

Chapter 9

Living on the Edge: Managing Project Complexity

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ABSTRACT

This game-changing chapter describes the unique and often catastrophic challenges involved in managing complex projects. The nature and dimensions of project complexity are discussed, including: team size, project duration, schedule, cost and scope flexibility, understanding of the problem and solution, stability of requirements, strategic importance, level of organizational change, inter-project dependencies and political sensitivity. Participants will be introduced to the new Project Complexity Model, a tool that is used to diagnose the complexity profile of a project. We explain the specific criteria or dimensions of complexity and propose complexity management strategies to manage each complexity dimension.

INTRODUCTION

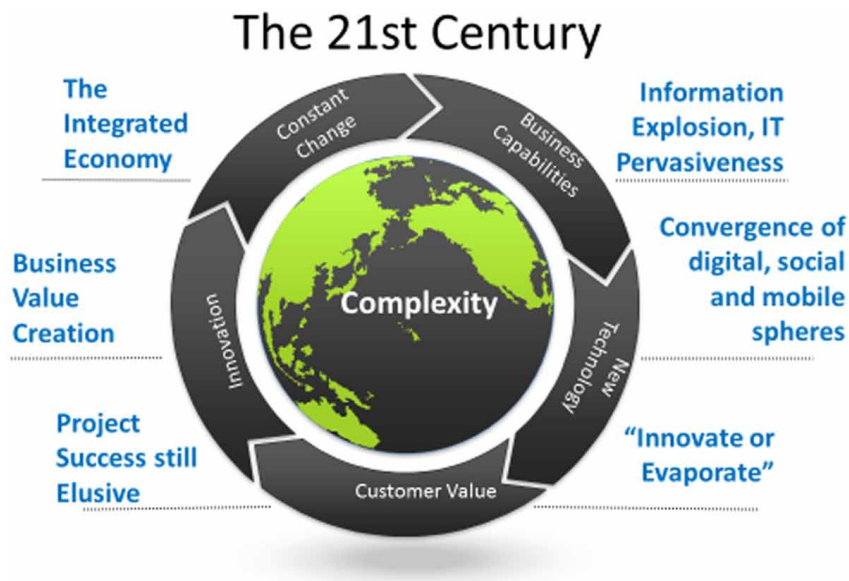
What is it in the 21st Century that makes projects so difficult? These are tumultuous times. Businesses are faced with unprecedented challenges in the hyper-connected 21st century global economy. Extraordinary gale-force winds of change are swirling faster than ever, causing us to rethink our approach to business, project, and performance management models.

The Integrated Economy

Everyone is feeling the effects of the global integrated economy. Many jobs are becoming commoditized; They can be performed by internal resources, contractors, or even outsourced resources located anywhere across the globe. Global wage scales have made U.S. employees too expensive to perform standard, repetitive tasks. Many U.S. jobs are gone and not coming back. For these reasons, basic tasks are beginning to be outsourced or performed by contractors.

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Figure 1. The 21st century



The Technology and Information Explosion

IT applications have also impacted global jobs by automating repetitive activities, often increasing the quality and predictability of outcomes. Smart IT applications are replacing knowledge workers across industries. The demand for new, innovative apps delivered quickly is making traditional requirements and development methods obsolete.

Convergence of Digital, Social, and Mobile Spheres

Social/mobile media has connected us all in obvious and subtle ways, some of which we don't yet fully understand; and new applications emerge that we can't even imagine until they reach us. As we see across the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere, people are using social media to bring about major changes to social and political systems. Project teams are using social media to enhance collaboration among key stakeholders across the globe.

Innovation vs. Business as Usual

The call to action for today's businesses is 'innovate or vanish'. For businesses to be competitive, they must be first to market with innovative, leading-edge products and services that are intuitive, easy to use, and offer surprising new features. It is no longer enough to ask business partners and customers what they want or need. Project teams must foster creativity and innovation during their working sessions, continually asking the question: 'Are we truly innovating?'

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