

# What Risk Registers Miss

Lessons from Expedition Leadership for Project Managers

Participant takeaway

## MAIN THESIS

**Risk registers help us manage what we have already named. Project leadership also requires noticing what is changing before we know how to name it.**

## RISK REGISTER AS MAP - NOT FULL REALITY

A risk register is part of the map: it documents risks we can describe, assess, own, and review. But project reality also includes shifting stakeholders, dependencies, team behavior, decision delays, and assumptions that may weaken before they become formal risks.

## MAP / TERRAIN / TEAM / DECISION

### MAP

Plan, schedule, risk register, RAID log, assumptions, governance, dashboard. Key question: What have we named?

### TERRAIN

Actual conditions: stakeholders, dependencies, suppliers, technology, regulation, organizational context. Key question: What has changed?

### TEAM

Trust, fatigue, candor, silence, hesitation, ownership, escalation behavior, psychological safety. Key question: What is hard to say?

### DECISION

Continue, adapt, pause, escalate, re-baseline, change route, or stop. Key question: What decision is needed before options close?

## THREE PRACTICAL TOOLS

### 1. Weak Signal Scan

**Purpose:** Notice early indicators before they become formal risks.

**Ask:**

- What feels different?
- What is becoming fragile?
- What are we avoiding saying?
- What would not surprise us next month?

### 2. Terrain Check

**Purpose:** Compare the formal plan with current project reality.

**Ask:**

- Have stakeholders or dependencies changed?
- Has the team or decision window changed?
- Does the plan still describe reality?

### 3. Adaptation Trigger

**Purpose:** Decide when normal monitoring is no longer enough.

**Ask:**

- Repeated surprises?
- Green dashboard, uneasy team?
- Delayed escalation or unclear ownership?
- Too many workarounds?

## Use this in your next risk review

1. Keep the register - review named risks and owners.
2. Add a five-minute weak-signal scan.
3. Ask: What changed? What feels fragile? What are we not saying?
4. If signals repeat or cluster, run a Terrain Check.
5. Convert validated signals into risks, assumptions, decisions, or actions.

## Final quote

**Keep the register. Read the terrain. Listen to the team. Act before certainty arrives.**