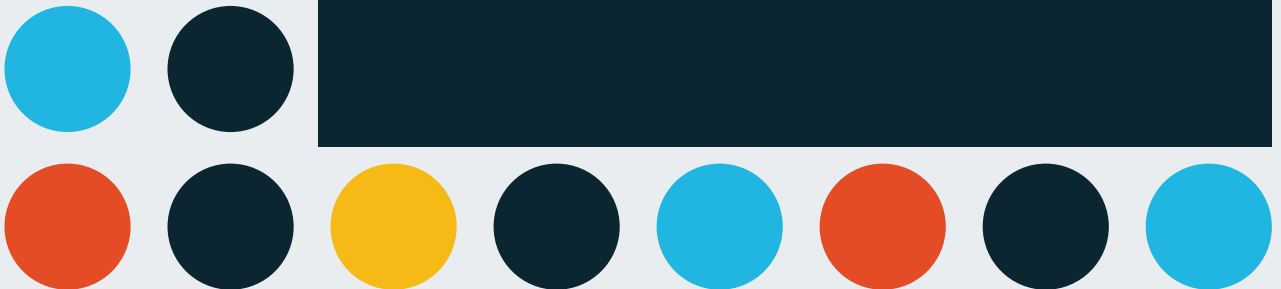


**FRAME  
WORKS**



**Moving Mindsets:**  
*How to Shape a Strategy*



**Want to change hearts and minds?  
Shift policy?  
Bring about structural change?**

***It starts with knowing what mindsets are—and aren't—and what it takes to shift them.***

Cultural mindsets are deep ways of thinking about the world that are part of our shared culture. They shape how we make sense of the world and how we think about the existing social order. Mindsets matter for social change because some of them naturalize the social order and can be used to maintain the status quo, while others problematize the ways that things work and can be used to contest and shift structures of power.

**Mindsets are so deep and firmly rooted that they are assumed and taken for granted. They are the soil in which our society grows, the terrain on which our politics happens, and the ground on which we make decisions about our shared social world.**

Mindset shift efforts are attempts to till and enrich this soil so that different things—behaviors, policies, institutions, and structures—can grow.

# What's Your Goal?

Understanding what a mindset is and isn't can help advocates, activists, and funders be strategic and efficient with their efforts and resources. Determining whether you need a mindset shift strategy—which is a large-scale effort—or something narrower is key. Small efforts over a short period of time just aren't enough to shift entrenched mindsets. On the other hand, changing a specific policy, attitude, or behavior may not require shifting mindsets. Using mindset shifts to achieve highly targeted and specific outcomes is like tilling, tending, and harvesting a whole field just to get a single stalk of wheat.

## Shifting mindsets

- Focuses on changing deep-level thinking about how the world works
- Requires a multi-faceted strategy that weaves together different strands, like issue campaigns, public education efforts, elite-focused policy and advocacy work, and mass mobilization

The modern environmental movement is an example of a mindset shift effort—in this case, moving fundamental understandings around the relationship between human beings and nature. The Cuyahoga river fire in 1969 was a turning point in the shift. Though the river had caught fire before, the 1969 fire captured national attention due to years of work that came before it—work designed to cultivate a different way of thinking about our relationship to the natural world. The movement leveraged this moment to catalyze policy change, which reinforced mindsets that were already in the process of shifting. Subsequent efforts have combined issue advocacy, mass mobilization, mass communication efforts, and other strategies to shift people from seeing the natural world as a resource to be exploited to seeing it as a basis of life itself and something to which we belong.

## Shifting a specific attitude, behavior, or policy

- Might result from a mindset shift but does not necessarily require a deep change in fundamental patterns of thinking
- Can be accomplished through a targeted approach such as short issue campaigns, advocacy efforts, or behavioral interventions

The successful policy effort to ban artificial trans fats in processed foods is an example of change effected without the need to shift deep mindsets. A campaign launched in the early 2000s sought to make changes at state and national levels to ban the use of partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs) in food production—beginning with the Oreo. The advocacy effort resulted in bans and partial bans in numerous states (including a high-profile ban in the state of California) and policy statements from the FDA that recognized the health risks of consuming PHOs, including death. The campaign positively affected the lives of millions of Americans—but did so largely through policy changes rather than by shifting deep mindsets.

# Types of Mindset Shifts and the Strategies that Go with Them

Mindsets can shift in four different ways. Once you've identified the type of shift you're after, you'll need to use the right strategies to make it happen. **The particular mindset shift you seek should be aligned with your fundamental objectives and should drive your strategy in the near- and long-term.**

## Temporary switch

A mindset activated at a given moment that, by itself, does not have enduring effects over time

### **Example: Making the case for an affordable housing project.**

As part of efforts to build new affordable housing, developers may attempt to shore up community support by temporarily accessing certain mindsets. They might try to activate the idea that our surroundings shape our opportunities or that all children should be able to go to a good school. The goal is to activate these mindsets long enough to persuade people of the importance of the project ahead of a community vote, rather than to create long-term changes in how people think about affordable housing.

### **Strategic implication:**

If you're after enduring changes in thinking, temporary mindset shifts won't get you there without sustained reinforcement.

## Change in boundaries

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New applications of familiar stories or ideas that create enduring change in the contours of a mindset

**Example: Marriage equality.**

Advocacy for same-sex marriage relied on taking an existing mindset—our collective understanding of marriage as a compact for long-term love and commitment—and stretching the application of that premise to include same-sex couples. By applying familiar tropes and stories about marriage to same-sex couples, the marriage equality campaign stretched the existing idea of marriage. The approach was effective because it relied on an already widely understood construct and the notion that desire for marriage holds across people, regardless of sexual orientation.

**Strategic implication:**

A mindset can be stretched by applying it in a new way. When using this type of a shift, strategies should take familiar narratives, stories, and frames—familiar ways of talking about an issue—and adjust them just enough to encompass the new idea. In the marriage equality campaign, stories about same-sex couples described marriage in familiar terms but changed them by making same-sex couples the protagonists. Showing wedding photos of same-sex couples engaging in familiar wedding activities like receptions, cake-cutting, and other recognized rituals helped make sense for them within the familiar understanding of marriage.

## Shift in salience

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An enduring shift in the salience or dominance of a mindset

**Example: Clashing arguments about capitalism.**

In the 1970s and '80s, deliberate efforts by President Reagan and neoconservatives promoted the idea that a flourishing market is a freely functioning one, reviving the idea of market naturalism and increasing the dominance and salience of this way of thinking. The increased dominance of this mindset paved the way for policies reflecting the “trickle-down economics” sensibility.

**Strategic implication:**

A shift in salience requires repeated activation of an idea. By flooding our shared conversations with communications that pull forward and reinforce a mindset, advocates and activists can make it more dominant over time. This type of shift does not involve a fundamental change in a given mindset. Instead, cuing the mindset frequently and in resonant ways increases its relative dominance within a culture. When using this type of shift, communicators should strengthen and pull previously held ideas to the fore with repeated activations so that people come to more consistently rely upon them in decision-making.

## Permanent replacement

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A displacement of a mindset by another mindset (either new or previously recessive)

**Example: Smoking.**

In the early 20th century, tobacco use was a social norm. Over time, public mindsets shifted away from the notion of tobacco as “restorative” and “natural”—ideas fueled by Madison Avenue and medical communities alike—toward a clear understanding of its harmful effects. Public policy change followed. Today, the former mindsets around tobacco have been almost totally displaced by the new ones.

**Strategic implication:**

Permanent mindset replacement requires a multi-stage effort. Advocates should start by introducing and socializing the new mindset alongside supporting evidence within a group of influence, then work to disseminate it outward until it gains traction and prominence among a broader audience.

The four types of mindset shifts are concepts on a continuum rather than distinct categories. In practice, the shifts frequently occur together or evolve in sequence over time. For example, if a temporary mindset shift is evoked with enough frequency, it can lead to a shift in dominance or displace a previously held mindset to become more permanent. **Still, a sound mindset shift strategy should recognize the four types of change and make sure that activities are oriented towards the relevant type of shift.**

# Conclusion

An effective social change strategy must consider whether the goal is a mindset shift or something narrower. And if the goal is a mindset shift, understanding what type of shift is desired can help shape strategy.

Whether you seek to create a favorable yet temporary change in mindsets, push the boundaries or shift the salience of an existing mindset, or permanently replace one mindset with another, keeping these ideas in mind is key to designing effective social change strategies.



## About FrameWorks

The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the mission-driven sector's capacity to frame the public discourse about social and scientific issues. The organization's signature approach, Strategic Frame Analysis®, offers empirical guidance on what to say, how to say it, and what to leave unsaid. FrameWorks designs, conducts, and publishes multi-method, multidisciplinary framing research to prepare experts and advocates to expand their constituencies, to build public will, and to further public understanding.

To make sure this research drives social change, FrameWorks supports partners in reframing through strategic consultation, campaign design, FrameChecks®, toolkits, online courses, and in-depth learning engagements known as FrameLabs. In 2015, FrameWorks was named one of nine organizations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

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