



Post COVID-19 Trends: The Future is Positive The Future is Projects



The Power of Perspective

Executive Summary

As most of us are battling the challenges of the COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown perhaps now would be a good time to reflect on how the world might look after the crisis, and as managers of change, how we might help to shape it.

I believe – and it's a feeling that is accelerated by the present crisis – we are approaching a tipping point where three things are going to happen:

1. First, there will be a huge upswing in the demand for trained change/ project professionals
2. Second, there will be an exponential focus on leadership instead of management of change projects
3. Third, the first two trends will lead to a rapid artificial automation (AI)-led revolution in how we use change project tools

The best way to predict the future is to create it. Let's give you some ideas about how you can shape that future.

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CHAPTER 1

Demand

I was giving a talk to some high school kids about what it's like being a project manager and was taken aback when one of them said:

"Hey, sir – so it's a bit like being a Doctor Who Time Lord then."

"How do you mean," I asked.

"Well, projects are mostly all about trying to control time, having adventures and making sure that the good guys win..."

I rather liked the analogy, but wondered how I was ever going to get a reliable Tardis!

So, when Cora Systems asked me to predict where project management would be in five years' time, I remembered the wise words of Homer Simpson (amongst others) who stated that: "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future."

If I had to put my "Time Lord" credentials on the line, then I think I'd flag up three main trends:

- 1) Demand. A huge growth in the demand for Project Professionals
- 2) Leadership. A strong trend away from Project Management towards Project Leadership
- 3) AI. Automation of Project Management

Let's look at them in turn.

Demand

In 2020, the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's chief advisor and change agent, Dominic Cummings stated: "We are hiring data scientists, policy experts, project managers – assorted weirdos."

I must confess to have rather liked being labelled as a "weirdo" – most of my career as a project professional has been a rollercoaster of change and I have continuously worked on the principle that it is better to ask for forgiveness rather than permission.

Mr Cummings then went on to add: "If you think you are one of the small group of people in the world who are truly GREAT at project management, then we want to talk to you."

I regularly lecture to The UK Cabinet Office and was tempted to perhaps apply, but the memory of the satirical TV show "Yes, Minister" made me think again.

Even 10 years ago, serious academic research clearly showed that global "projectization" was growing at a very high rate, but that the pool of available, qualified and experienced individuals was getting smaller. Some of the evidence includes:

- 1) In many countries (including Germany and Norway) projectization accounted even in a single year for 33% of their GDP.

2) Recently, The PMI (Project Management Institute) estimated that by 2027 globally employers would need approximately 90 million individuals working in project management-orientated roles.

3) The UK Government has recently calculated that 90% of its policy (over £500B of spend) is now delivered through major projects. It also points out that sadly over 30% of them are either amber or even red status – a terrifying statistic.

The demand for project professionals seems almost exponential.

As a result of these factors, the number of courses offering project skills has rocketed, with online learning, MScs and Charterships in abundance. Some of this skill development is excellent but some is still stuck in the old mindset of “it’s all about the methodology”. What I increasingly see is a desire to learn from a mix of doing, inspirational storytelling and “gamification” – for instance, using AI-enhanced project simulations.



CHAPTER 2

Leadership

Leadership

A major report on project leadership produced by the Association of Project Management (APM) stated that project leadership: “...is more about the future – setting direction, dealing with people and working outside the project with stakeholders – whereas many aspects of project management are inward and backward looking ... Project Leaders have, in many respects, much greater autonomy than people realize. They operate in a much more unstable and volatile environment and must make fast judgement calls in ambiguous situations.”

When I started in projects (in what seems like a galaxy far away and long ago), the culture was largely a construction and engineering mindset with vast teams of technical specialists applying complicated methodologies and complex critical paths. In these industries, it all seemed to work quite well, the teams were made up largely of logical individuals and the projects were physical and often with a single client.

Move to the present day and the project landscape has totally changed. Whilst there are still traditional mega projects, e.g. London Tideway and Olympics, the profession has expanded into virtually all sectors of industry – from IT and banking through to marketing and even R&D. Whereas there used to be largely a single client, now there is a multitude of internal and external stakeholders all of whom demand involvement and even direct participation.

At this point, I could use the word “agile” but that word is currently the most abused term in the project community so I will simply say that this expansion of projects across all sectors has meant a huge mindset change, and it has had to evolve. It has led to a revolution as to how many people see and interact with projects.

It has been fascinating talking to my two millennial sons and their friends about what they want from work. Often it is summed up by:

“I don’t want to work for a big traditional organization”

“I do want to work with a team of like-minded individuals who come together, make something cool happen, then go their separate ways”

“The thought of sitting at the same desk for over a year makes me feel sick”

“I want to work hard but then to play hard”

“What’s wrong with sometimes going with gut and intuition rather than obeying the compliance process?”

“Fast failure is cool – it’s all about being relentlessly positive”

“I actually like chaos and complexity”

“I want to work in flexible, diverse & self-organizing teams”

“I don’t want a career – I want a series of adventures”

“I don’t want a boss – I want a leader – and one I can actually respect”

Whilst these responses must strike fear into traditional HR specialists (who are already grappling with the demons of staff disengagement), they instead happily affirm to me what I have watched evolve in many organizations over the last decade.

The thoughts of these young people sum up not just a “project” orientation to their work, but also a desire for exciting leadership in fast-moving and flexible teams – not to be managers in command and control siloes. Overuse of governance and compliance has led to huge rises in “learned helplessness” – I believe that the pendulum is now swinging back to cultures of risk engagement rather than risk avoidance.

The rise of companies such as SpaceX and Amazon are living examples of this ethos in practice. Fast failure, unleashed enthusiasm, can-do attitudes, automation and a minimum of traditional “control” have turned these “start-up” organizations into mega players in what seems like the blink of an eye.

For example, did you know that in March 2020, SpaceX launched 60 satellites – in a single launch? These 60 add to the 300 SpaceX satellites already launched and that by the end of this year these satellites will be delivering internet access to the whole of North America. Did you also know that Elon Musk aims to roll this system out globally in the next 48 months? This will have a profound impact on society and business.

As for Amazon they have successfully disrupted and reset entire industries overnight and show no let-up in their ambitions. If you haven’t heard of Blue Origin, then have a look at their plans to commercialize space – it makes the industrial revolution look like a bit of a tea party. These trends are only set to increase rapidly. The days of the traditional slow-moving dinosaur organizations are numbered. Make no mistake – they are still big and powerful – but their days are numbered.



CHAPTER 3

Automation

Automation

The major report from the APM on project leadership, which I mentioned earlier, stated: “Project leaders have to let go of many, if not all, of their project management activities. So, to become a project leader can be, for some, a difficult transition.”

Yes, read that again! They really did say “if not all”. Taken out of context, this could be seen as an anarchist’s charter – let’s throw away the project reports, burn the methodologies and sack the project controllers; however, let’s explore what it really means.

Of course, we still need to “manage” projects. We need to see who is working on them, how much resources they have (or will use), what they have delivered and where the risks are. We still need to know how the costs stack up and how the many stakeholders view progress and success. All of these were traditionally the job of the project manager and they typically gathered all of this data together (often on a weekly basis) to present to “senior management” – ultimately a backward-looking culture that largely drags on forward momentum.

However, with the extraordinary pace of change that we are experiencing globally across all sectors, we see that these traditional systems are simply not fit for purpose. That’s where new technology and AI can help. The growth of live project reporting and control systems in my opinion are about to go mainstream.

Enterprise portfolio and project management (PPM) systems can currently provide everyone on the project with the instant, accessible data that they need, but increasingly AI will also be able to help predict trends and give project people the information they need to get ahead of the project instead of just reacting to last week’s issues. (The fact that these systems also provide governance, audits and financial reports should also keep the beloved accountants and lawyers happy as well!)



CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

I hope that you have enjoyed this brief speculation as to what the future might hold for us project professionals. What I believe you should be doing now is:

- 1) Train, develop and expand your change management teams – now!
- 2) Unleash the change leadership energy in your organizations.
- 3) Use AI-enhanced PPM tools to lighten the administrative burden.

I believe that the current COVID19 coronavirus crisis will accelerate the three key trends I have identified – but, of course – “only time will tell”. So, in the words of a famous Doctor Who Time Lord: “People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but actually from a non-linear, non-subjective viewpoint – it’s more like a big ball of wibbly wobbly... timey wimey... stuff.”

That sounds a bit like some of my projects – but let’s summarize where we are face it, in the words of Abraham Lincoln: “The best way to predict the future is to create it.” Let’s do this!



CHAPTER 5

How Cora Systems Powers Enterprise PPM & Transformation

Key Aspects of the Cora Solution

Cora Systems is a worldwide leader in providing enterprise PPM solutions to global organizations and government agencies, such as Honeywell, Allergan, PwC, City of London and the UK's National Health Service.

Cora is a proven foundation for the delivery of projects, digital transformation and strategic objectives. Fully digitizing program and project lifecycles, providing total transparency, empowering decision-making, and streamlining governance and reporting. Every day, across more than 50 countries, over \$20 billion worth of projects are managed on the Cora platform.

Powering Enterprise PPM & Transformation

Cora PPM contains a comprehensive suite of functionality that provides the strategic capabilities to optimize capacity, analyze scenarios, track benefits, inform all stakeholders and integrate across the enterprise. The platform acts as the bedrock for delivering major transformation programs.



Complete Enterprise Project & Program Management

Cora PPM provides the control, governance and insight required to identify, prioritize and authorize extensive enterprise portfolios that align to strategy and deliver ROI.



Digitize & Streamline Business Processes

Cora PPM digitizes all your portfolio, program and project processes, surfacing information when, where and how it's needed. Transform the way you manage your program lifecycle, providing the transparency, intelligence and decision-making capability to drive change across your enterprise.

“With Cora, we're able to sit around the table at senior management level and understand where we are much better than previously.”

Paul Moody

Director of Global Engineering Projects,
Allergan Pharmaceuticals



“We are happily using Cora to manage the portfolio of projects that makes up our £1.7bn Superfast Program, and our £294m Local Full Fibre Networks Program. It works well at a low level for project planning, risk and issues, change logs, benefits tracking, weekly reports, etc. Then the PMO can roll up and summarize that low-level data into a full program/portfolio view.”

Justin Leese

Program Director, Local Full Fibre Networks,
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (UK)





Integrate, Centralize & Consolidate

Cora PPM acts as a single point of entry for all project data and facilitates easy integration with any enterprise technology architecture. Providing you with an immediate, consolidated view of all your project portfolios and deliverables. Complete visibility and insight are acquired through instant information “roll-up”, linking top-down goals with bottom-up contributions of each and every initiative.



Swift Enterprise Deployments

Accelerate time to market and improve return on investment by leveraging best-practice implementation supported by our team of experts.



Mapped to Your Processes

Cora PPM is configured to each client’s specific business processes, and we are methodology agnostic – we’ll tailor the platform and the templates to fit your chosen project methodology be it Agile, PMBOK, PRINCE2 or other.

“It’s great to have that cascade of information to highlight issues and risks for the right people who can then intervene. The functionality to do that in a more controlled environment, to take it through the different authorization layers, we see as really valuable.”

Patrick Beattie
Director, PwC



“Cora really allows us to drill down into information so we can give our senior management the key decision-making information to make informed decisions on all our schemes.”

Ian Thrupp
Head of Planning and Project Controls, WSP



“Cora as a platform gives us that single source of truth to what’s going on in the organization and also gives us the ability to prioritize what’s really important to us. Being able to put that information in front of our board and our executive team to say, ‘Here is all of the change that’s going on. What’s the most important to you?’ and then actually allocate the resources and funding for those projects to help move us into that strategic position is invaluable.”

Sarah Malin
Head of Program Management, CityFibre



The Value

Digitize your programs and lifecycles, gain greater insights, more informed decision-making, and streamline your governance and reporting.

⦿ Strategic Insights

Roll out failsafe, strategically-aligned projects that utilize resources and deliver maximum value.

⦿ See The Full Picture

Quickly view data dashboards that visualize the health of your portfolio and drill-down to focus in on any issues.

⦿ Support Governance

Ensure the right people have the right oversight with multi-level access protocols.

⦿ Easily Scale

Small to large, local to global, all in the cloud.

⦿ Complete Control

Manage scope, financials, progress and quality of project delivery in one centralized system.

⦿ Seamless Collaboration

No matter the team – internal or contractor, desk-based or mobile – integrations make workflows seamless.



\$20 BILLION

Worth of projects managed on Cora PPM.



400,000+

Projects live on Cora at any one time.



50+

Countries where Cora is in use.



1

Platform & version of the truth.



Author Bio

Stephen Carver is rated as one of the top lecturers at one of Europe's leading MBA business schools, Cranfield University's School of Management in the UK.

He has a reputation of taking complex management concepts such as projects, influencing change and crisis management and being able to distil them down into highly informative and fast-moving lectures – often

using “storytelling” techniques. His attitude is: “If you haven't done it – you shouldn't be teaching it!”

Unusually, for an academic, he has actually spent most of his working life in real business and still runs his own, highly successful, project management company. Stephen is a rare blend of academic, businessman and teller of tales. He has taught across the world and has appeared on national radio and TV.

An aerial photograph of a winding asphalt road with yellow double lines, cutting through a dense, lush green forest of tall evergreen trees. The road curves from the top center towards the bottom left. The lighting is soft, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting.

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