PM World *Journal* *(ISSN: 2330-4480)*   *Why Most Organizations are Project-Driven in Name Only*
Vol. XV, Issue II – February 2026   *ReimaginingProject Management for a New Era*
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article   by Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez

Reimagining Project Management for a New Era

Why Most Organizations Are Project-Driven in Name Only [1]

Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez[2]

There's a phrase I keep hearing in boardrooms, strategy decks, and executive retreats:

"We are a project-driven organization."

On the surface, it sounds right. Even inspiring. Who wouldn't want to be driven by projects, the very vehicles that deliver innovation, transformation, and value?

But here's the uncomfortable truth: most organizations that say this are *not* project-driven. Not in structure. Not in culture. Not in behavior.

They are **project-decorated,** festooned with initiatives, pilot programs, agile squads, and innovation labs, but still operating under a 20th-century logic where functions reign, decision-making is centralized, and execution is someone else's problem.

Being "project-driven" is not about having lots of projects. It's about putting *projects at the center*, structurally, strategically, and culturally.

And we're not there. Not even close.

From Project Explosion to Project Confusion

We are living through a historic shift. Over the last 15 years, projects have become the main channel for change and value creation. Digitalization, sustainability, M&A, AI, and customer experience are all delivered through projects.

Yet paradoxically, this explosion in project activity has created *more confusion, not less*.

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)   *Why Most Organizations are Project-Driven in Name Only*
Vol. XV, Issue II – February 2026   *ReimaginingProject Management for a New Era*
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article   by Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez

In many organizations, projects now compete for scarce resources like shoppers at a Black Friday sale. Everything is "top priority." Everyone is stretched. Nobody has enough time, clarity, or authority.

You can't walk five meters in a large corporation without bumping into a project.

But ask a basic question: *What are our top three strategic projects, and who is accountable for each one?* And you'll get 10 different answers.

This isn't a leadership failure. It's a system failure.

We are trying to run a modern, fast-moving, project-powered enterprise on an operating model designed for factories.

What a Project-Driven Organization *Actually* Means

Let's be precise.

As I explain in my recent HBR article[3] and new book[4], a **project-driven organization (PDO)** is one where projects are not side activities. They are the engine of strategy execution. The enterprise organizes itself around the work, not around legacy structures.

That means:

- Strategy is translated into a clear, prioritized portfolio of initiatives.
- Talent flows dynamically to the work that matters most.
- Projects have real sponsorship, not symbolic oversight.
- Governance is adaptive, not a bottleneck on permissions.
- Success is measured in *outcomes*, not deliverables.

In a PDO, everyone understands that delivering the future is not someone else's job. It's *their* job no matter their title.

Contrast that with most organizations today, where strategy and execution are treated like divorced parents: sharing custody of projects but never in the same room.

Five Contradictions Hiding in Plain Sight

If you want to test whether your organization is truly project-driven, look for these contradictions:

---

[3] https://hbr.org/2026/01/the-project-driven-organization
[4] https://poweredbyprojects.com/

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)   *Why Most Organizations are Project-Driven in Name Only*
Vol. XV, Issue II – February 2026   *ReimaginingProject Management for a New Era*
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article   by Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez

1. Projects Are Strategic… But Nobody Owns Them

The CEO says the digital transformation is a top priority. But there's no full-time sponsor. No decision rights. No authority to kill legacy initiatives that block progress. Strategy is loud, execution is muffled.

2. Talent Is Critical… But Not Allocated

Everyone agrees people are the key to success. Yet project teams are cobbled together from whoever is available not who's best suited. Key roles are part-time. Priorities shift weekly. Accountability blurs.

3. Agility Is the Goal… But Governance Is Rigid

Executives want speed and innovation. But approvals still take months. Business cases are reviewed annually. Steering committees meet after the train has left the station. Projects stall in a swamp of well-meaning controls.

4. PMOs Exist… But Are Toothless

Many organizations have project management offices. But instead of empowering change, they manage templates and compliance. They've become the auditors of execution not the architects of impact.

5. Projects Abound… But Value Is Elusive

Everyone is busy. Milestones are tracked. Dashboards look green. Yet benefits are delayed, diluted, or never materialize. Why? Because we're still confusing activity with impact.

These contradictions erode trust. They exhaust teams. And they ensure that, no matter how many projects you launch, transformation remains elusive.

The Illusion of Progress

Years ago, I visited a large bank proudly touting its transformation. The walls were covered in Kanban boards. Dozens of teams ran daily stand-ups. The PMO had rolled out Agile at scale.

But when I asked frontline employees what had changed in their work, they shrugged.

"It's the same old decisions, the same hierarchy. Just now with sprints."

The illusion of progress is often worse than no progress at all. It creates fatigue, not momentum.

Real change requires more than ceremonies and software. It demands a fundamental rethink of *how the organization is wired*.

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)   *Why Most Organizations are Project-Driven in Name Only*
Vol. XV, Issue II – February 2026   *ReimaginingProject Management for a New Era*
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article   by Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez

What It Takes to Break the Pattern

To move beyond the illusion and become truly project-driven, organizations must tackle four deep shifts.

1. From Function-Centric to Flow-Centric

The work that matters, transformation, growth, and reinvention, cuts across silos. If your org chart can't flex to support that, you're doomed.

Think of Spotify's squad model. Or how Amazon dynamically forms "two-pizza teams" to tackle initiatives. Talent flows where it's needed.

Your structure must evolve from a fortress to a fluid system.

2. From Activity to Outcome

Every project should start with a sharp answer to: *What value will this create?* Not just features. Not just outputs. But real, measurable benefits.

And that value must be tracked throughout, not at the end, when it's too late to pivot.

This is where tools like the Project Canvas help by aligning stakeholders on purpose, impact, and ownership from day one.

3. From Project Manager to Project Leader

The days of taskmasters managing timelines are over. Today's project leaders must navigate ambiguity, influence stakeholders, integrate tech, and drive business outcomes.

In a PDO, every ambitious employee becomes a mini-CEO of a project. It's leadership in action, not administration.

4. From PMO as Enforcer to PMO as Enabler

The Project Management Office must evolve from a control center into a **Value Enablement Office**.

It should build capacity, coach leaders, break silos, and ensure alignment across the enterprise. Less police, more performance.

The Cost of Staying Stuck

Let me be blunt.

PM World Journal *(ISSN: 2330-4480)*   *Why Most Organizations are Project-Driven in Name Only*
Vol. XV, Issue II – February 2026   *ReimaginingProject Management for a New Era*
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article   by Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez

If your organization claims to be project-driven but clings to functional silos, delayed decisions, and weak sponsorship, you are not just inefficient. You are vulnerable.

Vulnerable to disruption. To employee burnout. To strategic irrelevance.

The world is moving fast. Markets shift. Technologies leapfrog. Competitors emerge from nowhere. In that environment, execution is not a back-office function. It is a survival skill.

And projects are the muscles through which execution happens.

Ignore them at your peril.

Final Reflection: Call It What It Is

The hardest thing to say in a leadership room is often the simplest:

"We're not as project-driven as we think we are."

But that recognition is powerful. It's the first step toward designing a system that matches your ambition.

Don't confuse motion for progress. Don't let ceremonies substitute for structure. And don't outsource transformation to the PMO.

The future belongs to organizations that put **projects at the center,** not just in words, but in how they think, lead, and act.

In the end, *projects are not part of the business*. **Projects *are* the business.**

See you in March.

_____

PM World Journal *(ISSN: 2330-4480)*   *Why Most Organizations are Project-Driven in Name Only*
Vol. XV, Issue II – February 2026   *ReimaginingProject Management for a New Era*
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article   by Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez

About the Author

Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez

Madrid, Spain

Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, PMI Fellow, is one of the **world's leading experts in Project Management and Strategy Implementation**. He is the author of the "*Harvard Business Review Project Management Handbook* " (HBR 2021) and is the **most published author on project management matters in Harvard Business Review**. His upcoming book, *Powered by Projects: Leading Your Organization in the Transformation Age*, will be published by Harvard Business Review Press in early 2026.

Antonio has brought Project Management to the center of executive leadership, positioning it as a critical capability for transformation in the next decade. He is the creator of influential concepts such as the **Project Economy®**, the **Hierarchy of Purpose®**, and the **Project-Driven Organization™**, which argue that *projects have become the operating system of modern organizations—and the language of future careers*.

His global impact on management and leadership has been recognized by Thinkers50, where he is **the only project management thinker included twice in a row** in the ranking of the world's most influential management thinkers. He is also the recipient of the prestigious **Thinkers50 Ideas Into Practice Award** and a member of the **Marshall Goldsmith 100 Coaches** community.

He was the global Chairman of the Project Management Institute in 2016 and has been recognized as a Fellow of PMI for his contribution to the project management profession. He led the creation of the Brightline Initiative, founded Projects & Co, and co-founded the Strategy Implementation Institute.

His work focuses on advising senior leaders on how to prioritize and implement strategic initiatives and lead transformational change.

Antonio is also the author of "Lead Successful Projects" (Penguin, 2019), "The Project Revolution" (LID, 2019). and "The Focused Organization" (Taylor & Francis, 2014), and has contributed to seven other books. A pioneer and leading authority in teaching and

PM World Journal *(ISSN: 2330-4480)*
Vol. XV, Issue II – February 2026
www.pmworldjournal.com

Why Most Organizations are Project-Driven in Name Only
ReimaginingProject Management for a New Era
Series Article   by Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez

coaching senior executives the art and science of strategy execution and project management. Currently visiting professor at Duke CE, Instituto de Empresa, Solvay, Vlerick, Ecole des Ponts, and Skolkovo.

He is a much-in-demand speaker at events worldwide. Antonio has presented at more than 800 conferences around the world, regularly evaluated as the best speaker. European Business Summit, Strategy Leaders Forum, Gartner Summit, TEDx, and EU Cohesion Policy Conference; are some of the events he has delivered inspirational keynotes.

He is former Sustainability Program Director and Head of Global Program Management Office at GlaxoSmithKline Vaccines. Previously he also served as Head of Project Portfolio Management at BNP Paribas Fortis and Head of Post-Merger Integration at Fortis Bank, leading the acquisition of ABN AMBRO, the largest in financial service history. He also worked for ten years at PricewaterhouseCoopers, becoming the global lead practitioner for project and change management.

Born in Madrid, Spain, and educated in Germany, Mexico, Italy, and the United States, Antonio is fluent in five languages. He is an Economist, has an MBA from London Business School and Insead's IDP. You can follow Antonio through his LinkedIn Newsletter - Lead Projects Successfully. For more information, visit his website at www.antonionietorodriguez.com. He can be reached via email: antonio.nieto.rodriguez@gmail.com