From PERT Charts to iPads: How Generational Diversity Shapes How We Manage Projects

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Abstract

Do you ever feel misunderstood by other generations? At times, have you also felt that you did not understand the people you interact with, whether they were co-workers or family members? Now more than ever, generational gaps are very distinct, and how project managers get along with one another and work together can be either hindered or helped by these generational understandings. The current workforce ranges from Traditionalists to Generation Y, and the distinctions between generations – their cultures, expectations, styles and "toys" – have never been so sharp and diverse.

So how do you create a high-performing, multigenerational team amidst a technological transformation? This paper will help readers gain an understanding about generational differences and learn practical techniques for how to effectively interact and manage each generation. In addition, readers will explore how Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y view current technology dilemmas in the areas of hiring, privacy, and productivity.

Finally, the paper will provide real success stories of how project teams overcame the conflicts caused by generational and technological "rifts". Readers will obtain techniques to turn diversity into real opportunities for improved team performance.

Introduction

As a project manager with three sons below the age of fifteen, I am often amazed at how they—and their generation—approach project management. The past two decades have experienced dramatic technological change, where now a small village in Africa can receive medical diagnostic consultation through a laptop and the internet, supported by experts from the United States, France, and other "modernized" nations. This interconnectedness has increased the number of minds available to lead, plan, design, and deliver projects to people, but it can also lead to chaos when team members do not understand the technologies and their applications. Watching my ten-year old plan and then create with other online users a world in Minecraft—the online, multi-player "Lego" playground—is amazing. Change happens. Today, it happens faster than ever. So, how do project managers lead in this fast-paced world, as well as leverage the strengths of their younger workforce who has been bred on the internet and in social media technologies?

First, this paper examines the generational differences—some of which are very sharply different between today's generations. Understanding the differences—as well as similarities—between these generations empowers a project manager to understand the drivers, motivators, and perspectives of their team members as the leverage technologies to communicate, manage work, and ultimately collaborate as a team. Second, the paper explores the emerging technologies and social media tools that are affecting the workplace. Not all may be used directly in project management, but their usage continues to increase, and the trends demonstrate that many of these technologies will become part of the project management toolkit. Lastly, the paper provides key findings and recommendations regarding how to leverage the new tools with the workforce in project management. Several success stories are described to enable project managers to improve their team performance without falling into chaos.

Understanding the Generations

Defining the Generations

The success of a project may not be fully dependent upon the scope, cost, or time of the project itself, but rather the people who are executing the project tasks. With so many different generations currently making up the workforce, it is important to understand what drives and motivates each generation, as well as how to best leverage their

differences. There are 4 main generations that are currently making up the majority of today's workforce: Traditionalists, Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y.

Traditionalists are those born between 1922 and 1945, and make up 76 million people in the world today. Their worldview is largely shaped by the Great Depression and World War II, and they consider their word to be their bond. Traditionalists value security, stability, due process, fair play, and hard work.

	Traditional	Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y
Birth Date	1922 – 1945	1946 – 1964	1965 – 1981	1982 – 2002
Defining Event	Great Depression & World War II	Prosperity & 1960s	Stagflation & Latchkey	Berlin Wall & 9/11
Core Value	Hard Work	Teamwork	Self-Reliance	Civic Duty
Personality	Security, Duty	Driven	Skeptical, Risk-taker	Tenacious optimists

Exhibit 1 – Generational Chart

A Boomer is anyone born between 1946 and 1964, and is a title that applies to 80 million people. They came of age during the Civil Rights Movement, nuclear disarmament, consumer advocacy, and the Women's Rights Movement. Boomers value competition, relationships, loyalty, and efficiency. There are two primary factors about Boomers that shape their work life: 1) Boomers do not see work as an "ends" but rather a "means" towards their goal in life: having fun, and 2) they emphasize relationships and everyone "getting along" over results. These have both caused problems with the younger two generations as the Boomers move into leadership roles, Gen X's tend to focus on results above relationships and Gen Y's need to "walk the talk," running counter to the Boomers desire for not "rocking the boat."

Gen X is the smallest generation since the Great Depression. Born between 1965 and 1981, Gen Xers make up 46 million people of today's population. Also known as the "latch-key" generation, their formative years were characterized by economic instability, government corruption, and job insecurity. They value a work/life balance, tend to be results driven, and are generally unimpressed by authority figures.

Gen Yers are those born between 1982 and 2002 and make up 76 million people. They are the product of the self-esteem movement and are thought to be the best educated and most technically literate. Generation Y values include teamwork, job flexibility, technology, and multi-tasking. At work, Gen Yers are driven by two primary factors: 1) career development opportunities through having multiple, different experiences, and 2) a values-based organization whose leadership "walks its talk."

Identifying Motivators, Expectations, and Drivers

So what does this mean for the workplace? Consider these statistics:

- Two-thirds of Generation Y workers believe they should spend no more than 2 years in an entry-level position (Downs, 2009, ¶4).
- In the next 20 years, 76 million Americans will retire with only 46 million replacing them (Gelston, 2008, ¶2).
- Generation Y will be 50% of the U.S. workforce by 2014 (Marlier, 2011, ¶1).

Despite the decline of workers due to the Boomers exiting the workforce, it is easy to infer that while the older generations have been noted as extremely loyal employees, Xers and Yers may value their relationships with co-workers above their relationship with their company. They value career advancement and development, which sometimes translates to job-hopping as a career advancement method. It is an important organizational initiative to note the values of the younger generations so as to retain, grow, and develop these workers (Tolbize, 2008, p.6). Effective project managers must learn to operate from a management style that involves these younger generations and allows them to take ownership and responsibility for their work.

Due to the varied views making up the workplace, generational conflict may be inevitable. Nevertheless, understanding the diverse motivators, expectations, and drivers can foster teamwork, spur creativity, and promote training and development among the workforce. Some important differentiators to note when dealing with the various generations include:

- Baby Boomers value appreciation and recognition for their hard work – viewing their long hours as a "badge of honor." This may cause conflict, as they may view the younger generations as slackers for their need of a work/life balance.
- All four generations cite boredom as a de-motivator, and find it frustrating when they are incapable of growth and development.
- Boomers and Gen Yers may be the most likely to possess conflicting views of appropriate workplace interaction. Diligent Baby Boomers often disapprove of exuberant Gen Yers who prefer to socialize in tandem with their work ("HR Creations", video file).

According to recent studies, there is a common denominator linking the generations — the desire to be challenged. Across all generations, each values challenging, stimulating, and varied work; however, what differs is how the different generations define a challenge. Whereas Gen Y wants to work on a variety of important projects that allow them to learn and improve upon their skills, Traditionalists and Baby Boomers would rather their work make a meaningful impact on the overall achievement of their organization.

Generational Trends

Not only are those in the workforce getting younger, but according to a survey conducted by Pitney Bowes Inc., 20 percent of the 231 people polled are reporting to a younger supervisor. This data supports the theory that today's workforce is more multi-generational than ever before. So, how does that affect the way project managers work?

One example calls attention to communications management, and how the general workforce must work harder and smarter to meet generational channel preferences. Generation X's technological proficiency often bridges the gap between less adept Baby Boomers and the innate digital savvyness of Gen Y.

According to Susan Johnson, VP of Executive Succession and Diversity Strategies at Pitney Bowes Inc., "Companies are working toward creating a more inclusive work environment. This means equitable messaging for all employees, regardless of how and where they work. Effective diversity strategies now address regional, generational, and even technological differences found throughout the workforce" (Pitney Bowes, 2011, ¶3).

Consider the communication preferences that may be most effective for each generation:

- Traditionalists value individual interactions, notes and memos. Words and tones should be respectful and formal.
- Baby Boomers are most familiar with phone calls and personal interaction. Boomers often see business and relationships intertwined, so mixing professional dialogue with personal interests may produce the best results.
- Generation X is flexible and savvy with most communication channels and technologies. Gen Xers value a straightforward message that clearly states what is needed of them.
- Generation Y is continuously connected and defaults to messaging rather than talking. They value collaborative interaction, where they feel part of a solution (Matz-Costa, 2009, pp 37-42).

Johnson concludes, "As companies master customer communications management, they should also apply this strategy with their own employees. Sending the right message in the right channel to each generation in this challenging economic environment may lead to increased productivity and morale" (Pitney Bowes, 2011, ¶6).

Emerging Technologies and Social Media

Explosion of Connecting Technologies

Just as the generations making up the workplace are becoming more diverse, business processes are also more multifaceted, interrelated, and mutually supporting than ever before ("Business Transformation", 2010, ¶2). Project managers are no longer constrained to the 40 hour work week with which Baby Boomers are so familiar – it is a 24/7 world, where the speed of change is ever increasing. Technology has become so engrained in today's culture that project managers must no longer view it as a distracter to their work, but instead a platform for which they present their message. Generations must learn to utilize this new technology rather than fear it.

Technology is evolving more rapidly than ever before. And now, for the first time in history, it is not strictly the purview of the young. Over half of U.S. adults over 65 years of age are online, with over one-fifth of them accessing social media in a typical day. Boomers are now one of the fastest growing segments of social media users, with usage nearly doubling in just one year (Falkow, 2010, ¶2).

Meanwhile, younger adults (25 to 36 years of age) are going mobile. Over two-thirds of this group own a smartphone, although research suggests that smartphone users spend more time browsing the internet, social networking, playing games, and listening to music than they actually do making calls. Phones have become the "Swiss army knife" of modern life, diminishing or eliminating the need for once-pedestrian tools like alarm clocks, cameras, and hand mirrors. Gone are the days when comprehensive software suites ate up our hard drive. Now, instant access to millions of "apps" gives every user an ultra-custom technology experience. Tasks that used to take exorbitant time, money, and expertise to execute can now be completed in seconds with the $1.99 purchase of a program on a smartphone ("Making calls", 2012, ¶2-7).

Mobile capabilities have finally reached a tipping point, making virtual collaboration as easy and seamless as sitting across the table from a colleague. Cell phones allow us to be reached almost anywhere, giving access to e-mail and other data at a wide range of locations. New technologies have given way to more rapid communication, increased efficiency, and the ability to work as a virtual team (Mamaghani, 2006, ¶22). For example, "cloud" computing has significantly changed the way that businesses operate, allowing companies a new way to deploy, and scale company-wide communications. This internet-based computing allows resources, software, and information to be shared by computers and other devices on demand. Cloud computing provides a cost-effective way to provision processes, applications, and services, along with making IT management more responsive. This, in turn, has also allowed companies with many offices and branches to share the same resources simultaneously, improving their communication capabilities and increasing productivity. Cloud computing provides a potentially limitless scale and quality with the end-user in mind. This technology is designed to promote innovation that ultimately provides companies with new solutions.

Additionally, companies today are not limited by their size or location. Connecting technologies have removed the borders and barriers that formerly obstructed smaller companies from having an international reach. Now, a small business in the U.S. is capable of doing business all over the world, manufacturing in Asian markets, and buying or supplying internationally. The survival rate of business is no longer dependent solely upon the local competition, but rather the pace at which a company can technologically advance and adapt its organization to the new market opportunities and challenges.

Embracing technology may not only be a critical factor for giving a company an edge over competitors in the market place, not doing so may be a killer for drawing young employees if it is not widely accepted. In fact:

- 45% of young employees say they would take a lower-paying job over a higher-paying one if it meant better social media access, more mobility, and more choice in which technological devices they used.
- 56% would turn a job down outright if it blocked social media.
- 64% would rather have Internet access than a car (Stillman, 2011, ¶5).

There is one certainty about the future of technology in the workplace. It will continue to transform and develop at a rapid pace. Despite the drawbacks and risks, a workforce's implementation of new technology is essential to remain competitive in the market (Todd, 2007, ¶11). "If it is to benefit, business will need to understand far more than the mechanics of new technologies. They will need to understand the way that people - their employees and customers,

will use and interact with them" (Standley, 2006, ¶9). This is a big world that seems to only be getting smaller through advances in technology.

Convergence of Technologies

In October 2004, Tim O'Reilly re-coined the concept of "Web 2.0" during a conference brainstorming session. O'Reilly noted that the web was gaining more value than ever with new end-user friendly applications and sites popping up regularly (O'Reilly, 2005, ¶3). This daily interconnection with the web placed more power in the hands of the internet. Through the creation of social networks and the popularity of blogging, wikis, and media sharing, the web has given way to community and collaboration like never before.

Social Business

As Boomers ascend to the level of digital natives and Gen Yers invade the workforce, leading enterprises are finding ways to apply social technologies to the workplace. Rather than turning to Facebook or Twitter, which limit employees' ability to collaborate due to privacy issues, companies are building or buying *internal* enterprise-level social networks. Although these networks have gotten off to a rough start (one-third of company networks do not include single sign-on to internal systems and 39 percent are not integrated with e-mail), experts predict that the next generation of social tools will be able to support both collaboration and task execution, so that users are motivated to integrate these systems with their daily work (Healey, 2010, p. 6).

In point of fact, the "next generation" of social tools may already be upon us. Wrike is a social project management tool used by T-Mobile, Adobe, and McDonalds to name just a few of its high-profile clients. The web-based program gives users—called "collaborators"—the ability to manage schedules, tasks, documents, and resource allocation for up to 5,000 projects at one time in a social environment that encourages direct contact between divisional vice presidents and front-line workers.

Gamification

It does appear that new approaches in the workplace are lending an ear to trends being seen throughout the country, as proven by gamification. A recent statistic claims that the number of people playing video games in the U.S. has risen 341percent since 2008 (Parks Associates, 2012, p. 2). As the gaming sector has grown, so has the body of research exploring human motivation and productivity. According to research commissioned by the Entertainment Software Association in 2008, 70 percent of major employers utilize interactive software and games to train employees—and employees who used video games as part of their training program had a 14 percent knowledge hike over those who did not. The use of games in the workplace is part of a movement called gamification; simply defined, gamification is the application of game-design thinking to non-game applications to make them more fun and engaging ("Games: Improving the Workplace", 2011, ¶7).

In an interview with Mashable, ESA Senior Vice Present Richard Taylor noted that "UPS began using video games to train newly recruited drivers after finding that 30 percent of candidates failed the company's traditional training program, and the Hilton Garden Inn worked with Virtual Heroes to develop *Ultimate Team Play*, an interactive game that places employees in a virtual hotel." Taylor adds that "even the U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice has developed a training game, called *Incident Commander*, in which emergency responders practice coordinating disaster relief efforts" (Lauby, 2012, ¶9).

A 2012 Tech Trends report by Deloitte tells the story of one healthcare provider that rolled out Mindbloom's Life Game, an interactive platform that allows users to establish health goals and use game mechanics to monitor their progress. In Life Game, users can cultivate a virtual tree representing their physical, emotional, financial and spiritual well-being—earning "water" and "seeds" by completing tasks such as taking a walk, eating more healthy foods, or putting savings in an emergency fund. In the beta trial, users visited the site an average of 35 times per week, spending about 15 minutes during each visit. These users set out to perform 13 million actions—and performed about three-quarters of them. The effort represented a 50 percent increase over prior attempts without gamification (Briggs & White, 2012, p 15).

As a deliverables-based field, project management is in a prime position to leverage gamification to improve performance. In fact, companies like RedCritter are already doing so. The software company has created a tracking program designed to "gamify" the agile project environment, allowing developers to compete for points and rewards (similar to an airline points rewards system.) As developers complete tasks or perform certain actions, they can earn badges which are pinned to each developer's profile and celebrated by the team ("Engage with Innovation", video file).

It is an early product with room for improvement, but it has started an important conversation in the project management community about the potential of gamification to help project managers drive specific behaviors from project teams and stakeholders.

App Culture

It used to be accepted wisdom that a standard ERP would likely only meet 80 percent of the organization's needs, necessitating costly customizations with almost every major software purchase—but as workers go mobile and "there is an app for that" culture gains tentacles in upper management, we are likely to see a decline in stand-alone systems that do not include opportunity for third-party enhancement through add-on applications.

Thanks to smartphones, workers expect a hyper-custom technology experience—and enterprise software systems are responding to the clarion call. PM software Basecamp and EPM Live have both adopted an app-orientation, allowing customers to add or delete high-level functionality without paying for enterprise customizations. There is also a push for industry-standard software to go mobile, empowering high-travel project managers and team members to ditch their laptops for iPads.

Birth and Evolution of Social Media

Social media is shifting how business owners increase profitability, market their business strategy, and even empower employees and clients to be ambassadors for their business. It's little wonder that 39 percent of Americans now say they spend more time socializing online than offline, a statistic that has launched a lively national debate about the healthy— as well as hazardous—effects that digital friendships have on modern life. Experts on both sides of the debate agree: love it or dread it, lifestyles are going digital. And for the first time, social and mobile technologies are converging in ways that will profoundly change the way we do business (Laird, 2012, ¶4).

Even as internal/enterprise social networks gain traction, public social media sites like Facebook and Twitter show no signs of decline. In fact, with younger workers, public social media sites are an employment deal-breaker. *Fortune* Magazine last year advised: "The corporate goal is to hire and retain the most talented people on the block. And the best way to do that, it seems, is to let them do whatever the hell they want" (Berreby, 1999, ¶11).

What is behind the attachment to social media? For one, younger employees are actively using their social media profiles to manage their career progression—and while it is true that young workers are changing jobs frequently, they are also adding substantial value to their organizations because of an intense drive to "cyberforage" for new skills and ideas. They are rapid learners and deep thinkers, in part because they can quickly and effectively access collective intelligence over the internet (Berreby, 1999, ¶11).

Younger employees are also struggling with a recession which has forced them to rethink the work/life balance concept so treasured by their older Gen X counterparts. Rather than abandon the concept all together, Gen Y has embraced a "work/life blur" model wherein the personal and professional aspects of their lives become nearly indistinguishable. For Gen Y, meaningful work is paramount to life satisfaction. Who is their work helping? What are their employer's values, beyond making money? Young workers will work hard—even around the clock—if what they are doing is meaningful. However, the more work intrudes on their personal life, the more they will expect their personal life to be welcomed at work (Spence, 2012, ¶11).

Younger workers are not the only ones flocking to social media as a career tool. Older workers are facing what Harvard Business Review refers to as "The Rise of the Supertemp," a phenomenon in which Boomers are pursuing part-time, projectized work as a viable alternative to retirement. Supertemps, as defined by the article, are "top managers and professionals—from lawyers to Chief Financial Officers to consultants—who have been trained at top schools and

companies and choose to pursue project-based careers, independent of any firm. They are increasingly trusted by corporations to do mission-critical work that in the past would be have been done by permanent employees or established outside firms." In order to maintain a steady flow of work, Supertemps must rely on social media and online professional networks to grow their networks and publicize their value proposition. Likewise, human resources departments driving recruitment efforts must be savvy social media recruiters to seek and score top talent (Miller & Miller, 2012, ¶4).

Managing Projects with Today's Workforce

Current Conflicts and Dilemmas

Between the generational diversity and rapid technological advances, today's workforce is constantly bombarded with change – which is almost always a springboard for conflict. So what are some of the dilemmas that today's workforce is facing when managing projects?

Retention

As improvements to the economy are made, studies show turnover rates will begin to increase if companies do not recognize not only the generational drivers that affect their employees' performance, but also the value they place on technology and communication. Consider these statistics:

- 46 percent of employees say that a lack of meaningful communication from management was their primary reason for losing trust and becoming job hunters (Lupfer, 2011, ¶10).
- The number of employees voluntarily quitting their jobs surpassed the number being fired or laid off for the first time since October 2008 (Lupfer, 2011, ¶3).
- Since 1997, the desire to move to jobs with more responsibility among young workers has increased. This increase has been greater for young women—from 54 percent to 66 percent—than young men—from 61 percent to 67 percent ("Questions and Answers", 2009, p 2).

This proves that today's workforce is finding it difficult to sustain the positive connection to their companies that produces consistent efficiency. According to Julie Gebauer, managing director, Talent and Rewards, Towers Watson, "When workers are not fully engaged, it leads to greater performance risk for employers. It makes companies more vulnerable to lower productivity, higher inefficiency, weaker customer service, and greater rates of absenteeism and turnover" ("Most U.S. Workers", 2012, ¶ 2). This begs for companies to ask themselves if they are recruiting and retaining the right talent, understanding what each generation is looking for in an organization, and motivating employees to stay, even when the economy improves and they are presented with other employment opportunities.

Knowledge Gap

Another conflict organizations are dealing with is the knowledge gap that is building between experienced Boomers and "green" Gen Yers. As more and more Boomers enter retirement, today's business and lifestyle landscape will dramatically change. With 75 million Baby Boomers on the verge of leaving the workforce and taking their knowledge with them, companies need to be even more proactive about ensuring a knowledge transfer to younger generations is taking place (Bernard, 2012, ¶1). This should be more than just making sure that valuable knowledge is captured and transferred – it should also sow the seeds of a knowledge culture within the organization. Each generation has something unique and valuable to offer and recognizing that may be the key to lessening the gap left by retiring workers.

With their technological confidence and fresh, innovative ideas, companies look to their new and less expensive talent to develop a competitive edge. However, younger employees are often quickly disenchanted with organizations that place demands on them without giving them the necessary tools to help them succeed, causing quick jumps to new companies where they feel they are supported to grow and develop. Contrary to that, Boomers are looking for new ways to give back to the organizations that have served them for decades, and they are

considering the business opportunities that provide them with collaborative working environments.

Mentoring provides the opportunity to join these two together, partnering Gen Y workers with more experienced Boomers, who not only have knowledge and skills to pass on, but also notable networks and broad business experience to guide younger employees to focus on their long-term career path and acquire the information needed to succeed. By investing in younger workers' professional growth and development, companies will retain younger workers who tend to "job hop", , and also fill the needs the older workers hold of working as a team, giving back, and bridging the knowledge gap as they cross the bridge of retirement (Lindenberger & Stoltz-Loike, n.d., ¶5-6).

Creating a culture focused on knowledge sharing is not only vital for the inevitable day when experienced Boomers enter retirement – it is also setting a foundation for a culture where team members contribute what they know for the benefit of the organization. Nurturing a culture that is more collaborative can help make knowledge transfer an overall part of how an organization runs.

Privacy

With all the benefits offered by new technologies, there are an equal amount of risks that businesses must bear in mind before incorporating these new technologies. Security is a primary concern when dealing with new technologies, especially those that are accessible outside of the traditional workplace. The physical securities of IT equipment, as well as the network access to unauthorized users are both aspects that must be considered now due to virtual teaming. In fact, "it was recently reported that the average business laptop held about $1 million of commercial data" (Standley, 2006, ¶7).

In addition, there is the security threat that social media sites pose in terms of spam and malware attacks. Sophos, a leading developer and vendor of security software and hardware, published its 2010 Security Threat Report, reporting a 70 percent rise in organizations experiencing spam and malware via social networks. That report also stated that 72 percent are of the mind-set that employee behavior in social networks does in fact endanger their business security (Solis, 2010, ¶8).

The other side argues that the creative process social media provides is actually beneficial to employee productivity. Human beings need periodic breaks to relieve the constant focus on the task at hand. Social media can act as a palette cleanser to help clear the mind and refresh thinking. *Creativity and the Mind*, a psychology text dealing with the neuroscience of creativity, observes that people are more successful if they are forced to move away from a problem or distract them temporarily (Ward, Finke, & Smith, 2002, p. 143).

As a project manager, it is important to understand and value both sides of the argument. Strategically engaging in social media can not only help motivate and refresh employees, it can also prove lucrative, providing access to tools and networks that could bring collaborative value to the company. However, the web is not outside the means to manage (Solis, 2010, ¶22).Without guidelines and beneficial governance, there is the risk of over-participation. In order to successfully utilize and benefit from the many aspects of social media, teams must master and respect privacy, boundaries, and time management.

Leveraging Diversity into Opportunity

Addressing conflict in a multigenerational team will require project managers to master a multigenerational mind set. There are many ways that project managers can leverage their project team's diversity for success.

Understand team members' beliefs and values

Individual's beliefs and values are not easy to change. By understanding why generations behave as they do, project managers may create a better project environment when thinking about team cohesiveness not only in their hiring decisions, but also throughout the project lifecycle.

Based on the drivers identified in Exhibit 1, project managers are able to adjust how they recruit and retain their

team by understanding, asking, and showing commitment to the team members' motivating factors (Gelbtuch & Morlan, 2010, ¶9). By understanding that values are at the center of who a person is, project managers can first work to understand where their team members are coming from in order to leverage different working styles for the benefit of the project. Asking includes questioning team members how they would handle situations, in order to gain insight into their personal motivation; project managers can show commitment by keeping an open mind and on-going dialogue to ensure differences are viewed as positives instead of hindrances. A project manager must be able to lead, recognize, and reconcile a team in order to overcome the challenges that arise out of a multigenerational workforce.

Communication and Collaboration

Communicating and collaborating clearly are other important aspects of a successful multigenerational, multi-functional project team. A successful model for collaboration is more than just a set of processes – it is to create a traditional way of thinking about collaboration so that teams can focus on the people, processes, tools and technologies for their current projects. With project teams becoming more diverse from a variety of locations, collaboration can either be a competitive advantage or detrimental to project success. While there are tools available to increase a project team's level of collaboration, the easiest and most cost-effective way to improve collaboration is by defining a collaboration model that best supports the specific organizational needs (See Exhibit 2).
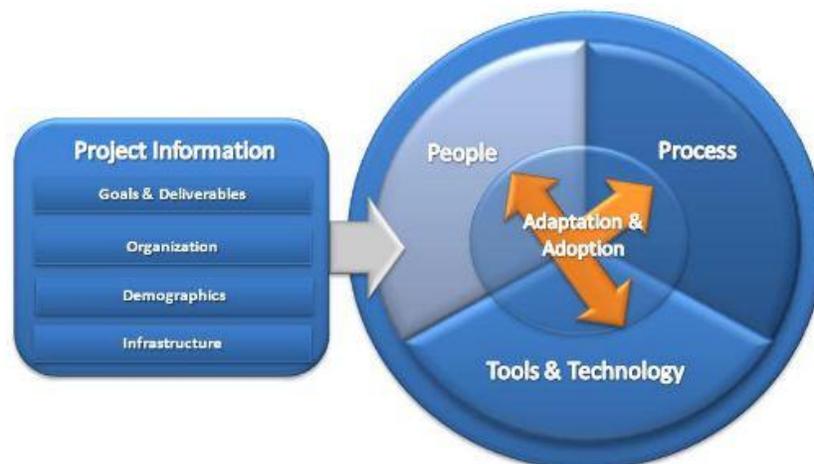

Exhibit 2 – Collaboration Model
(Helfrich, Jones & Roberto, 2012, ¶3).

Oftentimes, project success is dependent on how well the team can work together to achieve the project goal. When a team is struggling, it is typically the result of poor collaboration and can be identified through the collaboration model.

Leveraging Technology for Project Success

Working with the right toolset is just as important on a project as having the right people and processes. Project managers can leverage technology to increase collaboration, leading to better organized and more clearly focused projects.

One of these technologies, Citrix Podio, is a cloud-based work platform with new "do-it yourself" apps that can be modified and customized to fit the way project management teams work. These collaborative apps are marketed as being as easy to create as a spreadsheet and allow project teams to manage their processes and streamline workflows for ultimate efficiency. Podio was designed in order to allow workers to fit their projects and tasks into structures that work for them, and meet their specific, unique need. "Podio gives businesses a scalable way to manage various

projects and deliverables from one central place through the concept of 'apps' and workspaces. By creating a space and inviting teammates, the apps can be used to power an entire project from start to finish, creating a template for next time as well as any customization needed as projects evolve," said Dave Garrett, President & CEO, Gantthead ("Citrix Podio", 2012, ¶9).

Additionally, according to Gartner Research, at least a quarter of new business applications by 2014 will be built by workers outside the IT department who know what is needed to replace complex project management software that is no longer applicable to the way contemporary teams collaborate. ('Citrix Podio", 2012, ¶2).

Success Stories

Generational Diversity

Businesses that adapt to their multigenerational workforce are already proving to be more successful at retaining their employees than those who do not. For example, CVS Pharmacy understood that a large percentage of their workers were nearing the age of retirement and had unique drivers. CVS has stores in every region –and climate – of the country, so in 2004, CVS created its Snowbird Program, which allowed experienced store employees move among CVS locations according to their seasonal preferences. With many participants being mature workers who have a harder time in extreme climates, CVS privileged its workers to winter in southern states, and summer in warmer ones. Since the program's inception, over 1000 employees have participated, earning CVS a well-deserved award from the American Society on Aging (Hewlett, Sherbin & Sumberg, 2009, ¶7).

Social Media

A new norm has been achieved in the project environment, and it is not going anywhere. Stakeholders are demanding more for less and ensuring project success is becoming more vital as projects are being pushed towards increasing profitability. With the fast paced environment projects now occur under, learning to work smarter is becoming more important than ever before. The power of social media and advances in technology are helping project managers engage their teams and execute tasks faster than ever before .Breaking the physical boundaries of project teams needing to be in the same place at the same time in order to work, social media is encouraging project teams to color outside the lines in order to achieve results through 24-7 communication, instant feedback, knowledge sharing and growth, and collaboration opportunities.

Elizabeth Harrin, author of *Social Media for Project Managers,* shares a story about a colleague who used social media in one of her project environments. Harrin shares how wikis were used to better communicate with stakeholders by taking bits of information and placing it in a dashboard so there was always real-time information ready when stakeholders asked. Wikis were also used in team meetings so status could easily be identified and updates could be made live. Later, when going through an audit, they could back track the history of the project and could find all the information they needed to present to auditors within the wiki. This is a valuable explanation how social media can help track things in a transparent, manageable way (Fichtner, n.d., podcast).

Virtual training and development opportunities are also valuable parts of social media's capabilities. Staying on top of the newest project management trends and knowledge is an important part of working in project management. However, training and development during a project manager's schedule can be difficult. Podcasts and webinars are changing the way training is done, with sessions that project managers and PMP's can attend when their schedules allow. Project management training company Roeder Consulting hosts a monthly webinar presenting various topics, inviting guest speakers, and giving PDU's out per session. It's a win-win as project managers can virtually attend training whenever they have time, and Roeder Consulting gains recognition – a large following has become members of their LinkedIn group and keeps them at the forefront of their minds when training is needed ("Can Social Media", 2012, ¶6).

Understanding how to create, develop, and prosper with a multigenerational, multi-technological project team will be a key trait for project managers for years to come. As more Boomers exit, more Gen Yers enter, and technology continues to expand, project managers will need to be more organic than ever.

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