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The January and April Change in Mind Convenings are directed by the FrameWorks Institute from Washington DC. FrameWorks designs, conducts and publishes communications research to prepare nonprofit organizations to expand their constituency base, to build public will, and to further public understanding of specific social issues. The convenings help us work on our messaging so that it is more impactful. This Change in Mind Digest will talk about what we have learned so far and how we plan to implement it.

Framing-What is it and What does it do?

When communicating about an issue, there are three possible outcomes: Changes in Behavior, Changes in Scheme (providing more information about an issue), and Changes in Context. A frame is how an issue is communicated to the target audience to try to achieve one of these kinds of changes. They represent the choices made about what is presented, emphasized, how it is explained and what is left unsaid. A frame can shift how things are perceived by redefining social problems and making them approachable to everyone.

The FrameWorks Institute identifies 12 frame elements that can be used in constructing a frame that cues a specific response in the interests of social change. These elements include: context, explanatory chains, messengers, explanatory examples, narrative, explanatory metaphors, numbers, order, solutions, tone, values, and visuals. A strategic framer need not use all of these elements to create a good message. The use of values in constructing a good message is discussed later in the Digest, but this convening also focused on the use of explanatory metaphors and explanatory chains.

Explanatory Metaphors-these are simple, concrete, and memorable comparisons that explain an abstract topic and the more explanation you can provide the better, because people will substitute their own opinions and inferences into any blanks. The FrameWorks Institute provided us with a number of useful Explanatory Metaphors about brain development that we can use to make our messaging more approachable and memorable to our audience. These include talking about brain development as a house that depends on a solid foundation, discussing serve and return communication like a sport, and skill ropes as a metaphor for the integrated nature of skills.

Explanatory Chains-These are used to explain how an issue works. It is a clear and concise way of explaining the cause of a problem and the effect it has. This will allow the public to understand connections among the factors of the problem. An explanatory chain needs at least three links-initial factor (the original cause of the problem), mediating factors (what is set in motion by the initial factor), and final consequence (the effects). A good explanatory chain frames the problem and the final consequence strategically, which allows the average citizen to be able to identify it is a problem, strikes a balance between too much and not enough information, and allows for the consideration of appropriate solutions.

The FrameWorks Institute suggests that a good explanatory chain for the effects of toxic stress on brain development starts with focusing on a value of future prosperity and presents how science demonstrates that future prosperity is undermined by stress damaging brain architecture. The mediating factor in this explanatory change is the strength of the overall brain structure. The final consequence is a discussion of the inhibition of a child's optimum development as a result of stunted cell growth.

Framing with Values

Communicating information about complex social issues can be more effective if they appeal to values. These are stable general ideals that motivate attitudes, behaviors, and policies. A value is the beginning of the reasoning upon which opinions are developed. They are important in helping the audience understand why an issue matters and what can be affected if the issue isn't addressed.

When framing with values, it is important to state the value early and why it matters, as they activate a collective orientation. Values are a great way to get people to care about a topic without focusing on strong emotional appeals. That said, a good frame using values cannot focus on just naming the value and hoping it stands on its own.

Of particular importance is the focus on the tone of the values communication. It should

teach, not preach.

Different societies have different values. The FrameWorks Institute has identified values that work well in different countries and societies. In the United States, the values of Prosperity has been identified as a good value for framing healthy childhood development. The FrameWorks Institute suggests that framing communications about early childhood around its effects on shared social and economic good fortune will make it more impactful because it will redirect thinking away from individualism and consumerism.

Focusing on prosperity allows a message to focus on the common economic and social benefits of child well-being.

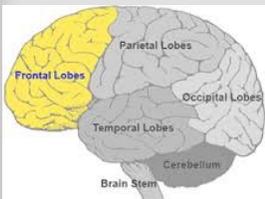
Cultural Models

A cultural model is a cognitive shortcut that has been developed through years of experience and expectations. These are important because they can affect how messages are received and what people will automatically determine to be the root cause of problems.

Cultural models:

- ◆ Are widely shared
- ◆ Exist in multiple forms for every topic
- ◆ Are durable
- ◆ Are used to structure thinking
- ◆ Are activated by associated information

One cultural model associated with early childhood development is individualism, which is a key value in the U.S. Individualism suggests "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger," which is directly counter to the effects of toxic stress on the brain. When we craft messaging about childhood adversity, we have to recognize that the cultural model of individualism may be triggered, and as a result need to construct our message in a way that counters the model.



Brain Science Brief– The Frontal Lobe

- Develops last, 20-25+
- Controls, coordinates 29 executive functions:
 - Impulse control, organizes thought / action, time orientation, reading social cues / facial expressions, predicts behavior / consequences, goal achievement, persistence, regulates amygdala
- Takes time, practice (e.g., stick shift)