

## Insights Report

### Project Management After Covid-19 <sup>1</sup>

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Coronavirus (Covid -19) has changed everything.

Our personal lives.

Our business lives.

This report brings together the useful insights of a wide number of project management leaders around the world (Belgium, India, Germany, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, USA), and provides important detail that can be used to help develop future forecasts, plans and improve decision making.

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### Time to Re-Invent Project Management

It is not the first time that the world experiences a crisis. We all remember the terrible 9/11 or the financial crisis in 2008 that swiped away millions of jobs in a matter of months. Yet, we have never experienced something similar to the coronavirus. It is unprecedented the speed and the severe impact that it has had across the world, not only on the health of millions of individuals and on the healthcare systems across the world, but also with tremendous consequences in the global economy and society at large. For which its full effects remain still unknown. The current situation is only (partially) comparable to the times of the Second World War, and the later recovery of a world devastated, through the Plan Marshall and other multi-billion reconstruction initiatives.

Leadership is always important in the tough and the good times, yet it is even more critical when a global crisis hits billions of people in a matter of weeks. And even more so when we come from some years in which leadership had lost most of its face value, where we have seen the worst face of leadership close to us: the selfishness, the hypocrisy, the manipulation, ...

I firmly believe that we have a unique opportunity to both re-invent leadership and re-invent project management. That we go back to the initial values and human believes and that we improve them to address the current and future needs of our planet. And the best way to do it is through inspirational projects and strategic initiatives that will help organizations and individuals navigate through the crisis and transform to come up stronger.

From a practical and project leadership perspective, this is a unique opportunity for leaders and project managers to take action, step-up, build the competencies, and move towards a more agile organization and more straightforward project management practices and approaches.

Project management methods have tended to be too complex to be easily understood and applied by non-experts. Modern project management methods were developed primarily in the 1970s and 1980s by expert practitioners (at the beginning, mostly engineers) for practitioners (also predominantly engineers). The central assumption of the project management methods has been that documenting every aspect of a project in detail will provide a high level of control of the planned activities during the implementation of the project. Many project managers ended up producing massive numbers of documents and swathes of paperwork, leading to an overall feeling that the role was primarily administrative.

In contrast, widely used management disciplines are often linked to a few simple frameworks that can be easily understood and applied, not only by managers but also by the majority of individuals. Porter's Five Forces and value chain analysis help to make strategy a key area for every organization to apply.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that we saw the rise of agile, triggered by the Agile Manifesto, written in February 2001 by 17 independent-minded software practitioners. That movement brought project management close to its end.

In late 2019, research from Gartner claimed that 80 % of today's Project Management tasks would be eliminated by 2030 as Artificial Intelligence takes over, which we should see as a call for action to redefine the future of our profession.

If we act now, there is a good chance that project management becomes one of the most sought after skills by organizations in the new world.



## Eren Akdur – Turkey

*Eren is a program manager, management consultant and university instructor with his demonstrated experience in the high-tech industry and lecturing PM courses in leading universities. He is skilled mainly in program management, management consultancy, setting up PMOs, digitalization in PM, risk management and lecturing. He holds PMP, PMI-RMP, PMO-CP, PSM I and CRMC certifications. He has strong engineering education background from METU and MBA degree from Ithaca College. He's been working for ROKETSAN Inc. for more than 19 years. In addition, he's been teaching project management courses at BILKENT University, and still volunteering as President in PMI-TR Chapter.*

As like many professions, project managers felt themselves threatened with the rapid spread of AI-based technologies which start to take place in our lives recently. It naturally made us think these technologies would occupy our positions. However, this common fear was largely superseded by the Covid-19 pandemic. Perhaps, the pandemic will cause us to fall in love with these sophisticated technologies. On our career journey, these technologies can remain one of our most beloved friends and may generously assist us to manage our tasks when we are away from the office.

To assure business continuity, the need to be present in the offices in order to reach the data stored or the softwares that run only on the servers is still an important factor to consider. Nevertheless, if we could have AI-based tools which could satisfactorily perform some duties when we are away, undoubtedly they would help us and become effective life-saving or at least time-saving tools for us. In the near future, it is strongly likely for organizations to consider making investments on such systems, and for project managers to be more eager to benefit from those.

After the current pandemic, the project management shall be much more crucial than ever before. As an expected result of this awareness created by the pandemic, all organizations will certainly desire to be more prepared for similar situations in the future. They will need well-designed projects to develop methods for dealing with and responding to these foreseeable risks, as well as skilled project managers. Without effective project management, it will be extremely hard to build a sustainable future for mankind.



## Dr. Gamze Karayaz – Turkey

*Dr. Gamze Karayaz currently works at ISIK University, Department of Management as a researcher, and instructor. She has a Ph.D. in Engineering Management & System Engineering. She is one of the founders of PMI Turkey Chapter in 2007, and served on the Chapter Board actively both as VP and President. She is also an alumnus of PMI LIMC 2016. With over 20 years of project work experience, Gamze has led and worked with different projects ranging from EU funded higher education projects to systems engineering, modeling, and simulation projects for both private and public companies. With a profound knowledge and certified project manager, she continues to be an active volunteer at PMI as Region 8 South West Mentor.*

### Trust or Leadership? Opportunity or Challenge?

Who would guess that humanity would learn a big lesson from a small virus soon after receiving the last pandemic in a decade. Some calls ‘force majeure’ though insurance companies may not feel the same way. One thing is sure that the virus has been quickly brought all word to heel. Due to necessary social distancing, many professions have gone virtually almost overnight, and many have adapted as quick as it was nothing extraordinary. As being a university instructor, I have been familiar with distance teaching, but it was not that easy to adapt for many students due to lacking equipment in their home or in their safe place, and not being in a face to face setting. As for project managers, it might have been easier to adjust because having already-home office workers in projects, yet still safety has been a big concern for others working in the field. Let’s assume we get used to work from home as a project manager, while there are still newbies into profession who are competent with technology, but need guidance and training in person. In the future, hopefully soon, perhaps there would be a face-to-face kick off, or getting advised in person, training at work for them and so on but what is our solution if new normal becomes normal? Certainly, there are many elements factoring into answer this question, but in this opinion piece, I would be only discussing few observations for project managers.

Since March 15th, our university is locked down, and I have been teaching online, and working from home. I consider myself lucky and yes, necessary mind shifts happened in universities as well. We advise students that when all is over they would have already experienced a crisis management, and know how to deal with such risks next time (hopefully!). As a project manager though I am not that optimistic that we would learned from lessons. Aren’t we supposed to be good at making plans as project managers? We plan for risks, and responses; and foresee the ones that may not ordinarily occur such as earthquake or pandemic. Well, it happened this time, and how well prepared in response? Or we thought it is another scenario that will not likely to happen to us. I believe many countries are also being prepared to response for such pandemic in their risk

and strategic plans, yet when it occurred, we see more adverse actions than mitigation. Covid-19 traveled faster than our response plans, and spread it to world dramatically; probability of happening such risk has been underestimated by not only project managers but also many managers, governments as well. In other words, let's admit we have been very optimistic, and unless you are "the" perfect project manager and have created a backup plan of adapting your project into this unexpected new normal. This may seem extraordinary!

Now, no one actually predicts what happens in near future, we as project managers could be able put our change management skills into the work for future. The current crisis has proved two facets of change required in our work systems: *leadership and trust*. I would like to recognize amazing leadership of women lead certain countries whom has been acting genuinely since day one. During social distance, putting the strategy into action, and follow and share the change with stakeholders transparently was a winner in leadership in my opinion. Their leadership has proved that being risk averse would not make anyone a better leader, certainly not a better project manager. We also realized the rising of virtual trust issue that have been long discussed since the first remote teams emerged. Such teams have been around for long time, yet they have not quite recognized as a way of full time working. Researchers are used to define them somewhat temporary work teams because by the time communication was a big issue to continue working on these teams. Charles Handy's (1995) research recommended that trust needs touch and requires leaders. As relevant to virtual teams, he put forward as: "trust is the heart of the matter", and yes, arguments are still valid, and evidenced in nowadays. As today's pandemic forced most of us work from home unprepared, human's desire to touch for trust has just broken overnight. What we have known about virtual teaming is now sounding like just another theory. In reality, we have adapted, adjusted, and gone virtually at full capacity, because technology has been collaborating in some way to save the day. One conclusion if to state my opinion, trust (*virtually*) would be one of the challenging pieces of *new normal*.

All in all, I conclude to recommend that we all must re-think the way of our working, and definitely need to re-visit our risk plans. When the restrictions are removed, we would need to set up new principles for work. In order to do survive in another unexpected crisis, I also believe that we need interoperability in our work systems. In addition, we need to re-visit project manager's role in today's and tomorrow's normal. Today's project managers need to work on curing our damages from this pandemic, and sooner the better we mitigate. Trust and leadership are the most required competencies for today's project managers, and we proudly believe to possess; nevertheless, it is time to rethink and redefine our competencies for future. Furthermore, change leadership and capability of establishing trust in digital transformation would make a difference in *new normal*.

Finally, it is not naive to say that new normal is here to stay and that's a digital future. It would bring opportunities as well as challenges. Some of the opportunities would be emerged from health and food services ranging from automation of logistics through more AI based digital systems and digital transformation. On the other hand, project managers are challenged to be competent in holistic work approach if one can imagine the scope of the new projects. We need

project managers more than ever in the transformation period of new normal under project economy. Are we ready to for the challenge?

References

\*Charles Handy, May-June 1995 Issue of HBR



## Dr. Karen M. Thompson – UK

*Dr Karen Thompson is a Senior Academic and member of the Environment and Threats Strategic Research Group at Bournemouth University. She is a co-creator of the award-winning concept Responsible Project Management. Her research interests include stakeholder engagement in projects within refugee camps, partnerships for achieving Net Zero and the development of new competencies for responsible project management. Karen's early career as a project practitioner was in information systems/technology and strategy development in local government, financial services and the voluntary sector.*

Will Social Responsibility be in a shadow or the spotlight after COVID-19?

Possibly the only certainties at present are that no-one knows what the world will be like after COVID-19 nor when 'after' will be. Past financial crises have brought lasting change, as did earlier pandemics. The present disaster has already brought unprecedented economic and social impacts to many parts of the world and it is not yet clear how project management will adapt once the recovery and rebuilding phase begins. It seems likely there will be many projects and high demand for project professionals that may exceed supply. Lack of supply of qualified professionals may threaten progress on the professionalisation of project management. Other threats may well come from the urgency to re-vitalise the economy.

Historically, financial drivers including notions of benefits and value have overshadowed project management concerns for the environment and society. Professionalisation confers some responsibility for the environmental and social impacts of projects and, in recent years, there have been a range of initiatives to address environmental impacts but much less activity on social responsibility.

The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) incorporate social, environmental and economic aspects. Within project management there have been calls for more action towards achieving the SDGs and on responding to the Grand Challenges facing society (e.g. Morris 2017). Some of the responses have called for a re-balancing of concerns for the environment with at least as much attention given to people and society. Examples of re-balancing can be seen in initiatives

such as CaProSoc (Wagner 2020) and Responsible Project Management (Thompson and Williams 2019).

Before COVID-19 climate change was probably the most pressing grand challenge facing society and has been used to illustrate a need for the project profession to engage with society. Achieving the targets for reductions in greenhouse gases will not be achieved by delivering excellent technical solutions alone. In many cases change will require harnessing new technology with behavioural change and developing new social practices. Social activism on climate change is already making the delivery of many projects challenging. The pandemic and the responses further highlight the dependencies and tensions between economies and communities, and these will play out in future projects.

After COVID-19 there will be demands for projects to rebuild economies and society. Pressure from local communities for projects to create both social and economic value is likely to increase. In the haste to re-build economies, and if project professionals do not develop new competencies to address the new challenges, there is a risk that social and environmental project benefits could be eclipsed by financial imperatives.

There is some good news. The professional bodies for project management have created frameworks, codes and guidelines around ethics and responsibility. Responsible Project Management (RPM) is attracting an unprecedented level of collaboration between the UK's leading professional bodies (APM and PMI UK) and the Association of Sustainability Practitioners. RPM uses the SDGs as a framework and incorporates the concept of Social Value. In the UK, the Social Value Act 2012 requires the public sector to ensure that the money spent on services creates the greatest economic, social and environmental value for local communities, and from April 2020 the requirement applies to spending by central government. Social Value can be used by other organisations, including projects, to evaluate impact and quantify social benefits. Incorporating social value into projects is in its infancy but the importance of doing so has been highlighted. If project professionals develop new competencies around using the SDGs and tools such as the Social Value Portal then COVID-19 could provide new impetus and put social responsibility in the spotlight.

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## Martin Berneburg - Germany

*Martin Berneburg, PMP, PSM, is the Vice-President & CEO of the Project Business Foundation and ECC Corporate Ambassador at the Project Management Institute, SGC.*

*Having spent most of his business life in North America, he now lives in Munich with a professional focus on Innovation, Project and Project Business Management. Within this field, international cross-corporate Projects as well as intra- and entrepreneurial endeavors are the backdrop for his evangelizing efforts to promote expert knowledge and the spread of resources in Project Business Management.*

### Three socio-economic thoughts on a post-COVID-19 Project Management world

1. Over the last five years Project Management has seen a tremendous shift from internal projects to cross-corporate projects, in essence letting buy-decisions outpace make-decisions. With this of course having held particularly true for large, multi-corporate projects, the increased accessibility of new opportunities brought about by an ever-more globalized economy has carried this development over to even small to mid-sized projects.

While this was already the trend pre-Corona, once organizations ease back into what we all hope to be a full recovery of the world's economy, this shift will be accelerated greatly by the changed realities:

In some of the most vital industries supply chains have been damaged. Worse still, in a world where the initial reaction of organizations and governments alike seemed to have favored an "us-vs-them" attitude, trust and the social fabric have been under severe stress. A multitude of examples comes to mind, from huge corporations' seemingly unwarranted (and well-documented) excessive exploitation of economic support measures to governments shutting down borders and urgent support for their neighbors in dire need of help.

So when project organizations will finally look to kick-start new initiatives and re-awaken dormant projects again, they will certainly do so with a high level of enthusiasm, albeit with an undoubtedly tentative approach when it comes to risk tolerance. This in turn will translate into yet another boost to a project business mindset and a cross-corporate approach to business strategy.

2. Another significant adjustment brought about by the crisis will have been in the area of human interaction and communication. In cases where before there was a hesitation with project managers in regards to working in virtual teams and heavy reliance on video conferences as a

means of communication, the uncompromising necessity to utilize these approaches under the COVID-19 measures will have opened a great number of minds to the inherent advantages of these tools.

As one result, business travel will likely be greatly affected. Even in cross-corporate initiatives, Project Managers will have become more accustomed and comfortable with remotely managing their teams and business relationships. On the upside, this will come with an overall average increase in productivity per work day, since less time is going to be spent traveling to remote partners and sites. But not to forget, this will also mean a significant decline in business for the multi-faceted transportation industry – just as it similarly did following the all but full stop to business travel in 2001 – hence negatively impacting one of the bigger employers in the field of project management.

3. Every crisis is a chance for improvement. In this context, one phenomenon currently strikes as tremendously encouraging – people left and right working together to come out of this crisis stronger than before. We see co-workers and even whole organizations supporting each other with an increased sense of togetherness.

Of course, this does not only apply to the project management community alone, but it is easy to see that Project Managers always have a very special self-image as drivers of change. For one, it is impossible to not be deeply impressed by the countless project management related posts on social media networks, offering help and advice on how to manage the numerous new challenges and opportunities that have arisen from the crisis-induced measures. So clearly, people have become aware that helping one another is one of the best ways of coping with the sudden stress of the current situation. It is not only optimists among the PM professionals who are already hoping to see this sense of humanity-centered community translate into better day-to-day working relationships once the world has regained its bearings. This is a great opportunity for all forms of project management, be it cross-corporate or cross-human.



## Peter Taylor – UK

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There is some dark humour around and one I love is the 'What is the biggest accelerator to digital transformation? The CEO? The CIO? The CTO? Or Covid-19?'

And it is true, isn't it? I have seen many organisations lumbering (being kind here) towards some sort of digital nirvana on the far-off horizon, one 12-month transformation at a time.

In the time of 'lockdown' and enforced virtual engagement we have all had some good experiences, and, if we are truly honest, some epic fails when it comes to collective remote digital engagement (all taken in the best possible spirit of course).

So, what will happen to all this when we do return to some form of normality? When we are back to the safety of what we have been used to in the past but with a realisation of what is 'possible' in the future?

Personally, I see this as an accelerator for the general adoption, and certainly more 'open-mindedness' from organisations on the value of, digital capability and intelligence tools, as well as a real sense of urgency from executive leadership to get it done now (just in case it all happens again). And for project management this is a good thing, in fact it is a critical thing, as we should embrace all that is potentially coming our way.

In 'How AI Will Reinvent Program and Portfolio Management' from Gartner 2019, there was the wake up, smell the coffee, and pay attention prediction that 'By 2030, 80% of project management will be eliminated as AI takes functions such as data collection, tracking and reporting' – wow!

But you know what? That is a good thing. It will allow project managers to actually get on with the job of managing projects (and the people that make up a project) and leave the drudgery of reporting, analytics, and subjective comment behind. The project 'mechanics' can be left to the machines, we can deal with the people; the soft skills, the engagement, the vision sharing and the team motivation, the performance, and the celebrations.

I will probably quit when AI organises the end of project party though!



## Reinhard Wagner – Germany

*Reinhard Wagner has been active for more than 30 years in the field of project- related leadership, in such diverse sectors as Air Defense, Automotive Engineering, and Machinery, as well as various not-for-profit organizations. As a Certified Projects Director (IPMA Level A), he has proven experience in managing projects, programmes and project portfolios in complex and dynamic contexts. He is also an IPMA Certified Programme and Portfolio Management Consultant, and as such supports senior executives in developing and improving their organizational competence in managing projects. Reinhard Wagner is Past President of IPMA and Chairman of the Council, Honorary Chairman of GPM (the German Project Management Association), as well as Managing Director of Tiba Managementberatung GmbH.*

In my view, the corona pandemic has resulted in society moving closer together. People are helping each other, through verbal encouragement, shopping by younger people for the elderly who have been exposed to a particular risk, virtual concerts in blocks of houses, communities and cities and also at home, families are spending more time together again. In this way we prove every day that our society is still viable and resilient. Many small individual initiatives have made a difference, have given us the courage to move forward in the almost hopeless situation and to emerge powerfully from the crisis.

During the crisis, project management also helps to overcome it. The number of blog posts, webinars and guides for virtual work, virtual PM seminars, online certification and even online advisory literally soared. Virtual project work, digital project management solutions and project-based work have received a significant boost. It is important to continue on this path. Existing barriers have disappeared miraculously and the environment has recovered considerably. With hackathons and innovation competitions, coordinated by project managers or associations, innovative solutions are pursued to overcome the crisis, be it in searching for medicines, researching the distribution of the virus through communication data or the manufacturing of ventilators using 3D printing.

Project management after the Corona crisis will therefore increasingly address social challenges of our time, be they migration, poverty, the climate change or a further mutation of the virus. Project managers are putting themselves at the service of society, which is certainly good for the image of the profession, which has too often fallen into disrepute due to failed projects. In projects, all creativity is unfolded in an agile, co-creative way, everyone can participate and project managers orchestrate people towards a common goal. It is rather a matter of moderating social processes, instead of executing predetermined schedules following directives. Isn't that a promising prospect? Anyway, I am looking forward to these changes and the road ahead.



## Dr. Robert Joslin – Switzerland

*Dr Robert Joslin is the founder of AIPMO, a professor and DBA/MSc supervisor at SBS Swiss Business School and head of their research advisory board.*

*He has 25 plus years, management consulting as well as designing, initiating and program management delivery of large-scale business transformation, reengineering, infrastructure, strategy development including winning prizes for ideas and product innovation. Robert was on PMI Standards core committee for the 4th edition portfolio management standard and on PMIs PgMP exam review board. Robert publishes books, research papers and is a peer reviewer for the three project management journals and in the process of co-authoring AIPMO's body of knowledge.*

Covid-19 is one of many Corona viruses but this one has the dubious title of the cause of the first 21st century pandemic. It will likely be known as the trigger that changed the way the world sees and carries out business.

Before Covid-19, the way of working was in teams; where a part(s) of the team worked physically in one location and the rest of the team remotely/virtually. The physical parts of the team met on a daily/frequently basis and were most likely to be full time employed where the virtual part was likely to be contractor based. Today, directors and owners of organizations are beginning to see how buildings and other fixed assets that were considered mandatory for organizations to operate, are no longer considered necessary and perhaps now viewed more as a liability. At the turn of the century, I worked at a management consulting firm where we saw billion-dollar organizations with less than ten people. They worked virtually with the partners around the world. They did not see the need big offices and traveled when they needed to attend meetings. Today, their mindset is likely to be shared by most decision makers.

So, what will be the implication of this paradigm shift of thinking to the NEW NORM during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Referring to figure 1, some decision makers will have terminated building contracts because of the need to survive, others will be thinking about it and will do this in a planned way. One factor on going permanently virtual is how successful they are in this period of working virtually. Not all will make it.

In Switzerland, for the past two months all organizations have been working virtually, so they know it works. The transition to virtual was a smooth affair because the Swiss were well prepared. This was in part because home working has been encouraged for over 10 years.

Mindsets are changing so virtual working will become the NEW NORM. Employees will accept this way of working especially if it extends into months which is the case already for some countries.

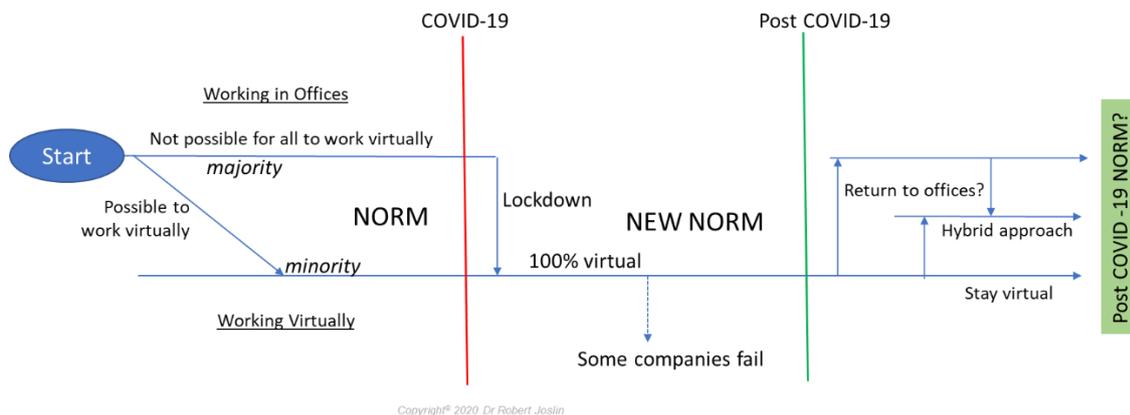
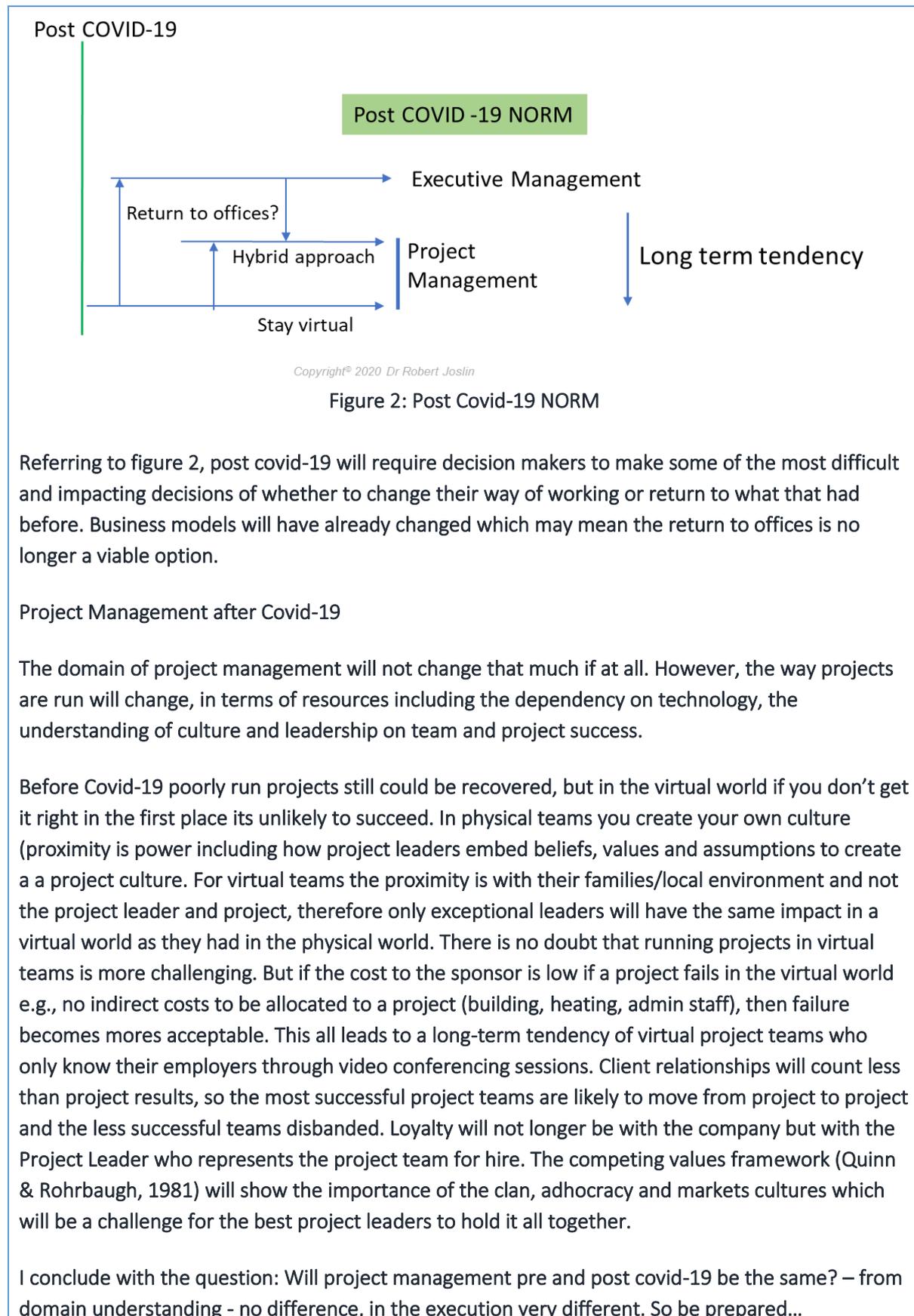


Figure 1: Triggers that change the way people consider what is normal (NORM)

Post COVID 19 implies a sudden change but this is likely. COVID-19 will be with us for at least 12 to 18 months and may be like Ebola - continued outbreaks for decades to come. Employees are and will be reluctant to return to work together as it will be a change again so will go against their NEW NORM. Every professional and decision maker will be in a position to compare the two ways of working (in office or Virtual) and have the metrics to prove which one is better for them. The question is which path with they take or forced to take - Stay virtual, return to the office or have a hybrid approach?

There are many factors to be considered on deciding which is the appropriate path, but what is most likely is that decisions will be taken on categories of workers. So, some categories of workers will no longer necessary to be needed to be in the office. There will be a second question of whether they need to be in the country. Categories of workers like Executive Management or mission critical functions will likely be considered as too important to risk leaving, so they will be asked to return to the office. Other categories are likely grouped into a hybrid approach where the come now and again to the office like consultants do today, who work for large consulting companies.





## Tejas Sura - India

*Tejas Sura serves on the PMI Board of Directors. He is the founder and managing director of Cubic Turnkey Private Limited, with 25 years of construction project experience with multinational organizations. He previously led Conart Engineers Ltd., an Indian publicly listed company, as managing director, implementing international best practices and growing the company revenues exponentially. Mr. Sura is an enthusiastic volunteer and has served PMI for 20 years in various capacities including founder, vice president/finance, president and advisor for the PMI Mumbai Chapter, region mentor (South Asia), Chapter Member Advisory Group (MAG), and International Standards Organization (ISO) MAG.*

### What does COVID-19 Mean for the Future of Project Management?

I've spent much of my career in the construction industry, where many impacted companies are converting into virtual environments. We're seeing the emergence of a "new norm" with teams using technology like Building Information Modeling to continue implementing projects remotely.

In an example of how the pandemic will impact other sectors, COVID-19 will trigger a range of new health projects. Since the production of a vaccine will likely take time, governments will have to create resources like quarantine facilities and run nationwide projects to implement the defensive response to the situation.

We also need to continue strengthening leadership skills in order to effectively communicate with dispersed teams. Leadership will be especially crucial in helping to address the fears that many people will have about returning to work and taking action to help prevent people from potentially becoming infected.

I think back to a time several years ago when my city of Mumbai saw a record amount of rainfall in a day. The entire city was shut down, with people stuck at home or work. However, we truly sprung back into action when it was over; people were very eager to return to work and get the city running again. That memory reminds me of what's possible when we maintain a positive mindset in challenging times. Given how instrumental project professionals will be to leading the recovery, it's crucial that we remain optimistic and open to the silver lining of how this terrible crisis can enable new ways of working.

I believe that this Covid-19 experience, and our altered mindset as a result, will be a true launching pad for a magnificent project management evolution.



## Tony Appleby – USA

*Tony Appleby serves as Chair of the PMI Board of Directors. He is the managing director of the Project Strategy Consulting Group, specializing in organizational maturity and the delivery of strategic transformation. He has led engagements on six continents, partnering with executive and leadership teams to achieve business objectives through improved operational capabilities and strategic performance management. He has spent over 20 years advancing his practical knowledge of project and change management across a variety of industries and disciplines. He has directly managed complex, global high-value projects in the healthcare, engineering, technology and research sectors. Mr. Appleby is also a long-time PMI volunteer, having served as president of the PMI San Francisco Bay Area Chapter.*

### What does COVID-19 Mean for the Future of Project Management?

As challenging as this time is for millions of people struggling with the illness itself and the economic toll, we already see project professionals playing an increasingly important role in leading the recovery.

They are helping organizations to work in new and cross-disciplinary ways. Project managers have long excelled as change agents who can help coalesce disparate disciplines to build something new. The world will be counting on them as change makers to continue delivering value and moving critical projects forward. I'm confident that in the post-crisis scenario, project management professionals will be in greater demand and need than ever before.

It's heartening to see so many project managers making the most of this time of social distancing to continue investing in their ongoing professional development. The Project Management Institute continues to provide project managers around the world with the digital tools and resources they need to continue advancing in their careers, even when it seems as though much of the entire world has grinded to a halt.

The capabilities they will need in this "new normal" will place a greater emphasis on what we have long called soft skills, and can more appropriately be called "power skills" – qualities like empathy, collaborative leadership, and an innovative mindset. All of these qualities are of greater importance than ever in virtual settings when non-verbal communication is not as readily visible.



## Zeynep Selen – Turkey

*Zeynep is the Chair of the Istanbul Project Management Association. During her nearly 30 years of professional career, she worked in the software projects of the IT departments of banks that pioneered the both Turkish and European financial sector.*

*She became a member of Istanbul Project Management Association (İPYD) in 2013 and started Career Coaching program within the association. In 2014, she took part in İPYD Board of Directors and supported Professional Development and Education Group. In 2017, she coordinated the Mentoring Program he established within İPYD and in the same year she established P30 (Project & Program & Portfolio) Interest Group. She is currently the Chairman of the Board of Directors of İPYD 2018-2020.*

There is considerable change in the world right now as a consequence of the Covid19 pandemic. We are witnessing that the blunt reality of an infectious disease can indeed affect our lives, even in this modern world. We are going through uncertain times, which can act as a learning moment.

Since project management is our main interest, we cannot help to wonder how this field will be affected. While it is through that there are still numerous unknown variables during this crisis, it is nevertheless possible to make a number of assessments.

While in some fields there have been a few pilot attempts to establish teleworking recently, as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, a considerable majority of white collar workers have been pushed into rapidly switch to teleworking in a very short amount of time. Those who are able to telework seem at least content to be able to save their time normally reserved for commuting.

According to our association poll, which was conducted on our members during the month of April, and titled “Project Management under varying circumstances”, we have been able observe that project managers, especially in the construction sector, have difficulties supervising their projects from a distance. It has been suggested that approval and supervising processes should be modified in order to adapt to this new working system. In other sectors, difficulties have been reported regarding the commissioning of new projects as well as the assignment of new tasks to project teams. In the same poll, the participants predict that in the near future, there will be an increase in global scale projects as well as in the number of online project teams, and as a result, aspects such as contract management, work safety and problem solving skills will have to be redeveloped in sync with these varying conditions.

According to a poll made in France(\*), 54% of participants state that they use this gained time instead for cooking longer, %52 for sleeping longer, and %38 for spending more time with their children. On the other hand, it is seen that teleworking renders the distinction between working

time and private time less clear. The same poll shows that %32 of its participants work more than usual while teleworking. At this point, it becomes more difficult for mid-level managers to assess whether their workers are working efficiently or not. Facing this reality, it may be more useful to assess workers based on their production levels instead of the actual time they spend working. It might therefore be high time to dissociate performance from the volume of working hours.

For project managers who take communication seriously, it may be necessary to improve on establishing empathy with their teammates, during and after this crisis. It is not easy to assess the working conditions of teleworkers at home, since they might even lack fundamental ergonomic work conditions, and their workload from daily household activities, such as related to their children, might vary in an unpredictable manner. Under these circumstances, it might be essential to establish communication individually with each teammate, based on their individual work conditions.

A further interesting issue is the change in the use of communication methods; it is seen that almost all conference meetings are executed digitally and the cameras mostly are open. During these conference calls, colleagues have creased insight into each other's private lives as a result of peaks into the background images from webcams. This can lead to a change of perception among teammates, since having a peak inside each other's houses gives these calls a more intimate character, and a feeling of being a guest in each other's house, as opposed to merely talking with someone who has a task in the project. This kind of change in perceptions can lead to a softening of hard hierarchical structures towards more flat ones.

Facing rapidly evolving conditions, project managers have to be more rigorous with their communication structures. In order to minimize communicative mistakes, communication plans as well as 'Responsibility Assignment Matrix' should be more thoroughly prepared.

Risk management has to be executed in a more rigorous and detailed manner as well. Some extreme cases, such as team members or their loved one's having health problems, disruptions in communication, both as a result of personal issues as well as technical, and various other eventual risk factors must be taken into account in a detailed manner.

To conclude, I sincerely hope that humanity will have underwent this difficult crisis. Also we are learning things which can lead to positive change as well.

#### References

(\*) Poll of 2736 people by flexible office operator Deskeo (28/03/2020)  
<http://www.industrie-mag.com/article24610.html>

## About the Editor



**Ipek Sahra Ozguler**

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**Ipek Sahra Ozguler** graduated from the Istanbul University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering and from Middle East Technical University with an MSc degree in Software Management. As a project manager, she has more than 10 years' experience in various areas such as portfolio management, program management, project management, software management, business analysis. She became a certified PMP in January, 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014.

She has managed a variety of projects across manufacturing, defence, FMCG (Cola Cola), insurance (Euler Hermes), audit (Deloitte), telecommunication, ICT and aviation sectors and gained broader insights. In addition, she has worked as international correspondent for the *PM World Journal* since 2014.

Ipek is the creator and editor of the highly acclaimed book, [The Perspective of Women Project Management Professionals](#), interviews with leading female PM experts and professionals around the world. The book was published in March 2020 and is available [here](#).

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