



Risk communication

Flavie GOUTARD – UR AGIRs, CIRAD
goutard@cirad.fr



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Risk Communication

- ❑ Providing information about the expected type and magnitude of an outcome resulting from a behavior or exposure
 - ❑ Typically an adverse outcome and probability of that outcome occurring for an individual
 - ❑ In an *E. coli* outbreak example, risk communication would be used to disseminate information about a person's likelihood of contracting the disease and what actions could increase or decrease that likelihood
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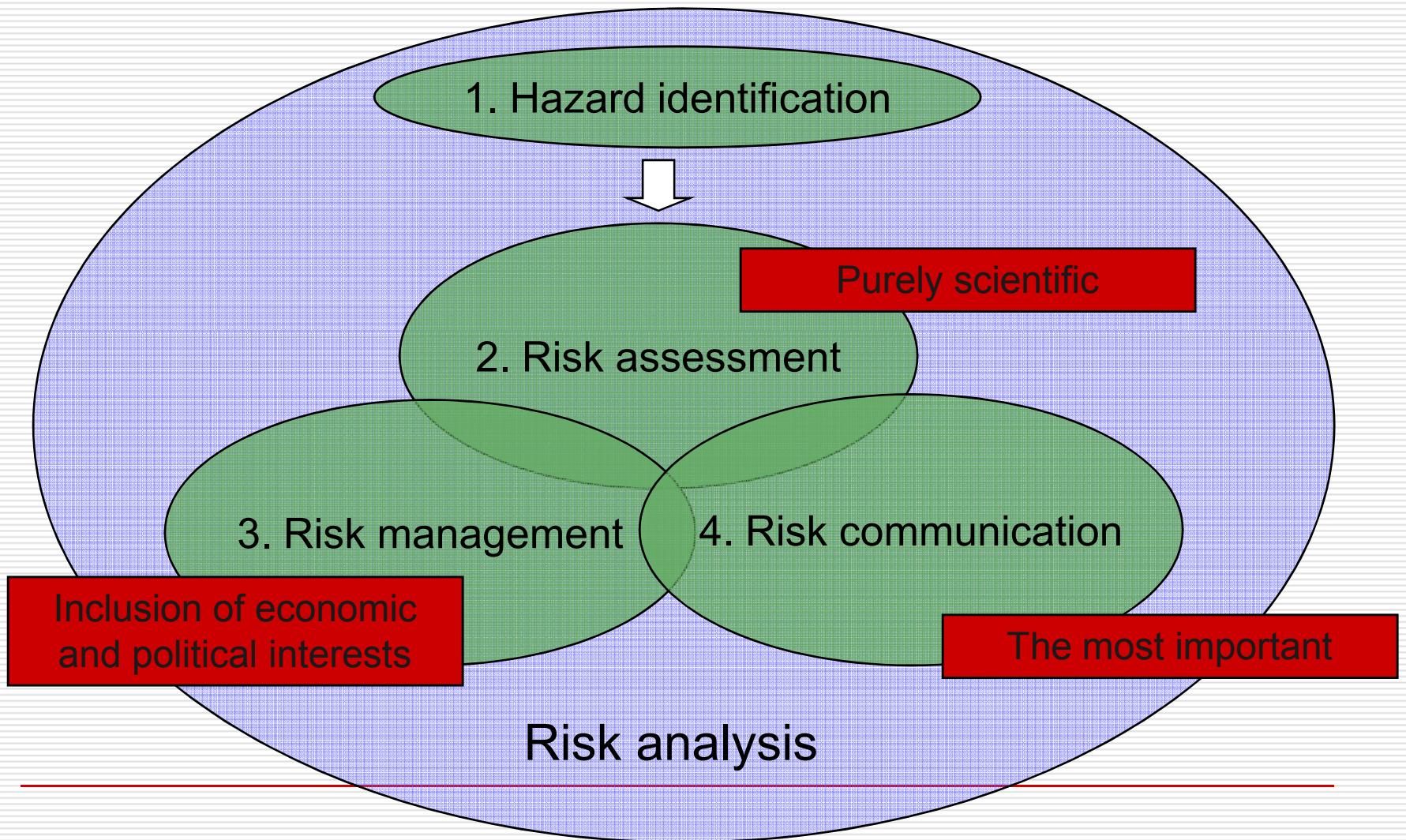
Communication: Health vs. Risk vs. Crisis

- Health: prevent disease, promote good health behaviors—long time frame

 - Risk communication: inform the public
 - Provide information about health affects
 - ID the hazard, explain the situation

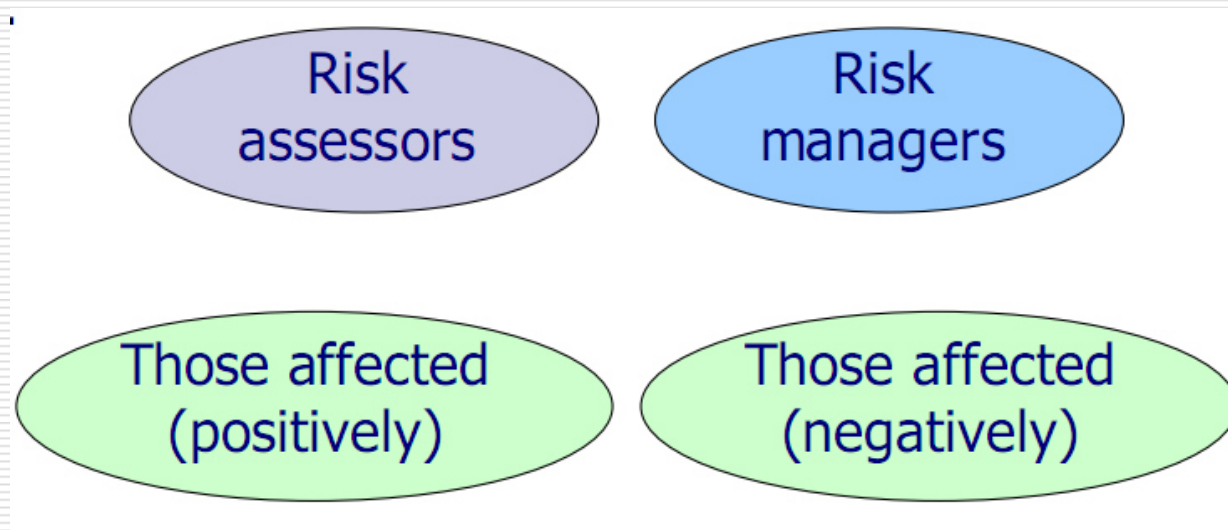
 - Crisis communication:
 - Has all the concerns above but higher emotional component, shorter time frame
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Risk communication as component of risk analysis



Risk communication: between whom?

Information exchange between risk assessors, risk managers and those affected by both the risk and the decisions taken before the final policy decisions are taken.



Risk communication: between whom?

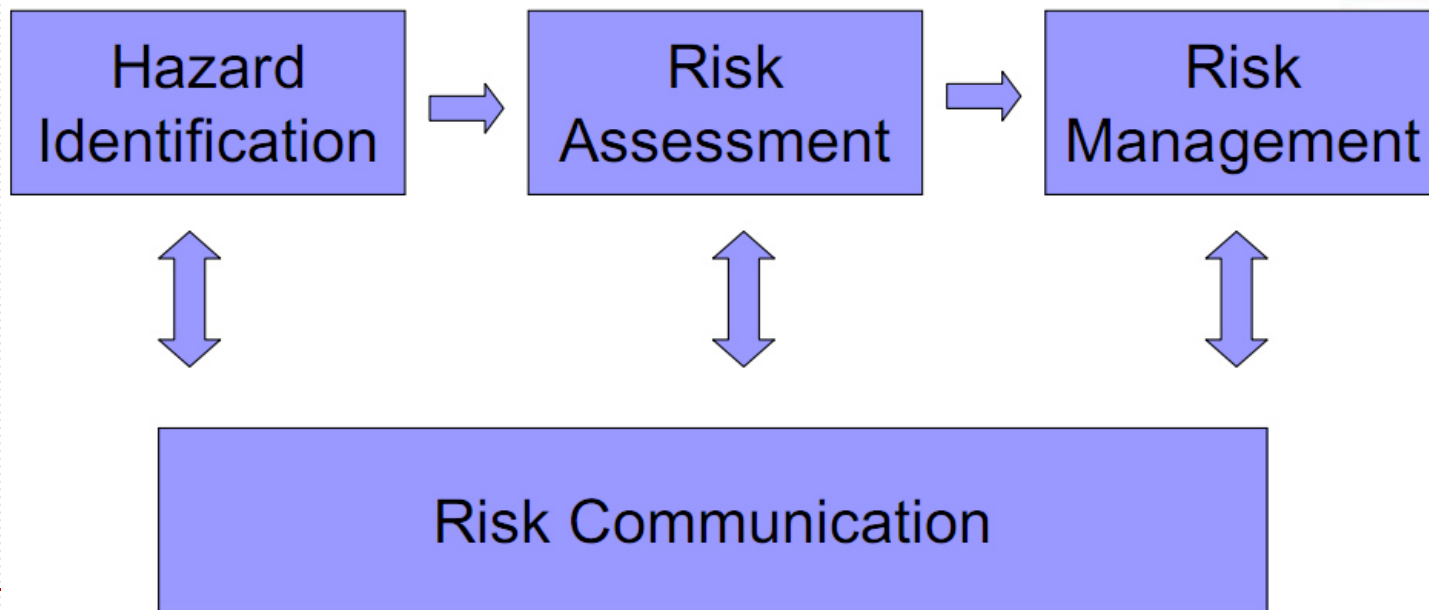
Ex:

- Public Health Administrations
 - International organisations
 - Public and consumer organisations
 - Academia and scientific institutions
 - Media
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Risk communication as component of risk analysis

□ Risk communication: when?

Ideally at the beginning of the risk analysis to ensure that all stakeholders are provided with an opportunity to become involved in the process



OIE Animal Health Code

Risk communication as component of risk analysis

Components of Risk Analysis

Risk communication as a component of risk analysis is a interactive exchange of information and opinions concerning risk assessment and management between risk analysts and stakeholders.

Setting up a communication strategy

- Identifying stakeholders
 - Providing stakeholders with the opportunity to participate
 - Providing information to stakeholders
 - Establishing expertise in risk communication
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Why is risk communication important?

- To avoid uncertain situations which raise concern
 - To avoid information vacuum that may be filled by media or stakeholders group. Once established, public perceptions are difficult to reverse.
 - To build or regain trust
 - To achieve agreement and facilitate risk management
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Why risk communication is difficult?

- Source problems
 - Limitation of communication skills
 - Lack of trust and credibility
 - Use of technical language
 - Limited understanding of what the audience needs
 - Channel problems
 - Selective and biased media reports
 - Emphasis on drama, conflict
 - Premature disclosure
 - Receiver problems
 - Perception of risk
 - Lack of interest in technical complexities (black-white answer)
 - Unrealistic expectations about potential of risk assessment and effectiveness of risk management
 - Desire for scientific certainty
 - Difficulty to understand probabilistic information
 - Resistance to change
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Gap between risk perceived by experts and the public

Experts

Based on risk assessment

Scientific

Objective

Rational

Average

Probabilistic

Public

Based on perceptions

Intuitive

Subjective

Emotional

Individual consequences

Yes / No (lack of interest in technical complexity)

Divergence in risk perception between experts and public considered to be not as simple as initially thought.

Mixed messages

- Difficulty in making probabilistic data understandable: wide variation in understanding of probabilistic information by individuals

 - Differences in understanding of terminology by risk analysts and the public: dual meaning of terms (technical vs. colloquial) that may result in 'mixed messages' (Jardine and Hrudey, 1997):
 - Risk
 - Safety vs. Zero Risk
 - Association vs. Causation...
- (Jardine C.G., Hrudey S.E. Mixed Messages in Risk Communication. 1997. Risk Analysis, 17: 489-498)
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Outrage factors

- ❑ Used in public policy
 - ❑ Portion of public opposition to a policy which does not derive from knowledge of technical details.
 - ❑ Institutional stakeholders: focus on risk-benefit or cost-benefit analysis of policy
 - ❑ Popular risk perception is not informed by the same concerns
 - ❑ If you want the support and cooperation of general public, you need to address these outrage factors
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Risk= Hazard + Outrage

Perception of Risk

Paul Slovic

Science, New Series, Volume 236, Issue 4799 (Apr. 17, 1987), 280-285.

Low risk	High risk
Voluntary Under individual control Natural Clear benefits Fairly distributed Familiar Affect adults	Involuntary, imposed Controlled by others Man-made Little or no benefit Unfairly distributed Exotic Affect children

Outrage management

- ❑ People weigh outrage according to their values
 - ❑ Reducing outrage will help to reduce perceived risk
 - ❑ OUTRAGE prediction & management software
 - Description of the management process
 - Selection and characterization of stakeholders
 - Prediction of outrage per stakeholders
 - Proposition some solutions and management alternatives to get outrage down
 - ❑ www.psadman.com
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Trust Determination Theory

- ❑ When people are upset they often distrust that others care about them
 - ❑ Higher emotion / distrust means more demand for consistently empathetic communication
 - ❑ Credibility:
 - Typically high for health professionals
 - Based on perception as empathetic and caring
 - Determined within the first 9-30 seconds
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Building Trust: Body Language

- ❑ Body language can override verbal communication
 - ❑ Listeners get up to 75% of the message content from body language:
 - Use good eye contact
 - Keep your voice low and calm
 - Don't sit back in your chair
 - Don't cross your arms across your chest
 - Don't frequently touch your hands to your face
 - Don't drum or tap your hands or feet
 - Don't rest your head in your hand
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Risk Communication Tips

- Accept and involve the public as a partner
 - Give people a chance to express their concerns.
 - Provide the public with information.
- Listen to the public's specific concerns
 - If you listen to people early and often, they are less likely to make demands.
 - Separate public disagreement with policies from misunderstanding of technical issues.
- Speak clearly and with compassion
 - ~~Pay as much attention to your process for dealing with people as you do to explaining~~

Risk Communication Tips

- Be honest, frank, and open
 - Release and discuss information about options and involve communities in strategies in which they have a stake.
 - Why should I have to worry about communication? This isn't my job!
 - You have a responsibility to the public. Learn to integrate communication into your job and help others do the same.
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Message Development

When creating a message, consider:

Audience	Purpose of Message	Method of Delivery
Relationship to event	Give facts / update	Spokesperson (TV, other)
Demographics	Rally to action	Print media
Level of outrage	Clarify event status	Web
	Address rumors	Radio
	Satisfy media requests	

Respond to Questions

- Consider how to answer general questions and specific inquiries
 - Be prepared
 - Track your key messages
 - Keep your answers short and focused
 - Practice self-management
 - Speak and act with integrity
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Example: Create a Message

- ❑ A new virulent strain of Type A influenza has caused 1500 infections and 150 deaths in India and in the past 3 days, people have become ill in Hanoi
- ❑ Today, 30 area residents were admitted to the hospital with high fever, difficulty breathing, and severe pneumonia; lab results will be available in 12-24 hours
- ❑ No vaccines or drugs are known to be effective
- ❑ Symptoms are treatable with supportive medical care
- ❑ Public health is operating on the assumption that this is the same flu reported in India
- ❑ Public health is working closely with hospitals and medical staff to identify other cases

Example: Create a Message

1. Expression of empathy and caring

“We’ve all been hearing news about the flu, and we’re concerned about what we might be facing in our communities.”

2. Confirming facts

“Today, 30 people were admitted to hospitals with high fever, difficulty breathing, and severe pneumonia.”

Example: Create a Message

3. What you don't know about the situation

"We suspect it is the same influenza that has recently appeared in India but we cannot conclusively identify this disease at this time."

4. Process to deal with the problem

"However, specimens have been sent to the state laboratory and we are awaiting the results. In the meantime, we have brought together the best medical and scientific expertise to care for the sick, learn the cause of their illness, and if it is a contagious disease, work to contain it."

Example: Create a Message

5. Statement of commitment

“This is a process that is going to take a little time. We will update the public on any information as it comes to light.”

6. Where people can get more information

“We have established a public health hotline to answer people’s questions and have important information on our Web site. The number to call is 1-800-555-1FLU, or visit www.FluInfo.gov.”

Summary

To get your message to the public, keep messages clear, short, consistent, and memorable.

When delivering your message, remember that your audience is human: speak with compassion and show your personal concern, in addition to presenting facts and instructions.



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