

IRS turns to employees to push system modernization efforts

BY MATTHEW WEIGELT

The Internal Revenue Service's workforce is becoming increasingly important to the agency's modernization efforts. As IRS officials continue improving and upgrading the information technology infrastructure, they are relying less on contractors.

The extent of the workforce's role became clearer in an October report from the Treasury Department's inspector general. It describes the degree to which the IRS has pulled systems modernization duties away from prime contractor Computer Sciences Corp. because of budget limitations. Acting as its own lead systems integrator, the IRS has developed new procedures, hired new employees and opened new offices, according to the IG.

Richard Spires, the IRS' chief information officer, alluded to the change in a speech Oct. 24. "We are trying to take on more responsibility for the overall programmatic and some of the systems engineering," he said, speaking at an Input breakfast. However, "that does not mean there is not a key role for contractors."

Spires' comments coincided with the release of a new five-year strategy for modernizing the IRS' business systems and steering IT investments. It involves planning more, but smaller, projects and enlisting support from the IT and business sides of the IRS.

"The key to our success, I think on

this, was the joint partnership" between business and IT sectors, said Andrew Buckler, acting director for business systems planning for the IRS' Small Business/Self-Employed Division. "I think we had really drifted apart in that over the prior years."

Business and IT leaders are helping prioritize projects in the new modernization strategy. A newly created executive advisory board, drawn from both sides, added its insights during the plan's development.

Mina Samii, vice president of CSC's Treasury Business Area, said support from the IRS' various parts is critical to moving forward. Their acceptance will determine the life or death of an initiative, she said in her presentation at Input's conference.

In the past, IRS structured its modernization separately from other parts of the agency, said Jim Cook, executive director of public revenue and finance at Mitre, who was also at the conference. Those efforts involved completely disconnected IRS office teams and goals.

"What that has done, in my view at least, is divorced much of the organization from the true task of modernizing the IRS," Cook said. That structure pitted sides against one another.

As the lesson of inclusion is worked out, the sides that once seemingly competed for agency dollars will take joint responsibility for modernization, he said.

"Modernization will be a part of the fabric of what the IRS does," Cook said. ■

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**JIM COOK,
MITRE**