

## WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?

This tool is a risk management tool and follows on from the risk calendar in Tool 1.05.

It will help you to work through the issues raised by the risk calendar and also provides an opportunity for an open discussion by the workgroup.



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### ***In-house, taught sessions on applying the tools can be arranged.***

Enquire about sessions for your department, or team, by emailing

[Dominic.Wallace@sharedservicearchitects.co.uk](mailto:Dominic.Wallace@sharedservicearchitects.co.uk)

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These are pathway seminars to the Postgraduate Certificate in Collaborative Transformation at Canterbury Christ Church University

# Tool: T&VI.06

## WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?

*“If you were a member of staff who wanted to sabotage the development of a shared service how many ways can you think of doing it?”*

Tool T&VI.06 is a risk management tool and follows on from the risk calendar in Tool 1.05.

It will help you to work through the issues raised by the risk calendar and also provides an opportunity for an open discussion by the workgroup that will:

- (a) nurture the trust between partners<sup>1</sup>
- (b) enable your workgroup members to share their personal concerns/fears about the success of the project

If you used Tool 0.04 when organising yourself, then you will see that this is the application of the same principle, but this time to the shared service project as a whole, rather than your own personal appraisal of risk.

The methodology the tool uses has a number of names such as “deconstruction”, “negative problem solving” and “wicked thinking”. The methodology taps into the emotion of negativity we each possess.

Using the feature in our personality that so easily generates criticism, it tempts each of the workgroup to identify what could be made to go wrong (within the law) in your partnership project. We have used this activity several times at this stage in projects and the participants tell us they really enjoyed doing it<sup>2</sup>.

The activity will generate a long list of things that could go wrong, or be legally<sup>3</sup> made to go wrong. Having collected the list of these issues, the group are then asked to create “antidotes” to the key elements of the list.

<sup>1</sup> Huxham and Vangen (2005) p80. On successful shared services, “...nurturing is a continuous focus in actively managing the collaboration”.

<sup>2</sup> Some have even described it a “cathartic” activity. At last they were able to say all those things they had been bottling up.

<sup>3</sup> If you do not introduce the “legally” caveat you will receive suggestions which are too extreme for this activity.

It is the antidotes the workgroup are after, for their risk management. The activity, if well run, will reveal a very creative catalogue of positive actions which can be put in place to make the management of risk successful.

As part of our research, we ran a workshop on shared services with Professor Victor Newman in which he inserted this exercise into the meeting, through the question: “If you were a member of staff who wanted to sabotage the development of a shared service how many ways can you think of doing it?”

The small group of senior managers certainly displayed zeal in their “darker” side by coming up with over fifty sabotaging suggestions.

Some were tongue in cheek. For example “use PRINCE2”, and “give it to the legal department”. Other negative suggestions were more pragmatic – such as “don’t appoint a leader” and “ensure lack of buy-in from the decision makers”.

Fifty ideas were too many to create individual antidotes for, so the group clustered them into 12 common concepts, of which the top five<sup>4</sup> were:

1. Don’t communicate with people outside the workgroup
2. Make sure there is no governance agreed
3. Make decisions without evidence
4. Do not have a clarity of purpose
5. Don’t learn from those who have done it before

Then the group worked on each of the 12 concepts to establish what the antidotes would have to be. For example, in response to the first concept of “Don’t communicate with people outside the workgroup” the group’s agreed antidote was to draft a communication plan that took account of all stakeholders.

<sup>4</sup> Macdonald-Wallace (2008) - Annexe p27. The research was used to inform the skills and knowledge requirements of a shared service architect.

## Step 1 - Understanding the context

*If done well, this is a methodology that is popular with groups, generating a lot of laughter ... it also builds camaraderie and trust.*

They followed through by recommending that someone, with the appropriate skills, resources and time, should be specifically appointed to manage regular communications between the partners and the wider stakeholders who will be impacted by the project activity<sup>1</sup>.

### Managing the outcome

If done well, this is a methodology that is popular with groups, generating a lot of laughter as it lends itself to the slightly cynical and gentle humour of the public sector staff. In doing so, it also builds camaraderie and trust.

More importantly, the activity enables groups to co-create a more comprehensive and insightful risk management register than they would have dreamt up by applying a traditional listing methodology.

However the list of outputs can be very long - fifty or more in our workshop. Therefore some kind of prioritisation has to take place so that the key problems and their antidotes can be handled effectively.

A way of handling that can be to cluster similar issues that are raised. This should distil the number of “ways of making it go wrong” down to a more manageable quantity.

The group could then decide to develop antidotes for a certain number - for example the “top five”. The others could be added to a risk list and further antidotes developed on a priority basis.

The subsequent list of issues and antidotes can be used by project managers to anticipate and diffuse potential issues that could arise during the project journey.

<sup>1</sup> The Three Rivers and Watford Shared Service Joint Committee (2009) p3, seem to have reached the same conclusion as our group, “A Communications officer has been in post since Feb 2009 and the project team is now regularly producing updates for staff within shared services, other council staff at both authorities, and members.”.

### How to use this tool:

Tool T&V1.06 is a risk management tool and follows the risk calendar in Tool 1.05.

**Step 1:** Divide your group into teams of twos or threes, each equipped with post-it notes and a flip chart, or A1 sheet of paper blu-tacked to a wall.

**Step 2:** Ask each person in the session to write down on post-it notes (one suggestion per post-it note) what could be made to go wrong<sup>1</sup> in your shared service project. They should randomly place their post-it notes on their group’s flip-chart sheet. (Give them about 10 minutes)

**Step 3:** Then ask them to discuss their post-it note suggestions in their team and cluster them by common themes. (About five minutes).

**Step 4:** Next, ask them then to draw a two-column table on their flip chart sheet, similar to the one shown on the opposite page. Ask them to write the two headings ‘POISON’ and ‘ANTIDOTE’ at the top of their columns.

In the left hand column they should write a list of their common themes<sup>2</sup> leaving the right-hand column blank.

**Step 5:** Finally, ask them to think of antidotes to the common themes they have identified and to write them into the right-hand column against each theme in their list.

**Step 6:** Each small team then feeds back, to the whole group, their “top five” issues and antidotes.

The subsequent list of issues and antidotes can be used to anticipate and diffuse potential issues that could arise during the project journey.

<sup>1</sup> Interpreted as staying within the law - for example destruction of data or files is too extreme.

<sup>2</sup> If there are a very large number of themes, maybe you could ask them to list their top 5 or top 10 depending on how much time you have.

# Tool:T&VI.06

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**Steps 1 & 2**



**Step 3**



**Steps 4 & 5**

<b>POISON</b>	<b>ANTIDOTE</b>
1. Don't share	Reward shared budgets with extra power
2. Upset unions	Engage with unions from outset. Add them to this team.
3. Refuse to travel	Map where staff live and additional travel costs and look for ways to balance the staff travelling times

**Step 6**

Each small team then feeds back, to the whole group, their 'top five' poisons and first attempt at antidotes.

Project managers can take away the list of issues and antidotes and use them to anticipate and diffuse potential issues that could arise during the project journey.

# Tool:T&VI.06

## USER LOG

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Project & date tool used	What was the desired outcome of using this tool?	What actually happened?	What would you do differently next time?