

# Adapt, survive and thrive:

## Leading successful transformation—part two

Because when projects  
succeed, society benefits





# Introduction

The accelerating pace of change means business leaders face the difficulty of contending with established challenges, as well as having to navigate new ones. Research by PwC found that 45% of global CEOs fear their organisation won't be economically viable in 10 years' time, with most of those saying they must reinvent their businesses for the future.

An APM survey of business leaders in the UK found 87% feel their organisation must increase investment in its project-powered transformational capabilities, to cope over the next five years. While there is clear recognition of the value of project management, this must be aligned with practical knowledge, skills and good practice in order to adapt – and thrive – in a constantly changing world.

This paper is based on conversations that took place at a roundtable event held by the Association for Project Management (APM) in winter 2024. Senior business executives from a range of topics and sectors contributed to the discussion with ideas and expertise. Their insights are reflected in the content.

## Contributors

- Andrew Archibald, former Commercial Director, The MDU
- Keith Bohanna, Operation Resilience Global Sales Motion lead, Aris
- Professor Adam Boddison OBE, Association for Project Management
- Jôvan Howell, Business Psychologist and Google Developer
- Lisa Martello, Director at ResoLex
- Ciara Pryce, Chief Operating Officer, VGC Group
- Dr Andrew Schuster, Managing Partner, The Promoveo Group





# The project paradox

Research by APM from across the business leadership community has revealed that many leaders feel they understand project management well and that project management is integrated at a strategic level in their organisation.

However, the same research has also found that leaders' understanding of project management and the way their organisations are equipped to deliver projects would benefit strongly from further development in some important areas.

**For example:**

- 92% of UK business leaders say they know 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' about the principles and practice of project management
- 90% say project management principles are integrated into their strategy

**But:**

- Only 37% know that projects take place in all industries
- Only 30% believe projects are best managed by people with relevant qualifications or accreditations
- Only 53% of SMEs and 29% of large firms have overall project responsibility at C-suite level (a recommended practice for ensuring projects support strategic goals)

This suggests a disconnect between perceptions of project management and the reality.

A C-suite that doesn't understand its company's projects cannot understand where it is or where it's going. So how can leaders enhance their organisation's project delivery capability?





# Invest in professionalisation

No matter your leadership style, it's important to have access to project expertise – either by appointing a professional or developing your own skills.

Any transformation, by definition, has an element of 'new' about it. This may be a new stakeholder, a new innovation, a new process or simply transitioning from current state to desired future state. This brings uncertainty. Professionalising the transformation by assigning a project specialist to it will inform decision-making at C-suite level and/or enable greater delegation.



Andrew Archibald commented: "Often, [a project] starts with uncertainty. You might know what you want and why, but that doesn't mean you know how. You have to allow for the fact that there will be mistakes and some re-work in the early stages, at this point. There are certain things that some stakeholders have never had to do before... You often have people at the top who are divorced from day-to-day reality and, without realising it, they make unrealistic assumptions."

## What can this lead to?

Without project professionals to guide the approach to finding the right solution, organisations may become locked on to a particular course of action, driven by one leader or sponsor.

Another scenario is the emergence of the 'hero' who tries to push onwards in the face of any and all challenges – often in good faith, but ultimately to the detriment of the business because they've never truly established the problem they are trying to solve.

Lisa Martello said: "We see 'heroics' quite often in infrastructure projects; the idea that one leader can guide us through any stage, any crisis, any drama, any opportunity. There's an increasing amount of theory that says 'hold on, perhaps we need to look at each phase as a distinct set of requirements, challenges and skills, and think more carefully about who we put forward to lead us through those stages'."

## Enter the project leader

Less than a third of business leaders polled by APM (30%) believe projects are best managed by people with relevant qualifications or accreditations. The view from the coal face is very different however, with 82% of project professionals saying their organisation needs to improve its project skills. In fact, project leadership was among the most highly rated skills in terms of its importance in APM's most recent *Salary and Market Trends Survey*.

When the people delivering projects are trained and certified to a professional level, they become project leaders. These are the changemakers who can be entrusted with driving the transformations that deliver value and support strategic goals.

Appointing certified or qualified individuals doesn't only bring expertise; It enables reverse mentoring, increases capacity and fosters a stronger team culture by identifying common ground that's necessary to building rapport and trust at all levels.



# Establish a common language



Establishing shared understanding around projects and the transformations they deliver is an important step to ensuring they contribute to strategic goals. Common language and definitions will help with this.

Dr Andrew Schuster elaborated: “There’s a lot of muddled language around projects. That word ‘project’ is used in so many different ways. What does it actually mean? And how do we bridge that knowledge gap that we find when people working on projects call themselves something else?”

In simple terms, project management is the application of processes, methods, skills, knowledge and experience to achieve specific project objectives within agreed parameters. Project management has final deliverables that are constrained to a finite timescale and budget.

A key factor that distinguishes project management from just ‘management’ is that it has this final deliverable and a finite timespan, unlike management which is an ongoing process. Because of this, a project professional needs a wide range of skills; often technical skills.

‘Project’ is one word for describing a change initiative, but many others are used in business, such as:

- Change management
- Transformation
- Evolution
- Transition
- Adjustment
- Portfolio management
- Programme management

Whatever term your organisation uses, be consistent across departments and within teams. This reduces the potential for confusion and misunderstandings, and provides a foundation of clarity for knowledge-sharing, decision-making and goal-setting.



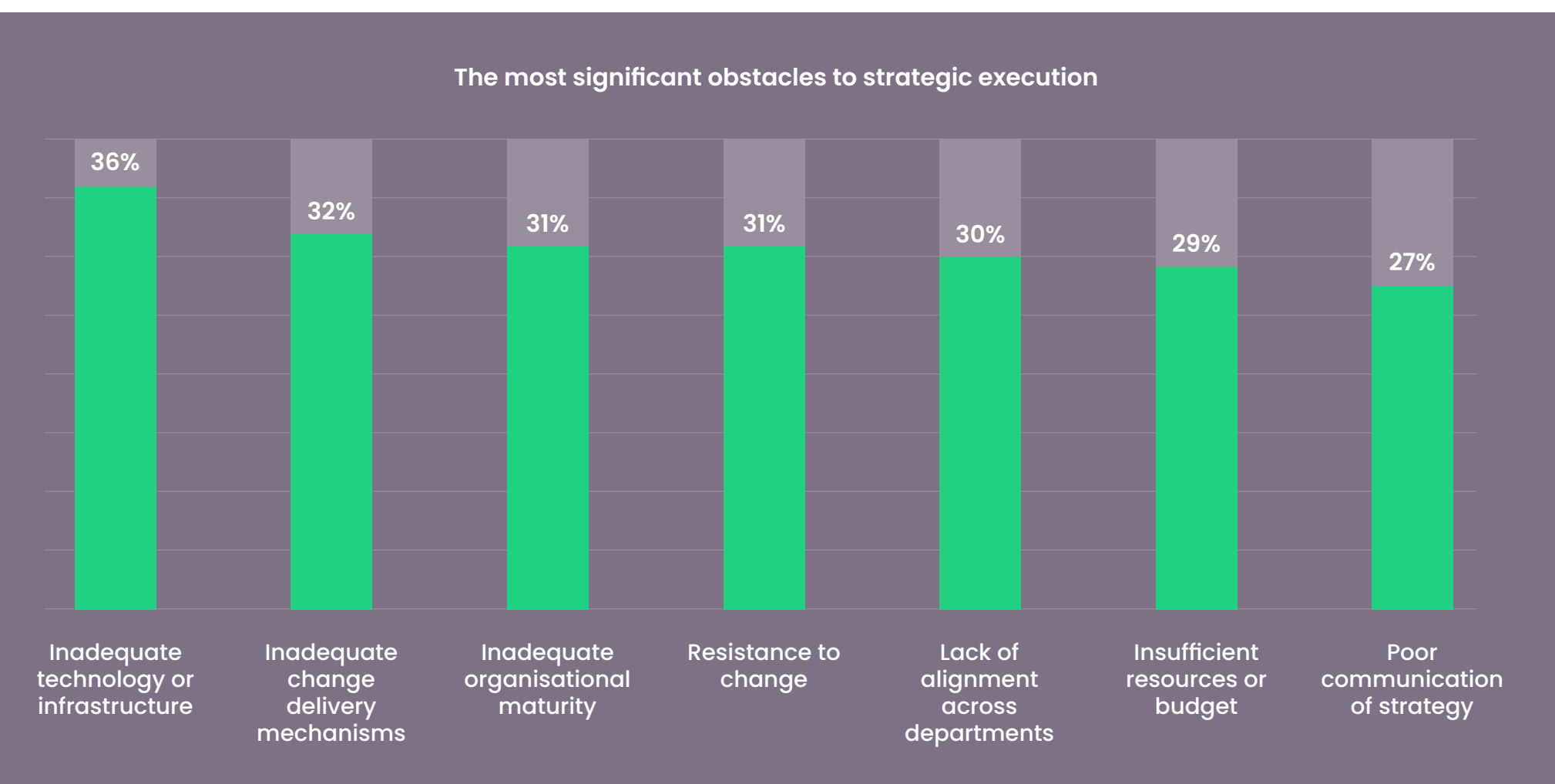
# Avoid change exhaustion

Nearly a third (31%) of business leaders say resistance to change is one of the most significant obstacles to strategic execution in their organisation. The chart below shows the percentage of UK business leaders surveyed by APM who selected the various answer options (respondents were invited to select up to three options).

Resistance to change is a natural response. But in a world that's constantly changing, trying to scale back or play down change is often at odds with growth plans, future-proofing, corporate social responsibility and other important goals.

Instead of playing down change, create clarity of purpose.

When an organisation is engaged in multiple changes at the same time, this poses a challenge to clarity, because communicating what is happening (and why) becomes more complex. This brings new risks of its own: poor communication and lack of alignment between departments are also seen as major obstacles to strategy execution.



Ciara Pryce referred the phenomenon of 'change exhaustion' (also known as change fatigue) which can be a collective affliction, as well as an individual one.

When the purpose is clear, it galvanises stakeholders. When things seem overwhelming, complex and unachievable, fractures can occur within teams. Focus on the aim. What is the purpose of being here? That focus enables prioritisation of work.

While aspects of a project may change during its life cycle (for example, its scope, its timeline, etc), the purpose – the fundamental reason why a project is being undertaken – should remain constant.

Indeed, the more dynamic and uncertain the environment is, the greater the focus on the overall purpose should be, rather than focusing on specific results and outcomes.



Keith Bohanna said: "One of the biggest mistakes in projects is not answering the question 'what's this meant to achieve?'"

Once you have clarity around the purpose, the single biggest thing you can do as a leader is stick to it.



# 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 45,000 members and more than 470 corporate partners based in 140 countries.

## Receive exclusive thought leadership from APM

If you would like to receive regular updates containing the latest thought leadership on the project profession and its impact on business, join our exclusive business leader mailing list by emailing [leaders@apm.org.uk](mailto:leaders@apm.org.uk)

APM takes privacy seriously and processes all personal data in accordance with Data Protection legislation and our privacy statement.

## Further resources

- [\*The difficult questions you must ask of your strategy\*](#)
- [\*Adapt, Survive and Thrive part 1\*](#)
- [\*Windsor Summit B2B white paper, Project Management in the C-suite\*](#)
- [\*Four ways to become a better project leader\*](#)





# Join Us at the Next Windsor Project Summit

Following the success of the inaugural Windsor Project Summit, we invite senior executives to express their interest in attending our next event set to take place at St George's House, Windsor Castle on Thursday 23 October 2025.

Designed exclusively for C-suite leaders, this summit offers a unique platform to explore cutting-edge insights, share strategic perspectives, and shape the future of the project profession. To maintain the calibre of discussions and networking opportunities, participation is limited to executives holding C-suite positions. If you meet this criterion and wish to be considered for an invitation, **[please fill out this form.](#)**







**We are the only chartered  
membership organisation  
for the project profession**

**Association for Project Management**  
Ibis House, Regent Park  
Summerleys Road  
Princes Risborough  
Bucks HP27 9LE  
0845 458 1944  
[apm.org.uk](http://apm.org.uk)

 @APMProjectMgmt

 @APMProjectMgmt

 @AssociationForProjectManagement

 @AssociationForProjectManagement

Association for Project Management is incorporated by Royal  
Charter RC000890 and a registered charity No. 1171112. Principal  
office as shown.