Association for Project Management

AI in the Boardroom

Because when projects succeed, society benefits

Introduction

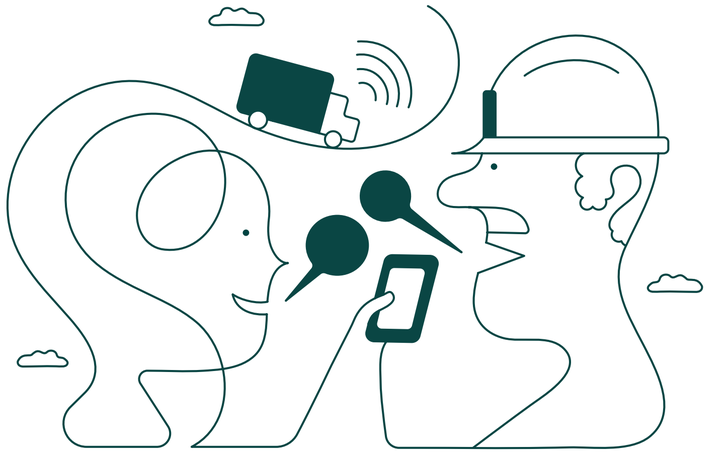
Between 2023 and 2025, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) within projects nearly doubled[1]. The majority (70%) of project professionals now say their organisation currently uses AI in project-related work. This high level of adoption is not exclusive to project practitioners; Nine out of 10 (92%) business leaders in the UK also say their organisation is using AI. But the outcomes are not always reflective of intent.

Of the leaders whose businesses use AI:

- **31%** say it's having no impact or a negative impact on productivity.
- **56%** say it's having no impact or a negative impact on their bottom line.

AI is redefining strategy, forecasting and execution. But how can project leaders wield it to improve outcomes – and without losing the human touch?

This paper is based on conversations that took place at the Association for Project Management (APM) Project Summit at Windsor Castle in autumn 2025. Senior project experts, leaders and C-Suite-level executives attended to share ideas and examine challenging topics in new and creative ways.



[1] https://www.apm.org.uk/news/ai-use-in-project-management-nearly-doubles-in-just-two-years-apm-survey-finds/

Contributors

Professor Eddie Obeng PhD, MBA

Eddie Obeng is a Professor at the School of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Henley Business School, founder and Learning Director of Pentacle, The Virtual Business School, and a leading business theorist, innovator and educator.

Sanj Bhayro, General Manager, International and Small Business at Asana

With over 20 years of experience in technology and SaaS, Sanj previously held the title of Vice President Sales for Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) at Intercom. Prior to working at Intercom, Sanj served as the EMEA Vice President of Operations and Customer Growth at Google where he was a member of the EMEA Google Cloud Leadership team.

Before his role at Google, he spent 14 years at Salesforce EMEA, most recently as the Chief Operating Officer and Senior Vice President EMEA. During his time at Salesforce, he was responsible for developing and scaling functions including small business and corporate sales, business development, cloud sales, go-to-market strategy and operations, and business development.

Mark Enzer OBE, Strategic Advisor at Mott MacDonald

Mark is a keen champion of outcomes-focused systems thinking, collaborative delivery models, digitalisation, connected digital twins and the circular economy in the built environment. As a Mott MacDonald Fellow, Mark provides advice to key clients on digitalisation and broader industry transformation.

Previously, Mark was the Director of the Centre for Digital Built Britain, where he was the Head of the National Digital Twin programme. Mark is a visiting professor at the University of Cambridge and Imperial College London, and he is a member of the Prime Minister's Council for Science and Technology.

James Garner, Head of AI and Data at Gleeds and Chair of the Project Data Analytics Taskforce

James is a pioneering digital and data leader in the construction industry, driving transformation through AI, analytics, and strategic innovation. Starting his career as a Quantity Surveyor in 2000 after earning first-class honours, he became a Chartered Member of RICS in 2002 and a Fellow in 2012 for his technical writing contributions to the RICS Black Book. He has delivered major projects across the UK, including for Imperial College and Oxford University. At Gleeds, James progressed from heading the Education sector in London to becoming the firm's Global Head of AI and Data, where he leads a function focused on business intelligence, project analytics, AI implementation and digital maturity.

He also produces the Project Flux weekly newsletter and podcast for professionals navigating the evolving landscape of AI in project delivery, offering insights, strategies and inspiration to harness the power of AI.

AI types and potential uses

AI has become a ubiquitous term that we are all used to hearing. But the use of a single encapsulating term belies the fact that AI is not a single thing. Rather, AI comes in different shapes and sizes.

As Mark Enzer described: “We’re all getting to be familiar with generative AI, which is very good at coming up with the next word in a document, the next pixel in a picture, or the next note in a song. But other types of AI are available.

“As leaders, we need to know the differences and apply the right type of AI in the right way.”

Generative AI

Popular AI-powered language models such as ChatGPT generate human-like text and responses. Day-to-day, this can assist with time-consuming project tasks such as replying to emails, creating documents (user stories, consolidating research, end user docs, etc) and writing presentations.

Machine learning

Machine learning tools are used to identify patterns and relationships in large data sets and are able to ‘learn’ from this data. ‘Neural networks’ are a type of machine learning, which can help predict project success. Off-the-shelf frameworks such as TensorFlow by Google and services by IBM Watson Studio have significantly increased the accessibility of these tools. However, research shows that the practical implementation of AI is often delayed due to managers being uncertain how it can be used in their organisation and the difficulty of reusing AI models for different purposes.

Deep learning

Deep learning is a more complex neural network, which is a subset of machine learning. It offers a more complex way of analysing data. The ‘black box’ phenomenon is often used to describe the difficulty in interpreting the reasons behind the output of deep learning models.

Expert systems

Expert systems is a term used for systems to support decision-making. These systems are stated to store “knowledge from experts”. Expert systems typically follow a rule-based approach and generally lack the ability to adapt and learn from previous data.

Computer vision

Computer vision is a field of artificial intelligence that enables computers to interpret and understand visual information from the world, such as images and videos. It uses techniques like image processing, pattern recognition and machine learning to detect, classify, and analyse objects and scenes for tasks like facial recognition, autonomous driving and detecting change on a building site.

Why a lack of ROI?

Reasons why some organisations are not yet seeing a return on their AI investment include:

1. AI is still at an early stage – businesses are still learning how to use AI and to what end. Reality and expectations do not always align.

2. AI is not fully embedded – many use cases for AI in business are extensions of how people use it in their personal lives. Tools are used like an assistant, to boost personal productivity, rather than being fully embedded in workflows.

3. It's all about data – if AI is not leveraging the data in its place of work, it cannot be truly intelligent. In many organisations, the data the AI needs does not sit in the same place. This requires people to spend time moving between applications that can access and use different data.

Sanj Bhayro commented:

"The period we're in now reminds me of when the internet first came around. People knew it would change things, but not how that change would manifest.

What's holding AI back?

- Data quality – if high quality, reliable, consistent data is not going into a system, that system shouldn't be trusted.
- Process maturity – organisations need to move up the maturity scale.
- People capability – leaders don't need to know the detail of AI but they do need to direct people to use it properly.
- Interoperability – shared data and data models are needed to support interoperability between systems and functions.
- Governance – Leaders must know what they want to use AI for. Define what the desired future state looks like and how to get there.

Mark Enzer said:

"Defining the future we want doesn't mean it will automatically happen. But if we don't try to get the future we want, then we will get the future that's given to us.

Where to seek value from AI

Leaders should embed AI into organisational workflows and not deploy AI to be used solely at individual level. While it is, of course, beneficial for people to be able to improve their personal productivity, business processes that take the most time represent the greatest opportunities for optimisation.

Sanj Bhayro shared his insight into project-related processes that can be automated, making the point that, at each stage, some parts can be automated, while others (specifically those related to review and decision-making) should involve a human.

Intake	Planning	Execution	Reporting
• Create new requests (**human**) • Gather requirements (**automate**)	• Prioritise and suggest staffing (**automate**) • Approve recommendations (**human**)	• Draft project brief (**automate**) • Finalise and kick-off (**human**) • Route for legal review (**automate**) • Receive and address blockers (**human**)	• Report project outcomes (**automate**) • Share in exec reviews to optimise future projects (**human and/or automate**)

Sanj said:

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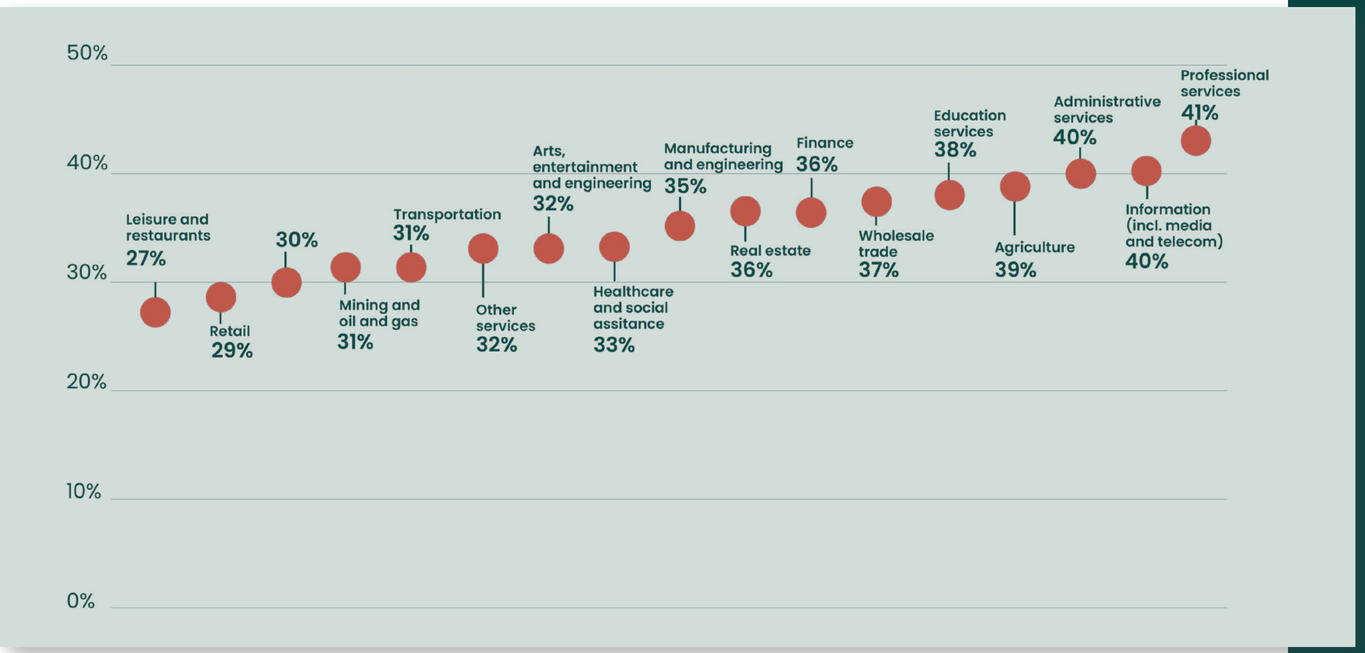
First and foremost, it’s about human and AI collaboration. To unlock that, AI needs access to the right context. But it also needs to have checkpoints in place where humans can review and approve the work.

AI as a thought partner – unlocking agility and strategic thinking

The percentage of labour time that can be saved via automation varies by industry, but is significant overall.

Estimated percentage of labour time that can be automated using generative AI



Note: Percentages based on preliminary estimates from economists and multiple studies

Source: Eisfeldt, Andrea L et al. "*Generative AI and Firm Values.*" National Bureau of Economic Research, May 2023

Unlocking this potential, however, will require using AI to support strategy, which in turn requires a change in thinking at leadership level.

James Garner explained by paraphrasing Professor Richard Susskind OBE, stating: "When you go to the hardware store to buy a drill, you're not really buying a drill; you're buying an outcome. You're buying a hole in the wall. We need to think about outcomes."

Part of the shift from process-focused to outcome-focused is for leaders to stop thinking about AI as a technological rollout and rather as change management, making sure employees are data-led, so they can make the most of the new technology.

This reinforces the importance of having people in the mix. AI is ideal for automating labour–intensive or time–intensive tasks, but people should still be responsible for decision–making.

Managing contributions from human and digital agents will require leaders to not only enhance their digital knowledge, but also their human–centric skills because of the increasingly human–like way that AI agents will interact with people.

James summarised: "The ability to manage not only human beings but also AI agents (whether that's physical agents such as robotics or digital agents on our laptops or phones) represent very different skills...But it means we're going to have to enhance our human skills. We almost come full circle because the way we interact with these agents will be in a very human way."

Context engineering

Design precise instructions for AI agents

Agent orchestration

Coordinate multiple AI systems simultaneously

Human–AI leadership

Conduct the symphony of intelligent automation

About APM

The Association for Project Management (APM) is a professional membership organisation that sets the standards for the project profession and raises its profile. APM is the only chartered organisation representing the project profession in the world. As a registered charity, APM delivers learning and networking opportunities, qualifications, research, resources, events, and best practice guidance for the project community, helping the profession deliver better.

APM currently has over 42,000 members and more than 470 corporate partners based in 140 countries.

Further resources

- White paper – *Data and AI: Embracing the future* (exclusive to APM Corporate Partners)
- Guide – *Getting started in Project Data*
- Research - *Generative AI and Firm Values* by Andrea L. Eisfeldt, Gregor Schubert and Miao Ben Zhang
- Community – AI Data and Analytics Interest Network

We are the only chartered membership organisation for the project profession

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