

## Mission: Control

### Control: Projects and People

While working on projects, we may sometimes encounter resistance from teammates, stakeholders and others involved in the project.

#### WHY?

- Participants are TOLD, not asked, to be on the team, they don't have a choice.
- Some are not clear on the project's objective and their role.
- Some fear that achieving the project's objective may equal job loss, change, or more work.

Whatever the reason ...

- **People on our teams often feel as though their work life is outside of their control. As human beings we don't like that feeling and the results show up in our meetings.**

How can we as facilitators and leaders help?

1. Knowing the research about how our brains respond and react to the idea of **Locus of CONTROL**.
2. Use the "**Mission CONTROL**" **Listing Exercise** to clarify and highlight where the team CAN influence and experience success.
3. Remember that NOTHING is really in our control!  
(More on that later...)

# 1. THE "LOCUS OF CONTROL"

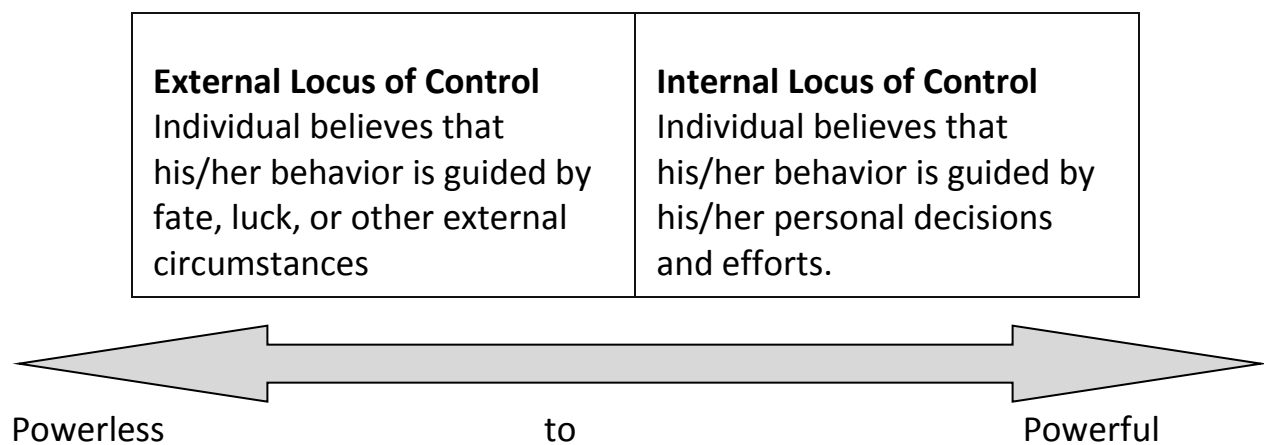
## What is Locus of Control?

Within the science of psychology, the concept of "Locus of Control" is considered to be an important aspect of personality.

The concept of Locus of Control was developed originally by Julian Rotter in the 1950s.

**Locus of Control:** refers to an individual's perception about the underlying main causes of events in his/her life. Or, more simply:

"Do you believe and experience your life or destiny as being controlled by *yourself* or by *external forces* (such as fate, or powerful others)?"



In general, it seems to be psychologically healthy, and an advantage, to perceive that one has control over those things which one is capable of influencing.

A more **Internal** Locus of Control is generally seen as desirable. Having an Internal Locus of Control can also be referred to as "Personal control", "self-determination", etc.

Research has found the following trends:

- Males experience a stronger Internal Locus of Control than females
- As people get older they tend to feel more Internal Locus of Control
- People higher up in organizational structures tend to have a more Internal Locus of Control

Keep in mind the concepts of internal/external are not “black & white,” i.e.; internal is good and external is bad.

**When an Internal Locus of Control orientation is matched with competence and opportunity ... a person is able to experience true personal control, achievement and success.**

**Research has also found that people with a more Internal Locus of Control seem to be better off, e.g., they tend to be more achievement oriented and to get better paying jobs.**

Research indicates that **Locus of Control is largely learned.**

And there is evidence that, at least to some extent, Locus of Control can be a response to circumstances.

## **2. Mission CONTROL: Team Exercise**

This is a great exercise to help focus a team who seems to get “stuck” on what they “CAN’T DO” and “what’s in the way” and may be going dysfunctional and off track because of it.

Clarifying what your team CAN control and focusing on that, will save you and your team tons of time & energy AND increase their sense of accomplishment and success.

**Use this exercise when you hear your team saying:**

- “How are we going to be able to do this with the resources we’ve been given?”
- “This will NEVER work. We tried this before and every time it’s fallen apart. We don’t have enough... They won’t ever...”
- “This project is a bad idea, I don’t think we should be doing it” (and you know that’s NOT an option)

**Supplies:**

- Easel stands and chart pads (or chart paper taped on wall), one for each team of 5- 6 people
- Tape, markers, sticky notes at each station
- Music

**Mission CONTROL Exercise: (facilitator script in *Italics*)**

*“Hey Team, Let me check in, it sounds like you might feel there are things out of our control here that get in the way of our doing good work?*

*How many of you might feel some of that?” (Raise your arm up)*

*“Let’s take a moment to write this all down and really look at it. What is OUT of our control and what is IN our control, so we see what we’ve got to work with, that will save us lots of time and energy.*

*“Let’s break into smaller groups to do this.”*

- Count big team into small groups (5 – 6 in a group)  
You go around the room giving everyone a number.

*“Let’s count off into teams, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, (6) 1, 2, 3...”*

- Direct them to their easel station:

*“Next, grab your chair. Everybody have a chair?  
In a moment, you’ll take your chair and huddle up in a horseshoe shape at the  
easel stations.*

*We’ll have the 1’s come on over here, 2’s here....*

*Okay move!”*

- After the teams are tucked in, ask for volunteers.

*“Say HI to your team everybody.*

*Here’s a secret – It’s GOOD to volunteer in this exercise!*

*How about a volunteer from each team!”*

*(Raise your arm up – with ENERGY!)*

*“Volunteers – Take the pad and the marker AND – pass it to the person on your  
team that you would like to be the recorder for this next listing!”*

*(You’ll get some laughs with this) “Remember- GOOD to Volunteer!*

*“Okay – Hands up Recorders – great, Thank You”*

### **Recorder Instructions:**

*“Here are a few instructions Recorders:*

*You’ll be writing down your team’s ideas on the sticky notes*

- *1 idea per sticky – you will have a stack of ideas.*
- *Write big*
- *Think ‘Bullet Point’ leave out ‘ands’ ‘buts’ ‘the’*
- *No Spell check*
- *Get your ideas in there too.*

*“This is a list – no need to discuss, agree/disagree with ideas – as many ideas as  
possible is what we’re looking for in this step.*

*This is a SPEED EXERCISE.*

*“Recorders, Questions?”*

*“Here’s the question you’re all working on:  
Thinking about our project, the scope, budget, timing, resources, let’s make a list  
of all of the things that get in our way, that are NOT in our control.*



*I’ll set the timer for 2 minutes – GO!”*

Put on some upbeat music.

Teams make sticky note list for 2 minutes.

Ask *“who needs more time?”* – give another minute.

*“Nice job, Thank you, teams!*

*Recorder, please take a marker and title top of your chart: ‘NOT in Control’.  
Now put your sticky notes/ ideas up on chart.*

*“Who will volunteer to read their team’s ideas? Thank You.*

*Everybody be listening for ideas we have in common and those we don’t.”*

### **Round Robin Brief:**

Each team reads their list of NOT in control sticky’s.

### **Next Round:**

*“Great first round everybody.*

*Let’s share the love – Who will record this next round?*

*Recorders, hand pad and marker to them. Thanks Recorders.*

*“Okay, Round 2: Now looking over the project again, considering – scope, time,  
budget, resources...*

*What IS in our Control What CAN we control?”*



Go to this bullet and repeat as above:

Teams make sticky note list for 2 minutes.

Ask Recorder to put sticky notes up on chart.

Ask Recorder to title chart: ‘In Our Control’.

Ask for new volunteer to read Sticky’s.

Facilitator: *“Let’s look at the CONTROL list – What can we focus on in this list to help us as we go forward? What’s standing out here?”*

*(Listen and let group discuss – 15 minutes or so)*

*“Great Job, Team!”*

*“Now here’s where all of your experience, your subject matter expertise will come into play.*

*Who remembers the Apollo 13 Mission to the Moon?*

*There was an explosion in the spacecraft, they were losing oxygen and couldn’t filter their CO2.*

*Lots of things were out of their control.*

*They had to get REALLY creative – and they did. With duct tape and cardboard...*

*You are all smart, experienced people.*

*“Take a look with your teams and talk about ‘What could we do to move some NO CONTROL items into the CONTROL list?’*

*What would it take?*

*“Listen for ‘We Can’t’ or ‘That won’t work’ **Don’t go there now**, stay in the HOW COULD WE, HOW MIGHT WE, place and see what you come up with.*

*Which ones might move?*

*What would it take to make them move – to make that happen?*

*Questions?*

*“I’ll set the timer for 4 minutes and check in with you all.”*

*(Give more time if teams are engaged, this could go up to 15+ minutes)*

*“Who would like more time?”*

**Round Robin Debrief:**

*“Who will give us an overview of what your team talked about and what you were able to move?”*

*Who hasn’t had a chance to volunteer yet?”*

After each team reports out, Facilitator asks:

*“What are some common ideas we were able to move?”*

*Where do we feel we are NOT in Control?*

*How would you like to begin to work on any of these items?*

*What would we like to dig into more, where can we get some traction, some easy wins? And how can we mitigate the ones we cannot change?”*

Let Team create an Action Plan.

**GOOD NEWS:** This exercise usually results in many of the NOT in CONTROL items getting moved to the IN CONTROL or closer to the middle.

The Mission Control Exercise is a great reminder to all of us to stay focused on what we CAN change, and let the rest go! In future meetings, if you hear the “We can’t do this..., etc.” refer back to the exercise:

*“Hey Team, sounds like we may be wandering back to what’s NOT in our control – there’s no cheese there for us, how about we look at HOW we could get around this...?”*