

Risk communication

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Risk communication

- Effective policies involve communication
 - To improve understanding
 - To facilitate informed decisions about policies
 - To promote public preparedness
 - To maintain trust
- Most case studies lacked detail about communication
 - Risk communication is not in 8 IRGC focus points
 - Risk communication is often not evaluated
 - Those communications that are evaluated often are found to *lack* effectiveness

Reasons for failing communications

- Using expert terminology
- Focusing on topics relevant to experts
- Repeating the same basic facts
- Not following best practices in communication design
- Leaving no time for communication design

Principles of communication design

1. Involve interdisciplinary experts *including* decision scientists and communication experts to ensure
 - Scientific accuracy and balance of content
 - Focus on decision-relevant information
 - Evidence-based choices in communication design
2. Base communication design on research with members of the intended audience to learn
 - Wording that recipients understand
 - Decision-relevant gaps and misconceptions
 - Topics people want to see addressed

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- (3. Evaluate communications
 - Randomized controlled trials)

Risk communication is central

- Integration
- Prioritizing risks
- Ascertaining accountability
- Ensuring flexibility and adaptability
- Creating transparency
- Fostering inclusion
- Providing convincing methods and procedures
- Determining the right timing

Recommendations

- Make risk communication central to all risk management activity
- Make expertise on risk communication available
 - Publish guidelines on communication design
 - Provide training in principles of risk communication
 - Provide access to database of effective communications
- Build the evidence base
 - Facilitate data collection and analysis to evaluate effects of communication efforts
 - Promote research to answer remaining questions about communication design

Relevant references

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Morgan, M.G., Fischhoff, B., Bostrom, A., & Atman, C. (2002). *Risk communication: The mental models approach*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Mental Models Approach

1. Expert model: What should people know to make informed decisions?
 - Conduct risk analysis and interdisciplinary literature review
 - Convene expert panel
2. Lay model: What do people already know and how do they already make their decisions?
 - Conduct qualitative interviews with small sample to identify relevant beliefs, preferred wording and decision contexts
 - Conduct follow-up surveys with larger sample to examine prevalence of beliefs
3. Communication design: What do people still need to know?
 - Compare expert model and lay model
 - Identify and fix knowledge gaps and misconceptions
4. Evaluation: Does the communication work?
 - Conduct randomized study to examine effect on understanding and decisions

Example projects

- Sexually transmitted infections
- Emergency contraception
- Pandemic flu
- Dirty bombs
- Smart meters
- Carbon capture and sequestration
- Inflation