The Six Project Management Trends You Need to Know

Project management as a profession must respond to changing market conditions—or die

~ By Duncan Haughey

Project management as a profession has been with us for years. Over those years, it has changed and adapted to fulfil the demand for products and services that deliver customer value.

These six trends keep the profession alive and well. They shape the project management profession today and are likely to continue shaping it in the foreseeable future.

1. Better Collaboration in the Cloud

As technology advances, better ways of collaborating are emerging. Although not specifically designed for project management, they offer many benefits to project teams.

One advance in particular, Cloud Computing, enables better document collaboration across multiple locations and electronic devices.

Recently, my team adopted Google Docs for collaborative creation of project documentation. It enables everyone to work on a single document simultaneously (removing the need to merge updates and changes from multiple sources).

It also contributes to document quality and reduced production time. Team members can comment on other people’s updates and changes as they work. As a bonus, my team enjoys working this way.

2. Geographically Dispersed Project Teams

More and more project teams are working across different geographies to reduce costs and raise efficiency. It is common for large projects to have significant portions outsourced to India, China and other emerging economies. This trend brings its challenges when it comes to meeting across different time zones.
Although the time-zone problem itself is unchangeable, technology provides a solution. Tools for virtual meetings have developed enough to make them a viable alternative to long-distance travel.

My team, for example, has reduced travel by 90% by using virtual meetings and conference calls.

Use of this approach seems prevalent in IT. However, this is unsurprising as tech people are usually keen to adopt new technologies.

3. Agile Project Management

Agile is the word on everyone’s lips. It is an exciting new approach to project management, offering a refreshing change from the traditional slow and cumbersome Waterfall method.

Although Agile is not a new concept, it is gaining traction and has benefits for many projects. For example, my team has recently adopted agile principles, introducing daily Scrums and developing software in Sprints.

Agile benefits customers by giving them visibility of the product or service early in the build phase. It allows adjustments and makes it easier to identify and fix bugs before completion.

4. Virtual Learning

There are more and more podcast and virtual project management training courses appearing online—with good reason.

Graduates often find themselves limited by finances as they look to enter the project management profession. As a result, they cannot afford in-person classroom training.

However, training providers are filling this gap with cost-effective podcasts and virtual training that provides the same qualifications, but at a lower cost. Although virtual learning needs more personal discipline than classroom training, I’ve met a number of project managers who have successfully followed this route.

5. Difficulty Entering the Profession

New entrants into the PM profession will continue to have difficulty finding their first project management job.

Employers demand experience. Most are reluctant to take on inexperienced project managers. Consequently, there is no easy answer or formula to entering the profession.

A good first step is to gain a project management qualification, such as PRINCE2, Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) or Associate Project Management Professional (APMP).

Qualifications show a willingness to advance into the profession. They show that you are serious about becoming a project manager.

Organisations should give junior project managers a chance - they may be pleasantly surprised by the energy and enthusiasm it brings to their project teams.
6. Compressed Project Management Life Cycles

Over recent years, the time to bring products and services to market has reduced from years to months. This has placed a demand on project managers and project teams to compress the project management life cycle to deliver more quickly.

Techniques such as iterative prototyping, agile principles and rolling wave planning will play an increasingly important part in reducing the time to market with new products and services.

This links to trend #3. It drives the adoption of agile principles to shorten the project management life cycle.

These trends are feeding the development of project management, keeping the profession alive and strong. They are shaping the profession into a more responsive and agile profession, one that aligns with today’s business needs.

Organisations that recognise these trends—and act on them—will have a competitive advantage.

Do you agree with these trends? What new trends and developments do you see shaping the profession? Share your thoughts, insights and experiences in the comments.