

# Risk Management Made Simple

Welcome to the FREE Online Newsletter about **Systematic Risk Management**  
for **executives** and **management professionals**  
from **Risk Wise Inc.** and **Diana Del Bel Belluz**

## May 2010

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"I've been doing risk management for 5 years, and I maintain that Diana is the only one who **knows how to explain it clearly!**"

**Sylvie Moreau**  
Office of Integrated Risk Management  
Health Canada."

## FEATURE ARTICLE: Definitive Risk Management Guidance

By Diana Del Bel Belluz, M.A.Sc., P.Eng.

Recently a member of the Enterprise Risk Management Association on the LinkedIn business networking site asked **What is the preferred enterprise risk guidelines covering all sectors?** This is a question asked by many people who are new to the risk management discipline.

**The truth is, there is no definitive guidance or approach for enterprise risk management (ERM), nor will there ever be.**

While there are principles of ERM that will apply broadly, they can't be applied in the same way in any two organizations. **This is because of the enormous importance of the role of context.** Even organizations in the same sector will differ greatly because of their unique contexts.

For example, two steel companies were located across the street from each other. They were in the same industry and same town, but were vastly different. These 'night and day' **differences began with their organizational cultures** (including their ERM mindsets), **and extended to the employees and suppliers they attracted** (one cultivated a strong relationship with its employees and contractors while the other had a union shop), **their business processes and practices** (one was able to sustain a high degree of innovation while the other was not), **and to their business results** (one was consistently profitable while the other was in and out of bankruptcy protection).

To illustrate the importance of context in understanding behaviour, Nobel Prize winning psychologist **Herbert Simon** used the metaphor of the mind as a pair of scissors. One blade of the scissors represents the brain (i.e., capabilities for perception, analysis, innovation and decision-making) and the other represents the brain's environment (i.e., the decision-making context). We cannot understand the operation of the scissors without understanding the simultaneous movement of both blades. Extending the metaphor, **unless you understand the organizational decision-making context, you cannot influence risk management behaviour.**

Attention to context is critical for effective enterprise and operational risk management because the devil is in the details of implementation. **Successful application of risk thinking to management decision-making requires attention to the interplay between context** (including **both the general** economic and competitive business environment **and the specific** nature and time horizon of the particular issue that must be decided) **and your risk management capabilities** (including your risk culture and your current level of risk management maturity).

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The **Risk Management Spectrum** (see box on opposite page) is a simple tool for understanding the maturity of your organization's risk management capabilities. If you want to enhance your ERM capabilities to move closer to the proactive end of the spectrum, know that **there is no one-size fits all with risk management guidance.**

**Here is my view on how three sources of ERM guidance** each add a valuable perspective on the intersection between **understanding the role of context** and **applying risk management capabilities to strategic and operational decision-making.**

### 1. COSO

While some financial organizations have embraced the COSO (Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission) ERM Integrated Framework, a recent survey<sup>1</sup> of executives working in the area of ERM revealed that **COSO was not considered a key source of information and guidance.** Many risk professionals (myself included) find that the COSO cube is needlessly complex and seems to be aimed more at satisfying auditors than supporting decision-makers.

**COSO does provide a strong linkage to the concepts of risk control.** In an operational context, managers need to ask 'What could stop us from achieving our objectives using our corporate strategy?', not 'Does this strategy effectively balance risk, reward, and costs?' That's because **in an operational context, where reliable execution of strategy is the main objective, an emphasis on control is entirely appropriate.** If you're constantly second guessing your corporate strategies, you'll never execute them efficiently.

### 2. ISO 31000

**ISO 31000** (like AUS/NZ 4360, CSA-Q850) **does a good job of explaining the importance of business context.** Unfortunately, too many practitioners skim over this step and rush to misapply risk assessment tools and then wonder why risk management doesn't gain traction in their organization.

In my view, **the most important contribution of ISO 31000 is that it puts risk management into the context of organizational design.** It includes a helpful discussion of the necessary components of an organization's framework for managing risk and the way in which those components interrelate. **This validates the approach I've used for over a decade to assist clients to build and continually improve their risk management framework and decision-making capabilities.**

**What I find disappointing with most standards** (and many risk management professionals) **is that they start with the implicit premise that the status quo level of risk is either acceptable or too high.** I'm inferring this from the stereotypical risk management options they offer which are along the lines of: 'avoid', 'reduce', 'transfer', and 'accept'. I'm delighted to see that **ISO 31000 includes a 'take or increase risk' option.** As a discipline, risk management professionals need to get comfortable with risk-taking and exploring the upside of risk if we want our discipline to be relevant to executive decision-makers.

### 3. Nonprofit Risk Management Center

**In the context of developing corporate strategy,** an innovation stance is essential for exploring the "opportunity" side of risk. **You need to remove your 'risk control' hat and ask questions such as:**

- Are we taking enough risk to achieve our goals?
- Are we taking the right risks (i.e., risks that will yield the desired type of benefits AND are consistent with our values)?
- Will we get paid enough (in terms of economic or social 'goods') for the risks we are contemplating taking?

A great source of guidance on these types of questions is **Ready... Or Not: A Risk Management Guide for Nonprofit Executives** the new book by **Melanie Lockwood Herman** (see this month's **Bonus Resource** for a review of this book). While it draws on examples from the nonprofit sector, **the concepts in this book are also highly relevant for organizations in the corporate and government sectors.**

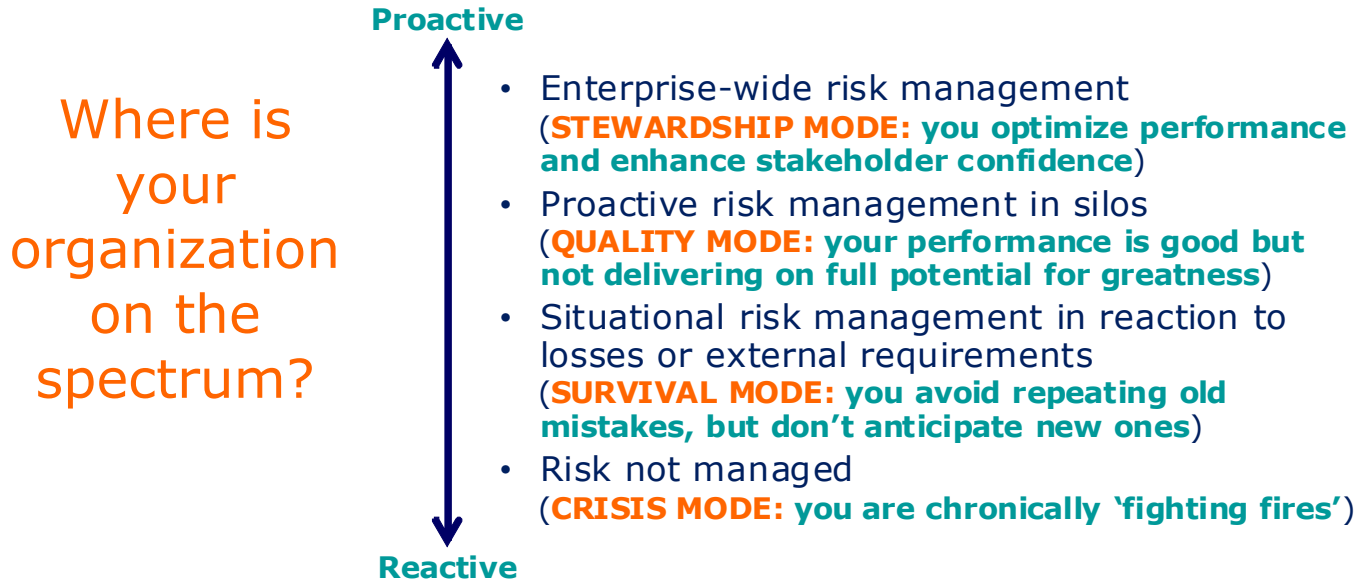
**The Risk Wise bottom line...** If you want your people to display appropriate risk-taking behaviour, **you need to ensure they have the know-how to tailor the application of your risk management tools to suit the context of particular decision they are making.**

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**How well do managers across your organization apply balanced risk thinking to the decisions they make?** To explore how you can enhance your people's abilities to attune their risk management capabilities to the particular context of each business decision they face, contact **Diana Del Bel Belluz** at **Risk Wise**: (416) 214.7598 [Diana.Belluz@riskwise.ca](mailto:Diana.Belluz@riskwise.ca)

<sup>1</sup> John R.S. Fraser, Karen Schoening-Thiessen, and Betty J. Simkins. Who Reads What Most Often? A Survey of Enterprise Risk Management Literature Read by Risk Executives. *Journal of Applied Finance*, 2008.

# The Risk Management Spectrum



## BONUS RESOURCE: Are You Risk Ready... or Not?

If you want a straightforward risk management guide, check out the latest book from **Melanie Lockwood Herman** – *Ready... Or Not: A Risk Management Guide for Nonprofit Executives*. Don't be fooled by the word "nonprofit" in the title, it's loaded with practical explanations and advice on risk management that will be extremely beneficial to executives in the corporate and government sectors!

This book provides a **practical and refreshing perspective on the key challenges of implementing sensible risk management programs**. The private and public sectors have produced guidance documents (e.g., COSO, ISO 31000) that are process oriented and structured around the *mechanics* of risk assessment and the *structure* of their particular management framework. **This book takes a different approach**. It is clearly focused on the *outcomes* of risk management.

**Herman starts with the premise "Why not risk?"** and then walks the reader through the fundamentals of enterprise risk management so that they can answer key questions such as "Why are we here?", "What could go wrong?... or right?", and "What will we do, or not do?". It's rounded out with chapters on: "Culture: Changing our Attitudes and behaviours" (I'm honoured to be quoted in that section), "Risk Communication", and "Stakeholders and Risk", among others.

**"Ready... Or Not" is a powerful thinking tool** rather than a prescriptive handbook. It makes an **excellent companion document to the COSO and ISO 31000** guidance materials, because it fully explores the importance of understanding the context for risk management that is uniquely dictated for each organization by the combination of its mission and its particular environment at any point in time. It is this combination that determines the opportunities, challenges, and risks that an executive must navigate in the development and execution of key corporate strategies.

Based on my 20 years of experience helping clients in the corporate, government and nonprofit sectors to implement proactive and systematic risk management at the operational and enterprise levels, **I highly recommend this book for executives in ANY sector**.

**To order the book**, visit the **Nonprofit Risk Management Center** at: [www.nonprofitrisk.org](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org)

Risk Wise presents a

## Free Webinar

on the book

### Enterprise Risk Management: Today's Leading Research and Best Practices for Tomorrow's Executives

September 20, 2010

12:00pm-1:00pm EDT

### Find out about emerging ERM trends...

Diana Del Bel Belluz will interview **John R.S. Fraser** and **Betty J. Simkins**, the co-editors of the latest ERM textbook published by **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.** The webinar will feature a live Q&A session. **Don't miss your chance to get answers** to questions such as:

- What does the book offer to executives who want to improve the practice of ERM in their organization?
- What important ERM challenges does the book address?
- What does this book add to the ERM literature in terms of new ERM approaches and thinking?
- What are the trends in how ERM is being applied?
- What concepts in the book are thought-provoking and potentially game-changing?
- What are readers saying about the book?

Space is limited. To reserve your spot, visit:

[https://www.riskwise.net/ERM\\_Webinar.html](https://www.riskwise.net/ERM_Webinar.html)

## Upcoming Events: For details visit: <https://www.riskwise.net/Events.html>

- **August 23-26, 2010**, Vancouver, BC - **Process Hazard Analysis (PHA) Leadership Course** from **ClearSky Risk Management**.  
**SPECIAL OFFER: 10% discount** for **Risk Management Made Simple E-Zine** subscribers.
- **September 15-16, 2010**, Ottawa, ON - **The Conference Board of Canada** will present its annual **Intergovernmental Forum on Risk Management Conference**.  
**SPECIAL OFFER: \$300 discount** for **Risk Management Made Simple E-Zine** subscribers.
- **October 10-12, 2010**, Philadelphia, PA - **Risk Management and Finance Summit for Nonprofits**. The **Nonprofit Risk Management Center** will present its annual conference.

## About Us



**Diana Del Bel Belluz**  
President  
Risk Wise Inc.

**Diana Del Bel Belluz, M.A.Sc., P.Eng.**, is a risk management advisor who **helps executives in complex organizations to implement systematic and sustainable risk management practices**. Since 1990, Diana has been doing **leading-edge risk work** for a wide range of organizations in the corporate, government and nonprofit sectors.

In addition, Diana **advances the field of risk management** by **teaching** university courses and management training seminars, **speaking** at conferences and **authoring** publications on a wide range of risk management topics.

**To learn more about Risk Wise**, contact Diana Del Bel Belluz directly at: [Diana.Belluz@riskwise.ca](mailto:Diana.Belluz@riskwise.ca)



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