

# Research Risk Assessment in a University

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# Outline

- Institutional risk management
- Project-level risk assessment

# Institutional Risk Management

- Often linked to institutional objectives
- Requirement to embed in institutional processes
- Development of policies to deal with range of issues, e.g.:
  - Financial Handbook
  - Research Good Practice
  - Research Misconduct
  - Conflicts of Interest
- Range of research risk areas

# Range of Research Risks

- Policy / Strategy
- Academic
- Physical
- Financial
- Ethical
- Humans and Animals
- Legal
- Commercial
- Staff-related
- Collaborative
- PR & Perceptions
- IT

## Examples (1)

Hazard Type (Strategy & Policy)	Market & portfolio imbalance
Associated Risks & Effects	Exposure to single source of funding; inability to respond
Those Affected	All, but action primarily by policy makers
Countermeasures	Develop research strategy and implementation plan; replanning

## Examples (2)

Hazard Type (Academic)	Investing a great deal in writing a proposal with low odds of success
Associated Risks & Effects	Loss of opportunity; damage to career status
Those Affected	Project leaders; researchers
Countermeasures	Replanning; seek info on other funders

## Examples (3)

Hazard Type (Physical)	Dangerous environments
Associated Risks & Effects	Working in dangerous environments; violent people
Those Affected	Those in relevant fields of research: project leaders, HoDs
Countermeasures	Seek advice from safety professionals; carry insurance

## Examples (4)

Hazard Type (Commercial)	Over-ambitious plans for work scheduling or funding
Associated Risks & Effects	Inability to deliver to plan; damaged reputation; liabilities
Those Affected	Researchers, project leaders, departments
Countermeasures	Effective project management; training / mentoring; insurance



## Examples (5)

Hazard Type (Collaborative)	Incompatibility between partners once under way
Associated Risks & Effects	Divergence of targets; not successful outcome
Those Affected	Researchers, project leaders
Countermeasures	Work on relationships; terminate ineffective partnerships

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# Project Risk Assessment

- To assess viability of a proposal
- To identify areas for attention
- To determine level of authorisation required

## How the Process Works

- Assessment against nine factors
- Two or three options for each factor
- Some are derived from information captured about the project
- Scoring of each option for each factor
  - Could be weighted
- Summation of “risk score”
- Use of total score to determine approval workflow
  - Effectively, Low, Medium, High categorisation

# Project Risk Assessment Factors

- Desirability
- Capability
- Public Good
- Involvement of Human Subjects or Animals
- Customer
- Type and Terms
- Cost
- Price
- Requirement for permanency of research staff

# Example

# Potential Issues

- HoD may score highly, regardless of reality
  - Regular reporting of assessments, and outcomes
  - Implies the need to capture output / outcome adequately
- Balance between systematic approach and human judgement
- Accumulating risks
  - Each high risk project may be acceptable on its own
  - What proportion of a profile is acceptable as high risk?

# Accumulating Risks

- What profile of risk is acceptable?
  - e.g. 50% Low, 30% Medium, 20% High
  - Depends on the level of aggregation (dept or institution)
  - Depends on the risk factors that make it high
  - High risk maybe more acceptable if the researcher is very experienced, i.e. a good capability rating, or the cost is low
- So, perhaps risk needs to be accumulated at the factor level?
  - Level of total financial exposure
  - Balance across customers



## Further Use of the Risk Score

- To direct monitoring / intervention during project life
  - If capability score is high risk, someone (e.g. HoD) should be checking progress regularly
  - If financial risk is high because the customer is an SME, debt monitoring should be frequent
  - Use score to affect criteria for exception reporting

## Summary

- Use of strategic risk management across a range of areas, embedded in normal processes
- Introduction of project risk assessment as part of the approval process
- Consideration of accumulation of risk
- Possible use of assessment in later stages



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