IT’S SCARY OUT THERE – HOW TO USE SOCIAL SCIENCE IN COMMUNICATION TO DECREASE FEAR AND BUILD TRUST

April 8, 2020 | 12 – 1:00 p.m.
Power Lunch Webinar
CAPIO WELCOME: THOMAS REEVES, APR

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It’s Scary Out There

How to Use Social Science in Communication to Decrease Fear and Build Trust

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April 8, 2020
CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

AIRLINE STAFF DIAGNOSED

MARKET PLUNGE

DISNEYLAND CLEOSES
Trust Happens When...

• Promises are filled
• Expectations are met
• Values are being lived
Ask Yourself

What would reasonable people appropriately expect a responsible organization to do in this situation?
Now is no time to be silent
In turbulent times, people crave reassurance.
Heightened Emotions Block Discourse
Discovered that when fear is present, people process information differently.
We need to move our audiences from this heightened emotional, fear-based state, back to one of reason.
Trust Determination Theory:

When people are concerned, stressed, upset... They want to know that you care before they care what you know.

Credit: Covello / Inst for High Concern Communication
Mental Noise Theory:

When people are concerned, stressed, upset... They have difficulty hearing, understanding and remembering information; they focus on what they hear first.
Negative Dominance Theory:

When people are concerned, stressed, upset... They often focus more on the 
**negative** than on the **positive**

Credit: Covello / Inst for High Concern Communication
Risk Perception Theory:

When people are concerned, stressed, upset... The gaps between risk perceptions and reality often become wider.
Risk Communications Core Principles and Theories
EMOTIONS  →  REASON
Empathize  Ask Questions  Attempt to Discuss Facts

EMOTIONS  REASON
Much of communication is nonverbal—especially when feelings are involved.

Body language is 55%

Tone of voice is 38%

Actual words is 7%
Responding in times of great uncertainty

- Provide information at four or more grade levels below the average for the audience
- Balance bad news/negative with at least three constructive messages
- Be brief and concise in your first response
Follow the 27-9-3 Rule

The human brain can effectively process NO MORE THAN 27 words, that can be spoken in 9 seconds, that have 3 (or fewer) pieces of information. (Source: Dr. Vincent Covello and the Center for Risk Communication)
Templates can help to respond quickly.

To give people a greater sense of control:

1. Share what is most important for the audience to know
2. Tell the audience what you are doing to address the concern
3. Share what people can do to address the concern
The CAP Template Demonstrates Caring Concern

Caring Message:
Provide a message indicating caring, concern, empathy or compassion. The message should communicate the seriousness of the situation.

Action Message:
State actions you have, are or will take to address the issue or problem. For example, the message might indicate you are cooperating with other organizations or investigating the situation.

Perspective Message:
Provide information that puts the issue in perspective or context.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CARING</th>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
<th>PERSPECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • I understand your concern about COVID-19.  
• I, too, am concerned, as a parent, a sister and a child of aging parents. | • Your tap water is not something you need to worry about.  
• It is safe to drink and use as always.  
• Our treatment and disinfection process kills viruses, including the coronavirus. | • The United States has some of the highest standards for tap water in the world and we consistently meet those standards |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your mental health is critically important to us</th>
<th>If you must go somewhere, please keep yourself and others healthy</th>
<th>Here are some resources to help you and your family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Take breaks from COVID-19 news.</td>
<td>• Wash hands for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.</td>
<td>• Contact our healthcare provider at INSERT HOW for access to licensed, online physicians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Practice self-care, with meditation, getting enough sleep, exercising, and eating healthy</td>
<td>• Stay six feet away from others.</td>
<td>• Access our free Employee Assistance Program if you need help with...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connect with friends and family safely, using online tools or staying six feet apart.</td>
<td>• Clean and disinfect surfaces you touch frequently</td>
<td>• We’ve posted many resources at the employee intranet site to help you work from home effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue to sneeze or cough</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Applying Behavioral Science to Informing the Public
Nudge Theory

Providing subtle interventions that guide our individual choices
Default Effect

Pre-set courses of action that take effect if nothing is specified.
Social Norms

Individual behavior is influenced by perceptions of other people’s behavior...
Cognitive Bias

People make bad decisions, especially when they are stressed.
Loss Aversion

Losses loom larger than gains...
Confirmation Bias

Emphasizing one dimension of an issue over another.
We can do this!

• What you do is as important as what you say

• Start with empathy

• Remember that being first is important

• Follow Covello’s 27-9-3 Rule

• Use social norms and nudge theory

• Make it easy for people

• Be wary of biases
Thank you!

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