

Project Management Series

SPOTLIGHT ON NON-PROFIT & AI



FALL 2025

Mehnaz Tabassum

B.B.A.'21, PMP

NL Eats Community Outreach Inc.

Chief executive officer and co-founder

CogniCo AI Consulting

Chief executive officer and co-founder

Mehnaz talks AI

Founder, Producer and Host

Education: B.B.A.'20 (Memorial University), Certified Project Management Professional (PMP), Certified ScrumMaster (CSM), Certified Scrum Product Owner (CSPO)

Experience: Ms. Tabassum began her career with the Government of Canada, where she rapidly advanced from a project support role to senior IT project manager. She has also co-founded four ventures: **NL Eats Community Outreach Inc.**, which addresses food insecurity with innovative and tech-driven approaches; **CogniCo AI Consulting**, an AI strategy and automation firm; **SheLeads**, a national community supporting over 100 women in leadership; and **Light House Rentals Property Management**.



MEHNAZ TABASSUM

What inspired you to take formal education in the field?

At a workshop in 2021, a senior government leader encouraged me to get my PMP. She even wrote the potential salary on a piece of paper. That pushed me to register right away.

What is the single most important project management skill that you rely on day-to-day, and why?

Prioritization. I manage multiple roles across different organizations, so without it, everything would feel chaotic. I start each week by identifying high, medium, and low priorities for each role and only focus on three top tasks per area. This keeps me focused, avoids burnout, and ensures I'm spending my energy where it matters most. It's the key to how I get so much done without feeling overwhelmed.

LET'S TALK ABOUT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

How did you first get involved in project management?

Even as a kid, I was extremely organized—everything had to be color-coded, scheduled, and planned. I was always starting little projects, like fundraising events or school initiatives. Looking back, I was already applying project management principles without realizing it. That mindset stuck with me and naturally carried into my university years and early career. When I started working in government, those skills helped me stand out, and within just a few months, I was promoted from project support to project manager.

"Project management is really about mindset; it's how you organize yourself and the team."

What are your thoughts on the role of project management in the non-profit and social enterprise sectors? How is it different from corporate or government settings?

Project management is just as essential in the non-profit and social enterprise space—maybe even more so. But it's different. In government, we often use waterfall or hybrid approaches where 80% of the project is defined up front—fixed budgets, clear timelines, and long planning phases. In non-profits, it's far more agile. You're driven by impact, not structure, and you need to be flexible. For example, with NL Eats, we had to pivot from a traditional food bank to a mobile model when space fell through. So, the approach has to be nimble, people-first, and open to constant change.

“Non-profit work is very impact-driven—you focus on the goal first, and the ‘how’ second, because you can’t wait weeks to act when people are hungry.”

As someone involved in AI consulting and education, how do you see AI transforming the field of project management?

AI is already transforming project management—and it's only just getting started. We're seeing a shift away from manual, task-heavy work, such as writing emails, organizing deliverables, or compiling reports. Tools can now do that in seconds. Project managers who embrace AI are becoming more strategic—they're focusing on analyzing data, guiding decisions, and improving outcomes rather than just managing checklists.

“Employers will say, ‘Before we hire you, show us why AI alone can’t do this role.’”

In my own work, I use tools like Fireflies AI that join meetings automatically, even ones I can't attend, and generate action items, summaries, and highlights I need to follow up on. Tools like monday.com and Notion help me organize entire workflows and integrate them with each other, so everything runs smoothly. These tools act like a “second brain,” especially when you're managing multiple roles and teams.

Even communication is being automated. Rather than constant back-and-forth with clients, AI can send real-time dashboard updates or summaries. It's seamless, efficient, and much more scalable. That's where we're heading: project managers who adapt will thrive, and those who don't will be left behind.

What are the biggest challenges you've faced as a project manager leading community-focused or tech-driven initiatives?

One of the biggest challenges has been switching between very different project management styles. In government, everything is structured, but with non-for-profit and tech work, things move fast, and you need to be flexible, adapt quickly, and focus on impact. Across all sectors, though, the hardest part is always stakeholder communication—making sure everyone's on the same page when they have competing priorities.

What advice would you give to students or new graduates who are considering project management as a career path?

You can start practicing PM right now—no formal designation required. Treat every group assignment, part-time job, or volunteer role as a mini project: define goals, map out tasks, assign responsibilities, and track progress. Dive into popular tools like monday.com or Notion to manage your calendars, to-do lists, and documentation. By applying PM techniques in real scenarios, you'll build hands-on experience that makes learning theory—and later exam prep—much more intuitive and effective.

“Don’t wait until you get your PMP to begin your project management journey.”

What advice would you give to those from underrepresented backgrounds?

Build your skills relentlessly. I've had to knock on more doors than others, but strong, diverse skills are what ultimately open opportunities—especially in an AI-driven job market where employers care more about what you can do than where you come from.

In fact, there's new hiring software powered by AI that strips out all the fluff and can just highlight your real, quantifiable skills and achievements.

Contact us

Dr. Jennifer Jewer, PMP
Faculty of Business Administration
Memorial University of Newfoundland
E: jenniferj@mun.ca