

HOW TO HANDLE RISKS IN TECHNICAL WRITING



by Oksana Sliusarova (she/her)

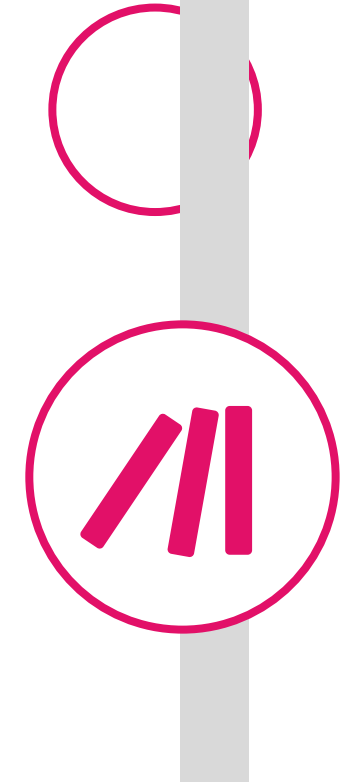
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MYSTERY (detective game)

How did it happen?

What was the **cause** of the person falling?

(Teaser: the banana pill is not the cause.)



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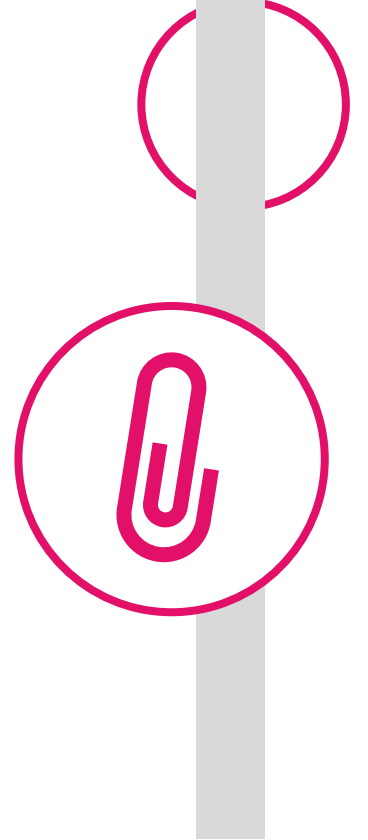
DISCLAIMERS

1 In this presentation, Technical Writing (TW) = Technical Communication.

2 Scope: TW risks on software projects.

3 Risk management is a very broad topic...

ISO 31000—standards related to risk management.



AGENDA

0. Intriguing intro (the mystery)

1. Theory
2. **Examples** of the most common TW risks
3. Stages of working with risks & responses types
4. Risks mitigation **examples**
5. Mystery solved
6. Tips & tricks
7. Call to action



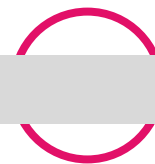
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LIL BIT OF THEORY (from captain Obvious)

Risk involves **uncertainty** about the effects focusing on negative, **undesirable** consequences.
In simple terms, risk is the possibility of something bad happening.

Risks have probability of **80% or less**. Otherwise, they become **issues** (facts).

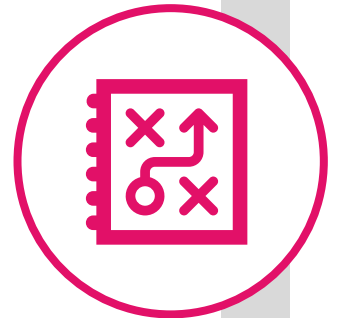


RISKS DO EXIST *(like, always)*

There is no such thing as no risk!

Think about **what can go wrong & why**—what factors can prevent you from delivering consistent documentation on time.

Consider all the **available** & **potential** TW risks on the project.
Especially, the worst-case scenario.

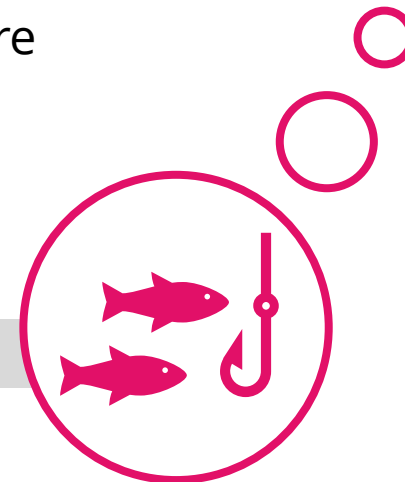


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MOST COMMON RISKS (aka risks checklist)

- Lack of permanent access to the product
- Lack of permanent access to the SMEs
- Lack of information
- Inaccurate TW **estimation**
- Poor **documentation strategy**
- Changes in the priorities & scope of work
- Incomplete TW **guidelines** (DoD, naming convention, tone of voice)
- Seniority level of the TWs
- No **backuping**
- No review & feedback
- Information security (incl. **AI**)
- Communication issues
- Force majeure



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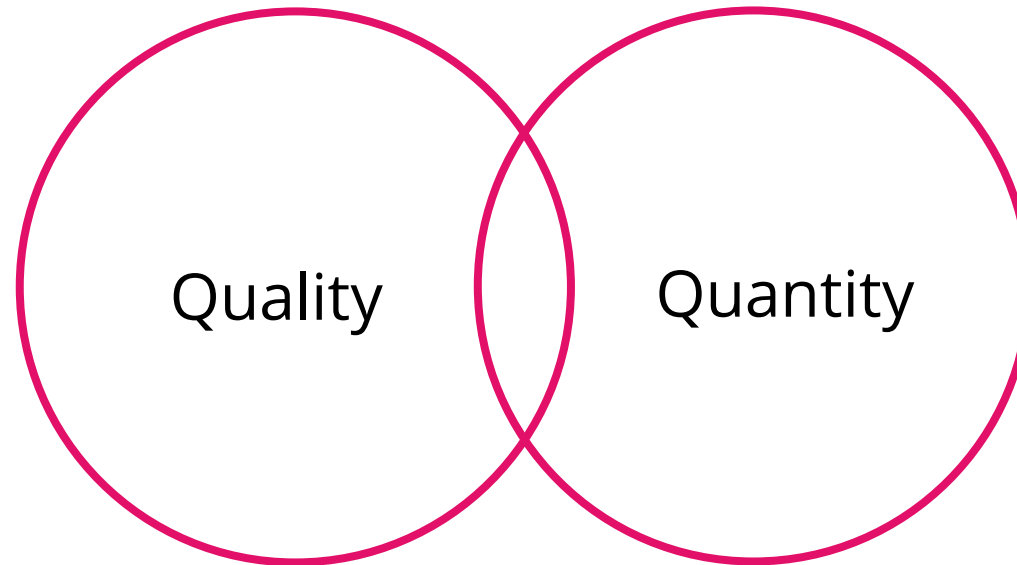


WELL-KNOWN BALANCE (compromise)

Workload

vs.

Tight deadlines

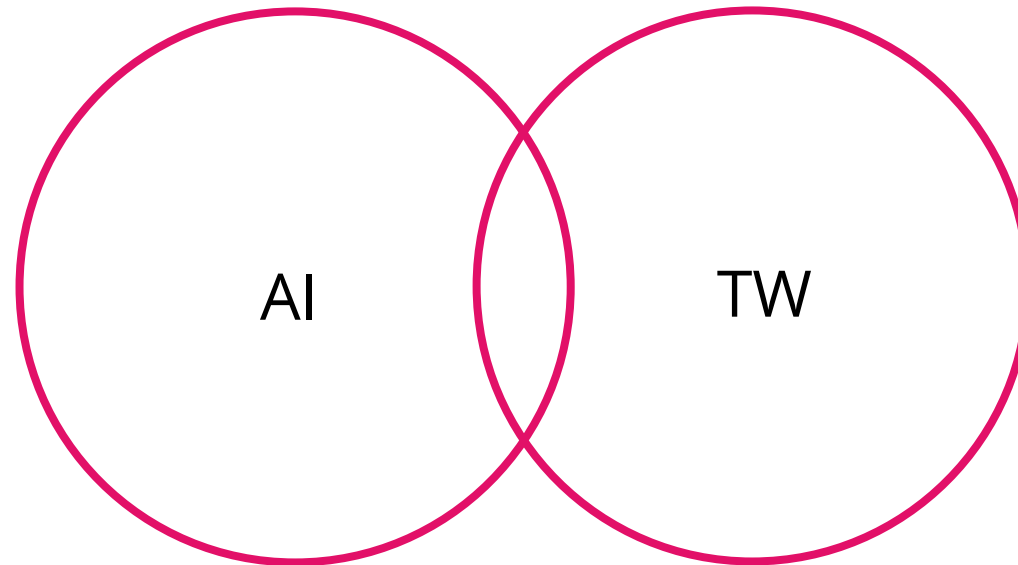




NEW RISK

(Neo is worried)

- ChatGPT
- Midjourney
etc.

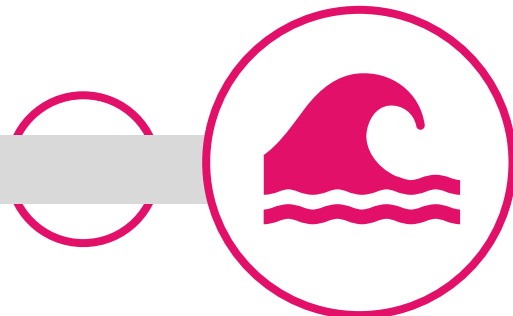


- Exposing sensitive data
- Intellectual property rights
etc.



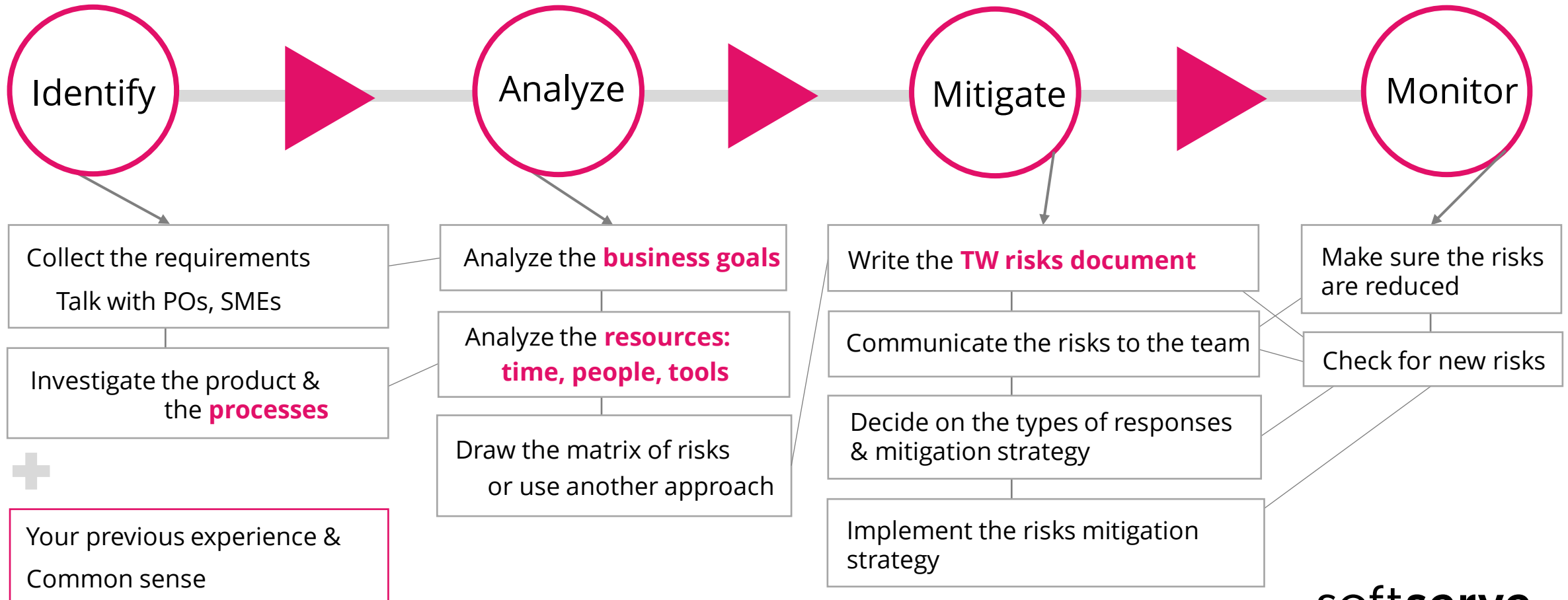
A FEW MORE RISKS (personal experience)

- Lack on onboarding materials
- Tasks outside of the direct responsibilities
- Unreliable **tool**
- Heavy **dependence** on other team members
- Too many communication channels, environments, & different accounts
- Lack of **communication** between the TWs & the CS teams
- Incomplete Tech Writing guides
- Manual synchronization
- Lack of info in Jira tickets
- Combining old & new UI descriptions





STAGES OF WORKING WITH RISKS

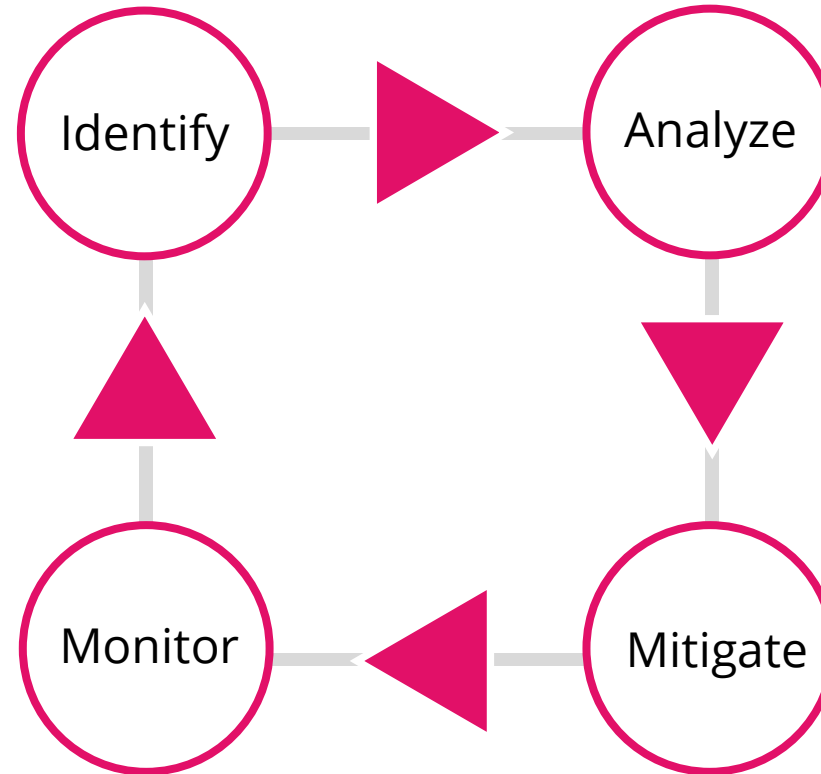


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RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk management is a **nonstop process**.



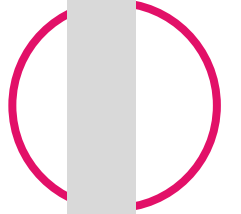
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RISK STATEMENT FORM

If **cause**, then there could be a **risk** resulting in a **consequence**.

If there are no guidelines on the project with several TWs, they will use different approaches, thus there will be no consistency in the documentation, & it will result in the customer dissatisfaction...

(fix the cause, not the risk itself)

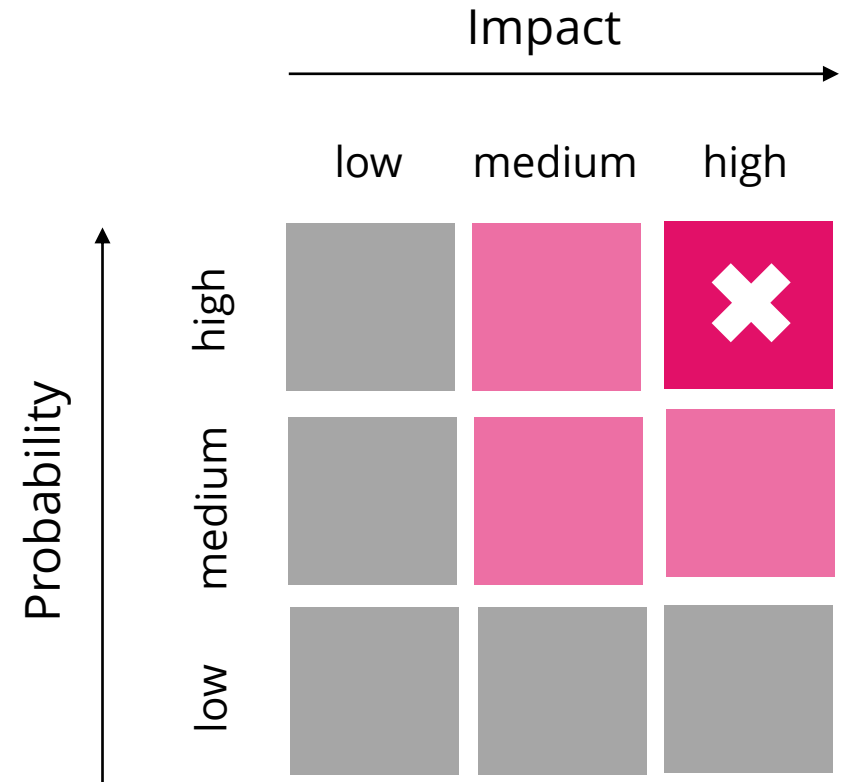




RISKS MATRIX (without Neo)

To define which are the greatest risks, determine the **impact** & the **probability** of a risk occurrence.

You can draw a risk matrix to better visualize the **likelihood of occurring** & the **possible extent of the damage**.

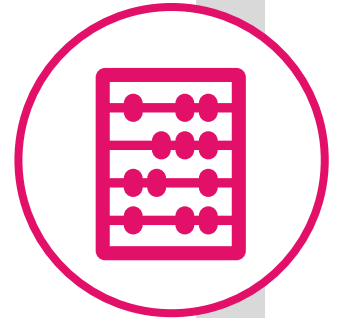


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RESPONSES TO RISKS

The most common response types are:

- **Avoidance** (no, thanks)
- **Reduction** (minimizing the loss)
- **Sharing** (sharing the responsibility)
- **Acceptance** (well, OK)



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MITIGATION (possible actions)

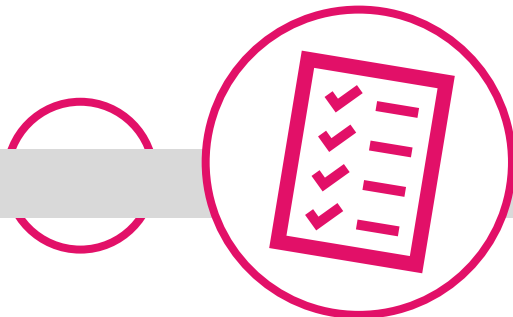
- High workload → Hire another TW (Reduction+Sharing)
→ Back up more often (Reduction)
- Excessive reviews → Skip some meetings (Reduction)
- Unreliable tool → Replace (Avoidance)
- Combining old & new UI descriptions → Add a note to the docs (Reduction)
→ Create DoD & share it (Reduction+Sharing)





RISKS TABLE (example)

| # | Risk | Probability / Impact | Risk statement | Status | Owner | Trigger | Mitigation plan | Backup plan |
|---|------|----------------------|----------------|--------|-------|---------|-----------------|-------------|
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |

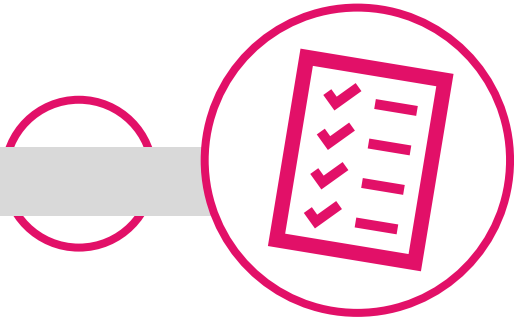




RISKS TABLE (my project)

| # | Risk | Probability / Impact | Risk statement | Status | Owner | Trigger | Mitigation plan | Backup plan |
|---|------|----------------------|----------------|--------|-------|---------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | |

Product



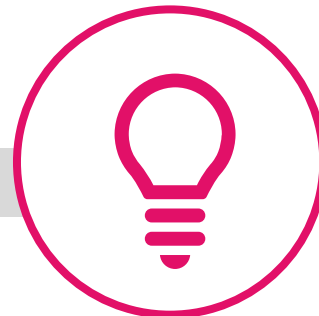


RISK MANAGEMENT

(a danger foreseen is half avoided)

A Tech Writer should:

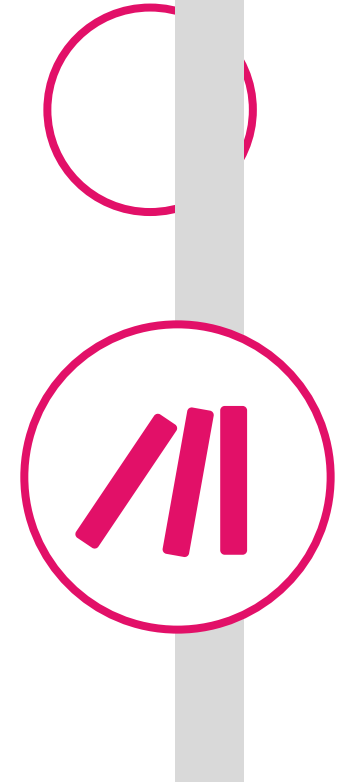
- ✓ **Be fully aware** of the TW risks (distinguish between risks & issues)
- ✓ **Document** them
- ✓ **Communicate** these limitations & assumptions to the team
(PM, PO, stakeholders, your TW teammates, other people involved)



MYSTERY (detective game)

How did it happen?

What was the **cause**?



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MYSTERY SOLVED

If there is a hole in the zoo fence, then a monkey can get away & make a mess.

Cause



Risk



Consequence



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TIPS (fix the cause, not the risk itself)

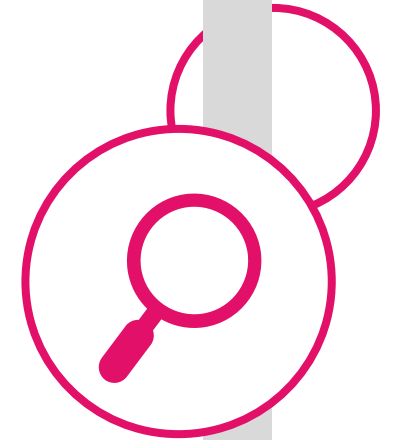
- Word / Excel / Trello
- Share (written form)
- Track (quarterly)
- Doubts show potential risks
- Work with 10 risks max
- Health checks
- Review risks after every change on the project
- Watch for triggers
- Watch for secondary risks
- Plan B, esp. for severe risks



DETECTIVE :)

Treat working with risks as a **game!**

Be your own Sherlock: seek out the clues, investigate, talk with witnesses, prevent further risks.




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QUESTIONS (and your stories)

If you want to ask a question on TW risks or share your thoughts, experience in this area, I'm happy to chat.

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The End

THANK YOU



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