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Digital Organizational Sustainability
Communication Manual

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Sustainability
Communication Manual**



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Introduction

This Manual was developed to support organizations in one essential task: building and implementing an Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan that is credible, transparent, and aligned with European values and sustainability principles.

Sustainability communication is often misunderstood as a matter of producing reports, publishing commitments, or sharing isolated actions. In reality, communicating sustainability requires a structured approach that connects institutional identity, operational practices, measurable results, and stakeholder engagement into a coherent and trustworthy narrative.

For this reason, this Manual does not simply explain what sustainability communication is. It provides organizations with the conceptual understanding, practical tools, and operational guidance needed to construct their own Sustainability Communication Plan step by step.

Throughout the document, readers will find:

- The key principles that ensure credible sustainability communication (institutional clarity, transparency, objectivity, indicators, stakeholder focus, continuous improvement, and leadership responsibility);
- Practical tools designed to translate sustainability actions into clear and understandable messages;
- Checklists, tables, matrices and exercises that allow organizations to apply these principles to their own context.

These elements are intentionally presented in two complementary parts:

1. The main body of the Manual, which explains the logic, principles and structure of sustainability communication;
2. The Appendix, which gathers all operational tools required to put these principles into practice.

The Manual should therefore not be read as a theoretical document, but as a practical guide for action. Its purpose is to enable any organization—regardless of size or sector—to use the provided tools to design, implement and continuously improve its own Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan.

By following the guidance presented in this Manual and applying the tools available in the Appendix, organizations will be able to:

- Define a clear institutional sustainability narrative;
- Identify the audiences with whom they need to communicate;
- Translate real sustainability actions into objective and transparent messages;
- Use indicators and evidence to avoid greenwashing;
- Select appropriate communication channels and formats;

- Establish a regular communication cycle based on learning and improvement.

In this way, sustainability communication becomes not an isolated activity, but an integral part of organizational governance, accountability and stakeholder trust.

This Manual is therefore both a reference framework and a hands-on instrument designed to be used directly in the construction of a Sustainability Communication Plan.

The final section of this Manual brings together all the elements presented throughout the document into a clear step-by-step process that allows organizations to construct their Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan in a structured and operational way.

1. Institutional Positioning within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

The first element of an effective Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan is the clear definition of the organization's political and institutional positioning.

Before communicating any sustainability action, result or indicator, the organization must establish from which institutional perspective it speaks, which values it represents, and which boundaries define its field of action.

This section explains why institutional positioning is a structural precondition for credible sustainability communication and how it forms the foundation of the Plan.

1.1 Political situation of the organization

The political and institutional situation of an organization constitutes the foundational layer upon which sustainability communication is built. Far from being a marginal or introductory aspect, institutional positioning determines the legitimacy, credibility and interpretative framework through which all subsequent sustainability messages are understood by stakeholders. In this sense, political positioning is not an accessory to sustainability communication, but one of its structural preconditions.

From the perspective of **institutional theory**, organizations are embedded within broader social, cultural, legal and political environments that shape expectations regarding acceptable behavior, responsibility and accountability. Legitimacy is not an inherent characteristic of organizations; it is socially constructed and continuously negotiated through the alignment between organizational practices, values, narratives and prevailing societal norms. Sustainability communication plays a key role in this process by articulating how the organization understands its role within these environments.

Institutional legitimacy is particularly relevant for organizations operating in the third sector or participating in European-funded programs. Such organizations are not evaluated solely on efficiency or outputs, but also by their coherence with democratic values, social objectives and public interest considerations. Communicating the political and institutional situation of the organization therefore serves to situate its sustainability actions within a broader normative and societal framework.

1.1.1. Political positioning as a legitimacy-building process

Political positioning, in the context of sustainability communication, should not be understood as partisan alignment or ideological advocacy. Rather, it refers to the explicit articulation of the organization's **institutional identity, mission, values, and boundaries of action**. This articulation allows stakeholders to understand from which perspective the organization speaks when addressing sustainability-related issues.

According to stakeholder theory, organizations operate within complex networks of relationships involving diverse actors such as beneficiaries, public authorities, partners, funders, employees, volunteers and the wider community. Each of these stakeholders evaluates organizational behavior based on different criteria and expectations. Political and institutional communication helps reduce ambiguity by clarifying priorities, commitments and limits, thereby facilitating mutual understanding and trust.

In sustainability contexts, ambiguity can be particularly problematic. Vague or generic sustainability claims may raise expectations that the organization cannot realistically fulfil, leading to disappointment, reputational damage or accusations of inconsistency. By clearly defining its institutional positioning, the organization sets a realistic framework within which its sustainability commitments can be interpreted.

Political positioning therefore functions as a **boundary-setting mechanism**. It communicates not only what the organization stands for, but also what it does not do, what falls outside its mandate and which responsibilities it does not assume. This aspect is often overlooked in sustainability communication, yet it is crucial for credibility and long-term legitimacy.

1.1.2. Stakeholder theory and institutional clarity

Stakeholder theory provides a key conceptual foundation for understanding why institutional clarity is essential in sustainability communication. Stakeholders do not merely receive information; they interpret it considering their own interests, experiences and expectations. When an organization fails to clearly articulate its institutional position, stakeholders may project their own assumptions onto the organization, creating misunderstandings or conflicting expectations.

In European projects, stakeholder diversity is particularly pronounced. Organizations often interact simultaneously with local communities, national authorities, European institutions, partner organizations from different cultural contexts and vulnerable groups with specific needs. A clear and explicit institutional positioning helps navigate this complexity by providing a stable reference point for communication.

Sustainability communication that is grounded in a well-defined political and institutional framework enables stakeholders to contextualize actions and results. For example, understanding whether an organization operates primarily at local, regional or European level influences how its sustainability impact is assessed. Similarly, knowing whether an organization is an advocacy-oriented NGO, a service provider or a community-based association shapes expectations regarding its role and responsibilities.

From this perspective, political positioning is not a static declaration, but an ongoing communicative practice. It requires consistency over time, alignment between discourse and action, and periodic reflection to ensure that the communicated positioning remains accurate as the organization evolves.

1.1.3. Public value theory and European context

Public value theory adds an additional and particularly relevant layer to the analysis of political positioning in sustainability communication. According to this perspective, organizations, especially those operating in the public or third sector, are expected to contribute to collective societal outcomes rather than solely pursuing internal or organizational goals.

In the context of European-funded programs such as Erasmus+ or CERV, this expectation is explicit. Organizations are funded not only to deliver activities, but to contribute to broader European objectives, including social inclusion, equality, democratic participation, environmental sustainability and social cohesion. Communicating sustainability commitments is therefore inseparable from communicating how the organization contributes to public value.

This has important implications for sustainability communication. Political positioning should make explicit how the organization's mission and activities align with European values and policy priorities,

such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the European Green Deal or fundamental rights frameworks. Doing so does not constitute political advocacy, but rather transparency regarding the normative context within which the organization operates.

At the same time, public value theory emphasizes the importance of accountability. Organizations claiming to contribute to public value must be prepared to justify their actions and demonstrate coherence between stated objectives and actual practices. Sustainability communication thus becomes a mechanism through which public value claims are made visible and subject to scrutiny.

1.1.4. Neutrality, inclusiveness and non-partisan positioning

A critical challenge in communicating the political situation of an organization lies in maintaining neutrality and inclusiveness while addressing inherently normative issues such as sustainability, social justice or environmental responsibility. In the European context, neutrality does not imply the absence of values, but adherence to shared democratic principles such as pluralism, non-discrimination and respect for diversity.

Effective sustainability communication distinguishes clearly between **institutional values** and **partisan positions**. Institutional values reflect widely accepted principles, such as human dignity, equality or environmental protection, whereas partisan positions align with specific political ideologies or actors. Confusing these two levels can undermine credibility and alienate stakeholders.

For organizations involved in European projects, maintaining this distinction is particularly important. European funding frameworks require respect for political neutrality and inclusiveness, especially when working with diverse or vulnerable groups. Clear institutional positioning helps ensure that sustainability communication remains accessible and legitimate across different social and cultural contexts.

Inclusiveness also implies recognizing the diversity of stakeholder perspectives and avoiding overly prescriptive or moralizing communication. Sustainability communication grounded in institutional clarity invites dialogue rather than imposing interpretations. It frames sustainability as a shared challenge and a collective learning process rather than a fixed ideological stance.

1.1.5. Trust, consistency and long-term legitimacy

Trust is a central outcome of effective political and institutional positioning. Trust does not emerge from isolated messages, but from consistent communication over time. When organizations communicate their institutional position clearly and act in accordance with it, stakeholders develop expectations that are reinforced through repeated interactions.

From a theoretical standpoint, trust can be understood as a relational asset that reduces uncertainty and facilitates cooperation. In sustainability communication, trust enables stakeholders to interpret messages charitably, even when results are partial or challenges remain. Conversely, inconsistent or ambiguous positioning erodes trust and increases skepticism toward sustainability claims.

Long-term legitimacy depends on the alignment between communicated positioning and organizational behavior. Sustainability communication that overstates ambition or obscures limitations may generate short-term visibility, but it undermines long-term credibility. By contrast, communication that acknowledges constraints and frames sustainability as a gradual and ongoing process supports durable legitimacy.

In European projects, long-term legitimacy is particularly relevant due to the emphasis on sustainability of results and transferability. Organizations that communicate their institutional positioning clearly are better positioned to maintain stakeholder engagement beyond the project lifecycle and to contribute meaningfully to broader learning processes at European level.

1.1.6. Implications for sustainability communication practice

Integrating a robust understanding of political and institutional positioning into sustainability communication has several practical implications. First, organizations should invest time in articulating their institutional identity, mission and values in a concise and accessible manner. This articulation should be shared internally to ensure coherence across different communication channels and actors.

Second, communication sustainability should explicitly reference the organization's scope of action and limitations. Doing so enhances credibility and prevents unrealistic expectations. Third, communication should situate sustainability actions within the broader European and societal context, highlighting alignment with shared values and public objectives without engaging in partisan discourse.

Finally, organizations should periodically review their institutional positioning as part of their sustainability communication strategy. Changes in context, partnerships or activities may require adjustments to ensure that communicated positioning remains accurate and credible.

Next, to summarize this theoretical framework from a more practical and informative perspective, I will provide you with some key ideas.

How to communicate who you are, where you operate, and why it matters

The following tool operationalizes this first element of the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan and is to be used when defining the institutional basis of sustainability communication.

Before communicating any action, indicator, or result, an organization must clearly answer an essential question: **who am I and from what position am I speaking when I communicate sustainability?**

This section of Manual A.6 helps organizations **explain their institutional identity** in a way that is understandable, honest, and aligned with European values, avoiding confusion, ambiguity, or misinterpretation of their messages.

Why is this section key?

In the current European context, sustainability is not only a technical issue, but also **a matter of institutional coherence and public legitimacy**. When an organization communicates its plan and results, audiences need to understand:

- What type of entity is it?
- What role does it play in society.
- What values and principles it act on.
- What commitments it voluntarily undertakes.

What needs to be explained (clear and informative language)

Communication of political and institutional status should include:

- **Nature of the organization:** association, NGO, foundation, non-profit entity.
- **Social mission:** what problem it addresses and who it works for.
- **Scope of action:** local, regional, national, or European.
- **Relationship with European policies:** Agenda 2030, SDGs, sustainability, inclusion, green and digital transition.
- **Clear institutional position:** commitment to democratic values, human rights, equality, and sustainability.

This is not a partisan political discourse, but a **statement of principles and public responsibility**.

How to communicate well

- Use language **that is understandable to everyone**, not just experts.
- Clearly differentiate between:
 - The **institutional position** of the organization.
 - The opinions of members or collaborators.
- Show consistency between what the organization **says** and what it **does**.

Expected communication outcome

A clear institutional narrative that serves as a **frame of reference for the entire sustainability communication plan**, making it easier for audiences to understand the meaning of the actions and results that will be communicated later.

✂ Tool A.1 – Communicable Institutional Identity Sheet

Objective: to have a common basis for all communication of the plan and results.

Element	Content
Nature of the organization	NGO, Association, Foundation
Mission	
Scope of action	Local, Regional, European
Key values	
Commitments to sustainability	SDGs, inclusion, green transition
Limits and realistic approach	What the organization does not do



LINK:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/12GtcOWWbZMoJG_o_HBNlUuD-N33RzvfsO/view

The following tool operationalizes this first element of the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan and is to be used when defining the institutional basis of sustainability communication.

Practical use:

- Institutional website
- Sustainability reports
- European project presentations

2. Transparency within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

The second element of an effective Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan is transparency.

Once the organization has clearly defined its institutional positioning, it must ensure that all sustainability communication is conducted in a transparent, understandable and accountable manner.

This section explains why transparency is a structural pillar of the Plan and how it enables stakeholders to understand, trust and engage with the organization's sustainability commitments

2.1. Transparency

Transparency constitutes one of the core pillars of sustainability communication and is widely recognized as a foundational principle of democratic governance, accountability and organizational legitimacy. In the context of sustainability, transparency is not limited to the disclosure of information, but encompasses the quality, relevance and intelligibility of communicated content. As such, transparency is both a normative expectation and a functional requirement for credible sustainability communication.

From a theoretical perspective, transparency is closely linked to **accountability theory**, which conceptualizes the obligation of organizations to explain, justify and make visible their decisions, actions and use of resources to those affected by them. Accountability is relational by nature: it presupposes an audience to whom explanations are owed and who are entitled to assess organizational conduct. Sustainability communication operationalizes this relationship by translating organizational practices into publicly accessible narratives.

2.1.1. Transparency as a dimension of accountability

Accountability theory distinguishes between formal accountability mechanisms—such as audits, reports and legal compliance—and informal or social accountability mechanisms, which rely on communication, dialogue and public scrutiny. Transparency plays a central role in both dimensions, but it is particularly significant in informal accountability processes, where trust and legitimacy are negotiated through communication rather than enforced through sanctions.

In sustainability contexts, accountability extends beyond financial performance to encompass social, environmental and ethical dimensions. Stakeholders increasingly expect organizations to explain not only what they do, but why they do it, how decisions are made and how trade-offs are managed. Transparency therefore involves making decision-making rationales visible, rather than merely reporting outcomes.

This explanatory function of transparency is especially relevant for micro and small organizations, which may lack the resources to produce extensive formal reports. For such organizations, transparent communication does not require sophisticated reporting systems, but rather a

commitment to clarity, honesty and consistency in explaining sustainability-related actions and results.

2.1.2. Transparency and information asymmetry

Governance theory highlights transparency as a mechanism for reducing information asymmetries between organizations and stakeholders. Information asymmetry arises when one party possesses more or better information than another, potentially leading to mistrust, misinterpretation or opportunistic behavior. In sustainability communication, information asymmetry can undermine stakeholder confidence, particularly when organizations communicate selectively or ambiguously.

By proactively sharing relevant information and contextualizing it appropriately, organizations reduce uncertainty and enable stakeholders to form informed judgements. Transparency thus contributes to more balanced power relations between organizations and stakeholders, supporting participation, dialogue and shared understanding.

However, transparency should not be equated with information overload. Excessive or poorly structured information may increase rather than reduce asymmetry by overwhelming stakeholders or obscuring key messages. Theoretical research emphasizes that effective transparency requires **selectivity and prioritization**, focusing on information that is material, relevant and comprehensible for intended audiences.

In sustainability communication, materiality plays a crucial role in determining what should be communicated transparently. Material issues are those that significantly affect stakeholders or the organization's ability to create social and environmental values. Transparent communication prioritizes such issues, rather than presenting exhaustive but unfocused data.

2.1.3. Narrative coherence and sense-making

Communication theory underscores the importance of narrative coherence in transparent communication. Transparency is not achieved solely by disclosing facts or figures; it requires organizing information into coherent narratives that enable stakeholders to make sense of complex realities. Sense-making involves connecting objectives, actions, results and impacts in a way that explains causality and intent.

In sustainability contexts, this narrative dimension is particularly important due to the long-term, systemic and often uncertain nature of social and environmental challenges. Stakeholders may struggle to interpret isolated indicators or fragmented messages without an overarching narrative that situates them within a broader strategy or vision.

Transparent sustainability communication therefore involves telling credible stories of change, grounded in evidence but accessible to non-expert audiences. Such narratives explain what the organization aims to achieve, what steps have been taken, what has been achieved so far and what challenges remain. By doing so, transparency supports understanding rather than mere visibility.

For micro and small organizations, narrative coherence offers a powerful way to communicate impact without relying on complex reporting frameworks. Clear storytelling enhances accessibility and fosters emotional as well as cognitive engagement, strengthening stakeholder relationships.

2.1.4. Transparency, limitations and organizational learning

A critical but often neglected aspect of transparency is the communication of limitations, challenges and failures. Traditional organizational communication has tended to emphasize success and downplay shortcomings, driven by concerns about reputation. However, theoretical research increasingly highlights that transparency regarding limitations can enhance rather than undermine credibility.

From an organizational learning perspective, acknowledging limitations is a prerequisite for reflection and improvement. Transparency creates opportunities for feedback, dialogue and collective problem-solving. By openly communicating challenges, organizations signal a learning-oriented mindset and invite stakeholders to participate in improvement processes.

This learning dimension of transparency is particularly relevant in European-funded projects, where experimentation, innovation and adaptation are often encouraged. Projects are expected to generate not only successes, but also lessons learned that can inform future initiatives. Transparent communication of both achievements and difficulties contributes to knowledge transfer and policy learning at European level.

Moreover, transparency regarding limitations helps manage stakeholder expectations. Sustainability transitions are complex and incremental, and overstating progress can lead to disillusionment. Honest communication about what has not yet been achieved supports realistic expectations and long-term engagement.

2.1.5. Transparency, trust and reputational resilience

Trust is a key outcome of transparent sustainability communication. Trust emerges when stakeholders perceive that an organization communicates honestly, consistently and in good faith. Transparency contributes to trust by reducing uncertainty and demonstrating respect for stakeholders' right to information.

Theoretical research on trust suggests that transparency enhances **reputational resilience**, enabling organizations to withstand criticism or setbacks. Organizations that have established a track record of transparent communication are more likely to be granted the benefit of doubt when challenges arise. Conversely, organizations perceived as opaque or selective in their communication may face heightened skepticism.

In sustainability contexts, where performance is often difficult to measure and impacts may take time to materialize, trust plays a particularly important role. Transparent communication helps bridge the temporal gap between action and impact by explaining processes, intermediate outcomes and future intentions.

For organizations involved in European projects, reputational resilience is especially valuable due to the visibility and scrutiny associated with public funding. Transparent communication supports compliance with reporting requirements while also enhancing public legitimacy.

2.1.6. Practical implications for sustainability communication

Integrating transparency as a core principle of sustainability communication has several practical implications. First, organizations should identify their key stakeholders and consider what

information is most relevant for each group. Transparency should be audience-sensitive, adapting language and formats to different levels of expertise and interest.

Second, sustainability communication should prioritize explanation over promotion. Rather than focusing solely on achievements, communication should explain decision-making processes, trade-offs and learning outcomes. Third, organizations should establish internal processes to ensure consistency and accuracy of communicated information across channels.

Finally, transparency should be understood as an ongoing practice rather than a one-off activity. Regular communication, reflection and updating of information reinforce trust and support continuous improvement. In this sense, transparency becomes a dynamic component of organizational governance rather than a static reporting obligation.

Next, to summarize this theoretical framework from a more practical and informative perspective, I will provide you with some key ideas.

How to communicate clearly, open the organization, and build trust

Transparency is one of the most important pillars of sustainability communication. It does not mean "telling everything," but **rather communicating what is relevant** in an accessible and understandable way.

This section of Manual A.6 guides organizations on **how to communicate their sustainability plan and results in an open, honest, and orderly manner**, strengthening the trust of stakeholders, funders, and the public.

What does transparency mean in practice?

Being transparent means:

- Explaining **what goals, the organization has set for itself**.
- Showing **what actions have been taken**.
- Communicating **what results have been achieved**.
- Recognizing **what difficulties or limitations have existed**.

Transparency does not weaken the organization: **it makes it more credible**.

What to communicate (and how)

In terms of dissemination, transparent communication should include:

- Sustainability objectives explained in simple terms.
- Actions taken described in concrete terms.
- Results are accompanied by understandable data.
- Responsible use of funds and resources.
- Connection with SDGs and local priorities.

Recommended channels and formats

To reach diverse audiences:

- Institutional website (specific section on sustainability).
- Short, visual digital reports.
- Infographics and graphic summaries.
- Social media with clear and consistent messages.
- Newsletters and public presentations.

Key to dissemination

It is not enough to publish documents: **you have to explain what the data means and why it is important.**

Expected communication outcome

A communication system that allows anyone to understand:

- What the organization is doing in terms of sustainability.
- What impact it is having.
- Why is it a reliable and responsible entity.

✂ Tool B – Table "From Plan to Message"

The following tool operationalizes this element of the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan and is to be used to translate sustainability actions into clear and transparent messages.

Element	How we explain it
Objective	What we want to improve and why
Action	What we have done specifically
Result	What has changed
Impact	Why it is important



LINK:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/12GtcOWWbZMoJGo_HBNluuD-N33RzvfsO/view

- **Use:** reports, website, social media, public presentations

3. Objectivity within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

The third element of an effective Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan is objectivity.

Once transparency is ensured, sustainability communication must also guarantee that messages faithfully represent organizational reality, avoiding exaggeration, ambiguity or greenwashing, **as part of the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan.**

This section explains why objectivity is a structural requirement of the Plan and how it sustains credibility and long-term trust.

3.1. Objectivity

Objectivity represents a cornerstone of sustainability communication and constitutes one of the most demanding principles in both theoretical and practical terms. In the context of sustainability, objectivity refers not merely to factual accuracy, but to the disciplined and ethically responsible construction of messages that faithfully reflect organizational reality, including achievements, limitations, uncertainties and future intentions. Objective communication is therefore inseparable from credibility, legitimacy and long-term trust.

From a theoretical perspective, objectivity in sustainability communication emerges at the intersection of **ethical communication theory**, **research on greenwashing**, **reputation management**, and **organizational learning theory**. Together, these frameworks highlight that objectivity is not a stylistic choice, but a structural requirement for responsible communication in complex social and environmental contexts.

3.1.1. Objectivity and ethical communication

Ethical communication theory emphasizes that organizations bear a moral responsibility toward their audiences, particularly when addressing issues that affect public interest, collective wellbeing and long-term societal outcomes. Sustainability communication often concerns matters such as environmental protection, social inclusion, equality or human rights, where misleading or exaggerated claims can have significant consequences.

Objectivity, in this ethical sense, requires accuracy, fairness and contextualization. Accuracy involves ensuring that communicated information corresponds to verifiable facts and evidence. Fairness requires avoiding selective disclosure or framing that privileges positive aspects while obscuring relevant shortcomings. Contextualization entails situating claims within their appropriate scope, scale and limitations.

Ethical communication theory rejects the notion that communication should primarily serve persuasive or promotional goals when addressing sustainability. Instead, it frames communication as a relational practice grounded in respect for stakeholders' right to truthful and comprehensible information. Objectivity thus becomes a prerequisite for ethical engagement with stakeholders.

In European-funded projects, ethical communication is not merely a normative aspiration, but an implicit requirement. Organizations are expected to communicate results in a way that allows public scrutiny, informed evaluation and democratic accountability. Objectivity supports these expectations by ensuring that communicated claims can withstand critical examination.

3.1.2. Objectivity and the problem of greenwashing

Research on greenwashing provides a central theoretical justification for the emphasis on objectivity in sustainability communication. Greenwashing refers to situations in which organizations communicate sustainability claims that are misleading, exaggerated or disconnected from actual practices. Importantly, greenwashing does not always involve deliberate deception. It may arise unintentionally from overly optimistic framing, internal misalignment or pressure to demonstrate impact.

The literature distinguishes between different forms of greenwashing, including selective disclosure, vague or ambiguous claims, disproportionate emphasis on minor achievements and the conflation of

intentions with results. Each of these practices undermines objectivity by blurring the distinction between what has been achieved and what is merely planned or desired.

Objectivity functions as an antidote to greenwashing by imposing analytical discipline on communication practices. By clearly distinguishing between **achieved results**, **ongoing processes** and **future objectives**, organizations reduce the risk of misleading stakeholders. This distinction is particularly important in sustainability contexts, where impacts often materialize gradually and where progress may be uneven.

In the European policy context, concerns about greenwashing have intensified in recent years, leading to stricter regulatory frameworks and increased scrutiny of sustainability claims. Objective communication therefore serves not only ethical purposes, but also compliance and risk management functions.

3.1.3. Reputation, credibility and risk management

Reputation theory highlights that credibility is a cumulative asset built through consistent behavior and communication over time. Objectivity plays a central role in this process by ensuring that communicated claims align with observable reality. Once credibility is damaged through perceived exaggeration or inconsistency, it is difficult to restore, even if subsequent communication becomes more accurate.

From a risk management perspective, objective communication functions as a preventive strategy. Overstated sustainability claims may generate short-term visibility or recognition, but they expose organizations to reputational risk, public criticism and loss of trust. In contrast, cautious and balanced communication may appear less impressive initially, but it strengthens long-term legitimacy.

This dynamic is particularly relevant for organizations involved in European-funded projects, where results are subject to monitoring, evaluation and potential audit. Objective communication facilitates external evaluation by ensuring that claims can be traced back to evidence and documented processes. It also supports internal risk management by aligning communication with actual performance.

Reputational resilience, the ability to withstand criticism or setbacks—is enhanced when stakeholders perceive that an organization communicates honestly and transparently. Objective communication builds this resilience by establishing realistic expectations and demonstrating integrity.

3.1.4. Objectivity and organizational learning

Organizational learning theory provides another important lens for understanding the role of objectivity in sustainability communication. According to this perspective, organizations learn by reflecting on discrepancies between intended outcomes and actual results. Communication plays a crucial role in this process by shaping how outcomes are interpreted and discussed internally and externally.

Objective communication supports **single-loop learning**, where organizations adjust actions to improve performance, as well as **double-loop learning**, where underlying assumptions, strategies and goals are questioned. By clearly articulating what has been achieved and what has not, organizations create opportunities for reflection and adaptation.

In contrast, communication that exaggerates success or obscures challenges inhibits learning. If failures or limitations are not acknowledged, organizations may repeat ineffective practices or fail to address structural problems. Objectivity thus becomes a condition for meaningful learning and improvement.

In European projects, learning is not limited to individual organizations. Projects are expected to generate transferable knowledge and lessons learned that can inform broader policy and practice. Objective communication contributes to this collective learning process by providing reliable information about what works, under what conditions and with what limitations.

3.1.5. Distinguishing facts, interpretations and aspirations

A key practical implication of objectivity in sustainability communication is the need to clearly distinguish between different types of statements. Theoretical research highlights the importance of separating **facts**, **interpretations** and **aspirations**, as each serves a different communicative function and carries different implications.

Facts refer to verifiable information, such as completed actions, measured outcomes or documented changes. Interpretations involve the organizations' assessment of what these facts mean, often in relation to broader objectives or values. Aspirations refer to future-oriented intentions, goals or commitments.

Objective communication does not prohibit interpretations or aspirations, but it requires that they be clearly identified as such. Problems arise when aspirations are communicated as if they were facts, or when interpretations are presented without acknowledging their subjective or provisional nature.

The use of tools such as message categorization (e.g. distinguishing results, processes and objectives) supports objectivity by providing a structured framework for communication. Such tools help ensure that stakeholders can accurately understand the status of sustainability initiatives and avoid misinterpretation.

3.1.6. Objectivity, uncertainty and complexity

Sustainability challenges are characterized by complexity, uncertainty and long-term horizons. Scientific knowledge may be evolving, data may be incomplete and outcomes may depend on external factors beyond organizational control. Objectivity in sustainability communication therefore requires acknowledging uncertainty rather than concealing it.

Theoretical perspectives on responsible innovation and precaution emphasize the importance of communicating uncertainty honestly. Acknowledging uncertainty does not undermine credibility; on the contrary, it signals realism and integrity. Stakeholders are generally capable of understanding that sustainability transitions involve experimentation and learning.

Objective communication about uncertainty also supports informed decision-making and stakeholder engagement. By clearly articulating what is known, what is uncertain and what assumptions underpin current strategies, organizations enable stakeholders to engage critically and constructively with sustainability initiatives.

In European projects, where innovation and experimentation are often encouraged, communicating uncertainty responsibly aligns with expectations of transparency, learning and adaptability.

3.1.7. Objectivity and dialogic communication

Dialogic communication theory highlights that communication is not merely a process of transmitting information, but a relational practice that involves listening, responding and adapting. Objectivity facilitates dialogue by creating a shared factual basis upon which discussion can occur.

When organizations communicate objectively, stakeholders are more likely to engage in constructive dialogue, provide feedback and contribute to problem-solving. Conversely, communication perceived as exaggerated or manipulative undermines dialogue and fosters skepticism or disengagement.

Objective communication thus supports participatory governance and co-creation, both of which are increasingly emphasized in European sustainability policies. By grounding dialogue in credible information, organizations enable more meaningful stakeholder participation.

3.1.8. Implications for sustainability communication practice

Integrating objectivity into sustainability communication requires deliberate organizational practices. First, organizations should establish internal processes to verify data and claims before communication. Second, communication teams should collaborate closely with operational staff to ensure alignment between discourse and practice.

Third, organizations should adopt clear frameworks for categorizing messages, distinguishing between results, processes and aspirations. Fourth, communication strategies should explicitly address uncertainty and limitations rather than avoiding them.

Finally, objectivity should be embedded as a core value of organizational culture. Leadership plays a critical role in setting expectations and modelling objective communication. When objectivity is prioritized at strategic level, it permeates communication practices across the organization.

Next, to summarize this theoretical framework from a more practical and informative perspective, I will provide you with some key ideas.

How to communicate without exaggerating, embellishing, or losing credibility

Objectivity is the antidote to greenwashing and empty overcommunication. This section teaches you how to communicate sustainability **with rigor, balance, and honesty**, even when the results are not perfect.

Why objectivity is essential

Audiences (financiers, administrations, citizens) increasingly value:

- Real data.
- Balanced messages.
- Recognition of limitations and challenges.

Excessively triumphalist communication can generate **mistrust**, while honest communication reinforces reputation.

Basic principles of objective communication

- Base messages on **real data and evidence**.
- Avoid grandiose promises.
- Clearly differentiate between:
 - Results achieved.
 - Objectives in progress.
 - Challenges still to be overcome.
- Acknowledge mistakes or deviations when they exist.

How to explain it in an informative way

Example:

"We have not achieved the planned objective, but we have made progress in this direction and have learned what to improve next year."

This type of message **humanizes the organization** and reinforces its genuine commitment to continuous improvement.

Expected communication outcome

Credible, robust, and respected communication, aligned with European standards for non-financial reporting and the logic of organizational learning.

✂ Tool C – Message Traffic Light

The following tool operationalizes this third element of the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan and supports organizations in clearly distinguishing between results achieved, actions in progress and future objectives, preventing ambiguity and greenwashing in sustainability communication.

Message	Status
Demonstrated result	Set to green
Action in progress	Set to yellow
Future goal	Set to red



LINK:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/12GtcOWWbZMoJGo_HBNIuuD-N33RzvfsO/view

4. Metrics and Indicators within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

The fourth element of an effective Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan is the use of metrics and indicators.

Once institutional positioning, transparency and objectivity are ensured, sustainability communication must be supported by clear, understandable and evidence-based indicators.

This section explains why indicators are essential to give credibility and substance to sustainability communication and how they should be selected and communicated within the Plan.

4.1. Metrics and indicators

Metrics and indicators constitute a central component of sustainability communication, functioning as the primary bridge between organizational intentions, operational actions and evaluative judgement. In sustainability contexts, indicators are not neutral technical instruments; they are social and communicative constructs that shape how performance, impact and responsibility are understood by stakeholders. As such, the selection, interpretation and communication of indicators have profound implications for credibility, accountability and organizational learning.

From a theoretical perspective, the role of metrics and indicators in sustainability communication can be understood through the combined lenses of **performance measurement theory**, **strategic management**, **accountability theory**, and **communication theory**. These frameworks converge in recognizing that indicators do not merely measure reality but actively participate in constructing organizational meaning and guiding behavior.

4.1.1. Indicators as instruments of performance measurement

Performance measurement theory conceptualizes indicators as tools designed to translate abstract strategic objectives into observable and assessable signals. In sustainability contexts, objectives such as social inclusion, environmental responsibility or organizational resilience are inherently complex and multidimensional. Indicators provide a means of rendering these objectives visible and manageable.

However, theoretical literature cautions against a purely technocratic understanding of indicators. Indicators are selective by nature: they highlight certain aspects of reality while leaving others unmeasured. This selectivity reflects underlying values, priorities and assumptions. Sustainability communication must therefore acknowledge that indicators are not exhaustive representations of impact, but partial and situated measures.

In European-funded projects, performance measurement frameworks often require the definition of indicators at the outset of activities. These indicators serve both monitoring and reporting functions. Communicating them transparently helps stakeholders understand how success is defined and assessed, thereby enhancing accountability and legitimacy.

4.1.2. Indicators as communicative devices

Beyond their measurement function, indicators operate as communicative devices that convey meaning to internal and external audiences. Communication theory emphasizes that numerical data acquire significance only through interpretation and narrative framing. Without explanation, indicators risk being misunderstood, misused or ignored.

Sustainability indicators often involve technical terminology, methodological assumptions or statistical complexity that may not be accessible to non-expert audiences. Translating indicators into clear and comprehensible language is therefore a critical communicative task. This translation process does not diminish rigor; rather, it enables democratic access to information and informed engagement.

Indicators communicated effectively can signal organizational priorities, demonstrate progress and provide evidence of learning. Conversely, poorly communicated indicators may create confusion or skepticism, undermining trust. The communicative dimension of indicators is thus inseparable from their technical design.

4.1.3. Accountability and the evidentiary function of indicators

Accountability theory highlights that indicators play a key role in enabling organizations to justify their actions and outcomes to stakeholders. In sustainability communication, indicators provide the evidentiary basis upon which claims of impact or responsibility are evaluated. They support the transition from aspirational discourse to evidence-based communication.

In European projects, accountability requirements are particularly salient due to the use of public funds. Indicators facilitate monitoring by funding bodies, evaluators and auditors, ensuring that communicated results can be traced back to documented activities and data. Objective and well-explained indicators reduce the risk of misinterpretation and strengthen compliance.

However, accountability is not limited to upward reporting to funders. Horizontal and downward accountability—to partners, beneficiaries and communities—is equally important. Communicating indicators in accessible formats enables these stakeholders to assess organizational performance and engage critically with sustainability claims.

4.1.4. Indicators, materiality and relevance

Theoretical discussions on sustainability reporting emphasize the principle of materiality in indicator selection and communication. Material indicators are those that reflect issues of significant importance to stakeholders or to the organizations capacity to create social and environmental value. Communicating material indicators enhances relevance and avoids information overload.

Materiality is context-dependent and dynamic. What is material for one organization or project may not be material for another. Sustainability communication should therefore explain why certain indicators have been selected and how they relate to organizational priorities and stakeholder concerns.

In European projects, materiality often reflects alignment with policy priorities, program objectives and societal challenges. Communicating this alignment through indicators helps situate organizational performance within a broader European framework and reinforces public value claims.

4.1.5. Longitudinal analysis and learning over time

A distinctive feature of sustainability indicators is their temporal dimension. Sustainability impacts often unfold over extended periods, and progress may be incremental rather than immediate. Longitudinal analysis—tracking indicators over time—enables organizations to demonstrate trends, learning and adaptation.

From an organizational learning perspective, indicators provide feedback loops that inform strategic adjustment and operational improvement. Communicating changes over time supports transparency and allows stakeholders to understand whether and how sustainability efforts are evolving.

In European-funded projects, longitudinal indicator analysis aligns with monitoring and evaluation frameworks that emphasize progress, outcomes and sustainability of results. Communicating indicator evolution enhances credibility by demonstrating commitment to continuous improvement rather than one-off achievements.

4.1.6. Quantitative and qualitative indicators

Theoretical literature recognizes the complementary roles of quantitative and qualitative indicators in sustainability communication. Quantitative indicators offer comparability, precision and apparent objectivity, while qualitative indicators capture contextual, experiential and relational dimensions of impact that may resist quantification.

Effective sustainability communication integrates both types of indicators. Quantitative data may show how many participants were reached or how resource use changed, while qualitative insights explain how and why these changes mattered. Communicating qualitative indicators through narratives, testimonies or case examples enriches understanding and humanizes impact.

In European projects, qualitative indicators are particularly valuable for capturing learning, innovation and social change processes. Communicating these indicators alongside quantitative data provides a more holistic picture of sustainability performance.

4.1.7. Indicators, uncertainty and methodological limitations

Indicators are subject to uncertainty, methodological limitations and data constraints. Measurement errors, incomplete data or external influences may affect indicator values. Responsible sustainability communication requires acknowledging these limitations rather than presenting indicators as definitive or infallible.

Theoretical perspectives on responsible innovation and evaluation emphasize the importance of methodological transparency. Explaining how indicators are measured, what assumptions underpin them and what limitations exist supports informed interpretation and trust.

Acknowledging uncertainty does not weaken accountability; it strengthens it by demonstrating honesty and methodological rigor. In European contexts, transparent communication of indicator limitations aligns with expectations of scientific integrity and learning-oriented evaluation.

4.1.8. Indicators and strategic alignment

Strategic management theory highlights that indicators influence organizational behavior by signaling what is valued and prioritized. Indicators communicated externally also shape stakeholder perceptions and expectations. Misalignment between indicators, strategy and communication can lead to confusion or credibility gaps.

Sustainability communication should therefore ensure coherence between strategic objectives, operational actions and communicated indicators. Indicators should reflect on what the organization genuinely seeks to achieve, rather than what is easiest to measure or most appealing to communicate.

In European projects, strategic alignment is critical for demonstrating coherence between project objectives, activities and results. Indicators serve as a connective tissue linking planning, implementation and communication.

4.1.9. Indicators as tools for dialogue and participation

Dialogic communication theory suggests that indicators can support dialogue rather than merely reporting. When communicated transparently and accessibly, indicators invite questions, feedback

and discussion. Stakeholders may challenge interpretations, propose alternative indicators or contribute contextual knowledge.

Using indicators as dialogic tools enhances participatory governance and co-creation, both of which are increasingly emphasized in European sustainability policies. Communicating indicators in interactive formats—such as workshops, dashboards or visual summaries—can foster engagement and shared learning.

4.1.10. Implications for sustainability communication practice

Integrating a robust theoretical understanding of metrics and indicators into sustainability communication has several practical implications. Organizations should carefully select indicators based on materiality and strategic relevance, explain their meaning and limitations, and communicate them consistently over time.

Communication teams should collaborate with technical and operational staff to ensure accuracy and coherence. Indicators should be embedded within narratives that explain progress, challenges and learning. Finally, organizations should periodically review indicators to ensure continued relevance and alignment with evolving sustainability objectives.

Next, to summarize this theoretical framework from a more practical and informative perspective, I will provide you with some key ideas.

How to convert numbers into messages that people understand

Indicators are essential, but **numbers alone do not communicate**. This section helps transform metrics and indicators into clear, understandable, and useful messages for citizens.

The main challenge

Many organizations measure well... but communicate poorly.

The goal here is **to translate the data from the sustainability plan into understandable stories**.

What to communicate about indicators

- What is measured and why.
- What does this indicator mean in real life?
- How has it evolved compared to the previous year?
- What impact does it have on people, the community, or the environment?

How to present the data

- Simple graphs.
- Before/after comparisons.
- Progress indicators (achieved/in progress/pending).
- Brief explanatory notes.

Key informative approach

Don't just say:

"We have reduced energy consumption by 15%"

But explain:

"This equates to lower emissions, lower costs, and more responsible use of resources."

Relationship with the plan and results

Indicators should:

- Be linked to the plan's objectives.
- Show consistency between what was planned and what was executed.
- Facilitate accountability and learning.

Expected communication outcome

A common language of indicators that allows any interested party to understand **what has been achieved, what impact it has had, and what remains to be done.**

🔗 Tool D – Communicable Indicator Sheet

The following tool operationalizes this fourth element of the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan and supports organizations in translating indicators into clear, understandable and evidence-based sustainability messages

Element	Content
Indicator	
Measures	
Evolution	Before, Now
Actual impact	What changes in practice



LINK:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/12GtcOWWbZMoJGo_HBNIuuD-N33Rzvfso/view

5. Comparison and Benchmarking within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

The fifth element of an effective Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan is comparison and benchmarking.

Once indicators are defined and communicated, organizations need a simple way to compare practices over time and against relevant references, so that sustainability communication becomes progressively clearer, more credible and learning-oriented. This section explains how benchmarking supports realistic improvement and strengthens trust by connecting sustainability communication to observable progress and good practices.

Introductory note

Communicating organisational sustainability requires more than goodwill or declarative intentions. To be understandable, credible and useful for stakeholders, such communication must be grounded in observable practices, learning processes and the organisation's ability to recognise where it currently stands, where it aims to evolve, and how it can improve in a realistic manner. It is within this framework that **comparison and benchmarking** play a structuring role.

In the context of micro and small organisations, comparison should not be perceived as a competitive exercise or as an attempt to replicate complex models used by large corporations. On the contrary,

benchmarking should be understood as a **practical learning tool**, enabling organisations to observe their own practices and those of others, reflect critically upon them and adapt solutions to their specific organisational context. Camp (1989) defines benchmarking as a continuous learning process based on the identification and adaptation of good practices, emphasising that its true value lies in the progressive and sustained improvement of performance.

In this section, **comparison and benchmarking** are presented as accessible and applicable tools for organisational sustainability communication, allowing organisations to learn from experience, strengthen coherence between discourse and practice, and improve the way they communicate their commitment to sustainability.

5.1. Benchmarking and sustainability communication: conceptual framework

Sustainability communication has gained increasing importance, driven by European policies, growing demands from citizens, and the rising risk of greenwashing practices. In this context, communicating sustainability without the capacity for comparison and evaluation may lead to vague messages, weakly substantiated claims, or communication that is disconnected from organisational reality.

Schaltegger, Bennett and Burritt (2006) argue that sustainability can only be communicated credibly when it is possible to demonstrate progress over time and when the information presented is comparable, even in a simplified form. Benchmarking contributes precisely to this comparability, enabling organisations to observe their own development and position themselves in relation to practices considered appropriate within their specific context.

For organisations and companies, this approach has a strong pedagogical dimension: learning to communicate sustainability implies learning to observe, compare, reflect and adjust. Benchmarking thus ceases to be an abstract concept and becomes a **daily practice for improving organisational communication**.

5.2. Benchmarking as an organisational learning process

Benchmarking applied to sustainability communication should be regarded as a **continuous process**, rather than a one-off action. This process begins with the observation of the organisation's own communication practices, continues through comparison with relevant references, and culminates in the identification of concrete improvements to be implemented.

This organisational learning cycle is particularly important for micro-organisations, which often communicate in an intuitive or reactive manner. Structured comparison allows communication practices to become more conscious, strategic and aligned with the organisation's real values and practices.

Example 1

A **microenterprise providing sustainable cleaning services**, with fewer than 10 employees, occasionally communicates on social media that it uses ecological products. When comparing its communication with that of another small company operating in the same sector, it realises that the latter explains in a simple way which products are used, why they are less polluting and what benefits they bring to customers. This comparison leads the microenterprise to reformulate its messages, replacing generic statements with brief and concrete explanations, thereby increasing customer trust.

What does comparison mean in communication practice?

Comparing sustainability communication does not mean assessing “who communicates better”, but rather analysing how specific communication choices influence stakeholders’ understanding, trust and engagement. This comparison may focus on several aspects, such as:

- the type of language used;
- the level of concreteness of the messages;
- the presence of examples and simple data;
- the regularity of communication;
- openness to dialogue and feedback.

Morsing and Schultz (2006) argue that effective sustainability communication should evolve from unidirectional models towards dialogical approaches, in which organisations learn from their audiences. Benchmarking helps to identify whether this dialogical dimension is present or absent.

Example 2

A **small local restaurant business** publishes a technical text on sustainable food practices on its website, using concepts that are not easily accessible to the general public. By comparing this text with that of another small restaurant, which uses everyday examples (such as food waste reduction and the choice of local suppliers), the business realises that simpler communication generates greater understanding and engagement. As a result, the company decides to adapt its language, making it closer and more accessible to customers.

5.3. Types of benchmarking applicable to sustainability communication

Internal benchmarking

Internal benchmarking consists of comparing the organisation’s own sustainability communication over time. This approach is particularly useful for assessing the impact of strategic changes, projects or new sustainability plans.

A **microenterprise in the vocational training sector** analyses how it communicated sustainability before and after participating in a European project. The comparison reveals that, initially, the company only mentioned generic commitments, while after the project it began communicating concrete actions, such as reducing paper consumption and adopting digital tools. Internal benchmarking helps the company recognise the progress achieved and identify aspects that are still insufficiently communicated.

Benchmarking with similar organisations

Comparing communication with organisations that are similar in size, mission or territory allows for the identification of transferable practices. This comparison should be selective and critical, avoiding models that are not suited to the organisation’s real context.

Example 4

A **small social enterprise providing community services** observes that another similar organisation uses short testimonials from clients and partners to communicate the impact of its sustainable practices. After analysing this approach, it decides to introduce short client stories on its website

highlighting the benefits of the changes implemented, adapting the practice to its own context and strengthening the credibility of its communication.

Functional benchmarking

Functional benchmarking focuses on a specific communication function or channel, such as a website, reports or social media. This approach is effective for rapid and targeted improvements.

Example 5

A local micro-consultancy firm decides to analyse only the “Sustainability” section of its website. When comparing it with that of another small consultancy firm, it realises that it does not present simple data on the results of its actions. In response, the company creates a small annual table listing the actions carried out (e.g. online meetings instead of face-to-face meetings, reduced travel) and their effects, making the communication clearer for clients and partners.

Learning by doing: practical benchmarking exercises

Exercise 1 – Guided external comparison

Example: An organisation compares its digital communication with that of a similar entity.

Criteria	Organisation A	Organisation B
Simple language	No	Yes
Practical examples	Few	Many
Impact data	No	Yes
Space for feedback	Yes	Yes

Conclusion of the example: Organisation A decides to revise its texts and introduce practical examples and simple data.

Now do it yourself

Choose one communication channel of your organisation and compare it with that of a similar organisation.

Criteria	Our organisation	Reference organisation
Clear and accessible language	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Use of concrete examples	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Information about impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Space for interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Reflection:What concrete improvement could be applied to our communication?

Exercise 2 – Internal benchmarking (comparison over time)

Example: An organisation compares its sustainability communication in 2023 and in 2025..

Aspect analysed	2023	2025
Frequency of communication	Low	Medium

Clarity of messages	Medium	High
Use of practical examples	Rare	Frequent

Conclusion of the example: The organisation identifies a clear improvement in message clarity but decides to further improve the regularity of its communications.

Now do it yourself

Compare how your organisation communicated sustainability two years ago with how it does so today.

Aspect analysed	Before	Now
Frequency of communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Low <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> High	<input type="checkbox"/> Low <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> High
Clarity of messages	<input type="checkbox"/> Low <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> High	<input type="checkbox"/> Low <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> High
Use of simple data	<input type="checkbox"/> Rare <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent	<input type="checkbox"/> Rare <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent

Reflection: In which dimension has the greatest improvement occurred? What can still be adjusted?

Exercise 3 – Focused functional benchmarking

Example:

An organisation analyses only the “Sustainability” section of its website and identifies the absence of simple indicators. It introduces an annual table with actions and results.

Now do it yourself

Identify a specific communication channel and complete the table below:

Question	Answer
What information is missing?	
What simple example could be included?	
What minimum data would help clarify the impact?	

Exercise 4 – Defining an improvement commitment

Example: “We will review our sustainability communication on a quarterly basis, comparing it with at least one similar organisation.”

Now do it yourself

“We commit to improving our sustainability communication through _____.”

Key idea of the section

Comparison and benchmarking enable organisations to learn from practice, communicate more clearly and strengthen stakeholders' trust. For micro-organisations, this simple and progressive approach transforms sustainability communication into a continuous process of learning, adaptation and realistic improvement.

✂ Tool D – Benchmarking Tool – Sustainability

For your convenience and to support a “hands-on” approach, readers can access the **Benchmarking Tool – Sustainability Communication** via the following QR code: (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/19xXKPDWTXnym82-TyIgm8SwPjm2lxjWP/view>)



6. Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

The sixth element of an effective Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan is the systematic use of lessons learned and continuous improvement.

Once sustainability communication is implemented, organizations need a simple way to reflect on what worked, what did not work, and what should be improved, so that communication becomes progressively clearer, more coherent and more credible over time.

This section explains how lessons learned support continuous improvement and strengthen trust by aligning sustainability communication with real practice and ongoing learning.

6.1. Learning from experience to continuously improve sustainability communication

Introductory note

In organisational sustainability communication, making mistakes, adjusting and improving are part of the process. For micro and small organisations, which often operate with limited resources and small teams, the ability to learn from experience is a decisive factor in ensuring clearer, more coherent and more credible communication over time. It is within this context that the concept of **lessons learned** plays a central role, directly linked to the logic of continuous improvement.

Lessons learned make it possible to transform past experiences—whether successful or problematic—into useful knowledge for future decisions. When integrated into a simple continuous improvement process, they help organisations avoid repeating mistakes, consolidate good practices and progressively strengthen the quality of their sustainability communication.

According to Argyris and Schön (1978), organisations learn when they are able to critically reflect on their actions and adjust future behaviours. In the case of sustainability communication, this learning is reflected in the ability to improve messages, formats and processes based on real experience.

What are “lessons learned” in the context of sustainability?

In the field of sustainability communication, **lessons learned** refer to structured reflections on what worked well, what did not work, and what can be improved in future communication actions. These lessons should not take the form of lengthy or overly technical reports, but rather of simple, practical records oriented towards action.

Kerzner (2017) emphasises that lessons learned only generate value when they are actually used to improve future practices. For micro-organisations, this means capturing learning in a simple, clear way that is integrated into everyday organisational activities.

Example 1

A microenterprise providing urban maintenance services launched a small online campaign to communicate a reduction in water consumption in its operations. After the campaign, the company realised that many customers did not understand the real impact of the measure. The lesson learned was clear: the message was too technical. In the following communication, the company opted for everyday examples and simple comparisons, significantly improving customer understanding.

From lessons learned to continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is a progressive process of small, successive adjustments based on experience and reflection. Deming (1986) describes this process through the **Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA)** cycle, which can be easily adapted to sustainability communication in micro and small organisations.

In communication terms, this cycle translates into:

- planning the message and the channel;
- communicating;
- assessing reactions and impact;
- adjusting future communication based on what has been learned.

Schaltegger, Bennett and Burritt (2006) argue that continuous improvement is essential to ensure coherence and credibility in sustainability communication, particularly when available resources are limited.

Example 2

A small local retail business initially communicated sustainable practices on social media only on commemorative dates. When evaluating the impact, it realised that sporadic communication did not generate engagement. The lesson learned led to the creation of short and regular posts, integrated into the company's usual communication, thereby improving the visibility of its sustainable actions.

Learning from successes and difficulties

A common mistake in organisations is to associate lessons learned only with failures. However, learning from what has worked well is equally important. According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning results from reflection on both positive and negative experiences.

In the context of sustainability communication, this implies analysing:

- which messages were better understood;
- which formats generated greater interaction;
- which channels proved to be more effective.

Example 3

A microenterprise providing sustainable catering services realised that posts featuring real photographs of the team and local suppliers generated more interaction than long explanatory texts.

The lesson learned was to systematically integrate real images into future communication, reinforcing the authenticity of the message.

Avoiding recurring errors through learning

The absence of a minimum reflection process leads many micro and small/medium-sized enterprises to repeat common mistakes, such as:

- communicating intentions rather than actions;
- using overly technical language;
- failing to collect feedback from stakeholders.

Morsing and Schultz (2006) emphasise that responsible communication should be bidirectional, allowing organisations to learn from audience feedback. Lessons learned help precisely to identify when this dialogue is absent.

Example 4

A small digital services company communicated environmental commitments on its website but never updated the information. After receiving feedback from a partner, it recorded as a lesson learned the importance of regularly updating content. From that moment on, the company introduced a semi-annual review of the published information.

Learning by doing: practical lessons learned exercises

Exercise 1 – Identifying lessons learned after a communication action

Example: A microenterprise published a post about waste reduction.

Question	Answer
What worked well?	Simple language and clear examples
What did not work well?	Low customer interaction
What did we learn?	We need to actively invite feedback
What will we do differently?	Include direct questions in future posts

Now do it yourself

Think about a recent sustainability communication action carried out by your organisation.

Question	Answer
What worked well?	
What did not work well?	
What did we learn?	
What will we do differently?	

Exercise 2 – Learning from a difficulty

Example. A small company attempted to communicate complex environmental data. Customers showed difficulty in understanding the information.

Lesson learned: simplify data and use everyday comparisons.

Now do it yourself

Identify a recent difficulty in your sustainability communication:

Identified difficulty:	
Lesson learned:	
Adjustment to be implemented:	

Exercise 3 – Commitment to continuous improvement

Example

“Our company commits to reviewing its sustainability communication on a quarterly basis, identifying at least one lesson learned and one concrete improvement to be implemented.”

Now do it yourself

Complete the sentence:

“Our organisation commits to continuously improving its sustainability communication through “_____”

Key idea of the section

Lessons learned make it possible to transform everyday experience into useful knowledge. For micro and small organisations, learning from both successes and difficulties is essential to progressively improve sustainability communication, strengthen credibility and align discourse with real practice. Continuous improvement does not require significant resources, but rather attention, reflection and a willingness to adjust.

7. Executive Management Responsibility within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

The seventh element of an effective Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan is executive management responsibility.

Even when communication tasks are delegated, credibility depends on leadership’s ability to ensure coherence between values, decisions, practices and messages, and to prevent ambiguity or unsubstantiated sustainability claims.

This section explains why leadership responsibility is central to credible sustainability communication and how it strengthens long-term trust and legitimacy.

7.1. The role of top management in credible organisational sustainability communication

Introductory note

Organisational sustainability communication is not merely a technical or operational matter. In micro and small organisations, it is closely linked to the decisions, attitudes and priorities of top management. Even when there are staff members responsible for communication or sustainability, it is executive leadership that defines the level of commitment, the coherence between discourse and practice, and the credibility of the message conveyed to stakeholders. The responsibility of executive management in sustainability communication is not limited to approving texts or authorising publications. It involves assuming an active role in defining values, priorities and key messages, ensuring that what is communicated reflects real practices and concrete decisions. As argued by Maak and Pless (2006), responsible leadership integrates ethical and sustainability values into strategic decision-making and into the way the organisation relates to its stakeholders.

Why leadership is central to sustainability communication

In micro and small organisations, top management often accumulates multiple roles: strategic direction, operational management and external representation. This proximity to daily operations makes leadership particularly visible and influential in shaping how sustainability is perceived, both internally and externally.

When sustainability communication is delegated without clear leadership guidance, messages often become inconsistent, weakly substantiated or misaligned with real practice. Conversely, when executive management assumes direct responsibility, communication tends to be more coherent, simpler and more credible.

According to Mintzberg (2009), leaders communicate not only through words, but above all through the decisions they make and the behaviours they adopt. In the context of sustainability, this means that leadership communicates as much through what it does as through what it says—or fails to do.

Example 1

A **microenterprise providing technical services**, with fewer than 15 employees, communicated generic environmental commitments on its website. Following an internal reflection led by management, the company decided to align its communication solely with actions already implemented, such as reducing travel and digitalising processes. The message became shorter, but also more credible, strengthening customer trust.

Strategic responsibility of executive management

The responsibility of top management begins with defining the organisation's **strategic direction** in relation to sustainability. This includes deciding which topics are priorities, which commitments are realistic, and how those commitments should be communicated.

Epstein and Buhovac (2014) argue that sustainability only becomes effective when it is integrated into strategic decision-making processes. From a communication perspective, this translates into leadership's ability to ensure that communication reflects real strategic choices rather than abstract intentions.

Example 2

A **small local retail business** decided to focus its sustainability communication on only two topics: local suppliers and waste reduction. This strategic decision, taken by management, enabled more focused, clear and consistent communication over time.

Leadership responsibility in preventing greenwashing

One of the greatest risks in sustainability communication is **greenwashing**, which is often unintentional. In micro-organisations, this risk frequently arises when communication is more ambitious than actual practice.

Executive management plays a central role in this regard: ensuring that what is communicated can be substantiated through concrete actions. Lyon and Montgomery (2015) emphasise that greenwashing weakens stakeholders' trust and damages organisational reputation in the medium and long term.

Example 3

A micro-consultancy firm planned to communicate that it was "carbon neutral". Management decided to review this statement and opted to communicate only the measures already implemented to reduce emissions, thereby avoiding a potentially misleading message and protecting the company's credibility.

Leading by example and internal coherence

Sustainability communication begins within the organisation. The way leadership acts directly influences employee behaviour and the coherence of external communication. When executive management adopts sustainable practices in everyday operations, these practices become easier to communicate and more credible.

Schein (2010) argues that organisational culture is shaped primarily by leaders' behaviour. Thus, executive leadership communicates sustainability not only through external campaigns, but also through internal decisions and practices.

Example 4

In a **small administrative services company**, management decided to eliminate unnecessary printing and promote online meetings. These decisions were subsequently communicated as concrete examples of sustainability, reinforcing coherence between internal practice and external communication.

Learning by doing: practical exercises for executive management

Exercise 1 – Identifying leadership responsibilities

Example:

In a microenterprise, management identifies the following responsibilities in sustainability communication:

Responsibility	Who is responsible
Defining key messages	Management

Validating content	Management
Implementing actions	Team
External communication	Management / Communication

Now do it yourself

Identify the responsibilities in your organisation:

Responsibility	Who is responsible
Defining sustainability priorities	
Validating messages	
Implementing actions	
External communication	

Exercise 2 – Assessing coherence between discourse and practice

Example: A small company communicated “reduction of environmental impact” but was unable to identify concrete actions.

Management decision: adjust communication to reflect only existing practices.

Now do it yourself

Complete the following:

Message we currently communicate:	
Concrete actions that support it:	
Adjustment needed (if any):	

Exercise 3 – Executive management commitment

Example:

“Management commits to validating all sustainability messages and ensuring that they reflect the company’s real practices.”

Now do it yourself

Complete the sentence:

“The executive management of our organisation commits to assuming responsibility for sustainability communication through “_____”
_____.”

Key idea of the section

Credible sustainability communication starts with leadership. For micro and small organisations, executive management responsibility is crucial to ensuring coherence, preventing greenwashing and

transforming sustainability into a real and communicable commitment. Leading sustainability is, above all, about aligning decisions, practices and messages.

8. Recipients within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

The eighth element of an effective Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan is the clear identification of recipients (target audiences).

Once the organization has defined what it communicates (positioning, transparency, objectivity, indicators, learning and governance), it must define to whom sustainability communication is addressed and how messages should be adapted to different stakeholders.

This section explains how to identify and group recipients in a realistic way, particularly for micro and small organizations, where communication is often direct, informal and relationship-based.

8.1. Recipients

Introductory note

In micro and small organisations, organisational sustainability communication is shaped by limited resources, close interpersonal relationships, and strong local embeddedness. Unlike large corporations, these organisations rarely engage in formalised sustainability reporting; instead, sustainability-related messages are communicated through everyday interactions, informal practices, and direct stakeholder engagement. The recipients of sustainability communication in micro and small organisations therefore tend to be fewer in number, more personally connected to the organisation, and often occupy multiple roles simultaneously (e.g., owner–manager, employee, and community member).

Understanding who these recipients are is essential, as sustainability communication in this context is less about external legitimacy through formal disclosure and more about building trust, ensuring compliance, reinforcing shared values, and supporting long-term organisational viability. Consequently, identifying the key recipients provides a foundation for analysing how sustainability principles are interpreted, communicated, and enacted within micro and small organisational settings.

In this section, recipients are presented in the context of micro and small organisations, for which organisational sustainability communication is usually targeted at a smaller, more personal set of recipients than in large firms. These recipients can be grouped into internal and external audiences.

8.1.1. Internal Recipients

Internal recipients are the people inside the organisation who receive, interpret, and act on sustainability-related messages. In micro and small organisations, this group is small, tightly connected, and often overlapping in roles, which makes sustainability communication more direct, informal, and practice-oriented than in larger firms.

Rather than receiving sustainability information through formal policies or reports, internal recipients typically learn about sustainability through daily decisions, conversations, and routines.

Key Internal Recipients and Their Roles

a) Owners / Owner-Managers / Founders

In micro and small organisations, the owner or owner-manager is **the primary internal recipient and communicator of sustainability**.

- They define what “sustainability” means for the business (e.g., cost saving, ethical behaviour, long-term survival).
- Sustainability communication is often implicit, reflected in:
 - Investment choices
 - Supplier selection
 - Employment practices
- Because decision-making is centralised, sustainability values are strongly influenced by the owner’s personal beliefs, ethics, and experience.

In practice, sustainability communication here is often **self-reflective** and strategic rather than formally articulated.

b) Employees

Employees in micro and small organisations are usually **few in number**, making communication highly personal.

- Sustainability messages are communicated through:
 - Direct instructions
 - Informal discussions
 - Role modelling by the owner or manager
- Sustainability messages focus on:
 - Responsible work practices
 - Resource efficiency (energy, waste, materials)
 - Ethical behaviour and company values
- Employees are expected to:
 - Follow resource-efficient practices
 - Adhere to ethical and social standards
 - Contribute ideas for improving sustainability

Because of close working relationships, employees often **internalise sustainability values** rather than simply comply with written rules.

c) Family Members (in Family-Owned Micro Firms)

In family-owned micro and small organisations, family members often function as **informal internal recipients**.

- They may be involved in:
 - Decision-making
 - Daily operations
 - Advisory roles
- Sustainability communication often focuses on:
 - Business continuity
 - Family reputation
 - Intergenerational responsibility

Here, sustainability is closely tied to **legacy and long-term survival**, not just performance.

d) Informal Leaders and Key Individuals

Even in very small organisations, certain individuals (e.g., senior employees or trusted staff) act as **internal opinion leaders**.

- They help translate sustainability intentions into daily practices.
- Their understanding and acceptance of sustainability strongly affect implementation.

Communication to these individuals is critical because they **bridge intentions and action**.

8.1.2. Distinctive Features of Internal Sustainability Communication in Micro and Small Organisations

In micro and small organisations, internal sustainability communication exhibits a set of distinctive features that differentiate it clearly from communication practices in larger firms. Due to limited organisational size and resources, sustainability-related communication is rarely formalised or documented in written policies, reports, or structured programmes. Instead, it is predominantly informal and embedded within everyday organisational interactions. Sustainability messages are communicated through direct conversations, routine instructions, and the day-to-day decisions of owner-managers, rather than through dedicated communication channels.

Internal sustainability communication in this context is also highly personal and relational. Close working relationships between owners and employees allow sustainability values and expectations to be transmitted through face-to-face interaction and role modelling. Employees often learn about acceptable environmental and social practices by observing managerial behaviour, such as resource use, treatment of staff, and engagement with suppliers, rather than by referring to formal guidelines.

Another defining feature is the central role of the owner or owner-manager. Decision-making authority is typically concentrated in one or a few individuals, meaning that sustainability communication reflects personal values, ethical orientations, and practical priorities. As a result, sustainability is often framed in pragmatic terms, such as cost efficiency, compliance, business continuity, and reputation, rather than as an abstract strategic or reporting exercise.

Furthermore, internal sustainability communication in micro and small organisations is action-oriented and experiential. Messages are closely linked to immediate operational practices, such as waste reduction, energy use, or fair treatment of employees, and are reinforced through daily routines rather than formal evaluation systems. This practical focus allows sustainability to be integrated into core activities but also means that communication may remain implicit and dependent on individual interpretation.

Overall, internal sustainability communication in micro and small organisations is characterised by informality, personalisation, centralised influence, and practical orientation. These features reflect the structural realities of small firms and shape how sustainability principles are understood, communicated, and enacted within the organisation.

8.1.3. Why Internal Recipients Matter So Much

Internal recipients play a critical role in the effectiveness of sustainability communication within micro and small organisations due to the unique structural and operational characteristics of these firms. In such organisations, staff numbers are typically small, decision-making is highly centralised, and formal communication channels are limited or nonexistent. As a result, internal recipients—primarily owners, employees, and key family members—serve as both the primary audience and the primary enactors of sustainability initiatives.

The importance of internal recipients lies in their ability to translate sustainability intentions into concrete practices. For instance, even if an owner values environmentally responsible operations, these values can only be realised if employees understand and adopt them in their daily activities. Employees often rely on observing managerial behaviour and receiving informal guidance to determine how to act sustainably, making them essential participants in embedding sustainability into operational routines.

Furthermore, in micro and small organisations, internal recipients frequently occupy multiple roles, such as decision-makers, implementers, and advocates. This overlapping of responsibilities means that each individual has a disproportionate influence on the organisation’s sustainability performance. Their understanding, commitment, and personal alignment with sustainability principles directly determine whether initiatives are successfully adopted or ignored.

Finally, internal recipients are critical because sustainability communication in small organisations is often informal, values-driven, and experiential rather than codified in formal reports or policies. Without the engagement of internal recipients, sustainability goals remain abstract intentions rather than tangible outcomes. Therefore, ensuring that owners, employees, and key individuals comprehend and embrace sustainability is fundamental to achieving meaningful and lasting organisational impact.

8.1.4. Practical Examples of Internal Sustainability Communication

Example 1: Owner–Employee Interaction

A small café owner tells staff during a morning briefing:

“Let’s make sure we switch off the coffee machine and lights when it’s quiet — electricity costs are high, and we’re trying to reduce waste.”

This communicates **environmental sustainability** (energy efficiency) in an **informal, direct way**.

Example 2: Role Modelling by the Owner

In a micro manufacturing firm, the owner:

- Personally separates recyclable materials
- Reuses packaging where possible
- Encourages staff to minimise material waste

Sustainability is communicated **through behaviour**, not written rules.

Example 3: Informal Policy Communication

In a small service firm, the owner says:

“We try to work with local suppliers even if they’re slightly more expensive — it’s better for the community and keeps our reputation strong.”

This communicates **social and economic sustainability values** to employees.

Example 4: Family Business Discussion

In a family-owned micro enterprise, sustainability is discussed informally at home:

“We shouldn’t cut corners with staff pay; this business needs to last for the next generation.”

Sustainability communication is tied to **legacy and long-term survival**.

Example 5: Day-to-Day Instructions

A small construction firm manager tells workers:

“Use only the materials you need — waste comes straight out of our costs and affects the environment.”

Sustainability is framed as **practical and cost-related**, reinforcing daily behaviour.

In micro and small organisations, internal sustainability communication commonly occurs through informal, day-to-day interactions rather than formalised policies. For example, owner-managers may communicate environmental responsibility by encouraging employees to reduce energy use or material waste during routine briefings or on-site instructions. Sustainability values are also conveyed through managerial role modelling, such as choosing local suppliers or demonstrating responsible resource use. In family-owned micro firms, sustainability communication may extend beyond the workplace into informal family discussions, where long-term continuity and ethical responsibility are emphasised. **These examples** illustrate how internal sustainability communication in small organisations is embedded in **everyday practices and personal relationships**.

8.2. External Recipients

External recipients are stakeholders outside the organisation who receive sustainability-related messages. Unlike internal recipients, they do not directly implement practices, but their perceptions, trust, and engagement can influence the organisation’s survival, reputation, and access to resources.

In micro and small organisations, external recipients are often fewer in number, locally connected, and personally known. Communication tends to be informal, direct, and relationship-based rather than through formal sustainability reports or corporate disclosures.

8.2.1. Customers / Clients

Customers or clients are a primary audience for sustainability communication because they directly influence the organisation’s sales, reputation, and long-term success. In micro and small organisations, customers are often local and personally known, making communication more relational and direct.

Organisations convey sustainability efforts through product labels, in-store messages, social media, or face-to-face conversations, highlighting eco-friendly practices, ethical sourcing, or socially responsible services. Effective communication fosters trust, loyalty, and differentiation in competitive markets.

Customers are increasingly sensitive to:

- Ethical sourcing
- Environmental responsibility
- Social impact

Sustainability communication with customers builds trust, loyalty, and brand differentiation.

8.2.2. Suppliers and Business Partners

Suppliers and business partners are critical recipients because they help implement sustainability practices throughout the supply chain.

Micro and small organisations communicate expectations regarding responsible sourcing, ethical conduct, and environmental standards to ensure consistency in operations. This communication is often informal, based on direct relationships or ongoing dialogue, and helps align partners with the organisation's sustainability values, reducing risk and enhancing operational reliability.

Communication may involve:

- Responsible sourcing
- Fair trade practices
- Environmental standards

Even at a small scale, this is essential for maintaining a coherent and sustainable supply chain.

8.2.3. Local Community

The local community is an important external audience for micro and small organisations, which are often embedded in their immediate social and geographical context.

Sustainability communication to the community emphasizes contributions such as supporting local employment, environmental stewardship, and social initiatives. By engaging with the community, organisations strengthen social legitimacy, build goodwill, and maintain a positive reputation that supports long-term survival.

This includes:

- Neighbours, local residents, community groups
- Communication about environmental care, local employment and social contributions

This helps maintain a social licence to operate.

8.2.4. Regulators and Local Authorities

Regulators and local authorities receive sustainability communication primarily to ensure compliance with legal and environmental standards.

In micro and small organisations, this communication tends to be formal but limited, focusing on demonstrating adherence to environmental regulations, health and safety laws, and labour standards. Maintaining transparent communication with authorities reduces regulatory risks and supports the organisation's legitimacy.

Sustainability communication here focuses on:

- Legal compliance
- Environmental and labour standards

In micro firms, this is often reactive rather than strategic.

8.2.5. Financial Stakeholders

Financial stakeholders, such as banks, investors, or microfinance institutions, are recipients of sustainability communication because their support often depends on the organisation's responsible management and long-term viability.

Communication may include evidence of ethical practices, risk mitigation, and sustainable operations, assuring stakeholders that their financial involvement is secure and socially responsible. For small organisations, this communication is often personal, relational, and focused on demonstrating credibility and trustworthiness.

This includes:

- Banks, microfinance institutions, small investors
- Communication about risk reduction, long-term viability, and responsible management practices

8.2.6. Informal and Digital Audiences

In micro and small organisations, informal and digital audiences play an increasingly important role in sustainability communication.

These audiences include social media followers, online communities, and industry peers who engage with the organisation through digital platforms or informal networks. Communication is often story-driven, visual, and values-focused, highlighting environmental initiatives, social responsibility, or ethical business practices.

Unlike traditional customers or regulators, digital audiences can amplify the organisation's sustainability messages through shares, reviews, and online discussions, helping to build reputation, attract potential clients, and foster community support.

For small organisations with limited resources, digital channels provide an accessible and cost-effective way to communicate sustainability and engage a wider audience beyond their immediate locality.

Communication here is often:

- Story-based

- Values-driven
- Less formal than corporate sustainability reports

Key idea

In micro and small organisations, external sustainability communication is primarily relationship-based. Trust, proximity, and credibility are built not through formal reports, but through consistent, understandable messages adapted to customers, partners, the community, authorities, financial actors, and digital audiences.

9. Key Messages within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

Once the organisation has identified its recipients, it must clearly define **what sustainability messages it communicates**.

In micro and small organisations, sustainability communication is built around practical, understandable and value-driven messages directly linked to everyday practices. These messages translate sustainability principles into concrete information that guides behaviour, strengthens relationships and enhances credibility.

Key messages usually cover environmental, social, economic, ethical and community dimensions.

9.1. Environmental Responsibility

These messages communicate the organisation's commitment to reducing its environmental impact through daily operational practices, such as:

- Efficient use of energy and water
- Waste reduction, recycling and reuse
- Eco-friendly sourcing and packaging

These messages are particularly relevant for customers, the community and regulators.

9.2. Social Responsibility

These messages emphasise the organisation's ethical behaviour and social engagement:

- Fair treatment and well-being of employees
- Support for local communities through employment or initiatives
- Participation in social, charitable or educational activities

They reinforce the organisation's role as a socially responsible entity.

9.3. Economic Sustainability and Business Continuity

- These messages communicate financial responsibility and long-term viability:
- Efficient use of resources and cost-conscious practices
- Stable management and planning for continuity
- Balance between profitability and ethical practices
- These messages reassure internal recipients and financial stakeholders.

9.4. Ethical and Transparent Practices

These messages reflect integrity and accountability in operations:

- Transparent sourcing and pricing
- Compliance with regulations and standards

- Ethical decision-making

They are essential for building trust with employees, customers, regulators and partners.

9.5. Practical and Action-Oriented Guidance

Sustainability messages are often translated into specific daily actions for employees:

- Turning off equipment when not in use
- Reducing material and energy waste
- Reporting unsafe or environmentally harmful practices

This ensures sustainability is embedded in everyday routines.

9.6. Local and Community Focus

These messages emphasise the organisation’s connection with its local context:

- Support for local suppliers and businesses
- Employment of local residents
- Positive contributions to community well-being

They strengthen social legitimacy and community relationships.

By tailoring messages to the needs and expectations of different stakeholders—including internal recipients such as employees and owners, and external recipients such as customers, suppliers, community members, regulators and digital audiences—organisations can embed sustainability into their culture, practices and relationships, supporting both operational efficiency and long-term survival.

Table summarising the key messages of organisational sustainability communication in micro and small organisations, linked to the audience and **examples**:

Audience / Recipient	Key Message	Example of Communication
Internal: Owners / Employees / Family	Environmental responsibility, social responsibility, practical action	Morning briefings on energy-saving practices; role modelling recycling; informal discussions about fair treatment of employees
Internal: Key Individuals / Informal Leaders	Ethical and transparent practices, action-oriented guidance	Demonstrating correct handling of materials; mentoring staff on ethical sourcing and reporting unsafe practices
External: Customers / Clients	Environmental and social responsibility, ethical products/services	Highlighting eco-friendly packaging, locally sourced products, ethical services via social media, in-store signage, or personal interactions
External: Suppliers / Business Partners	Responsible sourcing, alignment with sustainability standards	Direct discussions about sustainable materials, fair trade expectations, and collaboration on reducing environmental impacts

External: Local Community	Social responsibility, local engagement	Sharing contributions to community projects, supporting local employment, environmental initiatives visible to the community
External: Regulators / Local Authorities	Compliance, legal and ethical standards	Providing reports or evidence of environmental compliance, health & safety standards, and adherence to labour regulations
External: Financial Stakeholders	Economic sustainability, long-term viability, trust	Sharing information on resource efficiency, financial responsibility, and risk management to reassure investors or banks
External: Informal / Digital Audiences	Values-driven sustainability, social engagement, environmental responsibility	Social media posts, storytelling, online campaigns, and community engagement to demonstrate sustainability practices and build reputation

Sustainability Communication Matrix in Micro and Small Organisations

Axes:

- **Vertical axis (Y):** Recipient Type – Internal vs External
- **Horizontal axis (X):** Key Message Categories – Environmental, Social, Economic, Ethical/Transparent, Practical/Action-Oriented, Local/Community

Recipient Type	Environmental	Social	Economic	Ethical / Transparent	Practical / Action-Oriented	Local / Community
Internal: Owners / Employees / Family	Energy and water saving, recycling	Fair treatment, staff well-being	Resource efficiency, business continuity	Ethical sourcing, honest practices	Daily routines: turning off equipment, waste reduction	Local focus often overlaps with community responsibility
Internal: Key Individuals / Informal Leaders	Leading by example in resource use	Mentoring staff on social responsibilities	Supporting operational sustainability	Promoting transparency in processes	Guiding daily practices	Supporting local initiatives internally
External: Customers / Clients	Eco-friendly products, packaging	Ethical products and services	Highlighting sustainable business practices	Honest marketing, transparency of sourcing	Showcasing sustainable practices	N/A (focus is often local but external)
External: Suppliers / Business Partners	Sustainable materials, minimal environmental impact	Fair treatment in partnerships	Efficient supply chain practices	Transparency in agreements and standards	Collaboration on operational sustainability	N/A
External: Local Community	Environmental stewardship	Community engagement, social initiatives	Support for local economy	Ethical local behaviour	Volunteering, community projects	Directly engaged in community development

External: Regulators / Authorities	Compliance with environmental standards	Compliance with social/labour laws	Operational viability assurance	Transparent reporting	Documentation and reporting	N/A
External: Financial Stakeholders	N/A	N/A	Financial responsibility, long-term sustainability	Transparent financial practices	Evidence of sustainable operations	N/A
External: Informal / Digital Audiences	Sustainability storytelling online	Highlighting social responsibility initiatives	Demonstrating responsible practices	Ethical communication	Action-based social media campaigns	Community-oriented online engagement

To see the Infographic showing internal and external audiences with arrows linking them to key messages scan the following QR Code.



LINK: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HtpUH_kAPbjbIZ1gAeptHRdnk--vv7m/view

10. Communication Channels within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

The tenth element of an effective Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan is the selection of appropriate communication channels.

Once the organisation has defined its positioning, ensured transparency and objectivity, identified indicators, clarified recipients and structured key messages, it must determine **through which channels** these messages will be communicated.

This section explains how micro and small organisations select practical, resource-efficient and relational channels that allow sustainability messages to reach stakeholders effectively and translate into action.

10.1. Communication Channels in Micro and Small Organisations

Introductory note

Communication channels are the means through which micro and small organisations convey their sustainability values, practices and goals to internal and external stakeholders.

Unlike large organisations, which often rely on formal reports, dedicated departments or extensive campaigns, micro and small organisations typically communicate sustainability through informal, direct and resource-efficient channels. These channels are shaped by the organisation's small size, close-knit teams, limited resources and strong local embeddedness.

Understanding the channels used is essential, as they determine how effectively sustainability messages reach employees, customers, suppliers, community members, regulators, financial stakeholders and digital audiences — and how these messages are translated into actionable behaviour.

10.2. Internal Communication Channels

These channels focus on engaging employees, owners, family members, and key informal leaders to embed sustainability practices into daily operations:

- **Face-to-face meetings and briefings:** Quick discussions, morning huddles, or operational instructions on energy-saving, waste reduction, or ethical procedures.
- **Role modelling and observation:** Owners or managers demonstrate sustainable practices (e.g., recycling, efficient resource use) that employees emulate.
- **Informal discussions and mentoring:** Knowledge about sustainability is shared during casual interactions, training, or on-the-job guidance.
- **Internal digital tools:** Messaging apps, emails, or shared digital documents for reminders, updates, or tracking sustainability goals within small teams.

These channels are **highly personal, experiential, and action-oriented**, ensuring that sustainability is integrated into the organisation's culture and routines rather than remaining abstract.

10.3. External Communication Channels

External channels target stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, local communities, regulators, financial stakeholders, and informal/digital audiences:

- **Direct interactions:** Face-to-face communication during sales, delivery, or networking with customers, suppliers, and community members.
- **Social media and websites:** Sharing sustainability initiatives, eco-friendly practices, ethical sourcing, and social engagement to reach digital and informal audiences.
- **Product labeling and packaging:** Communicating eco-friendly materials, local sourcing, or ethical certifications directly to customers.
- **Local media and community events:** Press releases, local newspaper articles, workshops, and participation in community initiatives highlight social and environmental responsibility.
- **Formal documentation and reports:** Limited use for regulators, authorities, and financial stakeholders, focusing on compliance, ESG practices, and transparent operations.

These channels are **flexible, low-cost and relational**, allowing small organisations to engage stakeholders effectively despite limited communication budgets.

10.4. Key Characteristics of Communication Channels

- **Informal and relational:** Channels rely on personal trust, close networks, and face-to-face engagement.
- **Resource-efficient:** Preference for low-cost communication methods, such as social media, word-of-mouth, and direct interaction.
- **Action-oriented:** Channels encourage specific behaviours and operational changes, not just information sharing.
- **Localised and community-focused:** Emphasis on local stakeholders and digital audiences rather than distant or global reporting.

In micro and small organisations, sustainability communication channels are chosen for their **practicality, personalisation, and ability to translate values into tangible actions**. By using both internal and external channels effectively, these organisations ensure that sustainability messages are understood, trusted, and acted upon by employees, customers, suppliers, community members, regulators, financial stakeholders, and digital audiences.

By combining internal and external channels, organisations ensure that sustainability messages are understood, trusted and acted upon.

Table linking audience types, communication channels and example sustainability messages for micro and small organisations:

Audience / Recipient	Communication Channels	Example Sustainability Messages
Internal: Owners / Employees / Family	Face-to-face meetings, morning briefings, informal discussions, role modelling, internal messaging apps or shared documents	Daily energy-saving practices, recycling, fair treatment of employees, ethical sourcing, practical operational guidance
Internal: Key Individuals / Informal Leaders	Mentoring, on-the-job guidance, role modelling, team discussions	Leading by example in sustainable practices, guiding colleagues on ethical and environmental behaviour
External: Customers / Clients	Face-to-face interactions, product labeling, social media, websites, in-store messaging	Eco-friendly products, ethical sourcing, social responsibility initiatives, local community engagement
External: Suppliers / Business Partners	Direct meetings, email, collaborative planning, supply agreements	Responsible sourcing, alignment with sustainability standards, environmental and ethical practices in the supply chain
External: Local Community	Local events, workshops, community projects, local media, press releases	Community support, social and environmental initiatives, local employment opportunities
External: Regulators / Authorities	Formal documentation, compliance reports, regulatory submissions	Environmental compliance, health and safety adherence, labour law compliance, transparency in operations
External: Financial Stakeholders	Meetings, financial statements, reporting, emails	Responsible management, economic sustainability, resource efficiency, risk mitigation, long-term viability
External: Informal / Digital Audiences	Social media, blogs, newsletters, online communities	Storytelling on sustainability practices, environmental and social initiatives, value-driven engagement

To see the Infographic: How Micro and Small Organisations Communicate Sustainability scan the following QR Code



LINK: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/16fz8WHe1A6egbHJ6lfHECSZRPAUmrDgH/view>

10.5. Practice-Oriented Examples of Communication Channels Use

Face-to-Face Communication

1. A small retail owner explains eco-friendly product features directly to customers at the point of sale.
2. Employees are reminded verbally to reduce energy use during daily or weekly briefings.
3. Sustainability expectations are discussed informally with suppliers during deliveries or meetings.

Informal Internal Communication

1. Sustainability practices are shared during casual conversations or on-the-job training.
2. Employees learn sustainable routines by observing the owner's behaviour rather than reading formal guidelines.

Digital Communication (Low-Cost Tools)

1. A micro-enterprise uses WhatsApp or internal messaging apps to remind staff about waste separation.
2. Social media posts highlight sustainable sourcing or community initiatives.
3. A simple website page outlines environmental and social commitments.

Product and In-Store Communication

1. Product labels indicate local sourcing or environmentally friendly materials.
2. Posters or small signs explain sustainability actions, such as reusable packaging or reduced plastic use.

Community-Based Channels

1. Sustainability initiatives are communicated through participation in local events or markets.
2. Local newspapers or community boards are used to share environmental or social activities.

Formal and Semi-Formal Channels

1. Basic documentation is prepared for regulatory compliance or inspections.
2. Financial stakeholders receive sustainability-related information during meetings or in financial summaries.

✂ Tool E – Sustainability Communication Channels Template (Micro & Small Organisations)



To support organisations in selecting and planning their communication channels, the following practical template can be used.

(LINK: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Q9e34E-ZiqytLOunqmICGsQ6u4itIBLG>).

a) Audience Identification

Audience Type	Specific Stakeholder
<input type="checkbox"/> Internal	<input type="checkbox"/> Owners <input type="checkbox"/> Employees <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Key Individuals
<input type="checkbox"/> External	<input type="checkbox"/> Customers <input type="checkbox"/> Suppliers <input type="checkbox"/> Community <input type="checkbox"/> Regulators <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/> Digital Audiences

b) Sustainability Objective

What is the purpose of the communication?

- Raise awareness
- Guide daily behaviour
- Build trust and reputation
- Ensure compliance
- Strengthen relationships
- Demonstrate responsibility

Objective statement:

c) Key Sustainability Message

What sustainability issue is being communicated?

- Environmental (energy, waste, resources)
- Social (employees, community, fairness)
- Economic (efficiency, long-term viability)
- Ethical / Transparency
- Practical / Action-oriented

Local / Community focus

Message content:

d) Communication Channel Selection

Channel Type	Channel Used	Why This Channel?
Face-to-face	<input type="checkbox"/> Meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Briefings <input type="checkbox"/> Sales interaction	_____
Informal	<input type="checkbox"/> Conversations <input type="checkbox"/> Role modelling	_____
Digital	<input type="checkbox"/> Social media <input type="checkbox"/> Website <input type="checkbox"/> Messaging apps	_____
Product / On-site	<input type="checkbox"/> Labels <input type="checkbox"/> Posters <input type="checkbox"/> Signage	_____
Community	<input type="checkbox"/> Events <input type="checkbox"/> Local media <input type="checkbox"/> Networks	_____
Formal	<input type="checkbox"/> Reports <input type="checkbox"/> Compliance documents	_____

e) Frequency and Responsibility

How often?

Daily Weekly Monthly Occasionally As required

Who communicates?

Owner Manager Employee Family member

f) Expected Outcome

What should change as a result of this communication?

Improved behaviour

Increased awareness

Stronger trust

Better compliance

Enhanced reputation

Expected outcome:

g) Simple Evaluation (Optional)

How will you know it worked?

- Observation of behaviour
- Feedback from stakeholders
- Reduced waste/energy use
- Positive customer response
- Compliance achieved

Example (Filled-In Template)

Audience: Customers

Objective: Build trust and brand differentiation

Key Message: Use of eco-friendly packaging

Channel: In-store signage + social media

Frequency: Ongoing

Responsible: Owner

Expected Outcome: Increased customer loyalty

11. Commitment to Stakeholders within the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

The eleventh element of an effective Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan is the organisation's commitment to its stakeholders.

Once recipients, key messages and communication channels are clearly defined, sustainability communication must be grounded in a clear commitment to engaging, informing and responding to stakeholders in a consistent and credible manner.

This section explains how micro and small organisations demonstrate this commitment through practical, relational and action-driven communication practices.

11.1. Commitment to Stakeholders

Introductory note

In micro and small organisations, commitment to stakeholders refers to the organisation's dedication to engaging, informing, and responding to the needs of both internal and external audiences regarding sustainability. This commitment is not only a moral or ethical obligation but also a practical necessity, as stakeholders—including employees, owners, family members, customers, suppliers,

local communities, regulators, financial partners, and digital audiences—directly influence the organisation’s operations, reputation, and long-term viability.

Key aspects of this commitment include:

A. Active Engagement

- Micro and small organisations maintain close, personal relationships with stakeholders.
- Sustainability communication is used to **actively involve stakeholders**, making them aware of environmental, social, and ethical practices.

B. Transparency and Trust-Building

- Open and honest communication ensures that stakeholders understand the organisation’s sustainability goals and practices.
- For internal stakeholders, this includes guidance on day-to-day sustainable actions; for external stakeholders, it may include information on eco-friendly products, ethical sourcing, and community initiatives.

C. Integration into Operations

- Stakeholder expectations are considered in decision-making, ensuring that sustainability practices are **aligned with stakeholder interests**.
- Example: A small business sources locally to support community employment while minimizing environmental impact.

D. Action-Oriented Communication

- Commitment is demonstrated through concrete actions rather than abstract statements.
- Communication channels are chosen to **effectively convey practices**, encourage stakeholder participation, and promote sustainable behaviours.

E. Long-Term Relationship Focus

- Sustainability communication fosters ongoing trust, loyalty, and collaboration with stakeholders.
- In micro and small organisations, these relationships are often personal and central to business continuity.

The following examples illustrate how micro and small organisations demonstrate commitment to stakeholders through everyday sustainability communication practices.

11.2. Practical Examples of Commitment to Stakeholders

In micro and small organisations, commitment to stakeholders in sustainability communication is **practical, relational, and action-driven**. It ensures that all messages—internal or external—are meaningful, credible, and aligned with stakeholder expectations, fostering trust, engagement, and long-term organisational sustainability.

Practical examples of Commitment to stakeholders

Practical and real-world examples of how micro and small organisations can demonstrate commitment to stakeholders through sustainability communication. These examples focus on **actions and channels** relevant to their scale and resources:

A. Internal Stakeholders (Owners, Employees, Family, Key Individuals)

- **Morning briefings or huddles:** The owner reminds employees to switch off unused equipment and separate waste for recycling.
- **On-the-job mentoring:** Experienced employees or managers guide colleagues on ethical sourcing, safe handling of materials, or eco-friendly practices.
- **Shared digital reminders:** A small workshop uses WhatsApp or a messaging app to send daily tips about energy saving or sustainable practices.

B. Customers / Clients

- **Product labels and in-store messaging:** Highlight eco-friendly packaging, ethical sourcing, or social impact of products.
- **Social media storytelling:** A small café posts photos of locally sourced ingredients or sustainable practices to demonstrate transparency.
- **Direct engagement:** Staff explain sustainability practices during customer interactions, reinforcing trust and loyalty.

C. Suppliers / Business Partners

- **Collaborative meetings:** Discuss sustainable sourcing options and environmental standards for materials or services.
- **Simple agreements or email updates:** Communicate expectations for ethical and eco-friendly practices in supply chain operations.
- **Joint initiatives:** Partner with suppliers for waste reduction, energy-efficient processes, or community engagement projects.

D. Local Community

- **Participation in community projects:** Small enterprises engage in clean-up drives, tree planting, or local charity events.
- **Local media or community boards:** Share sustainability initiatives and social contributions to increase awareness and legitimacy.
- **Sponsorship or support:** Contribute to schools, local sports clubs, or social programs to demonstrate social responsibility.

E. Regulators / Authorities

- **Compliance documentation:** Submit environmental, health, and safety reports as required.
- **Transparency in inspections:** Actively demonstrate sustainable practices during local authority visits.

- **Clear communication:** Explain sustainability policies or initiatives during audits or meetings.

F. Financial Stakeholders

- **Reporting responsible management:** Share concise financial and operational summaries highlighting sustainable practices.
- **Demonstrating efficiency:** Show resource savings, risk mitigation, and long-term viability in communications with investors or banks.
- **Regular updates:** Keep stakeholders informed of progress on sustainability initiatives, reinforcing trust.

G. Digital and Informal Audiences

- **Social media posts:** Showcase environmental and social initiatives, like waste reduction or community support.
- **Blogs or newsletters:** Explain sustainability values, practices, and achievements to broader digital communities.
- **Engagement campaigns:** Encourage followers to participate in sustainability challenges or local initiatives.

Micro and small organisations realize commitment to stakeholders by **combining direct personal engagement, informal communication, digital tools, and visible actions.**

These practices show that sustainability is not just a statement but a **lived, observable part of operations, building trust, loyalty, and long-term support** from all stakeholder groups.

Table linking stakeholder groups to communication channels and practical examples of commitment to stakeholders in micro and small organisations.

Audience / Recipient	Communication Channels	Practical Examples of Commitment
Internal: Owners / Employees / Family	Face-to-face meetings, informal discussions, mentoring, messaging apps	Morning briefings on energy saving and recycling; on-the-job guidance for ethical sourcing; digital reminders for sustainable practices
Customers / Clients	Product labels, in-store messaging, social media, face-to-face interaction	Highlight eco-friendly packaging; staff explain ethical sourcing during sales; social media posts showcasing sustainability initiatives
Suppliers / Business Partners	Direct meetings, email, collaborative planning	Discuss sustainable sourcing options; send updates on ethical practices; co-develop waste reduction or energy efficiency projects
Local Community	Local events, workshops, community boards, local media	Participate in clean-up drives, tree planting, or charity events; share sustainability initiatives through local newspapers; sponsor schools or clubs
Regulators / Authorities	Compliance reports, formal documentation, inspections	Submit environmental, health, and safety reports; demonstrate sustainable practices during inspections; explain initiatives during regulatory meetings
Financial Stakeholders	Meetings, financial statements, email updates	Report on responsible management, resource efficiency, and long-term sustainability; provide updates on sustainability progress
Informal / Digital Audiences	Social media, blogs, newsletters, online communities	Share sustainability stories and community initiatives; engage audiences in eco-challenges; showcase company values and practices online

To help organisations visualise how commitment to stakeholders operates across different audiences and channels, the following infographic can be used.

To see the infographic *Commitment to Stakeholders*, scan the following QR code



LINK: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_SwJiTZgxVBqfclBe3_6tw5Wp8vL9ZI-/view

12. Conclusion

This Manual has presented sustainability communication through a set of concepts, tools and practical guidance that, when viewed together, reveal a coherent methodological structure rather than a collection of isolated recommendations.

What emerges across the previous sections is a **continuous organisational logic** that closely reflects the **Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA)** cycle applied to sustainability communication in micro and small organisations.

Sustainability communication, as proposed in this Manual, is not an additional task performed at the end of activities. It is the visible expression of an internal organisational process that begins with clarity of identity, is supported by evidence, strengthened through reflection and learning, and sustained by responsible leadership and stakeholder engagement.

In this sense, the Manual has followed a clear progression of fundamental questions that every organisation should implicitly answer before communicating sustainability:

- **Who are we and from which institutional position do we speak?**
(Institutional Positioning)
- **How do we ensure that our communication is transparent?**
(Transparency)
- **How do we avoid exaggeration and greenwashing?**
(Objectivity)
- **How do we demonstrate what we say with evidence?**
(Indicators)
- **How can we improve by observing and learning from others?**
(Benchmarking)
- **How do we learn from our own experience?**
(Lessons Learned)
- **Who ensures coherence between discourse and practice?**
(Executive Responsibility)
- **To whom are we communicating?**
(Recipients)
- **What exactly are we communicating?**
(Key Messages)
- **Through which channels do we communicate?**
(Communication Channels)
- **How do we demonstrate real commitment to stakeholders?**

(Commitment to Stakeholders)

Together, these elements form a structured cycle:

- **Plan** – defining identity, principles and ethical foundations of communication;
- **Do** – translating principles into actions and measurable evidence;
- **Check** – reflecting on practices and learning from experience;
- **Act** – adjusting responsibilities, messages, channels and stakeholder engagement to improve coherence and credibility.

For micro and small organisations, this approach is particularly suitable.

These organisations rarely rely on formal sustainability reports or complex communication strategies. Instead, sustainability is communicated through everyday practices, close relationships, informal interactions and continuous adaptation.

This Manual recognises that reality and provides a framework that transforms it into a structured, repeatable and manageable process.

Sustainability communication therefore becomes not a promotional effort, but the natural consequence of organisational clarity, ethical behaviour, evidence-based practice, learning, leadership responsibility and genuine stakeholder engagement.

Ultimately, the Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan proposed here is not merely a communication model. It is a **continuous organisational learning cycle made visible through communication**, enabling micro and small organisations to communicate sustainability in a credible, realistic and sustainable way over time.

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Appendix

Appendix: Organizational Sustainability Communication Plan

This Plan translates the principles, concepts and tools presented throughout this Manual into a practical, structured and operational instrument.

By completing this Plan, the organisation is able to:

- Structure its sustainability narrative
- Communicate with transparency and objectivity
- Avoid greenwashing
- Align messages with stakeholders
- Use appropriate communication channels
- Demonstrate real commitment
- Establish a cycle of continuous improvement (PDCA logic)

1. Institutional Positioning

Who are we and from which institutional position do we communicate sustainability?

This section clarifies the organisational identity that frames all sustainability communication.

Element	Your content
Name of organisation	
Type of organisation	SME / NGO / Association / Other
Mission	
Where we operate	Local / Regional / National / European
Our key values	
Our commitment to sustainability	
What we do NOT do (limits, boundaries, mandate)	

Note: This content can be directly used on the website, reports or presentations.

2. Transparency

What have we actually done in sustainability?




List concrete actions derived from your Operational/Sustainability Plan.

Sustainability objective	Action implemented	Result achieved	Evidence (photo, data, document)

Note: Only actions with evidence should be communicated.

3. Objectivity — Avoid Greenwashing

Classify messages according to their real status

Action / Result	Status
	 Achieved result
	 In progress
	 Future objective

Note: Never communicate  as if it were 

4. Recipients — Who do we communicate with?

Internal audience	External audience
Staff	Clients / Beneficiaries
Management	Partners
Volunteers	Local community
Trainers	Public authorities
	Suppliers
	Financial stakeholders
	Digital audiences

5. Key Messages — What type of sustainability message is it?

Tick the category for each action/result.

Action / Result	Env.	Social	Econ.	Ethical	Practical	Local impact
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note: This ensures message balance and coherence.

6. Communication Channels — How will we communicate it?

Audience	Message	Channel	Format	When
		Website / Social media / Email / Meeting	Post / Article / Report / Presentation	

7. Transparency Check (before publishing)

Before communicating, confirm:

- We explained what we wanted to improve
- We explained what we did
- We showed what changed
- We mentioned difficulties (if any)
- We included evidence

If you cannot tick all → do not publish yet.

8. Indicators and Proof — How do we prove what we say?

Message	Indicator / Data	Source of proof

9. Sustainability Communication Matrix

Ensure you are not always communicating the same thing to the same people.

Recipient \ Message type	Environmental	Social	Ethical	Practical	Local
Staff					
Community					
Partners					

10. Continuous Improvement — Annual Communication Calendar (PDCA)

Period	What we communicate	Purpose
Beginning of year	Objectives and commitments	PLAN
Mid-year	Actions in progress	DO
End of year	Results and lessons learned	CHECK & ACT

11. Commitment to Stakeholders — Coherence Check

- Messages reflect real practices
- Leadership validates communication
- Messages adapted to each audience
- Appropriate channels used
- Communication reviewed annually

Final Validation of the Plan

At the end of this Plan, the organisation should have:

- A clear sustainability narrative
- Evidence-based messages
- Audience-adapted communication
- No risk of greenwashing
- Ready-to-use content for website, reports and social media
- A structured system for continuous improvement