

Case Study

Building a Distribution Centre: From Empty Shell to Operational in 9 Months



How structured storyboarding and execution architecture enabled a complex, multi-functional project to move from concept to full operation – on time and on budget.

Context

A national retail organization initiated the development of a new distribution centre (DC) to support its Western Canadian operations. The facility — a 265,000 square foot building — was acquired as an empty shell, requiring full fit-out and operational activation.

The project extended beyond construction, encompassing all core operational functions including supply chain, distribution, transportation, human resources, IT systems, and inventory readiness.

Importantly, the DC was one of several foundational elements in a broader supply chain strategy designed to support the company's growth and strengthen its national infrastructure. Its successful delivery was critical to enabling subsequent phases of that strategy.

With a defined timeline and significant organizational visibility, the initiative required coordinated execution across multiple departments and stakeholder groups.

The Challenge

The opportunity was defined by the need to effectively coordinate a large-scale capital and operational initiative within a compressed timeline:

- ✓ Transforming an empty facility into a fully operational distribution centre
- ✓ Aligning multiple functional areas across the organization
- ✓ Establishing clear ownership and accountability across a broad stakeholder group
- ✓ Coordinating construction, procurement, hiring, and systems implementation in parallel
- ✓ Managing sequencing and interdependencies across a nine-month delivery schedule
- ✓ Reducing reliance on individual effort in favor of a structured execution approach



The Debonair Edge Approach

A structured execution system was implemented, with particular emphasis on establishing clarity at the outset through project storyboarding.

Project Storyboarding (Foundational)

- ✓ Facilitated a two-day session with key stakeholders to map the project pathway
- ✓ Aligned all stakeholders on sequence, priorities, risks, and critical dependencies
- ✓ Established a shared understanding of the full scope of work before execution began

This process created immediate clarity and alignment, transforming a complex initiative into a structured and navigable plan.

Execution Architecture

- ✓ Established a clear governance structure, including defined roles, responsibilities, and decision pathways
- ✓ Defined project scope, budget, success criteria, and risk mitigation approach
- ✓ Implemented structured systems for communication, documentation, and progress reporting

Team Enablement

- ✓ Coordinated cross-functional teams across all operational areas to ensure alignment and readiness
- ✓ Supported hiring, onboarding, and preparation of 60 new team members
- ✓ Equipped teams with clear processes, tools, and expectations to support execution

The Outcome

The DC was successfully delivered – on time and on budget – transitioning from an empty facility to a fully operational site.

By the time of launch, all critical components were in place — including installed infrastructure, operational systems, trained personnel, and incoming inventory. The organization was positioned to begin operations seamlessly from day one.

The project demonstrated a high level of coordination across both construction and operational domains, with stakeholders aligned and informed throughout the process. The structured approach enabled efficient decision-making, minimized delays, and maintained consistent forward momentum across all phases of the project.

Beyond the Project

Beyond the successful delivery of the facility, the project had a lasting impact on how execution was understood within the organization.

The structured approach — particularly the use of project storyboarding — introduced a new way of planning and coordinating complex initiatives. It demonstrated the value of aligning stakeholders early, clarifying dependencies, and establishing a shared execution framework before work begins.

This shift reduced reliance on reactive problem-solving and individual effort, replacing it with a more consistent, system-driven approach to execution.



Closing Insight



When complex projects are fully mapped, aligned, and structured at the outset, execution shifts from reactive coordination to intentional progress — enabling teams to deliver with clarity, confidence, and control.