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A Short Guide to Facilitating Risk Management

Engaging People to Identify,
Own and Manage Risk

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Foreword

DAVID HILLSON

Managing risk is a challenge for many reasons. There are lots of barriers to effective risk management, including organisational, practical, procedural and personal. As a result many people don't bother with it, or if they do then they see it as a necessary chore or bureaucratic overhead. Too much so-called 'risk management' involves simply ticking boxes, going through the motions, attending risk workshops and review meetings, and getting it over with as quickly as possible so we can return to the real job. Whatever this is, it is not managing risk.

There are many ways to overcome the barriers to managing risk properly. One of the most effective is to use a skilled facilitator. As Ruth and Penny explain early in this book, the word facilitator has its roots in the Latin *facilis* meaning easy. So the facilitator's role is to make things easier for others, helping them to achieve their goals as efficiently as possible. A good facilitator understands the barriers and has proven tools and techniques for dealing with them.

Facilitation skills are helpful in a wide range of settings, but they have particular value when we are dealing with risk. If risk is defined in the way that Ruth and Penny recommend,

as ‘uncertainty that matters’, then both the inherent uncertainty and the potential for significant consequences are likely to make people cautious in the way they approach risk. The risk workshop is not just another meeting, since we need to get it right if we are to identify the real risks that we face. Risk Registers require careful consideration as they indicate the areas requiring particular focused attention and action. Risk responses are not distractions from real work, but they define what needs to be done in order to minimise avoidable problems and maximise achievable benefits. Risk reports are important as they tell people about what is coming and what they need to do to get ready. In short, risk management matters and we need to get it right.

In this short guide, we find out how a skilled facilitator can help people who want and need to manage risk. While the focus is on the risk workshop, other aspects are covered where facilitation can provide useful direction and support. But where can we find a competent facilitator? And if I want to develop my own facilitation skills, what do I need to know? The best way to learn how to do something is to spend time with people who know how to do it. A close second is for them to tell you their secrets. That’s why this short book is so valuable.

I’ve watched Ruth and Penny in action as they work with groups in various settings. I’ve been impressed at how they get alongside people, make them feel relaxed and at ease, and guide the group towards achieving their aims in a way that delivers results while still allowing them to have appropriate fun. I’ve found myself wishing I could do what Ruth and Penny do, and wondering how they learnt to do it so well. Now we know, as they share some of their insights in this book. These include basic facilitation skills of course, but they

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also show us how to apply these to the challenge of managing risk, particularly in the setting of a risk workshop.

For many years I've been telling people that risk management isn't hard, for two reasons. First, they assume that it is a 'hard discipline' because it involves statistics, analysis and a rigorous approach, when the reality is that risk is managed by people not processes or techniques. And second, people think that risk management is 'hard' because it is difficult to do, when done properly it should be an easy and intuitive process. So risk management should not be hard, because it involves soft skills and it should be easy. This book addresses both of these aspects, reminding us that the risk process is essentially people-centred and that skilled facilitation can make it easy. Anything that makes it easier for people to manage risk effectively is a good thing, and I welcome this book as a significant contribution to that end.

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