

AI in Project Management

The Art of the Possible: Future PMO Technologies

Global Project Management experts Dr. Saadi Adra, Dr. Mazin Gadir and Dr. Ahmad Salih explore the future of PM tech whilst dissecting AI and evolving applications. Learn about the importance of upskilling and the synergy of human expertise with AI's transformative capabilities.



Introduction

In exploring the landscape of technology in project management, the conversation delved into the evolution from Excel sheets to advanced PPM tools, drawing insights from Dr. Saadi's many years' experience. He emphasized the exhaustion of current tools and the need for exploration into the next frontier. Dr. Mazin provided further context by linking technology adoption to organizational maturity, stressing the prevalence of basic tools in less mature organizations and the importance of innovation.



Dr. Saadi Adra is the winner of the Global PMO Influencer 2022 Award and PMI Snyder Award Winner 2016. He has been helping organizations in strategy implementation, governance, managing Benefits, portfolio management, and integration. APMG Accredited Managing Benefits and Strategy Implementation.



Dr. Mazin Gadir is director at IQVIA Payer Provider Government Management Consultancy, brings over 19 years of healthcare and innovation expertise. Advising the Dubai Health Authority, he holds a PhD in Quantum Electronics and Nanotechnology Innovation, an MSc in Management, and a BEng in Electronics and Electrical Engineering.



Dr. Ahmad Salih is Senior Director of Knowledge Management and Operational Excellence at Khatib & Alami. He established a PMO for the company in 2006 and led it for 8 years. He also teaches digital leadership and digital business strategy at Swarth University and is the co-author of a published book "Cultural Spaces in International Business Theories and Applications".

Dr. Ahmad contributed a futuristic perspective, envisioning blockchain's role in contract administration for complex projects and anticipating its widespread adoption. The trio collectively advocated for continuous exploration, with Dr. Saadi's emphasis on the crucial question of "what next." This analysis underscores the role of innovation, sector-specific maturity, and the anticipation of emerging tools in shaping the future of project management.

Challenges and Opportunities

Insights from Dr. Saadi intertwined project management maturity with technology adoption, spotlighting sector-specific nuances. He stated pioneering sectors like Aviation and Defence underscore the challenge of global project success amid diverse technological foundations. Whilst Dr. Ahmad delved into the construction industry's intricacies, unveiling cultural resistance to tech advancements, particularly among contractors. He shifted the focus from technology to human-centric challenges, noting governance and political intricacies as significant hurdles.

Dr. Mazin expanded on mega projects' complexities, especially in Healthcare, acknowledging technological strides but emphasizing persistent manual burdens. The discourse underscored the need for technology to address intricate aspects like stakeholder engagement and mental health. The conversation touched on AI chatbots, with insights from Dr. Ahmad about their internal AI chatbot. However, collective scepticism prevailed regarding the ongoing quest for AI technologies possessing the intelligence and adaptability needed for evolving project management demands.

Generative AI & Human Intervention

Advancements in technology signal a shift from high human involvement to adaptive systems, notably in the emergence of Chatbots and Chat GPTs. Dr. Saadi stressed technology's inevitability, urging a focus on AI ethics. Dr. Ahmad also highlighted the importance of unbiased data, expressing concerns about potential bias. Despite these, the experts emphasized the need for digital dexterity in organizations, allowing flexible technology adoption.

Transitioning to Generative AI, the conversation probed its transformative potential, considering the possibility of replacing 80% of PM roles by 2026. The conversation delved into task categorization, envisioning automation of basic tasks while preserving complex decision-making as a human domain. The dialogue grappled with the intricate balance between AI efficiency gains and ethical challenges in project management.

Dr. Ahmad underscored machines' potential for handling tedious tasks while emphasizing human decision-making's enduring importance. Dr. Mazin highlighted the swift progress of AI tools, showcasing how technology can relieve the burden of manual work.

“**Technology can alleviate manual work burdens**”

He suggested machines might soon evolve in creating business cases. The panel did stress the irreplaceable role of human input, emotional intelligence, and relationship-building in crafting impactful strategies.

They promoted a collaborative approach, positioning AI as a tool to fuel discussions, not replace human decision-making. Indeed Dr. Saadi questioned AI's readiness for an ideation-driven process of business case creation, emphasizing the human-centric nature and the irreplaceable role of discovery and interaction.

“**AI is not ready to undertake the human centric ideation driven process of business case creation**”

Evolving Practical Applications

The consensus among the experts underscored AI's potential for task automation but acknowledged the complexity of certain project management processes demanding human involvement and strategic decision-making. While recognizing the significance of large dataset analysis in leveraging AI, particularly in data analytics and risk analysis, reservations surface about AI's maturity. Dr. Saadi pointed to existing organizational silos hampering communication, and the panel advocated advanced capabilities in estimation, improved processes, and centralized repositories.

The discussion extended to using AI for sharing lessons across projects and Dr. Saadi emphasized its significance in knowledge management. Dr. Ahmad noted ongoing AI implementation for dynamic team advice, while Dr. Mazin highlighted the cultural shift needed for effective knowledge sharing. Interestingly, the panel observes the PMI GenAI (Figure 1.0) chart's lack of prioritizing benefits analysis, prompting reflections on the current practices' detached nature and the imperative for AI to address this gap.

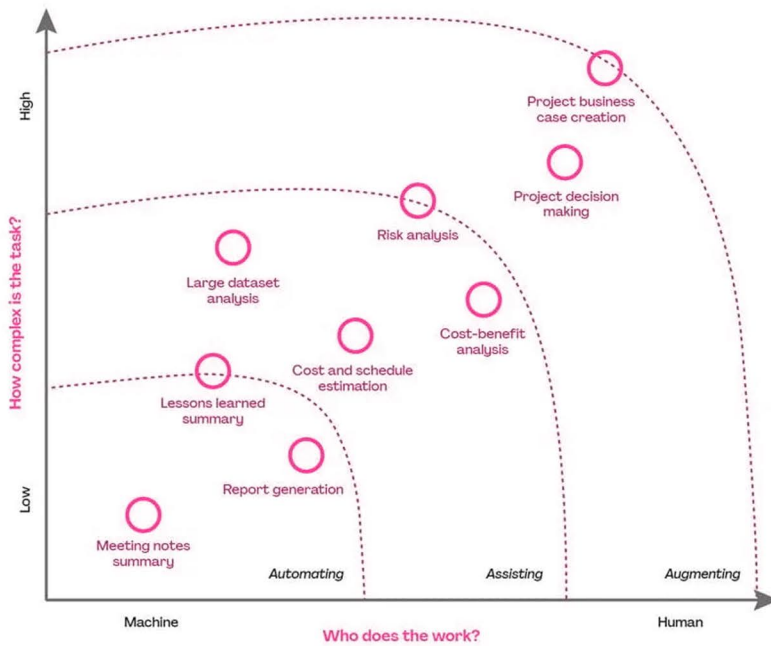


Figure 1.0: Level of support GenAI can provide for specific project tasks, mapped along the dimensions of task complexity and degree of human intervention (PMI, 2023)

Human Upskilling

The discussion further delved into obstacles like cultural resistance, executive mindset, and the urgent need for collaboration and innovation in navigating the evolving landscape of AI in project management. Dr. Mazin emphasized workforce upskilling, and the interpretation of AI outputs for actionable outcomes. He further stressed investing in data harvesting, stressing data cleansing for optimal results.

Shifting focus, Dr. Ahmad highlighted senior leadership's pivotal role in driving technology adoption, emphasizing the transition from data to knowledge and decision-making based on knowledge. Whilst Dr. Saadi added that executive unfamiliarity with big data can impede technological investments, advocating for a cultural shift and technology investments to foster integration and collaboration, addressing prevalent silo issues within organizations.

Human Expertise with AI

The panel uniformly emphasized the necessity for a comprehensive transformation spanning culture, organization, knowledge, governance, processes, and technology. Dr. Ahmad proposed bridging the industry-academia gap to mitigate resistance and enhance executive tech understanding. Dr. Mazin reiterated the significance of ethics, compliance, and sustainability in driving innovation, emphasizing collaboration, breaking silos, and integrating diverse teams. Dr. Saadi highlighted the importance of social skills, asserting project success relies on relationships and effective communication. Dr. Mazin echoed this, advocating for upskilling in emotional intelligence, leadership, and cultural awareness. Dr. Ahmad underlined the dynamic nature of project management, stating AI can't replace the crucial role of motivating project teams.



Figure 2.0: Different Types of Project Management Tools

Conclusion

The key message was the importance of integrating disruptive technologies like AI and Blockchain to enhance project management. However, the overarching theme revolved around recognizing AI as an enabler rather than a replacement, acknowledging the irreplaceable role of human skills in project management.

AI is an enabler rather than a replacement for humans

The panel urged a holistic approach, combining technological advancements with human-centric values for optimal project outcomes. Dr. Mazin advocated a strategic approach that leverages these tools for better stakeholder engagement and leadership buy-in. Dr. Ahmed encouraged embracing change for growth, while Dr. Saadi urged a realistic approach, emphasizing the need to address current project challenges before fully relying on technology.

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Lloyd has 25+ years programme management experience and leads the company's board and all major strategic initiatives. His working career started as a planner ahead of leading teams of planners, Project Offices and PMOs and as a Programme Manager has led full life-cycle, multi-year, major change and transformation projects with a value of £000ms.

greyfly.ai was founded when two LSE alumni reunited after 25 years. Historically greyfly.ai has delivered multi-million pound transformation projects and are approved government and BBC suppliers. Our mission is to apply AI in Project Management to reduce costs and improve project success. Our flagship product is the Intelligent Project Prediction (IPP) platform that uses AI to provide executive insights to increase project success. We offer a suite of complimentary tools to unlock knowledge within project data, provide predictions and Insights to enable guided interventions.

