

Chapter 93

Barriers to Social Media Adoption on Projects

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ABSTRACT

This chapter considers the reasons behind the lack of adoption of social media tools in a project environment. It discusses how project practitioners can overcome concerns about the lack of overall strategy, lack of senior management sponsorship, lack of a proven business case, security issues, information overload and the blurring of lines between professional and personal data online in order to realize the benefits of social and collaboration tools. It concludes that social tools are a fundamental part of the current and future project management landscape and that 'social' should be intelligently incorporated into working practices in order to meet a need instead of being a response to outside trends.

INTRODUCTION

More and more of our life is run online and the growth in internet tools has impacted how we communicate and connect with friends and colleagues. Whether it's organizing a party or sharing photos of our children, there's an app for everything, including productivity and project management tools to assist with work. Smartphones and tablets combined with online, cloud-hosted project management software and apps make it possible to check project status and collaborate with colleagues at any time, from wherever you can get an internet connection.

While it's clear that the ability to be 'always on' offers benefits to the project manager who travels extensively or for other reasons cannot be tethered to a desktop computer, it does mean that it's possible to check in with project team members and monitor status even at times when you aren't supposed to be working. The delineation between the work/life balance is no longer as clear cut as it used to be. This is compounded by the convergence of the personal and the professional in relation to data especially when it comes to virtual working. Project managers only want to carry one device, and expect to be able to manage their personal and professional networks from it.

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Social media is a valuable asset to project teams as the tools allow for improved and enhanced collaboration especially within virtual teams. As more project work is being carried out by virtual teams, social communication techniques offer the project manager another tool to lead and manage the team. CIOs even state that the major use of social tools at work is to manage projects (Kiron et al, 2013). Social technologies used within the enterprise have the potential to raise the productivity of a knowledge worker by 20-25 per cent (Chiu, 2012).

Projects are all about people working together to deliver shared objectives, and the ‘sharing’ and ‘collaboration’ features of social media couldn’t be more perfect to fit with that goal. Research into the value of project management like the (albeit small scale) study by Pollack and Adler (2014) show that project management practices improve productivity. Layering social media tools onto a project environment should therefore offer businesses a step-change in output.

One would expect, therefore, take up of social communication tools to be rife within the project management community. However, social media usage in the workplace is actually declining. In 2012, participation in professional discussion groups and social media networks decreased from the 2011 totals. Corporate social media usage is lower now than it was in 2009 (Hagel et al, 2013).

In the context of this chapter, the term ‘social media tools’ is used to include social collaboration and communication tools of all kinds including those used in the enterprise behind a secure firewall.

The objectives of this chapter are to look at the reasons behind the lack of take up of social communication tools on projects and consider how project practitioners can overcome these in order to realize the benefits that social media products have to offer project teams.

The chapter first looks at the background surrounding the impact of digital business on workplaces and how this enables organizations to operate differently. The chapter then discusses the barriers facing companies who wish to adopt digital and social tools in the project management environment. Finally, it discusses how project teams and senior managers can address and overcome the barriers to change in order to realize the benefits of new ways of working, before concluding with further research directions.

BACKGROUND

It wasn’t that long ago that faxes were commonplace in offices. Offices may still have one, tucked away in case of need or to send urgent contracts. However, it’s more common today for modern offices to operate with the minimum of paper moving between teams and buildings.

Interested readers can find more information about the growth of social media both for consumers and businesses elsewhere¹. Businesses that use social technologies and social media are more likely to lead their market sector, have greater market share than their competitors and use management practices that result in higher margins (Bughin & Chui, 2010). The top business benefits for companies using social tools internally according to a McKinsey study (Bughin & Chui, 2010) are:

- Increased speed of access to knowledge (77 per cent).
- Reduced communication costs (60 per cent).
- Increased speed of access to internal experts (52 per cent).
- Reduced travel costs (44 per cent).

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