

PEOPLECERT THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

**PROFESSIONALLY-QUALIFIED
PROJECT MANAGERS:
THE ESSENTIAL GLUE
IN ORGANIZATIONS**

PEOPLECERT THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

PROFESSIONALLY-QUALIFIED PROJECT MANAGERS: THE ESSENTIAL GLUE IN ORGANIZATIONS

If the basic definition of glue is something that holds things together, then what is “glue work” and how does it relate to project management skills and practices?

The Financial Times’ employment columnist, Sarah O’Connor, wrote recently about people that do glue work as those who “build relationships; can see the bigger picture” and fix the organizational cracks and help hold projects together, which is of particular interest to our project management audience.

As is becoming increasingly evident in certain industries, glue work is the essential element of what people do: O’Connor cites software engineering as a technical skill now often replicated by AI, meaning that “what is left is the ability to manage AI agents, to carefully document the wider context for them, to co-ordinate, to see the customer’s needs and the bigger picture. In other words,...glue work”.

The questions of “who is doing the glue work on your team?” and whether they are getting “credit and promoted for it” are what O’Connor believes managers should be asking now.

And how does the concept of glue work relate to the practices of managing projects and the adoption of methods like PRINCE2 Project Management?

MANAGING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES IN PROJECTS

One regularly recurring danger to projects is when, as the FT article notes, “two teams have different ideas of what is actually required”.

Susan Tuttle, Senior PRINCE2 Product Architect at PeopleCert said: “This is a very common misalignment [caused by a] lack of communication and a reluctance to write down objectives; these things may be discussed but everyone has different interpretations, different needs and what they want to hear.”

Fellow PRINCE2 Product Architect at PeopleCert, Szymon Pawlowski, noted how “large, cross-functional projects that have an impact on multiple areas of an organization, also have multiple stakeholder groups with diverse views on a project’s objectives, scope, and how it should be performed.”

What these project scenarios need, Tuttle added, is **“collaborative effort to achieve a common interpretation”** – in other words, glue work.

GETTING STUCK INTO GLUE WORK FOR PROJECTS

What are the key characteristics and competencies of the most effective glue workers – especially those working within projects?

Certainly, **emotional intelligence – understanding oneself and others** – and the ability to “read a room” rank highly. This focus on the “people side” of what happens in projects, goes beyond technical credentials.

According to Tuttle: “Project managers see the ‘unwritten org chart’ in a way most people don’t. They tend to understand how things actually get done across an organization; not just via reporting lines, but by **who people trust, who can unblock something quickly, and who might quietly slow things down**. The role is about connecting people,” she said.

But how do project managers develop the ability to see the underlying dynamics at play in an organization, rather than just working via the official organizational structures?

Aside from making mistakes and learning lessons from them, training and learning is key, according to Pawlowski: “This is why the inclusion of the people element in PRINCE2 Project Management is so important. Yes, being technically proficient is essential, but there is also a need for **people and culture-related competencies**; recognizing which people are influential and knowing how to overcome barriers.”

Training in a best practice method such as **PRINCE2 Project Management** emphasizes the fundamental nature of these skills and abilities and, as Tuttle says: “puts a name to what you might already be doing”.

HOW PRINCE2 PROJECT MANAGEMENT FEEDS INTO DEVELOPING GLUE WORK CAPABILITIES

How can professionals transform their subtle and often invisible talents for glue work into a **repeatable management capability**, underpinned by a structure and language that’s widely understood and used across project environments?

The PRINCE2 Project Management method helps managers to do four key things within their organizations:

- 1. View the organizational network** through stakeholder engagement, organizing, roles, responsibilities, and relationships.
- 2. Connect the network** through communication, planning, product focus, and quality expectations.
- 3. Keep the network moving** through risk, issues, progress, stages, and exception management.
- 4. Adapt the network to real-world demands** through tailoring the method to suit the project, learning from experience, leading people, and managing the human side of the project.

By mapping specific principles, practices and perspectives from the method to the essential attributes of glue work, Pawlowski has also ranked the different elements in terms of priority:

Priority	Element	Why it matters for glue work
1 People element		This foundation makes collaboration, leadership, communication, culture, team dynamics, and change adoption central to project success.
2 Stakeholder engagement		At its heart, this enables managers to understand formal and informal influence, build trust, manage resistance, and connect people with the influence to make things happen.
3 Organization practice		This practice clarifies roles, responsibilities, and relationships and helps overcome the issue of who has ownership of what.
4 Communication		Having a flow of visible and useful information helps managers tailor messages and keep people aligned.
5 Business case practice		Creating a shared justification for a project helps managers bring together competing groups around priorities, outcomes, benefits, and value.
6 Plans practice		Makes connective work visible by showing how activities, teams, products, decisions and dependencies fit together. It helps managers spot gaps, coordinate handovers, and keep work moving.
7 Risk practice		Human and organizational risks are identified early on, such as weak sponsorship, hidden resistance, unclear ownership, slow decisions, and adoption gaps.
8 Issues practice		This offers a practical route to unblock problems, escalate decisions, and stop friction leading to failure.
9 Progress practice / manage by exception principle		Managers can intervene at the right time, while allowing teams the autonomy to make decisions within agreed parameters.
10 Tailor to suit the project principle		This principle ensures the PRINCE2 Project Management method matches the reality of project size, type, organization, etc.

HOW ADOPTING BEST PRACTICE SUPPORTS GLUE WORKERS – SOME REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS

People who are either already, or emerging, glue workers in their organizations cannot always rely on their innate abilities or instincts to overcome the variety of challenges that projects will throw at them.

That's why the structured and time-tested approaches offered by best practice, such as **PRINCE2 Project, Programme and Portfolio Management**, can provide robust guidance to help keep change initiatives on track in any scenario.

Four challenging scenarios – and how best practice knowledge can support glue workers – are outlined by Tuttle:

1. WHAT GETS MEASURED VERSUS WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS

Organizations often measure delivery metrics such as time, cost, and scope while ignoring others, such as alignment, stakeholder trust, and dependency health.

This means projects can appear controlled but are, in fact, fragile. And if key people leave, this exposes the gap between **reported performance and real capability**.



PRINCE2 Project Management practices such as the **business case and progress** require ongoing justification and review by managers, which allows them to assess whether outcomes remain **aligned and viable**. The benefits management approach in PRINCE2 Programme Management and PRINCE2 Portfolio Management shifts the focus to outcomes and value realization.

A mature project management office (PMO) can enhance this by incorporating **health checks, dependency tracking and stakeholder engagement metrics** into governance. This makes glue work more visible.

2. VISIBLE WORK VERSUS VALUABLE WORK

Organizations often reward people's production of visible artifacts such as reports, plans and presentations. Meanwhile, they can undervalue the less visible competencies of **coordination, facilitation and conflict resolution**.

This can lead to the promotion of strong presenters, but who are weak when handling cross-**functional relationships and obtaining alignment**. Over time, project delivery will slow down as friction increases and relationships deteriorate.

Roles including project board, senior user, and senior supplier in PRINCE2 Project Management are accountable for alignment and decision making, not just outputs. The **organization practice and communication management approach** highlight stakeholder engagement. This establishes relationship-based work within delivery while programme and portfolio governance forums provide structured spaces for alignment and escalation; this helps ensure that valuable, albeit less visible, coordination work is recognized and embedded.

3. FRAGILE SYSTEMS VERSUS HIGH-PERFORMING HEROES

Project delivery often hinges on a limited number of high-performing professionals whose capability compensates for their organization's weak systems. Such people **manage dependencies, hold institutional knowledge and resolve issues informally**. If or when they move on, performance drops sharply because the system isn't self-sustaining.

PRINCE2 Project Management principles such as learn from experience and define roles, responsibilities and relationships **encourage knowledge capture** among a wider group of employees and reduce reliance on individuals.

Processes, which include starting up a project, managing a stage boundary and closing a project, help to retain lessons learned and share good practices. Programme and portfolio management add **structured dependency management and standardized governance**, while the PMO institutionalizes these practices. This creates repeatable systems that share glue work across the organization rather than concentrating it among a few people.

4. EFFICIENCY VERSUS COHERENCE

Senior leaders often prioritize **speed and resource efficiency**, pushing teams to deliver quickly without achieving alignment.

This results in fragmented execution, with teams moving in different directions and **creating rework, delays and increased risk**. The organization appears to be moving quickly but this masks a lack of strategic coherence.

The stage gates and the principle of ensure continued business justification in PRINCE2 Project Management stipulate **periodic checks on alignment** before a project proceeds; therefore, delivery is coherent and remains consistent with business objectives.

The issues and risk practices help create a shared understanding when circumstances change. At the programme and portfolio level, **coordinated governance, dependency management and prioritization** ensure that initiatives move in a unified direction. The PMO acts as the integrating function to ensure coherence across the system, rather than favouring individual project speed.



THE RISK OF UNCONTROLLED AI IN HOLDING PROJECTS TOGETHER

The importance of glue work – and the ways in which **best practice project management methods** provide the backbone for professionals delivering such work – is, according to Tuttle, especially relevant for AI.

“A lot of initiatives fail not because of the technology, but because **influence and decision making** don’t follow the formal structure,” she said.

“Using AI might make for faster processes, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that people are persuaded to embrace the change you’re promoting. So, the project manager’s skill is to engage with stakeholders, get buy-in, and bring people along on the journey.”

As referenced previously in the FT article – and reiterated by Tuttle – a big question is how to spot and reward the glue work happening in organizations, often embodied by project managers, smoothing out the various project problems.

In a letter responding to O’Connor’s FT article, entitled **“Why ‘glue work’ matters even more in the age of AI”**, Ben Barnett of AI work platform Monday.com noted how “glue work skills such as managing workforces and relationships, spotting misalignments early, and making sure AI solves real business problems without creating new ones” will be central to roles spanning technical, project management, and relationship building.

Copyright © 2026 PeopleCert International Limited and its affiliates (“PeopleCert”)

All rights reserved. No part of this document or the information in it may be copied, distributed, disclosed or used other than as authorized by PeopleCert. PeopleCert: Dream it, do it®, PRINCE2®, and the Swirl logo are registered trademarks of PeopleCert.

DISCLAIMER

This publication is designed to provide helpful information to the recipient. Although care has been taken by PeopleCert in preparation of this publication, no representation or warranty (either express or implied) is given by PeopleCert with respect to the completeness, accuracy or suitability of the information or advice contained within it, and PeopleCert shall not be held responsible for any loss or damage whatsoever relating to such information or advice.

