

# Employment Style Trends, Artificial Intelligence, and the Future of Program Management

## *Toward an Adaptive Governance Model for Distributed Work*

A. Souza<sup>1</sup>, H. Gresham<sup>2</sup>, R. Piro<sup>3</sup>, M. Harkley<sup>4</sup>, and M. Baldonado<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Federal University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

<sup>2</sup> University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, USA

<sup>3</sup> University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, USA

<sup>4</sup> University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, USA

<sup>5</sup> University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, USA

### **Abstract**

Hybrid work, global talent sourcing, and AI-enabled analytics are reshaping the conditions under which programs are governed. Existing literature often treats these developments separately, leaving program managers without an integrated account of how employment structures and intelligent systems jointly alter coordination, authority, and capability development. This conceptual paper synthesizes literature on distributed work, global virtual teams, AI-enabled decision support, ethical monitoring, and mentorship to examine how program management must adapt. Drawing on a structured review of academic and practitioner sources published primarily between 2010 and 2026, the paper develops an adaptive governance model with four interdependent domains: coordination architecture, trust and people systems, human–AI decision design, and developmental infrastructure. The analysis argues that future program managers will be less defined by co-located supervision and more by their ability to engineer communication routines across distance, interpret AI-generated signals without surrendering judgment, protect trust while using digital monitoring tools, and institutionalize reskilling and mentorship as governance mechanisms rather than optional benefits. Artificial intelligence does not eliminate the

need for program leadership; it increases the premium on human interpretation, ethical oversight, cultural intelligence, and organizational learning. The paper contributes a governance-oriented synthesis that integrates workforce change and AI adoption within one conceptual framework and identifies implications for program structure, managerial competencies, and future empirical research.

## **Keywords**

hybrid work; remote work; artificial intelligence; program management; distributed teams; mentorship

## **Introduction**

Work arrangements have undergone material transformation over the last decade. Advances in digital collaboration tools, the normalization of remote and hybrid work, and the continued globalization of talent markets have altered how organizations coordinate people, knowledge, and decision-making. Hybrid work is no longer well described as a temporary pandemic adjustment; it has become a durable organizational arrangement with implications for retention, collaboration, and managerial design (Bloom et al., 2024; Luring & Jonasson, 2025). Luring and Jonasson (2025) further argue that hybrid work should be understood not merely as a question of where work occurs, but as a configuration of interaction patterns, temporal rhythms, and coordination choices.

These shifts are especially consequential in program environments, where success depends on integrating multiple projects, stakeholder groups, and strategic objectives across time. As organizations rely more heavily on distributed talent, managers must operate across geographic distance, time-zone dispersion, and cultural diversity. Research on global virtual work shows that distributed collaboration changes how trust, accountability, and knowledge sharing are sustained

across interdependent activities (Froese et al., 2025). For program managers, physical proximity can no longer serve as the default coordination mechanism; alignment must be designed rather than assumed (Gemino & Reich, 2023; Kerzner, 2022).

At the same time, artificial intelligence is reshaping managerial work. AI-enabled systems now support planning, forecasting, monitoring, and pattern recognition in ways that expand managerial visibility but also complicate judgment, accountability, and surveillance boundaries (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Project Management Institute, 2024). In other words, the future of program management is being shaped by two reinforcing transformations: employment structures are becoming more distributed and flexible, while analytical work is becoming more data intensive and increasingly AI assisted.

Despite the relevance of both developments, the literature often treats them separately. Research on hybrid work focuses on collaboration and employee experience; AI scholarship emphasizes automation, analytics, and ethics; mentorship research concentrates on professional development. Program management requires these streams to be integrated because programs are governed through a combination of coordination design, stakeholder alignment, decision architecture, and capability development. This paper therefore asks: How must program managers adapt their governance, coordination, and developmental practices to lead effectively in hybrid, globally distributed, and AI-enabled work environments? In response, the paper develops an adaptive governance model that connects distributed work, human–AI collaboration, and mentoring infrastructure within a single conceptual framework.

## **Problem Framing and Review Approach**

### **Research Problem and Question**

Traditional program management assumes relatively stable reporting lines, visible work, and interpersonal coordination reinforced by shared settings (Brown, 2014; Kerzner, 2022). Those assumptions are under pressure. Hybrid work disperses interaction across platforms, time zones, and home–office boundaries, while AI tools increasingly participate in forecasting, prioritization, and performance monitoring. The managerial challenge is therefore not simply how to manage remote employees or how to use AI tools in isolation. The deeper problem is how to govern programs when coordination is distributed and analytical influence is partially automated.

The research question guiding this paper is straightforward but consequential: How must program managers adapt to the challenges created by shifting employment styles and the growing use of AI-enabled systems? The question is intentionally framed at the program level rather than the task or team level because programs require alignment across multiple initiatives, benefits streams, and stakeholder groups. The concern is not only whether work gets done, but whether interdependent work remains strategically coherent under new conditions.

### Review Approach

This study uses a structured conceptual literature review. Searches were conducted through Google Scholar and the University of New Mexico library using combinations of remote work, hybrid work, virtual teams, global talent, artificial intelligence, monitoring remote workers, mentorship, and program management. The review prioritized peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and high-quality professional reports published between 2010 and 2026. Foundational sources outside that period were retained when they provided durable concepts for program governance, virtual leadership, or developmental infrastructure (e.g., Bucero, 2003; Purvanova & Bono, 2009; Brown, 2014).

Sources were included when they clarified at least one of four themes relevant to the research question: distributed coordination, global talent and cross-cultural collaboration, AI-enabled decision support, or mentorship and reskilling. Because program-management-specific evidence remains thinner than adjacent work in project management, virtual teams, and organizational behavior, selected findings from those literatures are used where they illuminate program-level coordination problems. The review is not a systematic meta-analysis; its contribution lies in synthesis and model development rather than in causal estimation.

## **Literature Synthesis**

### **Hybrid and Distributed Work as a Coordination Challenge**

Hybrid work changes the mechanisms through which coordination occurs. In co-located settings, some alignment emerges through incidental contact, informal clarification, and visible work rhythms. In hybrid or fully remote settings, those corrective mechanisms weaken. Coordination must instead be built through communication architecture: explicit meeting cadences, documented decisions, platform discipline, and norms for asynchronous collaboration (Lauring & Jonasson, 2025; Manole et al., 2025). Bloom et al. (2024) show that hybrid work can support retention without damaging performance, but the result does not imply that distributed work manages itself. It implies that performance can be preserved when organizational design adjusts accordingly.

For program managers, this means the job becomes less about supervising visible activity and more about maintaining coherence across dispersed work. Froese et al. (2025) note that global virtual work depends on digitally mediated coordination, while Gemino and Reich (2023) argue that digital transformation creates program environments too complex to manage as isolated projects. Kerzner (2022) similarly emphasizes that program leaders must sustain strategic alignment and manage interdependencies across multiple efforts. In a hybrid environment, those

responsibilities require more intentional communication planning, clearer interface definitions, and disciplined documentation practices than traditional office-based routines demanded.

### Global Talent and Cross-Border Collaboration

Remote and hybrid employment models expand access to global talent, but they also expand coordination complexity. Organizations can recruit specialized skills beyond local labor markets, yet they must then manage language differences, time-zone separation, and cultural variation within the same program structure. Caligiuri et al. (2024) position global talent management as a strategic capability rather than a staffing tactic, and Ünal (2023) shows that team effectiveness in global virtual settings is shaped by communication systems, coordination practices, and the management of interpersonal distance.

The implications for program management are substantial. Time-zone dispersion can create handoff delays, uneven access to decision makers, and fragmented stakeholder engagement if schedules and escalation pathways are not deliberately designed (Tang et al., 2011). Cultural differences can enrich problem solving but can also complicate trust, interpretation, and stakeholder expectations. Anglani et al. (2023) and Osobajo et al. (2023) show that cultural intelligence and stakeholder sensitivity are not soft extras; they are operational necessities in international settings. Program managers therefore need structures such as overlap windows, regional coordination roles, and explicit norms for multilingual or cross-cultural communication. Without those supports, global talent broadens capacity while simultaneously weakening coherence.

## AI-Enabled Decision Support, Monitoring, and Governance

Artificial intelligence expands the informational basis of program management. AI-enabled systems can support forecasting, performance monitoring, anomaly detection, and resource allocation by processing volumes of data that would be difficult to interpret manually (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Project and program environments shaped by digital transformation increasingly rely on such tools to surface patterns, predict risks, and support faster managerial response (Gemino & Reich, 2023; Project Management Institute, 2024). In practical terms, AI strengthens visibility; it does not eliminate the need for judgment.

The same tools, however, introduce governance questions. Monitoring technologies can improve visibility into distributed work, but they can also degrade trust when they are experienced as surveillance rather than support (Laker, 2020). AI systems may encode bias, produce opaque recommendations, or intensify data-privacy concerns if their use is not bounded by clear governance rules (Morley et al., 2023; Marchant et al., 2010). For program managers, the critical issue is not whether AI should be present—it increasingly will be—but how decision rights, monitoring boundaries, and accountability protocols are designed so that AI augments leadership without displacing responsibility.

## Trust, Well-Being, and Stakeholder Management

Distributed work increases the premium on trust because distance reduces informal reassurance. Trust can no longer depend primarily on physical presence, spontaneous interaction, or constant observation. It must be built through leadership behavior, communication reliability, and clarity of expectations. Research on virtual teams indicates that transformational leadership still matters when collaboration is mediated by technology because leaders must align effort, reinforce purpose, and maintain commitment without relying on physical proximity (Purvanova & Bono, 2009). More

recent work on hybrid leadership similarly emphasizes adaptability, empathy, and digital fluency (Aslam, 2025; Usama et al., 2025).

The people side of distributed work also includes psychological risk. Chinyuku (2025) highlights the challenges of cohesion, isolation, and emotional distance in remote teams, while Beharay and Tilak (2023) note the dual pressures of flexibility and fragmentation in virtual work arrangements. Program managers must therefore treat team climate and stakeholder communication as governance concerns rather than discretionary relational work. Outcome-based accountability is generally more sustainable than invasive monitoring, but it only works when goals, decision routes, and feedback routines are explicit. Trust is not a soft accompaniment to program delivery; it is a precondition for sustained coordination in distributed systems.

#### Mentorship, Reskilling, and Capability Development

One of the least appreciated consequences of hybrid and distributed work is the weakening of informal developmental learning. In office environments, junior managers often learn through observation, proximity, and unplanned access to senior colleagues. Those channels are thinner in distributed environments. Choudhary et al. (2024) shows that technology-enabled mentoring can increase access, continuity, and scalability, while Ogburie (2025) argues that mentoring and coaching remain central to leadership development in project and program contexts. The implication is clear: organizations cannot assume that capability formation will happen accidentally when work is no longer co-located.

Mentorship therefore becomes more than a developmental nicety; it becomes part of program capability infrastructure. Sandvik et al. (2025) show that structured, embedded development programs can outperform purely voluntary arrangements, and Bucero's (2003) PMO case demonstrates how mentoring can be institutionalized rather than left to chance. In hybrid



and AI-enabled environments, program managers need deliberate support in interpreting data, exercising judgment, navigating stakeholder politics, and leading across distance. Formal mentoring, reskilling programs, and PMO-supported learning systems help close the gap between technological change and managerial readiness.

### **An Adaptive Governance Model for the Future of Program Management**

The literature points to a common conclusion: future-ready program management requires a governance model that integrates distributed coordination, people leadership, AI-enabled judgment, and capability development. Treating these as separate issues produces fragmented responses—new software without trust, remote work without mentoring, or AI analytics without accountability. The adaptive governance model developed here synthesizes the literature into four interdependent domains, shown in Table 1. Each domain captures a central tension that program managers must resolve if programs are to remain coherent under conditions of distance, flexibility, and technological augmentation.

**Table 1.** Adaptive governance model for hybrid and AI-enabled program management

| <b>Governance domain</b>     | <b>Core tension</b>                          | <b>Governance response</b>                                                                             | <b>Program manager emphasis</b>                           |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Coordination architecture    | Flexibility and dispersion versus alignment  | Common tool stack, documented decision paths, asynchronous norms, structured handoffs                  | Orchestrating interdependence across teams and time zones |
| Trust and people systems     | Autonomy versus visibility                   | Outcome-based controls, regular check-ins, inclusive leadership, transparent stakeholder communication | Building trust, climate, and sustained commitment         |
| Human–AI decision design     | Analytical speed versus accountable judgment | Clear decision rights, explainability, ethical monitoring boundaries, human escalation points          | Interpreting and challenging AI outputs                   |
| Developmental infrastructure | Rapid capability change versus skill lag     | Mentoring networks, PMO-supported learning, reskilling pathways, cross-functional exposure             | Developing capability and succession depth                |

## Coordination Architecture

The first domain is coordination architecture. Distributed work increases flexibility but weakens the corrective effects of proximity. Program managers therefore need to engineer the communication environment itself: common tool stacks, handoff routines, asynchronous norms, documented decision paths, and explicit escalation channels. The leader's role shifts from managing visible activity to designing the conditions under which aligned activity can occur.

## Trust and People Systems

The second domain concerns trust and people systems. Hybrid work grants autonomy but can produce ambiguity, disengagement, and uneven visibility. Governance must therefore include social mechanisms as well as technical ones: outcome-based expectations, regular check-ins, inclusive leadership practices, and transparent communication with stakeholders. Trust is sustained when employees understand how performance is assessed, why tools are used, and how decisions are made.

## Human–AI Decision Design

The third domain is human–AI decision design. AI can improve decision speed and signal detection, but it should not be allowed to dissolve managerial accountability. Effective governance distinguishes between analytical support and decision authority. Program managers must be able to interpret AI outputs, challenge them when necessary, and understand the ethical implications of automated monitoring or prediction. Human judgment remains the final integrative layer because programs involve political, relational, and strategic tradeoffs that cannot be fully encoded.

## Developmental Infrastructure

The fourth domain is developmental infrastructure. The more work becomes distributed and data intensive, the more capability development must be formalized. Mentorship networks, PMO-supported training, reskilling pathways, and cross-functional learning opportunities become part of governance rather than peripheral HR activities. Developmental systems matter because future program managers will need stronger digital fluency, cultural intelligence, ethical reasoning, and coaching skills than prior models of the role required.

## Risk and Governance Implications

Hybrid and AI-enabled programs create risks that are both technical and social. Some of those risks are familiar—communication delays, access gaps, and stakeholder misalignment—but they become harder to detect when work is dispersed. Other risks are distinctly socio-technical, such as trust erosion through surveillance or biased AI-supported recommendations. A useful risk framework therefore needs to connect the source of the risk to the governance response, rather than merely labeling the risk as high or low. Table 2 translates the literature into a governance-oriented risk view for program managers.

The table highlights a central lesson of the review: the strongest responses are rarely purely technical. Communication fragmentation is not solved only by buying more tools; it is solved by tool standardization, role clarity, and communication design. Trust erosion is not solved by more monitoring; it is reduced by transparent policies and outcome-based accountability. AI-related risks are not solved by removing human leaders from the loop; they are reduced by clearer decision rights, auditability, and ethical review mechanisms. In short, risk management in future program environments is inseparable from governance design.

**Table 2.** Governance-oriented risk view for distributed and AI-enabled programs

| Risk                                   | Program consequence                                              | Leading indicators                                                                    | Primary governance response                                                           |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Communication fragmentation            | Conflicting priorities, delayed decisions, inconsistent handoffs | Multiple unofficial channels, repeated clarifications, missed dependencies            | Standardize platforms, define communication cadence, document decisions               |
| Unequal access to tools or information | Execution gaps, exclusion, and avoidable rework                  | Version conflicts, delayed updates, unequal participation in meetings                 | Minimum technology standards, shared repositories, onboarding support                 |
| Trust erosion through surveillance     | Disengagement, resistance, and higher turnover risk              | Low participation, defensive reporting, reluctance to share problems early            | Use outcome-based metrics, disclose monitoring rules, review ethics of tracking tools |
| Burnout and social isolation           | Lower resilience, weaker collaboration, and talent loss          | Meeting fatigue, withdrawal, delayed responses, rising attrition                      | Workload review, meaningful check-ins, social connection routines, manager coaching   |
| AI opacity, bias, or data misuse       | Poor prioritization, compliance exposure, weakened legitimacy    | Unexplained recommendations, inconsistent outputs, stakeholder concern about fairness | Human review, auditability, data governance, ethics and escalation reviews            |
| Capability lag                         | Slow adoption, weak judgment, and fragile succession pipelines   | Low tool proficiency, inconsistent use of systems, weak bench strength                | Formal mentoring, reskilling plans, PMO-enabled training, cross-functional learning   |

### Implications for Future Program Managers

The model developed here implies a substantial evolution in the role of the program manager. The future program manager is not primarily a supervisor of co-located activity. The role becomes closer to that of a distributed orchestrator: someone who designs coordination systems, interprets AI-supported signals, manages cultural and temporal boundaries, and maintains trust while accountability is exercised at a distance.

Several competencies rise in importance under this model. First, program managers need digital and platform fluency—not because technology is an end in itself, but because tool choice shapes communication quality, access, and handoff reliability. Second, they need stronger AI literacy so they can evaluate predictive outputs, understand monitoring tradeoffs, and recognize

when automation exceeds its appropriate boundary. Third, they need cultural intelligence, coaching capability, and stakeholder sensitivity because distributed work magnifies the consequences of misunderstanding and weakens informal repair mechanisms. Finally, they need the judgment to distinguish between visibility that supports work and visibility that undermines trust.

These implications are organizational as well as individual. Firms that want to benefit from hybrid work and AI-enabled systems cannot simply ask program managers to adapt on their own. They need formal developmental structures, explicit governance policies, and PMO or leadership mechanisms that sustain mentoring, reskilling, and ethical oversight over time. Otherwise, organizations risk adopting distributed work and intelligent tools faster than they build the human capability required to govern them.

## **Conclusion**

Employment style trends and artificial intelligence are not peripheral issues for program management; they are changing the context in which programs are governed. Hybrid work alters the social architecture of coordination. Global talent broadens capability while complicating alignment. AI expands analytical reach while raising new questions about monitoring, judgment, and responsibility. Taken together, these developments require more than tactical adjustment. They require an adaptive governance model.

This paper argues that the future of program management will be shaped by four interdependent domains: coordination architecture, trust and people systems, human–AI decision design, and developmental infrastructure. The practical implication is that program managers will be judged less by how closely they supervise visible work and more by how effectively they sustain coherence, accountability, and learning across distributed and technologically augmented

environments. AI may change how managers see programs, but it does not replace the need for human leadership. If anything, it increases the value of interpretation, ethics, cultural intelligence, and mentoring.

### Future Research

Future research should test the adaptive governance model developed here in empirical settings. Comparative studies could examine whether hybrid programs with explicit communication architectures outperform those relying on ad hoc coordination. Research is also needed on the boundary conditions of AI-supported governance, including when predictive systems improve decision quality and when they create trust, privacy, or accountability problems.

Additional work should examine capability development in distributed program environments. In particular, scholars should study whether formal mentoring systems, PMO-supported learning structures, and reskilling pathways improve leadership readiness in hybrid and AI-enabled programs. Program management research has an opportunity to move beyond separate conversations about remote work, digital transformation, and employee development and instead examine how these forces jointly reshape governance.

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