

# Controlling the Project

A comprehensive guide to monitoring, analyzing, and correcting project performance across scope, schedule, cost, quality, risks, and stakeholder engagement – so you can keep every project on track and deliver on your commitments.

ISO 21502 FRAMEWORK

# 4.1 What Is Project Control?

Project control is the disciplined process of understanding where your project stands today, forecasting where it is headed, and taking timely corrective or preventive actions to close the gap between plan and reality. It is not a reactive scramble — it is a structured, continuous discipline that runs in parallel with execution throughout the entire project lifecycle.

## The Project Management Plan

Serves as the integrated blueprint — comprising the project baseline and all subsidiary management plans. Every plan demands a corresponding control process.

## What Controlling Covers

- Monitoring progress against the plan
- Assessing deviations and their impacts
- Initiating appropriate corrective actions
- Updating plans and communicating changes

# What This Chapter Covers

This chapter walks through every major controlling domain a project manager must master. Together, these processes form an integrated control framework aligned with the project management plan.

01

## Control Scope

Manage change requests and prevent uncontrolled scope creep

02

## Control Schedule

Monitor timelines, analyze the critical path, and recover delays

03

## Control Budget

Track costs using Earned Value Analysis and apply corrective measures

04

## Control Quality

Verify deliverables meet requirements before customer acceptance

05

## Control Issues, Changes & Phase Gates

Handle escalations, integrate change control, and govern phase transitions

# The Inevitability of Scope Change

No matter how thoroughly a project is planned, change requests will emerge. The question is not *whether* scope will be challenged — it's *how* you respond when it is.

"Hey, can you just add this to the project?" — The hallway conversation that launches scope creep.

When someone makes an informal request expecting it to be absorbed into the project without adjustments to time, cost, or resources, that is the genesis of **scope creep** — the uncontrolled expansion of project scope without corresponding changes to schedule, budget, or staffing. The antidote is a clear, predefined scope change control process that removes the burden from the project manager to unilaterally say yes or no.

# Why Scope Changes Happen

Understanding the root causes of scope change helps project managers anticipate and manage them proactively rather than reactively.



## Incomplete Requirements

Customers rarely articulate all functional requirements and quality attributes upfront. Gaps in the requirement elicitation process are a leading driver of change.



## Evolving Stakeholder Clarity

As a project progresses, customers gain a clearer understanding of what they actually need — which often differs from what was initially specified.



## Deficient Planning Processes

Scope may not have been clearly defined, structured, or validated during the planning phase, leaving ambiguities that surface during execution.

# The Scope Change Control Process

Channel every change request through a structured process. This protects the project manager, supports the sponsor's decision-making, and keeps the project baseline defensible.

1

## Submit in Writing

All change requests go to the project manager in writing — via a formal form or at minimum an email.

2

## Validate It's a Scope Change

Confirm the request actually impacts scope — not every issue is a scope change. Some are risks or issues to handle separately.

3

## Log It

Record the request in the scope change log with a unique identifier for tracking.

4

## Clarify Purpose

Ask the requester to articulate the business rationale. This is critical for the sponsor to make an informed decision.

# Scope Change Process – Steps 5–9

1

## Investigate the Impact

Define a work package to assess the change's impact on the baseline – cost, schedule, quality, and risk. Explore alternatives.

2

## Present to Change Control Authority

Submit the full analysis – purpose, alternatives, and impact – to the board or sponsor for approval or denial. Record the resolution.

3

## Update the Project Plan

Approved changes trigger updates to the schedule, budget, and risk response plans.

4

## Communicate

Notify all relevant stakeholders per the communications management plan. Include "changes" as a standing agenda item.

5

## Implement as Work Packages

Approved scope changes are executed just like any other work package in the project plan.

# Streamlining Scope Control

Beyond the core process, these strategies help keep scope management practical, efficient, and aligned with project realities.

## Define PM Authority Thresholds

Your project charter or change management procedure can authorize the project manager to approve changes up to a defined cost or schedule threshold – reducing bottlenecks for minor requests.

## Allocate a Change Budget

Reserve a separate budget position for unanticipated scope changes. Do not use contingency reserves for scope changes – they serve a different purpose and will be needed for risk events.

## Use a Backlog for Disruptive Timing

During late implementation phases, hold new change requests in a backlog as enhancement requests. Address them in a subsequent release – but never defer defects.

## Consider an Incremental Approach

If customer requirements are unclear or evolving, adopt an incremental delivery approach. This allows scope to be refined iteratively as understanding grows on both sides.

# Three Pillars of Schedule Control

Effective schedule control is not just about tracking dates — it requires a structured approach to monitoring, understanding impacts, and taking decisive corrective action before delays become irreversible.

## Pillar 1: Monitoring

Regularly update the schedule with current progress data from team members and identify activities that are behind.

## Pillar 2: Impact Analysis

Use critical path analysis to determine whether detected delays will affect the project's finish date — and by how much.

## Pillar 3: Corrective Action

Apply targeted schedule recovery techniques to critical activities, from fast-tracking to process improvements.

# Monitoring the Schedule: Process & Warning Signs

## The Monitoring Process

Update the schedule at the frequency and using the tools defined in your schedule management plan. Team members report completed activities and remaining effort. Identify activities that should be complete but are not, investigate causes, and reassess remaining duration collaboratively.

## Soft Indicators of Schedule Risk

- Small variances that are **growing**, especially early in the project
- Activities marked "done" that are **still ongoing** due to unclear completion definitions
- Sustained **overtime** to meet interim deadlines – unsustainable over time
- On-schedule appearance but with **increasing error rates** or scope dilution
- Declining team **morale** affecting productivity and schedule adherence

# Understanding the Critical Path

The critical path is the longest sequence of activities in the project schedule. Understanding it is essential to knowing whether a delay will affect the project's end date.



## Delays Cascade Directly

Any delay on a critical path activity directly delays the project finish date — there is no buffer to absorb it.



## Shortcutting the Path

Finding ways to shorten the critical path is the primary lever for compressing the overall project duration.



## Early Visibility

The critical path provides early warning of end-date impacts, giving the team time to implement countermeasures before it's too late.

📄 **Key distinction:** Activities with float can be delayed without impacting the project end date. Activities with zero float are critical activities — they must start and finish exactly as planned. "Critical" refers to float, not importance.

# Corrective Measures for Schedule Delays

When critical activities fall behind, project managers have several recovery levers available. Each carries different cost, risk, and morale implications – choose based on your specific situation.

## → Modify Finish-to-Start Relationships

Review the schedule for preferred or mistaken sequential dependencies. If two activities can run in parallel, removing an unnecessary constraint can recover significant time at zero cost.

## → Fast-Tracking

Start a successor activity before its predecessor is fully complete – typically safe when the predecessor is 75% done. Carries risk of rework if changes to predecessor outputs are required.

## → Crashing the Schedule

Add resources to critical path activities to accelerate them. Cost increases depend on the type and source of additional resources – weigh the cost impact against the schedule gain.

## → Process Improvements

Use retrospectives to identify and eliminate waste – including unnecessary approvals, waiting queues, or team distractions from non-project work. Often free and impactful.

# Preventive Measures & Communication

## Prevent Before You Recover

Prevention is always preferable to recovery. A well-developed WBS, clear work packages, and an unambiguous schedule with assigned responsibilities eliminate the most common sources of delay – unclear roles, missed commitments, and priority conflicts.

Proactively review approaching start dates and personally engage with responsible team members to refresh and validate their commitments.

## Communicate Schedule Risks

If corrective measures are insufficient to prevent a deadline miss, communicate the risk to the sponsor immediately. Provide revised estimates with two scenarios:

- The outcome if no action is taken
- The outcome if corrective measures are applied

This allows the sponsor to consider scope reductions or timeline adjustments before a miss becomes a crisis.

# Three Dimensions of Cost Control

Monitoring project costs requires more than comparing invoices to a budget. Effective cost control integrates three analytical layers to give the project manager a clear, accurate picture of financial performance.

## 1. Monitoring Process

Track actual expenditures versus estimates and monitor the organization's funds release rate to ensure cash is available when needed.

## 2. Earned Value Analysis

Relate actual costs to work accomplished to distinguish real cost overruns from apparent ones — and forecast the cost at completion.

## 3. Corrective Measures

Identify and implement targeted actions to recover from a budget overrun, from resource swaps to contract renegotiation.

# Cost Management Scenarios

The project manager's cost responsibility varies by organization. Understanding your scenario defines your monitoring scope and reporting obligations.

1

## Finance-Managed Costs

The finance department manages all project costs. The PM focuses only on scope and schedule, sharing the PM role with a cost manager.

2

## External Costs Only

The PM manages costs from external vendors requiring payment. Internal resource costs are treated as non-cash and excluded from the PM's responsibility.

3

## Full Cost Responsibility

The PM manages both external and imputed internal resource costs – including personnel hours, infrastructure, and equipment. This is the most demanding scenario and requires time-tracking systems and rate-based cost conversions.

# The Cost Monitoring Process

## Comparing Actuals to Estimates

Once the schedule is updated, the PM estimates the remaining effort and duration, then forecasts the cost at project completion. Adding actual expenses to expected future expenses and comparing to the cost baseline reveals whether the project is tracking to budget. This can be done via spreadsheets or advanced tools like SAP or Oracle.

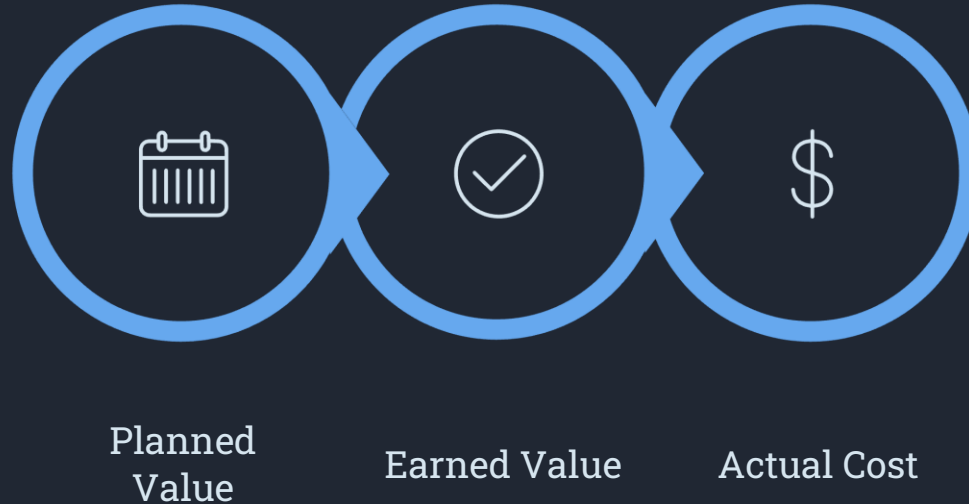
## Monitoring the Funds Release Rate

Compare actual and projected expenses against your organization's fund release timeline. Projects can consume funds faster than planned due to accelerated work or early payment obligations – not necessarily due to a true overrun. Monitor both sides: what you owe and what is available.

- ❏ Early warning indicators: a small cost variance that is growing; rework from "done" work discovered to have errors; planned schedule compression with cost implications; declining team morale reducing productivity.

# Earned Value Analysis – The Concept

A simple comparison of actual costs to planned costs can be deeply misleading. Earned Value Analysis (EVA) eliminates this ambiguity by relating costs to the *work actually accomplished*.



EVA provides a common financial denominator that unifies schedule and cost performance — enabling smarter corrective decisions. It was originally developed by the U.S. Army to ensure supplier payments reflect the value actually earned by the project.

# EVA in Action – A Worked Example

Project parameters: **Budget at Completion (BAC)** = €100, planned duration = 100 days, current day = 70. **Actual Cost (AC)** = €80, work completed = 50%.

€50

Earned Value (EV)

50% of work done × €100 BAC = the budgeted value of work performed

€70

Planned Value (PV)

70% of work should be done by day 70 × €100 BAC

-€20

Schedule Variance (SV)

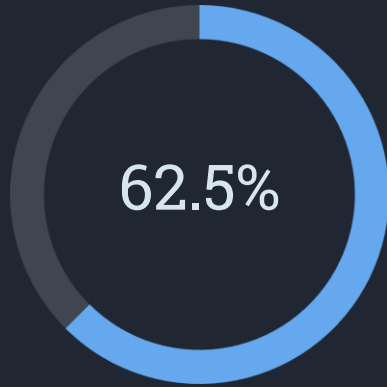
$EV - PV = €50 - €70$ . Negative = behind schedule.

-€30

Cost Variance (CV)

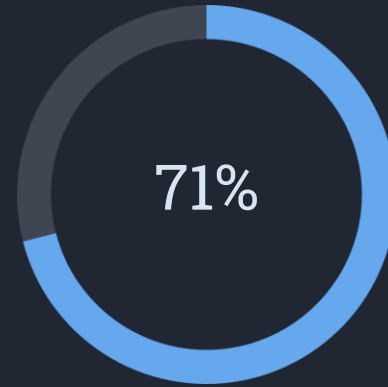
$EV - AC = €50 - €80$ . Negative = over budget. The simple comparison of €80 to €100 would have hidden this overrun.

# Performance Indices & Completion Forecast



Cost Performance Index (CPI)

$EV \div AC = €50 \div €80$ . We are spending €1.60 for every €1.00 of budgeted work.  
CPI of 1.0 = on budget.



Schedule Performance Index (SPI)

$EV \div PV = €50 \div €70$ . We have accomplished 71% of the work planned for this point. SPI of 1.0 = on time.

## EAC – If No Correction

$BAC \div CPI = €100 \div 0.625 = €160$ . If nothing changes, the project will cost €160 at completion.

## EAC – If Corrective Action Taken

Actual costs so far (€80) + remaining work at original estimate (€50) = €130.  
The past overrun cannot be reversed, but future work can be corrected.

# EVA at the Work Package Level

EVA is most powerful when applied to individual work packages — pinpointing where the problems actually lie and guiding targeted corrective action.

WP	EV	PV	AC	BAC	SV	SPI	CV	CPI	EAC (resolved)	EAC (not resolved)
A	200	200	200	200	0	1.00	0	1.00	200	200
B	90	180	100	180	-90	0.50	-10	0.90	190	200
C	100	100	130	200	0	1.00	-30	0.77	230	260
D	10	60	20	300	-50	0.17	-10	0.50	310	600
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>-140</b>	<b>0.74</b>	<b>-50</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>1,011</b>

All values in thousands of euros. The project is both behind schedule (SPI < 1) and over budget (CPI < 1). Work Package D is the primary concern on both dimensions.

# Reading the EVA Table – Key Insights

## Schedule Focus: WPs B & D


**WP B (SPI 0.50):** Originally planned for 20 days, it will now take 40 days at the current pace – double the planned duration.

**WP D (SPI 0.17):** A 60-day work package now projects to take over 350 working days – approximately 17 months. This is catastrophic. Schedule compression is urgent.

## Cost Focus: WP D Is Priority 1

**WP D (CPI 0.50):** At current burn rate, it will cost €600K instead of €300K. Only 3% of the work has been earned, meaning 97% of the work – and nearly all savings potential – lies ahead.

**WPs B & C** also show cost variances but with smaller savings potential of €10K and €30K respectively.

 Even if all issues are resolved, the project will cost €930K vs. the €880K baseline – a 5.7% overrun. Communicate a budget risk now and verify that contingency reserves are sufficient to absorb the difference.

# Corrective Measures for Budget Overruns

When facing a genuine cost overrun, these are the most effective levers available to a project manager with budget responsibility — ranging from internal efficiencies to external negotiations.

## 1 Process Improvements

Always applicable — eliminate waste, remove approval bottlenecks, and free team members from non-project activities that divert capacity.

## 2 Avoid Overtime Premium Rates

Where collective agreements allow, compensate overtime with future time-off rather than premium pay, reducing cash costs while maintaining team output.

## 3 Swap to Less Expensive Resources

Replace high-cost consultants with internal staff or more cost-effective specialists who still meet the current phase's requirements.

## 4 Reduce Non-Labor Costs

Economy travel, standard accommodations, virtual training, and sending one representative instead of two can yield meaningful savings without compromising project outcomes.

## 5 Renegotiate External Contracts

Leverage partnership relationships with vendors. A rate reduction in exchange for additional volume or preferred-supplier status can create mutual value.

# Quality Control: Verifying What You Deliver

Quality control is about measuring how well deliverables meet their requirements — before the customer ever sees them. It is the final gate of internal verification, ensuring that errors and missing functionalities are caught by the team, not discovered during final acceptance.

"Quality is the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfills requirements." — ISO 9000

## Quality Assurance

Implementing the standards, policies, and processes needed to produce compliant deliverables. Focuses on the production system.

## Quality Control

Measuring and verifying that deliverables actually meet their acceptance criteria. Focuses on the output. This is the focus of this section.

# The Quality Review Meeting

A quality review meeting is the structured mechanism for verifying that a deliverable is complete and correct. It applies to work package components, work packages, project phases, and the entire project at closure.

## The Presenter

The person responsible for executing the deliverable. Presents evidence of compliance and answers questions. May be supported by an admin for note-taking.



## The Reviewer

Chairs the meeting and assesses the deliverable against its acceptance criteria. Must be a different person from the presenter – independence is essential for objectivity.

The reviewer's role scales with the deliverable level: for a work package component → the work package leader; for a work package → the project manager; for a phase → the sponsor; for the full project at closure → the sponsor or a corporate governance body.

# Quality Review Outcomes

## Accepted


The deliverable is deemed correct and complete. It proceeds to the next phase or to the customer.

## Conditionally Accepted

The deliverable is nearly correct. A few agreed actions are required, but no second quality review meeting is necessary.

## Not Accepted

The deliverable is incomplete or incorrect. It is returned for rework, and a new quality review will be scheduled.

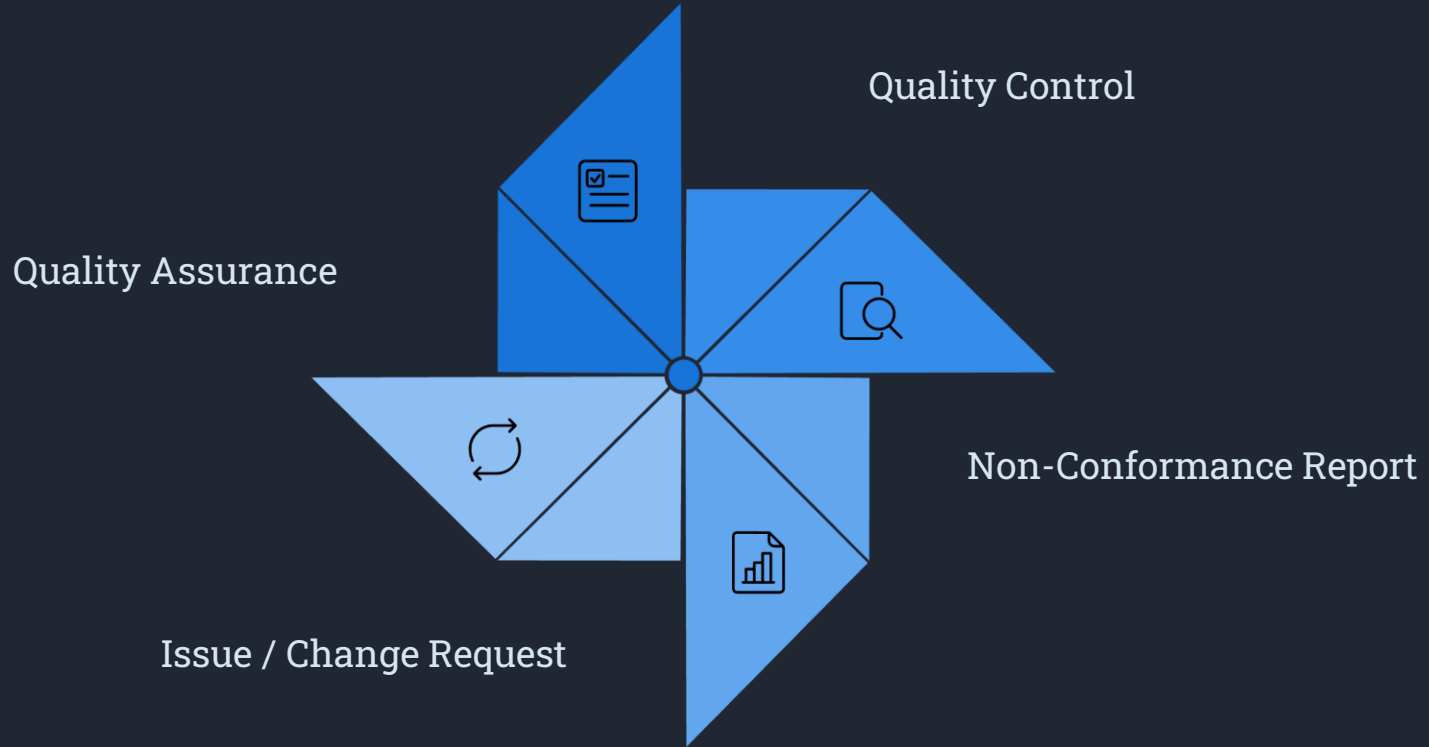
-  The quality review meeting does not measure compliance directly — it verifies the presence of evidence generated beforehand through tests, surveys, analysis, and reporting. Generate evidence first; confirm it in the review.

# Examples of Requirements & Compliance Evidence

Every product type has unique requirements and unique methods for demonstrating compliance. There is no one-size-fits-all test – the approach must match the product and industry.

Requirement Type	Example Requirement	Compliance Method
Functional	System must request caller consent to record the call	Functional test
Quality Attribute	Material withstands 500°C with deformation $\leq x\%$	Stress test
Quality Attribute	Speaker understandability $\geq 8/10$ for 80% of audience	Focus group survey and structured interview
Project Management	CPI must not exceed 20% deviation at each phase end	Earned Value Analysis report
Quality Attribute	Vaccine effectiveness $\geq 70\%$ for the 60+ age group	Regulated test series per exception law

# Interconnections: QA, QC, Issues & Changes



Quality assurance and quality control are not sequential steps — they form a continuous feedback loop. When quality control identifies a defect, it may signal a deeper problem in the production process, materials, skills, or team attitudes. These root causes trigger issues or change requests, which cycle back to improve quality assurance going forward.

# What Is an Issue?

Not every problem is an issue. In project management, an **issue** is a specific category of problem — one that poses a direct threat to project objectives and exceeds the project manager's authority to resolve unilaterally. Issues require escalation to the project sponsor and structured team involvement.

## Problem vs. Issue

A **problem** can be resolved by the project manager within existing authority and tools. An **issue** requires escalation — it impacts the project baseline and demands a decision from the sponsor or other senior stakeholders.

## Where Issues Come From

Every issue was once a risk. Issues arise when risks either go undetected or when the planned risk response proves inadequate. The sources of issues are as varied as the sources of risks — the only difference is timing: risks are potential problems; issues have already materialized.

# The Issue Management Process

01

## Determine Escalation Level

Assess whether the problem requires escalation (issue) or can be resolved by the PM (problem). Only proceed as an issue if escalation is warranted.

02

## Document Formally

Record the issue in writing using an issue form. If you cannot articulate it clearly in writing, you have not yet fully understood it. Enter it in the issues log with a unique identifier.

03

## Identify Stakeholders

Determine who needs to be involved — at minimum the sponsor, but potentially legal, procurement, line managers, or external parties depending on the nature of the issue.

04

## Collaborate on Resolution

Use teamwork to detect and analyze options and their impacts. Sometimes no perfect resolution exists — the team must select the best option from a set of unfavorable alternatives.

05

## Update Plans & Communicate

Record the decision, update the project management plan, capture lessons learned, and communicate the resolution to all relevant stakeholders. Approved measures become work packages.

# Root Cause Analysis

When investigating an issue, don't stop at the visible symptom. Like a weed, cutting the surface only makes it disappear temporarily – unless you remove the root, it will grow back. Root cause analysis reveals the underlying system of causes driving the visible problem.



**Processes** - inadequate or missing standard procedures



**Tools** - unsuitable equipment or technology



**Know-how** - insufficient expertise



**Attitude** - lack of commitment



Use techniques like **fishbone diagramming** and **brainstorming** to break the root cause into its components. The Titanic is a classic example: multiple independent causal paths (speed, rivet defects, no binoculars, insufficient lifeboats) all contributed to the same catastrophe. Most project issues share this multi-causal structure.

# Detecting Issues Early

The earlier an issue is identified, the lower its cost and impact. Ideally, issues are prevented entirely while they are still risks. Three practices enable early detection:



## Retrospectives

Regular retrospective meetings surface problems in their infancy – before they escalate to full issues. Don't wait for phase closure; run retrospectives at intermediate milestones throughout each phase.



## Earned Value Analysis

EVA doesn't reveal root causes directly, but it flags underperforming work packages that likely have underlying problems – providing a data-driven trigger for deeper investigation.



## Managing by Walking Around

Spending time with the team in their workspace enables informal observation of morale, blockers, and emerging risks that would never surface in a status report. A technique championed by Tom Peters in *In Search of Excellence*.

# Integrated Change Control

All controlling processes generate performance data that is compared to the project management plan. Deviations trigger changes. The integrated change control process ensures these changes are evaluated holistically — across every dimension of the project — before any approval is granted.

## Two Types of Change Triggers

**Reactive:** Corrective measures to realign the project with baselines, or defect repairs to fix non-compliant deliverables.

**Proactive:** Preventive actions taken to avoid anticipated future deviations before they occur.

## Authority Determines the Process

Changes that do **not** affect the project baseline fall within the PM's authority and can be implemented directly.

Changes that **do** affect the baseline must go through the formal Change Control Board process for approval by the sponsor and/or corporate managers.

# The Change Control Process

1

## Submit in Writing

Change requests are documented using a change request form and tracked in the change log with a unique identifier.

2

## Investigate Impact

The PM defines a work package to assess the change's impact on all baseline components – cost, schedule, scope, quality, and risk. Alternatives are explored.

3

## Decide

The change control authority approves, denies, or defers the request – with full awareness of all cross-dimensional impacts.

4

## Update & Implement

The PM updates the project management plan and communicates the resolution. Approved changes become work packages and are executed accordingly.

- ❑ Use an **integrated view** of every change request. A decision to compress the schedule to recover a critical delay – without assessing cost, quality, and morale impacts – can trigger a chain of unintended consequences across the project.

# The Remaining Controlling Domains

Beyond scope, schedule, cost, quality, issues, and changes, effective project control extends to five additional domains. Each follows the same controlling logic: track execution data, analyze it in context, generate insight, and initiate necessary actions.

## Control Risks

Continuously monitor the risk register: Have identified risks changed? Are planned responses effective? Have new risks emerged? Have assumptions transformed into risks? Update contingency reserves and validate the overall project strategy from a risk perspective.

## Control Material Resources

Ensure physical resources — equipment, materials, facilities, infrastructure — are available at the right time and place, and released promptly when no longer needed. Monitor planned vs. actual utilization and correct deviations.

## Control Communications & Stakeholder Engagement

Ensure optimal information flow and stakeholder support. Use satisfaction surveys at phase gates and update the stakeholder engagement assessment matrix — comparing current (C) vs. desired (D) engagement levels to guide targeted actions.

## Control Procurements

Verify that both buyer and seller fulfill contractual obligations. Ensure payments are tied to work accomplished — precisely where Earned Value Analysis proves its value. Involve the purchasing department's contract administrator as part of the project team.

# Stakeholder Engagement Assessment Matrix

This matrix is a practical tool for monitoring and improving stakeholder engagement. For each stakeholder, it compares their **current** engagement level (C) with the **desired** level (D). The gap defines the action required.

Stakeholder	Unaware	Resistant	Neutral	Supportive	Leading
Stakeholder 1	C			D	
Stakeholder 2		C	D		
Stakeholder 3				DC	

Stakeholder 1 requires an awareness campaign. Stakeholder 2 needs a resistance-management strategy. Stakeholder 3 is exactly where we want them – maintain their support through continued engagement and relationship-building.

# The Purpose of Phase Gate Reviews

Phase gates — also called stage-gates, kill-points, phase-reviews, handoffs, or transition-points — occur at the boundary between project phases. They are the primary governance mechanism for ensuring a project remains strategically viable before committing resources to the next phase.

## Evaluate the Closing Phase

Assess whether the phase delivered its objectives — on time, on budget, and to the required quality standard.

## Decide on Proceeding

The project board makes an informed go/no-go decision based on EVA results, business case review, and updated forecasts.

## Approve the Next Phase Plan

Issue the phase plan for the upcoming phase, including its goals, schedule, budget, risks, and WBS details.

## Administrative Closure

Confirm deliverable acceptance, release resources, close supplier obligations, and archive project information.

# Planning the Next Phase

The phase plan is a focused, condensed version of the project management plan scoped to the deliverables and activities of the upcoming phase. It should be issued at the phase gate of the preceding phase — ensuring the team has clear direction before the next phase begins.

## Phase Plan Components

- Phase goal and measurable objectives
- Deliverables and acceptance criteria
- Stakeholder identification and analysis
- Risk identification, analysis, and response planning
- Detailed WBS for the phase
- Schedule with appropriate level of detail
- Proportionate phase budget

## Validate Assumptions & Constraints

Every plan rests on assumptions and constraints established at a prior point in time. At each phase gate, revisit these foundational elements with fresh eyes and real data.

Assumptions that were reasonable at project start may no longer hold true months into execution. Surfacing these changes early is essential to maintaining an accurate and realistic plan going forward.

# Evaluating the Closing Phase

The phase evaluation determines the degree to which phase objectives were achieved. A phase end should align with the completion of major deliverables – making it a natural and ideal point for Earned Value Analysis.

## Earned Value Analysis

EVA confirms whether all phase deliverables are complete and provides CPI and SPI for each. A CPI and SPI of 1.0 for all deliverables = 100% phase objective achievement. Any variance quantifies the degree of over- or under-performance. Deliverables that are still in progress should not be included – if they cannot be completed by phase end, the phase boundary was not correctly defined.

## Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey

Conduct a structured survey of relevant stakeholders to assess satisfaction with the project team's work – responsiveness, professionalism, accessibility, and problem resolution. This qualitative data complements the quantitative EVA results and provides a fuller picture of phase performance.

## Lessons Learned Distillation

Phase closure is an ideal moment to distill the most important lessons from throughout the phase. Although lessons learned should be captured continuously, the phase gate provides a structured opportunity to document, consolidate, and share the most impactful insights before the team moves on.

# The Retrospective at Phase Closure

The phase retrospective is a dedicated team reflection session — not a blame assignment exercise, but a structured conversation about continuous improvement. Agile teams have popularized running retrospectives at the end of every two-week iteration; the same practice applies to traditional phase closures.

## Two Core Questions

### ● **What was done well?**

Identify practices, behaviors, and decisions that contributed positively — and ensure they are repeated and reinforced in the next phase.

### ● **What could have been done better?**

Surface friction points, process gaps, and missed opportunities in a constructive, forward-looking manner.

## Why Retrospectives Matter

Running retrospectives only at project end means months of learning opportunities are lost. The team must reconstruct what happened weeks or months ago — a flawed and incomplete exercise.

Intermediate retrospectives at milestones within each phase capture insights while they are fresh, build team cohesion, and drive incremental performance improvements that compound across the life of the project.

# Deciding Whether to Proceed

The go/no-go decision at a phase gate is one of the most consequential governance actions in a project. It must be analyzed from two angles — and approached with intellectual honesty.

## Angle 1: EVA Forecast

If the EVA forecast indicates a strongly negative trajectory — persistent cost overruns, significant schedule delays, deteriorating performance indices — the project board must consider cancellation or a scope reduction to salvage partial benefits. Continuing with full scope despite unfavorable forecasts is rarely justified.

## Angle 2: Business Case Review

The original business case was built on assumptions and estimates. At each phase gate, update the business case with real data and current forecasts. If the updated business case no longer justifies the investment, the board must have the courage to stop — or restructure the project around a revised value proposition.

📌 A decision not to proceed is not a failure — it is sound governance. The true failure is continuing a project that evidence shows should be stopped, consuming resources and delivering diminished value.

# Phase Gate Decision Outcomes



## Terminate the Project

When the business case no longer holds, external conditions have fundamentally changed, or the cost of continuation exceeds the expected benefit, the responsible decision is to close the project. Capture all lessons learned and formally release resources.



## Proceed as Planned

The updated business case remains solid, forecasts are acceptable, and phase objectives have been substantially met. Issue the next phase plan and mobilize the team for continuation.



## Modify & Proceed

The project has value but requires recalibration – a revised scope, updated business case, adjusted timeline, or changed assumptions. Document the changes, update all relevant plans, and rebaseline before proceeding.

# Administrative Closure Activities

Administrative closure is not a formality – it is a disciplined process that ensures clean handoffs, protects the organization legally, and releases resources responsibly for their next assignments.

## → Confirm Deliverable Acceptance

Verify documented evidence of formal acceptance for each phase deliverable. If any acceptance document is missing, obtain it now. Never assume acceptance without evidence.

## → Close External Supplier Obligations

Verify both parties have fulfilled contractual obligations. Resolve any open claims. Evaluate supplier performance. Escalate unresolved matters to the legal department if necessary.

## → Release Human & Physical Resources

Conduct performance evaluations for team members transitioning out. Release equipment, facilities, and excess materials. Reallocate or discontinue physical resources no longer required.

## → Archive Project Information

Ensure all project logs – issues, lessons learned, risks, and changes – are fully updated. Archive all project documentation in accordance with organizational standards for future reference and audit readiness.

# Key Takeaways: Controlling the Project

Project control is not a single activity — it is a continuous, integrated discipline that spans every domain of the project management plan. Here are the most critical principles to carry forward.



## Plan → Measure → Act

Every controlling process follows the same logic: compare execution data to the plan, generate insight, and initiate appropriate corrective or preventive action.



## Earned Value Is Your North Star

EVA provides an objective, integrated view of cost and schedule performance — exposing real overruns from apparent ones and pointing directly to the work packages that need attention.



## Channel All Changes

Never absorb scope or baseline changes informally. A structured change control process protects the baseline, the project manager, and the sponsor's ability to make informed decisions.



## Communicate Risks Early

Do not wait for a miss to become a fact. Communicate budget, schedule, and quality risks the moment they are visible — and provide two-scenario forecasts to support management decision-making.