Designed to Deliver

How Relationship Management Drives Infrastructure Projects

RESEARCH FROM PMI, MIGSO-PCUBED AND UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

Infrastructure projects cannot afford to leave relationships to chance.

Large-scale infrastructure projects are delivered through a dense network of contractors, suppliers, and public bodies whose relationships now extend across organizational, cultural, and national borders. Yet while cost, schedule and technical risk are governed rigorously, the relationships connecting these organizations are often left unmanaged.

This research reveals how decisive these business relationships are and how managing them well is one of the key factors in determining project success.

What the data shows

$1.6tn potential annual value from closing construction's productivity gap

There is a generational wave of investment in global infrastructure projects, but construction productivity lags behind most industries (Source: McKinsey).

But increasing project complexity is standing in the way

81% of project professionals say projects have become more complex in recent years. (Source: PMI Pulse of the Profession 2026)

The central finding and how we got there

Collaboration in major infrastructure projects is being managed as an informal, unquantified variable; while cost, schedule, and technical risk are governed with rigor. This asymmetry is a governance failure that is costing projects billions.

High-performing projects don't leave their relationships to chance. They design relationships deliberately and continuously nurture them rather than allow them to form by default. Projects that get relationships right are better able to navigate complexity and achieve better outcomes for stakeholders.

This report sets out five evidence-based recommendations to help project professionals and leaders design interorganizational relationships that drive project success. Each is grounded in evidence from 60 in-depth interviews with senior infrastructure leaders across United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany and Australia, and validated through academic research with University College London.

Five actions for infrastructure leaders

- Design relationship model with purpose
- Align the commercial model to deliver the intended relationship
- Make relationship vision part of delivery assurance
- Treat relational risk as key delivery risk
- Invest in relational capability across the delivery ecosystem

Relationships are a delivery variable. Projects that deliberately design, align and govern their critical relationships benefit from faster decisions, earlier problem identification, fewer disputes, greater resilience, stronger outcomes.

Explore the complete report, framework, and infrastructure case studies.
Read the full report on PMI.org