TOP 10 PROJECT MANAGEMENT TRENDS FOR 2014

ESI International's top 10 trends in project management highlight the need for leadership within projects, whether Agile or Waterfall. They also discuss the challenges associated with finding qualified PMs, and finding the right balance of PM approaches in this evolving industry. ESI International's top 10 trends in project management were identified by a global panel of ESI senior executives and subject matter experts.

1. **Agile expands in Singapore, Japan and Hong Kong.**
   IT project management professionals in Singapore, Japan and Hong Kong are aware of Agile but want to know more. There are pockets of practice but many are faced with internal resistance to such a radically different, yet compelling, model. Many practicing project managers and PMO heads are trying to thwart Agile implementation by describing it as yet another management fad. What the serious and interested players in these regions understand is that the keys to adoption are trying to obtain the necessary internal buy in from stakeholders, selecting the best project for an Agile pilot, and either establishing or modifying a Center of Excellence to support the Agile framework. Seems like they will not quit in the face of pockets of managerial resistance. They understand the benefits Agile can bring to an organization and they will do everything in their power to make this happen.

2. **Portfolio management continues to take center stage with PMI's new credential.**
   Do credentials follow practice or cause a practice to happen? Probably both. But with the Project Management Institute's (PMI)® new Portfolio Management Professional (PfMP)SM credential, we're bound to hear more about this important area in enterprise project management. Whether the credential actually takes off or not is immaterial; in an age when baby boomers are trying their best to retire, balance sheets remain flush with cash but spending by corporations remains exceptionally tight, and there are more projects than people to work on them, the ability to pick the most high-value projects has never been more important. Unlike a personal financial portfolio, where a reasonable investor expects certain investments to lag while others will gain, organizations expect all of their investments to pay off! Unrealistic? Yes, but that's the reality of the new portfolio management approach.

3. **Whether they like it or not, project managers are learning to learn through virtual learning.**
   In the "good old days" project managers went off to training by heading to the airport, booking hotel rooms, and attending live training classes in far-off cities. They liked the camaraderie, the intimacy of the classroom setting, and racking up those frequent flyer miles they could use for vacation travel. Those days have slowly ground to a halt. First, there's literally no time for training. And second, companies aren't willing to pay the travel and living costs for the "luxury" of attending an instructor-led class. PM training today is shifting, faster and faster, to the Internet accessed by desktops, laptops, tablets, and mobile devices. It's dispersed in "chunks" of video components, webinars, and online modules. It's not for everyone, but if that's all the organization will pay for then project professionals have a choice: they can either take the training or they can let their skills calcify. Seems like PMs are getting used to it and are taking advantage of it. The question is: is it as effective as being in a "real" classroom?

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4. **EPC companies admit they didn't invent project management and seek professional help.**
    Engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) companies are having their share of project management-related problems these days. The nature of the industry has changed. The projects are the same—megaprojects lasting for years and costing hundreds of millions into the billions of dollars—but the "owners" of such projects no longer seem to have the key technical staff to "ride herd" on their contractors. Vendors are managing vendors and projects are suffering as a result. For years, EPC firms looked inside for their professional development needs but that is changing. More EPC organizations now seek the services of outside vendors to ensure that their project managers receive the latest and most up-to-date project management training and advisory services. It's a 180 degree change from years of believing only they had the knowledge to teach project management to their staff.

5. **Think implementing one PPM tool was hard? Companies now need two!**
    Project portfolio management (PPM) tools: you can't live with them, and you can't live without them. Many organizations struggle to select and implement a PPM tool that will satisfy the needs of everyone from the project manager to the C level, and everyone in between. The problem is: for organizations that are now also using Agile, the standard PPM tool won't cut it. Why? Because the tools that have been available for years are based on the Waterfall method of project management. Agile development is based on an iterative, incremental method, and the entire approach to structuring work and reporting progress is completely different, requiring an Agile-based PPM tool. Implementing the Agile approach is a hard hill to climb in many organizations; but that hill just got steeper for those companies implementing Agile and implementing an Agile tool at the same time.

6. **Servant leadership makes a comeback, and not just in Agile.**
    There's a never-ending quest to find the right leadership model for projects. Many organizations, so they say, have long-abandoned the old command and control model searching for more collaborative approaches. Coming on strong is Servant Leadership, a term coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970. Both a philosophy and a set of leadership practices, servant leaders place the needs of their teams above their own by sharing power and serving others. Scrum Masters in the Agile world are encouraged, if not admonished, to adopt this approach and "serve" their teams rather than "manage" them. In fact, in the Scrum approach, there is no "project manager." However, servant leadership seems to be working its way into more traditional projects. It'll be interesting to see if the team is also willing to "share" the blame when things go awry.

7. **Benchmarking takes on greater urgency as competition heats up.**
    Every organization wants to know how its PM practice compares with *others in the same industry*. Just calling yourself "world class" doesn't make you so unless you've got some data to back it up. With the recent acquisition of Human Systems International by the Project Management Institute (PMI)®, benchmarking will now be placed into the forefront for many organizations. It will provide them with an opportunity to see just how really "good" they are and PMI will be front and center in the practice. One thought: why benchmark your project management practices against your competitors? Why not, as James P. Womack and Daniel T. Jones write in their classic book *Lean Thinking*, benchmark yourself against perfection? No one is offering that service yet!

8. **Organizations, dissatisfied with their project management performance, will radically change their approaches to get back on track.**

Since August 1990 we have gone from 431 to more than 590,000 Project Management Professionals (PMP)® and from one to more than 350 colleges and universities offering masters degrees in PM. And, in that same period, organizations have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in PM tools, credentials, and training. Yet PMI in its *Pulse of the Profession* reports, the United States Government Accountability Office in its various audits, and other reports published by Gartner, Forrester and the like, continue to document poor project results. This "wake up" call is being heard in every industry, and organizations, tired of disappointing results, are going to start to take drastic action to turn things around. That action can range from better leadership programs, to lean methodologies, to making sure each project has a sponsor with smarts and a backbone. Stand by, significant change is coming.

9. **Even with high unemployment globally, key project management jobs will remain hard to fill.**

As of this writing, there are more than 4,200 project management positions available on LinkedIn in the greater New York City area alone. Imagine how many there are worldwide. The numbers are staggering. Yet, many of the key project management roles such as those at the VP and executive level for heading up PMOs, product strategy, and portfolio management, will be tough to fill because of the lack of qualified applicants. Make no mistake about it: project management is a growth industry. In hard times, such as those experienced by many countries today, the discipline of project management can be the important "force multiplier" that improves performance. For organizations searching for that key professional, it will be difficult, but not impossible to find the right candidate. For those with a strong set of technical, business, and leadership skills; a proven track record; and a willingness to relocate, the future is looking brighter every day.

10. **Project and program managers will be asked to spend more time "leading" rather than "managing" their teams.**

It is not without coincidence that a small, but growing number of organizations are now calling their project professionals "leaders" not "managers." While the change might be subtle to some, it's extraordinarily important to others. To be sure, the term *project manager* will never go out of favor, but to some companies, the ability to "lead" a team is more important and, in the end, is more of a factor for success than "managing" one. The emphasis is on making sure that the professionals accountable for major projects not only have the technical and management savvy to get the job done, but also have the all-important "mojo, secret sauce, and X-factor" of leadership skills to pull a team together and get them aligned in the pursuit of a common objective. And, these organizations are not interested in training project leaders on generic leadership skills; they need them to have very specific project and program leadership skills. Notice the title on business cards today; chances are you're going to see more project and program "leaders" than "managers."