

Project Friction Checklist

Five places to look when a project gets harder than it should.

Ask these questions before work begins or when priorities, scope, timing, or conditions change.

Priority

- Why now?
- What have we already committed to?
- If we do this, what moves or shrinks?

A reasonable request can still be the wrong priority right now.

Scope

- Why are we doing this?
- What does done look like?
- What's enough to accomplish the goal?
- What has changed—or could materially change this?

Define scope at the start.

Ownership

- Who needs to act or decide?
- By when?
- What happens if they don't?

Make the dependency and the consequence visible.

Capacity

- TIME: Is it available in the window?
- TALENT: Are the right people and skills available then?
- TREASURE: Is the money or outside help there?
- What constraint is most likely to slow us down?

Plan against actual availability, not the org chart.

Learning

- What do we expect?
- What will we watch?
- What would cause us to adjust?

"Done" and "worked" aren't the same question.

Keep Projects From Going Off the Rails

When Something Changes

Projects, priorities, and circumstances change. When that happens, don't just absorb it. Decide what changes with it.

Look across six levers:

PRIORITY: Move or stop other work.

SCOPE: Do less or simplify the deliverable.

TIME: Move the deadline or sequence.

TALENT: Reassign work or add the right help.

TREASURE: Add budget, tools, or outside support.

RISK: Consciously accept a different level of quality, performance, or certainty.

When the project changes, something else has to change with it.

Language You Can Use

Make the trade-off visible:

- "We need approval by Thursday to stay on track or we'll need to move the date or scale back."
- "We can add that. What should change in scope, timeline, or resources to make room?"

The specific ask is the kind ask.

How to Use This Tool

- Use before significant work starts, not after work stalls.
- Run it quickly now and again if the project or circumstances change.
- Scale the process to the work. Small projects may only need a mental check; larger work may need a brief, kickoff, or project plan.

Don't add another process if you don't need one.

Why This Matters

- Clear priorities protect focus.
- Defined scope reduces rework.
- Visible ownership keeps decisions moving.
- Realistic capacity = credible commitments
- Learning while the work is moving makes the next decision better.