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Project Management Update from Nepal
Yamanta Raj Niroula
Regional Report

Project Management Update from Nepal[1]

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Kathmandu, Nepal

Generation Z as Project Managers: How Nepal's Gen Z Redefines Project Leadership

1.   Introduction

On September 8-9, 2025, Kathmandu became the center of a youth-led uprising that challenged Nepal's political system. Triggered by a sudden government ban on 26 social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, X (Formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and YouTube, the protests quickly escalated into one of the largest youth mobilizations in the country's history. Thousands of students and young adults flooded Kathmandu's streets to demand an end to corruption and reversal of a new government ban on popular social media platforms.

The protests, called the "Gen Z protests" were leaderless, digitally coordinated, and purpose driven. While the headlines focused on street clashes and tragic casualties, the deeper significance lies in how the protests unfolded: as a short lifecycle, a decentralized project executed with distributed responsibility across digital and physical networks.

Participants demonstrated rapid initiation, adaptive planning, and digital coordination. They used advanced project management practices without formal structures, charters, or leadership hierarchies.

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Symbolic image (Source: Republica)

This report examines the Gen Z protests through a project management lens. It maps the uprising to agile and adaptive methodologies. The events show a change in how complex projects can be managed in uncertain situations. They reveal that even high-stakes efforts can succeed if teams are organized, focused, and responsive to changing circumstances. This case offers practical lessons for project managers in South Asia and beyond. It highlights what matters in leadership, governance, and managing people and resources. It also shows the importance of engaging stakeholders effectively and handling risks in real time. Finally, it points to the skills needed to work with teams that are fully comfortable with digital tools and online collaboration.

2.   Context and Background

2.1.   The Setting

Globally, Gen Z's formative experiences include the rise of social media, economic volatility, and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In South Asia, their experience has also been marked by corruption, fragile institutions, and large-scale migration. These conditions have created a generation that is adaptive, quick to respond, and motivated by ethics and purpose.

Nepal's political environment has long been fragile. Institutions are weak, corruption is persistent, and citizens are disillusioned. Youth unemployment is high, and many young Nepalis migrate for work. Trust in political leaders is low.

In this context, the sudden ban on social media acted as a trigger. Young people depend on these platforms for education, work, social connection, and activism. The block was not seen simply as censorship but as an attack on their way of life. Earlier movements, like Occupy Baluwatar in 2012, had already shown a growing demand for accountability.

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What set the Gen Z protests apart this time was their scale, speed, and coordination. Social media allowed participants to act quickly, share information widely, and organize without formal leadership.

2.2.   Generation Z as Project Managers

Generation Z includes those born between 1997 and 2012. They are the first generation to grow up entirely online. From an early age, they have lived with the internet, smartphones, social media, and on-demand content. Using digital tools and interacting online comes naturally to them. Experts describe them as the first true digital-native generation, for whom smartphones and social media have always been present (Ita, 2025). They are tech-savvy, politically aware, and purpose-driven (Picagli, 2025), valuing flexibility, fast access to information, and constant social connection. Many in Gen Z work in the gig or creator economy. They freelance, create content, and earn money through online platforms. This shows they are comfortable working on their own and taking initiative.

Communication, for them, is immediate, global, and participatory. They stay connected constantly and use digital tools to share information, coordinate tasks, and engage with others around the world. Digital platforms are not just tools but primary workspaces. Immediacy is expected: rapid responses are the norm, silence signals disengagement, and feedback loops are tight. Trust functions laterally rather than hierarchically. Having grown up amid both reliable information and misinformation, they rely on peer networks to validate sources. This approach makes them adaptable but also leaves them open to rumors or manipulation.

In work settings, Gen Z values clarity and transparency. They prefer breaking large goals into smaller tasks that can be shared among team members. This method fits with agile project management, which focuses on iteration, adaptability, and distributing responsibility across the team. While often seen as reluctant multitaskers, they manage multiple streams effectively when roles and outputs are clearly defined. Leadership for them is participatory and authentic. Influence comes from contribution, not position, and they respond best to leaders who guide without imposing control. Flat structures appeal to them, as does consistent recognition, whether through digital validation or organizational acknowledgment.

Together, these traits reflect modern project management principles. Their reliance on digital platforms reflects the rise of virtual teams and distributed work. Their preference for authentic, service-oriented leadership parallels servant-leadership models. Their expectation of immediate communication reflects the demand for continuous stakeholder engagement. In this sense, Gen Z is already practicing modern project management in everyday life. Their actions show how the field is shifting from formal discipline to a lived practice embedded in social, professional, and civic spaces.

3.   The Gen Z Protests in Nepal: A Project Lifecycle

Nepal's Gen Z uprising can be analyzed as a short-lifecycle project, executed in distinct but overlapping phases: initiation, planning, and execution.

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3.1. Initiation Phase

The movement started online with the viral "Nepo Kid" campaign, which poked fun at the lavish lifestyles of politicians' children. The memes spread through TikTok, Instagram, and Reddit. They showed a sharp contrast between privilege and the struggles of ordinary Nepalis, many of whom work abroad to support their families.

The campaign functioned like a decentralized charter. It defined a clear purpose, challenging corruption and demanding the social media ban be lifted. Humor, satire, and viral content defined the scope. Hashtags guided thousands of participants in a self-organizing network. Peer validation allowed rapid alignment, showing how Gen Z initiates and manages complex social projects instinctively.

3.2. Planning Phase

Within a day of the ban, protesters came together around two clear demands: repealing the ban and holding political leaders accountable. All the planning happened online, using platforms like Instagram, Discord, and other digital channels. Task lists like "bring water," "carry masks," "assemble at *Maitighar Mandala*" were circulated, and visual instructions encouraged school uniforms and books, sending a clear non-verbal message.

Platform	Role
Instagram	Public messaging, protest guides, awareness campaigns; visual storytelling to engage participants and the wider public
Discord	Core coordination hub; secure channels for organizers; real-time messaging among key participants
TikTok	Viral storytelling, trending hashtags, content shares; amplifying protest narratives
Viber / WeTalk / Nimbuzz	Peer-to-peer coordination, group messaging; ad hoc instructions, micro-task distribution

Key digital platforms used during the Gen Z protests

These platforms acted as real-time planning and coordination tools. The speed, transparency, and flexibility allowed the movement to mobilize thousands within hours.

3.3. Execution Phase

The execution phase resembled a high-performance organization built on trust, shared purpose, distributed leadership, and adaptability. Trust emerged through peer validation on Instagram and Discord, replacing formal charters. Leadership was shared, with squads choosing their own roles in logistics, communications, and reconnaissance. Communication channels helped coordinate assembly points, stagger arrivals, and assign small tasks. Logistics squads managed water, masks, and first aid. Communications squads managed live streaming, social media, and digital content, and recon squads monitored crowd movement and police presence. Multiple nodes acted autonomously but stayed aligned with shared objectives.

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Demonstrators gathered near Nepal's Parliament during a protest in Kathmandu on September 8, 2025 (Source: Getty Images)

Digital platforms worked like agile backlogs: tasks were reprioritized through pinned messages, memes, and posts. Hashtags validated scope, feedback refined objectives and tested ideas. Iteration and feedback were constant. When police blocked streets, squads dispersed and regrouped, adjusting routes, timing, and messaging like agile stand-ups. Peer-to-peer recruitment and viral content scaled participation from hundreds to tens of thousands. A Discord server called "Youth Against Corruption" acted as a virtual parliament. At its peak, it reportedly hosted over 100,000 members, enabling thousands to propose actions and report local conditions in real time.

The movement functioned as distributed agile execution: digital platforms served as a central nervous system, autonomous squads operated as cross-functional teams, and success was measured by value-driven outcomes: high participation, widespread public attention, and tangible impact on government accountability.

3.4. Risk Management

The protests showed both strengths and weaknesses of emergent risk management. Tech-savvy volunteers acted as informal "risk officers," circulating VPN tutorials and safety guides. These ad hoc measures functioned as reactive, emergent risk registers, allowing the movement to adapt rapidly to the government's social media ban, which saw VPN usage reportedly spike by 8,000%.

However, the protests also revealed structural vulnerabilities. On September 9, widespread destruction of government buildings including the historic *Singha Durbar*, Parliament, and the Supreme Court were reported, with Gen Z participants noting the disruption was caused by external interference. Adaptive strategies helped reduce risks

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in operations and communication. But the networks were spread out and lacked formal ways to anticipate or handle serious security threats.

This shows an important point. Projects that grow organically and rely on decentralized decision-making move quickly and adapt well. But without structured risk management, they remain exposed to high-impact threats. They can achieve results, but major setbacks are always possible.

3.5. Results and Setbacks

The uprising delivered immediate results. The social media ban was lifted within 24 hours. Several ministers resigned. Parliament was dissolved, and the first woman prime minister was appointed on an interim basis. These results were clear and tangible. They show that even without formal leadership, organized groups can achieve results under extreme conditions.

But the protests also revealed their limits. Several young protesters lost their lives, and key institutions were destroyed. Police reports list 72 deaths and nearly 1,400 injuries. Gen Z showed skill in adaptive planning, fast mobilization, and execution. But the events also revealed a critical gap: they could not manage high-stakes risks.

For project managers, this highlights the dual nature of decentralized action: strategic wins paired with uncontrolled damage. Managing emerging risks remains essential, even when teams are highly adaptive.

4. Implications for Project Management

The Gen Z protests show how digital-native movements are transforming project management. Lessons extend beyond social activism, showing how projects can be rapidly mobilized and hyper-connected.

Youth-driven initiatives in South Asia resemble professional projects. Digitally connected participants can launch, scale, and execute complex efforts without formal organizations.

The implications are clear. Future projects will include people who grew up with digital tools, prefer flat structures, and work for purpose rather than rank. The events in Nepal show that the next generation of project leaders is already managing instinctively. They navigate uncertain situations using digital skills and flexible leadership.

The Gen Z protests confirm that activism in South Asia is taking the form of projectized initiatives, defined by limited timeframes, clear goals, and coordinated use of resources. Grassroots actors carried out efforts that matched or even exceeded corporate projects in speed, coordination, and impact. They did this without formal budgets, hierarchies, or traditional teams. More broadly, their work shows that projects can form naturally, grow quickly, and produce real results without centralized planning. This challenges the idea that complex initiatives always need formal structures.

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5. Lessons from Kathmandu

Traditional governance and PMOs often struggle with decentralized projects. Rigid oversight does not work well. Engagement through shared purpose works better, at least until risks go unmanaged. In unstable situations, governance must move from control to influence. The focus should be on alignment and adaptability instead of top-down command. This means connecting with independent actors who share goals, creating flexible policies and backup plans for risks like hijacked events or sudden escalation, and motivating people through purpose rather than authority.

The protests also offer lessons for project managers working with distributed, digitally native teams. Skills need to go beyond following processes. Managers should focus on agility, purpose-driven leadership, and comfort with digital tools. Transparency and participation matter more than formal authority. Plans should adjust in real time based on feedback and changing conditions. Continuous updates, rapid responses, and recognition are critical to keep momentum. Breaking work into micro-tasks allows people to act independently, while platforms serve as central hubs for coordination, scope, and risk management. Influence now comes through digital networks, storytellers, and independent participants. Mobilizing people with ethical goals and social impact is more effective than relying on traditional authority.

6. Conclusion

Generation Z is emerging as the next generation of project managers. Today, projects take shape in digital networks, where speed, purpose, and participation change how work gets done. Work is no longer limited to offices. It is visible in the streets, where digital natives coordinate tactics, build governance on the fly, and carry out complex initiatives with focus and agility.

The protests showed this clearly. They created a short-term, adaptive social project that was purpose-driven, digitally coordinated, and self-organized. It operated without formal leadership, using flat structures, iterative actions, and wide participation. The results were tangible. At the same time, the approach showed weaknesses, including major risks and damage to institutions, highlighting the limits of decentralized governance without structure.

The future of projects will require balancing agility with sustainability. Innovation needs to be supported by solid management practices. Success will rely on shared goals, the ability to pivot in unpredictable situations, and platforms that allow real-time coordination and risk management. Agile execution should work together with adaptive oversight. The goal is not to control Gen Z with rigid rules but to combine their strengths with structured governance.

7. AI Use Declaration

In preparing this report, AI tools were used only to make the language clearer and easier to read. All content was written, reviewed, and edited under human oversight. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work.

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Yamanta Raj Niroula is an accomplished Project Management Professional with more than 17 years of rich experience in engineering, infrastructure development, and project management across a variety of global settings. His skill set includes project planning, procurement, contract management, stakeholder engagement, and risk management, all with a particular emphasis on delivering projects in remote and developing areas under challenging conditions.

Yamanta holds a Bachelor of Engineering in Civil Engineering and a Master of Arts in Rural Development, along with a Diploma in Civil Engineering. He has been a certified Project Management Professional (PMP®) and an active member of the Project Management Institute (PMI) since 2010.

Yamanta has extensive experience in overseeing construction projects from the initial planning stages to final evaluations, Yamanta specializes in the management of complex processes such as procurement, contracting, and project execution while ensuring efficiency and compliance with regulations. By keeping abreast of industry trends and innovations, he ensures that the projects he manages are sustainable, forward-looking, and adaptable to the ever-changing environment.

Yamanta has successfully managed large-scale infrastructure projects, including roads, electrical infrastructure, wastewater treatment plants, logistics facilities, and disaster recovery programs. He has served in various capacities as Project Controls Specialist, Design Manager, Planning Manager, Engineer and Project Manager across international organizations and UN agencies in Nepal, the Maldives, Singapore, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Nigeria, Yemen, Sudan, and Ethiopia.

He has been responsible for project design, planning, execution, and control, ensuring timely delivery, budget adherence, and quality assurance while enhancing overall program outputs.

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