

# Message-Centered vs. Publics-Centered Campaigns: The Cocreational View

C. Botan

George Mason University



# Challenge Well Known

Intentions are good

Best available science is necessary, but seldom sufficient for effective health risk communication

1. Current models, focusing mostly on what we should say, work – sometimes
2. Two aspects of all communication -- content and implied relationship
3. Tool for equal focus on relationships – cocreational model.



# Current Models Work -- Sometimes

- ▶ Health promoting behaviors: absolute median change of 8.4 percentage points (CDC *Community Guide*, 6/3/2014)
- ▶ Snyder (2007), Meta-analysis 9 article 440 campaigns

The level of effectiveness of health campaigns that include some form of the media depends . . . seatbelt campaigns ( $r = .15$ ) . . . have had the greatest success rates, whereas youth drug and marijuana campaigns have had the least success ( $r = .01-.02$ ) (p. 2).

- ▶  $r$  = is effects size



# Growing Challenges

- Obesity, 1980– 2016, adult doubled; children tripled (Trust for America's Health, 2016)
- Publics changing
- 80% distrust government (Thompson, *Atlantic*, 4/2010)
- Only 40% have “great deal” of trust in media (Gallup, 9/28/2015)



# How We Communicate About Health May Be Part of Problem

- ▶ “Health communication campaigns apply integrated strategies to deliver messages designed, directly or indirectly, to influence health behaviors of target audiences.”  
(Community Guide, CDC, 3/4/2015,)
  - ▶ Note message centeredness
  - ▶ Mostly 1-way, some 2-way about how to get across the message **we already decided on**
  - ▶ Instrumental/behaviorist vs. cocreational



# Subjective/Human Component in all Risk Communication

- Risk measured on 1 – 10 scale
  - Hazard = technical risk (R X P)
- Expert 8-2 or 9-1 technical vs. subjective
- Publics 5-5 or 4-6 technical vs. subjective
- We have to learn more about the 1-9, not imply it is wrong



# Two Aspects of All Health Campaigns

- ▶ 2 aspects of all communication
  - ▶ Content
  - ▶ Relationship
- ▶ Coats (2009) . . .

Each person responds to the *content* of communication in the *context* of the relationship between the communicators. The word meta-communication is used in various ways . . . but Watzlawick uses it to mean the exchange of information about how to interpret other information.





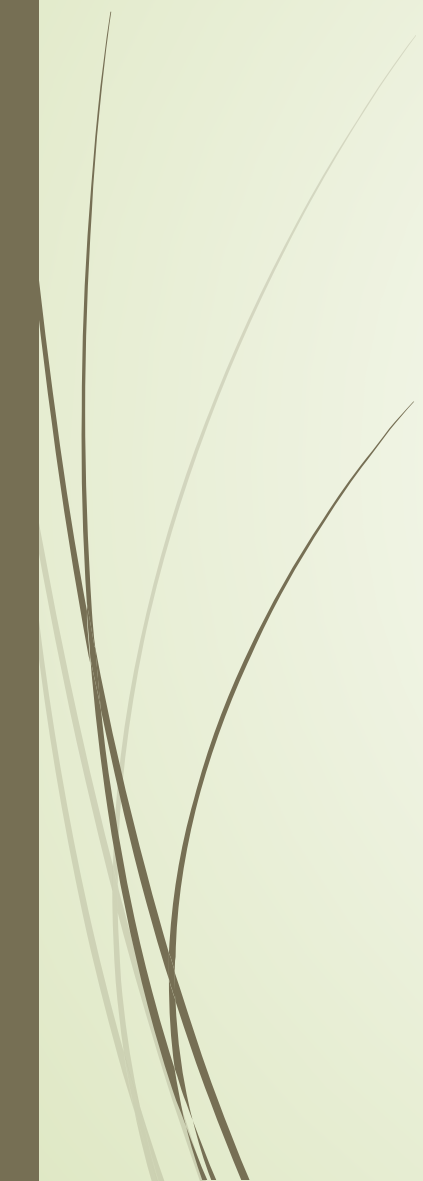
# Message today

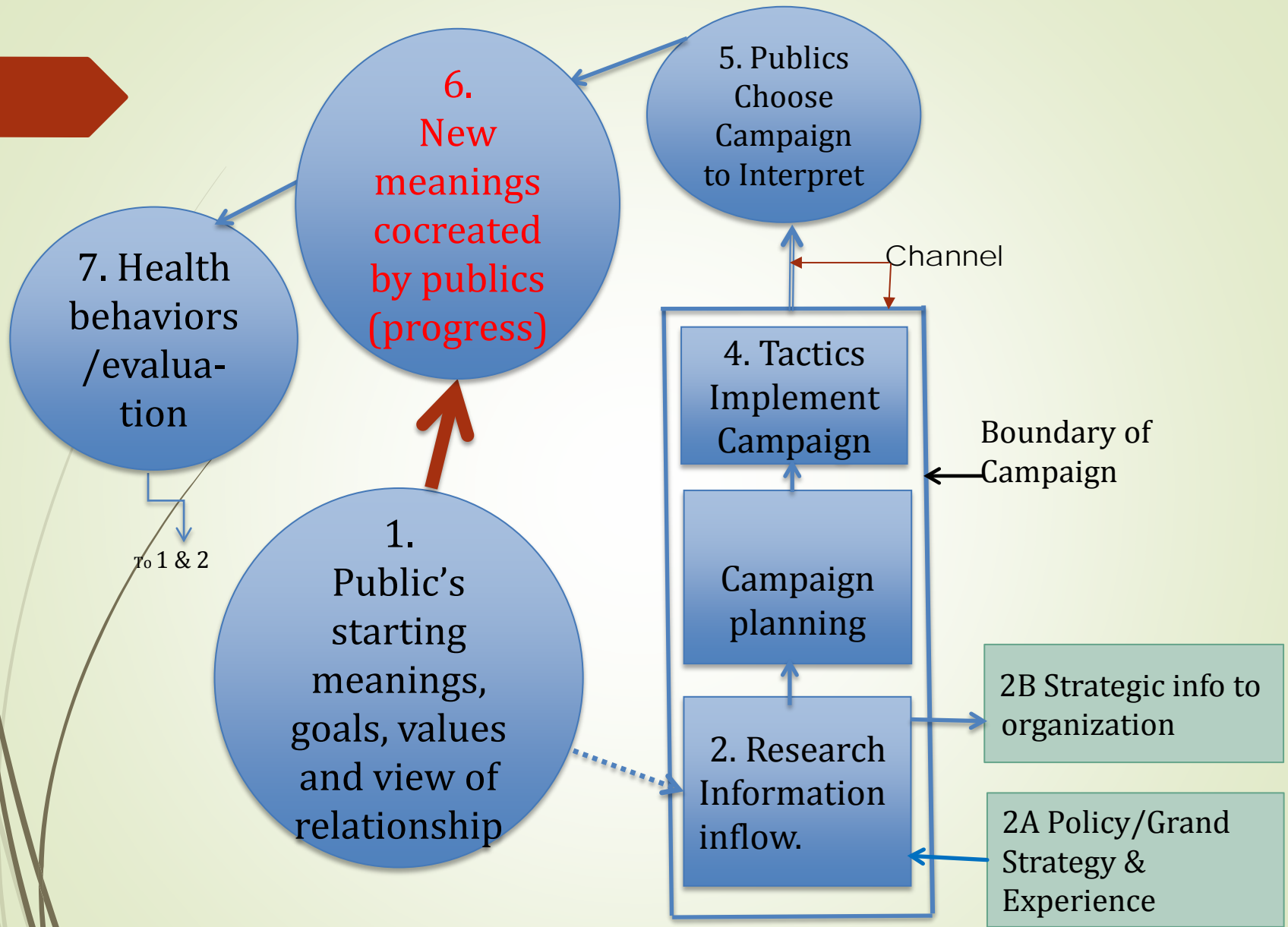
- Treat message relationship as equal in importance to message content.





# Cocreational

- Cocreational requires a change in assumptions
    - Publics at center – content secondary
    - Do not instrumentalize publics – even for good motives
- 



Cocreational Molecule



# Conclusion

1. The scientific content has to be right -- but good intentions and good content are not enough
2. Publics "hear" technical content and the relationship we imply with them (e.g., information gods)
3. Publics can actually understand our campaign more fully than we do
4. Our publics cocreate the real meaning of our campaigns



# Sources



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- ▶ Trust for America's Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2016). *Obesity*, <http://healthyamericans.org/obesity/>