Challenging behaviour

Edited by **Katherine Kerswell** and **Sue Goss**

Clive Grace
Michael Portillo
Matthew Taylor
Gillian Norton
Polly Toynbee
Leo Boland
John Atkinson
René Carayol
Jeff French

Peter A Glaser
Susan R Glaser
Rachel Litherland
Camilla Child
Joe Simpson
Michael Bichard
David Halpern

Leadership Centre for local government

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by Clive Grace and Joe Simpson

Being able to change public behaviour is going to be one of very few tools in the kit to minimize the impact of budget cuts in the UK. This important SFI report needs to be read by all in public policy and those charged with delivering the same public services for less. It can be done – you can even deliver more for less – and the experts in this report demonstrate how.

Although the idea that local or central government might deliberately influence personal behaviour is a problem for some (as authors Michael Bichard and David Halpern explain), it has been happening down the ages – not least when church and state were more closely identified. More recently, and often by force of legislation, government has changed our behaviour and attitudes towards drink-driving, shopping laws, smoking in public places, the availability of divorce, and the acceptability of same sex relationships. Polly Toynbee expands on the difficulties that public officials and politicians face on knowing the extent to which the state can interfere with lives.

But, as Michael Portillo warns us, after the UK's next general election,

those who govern will need to lead the country into the biggest change in expectations and behaviour since the Second World War.

So we are publishing here some tested methods for achieving attitude and behaviour change, as well signposting places to go to understand the possibilities and techniques.

We are extremely grateful to our contributors, to our sponsors and to Jo Benfield and Siobhan Coombs for putting this report together.

Clive Grace is chair of the SFI editorial board.

Joe Simpson is Director of Politics and Partnerships, Leadership Centre for Local Government.

Challenging behaviour

by Katherine Kerswell and Sue Goss

Social marketing, environmental design and techniques to 'nudge' citizens into doing the right thing have been in the news recently, but there's nothing new about government attempts to change behaviour. Whether it is using fiscal policy to create or constrain consumption, or sentencing policy to deter crime, it is part of government's *raison d'etre* to influence what citizens do. So if this has been part of the work of governments ever since governments were invented, what is all the fuss about? In a series of contributions about 'Challenging Behaviour' our contributors explore the heightened interest in government's role in behaviour change through three distinct, but interrelated, factors in modern government.

Sustainability

The first is a realisation that our current lifestyles are unsustainable. We borrow too much, we eat and drink too much, we use too much carbon and our society, if not broken, is more strained and less mobile than it was. These factors pose significant and daunting challenges to us as citizens and as senior local government leaders and suggest that economically, environmentally and socially our current behaviour cannot continue and needs to be challenged.

Budget cuts

The second factor is more recent and more urgent. As Michael Portillo points out in his sobering piece for this pamphlet, local communities and local government face a different and far less bountiful future. The impact of the credit crunch and consequent increase in public spending in the recent months – which has seen public debt doubling from 40–80% of GDP – will change for decades the shape and size of public services in the UK. The relationship between local authorities and their local communities is bound to change. The only question is whether it changes for the better, or for the worse.

Local authorities will no longer be able to afford to provide services at the same level as before and may need to introduce new criteria to help prioritise resources. One direction which policy could take is what Mathew Taylor in his piece in this pamphlet calls 'conditionality'. It takes the debate about rights and responsibilities a stage

further – suggesting that services might in the future have conditions attached. Citizens might be obliged to behave in certain ways in order to qualify for public services. For example, the costs of road accidents to the state could be reduced if all road users had to insure themselves against accidents. Should people who play contact sports have to insure themselves against harm? How far would we go? What about DIY accidents – we all know we should take care using a ladder, drilling etc., should we have to bear part of the cost of carelessness? What about skin cancer, if irresponsible sunbed use was to blame? At present, only citizens who do not act within the law can be stripped of certain rights. A condition attached to the entitlement for services to act as a good and healthy citizen would represent a significant break with post-war welfare settlement. The moral and ethical issues thrown up are considerable. Where would we draw the line on who is deserving and who is not? Whose version of a responsibility and desert would we codify? But the fundamental question – whether or not government should or could deny services to citizens who behave in ways that are costly to wider society – is being increasingly asked.

A different direction for policy recognises that government is unlikely to achieve behaviour change simply through state power. The tools government has at its disposal are relatively blunt. Incentives and rewards may not outweigh other motivations. Legal coercion has an important role to play (the smoking ban has proved very successful in reducing cigarette consumption) but regulation has to be enforced, and for this to happen public consent is required and can take time to build. Some professions assume that the public make rational choices based on evidence, while others recognize that users are often troubled, or emotional. Trading Standards uses regulation and enforcement, while planners try to 'design in' behaviour change (for example building flats without car-parking spaces) while children's services emphasise support and advice. It is striking, however, that our different professional groups seldom talk to each other about the assumptions they make, or learn across services about what works.

In new policy areas, such as reducing carbon footprint, recycling, community cohesion, healthy living etc, no social consensus has yet been built about the 'right' way for governments to respond. In many areas of social policy, government has limited power to change the lay of the land. Approaches that rely on enforcement don't work when people need to actively commit to change, rather than to simply comply. While the Department of Health seeks to regulate the many thousands of different organisations that make up the health economy, service outcomes are far more dependent on a range of individual and communal factors. The influence of friends, family and neighbourhood; where people live, what their occupation is, how much they earn, what they consume and how much they exercise will matter more than anything emanating from Whitehall. Governments have not yet found ways to compel people to exercise or to eat healthily –

and we rely on the goodwill and co-operation of citizens if we are to recycle effectively, to reduce energy use, or to create tolerant neighbourhoods. Where we need citizens to invest their own time and energy we must find ways to persuade our fellow citizens to join in a process of behaviour change.

Co-production

Co-production is therefore, as Mathew Taylor points out, the third strand of new thinking. It marks the emergence, he suggests, of the public as 'subject, rather than simply the object of public services'. We have more chance of changing the world when citizens work together to develop responses to challenging behaviour. The best solutions will always be developed from a mutual understanding about what is needed, and what is possible. Co-produced solutions can commit the energy and resources not simply of the local authority and its partners but of local people. But for co-production to work, public agencies have to be willing to share decision-making and control.

Leo Boland takes this argument one stage further. In his piece for this pamphlet, he identifies a conspiracy between public and politicians aided by the media to create a state 'solution' for every problem that individuals and families experience in life' – whenever tragedy strikes an 'initiative is announced and funded, based on whatever evidence there is to hand' Since this will be unsustainable in the future, Boland uses the work of Habermas to draw a distinction between the 'system' – the world of government and bureaucracy and the 'lifeworld': family, friendships and networks – a world of informality, caring, mutuality. If the system reaches too far into our personal lives, bringing with it bureaucratic systems, rule-governed decisions, control and uniformity, it can have drastic consequences ranging from petty irritations to more menacing intrusion. The way that families and communities solve problems is based on personal feelings of duty and empathy, and on active relationships reached by a process of serious conversation which Habermas calls 'communicative action'. On the other hand, the lifeworld is not always necessarily benign: sometimes councils intervene to protect people from abuse within their own family. But a change to the balance of intervention may be well overdue – communication free from coercion, and solutions found within the sphere of communicative action may be more sustainable in the long term than state intervention. Instead of the long, tedious and intrusive process of the Criminal Records Bureau, for example, perhaps we might all have learnt to be more vigilant, and asked better questions of our colleagues and neighbours.

Since a concern with behaviour is in

the zeitgeist, local government leaders, are beginning to ask a number of important questions. Where does our mandate to change behaviour come from? Who decides what is desirable behaviour and what is not? What is the concept of social good that we draw on to make these decisions? What is the right balance between the carrot and stick? What can we learn from experiments that can be replicated? What are the implications for our organisations, our staff, and our politicians?

We are learning more about behaviour

Policy-makers have traditionally assumed that we are rational beings that will respond logically to incentives or disincentives, and that we fail to make optimal choices because of lack of information. But insights from social psychology and behavioural economics show us that the picture is far more complicated. Insights drawn from psychology show the importance of understanding irrational responses, mental shortcuts, conditioned behaviours, and our unconscious response to reminders about social norms. The enormous success of Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's book *Nudge* is because we all recognise our wish to feel part of a wider group. Insights drawn from sociology show the importance of social relationships and human interaction, the powerful impact of a sense of reciprocity and the importance of social values such as consistency. Changes in the physical environment can also influence our behaviour.

In fact, almost the whole of social science is relevant – since behaviour change is a function of both interests and of identity. *Economics* and *sociology* help us to understand human interests; both financial – ranging from survival to accumulating wealth – and interests expressed through power and status. *Philosophy* and *social psychology* explore other motivations; including both the conscious human cognitive processes of expressing values and principles, and the emotions and feelings evoked by individual identity and the sense of belonging to a wider group. All this makes a single over-arching 'theory of behaviour change' an unlikely prospect. Useful insights can come from many sources, and theories conflict. If we see human behaviour as an 'open system' we can draw creative insights from many sources.

Mathew Taylor suggests drawing on cultural theory to understand the different ways of thinking about choosing and pursuing change: egalitarian, hierarchical, individualist and fatalist. These paradigms co-exist but cannot be synthesised – 'they are always in tension – like repelling magnets'. 'The best context for the emergence of sustainable solutions is to allow each approach to be in play, tapping into the energy that each has to offer, and managing the capacity of

each to disrupt the solutions of the others'. Thus neat solutions derived from a single model or theory are likely always to be wrong – since they don't allow for the disruptive power of competing paradigms. Far better to evolve clumsy solutions which balance competing drivers for change.

A range of approaches to behaviour change

Most approaches to behaviour change include some or all of the following:

• *Education and information giving*: giving people the information they need to make informed choices about the effects of their behaviour.

• *Social marketing*: learning from the world of marketing and from the social sciences is used to communicate simple social messages using advertising know-how – paying attention to the costs and benefits of the changes people are being asked to make.

• *Appealing to social norms and values*: exhortation and persuasion are based on consciously appealing to people's values and norms.

• *Choice architecture*: works with the grain of habits, emotions and cognitive biases to design options most likely to elicit positive behaviours.

• *Empowerment and peer-led change*: assumes that people will be more likely to change if they feel 'in control' and have access to the support they need.

• *Dialogue and exploratory conversation*:

draws on learning from cognitive therapies and techniques, recognising that people have 'learnt' patterns of behaviour and can 'unlearn' them, by reflecting on the triggers and consequences.

• *Rewards and incentives: points* systems, loyalty cards, reward schemes, special offers, competitions etc. recognise that we are motivated to change our behaviour by rewards, either financial or personal.

• *Enabling service provision*: people often face very real obstacles in changing behaviour – obstacles that are often to do with poverty or personal difficulties. Free education, recycling collections, rehabilitation programmes – are all examples of enabling service provision that make it easier for people to do what is wanted.

• *Law and regulation*: changes behaviours by controlling it through enforceable laws. Much depends, however, on the ability of the authorities to enforce the law and the levels of public consent for the law.

There is no silver bullet – no single approach works in every case. Local authorities are beginning to explore the conditions within which each of these approaches works best; but much seems to depend both on the context and on the good use of evidence and research. The National Social Marketing Centre stresses the importance of starting from the standpoint of the

user, and segmenting audiences effectively, understanding the different needs of the different people with whom you are trying to work. Joe Simpson, in his piece describing the experience of the first 'telethons', brings out the importance of some of the learning from social marketing: the crucial importance of understanding your audience, making an emotional connection and finding ways to make the desired change enjoyable.

Gillian Norton, in her piece on 'Headlines and a hard slog', illustrates the hard work involved in a sustained initiative to persuade people to reduce the use of private cars. Successful approaches combine a number of actions with a number of different stages; some will be about building consent and democratic support; some about building relationships and encouraging people to interact and feel involved, some will be about designing the environment carefully, or providing support; some may be about providing information or using incentives or disincentives. The optimal combination will change over time, and will emerge through a process of trial and error.

Rachel Litherland and Camilla Child, in their piece 'Why talk about behaviour change?' describes an approach the IDeA and the Tavistock Institute have been developing alongside Brighton & Hove using 'whole systems thinking' and a model of co-production to think differently about how to shift behaviours and attitudes in relation to teenage pregnancy. Instead of conventional information or marketing campaigns, they have been bringing community members together with frontline staff and partners to explore the issues, challenge, debate – and using a range of methods including individual interviews, community events and action learning sets to deepen understanding and consolidate change.

Behaviour change is never simply a technical fix

In exploring the possible strategies for changing behaviour, we uncover considerable unease about some of the techniques that might be used, and about the legitimate role of government in adopting some of these techniques. As Mathew Taylor says 'the idea of behaviour change as a goal of policy used to seem vaguely sinister'. One criticism is that behaviour change may be 'sneaky' or manipulative, trying to use psychology to change people's feelings or emotions without engaging with them as rational beings. Different concepts of 'agency' underlie different approaches to behaviour change. Some treat the public as full conscious deliberative individuals, and concentrate on education and persuasion, while others draw upon our underlying habits, desires and conditioned responses.

Another, more widespread, criticism is that governments are meddling beyond the proper boundaries of the role of the state; interfering in people's private lives and in behaviour that harms

no-one but themselves. It is no accident that local government leaders and commentators are returning to the work of philosophers – the behaviour change debate recasts a series of debates that philosophers have been having for centuries – between freedom of the individual and the good of society, between liberalism and paternalism, between individualism and utilitarianism.

Polly Toynbee, in her piece for this pamphlet, explores our contradictory responses. On the one hand, voicing concerns about the nanny state, and on the other hand calling for government to take action whenever something goes wrong. She argues that politicians need to 'tread carefully' since public views are often contradictory, and the state can only work with the grain of public opinion.

In workshop discussions, local government leaders express unease about the fairness with which we, as a society, treat the behaviours of others. Is there a class bias in assumptions that smoking is an unacceptable form of self-harm, when hang-gliding, skiing, motor-racing or other dangerous sports are not seen as similarly anti-social? Are we sometimes enforcing middle-class assumptions about the good life, and trying to control the 'the mass' or the 'underclass' as governments have done for centuries? On the other hand, it is argued, some behaviours are inherently anti-social and if people refuse to comply with the social norms which

create civility, we need to prevent them from destroying the peace of mind of their neighbours.

Gillian Norton says that 'talking about behaviour change is a sure fire way of making sure it doesn't happen'. In Richmond, they talked instead to local people about the social 'good' they were trying to achieve – increased recycling, more participation in sport, reduced carbon dioxide emissions.

Any attempt to change the behaviour of citizens must have a concept of 'social good' underpinning it. The values that justify a project to change behaviour must be explicit. But that does not make it simple. It is because the two important values of 'autonomy', and 'protecting others from harm' are in inevitable tension that any discussion of behaviour change is a discussion about the nature of the society we are trying to create. In the 19th century, individual liberty and autonomy were seen as very precious. It is perhaps a sign of the times that fewer people nowadays make the case for the freedom of individuals to harm themselves. Nevertheless, there are limits to the consensus supporting collective action that erodes individual freedom, and in a democracy those limits are theoretically set through the political process.

The role and impact of local government

Democratic government, at both national and local level, has to set out

the concept of 'social good' that underpins any attempt to change behaviour, and to be clear about 'who decides' what is acceptable. Different approaches have embedded in them, often implicitly, ideas about who makes these decisions. Is it ministers? The courts? Local communities? Individuals? Local government can play a particularly important role because it is local enough to engage directly in dialogue with communities about the balance of values that 'authorises' any intervention. Capital Ambition recently produced a guide to Behaviour Change that brings together the findings from a series of London collaborative workshops with local government leaders and practitioners. It suggests three key roles for local government in behaviour change:

• Holding a balance between values that are in permanent tension, through a democratic conversation with the local community.
• Creating space for, and building the relationships necessary to enable the 'who decides' question to be satisfactorily answered.
• Creating the ability for communities to act collectively to implement the decisions made.

Once decisions are made, it may be that the provision of services or the regulation of individuals or businesses might be the next step, but there are many other steps that could be taken.

Alternatives might include introducing rewards and penalties, or sharing information, supporting community self-help or simply finding ways to enable and encourage individual citizens to act differently. The crucial role is that of holding a democratic conversation with the local community.

Values, feelings and communication
Personal decisions about behaviour change are often strongly affected by personal values and feelings. Emotions play an important role in our commitment to protecting the environment, or to improving our health. So the realm of 'behaviour change' is also about our deepest values and feelings. And yet local government is not well equipped to deal with values and feelings. Discussions tend to be highly technocratic, meetings are low key, work processes worthy but dull. Worries about equity and equality make it hard for local authorities to respond to individual circumstances and individual needs.

But politics is inherently about values. Politicians are, or should be, more comfortable dealing with feelings and emotions, since they form a bridge between the bureaucracy and the public. Much has been written in recent months about the loss of trust in politicians. Part of what needs to be recovered is that sense of politicians playing a role in articulating the values and feelings of local people, ensuring the democratic legitimacy for the balance of values

chosen to underpin intervention, and working to secure consent. At a local level, the leadership of politicians seems to have been a significant success factor in gaining public support for change projects.

Values are not confined to politics, however. In our everyday life, we all carry values, and public services have values inscribed into their every activity. Many local government staff are passionate about their jobs and determined to achieve improvements in the lives of local people. Staff involved in working alongside the public need to be highly conscious of the values they carry, of the way they behave, and of the impact their behaviour has on the behaviour of others. Anecdotal evidence suggests that council staff have the greatest impact on the behaviour of others by setting an example, building relationships and generating trust and respect by the ways they behave. The public are often on the look-out for hypocrisy – if we want the public to use their cars less, how do council staff get to work? If we want communities to become tolerant and inclusive, what are we doing in our interactions with those communities to make that happen?

To co-produce solutions, as several of the contributors to this SFI pamphlet suggest, we need to create a new 'civil discourse'. Relationships with the public need to be built on honesty and integrity. and staff need to be honest about what can be achieved. By pooling the resources of local people and local organisations, staff need to work with the public to solve problems, rather than trying to pre-empt that discussion by 'providing' solutions.

Peter and Susan Glaser in their piece, identify the need for new skills to enable this to happen. A different sort of conversation, they suggest, will require 'skills in conflict resolution and collaborative dialogue'. Communication needs to change both within local authorities and outside; 'a strong council culture produces employers with a greater commitment and capacity for serving citizens'. They argue that these communication skills need to enable staff and politicians to be less defensive and to pay attention to criticism, seeing it as 'an opportunity to generate creative solutions to important problems'. Equally important will be the ability to tell the truth and to manage rather than avoid conflict, explaining that 'trust is not a pre-requisite for communication: trust is a by-product of communication'.

A new approach to learning?
Building these sorts of communication skills will involve more attention to learning; and a recognition that conventional training is not adequate to meet the demands of new roles and new relationships. If solutions to complex problems are to be co-produced, staff need to develop their ability to build relationships, to create a

sense of reciprocity where promises made are kept on both sides, and to build a deep understanding of the perspectives of others. We need staff to become more aware of the impact their behaviours have on the behaviours of others. To empower others, staff need to feel empowered. To generate successful shared solutions in conversation with residents, they need to feel able to make promises and agree actions, without taking suggestions back into the bureaucracy for a decision.

Organisations capable of supporting frontline staff in the building of reciprocal relationships within communities would feel very different from our current bureaucracies. Frontline staff and managers would be empowered to negotiate with local people, enabling them to make complex judgements, balance competing priorities and form long term reciprocal relationships. Managers and staff would be highly conscious of the values they carry, and of the judgements they are trusted to make. Much of our current consultation seeks responses to the council's agenda, and asks about the council's performance, instead of exploring the experiences and feelings of local people about their own lives. An organisation co-producing solutions would place stress on listening to the experiences and perceptions of local people, and of understanding the lifestyles, choices and values of residents. Conventional 'consultation' would give way to deeper and more

interactive communication. Councils such as Barnet are experimenting with ways that the council can intervene using the practices of the life-world-conversation, exploration, chance events – to craft solutions specific to each circumstance, rather than using the bureaucratic approaches that have characterised service delivery and improvement frameworks.

John Atkinson, in his piece draws on the work of Kurt Lewin and Ed Schein to explore the change in mind-set that may be needed. Lewin believed that we are likely to modify our own behaviour when we participate in problem analysis and solution and are more likely to carry out the decisions we help to make. Schein understood that human change involves painful 'unlearning' and that true learning involves us in serious reflection and restructuring our thoughts, perceptions, feelings and attitudes. Atkinson draws on this to set out the process of 'unfreezing' (through receiving 'disconfirming information' recognising that current ways of doing things may not work), and then 'cognitive redefinition' (finding new ways to 'think' of the solution – using creative forms of learning, from outside our own experience), before 'refreezing' in ways that create change that sticks. The more powerful the learning the process, the more likely it is that managers and staff will feel able to work in new and more fruitful ways.

What next?
Finally, we need to perhaps beware of

'solutions' to behaviour change that come from old patterns of government thinking. The worst thing that could happen would be a national programme of 'behaviour change' – with externally imposed targets, a complex new 'model' of how to change behaviour (complete with complicated diagrams) and a prescribed set of actions for localities to take.

The difficult questions about legitimacy and the role of government in changing behaviour remain. It is through the building of successful relationships and the holding of difficult, tense conversations, that local government will find answers to questions about 'who decides' – creating a context in which individuals and groups within our communities feel sufficiently heard and engaged to offer consent to actions that will shape our behaviours. Experiments in behaviour change teach the importance of evolving solutions through trial and error, working things out to fit local situations, and working on many levels at once, making sure there is public consent for the change, exploring solutions in partnership with local people, finding practical ways round obstacles, applying common sense and values in complicated situations.

A workshop on behaviour change held last autumn by the London Collaborative and the Leadership Centre for Local Government concluded that what was needed was not another 'toolkit' or pilot initiative, but a different way of thinking. We should not attempt to 'roll-out' successful experiments, or necessarily apply solutions that worked in one locality to other places. Each local situation and community would require an approach that matched local circumstances. Instead the workshop concluded that local leaders needed to do three things if they were serious about playing a role in behaviour change:

• Become clearer, with their whole organisations, about underpinning values and principles.
• Improve their understanding of the values, experiences and views within local communities.
• Share experiences and learning within and between organisations; exploring what leads to success.

As Mathew Taylor suggests, the important thing is not to attempt neatness – clumsy solutions will be the best we can find – using the creative power of difference and conflict – exploring openly and fearlessly, and recognising that there is no single 'mind-set' from which to understand all this, but a fascinating diversity of insights from which we can learn.

Katherine Kerswell is Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council and President of SOLACE.

Sue Goss is a Principal in National and Local Services with Office for Public Management (OPM). She has wide experience of working with local, regional and central government.

Mutiny or behaviour change

by Michael Portillo

Not being in politics any more, I do not meet the range of people that I once did. But my guess is that the majority of the British public feel pretty sullen, with good reason. Indeed, most people don't know the half of it, and if they appreciated more about the world that we are moving into, they might be positively mutinous.

Two things particularly have riled them: bankers' bonuses and members of parliament's expenses. Those are admittedly populist causes, and some of the public vitriol may be unfair. But whatever the misapprehensions, the two scandals have revealed that our society is divided between 'us' and 'them'. Britain, ever blighted by its class system, has even today a charmed circle of people who are paid millions or claim thousands on their second homes, and outside it a mass that peers in with disgust and envy.

Cloud-dwellers and have nots

Throughout our national history it has been possible to penetrate the élite's citadel, and it still is; but public resentment is compounded because social mobility has reduced and the gap between remuneration at the top and bottom has broadened. Incidentally, the cloud-dwelling clique includes senior local authority officers (who may be paid more than the prime minister), and the editors and broadcasters who self-righteously expose the excesses of other haves.

It would be comforting to think that out of the recent financial catastrophe a new ethical capitalism could emerge, but there is no sign of it, and there are many reasons to believe that behaviours will become worse rather than better. For example, consider the fate of people that Tories describe as trying to do the right thing – to be self-reliant even after they retire. The value of their shares has been wiped out. While bank depositors have been protected and bank executives handsomely rewarded, no tears fall for the one group that has been penalised: those who invested their life savings in supposedly secure businesses and institutions. Few executives, even those who made the calamitous decisions that ruined the banks and shook the global economy, have suffered more than a temporary interruption of their bonus flow,

whereas those who entrusted their wealth to their stewardship have been ruined.

They suffer too from interest rates close to zero, or if they are in work, watch dismayed as private sector employers dismantle their pension schemes. The example from the government is to address the problem of excessive borrowing and spending by more of both. Lower interest rates now lure still more people (as well as the Treasury) into excessive debt. It is painfully obvious that before too long the extreme laxness of monetary policy will unleash inflation in order to decimate the state's indebtedness. It will also devastate the savings of the 'prudent'.

No more effective suite of policies could have been devised to discourage thrift. You would in any case need to be quite well paid, and be lucky with your investments, to put aside during your working lifetime enough money to raise your income in retirement above the threshold for means-tested benefits. Quite soon half Britain's retired people will rely on income-related supplements from the state. It is not clear to me how we will cope socially and politically with the gap between the incomes of those in work and those who have retired. Pensioners will look across to continental Europe, where state pensions often reflect past earnings rather than being flat rate, and perceive a marked difference in living standards.

Impact on local government
The scenario is not attractive for local government. A growing army of embittered pensioners will become dependent on, for example, housing benefit. To make things worse, new haves and have-nots are apparent as a gulf opens between those who qualify for a public sector pension guaranteed against inflation (including local authority workers) and the rest. Over time, one government or another will have to address the public sector pension problem, by drastically reducing benefits or the number of state employees. Indeed, it will have to do both, and probably before long.

So, a much smaller local authority workforce is going to have to deal with a population increasingly affected by poverty and disappointment. The relationship between those who need state charity and those who dish it out is rarely a good one, and as councils increasingly make extra charges, for example, for parking and rubbish collection, it will hardly improve. The most important distinction between haves and have-nots is between those who have to involve the state in their lives and those who don't have to.

Towards sustainable public finances
The word 'sustainability' is often used in connection with climate change. But I can perfectly well see how with political courage and human ingenuity we could avert disaster in that area, for example with the mass development of nuclear power and electric cars. To me that seems a less daunting problem than the unsustainable economic trend on which

we are now dependent: a relatively small number of people in work struggling to pay even meagre benefits to today's pensioners, and making little provision for its own retirement.

The deterioration in the public finances during the recession will require changes in taxation and public spending on a scale that has few precedents in our history. But beyond that, the British will need to make a major adjustment away from consumption towards saving. It will require us to postpone gratification, to learn to wait for the things we want and to accept more responsibility for our futures. The government will need to compel us to be thrifty (which will be highly unpopular) and to guarantee us that what we put aside will actually lift us above the welfare safety net.

After the general election, those who govern will need to lead the country into the biggest change in expectations and behaviour since the Second World War. I hope they realise that.

The Rt Hon Michael Portillo entered the House of Commons in 1984. He was a minister for 11 years and had three positions in the Cabinet, including secretary of state for defence. Since leaving politics, he has devoted himself to writing and broadcasting. He writes for the Sunday Times and is a regular on both BBC 1's This Week programme and Radio 4's Moral Maze. He has made documentaries on subjects as diverse as Richard Wagner and the death penalty.

The search for clumsy solutions

by Matthew Taylor, Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA)

Until a few years ago the generic knowledge required by a local authority senior officer might have been of structures of governance, legal and financial systems, of organisational structures and change strategies. But to this we can now add an understanding of what drives human behaviour. Increasingly, we can expect local government leaders to draw on insights from fields such as behavioural economics, social psychology, social marketing, even anthropology and neuroscience.

In this forest of new findings and perspectives, leaders need to identify which are the most useful ways of framing their understanding. One such framework is offered by cultural theory. This approach doesn't offer simple answers but it can help identify the right questions and, more importantly, give clues as to why some strategies are doomed to failure while others have a chance of success.

The rise of behaviour change

The idea of behaviour change as a goal of policy used to seem vaguely sinister, and to some people it still does. But starting with the 2004 report on changing behaviour from the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, this concept has become a central part of social and public policy debate.

The emphasis on behaviour change reflects the pursuit of varied, but overlapping, objectives. Despite rising public spending in the post war decades, key social problems persisted and new ones emerged. Defenders of welfare provision faced a crisis of legitimacy. Benefit recipients were often portrayed as becoming dependent, and sometimes exploiting their status. In response, modernising progressives sought to re-legitimise welfare, a strategy summed up in President Bill Clinton's promise to provide 'a hand-up, not a hand-out'. This theme was taken up by New Labour in the New Deal, which threatened those rejecting the routes to employment and training with having their welfare benefits withdrawn. This idea of conditionality is a subset of a wider communitarian commitment to rights and responsibilities. It is now conventional for any announcement about new provision to the public (especially the disadvantaged) to be

accompanied by a statement about the conditions attached.

Conditionality is not just about legitimacy. It is also supposed to benefit those to whom it applies: the disadvantaged, it is argued, need clear signals and incentives if they are to improve their lives. But as well as applying to a strata of society, behaviour change has extended into a set of behaviours deemed to be destructive to the individual and society. Thus behaviour change has become a key objective of public health and environmental policy; in areas ranging from obesity to recycling, from sexual health to energy use.

Generally, the idea of behaviour change focuses on strategies of communication and incentive rather than compulsion. Even in relation to smoking, the legal ban on lighting up in public places was justified on the classical liberal grounds of defending the rights of the innocent non-smoker. Supporters of the policy are now pointing to higher smoking cessation rates as evidence of success. It seems it is only when the change has been safely implemented that policy-makers are willing to admit paternalistic motives.

As the explicit aim of behaviour change spreads first from the disadvantaged to any of us deemed to be behaving in self destructive or anti-social ways, it links to another debate; this time about public engagement. It has long been a commonplace to recognise that the outcomes of public services depend on the ways in which the public use those services. Thus health treatment is more effective if patients pay regard to health advice; schooling is more successful if parents get their children to follow school rules and read and study at home; policing is more powerful if the community is also committed to crime prevention and detection. This insight challenges the idea of public service 'delivery' with its connotation of service users as passive recipients. In recent years we have seen the rise of an alternative conception, of public services as a co-production between service provider and recipient/citizen. Taken together, ideas of conditionality, behaviour change and co-production represent the re-emergence of the public as the subject, rather than simply the object, of public services.

At the same time as central and local government has started to think more systematically about behaviour change, so our way of thinking about what drives human behaviour has undergone a major shift. A combination of new research and real world events – most dramatically the credit crunch – have exposed the myth of 'homo economous'. This is the idea that human behaviour can be understood sufficiently as the choices of self-interested, utility maximising individuals.

We have over recent years seen the emergence of powerful new insights into the complex reality of human decision-making. Having read books like Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's *Nudge*, we are all becoming experts on the decision-making heuristics (rules of thumb) that, for example, lead people to put the short term over the long term, to follow the crowd and to fill in missing knowledge by what is expected

rather than what is there. The rise of social marketing – which has gone from the margins of public health to being an integral part of the public policy-maker's toolkit – reflects the welcome move to a more subtle understanding of human motivation than the mechanistic cost-benefit model traditionally relied upon by Treasury mandarins.

However, a weakness of some of the literature on new models of decision-making is that, deriving from disciples primarily focussed on the individual agent, it understates and under-theorises the dimension of culture and social norms.

Put simply, human actions can be seen to emerge from three levels of mental process:
• The automatic and hard-wired – the things we do because of who we are as a species.
• The tacit and culturally conditioned – the things we tend to do because of our social nature and the norms which pertain in our social milieu.
• The consciously arrived at – the things we decide to do and over which we feel we have choice.

Framing the interaction of what has been described as the 'elephant' (our hard-wired impulses) and the 'rider' (our conscious mind) are the cultural norms and patterns that provide the social context of human behaviour. We might describe this as the terrain across which the elephant walks.

The four paradigms of cultural theory

Cultural theory offers one way of thinking about change in organisations (broadly defined as any group of people trying to do something together) at the level of norms and values. It is one of a number of theories of plural rationality which argue that social strategies are reducible neither to a single motivation (as in homo economous), nor an infinite range, but a finite array.

Cultural theory suggests there are four different ways of thinking about, choosing and pursuing change in organisations. These ways of viewing the world will be expressed differently and the ways in which they interact is inherently unpredictable but there does seem to be some evidence that in some form or another they will emerge whenever groups of people try to make social decision. There is even some emerging evidence the four ways have some neurological basis, involving distinct bits of mental wiring. The ways are:
• The egalitarian.
• The hierarchical.
• The individualist.
• The fatalist.

These paradigms emerge as organisations face problems and develop solutions. They are not personality types, although some people may have a predisposition towards one or other way of viewing issues. But as the perspectives emerge

they are not just a way of describing the world but a lens through which it is seen. They are theories of change in themselves but, in situations of conflict, more often expressed as critiques of the other ways of doing things. As each offers only a partial view, all four views have an Achilles' heel – a flaw or paradox which threatens to undermine its case.

The egalitarian paradigm

This sees successful change as being driven bottom up through collective action by those who are united in their shared values and status. The idealism of egalitarians (emphasising the possibility of equality and the power of shared values) leads them to feel that (human) nature has been corrupted, and this is linked to a view of nature as being highly vulnerable to exploitation and destruction. Egalitarians tend to see individualists as selfish and irresponsible and hierarchists as out of touch and overbearing. The paradox of egalitarianism is that while it espouses shared values, it gains its strength by being exclusive (only those with the right values or status are seen as valid or can join). An example of this is the uneasy alliance sometimes seen between environmentalists and anti-immigration movements. The adherents of these different views may have contrasting ideological and class interests, but they share a view that the natural order of things is being corrupted and threatened in the name of progress.

The hierarchist paradigm

This sees successful change relying on leadership, expertise, rules and regulation. If these things are in place then the potentially dangerous cycles and vagaries of nature (including human nature) can be managed. Hierarchists see the other paradigms as naïve and unbalanced, but feel that each has its place as long as hierarchy allots and regulates those places. The paradox of hierarchy is that while the top levels of organisations try to present a face of order and authority to the outside world, they contain within themselves the four paradigms. People may be members of hierarchies, and in that role adopt a hierarchical world view, but when it comes to conflicts within the hierarchy they may adopt an egalitarian, individualist or fatalistic stance. Hierarchists fear this guilty secret being exposed and the consequent loss of the legitimacy (the key source of hierarchical power in democratic societies).

The individualist paradigm

This sees successful change as the result of individual initiative and competition. Individualists don't need to worry about pursuing their own interests as the sum of individual actions is collective good and, anyway, the world is resilient to change. While

individualists recognise the need for some hierarchy, they see the other paradigms as self-serving – hierarchists and egalitarians are hiding their own interests behind their paternalism and collectivism, while fatalists are simply excusing their laziness or lack of talent. The paradox of individualism is that it espouses meritocracy while tending, over time, to foster unmerited inequality and exclusion.

The fatalist paradigm

This sees successful change as unlikely and, in as much as it is possible, random in its causes and consequences. The world is unpredictable and unmanageable. Fatalists view the other paradigms with indifference or scepticism, although they will often tolerate them for the sake of a quiet life, or in order to help justify their own inaction. The paradox of fatalism is that fatalists know (even if they don't admit it) that they rely on non-fatalists to keep the world turning.

Seeking clumsy solutions

These paradigms are perspectives that emerge dynamically (the more one emerges the more it leads to the others emerging in response) and condition our responses. Politicians and policy-makers often strive for solutions that will somehow transcend differences and make everyone happy. But, according to cultural theory, it is almost impossible to create a synthesis of the

paradigms as they are always in tension – like repelling magnets. Instead, the best context for the emergence of sustainable solutions to organisational and policy challenges is to allow each approach to be in play, tapping into the energy that each has to offer (while recognising the inevitability of fatalism) and managing the capacity of each to disrupt the solutions of the others.

An example of an unsuccessful neat solution is the Kyoto accord. Designed by hierarchists, and praised by egalitarians, it offered no incentives to individualists and was unrealistic about the fatalism of most people in the face of climate change. According to cultural theorist Michael Thompson, a micro example of a successful clumsy solution was the development of the Arsenal Emirates Stadium, bringing together of the different interest of the individualist actor (Arsenal FC), the egalitarian actors (local residents and club supporters) and the hierarchical actor (Islington council).

More controversially the fact that the National Health Service is now achieving unprecedented user satisfaction ratings may reflect its 'clumsy' balance of individualist change drivers (choice and competition), hierarchical (expertise, strategy, targets and regulation) and egalitarian (professionalism and the public service ethos).

As the table *opposite* outlines, from the perspective of solution-seekers (leaders and policy-makers) variations

within each paradigm can be placed on a normative continuum. At one end, advocates of one paradigm tend to present their case in a way which is dogmatic, defensive and hostile to all others. At the other, the adherents recognise plurality, engage with other perspectives and acknowledge that in the real world the best solutions are clumsy.

Those seeking to create the conditions for clumsy solutions have two tasks. The first is to ensure that all the paradigms are considered, if not, at best, the solution will be sub-optimal, while, at worst, it is destined to be sabotaged by those whose view of change is not accommodated. But the best context for clumsy solutions requires not just that the different perspectives are considered, or even present, but that they are inclined to work with each other.

As paradigms derive their power both from their internal logic and from their antagonism to other perspectives, the more each rests on its positive case the more likely it is to engage constructively with the others. This leads to the paradox that the best way to encourage clumsiness is to encourage the advocates of each world view to make their own best case. Thus the effective hierarchist (solution-seekers in state organisations will tend to be hierarchists) welcomes and fosters manifestations of egalitarianism, encourages displays of individualism and sees fatalism as inevitable at a certain level, but beyond that (like a canary in a mine) providing a warning that clumsiness is in retreat.

Behaviour change in a cold climate

The statistician George Box once said 'all models are wrong but some are useful'. This is a good way of thinking about how we conceptualise social behaviour. Policy-makers need to choose and refine useful ways of

Engaged and antagonistic cultural paradigms		
Paradigm	**Engaged form**	**Antagonistic form**
Egalitarian	Just, collaborative	Exclusive, negative
Individualist	Creative, dynamic	Selfish, irresponsible
Hierarchical	Responsible, expert	Self-serving, bureaucratic
Fatalistic	Respectful, compliant	Cynical, resistant

thinking about what shapes individual decisions and social behaviours.

As we enter a long period of public spending retrenchment, the search will be on for major productivity gains. There may be scope to cut costs in administration and back office, some non-statutory services may simply fade away, but if the next few years are not to a dismal round of salami slices, local government need to think about not just re-engineering but reconceptualising public services. Personal budgets in social care are one of the few examples of such a profound shift. As in this example, service transformation will involve a recalibration of the relationship between service planner, service provider and service user.

Big thinking like this involves engaging with our hard-wired characteristics and the dynamics of social problem-solving, as well as the explicit process of conscious decision-making. Paradoxically, it is by understanding the limitations of conscious cognition in day-to-day decision-making that we can see what really makes it special; this is what is called meta-cognition, or 'thinking about thinking'. In society as in individual counselling, understanding who we are makes it easier for us to know how to change what we do. Thus the process of making collective decisions and winning public support should become one which seeks to engage people in a much richer conversation about who we are, what we want and what we have to do to achieve what we want. Given what lies ahead, now is a good time to be thinking about how to promote such a conversation.

In developing new solutions for the difficult world into which we are now moving, local government leaders will need to have models not just about how laws, systems and processes work, but how people do too.

Matthew Taylor became Chief Executive of the RSA in November 2006. Prior to this appointment, he was Chief Adviser on Political Strategy to the Prime Minister. He was appointed to the Labour Party in 1994 to establish Labour's rebuttal operation. His activities before the Labour Party included being a county councillor, a parliamentary candidate, a university research fellow and the director of a unit monitoring policy in the health service. Until December 1998, Matthew was Assistant General Secretary for the Labour Party. During the 1997 General Election he was Labour's Director of Policy and a member of the Party's central election strategy team. He was the Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research between 1999 and 2003, Britain's leading centre left thinktank.

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Headlines and a hard slog

by Gillian Norton, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

There aren't so many local authority leaders or senior councillors who find themselves for days on end giving TV, radio and press interviews, not just nationally but internationally, about a new policy initiative. But that's what happened to the leader of London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and some of his senior colleagues in October and November 2006.

The cause was the launch of the council's consultation on charging differential rates for resident parking in controlled parking zones (CPZs) according to a vehicle's CO_2 emissions. It was a straightforward stick-and-carrot approach – people would pay more if they had bigger, more polluting cars and less if they had smaller, more environmentally-friendly ones. Though focused on quite a narrow area – reducing CO_2 emissions in CPZs – the purpose was as much to engender a debate locally about climate change and what a difference individuals could make by changing their behaviour. The administration had been elected in May 2006 on a manifesto which aimed to put the environment at the heart of the council and ensure everything possible

was done to combat the adverse effects of climate change. So around the same time there was also a major expansion of the recycling service, energy-saving schemes, a focus on the benefits of public transport and a host of other, discrete initiatives to emphasise the need for change and how small adjustments on the part of individuals and organisations could have a beneficial cumulative effect.

The consultation process was extensive and showed a high level of awareness about how personal behaviour and choice could impact on CO_2 emissions. Moreover, and encouragingly, the findings showed support and agreement that people would reconsider their choices when replacing their car – and be more prepared to opt for something more environmentally-friendly (64% of residents and 58% of business indicated that they would consider opting for a lower emission vehicle). Yet while there was majority support for the scheme from individuals, it was small (49% in favour, with 39% opposed, and 12% undecided) and in relation to businesses the majority were opposed (30% in

favour, with 47% opposed). The debates in the council's overview and scrutiny committee and cabinet raised some interesting objections – notably that it was a covert revenue-raising device (it wasn't), and that in focusing only on CPZs the council was penalising a minority of the borough's population since CPZs cover only about a third of the borough. There was an interesting angle to this argument too which went something along the lines of 'the people with gas guzzling 4x4s all live in big houses with garages and driveways' – so even if they lived in CPZ areas they weren't being hit!

There was also a much-repeated complaint that if as a result of the policy people immediately went out and bought a new, more environmentally-friendly car, the process of manufacturing a new car increased CO_2 emissions. I certainly learned that the pluses and minuses of CO_2 emissions – let alone their contribution to climate change – was complex and controversial. Yet it's fair to say that on the whole local people consented to the policy change and broadly understood and had a degree of sympathy with its purpose, if not all its details. Certainly when we carried out a survey of residents' views a year later the result showed a high level of satisfaction with the council's work on climate change.

Recession and the environment

Now some two and a half years later what has changed? A number of other authorities have adopted similar schemes. Buoyed up by the public support, or at least acquiescence and given that the technology has moved on, earlier this year the council decided to consult on extending the differential charging to car parks and on-street parking. This time, the reaction has been much less supportive. The difference seems to be that we are in recession. The fact that the proposal delivered on what some of the criticisms had been two years earlier seemed to count for nought. Businesses, in particular the retail sector, opposed anything that might influence people to stay away from Richmond's shops. There was a sense that it was acceptable to have innovative policies which encourage people to think about and change their behaviour in the good times, but in the bad it was a case of battening down the hatches and just getting through. The council recognised this and has amended the proposals so that there is a lot more carrot than stick. Amendments made as a result of the consultation include lowering the cost of on-street parking for the first 20 minutes, to encourage local shopping, and introducing a very low tariff in car parks on Thursday afternoons to encourage shoppers to stay longer in the area and to enjoy what the borough has to offer.

As part of the work on this we have also begun to get the first hard data that people are making specific choices for smaller, less polluting cars when they purchase a new one. In particular the figures show a 7% reduction in ownership of cars in the highest three car tax bands and 8% increase for the lowest three bands. Part of the problem is that it's not easy to disentangle the various possible influences at play. It might be that people simply see buying a new car as an opportunity to lower

costs and smaller cars cost less to buy and run, coupled with the fact that manufacturers are making more efficient (and therefore less polluting) engines. Certainly the government's car scrappage scheme will have an effect and I suspect we will see a continuing downward trend. The council's polices are unlikely to be the only factor, but they may well have influenced people's thinking.

Lessons for changing behaviour
What have we learnt about changing people's behaviour through this and other programmes we have run?

• First, political drive and ownership are key. The council has been most successful when politicians rather than professionals have been championing the policy.
• Second, any stick element creates an opposition and this will quickly identify any woolly thinking or weaknesses in the policy. Consequently, carrot-only policies are much easier –for example the council has run a hugely successful Competitive Edge programme which has seen almost all young people in the borough's schools having two hours of PE and sport each week, more than half involved in inter-school sporting competitions, and again just over half involved in community sports clubs – making a significant contribution to healthy lifestyles.

• Third, people need to be involved and understand how their actions in changing their behaviour link to the achievement of desirable outcomes. So we have helped people increase recycling significantly partly by making it easier but also ensuring they understood that they were, albeit in a small way, reducing the demand on finite resources and helping to save the council money.
• Fourth, talking about behaviour change is a sure fire way of making sure it doesn't happen. In Richmond we've never started there. But we have started with reducing CO_2 emissions, encouraging competitive sport and recycling. And sometimes in a very high-profile way – like CPZ emissions based charging – and sometimes in a rather more low-key way – like Competitive Edge and recycling – we've worked with borough residents to effect behaviour change and so achieve desired, and desirable, outcomes.

Gillian Norton has been Chief Executive of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames since 1999. Prior to that she was Chief Executive of Wokingham, initially as a district and then unitary authority. She is one of the chief executive leads for a London-wide piece of work on behaviour change, run through Capital Ambition, the regional improvement and efficiency partnership.

How far can the state go?

by Polly Toynbee, The Guardian

Everyone has strict limits to how far they think the state can interfere with their lives. But everyone would set that bar in a different place – and few, if any, of us are rational or consistent on what the state should do. That leaves politicians and public officials to tread carefully, never knowing where the landmines of public opinion will say they have over-stepped the line. It is always unknown territory.

Nanny state

The old shout of 'Nanny state!' went up when health officials recently suggested safe drinking limits, with liver cirrhosis rates rising alarmingly. David Hockney still fires off outraged letters to the press about the smoking ban's infringement of his liberty. In the depths of the *Telegraph* and *Spectator*, old-world libertarians still regard the seat-belt law as a totemic example of state despotism.

The bizarre campaign against Gatso speed cameras lets loose an anarchic strain among otherwise law-abiding citizens who seem to think there is a UN human right to drive as fast as they like.

Do something!

Yet some of these same anti-state people will be the first to call for government state action against even slightly suspected terrorists, against bad parents or 'hoodies' congregating noisily around a local supermarket. Litter louts, binge drinkers, people who fail to queue at bus stops, chewing-gum spitters, kids who shriek on buses all provoke calls for official action. So, incidentally, can the sight of women wearing full burkhas. 'Do something!' 'Something must be done!' So say the very same people who in theory want to shrink the state and diminish its powers.

Left and right

On the left, the tendency is to call for more state action. Let government provide the best public services, because only the state can buy for us the things that are most precious to our quality of life – health, education, safety in the streets, beautiful parks and open spaces. The things we can buy in shops out of our pockets are dross in comparison with the things we buy collectively. That requires the state to tax for good public purpose: tax does good.

But to the small-state right, taxation is theft, reaching into citizens' pockets to squander money that the individual will always spend more wisely. As for using tax to redistribute money and power between the rich and the poor, that amounts to stealing from the thrifty to give to the feckless. They point to the low-tax United States as the good society, while the left points north to the Nordics where high taxes pay for the best public services.

The time to act

Yet neither side is as consistent or rational as that suggests. The right, for instance, has instinctively demanded that the state act to stop people doing things that are 'immoral'. It calls on the law to step into people's private lives to stop them committing acts of homosexuality, viewing pornography or choosing abortion. At this, the pro-state left suddenly turns anti-state libertarian. Leave it to the individual to live their own private life! On these private moral matters governments have been cautiously pragmatic, not trail-blazers, leaving the law to private members' bills and free votes. Oppressive laws were abandoned only after public opinion firmly made it clear that divorce, abortion, homosexuality and (most) pornography had become an accepted part of society.

But in health, safety and public behaviour governments are obliged to give a lead, even if it is exceedingly difficult. When diabetes is soaring and today's children risk living shorter more unhealthy lives than their parents, the state has a duty to act. The NHS will pick up the cost, the country will sink embarrassingly in health league tables, and citizens do need protecting from themselves.

How to and how not to do it

The Conservatives, afraid of their own libertarian fanatics, have taken to praising economist Richard Thaler's 'Nudge' principal. The attraction of this theory is that the state need not use the sledge-hammer of the law but can lead, suggest and promote better habits in its people and companies. Maybe. The history of cigarette smoking suggests exhortation, scary reports, devastating facts and constant disapproval did effect a great culture change. The actual ban in public buildings only came long after the tipping point where smoking had become widely socially unacceptable. This slow approach took decades when hundreds of thousands died of smoking.

But the example of alcohol prohibition in 1920s America warned governments against trying any outright ban against anything too widely used. Mind you, that prohibition example has done no good in trying to breathe sanity into governmental attitudes to drugs. Report after report around the world has shown the UN war on drugs imposed at America's command has not only failed, but has had a catastrophic consequence on crime across the developed world, while making producer states from Colombia to Afghanistan ungovernable through drug

baron control. When the state tries to do the impossible against the grain of the widespread social use of cannabis, ecstasy and cocaine, it opens the door to organised crime it cannot control. Medicalising the problem, prescribing and permitting licensed sale of the milder drugs would be the rational response, if the state were willing to confront the limits to its powers.

Those limits are everywhere. What on earth is government to do about obesity? Every fat person wants to be thin. No government programme could afford a fraction of the campaign waged by popular culture coercing us to be thin. Pick up any magazine, read a thousand diets, gaze on size zero stars, see fatties mocked in every cartoon, all to no avail. It seems the Western countries with least inequality have least obesity – the Nordics and the Netherlands – while the UK and US are most unequal and fattest.

There is plenty the state can do to make us share wealth and quality of life more fairly. David Cameron himself once suggested we should move from GDP to a general well-being index as a measure of national success. If he meant it, everything might change. But the state would be firmly in the driving seat – and we would never agree on what 'wellbeing' is. One person's freedom is always someone else's oppression. The state can only do what it can, going with the grain of public opinion.

Polly Toynbee is a social and political commentator for The Guardian. Previously she was the BBC's Social Affairs editor. Her last book was Unjust Rewards, about inequality, co-written with David Walker. Before that she wrote Hard Work - Life in Low Pay Britain, in which she took minimum wage jobs. Together with David Walker, she is working on The Verdict - an audit of Labour's three terms in office.

Can the Leviathan stop eating people?

by Leo Boland, Greater London Authority

From buoyant to bust – a broken policy model?

In the boom times for public spending there has been a conspiracy between the public and politicians, aided by the popular media. It goes like this: something bad happens in at least one person's life, they complain via the media, politicians demand a 'solution' from officials, and an initiative is announced and funded based on whatever evidence there is to hand The initiative is seldom evaluated, is orphaned when the politician moves on, but continues in some half-life until the arrival of a new government.

The boom times will come to an abrupt end after the next general election. Attractive as it is, the fantasy that the government can address challenging behaviour by funding activity and using a mechanistic performance management framework to 'deliver' a way out, the money will not be there to support it. In any case, that particular model has been showing every sign of having reached its limits: teenage pregnancy, binge drinking, childhood obesity, social mobility, worklessness (particularly in London)

and violent youth crime are all issues that have failed to find solutions.

This broken model of public policy-making (or, if you do not concede the model is broken, a lack of resources to maintain it) presents what Professor Ronald Heifetz (*John F. Kennedy School of Government*) would call 'the adaptive challenge'. To meet the adaptive challenge, I believe we need to look deeply into how humans and society work in order to understand why this model of state intervention has shown such clear limits.

Well hello lifeworld!

I think at root is that fact that we have not fully grasped the distinction made by Jürgen Habermas, the German philosopher, between the 'lifeworld' and the 'system'. The lifeworld is society as community: as a network of relationships between parents, children, grandparents, aunties, uncles, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, buddies, school mates, lovers, cliques and so on. Why do we help a friend in trouble? Because we care. Because we are affected. In the lifeworld we help because we feel close to a person. This

type of support is quite concrete and tangible: 'I'll take care of your kids while you need to see the doctor', 'I can pick up your kids from the child carer and they can eat with us, while you can do the extra shifts your boss is demanding you do'.

We can also explain society as a system consisting of organisations, hierarchy, contracts, laws, economy, politics and politicians or, in other words, 'experts'. What is important is that the logic of the system differs from the logic of the lifeworld significantly. The German economist and sociologist Max Weber called the logic of the system 'instrumental rationality': meaning we do something because we expect to gain from this action. The market economy, for example, is driven by this logic: people work because they are promised a salary. Restaurants provide food because we pay for it. Achievements are the driving force of what Habermas calls 'strategic action'.

We may be deeply disappointed if our spouse said to us: 'I married you because you are earning lots of money and provide me with excellent living conditions'. However, our boss would be pleased to hear from us that his excellent salary motivates us as well as the superior working conditions he provides. People act on instrumental rationality when they expect advantages from their actions or to avoid disadvantages.

Pathologies occur when the system oversteps the mark, or 'colonises the lifeworld'. A child is neglected. Social worker intervenes. Case ends up in court. Lawyers for both sides battle it out. Family is left disintegrated and never able to function again as a family in the lifeworld. The child is consigned forever to the system, which has 'won'.[1]

The pathologies or 'disturbances' in our social interactions, and corresponding crises, Habermas lists as: loss of meaning, withdrawal of legitimisation, confusion of orientation, 'anomie', destabilisation of collective identities, alienation, psychopathologies, breakdown in tradition and withdrawal of motivation. All present in the list of policy failures I itemised at the beginning of the article. As Habermas wrote in 1987: 'The dilemma consists in that, while the welfare state guarantees are intended to serve the goal of social integration, they nevertheless promote the disintegration of life-relations'.

If not now, then when?

Why is this important now? Basically the successes and the failures of the Blair years, with their absolute focus on delivery and preparedness to back that up with resources, has been an almost laboratory experiment in the limits of the system and strategic action.

Much has been achieved in system terms, for example the CPA story, but the public satisfaction story is largely unchanged. We are still left with new giants of evil (to update Beveridge) to slay: obesity, violent gang crime, low parental aspiration, disadvantaged kids in care; all lifeworld problems which remain impervious to strategic action.

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[1] I am indebted to Professor Frank Fruchtel for much of the above passage taken from his talk Community or Colony :"Family-centred solutions – Changing child welfare policy and practice on the ground, 17 September 2008, Stratford-Upon-Avon

So it poses the question for me: can the state, the very embodiment of the system, actually cross over into the lifeworld and engage in communicative action with citizens? Or will all our efforts merely result in system interventions in people's lives that might sort the state's problems but not their's. Strategic action will never encourage people to change their behaviour; it has not helped to solve challenging behaviour either.

But fortunately there is now a greater opportunity for communicative action between the state and the citizen than there ever has been. If rationality is 'the experience of reaching mutual understanding in communication that is free from coercion and the this understanding is reached through the practice of argumentation as a court of appeal without the direct or strategic use of force', then the potential of Web 2.0 offers a much greater chance of rational communicative action between leviathan and the individual than any amount of community forums or care assessment interviews.

This is what Jürgen Habermas calls his 'practical hypothesis': for a decolonisation of the state and the markets, and reviving the Enlightenment dream of a life steered by reason. Can the Leviathan stop eating people up whole and using them to sustain its own existence?

Leo Boland has been Chief Executive of the Greater London Authority since January 2009. Previous to that he was Chief Executive of Barnet Council in north London, which between 2006 and 2008 went from two to four stars in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

Father of modern understanding

by John Atkinson, Leadership Centre for Local Government

There is no shortage of advice and opinion today on how organisations and individuals change. From mechanical, process-driven 'solutions' to new-age, free-thinking 'evolutions' there will be a theory somewhere that suits your particular preference. Making sense of that is relatively simple – just choose the one you like. Yet, if we are to find value in this plethora of ideas, it is worth stepping back behind the immaculately presented exteriors and looking at how these approaches were built.

Back to the roots

To do this we need to go back to Berlin in the 1920s and the work of Kurt Lewin. Lewin was one of the most straightforward and pragmatic academic thinkers in the field of human change, both individual and collective. He believed there was nothing as practical as a good theory, and that to truly understand something you need to try and change it. He also believed that the basic model of consultancy was irrevocably flawed in that you cannot separate the notion of diagnosis from the notion of intervention. When we look at today's consultancy bill for the public sector we might ponder, therefore, the likelihood of it offering value for money.

Lewin is the father of our modern understanding of human change: many management theorists, systems thinkers and organisational psychologists claim him as their source of inspiration. However, Germany in the 1930s was a dangerous environment for a Polish Jew and, in order to carry on his work, he went to Iowa, where he carried out groundbreaking research through the second world war and the late 1940s.

His early research involved changing the patterns of diet in society and is therefore particularly relevant to issues, such as obesity, that we face today. In his case the challenge was to decrease wartime America's reliance on high-grade meat by eating increasing quantities of offal. The outcomes he reached showed the importance of identifying what he described as 'gatekeepers': the people who influence others in making decisions. The problem was 'housewives' who did not wish to be seen buying low standard food, contrary to the long-held belief that it was 'husbands' who would refuse to eat it. He further found that simply

explaining the importance and necessity of the change had little impact, whereas groups of people working with the raw data were much more likely to decide a better course of action, implement it and stay with it. His conclusion was that we are likely to modify our own behaviour when we participate in problem analysis and solution and likely to carry out decisions we helped to make.

This research was replicated in post-war work in manufacturing environments. In applying Lewin's principles to a variety of change situations, groups adopting the process would outperform control groups by at times up to 50%. Lewin died in his late 50s so never perhaps brought his work to the conclusion it deserved.

Key principles

So what were Lewin's underlying principles? As a professor of psychology and key player in the practice of gestalt psychotherapy, Lewin's understanding of how change occurred was at a much deeper level than many of us can attain. His principles have been simplified and codified over time (and their source no longer credited) in the model of change that describes a process of 'unfreeezing' followed by 'restructuring' then 'refreezing'. As ever with such models, they are shorthand for a more complex method and to truly gain their value we must dig a little deeper.

Unfreezing

Ed Schein (Professor Emeritus at the MIT Sloan School of Management) was deeply influenced by Lewin. He understood that human change is a profound process that involves painful unlearning without loss of identity and difficult relearning as one attempts to restructure one's thoughts, perceptions, feelings and attitudes. 'Unfreezing' is therefore the critical starting point for change, yet is often overlooked as we plan the processes by which the new solution will take shape. Lewin saw that for people to unfreeze from their current patterns of behaviour, three pre-conditions had to be simultaneously satisfied.

• First, people have to receive what he called 'disconfirming information'. In other words, so long as our leaders are telling the wider world how well we are doing and how, despite difficult external conditions, we have outperformed expectations, the basic precondition for people to change has not been met. In a world where we feel we must satisfy the Audit Commission and our electorates while maintaining staff morale, the chance of lasting change is slim. An inertia is created built on a façade because auditors, voters and employees are not unaware of the real conditions, despite our insistence on describing them otherwise. John Kotter, the Harvard leadership professor has said that 'too

much happy talk from senior management' is one of the major barriers to change.

• Second, simply hearing the real story doesn't unfreeze people – people will often reject the story because they simply don't care. For Lewin, the story had to create 'guilt or survival anxiety'. And more often than not, admitting things are wrong damages self-esteem and identity.

• The third pre-condition was also critical, disconfirming information could also create what he termed 'learning anxiety'. This creates a sense of powerlessness, a feeling that we can't change because we are unable to learn quickly enough how to move into the new environment and adapting poorly often looks more palatable than risking failure in the learning process. Overcoming learning anxiety is probably the hardest and most critical element in unfreezing.

To give an example, you can tell me that my dancing is awful and I simply don't care (disconfirmation not creating guilt or survival anxiety). You can then tell me that I am dancing on live television this Friday for a new reality TV show. Now I am considering the data differently as the risk of making a fool of myself is very real (survival anxiety). You can also tell me that as part of the package I get lessons from a top professional dancer and perhaps I suddenly discover a desire to dance (overcoming learning anxiety). It is also

worth remembering that at this point in the change process I might also run away!

Restructuring

So unfreezing is the most critical and most difficult part of any change process, and also the hardest to achieve as self-esteem and identity hold us so firmly where we are. Yet if we achieve this we still have much to do. Lewin's next stage, 'restructuring', did not mean restructuring our cabinet posts or organisation charts. For him this too had three elements beginning with restructuring our thinking. He called this 'cognitive redefinition' and it is at the heart of much of today's 'systemic thinking'. The importance of gaining adifferent perspective of the same problem in breaking through to new solutions is now widely understood although much harder in practice. Einstein's much quoted statement that solutions are not found from within the thinking that created the problem is another way of saying the same thing. So critical to moving on once unfreezing has occurred is the need to encounter and engage with others who see the same problem differently.

Lewin then suggested that the next elements were about how we learn, as for him, change was 'managed learning'. The easiest and quickest way to learn in this circumstance was by 'imitation or identification'. Finding others who we respect who do things

differently allows us to copy their approaches. This process is very evident today in benchmarking and peer-based learning. It has been adopted wholeheartedly by the sector as its method of learning and yet, as a principle of change, Lewin considered it very dangerous. For him, learning in this way can be shallow and superficial; we have not really internalised what we are being told or attached much personal value to it. Instead it is an easy alternative in a difficult situation that is easily jettisoned or ignored as pressure diminishes.

There is a second problem with peer-based approaches. Unfreezing creates a predisposition to learn, it doesn't say what will be learned. If the solutions do not fit the culture and environment of the problem (and the whole point of local government is that places and their cultures are different) then they are simply not going to work. Solutions that work well in one place do not always work well in another. You can learn things that don't work! More than that, if the peers are all from the same environment (the sector) then there is a real and present risk that we simply recycle the same knowledge without learning anything new.

Kurt Lewin therefore favoured a different means of learning that he called 'scanning'. This meant seeking external sources of data including reading, travel and conversations with people from different backgrounds in order to gain insight into your own situation and adapt accordingly. The problem he saw with peer approaches was that if nobody had scanned appropriately then everyone got sub-optimal data. And if the new behaviour isn't congruent with the personality and experience of the learner then it becomes 'disconfirming' and off we go again.

Refreezing

The final element of Lewin's model is 'refreezing': making things stick. What he found was that working with 'gatekeepers', collectively, through 'scanning' rather than 'identification' creates change that sticks and becomes eventually refrozen into the new norm.

So if we see the need to change behaviour as critical to our new role in a rapidly changing environment then Lewin has much to offer us, whether we wish to see that change in the people who live and work in the places we represent or within our party groups or organisations. It also says that our understanding of the fundamentals of how change occurs needs to grow, and that we place too much reliance on too narrow an element of the process in our existing methodologies.

And, finally, you don't have to agree with the validity of Lewin's theory or the emphasis he places within the various elements. But if you are a leader and therefore responsible for change, you need to have a philosophy

that you believe in as to how change works, that you can articulate and that you can test and adapt and evolve as your learning grows around how change works. Because, as Lewin taught us, there is nothing so practical as a good theory.

John Atkinson is Managing Director, Leadership Centre for Local Government. He deals directly with local authorities responsible for ensuring chief executives, the leader or mayor and both their senior teams are given the opportunity to fundamentally shift their thinking on leadership. He defines the scope of the work to be carried out, and he manages and develops the team of advisers who have become experts in working with local authorities, from making an initial assessment of an authority's leadership challenges to facilitating and supporting change and development. He also evaluates the impact and effectiveness of the work. He ran his own very successful leadership development business working with both the public and private sectors, including several of the world's largest businesses. He started his career in the army as a commander of the leadership development wing of the Royal Artillery where he was responsible for officer selection and development of non-commissioned officers.

Acknowledgement
This paper is based on a session at Leeds Castle for senior political leaders and chief executives from the sector that addressed the nature of behaviour change and the implications of that for today's leaders.

It's a leadership thing

by René Carayol, Inspired Leaders Network

Exceptional times demand exceptional leadership and, make no mistake about it, these are unprecedented times. Our world is more joined up and interdependent than it has ever been before. Information spreads at digital speed and no economy is immune or unaffected by the force, velocity or impact that negative news can have. The economic landscape has changed beyond recognition and the weak have been found out while the winners have managed to weather the storm. Some have even managed to thrive.

If in the past a good management team and a strong brand were good enough to 'get by'; in this new world these strengths alone are no longer enough. By management I mean strategy, plans, process, procedure, tasks, execution and key performance indicators.

Management is still essential, especially in the public sector, but everybody practices management now and it is readily available to all. Each and every aspect of management has become commoditised and everybody has similar access and is subsequently playing by similar rules. The rules of engagement have changed and something has to give.

Back to the future

If you cast your mind back 30 years, the way some of the truly great corporations conducted business was very different from today. In sharp contrast to the current unforgiving and unrelenting business environment, the likes of Unilever, Marks & Spencer and Shell quietly and effectively built up 'academy' businesses that proved the bedrock to their unparalleled success. These businesses were 'values-led'.

In the 1990s, the majority of big corporations swapped values for performance and with it came the rise of short-termism, league tables, quarterly bonuses, targets and trends. Employees were dehumanised into payroll numbers, averages and extrapolations as work became a numbers game.

But Generation Y is not the same as my generation. In the court of public opinion, organisations that are solely performance-driven have had their day.

So perhaps a glance backwards could also provide a glimpse into the future.

Academy rules

The 'academy' business model was a career, not a job. These were the

institutions that your parents wanted you to join; great training, ongoing personal development, movement across the business, positive role models, visible leaders and perks that extended way beyond your salary. The business made sure you felt cared for, valued and protected. And in return this created a 'passion' brand. Working for one of these businesses meant something significant – they set you up for life and in return got healthy, loyal and productive staff, who became ambassadors and advocates.

Any large corporation or public body must now mesh global markets or national problems with local knowledge and operations and vice versa. The leadership must be open to new ideas, tactics and technologies. It is essential they ask their people what they think and importantly act on the great initiatives.

Yet so many large organisations are no longer one seamless entity but a group of rock solid stand-alone functions with little, if any, synergies or common goals and usually with a powerful baron or warlord at the helm of each 'silo'. This must stop.

Brave new world

In the 'new world' the leadership must encourage information sharing and innovation in a continual process of being aligned and integrated. They must value ethical behaviour, integrity and fair play. At the same time, the leadership must be irreverent about hierarchy and office politics; tolerating, even enjoying, those who dare to bend the rules but be unaccepting of those who break the ethics.

They should reward those who work smartly, produce high-quality products and services, but the watch word is simplification not added complexity. In short, organisations should recognise those who thrive on new challenges with personalised recognition, continuous development and a good living.

The challenge now is to make public bodies feel small, even though they are relatively big. The big benefits are a shared vision, true engagement with both customers and employees and no wasted effort on internecine battles. It is time to stop putting the stifling checks and procedures in place to make everything an industrial-strength process. Let go and trust your people.

It's a leadership thing

Once again it comes back to that 'leadership' word. If management is the hardware then leadership is the software. By leadership I mean vision, people, teams, culture; it is how you inspire your people towards your vision and naturally create more leaders for the organisation, in a virtuous circle that means the best of the best talent continues to be drawn towards the business. It needs everyone to embrace the customer instead of protecting the product.

In short, it is time to rip up the old rule book and throw away much of what you have known before; progressive organisations of the future need to be both performance-driven and values-led. Now, more than ever, is the time to step up so that we can prepare for the upturn.

René Carayol is CEO of the Inspired Leaders Network, with operations in London, Belfast, Accra and Johannesburg. He specialises in leadership and culture.

The value to citizen model

by Jeff French, Strategic Social Marketing Ltd and European Social Marketing Centre

We all know that there is room to develop more effective and efficient service delivery. In the past citizens have not always been seen as key drivers for such improvement; rather, they have often been viewed passive and dependent recipients of services of what experts have decided they should receive. This model is no longer tenable in a world driven by consumer expectation, with increasingly sceptical and empowered citizens.

The 'value to citizen 'model

It is becoming increasingly clear that the people with many of the answers to the big challenges we face in public service delivery are the same people who experience, and contribute to, the generation of the problems – citizens. As we seek to modernise service delivery we need to address the fundamental nature of the contract, responsibilities and power shared between state, communities and individuals, as well as the private sector and not-for-profit organisations. Part of this realignment of the relationship between the state and citizens is the need for a true partnership in tackling big social challenges. This realignment in power is based on the need to redefine the 'value' of services in terms of what the user of the services believes are the benefits and subsequent value of the service. The old saying 'The operation was a success but the patient died' is apt here. The 'value to citizen' model that we need to develop puts citizen assessment at the heart of measuring success and developing service processes: 'social marketing'.

What is social marketing?

Social marketing is a process that can help in shifting the power balance by developing better informed, planned, executed and evaluated interventions and also by ensuring that all service provision is designed around the needs of citizens. Social marketing is not social advertising or smarter media campaigns to tell people what to do. Social marketing is a process that starts with developing a deep understanding of a social issue, and the people it impacts on, and then crafting interventions that will result in individuals and communities being able to make the changes that will improve their life experience and that of the broader

community. Social marketing is a planned process of understanding, developing, testing, applying and evaluating programmes of action that produce social good.

The customer triangle model is an easy device for depicting the key features of the social marketing approach:

People at the centre
The main aim is to ensure all interventions are based around and directly respond to the needs and wants of the person, rather than the person having to fit around the needs of the service or intervention. Social marketing always starts with seeking to understand 'where the person is at now', rather than 'where someone might think they are or should be'.

Clear 'behavioural goals'
Social marketing is driven by a concern to achieve measurable impacts on what people actually do not just their knowledge, awareness or beliefs about an issue. Establishing 'behavioural goals' requires going beyond the traditional focus on 'behaviour change' to recognise the dynamic nature of behaviour within a whole population.

Developing 'insight'
Social marketing is driven by 'actionable insights' about what will and will not help people to change. To develop such insight means moving beyond traditional information and intelligence (for example demographic or epidemiological data) to looking much more closely at why people behave in the way that they do

'Exchange'
Social marketing puts a strong emphasis on understanding what is to be 'offered' to the intended audience, based upon what they value. It also requires an appreciation of the 'full cost' to the audience of accepting the 'offer', which may include money, time, effort, and social consequences.

'Competition'
Social marketing uses the concept of 'competition' to examine all the factors that compete for people's ability to adopt a specific behaviour and develops strategies to tackle the 'competition'.

Segmentation

'Segmentation' goes beyond traditional 'targeting' that uses geodemographic data to select priority groups. Segmentation also uses deeply-held beliefs and attitudes and actual behaviours to group people that share these attributes, which can then help to define interventions intended to address their specific needs.

'Intervention mix' and 'marketing mix'

In any given situation, there are probably a range of intervention options that could be used to achieve a particular goal. Social marketing focuses on ensuring a deep understanding of the target audience is used to inform the identification and selection of appropriate intervention methods and approaches that are mutually supportive.

Operational social marketing is not enough

When considering how social marketing might be able to make its contribution to the achievement of positive social goals, it is useful to make the distinction between strategic and operational social marketing. Social marketing can be used to inform and assist policy and strategy development, and to guide as well as the delivery of specific interventions. Used in this strategic and operational way social marketing should represent an attractive approach to local government to tackling behavioural issues. Social marketing sets out a transparent, planned approach to citizen-driven change based on evidence and insight which is subsequently tracked, evaluated and modified as required. Social marketing just like marketing is not a black box but a transparent evidence and data driven approach to adding value. Social marketing is also attractive because success is measured on hard, bottom line changes in behaviour and also in terms of return on investment.

We still have some way to go, however, to embed social marketing into the heart of public policy-making and delivery. Social marketing needs to be viewed in the same way that marketing is viewed in many successful for profit and not-for-profit organisations, as the driver of the business and not a second order technical adjunct to the important business of policy and strategy development. To achieve this, the public sector needs to develop its understanding of social marketing principles if it is truly determined to put citizens at the heart of public sector delivery.

Professor Jeff French is Chief Executive of Strategic Social Marketing Ltd and Senior Vice President of the not-for-profit European Social Marketing Centre. He has over 30 years' experience at the interface between government, public, private and not-for-profit sectors. He is a visiting professor Brunel University and a fellow at King's College London.
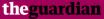
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Leadership and candour

by Peter A Glaser and Susan R Glaser, Glaser & Associates, Inc

Government leaders who leave a legacy in their communities are those who find a way to bridge their personal and political differences. This is easier said than done in an environment where the economy is in recession, and budget cuts feel like they're coming from muscle and bone rather than fat. Yet, citizens are less concerned with how their leaders stand on a particular issue and more concerned that those leaders are engaging in civil discourse to reach sound decisions – especially when those decisions involve reductions in service that violate long held expectations.

Listening to the worst of what others have to say

Unfortunately, our current political climate has provided too many examples of discord and stalemate, which are reinforcing the public perception of government inaction, as well as demoralising government leaders and staff at all levels. Civil discourse resulting in sound decision-making requires more than good intentions. It requires skill in conflict resolution and collaborative dialogue. Strong communication within our local authorities and excellent service to the public are two sides of the same coin – a strong council culture produces employees with a greater commitment and capacity for serving citizens.

Unfortunately, excellent communication, even in the best of times, is counter-intuitive. Our gut instincts too often lead us down the wrong path. This is especially true when we are forced to listen to unhappy people communicating their abject disappointment, criticism, and anger in us, and the service we provide. No one enjoys criticism. Even if it's called 'constructive feedback' our minds get busy mounting an internal counter offensive that we just can't wait to unleash. Still, our ability to listen to the worst of what others have to say is the key to instilling confidence in our staff and our public.

As long-time researchers in the field of communication and conflict resolution, we acknowledge that dysfunctional responses to criticism are natural and instinctive. We default to a defensive mode because our bodies and minds perceive criticism as a threat to be defended against. Physiologically, we react to criticism the same way our ancestors reacted to a sabre-toothed tiger. Our

flight-or-fight response takes over. And when that happens, we too often say things that we regret later.

Because in a complex, interactive civilisation, going with one's primal instincts is not always – or indeed often – a winning strategy. Paradoxically, the consequences of battling or deflecting criticism are far worse than experiencing the initial discomfort and learning to cope with it and, indeed, to embrace it.

Cheryl Miller, Chief Executive of East Sussex County Council put it this way:

"It doesn't matter how obstinate, irrational, or prejudiced another person's opinion. Until you accept that, to them, it's a good and rational reason, you will never understand the 'why' – and will never resolve the problem. I have no difficulty admitting my personal vulnerability – admitting what I don't know and can't do. This is what opens up other people to acknowledge their own vulnerability and fallibility".

Rejecting criticism can result in disaster

Conversely, pushing away critical information can have disastrous consequences. Consider how the systemic suppression of criticism contributed to the Challenger disaster on 28 January 1986 when the space shuttle broke apart 73 seconds into its flight, leading to the deaths of its seven crew members. According to investigations carried out in the aftermath of the incident, a tendency for the now notorious 'O' rings to malfunction at low temperatures had been noted by engineers well before the explosion. Many credit the tragic decision to the circumstances surrounding the launch – notably the intense media

attention attracted by the teacher-in-space programme, pressure from Washington DC and the repeated delays that had already occurred. But a 13-member US presidential commission blamed the disaster on NASA's faulty decision-making. Why did such a decision have to be made under pressure if the potential for failure was already known? The reason lies in a culture with the habit of ignoring negative news. After all, went this particular rationale, if you listened to engineers, who always want more data and consistently err on the side of caution, you'd never get anything done.

The end result of defending against criticism – without listening to it – is often a stalemate or worse. Breakthroughs occur only when criticism is truly heard and the positive potential of conflict is fully appreciated. Instead of dreading criticism and conflict, we must recognise them for what they are – opportunities for generating creative solutions to important problems, for gaining new perspectives, and for enhancing personal and professional relationships.

But listening to people is only half the equation. We must also have the capacity to deliver difficult messages. Why do so many of us fear raising sensitive subjects? The answer seems to revolve around trust, and what we imagine creates trust between people. Most of us equate trust in relationships with lack of discord.

Delivering bad news can build trust

This is not to suggest that getting along is an undesirable goal. We all enjoy having an air of overall ease in our relationships. But heartfelt trust – the firm belief that someone will act honourably,

responsibly, and fairly – can only develop as a result of a deeper dialogue. The more we're able to tell people what's on our minds, and to do so in a non-threatening manner, the more they'll be inclined to respond openly. This dynamic lays a bedrock foundation that will hold firm even on those days when things may not be very pleasant on the surface, and when we don't necessarily see eye to eye.

Often when the moment comes to air a delicate issue, we wonder: is there enough trust in this relationship that the person will hear my concerns without becoming defensive or angry? If we fear that answer is no, that our bond isn't strong enough, we'll lose our nerve and back away. But here is the paradox: courageous communication requires forging ahead anyhow, secure in the knowledge that trust is not a prerequisite for communication; trust is a by product of communication.

We must face our demons to thrive on conflict

It only takes one person to transform a dialogue. As one person changes, the other moves to accommodate the change. So, in order to thrive on conflict, we must be able to raise sensitive issues in such a way that people will readily engage with us in a conversation and work toward a shared solution. Since we already know how likely most people are to assume a defensive position – physically, mentally, and emotionally – when they face criticism, it stands to reason that our persuasive powers will be greater if we bring up whatever the matter is in a way that minimizes the listener's resistance.

It's never easy to confront delicate issues in these troublesome times, either with citizens or people working within our own organisations. But avoidance is worse. Side-stepping is undeclared wars that can ravage enterprises and personal relationships. Persuasive communicators must face our demons and choose directness that is carefully considered.

These courageous efforts will be rewarded with creative solutions, increased understanding from restless citizens, and systems and work teams that function at the highest levels.

Peter A Glaser and Susan R Glaser received their PhDs in communication from the Pennsylvania State University. They are the authors of the internationally acclaimed book, Be Quiet, Be Heard: The Paradox of Persuasion, and they have been married business partners and co-presenters for 37 years. The Glasers joined the faculty of the University of Oregon in 1975. Active consultants since then, their programmes have taken them around the world working with federal, state, and local government leaders from Oregon to New York, Scotland, New Zealand and Great Britain.

Why talk about behaviour change?

by Rachel Litherland, IDeA and Camilla Child, The Tavistock Institute

Many current global challenges require us to change our behaviour. We are entreated to reduce our carbon emissions, recycle, reduce consumption of unhealthy food, and take more exercise. Some of us live and work in communities which continue to face deprivation, where residents have limited aspirations, poor education and skills, and where community resilience and cohesion is low.

The IDeA and The Tavistock Institute have developed a model to explore current thinking and practices relating to behaviour change in local contexts, focusing also on what partners can also do to make a difference. Our evidence is drawn from literature and theory, supported by lessons drawn from good practices nationally. One of the early conclusions has been that changing behaviour in individuals and communities also requires change in strategy and service provision.

'Whole system' thinking is central to our approach. This sees all players (local authorities, sector partners and communities) playing a role. Research tells us that local specifics are of central importance.

In our current work, we are looking to address two key questions:

Why strategic and delivery partnerships are deemed to be effective, use best practices and yet results remain static?

If the conventional approaches are not working, what can we do differently that will be successful?

Principles for action

Today's financial circumstances require answers beyond providing more services. Sustainable change, rather, will involve a cultural shift by local strategic partnerships and providers to support change within communities.

Strengthened partnership working for better delivery

The shift to inter-agency and cross-boundary working which is becoming the norm in the public sector, makes extraordinary demands on organisations and the individuals working within them, as they struggle with different norms, expectations and practices. Unclear and contested roles are sometimes reflected in policy and practice. Often, local strategic partnerships work together effectively, but problems exist in

integrated service delivery, without clear messages being communicated down the line.

Improvements can be achieved in different ways. Exploring new ways of relating to partners, joining up services, or aligning budgets to deliver on agreed results these all support the development of a better integrated public sector.

Currently some of the related issues of sovereignty, authorisation, accountability and responsibility appear to be insurmountable. However, these issues must be looked at openly and addressed in order to plan, organise and deliver relevant services which deliver tangible results for our local communities.

Locally-driven policy formulation

In determining the shape and nature of services, local authorities and partners often inadvertently prescribe solutions from the centre with limited recourse to local need or context (an unpopular measure when practised by central government!).

A different response is to gain deeper understanding of local communities by being open to learning with and from them. Policies 'co-produced' by government departments, local partners and target populations, encourage 'buy in' and provides access to community aspirations and understanding of an issue. Frontline staff, the voluntary and community sector and local politicians may also have the key to unlocking solutions.

This system-wide view of behaviour change means that councils and partners may need to hold different kinds of conversations with each other and with their communities to discover solutions together. Allowing policy and solutions to be created 'side-by-side' may require change by agencies used to driving policy. However working in this way provides additional opportunities for organisations and groups to develop the capacity to learn, and increase resilience.

Brighton & Hove City Council taking up the challenge

Brighton & Hove City Council and the local strategic partnership have agreed to work with IDeA and The Tavistock Institute on a behaviour change project focusing on reducing the number of teenage pregnancies, setting this in a wider context of support for young people and their families.

The UK still has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe, and Brighton & Hove, along with other seaside towns, are grappling with this difficult issue.

As Acting Chief Executive Alex Bailey says: 'Teenage pregnancy is a real factor in inter-generational cycles of deprivation, we need to understand better what really shifts behaviours and attitudes if we are to effectively break those cycles'.

With the recent launch of a local teenage pregnancy action plan, local leaders and front-line staff are better prepared than ever, but are ready to explore an approach which broadens the issue to secure the change in behaviour

required to achieve local and national targets.

Developing the principles into a plan for change

Together, we are developing a way of working which focuses on the following:

• Working with the unique characteristics of Brighton & Hove residents and the experience of their everyday lives in deprivation hot spots. Bringing community members together with local strategic partners and front-line staff.

• Creating space in which partners can explore underlying issues contributing to or obstructing successful partnership allowing for constructive challenge, so that progress is grounded in an honest and collaborative appraisal of the issues.

• Concentrating on joining up the current good practices and improving communications so that the whole system works more effectively together.

We'll do this through a combination of methods including individual interviews, whole system community events setting goals, and action learning sets to deepen understanding and consolidate change.

A prediction for Brighton & Hove

Amongst the expected results are greater shared understanding and purpose about issues which impact on the worlds of young people, their families and teenage pregnancy. Coupled with shifts in how people communicate both between organisations and with community members, we would expect to create a shared understanding of how change can happen and the steps that need to be taken to secure it in different contexts. A related aspect is to develop a broad 'learning community' which champions change.

Achieving the kind of behaviour change we all envisage is not going to be easy. The pay-off, however, will be sustainable real results for local people, partners and councils alike.

Rachel Litherland is the IDeA's national adviser on partnership working. She leads a national programme of support, advice and guidance for councils and their partners on how to develop partnership working as a key way to deliver better results, more efficiently for local people. She is on secondment to the IDeA from Suffolk County Council where she is Head of Partnerships.

Camilla Child is a senior consultant at The Tavistock Institute, a not-for-profit organisation which undertakes research, evaluation and organisational consultancy for private, public and voluntary sector clients. She has many years experience of managing and designing evaluations and her current areas of expertise now lie in the organisation and management of cross boundary and multi-disciplinary working.

Lessons from social marketing

by Joe Simpson, Leadership Centre for Local Government

For over 20 years much of my day career was not in local government but in broadcasting. My broadcasting work was concerned with what became 'social action broadcasting'. This used the power of radio and television to encourage people to do things such as volunteer, consider adoption or fostering; take better care of their health or donate money to charities. This article is a summary of some of the lessons I learned and where I think those lessons have direct applicability to those in local government, thinking about how we engage with individuals and influence what they do. I tell this as a story, in the order that I learned these lessons.

Understand your audience
In 1974, aged 24, I arrived at Granada Television in 1975 and was responsible for a regional programme dealing with the response from a show called Reports Action (presented by a then young unknown called Anna Ford). My first task was to understand what the real boundaries of the transmission area were. A simple task I thought; I asked those who made the programmes, only to discover that this was not a major focus for them. So instead I asked the sales department, whose job it was to sell the adverts that paid our wages. Their maps were incredible. It seemed that people across much of Wales and nearly as far south as Birmingham could potentially watch Granada. So for one year I monitored every single response to the show until I was able to produce a real map of the places from where people responded. The parallel here with local government is that all too often too few senior managers and politicians have a detailed understanding of their demographics. An exception would be the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, where this knowledge has been used to reshape services. They used 'Mosaic' methodology, but thankfully we now have a free equivalent available to us in local government.

Build a sense of urgency and theatre
The first couple of series were rather turgid. It was as if in awe of the subject matter we produced rather 'goody two-shoes' television. The change came with a new producer; a live format and

banks of telephonists in view with a scoreboard to record the number of calls made. My role was much enhanced, because we aimed to be more adventurous in what we covered. The subjects which we could feature depended on them being able to engage respondents in a positive manner. I was shaping the content and not merely dealing with the consequences thereof.

Shortly afterwards, we became a peak time network show, broadcast early on Sunday evenings (now presented by Joan Bakewell and Bob Greaves). The ratings and the response to the show exceeded by far those of the earlier format.

The parallel with public service campaigns is simple: timeless generic encouragements to 'be good' just do not work. You have to grab people's attention and give them a sense of urgency and a reason to do something now!

It's the emotional connection and not just reason

The item which really showed that we were dealing with a different range of interaction than any other approach was one encouraging people to give up smoking. We had assembled a pack of free goodies to give away containing the usual suspects of chewing gum, patches and other commercially available products. The pitch was simple: the only thing that works is you wanting to quit but see if any of these help. We had 15,000 packs to give away; the trouble was that nearly 600,000 people successfully responded! We have no idea how many people attempted to respond, the phone system of Britain was at breaking point. The day after I had to appear on ITN News, appealing to people to stop calling. Wondering what to do with at least half a million people for whom we had nothing to offer, I telexed David Ennals, (then Secretary of State for the Department of Health and Social Security), asking for help and he immediately agreed. We met the next day to work out what could be done.

I thought our troubles were over, but the next few months were a trial of culture clashes. To my mind (and David Ennals') we had successfully connected with over half a million people who wanted help. However, the Civil Service thought we must do technical work first to determine what should be the right response, for example, which wording would work best. In their search for technical excellence, they missed the opportunity for a quick response. How many people subsequently gave up smoking we do not know. I do know that the stress created in our office due to dealing with hundreds of calls every day from people asking when would they receive something, meant that within three months, I was the only member of our team who was not smoking!

Jumping ahead, when heading up ITV's 27-hour charity fundraising show, our biggest critics were again operating with this mindset. Their criticism was that we should not focus on fundraising but should instead devote time to detailed in-depth documentaries exposing key evils. If we had done so, our audience would have simply switched off their televisions. We conducted detailed research on the impact such programmes had on viewers. The findings were clear; we

increased people's empathy. We were also able to attract their attention and to temporarily get them to consider a different perspective.

What we needed then was public service professionals and charities utilising this opportunity so the change could be sustained. What we need now are public campaigns which emotionally connect.

Tell a story people can relate to

The 1980s saw the rise of the big television fundraising events. ITV had five such telethons, two London and three national. They were powerful and raised significant sums of money (one raised over £24million). Over the 27 hours we reached large numbers of viewers, on occasion in excess of 37million. We adapted these events from America and the BBC subsequently evolved its own approach. For me the issue was, what would make people make the call and make the pledge. We had a sophisticated way of finding this out: over the show we had a simple format – 20 minutes of network television coupled with 10 minutes of local television produced by the regional ITV company. In every region, viewers would ring a telephone number specific to their area. We worked with BT so we were able to use their network control centre to map the number of attempted phone calls made every five minutes to all the key telephone sites. We could compare this to the output in

any region at any given time and easily discover what part of the output motivated people to pledge money.

The answer was pretty clear. Of course we needed celebrities and entertainment to attract and hold the audience, but viewers did not respond to that. What mattered were stories of people, people with whom they could relate because they could have been themselves or their family members. However, time and again we see public campaigns where the assumption is that if only we can get X celebrity or Y star to front it, will it be a success. Advertisers have learned this lesson, as they now increasingly use 'ordinary people' rather than awkwardly framed shots of celebrities 'endorsing' products. Despite this, in the public sector we retain this mad mix of 'fact, fact, fact' wrapped round a celebrity and hope that this will somehow work. Stories have always been central to human beings; Max Bygraves started the key part of his show with "I wanna tell you a story". John Nalbandian, of the University of Kansas, is one of the key political academics in the USA. He has a wonderful way of describing the parallel, but different logic sets of politicians and officers. One of those differences is that the politician deals with stories, the officer with reports.

'We' is stronger than 'me'

Starting in 1988, the network telethons were scheduled for the Sunday and

Monday of the May bank holiday weekend. On the first weekend there was horrendous rain, bad news for many, but a gift if you needed a large television audience. For the next, in 1990, we had the reverse. An amazing heat wave had swept across the whole country. This meant that people were outside enjoying themselves, and were not watching our show. With only three hours to go we had raised many millions less than at the same point in the last telethon. We decided to rip up the remainder of the schedule and replaced it with an emotional rollercoaster that raised over £10 million in three hours. This is still, despite being 19 years old, the most successful three hours of fundraising ever in Britain.

We achieved the effect you can see at some evangelical meetings, the difference being that our audience was not all together in one place but sitting at home watching their television, often alone. People may feel uncomfortable with this, but for good or for evil, 'we' is greater than 'me'. So much of what we do in the public sector is so individually focused that we fail to capitalise on the fact we are social animals, and more prepared to do things when others are also doing them.

KISS ('keep it simple stupid!')

Getting people to offer to volunteer, or to donate money was one thing, but getting them to fulfil their pledge required more than just presuming on their goodwill. For our first few shows, I felt that our promotion of credit card payment was more an advert for the credit card companies than an effective fundraising tool. At the time credit cards were a yuppie brand, even more so than mobile phones and whatever ITV was, it was certainly not a yuppie channel. As the telethons worked in collaboration with NatWest and the Post Office we ensured that having made the pledge in the evening, people had a paying in slip and a simple set of instructions on their doorstep the next morning to help them fulfil their pledge. It was simple, unthreatening and easy. We kept everything at a low level; even the expectation about the size of the donation was low.

In contrast, many parts of the public system still have too high a barrier for the first step. For those who are unconvinced of this importance, look at the Obama campaign. It was a campaign where everyone could do something, and they gently encouraged you to do more and more once connected.

Thank and reinforce

Following a pledge every donor also received a thank you note from the Prince of Wales (our patron), which also reminded them of the importance of their donation. Communication with the Prince of Wales was not a common occurrence for our audience.

Positive reinforcement of behaviour is something we encounter at a very early age, as it is core to parenting. Regardless, if we look at so much of public sector activity the attention is too focused on the anti-social behaviour of individuals. We forget to acknowledge and reinforce the positive behaviour that most of us do, most of the time.

None of these seven points are rocket science, but sometimes in dealing with very complex problems we forget that the building blocks are that the basic foundations on which we can construct very elaborate structures. They don't have to be complicated; they just have to be there.

Joe Simpson is Director of Politics and Partnerships, Leadership Centre for Local Government. He started his career in the voluntary sector, becoming Assistant Director of CSV. He has also worked in television, heading up the ITV Telethon, working as the strategy co-ordinator for BBC Worldwide and the director of programmes for the World Learning Network with David Putnam. He is also the former National Programme Director for the New Millennium Experience. In parallel he had a 16-year stint as a local councillor.

Services are not enough

by Michael Bichard, SFI and David Halpern, Institute for Government

The problem with the kind of significant increases in public sector investment we have seen in the last decade is that it can take away the incentive to think differently about how we design and deliver services – or whether some of the services we have long provided are still making a positive difference. The temptation is to carry on doing things in much the same way but with more money.

The problem with reducing public expenditure is that we traditionally look for ways of making existing services more efficient or more productive while controlling their budgets ever more tightly. So we continue to deliver the same services with less money.

But while – richer or poorer– we carry on doing what we have always done, the world around us and the policy challenges it presents is changing – and it is changing in ways that can make a mockery of our plans and actions. Will we be able to resolve those problems, for example, by simply delivering more efficient, more expensive, albeit quite traditional public services?

If chronic disease continues to grow at the current rate, then the cost of the NHS will shoot up. Even relatively conservative estimates from ageing alone suggest extra spending of more than £1bn a year real just to stay still. Add in estimates from growing 'lifestyle'-related costs such as from obesity (in the form of diabetes, heart disease etc.) and the figures get really scary. In the US, some analysts put the costs of obesity at $200bn per annum – while in the UK obesity has roughly doubled in the adult and child population over the past 15 years, a trend which shows no sign of slowing. But will the provision of more of the same stem that tide? And will more of the same make any significant impact on our professed determination to tackle climate change and create a more sustainable environment?

The growth of chronic disease
The reality is that unless we educate, persuade and influence people to change their lifestyles and eating habits, the growth of chronic diseases will continue. And until we persuade designers and their clients to take sustainability seriously, then our commitment to the environment will count for little when 80% of the

environmental impact of products and buildings derive from the design phase. In these and in countless other policy areas, future success will depend more upon influencing and sometimes challenging accepted behaviour than it will on providing a service.

Some find difficult the very thought of the state, local or central, becoming involved in influencing personal behaviour even though it has happened down the ages, not least when church and state were more closely identified. More recently too, often by force of legislation, government has changed our behaviour and attitudes towards drink driving, shopping laws, smoking in public places, the availability of divorce, and the acceptability of single sex relationships. On other occasions, attempts to exercise influence have proved less successful, leading to accusations of 'nanny state' government.

The influence of the state
The influencing of behaviour by the state is more acceptable to people when it involves preventing someone else getting hurt, such as stopping anti-social behaviour or containing the spread of infectious diseases. The latter provides examples of some of the most effective behavioural interventions ever conducted, as well as offering useful clues about the kinds of approaches that work. For example, the UK campaign to halt the spread of AIDS through changing sexual behaviour was one of the most effective of its kind in the

world, and saved tens of thousands of lives. It involved adverts that were emotionally engaging and considered shockingly blunt at the time. It involved unlikely coalitions between government and radical new campaign groups. It not only rapidly drove up public awareness about the transmission and impact of the disease, but succeeded in changing social norms around some of the most intimate aspects of our lives. Identifying effective advocates or messengers – often outside of government; using social networks; driving across messages on both emotional and cognitive levels; and sticking at it, are all lessons that apply equally to campaigns today.

It can be argued that the current crop of behavioural challenges we face are tougher, as the consequences are more diffuse and long term. The link between my driving a big car and global warming, or having an extra chocolate bar and getting diabetes, feels much looser than that between unsafe sex and getting (or spreading) AIDS. But current policy-makers do have least one advantage over their predecessors – the burgeoning field of behavioural economics (see the 'Mind cap' box, right).

The key insights of behavioural economics have their roots in laboratory based experiments from the 1970s and 80s onwards, not least in the work of Tversky and Kahneman for which the latter was subsequently awarded the Nobel Prize. But a series of recent books have poplarised these insights, and make excellent holiday reading for a chief executive and their team. (*cont, P62*)

Seven key lessons from behavioural economics

Messenger. Make sure the message comes from the right person. Expertise and authority make messages more effective. Better still are messages from people we know personally and like. For example it is better to give a health message from the chief medical officer than from the secretary of state.

Incentives and information. Prices have big impacts where there's an alternative to buy. But make sure your price signal, and information, are present when the key decisions are made. For example it is better to put up the tax of a fuel-guzzling car at purchase, than the same through petrol at the pump.

Norms. We follow the crowd and the behaviour of those around us. For example we are much more likely to drop litter when there's already some on the ground, and more likely to recycle if we think people like us are already doing it.

Defaults. We are very likely to follow the default, or 'do nothing' option. For example pension savings rise dramatically when employees are given an 'opt out' choice, versus an 'opt in'. Commitment. We are far more likely to change our behaviour if we have said to someone else that we will. For example failure to attend appointments is slashed by the simple act of prompting, and waiting for, a person to verbally confirm that they will let you know if they can't make it. Affect. Messages that make an emotional connection are far more effective than pure information. For example seeing a boy kill his own mother by not wearing a seatbelt is much more effective than a statistic about risks.

Priming. Our behaviour is strongly affected by cues that precede it and shape our state of mind. For example £-signs, or the word 'I' in a statement heard previously, make us behave more selfishly and less likely to help others.

Based on work by David Halpern and Paul Dolan.

Perhaps most well-known is Nudge (2008) by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, which explores the role and power of policy-makers as 'choice architects'. A tried-and-tested alternative, widely used by marketers, is *The Psychology of Persuasion*, by Robert Cialdini, and for those who want to show that they are one step ahead, *Predictably Irrational*, by Dan Ariely.

The basic idea is simple: we use mental shortcuts that make us liable to misremember, to misjudge in the present; and to mispredict our future. Policy-makers – and citizens – can respond to these insights in a number of ways:

• First, we can stick our heads in the sand and be buffeted around.

• Second, we can seek to arm citizens with the insights to resist 'behavioural predators' urging us to eat too much, spend too much, or consume in ways that will blight us all.

• Third, we can learn to be better choice architects – to shape situations and structure citizen choices leading us to more beneficial outcomes for all.

But a final word of warning. If policy-makers are to use these techniques and retain trust, they'd better get permission from their residents and constituents to do so. Behaviour change techniques can be powerfully effective, but citizens need to feel they are partners in the process, not rats in a laboratory maze.

Sir Michael Bichard is editor-in-chief of SFI.

David Halpern is Director of Research, Institute for Government, London. He previously worked as Chief Analyst in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2001-2007).