

Introduction

Hello, and welcome to this first module of the whole package that I call positive risk taking... which is designed to help you to appreciate just how positive risk-taking happens for you... and how you develop the confidence to make what are quite often very challenging decisions... And I'm talking about you as a businessperson, maybe starting up a business or expanding one... I'm talking about you as a practitioner... perhaps working in health or social care... or, in some ways, all of this should be relevant to you just in terms of your own personal life... So, my name is Steve Morgan... and you'll see from the screen... practice-based evidence... that's a business name that I established back in 2001, when I moved from being employed into being self-employed... and this content has been the focus of my business... going back even further... thinking of myself as a practitioner, working in health and social care, as an occupational therapist, a case manager... that's the kind of background that I'm bringing to this business.

So, you'll see module one is entitled, developing a risk mindset... and what I'm hoping to do here... is to reflect with you about how we develop a mindset... how we think about risk... how it affects us... how we respond to all these different influences that are around us... when risk is a part of our decision-making, part of our thinking.

So, what I'm going to do is... I'm going to initially talk about certain influences around fear... the process of fear... the ideas behind what we refer to as a blame culture... how that affects our work, how it affects us in our day-to-day lives... I'm then going to engage you to be thinking about how we need to be changing that mindset... and setting up some thoughts about how do we shift the agenda, about thinking about risk, and working with risk... I'm going to be using some particular quotes, that again, will be there to invite you to think and reflect on the work that you do... I'll set up a series of principles... the very principles, that this module... and all the other modules will focus much more on... It will be about being practical... it emerges out of a lot of reflection and publications that I've made, and looking at the literature and some of the research out there... but I'm not going to bombard you with too much of that... I want this to be very practical... useful on a day-to-day basis... So, the principles that support that way of working... and then finally, I want to come in this presentation to the concept of positive risk taking itself, and to reflect on what it is... what does that phrase mean? And, to help you to reflect on what it means for you in your life... in your work... whatever role you adopt. So that's broadly the structure.

Fear, Blame & Risk Aversion

In this section of the training, I want to focus on the negative connotations of risk... reflecting on the concept of fear, of the impact of living and working within a blame culture, of airing on the side of caution, that leads us to potentially become more risk averse in our decision-making.

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... Taking that first phrase – Working with Risk - it was the name of a publication that I produced or wrote many years back. But it's the phrase that I prefer to use day in, day out, because it's a phrase that does what it says on the tin. As you see there, it's what we do every day. It's what influences and affects every decision we make... we're constantly working with risk.

But 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. But I would 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 that helped to trigger those conversations between people. But as I said earlier, this particular beginning part of the whole presentation is going to focus very much from fear around blame, around what we might call risk aversion. And 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 particular slide is one I'll keep coming back to, there is no such thing as a risk-free option. So, I want you to be thinking first and foremost about your response to thoughts about fear, thoughts about a blame culture, thoughts about risk aversion... and how they play out for you in your life, in your work...

NEXT SLIDE

Which then takes us on to this next important question... What does risk actually mean to you? I've set up something here that I'll call a risk tolerance scale... and you'll see over on the left a group of people pretty much with their heads in the sand. Is that a way to be trying to avoid making decisions? That's the kind of more risk averse way of approaching something... whereas, across to the right... you'll see this person on the surfboard, surfing the big wave, more of a risk-taking picture, I'm sure you'll agree. Where are you on that risk tolerance scale? I would suggest when I think, and I reflect, and I'm sure you do to the same extent... that we would like to see ourselves more to the right side of the picture rather than to the left side of the picture on this slide. But my important message to you is... we should never think of ourselves as being just fixed in one position across that continuum... it is much more important that we should be thinking decision by decision. Different decisions we make, different circumstances we find ourselves in, different levels of information, different ways of collaborating with people will put us in different positions on that overall continuum. That's a much more important and nuanced way to think... different decisions can be located in different points across that wide spectrum from left to right.

Even the same decision might be located in different positions, as new information comes forward, as we find ourselves in slightly different circumstances. So, it's not a rigid either-or choice, it's not fixed. It's thinking about risk in a more fluid way.

NEXT SLIDE

But... staying with the idea of fear, fear and blame... I'll come back in a moment to the politics of fear Gardner's book... and I'll pick up on some of the main messages he puts across. But before I do, just think more broadly... a culture of fear, culture of blame is one that's quite often generates stigma... about particular people, about particular behaviours, about particular types of risks. And we'll generate a lot more of a negative thought, a negative feeling, a negative response... in a cultural sense. And I'll ask you to reflect for a moment or two on times that you've been particularly aware, maybe when you've been the victim of a sense of stigma, on that receiving end of very negative responses from others.

Then there's this issue about evidence, we'll often hear where's the evidence for what you're suggesting. Where's the evidence to show that it works... Well with risk we have a slight problem. There's an evidence base out there, but I'm going to suggest it's very narrow. It's an evidence-based that is based in failure. We're very good at recording when things go wrong, we can build up a whole range of evidence around events that went wrong... We're not so good at providing the evidence about things that work, what goes right, what helped it to go, right... We're not hardwired to think in those terms. So, when you're being invited to provide the evidence, think about the evidence base... When you're thinking about risk, I have to say it's very skewed. It's a very narrow base. So, we need to treat it with large degrees of caution... not to say that it's not accurate about some elements of what goes on, but we can't treat that as an evidence base for the whole spectrum of risk.

Then I'll ask you to just think briefly about personal responses. Maybe yours, or societal reactions when mistakes happen, and I'm talking about big mistakes here. There's a common theme that emerges, and you'll see this in some of the big news items that appear from time to time... where there's a sense that when a mistake has happened, the initial reaction is for people to go into denial. Wasn't me... no, cover their backs to an extent, and institutions again can also pull up the drawbridge to cover their backs, denials, even going as far as telling lies, creating different stories as to what happened and what didn't happen. It's a natural defence mechanism. We're defending ourselves against this fear.

This fear that blame is going to have severe consequences for us. 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, 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.

We're asking people, or we're putting people into positions where decisions are being made by and large from this position of fear and that the chance that we'd fail rather than really striving forward and going for it.

NEXT SLIDE

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. Just step back again.

NEXT SLIDE

I said, I'd come back to Dan Gardner 2008. And Dan was, or probably still is a journalist who lives and works in Ottawa in Canada and came out with a fabulous book, published back in 2008, called risk the science and politics of fear. And I just want to share a few of the thoughts and ideas that emerged in that book.

Dan starts off in the book by reminding us of the situation back at nine 11, 2001, New York city, just under 3000 people were killed... as those planes were flown into the twin towers. A lesser-known statistic is that for the 12 months following on from that event, 1,595 people died on the US roads 'above' what would be seen as the annual average. What we've got is a situation where fear shifted people on mass, out of planes, into cars, onto roads. And whilst we can say, fairly clearly, what the average number of deaths on the roads across the United States would be, year on year... for that one particular year, it was 1,595 higher than would be expected. And they know they can be that specific with that statistic because travel patterns pretty much returned to normal about 12 months later.

So, the latter part of 2002 onwards, the use of planes shifted back, people used their cars less... back to a level comparable with that pre the events on nine 11. What this is saying is that we need to be aware of the consequences of our decisions, particularly those decisions that are driven by fear. There is no such thing as a risk-free option!

But, Dan Gardner also suggests that fear can be constructive... When we worry about a risk, we think more about it... and, as a result, we focus on it, and we can keep alive, perhaps... we can certainly thrive, and our business can thrive. And the work that we do with other people can thrive... because we're very much alert to and focused on and thinking about the risk. But then there's fear going to the other extreme, which becomes a more unreasonable and unreasoning level of fear. And that's another matter altogether.

Within this book, he also goes on to suggest that we worry more than previous generations. You've just got to open a newspaper. You've just got to look at TV news or listen to news on the radio. And there'll be another cause of fear likely to be highlighted on an almost daily basis.

Having said that, he also reflects on the thinking of Ulrich Beck, and Beck suggests that we actually are more at risk than ever before. And that comes from the angle that if you look at technology, it's far outstripping our ability to control it, the constant change and development of our mobile phones and our laptops, all this technology, the advances in robotics, the concerns around the whole issues of climate change. All of these things really do seem to be running rampant. Can we really keep a hold of the advances and the magnitude of some of the fears there? But having said that, we've also got to take into account that in what's considered to be the developed world... life expectancy is constantly increasing, infant mortality is decreasing, and on most measures, we're living better quality lives now, more than at any other time... we're more prosperous than at any other time in the history of the planet.

But again, I'm kind of jumping around some of the thoughts that emerged from Dan Gardiner in his book. He suggested so much of what we do and think about risk does not make sense... It's based on assumptions that contradict, let alone support what evidence is actually telling us. It goes back to that idea about the road traffic accidents following on from nine 11... but he illustrates this by talking about people who smoke, who are more than prepared to go on marches in favour of banning genetically modified foods. Even though there's no evidence at this stage to suggest that genetically modified foods cause any harm.

Then there are the murders, which grab headlines... but the carnage on the roads doesn't... we have changes in attitudes across the generations about child safety. If I compare what I was able to do, and go out and be on my own, and out with friends when I was a child... and I compare that with my children, and that generation on, and how I and society have developed a very different outlook from the constant reports from 24/7 media... we'd have to say, we've become much more over-protective of children, probably in the face of what the actual evidence is telling us. We need to really seriously think about any consequences that might have.

And Dan Gardner's book is also telling us if we compare the deaths by terrorist activities with deaths caused by ordinary criminals... in terms of the sheer numbers, the latter way outstrips terrorism, but that's not a message that you'd really pick up from the media because fear sells. It makes money. The media on occasions will exaggerate situations and equally put out inaccurate perceptions. The words that are used can also be massively illuminated by corresponding images juxtaposed with the words.

The whole idea of stranger danger and the language of reporting around paedophilia... what we often find in reports is that figures are actually guesstimates... guesses are made, but when we repeat the same numbers and the same figures all the time, it very quickly becomes assumed that they're facts.

One of the many evidence-based facts that Dan Gardner does put forward is that we're 26 times more likely to be killed in a car than abducted by a stranger. Evidence indicates that we have never had it so good as now and that's an important message... but the hard wiring of our brains was actually shaped by environments that bear little resemblance to the world that we inhabit now. If you think in terms that we're trying to work with computers and the digital age, and it's argued that our brains were actually originally devised at a time when the most complex decision was picking berries in fields... Dan Gardner suggests that the wonder is not that we sometimes make mistakes about risks...the wonder really is that we get it right most of the time or even some of the time. That's the wonder... but we are the safest humans in history, despite the fact that this combination of the brain, the media and individuals and organizations with an interest in stoking up fear actually make us frightened of our own shadows at times. It's a wonderful book. And I do encourage you to get hold of a copy if you can.

NEXT SLIDE

Let's stay on this theme about blame culture. What are the potential outcomes? What are the consequences of this way of thinking?

Here's two that I'm going to offer you. Firstly, that a society that needs to perpetuate a culture of blame only serves to destroy the seeds of confidence before they have an opportunity to flourish. That's something I wrote in an article many years back, but it's an important one when we're thinking about this mindset... a consequence of this negative mindset, is that danger that if we're constantly stoking up fear, if people are more concerned about being blamed than getting things, right, then the result is creativity, innovation, which we're always lauding, that's our way forward, that's the advancements in society... We're actually holding those back.

And then at an individual level, particularly from my experience in health care and social care, the quashing of personal aspirations can only serve to contribute to the potential for serious risks and damaging consequences. What I mean by that is that if we're focused on a person, in terms of their pathology, their diagnosis, all about their negative experiences of a condition... and as a result, we're not listening to their agenda where they are trying to express their wishes... we actually give them very good cause to disengage from us, not see us as relevant to them. And whilst I'm saying that comes from a health social care perspective, if you're a businessperson listening to this presentation, I'd also say that all of the messages here are relevant in terms of business decision making as well. And it is important to think if you're managing other people in a business, or even your connections with your clients, that it's important to be very well aware of what their aspirations are, what their wishes are, what's their agenda. How do I work with that? How do I serve them?

NEXT SLIDE

If we're focused on the blame culture, this young woman here really does illustrate the situation. How is she going to feel able, or enabled, to consider taking risks if she's working in a team or within a culture where everybody is so quick to point that thing, finger of blame. You almost see the cogs turning there, where she's got the ideas, but she's held back by all of these influences around her.

NEXT SLIDE

So, we need to be thinking about shifting that risk agenda... And a number of ways that we can begin to think about shifting the agenda... Firstly, good identification of the risks that we're working with can be boosted, can be improved, by collaboration amongst people... not generating more of the I'm going to blame them... it was her fault, his fault, their fault. How do we collaborate more? How do we draw people in to share information? How do we reflect on the information that we've got, and reflect together on that information to help build up the fuller picture... And we also, as a counterbalance to the negativity of risk, which I'll talk about certainly in modules two and four... we need to integrate this whole appreciation of strengths. How strengths fit in with our way of working at risk... module four would be all about working with strengths. This is about you as a business individual, what strengths do you have? What strengths have you built up in the business that you're running and presented? What strengths do your employees have? What strengths do your

customers, clients have? Likewise, if you're working with health and social care, how do we focus on the individual who clearly is in contact with us because of problems that experiences that they will have because of a diagnosis or a set of social circumstances, but are we looking to their capabilities, their strengths, their abilities.

This is trying to draw in constructive positive information that we can blend in with the negativity of risk, in order to help us move forward in different ways. It's shifting that mindset. And here's a quote to help us reflect on the shift in agenda. The source is unknown, I think it's Romanian philosopher, but I've tried to Google it again recently and not really found the actual source, but there's an important message in here. If it wasn't for the possibility of suicide, I would've killed myself a long time ago... Now that's instantly the word suicide leaps out to people, and for those of you that are business orientated, not health, social care orientated, suicide is not actually the important word that I want to emphasize. That's not what I'm using this quote for... the key word here is possibility.

Looking at that message there. If it wasn't for having that choice, then I would have been backed into a corner, choices limited... and then, who knows... the message there is I would have killed myself a long time ago. So, it's about possibilities. That's what we need to think about when we're expanding our mindset about risk.

NEXT SLIDE

Scary image. Is this a person in relation to that quote that I've just mentioned to you? Is this a person that's just about to jump... or is this a person very comfortable surveying all the domain around them, all that they have access to, all that they may have power over? There can be very different perspectives on that limited bit of information that an image, or a few words, are conveying to us. And that again comes back to the risk mindset... opening up the mindset, a more dynamic fluid mindset.

NEXT SLIDE

So, it's about these different visions that we might have of risk. Again, if you think back to that quote that I mentioned, just a moment back, how you respond personally to the suicide quote, will reflect on the principles and the visions that you subscribe to in working with risk. So, when you saw that quote, if it wasn't for the possibility of suicide, I would have killed myself a long time ago. If you're taking a policy approach, depending on the nature of the work, the position that you're in, you might well instantly be looking at that and thinking, how do we develop the information to set targets so we can manage the numbers, and minimize the number of times that people do commit suicide.

If you're coming from an academic perspective looking at evidence, the evidence-based approach will be... how do we access more information to be able to identify the specific risk factors that will suggest whether a person is going to commit suicide or not.

And staying with a clinical theme, we're faced with this vision or this challenge of how do we manage the situation... do we get in there and take control for the person, or do we enable people by getting alongside them, helping them to express themselves more, gain more

information from them, which links in with the last point on this slide... this ethical vision of being focused on a personal narrative, getting the person to tell their story, supporting a person to have choice, particularly around decisions that they want to make. So, are we really there on their side? All of these are different ways of looking at perhaps the same piece of information.

NEXT SLIDE

So, I'm talking about shifting the agenda, but I just want to stay briefly with this idea of the politics of fear. Where's that coming from? What is it that's holding us in this particular mindset or frame of mind? Well, I'm going to suggest the media, the way media reports, risks and mistakes, in particular... Particularly when it's generated as being in the public interest to know who made the mistake, and then be seen to hold them accountable. That's a very powerful message. We're talking about big errors by and large, but there is this underlying thought that somebody needs to be hung out to dry for something that's gone wrong. The problem here is, again, back to that evidence base, we are talking by and large about very rare, very extreme events... And the reality of day-to-day risk for you setting up and developing a business, for you as a practitioner, working with all range of different people, for you as a person thinking about what you're doing in your life, the reality of day-to-day risks that we're working with can be totally distorted when all the evidence and all the reporting is on those extreme rare events.

What we've created over the years, by shifting in this direction, is that we've allowed bureaucratic reactions to take over. And we create a drive for administrative solutions to particular problems, and the risks that emerge. We're trying almost to remove that person and their experience out of it. We could manage it, or we believe we can manage it better, if we can impose some specific bureaucratic means and administrative processes. What this means actually is that not completing the risk assessment, may in fact be the greatest risk for many practitioners, or anyone else involved in making a big decision... If it goes wrong, the message coming back is: if you didn't complete a risk assessment... you were in the wrong. So that becomes our greatest risk... And a further consequence of this approach is that it becomes easy to lose sight of who are we are really serving... You as a practitioner lose sight of the individual person, when we're focused more on the processes on the bureaucracy... you as a business owner, lose sight of your clients, when you focus more on the processes that you're trying to adhere to.

NEXT SLIDE

This can be the outcome of this politics of fear, of this blame culture. Here we have a young woman who undoubtedly would have been a very creative, innovative person... but we see from this image that... files of policies, and attempts at filling in all of these administrative procedures takes its toll... It's exhausting... The toll that's taken is the individual, the person can no longer flourish. You end up exhausted by the administration of, at all.

NEXT SLIDE

So, I want you to reflect back. If you take a break at this point, reflect back on those messages about the politics of fear, the blame culture... how does that work for you? In what ways have you experienced that in your work, and reflect on the influence, being honest to yourself, the influence it might've had on you.

Principles into Practice

In order to challenge the negativity often associated with risk, the first task is to establish a set of clear principles. These should form a foundation for guiding and supporting our thinking. These should help us to review our own risk mindset and inform how we work with risk in practice. Confidence in our decision-making can be derived from understanding that our practice is underpinned by consistent principles, as well as our personal values.

NEXT SLIDE

But I'll start off with a quote again... Groucho Marx, you'd all be aware of who he is. These are my principles. And if you don't like them, well, I have others. Yes, I'm sure you'll appreciate I'm not actually very good at imitating Groucho Marx, and I haven't got his moustache either... but I'm sure you know who he is.

And it's all about the comedy with Groucho. So yes, do see this for its comedic value. Do not take that sentence literally... but it's a good one for reminding us, as you'll see further down the slide, that principles are vitally important to guide us... as long as we're clear and consistent in the principles that we adhere to.

And preferably if you're working in an organization or you're managing an organization, it's just as important to try to establish some consistency from the policy through to the practice... that the principles that the policy talks about really does connect with the principles as people deliver the practice, deliver the business, deliver the service. And I'll remind you that good practice is actually built primarily on being vigilant, being persistent and above all else this consistency of being clear on how we're adhering to our principles.

NEXT SLIDE

So, I'm going to give you 10 principles and we will flip through these fairly quickly... but again, I want you to reflect on the messages in each of these principles and how they relate to you as a person or the work that you do. Principle Number One, risk is dynamic... It is constantly changing in response to new information or altered circumstances.

Constantly changing... here we challenge again, this idea of the bureaucratic administrative approach... the approach that turns in my health, social care hat, that turns practitioners into administrators... The danger in filling in the risk assessments is that we focus on the electronic or the paper version and ultimately that's a very static statement. Whereas you'll all be aware that in reality risk changes minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. And it's important that in our own reflections that we identify those changes, respond to those changes. So, we're thinking dynamically in parallel to information that emerges.

NEXT SLIDE

Principle Number Two... risk can never be entirely eliminated, but it can be assessed and minimized. You cannot give a guarantee 100% that a particular risk is not going to go wrong.

We can never ever give that guarantee. We can be vigilant. We can focus. We can work. We can assess. We can analyse... the best we can do is say, we're going to minimize the risks and constantly be alert to catch things early if they're going wrong... but we cannot promise to eliminate risks.

NEXT SLIDE

Principle Number Three... assessment will be enhanced if you're able to access several sources of information.

Okay? The more people you can draw in, the more pieces of the jigsaw you can bring in. And that's an analogy I use a lot around all of this working with risk... the pieces of the jigsaw... I'll keep coming back to that one, I'm sure... but it is about drawing people in that may hold different parts of that picture.

There's an important message on the second half of this statement... Frequently, you will be working with incomplete and possibly even inaccurate information. You won't know it's inaccurate until future sources of information come to prove that what you were working with was inaccurate... but you still have to work with what you've got. And I'll pick that one up in module two as well, because it's vitally important when we are making judgments based on our assessment that we also put alongside that a statement of what was available to us when we made the assessment.

NEXT SLIDE

Principle number four... intuition, sometimes known instinct or gut reaction. This is a very valuable tool, but it is not a final assessment... and that's a very important message. Intuition, which is played down a lot by people that are perhaps more of the academics, the evidence base, we need to know only the facts. Well, the reality is we're human beings and we have experience. We build up experience. We make judgment calls based on that experience. And in the moment, it's intuitive because we can't pinpoint exactly the source of where that feeling is coming from. But those are important feelings that we build up. We carry with us.

Intuition acts as a means for telling us something is not quite what it seems... but its value lies very much in how we respond to it. How do we use it as an alarm bell, to remind us to go and access more information, which will then either backup or refute our initial assumptions. So again, I'm going to emphasize the intuition has a role, but it has to be used and treated with great caution. Use it as the alarm bell to find out more. Don't use it as your final assessment call.

NEXT SLIDE

Principle number five... identifying risks carries a duty to do something about them. So, we see the risk, we assess the risk. It's not good enough to then put that assessment in a frame on the wall and sit back and admire it... there's a responsibility that goes with identifying a risk. We need to do something. We need to respond to it. We need to manage it in some way, i.e., risk management... That might be as simple as communicating some information to others or searching out more information, but it can be a quite significant plan... It can be a very significant decision and a change of course of action... but it's important to always keep in mind when we identify a risk, we need to respond in some way to it.

NEXT SLIDE

Principle number six... risk assessment, management and decision-making can be improved when good teamworking, and multi-agency collaboration are achieved... Good teamwork and multi-agency working... again, this issue about bringing people together as opposed to a blame culture where everybody's quick to point the finger, shifting the blame onto somebody else.

This is about collaborative work in joint discussions, and care planning should include involvement of the clients and family, friends as much as possible. And likewise, in terms of the business that you might be running, if you employ people, you work alongside other people, even quite often with your clients, how do you involve them in the whole discussion, the whole assessment, the whole management plan? It's working as and thinking as teams... collaborating as teams

NEXT SLIDE

Principle number seven... defensible decisions are also constructive decisions, when they're based on clear reasoning... Again, I want to emphasize that word defensible. I'm not talking about defensive... defensive decisions fit very much more in the picture of fear and blame. And again, I'll pick this issue up and develop it more in module five focused on risk decision-making.

But in terms of a principle underpinning our risk mindset, thinking about risk is thinking about defensible decisions... ones where we can show that we've thought through the options, illustrate the reasons why we've come to one decision as opposed to another... it's that clear reasoning... being able to have confidence in the reasoning... And by and large, you will find that most reasonable people... when you lay out your reasoning for inspection, they would come to the same conclusions as you.

NEXT SLIDE

Principle number eight... risk-taking can engage positive collaboration with beneficial outcomes. So, the idea of taking risks... the thoughts about taking risks... If you go back to the, or think back to that picture, I showed you early on the person on the surfboard. We'd all like to be there, but we can't all be on that surfboard together, that doesn't work... but this idea of getting out there and surfing the wave, it actually does draw other people in... it's contagious in a way, the positivity that it could possibly generate... people want to get on

that bandwagon... let's get involved. This feels good... So, the principle about really thinking of risk taking as being something that can be positive, that draws people in... the kind of people who want to react and work together in a constructive way, particularly helping to shape why... the articulation of the outcomes that they can achieve.

NEXT SLIDE

Principle number nine... confidentiality as a right, but it may be breached in exceptional circumstances when people are deemed to be at serious risk of harm... Confidentiality is vitally important. Again, if we're talking about the field of work that you're in, the health or social care work that you do, you don't want to be somebody that is going to be known as a foghorn... someone that will just blurt out information about anybody else to whoever else is passing. Likewise, in your own personal life, you don't want to get known by those that have taken you in, trusted you, taking you into that confidence... if you then spill the beans to any and everybody else.

So, confidentiality is a vitally important element... particularly when we talk about risk, but it's an important element of who we are, and the communications that we hold. But the message here is about being aware that there are exceptional circumstances when we will need to break that confidentiality. And the issue is that where a serious risk of harm could emerge, there's very good reasons why we should then engage with the people, inform other people, bring others in... breaching the confidentiality as a result.

NEXT SLIDE

And the last of the principles number... is about the wider organization... organization management will work to minimize the experiences of a blame culture. That's important, if we're going to be challenging this mindset, challenging that blame, that fear angle that I've been setting up in the early parts of this presentation... it's important that within organizations, at least, everybody is working towards that same aim. So, it's important that the culture of management in an organization minimizes the sense for its frontline workers, that if you step out of line, you're going to get blamed.

Having said that... if we're trying to minimize that kind of experience, we're not doing it and condoning poor practice... far from it. Processes are in place that poor practice should be investigated quite openly and honestly, to learn lessons, which is one of those phrases we constantly hear... And only in the very rare, very extreme cases, further down the track where there's been clear negligence... it's then an issue to be thinking of some of those more negative consequences of a blame culture, dealing with the person appropriately at that stage.

It's no help to anybody jumping to conclusions about blame, jumping to conclusions to allocate accountability, right at the very beginning, once something's gone wrong... that's not necessarily going to be the best way of learning any lessons... other than how we all withdraw into ourselves and pull up the drawbridge and concoct stories... which doesn't help to really sort out, deal with, and learn from situations when they have gone wrong.

There's another element to this statement here as well. It's also about being sensitive to the experiences where people have become victims. So, in an instance where somebody has died, that will have a significant effect on staff that might have been working with them... on other clients that might've known them... on family and friends who have known a person that's deceased... and we're not minimizing the blame culture through being insensitive to their experiences.

So that's a challenge for organizations, the management of organizations, to really support and encourage an overall shift in mindset... an organizational shift in mindset, as well as helping individual workers to shift their mindset through the change of experience.

So those are my series of principles. And if you want to take the break now, I'll ask you to look back on those principles and again, think about each of those in relation to who you are, the position you're in, the work that you do.

Quotes

Now I want to explore our risk mindset from the perspective of a series of different quotes and images. Another way of helping us to challenge and develop our thinking.

NEXT SLIDE

Taking on the challenge of the unknown to begin with... I start with another quote with an unknown source... I think again, it was probably the same or maybe a different Romanian philosopher as a quote I used earlier in the module... If you don't risk anything, you may risk everything. Now for me, I have Googled, and I've seen different slightly modified versions of the words... Erica Jong in particular comes to mind... but this was the very specific words that I saw on the underside of one of those flip up seats in a black taxi cab in London, back in 1998, many years back... I was heading across the city towards a railway station to head up north somewhere to do some work around risk. And I've been developing, in what was then the Sainsbury's Centre for Mental Health, my thinking around positive risk taking... anyway, I sat in the cab and where I expected to see an advert... instead, this was the phrase I saw. If you don't risk anything, you may risk everything... I don't mind sharing with you that my initial thought was something about the driver and the driver's capabilities... was I going to get to my destination in one piece!? Clearly it was nothing to do with that... So, this was a phrase, because of the nature work I was doing at the time, it instantly leaped out to me.

I had to scribble it down. I've been using it ever since. To me, it's very important... because it help give us a perspective on this challenge of the unknown.

Jim Rohn, US author and entrepreneur, also illustrates this particular point... If you're not willing to risk the unusual, you'll have to settle for the ordinary.

NEXT SLIDE

Well, that does look a bit unusual and I'm not going to ask you all to take on the challenge of the unknown by strapping a bungee rope to your ankle... But there is this message... That, if

you're not prepared to go and really take on an unusual challenge, you will be doing what you've always done. That will be absolutely fine for many people, they're safe and comfortable that way. But again, it's about a mindset, an open mindset, going back to the risk tolerance scale, where do we fit on that? Clearly this person, is at an extreme end of it?

NEXT SLIDE

Then I want you to think about the rewards of not taking risks. Well, there's a rhetorical statement... I'm beginning to learn from Groucho Marx, it would seem... because you'll see from the actual quotes themselves, they're not necessarily rewards for not taking a risk... being risk averse is not being specifically rewarded in this context. Dan Pallotta, US author and entrepreneur says, when you prohibit failure, you kill innovation. I think that one goes very much back to the image of the young woman that I showed you earlier... exasperated, surrounded by the files, and scrunched up pieces of paper... When you prohibit failure... when that's your focus... the danger is that you will kill innovation. Is that a reward? It's a question I'll ask you to ponder on.

And then Morgan Spurlock, the US documentary filmmaker suggests that when you train your employees to be risk averse, then you're preparing your whole company to be reward challenged. So, if you really train, focusing on your employees, get them all thinking in a risk averse way.... [moving quickly to toilet image]

NEXT SLIDE

That's where you could possibly end up... We'll all go down the pan together... it would appear. That's my interpretation of Morgan Spurlock's quote anyway... You may have a different interpretation. That's for you to reflect on.

NEXT SLIDE

Then there's 'the need for change', which is what I'm establishing across this presentation. Thinking about a mindset based in fear... opening that up, shifting the risk agenda... Tony Robbins says, if you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always gotten.

It's a good reflection in a way... is it a need for change? It's certainly a reflection on a lack of change. I'll use it and I'll interpret it as a good mantra to keep us thinking about why we should... why there is a need... why we should consider change, when it's appropriate.

And Denis Waitley says, life is inherently risky. There is only one big risk you should avoid at all costs. And that is the risk of doing nothing.

NEXT SLIDE

But it's difficult... It's a challenge... which is well represented here in this image. This idea of change... It could feel like we're pushing the massive boulder up a hill, not even aware that there's some additional resistance on the other side... So, I'm not saying change is easy... but then doing nothing might feel easy, but that also has consequences... I always come back to

that thought... There's no such thing as a risk-free option. It's possibly not the last time I'm going to use that phrase.

NEXT SLIDE

Take a leap of faith... And that's probably what the bungee jumper was doing just a few slides ago... But yeah, Conrad Hilton says success seems to be connected with action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don't quit. That's the important thing to keep moving, keep trying. Successful people make mistakes. It's an important recognition there, but they don't quit. Keep moving forward. Keep trying.

Tamara Alexander says, but he learned long ago that a life lived without risks pretty much wasn't worth living. Life rewarded courage. Even when that first step was taken neck deep in fear. [Shift quick to next slide]

NEXT SLIDE

There's a familiar image... I'm sure it's used in many illustrations in different presentations Talk about the ambition of a goldfish... but certainly that leap, that leap of faith is well illustrated here. And that's one that we're sometimes being engaged to take.

You're not quite sure if you're going to make it... you might make a mistake. You keep driving forward... those flippers will be going at an unbelievable rate of knots there.

NEXT SLIDE

We need to think about the timing... is there a right time to take a risk? Well, Joshua Foer says that there's a short window at the beginning of one's professional life. When it is comparatively easy to take big risks... make the most of that time before circumstances make you risk averse. And that one reminds me of many years ago... I actually had a kind of mid-career change at the age of 26. Yeah, sure... you're thinking... 26 is not the middle of somebody's working career... But I gave up a profession of town planning, starting in a new career in the profession of occupational therapy at 26... it probably felt a lot easier at that age to make such a substantial change... In our relative youth... we take something on, we have great aspirations, and we turn a corner and it's completely different to what we expected... and, maybe we just haven't built up enough experience... we haven't become embedded enough in what it is we're doing. But, it does feel easier, as Joshua Foer suggests there. But does it mean we can only take these big risks when we're very young?

TS Eliot says only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go. And that applies to all stages of life... For me, I would say yes, I made a change of career many, many years ago when I was 26... But, many more years later, in 2001, I made another great big leap. So yes... we get involved with bringing up families, and we become established in what we do, and we become known for what we do... And it becomes more difficult to make the change...

Well, for me at that point, it was about changing from being an employee to running my own business. And I was a good few years older than 26 at that stage. So, this idea of taking those big risks, I would argue is not just about when you're young in the early stages of your professional life. Again, there is no specific answer to when is the right time... only you will know the right time for you personally... for you and your business developments... for you as practitioners in terms of the nature of the work you do, only you will know, because it's based on your processing of the information that's available to you... of your experiences... and how those change in time as new information emerges and new circumstances arise.

NEXT SLIDE

So, this picture... the big question mark... When is the time right? Only you can tell when to put yourself in that guy's shoes.

NEXT SLIDE

As I draw this part of Module 1 to a close, I invite you to reflect back on this series of quotes... did any of them particularly resonate with you, and your experience? Note down your thoughts, or gut feelings... and come back to them a little later to reflect further on how this content is helping you to examine and shape your risk mindset.

What is Positive Risk-Taking?

Positive risk taking... this is the phrase that represents the over-arching subject of this 5-module training course... my fundamental approach to good risk decision-making... But, more specifically for Module 1... thinking about this idea of our risk mindset shift, and a shifting of the risk agenda... then positive risk-taking is what I believe is at the core of achieving the necessary change of thinking. But, do you really know what this phrase means?

NEXT SLIDE

So, what is it? Well, first of all, what is it not... It's not the negligent ignorance of the risks... but it is taking a chance or a gamble... in a constructive, thoughtful way... not in a negligent way. And it's also represented by a range of words that you see on this slide... It's about seizing opportunity... It's about representing things that we gain, through the choices we make, having some personal control over the decisions that we make... feeling autonomous in ourselves, through all these other phrases about personal control, choice, decision-making... Alongside that comes responsibility... if we're going to take a risk, we have to be responsible for thinking through the whole issue. Why and how are we going to take that risk?

And, usually, not always... you'll have to do it on your own in certain circumstances... but it should more often be about collaboration... collaborating with others. Taking those big challenging decisions quite often can feel isolating... but we can do it with more confidence, perhaps, if we're engaged with others... doing it by moving forward together. It doesn't always go right, most of the time it does... and that's where it's about reflecting on the

genuine learning and how we grow as a result of taking risks... and how we change as a result of the changes we could be making in our lives. And ultimately, as you see, positive risk taking is an essential part of our lived experience.

NEXT SLIDE

We all do it... because it's an everyday event. For me, it was an idea that I created back in mental health services in 1994, within the team, the service that I was working in at the time... I was attending a lecture... a lecture by a lawyer called David Carson. He was talking about risk-taking in mental health... and I, and a couple of colleagues from the team I was in, went away from that one inspired by some of the ideas. And I pondered it quite a bit... as I was in the process of writing my second textbook, *Helping Relationships in Mental Health*, at the time... Risk-taking as two words, didn't quite capture what it was we were doing in the kind of ground-breaking case management work that our team was involved in.

But on reflection, I added the word positive to the phrase risk-taking... which really did seem to better capture what we were doing at the time. And I'll say why and what that's about in a moment or two... but that's where it emerged from. So, I came up with that concept of positive risk taking in response to that lecture back in 1994... It's very much about what people can do, and want to do, so it's strengths-based which will be the focus of module four.

It's part of a healthy way of living... risk is an essential part of our day-to-day life. If you were to take, or I was to take, risk out of your life... you would immediately want to bring risk back into your life... Taking risks in positive and constructive ways, engages people. But we should also focus on engaging those around them, who they trust the most as well... drawing in those that can help and support to make these aspirations work... to be achieved. It's about making reasoned decisions, very clear reasoned decisions... but it's also very much based in being aware of the different options that are available. It's not about seeing something we like and just putting the blinkers on... removing from our vision... ignoring... any evidence or information that might challenge our preference. No, blinkers need to be off for positive risk taking... we need to be open and really analyzing information around the different options... because there's that phrase again... there's no such thing as a risk-free option.

NEXT SLIDE

So, at this stage, I also want to say language and the use of language is so important in all aspects of our life... Particularly when I'm talking about this phrase, positive risk taking... What is it? Well... it's about taking action, and it's about taking risks. There's two of the three words... positive risk taking is about, taking risks... But it's about taking risks for very specific reasons... And those reasons are to do with the positive outcomes we want to achieve. You've only got to reflect on moments in your own life, your own career... because we all do it.... We all take risks in our lives. And with very few exceptions, the reason why we do it is because we can see a benefit that we will get. We can see a positive outcome... and that simply is what positive risk taking is! And I argue that if a person, practitioner or

whatever field you're working in, is not clear about the positive outcome of the decision you're facing... then a general rule is don't take the risk.

There's something about a very clearly articulated outcome that really does help us to shape the risk we're going to take... shape the plan to put it into action... shape and elevate the chances of it really working and succeeding. But again, I come back to the use of language... because I'm not talking here about phrases such as positive risk... positive risk taking is not to be collapsed into, oh, it's all about positive risk. I hear that time and time again, over the many years that I've been discussing and developing the theme with practitioners... in particular in health and social care. No, it is not positive risk. If I ask a few people what they mean when using the phrase... positive risk... I get a range of different answers... which is not very helpful when we need clarity in our communications.

Also, part of the work I did back in 2006, 2007, as part of a group in the Department of Health in London... At that time, they created this phrase positive risk management... which is not something I particularly adhere to... In my opinion, that's too general... It's a kind of direction of travel, a loose way of putting a positive spin on this whole idea of managing risk... which might more frequently be seen to focus on negative restrictions... So, the ideas of positive risk or positive risk management to me are too vague... too general. And the problem is that when we communicate through language that is vague and general... we might be very clear in our own heads, what we're trying to communicate, but the people on the receiving end are not necessarily going to be interpreting that information in the way you intended... By contrast positive risk taking is very specific, to an individual, at a particular time, in a particular set of circumstances, focussed on a particular outcome.

NEXT SLIDE

So, let's give you a definition... capturing what I've just been saying... Positive risk taking is weighing up the potential benefits and harms of exercising one choice of action over another. That's ensuring that we're constantly remaining open and aware of the different choices. It was based on a clear appreciation of the risks... so it's part a good risk assessment... which is not the end in itself... good risk assessment is a means to the end.

We can't really take a risk unless we've got a good appreciation, good understanding of assessing the risks of the different choices... of the different courses of action...

It's the development of detailed plans and actions. so... it informs and supports good risk management. You make a clearly stated positive risk-taking decision, and the action, the plan, almost falls out of it.

It's based in the capabilities and the expressed wishes of the individual person, the client service user, whoever it is you're working with. So, it's based in a strengths approach, which as I've mentioned before, will be addressed great detail in module four... And it's about achieving the desired positive outcomes... which will be very specifically stated... but also, going back to the idea of minimising, not eliminating risk... we can also minimize the potential harmful outcomes of the course of action that risk-taking represents...

There's a definition capturing all of this information on one slide.

NEXT SLIDE

What are the main characteristics? Well... collaboration I've been talking about quite a bit... if we're going to be shifting the agenda, developing the risk mindset, collaboration of all the relevant people... with the knowledge... with the interest of stakeholders in the particular decision... Bringing them together in collaboration... this also means we can share responsibility for making the decisions... and the burden, the weight, of making a very difficult decision is shared, distributed and held... and carried more if it's experienced as a shared responsibility... rather than if it's just me on my own, where it then becomes difficult to not allow all of the earlier parts of this presentation, the politics of fear, the blame culture, to creep in and have impact.

It's about being prepared to work together and learn along the way. So, things will go wrong and we're learning. We're constantly revising information and processing information and we'll change decisions on that basis. And there's a continuing focus on the can do... on what the person can do... as opposed to constantly just looking for the negative information of what they can't do or shouldn't do.

Everyone involved should be open... so, we're prepared to try out ideas... try out strapping that bungee cord to your ankle... Personally, I've jumped out of airplanes, and I've flown gliders... but the idea of a bungee jump does not appeal at all... But, there you go... we can't all be positive risk-takers in all aspects of our lives... But everyone working diligently with this concept should be prepared to try out ideas... and as with all of my discussion here about risk, and the mindset around risk, it's dynamic... there should be daily vigilance, and plans can change when the evidence indicates a need to change them.

NEXT SLIDE

What is needed to support it? This kind of overlaps a little bit with the main characteristics... being really person centred... focused on the individual. That's not just rhetoric in nice policies... it's reality. The way we can demonstrate that is the way we all think and work, and will deliver... That it's not just about focusing on risk aversion... Let me say at this point... this is not a presentation that is all about risk aversion bad, risk taking is good... I mentioned earlier, it's about being able to shift our judgments... shift on that tolerance scale that I showed you earlier on. It's about really thinking through the information but drawing on these positive elements... these strengths elements, might help us to challenge the blame culture and move, not be fixed in a risk averse culture.

Next point, there... everybody involved understands what the concept means and that it means something very specific, not just vague and general... decisions are made collectively, they're reasoned, and they're clearly identified as being in the person's best interests... It's listening to the person going back to person centred point at the beginning... but certainly for those of you involved in health and social care, you'll be aware of something called mental capacity... the mental capacity act, particularly in the UK... and where somebody's not deemed to have capacity, we can still be enacting this concept of positive risk-taking...

where it's relevant... where we see the positive gains for the person. But we must be really clear that decisions we're making, and risks that we're taking on their behalf, or working with them to take risks, are clearly in their best interests.

It needs to be based in clear principles. And I set out a series of principles that hopefully underpin this way of thinking... but we also need tools that are fit for purpose, that will support us to make these types of decisions... tools that will enable us to put these decisions into action. So, the tools available to us... and I'll outline some of those across these modules... it's vitally important that they are there to really help us to deliver on this way of thinking.

And it's about being creative in how we procure resources... being open-minded, flexible, creative and innovative... not being focused on... well, this is what's available in our particular sector... this is what's available through our particular service... We need to be constantly pushing the boundaries.

NEXT SLIDE

So that's pretty much it for this particular presentation in this part of module one. Here's a manual that I produced in 2013... Risk Decision-Making: Working with risk and implementing positive risk taking... a lot of what you've heard here and in subsequent modules will emerge from that, and some of my other publications.

NEXT SLIDE

I will ask you to reflect back on this positive risk-taking presentation... and check out the 'definitions' information sheet, and the 'What needs to be in place to support it to happen?' worksheet attached to this module... think and reflect on your use of the language... what have you learned, and what does this concept mean to you... in your life, in your work? How are you putting these ideas into practice yourself... and with colleagues? What changes can you consider making in your practice and that of the teams you work in?