AI in Project Management: Sharing Best Practices that Earned Us a PMI Excellence Certificate of Appreciation

Author: Marly Nilsson Lead Project Manager and Author of the AI in PM Project, PMP

Background

Business intelligence has always captivated me, naturally leading to an interest in artificial intelligence. However, it wasn't until I read the **2019 PM Network article "Brain Power,"** about how machine learning could transform decision making in project management, that I felt AI was within reach. I decided to learn more to be ready when the right opportunity arose.
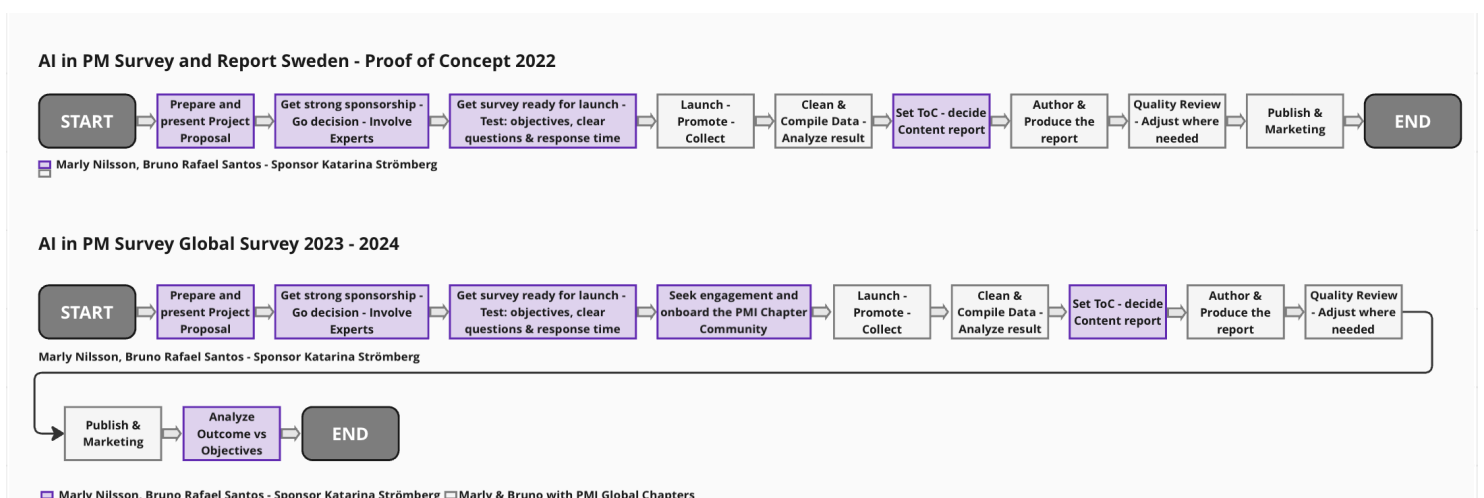
The right one arose at the end of 2021, when PMI Sweden President Katarina Strömberg supported my suggestion for a follow-up interview with two of the original article's subjects – **Geetha Gopal** and **Bruno Rafael Santos**. The <u>follow-up interview</u> discussed how the pandemic and digital disruption impacted AI interest and maturity. It marked the very beginning of this success story.

What has followed since is extraordinary: A global project involving 25 countries, 27 PMI Chapters, 34 project managers, and more than 2,300 survey respondents from 129 countries. Equally important was the support from thought leaders, influencers in AI in project management, academics, and AI experts worldwide.

I share this story to hopefully inspire others to pursue their own dreams and passions. As one of my role models, IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad, said, "Most things remain undone – glorious future." There is still so much to do, especially surrounding AI, so dream big and aim high!

Project Organization and Process: PoC (Proof of Concept) Initiation, Planning, and Execution of Global Survey

Link to view organizational set-up

Below are some of what I believe were our key success factors and challenges with a project this large.

Key Success Factors

- **Strong Sponsorship of Project:** Secure a strong sponsor or advocate to support decision-making when needed.

- **Solid Project Proposal**: Passion is contagious, but nothing beats facts when you need a GO decision. Back up your great idea with a comprehensive case (SWOT analysis, Project/Business Canvas, goals, scope, and objectives) for why the project should be undertaken, how it will be executed, and what benefits it is expected to deliver.

- **Proof of Concept - The Gateway to Trust**: Start small to prove your case and adjust where needed. The AI in Project Management initiative began with a survey in May 2022, focusing on AI interest and maturity in Sweden. An <u>excellent report delivered in October 2022</u> built confidence and trust in the project's viability.

- **Involve Experts Early and Test Thoroughly**: We involved AI experts early on to ensure the questions were clear, met objectives and overall goals. We also consulted research experts for advice on the questionnaire, data cleaning, and analysis.

- **Seek Engagement and Support from the Community**: The engagement and support from the PM community and AI specialists was phenomenal. Thought leaders generously shared their visions of AI in project management, and AI specialists provided case studies and practical examples. The PM community, with over 2,300 respondents, offered invaluable insights through their participation in our survey.

- **Emphasize Acknowledgment of Contribution**: Proper recognition was given to all contributors. Team members were presented on the PMI Sweden website with photos, flags, and chapter logotypes. They were also included in the reports with their roles. PMI recognized the team's excellent work, and PMI Sweden rewarded all team members with digital badges.

- **Be Transparent to Build Confidence**: Transparency was a cornerstone throughout the project. During the survey period, we were open about the ongoing results, sharing preliminary insights and addressing any underhand information promptly. This openness included detailed descriptions of our processes, including data cleaning and the critical quality review conducted both internally by PMI and external experts.

- **Delegate - Set a Strategy and Let the Team Plan Their Work**: The project lead set the overall strategy for the content and structure of the report and specified what each team should include to ensure conformity. The survey collection was managed by each chapter's project manager together with their volunteer network, allowing them to plan and execute their work independently.

- **Marketing is Key**: Early in the project, we formed a marketing team to share good examples of information in newsletters, avoiding reinventing the wheel. The team was very resourceful in marketing the project, producing reels, and so forth. Several articles were written, webinars recorded, and presentations delivered at conferences and congresses, giving the project recognition in the community. A LinkedIn group initiated within the project now has more than 1,400 members, showing the huge interest in AI.

Challenges

- **Time Zones:** Organizing meetings across nine different time zones was a logistical challenge, but the team's dedication made it possible.

- **All-Volunteer Team:** Running a team of volunteers with daytime jobs, family, and friends was another challenge. Fortunately, most of the team was extremely dedicated, and the way we were organized allowed people to plan their time and work independently.

- **Communication:** Although everyone was onboarded properly and informed about objectives and goals, having a SharePoint for better information structure would have been beneficial, as WhatsApp and other tools are better suited for quick information sharing.

Our collective contribution to the AI in PM community

- Three reports, focused on evolving trends in AI in project management.
    - **Artificial Intelligence and Project Management, Sweden survey 2022**
    - **Artificial Intelligence and Project Management: A Global Chapter-Led Survey**
    - **Navigating AI in Project Management**
- Multiple webinars presenting the global and regional results
    - **AI in Project Management Survey Results 2023 Global**
    - **AI and Project Management Survey Results 2023 Europe**
    - **AI and Project Management Survey Results 2023 Asia**

- Multiple articles published on projectmanagement.com. One of them "The Upcoming Report and What's Next" was made part of the community content on Infinity.

- Collaboration on a Thoughtlet for PM Journal with Ralf Müller, Giorgio Locatelli, Vered Holzman, Temisan Sagay and me **Artificial Intelligence and Project Management: Empirical Overview, State of the Art, and Guidelines for Future Research**

- Presentations at the **Passion for Projects Congress in Sweden,** PMI's Leadership Institute Meetings, **EIT Digital on the topic of Generative AI Essentials**, invited by Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, what an honor, Volvo PM Forum and many other events.

- Created a comprehensive presentation deck for the final two reports to increase awareness of the possibilities of AI in Project Management among PMI members and the global project management community. **Navigating the AI Landscape Presentation and Training Deck**

- Launched a LinkedIn group for PMs interested in artificial intelligence to share insights and knowledge. **AI in Project Management Studies (by PMI Chapters)**

I hope this story inspires you to pursue your own dream projects. Remember to dream big, aim high, and follow through with solid planning and execution. Looking ahead, the integration of AI in project management holds tremendous potential, and there is much more to explore and achieve.

Reasons for Supporting the Project and Its Impact on the PM Community

Last, but certainly not least, we are deeply grateful to our collaborating partners. Their support has been invaluable, and we are honored to close with a few statements on why they chose to support this project and how they think it has impacted the project management community.

Katarina Strömberg, PMI Sweden Chapter President & Sponsor
PMI is all about passion. And the AI in PM Project team has truly been showcasing passion! Marly Nilsson has been the guiding star which has guided the team and ensured its success. I am honored and so proud to have been able to support the Project as sponsor. The result is amazing and will support the community tremendously. I want to congratulate Marly Nilsson and the team on a fantastic achievement.

Antonio Nieto-Rodriquez Professor | HBR Author | Executive Coach
I had the pleasure of meeting you during our AI Project Management MasterClass and was immediately impressed by your eagerness to embrace new insights on AI and project management. Your motivation is not just about enhancing personal knowledge but about transforming how we all manage projects. I had no doubt that your passion would create a meaningful impact within the PMI community— congratulations on making it happen!

Conny Svensson, Director AI Adoption
At AI Sweden, we focus on applied AI, meaning how it can be used in real scenarios to solve societal and business challenges. AI is now quickly maturing to be a business tool and organizations need to focus on adoption to realize the value. Adoption needs to happen in each sector and business function. Therefore, we encourage and applaud initiatives like this one looking at what AI means for different roles, in this case project managers. We hope more professional networks get inspired by PMI and do similar things for their area of expertise.

Ricardo Viana Vargas, Ph.D. Global Leader in Project Management
Marly's dedication to exploring AI's potential in project management is truly inspiring. Your commitment and sense of community have been pivotal in driving such relevant research forward. Seeing how AI is already transforming our field is incredible, and your work is helping our colleagues navigate this new environment better. I'm inspired by your efforts and excited for the positive impact it will continue to have on our community.

Fredrik Hofflander, CTO
We at Eghed decided to support and contribute to the AI in Project Management initiative because we recognize the transformative potential of AI in enhancing project management practices. Our participation reflects our commitment to innovation and our belief that AI can significantly improve project efficiency and decision-making. By being part of this project and the expert panels at the Passion for Projects Congress, we aimed to stay at the forefront of technological advancements and contribute to developing AI-driven solutions that benefit the entire project management community.

Temisan Sagay, Technical Program Manager, Team member
I decided to contribute because there was a lack of comprehensive research addressing the role of artificial intelligence in project management - with a large sample size, especially with many project managers lacking an understanding of AI integration possibilities.
This report has significantly impacted the project management community by detailing current global and regional AI integration trends, being one of PMI's highest downloaded resources, serving as a foundation for subsequent

Giorgio Locatelli Full Professor of Complex Projects Business
Ralf Müller Professor Emeritus
Vered Holzman Professor
We decided to support Marly Nilsson and her team because their work is crucial for identifying key characteristics of AI transitions, including demographics of AI adoption, prevailing opinions, and public concerns. This information is vital for academics to develop research questions of practical relevance.
Their work has significantly impacted both academics and practitioners. For practitioners, it provides insights into the current state of AI adoption, and for academics, it guides relevant future research.

Britta Duve Hansen Technical Project Manager

As a technical project manager at Mobile Heights I use AI tools on a daily basis, both in project management as well as other tasks. When asked to support and contribute to the AI in Project Management report and presentation, it felt natural to be part of this initiative. I believe that there is a huge potential for AI tools in project management, both for more efficiency but even to make better decisions and to be able to follow up results. Accelerating understanding and adoption of AI is crucial in an organisation - therefore project managers, who are often involved in implementation processes, need to acquire knowledge in the field. PMIs and especially Marlys work is contributing significantly to reach this aim.

Kjetil Hatlestad Volle Systems Safety SME, Team member

Curiosity drive Innovation which leads to insight and results! As VP in the PMI Norway Chapter I quickly realized the importance when asked to support the AI Survey project. Never before have we seen such disruption to our profession as AI brings. The countless hours working together with professionals around the globe were well invested!