

FIX BROKEN PROJECTS, QUICKLY

The Key to a Turn-Around: Transparency, Swift Intervention, and Inclusiveness



Abstract

Encounters with technology project management's "Broken Project" are nearly inescapable. Such projects exhibit budget overruns, performance issues, and scrutiny from upper management. "Troubled" projects result from excessive deviations in time, cost, and scope, jeopardizing success. Effective assessment and recovery are vital, demanding rapid yet comprehensive action. Bluedog's structured five-step approach provides immediate guidance and outcomes. This process, led by Bluedog's expert project lead (EPL), involves project charter definition, assessment plan development, execution, recovery plan formulation, and progress monitoring. Clear communication, morale, and personnel management are pivotal. Successful restoration hinges on precise execution and reconstruction, culminating in an exit review.

In the realm of technology project management, encounters with the enigmatic "Broken Project" are almost inevitable. Whether one is a seasoned professional or one finds themselves thrust into such a role, regardless of their background, sometimes projects go off the rails. A Broken Project tends to exhibit certain common traits: it's plagued by budget overruns, underwhelming performance, and, more worrisome still, it endures intense scrutiny from the upper echelons of the organization. Essentially, a "troubled" project implies that the deviations in time, cost, and scope have surpassed acceptable thresholds, threatening the project's trajectory towards failure. Such projects exact a considerable toll, not just on the customer and the organization, but also on the individual navigating these stormy waters.

Naturally, a degree of "slippage" is inherent in project management methodologies, which revolve around the triad of time, cost, and scope. A competent project control system entails monitoring these facets, assessing actual performance against initial estimates, thereby revealing variances. Nonetheless, variances, which are normal in the real world, shouldn't inherently set off alarm bells. Alarm arises when these variances dramatically exceed "acceptable" levels, signaling the imperative need for rectifications to align the project with its intended baseline performance.

Experience has consistently demonstrated that projects tend to veer off course in the later stages of their lifecycle, often when they are poised for full-scale implementation. Predictably, this coincides with the worst possible juncture for turmoil to emerge. At this juncture, leisurely assessment and gradual implementation of a recovery plan are unaffordable luxuries. Sponsors, clients, customers, and stakeholders demand swift action, with expectations for immediate results, insights, and corrective measures. The focus intensifies, with heightened scrutiny pervading all activities from this crisis point onwards.

Given these exigencies, conducting a rapid yet thorough assessment and recovery becomes paramount. A structured five-step approach offers a playbook to provide immediate direction and outcomes for Bluedog's expert project lead (EPL) and the Bluedog team. The journey commences with the assessment phase, centering on gauging the project's present state and identifying necessary modifications in personnel, project specifications, and management processes to enhance performance. A Bluedog Project Assessment encompasses:

1. Defining the Charter: The project charter allocates authority to the EPL, typically an external individual. To ensure cooperation between the EPL, the Project Manager (PM), and the Bluedog team, the charter establishes a common commitment. In this important first step you are attempting to identify and agree on a number of critical elements which will be included in the project charter. For example, we need to:

- Define the mission with the customer and project sponsor
- Understand the project history and organizational sensitivities
- Determine the assessment approach and establish initial Bluedog team contact
- Complete the charter and obtain consensus

2. Developing the Assessment Plan:

Here, a realistic assessment plan is crafted, focusing on expeditious execution, accurate findings, and minimal project team disruption. Bluedog will develop a day-by-day schedule of the assessment process, which puts everyone on notice that time is of the essence. This means that certain people need to be available at specific times to help the Bluedog team. The assessment period is only a few days, so the more detailed and specific the agenda, the more productive Bluedog will be in its effort to produce a robust assessment plan.

Bluedog “broken project” assessment plan will include: Focused objectives of the assessment; WBS of the assessment process; Labor estimates and resources required for the assessment; Risk and problem

management approaches; Detailed schedule of activities; Tools to be employed for each task; a list of deliverables to be produced; and, if applicable, virtual war-room needs.

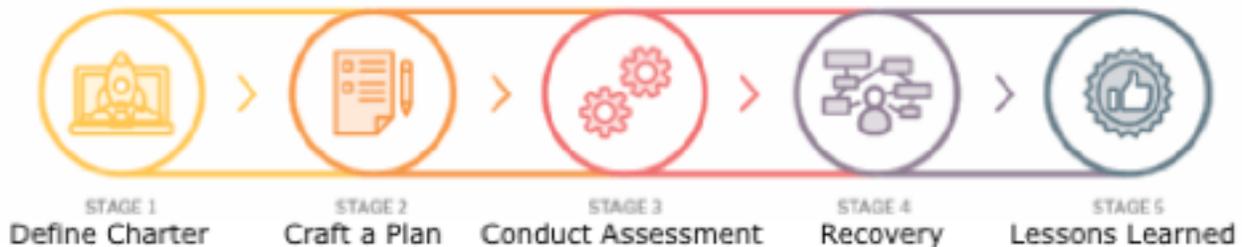
3. Conducting the Assessment: The Assessment Plan is executed, comprising activities such as reviewing project documentation, conducting interviews, and data analysis. Documents we would review include: Existing project charter; Contract or Statement of Work (SOW); Project management plan (PMP); task metrics and processes; signed agreements with internal organizational units; Estimate and pricing details; and, the project organization chart. One of the keys to successful conclusion of this step is to get off on the right foot—which means conducting a kickoff meeting with the extended assessment team. At this juncture Bluedog poses a difficult question to you, our client: Is it worth the attempt to recover this project?

4. Developing the Recovery Plan: This stage revolves around creating a recovery project plan and gathering a dedicated team for the task. The plan must withstand rigorous scrutiny, considering the precarious state of the project.

5. Conducting the Recovery: The execution and monitoring phase, where meticulous attention to inchstone-based progress is essential, eventually transitioning back to a baseline project plan. Inchstone-based progress is where we check team progress in a daily stand-up meeting with all hands on deck.

Throughout the assessment process, establishing clear communication channels, maintaining morale, and addressing personnel issues are crucial. Interviews, data analysis, and findings generation help uncover the root causes of the project's woes, enabling the Bluedog team to decide if recovery is feasible and advisable. Should recovery be chosen, meticulous monitoring, risk management, and stakeholder engagement become the linchpins of progress. Successful restoration hinges on the steady reconstruction of project elements, culminating in an exit review.

Getting a Project Back on Track, in Five Steps



In essence, navigating a Broken Project calls for a blend of precision and adaptability. Swift action, rooted in a structured approach, guides the way towards regaining control, fostering renewed confidence, and shepherding the project back from the brink of failure. With each step meticulously orchestrated, the EPL and the Bluedog team can orchestrate a turnaround that not only salvages the project but bolsters your team’s standing within your organizational fabric — and restores your customer’s faith in you.

Learn More

Contact us to find out how Bluedog's Workflow Optimization Services can help you improve workflow optimization to drive the success of your organization — visit www.Bluedog.net