PM impact

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Turning Sustainability into Real Impact

Projects For a Sustainable Future

Sustainability Is No Longer Optional
Lucila Dotto

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Frank Jäger

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The Forest Was Never About the Trees

Editorial

There is a moment in almost every good movie when we realize that the opening scene was not random.

The broken watch on the kitchen table.
The child counting passing trains.
The woman who always takes the stairs instead of the elevator.
The old engineer who insists on sharpening his pencil before every calculation.

At first, these details seem decorative. Charming, maybe. Slightly unnecessary. But then, somewhere near the end, the plot turns. The watch explains the alibi. The trains reveal the hidden route. The stairs become the escape path. And the pencil? Of course, the pencil was never about nostalgia. It was about precision.

This edition of PM*impact* is a little like that.

At first glance, the stories may seem to move in different directions. We talk about sustainability, AI, healthcare, construction, PMOs, agile delivery, decision-making, communication, leadership, and project value. Different protagonists. Different settings. Different conflicts.

But if we look closely, they are not separate stories at all. They are all about one question:

How do we turn good intentions into real impact?

The answer is less glamorous than a movie finale, but perhaps more important: through decisions. Through the small, concrete choices in projects where sustainability either becomes real—or quietly disappears behind deadlines, budgets, and "we will consider this later."

This edition shows that sustainability is not an add-on, a report, or a green paragraph at the end of a business case. It is a leadership capability. It means making trade-offs visible, using AI responsibly, understanding different perspectives, designing better decisions, and measuring value beyond delivery alone.

In the end, sustainable projects are not created by heroic speeches, but by project professionals who connect ambition with execution. Again and again. Decision by decision.

So perhaps the forest was never only about the trees. It was about the roots, the connections, and the care required to make something grow.

Welcome to this edition of PM*impact*.

Alex Bruckschen and Paula Wenzel
Editors-in-Chief PM*impact*

Alex Bruckschen

As a Senior Project and Transformation Manager, Alex Bruckschen manages complex cross-industry programs and develops scalable delivery and quality processes. Her expertise includes agile scaling, BizDevOps, and KPI and performance management.

Paula Wenzel

Paula Wenzel is a master's student in project management with a specialization in AI-supported methods and data-driven decision-making. Her focus is on healthcare and the development of practical approaches to improve clinical processes and care systems.

Sustainability Is No Longer Optional

It's a Leadership Capability

INTERVIEW WITH LUCILA DOTTO

As organizations navigate accelerating change, sustainability is increasingly becoming a defining capability for business success. From AI transformation to infrastructure delivery, project professionals are playing a more strategic role in helping organizations turn sustainability commitments into measurable outcomes.

In this conversation, we explore why sustainability is no longer just a reporting exercise, but a leadership mindset, and why project professionals are uniquely positioned to drive long-term value creation.

PM*impact*: You often describe sustainability as a mindset rather than a process. What does that mean in the context of modern project leadership?

Lucila: Sustainability is often misunderstood as a compliance exercise or a separate workstream. In reality, it is a way of thinking about how we create value and make decisions. For project leaders, sustainability is not limited to one industry or one type of initiative. It is a knowledge area that can be applied across everything, from construction and infrastructure projects to AI transformation. At PMI, we believe sustainability is fundamentally about the "how." How do we deliver outcomes responsibly? How do we create value not only in the short term, but also for people, organizations, and society over time?

That is why our P5 methodology places value at the center through five dimensions: People, Planet, Prosperity, Process, and Products. It helps project professionals assess the broader impact of decisions while still driving business performance. Modern project leadership is no longer only about delivering outputs. It is about delivering outcomes that are resilient, responsible, and sustainable.

PM*impact*: What convinced PMI that sustainability must become a strategic priority for the project management profession?

Lucila: PMI research made the business case very clear. Sustainability is the strongest predictor of project success. Projects that integrate sustainability considerations are 2.5 times more likely to succeed. But fewer than 5% of projects today systematically consider all sustainability dimensions in their delivery approach. That represents a major opportunity for differentiation and leadership.

Organizations, specially in Europe, are increasing their sustainability commitments, while regulations and stakeholder expectations continue to evolve rapidly. Businesses are now under pressure not only to define sustainability strategies, but also to demonstrate measurable progress. Projects generate the operational data, decisions, and impacts that ultimately determine whether an organization achieves its sustainability goals. With the right capabilities, project leaders can help connect enterprise strategy with real-world execution. That is why sustainability is no longer peripheral to project management; it is becoming central to modern business leadership. As organizations increasingly seek professionals who can connect strategy, delivery, and long-term value creation, PMI is investing heavily in building sustainability capabilities across the profession.

To support this shift, PMI offers a wide range of resources, thought leadership, and learning opportunities for members, as well as a dedicated certification: the CSPP. More information is available at pmi.org/learning/sustainability.

PM*impact*: For many years, project success was mainly measured by scope, time, and budget. Why is this definition no longer sufficient?

Lucila: Traditional success metrics still matter, but they are no longer enough on their own. Organizations today are asking a much bigger question: Did the project create meaningful value? PMI's recent research on project success shows that leading organizations are expanding how they define success beyond delivery efficiency. Success now includes stakeholder perception, long-term impact, resilience, adaptability, and contribution to strategic goals. Sustainability fits naturally into this broader perspective because it encourages organizations to think beyond immediate outputs and focus on enduring outcomes. At PMI, we often talk about the opportunity to do M.O.R.E.:

- Manage perceptions
- Own success
- Reassess continuously
- Expand perspectives

That mindset reflects the reality of today's business environment. Project leaders are no longer only managing schedules and budgets; they are helping organizations navigate complexity, uncertainty, and transformation.

PM*impact*: PMI research suggests that sustainability-aligned projects are significantly more successful. Why do you think sustainability has become such a strong predictor of project success?

Lucila: Because sustainability fundamentally improves decision-making. Sustainability-aligned projects tend to consider long-term value creation, stakeholder impact, resilience, and risk more systematically. Through methodologies like P5, project professionals can identify and assess hundreds of potential risks and impacts across environmental, social, economic, and operational dimensions. In fact, the P5 framework provides more than 260 ways to identify, assess, manage, track, and communicate sustainability-related impacts and risks throughout the project lifecycle. This strengthens governance, improves visibility, and supports better enterprise reporting. It is also a powerful complement to existing project management capabilities such as PMP certification because it helps project leaders connect delivery outcomes with broader business objectives. This is the reason the CSPP, the newest PMI-GPM certification, offers a special and faster track for PMPs.

Ultimately, sustainability helps project professionals step beyond execution and contribute as strategic business leaders.

Read more ...

PM*impact*: How can project managers integrate sustainability principles into everyday decision-making—even in projects that are not explicitly "green projects"?

Lucila: One of the biggest misconceptions is that sustainability only applies to "green" initiatives. In reality, every project creates impacts, through procurement choices, resource use, stakeholder engagement, governance decisions, technology adoption, or team well-being.

The P5 methodology helps project professionals integrate sustainability into everyday delivery decisions through five lenses:

- People
- Planet
- Prosperity
- Process
- Products

It provides practical ways to identify, assess, manage, track, and communicate risks and impacts throughout the project lifecycle. This allows sustainability to become embedded into normal project governance rather than treated as a separate reporting activity. Even small decisions made consistently during delivery can create significant long-term business value.

PM*impact*: You frequently speak about "human sustainability." What role does leadership culture, psychological safety, and well-being play in sustainable transformation?

Lucila: Human sustainability is essential. Transformation cannot be sustainable if people are exhausted, disconnected, or unable to contribute openly and creatively. The social dimension of sustainability is fundamentally about people, about creating environments where teams can thrive, innovate, collaborate, and adapt during periods of change. Leadership culture, psychological safety, and wellbeing are therefore not "soft topics." They directly influence performance, resilience, and long-term organizational success. Sustainability also requires accountability, data, and measurable outcomes. It is about balancing purpose-led leadership with disciplined execution. Organizations that succeed are usually the ones that can combine both human-centered leadership and operational rigor.

PM*impact*: AI, digitalization, and sustainability are currently converging in many organizations. How do you see these trends influencing the future role of project leaders?

Lucila: These trends are reshaping the role of project professionals very quickly. At PMI, we describe AI and sustainability as "content and innovation platforms"; areas that create opportunities for project professionals to learn, innovate, and expand their perspectives. Organizations today are operating in a world defined by rapid technological change, uncertainty, and constant transformation. That means project leaders must become increasingly adaptable and future-focused. The role is evolving beyond coordination and delivery management toward strategic enablement, cross-functional leadership, and change orchestration. Project professionals who can combine business understanding, sustainability thinking, digital fluency, and human leadership skills will be exceptionally valuable in the years ahead.

PM*impact*: If you look ahead five years, what capabilities will define successful project professionals in a sustainability-driven world?

Lucila: The pace of change is so rapid today that predicting exact future capabilities is difficult. What does seem certain is that change itself will remain constant. That means adaptability, resilience, innovation, and continuous learning will become even more important than technical expertise alone. Successful project professionals will need the ability to navigate ambiguity, connect strategy with execution, lead through transformation, and make decisions with long-term value in mind.

Sustainability is ultimately about balancing complexity responsibly, economically, environmentally, socially, and operationally.

The project leaders who thrive will be the ones who can continuously expand their perspective while helping organizations create value in a rapidly changing world.

As Global Head of Sustainability at PMI and Executive Director of the PMI–GPM Joint Venture, **Lucila Dotto** bridges the worlds of People & Culture, Leadership, and sustainable transformation. Her focus: fostering cultures that enable impact and accountability.

Green Project Manager – Basic™

Sustainability as a Competence in Project Management

Sustainability is becoming an essential competence in project management. It's no longer just about delivering projects on time and within budget, but also about understanding and managing their environmental, social and economic impacts.

The **Green Project Manager – Basic™ (GPM-b™)** certification, offered by PMI as a Course-and-Exam Bundle, helps you integrate sustainability systematically into your projects and create real value for organizations, people and the planet.

WHY IT MATTERS

Sustainability is a key competence in project management today. The GPM-b™ certification provides practical tools and approaches to:

- Assess environmental, social and economic impacts of projects
- Develop a Sustainability Management Plan
- Integrate sustainability across all project phases
- Design socially and economically responsible and resilient projects

THE BUNDLE

Includes the course *Sustainable Project Management for Certified Practitioners™* and the exam for the GPM-b™ certification.

CERTIFICATION OVERVIEW

- **75** multiple-choice questions
- **90** minutes exam duration
- Prerequisite: A qualifying project management certification such as CAPM®, PMP®, PgMP® or PfMP® – alternatively a master's degree in project or program management

WHAT'S NEXT?

- As of **June 5, 2026**, GPM-b™ will be transitioned to the new certification Certified Sustainable Project Professional (CSPP)™.
- Existing GPM-b™ certificants will be eligible for a free upgrade.
- The current GPM-b™ exam can still be taken until **December 31, 2026.**

BETTER PROJECTS. BETTER FUTURE.
Make sustainability part of every project decision.

> Sustainable project management means more than green actions – it's about making conscious trade-offs, creating lasting impact and generating value for organizations, people and the planet.

Youth Empowerment Program

Getting young people excited about project management

The program shows young people how to turn ideas into real projects—through teamwork, self-organization, and taking responsibility.

Start: September 2026
More information soon.

Sustainability Ambassador

A Role with Responsibility

FRANK JÄGER

PM*impact*: What motivated you personally to become involved in PMI's global Sustainability Ambassador community?

Frank: Being a project manager and having sustainability as a key personal value, I realized that I must leverage my profession to turn sustainability ambitions into real-world results. Many organizations already talk about sustainability, but projects are where strategies become decisions, investments, trade-offs, and measurable outcomes. PMI's global sustainability community appealed to me because it brings together practitioners who want to make sustainability a practical part of everyday project delivery.

PM*impact*: How do you currently experience the awareness and maturity of sustainability in project management within Germany?

Frank: In Germany, I would describe the situation as progressing, but still uneven. Awareness of sustainability is clearly increasing, especially because of regulation, stakeholder expectations, and growing business pressure to become more resilient. However, maturity in project management is often still at an early to medium level. Sustainability is frequently acknowledged as important, but not yet systematically embedded into project governance, decision-making, risk management, or success criteria. In many cases, it is still treated as an additional topic rather than as an integral part of professional project delivery. For instance, a project may have a dedicated sustainability workstream. That is a good start, but the next maturity step is to ensure that every workstream integrates sustainability into its own decisions, risks, deliverables, and success criteria—which underlines it even more.

The good news is that momentum is building, and I see strong potential for rapid development over the next few years.

PM*impact*: What are the most common misconceptions project professionals still have about sustainability?

Frank: A common misconception is that sustainability only matters in projects with explicit sustainability goals. In reality, nearly every project affects an organization's footprint. Another myth is that sustainability always adds cost, complexity, or delays. In many cases, the opposite is true: when considered early, it can reduce risk, build stakeholder trust, strengthen resilience, and prevent costly rework. Some project professionals also see sustainability as relevant only to large infrastructure or public-sector projects. But every project involves decisions about resources, governance, inclusion, suppliers, and long-term impact.

PM*impact*: Which practical changes can project managers already implement today to make their projects more sustainable?

Frank: Project managers can start with practical steps that are fully within their influence. They can include sustainability-related criteria in project objectives and decision-making, not just cost, time, and scope. A good starting point is to use an impact analysis to assess the environmental, social, and economic effects a project may create across its lifecycle. They can also establish a simple sustainability management plan that defines priorities, responsibilities, and practical measures for the project team. In addition, they can challenge unnecessary travel, reduce waste in workshops and deliverables, and think more carefully about sourcing, lifecycle impacts, and stakeholder inclusion. They can also integrate sustainability into risk discussions by asking what long-term consequences a project may create or avoid. Just as importantly, they can build awareness within their teams by making sustainability a normal part of project conversations. Small, consistent

changes in how projects are planned and governed can have a surprisingly large cumulative effect.

PM*impact*: How can AI help the project team in embedding sustainability?

Frank: Project professionals have powerful tools at their fingertips. With the right prompts, they can align the organization's sustainability strategy, international standards, and their projects within minutes. For example, if you plan to implement a new distribution center, AI can help you analyze your organization's logistics strategy and sustainability strategy, public building standards, such as LEED, ESG regulations in the respective geography, and thus derive concrete actions for the project team. The P5 Impact Analysis is quite comprehensive, since it covers many aspects across social, environmental, and commercial dimensions. Recyclable or reusable construction materials and low-energy technologies are examples for a distribution center project. It can feel overwhelming for project managers who have not dealt with sustainability yet. AI makes it much easier to apply.

At the same time, I think it is important to stay balanced: AI is not a substitute for leadership, judgment, or accountability. It works best when it strengthens human decision-making within a clear sustainability strategy.

PM*impact*: How does the global ambassador community collaborate to drive sustainability within the PMI ecosystem?

Frank: What I value most about the global ambassador community is that it combines shared purpose with practical exchange. People from different countries, industries, and backgrounds contribute ideas, experiences, and examples of what works in their own context. That creates a strong platform for mutual learning and for translating sustainability into project management language that professionals can actually use. Collaboration happens through knowledge sharing, joint events, discussions, community building, and the development of practical resources that help make the topic more accessible. In that sense, the community is not only raising awareness but also helping build capability across the PMI ecosystem. Webinars are a good means of creating awareness; ideally, they present case studies in which project managers have led their projects toward sustainability outcomes.

PM*impact*: What would you like project professionals to understand about the future role of sustainability in our profession?

Frank: I would like project professionals to understand that sustainability is not a temporary trend or a specialist niche. It is becoming a core expectation of modern project management. In the future, successful project leaders will be those who can combine delivery excellence with responsible, future-oriented decision-making. That means understanding impact, managing trade-offs transparently, and creating outcomes that are not only efficient today but also viable tomorrow. I see sustainability becoming increasingly embedded in standards, governance, stakeholder expectations, and professional capability models. For our profession, this is a major opportunity: we can help shape not only successful projects, but also a more resilient and responsible future.

Frank Jäger works in the Distribution Excellence division at adidas and, as a Global PMI Sustainability Champion (volunteer), aims to inspire as many project experts as possible to contribute to more sustainable business practices through their project work.

Sustainable Projects Rarely Fail Because of Ideas

They Fail Because of Decisions

ANDREA DE RUITER

Sustainability has evolved into a central strategic priority for organizations. Companies define ambitious ESG strategies, launch transformation programs, and initiate numerous projects to embed environmental and social responsibility into their business models.

Yet a gap often remains between ambition and actual impact.

This gap rarely results from a lack of ideas or insufficient planning. It emerges where strategic intent must be translated into concrete decisions. In complex transformation environments, impact is not primarily determined by the quality of strategy, but by the quality of the decisions that operationalize it.

Sustainability Requires Strategic Decisions

Sustainability initiatives operate in environments characterized by uncertainty, trade-offs, and competing interests. Typical challenges include:

- Balancing short-term economic pressure with long-term sustainability impact
- Managing complex stakeholder expectations
- Dealing with technological uncertainty
- Navigating evolving regulatory frameworks

It is precisely in these situations that organizations face fundamental questions:

- Which initiatives should be prioritized?
- Which investments are justified?
- Which trade-offs are acceptable?

These are not operational questions. They are strategic decisions.

The Role of Project Management

Project managers operate at the intersection of strategy and execution. They coordinate teams, manage resources, and ensure that projects progress. In sustainability initiatives, their role extends further: they contribute to structuring how complex decisions are prepared and made. Project environments thus increasingly become spaces where strategic decisions are made visible, shaped, and aligned.

Decision Architecture™—Designing Better Decisions

At this point, a critical gap becomes visible: organizations invest heavily in planning, reporting, and risk management—but far less in the deliberate design of decision-making processes. This is where a concept I have developed becomes relevant: Decision Architecture™—a framework for systematically designing strategic decisions.

Decision Architecture™ defines how decisions are structured, made transparent, and consistently aligned with impact. At its core, the framework integrates three layers:

- Structure—clear processes, roles, and decision logics
- Transparency—visible assumptions, scenarios, and trade-offs
- Impact—consistent alignment with outcomes and value

Only when these three layers work together do decisions become truly strategic.

A Practical Example Illustrates This Clearly

The transformation of the Danish energy company Ørsted is widely regarded as one of the most compelling examples of successful sustainable transformation. Within a few years, the company shifted from a fossil-based energy provider to a global leader in offshore wind energy. What drove this transformation was not a single initiative, but a series of consistent strategic decisions: prioritizing renewable energy, divesting fossil assets, and making long-term investment decisions under significant uncertainty.

From a Decision Architecture™ perspective, the key success factor was not the strategy itself, but the quality and consistency of the decisions that supported it over time. Sustainable transformation is therefore not driven by ambition alone, but by a Decision Architecture™ that makes trade-offs explicit, sets clear priorities, and aligns decisions with impact.

Data and AI as Decision Support

With increasing data availability and analytical capabilities, new opportunities emerge to support decision-making.

Artificial intelligence can help organizations:

- Explore scenarios
- Analyze large data sets
- Identify patterns and relationships

However, technology does not replace responsibility. It can support and improve decision preparation—but decisions themselves remain a leadership task.

Quick Check: How Strong is Your Decision Architecture™?

Sustainable projects rarely fail because of ideas—but because of the decisions shaping them. The following questions help assess the quality of decision-making:
Structure: Are decision processes clearly defined, with roles, responsibilities, and timing—or do decisions emerge ad hoc under pressure?

Transparency: Are assumptions, trade-offs and options visible and understood—or do key elements remain implicit?

Impact: Is it clear what outcome a decision is meant to achieve—and how success is measured—or is execution prioritized over results?

The stronger these elements are embedded in decision-making, the more likely organizations will achieve real and lasting impact.

Conclusion

Sustainability is not a project and not a stand-alone objective. It is a long-term transformation that unfolds through a series of interconnected decisions. Whether this transformation succeeds is not determined by strategy alone, but by the decision processes that follow from it. Organizations aiming to create sustainable impact must therefore not only refine their projects and initiatives, but deliberately design the architecture of their decisions.

Or, put differently: sustainable impact is not created by projects alone, but by the quality of the decisions that shape them.

Andrea De Ruiter is a strategy consultant, project manager, and transformation expert with experience in complex organizational and digital projects. Her focus is on value-driven project management, leadership in transformation contexts, and connecting strategy, execution, and impact. She is the founder of Decision Architecture™.

AI and Sustainability

An Important Perspective

INTERVIEW WITH PROF. DR. DANIEL SONNET

PM*impact*: When you look at current developments in AI, why do you think sustainability is an essential part of the discussion?

Daniel: Sustainability has many facets. The United Nations has identified a total of 17 Sustainable Development Goals. I think it's important to mention this briefly because, in my view, we in Germany often equate sustainability primarily with climate protection. But there is much more to it: less inequality, less poverty, health, affordable energy, life on and under water, partnerships, and peace.

AI is having a multifaceted impact on our systems and holds immense potential for change: for societies, nations, companies, organizations, and ultimately for our way of thinking. That is why we urgently need to examine the potential impacts of AI. A good example is climate protection. Training and operating AI models are very energy- and water-intensive. Right now, we're almost intoxicated by the possibilities AI offers. But we'd be well advised to look at the other side of the coin as well.

PM*impact*: In your view, in which areas can AI contribute to more sustainable business practices and work?

Daniel: AI definitely has positive aspects as well. Climate models are becoming more precise; in medicine, more cost-effective drugs with fewer side effects can be developed; and AI-controlled irrigation systems can help address water scarcity.

If you look more closely, you'll see: There is a vibrant community of people developing AI applications and conducting AI research to apply AI toward the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. That's good news. And it personally gives me hope that AI can continue to make a valuable contribution in the future, helping companies—or perhaps even people in general—operate more sustainably. What's interesting here is that sustainable behavior in companies often goes hand in hand with efficiency gains. A freight forwarder, for example, that saves fuel through optimized and dynamic route planning not only reduces its costs but also improves its environmental footprint. In this way, AI can contribute to greater sustainability even when economic goals are initially the primary focus.

PM*impact*: Where do you currently see the greatest areas of tension between technological innovation and sustainable action?

Daniel: I see the greatest areas of tension primarily in resource consumption, the speed of innovation, and the actual impact. The first area of tension is the question we must honestly ask ourselves: Does AI ultimately save more resources than it consumes? A second point is the pressure to innovate. Technology is often expected to be developed and scaled quickly, while sustainable action requires long-term thinking, a life-cycle perspective, and responsibility. And third, we need to measure more honestly whether digital solutions are truly more sustainable—or are merely marketed as such. AI, in particular, should not be deployed simply because it is possible, but because it delivers real benefits in specific cases. For me, sustainable innovation therefore doesn't mean slowing down technology, but using it more consciously: efficiently, measurably, and responsibly.

AI in Business and Society

PM*impact*: How do you currently perceive how companies are handling AI—more strategically considered or driven more by the pressure to innovate?

Daniel: Almost entirely driven by the pressure to innovate. On many occasions, both online and offline, as a manager you're now constantly confronted with AI and its seemingly limitless possibilities. It's probably almost impossible to escape that. That has an effect on people. The fear of missing out—FOMO—is present,

and the pressure is mounting. But fear isn't a good guide here either.

We often see that people are taking action to do "something with AI" without much thought. In the process, they often fail to analyze things properly: What are our AI goals? Where are our pain points? And which use cases actually bring us closer to these goals?

PM*impact*: You train AI managers across Germany. What questions and challenges do you encounter most frequently right now?

Daniel: The participants vary greatly in terms of their prior knowledge and motivation. Some have already delved deeply into AI and want to dive straight into the technology, legal texts, AI use cases, and their implementation. Others prefer a solid introduction first. As in many courses and training programs, we therefore need to establish a common foundation first so that as many expectations as possible can be met. The central question, however, is the same for everyone: "How do I AI-ify my company or organization as efficiently as possible?" I like to call this the AI "hammer phenomenon." Right now, thanks to AI, almost everyone is holding a hammer and looking for nails sticking out of the wall.

In other words: We're looking for problems to fit potential AI tools. But that's not effective. A hammer is the right tool for nails. However, if a screw is sticking out of the wall, it's better to use a screwdriver. In that sense, the course is also about first understanding an organization's pain points and then evaluating whether this is even an issue that can be meaningfully solved by AI.

PM*impact*: What responsibility do AI managers bear today toward employees, society, and organizations?

Daniel: I wouldn't want to directly attribute a specific responsibility to current and future AI managers. I would rather put it this way: How can AI managers today use their knowledge responsibly toward employees, society, and organizations? Companies in Germany are currently facing enormous challenges: digitalization, AI transformation, and demographic change are affecting nearly all industries simultaneously. This is precisely where AI managers can play a central role. Their task is to strategically align existing resources with the right AI projects. This means identifying, evaluating, and implementing relevant AI use cases that help companies develop in a meaningful, efficient, and future-proof way. That's easier said than done. That's why it's also part of an AI manager's job to involve employees early on. A good starting point can be to work with employees to identify the key challenges in processes, products, or business models and derive suitable AI solutions from them. This increases the likelihood that changes will not only work technically but will also be supported by the people in the company. Furthermore, AI managers should take on a mediating role: they can explain the opportunities and risks associated with the use of AI. This begins within their own company but extends beyond it—into families, educational institutions, clubs, associations, and ultimately into the broader societal debate.

Read more ...

PM*impact*: In your view, how is AI changing the way companies make decisions and exercise responsibility in the future?

Daniel: AI changes business decisions primarily by making them more data-driven, faster, and more forward-looking. Companies can identify patterns, assess risks earlier, and simulate scenarios that would otherwise be nearly impossible for humans to manage. At the same time, AI does not shift responsibility. It remains with humans. Companies must clarify which data is used, how transparent the results are, where human oversight remains necessary, and who is ultimately liable. The greatest risk is that people in leadership roles will treat AI results as objective truth. AI can provide support and make recommendations, but it does not replace judgment, the weighing of values, or leadership. People must therefore learn to make complex decisions and take responsibility for decisions whose full complexity they may not have been able to fully grasp themselves.

AI and Responsible Implementation

PM*impact*: What role will humans play in the future, particularly in an increasingly AI-driven work environment?

Daniel: I don't feel confident making a long-term prediction. AI development is too dynamic for that, and it would be difficult to provide a reliable assessment for all fields of work.

However, it is already clear today that knowledge-based professions, in particular, will have to adapt faster than many others. I'd like to illustrate this with a personal example. Three or four years ago, my expertise as a data scientist was a key part of my professional value. Through training and experience, I knew which methods and algorithms were appropriate for specific data analyses or AI model training. In other words: I had a knowledge advantage that made me attractive to companies.

Today, a large part of this knowledge has become almost immediately accessible and usable to a great many people through large language models. As a result, I had to redefine my own role. At the same time, I realized that many unwelcome and time-consuming tasks were preventing me from achieving my maximum productivity on a daily basis. This is exactly where AI could help. Now I no longer work against AI or alongside it, but hand in hand with it. My professional knowledge does not lose its significance as a result—it is complemented and enhanced by AI. This allows me to work more productively, faster, and often more creatively for clients. I believe this example can be applied to many professions. The central question is therefore not just: Which tasks does AI take over? But rather: How can I collaborate with AI to make my own work better, more efficient, and more effective? And when understood correctly, this can actually be a positive thing.

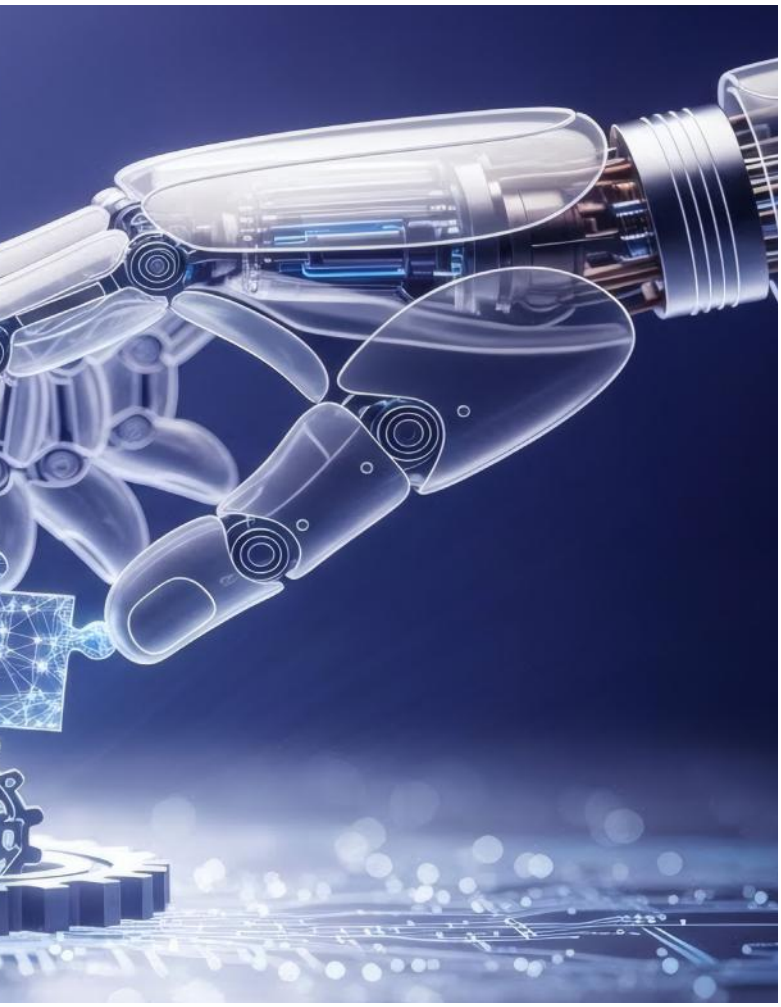
PM*impact*: What role should the responsible use of AI play in future projects and transformation initiatives?

Daniel: The responsible use of AI should be a central component of every project and every transformation initiative in the future—not as an afterthought, but from the very beginning. This means: Even during the planning phase, it must be clarified exactly which problem AI is intended to solve, what data will be used, what risks may arise, and where human oversight remains necessary. Equally important are transparency, data protection, fairness, and clear responsibilities. AI projects must not be evaluated solely on whether they are more efficient or cost-effective. It is also crucial whether they are transparent, secure, and socially acceptable. For me, responsible AI therefore belongs just as naturally in project governance, change management, and corporate culture in the future as budget, schedule, and technical feasibility.

PM*impact*: What recommendations would you give to organizations that want to establish AI not only quickly but also sustainably and responsibly?

Daniel: Organizations should not simply roll out AI as quickly as possible, but rather establish it in a conscious and structured manner. My first recommendation would be: start with clear use cases. AI should be deployed where it solves a specific problem and creates measurable benefits in terms of the set AI goals. Second, guidelines are needed. These include data protection, transparency, human oversight, clear responsibilities, and rules for handling sensitive data. Without these foundations, uncertainty or even risk can quickly arise. Third, companies should involve and empower their employees early on. AI transformation is not just a technology project, but a change process. Acceptance arises when people understand how AI works, where it provides support, and where its limits lie. And fourth, sustainability should be taken into account: efficient models, sensible tool selection, conscious use of resources, and regular impact measurement.

We always keep these four dimensions in mind in our daily work at the AI Syndicate—and this approach has proven successful.



Prof. Dr. Daniel Sonnet is a data science and AI expert specializing in machine learning and sustainable AI. He teaches at Fresenius University of Applied Sciences and, through the AI Syndicate, helps companies and AI managers use AI strategically, responsibly, and effectively.

Transforming Construction Project Management

From the Inside Out to Promote Sustainable Thinking and Action

MICHAEL JÄGER

In January 2019, a friend from the construction student council asked me if I could help out as a steward at a demonstration. It had something to do with the climate. One thing led to another, and a few weeks later I was sitting with 40 people in the plenary session of Fridays for Future. From then on, alongside my master's thesis (topic: The Interface between BIM and Lean Construction), I devoted every spare minute to organizing climate strikes.

Then, in September 2019, on the very same day that 1.5 million people took to the streets demanding more climate action, it was announced that coal-fired power plants would remain in operation until 2038. It became crystal clear to me that governments cannot be relied upon and that demonstrations alone will not solve the climate crisis. On that same day, I submitted my master's thesis and asked myself earnestly: Where can I work as a civil engineer where I cause as little harm to the environment as possible? The private sector was out of the question, and I didn't want to leave Munich; so, by process of elimination, I settled on Stadtwerke München.

My explanation that I had learned a lot about project management and leadership while organizing the protests, and that I was interested in sustainable construction, seemed to go over well with the management of the construction project management team in the real estate division. After a brief training period, I was allowed—or rather, had to—take on a highly complex project management role. Throughout this time, however, I didn't let up on the topic of sustainability; I kept bringing it up. Because public attention was focused on the issue due to the climate strikes, I was able to initiate the formation of a "Sustainable Construction Working Group." We began gathering ideas and conducting research. When the momentum in the working group had faded after the summer break, the real estate division management and the construction project management department decided to create a position titled "Expert in Ecological Construction." I have held this position since early 2022.

So there I was: with some practical experience, knowledge of sustainability from a few elective courses and self-study, and the mission to make our construction more sustainable. That's where my project management skills came in handy: I realized that we first had to define evaluation criteria, because in discussions about, for example, specific construction methods, the qualitative "It's more sustainable" and "It's €100,000 more expensive," the latter would always prevail—despite substantial employee-driven idealism—in a corporation that still thinks in terms of economic efficiency. And so I threw myself into sustainability certifications. The argument: you can only prioritize what you measure and evaluate. And with the DGNB certification system, ecological quality is measured in points, among other things. At the time, we didn't realize how much paperwork (and thus planning fees) such a certification requires, and how little a certified building actually needs to differ structurally from an uncertified one.

Another early issue was contracts and procurement, especially for planning services. Preparing a life cycle assessment, a building resource passport, a life cycle cost analysis, etc., is not free. At the time, these methods were still in their infancy. So we had to iteratively feel our way toward the correct contract wording and responsibilities for these services: Does the architect perform the life cycle assessment, or the building physicist, or perhaps a dedicated sustainability planner? And exactly what should it look like? Looking

back, we learned a lot the hard way here. But experience shows: Almost more important than the precise description of the planning service is the skillful composition of the planning team. By now, almost everyone knows that one should not commission the cheapest bidder with the planning. However, possible evaluation criteria in (public) planning contracts also include: "Description of the approach to planning low-emission and resource-efficient structures," "Quality of the proposed solution for implementing the sponge city principle in outdoor facilities," and "Approach to the ecological optimization of the structural framework." I have since observed that the greater the weight given to such criteria, the more likely one is to secure a motivated, committed, and competent planning team—and, after all, "what the planners dare to do" is often the limiting factor in innovative solutions.

We have also revised the qualitative requirements. When I wanted to incorporate ecological requirements into the template for our planning manual for new projects, I realized there was no suitable place for them. So, over the course of a summer, I developed a "model planning manual" from scratch. Sustainability requirements and principles—such as target values for greenhouse gas potential or climate-resilient planning—are now an integral part of every new project. Since then, I've taken the lead on an increasing number of such standard documents—whether a technical standards catalog, a Phase 0 checklist, or a "modular contract text" template. The goal from the start was sustainable goals, requirements, and methods are not add-ons, but integral and are no longer dismissed as the project progresses. Not all initiatives were successful. Heating new buildings with heat pumps instead of district heating was not feasible in a company that sells district heating. Certification projects were discontinued, and subsidies were cut one after another. But we have become increasingly better at focusing on the aspects where there is truly significant leverage and which cannot be remedied later during operation. In a system where the energy concept is essentially predetermined, the structural framework is by far the most critical element. We now halve the CO_2 footprint of the building structure through modular and timber construction as well as CO_2-reduced concrete—at almost negligible additional cost.

In general, we use a fixed KPI system instead of certification: GHG potential, life-cycle costs, circularity index, and green space factor are (theoretically) on equal footing with usable floor area factor, project budget, and completion date. We now also have a division-specific sustainability strategy: new buildings only to the highest standards, the existing portfolio is to achieve efficiency class C by 2040, and space requirements per user are capped. Starting this year, we've been deriving annual goals from this strategy using the OKR methodology. My recommendations for people who want to get things done: use objective evaluation methods. Make sure decisions are made once and for all. And above all: be persistent. If no one is thinking, "Ugh, not him again with his sustainability stuff," then you're not being annoying enough.

Michael Jäger is an expert in sustainable building construction at Stadtwerke München, where he heads the "Ecological Building" project. His focus is on climate-friendly construction methods, resource efficiency, and sustainable real estate strategies.

Sustainability in Project Management Requires Understanding

MONIKA WOLFF

Everyone Agreed—and Still Understood Something Different

In the project meeting, it is decided that a process will be specifically made more flexible. Everyone nods. The requirement is documented, prioritized, and approved. The business department is thinking of a process that can be adapted to special cases in everyday work. IT sees configurable input screens and parameterization. Test management hears: additional variant cases and increasing test complexity. Formally, the same decision was made; in practice, several mental models are working in parallel from this moment on at the latest.

Where everyone believes that clarity has been created, the first translation loss often begins. Sustainable impact emerges through connectable communication and translatable decisions, because otherwise misunderstandings create inequality, friction losses, and hidden strain. Here, the role of project management shifts toward that of an architect of systems of understanding.

Inequalities: a Particular Challenge in the Fast-Paced Project Context

During refinement, a colleague asks what seems to be a small follow-up question for the third time. "What actually happens if the customer interrupts the process halfway through?" The mood in the room visibly shifts. "We can clarify that later." "We need to move forward now." "That really is a special case."

Under time pressure, such questions can quickly seem like resistance. In fact, they are early signs of unstable assumptions or missing edge cases. People who perceive with unusual precision often recognize risks early, but cannot always immediately justify them fully. If such perspectives are continuously integrated, more stable decisions are created and there are fewer late—and less expensive— surprises.

Practical impulse: Which stakeholders contribute which logic of thinking and perspective?

Misunderstandings as Leverage

The ticket is maintained cleanly, all mandatory fields are filled in, and responsibilities have been clarified. Nevertheless, the topic has barely moved forward for weeks. The people involved mainly fulfill the formal requirements. The few specialists who truly work through the specific problem together are under heavy workload and often speak different technical languages as well. From the outside, the project appears organized; internally, however, there is no shared understanding. Ever more coordination meetings appear to be the easiest solution. However, when decisions are discussed again, context is lost, and those involved increasingly orient themselves toward process formalities instead of content-related clarity. Shared understanding therefore reduces coordination loops and makes existing performance more usable.

Practical impulse: Where do apparent capacity bottlenecks hinder sustainable growth?

Can We Just Understand the Idea First?

In a workshop, a team member introduces an unusual idea. While she is still explaining it, the first evaluations begin: "Too expensive." "Technically difficult."

"Not scalable." The discussion immediately jumps to feasibility, although no shared understanding has even been created yet. Innovation work often fails because understanding and evaluation have to happen at the same time. Transitions between idea, concept, implementation, and operation each require different forms of understanding. Only when an idea has truly been understood can it be meaningfully evaluated. Only when a concept has been examined from different sides should it be realized. Connectable innovation emerges where projects learn to consciously distinguish between building understanding, evaluation, and iterative experience, thereby making ideas, knowledge, and energy more sustainably usable.

Practical impulse: Which cognitive interfaces should we consciously design?

Neuroinclusive Structures Relieve Both People and the System

A manager says in a jour fixe: "It doesn't have to be perfect yet; a rough draft is enough for now." A few days later, the same person reacts with irritation to open points and missing details. "I thought this was further along." In everyday project work, strain is created not only by the tasks themselves, but also by contradictory or implicit expectations, as well as frequent context switches. Clear communication, transparent prioritization, and explicit expectations reduce misunderstandings and cognitive load here. This relief does not only affect individual employees; it increases reliability and stability in everyday project work. Neurodivergent employees act almost like a kind of early warning system here, but in the medium term, these factors are relevant for everyone.

Practical impulse: How reliable are our decision paths?

Outlook: When Projects Work in Sync Again

Sustainable projects are not recognized by fancy processes or many key figures, but by the fact that collaboration runs smoothly and evenly. Decisions are repeated less often. Different perspectives are continuously integrated. Risks become visible early. People first work toward a shared understanding before moving into evaluation and then implementation.

Understanding thus moves from being a "soft factor" to becoming the foundation for connecting people, knowledge, and resources in projects in a way that is viable over the long term. When different ways of thinking become translatable, usable performance increases, innovation becomes connectable, and work becomes noticeably healthier—not despite difference, but because of it.

As a systemic translator, **Monika Wolff** bridges different ways of thinking, with a focus on neurodiversity in organizations. She fosters productive and inclusive collaboration, particularly in projects within the automotive and insurtech sectors.

Sustainability in Project Management

Impact Instead of Symbolism

OLAF SCHWEIZER

Online meetings instead of business trips are, in our opinion, merely one option in the context of sustainability in project management—this was the general tenor among our experts at the Stuttgart regulars' table. Sustainability means working effectively toward the project objective. In other words, focusing on achieving the objective and, above all, avoiding the waste of time and resources—and therefore also costs and the waste of resources.

Three Aspects Are Relevant Here:

1. Objective Setting

Effectiveness begins, among other things, with the project manager's task of "achieving scope congruence." This means that all stakeholders have a shared understanding of the delivery scope. As a result, the project objective is clear, and work can begin as early and as focused as possible toward achieving that objective. In this case, unnecessary efforts are avoided that would otherwise arise from assumptions or speculation. Likewise, the effort required to create clarity is reduced when stakeholders do not yet have concrete ideas or consciously or unconsciously create confusion with so-called hidden agendas.

Addition: In the context of sustainability, there are other common goals that were touched upon in our discussion. Nevertheless, they are important and have a positive effect on motivation within the team.
Of the 17 UN Goals, "5. Gender Equality," "8. Decent Work and Economic Growth," "10. Reduced Inequalities," and "16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" should be a matter of course for PMPs or PMI members. In spirit, these goals are contained in the Code of Ethics.

Source: https://populationmatters.org/un-sdgs/

2. Collaboration

On the one hand, an "external" task of project management in terms of stakeholder management is to balance requirements. This means negotiating in such a way that everyone benefits from it or are willing to go along with it. Example: agreeing that requirements should be oriented toward the users of the product/service. This would be a decisive factor for success in the context of use. By contrast, working against one another creates friction, which requires more effort to achieve the project objective or partial objectives. On the other hand, internally: it is also the task of project management to increase team performance. Motivated employees perform better, are faster or finish earlier, and deliver higher quality. This means fewer errors, less rework, and lower effort.

In the introductory example, it is important to weigh what causes less waste: the team meeting in person and getting to know one another—building trust—versus saving a business trip. However, the corresponding business trip should then be organized in such a way that it causes as little environmental impact as possible—for example, taking the train instead of flying. The appointments should not be completely overloaded with content so that solutions can be worked on effectively instead of creating information overload. And so-called "socializing" should be taken into account so that personal relationships can be built, which are very valuable as a foundation of trust.

3. Processes

A project as an investment means, in terms of effectiveness, aiming for the earlier end date. This means

shortening the period until the project result is delivered or used. Delivering quickly, with low internal effort and an early start of monetization. The answer to this is streamlined/lean processes. And this applies in the context of planning, handling changes, and documentation. Scrum or other agile methods provide a set of

options for this. The prerequisite for this: methodological competence and experience are needed, as well as courage and trust in order to know the goal.

PS: Sustainability in relation to the scope—or product characteristics—means that the project objective or the product or service to be created should be as durable as possible. It should generate little waste, use materials that are as sustainable as possible, and create and also compensate for the lowest possible carbon footprint. In addition, recycling or, where applicable, a circular approach should be considered, and profits achieved could partly be returned in the form of social transfers. In the spirit of the 17 Goals of the United Nations.

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Sustainability in Healthcare Project Management

Somewhere Between Ideal and Everyday Reality

PAULA WENZEL

Sustainability in healthcare is one of those terms that is now almost automatically taken into account. It appears in strategies, in mission statements, and in project descriptions. At the same time, one thing becomes clear relatively quickly: as soon as you try to implement it in concrete terms, it gets complicated. Very complicated, in fact. This is due not least to the fact that the framework conditions in the healthcare sector have changed noticeably. Costs are rising, regulatory requirements are becoming more dense, and societal pressure to act more responsibly is also increasing, both ecologically and socially. As a result, sustainability is inevitably moving more strongly into focus. But it cannot simply be added as an extra goal "on top." The system is too sensitive, too complex, and, in many areas, too heavily regulated for that.

Specific Characteristics of the Healthcare Context

Anyone who supports projects in healthcare quickly realizes that different rules apply here. Changes must be carefully reviewed, documented, and validated. At the same time, very different groups of stakeholders work together: medical staff, IT experts, administrative teams, and regulatory bodies. Each of these groups brings its own perspectives, requirements, and ways of thinking. And above everything stands one aspect that is non-negotiable: patient safety. Decisions in the project context do not only have organizational or economic effects; they can very directly influence the quality of care. Sustainability must always be measured against this standard.

Sustainability as a Multidimensional Concept

Sustainability in the healthcare context goes far beyond ecological questions. Of course, energy consumption and the use of materials play a role. At the same time, however, social and economic aspects are also involved: access to care, the quality of treatments, and the long-term financial viability of healthcare systems.

These dimensions are closely interconnected and can rarely be considered in isolation. Rather, they create a network of different target variables that must be taken into account at the same time, often under conditions of high uncertainty.

Trade-Offs as a Structural Reality

This is exactly where trade-offs arise, and in healthcare project management they tend to be the rule rather than the exception. A typical example is the use of disposable materials: often necessary from a hygiene perspective, but problematic from an ecological perspective. Or digital innovations that promise efficiency gains, while at the same time coming with regulatory requirements. In practice, such areas of tension usually cannot be fully resolved. Instead, they require conscious balancing, transparent decision-making processes, and a willingness to deal with ambiguity.

Implications for Project Management

For project management, this means that traditional, linear approaches quickly reach their limits. Projects rarely proceed strictly along predefined phases; instead, they continue to evolve dynamical-

Area	Goal A	Goal B	Typical Conflict
Hygiene	Disposable materials / infection prevention	Resource conservation	Safety vs. environmental impact
Digitalization	Efficiency, better care	Regulatory requirements	Innovation vs. compliance
Costs	Economic viability	Sustainable investments	Short-term vs. long-term
Personnel	Efficiency, utilization	Working conditions	Productivity vs. social sustainability

Table 1: Typical Trade-Offs

ly. Validation, monitoring, and adaptation are not one-time steps, but continuous processes. In addition, a project often does not end with implementation, but transitions into ongoing operations, which must also be managed. At the same time, collaboration across different disciplines requires a high degree of coordination. Technical, medical, and organizational perspectives must not only be brought together, but often also actively translated.

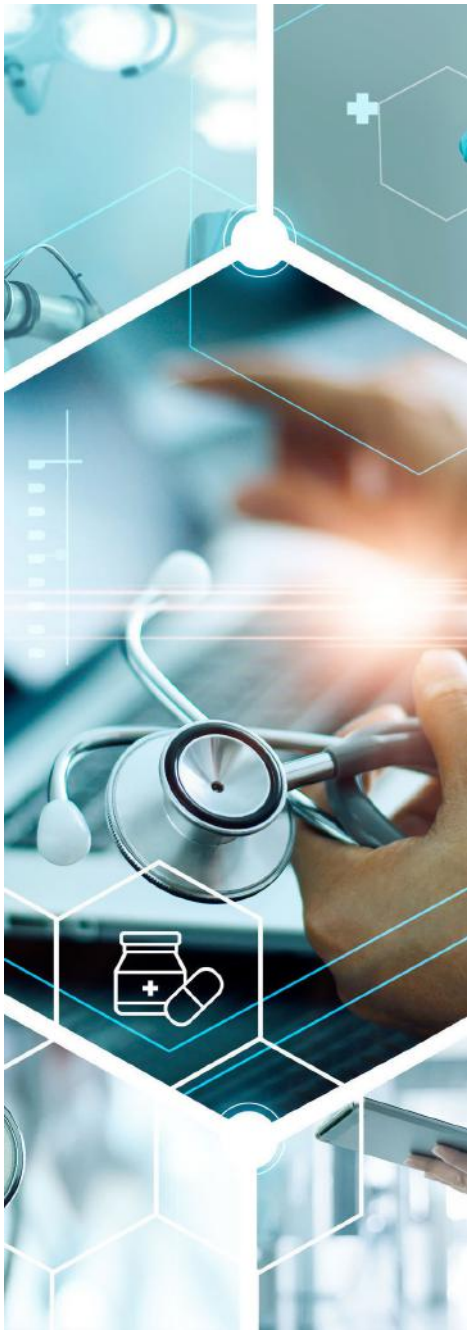
Starting Points for Sustainable Project Design

Despite these challenges, there are concrete starting points for specifically strengthening sustainability in healthcare project management. One central lever lies in the early integration of relevant criteria into project planning. Decisions should not be aimed exclusively at short-term efficiency, but should also take long-term impacts into account. Transparent documentation of decisions is also becoming increasingly important —not only with regard to regulatory requirements, but also in order to make trade-offs traceable. In addition, the active involvement of relevant stakeholders plays a decisive role. Sustainability does not emerge in isolation, but through the interaction of different perspectives.

Conclusion: Sustainability as a Mindset

Sustainability in healthcare project management is not a simple extension of existing target systems, but a structural challenge. It requires a shift in how projects are planned, managed, and evaluated. The point is less about completely avoiding trade-offs and more about dealing with them consciously and transparently. Especially in healthcare, this makes one thing particularly clear: sustainability is not an optional add-on. It is an integral part of responsible project governance —and ultimately also a question of mindset.

Paula Wenzel is a master's student in project management specializing in AI-driven methods and data-driven decision-making. Her focus is on the healthcare sector and the development of practical approaches to improve clinical processes and healthcare systems.



Strategic PMO Development on an Equal Footing

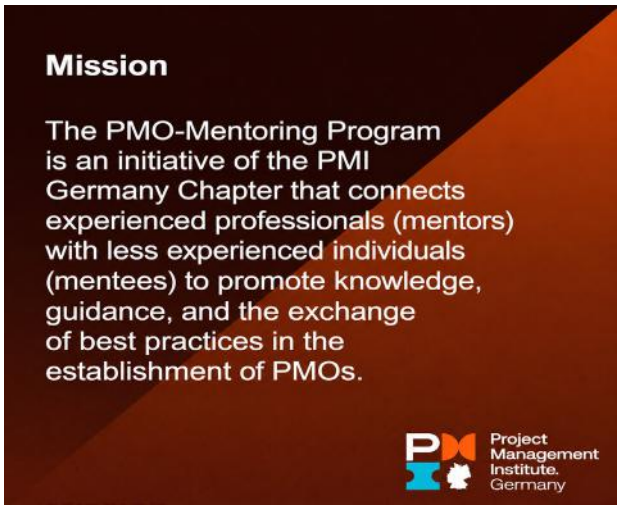
The PMO Mentoring Program (PMO-MP)

PIERRE CORELL AND ANNETTE BORN

The need for strategic PMOs is growing. Projects are becoming more complex, transformations are becoming everyday reality, governance requirements are increasing, and at the same time PMOs no longer want merely to administer, but to create measurable added value and provide orientation. More stable projects, high-performance teams, and benefits realization are some of the reasons why PMOs are founded as overarching service teams.

Anyone intending to establish a PMO usually approaches this undertaking without their own experience. What is sought is the exchange of insights, a pragmatic view of the existing frameworks, trends, and support with the first and subsequent steps—after all, the goals are to be achieved and the benefits proven. In the everyday reality of setting up a PMO, questions arise such as those concerning acceptance by customer groups, or which groups should initially be focused on, ideally contributing directly to the strategic mandate. Many topics need to be considered: which services are best to start with, which topics should have priority, and how to measure the minimum viable product of a PMO.

The PMO Mentoring Program of the PMI Germany Chapter offers members exactly this kind of exchange, support in development, and sparring on an equal footing. It was launched as a pilot before being rolled out on a larger scale. Head of PMO-MP Annette Born recalls: “In conversation with Americo Pinto and Christoph Hirnle at LIM (Leadership Institute Meeting) 2025, I recognized the need that PMOs have worldwide. The need for strategically positioned PMOs and PM professionals in this field is increasing globally; there is no generally functioning recipe. The PMO Mentoring Program of the PMI Germany Chapter has set itself the goal of providing a blueprint for new PMOs.”



With the support of Martin Härri, she founded the program and invited participants to the kick-off in September 2025. The program is sponsored by Germany Chapter President Wolfgang Friesike.

The PMO Value Ring® (PMOVR), on which the PMO Mentoring Program is oriented, is the PMI framework that was published at the beginning of 2025 as the Project Management Offices Guide at PMI as a new standard. Its perspectives focus not only on concrete process steps, which start with exploration and complete a flywheel cycle with (value) realization, but also on environmental variables and the foundational pillars of a PMO. In PM*impact* 01/2026, you will find a detailed expert article on the PMOVR framework.

Like a compass, the program offers practical orienta-

tion for PMO development and specifically supports newly appointed Heads of PMO on their journey. Every PMO is as individual as its organizational structure and topics. With their real PMO use cases, mentees are matched with mentors who, depending on the currently relevant topic area, jointly work out their steps—such as pitch, acceptance within the organization, KPI measurements, and a structured process—and gather inspiration.

The fixed point of the PMO-MP is the regular meetings: Concrete topics that currently concern the mentees are addressed personally in breakout rooms. In the plenary session, the progress of the program is discussed, and workshops on topics of the Value Ring are offered.

Initial experiences show that practical tools are especially helpful alongside the theoretical foundation: generally and specifically created road maps for the first 9–12 months, templates for interviews, and PMO service alignment. Value creation needs to be well thought out, targeted, effective, and efficient.

With a strong volunteer team of mentors and ambitious program leadership, the PMO-MP is currently moving from the exploratory into the formative phase—the working structures have been created, statistical mapping has been defined, and initial steps have been taken in breakout rooms, where current challenges are being evaluated.

It was quickly recognized that regular feedback from mentees is essential for the success of the program, and that there is a practical need to understand the principles behind the frameworks in order to address the challenges faced by PMO leaders efficiently and cleverly prioritized.

Anyone who would like to learn more, or who would like to contribute as a mentee or mentor, is warmly invited to contact pmo-mp@pmi-gc.de or directly to Annette.Born@pmi-gc.de.

As a PMP®, PMI-PMOCP™, and management consultant in a cybersecurity PMO, **Pierre Corell** combines theoretical knowledge with practical experience. He is actively committed to advancing the profession and fostering collaborative knowledge-sharing.

Annette Born, PMP®, PROSCI®, is a project manager and Head of PMO at a Dutch EAM software company. She oversees the establishment of the PMO and focuses on complex projects, modern PMO structures, and sustainable business value.

Why Sustainable Projects Need a Strong Story

A Practical Experience Report

ISABELL HERRMANN

The phone rings. Tom is calling. Once again, our ongoing sustainability project is at the center of the conversation. You can hear that the topic is on his mind. Not because the technical solution is unclear, but because the path to getting there repeatedly reaches limits in everyday work. After only a few minutes, it becomes clear: Sustainable initiatives require significantly more energy and commitment than initially assumed. They often fail because they are not given priority. Day-to-day business is pressing, commitments are not kept, and so sustainability regularly slips to the end of the to-do list—even though it should actually be a future-oriented topic. A good idea can then quickly become a project that everyone considers important, but for which no one really makes time.

Why Do Sustainable Projects Lack the Necessary Attention?

From a professional perspective, sustainable projects are often viewed as an additional task. The fundamental problem is that they lack a strong story. They are told as "nice to have"—not as an answer to a concrete challenge. Without a clear and convincing narrative, these projects quickly fall behind and are not perceived as equal to other initiatives. Yet the story determines whether sustainability remains abstract or whether people understand: This affects our product, our costs, our processes, and our responsibility.

Mindset Is the Beginning—Not the Result

The attitude within the company is decisive for the success of sustainable projects. It is not enough to merely define sustainability as a goal. It is much more important that the mindset is right from the start—both among project managers and within the entire team. They are the change enablers who actively drive the transformation forward. They translate an often large, difficult-to-grasp topic into concrete decisions: Which material do we use? Which solution is viable in the long term? Which compromises are acceptable—and which are not?

Business Cases Create Fairness and Comparability

Let's take Tom's project as an example: Through re-engineering, the product was designed to be more sustainable. The new design saves up to 40% material while maintaining the same function—a clear win for the environment and the budget. Suddenly, sustainability becomes visible: less material in the product, less effort in processing, less scrap at the end of the line. In addition, the new eco-design improves handling in production and reduces scrap, which further lowers production costs. But only a transparent business case makes the project tangible and enables a fair comparison with traditional initiatives. This makes sustainability part of the strategic decision and not just a nice addition. The story is then no longer: "We want to become more sustainable," but: "We are solving a real problem better—ecologically, economically, and operationally."

A Clear Story as a Success Factor

For sustainable projects, numbers and facts are not the only things that count. They need a story that inspires and convinces. This story must show why the project is important now, which problem it solves, and what difference it makes in everyday work. Those who clearly communicate the benefits and urgency gain support. A personal introduction, emotional images, and a connection to everyday work help anchor the topic of sustainability within the company. Because people rarely prioritize abstract goals. They prioritize topics whose meaning they understand, whose benefits they recognize, and whose impact they can imagine.

A personal introduction shows how sustainability influences everyday work. The right mindset determines the success of sustainable projects. Business cases illustrate the added value and create comparability.

Project managers take on the role of change enablers and actively drive change forward. A strong story connects these elements and turns sustainability from an additional topic into a comprehensible project with relevance, direction, and impact.

Conclusion

Sustainability is far more than a side project—it is a demanding transformation endeavor. Project management is one of the most important levers here. Anyone who wants to successfully advance sustainable projects needs a strong story, a convincing mindset, and clear business cases. Only when it becomes clear why a sustainable project matters, what it concretely changes, and what added value it creates does it receive the attention it deserves.

Isabell Herrmann oversees international programs focused on sustainable transformation and Scope 3 emissions reduction. She bridges the gap between strategy and implementation—from bio-based materials to driving change in day-to-day project work—and makes the impact measurable.

Role of AI as a Strategic Advisor in Decision-Making

RICHA ARGAWAL

Strategy formulation used to depend upon historical data, group consensus, and executive judgement. Today, though, an algorithm could go through possible strategies for entering the market, check them against any problems with competition and other changes within the market, and generate a list of possible solutions prioritized by significance.

Calculator to Counsel: How Do Things Change?

Historically, decision support addressed the queries, "What has happened?" and "What will happen?"

AI does not make any decisions itself; it simply identifies the possible decisions, calculates the uncertainties involved, makes the linkages apparent, and updates itself according to the resultant outcome.

How AI Really Guides Strategically?

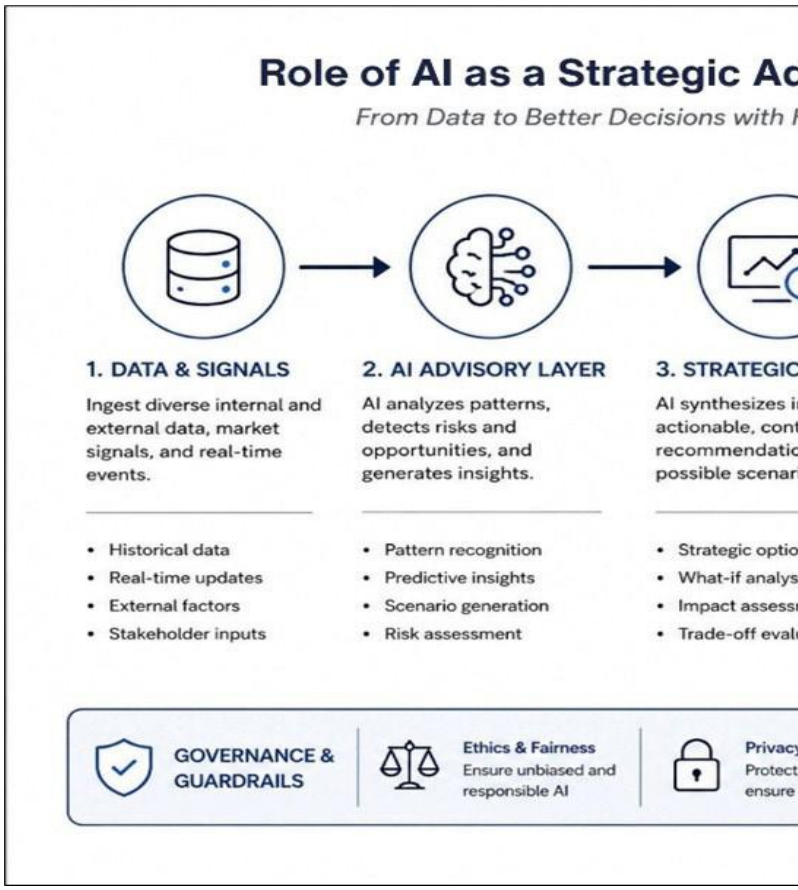
AI provides guidance through decision framing, not by issuing rulings. It generates thousands of scenarios on the basis of changes in prices, availability of talent, and draft policies. It identifies sustainable routes, showing which approaches can withstand the test of time and which fail when subjected to stress. Rather than offering one piece of advice, it provides decision trees complete with confidence intervals, risk levels, and escalation points.

Advisory Role in Real Life Cases

- Bosch made AI its guiding star: "All products by 2025 will have AI or developed using AI." AI wasn't only optimizing production processes; it advised R&D strategies and feature selection for market fit. Advisory function stemmed from strategy alignment rather than experimentation. (Source: Ethical-guidelines-for-artificial-intelligence)

- PepsiCo created a partnership with an agriculture cloud platform to develop an AI-based crop intelligence solution. AI didn't prescribe any decisions; it advised growers on crop scheduling and irrigation practices. Recommendations became advisory after a feedback loop was established with end-users taking local realities into account. (Source: Crop-intelligence-model)

- John Deere built the AI capabilities into their equipment strategy, however, gave the responsibility of escalation decision-making to operators based on their confidence levels and associated risks. Recommendations by AI include harvest scheduling and input quantities. Strategic scaling occurs through an advisory role that considers context. (Source: See-and-spray)



- Mastercard established an AI advisory body within the organization. The cross-functional advisory group assesses AI-based deployments strategically. AI advises on innovative products as well as setting a threshold for detecting frauds. (Source: Protection-at-authorization)

Human Guardrails:
Trust, Governance, and Ownership

Advisory: Humans Make Decisions. AI Provides Advice. What lies between will determine if advisory becomes an advantage or a disadvantage. Risk levels are pre-approved to ensure the AI works within guardrails. The legal, financial, and operations teams sign off on acceptable levels just once. Following this, AI advises on a large scale, while humans conduct audits on any exceptions. The AI Champions—a voluntary organization of mid-level and front-line managers—are responsible for transforming probabilistic suggestions into practical advice. They test their assumptions and recommendations against reality and feedback any practical friction into the advisory process.

AI as a Strategic Advisor: How to Implement

The answer is not a corporate transformation. It lies in decision architecture that sees AI as advisor, not oracle.

- **Define Scope** for the Advising Role: Pinpoint critical strategic choices to be made. Define confidence level criteria, escalation policies, and human accountability procedures.
- **Create the Feedback Loop:** Monitor all recommendations, executive decisions, and outcomes. Input these into the advising process. The better your strategy, the more you can learn through its implementation.
- **Governing for Advice, Not Permission:** Create an efficient advisory board. Predefine risk tolerances. Assess deviations.
- **Skill Up Leaders on Advisory:** Educate executives on probabilistic recommendations. Question: "Which information is lacking?" "What's the downside of being incorrect?" "How do we backtrack if necessary?" Without critical leadership thinking, no advice process will work.

Bottom Line

AI doesn't supplant strategic decision-making—it amplifies it. The companies that come out on top aren't going to be the ones that make everything about decisions automatic; they're going to be the ones that take everything to a higher level. When AI moves off the dashboard and into advisory territory, strategic thinking ceases to be something one does annually. It becomes a process.

Figure 1: Role of AI as Strategic Advisor

Richa Agarwal is an expert in AI and digital transformation, specializing in governance and modern project implementation. She has over 11 years of experience in banking, healthcare, and technology.

Sustainable Transformation in the AI Era

Three Trade-offs Every Project Portfolio Must Address

ANGELOS KIRIANES

AI and automation are accelerating transformation programs—and at the same time, the expectation is increasing that sustainability should not only be reported, but actively managed. In everyday project work, decisions are often made based on time, budget, and scope; ecological and social effects are evaluated later, downstream. Sustainability then remains a backdrop rather than a steering principle. This is exactly where PMI comes in: Project success is thought of more broadly than just "in time/in budget/in scope"—ESG is part of governance, value contribution, and project management practice. https://www.pmi.org/learning/thought-leadership/esghttps://www.pmi.org/standards/gpm-p5-standard-for-sustainability-in-project-management

After 25 years of responsibility for international programs, I see a recurring pattern: Sustainable decisions emerge where trade-offs are consciously weighed and anchored in the portfolio. AI acts as an amplifier here: It makes clarity visible—and structural ambiguity expensive. In IT and cloud portfolios, three lines of conflict occur particularly often:

1. Cloud/data center transformation vs. energy efficiency & resilience.

Consolidation and modern platforms promise efficiency. However, security and availability goals often lead to redundancies. Sustainable project management means not labeling resilience as "additional effort," but making it visible as a justified trade-off in architectural decisions. ESG in the business case is not a contradiction to economic viability: Energy and lifecycle effects impact OpEx over time—plannable, measurable, and decision-relevant. Especially in cooling and power usage, design thinking approaches help in planning—dimensioning, utilization logic, operating profiles—to

create reserves. What matters are documented ESG trade-offs and a regular re-check of assumptions. https://www.pmi.org/blog/project-management-climate-innovation-solutionaries

2. Global project organization vs. travel volume & carbon footprint.

Virtual collaboration reduces emissions in the short term. At the same time, in complex stakeholder environments, it can create internal fragility: Trust and psychological safety erode, and conflicts escalate later. Sustainable steering here means purposeful travel: traveling deliberately at the beginning—for kick-offs, teambuilding, critical decisions, and conflict resolution—instead of saving in the wrong place and later managing the crisis with additional re-travel. Risk management prevents follow-up costs before they arise: If a crisis occurs, everyone often has to come together quickly at one location—unplanned, expensive, and with an additional carbon footprint. Travel-related carbon emissions should therefore be incorporated into the steering logic as part of risk and cost logic—not merely "reported."

3. Hardware rollouts & supply chains vs. sustainable procurement.

Energy efficiency is important, but rarely the only lever. What matters are supplier selection, working conditions along the supply chain, and lifecycle management—recycling, second life, refurbished use. ESG criteria therefore belong in tenders and contracts; business cases must be calculated from a lifecycle perspective. In addition: The supply chain should be managed as part of the project risk register in order to make bottlenecks and sustainability risks visible early—instead of later forcing expensive special paths.

The core is governance as the "spine of success": Project success is defined as value contribution—ecological, social, and economic. Risk management makes visible which costs arise from poor decisions and escalations. ESG shows which costs can be avoided or even reduced through better design across the entire lifecycle of the product/system created by the project—not only within the project, but in its outcome. This exact decision logic—vision, culture as the foundation, and implementation through governance in the portfolio—is what I described in Die Wirbelsäule des Erfolgs and Die Wirbelsäule der Zukunft.

Take-away

The "spine" stands for leadership: It decides how to proceed and which trade-offs apply. An organization is never isolated—it reacts to what throws it off balance. That is why we must also consider the environment and natural resources: Project leaders create the future by aligning healthy organizations—for sustainable performance across the entire lifecycle.

Source: Image created with FLUX2 [pro]

Angelos Kirianes is a transformation and IT executive with international interim and portfolio experience in organizational change and large-scale IT projects worldwide. Certified by PMI and IPMA, he also holds certifications in CISO, ITIL, and Cynefin. He is the bestseller author of Die Wirbelsäule des Erfolgs and Die Wirbelsäule der Zukunft. At home in Munich, at home in the world.

Developing Competencies for Project Value

A Practical and Scientific Way

PROF. DR. RAINER ERNE

How can project professionals be empowered to noticeably improve project value, i.e., the value of projects? Two approaches for this are the "reflective practitioner" and "project studies." If these two ideas are combined, the answers are as follows: First, by systematically questioning the design and realization of real projects to determine whether they deliver sufficient value for individual stakeholders, for the organization, and for society. Second, by selecting the identified unexploited value potentials based on criteria and integrating them into the projects. This is the approach pursued by the new, one-year, part-time online degree program "Master of Project Studies."

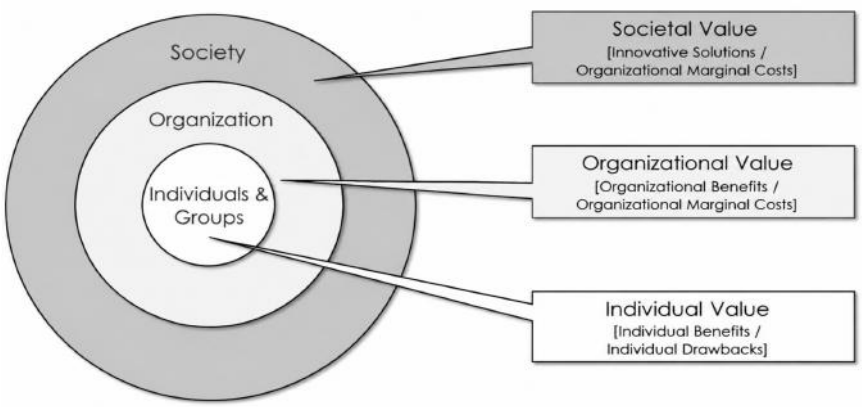
In November 2024, the Project Management Institute (PMI) published the Project Success Report (PMI 2024). Surveys and interviews with more than 10,000 professionals from different countries and industries revealed that project success should not reasonably be measured solely by whether a project has been brought to completion on spec, on time, and on budget, but also by the value it provides for stakeholders and society. If both aspects are integrated, project success equals the value of a project in relation to the investments it generates. According to the study, this can be operationalized and measured using the Net Project Success Score (NPSS).

What is advantageous about this approach is, first, that project success is expanded to include the essential aspect of the benefit of the results. This is a response to the more than 20-year-old finding that more than half of the projects carried out in Germany represent more or less meaningless prestige or alibi projects (Gröger 2004). Second, the value of a project is not equated with wishes for the project, but—in the tradition of the economic discussion of value—is defined as a relationship between benefit and cost (Herles 2011). The value of a project is therefore measured by whether the investments were worthwhile and whether "added value" was created.

The question remains: How can "project professionals" be enabled to make a well-founded assessment of the value of projects and improve it?

It is clear that this will not succeed solely through formal and informal qualification measures along the PMI Talent Triangle. This is because what exactly value means for different interest groups and how the different preferences and willingness to invest can be brought together in a project design depends strongly on the individual project. Our approach builds on the theories of the "reflective practitioner"—a term coined by MIT professor Donald A. Schön in 1983 (Schön 1983). Based on the learning theories of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, and David Kolb, he was able to explain why some professionals in different domains never move beyond their familiar patterns of interpretation and action despite 30 years of experience, while others with far less professional experience develop a remarkable breadth of patterns of interpretation and action from which they can draw variably and sometimes virtuously—depending on the situation. The difference lies in the fact that the latter repeatedly reflect on, modify, and test the fundamental assumptions underlying their interpretations of situations and decisions for action during and after projects.

Figure 2: Societal, Organizational, Individual Value



Professional judgment and professional competence to act therefore do not arise from the length of experience, but from systematically reflected experience.

If this idea is applied to the question of how competencies for improving the value of a project can be developed, the most promising approach is: In a first step, real projects are systematically analyzed for their exploited and unexploited value potentials. This brings various optimization possibilities onto the radar. In the second step, the identified improvement options are selected according to the decision criteria of effectiveness and feasibility and integrated into the project. This then initiates another learning cycle.

The levels of analysis and design are derived from some central ideas on project studies by Geraldi and Söderlund (2017), who understand this as an umbrella term for different perspectives on projects that are integrated into one approach. Following another proposal, three levels of analysis and design are suggested here:

At the level of individuals and teams, the question is asked which individual advantages and disadvantages the project may bring for the project stakeholders.

At the level of the organization, organizational benefit aspects are considered in relation to the additional marginal costs arising from the implementation of this benefit aspect.

At the level of society, the question arises to what extent it is worthwhile to strive for a completely new, innovative solution for the industry and possibly for society through a project—in relation to the additional marginal costs of the new solution.

In order to overcome the well-known phenomenon of silo thinking or local optimization in organizations structured around division of labor, a new member of the management board of a medium-sized mechanical engineering company launches an agile transformation project.

At the level of individuals and teams, the question here is which individual advantages and disadvantages individual stakeholders have from the project: opportunities for self-promotion and risks of failure, relief from unnecessary effort and the obligation to cooperate with unpopular colleagues, expansion and restriction of individual possibilities for action, and so on. If these advantages and disadvantages are correctly read and addressed for the respective stakeholders, opportunities open up in the project design that significantly reduce the change management effort in the subsequent implementation. Value is created at this level when at least the partial integration of individual advantages and the minimization of individual disadvantages in the project design proves advisable in view of impending resistance.

At the level of the organization, it can become clear that agile transformations in themselves do not represent organizational value. From an organizational perspective, value means shorter lead times, lower operational effort, lower error rates, and/or greater reliability in meeting commitments—depending on what is decisive for customers' purchasing decisions. Agile elements can contribute to achieving these goals. But perhaps it would be more purposeful to shift the focus from a topic project ("We need to become agile") to a value creation project ("We need to become leaner")—with corresponding consequences for the work packages. This makes the value for the organization directly visible.

At the level of society, the question may arise as to whether a little more than initially required should be invested in the approach of streamlining lead times and costs in order to be better equipped for the future. After all, there is already a whole stack of EU directives, national laws and regulations, as well as reformed industry standards in sight that could endanger the project's objectives. How can new directives be integrated into the organization in such a way that they require as little additional effort and as few commissioners as possible? If an effective and feasible solution is found here, this could represent an innovative solution that is also applicable to other cases. The value of an innovative solution is then given when, from the clients' perspective, it exceeds the additional marginal costs of its implementation.

The example makes clear that the levels of analysis and design require insights from different academic disciplines, in particular psychology and sociology—especially for the individual level—business administration and management sciences—especially for the organizational level—as well as political science, engineering, and environmental sciences—especially for the societal level.

Read more ...

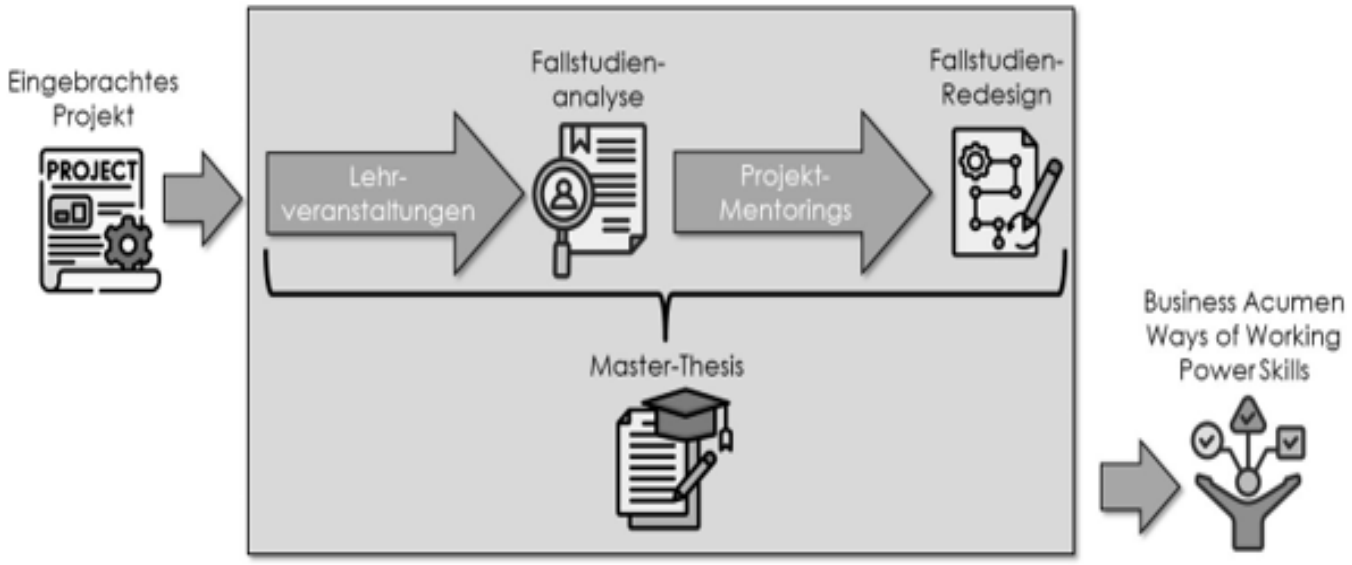


Abbildung 3: Stärkung beruflicher Kompetenzen

The combination of these two approaches, the "reflective practitioner" and "project studies," is the concept of the new part-time online degree program "Master of Project Studies" (www.hfwu-psx.de), which starts in October 2026 (HfWU 2026). At the center is the project contributed by the students themselves, which is analyzed and redesigned. The content-related and methodological tools for this are taught in a few selected courses as well as in individual project mentoring sessions. At the end of the degree program, there is a master's thesis, which, in the form of case study research, focuses on a well-founded analysis and redesign of the value of a project. Through this clear focus, the "Master of Project Studies" can be completed in one year. Our goal is that competencies for increasing value in further projects are developed. However, since the degree program has not yet started, the evidence is still pending here.

Rainer Erne is a professor of product, project, and process management at HfWU Nürtingen-Geislingen. Previously, he worked for IBM Global Services, Vector Consulting, and Robert Bosch, among others.

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The Agile Project Detective Kit

UWE GEUENICH

You have to read between the lines to unlock the full potential. - If everyone on the team sticks to the agreements, you will maximize value (anthill principle).

Imagine you are a project manager (in this case: Product Owner) and get handed over a huge, agile IT project (half-way, twelve months left, following the Scrum methodology). Imagine you are a program manager leading a program including eight to ten agile projects (including eight to ten product owners, following the Scrum methodology). In a world full of Proof-of-Concepts (PoCs), Minimum Viable Products (MVPs), pilots, fixed timelines, fixed budgets, no clear scope definitions upfront, and an enormous number of ever-changing expectations, how do you make sure that what you are going to deliver fits the expected outcome and benefits of the customer(s)? How do you make sure that you are maximizing the value of the underlying investment?

I have good news for you: There is a lot of valuable information and data available out there to assist you. Each piece of the puzzle is a bit hidden and has to be found, but if you collect this info, it gives you a perfect big picture of what to focus on with your team in order to have the confidence to deliver and maximize value. I call it the agile project detective kit. Even experienced project managers stepping into agile or hybrid delivery environments, junior project managers stepping into the ring for the first time, and IT delivery managers often struggle to assess whether a project is truly delivering value. This kit is also helpful for everyone along the project value chain, even for portfolio managers trying to get a grip on risk and value creation in their portfolios, constantly navigating through all three levels of their portfolios (project, program, portfolio). Most product owners tend to rely on the following two things: (1): The review session during each sprint (often on a 2–4-weeks cadence) to demonstrate the delivered value/functionality to the customer and to gather feedback from the customer at the same time. (2): Monitor the burndown (what work has been done) and burndown (what work is left) charts in (e.g., Jira).

This is by far not enough to ensure that you are on the right track, so let's break the kit down to get a better understanding. Each piece of the kit can be broken down into three categories:

(1) Maturity of the product owner

(2) Maturity of the scrum team

(3) Maturity of the value delivery mindset

Let us have a closer look at each of the categories, so that you get a better feeling for what to look at and where to look:

(1) Maturity of the product owner

- User stories without clear requirements are getting planned into a sprint. This is by far the biggest roadblock for value maximization out there. Pull the whole team together immediately and agree on what requirements should look like in order for everyone to fully understand the tickets. Work with demos, pictures and run-throughs wherever possible. You may want to utilize visualization techniques to the fullest.

- User stories are getting pulled in and out of an ongoing sprint. This jeopardizes the sprint goal, reduces the number of completed tickets, increases frustration in the team and increases communication efforts.

- No epic links, labels, and responsible info available for each user story. This leads to unclear responsibilities and accountability in the team and is not helpful for setting up the vision, sprint goals, and roadmap for the project.

- The next one to two sprints are not planned in the backlog. This is a sign of lacking clarity, vision

and roadmap and is not helpful for stakeholder management.

- The next sprint does not start immediately after the last sprint. If the gap is too long, it is a sign of a lacking vision and roadmap as well as low backlog prioritization maturity.

(2) Maturity of the scrum team

- No Definition of Done (DoD) and Definition of Ready (DoR) available
- No clear acceptance criteria for each user story defined
- No user story points are defined
- No clear user story point estimation process in place. This won't be perfect in the first 2-3 sprints and the whole team has to learn together and get a feeling of the size of each ticket
- Sprint length differ from sprint to sprint
- Go through retrospective minutes/documentation. If the team always brings up the same topics it can be a sign of an insecure environment or a sign that the team does not tackle the topics to be improved together
- Testing not properly prepared and roles and responsibilities of each team member in the testing cycle unclear

(3) Maturity of the value delivery

- Lack of vision clarity: No sprint goal defined. This is very important, since it creates focus and increases the output of each sprint
- Value vs. BAU ratio too high: Check each user story of each sprint for the last six sprints and categorize them. If you find too many BAU/user management user stories in the completed tickets you are delivering "things" but are underdelivering value. In the beginning of a project, it is totally common to see a higher ratio (max: 50%) of BAU/user management user stories because you are setting up the environment, the users and connecting systems/APIs for example. If you see more than 20% of these kinds of user stories after six sprints, something is not right and you should get the team together.
- Completed vs. not completed ratio too high: Check the sprint report and calculate the ratio for each sprint (completed, not completed, issues removed from sprint) for the last six sprints. A minimum 80% (better 90%) of user stories should be completed in the same sprint as planned. If not, you are inflating the backlog priority because the unfinished tickets are more often than not a forced priority for the next one to two sprints.

Read more ...

- Spike vs. user story ratio too high: Analysis sprints (only or mainly spikes in a sprint analyzing "things") instead of user story sprints (developing and creating "things"). It is totally fine if you need to analyze certain topics before tackling them in the dev environment. However, this often creates duplicate work because you are looking at things in one sprint and doing things in another sprint (4 weeks instead of 2 weeks until completion). This also creates a kind of forced priority, because you do not just want to spend time on the analysis, but also want to bring these user stories to production.

- Throughput unclarity: Too many or too few user stories and/or user story points for each sprint. This is very unhelpful in various ways. The team is either underutilized or burned out from putting in extra hours. This is also an indication that the team as a whole has not found the sweet spot for the number of user stories or number of user story points to be completed in each sprint to maximize value. That's why it is also important to keep the sprint length the same for each sprint.

This looks like a lot of work. However, if you know what to look at and where to look and you have done it a couple of times, you can analyze each project in 30–60 minutes. This is by far the best investment of your time for these kinds of projects. It is always a three-step process: (1) Gather the information. I am sure that some of you even find a smart way to automate this (2) Analyze the input (3) Implement the changes together with your team(s).

There are a couple of important recommendations to consider that complement the kit and are going to improve value maximization and team quality:

1) Make sure that your development team gets steered via tickets in (e.g., Jira) only and I mean only in ONE (Jira) board. This increases focus and reduces noise and confusion in the dev team

2) Make a pact with the dev team that nobody else from the company can make any requests directly to the dev team or certain people from your whole team or even worse: The dev team becomes active without having a ticket for it. In high-pressure environments, these things happen. However: You are the captain and all communication, prioritization and steering of the dev team should be channeled through you and nobody else. Remember, your main goal is to maximize value

3) Be cautious when it comes to part-time product owner roles or working as a product owner on several products/projects. My recommendation is to have one product owner working full-time on one product/project

4) Be realistic when it comes to the staffing of junior product owners. Keeping the value maximization premise in mind, especially in the short term, it makes more sense to staff an experienced product owner. If it's a long-term time horizon, it can make sense to staff juniors due to the steep learning curve. Have an honest and open discussion with potential candidates and decide together if it is the right thing to do. Maybe Product Owner shadowing for a period of time is a good start as well. I am confident that you will find the best way together.

Now, with the right team and this well-oiled delivery train that spits out value every two weeks, you can be sure to have increased the possibility of maximizing value, decreasing surprises, confidently managing changing customer expectations and stakeholder communication to the fullest extent.

Good luck with the execution.

Uwe Geuenich is a Project Portfolio Manager and holds certifications in PgMP® | PMP® | PMI-PMOCP™ | PSPO™. He is active in the PMI community, where he shares his perspectives on modern project management, facilitates knowledge exchange, and contributes to professional development. His focus is on providing practical insights for effective project work.

Projects for a Sustainable Future

Ambition and Reality

WOLFGANG FRIESIKE

When we talk about sustainability today, we do so in a time shaped by uncertainty, tensions, and conflicting objectives. Geopolitical developments, economic pressure, and social polarization shape the context in which organizations must act. Against this background, it is not always easy to write about shaping a sustainable future, at least not with the clarity and definitiveness one might perhaps wish for.

And yet, it is precisely in this situation that it becomes clear that sustainability is not an abstract guiding principle, but a concrete task of shaping the future. This task of shaping the future takes place in projects. Projects are the place where strategic goals are translated into reality. This is where economic requirements meet ecological and social expectations. This is where conflicting objectives become visible—and must be decided. Sustainability does not emerge through declarations of intent, but through consistent implementation. And this is exactly what professional project management stands for. The current discourse shows that sustainability is often discussed normatively or politically. For us as a project management community, however, a different question arises: How can sustainable aspects be systematically integrated into projects while at the same time achieving economically viable results? This is where modern project management offers important orientation. With its focus on value orientation, holistic thinking, and responsible leadership, as anchored, for example, in the PMBOK Guide Eighth Edition, a framework emerges in which sustainability is not understood as an additional requirement, but as an integral component of successful projects. At the same time, it becomes clear that this perspective is no longer merely conceptual, but is increasingly becoming concrete. In recent years, PMI has deliberately developed offerings to embed sustainability in project management. These include, for example, the “Green Project Manager” certification, which supports project leaders in systematically integrating ecological and social aspects into their projects (Green Project Manager (GPM-b)™ | Course + Exam Bundle). Likewise, initiatives such as “Project Managers Without Borders” (Making an Impact in Project Management | PMWB joins PMI) stand for the practical application of project management competence in socially relevant contexts worldwide.

Last but not least, the collaboration with the United Nations within the framework of the Sustainability Goals (https://www.pmi.org/volunteer/sustainability-goals) shows that project management plays a central role in implementing global development goals. Sustainability thus moves from an abstract ambition to a concrete implementation discipline. As the PMI Germany Chapter, we see our role as supporting this discourse—through exchange, through competence development, and through the promotion of a shared understanding of professional project management in a changing world.

We see ourselves as a platform where experiences can be shared, perspectives discussed, and solutions further developed. Precisely because many questions remain open, it is important to address them together.

A sustainable future does not emerge from consensus on paper, but from responsible action in concrete projects.

Wolfgang Friesike is the president of the PMI Germany Chapter. He studied industrial engineering at the Technical University of Berlin and has spent his entire career designing and implementing projects and project portfolios. Today, he works as a freelance mentor and organizational consultant.

PMI LIM Europe 2026 in Lisbon

KATHARINA BLESS DA SILVA

Sustainable Impulses for Leadership, Networking, and the Future of Chapter Work

At the beginning of May, the European PMI community came together in Lisbon for the Leadership Institute Meeting (LIM). A delegation from the PMI Germany Chapter with 11 members was also there. For us, the event became an intensive mix of professional input, personal exchange, and strategic impulses for further Chapter work. LIM Europe was guided by the theme “MORE, Together” and made this ambition tangible throughout the entire event. The focus was on General Sessions, Breakout Sessions, leadership-oriented workshops, and numerous formats for exchange across chapters. It quickly became clear that LIM is far more than a conference format. It is a space in which current future-oriented questions of project management, volunteer engagement, and the diversity of the European PMI community connect in a special way.

From my perspective, the exchange with representatives of other chapters was particularly formative. In many conversations, it became clear how inspiring it is to bring together different perspectives, experiences, and solution approaches. It was precisely this mixture of content-related depth and personal encounter that, for many, made up the actual value of the event. Whether in the sessions, in thematic exchange formats, or in conversations on the margins of the program: Again and again, it became tangible how strongly the PMI network lives from openness, engagement, and mutual learning. In terms of content, the topics of sustainability, social impact, and artificial intelligence left a lasting impression in particular. Several sessions showed very clearly that sustainability and social impact take different perspectives, but in practice are often closely connected. Examples of how chapters can create concrete impact with partners from the social environment were particularly impressive. Such

insights made it tangible that Chapter work does not only have an internal effect, but can also make a contribution far beyond one's own organization.

Another highlight for several members of the German delegation was the keynote by John Sanei. His impulses were very impressive, especially in connection with the future of project management and the influence of AI. The focus was less on the technology itself than on the question of which skills project managers particularly need in a changing environment. It became clear several times that methodological competence alone is no longer enough. Anyone who wants to shape projects successfully must recognize interconnections, classify different interests, and understand developments in their respective context. Human strengths such as empathy, adaptability, and emotional intelligence remain just as important.

In addition to these future-oriented topics, LIM placed strong emphasis on leadership and Chapter development. Workshops and exchange formats provided many practical suggestions for how volunteer engagement can be organized and further developed effectively. Especially for the PMI Germany Chapter, it was enriching to see how much creativity, professionalism, and commitment both large and small chapters in Europe bring to their work. At the same time, it also became clear what opportunities arise from the size and diversity of our own Chapter when it comes to addressing members in a targeted way and creating a broad range of offerings.

What made LIM in Lisbon particularly special for us was the connection between content and atmosphere. The event not only offered professional impulses, but also many moments in which European connectedness became very concretely tangible. The personal exchange, the shared reflection on the future of our profession, and the noticeable willingness to learn from one another left a lasting impression. Project management was not only the topic of the program here, but also the common language that connected people from different countries and contexts.

Thus, for me, PMI LIM Europe 2026 in Lisbon remains above all a place of sustainable impulses, where learning, networking, and joint creation came together in a convincing way. For our 11 member German delegation, the event was not only professionally inspiring, but also a strong signal of how much becomes possible within the PMI network when experiences, ideas, and engagement come together.

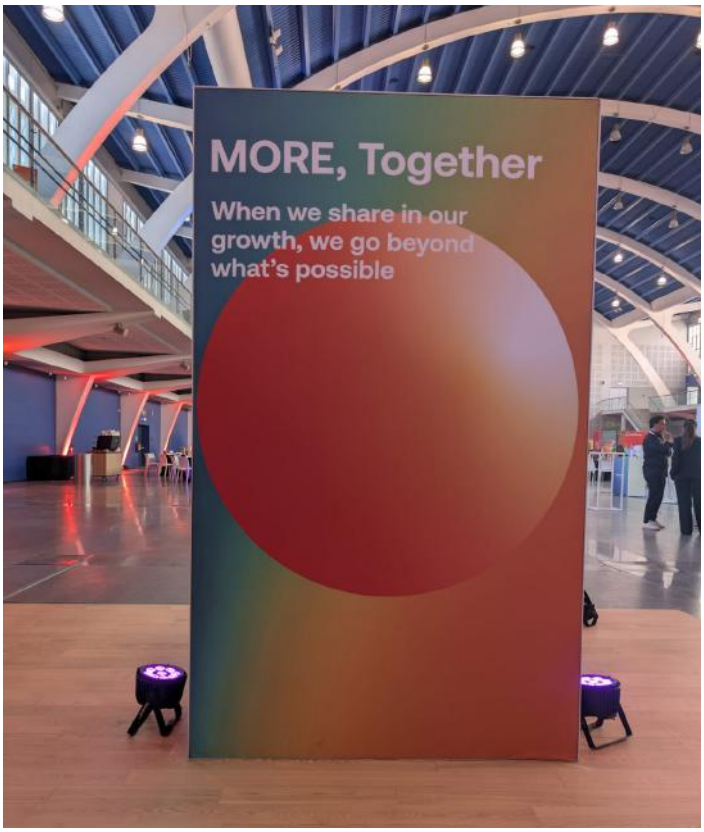
Katharina Bless da Silva is a project manager and PMO Lead based in Bremen with a passion for all things related to interculturality and strategy. She has been active with PMI for over six years and has served as the lead of the mentoring program for the PMI Germany Chapter since 2023.

Impressions of GSS and LIM in Lisbon

DR. MARTIN BERTRAM

The days in Lisbon at the GSS and LIM were exhausting—but also very enjoyable. For me, it was especially valuable to reconnect in person with many people I've worked with before and to make new contacts at the same time. International PMI events in particular consistently demonstrate just how important this personal interaction is: many ideas and insights arise not only during presentations, but also in casual conversations on the sidelines.

I was particularly impressed by how professionally the PMI team handled the last-minute relocation of the events from Dubai. Such a move is anything but trivial from an organizational standpoint—which made it all the more remarkable how smoothly the event went off in Lisbon.



In terms of content, my focus was primarily on the topics of sustainability and social impact. Since I have been dealing with these topics for quite some time, there was nothing fundamentally new for me. Nevertheless, it was exciting to see how firmly these topics are now anchored in project management internationally. Sustainability is no longer a marginal issue but is increasingly understood as part of professional project management. Worth mentioning in this context is the release of the new Version 4 of the GPM P5 Guide. According to Joel Carboni, this version was rewritten "from scratch." Additionally, the GPM-b certificate is being renamed, as the term "basic" apparently bothered many people. I myself earned my certificate at the beginning of the year and can highly recommend it as the second pillar of a solid education in project management.

The mindset described in M.O.R.E. also played a central role in many presentations. I was able to take away insights from several sessions—even though, as a retiree, I no longer lead major projects today. This topic is not only relevant to professional life; it also plays a central role in our strategy and planning within the chapter: How do we align ourselves? What impact do we want to achieve? And how do we remain relevant to existing and new members?

The presentations on social impact also made it clear that we are already on the right track with our activities in the chapter. They have encouraged me to continue

driving these activities forward. In doing so, we are not only doing good, but also becoming more attractive to younger project leaders who are increasingly seeking meaning, impact, and social contribution in their work.

Hardly any presentation went without touching on the topic of artificial intelligence. The consensus was often: "AI is just a tool." That's true—but tools can be used in very different ways. I was particularly struck by an anecdote from one speaker: He had given students from different countries the same task to be solved using AI. However, the results and approaches were completely different. This illustrates very well that it is not just the tool that determines the benefit, but above all the attitude, competence, and perspective of the people using it.

My takeaway from Lisbon: The central themes of project management continue to shift. Sustainability, social impact, new forms of leadership, and AI are no longer peripheral topics but are increasingly at the core of professional project work. For us as the PMI community and as a chapter, this means: We should actively embrace these developments, translate them into concrete offerings, and continue to foster dialogue around them.

Info box: What is the GSS?

GSS stands for Global Summit Series—an international series of events organized by PMI for the broader project management community.

The focus is on current trends and challenges such as leadership, transformation, sustainability, artificial intelligence, and complex projects.

The GSS provides a space for learning, exchange, and networking across national and industry boundaries.

After many years as a project management professional in the financial services sector, **Martin Bertram** is now retired. He serves on the board of the PMI Germany Chapter, where his responsibilities include overseeing our diversity initiatives. In addition, Martin Bertram serves as chairman of the board of PM4TheWorld—an organization dedicated to sustainable project management.

New Podcast Episodes You Won't Want to Miss

BY AND STARRING THOMAS WUTTKE

Folge 140 - A Sustainable Failure

When **sustainability** is introduced in a company, it initially sounds like a fresh start, purpose, and a bright future. But what happens when a good initiative gets out of hand? This podcast episode examines a fictional yet realistic failure—without assigning blame, but with valuable lessons to be learned. It covers internal organizational projects, a lack of customer pressure, sensitive changes to the product portfolio, and the question of how sustainable failure can be turned into sustainable success. The episode concludes with 9 points that sustainability initiatives should keep in mind. A must-listen for anyone shaping change.

Listen Now! (only in German)

Folge 131 - P5IA Sustainability Case Study

How can sustainability be made tangible in project management—beyond just good intentions? In this podcast episode, Thomas Wuttke speaks with Alexander Schroer from estecasa Fertig Modulbau about their concrete experiences with the P5 Impact Analysis. The tool assesses a project's sustainability impacts and highlights opportunities, risks, and blind spots. With a practical focus, the discussion covers serial construction, short construction times, sustainable decisions, and the question of whether P5IA delivers on its promises. An episode for everyone who not only discusses sustainability in projects but also puts it into practice.

Listen Now! (only in German)

Folge 118 - Introduction to the GreenProjectManagement

Sustainability in project management is more than just a green label. This podcast episode introduces Green Project Management—an organization that consistently places sustainability at the heart of project standards, methods, and certifications. The focus includes the P5 standard, the PRiSM method, assessments, and the question of how projects can be planned and implemented in a more sustainable way. At the same time, it explains why "GPM" doesn't always mean the same thing. A concise episode for anyone who wants to better understand Green Project Management.

Listen Now! (only in German)

PMI Global at a Glance

New Impulses for Project Management 2026

PM*IMPACT* REPORTING

Since the last issue, quite a lot has happened at PMI Global. Several current announcements show where the international project management community is currently heading: more strongly toward complexity management, strategic impact, AI, sustainability, and global networking.

One central topic is the new Pulse of the Profession® 2026, which PMI published in May. The report is titled "Driving Success in Complex Projects: From Navigating Tasks to Navigating Systems" and makes clear that complexity has now become more of the norm than the exception. According to PMI, 97 percent of the project professionals surveyed managed at least one complex project in the past year; more than half of all projects are now classified as complex. PMI particularly emphasizes the importance of systems thinking, stable teams, active stakeholder engagement, and PMOs as "execution hubs" that coordinate dependencies, governance, and priorities.

Changes are also coming to the PMP® certification. PMI has announced that a revised PMP exam will be introduced as of July 9, 2026. The new exam is intended to be more strongly aligned with real project situations and to place greater emphasis on topics such as AI, sustainability, stakeholder engagement, value delivery, as well as agile and hybrid ways of working. The weighting of the domains will also be adjusted: "Business Environment" will carry significantly more weight in the future than it has so far. In addition, PMI is continuing to expand its digital offerings. PMI Infinity™ is positioned as an AI-powered project management coach and is now available via PMI.org and the PMI Official App. According to PMI, the tool is intended to provide answers and guidance based on PMI standards and project management knowledge and to support project professionals in their daily work.

The global event landscape is also already well filled for 2026. In addition to the PMI® Global Summit Series Seoul in June and the Global Summit Series Cape Town in September, the PMI® Global Summit 2026 has been announced for October 21 to 24, 2026, in Detroit. In addition, PMXPO™ 2026 is available as an on-demand format, with the opportunity to earn up to 12 PDUs. For chapters, the PMI Chapter of the Year Award 2026 is also relevant. The nomination phase ran until April, and the finalists are expected to be informed in July; the winners will be announced at the Global Summit 2026 in Detroit. The evaluation criteria include, among other things, community impact, knowledge sharing, member engagement, PMI culture values, as well as chapter sustainability and volunteer excellence.

Overall, the look at PMI Global shows:

In 2026, the organization is placing a strong focus on future-oriented topics that go beyond traditional project management. It is no longer only about planning and implementing projects cleanly, but increasingly about achieving impact, managing complexity, meaningfully integrating new technologies, and further developing project management as a strategic capability of organizations.

Project Cycle in the Age of AI

Project Success Is Determined Before The Contract Is Signed

HÄNNES GNÄDINGER

Bent Flyvbjerg's analyses show that large-scale projects typically exceed their budgets and/or schedules. And the comprehensive GPM study "Projektifizierung 2.0" reveals that, despite excellent tools for execution and increased stakeholder satisfaction, the project success index has trended downward from 2013 to 2022.

Why do projects fail? Because cost estimates are based on an incomplete scope, coordination between engineering, procurement, and project management is inadequate, there is no consistent link between WORK–TIME–COST, and gray areas during handover lead to a loss of information and control, resulting in delayed corrections and new requirements, which in turn lead to costly rework and claims.

How do we turn the tide? The Betty Bossi success story serves as a metaphor that shows the way: In 1956, a creative copywriter decided to market her products through "Everyone Cooks." She took appetizing photos, described the recipes in easy-to-follow steps, listed the ingredients, and distributed these instructions—anyone who cooked with her recipes bought her products, was efficient, and earned praise.

Insight 1: Just like with a good recipe, quality and success don't come from the cooking itself, but from the preparation. Applied to projects, this means: Successful execution/project management requires a good "recipe" that defines scope, structure, responsibilities, time, and costs. A proven "recipe" is the common project language WBS 4.0. As an integrated model, it defines the clear relationship between WORK–TIME–COST as early as the tendering/bid phase, thereby linking scope work with the schedule and costs throughout the entire project cycle.

How do WBS 4.0 and the classic WBS approach interact? WBS 4.0 is superordinate to the classic WBS approach. For the project management team, WBS 4.0 serves as the common foundation in which the scope is structured top-down and the responsibilities for the project phases are assigned within the Division of Work. This facilitates the planning and management of documents and the procurement of the scope of work/deliverables, as well as "backward scheduling" of the work. For scope cost calculation and procurement, WBS 4.0 standardizes the CBS (Cost Breakdown Structure). The scope items in WBS 4.0 correspond to the work packages of the functional areas in the classic WBS, which are further broken down for execution/order processing to plan and control the individual work processes.

Insight 2: WBS 4.0 is the common language for all stakeholders in the project cycle. It is defined across projects by the PMO and supplemented by the functional areas with the classic WBS.

Why does WBS 4.0 increase project success? Because WBS 4.0 is the key to increasing effectiveness and efficiency in the project cycle within AI-supported tools. The roles of the PMO, the project managers, and AI are adjusted accordingly.

- The PMO ensures clean data and project structures with WBS 4.0.
- AI increasingly takes over scheduling, resource allocation, prioritization, control, and reporting.
- The focus of project managers shifts away from the daily management of task lists toward interpreting, evaluating, and communicating complex interrelationships.

Insight 3: WBS 4.0 ensures transparency and reliability – AI accelerates projects.

Project Cycle – From Chaos to Order to Chaos to Order

After each deliberate, solution-finding chaos phase, WBS 4.0 restores the structured order necessary for planning and control.
Use Case: Subject matter experts structure the customer's needs from the perspective of future

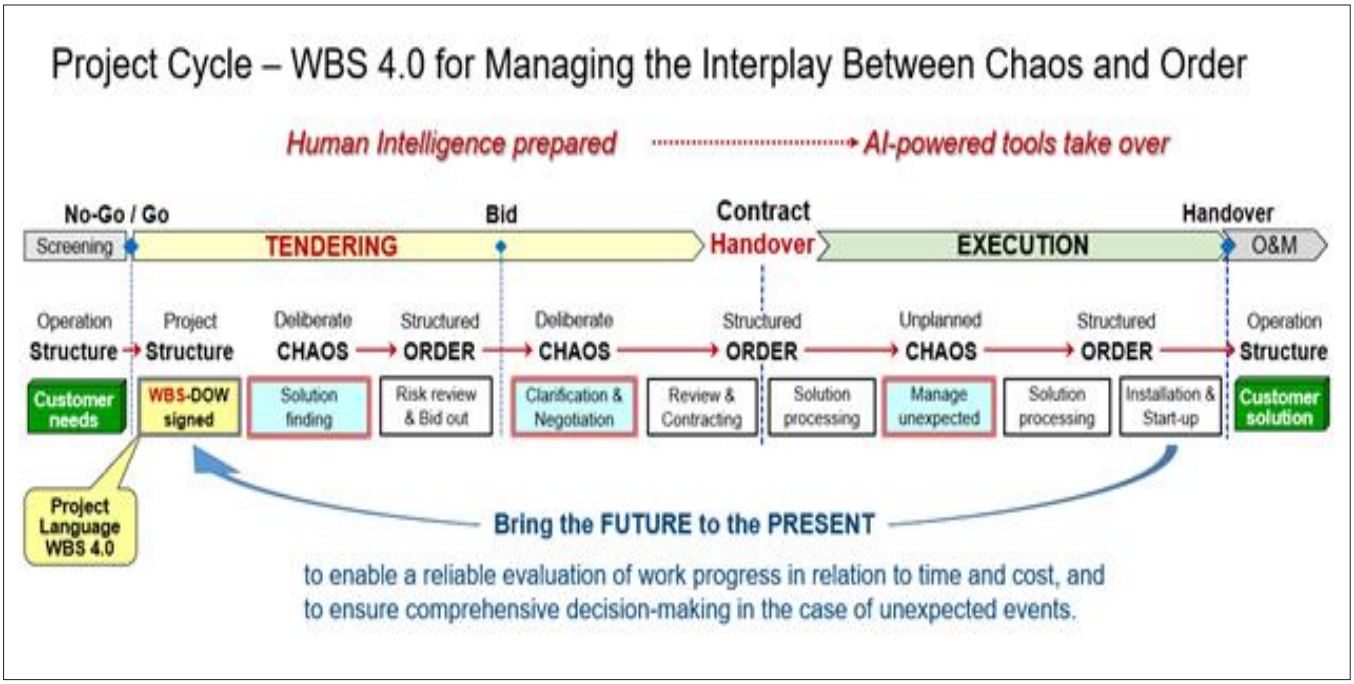


Figure 4: Project Cycle - WBS 4.0

operations. The solution provider translates this into the WBS-DOW, a structured project view for planning and control. Solution-finding begins with deliberate chaos, during which problems are identified that could lead to unplanned chaos during execution. With the solution-finding process begins the interplay between chaos and order, which repeats itself in the tendering/bid phase as well as in execution/order processing—in tendering between solution-finding and reviews, in execution between implementation and unexpected events. WBS 4.0 standardizes the logical WORK-TIME-COST dependencies across projects in the WBS-DOW. As a result, during the handover, the procurement items in the shopping lists are coordinated with regard to schedule and document dependencies, and AI-supported tools can increasingly take over the tasks in execution/order processing.

A structured handover is therefore crucial:

- Transfer of clearly defined shopping lists into the ERP system
- Transfer of scope, responsibilities, budgets, deadlines, and resources into the AI-supported tools
- Transfer of the WBS-structured document folder list with scheduled key folders

Insight 4: The tendering/bid phase requires human creativity and empathy—AI, on the other hand, requires clean, structured data to increase effectiveness and efficiency.

WBS 4.0 – From the CFO's Perspective

WBS 4.0 is not a methodological treatise—it is a financial control model that significantly improves the current situation through sound predictability.

Why are "WBS 4.0 projects" successful? Because the margin is predictable, since the scope is more fully structured before the contract is signed, WORK–TIME–COST are consistently linked, responsibilities are clearly assigned (WBS-DOW), costs are transparently validated through linked structures (CBS-WBS), schedules are coordinated (WBS-MTS), and documents are stored in structured folders (WBS-MDL).

CFO: Contribution margins are neither improved nor reduced during execution/order fulfillment—they are determined before the contract is signed.

Hännes Gnädinger is an expert in project-based management and WBS 4.0. Through his engineering firm, he demonstrates how clear project structures, WORK–TIME–COST logic, and AI-driven processes improve margins and governance.

Experience the PMI Germany Chapter **live**!

Every month, a variety of events take place across Germany, either virtually or in person.

You can find out more at
https://pmi-gc.de/event
(for PMI members and non-members).

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Our central theme is

PMO with Impact: How PMOs Turn Strategy into Results

**Do you have ideas as a writer or can you recommend interesting interview subjects? Get in touch with us!
redaktion@pmi-gc.de or scan the QR code.**