Chapter 13
Projects without Email, Is that Possible?

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ABSTRACT
Email is standard way of communication in our daily life and in projects. But email traffic becomes more and more cumbersome. More than 25 percent of a working day is spend on email related tasks. Email is misused, and can create crisis in project teams. Nowadays the current generation of project team members is more used to using social media and social collaboration to communicate. To take advantage of that and to limit the use of email, the Zero email program was introduced within Atos. Limiting the use of emails with project teams can be achieved by introducing the right set of tools, a thorough management of change program, using early adaptors, starting small and acting – as a project manager – as a good example. Completely get rid of all email is still not possible; only when all parties are working with the same social media and collaboration tooling, a 80% result can be achieved. But in the current global world of project management with all its different stakeholders and parties, there is still a long way to go.

INTRODUCTION
In the 1970s, email was revolutionary. It became a unique tool, allowing people to exchange information, manage documents, tasks, and workflow. It has replaced phone calls and face-to-face meetings. But, for all its strengths, email is also a source of immense frustration. Project team members can receive hundreds of emails a day, some of which are important; most of which probably don’t. Just dealing with the daily overload is a huge problem.

It can cause backlog – simply working through your emails after being away from your desk can take days. And it can cause error – missing the most recent message means you might waste time working on the wrong version of a document (Atos, 2012b).
Projects without Email, Is that Possible?

Some figures (Galaxy Research, 2010; Jackson & Dawson, 2003; Star survey, 2010; The Radiciti group, 2009):

- One in five UK workers spend 32 days a year managing email.
- 25 percent of the average corporate worker’s day is spent on email related tasks.
- 48 percent of managers find the need to constantly reply to emails stressful.
- It takes a minute to recover one’s train of thought after interruption by email, meaning that people who check their email every five minutes waste 8.5 hours a week figuring out what they were doing moments before.

Project teams – and specifically international or virtual project teams – are heavily dependent on email. At least, that is what they think they are. And therefore, they encounter the same burden of too many emails a day which impact their work and their results. For the project manager, it is even worse. As a spider in the web, he or she will receive all communication of the team (and the stakeholders). It is easy to send all email as a CC to the project manager; in this case the team member believes the project manager is informed and sometimes he even believes it is not his problem anymore. At the end of the day, this will impact project results in a negative way.

A solution is to aim for a project environment with as less email as possible (Atos, 2012b, 2012c). This is possible by introducing more collaborative, social media-based communications tools (Atos, 2012a; Singh, 2012; Silic et al, 2015). This has as results that email is becoming redundant – and can be eradicated – as other solutions outperform it. Calling on these other technologies – social collaboration, social media, chatting tools – dramatically enhances the way the team share knowledge and can hone each other’s skills while safeguarding the collective project knowledge base. In fact, it:

- Increases productivity.
- Introduces better collaboration for greater agility.
- Meets the expectations of the new ‘social’ generation.
- And there is less information loss, due to better version management.

This does not mean that email will be abandoned completely. It is very likely the project will still need to use email to communicate with customers or suppliers (stakeholders outside your direct project environment), but it shouldn’t be used as it has been in the past. Adopting a basic set of behaviors will help reduce the number of emails exchanged within the project. Keep in mind that for every action, there is a reaction: The more email sent, the more received, and CC-ing is like spamming.

This chapter will describe the requirements for projects with less email, how to introduce and implement collaborative, social media-based communications tools, and how to encourage your project team members to change from old to new ways of working. Although future research is still needed to identify the real quantitative effect on the project results, some preliminary results of this new way of working will be shown.