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Overflows and violence during social conflicts ... A fatality?



It is undeniable that, when a social plan is announced, reactions are very often guided by the emotions of each of the people affected by it... A primary feeling of major injustice prevails and, let's be honest, not to accept it and prevent it would be simply irresponsible! The safety of the people involved and impacted by the announcement, whatever the scale of the announcement, must be ensured and managed. We cannot simply «announce and see what will happen» ... It is essential to identify, reduce and manage the impacts on people ... I'm talking about all people here, namely the members of the company's management, the managers in charge of the announcement, but also the workers themselves, who are very often «pushed» into protest movements that can very quickly turn out to be dangerous for themselves.

The risks for the safety of people, but also for the company's assets ... are numerous, as soon as the intention to restructure is expressed. It is therefore essential to develop an effective and coherent plan for managing these risks. The effectiveness of this management plan can be measured by its impact on numerous parameters, such as :

- **Social dialogue:** this must remain possible. It is often «tense», but it must remain concrete, otherwise it could lead to violence, kidnapping or destruction (example: Air France, in October 2015).
- **The legal framework:** this is the basis of any restructuring plan. It is inconceivable to leave the legal framework, both in terms of social law and civil law (e.g. Meister in Belgium in 2012).



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- **The reputation of the 'Brand'**: this is inherent in maintaining its notoriety and renown at a regional level but also at a global level (for example: Renault took several years to return to a similar level of sales in Belgium before 1997).
- **The company's activity**: this activity must, in the interest of all parties, continue in an optimal manner, taking into account that between the announcement of the intention and the first departures, there are often many months that elapse. The paralysis of the company's activity very often generates a blockage of social dialogue (example: Delhaize Belgium in 2014).

This list of parameters is by no means exhaustive, of course, but it reflects an absolute obligation to prepare an effective, clear, transparent and precise plan for managing the risks associated with a restructuring plan.

My experience in managing safety risks for over 20 years now allows me to confirm that it is absolutely essential to identify, prevent and effectively manage the risks, as well as the possible impacts, linked to the announcement of a restructuring! Numerous cases, in Belgium as in France, of unacceptable excesses prove that if the safety of people is not put forward as soon as the announcement of intent is prepared, it unfortunately becomes excessively complicated to guarantee optimum safety for everyone.

From all the experiences I have had since 1997 and my first experience of social plans, I have retained a leitmotiv that still guides me in each of the projects I manage, to this day: «**It is better to be well prepared beforehand than really sorry afterwards!**».

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