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The Digital Twin Mindset: A Must-Have
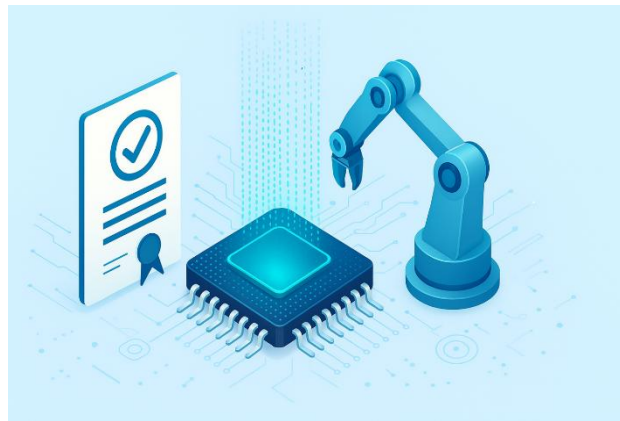for Modern Project Managers
by Fope Opeola

The Digital Twin Mindset: A Must-Have for Modern Project Managers [1]

By Fope Opeola

When we hear the word "twins," what comes to our minds first is a set of two individuals that are born with identical physical traits. Twins also share some behavioral traits, especially because they are brought up in the same environment.

How about a "digital twin," a concept that has been rampant in project management? To understand the concept of the digital twin mindset, we must first understand the evolution of project management and the complexities and expectations of projects in the information age.

In an era where the projects are growing more complex and the managers are becoming demanding, the digital twin mindset has been adopted for reshaping how managers think and lead their followers. Today, the digital twin mindset is rapidly moving from a "should have" to a "must have" approach. Project managers are required to have a digital mindset not only to reduce the costs incurred in a project but also to enhance how a project is executed.

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What is the Digital Twin in Project Management?

The digital twin is a real-time, virtual replica of a physical asset, process, or system. It's a concept that began in the 1960s when NASA researchers were rapidly exploring the universe. In their digital twin, they built a mirror-image spacecraft on the ground that would troubleshoot the issues experienced in orbit.

Today, the digital twin is applied in almost all segments, including the building and development of jet engines, wind farms, solar power machines, and smart cities. It revolves around every major project that we see in the world today.

A project digital twin is responsive with a data-rich model that mirrors all the aspects of the initiative in real-time. It corresponds with the initiative in terms of the schedule, cost, resources, quality, supply chain status, environmental conditions, and even the risks witnessed in a project. The "twin" usually mirrors everything available in the real initiative.

Why must a Modern Project Manager Adopt the Digital Twin Mindset?

A modern-day project manager should adopt the digital twin mindset. It's a mindset that sets apart a modern-day project manager from the classical manager who followed a project to set its outcomes. A modern-day manager can accurately forecast the issues they are likely to encounter in the project, hence forming appropriate mitigation strategies.

1. Early Warnings that Save Fortunes

The digital twin mindset allows a project manager to spot risks and threats way before they emerge. The early warnings are necessary in project management to fashion the appropriate mitigation strategies to avoid and reduce the impact of the risks. Research studies have shown that the digital twin mindset can reduce cost overruns and schedule slippage through spotting emerging risks way before they occur.

2. The Complexity has outstripped Human Cognition

Megaprojects are often highly demanding in terms of the resources, attention, and cognitive abilities of the project manager. They often contain innumerable

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interdependent activities that interconnect, thus outdoing what human cognition can understand and analyze. The digital twin comes as a lifesaver, acting as a shared objective "second brain" for the project managers.

3. Stakeholders Today Demand Certainty in an Uncertain World

Stakeholders and clients today have rapidly changed in their thinking and expectations. They expect project managers to give a probabilistic forecast of the expected changes in a project rather than relying on hope and intuition. The adoption of the digital twin mindset is timely in fostering project managers to make probabilistic forecasts in a project.

4. Digital Twin Attracts the Best Talent

One of the major reasons why organizations must adopt the digital twin mindset is that it allows organizations to attract the best talent. The millennials and Gen Z professionals look for organizations that will support their professional growth. An organization that adopts the digital twin mindset is driven by cutting-edge and data-driven projects rather than relying on spreadsheets and outdated dashboards. This means that a project manager who adopts the digital twin mindset will attract and retain the best talent.

Cultivating the Digital Twin Mindset

In cultivating a perfect digital twin mindset, one is not required to have a PhD in data science. They are only required to adopt the following traits:

1. The Twin must always win all Arguments

In this era, a project manager must always make sure that the twin becomes the sole source of truth when deciding. It's no longer an aspect of "My Excel says X, but my dashboard says Y." It's a matter of relying on what the twin says in project management.

2. Communicate with Probabilities rather than Promises

Project managers should move away from communicating with their stakeholders in promises. For instance, "we hope to complete the project by summer 2026." Instead, they must adopt the communication in probabilities. The project manager must train

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their team to say," The current trajectory shows that the project will be completed by July 10th, 2026 ± 14 days with a confidence interval of 92%." The approach, although uncomfortable, provides the audience with confidence in the certainty of project completion.

3. Treat Data as a Real Bloodstream

Most project managers usually treat data as an important tool in their monthly reports. They use data to present their progress in projects to the stakeholders. However, to achieve the digital twin mindset, project managers should treat data as a bloodstream. Organizations and partners should treat data as an important instrument from the IoT sensors, including earned value in real time, sentiment analysis, and resource logs. The approach allows data to give the required competitive advantage.

4. Ask Appropriate Questions that Trigger a Reaction in the Simulation

In the digital twin mindset, project managers must learn to ask the "what if" rather than the "what is" questions. The former allows every decision made to trigger a simulation in the twin. "What if the drilling price rises by 20% in the next quarter?" The questions are appropriate in fostering the development of the digital twin mindset.

The Bottom Line

The digital twin mindset is poised as a must-have trait for all the top project managers in the world today. The mindset allows project managers to rely on real-time data in deciding and forecasting projects. It's an approach that allows project managers to work on a "what if" rather than a "what is" perspective. Project managers using the digital twin mindset roll out multiple simulations that project how the initiative will roll out under different circumstances. The future of project management has shifted from certifications and methodologies to a relentless, real-time mirroring in a virtual environment. Adopt the digital twin mindset today, or spend tomorrow explaining why your project joins the high number that fail to meet project deadlines and budget in 2026 and beyond.

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Fope Opeola is a Project Manager at the National Oceanography Centre, United Kingdom, one of the world's leading institutions for oceanographic research. In 2021, he earned his Master's degree in Project Management from the University of Portsmouth, and since then has built a career managing complex, high-value projects across diverse industries. His work is rooted in meticulous planning, resource and budget management, risk management, team collaboration, and benefit realization all aimed at aligning his projects and programmes with organisational goals and realising value early. As an entrepreneur at heart, he is driven by curiosity, creativity, and the pursuit of meaningful impact through well-delivered projects. He is a Full Member of the Association for Project Management (APM) and the British Computer Society (BCS). He is an active APM volunteer within the Wessex Network and also sits on the APM Membership Panel. He can be contacted at fope.opeola@gmail.com