MESSAGING AND FRAMING HOMELESSNESS

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMES

Cognitive linguistics sees "conceptual frames" as "bedrock" of understanding.
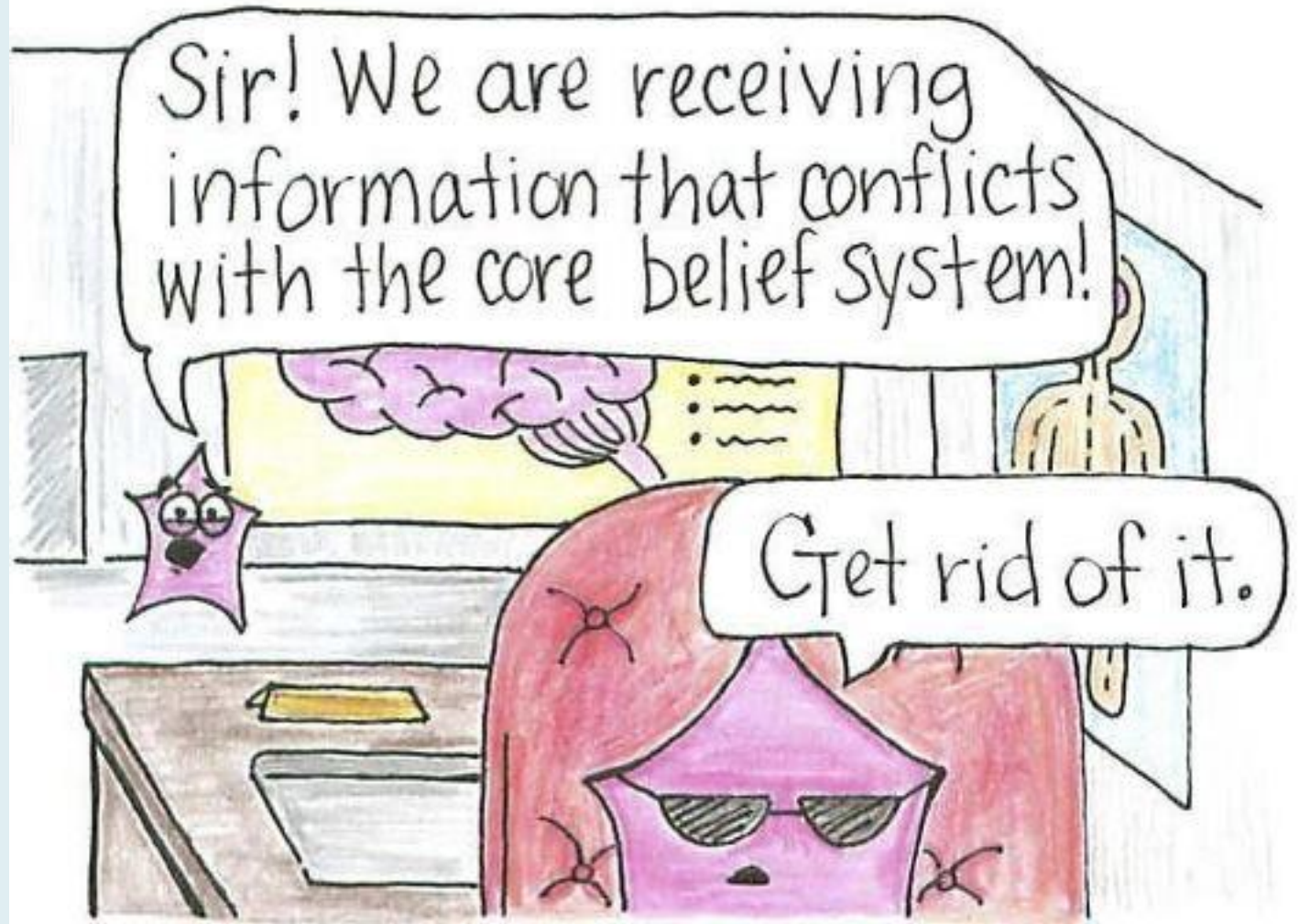
- People understand ideas because they fit them into existing conceptual frames.

- A few words or cues trigger whole frames inspiring certain interpretations.

   - George Lakoff

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ANY "ISSUE" CAN BE "DEFINED" BY MULTIPLE MEANINGS AND DIMENSIONS; THESE ALTERNATE INTERPRETATIONS SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR HOW ISSUES ARE VIEWED:

- How policymakers see an issue
- How the media covers it
- How advocates define it
- How the public judges it

SOMETIMES HOW WE TALK ABOUT AN ISSUE DETERMINES THE OUTCOME OF SOCIAL/POLITICAL POLICY

- Inheritance tax/ death tax
- War on Poverty
- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act ("Ending Welfare As We Know It")

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Unlikely the "general public" will be well enough informed about complicated issues to base views on objective highly specific cost/benefit ratios or deep academic studies.

We all rely on various relevant – often conflicting – interpretative shortcuts:

- core values
- "cues" – including cultural stereotypes
- how issues are presented in the media

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METAPHORS

Often expressed by metaphors

- **Horse race metaphors in political campaigns.**

- **War metaphors in public health threats.**

- **Sports or business metaphors**

- **Familiar frames are "labels the mind uses to find what it knows" – a translation process"**

                              - Gillian, 2003

People approach the world not as naïve, blank slate receptacles who take in stimuli in some independent and objective way, but as experienced and sophisticated veterans of perception who have stored prior experiences as an organized mass. This prior experience takes the form of expectations about the world, saving the individual the trouble of figuring things out anew all the time"

-Deborah Turner

FRAMING

- Often internalized from the media

- It becomes "second nature" or automatic

- Allows us to process information efficiently and get on with our lives

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Rugged Individualism

The "dominant language" that some sociologists call the "first language of America" is individualism and personal responsibility.

The notion that rugged individualism and self discipline determines outcomes

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INDIVIDUALISM IS BASED ON CORE BELIEFS:

- ➤ Economic opportunity is widespread
- ➤ "Anyone who tries hard enough can succeed"
- ➤ World is a fair place/hard workers reap rewards
- ➤ "Deserving"/ "undeserving" poor

HUMANITARIANISM ALSO BASED ON CORE BELIEFS:

- ➤ The world often isn't fair; outcomes dramatically affected by geography, class, racism
- ➤ Problems aren't just personal; often systemic
- ➤ We have a community obligation

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IN STUDIES PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR POVERTY POLICIES PROVIDING CASH BENEFITS AND FULL MEDICAL COVERAGE:

- "Perceived deservedness" was strongest factor is shaping responses

  - <u>Most deserving</u>: Widows w/ children; disabled, physically ill
  - <u>Least deserving</u>: "able-bodied" men, teen mothers, single moms

  Can't help but compare these to today's   homelessness policies regarding:

  - Veterans
  - Families with children

IDEOLOGICAL "MARKET JUSTICE" FRAMEWORK

Rooted in Adam Smith economics of the "invisible hand" of the free market.

➢ Free, unfettered market, until find the best way

➢ Dominated U.S. politics since Reagan era

➢ Based on limited restraint/ regulation of market

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"BLAMING THE VICTIM"

This "frame" holds poor, homeless or even mentally ill people personally responsible for their poverty or problems.

Among 44 countries surveyed, U.S. far more likely to hold people in poverty responsible rather than any external force

(Pew Research, 2002)

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Focus on Systemic and Institutional reasons for poverty and homelessness "beyond control" of individuals

REBALANCING

Rebalancing to a Social Justice Frame requires use of a "values" framework and different language

HOW AN ISSUE IS DESCRIBED/ "FRAMED" CAN DETERMINE POLITICAL/ POPULAR SUPPORT

Framing + Language Shape Reaction

Rugged Individualism	Community Values
Market Justice	**Social Justice**
• Self determination/ self- discipline	• Shared responsibility
• Rugged individualism self interest	• Interconnection/ Co-operation
• Benefits based on personal effort	• Basic Benefits assured
• Limited "collective good" obligation	• Strong "collective good" obligation
• Limited government intervention	• Court involvement necessary
• Voluntary + moral nature of behavior	• Strong sense of community and well-being

- George Beauchamp

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POLICY FIRST!

Of course, language doesn't determine policy

Policy is built on concrete plans, outcome goals, evidence based, and values

But, if outcome is important, language is a crucial tool in advocacy

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THREE LEVELS OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

Level I: overarching values, i.e., fairness, equality, equity

Level II: general issue being addressed: i.e., homelessness

Level III: Nitty–gritty – including policy – i.e., rental assistance

Success is largely determined by connection with Level 1 value

Values are Motivators
Messages should articulate Level 1 values, not get mixed in Level 3 details.

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TELLING OUR STORY

➢ Lead with Shared Values

➢ Tell a Systemic Story

➢ Talk Unequal Obstacles before Outcomes

➢ Offer Solutions

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SHARED VALUES

Equal Treatment   Community

                 Opportunity

Voice   Pragmatism

ISSUES

Immigration   Criminal Justice

   Affordable Housing   Civil Rights

Education   Poverty

POLICIES

Community Development   Block Grant

 DACA   Fair Sentencing Act   Title VIII

Three Strikes Law   COPS

Values

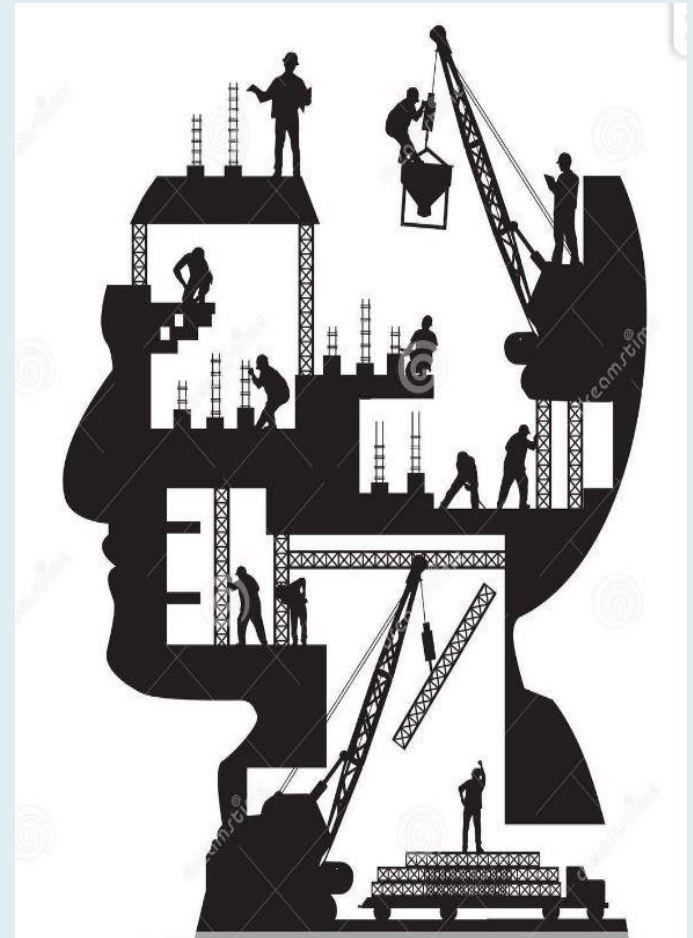Inspirational and forward looking – why your audiences should care. (What we believe)

Problem

Frame as a threat to vision and values. (How we are falling short)

Solution

Keeps audiences hopeful, restores values. (How to solve the problem)

Action

Move audiences to action.

VPSA

VALUE

PROBLEM

SOLUTION

ACTION

Avoid Myth Busting

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart

Thursday July 21, 2011
Statements of Clarification That Probably Won't Do You Any Good
Magical amulet-wearing congresswomen join forces against Congressman Allen West for his sexist remarks to Representative Debbie Wasserman Shultz.

The **Opportunity** Agenda

RESIST THE IMPULSE TO ARGUE NEGATIVE FRAMES

➢ You should set your frame ("values")

➢ Don't argue in your opposition's frame

➢ Research shows repeating negative frames reinforce them

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The General Public

29

AUDIENCE STRATEGY

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←  ( 1 )───( 2 )───( 3 )───( 4 )───( 5 )  →
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➢ Mobilize/Energize 1-2's

➢ ID Themes, messages, and spokespeople to move 3's and 4's.

➢ Neutralize the opposition's effect on the rest

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REACHING STRATEGIC AUDIENCES

- Base
  - *To be mobilized*

- Persuadables
  - *To be persuaded*

- Opposition
  - *To be ignored or marginalized*

- Decisionmakers
  - Policy Makers
  - Swing Voters
  - Board of Directors

- Influencers and Messengers
  - Constituents
  - Faith Leaders
  - Editorial Boards
  - Community Groups

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NY TIMES POLLING EXPERIMENT

Q 1. Should expected surplus be allocated to tax cuts or government programs? **60% for tax cuts**

Q 2. Should surplus go to tax cut, or be spent on programs for education, environment, health care, crime fighting and military? **69% for government programs**

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2004 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN ON HEALTH CARE

President Bush

"The debate is about whether or not the marketplace ought to have a function in determining the cost of health care of whether the federal government should make all decisions. I've made my stand. I believe that the best health care policy is one that trusts and empowers consumers, and one that understands the market."

National Public Radio, 2004

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2004 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN ON HEALTH CARE

Senator Kerry

"Have your co-pays gone up? Have your deductibles gone up? Then you need to tell this administration that we're fed up and their time is up…(my plan) will reduce the average premium by $1,000 a year and it will crack down on the skyrocketing drug prices we face today."

National Public Radio, 2004

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Group Framing Exercise

"If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about the answers"

- Thomas Pynchon (2000)

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