Propelling Project Managers in the Digital Age

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ecosystem of project management has changed alongside the massive shifts in the world of work over the last two decades. Today's leading project managers are expertly innovating within projects to improve outcomes and maximize business impact.

The influence of digital on project management precipitates a need for both technological know-how and general business skills, including an astuteness in managing global and diverse teams, and the ability to foster collaboration across projects. In the face of these shaping forces, project managers have become today's change managers.

This white paper discusses the role of project manager as change manager in the modern workplace, and examines how enterprises can best support individuals in this complex and dynamic role.

PROJECT MANAGERS ARE TODAY'S CHANGE MANAGERS

In today's digital world, work is planned and executed through mission-based teams. It's these focused entities that drive innovation across the organization and enable businesses to retain their competitive edge. Yet disruptive technologies are changing the way organizations conduct business on the individual, team and organizational levels, and not all organizations are successful in capitalizing on this disruption. In fact, sixty-one percent of businesses surveyed by the leading global membership organization for project managers, PMI®, struggle with the gap between digital strategy and implementation.[1]

One critical difference between the enterprises that are flourishing in the face of disruptive technologies and those that are floundering is the individuals responsible for governing and executing project and change management. Project managers (PMs) are stepping to the helm as change managers, cross-functional team managers and digital strategy enablers to help guide a workforce that can successfully adapt, pivot and adjust course in the face of new technologies. Adroit PMs can identify and plan more efficient delivery methods to gracefully usher a project through completion.

But in the new world of work, project management has changed. PMs are responsible for managing people and projects, incorporating emerging technologies, and leveraging data to inform current and future projects, and for successful project execution in this new landscape, organizations must be prepared to offer ongoing learning and development opportunities and solutions for project teams.

HOW DIGITAL IS IMPACTING PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Organizations are facing radical shifts in the world of work, and it's changing project management. Today project managers must be successful in balancing digital fluency with general business skills, have the ability to lead diverse teams and be effective in inspiring collaboration.

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1 "The Project Management Office: Aligning Strategy & Implementation." PMI®, 2014.

Project managers have increasingly tech-driven roles as they integrate new and emerging technologies into projects to increase efficiency. Cloud solutions have already replaced local storage and become the new standard in project management, and 84% of innovator organizations surveyed by PMI® stated that cloud capabilities have enabled their organization to retain a competitive edge. The majority of these innovator organizations have also incorporated IoT (62%) and AI (60%) into their project management practices to increase transfer of data and for faster and more reliable decision making, respectively.[2]

To complement this advanced digital fluency, PMs need top-notch skills to help the organization plan and meet outcomes most efficiently. The role of project manager has evolved to that of expert communicator, and PMs must be clear, concise, and effective in communicating technical information to both cross-functional team members and senior leadership. As project managers are responsible for incorporating bleeding edge technology to the greatest impact, an agile mindset is required in order to quickly come up to speed on the best ways to leverage these technologies for project efficiencies.[3]

Today it's through global business teams that multi-national corporations execute their strategic agenda, and an aptitude for leading diverse teams is imperative for PMs. Digitalization coupled with the rise of the global economy has made formerly limiting factors like cultural or linguistic differences and geographical boundaries very navigable in today's business world. PMs are required to seamlessly plan, staff, organize, monitor, control and evaluate projects against the context of different social, geo-political, linguistic and cultural factors. Without excellent communication and a sensitivity to cultural differences, global projects can result in significant miscommunication and team tension. The best PMs deftly mitigate these core cultural and philosophical differences and expectations to ensure the project moves along in a timely fashion.

And still, collaboration remains at the heart of effective project management and leadership. The modern environment demands a move away from the top down, command and control approach of yesterday, and executives of leading organizations are responding by enabling a flatter and more project-centric enterprise. In these more decentralized organizational models, project managers have become especially valuable as a single point of contact with upper management to guide teams to the best decision. With leaders at all levels, including a PM, upper management is able

According to PMI®, Innovators:
- Compose the top 12% of the organizations surveyed.
- Have a mature digital transformation strategy.
- Are risk tolerant.
- Consider the adoption of disruptive technologies to be a high organization priority.

Laggards:
- Are in the bottom 14% of the organizations surveyed.
- Slower to embrace and adopt disruptive technologies.
- Are risk averse.
- Have an immature digital transformation strategy.
- Consider the adoption of disruptive technologies to be a low organization priority.

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2   *"Maximizing the Benefits of Disruptive Technologies on Projects." PMI®, 2018*
3   *"The Project Manager of the Future: Developing digital-age project management skills to thrive in disruptive times." PMI®, September 2018.*

to better understand what ideas resonate, what products and processes work and how best to harness bleeding edge technology.[4]

PROJECT EXECUTION BY MISSION-DRIVEN TEAMS

Projects are how the strategic agenda of an organization is executed. While this isn't anything new, what has changed is the importance of execution due to innovation being the driving force of competitive advantage for organizations today. More than ever, projects—managed by PMs and project leads, are being executed by mission-driven teams that are enabling the organization to put its agenda, goals and vision into action.

The leadership component of the PM role is vitally important as "strong effective leadership creates a cooperative team environment in which employees are encouraged to participate, grow, learn, and work together to reach the ultimate goal of success."[6] Project managers are responsible for fostering productive teams with positive working relationships. They moderate conflicts, manage expectations, inspire confidence and build trust. Programs and projects derail when internal and external stakeholders aren't on the same page, and leadership experience and training are essential to develop competencies that enable successful planning and delivery by project managers.

Skilled PMs steer projects to successful completion by ensuring singular issues, like a lack of capability in a particular function, don't stymie the project and result in lost revenue or cost savings that aren't realized. An urgent need for agility, speed and adaptability from project managers has arisen because these mission-driven teams come together and disband quickly as business demands dictate. Increasingly, the onus is on PMs and project leaders to guide team members through changes and support individuals in stepping into new roles and coming up to speed quickly.[7]

> "In the past, project management was measured in terms of your ability to deliver on time and on budget. But what differentiates project managers today is the ability to innovate within the project."[5]

4 "When to Decentralize Decision Making, and When Not To." Herman Vantrappen and Frederic Wirtz, HBR, December 26, 2017.
5 "The C-Suite Role the Transformation of the Project Management Office." Forbes Insights with PMI®, Forbes, March 15, 2019.
6 "Leadership and Its Role in the Success of Project Management." Bianca Nova, Eric A. Landis, and Mary Lewis Haley, Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics Vol. 14(1), 2017.
7 "Rewriting the Rules for the Digital Age." Human Capital Trends, Deloitte, 2017.

PREPARING PMS FOR THE FUTURE: INVESTMENTS IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Investments in the ongoing learning and development of PMs and project leads is more important than ever before; their ability to enable teams to accomplish strategic business initiatives is key to an organization's success. While all employees need to have a growth mindset, this is especially true for PMs. Because it's a role based around learning new processes, technologies, methodologies and practices all the time, PMs fare best when they adopt a learning for life mentality.

But how exactly does this learning and development journey look? The pathway toward certification is a familiar route for PMs, but beyond these certification-specific competencies like scope, risk, quality and cost management, development around technological fluency and business skills is also essential.

What's certain is that PMs must have an understanding of the new technologies that are working their ways into the projects they're managing, as all projects have a tech component today. The requirements for digital fluency vary greatly by industry project type, scope and functions involved. For some, it may be as light as understanding basic terminology to enable a shared lexicon on the team or understanding how these technologies can add value to the project or business as a whole.

Alternatively, the technological know-how needed may be more granular and specific, like an understanding of big data and data analytics. Our digital lives are producing more data than ever before, and PMs and project leaders are expected to process, analyze and leverage this information to innovate within the project and improve outcomes. Enterprises are eager to hire and train PMs with data and analytics skills as mastery in these topics has emerged as key to measurable improvements in project management.

Previously it was common for projects to lack a data and analytics component, simply because data wasn't being collected and processed with the speed it is currently. But today advanced analytics is critical as the metrics gathered on projects have increased in sheer quantity and also complexity. PMs must understand what insights can be generated, how to generate them and how to apply those insights to optimize project outcomes.

Modern project managers and project leaders are focusing as much on learning and development as on management reporting.[8]

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8 "Agile PMOs Transform To Support Value Delivery." The Strategic Portfolio Management Playbook for 2019, Forrester Research, 2019.

Project management and data science streams share many parallels, illustrated by the image below. As PMs take a more data-driven approach to work and integrate the tenants of big data and data analytics, they are able to weave these actionable insights into the fabric of their project management strategy. The data can be used to develop new protocols for improved planning, management and execution of projects, and can be analyzed to mold the future project ecosystem at an organization.[9] Data insights enable clearer visibility into projects, promote a better understanding of how to align projects with business objectives and offer improved monitoring of project status.
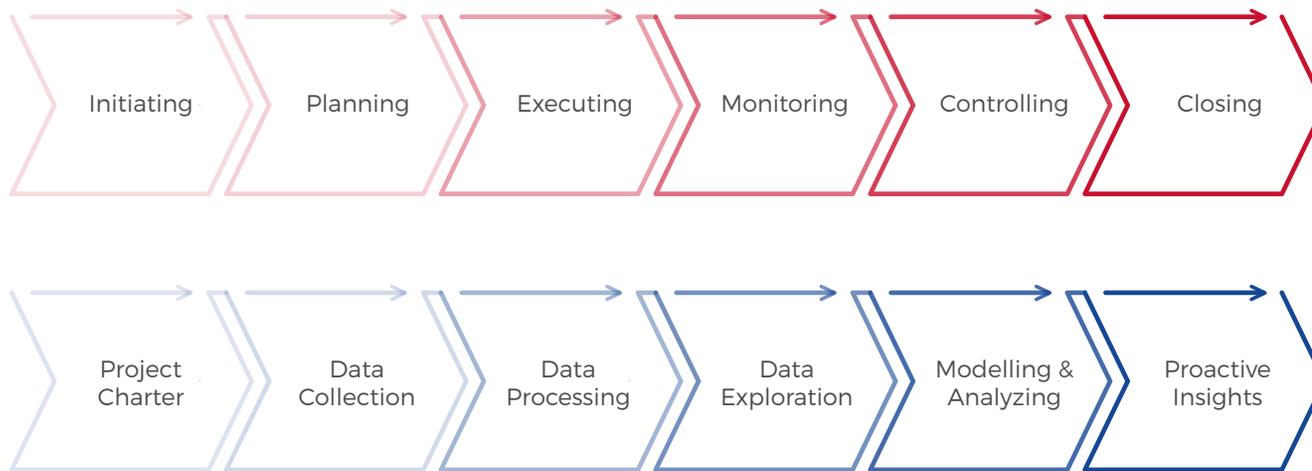
Initiating	Planning	Executing	Monitoring	Controlling	Closing
Project Charter	Data Collection	Data Processing	Data Exploration	Modelling & Analyzing	Proactive Insights

Figure 1. Image Credit DZone, Project Management and Data Science Stream Parallels[10]

Technological skills are core competencies needed to ensure the success of the project, but they are not all that's required of PMs in today's economy—one that is growing quickly but with less predictability. Project managers must be skilled at teambuilding, have strong leadership, strategy and business skills, and be able to successfully execute the project.

Teambuilding and collaboration skills are necessary to foster synergy within and across the team, and to draw on the unique strengths of team members. Effective PMs practice active listening and maintain an open mind to understand

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9   *"What Roles Does Data Have in Shaping the Future of Project Management." International Project Management Association, July 19, 2017*
10   *"Role of Project Manager in Data Science." Ramesh Manickavel, Big Data Zone, July 17, 2018.*

and accommodate others on the team, and the best are skilled at leveraging diversity to extract the most value from their team.

Leadership skills are required to usher the project through completion and manage change. PMs must remain adaptable and agile to successfully incorporate technologies, be open to new challenges and respond to evolving stakeholder expectations.

PMs need strong strategy and business skills to maintain project momentum, spur team engagement, overcome conflict, use judgment and decisiveness, and ultimately bring projects across the finish line on budget, on time and within scope. They must be able to establish a vision for the project and connect the team's mission to broader organizational goals.

Tasked with the burden of executing the strategic agenda of their organization, PMs require high-level proficiency across a broad spectrum of skills and competencies. They must be continuously improving their existing skills and integrating those required of bleeding edge technologies into projects in a timely fashion. And increasingly, project professionals are leaning on their organizations for support in providing a holistic learning and development solution.

HOW SKILLSOFT'S SEVEN SKILLS FRAMEWORK CAN HELP

Skillsoft's project management portfolio provides content that maps to PMI®'s PMI-ACP, PMP and CAPM certifications.
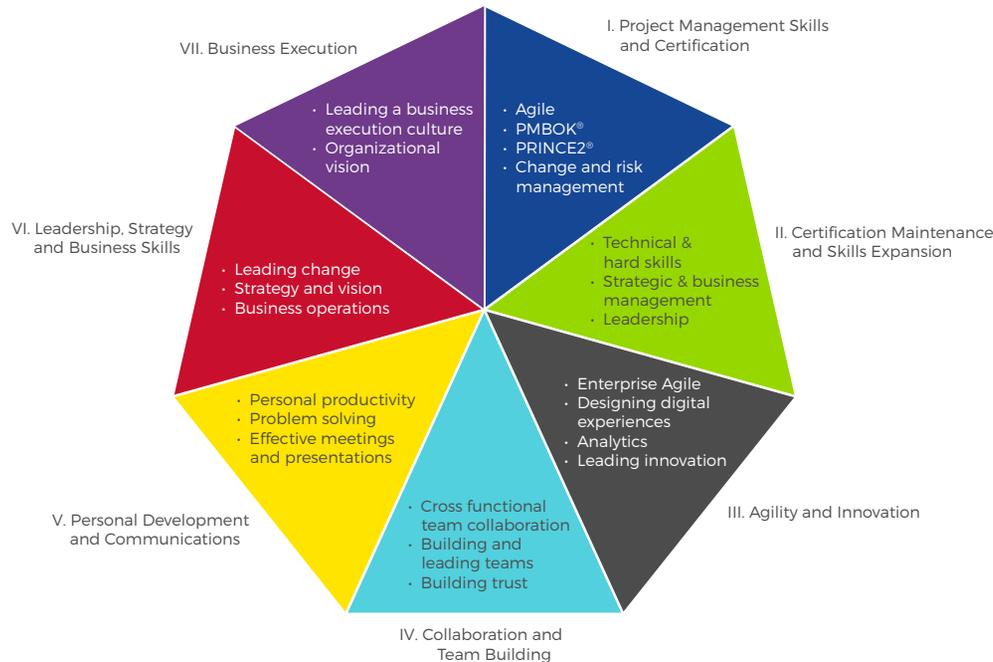
Our expert-level courses are designed with learning tightly connected to PMI's framework and the associated exam objectives. Skillsoft's hollistic approach provides assessments, exercises and job aids for reinforcement and retention and a comprehensive book portfolio for extended learning and exam prep. We also offer a virtual classroom boot camp-style solution for PMP candidates.

Necessary Skills for Project Management in the Digital Economy
- Data science skills
- Innovative mindset
- Security and privacy knowledge
- Legal and regulatory compliance knowledge
- Ability to make data-driven decisions
- Collaborative leadership skills[11]

CRITICAL SKILLS FOR PROJECT TEAMS

VII. Business Execution

I. Project Management Skills and Certification

- Leading a business execution culture
- Organizational vision

- Agile
- PMBOK®
- PRINCE2®
- Change and risk management

VI. Leadership, Strategy and Business Skills

- Leading change
- Strategy and vision
- Business operations

- Technical & hard skills
- Strategic & business management
- Leadership

II. Certification Maintenance and Skills Expansion

- Personal productivity
- Problem solving
- Effective meetings and presentations

- Enterprise Agile
- Designing digital experiences
- Analytics
- Leading innovation

V. Personal Development and Communications

- Cross functional team collaboration
- Building and leading teams
- Building trust

III. Agility and Innovation

IV. Collaboration and Team Building

PROMOTING PROJECT MANAGERS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The digital age demands a new project manager. This historically dynamic role has only grown increasingly complex in the face of emerging technologies, global business teams and the flattened enterprise. Project managers are taking the reins as change managers and driving the organization's strategic agenda with project execution by mission-driven teams.

To prepare project managers for these demands, investments in the ongoing learning and development of project managers is more important than ever before. Organizations are responsible for promoting an agile mindset in project managers and providing the learning paths necessary for PMs to balance the technical needs of the role with the people skills required to ensure successful project completion. **Visit our website** to learn more about development opportunities available for PMs.

Get complimentary access to Skillsoft content for 14 days.

START A FREE TRIAL

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Heide is Senior Vice President of Skillsoft's training and development content and is also responsible for its Leadership & Business Skills content portfolios. She joined Skillsoft in 2016 and is responsible for driving innovation across all content areas with primary responsibility for leadership and business skills.

Heide has extensive experience in the publishing, media, educational technology & corporate training sectors. She has developed award-winning eLearning products in the leadership and business skills content areas, including interactive simulations, video-based courses, case studies and experiential learning solutions.

Heide is passionate about leveraging technology to improve the practice of management. She is also a thought leader in the areas of training and development and management and leadership. She has been quoted in numerous publications including Forbes, The Economist, CLO Magazine, HR Drive, Business Insider, INC, Deal Crunch and Learning Solutions, to name a few. She is also a frequent participant in panel discussions and presenter at leading industry conferences. Because Heide has also held leadership roles in product development, innovation and product management at Fortune 100 companies, she has her finger on the pulse of what organizations need to train and develop today's leaders, especially in a digital economy.

Heide holds an MBA with distinction from Harvard Business School and is on the faculty of the Management and Organization Department of Boston College's School of Business. She was recently awarded a Top 50 Women in Technology award by The National Diversity Council.

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Russ Howard is Senior Director of Product Management for Skillsoft's Leadership and Business Skills content solutions. He also manages Skillsoft's Academic and Professional Accreditation programs which offer learners the opportunity to earn college and professional education credits from numerous academic and professional institutions.

Prior to joining Skillsoft, Russ enjoyed a 25-year career with Wang Laboratories and Getronics, holding a variety of operations and program management positions, including Director for both the Wang Global and the Getronics Universities.

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ABOUT SKILLSOFT LEADERSHIP

skillsoft▶ leadership

The award-winning Skillsoft Leadership Development Program addresses the changing way in which organizations need to develop their leaders by providing a scalable, cost-effective, and engaging leadership development experience designed for the modern, digital learner.

The courses support 30 critical competencies for leading in the digital economy, including:

- The Agile Leader: Perseverance and Flexibility

- Leading Virtually

- Leading Innovation

- Leading Through the Challenge of Change

- Embracing Diversity in Leadership

A unique learning design and scenario-based pedagogy set the Skillsoft Leadership Development Program apart from all others. Skillsoft's innovative approach leader protagonists throughout the curriculum, including a "leader mentor." Through compelling drama and pragmatic storytelling, Skillsoft models the critical human-interaction elements of leadership and demonstrates effective leadership and mindset strategies within the team context, allowing learners to tie learning to on-the-job leadership behaviors.

Learners also benefit from a wide array of tools and application resources, including reflection questions, knowledge checks, post-course assessments, facilitation guides, leader-led activities and exercises. Additionally, close to 800 carefully curated video-based assets, books, book summaries, audio books and expert-authored content extend the learning.

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ABOUT SKILLSOFT

Skillsoft is a front-runner in corporate learning, delivering beautiful technology and engaging content that drives business impact for modern enterprises. Skillsoft comprises three award-winning systems that support learning, performance and success: Skillsoft learning content, the Percipio intelligent learning experience platform and the SumTotal suite for Human Capital Management.

Skillsoft provides a comprehensive selection of cloud-based corporate learning content, including courses, videos, books and other resources on Business and Management Skills, Leadership Development, Digital Transformation, Technology and Developer, Productivity and Collaboration Tools and Compliance. Percipio's intuitive design engages modern learners and its consumer-led experience assists in accelerating learning. The SumTotal suite features four key components built on a unified platform: Learning Management, Talent Management, Talent Acquisition and Workforce Management.

Skillsoft is trusted by thousands of the world's leading organizations, including 65 percent of the Fortune 500. Learn more at **www.skillsoft.com.**