



# **The 2020 State of AEC Project Management Research Report**

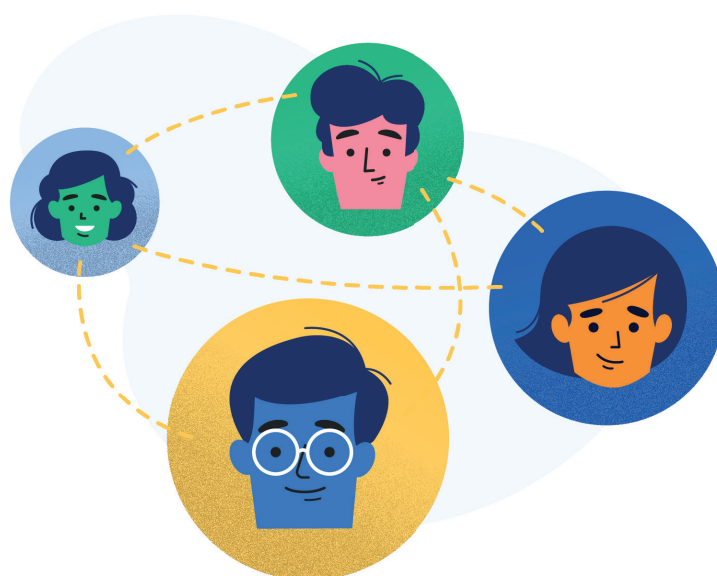
The 'why' of projects is in your inbox

ARUP



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Researched and written by Mail Manager, part of the Arup Group  
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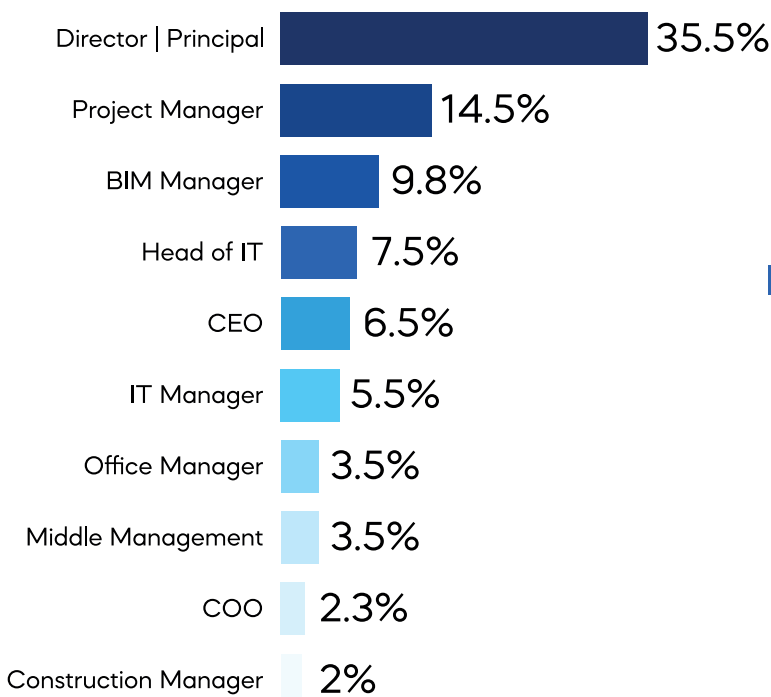
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# Introduction

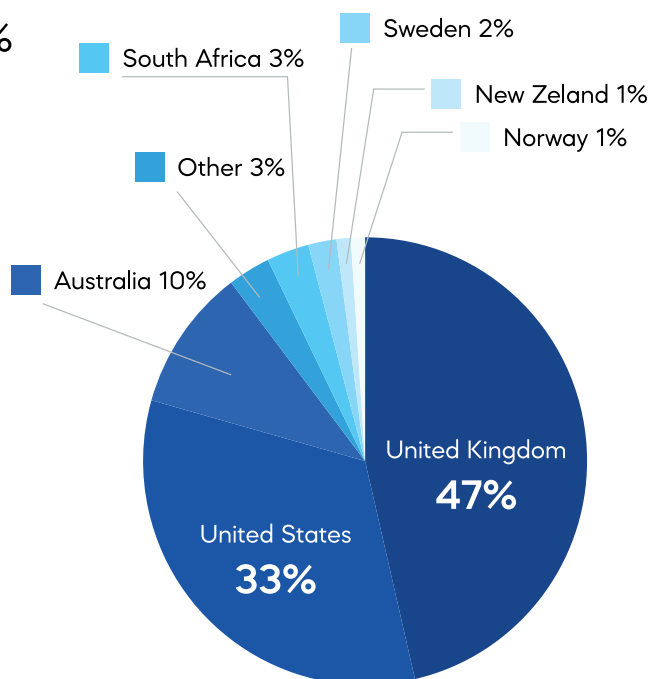
The purpose of this research by Mail Manager, part of the Arup Group, is to determine the challenges and trends architecture, engineering and construction businesses are facing regarding project management and correspondence. The report aims to discover where project information lives, how businesses manage project information, the problems faced when chasing payments, what information needs to be retrieved and what information is needed when faced with legal disputes.

We surveyed 450 AEC professionals in leadership roles in the United States and the United Kingdom. All respondents are in management job titles, including CEOs, Directors, Project Managers, BIM Managers, Heads of IT and Principals. The anonymous responses were collected in January 2020.

## Job title



## Country



## Type of organisation they work for



## Executive Summary



The key findings reveal email is still, despite the predictions of its death, the letter of today when it comes to projects. Indeed, 55% of respondents reveal over 80% of their project correspondence is via email. More worrying, 88% of respondents are concerned about project information not being readily available, and not being visible. The research clearly reveals that the retrieval of project information, the majority of which resides in email, is a key industry challenge, regardless of geography, business size and specific sector.

Jacob Wardrop, Director at Mail Manager, says, “Clearly, the results show the critical importance of email in today’s projects. Despite improvements in modern ways of working, particularly when it comes to disputes and scope disagreements, the context of a project remains in an inbox. That’s why it is vital that businesses have the ability to easily find and retrieve information, regardless of if the project is 10 years old, the person who was having the communication has left the business, or who was cc’d on the email.”

“Businesses we speak with can often find information, but the process is frustrating, unreliable, time-consuming and hard to access.”

**Jacob Wardrop, Director**

## The following are key takeaways from the research

**AEC firms are good at documenting information but lack the ability to retrieve it, which is critical in avoiding disputes.**



1 in 5 (18%) respondents 'need to reproduce information' when chasing payments



1 in 5 (18%) respondents say scope disagreements are the biggest problem they face



99% of respondents have had to retrieve emails from a past project



Only 1 in 10 (10%) respondents say they are confident and comfortable with finding project information



23% of US respondents are very concerned about project information not being readily available or visible, compared to 31% of UK respondents

**Businesses are focusing on efficiency and productivity.**



Despite the buzz around Digital Twins, BIM and cybersecurity, 'streamlining processes' was the top key initiative for respondents (19%), while 14% of respondents say their key initiative is cloud adoption.

## The day file of years gone by is not anymore. It all lies in email.



Email is still king. 50% of all respondents say the majority of information relating to scope changes reside in email.

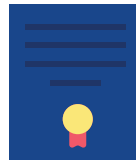


60% of UK respondents say the majority of information relating to scope changes lies in email, compared to 36% of US respondents, who seem to still prefer formal documents completed.

## Where is your evidence of the things that you've agreed to on a project?



In a legal dispute, half of respondents (48%) need to retrieve correspondence relating to scope/agreements on the project



and 23% need to retrieve contracts.



x

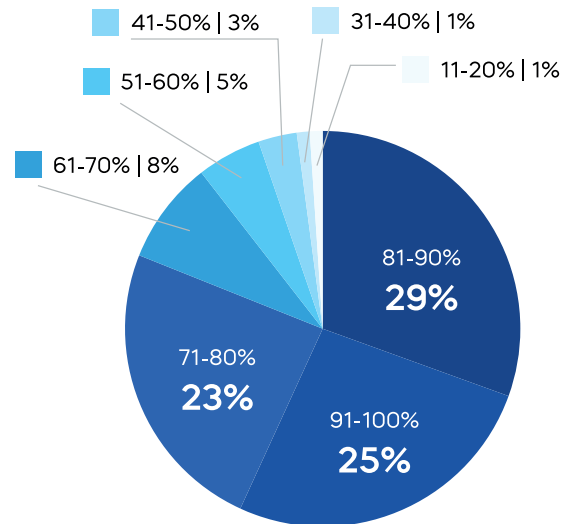


51% of UK respondents and 41% of US respondents need to find evidence relating to the scope/agreements of work in a legal dispute.

# Full Research Findings

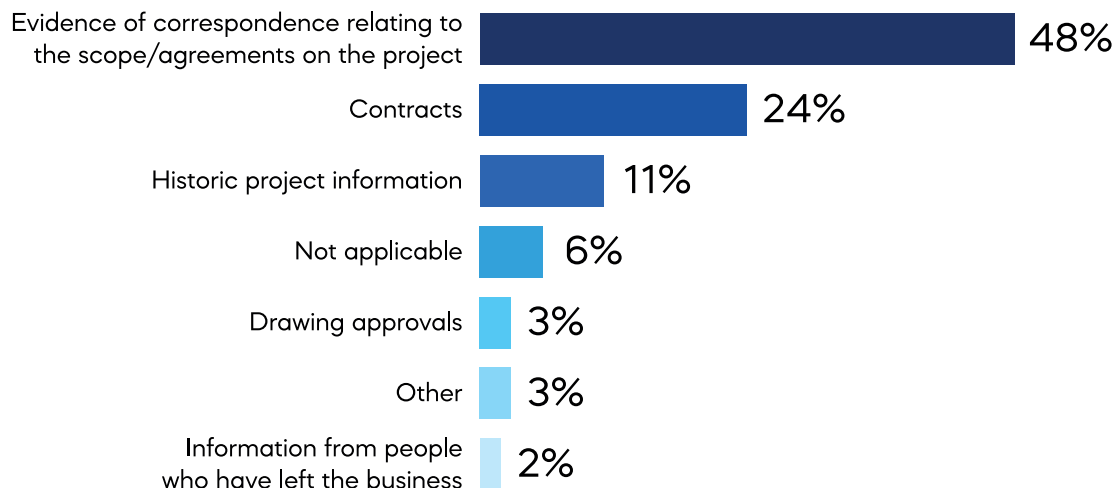
## What % of your project correspondence is via email?

When asked what percentage of project correspondence is done via email, the most popular answer was 81-90%, followed by 91-100%. These answers reveal email is still the go-to communication method for businesses.

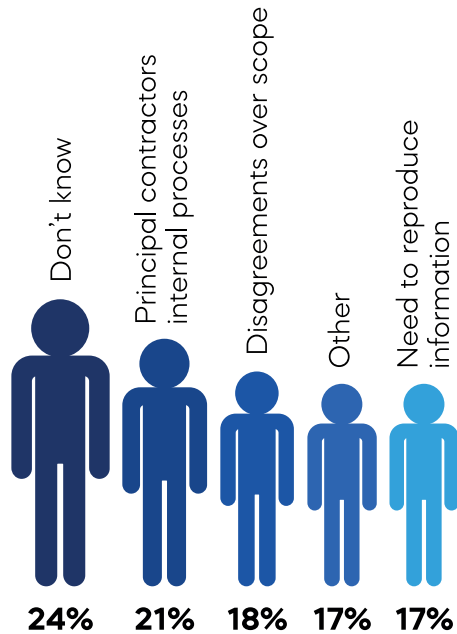


## In a legal dispute relating to a project, what information would you typically need to retrieve to evidence your case?

The respondents were asked what information they need to retrieve during a legal dispute to evidence their case. Half of respondents answered evidence of correspondence relating to scope changes and agreements was the most needed information (48%), followed by contracts (24.1%) and historic project information (11.8%)



## Full Research Findings

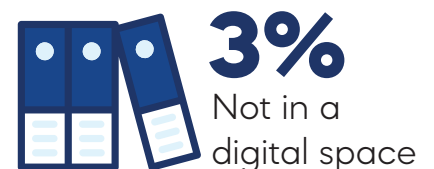


### When chasing payments what is the most common problem you face?

Respondents were asked what the most common problem they face is when chasing payments for projects. Principal Contractors internal processes (21.6%) and scope disagreements (18.7%) came out top, with the need to reproduce information (17.4%) also high.

### Where does the majority of information relating to scope changes reside?

The survey asked respondents where the majority of information relating to scope changes reside, with email being the top answer (50.1%). Positively, only 3% of respondents answered that the information resides in a non-digital space.

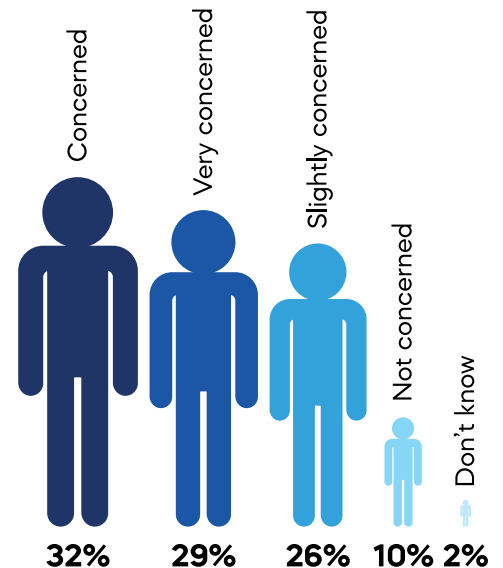




## Full Research Findings

### How concerned are you about project information not being readily available, and not being visible?

When asked how concerned they were about project information being available and visible, the results show there is a concern across the AEC industries about access to information. 32.2% say they are concerned, followed by 29.2% saying they are very concerned. Only 10.2% say they are not concerned about access and availability of project information.



### How often have you had to retrieve emails from a past project?

Following on, the respondents were asked how often they have had to retrieve emails from a past project, with 'often' being the most popular answer (46.3%), highlighting the importance of email archiving and retrieval capabilities. Only 1.5% of respondents say they have never had to retrieve emails from a past project.

**46.3%**

Often

**38.1%**

Not often

**14.2%**

Very often

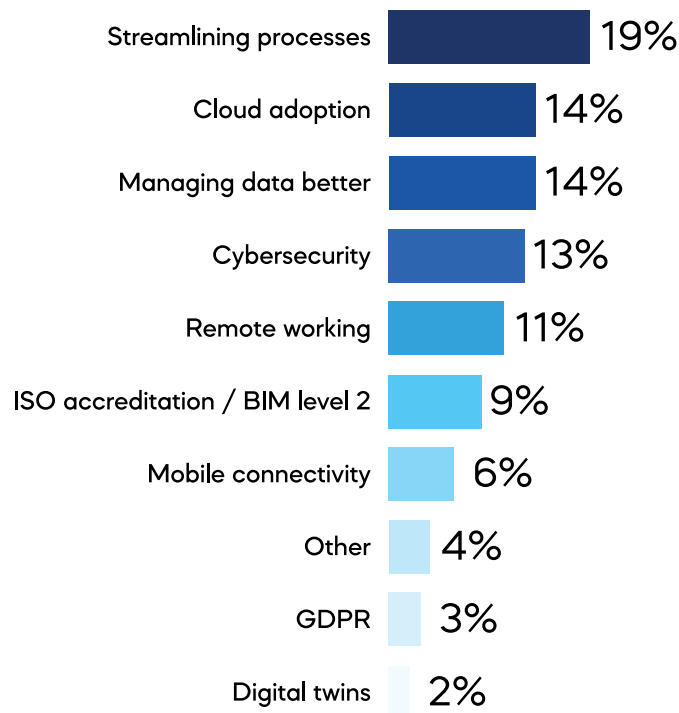
**1.5%**

Never

# Full Research Findings

## Please list out the key technology initiatives your business is considering at the moment?

Finally, the respondents were asked about the key initiatives their business is considering at the moment, with the need to streamline processes coming out top (19.8%). Showing the slow uptake of cloud technology across the industry, cloud adoption was second (14.3%), followed by the better management of data (14.1%).



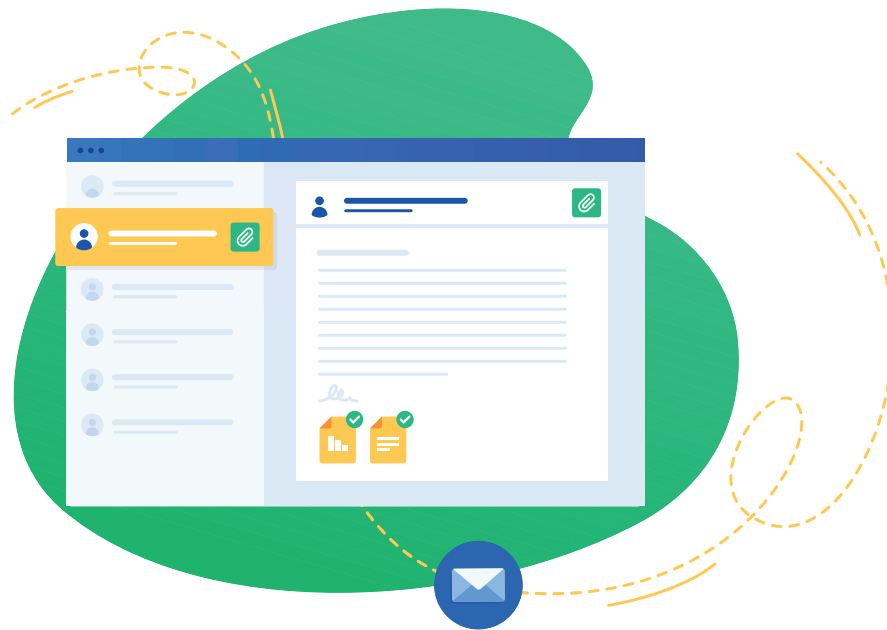
## Methodology

450 respondents were asked about their views relating to project management processes, what information they need to regularly find, where the information resides and how concerned they are with retrieving information. The respondents were in leadership positions, the majority of which were split between the UK and US. All answers were anonymous and the survey was taken in January 2020.

# Conclusion

These findings reveal that email is still the most-used communication method on a business and AEC firms lack the ability to find historic information relating to a project, leaving them wide open to risk.

While the need and ability to retrieve project information scored negatively, there were some positive results in the documentation of information. Almost all respondents said they document project information in a digital capacity, which is a step in the right direction. Interestingly, the biggest challenges around project delivery and payments is scope disagreements, making internal processes and contracts important for getting paid.



“This level of insight from senior figures in AEC provides a glimpse of how they address challenges around payments, contract risk, and how digital trends feature in their day-to-day reality. The industry is at a point where we know our challenges and what is wrong with how we operate, and there are pockets of businesses who are questioning how they deliver projects in a much broader context than BIM, in some ways going back to the core fundamentals of efficient project communication.”

Jacob Wardrop, Sales Director at Mail Manager

## About Mail Manager

Mail Manager is a leading email management solution, developed by Arup. Mail Manager works with more than 2,000 architecture, engineering and construction firms in 16 countries, with more than 50,000 users benefitting from powerful filing and search capabilities. For more information, visit [www.mailmanager.com](http://www.mailmanager.com).

To book a personalised demo of Mail Manager, or if you have any questions, contact [sales@mailmanager.com](mailto:sales@mailmanager.com).



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