

# From Compliance to value: new trends in project management

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This publication summarises several trends currently shaping project management theory and practice and reflects on their possible implications for Interreg based on the recent project management books review, events and trainings, publications in the project management communities (Project management institute and International Project Management Association).



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# Introduction

During the Navigating Monitoring event (17-18 March), we had a session and presentation on emerging tendencies in project management. The aim was to explore how project management is evolving more broadly, and what these developments might mean for Interreg programmes and projects.

This article summarises several trends currently shaping project management theory and practice and reflects on their possible implications for Interreg. The intention is to provide inspiration rather than prescriptions.

This article draws on a range of recent sources to ensure a well-informed perspective. It is based on a review of contemporary project management literature published in recent years, as well as ongoing engagement with the activities of the Project Management Institute in Europe – particularly in Finland and Lithuania – through webinars, events, conferences, and online materials. In addition, insights from the International Project Management Association, including activities in Latvia and participation in annual conferences, have been considered. To complement these inputs and validate the observations beyond personal experience, a number of recent articles on emerging project management trends (2026) were also reviewed prior to the event.

## 1. A Shift in how Project Success is Defined

Traditionally, project success was measured through the well-known “**iron triangle**”: delivering the project on time, within budget, and according to scope. Project management for many years focused strongly on control, processes, and compliance. This approach worked well in relatively stable environments. However, it sometimes led to situations where success was measured primarily by how closely a project followed the plan rather than by the value it created.

Research and practice increasingly suggest that “iron triangle” indicators alone do not fully capture project success. Today, many organisations are asking different questions:

- Why does this project matter?
- What benefits will it create?
- Do stakeholders accept the project outcomes, use them, and perceive them as valuable?

As noted in PRINCE2 guidance<sup>1</sup>, the traditional focus on time, cost, and quality still has its place, but it does not tell the whole story. For example, research on sustainable project management by Silvius and Schipper (2015) emphasises that projects should consider broader environmental and social impacts. In other words, the discussion has gradually shifted **from delivering outputs to delivering value, benefits, and long-term impact**.

This trend is also reflected in professional practice. A major survey report published by the Project Management Institute (PMI) surveyed more than 10 000 project professionals worldwide and conducted around 150 in-depth interviews. One of the key conclusions is that increasing emphasis is placed on whether projects create **real value, is the connection between the resources invested and outcome positive one**.

This shift is also reflected in organisational structures in the private sector. Some organisations, such as PwC, are moving from traditional Project Management Offices (PMOs) towards Value Management Offices. While this development does not directly affect the Interreg environment,

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<sup>1</sup> PRINCE2 (Projects IN Controlled Environments) is a widely used structured project management methodology that provides principles, processes and practices for managing projects throughout their lifecycle.  
(2017) *Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2*.

it illustrates a broader trend in project management: a growing emphasis on value creation and long-term outcomes rather than solely on the delivery of activities within predefined time, cost, and scope constraints.

For project managers, this evolution implies a broader and more strategic role. Beyond coordinating tasks and ensuring compliance with plans, project managers increasingly act as connectors between people, knowledge, technologies, and objectives of the organisations, taking care also of the wider societal context. Their role involves facilitating collaboration, aligning stakeholder expectations, and ensuring that project outputs translate into meaningful and lasting results.

### **Possible Implications for Interreg**

We are now well into the current programming period, with most of the funding committed. This provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the projects currently being implemented, the evolving external environment, and the upcoming performance-based approach before preparing guidance for the next programming period.

A few points to reflect:

- Do we need to rethink and update how we define projects and communicate expectations for projects in our guidance documents?
- Are there any alternative approaches that could help strengthen the focus on results, impact, and the actual use of project outcomes? While the performance based approach points into this direction, is it sufficient on its own?

Reflecting on the implications of these developments may help us gradually improve focus on results and value creation and test new ideas, and prepare better for the design of future programmes, including the transition to a performance-based approach.

## **2. Sustainability of Project Results and the Management Process**

Sustainability is becoming an increasingly important dimension of project management. Projects are no longer evaluated only by their efficiency in delivering outputs. Increasing attention is given to **long-term environmental, social, and economic impact**.

Empirical **research** based on a quantitative survey design identified **a strong positive correlation between sustainable project management practices and project success**, reinforcing earlier findings and indicating that integrating sustainability considerations into project management contributes to both project success and long-term value creation (Dubois & Silvius, 2020<sup>2</sup>).

As survey report on project success by the Project Management Institute (PMI)<sup>3</sup> highlights that sustainability is strongly linked to project performance. It is stated that **projects aligned with sustainability goals significantly outperform others**, with 55% meeting or exceeding customer satisfaction compared to 33% of projects that are not aligned with sustainability objectives.

The International Project Management Association (IPMA) also emphasises the growing importance of sustainability in project management. The IPMA published the [IPMA Guide to](#)

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<sup>2</sup> Dubois, O., & Silvius, A. J. G. (2020). *The relation between sustainable project management and project success*. International Journal of Management and Sustainability, 9(4), 218–238.

<sup>3</sup> Project Management Institute (PMI). (2025). *Step Up: Redefining the Path to Project Success With M.O.R.E.* Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.

[Sustainable Project Management](#)<sup>4</sup> and offers [certification programmes](#) focusing on how to integrate environmental, social, and economic considerations into project management and decision making.

Similarly, **PMI promotes responsible and green project management practices**, emphasising that projects should consider their broader environmental and societal impacts. In cooperation with the Green Project Management organisation PMI provide the Green Project Manager–b (GPM-b™) certification. In addition, there is a dedicated section on [sustainability](#) on their website<sup>5</sup>, which includes some resources about sustainability available for free download.

These developments reflect a broader shift: project management is moving from a primary focus on delivering outputs toward integrating sustainability across the project management lifecycle. Sustainability is not a “nice to have” but an integral part of project management.

### **Possible Implications for Interreg**

Interreg programmes often address complex societal challenges such as climate transition, regional development, social inclusion etc. Traditionally, sustainability in Interreg projects has often been interpreted primarily as **durability of project results** – ensuring that outputs remain available after the project ends.

However, the understanding of sustainability is gradually evolving. Increasingly, sustainability is seen as a principle guiding **the entire project lifecycle**, from planning and design to implementation and closure. This broader perspective is already visible in some programme practices. For example, some programmes promote in their guidance for projects:

- green public procurement
- advice how to organise green events
- sustainability section on programme websites
- awareness-raising activities related to environmental responsibility

This is also a good moment to learn from each other and reflect on how sustainability should be approached in the new programming period. **Do we want to focus only on the social and environmental targets defined in the regulation or use the opportunity to go further and evolve how our programmes and projects are implemented?** By addressing root causes and embedding sustainability into both our programme and project management processes and putting even more focus on sustainability of project outcomes, we can contribute to programmes that are not only compliant, but also socially responsible, environmentally sustainable, and economically viable.

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<sup>4</sup> International Project Management Association (IPMA). (2025). *IPMA Guide on Sustainable Project Management*. Van Haren Publishing.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pmi.org/learning/sustainability>

### 3. Hybrid and Fit-for-Purpose Methodologies

We are operating in a rapidly changing environment, which increasingly affects how projects are managed. Project plans are reviewed more frequently, greater adaptability and flexibility are required to ensure relevance and create value. At the same time, decision making involves higher level of uncertainty. In response, there has been a growing adoption of hybrid project management approaches.

Traditional approaches, such as waterfall models, emphasise detailed upfront planning and structured governance. Agile approaches, on the other hand, emphasise flexibility, iteration, and continuous learning. Increasingly, organisations are combining elements of both, adopting hybrid models that balance structure with adaptability. This trend is also reflected in recent research.

For example, a systematic literature review titled “The Evolution of Agile and Hybrid Project Management Methodologies” by Leech and Hanslo (2025)<sup>6</sup> shows that organisations increasingly **integrate structured planning with adaptive practices such as iterative learning and stakeholder feedback**. Similarly, another study (“Agile, Traditional, and Hybrid Approaches to Project Success”<sup>7</sup>) analysed 477 projects across industries and found out that **hybrid and agile approaches significantly improve stakeholder success** compared with purely traditional approaches, while still achieving similar performance in terms of time, cost, scope, and quality. Hybrid approaches were used in around 52% of the analysed projects, suggesting that they are increasingly becoming the dominant practice.

#### Possible Implications for Interreg

Interreg programmes operate within structured governance frameworks that require transparency, accountability, and compliance with funding rules. At the same time, many cooperation projects operate in complex environments or produce innovative outcomes where learning and experimentation are essential.

Hybrid approaches may therefore offer useful inspiration. **The research suggests that strong governance can coexist with flexibility that allows projects to adapt, refine solutions, and incorporate stakeholder feedback during implementation.**

This raises several points for reflection:

- How can Interreg programmes maintain strong governance requirements while allowing greater flexibility for projects during the implementation?
- To what extent need for flexibility and bigger focus on results can be addressed through the with adoption of a performance based approach?
- Are current monitoring approaches sufficiently focused on quality of results and value created, and do they support adaptive project management?
- What adjustments may be needed to better support projects operating in rapidly changing, complex or innovative environments?
- Should some of these aspects be more explicitly reflected in programme guidance?

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<sup>6</sup> Source:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/397322250\\_The\\_Evolution\\_of\\_Agile\\_and\\_Hybrid\\_Project\\_Management\\_Methodologies\\_A\\_Systematic\\_Literature\\_Review](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/397322250_The_Evolution_of_Agile_and_Hybrid_Project_Management_Methodologies_A_Systematic_Literature_Review)

<sup>7</sup> Gemino, A., Reich, B. H., & Serrador, P. M. (2021). *Agile, traditional, and hybrid approaches to project success: Is hybrid a poor second choice?* *Project Management Journal*, 52(2), 161–175.

## 4. Artificial Intelligence and Resource Optimisation

Artificial intelligence is becoming an increasingly practical assistant in project management. Many organisations already use AI tools and create agents to support everyday tasks such as analysing information, drafting documents, identifying risks, and summarising reports.

One emerging trend is **asynchronous communication to share project progress**<sup>8</sup>. Instead of relying mainly on meetings, teams share updates through digital tools such as Slack or Jira, while AI systems can automatically compile these updates into status reports.

### Implications to Interreg:

#### ***Supporting project idea development***

AI tools can help applicants structure project ideas, identify relevant evidence, and check whether their proposals align with programme priorities. There is also potential for programmes to save resources by encouraging and training applicants to use AI for **self-assessment of project ideas and applications** against programme requirements, including the assessment criteria. If applicants can review and improve their proposals before submission, the overall quality of applications would increase and the workload for programme staff during assessment could be reduced, more time left to focus on results and quality.

#### ***Improving access to information***

AI could help applicants and project partners navigate programme guidance documents more easily by identifying relevant sections and answering common questions instead of providing numerous questions to the staff of the Joint Secretariat.

#### ***Supporting monitoring and data analysis for Interreg promotion and capitalisation***

AI can assist programme teams in analysing project data, identifying patterns, and highlighting potential risks earlier. It has also great potential for the monitoring, avoid working with various information sources manually. At the same time it is also a great tool to cluster big amounts of project data, and prepare summaries about the pools of the project results which would be hardly possible or very resources demanding manually.

#### ***Reducing administrative workload***

Tasks such as summarising reports, preparing meeting notes, or drafting initial analyses can increasingly be supported by AI.

At the same time, effective use of AI requires **critical thinking and responsible use**. Project professionals need to assess AI-generated outputs carefully and consider issues related to transparency, data protection, and ethics.

Artificial intelligence is already becoming part of everyday practice in project development, implementation, often evolving without explicit programme level guidance. This present valuable opportunity and certain risks.

It is therefore a timely moment to reflect on whether more explicit programme guidance could support applicants and project partners in using AI in a consistent and informed way – particularly in strengthening project ideas, improving application and facilitating smoother project start and implementation and promotion processes. This could help to ensure the

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbestechcouncil/2024/09/10/20-emerging-strategies-and-trends-in-project-management/>

responsible application of technology, including consideration related to transparency, data protection and quality.

## 5. The Growing Importance of Power Skills and Change Management

Another important development is the growing recognition that technical expertise alone is not enough to ensure project success. In complex, digital, and international project environments, the ability to **work effectively with people** is becoming increasingly important.

Research highlights the growing importance of emotional intelligence, communication, leadership, and collaboration skills. Similarly the PMI Pulse of the Profession 2023–2024 report<sup>9</sup> shows that **organisations prioritising power skills achieve significantly higher project success** rates, reporting up to 72% more successful projects.

The evolving understanding of project management is also reflected in professional standards. The PMBOK Guide 7th edition introduced a shift from process-based guidance toward principle-based project management, emphasising areas such as stakeholder engagement, systems thinking, adaptability, and collaboration.

### The Human Side of Change

Every project introduces some form of change – whether it involves implementing new tools, introducing new services, or influencing behaviour among stakeholders. However, delivering a (technical) solution is only part of the challenge. The real impact of a project depends on **whether people accept, adopt, and use the new solution**.

Change-management frameworks such as **Kotter's 8-Step Process**, **Lewin's Change Model**, and the **ADKAR model**<sup>10</sup> emphasise that successful transformation requires:

- preparing stakeholders for change
- communicating clearly and consistently
- involving users early in the process
- anticipating resistance
- supporting people through the transition

These models highlight that change is not only a technical process but also a **social and behavioural one**.

### Possible implications for Interreg

With preparations for the next programming period approaching, this is a good moment to reflect on how change is perceived and managed in Interreg projects. Change is an inevitable part of project implementation and its absence does not necessarily indicate strong planning – it may suggest that projects are not adapting sufficiently to evolving contexts.

In practice, solutions defined at the application stage often need to be revisited early in implementation. This can be due to technological developments, shifting stakeholder needs or the time gap between the project design and start (often 1–2 years).

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<sup>9</sup> Project Management Institute (PMI). (2023). *Pulse of the Profession® 2023: Power Skills, Redefining Project Success* (14th ed.). Project Management Institute.

<sup>10</sup> Hamdo, S. S. (2021). *Change Management Models: A Comparative Review* (the article available on ResearchGate website).

This raises an important question: **how can programme change procedures be lean and robust while allowing projects flexibility to adapt to changing environments and stakeholder needs?**

In this context it is also worth reflecting on performance based approach – to what extent can risks related to uncertainty, disruptions and evolving needs be anticipated and addressed already at the measures planning stage? How can programmes and project maintain the **flexibility** needed to adapt and remain relevant?

Another important aspect is the human dimension of change. Programme guidance could include elements of change management principles, encourage projects to focus more on stakeholder engagement, managing resistance and integrating these elements into monitoring practices.