

Introducing new technologies without communicating risks is a very RISKY thing to do

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Risk presents the possibility that something unwanted, something bad may happen or something important or worthwhile may be lost. It also means being threatened or even in danger in a certain situation or environment. People face risks every day. Since birth, our surroundings have been warning us of them, teaching us how to minimize them, how to coexist with them safely, or better yet, how to avoid them as effectively as possible. In the business world, risk management is also one of the key goals and the cornerstones of long-term success. Like trust, good reputation, and high credibility. In fact, these foundations are strongly interconnected and interdependent. If the risks are proven justified, hidden or unspoken of, scientifically proven, (too) high or unacceptable to the (business) environment, and the companies' attitude towards them is wrong, this will certainly be reflected in a decline in reputation and lower credibility. These, however, quickly entail a decline in trust, which could be a potential recipe for disaster.

In traditional industries (e.g. mass production, energy, food, tourism, finance, insurance), risk management is a daily task, but far away from routine. Successful companies and brands are well aware of the risks and their potential consequences, take them into account, and protect themselves from them. Based on long-term experience, data, statistics, analyzes, scientific studies and findings, it is easier, but above all more reliable, to make the right business decisions, and to share their knowledge and insights about risk with their stakeholders and discuss them openly and transparently.

In the development and introduction of new technologies, however, the lack or absence of experience, data, analysis, research and studies means that the associated risks are very likely to become the subject of attention, doubt, concern, negative public image, fears, ... Above all in the present time of homo informaticus, where information (and misinformation) is available to everyone now, everywhere, and immediately, where new currencies such as trust, security, health, quality of life, community and environmental awareness apply. At a time when the media is grabbing any, even false, news about dangerous technologies, at a time when consumer rights are on the march, at a time when people are deciding quickly, superficially, and based on their values and the opinions of their community or initiative.

That is why, at the time of the emergence of new technologies, whose effects and risks have not yet been fully explored, well-defined and publicly accepted, comprehensive communication, including benefits and risks, is one of the most important processes of risk management. There are quite a few cases where the

development or implementation of new, but risk-related technologies was abandoned because communication support was poor, overt, or non-argumentative, and thus ineffective in providing public support. Of course, on the other hand, there are also many cases where, with potential risks, new technology has rapidly spread to users through effective, broad, inclusive, transparent and two-way communication. There are also examples of, say, mobile phones, along with 3rd and 4th generation networks, where the benefits of technology have outweighed the risks and were desired by users before the experts explored all their long-term impacts. However, these same users often opposed the construction of mobile telephony base stations near their homes, or immediately rejected a new model of mobile phone because stories of battery explosions appeared among users and in the media. Even after the manufacturer's investigation, reliable error correction and the significantly lower price of impeccable handsets, consumers have no longer been asking for this model.

The boundary between success and potential failure of new technologies is therefore thin, but in any case, the chances of success are greater if the development, deployment, and commercialization of new technologies or upgrades is comprehensively supported and communicated from day one, and the impacts and risks must play a prominent role in key content. An interdisciplinary approach, especially when it comes to risks, is the best long-term solution. Involvement of experts in the process of risk identification and assessment, in the development and implementation of risk management policies (and regulations), in building a credible system of long-term monitoring, measurement and evaluation of the effects of new technologies, in the implementation of education and public awareness of findings and measures, in the creation of communications platforms and content, and in leading an open public dialogue, it creates a credible communication environment and puts at the forefront of communication prominent experts, opinion leaders, clear and credible arguments, and actionable solutions.

When people judge that the risks outweigh the benefits of new but risky technology, whether true or not, it is often too late for calm, planned, manageable communication, and technology deployment processes become time consuming, complicated, expensive and often inefficient. The same stands for communications.

To support roll-out of new "risky" technologies, like 5G telecommunication networks, a multi-level constructive dialogue between all stakeholders should be established, the technology and its impacts (positive or negative) should be appropriately presented and explained, and stakeholder's perception factors (above all the concerns) fully understood. After that, an effective risk communication strategy and toolkit should be introduced to increase effectiveness by involving affected groups to improve dialogue, reduce tension and start building mutual trust. If you want people to accept and trust the information you provide, you should first take care to be heard and perceived as trusted and credible information source.