

THE VOICE OF THE PMO

TRANSFORMING PROJECT MANAGEMENT

iCoTech Services

Foreword from Joel Markham, CEO of iCoTech Services:



Our report outlines the main challenges 40 UK based PMOs discussed during closed focus groups, and their opinion of how technology could help their function mature. They and others expanded upon these points via a survey, which is small in sample and not representative but does provide a useful informational guide. This report is part of an ongoing project to connect industry experts to share best practice amongst practitioners.

Since September 2024, we've talked to the community from a range of industries across the private and public sector, with the latter comprising 57%. Just under a quarter work in small to medium enterprises (SME 1-250 employees), whilst the majority (43%) are employed by organisations of 2000 and more staff. Over half (52%) manage up to five projects, and nearly a third (31%) manage between 10 and over 20 projects concurrently.

"The intention of this report is to support a collaborative approach of shared learnings and best practice across the industry".

In this report, PMOs collectively refer to Programme, Portfolio and Project practitioners.

40

UK PMOs interviewed

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Out of the 40 PMOs...

43% Private sector

57% Public sector

52% manage up to 5 projects

31% manage between 10-20 projects

The Hand You're Dealt With and Other Challenges



Since the Pandemic...

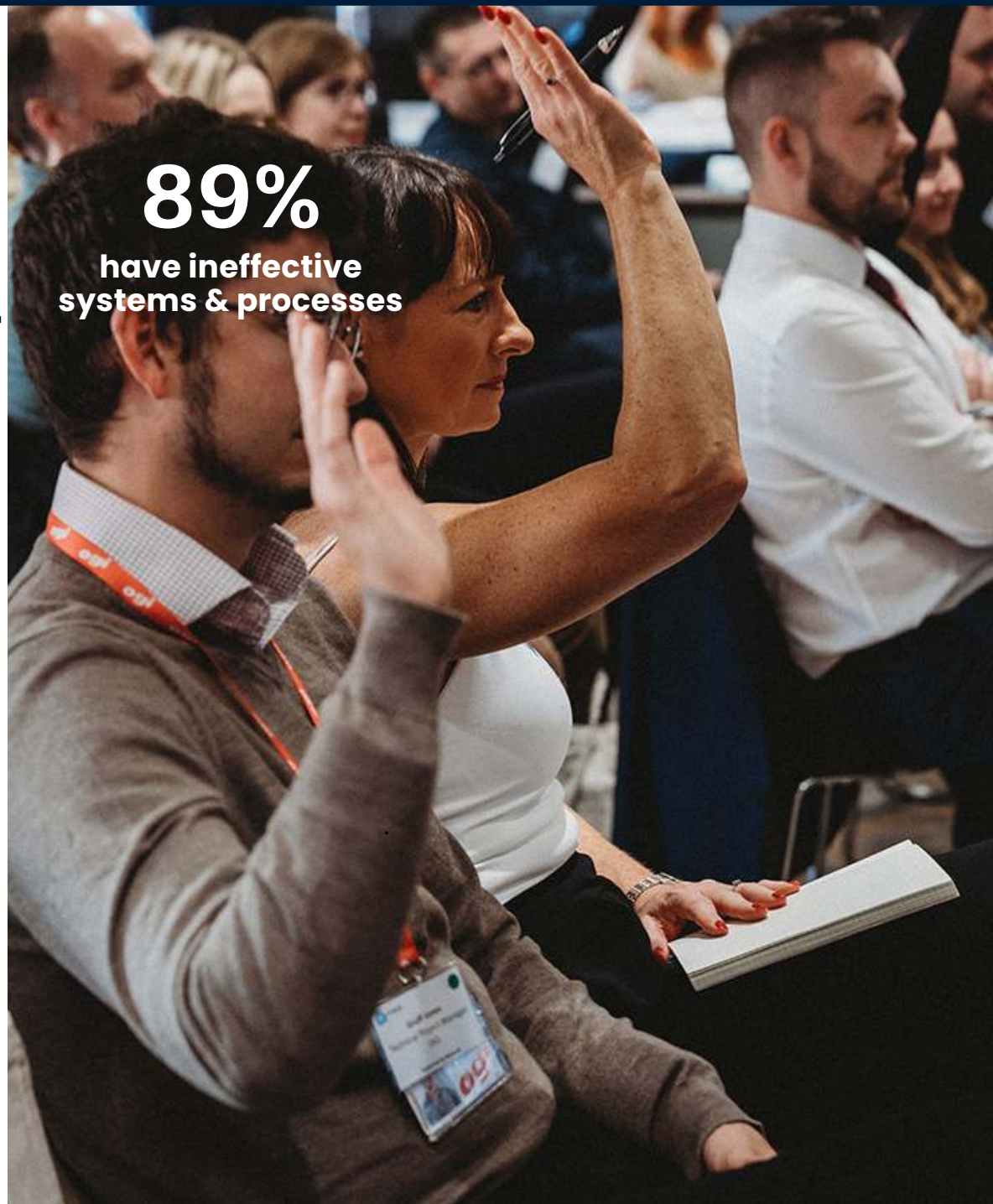
68%
have increased workloads

23%
hold more responsibility

52%
manage larger teams

This pressure is compounded by numerous factors. Including, a lack of understanding of what PMOs are there to do, siloed departments with different processes and system preferences, stakeholders with competing needs and varying levels of technical understanding, and projects that need prioritising.

Ineffective Systems and Processes



It has been hard work at times for less mature PMO departments to instil standardised processes and the structure to facilitate the right information, at the right level and at the right time across projects. Especially in an environment where they may be viewed as operational rather than strategic, face budget constraints (41%), resource shortages and ineffective systems and processes to control delivery (89%).

With a widely reported 60% of projects failing to meet set objectives (PMI), it was surprisingly common to find the tools available for our cohort often provide no visibility of the end-to-end process. Quite a few use spreadsheets, whilst those with corporate platforms had limited capability because of security restrictions in the Public sector, or multiple systems that aren't fully integrated in larger Private sector organisations.

Organisational Perceptions

These challenges are exacerbated by the need to address wider organisational perceptions of why PMOs are in the business. For example, Project Managers can often be helicoptered in to fix things when they have gone wrong for an accidental PMO.

And even then, it can be difficult to convince organisations that a structured approach from the very start of a project is beneficial. Our cohort suggested starting small. Either by reaching a compromise and introducing a pilot for a few well selected projects to show benefits of working in this way. Or to define your basic processes and apply them all the projects in your portfolio to gain consistency and commonality.

Those that had, were able to overcome previously limited engagement across their organisation and change the perception of what PMOs do, what their roles and responsibilities are at a functional level, and the value they add.

The key was to educate people that Portfolio, Programme and Project Managers are not here to make decisions but to make recommendations.

"They challenge, and make sure they do the right things for the office by providing the structure, and consistency required across the function"



Positive Movement

For some in our cohort changing perceptions is still an uphill struggle. It's striking that 9% feel the 'profession is more a hinderance with limited value' or the like, and others only say they are valued only some of the time. But more mature PMOs are generally respected for working with senior stakeholders and sponsors to deliver projects that are critical to business strategy and delivery, or providing a wider view across the portfolio in terms of corporate demand and external factors.

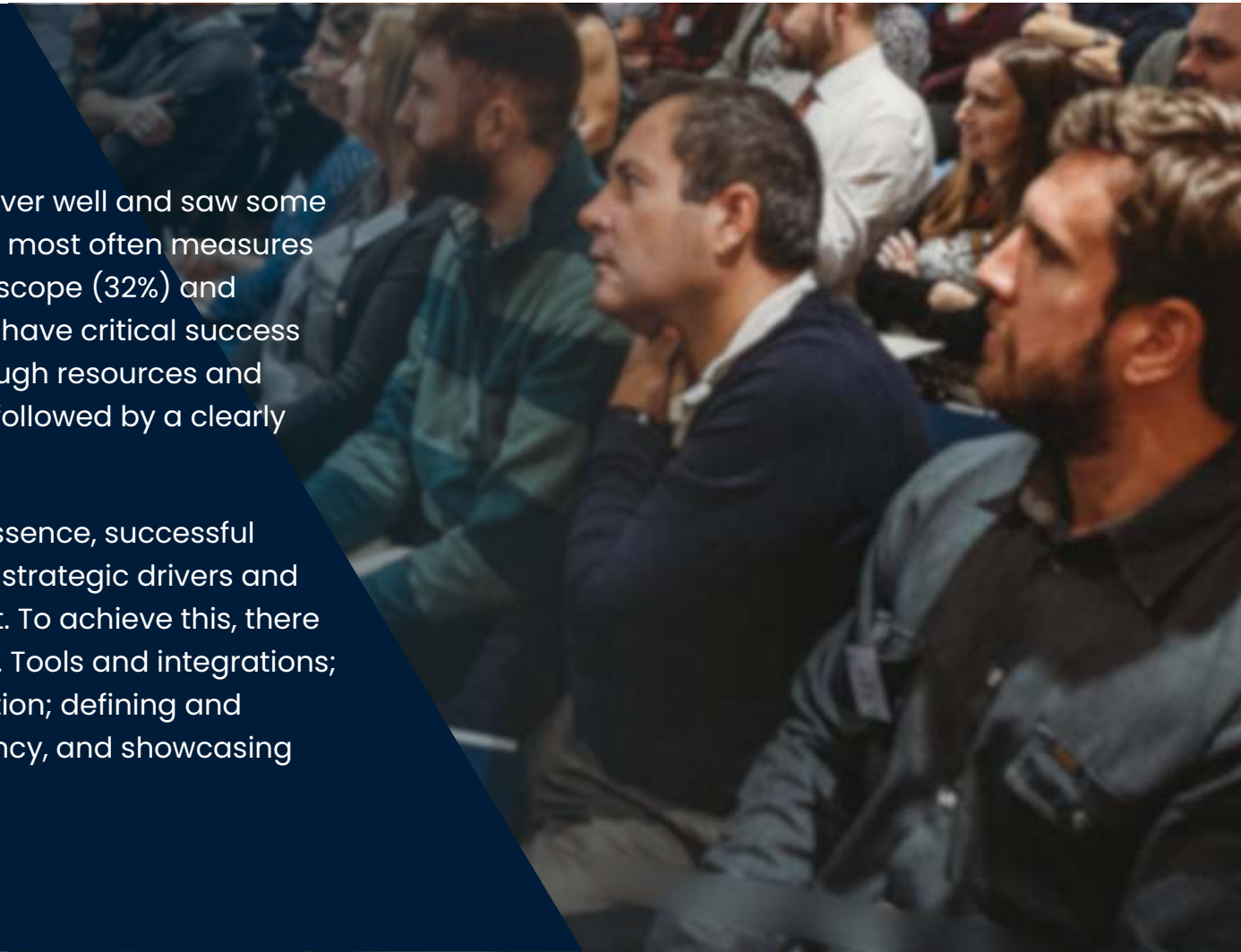
As the industry evolves, it is shifting senior stakeholder attitudes towards the PMO function positively; with 59% of our cohort suggesting senior managers are pleased with the value of their PMO function and 18% saying there is a better understanding of what they do now. Our PMOs acknowledged it is tricky to change perceptions, but the repeated message is to provide the right information, at the right level and at the right time and only escalate issues that required stakeholder input.

Transforming PMOs

Critical Success Factors

With this in mind, we looked at ways to deliver well and saw some common themes develop. Namely the two most often measures of success - delivering on time and within scope (32%) and driving adoption (23%) – as well as others, have critical success factors attached. These being, having enough resources and gaining stakeholder buy-in (both at 73%), followed by a clearly defined scope (64%).

Each project has its own nuances but, in essence, successful delivery rests on a mix of hitting all the key strategic drivers and remaining within expected over-all budget. To achieve this, there are some considerations our PMOs shared. Tools and integrations; standardising processes and communication; defining and delivering requirements; increasing efficiency, and showcasing value.



Tools and Integrations

There are times when you need to consider whether your processes align with the available technology and, if not, whether to update them or update the system. For many, cost is a big consideration (41%) and our PMOs advise assessing long-term goals against how new systems or applications connect to critical tools and will be used to help the business.

They stress transferring bad data and processes make any solution redundant so taking time to improve all underlying components is important. What data you have, where is it held, why do you need it, and how are you going to use it? What processes are in place, do they work, and can you standardise and improve them by automating documentation across the project's lifecycle? Or can you use AI to identify ROI and preliminary benefits and to create tailored training packages to facilitate user adoption?

Once these questions are answered, you can then source the best solution to support your needs. The suggestion is to start small with a scalable product rather than future proofing for a direction the organisation may or may not take down the road.

Begin with out-of-the-box solutions, like Power Platform and Co Pilot that are ready to go, easily integrated into existing systems, simpler to ingrain into an organisation, and allow you to evolve through customisations when you require.

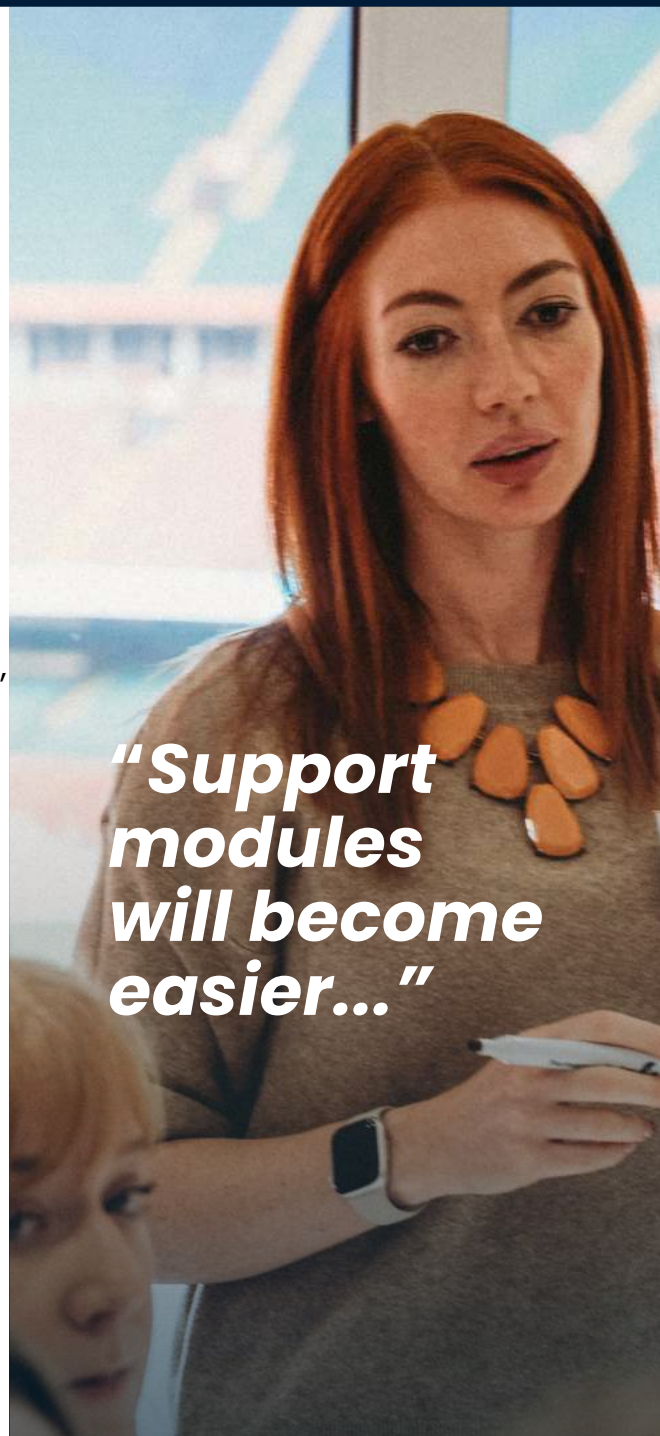
Standardising Processes and Communications

The biggest peeve amongst our cohort was a lack of standardised processes that are documented and communicated for the business to follow correctly.

As alluded to earlier, our PMOs believe technology can help. AI makes template creation quicker and easier, and is useful for researching and writing reports. And Power Platform, Power BI and Microsoft Lists automate documentation, stage gating and reporting to standardise project delivery and communication.

But as much as you standardised your approach and use a powerful tool to manage projects, if there isn't a clear understanding of how best to use it, processes will be disturbed by bad habits formed under pressure by users, or abandoned all together.

So, there is a compelling reason to use Teams, Sharepoint, Co Pilot, and Chatbots to provide a more personalised training package for people who don't want to read long documents or watch videos to facilitate adoption. They help you personalise and tailor support modules, meaning business champions can quickly see how a new application benefits their own team and help drive adoption.



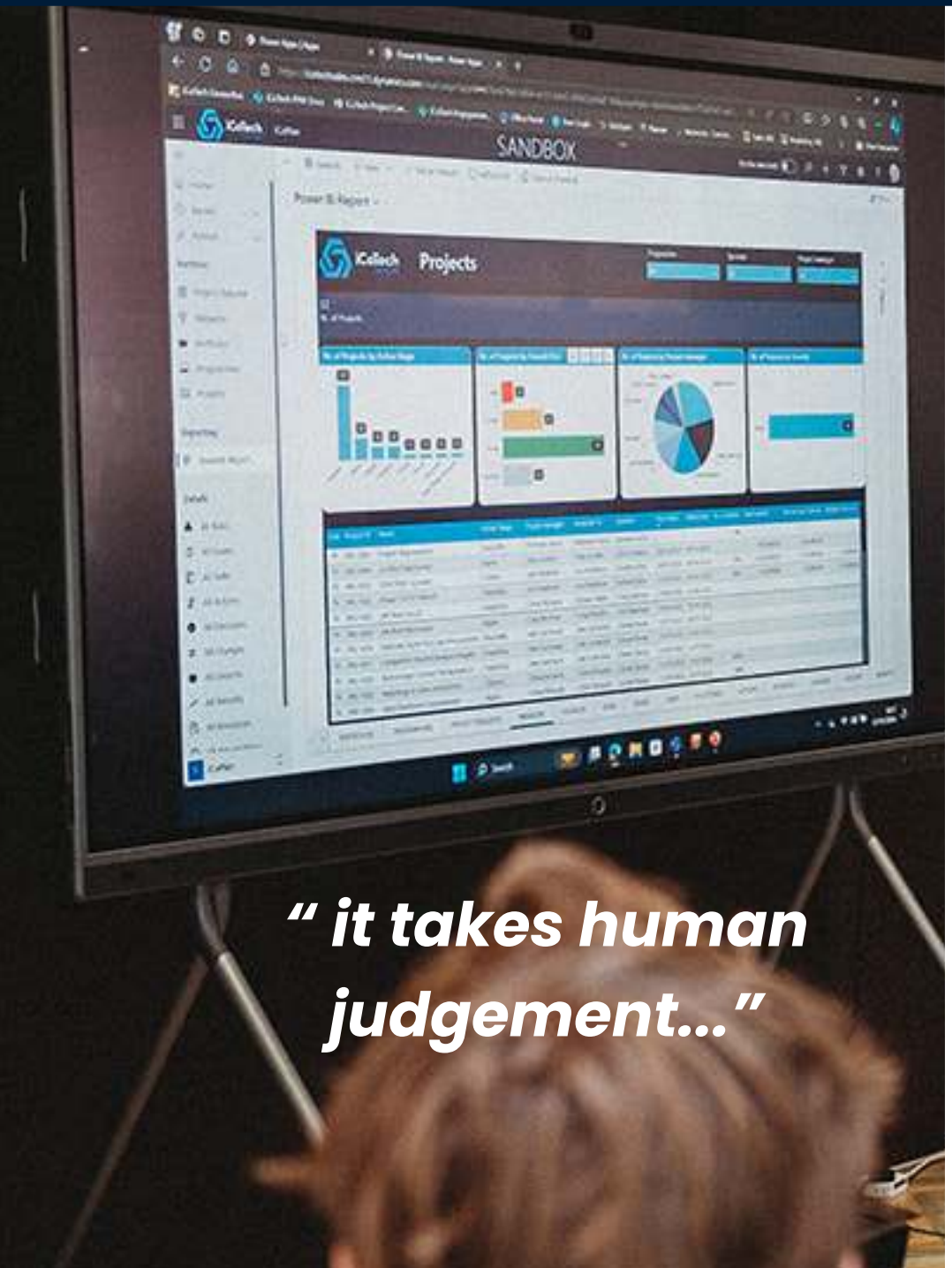
Defining and Delivering Requirements

As for implementing projects themselves, the common feeling is PMOs would benefit from paying more attention to building a business case that is not only rooted in analysis but feeds into an organisation's strategic objectives. This starts with spending more time with stakeholders to understand the problem you are trying to fix and gaining clarity of the requirements from the very start.

Early engagement with stakeholders is key so you can work together to align project delivery with the strategic objectives and corporate milestones, and show success through progressing strategic pillars. You then need to be clear on the methodology so you can follow it correctly rather than merge together, even though Waterfall shows the milestones stakeholders love and Agile allows for more consistent reporting.

A number in out cohort suggest Agile but recognised the challenge of demonstrating progress. They suggested using a Burndown chart to illustrate how the team are showing early value, to minimise this.

The main takeaway was to be strategic. Define the baseline position, identify the benefits and set measurements so you can track them across the project lifecycle and report back to stakeholders with the right information, at the right time, and at the right level. Use reports to provide options, backed up with papers, so stakeholders can take decisions that allow everyone to work towards a common goal. And if possible, use show and tells so stakeholders have something to see, which make it easier for them to draw a conclusion.



Increasing Efficiency

It is common for projects to have issues that could cause them to fail if you don’t prioritise and address them quickly enough. And that does take human judgement but AI can help. For example, you could use it to pull out a baseline risk report, giving you time to think about how to mitigate the risks and facilitate meaningful discussions with stakeholders so they can make considered decisions.

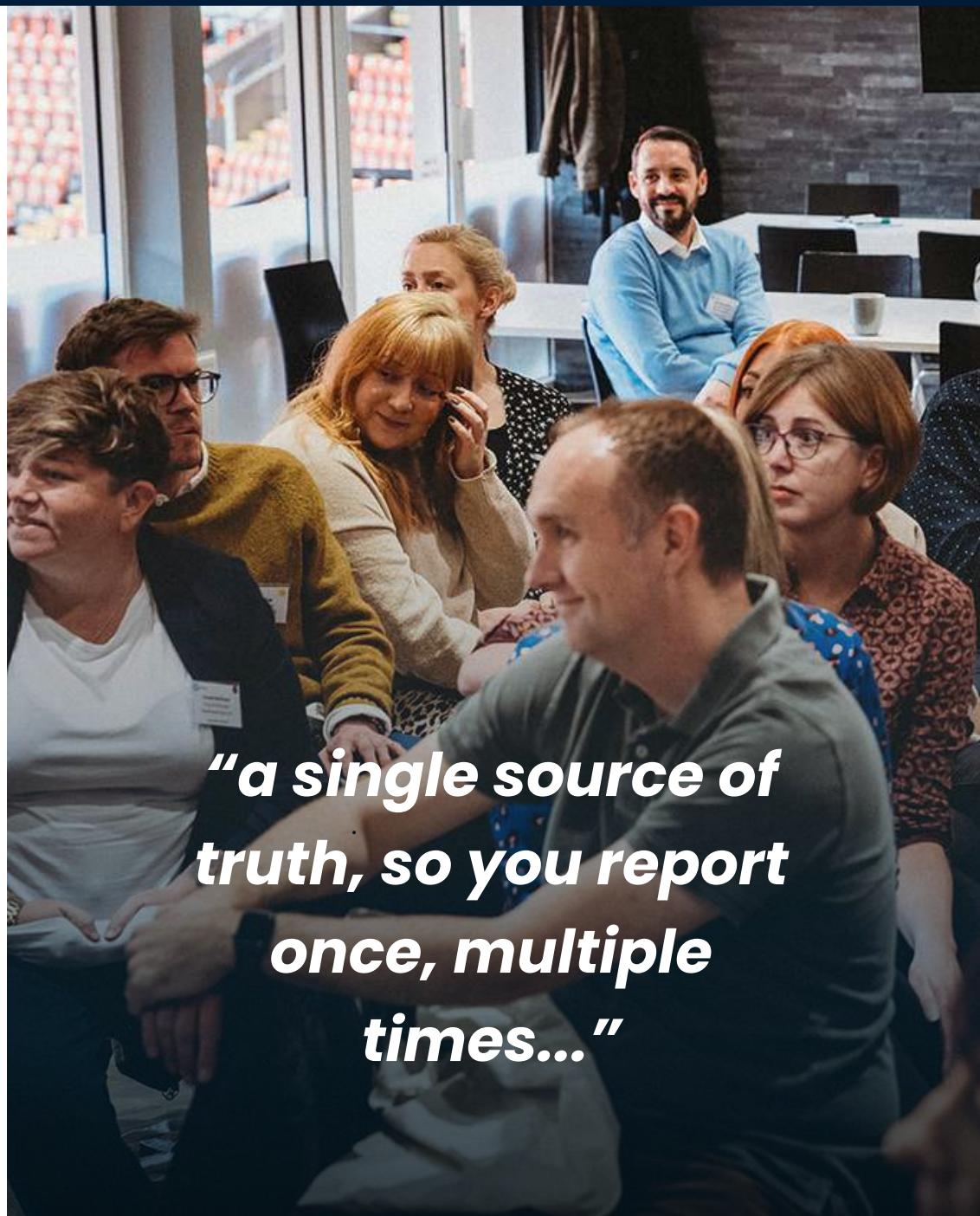
Or you could use it to help define the benefits and return on investment (ROI) of a project, which isn’t always easy. Moving to a different system, for example, and establishing a baseline that will unlock value in the future is a case in point. The approach shared to quantify the ROI of a baseline not yet met, was to map out your processes so you can make the system work for them, whilst simultaneously considering what the new system can do to help improve those processes, and let AI do some of the work for you. These are just some examples, but there are many more.

Showing Your Value

Whilst technology is not the only answer, it is a powerful tool to extrapolate data in a way that shows stakeholders what you do, why you do it, and the value you bring in a consistent way.

The likes of Power Platform, Power Automate, and Power BI can open the doors to a solution that pulls everything together at a Portfolio level for a single source of truth, so you report once, multiple times. 'Live' dashboards give stakeholders full transparency of what is happening, how the benefits are being realised, and how the costs are going, at any point in time. Whilst those making change requests, get to appreciate what's on the table so they understand the stretched resources PMOs have.

We hope this report has given you food for thought, and we look forward to continued collaboration with the industry to share your learnings and best practise amongst your peers.





How Can We Help?

We help you make the most of your Microsoft licensing with accelerators that amplify Power Platform and Planner.

Gain portfolio oversight and more control of projects

iCoTech Services

iCoPlan accelerates your productivity, insight & value to stakeholders.

iCoPlan sits across the Project Management function, giving you visibility and control of all data in your portfolios, allowing you to simplify how you work, deliver greater super user benefits, and to offer project certainty.

By applying our knowledge and expertise to design innovative solutions that have the structure and consistency, we give you more control over delivery, helping you to remain in scope, within budget and on time.

Our approach allows iCoPlan to deliver immediate value and desirable results at pace across your portfolio, programmes and projects, whether minor field changes or large-scale configuration for enterprise Portfolio Management in the Power Platform.

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