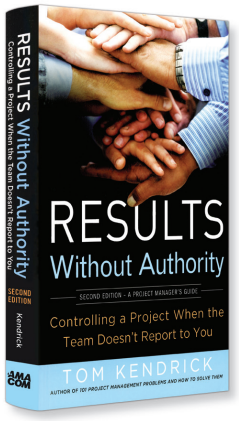
soundview
Executive Book Summaries®

Results Without Authority

Controlling a Project When the Team Doesn't Report to You



by **Tom Kendrick**

Contents

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

When you're a project manager with a team of people who don't technically report to you, your challenge is to get Results Without Authority. This book delivers proven techniques for controlling projects and managing diverse teams in a wide variety of situations and bringing those projects to a successful closure. The concepts are essential for all project managers, with and without authority, because they offer a productive alternative to "command-and-control" management techniques that can easily backfire.

Tom Kendrick's system will help you get successful project results from diverse, cross-functional, virtual, outsourced and other types of project teams. Packed with invaluable guidance for projects of all scopes and in any field, Results Without Authority will help novice and experienced project leaders get the best from their project teams.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The key project management processes, infrastructure and the role of the project office.
- Productive leadership styles that encourage reciprocity and collaboration.
- Tips for controlling a project through quantitative diagnostic metrics.
- How to create a collaborative planning process to provide a foundation for project control.

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 2 Christy Drive, Suite 302, Chadds Ford, PA 19317 USA. • Subscriptions start at $99/year. To subscribe, visit summary.com. • Vol. 41, No. 4 (3 parts), Part 3, April 2019 • Order #41BS04 • Sarah T. Dayton, Editor-in-Chief • Ashleigh Imus, Senior Editor • Kylie O'Connor, Graphic Designer

Control of Projects

Increasingly today, projects are undertaken in environments where the project leader has little formal authority. Even for projects managers with formal authority, significant portions of project work are done by contributors who work for other managers, often for a different company. Projects where no one is in charge are almost certain to fail. As the leader of your project, you must assume control, whether or not you possess organizational authority. Here is a list of things that project leaders can (and should) take control of, regardless of their position or power in an organization:

- Measurement
- Reporting cycles
- Milestones
- Communication
- Project reviews
- Change management
- Rewards and recognition
- Constructive criticism
- Reciprocity and exchange
- Risk monitoring

Project managers can use these means to enhance their control in any project.

Elements of Project Control

Every project leader has a number of levers available that increase project control. Three principal elements of control are

1. **Project processes** provide the structure necessary for control and can serve as an effective substitute for organizational authority.
2. **Influence**. Getting cooperation is much easier when you have a two-way relationship of trust and respect with your team members. The surest path to cooperation starts with establishing strong social relationships in which people don't want to disappoint each other. Another way to enlist willing cooperation is to involve your project staff in activities that they want to work on.
3. **Metrics (measurement).** Measuring a few key things on a project and publishing the results powerfully affect your project's progress. A small set of well-defined project metrics gives the project leader a powerful tool for managing project initiation, execution and closure.

Project control starts at project initiation, and it requires your full attention all the way to the end. Applying these concepts will carry you safely to your destination: project success.

Control Through Process

Successfully managing a project involves at least three separate activities: achieving project objectives, managing the project processes and leading the team. Project leaders who collaboratively fine-tune the project processes used by their teams gain control in two ways. Using processes that project contributors and stakeholders participate in defining augments the trust and collaborative environment that successful projects depend on. In addition, getting voluntary commitment to use well-defined processes encourages appropriate behavior.

Before doing a lot of work defining (or redefining) processes, assess where your organization stands on project management generally. It doesn't matter a great deal what specific processes you adopt as long as they make good business sense, have meaningful support from your team and stakeholders, and are actually used.

Life Cycles and Methodologies

Life cycles serve primarily to coordinate related projects and provide defined checkpoints, whereas methodologies drive to ensure consistency in how project work is done. Mandatory process aspects of either (or both) may be used to significantly enhance your project control.

Nearly all projects have at least an informal life cycle that provides an overall structure and consistency for major project milestones. There are two main families of project life cycles. One is the waterfall type, made up of a single arc through a series of sequential phases. The other is the agile type, in which projects are comprised of a succession of step-by-step, iterative cycles, each delivering an incremental result that approaches the final deliverable. The specific details must be customized to meet particular business, project and customer needs. For each requirement in a life cycle, ask two questions:

- Why is this necessary?
- How might I use or modify this particular requirement to enhance my control over my work?

Life-cycle requirements are also a powerful tool for managing potential conflicts among different functional groups with contradictory interests. If everyone commits to meeting well-defined project life-cycle requirements, there will be fewer conflicts over what is due and when.

In addition to specifying project milestone and review requirements, methodologies provide explicit guidance for how work is to be done. The process definitions generally include templates, checklists, forms and other materials that project leaders are either required or strongly encouraged to use.

Project Definition and Charter

Clear, unambiguous, high-level project documentation is essential for project control. Developing and communicating a thorough description of your project set the stage for all subsequent work. Get team buy-in for structured project management processes, and clearly document how you will use them. A project charter is a living document that may grow and evolve over the course of the project, but maintaining an unambiguous, easily accessed description of the project is a very powerful tool that you can use to keep your project under control.

Change Management

Change management processes that contribute to your ability as leader to keep things under control have several things in common:

- Specific requirements for submitting change requests
- A bias against accepting changes
- Standards for timely response on change requests
- A review process for changes
- Unambiguous authority for the owner of the process to make final decisions

Simply having a process that your team, sponsor and project stakeholders all accept is a powerful tool for overall project control. It puts people on notice that changes will be carefully examined before being accepted, and establishes the hurdle of adequate documentation of changes being proposed.

The project leader is best served by a process that clearly defines how the proposed scoping for future phases will be evaluated and prioritized, using objective standards and delegating unambiguous authority for final decision making.

Project Infrastructure

One way to begin establishing an infrastructure for your project is to list key questions that you would like to answer, working with your team. Review past projects for problems related to structure, and work with your team to make project infrastructure decisions to resolve them. Take advantage of organization expertise and project office capabilities, but resist surrendering control over your own project.

Control Through Influence

Project leaders need to determine what operating style works best for their project teams. Adopt a leadership style that works with your team members, and strive to deliver on what people care about the most. The leadership style that you adopt will determine how members of the team perceive you. Most of the time, this perception matters more than actual authority.

The fundamental basis for getting what you need relies, as it always does, on exchange: giving something in return for something requested. Build your awareness and skill for influencing others. A few things are common among successful influencers. They approach others one on one. Successful influencers also identify and use common ground and shared interests early. They are also generally well liked and seem to have a knack for closing the deal.

An overall process for influencing involves 10 steps:

1. Document your objective.
2. Identify who could do the work.
3. Evaluate your options, and select the best person.
4. Consider the other person's perspective.
5. List possibilities for exchange. These strongly correlate with motivating factors.
6. Meet with the other person.
7. Verify your assumptions, and determine what to exchange.
8. Request a commitment.
9. Document the agreement.
10. Deliver on your offer, and track the work to completion.

Negotiate credible commitments with contributors by discovering what they want that you can offer to them and by using exchanges.

To build influence in your team, lead by example, use random positive reinforcement, remove barriers, always provide positive reasons, coach, mentor, and assist, be inclusive, and practice credibility and integrity. Work to increase your influence through your actions and demeanor.

Building Influence with Your Manager, Project Sponsor and Stakeholders

To be successful, you also need to influence upward. You can improve your influence with your management by ask-

ing revealing questions and collaborating with your peers. Recommendations that come from a task force or a council of leaders carry a good deal more weight than those that originate from just one person.

Building influence with managers is largely about relationships; keeping your sponsor and stakeholders involved and supportive throughout your project is always a good investment of your time.

Control Through Project Metrics

Metrics can be used to better understand your project, to adjust the project's objectives, to improve your processes and working methods and to motivate team members. Project assessment metrics that use numerical data can show what you are getting into.

Measurement is also central to decision making. For the project leader with little real authority over team members, measurement is also an essential tactic for motivating project contributors. Used well, such metrics are a force for good that will significantly increase your ability to keep things under control and moving ahead.

Types and Uses of Project Metrics

Identify metrics that align with the project objectives and the desired behaviors. Of the three basic types of metrics, each plays a different role in project management:

- Predictive project metrics are based on definition and planning information and help set realistic expectations for the project.
- Diagnostic metrics are based on current status and serve as indicators of progress and as timely triggers for risk response, problem solving and decision making.
- Retrospective metrics assess how well the work you completed was done and provide insight into process issues and recurring problems.

Projects are complicated, and selecting the right measures for your project may be challenging. Defining the desired behaviors and objectives before considering the question of what to measure leads to more consistent, appropriate results.

Designing Individual Metrics

Methods for defining metrics include

- **Goal question metric.** A systematic process based on a three-tiered hierarchy. The first tier is at the top and defines the desired outputs and results. The second tier is composed of questions through which you can determine whether you have achieved those objectives. The third and lowest level contains measures that can be used in answering the questions.
- **Balanced scoreboard.** Robert Kaplan and David Norton devised a four-quadrant view that provides tension between the measures and helps to ensure that the metrics are less likely to result in dysfunctional behavior. Kaplan's four quadrants are customer, finance, internal process, and learning and growth.
- **Behavioral methods.** Metrics tied to rewards are nearly always defined starting with a behavior that is viewed as desirable and associating monetary payment, recognition or some potential for reward with specific behavior.

Select a small set of key measures, and obtain team support for them. Whatever process you use, the final steps of the process require you to evaluate your measures for appropriateness, consistency and potential dysfunction. Test the metrics, and establish a measurement baseline. Finally, use the metrics to monitor and control your project.

Control Begins With Project Initiation

Troubled projects frequently have tentative beginnings. You can avoid a lot of late project anguish by asserting control as soon as the project begins, ideally with a fully engaged project team ready to hit the ground running. To do this, you need the support of your sponsor, solid documentation and a project startup workshop.

Sponsorship

Your project sponsor has considerable organizational authority, at least enough to initiate your project. One of the first things you can do to ensure ongoing support and attention from your sponsor and other influential stakeholders is to set expectations right away and get specific commitments. Shortly after you assume responsibility for your project, use your influencing skills to extract commitments from your sponsor (and other key stakeholders) in exchange for your agreeing to lead the project.

Ask your sponsor to describe to you why, from his or her perspective, the project is being undertaken, and capture that rationale using your sponsor's words. However, avoid getting your sponsor too involved with the day-to-day execution of your project. You want your sponsor's support, not his or her detailed involvement; after all, it's your project.

Project Vision

Project vision is about why the project matters, and although this could be the same for everyone, some aspects may be personal and unique for each individual. For longer, more complicated projects, investing some time in the "vision thing" can be what differentiates a successful project that everyone cares about from a chaotic disaster.

An inspiring project vision increases your influence, particularly during project initiation. Work to understand your sponsor's expectations for the project. Your sponsor's motivations are the foundation for your overall project definition, and understanding the genesis for your project helps you uncover assumptions and constraints that you need to manage and control your project.

Develop a compelling project vision, and fine-tune it as needed to inspire and motivate your team.

Project Launch

With a sense of who wants the project and why, the project leaders can begin defining a foundation for project control by documenting and defining the project. Some of the documentation that you need to assemble for the initial project communication are

- **Project charter.** One way to collect initial high-level information. What matters most for project control is that you capture initial project expectations in writing.
- **Project priorities.** Documented priorities help you assess trade-offs and develop alternatives during project planning, minimize controversy over decisions throughout the project, negotiate project changes and support disciplined change control for your project. Setting priorities is equivalent to the old adage, "Fast, cheap, good — pick two."
- **ROI analysis.** Project ROI (return on investment) analysis requires two separate predictive metrics: monetary inflows and monetary outflows. Overall, focusing on the value of the project inherent in your vision is better than getting too wrapped up in financial ROI analysis.
- **Initial scoping.** One of your most important objectives in initiating a project that you can control is to get an early, solid fix on what "done" looks like. Changes, particularly late-project changes, are the enemy of control. You need to define deliverables, verify requirements, test the limits, validate initial scoping and get agreement on success criteria.
- **Project staffing requirements.** Following your analysis of preliminary scoping (or in parallel with it), confirm your project staffing. Particularly for leaders who do not directly manage the contributors on the project team, early identification and commitments for staffing are essential to project control.

Startup Workshops

Conduct an effective project startup workshop to get your project off to a healthy start. A project startup workshop serves to build teamwork and to establish a solid, shared understanding of what the project is about. Both the influence and control aspects of a well-run startup workshop are substantial.

Building Control Through Project Planning

Planning is a collaborative process that establishes buy-in and ownership of project work and motivates your whole team.

Plan Collaboratively

Plan your project thoroughly with your team, and integrate their inputs, suggestions and perspectives all through your planning documents. Collaborative project planning builds on the project charter, initial scoping and other documentation. Work for consensus, and document the decisions as you make them. Make your infrastructure decisions visible to your stakeholders and to others involved in your project.

Breaking Down the Work with Your Team

A project work breakdown schedule (WBS) is essentially the equivalent of a to-do list for your project. A project WBS is best developed by a team that includes a wide spectrum of perspectives — the more the better. Use planning data to set a realistic project baseline, negotiating required changes to initial objectives with your sponsor and stakeholders.

Defining the work is one challenge you face in controlling your project. Obtaining reliable commitments for every part of the work is the next. As your project's work takes shape, determine which member of your team is the most appropriate owner for the lowest-level activities in the structure. Develop a list of all project activities, noting the commitments that emerge during the development of your WBS. The commitments made by your team are only half the story. Also write down any commitments that you made to your team members, and schedule any work that you need to do to deliver on them. Commitments offered willingly are always much more reliable than those we try to force.

Collaborative Estimating

Estimating is one area where all the elements of control outlined in this book come together. Processes and metrics matter a great deal because estimates that aren't based on a good process and measured history are just wild guesses. Also, collaborative estimating provides excellent opportunities to build teamwork and influence.

Some ideas for developing estimates that help you understand and control your project include using your plan details, learning from history and approaching estimating as a team activity. Collaborative estimating is a well-established way to tap into the "wisdom of teams" and more deeply engage your team in the project. All collaborative estimating techniques create estimates based on team inputs. Because the estimates are produced by the same individuals who will do the work, they are motivating, and contributors generally do their best to deliver on them.

Constraints and Plan Optimization

As your project plan detail comes into view, much of what it reveals is not good news. The initial schedule is usually too long. The staffing, resources and budgets available are often far below what your cost analysis requires.

Spending at least a small amount of time exploring opportunities is both good business and one of your most potent levers for control. Consider opportunities for doing work in parallel (fast-tracking) to shorten the timeline. Determine whether a larger investment or staff will allow you to meet the timing and scoping goals. Once you have a plan, work to optimize it. Based on your project priorities, figure out how to meet the most important part of the scope-time triple constraint by relaxing the least important factors.

Throughout your project planning, maintain a list of risks that emerge. Keeping risks and their consequences visible is itself an effective mitigation strategy because people tend to work to avoid serious problems if they are aware of them. Collaborative risk planning also tends to build teamwork, enhances interpersonal relationships and can increase overall confidence in the project.

Measure Your Plan

You can use predictive metrics to assess your project as a whole, identify unrealistic assumptions, uncover significant potential problems and more clearly communicate what your project is up against. Because predictive measurements are primarily based on speculative rather than empirical data, they are generally less precise than diagnostic and retrospective metrics.

Useful metrics require a baseline, and baselines for predictive metrics are best set using retrospective information and metrics from recent comparable projects. Use these measures to further review your plans.

Use Your Plan

Once a credible plan is in place and agreed to, project control shifts to execution and tracking. Begin execution of your project with a credible, understandable plan that is available to all the members of your team. Once you set the project baseline, maintaining control now depends on keeping your plans up to date and visible.

Maintaining Control Through Project Execution

Initiation tells everyone what your project is doing, and planning shows how you intend to get it done. With everything clearly defined, project execution ought to be straightforward. Unfortunately, even the best-planned projects rarely run smoothly.

Define diagnostic project metrics that enhance control of your project; then get buy-in from your team. Diagnostic metrics in particular can show

- Critical activity slippage
- Adverse resource consumption and timing trends
- Chronic issues
- The need to modify project plans or execute contingency plans
- When to reset the baseline for the project

You need to select a small number of metrics that are likely to be useful enough to justify the effort it takes to collect them. All diagnostic metrics, even those you intend to collect only infrequently, have an ongoing cost. Select your metrics carefully, choosing ones that provide useful data that you can use to guide and control your project without inappropriate cost.

Status Collection

One of the most important and visible jobs of a project leader is communicating project status. This communication depends on a repeating cycle of information collections, analysis, response planning and outbound reporting. The tracking and reporting cycle repeats throughout your project, typically weekly.

If you are a project leader without a great deal of authority, you need to work to obtain meaningful commitments from your team to provide the information that you need. To do this, discuss with each individual on your team how the information will be used and what the benefits are.

Be dogmatic and disciplined in collecting project status. Whatever mechanism you select, do it the same way throughout your project. Email provides a simple, unambiguous way to collect status, and it leaves an audit trail for your records. Thank people for providing status, especially extended members of your team.

Informal Communication

Communication is arguably the most important job for any project leader. For project leaders who don't have a great deal of actual authority, informal communication can be substantially more critical to project control than formal communication. Informal communication — conversations, social exchanges, even nonproject interactions — forms the basis for the trust, teamwork and durable relationships that are essential for efficient project execution and the prompt resolution of difficulties. Use informal communication to collect soft data, and work to maintain relationships and trust within your team.

Maintaining Relationships and Keeping Your Team Focused

You can and should do a number of things to maintain good relationships with your team for the remainder of your project. Some methods include building on common interests, using team activities, tailoring your interactions, staying positive, interacting socially and using humor.

Use team-oriented activities throughout your project to encourage and sustain effective teamwork. One way to strengthen interpersonal connections right at the beginning of a project is to work as a team to name your project. Forging a project identity draws the team together by providing an easy, shorthand way to refer to the project as a whole.

Nonproject-related activities, such as going to a movie, a sporting event or some other type of outing, can be a significant boost to building team relationships. Likeable project leaders have more influence over their teams and more control over their projects. Cultivating an appropriate sense of humor is a good way to increase your likability.

For most project work, progress depends on people having substantial blocks of time to work without distraction. Do what you can to establish an environment where your contributors have protection from needless noise and interruptions. Getting results requires quiet, no matter how much we may believe otherwise.

Tracking and Monitoring for Project Control

Project scope depends heavily on scrupulously managing scope for your deliverables. Failure to control scope is about the most common reason projects fail to achieve their objectives. If you don't have a great deal of formal authority, a robust process for managing scope changes may be all that stands between you and complete chaos. If a good process exists in your organization, adopt it and use it. If not, write one, and get your team to provide feedback. Draft a process that has a default answer of reject for changes, with all changes treated as unnecessary until proven otherwise. Also include explicit criteria to be used in making a decision for each change.

Always answer two questions about every proposed change: **1.** What does it cost? **2.** What is it worth?

If the cost of a change appears to exceed its potential value, there's a good argument against the change. Finally, always consider four possible decisions for any change: rejected, approved, approved with modifications and deferred for future consideration.

When changes are approved, communicate them. Notify your team and others who need to know, and promptly update all affected project plans and documents. Use reports and other formal communication to keep people in sync with your project and aware of its progress.

Control Challenges

Projects of all types encounter barriers. To meet these challenges, you need to use your influence to establish relationships and trust with your team members, and maintain good team cohesion through your loyalty, personal interactions and good humor. Because most control problems are easiest to resolve face-to-face, meet one-on-one with your contributors as frequently as practical. Motivate your team using frequent thanks and recognition and rewards when appropriate.

Periodically review longer projects to validate objectives and plans and to revitalize the project vision. Deal with barriers to progress, and promptly resolve project conflicts. To remain in control, you need to manage barriers, resources challenges and conflicts.

Enhancing Overall Control Through Project Closure

Closing a project well involves some time and work, but it

is essential to the control of future projects. Getting agreement from your sponsor and from all your stakeholders that your work was satisfactorily completed is necessary before you can transition to new projects. Archiving your completed project documents provides information necessary for defining and planning similar future projects.

Employing Retrospective Project Metrics

In general, the role of retrospective metrics is to evaluate a process following execution. Retrospective metrics are especially useful for a project leader with limited power and authority. Whether your project ends successfully, with difficulty or even if it is cancelled, backward-looking project measurements reveal much about what you did well and what you need to improve.

Celebration and Team Rewards

One of the best (and certainly the easiest and least expensive) things that project leaders can do to motivate people and reinforce their influence is to thank team members for their contributions to the project. Thank people face-to-face if possible. Find at least one thing in particular to comment on for each individual as a way to reinforce your appreciation. Also, express your thanks in writing. Be generous in giving credit for project accomplishment to your team members in presentations, discussions with management and in other conversations.

As a project leader, you have another final task: arranging to commemorate the end of your project with some sort of event. Set up a small get-together to end your project on a positive note.

Capturing Lessons Learned

A post-project retrospective analysis provides you an opportunity to discuss all aspects of the project and allows you and your team to put it securely in the past and move on to whatever is next. The overall process is structurally very similar to a project review, except a retrospective analysis is, as the name suggests, primarily backward looking. Your tasks are to prepare for the retrospective, to meet to review project results and processes, and then to document and follow up on recommendations.

Document your retrospective meeting, and summarize the recommendations you and your team have made. Circulate your key findings to other project leaders. Follow up on your key recommendations. Capture and apply the lessons learned.

Conclusion

If you are asked to lead a project, someone believes that you are capable of doing it. If you believe it too, then you are both probably correct. Succeeding with any project is all about gaining the cooperation of the people involved. Controlling your projects when you have little authority comes down primarily to aligning your project activities and goals with those of your sponsor, your team and your stakeholders — getting by with a little help from your friends.

IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- ***The 4 Disciplines of Execution*** by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling
- ***Choosing Change*** by Walter McFarland and Susan Goldsworthy

Tom Kendrick is a program manager, most recently with Hewlett-Packard Company, and the author of ***Identifying and Managing Project Risk*** and ***The Project Management Tool Kit***. He conducts project management classes and presents at conferences and universities on program management, project risk and related topics.

Results Without Authority: Controlling a Project When the Team Doesn't Report to You. Copyright © 2012 by Tom Kendrick. Summarized by permission of the publisher, AMACOM, a division of American Management Association, Int'l. 276 pages, $19.95, ISBN: 978-0-8144-1781-2.