

The state of project management in the UK today was the focal point of the first Project/APM Round Table.

Five of the profession's leading figures joined in with the debate...

IN THE ROUND

A NUMBER of key areas were discussed at length during the event, including what makes a good project manager, the perception of the profession in the UK as well as training for the current and next generation of project managers.

Present were APM president Martin Barnes, who chaired the discussion, current APM chairman Mike Nichols, vice president Tom Taylor, Christopher Worsley of CITI and Paul Major from Program Framework. Tony Collins from Computer Weekly also listened to what they had to say.

Martin Barnes started off the discussion by looking at the way in which projects deemed to be failures receive more coverage than many of the successful projects carried out in recent years.

MB: The IT industry in particular has a bad press when it comes to high-profile projects. But in general we have some big projects which we should be very proud of, such as the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

Then there are some successful sporting projects, such as the Emirates Stadium (the new home of Arsenal) and the Commonwealth Games in Manchester.

One of the things I find very interesting is that there are some people doing projects very well who probably don't think they are doing projects at all.

TT: A lot of people I know woke up to project management around 2000, to some extent due to the Millennium and Millennium projects.

I think it's taken them since then to get their heads around it and now more people are beginning to grasp what it is all about.

PM: Project management and its benefits to business of managing multiple changes is rapidly becoming a mainstream business conversation.

The discussion then moved onto the demand for successful project managers in the UK over the next several years and how this will be shaped...

CW: There are some factors beginning to converge which will

lead to quite a significant hike in PM salaries.

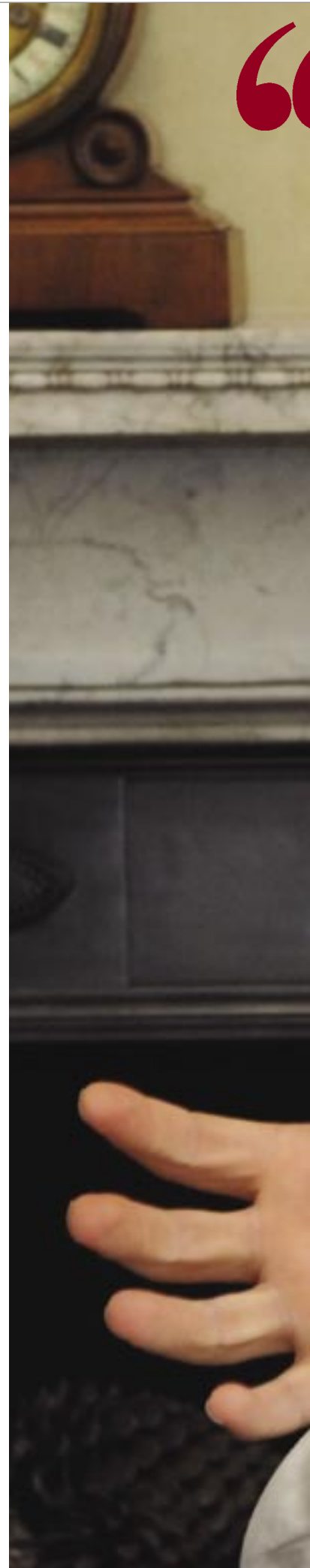
MB: The demand for project managers is now a lot greater than it was before and there is a demand for versatile project managers. I think that's a very healthy thing.

APM should be focusing on what is the core skill for project managers - it may not be exactly what's in the *Body of Knowledge* at the moment.

It should be more about how we bring it altogether - not just whether you tick the boxes. How you co-ordinate. How you motivate people to do what they've got to do.

MN: There is an advantage I find when I move people from one domain to the other as project managers. That is they actually bring a freshness and a challenge to the discipline that you do not get when people are slightly compromised by their historical knowledge of the domain.

MB: If you're working on a project where you have no domain knowledge it focuses your own mind on what are the



Project management and its benefits to business of managing multiple changes is rapidly becoming a mainstream business conversation.

”



GRASPING THE OPPORTUNITY: Paul Major engaged in the Round Table debate.

STIMULATING DEBATE: (Clockwise l-r) Tony Collins, Christopher Worsley, Martin Barnes, Tom Taylor, Mike Nichols and Paul Major deep in discussion.



core skills.

MN: That is something we should be thinking more of in terms of the profession of project management. We really need to recognise that there are two major constituencies for project management.

There is the profession of project management, the people who manage projects or participate in the management.

The other—rapidly growing, potentially competing one is management in general, because it's not a case of managing 'business as usual' any more, it's about managing change.

MB: 'Business as usual' is going to become a dead concept.

Paul Major then raised concerns focussing on training for the next generation of project managers...

PM: It seems to me that every business school course and virtually every degree course has a project management module these days.

What's tending to occur is that

organisations, particularly non-core project management aware industries and organisations, are getting these challenges coming along - it could be 'I've got to launch a new shop or build a new building'.

The management looks around the organisation and they may well say: 'I've got loads of project management capability because so many of my people have been on these courses with project management modules'.

Actually there's a huge difference between having a project management course that you've been on and actually being able to manage projects.

(These courses) are just a badge of honour. Thinking about it, not even a badge of honour as these have to be earned. They are just a badge.

MB: You've raised a very serious point, you're implying that the current training in project management is missing the significant ingredient.

“

There's a huge difference between having a project management course that you've been on and actually being able to manage projects.

”

MN: We are still looking at project management in a too narrow way – quick fixes, single solutions to the challenges. When in fact the only thing that really works is a much more holistic approach. It's not just about managing the actual delivery, but about the success of all of the various elements of it.

CW: One thing I've noticed is since the onset of PRINCE2 methodology there is this idea that if you've got an accounts technician, really you've got an accountant and so if you've done PRINCE2 you're seen as a project manager.

I've actually seen people stand up and really argue the case that knowing PRINCE2 means you're a project manager and not knowing PRINCE2 means that you are not. I find that extremely offensive.

TT: The analogy is this: 'I've been on such and such a course, now I'm a project manager' – 'I've been on a two-day Word course I can now write *Pride and*



Prejudice. It doesn't make you an author.

PM: As we promote the awareness of project management, particularly outside the traditional industries of construction, IT etc and encourage businesses to embrace a set of structured skill sets for managing change, we had better make sure we also tell them how to recognise the "real thing".

There is a real danger that we are encouraging businesses to take project management seriously, without helping them understand what it is or how to buy it.

The result is "commoditised project management": a world where people buy on price, not value, believing that every product is the same and only realising their mistake when they start using it.

So, when we talk about raising awareness of the benefits of project management, new training programmes and certification schemes, let's also

think about how we should provide advice to the end customers – the buyers of project management skills – on how to distinguish between the good and the incompetent.

The focus of the Round Table then moved towards the current state of project management combined with looking to the future of the profession.

TT: The state of project management in the UK is in flux and that's probably good.

I would like to be in a position now or as soon as possible where all young people come out of schools or universities with project management understanding in a similar way they came out with computer and keyboard skills a few years ago.

This would create a situation where by people interviewing them would say: 'Have you got keyboard skills?' and if they hadn't they would be quite submissive.



Otherwise for a long time to come there will be people in senior or medial positions who think they need project management but it's not there.

CW: I would like to see APM take a much more positive stand about project management, particularly training and education, because I don't think it does.

I really find it difficult to come to terms with the fact that APM doesn't make a much more progressive stance about what it is to be a project manager.

There a lot of employers out there who think they know what

it is to be a project manager and not enough people saying that this is incorrect.

MN: This comes back the confusion between process, methodology and management. We've let that go unanswered for too long.

PM: Perhaps it's somewhat of a closed community, from a business background. Project management is structured to embrace change and so the actual audience (for the profession) needs to be much, much wider.

MB: Collectively, we think there's a need to newly define project management.

I don't mean a one-line explanation, but define it as what are the key skills and re-direct training and education towards them.

It's much more to do with the interaction of people, clients and stakeholders and the integration of these aspects.

CW: The reason we know what a good doctor looks like is because we've been told enough times what one looks like. We haven't got that in project management.

TT: Overall, the state of project management is good in the UK. Some countries are making very

good advances in terms of IT, other ones in academics. We have got a very mixed, bouyant community.

MN: Relative to the rest of Europe project management is very healthy in the UK. I think the whole area of project management in the UK has come a long way in the last 30 years but as we've said today there is still a long way to go.

For information on sponsoring the second APM/Project Round Table later this year please contact Vicki Orbell on 01525 370013 or email: vicki@impact-now.co.uk

PROJECT PETE

by Mitch

