

PEOPLE BEHAVE
IRRATIONALLY TOWARDS
CLIMATE CHANGE –
What can we do?

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World Bank report

With business as usual we will end up in a 3-4 degree warmer world....

For a long time politicians have said they are planning to keep the warming to 2 degrees

But not much has happened...

A 3-4 degree warmer world is **not** something we want to live in... (Mark Lynas: "Six degrees")

Still people do not react...

One problem...for a long time the wrong concept was used: "global warming" which people read literally...

Instead it can be all sorts of erratic weather patterns as part of climate change

Draughts, forestfires, flooding, storms ...

Another problem: people do not know the problems of a 3- 4 degree warmer world...

In the western world most people
"know" about climate change

but we still do not act on our information

What contributes to this passivity?

The main reason is the human brain...

It is not well adapted to handle diffuse threats

The threat from climate change is hard for human brains to handle

- Diffuse
- Invisible -(If CO₂ had color we might have solved the problem already)
- In the future
- Distant



The human fear system is not adapted to modern world threats

Our "old brain" reacts to immediate threats

Wild animal = Action now --adrenalin flows



Dan Gilbert: Four "threat"-buttons

- Actor behind the threat
- Present threat
- Clear actions to avoid the threat
- Violates moral codes

Climate change does not press these buttons

We need to understand the challenges our brain poses when it comes to acting on the threat from climate change

I will outline 4 different kinds of challenges

Humans are not always rational!

1. **DENIAL = PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAPS**
2. **COGNITIVE TRAPS** that block good decision making
3. **SOCIAL TRAPS** that lead to unwise decisions
4. **ECONOMIC TRAPS** that make us blindfolded

Climate stereotypes

- "Red herrings" = take note

1. The Denial Mechanisms



Different ways to shut our eyes

(If you put your head in the sand you know something is wrong)

Many versions of denial

- **Breakfast defence** —*cognitive scan* —*emotions are dissociated*—gives peace for the moment but is bad in the long run
- **Diffusion of responsibility/denial of guilt**
(blaming others)
- **Denial of the content of the threat**
- *It is too improbable—it just won't happen!*

Humans have an array of different **denial mechanisms** to avoid unpleasant feelings and the information that cause them.

Denial helps us distance ourselves from a threatening reality -- when we think we cannot do anything about it /when we feel helpless.

1. The Climate repressor (Ostrich)

"I change channels on TV or move on to another page in the newspaper if there is a program or an article about climate change."

Protects us from anxiety short term.

Does not address the problem...maladaptive

2.The climate "comfortable"

"This is not a problem I worry about—nature has solved things before...and now the scientists will take care of the problem!"

Denies the content of the threat

A threat without a clear solution (like climate change) gives rise to unnerving feelings we want to avoid

- Fear/anxiety
- *Powerlessness/helplessness*
- Guilt...(that we are responsible)

American journalist/researcher John Krosnic:

“People stopped paying attention to climate change when they realized that there is no easy solution for it.”

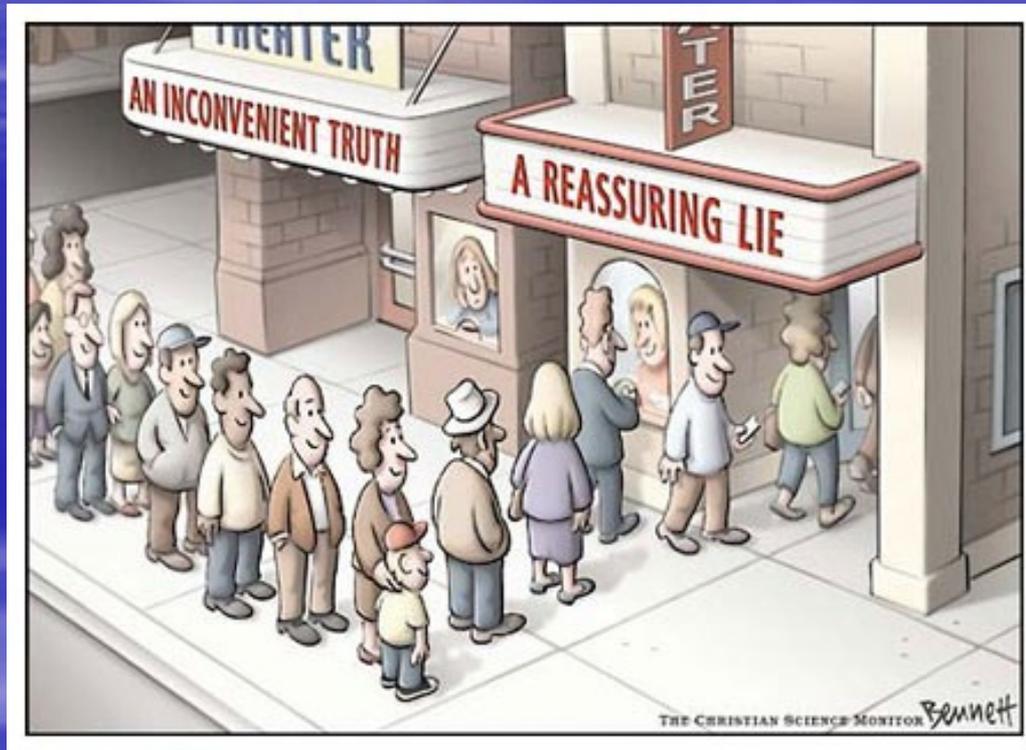
We hate to feel powerless/vulnerable
(we did as small children— we do not want it again)
so we deny the threat

Denial leads to what psychiatrist
Robert J. Lifton calls

The absurdity of the double life

We live with a disconnect between
abstract information about climate
change and how we live our daily lives

We tend to choose a reassuring lie over Gore's Inconvenient truth



Success story:

Threat to ozone layer

- Quick response from law makers
- Simple identifiable targets

Unfortunately to combat climate change we need more diverse actions ...

But maybe one way is to attack one "enemy" /problem at a time to get started?

Bill McKibben (350.com) suggests oil companies

Sot is another focus that has been suggested

To bypass denial mechanisms information needs to target emotions and provide solutions—

- Throwing arguments at people does not change their views..
- Threats should not be presented without giving hope = show that solutions are possible
- Psychology professor Timothy Wilson: "Stories are more powerful than data."

To get beyond denial

- We need to reach people's emotions without scaring them too much
- Use new media (the Arabian spring/Obama)
- Target specific groups with our message...
- Tell stories people can identify with
- Describe **local changes** that will affect people's lives—break the abstract spell...
it makes people more motivated
- Provide solution options

Emotional communication is key

Emotions direct our actions

A lot of emotional information is stored without words in the right brain --right brain communicates in images not in words.

So I suggest using images to reach people.

A successful Vietnam war image



Individual denial is increased by social denial mechanisms

To talk about climate change in certain social situations (like a party) is like swearing in the church.

So we do not talk about it...pretend it does not exist.

Not only denial because of
anxiety -- but resistance to give
up ingrewn habits/perks



In order to hold on to our habits

- Denial of guilt/responsibility

”My contribution is negligible!”, ”My neighbor drives his car...”

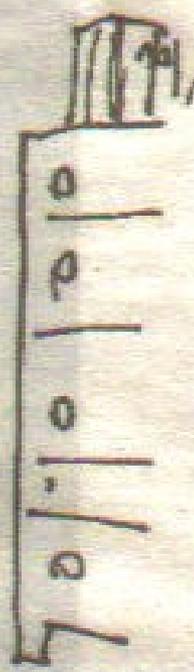
We want to keep our good self-image so we push the blame to others (also between states)

- We deny the reality of limited resources

Mark Lynas:

The whole of Western society is
based on denial mechanisms --
i.e. denial of the world's limited
resources

JAVISST,
ÄNDA TILLS NÅN
SÄGERTILL MIG
PÅ SKARPEN.



3. The life-style addict

- I need my car! Technical research will solve the problems of climate change so I need not change my way of life. The small things I can do would not amount to anything anyway...

Arguments seldom work. Regulation is one way when it comes to life style resistance.

We need regulation to break life style habits

- Car tolls
- Carbon tax
- Gasoline tax
- Recycling demands

In order to get these in place **politicians** need to act.

- If you tell people they have a role to play in saving the planet there must be an infrastructure to make that contribution --
e.g. recycling facilities
electrical outlets for electrical cars
Again depends on the politicians

Incentives are also important

- Good public (free) transportation
- No tax on electrical cars
- TV-serie—which family can live most environmentally friendly
- Cleanest town competition

4. The climate cynic denies guilt/responsibility

“Well, there might be a change in climate...
It is not my fault...I want to live my life to its
fullest. The effects will come after I am
gone, so why care! I am going to live it up!”

A counter phobic reaction. Does not want to
get in contact with with his/her fear.

Reducing denial mechanisms

Be careful not just to load it on with scary facts

Too threatening information can lead to total denial or apathy (The film *Undergången*)

5. The Climate Sad/Apathetic:

”I wake up depressed every morning. It is terrible what is happening. I feel paralyzed!”
I just have to forget about it to function.”

Thus: Information needs to point out ways to solve the problems = *anxiety control and hope*

The suggested measures need to be seen as effective= *control of danger*

Information needs to reach peoples' caring emotions...grandchildren...

Information needs to be supplemented by regulation and societal measures (smoking)

Denial reducing mechanisms

- Reduce anxiety by giving suggestions for effective solutions
- Use images to get to emotions
- When politicians stop talking and take action (acceptance of the fact)
- Higher price tag on bad habits and incentives
- Good role models (politicians important)
- Stories
- Show gains with new life styles
- Responsibility for future generations– it is their inheritance we spoil

Positive change ex: Smoking

- Politicians took action assertively (at last)
- Massive information campaigns
- Information in schools/young people

A problem with climate change..we do not want to scare kids into hopelessness

Must give hope when we inform about the threat

II. COGNITIVE TRAPS = leads to Irrational decisionmaking in humans

Daniel Kahneman & Amos Tversky et al

Many different researchers studying our
cognitive traps/thinking errors

Four major types of thinking errors

1. Fixation at the present = status quo bias

- a) What has never happened before cannot happen! (Jews in the ghetto)
- b) Problems with distant consequences-- has a hard time to sink in (smoking,cancer)
- c) We adapt to gradual changes (the frog)
- d) System fixation (ex. neoliberal capitalism)

How to inform to avoid this? **Images** and more.

6. The status quo defence

” It is just impossible to imagine...we have never seen climate change the way the scientists describe. It must be false alarm.”

2. Bias when making uncertain decisions

- a) Tendency to forget risks that we lack sufficient information about or diffuse risks (what a 2/3/4 degree temperature change means is diffuse)
- b) Denial of effects that happen far off in the world or far off in time

Important with concrete information/images/ + linking to local situation (ski race)

7. Climate Change Deniers= CCD:s

”Climate change has nothing to do with humans! It is all the result of the tilting of the globe towards the sun.”

”Climate change is a myth”

Some offer a ”scientific” theory” and they are so locked into their denial/their ”scientific truth” that it is impossible to reach them.

They feel superior. Others are misled.

3. We stick to an illusion of having control

- a) Sense that humans are in control
- b) Overestimating technical solutions

Inform how we can influence the process = find solutions but technical solutions take time to develop solar fuel...a new possibility

4. We have a tendency to anchor decisions in what we think is "known"

- a) Nature is seen as an unlimited resource
- b) People interpret information so it confirms their own ideas.

Try informing about the number of globes needed to fill the demands of present day life-style.

How to counteract cognitive errors

- Images of glaciers / polar bears
- Mark Lynas' *6 degrees* — concretizing
- Environmental footprint /number of worlds
- Reports of consequences for own country/ community + plans to counteract the problems
- Action programs for a major sector
- Tying the world together —"the there" affects "the here" (environmental refugees, food)
- Show alternative models of building societies
- Show how small changes in the economic model can change things around

III. SOCIAL TRAPS – ANOTHER HUMAN FALLIBILITY

A situation where a group of people act to reach a short term goal that leads to a long term loss for the group.

We are actually ingrained in a social trap right now= acting to preserve our present energy consuming life-style

1. TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

- Garret Hardin (1968)
- William Forster Lloyd (1833)



GARRET HARDIN:

”Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons.”

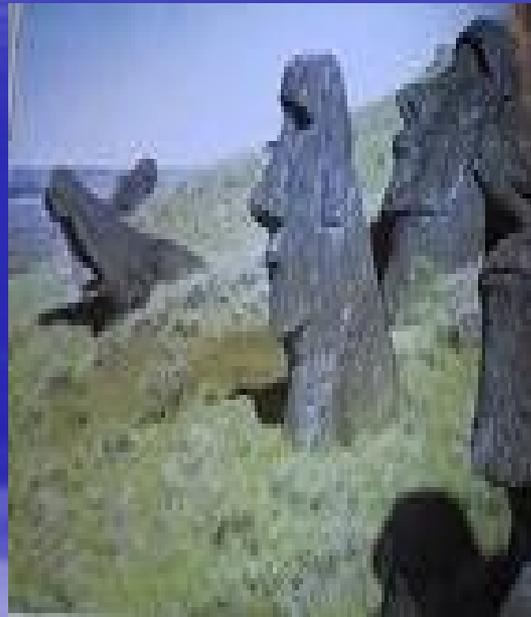
The tragedy of the unregulated commons

Elinor Ostrom: With regulation this kind of trap can be avoided – people can stipulate ways to share "a commons"

- Hmm...

At the globe level however there is no sufficient regulatory body for that

2. Fate of the Easter island



Similar to the tragedy of the commons =
Depletion of limited resources leads to catastrophe

- We have not realized that **our planet is a limited resource base**— like the Easter Island

Our economic system has seen nature's resources as goods to be exploited —there has not been a price put on them

Need a new perspective= if we want part of our common heritage we have to pay for it – and take care to restore the resources we depleted

Gretchen Daily—has a model for this

8. The social trap denial type

*”My contribution to the problems is negligible..
Life has been going on on this planet for a long
time. There is no reason why we should
have to restrict our use of natural resources.”*

A real social trap is our economic model

- Influencing the economic model is thus key to changing the process around

4. Economic traps

Peter Barnes: (Capitalism 3.0) Tragedy of the market

We are locked into an economic theory where each business is supposed to maximize its profit – independent of the cost for the environment

This it is part of economic education at the universities.

9.The business leader defense

”My main responsibility is to the share holders. I have to give them a profit or we crumble. If we do not exploit the oil and gas reserves somebody else will and they will prosper. It is the way it is!”

Needed: Change in economic thinking from within the economic field

Nicholas Stern report:

- "Global warming is the most extensive failure for the market"
- Climate change is "bad for business"
- Forceful preventive actions early on can be seen as profitable investments.

”Capitalism that started as a brilliant solution
has become a major problem.
It is time to upgrade the operating system!”

Peter Barnes

New economic thinking is on the way

Wish: Nobel prize for sustainable economics

Economic actions needed

- Change in economic thinking— environmental costs included
- Another view on growth= sustainable development
- Circular economy/ cradle to cradle thinking
- Regulation, carbon tax, fee on CO₂ pollution
- International agreements (post Doha)

Tragedy of governments

Locked into a "growth model"

Prioritizes the interest of businesses

An alternative model for growth is shown by Canadian Peter Victor (see on Youtube talking about "the folly of growth")

We overshot the capacity of the biosphere already around 1980

Influencing the economic model is an important key

- So much of the pollution comes from businesses
- Small changes in economic theory makes great results

How can we make people wake up?

How do we inform about limited resources?



To increase awareness in the public

- We need a steady flow of information
- The information using images needs to address different angles, present solutions, give hope and help to overcome wasteful habits

There is a "critical point" where enough people have accepted the fact of climate change

PARADIGM SHIFT

THE HUNDREDTH APE

Paradigm shift



Lyall Watson

William James:

"A new idea is first condemned as ridiculous and dismissed as trivial until finally it becomes what everybody knows."

SYSTEM RESISTANCE MAKES PARADIGM CHANGE SLOW AT FIRST

- Galileo's fight to prove earth is round
- Doctors washing hands between patients

Strong initial resistance to new regime/fact

Over a critical level= established fact

Potentials for change-- from worry to action

I. PARADIGM SHIFT

II. GROUP INSTINCT—THE HUNDREDTH APE

III. NEW GLOBAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Politicians are key figures

Problems:

- Afraid to take impopular actions
- Afraid to put regulations in place
- Their wish to be re-eleced favors short terms solutions
- Live in a culture of promises
- Their own denial mechanisms
- Afraid of cost for society for preventive actions
- Hesitating to put regulations in place (due to business interests)
- Caught in "economic growth model"

10. The politicians defense

“We live in a system where economic growth is basic. I must see to that we have a viable business climate. If I suggest regulations that limit economic growth I will be voted out in no time!”

Actions in relation to politicians

- Pressure from electorate
- International agreements are urgent
- National studies to support actions
- Leadership/responsibility

Economists also key figures

- Sustainable economics
- Need to feel the pressure to change their dangerous models
- Need politicians to put regulations in place so they have an incentive to change their way of doing business.

WE THE PEOPLE

We need influence

- Politicians
- Economists
- Journalists
- Teachers

We, the people

We need regulations, incentives and political leadership in order to function more wisely but we can actually open our eyes with information that

- is solution oriented
- that gives us hope
- use images to reach our emotions
- is targeted and realistic
- changes economic thinking
- shows effect locally

The crisis mood

- Paradigm shifts takes time—it is under way
- Important not to give up even if it feels like an uphill battle
- A crisis can make us wake up and the erratic weather has got people thinking...

Summary about information:

- Give information together with suggested actions = no anxiety producing information without ideas for a solution.
- Use imagery. Connect the here and the far
- Information needs to offset denial, cognitive traps and hardened world views.
- Regulation & price tag on bad energy habits
- Working to offset social traps
- New economic thinking = e.g price tag on carbon emissions and including costs for nature in economic calculation

REASONS FOR HOPE

- Many journalists and politicians have woken up
- More of general public are well informed
- China and India — environmental problems sound alarm for politicians within the country
- Regulation no longer a swear word (after the economic crisis)
- Even economists realize that climate change is "bad for business" – but more is needed
- Paradigm shifts in several affected countries
- Technical solutions for prevention are under way but take time
- New economic thinking is developing

WE HAVE A PRECIOUS GIFT



OUR EARTH SEEN FROM SPACE

The little red circle makes it possible for us to live here!= Our atmosphere. Let's protect it!