apm association for project management

THE CHARTERED BODY FOR THE PROJECT PROFESSION

PROJECTING THE FUTURE

A big conversation about the future of the project profession

FEEDBACK PAPER 5

SMART CITIES, URBANISATION AND CONNECTIVITY

SEPTEMBER 2020

#projectingthefuture

INTRODUCTION

Projecting the Future was launched by APM in June 2019 as a 'big conversation' about some of the major trends reshaping the project environment and their implications for the future of the project profession.

This paper briefly summarises some of the contributions to that conversation. Those contributions include social media comments in response to APM posts, particularly from APM's network on LinkedIn; emails received from APM members and corporate partners in response to the Projecting the Future Challenge papers; perspectives presented at APM events during 2019-20; and a variety of blogs and articles from a range of authors that were published by APM during this period.

The summary is not comprehensive but it aims to give a flavour of the views and insights shared by those participating in the big conversation and some of the conclusions that the Projecting the Future Group have drawn as a result. These inputs have all fed into our overall views about the emerging themes and the big ideas shaping the future of the profession which are presented in our report on the adaptive professional, also published along in September 2020.

www.apm.org.uk/projecting-the-future

THE SIX CHALLENGES

THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: ROBOTICS, DATA AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
80% of today's project management tasks could be automated by 2030

CLIMATE CHANGE, CLEAN GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY
The UK aims to be a world leader in the green economy having adopted a target for net zero carbon emissions by 2050

THE FUTURE OF WORK AND SKILLS
Four out of five UK businesses need more high-level skills in the years ahead

DEMOGRAPHICS AND AGEING: THE 100-YEAR LIFE
10 million people alive in the UK today can expect to live to 100

THE FUTURE OF MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT
The UK market for autonomous and connected vehicles could be worth £52bn by 2035

URBANISATION, CONNECTIVITY AND BUILDING SMART CITIES
The world will have 43 megacities by 2030; global spending on smart cities could hit $135bn by 2021

WHAT OUR CHALLENGE PAPER SAID

- *"The global number of city dwellers is rising inexorably, exacerbating existing challenges and creating new ones: from reducing pollution, adapting to the effects of climate change, and using resources sustainably, to improving infrastructure, connecting with surrounding towns, and providing a standard of life that meets residents' rising expectations."*

- Smart city systems and technologies aim to deliver benefits by changing city systems and residents' behaviours. Focusing on those outcomes, rather than being distracted by the 'smart' technology itself, is essential.

- Because smart city technology relies heavily on data, much of which could be personalised, concerns about privacy and security will be key. We wrote: "Public trust, consent and participation in smart city projects will be vital." Project managers will be challenged to engage effectively with end users including citizens and community groups, as well as other influential stakeholders such as local businesses.

KEY QUESTIONS WE ASKED

Does the profession do enough to ensure that community and stakeholder voices are heard in smart city projects?

How can the project profession share insight and expertise between different cities globally?

How can smart city approaches help meet other challenges such as the fourth industrial revolution, climate change and rising human longevity?

POINTS FROM THE BIG CONVERSATION

- While the Projecting the Future paper highlighted the rise of megacities around the world, cities are also increasingly dominant in the economic structure of the UK, explained Simon Jeffrey of the Centre for Cities. Having declined after World War II, the UK's major cities – including London, Birmingham and Manchester – have been growing rapidly since the 1990s. Policy makers talk of corridors, power houses and metro city regions – but whatever the label, he said, the reality is that the modern UK economy is "centred around cities".

- There is debate over what constitutes a 'smart city'. Stuart Croucher of Mott MacDonald suggested that smart cities "do not exist and nor are they ever likely to". The aim of "being a smart city", he argued, is often seized upon as a panacea for a range of urban challenges – but it is not an end in its own right. Rather, "smart" systems are simply tools for achieving different outcomes, across a range of different fields.

- The centrality of so-called smart technology was picked up in wider discussions. One Chartered Project Professional and APM Fellow told us: "The greatest challenge waiting the profession is to ensure that we as professionals stay on top of the possibilities technology can offer... whilst also remaining realistic". A smart city, he added, "is only as smart as the people that live within it" in terms of their understanding of the approaches and systems introduced. "It is our responsibility", he said, "to engage with the communities to understand what they need". That also has to mean resisting the labelling of things as smart which are not: "some things were never meant to be 'smart', and with others there is a danger of calling something 'smart' which isn't." That risks discrediting the whole notion.

- Another contribution pointed to the benefits that project professionals can bring to smart city projects by drawing on the experiences garnered by other cities. Key is that "the cities involved must understand what they are trying to achieve for their own citizens." Regeneration of Liverpool's Waterfront area was highlighted as a domestic success story: "The reason for its success was knowing why it wanted to make the change."

- Lessons should be learned from other cities, domestically and internationally. One project in Saudi Arabia, for example, benefited from lessons learned in Amsterdam and London: while allowing for contextual differences, the lessons helped government objectives "to be clearer and more prescriptive in nature." This should be standard practice: "lessons learned through experiential learning must be used as a best practice to avoid unwanted or unneeded deliverables or wasted resource". This could be supported by the internationalisation of project management standards, for instance APM's Chartered programme.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE PROFESSION: EMERGING THEMES

- Stakeholder engagement and 'customer centricity' – putting end users of services at the heart of the process – will be critical in designing and delivering smart city projects. That will often begin with political leaders, be they mayors, city authorities or local governments, but project managers will have a vital role to play in making it a reality over the duration of projects, engaging with diverse local groups and ensuring that the voices of all citizens are heard.

- Project managers need to maintain a focus on the benefits of projects for end users. Asserting the primacy of these aims is essential, and needs to be maintained in the face of possible over-focus from decision makers on the potential of new technologies. Achieving and maintaining clarity about objectives and intended benefits is crucial.

- The coronavirus pandemic has presented several challenges to our assumption about the requirements for urban living. Does the example of mass remote working undermine the assumption that the growth of urban centres is inevitable? Could thinking about 'smart cities' be better phrased as 'smart interconnectivity', with rural living and working suddenly more economically and socially relevant?