

# DESIGNING FOR EXECUTION

*A Strategic Project Design Brief for Senior Leaders*

Terry Schmidt | ManagementPro.com



## Most Projects Don't Fail in Execution. They Fail in Design.

Senior leaders know the pattern. A major initiative launches with energy and commitment. Teams are assembled, timelines built, resources allocated. Six months in, the work stalls. Not because the team was incompetent—but because the initiative was never properly designed.

The problem isn't execution. It's that execution began before anyone had answered the questions that determine whether a project can succeed in the first place.

**Forbes found that 54% of technology project failures are attributable to poor management**, while only 3% stem from technical problems. The culprit is rarely a technical surprise. It's a strategic failure that was baked in from the start.

Most organizations respond to this by improving their project management: better Gantt charts, tighter budgets, stronger PMO oversight. All of that is useful. But it addresses the planning layer, not the design layer. You cannot plan your way out of a flawed design.

*"A much stronger focus on implementation is urgently needed in this change-driven world... this is the perfect guide to help you and your organization navigate through this new reality successfully." —Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, former Global Chairman, Project Management Institute (PMI)*

## Planning Is Not Design. The Difference Is Everything.

Planning is about tasks, schedules, and resources. It answers the question: How do we get there? Design comes before that. It answers the questions that determine whether the destination is right, whether success is measurable, and whether the assumptions the project depends on are sound.

An architect creates the blueprint before the contractors break ground. **Strategic project design is that blueprint.** Without it, you are managing activities rather than driving outcomes.

# The Logical Framework: Strategy and Execution on One Page

"Terry's process and framework helps organizations better select and justify projects that are 'strategy relevant.'" —Howard Rohm, Cofounder and President, Balanced Scorecard Institute

The Logical Framework—known as the LogFrame—is the tool that makes Strategic Project Design rigorous, repeatable, and fast. Originally developed for USAID and used worldwide, it has since been adopted by national laboratories, technology firms, defense programs, R&D organizations, and executive teams who need to move from strategic intent to execution-ready design without losing the thread between the two.

Four levels of Objectives structure the thinking:

- **Goal** — The strategic intent: why this initiative matters to the organization.
- **Purpose** — The specific change or benefit this project is meant to deliver.
- **Outcomes** — The concrete deliverables the team controls.
- **Inputs** — The activities and resources that produce those deliverables.

These four levels are linked by a simple logic

**"If Inputs, Then Outcomes,  
If Outcomes, Then Purpose,  
If Purpose, Then Goal"**

At its core, the LogFrame captures a simple but powerful hypothesis: if we invest these resources and execute these activities, we will produce these outcomes; and if we produce these outcomes, we will achieve this purpose; and if we achieve this purpose, we will advance this goal. Each link in that chain carries assumptions—conditions outside the team's control that must hold for the logic to work. The LogFrame makes every link and every assumption explicit.

This causal logic turns every project into a testable hypothesis.

The sequence matters. Questions 1 through 3 are design questions. They establish what success looks like, why it matters, and what conditions must hold for the work to pay off. Question 4 is the planning question. Most organizations jump straight to Question 4 and never look back. That is where the trouble starts.

This structure is not bureaucratic scaffolding. It is an up-front discipline that forces the kind of clarity that alignment requires. When a leadership team has genuinely agreed on all four levels—and stress-tested the assumptions between them—they have a shared model of success that survives personnel changes, budget pressures, and scope debates in ways that a project plan alone never will.

	Objectives	Success Measures	Verification	Assumptions
Goal WHY?				
Purpose Why?				
Outcomes What?				
Inputs How?	When? Who?			

The Logical Framework Matrix

## The Four Critical Strategic Project Questions

The Logical Framework helps us to systematically answer and agree on these critical design questions:

1. What are we trying to accomplish and why?
2. How will we measure success?
3. What other conditions must exist?
4. How do we get there?

## When Leaders Reach for the LogFrame

The LogFrame adds the most value when the cost of misalignment is highest. Senior leaders and program managers typically deploy it in conditions like these:

- The strategic mission has shifted, but the portfolio of active initiatives hasn't caught up.
- A critical initiative is being launched with significant resource commitment and cross-functional dependencies.
- Multiple stakeholders or organizations must align quickly on a shared model of success.
- A troubled project requires a structured diagnosis: is it a design problem or an execution problem?
- Risk is high and the tolerance for costly mid-course correction is low.
- Resource justification requires a demonstrable link between investment and strategic impact.

*"My teams love this methodology and are actively applying these concepts to projects and programs that improve national security. This approach makes strategy simple, practical, and actionable."* —Tammy P. Taylor, Ph.D., former Chief Operating Officer, National Security Directorate, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory

Proof in practice: At one national laboratory, teams applied the LogFrame before commencing an advanced materials R&D cycle. By designing outcomes and surfacing assumptions before test plans were built, they cut months from the program timeline. Rework dropped significantly. Leadership gained confidence that every milestone tied directly to mission goals—not because someone declared it, but because the design made it demonstrable.

## About Terry Schmidt

Terry Schmidt is a recognized global expert in the Logical Framework Approach. He was part of the original LogFrame development team and has taught the methodology in 24 countries through USAID before adapting it for business, technology, and national security applications. He holds an engineering degree from the University of Washington and an MBA from Harvard, and is an award-winning instructor at UCLA Extension's Technical Management Program. He is the author of ***Strategic Project Management Made Simple*** and others, *Designing for Execution*.



Ready to explore what this looks like for your organization? Email Terry at [Info@ManagementPro.com](mailto:Info@ManagementPro.com) or book a no-pressure strategy conversation at <https://bit.ly/TerryStrategySession>.

# WHERE THE LOGICAL FRAMEWORK APPLIES

*The LogFrame adapts to virtually any strategic challenge. Here is where practitioners apply it most.*

## STRATEGY & ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTION

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design strategic plans and roadmaps tied to long-term goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate project and program feasibility before committing resources</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reframe corporate vision, mission, and long-term aspirations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support critical decisions by clarifying trade-offs and assumptions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Redesign organizational structures to support evolving strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justify resource and budget requests with a demonstrable logic chain</li> </ul>

## PROGRAM & PROJECT EXECUTION

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launch critical initiatives with cross-functional alignment from day one</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement change management with structured adoption milestones</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diagnose troubled projects: identify whether the failure is design or execution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan facility expansions with clear timelines, budgets, and dependencies</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve product development coordination across functions and timelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage R&amp;D initiatives with objectives tied directly to strategic goals</li> </ul>

## TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drive digital transformation with strategy preceding system selection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement data governance with defined accuracy, security, and access standards</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan and prioritize IT system upgrades against mission requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate and manage vendor relationships as strategic partnerships</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimize software development by aligning features with user outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scale business operations with resource and staffing plans tied to growth targets</li> </ul>

## PEOPLE, TALENT & ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop employee skills programs with clear learning objectives and success criteria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance cross-functional team collaboration around shared success models</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revamp onboarding processes to accelerate time-to-productivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve customer experience through initiatives with defined, measurable outcomes</li> </ul>