



NTNU
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BUT WHY DON'T WE ACT? THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CLIMATE COMMUNICATION

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Agenda

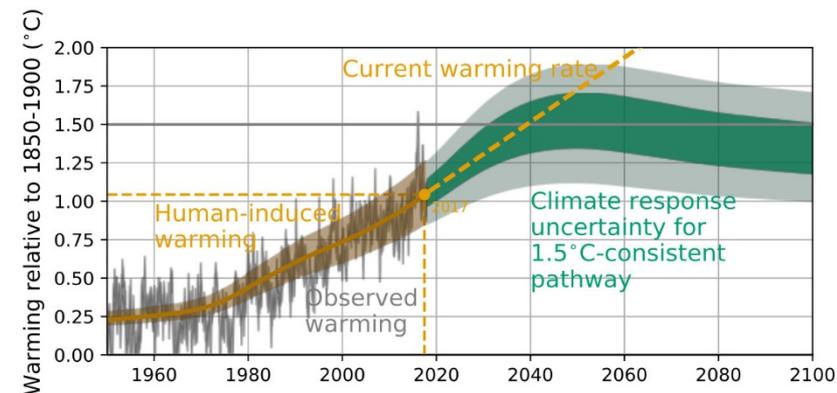
- We all know about climate change, right?
- But why do we not act?
 - Psychological problems with climate change (as compared to other environmental problems)
 - Psychological distance
 - Discouraging communication / lack of solution communication
 - Media presentation / artificial disagreement
 - Interfering factors
 - The dragons of inaction
- «We» instead of «I»
- Tailoring messages

AGENDA



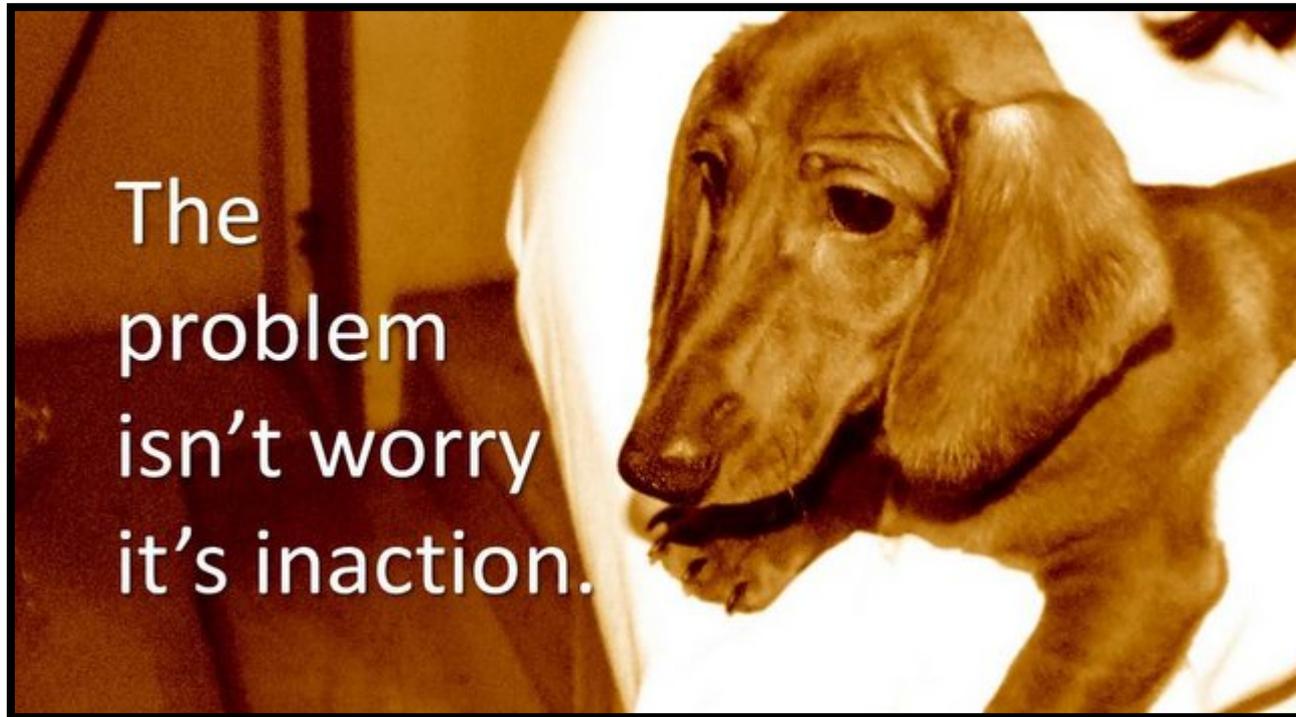
We all know it, right?

- Human made climate change is one of the biggest challenges to our societies
- There is hardly any scientific debate about this reality – there are few topics where scientists agree that much
- Drastic changes in the way we organize or lives are necessary
- Yet, we (individuals, politicians, administration, industry, ...) do not act enough



Source: IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, Chapter 1 – Technical Annex 1.A, Fig. 12

So why do we not act?



Some psychological issues with global climate change

- It is global, we think local
- It happens in large time spans, we think in shorter time intervals
- It is a complex system with non-linear effects and uncertainties
- Cause and effect are separated in time and space
- There is no single simple solution



Evolution of climate change denial

Climate change is not happening

Climate change is natural

Climate change is man made, but others are responsible

It's too late: Climate change is unstoppable



Psychological distance

What we like to think...

- Climate change hits far away countries most
- Climate change hits other species most
- Climate change hits people in the future most
- Climate change hits other segments of society most

- What I do is just a drop in the ocean
- It is too late to act
- Earth will survive, we will adapt

Psychological distance

What we should do...

- Make the global local
- Make it personally relevant
- Make it relatable
- Make the individual contribution relevant

Discouraging communication

How climate change communication often is...

- Scaring
- Lacking a positive vision
- Lacking solutions



Discouraging communication

What we should do instead...

- Describe the problem, but
- Present a positive vision for a solution
- Give concrete advice for action



Media debate



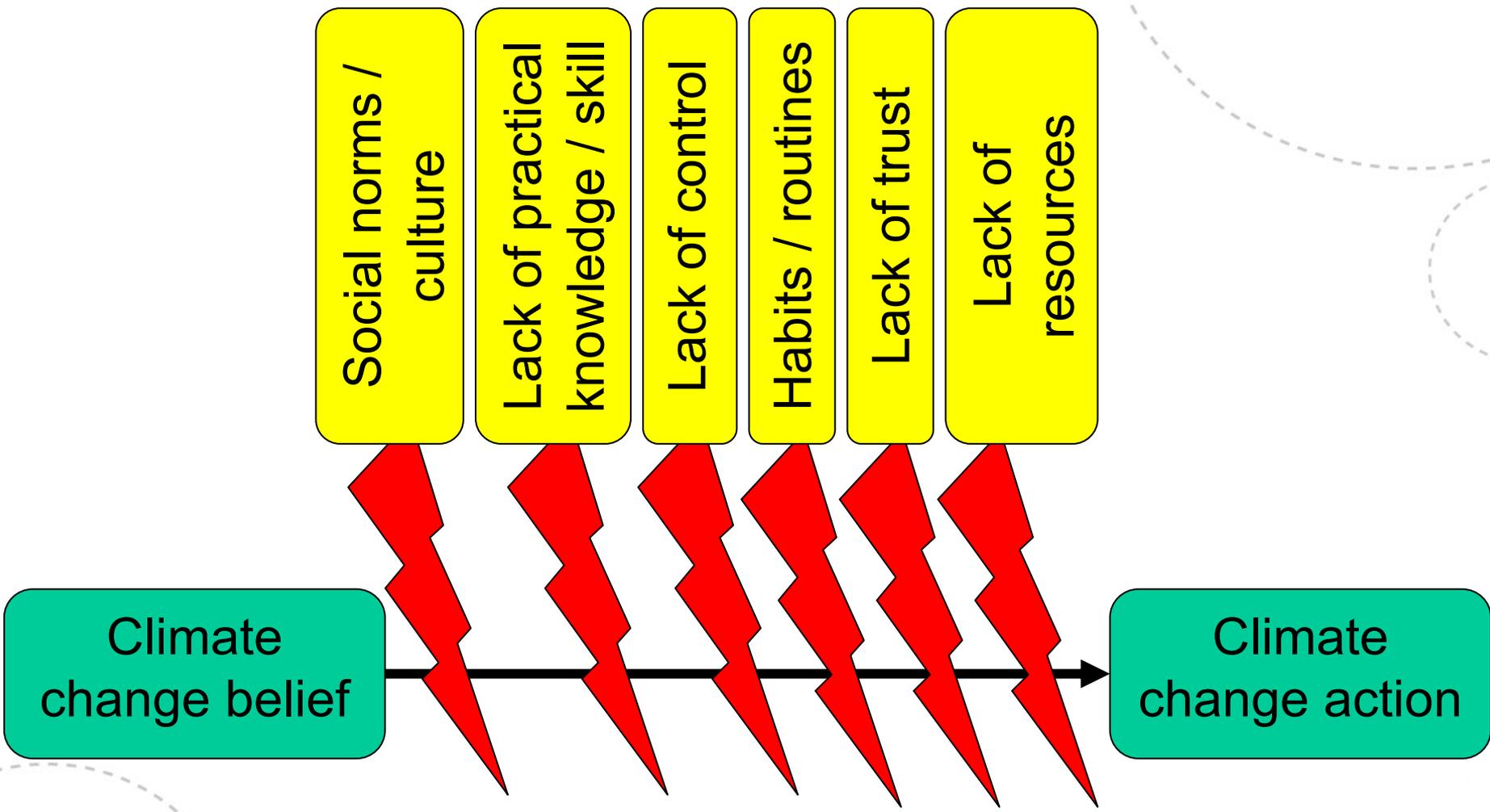
«Disagreement is more Interesting»

«Conflicts sell»

«Being neutral means showing all sides of the story»

«News need to be new»

Interfering factors



Interesting read ...



The Dragons of Inaction

Psychological Barriers That Limit Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Robert Gifford
University of Victoria

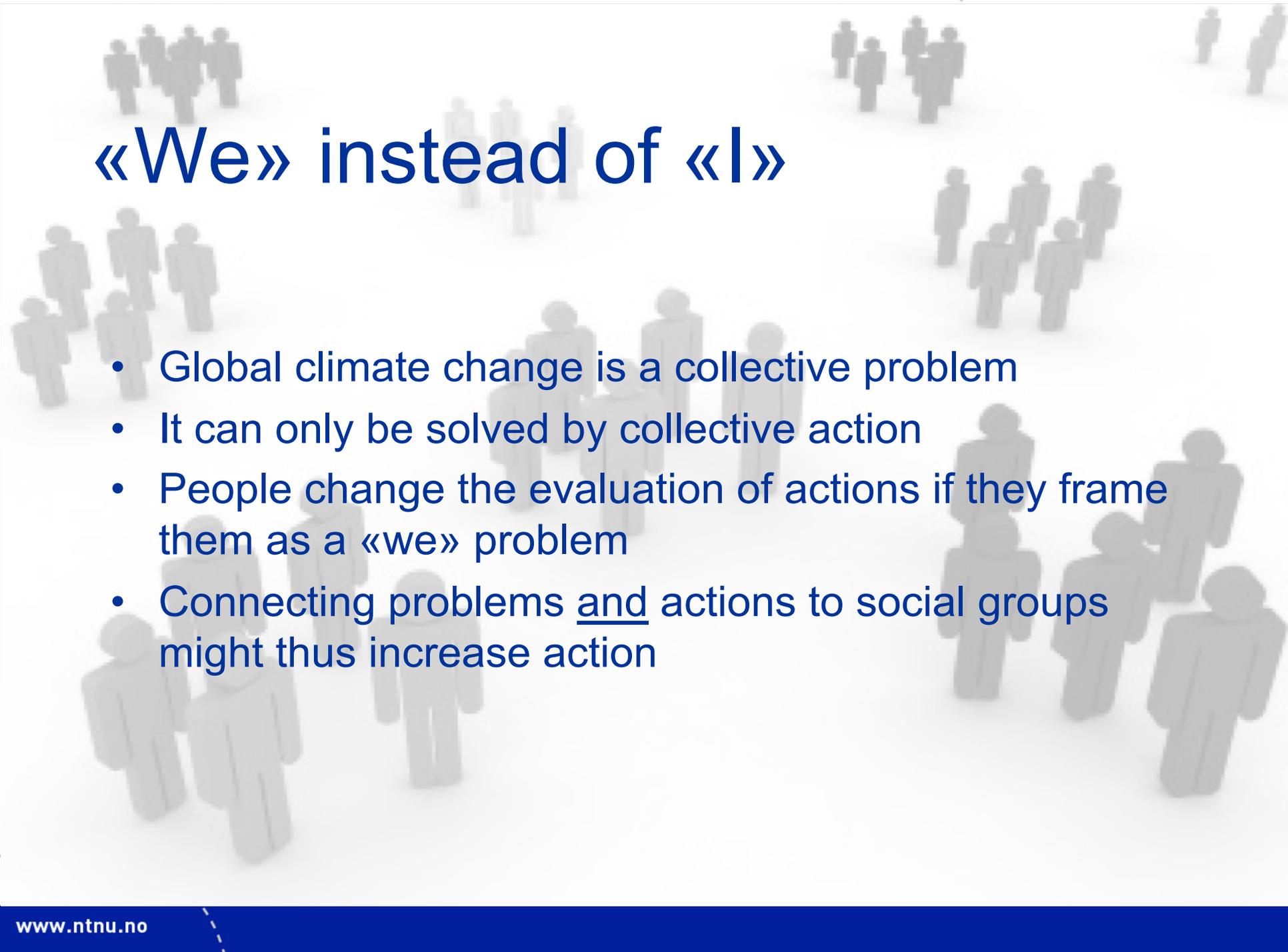
Most people think climate change and sustainability are important problems, but too few global citizens engaged in high-greenhouse-gas-emitting behavior are engaged in enough mitigating behavior to stem the increasing flow of greenhouse gases and other environmental problems. Why is that? Structural barriers such as a climate-averse infrastructure are part of the answer, but psychological barriers also impede behavioral choices that would facilitate mitigation, adaptation, and environmental sustainability. Although many individuals are engaged in some ameliorative

In some cases, the reasons for this behavioral deficit are structural and therefore beyond an individual's reasonable control. For example, low income severely limits one's ability to purchase solar panels, living in a rural area usually means public transport does not exist as an alternative to driving, and living in a region with cold winters restricts one's ability to reduce home-heating-based energy use. However, for almost everyone who is *not* severely restricted by structural barriers, adopting more pro-environmental choices and behaviors is

Psychological Barriers to Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

General psychological barrier	Specific manifestation
Limited cognition	Ancient brain Ignorance Environmental numbness Uncertainty Judgmental discounting Optimism bias Perceived behavioral control/ self-efficacy
Ideologies	Worldviews Suprahuman powers Technosalvation System justification
Comparisons with others	Social comparison Social norms and networks Perceived inequity
Sunk costs	Financial investments Behavioral momentum Conflicting values, goals, and aspirations
Discredence	Mistrust Perceived program inadequacy Denial Reactance
Perceived risks	Functional Physical Financial Social Psychological Temporal
Limited behavior	Tokenism Rebound effect

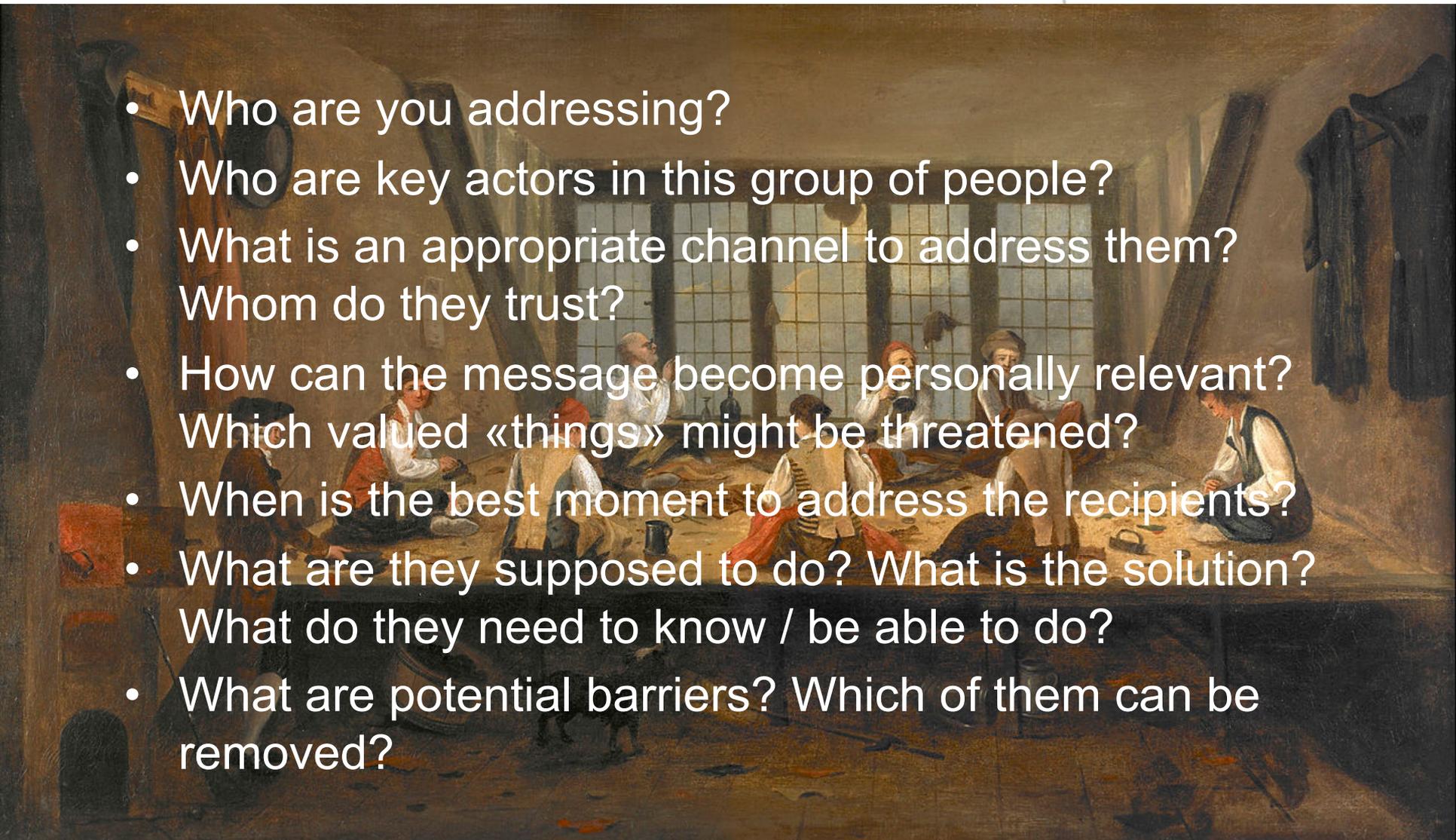


The background of the slide features a large, faint, light-gray illustration of a crowd of people. The figures are stylized, simple human silhouettes scattered across the white background, creating a sense of a large group or community.

«We» instead of «I»

- Global climate change is a collective problem
- It can only be solved by collective action
- People change the evaluation of actions if they frame them as a «we» problem
- Connecting problems and actions to social groups might thus increase action

Tailoring messages...

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- Who are you addressing?
 - Who are key actors in this group of people?
 - What is an appropriate channel to address them?
Whom do they trust?
 - How can the message become personally relevant?
Which valued «things» might be threatened?
 - When is the best moment to address the recipients?
 - What are they supposed to do? What is the solution?
What do they need to know / be able to do?
 - What are potential barriers? Which of them can be removed?

Thank you!

