Your project keeps slipping. Make the next decision clearer.

THE SLIPPING PROJECT CHECK

10 questions before your next Steering Committee.
A practical toolkit for sponsors, CIOs and project leaders.

Your outcome: a one-page recovery brief showing the evidence, the most consequential blocked work, the decision required and the next review.

- Start with a 15-minute check.
- Use six fillable worksheets to turn concerns into decisions.
- Follow a 14-day action plan and review what actually changes.

Includes a worked example, meeting scripts and three evidence-focused AI prompts.

Prepared by Colin. 28 years of project delivery experience, connecting technical work, stakeholder decisions and business outcomes.

This is a preparation and investigation tool. It does not diagnose a project, validate a completion date or guarantee recovery. No confidential employer material is included.

One meeting. One decision. Evidence before optimism.

Choose one milestone that matters commercially. Do not try to assess the entire portfolio in the first sitting.

01 / Check - 15 minutes

Answer the ten questions on pages 3-4. Write Yes, Partly, No or Not sure. Record the evidence you can actually point to.

02 / Investigate - 30 minutes

Use pages 5-7 to distinguish facts from assumptions, trace blocked work and specify a decision. Ask the relevant owners to verify your notes.

03 / Brief - 15 minutes

Complete page 8. Bring one clear recommendation, alternatives and the consequence of waiting to the sponsor.

04 / Follow through - 14 days

Use pages 9-10. Agree owners and dates. Review completed actions, waiting work and whether the original hypothesis still holds.

Use the PDF: download and open it in a PDF reader that supports forms. Save a copy after completing fields. Some browser and mobile viewers may not preserve entered values. Every worksheet also works printed.

Contents: check 3-4; evidence 5; blocked work 6; decision 7; executive brief 8; action plan 9; review 10; worked example 11; scripts 12; AI prompts 13; method and references 14.

Check the evidence.

For every item: Yes / Partly / No / Not sure. These answers are prompts for investigation, not a numerical risk score.

01. Can you explain the next important milestone using current evidence?

Look for remaining work, dependencies, resource availability and acceptance conditions. A date alone is not evidence.
ANSWER + EVIDENCE REFERENCE / GAP

02. Does every consequential pending decision have an authorised owner and due date?

Inspect the actual decision queue. Separate the person preparing a recommendation from the person who can approve it.
ANSWER + EVIDENCE REFERENCE / GAP

03. Are the dependencies between teams visible and confirmed by both sides?

Check the input, providing team, receiving team, need-by date and confirmation of readiness.
ANSWER + EVIDENCE REFERENCE / GAP

04. Are key people available for the work the plan assumes they will perform?

Compare assignments with competing commitments. Ask about actual available capacity, not just headcount.
ANSWER + EVIDENCE REFERENCE / GAP

05. Can you see what is started but unfinished, and why it is waiting?

Look at reviews, approvals, defects and handoffs. Avoid treating activity as evidence of completion.
ANSWER + EVIDENCE REFERENCE / GAP

Check readiness and ownership.

For every item: Yes / Partly / No / Not sure. These answers are prompts for investigation, not a numerical risk score.

06. Are testing inputs ready before the testing window starts?

Confirm environment, test data, access, stable build, scenarios and named participants.
ANSWER + EVIDENCE REFERENCE / GAP

07. Are acceptance criteria and the acceptance decision owner agreed?

Ask what evidence would allow completion to be accepted and who has authority to accept it.
ANSWER + EVIDENCE REFERENCE / GAP

08. Are recurring issues being resolved rather than repeatedly reported?

Inspect age, owner, next action, escalation and evidence of closure. A closed status needs support.
ANSWER + EVIDENCE REFERENCE / GAP

09. Does each recovery action have one accountable owner and a checkable result?

Replace "progress testing" with a specific output, due date and completion evidence.
ANSWER + EVIDENCE REFERENCE / GAP

10. Are facts, assumptions and unresolved questions separated in the forecast?

Ask what must be true for the forecast to hold, who will validate it and what happens if it is false.
ANSWER + EVIDENCE REFERENCE / GAP

Separate what you know from what you suspect.

Use dated documents or named confirmations. A concern is worth investigating; it is not yet proof of the cause.

CONFIRMED FACT | INCLUDE SOURCE AND AS-OF DATE

HYPOTHESIS | WHAT MAY EXPLAIN THE DELAY?

TEST | WHAT EVIDENCE WOULD SUPPORT OR DISPROVE IT?

UNKNOWN | WHO WILL VERIFY IT, AND BY WHEN?

COMMERCIAL CONSEQUENCE | ACTUAL / ESTIMATE / UNKNOWN

Example: fact: three approval items are awaiting a decision as at Monday. Hypothesis: this queue is limiting UAT readiness. Test: trace the blocked scenarios and check other readiness conditions. Unknown: approver availability.

Trace the work that is waiting.

Choose one consequential blocked item. Trace what it prevents, then check whether another condition would still prevent progress if this item were resolved.

BLOCKED WORK ITEM + DATE WAITING BEGAN

WAITING FOR | PERSON / INPUT / DECISION / CAPABILITY

DOWNSTREAM WORK AND MILESTONE AFFECTED

COMPETING DEMANDS AND OTHER READINESS GAPS

SMALLEST AUTHORISED ACTION TO TEST THE HYPOTHESIS

REVIEW DATE + EVIDENCE THAT PROGRESS IMPROVED

Challenge question: if this obstacle disappeared tomorrow, what would still stop the milestone? A prominent issue is not automatically the system constraint.

Turn escalation into a decision.

Prepare one decision request per sheet. Confirm who can make the decision and who must be consulted.

DECISION REQUIRED + LATEST USEFUL DECISION DATE

OPTIONS | INCLUDE WAITING / DOING NOTHING

RECOMMENDATION + SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

TRADE-OFFS | COST, SCOPE, RISK AND DOWNSTREAM EFFECTS

DECISION OWNER + REQUIRED CONSULTATIONS

DECISION RECORD | OUTCOME, DATE AND FOLLOW-UP OWNER

A strong request: "Approve a dedicated acceptance reviewer for the agreed window, or accept the stated impact on test readiness. Here is the evidence and the alternative."

The one-page recovery brief.

Use this page for the executive conversation. Keep it factual, readable and focused on a decision.

PROJECT / MILESTONE / AS-OF DATE

CURRENT POSITION | FACT + EVIDENCE

MOST CONSEQUENTIAL BLOCKAGE | HYPOTHESIS + TEST

DECISION NEEDED | RECOMMENDATION + ALTERNATIVE

CONSEQUENCE OF WAITING | ESTIMATE ASSUMPTIONS

NEXT THREE ACTIONS | OWNER + DUE DATE + EVIDENCE

NEXT REVIEW | MEASURE + UNRESOLVED QUESTIONS

A focused 14-day action plan.

This is a proposed investigation rhythm, not a promise to recover the project in two weeks. Agree dates with owners before treating them as commitments.

Days 1-2 / Establish the position

Confirm the milestone, acceptance conditions and evidence. Validate the most consequential blockage with the affected teams.

Days 3-5 / Make the decision

Present options to the authorised owner. Record the decision and any priority, resource or sequencing changes.

Days 6-10 / Check implementation

Confirm agreed changes actually occurred. Observe what completes and what remains waiting; resolve new evidence gaps.

Days 11-14 / Review and decide

Compare results with the starting position. Continue, revise or stop the action. Reassess the constraint hypothesis.

ACTION 1 | OWNER / DUE DATE / DEFINITION OF DONE

ACTION 2 | OWNER / DUE DATE / DEFINITION OF DONE

ACTION 3 | OWNER / DUE DATE / DEFINITION OF DONE

Escalate earlier when a consequential decision or milestone cannot wait for this rhythm.

Review movement, not busyness.

Run a 20-minute weekly review. Use comparable starting and current observations. Do not infer recovery from one improving measure alone.

0-5 MIN | WHAT COMPLETED? INCLUDE ACCEPTANCE EVIDENCE.

5-10 MIN | WHAT STILL WAITS? INCLUDE ITEM AGE AND OWNER.

10-15 MIN | WHICH DECISION OR CHANGE IS NEEDED NOW?

15-20 MIN | COMMITMENTS, OWNERS, DATES, NEXT REVIEW

Track a small set of observations:

- Age of the oldest consequential pending decision.
- Number of agreed milestone-critical items completed and accepted.
- Readiness gaps still open for the next milestone.
- Forecast changes, with the evidence and assumptions behind them.

Record the starting date, definition and scope of each measure. A shorter queue can also reflect removed scope or missing records; check the reason.

From "UAT is late" to a decision the sponsor can make.

Hypothetical example. All dates, counts and roles below are invented for teaching; they are not a client case study.

Situation

A project plans to start user acceptance testing on 20 November. Five priority scenarios need business acceptance criteria. Three have been awaiting approval since 9 November. The environment and access are confirmed; test data for two other scenarios is still unverified.

Working hypothesis

Approval availability may be limiting readiness for those three scenarios. It is not yet established as the project-wide constraint.

Evidence to obtain

Ask the business owner to confirm the three items, approval authority and availability. Ask the test lead to confirm downstream dependencies and the separate data gaps.

Decision request

By 13 November, nominate an authorised reviewer with a protected review window or explicitly revise the affected scenario sequence. Do not waive acceptance criteria to claim readiness.

Next actions

Business owner: confirm reviewer by 13 November. Test lead: verify data readiness by 16 November. Project manager: update the forecast after both confirmations, with remaining assumptions visible.

Review

On 17 November, check whether criteria are approved and data is ready. If approval improves but testing still cannot start, investigate the remaining limitation before declaring recovery.

Why this helps: the sponsor receives a bounded decision, evidence requirements and named ownership. The proposed date is still subject to the remaining conditions.

Useful words for difficult meetings.

Open the Steering Committee

"The next milestone is at risk. We have confirmed these facts, these points remain unverified, and this is the decision we need today. I will separate the evidence from the assumptions."

Clarify an approval delay

"This item has been waiting since [date] and blocks [work]. Who has the authority to decide? What evidence is missing? Can we agree the latest useful decision date?"

Discuss conflicting priorities

"The plan assumes [person/capability] is available, but they also have [commitments]. Which work takes priority, and what consequence are we accepting for the other work?"

Challenge an unsupported forecast

"What remaining work and resource assumptions support that date? Which conditions are confirmed, and what would cause us to revise the forecast?"

Close with accountability

"We have agreed [decision]. [Owner] will deliver [specific output] by [date]. We will review [evidence] on [review date]. What have we missed that could prevent this?"

Adapt these scripts to your role and authority. Keep the conversation focused on the system and the decision, rather than blame.

Use AI to organise evidence. Keep judgement with people.

Use only an organisation-approved tool and information you are authorised to provide. Remove identifying and sensitive details where appropriate. Verify every output against its source.

01 / Separate facts from assumptions

"Using only the notes below, produce four lists: confirmed facts with source/date; assumptions; unanswered questions; contradictions. Do not invent dates, owners or causes. Mark missing evidence explicitly. Notes: [approved, sanitised notes]."

02 / Prepare the decision request

"Using the verified facts below, draft a decision request: decision needed, authorised owner if stated, latest useful date if stated, options, recommendation, trade-offs and evidence gaps. Label any inference. Do not calculate savings or delivery dates without supporting inputs. Facts: [approved notes]."

03 / Stress-test the recovery brief

"Review the draft below. Identify unsupported statements, missing dependencies, vague actions, absent authority and conditions that could invalidate the forecast. Return questions to verify; do not assert a root cause or manufacture certainty. Draft: [approved brief]."

Human check: verify sources, owners, authority, dates, dependencies and confidentiality. AI output is not evidence that an approval occurred or that a forecast is achievable.

A practical starting point. An honest boundary.

These worksheets are an original preparation workflow. They combine practical project governance with questions about blocked work, dependencies and competing demands. They are not a validated assessment, TOC certification course or complete Critical Chain implementation method.

Theory of Constraints uses five focusing steps: identify the constraint; use it effectively; align other work to that choice; increase its capability where necessary; repeat as the limitation changes. A single late task does not, by itself, establish the constraint.

Critical Chain is a distinct project planning and execution approach involving resource conflicts and buffers. This toolkit does not resize buffers, rebuild schedules or claim to implement that method.

Further reading

TOCICO / Critical Chain

https://www.tocico.org/criticalchain

Theory of Constraints Institute / Five Focusing Steps

https://www.tocinstitute.org/five-focusing-steps.html

PMI / Six Steps to Project Recovery (2000)

https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/six-steps-project-recovery-4641

References provide background, not endorsement. The templates, scripts and worked example are original material. Source pages accessed 11 October 2026.

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Prepared by Colin | Paperwork to Performance.
Website: paperworktoperformance.online | Email: Colin@PaperworkToPerformance.online
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