FREE EBOOK · THG CONSEIL READING TIME: 60 MIN

Seeing a project through

Bringing new business software, an office move or a site opening in on time and on budget: five real cases, a step-by-step method and nine tools ready to fill in



Notre-Dame reopened on schedule and within its budget; Lidl stopped its software project after seven years and around €500 million committed, according to published estimates. This guide shows what separates those two outcomes, and how to apply it in your own company from Monday morning.

FOR Leaders of SMEs and mid-sized companies who are launching or overseeing a major project: business software or ERP, an office move, a site opening, a transformation

Tudor Hilcu, THG Conseil

The plan, held.

Contents

Who this guide is for, and how to use it . . . 4

The essentials on one page . . . 6

01 Case 1. Notre-Dame de Paris: on budget and on time . . . 7
- The decision that held the date . . . 9
- What slipped, and what the Court points out . . . 9
- What a business leader can take from it . . . 10

02 Case 2. Lidl and SAP: seven years, then a halt . . . 12
- The same question, at SME scale . . . 14
- What a business leader could have done . . . 14

03 Case 3. Revlon and SAP: a go-live that cost money for months . . . 16
- What this case says about a go-live . . . 18
- What a business leader could have done . . . 18

04 Case 4. Knight Capital: one missed server, 45 minutes . . . 20
- What a business leader could have done . . . 22

05 Case 5. TSB: a migration decided on an announced timetable . . . 24
- A date that gives the orders instead of taking them . . . 26
- What a business leader could have done . . . 26

06 The method, step by step . . . 28
- Step 1. Measure: know why you are launching this project . . . 29
- Step 2. Chart: the project on one page, then the plan . . . 29
- Step 3. Hold: the weekly rhythm . . . 30
- Step 4. Prepare go-live day . . . 30
- Step 5. Hold the first weeks . . . 31
- Adapting steps 4 and 5 to your project . . . 31
- Step 6. Hand over: close, learn, celebrate . . . 32

07 **Ready-to-use tools** . . . 33
Tool 1. The project on one page . . . 34
Tool 2. The budget, its contingencies and the cost of delay . . . 35
Tool 3. The plan, from the work towards the date . . . 37
Tool 4. The gap and customisation log . . . 38
Tool 5. The risk register . . . 39
Tool 6. The committee that decides . . . 40
Tool 7. The one-page PMO report . . . 41
Tool 8. The go/no-go in five questions . . . 43
Tool 9. The go-live checklist . . . 44
TOOL The daily review table, the first weeks . . . 45

08 **Self-assessment: will your project hold?** . . . 46
TOOL The sixteen questions . . . 47
Reading your score . . . 48

09 **Your action plan: 30, 60 and 90 days** . . . 49
CHECKLIST Days 1 to 30: measure and chart . . . 50
CHECKLIST Days 31 to 60: hold . . . 50
CHECKLIST Days 61 to 90: prepare go-live day, then hold it . . . 51

10 **Common mistakes** . . . 52

Glossary . . . 54

Further reading . . . 56

About the author . . . 58

Notes . . . 59

About this guide

WHO IT IS FOR

Leaders of SMEs and mid-sized companies who are launching or overseeing a major project: business software or ERP, an office move, a site opening, a transformation

READING TIME

60 min

VERSION

1.0

DATE

25 October 2026

Who this guide is for, and how to use it

You run an SME or a mid-sized company. You have launched, or are about to launch, a project that matters: new business software, an office move, a new site or branch, a warehouse, a reorganisation. It has a budget and a date, and it takes up your best people on top of their day jobs.

You may already know what comes next. Committee meetings where people sit through presentations and nothing gets decided. A date that slips by a month, then another. A “miscellaneous” line that drains away without anyone knowing why. And the discovery, too late, that the project will cost more than planned, or that go-live has held up deliveries to your best customers.

This guide is designed to prevent that. It starts from five real projects, documented by reliable public sources: France’s Court of Audit (the Cour des comptes), the US securities regulator, the UK financial regulator, a US federal court and the business press. Each case is told with its figures and its sources, then turned into steps you can take in a company of a few dozen or a few hundred people.

These cases also show something reassuring: a bank with more than five million customers, a retail giant and a listed group ran into the same obstacles as you. These are not questions of size. They are questions of how a project is run, and that can be learnt. And if you are running a project like this on top of your day job, you are far from the only business leader in that position.

What you will find

- Five real cases: Notre-Dame de Paris (a project that held), Lidl (a project stopped part-way), Revlon (a go-live that cost money for months), Knight Capital (an update that went wrong in 45 minutes) and TSB (a migration decided on a timetable announced too early).
- A six-step method, from scoping to final review, and a table to adapt it to an office move or a site opening.
- Nine tools ready to fill in: the project on one page, the budget and the cost of delay, the plan built from the work towards the date, the gap log, the risk register, the committee that decides, the one-page report, the go/no-go in five questions, and the go-live checklist.
- A scored self-assessment in sixteen questions, a 30, 60 and 90-day action plan, common mistakes and a glossary.

How to use it

YOU HAVE	START WITH
5 minutes	The essentials on one page
15 minutes	The self-assessment, then the chapters on your weak spots
An hour	Tool 1, the project on one page, filled in for your current project
A project nearing go-live day	The Revlon, Knight Capital and TSB cases, then tools 8 and 9
A project that is slipping	The Lidl and Notre-Dame cases, then tools 2, 6 and 7
An office move or a new site	The method, then the table “Adapting steps 4 and 5 to your project”

The boxes always follow the same logic. A case tells what happened. Key figures point to their source. The lesson fits in two sentences. A warning flags a trap or a limit. A tool is there to fill in, an exercise to do on your own project. The small numbers refer to the notes at the end of the guide.

Three caveats

1. **The facts are public and checked.** Every figure in a case comes from a public document, opened and reread on 24 and 25 October 2026. When a source reports an estimate, the guide says so. Passages quoted from French or German sources are translated by the author.
2. **Worked examples are flagged.** Calculations marked “Fictitious example” use a made-up company. This guide contains no testimonials and no client figures.
3. **Your contracts and your accounts remain a matter for specialists.** As soon as a subject touches on the law, a contract or your accounts, take it up with your lawyer and your chartered accountant. This guide is educational.

This guide is free. You may use it freely within your business; reselling or republishing it requires my written consent (terms at https://thgconseil.fr/en/legal-notice#documents).

WATCH OUT

If you only do one thing this week

Open the budget for your current project. Find the “contingency”, “miscellaneous” or “margin” line. Split it by risk (prices, unforeseen events, delay) and note, for each line, who can commit it. One hour’s work, and your margin stops being a reserve that everyone dips into.

The essentials on one page

A project is rarely lost on the day it is written down. It is lost in the weeks that follow, when nobody is holding on to it any more. The five cases in this guide each show this in their own way, and they come down to seven rules.

1. **Write the project on one page before you launch it.** A measurable objective, a budget with its contingency, a date and what it costs if it slips, a single owner, three risks and how you will counter them. If the project does not fit on one page, it is not ready to start.
2. **Set aside contingency by risk, with an amount and an owner.** Notre-Dame had €125.4 million of contingencies split into three lines by risk, tracked until the works were finished (two were merged along the way), and part of it was never used.
3. **Settle in writing every gap between the way you work and the software, and count the customisations.** At Lidl, the question “change the method or adapt the software?” stayed open for years.
4. **Do not announce a date before you have a plan that holds it.** TSB announced a migration for the first quarter of 2018 nine days after deciding to re-plan, before it had finished the new plan.
5. **Decide on go-live day against written criteria, 48 hours ahead, with a rollback ready.** At TSB, testing finished the day before the decision, and no rollback was possible.
6. **Have every release checked by a second person, and send alerts to someone who knows what to do with them.** At Knight Capital, one server in eight was missed, and 97 error emails went unheeded.
7. **Judge a go-live on the weeks that follow, not on the day itself.** Revlon’s plant was running normally again, but its retail partners were still being restocked at the end of the year.

CASE	PROJECT	WHAT HAPPENED	THE LESSON
Notre-Dame, 2019 to 2024	Restoration after the fire	Budget and date held	A contingency holds when it has an amount and an owner
Lidl, 2011 to 2018	New merchandise management software	Stopped after seven years	A gap left undecided becomes a customisation by default
Revlon, 2018	New ERP at a plant	Sales not shipped, controls weakened	A go-live is judged on the weeks that follow
Knight Capital, 2012	Update to a system	45 minutes, over $460 million lost	A release is checked by two people
TSB, 2018	Migration of a bank	Nearly eight months to get back to normal	A date announced too early decides for you

01

Case 1. Notre-Dame de Paris: on budget and on time

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10

IN THIS CHAPTER

The decision that held the date 9

What slipped, and what the Court points out 9

What a business leader can take from it 10

Let’s start with a project that ends well. Such projects are rare enough that this one deserves a close look.

KEY FIGURES

€552 million

cost of the restoration phase, set in May 2022

Source: Cour des comptes, 2025

€125.4 million

of contingencies, split into three lines by risk

Source: Cour des comptes, 2025

8 December 2024

reopening for worship and to visitors, on the scheduled date

Source: Cour des comptes, 2025

€140 million

or more in donations still available after the works

Source: Cour des comptes, 2025

CASE STUDY

Notre-Dame de Paris, 2019 to 2024

Background. On 15 April 2019, the cathedral caught fire. The following evening, the French President set a goal: to rebuild it in five years[1]. The state set up a dedicated public body to run the project, whereas restoring a state-owned historic monument normally falls to the Ministry of Culture’s regional services[2]. Donations, which quickly settled at around €840 million, gave unusual visibility over the money available[2].

What happened. In May 2022, the public body set the cost of the restoration phase at €552 million. That amount included €125.4 million of contingencies: €66.5 million for price rises, €38.63 million for risks and unforeseen events, and €20.22 million for schedule risk[2,3]. The cathedral reopened on 8 December 2024, the day after a public ceremony[2]. In its report of 3 September 2025, the Cour des comptes found that the work had been carried out in line with the schedule and the budget set, and that not all of the contingencies had been used[3]. At least €140 million remains available, which the major donors agreed to put towards a third phase of work[3].

Why. Three mechanisms stand out in the report. First, contingencies set aside by risk, then tracked. At the end of 2022, the lines for unforeseen events and for the schedule were merged. By the end of 2024, this combined line was 83% used: €49 million out of €58.8 million[2]. The price-rise line was 75% committed: €53 million out of €70.8 million, as inflation turned out lower than expected[2]. Second, a very active audit committee, chaired by a recognised specialist in running public construction projects on the client side[2]. Large contracts went before it ahead of approval: above €2.5 million excluding VAT for supplies and services, above €10 million excluding VAT for works[2]. From 2022, it also asked to see the results of tenders below those thresholds[2]. Third, a construction

economist, brought in from September 2020 at the request of the foundations, among others. The role: to cost the work, and to make sure the budget and deadlines were met[2].

What you can take from it. The project was exceptional, but the way it was run is not. Every kind of unforeseen cost has its own line. Every large spend goes before an outside eye. And the cost of delay is worked out before the decision is made.

The decision that held the date

The schedule line was there to hold the 2024 deadline if needed. The audit committee compared three scenarios, setting the cost of a longer project against the cost of measures taken solely to hold the date. Its conclusion: those measures would "in any event cost less than a slippage of the deadline"[2].

The roof timbers are a case in point. The wood given by a donor was not dry enough. Waiting for it to dry would have extended the project by six months, at an estimated cost of €50 million. The public body bought timber from the National Forestry Office (ONF)[2].

Remember the reasoning more than the amounts: you do not choose between "holding the date" and "holding the budget" on instinct. You put two figures side by side, the cost of a month's delay and the cost of what it takes to avoid it, and you decide on those two figures. Tool 2 in this guide takes you through the calculation step by step.

What slipped, and what the Court points out

Not everything was perfect, and that is instructive.

- **The towers.** Their reopening was planned for the same day as the cathedral's. It was postponed to the European Heritage Days in 2025, mainly because of defects found late in the south belfry, which required extra work[3]. The towers reopened on 20 September 2025[4].
- **Contract amendments.** These are additional orders placed with firms already appointed. Leaving aside two cases above 50%, they could reach 46% of a contract's original value, and they drew on the contingency for unforeseen events[2]. They often came from gaps between the estimated requirement and the price awarded. A study requested by the audit committee points, for restoration contracts, to "the weaknesses of the prior estimates"[2].
- **Changes along the way.** According to the audit committee, €20 million of additional spending came from design flaws or programme changes decided during the works[2].

Even a successful project uses up its contingencies along predictable paths: fragile estimates, contract amendments, changes decided along the way. Tracking them means knowing in time where the margin is going.

What a business leader can take from it

1. **One contingency per risk, with its amount and its owner.** Price rises, unforeseen events, delay: one line each, costed, with the name of the person who can commit it. Using a contingency for a different risk takes a written decision in committee.
2. **A single body answerable for the project.** One person or a small team holds the budget, the date and the contracts, and reports to the business leader. When three departments share a project, variances pass from one to the next and nobody stops them.
3. **An outside eye on the figures.** A partner, a board member, a peer or your chartered accountant: someone who is not running the project. Set a threshold above which any spending is shown to them before it is signed.
4. **The cost of delay, worked out before you decide.** On one side, what an extra month costs; on the other, what it costs to hold the date. The decision is made on both figures.
5. **Count the amendments.** For each contract, note the gap between the estimate and the signed price, then each additional order and its reason. If your supplier should have foreseen a change, check what your contract provides with your lawyer and your chartered accountant.

Holding the budget "results from rigorous monitoring by the client and the design team, with strong involvement from the audit committee".

Source: Cour des comptes, press release of 3 September 2025[3] (translated from the French)

THE LESSON

A safety margin holds when every line has an amount, a risk and an owner. A "miscellaneous" line with no name next to it ends up paying for something other than what it was there for.

WATCH OUT

The limits of this case

The project enjoyed conditions that no SME will bring together: plentiful donations raised early and a goal backed at the very top of the state. The €552 million covers the restoration phase only; the safeguarding and consolidation phase before it had its own budget[2]. The contingency lines of May 2022 were not tracked unchanged: two were merged at the end of 2022, and the price-rise line tracked at the end of 2024 no longer matches the original amount. Take away management practices, not amounts.

EXERCISE

Your safety margin

1. What is the amount of the “contingency”, “miscellaneous” or “margin” line in your project?

2. Split it by risk: price rises, unforeseen events, delay.

3. Who can commit each line, and up to what amount without asking you?

4. Above what amount must any spending be seen by someone outside the project?

02

Case 2. Lidl and SAP: seven years, then a halt



IN THIS CHAPTER

The same question, at SME scale 14

What a business leader could have done 14

The second case is the opposite of the first: a project stopped part-way, after years of work and hundreds of millions of euros committed, according to published estimates.

KEY FIGURES

2011 to 2018

seven years of work, then the halt

Source: heise online, 2018

About €500 million

committed according to industry insiders, a figure confirmed by neither Lidl nor SAP

Source: heise online, 2018

Over 1,000

Lidl and SAP employees involved, according to Handelsblatt

Source: Handelsblatt, 2018

CASE STUDY

Lidl and SAP, 2011 to 2018

Background. In 2011, Lidl launched a project to replace its in-house merchandise management system with new software built on SAP[5]. According to Handelsblatt, Lidl and SAP assigned more than 1,000 employees to it, along with more than a hundred consultants[6]. The new system was already live in Austria, Northern Ireland and the United States when the decision came[5].

What happened. In July 2018, Lidl stopped the project. The decision was first announced to staff in an internal message, quoted by the press: the strategic objectives set at the outset could no longer be achieved with reasonable effort[5]. According to industry insiders quoted by Lebensmittel Zeitung, around €500 million had been committed; neither Lidl nor SAP gave a figure[5]. Lidl chose to develop its old in-house system, known as Wawi[5].

Why. It started with a difference in method: Lidl and standard SAP for Retail did not value stock in the same way[6,7]. Lidl did not want to change its method, and the software was reworked to follow its practices, at great expense, with many hours of external consultants[7]. An insider quoted by Handelsblatt explains that every process would have had to be reviewed. According to the paper, management was not ready for that[6]. Handelsblatt also points to the mechanism: each additional change makes the software more complex and more prone to errors, and costs become hard to control[6].

What you can take from it. The question that proved costly was there from day one: change the way we work, or adapt the tool? Left open, it settled itself, one customisation after another.

The same question, at SME scale

An SME does not spend €500 million on software. Yet it runs into the same question as soon as it changes tools: when standard software does not work the way we do, do we change the way we work, or have the software adapted?

There is no answer that holds everywhere. A method that sets you apart in your customers' eyes can justify a customisation. A mere habit, much less so. The real risk lies elsewhere: leaving the question unanswered, and accepting customisations one by one, without anyone looking at the total.

What a business leader could have done

The sources do not tell us what would have saved Lidl's project. They do, however, describe a mechanism, and that mechanism can be broken with five simple steps.

1. **List the gaps before you sign.** Ask for a demonstration on your own cases: a typical order, a return, an invoice, a month-end. Note every point where the tool does not work the way you do.
2. **For each gap, decide in writing.** Change the method or adapt the tool, with the name of the person who decides and a deadline. One rule helps: adapt the tool for what sets you apart from your competitors, and align with the standard for everything else.
3. **Cost each customisation over its whole life.** Development, but also testing, maintenance and the vendor's version upgrades: the customisation has to be carried over to every new version. Tool 4 shows the calculation.
4. **Keep a visible counter.** The number of customisations and their cumulative cost, reviewed at every steering committee. The pile-up shows while it can still be stopped.
5. **Set in advance the points at which everything can be stopped.** Written dates and criteria: cost, time, scope. At each of these points, ask the question squarely: continue, scale back or stop. Money already spent does not enter into the decision; all that counts is what remains to be spent and what the project will bring in.

The "originally defined strategic objectives" could not be achieved "with reasonable effort".

Source: Lidl internal message, quoted by the Heilbronner Stimme and reported by heise online on 16 July 2018[5] (translated from the German)

THE LESSON

A gap left undecided becomes a customisation by default. Count the customisations, settle every gap in writing, and set in advance the point at which everything can be stopped.

WATCH OUT

The limits of this case

The facts come from the German press and the statements by Lidl that it reports. The figure of around €500 million is a published estimate, confirmed by neither Lidl nor SAP. The reasons for choosing to adapt the software are reported by insiders, not by Lidl. No source makes it possible to pin the failure on the vendor, on an integrator or on Lidl alone: this guide sticks to the mechanism.

EXERCISE

Your gaps

1. Name three points where your tool, current or future, does not work the way you do.

2. For each one: change the method or adapt the tool? Who decides, and by when?

3. How many customisations have already been requested on your project, and at what cumulative cost?

4. On what date, and on what criteria, could you decide to scale back or stop?

03

Case 3. Revlon and SAP: a go-live that cost money for months



IN THIS CHAPTER

What this case says about a go-live 18

What a business leader could have done 18

Lidl stopped before go-live. Revlon went live, and it was the aftermath that cost money.

KEY FIGURES

About $64 million

of sales Revlon could not ship in 2018

Source: Revlon, 2018 annual report

$53.6 million

of additional charges in 2018, mainly to restore service to customers

Source: Revlon, 2018 annual report

18 March 2019

Revlon announces that it cannot file its annual report on time, because of an internal control weakness linked to its new ERP

Source: Revlon, SEC filing (NT 10-K), 2019

CASE STUDY

Revlon and SAP, 2018

Background. In February 2018, the US cosmetics group Revlon switched on new integrated management software in the United States, an ERP system from the vendor SAP[8]. The launch affected, in particular, its plant in Oxford, North Carolina[8].

What happened. The plant suffered disruptions that hurt customer service. According to its annual report, Revlon was unable to ship around $64 million of sales in 2018, and it incurred $53.6 million of additional charges, mainly to restore service levels: expedited shipping fees and other unplanned expenses[8]. At 31 December 2018, the plant was back to its pre-SAP level, but Revlon was still refilling its retail partners' inventories, particularly internationally[8]. On 18 March 2019, it announced that it could not file its annual report on time: it had identified a material weakness in its internal control over financial reporting, related mainly to the launch of its ERP in the United States[8]. The report was filed on 28 March 2019[8].

Why. In its annual report, Revlon itself describes the causes of this weakness. It had not carried out an effective, continuous assessment of the risks that the new software posed to its controls. It did not have enough competent, trained people in the affected US operations to maintain those controls[8]. The result: controls over inventory, accounts receivable, sales, cost of goods sold and account reconciliations were not designed and applied reliably. These failings did not lead to any material misstatement in the 2018 accounts[8]. Its auditor, KPMG, nevertheless issued an adverse opinion on the effectiveness of that internal control at 31 December 2018[8].

What you can take from it. A go-live shows first at your customers' end, then in your figures. It does not end when the plant restarts: it ends when stock has been rebuilt, the backlog cleared and the accounts are reliable again.

What this case says about a go-live

The first to be hit are not the IT people: they are the retailers who do not receive their orders. A business software go-live shows first in deliveries.

The plant getting back to normal does not close the incident. Stock still has to be rebuilt, late orders caught up and customers' trust regained. At Revlon, the plant was back to its previous level by the end of the year, and the retailers were still being restocked[8].

The new software also changes the way the company records its stock, its sales and its receivables. Without enough trained people, the figures themselves become less reliable. Shareholders later sued Revlon and its executives. On 17 September 2020, the federal court dismissed the complaint without prejudice, for lack of sufficiently supported allegations, while allowing the plaintiffs to seek leave to amend it[9]. That decision establishes no wrongdoing by Revlon or its executives.

None of this is reserved for large groups. An SME that changes its business software, its till system or its warehouse management software runs the same risks, often with less margin to absorb the shock.

What a business leader could have done

1. **Write the go-live criteria before setting the date.** Successful tests, data migrated and checked, teams trained. If a criterion is missing, it is the date that moves, not the criterion.
2. **Run a full test on real data, from order to cash.** A real order, picked, shipped, invoiced, paid, then traced in the accounts.
3. **Build up advance stock for the biggest customers.** A few days' or a few weeks' worth of deliveries, to absorb a slower start than planned. And tell those customers the date.
4. **Train enough people, with a go-to person in each department.** Including on controls: who checks stock, invoices and reconciliations in the new tool, and how.
5. **Prepare the first month-end close with your chartered accountant.** Stock, accounts receivable, bank reconciliations: the first month-end on the new tool is prepared before go-live.
6. **Track orders received, shipped and invoiced every day for the first month.** A short meeting every morning that looks at these figures and decides the day's actions. The daily review table, at the end of the tools, gives the template.

> THE LESSON
>
> A go-live is judged on deliveries and on the accounts in the weeks that follow. Go-live day is only the beginning.

WATCH OUT

What the documents do not say

The amounts come from Revlon's filings with the US securities regulator; the unshipped sales are the company's own estimate. They measure unshipped sales and additional charges, not the total cost of the project. The shareholders' complaint was dismissed as it stood. This guide does not apportion responsibility between the vendor, the integrator and Revlon. If your own go-live touches on your accounts, your internal control or your contracts, take it up with your lawyer and your chartered accountant.

EXERCISE

Your first month after go-live

1. Your ten biggest customers, and what you will need to deliver to them in the first month:

2. How many days of advance stock for each, and who tells them the date?

3. The go-to person for the new tool in each department:

4. The date of the first close on the new tool, and who prepares it with your chartered accountant:

04

Case 4. Knight Capital: one missed server, 45 minutes



IN THIS CHAPTER

What a business leader could have done 22

The fourth case is not about an ERP, but a simple update. That is precisely why it speaks to every company: they all install updates, and few ask who checks them.

KEY FIGURES

1 in 8

servers missed during the update

Source: SEC, 2013

45 minutes

for over 4 million executions in 154 stocks

Source: SEC, 2013

Over $460 million

in losses

Source: SEC, 2013

97

automated error emails before the open, from 8:01 a.m.

Source: SEC, 2013

CASE STUDY

Knight Capital, 1 August 2012

Background. Knight Capital was a US broker. Its automated system routed its customers' stock orders to the markets. At the end of July 2012, it was preparing a new function, due to start on 1 August[10].

What happened. From 27 July, the team installed the new code in stages, onto a few servers each day. A technician failed to copy it onto one of the eight servers, which kept old code that had not been used for years[10]. Yet the new code reused a flag that had once triggered that old code[10]. Nobody reviewed the deployment, and no written procedure required anyone to[10]. On 1 August, from about 8:01 a.m., an internal system sent 97 automated emails reporting an error, before the market opened at 9:30 a.m.; they had not been designed as alerts, and staff generally did not read them[10]. At the open, 212 small customer orders, handled by the old code, set off millions of orders: more than 4 million executions in 154 stocks, in about 45 minutes[10]. While looking for the fault, the team removed the new code from the seven servers that were working. The old code then fired on those servers too, which made the problem worse[10]. Knight lost more than $460 million[10,11]. On 16 October 2013, the US securities regulator, the SEC, fined it $12 million[11].

Why. According to the SEC, Knight had, for this system, no written procedure for development and deployment, no review by a second technician, no procedure to guide its teams through an incident, and no clear guidance on when to disconnect a malfunctioning system[10]. The old function had not been used since 2003, but it remained installed and could still be triggered. In 2005, a change had mistakenly disabled its counter, the one that stopped orders being sent once the customer's order had been filled, and it had not been retested[10].

What you can take from it. The risk of a release is not measured by its size. A small update, with no review and no shutdown instruction, can cost more than a large, well-prepared project.

What a business leader could have done

The SEC says so itself: a simple written double-check procedure could have shown that a server had been missed, and building those error emails into system monitoring could also have prevented the incident[10]. For an SME, that means five steps.

1. **Two people for every release.** The one who installs, and the one who checks what was installed, and where. The rule fits in three lines of a written procedure.
2. **A list of everything that needs updating.** Workstations, servers, tills, shops, sites: the list is ticked off as you go, and reread at the end by the second person.
3. **Alerts that reach someone.** Every automated error message has a named recipient who knows what to do with it. Those that nobody reads are deleted, or turned into real alerts.
4. **A written shutdown instruction.** Who can switch everything off, how, and in how many minutes. In an incident, you stop first and investigate afterwards.
5. **Clear out what is no longer used.** Old settings, unused functions, forgotten access rights: anything left installed and idle can wake up one day.

"A written procedure requiring a simple double-check of the deployment [...] could have identified that a server had been missed."

Source: SEC, order of 16 October 2013[10]

THE LESSON

A release is checked by two people, stopped on a written instruction, and its alerts reach someone who knows what to do with them.

WATCH OUT

The limits of this case

The setting is the stock market, where a mistake costs money by the second. In an SME, the amounts are smaller, but the chain of events can be the same: an update made on nine tills out of ten, a price changed on the website but not in the invoicing software, an old setting that comes back to life. The preventive steps, for their part, cost almost nothing. Lastly, Knight consented to the SEC's order without admitting or denying its findings[10, 11].

EXERCISE

Your updates

1. Who currently checks updates to your software, your website or your tills?

2. Where do automated error messages go, and who reads them?

3. Who can stop everything if there is a problem, and how?

05

Case 5. TSB: a migration decided on an announced timetable



IN THIS CHAPTER

A date that gives the orders instead of taking them 26

What a business leader could have done 26

The fifth case brings almost all the others together: a timetable announced too early, testing cut back to hold the date, a go-live with no way back, and months to get back to normal.

KEY FIGURES

20 to 30%

of customers unable to make any online payment in the first week

Source: FCA, 2022

225,492

complaints between April 2018 and April 2019

Source: FCA, 2022

£32.7 million

paid to customers in redress over the same period

Source: FCA, 2022

£48.65 million

in fines from the two UK regulators

Source: FCA, 2022

CASE STUDY

TSB, the April 2018 migration

Background. TSB is a UK retail bank, which at the time had around 5.2 million customers[12]. Bought in July 2015 by the Spanish bank Sabadell, it had to move all its services onto a new IT platform, built by a subsidiary of its parent company. The programme ran from 2015 to 2018, and the target of migrating at the end of 2017 was public knowledge[12].

What happened. The programme fell behind from the start. On 20 September 2017, TSB decided to re-plan it. Nine days later, before finishing that new plan, the bank publicly announced a migration for the first quarter of 2018[12]. The programme soon fell behind again; the date was eventually held by pushing some functions back until after go-live or by providing manual workarounds[12]. Testing, running late, overlapped or changed scope, and was only completed the day before the decision to migrate[12]. The migration took place over the weekend of 20 to 22 April 2018. As soon as it went live, customers could no longer use internet banking or the app; they turned to the phone lines, which were overwhelmed, then to the branches, where queues grew[12]. TSB did not return to normal operations until 10 December 2018[12]. Between April 2018 and April 2019, it received 225,492 complaints and paid £32.7 million in redress[12]. On 20 December 2022, the FCA and the PRA, the two UK financial regulators, fined it £48.65 million[13].

Why. According to the FCA, TSB did not organise and control its migration programme adequately, and did not manage the risks arising from its main IT supplier[13]. At the end of February 2018, a decision taken outside the intended forum cut back the scope of a non-functional test of the digital channels (with both data centres active at the same time), treated as a purely technical matter; had it been carried out, a configuration defect would probably have been found[12]. The risk of not carrying it out was neither identified nor reported[12]. Some issues were not sufficiently discussed or challenged by the board: the overly ambitious timetable, the reasons for the delay, the realism of the new plan[12].

Finally, once the go-live had happened, no return to the old platform was possible, and the continuity plans were not equal to an incident of this scale[12].

What you can take from it. A date announced before it is achievable becomes a constraint that decides for you. A test is cut back, a function postponed, and you go live without a safety net.

A date that gives the orders instead of taking them

The FCA also criticises TSB for an “overly right-to-left approach”: a plan built back from the target date, rather than from the work towards the date[12]. When a plan starts from the date, every delay is made up by squeezing the stages that follow, and it is almost always testing that pays the price.

The same document notes that TSB, in its own view, would not have decided to migrate had it considered an incident of this scale[12]. That is the question the go/no-go must force: what happens if the worst occurs, and are we ready to live through it?

What a business leader could have done

1. **Announce nothing before you have a plan.** Not to your customers, your suppliers, your bank or your teams, and not even a quarter, as TSB did. Then announce a range drawn from that plan, and the date once the plan is finalised.
2. **Build the plan from the work towards the date.** Estimate each stage, add them up, then compare with the date you want. If they do not meet, it is the date or the scope that moves, not the estimate. Tool 3 shows how.
3. **Put every cut in testing or scope to the committee.** A technical decision that reduces risk coverage is a decision for the business leader. It goes into the decision log, with its risk.
4. **Ask the committee for the reasons behind a delay, not just the new date.** An unexplained delay repeats itself in the next plan.
5. **Plan for a serious incident when rollback is impossible.** More people on support, customers warned in advance, written fallback solutions, a crisis team ready to meet from the first hour.

TSB “failed to organise and control the IT migration programme adequately”.

Source: FCA, press release of 20 December 2022[13]

THE LESSON

A date announced too early decides for you. The plan is built from the work towards the date, and every cut in testing goes before the committee.

WATCH OUT

The limits of this case

The facts come from the FCA's Final Notice. TSB agreed to settle, which earned it a 30% reduction in the fine[12]. The direct technical causes of the incident lie mainly in configuration, capacity and code[12]; this guide draws only on the management decisions. A bank is subject to rules that an SME does not face, but timetables announced too early and shortened testing happen everywhere.

EXERCISE

Your date

1. Has your end date or go-live date already been announced? To whom?

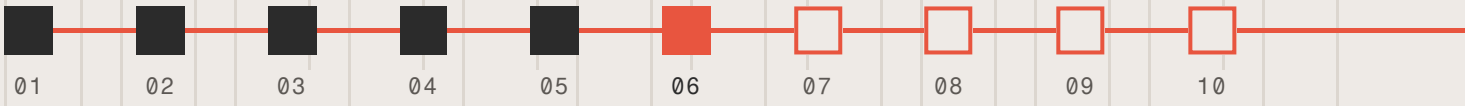
2. Was the plan behind it built from the work towards the date, or from the date back to the work?

3. Which tests or functions have already been cut or postponed to hold the date? Did the committee decide it?

4. If rollback is impossible, what is your plan for a serious incident from day one?

06

The method, step by step



IN THIS CHAPTER

Step 1. Measure: know why you are launching this project 29

Step 2. Chart: the project on one page, then the plan 29

Step 3. Hold: the weekly rhythm 30

Step 4. Prepare go-live day 30

Step 5. Hold the first weeks 31

Adapting steps 4 and 5 to your project 31

Step 6. Hand over: close, learn, celebrate 32

The five cases outline a method. It follows the four stages I apply on my assignments (measure, chart, hold, hand over), with two extra steps around go-live day, where projects tip one way or the other. Each step refers to the tools in the next chapter.

Step 1. Measure: know why you are launching this project

A project without a measurable objective can neither succeed nor fail: it simply ends. Before anything else, write in one sentence what will have changed, by how much, and by when.

- **The objective, with a figure and a date.** Fictitious example: “By 30 June 2027, cut the time it takes to prepare an order by 20%.” Not “modernise our tools”.
- **The starting point, measured.** What you measure today: lead time, cost, number of errors. Without a starting point, nobody will be able to say whether the objective has been met.
- **The cost of doing nothing, and the cost of delay.** What do you lose if you do nothing? What does a month’s delay cost? Tool 2 sets out the calculation.
- **Dates imposed from outside.** The end of a lease, a season, a legal deadline. For example, in France, issuing electronic invoices will become mandatory for SMEs and micro-businesses from 1 September 2027[14]. A date of this kind cannot be negotiated: you prepare for it early, or it catches you out. The timetable, and what to check now, are in the article “E-invoicing in France in 2026 and 2027: what changes for an SME”: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/articles/e-invoicing-2026-2027

Allow half a day, with the person who will pay for the project and the person who will deliver it. Keep this page: in six months, when a customisation or a postponement is being discussed, it will remind everyone why you launched this project.

Step 2. Chart: the project on one page, then the plan

- **The project on one page** (tool 1). Five boxes, reread and signed by the person who pays and the person who delivers. If they disagree on a box, settle it now, not after launch.
- **The budget with its contingencies by risk** (tool 2). One line per risk, an amount, an owner. That is the Notre-Dame lesson.
- **The plan, from the work towards the date** (tool 3). Each stage is estimated by the person who will do it, then the durations are added up and the resulting date is compared with the target date. If the resulting date is later, choose now: reduce the scope, strengthen the team, or move the date. That is the TSB lesson.

- **The gap log** (tool 4), if the project changes a tool: every gap between the way you work and the software, with a written decision. That is the Lidl lesson.
- **The risk register** (tool 5). The risks scored, each with its response and its owner.
- **The checkpoints** (tool 3, at the bottom). Two or three dates when you squarely ask the question: continue, scale back or stop, against criteria written down now.

Only announce the date outside the company once this work is done.

Step 3. Hold: the weekly rhythm

This is the longest step, and the one where projects get lost. It rests on a fixed rhythm, always the same.

- **A committee at a fixed time** (tool 6). Every week or every fortnight, depending on what is at stake, forty-five minutes, an agenda built around the decisions to be taken, the decision log reread at the start.
- **A one-page report** (tool 7). Schedule, budget, risks and decisions, with a RAG status for each area. It goes out the day before the committee.
- **Bad news early.** A delay, an overrun, a supplier that lets you down are reported as soon as they are known, and always with a proposal. A committee where people can raise a problem without being put in the dock sees problems in time.
- **The outside eye.** Above a threshold set in advance, any spending is seen by someone who is not running the project.
- **The counters.** The number and cumulative cost of customisations, contract amendments and additional orders, reviewed at every committee.
- **The link with the company's figures.** A regular check-in between the project and whoever keeps your accounts (financial control, finance department or chartered accountant): planned, committed, paid, still to come. A variance shows in the month it arises, not at the year-end close.

Any cut in testing, training or scope decided in order to hold the date goes to the committee and is entered in the decision log.

Step 4. Prepare go-live day

- **Go-live criteria, written before setting the date.** Successful tests, data migrated and checked, people trained, support ready. If a criterion is missing, the date moves.
- **A full test run, on your real data.** From the order to the payment traced in the accounts. For a tool used by many people at once (website, app, call centre), a test under real load.

- **The rollback.** Who decides, on what criteria, and until when it remains possible. If it is impossible, write that down in black and white, and strengthen the arrangements for the first days accordingly.
- **Your customers protected.** Advance stock for the biggest ones, and clear information about the date and what might slow down.
- **The go-live checklist** (tool 9), ticked and signed.
- **The go/no-go, 48 hours before** (tool 8). Five questions. Five yeses, you go. A single no or a single unclear answer, you postpone and you tell your customers.
- **For every update, however small**: two people, a list of what has to be installed, alerts that reach someone, a shutdown instruction. That is the Knight Capital lesson.

Step 5. Hold the first weeks

- **A fifteen-minute daily review meeting**, every morning, with three or four figures: orders received, shipped, invoiced; incidents opened and closed; customer calls. It decides the day's actions.
- **Reinforced support** and a go-to person in each department, known to everyone.
- **The first month-end close, prepared with your chartered accountant**: stock, accounts receivable, reconciliations.
- **An exit criterion written in advance.** For example: five consecutive working days with no late deliveries and no blocking incident. Until it is met, the arrangements stay in place. At TSB, it took until 10 December 2018[12].

Adapting steps 4 and 5 to your project

Steps 4 and 5 are written for business software. For an office move or a site opening, the logic stays the same: written criteria, a test in real conditions, a fallback, a few figures followed every morning. Only the content changes.

	BUSINESS SOFTWARE	OFFICE MOVE	OPENING A SITE OR BRANCH
Go-live criteria	Successful tests, data migrated and checked, users trained, support ready	Premises handed over, network, phones and workstations tested, access and badges ready, staff informed	Premises ready and insured, necessary permits obtained, team recruited and trained, stock and till in place
Full test run	A real order, from entry to payment traced in the accounts	A real working day in the new premises, with a pilot team, before everyone moves	A dry-run opening day with the real team: welcome, sales, payment, cashing up
Rollback or fallback	Go back to the old software, until a written deadline	Keep the old premises for a few weeks if your lease allows, or plan for remote working	An opening date that can still slip, until a written deadline, and customers forewarned

	BUSINESS SOFTWARE	OFFICE MOVE	OPENING A SITE OR BRANCH
Daily review meeting figures	Orders received, shipped, invoiced; incidents; customer calls	Workstations working, support requests, network or phone incidents, appointments kept	Customers served, sales, stock-outs, waiting time at reception or at the till, complaints

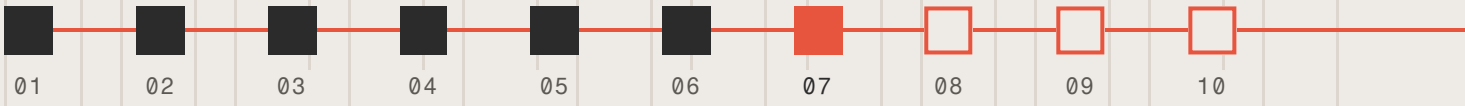
A lease, an insurance policy or an opening permit should be checked with your lawyer and your chartered accountant before you set the date.

Step 6. Hand over: close, learn, celebrate

- **The final review.** Has the original objective been met, to the figure? Where do the budget, the date and the contingencies used stand?
- **What remains open.** The list of postponed items, each with an owner and a date. A project that “ends” with ten loose ends is not finished.
- **The project’s memory.** The decision log, the settings, the procedures: filed where your teams will find them.
- **Handing back to the teams.** Those who will run the tool know how to use it, how to configure it and whom to turn to.
- **Time to celebrate.** Say thank you, name those who held firm, bring the team together. Notre-Dame reopened the day after a public ceremony[2]. Your project deserves to be celebrated too: that is what will make your teams want to carry the next one.

07

Ready-to-use tools



IN THIS CHAPTER

Tool 1. The project on one page 34

Tool 2. The budget, its contingencies and the cost of delay 35

Tool 3. The plan, from the work towards the date 37

Tool 4. The gap and customisation log 38

Tool 5. The risk register 39

Tool 6. The committee that decides 40

and 4 more entries: see the contents

The nine tools that follow can be filled in by hand or copied into a spreadsheet. Several also exist as free, ready-to-fill versions on the THG Conseil website:

- the module “The project on one page” (Excel workbook, step-by-step guide and printable sheet: project sheet, decision log, project status, go/no-go): https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/modules/project-on-one-page
- the PMO reporting template (Excel workbook: summary, budget, risks, decisions, milestones): https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/templates/pmo-reporting
- the go-live checklist (44-point PDF checklist): https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/templates/go-live-checklist

TOOL

Tool 1. The project on one page

Fill in the five boxes before launch, then have the page reread by the person who pays and the person who delivers. Allow an hour. If a box is left empty, the project is not ready to start.

BOX	WHAT GOES IN IT	YOUR PROJECT
1. The objective	One sentence, with a figure and a date: what will have changed, by how much, by when	_____
2. The budget	The amount excluding contingency, then a separate contingency line, split by risk	_____
3. The date	The end date, and what a month’s delay costs (money, customers, a missed season)	_____
4. The owner	A single name, not a department or a committee	_____
5. The three risks	For each one: what could happen, and the response you put in place beforehand	_____

REVIEW	NAME	DATE	AGREED?	RESERVATION
The person who pays	_____	_____	_____	_____
The person who delivers	_____	_____	_____	_____

Excel version, with automatic checks (a figure in the objective, a contingency line, a single owner): https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/modules/project-on-one-page

TOOL

Tool 2. The budget, its contingencies and the cost of delay

Part one: split your contingency by risk. Part two: work out what a month's delay costs, then compare it with the cost of the measures that would hold the date.

LINE	PLANNED AMOUNT	NAMED OWNER	CAN COMMIT ALONE UP TO	COMMITTED TO DATE	LEFT TO COMMIT
Budget excluding contingency					
Price-rise contingency					
Unforeseen-events contingency					
Delay contingency					
Total					

Fictitious example, step by step. A wholesale company with 45 employees is replacing its business software. Total budget: €300,000, including €260,000 excluding contingency and €40,000 of contingencies: €8,000 for price rises (owner: the purchasing manager), €20,000 for unforeseen events (the project manager) and €12,000 for delay (the managing director).

The cost of a month's delay is worked out in four lines:

1. The old software, which has to be kept for an extra month: €4,000.
2. The internal team, tied up for an extra month: three people at 30% of their time, or 0.9 full-time equivalent, at €5,000 a month including employer costs: 0.9 × 5,000 = €4,500.
3. The supplier, two days a week at €800 a day, over 4.3 weeks: 2 × 4.3 × 800 = €6,880.
4. The expected gain that does not arrive: the project is meant to reduce stock by €150,000; at a carrying cost of 8% a year, each month of delay costs 150,000 × 8% ÷ 12 = €1,000.

Total: 4,000 + 4,500 + 6,880 + 1,000 = €16,380 per month of delay.

The schedule shows two months' delay. Extra support of 20 supplier days, at €800 a day, or €16,000, would make up the delay. Comparison: two months' delay costs 2 × 16,380 = €32,760; the extra support costs €16,000. Holding the date saves 32,760 – 16,000 = €16,760. The committee decides on the extra support, charged to the delay contingency (€12,000), topped up with €4,000 from the unforeseen-events contingency, by written decision.

Your calculation:

ITEM	PER MONTH OF DELAY
Old tool, premises or contract to extend	
Internal team tied up for longer	
Suppliers	
Expected gains that do not arrive	
Customers, penalties, missed season	
Total per month	

Your decision:

LINE	AMOUNT
Months of delay forecast	
Cost of delay (total per month × months of delay)	
Cost of the measures to hold the date	
Difference (cost of delay – cost of the measures)	
Committee decision, and the contingency it is charged to	

To go further on the budget: the module “A budget you can steer”, https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/modules/budget-you-can-steer

TOOL

Tool 3. The plan, from the work towards the date

Have each stage estimated by the person who will do it, not by the person waiting for the result. Add up the durations following the dependencies, then compare the resulting date with the target date. If they do not meet, it is the scope, the team or the date that moves, never the estimate.

STAGE TO COMPLETE	ESTIMATED DURATION	DEPENDS ON	EARLIEST START	EARLIEST FINISH

LINE	YOUR PROJECT
Target date	
Calculated date (earliest finish of the last stage)	
Gap (calculated date minus target date)	
Decision: scope, extra support or date	

Fictitious example, step by step. The wholesale company from tool 2 wants to go live on its new software twelve weeks after launch. Each manager estimates their own stage, and each stage waits for the previous one to finish:

STAGE	ESTIMATED DURATION	DEPENDS ON	EARLIEST START	EARLIEST FINISH
1. Configuration	4 weeks	none	week 0	week 4
2. Customisations and data migration	6 weeks	stage 1	week 4	week 10
3. Full test runs	3 weeks	stage 2	week 10	week 13
4. User training	2 weeks	stage 3	week 13	week 15
5. Go/no-go and go-live	1 week	stage 4	week 15	week 16

Calculated date: 4 + 6 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 16 weeks. Target date: 12 weeks. Gap: 16 – 12 = 4 weeks. Shortening the tests to catch up would be TSB's mistake. The committee decides otherwise. Two

customisations that do not set the company apart from its competitors are dropped (tool 4): stage 2 comes down to 4 weeks, and the calculated date to 4 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 14 weeks. The two remaining weeks are taken from the date: go-live is set for week 14, and only now is it announced.

Then place two or three checkpoints in this plan: dates when you decide whether to continue, scale back or stop, against criteria written down today.

CHECKPOINT DATE	COST CRITERION	TIME CRITERION	SCOPE CRITERION	DECISION: CONTINUE, SCALE BACK OR STOP

Fictitious example: at week 8, if the forecast at completion exceeds the budget by more than 15%, or if the data migration is more than two weeks behind, the committee chooses between reducing the scope and stopping. Money already spent does not enter into the decision.

TOOL

Tool 4. The gap and customisation log

For any project that changes a tool. One line for each point where the tool does not work the way you do. Each line gets a written decision, a name and a date. The total of the customisations is reread at every committee.

THE GAP OBSERVED, IN A FEW WORDS	SETS US APART FROM COMPETITORS?	5-YEAR COST IF WE CUSTOMISE	EFFORT IF WE CHANGE THE METHOD	DECISION: METHOD OR TOOL	WHO DECIDES, BY WHEN	STATUS
Total						

Full cost of a customisation, fictitious example. The supplier quotes €12,000 for a customisation. It will need two days of testing at each of the vendor's version upgrades, with two versions a year, at €700 a day: 2 × 2 × 700 = €2,800 a year. It will also cost €1,500 a year in maintenance. Over five years: 12,000 + 5 × 2,800 + 5 × 1,500 = 12,000 + 14,000 + 7,500 = €33,500. The real price is nearly three times the quote. That is the figure to compare with the other option: changing the way you work. Put the two on the same line, and apply the rule from the Lidl case: adapt the tool for what sets you apart from your competitors, and align with the standard for everything else.

TOOL

Tool 5. The risk register

A risk is something that might happen. A response is what you do before it happens. Score probability and impact from 1 (low) to 3 (high), then multiply: a score of 6 or more makes it a major risk, reviewed at every committee.

RISK	P (1 TO 3)	I (1 TO 3)	SCORE	RESPONSE, IN A FEW WORDS	NAMED OWNER	RESPONSE DUE BY

Fictitious example, the same wholesale company:

RISK	P	I	SCORE	RESPONSE
Incomplete migration of customer records	3	3	9	Two trial migrations, checked by the sales team, before the decision
Logistics manager away in the month of go-live	2	3	6	Leave dates set outside that period, a trained stand-in
Late delivery of the new barcode scanners	2	2	4	Order placed three months ahead, old scanners kept as back-up

The first two are major: they come up at every committee until their response is in place. A major risk with no response in place a fortnight before go-live is a reason to answer “no” at the go/no-go.

TOOL

Tool 6. The committee that decides

A committee is judged by the decisions it takes, not by the presentations it sits through. Picture next Thursday's: forty-five minutes, three written decisions, a decision record sent out before noon. Here is what you need to run it.

Standard agenda, forty-five minutes:

TIME	ITEM	WHAT IS EXPECTED
5 min	Reread the decision log	For each decision: done, late with a new date, or dropped and why
10 min	Status and one-page report	Only the amber or red areas, and their cause
20 min	Two or three decisions to take	Each one presented in a one-page note, sent the day before
5 min	Major risks	Overdue responses, and who unblocks them
5 min	Reread today's decisions	What, who, when: read aloud before leaving

The decision note fits in five lines: the proposal; the reason; the cost; the risk; the decision asked of the committee. If its author cannot write it that way, the subject is not yet ripe for a decision, and that is useful information.

The decision record, sent the same day:

DECISION, IN A FEW WORDS	WHO OWNS IT	BY WHEN	WHY IT WAS TAKEN	STATUS AT THE NEXT COMMITTEE

Three meeting rules: an action given to "the team" belongs to nobody, so every decision carries a name; bad news comes with a proposal; on a subject under discussion, the business leader speaks last, so that everyone can say what they think. To go further: the article "Leadership meetings: seven rules to make them actually decide", https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/articles/leadership-meetings-that-decide

TOOL

Tool 7. The one-page PMO report

One page, sent the day before the committee. The business leader must see in thirty seconds what is going well, what is slipping and what is expected of them.

AREA	STATUS (GREEN, AMBER, RED)	WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE THE LAST REVIEW	WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THE COMMITTEE
Schedule			
Budget			
Scope			
Risks			
Team			

MILESTONE	PLANNED DATE	PLANNED OR ACTUAL DATE TODAY	GAP IN DAYS

Simple thresholds for choosing each area's status, to adjust to your project. The project's status is that of its worst area.

AREA	AMBER AS SOON AS	RED AS SOON AS
Schedule	progress is 5 points behind	it is 15 points behind
Budget	the forecast at completion exceeds the budget by 5%	it exceeds it by 15%
Scope	a planned function is postponed	a function essential to go-live is postponed with no workaround
Risks	the response to a major risk is overdue	a major risk has no response decided, or no response in place a fortnight before go-live
Team	a key person is missing or no longer has the planned time	a key person is missing in the month before go-live, with no replacement

Working out the forecast at completion, step by step (fictitious example):

1. Planned budget: €300,000.
2. Spent to date: €180,000.
3. Cost to complete, estimated by the project manager: €150,000.
4. Forecast at completion = spent + cost to complete = 180,000 + 150,000 = €330,000.
5. Gap = 330,000 – 300,000 = €30,000, or 30,000 ÷ 300,000 = 10%: amber.
6. Planned progress at this date: 60%; actual: 50%; 10 points behind: amber.

Your calculation:

LINE	YOUR PROJECT
Planned budget	
Spent to date	
Cost to complete, estimated by the project manager	
Forecast at completion (spent + cost to complete)	
Gap (forecast at completion minus planned budget), in euros and in %	
Planned progress at this date	
Actual progress	
Points behind (planned minus actual)	

The budget spent tells you nothing on its own. It is the forecast at completion that tells you where you will finish. Excel version, with milestone delays calculated and a status for each area: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/templates/pmo-reporting

TOOL

Tool 8. The go/no-go in five questions

To be filled in 48 hours before go-live, with the person who decides. For each question: yes, no or unclear, the evidence (or what is missing), and who confirms it. Five yeses, you go. A single no or a single unclear answer, you postpone and you tell your customers.

NO.	QUESTION	YES, NO OR UNCLEAR	EVIDENCE, OR WHAT IS MISSING	WHO CONFIRMS
1	Has the last full test run, from order to invoice, passed?			
2	Are the key people trained, and available on the day?			
3	Do your biggest customers have advance stock?			
4	Is the rollback ready, and until when does it stay available?			
5	Who can call a halt?			

Go-live date: _____ Decision no later than: _____

Decision taken by: _____

Question 5: “yes” if a person is named in writing, known to everyone, and reachable throughout go-live. A major risk from tool 5 with no response in place counts as a “no”.

If no rollback is possible, as at TSB, question 4 only gets a “yes” if there is a written plan for a serious incident from day one. For a project with no deliveries to customers (an office move, a new internal tool), replace question 3 with: “Do the people affected know what is changing, when, and whom to turn to?” For an office move or a site opening, the table “Adapting steps 4 and 5 to your project” gives the equivalent of the full test run and the rollback. The verdict is calculated automatically in the module “The project on one page”: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/modules/project-on-one-page

CHECKLIST

Tool 9. The go-live checklist

- [ ] The go-live criteria are written, dated and approved in committee
- [ ] The last full test run, on real data, from order to payment, has passed
- [ ] Tests under real load have been run, if the tool is used by many people at once
- [ ] No test has been cut without a written committee decision
- [ ] The migrated data has been checked by those who use it (customers, items, stock, prices)
- [ ] The defects still open are listed, with their workaround
- [ ] No major risk is left without a response in place (tool 5)
- [ ] Users are trained, and a go-to person is named in each department
- [ ] The key people are present on go-live day and the week after
- [ ] Reinforced support is organised: who answers, at what times, how to reach them
- [ ] The biggest customers have advance stock and know the date
- [ ] The suppliers and partners concerned have been told
- [ ] The rollback plan is written: who decides, on what criteria, until when
- [ ] If rollback is impossible, the plan for a serious incident is written and known
- [ ] The release has been checked by a second person: what is installed, and where
- [ ] Automated alerts reach a named person
- [ ] The shutdown instruction is written: who can switch everything off, and how
- [ ] Old settings and unused functions have been removed
- [ ] The daily review meeting for the first weeks is scheduled, with its figures
- [ ] The first close on the new tool has been prepared with the chartered accountant
- [ ] The exit criterion for the reinforced arrangements is written
- [ ] The go/no-go is set for 48 hours before, with the person who decides

TOOL

The daily review table, the first weeks

Every morning, fifteen minutes, these figures and the day's actions.

Fictitious example, in round figures, the first week after go-live:

DAY	ORDERS RECEIVED	ORDERS SHIPPED	CUMULATIVE BACKLOG
Monday	120	95	25
Tuesday	110	104	31
Wednesday	130	140	21
Thursday	115	125	11
Friday	100	105	6

The cumulative backlog is worked out as follows: the previous day's backlog + orders received – orders shipped. Tuesday: 25 + 110 – 104 = 31. On Monday, one order in five does not go out, and the backlog grows again on Tuesday. The committee sees it on Tuesday morning, adds people to picking, and the backlog falls back to 6 orders by Friday. Without this table, the problem would have come to light at the end of the month, at your customers' end.

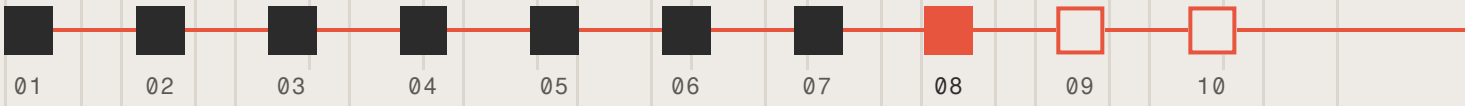
Your table, to copy for each week of the arrangements:

DAY	RECEIVED	SHIPPED	INVOICED	CUMULATIVE BACKLOG	INCIDENTS OPENED / CLOSED	CUSTOMER CALLS	ACTION OF THE DAY
Monday							
Tuesday							
Wednesday							
Thursday							
Friday							

The full list of points to prepare is in the go-live checklist:
https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/templates/go-live-checklist

08

Self-assessment: will your project hold?



IN THIS CHAPTER

TOOL The sixteen questions 47

Reading your score 48

Sixteen questions, fifteen minutes. Answer for your current project, honestly: nobody but you will see the score.

TOOL

The sixteen questions

Score each question: 2 if the answer is yes and you can show written evidence; 1 if it is partly true, or true with nothing in writing; 0 if it is no, or if you do not know.

NO.	QUESTION	SCORE
1	The project's objective fits in one sentence, with a figure and a date	____
2	A single named person is answerable for the project	____
3	Contingencies form separate lines, split by risk, each with an owner	____
4	You know, in euros, what a month's delay costs	____
5	The gaps between the way you work and the tool are listed, each with a written decision	____
6	Customisations and contract amendments are counted, with their cumulative cost, and reviewed in committee	____
7	Two or three checkpoints are dated, with written criteria (cost, time, scope) to continue, scale back or stop	____
8	The steering committee meets on a fixed day and at a fixed time, with an agenda built around the decisions	____
9	Every decision is written down in the meeting (what, who, when) and reread at the next committee	____
10	A one-page report (schedule, budget, risks, decisions) is produced at least every fortnight	____
11	Every major risk has a response in place or dated, and an owner	____
12	Above a set threshold, any spending is seen by someone outside the project	____
13	The end or go-live date was only announced after a plan that holds it had been built (or it has not been announced yet)	____
14	The go-live criteria are written, and a full test run on your real data has been done or scheduled	____
15	The rollback is written down (who decides, on what criteria, until when) or, if it is impossible, the plan for a serious incident is written down	____
16	The arrangements for the first weeks are planned: daily review meeting, support, first close	____
	Total out of 32	____

Reading your score

SCORE	WHAT IT MEANS	WHERE TO START
26 to 32	Your project is in hand. The basic rules are in place, with written evidence.	Keep up the pace. Go back to the questions scored 1 and bring them up to 2 before the next checkpoint.
16 to 25	Your project is fragile. It is moving forward, but part of it relies on memory and goodwill.	Deal with your 0s first, starting with questions 2, 4, 13 and 15, using the 30-day plan.
0 to 15	Your project is at risk. It can still succeed, but not without changing the way it is run.	Fill in tools 1, 2 and 6 this week, and hold a committee within a fortnight.

WATCH OUT

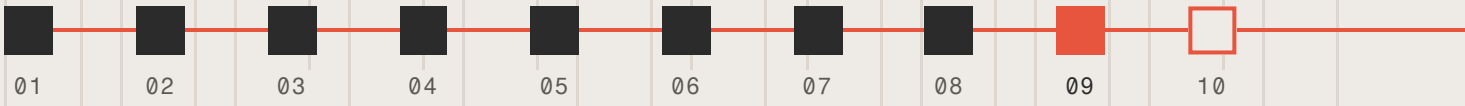
Four blocking questions

Whatever your total, a 0 on question 2, 4, 13 or 15 is dealt with first. A project with no single owner, no cost of delay, a date announced without a plan, or no written rollback or incident plan can show a good score and still go wrong. At TSB, the date announced before the plan and the lack of any rollback weighed heavily; at Notre-Dame, it was the cost of delay, worked out in figures, that informed the decision to hold the date.

Take this self-assessment again in a month. A rising score is the best sign that the way you run your project is really changing.

09

Your action plan: 30, 60 and 90 days



IN THIS CHAPTER

CHECKLIST Days 1 to 30: measure and chart 50

CHECKLIST Days 31 to 60: hold 50

CHECKLIST Days 61 to 90: prepare go-live day, then hold it 51

This plan applies to a project under way or about to start. If your go-live day is more than 90 days away, keep the order of the actions and spread out the third part.

CHECKLIST

Days 1 to 30: measure and chart

- [ ] Write the project on one page (tool 1) and have it reread by the person who pays and the person who delivers
- [ ] Split the contingency by risk, with an amount and an owner for each line (tool 2)
- [ ] Work out the cost of a month's delay (tool 2)
- [ ] Build the plan from the work towards the date, and place two or three checkpoints in it (tool 3)
- [ ] Open the risk register and give every major risk a response (tool 5)
- [ ] If the project changes a tool: open the gap log and settle the first three gaps (tool 4)
- [ ] Set the day and time of the committee, always the same, and open the decision log (tool 6)
- [ ] Choose the person outside the project and the spending threshold above which they are consulted

CHECKLIST

Days 31 to 60: hold

- [ ] Send the one-page report the day before each committee (tool 7)
- [ ] Reread the decision log at the start of each committee
- [ ] Count the customisations, the contract amendments and their cumulative cost, and present them in committee
- [ ] Review the plan from the work towards the date with the people doing the work, and settle any gap (tool 3)
- [ ] Hold the first checkpoint: continue, scale back or stop, against the written criteria
- [ ] Write the go-live criteria and schedule the full test run on real data
- [ ] Take the self-assessment again and compare the score

CHECKLIST

Days 61 to 90: prepare go-live day, then hold it

- [ ] Pass the full test run on real data
- [ ] Fill in the go-live checklist (tool 9)
- [ ] Write the rollback plan, or the plan for a serious incident if rollback is impossible
- [ ] Tell the biggest customers and build up their advance stock
- [ ] Hold the go/no-go 48 hours before (tool 8), and postpone without hesitation if an answer is unclear
- [ ] After go-live: a fifteen-minute daily review meeting until the exit criterion is met
- [ ] Carry out the final review, file the project's memory, hand back to the teams and celebrate go-live

Tick as you go. In ninety days, reread the page from step 1: you will know, figures in hand, whether the project kept its promise.

10

Common mistakes



These twelve mistakes come up often in projects that slip. The five cases in this guide show most of them, on a large scale.

NO.	THE MISTAKE	THE CASE THAT ILLUSTRATES IT	WHAT TO DO
1	Announcing the date before having the plan	TSB	Announce nothing before having the plan, then a range drawn from the plan, and the date once it is finalised
2	Building the plan from the date	TSB	Estimate the work, then compare it with the date
3	A “miscellaneous” line instead of contingencies by risk	Notre-Dame did the opposite	One line per risk, an amount, an owner
4	Leaving a gap between method and tool undecided	Lidl	Settle every gap in writing, with a name and a date
5	Carrying on because a lot has already been spent	Lidl: the halt came after seven years	Set checkpoints, and decide on what remains to be spent and on what the project will bring in
6	Confusing “testing finished” with “ready to go live”	TSB	Go-live criteria written before setting the date
7	Cutting a test to hold the date without telling the committee	TSB	Every cut in testing goes to the committee and is written down
8	Releasing without a review	Knight Capital	Two people, a list, a shutdown instruction
9	Alerts that nobody deals with	Knight Capital	A named recipient for every alert
10	Going live with no rollback and no incident plan	TSB	Write one or the other, before the go/no-go
11	Judging the go-live on the day	Revlon: the effects lasted for months	Track deliveries and incidents every day until the exit criterion is met
12	Forgetting the accounting controls in the new tool	Revlon	Train people on the controls and prepare the first close with the chartered accountant

WATCH OUT

The mistake that contains all the others

A committee that listens instead of deciding. The twelve mistakes above have one thing in common: each one is corrected by a written decision, taken in time, by the right person. If you change only one habit, change that one: every committee ends with decisions read aloud, each with a name and a date.

Glossary

The terms used in this guide, in alphabetical order.

Checkpoint. A date set in advance when you decide, against written criteria, whether to continue, scale back or stop the project.

Client, design team. On a French construction project, the client (maître d'ouvrage) commissions and pays for the project; the design team (maître d'œuvre) designs it and directs the work.

Contract amendment. A change to a contract already signed, often an additional order placed with the same supplier. On a construction project, it is one of the ways contingencies drain away.

Cost to complete. What remains to be spent to finish the project, estimated to date.

Decision log. The list of decisions taken: what, who, why, by when, and their status.

ERP, or integrated management software. Software that brings several of the company's functions (purchasing, stock, sales, accounting) together around the same data.

Forecast at completion. The expected final cost of the project: what has already been spent, plus the cost to complete.

Full test run. A test that follows a real transaction from start to finish: the order, picking, shipping, the invoice, the payment, then its trace in the accounts.

Gap log. The list of points where a tool does not work the way the company does, each with its decision: change the method or adapt the tool.

Go-live, cutover or switchover. The moment you move from the old tool, the old site or the old organisation to the new one.

Go-live criteria. The written conditions to be met before go-live: successful tests, data checked, people trained, support ready.

Go/no-go. The formal decision whether or not to go live, taken on written answers, 48 hours before go-live.

Load test, or test under real load. A test that checks the tool holds up when many people use it at the same time.

Milestone. A dated stage of the project: you can say, without argument, whether or not it has been reached.

PMO. The function that organises how a project or a set of projects is run: schedule, budget, risks, committees, reporting.

RAG status. A simple way to sum up the state of one area of the project: green (within the thresholds), amber (a variance to watch), red (a decision is needed).

Risk contingency. A sum set aside in the budget for a specific risk (price rises, unforeseen events, delay), with an amount and an owner.

Risk register. The list of scored risks, each with its probability, its impact, its response and its owner.

Rollback. The planned, written ability to return to the old tool or the old organisation if go-live goes wrong, with its owner, its criteria and its deadline.

Scope. What the project must deliver, and what it does not deliver.

Steering committee. The regular meeting where the project's decisions are taken. It is judged by the written decisions it produces.

WMS. Warehouse management software: receiving, storage, picking, shipping.

Further reading

All the documents below are free and self-service, with no sign-up. The full index is at https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources.

This guide's tools, in ready-to-fill versions

- The project on one page: project sheet, decision log, project status, go/no-go (Excel workbook, step-by-step guide, printable sheet): https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/modules/project-on-one-page
- PMO reporting: summary, budget, risks, decisions and milestones on one page (Excel workbook): https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/templates/pmo-reporting
- The go-live checklist: what must be ready, the committee's decision, the rollback, the first days (PDF checklist): https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/templates/go-live-checklist
- Go / no-go, five questions, 48 hours before go-live: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/articles/go-no-go-five-questions
- A budget you can steer: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/modules/budget-you-can-steer

The cases, told in detail

- Lidl and SAP, seven years of work, then a halt: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/articles/lidl-sap-seven-years-then-the-stop
- Revlon and SAP, the 2018 go-live: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/articles/revlon-sap-the-2018-go-live
- Notre-Dame, on budget and on time: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/articles/notre-dame-budget-and-date-held
- Knight Capital, one missed server: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/articles/knight-capital-one-missed-server
- E-invoicing in France in 2026 and 2027, what changes for an SME: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/articles/e-invoicing-2026-2027
- Leadership meetings, seven rules to make them actually decide: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/articles/leadership-meetings-that-decide

If the project turns into a crisis

- The module "The crisis on one page": https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/modules/crisis-on-one-page
- The 12 warning signs: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/12-warning-signs
- The 13-week cash flow plan: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources/templates/13-week-cash-flow-plan

To pin down your priority

- The rapid assessment, four questions and two minutes; the calculation runs in your browser, and nothing is sent or stored: https://thgconseil.fr/en/contact#diagnostic
- The method, and what you gain from it: https://thgconseil.fr/en/method-and-gains
- Project leadership, the service: https://thgconseil.fr/en/services/project-leadership

About the author

My name is Tudor Hilcu. I founded THG Conseil in 2022. I work with leaders of SMEs and mid-sized companies to grow, come through a crisis or take back control of their projects.

Since 2018, I have worked as a PMO, project manager and programme director for four major groups: TotalEnergies, The Walt Disney Company, GRDF and Monoprix. An ERP and a WMS put into service, critical releases, the budget of an IT domain. On every assignment, I also managed the supplier contracts, right down to penalties and refunds. From each one, I keep a lesson that applies to an SME: a weekly budget report is worth more than a quarterly review; a budget is steered with the people who spend it; a programme with several partners is held together through its finances; a critical release is decided before go-live day.

From 2015 to 2021, I ran a premium sports club in Paris. In 2020, it had to close overnight, by government order, and the club held on. My companies taught me what a decision costs when it's my name at the bottom of the contract. Large groups taught me how to make it hold at scale.

Alongside my assignments for major groups, I have worked from time to time with business owners and organisations outside IT: advisory work, hands-on support, development, audit, optimisation, crisis management, governance. Some fifty companies in all, in audiovisual, construction, energy, e-commerce and multi-business groups. Depending on the sector and the target, these assignments produced gains of 30% to 140% (depending on the client, in margin, costs, revenue, productivity, savings or efficiency), and savings of several hundred thousand to several million euros. These are past results: they do not predict yours.

I hold the PMP, PRINCE2 Agile and ITIL 4 certifications. For your projects, I work as a part-time PMO, one to two days a week: committees that decide, a master plan, a budget tracked with your financial control team, releases prepared ahead. The method has four stages (measure, chart, hold, hand over), and your teams keep it after I leave. Accounting and legal documents remain the responsibility of your chartered accountant and your lawyer. I sell no software and take no commission.

> THE LESSON
>
> **The first conversation is free, by phone and in confidence, within 48 hours. In an emergency, the conversation and the intervention contract happen within 2 hours.**

- Phone: +33 6 74 86 88 70; email: contact@thgconseil.fr
- Get in touch: https://thgconseil.fr/en/contact
- Free self-service documents: https://thgconseil.fr/en/resources

Notes

CHAPTER 1 · CASE 1. NOTRE-DAME DE PARIS: ON BUDGET AND ON TIME

1 Public Sénat (with AFP), B. Legendre and F. Pris, “Notre-Dame sauvée des flammes, Macron veut la rebâtir ‘d’ici cinq années’” [Notre-Dame saved from the flames, Macron wants to rebuild it “within five years”] (in French), 16 April 2019 (televised address on the evening of Tuesday 16 April), https://www.publicsenat.fr/actualites/politique/notre-dame-sauvee-des-flammes-macron-veut-la-rebatir-d-ici-cinq-annees-140262 (accessed 25 October 2026).

2 Cour des comptes, “Le chantier de la cathédrale de Notre-Dame” [The Notre-Dame cathedral project], thematic public report (in French), 3 September 2025, https://www.ccomptes.fr/fr/publications/le-chantier-de-la-cathedrale-de-notre-dame (full report: https://www.ccomptes.fr/sites/default/files/2025-09/20250903-Chantier-cathedrale-Notre-Dame-de-Paris_0.pdf) (accessed 24 October 2026).

3 Cour des comptes, press release “Le chantier de la cathédrale de Notre-Dame” [The Notre-Dame cathedral project] (in French), 3 September 2025, https://www.ccomptes.fr/sites/default/files/2025-09/20250903-communique-Chantier-cathedrale-Notre-Dame-de-Paris_0.pdf (accessed 24 October 2026).

4 Centre des monuments nationaux, “Les tours de Notre-Dame de Paris rouvrent au public” [The towers of Notre-Dame de Paris reopen to the public] (in French), 2025, https://www.monuments-nationaux.fr/actualites-du-cmn/les-tours-de-notre-dame-de-paris-rouvrent-au-public (accessed 24 October 2026).

CHAPTER 2 · CASE 2. LIDL AND SAP: SEVEN YEARS, THEN A HALT

5 heise online, “‘Elwis’ ist tot: Lidl stoppt millionenschweres Projekt mit SAP” [“Elwis” is dead: Lidl halts multi-million project with SAP] (in German), 16 July 2018, https://www.heise.de/news/Elwis-ist-tot-Lidl-stoppt-millionenschweres-Projekt-mit-SAP-4111245.html (accessed 24 October 2026).

6 Handelsblatt, C. Kerkmann and F. Kolf, “Wie SAP und Lidl Hunderte Millionen Euro versenkt haben” [How SAP and Lidl sank hundreds of millions of euros] (in German), 27 July 2018, https://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/handel-konsumgueter/digitale-transformation-wie-sap-und-lidl-hunderte-millionen-euro-versenkt-haben/22850166.html (paywalled; full reprint credited to Handelsblatt: https://de.finance.yahoo.com/nachrichten/sap-lidl-millionen-euro-versenkt-122205383.html) (accessed 24 October 2026).

7 heise online, “So starb ‘Elwis’: Hintergründe zu Lidls SAP-Rückzug” [How “Elwis” died: the background to Lidl’s SAP withdrawal] (in German), 17 July 2018, https://www.heise.de/news/So-starb-Elwis-Hintergruende-zu-Lidls-SAP-Rueckzug-4113285.html (accessed 24 October 2026).

CHAPTER 3 · CASE 3. REVLON AND SAP: A GO-LIVE THAT COST MONEY FOR MONTHS

8 Revlon, Inc., filings with the SEC: annual report (Form 10-K) for the 2018 financial year, filed on 28 March 2019, including “Item 9A” and the auditor’s report on internal control (p. F-3), https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/887921/000088792119000004/rev201810-k.htm (accessed 24 October 2026, reread 25 October 2026); notification of late filing (Form NT 10-K), filed on 18 March 2019, https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/887921/000115752319000627/a51956251.htm (accessed 25 October 2026).

9 US District Court for the Eastern District of New York, Lachman v. Revlon, Inc., No. 19-cv-2859, decision of 17 September 2020, https://www.stblaw.com/docs/default-source/court-decisions/lachman-v-revlon.pdf (accessed 24 October 2026).

CHAPTER 4 · CASE 4. KNIGHT CAPITAL: ONE MISSED SERVER, 45 MINUTES

10 SEC, administrative order against Knight Capital Americas LLC, Release No. 34-70694, 16 October 2013, https://www.sec.gov/litigation/admin/2013/34-70694.pdf (accessed 24 October 2026).

11 SEC, press release 2013-222, “SEC Charges Knight Capital With Violations of Market Access Rule”, 16 October 2013, https://www.sec.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2013-222 (accessed 24 October 2026).

CHAPTER 5 · CASE 5. TSB: A MIGRATION DECIDED ON AN ANNOUNCED TIMETABLE

12 Financial Conduct Authority, Final Notice to TSB Bank plc, 20 December 2022, https://www.fca.org.uk/publication/final-notices/tsb-bank-plc-2022.pdf (accessed 24 October 2026).

13 Financial Conduct Authority, press release “TSB fined £48.65m for operational resilience failings”, 20 December 2022, https://www.fca.org.uk/news/press-releases/tsb-fined-48m-operational-resilience-failings (accessed 24 October 2026).

CHAPTER 6 · THE METHOD, STEP BY STEP

14 Service-Public.gouv.fr, Entreprendre, news item A18953, “La facturation électronique est effective depuis le 1er septembre 2026 !” [Electronic invoicing has been in force since 1 September 2026] (in French), published on 2 September 2026, https://entreprendre.service-public.gouv.fr/actualites/A18953 (accessed 25 October 2026).

The plan, held.

THG Conseil works with the leaders of small and mid-sized companies: steering projects, growing the business, getting through a crisis.

A first conversation, free of charge, by phone and in confidence, within 48 hours.

In an emergency: a conversation and an engagement contract within 2 hours.

PHONE	+33 6 74 86 88 70
EMAIL	contact@thgconseil.fr
CONTACT	thgconseil.fr/en/contact
RESOURCES	thgconseil.fr/en/resources

Seeing a project through, version 1.0, 25 October 2026. Tudor Hilcu, THG Conseil.
THG CONSEIL, single-shareholder SARL with share capital of €5,000, Paris Trade and Companies Register 920 867 967.