

The First 30 Days.

A structured intervention framework for programs where standard delivery has broken down.



- 01 Most programs do not fail because of execution. They fail because decision authority collapsed before anyone noticed.
- 02 Coordination does not fix a structural problem. It masks it long enough to make recovery harder.
- 03 The first 30 days are not about managing the plan. They are about restoring the conditions under which a plan can work.

Ricardo de la Vega

Enterprise Program Recovery & Transformation Leader

`rdelavega.lat`

CONTEXT

Why This Framework Exists

Programs in crisis share a recognizable anatomy. By the time recovery becomes the mandate, three structural failures have typically compounded: decision authority is fragmented or absent, the critical path has been replaced by activity theater, and stakeholders have stopped trusting the program's outputs. No governance framework resolves this on its own. What resolves it is rapid diagnosis, followed by deliberate structural intervention.

This playbook documents the intervention sequence applied across program recoveries in global financial services, enterprise SaaS, and regulated infrastructure environments. It is not a methodology. It is an operational sequence with defined deliverables, specific decision points, and explicit ownership at each stage.

COMMON FAILURE MODES ADDRESSED

FAILURE MODE	SIGNAL	STRUCTURAL CAUSE
Decision rights vacuum	Meetings end without decisions	Ownership fragmented across vendors or layers
Dependency deadlock	Critical path blocked for weeks	No single owner of cross-team dependencies
Accountability diffusion	Everyone is responsible; no one is accountable	RACI not enforced; escalation paths unclear
Milestone theater	Green status until sudden red	Reporting optimized for optics, not accuracy
Governance collapse	Steering committee receives updates, not decisions	Cadence designed for visibility, not control

What this covers: Programs that have lost execution control: missed milestones, collapsed ownership, or a fixed deadline at risk. Applicable to cloud migrations, SaaS implementations, infrastructure consolidations, and multi-vendor delivery programs in regulated environments.

What this does not cover: Programs that need more resources, faster delivery, or better tooling. Those are optimization problems. This addresses structural failure where the issue is not capacity but architecture.

STRUCTURE

The Four-Phase Intervention

The 30-day recovery is structured in four phases, each with defined inputs, deliverables, and decision gates. Phases are sequential in structure but overlap in execution.

DAY 1 TO 3

Rapid Assessment 01

- Architecture & dependency map
- Project plan & RAID log review
- Stakeholder power mapping
- Last status report forensics
- War room established

DAY 4 TO 10

Governance Reset 02

- Decision authority anchored
- RACI rebuilt with real owners
- Escalation path defined
- Meeting structure redesigned
- Critical path validated

DAY 11 TO 21

Structural Stabilization 03

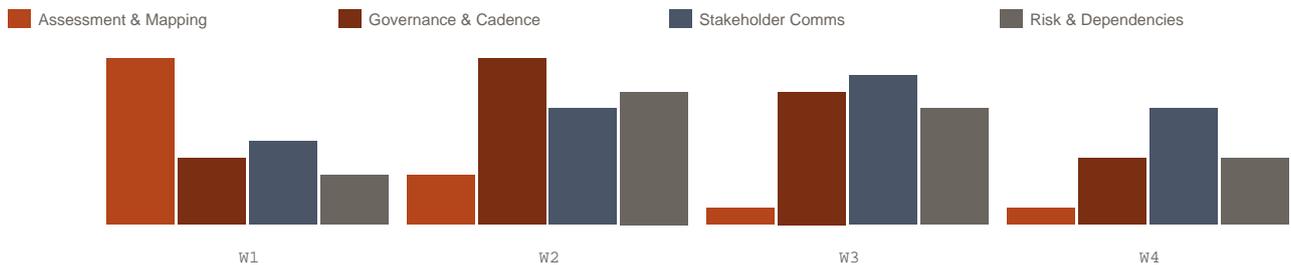
- Risk register with owners & thresholds
- Dependency map with blockers surfaced
- Scope rationalization completed
- Communication plan activated
- Operating cadence running

DAY 22 TO 30

Executive Alignment 04

- Milestone baseline reset
- Sponsor briefing delivered
- Recovery trajectory confirmed
- 90-day forward plan issued
- Handoff or continuation defined

ACTIVITY INTENSITY BY WEEK



Assessment and mapping front-loads the first week. Governance and cadence peak in weeks 2 and 3. Stakeholder communication accelerates as structure stabilizes.

EXECUTION

Phase 1: Rapid Assessment

Before any intervention, the program must be understood on its own terms -- not as reported, but as it actually operates. The assessment is not a discovery workshop. It is forensic.

DAY 1 -- COMMAND & ORIENTATION

Architecture review	Map all applications, services, and integration points in scope. Identify what is live, what is in progress, and what is at risk. Do not rely on documentation -- confirm with technical leads.
Project plan analysis	Review the current plan against the original baseline. Identify where schedule compression occurred, which milestones have been redefined, and where float has been consumed without acknowledgment.
RAID log forensics	If a RAID log exists, review what has been open for more than two weeks without resolution. Those items are the program's real critical path, not the Gantt chart.
Stakeholder mapping	Identify who has decision authority, who has influence without title, and who is actively blocking progress. This is political architecture, not an org chart exercise.
Last status report	Read the last three status reports as a set. The gap between what was reported and what is actually happening is the first diagnostic finding.

END OF DAY 1 DELIVERABLE

One-page executive status report. Not a slide deck. A document that states: program scope as understood, critical path as mapped, three highest-risk items with owners, and the one question that must be answered before anything else can move.

Phase 2: Governance Reset

The assessment will have identified where decision authority has collapsed. The governance reset does not add process -- it removes ambiguity. Every open question should have exactly one owner and one deadline.

Decision rights	Anchor decision authority explicitly. For each open issue, one person is accountable for the decision -- not the meeting, not the committee.
RACI rebuild	Rebuild the RACI with real owners, not role titles. If the person assigned cannot make the decision or does not have the authority, the RACI is decorative.

Escalation path	Define the escalation path in writing. Two levels maximum: team lead to program lead to sponsor. If it takes more than two escalations, the governance is broken.
Meeting redesign	Redesign every recurring meeting. Remove any meeting that produces updates. Keep only meetings that produce decisions. Each meeting ends with an owner, an action, and a date.
War room cadence	Establish a weekly executive war room. Not a status meeting. A decision meeting. Attendance is mandatory for decision-makers only.

EXECUTION

Phase 3: Structural Stabilization

With decision authority restored and cadence established, the program can now address its structural backlog: risks that were known but unmanaged, dependencies that were blocking but unacknowledged, and scope that was consuming resources without value.

Risk Register

Risks without owners do not exist. Build the register with three fields for each item: owner, threshold (the point at which it escalates automatically), and mitigation action. Review weekly.

Dependency Map

Map every cross-team and cross-vendor dependency with a date and current status. A dependency blocked for more than five business days without escalation is a program risk, not a coordination issue.

Scope Rationalization

Identify what is in scope that was not in the original scope but has no change record. That gap is the most common source of unplanned timeline pressure. Pause or formally accept it.

Communication Plan

Define cadence, format, and audience for each stakeholder group. Executive sponsors need decision-relevant summaries, not operational detail. The communication plan is a governance document, not a newsletter schedule.

Phase 4: Executive Alignment and Handoff

By day 22, the program should have a functioning governance structure, an accurate critical path, and a realistic milestone baseline. The final phase converts that operational stability into executive confidence and a forward plan.

THE MILESTONE RESET

ORIGINAL MILESTONE	BASELINE	STATUS	RESET DATE	OWNER
Architecture sign-off	Week 2	Missed	Day 18	CTO / Program Lead
Vendor integration	Week 4	At risk	Day 24	Integration Lead
UAT entry gate	Week 6	Deferred	Day 28	QA Lead
Stakeholder sign-off	Week 8	Pending governance	Day 32	Program Sponsor
Go-live	Week 12	Unknown	TBD	Executive Sponsor

THE SPONSOR BRIEFING

This is not a status update. It is a structured conversation with one purpose: confirming that the sponsor has the same understanding of program reality as the recovery lead. It covers four points only:

1. Where the program actually is versus where it was reported to be.
2. The three decisions that must be made at the executive level before day 30.
3. The recovery trajectory -- what stabilized looks like and when.
4. What happens if the required decisions are not made.

DELIVERABLES

Complete Deliverables Matrix

Every deliverable has an owner, a format, and a target date. Deliverables without owners are aspirations.

DELIVERABLE	FORMAT	TARGET	AUDIENCE	OWNER
Executive status report	1-page document	Day 1	Sponsor / Exec	Recovery Lead
Architecture & dependency map	Visual diagram	Day 2	Program team	Tech Lead
RAID log (structured)	Live register	Day 3	All stakeholders	Program Lead
Stakeholder power map	Internal document	Day 3	Recovery Lead	Recovery Lead
Decision rights document	RACI matrix	Day 5	All leads	Recovery Lead
Critical path (revised)	Schedule	Day 7	All leads	Program Lead
Meeting structure	Calendar + rules	Day 7	All	Recovery Lead
Risk register (with owners)	Live register	Day 10	Sponsor / Exec	Risk Lead
Dependency map (live)	Visual + dates	Day 14	All leads	Program Lead
Scope rationalization	Decision log	Day 17	Sponsor	Recovery Lead
Communication plan	Document	Day 18	All stakeholders	PMO / Comms
Milestone reset baseline	Updated schedule	Day 22	Sponsor / Exec	Program Lead
Sponsor briefing	Meeting + memo	Day 25	Exec Sponsor	Recovery Lead
90-day forward plan	Document	Day 28	Sponsor / Exec	Recovery Lead
Handoff or continuation memo	Decision document	Day 30	Exec Sponsor	Recovery Lead

OUTCOMES FROM APPLIED ENGAGEMENTS

<p>85%</p> <p>Faster deployments</p> <p>Fintech SaaS platform</p>	<p>88%</p> <p>OpEx reduction</p> <p>Global network consolidation</p>	<p>99.9%</p> <p>Availability sustained</p> <p>Financial data infrastructure</p>	<p>3 mos</p> <p>To stabilization</p> <p>Average across engagements</p>
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PERSPECTIVE

What Recovery Actually Requires

Program recovery is not a project management discipline. It is an organizational intervention. The plan is the least important thing. What matters is restoring the conditions under which the plan can be executed: clear ownership, working decision authority, and stakeholders who trust what they are being told.

In practice, the first two weeks of any recovery engagement are not about the program. They are about the organization. The dependency deadlock is real, but its root cause is not a scheduling problem. The milestone that was missed is symptomatic, but the cause is that no one had both the authority and the accountability to prevent it.

THREE OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

The RAID log tells you what the PM was afraid to escalate.

What is in the log reflects what was safe to document. What is not in the log is the real critical path. Look for risks that have been open for more than 30 days with no action. That is where the program has given up.

The critical path is almost never where the schedule says it is.

In every recovery engagement, the actual critical path has been displaced by political convenience. A dependency that nobody wants to own gets removed from the plan. An estimate that makes someone uncomfortable gets padded out of sight. Reconstruct it from first principles.

The sponsor often does not know how bad it is.

Not because they are not paying attention. Because the reporting structure has been designed to protect them from operational reality. Part of the recovery lead's job is to break that pattern -- once, clearly, early. That conversation is the most important deliverable of the first week.

Recovery is not about heroics. It is about discipline, applied consistently and early enough to matter.

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rdelavega.lat - ricardo@rdelavega.lat