LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MANUAL

for your Property Management Company

By Gwenn Aspen

anequim

About the Author

Gwenn Aspen is the co-founder and president of Anequim. Anequim helps property management companies be more efficient and successful through a variety of service offerings. From sourcing and managing professional remote labor from Mexico, to Rent Manager Call Center and Anequim Office Services, Anequim is able to provide game changing results to its clients. She is also co-host of the Bootstrappers Show which releases weekly episodes on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and Youtube. Gwenn was a founder of Wistar Group property management company in Omaha, Nebraska which manages 1,200+ doors. She continues to serve on Wistar Group's board. Gwenn has a background in the healthcare industry and is a graduate of the University of Michigan.

In This Guide:

Introduction:

"Do you have a second? I just want to talk to you about my career. I really want to move up and I was wondering if we could talk about how I might be able to do that."

As managers we have all gotten this inquiry – from all kinds of employees from rock stars to the uneven performers. Generally it solicits a deer-in-headlights response from us. We want the answer to be "yes!" But we may hesitate for a number of reasons.

First off, perhaps this person needs a lot more experience or coaching before we increase their level of responsibility or make them into a manager. Maybe they have a great heart but lack confidence. Maybe they are professional one minute, then fly off the handle or are overly emotional the next. Possibly they are excellent performers, but can be cruel and cutting if someone falls short of their high expectations. Whatever the reason, it is not always obvious where you should put your energy in terms of developing people because you are not entirely sure the juice is worth the squeeze.

Secondarily, you may love this person and think the world of them, but you are busy just keeping the ship asail. When in the world would you have time to develop this person? How much time would it take? How do you efficiently fit these development sessions into your already overloaded schedule?

> *"What does an employee development program even look like? Do you have to take them out in the woods and do some "trust falls"?"*

And last but not least, what does a development program even look like? Do you have to take them out in the woods and do some "trust falls"? Do you have to send them to an expensive leadership training center where they work on projects that have

nothing to do with the day-to-day operations of the office? It is hard to know what to do and whether it will actually help them become better leaders in the real-world business environment.

"What does an employee development program even look like? Do you have to take them out in the woods and do some "trust falls"?"

An Experience Every Manager Gets

These are the challenges that face every business that has employees. I've certainly faced them. In fact, as I was driving home from work after one of these touchy conversations, I was reflecting on how badly and awkwardly I had responded in the moment. I started to fantasize about having a manual ready to go for exactly these conversations. Wouldn't it be awesome to just shoot a manual/workbook over for them to read to get the development process started? And what if the process depended primarily on the employee's effort and time, not the manager's?

After a thorough search, I couldn't find anything that was flexible enough to align with my business demands and organized enough to create a systematized framework and disciplined approach. I wrote this guide to meet these needs.

> **EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT THAT IS:**
> - Simple
> - Easy to follow
> - Doesn't take away from your business
> - Costs essentially nothing to implement

It is designed to give to employees when they are hungry or restless for more responsibility. It is simple, easy to follow, doesn't take away from your business and costs essentially nothing to implement. It outlines exactly what needs to happen for someone to move up and quantifies their personal growth. It is perfect for busy managers who work with real employees in the real world. I hope you enjoy it and you find it useful in your business.

Boosting the Value of Your Business With Employee Development

Many property management companies struggle with developing their employees in meaningful ways. Generally speaking, managers wear many hats and are spread thin operationally. They are charged with solving so many mission-critical challenges that creating an employee leadership development curriculum is usually put on the back burner. And let's be honest, where do you even start with that kind of endeavor?

Don't feel bad, if you can relate. It turns out, small- and medium-sized companies are not alone in the struggle to nurture talented individuals. Even large corporations struggle with leadership development. According to research from the **Corporate Executive Board (CEB)**, "66% of companies invest in programs that aim to identify high-potential employees and help them advance, but only 24% of senior executives at those firms consider the programs to be a success. A mere 13% have confidence in the rising leaders at their firms, down from an already low 17% just three years ago."

The problem is not that we lack internal talent; rather, it is finding the time to manage specific projects that will help employees develop the mental muscles, habits, confidence and skills that leadership requires. Because of this challenge, there seems to be a big gap between where our entry-level employees currently are and where we need them to be in order for them to move up to the next level.

The real crime is that without a systematic approach, one that gets our highly valuable colleagues the training they need to move forward in their careers, we risk losing them to other firms. We also risk losing their engagement in their current position as their motivation takes a beating. When our employees check out this way, we stop seeing their growth potential, which drives that downward spiral of untapped talent.

The end result is that we have to then hire outside talent at a premium price to take those management and supervisory positions. But there are costs to doing so. That process drains valuable institutional knowledge and fails the people we care about and have invested in.

"When we fail to cultivate our employees, our businesses become overly dependent on owners to do an overwhelming amount of work, which leads to burn out."

Additionally, when we fail to cultivate our employees, our businesses become overly dependent on owners to do an overwhelming amount of work, which leads to burn out. Even worse, businesses that are overly dependent on their ownership for all the leadership responsibilities are **less valuable and harder to sell** than businesses that rely on employees for those responsibilities.

With so much on the line, can you really afford NOT to have a process to nurture talent within your organization?
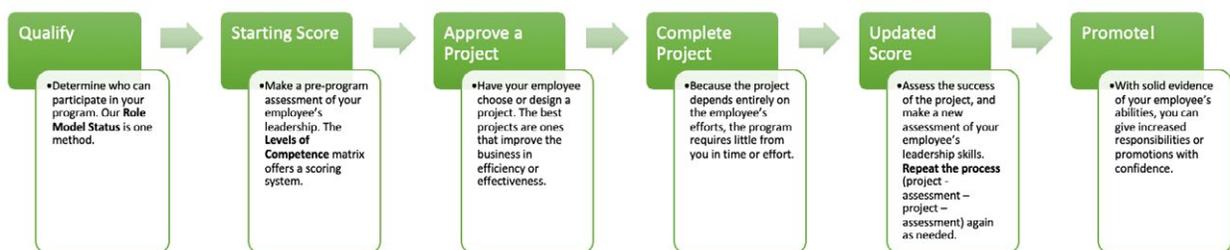
A Simple, Doable Program

To design a simple, doable leadership development program, we started by outlining the criteria that our program would have to meet in order to be successful. Here were our non-negotiable criteria for the program:

- NOT a time-suck for already overloaded managers
- Completely employee driven
- Aligns with the property management company's existing priorities and initiatives
- Simple and easy to follow
- Low cost
- Quantifies leadership growth
- Research-based approach

The leadership development program we cooked up is inspired by the Harvard Business Review Nov/Dec 2017 edition, which focused on launching successful leaders. The design gives your team a framework and all the tools you need to formalize a program that can be customized to your needs. From determining who is actually ready to participate and assessing baseline leadership skills, to outlining projects, measuring success and reflecting on real leadership gains, our program has all the components you need to easily and quickly start nurturing talent now.

Project-Based Employee Development: Program Steps

Qualify
- Determine who can participate in your program. Our **Role Model Status** is one method.

Starting Score
- Make a pre-program assessment of your employee's leadership. The **Levels of Competence** matrix offers a scoring system.

Approve a Project
- Have your employee choose or design a project. The best projects are ones that improve the business in efficiency or effectiveness.

Complete Project
- Because the project depends entirely on the employee's efforts, the program requires little from you in time or effort.

Updated Score
- Assess the success of the project, and make a new assessment of your employee's leadership skills. **Repeat the process** (project – assessment – project – assessment) again as needed.

Promote!
- With solid evidence of your employee's abilities, you can give increased responsibilities or promotions with confidence.

Step 1: Qualifying Candidates for Your Program

First, you need a way to determine who can and should participate. One simple way: admit anyone who meets our metrics for Role Model Status, as rated by their direct supervisor or manager.

Have your high-potential employee fill out **this form** to determine if they are ready and eligible for the program. Then schedule a 15–30 minute meeting to discuss whether you are in agreement with their self-assessment based on the worksheet. They must meet all the criteria outlined below.

Role Model Status is defined as having the following characteristics and abilities:

Personal characteristics:
- Trustworthy
- Reliable source for key institutional knowledge
- Capable of training other employees for the position he or she currently holds
- Embraces company values by incorporating them into daily work, articulating them to others and leading with them in the encouragement of colleagues
- Positive, forward-thinking attitude
- Willing and able to fill in whenever necessary
- Can tactfully point out systemic issues and propose ways to fix them (does not stay silent when things are not working)
- Handles feedback well and is coachable
- Kind and pleasant to work with

Operational abilities:
- Must get work done without having to be asked
- Must meet deadlines
- Must meet Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
- Must respond promptly to emails and phone calls, and be punctual to meetings
- Have clear, easy-to-understand communication
- Know how to do your operational role completely without needing help

When you meet to review the worksheet, if you identify some weaknesses of the team member and they do not meet all the criteria for Role Model Status, then set a meeting out a few months in the future and reevaluate to see if

they have improved enough to enter the program. The program is not for people who do not meet all the markers of Role Model Status.

If the individual meets all the criteria identified above, they then can enroll in the leadership development program. The next step in the program is to measure a baseline of their current leadership abilities.

Step 2: Get a "Starting Score" of Leadership Competencies

One of the main goals of the program is to help key employees quantify their growth in abilities and competencies regarding leadership. Our program uses the following matrix to assess leadership competencies. This matrix is used in executive evaluations at the corporate level across the United States.

The "Levels of Competence" Matrix
From Egon Zehnder, 2017, Harvard Business Review

LEVELS OF COMPETENCE

We evaluate executives on their mastery of eight leadership competencies (listed in the far left column), assessing where they fall on a spectrum from 1 (baseline) to 7 (extraordinary). We have found that four traits-curiosity, insight, engagement, and determination-predict how far managers will progress. Below each competency are the traits linked to strengh in it.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
RESULTS ORIENTATION PREDICTED BY: • Determination • Curiosity	Completes assignments	Work to make things better	Achieves goals	Exceeds goals	Improves firm's practices and performance	Redesigns practices for breakthrough results	Transforms business model
STRATEGIC ORIENTATION PREDICTED BY: • Insight • Curiosity	Understands immediate issues	Defines plan within larger strategy	Sets multiyear priorities	Defines multiyear strategy for own area	Changes business strategy in multiple areas	Creates high impact corporate strategy	Developes breakthrough corporate strategy
COLLABORATION AND INFLUENCE PREDICTED BY: • Engagement • Determination • Curiosity	Responds to requests	Supports colleagues	Actively engages with colleagues	Motivates others to work with self	Facilitates cross-group collaboration	Establishes collaborative culture	Forges transformational partnerships
TEAM LEADERSHIP PREDICTED BY: • Engagement • Curiosity	Directs work	Explains what to do and why	Gets input from team	Inspires team commitment	Empowers teams to work independently	Motivates diverse teams to perform	Building high-performance culture
DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITIES PREDICTED BY: • Engagement • Insight • Curiosity	Supports development efforts	Encourages others to develop	Actively supports team members growth	Systematically builds team's capability	Aids development outside team	Builds organizational capability	Instills culture focused on talent management
CHANGE LEADERSHIP PREDICTED BY: • Engagement • Determination • Insight • Curiosity	Accepts change	Supports change	Points out need for change	Makes compelling case for change	Mobilizes others to initiate change	Drivers firmwide momentum for change	Embed culture of change
MARKET UNDERSTANDING PREDICTED BY: • Insight • Curiosity	Knows immediate context	Knows general marketplace basics	Investigates market and customer dynamics	Deeply understand market	Generates insights about market's future	Identifies emerging business opportunities	Sees how to transform industry
INCLUSIVENESS PREDICTED BY: • Engagement • Insight • Curiosity	Accepts different views	Understands diverse views	Interrogates other points of view	Functions well across diverse groups	Facilities engagement between factions	Strategically increase employee diversity	Creates inclusive culture

SOURCE EGON ZEHNDER

Have the employee evaluate themselves on the eight leadership competencies in the matrix using the following form: [Where are you on the Leadership Competency Matrix]? This helps establish a baseline "starting score," which will allow you to measure their progress as they move forward in the program. After they fill out the form, meet with them for 15-30 minutes to determine if you agree with their self-assessment.

Moving Up the Matrix Through Employee-Directed Projects: Steps 3, 4, & 5

The worksheet linked above helps the participant identify a leadership composite score at baseline, and as they move through the program, they should be able to see their composite score increase as they acquire more skills and competencies. The only way to move up the leadership matrix is through hard work and practice. Our curriculum asks participants to design, lead and evaluate the results of projects that move your business forward through a formal process. Once the project is complete they would re-evaluate themselves on the leadership matrix to see if they improved in their leadership acumen.

Step 3: Project Design & Approval

Here's where the real action begins. You've got an employee who's qualified and you've measured their baseline leadership competencies. Now the employee needs to dream up an appropriate leadership project. This is their thing — after all, true leadership has to include initiative and strategic thinking. It's their responsibility to figure out a clearly defined project that THEY can lead.

This process only works if the employee has to plan the project out and pitch it to their manager or supervisor for approval.

> **LOOKING FOR GOOD PROJECT IDEAS TO GET THINGS GOING?** Read on to Chapter 4, which has different projects that could be ideal.

Step 4: Project Execution

Are you still involved? You shouldn't be. At this point in the program, your developing leader should be managing every little part of their approved project. That's the real beauty of an employee-driven program. Not only does it protect your time and energy, it also puts the burden of growth

and progress on the aspiring leader. Can they come to you with questions? Of course. But this is their time to shine, and it's also your time to step back. If they struggle, try to refrain from jumping in. As you surely know all too well as a manager or owner, the progress comes from figuring out and working through the most difficult parts of any project.

Step 5: Project Evaluation and Leadership Re-Assessment

If your employee has made it to the finish line of their project, you may indeed have a developing leader on your hands. At this stage, it's time to assess.

First, your employee should present to you the outcome of the project using the **Closing of a Project Form**. If there's a measurable KPI to review, that should definitely be part of the conversation. It's also useful to hear what challenges they encountered and how they worked through problems.

Finally, your employee should again score themselves on the **Leadership Competencies Matrix**. Together, you should review the progress that they have made. Only then can you determine what the next step is. For some employees, it'll be another, more challenging project, probably to work on a different set of skills. For some employees, you'll be able to see that they are ready for some added responsibility - or possibly even a promotion!

Putting a Project-Based Program Into Place

You're ready, and your employees are ready to launch an effective employee development program. But what if your employee can't think of a fitting project?

First off, review the ingredients that make for a great leadership project. In our view, any solid project worth the effort has to include these ingredients:

- Improves the business in some way, making it more EFFECTIVE or more EFFICIENT
- Clearly defined goal/outcome
- Measurable results, allowing you to track progress objectively with KPIs
- The right size - big enough to be a challenge, but small enough to finish within a few months

This **Project Brainstorming** worksheet can help them come up with some project ideas. After the participant completes this worksheet, have them schedule a 15-30 minute meeting to collaborate with you regarding choosing a project.

What a Project Is NOT

Be on the lookout for some common pitfalls in employee projects. Here's a hit list to keep in mind:

- Requires extended input or participation from you
- Is hard to tell when it's finished
- Hard to measure the outcome
- Requires a big financial investment
- Doesn't improve your business in an important way

Ideas to Get Your Employee Started

The project design is, for most teams, the single hardest part of this kind of employee-driven leadership development program.

To help your employees get some inspiration and some sense of good projects, read on. Chapter 4 has project ideas that the employee could head up in order to improve their leadership capabilities. Of course, any project that meets your organization's needs can be worked through with this methodology. However, many teams benefit from seeing examples of projects guaranteed to increase your team's effectiveness or efficiency, really moving your business forward.

Sample Projects

Take a look at these projects to see a range of solid examples. Even if these aren't exactly right for your business, they can give your employees a solid idea of the scope and nature of a good leadership development project.

1. After Hours Call Center Implementation

Most property management companies struggle with answering the phones and 24/7 maintenance, leasing, and call overflow support. Not having good after hours support can result in lost leads in clients and with prospective renters as well as expensive maintenance issues if emergencies are not handled properly.

PROJECT: Research various call center options and costs.
Come to management with the options and once an option is chosen be the facilitator for the implementation.
The participant should gather information like where the water shut off valve is on every building, key codes are entered, owner approved to spend limits are documented and a clean FAQs fact sheet is updated so the call center has the most up to date information.

Additionally, they should make sure the phones roll over at the right time and they should define how to handle emergency calls.

Lastly, make sure it is clear how your organization will deal with the service issues created and write down the new processes and procedures in your operational manual.

Done right this project can give you and your team well deserved evenings, weekends and holiday off especially if it is implemented well.

POSSIBLE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IMPACTED: Results Orientation, Collaboration and Influence, Team Leadership, Developing Organizational Capabilities, and Change Leadership

2. Automating Signable Documents

Automating signable documents can ensure consistency in all the documents an organization sends out. This will have a game-changing effect on your organization because it ensures that people are doing things according to processes and procedures and can greatly reduce the possibility of mistakes which can cost you dearly.

Not only does automating signable documents create consistency across all your communications, it also saves your employees hours upon hours of time leaving them to do other tasks that move your business forward.

Four documents that are game changing to have as automated signable documents include:
  • Lease Agreements
  • Management Agreements
  • Lease Addendums
  • Lead-based paint addendums

PROJECT: Work with team members directly affected by these documents and help them get the documents into signable documents. Have them script wherever possible to eliminate the possibility of mistakes caused by human error and greatly reduce the time spent processing each agreement.

POSSIBLE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IMPACTED: Results Orientation, Collaboration and Influence, Team Leadership, Developing Organizational Capabilities , Change Leadership, and Market Understanding.

3. Systematize and Automate Rent Collections

Rent collection can be a hassle and inconsistent if you don't have a strong process in place. Rent Manager can automate a lot of the process and reduce the amount of time your employees spend bringing the rents in.

PROJECT: By designing strong processes and procedures and implementing the automation through your computer system your rent collection can

improve tremendously and come across as highly sophisticated. The individual heading up this project can create filters in the system to ensure communications go out only to those who need it, while creating a disciplined timeline and essentially automating your accounts receivable.

POSSIBLE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IMPACTED: Results Orientation, Strategic Orientation, Collaboration and Influence, Team Leadership, Developing Organizational Capabilities, Change Leadership.

4. Implement Traction

[Traction: Get a Grip on your Business by Gino Wickman](#) is a business classic and can help your team get on the same page regarding vision, and implement a meeting cadence that facilitates positive action in any organization.

PROJECT: Participant needs to read the book. Then facilitate the discussion regarding the VTO. Following the creation of the mother documents and quarterly rocks the participant should propose the Key Performance Indicators tracked weekly and facilitate the meetings. This is a very high level project that requires the participant to have a high degree of confidence.

POSSIBLE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IMPACTED: Results Orientation, Strategic Orientation, Collaboration and Influence, Team Leadership, Developing Organizational Capabilities, Change Leadership, Inclusiveness.

5. Implement a Systems Software

Implementing written processes and procedures into a systems software can take any property management company to the next level. Systems software applications have a leg up on Google drive or other generic documents because they have more sophisticated nesting capabilities, checklists, tags and other organizational strategies built in that help you organize your business and make it more scalable and saleable.

PROJECT: The teammate heading up this project will need to research the various systems softwares (Sweet Process, Process Street, Tallyfy etc.) and present their positive and negative attributes to the team. They will have to move all the documents over to the new system while checking to make

sure the processes they are either creating from scratch or moving from an existing system are still accurate. This project requires them to work with all interested parties to make sure the processes and procedures are easy to understand and an accurate reflection of how people are doing.

POSSIBLE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IMPACTED: Results Orientation, Strategic Orientation, Collaboration and Influence, Team Leadership, Developing Organizational Capabilities, Change Leadership

6. Improve SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and Web Presence

Having a good online presence is imperative to growth and success in property management however it is often something that gets neglected over operational tasks.

PROJECT: The participant should do an analysis of your current SEO and web presence then propose a plan for improvement. Is it more Facebook ads? Is it more blog entries? They need to propose a plan and then implement it.

POSSIBLE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IMPACTED: Results Orientation, Strategic Orientation, Collaboration and Influence, Team Leadership, Developing Organizational Capabilities, Change Leadership, Market Understanding, Inclusiveness

7. Create a Branding Document

Branding documents can help you standardize your image and make sure you are known in your market. Branding documents to work off of are free on the internet. Many big companies have them as a model that you could replicate to create a sophisticated marketing strategy that sets you apart.

PROJECT: The team member heading up this project should research the branding documents of well known companies and solicit a designer to help with the design. They should interview and look at the work of the designer and hold meetings to get buy in from stakeholders. They should ensure that the document is created with the right look for the organization and make sure all of your documentation, web presence and presence in the community is in line with the standard set in the document.

POSSIBLE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IMPACTED: Results Orientation, Strategic Orientation, Collaboration and Influence, Team Leadership, Developing Organizational Capabilities, Change Leadership

8. Presentation on Book, Skill, or Software

Is there a software, skill or book you have not read or don't have time to research but you wish you did? Participants can learn everything there is to learn about a particular topic or book and create a recorded presentation about the topic so that you can decide whether you would like to implement it, act on it, or just learn more about the strategically important topic. The team member should be able to integrate what they learned into a proposal for your organization or explain why they believe the change would not be helpful to the goals of your organization.

POSSIBLE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IMPACTED: Results Orientation, Strategic Orientation, Collaboration and Influence, Team Leadership, Developing Organizational Capabilities, Change Leadership

9. Create a Branding Document

Developing your own educational content regarding the market you serve and your own business culture and values can be a time saving and cutting edge strategy. It is easy to record training courses live via tools like zoom and then house those training sessions in a training software with assessments to confirm understanding of employees. Having a robust series of training sessions online can help you scale up quickly in your business by culturally acclimating new team members seamlessly. You have the ability to create tests, surveys and all kinds of assessments on many of the platforms.

PROJECT: The team member implementing this project should define a curriculum that would really help your team flourish. They should devise the video content, create the assessments and help your team reach their full potential with top of the line training.

POSSIBLE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IMPACTED: Results Orientation, Strategic Orientation, Collaboration and Influence, Team Leadership, Developing Organizational Capabilities, Change Leadership, Market Understanding, Inclusiveness

Post-Project: Evaluating and Upgrading

If your employee has made it to the finish line on their project, congratulations — this program is really working for you! (Oh, and for your employee!)

Once the project has been completed and implemented, the participant should fill out the **Project Closing worksheet**. You will also want them to complete the **Leadership Matrix** worksheet again to see how they have moved along the leadership continuum and improved their composite score. The participant should meet with their manager/mentor for 15-30 minutes at the completion of the project to review the experience and determine next steps.

Next steps could be:
- Working on another project
- Mentoring someone else through the leadership development process
- Promotion
- Lateral move to make them more well rounded

The goal of all the projects is that the participant continues to learn and grow their leadership capabilities and business acumen.

How to Handle the Issue of Compensation

It is essential that participants of the program know that they have to show their value first before they will receive any additional compensation for their work. Therefore work done on these projects typically will be done at agreed upon times by the direct manager and at the current pay rate of the

participant. The work and the project accomplishments always have to come before any raise. Just because one project is completed doesn't mean that a raise will automatically be given. The best chance for any promotion or raise comes if the participant can directly attribute increased company revenue to their actions.

NEXT LEVEL: TRAIN THE TRAINER

If you have an employee who has mastered one or more of these projects, they can act as a mentor to other employees by helping them through this process. This leadership development curriculum works well in a mentorship capacity. Leading a project as the manager will thereby augment your key employee's skills even more,which gives you more capable people who can spearhead key projects, compounding your organization's ability to move and grow quickly.

What is it like to have several people on your team competent at leading key projects? It means less stress for ownership and makes your business more **valuable and sellable**.

REAPING THE BENEFITS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

When employees direct their own success with the support of great coaches and managers, so much moves forward. Not only can they learn a lot, it also helps crucial talent to stay engaged, while also helping owners build their company to its greatest potential.

This simple plan is an easy way for companies to develop their employees while avoiding the common pitfall of mistakenly adding another time-consuming project to their to-do list. Using these tools and this methodology, small- and medium-sized companies can develop their people much like any large corporation. We hope you have enjoyed this guide and that it helps you on your journey to nurturing your employees.

Here is a list of all the worksheets to create your own leadership development program:

- [Are you at Role Model Status](#)

- [Project Brainstorming Worksheet](#)

- [Project Planning Worksheet](#)

- [Milestone Worksheet](#)

- [Project Closing Worksheet](#)

- [Leadership Matrix](#)

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