

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



RISK COMMUNICATION

**A VITAL TOOL FOR BUILDING
PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR
CLIMATE CHANGE
ADAPTATION**



Risk Communication and Climate Change Adaptation

Risk communication is more about building constructive relationships than just explaining the facts.

“Actions, words, and other interactions that incorporate and respect the perceptions of the information recipients, intended to build trust and help people make more informed decisions about threats to their health and safety.”



Risk Perception and Climate Change Adaptation

Risk Perception Psychology

Risk is SUBJECTIVE!

The facts AND how we interpret them.

**How we *feel* about the facts drives how
we decide, and how we behave**

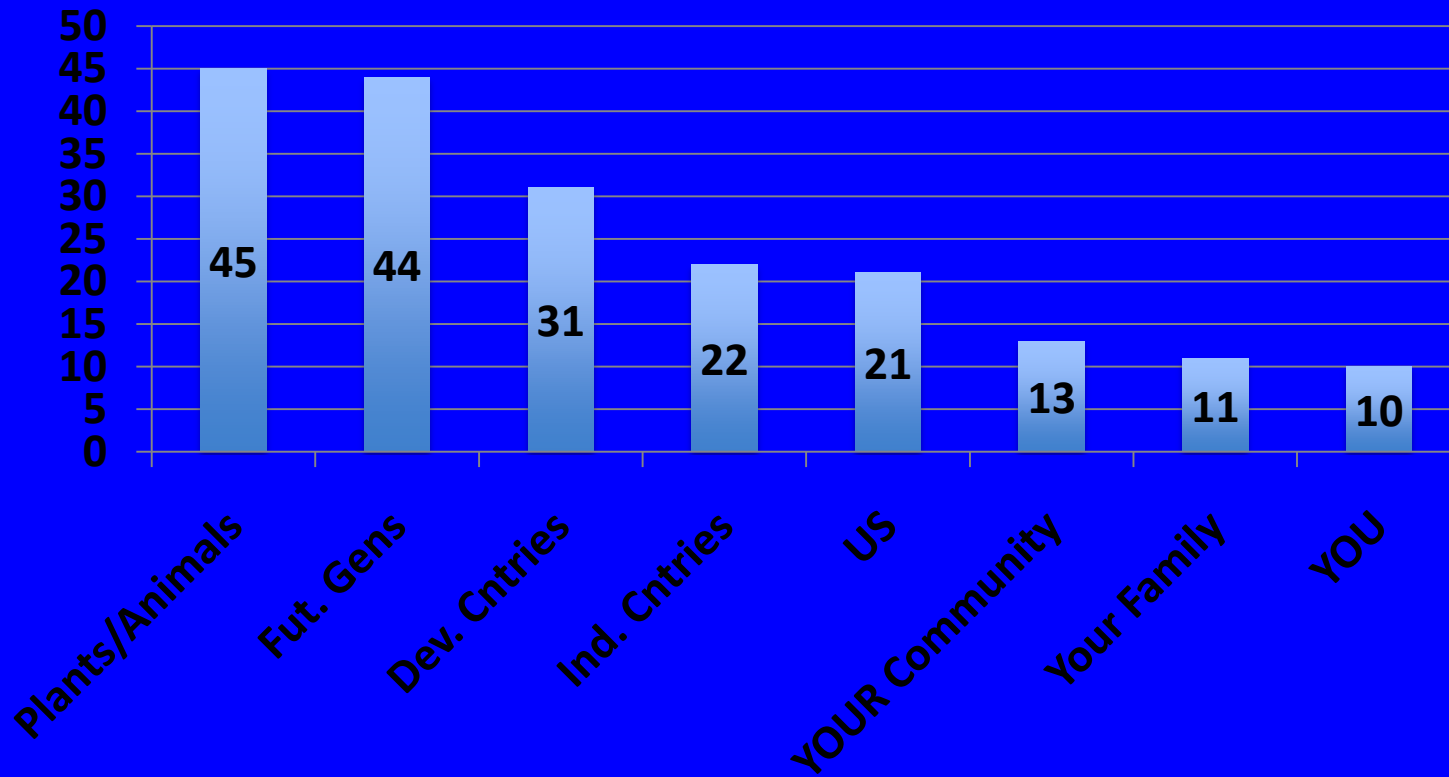


Risk Communication and Climate Change Adaptation

**Progress will depend on public support in
two key groups.**

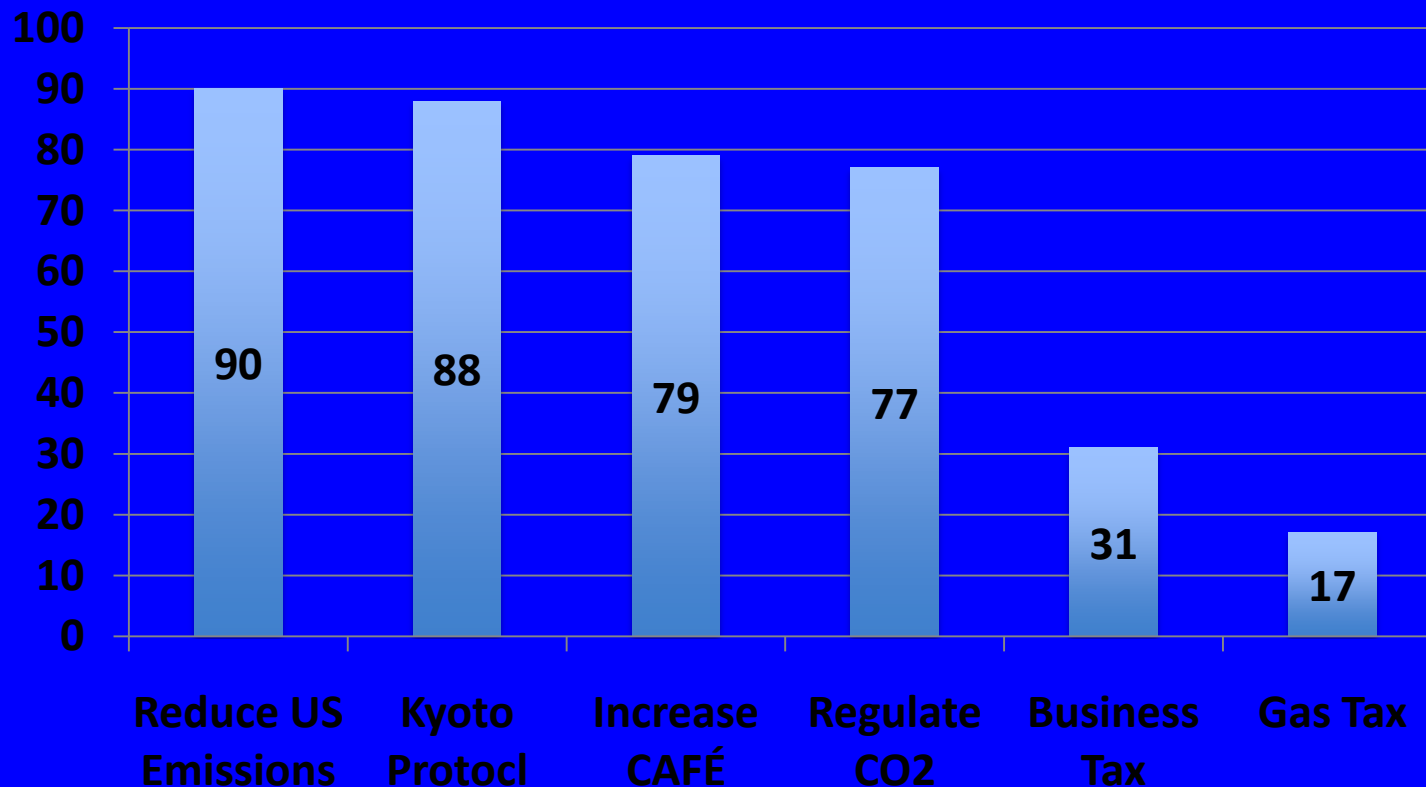
- 1. Those who deny climate change**
- 2. Among those who accept it, their
degree of concern**

Risk Perception and Climate Change Adaptation *Who Will It Happen To?*



Anthony Leiserowitz, "Climate Change Risk Perception and Policy Preferences: The Role of Affect, Imagery, and Values" 2006

Risk Perception and Climate Change Adaptation *What should we do about it?*



Anthony Leiserowitz, "Climate Change Risk Perception and Policy Preferences: The Role of Affect, Imagery, and Values" 2006



Risk Perception and Climate Change Adaptation

Can It Happen to ME?

Yes = more concern. No = less concern

Now or Later?

Now = more concern. Later = Less concern

Personalized or Abstract?

Personalized = more concern.

Abstract = less concern



Risk Perception and Climate Change Adaptation

Benefit v. Risk

The greater the benefit from a behavior or choice, the smaller any associated risk will feel.

Catastrophic or Chronic?

Risks that do harm over time evoke less concern than those that do their harm all at once, on a large scale



Risk Perception and Climate Change Adaptation

Voluntary or Imposed?

A risk we choose to engage in evokes less concern than the same risk if imposed on us.

Control

A risk we feel we have some control over worries us less than if we don't think we have any control



Risk Perception and Climate Change Adaptation

Natural or Human-made

**Natural = less concern. Human-made =
more concern**

Risks to Our Kids

Risks to children = more concern



Risk Perception and Climate Change Adaptation

The Deniers – A Different Psychology Cultural Cognition

**WE TAKE POSITIONS THAT CONFIRM WHAT OUR
GROUP BELIEVES, IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN
THE GROUP, AND THE GROUP'S ACCEPTANCE
OF US AS A MEMBER IN GOOD STANDING.**

www.culturalcognition.net



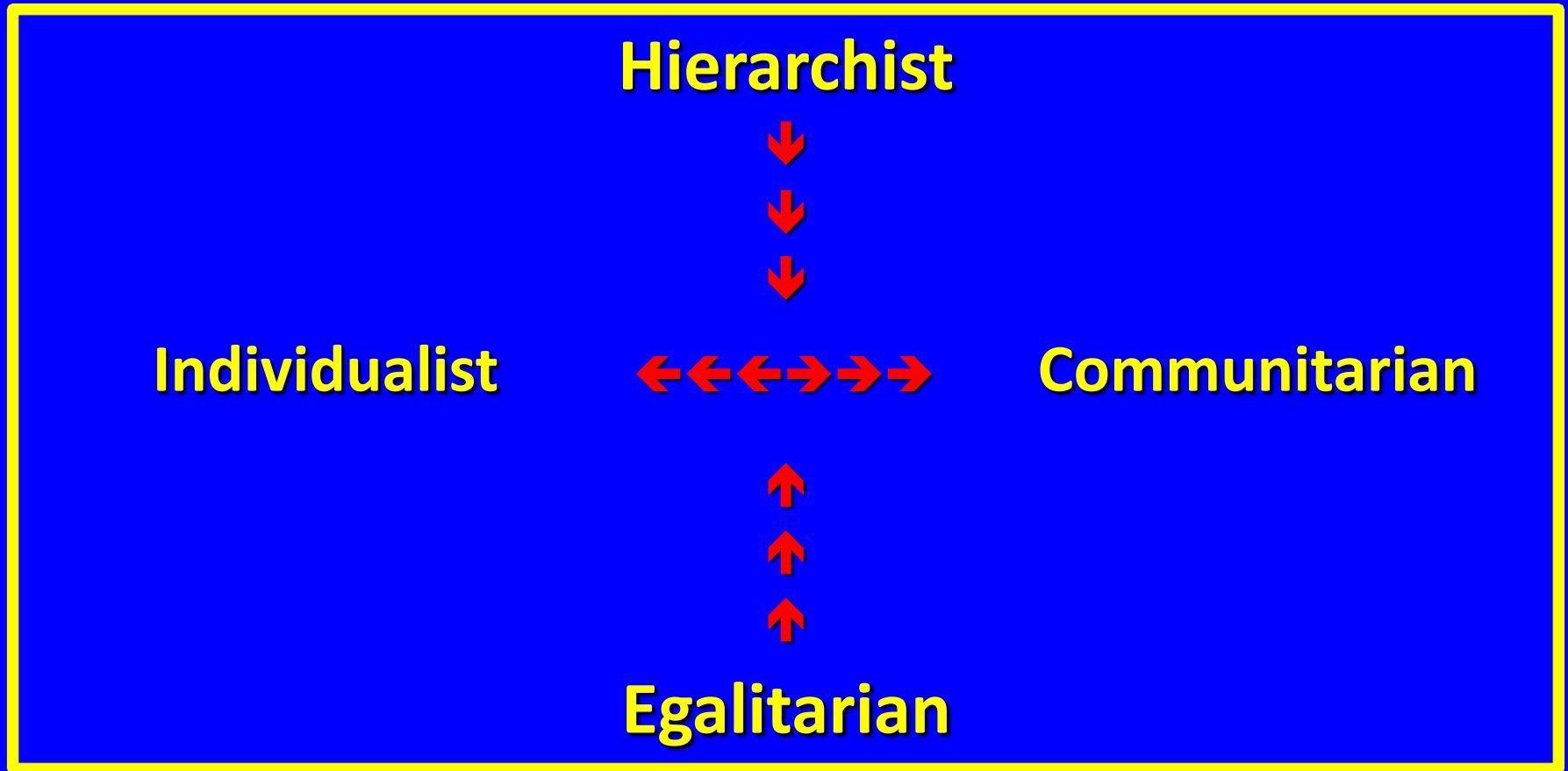
CULTURAL COGNITION

**GROUP = HOW WE THINK SOCIETY
SHOULD OPERATE.**

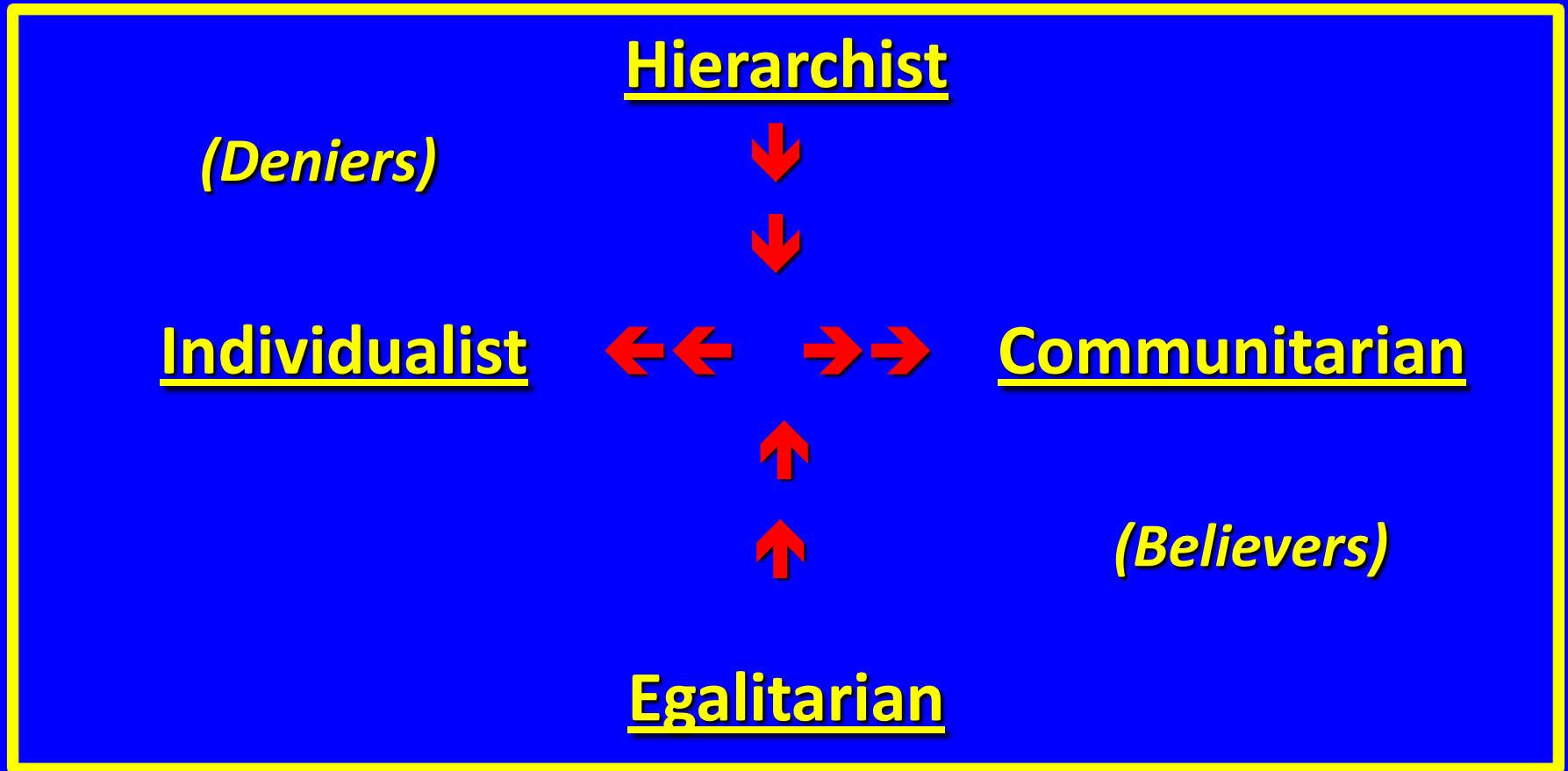
INDIVIDUALIST ↔ COMMUNITARIAN

HIERARCHIST ↔ EGALITARIAN

CULTURAL COGNITION



CULTURAL COGNITION



CULTURAL COGNITION

Individualist ↔ Communitarian

Rate these 0-5. 0 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

Total your answers to the odd questions, and to the even questions

1. The government interferes too much in our everyday lives.
2. Government needs to make laws that keep people from hurting themselves.
3. The government should stop telling people how to live their lives.
4. The government should do more to advance society's goals, even if that means limiting the freedom and choices of individuals.
5. Too many people today expect society to do things for them that they should have to do for themselves.
6. People should be able to rely on the government for help when they need it.
7. Society works best when it lets individuals take responsibility for their own lives without telling them what to do.
8. It's society's responsibility to make sure everyone's basic needs are met.
9. People who are successful in business have a right to enjoy their wealth as they see fit.
10. Taxes should be higher on the wealthy as a fair way of getting them to share the benefits society gives them.

(The greater your total to the odd questions exceeds the total to the even questions, the more Individualist you are.)

CULTURAL COGNITION

Hierarchist Egalitarian

Rate these 0-5. 0 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

Total your answers to the odd questions, and to the even questions

1. Our society would be better off if the distribution of wealth was more equal.
2. Nowadays it seems like there is just as much discrimination against whites as there is against blacks.
3. We need to dramatically reduce inequalities between the rich and the poor, whites and people of color, and men and women.
4. It seems like blacks, women, homosexuals and other groups don't want equal rights, they want special rights just for them.
5. It's old-fashioned and wrong to think that one culture's set of values is better than any other culture's way of seeing the world.
6. The women's rights movement has gone too far.
7. We live in a sexist society that is fundamentally set up to discriminate against women.
8. A lot of problems in our society today come from the decline in the traditional family, where the man works and the woman stays home.
9. Parents should encourage young boys to be more sensitive and less rough and tough.
10. Society as a whole has become too soft.

(The greater your total to the odd questions exceeds the total to the even questions, the more Egalitarian you are.)



CULTURAL COGNITION

**MORE PREDICTIVE OF POSITIONS THAN
STANDARD DEMOGRAPHICS ON;**

- **CLIMATE CHANGE**
- **NANOTECHNOLOGY**
- **ABORTION**
- **GUNS**
- **NUCLEAR POWER**
- **CERVICAL CANCER VACCINE FOR GIRLS**

CULTURAL COGNITION INSIGHTS FOR COMMUNICATION

**2 NEWS STORIES QUOTING SCIENTISTS DESCRIBING CLIMATE
CHANGE FACTS, SAYING SOLUTION WOULD REQUIRE USE OF
NUCLEAR POWER.**

IDENTICAL FACTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE.

ONE LINE WAS CHANGED.

- 1. “REVITALIZE THE NATION’S NUCLEAR POWER INDUSTRY.”**
- 2. NUCLEAR POWER SHOULD BE PROMOTED THROUGH
“INCREASED ANTI-POLLUTION REGULATION.”**

CULTURAL COGNITION INSIGHTS FOR COMMUNICATION

HIERARCHIST/INDIVIDUALISTS

**STORY 1, *PRO ECONOMY*, = *MORE* AGREEMENT WITH FACTS ON
CLIMATE CHANGE!**

STORY 2, *PRO REGULATION*, = *LESS* AGREEMENT W/SAME FACTS.

EGALITARIANS/COMMUNITARIANS

**STORY 1, *PRO ECONOMY*, = *LESS* AGREEMENT WITH FACTS ON
CLIMATE CHANGE!**

STORY 2, *PRO REGULATION*, = *MORE* AGREEMENT W/SAME FACTS.



Suggestions

BE HONEST. RESPECT FEELINGS AND BELIEFS. EMPOWER CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT WHEN POSSIBLE

- 1. MAKE IT LOCAL!**
- 2. MAKE IT CONCRETE, NOT ABSTRACT!**
- 3. MAKE IT NOW, NOT LATER!**
- 4. TALK ABOUT TRADE OFFS BETWEEN RISKS AND BENEFITS, AND THE BENEFITS OF ADAPTING SOONER RATHER THAN LATER.**
- 5. FIND WAYS TO FRAME ADAPTATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LOCAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS CLIMATE CHANGE. (THERE ARE OTHER REASONS THAN CLIMATE CHANGE TO TAKE MANY ADAPTIVE ACTIONS.)**

“Climate Skeptics Embrace Cleaner Energy.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/19/science/earth/19fossil.html?ref=us>

RESOURCES

**George Mason University Center for Climate Change
Communication**

<http://www.climatechangecommunication.org/team.cfm#>

The Psychology of Climate Change Communication

<http://www.cred.columbia.edu/guide/guide/sec1.html>



RESOURCES

David Ropeik,
Principal, Ropeik & Associates

www.dropeik.com

dpr@dropeik.com

978 369-5675

How Risky Is it, Really?

Why Our Fears Don't Match the Facts

