

Cover to Cover

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Rescue the Problem Project: A Complete Guide to Identifying, Preventing, and Recovering from Project Failure

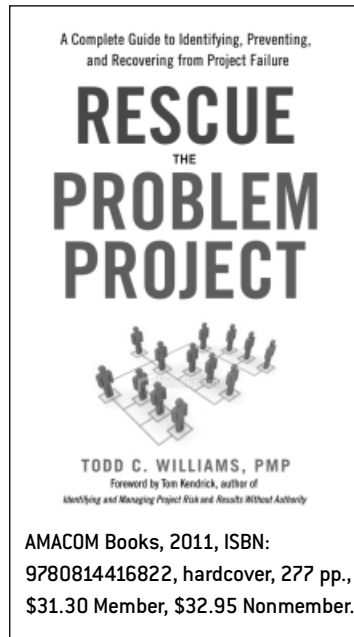
by Todd C. Williams

Most people are honored to be asked to manage a project for their organization, especially if it is a high-profile one and if they have a committed and motivated team focused on project success. However, for many reasons, a project may easily become one that is in jeopardy or considered to be “red” using the traffic light analogy. Should one then find he or she is managing such a project, Todd C. Williams’s *Rescue the Problem Project* is a useful resource. It also is helpful for others, such as executives, members of a project management office, or customers who see projects that require recovery.

The author provides a series of steps to consider and tells how best to apply them, beginning with recognizing there is a problem. For example, the team may not wish to escalate issues to the project manager, the project manager may feel similarly about escalating to a sponsor or a steering committee, useful metrics may not be used to monitor the work, and the organization may not have a defined portfolio management process that is used consistently. Then, as Williams explains, the next steps are to objectively audit the project; analyze the audit data, focusing on root causes; negotiate a winning solution; and implement a new plan.

On the surface, these four steps appear to be basic ones to follow. What sets this book apart from others is the author’s experience in serving as a recovery manager for problem projects and the lessons he has learned in doing so. The chapters present short but meaningful case studies; many based on personal experience, illustrated with tables and figures and with summary “takeaways.”

Since not everyone is suited to serving as a recovery manager, Chapter 2 describes key competencies: objectivity, a supportive team leader, and an effective negotiator. Williams discusses whether the recovery manager should



be internal or external to the organization and the need for a statement of work for the recovery effort.

The auditing step goes beyond the typical auditing discussion to lead to the root cause of the problems faced by the project. Since interviews serve as a cornerstone for audits, Williams discusses ways to make interviewees interested in sharing their concerns and suggestions. He provides guidance on how to best say no, for example, to scope creep. In analyzing auditing data, the author focuses on maintaining an engaged team with some early wins and correcting any project misperceptions.

Recognizing the usefulness of agile and critical chain techniques, Williams describes how they can assist in recovery in Chapters 11 and 12 with a concise overview of each one. Of particular interest here is his description of multitasking, since so often many feel it enhances productivity when in reality it does not. He extends the usefulness of agile and critical chain versus classical approaches in discussing change management, customer relationships, estimating, processes, and team member and subcontractor involvement.

After data are analyzed, it is time to negotiate workable solutions. Useful topics discussed include not only how to prepare an effective presentation, but also how to prepare the attendees in advance for negotiations. Then, the agreed-upon workable solution must be implemented, through corrective actions and by overcoming people’s perceptions about the project. Last, but certainly not least, is a discussion on avoiding troubled projects, with a focus on what to do when the project is initiated.

While a number of topics are covered in *Rescue the Problem Project*, the book is organized in a way that enables a project manager to consult specific topics to take proactive actions before recovery becomes a necessity.

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