Consumer confidence and food risk analysis.

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Public Perceptions of Risk and Safety

The key questions that need to be asked

- What is driving consumer perceptions of ***risk*** and ***benefit***?
- Who ***trusts*** whom to inform and regulate?
- How does this relate to ***consumer confidence*** in the food chain and associated science base?
- Are there ***cross-cultural***, ***inter-*** and ***intra-*** individual differences in perceptions and information needs?
- How do other consumer attitudes ***(ethics, wider value systems)*** relate to perceptions of risk?
- How do the public react to information about ***risk uncertainty***?
- How do we understand ***risk variability*** across different population groups

Why is it important to address people's perceptions……..

……..as part of the process of risk management, communication and assessment?

- Failure to do so will result in the activities of risk managers and assessors to be considered as detached from the concerns and fears of ***consumers***

- As a consequence, the public will ***distrust the motives*** of those responsible for assessing, communicating or managing risk

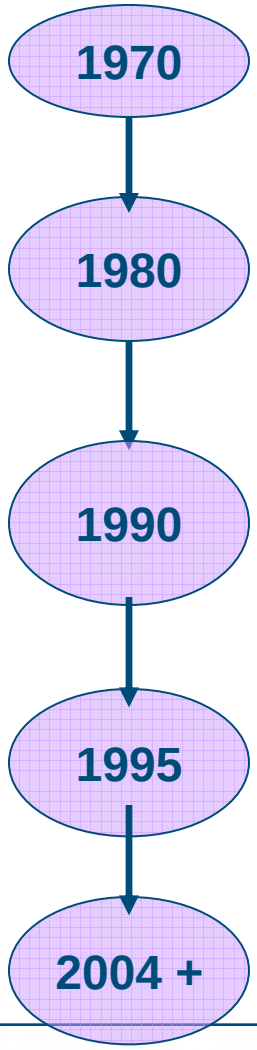
Public Risk Perception – a societal view.

- The **psychology of risk perception** drives public risk attitudes
  - *An **involuntary risk** over which people have no control is more threatening than one people choose to take*
  - *Potentially catastrophic risks concern people most*
  - *Unnatural (technological) risks are more threatening than natural ones*
- ***Ethical representations*** and concerns are emerging as an important determinant of consumer decision making
- Perceptions that the ***"truth" is being hidden*** increases both risk perception and distrust in regulators and communicators
- ***Increased transparency*** in risk analysis systems implies uncertainty and variability become open to public scrutiny - as a consequence, this information must be communicated to the public in an understandable and useful form

Public or publics?

- Individual differences in risk perceptions are important, particularly under circumstances where risk exposure is ***perceived to be involuntary***
- ***Affective or emotional factors***, such as “worry’’, influence perceived risk as may ***personality correlates*** such as “anxiety”.
- Differences in perceptions of risk and benefit associated with various food hazards exist between different
  - ***Countries*** and ***cultures*** influence risk perceptions
  - ***Individuals***, and even for the same individual at different times and within different contexts (e.g. women *versus* men; parents versus non-parents)
- Are specific groups in the population ***differentially disadvantaged***? (e.g. children, the elderly, specific ethnic groups)

From risk perception to public engagement - trying to build public confidence in risk analysis



RISK PERCEPTION - “why are the public not rational?” The deficit model

RISK COMMUNICATION “align public views with those of experts”

PUBLIC TRUST - “Problems will disappear if we regain consumer confidence in risk management”

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT - “Involve the public in the risk management process”

BEST PRACTICE IN PUBLIC CONSULTATION - “Evaluate the impact on policy processes”

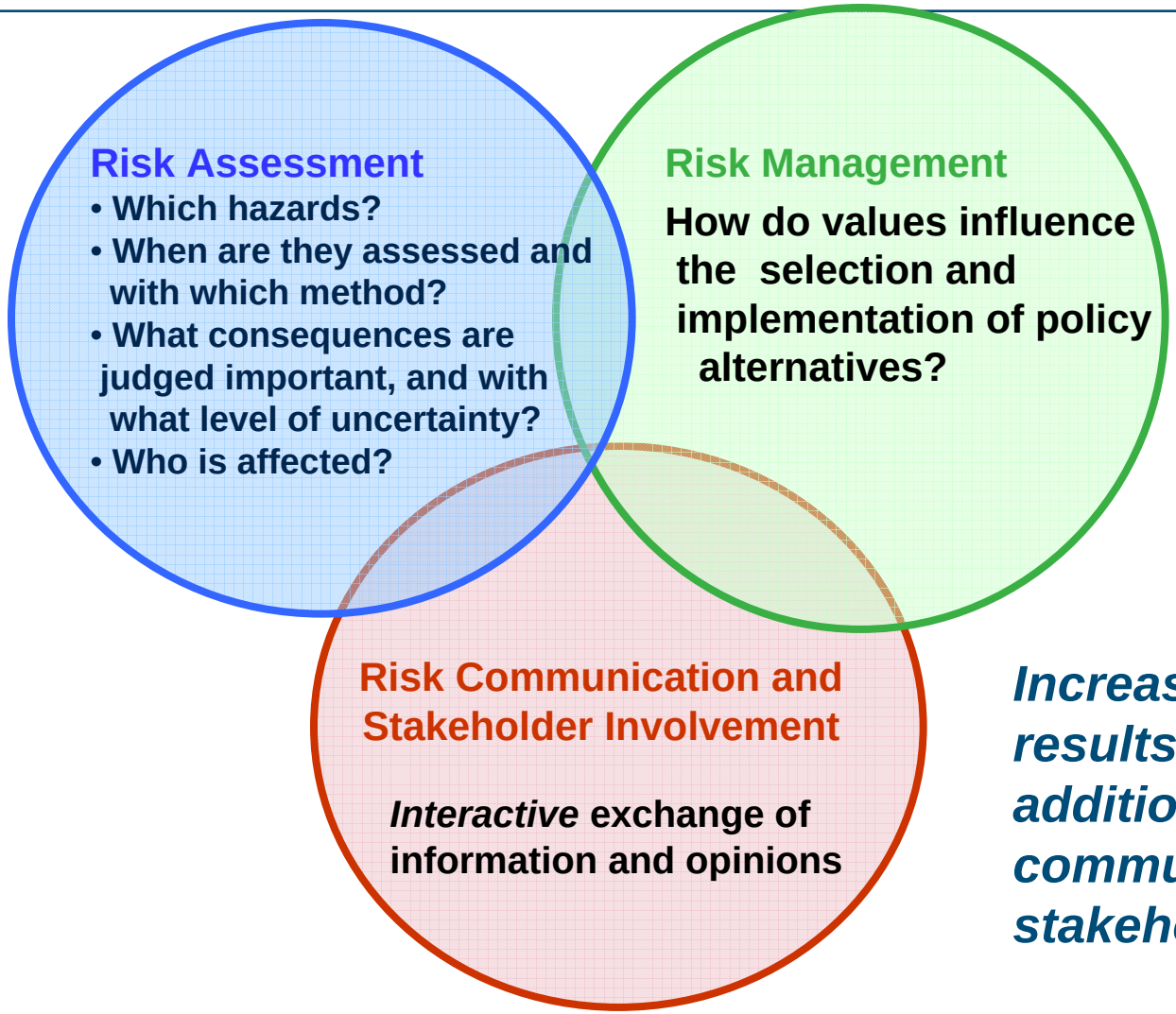
Risk Analysis Framework; improving trust through increased transparency?

(after WHO,1998)

Public distrust in the process of risk analysis

- The ***signal potential*** of various risk incidents has demonstrated that risk management is “out of control”
- Increasing availability of ***accessible specialist information*** (for example, via the Internet).
- Public reliance on the ***decisions of expert or elite groups*** is no longer a tenable way to conduct risk analyses
- The rise of the “***consumer citizen”,*** means that societal disquiet with risk management and risk assessment may be expressed through consumer preference and choice ***in the marketplace*** **(“To buy or not to buy”)**

Risk Analysis Framework; improving trust through increased transparency?



Increased transparency results in the need for additional communication and stakeholder involvement

Some additional effects of increased transparency in risk analysis

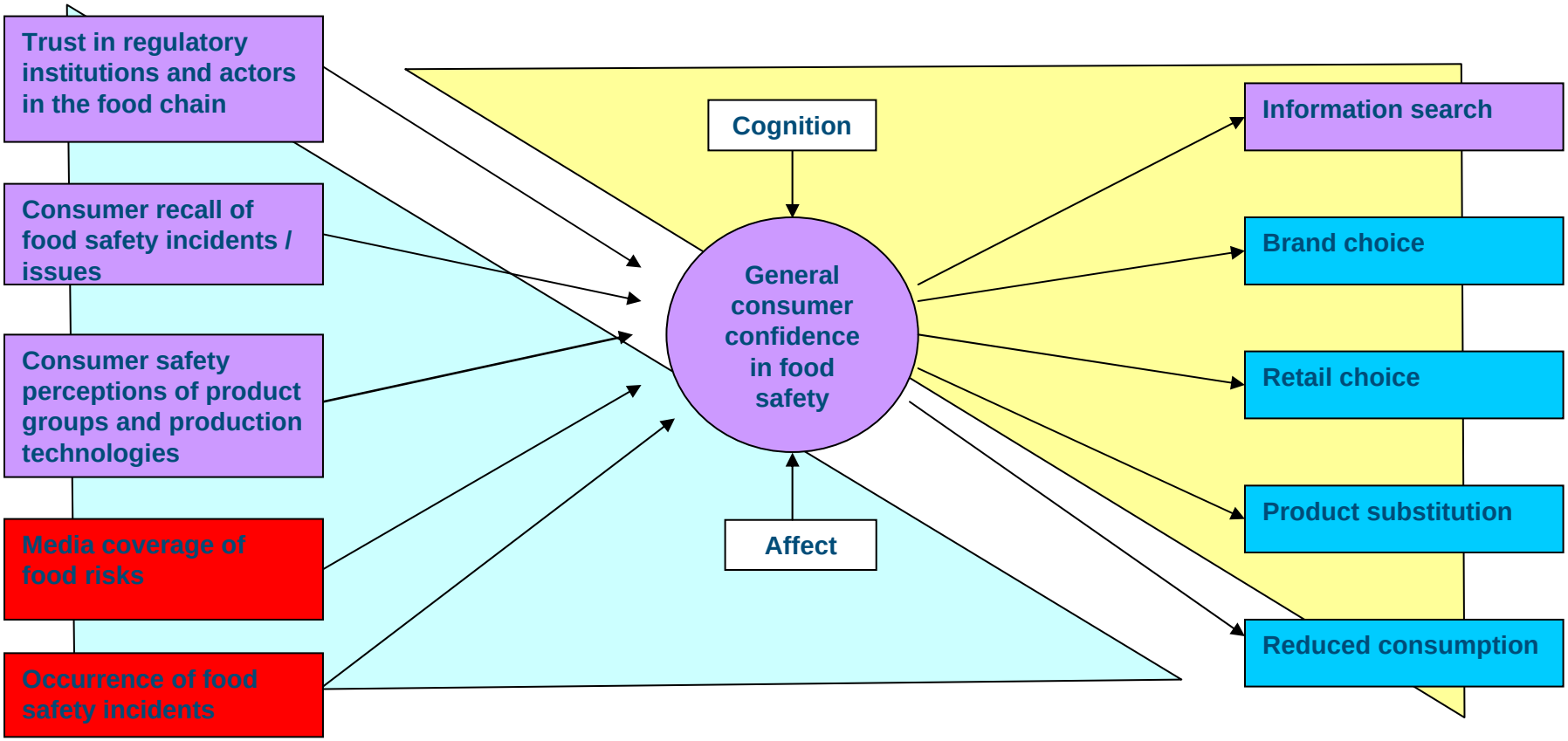
- Does ***increased transparency*** increase consumer confidence?
- Decreased transparency will ***reduce*** confidence ("what is being hidden?")
- Increased transparency may also decrease confidence unless there is ***proactive communication*** about various factors inherent in risk management and risk assessment :
  - Uncertainties (of different types, e.g. measurement ***versus*** who is affected)
  - Methodological issues (e.g. probabilistic ***versus*** deterministic risk assessment)
  - Variabilities across populations
  - Values used in the decision-making process ***(management and assessment)***

Public Participation - The Nine Evaluation Criteria

- **Representativeness**
  Of a broad public not just interest groups
- **Independence**
  Participants not dependent on sponsors
- **Early involvement**
  Early enough to count in decision making
- **Influence**
  Exercise must have an impact on policy
- **Transparency**
  Open to public scrutiny, with an audit trail
- **Resource accessibility**
  Sufficient time, money and access to expertise
- **Task definition**
  Define scope of exercise at the outset
- **Structured Decision-Making**
  An organised framework - assess alternatives/ formulate decisions

(Rowe and Frewer 2002)

A MONITOR FOR CONSUMER CONFIDENCE IN FOOD SAFETY



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De Jonge et al. (in press)

Conclusions (1)

- Public concerns about different hazards, need to be understood to develop communication and dialogue ***as an integral part of the process of risk analysis***
- As natural science knowledge about ***risk variability*** increases (for example, as more is known about individual susceptibilities to risks through advances in genomic research), there will be increased need for ***targetted communication*** for those at risk
- Communication practices and participatory democracy must explicitly incorporate the *actual concerns* of consumers
- New consumer concerns will arise as new technologies emerge (e.g. ***post-genomic technologies, nanotechnology, biosecurity and bioterrorism***)

Conclusions (2)

- Increased transparency may also decrease consumer confidence unless there is *proactive communication* about various factors inherent in risk management and risk assessment :
  - **Uncertainties** and how these are handled
  - **Methodological issues** (e.g. probabilistic *versus* deterministic risk assessment)
  - Risk **variabilities** across populations, and how resources are **differentially allocated** to vulnerable groups
  - Values of all those used in the **decision-making process** (management and assessment) must be understood and made transparent
  - In a globalising economy, how the above vary across **countries** and **cultures**

An eventual end point

The harmonisation of risk analysis practices (including assessment, management and communication) across science, society, cultures and geography

Thank you!

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