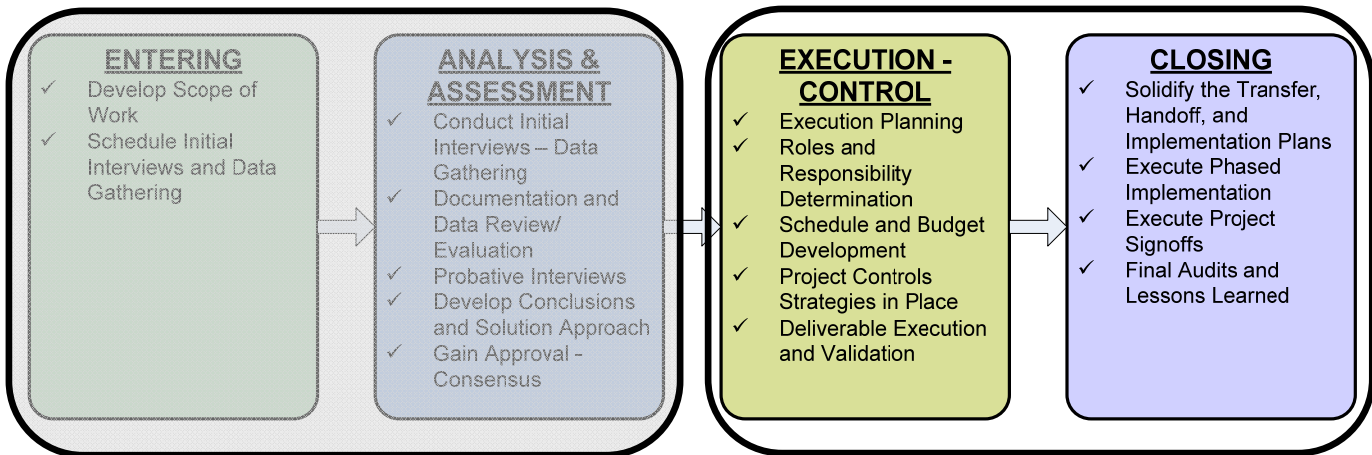


Article

Recovering Distressed Projects (part 2 of 2)

Written by: Tom Flynn, P.E., PMP

In the first installment of this two-part article, we left off at Gaining Approval for Findings and Solutions. In this, the final installment, we will discuss project execution, control, and formal closeout of the distressed/recovered projects.



Execution and Control Phase

Of the four required phases involved in recovering the distressed project, the Execution and Control phase signals a temporary sigh of relief. Although much more work will be required, it signals that we have properly assessed the issues with the prior project difficulties and our solution has been validated and approved.

Execution Planning

During the Analysis and Assessment Phase a fair amount of execution planning would have been committed to in order to develop sound and approvable solutions. In this phase, we will complete the definitive execution planning for our solution. Over the years, we have seen that most distressed projects lack proper execution planning and where there is a lack of execution planning, there is lack of execution cognizance and the lack of proper resources and for execution and closeout. Elements of a sound project execution plan (or project plan) include the elements-areas listed below and will vary from industry to industry.

Project Management	Design Management	Security Management
Risk Management	Information Management	Controls (Scope, Time, & Cost)
Communications Management	Resource Management	Quality - Testing - Validation
Quality Management	Procurement Management	Implementation - Closeout

With the proper execution elements addressed, planned for, and documented it should be very clear which resources we will need to execute our overall recovery plans.

Roles and Responsibility Determination

With a solid execution plan in place and the team resources identified, alignment sessions are utilized to review all deliverables, major roles, support roles, interdependencies and the required timing for deliverable development. Regardless of the size of the project effort, roles and responsibilities should be clearly documented using a basic RASCI (**R**esponsible, **A**ccountable, **S**upport, **C**onsult, & **I**nform) tool. For more definitive detail a complete WBS Dictionary may also be utilized.

Schedule and Budget Development

As with execution planning, we would have determined initial schedule and budget implications during the development of our recovery solution. In this phase, we will be developing the definitive master schedule and associated budget baseline (supported by our definitive execution plan). In sizeable project efforts it is advisable to utilize a dedicated scheduling resource (master scheduler) to develop and administer the project schedule. Many best-in-class organizations have realized that expecting the project manager to develop and maintain a complex network schedule and manage the various constituencies on the project is a tall order to say the least. Scheduling is a professional discipline and project scheduling on large and complex projects borders on art form. Developing accurate baselines that can be monitored, trended, and controlled is well worth the additional cost of the scheduling resource and in a recovery effort, we can't afford to miss the target a second time.

Project Control Strategies in Place

Developing sound project control strategies begins with accurate and "controllable" baselines. As mentioned above, a dedicated scheduling resource can make this "control" possible for the project manager. Experience has clearly shown us that for any sizeable effort, the project manager will not be able to successfully perform both the management and control duties required by such a project. In addition to accurate baseline development, sound project control requires the development of the following elements:

- Key milestones identified and attributed with deliverables
- Key deliverables with clear completion metrics
- Formal execution reviews (performance and risk related)
- Earned Value and Burn Rate strategies (monitoring and trending analysis)
- Defined and consistent performance reporting requirements for team members

Deliverable Execution and Validation

Once control strategies are in place deliverable execution may begin again. Our control strategies and practices will assist in trending actual performance against our baselines and incrementally validating deliverable execution (and reacting to variance).

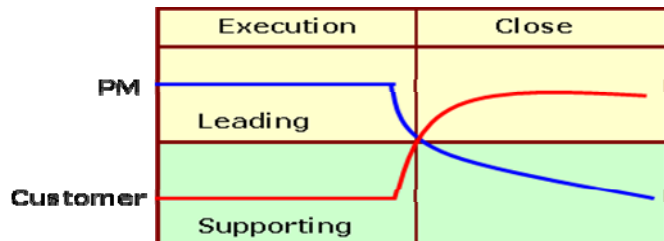
Closing Phase

For most projects, especially those that are large and complex, project closing is accomplished in a phased manner, or "rolling-wave" closing. It is not inconceivable to have early deliverables or portions of the project in Implementation/Operation while we are still completing later deliverables. The "fast track" expectations of most projects will ensure such a phased closing schema and adds another layer of chaos to the project. Also, and as true for many projects, organizations begin to "strip" resources from projects as they appear to be reaching the finish line. The project manager will want to guard against this by modeling (in the risk assessment) the adverse effects of prematurely diverting key resources to other projects.

Solidify the Transfer, Handoff, and Implementation Plans

This element of the overall project execution plan (project plan) requires a great deal of time and coordination to develop and solidify. Customer and project resources must be in alignment on roles and responsibilities for:

- Final testing and validation
- Training (content, materials and facilitation)
- Implementation assistance
- Timing for "custody" handoff of phased deliverables (project-based to operations-based transfer) the "roll-over"... the graphic below illustrates what we refer to as the "rollover", i.e. the Project Manager rolling down to the support role and the Customer rolling up to the leading role.



Execute Phased Implementation and Signoffs

If the Transfer, Handoff, and Implementation Plans are complete than the phased implementation and required signoffs can be executed as scheduled. For projects where the closeout phase is highly complicated, a separate and more detailed completion schedule (inch-stone schedule) to ensure a successfully executed closeout.

Final Audits and Lessons Learned

In a phased closeout the final audits and final lessons learned sessions will coincide with the phased execution schedule. It seems that no matter the size and criticality of the recovered project, there is always plenty of reasons to avoid the audits and lessons learned sessions. These practices are important for any project and organization and in the case of a recovered project where we will have spent significant sums of time, money, and attention to rein it in; we should commit to their execution in order to memorialize the initial issues and their costly solutions.

In summary, with a detailed and methodical approach to recovering projects, the effort need not be cathartic yet, it is still a wiser and less stressful approach to commit to the proper planning and diligence initially.

Tom Flynn, P.E., PMP is a founding partner and Vice President of Consulting Services at Advanced Management Services, Inc., Tom has initiated and spearheaded the development of the Project and Program Management Division which helped transform AMS into its current position as a leader in the Project Management Consulting and Training industry.

In addition to his technical project management competencies, he also utilizes his extensive training and experience in conflict management-resolution, change management and human development to successfully coach and mentor senior executives, project managers and project team personnel.