

Future PM Trends¹

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At the end of 2018, this **PM Review** magazine (<http://www.pmreview.com.cn/english/>) journalist interviewed more than 20 top experts across the globe to collect their opinions about future PM trends. Based on the results, we summarized their observations into 17 trends.

Trend 1: Redefinition of Project Success

In VUCA era, projects are characterized by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. Therefore, it is necessary to redefine the criterion of project success. Doctor Harold Kerzner pointed out that we will not merely rely on scope, time and cost to measure project success and that business value creation will be an essential criterion. Professor Wang Xiaojin said, “Faced with rapidly-changing technology and markets, projects, as the means for organizations to embrace changes, will play an increasingly important role. Therefore, measuring project success should focus on the extent to which projects have achieved expected changes for organizations and on the business value created by the changes. When talking about the definition of projects, *PMBOK Guide* (6th edition) added ‘driving change’ and ‘creating business value’, which aims to remind us not to forget the original reason of doing projects. It’s unreasonable to do projects only for doing projects.” Professor Ou Lixiong emphasized that project success should not merely be measured in terms of delivering the deliverable within agreed framework but in terms of the satisfaction of key stakeholders. Professor Ding Ronggui emphasized that in terms of the criterion of project success we should learn from Eastern philosophy: more synthesis, less decomposition.

Trend 2: From Agile Tools to Agile Mindset

The application of Agile is getting more and more common. It is reported that 75% companies in Netherlands and Belgium adopt agile methods, but many ended up in failure. Relevant surveys show that the most common reason is that corporate philosophy and culture cannot adapt to agile practice. Reinhard Wagner, Chairman of the IPMA Council of Delegates, said, “Agile is an ongoing trend, but the focus should shift from agile methods and tools to agile leadership, mindsets and cultures. Application of agile methods and tools will fail if the embedding organization is not ready for it. Agile projects require the leaders to give more space to maneuver to project teams, to let them self-organize, to enable creativity and innovation. The top-down mentality will disappear over time, otherwise agile project management is a farce.” To embrace this trend, IPMA has initiated Agile Leadership Certification.

Trend 3: From “Responding to Change” to “Embracing Change”

In VUCA era, change is constant and inevitable. Since change also means new possible projects and opportunities, project management and change management should go hand in hand. In our interview, it is agreed among experts that we should change our attitude towards change, which

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means making good use of disruptive technologies to identify opportunities in the course of change rather than passively responding to changes. Professor Ou Lixiong explains, “In light of the VUCA era ushering in an era of change, it also means the opening of doors to a world of new possibilities and opportunities. This also means that the study of ‘how to manage opportunities’ would be an area that is worth researching. Also we previously used to emphasize on ‘responding to change’, however, now we should put emphasis on ‘embracing change’. Previously when encountering changes, we may wonder if there are problems but now faced with changes we should try to identify opportunities. Therefore, for project managers the attitude towards changes needs changing.”

Matti Ahvenharju, former IPMA Vice President, has proposed the concept of Management of Opportunities by Projects (MoP), which I believe will have more room for application in the future.

Trend 4: Digital Competences

According to a survey by PMI, 82% companies worldwide want to achieve digital transformation in the next three years. In 2017, China launched the Artificial Intelligence 2.0 Program, aiming at helping China to stay competitive in the digital age. Various signs show that the trend of digital transformation and digital disruption cannot be ignored.

Joseph Cahill, Chief Operating Officer of PMI, said in PMI (China) Project Management Congress 2018 that emerging technologies are an indispensable topic whenever and wherever we are. Artificial intelligence, block chains, virtual reality, automation technology and so on have begun to influence the work of project managers, and even those management practitioners in non-high-tech fields. In order to survive in the environment of continuous digital disruptive technology, project managers need a unique combination of skills. In addition to each aspect of the "PMI talent triangle", they also need technological capabilities in the digital age, such as data-driven decision-making ability, collaborative leadership, and continuous innovation mindset.

Trend 5: More Emphasis on People and Soft Skills

Matti Ahvenharju told us that in the initial years of his 40-year career, he attached great importance to systems, methods, etc. However, gradually he came to realize that it is people that matters most in project management. Reinhard Wagner agreed that people outweighs methods and tools. He said more than once in various interviews with us, “People in projects are getting more important! Their motivation, competence and confidence in performing projects autonomously will be the driver for project success. People learn through projects, from school through universities or vocational education to professional mastery. Processes, methods and tools are supporting people in getting things done, not the other way around. For different projects, the people involved need to be virtuous, they need to apply the right approach for the right project type, phase or activity. Like in the guild, experienced ‘masters’ help others in choosing and applying the right approach. Soft skills are more important than technical skills.”

Quite a few experts noted that though AI will facilitate humans in project management but it will not replace people with soft skills. As PMI *Pulse of the Profession* in 2018 indicates, four in five respondents report that soft skills such as communications, leadership and negotiation, are more important. With the development of globalization, an increasing number of projects will be carried out across cultures and nations. Soft skills in virtual team management and collaboration will be

key to success.

Professor Mario Vanhoucke reminded us that when we are people-oriented, we are likely to be biased, which will lead to decision-making errors, thus increasing project risks. He suggested that we adopt data-driven project management method to integrate people skills and data.

Trend 6: Respecting Diversity

In the wave of globalization, project teams are increasingly diverse with various members from different cultures, with different beliefs, values and expertise. As Matti Ahvenharju pointed, diversity management will be a frontier topic worth researching.

Diversity brings both challenges and opportunities. As Thinkers50 winner Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez has said, diversity can become an asset if it is incorporated and embraced by the project. Mike Clayton, CEO of a training website, has spoken highly of diversity by saying that diversity is the panacea for project success. Research has shown that diverse teams have unique advantages in problem-solving, decision-making, etc. because different perspectives can boost creativity and innovation. To sum up, how to give full play to the advantages brought by diversity and enable different team members to work together in a harmonious and efficient way is worth our attention.

In order to reflect the trend of diversity, IPMA has held annual "Project Management Diversity Congress" since 2017 and added the "Project Management Diversity Award" to the IPMA Global Awards. The third "Project Management Diversity Congress" will be held in Finland in October 2019.

Trend 7: Manage upward

PMI *Pulse of the Profession* in 2018 indicates that 26% organizations report projects fail because of inadequate support from senior management, from which we can see the importance of managing up. Stacy Goff, former president of IPMA USA Chapter, said, "Organization executives and managers who not only permit but also expect their initiative managers to manage upwards produce better business results, far faster, and typically at half to a quarter of the cost of those laggards who do not. We tend to see more acceptance of this trend in organizations that use projects and programs as a core part of their offerings to their customers, rather than for internal-only purposes."

Trend 8: From Projects within Organizations to Trans-organizational Project Networks

PMI *Pulse of the Profession* in 2018 shows that with the rise of gig economy, 68% organizations report using outsourced or contracted project managers.

Matti Ahvenharju said, "In a gig economy, temporary, flexible jobs are commonplace and companies tend to hire independent contractors and freelancers instead of full-time employees. Gig economy undermines the traditional economy of full-time workers who rarely change positions and instead focus on a lifetime career. Work shifts from hierarchical level to a network and platform, and from a career to a combination of various gig jobs." Oliver F. Lehmann has also noticed this trend, saying, "Work is outsourced to external companies, who may in turn take again other companies or individuals under contract to do the work. Projects then are no more just cross-

functional but cross-corporate, done by complex, opaque and highly dynamic project supply networks. This trend brings new aspects into project management, such as commercial and legal aspects. Different business interests of the companies lead inevitably to conflicts, which, if they are poorly managed, can lead to expensive lawsuits. There are also technical, organizational and interpersonal aspects, which increase the high risks in these business projects. Project managers are generally not well prepared for these situations. It will be helpful to accept “Project business management” as a new business discipline and qualify project managers for that. The current approach to develop skills in the field is by trial and error, and while trial is expensive, in a contractual environment, error is even more expensive.”

Professor Ding Ronggui mentioned that with the integration of management and technology, roles and people, project organizations have gradually become loose communities, and dynamic resource management and interface management will be of great concern.

Trend 9: Project Governance & OPM

Ralf Muller, Chief editor of *Project Management Journal*, said, “The focus will turn even more to project governance and its role in successful project delivery. Risk is that governance will be looked at as a panacea, instead of being understood as one of many factors that need to be aligned across the entire organization (or multiple organizations). In the longer term, this will lead to a sensitivity for Organizational Project Management (OPM), that is, a holistic understanding of project management in the organization, with most or all units understanding their role and becoming accountable for their contributions to project success.”

Professor Ou Lixiong believes that projects are initiated by the organization and serve the implementation of the strategic objectives of the organization. It is essential and imperative to study and solve the problem of project management from the perspective of long-term organization. With the advent of VUCA era, goal-oriented cross-border integration has created new opportunities and higher requirements for the development of organizational project management.

Trend 10: From Management to Leadership

Professor Ding Ronggui once said, "Management depends on power and leadership depends on influence; we manage subordinates and lead followers." Peter Docker has pointed out, “Management is about handling complexity. Leadership is about creating simplicity. ” Grace Hopper says, “You manage things, you lead people. We went overboard on management and forget leadership.”

In the field of project management, leadership is mentioned with increasing frequency. “Projects, programmes and portfolios increasingly rely on leadership,” IPMA ICB 4.0 noted. In the 6th version of *PMBOK Guide*, there is a new section about the role of project managers, talking about PMI talent triangle which includes leadership. And IPMA has released *Human Leadership Manifesto*: Unleashing human potential over employing human resources; Diversity and dissent over conformity and consensus; Purpose and trust over command and control; Contributions to networks over position in hierarchies; Creating leaders over leading followers; and Courageously exploring the new over efficiently exploiting the old.

Reinhard Wagner said, “Good leadership provides purpose, direction and space to maneuver for people to get things done. The leader is like a gardener, you will plant the seeds, provide the necessary ingredients and protect the growth from adverse influences. Support the development of the team, for example through facilitation, supervision and mentoring. But the more you intervene, the more the team will lean back and wait for your interventions (and stop doing it on their own).”

Trend 11: Followership

Great followers are essential for project success, but research about followership lags far behind leadership. About this topic, Professor Ding Ronggui has said, “Soldiers who do not want to be generals are not good soldiers, but if everyone wants to be a general, it will lead to confusion and imbalance.” In the future, how to empower followers and establishing effective interaction between leadership and followership is worth our consideration.

Trend 12: Sustainable Project Management

The theme of IPMA Global Conference in 2019 is "Integrating Sustainability into Project Management". As the theme of a conference is industry vane, the importance of sustainable project management is self-evident. In the interview with us, Joel B. Carboni, founder of GPM (Green Project Management) Global, emphasized, “The global market has shifted to see sustainability as a necessity. Sustainable project practices can increase benefits, reduce risks and ensure as sustainable production as possible. Sustainable project management is increasing in value and we believe that in the future, ‘mainstream’ project management and sustainable project management will become one and the same.”

Trend 13: Flexible Approach Instead of One-size-fits-all Approach

Many organizations hope to find a project management methodology that could be applied to all projects. Dr. Harold Kerzner noted, “Many companies worldwide are recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work for all projects. Techniques such as Agile and Scrum have made it quite apparent that project managers need flexible methodologies or frameworks that can be customized to the needs of an individual project. This flexibility allows the project managers to customize a solution to the customer’s needs that better aligns the outcome of a project to the customer’s strategic business objectives. Project management flexibility could very well become the driving force for those firms that must survive using competitive bidding and repeat business.” Oliver F. Lehmann agreed by saying that project managers will need to learn mastering a multitude of methods and will need to know better which of them should be favored in specific situations.

Professor Mario Vanhoucke advocates integration. He said, “I noticed a shift trend from project management as a special discipline to a more integrated decision-making process approach, in which the tools, techniques and methodologies of PM are integrated into the overall decision-making process of a company. No more waterfall versus agile discussions, no more techniques versus people discussions, but rather an integrated view to improve the decision-making process for managing projects.”

Trend 14: Full-lifecycle Project Management

Stacy Goff noted that, many who work in projects focus most on the ‘doing’ part of projects. Some entire organizations (and some popular methods) use the same approach, by starting with ‘the action’. Leaders start with the initial inspiration. When they do so, they move their focus to the high-value ‘thinking’ and communicating’ early parts of projects, which have far greater impact on project and business success.

Even some professional associations focused their standards on the last half of the project life cycle for decades. They thought that it was the most important part. Leaders know that is clearly wrong. The truly most important project part explores the right strategic linkage, the intended benefits, the stakeholder engagement, the requirements for a successful solution, and prioritization of required and optional features.

Why is the project’s front-end important? Those who place emphasis on the project period from inspiration, to strategic linkage and business requirements development, consistently outperform all their competition, and produce much richer return on investment, faster, and at lower cost.

Trend 15: Cooperation and Co-creation

As Reinhard Wagner has emphasized, with the progress of globalization and virtualization, projects are increasingly done in a network structure not within your boundary, which points to the trend of collaborative leadership. Cooperation and co-creation are key for innovation project management.

PMI (China) Project Management Congress 2018 was themed “Together We share, We Inspire, We Win”, which fully echoes this trend of cooperation and co-creation.

Trend 16: From Management of Projects to Management by Projects

Management has evolved from ‘Management of Projects’ to ‘Management by Projects’, from ‘Project as a Management Object’ to ‘Project as a Management Measure’, from ‘Application Research on PM’ to ‘Fundamental Research on PM’.

“With the projectification of society, we should not only treat Project as a management object but also treat it as a subject or discipline. It is generally voiced that project management lacks fundamental theory. ‘Science of Project’ (‘PROJECTICS’) is designed to solve the problem that project management lacks in fundamental theory. With the advent of the concept of project-oriented societies, we should not only focus on research related to the management of projects but rather emphasis should also be given to the study of other issues related to projects. ‘Science of Project’ is a potential solution that will provide a new avenue for the development of other disciplines.” Professor Ou Lixiong said in the interview.

Trend 17: Cross-integration of Project Management, Management by Projects, Management for Projects and De-project management

Professor Ding Ronggui said that without projects there would be no progress, but without

operations there would be no security. After discovering new opportunities and defining projects, other departments are required to support and guarantee the project, which is called "Management for Projects". At the end of the project and after the transformation of the results, we need to do "De-project management" (such as de-model) in the operation stage. In the future, the four forms of project management will be fully integrated.

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