

Interpersonal communication



Some days, you get so excited about science and research that you want to tell everyone about it. Research – wow! Enthusiasm is best conveyed face to face. So shouldn't science communication focus primarily on interpersonal communication as a success factor? Well... no!

Direct, interpersonal communication between individuals can be described as the most complex form of communication. In addition to word-bound information, facial expressions, gestures and voice modulation are exchanged with information about the emotional state of the communicating persons. Even the clothing and chosen setting play a role that should not be underestimated. Communication science and psychology offer a wealth of findings in this area.

A face-to-face encounter usually sticks in the memory longer than a read message, and if something is particularly important, we like to communicate it directly. But interpersonal communication requires work. Sending a message via a messenger app to a group of colleagues is much less effort than making phone calls or meeting all these people in person. For active communicators, therefore, one aspect in particular is central in the context of interpersonal communication: efficiency.

Assuming that the goals of science communication are essentially to share knowledge and build trust, the various forms of science communication must always be weighed up against the costs and benefits. Especially when scientists communicate themselves and do not delegate the work, it must always be considered whether it is better to invest time in their own research or in communicating it. Science communication often gets the short end of the stick here, and rightly so. If I can reach millions of people with an animation on YouTube or an appearance on a popular TV show, the question of whether face-to-face communication would be an alternative doesn't even arise. Online information, brochures and flyers or even podcasts use communication channels that are open to hundreds or thousands in the online community. Especially in the case of primarily factual information dissemination (current state of research or ongoing projects), generally accessible information channels suitable for the masses are well suited.

When it comes to trust, the situation is somewhat different. Here, a balance has to be struck. When it's about gaining the trust of influential stakeholders – such as donors – interpersonal, direct communication is probably worthwhile. There is also no substitute for face-to-face communication when it comes to finding new partners in research or business. And one last practical tip: Beside the use of video conference systems for daily communication, compromise formats such as video or audio productions are particularly worthy of attention. If researchers present themselves in a video on YouTube with an exciting topic in good picture and sound quality, many aspects of face-to-face communication are conveyed in addition to the factual information. This can be very helpful, for example, when recruiting new team members for your own research group.

Everyone knows examples of misunderstandings by **TEXT MESSAGES**.

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