Project Management in the 21st Century: Governance, Technology and Sustainability

A report on the 2nd International Congress on Engineering and Project Management hosted by Nebrija University, Madrid, Spain[1]

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The growing complexity of organizational environments is creating new demands for project management. These challenges were at the centre of the 2nd International Congress on Engineering and Project Management (Congreso Internacional de Ingeniería y Gestión de Proyectos), held at Nebrija University (www.nebrija.com) in Madrid on 29–30 September 2026. The gathering welcomed academic researchers, industry professionals, and students. Discussions addressed both current challenges while also considering new possibilities within the project management field. The Congress followed its first edition in 2025. It continued to promote closer links between academic research findings and their application in the workplace. The event also created a forum for sharing knowledge, experiences and new perspectives.

Three areas stood out in the program: corporate governance, technology and artificial intelligence, and sustainability. Participation was organized through a hybrid format. The first day took place on the Madrid-Princesa Campus, with online access also available. The second day took place virtually. Researchers and professionals from different geographical locations were therefore able to participate, reinforcing the international dimension of the Congress.

Scope, time and cost still provide an important basis for project management, but these measures alone no longer capture the challenges surrounding contemporary projects. The discussions at the Congress made this broader perspective particularly clear. Project professionals are increasingly required to address new technologies, sustainability requirements and changing stakeholder expectations. Governance is also becoming more complex as organizations adapt their structures and decision-making processes. These issues appeared throughout the two-day program.

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Presentations explored how new technologies are affecting project planning and decision-making. Other discussions examined changing governance models. Sustainability was examined by examining how ways projects are conceived, selected and managed. The Congress thus moved beyond a field defined only by its methods. Rather, project management was described as an organizational capability with a broader strategic role, particularly in supporting transformation and creating sustainable value.

Artificial intelligence was only one element of the broader technological transformation discussed at the Congress. The presentations addressed, in fact, various digital tools and how they influence project management. AI supported tools were considered for risk analysis, decision-making, project governance, communication and organizational learning. Their adoption, however, was discussed while stressing the importance of keeping these tools consistent with project objectives and organizational needs. Other contributions examined BIM implementation, data traceability and digital quality management. New approaches to increasingly complex technical projects also formed another subject explored during the event. Together, these perspectives showed that digitalization is changing more than the technological resources available to project managers. Digitalization is also changing the abilities and professional knowledge needed by current practitioners and future entrants to the field.

Maintaining strong alignment between project activities and organizational goals becomes more challenging when their structures and stakeholders grow more complex. This makes organizational maturity a key consideration in effective project governance. The Congress addressed this issue through discussions on maturity models, the role of PMOs and organizational decision-making. Some contributions also examined governance approaches supported by technology. These perspectives pointed to a common challenge: projects need organizational structures capable of supporting coordination and strategic alignment. The discussion then moved beyond structures and processes. The discussions also highlighted how leadership and effective communication become essential when projects involve professionals from different areas of expertise and groups of stakeholders. Under these settings, technical expertise cannot address every demand. Collaboration, strong communication and leadership are just as essential. Achieving project goals relies on the combined contribution of technical expertise, organizational capabilities and human skills.

The transition toward more sustainable models of development also changes what projects are required to achieve. The Congress explored this third major area through contributions on the energy transition, sustainable infrastructure, along with alternative approaches to producing and using energy. These discussions showed how projects can provide a practical means of translating broader sustainability objectives into organizational and societal initiatives. Doing so requires e environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations to inform project decisions from the outset. They cannot be treated as an external concern added once the main project choices have already been made. Sustainability therefore adds another dimension to the work for project managers, who must increasingly integrate strategic objectives, technological developments and sustainability within complex transformation processes.

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One of the main objectives of the International Congress on Engineering and Project Management aims to create a space for collaboration point between academic research and professional practice, bringing together researchers, project professionals, doctoral candidates and students to exchange theoretical perspectives and experiences from real organizational contexts. The diversity of contributions, from construction and energy to digital transformation, governance, communication and leadership, reflected the increasingly multidisciplinary nature of contemporary project management while also encouraging professional connections and future collaboration. The knowledge exchange initiated during the Congress will be extended through the forthcoming edited volume, *Project Management in 21st Century Organizations: Governance, Technology and Sustainable Development* (*Gestión de Proyectos en Organizaciones del Siglo XXI: Gobernanza, Tecnología y Desarrollo Sostenible*), which will further explore a number of topics explored at the event and bring together academic and professional perspectives.

Overall, the second edition highlighted governance, technological transformation and sustainability as key areas shaping the changing direction of the project management field, while also reinforcing the continuing importance of its human and organizational dimensions, particularly leadership, communication and collaboration. Nebrija University wishes to express its appreciation to all keynote speakers, presenters, researchers, professionals, students and participants whose participation contributed to the success of the 2026 Congress. Building on the experience of the first two editions, preparations will now begin for the 3rd International Congress on Engineering and Project Management in 2027, with the aim of further building a global network dedicated to advancing research, professional practice and knowledge in project management.

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Elena Bulmer holds a BSc (Hons) in Biology from the University of Sussex (UK) and two PhDs, one from the Complutense University of Madrid and another in Sustainability and Project Management from Rey Juan Carlos University, focusing on the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development. She is an Associate Professor whose research focuses on environmental and social sustainability, particularly the integration of social responsibility, governance, and stakeholder engagement into project management, promoting more equitable and sustainable models aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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