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THE RECOVERY ROUTEBOOK 47

Your Project Is Behind Schedule: A Practical Recovery Guide



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Start with a dated recovery question

A recovery plan must improve the forecast while protecting the required outcome.

Ask the decision

How late is the current forecast, what causes it and which feasible option best protects business value? State the target, status date and uncertainty before promising a new finish.

The running case

A small equipment setup was planned to finish at day 9. At the end of day 2, requirements are complete but configuration is now estimated to need six further working days rather than four.

The immediate response

Confirm remaining work, dependencies, resources and acceptance needs. Keep the approved target visible while rebuilding the forecast from evidence.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write the target, current cutoff and decision your recovery review must support.

Verify the status before intervening

A misleading update can send recovery effort to the wrong place.

Check actual progress

Confirm completed outputs, actual start and finish dates, remaining durations, blockers and required rework. Ask the people doing and accepting the work to explain their evidence.

Use a common cutoff

In the case, day 2 means two working days have elapsed from a day-0 start. Activity A is complete; B and C have not started. Do not count A's two days again as remaining work.

Reconcile uncertainty

If a task is called nearly done, ask what remains before its successor can use the output. Record estimate ranges or assumptions when the evidence is incomplete.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Review one claimed completion against its actual acceptance condition.

Rebuild the dependency logic

The controlling sequence matters more than the largest overdue task list.

Trace the network

A requirements takes 2 days. B configuration takes 4 after A. C training preparation takes 3 after A. D integrated testing takes 2 after both B and C. E handover takes 1 after D.

Confirm feasibility

The baseline assumes separate, available owners for B and C, one working calendar and finish-to-start links without lag. Verify these assumptions before using parallel dates.

Inspect the interfaces

Ask which input each dependency represents and whether a milestone or imposed date is concealing unfinished work. Include testing and handover in the network.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Explain the real input behind the link most likely to control completion.

Calculate the original finish

Use the baseline network as the comparison, not as a substitute for today's forecast.

Forward calculation

A finishes at day 2. B finishes at 6; C finishes at 5. D starts at max(6, 5) = 6 and finishes at 8. E finishes at 9.

Controlling sequence

A-B-D-E totals 2 + 4 + 2 + 1 = 9 days. A-C-D-E totals 8 days. Under these assumptions, C has one day of float before it delays D.

Keep the meaning clear

Float belongs to this network and calendar. A resource restriction, changed duration or additional dependency could change it. Preserve the approved dates for comparison.

ID / work	Duration	Predecessor
A / requirements	2 days	None
B / configuration	4 days	A
C / training prep	3 days	A
D / testing	2 days	B and C
E / handover	1 day	D

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Recalculate the finish if the training-preparation duration increases to five days.

Calculate the current delay

Forecast from the cutoff using realistic remaining durations.

Updated evidence

A is complete at day 2. B now needs six days from day 2, so it finishes at 8. C still takes three days and finishes at 5 with its separate owner.

New forecast

D starts at max(8, 5) = 8, finishes at 10 and E finishes at 11. Forecast delay = day 11 - target day 9 = two working days.

Focus the investigation

B controls the current forecast, but confirm what caused its increase and whether other risks could affect the new path. Avoid adding arbitrary negative lags to force a target.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

State the current finish and the assumptions that could still change it.

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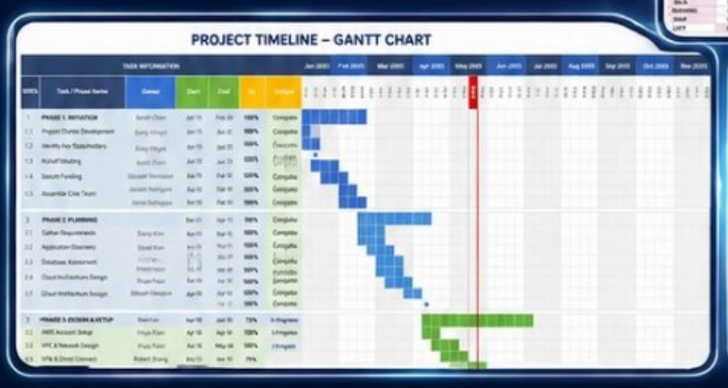
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Diagnose the cause before choosing a remedy

Different causes need different recovery actions.

Ask what changed

Compare original assumptions with actual evidence. Distinguish missing inputs, underestimated work, unavailable skills, avoidable rework and a dependency outside the team's control.

Apply the case

The supplier confirms that configuration needs additional work, not merely more waiting for an approval. A meeting about approval speed would therefore not remove the six-day requirement.

Use a cause-action link

Record each proposed action with the cause it addresses and the evidence that it can change the remaining plan. Avoid calling extra hours a solution without checking productivity and quality.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Choose one delay cause and test whether the proposed action actually addresses it.

Check resources and calendars

A shorter logical path is useful only if it can be staffed and executed.

Confirm capacity

Check named people, skills, equipment, access windows, absences and competing work. Resource commitments should come from the people authorised to provide them.

Test parallel work

If B and C require the same unavailable specialist, their apparent overlap is infeasible. Rebuild the schedule with that constraint before comparing recovery options.

Inspect work conditions

Extra shifts may need supervision, approvals, equipment access or handover time. Estimate their effect with the team rather than assuming twice the people halves the duration.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Validate the scarcest resource against the proposed recovery dates.

Option one: accelerate controlling work

Crashing trades additional cost for a feasible reduction in duration.

Case proposal

The supplier offers a confirmed additional specialist who can reduce B from six remaining days to four. The incremental cost is 400 per day saved, with a two-day maximum reduction.

Calculate the result

Added cost = 2 x 400 = 800. B finishes at day 6; C at 5; D at 8; E at 9. The option recovers the two-day delay under the stated assumptions.

Check before commitment

Confirm the offer, mobilisation, skill mix, acceptance standards and authority to spend. Recalculate other paths after the change; another sequence may become controlling.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Ask for evidence that the quoted duration reduction is achievable.

Option two: overlap suitable work

Fast tracking changes sequencing and can increase rework or coordination risk.

Case proposal

Split D into one day of test preparation and one day of final integrated testing. Preparation can use a stable partial configuration at day 7; final testing still waits for B to finish at day 8.

Calculate the result

Preparation runs day 7 to 8; final testing day 8 to 9; handover day 9 to 10. The revised logic recovers one day, leaving a one-day delay against the day-9 target.

Check the new dependency

This works only if the partial input is usable and the changed test sequence is technically approved. Record rework exposure and preserve the final acceptance requirements.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Identify which specific input permits overlap and who confirms it.

Option three: defer lower-value scope

A scope trade-off requires an authorised change and an acceptable result.

Case proposal

A separable optional reporting feature contributes two of B's six remaining days. Deferring it could reduce B to four, provided the pilot still meets the agreed operating outcome.

Calculate and assess

With B at four days, the network can again finish at day 9. Assess the feature's benefit, contractual and acceptance effects; do not assume duration savings automatically become cost savings.

Record the decision

Show what moves to a later release, who owns it and what users receive now. Update controlled scope and related plans only after the authorised decision.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Ask the acceptance owner whether the reduced result still fulfils the intended need.

Option four: accept a revised date

An honest date change can be preferable to an unsafe or uneconomic recovery.

Case proposal

Retain the current scope and feasible sequence, finishing at day 11. Explain the operational effect of the two-day delay, any dependent commitments and the cost of alternatives.

Compare business effects

If the delayed benefit is small and acceleration is expensive, accepting the date may be sensible. If a fixed access window would be missed, the consequences may be much larger.

Record authority

Present the recommendation to the decision owner with evidence and uncertainty. A revised forecast can be reported immediately; changing the approved baseline requires the appropriate authority.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Estimate the business effect of delay before choosing an acceleration premium.

Compare the options on one basis

A review should compare credible alternatives from the same cutoff.

Case summary

Current forecast: day 11. Confirmed acceleration: day 9 for 800 extra. Approved overlap, if feasible: day 10. Scope deferral, if accepted: day 9. Accepting delay keeps day 11.

Include more than the date

For each option, show scope, cost, resource commitments, acceptance, residual risks and confidence. Identify any mutually exclusive assumptions or unresolved approvals.

Recommend with conditions

State which option best supports the project's objective and what must be confirmed before commitment. Do not combine duration savings mechanically when the actions affect the same work.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Prepare a recommendation that includes both the expected result and its conditions.

Authorise and integrate the recovery

Make the chosen option executable across the project records.

Obtain the decision

Confirm the authority for added spend, changed scope, dependency revisions and any baseline adjustment. Preserve the original comparison and the reason for the approved change.

Update the connected plan

Revise activities, resources, costs, risks, acceptance steps and communications. Give each recovery action an owner, start condition, completion evidence and review point.

Apply the case

If acceleration is approved, obtain the specialist commitment and supplier dates before reporting day 9 as the committed recovery plan. Keep day 11 visible until the assumptions are secured.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Trace the chosen option into the schedule, budget and risk register.

Monitor whether recovery is working

Use short feedback intervals tied to the controlling work.

Check leading evidence

Review the inputs, specialist availability, intermediate outputs and acceptance progress that support the recovery date. Waiting for the final milestone can make corrective action too late.

Track the forecast

At each cutoff, update remaining durations and dependencies from evidence. Compare target, recovery commitment and current forecast; explain any difference rather than repeating the original promise.

Use explicit triggers

If B's stable output misses its checkpoint, reassess the date and escalate the decision. Record whether the response failed, its assumptions changed or another path became controlling.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Choose one early trigger that would require revisiting the recovery decision.

Communicate the situation clearly

Stakeholders need the delivery consequence and the decision they can make.

Use a concise message

State what changed, the forecast effect, the evidence, available options and your recommendation. Name the required authority and latest useful decision date.

Case message

Configuration now requires six days. Current finish is day 11 against day 9. A confirmed supplier option can restore day 9 for 800, subject to spend approval and retained acceptance standards.

Keep commitments distinct

Explain whether a date is the original target, an unapproved option or an authorised recovery commitment. Communicate changes to dependent teams and the operating owner.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write a five-sentence recovery message using the case structure.



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Your recovery desk check

A complete recovery decision connects diagnosis, feasibility and follow-through.

Diagnose

Status cutoff reliable; remaining work verified; dependency logic complete; current controlling path and resource constraints understood; cause linked to action.

Decide

Options compared on common assumptions; costs and acceptance effects visible; residual risks explained; owner and authority confirmed; chosen conditions secured.

Deliver

Integrated records updated; actions owned; leading checkpoints scheduled; current forecast reviewed; lessons captured. Keep reporting reality when the recovery plan needs adjustment.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Recalculate the forecast whenever new evidence changes the remaining network.