

PULLING TOGETHER – BUILDING A COMMON FUTURE TO THRIVE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD



Highlights from the Major Projects Association Annual Conference held on **19th–20th September 2018**

To succeed in the increasingly uncertain political, social, economic and technological environment that surrounds the delivery of major projects, the sectors must collaborate to create inclusive teams that can embrace and build on the best of our talents across the spectrum of age and experience.

The immediate challenges facing individuals and organisations, and the actions that can be taken to mitigate them were identified and discussed. The conference programme drew on both the established viewpoint of experienced professional and those of the next generation of younger professionals. A number of key themes emerged throughout the event.

This report will expand upon the theme of talent management. The other themes that emerged will be explored in more detail in our longer report from this event. They were:

- The political and public expectations of major projects
- The communication gap between the UK R&D sector and major projects
- The need to collaborate better

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Globalisation, political and economic uncertainty plus a fast-changing technological landscape is rapidly and radically altering the roles, jobs and rewards on offer to all professionals working in the major projects sector. Maintaining the talent pool – both a stream of new entrants and a core of experienced professions – is key to future success.

How do we overcome the problem of not having enough talent to meet the demands of the major project portfolio? There are major challenges when planning strategies to meet this changing goal. Graduates, for example, are full of great ideas, but we tend to teach them how we currently do things now rather than listen to ideas about how we might be able to do things in the future.

'We have to foster a culture that allows young professionals to ask questions and make challenges and know that their viewpoint will be taken seriously. That means allowing new ideas to develop, risks to be taken and learning from mistakes. It isn't simply about passing the buck of technology to the younger generations, it's about all of us working together in a truly collaborative fashion to tackle the big challenges our industry faces.'

Laura Hawkins, Innovation Project Manager, SSE plc

Experienced professionals, on the other hand, have to work hard to ensure that the rapid technological change being embraced by young professionals is properly managed rather than allowed to simply happen to us.

'Most professionals now accept that an increase in technology will impact on our working lives. Big projects give us the time and opportunity to develop new technologies – but we need to understand where these new technologies will best impact the industry.'
Sakthy Selvakumaran, Civil Engineer & PhD Researcher, University of Cambridge

Despite this clash of cultures, it is crucial that collaboration thrives across the workplace. The speed of change means that companies cannot resist investing in the new skills and strategies needed. Careers are no longer linear but are founded on change, and the major projects sector must embrace and support professionals across the span of their careers.

'For me to be successful I need all of my team to be successful – it is not just about the rising stars but must involve everyone across the organisation. As managers and leaders, we need to empower people and give them responsibility, but we also need to look after and support them.'
Scott Pillinger, Programme Manager, Network Rail

It is a difficult and challenging area. While innovation and embracing new ideas and new technologies is the key to boosting performance, efficiency and building in resilience, it also requires professionals to take the risk of moving beyond the norm and the known.

For example, understanding and creating social value now sits at the heart of the modern major projects profession and is often driven by a younger generation that is deeply aware that we live in an increasingly unbalanced society. We have to make our work accessible to the public and explain the value we add – social media is a good tool but not everyone is good at it. We need to employ a wider range of talent and use modern forms of communication to tell the story.

'The fear is that we don't act to leverage the available skills – not just to provide for society but to actually shape the future. We must recruit beyond our comfort zone.'
Dr Rosie Hughes, Innovation & Continuous Improvement Lead, Strategic Highways Europe, AECOM

A new breed of technology-focused, highly entrepreneurial companies are emerging in the major projects space and embracing this change and opportunity. By operating in an open plan, inclusive environment with a vertically integrated model, they allow and encourage teams to develop new ideas, testing early and testing often, learning from mistakes rapidly along the way.

ACCELERATING TALENT – THE CPO MODEL

Jobs for life are over as people are forced to refresh their skills. The single career is no longer the norm. Research suggests skills today will not be relevant for most people in three years. Young people, in particular, do not want jobs for life; they want change. The concept is now of shorter, well-defined career ‘tours of duty’ lasting two to four years.

A motivated and well-trained workforce can help a modern business to increase agility; improve engagement; strengthen commitment. To generate these returns it is essential that employers understand employees’ passions and motivations – at work and in the hours beyond it – and invests both time and money to develop new and existing talents.

However, the average company spends just £283 per person each year on learning and development. Even factoring in the fact that technology and online learning programmes have substantially reduced the cost of training, this is a very low figure.

The CPO model, shared by Moorhouse, attempts to help organisations to find and support individuals’ ‘sweet spots’ that most effectively balance three core elements, namely:

Capability: the skills, knowledge and experience of an organisation are vital, and building a ‘learning culture’ helps to boost efficiency and effectiveness – the key is to commit to investing both time and money in people.

Passion: what drives people and makes work not feel like work.

Organisational needs: it is important to communicate and articulate this need with great transparency and authenticity.

POINTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- To what extent will the emergence of new technology impact the way that major projects organisations recruit and retain staff in the future?
- How will political changes such as Brexit impact the availability of and demand for talent in the sector?
- Should major project professionals be trained and more engaged in the financial management of assets?
- Do we understand and support the growth in portfolio careers?

[more](#)  [Major Projects Association seminars](#)

[more](#)  [Major Projects Association reports](#)

Co-Chair: Sir Tim Laurence, Chairman, Major Projects Association

Contributors:

Olivia Blessington, Senior Associate, Clyde & Co
 Dr Michèle Dix CBE, Managing Director, Crossrail 2, Transport for London
 Claire Durkin, Head of Global Science, Innovation and Knowledge Economy, Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
 Lisa Fahey, Consultant, Moorhouse Consulting
 Will Goode, Associate, Arup
 Laura Hawkins, Innovation Project Manager, SSE plc
 The Rt Hon the Lord Heseltine, Former Deputy Prime Minister
 Dr Rosie Hughes, Innovation & Continuous Improvement Lead, Strategic Highways Europe, AECOM
 Isabelle Linden, Principal Consultant, PA Consulting

Participating Organisations:

AECOM
 Advance Consultancy Ltd
 Affinity Water
 Amey
 Anglian Water
 Arup
 Atkins – member of the SNC-Lavalin Group
 BAE Systems
 BP Exploration Operating Company Ltd
 Balfour Beatty plc
 Bentley Systems
 Berkshire Consultancy Ltd
 Burges Salmon LLP
 Campbell Lutyens
 Clyde & Co
 Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
 Department for Transport
 dRMM Architects
 Environment Agency
 Ernst & Young LLP
 FCO Services
 Fluor Ltd
 Gardiner & Theobald

Grosvenor Britain & Ireland
 HS2
 Heathrow Airport Ltd
 Highways England
 Horizon Nuclear Power
 Hyperloop
 IBM United Kingdom Ltd
 Infrastructure and Projects Authority
 J Murphy & Sons Ltd
 Jacobs Group
 KPMG LLP
 Laing O’Rourke
 Logikal Projects
 London Legacy Development Corporation
 Major Projects Association
 Ministry of Defence
 Moorhouse Consulting
 Morgan Sindall Group
 Mott MacDonald
 NATS
 National Grid
 Network Rail Ltd
 Northumbria University

Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
 PA Consulting
 Pinsent Masons LLP
 PwC
 RSM UK
 Ramboll
 SLC Rail
 School of Construction and Project Management, UCL
 Severn Trent Water
 Siemens UK plc
 Sunbeam Consulting
 The Nichols Group
 Tideway
 Transport for London
 Turner & Townsend
 UK Power Networks
 University of Cambridge
 University of Edinburgh
 WSP
 WYG
 Wood

Co-Chair: Claire Gott MBE, UK Head of Corporate Social Responsibility, WSP

Bill McElroy, Head of Industry Strategy, Turner & Townsend
 Professor Sadie Morgan, Director, dRMM Architects
 Tayo Oyetan, Principal, Moorhouse Consulting
 Scott Pillinger, Programme Manager, Network Rail Ltd
 Tim Richards, Legal Director, Clyde & Co
 Sakthy Selvakumaran, Civil Engineer & PhD Researcher, University of Cambridge
 Dr Anita Sengupta, Senior Vice President – Systems Engineering, Virgin Hyperloop One
 Charles Urquhart, Partner, Clyde & Co
 Simon Webb, Executive Director, The Nichols Group