The Workshop

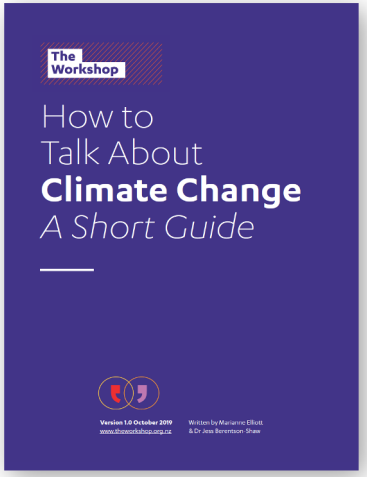
Narratives for Change: Communicating for Deepening Understanding

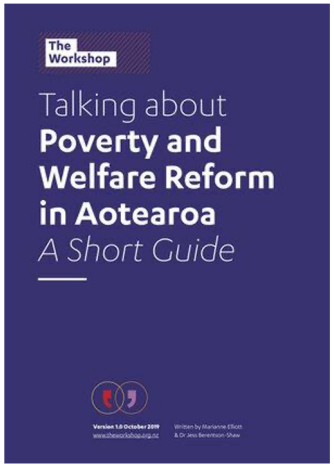
IPANZ. October 2021

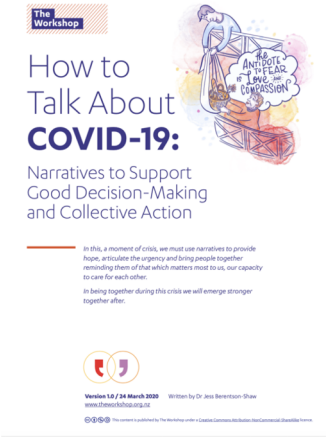
Dr Jess Berentson-Shaw

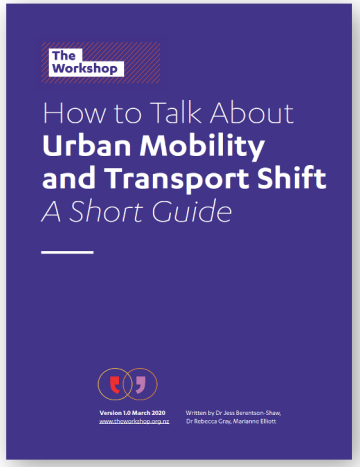
the WORKSHOP

Writing & guides





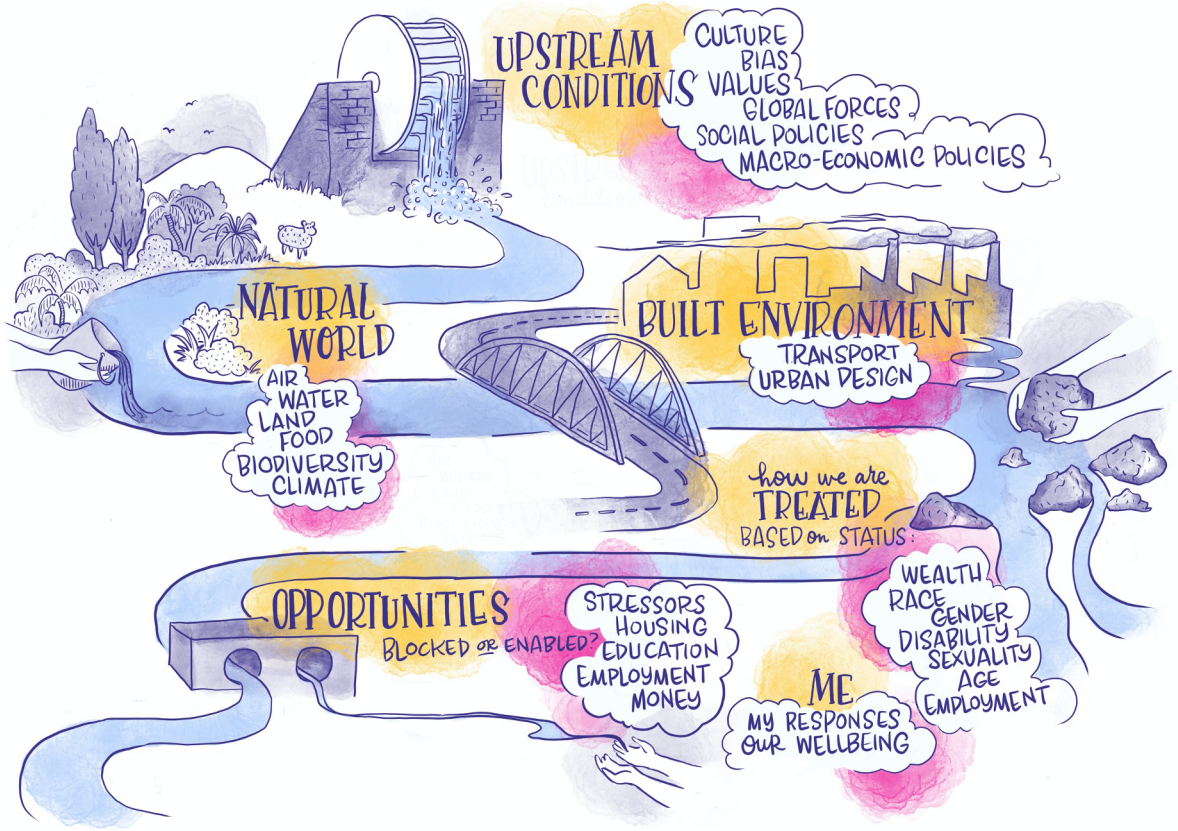




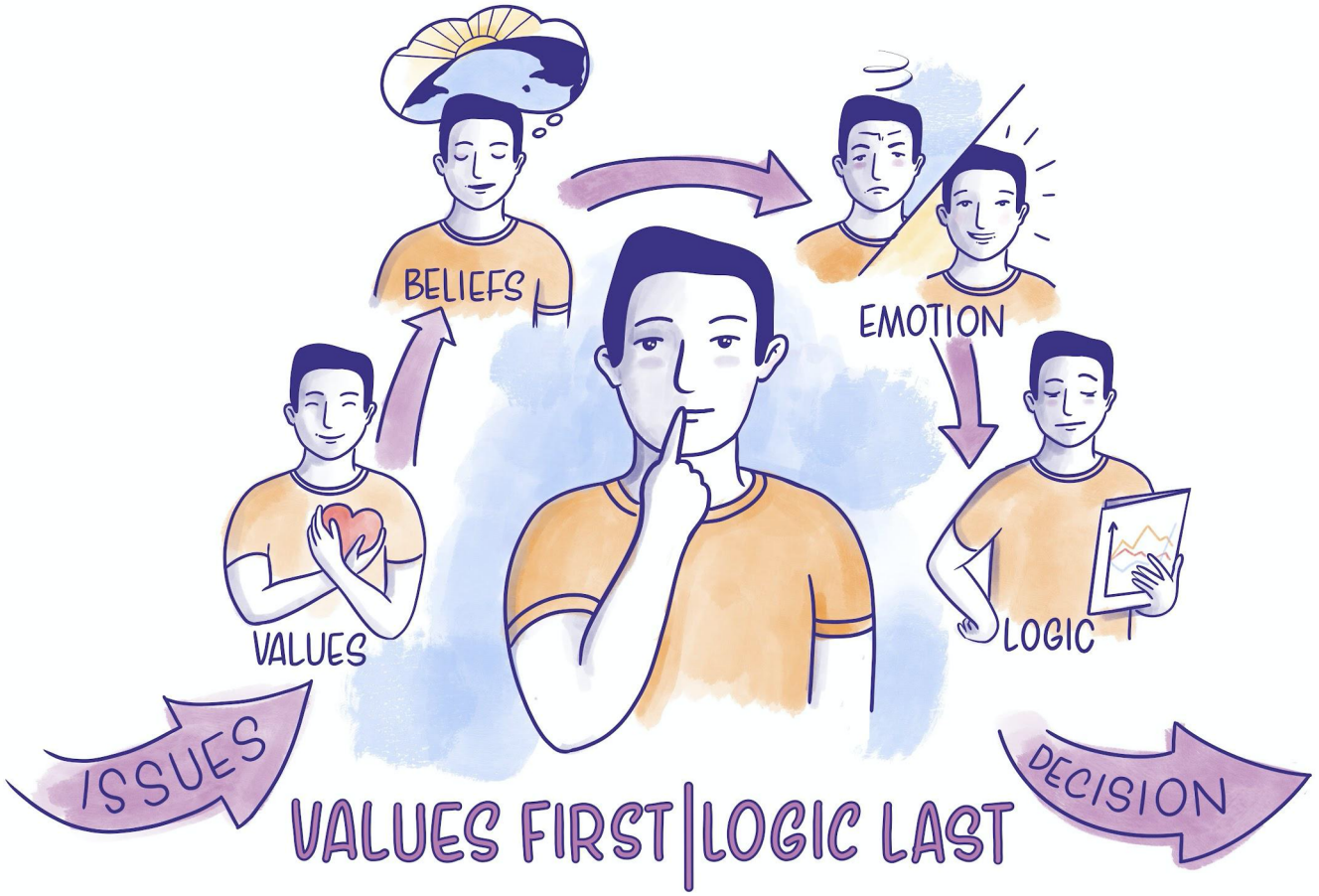
Our Vision

CHANGES that MAKE the BIGGEST DIFFERENCE
CHANGE
A Better World
IMPROVED DECISIONMAKING
DEEPENING PUBLIC THINKING
IMPACTFUL NARRATIVES
VOTE
LAW

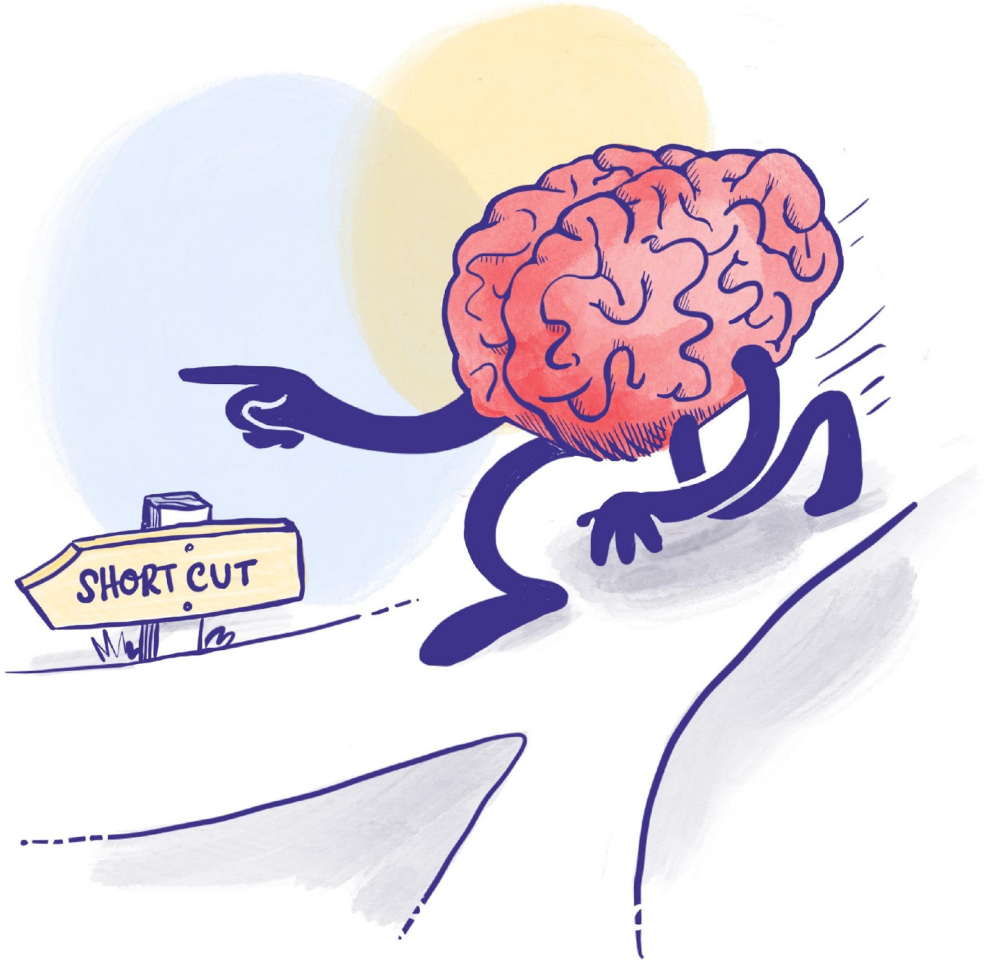
People need changes that make the biggest difference



Why do people not always see or understand the upstream issues and support that action?

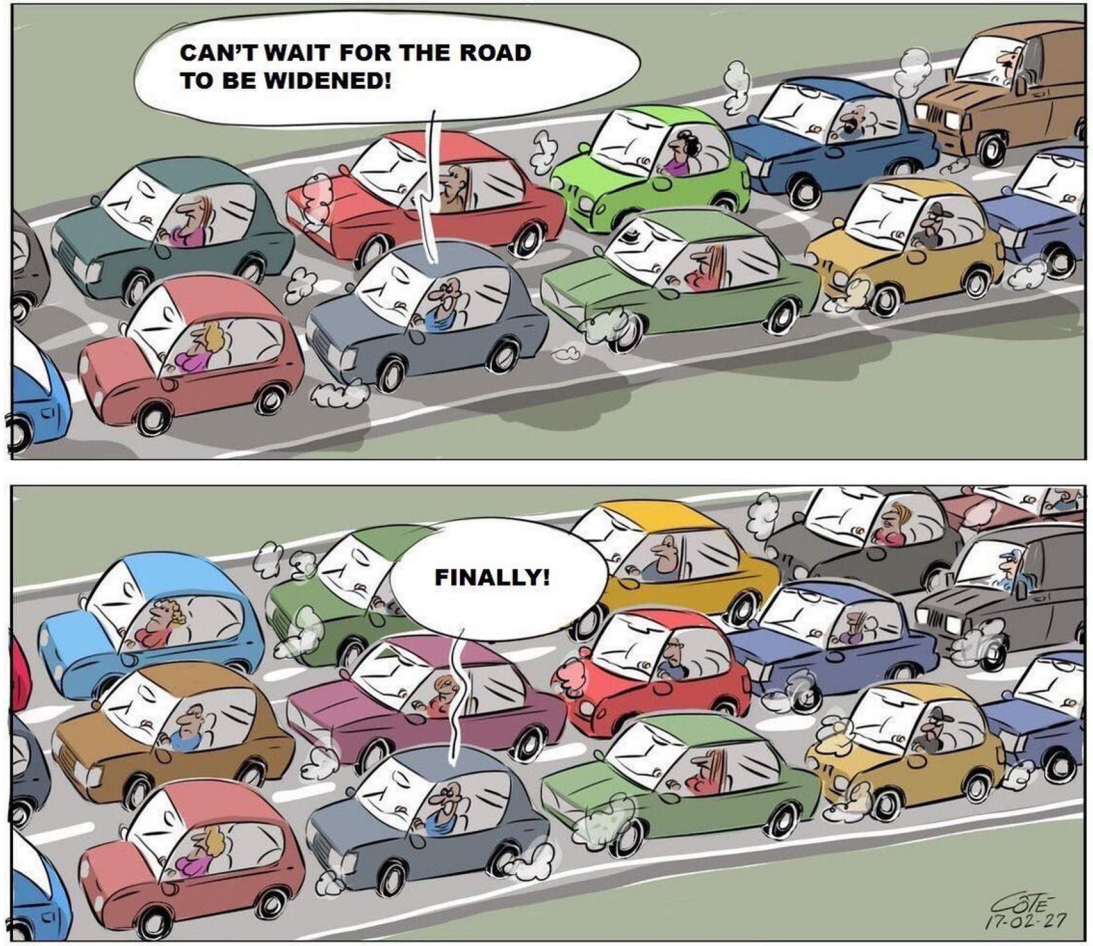

BELIEFS
EMOTION
VALUES
LOGIC
ISSUES
DECISION
VALUES FIRST | LOGIC LAST

Fast brains use short cuts

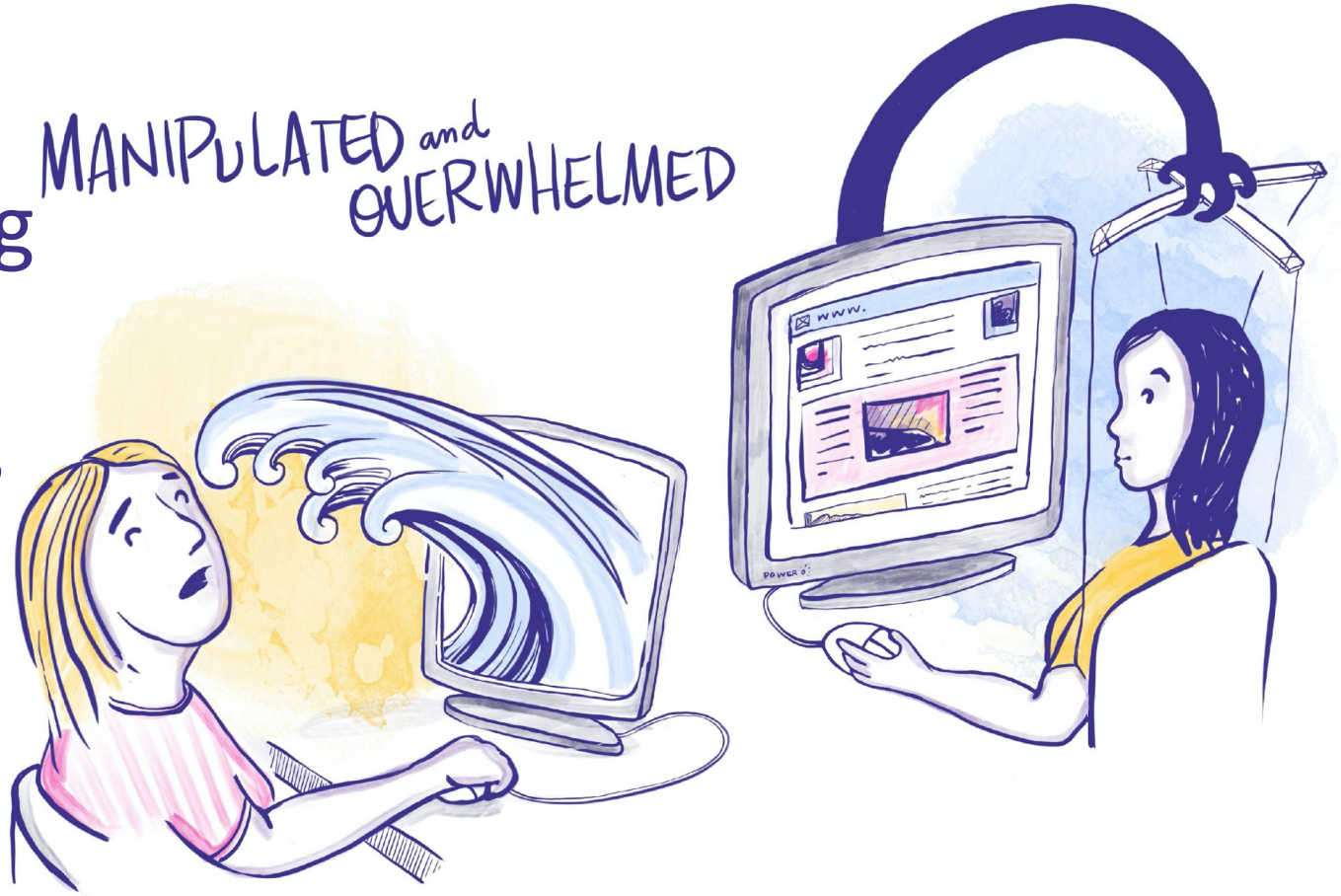


Fast thinking can be both helpful and unhelpful

Fast brains can surface unhelpful thinking in relation to complex issues



Narratives shape and bring to the surface particular ways of thinking



The bootstrap mindset and narrative influences understanding

A trip down John Key's struggle street

MARTIN VAN BEYNEN · 08:37, Sep 15 2014

The surprising personality trait rich people share

7 Dec, 2018 12:16 PM

3 minutes to read

Millionaire tells millennials: if you want a house, stop buying avocado toast

Australian real estate mogul Tim Gurner advised young people to solve their housing woes by putting their '$22 a pop' toast toward a deposit instead

'When I was trying to buy my first home, I wasn't buying smashed avocado.' Photograph: Vladislav Nosick/Getty

Stripe co-founder John Collison is the youngest self-made tech billionaire in the world, Forbes reports. He's pictured here at the 2014 Web Summit. Photo / Getty

False information (including minimisation) is political.

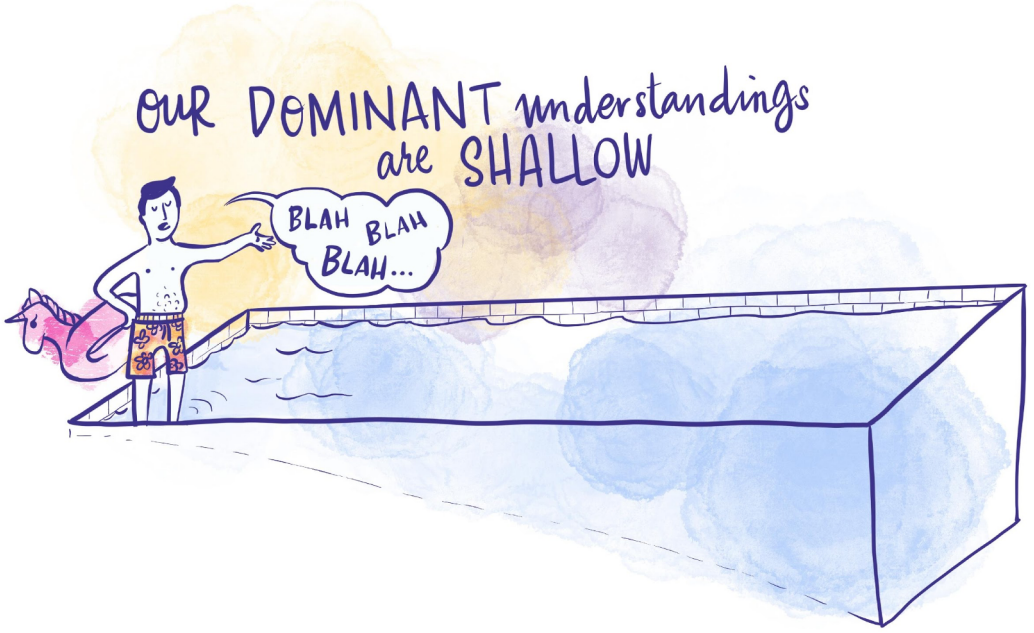
Interview

Naomi Oreskes: 'Discrediting science is a political strategy'

Zoë Corbyn

▲ Naomi Oreskes: 'It is deeply problematic if the leadership of the US government is rejecting science.' Photograph: Phil Penman

Fast thinking +
mindsets +
particular narratives
=
Unhelpful thinking



We treat failure to understand as an individual cognitive weakness, or a deficit of information

NEW ZEALAND / COVID-19

Covid-19 scepticism a failing of intellect, Phil Goff says

10:20 am on 11 September 2020

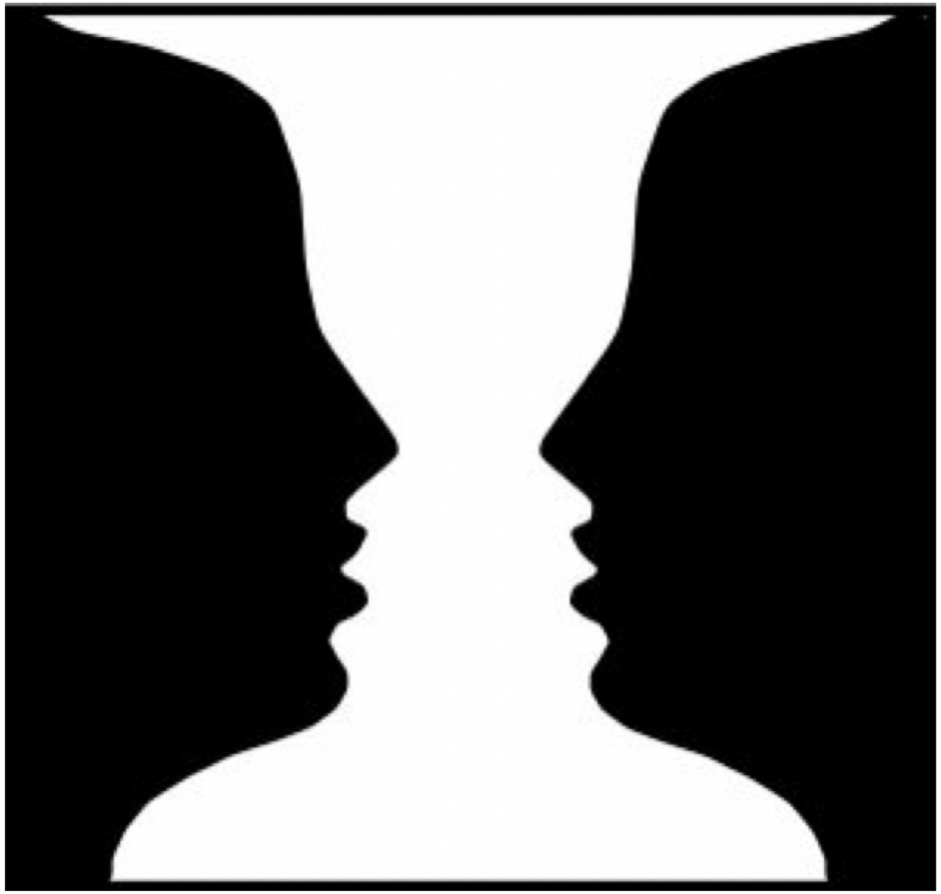
Share this

Auckland Mayor Phil Goff says people in the city are, by and large, following the rules and prosecution shouldn't be ruled out for those who break them or spread misinformation.

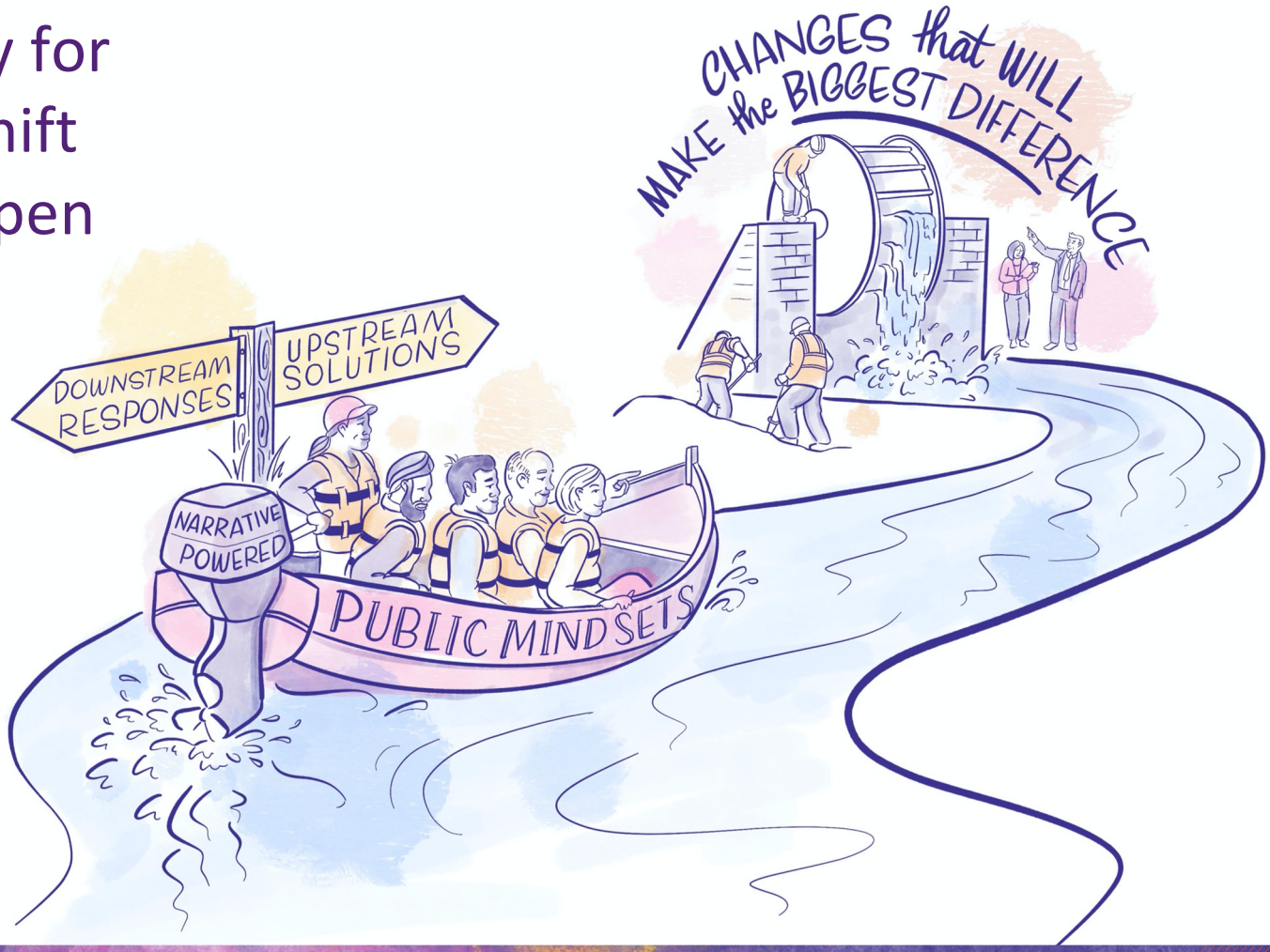
Our mindset leads to default communication

- We don’t connect with the people we need to (we focus on ideological opposed people)
- We lead with the problems
- We lead with facts & science
- Give time to the story we don’t want to tell
- Myth-bust & rebut false information (making people more familiar with unhelpful information)
- Focus on “emotional stories”

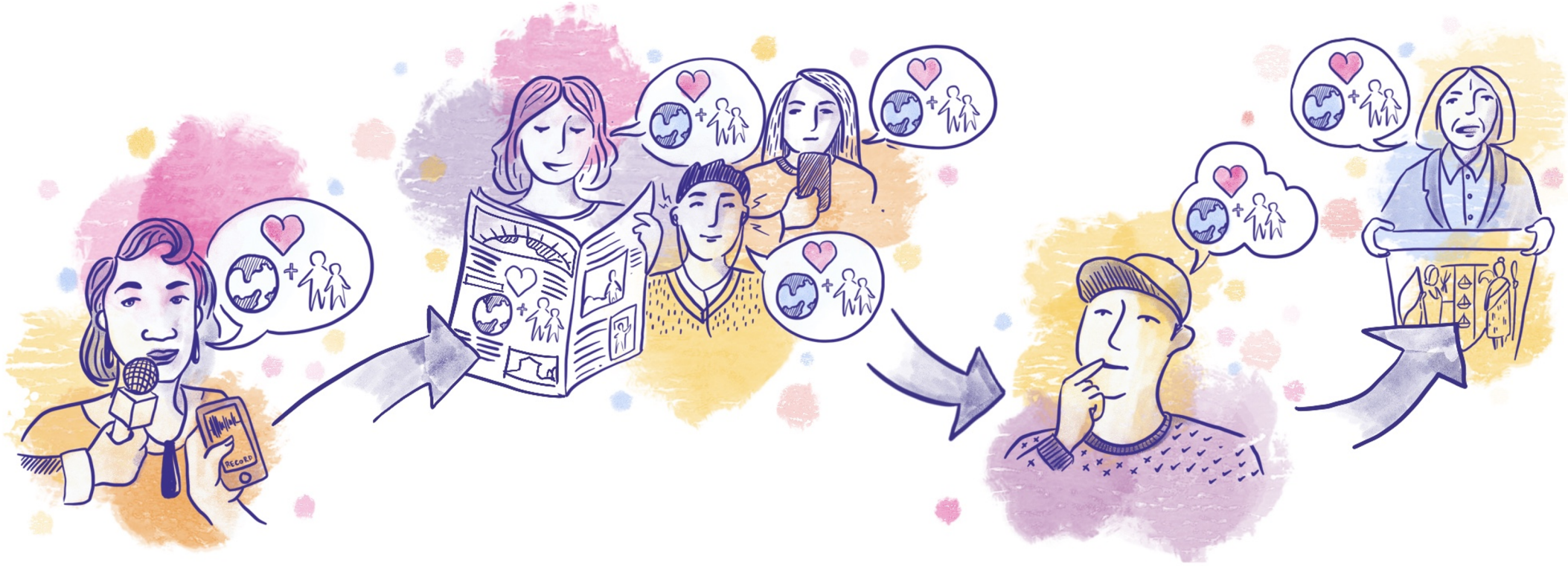
GOOD NEWS!
Most people can understand things differently with different narratives



A narrative strategy for information can shift mindsets, and deepen understanding

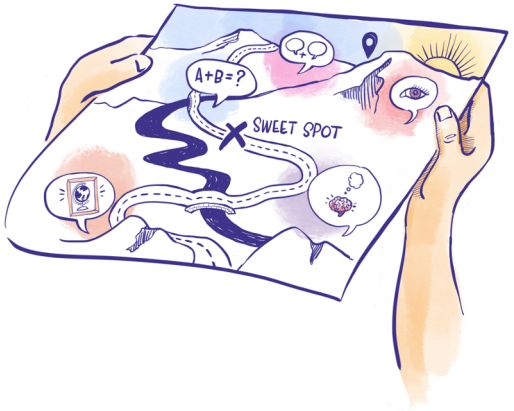


Science of Narratives

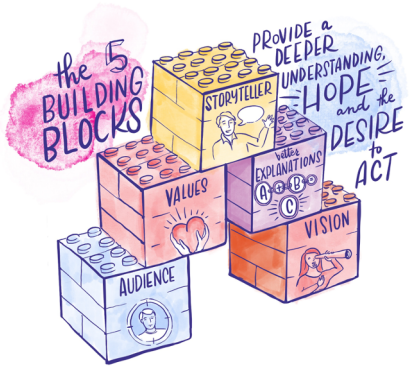


MANY WAYS of KNOWING

Three phases of narrative change



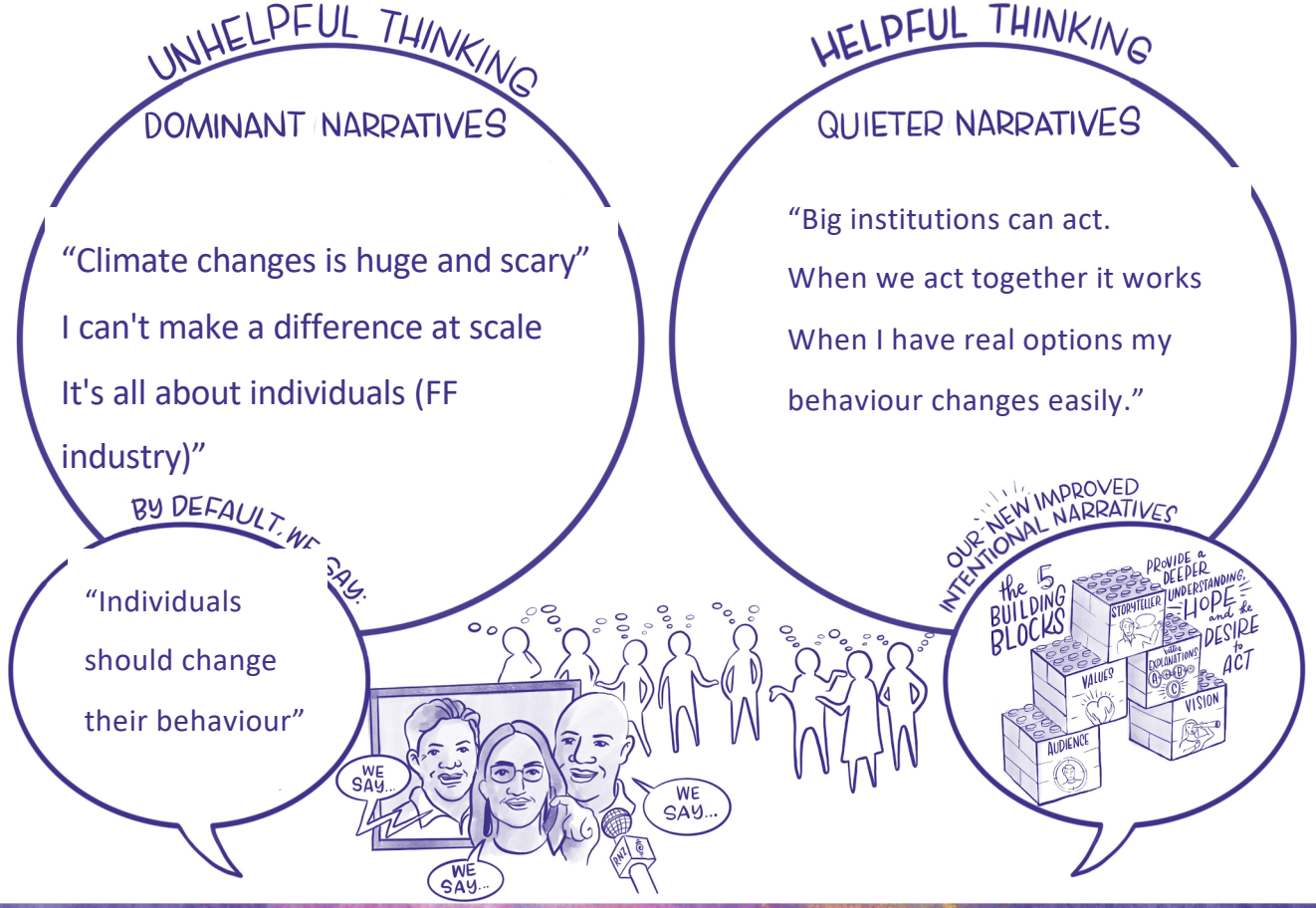
Identify existing mindsets and narratives



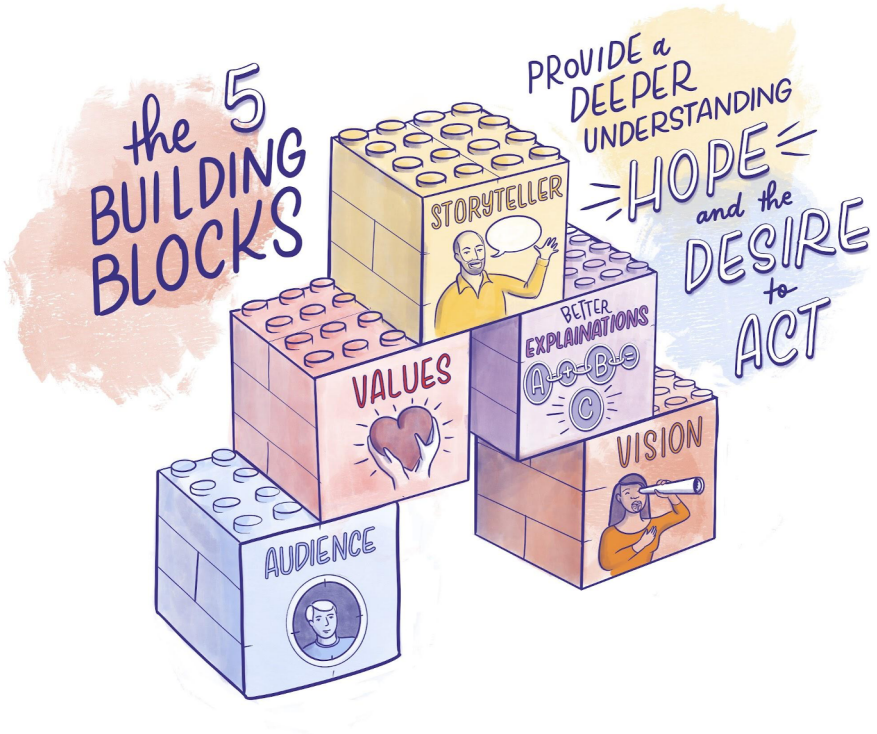
Strategy to bring to the surface helpful thinking

Equip fields of practice

Identifying mindsets and narratives



Narrative Building Blocks for Helpful Thinking



1. Talk to persuadables (not hard to persuade)
2. Lead with the cake (the better world)
3. Surface people's intrinsic, collective values
4. Explain better (don't just describe problems)
5. Understand WHO is trusted and why

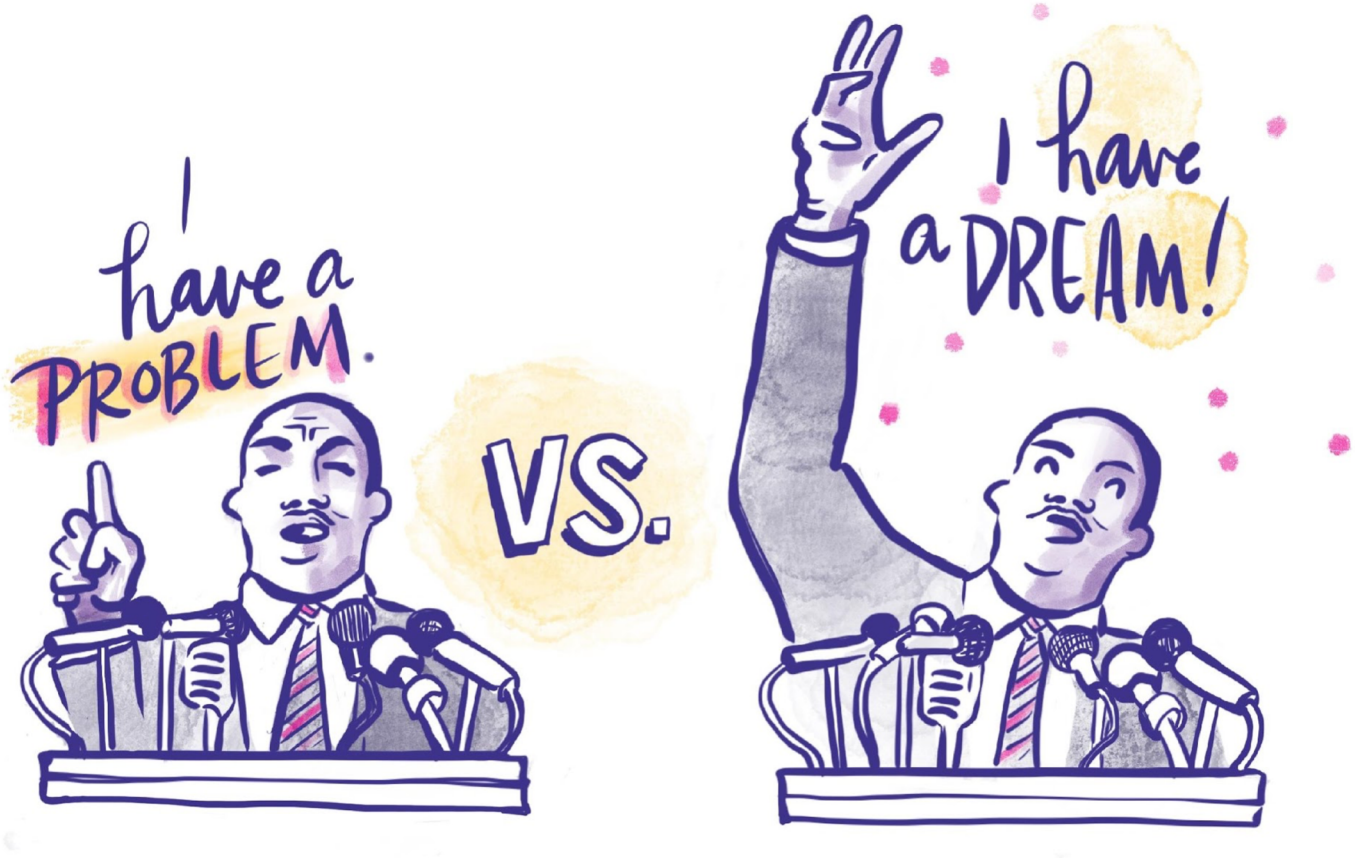
1.Audience defined by their position on your issue

Base
Those who understand and will amplify your message

Potentially Persuadable
The bulk of the population whose views are not strongly held and whose thinking can be affected by how you talk or frame an issue

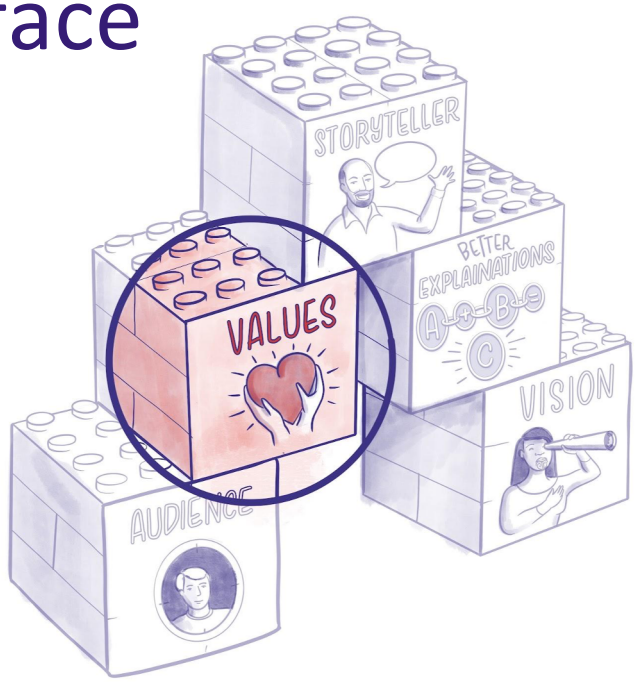
Hard to persuade
Those opposed to our policies and who are very unlikely to change their minds when we use a different message

2. Vision. A better future is possible

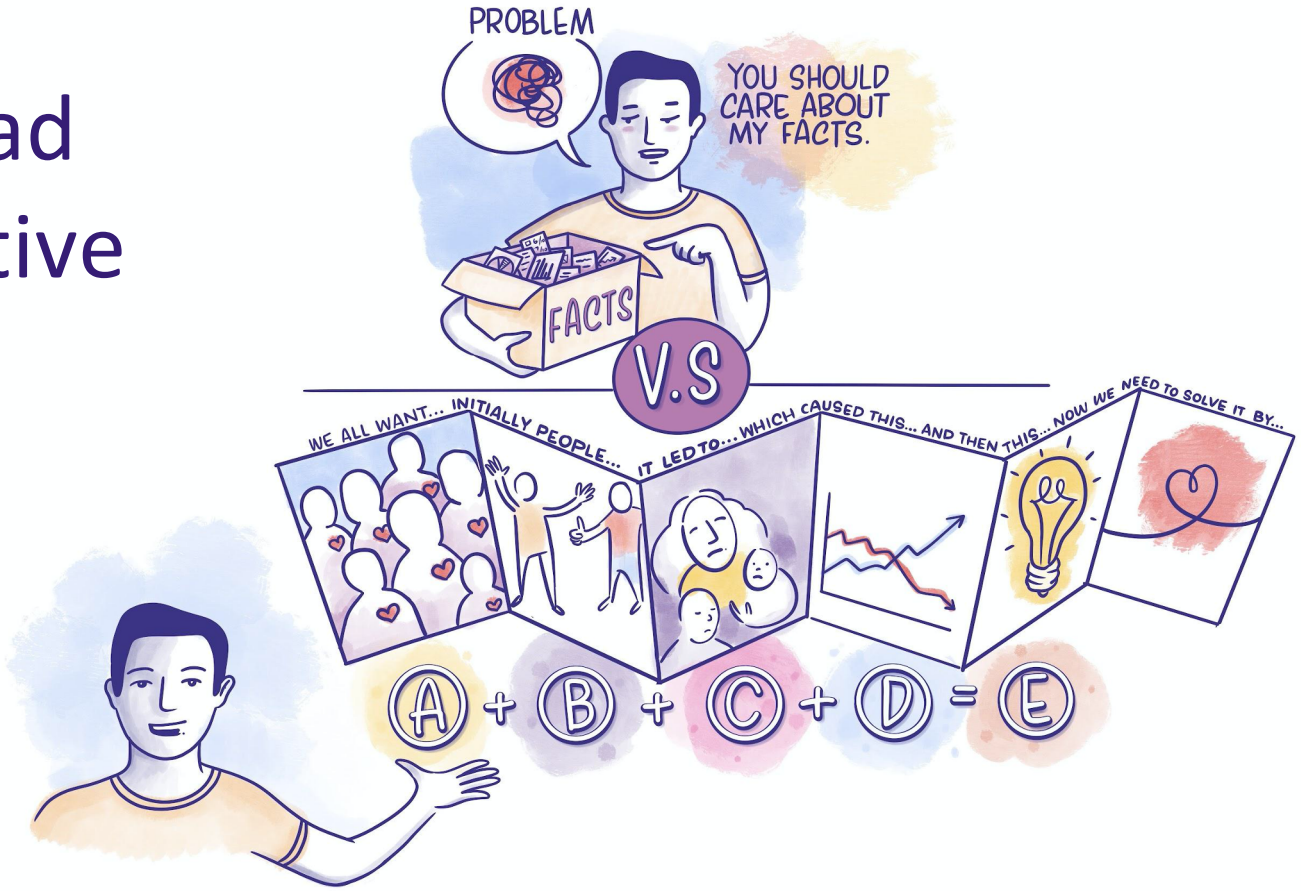


SELL the CAKE (NOT the INGREDIENTS!)
For You!
VS.
RECIPES
FLOUR

3. Bring intrinsic values to the surface



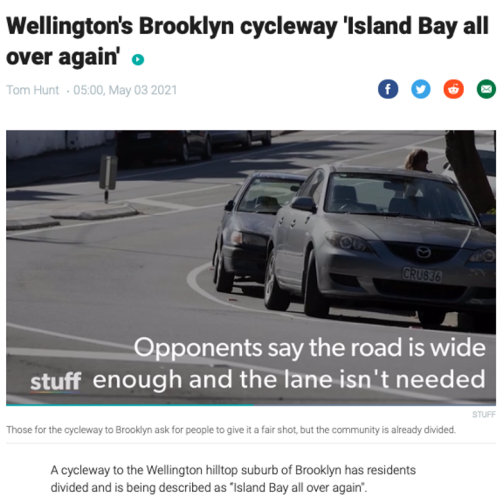
4. Better explanations lead people to effective solutions



5.Use messengers that connect people with new narratives

- Don’t assume formal experts, institutions are trusted by your audience
- Use messengers with shared values of audience
- Equip that messenger with an effective narrative strategy
- Repeat

Case Study: A narrative for transport information

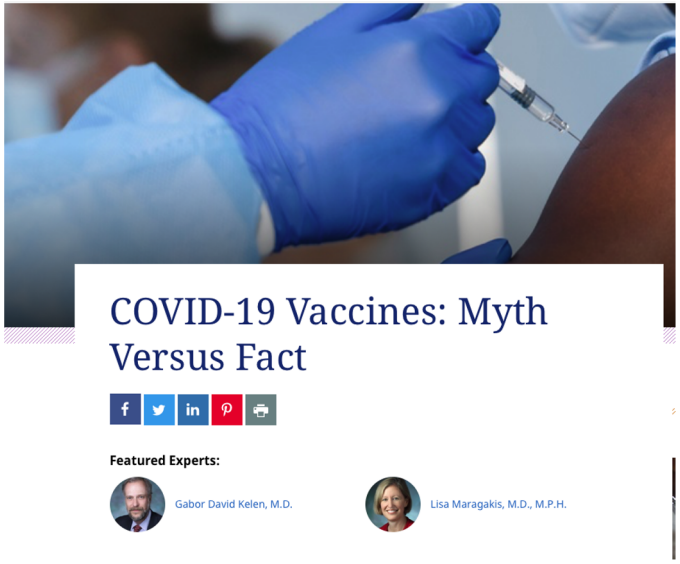


Dominant narrative:
Them versus us

Default communication: solving car & financial problems

New: Opening streets/ independence for people

Case study: A narrative for vaccination

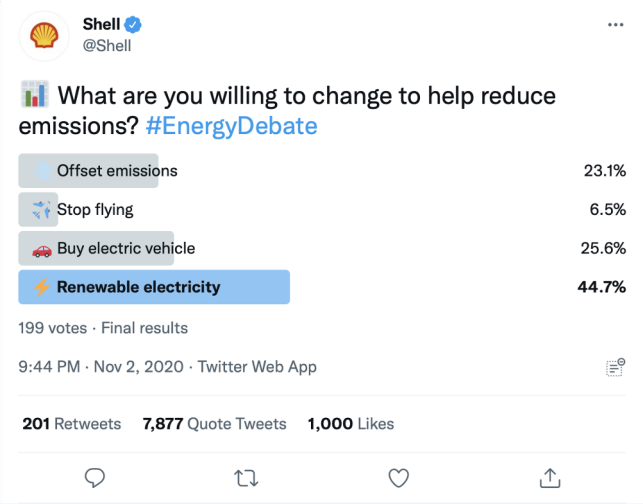


Dominant narrative: individual risk & fear

Default communication: believe science & experts

New: collective wellbeing & immunity

Case Study: A narrative for climate



Dominant narrative: Individualism/ or denial of issue

Default communication: fear/or individualism

New narrative: collaborative action at scale

5 things people in public institutions can do

1. Collaborate so you know the changes that will make the biggest difference
2. Seek to understand mindsets - how people think and reason about them, and the narratives that hold us back from understanding and accepting these changes: People care but this is not the same as understanding the effective solutions to support
3. Understand how implacable opponents will seek to control the information landscape and prevent deeper understanding
4. Avoid default communications - it performs poorly
5. Use evidence based communication to frame evidence and policy solutions that work

Our Vision

CHANGES that MAKE the BIGGEST DIFFERENCE
CHANGE
A Better World
IMPROVED DECISIONMAKING
DEEPENING PUBLIC THINKING
IMPACTFUL NARRATIVES
VOTE
LAW

The Workshop

Narratives for Change: Questions

Jess Berentson-Shaw