Perspectives from the trenches: How Australian risk communicators see themselves, who they trust, and what they need from research

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Few studies about risk communicators with extant focus on organisational strategies (Ha & Riffe, 2015)

Understanding the state of the field can help identify research gaps and training needs
Research questions

- What level of self-efficacy is possessed by risk and warning communicators?
- Who do risk and warning communicators trust?
- What level of emotional intelligence is possessed by risk and warning communicators?
- What are the research interests of risk and warning communicators?
- What are the training needs of risk and warning communicators?
Methods

- Online survey
- Distributed to participants of risk and warning communication workshops in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne and to contacts
- Invited 128 participants and 44 completed the survey
- Sample comprised people with communication and operational backgrounds
- Even split between male and female genders
Sample characteristics

**Age**
- 65 years or older: 5%
- 55-64 years: 11%
- 45-54 years: 18%
- 35-44 years: 34%
- 25-34 years: 30%
- 18-24 years: 2%

**Highest level of education**
- Bachelor's degree: 34%
- TAFE: 16%
- Did not complete high school: 2%
- High school: 2%
- Doctorate: 7%
- Postgraduate masters/graduate diploma or certificate: 39%

**Years of Experience in Role**
- 1-5 years: 26
- 6-10 years: 10
- 11-15 years: 4
- 16-20 years: 3
- 21 years or above: 1
## Primary organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisational type</th>
<th>% of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State or Territory Government</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Government</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government owned corporation</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency service</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory authority</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

Trust
Emotional intelligence
Self-efficacy
Trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Expertise in competent judgement</th>
<th>Useful source</th>
<th>Doing what is right</th>
<th>Telling the truth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporations or Businesses</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insurers</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>4.03</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government Corporate</td>
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<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Government</td>
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<td>4.12</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
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<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emotional intelligence

- EI is a set of interrelated abilities “to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10)
  - Operationalised as appraisal of own emotions, appraisal of others’ emotions, regulation of emotion, use of emotion (Wong & Law, 2002)

- Central to leader effectiveness

- Studied in relation to work outcomes like satisfaction, commitment, and intention
Findings—Emotional Intelligence

- Women had greater EI than men (F(1,42)=4.52, p=.039) (mean for male= 5.4261 vs. mean for female= 5.8835)
- Positive association between age and EI (F(4,38)=2.75, p=.042).
Self-efficacy + findings

- Defined as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands” (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 408)
  - Studied using Chen et al.’s (2001) general self efficacy scale
- Women have higher self-efficacy than men (F(1,42)=7.308, p=.010) (mean for male = 5.585 vs. mean for female = 6.074)
- Linear regression found positive association between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy (F(1,42)=30.924, p=.000) with an R square of .424.
Research interests

• Message
  – Effectiveness, timing, tailoring, visuals
  – Evaluation
  – Communicating for behaviour change

• Community
  – Expectations, education needs, engagement, differences

• Social media
  – Validating, tailoring
Training needs

- **Message**
  - Effectiveness, message construction and targeting
  - Case studies of good and bad practice
  - To achieve certain outcomes: evacuation, preparedness
- **Social media**
  - Role of and emerging trends
  - How to maximise via targeting
- **Community**
  - Understanding audiences and decision-making and human factors (e.g. stress)
  - Understanding motivations for community
  - How to engage vulnerable and CALD communities
- **Strategic development**
  - Systems to avoid crisis
  - Managing and/or working with stakeholders (e.g. volunteers, media, government)