apm

Professional responsibilities and obligations
The case of millennials

THE CHARTERED BODY FOR THE
PROJECT PROFESSION

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About the author

We are grateful to Dr Efrosyni Konstantinou of University College London (UCL) for drafting this paper.

Since 2001, Effie has been studying people in organisations and how they use their knowledge to build their professional identity in everyday work. Her research is informed by philosophy – especially the reading of Parmenides – and contemporary management thinking that emphasises a critical approach to business. Previous experience in the industry has informed her ideas, which she is now exploring in project-based organisations, following the award of her PhD from the University of Stirling, Scotland. She has studied the identity of upper-middle and top managers and has reviewed issues of the politics of knowledge and its management in nine industries, and across the public and private sectors. Effie developed the Centre for Performance at Work (City University London) and worked at Deloitte LLP as a knowledge manager before joining UCL and the Bartlett School of Construction and Project Management, where she leads the MSc in strategic management of projects, and teaches critical thinking for business and about people in organisations. Effie is assistant director, and head of strategic initiatives, at the Bartlett School of Construction and Project Management. She is a senior lecturer in strategic management of projects, fellow of the Higher Education Academy, co-chair of the Knowledge and Learning Special Interest Group at the British Academy of Management, and academic lead at the Bartlett Change Initiative – the think tank for social change and the built environment. Her email address is efrosyni.konstantinou@ucl.ac.uk

1. Foreword

This paper focuses on one of the key issues facing the project management profession and, indeed, the leadership and management of organisations and firms more generally. In a few short years, the millennial generation will constitute the majority of the workforce and will be emerging, if they are not already, as the leaders in their field. Therefore, the themes and values of this group, which Dr Efrosyni Konstantinou identifies so well in this paper, offer two major challenges as we seek to build a project management profession that matches the traditional Chartered professions, both in terms of perception and status.

First, how can the current profession absorb and embrace the best of these 'millennial' values into the existing profession to help evolve it? And second, what do we need to do to attract millennials into the profession to participate and influence developments, and to avoid alienating them by carrying on with existing methods or cultures that inadvertently exclude them?

Surely the answer is simple – to build a confident and progressive profession which encourages us all to learn from each other. The journey towards the Chartered profession on which we have embarked needs experience, but also a new infusion of younger professionals who are prepared to challenge, and offer a commitment to lifelong learning and ethical considerations as to how project management is conducted.

This paper provides us with food for thought as we consider what elements we need to build our new Chartered professional community, and how we can best embrace and promote the new flow of diverse talent into our ranks.

Sara Drake
Chief executive, APM

2. About this series

This paper is the sixth in a series of Chartered thought-leadership papers – 'The Road to Chartered' – being prepared by APM to help build its capacity as a Chartered body. The series is being published over the 12 months to spring 2018.

We are grateful to Dr Efrosyni Konstantinou of UCL for the preparation of this paper, which considers how the professionalism of the project manager is evolving beyond 'delivery execution' skills – and with this comes new requirements of competency, knowledge and ethics if project management is to receive wider recognition as a profession by peers. It focuses on the importance of professionalism and ethics, looking at the impact of the millennial generation and how this can shape the future of the profession, and what the profession needs to consider as it embraces the new wave of thinking and approach this generation brings.

As this series progresses, it will provide members with insight into how APM will develop and what this will mean for them, and crucially how members can be involved in this evolution. It will also signal to the wider public the intent of the project management profession to play its part in the development of the social and economic well-being of the UK – a contribution that, we believe, has for too long been underappreciated.

More details of the other papers in the series are in section 10 (page 14).

We hope you will find the series informative and, whether you are a member, prospective member or interested external stakeholder, that it provides a proper context to this important phase in the development of our profession.

3. Introduction

Your professional responsibilities and obligations define what is expected from you as a member of your profession. They are the boundaries within which the professional practitioner is expected to work and behave, at least when they are practising. However, our current understanding of the professional responsibilities and obligations for project managers tends to centre on the execution of projects, and is thus somewhat restricted. This paper argues that there is a new way in which we can think about professional obligations and responsibilities, especially where millennials are considered.

4. A new approach to professional responsibilities and obligations in the management of projects

In his most recent book, Timothy Snyder[1] writes: "Life is political, not because the world cares about how you feel, but because the world reacts to what you do."

In this one sentence, Snyder captures the essence of professionalism. As a professional project manager, you have impact. And your impact comes from your actions. As a professional practitioner, you can be trusted with the knowledge that has been created over the years – you can be trusted with defining the purpose of a project and how it will affect the lives, well-being, wealth, hopes and aspirations of fellow citizens in a modern society. You can be trusted to put your expertise and experience to good use and enhance rather than diminish the lives of others.

However, today, project managers are mostly seen as responsible for the execution of projects, while the definition of the purpose of the project, the necessity of education for project managers, and a higher level of engagement and responsibility over the entire project are frequently not seen as part of the job. Trusting you with the entire project – its purpose, design and execution – means that the boundaries of the professional responsibilities and obligations of the project manager need to be expanded. You need to do more. You need to go beyond the strict definition of your professional responsibilities and obligations that centre on project execution. The more you know about your work, your projects and their purpose, and the more you understand and consider the implications of your projects, the more you can claim full responsibility and master your work.[2]

Existing work[3] suggests that – as a knowledge worker – the professional project manager feels responsible and obliged to:

- Be motivated towards achieving career development, i.e. maintaining continuity in employment that is rooted in uncertain market conditions. Project managers are actively involved in their career development.

- Believe and seek to significantly enhance the marketability of their professional insights and knowledge. Project managers are keen to promote their experience and expertise in a professional context.

- Critically reflect on employment conditions, on the level of fairness of procedures and of interactions with stakeholders, and – perhaps more importantly – on their individual contribution to their work. Project managers are inclined to work in fair professional environments where justice and equality are valued.

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[1] Snyder, T. (2017). On Tyranny: Twenty lessons from the twentieth century. The Bodley Head: London

[2] Foucault, M. (2000). Ethics: Subjectivity and truth: Essential works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984 (v.1). London: Penguin Books

[3] Konstantinou, E. (2008). Knowledge Management in a global context: A critique of knowledge transfer and the role of knowledge worker. PhD thesis. University of Stirling

- Be socially adept. Project managers can build and maintain professional relationships and social capital.

- Be skilled in combining and evaluating information and facts so as to produce sufficient insight into evolving business situations. Project managers have skills of analysis and synthesis, and the capacity to understand projects and their work.

- Be able to handle ambiguous work, the temporality of projects and the potential of failure. Project managers exhibit a highly dynamic professional identity.

- Be able to do the work, i.e. make decisions, act conscientiously towards others, stay updated and be a problem solver. Project managers can be effective in their work.

However, a further recent study[4] showed that highly experienced project managers, who are exceedingly competent and seek to deliver projects of quality with integrity, feel that the ethical aspects of their work are frequently marginalised. Their professional responsibilities and obligations to the client, the profession and society rarely include ethical issues. This means that even the best in our field – the experts – have a somewhat limited understanding of their professional responsibilities and obligations, which – by implication – limits the scope of their decision-making authority over their work. More specifically, the lack of ethical considerations in the delivery of project work means that even the most devoted and experienced project managers may be fundamentally irresponsible in three very significant ways:[5]

- Political irresponsibility or 'not knowing what is happening' arises when a professional practitioner displays a salient and noticeable lack of understanding of their time and place – that is, a lack of understanding of the environment or context of the project. Here, the decisions the practitioner makes are decontextualised. Frequently, this means that the professional practitioner does not have a full view of who is involved and affected by the project, and therefore the commercial, ideological or political needs and requirements of a particular group of stakeholders are prioritised over the needs of other rightful stakeholders. The professional practitioner can hardly claim that they are acting responsibly.

- Intellectual irresponsibility or 'not knowing any different' arises when a professional lacks an in-depth understanding of their practice and can only unresponsively follow the dominant professional and disciplinary trends. Here, the decisions and actions of the professional practitioner are susceptible to 'the one – the only – way of doing things', because the practitioner is not aware of different established or innovative approaches to work, or they do not feel confident enough to diverge from the established way of working in a given industry, sector or job role.

- Moral irresponsibility or 'not knowing the difference between right and wrong' arises when a professional practitioner is inclined to commodify their skills – that is, apply their project management skills to projects with questionable, or even unethical, purposes.

[4] Konstantinou, E. (2015). Professionalism in Project Management: Redefining the role of the project practitioner. Project Management Journal, 46(2), 21-35

[5] Judt, T. (2007). The burden of responsibility. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

The above types of irresponsibility suggest that in developing a new approach to professional responsibilities and obligations in the management of projects, we should be thinking seriously about the ethical dimensions of professional project work if we are hoping to claim responsibility and ownership over our work, i.e. claim to be professional. More specifically, a new approach would suggest, that – to act responsibly – the professional project manager needs to create the space in which they can:

- Actively develop an understanding of the context of the project, including a full understanding of the stakeholders who will be affected, and a set of ethical principles and priorities against which to critically evaluate the political, intellectual and moral implications of the purpose of the project. Traditionally, when professional practitioners were in doubt about the ethical dimensions of their work, they would seek support in the profession, and discuss and consult with fellow professionals with similar experiences and dilemmas.[6] Evaluating a project in context and understanding its ethical implications for different stakeholder groups, would enable acting responsibly.

- Engage in the ongoing understanding and development of project management practice. Knowledge about projects can be found in academic books, the expertise and experiences of fellow professional practitioners, the requirements of clients, and the lived experiences of citizens, the people and communities for which projects are created and delivered. Engaging with a range of different project stakeholders can reveal evolving stakeholder priorities and, in turn, improve established ways of work and allow new, innovative and disruptive project management practices to emerge. Traditionally, the knowledge of a profession was developed by the academic community, which in turn influenced the professional community.[7] However, in a networked, global context, we now understand that the knowledge that is created in the workplace, in the field and society, and within the profession and the communities who benefit from projects, can be equally important to disciplinary, academic knowledge[8] and help develop different project management practices. New or modified practices will have their own merits and limitations when applied to projects, and will be relevant to some projects and not others, but will reflect a more relevant, tailored approach to managing projects responsibly.

- Develop and exercise their professional judgement. Being professional means making the decisions that most people would avoid. A set of ethical principles and criteria can: (a) help the professional practitioner make decisions and distinguish between what is right and wrong; (b) define their professional identity and contribution to the field of project management (i.e. what they will be known for);[9] and (c) by implication, enable acting responsibly and being trusted as a manager of projects.

[6] Abbott, A. (1988). The System of Professions: an essay on the division of expert labor. London: The University of Chicago Press

[7] Abbott, A. (1988). The System of Professions: an essay on the division of expert labor. London: The University of Chicago Press

[8] Scott, D., Brown, A., Lunt., I. and Thorne., L. (2004). Professional Doctorates: Integrating professional and academic knowledge. The Society for Research in Higher Education

[9] Konstantinou, E. and Müller, R. (2016). The role of philosophy in project management. Project Management Journal, 47(2), pp3-5

5. Why are the ethical implications of projects important?

This is important because – as Snyder reminded us recently – actions have impact and they are political. For example, building a dam in a remote area may enable the regeneration of a number of surrounding areas; it has environmental impact, and political implications for the regional and commercial development of nearby nations, along with being a significant engineering feat that has to be executed and efficiently delivered. We know that:

> "An expert's role also determines the scope of accountability for the expert's work. Professionals account for the complete professional task, including treatment. We can say that experts represent not only units of expertise (as human capital) but also units of accountability for the application of expertise in accordance to their expert role."[10]

So, asking yourself as a project manager if you should contribute to and be accountable for a project is important, because your contribution will have an impact on different project stakeholders.

Professional life matters to people. You devote your efforts to your work, the time you spend on projects is time away from your family and friends, and many people gain a sense of purpose and self-worth from work.[11] And this is rightly so in the case of projects, because projects themselves are important to people and society.[12] They deliver the buildings in which we get healthy; they build our airports and all other transport so that we can explore the world, share ideas, learn and be connected; academic research projects enhance our understanding about a particular subject and help influence society and public policy; in the civil service, projects create the IT that enables key services to be provided to citizens; and, similarly, across all industries and sectors, projects transform the organisations and societies that we live in for the better. Their professional design and delivery matters, and it matters a lot!

Finally, project managers need to consider the ethical implications of their work, because until they do so, they cannot claim and hold the responsibility and accountability for their projects. This is a limiting factor for the professional project manager, who – in being professional – seeks the ownership of their actions, the professional autonomy and authority to make challenging decisions about the project as a whole, and the professional status that will distinguish them from the non-professional, inexpert project manager.

"An expert's role also determines the scope of accountability for the expert's work. Professionals account for the complete professional task, including treatment. We can say that experts represent not only units of expertise (as human capital) but also units of accountability for the application of expertise in accordance to their expert role"

"Project managers need to consider the ethical implications of their work, because until they do so, they cannot claim and hold the responsibility and accountability for their projects"

[10] Mieg, H. A. (2009). Social and sociological factors in the development of expertise. In K. A. Ericsson, N. Charness, P. J. Feltovich, and R. R. Hoffman (Eds.), The Cambridge handbook of expertise and expert performance. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press

[11] Noon, M. and Blyton, P. (1997). The realities of work. London: Palgrave

[12] Morris, P. W. G. (2013). Reconstructing project management. Oxford, England: Wiley-Blackwell

6. Why is it important now? The case of millennials

All of this is well and good on paper, but today, ethics is in crisis. Everybody is talking about ethics as if it were a recent discovery, such as the Higgs boson, whose existence was first suspected in the 1960s and has been confirmed only recently. But ethics is not new. It seems that, as a society, we reached a point of denying ethics and the need for a critical evaluation of the purpose and delivery of work, and in turn our projects. Perhaps this is the result of the industrialisation of work, whereby critically evaluating the purpose of work (i.e. against a set of ethical principles and criteria) is no longer a requirement for those delivering a single task or number of tasks.[13] Maybe this is a consequence of the birth of the business school,[14] which has deprioritised ethics in business and organisation studies by narrowly defining it as safeguarding the interests of shareholders.[15] Whatever the reason, our willingness to execute and deliver work (and, therefore, projects) without critically evaluating its purpose has been seen as a contributing factor to the financial crisis, climate change and the impoverishment of working life. And similarly, in addressing the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Baroness Onora O'Neill noted:

> "The most basic question we can ask about any activity or any institution is: what is it for? What are its purposes? By this I do not mean the objectives or targets its leaders or managers set for a particular activity or time period, but what it seeks to achieve."[16]

How can we change the way we are thinking? How can we reinstate the importance of ethics at work, and reclaim the political, intellectual and moral responsibility of our work and its implications for society? This question may seem far-fetched, impossible, fervent, revolutionary or even nonsense. But it is not. Especially when we think of millennials.

The millennial generation comprises people born after 1980 who – at the time of writing this paper – are in their early or mid-thirties. They think and act differently. Most importantly, they organise around social values, such as justice, equality, etc.[17] For example, today, people from all walks of life take an interest in climate change, same-sex marriage, the refugee crisis, Brexit and so many other social matters. Today's up and coming workforce has been born in a networked, globalised and interconnected world, which lies at the tips of their fingers via social media.

The relentless flow of information creates the potential for the comparison of different ideologies, philosophies, work practices and forms of social organisation. Rightful and unjust discriminations take place within a global, interconnected, digitised context. Different political and social ideas, new and disruptive ways of working and solving problems, the customs and traditions of far-flung civilisations and cultures, power structures and relationships of organisational and social control, and entrenched biases and prejudices become visible on a number of screens on smartphones, smartwatches, smart glasses, computers, laptops, tablets, etc – they are within reach, accessible and vulnerable to the scrutiny of millennials.

"The most basic question we can ask about any activity or any institution is: what is it for? What are its purposes? By this I do not mean the objectives or targets its leaders or managers set for a particular activity or time period, but what it seeks to achieve"

[13] Bradley, H., Erickson, M., Stephenson, C. and Williams, S. (2000). Myths at work. Cambridge: Polity

[14] Morsing, M., & Rovira, S. (2011). Introduction. In M. Morsing and A. S. Rovira (Eds.), Business schools and their contribution to society. London: Sage Publications.

[15] Fryer, M. (2015). Ethics Theory and Business Practice. London: Sage Publications.

[16] Baroness Onora O'Neill (2015). "What is banking for?" Remarks at Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

[17] Inglehart, R. (2016). Inequality and modernisation: Why equality is likely to make a comeback. Foreign Affairs, 95(1), 2-10.

> "Millennials have access to and learn in the world, not just their particular locality. They have been brought up in a world characterised by rapidly developing technological connections, social and moral plurality, and dispersed, even diluted and contested, everyday realities. This may make it hard for them to focus and define the purpose of their work in the absence of national, intellectual and other boundaries, and may render them powerless and uninterested"

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- It removes millennials from fundamental social structures and (at least the traditional) relationships of power and injustice in society. Millennials have reach; they can expand, and organise their work and citizenship differently.

- It creates the need and the urge to find meaning and purpose. It is not only the consequences of climate change, and the pointlessness of working in massive, multinational organisations when you don't know why these were created in the first place, that make the millennial generation look for meaning and purpose. In a networked world where all can be challenged and contested, meaning and purpose in life are not ascribed by religion, class, family, society, an employer or different political ideologies and views – meaning and purpose has to be sought out and negotiated among these.

Looking into the experiences and life trajectories of millennials for more than five years at UCL, listening and empathising with their professional goals and aspirations, and closely observing the way they think and pursue their professional development, it has been noted that millennials from all around the world prefer to:

- work in networks rather than hierarchies;

- influence rather than dictate, command and control;

- innovate with others from across the world through social media;

- work beyond boundaries and be dynamic – they thrive in uncertainty and change, rather than stability and a structured, fixed approach to work;

- create value and be involved in all decision-making, rather than executing plans and orders; and

- take an ethical approach to work and professional practice as a means to competitiveness, and their professional well-being and development, while working using environmentally sustainable practices.

So, there is an opportunity for the profession of project management. This is to trust and support millennials – to create the space in which millennial attitudes and behaviour, which emphasise an ethical approach to work, are trusted and supported, and can become an integral, key part of project management practice, and the design and delivery of projects.

Millennials (and the professionals from all generations who think like millennials) do not need to adapt to new ways of working; they themselves reflect a new way of work. In a slightly more deterministic manner, as they become senior and hold strategic positions in their own and related academic disciplines and professional fields, their inclination towards an ethical approach to work may prevail. Some will adapt to traditional ways of thinking and working, and some will affiliate themselves and build networks with like-minded colleagues. And this would constitute a shift of social nature in our world.

7. The role of APM in relation to professional responsibilities and obligations

The profession has a key role to play here. And this is to create a space where:

- the previous generations meet the millennial generation of project management professionals, and one learns from the other;

- professional practices are shared, discussed, debated and critically evaluated; and

- professionals can explore and find together the purpose and 'the why' behind projects, which will make their work even more meaningful and important.[18]

Again, Snyder reminds us:

> "Professions can create forms of ethical conversation that are impossible between a lonely individual and a distant government. If members of professions think of themselves as groups with common interests, with norms and rules that oblige them at all times, they can gain confidence and indeed a certain kind of power."[19]

Academics, clients, citizens, policy-makers and others need to be invited to contribute their own political, intellectual and moral priorities and perspectives, while knowing that millennials will be questioning, challenging, and comparing and contrasting these with other priorities and perspectives from around the world.

In this sense, professionalism and being professional can be seen as an all-encompassing, meaningful form of engagement with professional practice, which extends beyond (but certainly does not forget) the strict measurement and assessment of competencies and skill sets. A focus on the meaning and purpose of projects, on debating a set of ethical criteria, based on which the political, intellectual and moral implications of projects can be critically evaluated, can be the new way in which we, as the profession, can start thinking about the future of project management.

Maybe this will help develop more trustworthy professional practitioners in the management of projects who can be trusted to work unsupervised by self-regulating and self-managing[20] based on a set of ethical principles that have been developed in their primary professional community – the profession of project management.[21]

"Professions can create forms of ethical conversation that are impossible between a lonely individual and a distant government. If members of professions think of themselves as groups with common interests, with norms and rules that oblige them at all times, they can gain confidence and indeed a certain kind of power"

[18] Konstantinou, E. (2015). Blanchot – the new black: an essay on the nature of project work and the relationship between the project professional and the work. Presented at: The International Research Network on Organising by Projects (IRNOP), London, UK

[19] Snyder, T. (2017). On Tyranny: Twenty lessons from the twentieth century. The Bodley Head: London

[20] Baroness Onora O'Neil (2002), BBC Reith Lectures

[21] Konstantinou, E., Earl, S. and Edkins, A. (2016). Professionalism: A more resilient approach to developing the professional project manager?, EPOC Conference Proceedings, Engineering and Project Organisation Conference (EPOC), Seattle, USA

8. Conclusion

This paper suggests that, even though ethics have been marginalised by previous generations, the millennial generation seems to be reinstating the importance of ethics in project work. And this is important, because projects and their impact on the societies we live in are important too. Knowing what is happening in the context of the project, knowing different ways of understanding projects, and knowing the difference between right and wrong can help develop trustworthy professional practitioners who can be trusted to define the purpose and meaning of their work, along with delivering it, and, in turn, help build the profession itself.

9. CPD reflective questions

■ Looking at the characteristics of the millennial generation and their possible impact on the current workplace, which of their attributes could be a force for good professionalism, and which might be less so?

■ If these attributes drive the millennial generation, what might be the impact of the following Generation Z – those born towards the turn of the century, not least as 'digital natives'?

■ Are there ways in which the attributes ascribed to millennials might be difficult to absorb into certain types of projects, i.e. one more suited to traditional or waterfall approaches?

■ What is the international dimension to this – do millennials' influences extend to all cultures and geographies equally or not. Is there a global millennial phenomenon, or is it over-exaggerated?

APM – Continuing professional development

Continuing professional development (CPD) is part of the APM FIVE Dimensions of Professionalism and fundamental to today's business environment. It ensures that you have the breadth of knowledge to illustrate your commitment to lifelong learning in a rapidly changing environment.

APM expects professionals to undertake 35 hours of formal and informal professional development every year. This is a professional obligation to clients and employers. As a committed project management professional, you are responsible for your own CPD activities, and you are expected to complete the required hours every year.

This publication counts towards up to an hour of CPD using the reflective questions.

A list of what APM classifies as CPD can be found at **apm.org.uk/qualifications-and-training/continuing-professional-development**
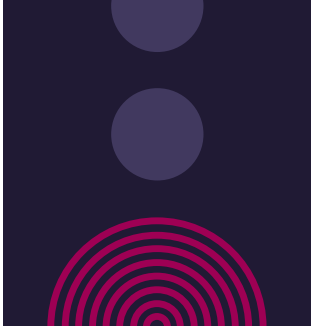
10. APM as a Chartered Body: Thought leadership – the 'Road to Chartered' series

As part of the launch year of Chartered status, APM is publishing a series of thought-leadership papers for the benefit of members, as well as interested stakeholders. The papers will examine and debate the key components of Chartered and the contribution we believe it will make to advancing professionalism, and the profession, of project management.

"The award of Chartered status to APM is tremendous recognition for a relatively new profession that now makes such a significant contribution to social and economic well-being. I hope you enjoy and contribute to the debate through this and subsequent papers we publish, and help to set the direction of travel for our new Chartered body," commented APM chair John McGlynn.

A number of themes are explored in the 'Road to Chartered' papers, including the role of volunteering, ethics and behaviours; nurturing talent; developing the next generation of project managers; and the importance of CPD.

"The papers aim to give members and other interested stakeholders a greater insight into what becoming Chartered means," said David Thomson, APM head of external affairs, who is responsible for overseeing the development of the 'Road to Chartered' series. "They will also help explain the transformation APM is experiencing as it evolves into a fully fledged Chartered body. We also want these papers to act as a springboard for debate as we evolve as the Chartered body for the project management profession."

The papers that have been published so far are:

- *21st-century professionalism: The importance of being Chartered*
  In this introductory paper, the history of Chartered and the step change to a Chartered body are set out in more detail, including, importantly, the obligations of a modern project professional.

- *For the public good? Volunteering in the Chartered profession*
  The second in the series focuses on a theme that APM has always had at its heart: volunteering.

- *The importance of ethics in professional life*
  Created in collaboration with the Institute of Business Ethics, the third paper explores different aspects of ethical behaviour and seeks to engage individuals across the profession to gain a better understanding of the increasing importance of ethics and integrity.

- *The growing significance of CPD: Ensuring professionalism in a dynamic and changing workplace*
  The fourth in the series addresses CPD, which plays a key part in the journey of a professional. Arguably, in this era of constant change and the increasing public expectation that professionals are updating their skills, CPD becomes ever more important. This paper is published in cooperation with the Professional Associations Research Network.

- *The robot professional: The role of project professionals in the digital future*.
  This fifth paper looks at the impact of technology on professionals and sets out some principles for guidance.

Explore the 'Road to Chartered' series at **www.apm.org.uk/roadtocharteredseries**

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