Top Priorities for IT: Leadership Vision for 2021
Program and Portfolio Management Leaders
Introduction

2020 has been a year full of terms like “unprecedented” and “unanticipated.” Every industry has been affected in some way by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic fallout and social unrest around the globe. Strategic and business model change has translated, and continues to translate, into new challenges and priorities for function leaders. For the CIO and the whole IT organization, 2021 brings with it the imperative to generate more business value using innovative technologies and approaches to information.

Each IT role faces specific challenges — from planning and supporting digital acceleration to integrating more strategically with the rest of the business. As business partners grow more comfortable with identifying and using technologies, IT leaders will need to become more sophisticated in their partnership and collaboration.

And, despite the challenges, a significant great opportunity exists to transform business operations and models from the ground up, enabling the organization to respond to future disruption quickly and strategically.

This e-book highlights the trends and challenges program and portfolio management (PPM) leaders will have to reconcile in the coming year and provides specific actions that they can take in response — and to better align their piece of the organization with the business.

IT leaders have learned many valuable lessons in the past year, from how to quickly move entire organizations to remote workforces, how to create a secure work environment and how to prioritize digital initiatives like never before.

But there is more work to be done.

Leading in 2021 will look different from leadership in 2020, but understanding and planning for unknowns and continued disruption across the IT organization is critical to moving forward.

Chris Howard
Chief of Research, Gartner
PPM leaders must enable rapid transformation during turbulent times.

Until recently, project management offices (PMOs), enterprise PMOs (EPMOs) and strategy realization offices (SROs) were directive, top-down, command-and-control organizations designed to reduce risk by slowing the pace of change. The increased reliance on digital business, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has forced virtually every PMO, EPMO and SRO to pivot and become more adaptive, enabling change using techniques like agile and technologies like platform as a service.

By 2024, 50% of all PPM leaders will integrate complementary technologies to enable portfolio decision making and modern work management for digital business evolution.

Source: Gartner

Pandemic impact on work: How IT needs to change to be better prepared for disruptions like COVID-19

Future disruption countermeasures
Multiple responses

- Remote work capabilities: 40%
- Increase investment in digital channels/technologies: 36%
- Better business-IT alignment: 30%
- Increase modularity/agility/flexibility: 29%
- No changes needed: 20%
- Increase investment in cloud: 16%
- Shifting budget (reductions or reprioritization): 16%
- Others: 13%

n = 85; all respondents
Q. How does your organization plan to change IT to be better prepared in the future for disruptions like COVID-19?
Source: Gartner 2020 Future of Applications
Gartner Research Circle members (One Circle)
3 trends that will impact PPM leaders in 2021

PPM evolves alongside the organization’s digital maturity
Organizations continue to mature their digital business capabilities. As they do, new technologies and techniques spread throughout their organizations. In turn, PPM leaders must evolve to enable digital business. This often means shifting from a command-and-control mentality to a change enablement mindset. The shift can be significant as organizations scale their efforts. PPM leaders must assume new roles within digital business.

PPM adapts to enable new ecosystems
The “directive” PPM has given way to the “adaptive” PPM as digital business demands more agility and flexibility. A need for an adaptive way of working has given way to a rise of citizen PMs.

Digital business and technology innovation drive PPM to focus on oversight and governance
Traditional rigid oversight and governance, and a lack of modern adaptive portfolio management practices, are enduring obstacles to agility. Streamline oversight, governance and portfolio management by identifying and addressing activities that provide little value and adopting newer approaches that do deliver value.
Organizational responses to COVID-19 are forcing business change, but the response varies

COVID-19 impacted virtually all organizations and virtually all PMOs. PPM leaders can expect to adjust what they do — if they haven’t already — to support several potential paths for the organization. For example, organizations looking to rescale would likely translate this into a goal of supporting new business market expansion.

COVID-19 presents an opportunity for PPM to introduce necessary cultural change and adaptive practices

COVID-19 highlighted an opportunity and a challenge for businesses to transform themselves to be more prepared for inevitable future disruptions. For most Gartner clients, this means focusing on preparing for a work-at-home world, becoming more agile, moving toward modularity and toward data centricity.
Partner with HR professionals to address the demand for digital talent

Individual managers or leaders outside of IT are building their own fusion teams with a heavy digital focus. Unfortunately, this means that the teams and the efforts to hire and develop talent for them are distributed. PPM can capture economies of scale by nurturing emerging, evolving and expanding areas of digital expertise in central groups that transfer skills to digital product teams.

Experiment and explore with AI and analytics to enable dynamic PPM

Determine how artificial intelligence (AI) can be a part of a PPM technology investment strategy by investigating approaches for conversational AI and machine learning, in addition to exploring robotic process automation. Plan on taking small steps toward using AI-enabled PPM technology by keeping it simple, experimenting with and adopting conversational AI, and using chatbots in ways that improve the lives of PMO managers and project team members.

2 actions for PPM leaders to take in 2021

Given the challenges that PPM leaders will encounter, consider these two actions to help move the organization in the right direction:
PPM leaders must ensure the right roles exist to support digital business

Evolving PPM leadership roles supporting the digital business

**Orchestrator**
Coordinate solution delivery team workflows and dependencies.

**Service provider**
Support stakeholders with on-demand expertise and services.

**Investment steward**
Update investment allocation processes for a digital context.

**Talent enabler**
Develop talent and enable new roles in solution delivery communities.

**Promoter**
Advocate for support enterprise charge.

**Program driver**
Execute large, strategic and cross-expertise initiatives.