Project management is a young profession with unanticipated, rapid developments on the one hand and teething troubles on the other. The latter will change during the coming 30 years, the first will not. Ron Oudega dreams of information systems that with regard to simplicity are comparable with the current apps; easy to install and with all desired functionality. This demands far-reaching standardization of processes and offers room for more focus on what actually matters: achieving an organizational change.

Project Management Focus Will Shift Dramatically

Ron Oudega

Firstly: what is your profession?

My profession is supporting customers with the effective and controlled execution of projects and programs and having a good portfolio. I work in the IT Advisory sector, so it concerns technology that must be changed, developed or purchased. And everything that this involves.

What has changed in your profession during recent years?

Carrying out projects and developing supporting IT is a relatively young profession that is progressing in fits and starts. Project management is becoming more professional. At this time, we still see large differences between organizations, but an increasing number of organizations applies good methods and techniques. And if, for example, we start talking about a PMO (Project Management Office), then this is no longer a complete surprise. Companies know the concept and are open for or want support with the implementation. Meanwhile, organizations also know that project management requires educated people. Project management has become a real profession. And program management and portfolio management become increasingly common and better executed. This trend will continue.

What do you see as a teething trouble in the young profession?

The technical complexity. I cannot imagine that in 30 years' time we will still be messing about with selecting, setting up or developing information systems and their mutual connections. That, for instance, something still doesn't work due to an incorrect software version. This will all require far less energy.

What does your profession look like in the future?

Project management consists of three phases: firstly, obtaining clarity about what the organization needs; secondly, ensuring that the system arrives (developing or buying); and thirdly, implementation. Considerable steps will be made in all these three phases, but especially the designing, developing and setting up will be considerably easier. Attention can then shift to alignment and implementation. And

The business can soon discuss directly with the IT department

not unimportant: there will be more scope for benefits realization.

If we consider these phases individually and first focus on designing, developing and setting up, what do you anticipate in 30 years?

I dream of information systems with more crystallized mature functionality that are easy to integrate with other systems. Just as easy to install and use as an app on the telephone: download, click and it works. Easy to integrate and connect and less error-prone. Business processes such as finance, logistics, administration and stock control become available as separate elements with additional variations for each business sector. The business is supported really well, but must drastically standardize the business processes. Companies will do this. They are not unique in these processes. And linking own software to standard systems has already caused enough inconvenience for system management. If IT projects fail, it is frequently because all this software does not optimally connect with each other.

What will happen with alignment?

If organizations have to think less about design, development and setting up and if this is more standardized, the organization will be more versatile. The business can discuss directly with the IT department. If the technology becomes as easy as an app, then it will later be much easier to carry out smaller and larger modifications. This of course places certain requirements on the implementation.

What is going to happen in the area of implementation?

Much attention is still given to acquiring the functionality and fitting it into the entire IT landscape.

If this becomes easier and more standardized, there will eventually be time for the further professionalization of its implementation. I expect that ultimately the correct level of attention will be given to this aspect and, for instance, benefits realization will receive the attention it deserves. The present and coming generations who are working in organizations are also more used to dealing with changes. This also has its impact.

You anticipate more attention for benefits realization?

The concept has already been known for many years. However, up till now its application has been limited. This is of course too ridiculous for words, because this is what we do everything for. Within 15 years benefits realization will be completely integrated into project management and we will not be finished when the functionality is installed, but only when the benefits have actually been achieved. This means that after delivery a project is still followed for half a year or longer and, if necessary, adjusted. A logical additional step, because ultimately, project management is about the realization of an organizational change.

Ron Oudega is an associate director with IT Advisory, part of KPMG Management Consultancy. He started at KPMG IT Advisory on the same day as Hans Donkers in 1990. He was CIO at Randstad Netherlands from 2007 until 2011. After that he returned to KPMG.