

# ResoLex's Lessons from the Tideway Project: Reflection on A Rare Project Management Unicorn

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**Only 8.5% of mega projects deliver on time and budget\*.**

This was the opening line at the ICE event 'Lessons from the Tideway Project', and it's certainly one that catches your attention!

Mainly because Thames Tideway, the £4.5bn, 25km super sewer under London, has managed to be one of those few 'unicorns' – despite the challenges of a major urban area, challenging stakeholders, and even being hit by a global pandemic.

So, how was this such a success? And, what can we learn to create the same environment for success?

The event began with a keynote speech from Andy Mitchell CBE, the CEO of Tideway, followed by a panel discussion with Chris Merridew, Roger Bailey, Wendy Gillies, and Rafael Foulquie, facilitated by Raj Pathak, that represented some of the key organisations within the Tideway Alliance. Andy's speech highlighted four key themes to Tideway's success, which were supported and reinforced by the panellists:

1. **Culture:** Tideway built its culture from the ground up, with appropriate ground rules for ways of working that focused on the vision. Important to note that the culture always had to drive decisions and behaviours, rather than being secondary to 'profit' or the 'mission'. As Andy put it: Culture that only works on good days is an inauthentic illusion! The project culture was fundamental to enabling the other themes, as well as the wider success of the project.
2. **Financing and contracting:** Tideway had a practical approach to financing and contracting, with a sensible range of outcomes that would define success and straightforward supply chain contracts – and, importantly, a straightforward approach to using the contract in practice: It's all well and good saying "the contract says that's your problem", but if it's a big problem, you can't hide your head in the sand! This requires practical, forward-thinking decision-making, built on trust.
3. **Effective leadership:** Tideway set up an effective, independent board that enabled rapid decision-making so that they could get on with implementing those decisions!
4. **Clear relationships:** Tideway focused on building good relationships with informed stakeholders, having regular meetings, with transparent information sharing to ensure that the key stakeholders, both internal and external, knew what they needed to know to do their jobs, and build the trust needed to effectively deliver together.

Andy was clear that embedding these themes was not an overnight job – it took years to build and define what success looked like and build the trust needed to deliver!

In the panel discussion, all the participants repeatedly echoed the vision: **Reconnect Londoners with their river**. This was clearly more than just a corporate platitude, but something that every person, regardless of their position or parent organisation, believed in.

So what were their big tips for ensuring success?

- **Build trust** with your internal stakeholders, those on the ground delivering your vision – through transparency, clarity, and doing what you say you will.
- Build an aligned and inspiring **vision** – make sure everyone knows why they are there and what they are working to!
- Embed **behavioural safety** – so your people dare to be the best they can be, knowing they are supported
- Introduce **play** – let people be imaginative, try new things, and transform the way we deliver.
- Finally, it **all comes back to the Client** – be clear on what you stand for, because ultimately the culture and behaviours that underpin project success start from you. Whether it's an Alliance arrangement or a classic transactional environment, you are the leader, and you demonstrate the way things should be done.

Ultimately, it was inspiring to see a project that understood the need for and focused on the people, ways of working and the project culture – and got the right results from doing so!

To find out more about the revolutionary worked being pioneered by the teams at ResoLex, click [Here](#).

*\* based on the research by Bent Flyvbjerg*