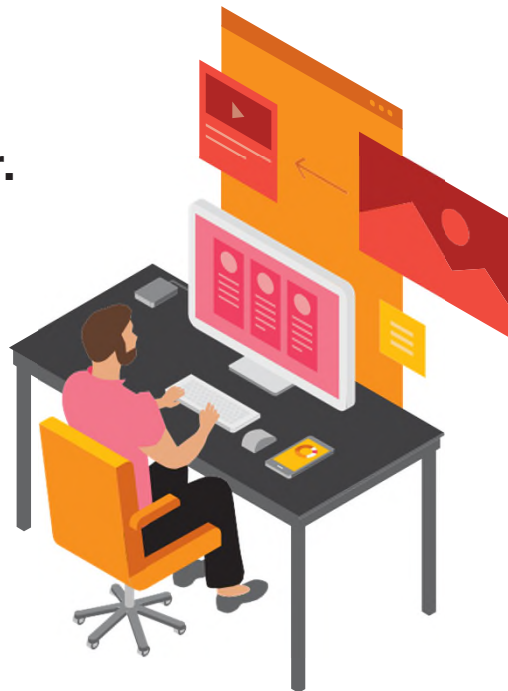# Who is the Modern Project Manager?

Fundamentals alone do not cut it. Meet the Project Influencer.

These days projects are everywhere. The global trend of 'projectification'[1] has meant that more and more activities are being organized into projects, and more and more people are working as project managers. Projects are not only more numerous, they are also becoming larger and more complex, with mega projects and organization-wide transformations becoming the norm. Adding digitization into the mix has created efficiencies, but the speed at which technology evolves means that we are now in a constant state of rapid evolution. As a result, the demand for people with the proven ability to manage projects has surged.

But rather than celebrating project managers, headlines instead announce that the role will soon go the way of the dinosaurs.

Research from Gartner[2] estimates that 80% of all project management tasks will be automated by 2030, with artificial intelligence capable of analysing and reporting data faster and more accurately than humans. Attempts to reduce human error might lead the humans to be scrapped entirely, a quick Google search for **'the death of the project manager'** brings up countless articles calling in the Grim Reaper.

80%

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[1] The term 'projectification' was first used in the article: Schoper, Y.G., Wald, A., Ingason, H.T. and Fridgeirsson, T.V., 2017. Projectification in Western economies

[2] Gartner Says 80 Percent of Today's Project Management Tasks Will Be Eliminated by 2030 as Artificial Intelligence Takes Over, March 2019. https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2019-03-20-gartner-says-80-percent-of-today-s-project-management

In reality, the Project Manager (PM) role, like the surrounding business environment, is changing and is more important than ever. PwC's latest research shows that project managers are evolving, no longer a group focused on scope, schedule and budget alone, the best project managers today are leveraging new technology to streamline much of what they and their teams have done in the past, to in turn focus on **influencing outcomes, building relationships** and achieving the **strategic goals** of their organizations. They are not just project managers, they are **Project Influencers,** and will never be replaced by a machine.

Project Influencer focus

Influencing outcomes

Understanding strategic goals

01

03

02

Building relationships
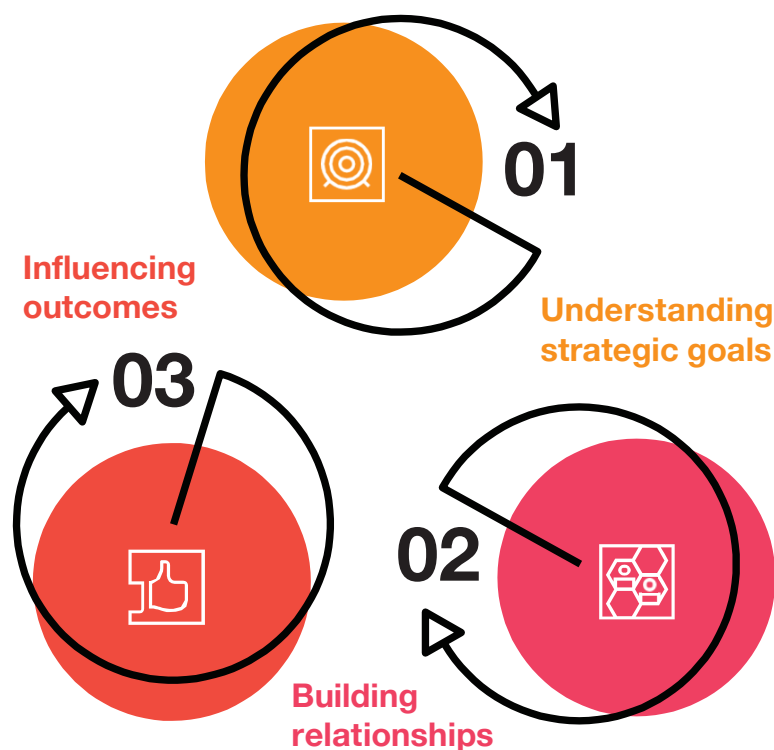
Meet the Project Influencer

There is an old misperception that the PM role is simply running reports and pulling together schedules, tasks that could, in truth, be automated. But as our interviews with senior project professionals and transformation leaders across North America highlighted, the Project Influencer is defined by fundamental technical project management skills in addition to core **human** skills that are leading them through this era of transformative digital change, based in empathy.

Project Influencers are skilled in the fundamentals, like scheduling, managing scope, controlling budget, and reporting. But on top of this, they possess a business acumen and emotional intelligence that allows them to build relationships and an agile mindset that enables them to leverage new technology, which enables them to proactively forecast and manage risk on a global scale. They excel in understanding how to craft a message, keep people engaged, stay focused on a broader goal, and utilize technology to further this. "It's the human element that's most valuable," says Dawn Bloom, Executive Vice President & Chief Digital and Information Officer at Board Member at Saskatchewan Government Insurance. "You can't replace it, or rather, it wouldn't be wise to replace it."

> "
>
> There are some that think project management is just filling out a template and then you've done project management. My expectation is that my PMs can bring that discipline and structure but also act as advisors. I see it as an advisory service, rather than a compliance service.
>
> **Susan Ingram**
> Director General, ESDC

The Project Influencer: Key Skills and Attributes

Business basics

Project management fundamentals
Highly organized and professionally certified/credentialed in applying discipline and structure through appropriately controlled scope, schedule, and budget levers.

Business acumen
Strong knowledge of the organization and industry they are a part of: understands the key dependencies, sees the big picture. Strong understanding of key business problems and how the strategy and execution of the project will solve them.

Ways of working

Agile mindset
Takes a flexible approach, frequently re-evaluating and adapting along the way to get things done better, faster and often cheaper.

Digitally enabled
Leverages technology to streamline processes and uses automation to enable enhanced, data-driven decision making.

Problem Solver
Brings creativity to their thinking to drive the project forward.

The human factor

Amateur psychologist
Possesses emotional intelligence and leads and guides progress by building relationships and trust.

Motivator
Makes people enthused and eager to give their best.

Gravitas
Feels comfortable in a position of authority and able to hold people accountable.

In a world where change is the only constant, the ability to adapt and re-evaluate is irreplaceable. "Agile is super important, to me, it's number one," says Debasis Bhaumik, Vice President, Information Technology at Nutrien. "It's the ability to think big, then have the flexibility to start small in scale and accept change. That's the reality of life, it's always changing, and ability to change is needed, but keep the big picture in mind. It is a capability, rather than a process as such."

Our conversations indicated that digital savviness isn't a 'hard' skill, but more of an outcome of this 'agile mindset'. It enables project managers to accept new technology, adapt to it, and identify its benefits. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the huge impact that Project Influencers, and their agility and digital capabilities, have on successful delivery. Project Influencers have continued to thrive in the remote world, even when working in industries that do not easily lend themselves to remote working, such as infrastructure. Their agility has enabled them to quickly adapt, and their gravitas and emotional intelligence ensures they still command the presence needed to maintain and leverage relationships to solve complex problems, even when they are just a tile on a video window.

Modern technology amplifies the key skills and attributes of the project influencer

In our discussions we found little evidence or belief that any type of technology will, or can, replace the human project manager any time soon. Instead, our research indicates that Project Influencers are leveraging digital tools to alter trajectories, enforce best practices and free up time to focus on the people-centered aspects impacting outcomes.

We cannot underestimate the power of human attributes. If the project manager's work is purely scheduling and reporting, they can be replaced by technology very soon. But if they use strategic thinking, human sensitivity, creativity and act as Project Influencers within their organizations, then we will see faster delivery, mitigated risk, and more customer-centered solutions, and the role will survive for a long time yet.

Does our research resonate?

1 Do you see this evolution in your effective PMs and PMOs?

2 Is your organization set up to foster this kind of evolution?

3 What are you doing as an organization to provide your PMs the tools and training to adapt these traits, and realize the benefits?

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