

What Does a Project Manager of the Future Look Like?

Highlights from ICCPM's Breakfast Panel Discussion in Canberra, 28 March 2019



Theme

The future success of an organisation relies on the ability to manage a diverse body of talent that can bring innovative ideas, perspectives and views to their work. The challenge and problems created by workplace diversity can be turned into a strategic organisational asset if an organisation is able to capitalise on this melting pot of diverse talents.

As the global economy becomes more project-oriented there's a lot more awareness and recognition of project management as the connector between strategy, action and successful implementation of organisational initiatives. Expected to manage teams of individuals with diverse skills, ages, values/beliefs, traditions, ethnic backgrounds, personalities, and across disbursed locations, today's project managers play a pivotal role in championing, implementing and maintaining inclusive cultures within project teams. Creating an environment for diversity to flourish creates high-performing teams, reducing time, effort and costs for projects, and directly contributing to successful outcomes for the organisation.

The panellists represented a variety of industries but all agreed they were working in **increasingly complex environments** with greater and more diverse project expectations and outcomes. Panellists identified increased stakeholders with greater cultural diversity, distributed partners and workforce (geography and time zones), rapid technology innovation, political uncertainty, and the emergence of the 24hr news cycle and social media. It was acknowledged that these challenges also presented opportunities but projects no longer fit within the boundaries of the iron triangle (scope, budget and time). To be successful, project managers need to focus on **bringing together the aspects of complexity - people, culture and technology** – we need to give people in PM roles the **skills to focus on the people; understand human nature, and embrace challenges of diversity to turn them into an asset.**

To respond to these challenges and create opportunities, the panellists agreed that we need PMs who can **embrace ambiguity and uncertainty**, and work in dynamic environments whilst working toward strategic objectives. Project leaders need to become more flexible in their thinking and work with the variety within the organisation and stakeholders. We can achieve improved risk management, better team relationships and produce sustainable solutions by being aware of biases reflected in judgements and decisions, competing different ethical frameworks, and the diversity of world views.

The key is supporting project managers to develop their skills and **get the balance right between technical expertise and the human perspective**. A project manager of the future **needs a diverse toolkit of skills and the experience to know when to apply them**. We can support this process through training, experiential learning, and through the support of active mentoring and access to shared-learning communities. We need to embrace these opportunities to develop and encourage **a two-way learning organisational culture**. This fosters greater empathy and an appreciation that people come from different backgrounds, have different workplace experiences and perceive the world in different ways. Only when a team is upskilled to use the diversity of skills and experience to their advantage, are we able to get the best out of our people and ensure full and meaningful participation of our workforce.

It was recognised that as projects become more complex and project boundaries expand, project managers need to model **solid ethical behaviour and transparency**. They also need to engage their team and their stakeholders. They will be **courageous learners, resilient to failure and highly skilled communicators**. In that sense, a project manager of the future will be a story teller. Those who share their stories well will encapsulate their learning story within their organisation and influence the way the company moves forward. Accurately framing the story of project beyond the company and **connect it to the broader community will deliver values and benefits.**

Success will stem from intersectional success, **the ability to work with people to get outcomes delivered in a timely way, bringing together the strengths of those who can contribute to the outcome.**

WITH THANKS TO:

ICCPM would like to thank our expert panellists, moderator, and event attendees who contributed their insights on the topic. **Panellists:** **Traci-Ann Byrnes** (First Assistant Secretary, Program Performance, Capability and Sustainment Group), Department of Defence | **Megan Bunfield** (National Manager, Online Services and AI CoE, CIO Group, Department of Human Services) | **Dr Steve Rogers** (CEO, Centre for Appropriate Technology Ltd) | **Ashleigh Streeter-Jones** (2018 ACT Woman of the Year, Former Director, Future 21: Young Australians in International Affairs) | **Dr John Bensley** (Academic Director, QUT Graduate School of Business and QUT EX) | **Moderator:** **Dr Naomi Mathers** (Director, Industry Liaison and Member Services, ICCPM).