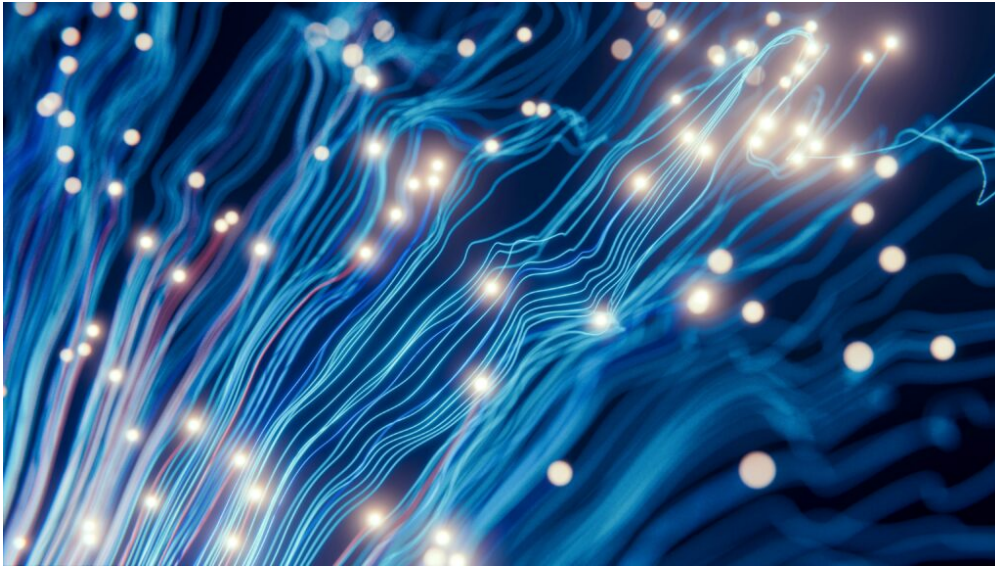


# Is the US Losing the AI Race with China – And What Does That Mean for Project Managers?

December 15, 2025



*Insight from David McLoughlin, PMG*

**The common narrative says the US is winning the AI race with China. And by traditional metrics, that seems true. OpenAI, Google (DeepMind), Microsoft, NVIDIA, Meta, and Amazon dominate frontier AI models, cloud platforms, and advanced semiconductor design. From a technical standpoint, the US still leads.**

But here's the uncomfortable question project managers should be asking: what if technical leadership matters less than execution at scale?

China may be losing the *model race* while winning the *delivery race*. Companies such as Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Huawei, and ByteDance are embedding AI directly into manufacturing, logistics, payments, and infrastructure – often through tightly coordinated, large-scale programmes. These aren't experiments; they are national-scale transformation projects, executed rapidly and iteratively.

For project managers, this should sound familiar. Strategy without delivery is just theory. AI value is realised not in research labs but through programmes that integrate technology, people, processes, and governance. While Western firms debate ethics, regulation, and perfection, China's approach often prioritises deployment, learning, and continuous improvement.

US export controls may slow China's access to cutting-edge chips, but they've also forced Chinese organisations to re-plan, de-scope, and innovate around constraints – classic programme management under pressure. The result? Faster learning cycles and growing delivery maturity.

So why should project managers take note? Because AI leadership will be decided by who can run the most complex transformation programmes successfully. Not who has the best model, but who can integrate AI into real operations – on time, at scale, and under constraint.

The provocative question is this: are Western organisations underestimating the importance of execution discipline in AI programmes? And could project managers be the hidden differentiator in this global race?

We'd love your perspective. Is AI leadership a technology problem – or a delivery problem?