



RISK DOCTOR BRIEFING



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.