DEMOS

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Carrots, sticks and sermons:
influencing public behaviour for
environmental goals

A Demos/Green Alliance report
produced for Defra

Version 4.0, 16/12/03

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Defra's success as a government department depends in part on its ability to influence people to change their views and behaviour. For example, success in waste policy depends on successfully encouraging people to sort their waste for recycling, and to re-use or minimise waste wherever possible; and energy efficiency targets will not be reached unless each household contributes. This 'influencing' role is tricky for government, as it is indirect, and relies on a sophisticated understanding of people's motivations and behaviour.

There are several ways in which a department such as Defra can influence people to achieve government goals:

1) *Legislation*, such as product standards or bans on harmful chemicals;
2) *Economic instruments* which alter the price of products or services to make it cheaper to protect the environment, and more expensive to pollute it – such as reducing VAT on energy efficient products;
3) *Provision of information*, so that people can make an informed choice – such as ecolabelling schemes and the 'tractor mark' for British food;
4) *Marketing and influencing strategies*, which aim to win hearts and minds so that the right behaviour follows - such as the 'are you doing your bit' advertising and awareness campaign.

In reality, when dealing with a complex policy area, a combination of each of these approaches will be necessary. This report looks at how the last two measures – provision of information, and marketing and influencing strategies, can help Defra achieve its environmental goals.

Influencing the public is as much an art as it is a science, and experienced marketers know that what works in one instance may well fail in another. The report identifies current thinking and best practice in the art of public influencing. It aims to assist Defra in identifying and incorporating a broader set of cultural, psychological and social factors into the development, communication and delivery of policy.

There is no magic bullet in this area; no secret formula for success. But a lot can be drawn from the latest thinking and best practice in the UK and further afield, and then used to inform and shape strategies to good effect.

Report structure

In chapter one, we review how thinking about public influencing has developed over time, and look at the private sector to see what lessons government could learn from commercial marketing techniques. We then examine the role of government in public influencing, and discuss successes and failures to date.

Chapter two focuses on public behaviour and the environment. It highlights the main hurdles in applying public influencing to environmental goals – translating complex problems into everyday solutions; moving from awareness into action; and reaching beyond the committed core of concerned citizens.

Our case studies focus on three examples of public influencing: environmental awareness campaigns in the UK and Scotland; strategies to reduce plastic bag use; and the 'five-a-day' campaign which encourages people to increase their consumption of fruit and vegetables. Based on interviews with the people who designed and implemented these strategies, the case studies draw out lessons for Defra in designing future approaches. Each looks at a particular aspect of influencing behaviour: the 'are you doing your bit?' case study examines the difficulties of translating awareness into action; the plastic bags example discusses how influencing can sit alongside other policy measures; and the 'five-a-day' example looks at how other sectors, including the voluntary and commercial sector, can work with government to achieve a common aim.

Next, we put forward 'seven steps toward successful influencing'. Based on findings from the literature review and the case studies, these seven steps outline the issues that Defra needs to consider when drawing up strategies for public influencing.

This report, and in particular the seven steps, were be discussed at a workshop for Defra officials, to held in October 2003. The final section of the report applies the 'seven steps' to existing challenges that the Department faces, in public influencing on waste issues, climate change and sustainable development communications.

1.   Influencing public behaviour: a beginner's guide

'Public opinion' is a relatively young concept. The phrase was first coined in 1781, but a view of public opinion and behaviour as entities that could be shaped only came about with the rise of mass communications in the late 19th century. In recent decades, the challenge of how to influence public opinion and behaviour, has occupied politicians, policymakers and social theorists, and has become the defining question of the advertising industry. Numerous policy objectives – from reducing smoking and curbing obesity, through to promoting personal savings or energy efficiency – rely heavily on successful influencing strategies.

Government efforts to change behaviour started in earnest in wartime, with memorable appeals to 'Dig for Victory' or dire warnings that 'careless talk costs lives'. These forms of communication, which secured a place in the public imagination, are the direct predecessors of more recent campaigns, such as those addressing drink-driving and AIDS. It is only in the past 10-15 years that government has started trying to measure systematically the effects of such campaigns on actual behaviour, and this task remains difficult, especially when information campaigns are accompanied by other policy measures.

Compare this with the much longer history of attempts at changing behaviour through laws or markets. The rule of law has been developed and improved over millennia; economics has enjoyed 300 years of intensive development. By contrast, the art of directly influencing public behaviour, through 'soft' measures such as advertising and public information, is still relatively underdeveloped.

Social changes over the past thirty years have also cast doubt on the idea of public opinion as homogenous and readily identified. People are now acknowledged to exhibit a far greater diversity of individual motivations, beliefs and behaviours. Tom Bentley sums up this trend: "As societies have become more diverse, more complex and more open, the range of issues and social groupings has become far harder to corral into coherent policy platforms or voter coalitions" [1]

The media is also changing. Traditional mass channels such as newspapers and television are diversifying and facing competition from new media and

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[1] Bentley, T. (2001) *It's Democracy Stupid*, London, Demos, p.5.

peer-to-peer networks. New forms of communication such as email and mobile phones made it easier to maintain extended networks of acquaintances, which often become the anchors of identity and behaviour. This encourages a trend whereby porous social networks (instead of membership of large social groups) become the primary arbiters of behaviour. As Andrew Curry argues:

> "People's trust is migrating towards 'my world group' and away from sources of authority. So what we will end up with is people in those 'my world groups' acting as gatekeepers, where trust is formed around word of mouth"[2]

These trends do not sit well with conventional notions of public opinion and behaviour, capable of being shaped and manipulated through the mass media. A more diverse public makes the mobilisation of public opinion more difficult, but it also makes the use of softer influencing techniques more essential, as traditional policy tools struggle to adapt to the complexities of modern society.

Methods of researching public opinion

Opinion polling is the quick, and some would say crude, route to understanding public opinion. In the past decade, following the serious polling errors in the run-up to the 1992 general election, the accuracy of polling has improved dramatically. Yet it remains limited in its ability to offer a useful picture of issues outside the formal political arena. Currently there are only a few large-sample, many-question surveys (such as Environics International's yearly *International Environmental Monitor*) which can give a broader picture of what people think about complex issues such as the 'environment', and what they will 'do' about it. And even then, such polls provide at best a fragile impression.

An alternative approach to assessing public opinion and behaviour is consumer preference theory, which assumes that public attitudes are reflected in product preference and purchase patterns. Analysis of this has flowed from both sides of the political spectrum, in the work of theorists such as Gary Becker and Joseph Stiglitz, and in the socio-psychological analysis of researchers such as Elizabeth Shove and Juliet Schor.

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[2] Andrew Curry quoted in Harkin, J. (2003) *Mobilisation*, London, Demos, p.25

Both research fields are starting to develop crossover methods, which recognise that some issues need to be analysed in more nuanced terms than '*will people buy it?*' or '*will they vote for it?*'. In the research fields between public opinion theory and consumer analysis, new data-gathering methods are being pioneered, which are more reliant on research at small group level.

New research of this sort tends to be more 'user-centric'. For example, in the German ULYSSES project, which looked at climate change, small groups of citizens shared a moderated discussion on the risks of climate change and options for policy. The groups met five times and the range of arguments expressed was then condensed and given to policy makers. Such research can often itself contribute to changes in the opinions and willingness-to-act of the subjects, so it can offer the best insights into how to convert opinion into actual behaviour change. [3]

Changing consumption: lessons from the commercial sector

Theories of consumer preference used to be based on a linear model of behaviour known as "AIDA" (attention, interest, desire, and action). According to this model, consumers first become aware of a product; it must get their attention. Once it has their attention, they may become interested in what it has to offer. Consumers then want the product – the desire is created – and this is followed by the action or purchase of the product.

In reality, it is rarely this straightforward. Marketing expert Wendy Gordon points to the 'opportunistic' purchasing behaviour of individuals, highlighting "a gap between what people say they want, and what they actually buy when faced with the moment of truth about what to put in the shopping trolley". [4] Purchasing decisions are rarely rational and linear, and are more often opportunistic and emotional impulses, based on cultural cues and wider trends.

In the past twenty years, marketing theory has changed to reflect this. There is now a growing focus on 'brand', and the need to create an identity that resonates with the consumer. Straightforward advertising as information provision – the first step in the AIDA model – is long gone, and has been replaced with more sophisticated campaigns.

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[3] Jaeger, Shackley, Darer, Waterton, 1997. *Towards a Polylogue on Climate Change and Global Modelling*, http://www.zit.tu-darmstadt.de/ulysses/ewp97-3.pdf

[4] Gordon, W. (2002). *Brand green: Mainstream or forever niche?* London, Green Alliance.

For advertisers keen to appeal to a new generation it is common to use techniques that are deliberately pastiche, or which involve innovative or viral marketing models. For example, the UK advertising agency Cake specialises in street level stunts, and recently painted a whole street red to celebrate Barbie's 40th birthday. The aim of these techniques is to create a word of mouth 'buzz', which can often be more effective than the scatter-gun effects of TV advertising.[5] There is also great interest in the marketing community in using original content, such as films and soap operas, as vehicles for advertising. This had led to a rise in sponsorship of particular programmes (for example Volvo's sponsorship of 'ER' or Npower's of 'The Bill'), a process which will develop further in the next few years, as advertisers start to influence the actual content of programmes (for example, a holiday show made 'in association' with, and including prizes from, a leading travel firm).

However, as marketing techniques become ever more sophisticated, so the huge environmental problems inherent in over-consumption have also become more apparent. The need for more sustainable patterns of production and consumption has been identified as a priority at both the Rio (1992) and the Johannesburg (2002) Earth Summits, and the UK government recently published a sustainable consumption and production strategy, which outlines a policy framework for tackling these challenges.[6]

The question remains whether, as part of such a strategy, policymakers can co-opt the techniques used so effectively in the marketing of consumer goods to achieve environmental and social, alongside commercial goals.

Expert or facilitator? Government's role in public persuasion

Government's ability to influence behaviour relies heavily on public trust and confidence in the messages that it sends out. However, this trust can no longer be taken for granted. In her 2002 Reith Lectures, Onora O'Neill describes how a trust deficit now cuts across almost every aspect of contemporary British society. "Mistrust", argues Professor O'Neill, "is now directed not just at … crooks and wide boys. [It] has spread across all areas of life, and supposedly with good reason. Citizens, it is said, no longer trust governments, or politicians, or ministers, or the police, or the courts, or the

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[5] Harkin, J. (2001). *Brand Name Bullies Fight Back with Greenwashed PR*, New Statesman

[6] Defra/DTI (2003) *Changing Patterns: UK Government Framework for Sustainable Consumption and Production,* www.defra.gov.uk/environment/business/scp

prison service….None of us, it is said, trusts banks, or insurers, or pension providers. Patients, it is said, no longer trust doctors, and in particular no longer trust hospitals or hospital consultants."[7]

Her argument is backed by polling data from MORI, which shows that some authority figures such as police and civil servants are trusted by only half of the population, while politicians command the trust of less than a quarter of their electorate. Overall, the latest MORI research concludes that: "Trust in the Government is low, with only a quarter to a third of us believing that the Government is acting in the public interest..."[8]

The growth in the use of 'spin' in political communication has further undermined trust in government. Various communication fiascos, such as the Jo Moore/Martin Sixsmith affair and more recently the Iraq/dodgy dossier row have contributed to an overall impression that government cannot be trusted. This problem formed part of the focus of a recent study by the Government Communication Review Group, chaired by Bob Phyllis. A Demos submission to this group argued that the aim of government communication should be to open up public debate, not close down alternative perspectives:

> "The current government has discovered that overuse of tactical communication techniques not only reduces their effectiveness, but makes public participation in debate less likely…Post-spin communication is not 'straight' or 'neutral' communication, but communication which acknowledges multiple viewpoints, multiple sources of information, and the fact that public opinion is not fixed and cannot therefore be 'won'."[9]

Trust is not the only factor which impacts on a government's ability to influence public behaviour. Perceptions of how responsive the political system is also determine the levels of public engagement in political debate and action. As Frank Fischer, amongst others, has pointed out, the advent of new forms of environmental risk has highlighted the limitations of traditional models of democracy.[10] More innovative forms of public participation are often necessary to cope with the complexities of

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[7] O'Neill, O. (2002) *A Question of Trust*, Cambridge University Press

[8] http://www.mori.com/polls/2002/uea.shtml

[9] Gibb, E. (2003). *Publicity: From persuasion to participation*. London, Demos.

[10] Fischer, F. (2002). *Citizens, Experts and the Environment* Durham, USA, Duke University Press.

contemporary environmental issues, such as the pros and cons of GM crops, or the use of incineration for waste disposal.

For environmental problems which are characterised by risk and uncertainty, open and participatory models of communications between citizens and experts have proved particularly effective. The Global Environmental Change Programme of the ESRC has developed recommendations for how governments should cope with situations of uncertainty and declining public confidence. Commenting on conventional attempts by governments to 'steer' public opinion, the GECP authors argue that:

- Better institutions and more scientific knowledge are not the only essentials for rebuilding trust. Above all, openness about risks and uncertainties is called for.
- There is an urgent need for more deliberative policy processes that encourage greater legitimacy, transparency and public ownership, thereby generating greater trust in outcomes.

They propose the following methods of building public trust:

- Integrating perspectives: ensuring that input comes from a wide variety of expert and non-expert sources (which includes the need to cross-check supposedly hard data).
- Interactive research: the user-centric methods described above, which encourage people to form and reformulate their opinions interactively, consensually and consciously.
- New ways to make decisions: interactive research ought to be accompanied by a commitment to allow the public a meaningful role in decisions and their implementation.[11]

Attempts to adopt these practices are still experimental. The recent 'GM Nation?' government-backed consultation exercise is perhaps the most significant innovation in this area so far, though even this has been criticised for not being sufficiently linked to policy decisions.

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[11] ESRC Global Environmental Change Programme (2000) *Risky choices, soft disasters: environmental decision-making under uncertainty*, www.gecko.ac.uk

Successes and failures in government influencing techniques

The first serious attempts by government to influence public behaviour were wartime propaganda messages. These were based on a top-down, expert-led model in which government imparted information and made clear the type of behaviour it expected from the public. Such campaigns often demanded personal sacrifice or behaviour-change, for the sake of the greater good.[12] But their applicability outside wartime, or a situation of serious societal upheaval, is limited.

In recent decades, the focus has shifted to public education campaigns. These normally present behaviour changes as a way for individuals to improve their own lives, for example by driving more safely or adopting healthier lifestyles. Government campaigns can also be used to break taboos and challenge perceptions, as seen in recent campaigns to promote the employment of disabled people, or to highlight the problem of domestic violence.

Some of these campaigns have been huge successes. These include the high profile campaigns against drink-driving and smoking. Yet even here it can be difficult to isolate the effects of government campaigns from wider policy impacts, such as higher taxes on cigarettes, or stricter legal penalties for drink driving.

Smoking in the USA: the longest running public education campaign

In the US, after decades of anti-smoking campaigns, the Surgeon-General dedicated his 2000 report to a comprehensive review of anti-smoking methods. His conclusion supports a 'comprehensive approach' to anti-smoking, which includes the following instruments:

- Educational strategies, conducted in conjunction with community groups and the media;
- Pharmacological treatment of nicotine addiction, combined with behavioural - support (such as physicians advising their patients to quit smoking);

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[12] These techniques were based on the work of Walter Lippmann and Edwin Bernays, theorists in public control by mass communication techniques. See Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 1922; and Bernays, *Propaganda*, 1928. Bernays was involved with the Committee for Public Information which coordinated US propaganda in the First World War.

- Regulation, including controls on advertising and promotion and clean indoor air regulations;
- Taxation at optimal levels on tobacco products;
- Community interventions, which require the involvement of schools, health agencies, city and county governments, and other social and recreational organizations.

Despite the fact that the anti-smoking drive in the US is probably the longest-running, best-funded public behaviour influence campaign ever, the Surgeon-General is realistic about how measurable the dynamics of policy packages really are: "The available approaches to reducing tobacco use–educational, clinical, regulatory, economic, and comprehensive–differ substantially in their techniques and in the metric by which success can be measured. A hierarchy of effectiveness is difficult to construct."[13]

There are lower profile but equally effective examples, such as the campaign for smoke alarms, which has led to an increase from 18 % to 75% in the number of homes which are fitted with alarms. This campaign is interesting in that it combined TV advertising with retailer promotions and a fitting service available free from the fire service. NGOs and campaigning bodies have also enjoyed some success in using the public education model to shift consumption patterns around unethical goods, such as fur or battery eggs.

Overall, the evidence for why particular campaigns succeed is patchy. The UK Health Development Agency has reviewed the effectiveness of government health promotion work, and concluded that there is no single template for behaviour-related interventions, nor an agreed formula for success.[14]

Learning from failures is potentially more instructive. It is significant that the campaigns that have struggled the most appear to share some characteristics. They tend to be psychologically complex (such as ending addiction), or targeted at relatively private spheres of activity or at peer networks. For example, government has actively promoted the anti-drugs message for decades, but by the age of 18 nearly a third of young people are still using cannabis regularly.[15] Similarly, messages about contraception and sexual health have been consistently circulated since the 1960s, but the UK

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[13] *Reducing Tobacco Use: a Report of the Surgeon General.* US Department of Health and Human Services, 2000. http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr_tobacco_use.htm

[14] http://www.hda-online.org.uk/html/research/effectiveness.htm

[15] Bradshaw, J. The Wellbeing of Children in the UK, 2002, Save the Children. P301

still has the highest rate of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases among 13-15 year olds in Europe.[16]

The mixed success of public education campaigns echoes the experience of business. Lord Leverhulme, the founder of Unilever, famously complained: "I know that 50% of the money I spend on advertising is wasted, unfortunately I can never find out which half ..." Despite occasional gripes about the cost, few business leaders would deny the value of advertising. Research shows that, over the long term, brands which are consistently advertised can weather the economic cycle more effectively than non-advertised alternatives.[17]

Public behaviour as a complex system

Arguably, the underlying problem with many efforts at public influencing is that they are still reliant on an outdated model of government's relationship with citizens and consumers. The expert-led, command-and-control approach to public influencing which came to the fore in wartime propaganda, and persisted in public awareness campaigns until the 1970s and 1980s, is no longer adequate for the complex, diverse and individualised society of 2003. Defra's strategy for Sustainable Production and Consumption acknowledges this challenge: "policy intervention is fraught with difficulty, made harder by the complex nature of the market and the often close relationship between, and motivations of, producers and consumers."[18]

Demos has argued for some time that the conceptual models which underpin public policymaking have much to learn from systems thinking.[19] This argument can be applied with equal force to the task of influencing public behaviour. Conventional approaches attempt to break a task down into its component parts and tackle them in a rational, linear manner. The mechanistic logic at work is reflected in the language used – policy levers, instruments etc – and there is an assumption that interventions can be made at a certain point in order to produce a planned and controlled outcome.

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[16] Meyrick, J. Harris, R. 1994, 'Adolescent sexual behaviour, contraceptive use and pregnancy: a review' ACPP Review and Newsletter Vol 16 No 5

[17] Buck, S. (2002) *The True Cost of Cutting Adspend.* Oxford, World Advertising Research Centre.

[18] Defra/DTI (2003) *Changing Patterns: UK Government Framework for Sustainable Consumption and Production,* www.defra.gov.uk/environment/business/scp, p.25

[19] See for example, Chapman, J. (2002) *System Failure: why governments must learn to think differently*, London, Demos; Bentley, T. (2002) *Letting Go: complexity, individualism and the left,* Renewal Vol.10, No.1

The reality in most areas of policymaking – including this one - is a lot more complex and messy. Just as consumer preferences do not follow a linear AIDA pattern, neither does public opinion and behaviour. Attitudes rarely translate neatly into action or voter preferences. Providing information does not necessarily change attitudes, and changing attitudes does not necessarily cause a change in behaviour.

Recognising this complexity does not make the challenge of influencing behaviour any easier. But it does at least mean that policymakers approach that challenge with more accurate conceptual models, and are less likely to come unstuck when a simple, linear theory collides with a more complex reality.

Alongside a better understanding of the nature of complex systems, we also need a richer and more sophisticated account of consumer motivation and behaviour. Tim Jackson of the University of Surrey has done a great deal of pioneering work in this area. He argues that attempts to influence public behaviour have often failed because of inadequate theoretical conceptions of behaviour:

> "Existing institutional responses… have tended to rely on rather meagre, one-dimensional conceptions of human behaviour, which turn either on the 'economic rationality' of the individual consumer or the supposed 'commodity fetishism' of consumer society. Neither of these responses is unequivocally useful: the former because it offers little new to existing policies; the latter because it underestimates the complexity of human motivations and risks alienating those whose behaviour it seeks to change." [20]

Given the immense difficulty of conceptualising human behaviour, it is hardly surprising that commercial marketing does not attempt to model behaviour or motivation, instead basing its work on experimentation, hunch and instinct. Jackson argues that consumer behaviour will continually evade neat conceptualisation. Understanding it requires a sophisticated model, "which encompasses both individual and social aspects of human motivation, incorporates both ethical and prudential behaviours, and is based on credible theories of intention, motivation and agency."

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[20] Jackson, T. (2003) *Mapping Models of Mammon – a cross-disciplinary survey of conceptual approaches to consumer behaviour*, Paper to epuk03 Conference, June 2003, www.envpsy.org.uk

One potential theoretical model for consumer behaviour that moves some way towards this is 'social learning theory'. This model concerns itself not so much with why we consume, but more how behaviour, including consumer behaviour, spreads through populations. Social learning theory holds that people change by aligning their behaviour to that of their role models, rather than by considering their conduct philosophically, or by reading public education leaflets.

Social learning theory is helpful because it can help us understand why some ideas and practices spread exponentially with virtually no promotional activity on the part of government or institutions, whilst other practices persist stubbornly, despite mass attempts to reduce or eliminate them.

Illustrations of this phenomenon include, for example, the huge post war decline of consumption of full fat milk, butter and lard in favour of healthier alternatives, which happened in the absence of any kind of major promotion on the part of a Health Education Council or similar organisations. On the other side of the coin, organisations campaigning against smacking, such as Barnardos and the NSPCC, despite energetic campaigning, continue to fail to significantly alter public attitudes to smacking – with one office for national statistics poll showing 88% of respondents agreed that it was sometimes necessary to smack a naughty child, with only 8% disagreeing.[21]

Yet we do know that public influencing campaigns can have significant effects, as the experience with fire alarms, drink driving and smoking have shown. Social learning theory helps show us how public education campaigns can help to alter public behaviour - if and when it is integrated into social networks.

Influencing techniques based on social learning theory have been mostly applied in situations where behaviour is demonstrably anti-social (e.g. juvenile delinquency), rather than where consumers are being encouraged to make modest behavioural changes. Nonetheless, it seems a promising candidate for wider application to environmental goals.

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[21] Office for National Statistics, Department of Health Omnibus survey (1998). Interestingly, children's rights campaigners argue that other countries which have made physical punishment of children illegal (such as Sweden) also demonstrated high agreement with smacking in polls, but public opinion, and behaviour shifted following the legislation

Indeed, the Canadian government has recently attempted this, by producing a set of guidelines for altering public behaviour around environmental and health goals, which are grounded in social learning theory. Known as the 'Tools of Change', these guidelines encourage individuals and groups to spread good environmental practices throughout their peer group.[22] The table below illustrates the main elements of the Tools of Change approach:

Planning parameters	Nuts and bolts	Multifaceted approaches
Setting objectives	Building motivation over time	Home visits
Developing partners	Providing feedback	Mass media
Getting informed	Financial incentives and disincentives	Neighbourhood coaches and block leaders
Targeting the audience	Norm appeals	Peer support groups
Choosing tools	Obtaining a commitment	School programmes that involve the family
Financing the programme	Overcoming specific barriers	Word-of-mouth
Measuring achievements	Vivid, personalized communications	Work programmes that influence the home

Spreading the idea virus: influencing behaviour through networks

Social learning theory teaches us that how marketers connect with underlying beliefs is important, but so is the *mechanism* by which a message spreads. Certain attitudes and sympathies can remain dormant until they are activated by an idea or practice becoming more visible and public. For example, some commentators suggest that those who are already recycling are now waiting for the next set of environmental actions they can take, but until these opportunities become visible, they are unlikely to be seized.[23]

The viral nature of behaviour change has been well described by Malcolm Gladwell who coined the term 'tipping point' to describe the point at which an idea or practise is being transmitted to more than one person at each transaction. He uses it to explain how small, or even imperceptible alterations in the environment can initiate changes in behaviour. For

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[22] www.toolsofchange.com

[23] Flisi, C. (2001) 'Strange Bedfellows: Advertising and the Green Consumer', International Herald Tribune.

example, removing the graffiti from the New York subway could be seen as a tipping point in the decline of crime in New York.[24]

Such thinking challenges the 'billiard ball' conceptualisation of public opinion and behaviour, whereby citizens respond neatly to series of interventions, as a ball does to a well-placed cue shot. Rather, the process of influencing becomes much more about managing, cultivating and spreading change.

Key to this process is identifying the intermediaries or 'network hubs' able to influence others to change behaviour. Seth Godin, author of *Unleashing the Idea Virus* refers to such people as 'sneezers'. He insists that "Sneezers are at the core if any ideavirus. Sneezers are the ones who when they tell ten or twenty people – people *believe* them."[25]

A similar argument is made by the market research company Opinion Leader Research (OLR) in a recent paper on "the new persuaders". OLR argues that the decline of trust in authority, and an upsurge in media presenting alternative viewpoints, have made people more likely to turn to trusted intermediaries to help shape their opinions and behaviour.[26] They suggest that influence now revolves around the interactions of two personality types: *protagonists* and *perceivers*.

Protagonists are:
- Skilled friendship makers and know a wider variety of people;
- Skilled at maintaining their friends and acquaintances;
- Persuasive people, good at encouraging others to adopt their point of view;
- Good information gatherers, skilled at absorbing information and news.

Perceivers are:
- The majority in any group and society;
- More likely to listen to the ideas of others;
- Hold onto positive or negative opinions for longer periods of time;
- Can make an idea become more powerful by zealously pursuing a brand or idea.

[24] Gladwell, M. (2002) *The Tipping Point*, London, Abacus

[25] Godin, S. (2002) *The Idea Virus*, New York, Simon and Schuster

[26] The New Persuaders (2003) Opinion Leader Research, London

For any organisation – including government – to communicate successfully, it must influence and engage with protagonists. These are the people who will ensure that ideas are carried and circulated through the wider communities.

Moving beyond the marketing literature, there are some rich insights that can be applied to this discussion from the field of network theory. Network theory is based on a set of observations that seem to hold true for a large number of complex systems. These might be computers in a network, cells in an organism, grains in a pile of sand, electrons in a piece of conducting material or people walking over a bridge.

It was the mathematician Mitchell Feigenbaum who observed that by knowing the most basic facts about one system, he could predict what could and could not happen within one system without detailed information about it. While less work has been carried out on complex social and organisational systems, there is good reason to believe that some rules of network theory hold true for these kinds of systems as well.

Within all networks, the inter-relationships between members are at least as important as the actual members themselves. Network theory always asks about the links; what matters in a network is each person's degree of connectivity, rather than, for example, their status. Rather than asking people how they feel, or what they do, network theorists are interested in how they interact.

It follows from the importance attached to inter-relationships that networks are seen to add up to more than the sum of their parts. *Emergence* is a term that has been used to describe networks where low-level rules can translate cumulatively to higher level sophistication, without any apparent leadership, direction or co-ordination. A classic example of emergence is that of the ant colony. The key to a colony's success lies in the fact that each individual ant does not have to do or indeed understand much. Instead they pay attention to their neighbours (rather than waiting for orders) to decide what to do next. As a result, colonies successfully feed and protect themselves, evolving systems as complex as waste collection and burial sites. In other words, 'local information can lead to global wisdom'.[27]

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[27] Deborah Gordon, quoted in S. Johnson (2001), *Emergence,* London, Penguin

How can we map the different 'parts' of a network? In fact, there are only two key 'parts' – nodes and links; it is the way in which they inter-relate that really makes a difference. *Nodes* are the number of 'points' in a network. *Links* are the connections that join the nodes together. In order to be part of a network every node needs at least one link.
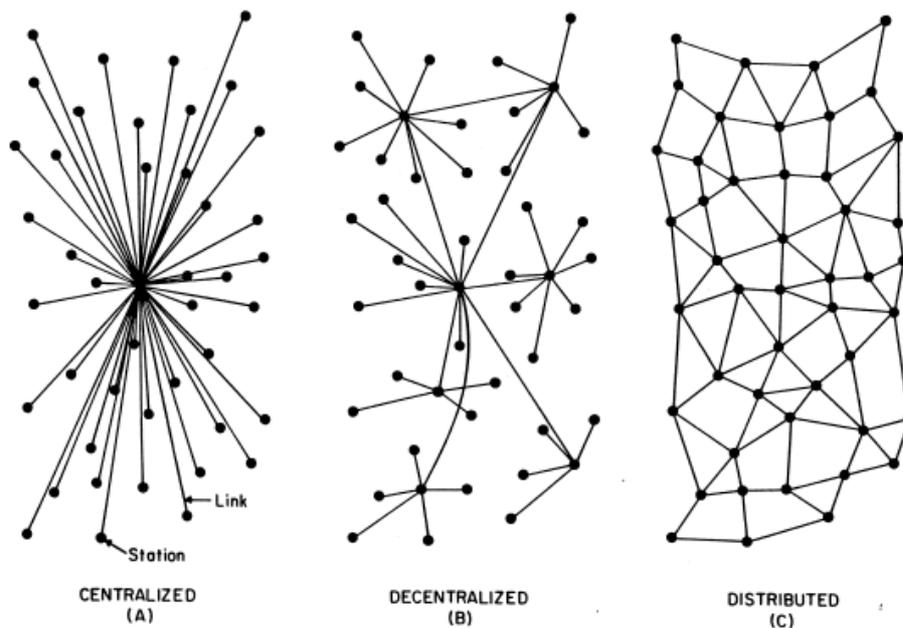
FIG. I — Centralized, Decentralized and Distributed Networks

The diagram above is from Paul Baran's original paper on the design of the internet. Each diagram contains identical nodes ('stations' in his terminology) but has very different properties because of the arrangement of the links on the diagram. Baran's aim was to design a network capable of withstanding nuclear attack, one that would remain operational even if a high proportion of nodes or links were removed at random. The network configuration most suited to this purpose is the distributed one on the right, which has a high network *resilience*: even if 50% of the nodes were removed, this network would be able to operate.

Network theorists have argued that many human networks more closely resemble the middle model. Albert-Lazslo and Barabasi argued that this was due to the *rule of preferential attachment* – the 'rich get richer' effect. Once a node has slightly greater access to the resources of a network (i.e. a few more links than other nodes), it becomes an attractive place for a new node joining the network to connect with, which in turn leads to the well-connected node gaining an even greater advantage.

It's easy to see the relevance of this theory to human organisation, and to the challenge of influencing public behaviour. Hubs are people who become the gathering and sharing point for critical information: Godin's 'sneezers' or OLR's 'protagonists'. These people are critical to keeping the flow of information going around a network. As in Baran's diagram, they have links to many different people across the network, reflecting the high levels of trust they command. Hubs often become the main communication channel between people.

For an public influencing strategy to be effective, it has to find a way of reaching these network hubs or intermediaries. In chapter two, we discuss how this challenged can be applied to changing public behaviour towards environmental goals, and explore whether changing environment-related behaviour presents some unique challenges.

2.   Public behaviour and the environment

Environmental goals present a tough communications challenge. They are often based on complex or uncertain science, and they tend to require long-term, collective actions.

The environment also suffers from a perceived gap between problems and solutions. In one recent survey, 73% of people said that they were more aware of environmental problems than of solutions.[28] The social theorist Ulrich Beck has termed this phenomenon 'industrial fatalism': citizens are unable to explain or understand many invisible environmental problems, or identify their perpetrators. The defence mechanism against such uncertainty is simply to ignore the problems.[29]

The balance between individual and collective benefits is also complicated. Giving up smoking may be difficult, but there are clear benefits to the individual in doing so. By contrast, recycling household waste does not benefit the individual directly, except, perhaps, by generating a general feelgood factor. Most of the benefit accrues at the collective level

Yet even at the collective level, most people fail to recognise that their individual actions make a difference. In her recent study of green consumerism, Wendy Gordon contrasts the 'circle of concern' – issues that worry or concern people - with the 'circle of influence' – the ability of the individual to influence events. Environmental problems are perceived to be within the circle of concern, but not the circle of influence.[30]

Despite the massive surge in awareness over the past fifteen years, the environment is still far from being a mainstream issue. Politicians and the media – especially the tabloid press - discuss environmental issues only rarely. It hardly ever features in television dramas or chat shows. As a result, few people feel a real sense of urgency, or an imperative to take action. Ian Christie and Diane Warburton describe the invisibility of the environment in much public discourse: "Our politics and media largely fail to give voice

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[28] Eurobarometer (2002) *The attitude of Europeans towards the environment*. Brussels, European Commission

[29] Beck, D. (1995) *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* London, Polity Press.

[30] Gordon, W. (2002) *Brand green: Mainstream or forever niche?* London, Green Alliance

to these ideas... politicians are unlikely to be good at asking fundamental questions about the purpose of growth and consumption."[31]

Evidence suggests that feelings about a lack of real personal influence over environmental problems is even more pronounced in disadvantaged groups. Asked in focus groups which environmental issues concerned them, participants from disadvantaged communities "were largely unfamiliar with the language of environmentalism", "[their] environmental concerns focused on the impact of local problems on health and well-being". The study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation concludes that environmental issues must be connected firmly to people's everyday lives, if they are to motivate and inspire.[32]

It may be that the all-encompassing nature of 'sustainable development' makes communication of environmental issues more difficult. The lack of public engagement in the recent Johannesburg summit is a case in point – environmental group WWF reported a 'sad lack of interest' in the summit from the general public, because of the broadness and lack of immediate relevance of the issues at stake.[33] This points to the need to communicate in small, manageable, relevant chunks, rather than selling an entire world-view.

It could be argued that 'sustainable consumption' is a more manageable concept to communicate than 'sustainable development'. This is also where individuals have the most impact through behaviours such as ethical purchasing, altering the use of a product to save energy or pollution, and recycling or reusing. Sustainable consumption also has a familiar precedent in the idea of 'waste not want not', and the rationing mentality of the war and post war years.

However, sustainable consumption remains difficult to communicate because experts can't agree what 'sustainable consumption' means; consuming responsibly, consuming less or consuming differently[34].

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[31] Christie, I. & Warburton D (2001) *From Here to Sustainability: Politics in the Real World*, London, Earthscan

[32] Burningham, K and Thrush, D, *Rainforests are a long way from here: The environmental concerns of disadvantaged groups*, 2001, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

[33] WWF in evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee report on 'UK Preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development', third report, 2002

[34] Jackson, T. and L. Michaelis (2003). Policies for Sustainable Consumption. London, Sustainable Development Commission.

There are also huge vested interests at work, perhaps preventing the real case to be stated.

All these factors make environmental issues, and sustainable consumption issues and their solutions difficult to communicate.

However, it is certainly true that awareness and endorsement of the need to conserve the natural world and reduce the risk of natural disasters such as climate change is high amongst the general population, as demonstrated in high membership of organisations such as WWF and Greenpeace. A key challenge is bridging the gulf between high levels of public agreement on conservation issues, and the low priority accorded to environmental concerns in personal lifestyle decisions.

Worlds apart: awareness and action

Surveys consistently show that people are willing to change their behaviour to limit environmental damage. For example, a UNEP survey of 700 global consumers, found that 83% thought 'all of society' should be responsible for changing consumption patterns and promoting sustainability, closely followed by governments (76%) and business (70%). The same survey showed that most consumers (and particularly those in the middle to upper income groups) would support initiatives to change their consumption patterns.[35]

However, the attitudes expressed in surveys do not necessarily flow through into action. A report from the Co-op Bank in 2000 described the phenomenon by which roughly 30% of consumers claim to care about companies' environmental and social track records, yet only 3% channel these beliefs into their purchasing preferences.[36]

Similarly, a MORI survey in 1999 showed that 25% of domestic electricity customers (representing up to 5.7 million households) would be interested in a green electricity tariff, even if this meant paying a little more to access

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[35] Bentley, M. (2000). 'Consumer trends and expectations: An international survey focusing on environmental impacts' *UNEP Industry and Environment Review*. **23:** p9-11

[36] Cowe, R. & Williams, S. (2000). *Where are the ethical consumers?* The Co-operative Bank

renewable sources.[37] Yet four years after such tariffs became available, their market share remains pitifully low.[38]

Another example from the London Borough of Lambeth further illustrates the difficulty in triggering action, even when the right incentives are in place. Lambeth's Private Landlords Energy Award Scheme (PLEAS) offered landlords 50% grants towards energy efficiency improvements, with interest free loans of up to 25%. Yet uptake remained very low, and the council concluded that although their market research had shown that landlords valued the idea of reducing costs through energy efficiency, this concern was not sufficient to make them willing to pay upfront.[39]

Although there remains a significant gulf between claimed and actual behaviour, ethical purchasing continues to grow. The Ethical Purchasing Index, developed by the Co-operative Bank and New Economics Foundation, has recorded a dramatic increase in the sales of ethical products since its inception in 1999. The market share of organic food is up by 28%. Ethical investment and banking has seen a growth of 30%. Energy efficient household appliances are now becoming the norm, with nearly 60% market share.[40]

These increases are encouraging but not enough. Extending environmental behaviour from the concerned few to the mainstream is the next task of environmental influencing techniques.

Why labelling isn't enough

Eco-labelling is perhaps the best example of a policy which relies on a naive conceptualisation of human behaviour. The assumption is that information drives action, so that an eco-label on a product will be sufficient to change purchasing decisions. However, all the available evidence suggests that this is a false assumption: people do not purchase in a rational, information-seeking way.

This may be why eco-label schemes have been such a failure. Even the most successful scheme, the German 'Blue Angel' label, which has been running

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[37] http://www.mori.com/polls/1999/energy02.shtml

[38] GreenPrice index www.greenprices.com/uk/

[39] Blaza, A. & Horrax, S. (2002) *It's your choice: influencing more sustainable patterns of consumption in the UK*, Imperial College and UNED UK.

[40] The Co-operative Bank/New Economics Foundation (2002) *The Ethical Purchasing Index 2002.* Manchester

for twenty-five years, still only applies to 90 product groups. And five years after a Blue Angel label was introduced for car tyres, only one manufacturer had bothered to qualify for it.[41] The EU-wide eco-label, meanwhile, has been a spectacular failure, as Michael Meacher acknowledged when he was environment minister: "How many people in the street know about it? Despite a lot of debate, take-up Europe-wide has been low. It is not working."[42] Meacher went on to argue that eco-labels will only work if marketing efforts are put into explaining the reasons for the labels – in other words, if we accept that information alone will not drive action.

The same limitations apply to 'on pack' green claims. Although a Green Claims Code now exists to promote best practice in this area, a National Consumer Council survey in 2001 found that 25% of products still failed the code. Recognition and understanding of logos was low, and many claims were still vague and misleading.[43]

Reaching the many

In 1996, a research team at Harvard Business School published an influential paper which argued that conventional marketing techniques rely on a clear perception of individual benefit and are therefore difficult to apply to ethical issues such as the environment.[44] The researchers developed an analytical framework for social marketers that viewed the change being advocated from the potential adopters' perspective. The model categorised challenges in terms of cost of adoption (time, effort and/or resources) and tangibility of benefits, and recommended marketing strategies accordingly.

The paper argues that where action clearly benefits the individual and costs are low, the key success factors are communication and information. This also applies where inaction has clear, individual disbenefits, which explains the success of education campaigns to reduce drink driving or to increase breast-feeding.

However, influencing environmental behaviour tends to fall into the next category, where costs are low but action is not compelling because benefits are generally intangible, and are experienced at the level of society rather

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[41] 'Blue Angel ecolabel scheme turns twenty-five', *Environment Daily* 1455, June 2003

[42] Michael Meacher, speech to SERA sustainable consumption seminar, 21 May 2003

[43] National Consumer Council (1999) *The Green Claims Code: Is it working? Part I: results of the monitoring surveys in the code's first year*. London, National Consumer Council.

[44] Rangan, Karim & Sandberg, 'Do better at doing good', Harvard Business Review, May-June 1996.

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than the individual. Here *convenience* is said to be the key: "Marketers facing these challenges need to focus their efforts on providing a catalyst for change in the form of a convenient way for the target population to comply."[45] This idea is backed up by a recent MORI survey, in which respondents cite benefits such as cheaper 'green' products (36%), better health benefits (44%) and more convenient local recycling facilities (42%) as their main motivators for becoming more environmentally friendly.[46]

It seems clear that convenience is an important precursor to individual action but may not in and of itself act as a sufficient trigger. The potential to move environmental behaviour into the first category – linking it directly to individual benefits, through financial incentives such as variable household waste charges – tends to be under-explored in this context.

Connecting with the heart not the head

Methods of environmental persuasion can take a variety of different forms. NGOs, such as Greenpeace, sometimes bypass traditional channels to spread campaign messages through viral or 'guerilla' marketing tactics. The anti-advertising movement even has its own magazine known as *Adbusters*, which is linked to the 'Culture Jammers Network' who engage in activities such as the subversion of billboards.

These more radical approaches appear to have latched onto something that many marketing experts would recommend: to change behaviour, you need to connect with the heart, and not the head. The benefits of engaging with deeply held beliefs is well illustrated by the '*Don't mess with Texas*' campaign; an initiative designed to tackle the growing litter problem in Texas. The advertisers carried out research which showed that the main culprits - young males – were unlikely to respond to messages about not spoiling the natural environment. Instead, they decided to base the message on state pride, hence the '*Don't mess with Texas*' tagline. Within 12 months, the number of litter incidents plummeted by 29%.[47]

In contemporary marketing, brands are designed to generate and elicit this type of values-based, emotional response. Brands are all about ideas, feelings, aspirations, - not just the products themselves. Those seeking to

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[45] ibid

[46] http://www.mori.com/polls/2001/rd010410.shtml

[47] Fenton Communications (2001) *Now Hear This; The Nine Laws of Successful Advocacy Communications*, Washington DC

promote sustainable consumption need to learn from this. Michael Wilmott of the Future Foundation has developed the idea of 'citizen brands' whereby corporations trade on their broader ethical reputation. Citizen brands might also involve moving away from the manufacture of products to the leasing of services, for example in the home energy market.

As this chapter has shown, although there is rising awareness of environmental issues, there is still a long way to go in communicating the benefits of environmentally-beneficial behaviour in ways that connect at an emotional level. Policy makers and campaigners need a more sophisticated understanding of how environmental impacts can be 'locked in' to particular lifestyles, and how those lifestyles are most likely to be influenced through peer networks.

The Climate Change Communications Project

What would a new approach to influencing public behaviour look like in practice? An interesting blueprint is contained in a recent report from the 'Climate Change Communications Project', an independent group seeking to engage the public in the development of a low-carbon future.[48] Their proposed campaign has five components:

i) A simple, powerful message, developed in conjunction with NGOs, businesses, scientists and communications professionals;

ii) Delivery of the message through a wide range of channels, including television advertising and TV weather reports; business and NGO messages to their customers and supporters;

iii) A sustained campaign, which does not change the core message, but which could shift in focus over time, for example emphasising problems, then solutions in turn;

iv) Management and coordination from an independent board, with creative independence from government;

v) Explicit links to existing government initiatives on climate change, such as the work of the Energy Saving Trust.

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[48] Calder, F. (2003, forthcoming) *The climate change communications project: a proposal for a new campaign to engage the public in the development of a low-carbon future for the UK*

It is now possible to discern the contours of a new approach. Our draft guidelines, outlined in Chapter 4, suggest that public influencing must be based on a sustained, consistent campaign, going beyond the provision of information. It must engage and motivate, by building green brands, involving companies and voluntary organizations, and linking to government policy and legislation.

However, before moving to the guidelines themselves, the next chapter details three case studies, which illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to public influencing. The case studies are based on a combination of desk research and in-depth interviews.

3. Three case studies

3.1 Environmental awareness campaigns

Interviewees
Bob Ryder, Head of Environment, Business and Consumers Division, Defra
Charles Harkness, Marketing Unit, Environmental Protection, Defra
Kelly Freeman, Head of Communications, Defra
Mike Porter, Communications Manager, Defra
George Burgess, Head of Sustainable Development, Scottish Executive
Paul Morrissey, Department of Environment, Irish Government

The most ambitious environmental awareness campaigns of recent years – the UK-wide *'Are you doing your bit?'* (AYDYB) and the Scottish Executive's *'Do a little, change a lot'* are now on hold. The reasons for their discontinuation differ: AYDYB was suspended due to funding being diverted elsewhere; the Scottish Executive has placed a temporary moratorium on all government advertising due to intense public and media scrutiny of the costs. George Burgess of the Scottish Executive's Sustainable Development Unit admits "there is a perception that government advertising is advertising government".

Meanwhile, in Ireland, the equivalent government campaign *'It's easy to make a difference'* has also been discontinued, and replaced by a narrower campaign focused on building public acceptance for waste management options, including incineration.

The campaigns

'Are you doing your bit?' ran from March 1998 to October 2000, at a total cost of £28.4 million. The box overleaf gives a breakdown of the campaign:

Campaign Strategy	
Preliminary year (1998/99) £3.4m	Educate and inform via press ads Provide incentives – exhaust emission checks
Year 1 (1999/2000) £7m	Inform/motivate via TV, radio and press ads Build national/local partnerships Use roadshow/regional media
Years 2/3 (2000/02) £9m per yr	Motivate using TV/Press/Consumer incentives

The Scottish Executive launched *'Do a little, change a lot'* following devolution, as a successor campaign to AYDYB. It ran for three years at a cost of £900,000. Its aims were the same: to raise awareness, and translate this into action. However, in contrast to AYDYB the scheme prioritised tracking research on behavioural change (not simply awareness).

Awareness into action?

An internal Defra review of AYDYB concluded that it had created a strong campaign brand and succeeded in raising awareness, but that "personal motivation to act appeared less strong and there had only been small changes in consumer attitude or behaviour."[49] Nine in ten people surveyed said they already carried out the actions promoted, and only two in ten felt that they were motivated to do anything more by the campaign.

This gap between environmental awareness and personal action is acknowledged in the original rationale for AYDYB, but raising awareness

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[49] Defra (2003) Development of the UK's campaign to stimulate public action to protect the environment (March 1998 – October 2000), (unpublished)

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was still made a primary goal. Surveys conducted prior to AYDYB found that 87 per cent of the public were "concerned", and yet "the challenge faced by the campaign was how to make people care."

Tracking research following the Scottish Executive's campaign in September 2002 found there was "not a very strong evidence of change of behaviour linked to the advert campaign." [50] This led to the conclusion that "while professed concern about the environment may be increasing on the macro level, it does not feature highly on the agenda as far as personal behaviour is concerned. It is more convenient to feign ignorance…than actually to change one's behaviour." Those who had seen the most recent TV advert were just as likely to agree that they were "unsure of what lifestyle changes they could make to help the environment" as those who had not. [51]

The conclusion to be drawn from both is that information-based advertising campaigns can have only a limited impact on public behaviour. The question of what would be more effective has been at the heart of the current review: "DETR was focussing on simple actions where legislation was not practical and promoting a range of good habits rather than products that are widely available in stores. To be successful and change behaviour DETR needed to change attitudes first, overcoming inertia, apathy and consumer reluctance to take action, unless it's cheap, easy and convenient and there is a personal benefit."[52]

An assumption made by the campaign was that information-based coaxing was the main alternative to legislation. As a result, it did not address issues of price and convenience, and neither did it take account of the shortcomings of information-based advertising. The campaign also ran on the basis that awareness would lead to action, when this is rarely the case.

Recognising this problem, the Scottish Executive ran a series of focus group to identify triggers to action around energy efficiency and waste reduction. Participants made it clear that helping to save the planet by switching off lights has some appeal, but is unlikely to act as a strong driver to consistent action. The simultaneous opportunity to save money is more likely to make people take notice – participants were struck by a poster that compared the

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[50] Survey on Environmental Issues in Scotland, System Three, September 2002
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/environment/surveyenv02.pdf
[51] ibid

[52] Defra (2003) Development of the UK's campaign to stimulate public action to protect the environment (March 1998 – October 2000), (unpublished)

costs of keeping a TV switched on all year to keeping it on standby (few had realised that standby mode consumes only marginally less energy).

Focus group participants also stressed the difficulty of responding to recycling messages for those who live in flats, or several miles from recycling facilities. In the recent *Survey of Public Attitudes to the Environment in Scotland*, 88 per cent of those surveyed said they would recycle paper, 85 per cent glass and 79 per cent cans, if this was made convenient through a doorstep collection service.[53] Similarly, an Environment Agency survey for England in 2002 found that 9 out of 10 people would recycle more waste if it were made easier.[54]

The importance of cost and convenience is well known to social marketers, but these factors are often downplayed by public influencing campaigns because they require action in policy realms, such as fiscal policy or the development of infrastructure, which are beyond the remit of those running the campaigns.

In AYDYB, the campaign strategy acknowledges that "supporting infrastructure, with clear signals from Government and business that they are leading, is also essential to change consumer attitudes." But the campaign plan of action made no reference to parallel delivery of enabling infrastructure, such as doorstep recycling, or supportive fiscal policies to reduce the cost of energy saving devices. The preliminary year includes the objective of "providing incentives", but these ran no further than the provision of free exhaust checks.

George Burgess, Head of Sustainable Development at the Scottish Executive accepts the need for a more holistic approach to public influencing. "Large scale advertising campaigns do not work in isolation", he says, "they need to be part of a wider package of measures."

The Scottish Executive appears to have taken this into account in its approach to promoting recycling. In common with most schemes, an advertising agency was contracted for the campaign, but the agency in this case, Barkers Advertising, actually had someone based in the Sustainable Development team for two years as campaign manager. This person was

[53] Hinds, K., Carmichael, K. & Snowling, H. (2001) *Public Attitudes to the Environment in Scotland* Scottish Executive National Statistics
[54] Environment Agency press release 23 May 2002

able to liase closely with the waste and climate change teams that were responsible for the delivery of policy relating to the campaign goals.

Partly as a consequence of this, the second TV advert campaign on waste coincided with the launch of the national waste strategy, which assigned £200m to improving local recycling facilities. Due to the variation in recycling facilities across Scotland, the TV advert had to work nationwide and could not, for instance, advise people to take their plastics to a local facility. However, the campaign also involved extensive work with local authorities to develop adverts for local newspapers and radio, which could provide specific details of existing and proposed local facilities.

Tracking research undertaken after the three waves of the Scottish campaign generally found raised awareness but little evidence of behaviour change. The exception to this was the waste awareness work, which led to a discernible rise in recycling levels. The survey found that "in line with increased access to facilities, there has been a commensurate increase in the percentage recycling any household waste to 70 per cent. In addition to new recruits to recycling, others are becoming more active in the range of waste materials which they recycle." The researchers concluded that "availability of facilities for recycling is a major influence on participation in such activity." Further facilities will come on stream over the next two years, and the Scottish Executive plans to work with local authorities to further publicise local recycling opportunities.

The review of AYDYB draws out several lessons, but fails to indicate which of these are most significant. The principles that "infrastructure must be available", and "consumer incentives are an important way of stimulating individual action", are acknowledged; but they are also preceded by a re-statement of the mantra that "to stimulate action, attitudes must be changed first."

In the past, DETR/Defra has perhaps placed too much faith in the idea that information drives action. Ministers and policy teams have decided the overall objectives of marketing campaigns, and have then left delivery to marketing agencies. There has been too little integration of communication and policy, to ensure that government is seen to be playing its full part.

Greater efforts should be made to emphasise potential cost savings. Building on the messages coming out of their focus groups, the Scottish Executive plans to emphasise in future campaigns the financial incentives for action on

energy efficiency. The hope is that the feel-good factor generated will transfer over into action on recycling, where there is currently no financial incentive.

The potential for financial incentives in areas such as recycling, for example through variable household charges, should be explored further. Such measures can act as a guarantee of collective action and environmental effectiveness, addressing key barriers to individual action. The popular support for the plastic bag levy in Ireland (discussed in the next case study) suggests that the public may in fact welcome the imposition of a strong financial sanction against inaction, perhaps because this guarantees that individuals are not acting alone, and that a better overall environmental outcome will be secured.

This argument could be extended further, to suggest that government should only consider running an information campaign if it can offer some additional policy solutions alongside it. Without those additional policies, there is little point in the campaign. Awareness-raising reinforces other policies; it will have little impact in its own right.

In conclusion, the reasons for low rates of public response to environmental awareness campaigns - however well marketed - are increasingly accepted. Awareness will only trigger action if upfront costs are not prohibitive, supporting infrastructure is in place, and there is some guarantee that the majority cannot continue to free ride on the individual sacrifices of a few. The new toolkit for public influencing should include enabling facilities, and financial sanctions as well as incentives.

3.2   Plastic bags

> *Interviewees*
> Paul Morrissey, Environmental Awareness division, Department of
> Environment, Irish Government
> Mary O'Keefe, Waste Management Division, Department of Environment,
> Irish Government
> Eleanor Ashton, Clean up Australia

Plastic bags are a highly visible form of litter. UK consumers use an estimated 8 billion plastic shopping bags each year, and most are discarded as waste after a single use. Less than one per cent are returned or recycled.

Initiatives in the Republic of Ireland and Australia over the past decade have attempted to encourage the public to reduce, re-use and recycle plastic bags. Following a recent analysis of these initiatives, the two governments arrived at very different strategies for tackling the problem in future. In March 2002, the Irish Government imposed a point-of-sale levy on plastic bags. In December 2002, the Australian Federal Government launched a new education campaign to persuade shoppers to stop using plastic bags. This case study considers what can be learned from both approaches.

Australia

The Australian Minister for the Environment and Heritage, David Kemp recently argued that "In terms of recycling and general waste management, Australia is way ahead of Ireland which this year introduced a levy on plastic bags." He went on to argue that Australians respond well to recycling when they have the facilities to do it, which is why voluntary initiatives are likely to be much more successful there than in some countries.

Plastic bag recycling facilities are widely available in Australian cities. Many local councils, environment groups and some retailers have promoted the use of alternatives such as calico bags, as well as highlighting the impacts of plastic bags on aquatic life through graphic imagery. In November 2001, the first nationally based plastic bag campaign was implemented by Clean Up Australia in partnership with the Australian Retailers Association, Environment Australia, Coles and Woolworths. The *'Bag Yourself a Better Environment'* campaign ran for a week and involved calico bag promotions, plastic-bag-free lanes in supermarkets and a website giving tips.

The federal government decided to sponsor *Bag Yourself A Better Environment* to run for a second month in March 2003. The theme this time was encouraging people to "Refuse, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle" their plastic bags. Local government was heavily involved. For example, Wollongong Council ran a successful promotion, offering to exchange 20 or more plastic bags for a free calico bag. On the first day, the council received over 1,200 plastic bags.

The campaign – both in 2001 and 2003 - achieved short-term increases in recycling and the use of alternatives. Yet according to survey data collected by Clean Up Australia, although 92 per cent indicated that the effects of plastic bags on wildlife was a major concern, the majority of respondents indicated that they were still unlikely to use an alternative (72 per cent), reuse a bag (63 per cent) or recycle a bag (64 per cent). The latest figures suggest that only around 1 per cent of Australia's plastic bags are currently being recycled.

In 2002, the Federal Government commissioned a study of the options for reducing plastic bag use, and set up a National Working Group on plastic bags. The Working Group noted that there have been numerous plastic bags campaigns, which have been "effective in raising the community's awareness that plastic bags can be harmful to the environment and have encouraged a small percentage of consumers to change their behaviour."[55] The consultants evaluated other policy options pursued internationally, and concluded that a mandatory levy was the most effective option.

On the day that the Irish levy came into force, the Australian NGO Planet Ark launched a major campaign for an Australian levy, on the grounds that a financial incentive is essential for changing attitudes to plastic bags. This campaign has been successful in raising public awareness, and has enjoyed widespread media coverage. A recent survey identified that eight out of ten Australians now support a levy on plastic bags.

Ireland

In Ireland, plastic shopping bags have long been a cause of public concern, They were a visible problem in rural environments with an impact on tourism, Ireland's second largest industry. An estimated 1.28 billion plastic

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[55] National Plastic Bags Working Group (2002) *Report to the National Packaging Covenant Council*, December 2002

shopping bags (325 bags per person) were consumed annually, at a cost to retailers of $50 million. However, the recycling rate was below 0.5 per cent.

A consultancy study commissioned by the government in 2001 noted that: "While efforts have been made over recent years by many retailers to encourage the use of alternatives to free plastic shopping bag, these have not been particularly successful to date - mainly due, it would seem, to consumer apathy."[56] Opportunities for recycling plastic bags are limited, owing to a lack of infrastructure for collection and processing.

The consultancy study recommended a levy, and in 2001 the Waste Management (Environmental Levy Plastic Bag) Regulations were brought into effect, levying all plastic bags with a charge of €0.15. This levy is imposed at the point of sale, and retailers are legally obliged to pass it on directly to the customer. This contrasts with Denmark, where the 1994 plastic bag tax is included in the price of bags to the retailer, so is less obvious to consumers.

The Irish levy, or "PlasTax", has been a phenomenal success, leading to a 90 per cent reduction in the consumption of plastic bags.[57] It is important to note the relatively high level of tax. The intent appears effectively to ban plastic bags, without eliminating them as an option altogether.

To accompany the introduction of the PlasTax, the Irish Government launched a comprehensive education campaign. Pamphlets were sent to every household outlining why the levy was being introduced, and how consumers could avoid the levy by using reusable bags. Retailers were given leaflets to publicise the measure. Revenue generated by the PlasTax is also earmarked for an Environmental Fund, which will be used to support waste management and other environmental initiatives. The fund is expected to be worth around €55 million in 2003.[58]

A TV and billboard campaign was launched just before the levy came in to force. The TV advertisement, which was shown on all Irish channels, featured a long-haired dog surrounded by a storm of plastic bag litter. It ran for a month, and was complemented by an outdoor poster campaign, also featuring the dog.

[56] Ref?

[57] Department of the Environment, press release, August 2002

[58] ENDS Environment Daily, 15 July 2003

According to Mary O'Keefe of the Waste Division, "Nobody complained about it. People only complained about retailers not enforcing it properly." After the levy announcement Tesco Ireland's environmental manager, Jim Dwyer, was reported as saying: "Customers are telling us they broadly welcome the introduction of the levy. We have seen a…significant increase in sales of our re-usable bags."

A report on the PlasTax by Nolan ITU noted that: "According to both the Department of the Environment and retailers, there has been a high level of understanding and acceptance of the PlasTax; both attribute this in part to the education campaign that occurred prior to its introduction. Retailers commented that they encountered little difficulty with customer resistance or lack of understanding."[59]

The Irish experience suggests that fiscal incentives, allied to effective public education, create a powerful combination that is genuinely capable of shifting public behaviour. The most recent survey found that 91 per cent of the population believes that the PlasTax was a good idea.[60] According to Paul Morrissey of the Environmental Awareness team, "this shows that the public may be unwilling to take action for the greater public good unless there is some form of financial incentive or punishment."

Following the success of the levy, the Irish government is now exploring similar measures in other areas. Opinion polls seem to suggest there are significant levels of public support, notably for a levy on chewing gum (42 per cent in favour), household waste (27 per cent in favour), and plastic water bottles (26 per cent in favour). Most recently, Irish environment minister Martin Cullen has announced plans to introduce a tax on polystyrene fast food packaging, which often litters the streets: "My plan is to end polystyrene. If companies are slow in doing so, I will use a levy to bring about the changeover."[61]

In the wake of the Irish success, there are also signs that UK public opinion is shifting on this issue. A MORI poll carried out in February 2003 showed that 63% of consumers support the idea of paying a 10 pence levy on plastic bags, with only 27% actively opposed.[62]

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[59] NOLAN-ITU (2002) *Plastic Shopping Bags – Analysis of Levies and Environmental Impacts*, Final Report, December 2002

[60] [ref?] Attitude and Action survey 2003 (unpublished)

[61] ENDS Environment Daily, 15 July 2003

[62] www.mori.com/polls/2003/meb1.shtml

3.3   Five-a-day

Interviewees
Katy Tappar, Bangor University
Jane Wardle, Health Behaviour Unit, University College London
Sheela Reddy, Department of Health
Jeanette Longfield, Sustain

According to the British Heart Foundation, nearly half of all deaths from coronary heart disease in Britain are due to raised cholesterol.[63] Poor diets are also a contributing factor to around a third of all cancer cases.[64] Yet diets in the UK are getting worse, not better. The rise of obesity amongst children is particularly worrying, with 22% of children now classified as obese, a figure which has more than doubled in the past thirty years.[65]

Despite these shock statistics, awareness of specific links between diet and disease is not particularly high amongst the general public. As the Health Behaviour Unit at Cancer Research UK observes: "People are unaware that different cancers have different causes and outcomes, they are ignorant about recommendations to increase fruit and vegetable intake, or the hypothesised role of diet in cancer."[66] Similarly, a recent survey by the British Heart Foundation found that "losing eyesight" (27%) topped people's fears of growing older, with only 9% citing "too high cholesterol", despite the latter being a far greater risk.[67]

Although many people have a general sense that they would like to eat more healthily, or lose weight, the evidence is that a well balanced diet is far from the norm for British people. The National Diet and Nutrition Survey found that only 13% of men and 15% of women ate five or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Average daily consumption among adults was around only 3 portions.[68] Like smoking patterns, there is a considerable social

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[63] British Heart Foundation. www.bhf.org.uk

64 Doll R and Peto R (1981). The Causes of Cancer: Quantitative Estimates of Avoidable Risks of Cancer in the United States Today. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

.[65] Chinn, S & Rona, R (2000) 'Prevalence and trends in overweight and obesity in three cross sectional studies of British children 1974 –1994' *British Medical Journal* 322, pp24-26

[66] Cancer Research UK, Health Behaviour Unit website http://science.cancerresearchuk.org/

[67] British Heart Foundation press release, June 17 2003

[68] The National Diet and Nutrition Survey, 2001, available on the Food Standard Agency's website www.foodstandards.gov.uk

divide between rich and poor, with the less affluence being much more likely to have poorer diets.

It is widely recognised that increasing fruit and vegetable intake could dramatically reduce the incidence of many serious diseases and lead to corresponding savings within the NHS. The government's 'Five a day' campaign is an effort to encourage consumers to increase their fruit and vegetable intake to at least five portions a day. The campaign has a historical precedent, with a number of large charities in the UK having campaigned on this issue for a number of years.

The five a day programme is managed by the Department of Health and incorporates five strands:

- A national free fruit scheme for primary school children;
- Local five-a-day initiatives funded by the New Opportunities Fund to improve access to fruit and vegetables, especially amongst low income groups;
- National and local partners amongst government, health and consumer groups;
- A communications programme including a five-a-day logo for use on products and promotional material;
- Work with industry: food producers, caterers and retailers.

Strengths of the scheme

There is evidence that the five-a-day message has increased people's awareness of the importance of healthy eating. The Food Standards Agency's 2002 survey of consumer attitudes found that 52% of respondents were aware of the five-a-day message, compared with only 43% in 2000. The highest levels of awareness were found amongst people in the A or B socio-economic groups (70% in 2002) and the lowest amongst people in social groups D or E (39% in 2002).

There are various reasons for the relatively high awareness of the five a day message. One of our interviewees pointed out the strong historical precedent of fruit and vegetable promotion including 'eat your greens', and 'an apple a day keeps the doctor away' (though she also pointed out the problem that the apple a day message implies only one a day is sufficient). The longevity of the message has helped cement the association between 'healthiness' and fruit and vegetables in a way that is not always the case in other communications based on complex science.

Also helpful is the fact that the message is not owned by any one group. Health charities, food manufacturers and retailers are all involved in promoting it, which means that consumers are likely to experience repetition of the message in a number of different contexts. Government can then take on the role of clarifying the message, rather than having to legitimise it. So, the Department of Health sometimes intervenes to clear up misinterpretations, such as whether potatoes or orange juice count towards the five a day goal.

How far this general awareness is being translated into behaviour change is yet to be seen. The only evaluation to be published so far is of local schemes, funded by the New Opportunities Fund, aimed at improving access to fruit and vegetables in a local area. Based on only a year's data, this evaluation shows that the local initiatives did counteract the national trend towards a fall in fruit and vegetable intakes. 35% of people living in the target areas reported that their access to fruit and vegetables had improved, compared to only 21% living in the control areas. The schemes were most significant amongst those with the lowest intakes, who were shown to have increased their intake by one portion.[69]

The free fruit in schools campaign has not yet been officially evaluated. However, the general evidence is that it has been well received in schools, especially by teachers who choose to incorporate the scheme into their teaching. It is not yet clear how the scheme is impacting on children's wider diets. However, a related scheme run by Sustain, the sustainable food charity, found some evidence that wider availability of fruit in schools was displacing unhealthier snacks such as crisps.[70]

Five-a-day promotional material tends to focus on the variety of colours, textures and ways to cook vegetables and fruit, and avoids preachy messages about the dangers of unhealthy eating. This is important for children, who can find it impossible to relate to long-term message about disease prevention. Indeed, some studies have shown that telling children that a food is 'healthy' may even reduce their acceptance of that food.[71] As one

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[69] Department of Health (2002) Five a day Community Pilot Initiatives: Key findings, November 2002

70 Summary of the Grab 5! Evaluation report, November 2002, Sustain, London

71 Gibson, E.L., Wardle, J. & Watts, C.J. (1998) *Fruit and vegetable consumption, nutritional knowledge and beliefs in mothers and children.* Appetite 31, 205-228. and Wardle J., Cooke

commentator said in our interviews: "Health promoters were just so relieved about having something positive to say. For years they've been saying don't do this, or have this, and now the message is eat it all!"

Weaknesses of the scheme

The most widely reported weakness of the scheme relates to misleading claims by food manufacturers and retailers.[72] For example, Heinz promotes about 70 products under the banner of "five-a-day the Heinz way", including unusual 'vegetables' such as tinned spaghetti. Other misleading claims have been made about soup, and even ice cream. There have been problems in using existing trading standards rules to prevent such misleading claims. Part of the problem stemmed from timing complications. The development of the official five-a-day logo, and the criteria for using it, took longer than expected. By the time it was launched, industry only schemes, such as Sainsbury's 'Way to Five', were already established. Even now, some retailers have withdrawn support from the scheme because of disputes over permitted levels of salt and sugar. All of this runs the danger of confusing consumers with mixed messages. Indeed, 79% of respondents in a recent survey incorrectly believed that a jacket potato should count toward their daily intake of fruit and vegetables.[73]

Potentially more damaging than a few wild claims is the threat of overload from rival schemes. The Dairy Council are now preparing their 3-a-day scheme for dairy products, and Cancer Research is promoting its 'Red Amber Green' rule for fruit and vegetable choice. The worry is that too many schemes may turn off consumers from message altogether.

In fact, the five-a-day message, although very positive, may be difficult to embed in sustainable behaviour change because it is based on a 'resolution' model of behaviour change. Aiming to achieve five-a-day is psychologically similar to other resolutions, such as diets, which are notoriously difficult to maintain.

As we have highlighted earlier, the most effective route for influencing behaviour, is in fact through peer influence and imitation. In the context of

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L.J., Gibson, et al. (2002) *Increasing children's acceptance of vegetables: a randomised trial of guidance to parents.* Appetite 38, 1-9.

[72] See for example *The Guardian* '5 a day fruit and veg plan revamped', James Meikle, 11 January 2003

[73] 'Statistics on public awareness of the 5 a day message and attitudes to the consumption of fruit and vegetables' Department of Health, January 2003 Press Release

food consumption, this principle is reinforced by the work being undertaken at Bangor Food Research Unit (BFRU) with primary school children.[74] As Katy Tapper from the unit says: "Instead of attempting to change knowledge about healthy eating, or attitudes towards particular foods, we have focussed on food consumption itself and drawn on principles from social learning theory, developmental psychology and behaviour analysis."[75]

The scheme developed at Bangor – known as 'the food dudes' – uses a system of role modelling, repetition and rewards to achieve behaviour change amongst children. Peer modelling schemes amongst children, whilst expensive, are relatively easy to conduct because of the school environment. Peer modelling schemes amongst adults are much more difficult, and there is as yet no evidence about how the five-a-day scheme is used and interpreted within peer networks.

It is possible that some of the more drastic measures being considered to enforce healthy eating, such as the imposition of a 'fat tax' or legal action against junk food retailers, may stem from our desire to establish norms of what is and is not acceptable in the social activity of eating. The fact that a debate is now raging in the media about obesity is perhaps an early sign of healthy eating being normalised through peer to peer networks of approval and disapproval. How government can facilitate this, perhaps through reward systems, or identifying effective influencers, is a challenge that we shall return to in the final chapter.

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[74] Lowe, C.F., Horne, P.J., Tapper, K., Bowdery, M. & Egerton, C. (2003, forthcoming) 'Effects of a peer modelling and rewards based intervention to increase fruit and vegetable consumption in children' *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*

[75] Tapper, K., Horne, P.J. & Lowe, C.F. (2003) 'The Food Dudes to the rescue!' *The Psychologist* 16(1), 18-21.

4.   Seven steps towards successful influencing

In this section we synthesise the key conclusions from the literature review and case studies into seven steps that should suggest should be followed in any public influencing campaign:

- Define your objective.
- Make the links across government goals and policies.
- Don't assume that information leads to awareness – or awareness to action.
- Assess the audience and finesse the message.
- Communicate creatively.
- It's all about networks.
- Sustain, build and learn the lessons.

No.1: Define your objective

Public influencing needs to be built in from the beginning, not factored in later on. What is the objective, and how will success be measured? It is at this point that past experience and research should be digested, and further research commissioned as necessary.

Influencing the public is difficult, and is a relatively underdeveloped art, as Chapter 1 shows. 'Public opinion' is actually a febrile mix of divergent views and opinions, not a steady state that can be easily manipulated. As described above, a comprehensive attempt by the Health Development Agency to review the effectiveness of health promotion work, shows that there is no agreed formula for success – and no clear understanding of what works and why. In Chapter 2, we describe the particular difficulties about communicating environmental messages – environmental issues tend to be complex, long-term, and difficult to relate back to individual motivation and action.

This is why it is important to be extremely clear about what the objective of public influencing is – and how you will know if it has been successful. There is a great deal to learn from commercial agencies, who in devising an advertising campaign, will be very clear about the change in behaviour they are trying to bring about.

No. 2: Make the links across government goals and policies

Attempts at public influencing will not work in isolation from wider government goals or policies. Public influencing should be seen as complementary to other policies, not as a strategy in its own right. People need to know that they are not acting in isolation. Information and influencing campaigns will work best when people have a reason to want to know – and government is ideally placed to create that reason, through other policy measures such as taxes or regulation. Conversely, a public influencing campaign will help people to understand the reason for a tax.

The environment is a collective good. People recognise this, and are understandably reluctant to change their behaviour unless they think that others will do likewise. There is an understandable cynicism about free riders. Eurobarometer work has shown that Europeans "favour an active attitude but, at the same time, want their action to be part of a wider solidarity".[76] In practice, this means that public information campaigns to encourage greener behaviour are very unlikely to be effective in isolation, without other government policies to back them up.

Our second case study shows how Irish government attempts at reducing plastic bag use have deliberately included both 'hard' and 'soft' measures – a punitive tax of 0.15 Euros on a bag, accompanied by an influencing campaign which explains the reasons for the charge. Results have been startlingly successful, with strong support for the tax and a 90% reduction in consumption of plastic bags. This example shows how influencing can reinforce legislation, and vice-versa. By comparison, in Australia, concerted efforts at influencing and providing information about the environmental impacts of plastic bags have not been successful in changing behaviour, with the result that an Irish-style levy is now being considered.

In other fields, the necessity of combining public influencing with other instruments is widely acknowledged. Examples cited above include the US Surgeon General's review of anti-smoking methods, which recommends a 'comprehensive approach' combining educational strategies, regulation including controls on advertising, taxation, and interventions by community groups and schools. Similarly, the UK's 'Think!' campaign on road safety has combined strong influencing messages, against drink-driving and speeding, with strict enforcement of the law.

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[76] Eurobarometer (2002) *The attitude of Europeans towards the environment.* Brussels, European Commission

There are other, more practical reasons for linking public influencing to other government policy. People need to have a real choice to make. For example, a campaign to promote recycling will not work unless local authorities have put accessible recycling facilities in place. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation study into the environmental concerns of disadvantaged groups emphasises this point – participants said that they could not recycle waste because facilities were inaccessible. Put simply, people need to know that if they do *their* bit, government will too.

The failure of the UK's *'Are You Doing Your Bit'* campaign to change behaviour may stem from the lack of linkages to other policies, as the first case study above shows. Encouraging 'good' behaviour – like energy efficiency in the home – may only be effective if the correspondingly 'bad' behaviour is tackled, through legislation or fiscal measures. Another shortfall of *'Are You Doing Your Bit'* was its faith in the idea that information drives action. This is rarely the case, as the next guideline shows.

No.3: Don't assume that information leads to awareness – or awareness to action

It is important not to overestimate the power of providing information. Information does not necessarily lead to increased awareness, and increased awareness does not necessarily lead to action. Information provision, whether through advertisements, leaflets or labelling, must be backed up by other approaches.

As we explain in Chapter 1, behaviour does not follow a linear model of behaviour, with information leading to attention, desire for change and then action. In contrast, as authors such as Wendy Gordon assert, decisions are rarely rational or linear, and are more often opportunistic or emotional impulses, based on cultural cues, family, friends, role models and wider trends. Hence the change in commercial advertising from old-style adverts designed to provide information, to modern approaches aimed at building a 'brand'. Government communications need to make this shift too.

The gap between awareness and action seems particularly acute for environmental issues, as Chapter 2 shows. A third of consumers claim to care about companies' policies on environmental and social responsibility, yet the market share of ethical products rarely exceeds 3%. Similarly, a

MORI poll showed that nearly 6 million households were interested in a 'green' energy tariff, even if they would have to pay more, yet the percentage of households buying green tariffs remains tiny.

Similarly, research into *'Are You Doing Your Bit'* shows that the awareness created by the campaign was not translated into action. As the case study of AYDYB shows, awareness is a trigger to action only if costs are not prohibitive, supporting infrastructure is in place to make the action convenient, and there is some guarantee that the majority cannot free-ride on the individual sacrifices of a few.

Product labelling, in particular, has a very limited effect unless linked to other initiatives, as our discussion of eco-labelling suggests. There is a growing understanding that people make decisions with the heart, not the head, relying on sensory cues and brands, not written information. In practice, this means that government should not rely merely on providing information, and expect action to follow – it should look for creative forms of engagement with individuals, as described in guidelines 5 and 6 below.

No. 4: Assess the audience and finesse the message

A single message cannot hope to influence all of the people, all of the time. Who is the message aimed at? Those who are aware, but don't act; or those who have no motivation to change at all? Is the aim to encourage certain behaviour, or to stigmatise the wrong behaviour?

Commercial marketing campaigns always start out with a very specific demographic in mind. They understand that different sorts of people will respond to different messages, and target their campaigns accordingly. Government influencing, by contrast, often attempts to reach a wider group of people and downplays the need to tailor messages to particular audiences.

Friends of the Earth, for example, targets new parents with its 'safer chemicals' campaign, providing material about chemicals in the home for parent-and-baby groups. New parents are particularly receptive to environmental and messages – as the growth in organic baby food has shown. Another example described in this report is the anti-litter *Don't Mess with Texas* campaign, which appealed to young men who were more receptive to messages about state pride than spoiling the natural environment.

Attempts at public influencing should therefore be carefully targeted – at a particular demographic, such as new parents, families or young people; or at people with a particular view – such as those who care about environmental issues but do not know what action to take.

Once the audience has been identified, the influencing strategy should target a clear headline message to communicate. Wherever possible, this should be a simple, powerful message that can be communicated in bite-sized chunks. There is little point in trying to promote a very general message ('be greener') unless this is broken down into simpler, more immediate messages. Where general messages need to be communicated, a hierarchy of messages should be created: an overriding, general message, with simple, specific messages following on. For example, the 'Think!' campaign for road safety promotes a hierarchy of specific actions – wear seatbelts; don't drink drive – under a general banner of road safety awareness.

Environmental problems are often complex and long-term. They need to be broken down into manageable actions. In the Irish example, a complex environmental problem was broken down into a simple campaign and policy – the plastic bag levy. From this simple message, people learned wider truths about the need for waste minimisation.

No. 5: Communicate creatively

Government often relies on conventional communication channels, such as television advertising, but there are other routes that may be more effective. There is no single correct approach, and it will be necessary to experiment with different communication options.

Examples of creative communication include the 'guerilla marketing' approach of UK agency Cake, which painted a whole street red to celebrate Barbie's birthday; the sponsorship of particular programmes – like Volvo's sponsorship of ER; the graffiti gang the TATS crew creating advertising for Coca-Cola; and Greenpeace's protest messaging on city billboards. Government influencing still tends to rely on providing information through advertising, but this is of limited use (see no. 3 above).

The goal of more creative communication models is to create a 'buzz' through word of mouth – far more potent than any direct communication. Hotmail, Blair Witch Project and the iMac all owe their popularity to 'buzz',

according to Emanuel Rosen, author of *The Anatomy of Buzz*.[77] Government needs to recognise this and draw more creatively on the power of buzz.

No. 6: It's all about networks

It is important to understand how behaviour spreads through conversations, social learning and peer group networks. The initial communication needs to get people talking, and inspire curiosity, so that the message spreads. A message may be best delivered not by government itself, but by intermediaries: the Womens' Institute, the National Childbirth Trust, supermarkets, soap operas, opinion-leaders. If intermediaries are used, government must be prepared to let go, and allow the message be developed and interpreted by others. Key to this process will be the network 'hubs': what Seth Godin calls the "sneezers" who spread the "idea virus", or the minority of network leaders that Opinion Leader Research define as "protagonists".

Organisations as well as individuals can act as network hubs. The 'five-a-day' fruit and vegetables campaign shows the strength of persuasion through partnerships. By involving voluntary groups, schools and supermarkets, the message has been carried far wider than a straightforward advertising campaign would have achieved. The legitimacy of the message is increased, as well, as using intermediaries increases trust and lessens the sense of government 'preaching' to citizens. It also allows influencing to happen at each point in the decision-making process: awareness-raising is reinforced by supermarket promotions; the reasons behind providing free fruit in schools are explained in lessons.

Parenting education is another example of successful persuasion through partnership. Government is not seen as an honest broker of advice, as shown by the relatively low uptake of parenting education programmes - only about 4% in 1994/5[78].   So the new Parenting Fund announced in the 2002 spending review will be delivered by the voluntary sector, not government. Sure Start is a government-funded initiative which delivers parenting education by integrating courses (such as nutritional advice), into existing childcare or health care services. Sure Start is also innovative because of the way the schemes involve the users in governance of the programmes. Early

[77] Emanuel, R (2000) The Anatomy of Buzz: Using Invisible Networks to Spread the Word About Your Product, HarperCollins Business

[78] Family Change: Guide to the issues, February 2000Family Briefing Paper 12
Family Policy Studies Centre

indications are that parents value the many different services provided by the programmes.[79]

In the environmental field, the UN Environment Programme recommends the use of third party input to policy delivery for sustainable consumption. [80] Those that stand to benefit directly from a proposed change should help to influence. For example, a tram company has the most to gain by commuters leaving their cars at home, so they should take at least some responsibility for communicating the message. In parcelling out responsibility in this way, governments can create a 'virtuous cycle of responsibility', where small and at least partly self-interested actions by one agent, can contribute to an overall momentum for change. On this basis, UNEP has proposed the development of national policy coalitions to promote production and consumption, which do not necessarily rely on the government for intervention and delivery.

No.7: Sustain, build, and learn the lessons

Public influencing is only effective if it is sustained over time. It needs ongoing commitment from government. Strategies should be planned, measured and refined over years or even decades. Lessons from public influencing strategies should be captured and fed back systematically into new approaches.

Government attempts to reduce drink-driving have been successful because they have been sustained and reinforced over decades. By contrast, other attempts at public influencing – from AIDS awareness to anti-litter – have not been implemented consistently. Messages have changed over time, and communication has been sporadic.

Given the complexity of environmental issues, there is a need for strong, consistent messages over a long timescale, reinforced with government policy and the actions of other parties. This means that there may be a case for all government actions and communications on the environment to be given a common 'brand' (as in the 'Think!' example for road safety) with individual messages promoted as part of this brand.

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[79] The Impact of Sure Start – One Year On, published by the Sure Start Unit, July 2001

[80] *Consumption Opportunities: Strategies for change – A report for decision makers.* UNEP, 2001. http://scope.4cee.net

Appendix 1: a timeline of public influencing strategies

1940s

The war years saw the 'careless talk costs lives' and 'dig for Britain' posters.

1950s

1950   The Archers began broadcasting from the BBC's Midlands Home Service, with the aim of providing agricultural advice to a nation still subject to food rationing. The Archers lost its official educational purpose in 1972.

1958   The British Eggs Marketing Board launch an advertising campaign using Tony Hancock and the famous 'Go to work on an egg' strapline. Egg rationing was only lifted in 1953 and consumption increased by about 14% between 1957 and 1970.[81]

1960s

1966   Saw the introduction of the road safety bill by Barbara Castle. Not all the measures included were popular; the new breathalyser prompted accusations of a 'nanny state' and 'Killjoy Castle'. It was accompanied by various public awareness campaigns which continue today. Attitudes to drink driving in particular have radically changed since the 1960s.

1969   Sex education starts in earnest with the hard hitting "Would you be more careful if it was you that got pregnant?" (featuring a photograph of an apparently pregnant man) poster from the Health Education Council.[82]

1970s

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[81] http://195.92.138.239/marketing-study.pdf

[82] Image at http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/content/images/2002_2230.JPG. The poster was designed by Bill Atherton at Cramer Saatchi, won a D&AD Yellow Pencil for Poster Design in 1970.

Carrots, sticks and sermons: influencing public behaviour for environmental goals

The 1970s included a series of Public Information Films commissioned by the government agency the Central Office for Information (COI) such as the Green Cross Man and the 'Charlie Says' series. A plethora of other subjects were screened including Rolf Harris encouraging parents to teach children how to swim, the dangers of driver fatigue, the rules of the countryside code, the anti-vandalism 'do you know where your lad is tonight' and the motorcycling safety 'take your helmet seriously'.[83]

The 'clunk-click' seat belt adverts and posters which ran throughout the 1970s (featuring Jimmy Saville amongst others) helped to change public opinion before the introduction of a new law in the 80s making the wearing of front seatbelts compulsory.

1980s

1982   The first Neighbourhood watch is set up in the UK in Mollington near Chester. The idea was transported from America and now there are over 153,000 Watches in the country.[84]

1983   The seat belt law cements a change in behaviour. Soon after it comes into effect, 90 per cent of front seat drivers and passengers are wearing belts.

1985   A consumer movement against CFCs is prompted by concerns about the newly discovered hole in the ozone layer. Manufacturers respond by marketing CFC-free deodorants and sprays. The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is established in 1987, with a commitment to the phasing out of CFCs and halons.

1986   The anti fur movement gains momentum and fur becomes distinctly unfashionable. An advert for the animal welfare charity Lynx, shot by David Bailey said "it takes over 40 dumb animals to make a coat, but only one to wear it". The threat of violent anti fur protest also encouraged outlets to close down.

1986   The cast of teen-drama Grange Hill is used to promote the 'Just say no' anti-drugs message first promoted by Nancy Reagan.

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[83] To view some public information films see http://625.uk.com/pifs/index.htm

[84] For more information http://www.neighbourhoodwatch.net

1987   The 'Don't die of ignorance' Aids awareness campaign, including a national leaflet drop, is launched. Awareness of Aids is consequently high but the campaign has also been criticised for spreading fear. Fifteen years on, safe sex is not a reality for many young people.[85]

1990s

1993   The 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign is started by the Commission for Racial Equality and the Professional Footballers' Association. The campaign continues to run and enjoys wide support. Leaflets tell people in stadiums to take personal responsibility for reporting racism.

1998   The Green Claims Code is established by the DETR. The aim is to instil greater confidence in consumers trying to buy green. However, the code is only voluntary and an evaluation by the National Consumer Council in 1999 found that eco-labelling was still vague and misleading.[86]

1999   When the French government declare British beef unsafe in 1999, the 'eat British Beef' campaign starts. Every single shop and pub in the Devon town of Hatherington stops selling French goods in a show of solidarity with the community's farmers. However, sales of beef still plummet

2000

2003   The government promotes the idea that adults need to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. The Department of Health 'five-a-day' campaign includes work with schools and local groups.

2003   The Department of Health establishes 'Breastfeeding awareness week'. Rates of breastfeeding in England of Wales have increased from 64% in 1990 to 70% in 2000 and the government hope to increase this further. However, press coverage reflected that not all mothers appreciate being told what to do.

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85 http://www.kingston.ac.uk/cusp/Publications/CuspReview/AIDS.htm

86 Green Claims Code: is it working? 1999 The National Consumer Council

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