



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Is Technology 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. If you asked a number of people this question, you would get varying answers on whether technology is having a major effect on project management. 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 not a project management issue, but it is a product characteristic. That is, the solutions we are building are more technically challenging and require more advanced solutions than they did before. On the technology side, we have gone from punch cards to the mainframe, to client-server, to the web, to mobile, etc. Business needs have become more complex, time-sensitive and integrated. This has driven the technology side of projects.

Second, the tools we use for project management are changing. Client-server tools have replaced mainframe tools, which have been replaced by web tools. The tools have also become more flexible and more complex to satisfy the needs of project managers today.

As far as actually managing the project, there is also a lot of discussion today about 'light' methodologies. This means that you streamline the project processes so that you can deliver basic solutions more quickly and enhance them more quickly as well. This may be a change in philosophy if you are used to a strictly cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach to project management. However, if you believe in scaling the project management to fit the characteristics of the project, then this may not represent much of a change.

All that being said, 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.

Some people would say that the drive for better, faster, cheaper solutions has made project management more streamlined. That may be true, but this should have always been how you manage a project. For instance, you may need to accommodate scope changes much more effectively on a rapid application development (RAD) project, but this is still scope change management. Risk management has become more important, but it is still risk management. In general, the technology may be more complex, but you still have to plan the work and work the plan. The delivery cycle may be compressed, but that may, in fact, require more discipline and structure on the part of the project manager.

Overall, good project management processes and techniques will carry the day regardless of how technology and tools progress, as long as those processes remain flexible and scalable based on the project that is being undertaken.