

# Mobilizing for Effective Decision Making

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# Overview

Climate decisions

Climate decision makers

Studying climate decision making

Mobilizing and managing research

# Overview

## **Climate decisions**

Climate decision makers

Climate decision making

Mobilization - Leadership

# Climate Changes

For 25 years, the scientific community has known that greenhouse gases are increasing, with large, uncertain effects.

# Greenhouse Gases Could Affect

Temperature (peaks, means, variability)

Precipitation (peaks, means, variability)

Storms

Sea level

Acidification

Ozone protection

...

# These Effects

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Depend on concurrent changes in politics,  
environment, economy, technology

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As a result, many surprises are possible;  
capitalizing on potentially good  
changes may be hard.

# The Climate Gamble

Whatever we do, including waiting for better evidence, represents a gamble, with uncertain effects.

# Many Public and Private Decisions Affect or Reflect Climate Change

energy production and consumption

land use and conservation

home insurance

public health planning

disaster response

...

Each choice reflects beliefs about climate change and commitment to act on them. However, climate is only part of each choice.

So, you'd like to  
change energy production, but...  
have a better insulated home, but...  
buy greener products, but...  
relocate from the coast, but...  
restore wetlands, but...  
...

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In order to choose well, decision makers must understand:

What their options are.

What might happen if they choose different options.

What really matters to them.

How they can create better options.

# Many Factors Conspire Against Them

Honest miscommunication

Merchants' and politicians' green-washing

Enthusiasts' misdirection

Active disinformation

Their own conflicting goals

Ignoring these complications encourages unwarranted criticism and paternalistic solutions.

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**It compounds the natural temptation to make sweeping generalizations about people's competence.**

# Claims about Competence Driven by Political Concerns

Political predisposition:	“liberal”	“conservative”
Behavioral assumption:		
hyper-rational public	popular democracy	free markets
irrational public	paternalistic regulation	technocratic control

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# Decision-Focused Research Entails

*Analysis:* What gambles are people facing?

*Description:* Why do people take the  
gambles that they take?

*Intervention:* How can people be helped to  
take wiser ones?

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Decision making follows simple principles.

However,

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- the interactions are complex

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As a result, decision-specific research is needed.

# Some of Those Principles

with possible strategies for applying them  
to climate change-related decisions

# Principle 1

People consider the return on their investment in making decisions.

## As a result

They can be paralyzed by disinformation.

They can knowingly ignore big problems.

They can focus on small problems, if it's  
easy to learn about them.

They can dig in, if it really matters to them.

## Some Strategies

Focus on the few things that really matter.

Make the decision seem comprehensible.

Reduce the number of decisions by

- offering one-time commitments
- create (unthinking) habits
- bundle climate with other concerns  
in consumption, voting...

# Principle 2

People dislike uncertainty.

## As a result

They will pay a premium for sure things.  
They can be insensitive to differences in  
the probabilities of things happening.  
They are sensitive to contractual  
ambiguities (e.g., discounting).

# Some Strategies

Show sure benefits.

Show the uncertainties in “business as usual.”

Establish a reputation for credibility.

## Principle 3

When faced with novel choices, people may not know what they want.

## **As a result**

They can be manipulated by how choices are framed.

They are challenged when they've never experienced a possible outcome.

They are challenged when they must choose among dissimilar outcomes.

# Some Strategies

Focus on deep concerns (sacred values).  
Emphasize comparable outcomes  
(costs/benefits, lives today/tomorrow).  
Provide deep experiences.

## Principle 4

People are good at tracking what they see, but not at detecting systematic biases in that evidence.

## As a result

They may not even think that  
appearances might be deceiving.  
They may not know how to adjust for bias.  
They are often overconfident.

## Some Strategies

Attack biased reporting.

Provide better information, explaining differences.

Address insidious effects of disinformation.

## Principle 5

Transient emotions can affect perceptions,  
perhaps enough to tip close decisions.

## For example

Anger

is mobilizing.

focuses attention on people, not  
situations, as the source of  
problems.

increases optimism.

# Some Strategies

Evoked appropriate emotions, when decisions are made.

Encourage pre-planned choices, made under appropriate emotions

## Yet Other Principles

People have difficulty projecting non-linear trends.

People are insensitive to opportunity costs.

People have difficulty imagining themselves in other visceral states.

People are prisoners to sunk costs, hating to recognize losses.

People confuse ignorance and stupidity.

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**Mobilization - Leadership**

# Mobilization - Leadership

Public engagement

Staffing

Adaptive learning

# Mobilization - Leadership

**Public engagement**

Staffing

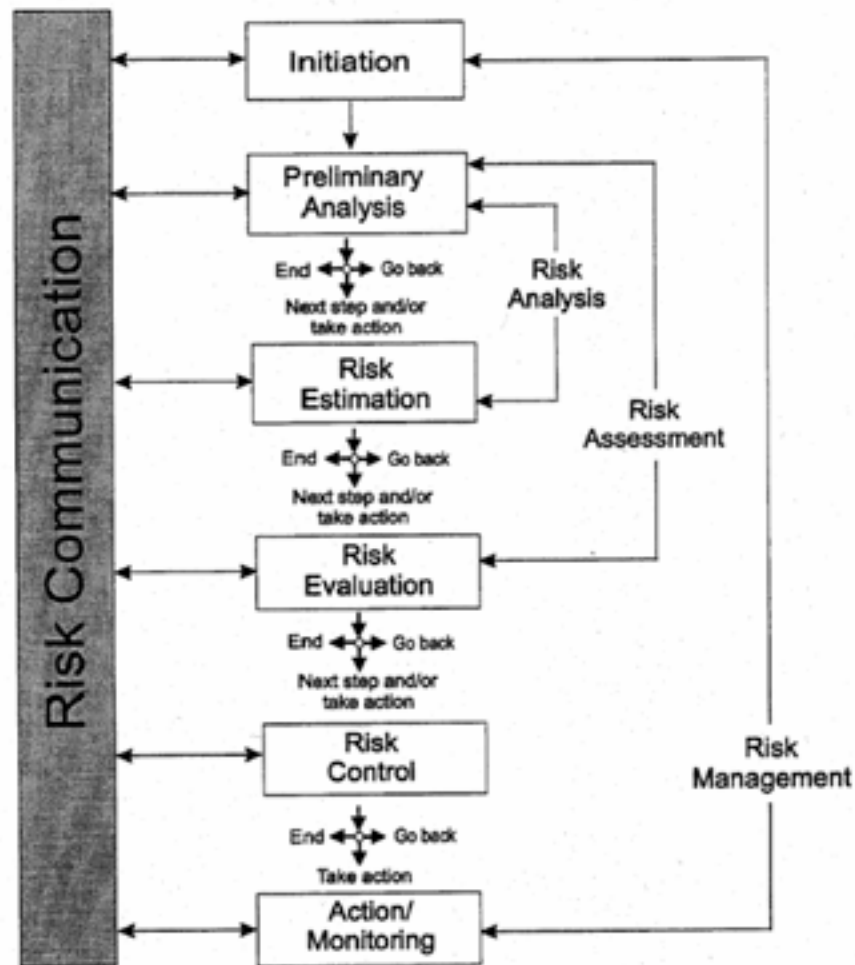
Leadership



CAN/CSA-Q850-97  
***Risk Management:  
Guideline for  
Decision-Makers***

*A National Standard of  
Canada*

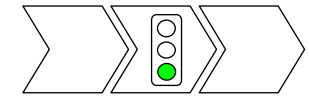




**Note:** Risk communication with stakeholders is an important part of each step in the decision process.

**Figure 2**  
**Steps in the Q850 Risk Management Decision-Making**  
**Process — Simple Model**

# Concern Assessment Framework



CBA, including...

Deaths	Harm
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'Baseline' WTP

Societal Concerns

Concern factors	Expert views	Public views
1 Familiarity		
2 Understanding		
3 Equity		
4 Dread		
5 Control		
6 Trust		

Decision making

# Mobilization - Leadership

Public engagement

**Staffing**

Leadership

# Strategic Staffing Requires

*Domain specialists*, for representing the science relevant to the decisions

*Decision analysts*, for identifying the information critical to choices

*Social scientists*, for designing and evaluating human engagement

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**All working on their own tasks**

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# Demand-Side Barriers

institutional inertia

inappropriate staffing

isolation from lay concerns

indifference to lay concerns

incentive for lay confusion

...

# Supply-Side Barriers

separation of analytical, descriptive,  
intervention researchers

isolation of researchers from  
practitioners

sweeping claims about competence  
predisposition toward manipulation

...

# A Complex Working Hypothesis

- People usually do sensible things if they
- get relevant information in a concise, credible, comprehensible form
  - are judged by their own goals.
  - have control over their environment
  - have basic decision-making competence

We have an obligation to create  
these empowering conditions.

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