



Strategy Execution's TOP 10 TRENDS FOR



TRENDS

Challenging project leaders to lead confidently in uncertain times

With the start of every new year, we again recognize that our business environment has expanded across geographic and organizational boundaries, and the project work that we engage in has only grown in complexity. As technology and the methods by which work gets done continue to evolve at an ever-increasing pace, our strategic projects face greater challenges while involving more stakeholders than ever before. The implications are vast: today's project leaders need to make faster decisions and think of new solutions to emerging problems.

They also must be able to see obstacles and opportunities through a new lens. This requires an adaptive mindset and skill set – capabilities that go beyond just the technical, tactical realm – to empower people to lead confidently in uncertain times.

This year's trends, developed by our team of learning, product, and project leadership experts, highlight reasons why adaptive skill sets are increasingly in demand, and why project leaders at all levels of organizations across different industries should work to develop these holistic capabilities.

01 DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES WILL CONTINUE THEIR TRAJECTORY

In years past, we've heard plenty about the Ubers and Amazons of the world that shake up their industries and cause ripple effects in the business world. But even as organizations and customers adapt to their current realities, it feels as though something new is always around the corner. Blockchain was the more recent trend to generate buzz, but will it have staying power? The fact is, even though they're difficult to predict, disruptive technologies are here to stay. More important than being able to assess what the future holds is ensuring your leaders are equipped to react appropriately and adapt to whatever may come. According to a recent Accenture report, while 93% of executives say they know their industry will be disrupted at some point in the next five years, only 20% feel they are highly prepared to address it.¹ Adaptive mindsets and skill sets will help those who drive disruptive technologies as well as those who are impacted by them stay ahead of the game by embracing imminent change and reacting more quickly to it.

02 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND BIG DATA ARE PERMEATING PROJECT-BASED WORK

As the inevitability of increased automation and robots looms large and humans wonder about their future in the labor force, it's essential that we evaluate and analyze how artificial intelligence (AI) and big data have and will continue to affect project-based organizations and their leaders. Rather than seeing these developments as a threat, it's more important to identify how humans can continue to create value that machines and data will never be able to replicate. Developing leaders today with holistic and adaptive skill sets beyond what robots can do will be the key for companies to adapt to what's ahead. The "human element" – that is, competencies that require emotional and cognitive skills, such as influencing without authority or building effective teams, will become increasingly important as the need for button-pushing and other manual tasks will decline. Being able to see beyond big data for big data's sake – and effectively curate, interpret, and extract actionable, practical insight and better decision-making from it – will set organizations apart from their competition. Companies that are slow to adapt to these shifting skill demands will fall behind.

03 VENDOR MANAGEMENT AND OUTSOURCING IS GROWING

Across all functions of the business world – from the private and the government sectors to marketing, payroll, and web development – the use of vendors and outsourcing is on the rise. Analysts forecast the global IT outsourcing market to grow at an annual rate of 4.42% between 2018 and 2022.² The challenge for project-based workers overseeing outsourced work is having the right technical skills to manage the sourcing life cycle from start to finish, while also being able to have the adaptive and relational skills to maintain various vendor relationships. Further, having freelancers and various vendors working together on the same or overlapping projects introduces another challenge of aligning the cultures across these diverse stakeholders. Getting your vendors to think adaptively and approach problems in new ways will go a long way in driving a successful partnership with a strong culture of communication and collaboration.

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04

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT MATURING WITHIN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

In 2016, the federal government signed the Program Management Improvement Accountability Act (PMIAA) into law. Last year, the Office of Management and Budget further outlined the implementation plan for PMIAA and the overall strategy for improving federal projects and programs (P/PM). One of the desired outcomes of this legislation is to formalize the program management profession in the federal government and to provide a more transparent and attractive route for employment, growth, and professional development of program management professionals. The Program Management Improvement Officers (PMIO) for the large civilian agencies have been appointed and held their first meeting in September 2018 to set goals and discuss ways that the agencies can improve the success of their programs. With a concerted effort and mandated priority to implement a standards-based approach to program management in the government space, we can expect to see continued emphasis on the need for training surrounding federal project leaders and as a result, strategic government initiatives may see improved results.

05

PROJECT TEAMS ARE MIGRATING TO SHARED PLATFORMS

We're witnessing the rise of shared platforms and other technology – Skype for Business, Slack, or Microsoft Teams, for example – to allow teams to track project work and milestones in a transparent and collaborative way. Microsoft announced recently that nearly 330,000 organizations worldwide use their Teams app – up from 125,000 only a year prior.³ The age of sending email documents back and forth is on the decline; many project-centered organizations are turning to information repositories to manage their work. Consider how many projects you work on whose stakeholders include people outside of your department, your organization, and even your time zone. When teams are increasingly dispersed, enabling communication and information sharing in a unified way is critical to organizing project work. Teams must be adaptive enough to learn these new technologies and also juggle priorities and milestones across multiple, cross-functional projects.

06

AGILE RISES FROM THE TECH STORE TO THE TOP FLOOR

While once reserved for IT and back-office operations, Agile is now rising to the top of organizations. As the C-suite tries to collaborate while functionally leading, an increasing challenge is how they can organize management beyond their expertise. One way for them to do this is by embracing an Agile mindset. A recent survey by Deloitte showed that more than 90% of senior executives give high priority to becoming agile.⁴ Leaders at the highest levels have begun to recognize that implementing Agile across the business allows an organization and its people to adapt and change quickly. This does not necessarily mean that the C-suite is using Scrum or Kanban in their day-to-day work, but rather that executives understand that the need to turn on a dime and react quickly may be more important than turning out a finished, perfect product. This is also influencing how strategies are devised: no longer static and in a vacuum, they are developed in a more agile way that allows for pivots in response to external changes.

07

MANAGING CHANGES IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Enterprise-wide change management has taken on new relevance and importance, but not necessarily in the way we could have expected. We've seen many organizations hire specifically for change management roles, and some even establish specific change management departments. With the prevalence and frequency of change, we're now also seeing a decentralization of change management officers and a shift to spread this skill set across the business. Managing change is a skill set that can no longer be contained in one department. That is, project and program managers, and increasingly, employees at all levels of the business, are expected to be change leaders and change agents. Getting more people involved – rather than a small group of players – goes a long way in establishing a collaborative culture that will buy into and commit to the company's vision for change.⁵ Increasingly, organizations are seeking out those who can best adapt to constant changes and communicate them up, down, diagonally, across, and outside the organization. Having a mindset and skill set that supports this type of leadership and decision-making will further accelerate the success of enterprise-wide change management.

08

CURATED LEARNING ON THE RISE

As organizations grapple with constant updates in the marketplace and business environment, it's become even more important for their employees to keep up with new technologies, competition, and the socio-political landscape. People are having to cope with learning more while still doing their day-to-day jobs. As a result, organizations will increasingly rely on platforms or vendors to curate the learning experience for their employees. On-the-job learning won't happen in the traditional way, with manuals and plug-and-play courses. Working professionals today are confronted with enough chaos in their work, so when it comes to learning and professional development, curated learning will be an asset rather than an added stress. Project leaders will see an increase of blended and flexible learning on demand – modern approaches that allow them to understand their external context, how it affects their day-to-day jobs, and immediately apply learnings to their work. Organizations will also seek out content that is relevant, applicable, and blends technical know-how with new concepts, such as adaptive leadership, influence, design thinking, and complex decision-making.

09

PROJECT MANAGEMENT BOOMING IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

The population of project management-related roles – currently 65.9 million globally – is expected to grow 20% over the next eight years, with the main growth being in India and China. China specifically will make up over 50% of the global market opportunity over the next five years.⁶ As a result of this growth, we expect to see continued demand and need for project management capabilities to support these global changes. While we believe that traditional project management skills should be complemented by adaptive leadership approaches, in countries where there is still significant growth potential, it's essential to build a solid foundation backed with technical rigor. Only when the technical groundwork is laid can organizations then introduce more adaptive and Agile approaches in tandem with project management.

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SUPPLY CHAIN MOUNTING IN COMPLEXITY

No matter what products you're selling, customer needs and expectations today have changed drastically. The supply chain of yesterday is no longer what it needs to be tomorrow. Customers expect new products to arrive faster, perform better, cost less than they used to, and be easily exchanged. These increased demands have put pressure on supply chain management to run smoothly and efficiently. Further, where top-down leadership intersects with those actually delivering and returning the products, more adaptability and improved communication is essential. In order to bridge this gap while also continuing to meet customer expectations, the most successful organizations will need to combine traditional project management approaches with adaptive leadership to effectively navigate where the supply chain intersects the overall business strategy, the project work, and the people getting the work done.

CONCLUSION

In the coming years, everyone involved in project-based work will feel the impact of a changing global environment, new technology, and growing project complexity. It's impossible to have all of the answers or to be able to predict what the future holds. The best we can do is to prepare ourselves to react quickly and change course if necessary. By developing an adaptive mindset and skill set, we can empower ourselves and our organizations to make better, faster decisions and approach everyday and new problems with a renewed perspective.

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