

DIACOMET

„Fostering capacity building for civic resilience and participation: Dialogic communication ethics and accountability“

Grant agreement no 101094816

Concepts of DCE and accountability
Deliverable 1.3

Document Information Sheet

Settings	Value
Document title:	Deliverable 1.3:
Project name:	Fostering capacity building for civic resilience and participation: Dialogic communication ethics and accountability
Project number:	101094816
Call/topic:	HORIZON-CL2-2022-DEMOCRACY-01-06 Media for democracy – democratic media
Project starting date:	1 June 2023
Project duration:	36 months
Work package no and name:	WP1 THEORY
Lead beneficiary:	2. UTARTU
Lead authors:	Prof Halliki Harro-Loit
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Reviewers:	Epp Lauk
Document type:	R – Document, report
Dissemination level:	Public
Due submission date:	M35, 31.03.1926
Actual submission date:	31.03 2026

Document Revision History

Version	Changes	Date	Contributor
01	First draft	21.03. 2026	Prof. Halliki Harro-Loit
02	Second draft based on comments and suggestions received	30.03. 2026	Prof. Halliki Harro-Loit

Tables and figures

Table 1. The number of respondents (N 145) across the countries **36**

Table 2. Percentage of the respondents : how respondents from different countries were delivered across Factro groups **37**

Table 3. The six domains of DCE provide a foundation for civic resilience development. **63**

Figure 1. The main ingredients of the DCE concept **4**

Figure 2. Implementation levels of dialogic communication ethics **8**

Figure 3. The competence model of DCE. **20**

Figure 4. The MediaAcT Axis Model – a typology of media accountability instruments (Source: Fengler, Eberwein, & Leppik-Bork, 2011, p. 12) **54**

Figure 5. The DIACOMET research scheme and outcomes. **68**

Contents

Introduction: the core of the concept of dialogic communication ethics	4
<i>Halliki Harro-Loit, Epp Lauk</i>	
The structure of Deliverable 1.3	11
1. Theoretical foundations of dialogic communication ethics	12
<i>Halliki Harro-Loit</i>	
Relational ontology of dialogic communication: agency, responsibility and vulnerability	15
<i>Marten Juurik</i>	
2. Competency dimension of DCE	19
<i>Halliki Harro-Loit, Mari-Liisa Parder</i>	
3. Narrative-based tools and gamification and instruments of media accountability	23
<i>Tobias Pilv</i>	
4. Principles. Transformation of theories and concepts into the values, domains and principles of dialogic communication ethics	27
<i>Halliki Harro-Loit, Epp Lauk</i>	
5. Q sorting results	35
<i>Eleri Lõhmus, Halliki Harro-Loit</i>	
6. Principles for Dialogue-Supportive Communication	44
<i>Halliki Harro-Loit, Epp Lauk, Marten Juurik, Mari-Liisa Parder, Tobias Eberwein, Marie Rathmann</i>	
7. Accountability	49
<i>Tobias Eberwein, Krisztina Rozgonyi, Marie Rathmann</i>	
8. Dialogic communication ethics and civic resilience: Future perspectives	59
<i>Auksė Balčytienė</i>	
References	68

Introduction: the core of the concept of dialogic communication ethics

Halliki Harro-Loit
Epp Lauk

The aim of Deliverable 1.3 is to provide a concept of inclusive accountability system of dialogic communication ethics (DCE). The concept is based on three pillars. First, synthesis of various approaches that enable to formulate theoretical frame of the DCE. Second, accountability instruments (principles, bodies, and formats supporting discourse on responsibility), aimed at collecting casuistic practices and supporting accountability. Third, tools for supporting dialogic communication competences, including gamification. In DIACOMET, this is represented by the serious game Dialogue Lab (both individual online and group-based board game versions), which supports ethical awareness and sensitivity. Additional tools support listening, negotiation, and participation skills (see Figure 1).

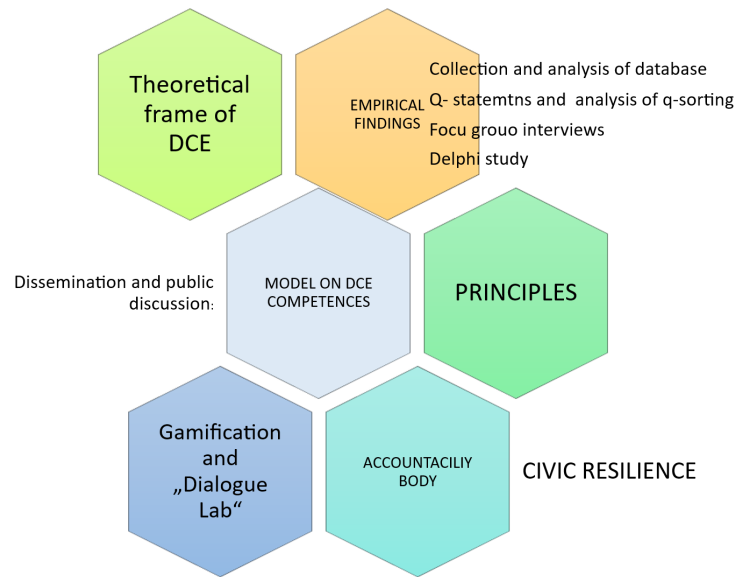


Figure 1. The main ingredients of the DCE concept

The theoretical framework of DCE developed by the Diacommet project draws on studies in ethics, moral philosophy, deliberative democracy, pedagogy, media- and communication studies, interpersonal communication, pragmatics. DCE is a normative approach that provides tools for defining values and behavioural norms that encourage good communication and can be applied regardless of professional context. In simple terms, DCE helps answer the question of how individuals should interact in order to understand each other as well as possible, reach agreements when possible, and remain calm and



respectful even in situations of disagreement. Dialogic communication is essential for collaboration, mutual understanding, resolving disagreements, and building and maintaining good relationships.

Dialogue, however, is not necessary in every situation. For example, one-way communication may be more appropriate in crisis situations where people need to act quickly and require clear instructions. Teaching situations – such as lectures or presentations – also often take the form of one-way communication.

Dialogue and dialogic communication have been theorised over a long period and, as noted above, across multiple disciplines. However, in most disciplines these approaches have remained largely theoretical. Applied approaches to dialogic communication have been developed primarily in educational sciences and by a limited number of individual scholars (e.g., Escobar). The main objective of the DIACOMET project is to develop an applied concept of dialogic communication ethics.

When developing the accountability system of DCE, it is essential to consider the target users. While accountability instruments such as codes of ethics, ombudsmen, and press councils exist in traditional media and established professions, no equally effective mechanisms are available for broader public communication. Dialogic communication ethics differs from professional ethics in that every participant has agency shaped by their role and context. Therefore, an **agency approach** is crucial: in DIACOMET's framework, individuals in diverse roles and communication situations are moral agents who must first recognize ethically significant situations, engage in moral reasoning, and then make, justify, and take responsibility for their decisions.

Communication ethics and professional ethics both provide guidance in ethically complicated situations. In addition, professional ethics are based on specific professional ideologies and competencies mandatory for the practicing professionals. There are some general criteria that apply to professionalism: practicing is based on scientific knowledge and an experience of utilising intellectual skills; the service offered is paramount to society; the practitioners are members of the occupational organization and decide the conditions of membership; the practitioners develop the norms of quality and norms of behaviour for their field and overlook the adherence to them; professionals have a monopoly on their expert service; professionals enjoy high trust in society, but also have high responsibility for their activities. The ethical standards of a profession formulate the ideal characteristics of a professional (Pevkur, 2023).

Relatively long tradition of the professional ethics of journalism and journalists exists in most European democratic societies. Public is more or less acquainted with the ethical norms of journalists. Therefore, important source for the DCE is the discourse of journalism ethics. Several touchpoints between journalism ethics, deliberative communication and DCE come into sight when we compare the basic values each of them carry. As Fourie (2022, pp. 31, 32) argues, “in communication ethics, the emphasis is on respect, caring and responsibility for the speaking, listening, reading, seeing /.../ Communication ethics is more human/person-oriented, whereas journalism ethics is more profession oriented”. The codes of journalism ethics prioritize the values and principles that emphasize journalists' highest responsibility for the quality of information that serves the public need for truthful, reliable, impartial and complete information. Information quality is also a necessary precondition for the advancement of dialogic communication, but does not stand in the centre of the DCE values.



Dialogic ethics focuses attention on the intersubjective dimensions of **relationships between self and others** (Lipari 2017b), and therefore, **mutual respect between people, equality, engagement and listening embody the core values of the DCE**. These are supported by the **individual autonomy of dialogue participants** that stands on their **equality in communication situations** and encourages the **freedom to speak out without fearing the consequences**, while professional autonomy of journalists is a precondition for fulfilling their duty of serving the public interest.

According to deliberative communication theory (Harro-Loit, Nord, Eberwein, 2024), equality and the absence of coercive power relations are key conditions for deliberative communication. In reality, however, power relations are often unequal. In such cases, those with greater power have a responsibility to empower others. At the same time, power is dynamic: individuals may occupy different positions depending on context. For example, a doctor holds epistemic authority in relation to a patient but must also empower the patient to make informed decisions. In another context (e.g., as a parent interacting with a teacher), the same individual may have less power and require support. Thus, individuals move between positions of power and vulnerability, sharing responsibility for enabling dialogue.

Journalistic ethics codes typically do not require journalists to sustain dialogic relationships, as their primary responsibility is to serve the public interest by providing reliable information and scrutinising power. In contrast, **dialogic communication ethics emphasises maintaining constructive relationships, fostering listening and respectful disagreement**, and reducing societal polarisation. Dialogic communication ethics is therefore a shared responsibility of all members of a democratic society, within their respective capacities.

Ideally, the norms of DCE apply and are implemented across **multiple levels** (see Figure 2): including individual, organisational, and societal levels. The “grass root level” is that of the **individual**. The implementation of communication ethics depends on the moral sensitivity and awareness of the lay members of society as well as on the values they practice in everyday life. It depends also on individual’s motivation to take responsibility for their communicative choices and the consequences of these choices. For instance, the right to informational self-determination is an important principle, according to which the individuals should be able to independently decide which and how much information is known about them. This also implies that the individual should have autonomy to decide the extent of their involvement in communicative situations. The individual level is also the level for auto-communication (e.g., keeping a diary, inner monologues), self-reflection and acceptance of feedback. Well-intended communicative initiatives may sometimes fail merely because the individual is not open to critical or constructive feedback. In this sense, it is fundamental level for communication ethics.

The next level of communication ethics is **interpersonal communication**. At this level, the ability and motivation of people to listen to each other and to be open to accepting each other's experiences and feelings is important, as is the ability to assert oneself and to negotiate – in line with the universal values of communication (Christinans, 1997, proposes the following universal values: truth, respect for another person's dignity, and no harm to the innocent). In some cases interpersonal communication could take



place in a public space (for instance, in social media or when people are speaking on the phone in a public space), therefore some common values and principles should be agreed upon by people.

Intra and interpersonal communication ethics both contribute to personal growth and self-awareness. Both forms of communication can influence individual behaviour and decision-making.

The third level is the **intra-group communication** where communication follows the rules and procedures agreed upon within the group. This is the level for **ethics of professional and organisational communication** (agreed values and principles, how to live up to them and mechanisms or means of ensuring accountability). The borders or limits of organisational or professional communication are not always clear. Two individuals could have an interpersonal chat within the office if the topic is personal and the dialogue is not governed by organisational/professional norms or standards. However, a job interview outside the office could still fall within this category, as the interview is influenced by organisational values, principles, and procedures. There are many types of organisations and groups, from small informal social media groups of activists to huge international corporations with numerous harmonised internal rules and standards.

The main actors on this level are members of the organisation (or the group in general) **with various roles, interests, and responsibilities**. The implementation of communication ethics on this level depends on the decisions and values of the leadership, but also on the actual choices and practices of all individual members of the organization or group.

Intra-group communication of organisations has been widely studied by communication scholars. For instance, it has been shown that dialogic internal communication positively influences employee–organization communal relationships, and that organizations use dialogic strategies to improve their online communication with their stakeholders (e.g., Sommerfeldt & Yang 2018; Pang 2018).

The fourth level is **inter-group communication ethics** which is usually applied if the communication takes place via media. This level includes marketing and political communication, propaganda, variety of news and social media and all other sorts of communications that is targeted at the public. The main actors on this level are various organisations, institutions, authorities, and their representatives, who usually try to achieve their own agenda via communicative means. Media organisations have a crucial role here, as they are in the position to influence the communication by deciding what gets published and how, by balancing strong and weak voices, editing and fact-checking.

The fifth and sixth level are the **EU communication ethics** and **global communication concentions**. In a broad sense, this level constitutes the general structure for communication within a society, the values, norms, and taboos of a society, which in turn influence the communicative practices. It could manifest itself in communication between large communities (societies, cultures) or in international communication practices. Level five has been discussed mostly in academia (developed by scholars e.g. Stephen J. A. Ward; Clifford G. Christians; Bassam Tibi). S. Ward (2020) argues at this level:

Global media ethics proposes aims, principles, and norms for global media work, and pays special attention to coverage of global issues such as climate change, immigration, and terrorism. The primary principles tend to stress media protection and advancement of human rights, human development, and global social justice. However, “global media ethics” does not refer to something clear, singular, or

established. There is no one code of global media ethics. Global media ethics is a work in progress, a contested zone where globalists advance rival ideas, while skeptics dismiss global ethics as a dream that can never be realized. (Ward, 2020)



Figure 2. Implementation levels of dialogic communication ethics

Why DCE is necessary? Is politeness sufficient?

At first glance, politeness may seem an obvious way to maintain good relationships and thus ensure calm and balanced communication. However, the answer to the question above is “no”. Dialogic ethics cannot be reduced to polite conduct without losing its critical and epistemic significance. Although DCE and politeness may overlap at a surface level, they differ fundamentally in their orientation, depth, and ethical scope (Watts, 2003).

Politeness is primarily concerned with regulating communicative behaviour according to existing social and cultural norms. It may serve instrumental purposes such as conflict avoidance, impression management, or the stabilization of social hierarchies, and it can occur without genuine engagement with the other person as a moral subject (Leech, 2014).

Drawing on pragmatic traditions, politeness theory explains how speakers mitigate face threats, maintain social harmony, and navigate interactional expectations. In this sense, politeness is largely procedural and context-dependent: it focuses on *how* something is said rather than on the **ethical quality of the communicative relationship itself**. DCE, by contrast, is grounded in a relational and moral



understanding of communication. Its central concern is not whether communication conforms to social norms, but whether it sustains a relationship in which participants are treated as morally and epistemically significant others. From a dialogic perspective, ethical communication requires openness to being influenced by the other person, a willingness to listen attentively and respond thoughtfully, and readiness to reconsider one's own assumptions. These demands go beyond the requirements of politeness and cannot be fulfilled through courteous behaviour alone.

This distinction becomes particularly clear in situations of disagreement or conflict. Politeness often favours harmony and may therefore discourage open disagreement or critique. **Dialogic communication ethics, however, does not equate ethical communication with agreement or comfort. On the contrary, dialogic engagement may involve tension, discomfort, or strong disagreement, provided that the dignity and epistemic standing of the other person are respected. Ethical dialogue allows critique, but frames it as responsive, accountable, and oriented toward understanding.**

When politeness is used mainly to maintain good relationships and avoid disagreement at any cost, it may even become an obstacle to dialogue, leaving problems unaddressed and unresolved. Consider, for example, a leader of an organisation who cannot tolerate conflict or disagreement and therefore tries to prevent such situations by never making critical remarks. Instead, the leader enthusiastically praises subordinates for every effort they make and for every suggestion they offer, without questioning whether improvements might be needed. Critical questions from team members are ignored for fear that someone might feel offended. On the surface, the atmosphere appears positive and harmonious. In reality, excessive praise and constant positive feedback may even signal that the leader has not seriously engaged with the issue or lacks the competence to provide informed evaluation.

Hence, while politeness may prevent conflict, it can also inhibit critical discussion, which is essential for communication quality and trustworthiness. Supporting good relationships must not come at the expense of information quality. Thus, implementing dialogic communication ethics is complex, and fostering a dialogic culture requires sustained effort and time. This can be achieved through education, professional codes of ethics, and the broader recognition and practice of dialogic communication.

What is needed to apply DCE in practice?

Effective application of DCE principles requires understanding their meaning, the context in which they apply, and the reasoning behind them. Consequently, people need appropriate competences to recognize, evaluate, and address ethically problematic communication situations. In professional contexts, interpreting and adhering to ethical principles is usually learned together with specific professional skills and knowledge. DCE competences, in contrast, focus on the skills and abilities required to recognize ethically problematic communication situations, orient oneself among possible ethical choices, and respond appropriately to unethical practices. DCE combines ethical and communicative competences, which in practice are closely interwoven.



Ethical competences include the ability to perceive situations from an ethical perspective, to reason ethically, to make ethical judgments and decisions, and ultimately to act ethically. Communicative competences include various techniques of listening, the ability to ask reflective and clarifying questions, the ability to negotiate and deal with value disagreements, to manage conflicts, and to initiate dialogue in order to address disagreements constructively.

These competences are not innate; they must be developed through learning and training. To support this process, educational institutions at all levels should provide appropriate curricula, teaching materials, and teachers with relevant expertise. The Diacomet project has developed both an online and a board game called “**Dialogue Lab**”, designed to help people learn how to interpret and resolve ethically challenging communication situations.

Another important precondition for developing competences and encouraging engagement is the existence of **mechanisms of civic accountability**. In addition to ethical guidelines themselves, these may include networks of NGOs, online and offline forums, and advisory bodies or boards. Such initiatives could involve people trained in dialogic principles who understand how dialogic communication works and possess the knowledge and practical skills needed to teach and promote DCE. These bodies could operate at the grassroots level in organizations and communities, or in cooperation with local governments. Their role could include collecting and analysing cases that have attracted public attention, initiating and maintaining public discussions about ethical communication, and offering guidance to individuals facing complex communicative situations.

DCE as a lifelong learning process, importance of competences

DCE represents a field that offers many opportunities for learning as well as challenges to overcome. People have different personalities and fulfil many roles in everyday life – as professionals, parents, leaders, or public figures – sometimes all at the same time. Each of these roles requires different communicative skills.

For example, parents are responsible for fostering dialogue in their relationship with their children. They need to encourage children to express their thoughts and feelings while also respecting their dignity and personal autonomy. People in leadership positions are responsible for the working atmosphere and the wellbeing of their employees. By applying DCE principles, they can develop open, encouraging, and motivating working environments. At the same time, people differ in their abilities and experience when practicing dialogic communication. They may also have varying levels of awareness about the strengths and weaknesses of their own communication styles.

Imagine a person A who has always maintained good relationships by being sensitive to other people's emotions and has often succeeded in building positive relationships through such behaviour. After being promoted to a leadership position, however, A must moderate staff meetings where opinions clash, disagreements sometimes become heated, participants occasionally use manipulation, and people do not always listen to each other. In this situation, the person who previously succeeded mainly through appreciation and politeness now faces a different challenge. If A had training in DCE, they would be



able to facilitate a dialogic discussion: listening attentively to the participants, noticing manipulation and responding to it, keeping the conversation focused on the main topic, and, if necessary, helping reconcile conflicting viewpoints. To do this effectively, A would also need to analyse the discussions from the perspectives of different participants, distinguish between accidental misunderstandings and deliberate ignorance, and respond appropriately to manipulation or attempts to derail the conversation. In other words, these situations require both ethical and communicative competences that are valuable in many areas of life.

The structure of Deliverable 1.3.

Deliverable 1.3 is structured into five chapters and several sub-chapter

1. **Theoretical foundations of dialogic communication ethics**, including short overview on **disciplinary roots of DCE, agency approach**. The agency approach is important, because in DIACOMET's concept, people in diverse roles, are moral agents who must first recognise situations that require ethical consideration, then make a decision and justify their decision. However, artificial intelligence (AI) enable non-human agents to perform, therefore one needs to ask are the human and non- human agents equally responsible?
2. **Competency dimension of DCE**. The theoretical background of the DCE competence model is presented in Deliverable 1.2. In Deliverable 1.3, we present the DCE model as well as a description of the “Dialog Lab” method. The online version of the “Dialog Lab” game primarily helps to develop the ability to recognize ethical decision points and to analyze situations. The board game version, designed to initiate group discussions, also supports the development of communicative skills, such as listening, argumentation, and engaging in discussions across differing viewpoints.
3. **Principles**. Although DCE is grounded in values (listed in the introduction of this deliverable), these are too abstract for assessing everyday communication practices. To operationalize DCE, it is necessary to formulate **principles**, i.e., practical guidelines for behaviour. The principles developed within the Diacommet project are derived from following sources:
 - a) Initial normative domains were constructed on the basis of normative theories in journalism, media, and communication ethics, as well as specific concepts (such as privacy, freedom of expression, informational self-determination, etc.) (see D. 1.1)
 - b) **These initial domains were then used to develop analytical categories for examining existing codes of conduct**. The analytical output of the database of codes enabled to fine-tune the final wording of the principles.
 - c) In addition to academic normative discourse, there are also communication-related principles and norms that are valued differently by ordinary citizens. Public debates in the media—on issues such as the limits of freedom of expression, confidentiality of information, sensitive topics, labelling, and the boundaries between public criticism and offense—undoubtedly shape people’s attitudes regarding which values and principles they consider most important, which require contextual and consequential consideration, and which are less significant. To understand which norms people consider most important, where attitudes are ambivalent, and the extent of consensus or disagreement, we applied the **Q-sorting methodology**. This method requires

formulating **statements** that participants can rank. In the Diacomet project, **these statements were derived from the initial normative domains and compared with widely discussed media cases** (both in Estonia and internationally) involving debates on communication ethics. In total, 32 statements were formulated, representing different discourses in communication ethics. The results of the Q-analysis, presented in D1.3, demonstrate that academic normative discourse and the understandings of communication conventions among participants from different countries are quite similar. This suggests that the principles for dialogue-supportive communication developed in D1.3 have a broadly universal character.

d)The initial normative domains were revisited during the progress of the Diacomet project, as gaps in certain domains and topics became evident—for example, during the development of narratives for the serious game “Dialog Lab.” As a result, an additional domain—feedback—was introduced, and the issue of agency was further clarified. Consequently, the Austrian and Estonian teams were able to propose the final “Principles for Dialogue-Supportive Communication.”

As both the concept and the formulation of these principles are prerequisites for implementing DCE, Deliverable 1.3 provides the methodological background of the concept of principles, as well as the principles themselves.

4. **Accountability instruments as a „toolbox“ is the main output of Diacomet project.**
5. Future perspectives, examining **the relationship between dialogic communication ethics and societal resilience**, both of which emphasise human agency and adaptability in conditions of rapid change.

1. Theoretical foundations of dialogic communication ethics.

Short overview of disciplinary roots of DCE

Halliki Harro-Loit

The dialogic communication and communication ethics has been elaborated and implemented in various disciplines: philosophy, political science (connects communication studies and deliberative democracy focusing on questions how citizens process information and exercise judgment and how to deal with increasingly diverse communities (Carcasson, Black & Sink, 2010); education studies (e.g., Englund, 2016) and (educational) leadership (e.g., Padrós & Flecha, 2014), (applied) communication and media research (Anderson, Baxter & Cissna, 2004). However, several authors point out that many questions remain unexplored about how dialogic communication is promoted and rooted in communication culture in the long run, beyond professional practice. Arnett and his colleagues (2006) provide an extensive overview on the development of the dialogic theory (involving the works of individuals like Buber, Gadamer, Freire, and Arendt), dialogic ethics, and communication and finally they propose a theory of dialogic communication ethics.



Arnett (1987) examines the literature on (speech)communication ethics from 1915 to 1985 (128 articles), adopting Chesebro's four categories of communication and adds narrative ethics:

-Democratic Ethics: Focus on the ethics of public discourse within a free society, emphasizing the "marketplace of ideas" and responsible citizenship.

-Universal-Humanitarian Ethics: Principles that emphasize human dignity and responsibility across different contexts, often transcending cultural boundaries.

-Codes and Standards for Ethics: The development of specific rules and professional standards to govern communication behaviour (common in later decades of the study).

- Contextual Ethics: A focus on "fitting" ethical communication to a specific, unique situation, valuing the particular over the universal.

-Narrative Ethics: The use of stories, "community of memory," and storytelling to establish ethical frameworks. (p. 52-54).

Early studies on communication ethics were often philosophical or pedagogical, whereas toward 1985, more studies began focusing on ethical issues in journalism, electronic media, and public relations. Arnett et al (2006) explain the dialogic turn and point out following aspects that are important for the Diacommet project: First, ethics emerges in interaction between people (relational ethics), not just within individual reasoning. Therefore, responsibility is co-created in communication; Secondly, communication is inherently responsive and accountable; Third; instead of fixed universal rules ethics is situated and depends on context (focus shifts from the rules to the questions how should I respond responsible here) Fourth: communication ethics includes listening, openness and willingness to engage difference. Fifth: disagreement is a normal and necessary condition for communication. Lipari (2017) points out that „...over the last 100 years, communication ethics has engaged questions about how to create ethical worlds with our communication processes, be they individual, face-to-face, mediated, or institutional.“ (p.3)

Hence, the theoretical concept of dialogic communication ethics proposed by Ronald Arnett and his colleagues (2009, 44, 45) defines dialogic communication ethics as one branch of various communication ethics (e.g., democratic communication ethics, universal-humanitarian communication ethics, codes, procedures, and standards in communication ethics; contextual communication ethics; narrative communication ethics and dialogic communication ethics).

As mentioned, the applied approach of communication ethics has roots across academic disciplines. For example, educational studies use an approach called “dialogic education”, which has been defined as engagement of students and teachers into various activities and empowers students to express their perspectives as well as develop ideas collaboratively (Phillipson & Wegerif, 2017, Cui & Teo, 2021). In essence, dialogic education emphasizes conversation and meaningful interaction between teachers and learners.

Political scientists connect communication studies and deliberative democracy by focusing on questions about how citizens process information and exercise judgment, and how to deal with increasingly diverse communities (Carcasson, Black & Sink, 2010).



In deliberative communication theory, dialogue has a central role, as it presupposes mutual respect between interacting parties, civility, rationality and reasoning-based argumentation (Goddard, & Gillespie, 2023). Political communication scholars also generally agree that equally important qualities are the absence of coercive power in communicative relations and equal communicative freedom (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019; Grill & Schäfer, 2022; Scholl & Huber, 2022).

In journalism studies, social media's dialogic structure has specified a new type of "dialogic journalism" approach, in which "Journalism in the digital age is marked by dialogical relationships between journalist and sources, text and sources, text and other texts, text and audiences, journalist and audiences, sources and audiences, and between audiences" (Hornmoen & Steensen, 2014:4).

Dialogic journalism emphasises journalists' abilities and motivates them to talk to their audiences (Heikkilä & Kunelius, 1998, Heikka, 2017), to respond to commentators and engage diverse societal groups (Lewis, Holton & Coddington, 2014). The key words are engagement and participation in online environments, which have also raised the question as to how journalism educators are teaching the skills that are needed to facilitate and develop various conversations (Martin & Murrell, 2021).

Some studies on journalistic interviews pay attention to listening in the interviewing practice (e.g., Miller-Carpentier, Cepak & Peng, 2018; Harro-Loit & Ugur 2017; Harro-Loit & Ugur 2019; Eljand-Kärp & Harro-Loit 2020). Interviews could be seen as a type of dialogic communication between the interviewer and interviewee, and certain skills, like listening and asking questions, have been shown to facilitate better dialogue.

In public relations studies, for example Maureen Taylor and Michael Kent argue that "dialogic communication allows members of the public to engage and participate in decisions that hold direct implications for daily life" and suggest that "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions" can be viewed as dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998)

. Nicholas Browning takes a step further towards DCE and offers a viewpoint that comes close to the reciprocity idea, accommodated in journalism's social contract. He suggests that dialogic communication is considered an ethical approach to decision-making, that hallmarks an era of two-way symmetrical communication relationships between an organisation and stakeholders (Browning, 2015).

Furthermore, journalism and communication ethics rely on various 'moral' based approaches in philosophy, psychology, and training (awareness raising and other phases of moral decision making and moral action), combining philosophical ideas with didactics, etc

The discourse of the public communication ethics includes issues and concepts from journalism (and media) ethics. Journalism ethics is a normative professional ethics while communication ethics is more general. Professional ethics has rules that are defined within the profession by journalists and are compulsory for members of the profession, while communication ethics includes more actors and provides a more comprehensive and broader foundation for moral reasoning. As Fourier points out: "

In communication ethics, the emphasis is on respect, caring and responsibility for the speaking, listening, reading, seeing (...) in short, the communication subject. Communication ethics is more human/person-oriented, whereas journalism ethics is more profession oriented. (...) [i]n the context of the digital media landscape, normative media theory is no longer adequate as a foundation of journalism



ethics, and journalism ethics as such is too narrowly focused on journalism for today's digital media landscape. (Fourie, 2022, pp. 32-33, 34)

One branch of communication ethics (Planalp, & Fitness 2010) is interpersonal communication ethics, and this approach points to dialogic ethics in the manner of listening, attentiveness, negotiation and – most importantly – encouraging positive relationships with other people. Definitions of interpersonal communication range from intimate (non-public) communication to the public. The impact of communication ethics on the quality of interpersonal relationships is high. "There are several factors that influence communication ethics and the quality of communication in interpersonal relationships, including: environment, social values and norms, understanding and self-awareness of the importance of communication ethics, and the ability to manage emotions in communication (Laksana & Nurhaliza, 2003, p.993, 994). Disagreements come from differences in perception; inaccuracy in conveying the message; emotions that affect the way of communicating; limitations in non-verbal communication (op. cit. 992).

Relational ontology of dialogic communication: agency, responsibility and vulnerability

Marten Juurik

In the discourse of ethics, one central notion is a **moral actor**. Arnett and his colleagues point out the importance of agency in dialogic ethics:

Dialogue is understood as the communicative exchange of embedded agents standing their own ground while being open to the other's standpoint, conceptualizing meaning that emerges in discourse situated between persons while engaging a common text in their communicative event. A dialogic ethic assumes an embedded communicative agent, recognizing that a human being lives within an ongoing conversation that began well before a specific interpersonal interaction begins."

(Arnett et al., 2006, 164)

Moral agency in the general philosophy is the fundamental competence to be human and to make moral choices. For example, a child with limited or no moral agency (e.g. a 2-year-old child) cannot be expected to understand the moral dimensions of their choices and thus be morally responsible for their actions. An adult capable of acting is presumed to have full moral agency, i.e. they can be held equally responsible for their choices. If agency is linked to responsibility, then adults would have equal agency and equal responsibility (being responsible for their own actions). Exceptions may be in power and dependency relationships (e.g. prisoners, soldiers), but in any such situation responsibility is also shared differently.

If moral agency is distinguished in terms of complementary competences, i.e. moral sensitivity, for example - then the agency of people could differ. But this reasoning creates a somewhat complex problem. For example, a person in a managerial position (high responsibility) may have quite limited moral competences and thus a more limited moral agency. If he makes bad choices, he could excuse himself for not understanding the moral aspect of his choices - and he would be right – but would that reduce his responsibility? Generally, ignorance or incompetence



does not absolve a person from responsibility, but in some situations the institution or the management may be responsible for ensuring that employees are instructed. Thus, if employees are not instructed in the use of particular tools or methods, they cannot be expected to know how to use them and not make mistakes. Perhaps something similar could be assumed about the principles of professional ethics - that if people have not been taught them, there is no reason to assume that they know how to follow or apply them. But to some extent this probably should not be the case, as it could lead to relativisation of responsibility because anyone could excuse their choices by saying that the moral implications were too complex for them to understand or notice.

However, *agency* cannot be reduced to competences only. Archer (1995) argues agency is partly expressed in the willingness to act or make decisions. At the same time, even a person with very good moral competences may not do anything and stay out of the way - neither acting to induce change nor actively maintaining the existing structure. An individual does



not use their agency, even though there is the potential to do so, which in turn raises several questions. Is agency some kind of quality that requires action, in that those who make choices and decisions are assigned agency? Or is agency a more passive quality, capability in general, in that people are assigned moral agency according to competencies (child, apprentice) and situation (limited freedoms) or role?

We propose to link **agency** to the five levels of communication ethics and highlight the differences concerning the various situations. It is also possible to look at agency in terms of roles - then this universal moral agency would only be related to the general role of being human, but based on the social or professional roles we could distinguish different degrees of agency.

For the DIACOMET approach it might be useful to ask questions that are important for the **multi-actor/agent** approach (Pruyt, 2010): Who is really concerned? Who will be participating and who will be represented? Who ought to be involved? The paired term “actors/agents” will be used to refer to all types of parties (citizens, journalist, and communication specialists, but also representatives of professions whose professional ethics already include normative approach to communication). However, “citizens” is too broad a category because lay people represent assorted perspectives and communicative goals (depending on interests, roles, backgrounds, position in society, different forms of participation in public communication, values, duties, etc.).

In daily communication situations people act in various roles and do not have identical information, and their experiences differ. It is also important to note that individuals have assumptions, and they sometimes draw conclusions about other’s activities that are based on limited information.

Agency, vulnerability and social context

The final step of moral decision-making is to act, which poses its own set of problems and questions. Is the individual in the position to change the social context or the communication “culture”? How could the action impact the individual? Is the individual vulnerable to undesired outcomes? The focus thus shifts on additional concepts related to the social conditions of communication.

We could begin by looking at the structural conditions (Archer, 2020) of the specific act to better understand the social context of communication and the role of the specific agent within that context. Based on the capacities and available resources an individual may be more or less likely to impact on the social *structure* and the *culture* around it. A person with good intentions, proper reasoning and motivated to do good might still fail to have any lasting impact on the context in which the good act was carried out. On the other hand, individuals with selfish motivation or imperfect moral reasoning might have a much lasting effect on the social context. The impact of a single act does not depend on the elements of moral behavior but rather depends on the elements related to *agency*. This also leads us to explore the concept of *vulnerability* understood as a specific type of structural condition that can either constrain or enable the agency of individuals. (Juurik, 2026)



Therefore, additional questions become relevant when framing moral behavior in social context. Who is in the best position to act? This is a question of agency: who has the necessary capacities, social position, authority and legitimacy to initiate social change. Who may face silencing, ignoring, or harm? This is a question of vulnerability, about asymmetric relations in terms of power or knowledge. How does the agency and vulnerability align with obligations or duties of the subject? This is a more general question of responsibility and fair distribution of obligations. These questions help us assess critically whether those who are held accountable are in a position to change how organizations or institutions work. Or on the other hand, do we hold accountable those who are actually in the position to do so?

For DIACOMET, it is useful to reflect on issues related to agency and vulnerability, when assigning accountability related obligations among relevant actors. It is important to avoid exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and assigning the burden of accountability unfairly to people that lack the necessary agency. It is equally important to try to identify those actors who actually are able to affect the social structure, who maintain the undesired practices or who could initiate a change for the better, if required. This is necessary to ensure that responsibilities are not assigned based only on formal criteria like position or role but take into consideration their actual capacity to bring about the desired structural elaboration.

Understanding the structural conditioning (that is the context) of moral actions is also useful to identify social and cultural aspects that could inhibit desirable behaviour. For instance, admitting mistakes in very competitive environment could be seen as a weakness to be exploited. It is not *only* a matter of moral decision making and having the necessary skills, but also a wider issue of cultural shift – if only one person in a hypercompetitive environment admits their mistakes, then it would only be to the detriment of that one person. Meanwhile, the general culture remains unchanged, and all other actors could continue denying any responsibility, even if they make mistakes. Demanding accountability only from that one honest individual is somewhat unfair, as all the other actors continue with their irresponsible practices without consequences. If we wanted to change the culture to be more responsible and less tolerant of irresponsible actions, we would have to identify those actors who work towards maintaining the current structure and limit their agency and identify those actors who can initiate change and empower them with necessary skills and resources.

The *mutuality* criteria of dialogic communication highlights yet another aspect of accountability, that giving account of one's actions and demanding explanations for actions of another, form a communicative whole. Even accountability mechanisms can be misused, if not properly balanced around the contextual factors affecting one's ability to explain one's action. For example, a professional with confidentiality obligations is an easy target for accusations of secrecy or lack of transparency. Yet such professionals rarely have means to protect themselves from such attacks and the reputational harm. Even rarer is their ability to redirect these accusations back at the accuser, to demand accountability for intentional attacks, misinformation and undermining trust in public institutions.

2. Competency dimension of DCE

Halliki Harro-Loit, Mari-Liisa Parder

DIACOMET development activities are underpinned by the theoretical model of ethical and dialogic communication competences. Diacomet uses the definition of competences suggested by Corten et al.2015, which is in line with the characteristics and definitions of the earlier studies (e.g., by Eraut, 1998; Mulder et al. 2009; Clarke et al. 2013): Competence is the personal capability to mobilise and use required knowledge, skills, motivation and values to accomplish a task in a specific context.” The definition suggests that competence is a distinct capability rather than a mere sum of underlying elements, that knowledge, skills, motivation, and values are independent attributes, and that competence is always linked to a task.

James Rest (1994) offers a simple and universal four components model to understand the fundamental parts of any moral or ethical behaviour. This model is also helpful when thinking about communication ethics training, as every training activity can target separate components and their aspects.

According to Rest (1994), the four **components of ethical behaviour are:**

1. **Moral Sensitivity:** this relates to recognition or identification of moral issues. A person may fail to act morally simply because that person did not realize the situation or choice had any moral implications.
2. **Moral Judgment:** this covers moral judgement and reasoning, when a person tries to assess the morality of potential choices or actions. A person may fail to do the right thing, if the reasoning is erroneous and the *goodness* of a given action is based on bad judgement.
3. **Moral Motivation:** this covers the motivational aspects of a person, for instance if they are motivated by simply ‘doing the right thing’ or expect something in return. A person may fail to act morally, if the morally right action comes with high personal costs.
4. **Moral Character:** this covers aspects of the person’s character, like courage or persistence, which are necessary to act upon the moral intent. Sometimes it is not enough to know what is right and to be motivated by doing what is right, especially if the right action leads to conflict or unpleasant consequences.:

The DCE model is an adapted version of the earlier ethical competence model (Sutrop et al 2025) developed by the University of Tartu, Centre for Ethics. DCE competence model is two-dimensional: ethical and communicative competence.

Ethical competences dimension embraces five kinds of abilities: (1) the ability to perceive a situation ethically, (2) the ability of ethical reasoning, (3) the ability to make ethical judgements, (4) the ability to make ethical decisions, and (5) the ability to act ethically (see Figure 3),

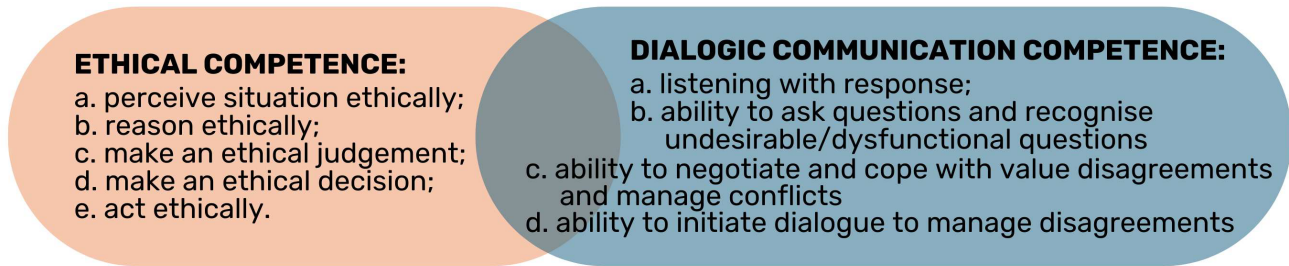


Figure 3. The competence model of DCE.

1. The ability to **perceive a situation ethically** means recognising and understanding the ethical dimensions in daily life and is widely viewed as the first step in the process models of moral behaviour (Jordan 2009) Here, two concepts are connected: ethical awareness (Katsarov et al 2023) and ethical sensitivity (Weaver 2007). There is a general lack of consistency of scholarship in defining these concepts, which sometimes are used as synonyms, or replaced by other terms (such as *sensibility*, *recognition*). In view of this question, we support the distinctions proposed by Reynolds and Miller (2015). They suggest that it is appropriate to speak of sensitivity when talking about a person's ability (trait) to recognise ethical aspects and of awareness when referring to the (temporary) mental state of a person who has determined that a single situation should be considered from an ethical perspective. While individuals' inherent ethical sensitivity may vary, it can be improved by practicing. The ability of ethical sensitivity and awareness aligns with the concept of moral imagination – the ability to see the moral consequences of actions and distinguish between emotional responses and objective appraisals (Clarkeburn, 2002).

Moral imagination allows individuals to put themselves in the shoes of others, including perceiving the situation from the third perspective, or through the eyes of an “impartial spectator, considering alternative perspectives and potential outcomes, which is crucial for ethical decision-making (Smith, A. 1759/1976; Werhane, 1999:67) proposes a concept of **moral imagination** “[t]he perspective of engaging critical perspective on oneself, one's activities, one's behaviour and one's situation – is development of moral imagination”, which is useful because she points out the importance of roles and role responsibilities (in professional ethics). Werhane also notes that one should be aware of the character, context, situation, event and possible moral conflicts or dilemmas that might arise in that situation. Is this moral conflict solvable, what are the possibilities that are not context driven? (Op. cit 121). For DIACOMET, **taking into consideration different perspectives and ability to regard situations from another point of view** (as well as individual, organizational and institutional) is important. As Werhane points out: “Moral imagination enables us to become aware of the moral demands of particular events and the conceptual schemes or mental models operating in specific contexts.” (p. 107)

2. The **ability of ethical reasoning** involves systematic analysis of ethical issues to determine justifiable actions and to balance principles and values. For this model, we

distinguish values and principles. Values describe what is important in a person's life and are usually abstract, while principles guide the actions (Chippendale, 2001). Prerequisites for ethical reasoning include knowledge of prevailing values and an ability to carry out analysis of the context, i.e. the ability to break ethical situations into key elements: main actors, (e.g. Weaver ja Mitcham 2016), (conflicting) values and loyalties (e.g., using Potter's Box framework (Swain, 1994). Training the ability to view an ethical situation/issue from multiple viewpoints and perspectives enhances the individuals' chances to make better-informed choices (Hall& Davis 2007). Knowledge about different ethical approaches and streams (e.g., teleological and deontological ethics, utilitarianism, ethical egoism) enables individuals to provide more profound model of reasons behind human behaviour

3. The ability to **make ethical judgements** combines moral awareness with critical reasoning to assess what is right, fair, or just a particular context. It requires evaluating actions against ethical principles, justifying choices, and being accountable for them. Shaped by cultural and social norms, this competence demands both Analytical clarity and a commitment to shared values. (Hall & Davis 2007).

4. The ability to carry out **ethical decision-making** involves selecting morally appropriate actions, integrating reasoning with practical implementation. The ability to make ethical decisions is fundamental to acting ethically (Spielthener, 2017)

5. The ability to **act ethically**. Moral action involves implementing ethical decisions and behaving in accordance with one's values and judgments, often in the face of obstacles. Acting ethically translates moral insights into behaviour, requiring integrity, empathy, and courage to prioritise ethical values over competing goals. Unlike moral reasoning and decision-making, moral behaviour is influenced by external factors, such as other actors, practices, and the context in which the moral agent operates. This ability cannot be developed using the proposed toolkit.

Dialogic communication competences dimension embraces (1) listening with response, (2) the ability to ask relevant questions and to recognise dysfunctional questions, (3) the skills to negotiate and cope with disagreements and manage conflicts, and (4) skills to maintain dialogue. Functional habits —such as active listening and empathy—foster positive outcomes like problem-solving and strong relationships. In contrast, dysfunctional habits, such as yelling, interrupting, and personal attacks, lead to negative consequences for individuals and relationships.

The competences of the dialogic communication dimension of the EDC competence model:

1. **Listening with response**. For the model we use the notion of active-empathic listening (AEL) that includes sensing, processing, and responding, proposed by Drollinger et al. and Gearhart and Bodie (2006). They demonstrated that AEL is empirically linked to general social skills, including interactional competencies such as emotional sensitivity. Democratic legitimacy requires that citizens listen to each other's deliberative contributions to give them fair consideration (Sodoma . & Sharp, 2025). Mary F. Scudder (2021) suggests a theoretically informed instrument with six levels for measuring and assessing listening in deliberation, of which for the training of listening four are relevant: the listener can recall what the speaker said, the listener responds verbally or non-



verbally, the listener's response is substantive and relevant, and the listenee's behaviour sparks speaker's satisfaction with the sincerity of listening.

2. **The ability to ask relevant questions** and to recognise dysfunctional ones.

As Jolly and Radcliffe (2001) note, questioning is a recursive and iterative process, refined through reflection and feedback. While questioning is highly contextual, it is also important to recognise unproductive or dysfunctional questions—those that may hinder learning or inquiry. Lesley S. Farmer (2007) identifies several types of such questions: those with no discernible answer (e.g., What is reality?), those beyond the cognitive grasp of learners (e.g., How do you build a nuclear space station?), those requiring inaccessible or irrelevant data (e.g., How many Peruvians have infected toenails?). Eljand-Kärp and Harro-Loit (2020) further emphasise that some questions may be too broad in scope, either temporally or thematically (e.g., Why did you become a teacher?), which can make them ineffective for guided inquiry. Listening-based questioning also includes rephrasing, asking about information gaps, and reflecting on underlying presumptions etc.(Harro-Loit &Ugur 2017).

3. The skills to negotiate and cope with disagreements and manage conflicts. Effective negotiation requires strong communication and active listening skills to understand others' needs, build trust, and manage complex interactions. Beyond theoretical knowledge, negotiators must practice applying interpersonal communication techniques (Escobar, 2011) dynamically in real-time, for example, through simulations or role-play. Equally important is emotional competence—the ability to regulate one's own emotions while recognising and responding to the cues of others (Babatunde, Haruna, & Omotayo, 2023). Such awareness helps negotiators remain composed, focused, and responsive to the core issues at hand.

4. Skills to maintain dialogue. Educational research frequently draws on the concept of dialogic education, which refers to engaging students and teachers in meaningful dialogue that fosters the expression of diverse perspectives and the collaborative development of ideas (Phillipson, & Wegerif, 2016). At its core, dialogic education emphasises interaction, mutual respect, and co-construction of knowledge. The dialogic approach to education is grounded in the principle of treating others as equals in communication (Bächtiger, Dryzek, Mansbridge, & Warren, 2018), listening with empathy, and engaging in mutual understanding (Lipari 2009). At its core, it values openness to learning from others (Arnett et al 2009), respect for difference, and reciprocal dialogue as the basis for co-constructing meaning. Dialogic ethics emphasises constant negotiation and exchange between individuals – seeing dialogue not as a means to consensus, but as an ongoing process of exploring values, perspectives, and tensions (Arnett et al 2010). Rather than one-way transmission, dialogue becomes the engine of communicative learning, particularly in ethically or emotionally complex human encounters. In this view, disagreement and uncertainty are not barriers but opportunities for transformative insight and attitudinal development. While the dialogic approach is well established in educational studies, its application in complex situations involving disagreement or value conflict requires particular attention. In such contexts, dialogic competence extends beyond skills – it is deeply tied to the formation of attitudes, such as openness, respect, and the willingness to engage across difference.

Ethical and dialogic communication competences are cross-cutting

3. Narrative-based tools and gamification

Tobias Pilv

The traditional way for teaching ethics, especially professional ethics has been **case-based and discussion-oriented activities** (e.g., Lind, 2015; Bebeau et al., 1995; Goodpaster, 2002; Pimple, 2007; Abma et al., 2009), however the assessment of the implications of these methods are extremely limited. One of the areas, where ethics didactics have been developed and assessed is research integrity, research ethics, and responsible conduct of research. Although DIACOMET project is not research integrity and ethics oriented, there are several learning points to include in the dialogic communication didactics.

Todd et al. (2017) identify four themes that are effective in delivering research ethics education: 1) active participation; 2) case-based activities; 3) combination of individual and group approaches, and 4) a small number of instructional methods. Less effective elements were also identified, and they included 1) passive learning; 2) group-based approach and 3) large number of instructional methods. Similarly, Tammeleht et al. (2019, 2020) indicate that these cases together with group work are an effective way of ethics learning. In addition, there has been noted a shift from “*education* – the transfer of knowledge about codes –

towards *training*: teaching skills” (Peuter & Conix, 2023¹³⁰) and case-based methodologies play a crucial role in this shift providing possibilities for deeper understanding (Todd et al., 2017).

Longer cases with moderate complexity support effectiveness (Watts, Mulheam et al., 2017¹³¹). They also found that activities that are frequent and spaced through time are more effective. Effective activities are debates, role-plays, computer simulations, and self-reflections (Watts, Mulheam et al, 2017: 635).

Bagdasarov et al. (2012¹³²) highlight that case content plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of ethical decision-making with explanations in the case about social context, specifically autonomy-supportive context being the important part. Bagdasarov et al. (2012) explain sensemaking being an important part for ethical decision making, meaning the cases help people to make sense of the situation, but for doing that the cases must be relevant and meaningful to the people. Sensemaking is one of the important functions of the cases (Mumford et al., 2008¹³³).

In addition, Thiel et al. (2011¹³⁴) highlight the emotional case content is more effective. Katsarov et al. (2021¹³⁵) emphasise in their meta-analysis of effectiveness of research integrity training that experimental learning approaches with emotional involvement by the participants were most effective. They also found that combining individual learning with group-based learning is more effective, however, they note that this result is tentative. Additionally, dealing with concrete cases was also more effective as well as working with learners from multiple domains. Repetition and practicing the skills did not influence the learning outcome.

„Dilemma game“ format.

According to our present knowledge, the first „dilemma games“ were created in the 1980s: a board game “A Question of Scruples” (1984) became the prototype for a care-ethics game in 1995; Citicorp developed “The Work Ethic” in 1989¹³⁶. The game was intended for use in large organizations, but also found use in university ethics courses. The aim of the game was to allow employees to practice ethical decision-making in a risk free and playful atmosphere. In 1992 Julianne Nelson¹³⁷ created “Market Ethics” that was inspired from “The Work Ethics”¹³⁸ – in this game the cases on business ethics included 3-4 possible solutions. Similar games have been used for various topics, including research integrity¹³⁹ and managed care ethics¹⁴⁰. sustainable development Dilemma games for professionals and assorted problems in moral thinking were later created.¹⁴¹

The main elements of the game are ethical cases provided as narratives and given solutions – none of which is ideal. Cases are based on real-life situations. The games are usually designed for use either in large groups, meetings or alone.

The Theoretical Background of the Game Elements Within "Dialogue Lab"

"Dialogue Lab" is a game meant for enjoyment as all games, to some extent, are. This means that "Dialogue Lab" as a game has a built-in design requirement that the game creators have had to consider -- namely, it being a fun and engaging experience for the player (Alexiou & Schippers, 2018). This needs to be kept in mind going forward, when discussing game design choices and the reasons behind them. What's more, "Dialogue Lab" is a serious game.

Serious games, along with having the objective of being engaging, also aspire to teach or inform the player about a topic that is seldom used as an object of a game (surgery simulations, language learning apps, drone/flight simulations, etc). "Dialogue Lab" for instance is a game about dialogic communication ethics. Contrary to regular games, serious games need to find a balance between being informative whilst staying immersive for the player (Alexiou & Schippers, 2018). This is reflected through the design choices for serious games.

While the theoretical background for dialogic communication ethics comes from journalism and media ethics, dialogic ethics, communication ethics and deliberative communication theory the *game* part of "Dialogue Lab" finds its basis in gamification theory. Gamification, although different from game creation is still relevant when analysing game elements (Deterding et al., 2011).

Gamification describes “*The use of game design elements in non-game contexts*” (Deterding et al., 2011). Gamification occurs when game elements are added to already existing things that don't have the primary function of being games (piano stairs, trivia sides like *Kahoot!*, spelling bee, choosing a person via rhyme or song). There is an ongoing debate whether serious-game creation falls under gamification (Deterding et al., 2011). We can, however, still view its design elements through the lens of gamification to better understand how gamifying instances of dialogic communication could be beneficial to societal relations and conflict resolution.

Dialogue

"Dialogue Lab", as the name might suggest, is centred around dialogue and more specifically dialogic communication ethics. This means that the main goal of "Dialogue Lab" is teaching the player to recognise ethical problems, train ethical imagination and ethical decision making in dialogic communication in an immersive way. In case of board game this is done through dialogue between players, a central element of the



game and the main objective of the players; there is no winning or losing in "Dialogue Lab". All other additions or exclusions of game elements are intentionally deployed to enhance the objective of dialogue. For example, there are no points or scoreboards so that competitiveness could be minimized (Aster et al., 2024). Instead "Dialogue Lab" focuses on cooperation between players.

Cooperation

Cooperation is necessary to increase openness and communication as well as, to enhance collaborative conflict resolution (Aster et al., 2024). The game is designed to create deep discussions on ethical decision-making in dialogic situations leading to a mutually agreed outcome. Moreover, the game lets players train their active listening and reasoning skills by giving them the chance to 'state their case'. This means that 1) players individually choose their preferred answers, 2) which they have to explain 3) thus setting ground for a discussion 4) that will lead to a group decision. This is the mechanical structure of the game that, once repeated, becomes learnable and applicable to real world scenarios.

Cooperation is also promoted by the in-game content. Here we find different game elements most of which can be categorized under the broad term of narrative: storyline, themes, connection to real life, avatars/characters and feedback. These narrative tropes are widely used in serious games according to Alexiou & Schippers (2018) and Aster et al. (2024). Most of the game elements for "Dialogue Lab" come from the narrative category.

Storyline

"Dialogue Lab" is built around storylines, which in this case are gamified instances of a conflict from real-world examples in a text-based narrative form. The original real-world examples are a collection of dialogic communication conflicts that were gathered from focus groups in different countries. Reading through these conflicts and discussing them among other players builds the ability to notice future similar conflicts more easily when applying it outside the game (Aster et al., 2024). This is one of the main skills "Dialogue Lab" teaches to the player which, in theory could increase social group cohesion.

Although, to find the balance between teaching and gaming, each story has gone through several stages of development and trialling. In many cases, stories in "Dialogue Lab" have been modified to fit different requirements, like adding or excluding details/information, simplifying problems, checking for coherency, etc. This is because, feedback from testing has shown that certain parameters (length of task, understandability, clarity, difficulty, etc.) have an impact on the immersiveness of the game. Thus, game designers of "Dialogue Lab" have modified every story to be easily readable and engaging whilst staying informative.

However, what is special about the game of "Dialogue Lab" is that it's built on a storytelling tactic where one story gets told two times through different perspectives. This form of dual-perspective change storytelling is beneficial for several reasons. First, it allows players to see both sides of a conflict and get more information about a given situation (Katsarov et al., 2017). Second, it intentionally creates an environment where a player 'puts themselves into the shoes of another' which trains empathy. Third, it allows for a more nuanced problem that in turn creates grounds for discussion. There are 39 dual-perspective stories (78 individual cases) that are categorised into 5 themes.

Theme

Themes are useful tools for categorisation that help players navigate the game layout as well as increase player engagement. Themes (categories & individual story titles) act as hints to what should be expected from a given game section which, according to Self Determination Theory (SDT) helps satisfy the players' psychological



need for competence (Aster et al., 2024). Players feel more competent upon task completion which is supported when receiving hints.

The themed categories of "Dialogue Lab" are: 0) introduction, 1) journalism and communication experts, 2) Organisation representatives, 3) Higher educational setting, and 4) Schools. Every category has nine stories apart from 0) introduction which has three stories taken from fairytales. The stories follow the general theme of their respective category. The themes were chosen as representations of the environments where dialogic communication is essential.

Furthermore, in these four environments power/authority differences exist between different actors (journalist vs publisher, manager vs employee, student vs teacher, etc.) that adds to the nuance of the problems. The players learn to notice these power relations and consider potential implications, which in turn helps foster player autonomy.

Autonomy, according to SDT is a psychological need just like competence and likewise boosts intrinsic motivation in players by letting the player feel in control of their actions. Other autonomy promoting design choices in "Dialogue Lab" are 1) the lack of time limit -- players can decide themselves when they want to move forward, 2) multiple answer choices -- players pick a preferred choice, 3) chance to explain the chosen answers, 4) option to disagree -- players can put forward counter-arguments and likewise disagree in final group-decisions (Gray avatar colour-tile), 5) individual/cooperative character creation.

Characters / Avatars

Character creation or avatar building in "Dialogue Lab" is another big feature that encompasses most of the playful aspects of the game. Players build their individual avatars as well as a group avatar that results from group dialogue. One avatar consists of 6 pieces. There are 5 different avatars, each in their own colour that align with the 5 distinct answers players can choose from in the decision part of the game. Likewise, each answer is generated from a set of 5 ethical worldviews, meaning that each ethical worldview has a colour: 1) dark-pink - deontology, 2) yellow - utilitarianism, 3) blue - ethical egoism, 4) green - care ethics (protecting relations), 5) purple - care ethics (protecting the weak).

When players are building their individual avatars from their original choices, they are exercising autonomy (Aster et al., 2024). They choose what worldview is most appropriate for them in each conflict. Furthermore, the choice is usually thought through as the player later explains their decision to the group. Both the original decision as well as the explanation that follows are autonomous. The coloured avatar piece that gets added reflects the decision made. While the decision is an exercise in autonomy the visual representation builds on SDT-s third and final psychological need for relatedness.

A completed avatar shows how a person tends to react in a dialogic communication conflict scenario, which is useful information for oneself and for others. Furthermore, with every game iteration the player adds to their previous answer making the percentile ratios of chosen ethical worldviews in relation to each order more accurate and thus, more relatable. The board game version of "Dialogue Lab" is limited in this regard because pieces cannot be added to the avatar after a game (6 rounds) is completed (not enough pieces exist -- physical boundary). The online version, however, allows for the results of a previous game to be carried over, so that the player might improve the accuracy of the colour percentile ratios. More accurate results combined with colour pairings sets grounds for introspection that helps players relate to each other more effectively. The need for relatedness is further exploited in the group-avatar building stage.

During the group-avatar building stage a 6th colour is added: grey - no consensus. When players have reached a consensus on what single answer/colour best fits the desired outcome a correlating avatar piece is added

to the rest. Since individuals naturally want to relate with the group (Aster et al., 2024) they are more inclined to calmly present their explanations and listen to others so that consensus might be reached.

However, this does not mean that not reaching a unanimous decision (grey avatar piece) is an inferior outcome. On the contrary, people often hold differing opinions which fuels autonomy when expressed. Likewise, ethical dilemmas are often very nuanced which leaves room for differing interpretations that leads to deeper discussions. After all, that is the main objective of the game. Whether or not the group agrees is secondary; what's important is the dialogue from which a decision is made. In other words, there are no wrong choices in the deciding of an answer. This leads us to the final narrative-based game design element.

Feedback

Since communication ethics is one of the cornerstones of "Dialogue Lab" game designers have put much emphasis on how player interact and respond to each other. Through communication ethic the DIACOMET team has developed a set of principles that should govern proper dialogic communication which are: equality, openness, inclusion, recognition, human dignity, autonomy, freedom, safety, truth, trust, and access. All of these should be present in the feedback between players.

First and foremost, all players should have an equal opportunity to express their feedback openly without risking exclusion from other players. This is reflected in the rules which forbids interrupting. For this the players need to recognise the human dignity, autonomy, and freedom of others while responding truthfully and without aggression so that others might feel safe. This means responding in a well-mannered inquisitory (not accusatory) way without using conversational tactics to mislead or manipulate. Finally, trust is formed when interlocutors have access to each other's reasoning -- players should have explanations for their statements. This encompasses feedback between players in the discussion part of the game. However, the game itself gives feedback as well.

After finishing the game, players can find informative descriptions of the ethical worldviews at the back of the game manual which the answers are based on. Furthermore, the descriptions share insight into how these ethical types tend to answer as well as what drives those decisions. Likewise, there is a section about the meaning of different colour combinations, and what they might say about the player/group. It must be kept in mind, however, that these descriptions are generalisations and do not describe the person in any accurately measurable way. The game's feedback is meant more as a guideline for introspection and later discussions.

4. Principles. Transformation of theories and concepts into the values, domains and principles of dialogic communication ethics

Halliki Harro-Loit , Epp Lauk

What are the principles for what are they useful for?

Professional codes of ethics which usually include and use the principles are described as living documents, therefore revisions and updating of professional codes of ethics as a response to new ethical issues is a natural process and recently developed areas of practice (Pettifor et al., 2005). It is perfect if ongoing dialogues on DCE shape the principles.



Principles have various logical structures. Some are unconditional/categorical norms (e.g., do not kill), but the type of but most of them are conditional norms (if a condition of the application of the norm is satisfied, something may or may not be done). Principles also include normative status - obligations (must); permission (may) or prohibition (may not) which have content: a conjunctive or disjunctive action. Principles often require a great deal of interpretation before they can help to provide a resolution of ethical issues. (Spielthener, 2017, pp. 278-279). Principles also include the determination of the actors, their responsibilities and in some cases the relations between various actors (Harro-Loit, 2016).

Principles can be applied to cases in a meaningful way but require detailed understanding of the principle to be applied, fairly extensive factual research, and correct reasoning in the application of the principle. (Spielthener, 2017, pp. 278-280) “It is generally agreed that the application of ethical principles is one important strategy that we commonly use in order to arrive at justified ethical decisions ... The principle-based method ... provides resolutions of ethical issues that are logically related to principles ... are therefore not merely based on vague gut feelings or inexplicable moral convictions.” (Spielthener, 2017, p. 276)

The basic values and principles provide a framework for ethical thinking in DCE. Ethical values are typically general and abstract, yet they serve as pillars for considering what kinds of communication we desire or wish to avoid. In the introduction to Deliverable 1.3, the concept of DCE was introduced, and its core values were identified across various theoretical approaches.

The DCE framework is grounded in three interrelated **value categories**: moral values, instrumental (relational) values, and negative (anti-dialogic) values

1. Moral values (normative foundations): truth, human dignity, equality, freedom (of expression), security, autonomy, privacy, inclusion
2. Instrumental / relational values (dialogue-enabling practices): *mutual respect, listening, inclusion, informational self-determination, openness (to differences and learning); equal access to reliable information; attentiveness; transparency, absence of coercive power*
3. Negative values (anti-dialogic communication), Serve as analytical counterpoints, helping to identify and prevent communication practices that weaken dialogue.

These values represent forms of communication that undermine or disrupt dialogue: exclusion, disrespect, manipulation / misinformation misuse of power etc.

Instrumental values refer to actions and are therefore more readily understood as **principles or guides for behavior**. For example, „human dignity“ and „mutual respect“ are closely related ethical values, but they operate at different levels. **Human dignity** refers to the inherent, universal, and unconditional worth of every person; it exists independently of others' actions and serves as a moral foundation for ethical behavior. **Mutual respect**, by contrast, is relational and reciprocal—it emerges in how people interact and communicate with one another. While dignity applies to all individuals at all times, respect is expressed through specific behaviors, such as listening, acknowledging different perspectives, and engaging fairly in dialogue. Despite these differences, the two values are closely connected: mutual respect is a practical way of recognizing and upholding human dignity in everyday interactions. Together, they provide both a guiding principle and its enactment in ethical communication.

The absence of coercive power (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Nord & Harro-Loit, 2024, pp. 14–15) in communicative interactions refers to conditions in which every participant feels free to express their views and opinions without fear of sanctions or being forced into specific choices. While deliberative communication theory envisions a communication space completely free of power imbalances, this is an ideal that rarely exists in reality. Nonetheless, meaningful and equal dialogue can only occur when those with greater power actively enable and support those with less power to participate freely.



By combining the values of absence of coercive power, freedom of speech, and safety, it becomes possible to derive behavioral guidelines that foster honest dialogue without fear of negative consequences. As a principle, this emphasizes the responsibility of individuals with greater power to consider and act in ways that empower those with less power.

In addition, like deliberative communication, dialogic communication also requires reasoning-based and truthful arguments, as well as participants' equal access to information. The concepts of misinformation and disinformation enable us to formulate principles that provide guidance on fact-checking, critical evaluation of sources, and source transparency.

Thus, abstract values, together with instrumental values, **require concepts for their interpretation**. Concepts—such as the public interest or “cancel culture”—are typically associated, either in public discourse or in professional contexts, with practices and/or cases in which different values intersect and must be weighed against one another: that is, determining which value is more important than another in a specific context.

The importance of concepts in shaping principles is clearly evident in analyses of various codes of ethics. For example, journalistic codes of ethics are grounded in concepts such as the public interest, freedom of journalistic expression, journalistic autonomy, and the protection of sources. Journalistic autonomy is a value, but as a concept it also encompasses the mechanisms that place pressure on journalists (e.g., self-censorship, political pressure, ownership control, and constraints arising from employment contracts, as well as role conflicts). Similarly, the concept of freedom of journalistic expression distinguishes between the freedom of speech of citizens, journalists, and news media as institutions.

In order to “translate” the normative discourses of communication ethics, dialogism, deliberative communication, interpersonal communication, and media and journalism ethics into principles, we took the aforementioned values as a basis, grouped them into interrelated “clusters,” and analyzed how the normative discourses of different forms of communication relate to these clusters (see subsection “Principles”).

Initial clusters of normative discourses of communication ethics

Truthfulness and Honesty: At the core of communication ethics is the principle of truth-telling (e.g. Jacquette, 2007). This involves providing accurate information and being honest in communication. Misrepresentation or deception undermines trust and can lead to harmful consequences. This principle emphasizes the importance of providing accurate information and avoiding the spread of misinformation. Communicators must ensure that the content they share is reliable and fact-checked (Brannigan, 2012; Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004). Honesty is a central concept in interpersonal communication ethics. Across relational contexts, at least two aspects of human communication are relevant to honesty: the content dimension, which references factual information carried by a message; and the relationship dimension, which provides the implied stance or attitude toward the other and/or the relationship (Friz 2020).

Balance, impartiality (objectivity)+ truth. Three cornerstones of ethical journalism are balance, impartiality, and fairness ... the journalist must guard against *false balance* or *false equivalence*, when in the quest to appear balanced, equal weight is given to valid arguments and discredited ones (Wishart, 2024). Journalists are encouraged to provide context, verify facts, and avoid sensationalism that can lead to misinterpretation.

Principle of Source Verification: This principle emphasizes the importance of verifying the credibility and reliability of sources before disseminating information. Communicators are responsible for ensuring

that their sources are accurate and trustworthy, which helps to prevent the spread of misinformation (Plaisance, 2014; Eberwein, 2021).

Principle of Informed Consent: This principle requires that individuals understand and agree to the use of their information or stories in communication. Informed consent ensures that participants are aware of how their contributions will be used, thus respecting their autonomy and privacy. This includes respecting confidentiality agreements and ensuring that sources are not harmed by the information they provide (Duncan, 2023; Gillespie, 2021).

Principle of Attribution: Properly attributing sources is critical in communication ethics. This principle requires that communicators give credit to the original sources of information, which not only enhances transparency but also maintains the integrity of the communication process (Christians, 2019; Harcup, 2021).

Principle of Ethical Sourcing: Ethical sourcing involves obtaining information from sources in a manner that respects their rights and dignity. This principle encourages communicators to consider the ethical implications of their sourcing practices, particularly when dealing with vulnerable populations (Aznar & Castillo-Martín, 2018; Tompkins, 2015).

Principle of Contextualization: This principle highlights the necessity of providing context when presenting information from sources. It ensures that the audience understands the background and significance of the information, which aids in informed decision-making (Wasserman, 2015; Fourie, 2021).

Respect for Persons or principle of respect: This principle emphasizes the inherent dignity and worth of individuals. It involves treating others with respect, recognizing their rights, and valuing their perspectives. This is crucial in fostering mutual understanding and dialogue (Wasserman, 2015; Tompkins, 2015). The principle is also related to the concept of reputation: „ ...whenever a person's behaviors conform to moral norms, he will gain a good reputation from society and others that greatly promotes his interests and will satisfy his very strong sense of reputation, giving him great pleasure, which will effectively make him conform to morality much better. Conversely, if his behaviors violate moral norms, he will get a bad reputation from society and others, and will suffer humiliations and public condemnations, which will greatly work against his interests, and will make his sense for the pursuit of reputation dissatisfied.“ (Haiming, 2020)

Fairness and Justice: Ethical communication requires fairness in representing different viewpoints and ensuring that marginalized voices are heard. This principle promotes equity in communication processes and addresses power imbalances (Lambeth, 1989; Plaisance, 2014).

Confidentiality and Privacy: Respecting the privacy of individuals and maintaining confidentiality is fundamental in ethical communication. This is particularly relevant in journalism and media, where trust is essential for effective reporting (Gillespie, 2021; Eberwein, 2021).

Transparency: Being open about methods, sources, and potential biases is crucial for ethical communication. Transparency helps build credibility and trust between communicators and their audiences (Christians, 2019; Harcup, 2021). Transparency as a concept is appealing as it builds on the

conceptual metaphor of ‘understanding is seeing’. However, transparency is more complex. It covertly oscillates between practices that reveal governance as it is to the governed (hostility towards representation; ‘iconoclasm’), and practices that create appearances of governance (reliance on representation; ‘iconophily’) (e.g. Koivisto, 2022). Transparency and access to information are closely related concepts in communication ethics. Transparency refers to the openness and clarity with which information is shared, while access to information pertains to the availability of that information to the public. When organizations prioritize transparency, they actively ensure that relevant information is accessible to their audience, thus empowering individuals to make informed decisions. Conversely, limited access to information can hinder transparency, leading to mistrust and skepticism among audiences.

Engagement and Listening: Effective communication is not just about speaking but also involves listening and engaging with others. This principle highlights the importance of empathy and understanding in fostering constructive dialogue (Arnett et al., 2010; Miike, 2021).

Social Responsibility: Communicators are urged to consider their role in promoting the public good and contributing to a just society. This principle extends to media organizations and their impact on public discourse (Caldwell, 2014; Duncan, 2023).

Duty of Care and Minimising Harm. It is the journalist’s responsibility to decide on the wisdom of interviewing someone in a public place in a sensitive country. Journalists should be polite and express condolences, while being careful in their choice of words and attempts to empathise (Wishart, 2024, ch 7)

Principle of Sensitivity to Vulnerability: This principle emphasizes the need for communicators to be aware of and sensitive to individuals and groups that are vulnerable due to factors such as socioeconomic status, health conditions, or social marginalization. Ethical communication should prioritize the dignity and respect of these individuals, ensuring that their voices are heard without exploitation (Aznar & Castillo-Martín, 2018; Duncan, 2023). Vulnerable topics may be related to children, migrants, sexual orientation, race, religion, ethnicity, disability and mental health.

A special discourse of communication ethich is related to speak about crime and criminals: Crime coverage practices serve as a lens to consider underlying cultural attitudes to concepts like privacy, public, public right to know, and justice. (Fullerton and Patterson 2020). **In Nordic countries there seem to be following principles:** (1) protecting the defendants’ families—especially if they have children; (2) respecting the right to the presumption of innocence; and (3) avoiding dissemination of information that could damage the defendant’s reputation and/or chance for reintegration (op. cit)

Principle of Compassionate Communication: When addressing sensitive issues, especially those related to trauma, grief, or suffering, communicators are encouraged to engage in compassionate communication. This involves expressing empathy and understanding, allowing for a respectful dialogue that acknowledges the emotional weight of the topic (Wasserman, 2015; Jackie Newton & Duncan, 2021).

Principle of Ethical Reporting on Death and Trauma: Journalists and communicators must adhere to guidelines that ensure the respectful reporting of death and traumatic events. This includes obtaining



consent from affected parties, being mindful of the impact of their reporting, and avoiding sensationalism. The focus should be on honoring the deceased and providing support to those affected (Duncan, 2023; Eberwein, 2021).

Principle of Opposing Hate Speech: Ethical communication must actively oppose hate speech and discrimination. This principle calls for communicators to challenge narratives that promote hatred or violence against individuals or groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or religion. It advocates for inclusive language and the promotion of understanding and respect among diverse communities (Gillespie, 2021; Tompkins, 2015).

Principle of Transparency in Communication on Sensitive Issues: When discussing sensitive topics, communicators should maintain transparency about their motivations and the sources of their information. This helps to build trust with the audience, especially when handling delicate subjects such as mental health, addiction, or societal issues (Harcup, 2021; Fourie, 2021).

Hate speech, also called bias-based speech, is a type of discriminatory harassment that can occur as verbal or written slurs, stereotypes, or images involving any protected characteristic. Bullying and harassment can have significant negative physical, psychological, and academic consequences on those who are bullied, those who bully others, and those who witness bullying. (Hate Speech and Bullying. Fact Sheet. [S. l.: s. n.]. Disponível em: <https://research-ebSCO-com.ezproxy.utlib.ut.ee/linkprocessor/plink?id=3d82bc31-eb18-37a4-8c0a-fff60534b050>.)

Freedom of speech Freedom of speech touches on every aspect of our social and political system and receives explicit and implicit protection in every modern democratic constitution. (Stone and Schauer, 2021). Freedom of speech is closely related to the autonomy of individual listeners and speakers. It is plausible to think that the state should respect, protect, and promote the autonomy of everyone—speakers, listeners, thinkers, bystanders, and members of the public at large. Enhancing the autonomy of some might, require restricting the speech of others. (e.g. Mackenzie and Meyerson, 2021). Freedom of speech is also related to human dignity. The hardest cases of conflict between freedom of speech and dignity are probably hate speech and pornographic expression. (Grimm, 2021)

Privacy. Distinction between the private and the public is especially unhelpful in the digital age, when the paradigms of the private sphere are collapsing into the public sphere. How to protect privacy in the twenty-first century: data minimization, setting limits on the storage of personal data, and banning the trade in personal data? (Véliz 2024). What people do and wish to do with technologies? With data ethics seen as less a matter of the right to be alone than interest in the terms of connectivity with systems and organisations, there is certainly a controversy (McStay 2023, ch 4). Privacy includes the concept of the „Right to be forgotten“ or „Right to Erasure“. The right to erasure/right to be forgotten (RTE/RTBF) has been expansively interpreted in recent years from a tool to counteract search engines' indelible digital memory to an instrument to reshape the ways in which the past is reflected in online press archives. (Katsirea, 2024, ch 4)

Anonymity. The anonymity people may assume *online* raise new and complex ethical questions; the dangers of deception and manipulation. The perceived anonymity we seem to enjoy online can spawn abusive communication, including racism, sexism, and other related forms of bigoted communication.



(Neher, 2023 chapter in: Communicating Ethically: Character, Duties, Consequences, and Relationships (4th ed.))

Whistleblowing. Whistleblowing can be morally justified - the possibility of unauthorized disclosures provides the most effective and credible guarantee that those who have the formal authority over state secrecy cannot systematically use it to their own advantage. However, it also highlights the fact that officials can—and do—make anonymous disclosures of classified information to advance narrow or partisan agendas by revealing classified information that casts their actions. Can there ever be a duty to #“low the whistle“? in public interest? (e.g. Sagar, 2017, Boot 2019). The concept is also related to loyalty issues - how one determines what loyalties should be judged as good and what loyalties should be judged as bad (e.g. Foust 2012)

Basic Principles and Values of Dialogic Communication Ethics. - Dialogic communication is directly opposite from monologic policies, or policies where an organization simply uses a digital space to direct messages outward from the organization to target audiences. (Novak, Sebastiona, 2018)

Dialogic Communication and power relations. Dialogic communication emphasizes the importance of open and equitable exchanges between participants. However, it is essential to recognize that coercive power relations can significantly affect the dynamics of dialogue. These power imbalances can manifest in various forms, including social, economic, or institutional pressures that influence who gets to speak, whose voices are prioritized, and how messages are received (Wasserman, 2015; Harcup, 2021)

Mutual Respect: Dialogic communication ethics emphasizes the importance of treating all participants with respect. This principle fosters an environment where individuals feel valued and are more likely to engage openly and honestly (Arnett et al., 2010; Christians, 2019).

Active Listening: Active listening is crucial in dialogic communication. This means not only hearing what others say but also seeking to understand their perspectives and experiences. It requires patience and an openness to learn from others. (e.g. Liapri 2006, Wasserman, 2015; Miike, 2021).

Inclusivity: Dialogic communication ethics advocates for the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives in discussions. This principle recognizes the value of differing viewpoints in enriching dialogue and fostering understanding among participants (Fourie, 2021; Aznar & Castillo-Martín, 2018).

Transparency: Being transparent about one’s intentions, beliefs, and the context of the dialogue is essential. This principle builds trust among participants and encourages honest exchanges (Harcup, 2021; Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004).

Responsibility for Outcomes: Participants in dialogue are responsible for the outcomes of their communication. This includes being mindful of how messages may affect others and the broader community, promoting accountability in interactions (Duncan, 2023; Plaisance, 2014).

Empathy and Compassion: Dialogic communication emphasizes the need for empathy, where participants strive to understand each other's feelings and experiences. This value fosters deeper connections and enhances the quality of dialogue (Wasserman, 2015; Arnett et al., 2010).



Constructive Engagement: The principle of constructive engagement encourages participants to approach dialogue with the aim of resolving conflicts and finding common ground, rather than simply to win an argument (Eberwein, 2021; Tompkins, 2015). Listening as an ethical position requires a fundamental revision of the relationship *between journalists and their publics*, one in which power relations are radically revised or overturned (Wasserman, 2020)

Equal access to information and discussions.

Specifically: actors, agents and power relations and equality (this needs a special attention as this X -dimension of the previously mentioned discourses of principles) (e.g. Mumby , 2010 – in the Handbook of Communication Ethics)

Specific issues in workplace communication ethics: „Typical problem areas in workplace communication include harassment of co-workers or subordinates, lying to cover up mistakes, lying to or misleading a superior or subordinate about the status of a project, taking credit for another individual's work, and falsifying expense reports, time sheets, or other financial documents.“ (Bobbitt, 2020, ch 11)

Specific issues concerning communication ethics concerning advertising, marketing, promotion, publicity, propaganda, and other terms dealing with persuasion. (e.g. Barney, 2001, a special double issue of Journal of Mass Media Ethics). The TARES Test consists of five principles: Truthfulness (of the message), Authenticity (of the persuader), Respect (for the persuadee), Equity (of the persuasive appeal) and Social Responsibility (for the common good). (Baker, Martinson, 2001 - The TARES Test: Five Principles for Ethical Persuasion; Ethics and Professional Persuasion , A Special Double Issue of the journal of Mass Media Ethics)

Specific concerning feedback and feedforward as dialogic communication (Harro-Loit, 2019).

Ethics in Interpersonal Communication: Foundation is dialogical ethics. „Typically, interpersonal communication refers to interactions that are face to face, involving just two people (dyadic), and within an ongoing relationship. The widespread reliance on social media, however, modifies this view. Many people who grew up with the many forms of mediated communication have difficulty seeing face-to-face communication as any different from mediated communication on social media platforms“ (Neher, 2023).

5. Q sorting results

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For the Q-sorting results we constructed 32 statements. The statements represent various normative discourses (named in brackets) that are related with academic literature as well as the topics that have been discussed in media.

- 1.It is important that my colleagues and leaders listen to me (listening, inclusion)
- 2.If you keep listening to everyone all the time, no sensible decision can be reached (inclusion, com. efficiency)
- 3.When making quick decisions, even limited information at hand should suffice. (com efficiency, information quality)
4. Giving vague answers to specific questions amounts to lying. (truthtelling)
- 5.You can lie if the truth hurts. (truthtelling)
- 5.It is necessary to argue until a compromise or the truth is found.(truthtelling, negotiation, efficiency)
- 7.Sharp disputes need to be avoided to maintain good relationships. (negotiation, diversity, relations, free speech)
- 8.Criticism of someone can be expressed anonymously.(free speech, transparency, critical opinion)
- 9.An organisation may prohibit its employees from speaking openly about the organisation's problems to protect its reputation (reputation, ctirical and free speech, security, autonomy)
- 10.I take criticism of myself as a learning opportunity and not as offense. (critical speech, feedback)
11. It is right to express your opinion honestly and frankly, even if it offends the feelings of an individual or a group.(freedom of sepeech, human dignity, defamation)
- 12.You must not publicly abuse someone, even if you are very angry. (defamation, free speech)
- 13.People have the right to express unpopular and controversial views in public, for example that they do not like Middle Eastern refugees or Ukrainians. (freedom of speech, huma dignity, mutual respect)
- 14.Racist and homophobic public statements must be unequivocally condemned. (hate speech, freedom of speech)
- 15.Hate speech does not bother me, there is no point in making an issue out of it.(hate speech, freedom of speech)
- 16.I can express critical opinions in my workplace/school without fear of consequences. (free speech, organizational com.)
- 17.It's important colleagues talk to me directly at work/school, not behind my back. (inclusion, autonomy, feedback, openness to criticism)
- 18.I want to have a say in matters that concern me at work/school/community. (Inclusion, equal access to information, participation)
- 19.The State has the right to collect and process information about everyone.(state, security, data collection norms)
- 20.I must have right to decide what information companies/organizations can collect about me. (Informational self-determination)
- 21.I don't mind if someone shares information about me on social media.(informational self-determination, autonomy, privacy)
- 22.It is my policy not to publicly share information about my private life and family. (Privacy)
- 23.It is not acceptable to talk about people's sexual life and preferences in public.(privacy)
- 24.Manipulation in politics is inevitable, and politicians should not be blamed for it. (Manipulation, misinformation)
- 25.Populism is inevitable, it is everyone's own responsibility what they believe. (manipulation, populism)
- 26.On the grounds of confidentiality or business secrets, officials are also allowed to withhold public information. (confidential information, transparency)
- 27.Children's access to social media should be more restricted to better protect them. (children, vulnerability, autonomy)



28. All racist and derogatory language should be removed from old children's books.
(censorship, vulnerability, children)
29. Children should not be told about war and other atrocities. (censorship, vulnerability, children)
30. In times of war, the horrors and violence of war (corpses, torture, etc.) must be shown in the media.
(violence in media, freedom of information)
31. The voice of all minorities must be represented in the media. (representation of minorities)
32. I will intervene when I see someone being insulted. (intervention, insult, human dignity)

Sample and methodology of analysis

Q-sorting was conducted using the web-based software Q-Software, developed by Alessio Pruneddu. The software was selected due to its accessibility as an online platform, its open availability, and the absence of restrictions regarding the number of participants or Q-set size. In addition, Q-Software enabled straightforward data export in formats compatible with subsequent analysis in specialised Q-method software.

Data analysis was conducted using Ken-Q Analysis software (Banasick, 2023). The Q-set consisted of 32 statements. Participants were instructed to rank the statements using a forced quasi-normal distribution ranging from -3 (most disagree) to $+3$ (most agree). The distribution grid allowed three statements at each extreme position (-3 and $+3$), four at the ± 2 positions, five at the ± 1 positions, and eight in the neutral category (0). This forced distribution enabled the examination of participants' relative prioritisation of the statements within the Q-set. In total, 145 Q-sorts were collected. Following the classical Brownian tradition in Q methodology (Brown, 1980), centroid factor extraction was employed, as it allows for theoretically informed and interpretative engagement with emergent viewpoints. In line with the epistemological foundations of Q methodology, the aim of factor extraction was not the optimisation of explained variance, but the identification of coherent configurations of subjective meaning.

As an exploratory step, eight factors were initially extracted. The first factor had an eigenvalue of 46.8 and accounted for 32% of the explained variance, indicating the presence of a strongly dominant discourse among participants. Subsequent factors were considerably smaller in both eigenvalues and explained variance.

Factors six to eight were not retained for rotation, as they were defined by only a small number of Q-sorts and did not yield substantively distinct or interpretable viewpoints.

To achieve a simple factor structure and enhance interpretative clarity, only Q-sorts with statistically significant and unambiguous loadings were retained as factor-defining. Sorts that, despite being automatically flagged, also showed secondary loadings above .30 on other factors were treated as confounded and excluded from factor interpretation.

Of the 145 Q-sorts included in the analysis, 105 were retained as defining sorts in the final five-factor solution. The solution was characterised by one highly dominant factor ($F1 = 60$ defining sorts) alongside several smaller but clearly interpretable factors ($n = 9-14$), suggesting a hierarchical yet plural configuration of viewpoints.

Factor retention decisions were guided not only by statistical criteria but also by theoretical and interpretative considerations, consistent with the abductive logic of Q methodology. Although the fifth factor showed moderate correlations with other factors and accounted for a smaller proportion of variance, it was retained due to its clear interpretative coherence and its representation of a substantively meaningful configuration of viewpoints within the dataset.

The fourth factor demonstrated a comparatively higher correlation with the dominant first factor, indicating partial overlap in shared viewpoints while still constituting a distinct configuration of meaning.

Table 1. The number of respondents (N 145) across the countries

	Number of respondents	Faktor1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Slovenia	9	4	4	1	0	0
Estonia	40	6	3	6	11	15
Switzerland	7	5	1	0	1	0
Finland	16	3	1	2	4	6
Lithuania	17	9	0	2	3	3
Hungary	31	23	2	0	2	4
Austria	25	15	5	4	0	0

Table 2. Percentage of the respondents : how respondents from different countries were delivered across Factro groups

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Slovenia	44,4	44,4	11,1	0	0
Estonia	15,0	7,5	15,0	27,5	35,0
Switzerland	71,4	14,3	0	14,3	0
Finland	18,8	6,3	12,5	25,0	37,5
Lithuania	52,9	0	11,8	17,6	17,6
Hungary	74,2	6,5	0	6,5	12,9
Austria	60,0	20,0	16,0	0	0



The Q-sorting analysis provides a nuanced picture of how participants evaluate principles related to dialogic communication ethics (DCE), revealing both strong areas of agreement and clear points of tension. Overall, the findings suggest that while participants share a common ethical foundation, disagreements emerge when these values are applied in more complex or politically sensitive contexts.

At the most general level, there is **strong consensus around the relational core of dialogic communication**. The most widely supported statement is *“It is important that my colleagues and leaders listen to me”* (consensus index 1.54), with consistently high Z-scores across all factors (F1: 0.92; F2: 1.96; F3: 1.50; F4: 1.99; F5: 1.56), indicating broad and stable agreement. Similarly, *“I want a say in matters that concern me”* (index 0.86) is positively valued across all perspectives (Z-scores range from 1.08 to 1.61). Statements emphasizing direct and transparent interaction—such as *“Colleagues should talk to me directly, not behind my back”* (index 1.74)—also receive strong support.

Respectful interaction emerges as another key area of consensus. The statement *“One must not publicly abuse someone, even when angry”* shows near-consensus (Z-scores: F1: 1.46; F3: 1.55; F4: 0.56), indicating a widely shared norm against harmful communication. Likewise, *“I take criticism as a learning opportunity”* is positively rated across all factors (F1: 0.97; F2: 1.85; F3: 0.80; F4: 1.80; F5: 0.02), reinforcing the importance of constructive dialogue. These findings demonstrate that **inclusion, mutual recognition, and respect form the strongest shared foundation of DCE**, particularly within Domain I (Active Listening and Inclusion).

A similarly strong consensus appears in relation to **truthfulness and the rejection of manipulation**. Statements such as *“Manipulation in politics is inevitable and should not be blamed”* are consistently rejected (Z-scores: F1: -1.46; F2: -1.45; F3: -1.21; F4: -0.26; F5: -1.03), representing one of the strongest shared negative positions. Likewise, *“Populism is inevitable”* is rejected across all factors (F5: -1.50 being the strongest), and *“You can lie if the truth hurts”* is also consistently evaluated negatively (F1: -1.06; F3: -0.82; F4: -0.87). These results show a clear normative commitment to **honesty, accountability, and non-manipulative communication**, particularly within the domain of Prevention of Manipulation.

There is also notable agreement on **privacy and informational self-determination**. The statement *“I don't mind if someone shares information about me on social media”* is negatively rated across all factors (F1: -1.21; F2: -0.80; F3: -0.64; F4: -0.35; F5: -0.10), indicating a shared concern for personal data protection. Similarly, *“It is my policy not to publicly share information about my private life”* shows moderate positive agreement (Z-scores around 0.44–0.71). These findings suggest relatively strong consensus within Domain VI when it comes to personal privacy.

However, this consensus begins to fragment when communication is examined in relation to **freedom of expression, power, and protection from harm**. The most controversial statements—those with the highest dispersion and controversy indices—highlight deep normative divides. The strongest example is *“Racist and homophobic statements must be condemned”* (controversy index 3.55), where Z-scores reveal a sharp split: strongly positive in F1 (+1.94), F4 (+1.83), and F5 (+1.50), but clearly negative in F2 (-1.20) and F3 (-1.61). This indicates a fundamental disagreement about the limits of acceptable speech.

Similarly, “*People have the right to express controversial views (e.g., anti-refugee opinions)*” (controversy index 2.42) shows strong support in F2 (+1.53) but negative or neutral evaluations elsewhere, again reflecting divergent views on freedom of expression. The statement “*Criticism can be expressed anonymously*” (index 2.80) is another highly polarized issue, with strong support in F5 (+1.29) and strong rejection in F4 (−1.51). These examples demonstrate that **Domain II (Freedom of Speech)** and **Domain V (Human Dignity and Respect)** are the most contested, reflecting deeper ideological differences regarding the balance between openness and protection.

Controversy is also evident in issues related to **institutional power and regulation**, such as state data collection (*index 2.54*) and the withholding of information, as well as in Domain VII (Protection of the Vulnerable), where statements like removing racist language from children’s books (*index 2.24*) divide participants along similar lines.

In contrast, some statements elicit **neutral or ambivalent responses**, suggesting context-dependent reasoning rather than strong normative positions. For instance, “*It is right to express opinions even if they offend others*” shows Z-scores close to zero across all factors (F1: 0.02; F3: −0.02; F4: −0.21), indicating no clear consensus. Similarly, “*It is necessary to argue until truth or compromise is found*” (F3: 0.01; F4: −0.21; F5: −0.64) and “*Limited information is sufficient for quick decisions*” (ranging from −0.19 to +1.19) produce mixed responses. These patterns are particularly visible in Domain IV (Truth-telling and Information Quality), suggesting that participants view these issues as **situational and context-sensitive rather than governed by fixed principles**.

At the domain level, a clear pattern emerges. **Active Listening and Inclusion (Domain I)** and **Prevention of Manipulation** show the highest levels of consensus, indicating that these domains form the normative core of DCE. In contrast, **Freedom of Speech (Domain II)**, **Human Dignity (Domain V)**, and **Protection of the Vulnerable** are the most controversial, reflecting tensions between competing values. Domains related to **truth and autonomy** occupy an intermediate position, combining areas of agreement with context-dependent ambiguity.

In sum, the analysis demonstrates that while there is **strong agreement on the foundational values of dialogic communication—listening, respect, honesty, and inclusion—there is no uniform agreement on how these values should be applied in practice**. The divergence in Z-scores across factors shows that the greatest disagreements arise precisely where values intersect and must be balanced. This underscores the importance of developing DCE principles that are not only normatively grounded but also sensitive to context, power relations, and plural perspectives.

Narrative Profiles of Q-Sorting Factors

The Q-sorting analysis reveals five distinct interpretative positions on dialogic communication ethics (DCE). Each factor represents a coherent way of understanding how values such as freedom, respect, truth, and power should be balanced in communication. While all groups share a commitment to dialogue, they differ significantly in how they interpret its limits and conditions.

Factor 1: The Principled Democratic Protector

Factor 1 represents the most **normatively firm and ethically consistent position**. Respondents in this group strongly emphasize the protection of human dignity, the rejection of hate speech, and the defense of vulnerable groups. Racist and homophobic statements must be clearly condemned ($Z = +1.94$), and indifference toward hate speech is strongly rejected ($Z = -2.19$). If someone is insulted, there is a perceived responsibility to intervene.

At the same time, F1 strongly supports **respectful and constructive communication**. Public abuse is unacceptable even in moments of anger ($Z = +1.46$), and honesty is a core value—lying “to spare feelings” is rejected ($Z = -1.06$). Dialogue should be direct, transparent, and inclusive, with strong support for participation (e.g., being heard: $Z = +0.92$; having a say: $Z = +1.14$).

A defining feature of this factor is its strong emphasis on **privacy and informational self-determination**. Respondents strongly support individual control over personal data (Statement 20: highest distinguishing score), reject state data collection ($Z = -1.46$), and are uncomfortable with others sharing personal information ($Z = -1.21$). Institutional power is therefore viewed critically, particularly when it threatens autonomy.

Overall, F1 combines **democratic participation, strong ethical boundaries, and rights-based protections**, making it the most normatively principled and protective orientation.

Factor 2: The Libertarian Free-Expression Advocate

Factor 2 reflects a **freedom-oriented, anti-censorship perspective** that prioritizes open expression and personal agency. Respondents strongly support the right to express controversial views ($Z = +1.53$) and are less supportive of categorical condemnation of harmful speech ($Z = -1.28$ for condemning racist/homophobic speech).

Like F1, they value participation and recognition—being heard is extremely important ($Z = +1.96$), as is having a say in decisions ($Z = +1.17$). They also show strong personal resilience, viewing criticism as a learning opportunity ($Z = +1.85$).

However, F2 differs in its **pragmatic and efficiency-oriented approach to communication**. Respondents agree that limited information can suffice for decision-making ($Z = +1.19$) and that excessive listening can hinder action. This reflects a preference for decisiveness over prolonged deliberation.

While they reject manipulation ($Z = -1.45$) and state overreach ($Z = -1.07$), privacy is not their central concern. Instead, their defining feature is a strong commitment to **free speech, even at the cost of potential offense**, combined with skepticism toward moral or institutional restrictions.

Factor 3: The Civility-Centered Institutional Pragmatist

Factor 3 represents a **moderate, order-oriented perspective** that balances participation with institutional trust and social stability. Respondents strongly support civility norms, such as rejecting public abuse ($Z = +1.55$), and value being heard ($Z = +1.50$) and having a say.

However, unlike F1 and F4, this group places clear limits on participation. They agree that listening to everyone continuously can hinder decision-making ($Z = +1.01$), emphasizing the need for **efficient leadership and structured processes**.

A key feature of F3 is its **trust in institutions**. Respondents are relatively comfortable with state data collection ($Z = +0.93$) and accept institutional authority when it supports order and functionality. At the same time, they believe that criticism can be expressed safely within institutions ($Z = +0.93$), suggesting confidence in existing structures.

In terms of values, F3 strongly rejects hate speech ($Z = -2.19$) and inappropriate public discourse (e.g., sexual topics: $Z = -1.62$), but does not strongly support moralizing or symbolic condemnation ($Z = -1.61$). This indicates a preference for **civility over moral activism**.

Overall, F3 reflects a **balanced, pragmatic stance** that prioritizes order, moderation, and institutional stability while still supporting respectful dialogue.

Factor 4: The Transparency-Centered Dialogue Advocate

Factor 4 is the most **dialogue-centered and institutionally engaged perspective**, emphasizing openness, transparency, and communicative equality. Respondents place extremely high importance on being heard ($Z = +1.99$) and on direct, honest communication.

A defining characteristic of F4 is its strong support for **freedom of expression within institutions**. Respondents strongly reject restrictions on employee speech (distinguishing statement, $p < .01$) and support the ability to express critical opinions without fear ($Z =$ strongly positive). Transparency is seen as essential for accountability, and withholding information is viewed critically.

F4 also strongly condemns discrimination ($Z = +1.83$ for condemning racist/homophobic speech), but, unlike F1, places less emphasis on privacy or data protection. Instead, the focus is on **open dialogue and institutional accountability**.

This group is skeptical of anonymous criticism ($Z = -1.51$), favoring openness and responsibility in communication. They also reject manipulation and dishonesty, and do not support avoiding conflict merely to maintain harmony.

Overall, F4 represents a **communication-optimistic perspective**, grounded in trust in dialogue, transparency, and the transformative potential of open communication.

Factor 5: The Outspoken Participatory Realist

Factor 5 reflects a **participation-driven but pragmatic and less internally cohesive perspective**. Respondents strongly value having a voice ($Z = +1.61$) and being heard, aligning with other factors on participatory ideals.

They clearly reject discrimination (positive stance on condemning hate speech), but their broader approach to communication is **more permissive and less restrictive**. They support anonymous criticism ($Z = +1.29$) and are more tolerant of offensive or confrontational speech. They also reject the idea that conflict should be avoided ($Z = -1.44$).

F5 combines this openness with a **realist orientation toward communication contexts**. They support protective measures for children ($Z = +0.91$) but also believe that difficult realities (e.g., war violence) should be openly shown ($Z = +1.12$). This reflects a preference for confronting rather than filtering reality.

Privacy is moderately valued but not central, and institutional authority is approached pragmatically rather than ideologically. Respondents reject manipulation and vague communication, emphasizing clarity and directness.

Importantly, F5 rejects retrospective censorship, such as removing problematic content from older materials ($Z =$ strongly negative), indicating resistance to **moral regulation of past discourse**.

Overall, F5 represents a **realist, open-expression stance**, combining participatory values with tolerance for conflict and skepticism toward normative constraints.

Comparative Perspective

The relationships between factors reveal broader ideological groupings:

F1 and F4 are the closest (correlation 0.57), sharing strong commitments to inclusion, anti-discrimination, and dialogue. However, they differ in emphasis:

F1 prioritizes **privacy and principled ethical boundaries**

F4 prioritizes **transparency and institutional openness**

F5 is moderately close to F1 and F4, but represents a more **permissive and less normatively rigid variant** of this cluster.

F3 and F2 form a more distinct cluster, oriented toward **pragmatism, order, and/or free expression**, but with different emphases:

F3 emphasizes **institutional trust and civility**

F2 emphasizes **individual freedom and anti-censorship**

F2 is the most distant from F1/F4, reflecting a clear divide between **protective/ethical regulation vs unrestricted expression**.



Conclusions

The Q-sorting analysis of the statements that concern the dialogic communication ethics (DCE) reveals a remarkable balance between shared ethical foundations and diverse interpretations of their application. Across all participants, there is **strong universal agreement** on core values such as active listening, inclusion, honesty, mutual recognition, and respect. Statements like “It is important that my colleagues and leaders listen to me” and “One must not publicly abuse someone, even when angry” receive broad and stable support, showing that people consistently prioritize relational respect, constructive dialogue, and the rejection of manipulation. Similarly, norms protecting privacy and informational self-determination are widely endorsed, indicating a shared commitment to personal autonomy and accountability. These areas—especially Active Listening, Inclusion, and Prevention of Manipulation—form the **normative core of DCE**, representing values that transcend cultural or ideological differences.

At the same time, the analysis highlights **considerable diversity** in how participants interpret and balance these values in complex or politically sensitive contexts. Domains such as Freedom of Speech, Human Dignity, and Protection of the Vulnerable show sharp divergences. For instance, statements on condemning racist or homophobic speech, expressing controversial opinions, or using anonymous criticism divide participants into distinct clusters, reflecting differing priorities between openness, ethical protection, and institutional trust.

In sum, the Q-sorting results illustrate a **shared normative foundation** underpinning dialogic communication, while also revealing **context-sensitive, pluralistic interpretations**. These findings underscore the importance of DCE principles that are both **universally grounded in core values** and **flexible enough to accommodate diverse perspectives and situational complexities**.

Across the 145 respondents, there is a clear variation in the alignment of participants from different countries with the five interpretative factors of dialogic communication ethics (DCE).

- **Factor 1 (Principled Democratic Protector)** attracts strong representation from **Hungary (23 of 31)**, **Austria (15 of 25)**, **Lithuania (9 of 17)**, and **Switzerland (5 of 7)**, showing that these countries have a high proportion of participants with a protective and principled stance toward dialogue, emphasizing dignity, inclusion, and ethical boundaries.
- **Factor 2 (Libertarian Free-Expression Advocate)** is comparatively smaller overall, with modest representation from **Austria (5 of 25)**, **Slovenia (4 of 9)**, **Estonia (3 of 40)**, **Finland (1 of 16)**, and **Hungary (2 of 31)**, indicating that the free-expression perspective is less dominant but still present across multiple contexts.
- **Factor 3 (Civility-Centered Institutional Pragmatist)** draws smaller groups, with notable participants from **Estonia (6 of 40)**, **Austria (4 of 25)**, **Lithuania (2 of 17)**, and **Finland (2 of 16)**, reflecting a moderate, pragmatism-oriented approach balancing civility and institutional trust.
- **Factor 4 (Transparency-Centered Dialogue Advocate)** is primarily represented by **Estonia (11 of 40)** and **Finland (4 of 16)**, with minor contributions from **Lithuania (3 of 17)** and



Switzerland (1 of 7), highlighting participants favoring openness, dialogue, and institutional transparency.

- **Factor 5 (Outspoken Participatory Realist)** sees the largest share of **Estonian (15 of 40)** and **Finnish (6 of 16)** respondents, alongside smaller numbers from **Hungary (4 of 31)** and **Lithuania (3 of 17)**, representing a pragmatic, participation-focused, and permissive approach to communication.

Overall, **Hungary, Austria, Lithuania, and Switzerland** tend to cluster in the principled and protective Factor 1, while **Estonia and Finland** are more widely distributed across Factors 4 and 5, reflecting diversity in participatory, transparency-oriented, and pragmatic communication perspectives. **Slovenian respondents** are split between Factors 1 and 2, suggesting a division between principled and free-expression stances

6. Principles for Dialogue-Supportive Communication

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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. 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 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:

1. Individual autonomy and informational self-determination;
2. Quality of information and deliberation;
3. Ethical conduct in situations of confrontation and disagreement;
4. Equality, freedom, and safety;
5. Active listening and inclusion;
6. Constructive feedback.

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.

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 barrier¹ 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.

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.

¹ 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.

4.5. 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 manipulation² in communication are unacceptable.

4.7. Manipulation such as tone-policing (as a conversational tactic)³, grooming, or shaming, is unacceptable, particularly when it targets protected characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation, including their intersections.

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.

² 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.

³ ***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.



- 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.

7. Accountability

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The central role of media accountability in democracy

The **fundamentals of accountability** as a social, political, and legal relationship can be best defined as “a relationship between an actor and a forum in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify [their] conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences” (Bovens, 2007, p. 452). Hence, accountability goes beyond organisational responsibility and legal liability, and because it involves the strong communicative component of questions and justifications, it creates a mutually reinforcing dialogue. Accountability as a virtue (Bovens, 2010) could be placed in broader perspectives of accountability-ethics relationships, especially regarding answerability and the potential ethical strategies that follow (Dubnick, 2003).

Media accountability plays a vital role in ensuring that the media and journalism fulfil their democratic functions effectively, primarily as a watchdog, an enabler of freedom of expression, the diversity of opinions, the right to dissent, and acts as a manufacturer of social cohesion. News media, in particular, were supposed to hold themselves accountable and ensure a higher degree of citizens' trust in such media (Thomass et al., 2022). In the field of normative media and communication theory, the social element of the accountability relationship prevailed, with a strong emphasis on *public accountability* as a notion “about providing answers, about answerability towards others with a legitimate claim to demand an account” (Bovens et al., 2014, p. 6). Finally, trust-based accountability (Mansbridge, 2014) emerged as a vital organising principle of the media's contributions to the public (Picard & Pickard, 2017).



The justification for emphasising the social relation element was the reference to the public interest (Siebert et al., 1956; McQuail, 2003; 2005; Christians et al., 2009). **Public interest**, an important though contested concept, should be subordinated to private interests with “inevitable tension, compromise and improvisation” (McQuail, 2003, p. 48). Consequently, media accountability is rooted in the paradigm of social responsibility, while “a single, coherent theory of the media’s social responsibility simply does not exist” (Bardoel & d’Haenens, 2004, p. 6). The agreed-upon interpretation of media accountability entails both the “terms of ‘responsibility,’ referring to the media’s responsibility with regards to society, and ‘responsiveness,’ relating to the manner in which the media is to listen to and take the public into consideration” (Bardoel & d’Haenens, 2004, p. 6). These two main approaches and interpretations were also followed in the different, though interconnected, interdisciplinary research streams. These included media and communication studies, media ethics, media regulation and media history, with input from media law, political communication, political economy and political philosophy, and aimed at understanding and conceptualising the complexities of media accountability within the broader context of political systems and democratic societies.

a. Accountability and media governance

Media accountability is related to media governance, and as McQuail states: “the issue of accountability has to be addressed within some framework of governance in the widest sense” (McQuail, 2003, p. 91). **Media governance** “refers to the sum total of mechanisms, both formal and informal, national and supranational, centralised and dispersed, that aim to organise media systems” (Freedman, 2008, p. 14); thus, the connection with accountability was established in the governability perspective (Rhodes, 2007). This approach corresponds



with other conceptualisations of media governance “as a regulatory structure as a whole, i.e., the entirety of forms of rules that aim to organise media systems” (Puppis, 2010, p. 138). Since, at the societal level, questions of media ethics have been dealt with by particular designs for regulation; some key professional groups have taken responsibility to conceive their own rules for ethical conduct and supervise the performance of their peers (journalists, advertisers and the like). Accordingly, in collective media governance – statutory regulation, co-regulation, and self-regulation – *accountability is the standard foundational requirement* towards media entities. It usually takes the form of *transparency, enforcement reporting and compliance obligations*, which also provide space for dialogue and interaction and require answerability/responsiveness and openness vis-à-vis the media users and audiences while reflecting on the central guiding concepts of media ethics. Arguably, the role of accountability in media governance cannot be underestimated as a critical component of resilient and sustainable governing, ensuring effective and enforceable regulation of the media, both internally and externally, on each level of governance.

b. Frames and instruments of media accountability

Previous research made it possible to differentiate varying contexts or “**frames**” of media accountability (Bardoel & d’Haenens, 2004). Besides the profession of journalists, Bardoel and d’Haenens (2004) mention the market, the political sphere, and the public. Fengler et al. (2022) add the context of international media accountability actors as an additional frame. According to this frame model of media accountability, DIACOMET specifically focuses on processes of *public accountability*, which is linked to the media’s assignment of maintaining more direct relationships with citizens, in addition to their relationship with the market and the state (Bardoel, 2000; 2001).

Codes of ethics are vital instruments in the process of triggering media accountability processes – and to date, they are one of the more thoroughly researched media



accountability instruments (MAIs) (Eberwein et al., 2018) that have also been evaluated from a comparative perspective (e.g., Lauk, 2022). There is a variety of approaches to the codes of ethics. One approach is related to new emerging problems concerning journalism: Karlsson et al. (2023, p. 554) present a theoretical problem: “how journalism can address its legitimacy issues through modifying existing codes of journalistic ethics (the “recoding” of the title) by formalising and making explicit hitherto overlooked yet existing and important journalistic norms.” According to the authors, most ethical codes have never formalized *all* journalistic norms into explicit codes, but only ever a small and highly selective portion of all the institutional normative standards of the profession. Their research suggests at least six primary categories of codes of journalism that are non-formalized so far, although they are used to highlight upcoming ethical issues. 1: Codes of aesthetics (how journalism should appear and look like). 2: Automation (the purpose of a code of ethics is to (seem to) regulate behaviour. 3: The “black box” challenge of algorithm-driven automation), distribution (the problem is related to the phenomena that the search engines and news aggregators capitalised on algorithmic curation and distribution of news). 4: Engagement (the prevalent institutional understanding of audience engagement is something quantifiable that can be turned into currency; with explicit codes of engagement, news organisations will formally recognise a more integrated mode of interaction with the public, one that better fulfils journalistic norms and ideals). 5: Identity (who is and is not a journalist?). 6: Proximity (codes of proximity are norms surrounding when and where journalism should be performed, produced, and disseminated).

However, other studies have shown that ethical codes are certainly not the only instruments relevant as drivers of media accountability and that, indeed, the number of MAI types has notably increased over the past decades, particularly since the advent of social media (Fengler et al., 2015). The FP7 project “Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe” (MediaAcT) proposed an axis model distinguishing between varying degrees of institutionalisation as well as between journalism-internal and journalism-external processes to visualise in which forms media accountability can appear in the digital age



(Eberwein et al., 2011). According to the model, media accountability bodies display the highest degree of institutionalisation and, thus are fundamental pillars of sustainable and resilient accountability schemes and play an essential role in times of decreasing trust towards journalists and media outlets. (For further insights, see the European Commission-funded [#PRESSCOUNCILSEU project](#).) Press and media councils, the most widespread self-regulatory bodies for journalism (Puppis, 2009), were established to provide guidance to journalists through ethical codes of conduct while also offering the possibility to media users and other interested parties (i.e. civil society organisations) to submit a complaint if they believed that the journalistic code had been infringed. Meanwhile, ombudspersons were expected to “act as independent representatives of the media’s public” (Fengler, 2019, p. 7), report to the publisher or the editor-in-chief, and assure self-control and, thus, accountability of the press.

Codes of ethics represent traditional instruments of media self-regulation as they are usually placed among the journalism-internal MAIs with a higher degree of institutionalisation. However, the model demonstrates that journalism-external MAIs (such as NGOs or academic media research) can also contribute to holding the media accountable. During digitalisation, several new – mostly less institutionalised – instruments came into existence all around the globe. They include both journalism-internal MAIs (such as journalist blogs or various transparency tools used by newsrooms) and journalism-external MAIs (such as citizen blogs or media criticism via social media).

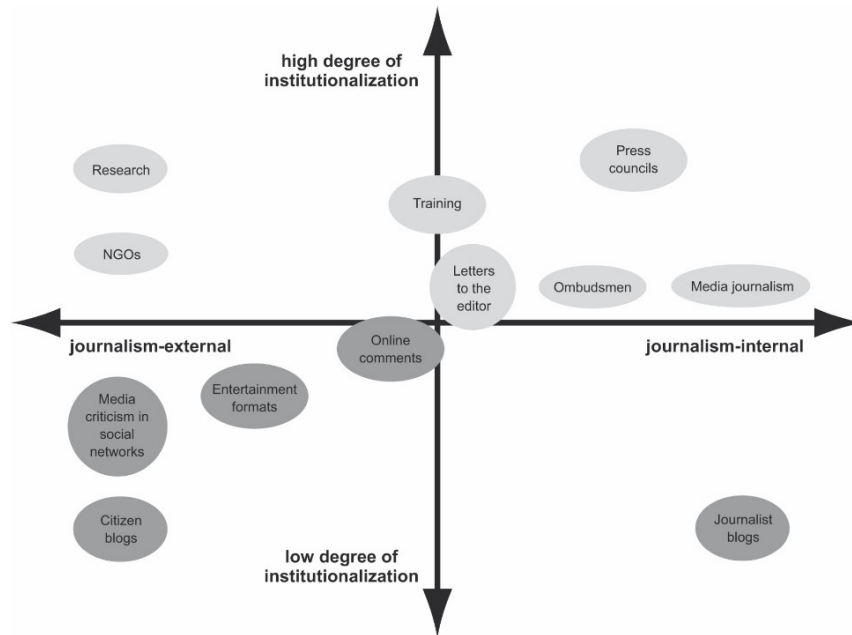


Figure 4. The MediaAcT Axis Model – a typology of media accountability instruments (Source: Fengler, Eberwein, & Leppik-Bork, 2011, p. 12).

c. Specific and emerging accountability areas

In recent years, the core structural changes in the media systems – digitalisation, globalisation and platformisation – necessitated a re-conceptualisation of media accountability and the adaptation of adequate principles, such as reciprocity and mutuality (Eberwein, 2022). Several key areas need to be highlighted:

Public Service Media and accountability: The accountability dilemmas of the media resonated with the ethos of public service broadcasting (PSB) and the institutionalisation of public service media (PSM) (Jakubowicz, 2003). The notion of the ‘public value creation’ was linked to accountability, and since the 2000s, “instruments of control and accountability have become increasingly organised within a competition framework between PSM organisations and other media market players – mainly commercial operators” (Bulck, 2015, p. 80). Public value ex-ante tests were introduced across Europe as regulatory accountability schemes to control the public worth and possible market impact of planned publicly funded media



services (Donders & Moe, 2011), which have improved transparency and thus accountability of PSM (Collins, 2011). PSM accountability concepts and implementation reside mostly on legally inscribed, largely administrative frameworks, such as financial and operating reports on the fulfilment of the public service remit, and strictly regulated institutional governance structures – management boards, supervisory bodies, and formally mandated contact points and channels for interaction (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2022).

Platforms accountability: Platforms' accountability has been contextualised within internet governance and referred to the formal and informal relations among the actors who defined structures and internet policy processes. According to the normative order of the internet (Kettemann, 2020), accountability was realised with “a much broader ambit than international law in that it focused less on norms and more on responsibilities of actors for different aspects of the governance of the internet” (Kettemann, 2020, p. 128). Meanwhile, a major shift in intermediary (platform's) liability to accountability occurred, and as a result, “(a)ccountability schemes differ significantly, ranging from legal entitlements to request assistance in enforcement to entirely voluntary private-ordering schemes” (Frosio & Husovec, 2019, p. 2). In parallel, ‘procedural accountability’ was realised in hard law and legislation, which hold that platforms and regulators are required to divide responsibilities based on broad policy objectives and governance standards (Bunting, 2018; EAO, 2021). Lastly, the potentials of social media councils, namely bodies of either or both experts and selected user representatives, as institutionalised accountability bodies, were explored, with a focus on ‘multi-stakeholderism’, and the comparative research across four continents concluded, that incorporating technical expertise and promoting inclusivity were the core considerations in their design (Kettemann & Schulz, 2023¹⁰⁷).

Algorithms and accountability: Currently, algorithmic accountability is at the top of the agenda of policy debates about internet and platform governance. Scholars argue that the lack of transparency and high complexity of algorithmic systems, the fragmentation and heterogeneity of the involved industries, and the increasing autonomy of the technological systems hamper accountability and governance (Saurwein, 2019). They further argue that the “socio-technical assemblages, composed of the use and design of algorithms, platform design, commercial interests, social practices, and context”, are explicitly responsible for online harms (Saurwein & Spencer-Smith, 2021, p. 2) and not only algorithms. Therefore, researchers recommend possible governance interventions to focus on socio-technical mechanisms of harm based on evidence- and research-driven legislative frameworks to ensure the accountability of internet intermediaries (Pirkova et al., 2021). The latest, thorough overview of the European regulatory and policy approaches to the use of AI technology in news media and journalism conclude that disinformation, data, and AI literacy, as well as diversity, plurality, and social responsibility, are primarily identified as the policy objectives of the relevant regulatory frameworks (Porlezza, 2023).

The missing ‘link(s)’: the inclusive model of accountability

Even if self- and co-regulatory systems and media accountability instruments do have their place in the contemporary media environment, they cannot keep their promise to guarantee high ethical standards in public communication and sustain its legitimacy. Therefore, DIACOMET advocates the combination of two concepts: dialogue and ethics, thus establishing the missing link(s) between accountability and dialogic communication by generating the concept of dialogic communication ethics (DCE), which would provide a framework for an inclusive model of accountability

mechanisms that combine media accountability (the level of organisations) with civic accountability (the level of citizens).

The concept of inclusive media accountability traditionally refers to media organisational and journalistic processes and mechanisms of responsiveness towards their diverse audiences to “promote inclusiveness, pluralism, and collective purpose” (McQuail, 2009, p. 126). DIACOMET’s aim is to answer the central research question of: *what factors, mechanisms, and conditions render media accountability inclusive?* Thus, the project specifically asks:

- Who is eligible to take part in discussions about media ethics?
- Who should be involved: who are the actors or agents who carry out moral reasoning and make moral choices in the (public) dialogic communication situation?
- What is the role of dialogue in the quest for conceiving inclusive guidelines for media ethics: to what extent should accountability instruments be allowed to make judgments about agents (about their virtues and vices, often based on their motives) or judgments about the rightness or wrongness of their actions (deontology) or the goodness or badness of consequences (teleological approach)?
- In what procedural settings?
- To what outcome?

In parallel, DIACOMET also pursues the question of a *novel concept of civic accountability: how do we conceptualise ‘civic resilience’ from the perspective of DCE?* Combining the answers to these interrelated questions enables us to **develop the framework for an inclusive accountability model.**

Rethinking DCE and inclusive accountability: insights from DIACOMET

The **empirical studies conducted within DIACOMET** provide first answers to the questions outlined above and, in doing so, invite a reconsideration of the theoretical foundations of DCE and inclusive accountability. Particularly important in this respect are two strands of research: a systematic analysis of ethical codes and other guidelines for public communication, and a Delphi study involving media experts and stakeholders from related fields. Taken together, these studies not only put the concepts discussed above to an empirical test; they also illuminate possible pathways for their practical operationalisation.

The **document analysis** sought to reconstruct how ideals of ‘good communication’ are articulated and justified across European media systems through established ethical codes and related normative documents. A further aim was to examine the extent to which these documents assign any meaningful role to practices of dialogic communication and inclusive accountability. To this end, DIACOMET partners collected a total of 429 sample documents from the participating countries, covering a broad range of domains within public communication. The corpus included texts relating not only to the classic media professions (journalism, public relations, advertising), but also to public institutions, civil society organisations, and media users. Where feasible, the sample also encompassed documents from different hierarchical levels – macro, meso, and micro – resulting in a diverse corpus marked by heterogeneous institutional affiliations. All documents underwent a

standardised indexing and annotation process before being made accessible through a public database (<https://diacommet.eu/database/>). They were subsequently subjected to computer-assisted qualitative content analysis, with the conceptual variables derived from the theoretical frameworks of DCE and inclusive accountability serving as the main analytical point of departure.

The findings reveal **only limited alignment between the analysed documents and the principles of DCE and inclusive accountability**. Most texts remain firmly centred on journalism, whereas media users, civic actors, and broader publics appear only at the margins. Existing accountability frameworks are predominantly institutional, professional, or market-oriented; genuinely public- or citizen-centred models remain the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, the majority of documents are non-binding and provide few, if any, concrete mechanisms for implementation or sanctioning. Ethical challenges arising from emerging technologies – artificial intelligence above all – are also addressed only sporadically.

At a more fine-grained level, the analysis shows that **traditional ethical dilemmas continue to dominate**. Tensions between truth-telling and confidentiality, or between transparency and privacy, feature prominently and reflect the enduring fault lines of journalism ethics. Although many documents refer, at least rhetorically, to dialogue, participation, or communicative exchange, such references often remain cursory. They are mentioned, but rarely developed, invoked, but seldom institutionalised. This is true even in documents addressed to citizens or non-professional communicators.

Responsibility emerges across the corpus as one of the most widely shared normative principles, increasingly framed as a distributed obligation shared by professional communicators and digital media users alike. Loyalty likewise appears frequently, though it is less pronounced in documents aimed at citizens. Autonomy – especially in the sense of editorial and organisational independence – remains a recurring concern, often accompanied by broader calls for political independence in public communication beyond the confines of legacy media. At the same time, inclusivity and diversity are among the more visible values in the material, particularly in texts linked to public interest, participation, and civic engagement. Many guidelines explicitly advocate equitable access, non-discrimination, and the empowerment of diverse user groups. International documents, in particular, tend to stress linguistic plurality and procedural openness. Resilience, too, surfaces as an emergent normative value, especially in documents concerned with the safety and empowerment of communicators in digital environments. Yet again, one pattern recurs with notable persistence: principles are articulated far more often than they are anchored in enforceable structures. Mechanisms for ensuring compliance are largely absent, weakly specified, or outsourced to external co-regulatory bodies beyond the immediate scope of the documents themselves.

To deepen and contextualise these findings, DIACOMET partners subsequently carried out a **Delphi study** (Brady 2015) designed to subject the ethical ideals identified in the documents to a form of practice-based stress test. Across three survey rounds, more than 170 international experts from the fields of education, communication and media, technology, and regulation were asked to reflect on possible blind spots in the analysed documents and to discuss potential responses to the most pressing challenges. While the first two rounds were based on standardised online questionnaires, the final round took the form of focus group interviews. In order to leave room for more creative approaches, this final stage deliberately incorporated design-thinking techniques (Goi & Tan, 2021), encouraging participants to move beyond conventional solutions and experiment with new ideas. The material generated in this process was likewise subjected to a systematic qualitative analysis.



The experts consulted in the Delphi study unanimously emphasised the potential of dialogue-oriented communication to strengthen social participation and democratic inclusion. At the same time, however, they also identified considerable deficits across all countries represented in the DIACOMET project. Much as the document analysis had already suggested, **effective accountability infrastructures capable of sustainably embedding a comprehensive understanding of DCE remain scarce**. Starting from this diagnosis, participants discussed a range of measures for fostering good dialogic communication practice and, through the design-thinking process, developed a series of prototypes that were eventually brought together in an innovative *Inclusive Accountability Toolbox* Duvekot, Slagt & de Haan 2026: https://diacommet.eu/publications_type/inclusive-accountability-toolbox-prototype-of-a-civic-accountability-mechanism/.

Among the concepts developed in the different DIACOMET country teams were the following:

- the ‘Accountability Body for Dialogic Communication’ – an independent advisory board designed to provide guidance, advice, and recommendations on the quality of public communication and public debate, while helping to cultivate a shared culture of dialogic communication;
- the ‘Community-Oriented Code of Conduct’ – a publicly accessible set of rules for trustworthy, credible, and respectful communication in public life, jointly developed by key actors in public communication and tailored to their different roles and responsibilities;
- the ‘Deliberative Local Forum’ – a physical space for structured and inclusive public exchange in which citizens aged 16 and above deliberate on local issues, articulate diverse perspectives, and feed these perspectives into formal decision-making processes.

These and other instruments developed within DIACOMET may be understood as first, still provisional, but nonetheless tangible steps towards a more deliberate promotion of DCE and inclusive accountability in Europe and beyond. Their value lies not in offering a finished blueprint, but in opening up an experimental space between diagnosis and design – between what is normatively desirable and what might become institutionally possible.

Taken together, the empirical findings underscore the need for ethics frameworks that are more robust, more inclusive, and more capable of practical effect. The document analysis demonstrates that elements of DCE and inclusive accountability can indeed be found in existing ethical codes and guidelines. Yet they usually appear only in fragmentary form – scattered references rather than a coherent normative concept. The more holistic understanding proposed by DIACOMET is, in most cases, barely discernible, and an explicit grounding in communication ethics remains strikingly weak in the majority of the documents. By contrast, the *Inclusive Accountability Toolbox* emerging from the Delphi study points to possible ways forward and begins to sketch how some of the diagnosed implementation gaps might gradually be addressed. Whether these proposals can move from promising prototype to durable practice, however, remains an open question – and, perhaps, the next necessary one.

8. Dialogic communication ethics and civic resilience: Future perspectives

Auksė Balčytienė

Preface

In this final part of the D1.3 report, we examine the relationship between dialogic communication ethics (DCE) and societal and civic resilience, both of which emphasise human agency and adaptability in conditions of rapid change.

When discussing civic resilience, we focus on characteristics of human agency but examine them in a communicative context, particularly one marked by ethical challenges. Regarding human agency, we refer to people's capacity to act, judge, respond, and make choices in the face of emerging communicative situations. Being resilient requires the ability to adapt to changing situations – these can be marked by information overload, unclear guidance, manipulation, exclusion, or even aggressive communication.

In this part, using examples from the DIACOMET project, we'll show that much of our argument is grounded in qualitative discussions conducted in WP3. The Focus Group discussions conducted in each participating country revealed not only the complexities that people experience in various public communication settings, including neglect and a sense of not being heard. But people were also vocal about certain cases and provided examples of how they could cope with the arising challenges. It is precisely in such moments that we could detect civic resilience becoming visible.

Before turning to a deeper analysis of how DCE contributes to the development of civic resilience, it is important to say a few words about the broader contexts in which polarization and communicative clashes are particularly detrimental. And also to identify where the gaps are.

Why accountability and ethical guidance?

Problems in the public sphere – especially polarization and the spread of dysfunctional communication, such as hostility, manipulation, exclusion, non-listening, and destructiveness in communication – have become ingrained in everyday culture, with many of these habits now normalized. As it turns out, while contemporary communication arenas have opened new spaces for people's interaction, they are often not perceived as safe or engaging places where people feel comfortable expressing themselves. The DIACOMET project identifies several gaps, one of which indicates that *existing communication frameworks offer little guidance to people on how to respond ethically and responsibly to emerging conflict situations in mediated and public communication settings.*

To put it simply, there is an accountability gap in public communication. Traditional media have concrete standards for professional communication. Their principles are based on truthfulness, fairness, respect, and responsibility. But in a much broader public communication space sustained by social media platforms and a new communicative workforce – influencers, populists, ordinary people – there are no equally strong or shared frameworks to guide how these various actors should communicate (Salomon et al., 2026).



When communication becomes messy, harmful, or insufficiently guided by shared norms, what is most needed is some form of *answerability and responsibility* for the consequences of actions. Without such awareness, harmful practices in public communication can spread more easily, making it harder to sustain the kind of trustful, responsible communicative relationality and interaction that underpins societal resilience. Accountability is needed to counter these disruptions and to uphold norms of good practice in public communication. In this way, accountability serves as a precondition for the development of resilience.

Gaining greater awareness of communicative process relies on agency features: responsible action, trust, and learning (Reveilhac & Boomgaarden, 2025). As discussed in previous parts of this report, developed within DIACOMET, dialogic communication ethics (DCE) offers a necessary ethical orientation for fostering accountable, participatory, and resilient public communication in increasingly fragmented media and communication environments. Dialogic communication ethics emphasises maintaining constructive relationships, fostering listening and respectful disagreement, and reducing societal polarisation. Dialogic communication ethics is therefore a shared responsibility of all members of a democratic society, within their respective capacities.

How is civic resilience conceptualized?

The DIACOMET project examines resilience from a communication perspective: by exploring how people cope through public discourse, interactions, and communication practices. This perspective also connects to more traditional understandings of resilience. In general, resilience refers to a person's or group's ability to withstand and respond to disruptions and maintain meaningful functioning under conditions of heightened uncertainty and pressure (**Pursiainen, 2025**). Such an ability has two sides. On the one hand, it involves the capacity to endure disruption, remain functional, and keep going even when conditions have changed. In this way, resilience denotes social and psychological stability. On the other hand, an important feature of resilience capacity is flexibility: people may need to adapt their behaviour to respond to new situations, take risks, reflect, move forward, develop new understanding, and form new relationships to cope with a new reality. Thus, resilience is not about staying firm; it involves the capacity to learn and adapt when circumstances change.

Applied to communication, resilience is not about holding one's firm opinion; it involves the capacity to reflect, learn, and adapt one's communication when circumstances, relationships, or communicative conditions change. Furthermore, a communication perspective to resilience development stresses that resilience is about whether a society can hold together, preserve the legitimacy of its institutions, and sustain cooperation, take risks, and learn from mistakes, without falling into fragmentation and democratic erosion. But here, the key question is not whether democracy survives pressures, but rather the capacities that make that survival possible.

Resilience capacity refers to the resources and qualities that enable the functioning (performance) of democracy. Among these important capacities is the ability to sustain democratic norms, which provide shared principles for political conduct and civic life. Similarly, in other writings by other analysts, resilience is discussed in terms of **designed and learned resilience (Gajauskaitė, 2026)**. While discussing civil defense and society's preparedness to mitigate geopolitical risks, Ieva Gajauskaitė explains that designed resilience entails strategic planning, state-led efforts to prepare society through civil preparedness measures, training, infrastructure, and public information campaigns. This aspect is essentially a top-down approach. Whereas learned resilience refers to bottom-up capacities that emerge from society itself, such as trust, collective memory, self-reliance, self-organization, and informal



cooperation. Learned resilience strengthens the civic aspect: societies do not become resilient only through policy design and education; civic resilience also grows through lived experience, habits of cooperation, and local autonomy. Hence, civic resilience primarily concerns how people communicate and interact with one another and with institutions through civic acts, such as networking and cooperation. Here, again, we see that communication is central to how people learn to function in a society: through communication with others, people learn shared ways of understanding problems, dealing with conflicts, interpreting information, and behaving in socially acceptable ways. Briefly, communication scholarship increasingly treats resilience as enacted through communicative processes rather than as something possessed solely by individuals (Petrun Sayers et al., 2023). However, what we see in these analyses is that their focus is on relations management rather than examining how people's awareness develops of communicatively shaped challenges: conflicts, dialogue disruptions, and the like. The DIACOMET project specifically examines the *structural features of the communicative process* and explores ways to activate human agency, raise awareness, and set norms for good communication practice.

All in all, the main claim in much of the literature on society's resilience is that a resilient society depends on a vibrant civil society, strong relationships, and the capacity for self-organization through bottom-up networks, rather than on top-down preparedness alone (Berzina, 2026). Here, social relationships, trust, the quality of information exchanges, mutual understanding, and a shared purpose are key factors driving strong partnerships and integration. In general, most writings argue that a strong participatory political culture is essential for resilience development. How can all these aspects be used to better develop and define the prerequisites for accountable communication and civic resilience?

The human-centered focus

Resilience denotes the human capacity to function despite disruptions (Masten et al., 2023). *Functioning* here encompasses multiple abilities of individuals and groups: withstanding stress, learning and transforming, adapting, and persisting. Various cultures may have their own everyday terms for the concept of resilience. One quickly notices that all languages and cultures share a similar idea of the human capacity to endure difficulty and keep going. In English, this is called *grit* and relates to what we now describe as resilience. Sometimes, these ideas might sound like mythic words – for example, the Finnish word *sisu*. For Finns, *sisu* means the ability to persevere in complex conditions. Lithuanians are often described as having a persistent, unbroken spirit (*atkaklus, nepalūžtantis*). In other cultures, words convey similar references to features that define inner strength: gritting your teeth and persevering, biting through and pushing despite difficulty, and sticking with something and keeping going.

Although the state of resilience may seem like an endpoint, resilience is dynamic and developmental rather than constant. Discussions of resilience are found in social and cognitive psychology, organizational studies, and other social sciences. Also, we see that current geopolitical tensions have made resilience a central framework in security and defense studies, where it is used to analyze the psychological characteristics of individuals and the state of institutions and social systems, particularly during crises and uncertainties that generate change, anxiety, and vulnerability.

Resilience is enacted through human agency; hence, human aspects strengthen civic resilience through lived experiences and learned features, which are sustained through social ties, trust, and



communication. Without a human dimension, resilience remains just an ideal rather than a lived democratic practice.

A *human-centered approach* is also essential here because it conceptualizes communication in relational terms and accounts for people's social and media identities (Coles et al., 2025). Following such an idea, the communication process encompasses not just the transfer of messages but also ritual and cultural practices. Such a perspective denotes people as active agents who do not interpret communicative situations neutrally but through their social positions, prior experiences, and perceived relevance. Thus, analysis of public communication must also address how people approach communicative conflicts and what values and norms they bring to such contexts (Balčytienė et al., 2026).

At this point, it is important to explain how dialogic communication ethics – the DCE framework developed in the DIACOMET project – functions as a normative framework for improving the culture of dialogic communication in society. This will be done in the next section, which shows how the six domains of DCE (for a more extensive discussion of those domains and guidelines, please see Harro-Loit et al., 2026) can serve as a practical approach to strengthening resilience.

Linking dialogic communication ethics and civic resilience

In the DIACOMET project, civic resilience is understood not as an abstract condition but as civic abilities that enable people and communities to act, adapt, and sustain democratic life. As will be shown, learning to handle complex communication processes and conflicts is a skill well aligned with resilience development.

Our starting argument is that the six domains of principles outlined for dialogic communication ethics (DCE) form a foundation for strengthening civic resilience by enhancing human capacities required for dialogic communication. The domains of DCE are normatively framed and presented as ethically guided principles of dialogic communication: they encompass both people's capacities and the contextual conditions under which communicative interaction occurs, and both must be considered when practicing communication.

The six domains follow a specific logic (see Table 1, section “Six domains of DCE capturing features of communicative process”): they cover human agency characteristics and rights and freedoms (1), then address the quality of communicative situation and interaction (2-5), and finally refer to learning and adjustment (6).

In this way, we could say that developing resilience requires capable people with specific capacities to cope and adjust to challenging conditions (see the “**Human-centered focus**” section in Table 1). DCE addresses both aspects by adopting a human-agency-centered framework.

Table 3. The six domains of DCE provide a foundation for civic resilience development.

	Six domains of DCE capturing features of communicative process	Human-centered focus	Preconditions for civic resilience development
1.	Individual autonomy and information self-determination	Citizens must first be empowered as communication agents	Active agency means the capacity to act intentionally, reflectively, and responsively
2.	Quality of information and deliberation	All communication actors should have equal access to trustworthy information	Epistemic robustness is individual and quality feature that emerges from communicative situation (the quality of dialogue, criticism)
3.	Ethical conduct in situations of confrontation or disagreement	They must be able to disagree without breaking down the communication flow	Constructive capacity
4.	Equality, freedom of expression and safety in communication	They need fair and safe conditions for participation and self-expression	Capacity to participate under conditions of pressure: in conflict, emotional strains, fear of exclusion or attack
5.	Active listening, response and inclusion	They need to be heard and included in communication	Social cohesion refers to strength of social bonds, belonging and trust
6.	Constructive feedback	They must be able to learn and engage in self-correction	Adaptive learning and self-correcting ability

As shown in Table 1, the six domains do not remain abstract ethical principles; they become practical guidelines for building the communicative capacities through which societies can withstand disruption, respond to conflict, and sustain democratic dialogue. Taken together, these capacities form the basis for developing civic resilience (see Table 1, section “**Preconditions for civic resilience development**”).

When viewed in this perspective, resilience capacities and conditions become a structural attribute that has varied competencies required on different levels:

- **At the individual level**, they build civic resilience as competencies: ethical sensitivity, listening, judgment, courage to act, and critical interpretation of communicative situations.
- **At the interactional level**, they shape how people interact and deliberate, disagree, include, and respond to one another.
- **At the institutional level**, they become accountability instruments: rules, moderation procedures, participation standards, safeguards, and feedback mechanisms. This fits especially well with the article’s emphasis on power, responsibility, and the need for both individual and structural reflexivity.

How do the outlined domains of DCE principles create a framework for civic resilience in practice?

To answer the question, we will refer to one part of the DIACOMET project: the focus group discussions held to understand how people manage communicative situations prone to conflict, misunderstandings, and differing views.

In total, 87 focus group discussions were held across the eight participating countries: Austria, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Switzerland. Over 500 participants took part in these discussions, reflecting on the ethics of public communication and the media environment in



their respective countries. A shared methodological framework was used by all country teams to ensure overall coherence across country reports produced by the project teams⁴.

As arranged, in all eight countries, the discussions were intended to show how complex communicative situations are: the goal was not just to mention communication complexities, but to uncover tensions and contradictions, people's experiences, and reactions. A human-centered focus was applied in practice: people's lived experiences, values, and worries were recorded to gain a deeper understanding of the capacities and other needs required to manage communication disruptions. All discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The analysis used an inductive approach and applied thematic analysis, a common and versatile method for spotting, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data. Research questions addressed by the country teams focused on the studied people's interpretations of the hybrid media environment; their descriptions of the state of public communication in relation to ideals of communication that matter to them; and the ethical principles to which people give the highest account for upholding or institutionalizing them. The results reveal how participants perceive their environment, articulate their experiences, and construct social meaning.

In the next six sub-sections, we use the six domains outlined in Table 1 and present our arguments, together with selected illustrations from the focus group country reports. We interpret the observations with resilience features in mind.

A word of caution is necessary here. We do not aim to provide a comparative analysis of public communication features across different countries. Instead, we use these country examples as illustrations to support our argument that the DCE domains help us identify specific situations in which communicative problems occur and how people respond to them. These examples also highlight deficiencies in communicative situations that indicate the need for specific resilience-building capacities.

1. Autonomy and informational self-determination

Resilience depends on safeguarding people's capacity to act as capable participants. In this context, human agency is essential in strengthening resilience. For communication, this means that people must be viewed as active agents rather than passive recipients of information influence. A few illustrations can be drawn from country reports on the analysis of focus group discussions. For example, as the report from Austria shows, information exposure is nowadays strongly shaped by media structural features (algorithmic recommendations, media commercialization) – in such situations, people do not feel in control of what they see, and emotional content predominates over reflective discussions in media. A Lithuanian report suggests that when journalism drifts toward profit, spectacle, or one-sidedness, resilience weakens because citizens lose common reference points for public reasoning, thereby weakening agency. The Estonian report also strongly emphasizes agency aspects, which are especially evident in people's expressed concerns about privacy breaches in social media communication and the use of AI tools. The capacity to act as an independent agent exists as an aspiration, and such awareness is uneven and fragile among people.

⁴ All country reports of focus group discussions are available here: https://diacommet.eu/publications_type/focus-group-country-reports/



All in all, all country reports identify this failure: they suggest that active agency capacities exist, but these are weakened by information inequality, institutional opacity, and information overload. The Swiss report repeatedly shows that, for focus group participants, individual autonomy is not simply the formal freedom to choose information, but the real possibility of orienting oneself meaningfully in a complex media environment. In Hungary, people acknowledge that social media increases formal opportunities to speak, but not necessarily meaningful self-determination: participants describe these media spaces as lacking “compass”, being overwhelmed by noise, and being shaped by reputational or professional risk.

All in all, resilience capacity is evident in some of these illustrations, especially in how people develop selective, strategic forms of participation, including cautious speech, alternative media use, and sometimes even a protective withdrawal from communicative situations.

2. Quality of information and deliberation

Civic resilience depends not only on social trust and participation, but also on epistemic robustness in public communication. **Specifically, the resilience feature of epistemic robustness requires people to understand how information is turned into journalism and to be able to identify whether it informs or causes confusion.**

Participants from Austria describe serious weaknesses in the information environments, specifically weak contextualization in the news, repetitive voices, narrow discourse, and cultures of ongoing disputes rather than true solutions-oriented features. As the Dutch report shows, in people's view, deliberative quality is significantly weakened by superficial reporting and information overload. The Finnish report also suggests that resilience depends on admitting uncertainty and preserving interpretive depth in an accelerated media environment. The Hungarian report suggests that the quality of information and deliberation has been badly eroded, but not entirely abandoned as a public ideal.

In conclusion, high-quality information, transparency of sources, and clarity of communicative intent are presented as conditions for trust-building, while deception is rejected as incompatible with dialogic relationships. This proves that the quality of information is vitally significant for the development of informed and resilient citizenship.

3. Ethical conduct in disagreement

Resilience here is understood as the capacity to handle conflict constructively. In all focus group discussions, the dialogic interview format has clearly proved beneficial, as it has shown participants that a safe space for discussing complex issues can be created. The Lithuanian example shows normative aspiration of group participants: people acknowledge that disagreements should be resolved respectfully. Similarly, in Estonia, respondents suggested that such capacity exists in society, but it is often overpowered by aggression, asymmetrical power dynamics, and irresponsible communication interventions. The Dutch report also discusses the need to sustain respectful communication: in disagreements, communication shouldn't be merely simplified; it should remain respectful. The Finnish report suggests that people are deeply aware of these tensions but often lack stronger support to handle them.



Altogether, polarization and disagreement are not only bad developments but also inevitable aspects of communication and opinion formation. Thus, disagreement shouldn't be eliminated from public communication settings, yet people should be equipped with understanding and the capacity to handle these challenges. Practical tools must be considered for handling such occasions that might lead to disruptions, but the essential aim for participants is to continue being in the relationship. The ability to handle complex situations is an expression of resilience.

4. Equality, freedom of expression, and safety in communication

Resilience is perceived as the capacity to participate inclusively under pressure. This aspect was strongly expressed in the groups' discussions in all countries. In some countries, predominantly in Estonia, it was acknowledged that marginalized voices are often drawn to periphery and niche channels, and a strong right-wing rhetoric and emotionalization dominate, especially on social media. As the Austrian report reveals, formal freedom of expression exists; however, a safe environment is not equally available to all. The Lithuanian example also shows that vulnerable groups lack support and protection in public communication. The Estonian example reveals situations in which people do not dare to express their opinions in public for fear of the consequences. It looks like this aspect remains a very significant point in contemporary public communications. As revealed, in Lithuania, even respondents with privileged public positions acknowledged feeling unequal in some social media discussions – as a result, they've chosen to withdraw from communication. The Swiss report suggests that expressing oneself remains unevenly distributed across regions and social groups. Safety issues are central in the Slovenian report: respondents describe fears of public attack, reputational damage, or being overwhelmed by hostile responses. Civil society actors face repetitive discrediting campaigns, while marginalized groups are exposed to misinformation and hostility. Safety is further weakened by platform governance problems: harmful content can spread across transnational infrastructures that local actors feel unable to control. In Finland, marginalised groups, rural residents, youth, and ethnic minorities repeatedly describe harassment, stereotyping, exclusion, reputational risks, and withdrawal from public discussion.

These examples show that power features are the most common indicators of communication disruptions. Handling balanced power relations and ensuring safe conditions for expressing even critical views without fear of consequences is a fundamental skill and a prerequisite for civic resilience.

5. Active listening, response, and inclusion

Resilience capacity also contributes to relational repair, which is democratically desirable as it sustains relationships and societal cohesion. Reports from all countries show that participants from diverse professions and backgrounds value dialogue. The Austrian example shows that people understand and want to see more recognition in public communication that complex issues have many facets and are not just black and white. The results of Lithuanian discussions suggest that the media must foster more reconnecting practices among opposing sides, including those with diverse voices and vulnerable groups. The media should take off its "all-knowing hat". The Estonian report discusses failures and harms in communication: people talk about authorities as exposing "listening" to ordinary people, but they do not actually respond meaningfully to people's needs. Such a practice is especially harmful. Very similar examples are provided in the Dutch report. The Swiss report makes clear that the lack of meaningful response is itself a driver of cynicism and withdrawal. In Finland, climate activists,



minorities, and other participants describe cases in which they were formally consulted by authorities yet substantively ignored.

Listening, noticing, and empathic, compassionate awareness of the other are extremely important for civic resilience. If we look at civic resilience as relational, then it depends not only on expressing views but on whether people are heard and recognized as equal partners in communication. This capacity is especially important for social cohesion: to rebuild damaged civic ties and prevent the exclusion of individuals and groups from becoming alienated.

6. Constructive feedback

Resilience draws on continuous learning, adaptive responses, and self-corrections. Participants from Austria often highlight the importance of solutions-oriented communication in the media. At the same time, they understand that such journalism and public communication can become empty branding. The Finnish report shows that this capacity to learn and adjust one's responses is present, but too often carried privately by individuals rather than supported by stable collective norms or institutional mechanisms.

In general, public communication supports participants' resilience when participating actors can be questioned, corrected, and held to account, and when communication systems enable revision and learning. The Hungarian report, for example, suggests that this capacity is desired by people, but it is weakly institutionalised and politically constrained.

These examples show that resilience development shouldn't be assessed as a planned and reactive process. On the contrary, its most significant aspect is developmental. Resilience is strengthened when people can learn, self-correct, and improve without humiliation or defensiveness. The constructive feedback feature calls for greater attention to learning, revision, and self-corrections. The ability to accept feedback and possibilities to reflect on one's progress is a truly engaging feature.

Discussion

As we can see from these examples, resilience is not something people are born with. It is a learnable capacity that requires regular practice – whether at school, work, or in other daily public communication situations.

What could be done, by whom, and, if possible, how to help people handle complex communication situations?

As revealed in many of the country reports, for example, the media could help address these issues by shifting its operational functions towards greater inclusivity and attentiveness to people's needs. Vulnerable groups must also be identified by policymakers, and adequate support instruments must be tailored to their needs. Many of the country reports also mention greater investments in media literacy and education to help people navigate complex communication environments and arising conflicts.

As can also be noted, public communication acquires resilience-supporting features when it provides space for people to reflect on tensions and assume responsibility. Our experience suggests we need simple, readily applicable tools and instruments to practice communication and develop relational capacities in ways that suit everyday life situations and strengthen civic resilience.

To meet these needs, the DIACOMET project (see Figure 5) began by identifying communicative conflicts as a main research topic (“What is the Problem?”). Then, we proceeded to empirical illustrations that demonstrate how people’s awareness and capacities can be aligned to advance relational practices in communication (“What is Needed?”). As noted in the country illustrations above, people generally appreciate dialogue and are willing to invest in seeking common ground in complex communicative situations, yet they need support (“What Can Help?”).

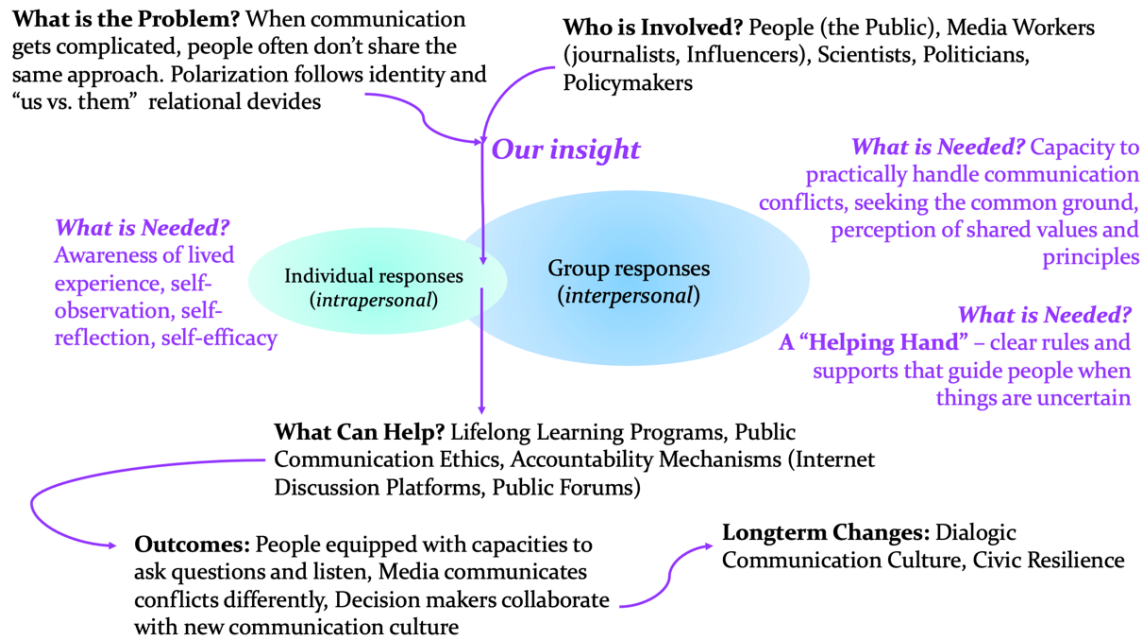


Figure 5. The DIACOMET research scheme and outcomes.

Participation in DIACOMET has taught us that we need to rethink how we define contemporary communication problems and redesign policymaking to build long-term trust and people’s capacity to sustain relationships.

Reactive communication crisis fixing is not enough. Before establishing a relationship and common ground among people with diverging opinions, a shared awareness and orientation toward trust, respect, and goodwill must be established. For that, specific dialogic communication ethics are needed. Communication is genuine when it is based on inclusion and openness, and dialogue emerges when space is created for people to express views, ask questions, and listen and be listened to, rather than to push their own agenda. This is an example of a truly civic response. Practicing civic resilience is a dialogic and relational strategy – it is more than resisting problems and surviving crises. Civic resilience is also about relationships and communication across differences.

In line with resilience thinking, DCE does not treat communicative complexities as something to be eliminated, but as a condition to be navigated in ways that preserve the communicative and relational capacities necessary for continued collective life.

As we have shown with our examples, DCE's contribution to resilience lies in fostering dignified, inclusive, and ethically grounded forms of disagreement that protect agency, mutual recognition, and the integrity of relationships even under conditions of power asymmetry and vulnerability. Civic resilience does not emerge only from individual strength or institutional protection. It is developed through communicative relations, public interaction, mutual listening, and the maintenance of social ties that enable societies to respond to challenges.

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