

The Connected Future Business Culture: The Great Project Management Accelerator

The Reinvention of the Project Manager¹

By Dr. Harold Kerzner

and

Dr. Al Zeitoun

Introduction

When we look at the words project management, our minds could still take us to a place where rigor, structure, and control processes prevail. The last decade has altered much of our conviction about what great project management is. We learned a lot about what no longer works, the true definitions of what good looks like, and the qualities of the person whom we might still give the title project manager. The next decade is the most critical test for this profession that many authors and practitioners admire and believe in its impact.

This look ahead requires us to build on the learnings of this past decade. The unprecedented reliance on digitization, the intense collaborative working from every possible corner of the universe, the shift in the ways of working and frameworks, and the understanding of the impact of projects and programs on creating change, have opened a new page for experimenting with the role of the project manager. Is that role truly about managing, is it about leading, is it about both, or is it an emerging set of ingredients that should be categorized differently and given new naming. The evidence of organizational excellence continues to center on practices that agree to a set of principles, focus on execution, use a higher trust currency, and realize the unlimited potential of projects in this project economy for making sustainable changes stick.

The reinvention of the project manager is upon us and requires a degree of commitment to rebuilding the future organization to be the strategic, innovative, and learning community it will have to become for meaningful and sustainable strategic successes to prevail.

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Forecasting Changes to the Role of the Project Manager

When we combine the words ‘forecasting’ and ‘project management’, we envision a process of making predictions or assumptions on the possible outcomes of a project. We perform an analysis of historical project data as well as guesses on future outcomes to determine the duration, cost, and performance at project completion.

Project forecasting is done continuously and on every project. What companies fail to do is to forecast what the role of the project manager will be in the future based upon the major changes identified in the project management community of practice or changing roles within the organization.

Past success in project management is no guarantee of future performance. The management guru, Peter Drucker, often used the term, “The Failure of Success,” where companies become so successful at what they are doing that they refuse to challenge the results and the accompanying processes to see if it can be accomplished better in the future.

Drivers for Role Change

Forecasting major changes to the role of the project manager must begin with an understanding of the drivers that will necessitate that changes expected to take place.

Some of the drivers for role changes include the need for the project manager to:

- Manage new types of projects
- Design and select new types of methodologies for the new types of projects
- Make business as well as technical decisions
- Select new types of metrics for the new decisions required
- Use information warehouses, business intelligence systems and digital technologies

Developing new types of project leadership skills and being able to collaborate with all stakeholders more effectively, will shape the DNA of the future project manager. One of the biggest mistakes executives still make is limiting their views of what project managers are capable of achieving for their organizations strategically. The traditional tactical view of projects’ value has shifted to strategic value in most of the world organizations that have exemplified a pattern of consistent growth. These organizations now holistically measure what matters and thus understand the shifts in the role of the project managers that gets them there.

Types of Projects

Project managers have been managing traditional projects for decades. Traditional projects have well-defined requirements, a business case, a statement of work, and possibly a complete work breakdown structure for all the work broken down to five or six levels of detail. Project managers are now being asked to manage strategic projects, such as with innovation and R&D, that begin with just an idea and the scope of the effort is progressively elaborated as the work takes place.

New types of projects usually require new types of leadership and new types of decisions to be made. On traditional projects, the governance committee or project sponsor often had the major role for making business decisions. On strategic projects, business decision-making is becoming a project management responsibility.

Making Business Decisions

In the early years of modern project management practices, project management evolved from the aerospace, defense, and heavy construction industries. Most of the project managers were engineers who were assigned to the projects because of their command of technology. The criteria for being assigned as a project manager were a command or good understanding of technology accompanied by writing skills. Business-related decisions were most often made by governance personnel and project sponsors.

Senior management over the years have realized that, as the number of projects has increased, executives did not have the time to act as sponsors on all projects. Allowing PMs to make business decisions meant that senior management had to rethink whether a command-and-control leadership model from the top floor of the building was the best approach. Senior management surrendered the idea that information is power and began sharing strategic information with project teams.

Today, there exists a line-of-sight between project teams and senior management to make sure that all projects are aligned to strategic business objectives. Knowledge of strategic business objectives is a necessity if PMs are expected to make business decisions and interface with stakeholders.

Many of the decisions made by project managers on traditional projects were heavily focused on short-term profitability and short-term decisions. The management of strategic projects focuses on decision-making affecting long-term rather than short-term expectations.

The Fuzzy Front End (FFE)

Companies are now rethinking when to bring project managers on board the project. Project selection and prioritization is referred to as the FFE. Historically, senior management selected the projects, assigned a priority to the projects, and then assigned a project manager responsible for project execution.

The problem with this approach was that the PMs had a poor understanding of how the executives selected the projects, the factors they considered in selection and prioritization, the risks they considered, the business benefits and value they expected, and most often the budget and schedule provided was insufficient. In the future, we can expect project managers to be brought on board during the FFE to assess the resources needed, whether the technology needed is available, and whether the expectations are realistic.

New Metrics

Perhaps the most significant change that will take place will be the use of new metrics. When project managers are expected to make only technical decisions, the metrics of time, cost, and scope that are included in the earned value measurement system may be sufficient. But if project managers are expected to make business and strategic decisions, then significantly more metrics will be required. Some of the new metrics that project teams will require will include:

- Metrics that track the creation of business benefits and business value
- Metrics that measure intangibles such as the effectiveness of project governance and customer satisfaction
- Metrics that measure strategic issues related to the project such as how well the project is aligned to strategic business objectives

Another metrics category that is growing includes metrics related to risks. Traditional metrics report progress and issues but usually not the cause of problems, especially

potential problems or risks that can lead to failure. Failure does not occur at the end of a project. There are always indicators or metrics that, if used as part of monitoring and control right from the start of the project, could provide early indication that a potential risky situation is about to occur. This could allow teams to correct risky situations early in the project's life cycle. These metrics can serve as an early warning system. Unfortunately, they are not part of traditional EVMS usage. Some of these critical metrics include:

- The number of new assumptions made over the project's life cycle
- The number of assumptions that changed over the project's life cycle
- Changes that occurred in the enterprise environmental factors
- The number of scope changes approved and denied
- The number of time, cost, and scope baseline revisions
- The effectiveness of project governance
- Changes in the risk level of the critical work packages

Methodologies

The days of using a one-size-fits-all methodology are disappearing. The new types of projects and the new decisions that project managers will be making will necessitate giving project teams a choice of flexible methodologies to use. At the onset of a project, the team will select the best methodology for the project. In an ideal situation, the methodology selected, as well as the life cycle phases, will be aligned to the customer's business model if possible. This will build customer satisfaction and trust, accelerate the decision-making process, and generate repeat business. This can make life much easier for customers to track the project and provide the correct and timely support when needed.

The team will also select the metrics they need for the decisions they make, and the information requested by the stakeholders. Each stakeholder may have different information needs. A dashboard designer will be assigned to each project team to customize the dashboards that stakeholders request.

Leadership

Over the years, project management leadership has focused heavily upon the use of authority and power. Attempts were made to adapt traditional functional leadership models into a project management environment, and many attempts were unsuccessful. A new form of leadership is emerging, namely social project management leadership, which focuses upon ways to get team members more engaged in the project. Some of the factors driving new forms of project management leadership include:

- New types of projects are requiring a greater need for collaboration with team members and stakeholders
- Projects are becoming longer in duration and project managers have more time to interface with team members and understand their needs
- Project managers are increasingly providing input into team members' performance reviews

Project management leadership decisions will focus upon business as well as technical decisions.

Change Management

The outcome of many projects requires changes to be made in how the company conducts its business. Projects will be needed to align the deliverables to business growth needs. In the past, project managers did not have an active role in change management practices. In the future, project managers can be expected to take the lead in implementing the changes needed because of the project's deliverables.

Crisis Management

In most companies, crises committees are chaired by senior management accompanied by a command-and-control leadership style from senior management. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in most people working from home and made it clear that the role of the project manager was increasing in importance. Project managers were required to manage projects using virtual teams and find ways to determine the mental health of the team members. New project management leadership styles will be needed to engage team members using virtual meetings technologies.

THE PATH FORWARD

The changing role of the project manager, with a heavy focus on business strategy, is forcing project managers to develop many new skills, especially business-related skills. These skills will be transferable to other job opportunities.

The good news here is that executives are gradually comprehending the strategic potential of project management and thus are paying closer attention to the leaders running the initiatives. The impact of project managers is finally reaching a level of clarity not seen before. As an example, and even though some organizations have used titles like Chief Projects Office over a couple of decades ago, they did not fully understand till recently the true nature of that executive position and how much it could contribute to transforming every aspect of businesses and their impact on key stakeholders. No one is better equipped in the future to lead transformation than properly and strategically prepared project managers.

Shifts in how we prioritize and do work, how we run dialogues and execute programs and projects, and how we integrate these efforts with the right metrics and new views of success will shape much of the role changes ahead. It is our sincere wish that this reinvention of the project manager will have a lasting impact on a globe that is dealing with more uncertainty than any time in recent history and is affected by complex disruptions much more difficult to predict. It is with adaptability, resilience, and true belief in the diverse views of talented project and program team members that we would be able to achieve the shifts in organizational and governmental leadership that will transform the project management skills to the level of achieving missions and outcomes that matter.

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About the Authors



Harold Kerzner, Ph.D., MS, M.B.A

Senior Executive Director for Project Management
International Institute of Learning
New York & Florida, USA



Dr. Harold Kerzner is Senior Executive Director for Project Management for the International Institute for Learning (IIL). He has an MS and Ph.D. in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering from the University of Illinois and an MBA from Utah State University. He is a prior Air Force Officer and spent several years at Morton-Thiokol in project management. He taught engineering at the University of Illinois and business administration at Utah State University, and for 38 years taught project management at Baldwin-Wallace University. He has published or presented numerous engineering and business papers and has had published more than 60 college textbooks/workbooks on project management, including later editions. Some of his books are (1) Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling and Controlling; (2) Project Management Metrics, KPIs and Dashboards, (3) Project Management Case Studies, (4) Project Management Best Practices: Achieving Global Excellence, (5) PM 2.0: The Future of Project Management, (6) Using the Project Management Maturity Model, and (7) Innovation Project Management.

He is a charter member of the Northeast Ohio PMI Chapter.

Dr. Kerzner has traveled around the world conducting project management lectures for PMI Chapters and companies in Japan, China, Russia, Brazil, Singapore, Korea, South Africa, Canada, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Poland, Croatia, Mexico, Trinidad, Barbados, The Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Venezuela, Columbia, United Arab Emirates, France, Italy, England, and Switzerland. He delivered a keynote speech at a PMI Global Congress on the future of project management.

His recognitions include:

- The University of Illinois granted Dr. Kerzner a Distinguished Recent Alumni Award in 1981 for his contributions to the field of project management.

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- Utah State University provided Dr. Kerzner with the 1998 Distinguished Service Award for his contributions to the field of project management.
 - The Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Project Management Institute gives out the Kerzner Award once a year to one project manager in Northeast Ohio that has demonstrated excellence in project management. They also give out a second Kerzner Award for project of the year in Northeast Ohio.
 - The Project Management Institute (National Organization) in cooperation with IIL has initiated the Kerzner International Project Manager of the Year Award given to one project manager yearly anywhere in the world that demonstrated excellence in project management.
 - The Project Management Institute also gives out four scholarships each year in Dr. Kerzner's name for graduate studies in project management.
 - Baldwin-Wallace University has instituted the Kerzner Distinguished Lecturer Series in project management.
 - The Italian Institute of Project Management presented Dr. Kerzner with the 2019 International ISIPM Award for his contributions to the field of project management.

Dr. Harold Kerzner can be contacted at hkerzner@hotmail.com



Dr. Al Zeitoun, PgMP, PMI Fellow

Global Future of Work Executive
Siemens DISW
Ohio & Maryland USA



Dr. Al Zeitoun is a Future of Work, business optimization, and operational performance excellence thought leader with global experiences in strategy execution. His experiences encompass leading organizations; delivering their Enterprise Digital and Business Transformation; guiding fitting frameworks implementations; and using his empathy, engineering insights, and collaboration strengths to successfully envision new business models and execute complex missions across diverse cultures globally.

In his current role with Siemens, he is a Senior Director of Strategy responsible for driving the global program management practices, Master Plan governance, and enabling the Strategy Transformation processes and priorities.

In his position, as the Executive Director for Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation, Abu Dhabi, UAE, he was responsible for creating the strategy execution framework, achieving transformation benefits, governance excellence, and creating the data analytics discipline necessary for delivering on the \$40B complex country energy mission roadmap.

At the McLean, USA HQ of Booz Allen Hamilton, Dr. Zeitoun strategically envisioned and customized digitally enabled EPMO advisory, mapped playbooks, and capability development for clients' Billions of Dollars strategic initiatives. Furthermore, he led the firm's Middle East North Africa Portfolio Management and Agile Governance Solutions.

With the International Institute of Learning, Dr. Zeitoun played a senior leader and global trainer and coach. He was instrumental in driving its global expansions, thought leadership, and operational excellence methodology to sense and shape dynamic ways of working across organizations worldwide. He speaks English, Arabic, and German and enjoys good food, travel, and volunteering. Dr. Al Zeitoun can be contacted at zeitounstrategy@gmail.com