

Title Slide

Hello, and welcome to this introduction to the key messages of Module 1, which you will see from this slide is entitled... Developing a Risk Mindset! The implied message is that you shouldn't just dive straight in to doing a risk assessment... or making difficult risk decisions... until you have first reflected on how you approach or respond to the idea of risk itself... until you've reflected on your personal attitude towards the challenge of taking risks. Our mindset... the underlying influences on how we think... will play a big part in how you approach risk situations.

What's your more usual frame of mind when you're having to deal with risk... whether that's in your work, or even in your personal life? I know... it will vary from risk to risk, and moment to moment. You're human, after all... only a robot would respond in the same way every time.

But, it's still important to reflect on some of these wider considerations... my consistent message to crisis teams is, that when you're confronted with a crisis situation... your first step should be backwards, not just rushing blindly in... give yourself that moment of thinking space... that wider angle view of the situation. Then... go rushing in... only not so blindly!

We should never underestimate a frequent message throughout this whole training... time for reflection, supervision, and collaborative working is essential... it's not optional, it's not to be viewed as a luxury!

By the way... you've got my name already... but the 'Practice-Based Evidence' thing there on the slide... that's a business name that I established back in 2001, when I moved from being employed into being self-employed... a particularly challenging positive risk-taking decision I use as an illustration quite often... an example of what this idea can be about in practice. I'm still a practitioner, working in health and social care, as a case manager with an occupational therapy background... and that's what I'm bringing, alongside my consultancy experience, to this whole training and practice development approach.

Next slide (images of fear & uncertainty)

The mindset shift that I'm asking you to consider here... is summed up by the message and images on this slide... these represent the extremes across a broader range of thinking and experiences, but... we're essentially looking at fear and a blame culture at one end... often driving people to be more risk averse... concerned more for their own preservation in trying to avoid mistakes that they perceive they will be blamed for. This position is represented here by the heads-in-the-sand image... The most obvious question, for me, in this situation is... 'to what extent will a service user get a good or best type of service from people working in this way?' It may undoubtedly help to avoid some harms or difficulties for the service user... but a consistently conservative approach will also most likely deprive them from gaining some desired benefits from adopting a less restrictive attitude.

At the other end is the importance of taking a risk... working with levels of uncertainty, and putting the central concept of this whole training... Positive Risk-Taking... into practice. This isn't about negligent throwing caution to the wind... we're talking more about carefully thought out taking of risks... with clear reasons and motivations. It's represented here by the surfing image... but also by that brief quote from Katia Krafft: "*Curiosity is stronger than fear.*" I include this as an interesting thought to reflect on while you're thinking of your own ways of approaching uncertainty.

Next slide (glass half...)

I'm sure you're very familiar with this phrase... glass half full, glass half empty. Well, it's something that's very pertinent to thinking about risk and working with risk... and clearly relates to this notion of our risk mindset. The glass half full person is always open to possibilities... not ignoring the dangers and difficulties... but equally not instantly restricted by them.

Focusing more on the negative connotations of risk, for a few moments... the glass half empty individual will always seek out the problems first... and in doing so, will most likely block themselves from being able to see the opportunities in a situation. In this line of thinking... the concept of fear, of the impact of living and working within a blame culture, of airing on the side of caution, will most likely lead us to potentially become more naturally risk averse in our decision-making. That's not always going to be a bad thing... as long as the opportunities have also been explored, and clear reasoning can point to the need to be more risk averse at this time.

Next slide (On being more cautious...)

If you take that word – risk - to begin with, it's often defined, if you look at dictionary definitions, they tend to focus much more on the negative. So, you'll see phrases like loss and danger and harm. These words and phrases tend to point towards the potential for undesired outcomes... the things we most want to avoid in most cases. No wonder that we're feeling more risk averse at these times.

As I will frequently repeat throughout this training... there is a place for being cautious when the evidence points heavily in that direction. But... not if the evidence is weak and the motivations on behalf of staff appear to be driven more by the fear of something going wrong... than they are about trying to do the right thing!

I'm going to suggest to you that even if you are bound by the fear, you're bound by fear of being blamed... if something goes wrong, if that causes you to feel a little bit more risk averse in the decisions you make... there are still no guarantees that that is the safest and most secure way forward.

The final statement on this slide is one I'll keep coming back to... there is no such thing as a risk-free option.

Next slide (blame and blocked)

The worst outcomes of playing to the fear of the blame game are well illustrated on this slide... everyone deflects blame elsewhere, and we become trapped by fear.

But... I would also argue... if we're going to engage people in conversations to help us to reflect on risk, and how we think of and work with it... then to engage people, we need to see more than just the negative side. We need to be thinking, what are the positive elements of risk that we can engage as well... that will help us to build up that fuller picture and enable more open and honest conversations between people.

This fear that blame is going to have severe consequences for us... well, we talk about learning lessons, but we're not really able to feel that open to admit mistakes in order that learning can really happen... at least not in the sense that we'll feel understood and supported through the process. What this means is that, by and large, we're promoting a fear of failure over and above a focus on a potential to succeed.

What we end up with is something along the lines of it's his fault, her fault, it's their fault, but it's not me... and my most likely vantage point from where I'm making these claims, is enclosed in a risk mindset dominated by fear... we might as well be the woman in a jar depicted in this image!

Next slide (... not taking the risk)

So, we need to be thinking about shifting this risk agenda... that glass half full stance... shifting to something respectful of the risk averse fears, but that opens up a different way of looking at the fuller picture... a way that helps us to at least give full consideration to the possibility of taking appropriate risks.

The Denis Waitley quote on this slide gives us a mental starting point... "Life is inherently...." It echoes my favourite anonymous sourced quote... "If you don't risk something, you could risk everything." Essentially, doing nothing, possibly because of fear, is not a reasonable option!

Next slide (And the point is...)

And the point of this change in mindset is... that greater collaboration and an exploration of our strengths are going to be two key features of shifting this agenda. No... I'm not going to ask you all to take up skydiving as the means of overcoming your fears! I've personally been there and done that... loved it, but I have no plans even for me to re-connect with my fears in this way.

You'll see from this slide that the main point is about making clearly reasoned risk decisions... I can assure you these guys in this image have very much done that. For all the outward appearances, this is an incredibly safe way of scaring the hell out of yourself... or having fun... depending on your mindset! There is no element of doing things on a whim

here... there is no casual taking a chance. These guys will be operating within heightened (excuse the pun) passions, having trained, prepared, done the simulation rehearsals, and checked and double-checked all the safety measures before they arrive at the point in this picture!

We need to make sure we are focused on the benefits of why we might engage in taking a specific risk... notice I say 'specific' risk... this is a very personalised and situation-specific way of thinking about risk. You can leave all the vague generalisations behind when you are thinking and working in this way.

Next slide (principles)

Then there is the matter of principles... as Groucho Marx once said: *"These are my principles, and if you don't like them I have others!"* NO, that's not the way to be thinking... shifting our way of thinking about risk needs to be underpinned by a consistent set of clearly understood principles... understood at all levels of the organisation!

Here are some that I include for your reflection... when we recognise the reality that risk can be minimised but not eliminated, we need to see this idea reflected in practice, particularly when things go wrong.

Try to access different sources of information when developing your assessment... and remember, when you've identified a risk you have a responsibility to do something about it, to manage the situation... whether by simply communicating basic information to others, or developing a realistic plan to manage the overall risk. This will then link directly into the importance of good teamworking (which will also be developed more in Module 3).

The importance of language emerges in the next listed principle... defensible decisions are those where we can point to the evidence and reasoning to back up our decision... whereas a defensive decision is more likely to be a knee-jerk reaction to fear and blame.

Think for a moment what the concept of 'confidentiality' means in your work... generally we should always be looking to actively protect the confidentiality of people's information, and be transparent with them, first regarding the reasons why it could be beneficial for them if you can share specific information with others on a need-to-know basis. However, we also have a duty to protect others by sharing crucial information when we determine that someone else could be the victim of harm... i.e. to breach confidentiality.

And... whilst much of my presentation is focused on how we are working with individual's who need our service... these concepts are equally applicable to organisation management... and their role in providing the right environment in which good practice can flourish. A blame culture often starts with the attitudes communicated from the top!

Next slide (What is PR-T?)

Once again I have to say that language is vitally important... we all tend to slip into our own forms of shorthand in the way we talk... but that presents an often-unnoticed big problem.

What you said is not always what someone else heard! Repeat that phrase back again... what you said is not always what someone else heard. Strange, eh!

I may say to you... that there is a significant chance of a client of mine suddenly deciding to stop taking their prescribed medication. I know my client, and I know what that statement means in detail... but do you? No! Some of you might be guessing this is a big problem coming quickly down the road... while others might be thinking, perhaps it's time to have a more detailed chat with your client, Steve... yet others might be thinking, just let the psychiatrist &/or GP know. There could be as many interpretations of that brief statement as there are people hearing it... because you will process it through your own knowledge and experiences. Basically, I could have taken another sentence or two in order to communicate very much more clearly what is actually going on... and that could then reduce the chance of confusion or misunderstanding.

Now... take Positive Risk-Taking... on the slide there is a specific description of those three words (actually used in reverse)... taking risks for positive outcomes. Please, please, please, don't let me hear you using the term 'positive risk'! It doesn't mean anything... it's too vague and general... which in turn means that for every 10 people using it there will be at least 11 different interpretations. That simply doesn't help anyone when we're trying to work out a challenging and important decision with someone about taking risks to improve their own lives.

Next slide (definition)

Finally, for this brief overview of Module 1... here is my own definition of the concept I created back in 1994. It draws together content from across the following modules of this training and ties in with a 'structured approach to making decisions' as will be set out in Module 5.

Essentially, I present this to you as the opposite end of the spectrum from fear driven risk aversion. In essence it is the shifting of the risk agenda.

[Read the definition...]

However, let me finish off with a note of caution, as previously outlined in this presentation... the definition starts off with the weighing of pros and cons of different courses of action. If the cons outweigh the pros... and all the indications are that the more risk averse route is the best... simply DON'T TAKE THE RISK!