

Good Decisions Demand Trustworthy Data

Is your project data trustworthy? If you answered "no" or "I'm not sure", you aren't alone.

I've observed this to be a pretty universal conundrum. What's more, it compels us to ask the question, "If some of the data associated with project-based work is questionable, is there a way to improve its overall trustworthiness for decision-making?"

I believe there is.

There's been a lot of dialog recently about the impact of social media on the project management process. And, for the most part, we seem to fall into one of two camps. We're either advocates of embracing social media or we are opposed to it. I fall into the former camp. I'm a big fan of embracing the social media metaphor.

The key to whether or not we have trustworthy information to make decisions depends upon how accurately we can capture project information at the source—individual contributors on a project team. Like most of you, I've spent my fair share of time going from cube to cube asking, begging, and cajoling for a status update. I've also watched team members fumble around looking at notes, whiteboards and scraps of paper to pull that information together. Each time I was frustrated at how inaccurate I knew my report was going to be before I even started.

Most team members don't really get the project management process. They look at project managers as one more hindrance to actually getting things done. Of course, this isn't correct, project managers are facilitators and help get the work done, right?

I'm convinced that engaging the team in the project management process is crucial to collecting accurate and timely project information that can be trusted to inform decisions. What's more, I think the social media metaphor can help us do it.

Why is it that the same folks who chafe at updating their project status in PM tools will spend hours at home "updating status" on Facebook and other social media? I think the answer is pretty straightforward: Social Media Provides Value to the User

If the only value updating status in your project management software provides is giving you (the project manager) accurate information to push up, it's not enough value for most team members to contribute. In my opinion, social media provides value at a couple of different levels that we can and should be implementing into the project management process:

- Social media is about collaboration: Post an update, get a response. Make another update, start a conversation. That isn't happening in most project management software. Tasks get pushed down. There's little if any dialog. There's no request for comment. The obligation is on the team member to finish his or her task in the time allotted and that's pretty much it. Not a very collaborative way to collaborate on projects, tasks and issues is it? Incorporating the social media metaphor into the PM process allows team members, project managers and others to collaborate about work in a way that feels natural to the Facebook generation. If the metaphor works and is accepted by the workforce as meaningful, does it really make sense to fight it? Embrace it. Leverage it.
- Social media is about recognition: One of the things I've noticed over the last few years is the recognition component of social media. When people post an accomplishment, their friends and followers within their network seem to come out of the woodwork to congratulate and praise it. Applying the public nature of the social media metaphor to the PM process allows team members and other colleagues to make comment and acknowledge the accomplishments of their coworkers. Additionally, when everyone's accomplishments (or lack thereof) are visible to managers and their peers, people tend to perform at a higher level. It's more difficult to sit back and pretend to be busy working. Whether or not you are is visible to everyone on the team.
- Social media isn't very complicated: I must admit, I did have a younger colleague show me how to use Facebook initially. It took her about two minutes to completely explain how it worked. I didn't need to attend a multi-day training program to figure it out. When was the last time you were able to start using a project management tool with that level of ramp up? I know, what project management tools do is a lot more complicated than Facebook. I get it. However, they don't need to be that complex for the individual on a project team.

The real linchpin to whether or not we have trustworthy data to make decisions is the individual contributor on a project team. I think it's past time we started looking at him or her, and how we can best engage them in the process, to make sure that the information we rely on to make smart decisions is timely and trustworthy. Let's give them some value so they'll become willing participants in the process.

What are you doing to engage the team? Does your software help you do it?

—Ty Kiisel, AtTask