THE INCONVENIENT MIND

PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

PART TWO

Recommendations for climate communicators how to improve our impact on our audiences.

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'*Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced*'
James Baldwin

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INTRODUCTION

If concern alone would trigger climate action, present awareness and concern levels of the climate crisis by the middle class people around the world[1,2] would be sufficient to achieve the political and societal changes necessary. However scientists increasingly point to natural cognitive processes like ambivalence, anxieties and denial, triggered by the very concern about global heating, as reasons to actually prevent action from happening. Creating more concern as a standalone approach is therefore no solution; we need to resolve the emotional barriers that most of us carry.

Part Two of the "Inconvenient Mind" provides recommendations on how climate campaigners and communicators can improve their impact and motivate proportionate action. These are derived from the insights of the four scientific theories we summarized in part one[3]. We see these recommendations as conversation starter, that will allow organizations as well as all of us as individuals to form an opinion on how we should campaign on the climate crisis in the future.

SUMMARY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Put **the climate emergency** back at the **center of our communication** while experimenting with new frames that build motivation and agency.
2. Develop **new audience research methodology** to identify the **emotional barriers** of our audiences on climate, which in turn support the development of effective campaigns to remove these obstacles to change.
3. Listen to and engage in **conversations** with our audiences. Create safe spaces and **defining moments** to help people resolve their emotional barriers.
4. **Do not induce fear or guilt** to communicate urgency or to motivate people to take climate action. **Never communicate deadlines** that indicate a moment when it is too late. **Create courage and confidence** that we are starting to do the right thing.
5. Start addressing **deep adaptation**[4] by **integrating both adaptation and mitigation** into one campaign approach.
6. **Know yourself**! As individuals, teams and as an organisation we need to be aware of our own emotions to **avoid projection**.

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[1] While there was a decrease of concern about the climate crisis after 2008 until 2015 (Pew 2015) there is again an increase of concern in the past few years (even in Europe and the US) (Pew 2019)

[2] Awareness or poor rural communities in the global south are still lacking behind

[3] In part 2 we have decided not to reference specific scientific sources these recommendations are developed from. To explore the scientific background of these recommendation we invite the reader to turn to part 1 which is fully referenced.

[4] Deep adaptation is a term created by Jem Bendell, it describes a concept to create resilience, relinquishment and restoration. It combines adaptation and mitigation to prepare communities/societies to life in times of global heating.

Global Heating as a psychological challenge: anxiety, guilt, and denial

Global Heating is a difficult problem with a strong emotional component. It is probably the first environmental problem that considers societal collapse or even human extinction as a plausible near-term option. Besides anxiety it induces a lot of guilt as the disaster ahead of us is solely connected to our own behavior as a species on this planet and, despite increased knowledge, we are not ready to change. It is also a long-term problem that we have been dealing with for a while with no solution in sight. All these unpleasant feelings trigger our mental defence mechanisms. After four decades of climate debate, one can assume that only a few people within our audiences have an emotionally clean slate when it comes to the climate crisis; we are all at some stage of emotional distress or denial.

Denial needs to be understood as a gradual emotion, so we cannot divide the world into those that deny the climate crisis and those that don't. People are variedly concerned with different elements of the climate emergency (the science, the human responsibility, the personal responsibility or the personal agency one has, the severity of impacts, the personal exposure, the severity of societal changes needed).[5] Even more challenging is the fact that only a few of us are aware of our subconscious responses formed through individual and collective confrontations with the issue. The inconvenience thinking and talking about the climate emergency result in the creation of unspoken personal and collective taboos that scientists call the "climate silence" - the absence of the climate emergency from normal everyday conversations. In such a situation, the climate crisis has not only to compete with all the other issues that we consider important or urgent, but all these other issues are happily embraced giving us legitimacy and distraction not to think about global heating and its consequences. And when we then look around, we have a comforting experience, as nobody[6] around us seems to be concerned either. Thus denial evolves from a personal to a cultural anomaly and reaffirming experience.

[5] More on denial see Part One of this document.

[6] In this case nobody refers to nobody I care about, who represents my value base or social peer group. It does not matter if some scientists or activists sound the alarm.

RECOMMENDATION 1 (R1): PUT **the climate crisis BACK AT THE CENTER** OF OUR COMMUNICATION WHILE **EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW FRAMES** THAT BUILD MOTIVATION AND AGENCY.

A lot of our work benefits the climate, be it energy, meat, or forest work. Since broadcasting climate urgency has proven difficult for many reasons, as years of psychological research now shows, some campaigns rather focused its attention on easier and more engaging problems hoping that would result in collateral benefits for the climate. Air pollution, energy transition, meat consumption, forest protection are all less emotionally charged issues. These issues can be emotional issues, like heath, animal welfare or species protection, but they do not confront us with the responsibility of our own extinction. They also present more straightforward solutions and give people the feeling of agency. These have been and still are successful strategies, but given that they have not stimulated proportionate action to combat the emerging crisis, it is time to increase our efforts to engage people on climate directly[7]. From a psychological perspective, diverting attention from the climate crisis to other issues (e.g. air pollution) offers people ways to rationalize their denial and downscale the threat the climate crisis poses.

Based on societal changes deemed necessary by climate scientists and the insights from climate psychologists, we argue that working on and communicating about the changing world is crucial, as we believe that humanity will not be able to solve the challenges global heating is presenting, if we do not start facing them directly. Extreme weather events offer opportunities and risks when engaging people's emotions and mindsets. Also the student strikes indicate that some parts of society are prepared to talk about more meaningful climate action. Even more so, we think that the limited time we have and the lack of effective strategies to address the emerging crisis should encourage us to broaden our experiments to develop effective pathways.

When it comes to experimentation, several promising avenues can be identified Research has shown that people feel less defensive and more empowered when confronted with the impact of the climate crisis on pieces of nature they care about rather than their own lifes. Birdwatchers showed more motivation to reduce their carbon emissions after learning about the effects of the climate crisis on birds then being presented with information on the impacts on humans.[8] Also Virtual Reality (VR) that give people an experience of connecting carbon intensive lifestyles with the destruction of marine life due to acidification showed promising results to increase

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[7] Also because we become partially complicit in maintaining "climate silence"
[8] See more in part one of the 'Inconvenient Mind'

motivation to change to a more sustainable lifestyle.[9] Engaging people into intensive nature experiences also provides new ways of fostering sustainable mindsets[10]. We therefore see particularly strong potential for biodiversity campaigns to use these insights and experiences to develop innovative ways to support the societal transformation required to endure the climate crisis. More specific project advice will be covered in Part Three of this paper.

The next step after having committed to talking about our changing climate is to acknowledge and address the complex emotional reactions people have towards this issue. How to campaign and communicate on global heating we address in recommendations #2 to #5.

RECOMMENDATION 2 (R2): DEVELOP **NEW AUDIENCE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES** TO IDENTIFY THE **EMOTIONAL BARRIERS** OF OUR AUDIENCES ON CLIMATE, WHICH IN TURN SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGNS TO REMOVE THESE OBSTACLES TO CHANGE.

So how to communicate about climate emergency? A good start is always to know the audiences we are talking to. The distribution of climate anxieties, guilt and fear are neither linked to demographics, nor to values. Denial in countries like the USA, Australia and the UK does show some ideological roots (if you consider yourself a Republican, you need to be sceptical about climate science)[11]. But this politically motivated denialism is different and far more restricted in its distribution than the emotionally driven denial. So if we want to identify the emotional fabric of our audiences demographic and value-based segmentation are insufficient.

Even more challenging, denial is a subconscious process that is meant to hide anxieties or guilt even from ourselves. Thus responses to the climate crisis are often irrational. Explicit research methodologies like surveys or ordinary focus groups will do little to reveal the emotions of our audiences. On the brighter side, some more advanced interview methodologies built upon expertise derived from clinical psychology have been developed[12]. Also the development of implicit methodology gathering information through the analysis of big data, are promising avenues to explore. At present the analysis of digital conversations (social media) combining micro narrative tools[13] with Natural Language processing[14] can provide exciting new avenues

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[9] Personal conversations with the Virtual Human Interaction Lab at Stanford University.
[10] Natural change project
[11] A trend is quite recent past 2008 (for more info see part one of the inconvenient mind)
[12] Robison, Foulds, Lertzman (2017) Behaviour Change from the Inside Out: Applications of Psychosocial Ideas to Sustainability.
[13] Micro narrative tools analyse narratives that dominate a specific discourse see for example SenseMaker®
[14] Natural Language Processing (NLP) is a subfield of Artificial Intelligence that is focused on enabling computers to understand and process human languages, to get computers closer to a human-level understanding of language. Computers don't yet have the same intuitive understanding of natural language that humans do. They can't really understand what the language is really trying to say. In a nutshell, a computer can't read between the lines

to analyse the emotional states of our audiences and segment them accordingly. In the future, conversations our audiences could be having with chatbots[15] can also be used as valuable data for such analyses.

Unfortunately, knowledge about such methods is cutting edge still and not easily accessible through the agencies we usually utilize for our audience research. As with chemical analytic technologies in the past[16], NGOs could play a vital role in supporting the development, spreading, and use of more suitable audience research methodologies that can help to unlock a transformation of our civilization.

RECOMMENDATION 3 (R3): LISTEN TO AND ENGAGE IN **CONVERSATIONS** WITH OUR AUDIENCES. CREATE SAFE SPACES AND **DEFINING MOMENTS** TO HELP PEOPLE RESOLVE THEIR EMOTIONAL BARRIERS.

If we want to engage people to face their emotions on the climate crisis and move on to accept it and act on it, we need to create safe spaces and moments for people to uncover these emotions, and provide them with pathways to handle despair, guilt and anxieties. Breaking denial and resolving societal taboos have long been the focus of civil rights movements and the environmental movement can borrow some of their strategies. Part of the journey will be to create, "defining moments"[17], and conversations with and within our audiences.

Through conversations we are not imposing a view on people but provide space for people to explore their own emotions. We can then offer moral and practical support and explore solutions together. When listening we not only deepen our understanding of our audiences but motivate people to follow chain of thoughts that they normally would have avoided. This will help to build the psychological resilience to accept that the civilization we know will come to an end, a necessary insight to support proportionate action to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.

Conversations are harder to scale than broadcasting. Nevertheless some of the means we already hold, offline engagement, workshops, public speeches, volunteer groups, and supporter forums are all a good start to build and then snowball conversations into larger audiences. Also chatbots provide a new way of managing increasingly 'meaningful' conversations with thousands of people at the same time. As conversations should become an essential tool to shift mindsets, investments in such tools should be prioritised. Another important way of creating more conversations is to build supporter communities to have conversations with each other. Objectives for our supporter journeys should not only be to resolve denial but to build resilient

[15] See more on chatbots in recommendation 3
[16] notably the development of GMO detection in food
[17] Defining moment are periods in one person's life that are elevated, when people trip over the truth, feel proud of their achievement and build meaningful social relationships. More on defining moments you can find in here.

connected communities (virtual and in the real world) for our supporters to engage with each other in dealing with the climate realities.

RECOMMENDATION 4 (R4): **DO NOT INDUCE FEAR OR GUILT** TO COMMUNICATE URGENCY OR TO MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO TAKE CLIMATE ACTION. **NEVER COMMUNICATE DEADLINES** THAT INDICATE A MOMENT WHEN IT IS TOO LATE. **CREATE COURAGE AND CONFIDENCE** THAT WE ARE STARTING TO DO THE RIGHT THING.

When we communicate about global heating and the inevitability of a new civilization we need to be aware about the emotions that we will induce in people. As communication science has proven, the emotion we react with is not only dependant on what we say, but also on what our audiences hear and their emotional disposition. This is even more true for an emotionally challenging issue like the climate emergency. 'Fear' can be a great motivator for action, but only if people feel agency to combat the cause of fear in a short period of time (e.g. if I can change my lifestyle for personal health benefits). If fear relief is not possible, it is a natural human reaction to respond with denial. We start telling ourselves the problem is not urgent and not so dangerous. We avoid thinking or talking about it. 'Guilt' works the same way, if we can't resolve guilt, we deny that we are responsible or that we can do anything to solve the problem. The climate crisis easily induces both feelings and thus we are facing large audiences that are already in denial. Emphasising the same negative feelings in a person that lead to denial in the first place rather deepens than resolves this emotional state.

A lot of communication experts recommend to emphasize positive emotions and solutions instead of fear. Yet there is a wide spectrum of positive emotions that can be communicated, and not all of them work equally well. For instance, hope is a tricky psychological construct, as it is very closely linked to fear. Hope can be a form of denial, a passive desire that all goes well. Hope stories can reaffirm existing apathy, for example, the belief in 'divine' powers including human geniality, technology, god or the economic system. Similarly, connecting hope to certain solutions can backfire if people do not trust in these solutions. Even worse, when hope is connected to deadlines to create a hopeful urgency like the presently popular communication built on the IPCC report, that we have another 12 years to fix the problem. Such type of hope can easily flip to fear, not only when the deadline is reached, but as soon as slow pick up of change diminishes the hope that we will make it.

If we want to create sustained change we need to instill courage[18] into leaders and communities that we start doing the right thing despite being unsure that it will be sufficiently impactful in time.

In the context of a climate emergency, acts of courage can come in three forms 'physical courage', 'moral courage' and 'psychological courage'. Physical courage[19], the most lauded in society, is restricted to typical actions of saving people in distress, for example in a climate emergency. Such an action is only perceived as courage if the person is really taking physical risks in the action. Rescue actions and political activism can be perceived by our audiences as acts of physical courage[20].

Moral acts of courage describe an action to stand up against the social norm. Initially, at least, the risk is normally one of ostracism or social rejection by others. For individuals, the act of breaking the 'climate silence' by challenging 'life defying lifestyle', requesting emergency politics to combat the climate crisis or even talking about one's angst or feeling of guilt, should be considered acts of courage as they challenge social denial[21].

People show psychological courage when they risk their psychological equilibrium for a good cause[22], e.g. a person who is afraid of heights saving a kid from a tree (even if the climb is not objectively life threatening). In the context of global heating, breaking with denial requires such courage. Courage might not be taught but it can be inspired. Research indicates that inspiration comes from witnessing the same type of courage. Therefore, in order to tackle the climate crisis, we need to develop strategies and tools to first inspire psychological and then moral courage. Again the civil rights movement has multiple examples Martin Luther King's famous "I have a dream" speech demonstrated psychological courage and Rose Park's sitting in the front of the bus was and act of moral courage. Both actions inspired millions of people.

As we said before, in order to be able to inspire courage, we first need to know the emotional starting point of our audiences, thus we need appropriate audience research (R2). We also need to be responsive and able to address the feelings we trigger, thus conversations allow us to echo reactions and emotions of our audiences (R3). Moreover, courage is easier to develop in groups, thus community based interventions are better than those targeting individuals.

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[18] Platon already in the Protagoras (358d) identifies that courage has nothing to do with confidence. Thus an action is driven by the knowledge of doing the right thing even is one is fearful about it.

[19] Physical courage is the courage to take the risk for one's personal health or life.

[20] This includes physically challenging and risky actions or actions when we risk violent reactions. This also included rescue activities done in a climate emergency situation.

[21] In an increasingly polarised and violent environment moral courage can result in taking physical risk. Around the world civil rights and environmental activists have faced danger to their health or life due to their moral courage.

[22] Cynthia L. S. Pury (201) Can Courage be learned? (Positive Psychology chapter 6 vol.1)

Strengthening communities also enables people to feel resilience. Confidence come with the joy of sharing the experience of a different, sustainable progress. So again, we need to build relationships and conversations and allow for joy- and meaningful experiences. Building like-minded communities as virtual forums or in face to face workshops are not only reasonable for the general public, but hold as much truth when engaging decision makers. When we co-create with multiple stakeholders[23] we need to make efforts to build the social fabric of those engaging to solve the problem even if they bring very different worldviews.

RECOMMENDATION 5 (R5): START ADDRESSING DEEP ADAPTATION[24] BY **INTEGRATING ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION** INTO ONE CAMPAIGN APPROACH.

Traditionally organisations are working either on mitigation or adaptation or projects within an organization focus on one or the other. Even when implemented in one project they describe two very distinct pathway, one to reduce emissions and the other to adjust to changing temperature and weather. Often they are pitched against each other as they seem to compete for the same resources. Those working on mitigation are afraid that focusing on adaptation would derail people's attention from mitigation, or would instill a feeling of defeat, despair, resignation or acceptance. It is also perceived as an end of pipe solution, when adaptation is solely used as a technical concept narrowly addressing certain challenges related to extreme weather events, like flood protection, freshwater management or fire prevention. But in the past years the adaptation has evolved into the resilience debate, opening the field to also address social and psychological resilience.

The climate crisis is evolving from being a distant threat to already becoming a present reality. The challenge has shifted from changing our technologies of energy production and consumption to a total system remake that will be carbon neutral. In this new context, adaptation has emerged as a concept with far broader and deeper meaning. Today, realizing that our civilization as we know it will come to an end (either through its transformation or its total or partial collapse), adaptation has become a concept of system and culture change to allow life in a world affected by the climate crisis.[25] Such an adaptation integrates not only measures to reduce carbon and measures that make our system more resilient to rising temperatures, but also psychological and social resilience to cope with the changes that will inevitably be forced on us.

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[23] For more ideas how to build social fabric in a co-creation process look at the co-creation guidance

[24] Deep adaptation is a term created by Jem Bendell, it describes a concept to create resilience, relinquishment and restoration. It combines adaptation and mitigation to prepare communities/societies to life in times of global heating.

[25] The word adaptation as per definition in the cambridge dictionary "the process of changing to suit different conditions" is far more suited to describe what change is required than the term mitigation "the act of reducing how harmful, unpleasant, or bad something is".

Addressing adaptation in our communication has also psychological benefits. Adaptation can be a very good way to resolve denial in people. Mitigation has become a mathematical exercise of adding up tonnes of carbon that renders individual actions 'meaningless' and collective action 'unlikely', and creates a feeling of powerlessness. Adaptation provides individual, and even more community approaches, transition towns[26], the seed response project[27], the recent student movement[28] and the extinction rebellion are examples[29] for building resilience and thus ways to manage fear. Once accepting a climate emergency not only rationally but emotionally, it will be easier to address the system change necessary in a frame that acknowledges loss but also opens up to new possibilities.

FOOD AS AN EXAMPLE FOR A DEEP ADAPTATION APPROACH

Food is a very good example for such a combined adaptation/mitigation approach. As of now we aim to reduce meat production to reduce carbon emissions by promoting lifestyle and policy changes. In our communication, we often put the climate rationale second to animal welfare, pollution or health arguments, nevertheless it is a clear mitigation campaign.

According to climate scientists, food will be one of those most vulnerable systems affected by the climate crisis[30]. Multiple scientists predict major impacts on rainfed agriculture in the coming years[31] that could result in global food scarcities. Reduction of meat consumption might shift from a lifestyle choice to a lifestyle requirement (either financially or due to limited supply or both). At this point, the line between mitigation and adaptation blurs. Any lifestyle and policy change supports mitigation (less carbon) as well as adaptation (more grain for direct consumption).

Already today reducing investment exposure[32] by pension funds and other investors in companies affected by policy and societal changes due to food scarcity can be a meaningful adaptation campaign that supports mitigation objectives while allows for shifting the narrative of food from being a commercial to being a public good. Campaigns that stimulate more urban farming also support the same reframing of the narrative while at the same time providing community resilience.

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[26] Transition town movement

[27] For more information on the project and its rational read "Building campaigns when the world turns upside down"

[28] It is interesting to note that the student strikes more naturally include adaptation in their communication asking for a curriculum that prepares them for a world affected by the climate crisis. The process of developing such a curriculum will be more interesting than the curriculum itself, because it will require to imagine how a world affected by the climate crisis will look like.

[29] Research shows that lifestyle changes are more successfully initiated when involving communities not individuals

[30] even though food only makes less than 2% of the global GDP and thus its systemic impact is often underestimated by economists.

[31] The 30% production decline in Europe in 2018 is just a taste of what to come.

[32] Investment exposure is a financial term which measures the proportion of money invested in the same industry sector. Exposure is the risk that major financial losses will occur if this sector as a whole will lose value (like real estate in the 2008 financial crisis)

The mitigation/threshold thinking has created an absurd perception of the climate crisis that the climate will change after we passed a critical threshold. This concept creates increasing confusion today as extreme weather and personal experiences already indicate that the climate crisis has started, and could create fear and resignation when we are approaching the threshold[33]. On the other hand, talking about adaptation may instill fear and anxieties in people thus recommendation #4 clearly applies to this work. But avoiding an adaptation debate right now could also result in last minute adaptation panic that would see individual and national adaptation action and a significant breakdown of communal and multilateral thinking and acting and aggravated conflicts around the world. It is thus crucial that we start addressing adaptation in its wider form in our campaigns.

RECOMMENDATION 6 (R6): KNOW YOURSELF! AS INDIVIDUALS, TEAMS AND AS AN ORGANISATION WE NEED TO BE AWARE OF OUR OWN EMOTIONS TO AVOID PROJECTION.

Our work and impact to solve the challenges of global heating will also depend on discovering our own emotional barriers, being open to talking about them with our colleagues and being careful in our internal communication to not instil fear or denial. Recommendation #6 therefore is to consider recommendations #1-#5 also for our internal communication. We need to acknowledge the emotional component of this threat for ourselves and our colleagues, we need to break the silence and talk about these emotions. We need to start addressing resilience and adaptation for us as an organisation but also for us as the individuals that constitute it. Burnout and depression have become more common in the past years and this trend is likely to continue if we do not find ways to face the emotional challenges of the present and the future upfront.

Knowing our own emotions also helps us to avoid projecting our own fears and anxieties on our audiences and makes us more open to actively listen to their emotions. So for new audience methods and conversation with our audiences and our campaigns to work, we need to know as much about ourselves than of our audiences. Acknowledging the difficulties we have ourselves with our own 'inconvenient mind' also helps to build the empathy and gentleness with those minds we want to reach.

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

What we are proposing are quite significant changes in our way of campaigning. This is even more so as we are not advising to just implement one or two of the recommendation but the whole package, as the recommendation are complementing each other. So when we are recommending to integrate mitigation and adaptation (R5), we should do this by

[33] See also recommendation one of this document

avoiding to create fear and instilling courage (R4) instead. The latter can be done by using dialogue as means of communication (R3), knowing the emotional fabric of our audiences (R2).

How difficult such an approach is, became clear to us when writing this paper. Yes, it is an invitation for a dialogue but in itself it is just a paper that is broadcasting ideas. We have not done our own part in analysing the emotional fabric of our audiences that we will send this paper to; and yes, it might induce fear or denial in some of our readers. We tried to mitigate emotional harm as much as possible but we need to find ways to start conversations about the content, to workshop with those who know much better the realities of lobby-, corporate-, engagement- or investment work. For some ideas, such as chatbots, Mindworks can take the lead but for others we need the others to innovate and we as Mindworks are looking forward to supporting any such efforts wherever possible.

As next steps we will work on Part Three of this document, which will provide specific advice for different projects. This will be work in progress, adding more and more projects over time. If possible, we would like to do this in collaboration with project teams. We also work on developing a workshop[34] where we would help campaign teams to dive deeper into the applications of climate psychology to develop new ways of cracking denial, integrating adaptation, and build campaigns that inspire people to be courageous.

[34] If you are interested to organize such a workshop with your team please contact mindworks-group@greenpeace.org