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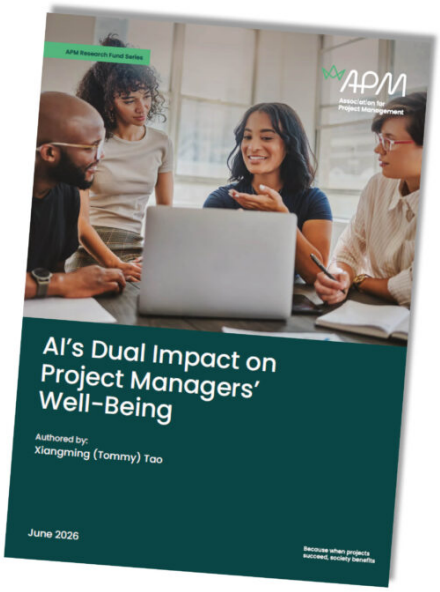
AI Is Changing Project Management, but New APM Research Warns Well-Being Must Not Be Left Behind

June 23, 2026



Artificial intelligence is reshaping project management, but its impact on the people leading projects is far from straightforward, according to new research from Association for Project Management.

The report, *AI's Dual Impact on Project Managers' Well-Being*, authored by Dr Xiangming Tao, examines how AI is affecting project managers psychologically and professionally as the technology becomes more embedded in project workflows. Its central finding is clear: AI is neither simply a productivity tool nor an existential threat. For project managers, it is both a source of empowerment and a source of anxiety.

The study draws on a quantitative survey of 181 project managers across different industries, supported by qualitative insights from practitioners. It explores how AI tools used for scheduling, reporting, risk analysis, forecasting and decision support are influencing project managers' confidence, job satisfaction, stress and perceptions of job security.

The findings come at a critical moment for the profession. AI is increasingly being deployed across organisations to automate routine tasks, improve decision-making and strengthen delivery performance. For project managers, this means familiar responsibilities are changing quickly. Administrative work, cost calculations, progress reporting and data-heavy risk analysis can now be supported, and in some cases partly handled, by AI systems.

That brings clear benefits. The research finds that AI can improve project managers' self-efficacy, meaning

their confidence in their ability to perform effectively and adapt to new challenges. Project managers who actively use AI tools often report feeling more capable, better informed and more able to focus on higher-value work.

This is the positive side of the AI equation. When AI takes on repetitive or time-consuming tasks, project managers can spend more time on leadership, stakeholder engagement, problem-solving and strategic decision-making. In this sense, AI can act as a professional resource, helping project managers do their jobs better and increasing their sense of control.

However, the report also identifies a negative pathway. AI adoption is associated with increased job insecurity among some project managers, particularly where the technology is seen as a potential replacement rather than an assistant. The same tools that make work more efficient can also raise uncomfortable questions about the future shape of the profession.

One project manager quoted in the report captured this tension sharply, saying that AI helped them “crunch numbers quickly”, but also left them wondering whether they would still be needed in five years.

This dual effect is the heart of the research. AI can simultaneously make project managers feel more capable and more vulnerable. It can reduce workload in some areas while adding new pressures in others. It can boost productivity while creating stress about role erosion, skills gaps and long-term career security.

The report frames this through the job demands-resources model. Under this approach, AI can be understood as both a job resource and a job demand. As a resource, it provides automation, insight and decision support. As a demand, it requires new skills, creates uncertainty and may intensify concerns about employability.

For project management professionals, the most important message is that the outcome is not predetermined. Whether AI improves or damages well-being depends heavily on how organisations introduce it, how leaders communicate its purpose and how much support project managers receive during adoption.

One of the report’s most significant findings is the role of psychological safety. In organisations where project managers feel able to ask questions, admit uncertainty and experiment with AI tools without fear of judgement, the negative effects of job insecurity are reduced. At the same time, the positive effects of AI on confidence and self-efficacy are strengthened.

This makes psychological safety more than a cultural nicety. In the AI-enabled workplace, it becomes a practical delivery issue. If project managers are afraid to reveal what they do not understand, they are less likely to engage fully with new tools. If they feel AI is being imposed without transparency, resistance and anxiety are likely to grow. But if they are encouraged to learn, test and challenge AI outputs, adoption becomes healthier and more effective.

The report also highlights upskilling as a turning point. Training is not only a technical intervention; it is a psychological one. Project managers who receive meaningful training in AI tools are more likely to see the technology as an asset rather than a competitor. One respondent said that after becoming certified in AI

scheduling software, they stopped worrying about it and started using it to “shine” in their role.

This has major implications for employers. Basic tool demonstrations are unlikely to be enough. Project managers need structured development that builds AI literacy, data confidence, critical judgement and the ability to interpret AI-generated recommendations. They also need clarity on the limits of AI. Understanding what AI can and cannot do is essential to reducing both overconfidence and fear.

The research argues strongly for an augmentation narrative. Leaders should communicate that AI is being introduced to support project managers, not to remove them from the equation. That distinction matters. Project management is not just about producing schedules, reports and forecasts. It is about judgement, influence, ethics, accountability, negotiation and the ability to lead people through uncertainty.

AI may be able to generate a status report, but it cannot understand the politics behind a delayed decision. It may identify a delivery risk, but it cannot rebuild trust with a frustrated sponsor. It may optimise a resource plan, but it cannot empathise with a team member close to burnout. The more AI handles technical and administrative tasks, the more visible the human dimensions of project management become.

The report also calls for ethical AI governance. Project managers need confidence that AI systems are transparent, fair, secure and accountable. If AI tools operate as opaque “black boxes”, they can increase stress rather than reduce it. Project managers remain responsible for decisions, so they need to understand how AI recommendations are produced and where human oversight is required.

For individual project managers, the message is equally direct. Avoiding AI is unlikely to be a sustainable career strategy. The professionals who benefit most will be those who experiment early, build digital capability and learn how to combine AI-enabled insight with human leadership. AI literacy is becoming part of modern project competence.

At the same time, the report cautions against treating adaptation as an individual burden alone. Organisations have a responsibility to support project managers through this transition. That means providing training, creating safe learning environments, explaining the purpose of AI adoption and involving project professionals in implementation decisions.

The report concludes that AI can help project managers flourish, but only if it is introduced with deliberate attention to human well-being. The goal should not simply be faster reporting, better forecasting or lower administrative effort. It should be more sustainable project careers, healthier teams and better project outcomes.

For a profession already defined by pressure, complexity and accountability, that distinction is vital. AI may change the tools of project management, but the future of the profession will still depend on people. The challenge now is to ensure those people are equipped, trusted and supported as the technology reshapes the work around them.