

## **Effective Risk Facilitation: Understanding the Four P's<sup>1</sup>**

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The role of the facilitator is to make things easier for a group of people working together on a common task. This is a difficult job that needs special skills and careful preparation, particularly when facilitating a risk workshop, where the element of uncertainty introduces special challenges. There are two main ways in which a facilitator can make things easier for a group undertaking a risk workshop:

- *Easier than individuals working alone.* By helping the group to function effectively together, the facilitator ensures that multiple perspectives are shared openly to provide a common understanding of the risks facing the project.
- *Easier than the group working alone.* By taking care of practical elements of the risk workshop, the facilitator can release the group to concentrate on what they are doing, allowing them to dedicate their full attention to identifying and assessing risks, then developing appropriate responses.

To be fully effective, a risk facilitator needs to understand four key areas:

**1. Project.** The risk facilitator should be familiar with the project's characteristics, including:

- The scope and objectives to be considered during this risk assessment
- Underlying project assumptions and constraints
- Current project status, including issues, problems and concerns

**2. Principles.** The risk facilitator must clearly understand basic concepts of risk, including:

- All risks are uncertain, and all risks affect at least one objective if they happen
- Risk includes both threat and opportunity
- Risks should be owned by the person or party who owns the affected objective

**3. Process.** The risk facilitator will know which tools and techniques to use for the various steps in the risk management process, including:

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<sup>1</sup> This is article one in a four-part series of briefing notes by Dr Hillson on Effective Risk Facilitation. Check back next month for the next article in the series.

- Strengths and weaknesses of different techniques to identify risks, including both threats and opportunities
- How to describe a risk clearly and unambiguously, for example using risk metalanguage to separate cause-risk-effect
- How to define risk thresholds to be used when prioritising risks for further attention
- When and how to use quantitative risk analysis techniques
- How to choose an appropriate risk response strategy, turn it into specific actions, and ensure implementation

**4. People.** The risk facilitator must have excellent interpersonal skills, and be able to:

- Motivate all participants to contribute openly and freely
- Recognise and counter bias
- Ensure that everyone is heard and respected
- Handle difficult people

A good risk facilitator will combine all four aspects in their preparation and facilitation of the risk process, enabling them to support the group effectively. The goal is for participants in a risk workshop to leave feeling that they have done a good job, confident that they have identified the real risks, and ready to tackle them proactively. Easy!

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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 Author



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**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).

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