A NEW PARADIGM FOR RISK ANALYSIS

A novel paradigm for risk analysis is proposed and illustrated. The rationale is to engage with five self-evident observations about the nature of risk that have as yet been insufficiently absorbed within current risk paradigms. The five observations are: (1) that people’s knowledge is what determines the way they perceive, define and assess risk issues; (2) that risk issues are a combination of physical and social qualities and properties; (3) that risk issues are pervaded by uncertainty and crises of trust; (4) that risk issues are intrinsically dynamic, changing in profile over time and across geographical and cultural space; (5) that the effectiveness of risk management interventions rests on the quality of the knowledge (scientific and social) on which they are based, and on the internal congruence of that knowledge. Complementary elements of a proposed meta-theory of risk (a new risk paradigm) are set out below with respect to each of these five aspects in turn. The paper is offered as a stimulus to thinking about the possible existence of a unified paradigm that can span all the various spheres of interest of risk analysis, and as a specific proposal for the possible nature and scope of such a paradigm.

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