University of Southampton
Business School

Mastering Complexity: Advanced Project Leadership



The Strategic Project Leader: Delivering Value in Complex Environments

Organised by the
University of Southampton Business School

Programme Overview

Mastering Complexity: Advanced Project Leadership is an Executive Education programme for professionals who lead, guide or contribute to projects, programmes and major organisational initiatives in dynamic and complex environments. It explores what it takes to connect strategic ambition with meaningful outcomes when priorities change, decisions cross organisational boundaries and success depends on people working towards a shared purpose.

"Organisations will invest enormous effort in projects that appear to be progressing well, only to discover that the problem they set out to solve has changed. This affects everyone involved, from those shaping strategy and making decisions to those contributing expertise or putting change into practice. The challenge is recognising how these different perspectives and decisions connect, questioning assumptions that may no longer hold, and understanding whether the work we are doing is genuinely creating the value we set out to achieve."



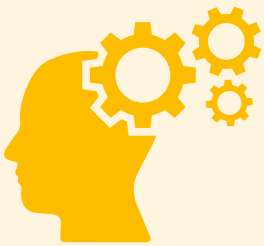
Associate Professor Nicholas Dacre
Programme Lead, Mastering Complexity: Advanced Project Leadership
University of Southampton Business School

Four Core Areas of Advanced Project Leadership

The programme builds on this perspective, moving beyond traditional project frameworks to explore how leadership, systems, technology and organisational change interact in complex environments.

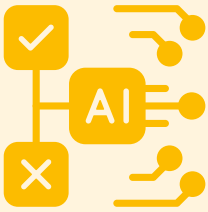


Strategic project leadership and high-performing teams



Systems thinking for strategic project outcomes

Decision-making in digital and AI-enabled environments



Stakeholder influence and organisational change



Together, these themes consider how professionals can lead people effectively, understand complexity and the wider systems in which projects operate, make informed decisions in digital and AI-enabled environments, and build the alignment needed to deliver organisational change.

Learning Objectives and Outcomes

PROGRAMME AIMS

To strengthen advanced project leadership capability by enabling participants to take a more strategic, systems-aware and adaptive approach to leading projects and programmes, with greater confidence in navigating complexity, shaping organisational outcomes and creating business and societal value.

Learning Outcomes

CATEGORY	COMPETENCIES
Knowledge and Understanding	• Develop an understanding of the relationship between organisational strategy and project execution. • Recognise some of the leadership challenges associated with dynamic and complex project environments. • Explore the contribution of high-performing teams, systems thinking, digital and AI-enabled decision-making, and stakeholder influence to strategic project leadership.
Intellectual Skills	• Consider project challenges from both strategic and outcome perspectives. • Explore how complexity, uncertainty, interdependencies and technological change can shape project decisions. • Reflect on how project activity connects with wider organisational priorities and intended outcomes.
Professional and Practical Skills	• Identify approaches for leading cross-functional teams and supporting effective performance. • Explore how systems thinking can help project leaders understand interdependencies and wider organisational contexts. • Assess opportunities and limitations associated with digital technologies and AI in supporting project decision-making.
Transferable Skills	• Approaches to communicating across organisational and stakeholder groups. • Working effectively across functions and organisational boundaries. • Stakeholder influence and decision-making in uncertain and changing organisational environments.

Modular Framework

The structure below is indicative and may be adjusted to support the learning needs of the participant group.



Day 1 Learning Activities

Theme	Description
Strategic project leadership	Exploration of the role of the strategic project leader, including leadership in dynamic and complex environments and the challenges of leading across functions and organisational boundaries.
High-performing teams	Exploration of factors that can support effective team performance, including clarity, collaboration and alignment across functions.
Systems thinking	Introduction to systems thinking and exploration of how interdependencies, organisational context and wider priorities can shape project outcomes.
Integration	Opportunity for participants to relate the day's themes to their own project and organisational contexts, bringing together leadership, team performance and systems perspectives.



01 STRATEGIC PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Interactive session

02 HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

Workshop and discussion

03 SYSTEMS THINKING

Interactive and applied session

04 INTEGRATION

Applied discussion

Day 2 Learning Activities



Theme	Description
Decision-making	Exploration of decision-making in uncertain and changing project environments, including how organisational priorities, incomplete information and competing demands can shape leadership judgement.
Digital and AI-enabled environments	Introduction to the opportunities and challenges associated with digital technologies and AI in project environments, including their potential role in supporting project decision-making.
Stakeholder influence and change	Exploration of stakeholder perspectives, influence and organisational change, including approaches to building alignment across different groups and organisational boundaries.
Integration	Opportunity for participants to relate the day's themes to their own contexts, connecting decision-making, technological change, stakeholder influence and organisational change.



01 STRATEGIC PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Interactive session

02 HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

Workshop and discussion

03 SYSTEMS THINKING

Interactive and applied session

04 INTEGRATION

Applied discussion

Certification and Recognition

Participants who successfully complete all sessions will receive the University of Southampton Business School Executive Education Certificate of Completion.



Who is this Programme for?

The programme is designed for professionals seeking to strengthen their ability to lead and contribute effectively within project environments. It is particularly relevant for:

- Professionals preparing to take on greater leadership responsibility within project and programme environments.
- Managers and professionals whose roles involve leading or contributing to projects and organisational initiatives.
- Professionals working across delivery, governance and organisational change.



- Team Leaders managing complex, multi-stakeholder initiatives.
- Project managers looking to develop from delivery towards strategic outcomes.
- Change and transformation professionals responsible for delivering organisational initiatives across functions and business areas.

Programme Impact and Application

Expected Organisational Relevance

The programme is intended to support organisations seeking to strengthen project leadership capability and improve the connection between strategic intent and project outcomes. Areas of organisational relevance include:

- Supporting greater alignment between projects and wider organisational priorities.
- Encouraging informed decision-making in complex and changing environments.
- Strengthening cross-functional collaboration and stakeholder alignment.
- Developing greater awareness of the opportunities and challenges associated with digital transformation and AI.

University of Southampton Business School Community Affiliation

Participation in the programme provides an opportunity to engage with the University of Southampton Business School Executive Education community and to connect with professionals from a range of organisational and sector backgrounds. Participants may also have opportunities to remain connected with relevant Business School activities and future Executive Education initiatives



Faculty



Associate Professor Nicholas Dacre

Director of the Advanced Project Management Research Centre (APROM), Editor-in-Chief of Sage Business Cases: Project Management Series, and Associate Professor of Project Management at the University of Southampton Business School. Nicholas is a Fellow of the Chartered Association for Project Management (FAPM), and Chair of the British Academy of Management Project Management Consortium.

His research focuses on emergent 'ITS Complex' topics in Innovation, Technology, and Sustainability in Complex Projects, with emphasis on the intersection of AI and Industry 5.0. His portfolio includes over 80 publications, with papers in Information Systems Journal, Project Management Journal, Government Information Quarterly, and Production Planning & Control.

His expertise in AI implementation has resulted in keynote engagements, including addresses at the UK Parliament on AI's future in project delivery and presentations to the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority on AI governance in major projects.



Professor Jeni Giambona

Professor of Systems Thinking and the Associate Dean of Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise at the University of Southampton Business School. As such, she leads USBS's development of collaborations with both external organisations from all sectors and the wider public to further the development and impact of the School's teaching and research.

Jeni's activities focus on the development and implementation of external engagement strategies for collaborative partnerships, impact and dissemination, on building relationships with external stakeholders and co-creation activities.

Selected Faculty Publications and Insights

Faculty research and professional insights relevant to contemporary project leadership include:

01 *Clienting in Major Projects: Beyond Outputs, Towards Outcomes.*

02 *Digital Transformation and the AI Imperative in Public and Private Sector Projects.*

03 *Methods and Skills for Project Management.*

Bookings and Enquiries

For booking enquiries or further information about the programme, please contact:



Lakshmi Nath
Business Development and Partnerships Office
University of Southampton Business School

L.S.Nath@soton.ac.uk