

Frame101x: EPISODE 8

Many countries have a system of mandatory school tests. Children are regularly tested to determine their educational level and progress. In many countries, there is opposition to such tests.

We have an example here of an education minister who wants to introduce an additional mandatory school test. He has to respond to a scientist, who raises serious objections to school tests. Let's first have a look at the scientist

There is no scientific evidence that the constant introduction of new tests adds any value. What we do know, on the basis of scientific studies, is that such tests place too much emphasis on a "one size fits all" approach. We also know that many schools eventually start "teaching to the test". And finally, scientific research shows that the scope of such tests is very limited, since they do not cover a wide range of important knowledge and skills. As a scientist, I am therefore opposed to additional mandatory tests.

The scientist's frame is as simple as it is powerful: there is insufficient scientific evidence in support of mandatory school tests. The minister can choose to step into this frame by challenging the scientific evidence. That is a risky strategy. Instead, this minister responds as follows:

I am familiar with these studies. The objections that have been raised are significant, and we are doing our best to address them.

At the same time, however, I believe that parents have a right to know how their child is getting on after six years of education. I also feel that parents are entitled to an objective assessment rather than depending solely on what their child's school has to say about his or her development.

Ok, that was the minister. What just happened? First, the scientist presented a factual frame, a frame about the facts: studies show that mandatory tests have no added value.

Next, the minister responded by presenting a value frame, a frame about **parental** rights.

It is a sympathetic frame. What parent would decline the right to know how his or her child is getting on in school? It looks like the scientist wants to deprive parents of this right. It is possible, the minister notes, that a school may be underperforming. In such cases, the parents' right to know is even more significant.

Obviously, the minister does not ignore the facts – he says he is familiar with these facts, but he reframes the issue. From facts to values. From an emphasis on findings of research to an emphasis on parental rights.

So there are two conflicting perspectives, two conflicting worlds here. There is a world of facts: numbers, analysis, research and research findings. And there is a world of values: rights, principles, ideals. A statement based on values can be reframed by focusing on the facts.

I believe that people on higher incomes should pay more tax. Those with the broadest shoulders should carry the heaviest burden, especially in times of crisis. There is a lot of wealth at the top, and those who possess this wealth should pay their fair share of income tax. I am therefore in favor of raising taxes.

This is a frame based on values. The broadest shoulders should carry the heaviest burden. Now suppose you don't agree with this. How do you reframe?

This is a fine ideal, but it does not work, it doesn't work. If we raise taxes even higher, people will come up with all kinds of tricks to avoid paying tax. And they will succeed. In addition, raising taxes removes the incentive to earn more money, because far too much of it ends up going to the taxman. His proposal does not work. It is bad for the economy. I respect your ideals, but they are naïve.

The game of framing and reframing will be clear to you. The broadest shoulders should carry the heaviest burden. The facts are: it does not work.

So factual frames can be countered using value frames – and vice versa. What effect does this have?

First of all, you don't need to step into the frame of your opponent, who immediately goes from having home advantage to playing an away game.

But there's more. If you are using a value frame – an ideal – like the one in the example on income tax, you will end up looking naïve if your opponent reframes the issue by appealing to the facts. You may have fine ideals, but they don't work in practice.

Conversely, how will come across if you are relying on a factual frame, and if your opponent reframes the issue by appealing to values? Well, take the scientist and the school tests. The scientist turns into someone who questions people's rights. If you refer to the facts and your opponent to values, you might also be seen as a cynic. If people have a right, you should do your utmost to uphold it, rather than trying to take it away.

Finally, have a look at this. Bill Clinton argues for equal economic opportunities. His stance is equal opportunities is morally right. That's the world of values. This is what he says.

It turns out that advancing equal opportunity and economic empowerment is both morally right and good economics. (Cheers, applause.) Why? Because poverty, discrimination and ignorance restrict growth. (Cheers, applause.) When you stifle human potential, when you don't invest in new ideas, it doesn't just cut off the people who are affected; it hurts us all.

(Cheers, applause.) We know that investments in education and infrastructure and scientific and technological research increase growth. They increase good jobs, and they create new wealth for all the rest of us. (Cheers, applause.)

In this statement, Clinton offers both a moral and a factual justification for his ideas. This makes it much harder for his opponents to reframe the issue.