Breaking silos: the power of collaboration in major projects

Highlights

Highlights from the Major Projects Association event held on 10th February 2026

MAJOR PROJECTS ASSOCIATION

In his introductory remarks, Andy Murray, Executive Director of the Major Projects Association, noted that the topic of collaboration has featured in many recent Association events at which collaboration was stressed as a key enabler to major project success. But what is 'collaboration' in the context of a major project? Is it the 'silver bullet' to ensure success every time, or are there times when it isn't needed or indeed if applied badly can be counterproductive?

This seminar set out to explore the theories behind successful collaboration – and what gets in the way – and to illustrate good practice through the lens of case studies from projects at different stages in the project life cycle.

Hearing from others

The **Inclusion Moment** by Francesca Fozard of Gardiner & Theobald stressed that inclusive communication matters on major projects.

> ***'Without diversity of communication, we lose diversity of thought which greases the wheels of effective collaboration.'***

Francesca Fozard, Associate, Gardiner & Theobald

Peter Lynch of Bentley Systems highlighted the differences between major projects and aviation in their approaches to collaboration, despite both operating in similarly capital intensive and safety critical environments.

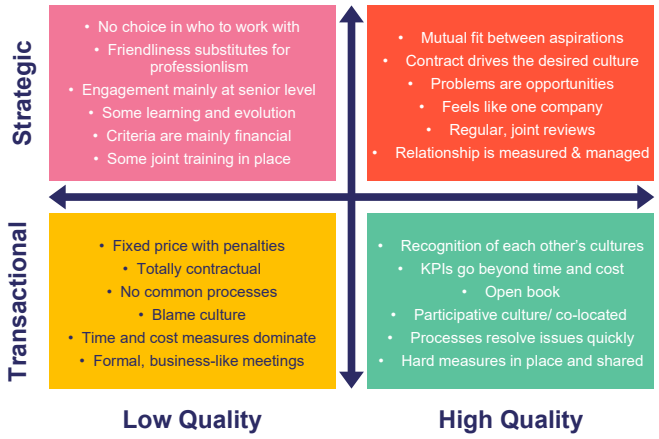
He told delegates how aviation takes a human-centred approach and has institutionalised learning from failure, encouraging sharing and use of data to inform and learn with openness, honesty and without fear.

David Whitmore, Managing Consultant, MIGSO-PCUBED shared insights from MIGSO-PCUBED's global database of experience and over 20 years of research with Warwick Business School and UCL.

This research shows that the biggest risk to project success is their inter-organisational relationships. Yet this risk goes largely unmanaged, in part because project leaders are not trained in the techniques to manage them effectively.

Shockingly, 97% of projects within the research failed even to measure their critical relationships against a framework, as illustrated top right, and relied on their leaders' intuition to identify relational issues and whether their project needed transactional or strategic relationships.

What type of relationship do you need for your project?



MIGSO-PCUBED UCL

This 'Leadership Intuition' is often clouded by perception, and few leaders understand how to share perceptions without upsetting other parties. It is clear that this understanding is a key competence for leaders in order to deliver major projects in the UK's highly complex environment.

David outlined the two different types of collaboration (Transactional or Strategic) and how to strike the right balance between collaboration and effort.

Ed Moore, CEO of ResoLex, explored why collaboration remains so hard by analysing failures and friction points, and examining how competing external drivers and short-term horizons undermine collaborative working.

Building on David's input Ed looked at the differences between relationship types:

- Effective transactional
- Co-operative
- Collaborative

Achieving a collaborative relationship requires far more effort and it is necessary to be clear on what specific value you want to achieve.

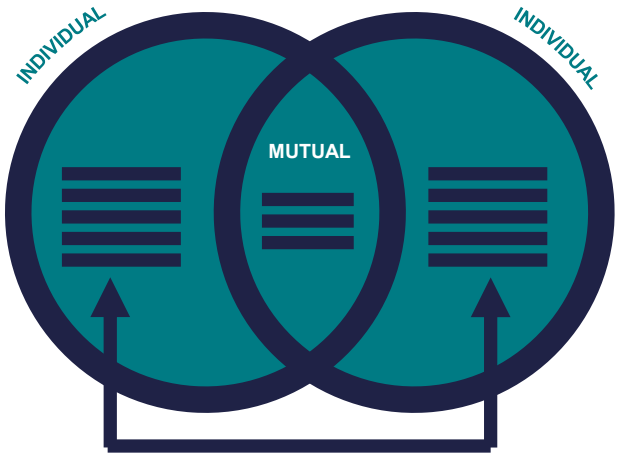
> ***'Collaboration – it takes time and takes real planning.'***

Ed Moore, CEO, ResoLex

Ed extended David's observations on project leaders' competencies and recommended the Major Projects Association study report on project leadership – **No More Heroes**.

To achieve a true collaboration, Ed highlighted the necessity of recognising and airing the range of objectives each party will have, as outlined in the diagram below.

Understanding Objectives



Ed Moore, CEO, ResoLex

Building on Francesca's key message, Ed noted that communications are now far more complex and require more consideration.

Real world examples

Drew Short from the **Nuclear Decommissioning Authority** (NDA) used case study examples to show how NDA group (4 operating companies and corporate centre) collaborate between 17 sites to solve complex decommissioning challenges via a 'lead and learn' approach.

> ***'Most successful collaborations don't happen by accident; they happen by design.'***

Drew Short, Programme Director for NDA Group P3M Excellence, Nuclear Decommissioning Authority

This approach enables NDA to solve challenges once, unlocking shared benefits through group collaboration, underpinned by a common methodology built on:

1. Shared vision and common purpose
2. Clarity of roles
3. Learning culture
4. Strong governance

Drew shared how this approach had worked not only across NDA group but also in international collaboration in the clean-up and decommissioning of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant post the **2011 disaster**.

Prior to 2011 NDA and the Japanese utility had a transactional 'customer–supplier' relationship. Applying 'lead and learn' combined with time and planning (as noted by Ed) NDA were able to turn this into a longer-term collaborative relationship.

Emma Whigham, H2.0 Alliance Operations Director, **New Hospitals Programme** (NHP) set out how the design and development of a collaborative approach has been essential to generate the supplier base required to deliver the Hospital 2.0 Programme.

The purpose of the NHP H2.0 Alliance is to:

1. Create a collaborative environment where member organisations solve collective problems.
2. Enable NHP to control and manage the programme, providing support and scrutiny.

This Alliance will embrace 3 distinct groups: 11 Trusts; 10 Tier 1 contractors; and NHP.

Illustrating a common theme that building a collaborative framework takes time, planning and effort, Emma pointed out that NHP engaged with industry for over 4 years. This was necessary to create a wider supply chain market (from 4 to 10 tier 1 contractors) and required an iterative approach with both government and market stakeholders.

The resulting H2.0 Alliance collaborative framework consists of 3 elements:

1. Alliance Agreement
2. Alliance Environment
3. Alliance Framework & Call-Off

These are supported by 3 pillars to create delivery alignment and consistency:

1. H2.0 Design
2. NHP Way
3. Scheme Lifecycle

The speakers all agreed some key principles of successful collaboration:

- The importance of long-term thinking and planning to avoid the desire to rush to action.
- A shared vision and mutual objectives promote collaboration, but each party also needs to recognise and respect the differing objectives each will have to achieve in order to reach full mutual alignment.
- 'Lead and learn' can apply equally to behavioural as well as technical aspects.

Points for further discussion

- How can technological tools support and enhance collaboration in major projects?
- Can we assess our project leaders' ability to develop effective relationships rather than command large organisations?
- How can we learn from other sectors to underpin 'institutionalised learning from failure'?

With grateful thanks to Bentley Systems for hosting this event.

Contributors

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Participating organisations

Advance Consultancy
AECOM
Agilia Infrastructure Partners
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Arcadis (UK) Limited
Ardent Management Limited
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