



## Navigating the Swamp with *Bridging & Pivoting* Brief

*Bridging and pivoting* is a public relations technique that involves answering a question without answering the question. It's a way of responding without "honoring" the premise of the question. Bridging is accomplished through an innocuous phrase, such as, "That's an interesting question." *Pivoting* is the conversational move that comes after the bridge statement. The pivot takes the conversation where the spokesperson wants it to go, as in, "I think of this issue as a challenge for us as a community, and there are some important things we can do as a community to address it." In communicating on complex social issues, strategic framers use bridging and pivoting as a technique to navigate the 'swamp' of public thinking in real-time interactions of all kinds, not just when talking with journalists. It allows the framer to maintain a Reasonable Tone, avoid invigorating unproductive cultural models, and introduce a reframed understanding of the issue by pivoting to Values, Solutions, or other frame elements.

### How to *Bridge & Pivot* in Three Steps

- 1. Analyze:** Identify the cultural model at work in the question or statement. This gives you what you need to make a decision about how to most effectively reframe. For instance, if you can tell that you're dealing with the corner of the swamp that explains climate change as a result of a 'hole in the ozone,' then you are a good way towards figuring out how you might redirect the conversation to the scientific understanding using the Explanatory Metaphor of the *Heat Trapping Blanket*. Or, if you are confronted with another corner of the swamp that attributes no responsibility towards fixing the problem, you can use the Value *Responsible Management* to suggest solutions. Clarifying the underlying model at work is the first step in responding strategically.
- 2. Bridge:** Use a redirecting phrase to open up conversational space for the reframed understanding you want to introduce. This helps you to maintain a Reasonable Tone, and has the added benefit of giving you a moment to think. Choose a phrase that lets you simply state your position. Stay away from bridging phrases that restate the swampy thinking. Strategic framers know that restating the negative frame only invigorates the dominant story or unproductive cultural model, and therefore makes your frame 'harder to think.'

**3. *Pivot:*** Use your analysis to select an effective way to reframe the discourse. Use a frame element that “matches” the cultural model at play. You might need to use Values to reorient thinking about responsibility, Explanatory Metaphors or Explanatory Chains to build a more accurate understanding of how the issue works, or Solutions to counteract perceptions that nothing could or should be done. Whatever you pivot to, be sure you’re making *your* point, not restating theirs. Answer the question you *wish* you had been asked, introduce a new understanding of the issue, or otherwise get back to the reframed story.

**To learn more:** Related articles available on FrameWorks’ website include “Bridging” and “Don’t Think About Elephants.”

## Examples of Bridging Statements

Bridge statements are innocuous phrases that allow a communicator to segue from a stated question to the information a communicator wants to impart to an audience.

“What’s most important to understand...”

“The one thing that is important to remember is...”

“Another thing to remember is...”

“While...is important, it is also important to remember...”

“And that reminds me...”

“A question I get asked a lot is...”

“That reminds me of a question I often consider...”

“Before we leave the subject, let me add that...”

“Let me put that in perspective...”

“Let me answer you by saying...”

“Let me emphasize again...”

“Here’s the real issue...”

“Another way to look at this is...”

“The question you raise is really about...”

“The key here is...”

“It's interesting you ask that. I believe...”

“It’s interesting you ask that. Science is telling us...”

“It’s important that we keep in mind what the research is telling us...”

**“It Came From The Swamp”  
Oceans and Climate Change – Discourse Analysis Cheat Sheet**

The following chart illustrates the analysis that a strategic framer would use to decide which tested frame elements are the best “match” to redirect swampy statements using the bridge and pivot technique. This “cheat sheet” chart is for purposes of illustration and teaching only. It does **not** represent every possible effective response – for instance, skilled framers might also pivot to Solutions, or to well-chosen data points framed with Social Math. And, this chart is not a substitute for the thoughtful analysis of discourse that fluent strategic framers conduct in real time as they “navigate the swamp” of public thinking. As you become more familiar and comfortable with the techniques and tools of strategic framing, you will develop greater judgment and creativity in deploying frame elements to match the communication job at hand.

In the meantime, you can use this chart to help you match frame elements to redirect the thinking that results from unproductive cultural models. The left-hand column summarizes and clusters different parts of the swamp that might be revealed in conversations with the public. The center column briefly explains the problem that results from this kind of thinking. The right-hand column suggests some frame elements that can help to redirect the conversation in a more productive direction. By pivoting to these frame elements, you can move public thinking away from unproductive “red light” cultural models and encourage visitors to start thinking like citizens about climate change and oceans.

| <b>Swampy element</b>   | <b>Why it sinks civic engagement in the issue</b>   | <b>Frame element that can help pivot the conversation to higher ground</b>         |
|---|---|--|
| Science Skepticism<br>(unproductive cultural models in the Science and Public Affairs domains)                                      | Doubt does not lead to a sense of efficacy to engage in solutions.  | -Explanatory Metaphor of the Heat Trapping Blanket<br>-Value of Ingenuity          |
| Progress Fatalism<br>(unproductive cultural models in the Progress domain)  | Implies a sense that damage done is done, depressing will towards engaging in solutions.                        | -Value of Ingenuity<br>-Value of Responsible Management                            |
| Ocean Uncertainty<br>(unproductive cultural models in the Oceans domain and “eat it while you can” from the Consumerism domain)     | Misunderstanding of how ocean systems work depressing understanding of the problem and engagement in solutions. | -Value of Interconnectedness<br>-Explanatory Metaphor of the Heat Trapping Blanket |
| Climate Doubt<br>(unproductive cultural models of “my observation,” “political football” and “ozone” in the Climate Change domain)  | Leads to disengagement, apathy, skepticism, and no solutions!   | -Explanatory Metaphor of the Heat Trapping Blanket                                 |
| Climate Confusion<br>(Unproductive cultural models of ‘big scary depressing’ and “political football” in the Climate Change domain) | Leads to disengagement, apathy, skepticism, and no solutions!   | -Value of Innovation<br>-Value of Responsible Management                           |

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| People Vs. Nature<br>(Unproductive cultural models in the nature, consumerism and pollution domains) | Misunderstanding of how earth systems work, what affects them, and leads to a sense that there are no solutions, or the wrong solutions. | -Value of Interconnectedness<br>-Value of Innovation<br>-Value of Responsible Management<br>-Explanatory Metaphor of the Heat Trapping Blanket |
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