

# The 3 Levels of Leadership

## Critical to Your Systems Project Success

Why Leadership Matters for Vision,  
Execution and Acceptance

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Every systems project introduces change, complexity and risk, and the single biggest determinant of success or failure is leadership.

**Strong leadership ensures that:**

- Change is embraced, not resisted.
- Teams stay aligned with business goals.
- Problems are solved quickly and decisively.
- Users adopt and maximize the system's capabilities.

CIOs naturally focus on technology, budget and timelines, but underestimating leadership dynamics is a critical mistake. The success of a system is not just about the software — it's about how effectively people adopt and use it.

**However, leadership in a systems project isn't about the CIO alone. Success depends on strong leadership at three levels:**

**1**

**Executive**

Setting the vision  
and securing  
organizational buy-in.

**2**

**Project**

Translating  
strategy into  
execution.

**3**

**End-User**

Driving adoption  
and trust at the  
ground level.

Let's explore what effective leadership looks like at each level and how CIOs can identify and coach effective leaders.

# Executive Leadership: Setting the Vision & Driving Commitment

## What Executive Leaders Do:

- Articulate the why behind the project, connecting it to institutional priorities.
- Communicate with clarity and consistency to ensure alignment across stakeholders.
- Provide visible, ongoing support, reinforcing that the project is a priority.
- Step in when resistance arises, addressing concerns at the highest level.

## Why It's Critical:

Executive leadership cannot be delegated. If top leadership fails to engage, the project will lack credibility and resistance will spread unchecked. Leaders can't just approve the project; they must actively champion it — especially when challenges emerge.

Strong executive leaders share some key qualities. First, they clearly articulate why the project is essential — both to the organization and to individual stakeholders. Second, they are engaged in major project milestones and communications. This allows them to spot and address risks earlier. Each engagement also reinforces the strategic importance of the project. And lastly, leaders address roadblocks proactively, rather than waiting for problems to escalate.

## Coaching Tip for CIOs:

- Ensure executives understand the importance of change management, not just project oversight.
- Provide them with talking points to reinforce messaging about the project's benefits.
- Encourage visible engagement including participating in town halls, emails and project updates.

# Project Leadership: Turning Strategy into Execution

## What Project Leaders Do:

- Take the strategic vision from executives and turn it into a clear, structured plan.
- Manage expectations, timelines and resource allocation across teams.
- Keep cross-functional teams aligned, ensuring business and technical teams work in sync.
- Anticipate risks and navigate challenges proactively.

## Why It's Critical:

Project leadership bridges the gap between vision and execution. Without steady, capable leaders, projects quickly lose direction, struggle with scope creep and fail to gain stakeholder confidence.

Strong project leaders demonstrate calm, clear decision-making even under pressure. They also are skilled at balancing competing priorities without losing focus. These skills earn them the respect of both executives and functional teams.

## Coaching Tip for CIOs:

- Establish clear authority and accountability for project leaders.
- Encourage transparent communication to ensure that risks and issues are detected early.
- Provide access to mentorship and leadership development to enhance decision-making skills.



# End-User Leadership: Building Trust & Driving Adoption

## What End-User Leaders Do:

- Advocate for the project within their departments and peer groups.
- Reinforce the benefits of change and why adoption matters.
- Provide real-world feedback to the project team to refine training and processes.
- Support colleagues in learning and navigating the new system post go-live.

## Why It's Critical:

End-user leaders are the trusted voices within the organization. Employees are more likely to accept change when peers champion it, rather than leadership mandating it. Strong end-users are critical in helping the organization successfully navigate the change management needed for new processes and systems to succeed.

You can find strong end-user leaders by looking for individuals who are respected within their teams and have strong peer relationships. Seek out people who are solution-oriented, focusing on how to make the new system work rather than resisting it. Generally, strong end-user leaders are naturally collaborative and proactive, helping others without being asked.

## Coaching Tip for CIOs:

- Identify key influencers early in the project and bring them into discussions.
- Equip them with clear messaging and tools to help their peers.
- Recognize and reward their contributions to project success.

# Final Thought: Leadership is Nonnegotiable for Systems Success

Before launching any systems project, CIOs must ensure they have:

- Engaged executive leaders who set the vision and remove roadblocks.
- Strong project leaders who translate strategy into execution.
- Respected end-user champions who foster adoption and buy-in.

## Key Question for CIOs:

Have you identified the leaders who will drive your project's success at all three levels?

Establishing a strong leadership team across all levels of your organization is just one step toward successfully implementing or optimizing your enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution. Synexis Consulting has 30 years of experience working with organizations to get the most from their ERP systems. Contact us to find out the next step to take after assembling your leadership team.

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