

Can you really trust your Project Controls data?

The data gathered through Project Controls processes, environments, methods and mechanisms, provide the basis for critical management decisions, but how much can you really trust the data?

In this article we will outline some of the common problems faced by project managers when dealing with inaccurate data, as well as offering suggestions to validate its reliability.

Why is Project Controls Data important?

Once a project is up and running, accurate data is required for effective monitoring, management and control to ensure your projects are on track, will deliver the correct outputs, and risks and budgets are being managed effectively.

Project Controls are an effective mechanism to provide better visibility of the status of a project or programme by generating such data. But how can you be really sure you can trust the data you are using to make those critical management decisions?

If the data is inaccurate then the perception of the status of the project or programme is inaccurate and critical decisions may be flawed.

Why can't we fully trust Project Controls data?

There are many reasons why the quality of project controls data might be questionable: Projects may not be suitably resourced to allow the Project Controller sufficient time to analyse the data adequately, the Project Controller might not be fully trained; indeed there may not be a process in place to deliver the necessary training, or maybe the organisation is resistant to fully embracing the use of project controls.

The most common cause for concern comes from the need to deliver: You may have witnessed or experienced pressure to adapt data to yield the 'right' answer, and such behaviour degrades the integrity of project controls data.

A culture where such behaviours are exhibited is a source of grave concern for successful project delivery as Senior Management and other key stakeholders will quickly lose trust in forecasts and outputs. But the impact of trusting flawed data is a serious problem for any organisation.

While reporting less than optimal progress and forecasts might be unpalatable, it is critical to offering the opportunity to enact a robust recovery plan.

How can you build trust in your project controls data?

A quick and effective way of confirming faith in your project controls data, and the processes that produce it, is to implement **Project Controls Maturity Health Checks**.



Schedule Management



Risk Management



Performance Management

A health check is a standard set of questions, specifically designed to review and critique the maturity of certain elements of an organisation's project controls system and their application to a project, programme or portfolio.

The output is a 'maturity score' with a list of recommendations which, when implemented, will improve project control processes and the quality of data produced in the future.

Health checks can be run on artefacts including risk registers, schedules and performance management systems and can assess how the programme or project office is set up. Examples of typical questions might include:

'Has a risk got a clear mitigation action plan?'

'Is the schedule linked logically?'

Any health check should be performed independently of those responsible for producing the data or directly involved in the processes. Once a decision to implement health checks has been taken, their use should be embedded in project control processes as part of the regular reporting drumbeat, thus forming an integral part of P3M governance and assurance.

What are the benefits of using health checks?

The main benefits of project controls maturity health checks are:

Simplicity: a quick, cost effective method of evaluating your project controls maturity.

Minimal preparation: reduced preparation time required, unlike traditional external assessments such as P3M3 assessments or IBRs.

Clear responsibility: once embedded into your processes and reporting drumbeat, it is clear who should perform health checks, when, and to what standard.

Reduced cost: as opposed to P3M3 assessments, IBRs or external audits, health checks are built into an organisation's ways of working and can be performed by peer review, without the need for employing external resources.

Embedding change: as people are taken on the journey towards a fully implemented and mature project controls system, the upward trend in maturity scores is an indicator of how far they have travelled towards their goal.

Supports Business As Usual: when implemented correctly, health checks act as an aid to routine project control tasks, and are less intrusive than IBRs or audits, which are often treated as an 'add on' to normal operations.

Motivates continuous improvement: staff new to project control practices, or even resistant to them, can be encouraged to improve low maturity scores and see the positive impact of training and coaching. Upward trends in maturity, as processes become more embedded, can be plotted so staff can see evidence of individual improvement. The implementation of maturity league tables across an organisation can really motivate those at the bottom to improve...and those at the top to stay there!

Where and when can you use health checks?

Health checks can be used right across the P3M spectrum; to specifically review the maturity of a project schedule, and also to look across all the projects in a portfolio to understand any organisation level improvements required.

They are useful for continuous improvement purposes, as they can demonstrate progress in developing and implementing controls; as the health check maturity score improves, so project control matures and data quality improves. Conversely, if inertia sets in, the score can be used to highlight regression in project control maturity.

Ultimately, by implementing health checks, an organisation can build a clear understanding of the project control areas that need to be

matured and the improvements that are needed to achieve that maturity. Once those improvements have been made, the data generated and information gained can be communicated to management to improve decision making across the organisation.

How can BMT Hi-Q Sigma help?

BMT Hi-Q Sigma use project controls maturity health checks when implementing P3M practices and methodologies for our clients.

At the start of a project, our consultants perform the health checks to analyse the maturity of the processes, systems and knowledge in the area we are working in. We then draw up a set of improvement recommendations and actions to develop the desired level of maturity.

Knowledge and skills transfer is embedded in our consultancy approach, and therefore we ensure the ability to perform health checks effectively is transferred to client staff as part of our engagement. To help foster a culture that recognises and values the accuracy of schedules and risk registers, health checks are a great way of assessing progress to that goal.

By implementing project controls maturity health checks, you can have complete confidence that the project controls data you use to inform critical decisions is accurate.

If you are interested in seeing and using some free health checks, they can be found on our website at www.bmt-hqs.com/p3m-health-checks.

