

# The Future Project Management Professional





# 1 | Foreword

## Peter Hepworth



We live in a fast-moving world, in which change is the only constant. However, that doesn't mean that you can't prepare for change. 'The Future Project Management Professional' provides a platform to look to the future, identify emerging trends and their impact on the profession and ensure that project, programme and portfolio (PPM) managers have the skills, knowledge and abilities to support their organizations to remain competitive and successful in the future.

We conducted in-depth interviews and roundtables with project management professionals and surveyed our global community to create this report, and we thank them for their feedback and insights. Their contributions have helped us to identify future trends and what they mean for project management professionals in the future.

What is encouraging is the level of optimism about the future. Project management will continue to transform and grow as a necessary business skill, giving project managers an opportunity to add value at a strategic level. To do this project management professionals will need to broaden their strategy, change management, risk management and agile skills to help businesses realize their organizational goals. We have seen first-hand, through the PRINCE2 Membership offering, that there is a demand from project managers to get access to supplementary content and resources to help them develop these skills for the future.

The findings of our research provide some fascinating insights for the future of the profession, and we're keen to explore these further with the best practice community.

**Peter Hepworth**  
**CEO, AXELOS**

# 2 | Executive summary

Projects are investments that organizations make to help them meet their strategic goals, and project managers play a key role in delivering these investments. To continue to add value, project managers need to continue to meet current organizational needs while also anticipating future demands. This report identifies the key trends that will most impact the project, programme and portfolio management profession, as well as the technical and interpersonal skills that will be required.

Project managers are optimistic about the future, with their profession remaining true to its current core. However, project managers recognize that organizations will demand greater strategic vision and business awareness and as such will need to develop broader strategic skills to fulfil this need.

Project management will be used widely by individuals across the whole organization and will be seen as a valuable business skill. This democratization of project management will only enhance the value of project managers, setting them apart as professionals as they evolve their roles to be more strategic and effect change within the business

As artificial intelligence and machine learning increase their dominance across organizations, project managers will need to reinforce the importance of emotional intelligence. Automation brings many benefits but for projects to be successful you cannot discount the 'human factor'.

Sharing of practical experiences will be vital as the pace of change within business increases. Project managers will look to their peers to share experiences and insights so they can build a bank of knowledge to help them prepare for whatever eventuality comes their way.

Agile methodologies will dominate the delivery of projects within certain industries. However agile behaviours will need to be adopted by everyone. Project managers can only meet evolving business needs if their response to project delivery is fast-paced, flexible, and business-orientated.

The way in which project management training is delivered will need to evolve to meet the expectations of a new generation of project managers. There will be a rise in online, interactive, and gamified learning solutions but these will need to be balanced against organizational expectations of accreditation.

Overall, these trends point to the growing influence that project managers will have on businesses in the future. To maximize these opportunities, project managers need to invest in their own professional development so that they gain the skills required for a successful future.

# 3 | The strategic project manager

In the future, project managers will become more involved in the business at a strategic level. They will be responsible for identifying which projects to progress and that they align with business goals. Projects without strategic importance will be dropped for projects that serve the organization's objectives.

By extension, project managers will be required to take a more holistic approach and extend their focus from outputs to include outcomes. This change of emphasis recognizes the fact that a project does not end when it is delivered, but only once the business benefits of the project have been realized. This will mean that some project managers will become as responsible for outcomes as any senior stakeholders.

Consequently, project managers will need to broaden their range of competencies to include business and strategic skills such as business analysis, change management, organizational diplomacy, influencing and relationship building.

“ **Strategic vision is primary. Projects are investments that a business makes to achieve its strategy, so you are not delivering to a project; you're delivering to an investment** ”

A 'golden thread' should run through everything, to give a line of sight from projects to the organization's objective

Projects don't finish with the output, but actually when the business benefits are realized – that's why PMs need to ensure their projects link to the business strategy

Five years ago, PMs weren't really involved in strategy but now they are involved in every stage of the road mapping.

**90%**  
of project managers agree that they need a much stronger strategic vision that aligns with the goals of the business.

**90%**  
agree new technologies will generate risks that will need to be managed.

**75%**  
agree that increased regulation and compliance will generate more projects.



# 4 | Project managers as agents of change

Over the coming years, we will see a democratization of project management skills as more individuals across the business start to take a project-based approach to achieve their objectives. As such project management will be recognized across the organization as a valuable business skill.

However, there will still be a distinction between people whose role is project management and those who utilize project management skills as an ancillary skill set. Practising project managers will embrace a broader remit that deeply affects change in their business. As the pace of business change increases project managers will be responsible not only for managing the project but also for managing the internal and external change brought about as a result of the project, to ensure that the business benefits are realized.

“ PMs are change agents (now), and need to be able to influence others, to effect change. They need to challenge, and it’s these wider skills that differentiate them as professionals ”

It will no longer be project management, it will be all about fast-paced change management

Training of PMs used to be all about outputs, but it will become all about outcomes

There needs to be a more blended approach to developing skillsets; it does not have to be linear. PPMs need to flex to accommodate business needs

There is a capability gap in project management and change management – PMs need to be more well-rounded

In five years, PMs will need to be business managers

**90%**  
of project managers believe ongoing training will be vital to keeping up with the pace of change.

**72%**  
see project management becoming a respected career choice.

**76%**  
believe project management will become a basic business skill.

**72%**  
believe project management will become more professional

# 5 | The importance of the 'human factor'

Increasingly, automation will impact on all professions, and project management is no exception. However, most project managers see this as a positive change. Automation may make certain tasks easier but, ultimately, emotional intelligence and soft skills such as communication, diplomacy and relationship building will be vital for the delivery of successful projects. The ability to work with people will become as important as technical project management skills.

“ Automated processes will make things easier – and leave PMs free to make a difference from a human perspective ”

Diplomacy is a key skill for PMs!

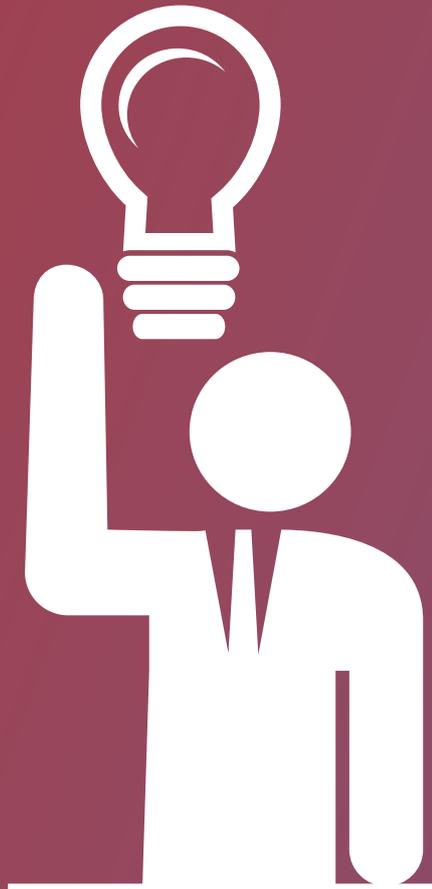
You need the emotional intelligence to know when something is not working and be able to say that, instead of just going ahead

It's not about tools, methodologies, or frameworks any more – it's about business change, and how to do it on a human level

There needs to be more focus on the softer skills and how to develop these

**59%**  
of project managers believe automation will take over routine tasks.

**57%**  
believe artificial intelligence and machine learning will have a profound impact on project management



# 6 | Project management in practice

Although the basics of project management can be learned on courses and through the certification process, it is important that this groundwork is fleshed-out with real world experience. Ever-increasing change means that the knowledge gleaned through practical experience will be essential in tailoring a project to the idiosyncrasies of real life.

Project managers will continue to swap their experiences with each other in order to build up their personal store of techniques, which will help them to prepare for whatever eventuality comes their way.

**“ Project management is seen as a good way to gain practical experience across all functions of the business, building detailed organizational awareness, and offering a route to senior management. ”**

It would be good to see training content with more practical elements, and trends that link to the industry.

I'd like to see peer-to-peer discussion forums, that are sector-specific, and let you share real-life experiences

At conferences, we share our own practical case study experiences, and the uptake is huge, but you don't see it from the PM providers



# 7 | All about Agile

The last few years have seen a huge increase in the adoption of Agile methodologies, and the rate of adoption is set to increase. Organizations are taking an increasingly agile approach to how they plan their business, which will filter down to project management. Working in an agile way will allow project managers to meet evolving business needs by ensuring their response to project delivery is fast-paced, flexible, and business-oriented. Real time information is increasingly important and calendar-based business reporting is becoming redundant. Agile allows for continual improvement once a product or service has launched, which means the initial release does not need to be perfect. This will reduce pressure on the launch, which will speed up development.

“ The pace of change in business today means you have to adapt and be more strategic – the world doesn’t stand still when the PIDs are signed off. PMs need to keep reacting ”

Agile will become more relevant because we need to be more responsive. The traditional model of annualized business planning is disappearing to deal with the rapidly changing external environment

The technology means we cannot afford to be so risk averse anymore

The quest for perfect results will change to the quest for faster and more flexible results. There is no time any more. 80% is good enough

When we moved to Agile, we re-named all our PMs, and called them Transition Managers instead, as it better describes what they do

Agile is becoming better known

In product development, the faster you can give the client something tangible to assess, the better; then loop round again to iron out the wrinkles. There is a demand for a much faster feedback loop

89% of project managers agree on the need for more creativity and flexibility in project management

84% agree that agile will grow in importance.



# 8 | Evolution of learning styles

There is a consensus that future project managers will learn in very different ways to their counterparts in the past. Online learning, the use of MOOCs, and gamified learning platforms will increase. Generational differences are already evident in the workplace.

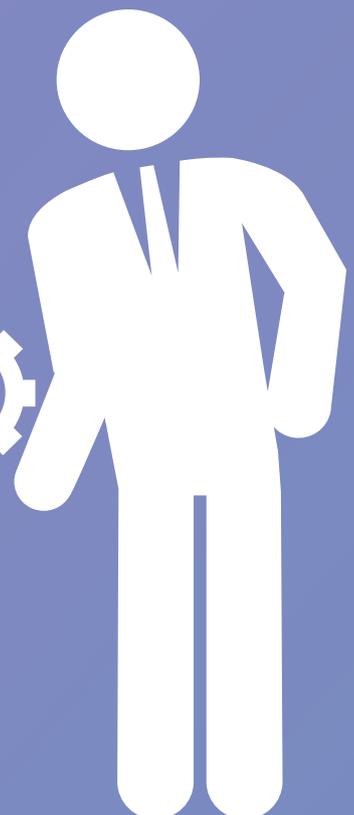
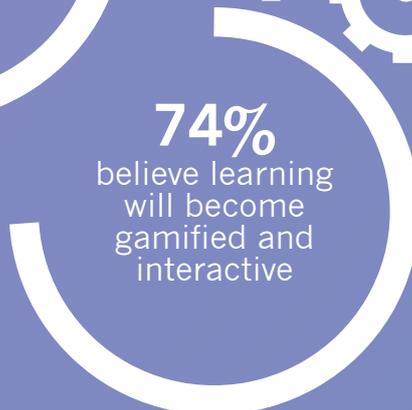
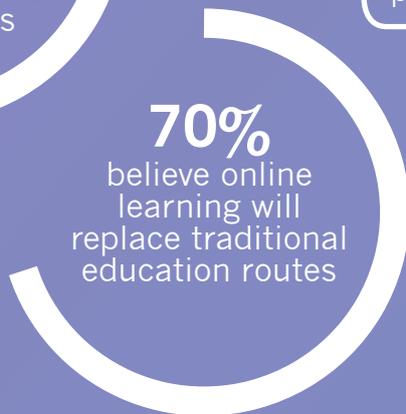
The way in which training is delivered will evolve based on an organization's appetite to invest. Current training solutions provide an efficient and effective way of delivering large amounts of information and we should not dismiss the value of face-to-face learning interactions as a way of building and sharing knowledge. Existing project managers play an important role in guiding organizations to find the right balance of theoretical and practical experience to meet the needs of future project managers.

**“ PRINCE2 is the foundation, then you need a masterclass in people – you have to have people skills to drive a project forward ”**

Training also needs to focus on the human factor and having the wider business skills to manage change.

PPM is now about business analysis at the front end, and business analysis at the back end, and training needs to reflect this

A methodology can't teach you to (manage change) in isolation of people skills



# 9 | Conclusions

The trends that have been identified in this report highlight the growing strategic importance that project managers will play in the future success of their organizations. Their ability to adapt to and effect change will set them apart and position project management as a respected profession. However, to realize these benefits project managers will need to start developing strategic skills and capabilities including business analysis, change management, organizational diplomacy, influencing and relationship building.

Agile methodologies and working practices will continue to influence the project management profession as the business looks to take advantage of technological innovations, and as such project managers need to be able to demonstrate both flexibility and creativity. However, project managers need to balance this with the risks that are

associated with new technologies and advise the business on how best to manage them.

The project management community will need to come together to share best practices and practical experiences to build a global knowledge pool that can be tapped into to support multiple project scenarios. Technology will enable the way in which this knowledge is developed and shared, influenced by a new generation of project managers; however, the fundamentals of project management will continue to be as relevant in the future as they are today.

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# Methodology

## **Quantitative methodology:**

AXELOS conducted a quantitative survey amongst a cross section of its current database members. This provided a robust sample of professionals, the majority who have been in the industry a long time. All answered a 20-minute online survey, with fieldwork conducted during August and September 2016. Questions were developed with the AXELOS teams, drawing on hypotheses, past research, and observed industry trends.

**Full responses were received from 172 PPM professionals.**

## **Qualitative methodology:**

After analysis of the quantitative research, AXELOS ran roundtable discussions with PPM professionals, to ask more probing questions, and to shed light on some of the numbers. This helped add context and richness to the quantitative work, and both sets of findings are woven together in this report. 15 PPM professionals attended the roundtable discussions. Telephone interviews were also conducted with 8 PPM professionals.

Our qualitative participants represented a cross section of PPM professionals:

- Portfolio Director, Visa
- Head of Business Delivery, Holiday Extras
- Business Transformation Manager, Coventry University
- Head of Programme Management, Arcus
- ACT Consultant Partners
- PMO Consultant, Chalk House
- Director, Capita
- Partner, RSM UK
- PMO Manager, Capita

# About AXELOS

AXELOS is a joint venture company, created in 2013 by the Cabinet Office on behalf of Her Majesty's Government (HMG) in the United Kingdom and Capita plc, to manage, develop and grow the Global Best Practice portfolio.

AXELOS is responsible for developing, enhancing and promoting a number of best practice methodologies used globally by professionals working primarily in project, programme and portfolio management, IT service management and cyber resilience.

The methodologies, including ITIL®, PRINCE2®, PRINCE2 AGILE®, MSP® and the new collection of cyber resilience best practice products, RESILIA™, are adopted by private, public and voluntary sectors in more than 150 countries to improve employees' skills, knowledge and competence in order to make both individuals and organizations work more effectively.

AXELOS is committed to nurturing best practice communities on a global scale. In addition to globally recognized qualifications, AXELOS equips professionals with a wide range of content, templates, toolkits and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) through our membership programme and online community of practitioners and experts.





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