



The Unofficial Project Manager:

A Guide for Leaders

FranklinCovey

Today's leaders have an astonishing amount of responsibility on their plates. Chances are, learning more about project management isn't at the top of most leaders' long to-do lists—or on their list at all. But great project management is a key component of success in any organization, and the ever-changing nature of modern business means that these skills are often needed at a moment's notice. Because everyone manages projects at some point, even team members without an official project management role need to know how to do it well.

HR and L&D teams must prepare everyone in their organization to play the role of unofficial project manager. And all leaders, no matter their organization's focus or industry, are responsible for executing projects. Leaders are responsible for guiding projects—whether they manage official project managers, unofficial project managers, or even manage projects themselves.

Seasoned leaders can use their far-reaching strategic vision to mobilize resources and deliver projects that move mission-critical programs forward. But harnessing the power to consistently deliver high-value projects on time and within budget can be a real challenge, even for the most experienced leaders. The good news is that understanding the basics of project management roles and processes can help leaders successfully guide projects and provide the right kind of support to their teams.

This guide provides an overview of project management best practices so that leaders can better understand workflows and guide project outcomes at a high level. This informed perspective will help leaders see where they can guide project teams toward success. When leaders ensure projects are managed well, they can skillfully drive collective action around the activities and initiatives with the most organizational impact.

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The Recipe for Project Success: Value + People + Process

Project management isn't just about workflows and deadlines. To help projects run smoothly, leaders first need to understand the factors that contribute to a successful project. The first factor is value—value guides which projects get resourced and what outcomes are tied to their completion. Helping people work together effectively on project teams is the second factor in the success equation. Sound, functional processes aligned to business outcomes is the third factor. Skillfully activating this combination—**Value + People + Process**—is the foundation for every project's success.

A Proposition of Value

Kory Kogon, VP of Content Development at FranklinCovey and co-author of *Project Management for the Unofficial Project Manager*, underscores why leaders need to consider value first: "Overall value is the major principle. Whatever it is that you're creating, you should be asking yourself—does it provide value to the client and to our company? And if it doesn't, stop what you're doing and change direction."

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—Kory Kogon, VP of Content Development, FranklinCovey and co-author of *Project Management for the Unofficial Project Manager*





A focus on value is the necessary beginning of the conversation. A clear, concise articulation of the benefit of your project—whether it supports customers, internal team members, or a broader company initiative—establishes a compelling, business-driven reason for doing the work and lays the energetic groundwork for supporting project infrastructure. Getting clear on the benefit you're delivering will ensure that every project yields value for your organization. Because leaders have a broader view of organizational priorities, they're often best positioned to articulate the value of a project and help project teams tie their efforts toward high-priority goals.

Kogon emphasizes an iterative, agile project management approach informed by updates and inputs along the way to help teams stay on track throughout a project's life cycle. "Instead of just getting started and hoping you'll have value at the end, make sure you're getting to value all along the way, so there are no surprises when your project ends," she says.

The Power of *People*

Healthy collaboration, even when people aren't part of the same team, is a vital piece of project management. The success of projects hinges not only on the talent of each team member but on their ability to work well together to achieve project goals. Leaders can help facilitate collaboration and buy-in across teams to spur collective action and make sure everyone contributes their best work to a project.

Process as an Essential Element

Sound processes help teams successfully execute high-value projects on time and within budget. Skillful process architecture has a huge impact on the quality, sustainability, and measurability of the results each project delivers. Having a repeatable, tested project management process is what helps teams effectively deliver consistent results and achieve target outcomes.

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The Project Management Framework: A Bird's-eye View

Most leaders don't need to become project management experts to succeed in their roles, but understanding the finer points of the project management process provides a shared framework of reference for leaders and their teams. This shared understanding enables leaders to guide frontline workers at the right times and places in support of the operational and strategic project elements. This is a vital perspective, according to Kogon. "If all leaders understood the principles of project management, our project managers would be able to do a much better job."

"When we're talking about 'unofficial' project managers," Kogon says of leaders with a varied range of roles, "project management is a shared responsibility. An understanding of project management principles is helpful to the success of an organization because it ensures that everybody is speaking the same language, understanding what it really takes to scope a project, and knowing what questions should be asked. It gets everyone on the same page in regards to what they mean by 'value.'"





Foundational Stages of Project Management

While each project is unique, they all follow a similar set of steps. Here are the foundational stages of project management:

- Scope
- Plan
- Engage
- Track and Adapt
- Close

Getting well-acquainted with each of these stages and their best practices will prepare leaders to steer projects confidently and provide support to the unofficial project managers on their teams.

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Guiding and Supporting Projects as a Leader

Often, a leader's most important role in a project is to serve as coach and cheerleader. With a clearer picture of how healthy projects function, leaders are better equipped to direct day-to-day operations toward a target destination. People and processes at every phase of a project benefit from informed guidance—to keep a project on a steady track or to help it course-correct if outcomes aren't as expected or new information arises.

Regardless of a project's purpose, effective leaders have ample opportunity to step in and support the people managing and executing the work—whether those people are on their direct team or not. Here are a few ways leaders can help project teams succeed throughout the process.





Be a Conduit of Communication

The variety of perspectives and experiences in a high-performing team makes it powerful. This richness also ensures there will be inevitable communication misses. Even the most talented teams will misunderstand or make assumptions during a project. Keeping an eye on a project as it unfolds to prevent miscommunication between stakeholders and team leads or between team members. Having a policy of over-communication and checking assumptions will keep teams on track and help bridge communication gaps.

Leaders can ensure smooth and seamless collaboration within and across teams by creating a supportive, inclusive atmosphere where people feel safe enough to communicate problems when

they arise. In a distributed work environment, it's even more important for team members to have access to technology and frameworks that help them communicate clearly and often with other project team members. Encourage team members to check with clients and stakeholders often to maintain visibility and alignment with project aims, and to adjust with agility to any changing inputs or requirements.

Make sure guiding documents and updates are regularly shared with both project team members and stakeholders to address and resolve any misalignments, and build in the expectation of these bidirectional check-ins through effective channels.

Tie Project Activities Back to Value

As a leader, your role is not only to understand where value fits in the success equation—it's also to communicate the purpose behind the project at every opportunity. Create connections for team members between the work they're doing and the project's value proposition. "Communicate that the project's value is its contribution to the goals

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of your organization,” says Kogon. “Leaders should be proactive in responding to the projects that are going on in the organization and ensuring that those projects align with what’s most valuable to their internal teams and customers.”

Communicating a value-oriented approach empowers team members to understand the meaning behind the project and contribute more creative solutions to problems or roadblocks that arise along the way. This value-focused communication might look like a question during regular team meetings to prompt ideas about whether the work and results are staying on track with the project’s intended purpose. Prompting a personal understanding and ownership of value in this way makes work more personally rewarding, increases investment, and helps team members understand the impact of their contribution.

“Everybody in an organization should understand project management—when you understand the basics, it enables informed problem-solving, and that’s what innovation is all about,” Kogon says.

Protecting Your Project Teams

As a leader who may be in an unofficial project management role or guiding projects at a higher level, providing consistent support to both your teams and potential project managers is key. Protecting both dedicated and unofficial project managers from overwhelm and distractions and demonstrating sane boundaries is a crucial leadership skill. “Everybody’s

making something, whether they’re making a new system, a new product, a new marketing program, or creating a training program,” says Kogon. “Part of a leader’s responsibility is to really mitigate pet projects, things that don’t really make sense in the context of the broader value proposition.”



Facilitating Smooth Sailing

Projects involve groups of people working together—and that means roadblocks and friction can pop up over the course of a project. Leaders have an active role to play in creating harmony, not just getting involved when conflict arises. Because change is an inevitable part of projects—especially multifaceted or longer-term initiatives—savvy leaders will anticipate conflict, get ahead of any potential points of friction within teams, and do everything they can to manage change ahead of time.

Be accessible and available at both scheduled and as-needed times so that team members can surface issues and concerns. Encourage team members to reach out to you before issues become serious or entrenched so that solutions can be creatively discussed and implemented to keep the project healthy and vibrant—and to keep team members mentally and emotionally engaged.

When conflict arises, think again about value as the core principle. What is the hoped-for benefit that resolution can deliver? When team members have a positive approach, they are set up to learn, gain, and



grow from the process. Resolution strategies include clearly defining expectations for both work quality and process/workflows, communicating expectations, and creating a framework for everyone involved to be thoroughly heard.

Inspire Enthusiasm

Leaders monitoring work at a project level can motivate teams in specific and meaningful ways. When it comes to helping people feel their talents and effort are recognized and appreciated, communicating individual, and team successes is a contribution worth its weight in gold.

Celebrations of milestones or smaller, more informal recognition opportunities, particularly through tedious or challenging legs of a project journey, can keep spirits high and foster the kind of loyalty needed for both keeping a project in scope and making sure the quality of work is excellent. Showing team members that their work is seen and valued can be a powerful motivator.

“Leaders who are good stewards have a good sense of when they are needed,” Kogon says. “They give timely feedback and give the project manager support by celebrating them, keeping them engaged and keeping them going. That’s pretty important!”

Find both formal ways, such as 360 reviews at regular or milestone-based intervals, and informal ways, such as dropping a line in a private message or sending an appreciative gift card after someone has gone the extra mile, to recognize good work and keep morale high.

“A leader has to have people skills,” Kogon says. “That’s the people part of project management. Leaders should rally

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their people and help build their confidence and morale. This is part of their role, they can’t only be pushing process.”

Cultivate Agility

Even the most careful planning and preparation can’t anticipate everything that will come up in the life cycle of a project, which is why an agile approach is essential. Agile project management means that along with staying nimble and responsive throughout a project, teams should also be creative, adaptable, and solution-oriented when things change.

New elements that arise in a project timeline are opportunities for team achievement. Build a culture of creative problem-solving by demonstrating a welcoming approach to challenges. Set an example of resilience and positivity to help the project get unstuck and teach team members a can-do approach.

This kind of empowerment has knock-on effects that send ripples throughout an organization. It increases employee satisfaction, heightens personal investment, and instills a sense of pride in creating quality work that ensures business outcomes.



Bring It All Together

Project management might not be the most strategically energizing topic, but it's very important for leaders to have a foundational understanding of how it works to support their team members and their own work. When leaders incorporate project management best practices as part of their strategic approach to business, processes become tighter and more efficient, and day-to-day operations meet organizational goals better. "As a leader with an organization full of knowledge workers, the question is, how do I make their lives easier? How do I help to speed up and support higher quality projects?" says Kogon. "That ability would be kind of amazing."

All leaders are involved with the management of projects at some level. This involvement in project management is why understanding the project management process—and developing both mindsets and skillsets to effectively manage projects—is so important to the health and effectiveness of any organization.



Project Management for the Unofficial Project Manager™

Successful project management isn't just about strategy and managing logistics. It's about getting people to work together and volunteer their best efforts, especially when they don't work directly for you. Real project success combines proven project management skills with proven people management skills to achieve consistent results.

In *Project Management for the Unofficial Project Manager™*, we've combined the robust processes of the Project Management Institute (PMI) with FranklinCovey's 30+ years of experience and timeless principles to enable leaders to guide every type of project with consistent success.

To learn more, email info@franklincovey.com.sg or call us at 65-6819 9400.



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