

# Twenty years of PMI's Pulse of the Profession (2006–2025): A review.

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## Abstract

This review examines two decades of the Project Management Institute's Pulse of the Profession series (2006–2025), the flagship global survey of project, program, and portfolio management. Forty reports were analysed, comprising 14 annual global editions, 23 thematic studies, and three practitioner-focused outputs. The findings show that Pulse has served both as an industry barometer and as an advocacy instrument. While the central message across all editions is consistent, poor project management wastes resources, the framing of this message has shifted over time: from cost-and-control narratives to capability-driven emphases on agility, digital fluency, power skills, and business acumen.

Using text mining (Voyant Tools) and qualitative coding (ATLAS.ti), the study identifies five clusters of project management approaches, governance, process, adaptive, people-centred, and purpose-driven, and traces how PMI's discourse has repositioned project management as a strategic, human-centred discipline with societal impact. The analysis underscores the value of Pulse as a directional indicator of industry priorities, while also highlighting its limitations as empirical evidence due to shifting metrics, selective transparency, and advocacy framing.

For scholarship, this review offers the first comprehensive synthesis of the Pulse series. For practice, it reinforces the importance of governance, agility, and people skills in sustaining performance. For doctoral research, it provides both a typology and a conceptual scaffold for examining how project management approaches contribute to the sustainability and scalability of public health programs.

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## Introduction

The field of project management has shifted considerably over the past two decades. Methodologies, frameworks, and approaches have continued to evolve, each designed to help organisations manage an environment that is increasingly complex and uncertain. As part of developing my doctoral thesis, I examined how these different terms, methodology, framework, paradigm, carry distinct meanings, and how traditional (predictive) and adaptive (agile) approaches each offer strengths and limitations. My analysis highlighted the growing prominence of hybrid approaches, positioned as a way to combine the stability of predictive methods with the flexibility of agile ones. This finding mirrors themes that have appeared repeatedly in *Pulse of the Profession*, the annual global survey conducted by the Project Management Institute (PMI).

Launched in 2006, *Pulse of the Profession* has become PMI's flagship research series. Its purpose is straightforward: to track the state of project, program, and portfolio management worldwide. Each year it provides a snapshot of performance trends, common challenges, and the skills seen as critical to success. Over time, its scope has expanded beyond efficiency metrics. Recent reports highlight themes such as business acumen, adaptability, hybrid delivery, and the future of work, while still emphasising the persistent costs of low performance. For practitioners, the *Pulse* offers a quick read on where the field is heading. For researchers, it represents a valuable longitudinal dataset that reflects how professional discourse has shifted over two decades.

Despite its influence, the series has rarely been examined in full. Individual reports are widely cited, yet few attempts have been made to synthesise their findings systematically across the entire twenty-year span. To my knowledge, no comprehensive review exists. This study therefore marks the first effort to bring the *Pulse* reports together in one place, offering a long-view perspective that can serve both scholarship and practice. The timing is also significant: 2025 marks two decades since the first *Pulse* was released. This review takes that milestone as an opportunity to trace the trajectory of recurring themes, headline statistics, and emerging insights from 2006 through to 2025. Its purpose is twofold: first, to

consolidate a substantial body of grey literature into an accessible narrative and dataset (Paez, 2017); and second, to deepen understanding of the trends and gaps that continue to shape project management practice. For doctoral researchers, early career academics, and practitioners alike, such a synthesis offers a foundation for learning and a starting point for future inquiry.

This review also serves as a contribution to my PhD thesis. Project management is, above all, an applied discipline. Much of its evidence base is drawn from practice rather than theory (Morris, 2013). The *Pulse of the Profession* reports exemplify this. They are not peer-reviewed studies, yet they are widely read and often shape the conversation within the profession. Reviewing them, therefore, serves two key aims: to capture how project management's concerns, challenges, and strengths have been reported over time; and to identify the project management approaches and practices that underpin those narratives. Taken together, these aims provide a panoramic view of the field and a conceptual grounding for the qualitative studies that follow in my thesis.

It is also important to note what this review does not claim. My use of the *Pulse* reports should not be read as endorsement of PMI or its advocacy agenda. Rather, it reflects a pragmatic decision to work with a unique and influential dataset. In the absence of comparable longitudinal surveys produced by academic or government bodies, the *Pulse* series offers a rare vantage point from which to observe how project management is framed, which priorities are emphasised, and how the field's identity has been redefined over time. In this review, then, the reports are treated less as neutral evidence and more as a lens: a way of examining industry narratives and practitioner perspectives that continue to shape both theory and practice.

This review draws on all global editions of PMI's *Pulse of the Profession* published between 2006 and 2025. The series was chosen because it represents PMI's flagship longitudinal survey of project, program, and portfolio management practice worldwide. Each year it provides a consistent dataset on performance trends, practices, and emerging challenges. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, all retrieved reports, together with extraction

tables and synthesis notes, have been archived openly on OSF (Zhangguan, 2025).

# Methodology

## *Data Source and Identification*

A three-step approach was used to locate the *Pulse* reports.

1. Content source filter (PMI Learning Library): By selecting *Pulse of the Profession* as the content type (151 entries as of 10 September 2025) and applying an English-language filter, 51 records were identified. These were mainly reports from 2011–2021, supplemented by regional editions and *Pulse In-Depth* briefs.
2. Keyword search (PMI Learning Library): A direct search for “pulse of the profession” produced 536 results. Once the English filter was applied, this reduced to 389. Many of the earlier records (1990–2010) turned out to be unrelated uses of the word “pulse.” The first verifiable *Pulse* report appeared in 2011, consistent with the content-filter results.
3. External verification (PMI Thought Leadership portal): Broader checks confirmed that the first survey was conducted in 2006. However, reports for 2006–2010 and 2022 could not be retrieved despite targeted searches. PMI’s labelling practices added complexity; for example, the “Power Skills” report (November 2022) is framed as part of the flagship series even though it does not carry the standard *Pulse* title.

On this basis, the review treats the annual global reports from 2006–2025 as the intended dataset, while acknowledging that the editions for 2006–2010 and 2022 could not be located. Supplementary products such as regional spotlights and topic-specific briefs were excluded to preserve focus on the main global series.

## Notes on Dating and Terminology

PMI sometimes releases a report late in one calendar year but designates it for the following year. For example, the “Pulse 2023: Power Skills” report appeared in November 2022. For consistency, this review counts that edition as the flagship report for 2023.

## Dataset Overview

- Initial pool: 54 entries (Learning Library + PMI portal)
- Exclusions: 13 duplicate webpage versions of existing PDF reports and one record that was a PMI industry growth forecast rather than part of the Pulse of the Profession series.
- Final dataset: 40 reports (2011–2025)

### Breakdown:

- Annual global *Pulse* reports: 14
- *In-Depth* thematic reports: 23
- Other outputs: 3 (*PMO Frameworks 2013*; *Elevating Success 2017*; *Practitioner's Guide 2017*)

In sum, this review covers 40 *Pulse* reports in total, including 14 annual global editions (2011–2025) and 26 thematic or related outputs. Reports from 2006–2010 and 2022 remain gaps in the dataset.

## Data Extraction

For each report, descriptive metadata were recorded: official title, year, category (annual, in-depth, other), publication month (where available), and source link. For the annual reports (2011–2025), additional text-mining was undertaken in Voyant Tools. Metrics captured included top terms, associations, vocabulary density, readability, and average sentence length. Cirrus (word cloud) and TermsBerry (network map) visualisations were used to surface dominant terminology and thematic linkages, and these outputs informed the initial codebook for subsequent analysis.

## Thematic Coding

Reports were imported into ATLAS.ti for inductive and deductive coding. Codes were

clustered around practices, skills, capabilities, and outcomes. Annual reports were coded line-by-line, whereas the thematic reports were organised into clusters, Agility, Talent, Strategy, Execution, and Technology, based on their framing.

## Interpretation

This review does not attempt to evaluate the methodological rigour of PMI's survey design. Instead, it treats the *Pulse* series as influential grey literature (Paez, 2017). The purpose is to map how PMI's framing has evolved, to highlight insights and recurring themes, to note areas where the series is silent, and to consider what this means for project management research and practice.

# Result

## Voyant Averages (2011–2025)

Across the 14 annual Pulse of the Profession reports (2011–2025), the language shows a consistently formal and professional register. On average, vocabulary density was 0.22, readability scored 15.8, and sentences stretched to an average of 31.6 words. Together, these figures reflect the use of long, complex constructions more typical of executive briefings and policy documents than of general communication.

This linguistic profile underscores the function of the Pulse reports as agenda-setting texts aimed at senior practitioners and decision-makers. Yet it also highlights a translation gap: the way findings are presented may resonate at the strategic level but can be harder to apply directly in day-to-day project practice.

## Annual Global Reports (n = 14)

### Coding Coverage (ATLAS.ti)

Systematic coding revealed consistent emphasis across six categories. Key Statistics and Comparisons accounted for the largest share (91 quotations), followed by Headline Findings (62). By contrast, Bottom Line (10) and Sample Size (17) were the least represented. This pattern highlights PMI's tendency to anchor each report in headline numbers and comparative framing.

	1: PM Pulse 2011	2: 2012 Pulse	3: 2013 Pulse	4: 2014 Pulse	5: 2015 Pulse	6: 2016 Pulse	7: 2017 Pulse	8: 2018 P.M.L.	9: 2019 Pulse	10: 2020 gmi.	11: 2021 P.M.L.	12: 2023 P.M.L.	13: 2024 P.M.L.	14: 2025 Puls.	Totals
bottom line	10	1	2			1		1		1	2	1	1		10
concerns	52	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	4	4	5	4	52
headline fi...	62	3	4	5	5	4	4	3	3	4	3	6	8	4	62
Key Stats a...	91	11	5	8	7	6	8	9	7	2	4	8	4	9	91
positive de...	56	4	4	3	4	5	4	4	5	4	1	4	4	5	56
Sample Size	17	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	17
Totals	23	21	23	21	20	22	22	22	11	14	22	20	25	22	288

Figure 1. Code–Document Table in ATLAS.ti showing the distribution of coded segments across 14 Pulse of the Profession reports (2011–2025). Color intensity reflects the relative number of coded quotations per category.

The dominance of statistics reflects PMI's intention to present the Pulse series as evidence-driven. However, the shifting metrics used across years complicate direct comparison, raising questions about longitudinal consistency.

## Co-occurrence Structure

Analysis of code–code overlaps showed that Headline Findings frequently co-occurred with both Concerning Trends and Positive Developments, with Key Statistics acting as a bridge between them. In contrast, Bottom Line and Sample Size remained largely isolated.

	bottom line 10	concerning... 52	headline fin... 62	Key Stats an... 91	positive dev... 56	Sample Size 17
bottom line 10			2			
concernin... 52			5	3		1
headline fi... 62	2	5		3	4	
Key Stats a... 91		3	3		3	
positive de... 56			4	3		
Sample Size 17		1				

Figure 2. Code–Code co-occurrence matrix.

This rhetorical pattern suggests a deliberate formula: headline numbers are framed as risks, counterbalanced by examples of successful practices, and reinforced by supporting statistics. The cycle allows PMI to both diagnose problems and promote enablers, ensuring that each report conveys urgency while pointing toward solutions.

## Wasted Spend and Budget Loss (2011–2025)

PMI has consistently highlighted the financial cost of poor project performance, though the way this has been measured has changed over time. From 2011 to 2018, reports expressed the loss as dollars wasted per US\$1 billion invested. Between 2019 and 2023, the measure shifted to the percentage of total spend wasted. Most recently, in 2024–2025, the framing moved again to budget loss and adherence rates

Table 1. Evolution of wasted spend reporting.

Period	Metric framing	Directional takeaway	Capability lens
2011 - 2018	\$ wasted / US\$1B	High, slowly improving	Maturity & governance
2019 - 2021	% spend wasted	Mixed, then improving	PMTQ/agility
2023	% spend wasted	Lowest reported	Power skills

2024 - 2025	Budget loss/adherence	Reframed, still capability-linked	Enablers/business acumen
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(Full year-by-year values in Appendix A.)

Despite these shifts, the underlying message remains constant: organisations with stronger capability maturity, whether through governance, agility, power skills, or business acumen, waste less money. This trend reinforces the view of project management approaches not as isolated techniques, but as integrated systems of capability.

## Sample Size and Composition

Survey participation grew substantially over time, from around 1,100 respondents in 2011 to peaks of more than 4,000 by 2018. Later editions broadened the pool to include executives, PMO directors, and subject-matter expert interviews. One notable gap is the 2019 report, which did not disclose its sample size.

*Table 2. Sample evolution and notable changes.*

Phase	Design	Notable shifts
2011 - 2015	Practitioner surveys	Modest but growing counts
2016 - 2018	+ Executives + PMOs	Broader stakeholder inclusion
2020 - 2025	+ SME interviews	Method mix; weighting by region

(Full year-by-year breakdown in Appendix B.)

Broader sampling enhances representativeness, yet it also complicates year-to-year comparison. These shifts underline the need to approach the Pulse series with a critical eye, recognising both its expanding reach and the limits this places on strict longitudinal analysis.

## Bottom Line Statements (2012–2024)

PMI’s “Bottom Line” statements have shifted noticeably over the series. In the early years, they delivered blunt cost warnings, emphasising the financial risks of poor performance. More recent editions, however, frame the bottom line in terms of strategic insight and cultural change.

Table 3. Bottom line evolution.

Early 2010s	Mid 2010s	2020s	Core shift
Cost of failure	Resource and maturity focus	Agility, power skills, fit-for-purpose	From control to value delivery

(Representative verbatim statements in Appendix C.)

This evolution mirrors the wider trajectory of project management itself: moving from a discipline preoccupied with risk avoidance to one increasingly focused on adaptability, value creation, and long-term impact.

## Headline Findings (2011–2025)

Early editions of the Pulse series emphasised high project failure rates and the scale of financial waste. By the middle of the decade, the reports pointed to modest signs of improvement. In the most recent years, however, the framing has pivoted toward people and capability, highlighting agility, power skills, and business acumen as the key levers of success.

Table 4. Selected inflection points.

Year	Inflection	Interpretation
2017	Waste at lowest dollar level	Governance maturity gains
2019	Performance not improving	Tech adoption limits
2023	Waste lowest at 5.2%	Power skills linked to outcomes
2025	Acumen gap highlighted	Next capability frontier

(Full headlines by year in Appendix D.)

Taken together, these shifts trace a broader evolution in the field: from a narrow focus on cost control toward recognising people and organisational culture as the true differentiators of long-term performance.

## Key Statistics and Comparisons

In the early 2010s, comparisons centred on the adoption of specific methods such as

Waterfall, Agile, and PMOs. By the 2020s, the focus had shifted to capability contrasts, agility, power skills, and business acumen, and to contextual factors such as hybrid and remote work. PMI's argument has become increasingly clear: success depends less on choosing a single method and more on building organisational "capability stacks." This perspective is directly relevant to questions of sustainability and scaling in public health programs.

## Positive Developments

Positive narratives also evolved over time. The early emphasis was on standardisation and certification, but later reports highlighted benefits realisation, agility, hybrid working, and power skills. By 2025, business acumen emerged as the defining strength (see Appendix E for year-by-year positive development statements). This trajectory reflects PMI's broader attempt to reframe project management as a discipline centred on people and capability, a framing with clear implications for how public health programs might institutionalise sustainability practices.

## Concerning Trends

Risks identified in the series likewise shifted. The early years stressed structural immaturity and the undervaluation of project management. By the mid-2010s, scope creep and weak knowledge transfer dominated. More recent editions pointed to capability gaps, undervaluing power skills, inequities in remote work, and shortages of business acumen (See Appendix F for year-by-year concerning trend highlights). These recurring challenges show that, even as practices evolve, organisations continue to underinvest in the enablers that drive long-term impact. The parallel for public health systems is cautionary: sustainability requires not only new methods, but ongoing investment in the capabilities that make them work.

## In-Depth Thematic Reports (n = 23)

To capture thematic breadth, 23 reports published between 2012 and 2020 were grouped into five categories (see Appendix G for full list of titles and focus areas):

- **Agility & Ways of Working.** High-agility organisations consistently outperformed peers

across goals, budgets, and ROI, with agility described both as a delivery method and as a cultural competence.

- Talent, Teams & Communication. Alignment of talent, quality of communication, and diversity were directly linked to higher performance, though persistent leadership gaps were evident.
- Strategy, Governance & Benefits. Portfolio maturity, active sponsor engagement, and benefits realisation capability emerged as decisive drivers of success; weak governance continued to waste millions.
- Execution Fundamentals & Complexity. Strong requirements management and effective knowledge transfer boosted outcomes significantly, while poor practices resulted in substantial losses.
- Technology, Innovation & Purpose. Organisations embracing AI and disruptive technologies outperformed laggards when supported by digital skills, cultural readiness, and robust measurement. Social impact also emerged as a new performance priority.

Taken together, these thematic studies reinforce a consistent message: sustainable performance depends less on individual tools and more on integrated capability systems.

This conclusion aligns directly with the focus of this thesis, understanding how such systems can support the scaling and sustainability of public health interventions.

## Discussion

### Critical Reflection

A central finding of this review is that PMI's Pulse of the Profession reports are not neutral accounts of project performance, but agenda-setting instruments that frame practice through shifting vocabularies. Across all editions, the message remains consistent: poor project management wastes substantial investment. Yet the categories used to illustrate this have changed with the themes of the day, from "high and low performers" (2011–2018), to "PMTQ innovators and laggards" (2019), to "gymnastic vs. traditional enterprises" (2021), and most recently to power skills, enablers, and budget adherence. These evolving labels keep PMI's narrative contemporarily relevant but at the cost of longitudinal comparability. In addition, because respondents evaluate their own organisations, the data carry an inherent risk of response bias, shaped by perceived industry expectations.

For these reasons, the Pulse reports should not be treated as definitive empirical evidence. Their greater value lies in acting as a directional barometer of industry priorities. They reveal how project management is positioned, promoted, and continually redefined, insights that are central to my PhD research. This interpretation resonates with established critiques in the project management literature, which view professional bodies as active producers of knowledge categories that shape both practice and scholarship (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2007; Winter et al., 2006; Bredillet, 2010).

The parallels with public health are striking. Just as PMI frames practice through evolving categories, organisations such as the World Health Organization (2016, 2021) and the Australian Government (2021) advance shifting agendas, emphasising health systems and integration in one period, people-centred care in another, and more recently sustainability and equity. In both domains, these flagship documents function less as neutral datasets and more as advocacy tools. They also risk generating a feedback loop: themes emphasised in official reports become absorbed by practitioners, only to resurface in future strategies and surveys.

## Voyant Analysis

The Voyant analysis reinforces the view of the Pulse of the Profession reports as expert-oriented knowledge products. Their linguistic profile, high lexical density, complex readability scores, and long sentence structures, reflects PMI's dual purpose of advocacy and professionalisation: to influence senior decision-makers while signalling intellectual authority (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2007). Yet this very complexity can act as a barrier for wider uptake among generalist audiences, a gap PMI has attempted to address through simplified outputs such as the 2017 Elevating Success infographic, which distilled findings into more accessible visual formats.

Lexical trends show both continuity and change. Core terms like "project" and "management" remain constant across the series, underscoring the reports' anchoring in professional identity. At the same time, new terms, AI, innovation, diversity, impact, emerged in later editions, reflecting PMI's responsiveness to technological disruption and broader societal expectations. This discursive evolution parallels the thematic broadening observed in the report clusters: from an initial focus on execution and governance to a wider agenda encompassing agility, people, and purpose.

The duality of audience is also evident. The flagship reports are clearly written for executives and policymakers, whereas derivative products translate key messages for practitioner-level use. This illustrates a deliberate communication strategy: tailoring the same findings for different layers of the profession. For my thesis, this reinforces the importance of examining not only what practices are adopted but also how they are framed and communicated to stakeholders, an issue central to sustaining and scaling public health programs.

These findings echo Bredillet's (2010) argument that project management discourse is plural, fluid, and continually reframed. New vocabularies, such as "power skills" or "PMTQ", are embedded in Pulse narratives and, through repetition, become institutionalised in both practice and scholarship.

The parallel with public health is instructive. Just as Pulse reports shifted from an emphasis on execution and governance toward agility and purpose, public health strategy documents

have moved from infrastructure and systems language to vocabularies of integration, equity, and sustainability (WHO, 2016, 2021). In both domains, language functions not only as a mirror of changing priorities but also as a driver of them, reinforcing some agendas while marginalising others.

## Annual Reports (2011–2025)

The longitudinal analysis of the Pulse of the Profession reports reveals a pattern of both continuity and inconsistency. The continuity lies in the central message: poor project performance wastes money, and organisational maturity helps reduce that waste. The inconsistency emerges in the shifting ways this message is measured. Between 2011 and 2018, wasted spend was expressed as dollars lost per US\$1 billion invested, allowing straightforward year-on-year comparison. From 2019 onwards, however, the framing changed to reinforce annual themes, technology (PMTQ), agility (“gymnastic enterprises”), power skills, enablers, or business acumen.

This thematic tailoring strengthens PMI’s advocacy role but undermines longitudinal comparability. A stable baseline indicator, such as “percentage of investment wasted globally”, would have enabled clearer tracking of progress over time. Instead, each report functions as a narrative vehicle, selecting whichever measure best amplifies the year’s headline message.

Sample size trends add another layer to this story. Participation grew from around 1,000 respondents in 2011–2012 to more than 4,000 by 2018, later supplemented with executives, PMO leaders, and SME interviews. This expansion reflects PMI’s effort to broaden legitimacy by incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives. Yet the unexplained omission of sample size in the 2019 report underscores persistent concerns about inconsistent transparency.

The trajectory of headline findings traces a clear arc. Early reports (2011–2016) stressed cost and failure; mid-decade surveys (2017–2019) pointed to modest improvement but continuing stagnation; more recent editions (2020–2025) reframed performance around capability gaps, agility, power skills, and business acumen, as the key differentiators. Wasted

spend figures did decline (from over US\$100M per US\$1B to just 5% in 2023), but PMI increasingly shifted attention from technical efficiency to organisational and human capabilities. This shift aligns with a broader redefinition of project management itself: from a control mechanism to a strategic capability (Morris, 2013).

The evolution of these metrics highlights the difficulty of balancing advocacy and comparability. As in public health, where indicators have moved from mortality and morbidity to sustainability and equity (Scheirer & Dearing, 2011), project management grapples with the tension between maintaining consistent baselines and adapting measures to reflect shifting strategic priorities.

Taken together, the annual reports trace the profession's changing narrative, from efficiency and control toward adaptability and people-centred capabilities. For public health, the lesson is clear: sustainability depends not only on technical methods, but on the organisational cultures and human capacities that enable long-term impact.

## Thematic Reports (2012–2020)

Clustering the 23 thematic reports reveals a clear trajectory:

- Early clusters, Strategy, Governance & Benefits and Execution Fundamentals & Complexity, centred on structures and processes. They emphasised portfolio management, sponsorship, requirements, and knowledge transfer, echoing traditional project management concerns with control and efficiency.
- By the mid-2010s, the focus had shifted. Clusters on Agility & Ways of Working and Talent, Teams & Communication highlighted people and adaptability. Agility, collaboration, communication, and diversity were framed as the new competitive differentiators, marking a pivot from structure to culture.
- In the later years, the Technology, Innovation & Purpose cluster extended the discourse further, situating project management within questions of purpose and societal value. Reports linked AI adoption, digital innovation, and social impact to the profession's evolving mandate.

This progression mirrors wider debates in management: from efficiency and control to people and culture, and ultimately to purpose and stakeholder value. It also resonates with contemporary discussions of stakeholder capitalism and the social responsibilities of organisations.

Viewed together, the clusters trace a field-wide arc, from tools and structures, through people and culture, toward purpose and impact. The parallel with public health is instructive. Just as PMI's discourse has shifted from delivery to value creation, public health frameworks have moved from program implementation to questions of sustainability and scalability (WHO, 2021; Australian Government, 2021).

## Special Outputs (2013–2017)

The three special outputs illustrate PMI's deliberate strategy to tailor Pulse findings for different audiences. The PMO Frameworks report (2013) reinforced the narrative of governance and maturity aimed at executives and senior managers. The Pulse at Work Practitioner's Guide (2017) translated survey insights into actionable guidance for day-to-day practitioners. Meanwhile, the Elevating Success infographic (2017) distilled headline statistics into simplified visuals designed for quick uptake by executive stakeholders.

Together, these products demonstrate PMI's dual-track communication strategy: technical and data-heavy reports to signal authority at senior levels, alongside more accessible tools to engage practitioners and broader stakeholders. This mirrors practices in public health, where the same evidence is often translated into different forms, policy briefs for decision-makers, infographics for communities, and guidelines for frontline practitioners. In both domains, tailoring communication to audience needs is central to sustaining engagement and ensuring that evidence informs practice.

## Defining Project Management Approaches

Across the fifteen years of reports, five broad clusters of practice emerge: structural and governance, process, adaptive, people-centred, and purpose-driven approaches. These categories are not discrete but deeply interdependent. Agility depends on sound

governance; benefits realisation is inseparable from effective communication; and innovation takes root only when technology and culture reinforce one another.

This synthesis echoes Winter et al.'s (2006) call to move “beyond the iron triangle” toward more pluralistic understandings of project success. By treating approaches as integrated constellations of practice rather than discrete methods, the review proposes a practice-grounded typology that can be examined empirically. The parallels with public health are clear: governance, systems, community engagement, and sustainability interact in similar ways to determine long-term outcomes (WHO, 2016; Scheirer & Dearing, 2011).

For my PhD, this typology offers a pragmatic framework. It provides a structured basis for the forthcoming case studies to explore how public health programs adopt, adapt, and combine project management practices to sustain and scale interventions. In this way, the synthesis not only interprets PMI's discourse but also sets the stage for empirical inquiry into the dynamics of sustainability in public health.

## Synthesis and Implications

Taken together, the annual reports, thematic studies, and special outputs form a layered discourse. The annual reports set the global agenda; the thematic studies drilled into specific enablers and barriers; and the special outputs translated survey findings into practitioner-friendly formats. This triangulation underscores PMI's dual role as both barometer and advocate, simultaneously diagnosing persistent gaps while promoting preferred solutions.

For practice, the message is consistent: immature project management wastes resources, while governance, talent, agility, and enabling structures enhance performance. For research, the Pulse series holds value less as a stable benchmark than as a directional barometer. Its shifting categories and advocacy-driven framing mean that findings must be triangulated with independent evidence to ensure validity.

The parallel lesson for public health is clear. Just as project management maturity is framed as enabling sustainability, health strategies increasingly link maturity to scalability, equity, and system integration (WHO, 2021; Australian Government, 2021). In both domains, the

challenge is to move beyond advocacy narratives and toward evidence that can be systematically tested, compared, and validated.

In sum, the Pulse of the Profession series is both indispensable and insufficient. It offers a uniquely broad, practitioner-proximal vantage point, but one that requires critical interpretation in applied contexts such as public health. By distilling a portable typology of approaches and exposing where comparability falters, this review contributes both a conceptual map and a methodological caution, setting the foundation for the next phase of this thesis.

## Conclusion

This review of PMI's Pulse of the Profession series demonstrates both the enduring influence and the inherent limitations of these industry reports. Across fifteen years of annual surveys, supplemented by thematic studies and practitioner-oriented outputs, the core message has remained steady: poor project management wastes resources, while mature practices generate measurable business and societal value. Yet the framing of this message has shifted over time: from cost-focused contrasts between high and low performers, to capability-driven narratives around agility, digital fluency, power skills, and business acumen. These shifts underscore PMI's dual role as professional association and advocacy body, deliberately shaping discourse to align with emerging priorities.

The analysis confirms that the series functions less as a neutral dataset and more as a barometer of practitioner sentiment and industry focus. Its absence of a stable benchmark for wasted spend, its evolving terminology, and its selective transparency limit comparability and constrain its use as definitive empirical evidence. It is best understood as a directional signal, highlighting where industry attention is concentrated and where capability gaps are perceived.

By triangulating annual reports, thematic clusters, and special outputs, this review makes two contributions. First, it distils a practice-grounded typology of project management approaches, governance, process, adaptive, people-centred, and purpose-driven, that reflects the applied diversity emphasised across the series. Second, it shows how project management has been progressively reframed: from a technical discipline concerned with control and efficiency to a more human-centred and purpose-driven practice oriented toward agility, leadership, innovation, and societal impact.

For practitioners, the findings reinforce a consistent lesson: investments in governance, agility, and people skills reduce risk and improve outcomes, even as digital transformation and social responsibility reshape expectations. For researchers, the series offers opportunities, large-scale global data and access to practitioner perspectives, while also exposing gaps that demand independent validation and more robust longitudinal analysis.

For my PhD, the Pulse series has provided a critical mapping exercise: a way to classify and define project management approaches that will inform the design and interpretation of forthcoming qualitative case studies on the sustainability and scalability of public health programs.

In sum, the Pulse of the Profession series is both indispensable and insufficient. It charts how project management has been defined, advocated, and practiced across two decades, but its insights require careful, context-sensitive interpretation and validation. By analysing this body of work, the review clarifies what the profession has chosen to emphasise, while also establishing a conceptual and empirical scaffold for advancing more rigorous scholarship on project management approaches in practice.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Wasted Spend / Budget Loss Data (2011–2025)

Full year-by-year breakdown of metrics (US\$ wasted per US\$1B, % spend wasted, budget loss, adherence rates).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Metric Reported</b>	<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>High Performers / Top Quartile</b>	<b>Low Performers / Bottom Quartile</b>	<b>Alternative Categories</b>
<b>2011</b>	\$ wasted per \$1B	–	\$40M wasted	\$350M wasted	High vs. Low performers
<b>2012</b>	\$ wasted per \$1B	\$120M wasted	–	–	–
<b>2013</b>	\$ wasted per \$1B	–	\$20M wasted	\$280M wasted	High vs. Low performers
<b>2014</b>	\$ wasted per \$1B	\$109M wasted	\$20M wasted	\$230M wasted	High vs. Low performers
<b>2015</b>	\$ wasted per \$1B	\$109M wasted	–	–	High performers 13× less waste
<b>2016</b>	\$ wasted per \$1B	\$122M wasted	–	–	–
<b>2017</b>	\$ wasted per \$1B	\$97M wasted	–	–	–
<b>2018</b>	% wasted (of spend)	9.9% (~\$99M)	1.4% wasted	29.1% wasted	High vs. Low performers
<b>2019</b>	% wasted (of spend)	12% wasted	8.5% wasted	16.3% wasted	PMTQ Innovators vs. Laggards
<b>2020</b>	% wasted	11.4%	–	–	–

	(of spend)	wasted			
<b>2021</b>	% wasted (of spend)	9.4% wasted	9% wasted	10.5% wasted	Gymnastic vs. Traditional enterprises
<b>2023</b>	% wasted (of spend)	5.2% wasted	4.8% wasted	8.8% wasted	High vs. Low priority on power skills
<b>2024</b>	% budget lost (failed projects)	25.7% lost	20% lost	37% lost	Budget loss by quartile; 31% (no enablers) vs. 25% (3+ enablers)
<b>2025</b>	Budget adherence	–	73% adherence	68% adherence	High vs. Low business acumen

## Appendix B. Sample Size and Composition (2011–2025)

Detailed participant counts by role (practitioners, executives, PMO directors, SMEs) and by region where available.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>
<b>2011</b>	1,100 PMI members and credential holders.
<b>2012</b>	1,000+ professionals across industries, roles, and experience levels.
<b>2013</b>	~800 project managers across global regions.
<b>2014</b>	2,500+ project management leaders and practitioners.
<b>2015</b>	2,800+ leaders and practitioners worldwide.
<b>2016</b>	2,428 practitioners, 192 executives, 282 PMO directors; plus 8 corporate leaders and 10 PMO directors interviewed.
<b>2017</b>	3,234 professionals, 200 executives, 510 PMO directors; plus 10 corporate leaders and 7 PMO directors interviewed.
<b>2018</b>	4,455 practitioners, 447 executives, 800 PMO directors across industries

	and regions.
<b>2019</b>	Sample size <b>not disclosed</b> .
<b>2020</b>	3,060 professionals, 358 executives, 554 PMO directors; global coverage including ASEAN, China, India, and Africa.
<b>2021</b>	3,950 project professionals surveyed; supplemented with interviews.
<b>2023</b>	3,492 professionals and 538 project leaders.
<b>2024</b>	2,246 professionals, 342 project leaders; plus 15 expert interviews.
<b>2025</b>	2,841 professionals (2,254 PMs, 587 leaders); weighted by region; plus 25 SME interviews.

## Appendix C. Bottom Line Statements (2012–2024)

Verbatim “Bottom Line” messages from each report, showing narrative evolution from cost warnings to cultural/strategic insights.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b>2012</b>	Failure is expensive, when projects fail, about one-third of the budget is lost, with ~\$120K at risk per \$1M invested .
<b>2013</b>	The financial impact is stark, high performers risk 14× fewer dollars than low performers, and failed strategic initiatives hit the organizational bottom line directly .
<b>2016</b>	Waste escalated, \$122M wasted per \$1B invested, a 12% increase over the previous year .
<b>2018</b>	The narrative shifts, bottom line framed in the context of a “world of constant disruptions” .
<b>2020</b>	The report tagline itself, “Ahead of the Curve: Forging a Future Focused Culture”, serves as the bottom line, signaling culture and foresight as critical .
<b>2021</b>	A pandemic-era message, despite crises, organizations deliver “remarkable change” through resilience, flexibility, and gymnastic enterprise .
<b>2023</b>	The focus turns to power skills, communication, collaboration, and strategic

	thinking become the edge in delivering value .
<b>2024</b>	The bottom line emphasizes fit-for-purpose approaches, aligning methods with organizational priorities (e.g., risk mitigation, compliance, speed to market) .

## Appendix D. Headline Findings (2011–2025)

Year-by-year summary of headline statistics, success rates, failure rates, and thematic emphases.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Highlights</b>
<b>2011</b>	Non-investors put 9× more dollars at risk; \$40K–\$350K wasted per \$1M spent; 92% vs 36% success gap.
<b>2012</b>	64% of projects met goals; 1/3 of budget lost on failure; \$120K wasted per \$1M.
<b>2013</b>	Success declined to 62%; 17% failed outright; \$135M wasted per \$1B; high performers risked \$20M vs \$280M for low.
<b>2014</b>	Only 56% of strategic initiatives met goals; \$109M wasted per \$1B; 89% vs 36% success gap; agility mattered (69% vs 45%).
<b>2015</b>	\$109M wasted per \$1B; high performers succeeded 90% vs 36% and wasted 13× less.
<b>2016</b>	\$122M wasted per \$1B (12% increase); 62% of projects met goals; 53% on budget, 49% on time.
<b>2017</b>	Waste declined to \$97M per \$1B (20% drop); first year with more projects meeting goals and budgets; strong 28× less waste for mature orgs.
<b>2018</b>	9.9% of every dollar wasted (\$99M per \$1B); \$2T wasted annually; champions wasted only 1.4% vs 29.1% for underperformers.
<b>2019</b>	12% of investment wasted; performance stagnated; innovators wasted 8.5% vs 16.3% for laggards.
<b>2020</b>	11.4% of investment wasted; agility, tech, and skills flagged as top future success drivers.
<b>2021</b>	Waste declined to 9.4%; gymnastic enterprises wasted 9% vs 10.5% for

	traditional enterprises.
<b>2023</b>	Wasted investment fell to 5.2%; orgs prioritizing power skills wasted 4.8% vs 8.8%; 92% agreed power skills improved performance.
<b>2024</b>	Hybrid adoption highlighted; enablers (mentoring, communities of practice) improved performance by 8.3 percentage points.
<b>2025</b>	Only 18% of professionals highly proficient in business acumen; majority moderate (66%).

## Appendix E. Positive Development Statements (2012–2024)

Year-by-year summary of positive developments reported in Pulse of the Profession, highlighting improvements in governance, training, agility, power skills, and business acumen.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Positive Development</b>
<b>2011</b>	PMOs taking on strategic roles; PMBOK-based practices reduced scope creep; PMP credential holders delivered better on-time, on-budget projects.
<b>2012</b>	Growing focus on benefits realization as a success metric; increased use of agile/iterative approaches.
<b>2013</b>	76% reported stronger alignment of projects to organizational strategy; enterprise PMOs emphasized training and portfolio management.
<b>2014</b>	High performers achieved twice as many successful strategic initiatives; PMOs shifted to strategic roles; benefits realization maturity improved.
<b>2015</b>	Agile/iterative use grew to 38% (up 8 points since 2013).
<b>2016</b>	Investment in training, career paths, and knowledge transfer led to significantly better outcomes; strategy-aligned EPMOs had 27% more success and 42% less scope creep.
<b>2017</b>	Waste declined 20% (to \$97M per \$1B); 31% reported high benefits realization

	maturity; champions prioritized PMI Talent Triangle skills.
<b>2018</b>	Champions heavily invested in technical (81%), leadership (79%), and strategic skills (70%); 80% saw soft skills as increasingly important.
<b>2019</b>	PMTQ (Technology Quotient) introduced; innovators wasted 8.5% vs 16.3% for laggards; improved outcomes tied to digital fluency.
<b>2020</b>	70% of organizations prioritized a culture centered on customer value.
<b>2021</b>	Gymnastic enterprises empowered changemakers via diverse skills, DEI, and innovation cultures.
<b>2023</b>	Power skills prioritized → higher maturity, less scope creep, stronger benefits realization.
<b>2024</b>	Hybrid/fit-for-purpose approaches rose from 20% (2020) to 31% (2023); PMOs enabled professionals via mentoring and CoPs.
<b>2025</b>	High business acumen professionals outperformed peers across performance metrics; expanded success measures to include ESG, culture, and satisfaction.

## Appendix F. Concerning Trend Highlights (2011–2025)

Year-by-year summary of positive developments reported in Pulse of the Profession, highlighting improvements in governance, training, agility, power skills, and business acumen.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Highlights</b>
<b>2011</b>	45% of organizations did not fully understand the value of project management; only 19% rated themselves as high maturity.
<b>2012</b>	Economic austerity cut back talent development; 40% canceled/delayed projects or training; project failures linked to shifting priorities.
<b>2013</b>	Fewer than two-thirds of projects met goals; training declined; only 6% had PM at the C-level; cancellations increased.
<b>2014</b>	44% of strategic initiatives failed; 46% of organizations did not value PM;

	change management use declined; outsourcing increased.
<b>2015</b>	Only 14% effective in knowledge transfer; success rates flat; risk management declined.
<b>2016</b>	Declining outcomes: fewer projects strategic, <50% with knowledge transfer; only 36% with high PM maturity.
<b>2017</b>	28% of strategic initiatives failed outright.
<b>2018</b>	52% of projects experienced scope creep (up from 43% five years earlier); outsourcing high (68%).
<b>2019</b>	80% of orgs tried disruptive tech, but only 25% achieved tangible benefits; digital fluency gaps and reskilling needs.
<b>2020</b>	11.4% of investment wasted; training and career path availability limited; orgs struggled to embed change into culture.
<b>2021</b>	Government lagged behind IT/finance; low diversity at the top (44%); rigid structures constrained change.
<b>2023</b>	Over-investment in technical skills vs. underinvestment in power skills; lack of perceived value in developing them.
<b>2024</b>	Disconnects in remote work policies; PMs required in-person more often than leaders, causing fairness concerns.
<b>2025</b>	Only 18% highly proficient in business acumen; younger professionals least supported; disconnect between leaders and early-career staff.

## Appendix G. In-Depth Thematic Reports (2012–2020)

Catalogue of 23 thematic reports published under the Pulse of the Profession banner, grouped into five clusters (Agility & Ways of Working, Talent, Teams & Communication, Strategy, Governance & Benefits, Execution Fundamentals & Complexity, and Technology, Innovation & Purpose).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Cluster</b>
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<b>2012</b>	Portfolio Management: Results of a Joint Survey by PMI and INCOSE	Portfolio practices	Strategy, Governance & Benefits
<b>2012</b>	Organizational Agility	Agility	Agility & Ways of Working
<b>Mar 2013</b>	The Competitive Advantage of Effective Talent Management	Talent	Talent, Teams & Communication
<b>May 2013</b>	The Essential Role of Communications	Communication	Talent, Teams & Communication
<b>Sep 2013</b>	Navigating Complexity	Complexity	Execution Fundamentals & Complexity
<b>Nov 2013</b>	The Impact of PMOs on Strategy Implementation	PMOs & strategy	Strategy, Governance & Benefits
<b>Mar 2014</b>	Enabling Organizational Change Through Strategic Initiatives	Change management	Strategy, Governance & Benefits
<b>Aug 2014</b>	Requirements Management: Core Competency for Project and Program Success	Requirements	Execution Fundamentals & Complexity
<b>Oct 2014</b>	Executive Sponsor Engagement: Top Driver of Project and Program Success	Sponsorship	Strategy, Governance & Benefits
<b>Mar 2015</b>	Capturing the Value of Project Management Through Knowledge Transfer	Knowledge transfer	Execution Fundamentals & Complexity
<b>Aug 2015</b>	Capturing the Value of Project Management Through Decision Making	Decision-making	Strategy, Governance &

			Benefits
<b>Oct 2015</b>	Capturing the Value of Project Management Through Organizational Agility	Agility	Agility & Ways of Working
<b>Mar 2016</b>	The Strategic Impact of Projects: Identify benefits to drive business results	Benefits realization	Strategy, Governance & Benefits
<b>Sep 2017</b>	Achieving Greater Agility: The people and process drivers that accelerate results	Agility	Agility & Ways of Working
<b>Sep 2017</b>	The Drivers of Agility: Engaging people and building processes to accelerate results	Agility	Agility & Ways of Working
<b>May 2018</b>	Next Practices: Maximizing the Benefits of Disruptive Technologies on Projects	Disruptive tech	Technology, Innovation & Purpose
<b>Sep 2018</b>	The Project Manager of the Future: Developing digital-age project management skills	Digital skills	Technology, Innovation & Purpose
<b>Jun 2019</b>	AI Innovators: Cracking the Code on Project Performance	AI	Technology, Innovation & Purpose
<b>Sep 2019</b>	AI @ Work: New Projects, New Thinking	AI	Technology, Innovation & Purpose
<b>Mar 2020</b>	Tomorrow's Teams Today	Future teams	Talent, Teams & Communication
<b>Jun 2020</b>	A Case for Diversity	Diversity & inclusion	Talent, Teams & Communication

<b>Aug 2020</b>	The Innovation Imperative	Innovation	Technology, Innovation & Purpose
<b>Nov 2020</b>	Why Social Impact Matters	Social impact	Technology, Innovation & Purpose