

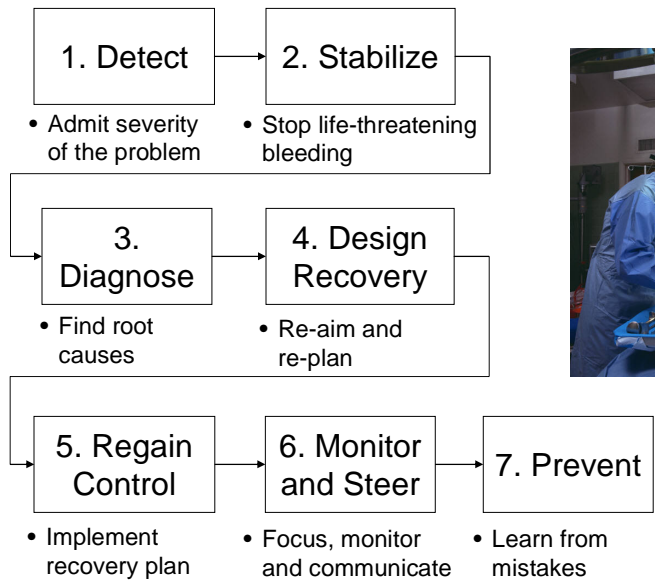
# How to Rescue Troubled Projects and Programs

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## Program Recovery Steps

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# ① Detect

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- Gradual deterioration
- Emotional stake

“  
 Studies by the Software Engineering Institute have found that poor project tracking is nearly universal in "chaotic" projects (which are the vast majority).”  
 - McConnell, *IEEE Software*



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# ① Detect and ② Stabilize

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Problem Area	Symptom
Poor performance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Frequent surprises and missed commitments</li> <li>2. No one knows real status of program</li> <li>3. Customer or management disengaged or losing confidence</li> <li>4. Unrealistic expectations regarding the triple constraint</li> </ol>
Excessive thrash	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Solution not converging</li> <li>6. Defect rate high and not dropping</li> <li>7. Unresolved decisions or festering issues</li> </ol>
Fuzzy finish line	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Unclear scope</li> <li>9. Out of control scope growth or changes</li> </ol>
People problems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Unclear roles and responsibilities</li> <li>11. Low morale, trust or performance among team members</li> <li>12. Sustained high overtime</li> </ol>

Apply first aid to stabilize for treatment



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### ③ Diagnose

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Diagnostic Category	Root Cause of Problem
People	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Insufficient resources</li> <li>2. Missing the right people with the right skills</li> <li>3. Low morale, poor motivation, or burnout</li> <li>4. Lack of trust and accountability</li> </ol>
Process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Insufficient controls to accurately track and steer</li> <li>6. Poor development methodology and tools</li> <li>7. Inadequate change control</li> <li>8. Quality shortcuts</li> <li>9. Missing communication mechanisms</li> </ol>
Product	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Unclear or unrealistic scope</li> <li>11. Unrealistic expectations for triple constraint</li> <li>12. Inadequate engineering design</li> </ol>
Technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Insufficiently stable technology</li> <li>14. Inappropriate technology for the problem</li> </ol>



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**Problem 1:**  
Replan

**Problem 2:** Finish the Project



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## ④ Five Bedrock Guideposts

- 1 There is only one chance to save patient
- 2 “Do it right” is the shortest path to success
- 3 Be unflinchingly realistic
- 4 Focus on the vital few
- 5 Plan for both short *and* long term victories

“This is a time for decisive action. If you’re going to make changes, make big changes and make them all at once.”

- McConnell, *Rapid Development*

## Discussion 1

**In teams, discuss your question. On the flip chart, summarize 2 points that you want to share with the rest of the group.**

1. How do you detect that a project is in enough trouble to require intervention?
2. How do you get beyond the symptoms to the real root causes of the problems?
3. What are your guiding principles for the replanning of a troubled project?

**④ Recovery Design: Re-Aim**

**I keep six honest serving-men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.**

Rudyard Kipling  
*Just So Stories*

**Why**

Re-clarify project's business purpose

**What**

Re-affirm or change agreement on project's scope

**Theory W**

Determine what success looks like

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**④ How, When, Who**

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Are the development and project management approaches still appropriate?

1: What deliverables will this program create?

2: What major tasks must be done to create them?

3: How long will they take?

4: What resources are required?

5: Who will do what?

6: How will we prepare for surprises?

7: How will we ensure quality?

8: How will we work together?

9: How will we work with the outside world?

10: How does everything fit together?

Intense risk management!

Revalidate scope and prioritize remaining deliverables

Update the WBS. What work remains?

How can tasks be arranged and resources deployed to get program back on track?

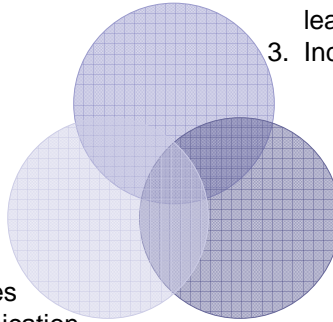
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## ⑤ Regain Control

### People First

1. Rebuild morale
2. Resolve people and leadership problems
3. Increase productivity



### Process

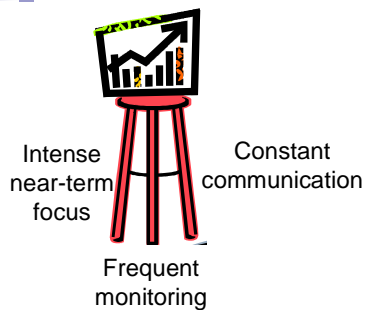
1. Repair broken development processes
2. Improve poor communication
3. Institute fanatic risk management
4. Install meticulous progress tracking

### Product and Technology

1. Clean up scope
2. Get to a known good state
3. Take out the garbage

## ⑥ The Fragile First Few Weeks

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*Remember Success Factors #4 and #5:*

4. Progress Measurement
5. Constant Communications

- Focus intensely on completing near term tasks
  - Set & track daily milestones
  - Build confidence and momentum
- Monitor progress constantly
  - Detect deviations early
  - React quickly
- Communicate frequently
  - Help everyone work together
  - Solve problems quickly
  - Celebrate progress and small victories

## Discussion 2

**In teams, discuss your question. On the flip chart, summarize 2 points that you want to share with the rest of the group.**

1. How do you ensure good progress in the first few weeks after restart?
2. What are your tips for renegotiating with the project's key stakeholders?
3. How do you repair people problems when rescuing a troubled project?

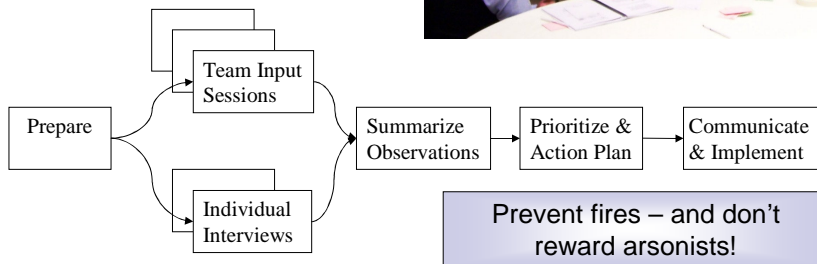
## Report Back

- Each team appoint a spokesperson to *briefly* summarize your team's 4 key points from the two discussions.
- Each team gets a total of 2 minutes maximum.

## ⑦ Prevent

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- Use fresh pain to motivate preventative action
- Learn lessons using a retrospective



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## Call to Action

1. First, admit the severity of the problems
2. Take time to find root causes and resist pressure for quick fixes
3. Fix people, process, product, and technology problems
4. Invest in prevention



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