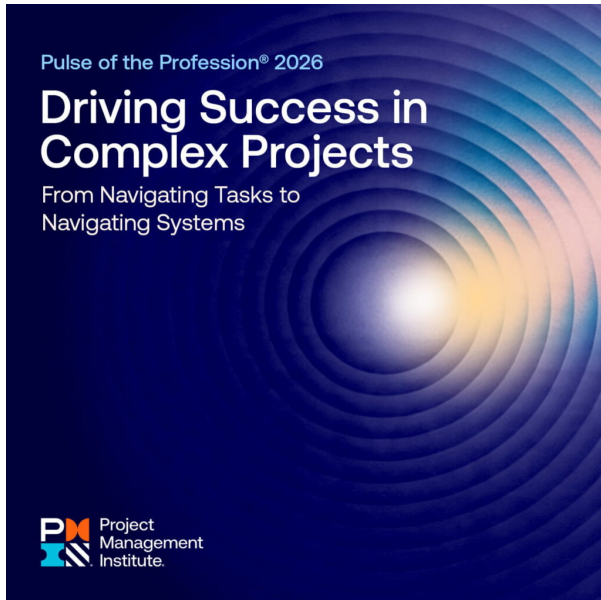


# PMI report warns complexity is becoming the defining challenge in modern project delivery

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**Project Management Institute (PMI) has released its latest *Pulse of the Profession* report, warning that rising project complexity is now one of the biggest threats to successful delivery as organisations struggle to adapt to rapid technological, economic and organisational change.**

The report, *Driving Success in Complex Projects: From Navigating Tasks to Navigating Systems*, found that projects managed effectively through complexity are five times more likely to succeed than those where complexity is poorly handled.

According to PMI, 81% of project professionals say projects have become more complex in recent years, while 37% report a significant increase.

The findings reflect a growing shift in project management away from traditional task-based delivery toward broader systems thinking, where project leaders must navigate interconnected organisational, technological and human factors simultaneously.

## Complexity becoming the default operating environment

PMI's research suggests complexity is no longer confined to major megaprojects or large transformation programmes.

Instead, it has become embedded across modern project delivery environments.

The report found that:

- 97% of project professionals managed at least one complex project in the past year
- More than half of all projects are now considered complex
- Nearly one-third of complex projects fail to achieve their intended benefits

PMI defines successful projects as those that deliver value worth the effort and cost involved. However, increasing complexity is placing growing pressure on both delivery performance and strategic alignment.

According to the report, unmanaged complexity often leads to:

- Cost overruns
- Delays
- Strategic drift
- Governance failures
- Stakeholder misalignment
- Team burnout

## AI transformation intensifying delivery pressure

The report identifies artificial intelligence as one of the biggest accelerators of project complexity.

While many executives view AI primarily as a strategic opportunity, project teams are increasingly experiencing it as an operational and delivery challenge.

PMI found that:

- 72% of CEOs cite AI and automation as the leading driver of operating-model change
- 48% of project professionals identify rapid technology and tool cycles as a key complexity driver

The report argues that many organisations are attempting to accelerate transformation programmes without adequately adapting governance structures, coordination models or decision-making processes.

As a result, complexity compounds faster than organisations can absorb it.

## Complexity increasingly driven by people and systems

PMI's research identifies three major sources of project complexity:

- Organisational complexity
- Environmental complexity
- Human complexity

Organisational complexity includes unclear governance, siloed departments and conflicting objectives.

Environmental complexity is being driven by geopolitical instability, regulatory volatility and accelerating technological change.

Human complexity — increasingly viewed as one of the most difficult areas to manage — includes competing incentives, political dynamics, stakeholder tensions and communication challenges.

The report argues that organisations are often structurally unprepared to manage continuous change at scale.

## Stronger people management linked to project success

Despite the challenges, PMI found that high-performing teams are not necessarily dealing with fewer problems — they are simply managing complexity more effectively.

Projects that successfully navigate complexity achieve an 88% success rate, compared with just 14% among teams considered only slightly effective or ineffective at managing it.

Several practices were identified as key differentiators among high-performing teams:

- Sponsor alignment early in the project lifecycle
- Scenario planning and dependency mapping
- Structured project frameworks
- Shared governance language
- Continuous reassessment of priorities

One of the report's more striking findings is that 35% of project professionals still used no formal framework at all on their most recent complex project.

Projects using structured frameworks achieved a 72% success rate compared with 61% for those without one.

## PMOs becoming more strategically important

The research also highlights the growing importance of Project Management Offices (PMOs) as organisations attempt to coordinate increasingly interconnected programmes.

According to PMI, organisations with PMOs were more likely to report high levels of success managing complex projects.

Rather than serving purely administrative functions, PMOs are increasingly evolving into enterprise execution hubs responsible for:

- Governance alignment
- Dependency management
- Strategic coordination
- Stakeholder communication
- Portfolio-level decision support

## Project delivery now central to strategic execution

Pierre Le Manh, President and CEO of PMI, said the report reinforces the idea that organisational strategy ultimately succeeds or fails through project execution.

“Strategy isn’t delivered in the boardroom, it’s delivered through projects,” he said.

“When projects work, organizations execute. When they don’t, the strategy never leaves the deck.”

For project professionals, the report signals a major shift in how successful delivery is defined.

Technical delivery skills remain important, but PMI’s findings suggest future project success will increasingly depend on systems thinking, adaptability, stakeholder management and organisational resilience.

Because increasingly, the challenge facing project leaders is no longer simply managing schedules, budgets and scope — but helping organisations function effectively in environments where complexity itself has become permanent.