



THE NEW PRAGMATISM

Coping with America's
Overwhelming Problems

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SEVERE AND OVERWHELMING PROBLEMS CONFRONT THE NATION

- Major financial crisis
- Staggering national debt, swelling as the nation ages
- Global warming exacerbated by U.S. and China policies
- Unprecedented transfer of wealth to nations hostile to our interests
- Severe loss of standing in the world
- Poorly understood – and dangerous – conflict with the Muslim world
- Rising costs of health care, higher education threaten social contract

PERSPECTIVE: WE HAVE OVERCOME EQUAL OR GREATER THREATS IN THE PAST



1929 crash



World War II



McCarthy era



Cold War



Cuban missile crisis



**JFK/MLK assassinations
& ensuing race riots**



**Vietnam War
dissension**



9/11

OUR PROBLEMS ARE SOLVABLE

We have abundant resources:



Human



Capital



Corporate



Technological/
Scientific



Potential to restore
world leadership
status



A long tradition of
pragmatic
problem solving

BUT...

OUR NATION'S PROBLEM-SOLVING GIFT HAS ERODED BADLY



Symptoms:

- Massive denial
- Grasping at straws
- Ideology instead of practicality
- Leadership pandering
- Polarization instead of cooperation
- Growing public mistrust/
“ressentiment”

REASONS FOR EROSION ARE MAINLY CULTURAL



Some are familiar:

Expert/Public Gap

Polarization

Culture Wars Over Core Values



REASONS FOR EROSION ARE MAINLY CULTURAL



Expert/Public Gap

Polarization

Culture Wars Over Core Values

Others are less familiar...

Public Demand for Voice
(without learning)

Technological Hubris

Growth of Self-Isolating
Communities

Generations Unaccustomed to
Sacrifice



WHEN OBSTACLES ARE CULTURAL, CONVENTIONAL STRATEGIES DON'T WORK

Conventional methods:



Throwing money at
the problem



Legislation and
regulation



Technological fixes



Applying specialized
knowledge



Media coverage and PR

**These won't
work against
cultural obstacles**

INSTEAD, WE NEED TO FIGHT CULTURE WITH CULTURE

**This means restoring a traditional American
habit of thought.**

REVITALIZING OUR PROBLEM SOLVING CULTURE OF THOUGHT

Reunite the culture behind the

New Pragmatism:

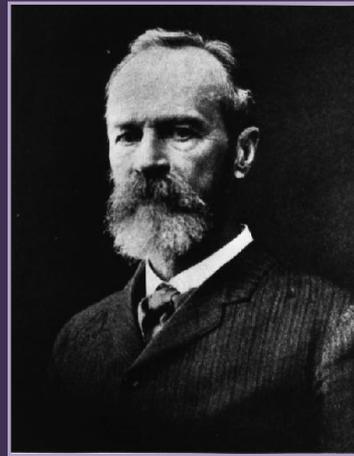
- Pragmatism: a distinctively American philosophy
- Strengthened our nation's problem solving capabilities in the past
- Transcends partisanship and heightens cooperation
- Recent renewal and updating in our universities

A THUMBNAIL HISTORY OF OUR 100 YEAR PRAGMATIST TRADITION

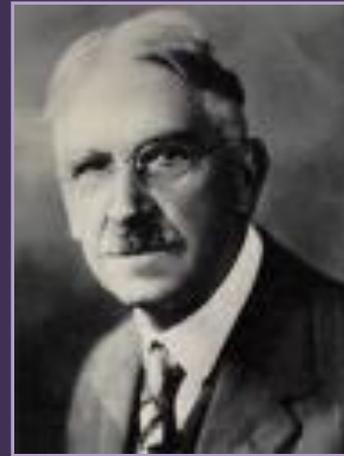
- Developed by four bold American thinkers



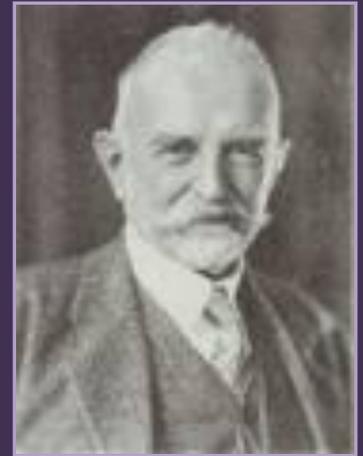
Charles Pierce



William James
(introduced pragmatism
to public 1907)



John Dewey



George Herbert Mead

- Important in social reforms: 1900-1930
- Brushed aside as 'old-fashioned' and 'outmoded': 1950-1980
- Revived and updated in a number of academic disciplines: 1980 – present

POPULAR UNDERSTANDING OF PRAGMATISM IS CORRECT BUT LIMITED

To be 'pragmatic' is to be:

- Practical/action-oriented, rather than theoretical
- Experimental (“try it out and see if it works”)
- Open to compromise/incremental solutions/art of the possible
- More concerned with solving concrete problems than with grand visions

NEW PRAGMATISM IS STRONGLY VALUE-DRIVEN

- Freedom of thought and action
- Opportunity to develop one's gifts and capabilities
- Trust in public judgment
- Faith in optimism/hope/trust/cooperation
- Against authoritarianism/dogma/ideology/fundamentalisms
- Strong utopian/reformist strain

“Democracy as a way of life”

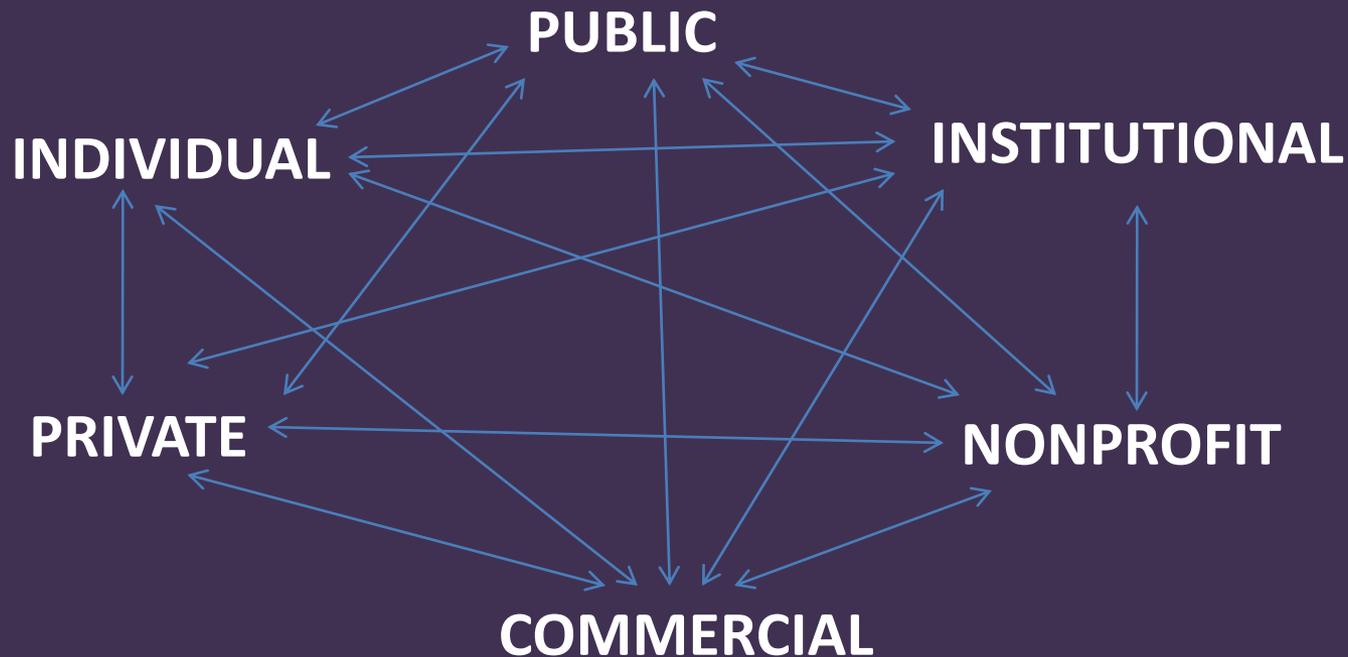
-- John Dewey

NEW PRAGMATISM HAS DISTINCTIVE METHODOLOGICAL BENT

- Committed to social experimentation with constant feedback
- Presupposes evolving culture/society/individuals
- Acceptance of uncertainty/contingency
- Emphasis on context & circumstances, rather than absolutes
- Examines problems from various points of view
- A radical theory of truth (ideas as tools for coping, not for mirroring reality)

ADVANCING THE SPREAD OF THE NEW PRAGMATISM BEYOND THE ACADEMY

- Through entrepreneurship and innovative thinking at all levels of society



EXAMPLES OF NEW PRAGMATIC INITIATIVES

- **Example #1:** strategies to reduce dependency on foreign oil
 - Pickens Plan
 - GE/Google Plan
- **Example #2:** Housing crisis
- **Example #3:** Charter schools
- **Example #4:** Adding billions of people to market economy/going green
- **Example #5:** *Learning Curve*: a new tool to accelerate the public's learning curve on urgent issues.

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 1:

Dealing with U.S. Dependency on Oil

(definition of problem)

- We now import 70% of our oil (vs. 24% in 1970)
- We consume 25% of world oil demand, with 4% of the world's population
- World oil production peaked in 2005
- The U.S. has only 2% of world oil reserves
- “The greatest transfer of wealth in human history” -- to nations hostile to our interests
- Inevitable decline of U.S. power, influence & leadership

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 1:

Dealing with U.S. Dependency on Oil

Pickens and Google/GE Plans

- Pickens Plan:
 - Substitute wind power for natural gas in generating electricity
 - Use our resources of natural gas instead of imported oil as transportation fuel
- Google/GE Plan
 - ALL electricity generation becomes renewable (wind + solar + geothermal)
 - Transform automobile fleet to plug-ins

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 1:

Dealing with U.S. Dependency on Oil

- Benefits of the two plans
 - Wean US away from fossil fuels (especially oil and coal)
 - Cut energy costs
 - Create new industries and millions of new jobs
 - Improve national security
 - Reduce transfer of wealth to other nations
 - Help reverse global warming

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 2:

Housing Crisis

- Support prime mortgage borrowers when their home equity goes negative
- Renegotiate variable rate mortgages in danger of foreclosure
- Stop “grenade” mortgages: oblige issuers to assume risk of default
- Support home-owners, and stop gaming the financial system
- Prohibit issuers of mortgage debt from paying rating agencies
- Revive values of thrift, sacrifice, and planning for the future with regard to home-buying

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 3: Charter Schools

Charter schools = Public schools that operate independently under a charter

- Expands public choice
- Encourages innovation
- Translates an abstract idea into concrete reality
- Tests educational alternatives in real-world situations
- Stimulates greater parental involvement
- Example: High Tech High in San Diego
 - Began as a single charter high school
 - Is now fostering a network of innovative schools across the country
 - Combats student disengagement and low academic achievement
 - Creates personalized, project-based learning

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 4:

Corporations Expanding World Consumer Base/ Going Green

- Helping several billion people to move into the market economy
 - E.g., cell phones/micro-lending
- International companies are less hampered by nationalism than governments
- Global corporations moving faster than governments to sustainability
- Increased recognition of responsibilities beyond bottom line
 - EVIDENCE: Annual McKinsey Surveys

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 5:



A NEW TOOL TO ACCELERATE THE PUBLIC'S LEARNING CURVE ON "TIME-GAP ISSUES" WHERE THE NORMAL LEARNING CURVE MAY BE TOO SLOW (e.g., the energy problem)

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 5:



Applied to the **ENERGY** challenge

Normal public learning curve likely to be too slow:

1. Problem is complex (triple-threat)
 - Economic (rising price of oil)
 - National security (transfer of wealth to hostile nations)
 - Global warming (oil/coal = major source of carbon emissions)
2. Solutions to some threats exacerbate others (e.g. coal)
3. Requires huge changes on part of institutions *and* the public
4. Special interests have an incentive (and means) to retard learning curve (e.g. Exxon's paid experts)

If public learning curve does not advance rapidly, consequences could be disastrous

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 5:



How the tool works



PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 5:



How the tool works

Step 1

Measure where the learning curve stands (e.g. ENERGY)

Public's current position



Consciousness raising

Working through

Resolution

Method: Tracking surveys

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

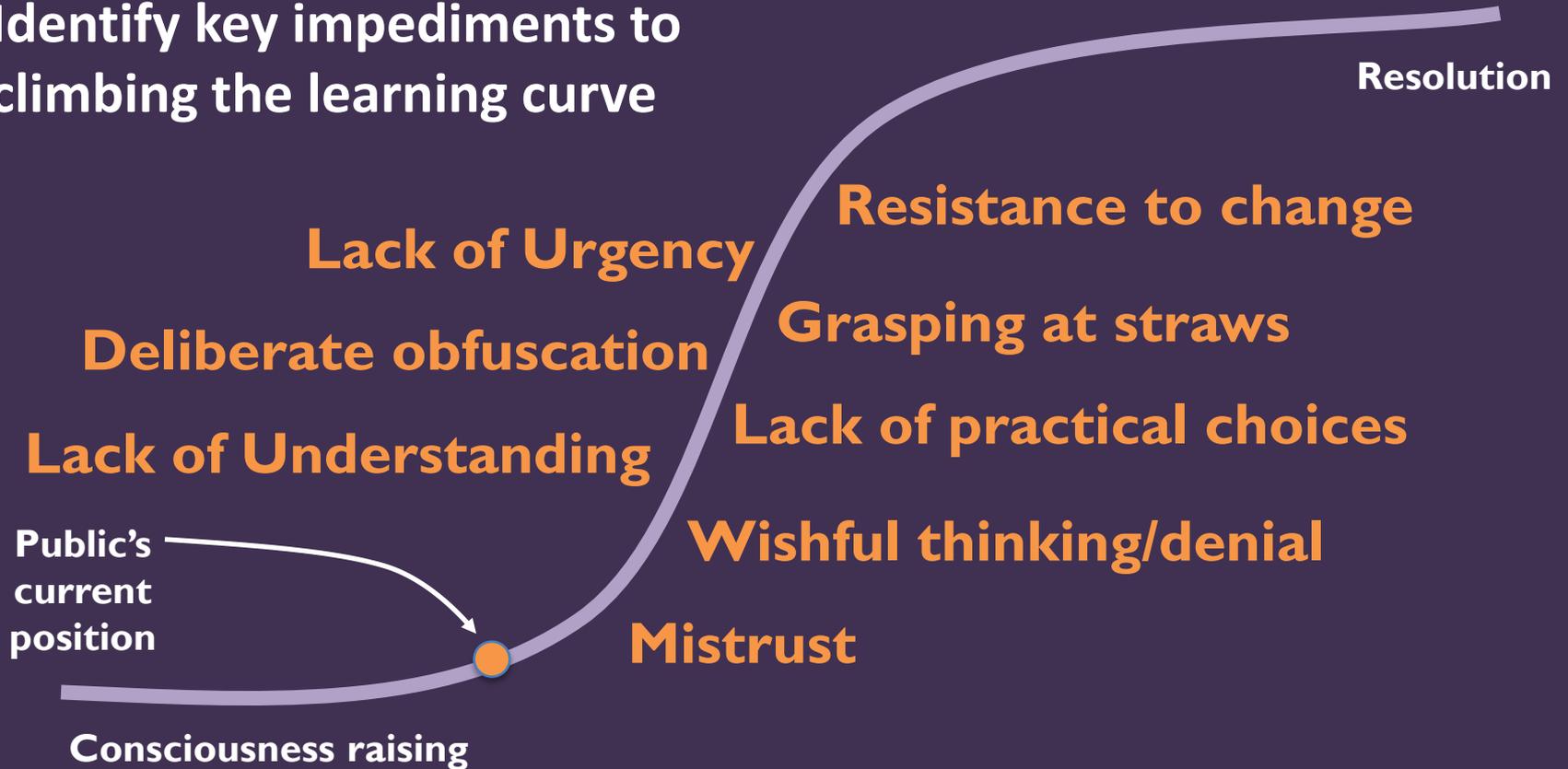
Example 5:



How the tool works

Step 2

Identify key impediments to climbing the learning curve



PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 5:



How the tool works

Step 3

Accelerate the learning curve experimentally with small cross sections of the public

Method: New kinds of learning curve research to identify the obstacles to adaptation and how best to address them

PRAGMATISM IN ACTION

Example 5:



How the tool works

Step 4

Connect with leaders

Method: Brief leaders on how to keep expectations realistic and overcome major obstacles to learning

Method: Help to advance “Explanatory Journalism” movement

ISSUES WHERE PRAGMATIC APPROACHES ARE CRUCIAL

1. Health care
2. Immigration
3. Growing national debt
4. U.S. loss of international standing
5. Conflict with Muslim world

CONCLUSIONS

1. It is not practical to counter the cultural forces eroding our problem-solving abilities one by one
2. The New Pragmatism is a powerful way to transcend many negative cultural forces
3. It provides the common ground we need to revitalize our national gift for problem solving



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