

## TALKING HEADS:

# JON BURCHELL

## HEAD OF P3M



**Our Head of P3M, Jon Burchell, is a project management veteran with over 25 years' experience. Here he reflects on the changing picture of P3M and his current role at Harmonic.**

### **You joined Harmonic as Head of P3M in February 2022. What was your path to this point?**

I started my career working in technology, then quickly decided to specialise in project management and spent 12 years delivering projects and programmes for IBM and Atos.

For the past 10 years I have worked as a contractor, which extended my experience across a much wider range of industries. My main passion during this time was delivering public sector projects. I found the more tangible societal benefits of these, and their real-world impact (such as environmental initiatives with Defra), really resonated with me and brought the whole point of doing my job to life. When the opportunity came up at Harmonic, I was excited by the prospect of taking on new, interesting work in a consultancy of Harmonic's size and vision. It felt like the right time for me to embrace a new challenge!

### **What does your role as Head of P3M involve?**

Harmonic is a people business and, as Head of P3M, the people are my primary focus. My role is about ensuring we have a breadth of skills, capabilities, experience and qualifications to allow us to manage all of our customers' needs in the areas in which we operate today and expect to operate tomorrow. The capabilities we have in P3M are the thread that runs through all the work we do.

I also play an assurance role for the client engagement teams in a pre-sale/bid capacity, and work with the other capability heads to ensure that work can be integrated to improve client outcomes.



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### **How do your strengths as an individual help in your role?**

With over 25 years' experience of delivering projects and programmes, I've seen most scenarios and got the war wounds to show for it! As a result, I can empathise with the problems people face and I know the traps and the opportunities. It's all about people and personalities – understanding what motivates them and influences how they behave.

I also think people management is a particular strength of mine. I've managed large teams before – when I was contracting, I oversaw the work of 100 people spread from the west coast of the USA to India. We're a physically dispersed team at Harmonic, so this experience has proved useful. I take a servant leadership approach – I firmly believe that if you look after people, they will get results and grow. I also feel that I'm typically someone who gets on and does things when they need to get done.

### **How is Harmonic's P3M team structured?**

The P3M team is structured around the professional capabilities of each area; however, it's important to say that this structure doesn't reflect the way we work with customers. We put together solutions that involve multiple capabilities – not just project management or business change in isolation. Ideally, we want customers to come to us with a problem early in the process and look to us to provide a complete solution, from requirements through to design and delivery. This integrated approach isn't just great for our customers – it's fantastic for people's development and career progression.

Our Programme & Project Management team, led by Charlotte Braithwaite, includes a mix of delivery consultants ranging from those with relatively little experience, through to those with the experience, leadership and decision-making skills to deliver complex programmes. Our Business Transformation & Change capability, led by Heather Allen, works in a more traditional advisory role, influencing and collaborating with customers in relation to change. Finally, Rhea Hudson leads our team of PMO & Tooling experts, who provide the overarching project and programme support functions, including expertise in activities such as planning.

## How has P3M changed over the course of your career?

Project management used to be very much about tracking risk, issues, costs, milestones and deliverables – the usual stuff that goes into getting things done.

Probably the biggest change I've seen over the past 25 years is the move to more iterative project delivery, with the likes of Agile and SCRUM breaking out from their traditional home ground of software development to many other types of project. Closely linked to this has been improved collaboration and greater recognition of the value of people and the softer skills that a P3M consultant needs. The legacy command and control mentality is all but dead in my opinion.

Finally – and this is something that has almost come full circle during my career – is virtual teams. When I started, everyone on a project worked together in the same office. Then thanks to globalisation, teams were spread far and wide (follow the sun, etc.), before the collaborative approaches mentioned above made it normal for people to be co-located again. Finally, over the past two years, Covid-19 has forced us to move back towards virtual teamwork. Some of the approaches will stick and some will change but, whatever happens, flexibility in terms of tools, work time and working practices is here to stay and in no way will that impede our ability to collaborate. As a business it is vitally important that we recognise our people's changing aspirations for work and a work-life balance. I'll say it again – we are a people-focused organisation!

## Being 'bold and innovative' is one of Harmonic's core values. How are you planning to put this into practice in P3M?

We look to the future in all our strategic plans for the P3M team. Using a combination of industry and capability foresight, we are on a mission to ensure that we have people in place with a breadth of market sector experience, skills and qualifications. As well as enabling us to place anyone in multiple roles, this will give us the confidence and flexibility to adapt, take risks and innovate.

We monitor and stay ahead of key trends such as hybrid delivery models and the rise of data and AI, enhancing our consultants' skills as needed and adapting our solutions accordingly.

## What differentiates Harmonic from the competition?

Harmonic stands out from the crowd because of the great relationships we forge with our customers – individuals and companies. We're extremely approachable and personable, and we hold ourselves to high standards of honesty and transparency.

At the end of the day, it all comes down to values. As an organisation, we have three core values – 'we act with integrity and keep our promises', 'we are innovative and bold' and 'we partner to deliver' – and we live by them in all we do. That last one is probably the most important for me. I can see that the real differentiator for Harmonic is that we partner with customers through the whole journey. Partnering is so much more powerful in my opinion.

As well as shaping our strategy and approach to work, these values will help to ensure that we attract and retain the right people. Recognising that my values matched Harmonic's played a big part in my decision to come on board. A job is about so much more than a payslip...

## You've joined Harmonic at a time of immense change. Is this one of the things that attracted you to the organisation?

Absolutely – I love change! As a contractor who has worked on many different projects and within many different cultures over the past 10 years, adapting and thriving in new situations has become second nature. I'm really enjoying using my experience to help everyone at Harmonic get the most out of the current period of change, following integration with KBR's Government Solutions Advisory business at the start of the year.

Having said that, a thread of stability is just as important as change. We need to manage change, ensuring our people are happy coming on the journey with us and making sure that they are invested in and excited about what lies ahead. The aim is to make improvements from a stable base and reach high-value performance as quickly as you can.

## What are you most excited about for your future as part of Harmonic?

Harmonic has immense growth potential and I'm excited about the opportunity this offers for growing our team and me personally! Helping existing colleagues to mature and bringing in additional talent with the skills and breadth of experience we need to support our growth ambitions – that's what makes me excited.

Variety is one of the best things about being in the consulting world – each new opportunity is different. I'm also excited to see how Harmonic diversifies into other markets.

## What three words would you use to describe Harmonic?

Friendly, Professional, Dynamic

## What do you think makes Harmonic such a great place to work?

In essence, we do really cool work with very interesting people. I'm only three months in, and already I can see it's a great place to be!

