Effective Risk Facilitation: Matching Style to Technique

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There are many techniques for identifying risks, and a skilled facilitator can help to make these more effective. The previous Risk Doctor Briefing outlined three main styles that a risk facilitator can adopt: ***Directive*** (where the facilitator controls the workshop from the front) ***Collaborative*** (where facilitator and group work together as partners), and ***Supportive*** (allowing the group to run the workshop, with the facilitator offering advice and guidance as required). Different facilitation styles work best for various risk identification techniques, as follows:

- ***Brainstorming***. This technique requires a strong *Directive* style from the facilitator, in order to set up and enforce the ground rules, to manage group dynamics, to encourage quiet individuals to contribute, to channel dominant individuals, to prevent distractions and diversions, to maintain the schedule, to reach consensus on outputs, and to record identified risks properly.

- ***Assumptions & Constraints Analysis***. Examination of assumptions and constraints as potential sources of risk requires a disciplined and structured approach that is best supported by a *Directive* facilitation style. Each assumption or constraint is tested in two dimensions, for its stability and its sensitivity, and those assessed as both unstable and sensitive are converted into risk statements. The facilitator needs to keep the group focused on following this analytical process in order to ensure the quality of the output.

- ***SWOT Analysis***. This technique requires the group to start with known facts about the organisation (Strengths and Weaknesses), then to use these factors as prompts to consider how they might lead to Opportunities or Threats. Since the base information comes from the group, the facilitator needs a *Collaborative* style to draw on their knowledge and experience while working with them to transform strengths into opportunities and explore how weaknesses generate threats.

- ***Influence diagram***. A *Collaborative* style works well when the group is building an influence diagram to model the key relationships and dependencies in order to determine areas of maximum uncertainty. Group members bring detailed knowledge of the characteristics and parameters of the situation, while the facilitator has knowledge of how to structure this information into an influence diagram. The technique can only work if both facilitator and group work together alongside each other.

- ***Delphi group***. When input is required from recognised domain experts, the facilitator should adopt a *Supportive* style, providing a neutral channel for subject-matter experts to make their contribution without challenging or influencing their views.

- ***Lessons-to-be-learned review***. Review of experience in previous similar situations can reveal risks that might be relevant this time. Lessons-to-be-learned are often held in an archive or knowledge repository, and these should be examined to determine whether previously-identified risks are definitely applicable, mere possibilities, or not applicable. This requires detailed knowledge both of previous situations and the current one, which the risk facilitator is unlikely to possess. Consequently a *Supportive* facilitation style is required, to enable the team to perform an effective lessons-to-be-learned review.

By adapting their facilitation style to match the risk identification technique, risk facilitators will ensure that risks are identified effectively in the workshop, providing a firm foundation for the management of those risks.

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), or visit the Risk Doctor website (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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