

# Behaviour Change Digest

# COI

**Welcome to the Behaviour Change Digest!** This digest aims to capture recent thinking and news relevant to behavioural theory. The articles it captures are summarised and arranged into categories. The categories covered in this edition are: Health; International Development and Social Justice; Justice and Home Affairs; Big Society; Applying Behavioural Theory; Behavioural Theory and Tools; The Importance of Behavioural Theory. The key difference between the last and penultimate categories is that 'The Importance of Behavioural Theory' tends to be less specific in its commentary on aspects of behavioural theory, focussing broadly on the discipline and its potential. All other categories are self-explanatory.

For further information or to draw attention to relevant literature, please contact [simon.ruda@coi.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:simon.ruda@coi.gsi.gov.uk) or the COI Behaviour Change leadership team\*.

## Behavioural Theory and Tools

**Steer – mastering our behaviour through instinct, environment and reason** *RSA Social Brain, Matt Grist (June 2010)*

This report, based on recent research, advocates a new take on the application of behavioural science yet purports to complement other behaviour change models. This approach – 'Steer' – gives individuals the tools and knowledge gleaned from behavioural science and theories of behaviour change and encourages them to 'use it on themselves' to modify their own behaviour. It empowers citizens to better guide their habitual behaviour by 'navigating their automatic, controlled and environmental impulses' through a set of everyday principles. The report then describes the application of these principles to practical problems.

[Click here for full article](#)

**Motivation, behaviour and the microfoundations of public services** *Gerry Stoker, Alice Mosely (2010)*

This paper discusses the importance of understanding microfoundations, in this context people's individual motivations, when formulating policy. It asserts that this is particularly significant in

the context of constrained resources which make co-production more important. Encouraging people to co-produce public services calls for the development of policy designs based on an understanding of the true factors that drive behaviour. It then discusses how the state can turn this understanding into tools of intervention and whether or not the state has a legitimate capacity to do so.

[Click here for full article](#)

**Nudge, nudge, think, think: two strategies for changing civic behaviour** *Peter John, Graham Smith and Gerry Stoker (Sept 2009)*

This paper reviews two contrasting approaches governments use to engage the citizen to promote better public policy outcomes: nudging citizens using the insights of behavioural economics, as summarised by Thaler and Sunstein (2009); or giving citizens the space to think through and debate solutions, as indicated by proponents of deliberative democracy. The paper summarises each approach, giving examples. Then it compares and contrasts them, illustrating their relative strengths and weaknesses. The paper concludes by suggesting that the approaches share some common features and that policy-makers could usefully draw upon both.

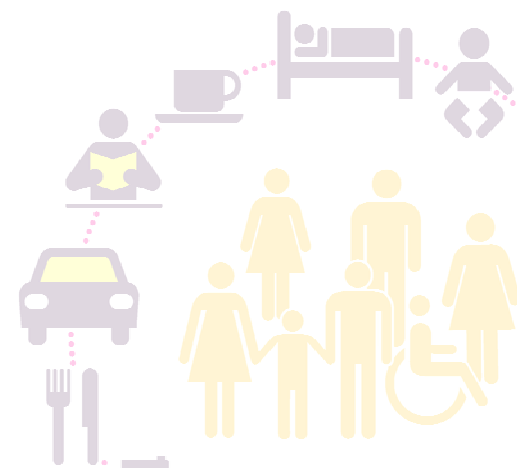
[Click here for full article](#)

**Walk on By** *BBC Radio 4 (June 2010)*

Concerned with social responsibility, this programme considers why some people are more likely to intervene in violent situations. Motivations for intervention include group affinity (e.g. support same football club). Barriers for intervention include 'leaving it to professionals' (e.g. the police); fear (of harm or legal repercussion, exacerbated by the media); and embarrassment / social awkwardness (considered a greater barrier than fear). The 'bystander effect', where likelihood to intervene decreases with increasing group size, is discussed - highlighting inhibition, social norms and diffusion of responsibility as causes. The programme therefore draws attention to the 'power of the group', and points to removing legal obstacles and preventing distorted perceptions of risk generated by the media, as solutions.

*This programme is no longer available on the BBC website.*

[Click here for programme synopsis](#)



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## Expanding the Use of Experiments on Civic Behavior: Experiments with Local Government as a Research Partner

*Sarah Cotterill, Liz Richardson (2010)*

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*We do not have access to the full paper but it can be purchased.* The paper discusses the challenges of implementing and delivering experiments at a local level in cooperation with policy makers and public service providers, drawing on four successfully completed experiments and two current experiments and referring to four proposed experiments that did not take place. The completed and ongoing experiments investigated canvassing to increase household recycling, Internet deliberation to change civic attitudes, education to change children's environmental attitudes, community support to improve quality of life for drug users, citizen pledging to donate to charity, and letter writing to influence the response of councilors to citizen interest groups. The paper concludes by assessing the benefits of co-produced field experiments. [Click here for full article](#)

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## Tools for Behaviour Change Communication

(Jan 2008)

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A report from the John Hopkins University, which draws up a very basic but sensible and clear 'check list' for behaviour change communication. It suggests a cycle for behaviour change communication and recommends steps to cover at each point of the cycle. Though the steps are generic and could be applied more broadly, the report is concerned specifically with health issues. [Click here for full article](#)

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## Big Society

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### How experiments can help get Britain to the Big Society

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This document is the output of a range of experiments undertaken by a joint research team from Manchester and Southampton Universities. It includes the headline results from several experiments that drew on behavioural theory to encourage 'Big Society' type behaviours, for example: community action (lobbying councillors); organ donation; kerbside recycling. More detailed information on each experiment can be found [here](#): [Click here for full article](#)

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### Citizens and local decision making: Feelings of influence

(March 2010)

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This research was commissioned to understand the degree to which people felt they could create influence in their area, over the people there and the council. The research investigated what factors relate to feelings of influence, both to place and population, and those that relate to local activity. Feelings of influence are strongly related to the background characteristics of an area: levels of ethnic diversity and in-migration; region; and whether the area is urban or not. Over and above this, the three main areas of local activity that can impact on feelings of influence are: Provision of information; Consultation – listening to views and acting on them; Attitudes towards local authority and partners. [Click here for full article](#)

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## The Importance of Behavioural Theory

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### Behavioural Economics Helping Marketers Better Understand Consumers Advertising Age

(July 2010)

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Introduces behavioural science and refers to its growing popularity in America in the public and private sector, noting Cass Sunstein's position as the Head of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. Recognising that behavioural insights are often quite intuitive but that it is difficult to base 'million dollar' decisions on intuition, the article suggests that behavioural science can give 'Ph.D. credibility and academic rigor to intuition'. It describes behavioural science as being an addition to - rather than a replacement for - marketing's traditional tools. [Click here for full article](#)

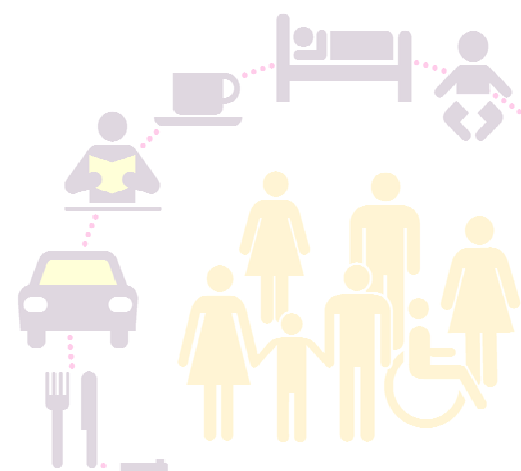
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### Everyone is giving a Nudge to advertisers

*Evening Standard* (June 2010)

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This article focuses on behavioural economics as a means of cutting the cost of Government marketing and frames it in a 'Nudge' context. It talks about David Cameron and his team driving forward this agenda while mentioning Matt Tee and Mark Lund as advocates. It recognises that both private and public sectors – as evidenced by the work of COI and the



MINDSPACE work – were looking at this before the new administration came to power. Rory Sutherland is quoted at the end saying behavioural economics can make marketing more effective, ‘not supplant it.’

[Click here for full article](#)

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### **The case for behavioural strategy** *McKinsey Quarterly* (2010)

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This paper discusses a variety of approaches, drawing on behavioural insights, to counter subconscious human biases among decision makers to enable them to make better strategic decisions.

[Click here for full article](#)

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### **Being a creature of habit is easy, making decisions is tough** *Wired Magazine*, Dan Ariely

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Defaults. This article describes how people tend to take the easy option, usually something they have done before, until a ‘crisis’ shakes them out of that habit. For many consumers, that crisis could be the economic downturn. Also mentions ‘anchoring’, making interpretations via reference points.

[Click here for full article](#)

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### **When the scientific evidence is unwelcome, people try to reason it away** *The Guardian*, Ben Goldacre (July 2010)

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This article addresses the notion that when people are confronted with scientific evidence that contradicts a pre-existing view they hold (not necessarily formed using scientific rationale), people have a tendency to dispute or even refute the scientific evidence, or science as a whole, rather than their pre-existing view.

[Click here for full article](#)

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### **Delaying Gratification**

*Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology*, Laura Haynes (March 2009)

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Hyperbolic discounting. This paper addresses people’s tendency to focus on short term rewards at the expense of long-term benefits. It suggests that understanding this tendency could inform policies that encourage individuals to make important life choices. It reviews evidence on the influence of time in decision making and considers implications for policy domains such as pensions, health and ‘consumer affairs’.

[Click here for full article](#)

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### **An attack on ‘Old Fashioned Economics’** *Nick Kraft* (April 2010)

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Review of a discussion of economists hosted by the Brookings Institution. Asserts that people are adaptive to adversity and can maintain levels of ‘cheerfulness’ even if they are experiencing a negative situation (be it health, prosperity, or otherwise). Suggests that this is because decisions are not always based on utility maximisation – or ‘rational acting’. Argues that people are not always strategic, and often do just enough to get by.

[Click here for full article](#)

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### **World Cup Economics** *The Economist* (July 2010)

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This blog explores why countries as large as China and India do not prioritise sport (and also the arts) as viable career options. The assumption is that their governments do not prioritise spending on sports because they are developing economies in need of other things (such as education), and that their people

do (or should) prioritise careers in ‘safer bet’ careers which will provide more guaranteed returns.

[Click here for full article](#)

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### **Economics Behaving Badly** *New York Times* (July 2010)

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An attack on the overuse of behavioural economics, this article uses specific examples to convey that behavioural economics is being touted as the solution to problems it can’t solve, or would be far less effective at solving than traditional economics solutions.

“Behavioural economics should complement, not [be a] substitute for, more substantive economic interventions”. David Cameron is quoted – using the now famous energy example of people moderating their energy use on discovering the average use for their neighbourhood – but the article suggests the difference this ‘nudge’ made was insubstantial, especially compared with the difference Cameron, among others, is hoping for. Suggests a carbon tax, in this instance, would be far more effective. Other policy issues raised include obesity and petrol consumption.

[Click here for full article](#)

