

Why Megaprojects Fail in the First 90 Days

How Execution Certainty™
helps you de-risk megaprojects
from day one.



Execution
Certainty
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INDUSTRY NORMS

The world is building bigger, faster, and more ambitiously and the tolerance for failure is less than ever before, yet success remains elusive. According to industry reports, the statistics show the following:

THE NUMBERS

98% of megaprojects face delays or overruns
Project Control Academy, cited in 2025 analysis

90% of megaprojects fail in at least one key area (cost, schedule, or benefits)
2024 Acquisition Innovation Research Center report

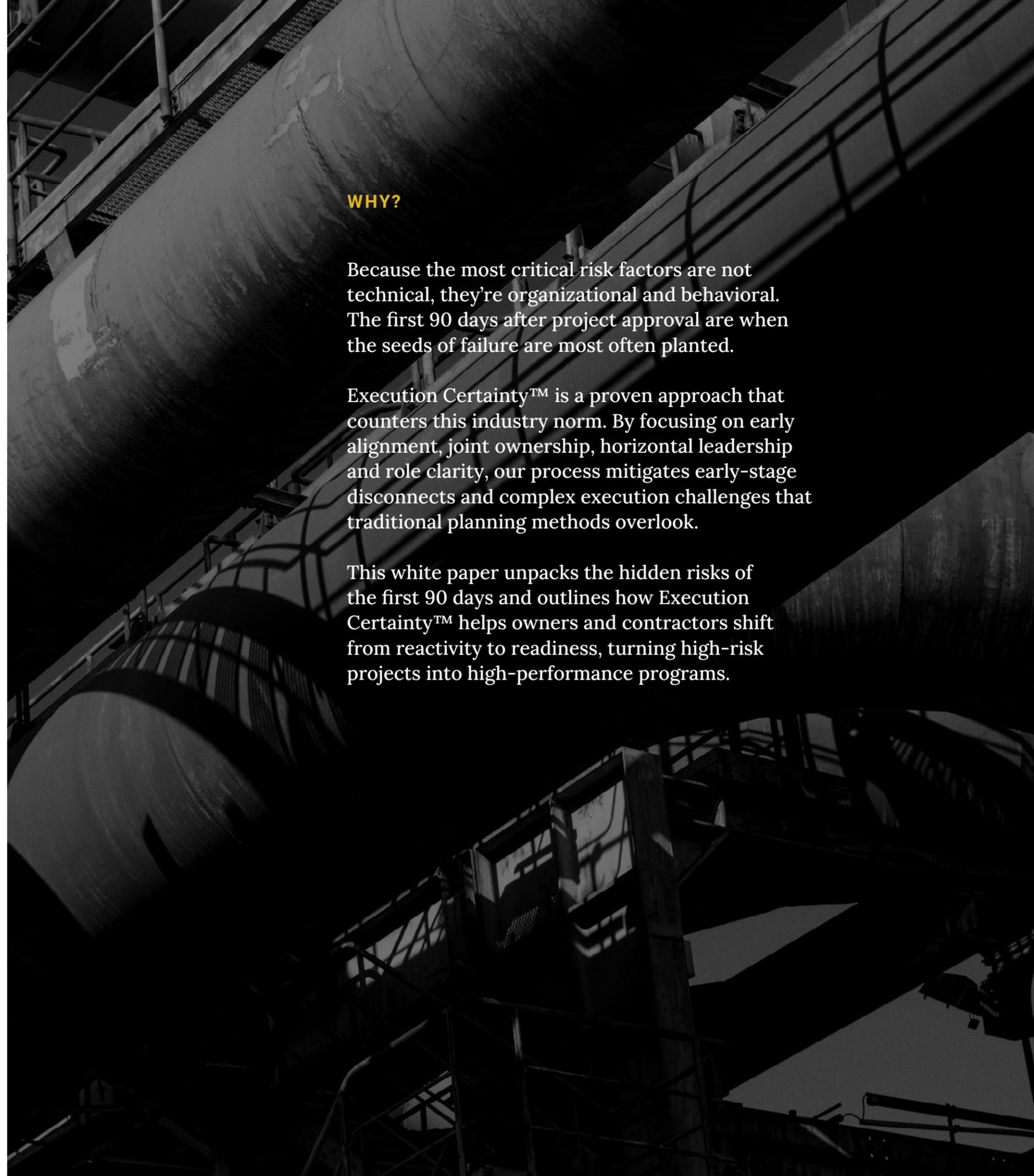
59% of current projects estimated completion costs were above the initial estimate
EY "Spotlight on oil and gas megaprojects" report 2014

WHY?

Because the most critical risk factors are not technical, they're organizational and behavioral. The first 90 days after project approval are when the seeds of failure are most often planted.

Execution Certainty™ is a proven approach that counters this industry norm. By focusing on early alignment, joint ownership, horizontal leadership and role clarity, our process mitigates early-stage disconnects and complex execution challenges that traditional planning methods overlook.

This white paper unpacks the hidden risks of the first 90 days and outlines how Execution Certainty™ helps owners and contractors shift from reactivity to readiness, turning high-risk projects into high-performance programs.





WHY THE FIRST 90 DAYS MATTER

Megaprojects don't fail at the end, they fail at the beginning.

In plain terms: teams often assume and hope things will go better than they do, and downplay difficulties to win approval or contracts.

This culture of false or overconfidence means most projects break down well before construction begins. The first 90 days are when vision and strategy must be converted into coordinated, accountable execution and a success condition set. If accountability governance structures, decision rights, and risk ownership are unclear at this point, failure becomes an inevitable outcome.

KEY RISKS THAT EMERGE:

- Disconnects between corporate business drivers and execution strategy
- Unclear vision, stakeholder misalignment, and lack of ownership for collective project success metrics
- Insufficient clarity of risks and their likely performance impact
- Lack of governance and collective rhythm
- Overreliance on tools, contracts, and expectations to manage complexity
- Gaps in execution assumptions and situational reality
- Leaders driven by their individual entity's priorities

Data shows that even “shovel-ready” projects often lack execution readiness. Once a project is mobilized, the cost of delay rises exponentially, on average each year of delay adds 4.6% to the total project cost, and often significant lost revenues.

“If you don't frontload rigorously, you're simply building delay into the foundation.” Bent Flyvbjerg

Execution Certainty™ frontloads leadership alignment, prevents execution misalignment, connects teams, removes blind spots, and sets a foundation for delivery confidence from day one.





THE HIDDEN RISKS OF EARLY EXECUTION

“The most overlooked variable in megaproject performance is human behavior.”

Bent Flyvbjerg



Most tools and plans don't fail, people fail to fulfill their intent. Simply put, megaprojects are destined for failure because their leadership fails to set a condition that fosters the partnerships and individual and collective ownership necessary to move the team through risk and uncertainty to certainty.

The following are five critical risks that Execution Certainty™ neutralizes:

1

MISALIGNED ASSUMPTIONS

Having worked on over 80 megaprojects, our experience shows that early-phase optimism bias leads to blind spots. Execution Certainty™ ensures stakeholders are brought together to surface differences and establish shared definitions of scope, success, and risk tolerance.

2

UNCLEAR ACCOUNTABILITY

Many megaprojects suffer from “accountability diffusion,” where everyone might know their role, but not what they are actually accountable for producing until it's too late and delays, over-spending, and quality issues are already in play. The Execution Certainty™ approach uses accountability-based waypoints to clarify decision rights, escalation paths, and delivery accountabilities across all partners.

3

IMBALANCED RISK ALLOCATION

Another symptom of underperforming megaprojects is risk avoidance, where owners or EPCs try to offload execution risk entirely to the other. Execution Certainty™ uses collaborative planning and success roadmapping to transparently distribute risk across stakeholders.

4

FRAGILE GOVERNANCE

Most governance structures aren't built for transparency, rapid issue resolution or real-time performance monitoring. Execution Certainty™ installs a governance rhythm that brings executive intent and field execution into sync, issues are flagged, solutions are presented, and the project's trajectory is maintained or restored.

5

ILLUSION OF READINESS

Project dashboards often create a false sense of control through bulk measures. But what's missing is transparency in joint large scale scope progress, human alignment and, behavioral readiness. Execution Certainty™ advisory, workshops, and readiness protocols validate execution assumptions, before failure becomes the default outcome.



THE EXECUTION CERTAINTY™ APPROACH

TURNING RISK INTO READINESS

Execution Certainty™ is purpose-built for, but not limited to, the first 90 days of a megaproject's lifecycle. It doesn't replace existing systems or processes, it complements them with a structure that identifies risk, creates clarity, and drives engagement across all stakeholders.

This isn't a checklist, it's a working model for execution.

This approach was built from inside the industry—not outside. It's what's missing from the high-level project strategies and low-level delivery tools that most projects depend on. It fills the critical middle gap where execution risk accumulates.

“Large and complex power and utility megaprojects are under massive pressure to come in on time and budget. And yet the majority of all megaprojects in the sector don't.”

Safia Limousin, EY, Capital & Infrastructure Leader 2016

KEY COMPONENTS:



1

CLARITY ACTIVATION

Having worked on over 80 megaprojects, our structured conversations and working sessions surface gaps in assumptions, success metrics, and stakeholder expectations before they cause derailments.

2

JOINT SUCCESS ROADMAPPING

A cross-functional planning approach aligns project partners on vision, sequencing, and execution risk. This ensures shared ownership from the boardroom to the field.

3

RISK READINESS WORKSHOPS

Focused alignment around potential failure points, governance, scope change, vendor coordination, and labor planning builds realistic plans that hold up under pressure and unexpected events.

4

ACCOUNTABILITY DESIGN

Roles, responsibilities, and escalation paths are clearly defined using accountability based execution modeling. Every stakeholder knows who owns what, and what is to be produced by when.

5

GOVERNANCE RHYTHM INSTALLATION

A governance model is established to bring real-time performance accounting, transparency, and course-correction into weekly, monthly, and quarterly cadence, compressing time-to-decision and avoiding issue escalation.



THE COST OF DOING NOTHING

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PROJECTS PROCEED WITHOUT EXECUTION CERTAINTY™?

The cost of capital is unforgiving. Every month of delay compounds financial, reputational, and political risk and most of it stems from early failures to address complex challenges in the first 90 days.

Our experience shows that when misalignment risks in execution are not sufficiently addressed, they can spread, making it nearly impossible to return to baseline. Projects get trapped in a reactive mode, managing crises instead of delivering intended outcomes.

THE DOWNSTREAM COST OF EARLY MISSTEPS:

Missed Alignment	Adds months to schedule	Inefficiency, delays, partner conflict, and safety risk
Poor risk allocation	Leads to change orders, disputes, and litigation	Cost blowouts average 30%-50%
Fuzzy accountability	Creates scope gaps and late/delayed decisions	Time = money lost, and trust eroded
Weak governance	Slow or unclear recovery plans and escalation paths	Problems linger and compound



THE CHOICE IS CLEAR

You can spend weeks, months, or even years reacting to risk after it materializes or commit time early in your project to build systems and partnerships to mitigate that eventuality. The choice is that simple.

Execution Certainty™ isn't just a process upgrade, it's a strategic advantage that protects your people, capital, timeline, and stakeholder confidence.



PROOF IN PRACTICE

EXECUTION CERTAINTY™ IN THE FIELD

Execution Certainty™ has been deployed on high-stakes capital projects across energy, infrastructure, utilities, and other industrial sectors. From multi-billion-dollar megaprojects to complex facility upgrades, the approach consistently delivers one thing: results.

INSIGHTS



HIGH-STAKES LEADERSHIP

Our High-Stakes Leadership component equips leadership teams to drive Execution Certainty™ by transforming how they lead. The work develops behaviors of ownership, transparency, and accountability, ensuring leaders can perform under pressure and align their teams to deliver consistent, sustainable results.

“This is the most transparency I have ever seen on a project, and members of all companies have the same view of current challenges.”

- Project Team Leader

CASE STUDY: GULF COAST PETROCHEMICAL PROJECT

PROJECT SCOPE AND VISION

- Joint Venture with a \$9B estimate sanctioned at \$7B and completed in 2020
- Featured the largest modules ever built and constructed in China
- Progressive contractor bid approach with exceptionally aggressive schedules publicly considered “unlikely to impossible”
- First greenfield investment for this U.S.-based energy major in over 35 years, intended as a flagship project

STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH EXECUTION CERTAINTY™

- Engagement period: 6 years, spanning multiple phases of the project lifecycle
- Aligned project leadership early, embedded a tailored culture through transformational leadership programs, and provided governance and behavioral support to drive the project-wide Integrated Roadmap
- Delivered discrete consulting initiatives and hybrid applications to address leadership imperatives throughout the engagement period, i.e. worked with front-line supervisors across all EPCs to shift behavioral orientation to safety

IMPACTFUL OUTCOMES

- All project milestones achieved and delivered on or ahead of schedule
- Project completed 6 months early and 9% under the \$7B sanctioned budget
- Zero lost-time injuries across 21 million stewardable hours
- Maintained full momentum despite Covid disruption: all modules built, shipped, and installed without delay
- Widely recognized as a flagship industry project, demonstrating feasibility of aggressive schedules and large-scale modular construction

“The value in Execution Certainty™ is that we’re discussing challenges twelve to eighteen months earlier, while we still have the ability to mitigate them.”

- EPC Project Director



EXECUTION CERTAINTY™: DESIGNED TO PREVENT THE FIRST 90-DAY FAILURES

The first 90 days of a megaproject are make-or-break.

Execution Certainty™ steps in when conventional approaches fall short, often before construction begins, before contractors mobilize, before symptoms harden. Our proprietary approach transforms the early phase into a zone of truth and immediate action.

KEY MECHANISMS FOR RISK MITIGATION

- **Risk-Readiness Diagnostic:** Uncover blind spots, incomplete plans, and stakeholder misalignment before they stall progress.
- **Joint Success Roadmapping:** Forces critical conversations early, reallocating joint risk amongst Owners, EPCs, and PM teams before tension turns into claims.
- **Accountability Frameworks:** Replace ambiguity with shared aim, and a “we’re in this together” mindset.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Execution Certainty™ doesn't eliminate risk, it reveals it, sets shared ownership and mitigates it through structure, clarity, and alignment.

We've learned from the failures.
Our clients don't have to repeat them.



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