


FRAMEWORKS

INSTITUTE

Framing Social Issues for Public Understanding and Support- A Brief Overview



Diane Benjamin, Deputy Director for Field Practice
FrameWorks Institute

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

FRAMEWORKS

INSTITUTE

What shapes public opinion on social issues?

Is it real world conditions?

- “There is no such thing as a social problem, until enough people, with enough power in the society, agree that there is. Social problems are produced by public opinion, not by particular social conditions, undesirable or otherwise.”
Armand Mauss and Julie Wolfe, This Land of Promises: The Rise and Fall of Social Problems, 1977.
- “A real world indicator is neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause for an issue to climb the (public) agenda.” *Ray Funkhouser in Dearing, J. and Rogers, E., Agenda-Setting, 1996.*

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

FRAMEWORKS

INSTITUTE

Goals for This Presentation

- Review the research and theory that support Strategic Frame Analysis.
- Review 4 “Framing Lessons” to improve communications about social issues.
- Present our research on how Americans think about food and fitness, with recommendations for more effective communications.
- Apply this research to a PSA about child nutrition.


The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

FRAMEWORKS

INSTITUTE

What do we know about how communications works and how people think about social issues?




The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

FRAMEWORKS

INSTITUTE




The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

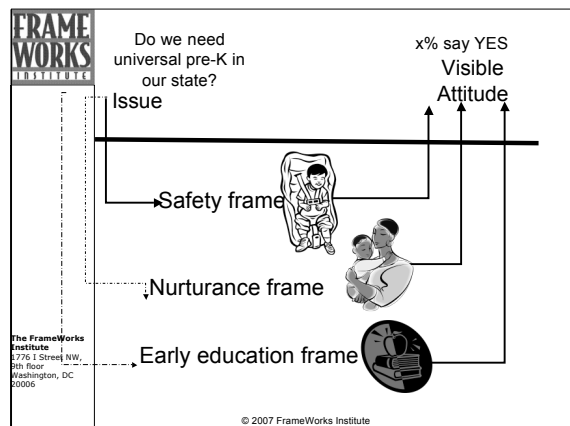
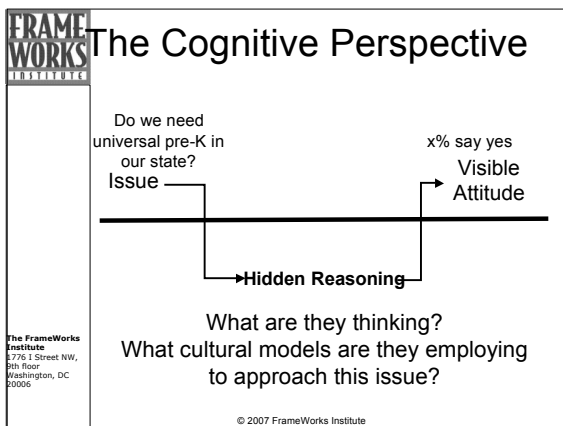
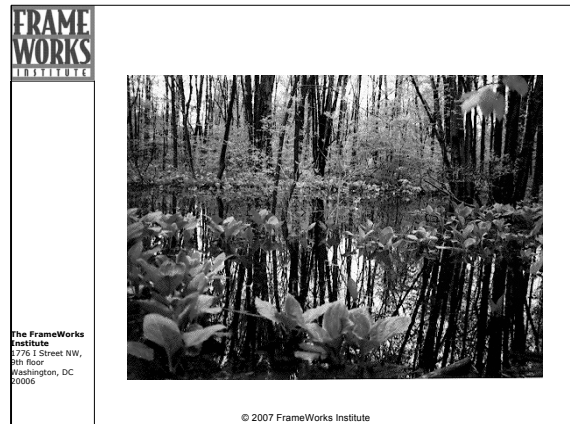
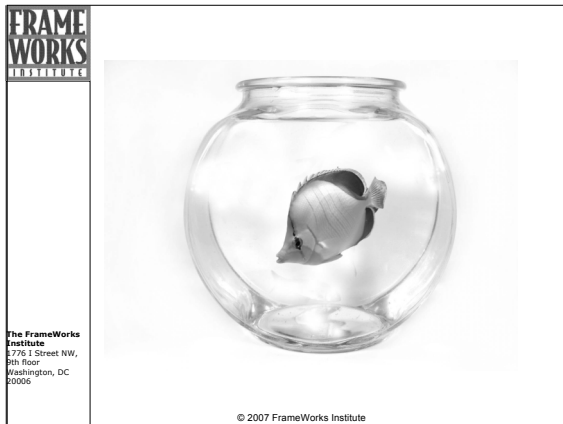
FRAMEWORKS

INSTITUTE



The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute



Therefore:

- Persuasive communications cannot depend on simply putting information in front of people
- Issue awareness is not the (only) goal
- Communications must change the lens through which they see the information

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

The Perspective We Bring (Strategic Frame Analysis)

- People get most information about public affairs from the news media which, over time, creates a framework of expectation, or dominant frame.
- Over time, we develop habits of thought and expectation and configure incoming information to conform to this frame.
- People use established mental shortcuts to make sense of new information.

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Strategic Frame Analysis: The Questions We Ask

- How does the public think about a particular social or political issue?
- How do these default patterns influence and constrain public choices?
- How do these default patterns diverge from expert or scientific understandings of a problem and its solutions?

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Strategic Frame Analysis: The Questions We Ask

- How are these default patterns reinforced or contested by advocates, journalists?
- How can an issue be communicated to evoke a different way of thinking, one that illuminates alternative policy choices?

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Communications Approaches consumer v civic perspectives



- Focus on individual behavior change – public relations, public service advertising, social marketing



- Focus on civic engagement – grassroots social mobilization, policy campaigns, strategic frame analysis

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Why doesn't the Public take responsibility for social problems?

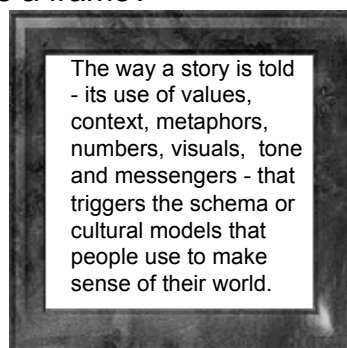
- People are selfish, small-minded, uncaring.
- OR
- It's a cognitive rather than a moral failure – they don't understand what their responsibility could be.

Our perspective

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

What is a frame?



The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Building Effective Frames

- Context/Stories
- Values
- Metaphors and Models
- Numbers/Social Math
- Visuals
- Tone
- Messengers

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

FRAMEWORKS
INSTITUTE

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

Power of frames:
Signal what counts and what can be ignored

- ✓Frames “fill in” missing information

Frames answer:

- ✓What is this about?
- ✓What is the problem?
- ✓Who is responsible?
- ✓What are the solutions?

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

FRAMEWORKS
INSTITUTE

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

Framing Lesson #1

Priming With Values Matters

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

FRAMEWORKS
INSTITUTE

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

Framing Lesson #1: Priming with values matters

START

- Level One = Values, e.g., equality, prosperity, opportunity, stewardship, interdependence, shared fate, responsible management
- Level Two = Issue-categories, e.g., health, education, the environment, the economy
- Level Three = Specific policy issues, e.g., EITC, dental screenings in schools, universal Pre-K, expanded SCHIP, minimum wage

FINISH

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

FRAMEWORKS
INSTITUTE

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

Where's the Value?

- Preventing obesity starts with kids. For the past two years, the Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley has worked in partnership with the Health Trust to leverage our philanthropic resources and provide grants to non-profit groups working to prevent childhood obesity in the Latino community. This year, our Healthy Kids Fund is focused on youth fitness. Latino youth have the highest prevalence (37.5 percent) of being or becoming overweight. Overweight adolescents have a 70 percent chance of being overweight or obese adults. This puts them at increased risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, arthritis and other health problems... (letter to the editor, San Jose Mercury News, 11/30/07)

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

FRAMEWORKS
INSTITUTE

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

Where's the Value?

- Preventing obesity starts by every institution in the community working together to create a healthy food and fitness environment for children. For the past two years, the Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley has worked in partnership with the Health Trust to leverage our philanthropic resources and provide grants to non-profit groups working to prevent childhood obesity in the Latino community. This year, our Healthy Kids Fund is focused on youth fitness. Latino youth have the highest prevalence (37.5 percent) of being or becoming overweight. Overweight adolescents have a 70 percent chance of being overweight or obese adults. This puts them at increased risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, arthritis and other health problems... (letter to the editor, San Jose Mercury News, 11/30/07)

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

FRAMEWORKS
INSTITUTE

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

Framing Lesson #2:

Context Matters

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Framing Lesson #2: Context Matters:

EPISODIC FRAMES THEMATIC FRAMES



lens = telefocus lens = wide angle

The FrameWorks
Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Framing Lesson #2: Context Matters:

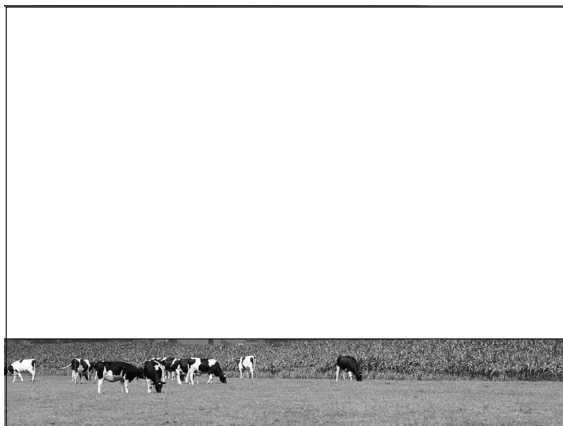
Different Stories Set up Different Solutions

EPISODIC FRAMES THEMATIC FRAMES

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| • Individuals | • Issues |
| • Events | • Trends over time |
| • Appeal to consumers | • Appeal to citizens |
| • Private | • Public |
| • Better information | • Better Policies |
| • Fix the person | • Fix the Condition |

The FrameWorks
Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute



Classic cows problem: Where is the context?



"British officials
may take custody
of extremely
overweight boy"
(AP) Feb. 2007

British authorities may take an 8-year-old boy weighing 218 pounds into protective custody unless his mother improves his diet, officials said Monday. Social service officials will meet family members Tuesday to discuss the health of Connor McCreddie, who weighs more than three times the average for his age.

The FrameWorks
Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Framing research shows that a human interest story alone, especially the more vivid and detailed it is, will not lead people to conclude that a policy solution is required for an entire population. More than likely, the case study or example will be interpreted as tragic or regrettable and worthy of sympathy or charity but without extension to public policy.

The FrameWorks
Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Framing Lesson #3:

Metaphors and Models Matter

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Framing Lesson #3:

Metaphors and Models Matter

- Simplifying a complex problem by use of an analogy helps people understand new information in a context they already know as familiar.
- “Simplifying models” convey the essence of an expert understanding into easily accessible analogies.
- When people understand HOW something works, they are better inoculated against SPIN.

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

What is a Simplifying Model?

A simple concrete analogy that conveys the essence of an expert understanding...

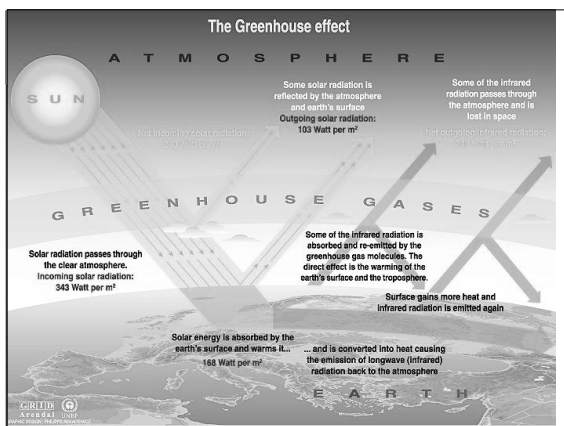
The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Analogies, Metaphors, Models

The FrameWorks Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute



SOME MISTAKES ARE NO BIG DEAL.

Global warming isn't one of them.

If you burn the toast, you can start over. But you can't do that with the earth. By relying so heavily on oil and coal, we put our children's future at risk. The good news is solutions to global warming exist. Let's ask our elected officials to get to work to solve global warming. Find out more at www.solveglobalwarming.org.

GLOBAL WARMING is caused by a man-made blanket of carbon dioxide that surrounds the earth and traps in heat.

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Framing Lesson #4

Social Math Matters



The FrameWorks
Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

What is “social math”?

Social math is a way to explain complex data and large numbers so that people can easily understand and remember it by creating visual pictures in their heads. (Concept developed by Berkeley Media Studies Group and The Advocacy Institute)



The FrameWorks
Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Using Social Math

- To compare the size of two things
- To make an abstract issue more concrete
- To create relationships between familiar and unfamiliar objects or issues

The FrameWorks
Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Social Math Examples

In 1969, for many students, walking to school was as easy as walking down the street because their school was right in their neighborhood. By 2001, lots of schools were farther away from their students, and walking or biking to school was the equivalent of doing a 5K race or more – twice a day.”

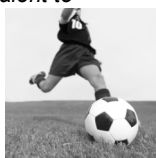


The FrameWorks
Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

Social Math Examples

“Between 1971 and 2002, the Trust for Public Land’s work in cities resulted in the acquisition of 532 properties totaling 40,754 acres. That’s like adding park space equivalent to 326,000 soccer fields.”



The FrameWorks
Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute

What Must Our Communications Convey?

- Provide strong alternative way of seeing the problem, prime it with values
- Resist temptation to make sympathy/charity/crisis the motivation
- Appeal to people as problem-solvers

The FrameWorks
Institute
1776 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute



What Must Our Communications Convey?

- Make the system the problem, not the people
- Surface solutions high in the message
- Don't shame, blame, guilt-trip, factionalize or partisanize

The FrameWorks
Institute
1775 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute



www.frameworksinstitute.org

(c) FrameWorks Institute

This presentation was developed for individual use and cannot be represented, adapted or distributed without the express written permission of the FrameWorks Institute. All images in this presentation are licensed for the purpose of this presentation only and may not be reproduced elsewhere.

The FrameWorks
Institute
1775 I Street NW,
9th floor
Washington, DC
20006

© 2007 FrameWorks Institute