


**SUSTAINABLE**  
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**Inspiring action  
with behavioural  
science**





# Itinerary

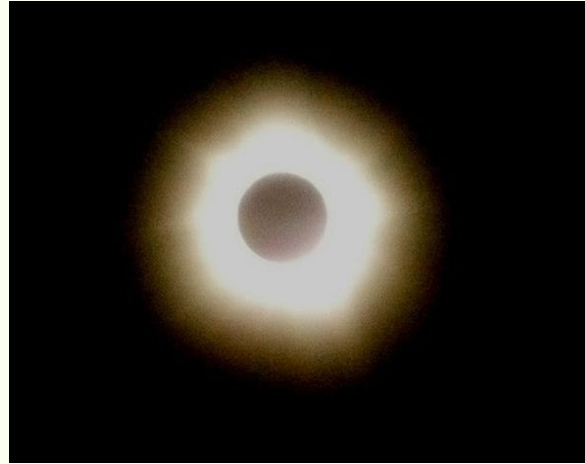
- Intro
  - Education vs behaviour change
  - What drives behaviours and how to utilise them
    - Psychological influences
    - Structural influences
    - Social influences
  - Communications
  - You will get these slides as a follow-up
- 

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**INTRO**

# About me...

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# Do you want to achieve behaviour change for the environment?

Apply this theory of change to your campaign, business or workplace to replace unsustainable habits for more planet-friendly actions.

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## WHAT IS DRIVING THE EXISTING BEHAVIOUR?

Understand the:

- Infrastructure
- Social expectations
- Habits



## WHAT STRUCTURAL CHANGES ARE NEEDED?

What are the

- Objects
- Materials
- Systems
- Infrastructure that need to be replaced?



## HOW CAN IT BECOME SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE?

- What will make it a social norm?
- Who are the messengers?



## HOW CAN YOU COMMUNICATE POSITIVELY?

- Use your message to:
- Reinforce desirable behaviour
- Emphasise how many people are taking action
- Show people they will make a difference

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# Education vs behaviour change

# What behaviour change is NOT...

- ....**Education** about the problem....this is the assumption that once people know they will act (**Information deficit model**)
- Talking about the problem is **JUST AWARENESS RAISING**
- The value- action gap demonstrates that **EDUCATION & AWARENESS RAISING** don't lead to action



# Conservation education doesn't change behaviours

- A 7 year suite of conservation efforts in a Ugandan national park including:
  - Conflict reduction
  - Education
  - Community resource access
  - Support for community development) built an understanding of conservation BUT poaching and illegal grazing continued.
- The researchers conclude that **“attitudes and awareness are not adequate predictors of conservation behaviour.”**
- In the case of the wildlife trade in Asia, researchers conclude the link **between information provision and behaviour change “is tenuous at best.”**

[Behaviour change for nature](#)



# The education approach

Examples of education on plastic reduction:

- Putting up a poster
  - Organising a talk
  - Sending an email
- 
- [Katie Patrick – How to save the world](#)

## THE EDUCATION APPROACH VS

Let's look at an example of a project to get people in a large office building to use fewer disposable plastic bottles. If we make the mistake of thinking that *education* leads to change, we might design an *educational* strategy like this:



1. Putting up a poster that has facts about plastic waste in the lunchroom.



2. Getting a local environmental leader to give a talk about plastic pollution.



3. Putting a pamphlet on reducing plastic on every employee's desk.



4. Going to a conference about plastic pollution.



5. Making everyone watch a documentary on how bad plastic is for the environment.



6. Writing a post on the company blog about how the company is trying to reduce its plastic use.

The Value-Action Gap theory indicates that these six educational initiatives will have a weak effect on getting people to change their plastic bottle use. Getting people to *care* about the issue isn't the most important thing in creating change.

# The behavioural approach

Examples of behaviour change:

- Giving everyone a water bottle
- Asking people to write a pledge
- Putting all the pledges on the wall
- Using smiley faces to acknowledge people using their water bottle

Katie Patrick – How to save the world

## THE BEHAVIOR APPROACH

Your project will take a different form when you design it to empower a *behavior*. People already know that disposable plastic is bad. They probably don't need much more education or emotional persuasion. A campaign that targets *behavior* might include:



1. Giving everyone in the office a reusable water bottle.



2. Installing a SodaStream in the office kitchen.



3. Getting each person to write out a pledge to promise to use their reusable water bottle.



4. Adding a smiley face or sad face to the daily chart when re-usable water bottle use goes up or down.



5. Putting up all the written pledges on a wall where people can see them.



6. Installing filtered water refill stations in easy-to-find places.



7. Counting the plastic bottles thrown out every day and writing the number on the wall in a clearly visible place, and charting the numbers over time.



8. Creating a sticker chart and putting a happy sticker on it for each person who uses a reusable plastic water bottle.

People need to feel *empowered* to influence change, like *their one action is making a difference*. These eight techniques empower our group of people for *action*.

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**What drives behaviours?**

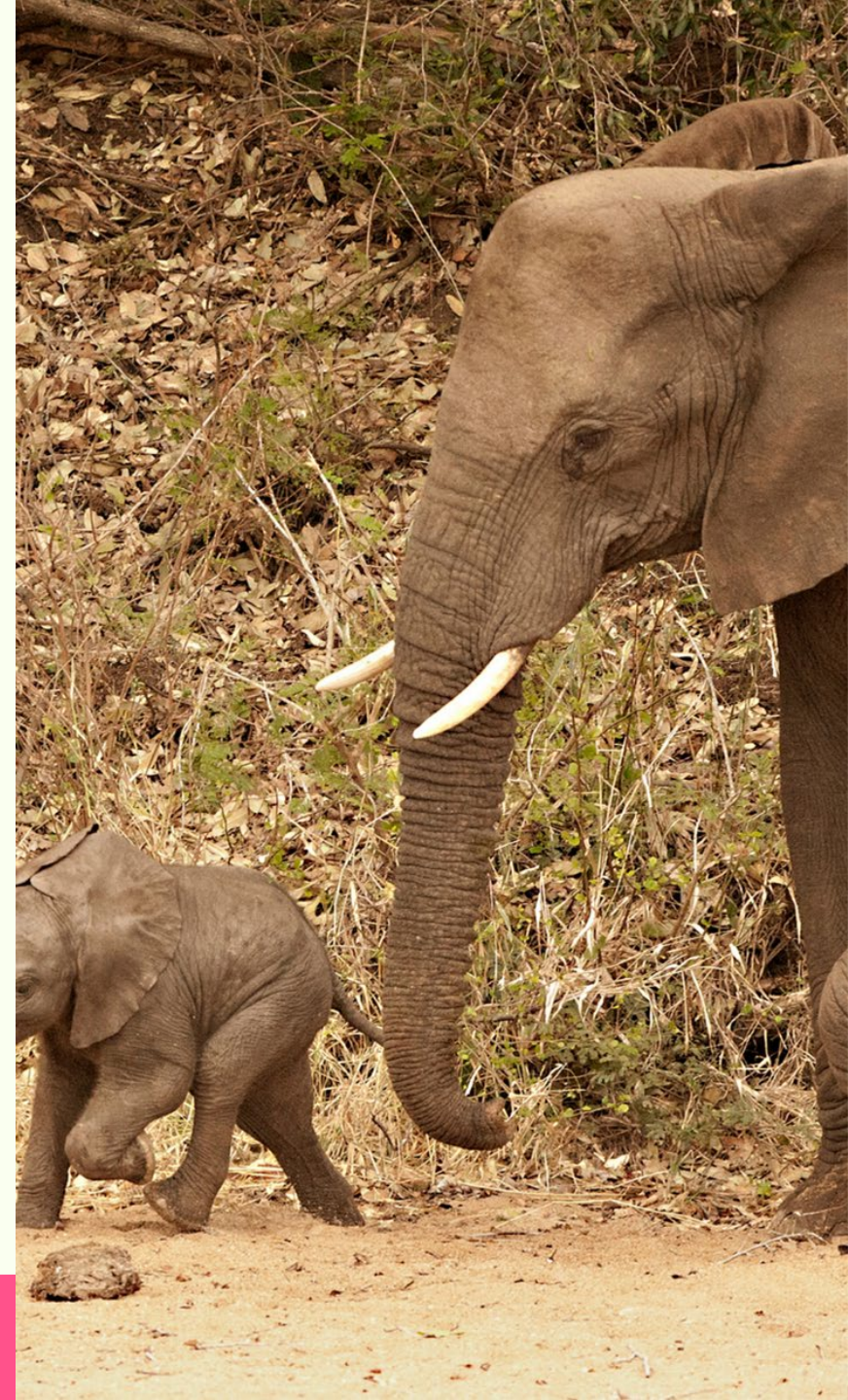
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# Psychological influences



# Behavioural economics

- Introduces psychology to economic theory to understand decision-making
- Highlights the **lack of rationality** of humans
- An extensive **list of biases** that inform behaviour in certain situations
  - **Behavioural economics**
  - **Nudge theory**



# Which part of our brain drives our behaviours?

- The Lizard, mammal or human brain?
- Behavioural economists discounted the economist view of 'rational man'
- Demonstrate that it's these older brain parts that are often running the show.



# Thinking is energy intensive

The brain uses a lot of energy to:

- Make decisions
- Process complexity
- **Make change**

This is a our system 2 part of the brain..

- Used for problem-solving
- Used less when tired

Daniel Kahneman  
Thinking fast and slow

## System 2:

- **Slow**
- **Deliberate**
- **Logical**

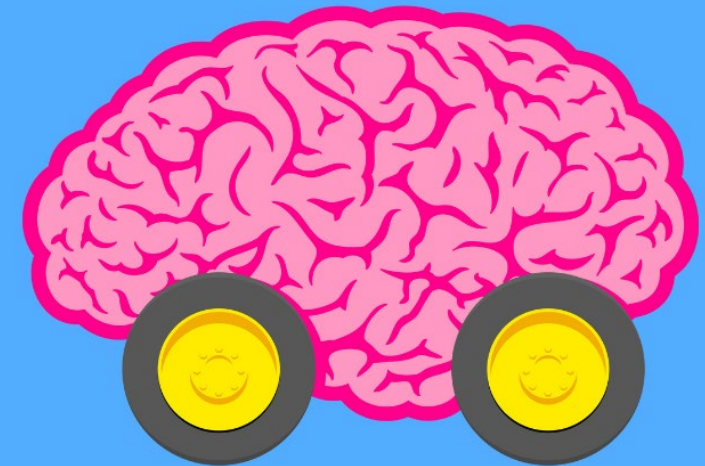


# Ways the brain saves energy

- **Memories & context** – Relies on previous experiences to make decisions
  - How did I get to work yesterday
  - What did I do last time I left the office
  - Last time I visited a nature reserve
- **Emotions** – Uses emotions to make decisions (what will make **me feel good right now**)
- **Short-cuts and the easy option** – choosing the path of least resistance

## System 1:

- **Fast**
- **Instinctive**
- **Emotional**



# Inattention blindness

- Our brains can only process **one thing at a time**
- It **filters information that is perceived to be relevant** to us at that given time, removing other information
- If you present information at a point that is not relevant it will **not be register**
- Or if the information is **hard to find** e.g. bin instructions



# Icons for mental shortcuts

- Our brains process visual images 60,000 times faster than text
- In a study students achieved a test result of 89% with image instructions vs 40% with text-only
- Therefore bins with colour and icons are better than wording



# Salient messages

Our brains are drawn to things that are:

- Moving
- Out of place
  - More likely to **pay a fine with a personalised text message** and £
  - More likely to **open a letter that is hand written** as it is novel and personal
- So presenting information in an unexpected way



**When are you presenting information to people?**

**How can you make this more salient?**

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# Effort vs Benefit

# Perceived effort

- **Perceived effort** accounts for **2/3rds** of effort- so how hard we think something is, is **mainly in our head**
    - Cycling versus driving
    - Looking for a bin for rubbish
  - **Time** is a signal of how difficult something is- **takes a long time = difficult**
    - Washable nappies vs disposable
  - Language is an indicator of effort
- 
- **Toxic words:**
    - **Have to**
    - **Must**
    - **Should**
  - **Feel good words:**
    - **Easy**
    - **Quick**



# Perceived benefit

- Our decision to do behaviours are often based on the **benefit to us**:  
**‘What’s in it for me?’**
- If there is **no perceived benefit** for us, **less likely** to take action
- How can we communicate the win-win rather than just the altruistic reasons?
  - Health
  - Family
  - Wellbeing
  - Local community



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**Short-term thinking**

# Long and short term goals & climate change

## ■ Temporal discounting

- People put **more value on what is available right now** rather than a more distant and future goal.
  - Accept less money now than more in the future
- People get **demotivated by the big goal** if they don't see a **reaction** immediately

## ■ Evolutionary wired for immediate certain threats

- COVID19 is invisible but it is immediate
- Climate chaos is invisible, uncertain and was in the future
- Ice caps melting and polar bears are not relatable for many people
- 12 years has meant climate change is a tangible time

George Marshall 'Don't even think about it: why our brains are wired to ignore climate change'

# Climate change case study

- People given money and a choice of public investment schemes :
  - One scheme was **cheaper** had no negative consequences in the present but presented **damage in the future**
  - One scheme **cost more in present** but has **no negative consequences** for future generations

**Almost everyone chose the short term scheme**

Using a **self-commitment nudge** more people committed to the long-term scheme. This plays in to **commitment bias**.

[Watch the Green Nudge TedTalk](#)

Self-commitment  
nudge



[...] I will not put the interests of my own group above the interests of subsequent groups.  
[...] I will act solidary towards the members of the subsequent groups [...]

# Public commitments in conservation

- Human bias towards having a '**consistent positive image**' and '**public commitment**' biases can be used for environmental behaviour change
- A study in the Northern Republic of Congo found that the use of participatory, inter-group monitoring systems decreased wildlife hunting more than inter-group communication alone.
- A small study in the Netherlands found that, compared to farmers who only received feedback, farmers who also made a public commitment reported being more likely to adopt sustainable farming.

Behaviour change for nature

# Addressing short-term thinking with feedback loops

To address temporal discounting, feedback loops can be deployed to demonstrate the impact of actions in the short-term. These include:

- **Energy monitoring equipment** – that gives immediate feedback on energy usage
- **Weekly emails** – a study where weekly emails were sent, reports sustained energy saving behaviour over a 3 month period post-intervention
- **Hand-written notes** – a study found people given these sustained behaviours whilst people given financial rewards stopped the behaviour when the money stopped
- **Social acknowledgement** also more effective than **financial rewards** for sustaining behaviour
- **Badges of honour** are visual and social recognition which can be more effective for sustained behaviour change e.g. **emails, award ceremonies, unexpected prizes**

# Supporter feedback loops

Wednesday 11:48

Thank you for your blood donation! Don't forget to let us know if you were unwell, after you left the donation session, by calling [0300 123 23 23](tel:03001232323)

Today 12:57

Thank you so much for donating on 16-Aug. Your donation has now been issued to Gloucester Royal Hospital. Every donation counts.

When you travel with Renfe you take care of the environment

Madrid  
Chamartín Clara > Castelló  
Campoamor

CO2 EMISSIONS PER PASSENGER

44,00 kg

12,20 kg

109,10 kg



**How can you build short-term goals and achievements into your communications?**

**How can you activate self-commitment or public commitment bias?**

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**Infrastructure**



# How infrastructure and layout influences behaviours

- **Choice architecture** - describes how the decisions we make are affected by the
  - **Layout**
  - **Sequencing**
  - **Range of choices** that are available
- People will choose the
  - Easiest option or
  - Most familiar (**status quo bias**)
- Manage the choice architecture so the **default option is the eco option** e.g. remove or charge for the disposable cup.



# Lowering meat content & food waste through choice architecture and defaults

- Make **sausages smaller** in the meat aisle = **20% reduction in meat sold**
- Putting vegetarian sausages **next to the meat** lead to a **50% increase** in sales
- Improving the **visual presentation of vegan and veggie options** on a buffet e.g. a display of vegetables and olive oil around it
- **Doubling the proportion** of vegetarian meals offered **increases vegetarian sales by between 41% and 79%** - 2 in 4 menus items in a Cambridge study
- BECC Conference made **the default choice** vegetarian **on the booking form**. Had to change to meat- 20% choice meat



# Campaigns that change the infrastructure

- Wildflower campaigns
- Wildlife corridors
- Working with landowners on rewilding campaigns – Norfolk rewilding
- Litterfree Dorset worked with shops to remove disposable BBQ's to address wildfire concerns this summer
- Refill has created a network of cafes, bars and venues to get free tap water bottle refills where bottled water is available



**What does your infrastructure lead people to do?**

**What are the defaults currently?**

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**Social influences**



# Social norms

- Rules that prescribe what people should and should not do given their social surroundings
  - **Injunctive norms** - what society in general approves or disapproves of
  - **Descriptive norms** - what others around us do
- **People look for other people to inform behaviours**



# Using social norms to drive change

- A study in China's Wolong Nature Reserve sought to boost farmers' re-enrolment in their Grain-to-Green program that converts agricultural land into forests or pastures.
- **When given information about their neighbours' behaviour** towards converting land in addition to a payment upon enrolment, **farmers were more likely to re-enrol.**



# Social proof & social contagion

- **Social proof** - We look for others to confirm our behaviour
  - More influenced by **people who look like us**
  - In situations of uncertainty more likely to do **what other people do**
- **Social contagion** - Tendency for people to mimic behaviours of those around them
  - Solar City in USA identified the social contagion effect.
  - One-third of customers were referred by a friend or neighbour.



**What are the social norms and influences around your behaviour?**

**How can you provide social proof?**

**How can you create social contagion?**

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**COMMUNICATIONS**

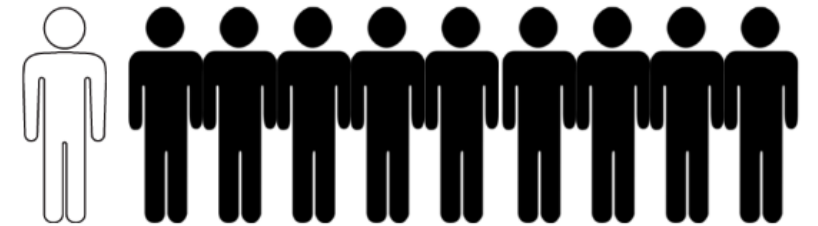


# Negative social proof

70% of people don't recycle

Negative descriptive norms:

This sign **increased littering** in an experiment in Looe Cornwall



1 out of 10 people litter

Litter harms our  
community and marine life

# Describing what to do

- **Prescriptive norms-** Telling us what to do, and what is expected
- **Positive descriptive norm-** focusing on how many people are doing the 'ideal behaviour'

These **reduced littering** in Looe, Cornwall



Be a hero - recycle

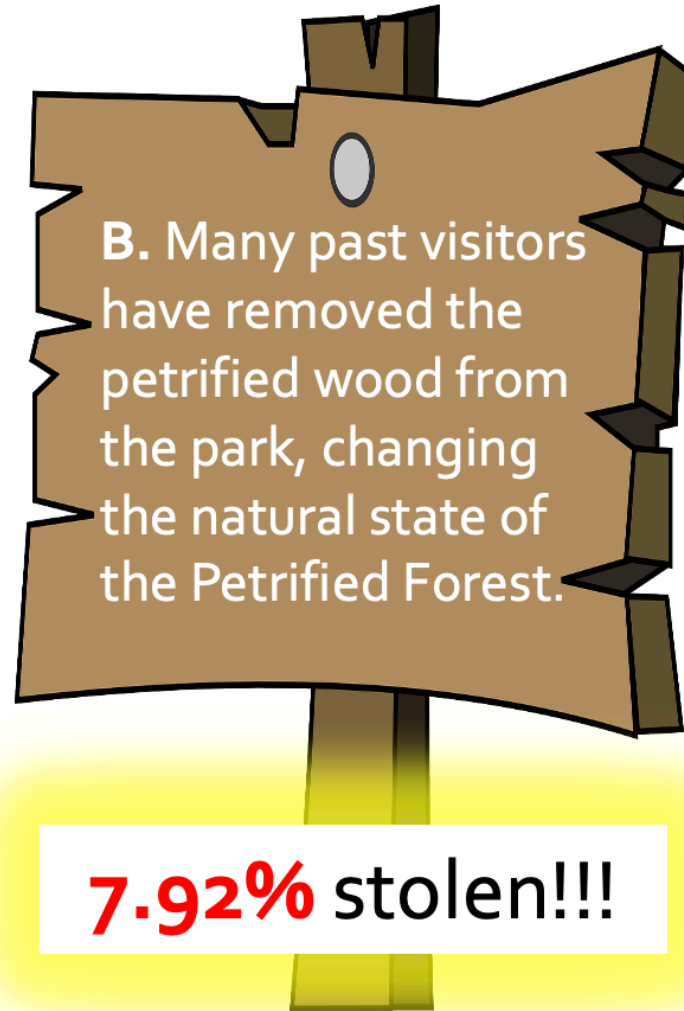
Litter harms our  
community and marine life



9 out of 10 people use a bin

Litter harms our  
community and marine life

# Which Performed Best?



C.



2.92% stolen

See: Cialdini, Robert B., et al. "Managing social norms for persuasive impact," *Social Influence*, 1(1) (2006)

# Who communicates the message matters

- Non-relatable messengers
  - Bird-Girl (Mya Rose) highlighted the lack of POC in Avon Wildlife Trust communications



FAMILIES

## Explore nature on your doorstep

with our My Wild Child sessions, Wildlife Watch groups and free resources.

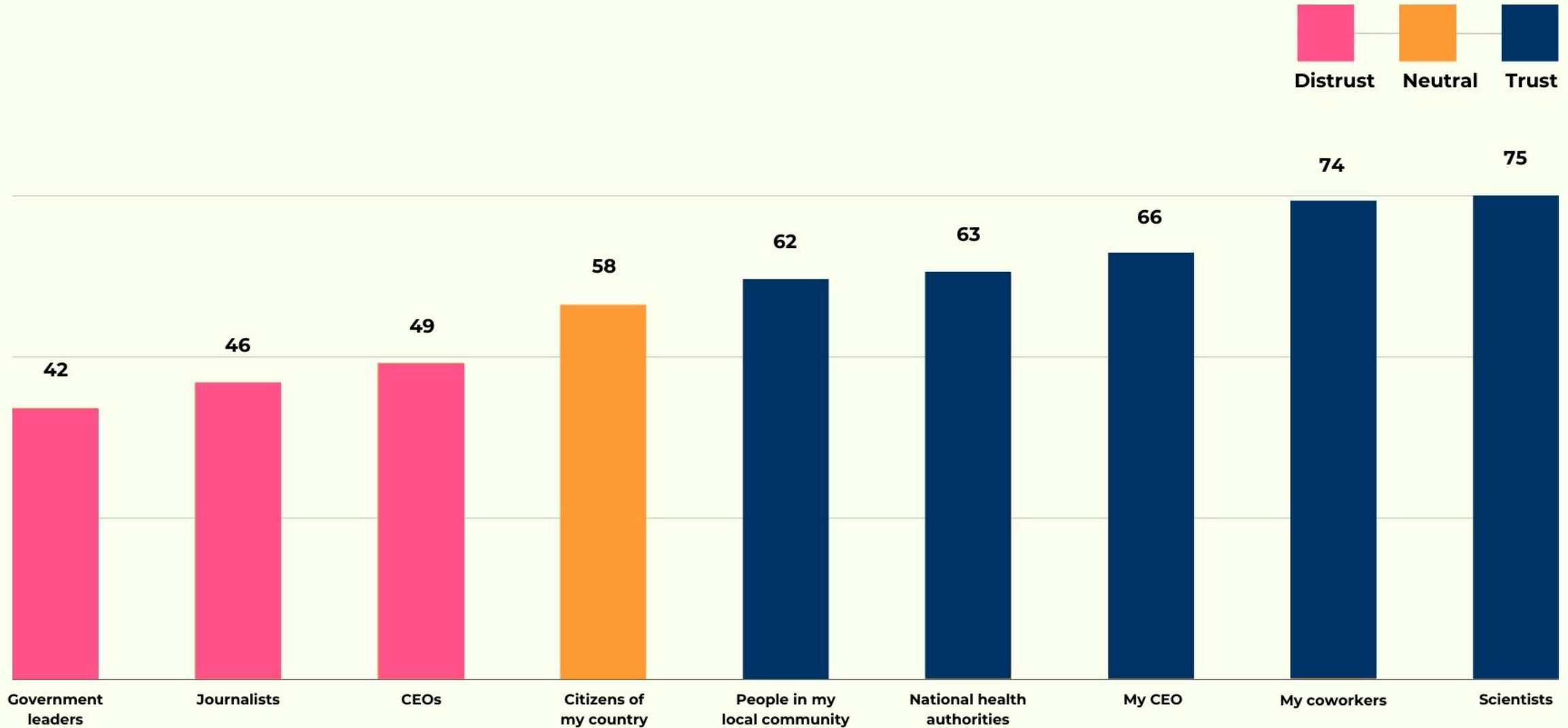
[Learn more](#)

# Messengers

- **Authority bias**  
Look for validation from ‘authority figures’ for appropriate behaviours
  - Managers
  - Trusted brands
  - Supermarkets
- **Messengers**
  - People who ‘look like us’ or are relatable
- Sabrina McCormick in her research on the viewers watching the ‘Years of Living Dangerously’ series found that they:
  - Responded more positively to seeing everyday people taking action than famous people (more relatable messengers)



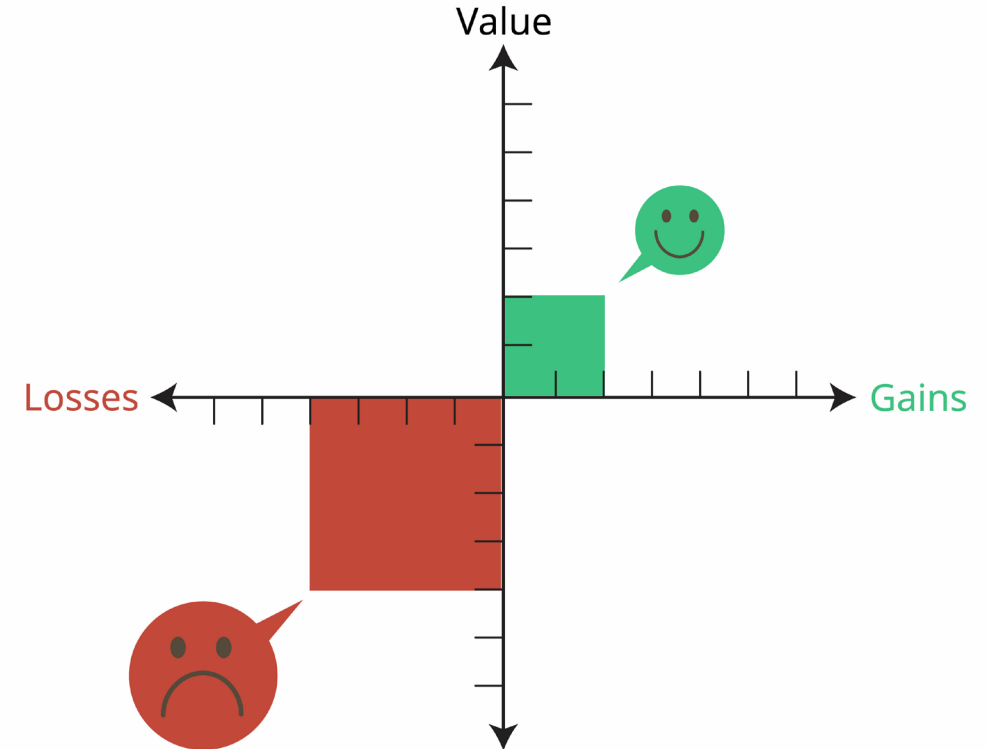
# Trusted messengers



# Activating loss is painful

The heuristic of Loss aversion highlights that:

- Pain of losing is felt **twice as much** as the joy of improvement
- This can be activated by talking about giving things up e.g. flying, meat etc
- FOMO is real!



# Using loss for good

Loss aversion has been shown to work to increase the use of reusable coffee cups and lower the use of disposables

Why the Latte levy works – 25p charge better than a discount

- If want to talk about financial savings from not doing x
- Frame it as ‘Lose ££ a day rather than save ££ a day’
- Has a 150% better outcome



# Talking about lack activates a scarcity mindset

Being told that there isn't enough time, resources doesn't always drive people to want to act. In fact it can:

- Leave people feeling resourceless and defeated, as there aren't enough people, time or solutions available.
- Reduce imaginative capacity because we look for ways to protect and not to innovate
- Limit experimentation as there isn't time for mistakes.
- 💰 In trials, people who have financial concerns and scarcity of wealth are impeded in completing cognitive tasks as well as those who don't have financial concerns.



# The antidote to this is abundance

So what is the antidote to this:

- Focusing on how many people are taking action
- Stories of action not inaction
- Talking about all the people are working together for change
- Looking at the bigger picture and how people have mobilised before and have driven change- talking about previous wins



**How can you communicate with social proof, relatable messengers and a frame of abundance?**

# EAST

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**OTHER  
SUPPORT**



# Other support and resources

- On-demand and live training on:
  - Behaviour change theory
  - Understanding audiences
  - Developing an initiative
- **Bespoke training sessions for organisations**
- Changemakers monthly mentoring support programme:
  - Live sessions to apply behaviour change theory to your projects
  - Support on your campaigns
  - A cohort of other changemakers



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