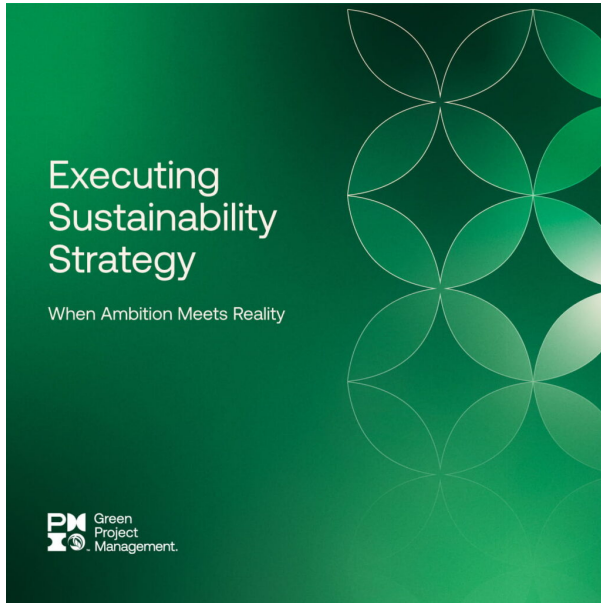


Sustainability ambitions are rising, but project delivery capability is struggling to keep pace, PMI report finds

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A growing number of organisations now view sustainability as a business imperative rather than a corporate responsibility exercise. Yet new research from Project Management Institute (PMI) and Green Project Management (GPM) suggests that many businesses remain ill-equipped to turn sustainability ambitions into measurable results.

The report, *Executing Sustainability Strategy: When Ambition Meets Reality*, paints a picture of organisations that increasingly understand the strategic value of sustainability but continue to struggle with the practical realities of execution. Based on a global survey of nearly 1,600 professionals across 35 countries, the research identifies a significant gap between executive confidence and delivery capability, raising important questions about how sustainability strategies are implemented at project level.

According to the findings, sustainability is no longer viewed as a peripheral concern. Nearly four in five respondents (79%) said sustainability positions their organisation for long-term success. However, only 41% reported that sustainability is fully integrated across projects and functions, highlighting a disconnect between aspiration and operational reality.

Perhaps the most striking finding is the confidence gap between those setting sustainability strategy and those responsible for delivering it.

While 85% of sustainability executives expressed confidence that their organisations would achieve their sustainability goals, only 43% of Project Management Office (PMO) leaders shared that view. Confidence

drops even further among project professionals, with just 20% reporting they are extremely confident in their organisation's ability to achieve its sustainability objectives.

The disparity suggests that those closest to project delivery see challenges that are often invisible at executive level.

Pierre Le Manh, President and CEO of PMI, believes the findings highlight a critical organisational challenge.

"Sustainability has often been a side agenda or a signaling exercise. But it is now increasingly tied to business resilience, competitiveness, and long-term value creation," he said.

"Our research shows that projects built around sustainability succeed at nearly twice the rate of those that are not. The challenge for leaders now, beyond embedding sustainability into strategy, is how to build the organisations to deliver on it."

That conclusion is reinforced by separate PMI research cited in the report, which identifies sustainability as the single strongest predictor of project success, ranking ahead of traditional factors such as governance structures, project methodologies and delivery frameworks.

The implication is significant. Sustainability is no longer simply an environmental or social consideration; it is increasingly becoming a performance driver.

However, the report argues that the barriers preventing progress are not rooted in a lack of commitment. Instead, they are systemic.

Researchers identified six recurring tensions that consistently undermine sustainability execution across organisations. These include difficulty quantifying sustainability benefits in financial terms, weak integration into decision-making processes, unclear project-level objectives, sustainability being deprioritised when projects face cost and schedule pressures, limited visibility of how day-to-day activities contribute to broader sustainability outcomes, and the challenge of measuring benefits that may not materialise until years after project completion.

Taken together, these challenges help explain why sustainability often remains prominent in annual reports and corporate presentations while struggling to gain traction in project delivery environments.

One of the most revealing findings concerns organisational scepticism.

Despite widespread support for sustainability in principle, 40% of respondents qualified as sustainability sceptics, expressing doubts about its impact, feasibility or business relevance. The report suggests this scepticism is often created by poor execution rather than opposition to sustainability itself. When employees see ambitious commitments that are not reflected in funding decisions, governance frameworks or project priorities, confidence inevitably erodes.

The research also identifies a broader organisational challenge around alignment.

PMI and GPM argue that successful organisations create what the report describes as a “golden thread” linking corporate strategy directly to project delivery. In many organisations, however, sustainability teams and delivery teams operate separately, resulting in weak translation of strategic goals into practical project requirements.

To address this challenge, the report identifies two critical enablers.

The first is leadership clarity. Organisations that perform well establish a clear and consistent definition of what sustainability means and how it contributes to business value. This ensures that executives, PMOs and project teams share the same understanding of success.

The second is capability. High-performing organisations develop the governance structures, processes, tools and skills required to embed sustainability into project decisions. Sustainability becomes part of project selection, funding approvals, procurement decisions, risk management processes and performance measurement rather than an additional reporting requirement.

The report highlights four practical actions that organisations can take to close the execution gap.

These include making sustainability value visible through measurable business cases, translating strategic goals into governance and decision-making processes, embedding accountability into everyday project delivery, and enabling teams with the tools, data and capabilities required to manage sustainability effectively.

Notably, PMI identifies portfolio management and PMOs as playing a pivotal role in this transition. Positioned between executive strategy and frontline delivery, PMOs act as the critical translation layer that converts sustainability ambition into executable projects.

The report found that respondents most frequently called for clearer project-level goals (24%), stronger cross-functional collaboration (22%), and tighter linkage between strategy and delivery (18%) to improve sustainability outcomes.

The findings arrive at a time when sustainability pressures are intensifying across industries.

Research from Morgan Stanley cited by PMI shows that 88% of companies now view sustainability as a driver of value creation. At the same time, climate-related disasters generated more than US\$200 billion in economic losses during 2024, while rapidly expanding energy demands from artificial intelligence and data centres are creating new sustainability challenges for project teams.

Regulatory expectations are also increasing. According to PwC’s Global Sustainability Reporting Survey 2025, 90% of organisations plan to maintain full sustainability reporting practices, placing greater emphasis on demonstrating measurable outcomes rather than simply publishing commitments.

Against this backdrop, PMI and GPM have launched the Certified Sustainable Project Professional (CSPP™) certification. The programme aims to help project professionals integrate sustainability considerations into planning, execution and performance measurement through the PMI-GPM P5 methodology.

Joel Carboni, Chief Executive Officer of Green Project Management, believes project professionals will determine whether sustainability commitments ultimately succeed or fail.

“Sustainability progress lives or dies at the project level,” he said.

“Every ton of emissions avoided, every resource conserved, every community made stronger by a project happens because a team had the skills, the standards and the will to deliver it.”

The message emerging from the research is clear. Organisations have largely won the argument about why sustainability matters. The challenge now is execution.

As sustainability becomes increasingly linked to competitiveness, resilience and long-term value creation, the organisations that succeed will not necessarily be those with the boldest ambitions. They will be the ones capable of translating those ambitions into consistent project decisions, measurable outcomes and lasting business value.

You can download the report [here](#).