This chapter is about production support, otherwise known as service delivery management. In the past few years, it has emerged as a major revenue earner for the traditional IT services companies across the world. Service-level agreements (SLAs), process automation tools, and many other things that you need to know about service delivery management are also discussed. The chapter ends with a case study on service delivery in a Fortune 500 company, discussing the company’s service delivery organization (SDO), its real-time SLAs, and much more.

In most of my client engagements, around 80 percent of IT budgets were spent on supporting and maintaining existing applications. It’s very likely that an IT manager will spend a few years of her career in support and maintenance jobs. Useful tips in IT support work are provided throughout this chapter.
What Is Service Delivery?

The service delivery process is the production support that deals with sustaining information systems once they go live for end users. This process deals with service or incident requests, from inception to closure. There are many time-tested third-party software programs available that handle incoming requests, route them to the correct work-flow group for decision making, and maintain and track a complete record of the process in real time. They have automatic escalation and expedite mechanisms for timely resolution of trouble tickets.

Service delivery process automation software reduces cost and minimizes error by automating change, configuration, provisioning, release, and many other related tasks. In today’s complex IT scenario, it’s impossible to imagine the service delivery function without the use of such software.

To maintain the support levels, service-level agreements and periodic customer satisfaction surveys are an integral part of the service delivery function. I will talk more about them in the following sections.

Let’s recall the definition of a project: a task that has a definite start and a definite end. Service delivery or production support is a continuous or ongoing process with no definite start and end. So technically speaking it can’t be classified as a project. It’s better classified as an operation. The main functions of service delivery are

- Service-level agreement (SLA) management
- Capacity management
- Continuity management
- Availability management

In many companies today, up to 80 percent of the IT budget is spent on service delivery or production support activities. That makes financial management a very important aspect in the service delivery process.

Differences Between a Service Delivery Manager and a Project Manager

A project manager takes a project through standard phases of initiation, planning, and execution. Then she hands over the application to a service delivery manager, who is responsible for sustaining the application. A service delivery manager maintains service levels as set by end users.