Culture, Psychology, and Motivation:
Getting Program Decision-Makers to Use and be Part of Risk Management Processes

Ray Williams
Software Engineering Institute
Carnegie Mellon University
rcw@sei.cmu.edu
The Problem

• Decision-makers don’t participate
  – Managing risks ≠ risk management
• The real risks aren’t in the risk repository
• Risk management is detached from mainstream project work
• Compliance (with standards, policies, models) masks ineffectiveness
• Formal risk management can be more harmful than no risk management
Reasons for the Problem

• Culture
  – Multiple, tiered perspectives on risk
  – Artificial distinction between “problems,” “issues,” and “risks.”
  – History of uselessness

• Psychology
  – PM is “shield for crap from above”
  – Use of single, public risk repository
  – Exposure to oversight & scrutiny
Reasons for the Problem

• Motivation
  – Plausible deniability
  – Not wanting to petition for “acceptable risk” status
Addressing the Reasons

• **Culture**
  – Having the “right cultural source” for risk management practice
  – Continual reinforcement from above

• **Psychology**
  – Multiple, distributed databases in risk repository
  – Guarantee of privacy at team and individual level
  – Allowing explicit acceptance of risks

• **Motivation**
  – Appropriate metrics
The Way Forward

• New leadership in risk management practices
• Manage programs by managing the risks
• Emphasize *effectiveness* rather than *compliance*
• Always assume that trust does not exist, and that it must be earned