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PREAMBLE

Good conduct in communication situations requires jointly agreed and widely recognised ethical principles that help prevent violations of commonly accepted social norms, misunderstandings, and manipulative forms of interaction. In a democratic society, it is essential to foster a culture of dialogic communication. For this reason, we refer to the present guidelines as "principles for dialogue-supportive communication". These principles serve as a practical application of dialogic communication ethics. The values and principles of dialogic communication ethics are drawn from theoretical and normative concepts of dialogism, communication and journalism ethics, and dialogic pedagogy.

For meaningful public discussion to take place, it is important to balance power relations between individuals engaged in communication and to ensure equal access to information for all.

Good dialogue also requires mutual respect and evidence-based argumentation.[1] The balancing of power relations in communication is achieved by empowering people who are in weaker or more vulnerable positions. Greater power is held by those who have more access to information or decision-making authority, and this is realised both in interpersonal communication and through the structures and rules of communication within organisations and institutions. Other scholars[2] have also identified universal values of communication ethics: truth, human dignity, and the protection of the innocent. In addition to theoretical approaches, we drew on focus-group interviews conducted within the DIACOMET project, which examined how people participating in different communication contexts perceive good, poor, or inappropriate communication. In addition, a systematic analysis of ethics codes and guidelines from a wide range of fields within public communication helped identify notable gaps in existing documents and provided important insights for their further development.

In developing the principles of dialogic communication ethics, we compared the theoretical approaches mentioned above and synthesised the key normative fields or discourses. We grouped these into six domains, each addressing distinct values and the principles of good communicative practice based on them. In formulating the principles, we also relied on the tradition of professional ethics, in which codes of ethics outline the principles of acceptable and unacceptable conduct within a given profession. It is important to recognise that the concrete behavioural guidelines found in professional codes rest on several underlying normative concepts. For example, journalistic codes of ethics are grounded in the concepts of freedom of expression, journalistic autonomy, professional roles, and the public interest, to name only a few.

Although ethical codes clearly define profession-specific behavioural norms (for instance, the presumption of innocence in journalism), they often remain vague when it comes to questions of communication ethics. As a result, it can be difficult to distinguish value conflicts arising from communication itself from those stemming from the specific nature of the profession. A distinctive feature of our framework is that it moves beyond the perspective of professional media actors alone. Instead, it demonstrates the relevance of dialogic communication ethics across diverse communicative contexts – from one-to-one and one-to-many interactions to machine-to-one and one-to-machine communication. In this way, the framework addresses not only individual communicators but also institutional actors and communication processes shaped by digital and machine-mediated environments.

Dialogic communication ethics helps to articulate behavioural norms that are recommended or discouraged from the perspective of ethical communication, and which apply regardless of professional context. We therefore propose that dialogic communication ethics – developed through the synthesis of various disciplinary approaches – can serve as a tool for raising awareness of communication norms and for reaching shared agreement about them. The domains are not listed in the order of importance. Rather than prescribing a fixed hierarchy, the prioritisation of domains and principles should be determined by the actors applying them, in accordance with the needs and conditions of their specific communicative context. While the adoption of these principles is strongly encouraged, communication itself is inherently dynamic and situational. The principles are therefore formulated in a way that allows them to guide ethical behaviour flexibly across a wide range of real-world contexts.

As noted, the domains are shaped by underlying normative discourses, and the six domains are characterised by the following key concepts:

- Individual autonomy and informational self-determination
- Quality of information and deliberation
- Ethical conduct in situations of confrontation and disagreement
- Equality, freedom, and safety
- Active listening and inclusion
- Constructive feedback

[1] Harro-Loit, H., Eberwein, T., & Nord, L. (2024). Monitoring mediascapes: Key concepts and basic variables. In E. Lauk, M. Oller Alonso, & H. Harro-Loit (Eds.), *Monitoring mediascapes: A Premise of wisdom-based EU media governance* (pp. 12–37). MEDIADELCOM/Tartu University Press.

[2] Christians, C. & Traber, M. (Eds.). (1997). *Communication ethics and universal values*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452243542

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PRINCIPLES FOR DIALOGUE-SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION

1 THE DOMAIN OF INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY AND INFORMATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION

This domain concerns individuals' ability and opportunity to make autonomously informed and considered decisions in communication situations, to consciously define the boundaries of their privacy, to choose the informational environment in which they wish to participate, and to take responsibility for the information they share. Informational self-determination also entails the possibility and the right to control the collection, accuracy, use, and disclosure of one's personal data. Dialogic communication is successful when each person has autonomy and a thoughtful understanding of the boundaries of their own and their close ones' private life. Institutions have a responsibility to protect privacy and to safeguard sensitive personal data in their own practices, including in digital and AI-mediated communication environments where personal data may be collected, processed, or inferred.

1.1. Individuals must have the opportunity to exercise their informational self-determination – meaning the capacity and possibility to decide what information about them is disseminated and how it is communicated, within the framework of existing laws.

1.2. Individuals must have the right to refuse information or communication that may endanger their well-being or that they consider ethically or personally unacceptable.

1.3. The right to informational self-determination must be supported when individuals are inexperienced, lack the necessary resources, and/or are vulnerable in the given communication situation.

1.4. Communication partners in a stronger position must empower the informational self-determination of those in weaker positions. It must be taken into account that children's communicative abilities correspond to their level of development, and that the informational self-determination ability of elderly and/or ill persons may be lower than usual.

1.5. Individuals must have access to information concerning them that is essential for making their decisions.

1.6. The use of digital and AI-mediated systems in communication should respect and support individuals' informational self-determination, including transparency about data collection, processing, and automated decision-making.

2 THE DOMAIN OF QUALITY OF INFORMATION AND DELIBERATION

The quality of information is a crucial precondition for ethical dialogic communication. High-quality communication means that people communicate honestly, are transparent about their intentions, and share relevant information in the best possible way. For good dialogic interaction, it is not enough merely to verify facts; information must also be presented in a manner that allows for critical evaluation and questioning. High-quality information exchange and reasonable discussions create the foundation for a trustful dialogue. In situations characterised by sensitivity or polarisation, communicators must exercise particular caution with regard to propaganda, partial truths, and misleading information. Participants in communication share responsibility for the proactive dissemination of reliable information in the public interest, especially in moments of crisis or heightened public attention. At the same time, emerging technologies create new opportunities for manipulation, which makes it essential to clearly disclose and appropriately label AI-generated content.

2.1. Participants are responsible for assessing the reliability of the information available to them.

2.2. Participants in communication should disclose their sources in order to ensure transparency and trust.

2.3. All participants in dialogic communication must provide and receive clear answers regarding the purpose of the communication.

2.4. Manipulation and/or deception – such as sharing false information, hidden advertising, propaganda, manipulative generalisations, or partial concealment of information – are unethical.

2.5. Communicators should ensure transparency when using digital and AI-assisted tools, including the clear disclosure of AI-generated or AI-modified content, in order to prevent manipulation and support informed evaluation by communication partners.

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3 THE DOMAIN OF ETHICAL CONDUCT IN SITUATIONS OF CONFRONTATION AND DISAGREEMENT

Differences of opinion and open discussion of their causes support dialogue between individuals, within organisations, and in society at large. Participants in communication should take responsibility for their messages by clearly and transparently expressing their motives, perspectives, and boundaries. Communicative acts carry ethical implications, and responsibility extends not only to the communicator's intentions but also to the possible interpretation and consequences of what is said. In situations of conflict, it is important to understand whether it was a communication barrier[3] that triggered the conflict and what kind of barrier it was. Courtesy remains essential in conflictual communication.

3.1. Each person has a responsibility to remain open to differing opinions and to listen to the reasons behind them. Disagreement should not be feared. Dialogue can lead to shared understanding, compromise, or a peaceful recognition of remaining differences.

3.2. When agreement cannot be reached, dissent should be accepted and the reasons for disagreement should be clearly articulated, as constructive engagement with disagreement is an essential element of meaningful dialogue.

3.3. When disagreements arise, it is important to distinguish whether the issue stems from misunderstanding or from a genuine value conflict.

3.4. In cases of conflict, it is necessary to check whether, and to what extent, the information underlying the conflict may be false, inaccurate, or distorted.

3.5. Labelling or stereotyping must not be used to strengthen one's arguments.

[3] Communication barriers can take many forms, such as talking past one another ("the garden and the garden hole" phenomenon), over- or under-asserting oneself, moralising or nagging, offering empty praise, making unfounded assumptions in conversation, and more.

4 THE DOMAIN OF EQUALITY, FREEDOM, AND SAFETY

The core values underlying dialogic communication are freedom of expression, human dignity, safety, courage, and confidentiality. Safety cannot exist without courage, and courage cannot exist without safety. Freedom of expression is the right to hold an opinion and share information, while safety in dialogic and respectful communication refers to an environment in which all participants are able to engage in honest and unobstructed dialogue. Human dignity requires equality. This principle should be supported by appropriate structural and organisational measures to ensure that equality is respected and upheld in communication practices. Dialogue-supportive communication values diversity across cultures, societies, and languages and encourages the active participation of people from all backgrounds and identities – including, but not limited to, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, minority status, and educational background. Safety ensures that individuals can express diverse and critical opinions without fear of repercussions. However, the expression of critical views must remain respectful and must not insult or demean others. When sharing information that may cause harm, confidentiality must be upheld.

4.1. Everyone has the right to express their thoughts freely – personally, within organisations, and through the media. This freedom must be exercised responsibly.

4.2. Communication should take into account the specific needs and circumstances of participants in order to ensure that everyone has a fair opportunity to be heard and understood.

4.3. Leaders and individuals in positions of greater power have a duty to ensure that people are able to express critical views safely.

4.4. Information should not be classified as confidential for the purpose of avoiding reputational harm. In certain situations, this may require prioritising the disclosure of critical information in the public interest, even when this conflicts with other loyalties or hierarchical expectations.

4.5. When communication takes place between people whose positions – or whose ability to participate and assess consequences – are unequal, the more influential and/or competent party has an obligation to help those in a more vulnerable position understand the potential consequences of the communication.

4.6. Harassment and emotional manipulation[4] in communication are unacceptable.

4.7. Manipulation such as tone-policing (as a conversational tactic)[5], grooming, or shaming, is unacceptable, particularly when it targets protected characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation, including their intersections.

[4] Examples include **gaslighting** (a form of manipulation in which someone attempts to undermine another person's self-esteem and perception of reality); manipulation through silence (**the silent treatment**); denial or belittling; victim-blaming; inducing guilt; and passive-aggressive communication.

[5] **Tone-policing** is a practice in which attention is directed toward **how** a message is delivered rather than **what** is being said. This conversational tactic shifts the focus away from the substance of the original message and onto the speaker's emotions – for example, suggesting that a person expressing a critical viewpoint should speak in a "calmer" or "more pleasant" tone in order to be taken seriously. Tone-policing delegitimises a person's experience, story, or standpoint.

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5 THE DOMAIN OF ACTIVE LISTENING: RESPONSE AND INCLUSION

Active listening is a central component and core value of dialogic communication, as it fosters inclusion and mutual understanding. By responding appropriately, the listener demonstrates attention to the conversation and understanding of their communication partner.

5.1. In dialogue, communication partners must listen to one another with full attention and respond in ways that support mutual understanding.

5.2. Attentive listening requires awareness of non-verbal cues and an attitude free from prejudice, which in communication means refraining from unfounded judgments.

5.3. Decisions concerning an individual must not be made without involving that person in the communication process. The guiding principle is: “Speak **with** the person, not **about** the person.”

6 THE DOMAIN OF CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

One reason why dialogic communication may fail in educational processes, leadership practices, or interpersonal relationships is the giving or receiving of inappropriate, excessive, or negative feedback. Feedback based on dialogic communication includes: prior agreements about the purpose, method, timing, and setting of feedback; active listening; and mutual respect. Above all, constructive feedback should help answer the question: What should we do next?

6.1. Constructive feedback is appropriate in tone and content; the person giving feedback avoids personal or excessive criticism and instead encourages dialogue about possible solutions.

6.2. Dialogic feedback requires a shared understanding between giver and receiver regarding when and on what issue feedback will be given.

6.3. Before giving feedback, the giver should consider whether the principle “Do not offer advice before it is requested” should apply.

6.4. The person giving feedback should assess their own competence and offer guidance only within the limits of their expertise.

6.5. The feedback giver should guide the recipient toward finding their own conclusions or solutions by asking relevant and supportive questions.

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