Toward an Inclusive Approach in Risk Communication: A Theoretical–Reflective Study for Public Relations

Hacia un enfoque inclusivo en la comunicación de riesgos: Un estudio teórico-reflexivo para las Relaciones Públicas

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Abstract

The field of crisis communication has, for some time, been consolidating itself within organizational communication studies, both in Brazil and internationally. Its importance, especially within the context of the risk society (Beck, 2010), is undeniable. However, there is a need to move forward, to refine processes, and to act effectively in the prevention and mitigation of risks and damages in ways that are meaningful for the diverse publics that constitute this society. This theoretical–reflective study addresses inclusive risk communication, reflecting on and proposing possible actions that are attentive to the different needs and characteristics of organizational publics. Based on a bibliographic review on accessible communication, the discussion is articulated with theories of the risk society (Beck, 2010), crisis communication (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2022), and risk management (Nunes, 2025). Finally, the culture of care is identified as a pathway for potential actions aimed at implementing accessible and inclusive risk communication processes.

Keywords: Risk communication, Risk society, Crisis communication, Person with disability, Public Relations.

Resumen

El campo de la comunicación de crisis se ha venido consolidando durante algún tiempo dentro de los estudios de comunicación organizacional, tanto en Brasil como a nivel internacional. Su importancia—especialmente en el contexto de la sociedad del riesgo (Beck, 2010)—es innegable. Sin embargo, existe la necesidad de avanzar, perfeccionar los procesos y actuar de manera efectiva en la prevención y mitigación de riesgos y daños de formas significativas para los diversos públicos que constituyen esta sociedad. Este estudio teórico-reflexivo aborda la comunicación de riesgo inclusiva, reflexionando sobre ella y proponiendo posibles acciones que atiendan las diferentes necesidades y características de los públicos organizacionales. Basándose en una revisión bibliográfica sobre comunicación accesible, la discusión se articula con las teorías de la sociedad del riesgo (Beck, 2010), la comunicación de crisis (Coombs, 2007;

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Coombs & Holladay, 2022) y la gestión del riesgo (Nunes, 2025). Finalmente, la cultura del cuidado se identifica como una vía para posibles acciones orientadas a la implementación de procesos de comunicación de riesgos accesibles e inclusivos.

Palabras clave: Comunicación de riesgo, Sociedad del riesgo, Gestión de la comunicación de crisis, Persona con discapacidad, Relaciones Públicas.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The process of corporate communication is intrinsically woven into everyday organizational life. It mobilizes information and promotes interactions between corporations and their diverse publics. When professionalized and properly planned, it becomes consolidated as a strategic force within the core of business activities, effectively establishing and managing organizational relationships, as well as organizational responses and positions in relation to contemporary challenges. This discussion is grounded in a theoretical reflection on the diversity of publics, considering their movements, articulations, and demands in the contemporary context. In this sense, the development of a thorough communication diagnosis that takes contextual factors into account is equally important.

Communication thus assumes the role of strategic mediation between organizations and their publics, encompassing the transformations and nuances of the risk society (Beck, 2011). Given the global scenario—marked by multiple risks such as global warming, armed conflicts, technological dependence, cyberattacks, among others, it becomes imperative that crisis communication permeates the entire scope of organizational action.

Research on crisis communication indicates that the literature in this field is still under development, addressing stages and practical actions for before, during, and after crises, as well as the competencies required to correctly identify an organizational crisis. On the other hand, when observing publics and their characteristics within this context, it becomes evident that research on risk communication, and more specifically on accessible and inclusive risk communication, remains incipient and fragmented.

Quick searches using web search engines yield a wide range of content labeled under this topic. However, certain perspectives tend to stand out: those focused on technical aspects, understood as accessibility tools; those related to education, connecting accessible and inclusive education as a fundamental right of every citizen; and those referred to as accessible communication, often structured as practical manuals based on a "how-to" approach. While acknowledging the importance of these materials, we also recognize the need to advance and critically examine them. We adopt the perspective of public relationship management, a foundational element of public relations and organizational communication.

Accordingly, the objective of this theoretical study is to reflect on accessible and inclusive communication in situations of risk and crisis. How can it be conceptualized? What reflections can be developed to address the complexity of publics and risk scenarios in the contemporary world? How can risk communication be rethought in light of risk society theory and studies on accessibility and inclusion?

To this end, we draw on national and international references, grounded in several key concepts central to this discussion: risk society (Beck, 2011), crisis communication (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2022), risk communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2022), and accessible and inclusive communication. The article is structured into three sections. The first contextualizes the risk society; the second addresses risk and crisis communication within this scenario. Finally, we reflect on the outlined concepts and contexts and shed light on the culture of care as a pathway for possible actions toward the implementation of accessible and inclusive risk communication processes.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Contemporary society from a risk perspective

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic further highlighted social inequalities, leading the UN to warn about the importance of accessible content for the effective management of that health crisis. "COVID-19: Who is protecting the people with disabilities?" was the question posed by Catalina Devandas, UN special rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, in March 2020.

Years later, in May 2024, the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in Brazil, faced its worst climatic catastrophe with unprecedented floods. Data from August of that year indicated 183 deaths, 27 missing, and over 600,000 displaced. Some news headlines illustrate the scenario at the time: "The Disturbing Invisibility of People with Disabilities in the Rio Grande do Sul floods"[2], "Rain in RS: wheelchair users face drama to save themselves amidst floods"[3]. In October of that same year, Spain experienced a similar situation: "The shocking images of the severe floods in Spain that have left dozens dead and missing"[4], "What happened in Spain with the deadly floods, where was the most damage and what caused the disaster?"[5]. These are just a few examples resulting from excessive rainfall, but we could also mention extreme heat waves in India in 2025, or even forest fires in North America, also in 2025 and previous years, as reported by the New York Times, "Canada Faces a 'Challenging' Wildfire Season: What to Know

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[2] Retrieved Feb 10th, 2025 from https://retinabrasil.org.br/a-perturbadora-invisibilidade-das-pessoas-com-deficiencia-nas-enchentes-do-rio-grande-do-sul/#:~:text=Sul%20%E2%80%94%20Retina%20Brasil-,A%20Perturbadora%20Invisibilidade%20das%20Pessoas%20com%20Defici%C3%AAncia,do%20Rio%20Grande%20do%20Sul&text=Enquanto%20as%20manchetes%20ecoam%20as,clama%20por%20visibilidade%20e%20aten%C3%A7%C3%A3o.

[3] Retrieved Feb 13th, 2025 from https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/sos-rio-grande-do-sul/noticia/2024/05/14/chuva-no-rs-cadeirantes-vivem-drama-para-se-salvar-em-meio-a-enchentes.ghtml

[4] Retrieved Feb 13th, 2025 from https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/cq6lg703j00o

[5] Retrieved Feb 13th, 2025 from https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2024/10/31/espana-inundaciones-mortales-causas-danos-trax

as Fires Rage in the West"[6]. These are situations resulting from climate change and global warming; imminent risks long warned about by the scientific community.

Regardless of the geographical region where these crises occur, it is imperative to look at the human factor, at the different populations that are exposed to these risks and disasters. Despite the time elapsed between the crises mentioned earlier, risk and crisis communication for people with disabilities remains inadequate or even non-existent. News highlighted the invisibility and challenges faced by these people during extreme climatic events. The scenario of these crises highlights the importance of adequate and attentive risk communication. Ensuring accessibility to content and the inclusion of diverse publics is essential to prevent crises and/or reduce damages resulting from disasters. Planning evacuation routes, training specialized teams, or even providing first-aid assistance can be ways of advancing from accessible risk communication to inclusive risk communication, by observing and intervening in processes as well. This is where the perspective of action grounded in the social construction of crisis and risk, as argued by Coombs and Holladay (2022), that will be addressed in the following section.

The perceptions of the German sociologist, Ulrich Beck (2010), support a sociological perspective of risk. This means that it is necessary to understand risk as the result of technological development and its effects on nature and society. If some time ago risk was understood as synonymous with boldness, Beck (2010) argues that in modernity it "Represents the set of threats, sometimes unforeseen, generated by industrial societies. By the mental, technological and economic model of managing life" (Jacondino and Elesbão, 2015, p. 130). With the industrialization of modern societies, human beings manage their own evolution and dynamics, often impacting changes/exploitations of nature and its resources. It is these uses and abuses that accentuate risk under the conditions of life on earth.

> The central thesis is that these risks, created by human beings and by the modern and industrial model of society, reach global proportions, as no region or country can feel free from the consequences and threats brought by this model. On the other hand, risks in modern society are in a state of latency, that is, according to our author, they are threats that hover over societies, but which, to a large extent, remain hidden: "Risk of self-destruction of life on Earth" (BECK, 2010, p.25), caused by technologies created by humanity itself (Jacondino and Elesbão, 2015, p. 131).

Hence the perspective of the sociological paradigm of risk; that which results from processes of social production. Another important aspect of the paradigm refers to the analysis of risk distribution in society. From the author's perspectives, two in particular directly contribute to the present reflection: 1) the distribution of risks is asymmetrical and 2) catastrophe emerges with political potential, implying the reorganization of power and authority. Regarding the first proposition, we understand that in adverse and often unmanaged situations, certain social groups become more vulnerable, such as children, adolescents, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

> This is because such groups are especially vulnerable in situations of risks and disasters, not only due to immediate consequences (risks of death, greater exposure to diseases and violence), but also in the short, medium, and long term, in relation to

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[6] Retrieved Feb 13th, 2025 from: https://www.nytimes.com/article/canada-wildfires-2025.html

their future development (school delay, psychological suffering, motor rehabilitation, among others), in the case of children and adolescents, and due to post-traumatic effects (motor rehabilitation, psychological suffering, fractures, among others), in the case of people with disabilities and the elderly (National Joint Protocol for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents, the Elderly, and Persons with Disabilities in Situations of Risks and Disasters - Secretariat of Human Rights of the Presidency of the Republic, 2013).

Thus, the need for attention to the diversity of publics is evident, not only in relation to their ties with organizations, but especially from the perspective of their degree of vulnerability. This is why, from Beck's (2010) view, the distribution of risks in society is asymmetrical. Democratic, because somehow the crises resulting from the risks of modernity will affect everyone, but asymmetrical, because their impact is distinct.

At the same time, the reorganization of power and authority also proves crucial as part of a communication process aligned with the different degrees of vulnerability of these same publics. Since in a crisis/disaster situation, various sources and voices emerge. Not all with the intention and/or necessary organization to minimize the impacts of the event, but precisely demonstrating the urgency of inclusive Crisis and Risk Communication.

2.2. Crisis communication

Just as society organizes and reorganizes itself over the years, organizations also experience new and multiple situations demanding plans and actions on different scales. Proof of this are the countless extreme climatic events already understood as part of this risk society (Beck, 2010) and which, in turn, impact organizations and societies as a whole. From the individual to the established public power, from neighborhood associations to non-governmental organizations, to political parties; as well as from the self-employed worker to private organizations.

> We live in a society continually affected by natural disasters, such as hurricanes, tsunamis, and forest fires, and by organizational crises, such as food-borne illnesses, corporate malfeasance, and terrorism. Regardless of where you live or the kind of work you do, many different types of crises have the potential to significantly disrupt your life. No community and no organization, public or private, is immune from crises (Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, 2007, p. 2).

From the perspective of the risk society, it is important to recognize that the constant crises to which we are exposed encompass three main characteristics: surprise, threat, and limited time for response. "A troubling event cannot reach the level of crisis without coming as a surprise, posing a serious level of threat and forcing a short response time" (Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, 2007, p. 6). The authors further contribute to the field by emphasizing that, based on these three characteristics, there are two types of crises: intentional crises (those directly related to the organizational context, with the potential to cause damage) and unintentional crises, which may include extreme climatic events, as well as "disease outbreaks, unforeseeable technical interactions, product failure, downturns in the economy" (p. 11).

In light of societal transformations and the impacts of human action on the environment, it is pertinent to clarify that in this article we adopt the term *disasters* or *extreme climate events*

rather than "natural disasters." As understood by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction,

> The truth is, there is no such thing as a natural disaster. Disaster equals hazard plus exposure plus vulnerability. A natural hazard, such as a hurricane, earthquake, or flood, only becomes a disaster when it impacts a community that is not adequately protected, and whose population is vulnerable as a result of poverty, exclusion, or social disadvantage" (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], n.d., para. 1).

Effective crisis communication begins with the use of appropriate terminology. In this sense, when addressing climate-related disasters, it is essential to acknowledge that many of them should not be understood as natural. There is, therefore, a clear field of responsibility involving governmental action across its multiple levels. This responsibility is social, political, environmental, and also economic, particularly with regard to planning for risk prevention and response, while taking into account social inequalities that, in turn, expose or relegate certain publics to even more vulnerable conditions.

Within this context, the present study is dedicated to reflecting on the risk communication directed at persons with disabilities. This group of stakeholders experiences, on a daily basis, multiple situations of limited or no access to basic information—a condition whose impacts are significantly intensified in disaster scenarios.

In this sense, Coombs (2007) reminds us that the crisis management process is varied and requires the integration of knowledge from multiple areas such as: media relations, environmental mapping and its risks, crisis communication, evaluation, reputation management, among many other knowledge and efforts.

It is fundamental to understand crisis communication as a broad process with different stages. In general terms, crisis situations can be understood as encompassing the pre-crisis or pre-disaster phase, the ongoing crisis, and the recovery and business continuity and/or social life phase. Coombs and Holladay (2022, p. xxviii) draw attention to the term *paracrisis*, which "denote[s] situations where an organization must publicly manage a risk."

All phases are relevant for adequate management and recovery in the face of the event. However, here we will particularly focus on the preparation stage: from risk mapping to subsequent risk communication with a close eye on the public.

> Crises disturb some stakeholders' expectations, resulting in people becoming upset and angry, which threatens the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders. When expectations are breached, stakeholders perceive the organization less positively: the reputation is harmed (Coombs, 2007, p. 3).

The author highlights the importance of organizational relationships, placing them in synergy with public expectations, as well as their perception of organizational reputation. Therefore, in a crisis scenario, expectations regarding the responsibility of organizations, whether public or private, for the preservation of their publics' lives, increase. The violation of these expectations directly contributes to the social construction of risk perception and, consequently, of the crisis itself (Coombs and Holladay, 2022).

In the risk society, the social imaginary is continuously shaped by informational flows, both true and false, in which the public is immersed. However, when addressing stakeholders with disabilities, it is essential to recognize that this social construction takes place within a context already marked by symbolic disputes, systematically unmet expectations, unequal access to rights, inequities, and social marginalization. Such conditions intensify the effects of disasters on this group. For this reason, it is imperative to consider them, since "Risk involves the threat of harm while crisis is the manifestation of risk" (Heath and Palenchar, 2000). Therefore, inclusive risk communication plays a role in preserving lives and strengthening the bonds and relationships between organizations (public or private) and their publics. Booth and Ainscow (2016) emphasize that inclusion should not focus solely on tools, but above all on the needs of interpersonal communication, empathy, and awareness.

In Latin America, the Glossary of the Brazilian Observatory of Communication and Crisis (OBCC) assists in delineating Risk Communication as a process that materializes into information, from the identification of imminent risks in that organization or social context to guidelines for conduct and/or reaction to the occurrence of risk. Its objective is to support the decision-making of the different actors involved in the issue. These can be organization managers, public authorities, media, and also employees and individuals from the community at risk (Nunes, 2025).

It is evident that Risk Communication involves different organizational publics, as it is not limited to merely mapping imminent risks, but above all demands a careful look at risk from the different perceptions and life experiences of individuals in these contexts. FIOCRUZ Brasília highlights that "The ultimate goal is for everyone at risk to be able to make informed decisions to mitigate the effects of the threat and take protective and preventive measures"[7]. Based on this appropriation of information and understanding, we conceive disaster risk reduction as that which is

> Rooted in equality, human rights, and the lived realities of diverse groups, disasters do not affect everyone equally. They amplify existing inequalities linked to gender, age, disability, income, and other factors. Recognising and addressing these intersecting risks and vulnerabilities are essential to build resilient, inclusive, and just societies in the face of rising climate and disaster challenges (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], n.d., para. 1).

Thus, the contemporary context demands a broad and complex perspective on crises and disasters, which are not limited to specific organizations but, within the risk society, assume a collective dimension, impacting and endangering society as a whole. In this scenario, the actions of public authorities and political leadership at a global scale become increasingly urgent, especially with regard to attention to vulnerable publics.

The adoption of this stance is imperative, since concomitant with this understanding, Harvard Law School researcher Michael Ashley Stein explains that "people with disabilities are two to four times more likely to die or be injured in climate emergencies, including heat waves,

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[7] Retrieved Mar 15th, 2025 from https://www.fiocruzbrasilia.fiocruz.br/minicurso-comunicacao-de-risco-conceito-e-pratica/

hurricanes and floods"[8]. In this way, the vulnerability of the PWD public becomes even more explicit, which should draw attention from both public bodies and non-governmental and private organizations.

In 2023, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction published a research report whose objective was to understand how people with disabilities reacted or would react in Risk and Disaster situations, their experiences, reactions, behaviors, fears…. Most of the respondents reported having difficulties moving (either walking or climbing stairs), others reported difficulties with vision, hearing, concentration, memory, dressing with agility, as well as being understood in their own language. Another relevant piece of data shows that 84% said they had no personal organization plans for responding to risks and disasters, and when asked about the need for independent evacuation based on prior warnings, 39% would have no difficulties, 38% claimed to have some difficulty, 17% a lot of difficulty, and 6% would not be able to evacuate without external help.

The outlined scenario and the presented data demonstrate that risk communication needs to go beyond risk assessment and general information. More than that, it needs to reach the reality of different publics, whether they are composed of people with disabilities, the elderly, people with low literacy or none. It is essential to anticipate specific forms of assistance that address the particular characteristics and needs of each public.

Martins and Spink (2015), report on three information and communication strategies that can contribute to more effective risk communication with different social groups, including the most vulnerable. The proposed strategies involve the elaboration of alert drafts based on risk mapping, planned and coordinated governmental and community action (where the participation of local leaders can confer greater credibility to messages), and the use of amateur radio to expedite the dissemination of information.

Reflecting on the strategies mentioned above, it is already imperative to ensure content accessibility through alternative communication, by providing materials in varied formats, sizes, and colors, as well as through accessible communication, which employs assistive technologies to make messages understandable and easily accessible.

3. METHODOLOGY

The scarcity of specific references on this topic, particularly from the perspective of Public Relations, motivated the adoption of an interdisciplinary investigative approach. This approach encompassed readings and studies from various fields of knowledge, ranging from the risk society, risk and crisis communication, to accessibility and inclusion. It became evident that understanding these themes requires openness to multiple forms of knowledge, sometimes built from the practical experiences of people who rely on specific resources to enable their communication.

Within this context, we present this theoretical–reflective study, aimed at problematizing the risks associated with extreme climate events and reflecting on risk communication in contemporary society, with particular attention to publics with disabilities. As Meneghetti (2011, p. 321) highlights, in a theoretical–reflective study, "the guidance is not given by the

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[8] Retrieved Mar 12th, 2025 from https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/12/driving-disability-inclusion-is-more-than-a-moral-imperative-it-s-a-business-one/

search for answers and true statements, but by the questions that lead subjects toward deeper reflections."

To support the discussion, a review was conducted of the proceedings of scientific events in the fields of Communication and Public Relations in Brazil. Given the scarcity of publications in this area, the scope of the investigation was expanded to include mapping international scientific publications, using the keywords *inclusive and accessible communication*, *public relations and people with disabilities*, and *risk and crisis communication*. A bibliographic survey was carried out with the support of the artificial intelligence tool Perplexity, employed as an auxiliary resource to identify scientific references in an international context. It should be emphasized that the selection of works, critical analysis, theoretical reflection, and textual composition are entirely the responsibility of the author.

From this study, the need to deepen and systematize knowledge on risk communication became clear, particularly with regard to the diversity of publics and the inclusion of persons with disabilities. This finding underpins the present proposal, which does not present empirical data but is grounded in observed realities, marked by the recurrence of extreme climate events that unequally impact different communities, in dialogue with open-access[9] theoretical references, albeit scattered across fields such as health, education, and communication.

The research adopts a qualitative approach, of an exploratory and descriptive nature. According to Prodanov and Freitas (2013), descriptive research aims to provide support for the definition, delimitation, and understanding of a phenomenon, often conducted in the form of bibliographic studies. Based on the analysis of these contents, the theoretical discussions were organized from the perspective of Public Relations, enabling the construction of reflections of a theoretical–descriptive nature.

4. RESULTS

4.1. For an inclusive risk communication

In this society that daily lives with threats of diverse characteristics, the trust and credibility of sources in risk communication acquire substantial relevance. It is necessary to understand that the communication reference in a risk situation also lies in easy and quick access to information[10]. For example, if a government or civil defense agency website of a state guarantees updated information with different assistive resources, this availability already contemplates an audience of approximately 15% of the world's population, if we are talking about people with disabilities. Still from this perspective, it is necessary to remember that the PWD public "is not a solitary market; they are surrounded by family members and friends who

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[9] It should be emphasized that this article is based on open-access theoretical references. We understand that the topic of inclusive risk communication should be recognized as a matter of public interest. However, it is observed that a portion of recent scientific production, potentially relevant for the advancement of the field, remains behind paywalls. Such a dynamic restricts the circulation of knowledge and limits the incorporation of scientific evidence by broader publics, thereby reproducing asymmetries in access to information and academic production.

[10] While this often results in the proliferation of misinformation that exacerbates crisis situations, the present article does not focus on this aspect. Instead, it concentrates on the significance of inclusive risk communication.

also recognize the value in products and services that accommodate all people in society" (Air.org, 2018).

Since the Public Relations professional is apt to manage communication and is attentive to organizational relationships, then it becomes strategic to incorporate the culture of care into the risk communication process, especially considering vulnerable publics. This process can enable inclusion by serving all publics equitably and, thus, avoiding crises and/or reducing damages. "We believe that preventive communication, in light of the culture of care, can privilege more opportunities for dialogues and collective constructions" (Oliveira, 2024, p. 54). In this regard, it is also important to understand care from its ethical dimension. Thus, "Care ethics seeks to maintain relationships by contextualizing and promoting the well-being of care-givers and care-receivers in a network of social relations" (Sander-Staudt, n.d., *para.* 1).

Studies on the ethics of care are linked to the moral theory originally attributed to the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan and philosopher Nel Noddings in the 1980s. Both argued that the concept of care, as understood until then, was organized from a male perspective, while in practice it was predominantly enacted by women. Joan Tronto, a feminist theorist and social scientist, proposes several stages of care. According to her:

> four sub-elements of care that can be understood simultaneously as stages, virtuous dispositions, or goals. These sub-elements are: (1) attentiveness, a proclivity to become aware of need; (2) responsibility, a willingness to respond and take care of need; (3) competence, the skill of providing good and successful care; and (4) responsiveness, consideration of the position of others as they see it and recognition of the potential for abuse in care (Tronto, 1994, pp. 126–136).

Bringing these considerations into the organizational context and paralleling them with the work of public relations professionals, we can understand this as an approach genuinely attentive to publics and their specific characteristics. What in contemporaneity can confers effectiveness to the communication strategies employed and efficacy to corporate actions and positions. Managing relationships with the different publics of organizations also means qualifying the links that sustain their existence. Furthermore, structuring communicative processes based on the culture of care presents itself as a viable path for building inclusive policies and strategies, attentive to the other (Oliveira, 2024).

Whether in a crisis context or any other situation of social and civic participation in a society, accessible communication should be practiced with a view to providing broad access to diverse publics in a way understandable to each person in their personal reality. The Employers for Change initiative in Ireland also contributes to this reflection by highlighting that:

> Making something accessible means providing alternative means (formats or options) to access what's on offer if the 'standard' offer is not accessible. Inclusive communications are designed to reach as broad and diverse an audience as possible with accessibility for different groups built in at the core and not an afterthought (Employers for Change, n.d., p. 2).

This understanding demonstrates that accessibility, although fundamental, does not exhaust the debate. Building on it, we understand inclusive communication as a deeper and more complex approach compared to accessibility alone. While the former is anchored in assistive

technologies to guarantee the availability and access to communication content, inclusive communication is characterized as a process that must include the participation of different publics, regardless of their characteristics, promoting equitable conditions of access and understanding for all people and effective participation in societal and/or organizational life. In a recent published study, Kelp (2025) summarizes inclusive communication into three characteristics: intentionality, reflexivity, and reciprocity.

From this point of view, the culture of care is reinforced as a path to concretize inclusive communication, since care is expressed through attention and dedication to others (Oliveira, 2024). In this way, the culture of care is understood as an indispensable process for the implementation of truly inclusive risk communication—one that is attentive, willing to understand others, their singularities, and specific needs. If organizational culture constitutes the matrix of identity elements and guides for an organization's conduct, it is within this space that the original locus of care is located, establishing itself as a standard for the implementation of institutional policies, programs, and strategies.

In this sense, identity, image, and reputation come to incorporate care as a distinctive feature, which in inclusive risk communication processes implies understanding that it is necessary to go beyond merely identifying risks and preparing pre-defined messages. Publics such as older adults, persons with disabilities need to be actively involved in processes; from planning, organizing, and training stages; rather than being considered only as final recipients of communication strategies.

It is at this point that the effective and strategic role of Public Relations becomes evident, as a field that, anchored in care theory, understands and accommodates the diversity of publics, involving them participatively in decision-making and communication processes. "The best way to embed inclusive communications across your organisation is to develop an inclusive communications policy that clearly sets out your commitment to inclusion and include internal and external stakeholders in the creation process" (Employers for Change, n.d., p. 2). These risks affect individuals, who must therefore be placed at the center of the care process, including attention and active dialogue with others.

Therefore, for risk communication regarding people with disabilities, it is necessary to seek broad knowledge about what disabilities this public has, where these individuals are, what their housing conditions are (alone or with company). Based on their personal conditions, how do they prefer to receive risk communication messages? Who among these publics could be a risk communication leader?. These questions can assist in building trusting relationships with different individuals, which in risk communication "is seen as linked to the perception of accuracy, knowledge, and concern for public well-being" (Rangel, 2007, p. 1378).

In this scenario, organizations/governments also need to be seen as agents of care, interested and committed to their different publics. The UN risk reduction survey (2023) pointed out that, of the respondents, 86% of people with disabilities said they had no participation in local and/or community decision-making regarding risk and disaster reduction plans; however, 57% would be willing to participate in these processes. According to these data, one of the UN's recommendations (2023) is precisely to integrate person-centered and community-based approaches to improve the preparedness of people with disabilities. Here, care is also reflected in the creation of these spaces for participation and joint construction of risk communication. Furthermore, communication from this perspective is a continuous dialogue

involving core values such as autonomy, shared responsibility, and support in facing and surviving the various crises of our society (Oliveira, 2024).

The perspective of care in communication for this specific public goes beyond promoting accessibility; it is a commitment to effective inclusion and social co-responsibility. It is about fostering autonomy, knowing and strengthening support networks, and allowing individuals and communities to face challenges with resilience. From this perspective, risk communication should not be seen as a technical tool, but a process that integrates active listening, adaptation to diverse needs, and valuing collective participation. Thus, by incorporating the culture of care, risk communication becomes more equitable, promoting not only the dissemination of alerts, but also the construction of a more prepared and inclusive society.

In summary, it is possible to outline some practical guidelines that contribute to the consolidation of inclusive risk communication. The first involves identifying and understanding the publics involved, taking into account their characteristics, needs, and communication preferences. Next, it is essential to involve representatives of these publics in the very processes of content conception and production, ensuring participation from the initial stages. The use of augmentative and alternative communication, as well as plain language (Roedel, 2024)[11], this includes image descriptions, the inclusion of captions, the use of sign language, and audio description in audiovisual materials.

Regarding the production of graphic materials, it is recommended to use sans-serif fonts and pay attention to appropriate contrast between text and background colors. The exclusive use of capital letters, as well as excessive use of italics or bold, should be avoided. For printed materials, it is equally important to provide Braille versions, intended for distribution in non-governmental organizations, social assistance agencies, media outlets, universities, and other spaces that, in emergency contexts, may serve as support points, shelters, or refuge centers.

In the digital social media environment, it is essential to ensure that disseminated content and information are accessible. This includes videos with a sign language interpreter and captions, as well as images accompanied by descriptions and/or alternative text. It is also recommended to indicate accessibility using hashtags such as #ImageDescription and #AltText. Finally, it is important to consider color accessibility[12], as well as in different languages and dialects, depending on where your public is located.

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[11]It is important to acknowledge that each country has established its own official guidelines for the development and implementation of plain language techniques. For instance, the Government of the United Kingdom provides such guidance through its official website: https://standards.education.gov.uk/standard/plain-language . In Australia, comparable resources can be accessed via https://plainlanguageaustralia.com/ , while in Canada, comprehensive materials are available at: https://www.canada.ca/en/government/system/government-communications/communications-community-office/communications-101-boot-camp-canadian-public-servants/plain-language-accessibility-inclusive-communications.html . Similar initiatives exist in other national contexts as well.

[12] Regarding chromatic accessibility, we recommend consulting the following resources: https://thiovane.com.br/guia-daltonismo/ and https://www.coloradd.net/en

5. CONCLUSION

In this article, we started from the concept of risk society proposed by Beck (2010), understanding that his reflections pertinently capture various recurrent phenomena in our daily lives. From this same perspective, we share the author's understanding that society, by generating risks and crises from its own actions on nature, must also, based on its knowledge, assume the responsibility of outlining solutions for the challenges it itself engenders. The reflection was conducted from the field of Public Relations, understood as an area that generally holds strategic knowledge and competencies for managing relationships between organizations and their publics.

The analysis highlighted the relevance of Public Relations practice across multiple contexts, including the governmental sphere, the third sector, independent professional practice, and the private sector. Within this framework, we consider it both possible and necessary to practice risk communication in light of risk society theory, proactively incorporating accessible and inclusive communication. The following discussion builds on the references and studies examined throughout the article, suggesting practical implications for Public Relations practice.

Regarding Public Relations in the governmental and public sphere, there is an evident need, though often superficially addressed, for knowledge about publics, mapping their needs and living conditions, and involving them in debates for the formulation of public policies. From the perspective of care, it is important to recognize that relationship management also encompasses the diversity of publics, their characteristics, and vulnerabilities, in a process of listening and dialogue, here, with particular attention to the public of persons with disabilities.

From there, we can already observe another direct path of action for PR professionals, who, with the elaboration of public or private communication campaigns, can contribute to the deconstruction of stereotypes and stigmas about these publics; likewise, with the democratization of knowledge about assistive resources, inclusive strategies in social and civic processes; and even by stimulating social interactions based on respect, equity, and justice.

Regarding Public Relations in the third sector and in its interface with governmental spheres, the UN Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (2023) also indicates approaches for action for both public authorities, such as governments, and third-sector organizations, associations, and clubs. For example, risk-preparedness projects aimed at persons with disabilities. Based on the mapping and organization of these publics, assisting them in preparing their personal organization plans for crisis/disaster situations. In parallel, it is also pertinent to invite them to participate in the debate and formulation of public policies for these situations and contexts. From this perspective, once again we refer to Beck (2010) to understand that risk situations end up reorganizing power and authority. In this sense, neighborhood communities and associations can play a role in training community leaders, who can serve as a reference for procedures and information in crisis response and in the preservation of life.

Regarding Public Relations in independent professional practice or within the private sector, it is increasingly important to deepen knowledge in the area of inclusive risk and crisis communication. Accessible and inclusive communication can be strengthened within the framework of a culture of care, developing strategic projects based on the phases proposed by Tronto (1994) in the ethics of care. Broadly, these phases can be understood as:

attentiveness**:** mapping the diversity of publics, content, channels, and preferred communication tools in detail; responsibility**:** involving these same publics in discussions, sharing their experiences, and refining ideas; Competence: bringing together different professional knowledge to seek better and more appropriate processes; Responsiveness**:** recognizing vulnerabilities and needs, measuring impacts, and responding promptly in a continuous improvement of flows, strategies, and positioning.

For future research, we suggest investigations from two perspectives: both in the sphere of communication production and one in the reception of communication. It is promising to conduct surveys and research with empirical cases of organizations that adopt a culture of care in their risk communication strategies when serving persons with disabilities. Equally important is the development of empirical studies that assess the effectiveness of these inclusive approaches in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

From the perspective of the reception of communicative processes, it is also relevant to deepen research with the specific publics of these messages, investigating the consumption, appropriation, and mediation of risk communication content. This approach can help identify potentials, limitations, and gaps, thereby expanding understanding of the effects and challenges of communicational inclusion in the field of risk management.

Finally, we hope to have contributed to the studies and practices in the field by reflecting on the process of accessible and inclusive communication in situations of risk and crisis. This theoretical–reflective study did not aim to exhaust the topic, particularly because it is an interdisciplinary area that involves diverse publics with different experiences and perceptions of risk. At the same time, as previously mentioned, we firmly believe in the need for further studies and debates from the perspective of Public Relations, in order to consolidate a body of knowledge and thereby encourage practices that are more attentive and aligned with the preservation of life and the varying degrees of vulnerability among publics.

6. AI STATEMENT

A bibliographic survey was carried out with the support of the artificial intelligence tool Perplexity, employed as an auxiliary resource to identify scientific references in an international context. It should be emphasized that the selection of works, critical analysis, theoretical reflection, and textual composition are entirely the responsibility of the author.

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