

“green  
alliance...”

*FROM HOT AIR TO  
HAPPY ENDINGS*

*HOW TO INSPIRE PUBLIC SUPPORT  
FOR A LOW CARBON SOCIETY.*

## **From hot air to happy endings** **How to inspire public support for a low carbon society**

Edited by Sylvia Rowley and Rebekah Phillips

Published under Green Alliance's **Green Living** theme, which focuses on the political opportunities for driving positive behaviour change

The views expressed in this publication remain those of the individual authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Green Alliance or its partners.

£5  
ISBN 978-1-905869-31-2

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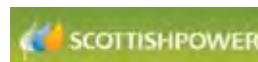
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Green Alliance is a registered charity no 1045395  
Company limited by guarantee (England and Wales) 3037633

Published by Green Alliance, February 2010  
Designed by Howdy and printed by Park Lane Press

### **Acknowledgements**

This publication has been made possible with the kind support of Green Alliance's Green Living Consortium partners.



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[From hot air to happy endings](#)

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# How to inspire public support for a low carbon society

Based on the collective wisdom of the articles featured in this publication, we have identified seven ingredients to help politicians communicate better and inspire us all.

## 1.

### Be positive

Create a tangible and desirable vision of a low carbon future, and develop an action plan to get the country there. Aim first for positive communication and explain the problem afterwards.

## 2.

### Tell a better story

Be clear that this is not just an environmental or a scientific issue, but one that relates to fundamental national concerns such as security. Inspire people and appeal to their values and emotions, using concepts such as freedom and fairness, not just statistics.

## 3.

### Make it visible

What people see and experience is as important as what they hear. Government should take practical actions that result in visible changes. This will take climate change out of the realm of speeches and into people's lives.

## 4.

### Show your own work

Switch from 'are you doing your bit?' campaigns to 'we're doing our bit'. With a problem on the scale of climate change, citizen action makes much more sense against a backdrop of concerted government action. Government should promote its existing work immediately, and communicate under the core message "we are doing everything we can to make these changes possible, but we cannot do it without your help".

## 5.

### Choose your messenger

Who does the talking is as important as what is being said. Enlist others – beyond the usual suspects of politicians and environmentalists – to talk to their peers about climate change.

## 6.

### Be clear and consistent

Decide what needs to be achieved and what role government is going to play in making these changes happen. Once you have clarified your position, reflect this in all interactions with the public: from what ministers say, to what they do, to the surroundings in public spaces such as libraries and hospitals. Develop an inspiring brand to endorse all low carbon policies and initiatives.

## 7.

### Know your values

Government may need to create public support for policies that are not in people's individual short-term interests, but that are in all of our collective, long-term interests (limiting the use of certain resources, for example). Promoting values such as responsibility and care for others could improve public support for more far-reaching changes.

## Contributor biographies



**George Lakoff** is professor of cognitive science and linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley. He is one of the world's best known linguists, and since the mid-1980s he has been applying cognitive linguistics to the study of

politics, especially the framing of public political debate. He previously taught at Harvard University and the University of Michigan, and was a founding senior fellow at the Rockridge Institute. His books include *Metaphors we live by* (1980, with Mark Johnson), *Moral politics: how liberals and conservatives think* (1996; 2nd ed., 2002), *Don't think of an elephant: know your values and frame the debate* (2004) and *The political mind* (2008).



**Solitaire Townsend** is a leading figure in communicating sustainability. In 2001 she co-founded Futerra Sustainability Communications Ltd, a communications agency which specialises in green issues. Solitaire was named

ethical entrepreneur of the year 2008-09 and she is a member of the United Nations Taskforce on Sustainable Lifestyles. Whether devising green campaigns for Microsoft, McDonalds and L'Oreal or helping Greenpeace reach decision makers, Solitaire works on making climate action accessible and desirable. Solitaire holds masters degrees in both sustainable development and English literature.



**Ian Christie** is an independent researcher, adviser and lecturer on sustainable development and environmental issues. He is also a visiting professor at the University of Surrey's Centre for Environmental Strategy, where he is a regular lecturer,

and a Green Alliance associate. Since January 2006 he has been a part-time policy adviser to ministers and officials at the Department of Communities and Local Government, working mainly with the DCLG Climate and Sustainable Development Unit. Previous positions include: deputy/acting director of the think tank Demos; associate director of the Henley Centre for Forecasting; and research fellow at the Policy Studies Institute.



**Chris Rose** is director of Campaign Strategy Ltd, a communications consultancy working for public sector, NGO and private sector clients. He is an adviser to Global Cool, a board member of 10:10 and has run campaigns for

Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, WWF International and others. Chris trained as a research ecologist and has written several books including *How to win campaigns* (2005). He publishes a free *Campaign strategy* newsletter from the website [www.campaignstrategy.org](http://www.campaignstrategy.org)



**Ben Caldecott** is currently a member of Climate Change Capital's Advisory Team, where he is the lead on UK and EU climate change and energy policy. Prior to this he held research directorships at Policy Exchange and The Henry

Jackson Society, two leading UK based think tanks. Ben has also worked in parliament and for a number of different government departments and international organisations, including the United Nations Environment Programme and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. He read economics and specialised in China at Cambridge, London and Peking universities.



**Rita Clifton** is the chairman of the brand agency Interbrand. Rita graduated from Cambridge and began her career in advertising. She worked at Saatchi & Saatchi for 12 years, becoming vice chairman and executive planning director in 1995.

In 1997 she joined Interbrand as its chief executive in London; in January 2002 she became chairman. Her writing has included the book *The future of brands*, and *The Economist* book *Brands and branding*. She has been a member of the government's Sustainable Development Commission and is on the Assurance and Advisory Board for BP's carbon offset programme 'targetneutral'. She has recently been appointed president of the Market Research Society.



**George Marshall** is the founder of the Climate Outreach Information Network, a climate change communications and training charity with 20 years experience in environmental campaigning. He speaks and writes widely on climate

change issues and is the author of *Carbon detox*. He is the creator of the blog [www.climatedenial.org](http://www.climatedenial.org) which examines our psychological responses to climate change.



**Paula Oliveira** is an associate director at Interbrand, focused on the disciplines of brand valuation and analytics. Since joining Interbrand in 2005, Paula has worked for leading companies from various sectors in South America, Europe and Asia. Before

joining Interbrand, Paula spent five years managing brands from Editora Abril, one of the largest media companies in Latin America.



**Tom Crompton** is WWF-UK's change strategist. He has worked and consulted for many governmental, international and non-governmental organisations on environmental issues. His recent publications include: *Weathercocks and*

*signposts: the environment movement at a crossroads* (2008); *Simple and painless? The limitations of spillover in environmental campaigning* (with John Thøgersen, 2009); and *Meeting environmental challenges: the role of human identity* (with Tim Kasser, 2009). He read natural sciences at the University of Cambridge, and holds a PhD in evolutionary biology from the University of Leicester. He writes at [www.identitycampaigning.org](http://www.identitycampaigning.org).



**Joe Brewer** is founder and director of Cognitive Policy Works, an educational centre and consulting service that provides strategic guidance to the progressive world. He is a social change strategist and much of his work has focused on values, identity, and modes

of thought that shape cultural understandings of political and social issues. He contributes to WWF-UK's Strategies for Change project.



**Tim Kasser** is professor and chair of psychology at Knox College, Illinois. He has authored over 60 scientific articles and book chapters on materialism, values, goals, and quality of life, among other topics. Tim also works

with activist groups on protecting children from commercialisation and encouraging a more inwardly rich lifestyle than offered by consumerism. He has a PhD in psychology from the University of Rochester.

## Introduction

### Sylvia Rowley

Policy adviser, Green Alliance



How people understand climate change affects how supportive they will be of policies to do something about it. This means that the way politicians talk about climate change matters.

Is climate change a scientific debate or a practical challenge? A nightmare or an opportunity? Is it 'the environment' at stake, or our security, our economy and our children?

The way climate change and the shift to a low carbon society are talked about determines whether people listen, and whether they think the discussions are relevant to them. It can also determine what actions seem justified, desirable and normal and which seem unreasonable. In short, it can have a considerable effect on public support.

But what politicians say is only part of the story. Political parties seeking public support need an overall communication strategy that extends into people's lives, not just a good line to take in their speeches. A great deal of people's decision-making is unconscious, influenced as much by what they see

and experience as what they hear. Government's communication strategy should focus on the signals it sends out through visible action and policy choices, as well as through what it says.

Many politicians feel that they do not have the public support they need to introduce climate change policies, particularly those that will affect people's lifestyles. By communicating better with the public, politicians could build stronger support for policies and reduce the likelihood of a public backlash. The Committee on Climate Change has said we need a step change<sup>1</sup> in efforts to cut carbon; to help make this possible we also need a step change in the level, coherence and quality of government communication.

An Ipsos MORI report on the government's Big Energy Shift Dialogue said that participants in citizen forums wanted a 'big story' and a plan from government, but felt it was missing. "To our participants, a big story from government will provide vital context for other initiatives," the report said. "This overarching message helps people to notice, understand and believe in local initiatives, which otherwise might be ignored or

treated with scepticism...[it is] therefore a prerequisite for enabling any of the individual initiatives to work on the ground.”<sup>2</sup>

**“is climate change a nightmare or an opportunity? Is it ‘the environment’ at stake, or our security, our economy and our children?”**



Here, we bring together a collection of views suggesting different ways in which politicians could improve their communication and inspire public support. It is presented in two parts. Part one examines the problem: what is wrong with politicians’ current climate change communication? Part two suggests how politicians could communicate better.

Better communication will not lead directly to behaviour change, that is not the aim of this publication. The aim is to reframe the debate on climate change, shifting public perceptions so that people are more receptive to targeted campaigns, incentives and legislation.

#### What’s the problem?

There is a growing body of research which indicates that standard ways of communicating about climate change do not work. From ‘apocalypse fatigue’<sup>3</sup> – suggesting that nightmare scenarios cause people to switch off or defend the status quo – to the fact that people’s decisions are based on experiences and values, not just information,<sup>4</sup> there are many reasons why current communication about climate change just isn’t convincing.

In **we are the polar bears** eminent linguist Professor George Lakoff argues that there are great flaws in the way the environment is currently talked about and understood. For example, the commonly used phrase ‘protecting the environment’ implies that nature is dependent on humanity, but omits the vitally important fact that human life is dependent on nature. Lakoff explains how the assumptions, values and metaphors used in relation to climate change are critical in shaping people’s reactions to it.

Turning to the specifics of the UK political scene in **how to confuse friends and alienate people**, Green Alliance associate Ian Christie looks at how years of mixed messages on climate change have damaged public understanding, trust and a sense of personal capacity to act. The yawning gulf between the government’s apocalyptic description of the problem and its extremely modest follow-up actions are a recipe for public confusion, as is putting an advert about looming disaster in the stream of other consumer messages without giving it priority or mentioning what national leaders are doing about it.

#### Inspiring public support

Climate change is complex, but the good news is that gaining public support requires having an understanding, not of climate science, but of human psychology and communication: something which businesses and academics have spent decades learning about.

Politicians should start off by selling heaven not hell, says Solitaire Townsend from sustainable communications agency Futerra, in **talk the walk**. Creating a positive, concrete vision of a low carbon future is a prerequisite for getting people’s attention, never mind their support. Be inspiring and positive about the changes we need to make, she tells politicians, and show ordinary people what life will be like for them in a low carbon society. Only then warn people about what happens if we choose the alternative path.

In **pictures in the mind**, seasoned campaign strategist Chris Rose argues that seeing really is believing. To engage the public, politicians need to create a real, visual story based on action and

events, not just a narrative for speeches. Visible initiatives such as putting wind turbines on roofs, starting a climate change version of Red Nose Day, or creating priority lanes for electric cars would take climate change out of the realm of debate and into ordinary people’s lives.

**“by improving their communication, politicians could build stronger support for policies and reduce the likelihood of a public backlash.”**

The story of climate change is complex and often abstract. It is a difficult story to tell well. In **we fight to win**, Ben Caldecott of Climate Change Capital suggests that politicians could tell a more convincing story instead: that of ensuring our security. Explaining the shift to low carbon living in terms of securing energy supplies, food production, prosperity and the climate itself, is more tangible and has wider appeal than talking about climate change alone.

Who does the talking on climate change has a big impact on whether people believe what is being said. In **building belief through trusted sources**, George Marshall from the Climate Outreach and Information Network suggests that, as politicians are among the least trusted members of society, they are not best placed to influence people’s attitudes or behaviour. Politicians could improve public support by showing that they are doing everything they can to lead the country towards a safer future. But they should pass on the rest of the communication work, like convincing people that they need to change the way they live, to more trusted messengers.

Rita Clifton and Paula Oliveira of Interbrand argue that government doesn't need just another advertising campaign to get the public on side, it needs to follow in the footsteps of the best businesses and develop a core 'brand'. Adhering to this brand based on sustainability would mean applying the principles of good branding – **clarity, consistency and leadership** – to everything that government says and does in relation to climate change.

To round up, Tom Crompton of WWF and co-authors Joe Brewer and Tim Kasser look at the importance of values. They suggest that appealing to short-term self-interest when communicating about climate change ultimately undermines efforts to secure public support for far-reaching climate policies. In **values, framing and the challenge of climate change** they propose that, to meet its carbon reduction targets, government will have to promote values such as caring for others, which will lead people to act more sustainably, in all of its communication from all departments.

### A note on definitions

**Narrative:** where the word narrative is used in this publication we mean a story about a series of events (such as how government intends to deal with climate change).

**Frame:** a frame is a set of ideas, assumptions and values that are evoked by a certain word or phrase. For example the 'tax relief' frame assumes tax is a burden, not paying tax is a relief, and anyone who tries to raise taxes is doing something wrong.

### Conclusions

To conclude, how politicians communicate with the public about climate change matters a great deal. Significant sections of the population have been left unmoved, confused, sceptical or downright antagonistic by mixed messages and weak political communication. Better communication, in terms of the language, values and stories politicians use, as well as the visible action they take, could do much to improve this situation.

But it is worth remembering that communication is not the only way that government can influence public support for low carbon policies. Incentives and infrastructure improvements, for example, can make change easier and more appealing. Nor are we suggesting that uncertain public support is an argument for delaying the urgent and decisive action we need. In fact, taking bold action is a vital communication tool in itself, as it demonstrates commitment and reduces the confusing gap between the catastrophe government talks about and its own modest responses so far.

**Deep frame:** a deep frame is a structure that shapes our fundamental values and our ideas about how the world works and our place within it. For example somebody who holds the 'rational actor' deep frame will assume that people act rationally in their own economic self-interest. This has an impact on the way they see everything from markets to government to people's behaviour.



*PART 1.*  
**WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?**

# We are the polar bears: what's wrong with the way that the environment is understood

## George Lakoff



How the environment is understood by the public is crucial: it vastly affects the future of our earth and every living being on it.

Just using the language of scientific facts when talking about global warming and the environment means that the significance – especially the moral significance – of those facts will not be understood. That moral significance can only be communicated honestly and effectively using the language of value-based frames, preferably frames already there in the minds of the public.

### What are frames?

We think, mostly unconsciously, in terms of systems of structures called ‘frames’. We use our systems of frame-circuitry to understand everything, and we reason using frame-internal logics. Words activate that circuitry, and the more we hear the words, the stronger their frame circuits get.

Take the frame evoked by the phrase ‘tax relief’ as an example. The word ‘relief’ evokes a conceptual

frame of some affliction, and a reliever who performs the action of relieving. So taxes are an affliction, a reliever is a hero, and anyone who wants to stop him from the relief is a villain. You have just two words, yet all of that is embedded. If you oppose reducing taxes and you use the phrase ‘tax relief’, you’ve already lost.

In the same way that the phrase tax relief invokes a whole frame and with it a set of heroes and villains, rights and wrongs, ‘us’ and ‘them’, so does the word environment, and this affects what action it seems right or sensible to take. We need to understand that there is an environment frame, and that many of the ideas we need are not yet in it.

### Is there a problem with the phrase ‘protecting the environment’?

Yes. The image you get is of the environment as something separate from you. It sounds as if there is a helpless environment out there and you are the big protector. The expression ignores that fact that we are part of nature, that we are nurtured by it, that we owe our very existence to it, and that it is our actions that are threatening what gives us, and everything else, life.

‘Protecting the environment’ assumes that there is an external threat. It does not say that the threat is us. Environmentalists have adopted a set of frames that fail to reflect the vital importance of the environment to everything on Earth.

The term ‘the environment’ suggests that it is an area of life separate from other areas of life like the economy and jobs, health or foreign policy. By not linking it to everyday issues, it comes to be seen as a separate category, and a luxury in difficult times. Wilderness: a place for those in Birkenstocks to go hiking.

### What's wrong with current framing?

First, the public’s very understanding of nature has to change. We are part of nature; nature is not separate from us. Nature nurtures us. The destructive exploitation of nature is evil. This is a moral issue, not just a matter of one public policy versus another. It is about who we are, morally.

Second, the economic and ecological meltdowns have the same cause: the unregulated free market and the idea that greed is good and that the natural world is a resource for short-term private enrichment. The result has been deadly, toxic assets choking the economy and a toxic atmosphere choking the earth itself.

Third, the economic arguments of those who oppose action need to be countered. Is it too expensive to save the earth? How could it be? If the earth goes, business goes. Too expensive for who? Our children? Our grandchildren? Their grandchildren? Saving the earth is not too expensive for them. It’s too expensive for existing interests without the imagination to change for their own long-term good and the public good.

Fourth, we are the polar bears. Human existence is threatened, as is the existence of most living beings on earth. When we see the polar bear struggling on the ice floe, that is us.

### “is it too expensive to save the earth? How could it be? If the earth goes, business goes.”

Fifth, take the concept of ‘environmental action.’ What can we, as individuals, do? Use less energy? Replace our lightbulbs? Drive less, walk more, ride bikes? Recycle? Eat local? Green our homes?

All of this is fine and necessary, but the most important thing is missing: political action. To an enormous degree, governmental action outweighs and shapes individual actions. When we think of the environment, we should be thinking of political involvement. But politics is not in the environment frame.

Sixth, agriculture is run by humans and so seems in a category separate from nature. But it is not. Food production makes use of nature, and it affects global warming. Industrial food factories (for example chicken factories, huge feedlots or huge slaughterhouses) are ecological disasters, producing methane (disastrous to global warming) and depending much more on oil than on the sun. Most of what we eat is oil-food, not sun-food, because of the use of oil-based fertilisers and pesticides, and petrol for transportation.

Seventh, we own the air jointly and we can’t transfer ownership. Polluting corporations are dumping pollution into our air. They need to gradually be made to stop: that is what a ‘cap’ on carbon dioxide pollution is about.

Ideas like these have to be repeated over and over. Liberals do not like repetition, but that is what it takes. Why? Because that is how brains work. Repetition makes the synapses stronger. If you realise that we think with our brains, that matters.

### The problem with cost-benefit analysis

Finally, for those in the business world: corporate interests are constantly pressing government by putting forth arguments based on cost-benefit analysis. But the very mathematics of cost-benefit analysis is anti-ecological; the equations themselves are destructive of the earth.

The basic maths uses subtraction: the benefits minus the costs summed over time indefinitely. Those benefits and costs are seen in monetary terms, as if all values involving the future of the earth were monetary.

**“when we think of the environment, we should be thinking of political involvement. But politics is not in the environment frame.”**

As any economist knows, future money is worth less than present money. How much less? The equation has a factor that tells you how much:  $e^{-dt}$  (2.71828...) to the power of minus  $d$  times  $t$ , where  $t$  is time and  $d$  is the discount rate. The equation says that, in a fairly short time, any monetary benefits compared to costs will tend to zero. That suggests there are no long-term benefits to saving the earth.

Cost-benefit analysis is simply the wrong paradigm for thinking about global warming.

### Can environmental scientists hurt the cause of environmentalism? Unfortunately, yes.

The environmental scientists' view is material: how many parts per million of CO<sub>2</sub> can the earth's atmosphere tolerate without undue global warming? It looks at the chemical reactions in the upper atmosphere that produce warming. It looks at the storage capacity for CO<sub>2</sub> in forests and oceans. It looks at the rate of melting of the glaciers and ice caps and how they correspond to the rise of the oceans. That is the domain of the crisis for environmental scientists, and rightfully so. They have our gratitude and support.

I can remember when, in the 1970s, I first heard that the earth's temperature might rise a degree or two. In seconds, my reaction was 'Omigod!' I had studied enough thermodynamics to know how huge an amount of heat that was. I had read enough about meteorology to realise the effects on storms, enough about species to understand how vulnerable they (and we) are to subtle changes in climate, and so on. I had enough of the scientists' frames in my brain to draw those conclusions instantly. And like other scientists, I believed at the time that if we all just got the scientific word out, the world leaders would see the threat, do the right thing and the world would change.

To some extent it has. To some extent cognitive frame changes have led to material changes. Electric cars are being developed. Companies – including some of the largest such as Walmart – have found ways to make more money by becoming greener. Food consciousness is increasing, with farmers' markets sprouting up and an organic garden on the White House lawn. But it is not enough. Not nearly enough.

It turns out that the results of the material science of the environment are not sufficient to change enough brains. For that we need some understanding of the cognitive and brain sciences.

### Real reason

The first thing that environmental scientists and policy-makers need to learn is probably the most basic lesson of the cognitive and brain sciences: people do not, and cannot, think using traditional enlightenment reason (ER). We need a new enlightenment based on real reason (RR).

**“the public's very understanding of nature has to change. We are part of nature; nature is not separate from us.”**

The difference between RR and the old ER is huge. ER says that all reason is conscious. RR has found that reason is about 98 percent unconscious.

ER says that emotion gets in the way of reason. RR observes that reason requires emotion. People who have strokes or brain damage that cuts off emotions cannot make rational decisions because they do not know what to want, and they cannot tell what others think of their actions.

ER says that reason evolved for self-interest. RR notes that we have a physical basis for empathy and co-operation, that empathy and co-operation form the basis of social life, and that a huge part of our reason is based on these aspects of social life.

Finally, ER said that reason is universal, that if you just tell people the truth they will reason to the right

conclusion, unless they are stupid or greedy. RR notes that people have different moral systems and that conflicting moral systems often form that basis of conflicting forms of political and social thought.

Scientists and policy-makers have to understand these basics of the cognitive and brain sciences, and take them into account when telling the story of the environment and climate change.

### Conclusion

These are among the big ideas that have to be understood by government first and foremost, as well as by the public. Language is needed, imagery is needed, conceptual frames and metaphors are needed: whatever will communicate the significance of the truth. Some of this is emerging in the US – the language of sun foods and oil foods for example – but much more is needed.

**“language is needed, imagery is needed, conceptual frames and metaphors are needed.”**

We need to understand that there is an environment frame, and that most of what we have been discussing – politics, people, health, economy, our reliance on nature – is not in it.

What is positive in all this? That we now know it. And if we know it, we can begin to act on what we know.

# How to confuse friends and alienate people: mixed messages and climate change communication in UK politics

## Ian Christie



Politicians in the UK have failed to provide consistent messages about the nature of climate change and what it demands of us all. The result has been confusion, scepticism and much more resistance from the public than might have otherwise been the case.

The key problem in UK politics is this. The government has presented climate change as a potential catastrophe, which it very probably is. Yet its statements about solutions, and its actual policies, do not match up to the story it tells about climate disruption. Mixed messages are highly damaging to public understanding, trust and sense of personal capacity to act.

### Talk about it

The need for long-term action on a global scale to avert serious climate disruption is arguably the most complex problem humanity has ever faced, and the demands of action to limit climate change are often discussed in terms of wartime emergency. World wars and the Cold War last century presented immense collective action problems, as does the

continuing challenge of averting the use and proliferation of nuclear weapons. But even these huge tasks do not have the complexity, and therefore the same need for good communication, as climate change. There are many reasons for this: the fact that the ‘enemy’ and effects of climate change are invisible to most people in the UK; the long time lag and great geographical gap between cause and effect; and the complicated and contested elements of climate science and proposed technological solutions.

When asked what Winston Churchill had done to help win the Second World War, his successor and wartime cabinet colleague Clement Attlee replied, ‘talk about it’. This was not flippant: Attlee meant that Churchill had been tireless in communicating a powerful vision of what the fighting was about, what the enemy was like and what was at stake for Britain and the free world. If, as many climate activists demand, we should be acting on climate change as if facing a wartime emergency, then we should look for similar power and consistency of ‘talk’ from our leaders.

### Political narratives

So, how have our leaders talked about it? Looking back over the past decade, a range of conflicting story lines can be found in the occasional speeches of UK politicians on climate change and the environment. In 1989, Margaret Thatcher made a notable speech to the UN in which she highlighted the risks of climate change and the need not only for action, but for a new set of values to inform it. Her framing was philosophical and religious:

“today, we have learned rather more humility and respect for the balance of nature. But another of the beliefs of Darwin’s era should help to see us through – the belief in reason and the scientific method... We need our reason to teach us today that we are not – that we must not try to be – the lords of all we survey. We are not the lords, we are the Lord’s creatures, the trustees of this planet, charged today with preserving life itself – preserving life with all its mystery and all its wonder. May we all be equal to that task.”

As George Monbiot has noted,<sup>5</sup> this speech could have been made 15 to 20 years on with few changes. And that is the problem. Mrs Thatcher, having presented climate change as a clear and present danger and immense future threat, and having created an ambitious and coherent way of framing it, failed to do the Churchillian thing and talk about it consistently. Worse, her government and its successor did little to act on the analysis. This set a pattern for the next two decades.

Successive premiers and ministers make occasional speeches announcing that climate change is a looming disaster. These are then

followed by action, or promises of action, that are manifestly inadequate if what they say is true. Often the action fails to materialise at all; and usually it is accompanied by other policies that undermine or contradict the policy on climate.

**“mixed messages are highly damaging to public understanding, trust and sense of personal capacity to act.”**

This is a recipe for baffling the public. Communication is also hindered by the confusing variety of story lines used by ministers. In speeches from Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband, we find the following ways of describing climate change:

- catastrophe: for the planet, for future generations, for poor people in developing countries, for people in Britain at risk from floods etc.
- opportunity: for British business, for modernising the UK, for jobs, for better quality of life, for new technologies and for dramatic advances in energy systems
- challenge: to our conscience, sense of justice and compassion

The story varies enormously: global crisis or UK-centric opportunity; enlightened self-interest or a need for altruism; immense economic opportunity or potential economic collapse. There has been no consistency in talking about these diverse ways of seeing the issues, nor in matching action to words. As a result confused and mixed messages have emerged in communication about climate to citizens.

### Technological rescue

Policy-makers have also encouraged, and plainly want to believe, a story that climate change can be solved primarily through technological progress. Ministers routinely make this claim, and its political attraction is obvious. The belief in technofixes goes deep, fostered by lifetime experience of a flow of new technologies. But many technological fixes are as yet unproven or uninvented. And there is a risk that this story will promote public inertia, as citizens will assume that ‘they’ will work out solutions and that nobody will need to accept sacrifices. The fact is that the scale of technical advances needed to sustain consumerist business as usual while slashing emissions is incredible.<sup>6</sup> We will need to make changes that will seem like sacrifices to many. Thus communications based on technological opportunity alone are neither honest nor likely to motivate the public to support policies that require changes in their lives.

**“even if people know that CO<sub>2</sub> is the chemical notation for carbon dioxide, how does one ‘act on’ a molecule? And why?”**

### Act on CO<sub>2</sub>

The latest government attempt to communicate about climate change and the need for action is the Act on CO<sub>2</sub> campaign. The aim of the campaign is laudable and vital, and the website is full of helpful and important information about steps towards a ‘low carbon life’. Act on CO<sub>2</sub> is a valuable source of information. But to be effective, it must make sense to citizens, attract their attention, and lead to real changes in their lives. What are its prospects? The problems start with the title. Act on CO<sub>2</sub>: but

why, how, who and when? The message is not attached to an audience, unless that is everyone. Even if people know that CO<sub>2</sub> is the chemical notation for carbon dioxide, how does one ‘act on’ a molecule? And why? The difficulties continue with the message of apocalypse in the Act on CO<sub>2</sub> bedtime story television advertisement. In this, CO<sub>2</sub> is portrayed as a demonic force mysteriously emanating from homes, appliances and cars. It is going to wreck the world: a distressing scenario is played out in the form of a nightmarish fairy tale told to an alarmed child.

But this advertisement takes its place in a flow of other sales messages about goods and services, hardly any of which, if any at all, speak in similar terms to the citizen. So we have a message about looming catastrophe that does not take priority in any way over all the other advertisements that citizens see on the TV and on hoardings. If a UK citizen goes to the Act on CO<sub>2</sub> website she will learn that ‘every action matters’, but the list of things to do in daily life – five and ten point checklists – seem puny and footling in the face of what she has been told about the looming calamity for her children’s generation and beyond. How can switching the TV off standby make any difference to that? The story of Act on CO<sub>2</sub> is one of meeting the threat of the CO<sub>2</sub> monster with tiny gestures such as closing the curtains at night. The analysis and the recommendations do not fit together. The question forces itself on her: if things are as bad as they say they could be, why aren’t we taking emergency measures?

Let’s return to the wartime metaphor often used in relation to climate action. In World War Two the equivalent of Act on CO<sub>2</sub> involved exhortations to ‘dig for victory’ and take all kinds of tiny domestic measures to support the war effort. Why did these

make sense? Because they dominated all other messages about domestic life, and because they were the home front supplement to a vast and un-ignorable national effort to win the war. Act on CO<sub>2</sub> sets out the actions for the home front to take; the problem is that its message is at odds with almost every other signal sent to citizens as consumers and that there does not seem to be another ‘front’ in the ‘war’. Our citizen walks into many public and private sector buildings in the course of a week, and the Act on CO<sub>2</sub> message is nowhere to be seen. Again, if things are as bad as they are said to be, where are the emergency measures?

The confusion is compounded by the flow of messages in advertising that urge more consumption of energy-hungry goods and services, and by the widespread public perception that government cannot really mean what it says. If we must Act on CO<sub>2</sub> why is Heathrow to be expanded and why is action to reduce flying always ruled out? Everyday life is full of messages, cues and incentives that undermine belief and trust in the Act on CO<sub>2</sub> message: for example, the high cost of taking the train compared to the plane and car; the blazing lights on all night in public buildings; the overheated hospitals, and so on.



### Changing track

The complexities inherent in climate change as a scientific and public policy issue mean that politicians are up against serious challenges of communication even if they have a clear story to tell and actions to match the diagnosis. If they do not have a clear narrative and are inconsistent in their messages and actions, then failure to win over their audiences is almost assured. Public understanding, trust and support for behaviour changes will suffer.

**“for two decades there has been a yawning gulf between the vast seriousness of the climate change diagnosis and the extremely modest follow-up actions.”**

To stop confusing and alienating its citizens, government, as well as politicians and policy-makers from all parties, must first stop sending out mixed messages. For two decades there has been a yawning gulf between the vast seriousness of the climate change diagnosis and the extremely modest follow-up actions, if any. This is at the core of public confusion. If a politician announces that we face a world-changing threat, immense moral imperative or call to new values, he or she and the rest of the government system had better act accordingly, in personal life and in public policy-making. For why should anyone take the message seriously otherwise?

**“if things are as bad as they are said to be, where are the emergency measures?”**

Second, framing has to be consistent with the analysis of climate change and its implications for environment and economies. It may be attractive to claim that climate change is primarily a great opportunity for new prosperity and that we can tackle it without challenging either our consumption levels, aspirations for material well-being or the fundamentals of the growth economy. But this narrative is incredible in the face of the scale of the problem.<sup>7</sup> It may be attractive to claim, as some campaigners do, that we have 100 months left to save the world from irreversible, serious climate change. But this combines implausible precision – given the uncertainties and degrees of probability in the science and scenarios – with built-in defeatism, since it is clear that whatever else happens the world is not going to respond adequately in the next 100 months. Honest communication needs to be based on the truth of what is happening and what we need to achieve.

## *PART 2.* *INSPIRING PUBLIC SUPPORT*

## Talk the walk

### Solitaire Townsend



Imagine the scene. The leader of the western world holds a global platform. Across the planet people huddle around transistor radios, crowds watch TVs through shop windows and in different countries people hug their children to them as they listen to his words:

“I address you tonight, not as the president of the United States, not as the leader of a country, but as a citizen of humanity. We are faced with the very gravest of challenges, the greatest challenge we have every faced. And yet for the first time in the history of the planet, a species has the technology and ability to prevent its own extinction. All of you praying with us need to know that everything that can be done to prevent this disaster is being called into service. The human thirst for excellence, for knowledge, every step up the ladder of science, every adventurous reach into space, all of our combined modern technologies and imaginations, even the wars that we’ve fought, have provided us the tools to wage this terrible climate battle. Through all the chaos that is our history, through all of the wrongs and the discord, through all of the pain and suffering,

through all of our times, there is one thing that has nourished our souls. And elevated our species above its origins. And that is our courage. Dreams of an entire planet are focused today on our goal. Each of us will need to exhibit that bravery, sacrifice and courage other generations have expected of their best, of their heroes. Today you are that hero. And may we all, citizens the world over, see these events through. God speed and good luck to you.”

Rousing stuff. Exactly what we need from our leaders on climate change, coupled with a radical plan to fully decarbonise our economies and societies.

Unfortunately most politicians are such weak communicators on climate change that I had to adapt this speech from the script of Armageddon, a Bruce Willis disaster movie. For those of you who read all of the reports, speeches and missives from national and international governments on climate change this probably isn’t surprising.

Yet politicians should have all the skills required to get this message across. Climate action is in the national interest, it requires leadership and to be blunt about it, it really is their job. Of course, you may agree politicians

are terrible at making a strong case for climate action, but also question if that is actually necessary. Couldn’t they just shut up and get on with it?

#### The case for stories

Maybe we should leave it up to the politicians, the experts, the teams of policy wonks and the interest groups. No need for a public narrative at all. In real terms almost every other terribly complex and international problem can be negotiated over the heads of us hard working citizens, because we aren’t needed to implement the deals. Families aren’t asked to dismantle nuclear warheads, checkout girls don’t calculate trade tariffs. We may all be impacted by policy, but we don’t actually do that much about it. The problem is, climate change is different.

Every single one of our six billion fellow citizens, every family, every small and large business and every community will need to act in response to climate change. No government in the world can implement a climate agreement alone. It is people, not politicians, who will make a climate deal work or fail. Climate change won’t be solved at the negotiating tables, but at the kitchen tables where billions of people choose to accept, support and change.

**“open with a positive vision of the future. Not the terrible threat, not the impending disaster, not even the moral imperative. Open with the goal.”**

Of course, those people may choose not to accept or change. As John Stuart Mill once wrote “in politics it is almost a triviality to say that public opinion now rules the world.” It would be

extremely naive to assume that governments can decide upon a carbon plan, implement it rigorously and then sit back and watch the carbon level drop. Those plans are worth nothing without the public support to implement them. That’s where a story comes in. And if you pitch it right, the heart lifts, the loins are girded and suddenly actions that would have been dismissed are embraced.

#### Sell heaven not hell

The first thing to remember about any form of communication, is that attention is voluntary. No one has a right to public attention: no message, no politician, no narrative. It has to be earned. Everyone who wants to communicate believes they deserve to be heard.

A rigorous climate narrative which makes all the key points but which the audience chooses to ignore isn’t worth the carbon expended saying it. The absolute and entire purpose of a narrative is to be listened to. If a narrative fails that test the content simply doesn’t matter. There are millions of important (or even frivolous) messages out there. That’s why a multi-billion pound communications industry exists; because you soon learn that being right isn’t enough, you also need to cut through the million other ‘right’ messages.

When it comes to climate change the public have a veto: a veto of attention. They can simply switch off if they are bored, however important your message is. In all the public testing Futerra has conducted for businesses and government there is only one way to guarantee that you hold attention. Open with a positive vision of the future.

It's worth repeating. Open with a positive vision of the future. Not the terrible threat, not the impending disaster, not even the moral imperative. Open with the goal.

We need to build a new narrative in people's heads. A self-fulfilling, low carbon prophecy. What if we get our act together, transform energy supplies, replace the old and dirty with the new and green. Switch from high consumption, high stress, high heart disease lifestyles to something more desirable. What would it look like, feel like, be like if we manage to pull it off?

That is the narrative we need to create. That is the dream that will become our reality.

#### Four steps to heaven

Simply put, this new narrative turns the current, assumed argument for climate action on its head. Rather than a climate narrative that runs from problem to solution, then finally to call to action, the powerful new narrative runs:



We must open all communication with the vision promise. A desirable and descriptive mental picture of a low carbon economy is the crucial piece missing from all current narratives. It wins us the right to hold people's attention through to the call to action. The major problem isn't that people disagree with or misunderstand climate communications; it's that they ignore them. Many climate messages are dull and depressing and audiences have an inbuilt veto: they don't have to listen to them.

Then you can outline the choice between that positive picture and the alternative of climate change. We can threaten climate hell, but only after we've promised low carbon heaven. It's extremely important to hammer home that today is the moment of choice between the two paths. Otherwise 'future discounting' kicks in, and audiences will wait until tomorrow to choose.

#### **“climate change won't be solved at the negotiating tables, but at the kitchen tables where billions of people choose to accept, support and change.”**

Then we offer a strong and simple five-year plan. The public stays with you if you offer a few memorable yet significant and impactful achievements. This simple five-year focus is opposed to the usual twenty to thirty-year targets – often even generational targets – which people can't imagine and are therefore meaningless.

Finally the narrative should set forth specific personal actions, so each of us can be a hero.

#### Vision ingredients

The language of threat and urgent choice has been well rehearsed already. There's been less research and debate about how to communicate a positive vision of low carbon life. But focus group testing by business and government reveals some simple attributes of a good vision:

##### vision first, always

Order matters. Open with the positive vision and you win the right to people's attention. Close with the vision and you'll lose them before you reach it.

##### make it visual

Create pictures in the mind's eye. What will a low carbon economy look like? A useful trick is to ask if someone could easily draw a picture of what you said (or take a short cut and actually use pictures). President Obama is particularly good at this. He draws the mental picture of “vehicles powered by clean renewable energy travelling past newly opened factories; of industries employing millions of Americans in the work of protecting our planet”.

##### make it national or local

The vision must be as local as possible. Don't describe a vision of a sustainable Delhi when you're in Durban, or vice versa. Refer to places and spaces where you are.

##### make it sizzle

Spice it up. If the vision isn't more desirable than what we've got now, then why bother reaching for it? Think about what your audience want – not what you want them to want – and then show how the vision will fulfil that.

##### cut the dates and figures

Dates, percentages and figures come in the five-year plan, not the vision. A 20 per cent cut by 2020 isn't a vision it's a target. Put all the targets together and imagine what the world would be like if we met and exceeded them: that's a vision

##### share the dream

Although you might develop the vision it doesn't belong to you. Show how it reflects common values and needs.

One thing is still missing though. Something that even Futerra can't work without. The problem: there isn't actually a vision yet. There are some snippets, a few ideas but not a full, all-singing all-dancing comprehensive vision.

#### **“we need to build a new narrative in people's heads. A self-fulfilling, low carbon prophecy.”**

Someone needs to do the heavy lifting on the real economics, technology, infrastructure and specifics of what a true low carbon UK would actually look like. Not just the bare bone outlines or criteria for decarbonisation, but a detailed picture right down to lifestyle level. It's government that has the independence, and resources, to build that vision. We need a bold report of a Low Carbon Britain. Then we can excite people about what that will look like.

### See the finish line

The one final hurdle. How do you get that story out there? Politicians don't talk to people, they talk to the media. A narrative needs to be iterated through all the channels that touch the people of Britain. And media doesn't just mean news media. The average Brit spends more than 14 hours a week watching TV, and they're not just watching Newsnight. The vision narrative needs to weave through soap operas, reality TV and fiction blockbusters.

If we're going to achieve that, then clearly not only politicians, but all of us, need to promote the vision. We need a low carbon vision that people can talk about in the pub. One that budding entrepreneurs can base their businesses plans on. One that parents can imagine their children growing up in. A vision will only become embedded or create political space if people talk to each other about it, rather than being talked at.

In the words of Bruce Willis facing Armageddon "The world just asked for your help. Anybody wanna say no?"



## Pictures in the mind: why government needs a storyboard

### Chris Rose



If government wants to create public support for its policies it must communicate not just in words but without words, as visuals: in realities observed or experienced, in pictures in the media, in pictures in the mind.

Time and time again visuals overwhelm words. Do you recall the hapless ministers who assured us that the last Foot and Mouth outbreak was under control, against a backdrop of burning pyres of cows? It was only when the government called in the army, and the craggy General Sir Mike Jackson began to prowl the fields in combat kit, that the visuals began to say 'control'.<sup>8</sup>

How did a small organisation like Greenpeace acquire such a huge part of the mindscape on environment? Because when you see them, actions really do speak louder than words. In the rank order of communications, only direct experience is more compelling than visual images. Ask people to recall when they first changed their mind about something significant and they rarely cite an argument: most often it is something they saw, what advertisers would call an 'evidence'.

### Political culture

Our political culture was forged in a pre-televisual age: it is rooted in a belief in argument, a love of reflective conscious thought and 'enlightenment values', and politicians are schooled in rhetoric and debate. It treats visuals, indeed communications strategy as a whole, as an afterthought. When ministers meet to discuss the 'line' to take, they betray a chronic obsession of UK public bodies with text, from drafting policy, through to legislation. Government will not acquire new political space to facilitate wholesale change in response to climate change in this way. It needs not just a story, but a real story. For its climate change ambitions, government needs actions and events which communicate visually.

Of course some in the vast machine that is government, do understand visual language (communicating without words). For years the state-owned central electricity generating board (CEGB) suppressed renewables by positioning them as only experimental. Outside a massive nuclear station, the CEGB put a solar panel and a lightbulb. On sunny days the bulb lit up. An information board explained that one day, such

technology might replace nuclear. The clear message was ‘not yet’.

The UK government might lead internationally on climate ambitions, but its actions have not helped create an effective visual narrative at home, as so much has been invisible. Desire for least-cost, hands-off, market solutions has led to a reliance on things like tweaking the terms of the electricity trading pool, emissions trading and other measures that mean and signal nothing in everyday life: it is all bean-counting jiggery-pokery and policy-speak mumbo jumbo.

Contrast this with Germany’s solar programme.<sup>9</sup> While Whitehall employed accountants to tinker with electricity rules, the more action-oriented German political culture put solar panels on 100,000 roofs by 2002. By 2008 15 per cent of Germany’s electricity came from renewables. Britain currently generates five per cent, but the important point is that, in Germany, renewables became a visible reality, and one experienced by thousands of homeowners who therefore knew firsthand that renewables work, while society saw climate action was a here-and-now reality. This said co-operation, collaboration and co-ordination.

### Ignore visuals at your peril

Any story about climate change has to be validated when people test it through what they see and experience. Track back to the government’s War on Drugs campaign. As a consultant to the Home Office on drugs communications I repeatedly urged the government to stop using the War on Drugs frame. It was popular with No. 10 and resonated

with the instincts of the *Daily Mail*, but from inside that frame the most effective policies of drugs treatment and prevention looked inadequate. People sitting in a room talking through the problems that led to drug abuse which led to crime did not fit the visual expectation created by war.

**“a credible story emerges in pictures that mean something in our lives. One about people, beneficial change and opportunities, not about theories, climatology, doom or disaster.”**

Similarly, some politicians and NGOs have suggested that we need to mobilise on the scale of war to address climate change. But if you cannot credibly declare war, do not invoke the ‘war’ frame: it just makes what you can do look insufficient. As I have argued recently,<sup>10</sup> the same applies to current NGO calls to declare an emergency for the climate: people hear the message but do not see evidence of the problem – no blue flashing lights for instance – neither do they see others responding to the alarm, so for most the wake-up call will fail to engage. They merely see it as expressing the messengers’ (ie environmentalists’) point of view. Former Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine used to refer to the ‘window test’: if middle England saw no problem through the kitchen window, then it was hard to convince it there were problems in the countryside.

Who is taking action, and whether it looks credible, is centrally important. Labour’s most spectacular flop in climate communication was the advertising campaign *Are You Doing Your Bit?*. Invoking an all-pull-together

framing appropriate to total war effort, amongst other things it encouraged people to cycle not drive. Yet it was fronted by John ‘two-Jags’ Prescott, who gallantly but unfortunately drove his wife a few hundred yards to a party conference thereby preserving her hairdo, but unravelling his messenger-credibility.

### What to do?

So what could government do to create a compelling visual story? First it has to decide its implementation strategy. For example, if change is to be delivered by central government action then that is different from locally devolved action, and rules (compliance) are different from market solutions (choice). It is not clear what the government’s strategy is.

Then it can look at possible frames for how we respond to climate change and see which best fits the strategy. This could include framing our response in terms of families (and children), in terms of the nation, in terms of doing the right thing or in terms of protecting our health. There are many possibilities.

Next it can look at how to create events and take actions which show this narrative to be a reality in visuals: the storyboarding stage. Not by creating ‘Potemkin village’ images just using photo-calls and adverts, but by substantive change.

The proposed execution needs to

- create visual realities
- be experiential (can be experienced)
- be matched by action by the messenger
- look credible: like the legs of a three-legged stool, the proposed objectives, actions and resources need to match

Each stage needs to be qualitatively researched: it is no good relying on gut instinct or what sounds good to those in the office. Each of the possible frames has an established suite of icons which can be used in communication. The most obvious is the nation, hence wrapping yourself – or your issue – in the flag. It also leads you to appropriate contexts, channels, messengers and audiences, and different opportunities.

For example it is not too late for the UK government to encourage community-owned wind turbines as Denmark has done. If climate is best responded to at a local level, then a story punctuated by one community after another acquiring its own turbines – and other forms of sustainability – could create the spine of a compelling story.

Government could also increase the sense that responding to climate change has real short-term benefits, by making currently hard-to-see and hard-to-report benefits much more visible and tangible.

For example, government could create an economic category like SMGEs (Small and Medium-sized Green Enterprises), and convene an annual green employment/employers’ conference. By bolstering and focusing a dispersed and young sector, it can more quickly enter the perception of what is succeeding and what is normal.

Such categories are essential in constructing political narratives, not least as they determine how the media interprets, populates and structures its stories.

### What makes a narrative compelling?

People are not all the same: what is compelling to one is not to another. Fortunately these differences are not limitless but systematic. One powerful and predictive way to identify a workably small number of audiences, with different ideas of what is compelling, is by differences in motivation arising from their dominant unmet psychological needs. Large-scale surveys which map people this way show us that one of the three main motivational audiences (inner directed Pioneers) is already well convinced about climate change and the need to act, but the remaining 60 per cent (security driven Settlers and outer directed Prospectors) are not. This gives government a target for who it has to engage the most with any narrative, and those are not only the usual suspects or the converted.

All too often conventional official climate communications have failed to connect emotionally in Settler or Prospector terms. However, it is not an impossible task. Last year Natural England accidentally leaked scenarios for the possible surrender of parts of the Broads to the sea, enraging Settlers who instinctively seek defence, not surrender; safety and continuity, not risk and change. A local campaign led by a farmer who happened to be an army general (potent Settler iconography), forced Natural England, represented by an academic climate scientist, to commit a U-turn. The image of an army general fighting to “save our coast from surrender to the sea”, successfully presented the battle against climate change in a way that appealed to a group of people often unmoved and unreached by traditional ‘green’ communications.

### What are Settlers, Prospectors and Pioneers?

It is widely accepted that politicians need to tailor their messages to appeal to different sections of society. One way of segmenting the population is to divide people up according to the values. Cultural Dynamics, a strategy and marketing company, splits the population up into three broad values groups which correlate with the level of people’s unmet needs. See table below.<sup>11</sup>

Values group	Driving needs	Response to climate change	% UK population 2008
Settler (security driven)	Safety Security Identity Belonging	These people are the most resistant to even thinking about climate change. They expect clear authority to give a strong reliable lead on climate change.	31
Prospector (outer directed)	Success Esteem of others Self-esteem	Few are yet changing their behaviour to respond to climate change. Propositions for them need to be uncomplicated and positive, about getting the best for themselves and their children.	28
Pioneer (inner directed)	Ethics Making connections Exploration Innovation Being all you can be	Pioneers have responded best to climate change communication. They are the ones who have created the dominant climate narrative around responsibility, ethics, universalism, globalism	41

### Settler narratives

Other visual stories which could appeal to Settlers – who are driven by unmet needs for safety, security, identity and belonging – could include local renewable fuel plots for community resilience, local wind for local jobs, and rooftop household solar for lower bills and security against price hikes. Conservation to help iconic local places and species survive, and to enable our kids to enjoy the same wild play places we did, could also appeal. Keeping Christmas snowy makes sense in Settler terms. A visual story for settlers needs to meet their needs for safety, security and belonging, or rather, show that changes are taking place that they will perceive as good and right because they do meet those needs.

### Prospector narratives

Once people meet those underlying and unconscious security needs, they begin to seek the esteem of others and self esteem. A story for them needs to be about having a good time and getting the best for themselves and their children. Not about giving things up. Not about issues, arguments and controversy, which are all risks to achievement of status.

So do not attempt to construct a narrative which connects lifestyle to Copenhagen. Better to connect it to the Lottery, X-Factor, Britain’s Next Top Model, Formula One or promotion at work. I’ve suggested how the government could learn from projects like Red Nose Day, which takes a classically Pioneer cause – overseas aid – and makes it Prospector-fun with celebrity and opportunities to win and be famous.<sup>12</sup> Government could reflect this by creating a Better Lottery to carry much of its climate communications in stories about people having fun and winning. This would weave climate change into people’s lives and making it an experience, not an issue.

The introduction of electric cars is also rich in potential. Give status to Prospectors through priority parking or vehicle lanes for electric vehicles and they will seek to use them. Make it visible – with promotion and PR, incentives and the right brands – and the objectives, activities and resources all begin to match.

A credible story emerges in pictures that mean something in our lives: one about people, beneficial change and opportunities, not about theories, climatology, doom or disaster. To create such a story – a narrative verified by experiences – government needs to create events, to do things, not just to talk about issues, policies or arguments. Government doesn’t just need a story, it needs a storyboard.



# We fight to win: security and action on climate change

## Ben Caldecott



The story of climate change is complex and often abstract: it is a difficult story to tell well. The predominant ways of talking about climate change have, until recently, been either scientific or environmental. Both of these can be alienating for many people in the UK.

To deliver action on climate change we need to convince individuals, communities and businesses that the measures required to deal with this threat are essential, and to do this we need to tell a more tangible and compelling story than the one that has been told so far. In this regard security – ranging from energy security to conflict prevention – provides a powerful narrative for the policies needed to tackle climate change. A security story can be tailored to appeal to a wide variety of groups and individuals because it can be shown to affect different levels (for example, individual, family, nation or region) and spheres (such as energy and food production, the climate itself or economic prosperity).

By talking about security we can also conveniently sidestep distracting debates with climate change

sceptics. Even in a world where climate change wasn't an imperative, security arguments would still justify many of the policies needed to move to a low carbon economy. That makes the narrative uniquely robust in an area where decision-makers are routinely required to provide a much higher burden of proof than in other policy areas.

When discussing the efficacy of this narrative though, we should be honest. Linking security and climate change together can generate fear, fear that our lives might be negatively affected by climate change in a variety of obvious (and not so obvious) ways. As a result, it can help justify the dramatic interventions needed to tackle climate change.

**“we need to tell a more tangible and compelling story than the one that has been told so far.”**

But fear can only ever be one part of a successful overarching narrative on climate change. We need hope as well. Hope that we can overcome the challenge, that our lives will be better off as a result and that we can provide a future for successive generations of humanity.

### Energy security and energy freedom

In Britain talking about energy security as a reason for promoting alternative energy and energy efficiency would not have been particularly effective a mere decade or two ago. The benign energy security situation that prevailed – as a result of relatively plentiful North Sea oil and gas supplies, as well as sufficient excess generating capacity – meant that energy security arguments would have rung hollow.

Times have changed. We now have a situation where Britain is a net energy importer, is exposed to significant fluctuations in energy prices and is partially dependent on energy from unstable and insecure parts of the world.

The theme of energy security in the British political discourse is becoming more important. This is because the situation is getting worse, with North Sea supplies declining further, old generating capacity closing down and insufficient nuclear, renewables or clean coal being deployed quickly enough to bridge the gap. Energy price spikes will also drive energy security up the agenda, as they highlight the problems of Britain's growing dependence on foreign energy supplies, as well as its problematic interaction with state-dominated energy markets in Europe and most of the rest of the world.

So the scene is set for energy security to become a powerful story. But, how can this narrative be used successfully to gain support for climate change action? For it to be convincing and successful, the narrative should contain four interrelated parts.<sup>13</sup>

First, politicians need to set out a positive vision of a country that has tackled energy security through the

deployment of alternative energy and energy efficiency: this is the UK once it has achieved energy freedom. A vision of Britain with stable and low energy prices for consumers, free from security threats from undemocratic, unreliable regimes and making a significant contribution to tackling climate change is attractive for a wide variety of voters beyond committed environmentalists.

**“fear can only ever be one part of a successful overarching narrative on climate change. We need hope as well.”**

Second, politicians need to make clear that there is a choice between this safer and cheaper future and one that is altogether more malevolent. There is a clear difference between the positive vision, and the country under business as usual, where energy security concerns have failed to be addressed effectively. In large part the divide between these two alternatives is easy for the public to see. The scale of the problem is emerging and voters are becoming aware of the difficulties. Price surges have been felt in energy bills, and regular coverage of Russia's use of gas supplies as a foreign policy tool have come together to lodge the issue in the public consciousness.

Third, it needs to be clear what should be done to get us from here to where we want to be, especially with regards to policies over the short to medium term (the timeframe that resonates most with voters). This could include the policies needed to deploy alternative energies such as renewables, nuclear and clean coal, as well as the disciplined and rapid roll-out of energy efficiency measures. This part of the narrative might include information on

the various ‘pay as you save’ schemes and where the money to fund alternative energy deployment might come from.

The fourth and final part of the narrative concerns empowerment. We need individuals and their communities to make a difference, and government needs to enable them to do so. What can they do and how can they do it? The answer might involve campaigning, or even just voting for change and consuming less energy through the installation of energy efficiency measures.

### Climate security

Energy security is not the only security dimension that is applicable to the climate change agenda. Climate security is also an important story that can appeal to enlightened self-interest, and help instill a sense that urgent action on climate change is required.

We know that climate change will be a potent stress factor in already unstable and less economically developed parts of the world. This will have wide-ranging implications for British security as we are called on to intervene in more frequent natural disasters and conflicts fuelled by competition for ever more finite resources. We will also have to manage climate-induced migration on a massive scale. In an interdependent world, these are significant security challenges for Britain, not to mention our European partners and the wider international community.

A climate security story can show the public that even though our islands will suffer less than others from the chaotic world forged amid a changing climate, we can never be immune because we live in an interdependent, globalised world. Simply, there is

no escape and as a result, we need to act.

On the international stage, climate security is also a powerful argument for countries in the developing world to take domestic action to help mitigate climate change. They will, after all, suffer the conflicts that climate change will fuel. In the context of arriving at an international deal on climate change that incorporates international targets for both the developed and developing world, this is a vital story to convey.

### Domestic security

A security story in relation to climate change and energy can also be linked to familiar aspects of people’s daily lives. For example, the need to spend money now to insure the country against future energy and climate problems can be compared to the household or personal insurance that many people take out to protect themselves.

**“even in a world where climate change wasn’t an imperative, security arguments would justify many of the policies needed to move to low carbon economy.”**

Energy and food security are also tangible domestic concepts: they are about being able to heat and light our homes and to buy food at affordable prices. Energy price spikes have already been discussed, and the increases in food prices in 2007-08 showed that our shopping baskets are not immune to changes in global food production.

### Mass mobilisation

All of these security narratives lend themselves to high-level co-ordinated government action, as well

as the mass mobilisation of individuals, communities and businesses. Both are needed given the scale of the challenge. Nothing less than the mass mobilisation of every part of the economy, every individual and every community is required if we are to meet our ambitious climate change commitments. We should never forget the scale of the challenge before us.

With our own history, particularly during the Second World War, this combination of strategic action and mass mobilisation to tackle a common security threat has particular resonance. For it to resonate properly though, people need to be convinced that doing their bit will actually make a difference. For a long-term and complicated challenge like climate change this will be difficult to convey. But, by focusing on the more immediately obvious security dimensions linked with action on climate change, we can convince people that their choices will make a difference.

### Towards policy and action

We have seen that a security narrative for action on climate change can be tailored to appeal to a wide variety of groups and individuals. It covers a number of security threats – ranging from energy security to conflict prevention – and is a story that can be neatly linked into positive themes of prosperity, freedom and hope. Furthermore, even in a world where climate change wasn’t an imperative, security arguments would still justify many of the policies needed to move to low carbon energy and deploy energy efficiency measures. That makes the narrative robust and allows it to resonate with groups that might be sceptical of climate change.



Fortunately, in Britain there is growing evidence that leading politicians and opinion formers – such as Pauline Neville-Jones, shadow security minister who contributed a chapter on the issue to Green Alliance’s publication *Conservatism in a changing climate* – have begun to use security narratives effectively to promote action on climate change. For this to have an impact, these messages need to be conveyed continually via a variety of traditional and non-traditional outlets and channels, whether the news media, blogs, charities or community groups.

We are lucky that there is an opportunity in 2010 for these messages to be disseminated on a larger scale. The coming general election offers politicians the opportunity to gain a mandate for policies that can ensure our security, whilst allowing us to take robust and immediate action on climate change.

## Building belief through trusted sources

### George Marshall



The lack of public action on climate change is, in many ways, a crisis of belief.

Even after twenty years, public confidence in the reality of human induced climate change is fragile.

Two thirds of people believe that “many scientific experts still question if humans are contributing to climate change”. Among those who accept the basic science, there is a strong tendency to play down its scale, urgency or proximity. Sixty per cent of people do not believe that climate change poses any major threat in their lifetimes.<sup>14</sup>

Despite ever-stronger warnings from scientists, this trend of disbelief is increasing. In the UK, public attitudes have shifted slightly towards greater doubt.<sup>15</sup> And in the US there has been a very sharp decline in confidence in the past two years, with 20 per cent fewer people now answering “yes” to the question: “Is there solid evidence the earth is warming?”<sup>16</sup> A crisis of belief, indeed.

The language of **belief** and **disbelief**, which I am using quite deliberately, is rarely found in connection

to climate change. Writing in *The Guardian* earlier this year, Vicky Pope, head of the UK Hadley Centre wrote “we are increasingly asked whether we ‘believe in climate change’. Quite simply it is not a matter of belief. Our concerns about climate change arise from the scientific evidence”.<sup>17</sup> Dr Pope’s response, entirely appropriate for a professional scientist is that conclusions should be built carefully from well researched and reviewed evidence.

However, let’s face it, most people lack the time, education or motivation to access these technical scientific arguments and reach their beliefs through an altogether more intuitive route. Applying tried and tested mental shortcuts – what behavioural psychologists would call heuristics – they ask a series of three questions before accepting any new information: “Does this information conform to my previous experience of the world?” “Will accepting this information be useful to me?” And, most importantly, “Do I have good reason to trust the person telling me this?”.

Let us imagine how somebody who hears the current warnings about climate change might answer each of these questions.

#### 1. Does this information conform to my previous experience of the world?

If you see the world as fragile and under threat from resource use and growth-based capitalism – in other words, if you are a left-leaning environmentalist – it fits rather well. This is the main reason why environmental campaigners have been free to shape the issues in their own image, permanently loading it with images of polar bears and the language of self abnegation.

However, the previous experience that most British people have to draw on is that the things they are told are causing climate change – travel, consumption, meat, electronics – are fun, harmless and socially approved. People feel that they entered in good faith into a social contract that if they are honest and hard working they are entitled to the rewards of increasing affluence and mobility. It is not surprising that they react aggressively when this is challenged.

#### 2. Will accepting and acting on this information be useful to me?

Advocates and opponents currently present a choice of storylines. One offers anxiety, moral conflict and demands major personal sacrifice. The other offers permission to enjoy all the opportunities and freedoms of modern consumption. In terms of personal happiness the latter seems far more appealing. Some people have an inherent desire to know the truth, however bleak. Some may see a personal competitive (or protective) advantage in having warning of what is coming. However, as any fairground clairvoyant knows, people only really want to be predicted a future they like.

#### 3. Do I have good reason to trust the person telling me this?

Here lies the greatest problem for climate change communications. The primary sources of information about climate change – journalists, politicians, and environmental campaigners – are among the least trusted people in society.<sup>18</sup>

Scientists are far better trusted, but the public is in no position to differentiate between the scientists representing the global consensus and the tiny number of professional deniers, some of whom have impressive backgrounds in academia and public life. They speak with confidence, authority and deep conviction, selling a message of complacency that people are happy to hear.

By far the most trusted sources of public information – and increasingly important in an information-saturated world – are the people closest to home: friends, colleagues, neighbours and family members. If the people around us accept the scientific consensus and are taking action to reduce their impacts, then accepting climate change is not just the easiest option but also brings the rewards of social validation.

However, if the people around us have adopted a different storyline (that it is exaggerated, a scam, the fault of the Chinese) or are aggressively critical of the people who believe in it (that they are bores, killjoys, or extremists) then it is not merely hard to believe in climate change but positively harmful to one’s social standing. Just as it used to be socially required to laugh at racist jokes, it is currently socially required to admire your friend’s holiday tan or your neighbour’s four wheel drive car, and there are strong social penalties for expressing dissent.

This analysis raises huge challenges for public engagement. It means that public opinion has its own feedbacks and tipping points. As soon as a given attitude or storyline on climate change crosses into the realm of inter-peer communication it can take on a life of its own and become deeply entrenched. The obscure statistic that the Chinese are building a coal-fired power plant every four days has passed rapidly into the popular rhetoric. Following the screening of the infamous Channel 4 denial propaganda documentary *The Great Global Warming Swindle* in March 2007, I overheard three conversations in pubs of people passing on its claims to their friends. And the reverse is equally true: social attitudes could change rapidly if people took ownership of climate change and actively promoted their concerns and solutions within their personal networks.

So, the core challenge to politicians and the government should be this: first, what story can government credibly tell about climate change? And, second, how can it enable others to do the rest of the communication work?

### Direct government communication: from ‘are you doing your bit?’ to ‘we’re doing our bit’

There is a widespread public belief that climate change is being exaggerated for the government’s own ends – most likely as a basis for increasing taxes – or that the government is shirking its own responsibilities. Government communications that talk about the dangers but then call on individuals to take voluntary action feed this cynicism. These messages are important but are better delivered by more trusted sources.

People want leadership and action from government and it is on this basis that they may best be persuaded to reciprocate with changes in their own lives. Government should focus its communications on promoting its own actions under the core message: “we are doing everything we can to make these changes possible, but we cannot do it without your help”.

### “the main sources of information about climate change are among the least trusted people in society.”

For people to believe in this new social contract they need two things. First, they need to actually see changes happening. There has been a tendency for government action to focus on technologies and subtle policy measures that are invisible to the electorate: offshore windfarms, gas-fired power generation, the carbon reduction commitment. People need to see scaffolding going up in every street, solar panels on every public building, electric cars in the driveway, and, at all levels, an attention to detail that asks how changes can be made possible for ordinary people.

Second, they need a storyline that, when they consider “is this information useful to me?”, enables them to respond with a resounding “yes!”. Politicians excel at promoting a positive vision of change and should be arguing that the shift to a low carbon economy will make us safer, more independent, happier, more modern, more respected and smarter. And, conversely, they need to argue that there is a price to pay for not listening: that we will become more vulnerable in the changes ahead.

### Enabling others to speak

Given that people are far more likely to believe people that they perceive as being like themselves, the question arises: how can government help to broaden the range of people communicating climate change and enable them to communicate to their peers?

A starting point is to recognise that there is already a great deal of peer-to-peer communication in this field. Scientists, campaigners, policy-makers and heads of local authorities are constantly engaging with their peers. There is also a widespread acceptance of peer engagement as the preferred strategy for reaching decision-makers. For example, it is taken for granted by the Carbon Trust that the best person to persuade CEOs to reduce the emissions of their businesses will be a CEO whose business already has.

What is needed is a wider application of this principle for public communications. National advertising and communication can only provide a backdrop for far more personal approaches that reframe climate change for different identities and affiliations. People have many identities based on locality, ethnicity, religion, class, age, sport, occupation and politics: all of which have their own cultures, values and triggers for change.

A few prominent spokespeople have already taken up the challenge of reframing climate change for their own constituencies: the Archbishop of Canterbury for Christians; David Cameron for Conservatives; Nicholas Stern for economists; Adair Turner for business people. Progressive councils are reframing the issues as a local matter: Manchester city council

for example is running their highly ambitious climate campaign under the slogan “Be Proud. Love Manchester”.

### Beyond environment charities

A great opportunity, as argued strongly by Stephen Hale in his Green Alliance pamphlet *The new politics of climate change*,<sup>19</sup> is to reach people through existing third sector organisations, especially those that bring together people with common values and interests.

### “the experience most British people have of the things they are told are causing climate change is that they are fun, harmless and socially approved.”

However, to be successful, the partners themselves need to both shape and deliver the messages, creating their own language and arguments and training their own communicators. Any attempt to use these networks as an alternative channel for delivering conventional top-down messaging is bound to fail.

A two-year project, run by the Climate Outreach Information Network, aims to engage the one million members of four trade unions through peer-to-peer communication. Core to its approach is the training of 200 presenters, recruited from rank and file union activists, to go into workplaces and branch meetings and make short presentations. Using their own words and arguments, they argue that climate change is, in every way, an issue that concerns working people and the trades union movement.

To give them due credit, Defra and the regional governments are beginning to recognise the value of third sector and community level engagement, with recent disbursements through the Scottish Climate Challenge Fund and the English Greener Living Fund (which is funding the union project mentioned above). However, these represent a tiny drop in the puddle of the £400 million spent last year on government advertising.<sup>20</sup> And because these funds only respond to the applications that come in there is an inevitable bias in favour of environmental organisations. The real opportunity is to create a strategy that proactively seeks new audiences and actively builds new partnerships

**“as any fairground clairvoyant knows, people only really want to be predicted a future they like.”**

### An alternative strategy

In conclusion, an alternative communications strategy would focus on building new social norms around belief and action. These would be target driven and evaluated with public attitude research. Government and politicians would focus on leadership, projecting a vision and promoting the visible steps they were taking towards a low carbon economy.

**“just as it used to be socially required to laugh at racist jokes, it is currently socially required to admire your friend’s holiday tan”**

The strategy should also proactively approach representatives from the prioritised networks and work with them to develop their own communications strategies, emphasizing face-to-face meetings and personal contact. This is an area where well-focused small grants are likely to be far more successful than large scale consortium funding.

## Clarity, consistency and leadership for a more sustainable society

### Rita Clifton and Paula Oliveira



Creating a more sustainable society is going to require the vigorous and imaginative application of what have always been the characteristics of the world’s most valuable brands, in any sector of activity: clarity, consistency and leadership

Governments should remember that good branding has some highly attractive benefits in trying to ensure people embrace the sustainability agenda. While most people applaud the theory of sustainability, to accelerate and deepen changes to our society we need sustainable solutions to be presented in a compelling and attractive way.

### Clarity about sustainability

The world is changing; the need for a more sustainable approach to business and consumption is less controversial now. Yet people are still

confused about how to take part, and what real contribution their small changes could make to the future of the planet. Further, there is an anxiety that a sustainable lifestyle may well be darker, dirtier and less convenient. The public need clear guidance on what sustainability really is and the greater quality of life it delivers, and real leadership about how to achieve it.

People don’t understand what the government is saying and doing. It requires a genuine interest and a fair amount of Google searching to learn how the UK government is addressing climate issues, and how effective their measures are. New policies are delivered alongside a massive amount of other information with which people are bombarded in their everyday lives. Not surprisingly, they get lost. People need true knowledge, not more loose and sometimes confusing information.

Government’s signals can be ambiguous, such as the cars our leaders drive, the energy consumption (or waste) in public spaces, or Boris Johnson openly defending environmental causes – even by cycling to work – but promising to eliminate the extended congestion charge in London.

Some actions come dressed under different labels, confusing people and reducing awareness regarding the real commitment of the government. For example, why not combine the recent scrappage scheme with the purchase of hybrid cars?

The public is naturally sceptical about claims made by businesses and government. A study published by Terra Choice, an environmental marketing firm, showed that 99 per cent of 1,018 consumer products surveyed were guilty of greenwashing.<sup>21</sup> It is important for government to be transparent and show that its interventions are derived from authentic environmental and social concerns, rather than a disguised interest in raising income.

There are many other agents in society that are able to inform and influence the population: media, social media, NGOs, businesses, brands, academia, family and friends. So how should the government act and be heard among all the noise, and gain public trust and support? And how can they ensure and facilitate the support and help of all the other agents of change?

**“there is an anxiety that a sustainable lifestyle may well be darker, dirtier and less convenient.”**



### Branding theory applied to sustainability

So, the three common principles that make brands powerful and able to engage important and desired audiences are: clarity, consistency and leadership.

**“it requires a genuine interest and a fair amount of Google searching to learn how the UK government is addressing climate issues.”**

### Clarity

Clarity of purpose, role and strategy is the starting point in creating a strong and engaging ‘cause’, and we might summarise this as ‘positioning’. As with all brands in the commercial or not for profit sector, this positioning should become the central organising principle of everything an organisation says and does. General Electric (GE), for example, launched in 2005 its Ecomagination program, which intended, amongst other goals, to increase spending on green technologies, reduce greenhouse emissions and generate US\$20 billion in revenues from green products, including jet engines, locomotives and wind turbines.<sup>22</sup> Ecomagination is a centrally branded idea inside GE, which acts as an organising principle in its strategy and communication, making the purpose of the business clear and attractive for its internal and external stakeholders.

This example suggests that the first step for government to gain public support should be to clarify its positioning regarding sustainability, what role it wants to play in changing people’s and businesses’ behaviour – at a local and global level – and express this as clearly and vividly as a well

branded approach would demand. This is not about yet another advertising campaign, exhibiting a new logo and a compelling tagline. It is about creating a proper ‘sub brand’ (such as Ecomagination is for GE), which is aligned with what Great Britain represents as a nation, which is bigger than the political party in power and reflects a true commitment to making the world a better and more sustainable place to live. It must, of course, have real substance and longevity, and yes, sustainability in its own right. To illustrate in more commercial terms, the current government should be a sponsor of the UK as a sustainable and influential nation. This brand should then organise all policies, communications and actions of the government and its leaders, and this leads us to the second principle of a powerful brand: consistency.

### Consistency

A brand manifests its positioning through all of an organisation’s touch-points: products and services, environment and channels, people and behaviour and communication. For world class not for profit brands, it is about the nature and coherence of their programmes, about how they use the money raised, their shops, how their employees and volunteers behave and work with people, and what they say through their various channels of communication. Therefore, to gain credibility and long-term support, it is not enough for the government just to introduce tactical new policies and taxes or to invest in PR or communication campaigns. These are short-term initiatives that would just make people more cynical about government actions.

To gain a level of consistency, firstly the government should seriously engage its leaders and civil servants through a very participative process, from concept to execution, even including leaders from different political parties. GE, for example, carries out 'treasure hunts' inside some of its units: the treasure are opportunities to save energy or reduce GE's carbon footprint, and employees who spot them are compensated. This kind of initiative not only motivates people to engage with the cause, but also has a positive impact on the overall work environment. By engaging people from different areas and departments, the government will guarantee consistency of behaviour and message around the programme. By engaging people from different parties, the government will demonstrate a real commitment to the cause that is more important than just the next election.

**“by showing its policies and initiatives are part of something bigger and for the benefit of the population, the government can lead change in society.”**

The sustainability sub-brand should endorse any government policy or initiative related to this cause: fuel taxes, incentives for solar panels and renewable energies, recycling programmes, advisory and informative services, a fleet of environmentally friendly cars, sustainable community work, regeneration projects, changes in public buildings and spaces (councils, hospitals and libraries) etc. On the latter, for example, simple measures could have an effect and make the brand closer and more tangible to the public: selective litter collection, use of energy-saving light bulbs,

better use of natural light and heat etc. It is about developing and enacting policies and actions that demonstrate the government's commitment to sustainability and society and, of course, communicate in a clear and accessible manner, endorsed by a single and unique brand.

In summary: 'walk the talk everyday, everywhere, by everyone'. Some of these initiatives will be more difficult than others to 'sell' to the public, such as the ones that impact on their pockets which could be seen as a disguised interest in raising government's income. Therefore, the sustainability brand and government's commitment to the programme need long-term and consistent support, rather than feeling like another tactical and politicised initiative; not something government has been particularly good at demonstrating.

### Leadership

The third and last principle is one that people are yearning for in the sustainability debate: leadership. Successful brands are ahead of consumers, innovating, creating products and services that are relevant and differentiated, making people's lives easier and better. From over 4,000 brand studies, leadership is the characteristic most closely correlated with sustainable brand value. Companies such as Honda and Toyota were the first movers in developing fuel-efficient cars and this is becoming a 'must-do' if automotive companies want to survive. The same could be said of restaurant chains, such as McDonald's and Starbucks, which, despite criticism and scepticism, have been trying to transform their business, investing in new products and ingredients from sustainable sources.

One of the best corporate examples of branding sustainability in the UK is M&S's Plan A. M&S thinks about what causes are close to its brand positioning, which ones would be most relevant for its core audiences and who would be the most reliable partners to help delivering the new initiative, all endorsed by its Plan A brand. This is embedded in what M&S does and says. By showing that a simple measure such as charging for plastic bags is part of something bigger that will ultimately have a benefit to its consumers, M&S motivates them to take part: either by reducing consumption of plastic bags and using reusable ones, or by paying without complaining, aware that profits will be converted to the environment specialist not for profit organisation Groundwork, M&S's partner in the initiative.

**“Britain is one of the most inventive and creative economies in the world; we should be showing that we can thrive with sustainable development as our central organising principle.”**

This is a real opportunity for the government. Instead of claiming it cannot move faster because the UK population might not want to accept change or does not support sustainable policies, the government should be a step ahead, guiding and supporting its people. By showing its policies and initiatives are part of something bigger and for the benefit of the population, the government will be able to lead the change in society that is so much needed. If done well, this is likely to have a highly positive effect on the image of the whole nation, domestically and abroad, making the population proud of being engaged with such a movement.

Again, this is real leadership, achieved through clarity of vision and consistency of actions.

### Real opportunity for leadership to change society

Britain is one of the most inventive and creative economies in the world, and we should be aspiring to a leadership role in showing how a society can live and thrive with sustainable development as its central organising principle: not in theory, but consistently in every consideration, practice and policy. Clarity of purpose and leadership in attitude and action is critical, not only to co-ordinate plans, actions and key performance indicators, but also to gain society's trust, engagement and support. Using the discipline and attraction of branded thinking on sustainability, and connecting the broadest issues across all government departments, can only help to ensure that.

Branding for a sustainable world. Now there's a thought.

# Values, framing, and the challenge of climate change

Tom Crompton, Joe Brewer and Tim Kasser



In the debates on how to change behaviour and gain public support for climate policies, one school of thought holds that it is enough to show how being green can appeal to people's financial interest or social status. Government campaigns have done this by highlighting the fact that people can save money by using less energy, for example.

In this chapter we argue that this is misguided. Such campaigns serve to reinforce underlying values that are counter-productive to the emergence of greater concern about problems like climate change. They also undermine public support for government policies aimed at tackling such problems.

So why is this? People's values and life goals, the aspects of a person's identity that reflect what he or

she deems to be desirable and worth striving for in life, have a profound impact on their motivation to engage in low carbon behaviour and to demand that government responds proportionally to the challenge of climate change.

Lasting and ambitious change will only be achieved through engagement with values and life goals. This is because, as research demonstrates, values and life goals organise the more specific attitudes and behaviours that make up people's day-to-day lives.

## The problem with financial success, status, popularity and image

Values and goals are grouped in similar ways in societies around the world. One group of values is consistently associated with more negative attitudes and behaviours towards social and environmental challenges; that is the relative importance individuals place on financial success, status, popularity and image. A range of studies show that the more people endorse these extrinsic, self-enhancing, materialistic values and goals, the more they report negative attitudes towards sustainability concerns, and the less often they engage in behaviour consistent with such concerns. Conversely, people who place greater

importance on intrinsic and self-transcendent values and life goals, such as concern for growing as a person, having close relationships, and benefiting the larger social world, are more likely to have attitudes that benefit society and sustain our environment, and to adopt behaviour consistent with those attitudes.

If the challenge of climate change could be met credibly through simple lifestyle changes that coincide with people's financial self-interest or social status, then building campaigns in this way could make sense. But the challenge that climate change presents is far greater. If government is to motivate active public demand for the ambitious interventions that are needed, such as the development of extensive new green taxation, increases in the costs of flying or private car use, consuming less stuff or accepting local windfarms, it is clear that appeal must be made to self-transcendent and intrinsic values rather than to self-enhancing, extrinsic ones. But it is not only the case that appeals to the latter values and goals are insufficient, they are actually counterproductive.

## “selling behavioural changes through appeals to financial self-interest or social status will be counterproductive in the longer term”

Selling behavioural changes through appeals to financial self-interest or social status will undermine the legitimacy of more intrinsic values, and is therefore likely to be counterproductive in the longer term. Studies show that people tend to experience self-transcendent, intrinsic values as being in opposition to self-enhancing and extrinsic values.

As the emphasis on extrinsic goals goes up, the corresponding emphasis on intrinsic goals goes down. As a consequence, government communications that serve to reinforce self-enhancing values and goals – for example, urging people to adopt simple domestic energy-saving behaviours to save money – are likely to have the unfortunate side effect of frustrating the emergence of more systemic low-carbon concerns and behaviours.

But it's not all bad news. Far from being exclusively held by a small segment of society, intrinsic values are ubiquitous, but are often suppressed by today's dominant social norms. Researchers have found that, rather than reflecting a fundamentally dominant aspect of human nature, self-enhancing and materialistic values are more prevalent in certain social and cultural settings than in others. The assumption that humans are essentially and primarily motivated by self-interest is, in part, a self-fulfilling prophecy brought on by cultural messages that people are and should be self-interested. Indeed, there is good evidence that the assumption of the dominance of self-interest can lead to the creation of social institutions – such as workplaces, schools, government departments – that serve to engender self-interest, and thus self-enhancing, materialistic values. A credible and proportional response to climate change must therefore begin to re-examine the role of social institutions and policies in determining which values and life goals come to dominate.

## Promoting helpful values: the role of 'deep frames'

As we have shown, it will be necessary to dismantle the ways that society currently encourages extrinsic goals, and to promote more helpful, intrinsic goals.

Driving such shifts in identity will require an engagement with what linguistic experts call ‘deep frames’: the mental structures that shape our fundamental values and our ideas about how the world works and our place within it (see George Lakoff’s contribution in this publication for more information on frames). For example, the ‘rational actor’ frame at the heart of neoclassical economics asserts that people are principally motivated by self-interest. Those who hold the beliefs and values associated with this frame will view the world in a particular way, with profound implications for a wide array of concepts, including their understanding of what governments, markets and people really are, and what they are there to do.

Political leaders have always had a profound influence over people’s deep frames, and effective leaders know this intuitively. Margaret Thatcher commented in 1981, for example, that her aim was to engage at the level of the nation’s deepest values:

“...it isn’t that I set out [to change] economic policies; it’s that I set out really to change the approach, and changing the economics is the means of changing that approach. If you change the approach you really are after the heart and soul of the nation. Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul.”<sup>23</sup>

George Lakoff and his colleagues at the Rockridge Institute have shown that specific deep frames can be embedded by politicians, and others in the public eye, through concerted and sustained effort. They demonstrate that the leaders of the American right have assiduously and successfully set about embedding “their deepest values into the brains

of tens of millions of Americans” over the course of the last few decades, and attribute the success of the American right over the past decade to the success of this project.

### **“lasting and ambitious change will only be achieved through engagement with values and life goals.”**

So, if we know that peoples’ values and behaviours are determined in important part by the deep frames that they use to understand and make sense of the world, and if we know that politicians have the power to influence these frames, then the challenge is set: what deep frames should politicians be reinforcing, repeatedly, to promote the values that will enable a shift to more sustainable behaviour, and that will build active public demand for ambitious policy interventions on climate change?

### **Examples of deep frames that will promote active public engagement on climate change**

There are many different deep frames that take self-transcendent and intrinsic values and goals as their starting point. We set out three examples below, which must come to underpin any proportional response to the challenge that climate change presents.

The first example establishes the possibility of working collectively to bring intrinsic values to the fore. The second and third examples build values of ‘universalism’ – an awareness of interconnection with others – and ‘benevolence’ (care for others), which have both been shown empirically to be associated with greater concern about sustainability, and greater motivation to engage in corresponding behaviours.

### **We decide, collectively, what values we live by**

How we each behave, and how our communities and social institutions operate, has a profound effect on the values that come to dominate within society. Far from arising as a result of factors beyond our influence, these values reflect the collective decisions we make about how we structure society.

### **We are part of the world**

Human beings are part of the world. Our biological existence is bound up in global ecological processes. Our social and environmental identities are bound up in a web of relationships, an ecosystem of the people and places that tell us who we are, and many of us report feeling most alive when we are aware of a profound psychological or spiritual connection to other people, other living things, and the wider world.

### **We care**

People care deeply for one another, for other living things, and the wider natural world. This care must extend beyond those that are currently alive, to include future generations. We should properly value the lives of those who have yet to be born by living in a way that does not compromise the needs of future generations. It is also right to treat non-human animals with compassion, recognising that other beings have inherent value irrespective of their usefulness to humans.

But all these deep frames are just abstract sets of words. To be effective they need to become hardwired into people’s brains as starting points for thinking and acting differently. In this final section we look at how this can be achieved.

### **Embedding deep frames**

It is possible to develop a set of key principles for embedding deep frames. This includes the need for consistent and repeated use of clear messages that reinforce the desired deep frame. But messaging alone will not be sufficient. Promoting deep frames also requires a focus on institutions and policies. This is because deep frames are shaped not just by how policies are presented to people, but also as a result of people’s experience of these policies. Joe Brewer and George Lakoff distinguish two types of policy, material policy and cognitive policy:<sup>24</sup>

“material policy consists of the nuts and bolts, what is done in the world to fulfill policy goals. Cognitive policy is about the values and ideas that both motivate the policy goals and that have to be uppermost in the minds of the public and the media in order for the policy to seem so much a matter of common sense that it will be readily accepted.”

Policy proposals that may seem similar in terms of their material aims can differ widely in terms of their cognitive impacts. This difference may be implicit, drawing on – and supporting – a set of deep frames without conscious discussion. In simple terms, it is not just the material effect of the policy that matters, but also the psychological effect that living with that policy has on people.

Furthermore, the promulgation of a set of values in one area of policy, perhaps far removed from climate change policy, will have implications for public acceptance policy aimed at mitigating climate change.

Policy-makers should therefore examine the cognitive impact of public policy, across the whole gamut of government. They should support and extend policies that contribute to the strengthening of intrinsic goals and self-transcendent values. The National Health Service (NHS) is an example of a policy with cognitive impacts that will help to embed the deep frames necessary for a proportional response to the challenge of climate change. The first principle of the new NHS Constitution (published earlier this year), states:

“the NHS provides a comprehensive service, available to all irrespective of gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief. It has a duty to each and every individual that it serves and must respect their human rights. At the same time, it has a wider social duty to promote equality through the services it provides and to pay particular attention to groups or sections of society where improvements in health and life expectancy are not keeping pace with the rest of the population.”



People’s experience of the NHS, both their experience of contributing to it through taxes, and their experience of freely using it as patients, serves to reinforce the perception that it is right that everyone’s health needs should be met as a public service. The NHS, as an institution, thus serves to reinforce public perception of the possibility and benefits of contributing to the greater common good. To the extent that it is supported, the NHS serves to promote those values to which necessary and ambitious climate change policy must ultimately appeal. Of those discussed above, it particularly promotes the ‘we care’ frame.

**“we should value the lives of those who have yet to be born by living in a way that does not compromise the needs of future generations.”**

Conversely, undermining the principle of free healthcare for all will serve to undermine intrinsic goals and self-transcendent values and, therefore, public support for ambitious intervention on climate change. A similar case can be made for a wide range of other policies, for example, free nursery education for all, the minimum wage, the state pension, income support, child benefit or overseas aid.

### Conclusion

Many climate change campaigners advocate segmenting a public audience according to dominant value sets, and then designing climate change communications to appeal to each of these sets. This approach does not provide a credible basis either for motivating ambitious and systemic private sphere behavioural changes, or for building widespread public demand for the difficult policy interventions that are needed.

Rather, proportional responses to the profound challenge that climate change presents will entail working to make intrinsic and self-transcendent values more salient. These values are commonplace, but they are often suppressed by current social norms and even, tragically, by some climate change campaigns.

To play its part in achieving this value shift, government will have to adopt a coherent strategy across departments. Such a strategy cannot focus solely on the material impacts of government policy (reducing carbon emissions); it must also make use of the profound cognitive influence of public policy – and debate about policy – in all areas, to establish the prevalence of values known to promote positive social and environmental outcomes.

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