# Independent Decision Review

## Stage: In Development - Independent Delivery Review

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| **Illustrative client** | Northstar Ops |
| **Product** | B2B workflow and operations platform |
| **Current stage** | In Development |
| **Development model** | External vendor team with founder-led product ownership |
| **Review type** | Independent development health and delivery review |
| **Review status** | Complete Sample Review |
| **Prepared By** | Anshul Bagai<br>27+ years in product, technology, engineering and delivery leadership |
| **Review Date** | 18 July 2026 |

| **Purpose of this sample** |
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| Demonstrate the structure, depth, and executive presentation of an Independent Decision Review. The company, facts, metrics, and conclusions below are fictional and are used only to illustrate the service. |

# 01 Executive Review

| Decision Verdict | Proceed with Conditions | **Action Required**<br>Recovery is achievable with stronger product ownership, delivery visibility, scope control, and independent technology challenge. |
|---|---|---|

**Decision Verdict:** Proceed with Conditions
**Primary Root Cause:** Project-led operating model
**Immediate Priority:** Re-baseline accepted scope
**Vendor Recommendation:** Continue
**Pilot Date:** Reassess
**Recovery Window:** 6-8 weeks

**Executive Review Summary:** The current delivery issue does not appear to be caused by an incapable development vendor or a simple shortage of engineering capacity. The vendor team appears technically competent and is producing working software at a reasonable cadence. The primary concern is the operating model: the engagement is still managed primarily as a project, while product ownership, acceptance discipline, scope control, and outcome-based release planning remain weak.

| Primary issue | Evidence | Management implication |
|---|---|---|
| Project-led rather than product-led delivery | Working software arrives every two weeks, but roadmap priorities shift and business outcomes are not consistently used as the acceptance baseline. | The team can remain productive while the product still drifts from customer and pilot priorities. |
| Weak completion visibility | The project is reported as 80% complete, but only 9 of 26 pilot workflows have been formally accepted end-to-end. | The current completion figure cannot reliably forecast pilot readiness or remaining cost. |
| Rework consuming capacity | Approximately 31% of recent engineering effort is estimated to have gone into defect correction and rework. | Adding developers before reducing rework is unlikely to solve the delivery problem. |

# 02 Engagement Context and Inputs Reviewed

| Item | Illustrative case input |
|---|---|
| **Original development plan** | 6 months |
| **Current elapsed time** | 8 months |
| **Vendor team** | 7 people across engineering, QA, design and delivery |
| **Current vendor cadence** | Working increment approximately every 2 weeks |
| **Vendor-reported completion** | Approximately 80% |
| **Pilot workflows** | 26 planned; 18 reported developed; 12 demo-ready; 9 tested and accepted |
| **Current budget position** | Approximately 25% above original plan |
| **Technology ownership** | Vendor leads architecture and engineering decisions; founder owns product priorities |
| **Near-term commitment** | Pilot expected in 10 weeks |

Evidence reviewed: stage-specific questionnaire, 30-minute context call, delivery status summary, current release plan, defect/rework summary, team structure, selected product documentation, and pilot scope.

Scope limitation: This sample does not include a full source-code review, penetration test, security assessment, or architecture audit. Technology conclusions are therefore limited to evidence available from the delivery and governance review.

# 03 Founder Questionnaire - Responses Reviewed

| Question | Founder response | Initial review observation |
|---|---|---|
| Do you have a clear view of what is completed, pending, delayed, and blocked? | **2/5** | Visibility is weak despite regular reporting. |
| How frequently are you receiving working product increments or releases? | **Every 2 weeks** | Cadence is healthy. |
| Are agreed milestones or delivery dates being met? | **Sometimes** | Predictability is materially weaker than cadence. |
| Are scope changes documented with impact on cost and timeline? | **Somewhat** | Change control exists informally but is not consistently rebaselined. |
| Are testing and quality checks completed before work is accepted or released? | **Yes** | A QA process is present. |
| How much effort is going into bugs, fixes, or rework? | **High** | Forward capacity is being materially reduced. |
| Who currently owns and manages technology decisions? | **Vendor** | Technical challenge is concentrated on the delivery side. |
| Are risks, blockers, delays, and changes communicated clearly and regularly? | **Somewhat** | Operational communication exists; executive visibility is inconsistent. |
| Have you identified important skills or roles missing from the team? | **No major gap** | No evidence supports a simple headcount solution. |
| Are development costs tracked against delivered work and remaining scope? | **Somewhat** | Spend is visible, but cost-to-complete is not reliable. |

| **How the questionnaire is used** |
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| The questionnaire does not determine the verdict. It creates a factual baseline and identifies where the context call and independent review need to go deeper. |

# 04 Current-State Assessment

| Review area | Status | Independent observation |
|---|---|---|
| **Delivery cadence** | **Stable** | A two-week release rhythm exists and the vendor is actively producing working software. |
| **Delivery predictability** | **Needs Attention** | Release dates move and planned scope is not consistently converted into accepted scope within the expected window. |
| **Progress visibility** | **High Risk** | The 80% completion figure is not reconciled with tested and accepted end-to-end workflows. |
| **Quality / rework** | **High Risk** | High rework is reducing effective capacity and increasing uncertainty around remaining effort. |
| **Technology ownership** | **Needs Attention** | Vendor ownership of architecture is not inherently problematic, but independent client-side challenge is limited. |
| **Team capability** | **Stable** | No evidence currently suggests that the core team lacks basic technical or delivery capability. |
| **Product operating model** | **High Risk** | Delivery is optimized around project completion rather than customer outcomes, pilot-critical workflows, and release learning. |
| **Cost control** | **Needs Attention** | Historical spend is visible, but remaining budget is not tightly forecast against accepted remaining scope. |

# 05 Root Cause Analysis

The delivery delay is the visible symptom. The more important question is why a capable team with a regular release cadence is still unable to provide predictable progress, reliable completion visibility, and a defensible cost-to-complete forecast.

| RC01 | Project-led operating model |
|---|---|
| Evidence pattern | The vendor executes assigned requirements competently, but roadmap and release decisions are not consistently anchored to customer outcomes or pilot-critical value. |
| Effect on delivery | The team can keep delivering while product value and launch priorities drift. |

| RC02 | Completion measured through activity, not acceptance |
|---|---|
| Evidence pattern | 80% completion is reported, while only 9 of 26 pilot workflows have been accepted end-to-end. |
| Effect on delivery | Management cannot reliably forecast launch readiness, remaining scope, or remaining spend. |

| RC03 | Scope-change discipline is weak |
|---|---|
| Evidence pattern | Four material scope changes were introduced during the last 10 weeks; impact was discussed but not formally rebaselined. |
| Effect on delivery | Incremental changes accumulate into schedule and budget pressure. |

| RC04 | High rework reduces effective capacity |
|---|---|
| Evidence pattern | About 31% of recent effort is estimated to be defect correction or rework. |
| Effect on delivery | Nominal team size materially overstates forward-delivery capacity. |

| RC05 | Technology challenge is concentrated with the vendor |
|---|---|
| Evidence pattern | The vendor is competent, but architecture, estimates, and technical delivery are largely reviewed within the same delivery organization. |
| Effect on delivery | Founder-side decision making lacks independent challenge before choices become expensive to reverse. |

**What the evidence does not currently indicate**

- An incapable vendor or
- a fundamentally broken architecture or
- a simple shortage of developers or
- an immediate need to replace the full team

# 06 Independent Findings

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| **F01** | **Reported 80% completion is not a reliable measure of pilot readiness** |
| Evidence | The project is reported as approximately 80% complete. However, only 9 of 26 pilot workflows are currently tested and accepted end-to-end. A further 3 are demo-ready but not yet accepted. |
| Implication | Percentage-complete reporting is overstating certainty. It cannot be used reliably to confirm the pilot date or remaining budget. |
| Recommended action | **Replace percentage completion with workflow status: Not Started / In Development / Demo Ready / Tested / Accepted. Reforecast the pilot only from accepted workflow status.** |
| **F02** | **Delivery cadence is acceptable; delivery predictability is not** |
| Evidence | The vendor is producing working increments every two weeks, but only about 62% of committed pilot work has been accepted within the planned sprint or release window across the last four cycles. |
| Implication | The issue is not lack of activity. The issue is whether commitments can be trusted for business planning. |
| Recommended action | **Introduce a rolling 4-6 week committed release baseline with explicit scope, dependencies, acceptance owner, and planned-vs-accepted reporting.** |
| **F03** | **The team is capable, but the engagement remains project-focused rather than product-focused** |
| Evidence | The vendor demonstrates competent execution against assigned requirements. The current operating model, however, optimizes for delivering requested scope rather than continuously prioritizing customer evidence, pilot-critical outcomes, and release learning. |
| Implication | A strong project team can deliver efficiently while the product roadmap still drifts from the highest-value outcomes. |
| Recommended action | **Retain the current vendor team. Strengthen founder-side product ownership so roadmap priorities, customer evidence, release outcomes, and business acceptance remain independently owned.** |

# 06 Independent Findings - Continued

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| **F04** | **High rework is reducing effective engineering capacity** |
| Evidence | Approximately 31% of recent engineering effort is estimated to have been used for defect correction, requirement rework, and revisiting previously completed functionality. |
| Implication | Adding developers without understanding the sources of rework may increase coordination cost without materially increasing delivery capacity. |
| Recommended action | **Run a four-week rework analysis by module and cause: escaped defects, requirement changes, UX rework, integration issues, and technical refactoring. Use the result before making any headcount decision.** |
| **F05** | **Technology ownership needs independent challenge, not vendor replacement** |
| Evidence | The vendor currently leads most architecture and engineering decisions. Nothing reviewed indicates that those decisions are inherently poor, but independent client-side technical challenge is limited. |
| Implication | The founder has limited ability to independently validate major estimates, scalability, security trade-offs, and maintainability before committing. |
| Recommended action | **Introduce lightweight client-side technology governance - internal or fractional - for architecture decisions, significant estimates, technical risk, and release acceptance. The role should complement the vendor, not duplicate it.** |
| **F06** | **Budget visibility exists, but cost-to-complete is not yet reliable** |
| Evidence | Spend is approximately 25% above the original plan. Historical cost is known, but remaining spend is not directly mapped to tested and accepted remaining workflows. |
| Implication | Management can see what has been spent but cannot yet answer with confidence how much more investment is required to reach a pilot-ready state. |
| Recommended action | **Rebaseline accepted remaining scope first, then create a cost-to-complete forecast at release level with explicit contingency for defects and approved scope change.** |

# 07 Risk and Business Impact

| ID / Risk | Rating | Business impact | Horizon |
|---|---|---|---|
| **R01**<br>**Completion visibility remains unreliable** | **High** | Pilot timing and remaining investment continue to be forecast from weak evidence. | **Immediate** |
| **R02**<br>**Project-led delivery continues without stronger product ownership** | **High** | More scope may be delivered without improving pilot or customer outcomes. | **0-30 days** |
| **R03**<br>**Rework remains structurally high** | **High** | Effective delivery capacity stays materially below nominal team capacity. | **0-30 days** |
| **R04**<br>**Technology decisions lack independent challenge** | **Medium** | Costly architecture or scaling decisions may be accepted without founder-side validation. | **30-90 days** |
| **R05**<br>**Scope continues to move without formal impact control** | **Medium** | Further budget increase and timeline slippage remain likely. | **Immediate** |

# 08 Recommended Management Actions

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|---|---|
| **A01** | **Rebaseline the remaining product by end-to-end workflow and acceptance status.** |
| **Owner / timing** | Founder / Product Owner + Vendor \| Week 1 |
| **Expected outcome** | Reliable definition of what is truly complete and what remains. |
| **A02** | **Establish a 4-6 week committed release baseline with explicit acceptance ownership.** |
| **Owner / timing** | Product Owner + Delivery Lead \| Week 1 |
| **Expected outcome** | Higher predictability and clearer executive visibility. |
| **A03** | **Introduce independent technology challenge for architecture, major estimates, and technical risk.** |
| **Owner / timing** | Founder + Tech Owner \| Week 1-2 |
| **Expected outcome** | Vendor decisions remain supported but independently validated. |
| **A04** | **Analyze four weeks of rework by root cause before increasing team size.** |
| **Owner / timing** | Tech Lead + QA \| Week 2 |
| **Expected outcome** | Evidence on whether the problem is quality, requirements, UX, integration, or architecture. |
| **A05** | **Create a cost-to-complete forecast against accepted remaining scope.** |
| **Owner / timing** | Founder + Vendor \| End Week 2 |
| **Expected outcome** | Clearer remaining investment and contingency requirement. |

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| **A06** | **Shift roadmap discussion from feature completion to product outcomes and pilot-critical workflows.** |
| **Owner / timing** | Founder / Product Owner \| Ongoing |
| **Expected outcome** | Stronger product focus without disrupting the existing delivery team. |

**Decisions to avoid or defer**

- Do not add developers simply to compensate for missed dates.
- Do not replace the vendor based on schedule slippage alone.
- Do not initiate a full architecture rewrite without targeted evidence.
- Do not commit the pilot date from the current 80% completion estimate.

# 09 Delivery Recovery Plan

| Phase / Timing | Primary objective | Key actions |
|---|---|---|
| **Stabilize visibility Week 1** | Replace ambiguous completion reporting. | Workflow baseline; acceptance status; ownership map; pilot-critical path. |
| **Rebaseline delivery Weeks 1-2** | Create a delivery plan that can be trusted. | 4-6 week release commitment; cost-to-complete; explicit scope-change control. |
| **Reduce rework Weeks 2-4** | Recover effective engineering capacity. | Rework root-cause review; targeted quality fixes; stronger acceptance discipline. |
| **Shift to product-led execution Weeks 2-6** | Make product outcomes, not task completion, the primary operating lens. | Founder-side product priorities; customer evidence in roadmap; outcome-based release reviews. |
| **Recover predictability Weeks 4-8** | Prove that committed work can repeatedly become accepted work. | Track planned vs accepted delivery; adjust pilot timing using evidence. |

**Expected result after 6-8 weeks**

- Management should have a reliable remaining-scope baseline, a cost-to-complete view, explicit product and technology ownership, lower rework, and an evidence-based release forecast.
- The objective is not simply faster coding - it is predictable conversion of committed scope into tested and accepted product outcomes.

# 10 Executive Decision Summary

| Decision | Review verdict | Basis |
|---|---|---|
| **Continue with current vendor** | **RECOMMENDED** | Current evidence indicates adequate capability and active delivery. Strengthen the operating model rather than replace the team. |
| **Add more developers** | **DEFER** | High rework and weak delivery control should be addressed before increasing headcount. |
| **Introduce independent technology ownership** | **RECOMMENDED** | Founder-side challenge is needed for architecture, estimates, technical risk, and acceptance. |
| **Rebuild the architecture** | **NOT SUPPORTED YET** | No evidence currently justifies a full rewrite. A targeted technical review should precede that decision. |
| **Keep current pilot date** | **REASSESS** | The existing 80% completion estimate is not a reliable launch-readiness measure. |
| **Shift governance toward product outcomes** | **RECOMMENDED** | This is the most important operating-model change required to improve long-term product execution. |

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| **Decision Verdict** | **Proceed with Conditions** | **Action Required**<br>Recovery is achievable with stronger product ownership, delivery visibility, scope control, and independent technology challenge. |

# 11 Final Review Conclusion and Review Session

**Final review conclusion:** Northstar Ops should not treat the current situation as a vendor failure or respond by simply adding engineering capacity. The vendor appears capable and is delivering at a reasonable cadence. The more significant issue is the operating model: weak product-side challenge, insufficient acceptance-based completion visibility, high rework, and limited linkage between spend and accepted product outcomes.

The recommended path is to retain the current delivery team, establish independent product and technology challenge, rebaseline the remaining product by accepted workflow, and use the next 6-8 weeks to prove delivery predictability. Vendor replacement, major hiring, or architecture rewrite should only be considered if objective evidence from the recovery period indicates they are necessary.

**Included: Scheduled 30-minute review session**

- The review session walks through the Decision Verdict, the evidence behind the root causes, the management actions, the recovery sequence, and the immediate 2-week plan.
- It is also used to challenge unresolved assumptions and answer founder questions.

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