

Is Technology Changing Project Management?

I was asked a while ago whether technology was changing project management. It seems like technology is changing faster and faster all the time. But is technology changing project management to any degree?

This is an interesting question. Certainly, there are a couple aspects of projects where technology comes into play. First, many projects are becoming more and more technically complex. This is true for many projects - IT, pharma, engineering, finance, etc. It seems like many projects have some tool or technology component. However, this is not a project management matter, but it is a characteristic of the products we are building and the project tools we are using.

Second, the tools we use for project management are changing. This includes tools for scheduling, risk management, communications and more. Client-server tools have replaced mainframe tools, which have all been replaced by web tools. Today, many of the project management tools run in the cloud. The tools have also become more complex to satisfy the needs of project managers today.

There is a lot of discussion today about Agile methodologies. These rely on light processes to deliver solutions more quickly through short iterations. Many of these Agile projects are technology projects, but the project management approach is driven more by philosophy rather than by technology. In fact, the project management aspect of Agile actually discourages the use of software tools and focuses on simple manual processes.

All that being said, in my opinion, the actual project management discipline has not changed that much based strictly on technology drivers. You still have to manage scope. You still have issues to resolve. You still have to manage risks, etc. The various aspects of planning and managing work as a project do not necessarily change based on the technology. For example, it is true that there are new technologies for helping you build and manage a schedule. But the basic mechanics of building and managing a schedule have not really changed.

There may be some aspects of communication that have been affected by technology. Technology has given us the ability to communicate faster and in more real-time. There are also better tools for collaboration and sharing. This may be an area where technology has affected the fundamentals of project management.

So, to answer the question from the beginning of the article - has technology changed project management? In my opinion - not so much. The nature of the projects themselves may be impacted by technology, but the fundamentals of planning, cost management, schedule management, risk management, scope management, etc. have not changed so much. Project management is process-driven. Although technology has impacted the automation and speed of these processes, I think the fundamental nature of project management has not been changed much by technology.