
Risk Champions: Embedding First-Line Risk Ownership in Business Units Training Course

5 – 9 September 2027
Zoom





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Programme Summary

Risk champions in business units, and the first-line risk ownership they carry, are the subject of this one-week training course for managers and staff appointed to lead risk practice in their teams, ending in a risk champion operating plan for one unit. Many units treat risk as a task for the risk function, so registers age and issues travel upward late. The programme moves from principles, through diagnosis of unit practice, to design of routines and reporting, then to application on one unit. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this risk champions programme for organisations building first-line risk ownership.

The Business Case

A risk champion who knows the unit's work can spot a weak control, a stale register entry or a rising incident pattern long before an audit does. Clear roles, steady routines and agreed escalation thresholds turn scattered local knowledge into information that leadership can act on.

- Risk Visibility: Improves as units maintain current registers and report changes on a steady cycle.
- Escalation Timeliness: Improves as thresholds tell champions when an issue must move upward.
- Oversight Workload: Eases as the risk function receives consistent unit reports instead of ad hoc requests.

Principles and Evidence Base

- IIA Three Lines Model: It defines the first-line, oversight and assurance roles used in Sessions 1 and 4.
- ISO 31000 risk management principles, framework and process: They structure the risk identification and treatment routines in Sessions 2 and 3.
- Risk appetite and tolerance concepts: They anchor the escalation thresholds designed in Session 4.

Intended Participants

- Managers appointed to coordinate risk practice within a business unit or department.
- Staff who maintain unit risk registers and prepare risk updates for leadership.
- Team leaders who take day-to-day decisions that carry operational or financial risk.
- Risk and compliance staff who support and coach networks of unit champions.

The programme serves banking, healthcare, energy, manufacturing and public service organisations, and suits mixed groups.



Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to evaluate the risk ownership split between a business unit and the oversight functions.
2. Participants will be able to diagnose weaknesses in unit risk registers, escalation habits and risk culture.
3. Participants will be able to construct workshop and prompt tools that surface risks early.
4. Participants will be able to prioritise unit risks for escalation using agreed thresholds.
5. Participants will be able to justify a challenge to a unit decision using risk evidence.
6. Participants will be able to design a risk champion operating plan for one business unit.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Risk Champions and the First Line Principles

What does a risk champion own, and what stays with other lines?

- Three Lines Model Role Map
- ISO 31000 Principles and Process Summary
- Risk Champion Role Charter
- Risk Ownership Responsibility Matrix
- Risk Appetite Statement Reading Guide

Day 2: Diagnosing Risk Practice in Business Units

Where does risk ownership weaken inside a business unit today?

- Unit Risk Practice Health Check
- Risk Register Quality Review
- Near-Miss and Issue Log Sampling
- Role Confusion Interview Guide
- Risk Culture Observation Checklist

Day 3: Designing Champion Routines and Tools

Which routines and tools make a champion effective each month?

- Risk Workshop Facilitation Plan
- Risk Identification Prompt Cards
- Key Risk Indicator Tracking Sheet
- Challenge Conversation Script
- Monthly Champion Activity Calendar



Day 4: Reporting, Escalation and Network Design

How does risk information move from a unit to the risk function and leadership?

- Escalation Threshold Table
- Unit Risk Report Template
- Champion Network Charter
- Peer Review Circle Format
- Link to Second Line Reporting Cycle

Day 5: Applying the Champion Plan to One Business Unit

Is the champion plan ready for use by one business unit?

- Applying the Session 2 Health Check to the Chosen Unit
- Testing the Session 3 Workshop Plan in a Practice Session
- Rehearsing the Session 3 Challenge Conversation
- Checking the Session 4 Escalation Table on Sample Cases
- Completing the Risk Champion Operating Plan

Methodology

The programme uses a structured exercise method built on anonymised unit risk registers, incident summaries and escalation cases from several sectors. Participants review real documents in small groups, practise facilitation and challenge conversations with peer feedback, and build tools they can adapt to their own unit. Discussion centres on what a champion should do on an ordinary working week.

- Suggested activity: Reviewing a sample risk register and marking stale or vague entries.
- Suggested activity: Facilitating a short risk workshop with a peer panel.
- Suggested activity: Rehearsing a challenge conversation with a unit manager.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a risk champion operating plan for one business unit. It holds a role charter, a monthly activity calendar, workshop and prompt tools, an indicator tracking sheet, an escalation threshold table and a unit report template. The plan is used to brief the unit manager, start the champion's routines and agree reporting with the risk function.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is risk champions training suitable for staff with no formal risk background?

Yes. Risk champions training starts from the unit's own work and assumes day-to-day operating responsibility, not specialist risk qualifications or technical analysis skills.



Which models do risk champions and first-line risk ownership rest on?

Risk champions and first-line risk ownership rest on the IIA Three Lines Model, ISO 31000 for principles and process, and risk appetite and tolerance concepts.

How is the operating plan from risk champions training used at work?

You use the risk champion operating plan to brief the unit manager, begin monthly routines, set escalation thresholds and agree reporting with the risk function.

How does risk champions training differ from a programme on enterprise risk management?

Risk champions training centres on practice inside one business unit, while enterprise risk management centres on organisation-wide risk strategy, aggregation and reporting.