



COMMUNICATING
WITH HUMANS

STORIES

When a person listens to a story, both sides of the brain are working. The left brain is processing the words, while the right brain is actively filling in the gaps. This is the reason why it is so important to read to children, to allow their brains to imagine the story, rather than using television and films for all their learning.¹

Campaign communications need to roll out before an audience like a story, from the beginning.

Figures 2.1 and 2.2 show two ways of giving the same information.

We can immediately see what's happening in Figure 2.1, because it's a story. Figure 2.2 addresses the same subject – wolves, minors and near-death experiences – but in a quite different, less memorable way.

Stories certainly pre-date writing, and probably art. Use stories wherever you can, because people remember them, and if possible use real people in stories, because we can identify with them. Save the academic report format for communicating with machines, or for professional seminars.



Figure 2.1 A story involving a wolf, a little girl and a near-death experience

Report on Non-accidental Wolf Related Deaths

Table 2.1 - Wolf-Related Deaths in the United States

Year	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970
California	1	1	1	1	1
Colorado	1	1	1	1	1
Idaho	1	1	1	1	1
Montana	1	1	1	1	1
Utah	1	1	1	1	1
Washington	1	1	1	1	1
Wyoming	1	1	1	1	1
Other States	1	1	1	1	1
Total	7	7	7	7	7

Historical statistics showing trend in wolf-related non-accidental injuries involving minors (under the age of 16) in central regions. Daylight hours observations only. After column 3 the basis of calculation changes but the base sample remains the same. The trend is not significant but individual cases remain a cause for concern, especially in the small number that result in fatalities or close escapes. The figures speak for themselves.

Figure 2.2 Another way of displaying the information in Figure 2.1 – but less memorable

Stories are how we relate many important things in our lives, inside and outside organizations. They provide a free way for an idea to spread: as in urban myths, moral tales, or 'memes',² well beyond any paid-for communication.

Stories with human interest, based around a person, whether real or not, can move us from right-brain to left-brain communication, from facts and rationality to emotions and feelings. They take us there: 'it could be me'. Like pictures, stories don't need to argue, and you can't argue with them. Because you work out the meaning of a story yourself without having it thrust upon you, they can also more easily lead to that rare event, a change of mind. The deeper meaning can come to you long after you first hear a story.³

Using stories multiplies your options with the media: human stories are the stuff of feature pages, not news pages. That way you often get more space, and more readers, and your message is more likely to emerge intact, especially if it is embedded in the story structure.

Some say stories tap into fundamental psychology. Jan Stewart⁴ points to four 'brain states': beta (awake and most active), alpha (awake but daydreaming), theta (almost asleep) and delta (sleeping). She says of stories:

At the second attention level, as the brain searches for a deeper meaning ... the right brain is often favoured as relationships and patterns are developed. Processing ... is

an unconscious process – that is, we are not aware that we are doing it. The second attention level is where the story is reformulated to have personal relevance. Sometimes the story stays at this level and causes unconscious behavioural change, or it can rise into the first attention level through an ‘A-ha!’ reaction.

It is vital that the story, myth, legend or whatever is chosen is selected carefully. Ideally, the story should be easily understood at the first attention level, but stimulate a search for a deeper meaning at some time in the future.

There are said to be a number of ‘basic types’ of story. These structures might help tell yours. Here are examples⁵ applied to opera:

- 1 *Cinderella* – Unrecognized virtue recognized in the end. It’s the same story as the tortoise and the hare or the grasshopper and the ant. Cinderella doesn’t have to be a girl, nor does the story even have to be a love story. What is essential is that the good is at first despised, but recognized in the end. Further examples are *La Cenerentola*, *Cendrillon* and *The Magic Flute*;
- 2 Achilles – the Fatal Flaw – this provides the groundwork for practically all classical tragedy, although it can be made into comedy, too – for example, *Samson et Dalila*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Falstaff*;
- 3 *Faust* – The debt that must be paid, the fate that catches up with all of us sooner or later – other examples include *La Bohème*, *Rigoletto* and *La Traviata*;
- 4 *Tristan and Isolde* – that standard triangular plot of two women and one man, or two men and one woman – also *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Tosca* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Carmen*, *L’Elisir d’Amore* (*The Elixir of Love*), *Pagliacci*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*;
- 5 *Circe* – the spider and the fly – such as *Othello*, *Salome*;
- 6 *Romeo and Juliet* – boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy either finds or does not find girl (it doesn’t matter which) – *The Merry Widow*, *L’italiana in Algeri* (*The Italian Girl in Algiers*), *La Bohème*, *Così fan tutte*, *Orpheus in the Underworld*;
- 7 The gift taken away. This may take two forms: either the tragedy of the loss itself, or it may be about the search that follows the loss, such as in *Orfeo*, *Orpheus in the Underworld*, *Il Trovatore*;
- 8 The hero who cannot be kept down. This is demonstrated in stories of perseverance and determination that result in either joy or destruction for the protagonist, as in *Turandot*, *Don Giovanni* and *Aida*.

The story often has a familiar pattern, ‘grammar’ or structure. Robert McKee⁶ identifies five stages: the inciting incident – which is the primary cause of all that follows – the progressive complications, the crisis, climax and resolution. American business practice is

full of stories about the importance of stories. Many of these reflect the dominance of Prospectors (see page 72) in the US culture, with an emphasis on 'me, me, me', and personal presentations. Annette Simons details 'six stories you need how to tell':⁷

- 1 Who I am stories;
- 2 Why I am here stories;
- 3 My vision story;
- 4 Teaching stories;
- 5 Values in action stories; and
- 6 'I know what you are thinking' stories.

Another good resource is the Giozueta Business Library,⁸ with seven forms of organizational story telling.

Campaigns are always full of stories, but few campaigners have made enough use of them, myself included. The biggest political impact achieved by a pesticides campaign on which I worked with Friends of the Earth resulted from the public response to crop-spraying incidents, but not because we planned it that way. The campaign presented policy arguments based on detailed desk research, but we were unexpectedly contacted by large numbers of the public with their (often very distressing) stories. If we had appealed for the public to come forward with their experiences from the start, and based the campaign around those, we might have achieved more.⁹

SEEING IS BELIEVING: COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

Of all of our inventions for mass communication, pictures still speak the most universally understood language. (Walt Disney)

Almost every campaign is best conducted visually. Visuals give reach, accessibility and impact; modern technology has created an increasingly visual media world, and seeing, generally, is believing, because most people have an inbuilt preference for receiving information visually.¹⁰ For most people, a picture is worth a thousand words.

When we understand, we often say: 'I see'.¹¹ Some people's inbuilt preference is for speech – 'we sang from the same hymn sheet' – or touch – 'we clicked'.

Visuals can reach our emotions, bypassing argument. They can reinforce or change views. Research any issue and you tend to find that people's views often track back to some event, recalled as a picture. 'It was when I saw X that I realized things were serious.'

A campaign should communicate in as many dimensions as possible, but if you needed to choose one medium, and without one-to-one knowledge of your intended

audience, then it should be visuals. Once there's feel-touch-and-smell media, things may change.

Being visual often means escaping institutional preferences for text. Even if they accept the need for visual communication, many organizations communicate that with a written note!

However partial, TV is still enough of a window on the world for visuals to be used as a benchmark of truth. 'I just saw that – it's true.' All reporters tend to say 'we have seen' or 'we have been shown', when introducing an element of the story that they are positioning as true. If, on the other hand, a report begins with 'we are being told', then you are immediately suspicious that a 'claim' is being offered, something open to dispute and only a varnished version of the truth. The starting point is already some way below the 'truth'. So events that can be photographed or directly witnessed or participated in are important.

However, Gardner¹² argues that schools and culture focus on linguistic and logical mathematical intelligence (measured as intelligence quotient, IQ) to the detriment of other types of intelligence and ways of learning. Institutions tend to promote people who are good at text, speech or numbers, and their preferences tend to dominate internal communications. If this then dominates campaigns, however, the consequences can be disastrous.

Gardner proposes teaching based on multiple intelligences.¹³ Campaigners could profitably do the same:¹⁴

- words (*linguistic intelligence* – offer speech or text);¹⁵
- numbers or logic (*logical/mathematical* – offer numbers, classifications);
- pictures (*visuallspatial* – offer visual aids, colour, art, visual organizers);
- music (*musical* – offer music or environmental sounds, or key points in a rhythm or melody);
- self-reflection (*intrapersonal* – self-discovery, self-analysis, setting your own goals – offer choices and evoke personal feelings or memories);
- a physical experience (*bodily/kinaesthetic* – 'hands-on' – involve the whole body);
- a social experience (*interpersonal* – for example a party or exhibition – offer peer or cross-age sharing or cooperative work);
- an experience in the natural world (*naturalist* – offer ways to relate the subject to environment or ecology).

Putting on a festival complete with opportunities for reading, logic workshops, model-making, quiet contemplation and so on may be impractical. Yet reliance on words and numbers is likely to be less effective than a more holistic approach.

Most successful NGO communication has hinged on visuals. Amnesty International's candle, symbolizing its role of bringing hope and light into dark places, the guide dog of Guide Dogs for the Blind, the Worldwide Fund for Nature's (WWF) 1961 launch with

pictures of doomed rhinos and its panda logo, the Cousteau Foundation's ship Calypso, Greenpeace's actions at sea, the stylish advertisements of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF),¹⁶ invoking the established dramatic format of the 'flying doctor'.

Face to face, our body language outweighs what we say. Although there are important cultural differences,¹⁷ how we *look* generally says more than anything else. Psychologist Albert Mehrabian,¹⁸ is said to have stated that when it comes to expressing feelings:¹⁹

- 55 per cent of the communication consists of body language;
- 38 per cent is through tone of voice;
- 7 per cent is through words.

Feelings are important in determining what we think of a person or proposal. Do we trust them? If not, we're unlikely to believe them. Emotional and psychological deficits easily overwhelm rational, scientific, economic or technical plus points. As the PR firm Burson-Marsteller states: 'You can't win an argument with someone who has more credibility than you do.'

Even if you don't bother to communicate in pictures, then visually dominated media, such as TV, much online and 'social media' or even many newspapers, will do it for you and insert images themselves. These then dominate what is communicated and received – and may not be what you had hoped for. So make sure *your* pictures tell your story.

BE INTERESTING – OR BE IGNORED

Sometimes the most basic lessons of campaign design are the most important. In 2007 Elaine Lawrence and I conducted an evaluation²⁰ of the Friends of the Earth campaign 'The Big Ask'.²¹ As usual, we tried to look at outputs, outcomes and impacts, including through internal and external interviews. One of the most pertinent comments came from journalist Mike McCarthy, Environment Editor of UK newspaper *The Independent*:

Being interesting is very effective. Don't be boring. Many environment groups, in trying to win media interest, focus on the important rather than the interesting. There is a massive difference for the media. This campaign made something important interesting. What was 'The Big Ask' actually about? It took a frankly rather dull and complex public policy process about mandatory targets and made the legislative process interesting. It would have been very easy to make it boring.

The Big Ask was certainly effective. It mobilized tens of thousands of individuals and hundreds of Friends of the Earth groups in England and Wales to lobby almost every MP

to support moves for a climate change bill requiring the government to set targets for progressive reductions in CO₂ emissions. By a combination of energetic execution and good fortune in political circumstance it resulted in the government reversing its opposition and adopting the idea itself.

BBC political correspondent Nick Robinson said:

People often ask, 'Does anything change politics?'. Well it has here. Friends of the Earth did a rising campaign for a climate change bill. Ministers pooh-pooed the idea. What is the point of a bill they said? It wouldn't be worth the paper it is written on. Then David Cameron [then leader of the main opposition party] adopted it as his key theme. Menzies Campbell's [then leader of the second opposition party] first big policy announcement was on green taxes and ministers have gradually said, 'Oh, let's have a bill.'

But what was the interesting bit? It was the ask itself. What was 'The Big Ask'? As Mike McCarthy points out, the ask was politics and policy – inherently dull stuff. But by creating a brand for the campaign that did not even appear to be Friends of the Earth unless you looked closely, using rock music figureheads such as Thom Yorke of Radiohead and giving it personality and style that was younger, cheekier and more expressive than the Friends of the Earth brand, the campaign took the organization into new social and psychological territory, reaching new types of supporter and energizing old ones.

Advertising agency CHI helped create the idea of The Big Ask (Figure 2.3), which in communications terms was effectively a 'dangle', a tease that dangled in front of the viewer, reader or listener, inviting you in to find out what it was about (the D after ABC bridging – see page 198).



Figure 2.3 *The Big Ask*

Organizations often worry (see page 251) about avoiding mixed messages and getting key messages across or getting details wrong, but a far bigger risk is being ignored. You are interested in your subject, but others are more likely to see it as important perhaps, worthy yes but quite likely not compelling. So being interesting, if not enough in itself, is vital.

For another example of 'being interesting', this time on road safety, visit the topless campaigners of the Danish Road Safety Council at www.speedbandits.dk, or the equally popular www.globalrichlist.com, a very direct way to make people in rich countries realize how much richer they are than most of the world's population.

ENGAGEMENT AND AGENCY: WHAT DIFFERENCE CAN I MAKE?

The trouble with socialism is that it would take up too many evenings.
(Oscar Wilde²²)

Many campaigns fail because they simply never gather enough support. Campaigning is a 'follow me' or 'come with us' exercise. It invites others to give up some of their time, and make your agenda theirs. So why should anyone go out of their way to support or join your campaign?

Variations in campaign support are not just due to some people being better at it than others, or some causes being inherently 'sexier' or easier. If you hear a campaigner say that, it is likely that they haven't done the necessary design work to attract support.

In assessing a campaign proposition we all ask, 'Is it worth it?' We mostly assess the proposition intuitively: 'This is for me', or not.

The cause

Do we care about the cause? Is the campaign needed? (If the audience is already aligned, the answer should be 'yes'.)

The benefit

What will the results be if the campaign succeeds – generally or personally? Does it make a worthwhile difference? What agency does it give me: how does it increase my influence over the world around me? Does it make existing mechanisms work better, or provide new ones?

The means

Are they attractive – or do they put me off?

The prospects

Does it stand a chance of success?

Three things – the objectives, resources and activities – ‘triangulate’ a campaign’s perceived feasibility. If they are seen to match, the campaign can look attractive, workable and credible. If they do not, the campaign will be rejected, no matter how good the cause.

The ‘feasibility triangle’ can be used to assess a campaign, project or an organization.

In academic circles this is described by ‘Values Expectancy Theory’, originated by psychologist Martin Fishbein, but we can think of the ‘feasibility triangle’ (Figure 2.4) like a three-legged stool – if the legs don’t match in length, it will topple over.

A lack of support may be put down to ‘the fact that people don’t care’, or the idea that ‘they are ignorant of the facts’. The press can take the rationalization a step further and call it ‘compassion fatigue’ or announce that something is ‘no longer an issue – people don’t care’. Just as likely, the project doesn’t look credible.

Common feasibility problems

The objective is too big

The naive NGO failure, where the ultimate aim rather than an achievable objective is stated. For example, the Lower Snoring Campaign to Change World Trade (resources: four

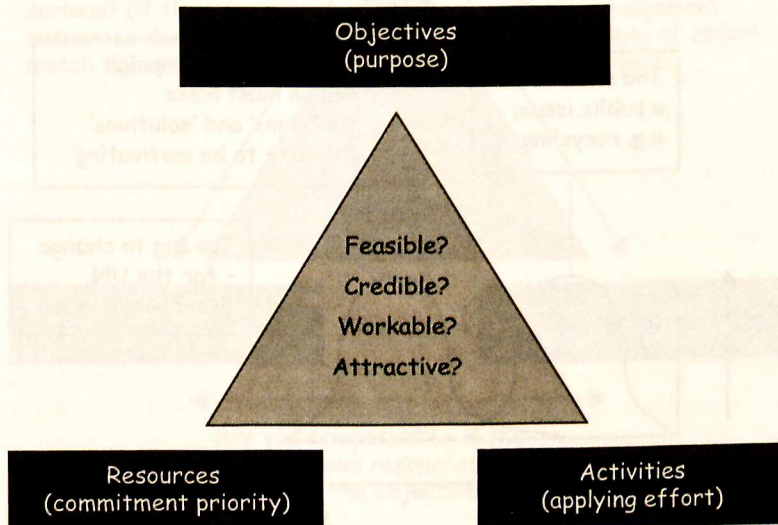


Figure 2.4 *The credibility triangle*

people and a dog). Many small groups 'taking on' big issues stay small and marginal, talking about change rather than achieving it.

A striking example arose in 2008 when a UK national 'Energy Saving Day' was reported by the BBC²³ as having had 'no impact'. People were asked to switch off appliances they were not using and national electricity consumption was monitored – with no discernible impact. The problem was that the project was far too ambitious in relation to its capacity to reach and engage the public. Of the many difficulties facing this campaign (discussed in an edition of the *Campaign Strategy Newsletter*²⁴) probably the greatest was that while originally to be backed by the BBC, it was continued after the broadcasters had pulled out. It was then too small to achieve its stated objective but big enough to get noticed and reported. If you are going to mount a campaign that is a 'numbers game', you need to be sure there is a good chance of exceeding expectations (see also 'Bridging the engagement gap', page 60).

Objectives too small

1990s research on the world views of UK Greenpeace supporters and others like them revealed a motivational 'black hole' that disconnected campaigns from potential support. People sympathetic to environmental issues often did not find them at all engaging.

Recycling was among a host of 'green' activities too small to be worth discussing in public: normal to do but not worth remarking upon. Others, such as global warming, were

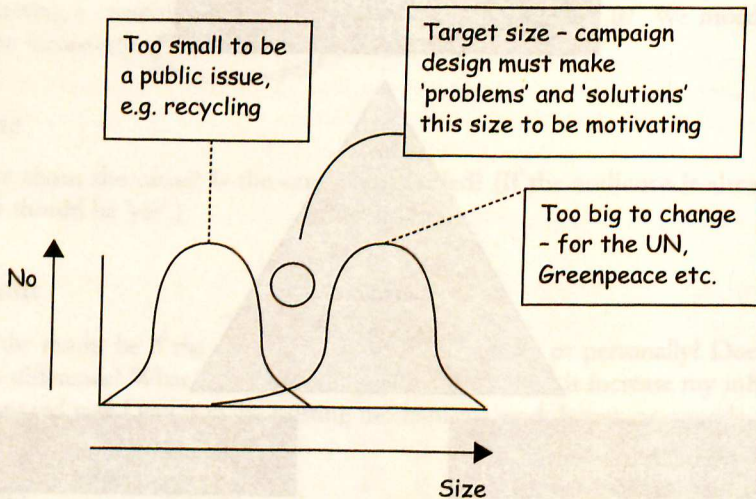


Figure 2.5 *The too-big-too-small problem*

'too large' for individuals to engage with: 'environment for environmentalists' (Figure 2.5). The answer to this is to break down big problems into smaller parts so that, for example, when Greenpeace and its supporters acted together, small efforts could add up to big results.²⁵

Objective not visible

Public bodies often suffer from this when they fail to make the objective explicit, and simply announce activities or resources, leaving the audience to 'patch in' an assumed objective from rumour or what they may have heard or seen on TV. Frequently, the assumed objective is huge.

Too much time spent on the objective

Where campaigning is not the main activity of a voluntary organization, there is often too much focus on defining the objective, and too little on putting together activities and resources.

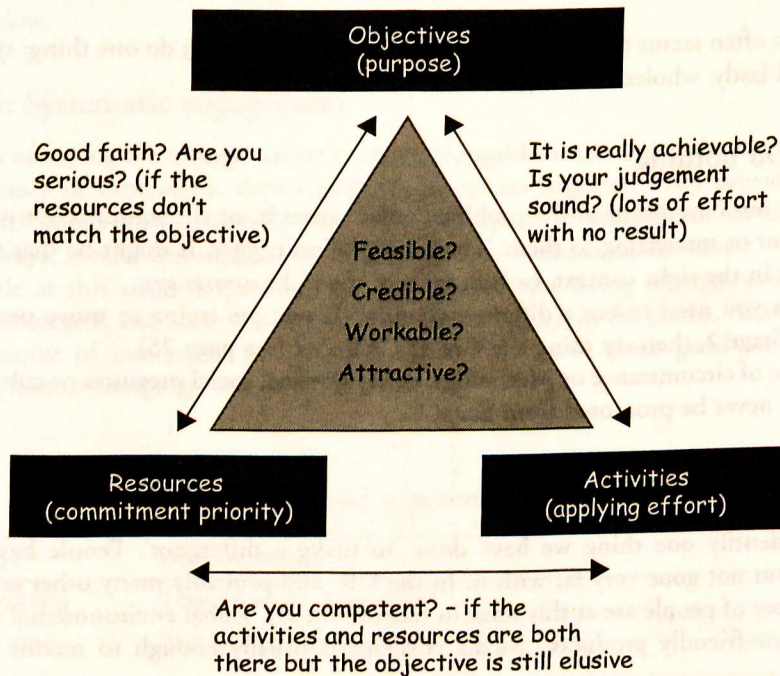


Figure 2.6 *Some of the doubts that can be raised if the objectives, activities and resources do not seem to fit*

Being vague

Companies tend to succumb to waffle outside their core business areas.

Poorly defined goals on 'difficult' issues sound good in a senior management team meeting, but look flimsy once they reach the annual report, and fall apart completely under public questioning.

Inadequate activities

Established NGOs can become too cautious to campaign effectively; too bureaucratic, with internal stakeholders defending their departmental interests or career paths, to take any serious risks. They may believe their own propaganda about being 'quietly effective' – if true, then of course there will be no need to campaign. Such groups set good objectives and have the resources, but they don't deploy them, don't invest in campaign tools, and don't involve top staff in campaigning.

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Engagement often seems to fit a four-stage pattern:²⁶ Do nothing; do one thing; systematic change; and lastly, wholesale change.

Stage 1: Do nothing

People may not have heard of the problem, what causes it, or the solution. Or it may not be significant or interesting to them. There may be no trigger. It might be that they have yet to see it in the right context, or hear it from the right messenger.

Perhaps you need to use a different channel. If you are trying to move people from Stage 1 to Stage 2, then try using the CAMPCAT tool (see page 25).

Because of circumstance or psychology, belief systems, social pressures or culture, some people will never be promoted from Stage 1.

Stage 2: Do one thing

Here we identify one thing we have done 'to make a difference'. People have bought the cause but not gone very far with it. In the UK, and probably many other countries, a large number of people are at this stage in relation to, say, global environmental problems: 'I buy ozone-friendly products.' Media coverage is usually enough to recruit people to Stage 2.

With established issues, these are usually the best prospects to be 'promoted' to take more action, as they have already accepted that there is a problem/solution.

Campaigners sometimes dismiss just doing one thing as 'token', but this is a mistake. Token efforts are not a sign that people don't care: it's a sign that they do. It's a rational use of time and effort: a form of bet-hedging. By doing at least something, individuals make a small contribution to what they hope is a bigger effort.

Token efforts may also be debris from some tidal wave of public concern that once swept society. Although high, dry and isolated, token gestures remind society that the problem could come again, and may be touchstones for igniting popular perception and promoting an issue to the forefront of consciousness.

Token gestures provide handles, short cuts and communication footholds, sometimes becoming icons; symbols with more than their literal meaning.

A single action may also be a response to social pressure to conform, for example around a campaign issue that has become normalized. Behaviour campaigners (see page 62) sometimes worry about 'single action bias', in which people disengage after 'doing their bit'. The answer to this is firstly to design campaigns with strategic outcomes (that is where the change is not simply at the individual level) and to organize another effort to get people engaged with your next campaign 'push'. Only a minority are likely to go on to Stages 3 and 4 below.

Stage 3: Systematic engagement

For most of us, big life changes mean working alongside others doing the same thing. This is the beauty of campaigns: they enable people to act together. They provide examples, proofs that things work, a socially acceptable or impressive explanation for taking action, and the ways, means and support to 'step out of line' without undue costs.

People at this stage frequently feel that they are not doing enough, externalize and become advocates, and consciously search for the campaign in the media. As such, they are not indicative of interest in the cause in general, but will make good use of training opportunities or campaign resources.

Table 2.1 *Levels of personal engagement*

Stage	What people say
Do nothing	'I don't need to do anything'
One thing	'This is what I do about it'
Systematic	'I do a, b and c. I try to do d and e ... I would like to do more, but ...'
Wholesale	'I have changed my life because of it'

ENGAGEMENT AND SHOPPING

Campaigners use engagement mechanisms lifted more or less unaltered from centuries-old political campaigning: tracts, leaflets and their cyber-equivalents, polemics and speeches. This puts them at a disadvantage in a consumer context.

Discover how to best communicate in specific environments by talking to those in the business: practitioners, suppliers and trade journalists – check for them in your supporter base. They may well save you time, money and effort with free advice. Find out how the decisions you seek are made, and present your desired decision in those terms, not yours.

The engagement mechanism needs to match the timescale and dynamic of the process being targeted. A sustainable timber campaign might ask people to exercise buying power when moving home, a time when they may buy furniture or timber. It also needs to target the key actors – in most house-buying the critical decisions are mostly made by women, not men, for instance.

Each transaction has its own culture. In some cases it may be better to enlist the shop assistants rather than the consumers – purchases of white goods, for example, are often decided by a conversation with a sales person or engineer, who is treated as an expert. For some goods or services there may be websites that are heavily used for referral or making choices; often not the same ones used to buy from.

Although shoppers may complain about supermarkets, they will be reluctant to change established habits. Context means getting both the time and place right. Potential supporters may be in supermarkets, making decisions about what products to buy – two essential factors – but that's not necessarily enough. Shoppers may be too busy. Parents of young children may be easier to reach with the same information while they are waiting to pick up the youngsters from school. Or perhaps you should go via their parents, who may have more time. Older shoppers might welcome a chat, especially if offered a cup of tea, as well. Young singles shopping in the evening might welcome an interview as a chance to meet others.

In 2000, Greenpeace UK adapted the technique known as 'accompanied shopping', in which a researcher shops with a consumer, for a genetically modified (GM) food campaign. Campaign Director Jane Wildblood explains how it worked:

Greenpeace trained a network of volunteers and provided them with a kit to run events at supermarkets, to inform and engage shoppers. They set up information points outside supermarkets on Saturdays over a period of months. These had an eye-catching backdrop in red (the big, vegetable-head logo of the campaign) and leaflets to take away, as well as knowledgeable people to talk to. They used the interaction outside the supermarket (that is, not interfering with the actual shopping) to recruit the really interested for 'supermarket tours giving information on GM and organic food, promoted as the safe solution to GM and other concerns'. These tours

were scheduled throughout the day with the full backing of the supermarket managers (mostly!²⁸). This avoided haranguing or interfering with people when it would irritate them, but enabled high-quality engagement and visibility. The feedback mechanism was via a send-back coupon on the basic leaflet. These people were then entered on a database and sent further information and invitations to participate in campaign activity. At later stages, we gave people at supermarket entrances tear-off coupons to send into the local shop manager, MP and so on. Later still, a shopper's guide was created on the website... (personal communication)

PERCEPTION OF CHANGE AND SIGNIFICANCE

* Perception of change and significance often drives decision-making. Relative change may be the most effective thing to communicate – a rate of increase or decrease, for example. Or you may want to focus only on recruits or losses, not total amounts.

To win media attention, indeed the attention of most audiences, changes usually need to be abrupt and discontinuous. This can be achieved by using the right scale of focus, and looking for thresholds or discrete consequences of a trend.

Because of the dominance of economists and accountants in institutions, it's often said that 'what counts is what's measured'. Campaigners who supply some numbers will find it easier to get their case talked about. However, careless quantification can easily anchor debate in the wrong place.

A list of points or reasons is usually helpful, but reliance on statistics is not advisable. Though the press love them, the public generally does not trust statistics, at least in the UK.

He or she who chooses the measure, often determines the conclusion. 'Horse race' polls show which political candidate is ahead: a favourite news-making device of politicians and political commentators,³⁰ which also implies that things outside the focus can be disregarded.

The context affects whether something looks big or small, effective or ineffective. The old UK Central Electricity Generating Board used a demonstration of renewable energy to make it look small.³¹ A solar panel that could illuminate one light bulb was placed outside a vast nuclear power station. On a bright day the bulb lit. The information panel explained words to the effect that: 'One day solar energy may have advanced to the point that we can use it to supply our energy needs. That day has not yet arrived, and for secure supplies of electricity, nuclear power is an essential part of a mix of reliable and proven energy sources.'

Altering perception of how to judge change may be the object of a campaign itself. Redefining Progress³² promotes a Genuine Progress Indicator³³ (Figure 2.8) in place of gross domestic product, because the latter fails to measure things such as depletion of nature, natural capital and ecological services. Here the gap between the two indicators may be the important thing to communicate.

BOX 2.1 – UNDERSTANDING WHY PEOPLE DON'T ENGAGE: THE HIER CAMPAIGN

Psychological optouts are often of strategic importance for campaigns – the reasons why people don't engage or take action. Understanding what these are, which is best done through qualitative research (see page 108), is often the key to amending an existing strategy or creating an entirely new one. This happened in The Netherlands in the mid-2000s.

The Dutch Postcode lottery, which funds many good causes in The Netherlands, had grown frustrated with the small-scale and scattergun approach of many of the projects it financed. Apparently, with good Dutch directness, it gave notice to NGOs that they would get no more money until they came up with something strategic on which they could cooperate. After several research projects, the NGOs found that on climate change, a major obstacle was the common perception that it was a 'not-yet' and a 'not-here' issue. Their response was equally direct: they launched Hier (Dutch for 'here'), a campaign of prominently labelling impacts, responses and actions associated with climate change, involving some 40 organizations (visit www.hier.info).²⁹

This approach meant that many things that were immediately understood as real and immediate, such as helping people on a one-to-one basis, or dealing with flooding, could be shown to be part of the response to climate change. It avoided the many problems with trying to 'sell' wholesale changes to society as a response to what might otherwise happen in the future as a result of continuing to pollute the atmosphere. As a result, organizations with a reach to particular constituencies that could not be engaged, or were unlikely to be engaged in the 'climate change' issue framed in terms of emissions of gases or global change, could be engaged in taking useful actions.

Hier has involved development, humanitarian and nature conservation NGOs developing projects to reduce the risks of the impacts of climate change, with a focus on safety, health, disasters, drought or desertification. These have included United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) teaching children how to swim in Bangladesh, where drowning is still a major cause of infant mortality; Simavi constructing so-called 'cloud catchers' in Nepal in the battle against drought conditions; the Red Cross and FreeVoice working on a disaster emergency system for hurricanes in Central America; and Natuurmonumenten, the major Dutch Nature Conservation NGO, proposing natural climate buffers as a way to improve safety against floods and sea-level rise.

Hier also links to the well-researched consumer product (TVs, computers, fridges, cars and so on) website www.topten.info, which shows the best products by carbon (the motivational purpose) rather than by price.

At an individual level, perception will be affected by unconscious ways in which we filter incoming information, some of which are genetic and others probably cultural. For example, most people in the 'West' conceive of time as going from the past, behind us, to the future ahead of us. Research suggests³⁴ that some cultures see 'past', 'present' and 'future' as distinct, others as overlapping, while in some, such as India and the Middle East,

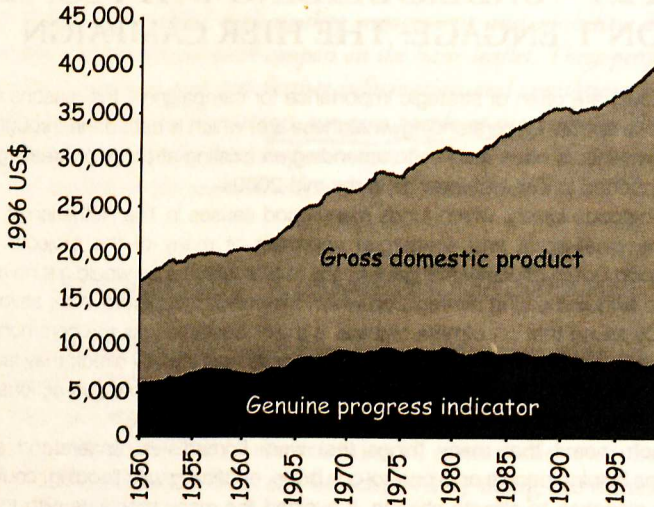


Figure 2.8 *Gross production vs genuine progress, 1950 to 1999*

there is little clear distinction between past, present and future. With the past behind you (others think of time as passing before them, as from left to right), it is easy to conceive of the future as a destination yet to be reached, its requirements not yet applicable, and the past as somewhere you cannot go back to. The directional idea of time ('time's arrow') chimes with the notion of progress, and anything framed (see page 28) in this way can render technologies and practices from 'the past' inapplicable for the future.

Some cultures (for example in Germany) are believed to see time as rare and precious, leading to propositions like 'no time to waste' (a popular slogan with Greenpeace), but elsewhere this idea may not have the resonance that its authors like to imagine. Just such an assumption seemed to lie behind the campaign www.tckctck.org, used by the Global Campaign for Climate Action in the run up to the Copenhagen talks in 2009.

BRIDGING THE ENGAGEMENT GAP

Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery. (Mr Micawber, in Charles Dickens's David Copperfield³⁵)

A campaign needs to be able to honestly say, and better, show, that 'without you, we will fail: with you we can succeed'. Support has to be needed.

Pick objectives you think are just possible with a reasonable degree of public engagement. Others will tend to view them as just about impossible. Engage enough support and you can bridge the gap and make the impossible possible. When a campaign bridges the gap, it succeeds. The longer the bridge, the more successful the campaign is seen to be.

This is what makes a campaign different from everyday life. It can make campaigning exciting, inspiring and motivating: the magic that helps to change the established order of things.

Without the gap, there's no need for anyone to support your campaign by joining in. It may amuse or please but it will not engage. People will not feel needed.

In campaigning, anything better than business as usual is achievement. It is the political equivalent of Mr Micawber's sixpence – result: happiness. Anything below is within expectations – result: misery. A campaigning organization is not necessarily expected to deliver huge change, but to change more than business as usual can. Normal politics is the art of the possible. Campaigning is the art of the impossible.

ALIGNMENT

Effective speakers begin by getting the attention of a group, and reminding everyone why they are there.

Generations of British children were introduced to radio stories by the BBC³⁶ with the question 'Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin.' The injunction to 'sit comfortably and listen', helps secure audience attention (awareness) by asking a question. It focuses your mind on your body and stops you thinking about whatever you were doing or were focused on before, and it aligns the audience – concerned with the same task. But the speaker doesn't need to explain all that. Indeed if she did, then it wouldn't work – you might even end up thinking about communications processes! Nor does the campaign need to explain it but the process still has to be followed.

In the process of trying to align an audience, use as few arguments as possible. Arguments come imprinted with age-old political meaning. Words are a fast lane to prejudices and preconceived ideas. Pictures are more reliable – they exist much more in the mind of the beholder, while words tend to remain the property of the source.

The more arguments you use, the more reasons you are giving that someone can disagree with. Resist the temptation to embellish a case with extra arguments: people only need one reason to disengage, adding arguments is likely to dilute strong ones with weaker ones while creating a wider range of options for disagreement. For alignment in the campaign sequence see Chapter 1 (problem–solution).

Resist also the temptation to box in your intended audience by offering a set of choices that say in effect 'you should choose to do this or that or the other to help our cause'. A large drinks company once developed two spirit-based drinks aimed at women, with slightly different offers. Let's call them A and B. A was intended to be smooth, silky, sophisticated. B racier, a bit naughty, daring. The company decided it lacked the money to run an ad campaign for each so it tried to run a campaign featuring both at once, asking at the end 'Are you an A-woman or a B-woman?' The result was disastrous: total failure. Women were prompted to think 'I'm neither of those', because it made them aware that the communication was attempting to play on their identity.

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE AND HEURISTICS

Almost any campaign involves a change in behaviour: inducing people to talk about something different, or attend an event, or causing a decision-maker to sign on the 'dotted line' all involve behaviour. Some campaigns are overtly designed to spread a new behaviour in society or amongst a particular group (see also 'Social marketing', page 279), and are explicitly labelled or conceived as 'behaviour change' campaigns, in which it is usually hoped that the behaviour will be repeated. Most commercial marketing and charity fundraising falls into this category. And many campaigns stumble because they fail to achieve a desired change in behaviour.

Behaviour change is a massive academic subject but accessible best-sellers that are useful for campaigners include Robert Cialdini's *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*,³⁷ which is famous for popularizing 'heuristics' or 'rules of thumb' that apply to behaviour (below), and George Lakoff's book *The Political Mind*,³⁸ which explains 'framing' (see page 28) in terms of reflexive thought (unconscious 'automatic' decision-making). A useful accessible short report is *Homer Simpson For Nonprofits: The Truth About How People Really Think and What It Means for Promoting Your Cause*, from US group Network for Good.³⁹ A huge amount of behavioural studies are understandably about relationships and these are often hard to apply to the group and society-wide scale, while many studies of society are in terms (for example social class or wealth) that tell you little about how to influence behaviour. Of all those I've come across, by far the most useful is values analysis, which because it divides people up by how they think as a result of their experiences in life, can map motivational values from the level of the individual through to whole countries (see page 71).

Heuristics

In this context⁴⁰ 'heuristics' are rules of thumb for behaviour that are more often right than wrong. Behavioural heuristics have been derived from experiments and observation, both

in the psychology laboratory and in sales and marketing. Ultimately they derive from our evolutionary hard-wiring, our culture and the interaction of these two influences in our upbringing. Here are some 'heuristics' described by Cialdini and others such as Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, that can be useful in designing campaigns.

Reciprocation (or 'exchange')

Much used in marketing (for example free gifts and vouchers) and door-to-door or face-to-face fund-raising – you do something for someone, however small, and they feel the need to return the favour. Making a concession in a negotiation invokes reciprocation, for example retreating from a large demand (A) to a smaller one (B), makes it more likely that (B) is accepted than if you went straight to (B). (A), however, has to be seen to have been asked for in good faith.

Consistency and commitment

While two different heuristics, these frequently work together. Consistency means we prefer to go on doing what we are already doing (and we rationalize it as our opinions – see VBCOP, page 143). If we start out doing something because we want it to be true, we are also very likely to ignore evidence to the contrary, even if we recognize its logic is invalid. Cialdini calls this 'walls against reason' – an example might be ignoring evidence that pleasurable behaviour is risky; this could be personally as in sexual activity or drugs, or socially as in driving a gas-guzzling car that adds to climate change for example. If the emotional rewards of changing behaviour (the feel-good in various forms) do not outweigh those of retaining the behaviour, we tend to retain the behaviour.

Commitment means that once committed to a course of action we tend to continue, even if the case for it begins to collapse. Salesmen may exploit this by first gaining commitment to buy something, and then changing the terms to their benefit. People who say what they would do in certain circumstances (if asked 'Would you be likely to donate to charity X?' or 'If you knew A, would you do B?') are then more likely to actually behave that way than if they had not first been asked and responded. They behave in line with their commitment. This effect is reinforced or multiplied if the commitment is made publicly, or even if it was expected to be made publicly and then is not. Numerous community-level campaigns have made use of this to make people into energy-savers and neighbourhood advocates.⁴⁰

So campaigns that trigger an indication of how we might respond and then create the opportunity and need to respond are likely to get a bigger result: trailer strategies. This is because we are mentally committing to be the-sort-of-person-who does this sort of thing (changing self-identity). It works even if the initial act seems very weak, such as responding to a survey.

Cialdini sites a famous study that shows how commitment and consistency can lead to small actions becoming large ones. In an American town, people were asked to display a very small notice advocating safe driving. Those who did were then much more likely to later agree to display a very large sign saying the same thing in their front garden. More surprising, the effect was independent of the message: the sign displayers became willing to undertake other 'civic' acts – they had become more 'public-minded' citizens.

Confirmation

The power of an act of alignment is considerably increased if you do something yourself, of your own 'free will', to confirm it. This is why propagandists and 'brainwashers' get their victims to write down their new 'beliefs', and why suicide bombers are induced to make their commitments to carry out an act in a video. It's also why if someone repeats or endorses the message or claim of an advertiser or cause group 'in their own words', such as 'I support X because...' or 'I like [product A] because', they are more likely to then go on and act consistently with that behaviour.

Effort

Sometimes in combination with the above (as in the case of painful or humiliating 'initiation' ceremonies giving access to a group), people tend to place more value on something that required effort to get than something that required no effort. Illogically but rationally this applies to the ultimately 'fungible' commodity of currency. A coin found in the street is more freely discarded or spent than one which you had to work for.

Social proof

Are others doing it? If so, there 'must be a reason'. So I will too. This heuristic is famously a cause of accidents and disasters. Car drivers for example sometimes cause pile-ups by copying what the car in front is doing even if there is no visible reason to do so. It is the cause of the 'bystander' effect, in which the more people are present at the scene of an accident or crime the less likely they are to intervene, unless others are doing so, in which case they will join in. Obviously it has a long evolutionary advantage for a social animal in terms of finding food or avoiding predators, but it can easily be manipulated or produce perverse results.

This has been frequently used to correct problematic behaviours. Cialdini cites an experiment in which simply showing withdrawn children a film of a similar child changing behaviour and ending up accepted and happily playing in a group was enough to change them, the more so if they saw several children doing it. The by stander effect or inaction inertia can be overcome by being specific. For example a campaign appealing for support from 'the public' makes such a general call that it has little traction with any individual,

whereas a more specific appeal for the help of 'retired dentists' or 'people with a 1998 VW Golf' is more likely to produce results. If you are an accident victim, point to someone in the crowd, identify them and tell them to call the emergency services.

Similarity

Many studies show that we respond better to people like ourselves. We tend to assign them better motives and extend them kinder acts than people who do not look like us or share our origins or backgrounds. This applies to how we dress, speak and to other personal identity signals, such as club or sporting affiliations, and clearly has implications for choice of 'messenger' (see CAMPCAT, page 25).

Alarminglly it also applies to suicides and violence as seen on TV or reported in the press. After a plane crash or suicide is reported, more such events tend to occur, including ones where a pilot, train or car driver, for example, takes others to their death, and in the US the same was found to apply to black on white or white on black violence following a boxing match between a black and white opponent. What we see in the media, especially where many people are presumed to have witnessed it, can lead to emulation based on similarity.

Campaigns that *demonstrate* desired behaviours by people-like-you are therefore more likely to work than those that simply advocate behaviours, or use unlike messengers or agents.

Liking and praise

Cialdini produces the remarkable statistic that somewhere in the world a 'Tupperware party' is taking place every 2.7 seconds. Tupperware parties and their many imitations work on the 'liking' heuristic: we are much more likely to respond to a request from a friend than a stranger. We feel 'obliged'. Canny communicators therefore get their audience to like them before asking for anything. Simply saying you like the audience will help: 'I always like coming to Anytown, where the people are friendly and known to be generous' may sound crass but it will increase the giving.

Many research projects have shown that liked situations transfer to liking the content: Ciladini points out that the 'luncheon effect' was documented by Gregory Razran in the 1930s, influenced by Ivan Pavlov, the celebrated discoverer of 'Pavlovian reactions'. We feel good when eating, so we feel better about a message received while eating. We feel good when we hear a favourite tune, so we are more likely to approve a message linked to the tune. Charities that organize free concerts with popular music are 'doing the right thing'. Yet many campaigners eschew fun and enjoyment – to the detriment of their campaigns, as these 'limbic' emotional reactions apply to us all.

This transference notoriously connects content to messenger (for example the messengers in ancient Persia who brought news of defeat and were slain, and American

weathermen may be attacked for 'bringing' bad weather). Cialdini quotes Shakespeare: 'The nature of bad news infects the teller.' Like politicians, therefore, campaigns need to seek to be bearers of good news, as well as of bad. An NGO that becomes associated with doomsaying is not going to be liked or welcomed and this will not help it get listened to.

Other studies show that we tend to favour attractive people. Our rational conscious brain may try to deny it, but research finds otherwise. Courts and teachers favour attractive children or adults with better treatment, and attractive politicians and staff are more likely to be elected or promoted and assumed to be more honest, trustworthy, intelligent and kind. Not just a little more likely, but hugely – one Canadian study⁴² found a 250 per cent voting bias in Canada on this basis, although 73 per cent of voters denied it and only 14 per cent allowed it might be true. So put your best looking advocates to the fore.

Cooperation and groups

Anything that puts people into groups with the potential to compete leads to competition and decreasing cooperation. Anything that is perceived as a common threat promotes cooperation. A campaign that sets out to mobilize support from an audience should therefore find a common reason for cooperation. As many large-scale problems require coordination or cooperation, this is a frequent issue for campaigners. (For an exploration of cooperation, coordination and trust, see James Surowiecki's *The Wisdom of Crowds*.⁴³)

Authority

Most people will have heard of the experiments in which an authoritative 'white coat experimenter' leads normal volunteers to impose what they think are cruel electric shocks on a 'subject', or the students who role-played cruel guards and ended up ready to abuse people playing prisoners inhumanely. The point being that we are, as a whole, conditioned to accept authority, although the degree of deference and the forms of authority vary from one culture to another (see the work of Geert Hofstede⁴⁴ for an international system of mapping cultural values including 'power-distance'). Campaigners are often pitted against authority: quite often they need to invoke the trappings or support of authority. The mind-bending antics of the 'yes men'⁴⁵ are based almost entirely on an entertaining (liking) hijacking of authority to give space for a 'rethink' of issues.

Scarcity

The 'rule of the few' or the scarcity heuristic is often linked to social proof and competition. We see a queue to buy something and join it (contagion⁴⁶): there must be something worth having. It's hard to resist the thought that we should get 'it' now before it runs out. Generally the less available something is, the more desirable it seems to be – from potential

partners to food or commodities. Absence makes the heart grow fonder: a survey found Florida State University students rated their cafeteria food as unsatisfactory, but after they learned part of the cafeteria had burnt down and food would be unavailable for several weeks, they rated it more highly.⁴⁷

Linked to this is 'reactance': we learn aged about two or three to resist restrictions on our freedoms (and so want the 'forbidden fruit' or cake or toy), and campaigners who seek to stop us doing something should bear in mind that, in varying degrees, this reflex never leaves us.

Cialdini cites⁴⁸ the case of a local phosphate-detergent ban imposed in a US town (for water-purity reasons), which led to 'soap convoys' headed to nearby towns to stock up, and people accumulating a 20-year supply. Campaigns might reverse the effect with a proposition that shows the new alternative is better but hard to get. This shifts the 'problem' to whoever is responsible for the scarcity. Scarcity is more about the satisfaction of possession rather than use, and may be linked to status (Richard Layard, for example, shows in his book *Happiness*⁴⁹ that whereas being wealthy does not necessarily make people happy, what makes them unhappy is being less well off than others – relative wealth).

Tasting a better life and then having that withdrawn, or gaining something and then losing it, has also been shown to cause much greater upset (even revolution) than not having it in the first place (note that this also matches the transition from Settler to Prospector – see page 72). Campaigns that mobilize support to recover something lost or rescue it from being lost are therefore more likely to generate support than those that try to give people something they've never had.

Representativeness

First identified by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky this says we tend to judge how likely something is to be true by reference to a 'comparable known' event, and then assuming that the probabilities will be similar.⁵⁰ This can often be done using just one property of the thing in question, for example an element of someone's appearance. Although this leads to many fallacies (for example misreading the probability of events), people often do it, so for campaigns it means that if you want people to adopt a cause or support a project, find a way in which it is like something they already agree with and use that 'thing in common'.

Availability

The availability heuristic is well known to exert a huge influence on beliefs in good or bad events recurring. It works because it is easier for us to recall more recent events than more distant ones, so we assume that the more recent ones are more likely to happen again. This too may have an evolutionary advantage – for example if a predator is still in the area – but it is totally useless in estimating things such as the probability of flooding. For the same

reason, prominent media coverage of crimes or accidents makes us think they are more likely to occur than they actually are.

In campaigns, this will mean that people are more willing to accept arguments based on readily recalled evidence – recent or very memorable examples – than on any amount of scientifically generated ‘facts’. It also means that people will extrapolate from one favourite example to the general. The allied idea of ‘vividness’ means that if you make the memory or description more ‘real’ by recalling or invoking multi-sensory properties (such as the bad smell of a flood), it becomes more real as a prospect. What ‘comes to mind’ most easily is treated as the most significant.

Adjustment from an anchor

In this heuristic we are prompted to define an estimate by a given starting point. We use the given fact as a reference and then are more likely to estimate close to the anchor. If asked to guess if the distance from London to New York was more or less than 2000 miles, we’d guess more or less. If then asked for the actual distance, we’d be biased to around 2000 (in reality it is 3470). This heuristic is often used in negotiation to define the general area where you want to end up by making an initial offer. It can also lead to excessive reliance on the particular factor chosen to start with, for example by asking how tall our recruits should be, or even how much over or under 1.8m. This phenomenon can clearly affect the way a campaign fares if it makes claims or calls to action in terms of how much or how something should be judged.

There are many other ‘heuristics’, and all of them are simply rules of thumb: they are not necessarily logical (in other words right for example in estimating probabilities) and nor do they describe how any one individual will respond, but they can be useful in formulating campaigns, especially if they involve perception and behaviour. If you compare these heuristics to the unconscious motivational influence of ‘values’ driven by unmet needs, you will also see that some are more likely to sway certain people than others. By their nature ‘heuristics’ do not separate out these differences, so they should not be taken as substitute for doing more detailed perceptual research where this is affordable.