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## **The Psychology of Communication for Behaviour Change**

*This summary should be used in conjunction with the presentation slides. It is based on notes taken at the presentation.*

Jim's core area of interest is influencing the behaviour of National Park users, for example, getting people to stay on tracks or pick up rubbish. The techniques used are equally applicable to industries other than tourism, e.g. in campaigns for sun exposure awareness or to promote adoption of green technologies. The examples given focus particularly on use of *communication* to bring about *behaviour change* but different approaches and theories can be applied. A range of mechanisms should be considered for each situation, e.g. government incentives schemes.

Some Parks examples illustrate the difficulties of bringing about behaviour change:

- In a Yarra Ranges picnic ground, signs with text and symbols telling people not to feed the birds are ignored. This behaviour is often pre-planned with families bringing their own seed.
- At Cradle Mountain everyone wants to drive their car to the walk site, causing unsafe road conditions as cars park on the roadside. A shuttle bus service was established, but signs politely asking people to use the free service didn't work.
- People ignore signs and barriers on cliffs in the Port Campbell National Park. The signs have graphic symbols warning of the danger or ask people to "show you care" about the environment.
- In the Swan River region of WA, toxic algal bloom in rivers is being caused by excessive nutrients from the use of fertilizers by home gardeners. An education campaign to get people to buy appropriate products failed - it was designed with no real research into its audience.

Some key points:

- You need to go and ask people, rather than basing action on intuition alone.
- Behaviours are context specific, e.g. the differences between farm and city settings; using one green product is quite different to using another.
- Over saturation of messages is an issue, e.g. too many signs.
- Messages need to be engaging, not just easy to read.
- Having the information doesn't always translate into behaviour change.

To know how to develop *persuasive communications* we have to focus on the audience; to understand what are the important factors for them. Strong habits are harder to break by communication alone, for example, vandals know they're doing something wrong – it won't help simply telling them that.

Theories in social science help us understand human behaviour and can be used to design messages that engage with the audience. The key is *audience research*.

### **Theory 1: Theory of Planned Behaviour**

This theory for predicting, explaining and influencing behaviour is well documented and has broad application, e.g. in campaigns for blood donation, recycling or melanoma awareness. It is based on the notion that behaviour stems from a person's *beliefs*. These beliefs can be about the likely outcomes (*Behavioural Beliefs*), the opinions of others (*Normative Beliefs*) or the factors facilitating or impeding actually doing something (*Control Beliefs*). The design of any intervention

must examine these beliefs of individuals. You need to ask what people believe about the situation and then identify the *beliefs to target*.

### **Applied examples from studies by Monash TRU**

What are better messages to use to prevent walkers leaving the track? The Unit visited the Port Campbell park and used interviews and questionnaires to uncover peoples' beliefs. These identified that people knew such behaviour was dangerous, but still did it because they thought they'd get a better photo opportunity. A series of six temporary signs using a range of message designs were put up and visitors observed and later questioned. The sign that worked best put across the message that if they stayed on track they actually won't be missing a better photo opportunity. When interviewed, the park rangers however thought the standard signs would work best – this shows you can't rely on intuition alone!

Jim's PhD focused on influencing visitor behaviour using alternative transport systems in Australian National parks. In the case of the shuttle bus on Cradle Mountain, one of the *primary beliefs* that distinguished bus users from car users was that taking the bus would give people greater flexibility for doing walks, thus giving them a greater experience at the park. *Secondary beliefs* were that not taking the car would reduce environmental impacts and that they would not have to look for a parking spot. New signs *targeting the primary belief* led to a significant rise in use of the bus.

The purchasing of environmentally sensitive fertiliser in WA was hindered by a *primary belief* that it was harder to find it in the store; that there was not enough information available. The *secondary belief* was that choice of fertiliser could have a detrimental effect on ground water. The solution here was remarkably simple: where possible, floor stock in stores was simply rearranged with appropriate information nearby to make the appropriate products more visible. Not all stores will allow this however because of advertising agreements. You can only target certain things via communication and other factors, such as cost, would be an issue here. Of course people have lots of beliefs, so you can only target some of these.

The actual design of any sign can be broken into elements. The Tasmanian sign, for example had six elements including a title framed as a question to instigate elaboration, a personal anecdote to connect with people, information about parking, a thank you message, disclaimer and logo signifying credibility of the source.

### **Theory 2. The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion.**

This tells you *how* to communicate by modelling how people process information. Basically an individual will process a message in two ways:

1. *Central route: giving real consideration to the message, resulting in a greater likelihood of influence and more long term decisions being taken.*
2. *Peripheral route: Taking a distracted approach where they don't read the whole message and use only peripheral processing. People may also use existing mental models to take a short cut, for example adopting negative arguments picked up from newspapers.*

There is a real need to understand the context of the situation. Are there too many other signs or other distractions? Short or longer text messages may be appropriate for different circumstances. It is also necessary to know whether the objective is a short or longer-term behaviour change.

### **Theory 3: TORE™ model (Ham, 2007)**

This theory looks at themes rather than facts. It is big on analogies and metaphor; how to convince people. Different tools such as media and petitions could be relevant for bigger issues such as Port Phillip channel deepening. The model considers strong and weaker paths (shortcuts) people might take to required behavioural outcomes.

### **Implications**

Persuasive communication is an emerging Social Science field. Researchers are interested in cause and effect and building understanding of influences on behavioural change. The Tourism Research Unit is developing methods and tools for more practice application. It has produced a handbook for

managers and laymen: “Promoting Persuasion in Protected Areas”. This covers many of the practical approaches in this presentation. This manual will be available shortly from the Sustainable Tourism CRC website.

Many research reports are also available at Sustainable Tourism CRC website:  
<http://crctourism.com.au>

**Points from audience discussion**

When signs alone don't prevent people from going into dangerous areas, barriers could be put up or made higher, but we really don't want to do this. Some balance is necessary

While we'd all like to measure the exact effects on behaviour, there are many variables involved. People counters, for example, are notoriously unreliable.

The Tasmanian shuttle bus has proven to be expensive. Fees are an option that could be incorporated into the park fee, but it's not sure that the service will be sustainable.

In the case of climate change campaigns, the 'black balloons' advertisements have been used, but you can't assume this will lead to behavioural change. There's no message about what people should do that would influence their *control* beliefs.

If anyone would like further information, Jim would be happy to assist. Feel free to send him an email.

*Mike Jorgenson* mentioned that Sam Ham (TORE™ Model) is coming to Australia and anyone interested hearing him should contact him at URS.

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