

The Nature of Outrage (p. 1)

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1. The hazard-versus-outrage distinction is not a distinction between data and emotions or between data and values.

Outrage and its various components are as real, measurable, tangible, and controllable as hazard. In most cases we have better data on outrage than on hazard.

2. The focus on outrage instead of hazard is universal.

Everyone is the outraged or “outrageable” public for all issues except his or her own. What data would persuade you to send your children to an HIV-positive dentist?

3. When people are outraged at you, the odds are overwhelming that you are also outraged at them.

It would be shocking if this were not true. But managers often deny it even to themselves, and label as strategy decisions that are actually grounded in their own outrage.

4. Outrage reduction doesn’t come naturally.

Self-esteem concerns, power concerns, and organizational concerns all get in the way. What is difficult in risk communication isn’t figuring out what to do; it’s overcoming the organizational and psychological barriers to doing it.

5. Outrage prevention calls for the same strategies as outrage reduction -- and it’s easier.

Even if people are not outraged (yet), risk communication may be a cost-effective way to buy “outrage insurance.” Strike while the iron is cold.

6. The optimal level of outrage varies with the situation.

If hazard is high, you may want high outrage. If hazard is low, you usually want low outrage -- unless you’re an activist in need of an issue, a regulator in need of a victory, or a contractor or bureaucrat in need of a budget increase.

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- 7. Outrage reduction strategies assume an audience that is attentive and hostile (or at least skeptical).**
By contrast, most communication experts are used to audiences that are apathetic but credulous. Traditional marketing communication fails in a risk communication environment -- and vice-versa.
- 8. The distinction between hazard and outrage applies to more than just risk controversies.**
Think of it as substantive issues versus process issues. How many people resolve conflicts with their spouses by citing data to prove that the spouse is in error?
- 9. Outrage reduction is good business.**
Among the consequences of high public outrage are excessive regulation, diminished morale, distorted management priorities ... and reduced profits. You don't need to be an ethicist to want to reduce outrage -- just a realist.
- 10. Employee outrage is not very different from community outrage.**
The only significant difference is that employees tend to be slower than neighbors to *show* their outrage; by the time you notice it, therefore, it may be further developed and harder to relieve.
- 11. All cultures focus more on outrage than on hazard -- but the details vary with the culture.**
A controversy that plays out over control in the U.S. may center on trust in Germany. An acknowledgment that seems refreshingly candid in Australia may be mutually humiliating in Japan.

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