Module 8

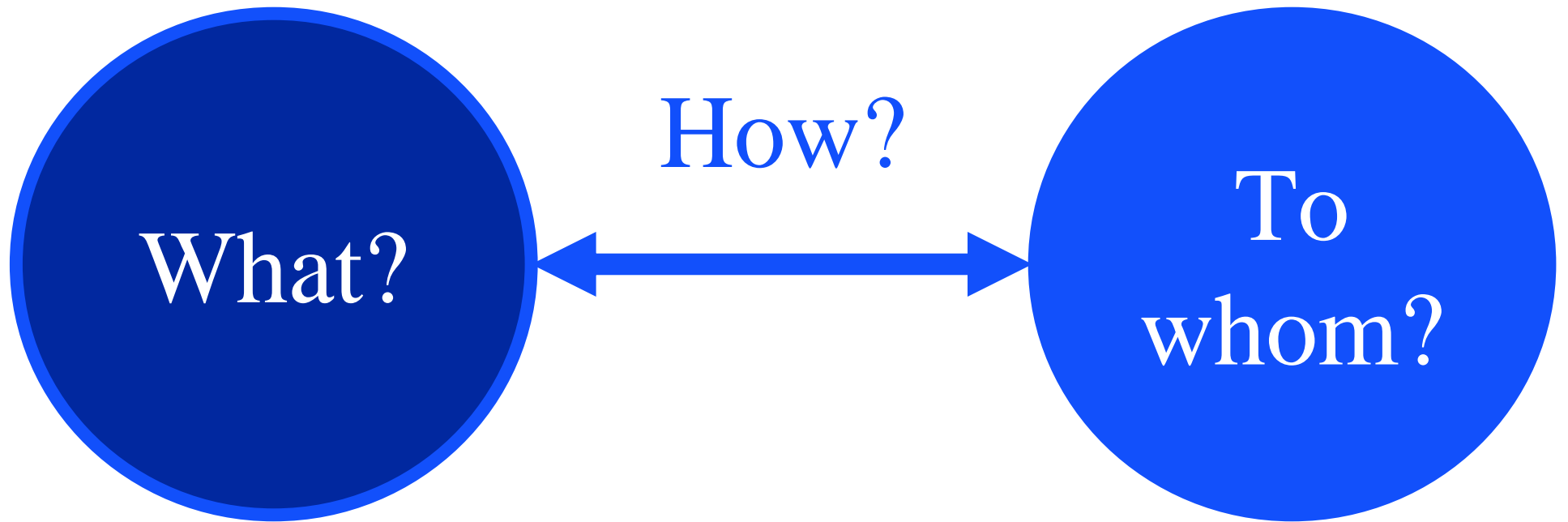# Risk Communication and

Decision Support

Klaus von Grebmer

The Tasks of Risk Communication

- To inform and to educate

- To initiate behavior change and support protective action

- To warn of disaster and provide emergency information

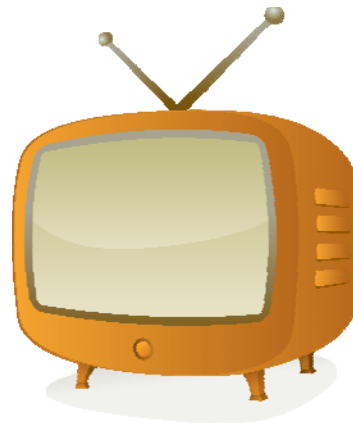- To support joint problem solving and conflict resolution

Communication Process Simplified

Risk Communication Process

Message

Channel

Source

Receiver

Potential Source Problems

Source

- Disagreement among scientific experts
- Limited resources for addressing risk issues of public concern
- Failure to disclose limitations of (risk) assessments and resulting uncertainties
- Limited understanding of interests, concerns, fears, values, priorities, and preferences of individuals and public interest groups
- Use of bureaucratic, legalistic, and technical language
- Lack of trust and credibility

Potential Message Problems

Message

- Deficiencies in scientific understanding, data, models, and methods resulting in large uncertainties in risk estimates
- Highly technical analyses that are often unintelligible to lay persons
- Sheer amount or complexity of the analysis

Potential Channel Problems

Channel

- Selective and biased media reporting that emphasizes drama, wrongdoing, disagreement and conflict

- Premature disclosure of scientific information

- Oversimplifications, distortions, and inaccuracies in interpreting technical risk information
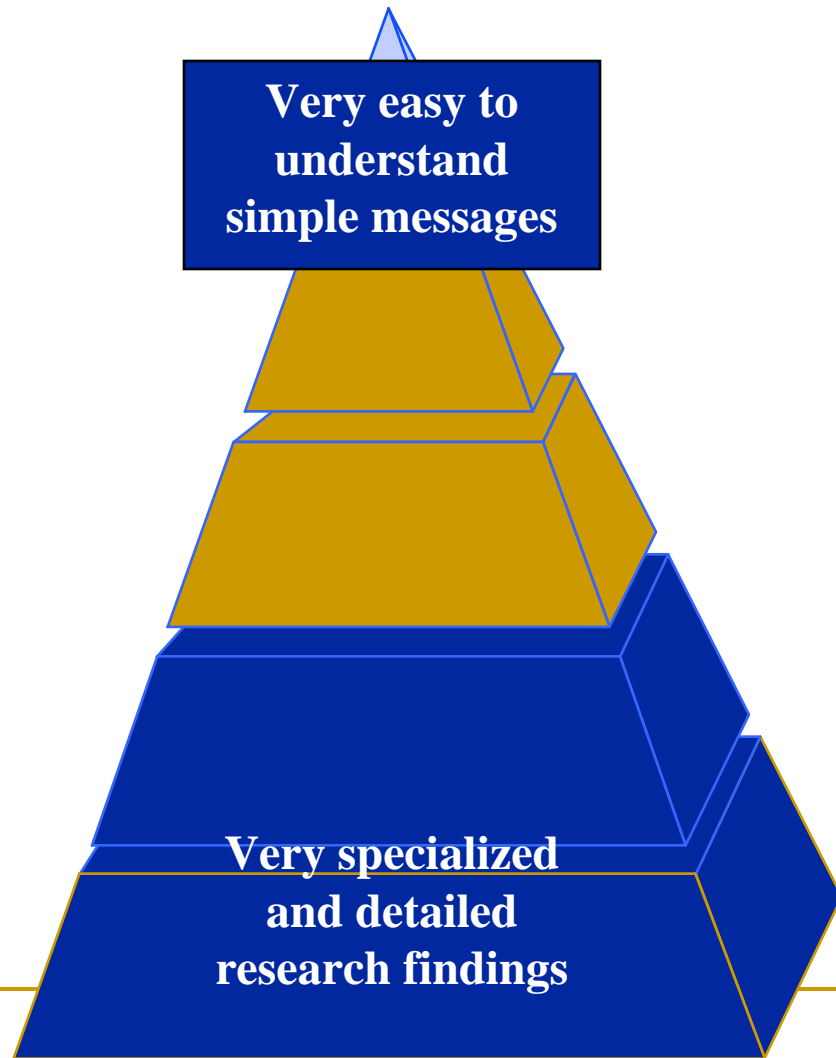
Potential Receiver Problems

- Inaccurate perceptions of levels of risk

- Lack of interest in technical complexities

- Strong beliefs and opinions that are resistant to change

- Exaggerated expectations about the effectiveness of regulatory actions

- Desire and demand for (scientific) certainty

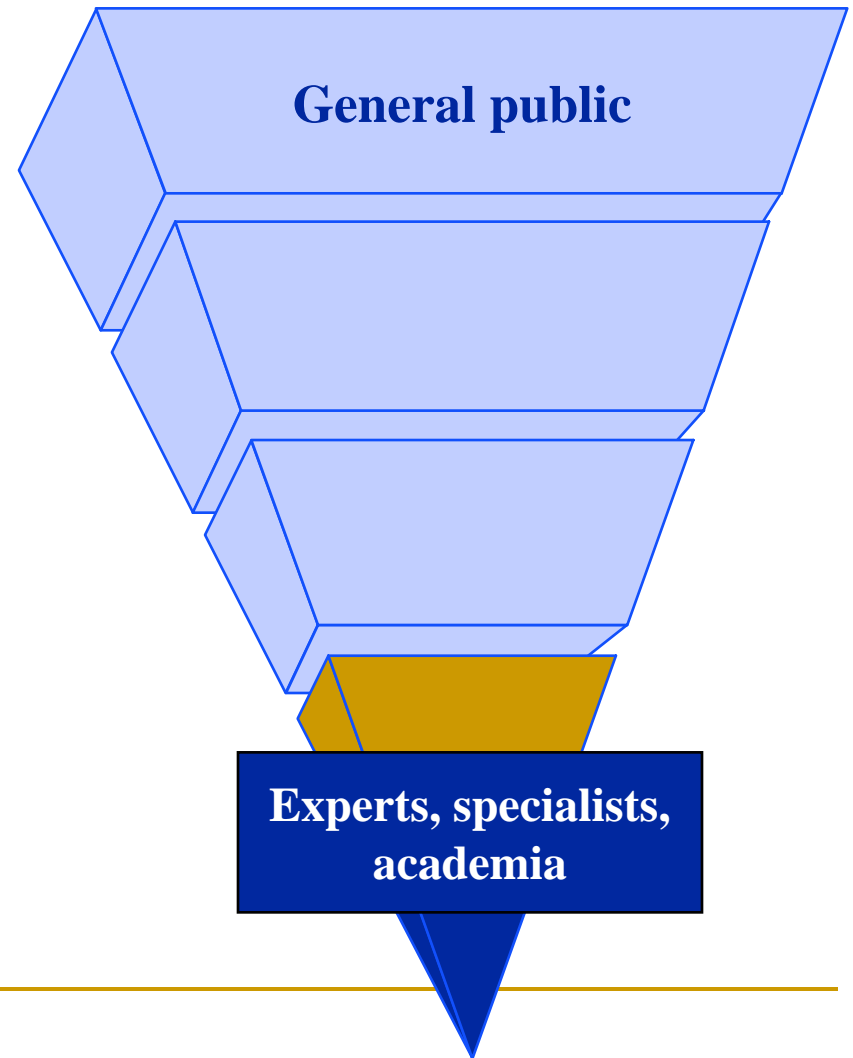- Reluctance to make tradeoffs between risks, costs and benefits

	Actual risk	
	high	low
Perceived risk — high	**Reinforcement**	**Education and awareness campaigns to align high risk perception to actual low risk**
Perceived risk — low	**Education and awareness campaigns to align low risk perception to actual high risk**	**Reinforcement**

Type of Information

Target Audiences

Very easy to understand simple messages

General public

Very specialized and detailed research findings

Experts, specialists, academia

Risk Message Checklist

- Information about the nature of risks
- Information on alternatives
- Uncertainties in knowledge about risks
- Information on risk management

Levels of Risk Communication

Global	**Liaison with international authorities**
Region	**Liaison with authorities from neighboring countries**
Country	• **Information and education**
State	• **"Master plan" for crisis handling (horizontally at all levels as well as vertically)** • **Practicing the emergency situation**
Community	• **Liaison with private sector and Civil Society Organizations** • **Contact with mass media**
Family Individual	How can I minimize risks? What to report a suspicion or case?

Internal Communication

- Ensure smooth communication among members of the project team

- Provide members of the project team with easy access to relevant information (e.g. website, wickis, accessible repositories)

- Update donors and developing country collaborators on progress of the project