



SOCIAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT?

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Abstract

The last 10 to 12 years has seen the spectacular rise of social media and online social networks, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Yammer, Google+ and LinkedIn. The use of these media is not only growing in terms of active users, but also in intensity of use. Given the importance of communication and collaboration in projects, it can be expected that social media also provide good opportunities for application in project teams and project management. However, the availability of documented experiences, research and ‘best practices’ of the use of social media in projects, is still quite limited. This paper reflects on the content and contributions of the book “Strategic Integration of Social Media into Project Management Practice”. This book provides an overview of opportunities, barriers, technologies, limitations and experiences of social media in projects, by a diverse coverage of studies and applications from Europe, North America, South America, Africa and Asia.

The different contributions and cases show that Social media and Web 2.0 technologies provide great opportunities to enable teams, especially virtual teams, to collaborate and share information, thereby enhancing project collaboration and coordination. However, social media also allows project managers to take this development even further and to make project management truly social. ‘Social Project Management’, recognizing that project teams are part of a broader project community, which is both formal and informal, and that engaging with that community is the key to getting things done.

Keywords: *Project management, Social media.*

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Introduction

The last 10 to 12 years has seen the spectacular rise of social media and online social networks, such as Twitter, facebook, YouTube, Yammer, Google+ and LinkedIn. The use of these media is not only growing in terms of active users, but also in intensity of use. Especially since the introduction of smartphones and other mobile internet devices, using the social media is literally a ‘finger tap’ away. And although concerns about privacy and misuse of personal data may discourage certain users to engage in these media, the largest social media (facebook, QQ and WhatsApp) are reporting active users numbers of between 700 and 1.400 million people. That is almost 1/5th of world population and roughly half of all people with an internet connection.

The role social media play in the social life of their users can hardly be overestimated. The way people express and present themselves on social media may be considered an inseparable part of their lifestyle and existence (Silvius and Kavaliauskaite, 2014). Also in the professional context, the use of social media is developing. The ease of use of social media, their rapidly developing functionality and their mobile accessibility, make them an efficient tool for team communication and collaboration. Some organizations even redesigned their corporate intranets and knowledge sharing systems as social media. In part replacing top-down structuring of information by bottom up inputs, discussion, personal profiling and ad-hoc collaboration.

Given the importance of (team) collaboration and (stakeholder) communication in projects, it can be expected that social media also provide good opportunities for application in project teams and project management (Harrin, 2010). However, the availability of documented



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experiences, research and ‘best practices’ of the use of social media in projects, is still quite limited.

This paper reflects on the content and contributions of the book “Strategic Integration of Social Media into Project Management Practice” (Silvius, 2016). This book, provides an overview of opportunities, barriers, technologies, limitations and experiences of social media in projects in 18 chapters, that provide a diverse coverage of studies and applications from Europe, North America, South America, Africa and Asia.

Following this introduction, the paper is structured in three paragraphs. The next paragraph will provide an overview of the content of the book. The third paragraph, Discussion and reflection, will reflect upon this content and discuss the lessons that may be learned from the book. The final paragraph of this paper will provide some conclusions and will discuss the concept of ‘social project management’.

Description of content

This book Strategic Integration of Social Media into Project Management Practice (Silvius, 2016) is structured in five sections, with the following themes:

1. The Opportunity of Social Media

In this section, four research based chapters will explore how the functionality offered by social media can be applied in project management processes and practices.

2. The Human Factor and Social Media

In this section, three chapters present the effect of social media on (virtual) teams and teamwork.

3. Tools and Technologies of Social Media

This section presents, in four chapters, an overview of technologies that can be applied to facilitate stakeholder communication and team collaboration in projects.

4. Cases and Applications

This section presents, in five chapters, a range of empirical studies of projects that applied social media in their communication strategy and discusses the experiences in these cases.

5. Conclusion

In this section, a first chapter presents an overall reflection on the content of the book by the editor. A second chapter is provided by authors of the Project Management Institute and describes the social media infrastructure that project management professionals can utilize to stay in touch with their peers and with the profession.

As the book presents a diverse set of contributions, developed by almost 30 project management professionals and academics, the next section provides a short description of each chapter.

Section 1: The Opportunity of Social Media

Chapter 1 is titled “Project Management 2.0: Towards the renewal of the discipline” (Nach, 2016). In this chapter, the author addresses the question why project managers would integrate social media in the communication in and around their projects. One the ‘why’ is clear, he describes a number of social media types that can be applied in projects and provides a roadmap for the integration of social media in project management.

Chapter 2, “Effects of Social Media on Project Management” (Sponselee, 2016), reports an explorative study into the potential application areas of social media within the project management subject groups of the ISO 21500 guideline. Next to the potential application areas, the author also explored the perceived barriers to social media use.



In chapter 3, “Social Media Use in Managing Project Communication” (Dokkum and Ravesteijn, 2016), the authors develop a framework that project managers can use in order to apply in social media to projects. The chapter concludes that social media can improve organizational communications, especially so in the context of project management, and has an impact on the costs of a project. Important success factors in the use of social media are: affordability, trust and ease-of-use. If these factors have been met than social media technologies can provide a self-organization information network were workers can have: peer-to-peer sharing, content evaluation and push nature.

Chapter 4 is titled “Social Media for Project Management” (Manzoor, 2016). In this chapter, the author explores how project managers can use social media tools. He describes a range of social media tools that can provide value in projects and provides practical implications and recommendations. The author concludes that “social media is here to stay” and that project managers should carefully research social media tools to determine their fit into the project and the organization itself.

Section 2: The Human Factor and Social Media

Chapter 5, “The influence of social media on teamwork aspects” (Molendijk, 2016), reports a study into the perceived effect of the functionalities of social media on quality of teamwork. The author concludes that the use of social media has the potential to have a positive influence on the quality of teamwork in projects.

In chapter 6, “Investigating the Intention To Use Social Media Tools Within Virtual Project Teams” (Giltenane, 2016), the author reports a study into the intention to use social media within virtual project teams, using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model. The findings validate the findings of previous studies using the model and indicate the models suitability for further refinement in the virtual project team area and in virtual teams in general.

Chapter 7, “Barriers to Social Media Adoption on Projects” (Harrin, 2016), explores the reasons behind the lack of adoption of social media tools in a project environment. In this chapter, the author, having authored a frequently cited book on social media in project management before (Harrin, 2010), discusses how project practitioners can overcome concerns about the lack of overall strategy, lack of senior management sponsorship, lack of a proven business case, security issues, information overload and the blurring of lines between professional and personal data online in order to realize the benefits of social and collaboration tools. The chapter concludes that social tools are a fundamental part of the current and future project management landscape and that ‘social’ should be intelligently incorporated into working practices in order to meet a need instead of being a response to outside trends.

Section 3: Tools and Technologies of Social Media

Chapter 8, “Analyzing the landscape of Social Media” (Silvius, 2016b), describes the ‘landscape’ of social media and discusses the landscape from the perspectives of functionality, social media size and growth, geographical market position, generational differences and gender differences.

Chapter 9, “Social Media Use Within Project Teams” (Merwe, 2016) gives practical recommendations about the social media tools and applications for use on projects. It introduces the reader to the most popular and widely used social media tools and provides considerations for the selection of the best tools to integrate in projects.

In chapter 10, “An Integrated Approach to Collaborative Learning in Projects” (Veronese and Chaves, 2016), the authors develop a social media and web 2.0 based architecture for



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knowledge management in order to analyze how the web 2.0 technologies can support capturing, sharing and disseminating lessons learned in project management.

Chapter 11, “Smart' Project Management: Smartphone Apps for Project Management” (Silvius and Silvius, 2016), reports an explorative study into the functionality of project management apps in the Google Play and Apple App stores. The authors analyze the apps according to type of functionality, project management processes supported, methodology/standard supported, topics covered, website support, languages supported, project roles supported, number of team members supported and number of projects supported.

Section 4: Cases and Applications

Based upon the theories of communication, chapter 12, “Developing a social media communication plan: a case study of the Quicker Steps project” (Nazari, 2016), describes the development of a social media communications plan for a the Quicker Steps project in Finland. The Quicker Steps project aimed to disseminate knowledge and best practices of the diverse cooperation and partnership solutions between higher education institutions and working life in Finland, Luxemburg, Austria and the United Kingdom. Next to describing the plan, this chapter also presents the result of a study into the effectiveness of the different communication channels.

Chapter 13, “Projects without email, is that possible?” (Wijngaard et al., 2016), describes the case of how the IT and consulting firm ATOS designed and implemented a landscape of project communication that eliminated email and replaced it with unified communications and social media. The authors share their view on the implementation steps, experiences, change aspects and lessons learned.

Chapter 14, “From reactive to proactive use of social media in emergency response: A critical discussion of the Twitcident project” (Boersma et al., 2016), reports a pilot project on the use of social media in the public safety sector. The authors discuss how social media, and in particular Twitter, could be used in the response room setting. The study concludes that the centralists had a hard time interpreting and validating social media data and linking them to other sources of information. This finding, however, does not mean that the use of social media data has to be abandoned. The authors conclude that the effective use of social media data requires a learning process.

In chapter 15, “Using Twitter for Collaborative Student and Project Manager Learning” (Barnett-Richards and Sams, 2016), the authors discuss the evolving nature of project management education and in particular the development towards collaborative learning in order to enhance both the employability of students, and enabling managers to reflect on their own practice and understanding. They report their experiences in using Twitter in order to support for collaborative learning. The authors discuss their reflections and perspectives of the value and challenges in using Twitter for this type of endeavor, and present their view on the future implications for adopting the use of Twitter, and social media more broadly, for project teams.

Chapter 16, “Social Media Applications Promote Constituent Involvement in Government Management” (Merwin et al., 2016), explores the use by local governments of social media applications to communicate with constituents and promote involvement in policy and project management activities. The authors provide a variety of examples from the local government context and discuss suggestions for the use of social media in government.

Section 5: Conclusion



In Chapter 17, “Social Project Management?” (Silvius, 2016c), the editor of the book reflects upon the lessons that may be learned from this book. In three concise paragraphs, it discusses the common ground amongst the different contributions, the ‘takeaways’ from the book and the concept of ‘social project management’ as the future outlook on social media in project management.

The final chapter, chapter 18 “Inside the Project Management Institute: Setting up Change Makers for Success Based on Social Connection” (Walker and Garrett, 2016), presents how the Project Management Institute (PMI) utilizes popular social media platforms in order to better support project management practitioners, as well as create a robust virtual community. Through social media, PMI aims to create an environment in which project practitioners create, curate, and share strong value-added content, take part in well-informed discussions, and collaborate to seek effective solutions.

Discussion and reflection

This section aims to reflect upon and summarize the lessons that may be learned from the book. In order to do so, we will discuss the common ground amongst the authors. What statements may summarize the different experiences and contributions? Elaborating on this, we will summarize what the reader may or should ‘take away’ from the book. What can be learned from social media and applied to project communication? In the final paragraph of this epilogue, we will take these lessons further and ask ourselves what ‘social project management’ could look like.

Common ground

When reflecting upon the contributions in the book, some common ground can be discovered amongst the different contributions.

Efficient and effective team communication

First of all, social media provides an opportunity for supporting efficient and effective team communication in project teams. Many contributions in this book, most notably Nach (2016), Sponselee (2016), Dokkum and Ravesteijn (2016), Manzoor (2016), Molendijk (2016), Giltenane (2016), Merwe (2016), Veronese and Chaves (2016) and Wijngaard et al. (2016), highlight the opportunities that social media offer for supporting efficient and effective communication within project teams.

Understand differences

While recognizing the opportunities of social media, Silvius (2016b) highlights the fact that the social media landscape is not unified. By discussing differences between regions, countries and generations, this contribution makes us aware that a social media communication strategy needs to be carefully planned, especially in the case of international projects with geographically dispersed teams.

Develop a plan

Plan the project’s social media communication strategy is also the conclusion that comes from Silvius and Silvius (2016) based upon their analysis of project management apps. An example of the development of such a social media communication strategy is contributed by Nazari (2016). The step-for-step approach described here may provide project managers with a practical process description for the development of their communication strategy.

There is a learning curve



The cases reported by Boersma et al. (2016) and Barnett-Richards (2016) show us that there will be a learning curve in the effective use of social media. Just as any new technology requires some ‘getting used to’, this may also be the case in the application of social media in the professional setting of projects.

And there may be barriers

The chapters by Harrin (2016) and Sponselee (2016) help us understand that the adoption of social media in projects may also experience barriers. Some of these barriers may have to do with individual concerns of team members, for example loss of privacy and blurring of lines between professional and personal online presence, whereas other barriers may be caused by the organization’s engaged in the project. For example concerns about data security or compliancy with the organization’s policies.

Social media in stakeholder engagement is lagging behind

A final reflection should be that the ‘external’ use of social media, the use of social media in stakeholder engagement, is lagging behind the ‘internal’ use, the use of social media within the project team. In the ‘opportunity’ section of the book, Manzoor (2016), Nach (2016), Sponselee (2016) and Dokkum and Ravesteijn (2016) do identify stakeholder management as an application area of social media in projects, however, the use of social media with the project team is more prominent in these contributions. This bias towards the internal use of social media is even stronger within the sections ‘human factor’ and ‘tools and technologies’, where only Silvius and Silvius (2016) explicitly discusses the use of social media for stakeholder engagement. In the ‘cases and applications’ section, Nazari (2016) and Merwin et al. (2016) report cases in which the use of social media was specifically aimed at engaging with external stakeholders.

Should it be concluded that in the external use of social media in projects the actual use of social media is ahead of our conceptual understanding of this use?

Take aways

What should the reader ‘take away’ from the book? Well, first of all some questions. Questions on how social media are used in his or her project and on how they may be used in a project. The following paragraph discusses these questions.

Is your project social?

For many professionals working in projects, social media is part of their everyday life. Some may use it mainly in their personal life, whereas others also engage professionally on social media. How is this in your project? How do you use social media to support team communication? Can team members ask questions and seek information within the team? Are social media used to share updates and inform each other? Can team members ‘show’ themselves in profiles? Is the way social media are used deliberate or accidental? Is it clear for everyone in the team what the boundaries of social media use are? Is there a ‘code of social media conduct’ with regards to the project?

And also in the communication with stakeholders outside the management team, social media provide a powerful tool. Is social media part of the project marketing mix? Are social media used to create stakeholder engagement? Is the project sponsor involved in the communication on social media?

In today’s world, it is not a question whether social media are used in projects, but how they are used. Communication is a key aspect of project management and social media are part



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of this. The project manager should therefore deliberately integrate social media in the communication strategy of the project.

What can you learn from social media?

Social media differ from traditional communication in many ways. This section addresses some of these differences and discusses what we can learn from social media.

- Fast and unforgiving

Social media are fast and unforgiving. Fast in the sense that social media are perfectly fit for spreading information quickly to a large group of direct and indirect stakeholders. This quality offers tremendous opportunities. However, social media are also unforgiving. Messages that are inaccurate, inadequate or sent by mistake are 'out there' forever. Corrections are hard to make and carefully developed reputations can be destroyed in seconds. Be careful! is a meager, but oh so true advice.

- Top-down and bottom-up

By nature, social media allow for both top-down and bottom-up communication. This is a great quality if we want to support team collaboration or engage with stakeholders. However, this openness also has a flipside. The traditional control that the project manager had over the communication with the project sponsor and (external) stakeholders decreases. Team members may post updates on their work in the project on twitter, facebook or LinkedIn, as part of their personal profiling or online socializing. Project managers should be aware of this and set guidelines and boundaries for how team members can express themselves with regards to the project. A general ban on social media is probably not the best solution. Paying attention in the team on what is sensible on social media and what is not, may make more sense.

- Create a community

Social media provide the opportunity to build a community within or around your project. And as humans are social beings, communities are a great good. Communities create involvement, engagement and, sometimes, loyalty. Use the opportunities that social media offer to find interested individuals, understand interests, keep stakeholders informed and create a fan-base. Do not neglect the 'social' in social media.

- Entertaining

Effective communication through social media requires more than a text based newsletter or press release. Make content rich, attractive and entertaining. 'A picture is worth a thousand words' and social media are very well suited for sharing photos and videos. Include this visual aspect in your project communication.

- Engage

Social media provide unprecedented opportunities for two-way communication with stakeholders. The traditional approach to stakeholder management, 'sending' information to stakeholders in order to hope to win their support, can therefore evolve to stakeholder engagement. An approach to stakeholder relations that builds upon a two-way communication with stakeholders in order to create a 'better' project for all stakeholders involved.



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Encouragement

The book should also be seen as an encouragement. An encouragement to apply social media in projects, both within project teams and in stakeholder engagement. Engaging on social media is fun! And it makes us more aware of news, fun facts and interesting events that may be worth sharing. Social media increase the intensity of communication and thereby the engagement of the ones communicating. All of which are desirable effects in projects.

The editor therefore concludes: “*Social media are here to stay, so go out there and ‘play’.* Make a plan, but do it. Try and learn.” (Silvius, 2016c).

Conclusions: Towards social project management

Projects have never been easy, but project managers today face high pressure to perform. Rapidly developing technologies and changing markets force organizations to anticipate, respond and change constantly. Projects are more than ever at the heart of every organizations survival and success.

In this highly volatile environment, the execution of projects also is dynamic. Project teams are international, intercultural, geographically dispersed and increasingly self-organizing. Project managers are faced the question how to increase collaborative capabilities and maximize performance of the team, while maintaining control and oversight? Social media and Web 2.0 technologies provide great opportunities to enable teams, especially virtual teams, to collaborate and share information, thereby enhancing project collaboration and coordination.

However, social media also allows project managers to take this development even further and to make project management truly social. ‘Social Project Management’, recognizing that project teams are part of a broader project community, which is both formal and informal, and that engaging with that community is the key to getting things done (Triolog, 2012). In social project management, the core business processes of the project and project’s management are brought online. Social project management makes the project process visible to everyone, both inside and outside the team. Thereby creating transparency and giving the internal and external project community visibility into the events of the project, in order to enable smarter, quicker and more efficient collaboration. Social project management allows for anyone who is interested, to engage socially with the team to assist in accomplishing the project and organization’s goals (Triolog, 2012).

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