PROJECT MANAGEMENT GLOBAL
The Place for People in Projects

Global Project Management Trends for 2026: A Worldwide Outlook

November 25, 2025

Global projects are entering 2026 amid rapid change. Disruptive technologies, shifting workforce dynamics, and rising pressures for sustainability are reshaping how projects are delivered across every region. Authoritative reports and surveys – from PMI's latest data to OECD and ILO studies – point to a profession adapting to new realities.

Project leaders face both unprecedented opportunities (AI-augmented tools, massive infrastructure investments) and challenges (talent shortages, economic volatility).

In this thought-leadership three-part overview, we explore the key trends that will define project management in 2026, examine regional nuances from Africa to Asia-Pacific and beyond, and outline actionable steps professionals can take *right now* to prepare for success. For part one today, we look at the trends.

Evolving Delivery Models and Approaches

Project delivery models are becoming more **adaptive and hybrid** as organizations seek fit-for-purpose methods. Rigid single-methodology approaches are fading in favor of flexibility. Research from PMI's *Pulse of the Profession 2024* finds that organizations have "shifted toward flexible, fit-for-purpose project delivery practices" to meet post-pandemic and digital-age demands.

In practice, this means blending traditional predictive techniques with agile methodologies – whatever best suits the project and stakeholder needs. Notably, PMI reports a **57% rise** in the use of hybrid project management approaches recently. Teams are proving that **no one method has a monopoly on**

success: project performance is roughly equal whether using predictive (waterfall), hybrid, or pure agile frameworks, provided they are applied with skill. The same holds true for work arrangements – on-site, remote, and hybrid teams deliver comparable results. This validates the trend of tailoring delivery models to each project's context.

Another facet of evolving delivery is the growing emphasis on **benefits realization and portfolio alignment**. It's no longer enough to "deliver on time and budget" – the approach must ensure the project's *value* is realized. However, many organizations struggle with this shift. In a 2025 industry survey, practitioners said the **hardest project management processes to embed** are benefits management, resource management, and project prioritization. This indicates that while frameworks are evolving, capabilities like benefits tracking and strategic project selection lag behind. PMOs (Project Management Offices) are poised to help: **72% of respondents** in that survey believe their PMO's scope and responsibilities will grow in the future.

In short, delivery models are trending toward greater agility and strategic focus, but organizations must invest in processes (like benefits and portfolio management) to fully realize the potential. Those that succeed will achieve *both* efficiency and strategic impact through their project delivery approaches.

Workforce Development and the Global Talent Gap

As demand for project skills surges worldwide, **workforce development** has become a top priority. PMI's latest Global Talent Gap analysis projects a potential shortfall of **nearly 30 million project professionals by 2035** if current trends continue.

Global demand for project talent could grow 64% from 2025 to 2035, driven by big capital investments and industry transformations. This crunch is being felt unevenly across regions – from Sub-Saharan Africa to South Asia, fast-growing economies need armies of project managers to deliver infrastructure and development goals. Even in mature markets, retirements and new digital initiatives are fueling talent needs. The good news: project management remains a highly rewarding and "future-proof" career path.

For instance, in the UK and Europe, salaries and opportunities are on the rise. The Association for Project Management (APM) reports average project manager pay in the UK jumped 10% in one year (to £52,500 in 2024) amid strong demand. Job satisfaction is high (80% in the UK are satisfied in their role) and **two-thirds** of practitioners are optimistic about their economic prospects for the next year. This reflects a **bright outlook for the profession**, provided organizations and individuals invest in skill development.

Upskilling and reskilling are the watchwords heading into 2026. The World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs 2025* survey of 1,000+ companies found that 85% of employers plan to upskill their workforce to address evolving skills gaps. Specifically, there is *unprecedented* demand for digital and data skills – particularly in AI.

By 2030, a net **78 million new jobs** are expected globally thanks to technology and the green transition, but realizing this potential requires closing the skills gap. Nearly 40% of core job skills are forecast to change in the next five years, and organizations cite the skills shortage as the number-one barrier to transformation. For project professionals, this means continuously developing competencies like data

analysis, AI tool use, and industry-specific knowledge.

Additionally, “power skills” (leadership, communication, creative problem-solving) and **business acumen** are increasingly differentiating top performers. In fact, PMI’s *Pulse of the Profession 2025* highlights **business acumen as the critical differentiator** that turns project managers into strategic value creators. Yet only 18% of project professionals today have high business acumen proficiency – suggesting a major opportunity for those who build their capabilities in understanding business strategy, finance, and stakeholder needs.

The talent imperative also has a **diversity and inclusion** dimension. With such a large talent gap, tapping new talent pools is essential. Many regions are encouraging more women and young professionals into project management. Notably, some Middle Eastern countries have sharply improved gender diversity in recent years, and Africa boasts a huge youth population that can be trained in project skills. International bodies like the ILO emphasize the importance of investing in education and lifelong learning to prepare the next generation for project careers.

In summary, workforce development in project management is both a **challenge and an opportunity**: organizations that actively close skill gaps and empower their project professionals will be best positioned to thrive in 2026 and beyond.

Sustainability and ESG in Project Delivery

Sustainability has moved from a buzzword to a core priority in project management worldwide. As companies and governments respond to climate change and social expectations, **ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance)** criteria are increasingly embedded in project selection, planning, and delivery. In practice, this means projects are expected to minimize environmental impact, support social value, and ensure good governance. A striking insight comes from recent PMI research: while **93% of executives** say sustainability is vital to business success, only **37%** have fully embedded sustainability into their operations.

This gap between aspiration and execution is closing rapidly, however. Organizations are realizing that meeting sustainability goals (from net-zero emissions to community benefits) **depends on effective project delivery** – whether it’s building renewable energy facilities, transit systems, or implementing new ESG compliance processes. As the OECD and World Bank have noted, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will require trillions in projects globally. For example, in Africa alone, closing the infrastructure gap to meet development needs could require $68–108 billion per year in investment, much of which must align with sustainability and climate resilience goals.

In 2026, expect **more projects to be driven by sustainability objectives**, and project managers to take on the role of sustainability champions. We see industry frameworks emerging for “sustainable project management,” combining traditional PM with environmental and social risk management. Project sponsors are also insisting on clearer *benefits realization* around ESG metrics – it’s not just *what* a project delivers, but *how* it delivers in terms of carbon footprint, energy efficiency, circular economy, and community impact. Fortunately, technology is providing an edge.

Marrying sustainability efforts with AI and data analytics can greatly amplify impact. In a global PMI survey of 650 organizations, firms that tightly integrated **AI into their sustainability initiatives** achieved a **26% reduction in CO2 emissions**, far outperforming those with little integration (only 3% reduction). AI is helping optimize resource use, energy consumption, and emissions tracking in real time, making projects "greener" by design. However, PMI cautions that this requires *proactive leadership and strategy* – AI is no silver bullet, and it comes with its own carbon footprint (think energy-hungry data centers).

The takeaway for 2026 is clear: sustainability is now a non-negotiable in project management. Professionals must be literate in sustainability principles and metrics, and be ready to innovate – whether it's using AI to cut waste or adopting green construction practices – to deliver projects that advance environmental and social goals. The projects of the future will be judged not just on immediate outputs, but on their contribution to a sustainable, equitable world.

AI and Digital Transformation in Project Management

Artificial intelligence and digital transformation are accelerating across the project management discipline, bringing both disruption and opportunity. The past year saw an explosion of interest in generative AI, and heading into 2026 this trend is only picking up pace. Organizations are **rapidly adopting AI tools** to support project work – from intelligent scheduling assistants and risk analysis algorithms to AI-driven dashboards that predict project outcomes.

According to the WEF's *Future of Jobs 2025* report, fully **50% of employers** surveyed plan to reorient their business strategy in response to AI, and 80% are actively upskilling workers to handle AI-based roles and processes. Rather than AI replacing project managers, the emerging model is **AI-augmented project management**: routine tasks like status reporting, effort tracking, or even drafting of project documents can be automated, freeing project leaders to focus on strategy and stakeholder engagement.

Indeed, many companies report that they do *not* plan large workforce reductions as a result of AI – only about 40% anticipate cutting jobs due to automation, while far more are focused on retraining and hiring for new skills. This suggests that in 2026, project managers will increasingly work alongside AI, and fluency with digital tools will be a baseline skill.

Beyond AI, the broader **digital transformation of project management** continues at speed. Teams are embracing cloud-based collaboration platforms, advanced data analytics, and even emerging tech like digital twins and blockchain for project tracking. Industries like construction and infrastructure are seeing the benefits of digital twins (virtual models of projects) to simulate outcomes and catch issues early.

The World Economic Forum observes that the digital future of sectors like construction hinges on collaboration, upskilling, and strong data governance – a statement that rings true for all project domains. However, digital transformation brings challenges such as cybersecurity risks and the need to manage change among teams. *Cyber-resilience* has become part of project risk management (for example, protecting project data and ensuring continuity of digital systems).

We also see **PMOs evolving into digital hubs**, where project data is aggregated for portfolio-level insights. Yet, a reality check: many organizations are still on the journey. The Wellingtone 2025 report

noted that **42% of project professionals spend at least a full day per week manually collating project reports** – indicating plenty of room for automation and smarter tools. Going into 2026, the push is for project management to become more data-driven and real-time. Those organizations that harness AI and digital platforms effectively will gain in agility and foresight (for example, identifying risks or trends across their project portfolio early). In sum, digital transformation is no longer optional – it's a competitive necessity in project management. The key for professionals is to adapt by learning how to leverage these technologies while also managing the human side of change.

Heightened Focus on Risk Management and Resilience

If the past few years have taught project professionals anything, it's to **expect the unexpected**. Global volatility – from pandemics and wars to supply chain breakdowns and inflation – has underscored the importance of robust risk management and organizational resilience. As we approach 2026, projects are operating against a backdrop of persistent uncertainties.

The World Economic Forum's *Global Risks Report 2024* warns of a world pushed "past its limits" by *cascading shocks*: war and geopolitical conflicts, polarized politics, a cost-of-living crisis, and ever-increasing climate impacts are all destabilizing factors. In this environment, project managers must take an **expanded view of risk**. Traditional project risk registers (focused on internal scope/schedule/budget risks) are being updated to include external risks like geopolitical instability, extreme weather events, commodity price swings, and cybersecurity threats. There is also a greater focus on *opportunity management* – being agile to capitalize on favorable shifts.

A major trend is the integration of **resilience planning** into project and portfolio management. This goes hand-in-hand with risk management. Organizations are asking: can our projects *withstand* shocks, and can we recover quickly when things go wrong? For example, supply chain resilience has become a key consideration in project procurement – ensuring alternative suppliers or local options to avoid disruptions.

The concept of "built-in resilience" is gaining ground: building flexibility into plans, budgets, and contracts so that projects can absorb change without catastrophic failure. Agile and iterative delivery methods support this, as they inherently adapt to change. Moreover, **scenario planning** and risk scenario simulations are on the rise. Advanced tools (often powered by AI) enable teams to model "what if" scenarios (e.g., what if a key vendor fails, or a natural disaster strikes a project site) and prepare contingent responses.

Crucially, the culture around risk is evolving too. Successful organizations are fostering a **risk-aware culture** where teams are encouraged to flag issues early and leadership supports transparent risk discussion. In many regions, we also see **governments stepping up oversight** for major public projects, precisely to manage risk and improve success rates.

For instance, the UK has consolidated its Infrastructure and Projects Authority into a new body (NISTA – National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority) to strengthen how major projects are governed and to better manage risks across its £600+ billion project portfolio. Ultimately, 2026 will reward those project teams that combine prudent risk management with adaptability. As one risk report put it, while global risks are growing, *so is our capacity to respond* – through innovation and cooperation. By

embedding resilience, project managers can navigate the “new normal” of constant uncertainty and still deliver value.

Strengthening Governance and Portfolio Assurance

High-profile project failures and growing investment stakes have put **governance and portfolio assurance** in the spotlight. Around the world, stakeholders (whether taxpayers, investors, or executives) are demanding greater accountability and success from projects. This is leading to more rigorous governance frameworks, oversight mechanisms, and emphasis on delivering the *right* projects, not just delivering projects right. A clear indicator of this trend: nearly **46% of project professionals** say they are dissatisfied with their organization’s project management maturity, citing gaps in accountability and support from leadership. In response, organizations are beefing up governance – clarifying roles and decision rights, establishing steering committees, and conducting regular health-checks or audits of projects and programs. The goal is to catch issues early and ensure each project remains aligned to strategic objectives. We’re essentially seeing **project governance “grow up”** as a discipline, often borrowing from corporate governance best practices.

At the portfolio level, assurance activities (such as independent reviews, risk audits, and benefits realization tracking) are becoming standard. Governments have been particularly active here: for example, the UK’s NISTA (mentioned above) publishes an annual report on the Government Major Projects Portfolio to transparently track progress and escalate intervention in troubled projects.

International bodies like the OECD have also reinforced the importance of governance for successful projects, noting that **transparency and strong infrastructure governance are preconditions for value-for-money outcomes**. In practical terms, this means more **emphasis on front-end business cases**, option analysis, and clear criteria for project selection. It also means *empowering PMOs* or centers of excellence to enforce methodology and quality standards across projects. The earlier-cited Wellingtone survey hinting that PMOs will expand in scope is relevant – many PMOs are evolving into custodians of project governance, ensuring consistency and elevating issues to senior management when needed.

Another aspect is the drive for **benefits realization assurance**. It’s not enough that a project delivers its output; there is increasing scrutiny (especially by finance and strategy teams) on whether the promised benefits are actually achieved and sustained. This is leading to the practice of keeping project managers or PMOs engaged even post-project to track outcomes – a shift from the old “deliver and disband” model.

Furthermore, **technology is aiding governance**: dashboard reporting and portfolio management tools give leaders real-time visibility into performance, which improves oversight. That said, human judgment remains key. Effective governance in 2026 will require a culture of ethical leadership and support for project teams. When done right, stronger governance and assurance don’t mean bureaucratic slowdown – instead, they *enable faster course-corrections* and more successful delivery by providing guidance and clarity.

In short, expect 2026 to continue the push toward **better-controlled, strategically aligned projects**. Organizations that invest in governance will likely see higher success rates and trust from stakeholders, whereas those that neglect it risk costly project overruns and missed objectives.

Read the other posts here:

- **Global Project Management Trends for 2026: A Worldwide Outlook**
- **A Regional Breakdown**
- **Preparing for Success in 2026: Actionable Steps for Project Professionals**