

Documenting Risks and Issues

Risk Statements – “A possibility”

A good risk statement should be:

- **Factual**
- **Unemotional** (avoid using motive language)
- Pitched at an **Executive level**.

A good risk statement must, at a minimum, include the following elements:

- **Risk Condition(s)**: The event(s) which must occur or condition(s) which must be satisfied to cause a risk to materialise (if... then... format work well to ensure elements are properly indicated).
- **Risk Consequence(s)**: The specific and direct consequences of a materialised risk.

Within our status update we only define the issue or the risk. There is no impact analysis (including likelihood). Additionally, the issues and risks captured in the status report are specific to the delivery of our engagement only. Project risks should be verbalized and formally raised to the PM. If they don't incorporate these risks, we have at least followed due process.

- **Risk Impact(s)**: The specific, measurable and direct impacts on the business/organisation/project correlating to a risk consequence. If there are multiple consequences from a risk, there is likely also multiple impacts to consider. Some consequences also result in multiple impacts.
 - For project risks, the impact should describe a specific impact to the project's defined scope, schedule, cost and quality objectives.
 - For business risks (e.g. relating to the problem trying to be solved), the impact should describe the who, what, where and when of the impacts (if known).
 - For BA service delivery risks, the impact should describe a specific impact to the scope of work, in terms of scope, schedule, cost and quality.
 - Can be qualitative: (e.g. Very High, High, Medium and Low) but more meaningful if can be quantified.
- **Risk Likelihood**: A measure indicating how likely it is that the Risk Condition will occur (usually qualitative, e.g. Very High, High, Medium and Low).

Issue Statements – “A reality”

A good issue statement should be:

- **Factual**
- **Unemotional** (avoid using motive language)
- Be pitched at an **Executive level**.
- **Concise** - An issue statement needs to be condensed down to a single, readable sentence.

- **Specific** - An issue statement, where relevant, needs to answer all of the following:
 - What exactly is the issue?
 - Who does the issue affect and who does it not affect? (e.g. groups, teams, individuals, organisations, customers etc.).
 - How does it affect the impacted parties/business? – You should focus on direct impacts. Secondary impacts which require a condition to be satisfied are actually risks based on the issue
 - When does it occur? (e.g. enduring, irregularly, intermittently, once every week).
 - Where does it occur (e.g. specific sites, teams, roles, systems etc.)?
- **Specify the impact.** The problem statement should identify the population affected by the problem and specify the direct result(s) of the impact.
- **Measure the impact.** Issues can be measured in terms of degree and frequency of impact. The strongest issue statements incorporate measurable aspects of both the degree and frequency that an issue occurs, and the size frequency of the impact. I.e. this happens weekly and causes X amount of rework.

Things to avoid when writing Risks and Issues:

- Stating multiple risks/issues where they are just different impacts from a single risk/issue. Careful analysis is required to ensure that you are not 'double-dipping'. Note, different issues and risks can have very similar impacts.
- Using motherhood statements - a general statement designed to convince the reader to agree to/react to the statement (the statement is 'positioned' in association with a goal that is considered important to everyone; i.e. linking a risk/issue to failure to achieve the overarching objective of an initiative. e.g. Taking this approach will cause the solution to fail).
- Only stating the risk/issue as a topic (e.g. 'scope creep'), but not exploring the cause and effect.
- Risks/issues outside the scope of the initiative, and/or outside the scope of your work. If the scope is the actual cause of the risk or issue, clearly state this and explain the risk/issue/impact of not bringing the item into scope.
- Defining the desired outcome or solution (that is the role of objectives and they should already be well known. If they aren't, that is the risk).
- Pre-empting or defining the solution (e.g. 'the need for a better...') - issues and risks should be identified before the solution is defined, not after.