# 5 Tips to Avoid Echo Chambers and Post-Truths While at Work

**By Vicki Wrona, PMP**

## Introduction

We may be familiar with the terms echo chamber or post-truths in terms of politics or the news (fake and otherwise), but have you thought about how it applies to our work? I believe that the echo chamber and post-truth is just as true at work and on projects as it is in politics, the military and the news. If you manage projects, manage remote team members, or work from home, don't let yourself get sucked into the echo chamber. Here are some tips to help you avoid that.

Before we explore this concept, let's define the terms. An echo chamber is a [closed environment in which beliefs are amplified by repetition and limited input](), or an environment where [existing views are reinforced and alternative ideas not considered](). Post-truth is a situation in which [people are less influenced by factual information than by their emotions or by beliefs they already hold](). In short, post-truth values feelings over facts.

Now let's explore how they affect us at work by exploring how they impact teleworkers, projects and teams.

## Echo Chambers and Teleworking

When working from home, the loudest voice we hear is often our own, echoing in our heads.

In this case, the echo chamber effect can be magnified due to the lack of feedback, both in immediacy and in variety. Feedback is delayed, and the volume and variety of feedback is less than what we tend to get in an office. If our primary perspective is our own, we may be more sensitive to the feedback that we do receive if it conflicts with our perspective. This is where post-truths apply, because here we value our feelings about our work over the feedback provided by others.

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When working from home, we are not exposed to the diversity of thought necessary to expand our perspectives, or the diversity of people that we typically encounter when going into a work environment. Even if our peers' offices are located in a diversified center or complex, it is likely still only a small representation of the diverse perspectives that exist. For example, if your work is centered around professionals or those who have a high school or better education, the perspective and mindset of a large portion of the population is consciously overlooked, and eventually that perspectives bleeds into other aspects of our lives.

> *An echo chamber is a closed environment in which beliefs are amplified by repetition and limited input…*

However, diversity isn't restricted to cultural or ethnic diversity. It also applies to diversity in experiences, backgrounds, educations, skills, perspectives, hobbies, and more. If you make an effort to really think about this for even a few minutes, I'm sure you can think of many perspectives that you don't automatically get.

## Echo Chambers on Projects or in Teams

If you are working with teams or on projects, are you involving each stakeholder at the appropriate level? I can hear the quick and resounding "yes, of course" here, but are you sure? Take the time to identify all stakeholders for your project, and create a plan that properly involves each one. That doesn't mean that all stakeholders are deeply involved, but that they are appropriately involved. Some will be involved more, other less. Not only do stakeholders include people or groups who are impacted by your project, but also those who *perceive* themselves to be impacted. Internal stakeholders can include your boss, project sponsor, customer, Finance, Project/Program Management Office, IT, HR, other interested functional areas, experts, project team members, and more. External stakeholders could include the customer, vendors, partners, special interest groups, grassroots or grasstops leaders, social media leaders, regulatory bodies, and more.

What about opposition stakeholders, or those who don't support your project? Truly listen to them, and work to understand their reasoning. They may have valid points, or they may not, but at least you know for sure. Hold discovery meetings with the opposition. These may provide a valuable perspective because they will challenge your beliefs and force you to think differently, possibly giving you a better end result. An added bonus is that you make a new career ally when you show respect for their point of view.

## Well-Meaning Co-Workers and Friends

Whether at home or in an office, is it possible that you believe you are meeting everyone's needs because your circle of friends and co-workers are trying to be supportive by telling you what you want to hear, or telling you everything is fine because they are conflict-averse and don't want to have to deliver bad news? If you need a dose of reality, find more diverse input.

They say that you are the average of the five people you are around the most, so choose wisely. If those five strongest influences in your life exclude important input and opinions, find ways to get other perspectives. Make an effort to get input from others, scary as that may be. None of us like to hear that our perfect idea really isn't, or that our performance could use some improvement, but we must be willing to go there to avoid fooling ourselves.

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## Tips to Avoid Echo Chambers and Post-Truths

1. **Realize you have a bias.** We all naturally gravitate toward like-minded people. According to The Guardian, we are much more homogeneous than we think, and tend to interact more with people who echo our beliefs. That bias drives our thought process and influences our decisions.

2. **Actively seek feedback.** Make an effort to hear perspectives that are different, and possibly the opposite, of your own. It helps not to hear the same message over and over. If we do, we actually start to believe that message. Others will then believe us because we are confident in our beliefs. But if those beliefs do not reflect reality, *our projects and/or our careers are in trouble.* If you are not presented with ideas, opinions, or facts that make you think, then your sources are likely not diverse enough. In addition to meetings, maybe automated tools, such as group testing, polling, or surveying, can allow you to see if you/your team's performance is meeting expectations for the wider audience.

3. **Evaluate and use feedback received.** Here is your chance to course-correct, if necessary. Don't get emotional if the feedback doesn't line up with your internal echoes and views. Think of this as an investment in your future or a business decision, rather than an attack on your character.

4. **Keep your team out of the echo chamber.** Encourage your team to bounce ideas off each other rather than relying solely on your input or their manager's input.

5. **Make sure you are not part of someone else's echo chamber problem.** Beware of those in higher positions who are perpetuating the echo chamber effect. If your boss provides a warped and incorrect view of what is happening within the organization, isolates you/your team so that they control all information regarding the project and team, or who forces you to adhere to only their perspective, then you are likely stuck in that person's echo chamber. See what you can do within the organization to get a broader perspective or other inputs. I realize that office politics may make this easier said than done. For ideas on how to do this, please see my eBook on Overcoming Organizational Dysfunction.

## Conclusion

In summary, understand that the echo chamber and post-truth impacts our projects and our work environment. Stop the echo and enhance your career by getting out of your head and stepping (a little) out of your comfort zone. Good luck!

## About the Author

Vicki Wrona, PMP, is the founder and President of Forward Momentum, LLC, a PM Training Alliance® (PMTA) Certified Training Provider (CTP) and a woman-owned small business (WOSB) offering Project Management and Instructional Design services.

She has over 20 years of leadership and project management experience, and more than 15 years public speaking and learning / development experience. She has presented at a number of conferences, trained over 40,000 people, has mentored individuals and organizations, and has authored multiple white papers, blogs and eBooks.

She was invited to serve on PMI's committee to write and review the PMBOK® Guide 4th edition, and co-developed the program that won PMI's Professional Development Product of the Year award and Perspectives Program of the Year award. She was the #1 downloaded speaker for Compaid in 2018 and 2016, and #2 in 2017. She has served on the Board of Directors for the Texas Soaring Association.

Her passion is equipping individuals and organizations with practical knowledge and tools so that results – and bottom-line impact – are consistently achieved. You can contact her at vwrona@forwardmomentum.net.

## About Forward Momentum, LLC

Forward Momentum, LLC is a woman-owned small business (WOSB) specializing in project management training/consulting, instructional design services, and custom learning solutions for commercial, government, and non-profit organizations. Since 2000, Forward Momentum has grown to develop, manage, and deliver award-winning Instructor-Led Training (ILT), virtual Instructor-Led Training (vILT), eLearning, and blended learning programs physically on five (5) continents and virtually to all seven (7) continents. Our eLearning is rigorously tested by DHS Certified Trusted Testers for Accessibility and is Section 508 compliant.

To date, we have trained over 40,000 people, including over 6,000 on the Project Management Professional (PMP®) certification exam preparation. We co-developed the innovative blended learning PMP® exam preparation program that earned PMI's Professional Development Product of the Year award in 2007.  We are a PM Training Alliance® (PMTA) Certified Training Provider (CTP), and Project Management Institute® (PMI) Global Registered Education Provider (REP).

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