Communication: From Simple to Complex

John Parrish-Sprowl, PhD
Global Health Communication Center
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
Call for complex approach to vaccine risk communication

“Vaccine risk communication is complex as it needs to address not only communicating both the risks and benefits of vaccines at the individual level, but also at the societal level, including communicating the risks of not vaccinating. It also implies ongoing attentiveness to understanding perceptions of risks, as well as mitigating potential risks by ensuring that vaccine delivery strategies take into account sociocultural and political realities which can disrupt programmes if they are not planned, and timed, well. Trustbuilding in immunization programmes needs to be an ongoing task.”

If we want something different then we have to make it

But how?
On what basis?
We can make a choice: simple to complex

**Medicine**
- An art form
- Can be based on traditional thinking
- Can be based on science

**Communication**
- An Art form
- Can be based on traditional thinking
- Can be based on science
Science and Communication

- Perception is an active decision-making process
- Mirror neurons play an important role in communication
- Communication shapes and reshapes brain structure
- Implicit as well as explicit memories shape interaction
- Communication impacts at the epigenetic level
- Communication is ideally an integrated brain function
- Cognition materializes in interpersonal space
So what does all of this mean?

- Communication is much more than the simple transmission of information or messages. It is a beautifully complex, reflexive process, in interplay with the biology of self and others, that creates and shapes our understanding of the world in which we live.

- A scientific understanding of communication opens the door to a richer and more powerful set of options for communication professionals.
Implications for Communication Strategy

- Communication is more than information
- The public is part of the process, one way or another
- Focus on relationships, not just messages
- Good communication strategy is ongoing, highly monitored, and constantly adjusted
- Good communication strategy encompasses the entire process, not just the messages to the public
Thanks for listening!