

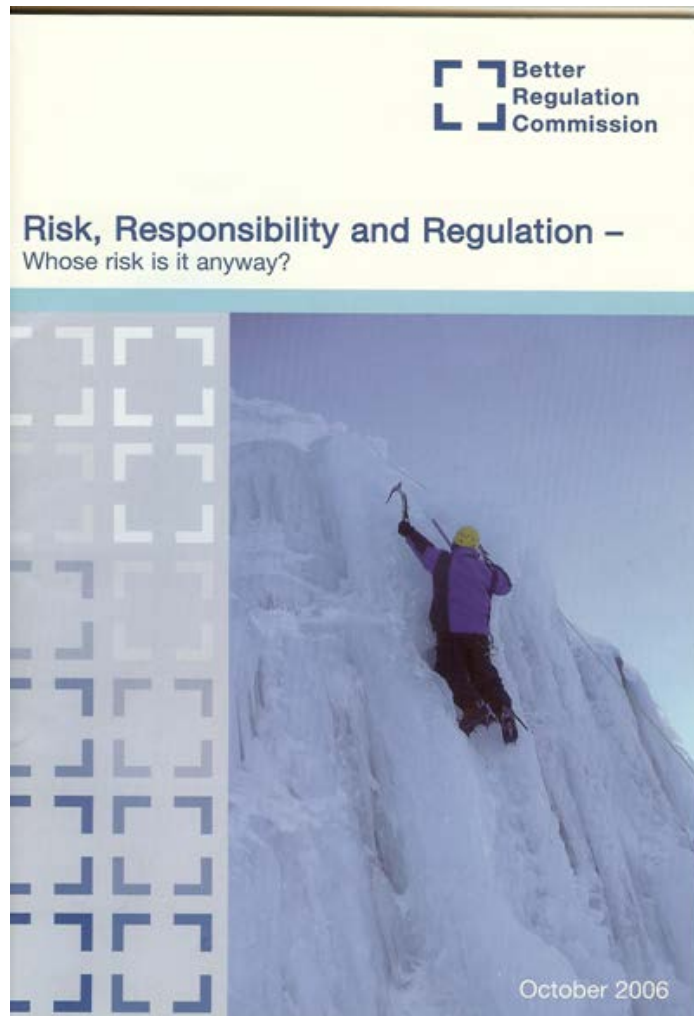
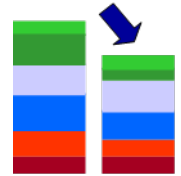
# Public Risk as Political Hazard

Donald Macrae

Rethinking Regulation Conference

Paris, 13 October 2014

# The BRC Risk Report

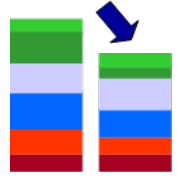


In 2006, the UK's Better Regulation Commission produced The Risk Report, a seminal work illustrating bad regulatory responses to disasters and crises.

It was very readable and popular but it didn't appear to be actionable.

It set out the problem but no solution.

# The Risk and Regulation Advisory Council



The BRC was wound up but succeeded by the RRAC, with a remit to implement the Risk Report, in 18 months.

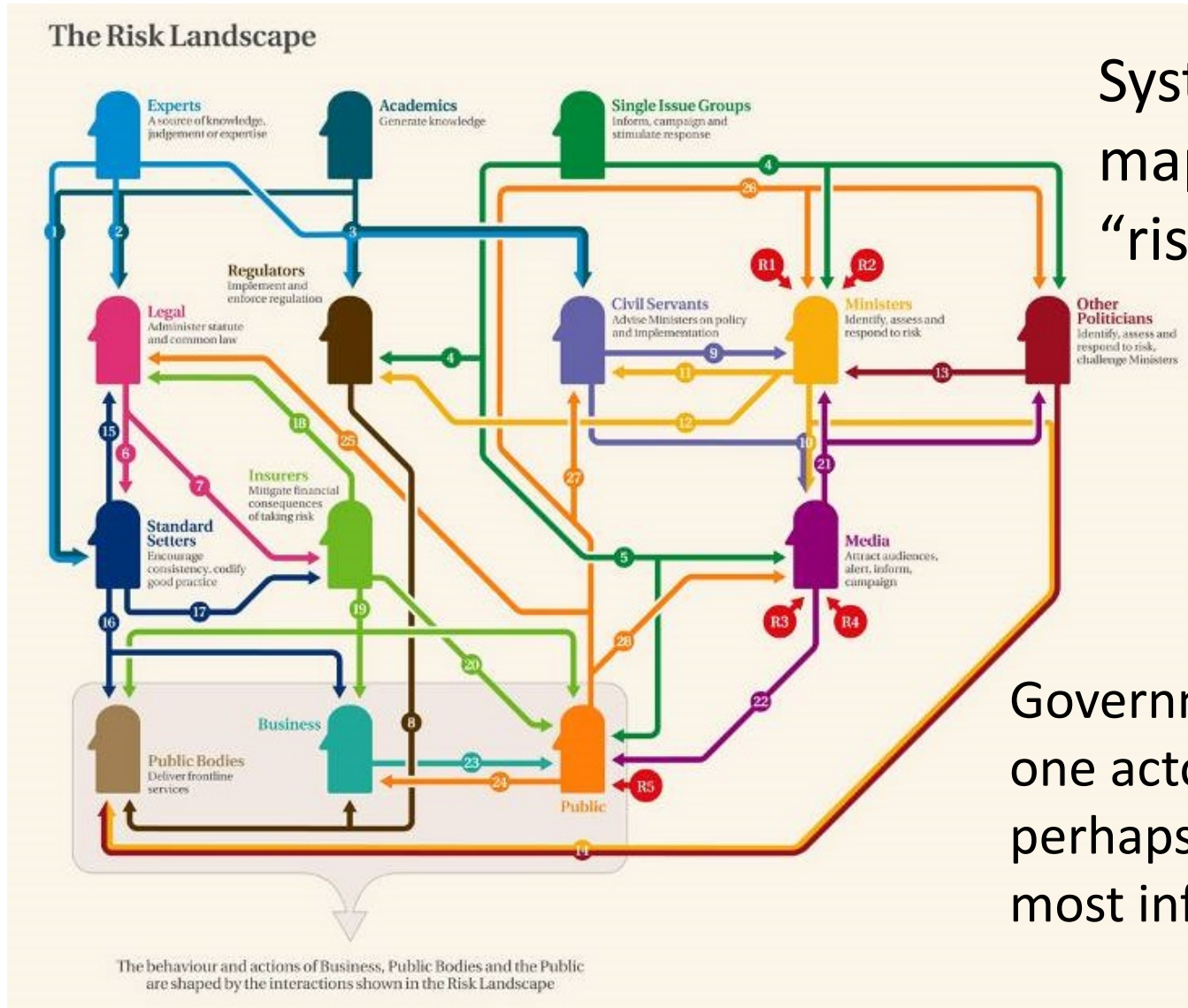
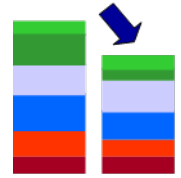


It invented the term “Public Risk” and defined it as follows:

*those risks that may affect any part of society and to which government is expected to respond*

It was defined by reference to public anxiety therefore the content could be anything. The essential problem was seen as being how to help Ministers respond to heightened public anxiety without producing bad regulation.

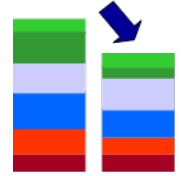
# The Risk Landscape



Systems mapping of “risk actors”

Government is only one actor – and perhaps not the most influential.

# The Dutch Follow-Up



risico  
regel  
reflex



Ministry of the Interior and  
Kingdom Relations

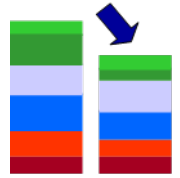
The RRAC produced good research but failed to have any political impact.

But they inspired the Dutch to set up a four year “Risk and Responsibility Programme” based on what they called:

## “The Risk Regulation Reflex”

defined as *“the pitfall of disproportionate government safety interventions following an incident or publication of a risk”*.

# Public Risk / Political Hazard

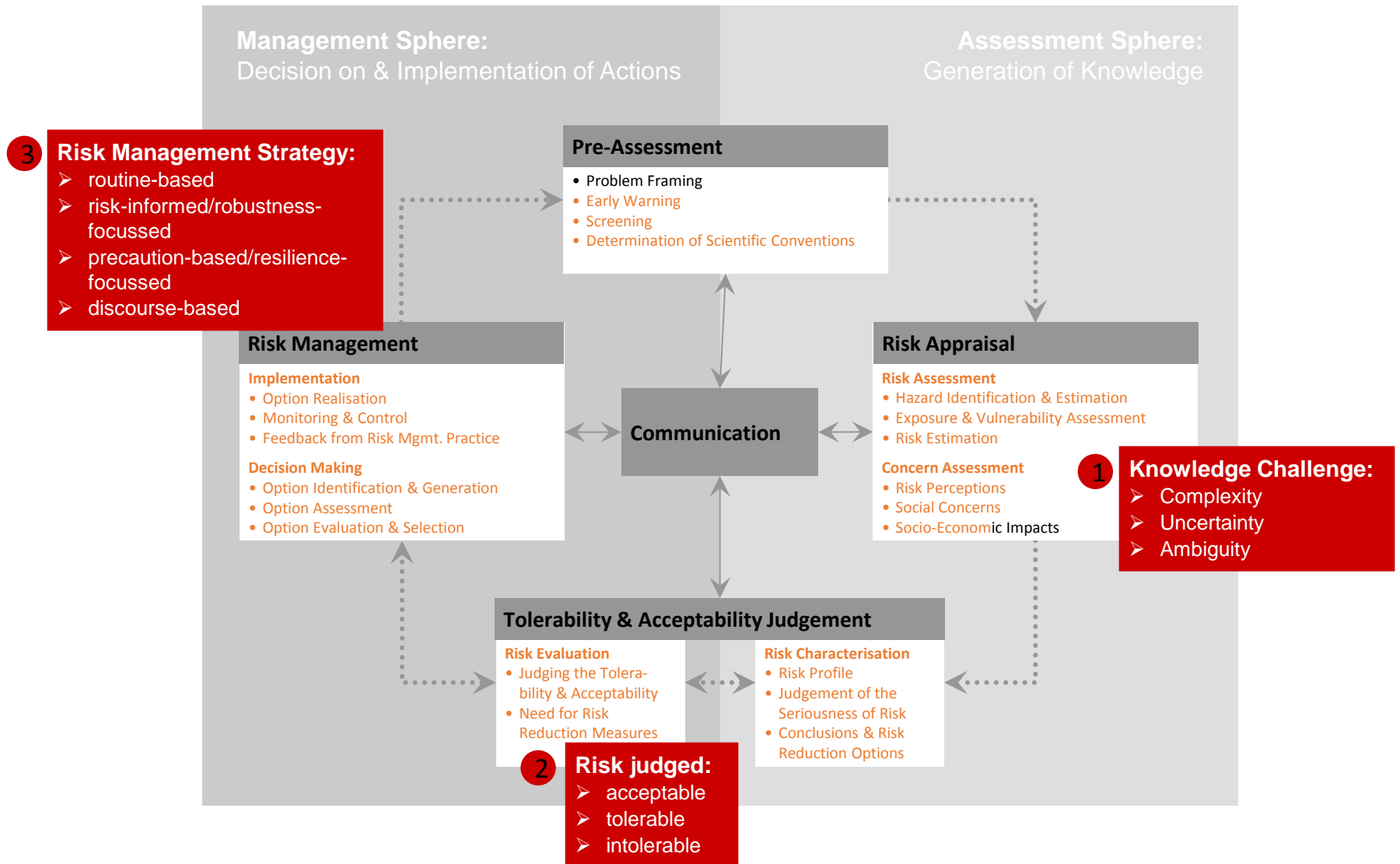
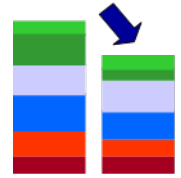


For both programmes, the focus has been on how to help politicians resist strong pressure for immediate but not well thought-out action. They recognise that this is about politics more than it is about science or Public Administration.

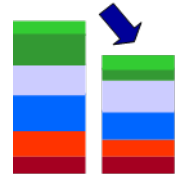
Often, all that is needed is empathy and compassion but some politicians can express compassion only in action.

The truth is that some politicians love a crisis and want to grandstand. Some don't want tools. But others do. The Dutch Programme is building towards a "Cabinet Vision" on the topic.

# IRGC framework



# Concern Assessment



Assessment Sphere:  
Generation of Knowledge

## Risk Appraisal

### Risk Assessment

- Hazard Identification & Estimation
- Exposure & Vulnerability Assessment
- Risk Estimation

### Concern Assessment

- Risk Perceptions
- Social Concerns
- Socio-Economic Impacts

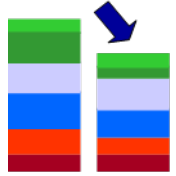
In the framework, the Concern Assessment runs in parallel to the Risk Assessment.

In cases of high public anxiety, this is exactly what the politicians need to have assessed.

This is a political assessment, as much as a “concern” assessment.

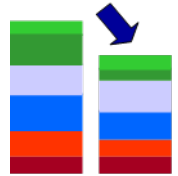


# Why assess concerns?



- The issue may exist **only** at the level of concern.
- The issue may exist **also** at the level of concern.
- Consequences that flow from the crisis may be influenced by the concerns, rather than the concrete actions, e.g. the government doesn't care.
- The concern may be a weak signal of a deeper issue that has been missed.

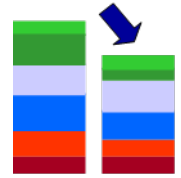
# The moral dimension



The public's concern may be based on a moral rather than technical concern.

If a community objects to a dangerous facility being put in their town, just saying that the risk is low does not deal with their question which is why should it be in their town.

# Concern Response

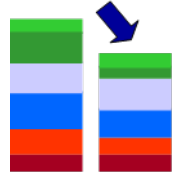


The appropriate response to the public's concerns is a Political Statement, which is based on values or emotions and gives leadership. It will also take account of the scientific advice from the risk assessment but it may be needed before that advice is available.



In response to the London bombings, Blair said simply “London remains open”. It was a call for stability and normality, i.e. values, not actions.

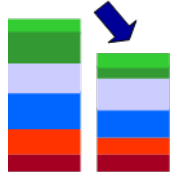
# A tragic paradox



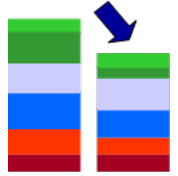
“When the government attempts to convince citizens that a certain risk is acceptable, it often uses the argument of risk avoidance. But the emphasis on how small a risk is only enhances the implicit principle that less risk is always better. This argument is self-defeating. Technocratic argumentation only strengthens the moral need to reduce risks, as it disconnects risks from the moral reasons why we perhaps ought to take them. And only the latter contains the key to achieve risk acceptance by the public.”

*Jan van Tol - Dutch Risk and Responsibility programme. Some research into citizens' views on a proportionate handling of risks and incidents JRR 2014*

# Links to materials



- BRC Risk Report - [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100623194820/http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/brc/publications/risk\\_report.html](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100623194820/http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/brc/publications/risk_report.html)
- UK Risk and Regulation Advisory Council - <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100104183913/http://www.berr.gov.uk/deliverypartners/list/rrac/index.html>
- Dutch Risk and Responsibility Programme – <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/kwaliteit-en-integriteit-overheidsinstanties/documenten-en-publicaties/publicaties/2014/06/24/dutch-risk-and-responsibility-programme.html>
- Risk Regulation Reflex - <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/publicaties/2014/10/08/dealing-with-the-risk-regulation-reflex.html>
- Concern Assessment - <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/kwaliteit-en-integriteit-overheidsinstanties/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2014/06/19/managing-a-political-crisis-after-a-disaster.html>



Thank you for your attention.

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