Is a Project Manager Necessary in the Age of AI Technology?[1]

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Is a Project Manager Necessary in the Age of AI Technology? Intriguing question. In particular, when it hits very close to one's self worth, livelihood, and professional value. The AI Robot may be more efficient at certain activities and tasks [although routine and rather boring] than any human. However, the humanoid Project Manager [PM] provides the savant skills, savvy persuasion and sage advice critical to working with the building blocks of teams – people, which makes all projects work. The essential human aptitudes and competencies that AI cannot replace *yet* [as of the publication of this article] include creativity, critical thinking, ethical decision making, and human interaction.

The Irreplaceable Human PM

Four human skills that require real intelligence form the arsenal of the PM. These four irreplaceable people-tools are discussed herein.

> ***Creativity***. The purpose of a *Project* is to "…create a unique product, service or result" (PMI, 2025). This requires the PM to lead their Team to develop innovative solutions, solve problems that did not previously exist [uniqueness], and make executive-level decisions. These brain-based actions all require human insight, adaptability and confidence (Vichkanova, 2025). *Creativity* demands the PM to think outside the *box*, which is something an AI *bot* cannot do.
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> ***Critical Thinking***. The PM, above all else, must *think*. Critical Thinking, a unique human skill, involves several distinct human capabilities such as emotional intelligence and deep contextual understanding. While AI can be a powerful tool to assist the PM and their team by processing information, the human PM and their Teammates must still perform the Critical Thinking itself, including questioning assumptions, evaluating evidence, and forming independent judgments (Harkness, 2024). Critical Thinking consumes a large portion of the PM's working day, which cannot be delegated to the AI bot.

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Ethical Decision Making. PMI's "Ethical Decision-Making Framework" (EDMF) is a five-step process designed to help PMs and their Teams handle ethical dilemmas through critical thinking. The steps (PMI, 2025) are:

1) Assess the situation and gather facts,
2) Consider and evaluate alternative choices,
3) Analyze the potential consequences of the best choice,
4) Apply the PMI ethical principles (responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty), and
5) Make a decision and take action.

The EDMF serves as a guide to supplement the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. AI may help augment the EDMF process, such as, the facts gathering in step 1. However, the human PM and their Team are essential for executing the bulk of the critical project items, especially applying the PMI ethical principles of responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty (PMI, 2025). Moreover, ethical oversight is the sole providence of the human soul of all projects - the PM. PMs are responsible for ensuring the responsible and ethical use of AI, including managing potential bias and data privacy concerns (Vichkanova, 2025).

Human Interaction / Person-to-Person Communication. The PM spends the majority of their time communicating with others, especially their Team [internal] and the key Stakeholders [external] of the project. PMs facilitate communication, translate complex AI-generated data into narratives for stakeholders, and handle crucial discussions that require genuine human interaction (Vichkanova, 2025). The AI-powered robot may be a novelty to communicate with by humans, but it certainly is not the preferred mode of communicating by fellow humans. People still prefer talking with each other.

AI Augments the PM's Role

The Project Manager of the future must be more than just conversant with Artificial Intelligence; the PM and their Team members will need to leverage AI to its full potential. Here are several examples of how AI augments the PM's role (Vichkanova, 2025).

Automates routine tasks: AI can automate administrative work like data collection, tracking, and reporting, allowing the PM to focus on strategic activities.

Provides data-driven insights: AI tools can provide valuable insights and predictive capabilities, which the PM can use to make more informed decisions and improve accuracy.

Increases efficiency: By handling repetitive tasks, AI can increase overall project efficiency and reduce human error.

Enables a human-AI partnership: The future is a collaborative one where the PM will use AI as a tool to enhance their own capabilities, leading to better outcomes.

AI Requires Actual Intelligence

Presently, I have the pleasure of instructing a "touchy feely" Engineering course at Lawrence Tech University - EGE3022 "Leadership & Professional Development for Engineers". This course lacks number-crunching and esoteric formulas [good news for the weary Engineering student]. Rather, my Engineering students are tasked with dealing with conflicting ethical dilemmas, making values-based decisions without the benefit of complete knowledge of all related facts, and then reflecting on the ethical conundrums. The writing assignments are particularly taxing. Not an easy assignment for this required course on Ethics in Engineering.

It is an ABET accreditation requirement that Engineering graduates need to "recognize ethical and professional responsibilities in engineering situations and make informed judgments, which must consider the impact of engineering solutions in global, economic, environmental and societal contexts" (Vazquez Toness, 2017). Similar *Ethical Decision-Making* accreditation requirements are mandated by all professional-focused academic programs including Architecture [AIA], Business / Management [AACSB] and Project Management [PMI-GAC]. The professionally educated and savvy PM will be prepared to perform their most important activities – think critically and act ethically. For now, the humanoid PM will rule.

As always, your questions, comments and criticisms are welcome. Feel free to contact me in care of email: William.moylan@emich.edu

Best regards,

Dr. Bill

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