R

REAKTOR PROJECT HANDBOOK

v. 0.5

Written by
Reaktorians

Edited by
Aapo Kojo
Mari Elomäki
Laura Kuisma

Layout by
Antero Päärni

Additional help
Rebecca Hakola
Ville Mäenpää
Mikko Luotonen
Mathias Lindholm

Project Handbook with links to online material
pages.reaktor.com/project-handbook

WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

You’re looking at the Reaktor Project Handbook, a manual for everyone involved in our projects; developers, designers, project managers and other specialists alike.

We want to make information sharing easier over projects and assist in facilitating basic project practicalities – no need to reinvent the wheel every time.

These guidelines have proven to be useful and valuable in past product development projects. They’re suggested best practices; of course, it is up to you to choose the tools and methods for your case.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Here are the key principles that guide project work. These have proven to be useful in the past Reaktor projects. To increase the odds of a good project outcome, they are good to keep in mind throughout the project and check up on regularly.

Drive for success

- Do you know the success criteria for this project?
- What's the client's target? What's your target?

Take a look at the big picture

- Are you heading in the right direction?
- In the bigger picture, are you using time and money in the best possible way (not just sub-optimizing)?

Do the minimum

- "If you don't feel like you are living in scarcity, you're doing something wrong."

Maintain a forward-going attitude

- Work in autonomous teams: make decisions and go forward in the best way you can.
- Inspect your own ways of working regularly, make adaptations as you learn.

Team of 500

- No matter what the subject, you can always ask for advice from another Reaktorian.
- Slack, call, video call, have a coffee: utilise the hive-mind and get to know other Reaktorians personally.
- Are you solely working on the optimal solution for achieving the target (nothing more than what's required)? Be very explicit on what is the target.

These guidelines have proven to be useful and valuable in past product development projects. It is up to you to choose the tools and methods for your case.

Remember: “Zero users, zero insight”

- Rule of thumb: You should have at least 50% of your budget left when you go into production.
- The real work starts when your product is being used by real users. Validate everything in the real world.

Follow the rule of Sr. Koponen

- Avoid proxies in communication.
- Always try to involve all the relevant people in the same discussion.
- If you don’t have the power to make decisions on the matter you’re discussing, you’re talking with the wrong set of people.

> “If you don’t feel like you are living in scarcity, you’re doing something wrong.”

1.
PROJECT START

A well-structured and well-facilitated start lays the groundwork for the success of the project. Likewise, a poor start may lead to an unsatisfactory ending. Everyone involved in the project needs to share a common understanding of the basics of the project.

Make sure these basics are shared with everyone involved: the Reaktor project team, your client representative (Reaktor bizdev), the client, and relevant third parties. A kick-off is a good way of getting everyone on the same page from the get-go.

CREATE A COMMON UNDERSTANDING ON THE PROJECT BASICS

Project purpose

- What's the success criteria for the project? How do you measure success?
- What does the client want?
- What has the client bought from us?

Project practicalities

- What's the project budget?
- What's the pricing model?
- Is it a fixed budget with fixed scope?
- Is it billed on time and material basis?
- What are the hourly rates?
- Is there a need to separate specific work with different Hours codes?
- What has been agreed on in the project agreement with the client?
- What was written in the offer for the project?

1. PROJECT START

KICK-OFF

Have a kick-off with your client and invite all stakeholders. If your client isn't organizing it, do it yourself. Note that you can also run a kick-off during the project, if the staffing or goals change.

Go through the following with your client

- What's the success criteria for the project?
- Who does what? Don't count on titles. Instead, ask what each person does and who's responsible for what.
- Who owns the budget?
- Who decides which task should be prioritized?
- Who needs to know what the team is doing?
- How do we communicate progress to the rest of the organization?
- What does the client need to know about the future?
- What are the dependencies?
- What are the risks in the project, how can we fail? (You can consider arranging a separate pre-mortem)

In case you'll be working in a distributed team, follow Turjo's distributed How-to

- For the kick-off, have everyone come on-site to the same place for a week or two
- Include after-work activities so that people have a chance to get to know each other
- Design teams around work streams so that teams are as independent as possible. In other words, minimize dependencies. This is crucial.
- Make global-level working agreements: when are different people available? How will you communicate?
- Establish an on-site cadence (of integration, demos, pull events, retros or whatever), so that people get together every other month, again for a week or two at a time.
- Invest in high-quality communications equipment.
- Set aside a budget for travel. You have to accept that remote teams comes at a cost.

YOUR WAYS OF WORKING (WOW)

Standup

The start of the day is usually good for this: don't just report what you did, but focus on what you plan on doing next. A good way to run the daily is to go through all relevant things on the wall from right to left, instead of going through each individual as suggested by classic Scrum.

Weekly

What day, what time? Invite the client and stakeholders, if needed. This is usually the place to prioritize the work for the following week with the client.

Demo

Agree on a time when most of your stakeholders can attend. Keep a regular time and always hold a demo. If you don't have anything to demo, still hold the demo. Cadence is important. Get your clients to meet with you regularly.

Retrospectives

Retrospectives are an opportunity for the team to improve the way they are working. "We're too busy to have a retrospective this week" means you definitely need to have a retrospective.

Visual control

Start the project by visualizing all possible work on a big board so that everyone can see it at all times. This board becomes the heart and soul of progress and status of the project.

Inspect and adapt

Improve your process in small steps when you learn what works and what not in your team. This is the single most important thing for any project's success.

> “It’s a good idea to post the WoW on a wall in your team space where everyone can see them.”

1. PROJECT START

AGREE ON WORKING PRACTICES

Working hours

People have different daily rhythms, you might work in different time zones, etc. Agree on working hours to maximize your time together.

How and where to talk

It's good to have a silent and peaceful working environment, but it's also advisable to foster informal discussions. Find a balance where both needs are satisfied.

How you work

What are your preferences for the working environment? Find the seating that best supports your daily activities. Don't get stuck; change the seating when your way of working changes.

Communicating absences

Have a system for communicating vacations, personal days off, sick leaves and and other absences with the team and the client. If you plan on working remotely regularly, agree on when and how to do it.

TAKE CARE OF PRACTICALITIES

Get access to everything you need, equip yourself with:

- A space from the client's office with tables and chairs and a wall, as close to your client as possible
- Knowledge of where your key stakeholders work
- Keys to the client's office and possible security clearances
- Sign NDAs
- We prefer company NDAs over personal NDAs
- Ask #help-legal in Reaktor Slack if in doubt
- Access to the client's systems: internet, intranet, IT, version control
- Communication essentials: client's IMS, mailing lists
- Commuting essentials: parking spaces for cars or bikes, etc.
- Office essentials: magic chart, paper, post-its, markers, pens (the proper kind), printer (or access to one)

> “Bribe the necessary people to get what you need :)”

2. DURING THE PROJECT

When the project has been running for a while and it's going forward in iterations of agreed time periods (e.g. sprints, weeks or months), it's essential to stay focused on the right things. Make sure your targets are up-to-date and that you're doing the right things to achieve the targets.

Working should be energizing, not energy-draining. Build mechanisms for checking your personal and team well-being and also make sure that you have enough ways to relieve pressure: retrospectives, team activities, dinners and such. Include your client when relevant.

From time to time it's good to make bigger shifts in the team's ways of working. This will keep things interesting for the team and ensure that product development keeps progressing. You can, for example, have a mid-project kick-off, reorganize the team space or shuffle the team structure.

This section presents a handful of practices to help with the routines.

DAILY

What to do today?

Keep your focus on the future, not the past. “What will I do today to achieve our targets?”

Challenge your activities

- Is this the most relevant thing to do right now?
- Are we focusing on the single most significant thing that needs to be done?
- Is this the most effective way to achieve the target?
- Are we focusing on getting stuff into production?

Keep your project board/ wall up to date

- Take out all irrelevant and outdated things from the board, grooming the board daily
- Is the board visualizing the way you work? Are there steps in your workflow that are not not visualized on the board? Are there unnecessary lanes or steps on your board? If the board doesn’t match reality, change the board.

Eliminate blockers

- Try to have as many dependencies in your own control as possible. Drive towards this every day.
- When you detect a blocker, help solve the issue with your client.
- Have hard deadlines for your dependencies, agree on what happens if the deadlines are not met.
- Escalate if your highest priority target cannot be met.

Eliminate invisible work

- Make all work visible and actionable. Set targets.
- Minimize the time spent on keeping the development environment up and running. Maximize the time spent on creating value.

How to spot invisible work creeping into your project?

- Someone is constantly working on a generic pool of things, e.g. infrastructure work, or refactoring
- Task post-its are are making babies – even simple tasks generate a lot of stuff that needs to be fixed before you can actually start the original task
- Work out of lanes: tasks that creep on to the board outside the prioritization

Maintain perspective

- Distinguish failure demand from value demand
- Don’t act on every request; remember your targets and priorities
- Agree with the team on how incoming requests are handled. Prioritize together with the client

Pay attention to whether the work is meaningful

- For the final customer
- For the client
- For you
- For Reaktor

WEEKLY

It's not done before someone's using it

- Have you released something valuable to the users of your software?
- Focus on having the capability to release software weekly

Make sure all relevant people know what you're doing

- On a regular basis, demo your newest version for the client.
- Invite other stakeholders when needed.
- Make reports if required.

Plan the following week

- Are you still headed towards the same target?

Review your methods and the team's status

- Hold a retrospective once every few weeks.
- Whatever the interval, have a retrospective regularly.

Check up on the project budget

- Track your expenses.
- Report to the owner of the budget.
- Estimate future expenses (ask for help from #budusihteeri on Reaktor Slack).

Document your project

- Documenting your team's experiences and practices help not only your own project but may be of help to other projects in the future as well.
- Your documentation is needed for talking about the project both at Reaktor and the client, and for recruiting new talent and team members.
- Documenting on-the-go makes writing about the project easier later. Take good quality photos (and videos) of important moments, create high-quality screenshots of your services, take photos and backdrops from real-life usage scenarios. (When in need, ask for production help from #marketing on Reaktor Slack.)

Keep your space clean

- Keep your project space easy to approach: You want to invite people in for discussions.
- Signs of work (OK): sketches and piles of post-its on the desks and walls.
- Signs of untidiness (NOT OK): piles of cans, decaying food, desks and bins full of trash.

> "If you find yourself doing unmeaningful work, find out why, and act accordingly."

MONTHLY

Who decides whether the project will continue or end?

- It's likely a Steering Group.
- Make sure that those who decide about the project know its status.
- Participate in the Steering Group, demo the status.
- Are there corporate milestones that need to be met?
- Provide material for the corporate milestones, if needed.

Help monthly billing run smoothly

- Does the client know how much they will be charged each month? They should.
- Make sure your hours are reported properly and check the billing.
- Track and estimate your expenses weekly.

Stay in the know

- Attend trainings and conferences to keep yourself on the cutting edge of things

Share your experiences within Reaktor!

- Write about your learnings, successes and failures. Why not make it a reaktor.com blog post, too? (When in need, ask for editorial help from #writersblock on Slack.)
- Talk about your project in the Reaktor monthly meeting.
- Go to meetups to share learnings from your project.
- Attend communities of practice to talk about substance with other Reaktorians.

Do your homework for account management

1. Identify the key people
2. Meet them regularly
3. Repeat

- Make sure your client is happy with your work. Your team's way of working and results are the best reference for future projects.
- Promote your work across the client organization and keep an eye out for opportunities in helping the client with challenges in other areas.
- Work closely together with the Reaktor bizdev team to synchronize your status and communication with the client.

3. ENDING THE PROJECT

All projects end at some point, and that's cool. Make sure you know about the ending well in advance, so you can finish things in style.

Stay on the look for potential signals of the project ending, for example, the following: the budget is about to run out, a major milestone has been reached, the client organization is being reshuffled, the client's strategic focus is shifting, a vacation season is coming, or a new year or quarter is beginning.

This section provides some practicalities for wrapping up the project.

PRACTICALITIES FOR ENDING THE PROJECT

Hand the project over smoothly

Who will take over the product and project after you? Make sure they have all the knowledge and tools they need to continue smoothly.

Close the budget

Make sure everything is billed properly and analyze how we did financially.

Do a post mortem

Hold a final retrospective for the project.

Celebrate!

Organize an event with your client, where you can cherish your memories of the project.

Leave the house neatly

Pack your bags and leave things tidier than they were when you came.

Follow up

After a while, ask the client how they're doing. How was the handover? How's the project doing now?