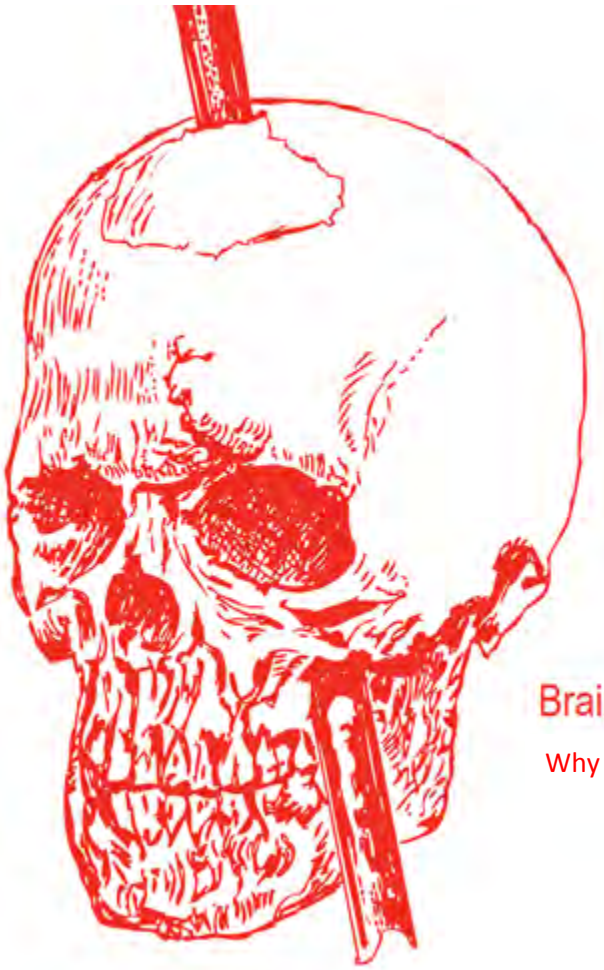
Ogilvy Public Relations

Christopher Graves 2014



Brain. Behavior. Story.

Why Public Relations Needs to Return to its Scientific Roots.

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Over a six-year period, Ogilvy Public Relations Global CEO, Christopher Graves, digested more than 800 pieces of primary research to connect emerging findings in behavioral economics, neuroscience and narrative theory in order to craft a new point of view on narrative effectiveness in communications. The outcome has been a series of articles, a 75-minute video, and a workshop for Ogilvy & Mather employees and clients all over the world. The findings overturn much of what communications professionals believed through conventional wisdom. Below is a summary of that workshop and its annotated scientific support materials. The workshop itself has been received with high emotion and requests for repeat sessions for clients from BP to Unilever. Based on this work, Graves has been asked to lead the industry in further research by the Institute for Public Relations.

Articles in trade magazines appear in the appendix, as do links to videos of sessions Graves has led with scientists.

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Back to our roots

While public relations once called itself an applied social science, it now risks being left behind as anachronistic. After decades of fine tuning its execution in media relations, mapping influencers, developing detailed plans to segment and target separate audiences for messaging, PR has not kept pace with scientific discoveries in behavioral economics, neuroscience and narrative theory. But now, by connecting three historic accidents and discoveries, we can revitalize this social science to bring far more effectiveness and scientific underpinning to the art of narrative that lies at the very core of successful public relations and all communications.

1. The hole in the head ("Gage who is no longer Gage")

On September 13, 1848, just about 4:30 in the afternoon, a young railroad foreman near Cavendish, Vermont was going about his job of clearing the New England boulders from the path of the new high tech transport mode known as the railroad. He did so by blowing them up. But on this afternoon, the 13-pound steel rod he used to tamp down the black powder in the hole accidentally scraped the stone, sparking an explosion that sent the rod shooting up under his left eye and tearing through the top of his head. The local newspaper reported "The most singular circumstance connected with this melancholy affair is, that he was alive at two o'clock this afternoon and in full possession of his reason, and free from pain."[1] While Gage did survive, it turned out he may not have been "in full possession of his reason" after the accident.

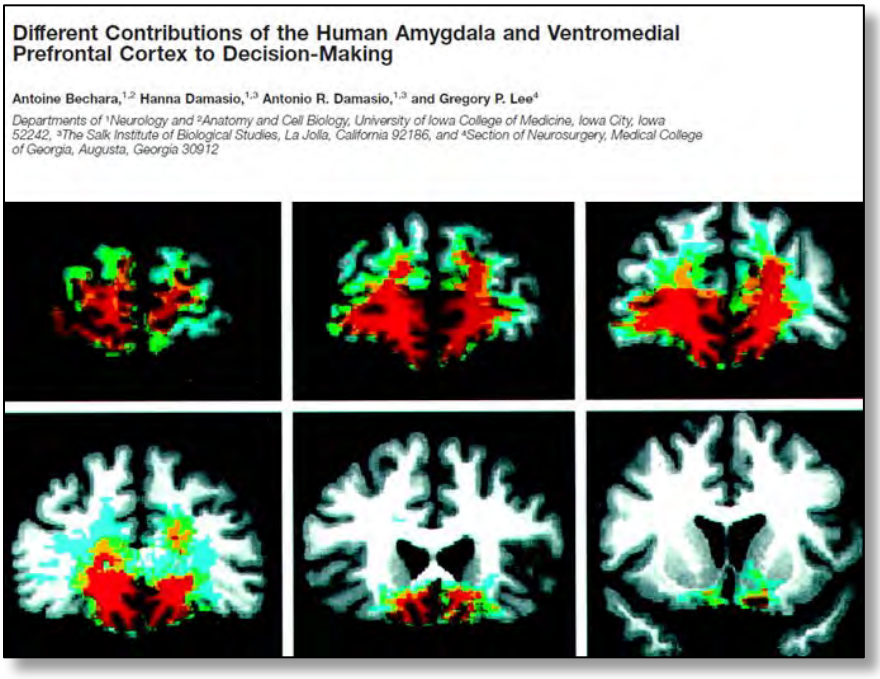
While today there is a plaque today in Cavendish that tells the tale of Phineas Gage, perhaps it should also mark the spot where the modern era of effective communications should have begun.

Gage's case triggered many neuroscientists, in CSI

[1] *Free Soil Union* newspaper (Ludlow, Vermont), September 14, 1848

fashion, to determine just what specific parts of the brain were damaged. Their obsession stemmed from the contemporaneous reports of Gage suffering a personality shift and an inability to make sound decisions after the rod carved a donut hole in his brain.

In 1994, neuroscientists Antonio Damasio and Hannah Damasio, suffering from a lingering curiosity about the Gage accident and the reports of associated behavioral changes, rebuilt Gage's brain with 3-D software. Their research ("The return of Phineas Gage: clues about the brain from the skull of a famous patient") put Gage into the same category of anatomical damage as twelve patients Antonio Damasio had studied. He concluded: "Their ability to make rational decisions in personal and social matters is invariably compromised and so is their processing of emotion. On the contrary, their ability to tackle the logic of an abstract problem, to perform calculations, and to call up appropriate knowledge and attend to it remains intact. The establishment of such a pattern has led to the hypothesis that "**emotion and its underlying neural machinery participate in decision making…**"


Different Contributions of the Human Amygdala and Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex to Decision-Making

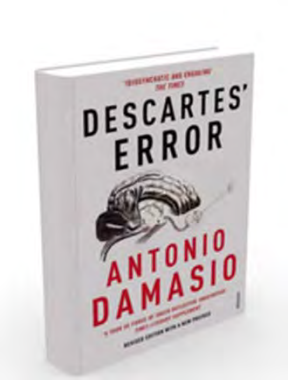
Antoine Bechara,[1,2] Hanna Damasio,[1,3] Antonio R. Damasio,[1,3] and Gregory P. Lee[4]

Departments of [1]Neurology and [2]Anatomy and Cell Biology, University of Iowa College of Medicine, Iowa City, Iowa 52242, [3]The Salk Institute of Biological Studies, La Jolla, California 92186, and [4]Section of Neurosurgery, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, Georgia 30912

Damasio proceeded with more digging and scanning, using functional MRI to peer into brains in real time, from which he crafted a breakthrough theory[2] that humans do not make decisions by delegating such tasks to purely cognitive, or reason-oriented, parts of their brain. Instead, there is an interplay of the emotional governing center (the limbic system, primarily the amygdala) and the more evolved area of contemplation (pre-frontal cortex). In his book, *Descartes' Error,* Damasio declares "We are not thinking machines. We are feeling machines that think." Or as a New York Times book reviewer paraphrased behavioral economist and author Daniel Ariely: "We aren't cool calculators of self-interest who sometimes go crazy; we're crazies who are, under special circumstances, sometimes rational."[3]

[2] "Different Contributions of the Human Amygdala and Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex to Decision-Making" The Journal of Neuroscience, July 1, 1999, *19*(13):5473–5481

[3] "Emonomics" by David Berreby, The New York Times, March 16, 2008



> We are not thinking machines.
> We are feeling machines that think.

Damasio posited a theory called the "somatic marker." That is, every moment of every day, our brain stamps an emotion onto everything we experience. That emotion, or somatic marker, helps us project into the future and decide what to do when we encounter a similar situation again. If you go to a casino, for example, and gamble away all your money, your brain will mark that moment with a feeling. The next time you go to a casino, the brain will dredge up that old queasy feeling and you will likely behave more cautiously. That is, unless they have a brain abnormality that interferes with this communication between the emotion and cognitive centers of the brain, in which case they act more like a self-destructive addict.

Damasio writes of brain-damaged patients who have lost no intellectual reasoning capabilities at all; indeed they can reason every aspect of a decision but never come to a final conclusion. "The ability to manipulate data and make analysis of costs and benefits is maintained in a very cold way…" says Damasio[4] "The reason they can't choose, is they haven't got this lift that comes from emotion. It is emotion that allows you to mark things as good, bad or indifferent. They cannot conjure up, for a given situation, an emotional state, that will help them decide in one direction or another."

Think of it this way. You are walking through a forest and suddenly you catch a glimpse of something near your foot—a snake! You freeze. Your amygdala, the fight or flight emotion center of the brain is on full alert. Then, gradually, you understand that it is not a snake but a stick that looks quite like a snake. That's your ventromedial prefrontal cortex kicking in to temper the amygdala's panic. At this point your brain will also stamp the moment with a somatic marker so in the future you may not panic so quickly. The amygdala, that emotion center, is extremely powerful in young people. "It is believed that a developing amygdala contributes to two behavioral effects: the tendency for adolescents to react explosively to situations rather than with more controlled responses, and the propensity for youth to misread neutral or inquisitive facial expressions of others as a sign of anger. And one of the last areas to mature is the prefrontal cortex, located just behind the forehead."[5] That agent of calm, the prefrontal cortex, does not mature until about 25 years of age. So until then, the amygdala is free to hijack

[4] Aspen Ideas Festival Interview July 4, 2009
[5] Adolescent brain development: Implications for drug use prevention by Jessie Breyer, B.A. & Ken C. Winters, Ph.D.

the brain. In short, a teenager is all snake and no stick. So when targeting a teen audience, you can forget the slower, "System 2" contemplative thinking with the prefrontal cortex as delineated by Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman in his book *Thinking: Fast and Slow*.

But even when the prefrontal cortex has matured, humans cannot make decisions based on cool, hard analysis alone. In fact, merely asking people to explain why they prefer one item over another leads them to make poor choices. Professor Timothy Wilson at the University of Virginia discovered this in a much-cited experiment[6] wherein allowed subjects to choose any one poster among five choices to take home. But Wilson told the other half they must explain their choice before taking one. Among those who had no obligation to articulate why they liked a given poster, 95% chose an impressionist painting poster. Yet among the group forced to explain their choice, 50% chose a silly animal poster (think "LOL cats" style). Wilson checked back with each

Which would you choose?

participant several weeks later to ask how happy they were with their choices. Those who did not have to explain their choice and who chose an impressionist painting poster were fine with their choice. However, the majority of those who took the humorous animal posters were unhappy with their choice. There is a growing body of research on the impact of explaining one's choice on the decision itself. It appears when we interrupt the emotional process with a forced, analytical one, we make decisions we regret. Wilson concluded that "the quality of the art posters that made them appealing… were difficult to verbalize whereas positive aspects of the humorous posters were easy to verbalize…" In other words, if your audience is unsure of its ability to defend its choice, it will go for the choice most easily and readily defensible, even if that is a choice they don't really like. No one wants to feel stupid defending his or her choice.

[6] Introspecting about reasons can reduce post-choice satisfaction, 1993, by Timothy D. Wilson et al

Emotion not only forcefully guides our decisions, it boosts our ability to recall just about anything. Several experiments[7] involving fMRI brain scans point to the activation of the amygdala (emotion center) alongside the hippocampus (memory). Emotion serves as a kind of turbo booster, strengthening the imprint of the memory. Some experiments have shown that the emotion need not be related at all to the item or task being burned into memory—just having an unrelated but strongly emotional catalyst works to make the experience or task more memorable.[8]

[7] The Journal of Neuroscience, July 12, 2006 • 26(28):7416 –7423

[8] **"**Memory enhancement by a semantically unrelated emotional arousal source induced after learning" by KA Nielson, 2005

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Lessons for Communicators from Accident 1:

Emotional narrative beats analytical messaging.
All human decision making depends heavily on emotion. Our efforts to persuade or explain need to also be rooted in emotion-triggering narratives. Whether it is a matter of reputation (combatting false allegations, restoring trust, recovering from a crisis) or of products (comparisons, launches), if we depend merely on the powers of fact and cognitive abilities of our audiences to weigh those facts, we will fail in our mission.

As companies strive to differentiate themselves, they often default to an analytical process of messaging. That process leads companies to cram as many benefits or positive attributes as possible into an over-edited, clinical wording of each component message, or a self-congratulatory (and possibly baseless) aggrandizement of the company or brand's powers. Once everyone agrees on just the right messages, they get disseminated and repeated, hoping the discipline of consistency coupled with frequency will result in an improved reputation or image. But we now know the human brain will see that as just so much noise, and will not allow those committee-architected messages to persuade or move it in any way. Instead, we should craft an emotionally-bonding narrative, complete with internal struggle, rich with sensory details, and leading to a scenario-based positive outcome.

And the role for facts? Those are the ammo we must supply so that someone can rationalize their decision to others.

2. The Backfire Effect

Changing someone's mind, persuading them to rethink their position, can feel nearly impossible. While ubiquity of information should provide enough public domain evidence to solve every argument, the opposite has happened; facts polarize people rather than bring them together in a moment of epiphany. The English philosopher Francis Bacon articulated this four centuries ago, writing:

> "The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion (either as being the received opinion or as being agreeable to itself) draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects and despises, or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects; in order that by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusions may remain inviolate."

In 1979, professor of psychology and author Charles G. Lord sought answers[9] as to whether we might overcome the Bacon principle, or whether humans are always held hostage to their initial beliefs even in the face of compelling and contradictory evidence. After identifying two groups of respondents into their respective beliefs as to whether capital punishment is an effective deterrent to crime, he then supplied each group with a summary of research showing either that capital punish is or is not effective. That was followed by a more robust, scientifically sound piece of research that supported the summary. Then, he exposed each group to different research with opposite findings. Rather than softening their initial beliefs when evidence challenged them, each group discounted the research that did not align with their pre-existing beliefs, saying it was not as sound as the research that agreed with them. Scientists call this phenomenon "confirmation bias." Lord and his co-researchers determined that objective evidence "will frequently fuel rather than calm the fires of debate."

Since then, an entire field of research around confirmation bias (also sometimes called "motivated reasoning") has sprung up. While it may not have been particularly surprising that people cling to their beliefs to the degree that they filter out any evidence that challenges their beliefs, an unexpected finding of the experiment was a backfire. Indeed it is now called the "backfire effect." Research has shown that when people are shown evidence they may be wrong, they not only discount that evidence, they become even more extreme in their original belief.

Drew Westen, director of the departments of psychology and psychiatry at Emory University, performed an updated version of Lord's experiment using fMRI brain scans. He had subjects self-identify as to political views and split them into two groups. He showed them their rival party's presidential candidate reversing himself on an issue. He then showed them their own

[9] "Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence" by Lord, Ross, Lepper, 1979

favorite candidate also reversing himself. Just as with Lord's experiment, both groups clung to their initial beliefs in the face of new evidence undermining those beliefs. They saw their favorite candidate's reversal of views as something smart, while condemning the flip-flops of the other candidate. When peering into what was going on in their brains during all this, Westen observed, "We did not see any increased activation of the parts of the brain normally engaged during reasoning. What we saw instead was a network of emotion circuits lighting up, including circuits hypothesized to be involved in regulating emotion, and circuits known to be involved in resolving conflicts."

When partisan subjects saw their own favorite candidate "flip-flopping" on an issue, Westen's research[10] showed correlations in the brain with areas that govern dissonance and even pain (the anterior cingulate cortex). The theory goes, therefore, that we tell ourselves little lies and reject contradictory evidence to make that dissonance, that pain of being wrong, go away. Worse, says Westen, once we do that, another part of the brain (ventral striatum) kicks in with brain chemical rewards (dopamine) to reinforce that little lie. The implication is that humans are wired through evolutionary development to resist being proven wrong.

Jason Reifler, assistant professor of political science at Georgia State University, has also pushed the investigation into motivated reasoning. In 2011[11], he also encountered a strong "backfire effect" when presenting subjects with evidence they were incorrect. Even if the evidence appeared to be incontrovertible, subjects still discounted a truth they could find easily in the public domain rather than change their minds. They, too, dug in their heels and reported feeling even more convinced and determined than ever after seeing evidence contradicting their views. But Reifler did discover an interesting avenue to opening minds. He found that if you first primed subjects with self-affirming attributes (e.g. letting them write about value important to them and an instance when they felt particularly good about themselves) they were more flexible and more willing to reconsider their views. He attributes this to disassociating the identity of the person from their view. If you do not do this, he theorizes, then a person's identity and self-esteem is inextricably linked to the view they've espoused, so attacking their view amounts to attacking them as a person. Reifler also found, without being to explain why, that graphical evidence tends to persuade more effectively than text.

[10] "Neural Bases of Motivated Reasoning: An fMRI Study of Emotional Constraints on Partisan Political Judgment in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election," Westen et al, 2006

[11] "Opening the Political Mind? The effects of self-affirmation and graphical information on factual misperceptions," Jason Reifler and Brendan Nyhan, 2011

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Compounding this inability for humans to easily consider evidence they might be wrong is a principle known as “homophily.” It is often defined as “birds of a feather flock together.” Homophily is a profound and primal force in humans that binds people together in clans, tribes or groups. But it also signals to tribes who is not an insider. Those who send cues they are from an out-group are exiled and nothing they say will be accepted at face value. The brain reinforces this evolutionary pull by rewarding those accepted into a group with a bit of oxytocin, also known as the “trust hormone” first encountered in life when newborns breast feed. The belongingness urge is so powerful among humans that the threat of being ejected from a group brings on a sharp activation of the anterior cingulate cortex—the region in the brain that governs physical as well as social exclusionary pain.

Imagine now, if your communications overlook the huge power of homophily. You risk being immediately in the out-group. To avoid being rejected from the get-go, you must choose representatives with whom each group feels comfortable, messengers or narrators who send the proper cues that identify them as in-group members. In some cases, you may choose only one group by design, further eliciting warm trust and passion from the in-group by wantonly differentiating from the out-group. One example is the PC vs Mac campaign from 2011 which reaffirmed those who identified with or aspired to belong to the Mac group that the PC tribe was uncool. Someone sending verbal or physical cues that they are with the PC tribe would encounter immediate resistance from the Mac tribe and have little hope of changing their mind on an issue, especially if they fell prey to the evidence-driven confirmation bias. In 2013, Samsung understood the power of homophily within the Apple tribe and made an attempt to drain some of its coolness by creating a easily-duped, wait-on-line-all-night set of easily-mocked hipsters whose tribal allegiance blinded them to out-of-date technologies. In a reversal of the PC vs. Mac approach, Apple fan-boys were suddenly the out-group.

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Lesson for Communicators from Accident 2:

Factual evidence alone does not change minds and can even backfire; affirmation of the audience can soften the blow of being wrong.

While motivated reasoning is now a much-studied, widely-accepted phenomenon, it was not until neuroscientists could peer into the brain to begin to answer what might be going on in our brains when we reject evidence. The metaphor it "hurts to be wrong" turns out to be more literally true in the brain; the anterior cingulate cortex, a monitor of physical pain, becomes active when you are shown evidence you are wrong.

When a company finds itself in a war of competing products, or finds its image and reputation under attack, the default strategy often seems for communicators opt for a battle plan or a defense based on evidentiary facts. But the human brain is wired to reject those facts if they are contrary to our existing beliefs, even if those beliefs are stereotyped, unfair or unreasonable. The brain heads off the pain of cognitive dissonance by discounting the evidence with a result of a worsening polarization of the target audience. Instead, we need to affirm the audience's core values and thereby disassociate their identity from their belief, and then argue the position via a more emotional narrative structure.

Homophily polarization dictates that your narrative cannot be presented in a vacuum and will always be held hostage by its bearer. Choosing the best in-group messenger is essential.

As we will see next, it will be easier to change minds if you can transport the audience via a narrative.

3. The Neural Roots of Human Empathy


Giacomo Rizzolatti

The third discovery involved a sort of voyeurism in a neuroscience lab at the University of Parma, Italy in the early 1990's. There, Giacomo Rizzolatti and his team of scientists were localizing and tracking the firing of specific neurons in macaque monkeys. Neurons are transmitters in the brain that fire and trigger every human motor action. Rizzolatti's team had put probes into the monkeys' brains to isolate very specific neurons controlling very specific motor actions—in this case grasping a piece of food and bringing it to their mouth. In order to track the firing of neurons, they wired the signals to a speaker which would crackle every time the neurons fired. But as the story goes,[12] one day, as a scientist put a piece of food up to his own mouth, they heard the crackle of neurons firing in the observing monkey. Those minute brain transmitters had a purpose beyond controlling all motor functions. They allow the observer to mirror and feel what the actor is doing. This discovery of so-called "mirror neurons" led scientist V.S. Ramachandran to proclaim this "the greatest discovery in neuroscience since Darwin." Scientists call these mirror neurons the neuro-biological roots of human empathy, an evolutionary development that allows species with such powers to learn from each other without having to recreate every experience for themselves. For example, if I were to pick up a tall glass of cold water, my brain would activate all the many motor skills necessary for me to balance it without spilling. Yet by merely watching me, your brain would mirror me, activating the very same parts of the brain even though you are not picking up anything.

Curiosity drove scientists to move beyond motor skills to test whether humans also mirror another's emotions. They do. V.S. Ramachandran says "we used to say, metaphorically, that 'I can feel another's pain.' But now we know that my mirror neurons can literally feel your pain."[13]

But beyond mirroring simple motor skills, are humans wired to mirror thoughts, emotions and whole narratives as well?

[12] "Mirror Neurons," NOVA, airdate January 25, 2005, PBS
[13] "I Feel Your Pain," by Gordy Slack in Slate, November 5, 2007

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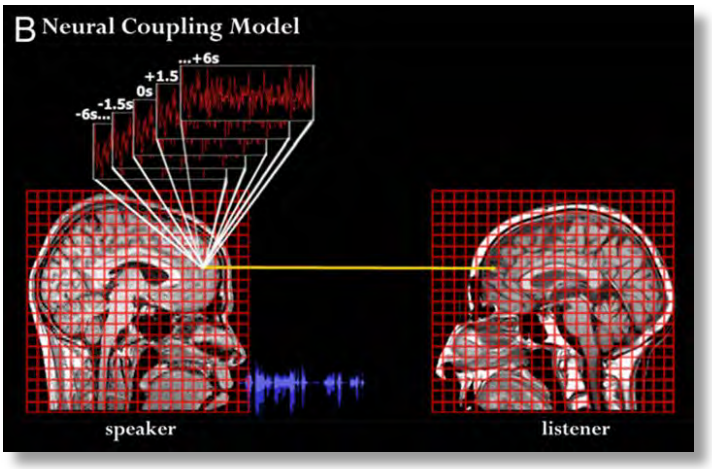


Uri Hasson, assistant professor at the Princeton Neuroscience Institute, sought to discover whether humans generate mirror neurons during storytelling. Hasson tracked their brain patterns and found the listener's brain did indeed mirror the teller, but at a slight delay. Then, as the story evolved, the listener mirrored the storyteller synchronously with no delay. Finally, and here's the Vulcan "Mind Meld" part—the listener's brain started accurately mirroring the teller's brain before the teller got to that part of the story. They were truly on the same wave length. Hasson calls this "neural coupling." Neural coupling demonstrates the power of narrative to trigger an empathetic simulation in the listener's brain.

Words To Ban

Q: Why are these words, used frequently in corporate communications, so ineffective in narratives designed to persuade or move people?
(see answer below)

Synergistic

Value-added

Innovation

Paradigm

Out-of-the-box

Shareholder value

End-to-end solution

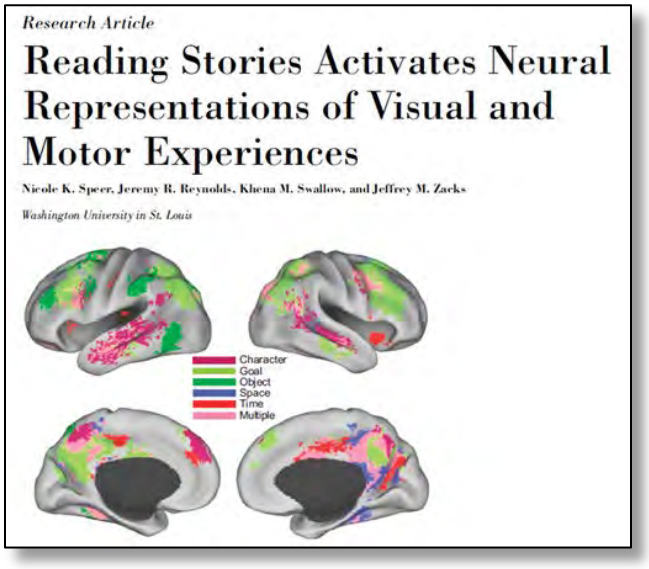
A: The words create no specific image in the listener or reader's mind, thus cannot trigger mirror neurons.

Meanwhile, Raymond Mar, a psychologist at York University in Toronto, Canada, studies people's brain patterns while they read stories. He's discovered as we read text, our brain simulates the real world aspects triggered by the text—in our brain we simulate what we read about--we can hear, smell, feel and even mimic motion. His later studies found a correlation between those who are more avid readers of fiction with a greater capacity for empathy. He hypothesizes that reading fiction exercises the unique human ability to mirror what others think and feel and thus build empathy. At an Ogilvy Public Relations session on neuroscience and narrative at the Global PR Summit 2012, Mar went on to say that immersive stories actually are quite effective at changing minds: "The more people are transported into the world of a narrative, the more they feel immersed in a story, the more likely they are to change their beliefs to be more consistent with those expressed in the world of narrative." Mar says that even if you tell subjects that this story is a work of fiction and not necessarily true, it still can

influence their views. In other words, this implicit experiencing the views of others works better than an explicit argument.

But does it have to be fiction to work? Can't persuasive essays change minds? Mar says, "The distinction isn't really between fiction and non-fiction, but between stories and exposition. Making something narrative in nature—a story—regardless if you label it a true story or a fictional story, the more absorbing it is, the more people will be absorbed and immersed and possibly the more persuasive it will be."

One of Mar's experiments compared the impact of reading a Chekhov short story with a version of the story rewritten like a trial transcript. Mar's research stated: "People who read the short story experienced significantly greater change in personality than the control group and individuals in this group also reported being more emotionally moved. Further analyses indicated that their change in personality was mediated by the emotions evoked by the text. Emotion, therefore, was central to the experience of change in the ways in which they viewed themselves, that is to say in their personality."[14]



The findings of a group of scientists at Washington University in Saint Louis bolster this notion of the human brain as ultimate simulator. They found that as subjects read stories, their brain would recreate actions, sensory experiences and even the intentions and coals of characters in a story.[15]

Professor of social psychology and breakthrough researcher on narrative transport, Melanie C. Green, wrote that "Despite the normative presumption that individuals should form their beliefs based only on factual sources, common experience suggests–and my data confirms–that individuals often base real-world judgments on information from fiction. Humans are practiced at creating possible worlds, and when confronted with a fictional situation, individuals appear to be basing their judgments on plausibility rather than accuracy."[16] Green, like Mar, says her research reveals that while an expository or evidentiary approach to

[14]" Emotion and narrative fiction: Interactive influences before, during, and after reading" by Raymond Mar et al, 2010

[15] "Reading Stories Activates Neural Representations of Visual and Motor Experiences" By Nicole K. Speer, Jeremy R. Reynolds, Khena M. Swallow, and Jeffrey M. Zacks, 2009

[16] Melanie C. Green, Research Statement, 2012 (Dept. of Psychology, UNC Chapel Hill

persuasion may fall prey to the backfire effect, the power of transporting people through narrative can succeed.

At an Ogilvy PR session of the Global PR Summit 2013, Green says the power comes through "stepping into the lives of these characters. It's being immersive, it's being enjoyable. We're not being critical, we're not counter-arguing. So those kinds of things can break down some of the initial barrier that we're going to have to be persuaded. But what it can also do once we're in that narrative world is create those connections that are so important… We're taking the perspective of these people, and the empathy that it creates goes out and we carry it beyond just those few moments when we were thinking about the story."[17]

The discovery of mirror neurons, the further findings of neural coupling, and the narrative transportation findings of Mar and Green all add up to a crucial storytelling technique and approach often completely overlooked by or abandoned by corporations: The old creative writing saw of "show, don't tell" becomes more relevant than ever. That little rule of thumb sounds easy, but pulling it off is more difficult. But the positive impact of doing it well can be huge. While writers may have always known that "show, don't tell" was intuitively the right approach, now brain science backs that up.

"Telling" refers to expository writing, plot summary and Powerpoint bullets, while "showing" refers to furnishing the empty mind through creating rich, detailed descriptions and imagery. Telling instructs you how to feel or what to do; showing creates the emotion, mood and character that allow you to infer what is going on. Showing is much tougher to pull off but when successful, allows the audience to take control of the narrative, to picture it in their own minds and own it emotionally. Public relations and corporate communications nearly always take the "telling" route via messaging. But instead, to be more effective, communicators need to adopt a novelist's approach of creating a scene, and a character struggling in a specific world. Telling brings us no imagery while showing creates a movie in the listener's mind. Such a movie triggers mirror neurons, those roots of human empathy. Neuroscientists have discovered that as we read stories, the brain recreates them as though we ourselves are experiencing them physically.

Take this example. Imagine you wanted to change minds about same-sex marriage. Look at a side-by-side comparison. The

[17] Melanie C. Green, interview with Christopher Graves at Holmes Global PR Summit 2013

first is a website called “Minnesota for Marriage.” It lays out all the “myths & facts.” This is well organized and logical but most likely will not change minds because it does not tap into the emotional governors of decision making nor does it transport the audience.

Then look at a 3-minute video by Expedia called “Find your understanding.” It starts with a father who talks of his daughter, reminiscing about his hopes and dreams for her, wondering what guy she will marry.

So when his daughter introduces him to her future wife, he is thrown for a loop. He confesses “this is not the dream I had for my daughter.”

“I had some real apprehensions about it. What’s this going to look like, two girls getting married.

“You have to make a decision: are you going to have daughter… or are you going to lose that child?”

“Once I got out to California and I saw how happy they were, all that trepidation just seemed to go away.”

“We are just so happy that we have our Jill back… and now we have Nicky.”

When constructing such a narrative, social psychology also guides us into another important choice: should the story feature one, single protagonist or several? Here the findings are singularly clear.

Nobel Prize Laureate Thomas Schelling who in 1968 developed the notion of the "identifiable victim effect" where results found that people were far more willing to come to the aid of a clearly identified individual than to a whole group in need.

In a more recent piece by researcher Paul Slovic of the firm Decision Research, he determined that there is a steep falloff of sympathy and willingness to donate to a group versus an identifiable individual. In fact the drop off starts with just two people.

Then, in 2007, Wharton School marketing professor Deborah Small discovered a powerful new piece of information.[18] Not only do we stop caring after the first individual, statistics and facts drain us of all empathy. Her research compared the willingness of subjects to donate when they had three different options. The first was a story about an individual with a name (a little girl named Rokia) and photo and no statistics at all. The second was a set of statistics showing the magnitude of the problem and how badly they need donations. And the third combined the story and the statistics as a combination of narrative and fact. The lone story of the single individual always beat any version that included statistics or sets of facts. Why do we feel so much more sympathy toward the less scientific version, the so-called "identifiable victim" version? Loewenstein[19] conjectures the reasons include vividness ("vivid details may result in a perceived familiarity with the victim"). This fits with research from Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman wherein he identified and named a bias the "simulation heuristic." He discovered that if you more readily imagine a scenario or picture it, you weight it more heavily and think it to be more true than a conceptual or factual version.

Yet think of all the public relations and corporate communications efforts usually pay no heed to these findings. Think how many have depended on analytical, logical "facts vs. myths" approaches, piling on the evidence of their argument, creating a backfire. Or cleansing the emotion and vividness from the narrative in an effort to be taken seriously. Or think of how many times you have seen a collage or montage of smiling employees ("teamwork!") instead of one, lone fully-developed story of an individual.

[18] "Sympathy and callousness: The impact of deliberative thought on donations to identifiable and statistical victims" by Small, Loewenstein and Slovic. University of Pennsylvania, 2005.
[19] "Explaining the 'Identifiable Victim Effect'" by Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997

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Lessons for Communicators from Accident 3:

Immerse and transport your audience to trigger mirror neurons and empathy. Create vivid movies in the audience's mind. Avoid numbing data and facts in favor of an emotional narrative featuring one well-defined individual.

Neuroscentists have discovered that the human brain is a simulator. When we read, the brain mentalizes the imagery and scenes and recreates actions we hear or read, and most importantly, it allows us to empathize with the feelings and thoughts of others. If the style of the narrative is expository, the brain struggles to create its own movies. If you can create a movie in the minds of the audience, you can drive empathy through triggering mirror neurons and can change minds through transporting the audience. Persuade and instruct through narratives—not through bullet points or technically correct messages. Transport your audience through richly detailed scenes and the struggles of one individual at a time, rather than hammer them with pros and cons. Write cinematically with action verbs and describe settings with specific details that evoke the senses. While it may be tempting to revert to an evidence-based messaging, psychologists and neuroscientists tell us that's simply not as effective as a narrative approach.

Choose one, individual character or protagonist who is brought to life through rich detail. Avoid the trap of an ensemble cast or team approach.

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Summary

To elevate public relations above a sometimes-effective, rational and functional approach of messaging, we need to understand and embrace the huge progress social psychology, behavioral economics and neuroscience are bring to narrative theory.

Emotion governs all human decision making and opinion shaping. Yes, we do need hard, cold facts to arm ourselves with a way to rationalize our decision, but those facts, according to brain scientists, are not the catalysts to decisions. As neuroscientist Antonio Damasio discovered, in patients who have full logical and analytical capabilities but impaired emotional capabilities, they can run a pros vs cons analysis all day and never arrive at a conclusion.

Changing minds is very tough or impossible in a facts showdown, since polarized parties discount any facts that do not confirm what they already believe. To overcome this bias, we have to separate the identity of those whom we wish to persuade from the views they hold, otherwise we will be seen as attacking their very being and not just a political or academic issue. We must affirm them as people before challenging their views. We must accept that an out-group character cannot persuade, so we must find a messenger whose cues suggest they are an in-group person.

We must learn to trigger the roots of human empathy—mirror neurons—through a well-crafted "showing" of the narrative instead of the usual corporate speak that is all "telling." Showing creates movies in the audience's mind and brings the narrative to life, making it real. The language of showing involves sensory details, not plot summaries.

He was a low-income child who had to struggle to achieve his dreams.	From: The Wall Street Journal "Cedric became a latch-key child at the age of five, when his mother went back to work. She filled her boy's head with visions of the Ivy League, bringing him home a Harvard sweat shirt while he was in junior high. Every day after school, after double-locking the door behind him, he would study, dream of becoming an engineer living in a big house -- and gaze at the dealers just outside his window stashing their cocaine in the alley."

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Appendix A

"Mental Mines & Changing Minds"
Global PR Summit, Miami, Nov. 13, 2013
Christopher Graves with:
Melanie Green, Prof. of Psychology, UNC
David McRaney, author, "You are Not so Smart"
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ecCWXTo46U
Duration: 54min

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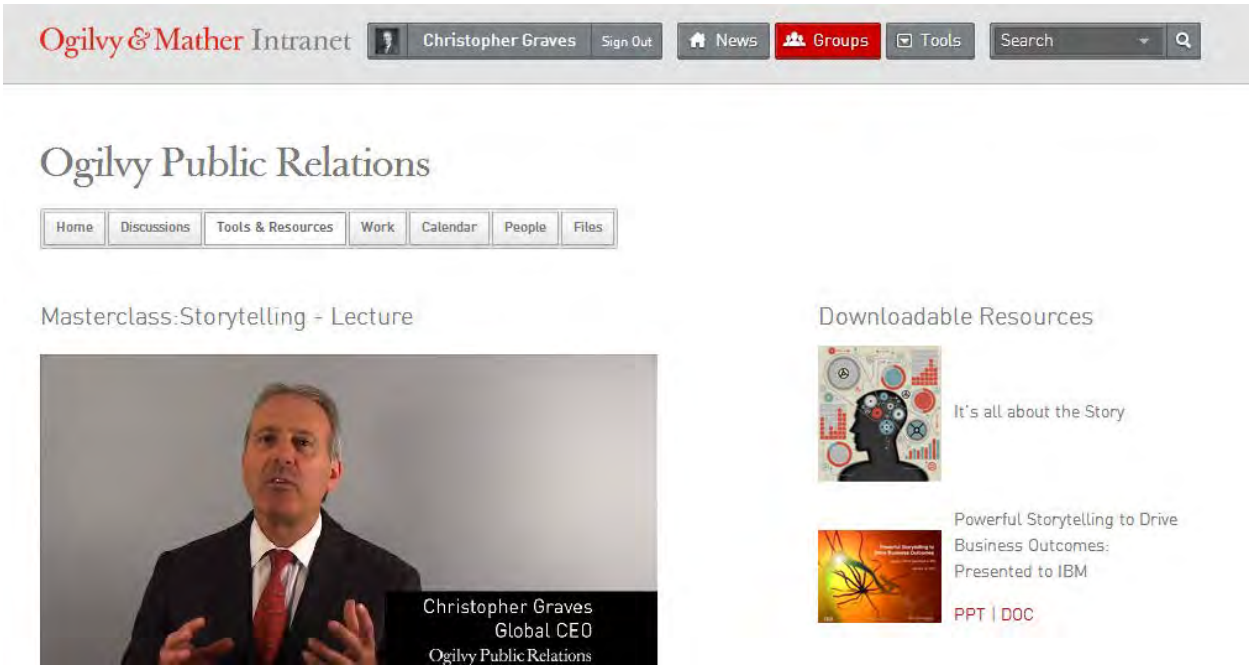
Appendix B

75-minute Video Presentation & Workshop on Ogilvy & Mather intranet for all 23,000 employees worldwide.



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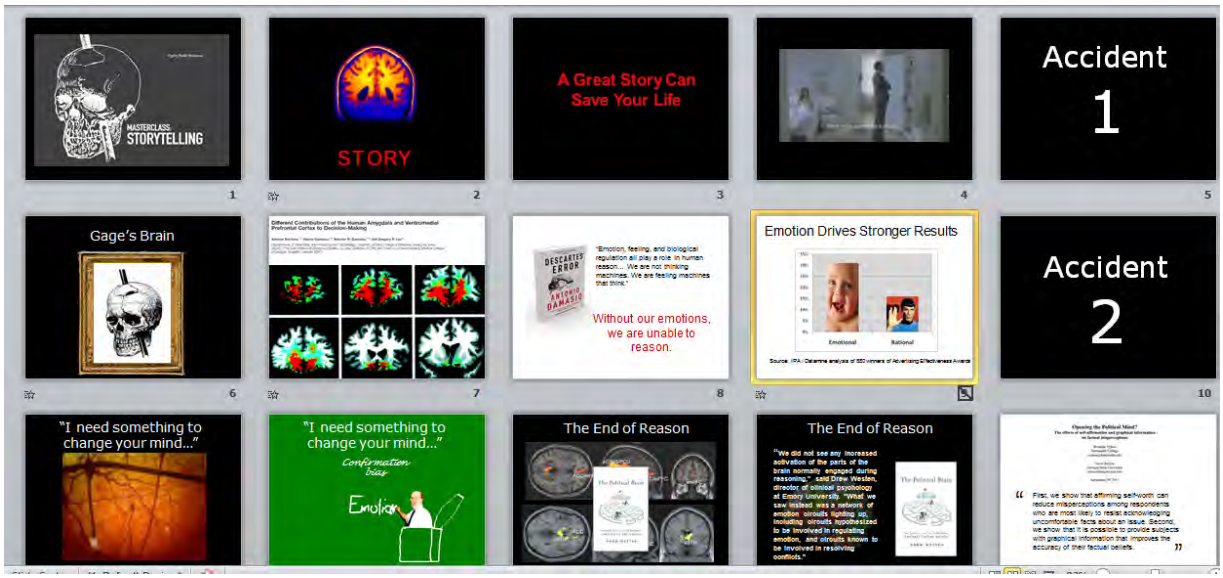
Appendix C

Powerpoint from Storytelling Workshop



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