

Practical Risk Management: Using Scenario Training with Students and Leaders to Teach Judgement and Responsibility

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1. Overview and working definitions of RISK, HAZARDS and THE FUNNEL

1. RISK

Risk isn't random. It can be analyzed and managed: Risk = Time x Probability x Severity

"Risk" is the chance of losing something valuable to us (health, life, property)

"Time" is the duration of the activity/event

"Probability" is the chance (certain, high, medium, low or none) of something happening

"Severity" is how bad it will be if something happens (e.g. skin your knee v. die)

It is the combination of T, P and S that you calculate to determine risk. To lower the risk, you lower one or more of the variables (T, P or S). If you cannot lower one of them, maybe you can (or must) lower the other ones.

2. HAZARDS

A hazard is a source of potential harm. Hazards can be divided into either subjective vs. objective — deciding what type of hazard will help with deciding what (if any) control one has over the exposure to the hazard.

Subjective hazards relate to the self and decisions and actions. Objective hazards are external to the self, commonly the environment and other actors

3. THE FUNNEL

A sequence of choices can determine the outcome — pushing you down the "funnel" of events and choices.

As we move forward in an event or chain of events, we will have fewer and fewer choices. "Moving down the funnel" makes an outcome more likely to happen—eventually perhaps inevitable. Choices can move us UP or DOWN the funnel—giving either more or fewer options. Key decisions earlier on make a difference later.

2. Scenarios

There are a few key points that make or break training with scenarios:

1. A scenario is not a "role play" but emphasis on decision making with "forced" outcome (e.g. the point you want to make / key issues to train people on).
2. Be REALISTIC and RELEVANT to your participants — done correctly they will think about this when confronted with a similar situation in real life.
3. Set the stage (think drama / short story) — work it out in advance, including resources, timing, etc. Be descriptive and thoughtful about details.
4. Define and understand key actors and stakeholders — what sorts of mistakes (or correct action) would they take in this sort of situation? What have you seen and want to protect against happening again?
5. Break the scenario into "acts" at key decision making points — this provides for discussion and debate in small groups. Be careful to make the choices realistic and relevant as well — what would people actually do (good or bad decisions or simple mistakes with big consequences).
6. Drive to CRISIS and RESOLUTION (use time limits to your advantage!) — don't let people debate forever about what they should do.
7. Use narrative to focus on key points — provide enough framing and context that participants need to figure out what is relevant information and what is not.
8. Leave lots of time for DEBRIEF and DISCUSSION — be sure to walk through the decisions and choices, and use the models of RISK, HAZARDS and THE FUNNEL to analyze the scenario.