

Aligning Projects with Purpose: A Practical African Perspective on Why Portfolio and Project Management Matter¹

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Abstract

Across Africa, organisations are not short of vision. What they often lack is the ability to turn that vision into consistent results. In my experience as a business leader, executive, and project professional, the gap between strategy and delivery remains one of the biggest risks facing African enterprises today.

This paper reflects on the role of portfolio and project management (PPM) as practical tools for aligning projects with organisational purpose. Drawing from real organisational challenges in both the public and private sectors, it explores how aligning projects with organisational purpose improves execution, sharpens decision-making, protects scarce resources, and enables long-term adaptability in a volatile environment.

Keywords: *Portfolio Management, Strategic Alignment, Project Governance, Resource Optimisation, Organisational Agility, Innovation*

1. Introduction

Strategy Is Easy. Execution Is Hard. Over the past three decades, I have worked with organisations across healthcare, ICT, financial services, non-profits, and professional bodies. One pattern repeats itself with uncomfortable regularity. Boards approve sound strategies. Leaders speak convincingly about growth, impact, and transformation. Yet months later, little has changed on the ground.

Why? Because strategy does not fail on paper. It fails in execution. In African organisations, especially where resources are limited, skills are stretched, and external pressures are constant, execution discipline is not a luxury. It is a survival skill. Portfolio and project management, when applied correctly, provide that discipline. Not as

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bureaucracy, but as a practical way of ensuring that effort, money, and people are focused on what truly matters.

2. Why Alignment Matters More Than Ever

Too many projects still begin with good intentions but weak strategic grounding. Someone has an idea. A department feels pressure. Funding becomes available. A project is launched. What is often missing is a simple but critical question: *How does this initiative advance our organisational purpose?*

Modern portfolio management forces leadership teams to confront that question honestly. It requires projects to earn their place by demonstrating strategic relevance, not political support or historical precedent.

Research supports what many of us have observed in practice. Organisations that deliberately align projects with strategy waste far less money and deliver better outcomes. In African contexts, where every rand, shilling or naira must work harder—this alignment is not optional, it is essential.

3. Making Tough Choices About Scarce Resources

One of the hardest leadership responsibilities is saying “no”. Portfolio management provides a structured way to do exactly that. It makes trade-offs visible. It shows what is affordable, what is feasible, and what must wait.

In my work with SMEs and professional bodies, I have seen organisations attempt to run too many projects at once, spreading skilled people thin and exhausting management attention. The result is predictable: delays, burnout, and under-delivery.

Effective portfolio governance introduces realism into planning. Capacity matters. Timing matters. Priorities matter. When leaders regularly review and adjust their portfolios, organisations become more resilient and far better positioned to respond to change.

4. Visibility Creates Accountability

Another recurring challenge I see is poor visibility. Executives are often surprised by project failures that were quietly unfolding for months.

Centralised portfolio oversight changes this dynamic. Clear reporting, shared dashboards, and regular review forums create transparency. Problems surface earlier. Decisions improve. Accountability becomes part of the culture rather than an afterthought.

This is not about control for its own sake. It is about enabling leaders to intervene constructively—before small issues become organisational crises.

According to **Gartner (2022)**, organisations using advanced PPM platforms reduced project failure rates by up to 20%, thanks to improved data-driven decisions and accountability frameworks.

5. Innovation Without Chaos

Africa is one of the most dynamic regions in the world. Innovation is not optional here, it is constant. Yet innovation without structure quickly turns into chaos.

Portfolio management allows organisations to experiment responsibly. Agile principles, phased funding, and iterative delivery enable learning without undermining governance. In my experience, organisations that strike this balance innovate faster and recover quicker when initiatives do not deliver as expected.

Agility, properly understood, is not the absence of discipline. It is disciplined adaptability. **PwC's Global Project Management Survey (2020)** reported that 97% of organisations regard project management as critical to business performance. Firms embedding agility in portfolio management outperform peers in responsiveness and innovation.

6. A Reflection for African Leaders

If there is one lesson I would emphasise to African business owners, executives, and board members, it is this: *Projects are not operational distractions. They are how strategy becomes real.*

When organisations treat portfolio and project management as strategic capabilities, rather than administrative functions, they unlock clarity, focus, and momentum. They move from reacting to events to shaping outcomes.

7. Conclusion

Portfolio and project management (PPM) have matured well beyond tools and templates. In African organisational context, they are leadership capabilities.

When projects are deliberately aligned with purpose, organisations are better able to:

- Translate strategy into action.
- Protect and optimise scarce resources.
- Improve transparency and decision-making.
- Adapt confidently in uncertain and fast-changing environments.

These organisations will not only deliver today's objectives more effectively, they will build the capability to lead tomorrow.

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Transparency Note

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