

Adaptive Execution of Strategy

It's the end of project management as we know it. Business today requires project professionals to think more strategically and move away from only using processes and procedures to get work done, and instead solve business problems by using adaptive skill sets. This concept of adaptive execution is permeating organisations across the globe and it's rooted in a mindset that leverages processes to help and not hinder progress. Organisations are intentionally moving away from being married to processes and instead viewing them as a tool for successful strategy execution.

Many are finding success by learning to improvise with familiar techniques, and allowing that knowledge to serve as the foundation for innovation. They're essentially learning how to operate more effectively because many leaders have come to realise that they can't just manage projects anymore. The healthiest organisations aren't afraid of active experimentation, but understand that in order to be successful in the world today, they must find a system that works for their particular product, circumstance, industry, and culture.

This transformation is breaking barriers between disciplines at all levels and creating flatter organisations. Business analysts and project managers are no longer working separately, but are collaborating to deploy strategic mindsets and leadership capabilities their cultures require of them. Change managers are becoming significantly more important to an organisation's ability to manage risk and innovate. Agile practices are spreading across departments and changing culture and the way projects are run. At the same time, the cross-pollination of disciplines and practices is introducing more non-project managers into the project management world.

TwentyEighty Strategy Execution put together a panel of experts to identify the top 10 project-based work trends for 2017, which further explore the transformation of traditional project management and highlight the emergence of the combined meta-practice of project management, business analysis, and strategy execution.

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1. The Birth of One Meta-Practice

The clear and solid lines that used to delineate project management, business analysis, and strategy execution are disappearing. Practitioners are applying best practices they need from each of these disciplines to get work done.

Organisations are less concerned about adhering to just one methodology like Agile or Waterfall, and are instead creating a blend that works for their products, culture, and strategy.

2. Digitalisation – A New Project Management Tribe

Adoption of mobile, cloud and data technology is driving the business process and impacting how companies run and get work done, and with that, a new tribe is emerging. Digital project managers are a group of project practitioners who are finding their path to delivering projects more quickly and efficiently than traditional corporate projects. The digital project management tribe is looking the other way when it comes to long-established project management best practices – opting instead to manage projects their way. Even Agile – the framework most closely associated to the software development world – is not on the digital project manager’s radar. Instead, this group is swapping and sharing their approaches to product management; supporting each other in the community; making their way by trial and error but having fun along the way. The digital project management tribe is finding its niche and if we need any evidence of emerging millennial project management, this is where we need to look.

3. Change Managers are Essential for Innovation

In the past, the change manager has been seen as a role that is a “nice to have” within programmes and projects – not a mandatory position. Yet the success of many projects relies heavily on how people and the wider organisation accept the change. That’s why smart organisations are investing in project management as a change management strategy. Change managers are no longer being sidestepped as organisations recognise that change needs to be handled formally. Change managers work to tie in the organisation’s appetite for change as it sets strategic direction; prioritizing how and what changes the organisation can withstand; and further maturing the programme and project level practices. The change managers of today are laying the foundation for the progress of tomorrow.

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4. The BA and PM Partnership Strengthens

The relationship between business analysts (BAs) and project managers (PMs) has sometimes been rocky – as each jostle for position as the clash in leadership roles and overlap in tasks and activities served as a big bone of contention. As adaptive strategy execution continues to evolve, the relationship between BAs and PMs will mature into a strong partnership that combines powerful best practices from each of the two disciplines to more effectively accomplish organisational strategy.

5. Renewed Focus on Benefits Management

Benefits management is the process of identifying, planning and realizing business benefits. It had lost its way when many in the programme and project management field couldn't agree on who was responsible for the realisation of the benefits and the techniques for benefits management were deemed to be too difficult to understand and implement. This year, there will be a renewed focus on benefits management as it reinvents itself as a simpler process and one not just reserved for business analysts. The Project Management Institute (PMI)[®] kicked off the revival in its PMO Symposium in November 2016 where its advice was simple: pick an anchor strategy – do benefits management with one and do it well. The call to action was, “just do it – adapt the benefits management process and take small and pragmatic steps.”

6. Project Management is for Everyone

Project management used to be a niche profession reserved for a small group of practitioners in distinct industries. Today, we're seeing the implementation of project leadership practices across careers from marketing to finance.

As more organisations realise that their strategies are executed through a series of projects, more professionals are seeing the value of acquiring PM skills. As more diverse professions are stepping into the PM world, traditional project managers continue to expand and bolster core strengths and identify advanced competency from the Project Management Institute (PMI)[®] Talent Triangle[™]: technical, leadership, and strategic business management.

Organisation leaders will focus on attracting, embedding, and retaining younger talent by investing in training programmes to upskill their workforce.

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7. Value is the Buzzword

Value in the PMO; value in the programmes and projects delivered; value in being more mature; value in prioritizing projects in the portfolio; and adding value to the organisation. The word value has slowly overtaken the word benefit in project management, yet it is not fully understood what value really means. This year, practitioners will have renewed focus on identifying and communicating the value they bring to their organisations. They will eliminate the trendy buzzwords, and really spell out the value – or return on investment – in real language that everyone understands across organisations.

The PMO will talk about the visibility and speediness of project status for more accurate senior executive decision making. The programmes and projects will include better business cases so the organisation can really understand if these programmes and projects will meet their strategic objectives. The organisation will commit to improving the maturity of its project delivery because it will enable better resource management and planning. The portfolio of programmes and projects will be prioritised to allow better use of resources or to meet the strategic objective more quickly. Now is the time for project management to become a straight-talking profession.

In order to successfully pivot while a project is underway, cross-functional teams are forced to increase their communication and reliance on each other.

8. Accountability through Coaching

With powerful behavioural coaching and mentoring in organisations leading to performance improvement and increased effectiveness of people, the project delivery organisations are getting switched onto coaching programmes to improve project performance. Within project management, less experienced project managers are gaining direction and support from the more experienced project professional – within a formal coaching relationship. Senior project managers are, more importantly, taking time out between project deliveries to dedicate time to a formal leadership and coaching role for more junior members of the organisation – a role that also brings new experiences and development for the senior practitioner. Coaching programmes include formal training for would-be coaches; assessment and matching of coaches/mentees; time availability and review periods.

9. Co-Location, Distributed Work and the Rise of Collaboration

Organisations are still trying to find the sweet spot between project teams conveniently co-located to make the most of Agile project management approaches and the more economically distributed and virtual working methods that many have pursued in outsourced, national or global project teams. With team collaboration cited as a must have for successful projects, organisations will spend more time focusing on how to bring teams closer together – more interconnected – through web and physical space use. There will be increased interest in collaboration tools – understanding how technology will support and enable teams to collaborate more easily and remove blockers in the organisation’s culture to promote more non-traditional collaborative working.

10. Agile is not just for IT

As Agile bursts through organisational silos and permeates departments beyond IT, it’s causing a destruction of barriers as well. Because Agile is a temperament as well as a discipline, it naturally creates a collaborative and innovative atmosphere. An active migration toward an Agile mindset means that project workers are learning to adjust while projects are in mid-flight, instead of planning the course ahead of time and sticking to the original route. In order to successfully pivot while a project is underway, cross-functional teams are forced to increase their communication and reliance on each other.

Consider all of these trends as indicators of a new way of doing business. The collaboration of best practices and blending of disciplines suggests that organisations are pushing toward the dismantling of a traditional project management world we used to know. While totally abandoning structure and succumbing to unwarranted self-organisation can leave some companies in total chaos and executives in a panic, leaders are grappling with the learning curve and educating themselves and their teams as they move into this new way of running projects. To effectively realise results, organisations must invest in training their doers to be thinkers and leaders, and incorporate a strategic mindset into their day-to-day work.

The PMI Talent Triangle is a mark of the Project Management Institute, Inc.

To learn more about these trends and what you can do to get ahead of them, contact an expert at

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