

KEEPING PACE

Project professionals need to be bold and innovative or risk falling behind when it comes to new technologies. **James Simons** and **Andrew Hubbard** report on *Project's* Round Table event, which saw software developers and project managers discuss PM in the collaborative age.

We should be project leaders, not managers – that was the big idea to come out of *Project* magazine's first round table held at Microsoft's offices in central London.

In answer to the growing divide between software developers and consumers – the project sponsors, CEOs and other senior leaders – project managers were urged to grasp the mantle and demand better tools and better technologies.



PAUL MAJOR, DIRECTOR AT PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

"Change isn't the issue – it is the pace and scale of change that

we need to respond to. We need to become far more active in what we do with our stakeholders and communities. Project managers are the people with the experience and knowledge to deliver change. We are the innovators. We just need to believe it."

The current situation was described as a state of paralysis with project managers and more specifically, their paymasters reluctant to invest or embrace new technology. In some organisations the problem is so acute that developers report project software being used that is at least 14 years old.



RICHARD GORDON, PROJECT SOLUTION SPECIALIST, MICROSOFT

"We need to find a way to move

organisations forward. I know of one organisation that still uses Project 1998. In that amount of years there has been a lot happening with software and technology. I think there is a long way to go before organisations make the most of what is available right now."

The reluctance to see the benefits of upgrades or investment in future technologies has seen the gap widen and in many cases has resulted in the wrong tool being used on the wrong project, jeopardising the overall success.

Microsoft's Richard Gordon said the capability is there, the client is just not using it effectively – and all the time innovation is moving on at a pace.

To avoid being left behind even further, it was felt that project managers should become the innovators and act as agents of change to take the conversation forward. Anne Workman, IT project manager, suggested that the job title should be changed to reflect this, from project manager to project leader.

The need to act quickly and decisively took on a greater sense of urgency when set against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world of projects.



BENJAMIN SÄRKKÄ, DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS, IMPROLITY

"Everything is moving faster in project management."

Project managers need access to resources and information more quickly – and that's the challenge for organisations and toolmakers."

In this new world, where dialogue and ideas are shared in real time, and projects

operate from multiple locations, different countries and time zones, information is king.

But how do we manage this change? The panel, chaired by Elizabeth Harrin, was asked to discuss how we harness traditional and new technologies to involve and engage with remote project teams and stakeholders, and more importantly, how do we embrace PM in the collaborative age?

COLLABORATION VS. CONTROL

The first obstacle was the debate over collaboration and control. As the world becomes smaller, and flatter, and the availability of information becomes more readily available, concerns were raised about managing the sensitivities of business leaders and clients. In other words, how do we move to a place where the dissemination of knowledge and experience (what works, what doesn't) is freely shared between practitioners – without fear of repression or repercussions?



FREDRIK KELLERMANN, DIRECTOR GLOBAL MARKETS, PROJECTPLACE

"By including stakeholders and allowing them to

be involved, it reduces the risk of large issues. We need to open up and allow others to be more transparent in the world of project management."



JAMES MACDONALD-BROWN, PROJECT MANAGER, ANTARES UNDERWRITING

"Information is power and,



Elizabeth Harrin (above centre) chaired a lively discussion on how PM can drive technology in the future.

as project managers, we need to be conscious that who we give our information to first can have consequences, especially within highly charged political environments. I have mainly worked within organisations that prefer the control route as opposed to the collaborative route."

SECURITY

Hot on the heels of the control debate – and in many ways key to solving it – is the issue of security. For many participants the issue of secure data, restricted access to sensitive materials and the risk of marginalising stakeholders remained a key concern, and one that held the biggest fear factor. Yet again, however, technology was presented as one step ahead, with software developers pointing to the availability of security measures including biometrics. In fact, the least secure method was email. Providers were quick to point out the limitations of the technology, especially around security and the risk of hacking.

FREDRIK KELLERMANN

"Everybody feels extremely secure when they send an email but in reality it's very

open and it's very easy for hackers to intercept."



MATTHEW DOWN, PROJECT MANAGER, TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

"Things can snowball quickly – that small piece of information

that gets fired out by someone can be picked up and has the potential to get completely miscommunicated. Managing that situation and the fall out is a big challenge."

ONE SIZE FITS ALL

One of the barriers to entry, and the vision of a one-system approach, was the disparate nature of existing technologies, in particular the inoperability of certain tools. The general feeling was that a one size fits all approach was applied too readily to different project tasks, so for example, there would be no distinction between project schedulers or project managers. This in part was

down to a lack of awareness but also a reluctance to commit to new tools or worse still, a clearly defined project plan including toolset.

In response it was felt a more tailored approach was needed, where users can visit a central repository or hub to choose from a suite of options – but done in such a way as to not overload the user with too many products.



ANNE WORKMAN, IT PROJECT MANAGER

"It's of huge benefit to have a tool that allows you to have a single place where everyone can comment without

losing audit trails or having it sit in your inbox."

"Software that can talk to each other or modules where you can take the best bits and have them all work together would be great – but it's probably an impossible dream."





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MINDSET

Perhaps the toughest nut to crack, however, was the cultural divide. The rapid expansion of technology and pace of change has inevitably led to differences in opinion over its relevance to the day-to-day project process.

For some the generational difference, or indifference, was perceived to be the biggest barrier to progress. The advent of social media was a prime example. The Facebook generation, singled out by Program Framework's Paul Major, has embraced, and now expects, instant, unconstructed information – relying less on tight controls.

While this raised questions over security, it also signalled a fundamental shift in the way consumers and stakeholders prefer to consume and share data. The quandary for organisations, both internally and externally, was how to manage that shift. As the next generation of project managers comes on stream, they too will be well versed in the use of social media, and will see benefits in different ways of working and communicating.

This leaves the idea of company restrictions on the flow of data looking increasingly vulnerable – something that is bound to be tested more in the years ahead. So instead of swimming against the tide, the question posed to the panel was what do we need from technology to support PM and how do we get that message across to the people that matter?

JAMES MACDONALD-BROWN

"In my project experience, I have not encountered many senior business leaders who actively champion new technology. The heads of department, the ones with the chequebooks, frequently do not appear to be sold on the idea, or tend to be conservative by nature."

PAUL MAJOR

"It's not that the technology is not available to us; it's actually explaining to our stakeholders, CEOs, the value of using this and getting it embedded within the organisation."

A CALL TO ACTION

In playing catch-up, the overriding feeling among the panellists was that there was no single magic bullet to bring developers and end users closer together – rather a series of actions. Nor should it be assumed that technology has all the answers, and can be seen as replacement for face-to-face conversation with the client or key stakeholders. There was a sense, however, that the profession is nearing a tipping point and in future projects will increasingly see the sharing of ideas, and communicating the aims of the project, channelled through more collaborative tools and ways of working.



**ELIZABETH HARRIN,
HEAD OF IT
PROGRAMME DELIVERY,
SPIRE HEALTHCARE**

"We need to move from our role as the people who deliver from A-to-B, to

people who can advise strategically and be project leaders."

#PROJECTIDEAS:
Attendees were encouraged to tweet live updates from the event.

SUDDENLY, MORE BECOMES POSSIBLE

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