

Evaluation, communication, participation - theory and practice of risk communication

PD Dr. Gaby-Fleur Böhl

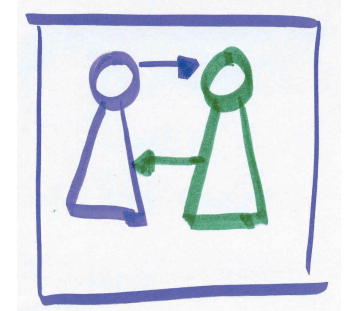
Head of Dept. Risk Communication

Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, Berlin

Risk Communication

communication

what is nice to talk about or strategie?



participation

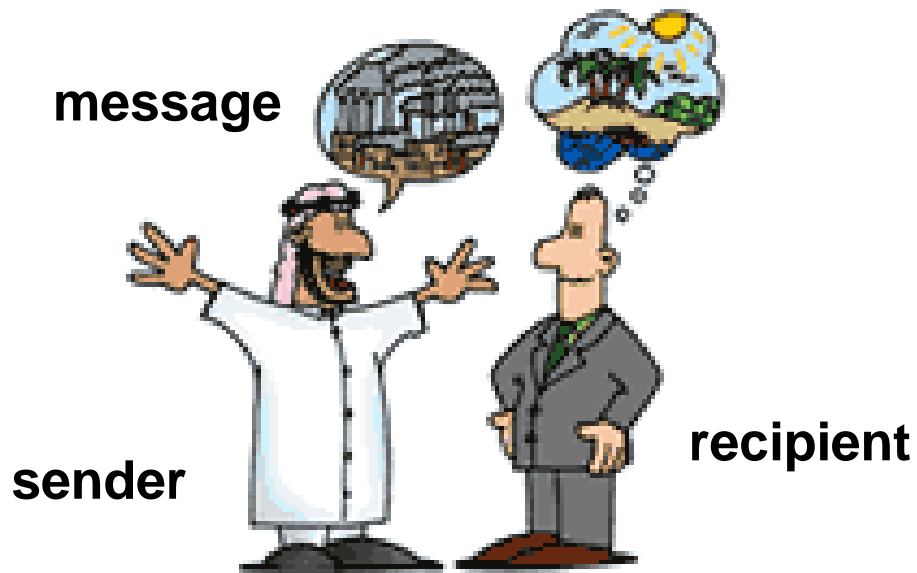
acrobatics, alibi or interaction?



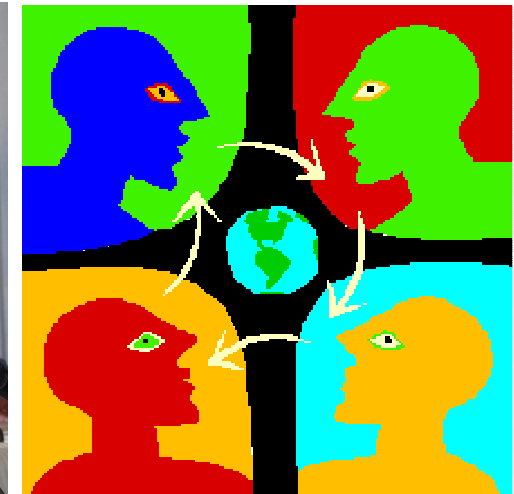
evaluation

actionism or reflection?

Risk Communication in comparison to press relation

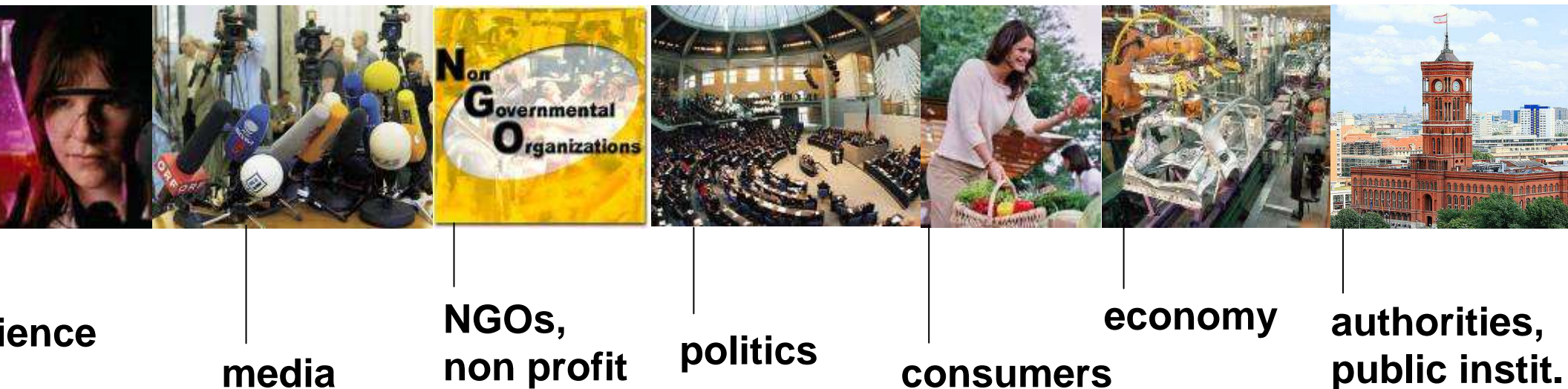


participatory dialogue



Communication of risks

- multi-dimensional, participative, transparent, proactive
- targeted, **stepwise** involvement of different **stakeholder** groups
- strategic use of **multipliers** (physicians, pharmacists, teachers, educators)
- multiple **ways** of information (leaflets, internet, TV, cinema)
- consideration of different modes of risk **perception** and **irrational** reactions



building up confidence takes long – losing it happens abruptly

Stepwise and strategic involvement of stakeholders



consumers, media

*round tables, consumer
conferences, open door events*

politics, unions, non-profit org.

stakeholder conferences (platform)

experts (economy, authorities)

workshops, status conferences

experts (science)

expert meetings, scientific symposia

Accessibility of target groups apart from demographic factors

Frustrated Frederic

- avoids conflicts
- rarely turns to a doctor
- ‘what can be eaten anymore?’
- no active reception of informations



Daredevil Dragon

- lives for amusement
- likes to pop a pill
- intensive user of the internet
- ‘what doesn’t kill me, makes me stronger’



Anxious Anne

- weighs pros vs. cons, prefers to ask
- makes use of all medical screenings
- ‘only tested goods are acceptable’
- ‘sucks in’ informations



consideration of **role heterogenities** (e.g. father, manager, extreme sport athlete)

Risk perception: over- and underestimation of risks

Differences in risk perception depend on **media reports, usualness** or **dreadfulness** of risks

- **risk compensation**: traveling by car instead of using flights

→ 1.500 more people died from car accidents
in the following 12 month in the USA

4.477 persons died by **road accidents**

in Germany in 2008 (= **12 dead persons per day**)

'that happens to others, but not to me'

- **optimistic bias**: **under-estimation** of individual risks,
often regarding unhealthy behaviour (**smoking, unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity**)
- **defensive optimism**: to **deny** hazards, believe in **mother nature** (safe and gracious)
- **functional optimism**: **over-estimation** of own (re)action possibilities (illusoric control)

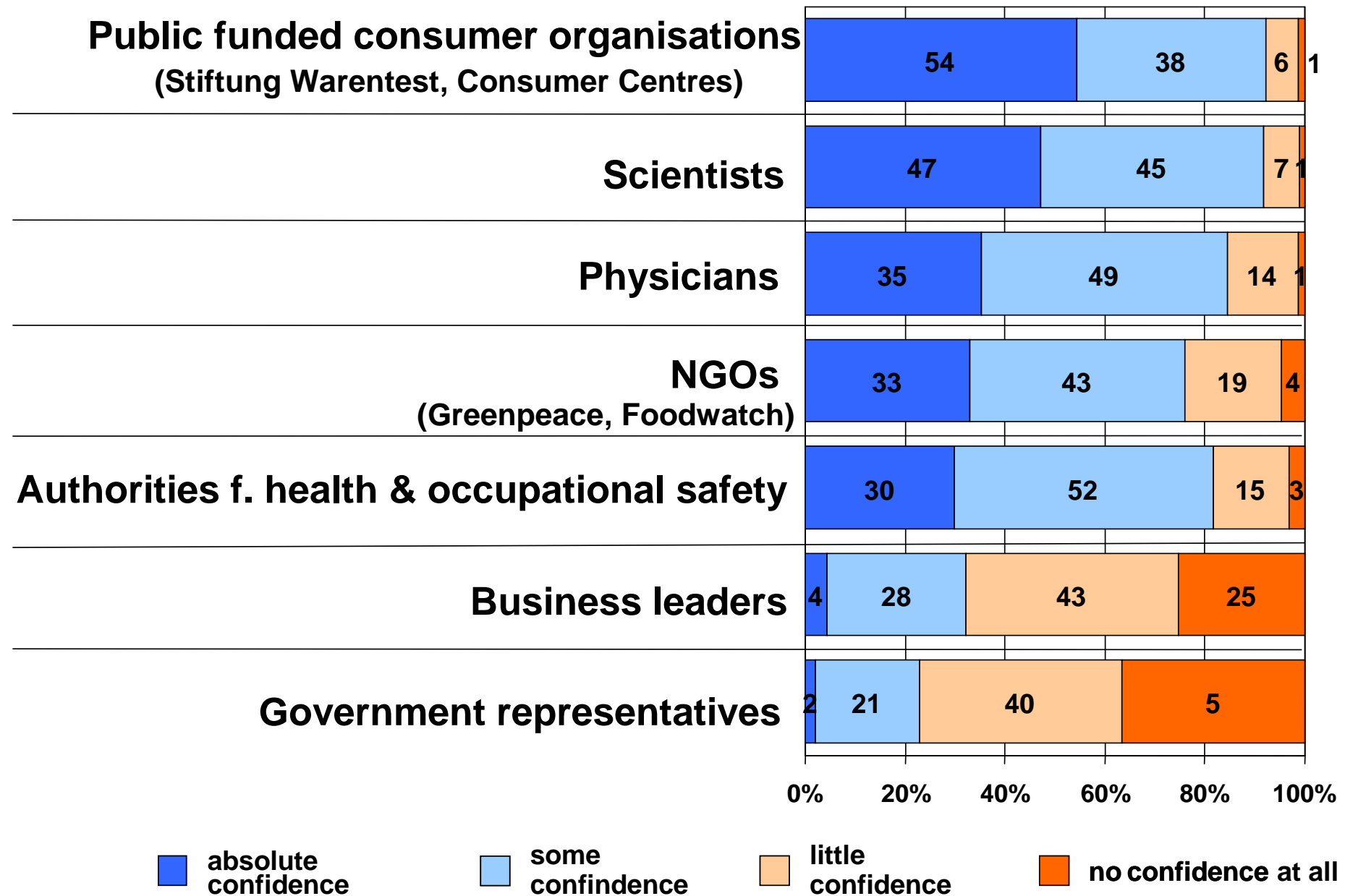


11. Sept. 2001



car accident, daily

Confidence in information depends on the communicator



BfR, 2007, repres. survey on nanotechnology

Participation as process - examples

Aim

establishment of networking, publicity, public confidence in decision

Consumer conference

Consensus, respectively constructive dissent regarding a controversial subject, opinion poll, concluding vote (n = 15 - 30 laymen)

Delphi procedures

Explanation of opinions and options at complex matters, multilevel questionnaires with feedback, compilation of future trends (n > 100 experts)

Focus groups

Moderated, structured opinion exchange (n = 4 – 12 Stakeholders/consumers per group), protected environment

→ **Limitations and possibilities of participation
(democracy awareness)**

Participation as process - critical points

Disadvantages

- high level of **expectations**
- pre-programmed **disappointment**
- participation as **artificial laboratory experiment**
- **self-expertization** of laymen combined with **social romantics**
- **marginalization** of important scientific contents (only process in function)

Criteria for positive evaluation of participation

- **confidence** in sociopolitical **decisions**
- **tolerance** and **consensus** on existing **dissents**
- generation of **publicity**
- **changes** in **behaviour** of involved persons

→ Participation **means joint consultation and configuration,**
but not collective decision and regulation

Go for

- consideration of subjective **fears**
- information about the level of **uncertainty, risks** and **benefit**
- high level of **transparency** to build up **trust**
- **participation** as real **challenge**
- consideration of **sociocultural criteria of risk perception**
- acceptance and enabling of **constructive dissent**
- targeted use of **multipliers** and **trustworthy institutions**
- transfer of knowledge and empirical formula already in **school**
- **multimedial** translation of science
- **learning** from failures of the past (BSE, gene technology)

No go

- **medial self control** because of **lacking willingness** for dialogue (**wait and see**)
- **appeasement** or generating **panic**
- **unfair comparisons** of risks
- **participation** as **acrobatics**
- disrespect of **sociocultural criteria of risk perception**
- exclusive search for consensus
- **illusion** of direct transfer of scientific knowledge
- hope for **self-regulation** of the topic ('good thing')
- **persistance** in **own community**
- user-defined use of the **precautionary principle**

**Thank you for your
attention !**

Federal Institute for Risk Assessment

Thielallee 88-92 • D-14195 Berlin

Tel. +49 30 - 84 12 - 3229 • Fax +49 30 - 84 12 - 1243

gaby-fleur.boel@bfr.bund.de • www.bfr.bund.de