Is your critical path real?

What Primavera P6 shows you, and what the logic actually drives.

A programme can look green, on time and fully floated, and still be hiding the path that really governs the finish. Here is what a standard read leaves you to catch by hand, and how to catch it before it costs you.

1. P6 paints “critical”, not “driving”

By default P6 flags an activity as critical only when its total float falls to zero or less against the completion date. While the network still carries project float to an early finish, nothing turns red, even though a longest, driving path has existed all along. The colour appears only once the float has already gone. So a schedule with no red is not a schedule with no risk. It is a schedule that has not run out of slack yet.

2. Constraints quietly distort the float

Oracle’s own manual is blunt: soft date constraints such as “Start On” and “Finish On” do not stop an activity moving, but they distort float. Add two date constraints, drop a single logic link, and the reported dates and float shift without one hour of real work changing. A completion field that does not move is not a finish that did not move. Only a recompute tells a constraint-asserted date apart from a logic-earned one.

3. P6 treats every link the same, but many are not

There is no field in P6 that separates hard logic from preference. Yet a great many construction links are management choice: floor sequence, gang route, zone order. When a delay lands on a preferential link, the whole chain shows as slipping, when the site could simply re-sequence and recover. An accepted path built on preference can be longer than the one the logic actually drives, and that accepted path is often what a claim is later measured against.

Five checks before you trust the red

- Look at the **longest (driving) path**, not just total float. Set P6 to define critical activities by longest path and compare.
- **Audit every date constraint.** Recompute the programme with them and without them, and read the two finish dates side by side.
- **Separate hard logic from preference.** Ask of each driving link: is this physics, or is it a sequence we chose?
- **Check the calendars.** Cross-calendar hand-offs and working-time gaps move dates silently and are easy to miss.
- **Run Check Schedule and the Schedule Log** for open ends, dangling activities and out-of-sequence work before you issue.

When you want the machine to do it for you

ARCHIE reads a P6 .xer the way a forensic expert would, separating what P6 shows from what the logic drives, sealed and reproducible.

XER CrossCheck compares two versions line by line. **XER Logic-Guard** audits the logic. **XER Holdpoint** strips a file before you send it.

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