

Preface

If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is: infinite.

William Blake (1757–1827)

Since we started working together several years ago, we have discovered a shared fascination with two topics: risk and people. Of course these are not separate, since risk is identified, assessed and managed by people, not by processes or tools, but the relationship is more complex than that. People are both a source of risk exposure and part of the solution, and nearly every step in the risk process is influenced by perception: managing risk requires judgement.

Our previous work together has explored one key interface between the worlds of risk and people, namely risk attitudes. By taking the insights available from the field of emotional literacy, we have provided practical advice to enable anyone to understand and manage risk attitude, for themselves or for groups to which they belong. This book takes our work much further.

Most of what people do is accomplished through groups of one sort or another, and involves decision-making at various levels. Our continuing interest in risk and people has led us to examine this more closely, focusing on how people make decisions in groups, particularly when those decisions involve risk. Group risk attitude is a significant influence on both the decision process and the outcome, and if it is left unmanaged the consequences can be unpredictable. We have therefore conducted some research to explore how groups make risky decisions, focusing on the factors which influence risk attitudes, and our results have led to unexpected conclusions. The popular understanding of emotional literacy appears to be missing some crucial elements. Drawing on our deep experience of managing risk, we propose an extended framework to include explicit steps which allow group risk attitude in the decision-making context to be managed proactively.

We remain excited about the challenges of working in groups to understand and manage risk. We offer our findings to others who share our dual passion for risk and people, and we hope that our contribution makes a difference for those who are prepared to put it into practice.

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