Can “Listening to Understand” Make our Water Talk More Productive?

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Dedicated to enhancing local democracy through improved public communication and community problem solving
Overview

• The Bad News about our Brains
• The Bad News about our Interactions and Processes
• The Good News about Authentic Engagement
What Are We Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

The Problematic

We crave certainty and consistency
We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative
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We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views
## What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

### Stages of motivated reasoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What and who we expose ourselves to</th>
<th>selective exposure /echo chambers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How we interpret new evidence</td>
<td>confirmation bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How we make attributions and tell stories</td>
<td>egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How we make decisions</td>
<td>heuristics, self-serving bias, social proof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What we remember</td>
<td>availability bias</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

- Individually developed subconscious biases
The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

Individually developed subconscious biases

Negative interaction effects
Negative Interaction Effects

Kathryn Shultz – Being Wrong

• First step: Ignorance assumption
• Second step: Idiot assumption
• Third Step: Evil assumption
The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

Individually developed subconscious biases

Negative interaction effects

The Russell effect
The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts.

-Bertrand Russell
The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

Individually developed subconscious biases

Negative interaction effects

The Russell effect
The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

- Individually developed subconscious biases
- Negative interaction effects
- The Russell effect
- Impact of the internet
The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

1. Impact of the internet
2. The Russell effect
3. Overly adversarial political system
4. Individually developed subconscious biases
5. Negative interaction effects

The cycle begins with the impact of the internet, leading to the Russell effect, which creates an overly adversarial political system. This system then reinforces subconscious biases, leading to negative interaction effects, which further恶化s the cycle.
The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

- Media focus on conflict
- Individually developed subconscious biases
- Negative interaction effects
- The Russell effect
- Impact of the internet
- Overly adversarial processes
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What We Are Learning from Social Psychology and Brain Science

The Good

We are inherently social and seek purpose and community
We are inherently pragmatic and creative
We can overcome our bad tendencies and build better habits
The Problem We Face

Most of our processes for public engagement and community problem solving primarily activate the most negative aspects of human nature, and rarely tap into or nurture the positive.
What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

Bottom line: The most powerful thing to help people overcome their biases, refine their opinion, and build community is **genuine conversation with people they respect.**
DELIBERATION
Purpose is to make tough decisions together

DEBATE
Purpose is to evaluate quality of arguments through clash and/or expertise

DIALOGUE
Purpose is to foster understanding and respect through listening, storytelling, and conversation
Four Key Shifts

• From wicked people → to wicked problems
• From inciting the worst of human nature → to bringing out the best of human nature
• From facts as cherry picked ammunition → to facts as tools for solving problems
• From adversaries → to collaborators
The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization

- Media focus on conflict
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- The Russell effect
- Overly adversarial processes
- Impact of the internet
The Virtuous Cycle of Authentic Engagement

1. **Listening to understand**
2. **Development of mutual understanding**
3. **Building of trust and respect**
4. **Greater refinement of opinions (i.e. learning)**
5. **Potential for genuine collaboration and co-creation**

The cycle flows from one step to the next, with each step leading to the next, creating a virtuous cycle.
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Poudre River Forum
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February 2, 2018

Can “Listening to Understand” Make our Water Talk More Productive?
As you listen today—to our presenters as well as to those you interact with at breaks—practice “listening to understand” instead of focusing on defending your opinion or winning an argument.

Throughout the day, fill in below, as you wish. Then, at 3pm, you will have the opportunity to share something you wrote with folks at your table. As you discuss, listen to what your tablemates have to say and ask questions that help you better understand their point of view—without responding with your own point of view. Everyone at the table will have a chance to share something they have written.

Something I heard today that encouraged me:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Something I heard today that discouraged me:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________