



Reasons to Web Enable Your Project Management

By Cynthia K. West, Ph.D., V.P. Project Insight (<http://www.projectinsight.net>)

Web enabling your project management can make your project teams more efficient and productive. What are the challenges of managing projects without web enabled project management? What are the benefits of web enabling project management?

Project Management Trends

One reason why so many organizations persist in their usage of desktop applications for project management instead of enterprise and web enabled solutions is simple. Project managers have, historically, lacked enough political clout to demand the 'right tools for the job.'

Project management as a profession is still in its adolescence and is in the process of maturing into an officially recognized discipline and profession. Until recently, project management was housed inside of functional teams and departments. One trend is that many mid-market companies are starting to create project management offices (PMOs) like the Fortune 500 corporations. This validates the notion that project management deserves to be its own organization instead of being lumped inside of individual, functional departments.

Similarly, while project management as a discipline is certainly not new, there is a growing trend toward the 'professionalization' role of the project manager. When I speak to project managers and ask them how they came to be in their roles, I hear the majority claim that they 'fell' into the role. They were working on a project and showed some leadership abilities, and were subsequently labeled the project manager.

Only recently has the Project Management Institute (PMI) created formal certification processes, creating the CAPM and the PMP certifications. This has had the effect of professionalizing project management, much in the same way that having a CPA is imperative for an accountant. Now, young people can take courses in project management, earn degrees, and get hired as project managers.

The PMI, the non-profit standards body for the industry, has a presence in over 125 countries and has over 200,000 members. The mere existence of a neutral standards body and its growing membership means that project management is coming into its own. PMI has also published the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK), a book which provides guidelines for the standards of the profession.

Prior to these developments, project managers did not have enough corporate clout to demand decent solutions. So many project managers simply turned to the applications that were available on the desktop.

Common Project Management Challenges

These trends make the voice of project managers stronger and the notion of managing projects the old way less viable. 90% of the project managers I talk to every day tell me that they are managing projects using MS Project desktop, Excel, or even 'sticky notes.' The biggest challenge with these tools is that project management is inherently a team effort, not an individual effort, and desktop applications are intended for individual use, or at best to be posted and shared on a network.

Teams that use Excel for project management often complain that updating tasks is cumbersome. They usually have a column in Excel for the start date of a task and another column for the end date of the task. The reason it is cumbersome is that whenever one task is delayed all subsequent tasks need to be changed, meaning that the project manager must then go in and manually change all the dates in the sheet. Excel was not designed with the notion of dependencies, so it falls quite a bit short as a project management tool.

More experienced project managers use MS Project, which at least has the virtue of having been designed for the job of project management. Teams using MS Project are usually managing projects in a traditional way. By this, I mean that the project manager is the master of the schedule and the glorified administrator, running around and asking team members how far along they are on their tasks and then updating the schedule for them.

Project managers complain that too much of their time is spent trying to gather information for updates. Executives complain that project managers keep their schedules hostage and not available for viewing so that they receive all the bad news at the end of the project, after it is too late to salvage or cancel the project. Team members complain that it is not clear what tasks they are supposed to work on and in what priority. They lack the visibility of the tasks and the communication of priorities.

In an effort to share information, more evolved project managers post the MSP file on the network or email the file to the other team members. The issue with emailing the file around is version control. Too many times, project managers are conversing with project sponsors about the project status, only to find twenty minutes into the discussion, they are viewing two different versions of the same project. More time wasted. The posted schedules are available for viewing, but only one person can update the schedule at a time. Everyone has experienced the problem of a file being opened by another person and then left open too long, so updates cannot be made.

The common challenges experienced by project managers include:

- Wasting time getting information
- Wasting time updating schedules
- Wasting time searching for documents
- Cannot share projects and information
- Too many versions of the project
- Each project manager has his/her own methodology
- Too many projects not enough direction on priority from management
- Not enough authority on projects
- Scope is not clearly defined
- Too much emphasis on staying on schedule and not delivering quality

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<http://www.projectinsight.net>

-Project team is dispersed and there is no good way to share information

Benefits of Web Enabled Project Management Solutions

Now with the popularity of outsourcing, it is even more important to deploy a web-enabled, enterprise project management solution. Web-based or on demand project management solutions provide the project team with one centralized repository for all projects, project files, assets, and communication, solving the sharing problem commonly experienced.

Web-based software allows all team members to create, access, edit, and update projects and tasks from any browser in the world, at any time. The software automatically distributes tasks to the right team member's portal. From there the tasks may be updated. Instead of project managers losing valuable time asking for updates from team members, team members are empowered to update their tasks as they complete them.

A web-enabled solution also provides visibility and transparency for project managers and executives. As information is posted in real-time, it becomes clear which team members are getting their tasks completed and which are not. This ultimately translates into increased accountability by all on the team.

Visibility is even more critical as teams are geographically dispersed and not centralized. For example if a software development team is working with an outsourced company in India, if the Indian team updates tasks, then when their U.S. counterparts arrive in the office, they can pick up from where the others left off, saving valuable time and leveraging the difference in time zones.

All centralized, web solutions provide much needed collaborative zones for team members to post discussions, files, upload emails and other assets. The value is that the entire history of the project is kept in one place, so when the inevitable change of resources occurs, the new team member can read, review and get up to speed rapidly.

Conclusion

There is no reason why a team of any size, if with a small budget, cannot web-enable their projects. Web-enabled or on demand solutions are available in three tiers:

- Low end tools
- Mid market solutions
- High end systems

The low end project management tools can be quite sufficient for many teams. They offer basic collaboration zones, task lists and resource management. Pricing for this tier ranges from as low as \$10/month per user to \$3000/year for a small team.

The mid-market solutions are more robust in feature set, often including more advanced scheduling functionality that MS Project users are familiar with and require. They will have richer resource management, document management and reporting features. This level ranges from \$3000/year to \$30,000 approximately.

The high end systems are more complex and designed for larger teams whose entire project team is more mature and disciplined in its project management practices and methodologies. These systems start in price from \$50,000 and up.

The web enabled project management market space is on the cusp of rapid expansion. As there are solutions for every budget and requirement set, more project teams will realize there is no need to continue experiencing the challenges that result from using non-collaborative project solutions.