Online library of Quality, Service Improvement and Redesign tools

Identify your issues and risks

NHS England and NHS Improvement
Identify your issues and risks

What is it?

The early identification of risks and potential issues in project management is undervalued and can often be missed. It is important to identify these at the outset and during the project start-out phase so that they are recognised, acknowledged and mitigated where possible.

When to use it

Risk and issues logs need to be populated at the start of the project and updated regularly. Maintain them as live documents that can be accessed by the project team via a shared drive (consider who has read-only or updating rights). It is important to have an audit trail to ensure that, as risks and issues are identified, mitigated and ultimately closed, all actions and steps are captured.

How to use them

Risk and issues logs can be as simple as a spreadsheet or a more sophisticated system. When a risk or issue is first identified, record it in the risk or issue register in as much detail as possible. The risk or issue should be evaluated according to the likelihood of it occurring and the consequence to the project if it did occur – typically on a scale of low, medium or high. The two factors are multiplied to determine the overall risk. Create an action plan to determine how to mitigate the risk or issue, by whom and by when. It is also useful to show (using the same scale) the risk occurrence and likelihood after mitigation.

Sample risk logs

Below are two sample risk logs that can be maintained in Word or Excel. By providing a framework to rate the risks, they will help you determine where most effort should be placed for managing risks.

Figure 1: An example of the headings that you may expect to use in a simple risk log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Date identified</th>
<th>Last updated</th>
<th>Risk author</th>
<th>Risk description</th>
<th>Risk owner</th>
<th>Impact (I)</th>
<th>Likelihood (L)</th>
<th>Risk rating (IxL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>08/01/17</td>
<td>10/01/17</td>
<td>R. Log</td>
<td>Resources are insufficient</td>
<td>Dept. head</td>
<td>4 – major</td>
<td>3 – possible</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Risk author is the individual who has recorded the issue. The risk owner is the individual who has taken the responsibility for managing the risk.

The potential impact (I) column is often populated by a score rating between 1–5 (1 – low, 2 – minor, 3 – moderate, 4 – major, 5 – serious).

The likelihood (L) column is often populated by a score rating between 1–5 (1 – highly unlikely, 2 – unlikely, 3 – possible, 4 – likely, 5 – highly likely).

**Figure 2: An example of the extra headings that you may expect to use in a more complex risk log**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Date identified</th>
<th>Last updated</th>
<th>Risk author</th>
<th>Risk description</th>
<th>Risk owner</th>
<th>Impact (I)</th>
<th>Likelihood (L)</th>
<th>Risk rating (IxL)</th>
<th>Counter action plan details</th>
<th>Residual Impact (RI)</th>
<th>Residual Likelihood (RL)</th>
<th>Residual Risk Rating (RIxRL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>08/01/17</td>
<td>10/01/17</td>
<td>R. Log</td>
<td>Resources are insufficient</td>
<td>Dept. head</td>
<td>4 – major</td>
<td>3 – possible</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>New sources of resources found</td>
<td>3 – moderate</td>
<td>4 – likely</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The residual risk ratings are ratings based on how the original rating would change when an agreed action plan is implemented to try and reduce or mitigate the original risk. This may include details if the risk has been escalated, ie brought to the attention of other areas of the organisation.

**Sample issue log**

An issue log will help you record issues and determine where most effort should be placed in resolving these issues. The issue log can be maintained in either Word or Excel.

**Figure 3: An example of the headings that you may expect to use in a simple issue log**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Date identified</th>
<th>Last updated</th>
<th>Issue author</th>
<th>Issue description</th>
<th>Latest update</th>
<th>Issue owner</th>
<th>Priority rating</th>
<th>Issue resolution date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>08/01/17</td>
<td>10/01/17</td>
<td>A. Log</td>
<td>Specification for equipment is incorrect</td>
<td>Suppliers have been asked to redo specification</td>
<td>Dept. head</td>
<td>4 – high</td>
<td>12/01/17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Status is used to establish if the issue is closed or open. It is important to keep a record of closed issues until the project is over, they can often be used to establish lessons learned and occasionally provide useful reference points. If Excel is used for the Issue log then it is much easier to filter the Issues on open or closed status.

Issue author is the individual who has recorded the issue. The issue owner is the individual who has taken the responsibility for resolving the issue.
The priority rating column is populated by a rating to indicate the priority of the issue. For example:

1 – Insignificant
2 – Low
3 – Normal
4 – High
5 – Showstopper

**What next?**

The risk and issues log should be evaluated through the duration of the project to ensure that all entries are mitigated. At project closure you should evaluate the risk log – escalate any unmitigated risks and issues to relevant stakeholders/sponsors for evaluation. It is perfectly fine to accept the risk or issue but this needs to be clearly recorded in the log.