

UNITED WISDOM

Risks I Take and Risks I Pass On to Others

Freedom and Action

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

A-08-N03 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Risks I Take and Risks I Pass On to Others

Epigraph

> *“fairness in distribution”*

US National Commission, *The Belmont Report*, 1979, B.3 Justice, a fragment of the definition. Its subject is the allocation of benefits and burdens in research involving human subjects, rather than a ready-made rule for our hypothetical meeting. Official version.

What this article is about

A person is willing to spend an evening, try an unfamiliar way of working and accept failure. Yet the same decision may take someone else's day off, delay a shared piece of work or leave another participant to repair the result. Willingness to risk one's own resources does not describe this second part. A single action can contain several different possibilities of losing time, access, trust or a say in what happens. Those possibilities may belong to different people.

We will examine risk through its distribution: who decides, who hopes to benefit and who will have to deal with an unfavourable outcome. Our primary interlocutor is the Belmont Report, which distinguishes the ethical question of research benefits from the distribution of research burdens. The report concerns research involving human subjects; our everyday scenes do not apply medical rules. They explore a narrower distinction: personal courage can support a shared undertaking, but cannot replace a conversation with people whose options change along with our choice.

I. One Action Can Contain Several Different Risks

Imagine a small discussion group preparing a public meeting. One member proposes a new way to record the talks. They are willing to learn the software, spend an evening and acknowledge that the attempt did not work. Described this way, the proposal looks like a personal experiment. However, another person needs the recording to prepare a written account, and the room must be vacated at a particular time. If learning the software takes too long, the effects extend beyond the initiator's evening. The second person loses the chance to finish their part on time; a third must change their next arrangement.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

It helps to unpack the claim that someone is taking their own risk. What exactly do they accept: preparation costs, the possibility of an inconvenient result, additional work after a failure? What remains outside that description: other people's waiting, a shared resource, the task of restoring the usual arrangement? One choice may contain both parts. Clarifying them does not devalue initiative. It distinguishes a genuinely personal trial from a change to a shared undertaking described as personal simply because one person proposed it.

Risk here means the possibility of an unfavourable outcome, rather than a loss already caused. As long as the software works, nobody has been delayed. But the opportunity to discuss conditions matters before failure, while the attempt can still be arranged differently. Waiting for a loss before first asking others about their involvement removes some available options. A different time, the usual recording method or a smaller new function might have been possible. After a failure, the group may only be able to divide up the work that has already arisen. Distinguishing possibility from an actual event does not remove attention to the future; it explains why that attention is useful beforehand.

Not every effect needs a separate group meeting. People constantly change how they do things, and a shared plan can tolerate many small variations. A concrete issue arises where someone else's part depends significantly on the new decision: a deadline becomes unreliable, familiar access disappears or recovery assumes unconfirmed participation. Naming that dependence is useful. Otherwise, the discussion can drift into whether a person is allowed to try something new at all, when the disagreement concerns a single condition for handing over the result.

II. Benefits and Burdens Need Not Reach the Same Person

The Belmont Report discusses beneficence and justice as different ethical principles. The first concerns the handling of possible harms and benefits; the second asks about the distribution of research advantages and burdens. This is an argument within research ethics, rather than permission to assess everyday relationships as a clinical protocol. What matters for our reasoning is the separation of questions: expecting a good collective result does not yet tell us who bears the costs of reaching it.

Suppose the group wants an attractive recording that many people can use. That is an intelligible aim. But if the same volunteer always does the extra processing, collective benefit and individual workload are distributed differently. Inequality alone does not establish unfairness: a person may willingly choose that role, have the relevant skill or receive some other benefit that matters to them. A different clarification is needed. Is this work genuinely offered as a choice, or built into the plan as an unnoticed feature of their character, as though a reliable person will always repair someone else's attempt?

The number of beneficiaries does not settle the matter automatically either. A large audience does not make any small participant an available resource. Conversely, personal inconvenience does not establish that the whole project should end. Between those conclusions lies discussion of an acceptable workload, its conditions and available alternatives. Sometimes time for processing can be set aside in advance. Sometimes the recording has to become shorter. Sometimes the participant declines and the group must find another method. None of these outcomes follows simply from counting satisfied viewers.

This discussion matters particularly when benefit is easy to display and burden hard to notice. Everyone sees the finished recording; recovery of lost files or several evenings of corrections remains out of sight. Project success can then conceal how the project worked. Distribution is worth considering after a successful result too: what work did it require, who accepted it and has a one-off agreement become a continuing expectation? Success confirms that the recording was made. It does not automatically confirm that every cost of producing it was agreed.

III. Agreement Concerns a Particular Possibility, Not the Entire Future

A participant can agree to help with one trial recording and decline to maintain the new system indefinitely. They can accept a ten-minute delay without accepting a postponed meeting. These distinctions are not petty objections to a good idea. They define which possibility of losing time or changing work was actually offered. As the effects of a decision grow wider, an indefinite assurance that everyone broadly agrees to try becomes less informative. General approval of a direction does not answer every question about emerging conditions.

In our scene, the volunteer says they can check the sound before the meeting. The initiator understands this as willingness to be responsible for the whole recording. The difference does not yet mean deception. Both may have used familiar shorthand without noticing what each understood. But the project cannot proceed on the more convenient version of another person's agreement merely because that version is already in the plan. The discussion needs to return to its subject: checking sound, recording the meeting and processing afterwards are different tasks. Each may have a different person, deadline and boundary for declining an expanded role.

Agreeing to a known inconvenience also differs from promising to accept an unknown amount of loss. A person sometimes understands that a format is untested and is genuinely willing to join a limited attempt. That does not turn uncertainty into an unlimited obligation. The group can agree on a time limit, retention of the usual method or a point at which the trial stops. If the boundary cannot yet be defined, saying so helps. Honestly naming a gap preserves

discussion; confidently declaring acceptance of any risk may merely conceal the absence of an intelligible object of agreement.

One person's agreement does not extend to people they do not represent. An organiser can permit use of their own time without promising that invitees are comfortable with a delay. A group representative may have real authority, but its extent also needs to be clear. We are not proposing a legal examination of every everyday phrase. The narrower point is not to treat personal willingness as evidence of someone else's willingness. Where others' involvement matters substantially to the attempt, their answer remains a separate part of the decision. Our confidence cannot supply it.

IV. A Right to Decline Becomes Visible in the Available Alternative

A seemingly voluntary trial may be arranged so that the person declining it receives all the inconvenient work. For example, the group chooses a new format and asks the person who wants to keep the old one to process both versions alone. Formally, they may decline to support the innovation. In practice, others have already assigned them the cost of refusal. This need not immediately be called deliberate pressure: the group may simply have failed to consider distribution. But it should be discussed through the actual alternative, rather than the word voluntary alone.

An alternative need not be equally convenient for everyone. Sometimes a shared resource cannot be used in two ways at once. Sometimes a collective decision inevitably leaves some preferences unsatisfied. That makes it especially useful to distinguish inconvenience arising from a common choice from a new workload assigned for disagreeing. In the first case, participants discuss the undertaking's limitations. In the second, refusal becomes a reason to expand someone's role without confirmation. These are different subjects, even when both create tension and require revision of the original plan.

A useful question can be asked calmly: what happens if this person does not join the new part? If the answer involves others reducing the idea, finding another volunteer or retaining the old method, refusal exists as an option. If the whole project is said to have been ruined specifically by the person declining, although their role was never agreed, there is reason to examine the expectations. This examination does not identify the group's motives or guarantee agreement. It brings the conversation back from personal loyalty to what actually supports the new attempt.

The opposite mistake is also possible. Someone agrees, then claims that the existence of shared inconvenience proves they had no choice. Participation can be voluntary and still include an unpleasant part. Rather than settle the issue with one label, it helps to recover the

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

proposal, the available options and the conditions known at the time. Not every regret cancels earlier agreement; not every spoken concession confirms a freely expanded role. A concrete description leaves both possibilities open and helps identify which condition needs a new agreement now.

V. Someone Else's Spare Capacity Is Not Free Insurance

Shared work often includes a person who can repair a delay. Thanks to them, bold proposals seem almost safe: if the new method fails, they will do it the old way. Yet another participant's ability to remove the consequences does not give us permission to include it in our own calculation. Their free evening may be intended for something else. Their experience may let them find an error quickly without removing the cost of switching tasks. Even if a repair takes little time, that time does not become a collective resource by itself.

Imagine an organiser promising the group a completed recording by the next morning. They assume a familiar editor will support the experiment, although they only discussed routine work with that editor for the following week. Risk is passed on before a technical failure occurs: the initiator's confidence rests on another person's involvement, which does not yet exist. The arrangement can be corrected beforehand. They can ask about availability, change the promised deadline or leave out the new function. There is no need to prove that the editor will certainly refuse. It is enough to acknowledge that their answer has not arrived.

Even confirmed backup has boundaries. Someone can agree to recover one file without agreeing to correspond with every viewer or repeat the entire job. It helps to describe the reserve by the action it covers, rather than the name of a reliable participant. Then its scope and remaining uncertainty are visible. This protects the initiator too: they gain an actual resource instead of an indefinite hope based on familiar helpfulness. Without that resource, the decision may become less convenient, but its grounds no longer depend on another person's unspoken promise.

Spare capacity is not always personal. An extra room, a free hour or a copy of a document also has conditions of use. If it has already been promised to another group, our experiment does not control it completely. Asking about backup therefore includes availability and who can authorise its use, rather than mere existence. It does not require a comprehensive account of participants' lives. Its task is limited: to identify the means on which the proposal already relies in an unfavourable outcome, and distinguish a confirmed option from a convenient assumption.

VI. An Unknown Probability Does Not Make Consequences Identical

Sometimes a group cannot estimate how likely a failure is. That is unsurprising with a new way of working: an exact number may be unavailable. Inventing one for persuasion would be a mistake. But lacking a number does not erase differences between consequences. One option requires repeating a trial; another removes someone's only available time; a third affects material that cannot be recovered. These differences can be discussed without claiming to have calculated risk. Uncertainty concerns the frequency or probability of an event, while the dependence concerns what would happen if it occurred.

Return to the meeting recording. At an ordinary rehearsal, a short talk can be repeated. During a guest's only visit, repetition is unavailable. The same program and the same malfunction therefore have different significance. This does not establish that the new method is forbidden in the second case. Perhaps an independent recording with the usual method is available. But without it, confidence based on an easy rehearsal does not fully describe the present choice. The conditions for recovery have changed, rather than merely participants' feelings about novelty.

Individual limits differ too. A one-hour delay may be tolerable for someone with a free evening and unacceptable for someone who must catch the last available transport. Noticing the difference need not require details of their personal life. They can state a time limit without explaining why. The group can decide whether that limit fits its task, but should not turn a lack of detail into an assumption that the consequences are minor. An unknown reason for declining and a known boundary of participation are different kinds of information.

Our everyday trial is unsuitable where there is substantial danger to health, safety or access to essential help, or where coercion is involved. This article does not propose independent experiments under such conditions or replace necessary professional assistance. That boundary matters to the argument itself: being able to discuss risk does not mean every danger can become acceptable through a good conversation. Sometimes the appropriate next action is to seek a suitable protective procedure rather than launch another attempt, and to decline promises participants lack the authority or resources to make.

VII. A Shared Aim Allows Disagreement About the Method

A person can support the meeting without supporting the new recording. They can value the finished material while regarding the deadline as too demanding. If disagreement about means becomes a test of loyalty to the undertaking, the group loses information about a specific dependence. Participants begin proving who cares more about the result instead of discussing recovery, scope or time. Yet disagreement may reveal a condition the initiator cannot see from their role. It can be useful even if the proposed refusal is ultimately not accepted.

This does not mean every objection must halt a decision. Shared projects have decision rules, time limits and organisers' authority. But such rules do not turn someone else's risk into the announcer's personal risk. A person can have authority to choose the format while also being responsible for describing the workload honestly, informing participants and not inventing their additional roles. Authority to decide is different from knowledge of all consequences. The more confidently the group distinguishes them, the less it needs to perform unanimity where a real difference exists.

After discussion, our hypothetical group keeps the new format but reduces its scope and stops promising publication the next morning. The initiator does not get the entire original idea. The editor does not get complete abandonment of the innovation. Yet a possible delay no longer depends on the editor's unplanned evening. This is a limited agreement, rather than proof of ideal fairness. Its value lies in its content: the deadline and obligation that made participants' risks diverge have changed. The conversation need not end with everyone having the same attitude to the idea itself.

Sometimes this agreement cannot be reached. One person considers immediate publication essential, another is available only later, and there is no third worker. An acknowledged disagreement may then lead to a smaller project or its closure. That is an unwelcome outcome, but it differs from proceeding on a condition one party supposedly has to accept for the shared purpose. A group need not accept every preference. It needs to see which refusal really limits its idea and which question remains open to discussion of other available means.

VIII. Reversibility Needs to Be Examined for Each Participant

A trial is often called reversible when the previous setting can be restored. Yet a technical rollback does not return a lost evening or remove an expectation already created. For the initiator, uninstalling a new program may end the experiment; for the editor, recovery work has only begun. It therefore helps to relate reversibility to a specific loss. Can access be restored? Can the action be repeated? Can occupied time be released? Can a publicly promised deadline be corrected? Different answers reveal different remaining effects, even when the original switch can genuinely be put back.

There is no need to demand absolute reversibility, which is rare in everyday life. What matters is not to use an incomplete meaning as proof that there is no cost to another person. If only a small, previously agreed amount of time is lost, participants may accept the condition. If the only copy of shared material disappears, the attempt needs different precautions. If an announcement has already reached the audience, changing the format includes a new announcement. Reversible then becomes a description of available recovery and what will remain afterwards, instead of a general reassurance.

In our scene, a safer option is to test recording during a short rehearsal and retain the familiar method independently of the new program. This is an authored example of limited organisation, not a universal instruction or a rule of the Belmont Report. Even this trial requires the involvement of people whose time it uses. Its smaller scope, however, makes known conditions available for discussion: short duration, separate material and no promise to publish the result. The experiment need not prove the reliability of the entire future system. It examines one available function in a chosen situation.

Small scope alone does not guarantee small risk. A brief action can affect an irreplaceable resource, while a lengthy action can take place in a wholly voluntary independent project. Reduction therefore helps only alongside questions about dependence and recovery. Sometimes changing the object of a trial is better than shortening its duration: using a separate draft, for example, instead of a shared recording. This distinction keeps attention on the structure of the consequence—what is protected, and by what means—rather than how modest an invitation to try sounds.

IX. Two Different Conversations Remain After the Outcome

If the recording succeeds, the group may want to regard earlier concerns as unnecessary. But success answers a question about the actual result, rather than whether unplanned work was agreed. If the recording fails, the opposite temptation arises: to declare all initiative irresponsible. That conclusion is too broad as well. Failure may occur under honestly described conditions in a genuinely accepted limited trial. Assessment of the result and assessment of how the decision was arranged are connected, but neither automatically replaces the other.

The first conversation after a failure concerns help: what now needs recovery, who can act and whether the offer suits those who experienced the loss. The second concerns the earlier choice: what was known, whose involvement was treated as confirmed and where an assumption was mistaken. Mixing them can make urgent help a payment for ending questions, or make discussion of causes a reason to withhold an available repair. Keeping both subjects helps. Someone can assist now and separately acknowledge having counted on another person's work without sufficient grounds.

An offer to repair does not remove the other person's right to decline further involvement. The editor may not want to join another recording even if the initiator is now willing to do most of it. The parties can discuss handing over finished material or clearly ending the work. But recovery cannot be imposed to demonstrate one's own good intentions. It needs to fit actual possibilities and wanted involvement. Otherwise, the initial transfer of risk repeats in a different form: another task is offered to repair the relationship without asking whether the task itself is wanted.

A successful outcome can yield a narrow conclusion too. A short function, for example, worked with particular material at a particular time. That supports discussion of the next trial, rather than proving every participant's willingness to take a permanent new role. Even a habit established after several successes deserves reconsideration when scope changes. Attention to risk therefore does not end with apprehension before the first step. It remains a way to examine whether the current distribution of work matches the participation people actually confirm now.

X. Personal Courage Becomes More Precise When Another Person's Boundary Is Visible

Willingness to try something new can be valuable. Without it, shared work sometimes remains stuck in an inconvenient arrangement nobody dares to change. But courage becomes more definite when a person can name the cost they accept and distinguish it from other people's costs. The proposal then includes an intelligible arrangement for the attempt alongside a desired result: which resources will be used, who joins, where an answer is needed and what stops under an unfavourable condition. This precision does not promise success. It makes agreement specific.

Nobody gains complete control over other people's future losses. Even an attentive group may fail to foresee something. What matters is the opportunity to report a change without immediately turning it into an accusation or a test of endurance. If a participant discovers that the workload is larger than expected, their report becomes a new circumstance for the choice. It does not always require immediate cancellation of everything. But earlier agreement should not be used to forbid discussion of an emerging dependence. An open boundary differs from a promise to agree once and never object again.

Risks taken personally and risks passed to others therefore do not form two sealed categories. In shared work they can combine, cross over and change over time. The task is not to find an action that affects nobody else. It is to describe an existing connection more honestly: my willingness to work, your right to define participation, a shared resource and the conditions for recovery. Sometimes the proposal becomes smaller. Sometimes others willingly choose a

larger attempt. In either case, the new part should arise from their confirmation rather than our confidence in their readiness.

The significant result of this attention is modest: it becomes clearer which risk a person genuinely accepts and which still needs discussion. This is neither a certificate of moral innocence nor a calculation of every possible event. It offers a chance to stop building a good idea on someone else's invisible reserve. Initiative can then retain a living place in shared work, while participants retain a place in decisions about consequences affecting their own time, work and available ways to act.

What this means in practice

If it suits you, consider one small, safe shared task that can still be changed: a trial rehearsal, a separate draft or an ordinary handover of material. Do not choose situations involving threats, coercion, substantial danger or serious harm already caused. You may skip the exercise entirely. It requires no disclosure of personal circumstances and is not intended to assess someone else's guilt.

Name the expected benefit and one possible loss. Then note separately the person proposing the action, the person receiving the benefit and the person who would handle recovery after failure. These may be the same people. If you do not know who will make repairs, leave that as unknown instead of inserting your most reliable acquaintance. Examine just one important point: does the present plan assume additional participation by someone who has not confirmed it?

If you wish, formulate a more limited option: separate material rather than shared material, smaller scope or a deadline that does not promise unplanned processing. Do not announce it as agreed without an answer wherever another person's answer is needed. If a conversation is appropriate and safe, you can offer the option and accept refusal of the new part. Do not demand an explanation of every personal reason; knowing the boundary of available participation is enough.

The narrow observable result is a clearer distinction between your accepted workload and assumed work by someone else. You may identify one unconfirmed condition or reduce a dependence. This does not guarantee a successful project, complete agreement or the disappearance of risk. Stop if pressure arises, unwanted personal disclosure is requested, safety deteriorates or you are required to continue despite declining. Completing the exercise is not necessary to prove responsibility.

Key quotation

> *“...some burden is imposed unduly”*

US National Commission, *The Belmont Report*, B.3 Justice, the end of a sentence about unfair allocation. Its opening also considers denying an entitled benefit without good reason. The fragment declares neither every difficulty unjust nor participants in our hypothetical scene guilty. Official text.

Connections between traditions

Source actually read	Shared question	Substantial difference
The Belmont Report, B.2–3	A shared benefit does not settle the allocation of burdens	An ethical framework for research involving human subjects, rather than everyday instructions
Mill, On Liberty, opening of IV	One person's choice relates to other people's interests	Historical political philosophy considers limits on interference rather than a procedure for assessing research risk
Our hypothetical meeting	Can unconfirmed participation by another person be reduced?	An editorial comparison, without a new empirical finding

A beneficial aim, freedom of choice and fairness of allocation retain different questions. The table assembles no single theory and does not require readers to follow our proposed conversation.

Sources

• B20-A-08-N03-S1. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. The Belmont Report, April 18, 1979, official HHS/OHRP presentation. Selected B.2–3 and C.2–3 contexts were read; the appendices were not. Research ethics does not establish a current everyday legal rule. Worldwide permission remains unestablished; short fragments and an original comparison, without importing the complete report.

• B20-A-08-N03-S2. John Stuart Mill. On Liberty, 1859, selected opening of Chapter IV. PG34901 contains a separate introduction by W. L. Courtney dated1901, which is not attributed to Mill. Selected paragraphs were read, rather than the whole book. A limited comparison only, without new direct quotations; the work's age establishes no worldwide permission.

Tags

risk, risk distribution, personal choice, shared responsibility, consequences, burden, benefit, fairness, agreement, refusal, voluntary participation, uncertainty, probability, reversibility, spare time, shared resources, recovery, repair, cooperation, expectations, boundaries, authority, hypothetical example, research ethics, Belmont Report, Mill, liberty, safety, United Wisdom

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.