

INTRODUCTION

THE HEARTWIRED ANIMAL



In this guide, we analyze how change-makers have leveraged a heartwired understanding of their audiences to accelerate change on their issue. Then we show you how to apply the heartwired approach to mapping your own social change. With Heartwired, we hope to better equip you to generate deep and lasting change.

Human beings are heartwired.

Much has been written in the last decade about how human brains are hardwired — a set of circuits and connections that govern how people make decisions. Advances in the neurological and social sciences have created a paradigm shift in our understanding of how the human brain processes emotion, logic and primal or gut reactions, and how those brain processes influence people's decision-making.

The ways people are heartwired further shape our attitudes and behaviors on the pressing issues of the day. Just as there is a complex network of circuits that wire people's brains and influence people's impulses, there's also an elaborate psycho-social circuit board that connects people's **emotions, values, beliefs, identity and lived experiences**. In other words, human decision-making is influenced by how people are heartwired — the mind circuits and connections that tie together their emotions, identity, values, beliefs and lived experiences.



Photo Credit: Dboybaker via Flickr

As research and communication geeks with real-world experience generating social change, our teams at Goodwin Simon Strategic Research and Wonder: Strategies for Good have examined how change-makers have leveraged a heartwired understanding of their target audiences to hasten a tipping point on their issues.



We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN, FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS



Consider the dramatic changes in Americans' attitudes and behaviors regarding the freedom to marry for same-sex couples.

By the end of 2008, opponents of marriage for same-sex couples had a string of over 30 victories at the ballot box. Beginning in 2009, Amy Simon and a team of researchers and advocates undertook extensive qualitative and quantitative research, seeking pathways forward to reverse the string of losses at the ballot box. As *The Atlantic Monthly* noted, Simon and colleagues began to see the deep conflict that many voters experienced about the topic of marriage for same-sex couples.

Simon's sessions could be wrenching. A participant in one focus group had been screened as a soft opponent of gay marriage, yet she spent half an hour sounding very supportive. She talked enthusiastically about her affection for the gay people in her daily life, including gay coworkers and a lesbian sister-in-law. "Finally, I said to her, 'When we called you, you said you were undecided or leaning against [gay marriage]. Did we make a mistake?'" Simon recalled. "She looked at me and she stopped, and she said, 'No, no, no.' Then she started crying, and she said, 'I want to be for this. But I'm afraid I'm going to burn in hell.'"

Simon found many voters were struggling as painfully as that woman with the issue of gay marriage. Their "undecided" status didn't come from a lack of feelings on the issue. They were powerfully conflicted, caught between two deep-seated sentiments: On the one hand, a desire to be fair and compassionate toward their fellow man; on the other, a loyalty to what they saw as the ironclad teachings of religion, tradition, or culture.

This woman's identity as a Christian, and her beliefs about salvation and marriage as a religious covenant between a man and a woman, led her to oppose marriage for same-sex couples. However, her lived experience of caring deeply for her lesbian sister-in-law and close gay and lesbian friends provided a powerful motivation to want to do right by them.

A heartwired research approach recognizes that people's internal conflicts are actually doors of opportunity to facilitate internal change within the audiences we seek to persuade.

For change-makers, the ability to make progress on a tough social issue requires an understanding of just how a target audience is heartwired to think, feel and

respond to your issue. This understanding enables you to see the range of possibilities for rewiring those circuits and connections among those audiences.

In the coming chapters, we analyze efforts in which a heartwired approach to audience research has led to breakthrough insights and transformative change. From the historic campaign to win the freedom to marry for same-sex couples to successful efforts to reform marijuana laws, common lessons emerge.

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These social-change case studies show how change agents have used heartwired research to map the strategic terrain. Some have identified gateways to persuasion that previously had been closed to them. Others have pinpointed the barriers to persuasion that were rooted in their audience's **values, beliefs, emotions, identities and lived experiences**, which created resistance to change. Their research helped to plot the interim changes needed to lay the groundwork necessary for even greater change down the line.

In every case, strategic opinion research illuminated a new path forward in the audacious pursuit of social change.

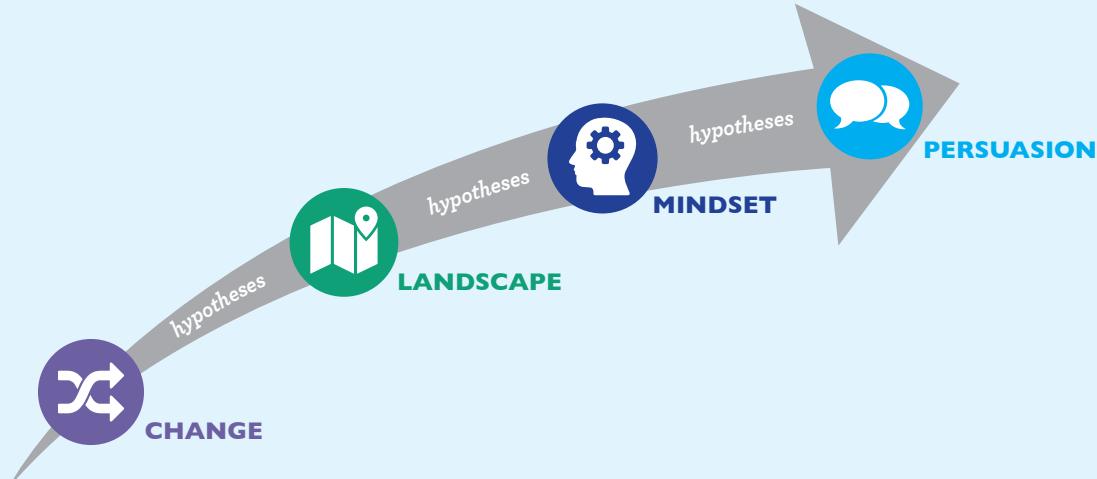
While the ideas in this strategy guide are shaped by our three decades of work as advocates, strategists and researchers, those ideas have come together here because of the contributions and thinking of many — what Steven Johnson, author of *Where Good Ideas Come From*, calls “liquid networks.” According to Johnson, “every idea is fundamentally a network of ideas.” Liquid networks require a diversity of experiences and expertise. It’s the active interchange of insights and ideas that so often finally yields the big breakthrough.

Our heartwired thinking, as well as our work, have been inspired by the ideas, best practices, books and successes of many others.



THE HEARTWIRED MAP

Using Strategic Research to Accelerate Social Change



Later in this guide, we outline how to map out your heartwired research strategy to accelerate social change.

Whether you are conducting a single survey or launching a large-scale social change campaign like marriage for same-sex couples that may take years and require deploying multiple research methods, applying the process outlined below will help ensure that the resulting research findings and communication recommendations best support your objectives.

This research process includes four phases that are interconnected and ongoing. Each of the four research phases are guided by the strategic questions below:

CHANGE: What is the specific change you want to enact in the world?

The freedom-to-marry movement came together and developed the 10/10/10/20 framework as their vision of change, which they translated as: In the next 20 years, winning equal marriage rights in 10 states; civil unions in 10 states; relationship recognition for same-sex couples in 10 states; and at least some pro-equality organizing in the final 20 states.

LANDSCAPE: What is the current landscape, or the playing field on which you have to compete, to create the change you seek — and what is already known about it?

In research to understand the attitudes of American millennials toward ocean conservation, the research

team first conducted an extensive review of existing public opinion research to ensure their work would build on, rather than simply repeat, polling that had already been done.

MINDSET: What is the mindset of the audiences you need to persuade?

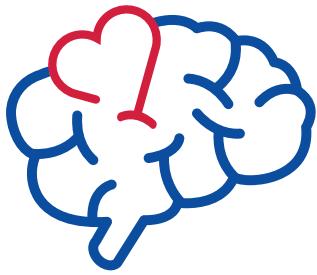
Research for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation explored conscious and unconscious biases as a way to understand how to build support for programs and policies to improve the health and success of young men of color.

PERSUASION: How do you translate your new heartwired understanding of your target audiences to develop effective persuasion strategies?

Mississippians for Healthy Families was able to defeat an extreme anti-abortion ballot measure in the state by communicating the message that “it was perfectly acceptable to be pro-life and to vote against Initiative 26.”

By mapping your change strategy, as the advocates, researchers and strategists featured in this guide have done, it is possible to accelerate momentum on your issue. Doing so gives you a bird’s-eye view of the world in which you are seeking to create change, and can transform how you approach your work once you’re back on the ground working to change hearts and minds.





FIVE HEARTWIRED FACTORS

The heartwired approach to research focuses on the ways that emotion, values, beliefs, identity and lived experiences combine, and often collide, to shape people's attitudes and behaviors. Here's how each of the heartwired factors influence people's thinking and decision-making.

EMOTIONS: The feelings that human beings have in response to the stimuli both within and around us are complex. Our emotions typically drive our behavior. In his book, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, psychologist Jonathan Haidt uses the analogy of an elephant and a rider to describe how our emotional brain works with, and often competes with, our rational brain. He writes, "Like a rider on the back of an elephant, the conscious, reasoning part of the mind has only limited control of what the elephant does." Our emotions work to prioritize different concerns — especially when we feel threatened and need to make a split second decision (Stay and fight the big bear? Or run like crazy?!). When we have more time to consider different priorities, our rational brain has the capacity to guide the elephant, though the elephant (emotions) can still win out over the rider (rational thought).

IDENTITY: Self-identity is how a person sees himself or herself in relation to the world around them. It is an incredibly powerful factor in how we experience the world. We are all driven to make decisions that align with our sense of self. When we don't, we experience uncomfortable cognitive dissonance. While each of us has a single identity, that identity incorporates many facets such as gender, race, ethnicity, profession, family and social roles, political affiliation and faith as well as traits such as being hard-working, fair-minded, educated and more. Each of us places different weight upon each facet of our identity, and that relative weight can change based on circumstances and on the moment we are at in our lives. For example, someone may see herself as a young woman, sister and daughter; when she marries and has children, she also sees herself as a wife and mother. Those facets of our identity that we prioritize have greater impact on our decision-making. Internal conflict on social issues is often the result of a moral tug of war between different facets of a person's identity.

LIVED EXPERIENCES: The events and relationships a person experiences in their life combine with the meaning that they assign to those experiences to shape how they think about social issues. The way we interpret and remember events — the narrative we construct around them — is just as important as what actually happened. Subgroups (parents, immigrants, women, African Americans) can share common, even if slightly different, lived experiences. Exploring and understanding those lived experiences is key to effective messaging strategies.

VALUES: Values are ideals that individuals hold about what is good or bad, right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate. Values influence emotional reactions, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. Values are often shared broadly within a culture or community. A person's values help them to make meaning in their lives and weigh the importance of their actions and decisions. When a person feels that an issue position is aligned with their values, they are able to feel a sense of ease and contentment. If those values are contradicted, people experience a sense of dissonance and incongruence, which interferes with their capacity to support that issue position.

BELIEFS: Beliefs are ideas that people hold to be true. People make their way through life building a set of assumptions about how the world works. When we have a lot of experience with something — whether that be a group of people (immigrants or LGBT people) or a topic (healthcare) — our beliefs are deeper and more nuanced. When we have little to no experience with something (the science of climate change), we tend to fill in the knowledge gaps based on isolated experiences, the little information that has come our way or by spontaneously constructing analogies to things that feel similar to the thing we are pondering. Whether we have deep or scant knowledge, our beliefs are further shaped by our identity, our lived experience and our values. In other words, facts alone do not shape beliefs.

