

Introductory Remarks for Communications and Messaging for a New Biopolitics

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I'm pleased to be introducing this plenary session which will be led by Jane Elder, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters. After I give a bit of context for the session, Jane will be talking with us about how and why it's important to frame our issues powerfully and connect them with cultural values. We'll then be breaking into small groups to do some thinking, writing, and talking about tailoring messages for specific audiences--your audience is on the card at the center of your table. We'll have a short "Gallery Walk" in which we get to see one another's messages, and then we'll have some closing thoughts and summation. Those of us who have been planning this session are excited about its potential outcomes in terms of moving us forward, individually and as a group, in our efforts to craft effective biopolitical messages for a range of audiences.

Why is a structured, strategic approach to communications even needed?

DNA-->RNA-->Protein Let's begin with an analogy--the Central Dogma. We know now that this iconic formula put forward at the birth of the gene age is not just simplistic but, in some regards, quite inaccurate. It doesn't describe what really goes on in cells as they go about the business of producing proteins.

Facts-->clear presentation-->reasonable action Yet many of us, when it comes to communication, often operate with a model, conscious or unconscious, that is similarly unsophisticated. Call it the legacy of classical rhetoric and the Enlightenment. We bank on the power of empiricism and believe that if we communicate clearly enough, people cannot fail but respond rationally.

Reality Based Community Member We cling to our membership in the Reality Based Community, which Karl Rove in 2004 defined for journalist Ron Susskind as "people who 'believe that solutions emerge from...judicious study of discernible reality.'" Of course, "That's not the way the world really works anymore," Rove went on. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality, we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

Big Lebowski To paraphrase John Goodman in "The Big Lebowski": say what you will about Enlightenment values but at least they were an ethos.

the truth In terms of science and technology, the connection of facts or small "t" truth to public policy sometimes a bit surreal. Political science Peter Haas has written, "While speaking truth to power has long been a major theme in political science and policy studies, commentators are increasingly skeptical about whether modelers and scientists are capable of developing truth, and whether power ever listens to them anyway."

Hoppe's typology Attempts to understand how underlying assumptions about science and technology inform and impede policymaking have led to some complex typologies--this one here is by Robert Hoppe showing boundary relationships among scientists and policymakers. It bears scrutiny, and if you're interested I've uploaded a couple key Hoppe papers to the Tarrytown website, but we don't need to understand the details of this schematum to grasp the main point, which is that we need to have an understanding that our biopolitical messages--whatever they might be--are being sent and received in a space that is not only complex but uncertain, and sometimes subject to stochastic processes--say, the will of Karl Rove.

Not in Kansas anymore So we're way beyond classical rhetorical strategies of logos-pathos-and ethos here.

Megaphone And what we are trying to suss out is how beliefs impact behaviors and what their relationships to knowledge and social change are. What we'll be hearing from Jane Elder is how two key tools--framing and connecting to primary values--can enhance our ability to reach listeners and, ideally, influence their attitudes and behaviors.

Kahneman and Tversky The workshop today rests on several decades worth of nuanced, sophisticated study of how and what we--my dog Toodles would probably challenge me on my anthropocentrism here--communicate, and how we respond to messages. This work, which probably most of you are familiar with, has been done by psychologists sociologists, neuroscientists, linguists, New Rhetoricians, communications studies and science and technology studies folk. Among the most influential has been the body of research carried out by psychologist Daniel Kahneman, winner of the 2002 Nobel Prize in economics, and the late Amos Tversky, a cognitive and mathematical psychologist. These are two of their most famous papers, the 1974 *Science* article, "Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases," and the 1984 *American Psychologist* paper, "Choices, Values, and Frames." These two papers laid the foundations for the field now known as decision analysis, which examines human choices empirically and has produced findings with ramifications for economics, sociology, political science, psychology, neuroscience, and beyond.

Predictably irrational In effect, Kahneman and Tversky challenged theories at both ends of the spectrum, at one pole those of liberal economists and *their Homo economicus*, the so-called rational actor making choices to maximize his utility, and at the other pole, those of Freudians and philosophers who saw the roots of human choice as drawing on the deep, irrational unconscious. In his recent book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Kahneman lays out several decades worth of research showing that each of us basically combines both logical, meticulous cognitive features with impulsive, biased ones. Or, as behavioral economist Daniel Ariely put it, we are "predictably irrational."

Biodiversity Project If that's the case, then it stands to reason that we want to think carefully about, and gain greater proficiency in, delivering our messages, which is what Jane Elder has for many years helped an assortment of organizations to do. As a principal of Jane Elder Strategies, she designed communications campaigns and coached

organizations to craft communications strategies. Currently at the Wisconsin Academy, she was previously founding and executive director of The Biodiversity Project, which is the webpage here, directed the Sierra Club's Ecoregion Planning Program, and served as Great Lakes Program Director and Midwest Representative for the Club. She holds degrees in Land Resources from the University of Wisconsin, and Communications from Michigan State University. I'm pleased to present her to you today.