# Mind the Mobilisation Gap

## Why we're still getting mobilisation wrong on major projects, and how we can do better

Perspectives Paper

ResoLex

A paper by Tony Llewellyn and Lisa Martello of ResoLex on behalf of the Major Projects Association

MAJOR PROJECTS ASSOCIATION

# Contents


**Contents** 2

**Introduction** 3

**Basis of this paper** 4

What do we mean by mobilisation? 4

**Where are we going wrong?** 5

Uniqueness bias 5

Inadequate industry standards 6

Political pressure 7

Hero leadership 7

Summary 8

**How can we do better?** 9

Front-end loading 9

Strategic planning 10

Pre-contract funding 12

Early attention to digital technology 12

Prioritising social infrastructure 13

Selecting the right team for right now 14

Building a collaborative culture 15

Developing a Project Charter 16

Aligning around a common purpose 17

**Conclusion** 19

**References** 21

**About Resolex** 23

**Appendix A: Major Projects Association Workshop** 24

Workshop contributors 24

# Introduction

From the moment a major project is announced, there is a societal, political and organisational pressure to deliver the intended benefits as quickly as possible.

This pressure creates a culture that champions technical delivery above all else, pushing teams towards the 'build' stage of the project life cycle before they are ready. As a result, many of the key elements critical to the project's success are neglected or poorly planned, and come back to bite us later. We are calling this the 'Mobilisation Gap'.

The need for effective project mobilisation is not a new concept. It is well understood that how the delivery stages of a project begin will have a fundamental impact as to whether it reaches a conclusion that is deemed successful by its participants and sponsors.

Many organisations, industry bodies and government agencies have published articles, studies and thought pieces over the last five years talking about the need to increase productivity, improve planning at the beginning of the project, and focus more attention on the mobilisation stage of the life cycle. There is, however, not a great deal of practical advice as to how to actually do it.

This paper provides thoughts, observations and recommendations on how to plan and deliver project mobilisation. Its objective is to support project organisations to consider and embed mobilisation as a critical stage in the programme, complete with the time, attention and resources it needs and deserves in order to be successful.

# Basis of this paper

The contents of this paper have been informed by a review of recent industry publications, and analysis of the outputs from a Major Projects Association workshop held in conjunction with ResoLex on 13th September 2023.

During the event, called *'Challenging the Mobilisation Myth: Driving performance through effective Contract Mobilisation',* an audience of experienced project professionals worked through a number of questions designed to identify the common issues affecting mobilisation. In addition, contributions from a working group organised by the Association have also been analysed and built into the paper. The working group members are identified in Appendix A.

The **Project Routemap** produced by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) is a core contributing foundation of this paper. The Routemap contains eight modules, and provides practical advice to help set up projects for success. The modules have been developed by the UK Government in collaboration with industry and academia, and capture best practice and learning from £300bn of capital programmes. The Routemap identifies a number of cross-cutting themes that project leaders cannot ignore, prompting a number of useful questions around issues such as benefits realisation, people skills, culture and behaviour, digital technology and transitions.

## What do we mean by mobilisation?

In the context of a major project, mobilisation is a distinct phase of the programme where teams bring together the key resources needed to begin delivering the project and to start on-site. This includes physical resources such as people, accommodation and equipment, as well as digital or procedural resources such as the establishment of processes, collateral and governance mechanisms which enable effective decision-making. This is distinct from project initiation, which is the first phase of a project's life cycle, and the stage where a project is formally authorised, its goals defined, and where support is secured from stakeholders.

# Where are we going wrong?

Every major project has its own unique features, and so to a certain extent, mobilisation activities must align to the particular needs and circumstances of the scheme. However, the underlying concept and the activities involved allow us to observe mobilisation as a framework which can be scaled, tailored and applied to most sizeable projects.

One of the questions explored in the referenced Major Projects Association **workshop** and working group was, 'Why do many mobilisations fall short?' A number of thoughts and observations from the participants and the authors are shared and discussed in this section.

## Uniqueness bias

One such observation is the strong tendency throughout the infrastructure world to see every major project as unique. As a result of this belief, leaders and teams consistently discount or diminsh any learning from previous programmes, and instead go through a trial-and-error process which inevitably wastes time and opportunity.

This phenomenon has been termed 'uniqueness bias', and has become the topic of many studies, books and social media publications in recent years, perhaps most notably by Bent Flyvbjerg and Dan Gardner in their book, *'How Big Things Get Done: The Surprising Factors That Determine the Fate of Every Project, from Home Renovations to Space Exploration and Everything in Between'* (Macmillan 2023).

The term was originally identified by psychologists (Goethals et al., 1991; Suls et al., 1988; Suls & Wan, 1987) as the tendency of individuals to see themselves as more singular than they actually are. The concept was first applied to project management and project planning by Flyvbjerg in 2014, who defined uniqueness bias as the tendency of planners and managers to see their projects as singular.

This is not particularly helped by the definition of a project according to some of our own professional guiding bodies, for example:

- **The Association of Project Management** (APM) defines a project as 'a unique, transient endeavour, undertaken to achieve planned objectives, which could be defined in terms of outputs, outcomes or benefits.'
- **The Project Management Institute** (PMI) defines a project as 'a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique products, services, or result.'

Interestingly, other professional bodies steer clear of 'uniqueness' as a defining characteristic, with the IPA (and consequently the Major Projects Association) opting to define a project as 'a temporary organisation that is created for the purpose of delivering one or more business products, according to an agreed Business Case.'

Uniqueness bias can particularly affect the planning and preparation stages of major projects, leading participants to discount the value of seeking lessons learned and best practice. At a basic level, it can drive complacency and ignorance – causing leaders to think fast, move fast and potentially miss vital opportunities and red flag warning moments in the early stages of the project life cycle that could have prevented issues later.

## Inadequate industry standards

Another theme emerging from the workshop was a lack of established process throughout the industry for beginning complex projects, particularly as so many are now delivered by alliances or joint ventures. Even the aforementioned IPA Project Routemap, which provides a lot of useful benchmarked guidance on setting up and running successful projects, only mentions mobilisation once in a case study.

It is clear from the numerous blogs, thought pieces and social media posts that there is an appetite for more rigorous and defined professional standards and guidance when it comes to project mobilisation. Some examples of social media content calling for the sharing, learning and standardisation of project mobilisation include:

- **Mobilising a Project? A simple checklist to follow**, Follos, 2015
- **How to build teams for major project mobilisation: the views of 3 leaders**, Maister, 2021
- **Successful Mobilization is a Key Milestone Towards Sustainable Facilities Management**, Chauhan, 2024
- **Hitting the Ground Running: A Guide to Successful Mobilisation in Telecoms Projects,** Thorpe, 2024
- **Key elements for a successful mobilisation**, Ventia, 2024
- **Are you forgetting to chew? The unhealthy obsession hampering major projects, Martello**, 2023

Whilst individual organisations often have clear methods for acquiring resources and setting up systems, major projects involving multiple leading parties and an administratively inflexible client often struggle to make decisions and take action quickly. Add to this the usually ambitious and tightly time-bound deliverables and expectations contained within a client's works information, and this means that projects often kick off immediately at odds with the pace and productivity expected from the project's client, sponsors and end users.

## Political pressure

Major projects in the UK (and around the world) are placed under a huge amount of political and stakeholder pressure. This pressure exists for worthy reasons, such as the need to deliver nationally significant benefits, the imperative to demonstrate responsible spending of public money, and the drive to justify why any particular project deserves critical funds as opposed to other important causes.

Though of earnest origin, this pressure creates an urgency within major projects to demonstrate tangible and visible progress, pushing leaders and teams to start some form of physical activity that shows the works are underway. Seeing physical construction works begin can create a false sense of progress and security for project participants (internal and external), but can buy the team temporary relief from the scrutiny and pressure from senior stakeholders.

The trouble is that we often see project teams press on into delivery, knowing that the plan is not adequately developed, and the underlying infrastructure is not ready, but believing nevertheless that things will somehow sort themselves out. This is effectively a 'strategy of hope' which sees the delivery team still building the ship after they have set sail!

## Hero leadership

In addition to the premature action catalysed by political pressure, it is important to note the personal and organisational biases at play here. *'The delivery stage is for many, more tangible, measurable, and gratifying than the paperwork-heavy stages of the project life cycle.'* (Martello, 2023), and many/most organisations are guilty of hiring delivery-centric leaders who they believe can lead the team expertly through any and all stages of the project life cycle, despite their experience and CV only really covering one or two.

The workshop participants agreed that it is time major projects dropped the idea of the single 'Hero Leader' and developed a new and more fit-for-purpose leadership approach that recognises the different skills, experience and personalities required at different stages of the project's life.

This view aligned completely with the work of the Major Projects Association's Capability Task and Finish Group, which was established in response to the 2020 Strategic review. This group produced a report entitled **No More Heroes**.

The UK's Institution of Civil Engineers' (ICE) 2020 report, **A Systems Approach to Infrastructure Delivery**, took lessons from five major projects at various stages of delivery, and one of the main recommendations was an overhaul of outdated leadership models.

The report concluded that, *'Construction's traditional, ''heroic'' style of leadership is not fit for purpose for modern infrastructure projects. The sector needs to adopt leadership models that spread authority and empower highly competent individuals to take the key decisions in their areas of a project, while ensuring that everyone involved is focused on maintaining the integrity of the system to deliver the outcome demanded by its users and owners.'*

It adds: *'Scale matters. The larger and more complex a project, the less likely it is that it can be successfully led by a ''warrior'' leader who can manage crises by force of will, or by a super-project manager who is focused overwhelmingly on process and deliverables.'*

## Summary

By failing to champion and apply adequate focus to the planning and mobilisation stages of projects, we are globally dropping the (very expensive) ball and selling ourselves short on our capability as a nation and a profession to deliver great project outcomes, whilst enjoying ourselves along the way.

# How can we do better?

Whilst understanding what commonly goes wrong is the first critical step to doing better, actual change requires taking active steps to make improvements. This section explores some useful ideas, best practice and recommended strategies to help teams improve their project mobilisation practices which came from the initial event and follow-up discussions.

## Front-end loading

The concept of front-end loading is becoming more familiar in project management literature. It refers to the process of setting aside time at the start of a project for thinking through the project's implications and needs.

An article published by the IPA in September 2020 describes front-end loading as the implementation of robust planning, design and preparation for project execution in the early stages of a project's life cycle to improve the potential for success. Nick Smallwood, CEO of IPA and author of the blog, sums it up in a way that draws in some of the earlier themes discussed in this paper, by saying:

*'We must invest time in thorough up-front planning to ensure that projects are deliverable and affordable before commitments are given. No amount of good engineering, management, and construction will provide much resilience if a project was the wrong one to begin with and even good project management will not recover the needed value in a poorly selected project.'*

It seems simple, but time spent thinking clearly about how to achieve the outcomes the stakeholders need will pay dividends further downstream. Exploring questions such as how the team will work together, how the team will make decisions, and how to embed and sustain the right culture, will often significantly improve the project team's effective functioning once they move into delivery.

By inviting key individuals into a series of discussions where the multiple issues that generate complexity can be worked through, compared to other projects, and fully understood, we slow down our thinking and push ourselves to challenge our biases and assumptions – and importantly, spot problems early.

This type of 'slow thinking' can be counterintuitive for those with a predisposition towards action, and those who cannot (or will not) step away from the noise of stakeholder pressure. It requires a different set of skills more associated with social intelligence, and an underlying culture and project team mindset that stops every difficult issue from being 'kicked down the road'.

## Strategic planning

A key theme arising from the discussion at the workshop was the need for strategic planning at the start of a project. One critical element of strategic planning, particularly for major projects, is to identify the sources of complexity that are likely to create uncertainty in the project as it progresses through the life cycle.

The construction process is complicated in that whilst many interacting elements must be connected and sequenced, those with knowledge and experience broadly understand the mechanics. The complexity arises from the multiple sources of interaction between individuals and groups, with either a direct or indirect interest in the project.

Strategic thinking requires zooming out of the comfort zone of detailed task planning and taking a broader perspective across the project. So, whilst teams cannot control complexity, they can manage it. Therefore, the challenge is to anticipate the sources of complexity (which to an extent, will be particular to each project), and work through the steps to reduce potential disruption.

The eight elements included in the table below are useful to cover as part of an early-stage strategic discussion:

| **Strategic Elements** | **The Big Questions** |
|---|---|
| Articulating a Shared Purpose | What is our vision for this project and how do we explain it in a way that aligns all of the teams? |
| Business Case | Are we clear on the implications of the business case and the parameters they place on the project? |
| Project Culture and Values | What type of project culture do we need and how do we mitigate any potential cultural mismatch between the key parties? |
| Stakeholder Support | Who are the critical stakeholders we need to keep engaged? |
| Leadership | What are the leadership needs for this project and how can we recruit and develop the right people to lead? |
| Decision-Making Structure | How can we delegate authority to ensure fast decision-making whilst maintaining effective governance? |
| Alignment | How do we get all of the teams involved in the project aligned to the vision? |
| Enablers | What are the key enablers we are going to need to make this project work? |

These are big questions, each of which will take some time to work through. As a suite, they provide project leaders with a set of principles that then inform all subsequent decision-making, making it much easier to manage complex problems as they arise.

## Pre-contract funding

Another observation was the disconnect between the desire from the client and primary stakeholders to see immediate physical signs of a start to the project, and the need to fund time and materials, work through the often very heavy documentation requirements, and commence regulatory and environmental consents.

It is common for supply chain organisations to have been informed they have been awarded a role on the project, only to then go through a period of delay as contracts are negotiated and signed. This is the time when teams are assembled and ready to go, but must wait for contract signature before any significant work can be started. This waiting time can be incredibly counterproductive, as costs and day one change start to stack up, and key resources might be redeployed to other projects.

Client organisations should budget for a pre-mobilisation period. They should be prepared to spend time assembling the necessary assets, and committing practically to funding the time of the individuals required in this critical period of thinking, talking and planning how the mobilisation process will work.

## Early attention to digital technology

Another of the primary themes to emerge from the workshop and subsequent discussions was the importance of having a clear strategy and plan for the creation, collection, storage and dissemination of digital information.

There is a tendency for major projects to begin without a clear understanding as to how digital processes are to be integrated into the team's ways of working, as well as a huge underestimation as to how long these matters will take to design, implement and embed.

Digital technology offers project teams significant benefits in terms of planning, design, knowledge sharing, and timely and accurate record-keeping. However, project leaders often lack the experience and/or understanding as to how to integrate the digital processes into the workflow. Consequently, teams end up trying to apply new procesess long after a project has started (or not at all), therefore losing productivity, and much or all of the potential benefit.

In addition, it is important to note that asset owners these days require greater levels of assurance and record-keeping – for example, whilst it is possible to backdate a physical drawing, one cannot go backwards to create a digital record.

In practical terms, thought needs to be given long before physical mobilisation to questions such as:

- What kind of digital information will your project create/receive?
- Where will digital data to be stored?
- Who owns the data?
- How will the data be accessed and shared?
- Can the right people access the right systems?
- How will you train team members to use the systems you choose?
- Are your systems compatible with those of your supply chain/delivery partners?
- How long will it take and how much will it cost to enact your digital technology plan?

Project leaders need to understand the full digital journey and how technology will play a role in the creation of future value of the asset. A good start is to tap into the experience and resources of their supply chain, and focus less on the selection of specific platforms, for example, CEMAR or Asite, and more on exploring what is needed in the first place. This will avoid the time and cost of trying to make a square peg fit into a round hole.

## Prioritising social infrastructure

Source: Resolex

One can observe that projects comprise three primary areas of expertise – technical, commercial and social. When it comes to project mobilisation, all three are incredibly important.

1. **Technical:** The different physical and technological components that make up the intended output.
2. **Commercial:** The management of money through contracts, government procedures, delegated authority and the management risk.
3. **Social:** The human components shaped by competencies, leadership, teamwork, stakeholder interaction and group resilience.

Traditional project management practice tends to focus primarily on the technical and commercial aspects of project delivery, leaving the social element largely to chance. The dominant message coming from the September 2023 workshop was the critical need to pay attention to the social element as a primary success factor for project mobilisation, so let's focus on that element now, using a series of key themes identified at the workshop.

## Selecting the right team for right now

Team selection (client, delivery contractor(s) and supply chain partners) is often one of the very first items on the mobilisation To-Do List. As the project prepares to transition from one phase to another, choosing the right people to help make the project a success needs to be prioritised.

It is important that this large and important task is considered slowly and carefully, and with awareness of the cognitive and behavioural biases that can come into play when we are hiring, placing and promoting people. There are many potential pitfalls when it comes to the recruitment and selection of project team members, and unfortunately, many project leaders fall foul of them. Such pitfalls include hiring only people we have worked with previously, recruiting and promoting 'people like me', failing to understand (and consider) the different skills and personalities required for different stages of the project.

A useful starting point is to consider the following questions:

- What people skills will we need and what attitudes will we require in order to succeed?
- What personality types and attitudes do we already have, and how can we balance them?
- What technical and commercial skills will be valuable to the project?
- What blend of experience and fresh thinking do we want to create?
- What gaps and weaknesses are there in the existing team that we need to cover?
- What blend of referrals and 'unknowns' should we aim for?

## Building a collaborative culture

Establishing positive behavioural norms must be done from the start, because once patterns of behaviour are established, they become very difficult to change. The mobilisation process must have a strong emphasis on how the people are going to actually deliver, and how the teams are going to work together. From a strategic perspective, this is more about how the numerous teams that are dependent on each other communicate, cooperate, and ultimately collaborate when working under pressure.

Making genuine and sustained efforts to build a collaborative culture is one way to prioritise and embed social infrastructure in major projects, which in turn helps lead to successful project mobilisation.

Culture is often regarded as a 'soft', 'hazy' or 'fluffy' topic that does not fit well with the practical task delivery focus of the archetypal project manager. Culture, nevertheless, impacts on the very 'hard' and non-disputed measurements of a project's efficacy such as performance, retention, innovation, agility and profitability. Culture can be defined as a set of unspoken rules that develop as 'the way things work around here', and in a project context, culture represents the shared norms, beliefs, values and assumptions of the project team. Culture cannot be imposed, but is heavily influenced by the values, behaviours and beliefs of the project leaders and influencers, whether or not they hold a formal leadership role.

There is a range of activities that should be introduced to help shape and monitor the right project culture. Table 1, extracted from the ResoLex 2021 report: **Changing Behaviours in Construction: A complement to the Construction Playbook**, provides a useful framework to move a discussion on culture from the theoretical to the practical. Working through each of the cultural elements, it is easy to distinguish the default culture on a major construction project against the aspirational.

The question is then, 'How do we avoid falling into the default culture?'

### Table 1: Cultural elements in construction

| CULTURAL ELEMENT | DEFAULT INDUSTRY CULTURE (What will happen unless we change it?) | | THE CULTURE WE NEED |
|---|---|---|---|
| Common purpose | Deliver on our promises (get stuff done) | ▶ | Deliver on our promises (get stuff done) |
| How we solve problems | Individual or group self-interest (self-protection) | ▶ | Thrive together (collaborate) |
| Team selection | Homogenous teams based on recruitment bias (white, male, common interests, known) | ▶ | Best people for the project (heterogenous teams) |
| Working methods | Stay with what worked in the past (fearful) | ▶ | Pursuit of operational excellence (expansive) |
| Mindset | Closed mindset (stick to what we know) | ▶ | Open mindset (how can we improve?) |
| Sub-groups | Siloed (desire to maintain control) | ▶ | Connected (recognise the value of the network) |
| Relationship **with** client | Master-servant. Segregated (transactional boundaries and confrontational interfaces) | ▶ | Integrated (client/contractor/supply chain working towards a common purpose) |
| Relationship with supply chain | Master-servant. Coercive. | ▶ | Integrated - seeking to tap into innovation and specialist knowledge |
| Problem solving | Seek to blame and avoid ownership of the solution | ▶ | Seek to understand and find resolution |
| Time frame | Short term | ▶ | Long term |

## Developing a Project Charter

The leadership team should be engaged in the development of a Project Charter at an early stage of the project (but not so early that there is too much uncertainty to make it meaningful). The output should be an explicit set of statements that articulate and clarify the culture your programme needs.

Project Charters can take many forms, from a wall poster to a comprehensive booklet, but at the heart of most of these is a set of behaviours and value statements that the team aspire to bring to reality. The challenge with charters is that they are usually created with the best intent, but having been written up and published, they are rarely properly implemented.

The charter document is not in itself a driver of positive behaviours, but it does act as the main expression of the senior team's intentions and holds a strong symbolic value. Projects which have a strong collaborative culture have a clear set of values that the leaders consistently demonstrate in their behaviours and decision-making, and when this is the case, one tends to find that project team members are far more likely to follow suit.

When consistent efforts and interventions are made to keep the Project Charter 'real', a positive culture can be sustained and can provide benefits when it comes to openness, honesty, trust, challenge and psychological safety.

## Aligning around a common purpose

Major projects bring together people from multiple firms, each with their own cultural values and personal interests. They are tied together formally by a series of contractual arrangements which set out the activities each party must undertake. However, individuals create a far stronger bond when they find a shared sense of purpose which is great enough for them to subsume their personal interests in pursuit of achieving a collective goal. This shared sense of purpose is the fundamental basis of all teamwork. The question is how to accomplish this shift in motivation and commitment.

Chapter 4 of the UK Government's **Construction Playbook** (2020) recognises the importance of creating alignment and clarity between the project team, decision makers and key stakeholders. When dealing with the complexity of a major construction project, this can really only be achieved through a facilitated process, usually in the form of a workshop, or series of workshops.

Early-stage workshops are a vital factor in shaping project culture and downstream behaviours. The industry has lost the habit of budgeting for compulsory off-site workshops where the team can start learning about each other and begin building trusting relationships. The predominant view is that there is insufficient time or budget to cover the cost of such events, and that they are 'fluffy' or superfluous to requirements. This is a classic example of the **collaboration fallacy** in action, where project leaders undervalue trusting relationships, or assume that they are already established, so there is little need to waste time on their development. This assumption typically comes back to hurt the project as soon as cost or performance pressures arise, and selfish transactional behaviours emerge.

Many years of research into team performance show that group behaviour can be influenced if the individual members bond through a range of exercises designed to tap into the emotional connections that humans need to begin to understand and trust each other. There is logic to the view that the exercises suggested below are compulsory, not just for the leadership team members, but for every team or sub-team that is engaged through the project.

The table includes exercises which form the outline agenda for an early-stage workshop that should be part of every team's setup process.

| **Exercise** | **Action** |
|---|---|
| 1. Articulate a clear vision | Examine the project vision and how it will have an impact on each sub-team. |
| 2. Actionable values | Agree what the project's values are, and how they will be applied in practice. |
| 3. Build relationships | Identify the key relationships that need to be developed for the team to succeed and design an action plan. |
| 4. Roles and accountabilities | Clarify the output and outcomes required for each role as a mechanism for embedding a culture of accountability. |
| 5. Rules of engagement | Co-create a set of internal rules agreed by each team for their own use. |
| 6. Test assumptions | Facilitate a discussion questioning what assumptions the team is making about how the other parts of the project (that affect their output) are going to work. |
| 7. Conflict management | Facilitate a discussion on how the team will manage future conflict, both within the team and with other teams. |

# Conclusion

When projects don't go as planned, it's easy to look backwards and work out what went wrong. The things we didn't adequately plan for, the leader we shouldn't have appointed, the decisions we should have made differently. However, it's a lot harder at the outset of a project to pinpoint the opportunity cost of not valuing or taking certain actions.

The fundamental principle underpinning the importance of the project mobilisation phase is the recognition that slowing ourselves right down in the early stages of the life cycle will mean we can operate at a much greater pace later, and give ourselves a far greater chance of achieving the desired project benefits.

And so in conclusion, whether you are starting out at the beginning of a major project, transitioning from one phase of the life cycle to another, or gearing up to commence physical works, here's a reminder of the things you should have on your mind:

1. **Your project is not unique** – (at least not entirely). There will be countless other similar projects around the world that can offer insights, lessons and case studies that can help you set yours up for success; you just have to seek them out.
2. **We have a standards gap** – Though government guidance and professional standards exist to guide and govern projects and project management as a whole, this paper has identified a missing puzzle piece which looks at mobilisation specifically. A future industry target could be to co-create a mobilisation standard for major projects.
3. **Resist the pressure** – to start physical works before you're ready. Though this might prolong the stressful scrutiny and political pressure (and delay gratification), it will lead to a more efficient and productive delivery stage, and less scrutiny in the long run.
4. **No more heroes** – Let's move away from the idea of the 'Hero Leader', and recognise that not only do different stages of the project life cycle require different skills, but also that not knowing all the answers and figuring things out together as a team is a perfectly reasonable strategy.
5. **Front-end loading** – Give yourself thinking time and breathing space to plan and work through scenarios at the beginning of a project. You won't be able to get it all buttoned down, but slowing down at the outset will speed you up in the middle and at the end.
6. **Failing to plan is planning to fail** – Zoom out of your detail comfort zone and take a broader perspective across the project in strategic planning discussions.
7. **Get digital** – Figure out the digital environment you need and want, and don't underestimate how much money, time and effort it will take to bring it to reality.
8. **Go social** – Social competency is an essential part of a project's success, and building it requires adequate and ongoing focus and attention. Use these recommendations to guide you through selecting the right team, building a collaborative culture, and aligning around a common purpose.

# References


- **Setting up for success: The Importance of Front-End Loading**, Nick Smallwood, Infrastructure and Projects Authority 2020
- **Mobilisation: Setting the Foundations for Success**, CBRE, 2022
- **Mobilisation: how to get major projects right, right from the start**, Stuart Maister, 2020
- **The Most Common Mistakes Leading to Poor Project Mobilisation**, Iness Torchi, 2021
- **Developing a new procurement model, using behavioural economics, to enable continuous improvement of productivity and better value in large UK infrastructure projects**, Martin Perks, 2023
- **Productivity in the UK: Evidence Review**, 2017
- **Reinventing construction**: **a route to higher productivity**, McKinsey Global Institute, 2017
- **Challenging the Mobilisation Myth: Driving performance through effective Contract Mobilisation**, ResoLex, 2023
- **Reshaping British Infrastructure: Global Lessons to Improve Project Delivery**, Ruparel, Roche, Williams, Hollingsworth, Westgate, Chapman, Zaayman, Fox, and Johnson, 2024
- **Project Routemap: Setting up projects for success**, Infrastructure and Projects Authority, 2014

- **Top Ten Behavioral Biases in Project Management: An Overview**, Flyvbjerg, 2021
- *'How Big Things Get Done: The Surprising Factors That Determine the Fate of Every Project, from Home Renovations to Space Exploration and Everything in Between'*, Flyvbjerg and Gardner, 2023
- **Project Terminology**, Major Projects Association
- **What is a Project?** PMI
- **What is project management?** APM
- **Mobilising a Project? A simple checklist to follow**, Follos, 2015
- **How to build teams for major project mobilisation: the views of 3 leaders**, Maister, 2021
- **Successful Mobilization is a Key Milestone Towards Sustainable Facilities Management**, Chauhan, 2024
- **Hitting the Ground Running: A Guide to Successful Mobilisation in Telecoms Projects**, Thorpe, 2024
- **Key elements for a successful mobilisation**, Ventia, 2024
- **Are You Forgetting To Chew? The Unhealthy Obsession Hampering Major Projects**, Martello, 2023
- **The Construction Playbook,** UK Government, 2020

# About Resolex

ResoLex specialises in strengthening the social, behavioural, and cultural components that are crucial to achieving desired outcomes within complex environments, like major projects. They work with leadership and project teams to identify and understand the impact of behavioural and cultural challenges and help develop and implement strategies that enable the team to work more effectively.

The ResoLex team combines research into team performance, group dynamics and integrated working, with lessons learned from their experience on some of the UK's largest and most complex projects. They support clients in developing collaborative and integrated ways of working, and designing and implementing effective strategies that optimise human interfaces, monitor and measure cultural maturity, and mitigate behavioural risk.

# Appendix A: Major Projects Association Workshop

## Workshop contributors

Rene Nibbelke, BAE Systems

Michael Summerfield, CJ Associates

Andrew Wright, Constructive Collaboration

Jonathan Wareham, Costain Ltd

Thomas Cleary, Costain Ltd

John Pelton, Costain Ltd

Guy Shearer, Department for Education

Jacqui Bandy, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Beth Willoughby, East West Rail Company

Rich Fisher, Great British Railways Transition Team

Carl Chouler, HKA

Liz Lawman, HS2 Ltd

Lucy Colls, HS2 Ltd

Eleanor Taylor, Jacobs

Julian Pannett, Jacobs

Krzysztof Sieledczyk, Jacobs

Jim Abbott, JCP Consultancy Ltd

Sascha Flint, Major Projects Association

Manon Bradley, Major Projects Association

Andrew Lewis, Mott MacDonald

Elle Gingell, ResoLex

Edward Moore, ResoLex

Richard Bayfield, ResoLex

Joanna Jarvie, ResoLex

Tony Llewellyn, ResoLex

Tom Chick, ResoLex

Michelle Kearney, ResoLex

Kelachi Amadi-Echendu, ResoLex

Scott Murray, SCS Railways

Simon Higgens, Story

Robert Stockwell, Tideway

Natalia Jones, Tideway

Robert Stacey, Turner & Townsend

Iain McLaughlin, Turner & Townsend

Natalie Laing, Turner & Townsend

Sofia Sanfizcasas, Turner & Townsend

Caroline Charles, University of Reading

# Mind the Mobilisation Gap

## Why we're still getting mobilisation wrong on major projects, and how we can do better

Perspectives Paper

more > Major Projects Association resources

more > Major Projects Association events

For further information:

mpa@majorprojects.org

info@resolex.com

majorprojects.org

resolex.com

© Major Projects Association 2024