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Risk Management Is a Skill: Practicing Professional Judgment Through Real-World Project Scenarios

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The core thesis

Risk management is the practice of professional judgment

Technical expertise answers the question in front of you.

Professional judgment considers what might be around the corner.

Professional judgment is a skill.

Skills are built through reps.

Experienced professionals must give their people the reps — and mentor them through those reps.

Scenario 1 — Quick Due Diligence

REP 1

Scenario 2 — Value Engineering – Stormwater System

REP 2

Scenario 3 — Cracked CMU Walls

REP 3

From practice reps to a framework

The three scenarios were reps in professional judgment.

The six prescriptions give us a framework for thinking and talking about the reps.

The Six Prescriptions – A Framework

1	**Evaluate risk — continuously**	Risk evaluation never ends
2	**Scope of work**	Be clear about what you will - and will not - do.
3	**Contracts**	Give your legal team a fair hand if the contracts ever become necessary.
4	**Construction document quality**	Quality comes from process, culture, and judgment.
5	**Construction administration**	Recognize roles and responsibilities.
6	**Communication**	A professional skill that requires deliberate practice.

The common thread

Good risk management depends on recognizing when the technical answer isn't enough.

- ask the right questions;
- consider what could happen next;
- look beyond the technical answer;
- recognize when your role or the problem is changing.

There is no checklist that can do all of that.

Standard of Care and Risk Management

Meeting the standard of care does not make a project dispute-proof.

These scenarios are intended to develop professional judgment –
not to determine negligence or whether the standard of care was met.

Good risk management can reduce the likelihood and consequences of disputes. That's the goal.

The leadership responsibility

If risk management is the practice of professional judgment, then developing judgment is a leadership responsibility.



This is what leadership needs of experienced professionals.

A mentoring vignette

Reserve vignettes: there are dozens of these

- Owner asks engineer to hire geotechnical engineer as a subconsultant.
- Stormwater vault submittal includes structural calculations and the wrong volume.
- Sequencing plans: what should be shown, and what should not?
- Adjacent properties, property-line work, condos, and untracked submittals.

AI changes the reps

AI may compress some of the ordinary experiences through which engineers have traditionally developed judgment.

- calculations
- modeling
- drafting
- routine analysis

The leadership question:

What reps must we create intentionally when traditional reps are compressed?

Build the culture

The objective is professionals who recognize when judgment is required – and a culture that expects them to act on it.

- Something does not make sense.
- The situation has changed.
- The consequences could be significant.
- This is outside my experience.
- I need another perspective.
- We need to slow down.

Leadership Responsibility

Give the reps.
Mentor the reps.
Build the culture.

That is how professional judgment develops.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Risk management is the practice of professional judgment.

Judgment is built through reps.

Give the reps. Mentor the reps. Build the culture.

Thank you

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