



CONSTRUCTIVE COMMUNICATION

Improving Staff and Patient
Experiences within Healthcare

infinia

WE MAKE

THE COMPLEX
SIMPLE AND
THE SIMPLE
MEMORABLE

Improving Staff and Patient
Experiences within Healthcare



Ron Cappello is the founder and CEO of Infinia Group LLC, a leading consulting and design firm. Since 2003, Ron and his colleagues have been creating effective brands, communications, and designs that move markets, organizations, and the world forward by making the complex simple and the simple memorable.

www.infiniagroup.com

Improving Staff and Patient Experiences within Healthcare

RON CAPPELLO, CEO Infinia Group LLC

JUNE 2022

In an April 22, 2022 address at Stanford, President Barack Obama called for greater regulatory oversight of the country's social media giants. He stated that their power to curate the information that people consume has "turbocharged" political polarization and threatened the pillars of democracy across the globe. He also suggested Constructive Communication had a role to play in improving our cultural discourse.

This was my introduction to a new concept. I had never heard of Constructive Communication before, despite consulting on brand, marketing, and communication matters for the past 20+ years. My curiosity was ignited. What is it and why would MIT create a new Center within the media lab to conduct research, educate, and confer graduate degrees in this discipline?

I set out to learn more and to explore whether Constructive Communication might have a role in helping healthcare professionals do a better job of informing, educating, and connecting with peers, patients, and the public.



CONSTRUCTIVE
COMMUNICATION

OPEN
EMPATHETIC
PERSONAL

Constructive Communication is necessary when gaps in understanding occur between those involved. To bridge this gap, those communicating must be open, empathetic, and personal.

OPENNESS

Being open to others' thoughts and opinions is necessary for meaningful conversations to take place. However, due to tribalism, this has become difficult. When information is presented that goes against people's beliefs, it often results in an instant defense mechanism that ends communication entirely (Mukerjee & Yang, 2020).

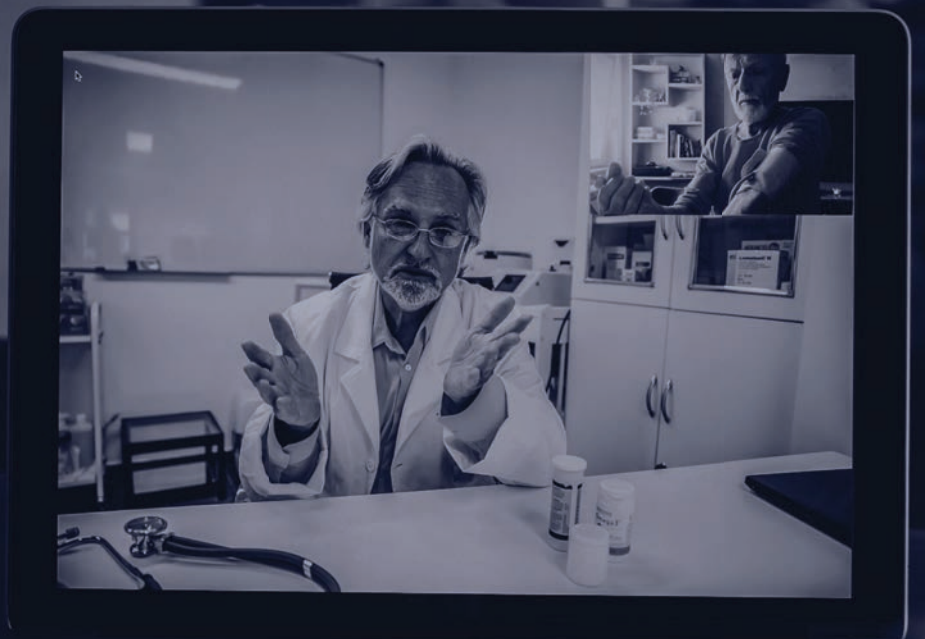
EMPATHY

Being able to "step into someone else's shoes" and use empathy will allow conversations to be more productive, even in the presence of conflicting beliefs. When empathy is displayed, individuals are less likely to patronize the other, which helps in the acceptance of information (DiRusso & Stansberry, 2021; Najafbagy, 2008).

PERSONAL

The ability to speak on a personal level is essential. Blankly reciting facts without relating to others in the conversation can backfire, as people feel their beliefs and identities are being attacked (Mehl & Haidt, 2021).

The following highlights what I discovered and outlines some of the areas where utilizing Constructive Communication might be helpful within the healthcare sector.



THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Despite the positive effects new digital media channels have, it would be unethical to ignore the larger pain points they have caused.

The digital transformation is one driver underscoring the need for Constructive Communication, as this approach has the potential to improve patient outcomes, lower recovery times, and reduce readmittance rates.

Despite the positive effects new digital media channels have, it would be unethical to ignore the larger pain points they have caused. This includes the acceleration of tribalization and the inability to make meaningful human connections with others, which has contributed to a lack of empathy and understanding within society.

The discipline of Constructive Communication might be one way to bridge the resulting trust and perceptual gap, which impedes the establishment of the mutual understanding needed to achieve better healthcare outcomes, increase staff retention, and improve the overall patient experience.

We only need to look at the 2,700+% increase in the use of Telehealth fueled by the Covid-19 pandemic to see a format where Constructive Communication can generate a positive effect. While Telehealth has become widely accepted, the medium has altered doctor-patient relationships and interactions. Both would say that adjustments need to be made to ensure that the information communicated in virtual visits is as effective as it is with in-person visits.

Constructive Communication allows for the conveyance of important information, reducing the chance of it being misunderstood. This is particularly vital in the healthcare arena where information must be correctly communicated from providers to patients.

ALONE, TOGETHER

Adrift in a Sea of Information



In today's world, people increasingly want to feel part of a group, or a tribe, that is full of like-minded individuals (Centola, 2021). This is exacerbated by social media corporations, which have access to everyone's preferences. Since social media companies' main goal is to fuel engagement, they choose to present people with information that only reinforces their beliefs, furthering tribalization (Centola, 2021; Saveski et al., 2021).

In addition, the recent digital transformation has also greatly affected the amount of information and misinformation online. Web 2.0 allows anyone to receive and share information as soon as they would like, even if that information is incorrect and lacks validity (Chan et al., 2018; Jenkins et al., 2020). This allows people to produce and distribute information that can contradict messages from field experts (DiRusso & Stansberry, 2021).

Web 2.0 allows anyone to receive and share information as soon as they would like, even if that information is incorrect and lacks validity.

A person wearing a dark hoodie and a baseball cap is looking down at a smartphone. They are standing in a public transit vehicle, with a vertical pole visible next to them. The background is blurred, showing the interior of the vehicle and other passengers. The text "HARNESSING THE POWER OF NARRATIVE" is overlaid in a light yellow, serif font.

HARNESSING
THE POWER OF
NARRATIVE

Constructive Communication allows individuals to engage with a greater sense of common decency.

An important tool when communicating constructively is utilizing narratives. These can trigger empathy in the listener, making them more likely to acknowledge the validity of your views, even if they may not agree with them (Mehl & Haidt, 2021).

Narratives are also important in overcoming people's beliefs in misinformation. They help individuals think through why the information is incorrect, as well as help them to empathize with others in the conversation (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2017; Ladyzhensky, 2022; Mehl & Haidt, 2021).

Constructive Communication is essential when healthcare providers communicate with staff, patients, and the public, especially as the distortions of social media and tribalism continue. In the end, it supports the Hippocratic oath of "first, do no harm."

I believe that one would be hard-pressed to think of a situation where being more thoughtful, empathetic, and personally engaged would result in any harm, especially given the technological, medical, and generational changes that are taking place today. These changes place additional stress on doctors, staff, and patients. Therefore, anything that supports the ever-important "human element" in the delivery of care should be acknowledged and celebrated.

In the final analysis, Constructive Communication allows individuals to engage with a greater sense of common decency. This is something that has become less prevalent in the personal, business, and political discourse we find ourselves in today; and that, in and of itself, is constructive and worth trying and embracing.

Using Constructive Communication with Anti-Vaccination Advocates

Communicating with anti-vaccination advocates is one area where Constructive Communication can be useful. Due to the digital transformation of social media, anti-vaccination messages can be written by anyone and shared to reach a greater audience. Communicating with this group is a great challenge to healthcare professionals, because of the misinformation and the lack of trust present today. This represents an opportunity to practice Constructive Communication.

To communicate effectively with this group, practitioners should treat anti-vaccination advocates as equals and humanize them. Additionally, they should use narratives to make the information they are presenting more believable, and the conversation should be an equal information exchange as opposed to lecturing them in a condescending manner (DiRusso / Stansberry, 2021).

INFIRMIER
NON
VACCINÉ



REFERENCES

- Annenberg Public Policy Center. (2017, September 12). *Debunking Study Suggests Ways to Counter Misinformation and Correct "Fake News."* www.asc.upenn.edu. <https://www.asc.upenn.edu/news-events/news/debunking-study-suggests-ways-counter-misinformation-and-correct-fake-news>
- Baliotti, S., Getoor, L., Goldstein, D. G., & Watts, D. J. (2021). Reducing opinion polarization: Effects of exposure to similar people with differing political views. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(52). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2112552118>
- Becker, J., Porter, E., & Centola, D. (2019). The wisdom of partisan crowds. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(22), 10717–10722. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1817195116>
- Bode, L., & Vraga, E. K. (2021). Correction Experiences on Social Media During COVID-19. *Social Media + Society*, 7(2), 205630512110088. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211008829>
- Centola, D. (2018). *Social Learning and Political Polarization*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/how-behavior-spreads/201811/social-learning-and-political-polarization>
- Centola, D. (2019). Influential networks. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 3(7), 664–665. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-019-0607-5>
- Centola, D. (2021, October 15). *The Dangers of Social Media*. Bottom Line Inc. <https://bottomlineinc.com/life/consumer-technology/the-dangers-of-social-media>
- Chan, M. S., Winneg, K., Hawkins, L., Farhadloo, M., Jamieson, K. H., & Albarracín, D. (2018). Legacy and social media respectively influence risk perceptions and protective behaviors during emerging health threats: A multi-wave analysis of communications on Zika virus cases. *Social Science & Medicine*, 212(50-59), 50–59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.07.007>
- DiRusso, C., & Stansberry, K. (2021). Unvaxxed: A Cultural Study of the Online Anti-Vaccination Movement. *Qualitative Health Research*, 32(2), 104973232110560. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323211056050>
- Gillani, N., Yuan, A., Saveski, M., Vosoughi, S., & Roy, D. (2018). Me, My Echo Chamber, and I. *Proceedings of the 2018 World Wide Web Conference on World Wide Web – WWW '18*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3178876.3186130>
- Guilbeault, D., Becker, J., & Centola, D. (2018). Social learning and partisan bias in the interpretation of climate trends. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115(39), 9714–9719. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1722664115>
- Hughes, M. A., & Roy, D. (2021). Keeper: A Synchronous Online Conversation Environment Informed by In-Person Facilitation Practices. *Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445316>
- Jenkins, E. L., Ilicic, J., Barklamb, A. M., & McCaffrey, T. A. (2020). Assessing the Credibility and Authenticity of Social Media Content for Applications in Health Communication: Scoping Review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 22(7), e17296. <https://doi.org/10.2196/17296>
- Krishna, A., & Thompson, T. L. (2019). Misinformation About Health: A Review of Health Communication and Misinformation Scholarship. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 65(2), 000276421987822. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219878223>
- Ladyzhensky, A. (2022, March 31). *How Storytelling Can Motivate Us to Help Others*. www.asc.upenn.edu. <https://www.asc.upenn.edu/news-events/news/how-storytelling-can-motivate-us-help-others>
- Lohmann, S. (2018). Who is Saying What on Twitter: An Analysis of Messages with References to HIV and HIV Risk Behavior. *Acta de Investigación Psicológica*, 8(1), 95–100. <https://doi.org/10.22201/fpsi.20074719e.2018.1.09>

- Lohmann, S., White, B. X., Zuo, Z., Chan, M.-P. S., Morales, A., Li, B., Zhai, C., & Albarracín, D. (2018). HIV messaging on Twitter. *AIDS*, 32(18), 2799–2805. <https://doi.org/10.1097/qad.0000000000002018>
- Mazer, J. P., Barnes, K., Greivous, A., & Boger, C. (2013). Coach Verbal Aggression: A Case Study Examining Effects on Athlete Motivation and Perceptions of Coach Credibility. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 6(2), 203–213. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.6.2.203>
- McClure, D., Saveski, M., Beeferman, D., & Roy, D. (2021). Engaging Politically Diverse Audiences on Social Media. *ICWSM'22: International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*.
- Mehl, C., & Haidt, J. (2021, November 24). How To Have Fun With That Relative Whose Opinions You Can't Stand This Thanksgiving. *Time*. <https://time.com/6123239/politics-conversation-thanksgiving>
- Moran, M. B., Soneji, S., Tan, A. S. L., & Choi, K. (2019). Associations Between Exposure and Receptivity to Branded Cigarette Advertising and Subsequent Brand Preference Among US Young Adults. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, 22(6). <https://doi.org/10.1093/ntr/ntz093>
- Mukerjee, S., & Yang, T. (2020). Choosing to Avoid? A Conjoint Experimental Study to Understand Selective Exposure and Avoidance on Social Media. *Political Communication*, 38(3), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1763531>
- Najafabaghy, R. (2008). Problems of Effective CrossCultural Communication and Conflict Resolution. *PalestineIsrael Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture*, 15/16(4/1), 146–150. AltPressWatch; Ethnic NewsWatch. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarlyjournals/problemseffectivecrossculturalcommunication/docview/235690446/se2?accountid=150326>
- Power Up Your Team with Nonviolent Communication Principles. (n.d.). Review.firstround.com. <https://review.firstround.com/power-up-your-team-with-nonviolent-communication-principles>
- Rothbart, D., & Allen, S. H. (2019). Building peace through systemic compassion. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 36(4), 373–386. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21249>
- Roy, D., & Dunn, J. (2022, January 13). MIT's Deb Roy on data-driven storytelling | McKinsey. [www.mckinsey.com. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/the-data-driven-future-of-storytelling-mits-deb-roy-on-the-message-and-the-medium](https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/the-data-driven-future-of-storytelling-mits-deb-roy-on-the-message-and-the-medium)
- Saveski, M., Gillani, N., Yuan, A., Vijayaraghavan, P., & Roy, D. (2021). Perspective-taking to reduce affective polarization on social media. In *arXiv e-prints* (p. arXiv:2110.05596).
- Stecula, D. A., Motta, M., Kuru, O., & Jamieson, K. H. (2022). The Great and Powerful Dr. Oz? Alternative Health Media Consumption and Vaccine Views in the United States. *Journal of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqac011>
- Study Finds Surprising Source of Social Influence. (2021, July 20). [www.asc.upenn.edu. https://www.asc.upenn.edu/news-events/news/study-finds-surprising-source-social-influence](https://www.asc.upenn.edu/news-events/news/study-finds-surprising-source-social-influence)
- Tan, A. S. L., & Bigman, C. A. (2020). Misinformation About Commercial Tobacco Products on Social Media—Implications and Research Opportunities for Reducing Tobacco-Related Health Disparities. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(S3), S281–S283. <https://doi.org/10.2105/aiph.2020.305910>
- Williams, S. (n.d.). *Communicating Constructively*. [www.wright.edu. http://www.wright.edu/~scott.williams/LeaderLetter/communicating.htm](http://www.wright.edu/~scott.williams/LeaderLetter/communicating.htm)
- Yuan, A., & Gillani, N. (2017). *Championing a spirit of genuine inquiry to combat social fragmentation*. Invited paper at “Re-examining the meaning of education in an uncertain world,” Oxford Comparative and International Education, Oxford, UK.
- Zaleski, A. (2021, December 17). Better democracy through technology. *MIT Technology Review*. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/12/17/1040690/better-democracy-through-technology/>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks and appreciation to:

Olivia Cappello
Mark Leiter
Lizzie Kupersmith
Priscilla Newman
Nancy Senken
Lissa Villani

CREDITS

Creative Direction and Design
by Cristiane Borges

Copyright © 2022 Ron Cappello
All rights reserved. Printed in New York.

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover Image by Matthew Waring (Unsplash), depicting the nurse Melanie Senior mural, by artist Peter Barber (Manchester, England). Mural based on a photograph by Johannah Churchill.

Unsplash Image License:
Chris Ainsworth and Jordan Bracco

Pexels Image License:
Cedric Fauntleroy, Laura James, and Elijah O'Donnel

INFINIA GROUP LLC

New York

We create simple brand strategies, designs and communications that move markets, organizations — and the world — forward by collaborating with our clients to change experiences in ways that positively impact the behaviors of customers, employees, investors and policymakers.

We make this happen by transforming complexity into simplicity and ensuring what is simple becomes memorable.

Infinia is a founding member of the
Selbey Anderson Global Alliance: selbeyanderson.com

A dark, monochromatic photograph of a brick wall. The wall is composed of many small, rectangular bricks. On the right side, there is a decorative corner element made of bricks, featuring a series of downward-pointing chevrons. A vertical pipe runs down the wall, slightly to the left of the corner. At the bottom of the wall, there are some electrical boxes and wires. The overall tone is dark and moody.

INFINIA GROUP

www.infiniagroup.com