

### Working with Risk ~ Introduction

Early in the 2000's James Pickford published, through The Financial Times, a text entitled *Mastering Risk*, it was a compilation of articles... one of the early ones is by Peter L Bernstein... entitled *The Enlightened Men Struggle Against Uncertainty*... and, within this piece, Bernstein reminds us of the broad range of activities that come under this umbrella term of risk... depending on what you work with, what area you work in... we could be thinking about financial risk... operational risk... brand and reputation risks... on a grand scale, there are natural disasters... while on a smaller scale, there's individual human behaviours influenced by their decisions... We also don't work in isolation... we work within systems... and there are risks embedded in those... We are invited to follow particular procedures, that may also incur some risks... and ultimately, we form relationships, positively, or sometimes, not so positively... and there are risks very much involved in that activity as well.

Now... depending on what area you work in, no doubt, you can drill down into much more detail about the types of risks that are relevant to your business, or your occupation... For example, in my own background of health and social care... particularly around mental health... some of the risks would include... suicide risk... self-harm... neglect... aggression and violence, as a range of very specific risks we might be regularly working with.

Another comment, that Peter L Bernstein mentions in his paper, is the view that we can reach out into the future... to bring it under control... this is one of the most audacious advances in the history of humanity... and, therein lies one of those challenges with the whole idea of risk assessment... that this is somehow a way in which we predict the future... and that, by predicting it... we are able to exert more control, to try and prevent many of those risks happening... I'll be focusing on that challenge quite a bit in this module.

Module two is entitled 'Working with Risk'... a working title I adopted for manuals I published in 2007, because... it says what it does on the tin... we work with risk every day... we assess risk, we manage risk, we take risks, we avoid risks... we 'work with risk'!

A key component that underpins positive risk taking, is a very clear recognition, and a very clear articulation, of what the underlying risks are... that's what we would normally refer to as a good risk assessment... Whatever business you happen to be in, whatever occupation... you all need to make difficult decisions from time to time... and you do require quality information in order to do so... The task that faces all of us, therefore, becomes one of assessing and also evaluating the information that is actually available to us... However, therein lies a problem... we actually operate within an imperfect world... one where we do not necessarily have access to complete, or even on occasions, accurate information... Yet we still have to make some decisions.

This is a world that has increasingly become one of applying the spotlight of intense scrutiny when decisions go wrong... kicking in that notion that I referred to back in module one... about the blame culture... This is a complex world, where those who make the decisions, are

often subject to scrutiny and regulation, by those who are more tasked with management than the actual delivery of the decisions and the actions... This is a place, where too often, opposing worlds of practical application on the one side, bureaucratic administration on the other, can often collide... And the result of this coming together is not always directly beneficial in supporting the task of compiling the most accurate of risk assessments.

NEXT SLIDE [EXERCISE]

Before moving on to the next video, I would like you to take a few minutes stopping to reflect on your situation. Use these three questions to establish where you're at presently, before going on to the ideas and practical guidance offered throughout this module. Reflection time should not be underestimated... and it may just help you identify your own baseline, against which, you can then evaluate the messages that follow in this training.

### **A 10-Minute History of Risk & Uncertainty**

What of the history of the concept... don't worry... you're a practical sort of person, so I'll keep this to a minimum... just a very potted brief history... the history of risk in under 10 minutes!

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For much of history... risk assessment... risk management... has not necessarily demanded much attention... Much of the history of the human race is more characterized by living in simpler times... where agricultural priorities, and forging for the necessities of survival, comprise pretty much the totality of risk... not to minimize that... we're talking about survival after all... but they are, by and large, simpler times.

It's only when global trade routes were opened up... giving rise to the complexity of economics, and a wider view is then taken... beyond that of just feeding ourselves... As thinking takes place on a regional, national, and worldwide scale... that's when the subject of risk assumes a new level of importance... a new level of complexity.

If we think about the Renaissance period as being one of profound cultural change... about the Reformation in terms of religious change... these are times in history that heralded a transformation in how we perceive the future... and therein lies another source of why risk gradually became more important... This enabled us to dare to control our own fate.

The fact that we were beginning to perceive the future more, and wish to take more control of it... shape it more... this was period of time that also coincided with changing economics... because the age of the seafarer, of discovery... this coincided with the expansion of commerce... This, in turn, lay the foundations for a more sophisticated consideration of what risk was all about.

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The development of risk as a concept, and its measurement as a utilitarian tool, can be traced largely in terms of mathematical developments from the mid 17th century onwards... In 1654, two mathematicians created the 'Theory of Probability', by focusing on games to think about 'chance'... Whatever your view of the insurance industry... this is where it emerged from... It coincides with a time where we begin to think about life expectancies... and therefore, consider more about the insurance against our lives.

In 1738, advances in probability theory were made, by introducing the 'Notion of Utility'... by this, I mean, raising the idea of the value of 'consequences' of making decisions... And when we're talking about risk... it became vitally important that, when considering taking a risk... a big part of our consideration is thinking about the consequences of our decision-making.

In 1895, we find the discovery of the concept of 'Regression to the Mean'... the idea that everything returns to normal in the long run... there was an average to which the extremes will always ultimately return... That's an important and interesting concept... because with my mental health hat on again, thinking in terms of crisis theory... crisis teams, working with people through their crises... part of crisis theory talks about how, if we did nothing at all... a crisis would follow its natural path back to some type of equilibrium... Of course, when we're dealing with people's distress, it's best not to just sit back and say... suffer it until it sorts itself out... But there is a similar idea here, which goes back to this concept in 1885, about 'Regression to the Mean'.

In 1952, the link was demonstrated between risk and return... And with this, we have the foundation for the concept of diversification of our investments... minimizing the variance of returns by carefully spreading our bets... spreading the investment... And, out of this emerged the concept of portfolios and investments... Now, clearly these are all mathematical innovations... but it's important to remember, they're only mathematical tools... the real value is in knowing when, and how, to use them.

The same goes for all tools that are available to us... depending on the type of risk that we're working with... knowing how and when to use particular tools... that's where wisdom kicks in... that's when we're working from a wiser perspective. Bureaucratically mandated times to fill in forms fails to meet my own personal 'wisdom test'.

But also from this slide, you'll see... bringing it up to date, in terms of 21st century... we can bear witness to the rise and rise of risk management... because, more attention is now being paid, with an increase in focus, on decisions that are being made... particularly focusing on decisions when they go wrong... That element of wanting to put people on pedestals... and then knock them off, is at the heart of the blame culture...

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What we're primarily working with here is uncertainty... that's the concept to keep in mind... particularly when we're thinking about taking risks... in whatever ways we're 'working with risk', it's important to remember... we are actually working with 'uncertainty'... Taking risks is always going to be an issue of making decisions in the face of acceptable, or maybe

unacceptable, degrees of uncertainty... The assessment of risks is essentially an attempt to manage that uncertainty... and, the source of most uncertainty lies, not so much in nature and the weather, but actually in people. That's the important message here.

Real life is made up of decisions based on a series of compromises... and our decisions will influence the decisions and actions of others.

Then, we have this concept of 'Game Theory'... one thing it teaches us, is that human beings create a complex jumble of uncertainties for one another... We learn, and we change, through these experiences... through these interactions... through these connections with uncertainty... But, I don't want you to see uncertainty as a negative... I want you to see uncertainty more as something to be embraced, rather than something to be fearful of... particularly if we're in the business of taking risks... Part of that, has to be, embracing the concept of uncertainty... rather than retreating, perhaps, into more defensive shells because of a fear of the uncertain.

However, the immense sophistication of modern risk management techniques... and certainly they've been developed through a range of different types of businesses, as well as mathematics and economics... this sophistication, should not lead us to think that we've conquered risk... or even, that it's possible to conquer risk... Remember, humans will continue to interact, make choices in unpredictable ways, that will continue to fuel sources of uncertainty... We cannot promise to eliminate risk, however good we think our risk assessment might be... This is what is at the heart of good risk assessment, and good risk management.

It is about a focus on information... analyzing and evaluating that information, in ways that help us to make decisions that can minimize the potential harms, or the downside of risk... This picture on the screen, is an example of stepping out into uncertainty... This is where the guy might well be saying to himself... I guess I should've done a risk assessment first! But then don't be left wishing that that was your thoughts, your idea... that, after the event, you find yourself in a position wishing you'd done the risk assessment before you took that leap forward... Again, I emphasize, even though risk assessment is no guarantee to eliminate risk... it will help us to make an informed decision... So, thinking about the concept of risk assessment, it's essentially about looking where we're going.

### **What is risk assessment?**

As with so many phrases that enter our personal or professional lives... risk assessment is frequently used, asked for, communicated in various ways... but do we stop and think what the phrase actually means in the context we are using it? Do we stop to think, if the other person, or people, we're communicating the phrase to, are understanding and interpreting it the same way as we are?

NEXT SLIDE [IMAGE]

Here's a relevant image... as the paths of life and work are littered with potential banana skins... risk assessments should be an integral part, a daily function, of the practical

delivering of every business... not just seen as some exercise in meeting regulatory requirements... It should be integrated into everything you do and think... Evaluating and controlling risks effectively, will ensure that opportunities are not lost... will ensure that our competitive advantage is enhanced, depending on what field of work you're involved in... And, it will ensure, by and large, that we'll spend less management time spent firefighting... constantly chasing our heels.

Assessing and evaluating risk should be about having a framework... That's an important message... a framework is the way I've always thought through all the developments of my risk publications, and tools, and ideas... because it should be there as a framework to prompt and to guide you... It's not about trying to establish the definitive rule book... that would actually spend more time restricting and constraining you... Positive risk-taking is never constructively promoted, when we're working within strictly defined parameters... the narrower our focus, and our vision... the less easy it is, to think about taking those risks... We need to focus on 'managing' rather than eliminating risks... and if we take a low-risk appetite, this is not really going to help the pursuit of high returns, or beneficial outcomes... that the whole concept of positive risk-taking tries to embrace...

So, if I'm thinking about a framework... within the framework, we need to be engaged in the problems, or the risks... we don't ignore those... We also need to be aware of near misses... the things that nearly went wrong... But, we also, within this framework, need to try to anticipate risks that have yet to even crystallize... So, there's always going to be an element of risk assessment being about trying to anticipate the future... Don't get caught up in the term prediction too much! I'll come back to that... but anticipating what could be, what those risks may be... It is all about planned risk-taking in reality... Ultimately, that's even supported by one of our UK government agencies... The National Audit Office... some years ago, back around about 1999... they produced a report, which again, highly recognized the need for us to take risks... but where it is well-conceived and well-planned... that's the message.

Risk has an upside... as well as a downside... and we need to keep this very much in mind... The secret of mastering risk is to identify these... analyze them carefully... mitigate those downside risks as far as is convenient, or economic, or possible... And then, any of the remaining risks need to be monitored... controlled... we need contingency plans in place, wherever possible... should those risks occur, we feel reasonably confident we have some anticipated response, that can kick in fairly quickly... If we do this methodically... we will increase the chances of success, in any enterprise, or field in which you work... And that's where risk assessment, and evaluating information, is going to be crucial.

NEXT SLIDE [DEFINITION]

So let me give you a very detailed definition... So, you see on the screen here, what risk assessment is... and I'll break this down into three different parts.

Firstly, it's the gathering of information through processes of communication, investigation, observation, and persistence... and the analysis of potential outcomes of identified behaviours... It's about identifying specific risk factors, of relevance to an individual, and the

circumstances in which they may occur... So, if we go back to the first sentence there... it's about a range of activities that are common sense... like good communicating, persistence is all about vigilance, and investigating, and trying to draw in as much of the information as possible... as well as observing what's there in front of us... and the connections of what's there in front of us.

The second part... you'll see a counterbalance... identifying specific risk factors of relevance to the individual, and the circumstances in which they occur... now, risk factors will be the negatives... where risks have gone wrong... Examine the risk research, and you will find this is what it focuses its attention on... But, here, in my definition, we want to counterbalance those negative factors... So, you'll see in the middle part of this definition... it's also about counterbalancing the negativity of your risk factors, with the presence of protective factors... These, you should think of as being... the personal qualities, or the resources, in and around a person... that help them to reduce or mitigate the potential for risk... So, there's this counterbalance of risk factors on one side... protective factors on the other.

Then there's a timescale issue... so you see towards the end of this definition... this process requires linking historical information, to current circumstances, in order to anticipate possible future change... And there's something else about timescale... from history to current to future... it also in the last sentence says that risk assessments should be distinguished separately from risk screening! The importance of language will crop up yet again... Risk screening, will be an initial process of determining which risks require more detailed and thorough processes of assessment... So, a risk screen is something, with a series of prompts, that we do very quickly, on relatively limited information... Whereas... a risk assessment takes a lot more time... it's a lot more in depth... it's a lot fuller picture... but, I emphasise again... it takes time!

Those are two very important and distinctive tasks... the number of times that we're hearing the misuse of language... which then guides the kind of misuse of thinking to an extent.

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Here we have frequently used bureaucratic cliches... for many people, thinking of those of you, let's say in practitioner roles... the power of risk assessment has been somewhat undermined by the... let's say, blandly repetitive cliches... And you'll see a few on the slide here... Where is the risk assessment? Have you done the risk assessment? Those in particular crop up once something's gone wrong, as the first questions that emerge...

Services linking with each other saying... we cannot consider this referral until you provide us with a risk assessment... The danger that lies here, in this mantra... is that it kind of signifies more of an organizational defensive cover-your-back type of stance.

I don't get a sense, from these particular statements... that we're talking here about progressive pursuit of best practice... Yes, risk assessment IS part of that progressive pursuit of best practice... but, it's the tone in which some of these questions are asked, and the situations in which they're asked... that makes you wonder where are people really genuinely coming from? For all of the good work you do... the problem, as you'll see at the

bottom of the slide, is the greatest risk for many practitioners may now be... not completing the risk assessment! The message might as well be... if you haven't ticked those boxes, well, you simply haven't been doing your job... and on your head be it!

NEXT SLIDE [WET CAT IMAGE]

Well... here's an image that should stop us in our tracks, regarding the mixed messages from these bureaucratic cliches... So what if you have ticked all the boxes? It doesn't necessarily mean that you've evaluated or managed the risk in any way... And here's a pair of eyes looking straight at you saying... okay, well done... you've ticked your boxes, but just look at the state I'm still ending up in!

NEXT SLIDE [EXERCISE]

Before you move on to the next video, let me ask you to do two brief tasks. Firstly, read the pdf handout entitled 'The Prediction Conundrum' and think about its messages in relation to the ideas of predictive risk assessment, and how we may then prevent risks.

Secondly, take a look at the pdf worksheet entitled 'Assessing & Managing Risk'. This sets out a series of prompts to build up an assessment of risks, and a management plan. Apply these series of prompts to a situation or risk decision that you're currently working with.

### **Prioritizing Risk**

We amass information as best we can... from as many sources as we are aware of... But, what we then do with that information, is crucial... Here, I want to talk about 'prioritizing risks', as part of how we evaluate information... which leads to prioritizing decisions and actions... what it is the person wants... or we're going to focus immediate attention on.

NEXT SLIDE [CHART]

This image is taken from the 'Mastering Risk' publication, in 2000, from the Financial Times... setting out quadrants related to the relative likelihood and impact of a risk, as part of how we evaluate its priority for attention... Priorities pan out on an ABCD list... to see what level of attention we may afford to a particular risk.

Quadrant B is where we see potential high impact and low likelihood... which would suggest we should afford a high priority in terms of attention. Yes, the high impact is what's going to concern us, even though there's a low likelihood... If it does happen, it's going to have a major impact... in terms of its outcome on people... Though, our highest priority should be Quadrant A... as high impact and high likelihood speaks for itself.

How might you respond to Quadrant C? There is clearly going to be a high likelihood of the risk occurring... but the impact remains low... We still need to pay attention... but, the magnitude of the impact might not draw us in, and concern us, quite so much... Even with Quadrant D... a low impact and low likelihood... we're still talking about risks... we don't ignore them... but clearly, in our order of priorities, that would take a lower level. So, this is

a rough and ready subjective approach to evaluating risks... but, it is at least, a tool for helping us to prioritise... when our resources are finite, but the competing demands of different risks still require our attention.

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Then again... how do we respond to each of these categories? The high impact and high likelihood risk, clearly requires immediate action...

The high impact, but low likelihood risk, needs a contingency plan... something in place... a rapid response as and when needed...

The low impact and high likelihood risk, needs constant consideration... action should be considered as and when these particular priorities emerge...

And then, the low impact, low likelihood risk... these remain as actual risks... and shouldn't be ignored... but they are more likely to require just periodic review... continuing to be aware of the potential for a risk to happen.

NEXT SLIDE [IMAGE]

Ultimately, risk assessment is about informing the decisions that we have to make... So, *decisions, decisions... it's all about decisions...* But... thinking in ways that are too black and white... about being right or wrong... can only serve to probably make us, unnecessarily more risk averse... Is there really a right way or a wrong way? No, there isn't such a clear distinction in much of what we do... Again, I want to come back to clearly stating that, risk averse decisions are good decisions... if they're clearly thought out, and reasoned...

However, they're not good decisions... if they're purely the result of fear and defensiveness... Ultimately, it is about taking things on a decision by decision basis... taking into account the context of the information... rather than seeing everything as either a right way or a wrong way.

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So, as I arrive at the final slide, we see a risk assessment is all about information... I've mentioned that many times throughout these presentations... but, it bears repeating... Figures will tell us something... going back to the actuarial approaches... but, treat them with caution.

Remember that next point? It's all about the situational context... the individual triggers, carefully constructed, succinct narrative accounts... are what communicates the quality information... The figures... the broader pictures from the research, the evidence-base... can inform those things... But, you're not dealing with a large group of people... as is the case with most research studies... You are, usually as practitioners, or even in terms of your business... focused in on a specific decision... or a risk assessment, and an evaluation of that information that links to a specific decision... And you need to think about the weight that you give, to specific factors... that will vary, dependent from decision to decision... and even from time to time.

I'd like to finish, by repeating a statement that I published back in 1998, in a manual that was entitled, *Assessing and Managing Risk*... And, I want to share it now... because it feels just as pertinent today... Back then, what I said was... *access information, determine the risk factors, identify the early warning signs, and develop a clear and comprehensive plan of intervention... Prediction could not be simpler... and prevention must surely be the outcome! This assumption relies on good quality assessment tools... but probably, also on people remaining consistent in their behaviour patterns... Both of these assumptions are somewhat dangerous to rely on... We know that people are not consistent in their behaviour... even without the experience of mental health problems... It is also safe to say that our current assessment of situations and of the precipitants of incidents is better in hindsight!*

Ponder that one for a moment.

NEXT SLIDE [EXERCISE]

Here's an exercise encouraging you to reflect on your management responses to the risks you have assessed. At this point, I would also like you to read the pdf handout in the resources of this module, simply entitled 'Risk Management'.

Using the 'Priorities in Practice' slide... firstly, how would you categorise the risks you're routinely working with? Secondly, what do the four types of response generally look like, in your experience?

### **How to hinder good practice**

Let me just remind you again of those favoured phrases of senior management... *Where is the risk assessment? Have you done your risk assessment? I need the risk assessment done in that first contact! I can't consider the referral without a risk assessment!*

What does all of this mean, in reality? Make sure you've fully completed the 'risk assessment form'.

And... what utility does this act actually serve? Well, it makes life a whole lot easier for managers, auditors, and external regulators. Success equals the percentage of completed risk assessment forms... after all.

And, remind me again... how often do you use that form to directly instruct and guide your daily practice with the people you are meant to serve? Ok... so, I didn't really need an answer to that question... But, how much time does it take to complete the necessary paperwork to the required standard? Ok... I get the message

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Let me just talk for a few moments on what I refer to as... The Blight of Bureaucracy... It's not just me thinking in these terms, in this day and age... Let's go back a couple of centuries... Henry David Thoreau was saying that: *"Men have become the tools of their tools."* Now, I find this to be an interesting concept... that certainly bears witness for most

people these days... But Henry David Thoreau's talking here 200 years ago... that the tools... rather than being the support, for us achieve what we need to achieve... the whole focus of attention is on the tools... serving the actual tools themselves... That's an interesting take on how bureaucracy overtakes, the situations that we're working with... and, what we ended up with, is an over-procedural approach... to what should be, more of a context specific, and individualized activity.

Then we get these questions also arising: Is assessing risk, primarily a practical activity, or is it a bureaucratic requirement? In your individual circumstances... you've got to weigh up the messages that you hear, from people around you... and determine, is risk assessment really about trying to support your practice and your decision-making... or, has it been usurped, in a way, as a managerial tool, for ensuring that audits achieve top marks because the formats have all been completed correctly?

Well, I mention there at the end of this slide... documenting risks should not be about completing excessive forms... it should be about creating those accessible reasoned decisions... The more forms you fill in, the more time that's taken away, from constructive thinking and observation, and actual practice... I will argue you won't find the research around this... but I will stand by the argument that , what this is doing, is taking us away from the primary activity that we should be engaged in.

NEXT SLIDE [IMAGE]

Or... here's another take on that... another vision... perhaps we don't need risk assessments so much after all... Who needs a risk assessment, when we have you under surveillance? So, in these days, where the tools of surveillance are superseding the traditional approaches to assessing risks... just perhaps, all we need to do now, is spend hours and hours evaluating what we actually see in the recordings that are captured by these machines.

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Staying with the same theme... here are a couple of questions that come up... that I think are important to always keep in mind: Do we want our staff to primarily function as administrators, or as practitioners? Because, therein lies a danger... if we're fine tuning and over-elaborating the forms, the formats, the electronic formats... then we're developing a bureaucratic approach... which I persistently will argue... this will be to the detriment of giving people time, to develop trust in the all-important working relationships... It will challenge our true trust in people's own skills.

And then... we have this other question: Does a focus on prediction, just serve to underestimate the human potential for unpredictability? If we are to get caught up in this idea, we're going to predict the risk... and if we can predict the future, we can prevent a future risk... Well, bear in mind, that one of the positive attributes of humans, is that we're unpredictable! We don't all want to become automatons... all become machines... So, we have to exercise a degree of caution when we're focused on this idea... that risk assessment is about predicting the future... I've already referenced a pdf handout in the module resources entitled 'The Prediction Conundrum', but, feel free to check it out again.

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Here's the danger... if we really do focus our attention, and put pressure on people, into a kind of pseudo-scientific exactness regarding prediction... Well... don't be surprised, if this is the result that you get... a far from informative, more banal type of assessment... My risk assessment, in this situation is, well, it could be, yes, it could be, no, it could be, maybe... If you push people too far into a defensive position, that's going to be the level of quality you might well get back as a return.

### **A Structured Approach to Good Practice**

If bureaucracy has the potential to hinder it... what drives good practice... particularly when focusing in on this concept of good risk assessment... as well as good risk management.? My view is that it is driven by a Structured Approach.

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It requires valuing characteristics such as creativity and flexibility... That's my first thought... Every person's situation is individual and unique... so our responses to them, need to be likewise.

The evidence base for risk and risk assessment is very narrow... in my studies of the research literature regarding mental health risks... well... the research focuses almost exclusively on aggression and violence, and suicide... Why? Because those are the areas, the activities, the types of risk... that when they happen, will attract media attention... big headlines... negative statements... Politicians worry about that... because these are the headlines that are informing the general public... And so, politicians will put pressure on services to become more restrictive... and more of a bureaucratic approach will inevitably result... So, the evidence base itself is not necessarily very helpful... certainly not to the vast majority of the clients, the service users... because it almost exclusively focuses in on, what I would argue, is the 5% or less of everything that's going on... the rare events! I'm never convinced that policy and procedural arrangements should be built on the rare events alone.

But, it's also being developed in line with a certain academic hierarchy... that when it looks at evidence... when it looks at research... it values personal accounts much less, than the hard numbers... Bearing that in mind, hard numbers leave many of us cold... whereas we respond better to those detailed accounts... those stories... the narrative detail that we can connect with... Yet, it's the hard numbers is what the focus of audit, and inquiry, will be all about... And, even though the inquiries are there to help us focus, and are trying to help us shape our understanding of how things go wrong... again, I have to emphasize, that they are based on a very, very small percentage, of the rarest, most difficult risks and events... And, if that's all the messages that we keep churning out from our inquiries, then the result is that we distort the whole picture... We talk about the tiny proportion of total practice... and yet, it almost takes on a life of its own... as though this negative gloss refers to the whole picture.

And then, again, people do get very negative about the whole concept of risk assessments, and how it's being used... So ultimately, a focus on more forms, will only serve to restrict the potential for flexibility that's needed... so that we fail to see the very picture that's in front of us, and that we should be working with.

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Paperwork... whether electronic, or the hard copies... let's focus on that just very briefly... Record-keeping is actually only as good as the design of the tools, and the abilities of those using them.

However... record keeping is very important... we do need to document something... but I would argue, that we don't need to document everything... There's always a danger of overload... particularly where it is the elaborate bureaucratic system, that is dictating the direction and needs of recording... which can easily feel like pretty much everything needs to be recorded in standardised formats... The accuracy of records shouldn't be automatically overestimated... There's a debate in the literature, which identifies that, as a result of electronic communications, issues of confidentiality and privacy get raised... with the unwanted result, on occasions, that some people... clinicians... practitioners... withhold details...

So, when this is taken to an extreme... and I don't want to support extremes... we could see a lot of what's recorded as being nothing more than pure fiction! But, the reality is it's somewhere in between... We still have limited amounts of information, and sometimes inaccurate information... as I mentioned earlier.

Now the amount of time required in administrative tasks, can feel imbalanced, to a degree that kind of reduces the quality time for us to really use... to analyse... and evaluate the information that's available to us... So, we do end up, again, with this tension between a tick-box bureaucracy and narrative experience...

So, there's the question... can reality ever be adequately depicted on a form? I have to argue, no... but that's not to say that forms are worthless... It's more that we need to achieve a better balance of priorities, between the time that we allocate to the task, and the time that we allocate to recording the task... The complexities of somebody's life can never be entirely captured in a form... but that's not to say the form doesn't have its role... It still should be able to prompt, guide, and capture, some of those essential elements of the person's story.

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And, when approaching this overall challenge... there are two particularly broad areas... actuarial and/or clinical judgment... The actuarial approaches focus attention on the numerical outputs of randomized control trials, and meta-analysis of masses of different research programmes... The statistical representation of characteristics identified in large groups of subjects... that's what we're focused on, when we look at our research... The clash here, is that you and I, are generally dealing with one person... or one discrete source of

information... not this very broad, large group... The actuarial approaches make strong claims to being objective... to being consistent... but there are also counterclaims that they also can become too inflexible... and reduce the possibility of us being able to overlay our assessment with experience... nuanced judgment... or to focus on the context... the focus on the situation, which is much more the individual person... the individual task that we're assessing the risk around.

Then on the other hand, there's the professional judgment approach... a clinical judgment approach, which is largely challenged by the academics as being too subjective... Even further down the research scale of priorities, lies the service users personal accounts... which the academics see as interesting... but very subjective... much further down the hierarchy of academic priorities.

What we need to be looking at, is a combination of what can be called... a structured professional (or clinical) judgment approach... and this is very much promoted through my concept of positive risk taking... It's a combination of the actuarial methods, and professional judgment... it'll draw on the best of both... And I will attempt to develop that in much more detail in module five.

I will remind you at this point, that there are two pdf documents in the resources section of this module that I want to draw your attention to... 'Components in Assessing & Managing Risk' and 'Risk Categories & Factors'... The first is an outline of the complex range of influences we may need to consider when building up an assessment of risk over time... as with most of the tools I design, it should act as an aide memoir... You don't need to apply all of these to each and every person or situation you're assessing... but you do need to be aware of this wide-ranging series of influences that 'could' be relevant on each occasion... Your, often difficult challenge, is to apply those you deem to be relevant... and that is the kind of best practice we should be aspiring to! Managing Risk is included in this document... to draw your attention to the all-important principle... if you identify a risk, you have a responsibility to do something about it! That can be simply communicating it to other relevant people... but might be a choice from a complex range of other responses.

Secondly, I provide a pdf document listing Risk Categories & Factors... relevant specifically to mental health services... but those of you working in other fields should be able to adopt this template in listing the categories and factors you more commonly experience, and work with. The point here is... we are not ticking boxes! I'm not against the tick-box formats... I'm against ticking them! They are able to function as an aide memoir... though they still do vary in quality, particularly for this more important purpose.

The exercise at the end of this video will prompt you to use both of these documents.

But, before moving on... here is an interesting question as well... what can weather forecasting tell us about risk assessment? I throw that in, because whether you're using actuarial approaches, or clinical judgment approaches... it's interesting to look at weather forecasting... at least, because they have developed decades of data, and computer systems to manage all this data about weather systems... in order to try and forecast locally, what the weather is going to be like... Now I can assure you that, as I'm looking out of my window

now... and I can give you... with a hundred percent confidence... an accurate description of what the weather is right now... It's cloudy... it's overcast... it's breezy... And, I might even be tempted to say, that could indicate there may be some rain coming in within the next hour.

Wow... does that make me a professional weather forecaster? No, it doesn't... But then again, you can listen to the professionals... they will give you very accurate and confident predictions... of what's going on at the moment, or in the next hour or so... But, when you then extend that, to what this picture is going to look like outside of my window... let's say... in three hours... I'm going to be slightly less confident... And, what about this time tomorrow? I'm going to be even less confident... and later in the week, even less... So, the issue is one of timescale... that's what weather forecasting should remind us of... particularly when we're focused on risk assessments... don't back yourself into a corner, with high levels of confident prediction, over anything other than an immediate timescale... Anything beyond that... and you need to cage your language, a bit more cautiously... because we cannot give a hundred percent predictions, with accuracy and confidence, as the timescale expands over the hours... and the days ahead.

NEXT SLIDE

Let me just share a few thoughts, that consistently emerged from my own practice reviews... looking at risk assessments, and indeed risk management... but, also looking at procedures I identified in a range of organisations through my practice-based evidence consultancy over the years... My approach was semi-structured interviews of practitioners involved in parts of the training I've delivered... but then looking at reviewing their subsequent practice with them... What comes through, are a number of consistent messages... Firstly, that there's a broad understanding of what good practice is, amongst the vast majority of the practitioners that I encounter... These are experienced people... who have a value base that suggests they want to do good work... It's a broad understanding... not necessarily a detailed and nuanced understanding, of everything that informs good practice in risk assessment... By and large, people are aware that there are policies in place... but generally they're not using them! The policies are written by people, not necessarily on the front line... actually, hardly ever on the front line... So, there are these clearly different populations... people on the frontline, doing the work... and then, a completely different population, at some physical geographical distance... sitting around tables, coming up with ideas, and writing policies.

The brief risk assessments... the screening tool... as I mentioned earlier... are more often and consistently used... but there's a recognition, that they provide, by and large, inadequate information... If we're looking for really good risk assessments... the full risk assessment formats... these are inconsistently used... but when they are, there's a recognition, they provide good quality, detailed narrative information...

A consistent message across most people, is... that risk assessment, as a phrase... is now far too bureaucratically loaded... and the meaning, when the phrase is used by senior managers, is not the same as the true meaning of what should be happening in terms of frontline practice...

NEXT SLIDE [IMAGE]

What I could come up with... from some of these reviews... as a statement... would be something like this... If you put all of the paper-based risk assessments end to end, this is where you're likely to end up... a state of confusion! And a danger is... that we spent so much time... listening to all these conflicting messages in the literature and the research... that fear drives us to rely too much on forms... And ultimately, we become confused individuals within dysfunctional teams.

NEXT SLIDE [EXERCISE]

Set aside some time to read the two pdf documents previously outlined... Reflect on the construction of both as an aide memoir to practice... and how they can be adopted, or adapted, to the needs of your work...

Identify a current risk situation that you're engaged with... and apply the thinking represented in these two documents to this situation... Finally, spare some time to consider... what needs to happen in your practice &/or service in order to incorporate this thinking?

### **Design for Good Practice**

Part of the challenge, becomes a need to redesign the tools... try and make them a bit more fit for purpose...

NEXT SLIDE

What do we need to take into account? I'll give you a few thoughts here... Firstly, a healthy scepticism for the evidence base... That's not dismissing the evidence-base... but, being cautious of how we use it... being aware, as I was mentioning earlier, that the evidence-base is about large populations... characteristics or factors from large populations... Whereas, we will be dealing with individual people and their own circumstances... So, the tools need to recognize both... but focus more on the latter...

We need to engage our clients, our service users... and the whole conversation about risk, and the tools... need to provide the prompts, to remind us to do that... and to capture their language, their terminology, their experience... This will be explored in more detail in Module 3.

We need to combine, what I will call a strengths approach... which will be the focus entirely of Module 4... combine a strengths approach and risk... in order to provide this more balanced viewpoint...

And we need to develop good risk decision-making through a structured approach to positive risk taking... So again, when we're redesigning the tools, thinking about the purposes... that is one of the main purposes clearly of the whole of this course... this programme, or set of resources... we need the tools that support us to do that... and again, that will be an emphasis in Module 5.

My consistent argument will be... that there we need different tools for different purposes... And we should constantly be focusing on the narrative detail.

NEXT SLIDE [IMAGE]

Ultimately, if we're going to get out of some of the negativity, that I've emphasized through earlier parts of these presentations... then this picture represents it... We need to take a look from a different angle... 'taking the risk' means looking at information... the situation... the circumstances... even our decision-making... from a different angle, to that which is more often driven by the bureaucratic approach to form filling.

NEXT SLIDE

And in designing such a response... then I'm going to suggest 'Working with Risk'... a phrase that I use all the time... and the name of tools that I've developed over many years... But first, I need to emphasise, that in elaborating and providing sight of these tools... I'm not expecting anyone to have to adopt these (unless they want to, and can do so within the context of your work) ... The purpose of using these here, is to illustrate the elements and components of good design, that I want you to understand... Perhaps, even, the way you should look at the tools you're required to use, but see them in a different light... use them in a different and more constructive way.

'Working with Risk' needs to be a flexible system... responding to what we're doing in practice... That phrase captures what we do day in, day out... we work with risk... A design response needs to provide a wider range of prompts to support people, guide people to good practice... It needs to focus in on context... of the individual's situation... but also be aware of chronology... looking at the historical precedence for different risks taking place... historical details of when, but most importantly... related to the context, each time.

A designed response needs to guide and support you in the task of good risk decision-making... in a very proactive way... and, as already mentioned... the tool to implement this task will form the core feature of Module 5.

In attempting to capture key information... it needs to also engage the views of service users, the clients... of strengths-based information, and protective factors alongside relevant risk factors... And acknowledging the place for 'Positive Risk-Taking'... The full picture should be able to balance the negativity of a risk assessment with the positivity of a strengths assessment... seeing this information as resources, on which we can base our action... or risk management plan.

The final point on this slide is meant to remind us, that in a design response... we should offer protection to decision-makers, at least by prompting them to reference the source material that was available to them, at the time of completing the assessment, on which they may be basing a decision.

NEXT SLIDE

And by example... that's all this is... my own Working Risk tools... This is what the response broadly looks like... I'm emphasizing this as an example... but I would still ask you to evaluate what's available to you, alongside the messages that I put across with this 'working with the risk' type of package.

These are tools that I developed back in 2007... and revised and updated in 2013... What you get is a Current Situation... which is very much a risk screen... This could be completed in minutes... updated as and when needed, very quickly... responding to the need to provide a brief narrative through the information captured... but also able to respond to circumstances and rapid change... that is part of a dynamic experience of risk... How can risk assessment be dynamic? Well again, we have to emphasize capturing information quickly... and then also updating it quickly...

In a service review of the use of these tools, many years ago... even I was astonished to hear of an example that had been updated in a ward environment many times in the space of a week... without staff members complaining of excessive paperwork... On detailed review, each update had captured the volatile changes in a person's presentation... and the date and timing of each update enabled an interesting picture of chaos to be documented as the behaviours changed.

Alongside that... there's a separate tool to prompt a Detailed Review... which is the fuller assessment of risk... This is incorporated into the longer timescale... again based on providing prompts to accumulate specific types of information, more in a narrative format... Chronology is a particularly important section of this format... but it also enables us to capture some of the deeper thoughts about crisis and contingency planning, embedded within the current risk management plan.

Each of these documents are located in the resources section of this module as pdf's, but they also include written guidelines for the 'flexible' ways of using the tools in practice... not a rigid bureaucratic mandate!

There are specific guidelines for positive risk taking... a tool that is designed for structured decision-making... and, as previously stated... this will be provided in Module 5 of this course.

And then there is a focus on risk categories... risk factors... but more importantly, you'll see here, it's an aide memoir... It's not a tick box exercise... and that's a big distinction there... supporting people, guiding people... rather than demanding people spend so much time going through laboriously ticking boxes... The pdf document has already been referenced in an earlier exercise in this Module, but I emphasise here... that it also offers guidance towards examples of 'protective factors'... not just risk factors... which may help your understanding of the counterbalance I frequently refer to.

So, this is my example, of a designed response... You need to evaluate the tools that are available to you, by some of the messages that I'm thinking about here... in terms of redesign and design responses.

NEXT SLIDE [IMAGE]

Ultimately... in this picture here... the devil is in the detail... and that's what we've constantly got to be focusing on.... There is a need to always be curious to be persistent... I want to remind you again... ultimately, we're in the information business. So, we need to be constantly delving into the detail... in order to keep adding to and developing that information.

Something else we're doing as part of risk assessment... which I believe is a vitally important message to keep reminding ourselves... it's there to 'inform' our thinking... risk assessment is not an end in itself... it's a means towards an end!

NEXT SLIDE [EXERCISE]

Having already described and prompted you to read the 'Working with Risk' tools and guidelines documents... I would now like to ask you to reflect and make your own notes on what they are offering in terms of good design and guidance for prompting good practice. How do they meet some of the design challenges I've set out across module 2?

There are no right or wrong answers here... this is for you to reflect and develop your own good practice.

Now... take a look at the two documents based on a Sabrina case study... Don't get caught up in trying to solve the Sabrina case... it has long since ceased to be a current case... But, it is still used for illustrative purposes... as to how these tools may be used, in both prompting and capturing assessment information and management plans... Remember, this is an example only... but one that highlights good practice.

Finally... think about the messages you take away from reflecting on all 4 documents... how will you put some of those messages into practice? Also... what might you need to do in your team or service, in order to get many of these messages implemented for you?

### **Risk Formulation**

I can't leave Module 2: Working with Risk, without raising your attention to the concept of 'Risk Formulation'... something that should systematically emerge out of the analysis and evaluation of risk assessment information.

NEXT SLIDE

This is an idea adapted from the more common concept used by psychologists... that of formulation, or problem formulation... Essentially, it is making sense of the complex information we have put together around a person, and the context of their experience... it can be thought of as, shaping the assessment into a coherent management plan... all the time being aware that risk is dynamically changing.

We are attempting to balance the risk factors and the protective factors, previously mentioned in the videos across this module... Despite the caution always raised about the idea of 'prediction'... we are still making judgements about the foreseeable risk, to inform our risk decisions.

As far as is possible... we are trying to identify factors that could increase a specific risk... and also those that could help to mitigate, or lower, the risk... We don't have a crystal ball, and we mustn't be suggesting we have 100% accuracy in our predictions... But, we can confidently offer our thoughts about the context in which a person's risk may elevate or decrease, based on our assumptions from the assessment information... It's a kind of 'showing the workings out'... if I can put into a mathematical analogy, which most of us may remember from dim-distant passed school days!

NEXT SLIDE

The formulation is about asking 'why' questions... in particular:

- How serious is the risk?
- Is the risk specific or general?
- How immediate is the risk?
- How volatile is the risk?
- Are circumstances likely to arise that will increase the risk?
- What type of management could best reduce the risk?

NEXT SLIDE

Again... psychologists will use variations on the theme of the 5P's... as outlined on this slide... in order to systematically develop their formulation:

Presenting problems are what we see or experience...

Predisposing factors are what the person may be susceptible to...

Precipitating factors are possible causes, or triggers...

Perpetuating factors are what maintains the behaviour...

Protective factors are positive attributes or conditions...

If I apply these very briefly to the Sabrina case example you saw in relation to the last video presentation...

The presenting problems are anxious and depressive behaviours, with expressions of suicidal thinking... the predisposing factors are a history of suicide attempts in response to losing personal control of the situation... the precipitating factors are a history of physical and sexual abuse... the perpetuating factors are occasional contact being made directly from her historical abuser... and, the protective factors are primarily her care for her children, with a secondary focus on developing a personal strengths assessment with her.

This is not the complete picture... but you get the idea as to how this structure prompts the thinking and organising of complex assessment information.

NEXT SLIDE [EXERCISE]

Before we draw Module 2 to a close, I would like you to read the pdf worksheet entitled 'Risk Formulation Worksheet' in the resources associated with this module... then complete the two exercises outlined here... and at the end of the worksheet... Firstly, apply the 5P's approach to a person, and their situation, you are currently working with... And, then give some thought as to how you can bring the ideas of 'risk formulation' into you're Working with Risk practice, particularly in some of team meetings you may attend.