Make a Risk Matrix You Can Explain

Leader Rebellion · Likelihood × Impact · Risk conversation

A likelihood–impact map with evidence, owners, actions, and a review date.

Open the web tool

Start here

Agree one time horizon and clear meanings for likelihood and impact from 1 to 5. Keep uncertain estimates visible.

Place risks on the map with their evidence. Check severe consequences separately, even when likelihood seems low.

Name an action, an owner, and who can accept the remaining risk. Set a trigger and a date to review the assessment.

Plot the risks on paper

Give each risk a short ID. Place that ID in the grid using your agreed likelihood and impact values. Record its description, evidence, uncertainty, action and owner beside the grid or on another sheet.

Impact increases upwards; likelihood increases to the right.

Impact / Likelihood	1	2	3	4	5
5					
4					
3					
2					
1					

The lower 1–2 / higher 3–5 visual split is a discussion aid, not an acceptance rule. Check severe consequences separately even when likelihood seems low. Follow the relevant policy and name who has authority to accept any remaining risk.

Define the decision and time horizon

What event or project are you considering? Use the same horizon for every risk.

Define likelihood and impact

Use 1–5 with agreed meanings. Record uncertainty. The map splits lower 1–2 from higher 3–5; that visual split does not replace your organization's policy.

Choose action beyond the score

Avoid, reduce, transfer/share where appropriate, or accept with authority. Name an owner and a check on residual risk.

Set triggers and a review date

What new evidence, incident, or change would reopen the assessment?

A question to keep

Could a reassuring color hide a consequence we should not accept?

Worked example — fictional

Define the decision and time horizon

The next four weeks of a small service-process trial.

Define likelihood and impact

Likelihood: 1 rare in this trial, 3 plausible, 5 expected. Impact: 1 easily recovered, 3 significant service disruption, 5 severe consequence. Escalate severe hazards through the required process regardless of color.

Choose action beyond the score

Add a backup approver and test access before launch. The service owner confirms whether remaining risk is acceptable.

Set triggers and a review date

Review weekly and immediately if access fails on a live shift. Record what changed and whether controls worked.

Behind the tool

Likelihood–impact matrices are common risk-discussion aids. This original tool uses transparent ordinal scales and retains evidence beside the map. Multiplying ratings does not create a measured probability or expected loss, and different risks can require different escalation despite similar positions.

Ask who bears the consequence and who has authority to accept it. People carrying a risk should have a voice in describing and reducing it.

You Have a Culture Problem — Nic Payne

Keep only notes that are useful and appropriate to share.

Hope is rebellious.