Article

Oct 2026

‘Doing more with less’ can actually work. Here's how.

Every business runs some version of a productivity agenda, spoken or not. Get more out of the same budget, the same team, the same hours in the day. It's nothing new. Budgets have tightened. Teams have shrunk. The skills that used to sit comfortably across a bigger team now have to stretch across a smaller one. And on top of all that, there's a growing expectation, partly fuelled by AI, that everything should move faster than it did last year.

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None of this arrived as a single instruction from above. It's the accumulated effect of pressures nobody in the business really controls, and it isn't a phase to wait out, these forces keep evolving, and the pressure they create isn't going to ease off on its own. It's felt across the business, and IT is usually where people look for part of the answer.

Most businesses stumble into ‘doing more with less’, and that's usually where it goes wrong…

When budget or headcount disappears, the workload usually doesn't shrink with it. Nobody sits down and decides what stops happening, so the same list of tasks gets squeezed into less time, with fewer people, right across the business. It's just pressure, redistributed onto whoever's left, and IT often absorbs a second wave of it when other teams start asking for technology to make up the difference.

Automating a process that was never fixed. Under that pressure, automation looks like the obvious relief valve, and IT is usually the team asked to deliver it fast. But automation doesn't fix a broken process, it just runs it faster. If three teams were doing the same task three different ways, automating it usually locks in whichever version got built first, inconsistencies and all. The mess doesn't disappear. It just gets harder to see, and it's now running at speed.

Skipping the groundwork that isn't visible yet. Security checks, proper testing, documentation, none of this looks like progress in the moment, so it's often the first thing dropped when time is short, wherever the pressure is coming from. It rarely causes a problem immediately. It causes one later, usually at a worse moment and a higher cost than doing it properly would have taken in the first place, and it's usually IT left to explain what happened.

Reaching for AI without deciding what it's for. The pressure to be seen doing something with AI is real, and it often comes from the wider business wanting to move fast, with IT expected to make it happen. Adopted reactively, it rarely delivers the result it promised.

What doing it well actually looks like

The businesses that make "more with less" work aren't the ones with fewer problems, they're the ones who stopped absorbing the pressure by default and started responding to it on purpose. In practice, that comes down to three deliberate choices: deciding what to stop doing, rather than trying to do everything slightly faster; being selective about what's genuinely worth automating properly, rather than automating whatever's quickest to plug in; and protecting the things that matter most, security, quality, and the people doing the work, no matter how tight things get.

None of that happens by accident. It's a decision the whole business needs to make deliberately, not one IT can be left to solve on its own, however capable the team.

That decision is what separates businesses that quietly get ahead of this from the ones still coping with it a year from now, still leaning on IT to fix what's really a business-wide problem. Less grind, more progress, starts there.

Three questions worth asking yourself:

1. **What could we stop doing, rather than just do faster?** If nobody's actively decided this, the workload hasn't shrunk, it's just been redistributed.
2. **What are we about to automate that we haven't actually fixed yet?** If the process is inconsistent today, automating it will only make the inconsistency faster.
3. **What are we tempted to skip because time is short?** Security, testing, documentation, whatever it is, that's usually the bill that arrives later, at a worse moment and a higher cost.

Answer those honestly, and you're already ahead of most.