

REDUCING DESIRE FOR IVORY

A PSYCHOSOCIAL GUIDE TO
ADDRESS IVORY CONSUMPTION



A PSYCHOSOCIAL GUIDE TO ADDRESS IVORY CONSUMPTION

Renee Lertzman, PhD,
with Karen Baragona, Conservation Advisor

In the global effort to address elephant poaching and the broader scourge of wildlife crime, greater attention has been focused on consumption of illegal and unsustainable wildlife products, the driver of most poaching.

Conservationists are redoubling efforts to reduce demand for ivory for example. With the stakes so high and the prognosis for elephants so dire if we falter, we must widen our search for solutions. We are venturing into disciplines beyond the domain of traditional conservation. We are plugging into novel sources of inspiration and expertise to probe the complex, nuanced nature of demand for ivory.

This guide represents one such foray into new territory for conservationists: a *psychosocial* approach to demand reduction. Drawing from cutting-edge psychology and neuroscience, the guide examines how societal and cultural forces combine with individual experiences and emotions to generate a desire for ivory. With deeper knowledge of the hidden factors that give rise to desire, we gain a more intimate understanding of the ivory consumers we need to engage. Through this stronger connection with our target audiences, we can more effectively redirect their desire away from ivory. Redirecting desire, thereby diminishing ivory demand, represents a major step toward making the world safe for elephants.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Renee Lertzman and Karen Baragona developed this guide based on Dr. Lertzman's research into psychosocial approaches to addressing conservation challenges. The guide was informed by a workshop, "Beyond Behavior Change: New Approaches to Changing Consumer Demand for Ivory," held in May 2016 by World Wildlife Fund at the National Geographic Society in Washington, DC, facilitated by Dr. Lertzman and attended by conservation, academic, and government stakeholders. Additional input and editing were provided by Jan Vertefeuille and Jay Sherman of WWF, and the authors wish to thank the WWF-China and TRAFFIC behaviour change team for their contributions and insights.

Cover artwork "Elephant": © 2016 Tim Jeffs Art.

Purpose of this Guide

This guide shares a set of psychosocial insights and tools for reducing consumer demand — or, as we have reframed it, desire — for ivory. It presents a new lens through which to view conservation campaigns and their audiences — one that takes on the complex psychological, neuroscientific, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of ivory consumption. It is intended to support efforts that directly address the active market for these goods, including groups that are hardest to reach. This approach is not unique to ivory, yet presents an opportunity to take our work on the ivory market further.

This guide is a first step in teaching conservationists how to apply a psychosocial lens to our work. The approach it outlines is not meant to replace current campaign strategies, but to build upon their strengths and amplify their effectiveness.

2 PART 1 Basic concepts

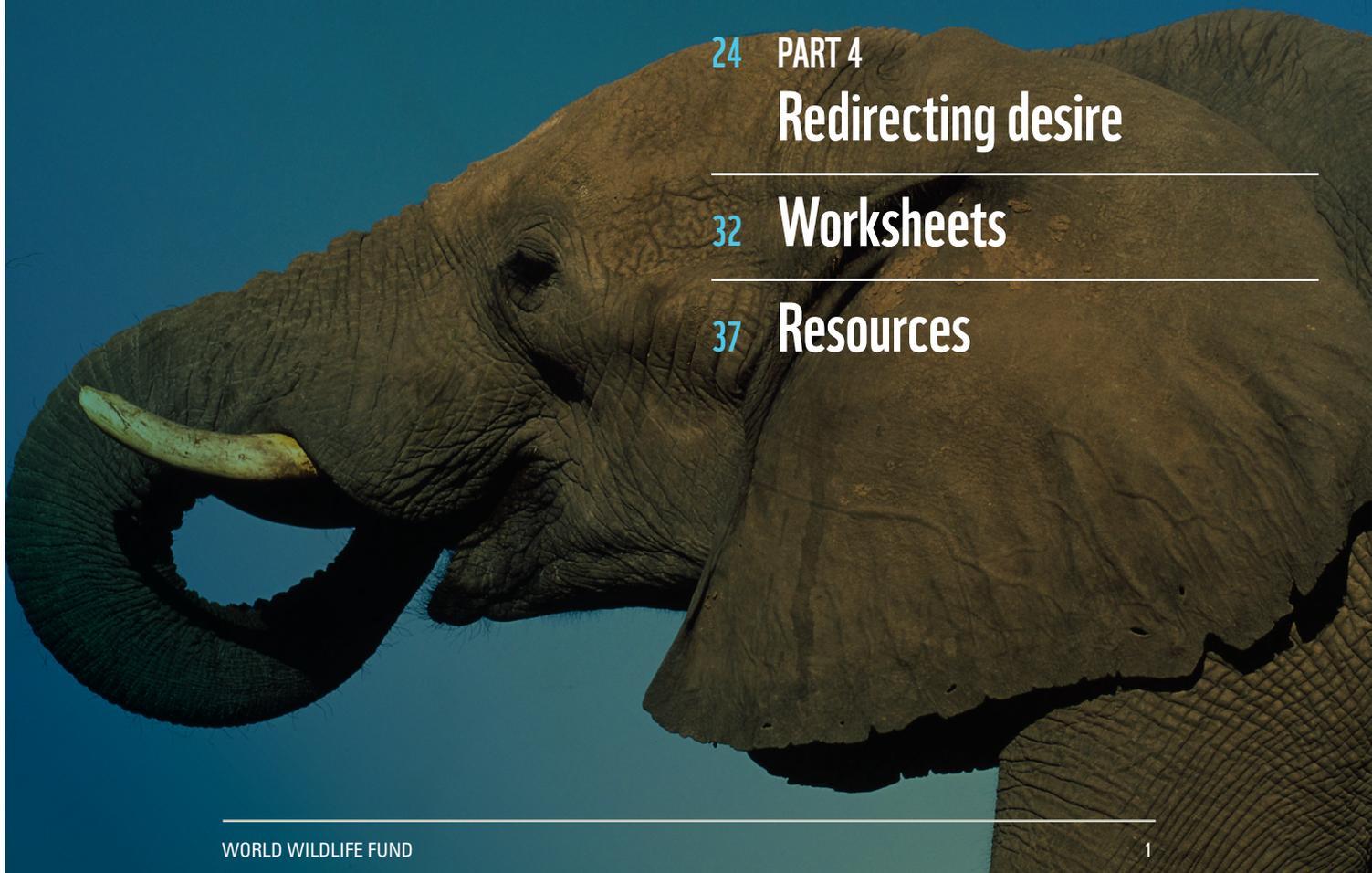
8 PART 2 Current approaches: the landscape

16 PART 3 Toward a psychosocial approach

24 PART 4 Redirecting desire

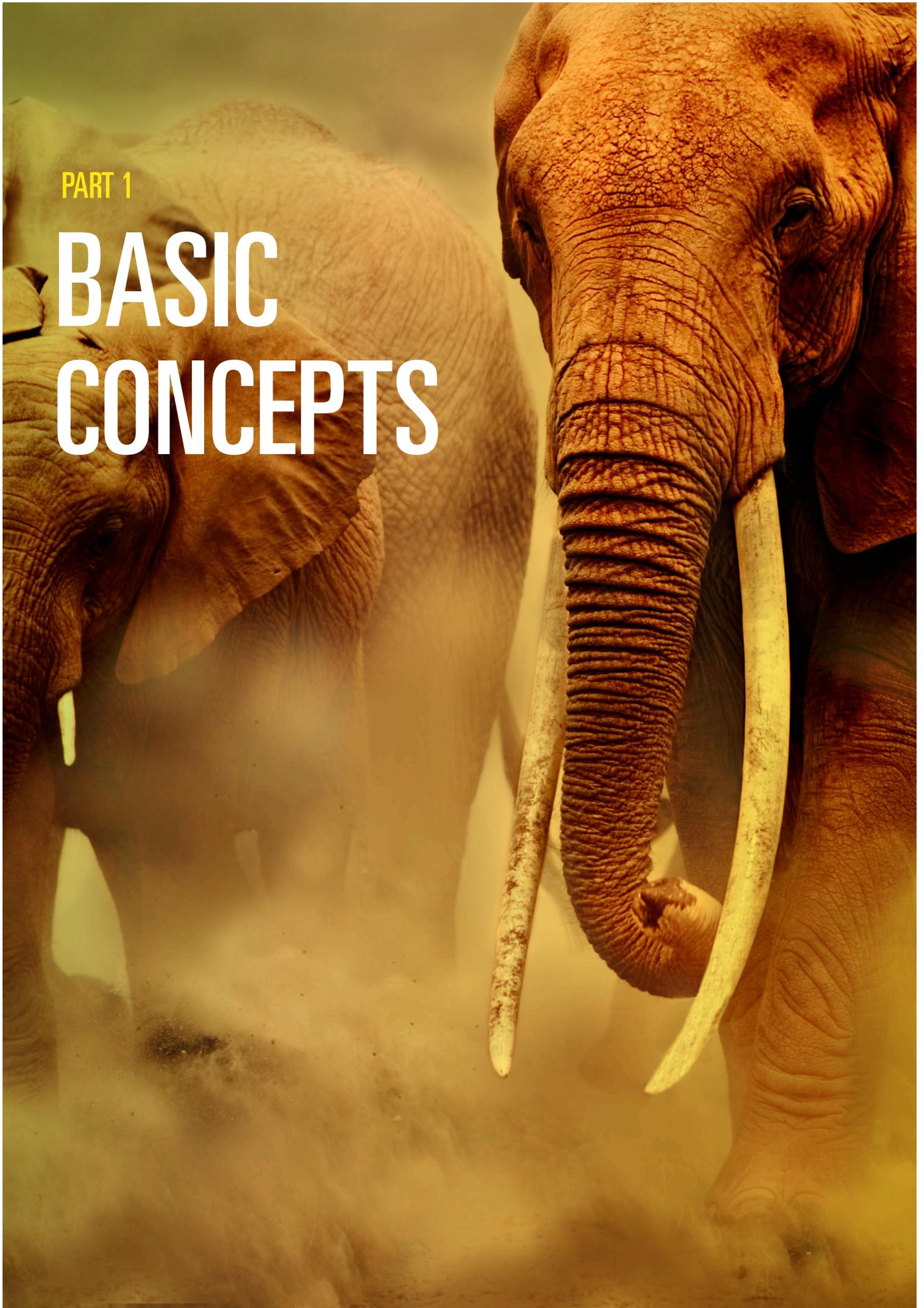
32 Worksheets

37 Resources



PART 1

BASIC CONCEPTS



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PSYCHOSOCIAL?

The term “psychosocial” refers to the interplay between our individual psychology and the social and cultural context in which we live. Psychosocial research probes the below-the-surface motivations that drive our actions and choices. It is an approach which recognizes that appeals to people’s rationality or facts about our crises are not sufficient unless campaigners and communicators engage with how individuals and societies manage their complex relationships with the natural world. One of the hallmark features of this approach is its emphasis on *affect*. Affect is a key underpinning of desire: particularly the complex desires that lead to the consumption of ivory and other products derived from wildlife. Understanding affect helps us get at the best ways to address the desire for ivory.

WHY DESIRE?

Desires are complex drives, leading us to enact certain behaviors. Often these desires are both socially influenced and personally experienced (as “I want that” or how something makes us feel). Desire is an expression of what psychologists call “affect.”

Affect is similar to emotion; however, it is largely under the surface of our awareness. It’s the feeling associated with a place, thing, interaction, or memory, often “felt” before “thought.” Think of *affect* as the feelings attached to the visceral wants and needs buried within each of us. We are largely unaware of them; they lie out of reach of conscious thought. We strive to satisfy these hidden needs through certain behaviors, without fully knowing why we engage in them. It is the *affect* that we are most aware of — for example, the pleasure of handling a beautiful object, the pride associated with celebrating a cultural artifact, the anxiety of feeling left out or excluded, or the sense of peace we feel with people who accept and love us. Psychologists who work in clinical settings often focus on *affect* as a key component, as it often drives and shapes our behaviors. Marketing professionals engage *affect* when creating specific moods through messaging or campaigns.

Affect might show up as a desire or attraction for a specific object, such as ivory. It is not processed at a rational level; it is a feeling, a craving for something. People buy ivory not solely for its beauty, but for what it represents and how it meets unspoken needs. These needs may include feeling valued, safe, powerful, accepted, respected, connected with history or one’s cultural heritage, or able to possess what was once accessible only to the elite. Often these needs are socially influenced, hence the term “psychosocial.”

To redirect desire away from ivory, we need to first acknowledge, and then meet these same needs through other means. If the need is to feel pride, we need to show pride through another frame. We don’t simply tell people not to engage in the practice or simply provide a substitute for the material. It is more complex than that. We need to offer ivory consumers alternative ways to derive the same feelings of security, connection, and so on.

WHAT IS AN EXAMPLE OF DESIRE?

Here is a simplistic example of how affect-laden desire drives behavior. We eat when we are hungry. We also may eat because we are stressed, lonely, bored, depressed, hurt, or angry — what some people call “emotional eating,” or “eating their feelings.” We may be experiencing an unconscious need to feel calm or loved or reassured, but it translates into a desire for food, even a particular kind of food. We don’t know why, but we just have to have it. We might be attracted to certain foods that evoke strong positive emotions — for example, a dish a beloved family member used to make, or an ingredient that takes us back to a time and place when we felt happy. We even have a shared understanding of “comfort food.” We sometimes use food to satisfy our submerged emotional needs, yet we often are oblivious to the hidden forces at play.

WHY DO WE SAY “DESIRE” RATHER THAN “DEMAND”?

If we hold consumer “demand” up to the light, we see what it is really made of: desire. It is people buying things because of an irresistible allure. Demand for ivory arises from a desire whose roots may reach so far underground that the consumers themselves cannot fully explain their powerful attraction. It may involve a love of one’s heritage and country, insecurity in the face of rapid global economic change, or longing to connect with one’s ancestors through the collection of the objects. Some people may even derive a sense of power by engaging in a “forbidden” activity. Addressing desire can help conservationists crack the code in reducing demand.

WHAT IS THE PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH, IN A NUTSHELL?

Here are the basic elements to the psychosocial approach to reduce demand:

Identify the unconscious, core needs consumers are trying to meet by buying ivory.

Acknowledge these needs in campaign messaging in a non-judgmental way.

Redirect consumers to an alternative, “elephant-safe” way to meet their needs.

Each step is essential. If we skip one, the campaign is incomplete. Often, the second step is overlooked completely. Without integrating these psychosocial insights, a campaign may fail to change consumer behavior at a scale that makes a real difference for elephants. (We will talk more about these in detail on the following pages.)



Raising awareness about the damage and risk to wildlife is usually not sufficient to change behavior. We need to also address the complex psychosocial factors that often influence ivory desire.

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM “BUSINESS AS USUAL”?

Many recent campaigns to reduce demand for ivory use mass media public awareness techniques or “behavior change” approaches that emphasize behavioral economics and social marketing. They have raised awareness about the plight of elephants, used trusted messengers (e.g., celebrities) to urge consumers to say no to ivory, and invited people and companies to take a pledge not to buy or sell ivory. Campaigns also have used sentimental, “heart strings” tactics that bring up guilt, shame, or conflict, which can backfire, as we will discuss below.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been successful in educating the public about elephant conservation and dissuaded some potential ivory consumers from buying. They also have created a climate in which people approve of and even welcome tighter restrictions by governments.

Yet, desire for ivory persists. Legal markets thrive in some places, with government sanction, and vigorous black markets operate out of view. The illegal ivory trade is alive and well — and driving the rampant poaching of wild elephants.

Moreover, survey results (The Nature Conservancy 2016; National Geographic Society and Globescan 2015) show that even when people realize how ivory consumption threatens elephants’ survival, their attachment to ivory and inclination to buy it may remain unchanged. The approaches that have gotten us this far may not reach all the way down to the powerful, latent motivations that drive desire.



The psychosocial approach acknowledges people’s desire for ivory, which helps them contemplate change.

The psychosocial approach is about changing behaviors. But this approach differs significantly from the majority of campaigns by targeting the underlying drivers: desire, affect, and attachments. By employing tactics in addition to current behavior change approaches (such as pledges, champions, generating a viral cultural conversation) and awareness raising, integrating a psychosocial approach into campaigns to reduce desire for ivory can move us past two major roadblocks to success:

- The use of “shame and blame” tactics that, according to brain research (Alcorn M. 2013), trigger emotional states that block people from processing what our campaign messages are saying.

The psychosocial approach acknowledges desire without blame or judgment. The brain struggles to process information that distresses us and threatens our identity. The psychosocial approach promotes constructive engagement with consumers to shift them to alternative, elephant-safe behaviors precisely by taking an empathy-centered approach that acknowledges the core needs trying to be met. It does this because it helps our brains process new information and the possibility of change.

- The absence of a redirect — a new behavior that replaces the old behavior (buying ivory) and serves the same fundamental function — that meets the same fundamental need (connection, pride, acceptance, prestige and so on).

The psychosocial approach examines consumers’ underlying motivations for buying ivory and devises a redirect. One reason people may buy ivory, even when they know elephants are imperiled, is because their desire persists and has no other outlet. Buying ivory may give consumers a sense of power, entitlement or prestige, or other qualities that form their most profound sense of themselves. If this source of identity is taken away, something else must be offered to replace it and we call this a redirect.

Note: *This is not a how-to manual. This guide presents a series of concepts and insights in the hope that it also sparks ideas about how they can be applied. Naturally, users will not suddenly become experts. Additional support, training, and consultation on this material will add value to this guide’s utility.*



PART 2

CURRENT APPROACHES: THE LANDSCAPE

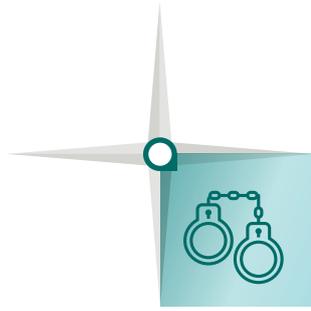
THE FOUR QUADRANTS

Conservationists tend to draw from a mix of approaches when designing campaigns, but may not have stopped to categorize and analyze them or to consider how they complement each other. Below, the Quadrants of Engagement (Lertzman, 2016) does just that.

The Quadrants graphic represents the whole toolbox of approaches to changing consumer behavior. **Campaigns often employ tools from just one or two quadrants; yet to maximize effectiveness, they should take an integrated approach, incorporating tactics from each of the four categories.** The Quadrants can help conservationists evaluate where their campaign strategies are strong and where they could add more tactics from neglected or overlooked quadrants.

Individual quadrants overlap with one another to some degree. However, for the sake of simplicity, The Quadrants categorizes the wide range of campaign approaches into four distinct groups, characterized by their dominant feature: Regulatory/Enforcement, Awareness-Raising/Culture, Behavioral Economic/Social Marketing, and Desire.





THE REGULATORY/ ENFORCEMENT QUADRANT

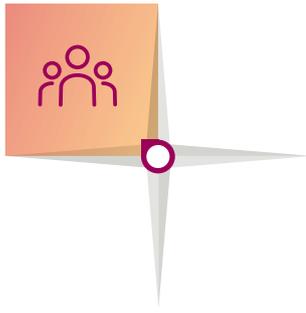
What are the external systems that impose restrictions on the behavior?

This Quadrant comprises regulatory mechanisms by governments, corporate actors, or intergovernmental bodies that constrain a behavior — like buying ivory — through restrictions or bans, and consequences for violators.

Examples for controlling the ivory trade include the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and national legislation (e.g., the Endangered Species Act in the U.S., China's Wildlife Protection Law), national agencies that execute and enforce these laws (e.g., the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, China's State Forestry Administration), interstate/domestic commerce laws, customs services, and border control agencies. The main penalties, which are also meant as deterrents, are fines and imprisonment.

You know you are in this quadrant when:

- > *You are mainly focused on specific regulations.*
- > *Your energy is dedicated to ensuring effective implementation of laws.*
- > *You believe that ultimately it is regulation that will create change.*
- > *You focus on policy and international agreements.*
- > *You focus on enforcement and trafficking.*



THE AWARENESS-RAISING/ CULTURE QUADRANT

What are the most powerful messages — and messengers — for changing the behavior?

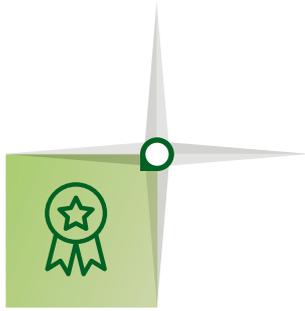
This Quadrant is about influencing cultural perceptions through messages — often celebrity-driven — that saturate the media landscape, grab people’s attention, and incite them to take action (in the form of petitions, donations, contacting their lawmakers, and so on — in the Behavioral Economics/Social Marketing). The focus in this Quadrant is on how we design and frame the message. Drawing on insights from social psychology and social marketing, this approach strongly focuses on using trusted messengers, which often includes a variety of public figures to deliver the message.

These messages often aim to shock, surprise, persuade, incentivize, or intrigue audiences. In the ivory context, they may horrify us with images of slaughtered elephants or inspire us with profiles of conservation heroes.

This approach focuses on the appeal to consumers’ values and beliefs to persuade them to reject ivory — or curb other environmentally damaging behaviors. For the point of view of this Quadrant, our greatest efficacy as campaigners is to design the most compelling message. It leverages the use of media saturation, often combining trusted messengers with a call to action, such as signing a pledge or joining a network of supporters.

You know you are in this quadrant when:

- > *Your main focus is on designing effective messages to make a behavior socially unacceptable, such as using popular cultural figures/celebrities. The audience tends to be broad.*
- > *You ultimately believe that effective messages have the power to influence behavioral change and impact the ivory trade.*
- > *Your primary objective is to raise awareness through media/social media memes.*
- > *Your focus is on crafting persuasive messages about the value of wildlife, or the “wrongness” of the ivory trade.*
- > *You aim to tell people about the wrongs and harms caused by the violent ivory trade, to “wake people up.”*



BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS/ SOCIAL MARKETING QUADRANT

How do we get people to do X behavior?

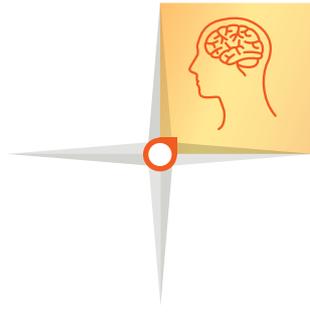
This Quadrant reflects one of the more prominent approaches in ivory demand reduction. It draws on the the rapidly developing field of applying behavioral economics, “social marketing,” and social psychology to changing behavior for conservation purposes. Common frameworks aim to “remove barriers” and “increase motivation,” and make it easier for the target audiences to do or stop doing specific behaviors.

Tactics include pledges, competitions or challenges, “nudges,” recruitment of champions, and social norming and influence. These mechanisms have proven successful at shifting behavior around discrete activities, such as recycling. The emphasis here is on leveraging behavioral economic tactics to diffuse influential views, such as making ivory undesirable or taboo by having a figure influential with the target audience publicly state their distaste for a product and intention to boycott it.

This approach often utilizes spokespeople who already support a change in behavior, early adopters, as powerful role models for influencing others. It recognizes that both social reward (self-esteem, being recognized for achievements) and stigma (being judged or shunned) can stimulate new behaviors. Humans are intensely social creatures whose very survival instincts are bound with acceptance and fitting in with a culture or community. The risk of stigma — or participating in a socially unacceptable activity — carries great weight. These campaigns leverage these mechanisms to create an “in-crowd” association with the desired behavior.

You know you are in this quadrant when:

- *Your primary sources of inspiration and strategy come from behavioral economic insights, such as using nudges, defaults, and incentives (prizes, rewards).*
- *You ultimately believe social marketing tactics are the most effective ways to shift demand reduction and behavioral changes.*
- *Your campaigns center largely on a call to action of taking a “pledge” or taking an action to demonstrate visible support.*
- *You focus on engaging communities through the use of fostering champions to influence peers and networks.*



THE DESIRE QUADRANT

What is the experience of the consumer? What needs are they expressing through their consumption?

This Quadrant is the most complicated to tap into and the one that is least used in current campaigns. It delves into the underlying psychological needs and motivations that fuel consumer desire for ivory. Its methods reflect a cross-disciplinary blend of neuroscience, psychology, and anthropology/ethnography. It traces the hidden forces that attract people to the things they desire. It peers into people's complex, often conflicted, emotional relationships with what they buy (e.g., ivory), and how identity and self image factor into these choices.

This Quadrant can serve and support the other quadrants. It can guide us in developing our messaging, social marketing, and social media tactics, the memes we generate. It directs us to acknowledge the hidden drivers that lead people to want ivory. It is not a distinct, stand-alone approach, but a set of considerations and perspectives that often are missing or greatly underdeveloped in campaign strategies.

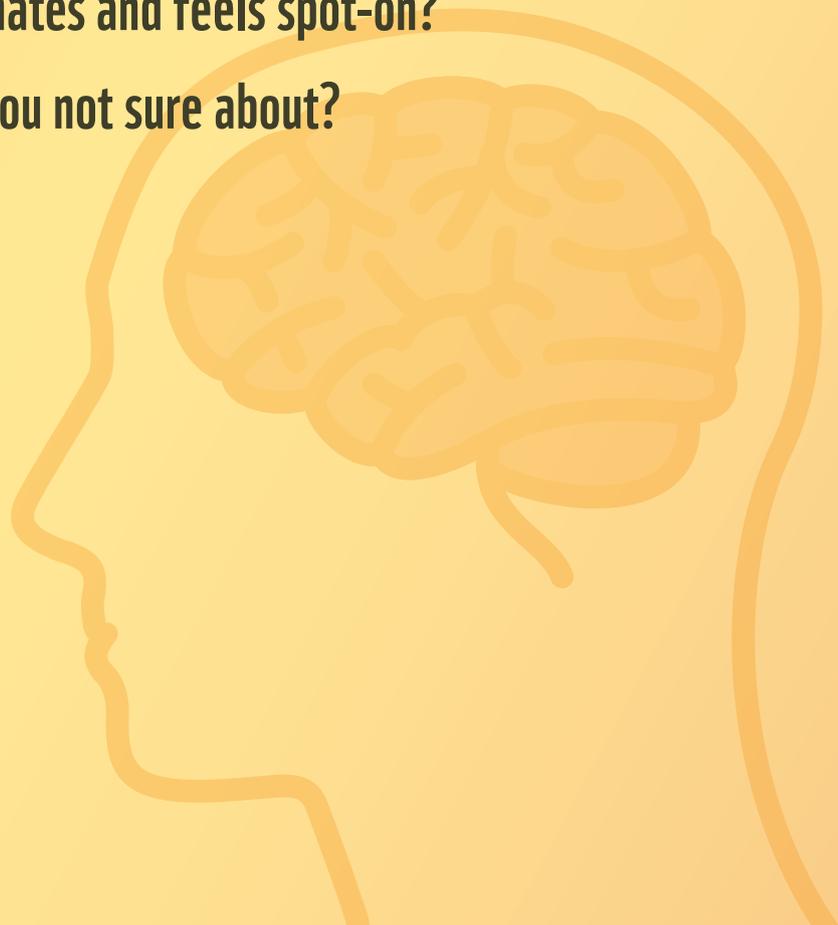
You know you are in this quadrant when:

- > *Your focus is on the emotional and latent desires associated with ivory and related products/goods.*
- > *You believe addressing the core underlying desires is a key to unlocking and shifting behavioral changes and demand reduction.*
- > *You are guided by psychological research that looks at the irrational, "affective" dimensions of human behavior, including contradictions and consumption.*
- > *You incorporate into your campaigns the development of "micro-campaigns" to specifically target these desires and needs.*
- > *You use a process when designing campaigns, including collaboration with researchers, to explore the psychosocial contexts of ivory.*

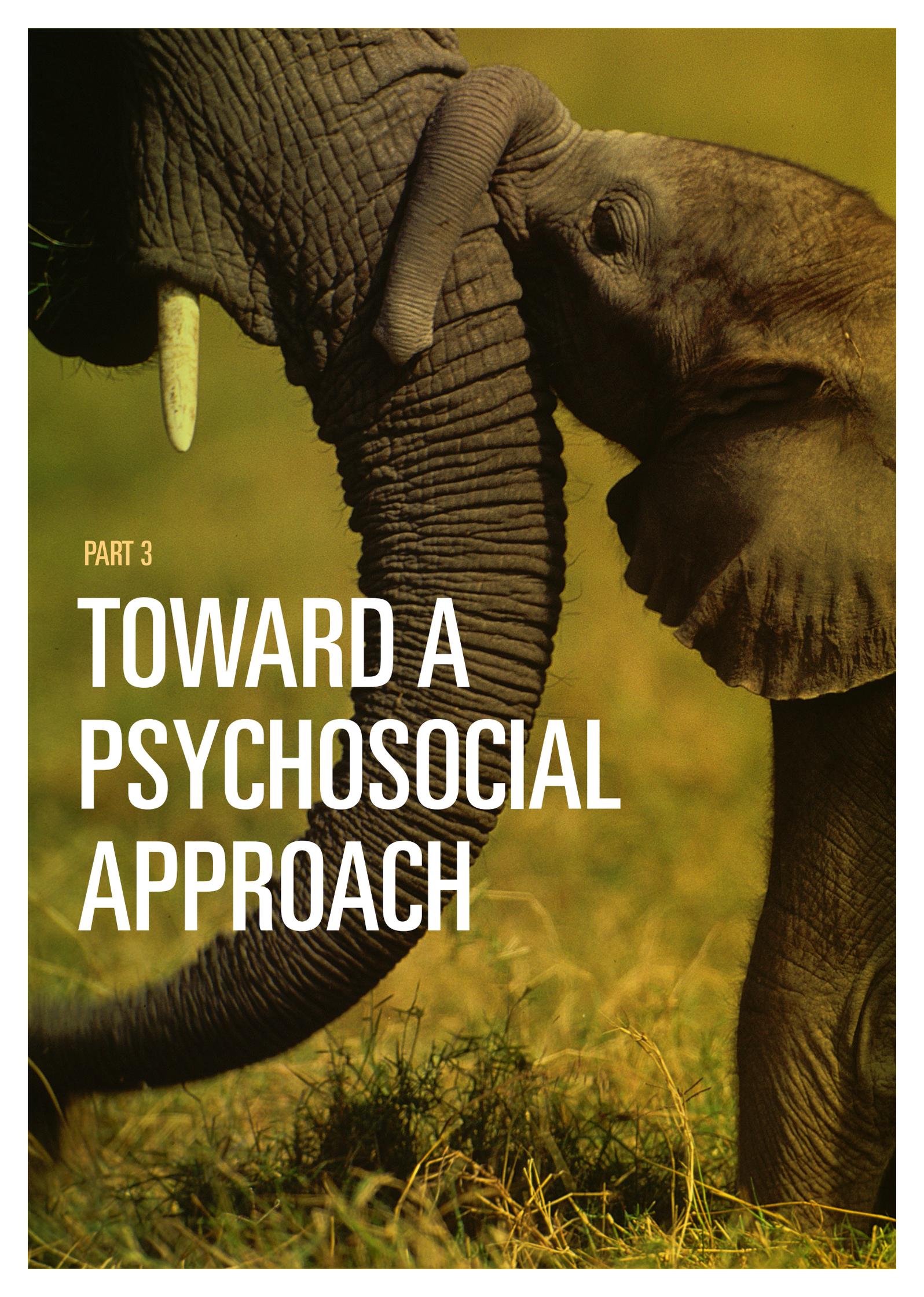
Through piloting and experimenting with the Desire Quadrant, we can reach deeper into the underlying factors that fuel ivory desire. The next section walks us through the Desire Quadrant, the concepts it is based on, and how to apply it.

We invite you to reflect on your own understanding and orientations as you review the following content:

- How does this challenge your assumptions about how to target ivory demand or desire?**
- What resonates and feels spot-on?**
- What are you not sure about?**





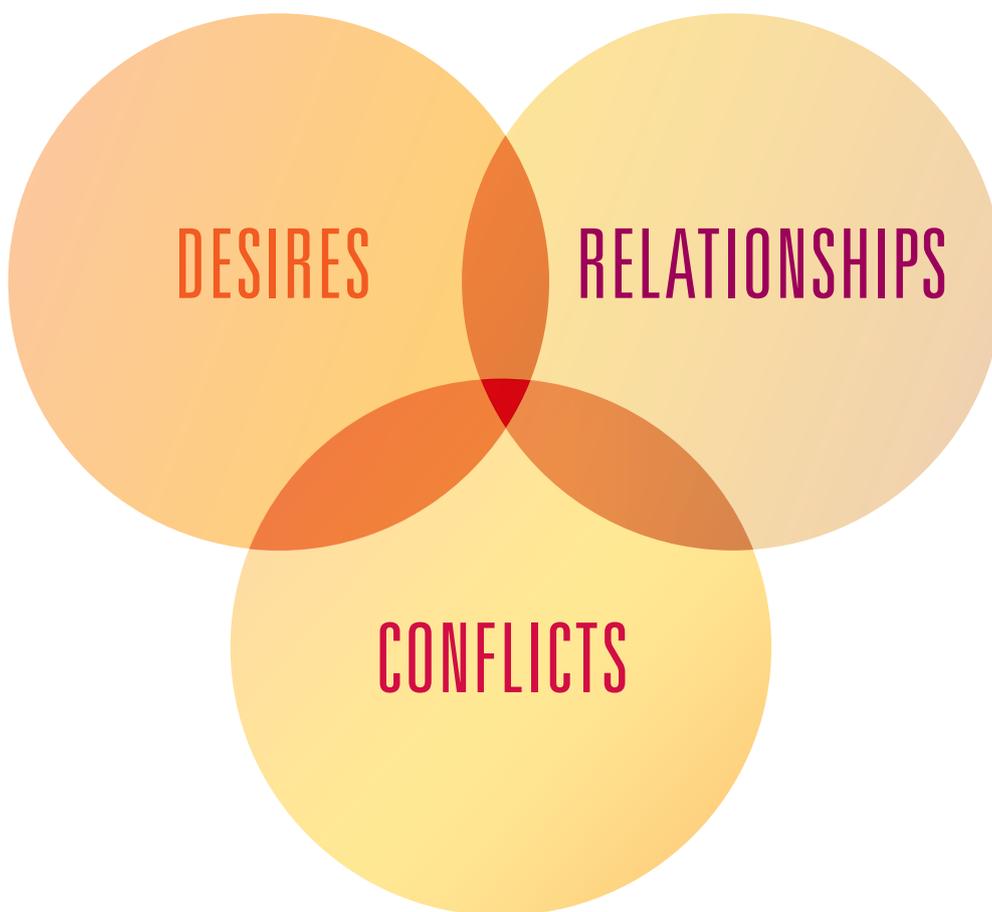


PART 3

TOWARD A PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH

DESIRES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND CONFLICTS

Three interlocking components form the bedrock of desire for a product like ivory: Desires, Relationships, and Conflict. To develop and apply a psychosocial approach, we must first become familiar with these concepts.



DESIRES: OUR CORE EMOTIONAL NEEDS

The Role of Desire and the Unconscious in Behavior

Several principles in the psychology and neuroscience of human behavior have significant implications for how we design campaigns to reduce desire for ivory:

1. The emotions and desires that drive our behavior — including buying ivory — are usually unconscious and deep-seated.
2. How people process information is tightly entwined with emotions. Unwelcome information that challenges their sense of self — for example, “buying ivory is wrong because elephants are dying” — can generate feelings of shame, fear, and anxiety if not combined with other messages that help effectively redirect. These emotions literally shut off the brain’s capacity to absorb and assimilate the messages we want people to hear.
3. Therefore, the *kind* of emotional triggers we use in our campaign messages make all the difference in how well people are able to *hear* and *respond* to messages about changing a behavior, like rejecting ivory. It is not just about making “emotional appeals.” It is about people feeling understood and then redirected to a better, more positive or productive direction.

Incorporating *Desires* into Campaign Design

Addressing affect in campaign messaging goes beyond simply “touching the heart” or tugging at heartstrings to create an affinity with endangered animals. Affect concerns the latent emotional needs that influence consumers’ desires. The impulse that makes us crave a certain object, such as an ivory carving, flows through the brain at lightning speed. We simply feel we want it without fully knowing why. It often relates to meeting a very specific need, such as social recognition, or feeling valued or more secure (in the face of rapid change and uncertainty).

Many conservation campaigns try to interrupt desire before it turns into action, imploring people to stop and reflect on the destructive consequences of their behavior. They try to make a compelling connection between an object (ivory) and the impact (death and potential extinction of elephants).

This approach can work, but it overlooks the core needs that give rise to desire for ivory in the first place. These underlying, affective drivers of desire are often well beneath our conscious awareness. They flow under the surface like groundwater. To tap into these subsurface reservoirs, we must do some excavating.

Latent Needs — Where Desire for Ivory Comes From

Recent studies (The Nature Conservancy 2016; National Geographic Society and Globescan 2015) of consumer motivations by conservation groups have already shed some light on the roots of the desire for ivory. However, if we take at face value the in-the-moment, “top of mind” responses evoked by some surveys, we miss the subtext. We need to dig deeper to reach people’s latent emotional associations with ivory, etched by history, culture and social interactions, and norms. In the U.S., ivory may be a symbol of good taste and social status via possession of family heirlooms. In China, for instance, we must consider how some of these associations may be activated by the country’s rapid rate of societal and economic change of the past two decades.

Ivory represents both the millennia of Chinese culture and the modern Chinese way of life. The ancient tradition of carving ivory required extraordinary craftsmanship and artistry. Possessing ivory signified wealth, status, and privilege. Ivory is seen as an inflation-proof investment that holds aesthetic value and symbolizes artistic mastery. It is auspicious and brings good fortune. These are some other factors that may be fueling today’s desire for ivory among Chinese consumers:

- It may provide a connection to positive attributes of Chinese history and culture.
- It may represent access to privilege and riches once available only to the elite, so it signifies prestige and entitlement.
- It may embody stability during a period of dramatic economic transition and rapid rate of social change.

We must delve deeper into these latent needs to progress beyond this early stage of speculating and inferring. Careful research, sensitively conducted and using methods described in the final section of this guide, will bring this somewhat grainy picture into



much sharper resolution.

RELATIONSHIPS

The second essential component of the psychosocial approach is relationships, specifically:

- our relationship to our natural world (and, in this case, the elephant)
- our relationships with one another (including social transactions such as gifting and displaying wealth or status)
- our relationship to ourselves and what we hold sacred or valuable

All of these shape consumer behavior and desire. For example, buying ivory may be a way to forge a relationship with the qualities that it symbolizes, such as excellence, craft, tradition, and status. Ivory also has become a valuable currency in the economy of social relationships, especially as a gift exchanged between business colleagues.

These relationships dictate the value of ivory. Buying ivory is an expression of social needs that arise from these relationships: needs for status, esteem, respect, a sense of belonging, and so on. In other words, people buy ivory because of how it makes them feel: admired, accepted, etc. If we redirect people to a different way to meet these needs and supply these feelings, ivory loses value, and the desire for it declines.



Buying ivory can be an expression of social needs that arise from relationships... people buy ivory because of how it makes them feel: admired, accepted, etc. If we redirect people to a different way to meet these needs and supply these feelings, ivory loses value, and the desire for it declines.

CONFLICTS

As we have seen, stark contradictions can exist between what people say and what they do. People may believe a behavior is wrong, but do it anyway. Or they may have paradoxical feelings, like an admiration for wildlife that coexists with an attraction to wildlife products. Many respondents to ivory demand surveys express concern about the survival of elephants while still owning or wanting ivory. This can make understanding consumer desire for ivory confusing.

Many reasons account for such internal conflict. Some involve basic human nature. When we face competing behavioral choices, we each use a personal “hierarchy of desire” to rank what we want to be, do, and have. Sometimes, although we want to be virtuous and do the right thing, we still want to have the things we desire. This is often due to the sense that we have “no choice” due to social or economic pressures. We readily admit to some of these because the ambivalence we feel is mild.

Even though we know we should keep trash out of landfills, we sometimes throw out things we should recycle. Even though we know air travel contributes to climate change, we sometimes fly anyway. Even though we know electronics may produce toxic waste, we love our gadgets regardless. Even though we know some seafood is overfished, we continue eating it.

In other instances, people do not consciously recognize their behavior is harmful. Making people aware of the damaging consequences of their actions can generate conflict and fire up what are called in psychology “defense mechanisms.” Understanding defense mechanisms (defense reactions or avoidance) can significantly help us be more effective in our efforts.

Even though we know some seafood is overfished,
we continue eating it.





Defense mechanisms help people cope with feelings of guilt, shame, or powerlessness, and with information that clashes with their identity, way of life, or world view. Telling people to stop buying ivory because it is wrong and harms elephants may backfire because no one wants to feel like a “bad person” and no one wants to be denied something to which they feel a deep, abiding attachment. So their defenses go up and parts of their brain literally shut down. Common defense mechanisms are denial, disavowal, and rationalizing.

APPLY THIS

Defense mechanisms, such as denial, disavowal, and rationalizing, are tricky to observe, precisely because they are unconscious and most people are not aware when they are using them. However, our work is much more effective when we keep them in mind. We can begin to apply this to our work by “decoding” when we have triggered people’s resistance and

defenses.

- **Take time to consider when your message about ivory and elephant populations may evoke defense mechanisms.**
- **How can your message tie in with aspirations that are most compelling for your particular situation?**

DENIAL

Denial crops up when our self image or sense of moral integrity feels threatened. If we tell people what they are doing is causing harm, they may have an unconscious response of shame and guilt. When people are in denial, they literally cannot accept that there is a problem. Their brains are rendered incapable of taking in the reality of a crisis.

Here is a simple example: A doctor tells a patient his blood pressure and cholesterol are too high, he is at risk for diabetes due to his poor diet and lung cancer because he smokes, and he has severe arthritis in his hips and knees because he is severely overweight and does not exercise. The patient responds, “So I’m doing pretty well. I don’t need to make any big lifestyle changes.” He refuses to see himself as unhealthy or his behavior (smoking, overeating) as unsound. He cannot process the warnings in his doctor’s message.

DISAVOWAL

With disavowal, people choose to remain unaware of a problem. They turn a blind eye to the impact of their behavior, continuing to think and act as if nothing were amiss. This is a very common response when faced with the damage to wildlife, nature, and climate wrought by human activities and behavior choices.

For example, a common assumption is that ivory comes from tusks shed naturally by elephants. While some consumers genuinely believe tusks fall out like teeth, some simply choose not to ask whether ivory comes from dead elephants, and others actively avoid knowing the truth. This kind of avoidance explains how consumers may tune out even the most vivid and compelling awareness-raising campaign. Disavowal does not respond well to raising awareness on its own. The necessary missing ingredient is the “redirect” discussed later in this guide.

RATIONALIZING

Rationalizing is a way to distance ourselves emotionally from a problem and justify continuing the behavior. We invent lines of argument to somehow make it okay, when deep down there is a sense that perhaps it is not. For instance, some survey respondents felt it was okay to buy a “little bit” of ivory, because at this small scale, they could not possibly be putting elephants in danger. Rationalizing is a way to avoid accountability and responsibility, because the truth may feel too overwhelming, clash too hard with one’s sense of self, or induce intolerable guilt and shame.

We See the Defense Mechanisms, Not How People Truly Feel

When people react to questions about ivory and elephants with denial, disavowal, and rationalizing, we might assume this tells the “whole story” and reflects their true attitude — that they do not care much about the impact of their behavior.

We need to recognize that denial, disavowal, and rationalizing are defenses. They cover up profound conflicts that are hard for people to articulate or even to consciously experience. For this reason, we need to use custom-designed, qualitative research methods to slip underneath these defenses, so we can address conflicts and identify viable redirects.

PART 4

REDIRECTING DESIRE



TARGETING DESIRE BY “REDIRECTING”

One of the most critical elements of the psychosocial approach is the *redirect*. This is the process of shifting people’s attachments and desires away from ivory onto a set of new, elephant-safe ways to fulfill them. Redirecting doesn’t necessarily mean replacing desire for ivory with desire for a new product, but rather replacing the feeling someone gets from buying ivory or the need it fills with another.

The redirect is based on current insights from neuroscience and psychology into how *neural pathways* direct behavior. Neural pathways are the tracks in the brain along which information travels. They are laid down by habit, conditioning (learning a certain emotional response to a particular stimulus), life experience, and social-cultural influences, and they form the architecture of our behavior. People assimilate new information and adopt new behaviors most readily when the new ideas and actions can link into existing neural pathways. Simply put, to persuade people to change, we need to meet them where they are. We can best redirect them to a new way of thinking and acting by building onto a foundation that has already been laid.

HOW DO WE REDIRECT?

Redirecting ivory consumers to new, elephant-safe behaviors — in its simplest form — looks like this:

- Identify the underlying need being expressed through buying ivory. People may desire ivory because it connects them to family or ancestry, heritage, or history. It may help them impress colleagues, attain respect, attract admiration, and feel special or entitled by accessing something rare. We cannot see the full picture without conducting psychosocial research according to the methods described in this section.
- Acknowledge the validity of these core needs and that the desire itself is not wrong — it is the damaging consequences that cause problems. Engage constructively with ivory consumers to explore other ways to satisfy desire.
- Identify alternative practices that are as good or better at fulfilling consumers’ core needs, such as celebrating cultural attributes or values in other, more enduring and powerful ways.

INSIGHTS AND THE ROLE OF RESEARCH

How can we ensure we are accurately tapping into the right affects, relationships, and conflicts? How do we know we are not simply speculating? We need more revealing insights into the innermost needs and motivations of our target audiences. Fortunately, psychosocial research is a finely honed instrument for extracting such insights. It is the well that can tap into the groundwater of subterranean desires and motivations.

One of the cornerstones of psychosocial research is **listening** with intense concentration to the people we strive to understand — in this case, consumers of ivory. One of the most effective ways is through an intimate, conversational style of interview that fosters a trusting rapport between researcher and participant as well as a sense of mutual exploration of the topic at hand. Skilled researchers can decode what is “between the lines” of the stories, anecdotes, and fantasies participants share. They can unearth troves of buried treasure — the unconscious needs, desires, and motivations of interviewees — by knowing how to listen.

The second critical element is how we analyze and make sense of the data. For optimal accuracy, collaborating with psychosocially or ethnographically oriented researchers is strongly advised. In analyzing psychosocial data, separating the signal from the noise requires a specialized ability to “decode” the stories people tell. Stories, from a psychosocial perspective, are a gold mine of meaning and context. Stories can shed light on the competing pressures and affective dimensions, such as pride or connection, associated with specific behaviors.

How do we uncover these desires?

Even if we don't have the resources, time, or access to advisors to launch into uncovering people's latent needs and desires, we can still generate meaningful and valuable insights. One of the most powerful ways of uncovering hidden needs and desires is to conduct your own analysis by creating “free association maps” discussed in Worksheet 4. You start with one particular group or audience and begin to draw out all of the influences on their behavior, including the emotional and affective. This can help you “decode” and identify the irrational and often deep drivers leading to ivory demand. Your ability to integrate and weave these latent desires into your campaign messaging will amplify your abilities to get past resistance.

APPLY THIS

One of the most powerful ways of applying the redirect is by indirectly or directly referencing the latent need or desire in the campaign or messaging, such as being liked or admired, and showing how it can be achieved through a far more positive way. When recommending a different behavior, such as using another material or high-value good (such as art), think about how you can also affirm the core need that desires ivory. For example, love of heritage and craft, pride, or a celebration of ancient traditions associated with excellence. We can't advocate stopping a behavior unless we can sensitively and skillfully address what needs it's meeting, even if those needs may seem irrational or unreasonable.

HOW DO WE RESEARCH LATENT DESIRE?

Psychosocial qualitative research need not be extensive or expensive. When done with the right expertise, ideally by people trained in psychosocial research methodologies, we can glean many insights through brief interviews, focus groups, and on-the-fly ethnographic conversations.

Psychosocial research is vital to deepening our collective insights into ivory desire and demand reduction because it allows for more candid and disclosing conversations, guided by an inquiry into the experiences and perceptions of participants. This kind of work is highly effective when done in conjunction with consumer surveys and related studies that cover a larger sample size, but in less depth. Using such mixed methods yields insights that are radically more profound and nuanced than surveys alone (Lertzman R. 2015).

Researching desire or “affect” is an innovative discipline emerging in the social sciences as well as the design sector. This attention to underlying desires and complex motivations is also referred to as “human-centered design” or “human factors.” The essence of this approach is understanding that what people say in a survey may not reflect the full story, and we need to employ a variety of methods to reveal more. These include:

- › Psychosocial research (conversational interviews, free association, and narrative analysis)
- › Ethnographic research
- › Cultural and historical research
- › Media analysis

APPLY THIS

The essence of applying a psychosocial approach is to always consider the full context of a behavior, and how shame, blame, and guilt tend to backfire.

- **Consider using research methods that are based on conversations in the field, where people feel safe (not judged).**
- **Design an in-depth interview approach that focuses on listening to the contradictions in what people say, so we can address those in our campaign strategies.**
- **Use indirect questions in our research design that focus on people’s feelings and experiences instead of attitudes, values, or beliefs.**

APPLYING A PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH: A “CHECKLIST”

This guide is most valuable when combined with a series of activities, reflections, and trainings/workshops. The prompts or questions below as well as the activity worksheets, are provided to complement the material presented here. This checklist is not intended to be all-inclusive, but to serve as a way to train our minds toward moving in a psychosocial direction.



1. When designing a new campaign, what do we currently understand (or think we do) regarding the underlying desires, emotional attachments, and needs being expressed through the specific behavior?



2. How well are we taking into account the full context: cultural and social history, current conditions, and the ways people cope with rapid change and global trends?



3. If we are designing an awareness-raising campaign, are we mainly drawing attention to the issue and why it is urgent or devastating? Are there ways to also include a recognition of why the product is desired in the first place?



4. Could the campaign we are designing potentially elicit feelings of shame, guilt, or blame? How can we sidestep this unhelpful result?



5. If our campaign is using cultural figures, influencers, or celebrities, how might their message be adjusted from a simple “Ivory is not good” to an affirmative statement that presents a redirect: “This is what it looks like to be a proud member of our society/culture.” “This is what it looks like to celebrate my heritage.” “This is what it looks like to respect my colleagues.” How can celebrity messages acknowledge ivory consumers’ latent needs for security, belonging, etc., and offer elephant-safe ways to meet them?



6. If we are drawing primarily on social media to demonstrate taking action, what are additional forms of engagement that involve ongoing relationships versus sporadic and episodic “events” such as pledges and competitions?



7. What kinds of emotional experiences do we want to cultivate in our audiences and populations?



8. When designing research into core motivations, how “deep” is the investigation and how innovative are the methodologies? Are we also including conversation-based, potentially more ethnographic methods?



9. How cross-disciplinary are our campaign teams and collaborators? Are we ensuring inclusion of human insights expertise, such as ethnographers, psychosocial researchers and human factors practitioners, in addition to behavioral sciences, media, and campaign strategists?



10. When assessing our own approach, where do we fall in The Four Quadrants? Are we heavily focused only on one or two areas? Where are there opportunities to expand and pilot new approaches?

SUMMARY

We currently face an urgent need to rapidly shift human practices away from the destruction of wildlife species whose populations are gravely threatened. This will require an integrated and insightful approach to reducing consumption of products like ivory — ideally from all parts of The Quadrants. We need all hands on deck and all tools in use — from pledges, champions, and viral campaigns to messaging that speaks to the core needs being met by the procurement of ivory products. These needs may be economic, emotional, social, or political. Regardless, human beings are far more capable of making changes when we feel both acknowledged and supported toward something better and inspirational. We know this from neuroscience and clinical psychological studies. When we combine the protection of elephants and other wildlife at risk with messaging that is sensitive, culturally and socially specific, and appropriate for the redirect, we may achieve new traction in our work.

This guide is intended as an introduction and overview to a new way of designing and implementing campaign strategies. As this is complex with potentially unfamiliar frameworks, we encourage you to continue developing your knowledge in a way that makes most sense for you and your campaign, culture, and organization, as well as through training, workshops, and ongoing guidance.

APPLY THIS

One of the most powerful ways of taking psychosocial approaches forward is by forming teams that draw on complementary expertise and disciplines.

- **Can you benefit from including collaborators or partners who bring psychological, cultural, or other perspectives?**
- **Consider your teams. Do they draw from all parts of The Quadrants? Where are you weakest and where are you strongest?**
- **What would a team look like that draws from all parts of The Quadrants?**

WORKSHEETS



WORKSHEET 1

Exploring the Desire of Ivory Consumption

This exercise is ideally conducted in a small group, such as your team, including the designers and communications professionals.

The intention of this activity is to practice a deep form of “attunement” to our audiences, starting first with their core needs and desires. This is a reversal of the tendency to focus on the values we want to instill or encourage, such as protection of the elephant. Of course, it’s always preferable to have informed insights. This is an exercise to stretch our imaginations and empathy skills.

1 Start with focusing on the prospective target of ivory consumers you are hoping to engage with this campaign. You are likely aware of these; you may want to review relevant research findings (see [Resources](#)), such as *The Nature Conservancy’s study* or the *National Geographic Society/GlobeScan research*. Make a list of these consumers.

2 Create a compelling persona to make this person really come alive.

3 Now, reflect on the following: You may want to do this individually to start, and then open into a group discussion and brainstorm.

QUESTIONS

What emotions or affective sensations may underlie the consumer’s experience of ivory? Imagine the feelings, sensations, experiences of viewing, handling, and purchasing the ivory.

What traditional values — both contemporary and ancient traditions — may drive these emotions or feelings and sensations? What kind of social influences and messages (for example: “white gold” or “cultural pride”)?

What broader socio-political and economic forces may be driving these desires? Fear of financial insecurity, desire to be elite or prestigious, etc.?

What kinds of anxieties or issues does this activity potentially help address or make go away? Hedging against inflation, losing money, being left behind?

What needs does this purchase or gift potentially meet (or feel like it’s meeting, regardless of whether it actually does), such as security?

Can you imagine how else those same needs may be met by alternative means? How would you plan a campaign that speaks to all of these items listed?

RESPONSES

WORKSHEET 2

Exploring Conflict and Dilemmas

This activity is designed to bring us more into awareness of how complicated some environmentally damaging practices or behaviors can be and to orient our thinking toward designing campaigns that can somehow address or acknowledge this while offering a “redirect.”

Ideally, this exercise is best done with a partner in pairs. Decide who is Partner A and Partner B. Each person has 5-10 minutes to speak and reflect while the partner simply listens and does not respond verbally. Take extra care to create a nonjudgmental and open setting.

Please take a moment and pick one behavior that you feel uncomfortable or guilty about doing. It could be something you love to do that you know may have negative environmental impacts, like eating a certain food or using resources in a particular way. Respond to the following prompts:

QUESTIONS

How does this behavior or activity make you feel?

Be as open and inclusive as possible. Pleasures, enjoyments, associations?

PARTNER A RESPONSES

PARTNER B RESPONSES

What needs does this behavior meet, both pragmatically as well as socially, emotionally, relationally, or symbolically?

What kinds of consequences or “blowback” might you encounter if you stopped doing this behavior; for example social stigma, family response, professional critique?

Now take turns. Ensure you have enough time to debrief with your partner. Can you imagine a campaign that was designed to address your own core needs and how you may be more able to shift into a different behavior? This is an opportunity to be creative and brainstorm.

WORKSHEET 3

The Quadrant

Set aside approximately 30 minutes for you and your team to meet and discuss your particular orientations and current approaches to reducing consumer demand and desire. Use this Quadrant worksheet to complete the following.

- 1 *Take a few moments with your team and review the Quadrant worksheet. Quickly fill in the quadrant sections with examples of how your team and campaigns are drawing on specific insights from the approaches. Please be as specific as possible.*
- 2 *After you have finished, note what parts of the Quadrant worksheet are almost full. What does this reflect about your current orientations and approaches?*
- 3 *Now, in the section below, begin to connect the specific insights and tactics represented by the different quadrants to see how they can be combined in new and different areas.*
- 4 *Use this quadrant and the activity to help orient your team when entering the pre-design phase, especially when working with agencies, researchers, and vendors. You want to ensure everyone is on the page, and working toward greater capacities to integrate and combine the insights and approaches.*

 CULTURE <hr/>	 DESIRE <hr/>
 BEHAVIOR ECONOMICS/SOCIAL MARKETING <hr/>	 REGULATORY/ENFORCEMENT <hr/>

WORKSHEET 4

Free Association Mapping

Sometimes we do not have access to an advisor or research support, and this free-association practice can generate quick and powerful insights. When it comes to uncovering the insights and latent needs/desires of ivory consumers, using free association can be a powerful methodology.

1 *Begin with a whiteboard or a large sheet of paper, big enough to cover many topics and areas. Flip-charts are good for this.*

Start with a particular focus area, for example antique/art collectors.

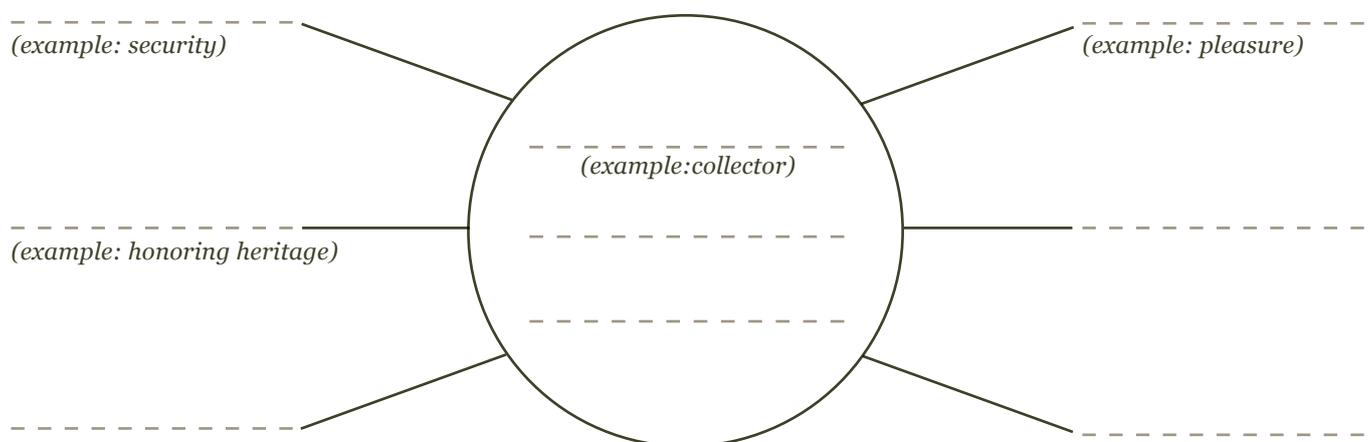
Place the name of your focus group in the middle of the whiteboard or sheet.

2 *Then, begin as a group to simply ask the question, “What needs and/or desires are being met?” Write responses down, not as a list but as a network of associations; for example:*

3 *Once you have your associations down, take the ones you have written and ask the following: “Where do those needs/concerns come from?” Be as open and exploratory as possible. There are no right or wrong responses.*

4 *Once you have that additional layer of associations, then take the whole series of associations and ask the question, “What is the core need or insecurity that is driving this behavior?” Fear of loss of income? Economic instability? Write those down on the map.*

5 *Finally, come up with a hierarchy of needs and desires that resulted from your mapping activity. See if you are able to identify which needs/concerns stem from a fear of loss or sense of insecurity. Then, see if you can identify which needs/concerns relate to an aspiration such as being admired, valued, or cared for.*



At the end of this activity, you should have a working map or “affective territory” you can draw on for your campaign strategies to help you better address and explicitly acknowledge potential needs and desires.

WORKSHEET 5

A “Redirect” Approach (Psychosocial)

The following are suggested simple steps you can use and that work in concert with the other worksheets included here. It’s recommended you do this in a group setting, ideally with participants who have varied insights — for example, advocacy, policy, cultural history, and so on.



STEP 1: Who are you wanting to engage? Business people, wealthy elite, collectors, traders?

Identify the unconscious, core needs people in this group are trying to meet.

What are their core needs, i.e., what underlies their desire for the product?

They need a sense of _ _ _ _ _ , or this is an expression of _ _ _ _ _ cultural or historical influence (rate of change, economic development, status, etc).



STEP 2: Acknowledge these needs in campaign messaging in a nonjudgmental way. (No shame and blame.) Reference this through the mood, narrative, imagery, and the message. Affirm.

How might you do this? Review examples from advertising campaigns, such as the Olympics 2012 “Greatness” campaign. In this campaign, the desire and longing for greatness was redefined and reframed in the context of everyone striving for their own personal best.



STEP 3: Redirect consumers to an alternative way to meet their needs — different product OR different behavior. Affirm needs met through alternative behaviors or values (care for wildlife, future generations, our children, etc.).

How might you do this? Redirecting is more than simply offering a substitution of a material or object. A redirect shows the core need being met and addressed through the activity of saying “no” to ivory and saying “yes” to something that reflects related attributes, such as celebration of tradition and heritage, security, and status.

RESOURCES

Alcorn, M. (2013). *Resistance to Learning: Overcoming the Desire Not to Know in Classroom Teaching*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bishop, C. (1921). "The Elephant and Its Ivory in Ancient China." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 41: 290-306.

Damasio, A. (1999). *The Feeling of What Happens*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Damasio, A. (2005). *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin.

Feinstein, J., Adolphs, R., Damasio, A., and Tranel, D. (2011). "The Human Amygdala and the Induction and Experience of Fear." *Current Biology*, 21: 34-38.

Gao, Y. and Clark, S. (2014). "Elephant Ivory Trade in China: Trends and Drivers." *Biological Conservation*, 180: 23-30.

Goleman, D. (1985). *Vital Lies, Simple Truths: The Psychology of Self-Deception*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Lemos, G. (2012). *The End of the Chinese Dream: Why Chinese People Fear the Future*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Lertzman, R. (2015). *Environmental Melancholia: Psychoanalytic Dimensions of Engagement*. London: Routledge.

Liu, X. (2002). *The Otherness of Self: A Genealogy of the Self in Contemporary China*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Liu, X. (2009). *The Mirage of China*. New York: Berghahn Books.

National Geographic Society and Globescan. (2015). *Reducing Demand for Ivory: An International Study*.

Ramachadran, V.S. and Blakeslee, S. (1998). *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind*. New York: William Morrow.

Schwartz, L. (2016). "Hierarchies of Desire." Personal communication. Berkeley, California.

Stenning, K. (2002). *Seeing Reason: Image and Language in Learning to Think*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The Nature Conservancy. (2016). *Curbing Ivory Consumption in China*. Retrieved from [ivory-consumer-research-faq.pdf](#).

Worthy, K. (2013). *Invisible Nature: Healing the Destructive Divide Between People and the Environment*. New York: Prometheus Books.

**REDUCING DESIRE FOR IVORY:
A PSYCHOSOCIAL GUIDE TO ADDRESS IVORY CONSUMPTION**

© 2016 World Wildlife Fund. All rights reserved.

