

Using the “Six Value Medals” to Identify and Assess Risk

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Edward de Bono is famous for promoting creative thinking, and he has written many books to explain his radical ideas. Perhaps his best-known technique is the Six Thinking Hats[®], encouraging people to adopt a range of different perspectives when thinking about an issue. Indeed the Six Thinking Hats can be very helpful in risk identification.

One of de Bono’s other thinking tools is the **Six Value Medals**[™]. These describe different types of value which are important to people and organisations, and against which we can perform a “value scan” when making decisions or determining courses of action. The Six Value Medals have many potential uses, as we seek to create and protect value. But they may also help us to think about risk in a new way.

The simple definition of risk as “*uncertainty that matters*” shows that we need to understand what matters before we can find the uncertainties that we need to manage. If we are managing risk at the business level, things that matter might include corporate objectives such as protecting reputation, generating shareholder value and ensuring sustainability. At project level we are usually concerned about achieving project objectives such as time, cost and performance. Risks are uncertainties that, if they occur, would affect achievement of one of these objectives. The objectives are also used as risk impact types in the risk process, so that we can assess how much each risk might matter.

de Bono’s Six Value Medals offer an alternative view of what matters, and so they could help us to find risks that we otherwise might overlook. They can also form the basis of a set of impact types against which we can assess and prioritise our risks. These are the Six Value Medals:

- **Gold Medal: Human values.** Gold is precious, and so are people. This medal covers the things that matter directly to people, both positive and negative. These include pride, achievement, praise or humiliation, a sense of belonging or isolation, hope, trust, and growth.
- **Silver Medal: Organisational values.** This medal is about the purpose and mission of the organisation, and what matters to the overall business. It considers what will help or hinder us in pursuit of our goals. Examples might include profits, market share or brand image.
- **Steel Medal: Quality values.** Steel must be strong and it has to perform with certain characteristics if it is to fulfill its purpose. The steel medal considers

effects on the quality or fitness for purpose of what we are doing, either positive or negative.

- **Glass Medal: Creativity values.** Glass is simple but has many creative uses. This medal considers impacts on our ability to innovate and change in order to do things in a new or improved way.
- **Wood Medal: Ecology values.** Wood points to the natural environment. The wood medal draws attention to the environment in the broadest sense, describing positive or negative effects of our decisions or actions on the world around us.
- **Brass Medal: Perceptual values.** Brass looks like gold but it is not. Perception matters, and this medal asks whether there is any resulting change in the way we and others perceive or are perceived.

These six groups of values give us a different perspective on the things that are important to organisations, groups and individuals. They can be used as a framework for identifying risks that could affect things we care about. They also provide a set of risk impact types that truly reflect the drivers of value, and which are much broader than the ones usually found in the typical risk process. By using the Six Value Medals to define “what matters”, we can identify and assess real risks, and prioritise the ones that matter most.

Details of Edward de Bono’s work, including the Six Value Medals, are available at <http://debonothinkingsystems.com/>. Dr de Bono describes the Six Value Medals in a short video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3KfshqJG-s>

To provide feedback on this Briefing Note, or for more details on how to develop effective risk management, [contact the Risk Doctor \(info@risk-doctor.com\)](mailto:info@risk-doctor.com), or [visit the Risk Doctor website \(www.risk-doctor.com\)](http://www.risk-doctor.com).

About the Author



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Dr David Hillson CMgr FRSA FIRM FCMI HonFAPM PMI-Fellow is The Risk Doctor (www.risk-doctor.com). As an international risk consultant, David is recognised as a leading thinker and expert practitioner in risk management. He consults, writes and speaks widely on the topic and he has made several innovative contributions to the field. David’s motto is “Understand profoundly so you can explain simply”, ensuring that his work represents both sound thinking and practical application.

David Hillson has over 25 years’ experience in risk consulting and he has worked in more than 40 countries, providing support to clients in every major industry sector, including construction, mining, telecommunications, pharmaceutical, financial services, transport, fast-moving consumer goods, energy, IT, defence and government. David’s input includes strategic direction to organisations facing major risk challenges, as well as tactical advice on achieving value and competitive advantage from effectively managing risk.

David’s contributions to the risk discipline over many years have been recognised by a range of awards, including “Risk Personality of the Year” in 2010-11. He received both the PMI Fellow award and the PMI Distinguished Contribution Award from the Project Management Institute (PMI®) for his work in developing risk management. He is also an Honorary Fellow of the UK Association for Project Management (APM), where he has actively led risk developments for nearly 20 years. David Hillson is an active Fellow of the Institute of Risk Management (IRM), and he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) to contribute to its Risk Commission. He is also a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) and a Member of the Institute of Directors (IOD).

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