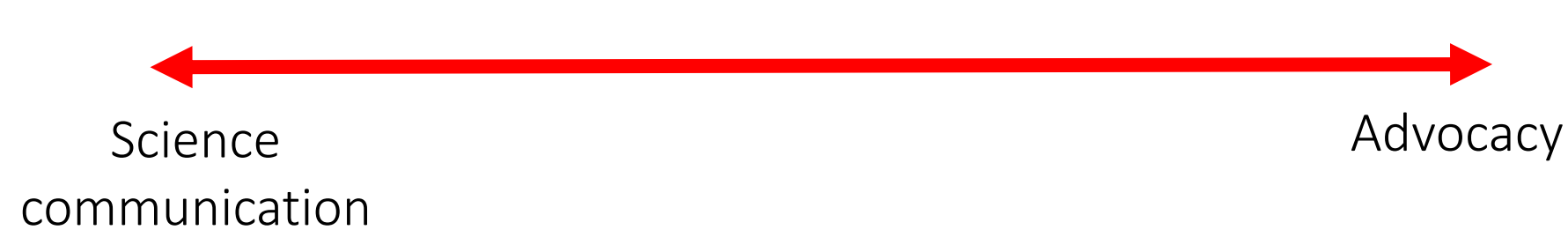


Facilitators, barriers and consequences experienced by researchers' engagement in the promotion of science for use in public policy: A qualitative exploration of Australian researchers.

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Background

The active involvement of scientists in policymaking promotes the development of evidence-based policies and fosters innovation. This association often entails science communication, which may sometimes transition into advocacy. Scholars have conceptualised this interplay using the science-advocacy continuum.



Though science communication is a fundamental aspect of the scientific method, the shift towards the effective advocacy-style public communication poses risks. For instance:

- Governments may exploit scientists to justify policy decisions.
- Scientists may face disproportionate blame in cases of societal backlash.
- Scientists may be misrepresented in the media, affecting public trust in science.

Hence, scientists must balance their desire to communicate their science and have impact with the risk of facing backlash and negative outcomes. Consequently, despite acknowledging the value of scientists' engagement in such communication, not all scientists are willing to participate.

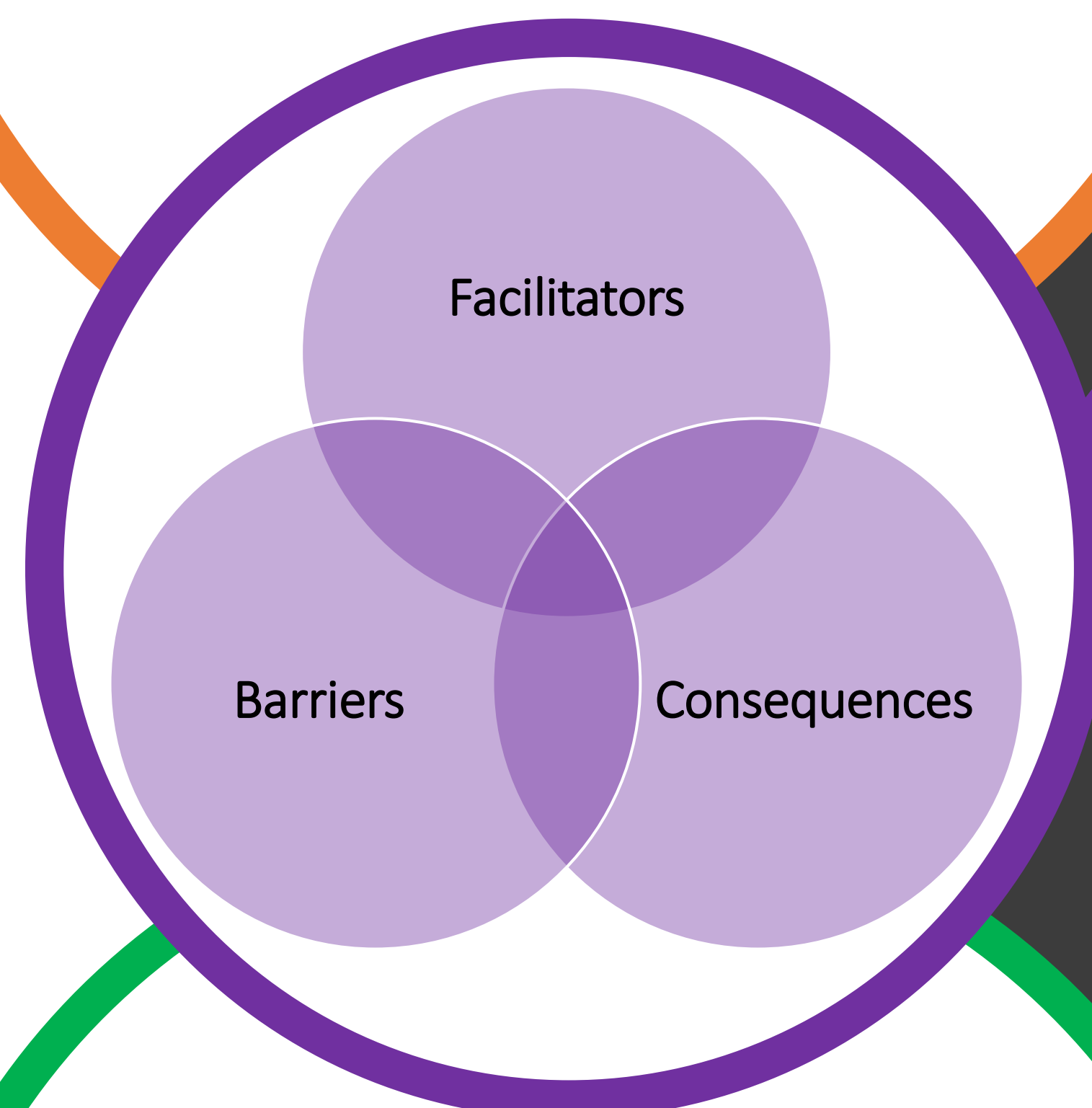
Aim

Understand researchers' engagement in science communication and advocacy.

Methodology

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted.
- Reflexive thematic analysis within an interpretive phenomenological analysis framework was used.
- The lived experiences of 33 scientists were explored (M age = 49.9, SD = 9.6).
- A total of 15 females and 18 males were interviewed.
- Disciplines represented:
 - STEM (n=20)
 - Public Health (n=7)
 - Social science (n=6)

"Scientists have a critical role in communicating... But there's a risk that you obviously fall into the advocacy space... it's important for scientists not to be advocates" [INV025].



"Look, it's time consuming. You've got to do training; you've got to be skilled at it" [INV017].

"... the way science is funded in Australia... you don't want to bite the hand that feeds you" [INV016].

"... I know people who have personally received death threats" [INV020].

Results

Scientists see the benefit of their engagement in all forms of science communication but often science communication which encroaches into highly politicised topics is viewed as advocacy.

Participant responses highlight several constraints, barriers and consequences that impact upon their willingness to engage in public facing communication, particularly communication that moved into advocacy-style public communication.

Facilitators

Several facilitators were reported by participants as impacting upon their willingness to communicate about science. For example:

- Time
- Training
- Institutional support
- Cultural norms

Barriers

Participants reported several barriers that hindered scientists' willingness to communicate about science:

- Fear of misrepresentation
- Perceived risk to reputation
- Incentive structure
- Institutional priorities

Consequences

Participants reported both positive and negative consequences as a function of engaging in public facing science communication. For example:

- Policy impact
- Increased funding opportunities
- Career advancement
- Personal safety concerns
- Emotional toll

Conclusion

These facilitators, barriers and consequences influence scientists' willingness to engage in all forms of science communication, potentially undermining the credibility of science among policymakers and the public. Addressing these often requires institutional support, changes in incentive structures, improved training programs, and a cultural shift within the scientific community to recognise the importance of science communication.