

## **The four fundamentals to lead sustainable projects Successfully <sup>1</sup>**

**By Manuel M. Ancizu Beramendi**

### **Abstract**

This article explores four elements that are key for every project leader or core team member to lead sustainable projects successfully: frameworks, people, risks and learnings. They are defined as the four fundamentals.

### **Introduction**

If you are entering the world of projects, it might be difficult sometimes to know where to start or what to prioritize among so many activities, words to learn, milestones, stakeholders, communication matrix, team meetings, customer requests... just to name some of them that might be overwhelming.

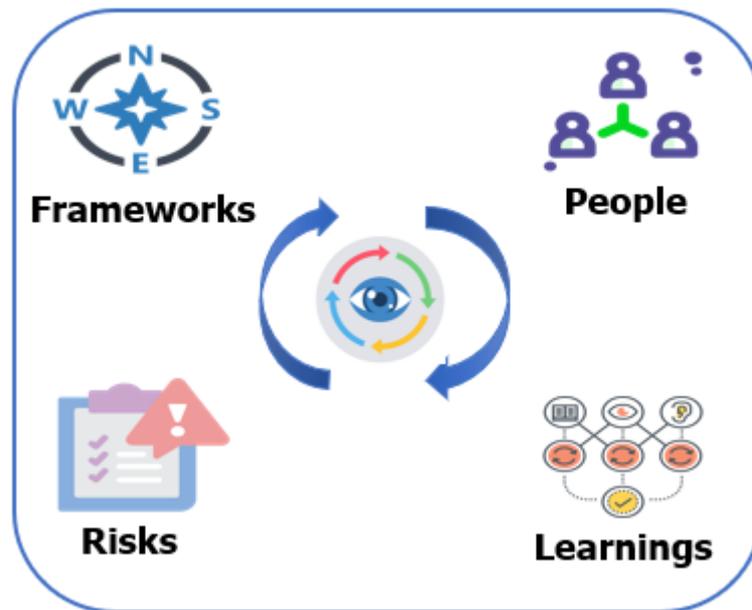
Yes, at the beginning it might feel overwhelming sometimes but don't worry too much, it is fully understandable and normal, we have all been there at some point.

In this context, I usually recommend a two-step approach:

- a) Remember the project's purpose and benefits: why are you doing this, what is the project's purpose? what would be the benefits created if the project was successful? Having purpose and benefits in mind will be very helpful to keep you inspired, move forward and overcome the challenges along the way.
- b) Focus your main actions on the four fundamentals to lead sustainable projects successfully: frameworks, people, risks and learnings.

---

<sup>1</sup> How to cite this article: Ancizu Beramendi, M. M. (2022). The four fundamentals to lead sustainable projects successfully, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XI, Issue I, January.



## The Four Fundamentals

Let's explore each of them in detail.

### 1. Frameworks

- a. Contract: If it is a project whose deliverables are goods or services to be provided to an external client, the contract is clearly your basic reference document, as it covers the rights and obligations between both parties and the metrics for the project to be considered successful; thus, read it carefully, analyze it and ask any questions that might not be clear enough because the contract will guide the relationship and the actions between the parties throughout the entire life of the project.
- b. Culture, Processes and Procedures: the project is embedded in the organizational structure so, no matter whether it is an external client or an internal one (e.g., efficiency, implementation of a new IT system,...), you need the support of your own company and colleagues to deliver what is expected.

In this context, understanding the internal culture (formal and informal), being aware of and applying company's processes and procedures is key to navigate the organization and engage the teams to deliver what it is expected according to the requirements.

On the contrary, if you failed to follow company's established processes your project's deliverables might be delayed or not delivered as initially expected and it could lead to misunderstandings and frustration among team members and stakeholders (internal and external).

## 2. People

Projects are all about people working together as a team to transform ideas into results, create the expected benefits and comply with agreed requirements.

Take the necessary time to know who is who in the project, the roles and responsibilities of client’s representatives, project management team, main stakeholders, those who will support us in specific issues...

A good network helps a lot because, in the end, people like working with other people instead of just with excel files or machines; we are human beings and like the feeling of belonging to a team and seeing that what we do is useful for other human beings.

Soft skills like empathy, the ability to reach agreements and the capacity to adapt are very valuable to engage people and move forward; actually, empathy was mentioned in a Forbes article<sup>(1)</sup> as the most important leadership skill according to research.

## 3. Risk management

All projects face risks; identifying, managing and monitoring them in advance, proactively and in detail is fundamental to achieve the goal within the approved guidelines to be considered successful.

Risks can be negative or positive depending on their impact on project goals. If the effect is positive, it is usually called opportunity.

The use of standard methodologies helps to monitor risks effectively. Once the baseline of the main elements (objective, quantity, planning, cost, quality, equipment, resources....) has been agreed, it is time to monitor potential deviations, both positive and negative, from this baseline; this is known as risk and opportunity management.

Each risk should have a probability, a potential impact that results in a risk level (ordered from highest to lowest), trigger event and an action plan if the trigger event was activated; impact and probability are a range of numbers, regularly between one to five or one to ten.

Risk Log	Impact	Probability	Risk Level Impact x Probability	Trigger	Action Plan
----------	--------	-------------	------------------------------------	---------	-------------

Following a standardized methodology, processes and formats contributes to efficiency (no need to reinvent the wheel every time), to better control (easier to know where to look), to have a common language among all parties involved and to transfer lessons learned in an agile way throughout the project.

This is especially important in decentralized projects (with activities and people in several locations at the same time) or in companies that manage many similar projects to one another (so it is not needed to start from scratch each time in terms of methodology, templates, steps to follow, training for new members, etc).

#### **4. Learnings**

As the project progresses, there are learnings that can be gathered and incorporated as improvements; a lesson learned session can be held at the end of the project or as an on-going process, using every opportunity to learn and implement small improvements that, over time, will make a difference.

Monitor what is happening around you and take also transversal learnings from other areas of the company, from other projects, from conversations or training courses... no matter where the learning comes from, implementing it can be beneficial to the performance of the team and the project.

It is important to collect learnings in a structured way and analyze them so that they can be used for the current project as well as be transferred to other projects that can also benefit from them.

Setting periodic audits and project evaluations to ensure proper compliance with standards, the maintenance of risks within agreed parameters and the availability of trained personnel in each activity contribute in a healthy way to continuous improvement and learning.

It is an iterative process that aims to incorporate all the lessons learned into the continuous improvement cycle.

---

#### **Conclusion**

With these four fundamentals (frameworks, people, risks and learnings) you will have a good foundation to lead or be involved in a project and thus materialize its goals and benefits. Isn't it great to be able to create something new and transform ideas into something real, that brings value to people and society?

#### **References**

- (1) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2021/09/19/empathy-is-the-most-important-leadership-skill-according-to-research/?sh=39cdc0d43dc5>

## About the Author



### **Manuel Ancizu**

Pamplona, Spain



Human leadership, Global Sustainable Projects, Renewable energy, Story-teller, Keynote speaker, Lifetime learner, Risk management, Standardization

**Manuel Ancizu** is passionate about human leadership, sustainable projects and people's motivations. Enjoys working in international multicultural environments and wants to have a positive impact in society.

Manuel graduated in Economics from University of Navarra and obtained an MBA from IESE Business School (Spain); he has also studied in CEIBS (China) and University Anahuac del Sur (Mexico). He holds a number of professional certificates such as the PMP by Project Management Institute, Lead Auditor in ISO 9001:2015 by IRCA Association and has also received training in Management of Development Projects and Risk Management by Interamerican Development Bank (IDB).

Manuel has lived in Spain, France, UK and Mexico; he currently works in the wind energy sector leading the quality management of Offshore projects. Manuel has been involved in wind energy renewable projects developed in different parts of the globe with external customers, as well as in internal projects of cultural transformation, IT and global processes.

Thanks to his experience, he has delivered training sessions, lectures and keynotes to a different number of institutions.

Manuel is a qualified member of the Spanish Standardization Body (UNE) and has been involved in the development of Standards and Norms in Projects, Programs and Portfolios; he has also participated in the translation of different ISO 21500 to Spanish language.

Manuel loves smiling, storytelling, dreaming and making ideas come true in a sustainable manner.

Manuel lives in Pamplona, Spain and can be contacted at [manuel@manuelancizu.com](mailto:manuel@manuelancizu.com)