We know firsthand that project leaders and managers rely heavily on the tools they use every day, and also that we are experiencing a radical shift in the nature of project-based work. Are we also experiencing radical shifts in the tools we use?

As collaborative ways of working bring new tools into the workplace, we wanted to find out more about how these tools are being used.

This research project attempts to examine real-world application of online project tools across a wide range of industries and roles. Over 500 respondents offered their input.

Thank you for taking the time to read the results. We look forward to hearing your thoughts.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY TERMS

KEY FINDINGS

KEY FINDING 1: Dissatisfaction with current tool.

KEY FINDING 2: Lack of integration causes frustration.

KEY FINDING 3: Collaboration features are going unused.

KEY FINDING 4: The majority want simpler tools!

PARTICIPANT FINDINGS

PM TOOLS IN PRACTICE FINDINGS

CURRENT TOOL USE

CORE FEATURES USED

MOBILE USE

CONCLUSION

ABOUT THE SURVEY

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ABOUT THE LINKEDIN PM COMMUNITY
Executive Summary

Project management tools are evolving at a rapid pace as the nature of work itself has become more collaborative and distributed.

We know that with the rise in collaboration tools and apps, the way we use traditional project management software is changing, too.

On our blog, we’ve written about the changing nature of productivity tools in the workplace, and how teams are using new social tools like Slack that promote transparent communication through its use. When the tools themselves can shift the culture of an organization, we can expect to see new uses of traditional tools, and even integrations that create hybridized tools and platforms.

In this survey, we wanted to learn the following:

- What way is project management software being used today? (07)
- How many tools are project teams using regularly? (08)
- What are their biggest frustrations with their current tools? (09)
- What features of their current tools do project teams use most? (10)

In short, we set out to study changing ways project management tools and software are used in practice.
Project management software is any kind of software, whether server-based installation, desktop download or online software-as-a-service (SaaS), which can include a mobile app, used for the purpose of managing the tasks produced by teams in the service of a project.

Apps are just another word to describe software applications (or programs) and can mean both desktop and mobile applications.

Integrations means two programs that can be connected together, either through an API or as a plugin, so that data is exchanged between them.

Agile here refers to the project management methodology, commonly used in IT project development.

Scrum is a process of managing project phases in sprints, or short bursts of activity, also commonly used by Agile software development teams.

Waterfall is a traditional project management methodology frequently used in large projects according to sequential phases in the project lifecycle.

KanBan is a method of delivering tasks using a visual medium of “boards,” whether actual in software, that enable tracking and prioritization of tasks.
We have highlighted four key findings from the survey...

**KEY FINDING 1:**
Nearly half of all survey respondents are unhappy with their current project management tools.

**KEY FINDING 2:**
Lack of integration is a major pain point for many project managers and software users.

**KEY FINDING 3:**
Collaboration features are much more unused than most project managers typically expect.

**KEY FINDING 4:**
The majority want simpler tools!
When we analyzed our key survey findings, we found a clear theme: increasing dissatisfaction with current tools, combined with increased adoption of multiple types of productivity tools is inevitably going to lead to changes in tool practice.

Much has been written elsewhere about all-in-one complex systems (Microsoft Project) versus leaner tools with single-purpose functionality (Trello). While the vast majority of respondents used a combination of tools, predominantly Excel plus another core tool, when Excel and other MS products were removed from the equation, it became clear that multiple tools like Trello and Jira were used to complement traditional project management tools.

Over 23% of all respondents, in fact, reported using 3 or more project tools regularly, and 72% use more than one tool.

While Excel is clearly a dominant tool for use in project management (a whopping 75%), the increase in new-to-market productivity tools like Trello, which came to wider adoption in the market only in 2012, as well as the rise of all-in-one online project management software applications such as ProjectManager.com (2008), Wrike (2006), and Smartsheet (2006), have begun to challenge Microsoft Project’s dominance in the market, at least in terms of customer satisfaction.
LACK OF INTEGRATION

A whopping 48% of respondents are not only unhappy with their current tool, they say that lack of integration is the leading cause of frustration.

We dug deeper and asked what their biggest frustrations were with their current tools and by a far margin (again 48%) the respondents stated a lack of integration with other tools.

A near second was that their tool “takes too much time to do what I need to do”. While that can mean many things, the subsequent options revealed more: 25% complained that their tool wasn’t being used by their teams, 14% felt the tool was “too complicated,” 12% felt it required too much training and only a small fraction felt their tool was too simple (5%).

With the vast majority of participants regularly using Excel (75%) and most also using an MS Project product, either server install (39%) or MSProject Online (23%), it’s clear there is frustration with those tools and their inability to integrate with other tools in use across the organization.
Given the rise in the collaboration economy and the inundation of collaboration tools in the marketplace, from social apps to chat tools to document-collaboration platforms, it’s striking that collaboration features are being under-utilized in project management software.

And given the sheer dominance of mobile use in the past several years, it is also remarkable that 83.5% of participants are not using their software tool’s mobile app.

When looking at what features are used most—Task Management (68%), Gantt Chart (67%), Reporting (58%), Risks Issues & Changes (44%), Dashboards (44%), Timesheets (40%) and Expense Management (20%)—a clear pattern of traditional project management processes emerge in the tool use.

Again, given the majority of users in the study were MS Excel & MS Project users, we can infer that their use of collaboration features were limited overall.

However, there are too many possible avenues to explore here to conclude why collaboration features overall are being underutilized. Certainly further study in this area is warranted.
In order to fully understand the way tools are used, it is important to understand who participated in the survey.

While the LinkedIn Group has over 300,000 project professionals, the vast majority who answered the survey were in Internet Technology (44%) in a clear project management role (67%).

What is interesting is the high numbers of participants reporting the need for simpler tools.

Again, the dominant tools in use were Microsoft products: Excel and MS Project suite.

The primary frustration of lack of integration was quickly followed by a series of responses indicating frustration with the tool’s complexity:

- 33% said their tool takes too much time to use.
- 26% said their team won’t use it.
- 13% said their tool was too complicated.
- 12% said the tool required too much training.

Clearly, the need to extend the tools easily to their teams is important for the project managers who answered the survey.
Role & Industry Breakdown:

SURVEY PARTICIPANT FINDINGS

January 2016  |   PM.com Research Team
The vast majority of participants in the LinkedIn PM Community Survey are in project management roles.
The majority of survey participants from the LinkedIn PM Community were in the IT and Technology sector.
Most PMs in our study used a hybrid approach to project management methodologies.

Methodologies Used

- Waterfall: 52%
- Agile: 50%
- Scrum: 26%
- Lean: 17%
- PRINCE2: 17%
- KanBan: 12%
- Unknown: 11%
Current Tool Use & Pain Points:

TOOLS IN USE FINDINGS
44% of the managers we surveyed are not happy with their current software.

Are you happy with your current PM software?

56% YES

44% NO
75% of all PMs use Excel in addition to other tools. Nearly 40-60% use MS Project Server and/or MS Project Online.
Trello & ProjectManager.com are the most commonly used PM tools outside of Microsoft products.
95% of all PMs use more than one project management tool to run their projects.
Only 12% of all PMs use Excel exclusively to run their projects.
76% of ProjectManager.com users are happy, compared with 44–61% of MS Project users.

Are you happy with your current PM software?

- Project Manager: 76% YES, 24% NO
- MS Project Server: 58% YES, 42% NO
- MS Project Online: 61% YES, 39% NO
- MS Project Desktop: 44% YES, 56% NO
Nearly half of the managers we surveyed are frustrated that their current tool doesn’t integrate with other apps.

What are your biggest frustrations with your current PM tool?

- Lack of Integration with other tools
- It takes too much time to do what I need
- My team won’t use it
- It’s too complicated
- Requires too much training
- It’s too simple
Core Features Used

Task Management & Gantt Charts were the most used tools, followed closely by Reporting.
Most PMs regularly create reports on a weekly basis.
Only 13% of PMs use their online project tool's mobile app.
Future Tool Use is Changing:

CONCLUSION

January 2016   |   PM.com Research Team
While collaboration tools and apps are changing the way we do work, traditional project management software needs are changing, too, but not in the way we might assume, based on current use of collaboration features.

However, the lack of integration capabilities by tools like MS Project with new collaboration platforms like Slack are one reason, perhaps, why the collaboration features are going unused.

Project managers are finding increasing satisfaction with emerging tools (72% are happy with ProjectManager.com versus 58% with Project Online and only 44% with Project Desktop) that can satisfy integration needs, inspire collaboration and don’t require training to rollout to their teams.

As one respondent wrote:

“[My] biggest frustration is that different areas use different tools which makes it difficult to have clear visibility across the organization to workload, resources.”

The clear rise in alternatives to MS Project and Excel is speaking to the need to support ease-of-integrations with tools across the organization, and enable more flexible, collaborative ways of working for teams.

Dissatisfaction with MS Project and its lack of integration, collaboration and adoption by others in the organization, is causing people to seek better, simpler tools.
A total of 517 respondents contributed their responses to 10 questions about applications of project management tools. Some participants chose to add some other thoughts.

**SURVEY DETAILS**

ProjectManager.com invited members of the [PM Community on LinkedIn](https://www.projectmanager.com/resources) to participate in the survey. The survey was created using a Google Form that opened on July 27, 2015 and officially closed August 24, 2015. The survey received a total of 517 participants.

**PROJECT MANAGER RESEARCH**

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**PARTING THOUGHTS**

“I have worked for several companies, and none of them have ever fully engaged everyone in the use of a pm tool, so it is frustrating to do everything twice, once for those who want the tool and once for those who do not.”

“Really need a simplified version of PM tools, collaboration site, and metrics all together.”

“I tried a lot of products but I can’t find something all-in-one. I built convenient tools for me via ECM (EIM) systems but it’s not perfect. And for planning I am forced to use MS Project (for example), for analytics - Qlik or another products, for project management Axapta etc. It’s not a big problem but those manipulations takes a lot of time.”

“Very difficult to find one tool for effective project, program, and portfolio management.”

“Integration issues with other tools the company uses causes frustrations when the management team needs project status reports. Our projects are kept in a non-traditional system that has to be exported then imported to another tool to be used as a dashboard. A dashboard works but some management members prefer excel pivots versus true reporting tools.”
ABOUT THE REPORT AUTHORS

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Nick Christensen is the Search Director at ProjectManager.com. He has a background in data analytics and market research, specializing in developing analytics for monitoring consumer behavior.

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Stephanie Ray is the Content Director at ProjectManager.com. In addition to her editorial background, she has deep experience in product management and the development of mobile collaboration platforms and tools.
With over 300,000 members and growing, the PM Community is one of the largest professional groups on LinkedIn.

Founded in 2007, the PM Community is owned and managed by ProjectManager.com.

We post new articles and videos to the group weekly, providing relevant training, news, research and resources on project management, productivity, leadership and more.

What’s really amazing, is the community activity. There are vibrant (sometimes heated) discussions on project management best practices for PM Pros, CEOs and students alike. The forum is a source of mentoring support and peer-networking for professionals around the globe.

Some recent discussions in the community include:

What Really Motivates People?

Has your PMP certification mattered?

Do you use Slack regularly and if so, how?

When to Push Back with Stakeholders?

Do You Ever Extend a Sprint Duration?

That’s just a sampling of the hundreds of topics in the channel, from Agile practices to certification pros and cons and deep dives into earned value analysis. To join the group, click the link to the left!
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ProjectManager.com is also home to a community of over one million project professionals globally helping each other to succeed.

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