

Chapter 2

Experience-Based Communication

Experience-Based Communication

The Consultancy Firm: Inhuman?

Some time ago a renowned consultancy firm invited one of the authors of this book to a non-obligatory meeting about possible future cooperation. Initially the CEO and Communications Director informed us that the company had undergone a lengthy process in order to define a series of values that effectively described the firm. When asked what these were, the managers were able to remember only a few of them; they did, however, stress that humanity was one of the crucial values in relation to employees and customers.

It is a thought-provoking and symptomatic situation when members of a management team – who should be setting an example – can neither remember nor understand the values they themselves defined. The problem here is obvious: it is well known that messages become increasingly blurred as they filter through the layers of an organization, so if the management is unable to understand them, how are their employees likely to fair? The experience of simply entering the building would confirm whether the humanity value was being put into practice in real life...

An oblong hall fitted with classic, cool marble tiles is the first thing that meets the eye as you walk through the company's glass door. A waft of universal cleaning materials mixed with the slightly stuffy smell so common to office buildings assails your nose. At the end of the hall lies the reception area, which is slightly elevated. It is in front of a large window, which from a distance turns the receptionist into a solemn, dark silhouette. You get the feeling that you are about to receive Holy Communion! As you amble towards her along the marble mile, you cannot avoid feeling slightly uneasy, humble and small. The receptionist looks down and greets you politely. You tell her about the meeting and she tells you to take the lift to the fifth floor.

Inside the lift a notice states very clearly which floors are reserved for EMPLOYEES ONLY – making you feel as though you are already trespassing. At the fifth floor you are met by yet another receptionist who states coolly: "The cloakroom is behind you. Please take a seat in the meeting room while I find the person you're looking for." The meeting room is nice and clean, with a bountiful supply of fruit, cake, water and coffee, but there are no people in sight. After 10 min the consultants emerge, and everyone presents themselves.

This account may sound rather embellished, but this is not the case. The question is: Where was the humanity in the way this company presented itself? From the time of arrival to the time of the meeting, 15 min had passed. During this period the experience was anything but friendly; on the contrary, it was cold and solemn.

Did that first impression actually influence the visitor's perception of the consultant? The answer is *yes*. In an age where everyone feels pressed for time, people want to spend it wisely. In an age where products and services are basically identical, where we try to differentiate what is on offer by ascribing emotional qualities to them – and in an age where we try to establish personal relationships with customers – we cannot help but wonder why this particular consultancy firm did not make more effort to ensure that the experience and the meeting successfully expressed their core values. Surely there must be another firm out there with a more human feel to it?

Before, during and after the moment of truth, i.e., the physical meeting itself, factors such as time, the environment and the overall experience help to determine people's expectations and lend the message credibility. Prior to the meeting, many of the elements of the experience were in place: the phone conversation during which the meeting was decided, the e-mail that confirmed it, the visitor's arrival at the office, the way in which he

The most important test a message can be subjected to is a face-to-face meeting with the outside world.

was welcomed, the waiting time at reception, the things he noticed in the lift, the waiting time in the conference room, the meeting itself, etc. Each one of these contact points was critical to honoring the company's humanity value. The physical meeting and the sensory impressions and signals that

were sent all helped to determine the nature of his experience. Unfortunately the overall experience was more or less ruined because – due to inadvertent behavior – the company's image lacked credibility.

Most people and companies today are extremely conscious of the significance of their ability to control their image. They are also aware that the manner in which they do so must in no way alter their own personality or the core identity of the company. They know what needs to be done when they are IN the spotlight; however, if their behavior changes when they are OUTSIDE the spotlight, the message they are striving to communicate will suffer. When this occurs, people are rarely conscious of

it. They forget that in this day and age, all of us are in the spotlight all of the time – even when we think we are not! The most important test a message can be subjected to is a face-to-face meeting with the outside world.

Would your messages pass the test?

Messages Tested Through Physical Meetings

In the real world we are always in the spotlight. Companies are generally not very good at controlling their images, nor do they fully understand how crucial physical contact points can be. They forget to express their values through their behavior. Consider your personality for a moment: any experience you wish to create must come from the heart in order to be trustworthy and genuine. Experiences and messages cannot be donned like clothing; they are the essence of who you are! *You* must be the experience and the message and you must be *true to both*.

If the atmosphere in the consultancy company had been warm and friendly the entire experience would have been different. Had there been a scent of fresh coffee, and had the reception area looked more like a lounge area, then our colleague's associations would have been more positive. And had the consultant arrived immediately and welcomed him with a firm handshake and a smile before escorting him to the meeting, a different impression would have been created. Why? Because all those fine words about humanity would have been backed up by concrete actions, and the visitor would have perceived a genuine interest in people through his sensory impressions. His senses should have been assailed the moment he set foot in the place. If you think this kind of behavior seems insincere, then your inability to empathize with clients and understand the world in which they operate will be reflected in the way you communicate.

Messages must be incorporated into your company and be experienced by both employees and customers in order to create a common understanding and strong working relationships. The primary message of this book is:

Add substance to your values and messages, and communicate in a way that can be both sensed and felt.

Communicate in a way that can be both sensed and felt

Set the scene for your company and make sure that your values pervade

your every move – from the way you conduct yourselves at meetings, seminars, employee events and exhibitions to the way your buildings are designed, organized and furnished. Deliver messages from the heart, so they appear trustworthy and valuable. People must experience, identify and empathize with those messages whenever and wherever they encounter them.

The former CEO of Copenhagen Airports, Niels Boserup, was the dynamo behind the restoration of the old airport terminal, which was designed by famous Danish architect, Vilhelm Lauritzen. Today the terminal houses the airport's administrative offices, among other things. The restoration was a conscious initiative on the part of Niels Boserup and it was designed to make the company aware of its identity and history – and proud of it¹.

Walking the talk

The management wanted the quality expressed by the physical framework to be reflected in all forms of communication and in the behavior of all its employees.



The recently restored airport terminal in Copenhagen houses the administrative offices for all of the airport's employees. Quality is expressed in many ways – one of which is the reestablishment of the original entrance with columns and a canopy. The airport terminal was carefully moved to a new location (Photograph: Copenhagen Airport Press Photography)

Copenhagen Airports has fully understood the influence physical meetings can have on people's behavior. A message is a promise, and it is only worth as much as it is reputed to be. If you have ever heard the expression "Walk the talk" you will know that it really is that simple.

About This Book

The consultancy firm did not succeed in making visitors identify and empathize with their message, and this book tells you how they might have achieved this. A series of key considerations concerning experience-based communication will be introduced with the purpose of increasing not only your comprehension of its strategic and emotional importance, but also the role it could play in your company's internal and external communication.

Experience-based communication happens when companies consciously use physical meetings and locations to create an affinity with a given market segment.

Experience-based communication occurs when a company consciously uses physical meetings and locations as communication tools to connect with a given market segment. When it comes to influencing people's behavior, no other tools are as powerful as physical meetings.

This book is not an A–Z on how to work tactically and operationally with experiences; in other words, the project-management oriented approach has not been prioritized. Instead we aim to shed light on – and accentuate the importance of – the influence experiences can exert on individuals, companies and networks.

The theories and considerations presented in this book will be integrated in the final chapter, which presents a holistic view of the strategic importance of optimizing your company's experience architecture. Such architecture can be considered optimized when your mission, vision and values can be experienced at every real-life touch-point. The objective is to engage your target audience mentally, physically and socially, thereby transforming them into loyal customers and willing ambassadors for your company.

You can read this book from cover to cover or use it as a source of reference. Chapter 2 is basically a snap shot of the whole book. If you do

read the entire work, be prepared for some repetition, because the concept of experience-based communication will be explored from many angles.

Whenever the word *experience* is used in this book it should be interpreted as *the experience medium itself*. This covers physical, multi-sensory contact between people and organizations.

To show you how our theories work in practice we provide examples where experiences have been used as a communication medium (Fig. 1).

The idea is not to reject other types of communication or media, but to make people aware of how physical meetings and locations can affect a

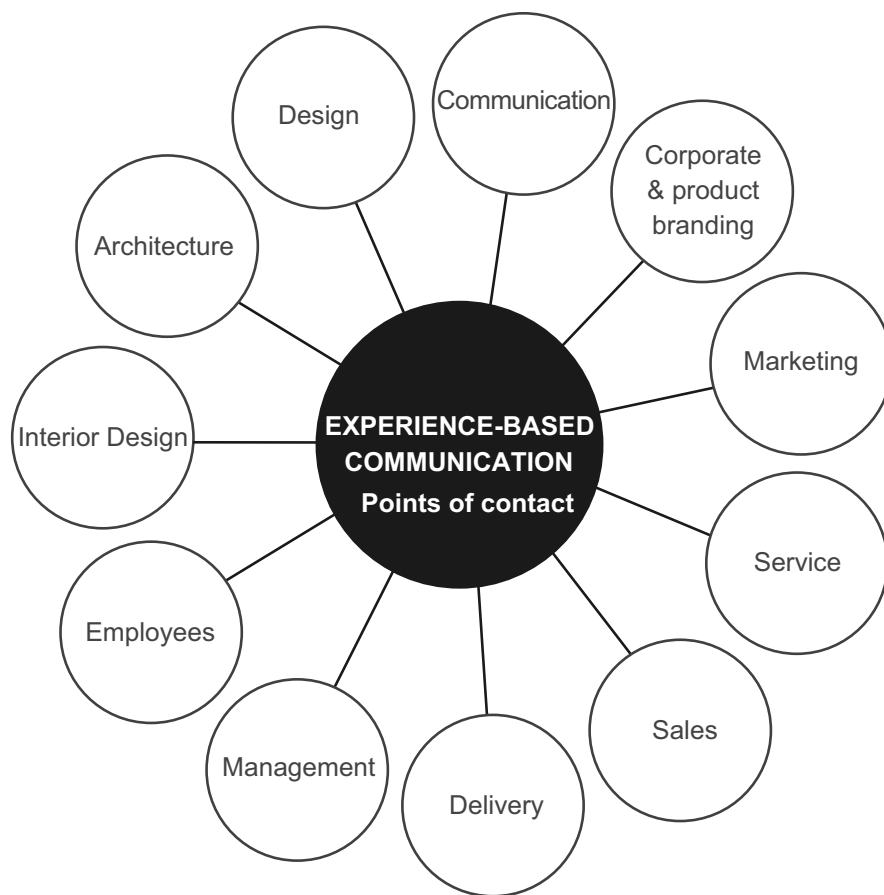


Fig. 1 *The body and soul of experiences (3rdDimension©)*

company or a person's credibility and ability to make their presence felt, as well as their ability to incorporate learning-via-the-senses into the message needing to be communicated.

The most important goal of communication – both internally and externally – is to create good relationships with the recipient. You have to meet people face to face, build up a rapport and establish emotional ties through experiences. Then you can turn your attention to other channels of communication, where the dialogue can continue in a more cost-effective fashion (or vice versa).

Support your message with the appropriate behavior and make that behavior your guiding light wherever you make contact with people externally. You can provide a coherent experience by integrating various disciplines in your organization and by taking a cross-disciplinary approach. The above model illustrates how experience-based communication works: it plays a pivotal role in defining behavior when communicating with selected target groups.




An oxygen bar, placed in an airport setting, where “air cocktails” containing various soothing and stimulating aromas can be inhaled through nasal tubes (Photograph: Arne V. Petersen)

This book will help you ensure that the way you communicate is considered to be cohesive by people in the outside world. The experience angle guarantees that messages are perceived through all of the five senses in order to move the recipient physically, mentally and socially. Our ambition is to provide a relevant, theoretical contribution to all individuals who formulate and convey messages; a source of inspiration to be used by dynamic companies and leaders who are ready for change – and by those who want to communicate and who are brave enough to set an example and bring their company's values to life. Whether you work in a company, institution, political party, association or church, etc. the only way to achieve this is to add substance to your values and support them with the appropriate behavior.

By integrating our theories on experience architecture into your strategic planning, you will be able to develop your business and achieve your goals. If you can create a corporate DNA that is authentic, credible and easily recognizable, you will be able to strengthen your image, build a larger and more loyal customer base, and create shortcuts to your most important target groups. You will also be able to motivate and retain employees, and ensure that they behave in a fitting manner in all dealings with the outside world.

Experiences: Nothing But Hot Air?

People are becoming more and more interested in their emotional needs, so the challenge for the communicator is to address both the intellect and the heart. Most products and services differentiate themselves through the emotional values attached to them through marketing. This trend has been



Increasingly, we seek
activation and
experiences

initiated by an increasing demand for superfluous, more luxury-oriented goods and services. One such commodity is the “air cocktail” that is served at the oxygen bar at Copenhagen Airport, which consists of fresh air containing various aromas

that can be inhaled through nasal tubes. Apparently, things that used to be ridiculed and described as nonsense and “hot air” can now be sold and make perfect sense!

It seems that hot air (i.e., the experience) has become a valuable commodity. People sell us *Silence from the Himalayas*, which comes in tins, and *Water from Greenland's ice cap*, and so forth, but they would have to be extremely skilled to sell sand in the Sahara. Or would they?

Society might be losing its heart and soul but people have not yet lost the privilege or will to mold and remold their everyday lives. It is not products or services that we value the most; increasingly we focus on the ritual accompanying their purchase or consumption. Just think about the “Build a Bear” concept, where an ordinary teddy bear becomes unique due to the rituals of giving it a heart, clothing it and christening it, etc. Not only do these rituals allow the company to charge a premium price; they have enabled them to expand their target groups from small children to teenagers and adults also. The queue of people waiting outside any “Build a Bear” shop speaks for itself.

Today people are not interested in passively consuming pre-fabricated dreams and stories; we want to be activated and have an influence – and we want true stories with personal significance. A story about a cheese that has matured in an ancient chalk pit is a good story, but is it trustworthy? The answer is yes, if it is founded on tradition. Otherwise it would seem insincere and profit-seeking. Companies and brands that recognize our worth as individuals, and who involve and interact with us seem credible and authentic, and we remain loyal to them. We are not looking for

We want stories that
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and relevant.

fabricated values and stories; we want the genuine article. And that is why messages must be brought to life. The dream society of yesterday lacked depth and credibility; today we want stories that are both authentic and relevant.



*The successful “Build a Bear” concept is an excellent example of brand activation
(Photograph: Scanpix)*

Today We Want Stories That Are Authentic and Relevant

This is where experiences become relevant because they *can* make things credible. For the world outside to associate a company with a certain set of values it is not enough simply to define them and print them. Values must be consistent and beyond reproach, and they must be reflected in a company’s actions. Products or services are no longer the primary focal point; today it is the company that commands people’s attention. Factors such as attitude towards the environment, sense of social responsibility, and involvement in issues affecting local communities can affect a company’s ability to sell its products or services as well as its ability to attract desirable employees. Networks and strong customer relationships have therefore become far more important than before. As individuals we have become wealthier, which makes it easier to satisfy our material needs. But we have also become poorer – both emotionally and spiritually.

As individuals seeking fulfillment we demand meaningful experiences that teach us something about ourselves. An example that perfectly illustrates this trend is the Christmas present, which today often takes the form of an experience – from spa vouchers to theater tickets or weekend getaways.

We are moving from shallow Christmas presents to personal ones. This is a definite indication that personal, emotional and meaningful *substance* is becoming more important than material goods. The yardstick of quality is no longer *more*, *bigger* or *better*; it has become *meaning*. Our needs have obviously changed.

Futurologists anticipate that in 50 years from now the average person living in Western world will have as much money to spend as a prosperous person living in Beverly Hills today. If this proves to be true, the financial opportunities to fulfill our hopes and dreams will be greater than ever. This may sound unrealistic, but today the unreal is often more credible than reality. We live in a huge, abstract hyper reality, where missing a favorite TV show can make people feel that they've lost touch with the real world.

The challenge is to
identify which
emotional anchors are
relevant

Directors and marketing specialists need to understand that emotional values are some of the best assets you can attach to a product. The challenge is to identify which emotional anchors are relevant.

These anchors might be birthdays, jubilees, holidays, final exams, trade fairs, etc. or they might be situations that educate, entertain, enrich or in some other way manage to move people emotionally. Such messages are thought to be intangible and abstract – but are they? They appeal to people's psychological and social needs. They are also difficult to grasp, and if they are irrelevant and consequently fail to appeal to the heart, they are perceived as being nothing more than hot air.

If values are to become tangible and believable they need to be expressed through meaningful behavior designed to motivate and inspire the recipient. Having said that, why do so many companies fail to achieve this? Where do they go wrong, and which stories do they fail to tell? Take food products, for instance. During product development, great weight is attached to sensory factors such as smell, taste, consistency, packaging and design. This is because the sensory aspects significantly affect people's perception of a product. What we are really discussing is the customer experience and emotional reaction. When addressing the customer experience, companies need to know which emotional drivers to employ in order to generate the desired reaction.

As the service society and the experience society have evolved, a struggle between identical products and services has developed. This has made branding very popular and intensified competition between products and brands. A superabundance of products has forced companies to find new ways of differentiating themselves from the competition. One of these involves attaching emotional values to products through marketing.

However, many companies are realizing that emotional values do not

**When emotional
messages lack
credibility, people
don't pay attention**

necessarily promise more visibility or a greater share of the market. Some might theorize that these values have lost their potency – but how true is that? The Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies once wrote a report on the branding techniques of the future,

and one of their scenarios (all of which are anchored in the concept of individualization) suggested that people's emotions have become saturated and that they now search for profound knowledge, clarity and fixed points in their lives². But the authors of this book beg to disagree. We believe that the problem is more likely to be the manner in which emotional values are communicated – because if they lack credibility, all they do is go straight in one ear and out the other.

Why is it that so few companies manage to address the sensory aspect of emotional messages when communicating? Can emotional values be brought to life or not? We might be able to see and hear that a brand is exclusive, provocative, romantic or inspiring – but why do we never get to taste, smell and feel these qualities? Are they nothing but empty promises?

At the end of the day your company has a choice: you can either communicate nonsense or you can add sensory elements and substance to your messages so that the recipients can identify with them. The three challenges that must be overcome in a company's management style and communication methods are a lack of sensitivity, anonymity, and behavior that fails to express the company's fundamental values.

The sixth sense in the model entitled *The Sensitive Organization* – Intuition – should be interpreted as the synergy between the five senses. All companies, political parties, NGOs, trade unions, etc. risk communicating nonsense unless they develop an awareness of how their messages are being experienced. You need to ask whether your company is actually

doing what it says it will do. Can you smell it, hear it, taste it, feel it and sense it?

People are rarely given the opportunity to experience messages through their senses, so they perceive many companies and products as being untrustworthy. But it is possible to inject credibility and authenticity into your messages by thinking of your company as an entity equipped with senses (Fig. 2).

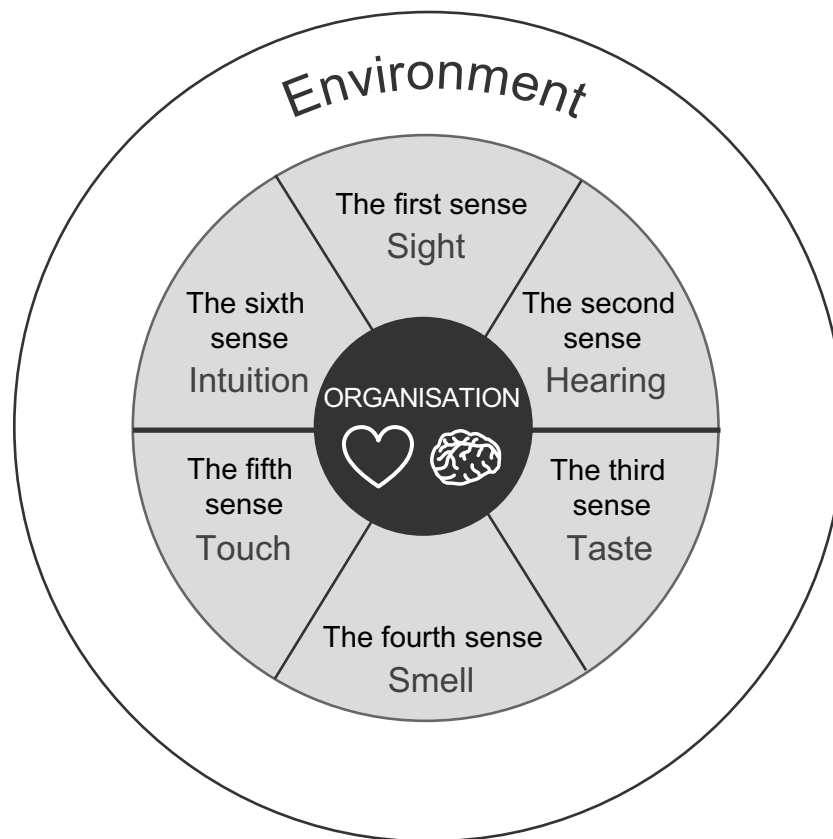


Fig. 2 The sensitive organization

A Society Without Physical Contact

Technological developments have made it easier than ever to contact people, but technology has also removed the human element from

communication. The sender has distanced himself from the recipient – whether the communication is internal or external.

Technology is teaching people new skills in the areas of research, communication, knowledge sharing, publishing and even activism. Internet surfers have learnt to share knowledge through Wikis; ideas through Social Book-marking; entertainment through You Tube; socialize via Facebook, etc. And people's awareness of media and communication channels has grown exponentially.

Electronic media has its uses but impact-wise it can never replace personal meetings. The optimum way to engage today's audiences is to employ various forms of communication to deliver "cocktails" of storytelling and sensory experiences. This is already happening: activists are using Speakers' Corners *and* internet blogs to get their messages across. Off-line brands are making themselves available on-line too. And on-line brands are developing a physical presence either at a permanent location or at temporary touchpoints, as the need arises.

**The sender has
distanced himself
from the recipient**

Many people feel that they are being pacified and that they are missing out on the total experience and this is because their senses are not involved. This deficiency is reflected in the demand for experiences in all facets of

life. The question is: Do we experience anything at all? We do everything we can to change our habits and escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Take the travel market, for instance: more and more of us go off trekking in exotic, far-off places in search of active, memorable holidays.

On the subject of travel, where does the journey actually begin? Think about the last time you went to the airport, for instance. Airlines have begun to outsource their fare systems, so you might have ordered your flight tickets via the internet, where they were automatically registered on your bonus card. When you arrive at the airport you leave your car in a car park that is monitored by electronic sensors and cameras. Sensors also open the doors to the departure lounge, where your luggage is scanned by a machine. Your body is then scanned by a detector, and you check in by running your credit card through a machine. Fifty years ago this process would have brought you into contact with twenty people; today you meet only two.



Self-service airport check-ins (Photograph: 3rdDimension©)

Just imagine, instead of sensors, detectors and machines that read your card, you could meet real people! Would that not influence your impression of, and relationship with, the airport and the airline? Ignoring the rational and economic arguments, ask yourself this: Have the automatic check-in counters and monitoring systems been introduced to help the airline and its staff, or to please its customers? Self service may look like an ideal opportunity to reduce costs, but is it customer liberation or corporate imposition? Even the faintest whiff of an agenda for transferring cost from company to consumer will cause it to be rejected by customers. Conversely, the more trust people have in a company, the more self-service as a concept will be considered.

Where airlines are concerned such rationalization and automation of services has made them appear superficial and anonymous. Being unable to see their faces or sense their values, we feel nothing when interacting with them. Without emotions there is no experience. Our muscles have been pacified by machines, our minds invaded by computers and our senses replaced by sensors. We are becoming increasingly passive, and the gap between ourselves, other people and other entities is widening.

Our emotions are the only part of us that have not been automated – yet! But how long is this state of affairs likely to last? The pharmaceutical

We want to be activated, and we want to think for ourselves. We want to get in touch with our senses and emotions.

industry already sells happiness in the form of pills. Cosmetic surgery clinics sell beauty, self-confidence and success. Will we one day be able to buy love, happiness, grief and anger? Feelings are generated by complex nerve impulses and processes in the body. Science tells us that they can be provoked hormonally with the aid of

adrenalin and other substances. But where will that lead us – and do we really want to go there?

Society could potentially become so comfortable and superficial that we become emotionally demotivated as employees, consumers and individuals. Emotions should move us, but when we are in this frame of mind, they fail to do so. And this lack of ability to respond produces a counter reaction. *We want to be activated, and we want to think for ourselves. We want to get in touch with our senses and emotions.* We live in insulated spaces – offspring of the age of technology – and the worst-case scenario is that we will lose touch with the real world and find ourselves adrift in cyberspace or some kind of hyper-reality that might turn us into zombies. Such a fate can also befall a company, product or a brand, because when people's sense of reality disappears, the physical experience falls by the wayside.

The noise, anonymity and inefficiency of mass communication have made direct marketing a more profitable solution; after all, why use a scattergun when a more effective weapon is at hand? But despite this more targeted approach, companies still fear face-to-face contact due to a higher contact price. Much can be gained from involving people physically because it puts a halt to passive observation.

Some of the most recent research into the brain and teaching principles indicates that people learn and understand more when they are allowed to get actively involved.

Experiences affect people's feelings through active involvement

People react emotionally to experiences because they feel actively involved, so if you want to move people, be sure to incorporate behavior and movement in your messages.

External motivation (the way you stage the situation in which the message is to be communicated) and *internal* motivation (the way you adapt the message to fit the target audience), are Alpha and Omega when it comes to communication. This combination helps the recipient tune in, so they can absorb and comprehend the message you are trying to convey. In this context, companies must acknowledge the significance of learning and the value of staging. One of the strengths of the experience medium is that it combines multi-sensory learning with physical staging. When messages involve both body and soul, recipients are affected physically, mentally and socially.

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Positive experiences alter not only people's reactions but also the roles they play. Passive spectators suddenly become willing ambassadors. Involvement engenders empathy, which makes the message feel important to the individual. And this reaction influences others in the group. We become involved completely voluntarily

when presented with an experience that affects us emotionally.

One of the conclusions of this book is that learning is optimized when the experience involves physical, mental and social dimensions.

Learning is optimized when experiences include physical, mental and social dimensions

Physical experiences are what we see, hear, feel, smell, taste and sense.

Mental experiences are when we begin to feel involved.

Social experiences are when the experience and involvement lead to empathy, interaction and communities.

The EET model (Experience, Engage, Transform) is the result of years of working with experiences in communication, where we have learned that these three dimensions make messages easier to comprehend. This model is not a definitive learning model; it neither includes the complexity and diversity that characterize our way of acquiring knowledge, nor is it described in learning theory. Take the time factor, for instance, which should be a parameter since learning takes place over time. However, we

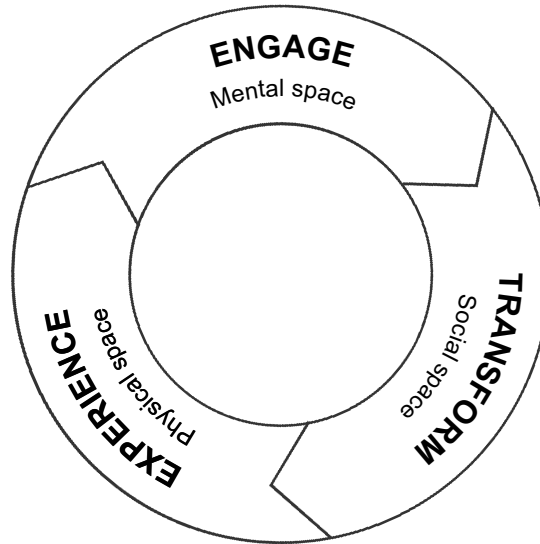


Fig. 3 The EET model (3rdDimension©)

believe that the model summarizes most of what learning theory encompasses (Fig. 3).

We believe that communication will increasingly involve bringing messages to life through telling authentic stories and involving the five senses in the process. This combination makes messages more pertinent and more credible.

**Messages that have
been brought to life
are more pertinent
and more credible**

The visual “business card”, which encompasses everything from architecture, shop facades and interior design to merchandise, logos and website design, etc. gives people an impression of a company’s culture. But the visual aspect is only a part of the

total experience. Companies often focus only on the surface, i.e., the visual identity, but if messages are to appear trustworthy they must permeate the whole organization, from the exterior design to the internal working methods and the way people interact.

Consider your own three-dimensional business card. The behavior of your employees *must* correspond to your company values. And mental and sensory dimensions must be attributed to these values in order to

differentiate them from traditional, image-based communication. Image-based communication usually provides a static and arbitrary picture that may well make messages visible, but this does not make them easy to understand or relate to. Paper-based messages or PowerPoint presentations may be visual but they lack true vitality, so people may not recognize them

The process you follow when bringing messages to life should be perceived as a test that will reveal whether they are genuine and trustworthy.

when entering a reception area, meeting employees, visiting a shop or calling on the phone.

All too often, very little attention is given to other sensory aspects – such as the way a building smells and sounds and, not least, the way employees treat visitors. When messages lack a solid foundation and support (both internally and externally), people are unable to

equate them with their perceptions of the company in real life. They do not want to be force-fed with messages that try to tell them what to think.

The process your company follows when bringing messages to life should be perceived as a test designed to reveal whether those messages are genuine and trustworthy. Untrustworthy messages are impossible to transform and only serve to help your competitors. They must therefore be eliminated to pave the way for more genuine and trustworthy messages. Experiences can help you to establish your identity both internally and externally, but to make these experiences unique you must ask these questions: How do people experience your values? What kind of experiences and emotions do they invoke? What kind of behavior will reflect your values in a face-to-face meeting? Such questions will help you ascertain exactly how your messages should be conveyed in terms of sound, smell, touch and taste.

To communicate effectively, companies need to perform certain symbolic acts

Written communication always falls short because the printed word commands only a fleeting interest. To communicate effectively, companies can dramatize certain symbolic acts. These may help you to communicate your values to the entire organization, but they play only a small role in the total experience. Basically, *drama*

means expressing oneself vocally and physically, and you can use these tactics to demonstrate how well your employees cooperate.

Dramatization can reveal whether everyone perceives a company's values in the same way, or whether they differ. The employees of the consultancy firm mentioned earlier could have benefited from asking themselves what kind of behavior or act symbolizes the Humanity value. By translating this value into actions the company could have helped everyone understand what it really meant. A friendly gesture – such as being polite and forthcoming – is the kind of behavior that symbolizes humanity and openness (Fig. 4).

American politicians have been using symbolic acts in election campaigns for years. At a carefully planned press conference in the 2004 election for Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger said to the sitting Governor of California and his staff: "I'll clean office." And he used a broom to emphasize his point. That same year, while visiting

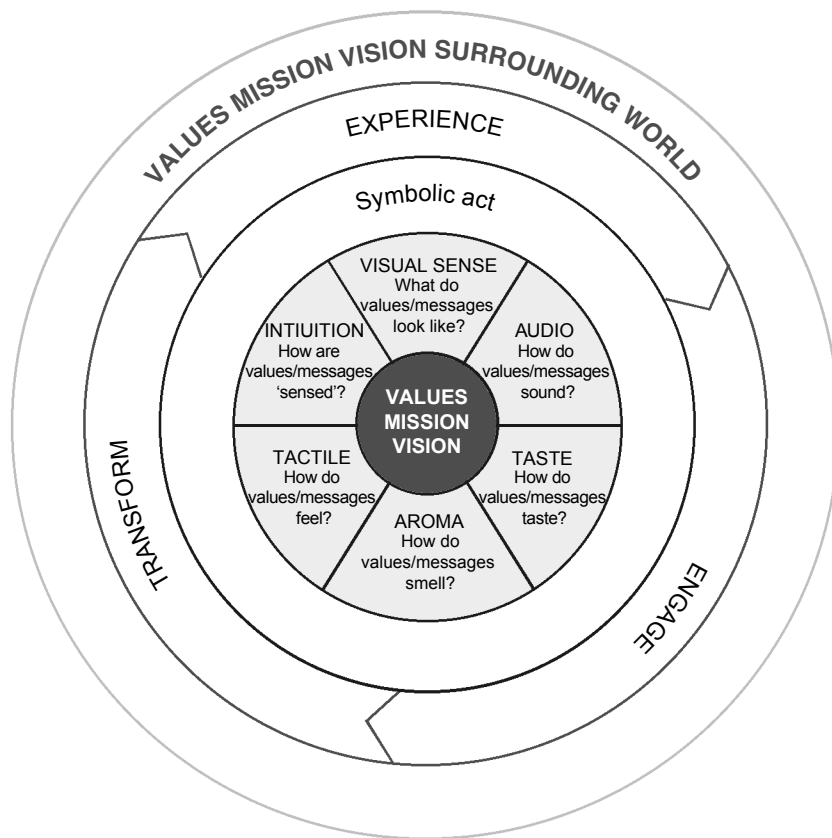


Fig. 4 Experience-based communication (3rdDimension©)

American soldiers during the war in Iraq, Schwarzenegger said with his characteristic accent to a cheering crowd: "I once played Terminator in the movie, but you are the true terminators." Although it may sound rather comical, this way of dramatizing things actually helped him become governor. Companies and people can make a powerful impact using very limited means by incorporating strong, symbolic acts in their behavior. The saying, "Actions speak louder than words" is all too true, and politicians are very well aware of this.

Yet sometimes politicians fail to follow the path of truth. Nobel Peace Prize winner Al Gore's documentary on climate change, *An Inconvenient Truth*, won an Oscar for best documentary feature. Unfortunately, The Tennessee Center for Policy Research has found that Gore deserves a gold statue for hypocrisy³. His mansion, located in the upper-class Belle Meade area of Nashville, consumes more electricity every month than the average American household uses in an entire year, according to the Nashville Electric Service.

In his documentary, the former Vice President calls on Americans to conserve energy by reducing electricity consumption at home. According to the Department of Energy, the average household in America consumes 10,656 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year. In 2006, Gore devoured nearly 221,000 kWh – more than 20 times the national average. In August alone he used 22,619 kWh, which is more than twice the electricity than the average American family uses in an entire year.

As a result of his energy consumption, Gore's average monthly electric bill topped \$1,359. Since the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gore's energy consumption has increased from an average of 16,200 kWh per month in 2005, to 18,400 kWh per month in 2006. And the extravagance doesn't stop there. Natural gas bills for Gore's mansion and guesthouse averaged \$1,080 per month last year.

"As the spokesman of choice for the global warming movement, Al Gore has to be willing to walk the walk, not just talk the talk, when it comes to home energy use," said Tennessee Center for Policy Research President, Drew Johnson.

Gore paid almost \$30,000 in combined electricity and natural gas bills for his Nashville estate in 2006. Unfortunately he failed to think his actions through; they provoked an extremely negative reaction because they revealed more about his own values and inconvenient truths than his



Al Gore with his Nobel Peace Price (Photograph: Scanpix)

opponent's. Gore's use of a private jet to promote his documentary worldwide has also come under fire: Why does he not travel by ordinary airplane or reduce his own CO² footprint? It is hard to make a genuine call for action if the messenger doesn't "walk the talk".

When Jose Bove, a French shepherd, attacked a McDonalds Restaurant in the village of Millau it was a strong symbol of the anti-globalization movement. Jose Bove became famous worldwide as the "David" who stood up to a commercial Goliath. The photograph of the attack made headlines all over the world and created more media attention than if Jose Bove and an army of activists had been standing in front of the European parliament or the World Trade Organization waving banners.

To some the attack reinforced the view that Frenchmen all too often take the law into their own hands. Images of farmers smashing trucks carrying imported vegetables; recurring riots in Paris suburbs, and the recent protest against new labor market laws all spring to mind. However, not all symbolic actions need to be provocative, controversial, illegal or detrimental to others.

Our lives are full of rituals and symbolic actions – from baptisms, weddings and jubilees to the christening of ships and inauguration of bridges. Companies can benefit greatly from using such actions as a means of communication.

One symbolic action that gained the attention of the media took place at global hearing aid manufacturer Oticon, which installed a huge paper shredder above a transparent tube in a central location at their head office to symbolize that the days of traditional paper-shuffling and bureaucracy were over. This had a major effect both internally and externally. Naturally, the more people you can involve in a symbolic act, the more memorable and personal it becomes.



Shepherd Jose Bove attacks a McDonalds Restaurant under construction – a symbolic act demonstrating his disapproval of US trade sanctions against the EU. The photograph traveled the entire globe (Photograph: Polfoto)

Experiences Target Our Hearts and Minds

Try to turn things around and get closer to people with your messages. Inject more emotion into them. Consider the cornerstones of all human

communication – perception and learning – and remember that we make ourselves understood through our senses, and that we use them to interpret the world around us. We learn more when we go “hands-on” – so why it is that so few companies include the body and the senses when communicating? All communication should be based on how it is likely to be experienced.

In a world where trustworthiness, meaning and authenticity are paramount, it is essential to create a strong emotional bond between leader and employee, employee and customer, seller and buyer, sender and recipient,

We communicate and make ourselves understood through our senses, and we use them to interpret the world around us.

etc. This book is designed to help those professionals whose responsibility it is to communicate values to increase the precision, comprehension and flexibility of their internal and external communication by eliminating unnecessary interference. This helps to shorten the distance between sender and recipient.

The authors of this book have brushed up on their basic knowledge of human perception and the way in which people learn in order to provide a clear idea of how best to engage and involve the target group – and teach them something in the process. This book’s contribution to the often heated debate on the values of marketing and branding is to bring things down to a more sensible level. The Chinese philosopher Confucius once said:

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.”

Confucius (551 BC)

Confucius understood what many people have difficulty understanding in this day and age; that when we are allowed to experiment and make our own conclusions, we understand more. The solution is to give people a face-to-face experience. It is not about making more noise than everyone else, or making it more often. Nor is it about making yourself more visible,

Give people a face-to-face experience!

or about being seen in all the right places. It is about creating an experience that has maximum impact on the recipient’s senses, to help them remember and understand.

Being convincing requires credibility and innovative thinking. If you have ever waited in a transit lounge, surrounded by rolling ads and noisy billboards all competing with messages being piped through the loudspeaker system, you have probably felt a strong urge to run. Bad timing – certainly! But airports are generally so noisy that when you hear futurologists predict that peace and quiet will one day become more valuable than time, you cannot help but applaud the idea.

Years ago most airlines, including Scandinavian Airlines (SAS), created a lounge area where bonus and business customers could temporarily escape all the noise and stress, and enjoy comfort and good service. This was the idea of course, but when actually visiting the SAS lounge you will find yourself surrounded by magazines and display cases full of items such as Örefors porcelain, etc. These products were carefully placed for maximum promotional impact, and they did match the “It’s Scandinavian” concept. But to be quite frank, the experience had nothing to do with SAS. How credible is that?

In our opinion, SAS appear to be compromising their core values and services in full view of their best customers, just to make an income from alternative sources. They are also missing out on the opportunity to use their lounge to differentiate their services from their competitors’ and to communicate important messages to travelers. Instead of bringing their values to life with no interference from other sources, they are actually “polluting” their own lounge and the desired SAS sensation. And their customers spend their time wondering why they have done this.

So what is the problem exactly? So many players are battling for our favor – from political parties, NGOs and non-profit organizations to companies and brands. They all attempt to outshine each other, sometimes in the most unexpected places. The average Westerner is exposed to up to 3,000 messages each day. We surround ourselves with cell phones, the internet, PDAs, Bluetooth technology and so on, and make ourselves available 24 h a day. Very soon, not a single place in the public domain will exist in which we are NOT bombarded with information. So we avert our eyes and ears in an attempt to register only those messages that seem relevant.

If the SAS lounge had motivated people to relax and *sense* the comfort and service level, they would have taken things to an entirely different plane. They would have come a lot closer to involving their customers in an experience that encouraged them to interact while visiting what should have been a noise and “pollution-free” zone.

In future the challenge will be not merely to create a cohesive experience of a company's identity but to take things a step further and allow people to experience its values via communication. People need to get involved and interact, so it is important to establish various oases or spaces in which to create these experiences, where noise and "pollution" are banned. Only when people feel they are part of something do company values become more personal.

An old Chinese proverb says: "If you think for too long about your next step, you will spend your entire life on one leg." Companies, organizations, and associations must understand that, when making choices, people are increasingly following their hearts, and they demand greater openness, authenticity and credibility. Superficial messages and empty promises fail to satisfy us; instead we value companies and brands that can be sensed. They should feel familiar; be pertinent; have faces and present authentic and trustworthy stories rather than dreams. Values need

We value companies
and brands that can be
sensed

to be sensed physically in order to become meaningful. Messages that put distance between sender and recipient are perceived as being empty and irrelevant.

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Experiencing a company's values can be quite disappointing because until that point they have only been seen in their best light. When we come in direct contact with a product or service, and venture behind the façade or packaging, the message suddenly

lacks depth and substance. It can seem intangible and non-existent – thin air compared to what we had expected.

Conversely an experience we expected to be disappointing can actually turn out to be quite positive. If the real-life experience manages to surpass the expectations that have been created through a non-physical contact point, it can be highly advantageous. However, the opposite is often true: values become watered down. People need to feel that companies, brands and products are less formal and more intimate. Therefore the challenge is to do what Jesus Christ is said to have done: turn water into wine!

Experiences can be evaluated in much the same way as a good wine, where we use our senses to assess its color, body, taste and bouquet. A

good wine opens the mind and provides a positive, multi-sensory experience. A fine wine also has a story to tell; a unique history that carries us through age-old traditions, unique cultures and remarkable regions. Such wine should be enjoyed in good company, where friends raise their glasses and share the experience.

See, hear, smell, taste, feel and sense. We may as well face the facts: experience-based communication will be viewed by some as old wine in new bottles – but what a wine it promises to be!



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