TRUTH AND REALITY

Western citizens are progressively having more difficulty in recognising ‘reality’ and identifying the ‘truth’, for some good reasons. However, most if not all of us, would believe that it is particularly important that we can recognise reality and identify the truth. To fail to do so, will damage individuals and our society.

Consequently, it is important for each of us and our society to overcome the difficulties of recognising reality and identifying the truth.

Dr James Hansen, a NASA scientist advising Al Gore, predicted that within 15 years, there would be metres of sea level rises that would cover a freeway in New York and the beaches of the Florida Keys. Fifteen years later, when taken to both locations and finding the ocean not covering either location, Hansen declared his predictions were still correct.

Hansen, a scientist, was having difficulty in recognising ‘reality’ and the ‘truth’ that his predictions had failed.

REASONS FOR OUR FAILURE

In short, our increasing difficulty in recognising reality and identifying the truth is caused by;

- A massive increase in the information available to us,
- Time we are willing to spend critically looking at this information
- A belief that we can trust these sources, and
- Our lack of original, or own, critical thinking on any issue.

Increased Information.

Compared with citizens 100 years ago, the modern citizen is swamped with information every day – they cannot avoid it. On top of that, today’s citizens have nearly unlimited information at their fingertips.

Unfortunately, much of this information is unverified and will mislead most citizens.

Time Spent with Information

There is not enough time in the day to read all this information, let alone undertake even a rudimentary verification.

We are further handicapped, compared with our predecessors, by being distracted in a myriad of ways and losing valuable time. This causes us to generally make a poor decision in the trade-off between the number of issues we consider, and the time needed to verify the information.

We can either consider many issues that we won't be able to check, or consider a few issues that we can check in depth. Unfortunately, most people choose many issues and do little original critical thinking about what they are being told. Their default position is "We trust our sources".

We are losing our ability to critically think and learn – today we 'outsource' our thinking to others. Unfortunately, this is where we get 'bitten'.

Trusting Our Source.

There is an increasing amount of literature that talks about the "war on making sense" of our World which concludes that there is little information that we can trust today, and we need to learn how to find the truth, or any truth, when it is wrapped in the 'noise' of misinformation and other deceit.

Because of the amount of information, the lack of available time, or interest, we unthinkingly trust our source of information – even blindly accepting it after it has passed through many hands. We are letting an agent think for us – which is dangerous when we don't even know that agent.

Lack of Critical Thinking.

Our original critical thinking is a 'two-way street'. We not only have to carefully check what our 'agent' is telling us, but also check any of our own flaws as we interpret the information.

Not surprisingly, when this original thinking does **not** occur, we are generally misled, and our decisions based on the corrupt information are poor. Two examples show how easily we can be misled and make poor decisions.

TWO EXAMPLES

Most Western citizens have heard from a variety of sources that when all the ice floating on the Arctic ocean melts, there will be a catastrophic sea level rise. Most have not given any original thought to this assertion even if they had tracked down the original source of information.

We have trusted the source and have gained confidence by hearing it from several sources. Over twenty of these sources have been from scientists which enhances our belief that it is true. Illogically we say to ourselves; "They can't all be wrong". How would we critically examine this issue.

First, it is an assertion, and any assertion should be tested to see what is supporting it. We would ask one scientist how he came to this conclusion. The following is his tale.

"*In the six months of winter in the Arctic region when the sun is absent, the ice grows on top of the Arctic ocean. When the sun comes out in summer much of this ice melts. Since the mid-1980s satellites measuring this ice melt have shown that 40-70% of the ice melts each summer. Scientists believe that when all this ice melts there will be catastrophic sea level rises.*"

Once we have opened our mind and turned on our brain, an obvious question jumps out after hearing this tale. "*If we get catastrophic sea level rises when 100% of the ice melts, why don't we see 40-70% of catastrophic sea level rises each summer?"* Then 'getting on a roll' we could add; "*Then why don't we see a 40-70% catastrophic sea level fall every winter? Wouldn't there be catastrophic rises and falls every year? The sea levels would be going up and down like yo-yo year after year – that is not happening.".* So, why isn't it happening?

This original/critical thinking would cause you to find out the answers to your questions. Very quickly you would find a buoyancy law taught to secondary students that states "Floating ice has already displaced its own weight in water so when it melts there will be no increase in the water level."

If unsure of this, you can do your own experiment in your kitchen to verify this law. Half fill a glass with water then place an amount of ice in the glass. Making sure the ice is floating and not jammed in the glass, fill the glass with more water right to the top. Wait for the ice to melt.

Your original scientist, telling his tale of catastrophe, expects you to believe that water will overflow from the glass. The secondary school science student will show that this does not happen. You and many others have been misled by "junk scientists" about melting Arctic ice. You need to learn how to critically think for yourself.

The second example.

Before anyone knew of the science behind the global warming issue, the Green Movement asserted that "*All the scientists agree*". In the next decade, it became apparent that there were scientists that disagreed – the assertion had to be changed. Two Green social scientists then declared "*97% of scientists agreed that Man's CO_2 would cause catastrophic global warming*".

If we open our minds and critically think about this assertion we would ask; "*Who has every scientist in the World on 'speed dial' or has the email or mailing address of every scientist in the World?"*

We would then find that the two Green social scientists did not talk to every scientist in the World. They had carried out a survey by reading the extracts of over 900 scientific papers. Our alarm bells would have gone off at this stage as most surveys are poorly designed, have a poor choice of subjects, and are carried out

poorly. This one was no different - but had an additional appalling professional failure.

Not one of these 900+ scientists had been contacted and asked for their "beliefs". The two Green social scientists decided that they could tell what each scientist believed by reading the extract of their work. This was a very bold decision as only 26 scientists stated in their extracts that they believed Man would cause catastrophic global warming. The social scientists could not explain how they had decided on the beliefs of the other 900 scientists.

Critical thinking should not stop there and "the other side of the coin" should be studied. If the assertion was correct, then it would be very difficult to find any scientist who disagreed. After spending only three hours on the internet undertaking a rudimentary search of only three countries, sceptics found more than 50,000 scientists who had documented their disagreement. Consequently, it was obvious this Green assertion was a lie.

WHAT IS NEEDED

Critical thinking teaches us to focus on the crux of any issue and strip away all the distracting and deceptive 'noise' that the crux might be wrapped in. Once focussed on the crux, step by step we should examine every part of the crux of the issue that supports the stated outcome.

Assertions and assumptions have to be tested. Facts need to be identified and factoids rejected. Arguments are to be logical and illogical arguments need to be discovered and discarded.

Knowingly, or unknowingly, arguments on both sides of the issue are likely to use a myriad of deception tools. These deceptions need to be identified and rejected.

Critical thinking skills use to be taught in our secondary and tertiary education system. It is not taught today. Consequently, our society is progressively losing our critical thinking skills. We need to reverse this trend.

Sections of our universities who embrace 'post modernism' openly declare they no longer believe in facts and logic. In our secondary schools, untrained teachers think they are teaching students how to think critically but, through no fault of their own, they are the blind leading the blind.

When told of this criticism many teachers are upset and don't believe it. So here is an easy test for all of us. Can we and therefore teachers identify and teach;

- How to identify the crux of an issue,
- How to identify assumptions and assertions and test them,
- How to identify facts from fictions,

- 20 logical arguments out of nearly one hundred,
- 20 illogical arguments out of nearly one hundred, and
- 20 deception tools out of dozens such as; *verbal deceit, definitional deceit, loose language, weaponised words, visual deceit, graphical deceit, emotional words triggering our imagination, large number deceit, "record' deceit, statistical deceit, unbalanced views - focussing on the negative and not looking at the positive, and a myriad of other deception tools.*

To show how lost we are when asked the above questions, a significant majority of teachers and lectures in our educational system cannot even start to answer. You will receive a blank look.

To see how dangerous the loss of critical thinking skills is, consider an extreme case. If no one can identify reality or the truth and are always using emotional and illogical reasoning, any knowledge we have gained will be misused damaging individual lives and our society.

If we cannot think 'straight' why waste our time learning any knowledge? We won't be able to use it effectively.

CONCLUSION

With the information overload that we have today, identifying 'reality' and the 'truth' becomes difficult. This has caused us to outsource our thinking to other people. Because we don't have time or the interest in checking how well these sources are thinking, we lazily default to a position where we will believe anything other people say.

Recognising this, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of individuals and organisations that we would normally trust who now spend most of their time deceiving us. They no longer deserve our trust. We need to test what they tell us. Without having critical thinking skills, we will do this poorly.