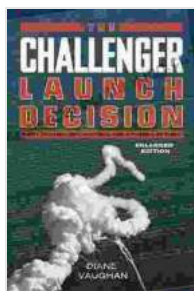


# The Challenger Launch Decision: A Case Study in Risk and Management

On January 28, 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded shortly after liftoff, killing all seven crew members. The disaster was the result of a series of failures, including a faulty O-ring seal in the shuttle's solid rocket booster. NASA's decision to launch the Challenger despite warnings from engineers about the O-ring problem has been the subject of much debate and controversy.



## The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA, Enlarged Edition

by Diane Vaughan

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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This article examines the Challenger launch decision in detail, providing a thorough analysis of the events that led to the disaster. It also discusses the lessons that can be learned from the Challenger tragedy about risk and management.

## **The Events Leading to the Challenger Disaster**

The Challenger disaster was the result of a series of failures, including a faulty O-ring seal in the shuttle's solid rocket booster. The O-rings were designed to prevent hot gases from leaking from the booster joints.

However, the O-rings were not designed to withstand the cold temperatures that were present on the morning of the launch. As a result, the O-rings failed, allowing hot gases to leak from the booster joint and ignite the shuttle's external fuel tank.

In addition to the O-ring failure, there were a number of other factors that contributed to the Challenger disaster. These factors included:

- The shuttle's design was flawed. The shuttle's external fuel tank was made of aluminum, which is a lightweight material but is also very flammable. The shuttle's solid rocket boosters were also made of aluminum, which made them susceptible to damage from the hot gases that were produced by the boosters.
- NASA's management culture was flawed. NASA's management was under pressure to launch the Challenger on time, and they were willing to take risks in Free Download to meet their deadline. NASA's engineers were not given enough time to properly test the shuttle's design, and they were not given enough authority to make decisions about the shuttle's safety.
- The weather conditions on the morning of the launch were not ideal. The temperature was cold, and there was a strong wind. These conditions made it more difficult to launch the shuttle safely.

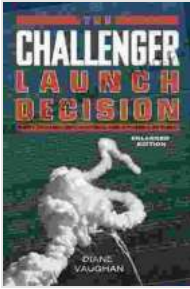
## **The Lessons Learned from the Challenger Disaster**

The Challenger disaster was a tragedy that could have been avoided. The disaster was the result of a series of failures, including a faulty O-ring seal in the shuttle's solid rocket booster, a flawed design, a flawed management culture, and unfavorable weather conditions. The disaster taught NASA and other organizations a number of lessons about risk and management, including:

- **The importance of risk assessment.** NASA failed to properly assess the risks of launching the Challenger in cold weather. As a result, the disaster was a preventable tragedy.
- **The importance of design safety.** The Challenger's design was flawed, making it susceptible to failure. NASA should have taken more steps to ensure that the shuttle was safe before launching it.
- **The importance of management oversight.** NASA's management culture was flawed, allowing the organization to take unnecessary risks. NASA should have had a more rigorous management oversight process in place to prevent the Challenger disaster.
- **The importance of ethical decision making.** NASA's decision to launch the Challenger despite warnings from engineers was an unethical decision. NASA should have put the safety of the crew first and delayed the launch until the shuttle was safe to fly.

The Challenger disaster was a tragedy that could have been avoided. The disaster taught NASA and other organizations a number of lessons about risk and management. These lessons are important for all organizations to remember, especially those that are involved in high-risk activities.

By following the lessons learned from the Challenger disaster, organizations can help to prevent future tragedies.



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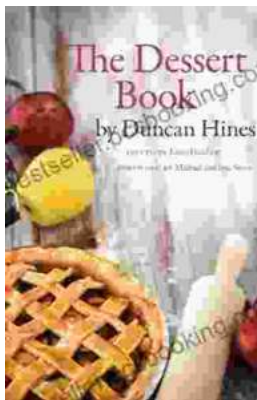
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