

Are You in Control? The Five Questions to Ask

LEARNER GUIDE

Introduction

The issue being discussed is whether a project that is proceeding on time and on budget, or is applying the 11 PMBOK control processes, may be described as in control.

Context

Project status reports traditionally require an evaluation of the project in terms of accomplishments versus schedule and costs versus budget. An innovation was encountered where a simple 'yes/no' response was required to the question 'Are you in control?' This immediately raised the question as to the meaning of being in control.

An Analogy

Consider the analogy of a road trip. If you are halfway to your destination and have used 50% of your gas, and are halfway through your schedule, you are on plan. But if you are distracted by cell phone use, or have your hands off the wheel for some other reason, you are not in control. A degree of control may be exerted by using a knee. This may or may not result in plan interruption as it will depend on road conditions and other independent events. So, this suggests that: being in control is not binary, but a **matter of degree**; a lack of control does NOT mean you are off-plan, but is increasing the **risk** that you will be; and finally, being in control is a factor of your **behaviour**.

We can apply this analysis to the 5 areas of project control and test our status with 5 questions.

Areas of Control and Five Questions

1. Task Control. Does everyone know what they're doing over the next two weeks, and agree with the time allowed?
2. Productively Control. Is anyone waiting over the next two weeks?
3. Completion Control. Do you know what's completed and what isn't?
4. Issue Control. Are you aware of all obstacles to progress?
5. Alignment Control. Does everything done on the project align with how you see the project; do you agree with it?

Conclusions

Being in control is not a simple question, but involves aspects of PM leadership behaviour in 5 areas. Use the 5 questions as part of your standard operating procedures. It is evident that a project trending out of control is a **leading indicator** of going off-plan. If your answers to the 5 questions seem unsatisfactory, then action must be taken or your project will shortly be drifting off-plan.



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