# Risks, Issues, Assumptions, and Constraints: Know the Difference



# Four labels, four next questions

*Classify the situation so the team can choose a useful response.*

## Risk and issue

A risk is uncertainty that can affect an objective. An issue is a current matter requiring attention. Ask what may happen and what already needs action.

## Assumption and constraint

An assumption is a planning belief treated as true without full confirmation. A constraint limits the available choices. Ask what needs verification and what boundary must be respected.

## Running case

A training event needs a venue, equipment and confirmed attendees. The same fact can move between categories as evidence changes. Classification should help the next decision.

**TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT**

*Classify one real situation and explain the next action its label suggests.*

# Describe a risk clearly

*A label such as "supplier risk" does not show what needs managing.*

## Use a cause-event-effect chain

Describe the relevant condition, the uncertain event and the possible impact on an objective. Include opportunities where uncertainty could create a beneficial result.

## Event case

Because the venue's equipment has not been tested, the projector may fail during setup, delaying the opening session. The setup objective and learning need are now visible.

## Make it actionable

Assign an owner, assess significance and identify evidence or a trigger for action. A well-written statement still needs someone to manage the uncertainty.

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Write a risk with its objective affected and its next check.

# Recognise a current issue

*A problem that has happened needs an action route now.*

## Use the current state

Record what is observed, its effect, owner, urgency and decision needed. An issue can result from a realised risk or arise without a previous risk record.

## Event case

The venue confirms that the projector is broken. Record the current failure and arrange the replacement decision rather than leaving it as a possible future event.

## Preserve the link

Keep the original risk history where useful and link the issue and response. New uncertainties about the replacement may still require risk management.

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Write an issue statement with a decision deadline.

# Make assumptions visible

*A plan can depend heavily on a belief nobody has checked.*

## Write the belief

An assumption states what is being treated as true for planning, why it is reasonable and when it must be tested. Give important assumptions an owner.

## Event case

The plan assumes the venue has compatible display cables. Ask for the connection specification and test a sample before equipment is packed.

## Assess the consequence

If an assumption proves false, identify the affected work and response. Some assumptions also create risks that deserve explicit assessment.

**TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT**

Find one planning assumption and set a verification date.

# Identify genuine constraints

*A boundary should have a source and an authority, not just a confident description.*

## Describe the limit

Constraints can involve time, budget, scope, resources, quality or other conditions. Confirm whether the boundary is contractual, organisational, technical or a preference that can be discussed.

## Event case

The venue contract permits access only from 07:00. Setup cannot rely on entry at 06:00 without an agreed change. A preferred early start is a different matter.

## Manage a conflict

If the required work cannot fit the boundary, present alternatives and seek the right decision. A constraint can sometimes change through authorisation.

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Record the source and decision owner for one constraint.

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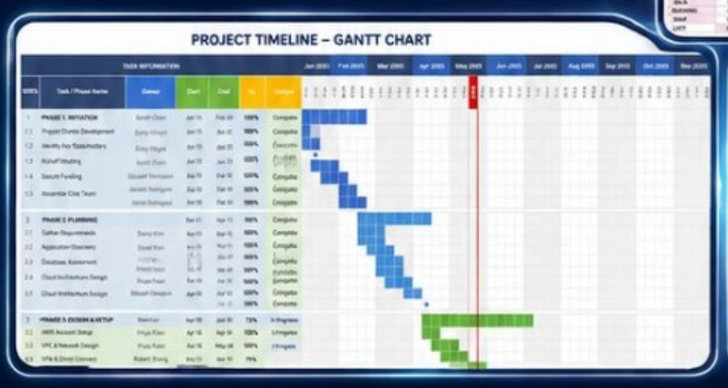
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# Keep dependencies in the picture

*A link between work items can carry risks, assumptions and issues.*

## Define the link

A dependency states what one activity or party needs from another. It is useful to record the needed result, owner, timing and evidence of readiness.

## Event case

The equipment team needs the room layout before packing. The assumption is that the venue supplies it Tuesday. The risk is that a late layout delays preparation.

## Respond to the actual state

When Tuesday passes without the layout, the current missing input needs issue handling. The dependency itself still describes the relationship.

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Write one dependency and one uncertainty attached to it.

# Watch a situation change over time

*The label can change while the underlying objective stays the same.*

## Follow the timeline

A belief is recorded, evidence is sought, uncertainty is assessed and an event may occur. Update the records so readers can tell what is known now.

## Event case

Monday: assume the lift can carry the equipment. Tuesday: the venue cannot confirm its rating, creating a delivery risk. Thursday: inspection shows the equipment will not fit, creating a current routing issue.

## Choose the next action

Link the evidence, decision and affected plan. Leaving all three records open with inconsistent wording makes the team's view less reliable.

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Trace one changed fact through the records it should update.

# Use probability and impact carefully

*A risk assessment needs a defined scale and a clear purpose.*

## Make scores meaningful

Likelihood and impact ratings can help compare exposure under an agreed method. Describe what each rating means. An ordinal score is not automatically a money amount or a precise probability.

## Event case

A "high" equipment delay rating must refer to something concrete, such as the opening session objective and the relevant timing range. Different people need the same basis for rating it.

## Improve the evidence

Record uncertainty in the assessment and review it as facts arrive. A neat colour matrix cannot compensate for a vague risk statement.

**TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT**

Define the meaning of one likelihood and impact rating.

# Expected monetary value

*Use a consistent financial model for a specific risk decision.*

## Calculate the example

A 20% probability of an $8,000 relocation cost gives $1,600 expected cost under this simple model. It is an average decision measure, not the invoice the event will necessarily incur.

## Compare a response

A $900 backup reservation reduces the stated probability to 5% with the same impact. Expected total becomes $900 + $400 = $1,300, a $300 expected reduction.

## Check the assumptions

Verify response effectiveness, residual consequences and the event's tolerance for the loss. Financial averages do not answer every readiness or safety question.

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*List the assumptions supporting a response's claimed benefit.*

# Choose and own a risk response

*The response should change exposure or prepare a credible reaction.*

## Consider the options

Depending on the uncertainty, responses may avoid, reduce, transfer or accept threats, and use suitable approaches for opportunities. The arrangement and retained responsibilities matter.

## Event case

Testing reduces uncertainty about equipment. A backup supplier reduces disruption if it fails. Insurance may address a covered loss but does not by itself restore the opening session.

## Assign action

Record the response owner, implementation date, cost, trigger and residual exposure. Confirm that the response was actually put in place.

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Name an action owner and the evidence that a response is ready.

# Triage an issue

*A current problem needs proportionate urgency and authority.*

## Ask practical questions

What is affected, by when, who can act and what options remain? Separate immediate containment from the decision needed to resolve the cause.

## Event case

The equipment supplier is two hours late and doors open in ninety minutes. The coordinator checks backup availability and the setup sequence while escalating the commercial decision within the agreed route.

## Record the outcome

Keep the facts, impact, authorised action and follow-up owner. Avoid inventing a solution deadline without checking what the response can deliver.

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*Prepare a short issue note with two feasible options.*

# Test assumptions before commitment

*Choose the cheapest useful evidence at the point it can still change the plan.*

## Prioritise validation

Test assumptions with high consequences, weak evidence or an approaching commitment. Use samples, demonstrations, records or expert checks suited to the unknown.

## Event case

The coordinator checks a sample attendee file in the registration tool before ordering all printed badges. The test reveals that long names are truncated.

## Adapt from the finding

Update the belief, requirement and plan. The purpose of validation is to improve a decision while alternatives are still available.

**TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT**

Choose a high-impact assumption and a small test.

# Negotiate a constraint conflict

*Conflicting boundaries need a decision that makes the trade-off visible.*

## Understand the sources

Check which constraints are binding, who set them and who can change them. Assess options across cost, time, scope, quality and the intended outcome.

## Event case

Access starts at 07:00 and setup needs four hours, but the opening is at 09:00. Options include earlier authorised access, a simpler setup or a changed opening arrangement.

## Seek authority

Present consequences and residual risks. A team should not solve the conflict by quietly assuming a contract or readiness condition has changed.

**TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT**

Write a decision request for two incompatible constraints.

# Use a practical RAID log

*One place can connect different categories without making them identical.*

## Define your convention

RAID commonly means risks, assumptions, issues and dependencies. Some organisations use different expansions. State yours and maintain the additional constraint records needed for decisions.

## Event case

Each entry has an ID, category, clear statement, owner, next action, date and links. A venue access constraint is referenced from the relevant setup issue.

## Keep it usable

Review the significant and changing items, not every entry equally. Close records with evidence and retain the decision history where needed.

**TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT**

Create one entry in each category and link related facts.

# Work a venue decision

*A single scenario can contain all four concepts.*

## Read the facts

The plan assumes a compatible projector. Equipment failure is possible. The venue confirms today that the projector is broken. Access still begins at the contracted time.

## Choose the actions

Verify the replacement's compatibility, handle the current failure as an issue, assess remaining delivery risks and plan within the access boundary or seek an authorised change.

## Check your reasoning

The categories coexist because they answer different questions. The useful result is a feasible setup plan with owners and evidence, not just correctly coloured labels.

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Write the four actions and the decision deadline for each.



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# Your decision-signals review

*Make the project record reflect what people need to know now.*

## Ask four questions

What may happen? What currently needs action? What are we treating as true? What limits our choices? Add dependencies so the team sees the affected handoffs.

## Apply the case

The event team updates the broken-projector issue, verifies the backup, records residual risks and checks the opening-readiness evidence against the access condition.

## Maintain the thread

Keep owners, next dates and decision links current. Revisit the record when facts change and confirm that closed actions actually resolved the relevant need.

**TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT**

Review one live item and decide whether its current label still supports the right next action.