Trusted Environment

Trusted Environment: what is it?

A Trusted Environment is a physical or virtual environment in which industry, universities and other research institutes (innovators) and (semi-)governments (regulators) can share and exchange information, knowledge and views on new technologies, such as innovative NMs and nano-enabled products, in a safe way, so that their organizational interests are protected. This requires upfront:

1. technical requirements to give organizations control over the process of information sharing (anonymity, confidentiality, logging of actions etc.);
2. juridical requirements to safeguard the information exchange process (non-disclosure agreements, regulations etc.);
3. social requirements, like clarity and agreement to participants about rules of behaviour on dealing with the obtained information.

The Trusted Environment provides facilities in all three aspects, thereby stimulating transparency on the knowledge and information exchanged but at the same time maintaining confidentiality as far as requested by the participants. In order to implement and maintain the Trusted Environment principle, an organization has to be be established, defining and supervising the technical, juridical and behavioural aspects of the Trusted Environment (including mediation in situations of conflict) and facilitating a virtual meeting point for all actors along the innovation process.

Why is a Trusted Environment needed?

- Nanotechnology is evolving at a fast pace; this challenges the regulatory ability to adapt to change and develop regulation to cope with potential risks.
- Industry has to deal with uncertainties about safety for humans and the environment and has to convince stakeholders in society that they are doing so adequately.
- Both regulatory authorities and industry need to assess safety of innovative NMs and nano-enabled products in the best possible way. This requires efficient, flexible and reliable processes that can be adapted to new information needs.
- There is insufficient room for dialogue and interaction between innovators and regulators during the various stages of innovation.
- Both industry and regulators perceive barriers for information exchange and dialogue in the innovation process; these barriers are related to the protection of their legitimate interests.

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Author: A.H.J. (Teun) Sluijters LLM, MSc | More information: t.sluijters@publicimpact.nl | December 2018

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Benefits of a Trusted Environment: why should you use it?

The trusted Environment provides the opportunity to:

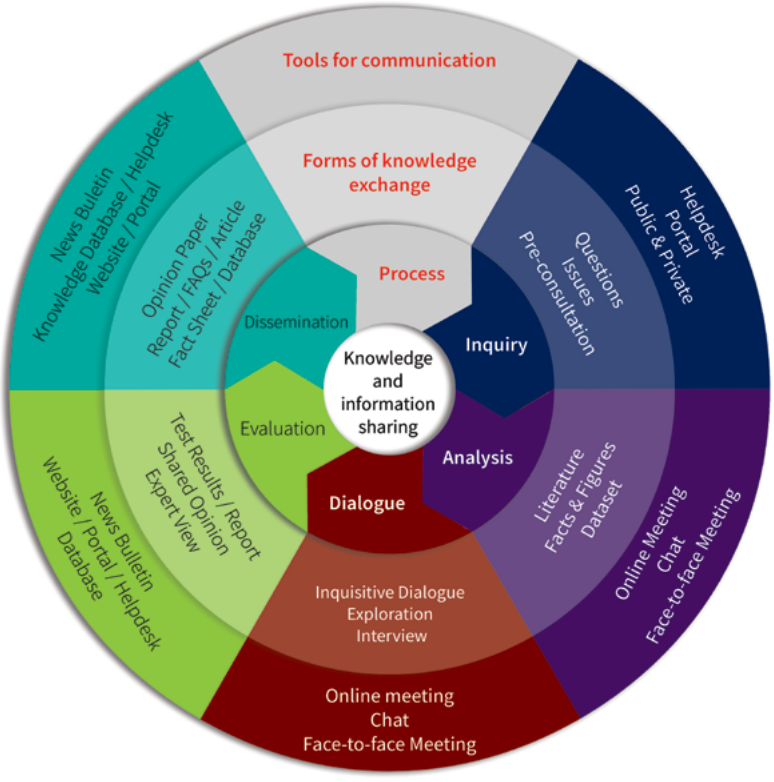
- communicate safely with regulators, innovators and other stakeholders in the innovation process;
- improve decision making in the innovation process, because there is additional information, and the existence of 'strategic spill over' knowledge exchange may lead to new and accelerated innovation;
- gain and maintain a reputation as a responsible innovator;
- be more effective as a regulator;
- exclude innovations with risks or potential negative effects on health and environment;
- receive trustworthy feedback on your innovation questions and issues.

Trusted Environment: ideas for practical implementation

We envisage the use of the Trusted Environment in the context of a process in which information is upgraded to knowledge. This may be a knowledge and information sharing system.

The figure below shows a graphical representation of a practical implementation of a Trusted Environment within such a system. At the centre of the system is the purpose to safely share knowledge or information between innovators, regulators or other actors during the innovation process. The first layer presents the process of knowledge and information exchange, which includes an inquiry, analysis, dialogue, evaluation and dissemination. The second layer presents the potential forms of knowledge exchange for each step of the process. The third layer presents the communication tools needed for each step of the process.

In our view the Trusted Environment can be used in every stage of this process, but it may be valued most in the stages of inquiry and dialogue (bold). Here it facilitates the possibility of getting useful information and for safely sharing knowledge between innovators, regulators and other actors. This means: participants being able to control with whom they share knowledge or information. So innovators should be able to exchange information without fear for losing any competitive advantage or intellectual property. And regulators should not have to worry if knowledge exchange would lead to unwanted precedents or preferential treatment in regulation or the monitoring of compliance.



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