

Saving a Construction Project in Crisis



Nancy Italiano – Creative Director, Acustruct
Women in Construction Summit 2025

About **ME** - Nancy Italiano

Nancy Italiano is a visionary leader in Australia's construction industry, known for her bold, design-led approach to building and business. As the co-founder of Acustruct and Acudesign, Nancy brings over two decades of hands-on experience in delivering high-end custom homes and boutique developments across Melbourne.

Her strength lies not just in creating beautiful homes, but in navigating complexity with clarity — a skill she now shares with women across the industry. From design development to client negotiations and crisis management, Nancy leads with strategy, creativity, and fierce commitment to quality.

Today, she's on a mission to empower women in construction to lead with confidence, reset the standard, and own their seat at the table — especially when the pressure's on.



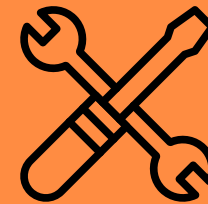
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**PROJECT
MANAGEMENT
SERVICES**



WELLNESS & HEALTH

The Reality Check

Projects rarely collapse overnight — they unravel silently. Think of a construction project like this stack of blocks. When crisis strikes, it's rarely because one big dramatic piece falls out.

It's the small shifts —

- The missed deadlines / Delayed feedback or uncertain decisions
- The blurred scopes / Purchase Order (PO) or contract confusion (CA)
- The silent tensions / Team misalignment
- The under-scoped trades / Disengaged subcontractors
- The deferred decisions — *that gradually weaken the structure underneath.*

By the time the collapse happens, the damage was already done long before. Crisis doesn't shout at you. It whispers — and it unravels silently if you're not paying attention.

The best leaders don't just look at the surface.

They see where the structure is weakening — and they act before it all falls



Crisis Signals Checklist

Top 5 Warning Signs of Crisis:

- 1. Repeated delays + excuses
- 2. Clients disengaged or overly controlling
- 3. Team in reactive mode
- 4. Decisions made without full info
- 5. Breakdown in communication



Where Crisis Tends to Strike Most

Pre-Construction

Scope gaps
Client confusion
Budget drift starts

Foundation

Engineering errors

Lock-Up

Poor weather planning
Material lead times

Handover

Defect panic
Pressure to hand over

Site Preparation

Trade delays
Misaligned expectations

Structural Framing

Structural surprises

Interior Fit-Out

Decision fatigue
Variation overload

Post-Construction

Warranty issues
Client dissatisfaction

The Hidden Causes of a Crisis

Crisis rarely begins where it explodes.

Look beneath the surface:

- Scope sabotage: hidden changes disguised as “minor tweaks”
- Cash flow tension: delayed payments or strained supplier relationships
- Leadership vacuum: unclear decision-making hierarchy
- Cultural rot: blame-shifting, low morale, silent site conflicts
- Regulatory pressures: inspections, compliance, and approvals creating bottlenecks

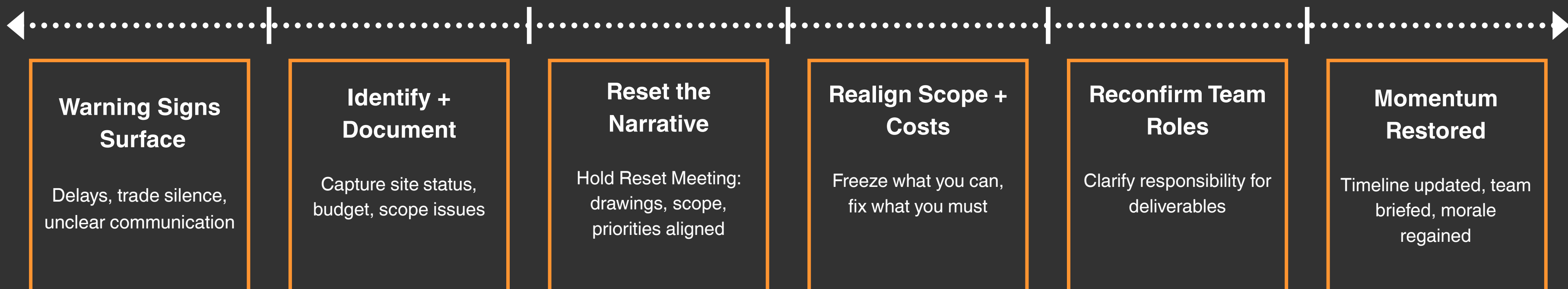


Key Message:

What we see is often the symptom, not the source.

True leaders find the real cause fast.

Your 72-Hour Crisis Plan (Table)



Key Action Triggers

- Issue updated software schedule
- Upload revised POs and trade timelines
- Confirm communication chain (internal + client)
- Document site issues and email client recap
- Nominate “crisis lead” per project stage (site/admin/client)



Think of it like:

“Site CPR” — not fixing the whole project yet, just keeping it alive and stable.

The 3 R's of Crisis Recovery

- **Recognise Early:** Notice tension, delays, confusion before they explode
- **Reset Fast: Don't delay action**
address it cleanly, calmly, confidently
- **Rebuild Trust Relentlessly**
Momentum only returns when people believe again

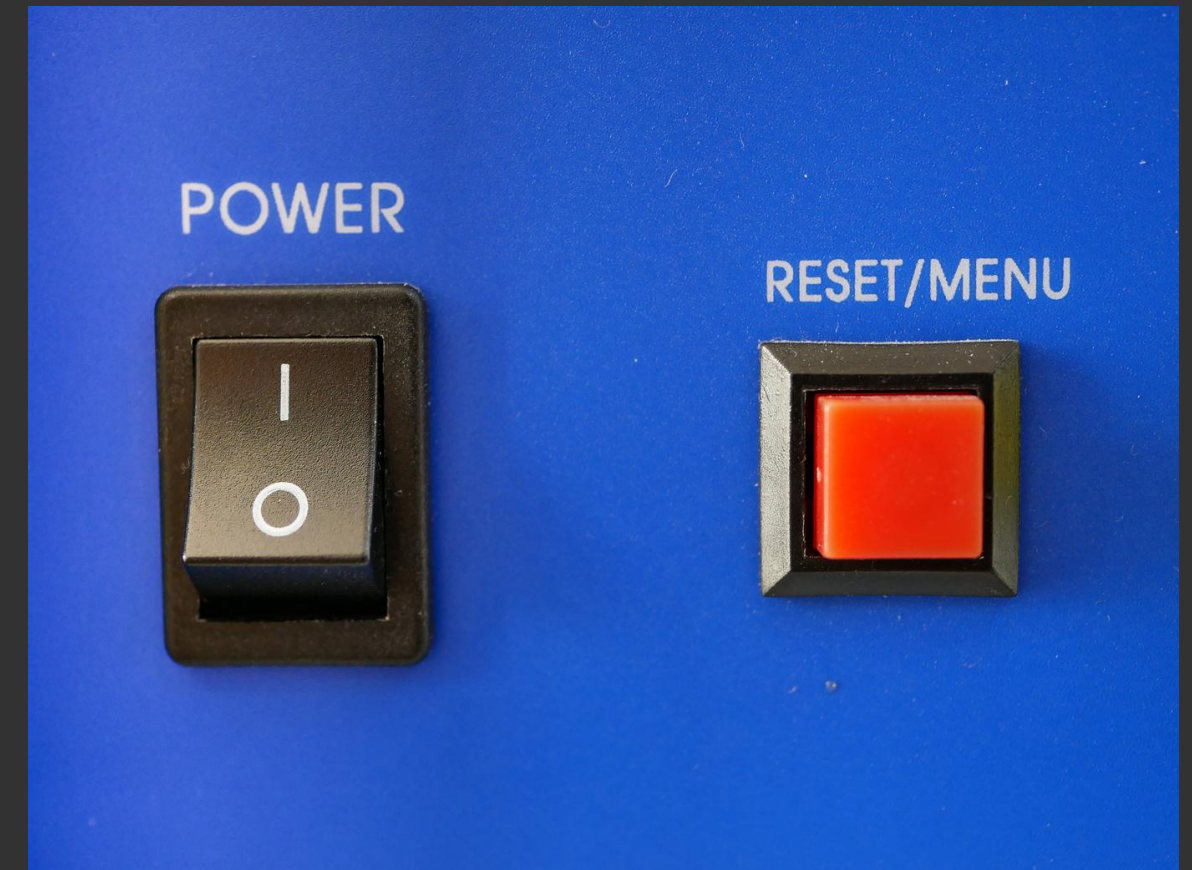


Key Message:

Speed stabilises sites — but trust rebuilds teams

Reset the Room

The Power of a Reset Meeting



- 1-hour site or Zoom session
- Everyone gets a snapshot: drawings, costs, scope
 - Reset tone: aligned, calm, forward-thinking
 - Clarify new deadlines, roles, key deliverables

Tech That Saves (Not Slows You)

When used right, tech isn't just a tool — it's a time-saver, clarity-maker, and crisis-defuser.

Buildertrend (Widely used across residential construction)

- Job scheduling, live variation tracking, purchase orders, and client communication — all in one place
- Ideal for builders with structured workflows and in-house teams

Trello (Common in design studios and admin teams)

- Visual task boards for selections, tenders, internal checklists
- Simple drag-and-drop interface your team will actually use

SiteCam / ArchiSnapper / Builda Price (Popular with supervisors and PMs)

- Site photo documentation, annotated defects, punch list management
- Bridges the gap between site conditions and office decisions

Loom / Vidyard (For fast, clear communication)

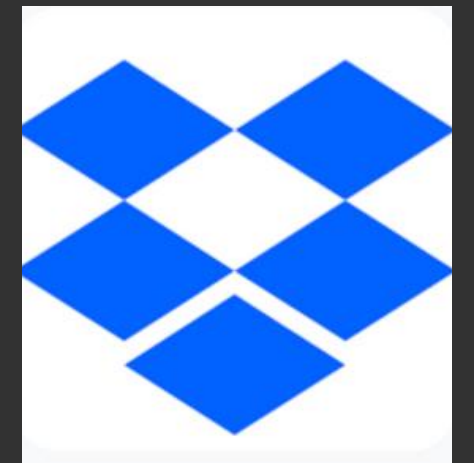
- Record quick video explainers instead of long emails
- Perfect for client updates, trade walkthroughs, or internal direction

Google Drive / Dropbox / OneDrive

- Shared folders for real-time access to drawings, specs, and notes
- Avoids version confusion and centralises information

Xero / AroFlo / Buildxact (Quoting, cost tracking, and accounts)

- Essential for job costing, quoting, and syncing with project management tools
- Xero integrates directly with Buildertrend

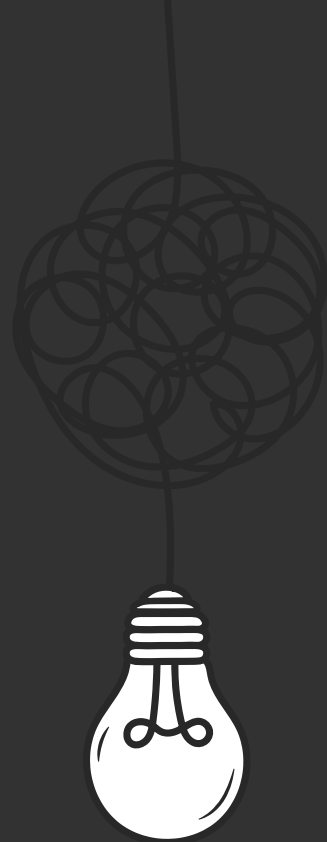


Nancy's Rule of Thumb

**"If your tech isn't saving time,
simplifying decisions, or aligning teams —
it's not worth it."**

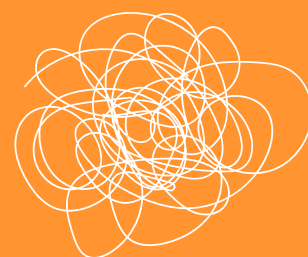
From Chaos to Clarity

Week - by - week Recovery Plan



Think of it like:

“Rehabilitation and strength training after an accident” — methodically restoring full project health and confidence.



Week 1 – Assess + Stabilise

- Confirm site status: what’s been done, what’s on hold
- Prioritise site safety, stop-gap solutions, and critical path items
- Assign leads for each trade/section moving forward
- Log everything in Buildertrend/Trello

Your goal: Create structure. Silence the noise.

Week 2 – Finalise scope + costs

- Review all unconfirmed selections, POs, and allowances
- Issue final variations and lock in any revised supplier pricing
- Ensure client understands what’s included — and what’s not
- Re-align internal team on revised margins and timelines

Your goal: Protect the budget and remove grey zones.

Week 3 – Rebuild trust + timelines

- Communicate updated build schedule with realistic deliverables
- Rebook key trades and reset expectations
- Share milestone dates with the client
- Update all platforms (Buildertrend, Trello, Dropbox)

Your goal: Drive alignment. Let no one say “I didn’t know.”

Week 4+ – Momentum + Milestones

- Run daily checks on trades, deliveries, site readiness
- Celebrate visible wins with your team — morale matters
- Set next 2 milestones (e.g. Lock-Up, Fix, Joinery Install)
- Create a rhythm again through leadership presence onsite

Your goal: Build trust through momentum — and prove the crisis is over.

People First, Always

Lead with calm. Decide with speed.



BE SEEN

PROJECT MANAGER
SITE SUPERVISOR



**SAY WHAT NEEDS TO BE
SAID**

ADMINISTRATION
CONTRACT
ADMINISTRATION



OWN THE OUTCOME

ESTIMATOR



**SHIELD YOUR TEAM
WHILE SOLVING THE
PROBLEM**

BUILDER

Leadership Under Pressure

Be the Still Point: When chaos rises, you stay steady. Your calm is contagious.

- **Language of Leadership:**

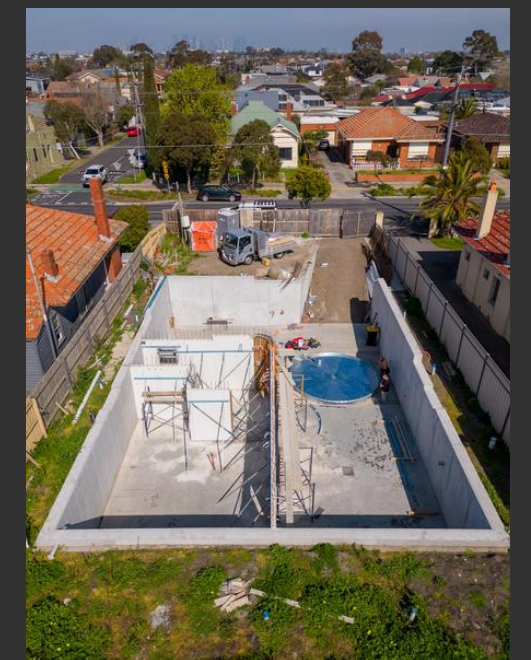
- “We’ll solve this together” → Stabilises
- “You should have done this” → Destabilises

- **Reset Trust in 5 Minutes:**

- Acknowledge the tension (“I know this has been tough”)
- Clarify the next move (“Here’s how we move forward”)
- Assign ownership cleanly (“[Person] will lead this by [date]”)

Key Message:

You don’t manage crisis by control. **You lead it by clarity.**



Lessons from My Own Builds

Things I Wish I Knew Sooner:

- Contracts *don't* shield *you* — clarity does
- Freeze (confirm / Lock in) *your* scope *early*
- You're *only* as strong as *your* weakest *communication* link
- You *don't* need to *win* every argument — just the *outcome*



Conclusion

- Crisis reveals the cracks — but also the leaders
- Tools matter, but clarity and people are what stabilise the build
- The first 72 hours decide whether you regain control or lose momentum
- Processes protect people — and protect you from yourself under pressure
- The real win isn't finishing a home — it's keeping trust intact through the mess
- Every chaotic build teaches you how to build better next time
- Lead with calm, communicate clearly, and don't vanish when things get hard
- You're not just building (homes, structures) — you're holding up entire teams, trades, and timelines
- **Steady leadership is your greatest asset in crisis**
- The goal isn't perfection — it's presence, perspective, and accountability

“So the question isn't ‘will a crisis happen?’

It's who are you when it does? And how do you lead from it, not just through it?”



It's not just about saving the project. It's about who you become while doing it.

I AM

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Let's Connect

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