Designing Project Architecture for Reuse:

How process maturity helps project teams move faster, reduce rework, and build value from one initiative to the next [1]

Madison Lundquist

Projects may be temporary, but the work patterns that shape their success rarely are.

Greater systematization of project architecture is becoming more urgent. Organizations are investing in automation and digital tools while asking teams to deliver projects faster, often with tighter budgets and leaner staffing. But modern platforms and AI tools do not automatically make projects more efficient. When project components are inconsistent or poorly defined, new tools can streamline project work on the surface while leaving the real sources of friction intact.

Research by the nonprofit American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC) on process maturity points to a practical insight for project leaders: The repeatable parts of project work need to be designed, managed, and improved with the same discipline as business processes.

From Templates to Project Components

The overlap between project management and process management points to the practices where process maturity can add the most value to project work (see Figure 1).

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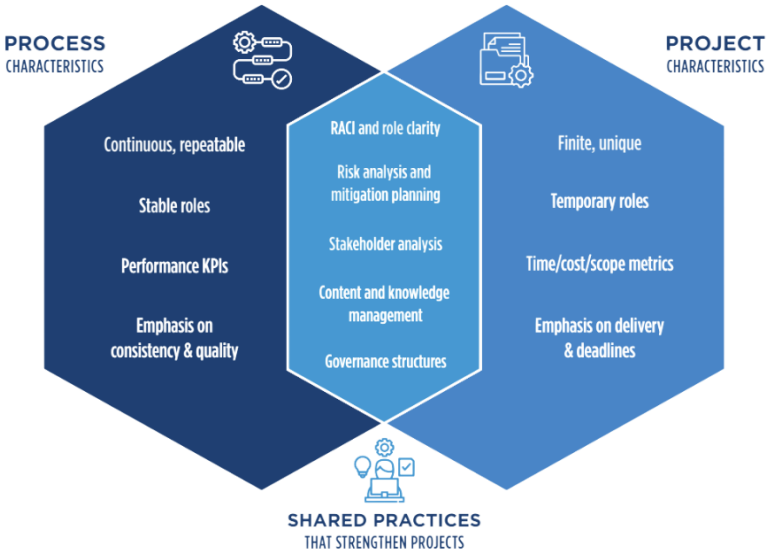
The Process-Project Intersection Map



Source: APQC

This image examines the characteristics that define projects and processes, along with their shared practices.

These areas – role clarity, risk and stakeholder analyses, knowledge and content management, and governance – are ripe for the kind of process development and discipline that saves time and energy in other parts of the business, generating value that compounds over time and across projects.

In organizations with process-mature project management, reuse extends beyond templates to include the context that makes those templates more useful. A stakeholder analysis, risk register, or governance model is easy to copy. But a copied artifact from a past project rarely gives the next team enough context to improve performance.

In process-mature organizations, project artifacts are paired with business rules, ownership, measures, and feedback loops. A risk register, for example, becomes part of a broader risk management component with common risk categories, escalation thresholds, decision rights, review cadence, and measures of risk response.

APQC research ties process maturity directly to project outcomes. In lower-maturity environments, projects are more likely to rely on individual effort and experience delays and

rework. As process maturity increases, project teams gain more consistent planning, reusable building blocks, faster delivery, and quicker knowledge transfer across projects.

Design Reuse With Process Expertise

Project managers do not need to become process managers to design reusable components. But they do need to recognize when project work is being slowed by weak or inconsistent processes. Where process management colleagues exist, they can be valuable partners. Where they do not, project managers can still apply process discipline at a practical level.

Identify recurring friction

Project managers are closest to the places where work slows down: unclear approvals, late stakeholder objections, repeated risk escalations, inconsistent handoffs, and lessons learned that never reach the next team. These patterns reveal where a reusable project component would have the greatest value.

Bring in process expertise where it exists

If the organization has process management, operational excellence, continuous improvement, transformation, or business architecture teams, involve them early. These colleagues can help define the process behind the project artifact: who owns it, how it should be governed, where it fits in the broader workflow, what measures should be attached, and how it should improve over time.

Start with one high-value componen

In organizations without formal process support, project managers can still begin small. Choose one recurring source of friction, such as scope-change approvals, risk escalation, stakeholder engagement, or project onboarding. Then build a component around it. Define the purpose, roles, required inputs, decision points, adaptation guidance, and measures of success.

Make ownership explicit

Reusable components fail when no one is responsible for keeping them current. A project manager may own the component during a project, but the organization needs a longer-term owner. That owner might sit in a PMO, a process team, a transformation office, or a functional

business area. The title matters less than the responsibility: maintain the current version, gather feedback, and decide when changes are needed.

Use measures to test whether reuse is working

A reusable component should improve project performance in visible ways. If the component addresses risk escalation, track escalation time, unresolved high-priority risks, or risk-related rework. If it addresses stakeholder engagement, track late objections, decision delays, or stakeholder satisfaction with the project process. This is where reuse begins to resemble process maturity.

Close the loop before the project ends

Do not wait for a lessons-learned session to capture improvements. At major milestones, ask what should change in the reusable component itself. Which guidance helped? Which decision rule was unclear? Which input was missing? Which measure would have shown progress sooner? By the time the project closes, the next version should already be clearer than the one the team inherited.

Make Reuse Part of How Projects Create Value

Reusable project architecture gives organizations a way to capture value beyond a single initiative. When recurring project components have context, ownership, measures, and feedback loops, they help teams reduce rework, improve consistency, and give the next project a stronger starting point.

Applying process management discipline to project work makes reuse more reliable. Teams should not have to depend on finding the right file or knowing the right person. Reuse should be built into how project work is designed, managed, and improved.

Project managers do not have to do this alone. Process management colleagues can help build the structure that makes reuse stick, and APQC's process management research and resources can help teams strengthen the practices behind it. With that structure in place, each project can give the next team a clearer path forward.

About the Author

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Madison Lundquist leads APQC's research on process and performance management. She uncovers best practices and performance metrics that help organizations improve efficiency and agility. Known for blending quantitative analysis with practical strategies, Madison's work helps organizations develop data-driven process programs and adopt proven approaches to continuous improvement.

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