

# A Risky Fable

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Distraught with despair, the King thought to call upon his neighbor, the good King of the land of Commercia for advice because it was well known that the successes of Commercia were always so profitable as to far outweigh the failures.

“Oh noble King of Commercia, I beseech you to divulge the secret of making successes outweigh failures,” appealed the King of Dod.

## The Expert Speaks

The King of Commercia said, “Surely there is a fair price to perform an independent study. A study on the way work is done in the land of Dod. I am confident I can help to bring back happiness to your gentle land.”

The King of Dod said, “Name the price. Compare our ways with yours, and devise a transformation process so we may properly succeed—even though there is no structure or need for profit in our land.”

And so it came to pass that agreements were negotiated and signed, and dates of delivery were declared. The King of Commercia collected his fair fee and assigned his excellent experts and superior sages to the task of studying Dod.

Some few years later, he called upon the King of Dod with the results. “You are in great luck, your majesty. I have in my hand the salvation of your land,” said the Commercia monarch. “We will soon deliver to your librarian the considerable tomes containing the validations behind our findings. This single page I hand you now—the royal overview— has the essence of the study. If you follow the guidance of this list of ten best business practices, you will find your country replete with happiness once again.”

## Sage Advice

The King of Dod fairly hopped with glee and grabbed the manuscript. His lips rapidly moved as he silently read the list, but a frown furrowed his brow as he reached the end. “What is this, oh marvelous monarch?” asked the King of Dod. “Your caveat at the end says the glue that binds these ten elements is of more value than each of the separate parts—the glue being some mysterious process you call ‘management of risks.’”

**Risk management won't work unless everyone does it all the time and the leader of the land shows the way.**

Once upon a time, long ago and far away in the country of Dod, there was a muttering and grumbling. The workers were sorely vexed. They were tired of the success or failure of their efforts being based upon the inconsistent skills of their foremen, and they craved a process, a means to ensure more successes than failures—or at the very least, less severe failures.

There came a day when the King of Dod could no longer ignore the muttering and grumbling. He called in the royal advisors for a conference, but their opposing opinions soon rose to a cacophony. Finally, in rueful royal confusion, the King placed his palms to his ears and shouted, “Enough!”

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“It is so,” answered the King of Commercia. “First you must conquer your fear of planning for risk and embed the management of risk in your very way of life. If you do that, then all manner of successes will fall at your noble feet.”

The King of Dod replied, “Well, I have favored you with a fair fee, and your perfect process seems so ... well, perfect. All across my land shall embrace it.”

“You must not perceive this purported process as perfect,” the King of Commercia said quickly. “Remember, I said the glue that binds the whole is the *management of risk*. At your imperilment will you neglect its implementation,” he warned.

Hastening on his way to hand down salvation to his workers, the good King of Dod distractedly shouted, “Whatever!”

### **Imperiled Implementation**

Anxious to get back to his neglected kingly duties, the King delegated the dissemination of the list to his Minister of Processing. The Minister of Processing read the list, harrumphed in haughty concurrence, and efficiently passed the action down to the Officer-in-charge of Implementing New Knowledge, who asked where the tomes of validation were.

“Trust me,” said the Minister of Processing, “and speedily make these ten best business practices our process across the land. They are simplicity itself, so no training will be required. The workers will know a good thing when they see one. And when you say that it’s the King’s will, it will *certainly* be done.”

So the Officer-in-charge of Implementing New Knowledge made haste and passed the ten best practices to the masses. Soon the workers were busily buzzing the buzz words. Risk management process acronyms were flying about like startled quail from a meadow.

But after a few months, some workers found the process was not designed to easily fit all tasks. Some of them were too busy fighting fires to try it. Others were chasing off wolves or polishing away rust and were far too preoccupied to bother with a process that—as it turned out—was *not* simple or intuitive. Still others feared that reporting risks would be tantamount to declaring that they didn’t know how to do their jobs.

A great cry arose for training and managerial guidance. When it reached the ear of the King, he again called on his advisors (but this time told them to speak in proper turn). The consensus was that the process was simple enough, but the workers just weren’t perceiving it correctly. The King sagely issued a royal decree that all res-

idents of Dod should adopt the management of risk process because it would bring wealth and happiness to them and to the land of Dod.

The King of Dod promptly delegated to the Minister of Processing the task of ensuring that the decree was faithfully followed. Now the paperwork resulting from the issuance of royal decrees is massive, and the Minister of Processing felt strained to finish it *and* monitor the risk process—so he promptly delegated the latter task to the Officer-in-charge of Implementing New Knowledge.

### **A Short-lived Fad?**

Not long after, the King issued another royal decree, this time about the Critical Strategies for Dod to Function. Alas, there was not a single mention of the risk management process. All in the kingdom read the latest decree. Finding no mention of risk management, they assumed it must have been a short-lived fad, and they returned to their old ways.

Years passed, and one day the King of Dod realized that he was again hearing mutterings and grumblings from the workers. “Egad!” he said to himself. “Are these people never satisfied?”

He hurried back to the King of Commercia and began to complain about a wasted (though fair) fee paid for a process that wasn’t working. Before he could finish, the King of Commercia said, “You didn’t heed my warning about the glue that binds the ten best practices! Risk management won’t work unless everyone does it all the time and the leader of the land shows the way. Your kingdom merely followed your example, your highness.”

### **Embracing the Concept**

The weary monarch finally realized the error of his ways. “You speak truth,” he said sadly. “I delegated without monitoring. I didn’t set the example for how to embed the process into our whole way of life. I didn’t provide my people with training for the process. And I failed to establish the proper infrastructure for them to embrace your sage advice. I failed to push down from the top.”

After a brief moment of introspection, the King of Dod smartly snapped his fingers and began running back to his kingdom, shouting over his shoulder to the King of Commercia, “I shall set up a Risk Central of specially trained risk managers and they shall guide my people in embracing the process!”

### **Moral of the story**

When a leader is too busy to truly embrace a new concept, he or she cannot expect the rank and file to embrace it.

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