

TRUTH DECAY

What is our role?

by

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ICMRESOLUTIONS

Presentation roadmap

- The Rand Corporation’s “Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life” was the inspiration for this session.

- Do public participation professionals have an obligation to help stakeholders find the truth or are we only obligated to capture their “truth?”

Some of us nudge the participants towards the sponsor’s “facts,” some the reverse, and some facilitate toward a shared understanding, which may or may not be based on facts.

- We will:

- 1) *explore Rand’s thesis,*
- 2) *grapple with our “duty of care”*
- 3) *examine our obligations to the “truth,” and*
- 4) *learn tools to help prevent “Truth Decay.”*



1. When there's a disagreement on truth, whose truth is more important in a public process?

- A. Participating public's**
- B. Wider population's**
- C. Sponsor's**
- D. Process'**
- E. Facilitator's**

Evolution of public participation

1970s– 80s: Beginnings

- *Public Involvement (Tell)*

1990s: Shift toward prevention

- *Public Participation (Tell and ask)*



2000s: Collaborative Governance

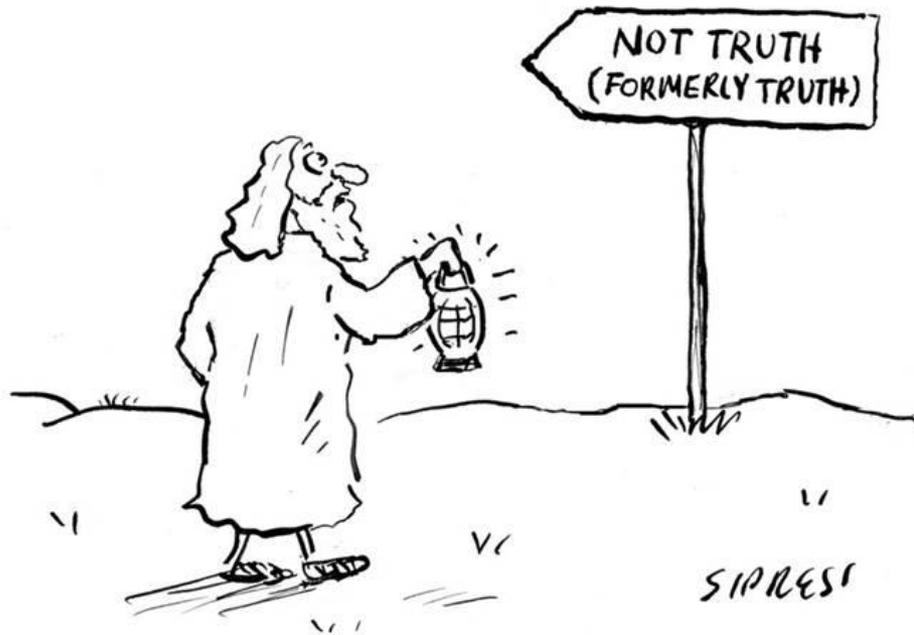
- *Collaborative Problem Solving / Recommendation-Making Stakeholder Advisory Committees*

2010s: Moving Toward “Competitive Governance” and “Pretend Public Participation”

- *Is this real, imagined, or is Sam just getting more cynical?*

2017: Enter “Truth Decay”

- *What are our obligations?*



**Truth has a long
history...**

Issue isn't new

“The leakage of reality from American life.”

“Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts.”



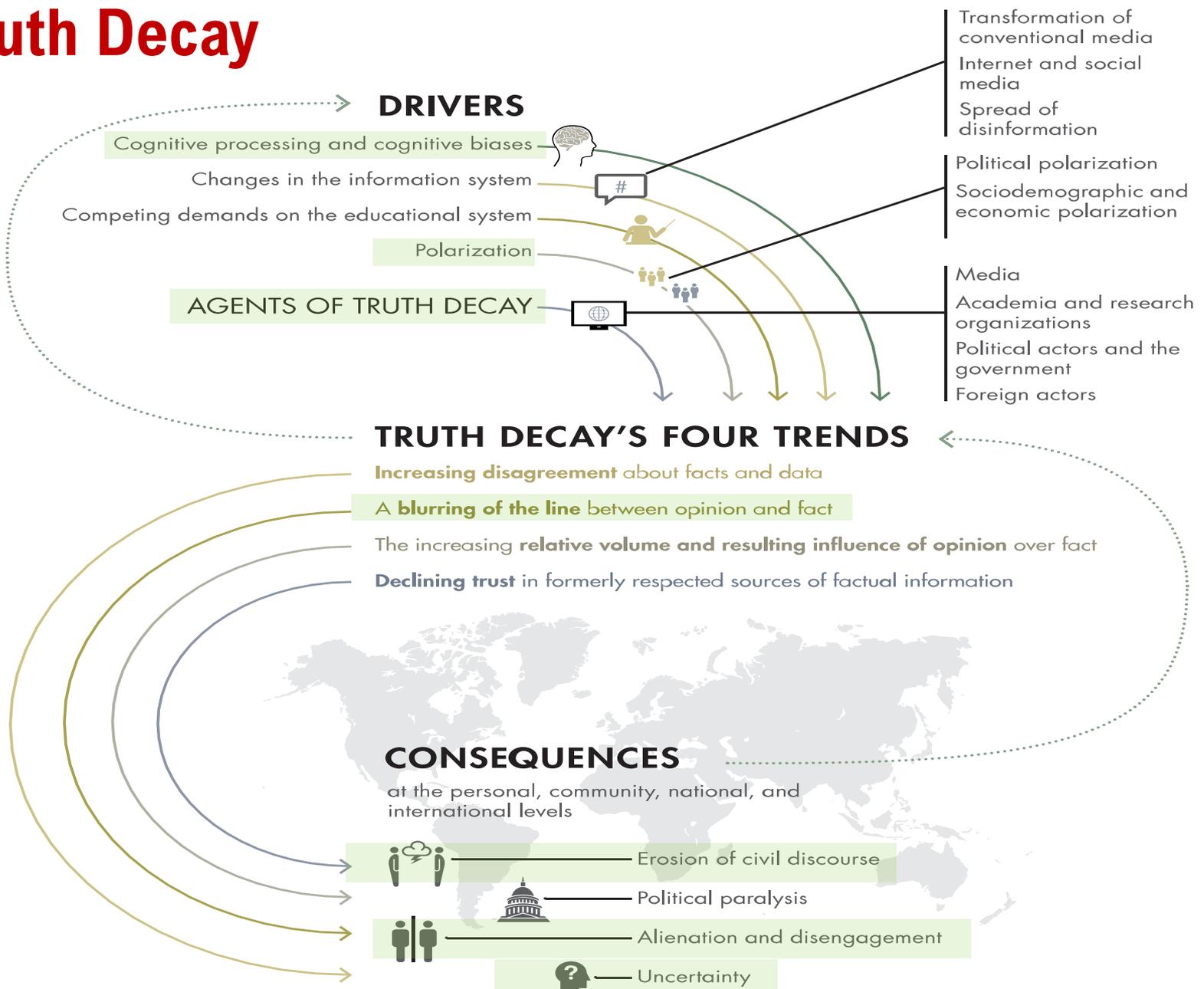
Daniel Patrick Moynihan
US Ambassador to UN
US Senator NY

Today's frames

- “Alternative Facts”
- “Fake News”
- “What you’re seeing and what you’re reading is not what’s happening”
- “Truth isn’t truth.”

Moynihan noted then the way standards and expectations, as they fall, become accepted at each new, lower level as somehow “normal.” He called it, “*defining deviancy down.*”

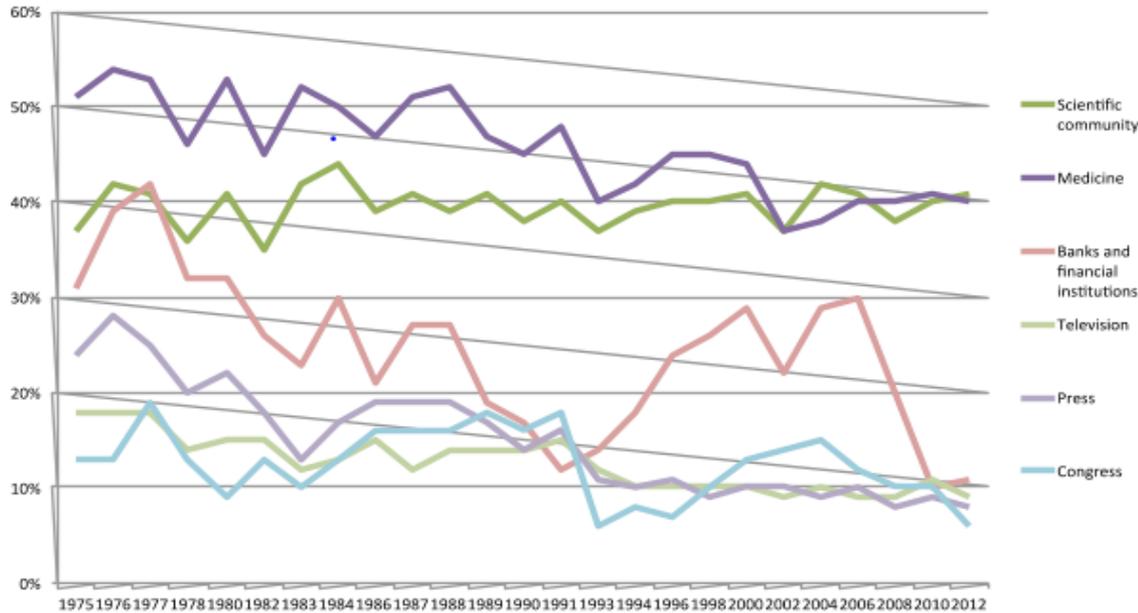
Truth Decay



2. Which of the consequences of Truth Decay have you seen most often in your facilitation work?

- A. Erosion of civil discourse**
- B. Political paralysis**
- C. Alienation and disengagement**
- D. Uncertainty**
- E. Other?**

Truth erosion leads to trust erosion



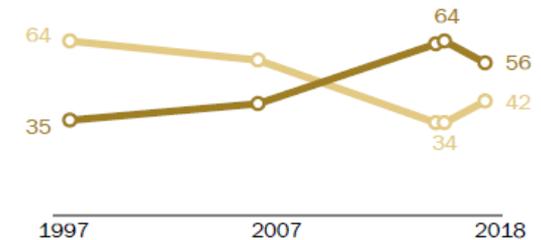
Source: NSF

18% of Americans Trust the Government in 2017

Most have little or no confidence in political wisdom of the American people

% saying they have ___ of trust and confidence in the wisdom of American people in making political decisions

○ Very great/Good deal ○ Not very much/None



Note: Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 7-14, 2018.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



No confidence in wisdom of people

Words Matter



“Facts” = something that has actual existence:
objective reality

“Truths” = the body of real things, events, and
facts, the state of being the case

“Beliefs” = a state of mind in which confidence
is placed in some person or thing,
considered to be true or held as an
opinion

“Trust” = assured reliance on the character,
ability, strength, or truth of someone
or something

Think about these definitions and what they mean in practice

Are we complicit?

IAP2's Code of Ethics defines the expectations and aspirations of a public participation process, which is defined as, “Any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and that uses public input to make better decisions.” <https://www.iap2.org/page/ethics>

1. **Purpose:** “We support public participation as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of the decision-making body.” (Emphasis added.)
2. **Role of Practitioner:** “We will enhance the public’s participation in the decision-making process and assist the decision-makers in being responsive to the public’s concerns and suggestions.” (Emphasis added.)
8. **Advocacy:** “We will advocate for the public participation process and will not advocate for the interest, party, or project outcome.” (Emphasis added.)

3. Based on our standards, which of the following is most important for IAP2 practitioners to focus on?

A. Facts

B. Truths

C. Beliefs

D. Opinion

TOOL TIME



What's the project? Helping parties decide.

- Five key criteria parties use to evaluate the “truth:”
 - General acceptance by others,
 - Amount of supporting evidence,
 - Compatibility with their beliefs,
 - General coherence of the statement, and
 - Credibility of the source of the information
- Parties are looking for “fluent processing” and “cognitive simplicity.”
- They want to give their mind an “excuse.” (E.g. a prior decision or belief was right given what was known then, but now that the underlying facts have changed, so should my mind.

What tools should a practitioner use, if a practitioner should use tools?

What if it's easier for the parties to dispute the facts than it is to alter their deepest beliefs?

The mind doesn't follow the facts. Facts, as John Adams puts it, are stubborn things, but our minds are even more stubborn.

Remind people that their beliefs are not "them!" Tell people that their previously held beliefs made sense given the information they had, and it's ok to update based on new information.

Give them a way out with dignity

W.O.W.D.

Consider Tim's Tools

- 1. Help parties understand *how* they determine “facts:”**
 - a) Normalize cognitive biases and changes in points of view (e.g. Anchoring, Fundamental Attribution Error, Confirmation Bias, Reactive Devaluation, etc.)
 - b) Help them be more open to the “facts” of others

- 2. Help parties understand *what* the facts are:**
 - a) Create an agreed-upon basis for “strong and reliable” information
 - b) Engage in joint fact-finding

- 3. Help parties with their non-fact-based processes to make decisions and form beliefs:**
 - a) Manage the “intersection of logic and emotion”
 - b) Help them “explore vs. debate”

Tim's Tools, continued

- 4. Help people determine what is important to them**
 - a) External reference points of decision-making such as: Justice, Equity, Fairness, Law, Cultural Norms, etc.
 - b) Others?

- 5. Help each understand what is important to the other**
 - a) Focus on where they do agree
 - b) Get to a “truth” they can live with

- 6. Normalize the idea that each may have their “truth”**
 - a) It's ok that they each see things differently if the issue is their “truths,” but if it's not ...
 - b) If a party has their “truth,” perhaps it's OK for the other person to have theirs

Framing issue with an “umbrella question” accommodates multiple “truths”

How can we address

_____ *(interests of Party A)*

while at the same time

_____ *(interests of Party B)*

thereby satisfying our

_____ *(common interests)*

?

Example:

How can we achieve economic viability, a net increase in environmental function, and social equity; while at the same time being good stewards of the island’s unique assets; thereby, collaboratively creating a shared vision for our sustainable community?

Use decision tables to evaluate options

Step 1: Preliminarily identify options

Step 2: Identify & weigh evaluation criteria (There's an App for that!)

Step 3: Gather quantifiable data for each criterion (Consider agreed-upon expert and/or peer)

Step 4: Evaluate options against criteria using colors/#s

Step 5: Eliminate, refine & combine ("sensitivity analyses")

Step 6: Assess risk, manage uncertainty & select best option using consensus polling

Step 7: Document, report, and lessons learned

Step 8: Implement, monitor, and reconvene if needed

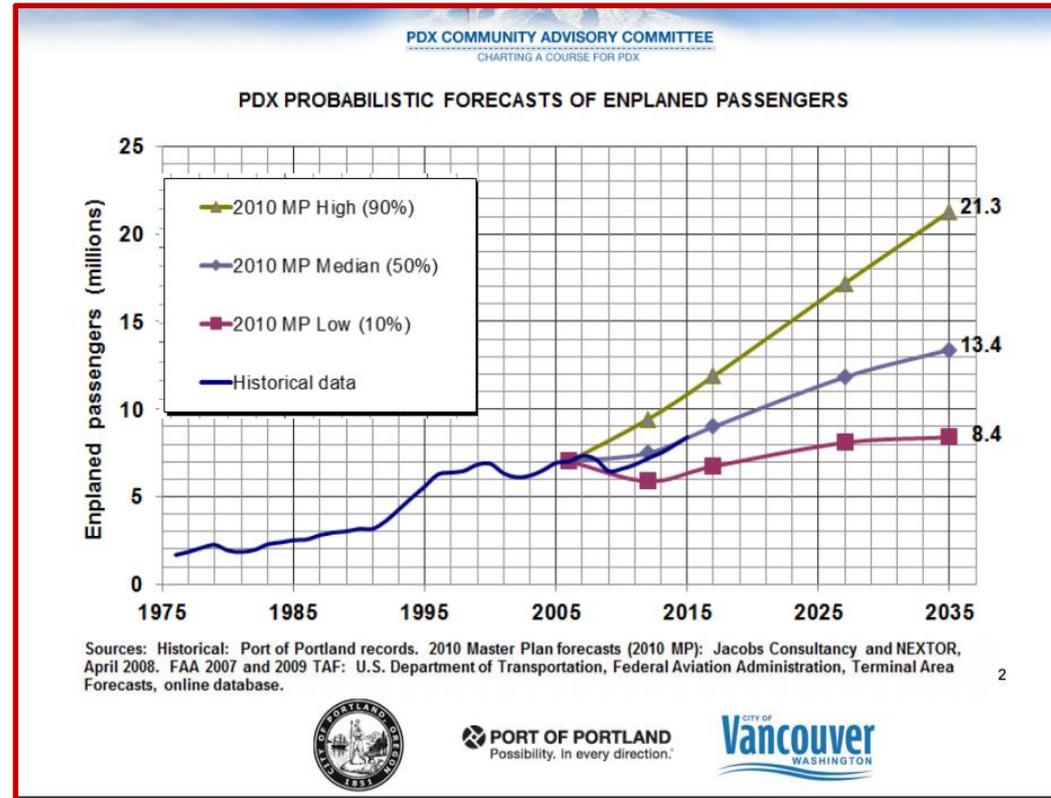
Example TTD Airport	A. Economical	B. Enviro.	C. Social	D. Legal	Total:
1) Maximum Commercial / Industrial	3	3	3	3	12
2) More Commercial / Industrial; Less Business Aviation	5	5	5	1	16
3) More Business Aviation; Less Commercial / Industrial	1	5	3	3	12
4) Maximum Aviation	1	1	1	5	8

Everyone gets an equal voice!

See, www.masteringdecisions.com

Use decision models to manage uncertainty

- Models help define problems, impacts, and choices
- Assumptions should be transparent and developed together or with shared expert
- Models do not provide one correct answer – they provide likely scenarios
- Go to Monte Carlo for consensus analysis!



Everyone's views are considered equally!

Disrupting Polarized Discourse: Polarization obstructs decision making at all scales. After the long-term failure, a sub-political process emerged to directly renegotiate a shared definition of risk. The challenge is to be prepared to acknowledge the legitimacy of divergent values, and to seek framings that sidestep, rather than confront strongly held conflicting values.

Truth decay has real consequences

“If our leaders seek to conceal the truth, or we as people become accepting of alternative realities that are no longer grounded in facts, then we as ... citizens are on a pathway to relinquishing our freedom.”



Rex Tillerson

John McCain



“Increasingly, we have our own facts to reinforce our convictions and any empirical evidence that disputes them is branded as 'fake.’”



4. How do you prevent Truth Decay?

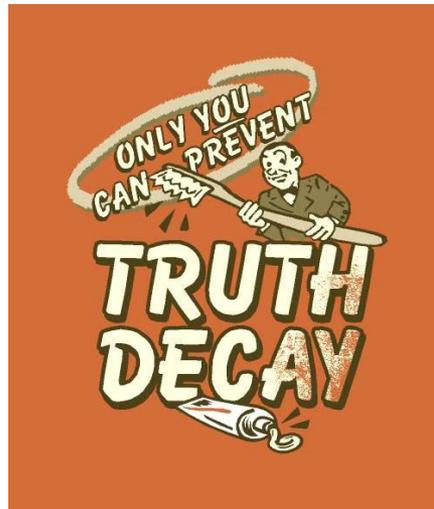
- What are your tips/tools to prevent truth decay and increase trust in our processes, while not advocating for an interest, party, or outcome?
- What is your commitment moving forward?

Please share your comments
in the question box!

Don't forget ...



“Truth is like the sun;
you can shut it out for a time,
but it ain't going away.”



Thanks!
Sam and Devin