The Communications Doughnut

A framework for effective and ethical communication for positive change

The Communications Doughnut is a simple but urgent framework that any organisation (or individual) can use to achieve greater influence and impact. In a clear, visual format, the Doughnut's 12 principles are easy to understand and apply. Harness the power of communication to realise your ambitions for leading positive change, whilst also helping to end the destructive consequences of poor & unethical communications.

The Communications Doughnut is:

- **Essential** - it will help important messages cut through the noise, even to hard-to-reach audiences, by guiding more effective, clear communications.
- **Impactful** - it will help you create stronger connections and influence with your audiences, leading to greater results.
- **Versatile** - it can provide a simple visual guide to effective communications or a more robust framework for creating and evaluating truly powerful communications if you want to go deeper.
- **For everyone** - it's easy to understand and implement, whether you're campaigning for climate action, reporting the news or selling ethical fashion.
- **A mark of standards** - it allows you to show commitment to being a force for good and to ethics, and to staying on the right side of increasing communication legislation.
- **Transformative** - it collectively helps stop the spread of unethical or manipulative forms of communication.

"This is excellent; an ethical framework for transformational communications that would not only work at an organisational level, but also a societal level." - CEO for a UK charity

"I really like it. I think it will strike a chord with a lot of people who are struggling to articulate these issues. It can help demonstrate when your current approach to comms is not fit for purpose." - Former News Editor for The Times

"The Doughnut has a lot of potential. Working on better, more credible communication could fundamentally change businesses." - Director at PR and news company

This document provides an introductory overview of The Communications Doughnut and invites feedback so that we might continue to refine the model and the plans for its use.

© 2023 - Adam Stones

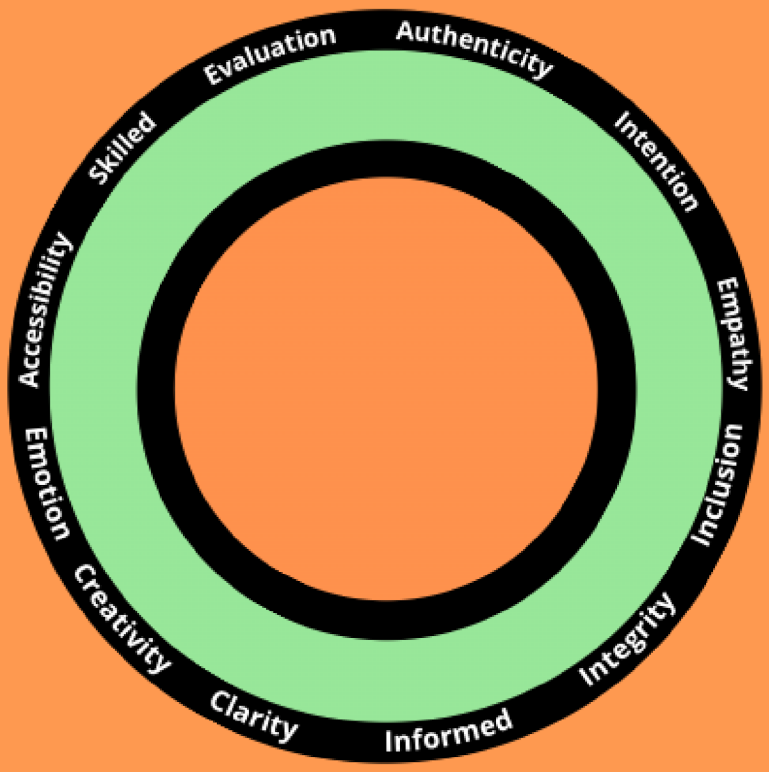
Welcome to the Communications Doughnut

Communication is the foundation of society; it is how we build connections, share information and bring about action. It allows us to fulfil our potential and realise our ambitions as organisations or individuals. A positive approach to communicating - what I call *constructive* communication - is therefore essential in supporting progress. It ensures we can individually or collectively rise to the challenges we face, whether that's on 'everyday' needs such as community harmony or effectively sharing information within an organisation, or more 'epic' needs such as addressing equality, biodiversity loss, or the climate emergency. All rely on constructive communication. Indeed, as Sir David Attenborough points out, saving our planet is inherently 'a communications challenge'. And *no* organisation can fully realise its ambitions for positive impact unless it also commits to constructive communication.

However, too often, communication - whether that's from brands, the media, in politics, or even in our work and personal relationships - is anything but constructive. It is sometimes used destructively as a weapon to divide instead of a tool to unite. Or it can be used to mask regressive activities or make false claims, stalling real progress. It could be anything from misleading marketing and greenwashing to biased reporting or prejudicial speeches, where the communicator attempts to win at all costs, including at the cost of truth and justice. The power of communication is being either willfully manipulated or recklessly mistreated in all aspects of our lives. As a result, we experience growing tension with others and - crucially - we are often unable to do what is best for ourselves or the planet because we do not act or because we are led to act in a negative and even self-destructive manner.

In addition to this, there is 'poor' communication, where it simply doesn't achieve traction or impact. But even this can have serious consequences. Picture a public health campaign that fails to get traction and results in people doing more of what needs to be prevented. Or a start-up with great ideas for a better planet that can never get attention. This poor communication can result from either believing it is too tricky to communicate effectively, or by simply ignoring your responsibility to do so.

The Communications Doughnut was created to make it easier to communicate constructively (ensuring important messages are really heard), as well as easier to recognise and repair - or call out - destructive and poor communications. It is a simple solution to a complex challenge. It is something we can commit to, be guided by and measure progress against. (And yes - it does owe some design inspiration to Kate Raworth's brilliant Doughnut Economics model for a sustainable economy, but more on that important connection later).



Coming up:

Why we need the Doughnut - page 3
How we can use it - page 5
Scoring your approach - page 6
The 12 Principles explained - page 7
Achieving positive impact - page 11
How to receive communications - page 12
Doughnut Economics - page 13
Next steps - page 14

Why the Doughnut was created

Every communication produces a reaction - it affects the way we *think, feel and act*. The Doughnut helps you control those outcomes for optimum results by taking responsibility for *why* you are communicating (intention), *what* you are saying (creation), and *how* you are saying it (delivery). It also helps you to better understand and learn from how effective it is (response). It provides a floor of standards below which no one should fall and a ceiling of ethics, above which no one should rise.

At the moment, no single comparable model exists. Whilst there are 'codes of conduct' for various professional bodies (e.g. PR practitioners and marketers), these tend to be narrow in focus (are both profession-specific and do not extend to the full spectrum of how we communicate), provide no global standard (differing by region), are restrictive rather than progressive (look to limit bad behaviour rather than also champion good and equitable ones), and are too impractical to provide a single, guiding solution. Simply put, there is an obvious and urgent need for a unifying solution that anyone can follow.

In identifying the qualities of the Doughnut, I have consulted a number of professional standards and codes of conduct, assessed papers on communications ethics and even drawn on the UN's International Declaration for Human Rights. (Article 1 states that 'all are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.') Crucially, I have also drawn on my many years of working as a social impact communications strategist (including publishing a book on communications strategy and skills - *Influence: Powerful Communications, Positive Change*). But it was important that whilst the tool must stand on robust reasoning and sound insights, it must also be practical: easy to survey at a glance and easy to implement immediately, by anyone.

From ethics to excellence

When I published my book, I was aware that anyone could use the skills I shared - whether they were truly committed to positive change or just wanted to build their influence for less honest means. So I decided I wanted to create a tool that would sit above the guidance of the book, and that would allow anyone to improve the way they communicate - to create maximum impact - but do so in a way that also demonstrated a commitment to justice and ethical standards.

Communication is inherently an ethical activity as it is informed by choice, reflects values and has consequences. As Shanon Bowen writes in *Ethics of Strategic Communication*, ethical communication is 'essential to the existence of a stable society'. She says it, 'allows groups to understand one another, facilitating economic and social relationships and continued coexistence through the exchange of information.' And in *21st Century Communication*, William Eadie says ethical communication 'will prove key to meaningful relationships, to responsible participation in the global economy, to the understanding and resolution of complex social and political issues, and to responsive civic engagement.' I couldn't agree more. He also adds: 'Communication in today's globally interdependent world has both extraordinarily creative and devastatingly harmful potential.' Communication has a light side and a dark side and we need to help ensure it is used for its extraordinary, positive potential.

Why then is there no agreed, international framework to help steer ethics in communicating? Perhaps it has been deemed too complex to distill into something that can be accessible and easy to act on. **The Communications Doughnut aims to answer this challenge, whilst going still further: *ethics and excellence*. Not only does the tool help you to be just and true, it also ensures your message connects more fully and leads to greater engagement with your audiences. Ultimately, it leads to more action. There is a growing awareness of the value of such an approach.**

Feeling the push

Further - in addition to the pull, there will be the push; an increasing *demand* to take part in this. For example, one of the most immediate needs for this model is with **business**, both in terms of effectiveness and ethics. Firstly, any investor in a business should rightly be asking if that business can be truly serious about success if it is not taking communications seriously. Secondly, there are increasing demands for businesses to serve a greater social purpose. This demand is being driven by customers, employees and investors alike. It is leading to the growth of movements such as B-corps, a wave of new social entrepreneurs and progressive approaches within established brands. 'Responsible communication' is a natural complement to being a 'responsible business' - in fact, increased scrutiny of the ways businesses operate will increasingly include the ways they communicate.

The EU's new Green Claims Law would, for example, require companies to back up green claims about their products with evidence, in a bid to fight greenwashing and misleading advertisements. And in the UK, new rules have been proposed by the financial watchdog to prevent fund managers from misleading consumers with green claims in their communications regarding more environmentally-friendly investments. And there's more: under the UK's digital markets, competition and consumer bill, companies could face penalties of up to 10% of global turnover for breaches of consumer law, which will include misleading environmental claims.

We could see more changes in **government** too. In New Zealand, the recent Plain Language Act identifies that clear communications are key to a functioning democracy. Government communications to the public must now be 'clear, concise, well-organised, and audience-appropriate', or face consequences. Government communications influence some of the most important aspects of our lives and if we do not understand them, it can lead us to disengage, lose trust and not participate fully in society.

And we could certainly benefit from more attention to this with the **media**. Even the BBC is failing in its obligation to effectiveness and ethics. Emily Maitliss - a former BBC news presenter - has accused the BBC of being unable to present a truthful representation of the news agenda, through self-censorship over fears of being criticised for bias or through controlling political interests. And she criticised the BBC for 'both-sideism', where just two people debate an issue that an overwhelming majority supports on one side. As Adam Grant points out, 'A balanced argument doesn't weigh two sides equally. It weighs the strongest evidence more heavily.' We must be brave in our pursuit of the truth. As it stands, the 'Accuracy' clause of the UK's Independent Press Standards Organisation's Code of Practice extends to just 120 words and mentions nothing of many aspects highlighted in the Doughnut.

The Doughnut will help you navigate regulations - or fill in the gaps - whilst also still giving you the confidence to use communications nimbly and decisively, to increase your impact. The difference between destructive and constructive communications - or between injustice, inaccuracy and ineffectiveness, and true impact - is in the Doughnut.

Knowledge is strength

The challenge of providing a simple frame to improve the way we communicate is not a new one. George Orwell wrote in an essay in 1946 that 'the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language'. He was reflecting on the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda in the Second World War, which had been using all means of communication to 'deprive its objects of the power of independent thought.' He said that language should be used 'as an instrument for expressing and not concealing or preventing thought.' However, it was sometimes used 'to make lies sound truthful' and 'to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind'. He stated that language can corrupt thought. Three years later, Orwell showed how far this idea could go with his novel 1984. Over 75 years on and that book could be speaking of the world we see around us today - with reality and fantasy being blurred, and suppression of our ability to do what is best for ourselves and the planet.

Orwell proposed a short set of rules to apply to the language we use in our communication to ensure optimal outcomes, with a focus on clarity and simplicity. The Communications Doughnut adopts similar ideas on language, whilst expanding into a number of other areas to provide **12 foundational principles for communicating**, that must all be incorporated. It should be a human right to be communicated with in this way and we should be able to hold people to account when they use communication destructively.

How we can use The Communications Doughnut

The Doughnut has been designed principally for the use of organisations (for businesses, non-profits, governments and the media), whether that's a large international organisation or a solo entrepreneur.

It can be used:

1. As a guide: the 12 principles provide the checkpoints for creating a positive culture of communication, and for crafting optimum communication practices every time. This guide can be used as either a simple visual reminder of what you need to do or as a robust framework to follow step by step for truly transformative communications. However deeply the ideas are applied, they will always help create a more credible and impactful brand.

2. As an assessment tool: the key points in each principle will be able to be (once the tool is developed further) used as a scoring checklist, allowing you to note where you are excelling or falling short. The scoring approach could be used to assess your own commitments (and highlight areas for development) or - in time - they may be used to expose shortfalls / unethical practices by others.

3. As a mark of standards: any organisation following the Doughnut's principles and sharing their score might - in time - qualify for a quality mark, showing the world their commitment to being a force for good. The principles could even become incorporated into other, more general ethical business quality marks.

The ideas can be used alongside any existing practices or standards you are already committed to.

Uses of the Doughnut include:

- Guide businesses to develop a credible, powerful brand
- Help governmental organisations to communicate inclusive, impactful messages
- Allow campaigning organisations to achieve greater traction and impact
- Help any organisation to publicly demonstrate a commitment to ethical and effective communication
- Allow communications professionals to visually demonstrate to execs the need to change current approaches
- Ensure important messages cut through the noise, even to hard-to-reach audiences
- Expose unethical, unjust and misleading practices by others

Developing the Doughnut further

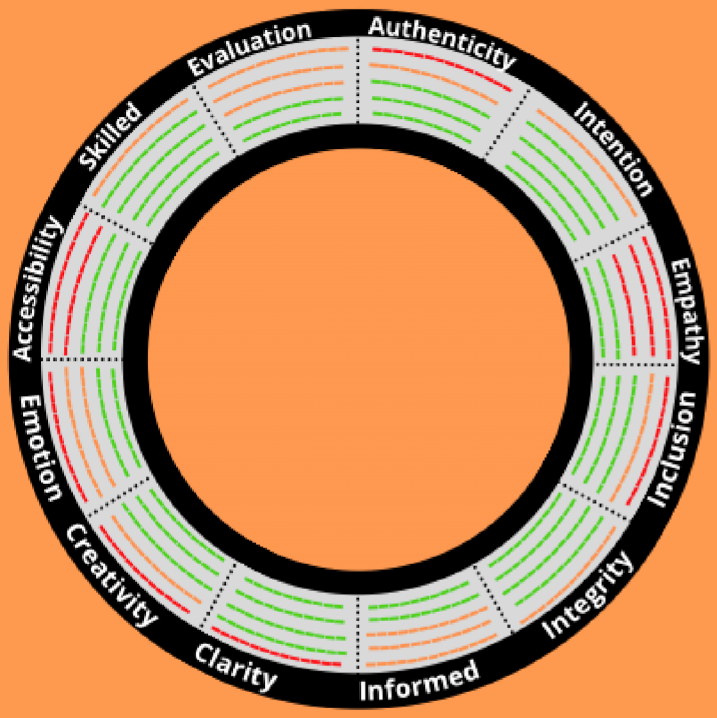
The Doughnut is still in development. There is enough information in this guide to start using its ideas straight away but to fulfil all the uses outlined above, more work is needed to refine and expand the tool. It may be useful for you to know that plans for the next stage include:

- Refined details within each principle to ensure each has up to 5 clear key points to follow
- Practical examples (good and bad) that reinforce the principles
- Step by step guidance on how to implement the principles within your organisation
- Simple evaluation guidance for anyone looking to score their approach
- Two versions of the Doughnut: a scaled-back, simple version that is easy to use as a quick, guiding framework, and then a detailed version that contains more depth around each element, for fuller application and robust analysis / evaluation

Scoring your approach

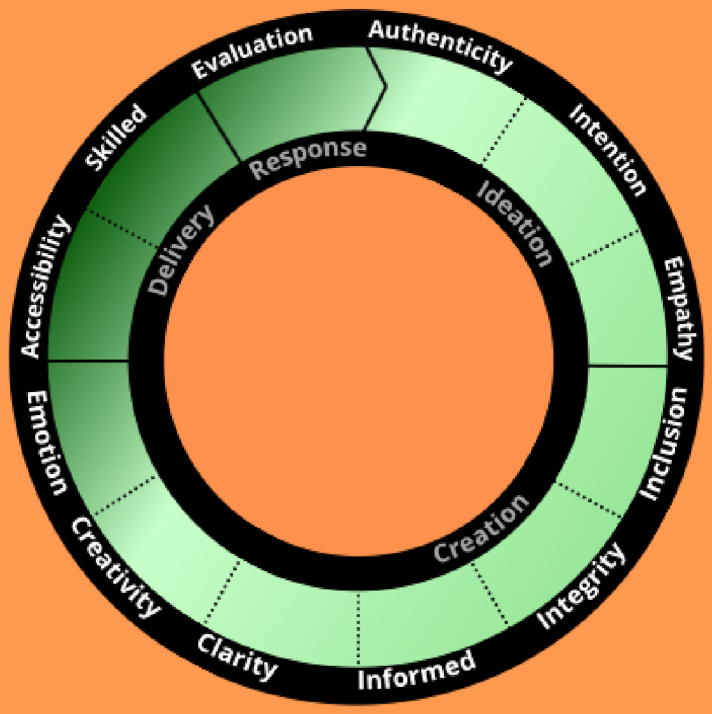
Once further developed, there are a number of ways the assessment of your approach could be represented visually within the more detailed version of the Doughnut. The intention is to have five scoring criteria within each principle, and for these criteria to then be represented as either amber (work in progress but nothing good or notably bad), green (criteria are met), or red (a serious shortfall). Another option is to just use green and red (achieving or failing) or just green (to just show which principles are being met. Either way, the visual evaluation would naturally always be presented with an accompanying narrative to explain the score and areas for development. A fully green Doughnut may be almost impossible to achieve but that would show that all the principles are being applied.

Evaluation may be done periodically (possibly in an annual review), as a temperature take on the general approach of an organisation, rather than to score specific communications activities, although those specific examples could be used to evidence the general approach.



The 12 Principles

The essential principles of constructive communication



IDEATION

1. Authenticity:

Ensure your communications are always representative of a strong, living brand

- Your distinct brand provides additional meaning to your message (as it becomes associated with your identity), it makes your message more credible (as it is backed up by your authenticity) and connects the message to everything else you have said before (thereby amplifying its effectiveness).
- So make sure the brand is clear in its promise (mission, vision, values, value proposition and story) and personality (the way you look, sound and act), and ensure this is represented by / feeds into all your approaches to communication.
- Ensure consistency of the representation of the brand - and a consistency of the topics you address - through your communications.

2. Intention:

Have a clear and sincere, motivating purpose behind your communications

- Your approach must always be led by a purpose: an intention for the immediate and long-term effect you wish communications to have; directly supporting your organisational purpose (or mission).
- The intention should be clear to the audience. No hidden or false agenda. No posturing. A genuine intent to add to an idea and not just to serve personal gain or create brand visibility. And not using the power of the communication as a distraction from other issues.
- Use your objective for how you want people to act, to understand and guide how they must *think* and *feel* as a result of your communication.
- Be aware of the potential consequences of the communication from multiple perspectives. Do not create consequences for others that you would not welcome yourself.

3. Empathy:

Understand your audiences and their true needs before you create anything

- All communication must be rooted in an empathic understanding your audiences: who are they, what are their beliefs and behaviours, what influences them, what do they need, how do they like to be communicated with?
- Prepare for what may stand in the way of the message being understood or valued, and what questions / issues it may expose. Note especially how people perceive and process information (including based on values, norms, identity and cognitive biases - we are not purely rational).
- Account for context (including relational, situational, geographical and cultural - for example, some US audiences are more likely to act on climate challenges framed as pollution issues).
- Also, understand which audiences will ultimately support you by amplifying your message or influencing your audiences. And be aware of the people that will be affected by the end-result of the communication.

CREATION

4. Inclusion:

Involve and account for diverse voices and needs in your communications culture and creative processes

- Ensure there is diverse participation / diverse co-creation when forming your communications. This could cover - for example - gender, ethnicity, identity, geography, ability, culture and age.
- Do not speak on people's behalf or to groups without their involvement or input to the creation. Include 'lived experience'. Be open to the fact others may have differing beliefs, values, and culture to you.
- Be relevant and inspiring: ensure all audiences feel included in your positive vision for the future. Ensure they can see the benefits for themselves that will come by acting on your message. And - crucially - ensure there is always something easy and positive that every audience group can do to act on your message, and that they will feel rewarded for doing so.
- Also include supporters / stakeholders in the creation and delivery of your communications.

5. Integrity:

Be fair, decent and honest at all times. And abide by appropriate ethical and professional standards

- Be fair: not manipulative, coercive, selective or deceptive, even if you think it is in their best interests. Do not mislead (knowingly or inadvertently through carelessness) or create false narratives by emphasising some ideas and masking others (such as creating a lot of noise around your ethical / sustainable approaches to distract from the larger unethical / damaging ones).
- Be decent: non-offensive, non-bullying, non-discriminatory and non-exploitative - not likely to cause harm or damage wellbeing.
- Be honest: aware of and open about your own self (your strengths, your position, your behaviours), as well as transparent on any interests informing your communication (commercial or otherwise). Commit to always being honest, rather than ever saying nothing.
- Do not give too much attention to an individual, organisation or issue without also acknowledging wider (negative) associations.
- Understand and act on your responsibilities and obligation to the truth with courage, aware of the extent to which audiences rely on you for the breadth of their understanding.
- Abide by all relevant legal, professional and ethical standards (or frameworks / codes). Accounting for confidentiality and consent. Ensuring respect and sensitivity for both people and issues.

6. Informed:

Ensure communications are credible and evidenced, and audiences are responsibly informed

- Root your communications in knowledge or a desire for knowledge, with expertise or claims expressed openly and evidenced. Differentiate between opinion and intellectual fact, and make truthful representation of the available information; knowing what data there is, what else has been said and by whom.
- Be proportionate and accurate. Be balanced while avoiding 'both-sideism'. Support expert knowledge with strong generalist knowledge and awareness of counter positions.
- Commit to ongoing learning. Be active across networks to ensure you're well-connected to appropriate issues and organisations. And ensure your messages connect to and contribute to the associated macro narratives.
- Avoid relying on sensationalist or celebrity-led stories and messages to get attention, and do not give platforms to people seeking attention over truth.
- Be mindful of language and the implications of words: use words that give appropriate meaning (i.e. 'climate crisis' not 'climate change') and avoid words that have loose / interpretive meanings. Further, ensure the broader implication of the message is contextualised and conveyed - such as the term 'coral die off' has severe wider consequences for global systems not understood in that phrase alone, so make your bigger meaning clear. Or such as not stopping at 'climate crisis will increase droughts' but also saying that 'this in turn will lead to mass migration, conflict, financial crises and political instability' etc. And not unfairly or loosely using terms that convey a greater meaning than might be evident, like 'green' or 'sustainable'. Avoid hyperbole and exaggeration.
- Do this whilst maintaining positive messages of hope and action to foster engagement and participation.

7. Clarity:

Use simple language and design to maximise the opportunity for understanding

- Simplicity ensures broader understanding of the true intentions. So always strive for precision, concreteness, conciseness and simplicity over complexity (especially when communicating complex or important subjects). This also ensures your audience can pass the messages on more easily / effectively.
- Apply simplicity and clarity to language use, structure and design. Present the most important information first, and use a limited number of key messages (not flooding communications with multiple ideas), break up your message to be accessible and digestible (not dense).
- Avoid jargon and technical language (which can confuse and turn off) - never assume the audience understands all the language specific to your field, i.e. megawatts, circularity, ESG or systems-thinking.
- Avoid euphemism (which can sway opinions without outright lying). Avoid superlatives.
- Use active language, not passive, wherever possible. E.g. "mistakes were made" removes responsibility.
- Ensure each communication can clearly express its message and what audiences should do.

8. Creativity:

Strive for new approaches and use diverse methods of communicating

- Continuously apply new ideas and freshness to the way you communicate - including tactics, style, language, and images - to ensure audiences maintain connection and involvement. Account for the changing way we connect with people and ideas, and for the fact people can resist ideas unless communications are repeated and reinvigorated.
- Employ storytelling and other narrative approaches. And bring ideas to life with graphics and visuals.
- Never rely on cliché (i.e. images of polar bears to illustrate climate chaos), which will not connect with many audiences. Instead, embed your creativity in your empathic understanding of your audiences.
- Commit to the AIDA framework: using creativity to ensure messages *grab Attention, spark Interest, awaken Desire and call to Action*. To achieve this, apply creativity to ensure ideas feel new but normal, are entertaining or enjoyable, and are positive.

9. Emotion:

Offer both factual and emotional connections to you and your ideas

- Scientific facts only speak to one part of the brain and are not as persuasive as emotional arguments. So, without manipulating, balance out the ways we perceive and process information to ensure every communication creates a strong emotional, as well as rational, connection.
- Use a variety of storytelling techniques (that are representational and appropriate) to convey the emotion of the message and invoke emotions in the audiences. And be mindful of how images can create strong emotional connections.
- Use non-verbal forms (including body language and tone of voice in spoken and written language) effectively to create a more rounded and real emotive communication approach. Maintain a human connection at all times.
- Ensure there is always a positive emotion involved - even when communicating serious issues - to bring people on board. Convey hope and determination.
- Use emotional intelligence: recognise and understand the emotions in yourself and the ones you inspire in others to make better, conscious decisions; matching your emotional expression to each situation. In this way, convey passion without displaying emotions that may result in defensiveness and inaction in others, such as frustration and anger.

DELIVERY

10. Accessibility:

Give more people the opportunity to receive (or engage with) your communication

- Ensure a diversity of delivery methods and styles, using a range of audio, visual and social communications to ensure wider reach.
- Use multiple channels, including those of stakeholders and audience advocates. Adapt your messages to a variety of content forms, and revisit / reappropriate the ideas over time to ensure longevity / longer exposure time.
- Account for those with communications challenges or in harder-to-reach communities.
- Provide additional information / resources behind all your communications for those that need them / want to learn more, including ensuring audiences can access assets that will help them share the message.
- And ensure there is always something audiences can do in response to your communication, to be active and engaged.

11. Skilled:
Communications are delivered skillfully, and these skills are continuously developed

- Commit to high technical communication standards, including in writing, public speaking, personal communication, body language, PR, storytelling, and visual design.
- To meet this commitment, enlist help from individuals or agencies to fill any skills gaps or capacity issues.
- Continuously develop your skills / the skills across the organisation through education and training.
- Share your skills - or examples of how you have communicated effectively - more widely so others may learn. I.e. Contribute to the global community of those committed to effective communication.

RESPONSE

12. Evaluation:
Understand the effectiveness of your communications to optimise your efforts

- Don't just 'broadcast' but also actively listen to what is coming back and continuously adapt the approach to optimise it. Ensure a robust evaluation methodology is applied to assess the impact of your communications - i.e. the way you *connect, inform* and *influence* the audiences' understanding and actions - as they relate to your initial objectives. (More on 'evaluation' later). Commitment to impact means commitment to learning.
- Ensure there is a method to receive this feedback and to respond to the messages coming back that is non-defensive. Commit to understanding the meaning of responses. Build resilience to learn from and engage with contrasting beliefs and behaviours, to better understand how to influence them.
- Pre-empt potential feedback / questions and factor this into clearer, more effective initial communications.

Note:

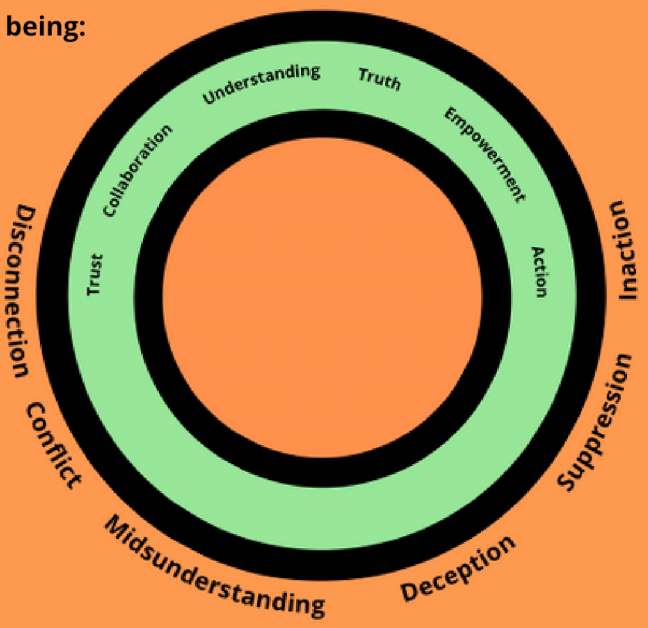
- This model has separated the principles into four process-led areas (Ideation, Creation, Delivery & Response) to make the ideas easier to access and act on. I am aware that some aspects within these areas may blend into other areas - there is, for example, a lot of flow through between points made in *creation* and *delivery* - and so whilst I believe this provides the best solution for now, I am very open to suggestions for how to better categorise these clusters, or embed 'process' into the principles.
- Some of the ideas within these principles may be more obvious, some may be more unexpected, but they are all essential and depend on each other for combined success. For example, there is no authenticity without integrity, and no chance of being informed without an intention.
- Whilst there is a lot of reference to climate or sustainability here, that is simply because it is my background and doesn't mean the tool can't be equally used for any topic or field, such as human rights.
- This model is not a guide for creating great content - it sits above that. Additional guides and resources can be layered on to each area of the model (and I have even produced some myself, free at adamstones.co).

Communications paucity

Examples of communication failures from ignoring these principles - i.e. sitting outside the Doughnut - may include being:

1. Inauthentic, disconnected
2. Directionless, lacking in purpose
3. Irrelevant, ineffective
4. Excluding, insensitive
5. Manipulative, indecent, unethical
6. Untruthful, inaccurate, imbalanced
7. Complex, confusing
8. Undesirable, unengaging
9. Unemotional, overly-intellectual
10. Inaccessible
11. Unskilled, lacking quality
12. Inefficient, unresponsive

These can lead to the destructive outcomes in the image.



Achieving positive results

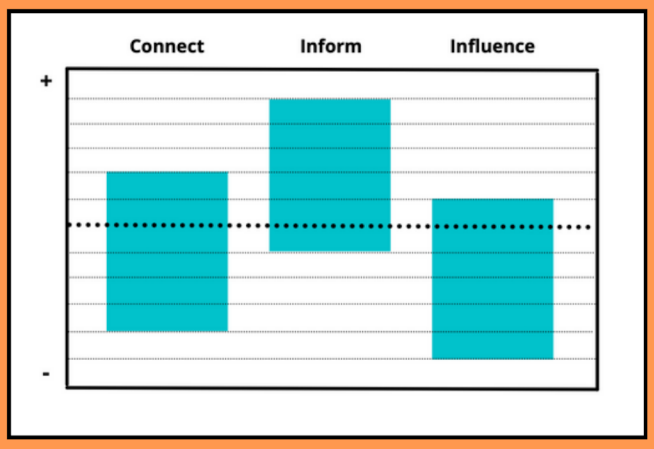
The doughnut guides optimum outcomes and mitigates against destructive consequences

The purpose of communication covers three main objectives - ***to connect, to inform and to influence***. I won't go into detail on this topic here but it is important to quickly identify some of the differences between **positive / constructive** and **negative / destructive** outcomes, so we can see what we are aiming for, and what we risk.

Connect		
Trust	< >	Disconnection
Building trust, loyalty and engagement		Breaking trust, hindering future engagement with you and your ideas, or between groups
Collaboration	< >	Conflict
Building closer associations and partnerships to ensure positive, active relationships and networks		Causing rifts, radicalism, aggression, stress, discomfort, narrative dominance, or injustice
Inform		
Understanding	< >	Misunderstanding
Fully informed of the factual and emotional intention of the communication, allowing new ideas to flourish		Either not understood or understood incorrectly, resulting in confusion, being misinformed or taking inappropriate action
Truth	< >	Deception
The intention and outcomes are honest and as expressed, resulting in being informed with truth		Immorally misleading or achieving aims that counter claims through manipulation or deception
Influence		
Empowerment	< >	Suppression
The audience is given greater opportunity to achieve their potential and enabled to act		Depriving opportunity for individual thought, disempowering, excluding, or repressing freedom
Action	< >	Inaction
Not only changing the way the audience thinks and feels but also how they act, and this action is positive and follows your intention		Poor communication results in apathy and inaction (or turning to alternative ideas). Progress is held up. Missed opportunities and unmet needs

The Doughnut provides a framework to guide and assess communication 'outputs', with the final principle ensuring we also assess the 'outcomes' of this effort. The table above and the simple visual to the right could be used to help inform and record that evaluation approach to outcomes. As Pema Chödrön says: 'The more clearly we can see, the more powerful our speech and our actions will be.'

Note: The approach to evaluating outcomes will be developed further - these are just thought starters.



Going further: Principles for receiving communications

The essential principles of reading and listening

Communicating works both ways, of course. How do we as individuals receiving a communication - reading an article or listening to a speech - know who's using communication skills for good and who's just green-washing or plain BS-ing? We need to move from being passive to active receivers of information, so we can be empowered and active and not manipulated or misled. So I identified principles to also guide this.

When receiving information, principles of constructive behaviour can be split into two main areas (each with two sub areas): **awareness and action** - being fully understanding of the communication and how it is working on you, and then engaging with it and with the world around it. (For general purposes and casual information, we use 'Awareness', then for bigger topics or information that might influence our choices, we also use 'Action'.)

When I first developed the Doughnut, it had two rings instead of one, with the principles for receiving communications that are listed below forming a second, inner ring. I wanted to show visually that effective and ethical communication only ever takes place when both the communicator and receiver are being constructive.

However, I want the Doughnut to be as practical as possible, and so in the version you have been reading about, I decided to focus on just the 12 principles required for organisations to communicate outwards, as this is something they can control and evaluate. That said, it is still essential to understand the principles for receiving. Indeed, I believe it is also an organisation's responsibility to make it as easy as possible for their audiences to be more proactive receivers of information. So whilst these principles listed here may not be represented within the model visually, they are still essential to it functioning.

Awareness

Reflection and investigation

Awareness of self
Having knowledge of your biases, the assumptions you make, norms you abide by, the baggage / historical references and experiences that may inform how you receive the communication.

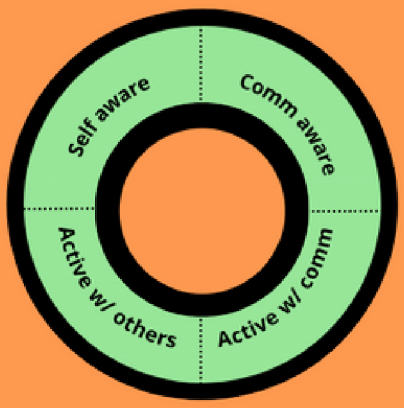
Awareness of the communication
Understand the meaning of the message and the ways the communicator may be leading your reaction. Fully consider the source, the intentions, the emotional balance, the context, and the potential consequences it may have.

Action

Engagement and participation

Active with others
Sharing the communication and your thoughts on it with others, and discussing shared or contrasting reactions. Ensuring diverse engagement over this communication and the wider subjects it represents.

Active with the ideas
Examining and interrogating the ideas behind the communication and proactively seeking diverse inputs around the subject. Then taking appropriate action in response to the communication.

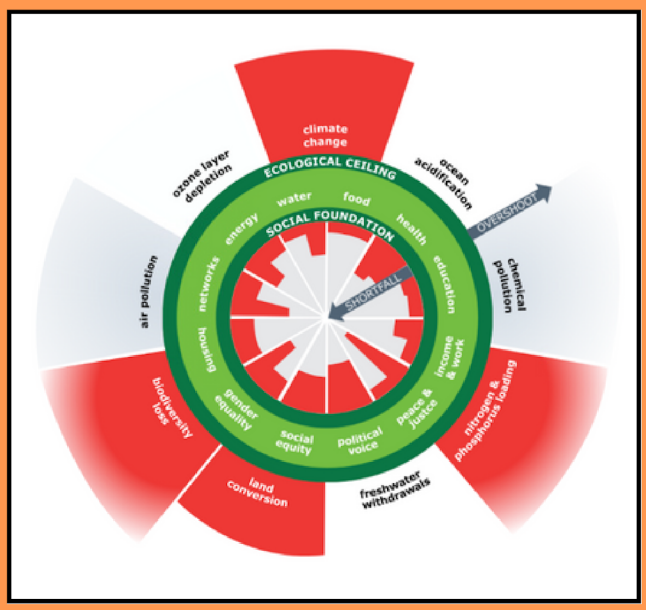


An early version of the Doughnut combined these receiving principles with the main 12 principles to form a double-ringed doughnut.

The Communications Doughnut and Doughnut Economics

A sustainable economy is interdependent with constructive communications

The Communications Doughnut is inspired by the brilliant Doughnut Economics model by Kate Raworth. It is a great example of how a simple-looking solution to a complex problem can be the most effective one. In her model, the green, doughy ring represents an economy in balance; socially just and environmentally safe, achieving the needs of all within the means of the planet. The hole in the middle of the Doughnut is where we are if we fall short of our societal foundations (from housing to healthcare) and the bit outside the Doughnut is what happens if we overshoot Earth's life-support systems (such as a stable climate, fertile soils, and biodiversity). And the model is catching on; being adopted by countries and cities around the world that want to ensure a thriving future.



Doughnut Economics model
by Kate Raworth

I realised that a ringed model can also represent communication (although in a less academic manner): in a 'sustainable' - or constructive - form of communication we must also operate 'in the dough'. Fall short of the principles and we find ourselves outside the Doughnut, where communication becomes destructive, leading to a number of negative consequences, such as conflict or exclusion (as listed earlier). Just as Raworth highlights the need to redefine what a functioning economy is, I believe we also need to define what successful communication is; not 'winning at all costs' but ensuring truth and justice are achieved.

But the Communications Doughnut isn't just inspired by Raworth's design, it also complements the model: several of the 'social foundations' of Raworth's economy are also essential societal conditions to enable constructive communications to take place. These include: Education, Income & work, Peace & justice, Political voice, Gender equality, Networks, Life systems (energy, water, food etc). (You can read more about these conditions at kateraworth.com). In turn, effective and ethical communications are needed to bring these economic foundations about. **A sustainable economy - however you frame that - and constructive communication are interdependent. We can not have one without the other. And anyone with an interest in either sustainability or communication should support progress in both.**

Being a visual model is an essential part of ensuring the principles take hold. As Raworth explains, you have to 'draw the change you want to see in the world, by combining the well known power of verbal framing with the hidden power of visual framing'. You must show the change, if you want people to be part of it.

And just as the old economic model is based on an old portrait of humankind (as Raworth also illustrates), so is the way we communicate. Paraphrasing Raworth, we have been told we are self-interested, isolated, calculating and fixed in taste, whilst we are actually social, interdependent, approximating and embedded in the web of life. We must 'nurture human nature' - the Communications Doughnut puts humankind at its heart. It also accounts for - and mitigates against - the fact that we humans are not wholly rational, but are subject to values and influences, norms and expectations, along with many cognitive biases. These are factors that destructive communication takes full advantage of.

Next steps and feedback

Thank you for reading this overview of The Communications Doughnut.

As I have said, this concept is still in the process of development. The ambition is to create a full, robust tool as well as a simple version that anyone can easily use immediately (see page 5 for more on the ways it will be developed).

I'd therefore love to hear your thoughts, to ensure that when we take this out into the world it provides genuine value and leads to positive impact.

In what ways would you refine it, expand it or use it?

Please let me know at adam@adamcomms.com