

APM South Wales and West of England, (SWWE) Branch South West Conference, 12-13 October 2021

The Project Team of the Future

How do we diversify and adapt our teams to embrace the opportunities of a digital future? Creating an agile mindset and embedding the power of data.

Sponsored by Frazer-Nash Consultancy, APM South Wales and West of England Branch Conference returned again this year after two successful conferences.

Having reflected on the Project Management Profession and the Project Manager of the Future, this year we shifted focus to look at the Project Team. What makes a great project team? how can our organisations help it perform to its best? what technology will enable (or threaten) future teams?

Three key themes were covered:

Technology and Tools: Harnessing better communication and automation tools to help the project team

With the digital revolution well and truly underway and the shift to remote working brought about by the pandemic, looking likely to endure into the future, what role will better data management and analysis play in helping project teams of the future. Also, how can we harness the advances in AI and communication tools to truly develop as teams to improve performance.

People Skills: Developing and leading the best Project Teams will take a range of new skills

Further to the technology revolution underway, what skills will be needed to form the best teams, lead the teams and help them deliver to the maximum potential. How must the project manager adapt to this changing environment and best lead their team?

Organisation Setup: What can organisations do to encourage the best Project Teams

Our professional organisations have a role to play in helping setup the right structures and culture for our teams to develop and deliver the best results. What are the key requirements? And what pitfalls should be avoided?

The conference was opened by Nick Jones, Frazer Nash Consultancy, who chaired the organising committee. He welcomed delegates and thanked the sponsors, Frazer Nash Consultancy, Turner and Townsend, and Mi GSO / PCUBED. He welcomed our key note speaker, Debbie Lewis, APM Chair.

Debbie Lewis, APM Chair spoke about the new world challenges we face and the implications for the project profession, focussing on the future project team, including the shape of the team, how they work and the skills needed. These include facilitation, collaboration, motivation, flexible leadership styles, digital skills and analytics, personal resilience, emotional intelligence and empathy. All of which are essential for the virtual team. As always, people are at the heart of the project profession and above all we need to understand them.

The theme for the first day, 12 Oct, was Technology and our speakers discussed a variety of topics around this theme.

Isabel Edkin, PA Consulting, discussed sparking innovation and collaboration through virtual reality and augmented reality. Hybrid working is now here to stay, team members can be located anywhere in the world. Virtual reality and augmented reality are essential tools for successful hybrid working, keeping team members engaged and supporting their wellbeing. Isabel used some examples of where the use of VR and AR has provided real benefits through improving collaboration and encouraging innovation. She noted that this represented a huge change for people which needed to be carefully managed.

Richard Simpkins and Nathan March, Turner and Townsend, discussed project data analytics - How do we bring people and teams on the digitisation journey. They discussed the digital transformation stages, from foundation, to getting fit for digital, doing digital and finally being digital, where new ways of working are fully embedded in the team as a digital mindset. Such change has to be carefully managed; a balanced approach to digitisation is essential. It has to be human centric, consider the people, their capability, skills gaps and upskilling, account for purpose and organisation with the right environment, structure and strategy, and consider process and operations including how your team and your suppliers work together, align processes and share information consistently.

Dr James Smith, Chief Technology Officer, Projecting Success, discussed artificial intelligence and data analytics. Project data analytics uses the exhaust plume of project data generated from completed projects to improve future performance. It is not simple as an analytic maturity growth curve illustrated. Available data shows still only 1 in 200 projects succeed in time, cost and benefits despite 60 years of formal project management; data analytics has the potential to make a step change in project performance. If project time/cost/performance objectives do not align with the data then challenge them! Data management can be centralised as a stand-alone function or federated and embedded in different roles in project teams requiring additional skills to be acquired. In the future, traditional PM roles such as risk management will be greatly impacted by DA, but it will augment other PM roles, create new roles, and assist timely and robust decision making. However, it is not all about the technology. Always start with the problem to be solved, and not the data. The main challenge is the quality of data, poor data will give poor results.

Baz Khinda, Wellington, discussed how Microsoft Project for the Web can be used to assist project managers with some interesting worked examples.

Catheryn Yardley, Frazer Nash, discussed artificial intelligence, (AI), in project management. AI can be classified as 'weak' (SIRI, Alexa, etc), 'strong' (human like) which is theoretical at the moment. Her talk focussed on 'weak' AI as the art of the possible in what can assist the PM. Tactical AI can help with admin tasks such as scheduling meetings, drafting e-mails, populating reports. Strategic level AI can look across all data and make predictions, create mind maps of networks, highlight risks and opportunities, help identify lessons for scheduling. Quality data sets are essential for AI, with a standardised format and unbiased: data input by people will always have some bias no matter what the intent. AI has the potential to be powerful, to release time for humans to focus on important tasks, such as people and relationships. AI will assist rather than replace.

Frank Curtolo, Mi GSO / PCUBED, APM System Thinking SIG, asked are Remote Teams Still Viable? - A Systems Thinking Analysis. A case study example was discussed showing the use of causal loop analysis and Stafford Beer's Viable System Model (i.e., one that can survive in a changing environment). These techniques helped define the scope of a project to implement a viable remote working team, including culture, IT systems, ways of working, skills, leadership and the need for online social interaction (Water cooler chats). Management needs to be by achievement, paying by results and underpinned by trust and honesty.

Day one was rounded off by a lively open discussion session, reflecting the day's topics, facilitated by Craig Shawbook, Frazer Nash Consultancy.

The theme for day 2, October 13, was People. Nick Jones opened the morning with a recap of day 1 which highlighted new and exciting technologies including AI, digitisation, virtual and augmented reality, and new tools, as well as the need for new skills. This was underpinned by a clear message that people will remain at the heart of the project profession, which led nicely into day 2 of the conference.

James Martin-Young, Mi GSO / PCUBED, discussed the agile mind set: communication, collaboration and coaching in a virtual world. A fixed mind set is one which is traditional 'comfort zone'. An agile mind set is focussed on growth, using failure to learn, challenges to learn and empowerment of others. Virtual teams and hybrid working are the future. Effective teams can be built using Tuckman's model, based on setting a foundation, giving ownership, regular maintenance and review and improvement. Providing the right tools is an essential enabler for collaboration (Miro, MS Teams, etc). Empowerment of the team is key as is coaching at 3 levels: the team, programme/department, and enterprise level. The project team of the future will be built on: Communication (regular, often, not just work focused, but also social), Collaboration (right tools, training to use the tools, empowerment), Coaching at 3 levels (support and structure, regular, reflective, learn and adjust).

Alex Richards, PA Consulting, discussed adaptive project teams of the future: adaptive delivery for transformation and project success. Project delivery is becoming harder with global power shifts, societal expectations, complex supply chains, and physical / digital convergence. This needs fast track mobilisation to respond rapidly to environmental changes, which involves earning the right to deliver through trust, reliability, credibility, using intimate stakeholder relationships to help navigate through continual change. To succeed, the future team needs to be oriented around different attributes, including, Sense making (being aware of biases, dealing with ambiguity and complexity, and taking multiple perspectives), Empowerment (leaders distributing power and authority), Collaboration (it is not an individual game – be aware of your ego!), Innovation (lateral thinking, experiment and challenge accepted norms).

James Lewis, Mi GSO / PCUBED, discussed project management neurodiversity. Diversity is much discussed now, but an area often overlooked is neurodiversity of which there are multiple types, including dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, autism, Asperger's, etc. and all are unique at an individual level. There are great benefits to a team which includes neurodiversity as many individuals have 'super powers' such as creativity, different insights and perspectives which can improve decision making and provide a strategic advantage. But there can be challenges with effective communication, and management, which can need careful consideration. James shared examples based on his experience over the years. Empathy can be difficult for some, avoid generic invitations – make them very specific to the individual, don't 'tell' dyslexic people – better to show. Feedback from them can be very blunt and unfiltered as social skills can be limited. Avoid role playing and ice breakers. Open plan offices and hot desking can be very upsetting for some. Be aware of your staff and colleagues – ask how they want to be communicated with. Hone your emotional intelligence skills.

David Wyse, Frazer Nash Consultancy, discussed: with more rapid projects, comes less control and the need for more Trust. We live in a rapidly changing world and projects have to be flexible and adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Projects teams have to react quickly and to do so effectively must be empowered to do so with authority to make decisions delegated down. This needs trust. Trust is the belief that someone will meet your expectations and is the foundation of all

relationships. It takes time to build, but can be lost instantly; “trust arrives on foot and leaves on horseback”. You need opportunities to demonstrate trust, the ability, or competence, to do what is expected, and the willingness to do so. Juniors are always looking to see leaders do as they say. It is a 2-way relationship and has to be earned. As a PM, you need to be an authentic leader and own up to mistakes. Treat people with dignity, provide a safe place to fail and learn, balance transparency with discretion and be vigilant to safeguard the trust you have built.

Donnie MacNicol, Team Animation Ltd, discussed, how to improve your personal team performance and PM practice. As leaders and team members it is very useful to understand who you are and your personal preferences when dealing with others. There are a number of personality profiling tools to help with this, e.g. Meyer Briggs, Insights Colour wheel, etc, which are all based on psychological models. Donnie used the Identify, Modify Adapt, (IMA) tool, which delegates were asked to complete before the event. IMA suggests a ‘high’ colour type which is your predominate style, your comfort zone. The IMA tool looks at your level of openness – readiness to share with others, and Level of Assertiveness – a person’s need to move forward. Donnie used examples to explain the strengths and weakness of the 4 colour types, blue, red, yellow and green, and how they interact with different colour types. Understanding your own and other’s colour types can help when dealing with a critical stakeholder in getting your message across. Also, with team effectiveness and communication within the team. From a diversity perspective it is essential to have all four colours in a team to aid performance and decision making. If you have gaps in your team, ask how to compensate to manage better.

Barbara Roberts, discussed, agile, it’s all about the people. For teams, there are 5 agile values from the 2001 Agile manifesto. Courage (wait a minute something feels wrong), Commitment (essential for collaboration), Focus (clearly defined and agreed goals), Openness (Transparency, willingness to share flexibility, an agile mindset), Respect (fundamental to establish effective team behaviours. Lack of respect drives defensive behaviours). All agile approaches emphasise the team, with a variety of skills and shared goals and ways of working. Tee shaped people are able to apply their knowledge and functional skills across situations. There is a flat organisation with servant leaders who facilitate. Empowerment is essential. Benefits for the team include motivation and self-actualisation and for the organisation, faster and better decision making. But not everyone wants to be empowered, which is a risk and without the handshake it is meaningless. Agile planning is fluid, collaborative and being constantly adjusted. Very different from a traditional static linear approach. Agile reporting is iterative, reporting on work done. Traditional linear approaches have long periods of little / no proof of progress. Agile is about transparency, being honest about progress – don’t blame me for the tigers!

Lucy Howard, Turner and Townsend, discussed Project 13 - A global movement in delivering better outcomes for construction projects. There is a big productivity gap in construction with very poor margins and low levels of digital transformation. Project 13 is an industry led movement for high performance, moving away from the broken transactional relationships to collaborative relationships based on an enterprise model that is fully integrated. There are 3 levels of maturity: Simple collaboration, integrated functional relationships and high-performance enterprise. There are 5 pillars; governance; organisation, integration, the capable owner and digital transformation. All parties working together to secure better outcomes for the client and end user. Big organisations are increasingly adopting Project 13.

The conference was rounded off by a lively open discussion session, reflecting the days topics, facilitated by Mark Sorrell, Mi GSO / PCUBED.

In summary, the key message from the conference is that project teams will be enabled by digital technologies, but that people deliver projects. Existing roles will change and new roles will appear, so new skills will be needed. Agile thinking supported by organisations using data effectively will lead to better and more timely decision making and improved project performance.

Martin Gosden

SWWE Branch Co-Chair