

Multigenerational Project Management ¹

Alfonso Bucero, MSc, PMP, PMI-RMP, PfMP, SFC, ACE, PMI Fellow

Managing Partner
BUCERO PM Consulting

1. Introduction

The workplace is in a demographic transition today. Dealing with different generations and working well with all of them understanding each other is a must. Four overlapping generations (Baby boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z) can be distinguished. What is normal and used daily for people from one generation, maybe not the same thing for people from another. Different habits, behaviors, and even different skills come up to the game.

That situation has become more and more challenging for project managers today. Depicting a picture of the current workplace, some facts like quick technology evolution, uncertainty and complexity increase; more and more changes arise, and the business world is becoming more competitive. Then project managers need to sharp and tune their skills in managing successful projects and adding value to their performing organizations.

The purpose of this article is to describe my point of view and experiences about multigenerational project management. As a frequent business traveler, consultant, teacher, author, and project practitioner, I had the opportunity to work with different generations and cultures over the years. Every project manager needs to understand all those generations and facilitate them working together to manage successful projects for the benefit of the organization. In this article, it is covered how to understand, compare, motivate different generations, how to be aware of our changing environment and which are the PM challenges in our century.

2. Understanding generations

Project managers need to understand people and influence them to get successful results. To do that they need to develop the ability to listen to people. Learning key lessons about listening usually takes time. Let us share an example with you:

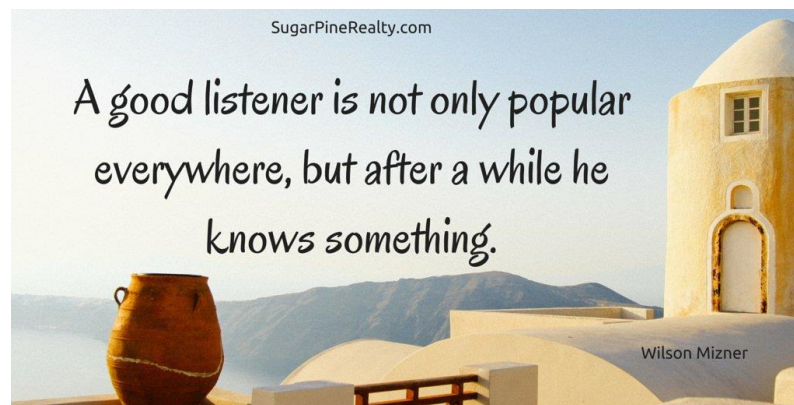
One common thing shared among our professional colleagues is that when project professionals try to sell project services to customers, they talk too much but they listen very little to them. However, in many situations, people are not conscious of that. People listen to themselves and are blind because of their enthusiasm.

Project professionals cannot succeed with others by dumping information on them. To help or have a positive impact on people, it is necessary to learn how to listen to them. No human being

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would listen to your talk if he didn't know it was his turn next. Too many people approach communication that way, they are too busy waiting for their turn to listen to others. The ability to skilfully listen is one key to gaining influence with others. There are some suggestions to be a better listener:

1. Pay attention to the other people words when they are speaking instead of trying to answer their questions
2. Write notes to remember what the other people said
3. Then prepare your answer, count from 1 to 5
4. Answer quietly



Good listening is effective for several reasons:

- People find out about the person who is talking: what matters to them, what they like and dislike what they need. They are giving you the information you need to influence them effectively
- People like talking about themselves, their job, and their challenges. Allow them to do it, be patient with them.
- Listening builds trust and rapport: you appear to be on their side, as opposed to talkers who seem to follow their agenda

Good listening is effective, but it is also an art form. Strangers who do this are often well worth avoiding, especially on public transportation. You need to know how to elicit the right information from the right people. Getting people to talk productively and purposefully is an art form.

To understand the four generations, we may need to deal with, we need to know their key characteristics.

Baby boomers (1946- 1964)

The Vietnam war happened during those years. The man landed in the "Moon". They dealt with civil/women rights. They are an experimental generation, innovators and hard workers. They saw the invention of the first Personal Computer. Many of them traveled abroad when we were older than twenty years.

Generation X (1965-1976)

Important facts that that generation lived were the "Fall of Berlin Wall" and the "Gulf war". Some characteristics from this generation are that they are independent, free agents and in that period important technological inventions happened (Internet, MTV, AIDS, Mobile Phone).

Generation Y (Millennials) (1977-1997)

They are more ethnically and racially diverse than older adults, they are less religious, less likely to have served in the military. Millennials embrace multiple modes of self-expression. They are relatively private, with over 70 percent placing privacy restrictions on their social networking sites. They are careful in dealing with people. They respect their elders, especially in work ethic and moral values.

Millennials prefer telecommuting and flexible hours and the opportunity to make up work remotely. They like multitasking or task switching and prefer to learn 'just-in-time' and only what is minimally necessary. I had the opportunity to work with millennials and observed that they interact and network simultaneously with many, even hundreds of others. Important facts to remark as characteristics or facts are as follows: September 11th Attack, Immediacy, Community service, Social everything, Google, Facebook.

Generation Z (1997-2010)

People from this generation are usually optimistic, with high expectations. They use several "Apps", social games and "Tablet devices.

Alpha Generation (2010-2025)

Generation Alpha will account for 2 billion of the global population by 2025. Generation Alpha is considered to be the most technological-infused demographics up to date.

They are the first generation entirely born within the 21st century. They are also known as the "iGeneration". They are the children of the Millennials. Generation Alpha uses smartphones and tablets naturally. These children were born along with iPhones, iPads, and applications. They don't know or can imagine how life was without them. They are not afraid of technology or touching buttons to learn what those buttons do. Alphas learn by doing. Generation Alpha is growing up with the familiar voice of Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant in their home.

3. Comparing generations

There is something different and interesting going on in the workplace right now. It's composed of multiple generations. This is the first time that in modern history that five generations are working together (see Figure 1 below).

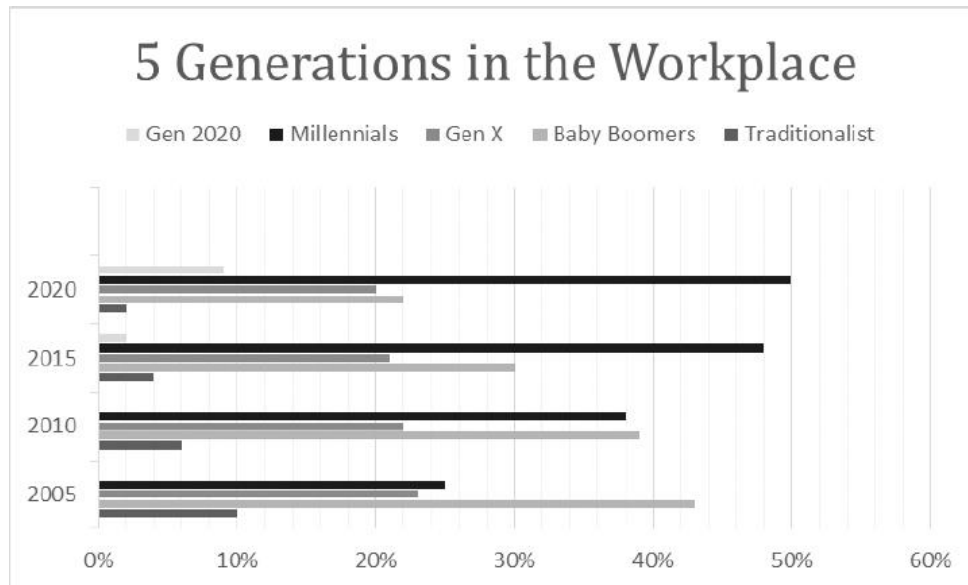


Figure 1: Five generations in the workplace
(Meister & Willyerd, 2009).

It may be a challenge for project managers who are trying to bring their team together in accomplishing a project goal. But that can be achieved once professionals understand how each generation wants to be motivated.

Traditionalists

Since this generation was born between 1928 and 1945, we cannot see many of them in the workplace. However, they still make up statistically around three percent of the workforce. This is the generation who firmly believes in an "Honest day's pay for an honest day's work." They're extremely loyal and enjoy being respected for that. Since they're conformists, they value most job titles and money.

Baby Boomers

This group is also referred to as the "Me" generation. They are predominately in their 40s and 60s and are well-established in their careers. Boomers are often ambitious, loyal, work-centric, and sometimes cynical. They prefer monetary rewards, but also enjoy nonmonetary rewards like flexible retirement planning and peer recognition. They also don't require constant feedback and have "all is well unless you say something" mindset.

Baby Boomers can be motivated by promotions, professional development, and having their expertise valued and acknowledged. Prestigious job titles and recognition like office size and parking spaces are also important to Boomers. They can also be motivated through high levels of responsibility, perks, praise, and challenge. It's expected that around 70 million Boomers will be retired by 2020.

Gen X

They are often credited for bringing work-life balance. This is because they saw first-hand how their hardworking parents became so burnout. Members of the generation are in their 30's and 40's and spent a lot of time alone as children. This created an entrepreneurial spirit with them. Gen Xers make up the highest percentage of start-up founders at 55 percent.

Even if they're not starting their businesses, Gen Xers prefer to work independently with minimal supervision. They also value opportunities to grow and make choices, as well as having relationships with mentors. They also believe that promotions should be based on competence and not by rank, age, or seniority. Gen Xers can be motivated by flexible schedules, benefits like telecommuting, recognition from the boss, and bonuses, stock, and gift cards as monetary rewards

Millennials (Generation Y)

They are the tech-savvy generation is currently the largest age group worldwide. They're the fastest-growing segment of today's workforce. For some Millennials, they're content with selling their skills to the highest bidder. That means unlike Boomers, they're not as loyal. In most cases, they have no problem jumping from one organization to another.

That's not to say that you can't motivate this generation because you can by offering skills training, mentoring, feedback. Culture is also extremely important for Millennials. They want to work in an environment where they can collaborate with others. Flexible schedules, time off, and embracing the latest technology to communicate are also important for Gen Y.

Millennials also thrive when there's structure, stability, continued learning opportunities, and immediate feedback. If you do offer monetary rewards, they prefer stock options.

Gen Z

This generation is starting to enter the workplace. This generation is larger than the baby boomers or Millennials. They are motivated by social rewards, mentorship, and constant feedback. They also want to be done meaningful and be given responsibility. Like their predecessors, they also demand flexible schedules.

We also can motivate this generation through experiential rewards and badges such as those earned in gaming and opportunities for personal growth. They also expect structure, clear directions, and transparency. What is most intriguing about Gen Zers is that 53 percent prefer face-to-face communication.

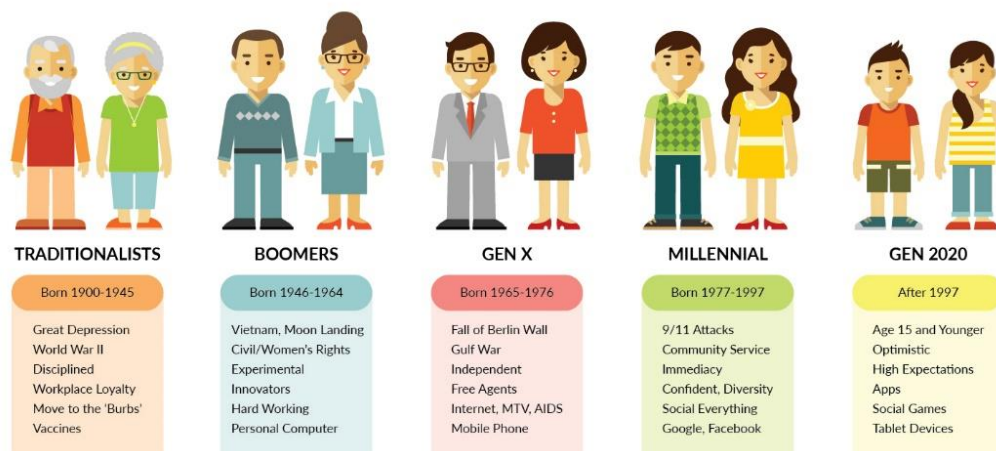
4. Motivating a Multigenerational Workforce

The question is how to manage across the generations, we have to learn to be mindful of each other and treat each other as individuals, No matter what generation we are from, it's too easy

to keep doing what we are doing now and acting like each generation is (or should be), motivated by the same things we are.

Even if our professional management instincts say 'no' of course we don't do this, we have to be careful that our actions don't demonstrate that we do. We always have to be mindful of our actions and stay open to listening to each other.

Five Generations Working Side by Side in 2020



However, it's still your responsibility as a project professional to make every team member, regardless of their generation, feel engaged. You also need to integrate them into your company's culture and make them feel valued. That may sound like a tall order to fill, but you can achieve that by first making sure that you've hired the right person for the job. Also, make sure that they're a good fit within your company's culture.

You also need to ensure that there are purpose and meaning behind their work. Creating and sharing a mission or vision should help them understand why their job exists. Don't forget to encourage work-life balance, offer health and welfare benefits, and provide rewards that your team members and/or employees would care about.

5. The changing environment

The current business environment is continuously changing in terms of people, processes, infrastructure, habits. Project managers need to adopt and adapt new methods and approaches to add value to organizations by managing successful projects. There are three main aspects to be considered: complexity, uncertainty, and technology.

Complexity

Complexity is increasing more and more because we are living in a complex context. The complex is an adjective that tells us that the thing, place, or person is intricate and hard to understand. It can be said that our environment is complex because it is interrelated among several things, it has interdependent parts and has features and parts that are constantly changing and unpredictable.

Uncertainty

Our environment is more and more uncertain. Uncertainty means a lack of sureness about someone or something. Uncertainty may range from a falling short of certainty to an almost complete lack of conviction or knowledge, especially about an outcome or result.

Technology

Current professionals are continuously impacted positively or negatively by technology advance, improvements. Today's professionals cannot survive without using some technology to interact with their teams, peers, colleagues or managers. The main issue is that technology evolution is faster and faster. Any professional can find him/herself obsolete in a short period if there are not taking care of some available tools.

6. The challenge for project management

A question, baby boomers may ask themselves is: how do they interact to communicate with other generations? I had an interesting conversation with several project managers about this great topic. And one of them kept frustrated with the way millennials communicate. "They have short attention spans!" "They're always looking at their phones!" "They never read the newspaper!". And honestly, this guy was part of the problem, not the solution. Because he kept looking at the situation through the prism of his generation and not through that of the one, he was managing.



Tools

Considering how those different generations see the world is important. Baby boomers had one foot in their generation and one in the prior generation. So as radical as they may have seemed at the time, they were in some respects still somewhat traditional in their ways of communicating, of relating, of using collaboration tools when working.

Millennials are by and large the children of the boomers. They are labeled perhaps unfairly, as “entitled.” But what differentiates the millennials, at least as far as communications? Two words – social media. Our kids grew up with computers from the age of two or three. They have had cell phones at least since they were teenagers. And how do many of their peers communicate? By texting.

Sometimes when they’re sitting right next to each other. So, when holding a kick-off meeting and talking about communication planning, this is something being discussed. If the project manager is planning to communicate exclusively by email, well, does that work? What kind of response time should be expected? could just be imposed the boomer style on everyone. But if anybody impose your style on other generations ask yourself this question – how has that worked out for you thus far?

The lesson learned is that trying to impose a particular communication style on other generations is a non-starter. Better to understand where they are coming from and meet them more than halfway.

Communications

Communications in a project are difficult enough without fighting that particular challenging battle. I tried to summarize the communication traits for different generations.

Traditionalists: They generally keep their thoughts to themselves and only speak when spoken to. Therefore, a one-on-one communication approach works well with this generation. As a group, traditionalists prefer more formal communication. This generation believes in following rules and respects structure and authority. “Many of these individuals have worked for the same practice for years,” notes Kate Zabriskie, president, Business Training Works Inc., Port Tobacco, Md.

Boomers: They have experienced many changes during their careers. They like to see flexibility in your thinking and want details to show that you have thought everything through. They can be outspoken, but they typically wait to be invited to give their opinions—unless they’re extremely concerned about a situation. Then, they tend to jump in with both feet. Like traditionalists, boomers prefer face-to-face conversations and to be shown how to do things. “If time is limited for an in-person discussion, consider video tutorials for this ‘show me’ generation.”

Generation X: Members of generation X are somewhat more adept with technology than their predecessors. This generation is juggling many things in their current stage of life, so e-mail works well for them as a communication tool, Mr. Walter says. Time may not always allow for face-to-face conversations.

Stakeholder engagement

Project professionals in our century need to manage multigeneration stakeholders. Then the challenge is not only to identify them and prepare an action plan to deal with but being able to engage them because what is very attractive and challenging maybe not the same for the rest of them. Knowing more about their traits and behaviors will be helpful for any project professional to know what is expected from them and how to plan to engage them. This process is becoming more complicated when dealing with different generations.

Leadership

Each generation has its unique mindset, work style and ways of communication. Managers need to recognize how to motivate team members individually and capitalize on strengths each member brings to the team.



Understanding attitudinal and behavioral differences among team members of different generations is an important tool of driving engagement. Dale Carnegie's employee engagement study shows that "Middle-aged employees (40–49 years) are less engaged or are disengaged from their organization. I have some suggestions to engage different generations:

Baby Boomers:

- Recognize their unique qualities and characteristics.
- Provide them with resources and involve them in decision making. They like a collaborative and consensual environment
- Appreciate their strong work ethic, willingness to work long hours, and desire to prove themselves.

- Communicate face-to-face and directly. Give them continual feedback with evidence.
- Recognize them publicly. They like to be praised in front of others.

Learn to communicate, coach, motivate and provide feedback for each generation! To understand how to better motivate employees, we need to know some of the main characteristics of the groups that dominate today's workforce.

Generation X:

They entered the job market in the wake of the "Boomers" and were confronted with new terms like "downsizing" and, "outsourcing." They tend to be skeptical toward authority and cautious in their commitments. Managers need to recognize those characteristics and provide the following:

- Freedom from traditional management practices Invites them to engage in multiple projects and empower them to prioritize these projects themselves so they feel in control.
- Provide challenging tasks.
- Give them room to grow
- Coach briefly and be straightforward. Gen X members are self-learners. Encourage them to figure things out themselves
- Listen attentively and respect their opinions. Provide constructive and direct feedback on their progress. They need to know what they are doing right and what they need to improve.

This generation grew up with technology. They are the employees most familiar with technology changes and multitasking. The extensive use of social media is one of the significant differences between the older generations. Millennials are motivated by opportunities to learn and develop. In general, family and work-life balance are important to the

Follow these tips to engage Millennials:

- Coach them directly and know they will get the point quickly. Paint visual pictures to engage, motivate and inspire them. Use different electronic forms to communicate with them.
- Get to know them as personalities and create a person-centered relationship with them. Show respect and interest in their personal lives. Focus on their values and goals, try to align those with the company's goals. Provide opportunities for learning, personal growth, and responsibility. Communicate the company's overall vision and plans for growth.
- Positively challenge their abilities, creativity, and interests. Gen Ys like to be challenged. Assign them projects from which they can learn. They like to try new things. Encourage them to use the latest technology and media. Stimulate out-of-the-box thinking and innovation.

- Create a positive, informal, and fun team environment and delegate tasks. Gen Ys prefer to work in tandem with others. Often their colleagues become their friends. Assign challenging and meaningful work. Show them how their work makes a difference and that it is important to the team and the company's goals. Give them flexibility, and they will be loyal to you. Respect their personal lives, family concerns, and health issues, and they will pay you back with respect as a leader.
- Create an environment where reciprocal feedback is encouraged. Show Generation Y employees your door is always open for them. Recognize them frequently with positive feedback. Personal recognition from direct managers is a very effective motivator.

Attitudes

I define attitude as the way people react or behave in front of the daily facts that affect them. Different attitudes have been observed from the different generations, as it is shown in Table 1 as follows.

	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y
Attitudes and values	A general optimism and satisfaction, feeling of social responsibility, work, health and wellbeing, personal growth, personal gratification.	Work is a challenge. Work is a contract and obligation, self-reliance, life/work balance, pragmatism, fun.	Work is a means to an end, optimism, social responsibility, ambition, morality, integrity, ethics, self- confidence, sociability.

Table 1. Attitudes Table

I observed that not all countries followed the same evolutionary generational path described above.

Risk management

According to an Ethics Resource Canter’s study, Generation Y—are the most at-risk generation in today’s workplace. They are most likely to observe misconduct, feel stressed to compromise their standards and engage in risky or questionable behavior. According to the survey findings, there are specific personal characteristics that make younger workers unique. These create special considerations for selecting and deploying online training and technology to properly acclimate this generation to the workplace.

Almost half of all millennials responded that they have observed misconduct in the workplace. This portion is likely so large because millennials have a high need for social interaction and a high level of engagement in company culture. This makes them more aware of and sensitive to their working environment, and thus more likely to notice potential violations by other employees.

Many of these young workers, however, are also more likely to turn a blind eye to the questionable actions of others. While some of this may be due to their lack of experience within the organizational hierarchy, it is a behavior worth noting when developing training plans.



The format of the training courseware should incorporate these workers' high need for social interaction and engagement. This means text-based PowerPoint slides are out and scenario-based training and interactive games are in. Millennials learn through the combination of relatable scenes and characters with voices, not by reading lengthy manuals. Further, the gamification of training establishes a two-way street during the learning process, since this generation thrives as active participants in learning, not just as passive listeners.

These methods are meant to optimize retention of policies, so employees can identify violations, understand the impact of threats posed to the company, and take action by reporting through the company's hotline. Employees—millennials in particular—are a company's first line of defense. Capturing their attention early can set the tone for how they will handle situations for the rest of their careers.

Millennials are most likely to feel pressure to compromise standards, millennials can also be bad actors themselves. Due to the inexperience of these younger workers, they may not yet have learned how to cope with stressful situations in their working environment. Further, the lack of job security in a weak economy may lead to a mentality of "the ends justify the means." The survey indicates that one out of three millennials are willing to break rules if they think it will save their jobs.

How to adjust your training: The remedy here is for companies to show a commitment to compliance over short-term results. The keyword is "show." Millennials not only need to be assured of this commitment by their immediate supervisors and leaders but also need to see this message reinforced through other media, such as online training. Training materials can convey this message more practically by providing relatable scenarios tailored to a company's particular working environment.

Employees don't just need to memorize the rules; they need to understand the rules and expected behavior in the context of common situations within the company. This "show, don't tell" approach to compliance training hits closer to home.

Millennials are the most likely to engage in questionable or risky behavior, and not just in terms of compromising standards. This generation is also particularly open and transparent on social media tools, making them more likely to share information about work experiences, both positive and negative, with others in their social networks. This behavior could create significant reputational risk, and today's directors don't want their dirty laundry aired worldwide. Millennials are also the most likely to keep copies of confidential company documents, which, if shared outside the company, could get into the hands of competitors.

For today's young workers, sharing information on Facebook and Twitter is second nature, and it is hard to imagine this cultural shift toward mass communication reversing for future generations. Going forward, social media risk and related company policies will be especially relevant to address through training.

Millennials are high-risk employees, meaning they need to certify and attest to policies and receive annual training, as well as frequent refreshers. As many in compliance know, incident reporting skyrockets immediately following annual training and then falls back to "normal" levels as employee awareness erodes. Since maintaining awareness of social media risks is crucial, the "YouTube generation" needs refresher training that matches the methods by which they are already accustomed to consuming information—in short, memorable bursts. Again, this reinforces the commitment to compliance and keeps expected behaviors and red flags top of mind.

The risks associated with millennials necessitate a proactive approach. While "tone at the top" and "message from the middle" have always been fundamental concepts when marketing a corporate compliance program, online training can play a key role in making policies more relevant for younger generations. Engaging content helps promote awareness throughout the program's existence, ensuring issues can be discovered and resolved quickly.

Taking a long-term view of the compliance training strategy is important because future generations will only get more technologically savvy, and it will take at least this much to keep their attention.

7. Conclusion

Project management is an integral function across all businesses and organizations. With the rise of globalization and digitization, there is a growing demand for skilled project management professionals to manage and lead projects on budget and on time. Principles and practices in project management need to evolve in line with an increasing project economy. What is the meaning of the project management future? Projects are proliferating globally, and it's forecasted that, over the next decade, organizations of all sizes and types will need nearly 88 million people working in project management roles (*PMI 2017 Pulse of the profession*).

Emerging technologies have revolutionized the project management business and transformed traditional practices. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is raising more and more and machine learning has provided us with valuable data and insights that can transform projects and consumer experience. The Internet of Things (IoT) is defined as 'the network of devices such as vehicles, and home appliances that contain electronics, software, sensors, actuators, and connectivity

which allows these things to connect, interact and exchange data' and by 2030, Gartner has predicted that 30% of our conversations with technology will be through conversations with smart machines.

What effect will this technology have on the project management industry? As all PMs will know there are usually several different technologies in use at the same time on a project and depending on the size and scale of the project it can be hard to manage. The IoT will allow PM's to fully integrate their equipment and create a network of connected devices that can connect. In the construction industry for example, by fitting machinery with IoT sensors that can communicate with one another, PMs will be able to retrieve real-time valuable insights and data that can rapidly increase efficiency and waste. We will live some challenges.

Successfully executed projects can lead a company to succeed in this competitive marketplace, and the correct use of technologies such as IoT and machine learning can dramatically improve overall project efficiency. However, this doesn't come without its challenges. As with any emerging technologies, some of them are still in their infancy and technical problems can arrive that can have a knock-on effect on an entire project. Traditional workplaces are transforming, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the individuals with the technical expertise to manage these technologies are transforming at the same rate. The project management industry is currently facing a skills shortage, and project management professionals will need to upskill to stay competitive and ahead of the curve.

A commitment to lifelong learning in the project management industry has a variety of benefits such as upskilling, career progression and broadening networks.

About the Author



Alfonso Bucero

Madrid, Spain



Alfonso Bucero, MSc, CPS, PMP, PMI-RMP, PfMP, PMI Fellow, is an International Correspondent and Contributing Editor for the *PM World Journal* in Madrid, Spain. Mr. Bucero is also founder and Managing Partner of BUCERO PM Consulting. Alfonso was the founder, sponsor and president of the PMI Barcelona Chapter until April 2005, and belongs to PMI's LIAG (Leadership Institute Advisory Group). He was the past President of the PMI Madrid Spain Chapter, and then nominated as a PMI EMEA Region 8 Component Mentor. Now he is a member of the PMIEF Engagement Committee. Alfonso has a Computer Science Engineering degree from Universidad Politécnica in Madrid and is studying for his Ph.D. in Project Management. He has 32 years of practical experience and is actively engaged in advancing the PM profession in Spain and throughout Europe. He received the PMI Distinguished Contribution Award on October 9th, 2010, the PMI Fellow Award on October 22nd 2011 and the PMI Eric Jenett Excellence Award on October 28th, 2017.

Mr. Bucero can be contacted at alfonso.bucero@abucero.com.

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