

Turn Strategy Into Action

The Logical Framework Approach to Strategic Project Management

By Terry Schmidt, Strategy and Execution Consultant

“Make no little plans: they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably will themselves not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram, once recorded, will not die.”

– Daniel H. Burnham, American architect and urban planner, 1846-1912

Good Strategy Isn’t Enough

Your organization may have a great strategy on paper, but can’t make it work in the real world. If so, you are not alone. In fact, *Fortune* magazine notes that 70% of all strategies fail, largely because of the inability to execute.

To achieve results, strategic intent must be turned into implementable projects that are understood and owned by capable teams.

Few organizations do this well. Most lack a systematic way to turn strategy into action through projects. Instead, many plan their projects using ad hoc means or turn to software tools before the objectives are fully understood.

How you initially plan projects will determine the results you get. If you start smart, using the right process with the right people, you build a strong foundation for success.

Based on three decades of assisting hundreds of teams worldwide, I’ve developed a simple yet powerful way to design and launch critical projects that deliver outstanding results.

This *Smart-Start Project Launch™* offers a best-practice planning process for projects and strategic initiatives of all types. Teams can benefit by using The Logical Framework, summarized here and described in my book *Strategic Project Management Made Simple* (John Wiley, 2009).

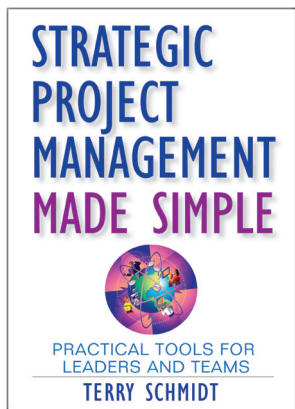
Objectives	Success Measures	Verification	Assumptions
Goal			
Purpose			
Outcomes			
Inputs			

The Logical Framework Matrix

The Four Critical Strategic Project Questions

The Logical Framework helps us to systematically answer and agree on these critical strategic 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?



Based on concepts drawn from good management and good science, this Systems Thinking Approach™ will equip you to:

- Turn fuzzy strategy into shared and measurable Objectives.
- Design practical action plans for any problem, idea, or opportunity.
- Align projects with the big picture Goals and vision.
- Clearly communicate project strategy among stakeholders.
- Discover and eliminate potential pitfalls in advance.
- Get teams moving faster.

The Bottom Line: Deliver on-target projects that meet customer needs.

Ask The Four Critical Strategic Project Questions

The *Four Critical Strategic Project Questions* provide a simple and logical conceptual vocabulary for project team conversations. Answers to these questions populate the cells of the Logical Framework, a 4 x 4 interactive matrix that helps teams design projects in a way that covers all the issues.

The “LogFrame” language and structure guides teams in developing a sound solution; and the completed matrix can communicate a complicated project clearly and concisely as a testable strategic hypothesis. Changes in one cell can affect the others, reflecting interconnections among project elements and the larger environment in which they occur.

1. What Are You Trying to Accomplish and Why? (Objectives)

Think of strategy as a set of linked *Objectives* of the form “If-Then.” The LogFrame’s first column summarizes Objectives and the *If-Then* logic linking them. The LogFrame makes important distinctions among various “levels” of Objectives:

- Goal** = big picture strategic intent.
- Purpose** = change or benefit expected from project.
- Outcomes** = project deliverables.
- Inputs** = key tasks or action steps.

Begin your project design by starting at the Goal level and work downwards to identify necessary Objectives at each lower level of The Logical Framework. The hierarchy of Objectives defines a testable strategic hypothesis comprised of *If-Then* logic:

*“If Inputs, Then Outcomes;
If Outcomes, Then Purpose;
If Purpose, Then Goal.”*

**The Logical Framework:
Solution Tool for NASA Rule #15**

“A review of most failed project problems indicates that the disasters were well-planned to happen from the start. The seeds of problems are laid down early: Initial planning is the most vital part of a project.”

– Source: *100 Rules for NASA Project Managers*

This means-ends, cause-effect logic makes it easy to communicate the thinking behind the project approach and helps build shared agreement on the best strategy.

2. How Will You Know You Are Successful? (Success Measures and Verification)

Objectives can be vague. The second column captures *Success Measures* for Objectives at each level. This question helps select appropriate indicators of Quantity, Quality, Time, Cost, and Customer Measures to clarify what each Objective means.

Measures need to be verified and the third column summarizes how you will verify the status of each Measure. The *Verification* column guides development of the project’s feedback and learning system.

3. What Other Conditions Must Exist? (Assumptions)

Every project involves risk, which can be reduced if recognized early and mitigated.

The fourth column pinpoints *Assumptions* – those ever-present but often neglected conditions required for success. (Murphy and his infamous law dwell in this column.) Identifying and analyzing internal and external assumptions lets you eliminate potential problems in advance.

4. How Do We Get There? (Inputs)

The bottom row of Inputs summarizes the work plan: *Who* does *What, When, How*, and with what resources. Software fits here to flesh out the task sequence and work plan details.

The experience of our clients around the world demonstrates that this thinking approach simplifies and accelerates the process of developing and communicating sound plans for projects of all types and sizes.

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification	Assumptions
Goal ▶ Big Picture Objective which project supports	Measures of Goal Achievement (quality, quantity, time)	Info sources to monitor and verify Goal Measures	To reach Goal: External conditions needed to reach Goal and beyond
Purpose ▶ Change expected by producing Outcomes	Success conditions expected at end of project	Info sources to monitor and verify Purpose Measures	To reach Purpose: External conditions needed to achieve Purpose
Outcomes ▶ Specific results needed from project team	Description of completed deliverables	Info sources to monitor and verify Outcome Measures	To produce Outcomes: External conditions needed to produce Outcomes
Inputs ▶ Activities, Resources and Responsibilities	Resource Budget and Schedule	Info sources to monitor and verify Inputs	To obtain & manage Inputs: External conditions necessary to obtain and manage Inputs

Elevate Your Focus

When best-laid plans encounter the real world, things change. Savvy leaders and teams appreciate *The Implementation Equation™* built into the LogFrame. This equation offers a dynamic view of the project environment by incorporating ever-changing Assumptions into the strategic hypotheses:

*“If Inputs and Assumptions, Then Outcomes;
If Outcomes and Assumptions, Then Purpose;
If Purpose and Assumptions, Then Goal.”*

This broader perspective elevates managerial focus to the larger context and prevents project leaders from concentrating their attention primarily on Input tasks and Outcome deliverables.

Manage The Implementation Equation™

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification	Assumptions
Goal		<i>Then</i>	<i>and</i>
Purpose	<i>If</i>	<i>Then</i>	<i>and</i>
Outcomes	<i>If</i>	<i>Then</i>	<i>and</i>
Inputs	<i>If</i>		

Communicate and Collaborate

The LogFrame readily scales and adapts to programs, projects, and tasks of all types. The matrix structure clearly captures answers to the standard “interrogative questions” – *Why, What, Who, When, and How*.

Goal is the big picture program *Why*, the rationale for this and related projects. Purpose is the project-specific *Why*, the reason for this effort. Outcomes are the *What* teams must produce. Inputs capture the *How, Who* and *When*.

The LogFrame’s common logic and standard vocabulary help teams to communicate and collaborate across functions and disciplines. This shared understanding facilitates teamwork, gets projects moving faster, and that produces superior solutions.

Streamline Your Communications

Objectives	Success Measures	Verification	Assumptions
Goal	WHY?		
Purpose	WHY?		
Outcomes	WHAT?		
Inputs	HOW?	WHO?	WHEN?

Apply at the Program Level

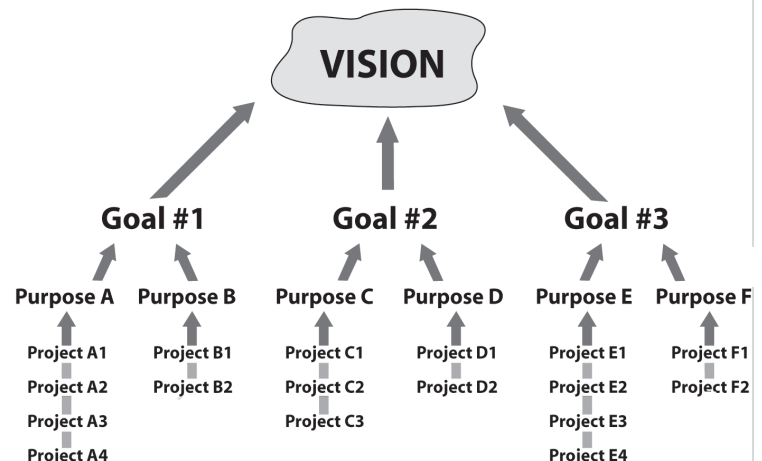
A program is simply a cluster of projects which support the same overarching goal. The same management concepts built into the Logical Framework and the *The Implementation Equation™* apply to programs as well as projects.

If-Then logic is ideal for clarifying the overall set of Goals which support organization vision and offers a line-of-site way to align projects and initiatives into a coherent strategic framework. *The Implementation Equation™* can be expanded by adding an additional level...

“If Goals and Assumptions, Then Vision.”

This invites leaders to examine the broader Assumptions, trends, and dynamics which affect the total enterprise.

Link Projects to Goals and Vision



Benefit From Some High-Payoff Applications

You can take the LogFrame in many different directions. Scan your internal and external environment; look for critical issues and start there.

Here are some high-payoff ways in which our clients in government, private companies, and research organizations have applied these methods:

- 1. Develop Execution Plans for Core Strategies.** This method supports a broader strategic planning process. Regardless of the context in which you operate, it's wise to periodically review and refine your strategic plan and portfolio. Prioritize initiatives and create LogFrame plans for the core strategies.
- 2. Strengthen Teams Across Work Functions.** The LogFrame tool helps bring together new teams and task forces. The questions and matrix provide a common vocabulary to integrate cross-functional players around common Objectives and enables them to work smoothly across organizational boundaries.
- 3. Reinvent Your Department.** From time to time, take a fresh look at where you are and where you need to go, and then develop strategies to get there. When performance levels lag, or your mission changes, it becomes more vital than ever.
- 4. Develop Information Technology Solutions and Algorithms.** The LogFrame serves as a general-purpose analytic tool that helps to integrate technology solutions with core processes to deliver customer value.
- 5. Design and Launch Marketing or Sales Initiatives.** Flesh out initiatives that support strategic sales Goals or balanced scorecard elements.
- 6. Take a High-Level First Cut.** Planning a research program to find intelligent life on Mars? Purchasing a remote island and starting your own country? Use the LogFrame as a front-end tool for high-level scoping of super-sized projects.
- 7. Develop Recommendations and Make Decisions.** Use this tool to be systematic and transparent about how to set decision criteria, identify alternatives, collect information, conduct the analysis, and make recommendations.
- 8. Improve Critical Processes.** Identify and harvest the "low-hanging fruit," where a modest process improvement effort yields big returns. The LogFrame can be used to analyze and redesign any process that needs an overhaul.
- 9. Handle Emergent Issues.** Got a hot potato? This approach works well on non-standard projects that arise suddenly and need quicker solutions than your organization's formal project management protocols provide. Slice and dice your project potato into a strategic hypothesis for a smart solution.
- 10. Unstick Stuck Stuff.** Take a fresh look at stalled projects, programs, and strategies; identify and evaluate alternatives; and redirect your effort along promising directions. Break out of stale paradigms by brainstorming fresh Purpose statements and see what new patterns emerge.
- 11. Structure Project Evaluations.** The LogFrame can be used to organize interim evaluations of ongoing projects in the portfolio as well as completed projects. Use a LogFrame at any project stage to think, plan, and execute the future phases.
- 12. Organize Learning and Development.** This tool works well to sharpen learning and development programs at all levels. Purpose describes desired behavior change; Goal highlights the expected benefits; Outcomes define the learning delivery system. This tool can help organizations identify and develop the future competencies needed.
- 13. Adjunct for Outside-the-Box Projects.** This approach can provide a refreshing, practical adjunct for projects that don't naturally fit traditional project management methodologies. In addition, it leverages and energizes phase and gate processes by offering a fresh perspective.

By using the Logical Framework, you'll build a strong foundation that leads to predictable success.

ManagementPro is a Seattle-based strategic business unit of The Haines Centre for Strategic Management – a global consortium of thought leaders, leading-edge consultants, and trainers in over 25 countries whose work is derived from *The Systems Thinking Approach*TM. We offer best-practice strategic management tools and technologies that have been proven to add value in organizations of all types and sizes, across multiple industries, and in many countries. Please check the websites for free articles, resources and support tools as well as our global workshop calendar.