Communication as a Science

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- Low-information elections
- Coalition bargaining

What Unites Us?

- Goal: Inform the public

- Means: Education/exposure

- Theory:
  - "If we tell them what we know, they will change how they think and what they do."

Opportunity Awaits…

A Common Result

An explanation…

A Walk in the Woods

The Problem is Us

- We misunderstand how "they" make decisions
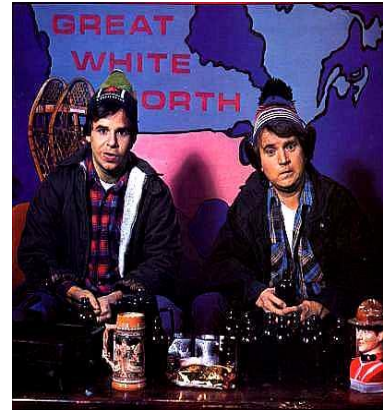
- We are mistaken *how and when* "we" can persuade.
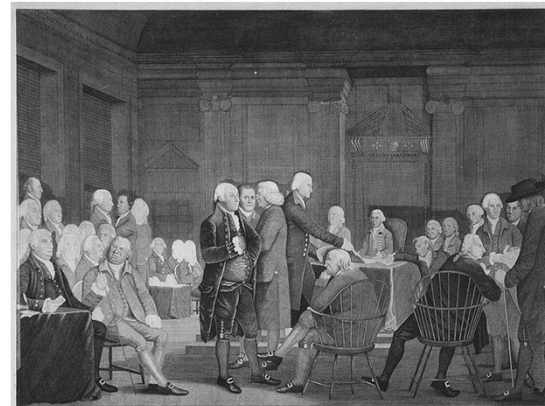
Progress Guidelines

- Biology defines possibilities.

- Social scientific studies of persuasion reveal requirements for success.

Necessary Conditions for Persuasion

Persuasion (definition)

- To move by argument, entreaty, or expostulation

- To cause to know something; to teach

- To cause belief change

- D O'Keefe (2002) *Persuasion: Theory and Research*. Sage Publications

Neuron

Dendrites

Axon

Electrical Impulses

Neurotransmitter Molecules

Receptor

Synapse
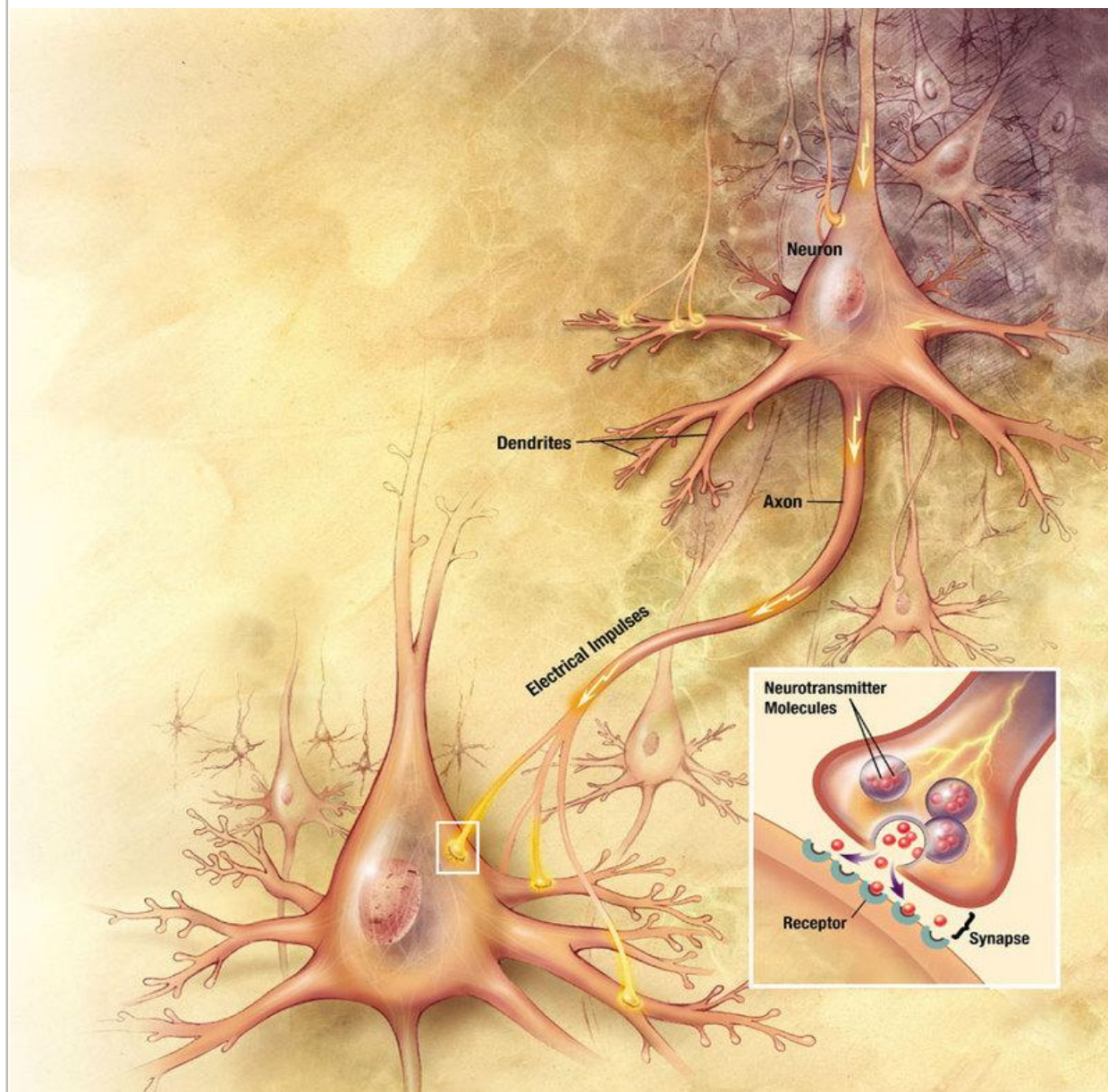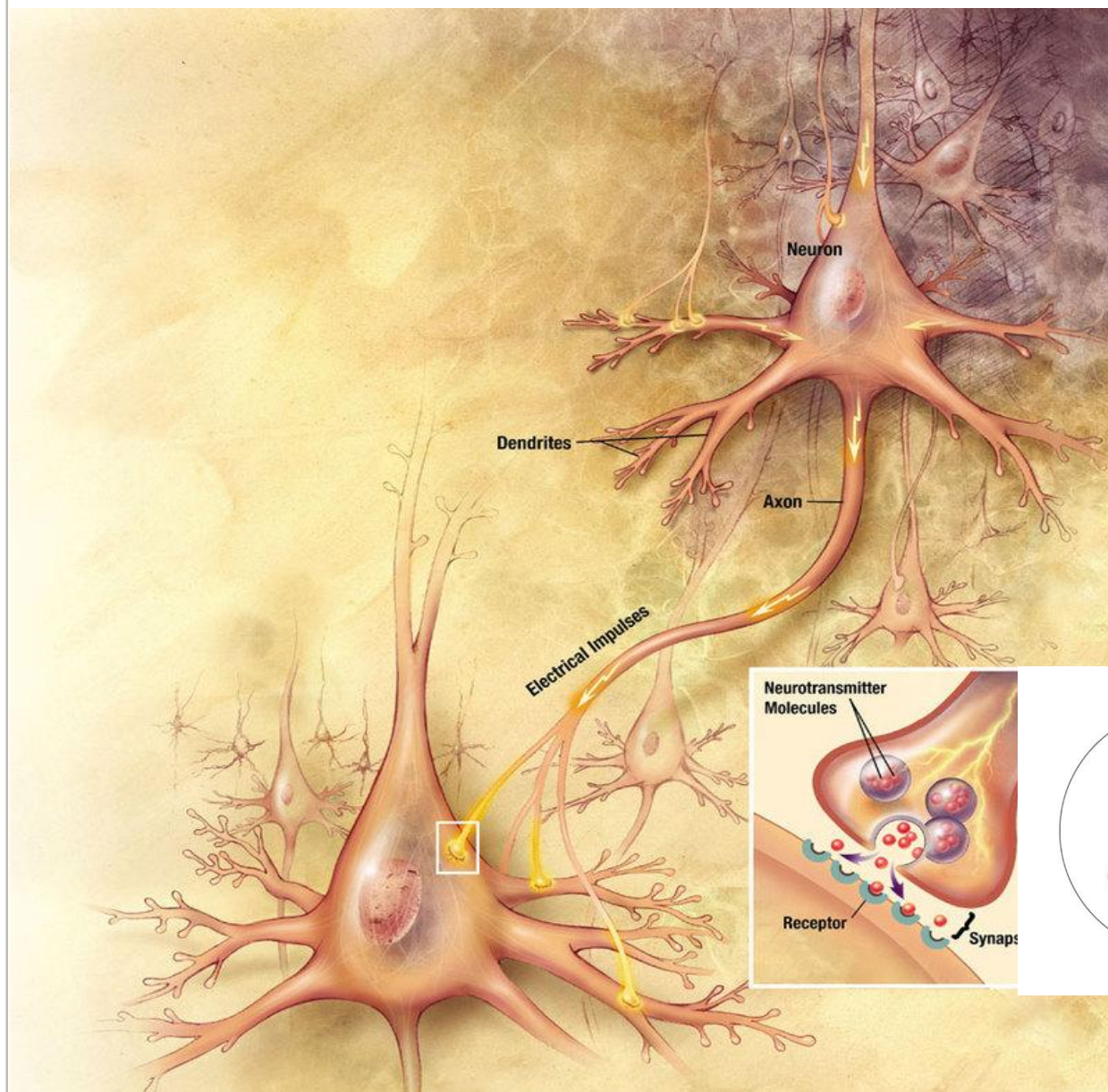
Necessary Conditions for Persuasion

- Attention

- Elaboration

- Credibility

The Battle for Attention

- WM has a very limited capacity (Miller 1956: 7±2)

- To win, the carrying utterance must:
  - imply large Δ in pleasure or pain (urgency)
  - prevail over proximate others

- AD Baddeley, N Thomson, and M Buchanan (1975). "Word length and the structure of short-term memory." J. Verbal Learning and Verbal Beh.14:575–589,1975, AD Baddeley (1999).Essentials of Human Memory. Psychology Press., N. Cowan (2001). "The magical number 4 in short-term memory: A reconsideration of mental storage capacity." Behavioral and Brain Sci. 24:87–185.

Climate Example

- To most citizens,

- The benefits of reducing emissions are: distant / abstract / uncertain

- The costs of lifestyle change are: immediate / concrete / certain

What Non-Scientific Audiences Want

- Make it close.

- Make it concrete and immediate.

- Make the desired outcome possible to achieve

B. Elaboration

Think about it…

What will you remember?

?

What will you remember?

What will you remember?

What will you remember?

What will you remember?

- If we try very hard, we can reconstruct only tiny fragments of life events.

- Even chunks that seem very important at the time.

- Implication: What a target audience remembers may not be what you want it to remember.

What does this image represent?

What does this image represent?

The answer depends on what your audience fills in
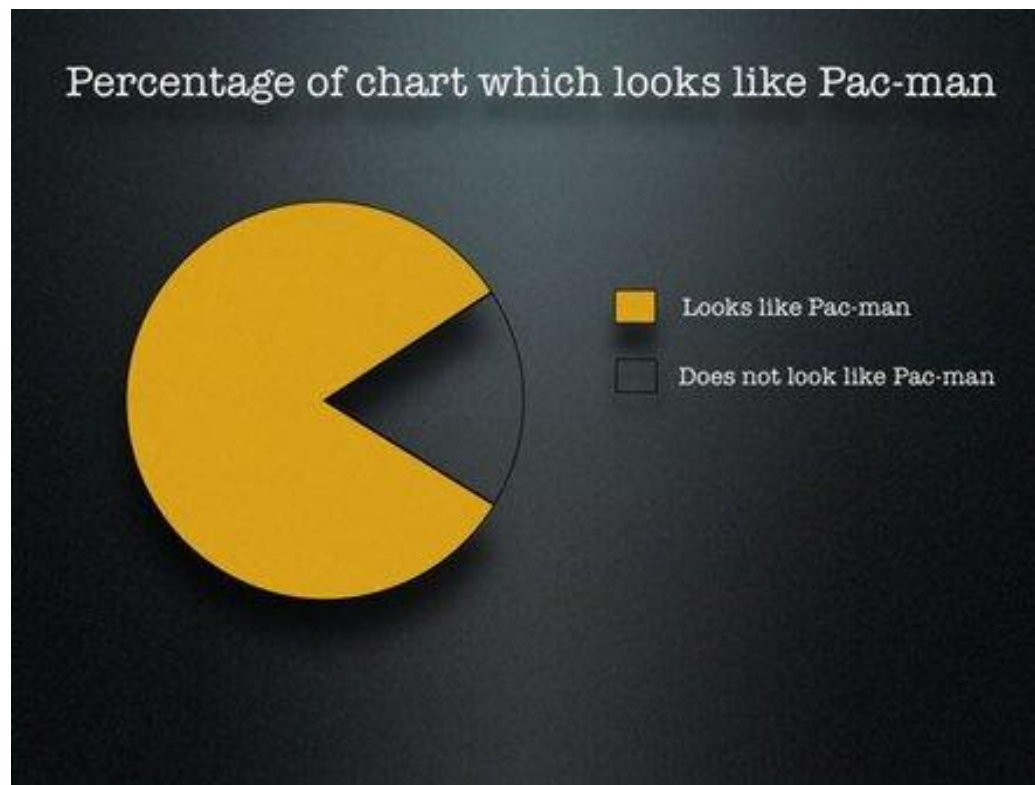
Where's the Warmth?
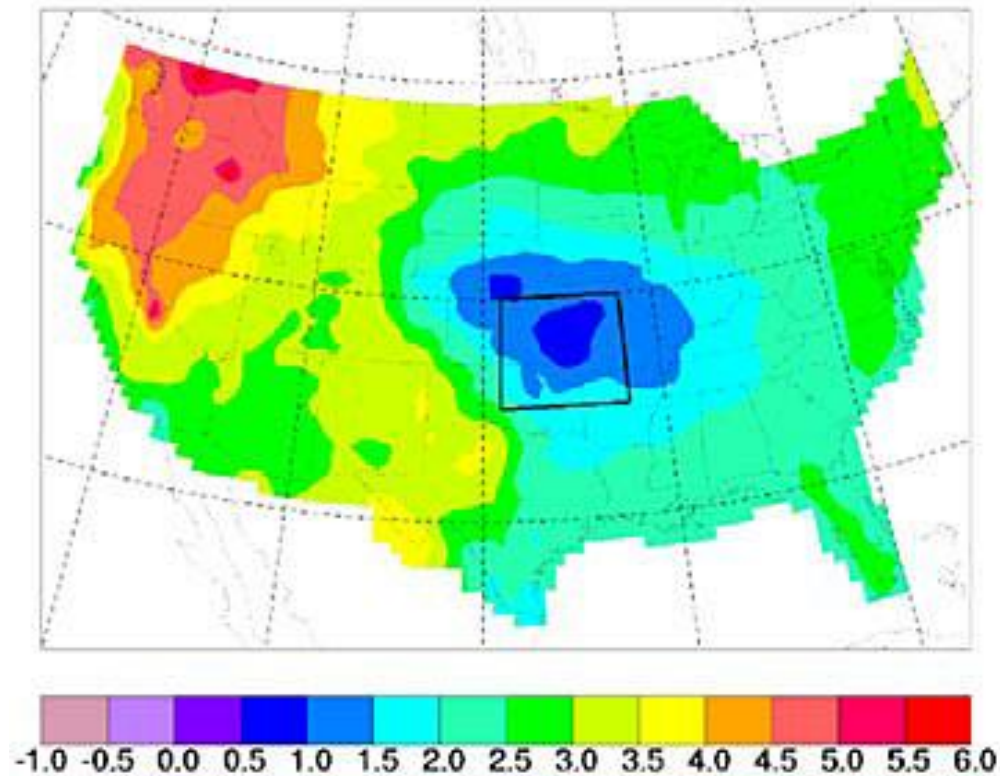
Source: ISU Regional Climate Modeling Lab

Credibility

Believe it or Not…Its Essential
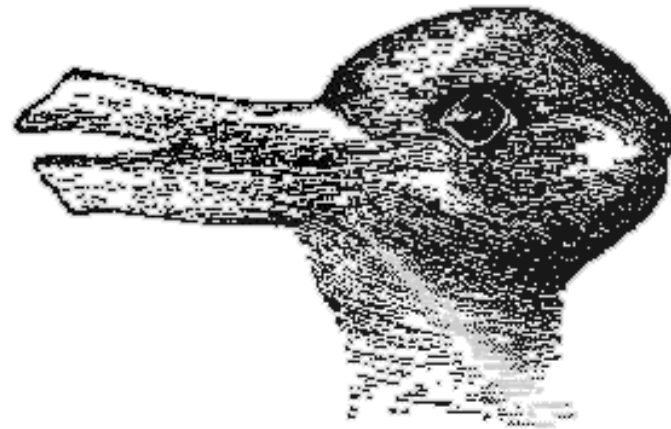
23 Oct 1892 *Fliegende Blätter*

- "duck"

…in the Political Context

- Politics entails conflicts not easily resolved.

- It yields language indeterminacy with a nasty edge.
  - Conflict brings incentives to manipulate context and meaning.

- Result: "communication games" with unusual incentives.
  - People have to work harder to learn.
  - Persuasion requires CREDIBILITY

Language and Leverage

- Political entrepreneurs seek leverage by
  - elevating favored arguments
  - and undermining others.

- If one political entrepreneur can reinterpret a statement for his own benefit, he will.

"Lipstick on a Pig"

- A phrase that dates back to the 18th century.

- Controversial in 2008, but not in 2004.

- Why?

VP Cheney (2004)

• "…Now, in the closing days of this campaign, John Kerry is running around talking tough.

• He's trying every which way to cover up his record of weakness on national defense. But he can't do it. It won't work.

• As we like to say in Wyoming, you can put all the lipstick you want on that pig, but at the end of the day it's still a pig. (Applause.)

• That's my favorite line. (Laughter.)" (19)

Senator Obama (2008)

- "John McCain says he's about change too, and so I guess his whole angle is,

- 'Watch out George Bush -- except for economic policy, health care policy, tax policy, education policy, foreign policy and Karl Rove-style politics -- we're really going to shake things up in Washington.

- That's not change. That's just calling something the same thing something different.

- You know you can put lipstick on a pig, but it's still a pig"

Governor Palin (three days earlier)

- "You know the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull?

- Lipstick"

Congressperson Drake (R-VA) (same day)

- "Barack Obama sunk to a new low today with his remarks today regarding Governor Sarah Palin....

- It is offensive not only to women, but anybody that cares about having a substantive debate on the issues."

Credibility

✖ For contested issues, high credibility is a must.

✖ Credibility is domain-specific and is bestowed by the audience.

✖ Credibility is a function of
   + Source attributes*
   + Message attributes
   + Contextual attributes*
   + Audience effects*

Credibility Formula

(Lupia & McCubbins 1998, Lupia & Menning 2009)

Source Credibility is a non-decreasing function of
Perceived interest proximity,
Perceived relative expertise,
and their interaction

It's Our Move..

We can make presentations that please "us" & affirm "our" values.

- And blame the audience if it does not persuade

OR

We can seek to persuade people who are different than us

- Let's base "our" strategies on the sciences of attention, memory, credibility, and decision making.

Opportunity Awaits…

Thank You!

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