

Unlocking growth: The power of uniting teams and AI



Because when projects
succeed, society benefits

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming a standard part of the business leader's toolkit. Research from Association for Project Management (APM) shows that 61% of business leaders found that AI improved their decision making¹. Despite the growing prevalence of AI in the workplace, there's an emerging skills gap that may be stopping businesses getting the most from this technology. Research by work management platform Asana has found that only 16% of professionals have received/sought out AI training², while a survey by APM and research company Censuswide research³ found that almost half (49%) of project professionals said technical knowledge and training is a challenge they've encountered. This gap demonstrates a clear divide between technological capability and human readiness, which risks undermining the value that AI can offer.

As AI becomes embedded in the everyday work of organisations, leaders face a strategic challenge: how can their teams stay aligned to the rapidly evolving AI capabilities to drive growth?

This white paper explores how leaders can bridge the gap for alignment by focussing on key areas: Strategic adoption, bridging the optimism gap and building trust to optimise the workflow. By approaching AI as a tool that can augment, rather than disrupt, leaders can ensure alignment between AI and teams. This alignment leads to streamlined processes, reduced repetitive tasks and free team members to focus on higher value tasks. Simply put, team and AI alignment can be a powerful enabler of growth.

This paper is based on a panel discussion between **Dr. Nicholas Dacre**, Associate Professor of Project Management at University of Southampton, and **Luke Coleman**, Head of B2B GTM at VodafoneThree, that took place at the "Next Gen PMO: Human and AI Collaboration for Scaled Impact" Asana event in London. It is designed for business leaders, project and programme professionals.

¹ <https://www.apm.org.uk/media/4tzccaom/digital-transformation-and-the-ai-imperative-in-public-and-private-sector-projects-methods-and-skills-for-project-management.pdf>

² <https://assets.asana.biz/m/39756c9aeda46673/original/Work-Smarter-with-AI-or-Get-Left-Behind-Playbook.pdf>

³ <https://www.apm.org.uk/news/ai-use-in-project-management-nearly-doubles-in-just-two-years-apm-survey-finds/>



AI and growth potential

A survey of UK business leaders by APM/Censuswide shows the bottom-line impact AI is already having, demonstrating its potential to drive future growth.

- 43% of leaders whose businesses are using AI say it is having a positive impact on their bottom line.
- 47% say it's having a positive impact on productivity.
- The departments where these impacts are most felt are IT, finance/ accounting, and research and development.

Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey has highlighted AI's ability to drive economic and productivity growth⁴. With the project profession currently employing 2.32 million full-time equivalents (FTEs) and contributing £186.8 billion annually to the UK economy, the potential for AI as a growth driver in businesses where projects are taking place is significant.

Strategic adoption

Strategic leadership is vital in how AI is adopted within an organisation. Some leaders get caught up in the hype cycle of a new technology, while others feel obligated to adopt because of competitive pressure.

Such reactionary approaches to adoption tend to only lead to short term benefits. In the long term, they can result in increasingly fragmented workflows and a misalignment of teams, all of which severely limit the positive impact that AI can have within an organisation.

A more measured approach increases the likelihood of long-term success. Leaders need to be proactive and make an informed decision around how AI is implemented within a team and throughout an organisation. The following principles were suggested by Dr. Nicholas Dacre and Luke Coleman as a strategic framework for effective and aligned adoption:



Define goals and outcomes:

Begin by identifying the problem you're trying to solve and the outcomes the AI needs to deliver. Also, look at what impact this will have on the team and wider organisation. This ensures alignment between the technology and organisational objectives.



Be agile:

An agile approach is essentially taking a flexible, iterative approach for implementing technology. This allows for scaling, adjustments or pivots based on performance and team feedback. Agile also reduces risk and improves the chances of successful long-term adoption. In recent APM research about AI in project management,⁵ 64% of respondents said that they favoured an agile approach for its flexibility and efficiency. However, commitment to agile is essential. Interviews from the same research revealed that poorly implemented agile practices have the opposite effect, creating rigid workflows and new bottlenecks.



ROI and quick wins:

Prioritise areas that will deliver measurable value quickly, such as automating repetitive tasks from your team like creating meeting notes or agendas. These early successes will build trust for broader adoption and will allow team members to focus on higher value tasks.

⁴ www.bankofengland.co.uk/speech/2025/march/andrew-bailey-university-of-leicester-chancellors-distinguished-lecture

⁵ Dacre, N., Baxter, D., Dong, H., Al-Mhdawi, M. K. S., Abeysooriya, R. & Shen, Y. (2025). Digital transformation and the AI imperative in public and private sector projects: Methods and skills for project management. APM.

Bridging the optimism gap and building trust

There's a widening disconnect in how executives, managers and team members view AI.

- For leaders, AI is seen as a strategic enabler that supports them in making confident, informed decisions. Nearly half (44%) of business leaders report that AI is having a positive impact on their bottom line, according to APM research .
- However, Asana's findings reveal a more anxious view among workers, with 76% believing that AI represents a fundamental change in how they work, and only 36% saying they understand how to use it effectively.

This is called the optimism gap, and it's one of the biggest barriers to successful adoption. Leaving this gap unaddressed can lead to disjointed adoption which slows teams, causes friction with management expectations and undermines strategic goals. It's vital to bridge this gap. Without alignment, even well-designed AI initiatives can fail.

Luke argued that trust within teams is the cornerstone of any successful attempt to bridge this gap. He said: "There is naturally some unease about AI, with people wondering how it will impact their work and what their role will look like going forward, in extreme cases, some are even worried about their jobs. Team members need to not only feel confident with using the technology itself, but also with its purpose and desired outcomes."

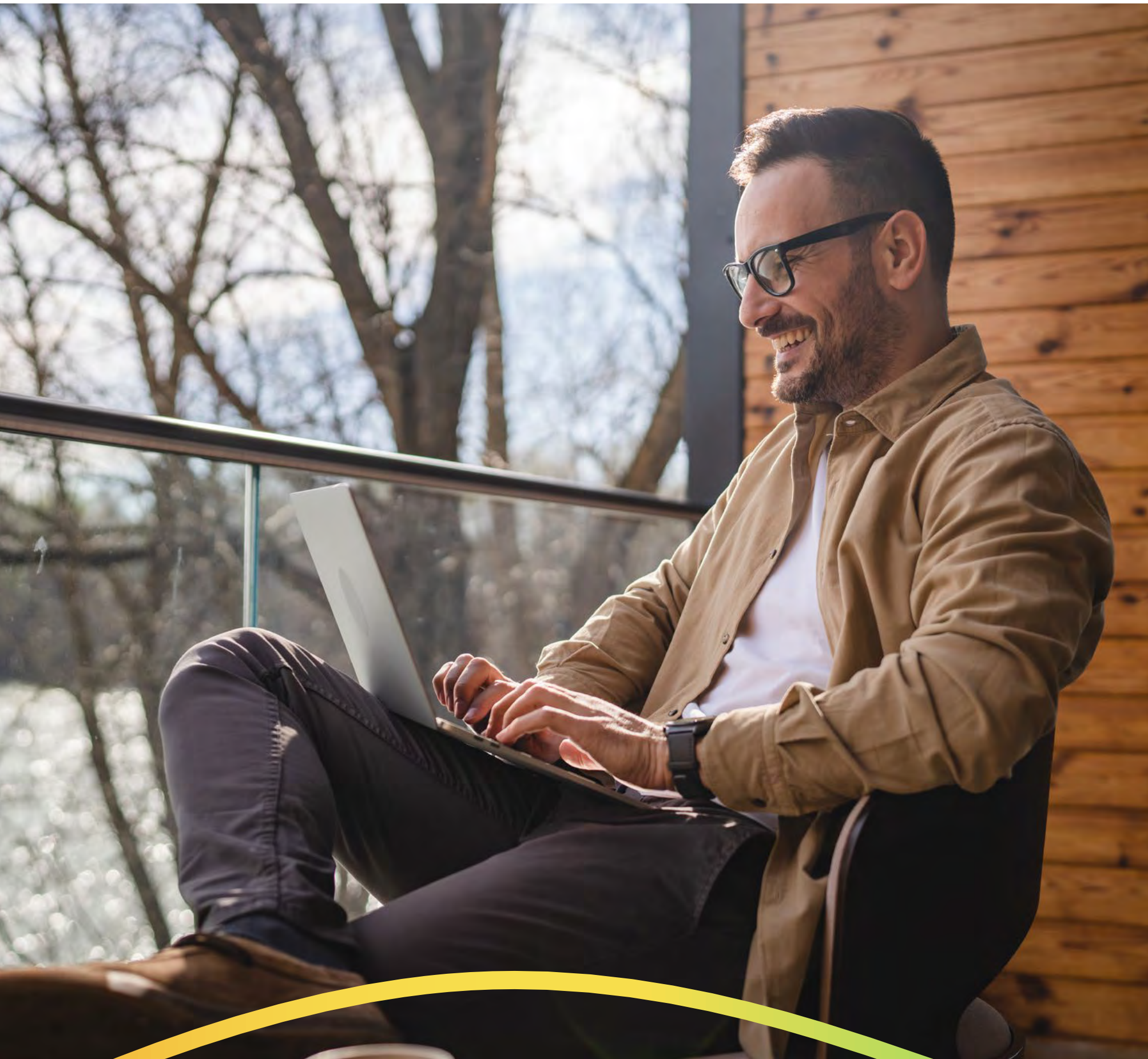
Luke emphasised that **AI should be used to augment, not replace the human workforce.** Although people and AI are working together, the human element will remain crucial, especially for ensuring AI outputs are logical, accurate and are able to drive growth.

Investing in training programmes that help team members better understand how to utilise the technology is another way to reduce the 'AI shyness', as it empowers team members to feel more confident in using it, ensuring accuracy and trustworthiness. There are often a mixture of skill levels throughout teams, so training shouldn't take a one-size-fits-all approach. Some will benefit more than others.

Transparency with team members will also build confidence in both the technology and its adoption. AI is seen as a disruptive technology, so leaders must provide clarity to team members. They need to be able to clearly articulate why the AI is being adopted, what problems it will solve, the impact it will have and how this will benefit team members and the organisation. Linking adoption to measurable outcomes, such as time saved on manual repetitive tasks, as well as honesty about where impact has not been as expected, builds confidence.



The value of optimising 'everyday' tasks



Focussing on automating smaller, repetitive tasks may not initially seem as impactful as a full AI rollout, but these routine tasks consume valuable time; the one resource organisations cannot get back. In the hybrid workplace, for example, there are constant questions around value of meetings, with the default time for an online Microsoft Teams meeting usually set for an hour. AI can streamline these meetings through the generation of real time notes, enabling people to be more present in meetings and not distracted by multitasking. It can also create agendas and post meeting recaps to ensure that teams are aligned. These tasks, while important, are repetitive and are rarely the best use of a person's time, as they take attention away from other tasks. Using AI to automate these smaller, repetitive tasks will free up employees to spend more time on higher value tasks.

Dr. Dacre summarised by saying: "Encourage AI adoption where it provides value".

One way to approach this is by treating AI as an additional team member; one who does all the tedious work within a team, such as summarising emails and reports. These are low risk tasks but will provide high value for teams in terms of the amount of time saved.

Conclusion

When teams and AI are aligned, growth follows naturally. Workflows become faster, teams become more focussed and organisational decision making improves. Without alignment, there is more likely to be a disjointed adoption that causes fragmented workflows, slowing growth. True transformation happens when people and the technology move in the same direction.

That's why alignment is so critical; it ensures AI elevates an organisation. In the competitive business landscape where every advantage matters, alignment between a team and AI is a platform for long term, sustainable success.

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 across 140 countries.

Further resources

- **APM Podcast** – [What artificial intelligence means for the future of project management](#)
- **APM Research** – [Digital Transformation and the AI Imperative in Public and Private Sector Projects](#)
- **Blog** – [project managing for the future: What today's leaders must learn from tomorrow's challenges](#)
- [What is artificial intelligence in project management?](#)
- [Case studies – AI in the project profession](#)





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