

Programme Recovery: Why You Need It and How to Spot the Warning Signs

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Introduction:

Transformation programmes are ambitious endeavours that aim to drive significant change within an organisation. However, not all transformations proceed smoothly. Sometimes, despite careful planning, projects encounter challenges that threaten their success. Recognising these early warning signs and taking corrective action promptly can make the difference between salvaging a project and facing complete failure.

What Is Programme Recovery?

Programme recovery, sometimes known as programme rescue and closely related to project recovery and portfolio rescue, refers to the process of salvaging a failing or troubled change initiative. The goal is to bring the programme back on track and achieve its intended objectives successfully. When a programme faces significant issues—such as missed deadlines, budget overruns, scope creep, or declining performance—it may require definitive intervention to prevent further setbacks.

Early Warning Signs:

Here are some common early signs that indicate a transformation program needs recovery:

1. Missed Milestones:

- Frequent or consistent missing of programme progress points, including project milestones, and deadlines is a clear warning sign of potential trouble.
- Delays can disrupt the overall programme timeline and impact the desired outcomes.

2. Budget Overruns:

- When the programme's actual or predicted costs exceed the budgeted

amounts, it indicates financial mismanagement.

- Uncontrolled spending can jeopardise the programme's viability.

3. Scope Creep:

- Scope creep occurs when the programme's scope expands beyond the original agreement. This could be at the programme level or indicated by scope creep within its projects.
- Additional requirements or changes that are not properly managed can strain resources and timelines.

4. Decline in Performance:

- If programme performance metrics (such as quality, efficiency, or stakeholder satisfaction) decline significantly, it's a red flag.
- Poor performance may indicate underlying issues that need attention.

5. Lack of Stakeholder Alignment:

- Misalignment among key stakeholders can hinder progress.
- Disagreements, conflicting priorities, or lack of buy-in can derail the transformation.

6. Communication Breakdown:

- Inadequate communication within the programme team or with stakeholders can lead to misunderstandings and delays.
- Clear communication channels are essential for successful execution.

7. Resource Constraints:

- Insufficient resources (human, financial, or technological) can hinder progress.
- Lack of necessary skills or expertise may require adjustments.

Taking Action:

When you observe these warning signs, consider the following steps:

1. Assess the Situation:

- Conduct a thorough assessment of the programme's current state.
- Identify root causes and prioritise areas for improvement.

2. Engage Stakeholders:

- Involve key stakeholders in the recovery process.
- Seek their input, address concerns, and gain their commitment.

3. Develop a Recovery Plan:

- Create a detailed plan outlining corrective actions.
- Address specific issues, allocate resources, and set realistic goals.

4. Implement Changes:

- Execute the recovery plan promptly.
- Monitor progress and adjust as needed.

5. Monitor Continuously:

- Regularly track project performance against recovery goals.
- Be prepared to make further adjustments if necessary.

Behaviour:

Performing recovery is always painful; for those executing the recovery and for those members of the programme and projects involved.

Even when handled smoothly, there is always a significantly awkward period from the point of the investigation to the point that the programme turns in the right direction. That takes time and tenacity to see through to the new direction and let go of previous beliefs. It is rare that recovery happens from within the programme itself. Usually there's an external challenger with experience in handling large portfolios, being able to uncover underlying

issues, describe what good should look like for that programme, and then set the new course and remediating actions.

Technology is rarely the issue.

Conclusion:

Recognising the warning signs early and taking decisive action can turn a troubled transformation programme around. Programme recovery ensures that the investment made thus far is not exacerbated further, and that valuable outcomes are achievable where possible.

It's better to intervene proactively than to face the consequences of programme failure. By spotting the signs and implementing recovery measures, you can steer your transformation programme toward success.