

SDS MAGNET #1

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9 Vital IT Project Recovery Steps

When does an IT project need to be “recovered”?

Project Recovery needs to be implemented when it becomes clear that the project is NOT on course to accomplishing one or more of its objectives.

Typically, projects that require recovery are experiencing one or more of the following:

- Over budget
- Behind schedule
- Lack of functionality
- Poor performance

Any of these issues alone are enough to require recovery steps. A combination of these issues increases the likelihood that failure is looming on the horizon.

Over Budget – In most cases, over budget issues have more to do with inadequate planning or an ineffective [development process](#). In projects where the budget is close to being blown, a scaling back of the scope is required in most cases.

Behind Schedule – In some cases, a project that is behind schedule doesn't need “Project Recovery” services. “[Project Acceleration](#)” services are all that are needed, such as an increase in staffing or access to [skilled software engineers](#) that are not on the team. Sometimes, deadline issues are not related to staffing but to the development process. This is a more involved issue to resolve [than](#) staffing.

Lack of Functionality – [A lack of functionality represents features that are not implemented yet or those that are implemented but are not usable because of quality issues.](#) This issue may be able to be resolved by accessing [higher skilled staff](#). However, it may also be an indication that the demands on the current staff are too high for generating a satisfactory quality result. (ED: This section doesn't talk of customer feature prioritization techniques or early delivery to drive feature urgency.)

Poor Performance – Slow response time, bottlenecks and limited scalability can all negatively impact performance. This issue can be extremely complicated to resolve and may need an architectural review of project in order to recover the project. [In a few cases, poor performance is due to the inefficiency of the](#)

code and is not an indicator of failed architecture. (See Ed's comment in discussion section)

9 Vital IT Project Recovery Steps

If you are experiencing more than one of the issues listed above, then these next steps are critical to recovering your project.

1. **Diagnostics** – How did the project get in this position? What's the problem? Consider the following areas and determine if **each** is an asset or an obstacle. (See Ed's comment in Discussion section)
 - **Leadership** – Is there truly a leader to this project? Is the leader headed in the correct direction to achieve the projects objectives? Is the current **project leadership** an asset or obstacle?
 - **Process** – Is the current **development process** effectively using the available resources? Do you have skilled team members, but are getting ineffective results? Is your current process an asset or obstacle?
 - **Project Manager** – Is the current **Project Manager** effective at managing the various aspects of the project? Is the Project Manager and asset or and obstacle?
 - **Product Manager** – Has the current Product Manager delivered the project requirement clearly and concisely? **Have** changes to the requirements been communicated effectively and **have they been timely**? Is the current Product Manager an asset or an obstacle?
 - **Technical Excellence** – Does the development team have the necessary combination of **skills AND experience** to deliver the project? Are the technical capabilities of the development team an asset or an obstacle?
 - **Architecture** – Does the architecture provide the foundation required to successfully complete the project? Does the architecture need to change? Is the current architecture of the project an asset or an obstacle? (per Ron)
2. **Identify the Obstacles** – Now that the diagnostic step is complete, summarize and prioritize the key findings. This will be your roadmap to project recovery. Based on this information, you will need to make the "Keep It or Can It" decision.
3. **Identify Key Priorities During the Recovery Phase** – Successful project recovery is a targeted process. Objectives must be accomplished in a prioritized order to bring the project back on track. Typically, this may require narrowing the scope of the project to earlier parameters. It is vital to set realistic expectations for the recovery process.

Quote of the Day

"The sooner we get behind, the more time we have to catch up."

Ohio Software Engineer

4. **Assemble the Best Team Possible** – In order to steer the project toward success and avoid repeating original problems, the harsh reality is changes in staff may need to be made. If the required expertise level is missing, then add it. If a team member can not produce the quality of work at the speed necessary for recovery, then replace them with someone who can. The recovery process is not the time for on-the-job training.
5. **Identify the Best Development Process for the Recovery Phase** – There are advantages and disadvantages to every development process. A project that has need of project recovery services may need to consider a change in the [developmental process](#).
6. **Set Realistic Expectations for Recovery Phase** – Do we still need this one?
7. **Create a War Room** - Communication is a vital key in project development and even more so in project recovery. Software is not developed in a vacuum! ALL MEMBERS of the team must be brought together in one room on a daily basis to discuss immediate issues.
8. **Appoint a Leader – Give Authority** – Every team needs a [leader](#) to guide them through the project. If the project is to be recovered, the leader must be given full authority to assign responsibilities and set priorities for the team members. Without this authority, the recovery process will fail.
9. **Avoid getting in the recovery position** – It is obvious (but not always real world) that having the right people, with the right skills, and adhering to a good development process, while having upper management support that appropriately funds the project with realistic expectations for time and money is the best way to eliminate the need for project recovery services. It's a complicated business!

If you are experiencing the frustrations of a project that is not on course to achieve its objectives, call Steve Held at 800-970-7374 ext 102 to discuss SDS's complete line of [Project Recovery](#) and [Project Acceleration](#) services.

DISCUSSION POINT

ED: Section Poor Performance

I don't think you can say "Slow response time ... negatively impacts performance".

Perhaps we can say "products experiencing response times that are slower than, or throughput numbers that are less than the original estimates, represent problems that require high skill analysis and in depth architectural reviews to overcome."

ED: Vital Step 1

The list of roles and the descriptions seem a little repetitive. Additionally, the role "Leadership" covers the Project and Product Manager roles, so could perhaps be combined in some way.

Most projects are going to review these roles are either determine that they are all fine or , because its the Project Manager performing the analysis, they will determine that the technical skill is not adequate. Not sure how to phrase this another way but perhaps more focus on role features instead of "asset or obstacle" will sound less confrontative and may allow the Project Managers doing the reading to self analyse a little better.

So a role feature might be "Does the project manager keep the entire team in a status meeting for more than 30 minutes each week?". "Does the team look forward to the status meetings?". Status meetings can be organized to take 5 minutes for teams of 12 to 15 people.

Another role feaure migh be "Does the technical leader engourage and police the use of unit testing amongst the team?". "Does the product build great more often that you would like?". "Are the product tests continuously executed?".

Something could be said about what has happened if no problems are found. "Are the expectations too high?". "Is the process preventing the great team from functioning at top speed?"