

CIPR Behaviour Change Symposium

Behaviour Change Theory –
Overview, Applications to Public
Relations and Current Trends

Jon White

22 January 2020

Behaviour Change

In Psychology, the scientific study of the way people think, feel and behave:

- ▶ Behaviourism a defined 'school' of study
 - ▶ Can only observe behaviour
 - ▶ How can it be influenced and changed (which stimuli will lead to which responses, what forces are at work, what drives behaviour)?
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Harold Burson, quoting Edward Bernays

From *Crystallising Public Opinion, 1923*:

Public relations:

An applied social science that influences behavior and policy, when communicated effectively, motivates an individual or group to a specific course of action by creating, changing or reinforcing opinions and attitudes. Its ultimate objective is persuasion that results in a certain action which, to succeed, must serve the public interest.

*Harold Burson, blog, A 'modern' definition of public relations? Why?
March 5, 2012*



Institute for Public Relations

“What we do in our daily practice is not just “stuff” and it’s not just common sense that anybody could figure out. Public relations, properly practiced is a disciplined, fact-based, research-based application of the social sciences to human behavior.”

Ward White, strategy officer for Edelman Public Relations, May 5, 2012

Public Relations, from a Psychological Perspective

- ▶ An applied psychology of intra- and inter-group relations with practical interests in making predictions about behaviour and acting to influence behaviour (accepting that the behaviour of the initiator of public relations activities may also have to change)

The Future of Public Service Communications

The Government Communication Service
The Future of Public Service Communications
Report and Findings

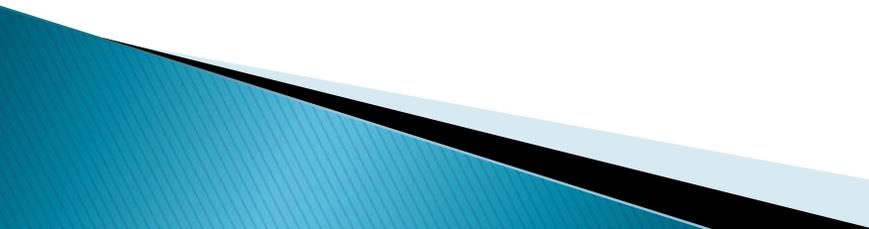
July 2015



In future

“Communicators will increasingly require different and more technical skill sets. They need to be familiar with data analytics, content creation, behavioural change techniques and be adept at building alliances. They must also be confident in applying this in line with civil service values to speak authoritatively to ministers and officials to argue the best professional case.”

*Page 2, The Future of Public Service
Communications*



Behavioural Exchange Conferences

– Recent Developments

- ▶ Fake news: experimental work to see if recipients of fake news can be ‘inoculated’ against its content and effects
- ▶ Assumptions regarding the value of reports relating to behaviour need to be revisited. Everybody lies in response to many direct questions (<http://sethsd.com/everybodylies>). Better understanding of behaviour from analysis of data relating to internet searches

Recent Developments

- ▶ People do not really know themselves: Nick Chater, a psychologist at the University of Warwick Business School. More reliable guide to how people are likely to behave is to look at their past behaviour.
- ▶ Our physical limitations have been stretched enormously over the past 300 or so years, but we've failed to stretch our cognitive abilities to the same extent, Dan Ariely (@danariely), the author of The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty.

- ▶ Cass Sunstein, the co-author of *Nudge*: people mainly unwilling to disclose their real views, opinions, unless in some way given permission. Once able to express themselves more directly, opinions spread rapidly and polarise. Examples, Brexit, the #metoo movement, populism have allowed more extreme opinions to emerge, with effects that we are still trying to manage
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CIPR Plans

- ▶ Behavioural Science Panel – to be established this year
 - ▶ Behavioural Insight Interest Group (reviving a successful Institute interest group active in 1990s, looking at psychological underpinnings of practice)
 - ▶ Collaboration with other research and study centres
 - ▶ Research
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References

- ▶ Behavioural Exchange Conferences, latest <https://www.bi.team/events/behavioural-exchange-2019/>, upcoming www.bx.2020.org
- ▶ David Halpern, Inside the Nudge Unit, WH Allen, London 2015
- ▶ The Future of Public Service Communications, The Government Communication Service, July 2015, https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/6.1048_Cabinet-Office_comms-future-document_v2_print_web.pdf
- ▶ The Institute for Public Relations, Behavioral Insights Research Center, <https://instituteforpr.org/behavioral-insights-research-center/about-birc/>
- ▶ Jon White, Behavioural Insights: A Foundation for Professional Public Relations Practice, Influence Online, September 9 2019, <https://influenceonline.co.uk/2019/09/09/behavioural-insights-a-foundation-for-professional-public-relations-practice/>