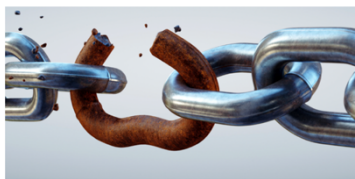
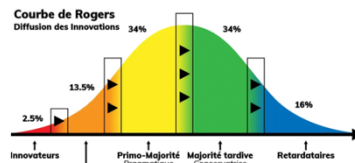


The misunderstanding of excessive communication (1)

Why complex innovations need to be explained



WinstantGold



Blog post

A recurring comment

Over the past few weeks, several partners have made the same observation. In their view, publishing two or three blog posts per week on blockchain, traceability, tokenization, or digital finance is excessive. Why revisit the same topics so often? Why multiply the analyses when the essential information is already available?

This is an interesting point, especially since it often comes from organizations whose communication strategy primarily consists of periodically disseminating the same institutional messages. The issue, therefore, is not merely quantitative; it concerns the very function of communication.

A question that deserves to be asked

After all, we live in an information-saturated world. Reports, memos, studies, emails, social media, and 24/7 news feeds demand our attention daily. In such a context, it seems legitimate to ask whether there is a point at which the effort of explanation becomes excessive. Does a complex innovation need to be continually reformulated for different audiences? Or is it sufficient to periodically present its main elements? Behind this question lies a deeper one: do innovative projects suffer from an excess of communication or a lack of understanding?

The scarcity of attention

Those who advocate for "communicating less" have compelling arguments. In the 1970s, Herbert Simon observed that an abundance of information simultaneously produces a scarcity of attention. When information proliferates, the truly limited resource is no longer the available knowledge but the human capacity to dedicate time to it.

This idea has now become commonplace. Specialists speak of infobesity, information overload, or the attention economy. Organizations seek to limit their public statements to avoid overwhelming their audiences. The reasoning seems sound: if attention is limited, it's better to speak less.

Informing is not the same as making someone understand

However, this analysis often rests on an implicit assumption: it presupposes that the information disseminated is already understood. But informing, communicating, and ensuring understanding are three distinct operations. A document can be transmitted without being assimilated. A presentation can be followed without altering the understanding of those listening. An innovation can be described precisely without being truly grasped. Between receiving a message and understanding it, there is always an intervening process of interpretation. Each participant reads the information they receive based on their own experience, knowledge, and concerns. Meaning never automatically flows with the message.

The challenge of complex innovations

This difficulty becomes particularly apparent when dealing with complex innovations. Take blockchain, for example. For its developers, it's a technical architecture based on distributed validation mechanisms. For an investor, it represents a new asset. For a

regulator, it raises questions of compliance and governance. For a local community, it often remains an abstract concept whose concrete implications are difficult to grasp. The same object thus produces different interpretations depending on the stakeholders involved. The challenge is therefore no longer simply to transmit information. It consists of making that information understandable to audiences who do not share the same knowledge or the same frames of reference.

Everett Rogers and the diffusion of innovations

This is precisely what Everett Rogers demonstrated in his work on the diffusion of innovations. According to Rogers, an innovation does not spread simply because it exists or is technically successful. Its adoption also depends on social mechanisms that enable its understanding, acceptance, and appropriation.

An innovation progresses through conversations, exchanges, demonstrations, and mechanisms of influence. It circulates less as an object than as an idea gradually made understandable to new actors. This observation is crucial. It shifts the focus from the innovation itself to the conditions of its diffusion.

Innovation mediators

Rogers places particular importance on early adopters and opinion leaders. These actors act as intermediaries between the designers of an innovation and its potential users. They translate technical mechanisms into concrete benefits. They illustrate possible uses. They reduce the uncertainties associated with change.

Their role is not only to adopt the innovation, but also to make it understandable. Each stage of diffusion thus involves additional work in reformulation. Specialized concepts are adapted to different audiences. Complex mechanisms are explained in more accessible language. Benefits are presented according to the concerns of each category of actor. The innovation is not simply transmitted; it is continually reinterpreted.

The more complex an innovation is, the more complex it is....

This analysis leads to an important conclusion. The more complex an innovation, the more mediation it requires. The more specialized the knowledge needed to understand it, the more explanatory efforts become necessary. Blockchain, tokenization, and digital finance mechanisms perfectly illustrate this situation. Their operation can be technically rigorous while remaining largely opaque to those unfamiliar with the specialized languages used to describe them. In these circumstances, multiplying analyses is not necessarily a sign of excessive communication. It may simply reflect the complexity of the subject under study.

A first conclusion

So the real question may not be whether we communicate too much or not enough. Rather, it consists of determining whether the actors have the necessary conditions to build a common understanding. An innovation that is not understood remains difficult to adopt.



A project that is not understood becomes difficult to coordinate. The challenge, therefore, is not only to produce information but also to enable its appropriation by different stakeholders, who may have different interests, skills, and languages.

A deeper question

This conclusion, however, leads to an additional question. If the innovations need to be explained, who carries out this translation work? How do actors from different worlds manage to build a sufficiently common understanding to act together? How do networks manage to maintain their coherence despite the diversity of interests and points of view?

To answer these questions, we must now shift the focus from the diffusion of innovations to the construction of the networks that make them possible. This is precisely what Michel Callon, Bruno Latour and the sociology of translation show. This will be the subject of the next article.