Crisis management : about new practices and the importance of interoperability in communication tools

Crisis can't be avoided nor foreseen. Natural hazards, exploitation incidents, terrorism, technological warfare, industrial espionage… They are more and more frequent and complex. Aware of these new risks, the State and big companies – especially vital operators (VO) - are pushing the envelope creating new special units and departments, standardized procedures and specific drills. However, what about their tools? How are their Information Systems evolving to help them improve their crisis management?

On February 7th, during a conference organized by StreamWIDE and the CDSE at the *Millenium Hôtel Paris Opera,* Home Secretary's and Elite Corps' team shared their practical experiences and the views in the highest spheres of the State. Three main issues arise regarding this change.

Democratization of the communication tools
For decades, the State has been benefitting from a technological advantage to coordinate more swiftly first responders (security and rescue). Vital Operators and the general population indirectly got residual gains from this. With the improvement and democratization of Information and Communication Systems such as WhatsApp and Telegram, opponents have caught up with this simple yet advanced technologies, untraceable and available to the general population.

Quality of the treatment of the information
We now can get more pieces of information and data ranging from drone images to bacteriological captors and there are even more stakeholders to coordinate. As a result, dispatching, treating, sharing and protecting information has become a lot more complex. Real-time coordination has become critical and we can't only rely on liaison officers anymore to ensure seamless communication.

Adoption of the solutions
Despite the creation of quite elaborate anticipation scenarios, people on the forefront of crisis detection and management will never be totally and perfectly prepared. When a crisis does happen, it's crucial for the human factor to be taken into account when choosing information and communication solutions. These tools should tackle everyday issues operators face.

To have a thorough response to these concerns, the State's information and communication systems as well as the vital operators have to comply to new requirements.

Interoperability
Whether it is about expertise, international collaboration or technical compatibility, interoperability on all levels is the keystone for crisis management (Molenbeek) or during big events (2024 Olympic Games). A political debate is currently taking place at the European Union level to ensure a technical harmony between the various nations' systems and a better anticipation of their evolution.

Interoperability should also serve and reinforce "operational trust", fostering communication around best practices and postmortem documentation with all parties involved.

Resilience
ICS must be accessible, everywhere and at all times. The disorganization in the wake of the hurricane Irma in Saint-Martin unfortunately showed us the importance of their resilience. These systems and solutions must work when the primary ones are being challenged in order to not delay and jeopardize the crisis solving.

Intuitiveness
A good communication tool is a tool that knows how to be forgotten because it matches with the habits and everyday behavior of its users. When the crisis arises, its use should be intuitive, a reflex almost, so that it won't delay the crisis resolution, cause mistakes or the switch to a non-secure general public solution.

In order to face the new challenges of critical communication, the State and vital operators must equip themselves with more agile and practical tools. Their conception should be compliant with the on-the ground demands and have sustainable costs to ensure economical and operational viability.

The *Réseau Radio du Futur* and its first stone « *PC Storm* » embody this paradigm shift. For this project, the Home Secretary has deployed StreamWIDE's "Team on Mission", a new, all-in-one, software app. Thanks to this secure, intuitive and fully interoperable platform, rescue and security first responders now have a shared critical and crisis communication digital tool. It allows them to keep control at all times and therefore talk, inform in real-time and follow automated processes in a secure environment.

A stern warning regarding humility was uttered. Even with the best laid plans and the most rigorous drills, availability of resources and technology (networks, apps and equipment) is a must. In times of crisis management, everything has to work everywhere and at all times.