TRIAL VERSION

Risk communication workbook

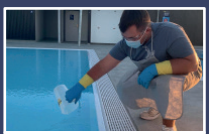
HOW TO ENSURE YOUR RISK COMMUNICATIONS SERVE THE COMMUNITIES YOU ARE INFORMING

Every day, people make decisions about how to manage risks.
For communities to keep themselves safe requires clear, actionable information **– Risk know-how**

This workbook provides you with practical questions to review your risk communications: what do you know about the context you are putting information into, and what do you need to provide for people to make sense of your risk calculations? Achieving this will reduce frustrations about communities not acting on risk information, avoid common misunderstandings and reduce people's frustration at not getting useful or actionable information.

A community can be a group of people in a geographical location, from a particular demographic group, or people connected by a given activity. Providing communities with Risk know-how empowers them to understand and make decisions about risks in their own context so they can:

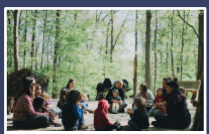
Ask questions about specific risks



Find suitable and reliable risk information

Understand how the framing of the information can be manipulated

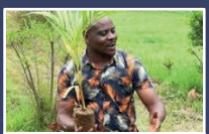
Understand information about the magnitude of a risk and the effectiveness of a response



Not be surprised by the consequences of a decision made regarding risks

Make reasonable comparisons between the potential benefits and harms of acting or not acting – understanding the trade-offs

Appreciate the danger of following information that confirms what we prefer or believe without challenging it



Be aware that the available risk information can change, and therefore decisions based on it can change too

Respect that every person has unique risk and benefit trade-offs, and not everyone has the opportunity to act upon risks

Understanding your audience and their context

Information context

In this community, how do people get information about risks and safety?

What information do you have about which sources they trust?

What risks are they most concerned about?

In the case of geographical regions, what do surveys such as the World Risk Poll and others show?

What are reliable sources of information for this community on this topic? Can they be accessed easily?

How likely is information to change and how will you communicate this?

What do they need/want to know? What decisions might they need to make?

Are there misconceptions that need to be addressed?

Action context

How would an understanding of your information benefit the community?

What past experiences might inform the way the community responds to your information?

What actions would show that your information is understood? Can people take them?

What other risks and benefits (trade-offs) will the community take into account? How significant are these compared to the risk you are communicating about?

Understanding your information

1. Have you clarified the scope of the risk?

a. What is the potential impact or consequence?

b. What factors might be contributing? How might they interact?

c. Who or what could be affected?

d. Over what time frame? Will the risk get worse?

2. Do your numbers help to understand the risk?

a. What is the absolute risk? (i.e. the overall risk, not just the increase or decrease in a risk)

b. Is it presented using expected frequencies with the same denominator?

E.g.: 3 out of 50 versus 4 out of 50

Not: 1 out of 12 vs 1 out of 17

Have you replaced any low percentages (smaller than 1%) with expected frequencies, which are easier to comprehend?

c. How many people (or properties or creatures, etc) are exposed to each situation?

d. How can you help people comprehend a very small or very large number?

e. What is a relevant comparison to put the risks in perspective?

E.g.: the risk of developing blood clots from a vaccine vs the risk of developing blood clots from the disease

Not: the risk of developing blood clots from a vaccine vs the risk of dying in a car crash

f. What kind of average was used (mean, median, mode)? Have you specified this? What other information needs to be shared about the full data set and the range of values from which the average was calculated, to give a clear picture of what to expect?

g. If you're communicating single event probabilities (such as, 'there is a 30% chance of rain'), can you explain what this means in words as well as numbers?

h. What misunderstanding might arise from conditional probabilities (e.g., a false alarm does not mean that a system is flawed)? What is the number of false positives and false negatives, and in what scenario?

3. Does your risk communication empower your community to make decisions in their own context?

a. Are all significant potential benefits and harms included? What information do you need to add about whether these are straightforward comparisons?

b. In the case of a population risk, can you also indicate what the risks are to an individual?

c. What are common misunderstandings or incorrect ideas about the risk?

d. Where should people go for more information about the risk and data you are communicating?

About Risk know-how

Find out more about the Risk know-how initiative, meet risk know-how practitioners from around the world and access the full framework and other useful resources on how to explain and communicate about different risk concepts at:

www.riskknowhow.org

Risk know-how is an initiative by:

Lloyd's Register Foundation

SENSE about SCIENCE
Because evidence matters

NUS National University of Singapore
Lloyd's Register Foundation Institute for the Public Understanding of Risk