

*Beyond Hype*¹

Top Skills Needed for Project Managers in the Age of AI ²

Ricardo Viana Vargas, PhD

Navigating the Winding Road to the Future

The uncertainty brought in by emerging technological developments like AI, machine learning, and deep learning is going to affect us all.

With that in mind, we must think differently about our career paths as these advancements challenge traditional notions of career management.

The question is: Is this just hype, or should we pivot our skills to keep our work relevant?

Understanding the Hype Cycle

Let's start by understanding how innovation happens in our society.

AI is not an exception.

Consider this: AT&T introduced the "AT&T Picturephone" back in 1964, a device that combined voice and video. However, its features were too limited to offer real benefits, such as document sharing and replacing face-to-face meetings.

Reflect on how far we've come with phone technology in nearly 60 years.

Innovation doesn't happen overnight; it takes several steps. Prof. Rita McGrath of Columbia Business School eloquently describes this business cycle in her [Stepping Stone Strategy Model](#), with five key phases: hype, dismissal, emergence, the inflection point, and post-inflection maturity.

¹ Editor's note: This series of articles by Ricardo Vargas, PMI Fellow and recognized thought leader, is based on his LinkedIn newsletter called [Beyond Hype](#) in which he periodically shares his thought on emerging issues and potential concerns related to project management or the PM profession. Ricardo is a former Chair of the PMI Board of Directors and the author or co-author of many books on project management, including [Project Management Next Generation: The Pillars for Organizational Excellence](#) (co-authored with Dr. Harold Kerzner and Dr. Al Zeitoun). Learn more about the author in his profile at the end of this article.

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During the hype phase, entrepreneurs launch products, investors fund them, and journalists rave about the latest innovation poised to change our lives forever. But inevitably, there are skeptics who cast doubt on the new technology, leading to what we call the "dismissal phase."

Consider the recent unveiling of the [Apple Vision Pro](#). It's a perfect example of hype and dismissal. Open any tech news, and you'll see experts voicing their opinions, like the "It's the best headset demo ever" from [The Verge](#) to the "Apple's Vision Pro Isn't the Future" from [Wired](#).



Following the dismissal phase is the emergence phase. This phase is where critical decisions about business models, infrastructure, asset ownership, and business relationships are made within the [business ecosystem](#).

At the so-called "inflection point," we experience explosive growth. It's the tipping point where the new technology gains mainstream acceptance and significantly impacts the industry.

The winners are far ahead and are equipped to gain leverage from the valuable opportunity for growth. Those who could not jump on are starting to decline.

The post-inflection point is the maturity stage, where it's evident to everyone how innovation will change the world. However, only a few know how to navigate and benefit from the change.

How Is Understanding the Hype Cycle Useful for Our Careers?

We must first know that change is a natural and continuous process.

We all must "learn" and "unlearn" quickly to take advantage of new cycles.

And, being brutally honest, if we think learning is challenging, imagine unlearning. It requires gigantic will and effort. One of my favorite videos exemplifying the concept of 'unlearning' is Destin Sandlin's [The Backwards Brain Bicycle](#). It shows that changing ingrained behaviors and perspectives - like riding a bike with a gear that moves the handlebars in the opposite direction - is incredibly hard, yet necessary in adapting to new cycles.

When you cannot unlearn, you become paralyzed, and there is a high chance that you perceive the only answer to this trend to be dismissal or disbelief.

Secondly, we need to be able to assess where we are as a society in the hype cycle. Is the hype only among experts, or can you see people talking, commenting, and using it outside the traditional expected group? See ChatGPT today, with [1.8 billion visitors](#) per month and growing. This clearly signals that generative AI is now being discussed seriously inside organizations, governments, and society.

Thirdly, even if the change lasts, we must acknowledge that not everyone will always end up as a winner. To be on the winning side, you must know which skills are needed to grow based on your passion, capabilities, and specific condition.

To prepare for this rapid evolution, we must understand the necessary skills for project managers in the current climate.

Essential Skills for Project Managers in the Current Climate

In my opinion, there are three vital skills for today's project managers: 1) Managing Uncertainty, 2) Knowledge of PM Tools, especially those utilizing AI, and 3) Creativity, Critical Thinking, and Soft/Power Skills.

Managing Uncertainty

Building a team's commitment is crucial to tackling uncertain situations.

Managing uncertainty, our first key skill is illustrated perfectly by [Steve Otto, CTO at The R&A](#), golf's governing body. He believes that we should balance two key attributes: a strong foundation and an agile attitude.

Otto and his colleagues were put to a real test as they used a combination of data and video to create a virtual magic tournament of golfing greats from the past 50 years in just three months.

The team's [ability to react quickly to rapidly changing conditions](#), while keeping the soul of what golf truly is, represents the abilities needed to understand and work under stressful situations—a strong foundation combined with an agile attitude.

Knowledge of PM Tools (especially the ones using AI)

AI has the power to automate many tasks, helping project managers save valuable time and resources. Not utilizing these advantages can leave one behind, especially as more and more professionals adopt these powerful tools.

When evaluating your needs and flow of work, you need to ask the right questions and apply the right solution. Who would benefit most from using AI? Which tasks can be automated?

Think about routine, time-consuming tasks and ways to use automation to free up valuable resources.

Experimenting with these tools could be a significant step forward. On a personal example, some project-related tasks that took me 2 to 3 hours to finish can now be done in maybe 10 to 15 min. It is 90% of savings in my time, my most critical resource.

You can listen to my podcast [playlist on AI and Generative AI on Spotify](#) to learn more about different aspects of the technology and its impacts. At the end of this issue, I will share my toolbox of AI apps that I am using and evaluating.

Creativity, Critical Thinking, and Soft/Power Skills

The third critical skill set for me is all about understanding that, up to now (at least), AI does not generate soft skills, critical thinking, and creativity.

These are all human skills. ChatGPT is just a transformer, an algorithm that, based on billions and billions of texts and other contents, is able to predict and "mimic" what a human would do. And this does not turn ChatGPT into a human or anything sentient.

Our ability to think out of the box in a disruptive way and analyze all the human and social impacts of our decisions will become imperative for the projects. This includes even the decision on where, how and at what level to apply AI in our own projects.

We decide that, not ChatGPT!

Ethical Use of AI

I mention ethics almost every single time I talk about AI.

Ethics is non-negotiable. Period.

Project managers and anyone involved in developing AI projects or using AI on their projects must think carefully about the ethical implications of the indiscriminate use of AI and work 24/7 to mitigate the side effects.

Every time we move and leave parts of society utterly alienated from what is happening, the problems will not magically fade. They will come back dressed as inequality gaps, social unrest, and destruction of the core pillars of our society.

One of the best ways to overcome these challenges is by providing workers with opportunities for learning and upskilling. I am not saying here that people should learn

only new tools. I am saying that we need to learn other potential applications of the knowledge we developed over the years.

This deliberate act of learning and looking for opportunities reduces fears, improves adaptability, and helps our organizations deliver what society expects from us.

And so, my journey began when I first encountered ChatGPT in December 2022. I plunged headfirst into this new realm, fueled by curiosity and the determination to stay ahead. As I navigated through the uncharted waters of AI, I committed myself not only to mastering this new frontier but also to serving as a guide for those who seek to understand this emerging era.

Together, we can ensure we're not just reacting to the future but actively shaping it in a way that benefits us all.

What Has Been on My Radar Recently?

My Favorite AI Tools

AI tools have been integral to my daily work, helping streamline processes, improve efficiency, and provide invaluable insights. Here are ten tools that have made the most significant impact:

[ChatGPT](#) - This one does not need explanation 😊

[Krisp](#) - Noise canceling tool I use all the time for video calls. It removes background noise and is brilliant for calls and meetings when you are on the road.

[DoNotPay](#) - It is an AI legal advisor, and I use it to look for initial legal advice on almost any project topic. It is the nightmare of lawyers.

[Grammarly](#) and [Quillbot](#) - Excellent tools to help me to write in English in different styles and improve grammar.

[Fireflies](#) - An AI tool that transcribes meeting notes from video conferences and recorded meetings and can even automatically transfer project tasks to other platforms like Asana and Monday.

[Humata](#) and [ChatPDF](#) - Read large PDFs and find answers to your questions in the content. Perfect to summarize large documents.

[Looka](#) - An AI-powered platform that allows you to create a project visual brand, including designing logos, business cards, and stationery.

[PMOtto](#) - It is an AI-powered assistant for all things Project Management. It is the ChatGPT of project management. It is currently in beta testing.

Disclaimer: I am one of the founders of PMOtto, and this is a tool you've been involved in creating. It's included in this list because I genuinely believe in its value. I do not have any commercial relationship with any other providers above.

Apple WWDC 2023

Apple's recent [keynote](#) was groundbreaking, as they announced several game-changing products, including the completely disruptive AI/VR glass, the Apple Vision Pro. It is a must to watch even if you do not like Apple or do not like tech. What was presented could shape the future of what we do.

Quick Announcements

PMOtto Beta Release

After months of arduous work, the beta version of the PMOtto is now available. It is still being tested, and the access is controlled by a waiting list. We plan to scale up the testing with the feedback we receive from the users! You can enter the waiting list to try the new PMOtto [here](#).

Remember, it is a beta version. 😊

Global Research on AI in Project Management

Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez and I are thrilled to invite you to participate in the [Global Survey on Artificial Intelligence in Projects and Project Management](#). This landmark initiative will delve into the state of AI in project management, exploring its adoption, the challenges it presents, and the exciting future it holds across a myriad of industries and regions.

The survey will take less than 10 minutes of your time and will contribute heavily to the work we all do. Results and analysis will be shared for free when ready (expected to finish this summer).

Don't Miss Out on the AI-Driven Project Management Revolution Masterclass!

We reached over 50 attendees registered in our [new masterclass on AI in Project Management](#). We still have some remaining spots. Register now here and do not miss this chance.

Your insights as a professional, practitioner, or researcher are invaluable. We want to hear about your experiences, challenges, and thoughts on AI's impact on project delivery.

Are you ready to dive deeper into the world of AI-driven project management? In two dynamic 4-hour sessions on July 5th and July 12th from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM ET, you'll participate in interactive group studies and hands-on exercises designed to elevate your expertise in this exciting new field. Register now [here!](#)

If you have any suggestions, comments, or anything that will help me make it better, please send a note to info@ricardo-vargas.com with your suggestions. I would love to hear from you.

About the Author



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Ricardo Viana Vargas is Managing Partner at Macrosolutions, past Executive Director of the Project Management Institute's Brightline Initiative, past Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services ([UNOPS](#)) Infrastructure and Project Management Group, and former Chair of the PMI Board of Directors. Passionate about transforming ideas into action and a popular speaker at international PM events, Ricardo is recognized worldwide as a chief advocate for the project economy. Specializing in implementing innovative global initiatives, capital projects and product development, he has directed dozens of projects across industries and continents, managing more than \$20 billion in global initiatives over the past 25 years.

Ricardo shares his expertise with millions of professionals around the globe through his "[5 Minutes Podcast](#)," which he's hosted since 2007. He has written [16 books](#) on project

management, risk and crisis management, and transformation, which have been translated into six languages and sold more than half a million copies. His latest book [Project Management Next Generation: The Pillars for Organizational Excellence](#), in partnership with Dr. Harold Kerzner and Dr. Al Zeitoun has recently been released.

Ricardo's influence on project management was affirmed when he became the first Latin American to be elected Chairman of the Project Management Institute. More than two decades ago, he founded Macrosolutions, a global consulting firm with international operations in energy, infrastructure, IT, oil and finance. Between 2016 and 2020, Ricardo directed the [Brightline Initiative](#), a Project Management Institute think tank bringing together leading organizations in a coalition dedicated to helping executives bridge the expensive, unproductive gap between strategic design and delivery.

Prior to his work with Brightline, Ricardo was Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services ([UNOPS](#)) Infrastructure and Project Management Group, leading more than 1,000 projects and \$1.2 billion in humanitarian and development projects. He has worked as a venture capitalist and entrepreneur in artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data, chatbots and machine learning resulted in tools and products that have revolutionized how users bring agility and agile management into project management software.

Ricardo holds a Ph.D. in Civil Engineering from Federal Fluminense University in Brazil and an undergraduate degree in Chemical Engineering, as well as a master's degree in Industrial Engineering from Federal University of Minas Gerais in Brazil. He can be contacted at ricardo@ricardo-vargas.com or ricardo-vargas.com or LinkedIn: [com/in/ricardovargas](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ricardovargas).