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LANGUAGE AS LEVER

As communicators, we know that every word we use matters. A poor choice of word or phrase may alienate an audience, mix a message, or undermine an outcome. At its very worst, poor messaging can drive internal, customer or shareholder rebellion, though often it is a more insidious failure to deliver on society's potential which is the real problem.

This month I wanted to focus on a few snippets of the rich data sets that reveal actions communicators can take to modify our language to deliver important outcomes. In areas as pivotal as climate, health and finance, there is much out there to be explored, and if this gives you a taste for that, do get in touch.

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NEED TO KNOWS

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NEUTRAL LANGUAGE HAS POWER

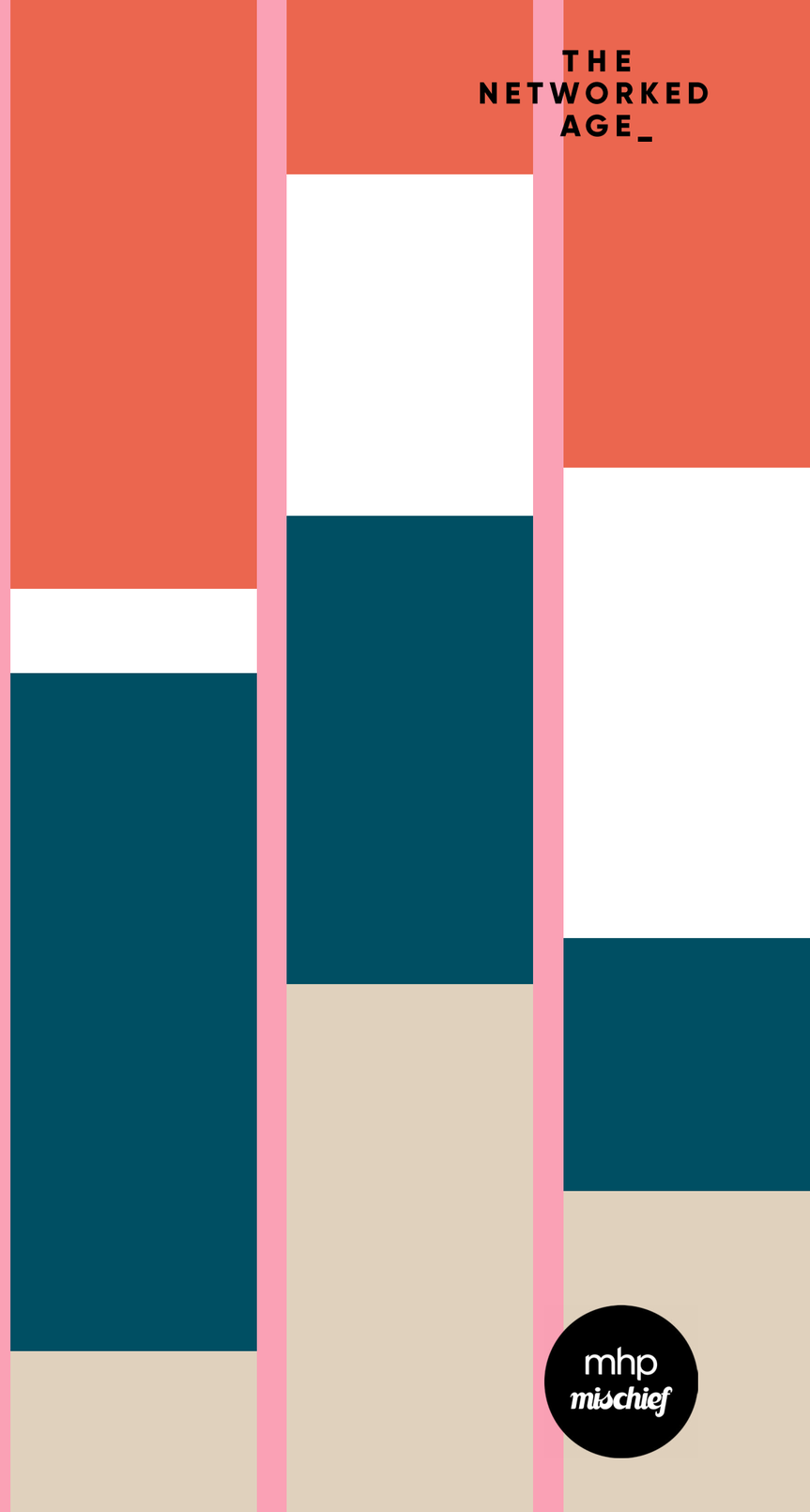
The terms we use have meaningful impact on outcomes

Recent research from the University of Austin shows that removing trigger words and replacing them with more neutral alternatives has real impact with climate sceptics.

A/B testing messaging to see which would drive climate sceptics to seek out and share more news about climate change, the research found 3 key changes had big impact:

- Replacing "climate change" and "global warming" with the word "weather"
- Avoiding mentioning who or what causes climate change.
- Focusing heavily on solutions, or what the public can do to prepare for or adapt to the impacts of climate change

As communicators this indicates the power of language which can be perceived as partisan or provocative to alienate the opposition, driving them to switch off from the topic entirely. Conversely, it should encourage us to use more neutral language, to bring new audiences into the discussion in a more collaborative way.



SHOULDA, WOULDA, COULDA

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Empower people using "could" for better results

A range of research, brought together by Frontiers in Communication highlights the risk of psychological reactance in health messaging.

This takes place when messaging to a patient is formulated as "should" (rather than "could"), indicating the patient's freedom is under threat and leading to anger and negativity. It points out that although campaigns and HCPs need to be clear and direct in what they are advocating for, the perceived removal of freedom often has negative impacts in patient behaviour.

When designing communications campaigns and messaging, we must always be cognizant of striking this balance: advocating for the best route, while ensuring the patient knows we are giving them the ultimate freedom to choose.

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LANGUAGE FRAMES REALITY

Where language ties present and future closely, so do speakers

Research from Yale University shows that in countries where language explicitly links the present to the future, citizens act in a more future-oriented manner: saving more and making healthier decisions.

The data shows that when comparing countries where language ties future and present more closely to those where it doesn't, those in the former group: were 31% more likely to have saved in a given year, had accumulated 39% more wealth by retirement, were 24% less likely to soe, 29% more likely to be physically active and 13% less likely to be medically obese, when comparing demographically similar households.

For communicators, this indicates the importance of using storytelling tools to tie us as closely as possible to our own futures, to drive these positive behaviours. Approximating more effective languages as closely as possible, where achievable, this could take place in the same sentence or phrase.

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THE RULES OF INFLUENCE

At MHP Mischief, we apply three simple Rules of Influence - developed with Dr Tali Sharot and UCL's Affective Brain Lab - to think through every challenge. As we go along, we'll show how the Rules play out in the real world. But before we begin, let's quickly recap on what they are:

RULE ONE:
Who you are is as important as what you do.
Audiences are tribal and united around shared narratives and values. To engage people, organisations must show they (and the people who run them) share the same values.

RULE TWO:
Influencers and passions spread ideas
People follow people like themselves and they respond to passionate voices. Passionate storytellers and emotional stories are more effective.

RULE THREE:
Arguments are never won, outcomes are
People will reject challenging arguments, even if they are supported by facts. To persuade people, you can't tell them they're wrong, you have to change the conversation.

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SOME HELPFULL LINKS

To learn more about communicating in a polarised world, download our Guide here.

If you want to know more about any of the insights in this email – or talk to us more about how we think about audiences, please email me at **kate.gomes@mhpc.com**

And don't forget to check out our Networked Age library, including our Guides to 'The New Rules of Influence' and 'Communicating in a Polarised World'.

You can find everything here, including the Nerdogram:
mhpc.com/NetworkedAge

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