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Green IT.  
Part-time team members.  
Retirement revised.  
What lies ahead for  
the project  
management profession?

With the uneven recovery among different countries, organizations with a flexible mindset will fare best when faced with the unexpected.



The daily demands of work keep project managers firmly grounded in the present. But visionaries must also keep an eye toward the future as they try to anticipate challenges and minimize risks. That's no easy task, considering the economic uncertainty that still looms in most corners of the world.

Although the recession shows signs of abating, the degree of economic uptick varies widely among regions. China's economy, for instance, should expand nearly 10 percent this year, according to a forecast by the International Monetary Fund. Meanwhile, annual economic growth for the European Union is estimated at 1.5 percent—and the United States isn't expected to fare much better, at 2.6 percent.

That economic backdrop sets the stage for what's next for the project management profession. With the uneven recovery among different countries, organizations with a flexible mindset will fare best when facing the unexpected. Within project management, that adaptability will manifest itself in a number of ways. For starters, project managers will have to adjust to new priorities for energy efficiency as organizations increasingly rely on sustainability to reduce costs and business risks. As work force demographics shift—including more part-time team members—project professionals will lean heavily on people skills that bolster effective collaboration.

It's all part of a nimble approach to project management that will play an even stronger role in giving businesses a competitive advantage.

Here's what some project managers predict will shape the future of the profession:

### GREEN BRANCHES OUT

The impetus to “go green” is nothing new, but now there's a greater sense of urgency to sustainability efforts.

That wasn't always the case. As recently as 2007, a survey from IBM and the Economist Intelligence Unit showed that most organizations had

sustainability goals, such as reducing carbon emissions, but often lacked a plan to follow through.

Today, though, businesses are increasingly implementing targeted sustainability programs to produce measurable ROI and meet corporate goals. In the coming years, such efforts will lead to bigger shifts in project management and delve deeper into other departments of an organization.

That includes IT operations. Sustainability is a new item on the CIO agenda and is becoming a business imperative, says Monica Nicolescu, PMP, Benelux network services business compliance and risk manager for IBM, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

With climate change looming as a major environmental and political issue, the European Union, for one, has established a directive to reduce carbon emissions by 20 percent (compared to 1990 levels) by 2020. In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued voluntary guidelines early last year for energy efficiency in data centers. The EPA's decision to provide efficiency metrics, tools and resources will shine a spotlight on data centers' need to benchmark energy performance.

Financial pressures are also prompting more IT departments to go green. According to the EPA, energy consumption by servers and data centers in the United States could reach more than 100 billion kilowatt-hours this year—a US\$7.4 billion electricity cost.

The need for increased energy efficiency is but one facet of the shifting priorities that will affect the project manager role. On the horizon, Ms. Nicolescu sees project management developing as a green competency model: “Besides the fact that all projects will likely include a sustainability indicator reported for the entire life cycle, project management will become a green core competency itself.”

Sustainability makes sense not only from a cost perspective but also as a way to reduce organizational risk, she

says. “Planning for energy efficiency and corporate responsibility with positive results go together,” Ms. Nicolescu says. “Energy consumption and environmental concerns are becoming priorities because they can impede the ability to grow and respond to organizational IT needs.”

Companies will likely address green IT projects at three levels: systems and technology, management systems and data centers. “This will give them the ability to accurately view the baseline energy cost and have cost savings. That will actually allow further growth, more computing performance per kilowatt and extended lifetime of IT facilities at an operational level—as well as meaningful energy conservation and reduced carbon footprint,” Ms. Nicolescu says.

## THE POWER OF PEOPLE SKILLS

In coming years, people skills will only become more valued, thanks, in part, to ever-shifting work force demographics.

“The workplace of 2020 is on track to be an unruly mix of traditionally minded workers, second- and third-career workers, and younger, more fluid workers,” says Julie Williamson, principal at North Highland, an international business efficiency consulting and technology firm in Denver, Colorado, USA.

Project managers need to understand the mechanics of the profession, but nothing will replace people skills, especially problem-solving, initiative and communication skills, attests Burton White, cofounder and partner at Excella Consulting, a business and IT consultancy in Arlington, Virginia, USA.

“For example, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* has all sorts of information about what should be in a communication plan and the effective elements,” he says. “A project manager will know what the important elements are, and that’s great. But if that person doesn’t have excellent communication skills, it really doesn’t matter what’s in that communication plan.”

Even the increasing popularity of agile methodologies is a driving force behind the growing importance of people skills. “Agile is coming onto the scene in greater force,” Mr. White says. “It’s meant to be adaptive and flexible, so people need to have stronger communication skills. With prior generations of methodologies, things were more prescriptive.”

As a result, project managers will have to become adept at creating and delivering plans that can leverage these diverse team members and stakeholders, rather than expecting them to conform to a particular process.

“Good interpersonal negotiation skills, strong facilitation and collaboration skills, and the ability to integrate different work products will be increasingly important skills for project managers to deliver exceptional results,” Ms. Williamson says.

Project managers can leverage their existing skills by emphasizing the ability to break down discrete tasks and assign them out to the most suitable resources, she notes.

That will, however, require some shifts in determining who is the most suitable.

“Project teams are much more interdisciplinary now, and going forward, that will require a higher level of skill to communicate with people who have different perspectives on things,” Mr. White says.

A highly connected, collaborative world—and the types of workers in that world—will challenge preconceived notions of what is important for quality delivery of projects.

“For the last 10 years, we’ve keyed on things like fastest path and rewarded project managers who get things done quickly—which for project managers often means finding the single best person for the job and leaning on him



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or her to get it done,” Ms. Williamson says.

Project plans need to change to accommodate more effective collaborations and some creative approaches to leverage contributors. You won't be able to rely upon full-time team members, as people's availability continues to be allocated out into smaller timeslots across more projects, she says. “Project managers will either need to develop exceptional facilitation skills or learn to build facilitation resources into their project plans. And they will still need to be able to deliver within compressed timelines.”

### PARTS OF THE WHOLE

When allotting resources, project professionals must be prepared for the continued rise of the part-time worker. The trend gained steam during the recession, as many employees the world over put retirement plans on hold and companies reduced their full-time staffs.

For experienced project managers, this could mean consulting on a part-time basis. Organizations can obtain real value in this phenomenon, as they can target contractors to address specific needs.

“There are stages of a project that sometimes require an increase in workload for a relatively short duration,” says David Lamontagne, principal at Stantec Consulting Services, a project management consultancy in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. “It's really difficult to find experienced talent that is available to work on a temporary or part-time basis,” he says.

Having access to talent for a six-month or one-year assignment is valuable, he says. He sees organizations bringing in experts who are big-picture thinkers during a project's initial phase—or detailed taskmasters toward the end of the cycle when things tend to get hectic.

In a business climate filled with younger workers, the addition of older, experienced team members—even on a part-time basis—allows the next gen-

eration of project managers to absorb their wisdom.

“One trend that has been noted by project management practitioners is the increasing concern over declining levels of experienced project managers as the ‘gray hairs’ retire and are replaced by entry-level project managers,” says Ignacio Inchausti, PMP, project manager of network engineering at Telstra, the telecom and IT giant in Melbourne, Australia. “Additionally, we are also seeing business school and university graduates armed with certificates and diplomas ready to strut the professional stage and embark on real-life experiences in project management. This new talent needs to find mentors and needs to learn from the war stories and campaigns of seasoned practitioners.”

Those who work on projects part-time, though, could have trouble keeping up with technology. “When you're working at a firm, you're always being introduced to new technology, either through your firm or other firms that you're working with,” Mr. Lamontagne says. “If you're freelancing, my guess is that you'll miss out on a lot of that.”

For example, construction projects managers must now be familiar with new software that shows all aspects of a building in 3-D, down to every last pipe and cable.

“With this new building information modeling, you do see the project management role potentially changing,” Mr. Lamontagne says. Part-time workers may have to put in extra effort to ensure they can keep up with their full-time counterparts on such technology.

The recession waters seem to be receding, exposing a changed—and changing—project management landscape. Though 2011 and beyond will no doubt bring a share of uncertainty, one thing is for certain: Only organizations and project professionals that adapt their strategies have a chance at emerging unscathed. *PM*