

Accenture Report Highlights Critical Need for Digital Transformation in UK Infrastructure Projects

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A new report from Accenture reveals a concerning trend in global infrastructure projects, with 92 percent finishing late and exceeding budget. This finding underscores the urgent need for fundamental change in how projects are planned, executed, and managed, particularly within the UK's burgeoning infrastructure sector, according to Huda As'ad, Accenture's Capital Projects lead in the UK.

The report identifies several key factors contributing to these delays, including increased project scrutiny, material and equipment availability challenges, complex regulatory landscapes, inadequate front-end planning, and escalating costs. A significant challenge also lies within the construction industry's persistent reliance on paper-based processes, with a substantial amount of project performance data still collected manually.

Furthermore, the sector faces a critical skills shortage, with experienced engineers retiring at a faster rate than new talent entering the workforce. Simultaneously, the demand for technology-related skills is increasing, yet these roles are proving difficult to fill and retain.

As'ad emphasizes that while other industries have embraced digitalization to enhance productivity and reduce costs, the construction sector has lagged, often relying on outdated methods and communication channels. This fragmentation within the industry, with its complex network of suppliers and contractors, further hinders the adoption of standardized digital solutions. Moreover, a culture of risk aversion can impede the embrace of new technologies.

Despite these challenges, there are promising developments. Modern project delivery approaches that prioritize early collaboration have demonstrated the potential to reduce cost variance by approximately 10 percent compared to traditional methods. The increasing adoption of Building Information Modeling (BIM) is also enabling stakeholders to collaborate on unified digital platforms, creating digital twins of assets under construction. Additionally, virtual and augmented reality technologies are emerging as valuable tools for enhancing site safety and improving training through immersive simulations.

As'ad stresses that true transformation requires more than just adopting new technologies; it necessitates a fundamental shift in mindset. Fostering an environment where workers are encouraged to contribute improvement ideas and view setbacks as learning opportunities is crucial.

The UK's renewed focus on national infrastructure, including significant investments in public transport and the development of data centers, presents a significant opportunity for the construction industry to reverse current trends. By embracing digital technologies, fostering better collaboration, and leveraging data-driven decision-making, the sector can modernize its operations and play a pivotal role in driving national economic growth.

Accenture recently acquired Glasgow-based capital projects consultancy Soben, further strengthening its capabilities in supporting the transformation of the infrastructure sector.