

Reimagining Project Management for a New Era

Why AI Makes Project Leadership More Human, Not Less ¹

Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez ²

In 1978, Herbert Simon, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, made an observation that feels remarkably relevant today:

"A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention."

At the time, information was relatively scarce. Managers waited weeks for reports. Data was fragmented. Analysis was expensive. Most organizations operated with limited visibility and imperfect information.

Today, we face the opposite problem.

Artificial Intelligence is making information abundant.

And abundance is creating a new form of scarcity.

Not information.

Not analysis.

Not forecasts.

Judgment.

Over the last year, I have met executives who can generate in minutes more insight than entire departments could produce a decade ago. AI can summarize market trends, analyze risks, identify patterns across thousands of projects, forecast outcomes, and generate strategic recommendations almost instantly. Capabilities that once required teams of analysts are increasingly available to anyone with a laptop.

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Yet I am not convinced organizations are becoming proportionally better at making decisions.

In some cases, the opposite seems to be happening.

Leaders are becoming overwhelmed by possibilities. More options. More scenarios. More recommendations. More signals. More information than any human being can realistically process.

The challenge is no longer finding answers.

The challenge is deciding which answers matter.

This may become one of the defining leadership challenges of the Project Economy.

Most discussions about AI focus on productivity. How many reports can be automated? How many hours can be saved? How much faster can we generate project plans, status updates, or risk analyses?

These are useful questions.

But they are not the most important ones.

The real impact of AI is not that it automates project management.

It changes what leadership means.

The End of Information Scarcity

For decades, management evolved around a simple assumption: better information leads to better decisions.

The assumption made sense.

Information was expensive. Data was difficult to collect. Analysis required specialized expertise. Entire management systems were designed around acquiring, consolidating, and distributing information. Dashboards, KPIs, business intelligence systems, and reporting structures all emerged from the same belief: if we can gather enough information, we will make better decisions.

AI represents the logical culmination of that journey.

For the first time, many organizations are approaching a world where information is no longer the primary constraint.

That should be good news.

Yet history suggests caution.

Kodak did not fail because it lacked information. In fact, it invented the digital camera in 1975. Nokia did not fail because it lacked market intelligence. Its leaders understood that smartphones were changing the industry. Countless organizations possess extraordinary amounts of data and still struggle to adapt.

The challenge is rarely awareness.

The challenge is interpretation.

What separates successful organizations from unsuccessful ones is often not what they know. It is what they choose to do with what they know.

This distinction becomes increasingly important as AI spreads.

When information is scarce, gathering it creates value.

When information is abundant, filtering it creates value.

The bottleneck shifts.

And with it, the nature of leadership.

The Rise of the Judgment Gap

In the previous article, I introduced the concept of the Decision Gap—the growing distance between recognizing that a decision is needed and actually making it.

AI may help reduce that gap.

Information becomes easier to access. Analysis becomes faster. Scenarios become easier to model. Decisions become easier to prepare.

Yet another challenge is emerging.

I call it the **Judgment Gap**.

The gap between having information and knowing what truly matters.

For most of modern management history, leaders were constrained by limited information. Increasingly, they will be constrained by their ability to interpret it.

This is a profound shift.

During a recent workshop with senior transformation leaders, one executive demonstrated an impressive AI-powered portfolio dashboard. The system generated predictive forecasts, identified emerging risks, summarized project health, and recommended corrective actions. The technology was extraordinary.

After the demonstration, I asked a simple question:

Which project would you stop tomorrow?

The room went silent.

The dashboard had solved the reporting problem.

It had not solved the judgment problem.

That distinction matters because organizations rarely fail due to a lack of information. They fail because leaders prioritize the wrong initiatives, continue funding projects whose logic has expired, underestimate risks, overestimate capabilities, or avoid difficult trade-offs.

AI can provide recommendations.

It cannot own consequences.

And leadership ultimately lives in the consequences.

Three Human Capabilities That Become More Valuable in the AI Era

Many people assume AI will reduce the importance of human capabilities.

I believe the opposite will happen.

As technology becomes more capable, certain human skills become more valuable.

1. Sense-Making

The future project leader will spend less time generating information and more time interpreting it.

This may sound subtle, but it represents a fundamental shift.

Organizations today suffer from signal overload. Every dashboard contains hundreds of metrics. Every project generates data. Every stakeholder offers opinions. Every AI system can generate additional insights.

The challenge is not visibility.

The challenge is significance.

Which signals matter?

Which assumptions deserve attention?

Which risks require action?

Which opportunities should be ignored?

Great leaders help organizations distinguish noise from meaning.

That capability cannot be automated easily because meaning is contextual. It depends on strategy, timing, culture, and judgment.

2. Strategic Courage

One of the least discussed aspects of leadership is courage.

Not physical courage.

Decision courage.

The willingness to act despite uncertainty.

AI can generate twenty scenarios.

Leaders must choose one.

AI can identify risks.

Leaders must decide which risks are worth taking.

AI can highlight trade-offs.

Leaders must live with the consequences.

This is why I suspect the most successful executives of the next decade will not necessarily be those with the best analytical tools.

They will be those with the courage to make difficult choices when the data remains incomplete.

Technology reduces uncertainty.

It never eliminates it.

3. Trust Creation

Projects are not technical systems.

They are social systems.

They involve stakeholders, sponsors, regulators, customers, suppliers, and teams. Success depends on alignment, commitment, and trust.

AI can analyze stakeholder sentiment.

It cannot create genuine trust.

It cannot inspire confidence during uncertainty.

It cannot build coalitions across competing interests.

It cannot persuade skeptical executives to support a controversial initiative.

Trust remains one of the most powerful accelerators of execution.

And one of the hardest capabilities to automate.

As machines become more intelligent, trust may become an even greater source of competitive advantage.

Beyond Project Management

This discussion extends far beyond project management.

In many ways, AI is forcing organizations to confront a deeper question:

What is leadership actually for?

For decades, management systems rewarded control, reporting, monitoring, and information processing. These activities were valuable because information was scarce.

But if AI increasingly performs those activities, where does human value shift?

I believe it shifts toward purpose.

Toward prioritization.

Toward judgment.

Toward meaning.

Leadership becomes less about managing information and more about helping people navigate ambiguity.

This is why the rise of AI may ultimately elevate project leadership rather than diminish it.

Projects exist at the intersection of uncertainty, change, and value creation. They are precisely the environments where human judgment matters most.

The future project leader becomes an integrator—connecting technology and people, strategy and execution, data and meaning.

That role is not shrinking.

It is expanding.

Five Questions for Reflection

As AI capabilities continue to advance, every project leader should reflect on five questions:

- Which decisions in my portfolio rely primarily on judgment rather than analysis?
- Where are we confusing more information with greater clarity?
- What capability are we building that competitors cannot automate?
- If AI handled all reporting tomorrow, how would I spend my time?
- Are we investing as much in judgment as we are in technology?

The answers may reveal more about your organization's future than any AI strategy.

Final Reflection: The Scarcity That Matters

For more than a century, management sought to solve the problem of information scarcity.

Artificial Intelligence is solving that problem faster than most of us expected.

The next challenge is different.

How do we lead when information is abundant?

How do we prioritize when options multiply?

How do we exercise judgment when machines can generate endless recommendations?

These are not technology questions.

They are leadership questions.

And they may become the defining questions of the next decade.

The organizations that succeed will not necessarily be those with the most advanced AI.

They will be those that combine artificial intelligence with something much harder to scale:

Human judgment.

Because projects rarely fail because information is missing.

They fail because people choose the wrong priorities, delay difficult decisions, avoid uncomfortable trade-offs, or misread a changing reality.

AI can help us see.

Leadership determines what we do with what we see.

And in the Project Economy, that difference increasingly determines who creates the future—and who reacts to it.

See you in August.

Disclaimer: ChatGPT was used to support editing and formatting. All substantive content is the author's original work.

About the Author



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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 prioritizing and implementing strategic initiatives and leading 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 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 and is regularly ranked 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