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# Another view of the Project Office

BY [KATHLEEN MELYMUKA](#)

(August 02, 1999) The support model most IT project offices are following is only a halfway measure, says Edward Mahler, director of the Project Administration Institute, a project management consulting firm in Larchmont, N.Y. He says IT will realize eventually that there's a better model for the project office right in front of their eyes.

So what model should the IT project office be using?

### Q. So what model *should* the IT project office be using?

**A.** There's a whole class of companies that do projects for a living: construction, engineering, defense contractors. They have spent a lot more time and focus on getting project management right because if it's not right, they're out of business. But the last thing a consulting service will tell a client is ``Don't hire me. Go watch your neighbor build a building.''

### Q. What's different about the construction industry's approach?

**A.** Most companies look at project office primarily as a support organization. That's a very different philosophy from those that do projects for a living. (They) will supply the experts to do the project planning and tracking and reporting. They'll do everything to free up the project team from administrative tasks so they can do the project.

### Q. And this service mode is more effective than the support model?

**A.** Now the project manager writes the scope, negotiates with the client, handles a lot of administrative work. As you move to a service orientation, a lot of that can be done by the project office. Professional writers can go through an interview process and write up the scope and planning documents. [Staff] can do the tracking and reporting.

### Q. Won't project managers want to retain control?

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**A.** Project managers who are not good or who want to control the information will continue to try to sandbag and keep the project office at a support level. Good project managers love it because it frees them up to do the job.

**Q. Is it really more efficient?**

**A.** Now project managers have to build plans for each new project, and there may be a new reporting format or new releases of the tools each time. There's a whole big learning curve. These things will be done more efficiently by somebody who does them full time.

**Q. How will this model catch on?**

**A.** People like to think that ultimately truth prevails, but my experience is that ultimately money prevails. Executives will figure out that it's more efficient to do it that way.

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