

## Risk Doctor Briefing

### Scaling the PEAKS of Competence

**Dr David Hillson and Dr Ruth Murray-Webster**

The Risk Doctor Partnership

How can you know if you are competent to perform in your role? Many professional organisations produce competence frameworks which attempt to answer this question. Unfortunately most of these frameworks are limited to assessing **what you know** or **what you can do**. But knowledge and skills are only two of the elements which are required for a person to be competent in a role.

To provide a more complete description of competence, we have developed the **PEAKS** framework. This defines the factors that separate truly effective individuals from the rest.

**PEAKS** is a general competence framework that can be applied to a wide range of job roles, including risk management, executive leadership, project management, facilitation, software development etc. The **PEAKS** framework includes:

- Five essential **elements** that contribute to competence
- Specific **attributes** under each element, describing competence in a particular role
- **Assessment mechanisms** for each attribute

The **five PEAKS elements** are:

- **Personal characteristics** (“Who am I?”) – natural traits/preferences that are essential for the role
- **Experience** (“What have I done?”) – relevant personal time spent practising this role or a similar role
- **Attitude** (“How shall I respond?”) – chosen responses to situations encountered in the role
- **Knowledge** (“What do I know?”) – facts, principles, processes that are learned through formal training and education or on-the-job
- **Skill** (“How do I apply the other elements?”) – putting it into practice and learning through experience

To develop a **PEAKS** framework, a family of job roles are examined to define the set of attributes for each **PEAKS** element. These attributes outline the things that are most important for performing each role in the particular organisation.

Each of the attributes can exist at different levels of maturity, and each role in a job family will require a different mix of maturity levels. For example, a risk analyst will need a high degree of competence in performing detailed quantitative risk analysis, but it is less important for a risk manager, and a Chief Risk Officer (CRO) might not

need to know how to perform a risk analysis at all. On the other hand, understanding business strategy might not be necessary for a risk analyst, a risk manager will require some strategic awareness, but this would be essential for a CRO. So developing a **PEAKS** framework needs first to define the **required attributes** under each of the five **elements**, then for each job role we must determine the **level of maturity** that is required for each attribute.

The **PEAKS** framework can be applied practically to identify and measure current individual competence as a baseline from which to manage personal development. It can also be used to support recruitment by detailing the attributes required for a particular job role. Finally **PEAKS** can support team formation and development, by ensuring that each member has all the elements of competence needed in a high-performing team.

*[This article was originally authored in August 2014 and represents Ruth Murray-Webster's personal views and not those of KPMG and it is not intended to be interpreted as such.]*

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*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 Authors



### **Dr. David Hillson**

The Risk Doctor



**Dr David Hillson** CMgr FRSA FIRM FCMI HonFAPM PMI-Fellow is The Risk Doctor ([www.risk-doctor.com](http://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).

Dr Hillson can be contacted at [david@risk-doctor.com](mailto:david@risk-doctor.com).



## **Dr Ruth Murray-Webster**



**Ruth Murray-Webster** DBA, MBA, HonFAPM, MIRM, CQP has more than 25 years' experience as an organisational change practitioner. She is widely respected for her work as a manager, facilitator and business coach, particularly in the areas of project and programme management, quality management, risk management and business benefits realisation. In her early career Ruth worked as a manager with major players within the chemicals and nuclear sectors. In both arenas, she was responsible for leading significant programmes of business re-alignment and organisational change. Her experience and ability when working internationally are extensive.

Since 1996 Ruth has worked as a consultant on a wide range of client assignments across the programme, project and risk management disciplines utilising skills as a practitioner, trainer, coach and consultant. She is currently a Director of KPMG's Risk in the Boardroom practice, based in London.

Although Ruth first formally used risk management in the mid-80s where she was adopting a Kepnor Tregoe™ approach to project-based change in ICI that looked at 'potential problem analysis' and 'potential opportunity analysis'. This was followed by time as the Quality and Operations Manager for a nuclear manufacturer. It was in the late 1990s when she became closely involved carrying out risk analyses (for projects) and consulting about risk management maturity.

Working with David Hillson in 1999, she worked on a risk management maturity assessment for a major pharmaceuticals company, looking at the maturity of their process, tools, training and culture. She also worked with David and others on the implementation of 'Total Risk Management' for a large construction company where facilitation of workshops, and training for facilitators was part of the scope.

In the years that have followed Ruth has facilitated risk workshops and provided training and coaching for people working in strategic, project/change and operational roles in organisations including Royal Dutch Shell, Hewlett Packard, ING Bank, AXA Insurance, University of Manchester, Hofmann la Roche and the UK government's Department for Work and Pensions.

Ruth was the author of the UK government's approach to the management of risk in 2010 (M\_o\_R, 2010). A major part of this rewrite was to align M\_o\_R with ISO31000: 2009.

She has also written extensively on the subject of risk management, having a particular motivation to understand why what is such an obviously useful practice at one level is so difficult for organisations to adopt formally. Her books with David Hillson (featured on this site) are recognised as contributing to the debate on how to enable people to join up risk management and decision-making in a way that taps into normal human influences and biases when risks are perceived. Ruth has another book, co-authored with Penny Pullan entitled '*Facilitating Risk Management: how to engage others to identify, own and manage risk*' (2011) – this is aimed at practitioners, intended to provide useful tips on how to facilitate in a way that engenders energy, enthusiasm and effective outputs.

In addition to her consulting and writing work, Ruth is a Visiting Fellow at Cranfield University School of Management.

Ruth was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Association for Project Management in 2013 for her services to risk and change management.