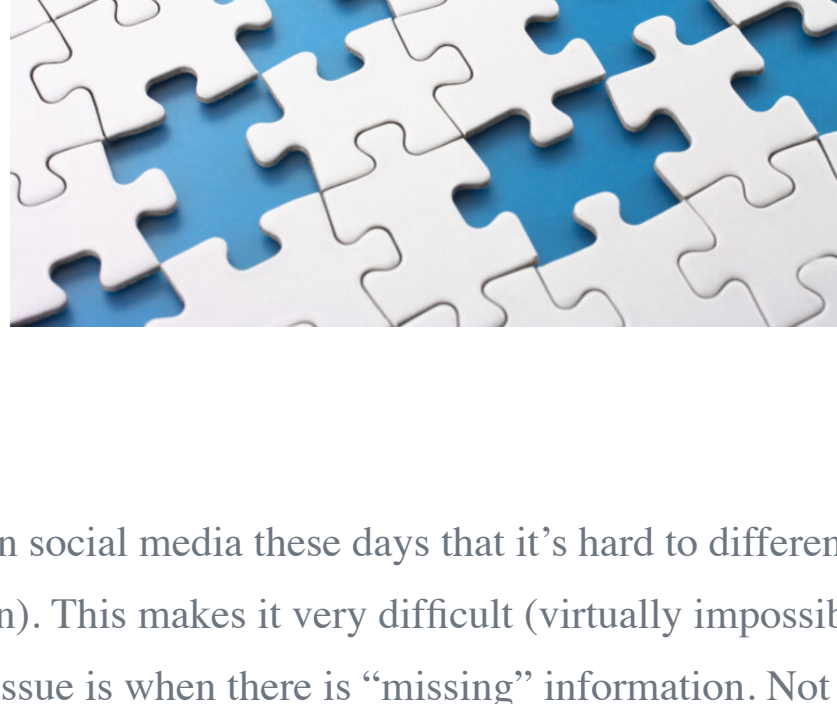
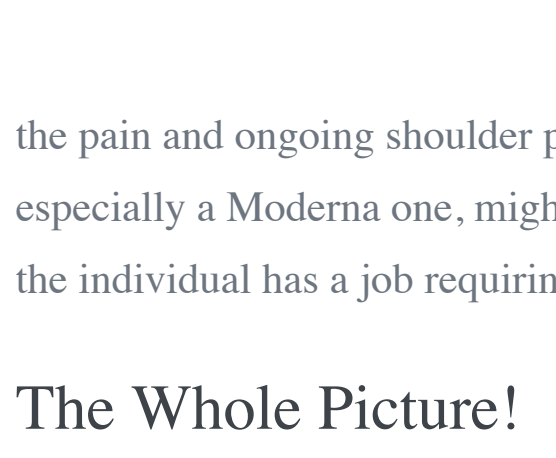


Missing Information–Worse than Misinformation!



The Problem . . .

There is so much misinformation in social media these days that it's hard to differentiate fact from fiction (especially if it's your only source of information). This makes it very difficult (virtually impossible!) to know which sources I can trust. However, I believe a bigger issue is when there is "missing" information. Not only does it encourage people to leap up a ladder of inference (https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC\_91.htm), they are doing so without having full information to selectively draw upon. The results can include coming to inappropriate conclusions and potentially taking inappropriate action.

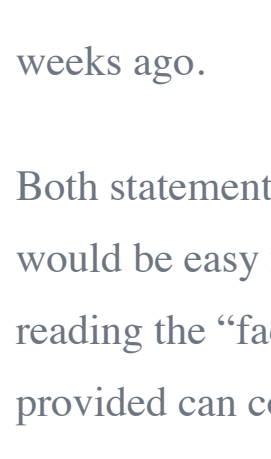


Let me give you several examples. Last week I had a Moderna booster in my right arm to better protect me from the COVID-19 virus. The next day, I had an incredibly sore shoulder that I could barely lift. I still have the same problem many days later.



One conclusion might be the booster caused the pain and ongoing shoulder problem. Someone who is hesitant to get a booster, especially a Moderna one, might use this information to increase their hesitance to get one. This is especially true if the individual has a job requiring the use of his or her shoulder.

The Whole Picture!



As it turns out, there is some missing information that is very relevant:
-->I had the Moderna booster in my right arm;
-->It was my left shoulder that was very painful and that I'm not able to lift very well;
-->I was diagnosed with an 8mm partial tear mid-tendon in my left supraspinatus tendon several weeks ago.

Both statements I made in the first instance happen to be true. If that was the only information I made available, it would be easy for someone to conclude there is a cause-effect relationship. This is particularly likely if the individual reading the "facts" has a pre-existing opinion that COVID-19 boosters has serious side effects. The information provided can conveniently be seen to support their opinion.

As you know now, there was not a direct cause and effect relationship. The information I provided was true, but incomplete. I did not provide any misinformation. I told the "truth". Do you necessarily trust me, knowing the information I provided was accurate? Or do you trust me less once you found out missing information led you to an inaccurate conclusion?



Part of my challenge is to determine if what I'm reading is true, complete and in context. If one of these factors is absent, my trust in the provider of the missing information plummets immediately and it becomes very difficult to restore.

COVID-19 Examples-Where is the Science?

Here are a couple of current issues related to COVID-19 restrictions. Before each iteration of announcements, there is never count on fixed dates--they feel more like an intention than a promise. Here are a few of them:



In a previous set of announcements, movie theatres were told they must close. I listened to several interviews where theatre operators were stunned at the announcement. As far as they were aware, there had been no evidence of the virus spreading in their venues, nor had they been involved in any conversations that led to the closings. Perhaps the health authorities had to make a fast decision, but to provide no evidence (the "science") of a present or impending danger made me question the decision-making process, not just for theatres, but for all the other restrictions.

Would making the science available (and comprehensible) have made a difference? Absolutely! I wasn't happy about one of the few sources of family enjoyment being removed; however, if a sound rationale behind the decision, I would have been in total support.

Are the Restrictions REALLY Supported by Science?

More recently, as of December 22, a series of new restrictions was announced. They apply until January 18, although I never count on fixed dates--they feel more like an intention than a promise. Here are a few of them:

- no organized indoor social events and gatherings of any size;
• concerts, sports games and theatres reduced to 50% seated capacity, regardless of venue size;
• closing gyms, fitness centres and dance studios;
• closing bars and nightclubs; and
• limiting table sizes at restaurants, cafes and pubs to a maximum of six people per table with physical distancing or barriers.

Most of these make sense to me because I have previously heard about the problems with limiting spread of the virus in the venues that are mentioned above. I have no doubt there is good science supporting most of these (at least I hope there is). The one that doesn't seem to make any sense is the closing of gyms (I am not a gym user--nevertheless, I will comment on the optics and the impact of this decision).

I understand that gym operators have been incredibly responsible in keeping their members as safe as possible from virus spread. I haven't heard of any problems. And I have heard no science/data that indicates there are likely to be problems. Now I find myself questioning the veracity of any statement regarding the science that was used to determine what restrictions to impose. If there is some science, what is it? And why not provide it to gain more support for the restrictions?

As an aside, I tend to be a rule follower who trusts those in authority (who presumably have expertise or access to it) to make good, rational decisions. Unfortunately, due to the lack of information on the "data/science" that guides decisions, my trust is slowly being buried. Are the decisions made based on good information and consultation, or are they made on the basis of "shoot from the hip"?

Before Pressing "SEND" on your Next Communication . . .

[Please note: If you prefer to send mixed or confusing messages, or manipulate the people you are communicating with by intentionally leaving out critical information, there is no need to read further!]

Based on my experience with the above mentioned scenarios, I offer the following suggestions to reduce the potential for mistrust in ANY communication! Remember--"missing information" is as damaging as misinformation. It is more subtle and very quickly leads to mistrust. These are some of the steps I attempt to take on a regular basis (if you think they may prove useful to you, they're yours):

- 1. I check the accuracy of my assumptions about what information is required for my readers to respond to my communication appropriately.
2. If I believe there is information that isn't necessary from my perspective, but could be helpful or of interest to a reader, I provide it anyway!
3. I attempt to put myself in the shoes (head?) of a naive (uninformed) reader and ponder on how he or she might misinterpret the intent of my communication. Then I provide information that will hopefully reduce the likelihood of that happening.
4. I provide the context for every communication I send (at least, I try to remember to do so). It's one simple step that requires a single sentence or two that can avoid a great deal of misinterpretation.

In the absence of a clear context, people will fill the vacuum with their own--and rarely is it the same as the one I was thinking of.

In Conclusion

I wrote this article out of the increasing frustration I feel when reading something from a previously trusted (by me, any way) source . . . where it appears what I imagine is vital information has been accidentally (or intentionally) left out. I hope this article will make its way to them so they can make better decisions when deciding what to include or exclude in their communication!

About David Gouthro

David has over 40 years facilitating high energy, creative and engaging face-to-face meetings that focus on delivering client value in a manner that is focused, flexible and fun. Embracing the challenge of providing the same quality of service in an online world has been heartily embraced and he now enjoys designing and delivering high impact meetings from afar! David can be reached at david@davidgouthro.com or 604.926.6858. And he is far from being Zoomed out in case you want a more visual conversation!

DAVID GOUTHRO | 12/31/2021 | ARTICLES | 10 COMMENTS

← You Change Faster if You're Willing to Blow It!

10 Comments

Jan Nicholls December 31, 2021
Impressive! You are an exceptionally clear communicator. Congratulations. And I agree with you.
Reply

David Gouthro December 31, 2021
Thanks, Jan! These days it is very hard to determine who is actually an expert on anything, and who to trust.
Reply

Adon December 31, 2021
Great points. Lots of misinformation in today's media climate. No gym Use has set me back on my goals however I've been two hotels this week pacific rim and best western both have their gyms open. Why can a hotel and not a gym be allowed to provide that service.
Reply

David Gouthro December 31, 2021
The apparent inconsistency in the application of restrictions creates more confusion and doubt about what the "right" thing is to do.
Reply

Bob Wiele December 31, 2021
Well done and well said David. Your four checkpoints on each communication are helpful.
Happy New Year my friend!
Reply

David Gouthro December 31, 2021
Right back atcha! Heading into the office to take an online workshop on how to think better!
Reply

Trudy Van Buskirk December 31, 2021
Thanks for the insight, David. I believe that people are basically good but the pandemic has made me question them and THEIR views on it -- AND that doesn't change my own belief that people are basically good. We choose what we believe and what we do -- everything is a choice, isn't it. Happy New Year's!!!!!!
Reply

David Gouthro December 31, 2021
I certainly agree that at some point we need to decide what to believe and then act upon it. Otherwise we end up feeling paralyzed and like a victim in a world that is increasingly chaotic and unpredictable!
We might as well choose to enjoy the ride!
Reply

Faith Wood January 04, 2022
Great points and I completely agree. Leaving information out is a very persuasive communication tactic, but is it always the best one?
Reply

Working at Walmart October 23, 2022
Good article!
Reply

Leave a Reply

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QUOTES

It is better to have a right destroyed than to abandon it because of fear. ~ Phillip Mann