

Empowering Female Leaders in Project Management: A Review of the APM's Women in Project Management 2024 Conference

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The recent Women in Project Management (WiPM) Conference in London, hosted by the Association for Project Management (APM), was a resounding success. This gathering of talented female project practitioners and industry allies provided a unique platform for networking, learning, and inspiring each other. The theme for this year was 'Leadership Unpacked' and the conference did not disappoint, the over one thousand attendees to the event in central London.

The conference, headlined by a litany of powerful female industry and non-industry leaders, including, social entrepreneur and broadcaster, Natalie Campbell MBE, England rugby world cup winner and 'Face' of England Rugby Maggie Alphonsi MBE. Fellow of the Association of Project Management and Delivery Director at Thames Water, Roselyn Unegbu and Programme Management Officer at Babcock International, Donna Sinnick to name but a few, covered a range of critical topics, including: Leadership and Career Development, Diversity and Inclusion, Mentorship and Sponsorship, and achieving Work-Life Balance.

Speakers shared their insights on navigating their own unique career paths, whilst overcoming challenges, and developing essential leadership skills. Discussions on the day focused on creating more inclusive workplaces and addressing gender bias in the project management profession. The importance of mentorship and sponsorship in supporting female professionals was emphasized. As well as reclaiming, the often hostile environment that many female professionals are subjected to, through fostering a sense of community and support.

Those attending were provided with practical strategies for achieving a healthy work-life balance. Exploring the importance of both mental and physical well-being, especially at time of increased pressure and stress in both the workplace and at home. Helping attendees manage their personal and professional

commitments effectively and ensuring the professional growth to ensure progression through their careers.

Conferences like these are crucial to enable us to connect with like-minded organisations and enhance inclusive hiring within our respective project management teams across our business.

They help us to build diverse talent opportunities, and create the space to meet talented, passionate women and allies whilst staying connected to innovative and cutting-edge discourse and relevant industry-led topics.

Regular engagement ensures that the topic of gender diversity, especially in project management, remains at the forefront, bringing the gap between male and female representation in the field.

– Samantha Saunders, Thames Water, Resourcing Business Partner

The event now in its eighth year, challenged the stereotypes holding back progress in the profession. The conference sends a powerful message that women are capable leaders and are not only valuable assets but are essential to profession.

APM WiPM 2024 was the third year that international built-environment consultancy firm MIGSO-PCUBED has supported the event with both stand sponsorship and facilitators for some of the excellent panel talks.

“It has been inspiring to see the event grow from strength to strength over these three years with more attendees and really relevant speakers and sessions. We hope that our support contributes to the ongoing journey to make the project management profession more diverse and more representative of those that benefit from successful project delivery.

“It was also good to see many male allies attending and seeking to understand the barriers and obstacles that women can face as they progress in the profession.

“Kudos to the APM team and the WiPM volunteers that organize this truly relevant event – see you again next year!”

– Mark Sorrell, Head of Public Sector, MIGSO-PCUBED

Conferences such as WiPM have a significant role in promoting the need for a more diverse workforce in the project management industry. By highlighting the achievements and contributions of female professionals, as well as voicing the inequalities still entrenched across the industry globally the APM has an important role in ensuring steps are taken to urgently address the industries shortfalls.

The industry still faces challenges in terms of gender balance. According to recent APM sourced data:

In the UK only approximately 28% of project professionals are women. And Worldwide, women make up only around 36% of project managers.

In the report *Discrimination Against Women in the UK construction sector* (Hajikazemi, Locatelli & Lawrence, 2024), it was found that during their careers within the UK construction sector, all of the 20 women participating in the study had experienced some form of discrimination. Over half of the women participants had observed discrimination against other women. And seven of the women participants highlighted that the discrimination they had experienced could have been influenced by factors such as nationality or ethnicity, or the participants being “too young”, or “too educated”, or a combination of these factors.

According to research by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) (Alderson, 2018)., around 30% of women in construction believe sexism has held them back from pursuing senior roles.

Despite these somewhat depressing figures, there is optimism about the future. Factors such as increased awareness, diversity and inclusion initiatives, changing perceptions, and education and training are likely to contribute to a more balanced gender ratio in the coming years.

And by empowering women and promoting their achievements, events such as WiPM help to create and foster a more diverse and inclusive industry. Not only benefiting individual women but also leading to better project outcomes and stronger project organizations.

If you would like to find out more about this and future APM WiPM Conferences, please follow the link [here](#). Where you will find the full line up of speakers and topics. There is also a specific APM Women in Project Management Special Interest Group (SIG), run by the APM, and which is open to new members now. Follow this link [here](#) to find out how to join today.