

# Scalable Communication



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# A typical story

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- Fred has a passionately held vision for changing the world
  - All he needs to do is convert “enough” people to his beliefs
- Fred tries to convert people through conversations:
  - Mostly one-to-one conversations
  - At work, bus stops, pubs, parties, ...
  - Some weeks he talks to just 2 people, other weeks he talks to more than 20
- Results:
  - Fred never manages to talk to “enough” people
  - His friends think he is boring because he talks about only one topic
  - Fred becomes frustrated by his lack of success

# Analysis

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- Fred's communication technique is not effective:
  - Each in-depth conversation lasts, say, 30 minutes or more
  - If he speaks for 8 hours each day, that's just 16 people per day (80 people in one week, assuming he speaks 5 days per week)
  - He probably needs to share his message with tens of thousands (or even millions) of people to bring about change
- Ideally, Fred should:
  - Find ways to communicate with *many* people at the same time
  - If possible, communicate without him being present
- This can be called *scalable communication*

# Examples of scalable communication

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- Example techniques for scalable communication:
  - Publish a letter or article in a national newspaper (readership measured in millions)
  - Make a video documentary and put it on [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com)
  - Put a PowerPoint presentation onto [www.SlideShare.net](http://www.SlideShare.net)
  - If you are a musician, write a song about the issue:
    - Fantastic if you can get a famous group to record it
    - Alternatively, make an MP3 version available for free on the Internet
  - Set up a website that contains relevant information
  - Write a book:
    - Publish it in paper format. Or make it available on a website
  - Publish your own newspaper, newsletter or magazine

# Example: Annie Leonard and “The Story of Stuff”

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## ■ Annie Leonard:

- Is an environmental activist
- Travelled a lot to speak to different groups about environmental issues
- Wanted a more scalable way to communicate her message

## ■ She:

- Wrote a script for a 20-minute “talking head” video
- Worked with a small team to shoot the video and add cartoon-style animation to complement the script
- Made the finished video available free-of-charge on a website:  
[www.storyofstuff.com](http://www.storyofstuff.com)

## ■ Results:

- The movie has been viewed over 6 million times in its first 18 months
- The website encourages visitors to download it and host screenings in their community

# Combining several communication techniques

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Al Gore combined several scalable communication techniques

- He wrote a slide-based presentation about climate change:
  - He presented this more than 1000 times around the world
- The presentation was filmed as *An Inconvenient Truth*
  - It was watched by more than 2 million people in cinemas
  - Lots of newspapers and TV programs reviewed this movie
  - It was watched by more people through DVD sales and rentals
  - Copies of the DVD were distributed to schools in several countries
- A companion book was released
- The book and movie promote a website that has more information ([www.climateCrisis.net](http://www.climateCrisis.net))

# Barriers to scalable communication

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- Many activists mainly use non-scalable communication tactics
  - Why?
- Partly because they provide instant gratification
  - Scalable communication requires lots of up-front effort
  - Example:
    - It might take weeks to write an article
    - You have to put in all that effort before the target audience sees it
- Scalable communication may require skills that are rare:
  - Ability to express yourself in a clear, simple and concise manner
  - Technical skills with computers, audio and video equipment, ...
- Scalable communication may require expenses:
  - Cost of computers, audio and video recording equipment, ...



# Gaining skills

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- Decide what forms of scalable communication appeal to you
  - Examples: “I want to make a documentary” or “I want to write a book”
- List the skills and equipment you will need
- Save up for the equipment or ask for it as a birthday present
  - Perhaps you can get it cheaply on eBay or free on Freecycle
- Ways to gain skills:
  - Play with the equipment as a hobby
  - Find somebody more experienced to mentor you
  - Read relevant books
  - Join a local enthusiast group

# Writing is a fundamental skill

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- Most forms of scalable communication require good writing ability:
  - To write books, articles, letters to newspapers, flyers, ...
  - To write the script for making a video documentary
  - To write a speech
  - To write a well-structured PowerPoint presentation
- Unfortunately, how to write well is taught badly in many schools and universities
- Find a person or group who can proofread your work and give feedback:
  - Ask in your local library for a list of local writers' groups
  - Ask a work colleague who writes well to give you feedback on your writing
  - Read books that provide advice on writing

# Summary

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- Many activists communicate in ways that:
  - Provide instant gratification
  - Are not scalable
- Scalable communication:
  - Requires a lot of up-front investment of time
  - Might require skills that are rare
  - Might require expensive equipment
  - Can have a much bigger impact than one-to-one communication
- Somehow:
  - Get the required equipment
  - Get the required skills
  - Invest the time to produce scalable communication documents