



The Bridges Project Case Studies

Understanding values to change debates - A Bridges application of framing

The policy challenge:

A Swedish dilemma

Sweden has a long tradition of welcoming refugees and successfully integrating foreigners. Swedish public opinion has largely stayed open to migration and diversity, even in the context of Europe's "refugee crisis". However, under pressure from a sudden increase in asylum seekers' arrivals in 2015, the country faces new challenges. Reception mechanisms are stretched and the impact of this increase on successful integration of refugees is difficult to predict. In parallel, public discourse around migration has dramatically shifted from humanitarianism to pragmatism, sometimes even xenophobia. How can policy-makers acknowledge practical challenges, and take into account this shift in public opinion, while at the same time preserving Sweden's tradition of openness to diversity? Framing, an approach from cognitive linguistics, can help.

Our Tool:

Framing

Frames are mental constructs that guide our understanding of the world by filtering the information we receive. These mental frames are closely interlinked with the values we hold. Framing is a communication method that deliberately activates certain mental frames, thus evoking selected values in the public. Read more about framing in our previous case study (<http://counterpoint.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Case-Study-Re-framing-the-Migration-Debate.pdf>) A first step of reframing a debate is to understand the mental frames currently in play and select the values we want to evoke.

Our Case:

The discourse around migration in Sweden

We designed a workshop for the Swedish Ministry of Justice on how to frame the migration debate differently. We analysed public attitudes that mark the current debate and identified which values they reflect. Welcoming attitudes persist in the debate, reflecting values of openness, solidarity, responsibility and fairness. Feelings of trust in the state, including its capacity to manage migration, draw on the value of security. Alongside these attitudes and values, new concerns for national and economic security have been emerging: can Sweden host an increased number of people if other European countries do not take their fair share of responsibility? And at what price for the Swedish welfare system? Analysing these concerns, we concluded they are expressions of the same values of fairness, responsibility and security. A way out of the Swedish dilemma could thus be for policy-makers to use communication frames that combine these values of responsibility and security with openness and tolerance. This could be achieved in numerous ways; for example the value of security could be effectively triggered through frames that give a sense of inclusion and belonging.

Your Benefits:

New policy options

This method helps policy-makers step back from "crisis mode", perceive the public differently and design their policies and communication accordingly. They realise that they might have more options at their disposal than it first seemed. Demands for a more pragmatic approach to migration and to safeguarding welfare standards do not have to be met at the price of openness and solidarity. For example, policies for hosting refugees that involve and empower local host communities and / or marginalised citizens can foster open attitudes whilst simultaneously addressing the public's need to feel safe.