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Behavior Change at Scale

Converting public policy into personal action

Notwithstanding the seriousness of today's global challenges (climate change, economic doldrums, food safety, et al), we've faced equally daunting things in the past, and have always marshalled the ingenuity and dedication to overcome these tests.

So what's different today? Perhaps it's the breadth and complexity of what we're facing. For the first time, policymakers are forced to confront what might otherwise be considered "individual choices."

In the aggregate, these personal choices become a very public cluster of problems.

It's time for individuals to play a role as agents of change — to understand the very "public" consequences of their private actions. Policymakers can help make this happen by crafting and broadcasting messages that reach the masses, but still connect with deeply personal motivations.

TAKE ACTION *– designing for Behavior Change at Scale*

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Coalitions at the outset	*Internalize externalities*	*Make norms a 'nudge'*	*Utilize social pressure*	*Leverage local values*
The scale of the challenge makes it unlikely that one party can affect change unilaterally; determine which partnerships need to be in place for success.	Make negative externalities tangible. People might stop taking long hot showers if bathroom tiles turned an ugly color after reaching a certain temperature.	If recycling bins were beautiful objects, who wouldn't want one? What if your boarding card were red because you hadn't offset your carbon emissions?	From children to workmates, to neighbors, and fellow detainees, social pressures play a key part of triggering deep personal changes.	Getting local is a step closer to getting personal. Broad-scale public messages need to connect at a local level to inspire change one region at a time.

The 'I' in Environment

Kalpana, originally from Chennai, India, was accustomed to seeing trash in the streets — it was a fixture of life. She struggled to believe recycling could make a difference.

When Kalpana moved to London in 2005 she discovered that her indifference was out of sync with her neighbors. Even her kids — inspired by what they learned in school — lectured her about recycling. When Kalpana read about government proposals to charge households for nonrecyclable waste by weight, her resolve strengthened — there was money at stake. This combination of forces helped Kalpana change her beliefs and behavior.

Today, some 90% of households in the UK regularly recycle at least two materials. Recycling and composting rates have been steadily increasing from 2000/01 through 2007/08:

2000/2001	2007/2008
Household Waste Recycled	
9%	26%
Municipal Waste Recycled	
8%	22%
Municipal Waste Landfilled	
72%	53%

Source: capitalwastefacts.com

How might public policy use social pressure, visual triggers, and economic incentives together?

Public welfare via personal wellness

Julia was a long-time smoker from Cardiff, Wales — and a proud one at that. Then, her father was admitted to a renal ward for treatment of kidney failure. Many of the other patients were receiving care for conditions tied to alcoholism. Julia sympathized, but couldn't help feeling frustrated: why were they eligible for the same treatment as her dad? Hadn't they brought these problems on themselves? This led her to realize that one day, it might be her there, siphoning care from more deserving patients.

When the U.K. outlawed smoking in restaurants and pubs, Julia got the final nudge to quit. She signed up for both an employer-funded financial support program that helps people stop smoking, as well as an NHS smoking-cessation program. She attended a Stop Smoking Group, and took advantage of services from the NHS: online literature, 24-hour counsellors, even a smoking-cessation savings calculator. Julia began to save her cigarette money for a holiday with her father. They eventually vacationed in Spain.

How can policies and services connect to help individuals grasp the larger consequences of their actions? How can organizations work together to provide a system of personal support?

Policy gets personal

A fourth-generation native of San Francisco's troubled Bayview District, Utuma witnessed her family and community endure decades of social, economic, and environmental hardship. In 2005, Utima was shot in gang crossfire and spent months convalescing, and exhausted her small savings.

Utuma dreamed of opening a consulting business, but didn't think she could raise the necessary capital. Enter EARN, a domestic-equity microfinancier dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty. The nonprofit requires participant commitment through an investment of both time and money.

Utuma resolved to change her future — and that of her family and community by extension. She enrolled in EARN's program and leveraged her experience in construction and sustainable building to found Sustainable Futures, a consultancy that develops environmentally sustainable projects and creates opportunities for underserved communities.

How might programs help people aim for lofty goals and give them support for new behaviors?

Winning hearts, minds

US-run detention facilities in Iraq and Afghanistan incarcerate large numbers "suspected militants," some of them innocent. Trial-less detention fosters resentment, and long-term internment can increase the likelihood of radicalization. Recognizing these risks, Major General Doug Stone launched a program, first in Iraq, to train, rehabilitate, and progressively release low-risk prisoners. Education and training are program cornerstones, offering hope for post-release employment and ideally for keeping former prisoners out of combat operations. Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) is central to the coalition's larger strategy in Afghanistan, but personal (entrepreneurial) initiatives — executed with an intimate knowledge of local customs, values, and existing social pressures — are the keys to success.

Cleaning up — the local way

"Don't Mess With Texas" is a 20-year campaign that harnesses Texan pride to lessen littering along the state's highways. It's a coalition among the Texas Department of Transport, Adopt-a-Highway, and Keep Texas Beautiful. The single-minded goal: is to reduce litter. The effort seems to be working. Roadside litter has dropped by a third since 2001, and the campaign has received praise for leveraging local values and attitudes to avert a "tragedy of the commons."

Other resources

The Tragedy of the Commons, by Garrett Hardin, was first published in 1968 and describes the dilemma in which multiple individuals acting independently in their own self-interest can ultimately destroy a shared limited resource.

The Politics of Public Behaviour, edited by Duncan O'Leary, is a collection of essays by British politicians that asks where do personal freedoms stop and mutual obligations begin?

Nudge, by Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, introduces the concept of "choice architecture," which means designing "choice environments that make it easier for people to choose what is best for themselves, their families, and their society."

PATTERNS are a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered through our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and develop richer design thinking experiences collectively.

Be a pattern spotter: Now that you've been exposed to a few different examples, don't be surprised if you start seeing *Behavior Change at Scale* patterns all around. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it's the next new pattern.

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