

# Chapter 70

## Effects of Social Media on Project Management

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter provides insight into the effects of social media on (the execution of) project management. Billions of people nowadays make daily use of social media. This phenomenon also gradually found its way to the business world. With projects being an essential element of many organizations, project managers must be aware what social media is all about and how it can strengthen their projects. The time is right for project managers to explore and embrace social media as an additional tool to be used for managing projects more effectively. This chapter tries to bridge an existing knowledge gap within organizations about how to make effective use of social media within projects. It is described how the functionalities of social media may be used within project management. Moreover, several overall effects of social media on project management are illuminated. And finally, four barriers for social media use within project management are captured.*

### INTRODUCTION

Many people, including project team members and stakeholders around you, nowadays make daily use of social media. For instance, in 2013, there were more than 1.3 billion registered users on Facebook and more than 340 million tweets a day on Twitter (KPMG, 2013). More and more communication takes place online. Social media provide a platform to individuals, communities and organizations to interact digitally and to be involved with people all over the world. Social media give people the option to finally have a say in things they are interested in, resulting in an increased level of involvement and a sense of society.

It is a new and easy to use way of interacting and working which gradually has found its way to the business world. “This represents an enormous challenge for firms, as many established management methods are ill-suited to deal with customers who no longer want to be talked at; instead, customers want firms to listen, appropriately engage, and respond” (Kietzmann et al., 2010, pp. 250).

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The International Standardization Organization (ISO) 21500 Guideline, introduced in 2012, provides insight into the complexity of projects. No less than ten subject groups, such as stakeholder management, scope management, resource management and risk management, are to be managed during the project (ISO, 2012). Projects are an essential part of organizations. Therefore, executives and project managers must be aware what social media is all about and how it can strengthen their projects. Project managers must adopt, adapt and work the way others work. “After all, even if you feel it’s a waste of time, you won’t personally make social media tools go away just by ignoring them” (Herrin, 2010, pp. 13).

The pace of change within the project management discipline is however relatively slow when compared to the evolvement of social media. Through the years, the number of available tools and techniques designed for use within project management did not increase significantly. An all-embracing project management tool that covers and supports all knowledge areas of project management is still lacking. The search for a more complete and flexible tool for use in projects would make the control and management of projects much easier.

Many projects (about 70%) still fail to deliver on time and within budget. Bad communication is considered a major problem (Standish Group International, 1999). Teun van Aken (1995) states that a project manager increases his chances of delivering a successful project through good communication with project stakeholders and by being informed on time on project issues.

With that in mind, one would think that the level of collaboration required between project team members and with stakeholders and the collaborative capabilities offered by social media would result in a perfect match. Social media exhibit all characteristics of a project collaboration tool. Elizabeth Herrin (2010) rightfully endorses this by stating that “Project managers are primarily focused on creating participation in projects, and because of this, it is important to know how to engage people. Harnessing the power of social media technologies is one way to do this” (p. 5). Another clear advantage of social media applications compared to traditional applications is that these are often free of charge or at least very inexpensive (Kangas et al., 2008, pp. 54). This fact makes social media even more attractive.

The time is right for executives and project managers to explore and embrace social media as an additional tool to be used for managing projects more effectively. “Projects that want to be understood by their environments, cannot withhold themselves from using social media” (King, 2010, pp. 4). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) confirm that many business executives, decision makers and consultants are already identifying ways to make profitable use of social media platforms. For most firms, however, it is still unclear how to use social media effectively and what should be avoided (Mustonen, 2009). This knowledge gap must be resolved. Deployment of social media in a project environment would mean the introduction of a tool that has already been tried and tested in other environments and that project team members and stakeholders will likely be familiar with. “Social media are a solution. They exist in many forms, possess diverse functionalities and are versatile, fast and cheap to use” (King, 2010, pp. 21).

The aim of this chapter is to bridge the existing knowledge gap within organizations about how to make effective use of social media within projects. The high amount of people that daily use social media indicates that social media care several interesting functionalities. What exactly are those social media functionalities? And in what way can these functionalities be used for managing the project management subject groups of the ISO 21500 guideline? What are those usage areas? In order to be able to answer those questions, in the background section of this chapter, the social media functionalities together with a brief introduction into the project management subject groups are demonstrated. A thorough understanding of the functionalities and the project management subject groups helps managers in discovering additional ways to manage projects by using social media.

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