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Chapter 6

The art of stickiness

How the product is more important than the message.

Noel Kesby is the CEO of the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority in New South Wales. His agency's task is to change the behaviours of tens of thousands of farmers over an area the size of Belgium. The official agency-speak for this mission is "River and Wetland Protection and Restoration". But if you ask Noel he pitches it differently: "Our job is to give farmers the edge in their business," he says.

Noel has spent his whole professional life working with landholders and he knows it's farmers who protect the environment, not government. And he knows the bottom line, which is that government programs must deliver on what matters to farmers, in this case, water and productivity. In the Bega Valley his agency is delivering "incentive products" to dairy farmers. Each incentive product combines a dollar grant with advice and technology for an environmental practice like fencing streams, providing off-stream watering points for cows, planting tree belts and so on. Each of these practices provides a mix of environmental *and business* benefits, which explains why around 90% of Bega Valley farmers have signed up for them. As proof of their commitment, each farmer has more than matched the government funds with their own hard-earned cash.

Noel got the "framing" right.

Framing hit the headlines a few years ago when George Lakoff, a linguist at the University of California, Berkeley, wrote a book called *Don't Think of an Elephant, Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. He wanted to educate Democrats about how Republicans had cleverly framed their language around people's hopes, fears and prejudices: "War on Terror", "tax relief", "free market", "pro-life", "Patriot Act", "Operation Enduring Freedom" and so on.

Framing, of course, is often a lie. Clever framing can work, at least temporarily, in politics, because voters are often too busy and distracted with their own lives to do the sums. But in their private lives, farms and businesses people are much better at doing the sums. They're hard to fool. As we saw in Chapter 3, "tell", "sell" and "threaten" have woeful track records when it comes to promoting sustained changes in behaviour.

Noel Kesby understood this. He went much further than just framing his messages in the language farmers liked to hear. His teams constructed products to actually meet farmers' needs. Because farmers got real life benefits they valued, those new farming practices are more likely to stick.

Borrowing from Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*, let's call this the *stickiness factor*.[*]

Stickiness is the probably the make-or-break factor in a change project. Getting the stickiness right means genuinely being at the

[*] Gladwell used "stickiness factor" to mean the content of a message that made it memorable. But, as we'll see, there is a lot more to stickiness than simply the language we use.

service of people, solving their frustrations and intentionally constructing answers to their needs. More than any other factor it determines whether people will be genuinely motivated to adopt a new behaviour or product and sustain that usage long into the future.

This chapter is about how to get the stickiness right.

Spotting hot wants

The first step is to spot people's wants. As we noticed in the last chapter, wants arise from feelings of unhappiness, frustration, dissatisfaction or guilt. The situations that make people most unhappy result in the hottest wants and so have the greatest potential for personal change. Knowing how to spot hot wants is the starting point for a great change project (or a great product).

So, for instance, if I wanted to change the world (or get rich), I'd start by asking people what they are most unhappy about in their lives. If, for instance, I asked housewives about their happiness I might find that commuting, childcare and housework cause their greatest unhappiness, as psychologist Daniel Kahneman did, producing this interesting table:

Table 1
Happiness in different activities

	Happiness (index)	Average hours per day
Sex	4.7	0.2
Socialising after work	4.1	1.1
Dinner	4.0	0.8
Relaxing	3.9	2.2
Lunch	3.9	0.6
Exercising	3.8	0.2
Praying	3.8	0.5
Socialising at work	3.8	1.1
Watching TV	3.6	2.2
Phone at home	3.5	0.9
Napping	3.3	0.9
Cooking	3.2	1.1
Shopping	3.2	0.4
Computer at home	3.1	0.5
Housework	3.0	1.1
Childcare	3.0	1.1
Evening commute	2.8	0.6
Working	2.7	6.9
Morning commute	2.0	0.4

Note: Based on Day Reconstruction Study. Average happiness is net affect.

Some moments suck more than others. Here's how 909 Texas women rated their moment-to-moment satisfaction during a real day in their lives. Source: Kahneman D. et al (2004). [1]

Commuting is a certainly a human experience that's ripe for improvement. There's research that seriously claims that commuters on Britain's rush-hour roads and railways can be more anxious, as measured by heart rates, than fighter pilots or riot police facing angry mobs of protesters. David Lewis, who carried out that research for Hewlett Packard, said commuting made people feel "frustrated, anxious and despondent". Most of his subjects called it an "ordeal". Some said it was a "nightmare". As a result "many commuters go into a sort of inner world when they're travelling and don't really notice what's happening around them."[2]

What exactly makes commuting so miserable?

Another study measured commuters' blood pressure and found that commuters on the most congested and interrupted routes were the most stressed. But what was surprising was that carpoolers had higher blood pressure than single drivers, suggesting that loss of personal control was an important factor. [3 4]

So, if I wanted to change the world (or make a lot of money) I'd invent a solution to commuters' loss of personal control. I might for instance, create an itsy-bitsy personal stereo system to give people back control over their sensory space. Or I might change the transport system itself, maybe make it fast, safe and simple to use. Dr Ela Babalik-Sutcliffe, an urban transport researcher at University College, London, compared new light rail systems in the USA, Canada and UK and found that the most successful systems were those that were believed to be safe, gave better access to where people wanted to go, were very frequent (with less than five minute waiting times), and had travelcards that allowed unlimited journeys and easy swapping between modes, all factors which maximize the sense of personal control by commuters.[5]

Loss of control certainly creates unhappiness. But it's not the only cause. Lots of things make people unhappy. Because human beings are unpredictable the only way we can really know what makes a particular group of people unhappy is to do some research. We might, for instance, ask them.

Social scientists have become quite sophisticated about doing this. The method-du-jour is to equip subjects with a beeper and a record book. When the beeper bleeps, say every 20 minutes, subjects are supposed to record what they are doing and how they feel about it.

(Just having a bleeper go off every 20 minutes would stress me, but I guess they know what they're doing.)

There's a far simpler method of finding out what makes people unhappy. Meet them and ask them questions.

Here's a question that gets straight to the point:

> "Thinking about how you live your life (or run your business, or care for your family, or whatever) what are the things you're unhappy about and would like to change?"

Practically everyone will readily answer that question, and, with a little probing, have a moan about the things that bug them. Try it with someone you know. You'll hear a lot of stuff, most of which you won't be able to do anything about. But amongst the complaining and griping, you'll find one or two hot wants you can construct an answer to, and you'll have the key to a successful change project (or a profitable product).

Here's a real life example. It's from a project that aimed to reduce smoking amongst Arabic-speaking people in South West Sydney, a tough challenge because tobacco is deeply entrenched in the social rituals of that culture. The project started with some focus groups (facilitated by local Arabic-speakers) which revealed that this audience didn't need to be told tobacco was a problem: it was already the causing plenty of conflict and bitterness in their lives. One pregnant woman felt humiliated because her requests not to smoke were taken lightly by guests who said "Come on, it's only one cigarette." Another woman hid the ashtrays but was still afraid of family fights. Some smokers felt sad their grandchildren wouldn't

kiss them. Others hated the smell in their homes. Heavy smokers felt ostracised when relatives wouldn’t visit them.

One of the sharpest points of conflict was the host-guest relationship. Hosts were expected to offer a tray of cigarettes to guests even when the hosts were non-smokers or there were young children in the home. Many were uncomfortable with the practice, but there was so much at stake socially they tended to swallow their frustration and not complain. Some guests were unhappy too: they wanted to respect the family’s health, but were afraid of insulting the host by refusing a cigarette.

It was clear that many in this community already felt that tobacco was a threat. The motivation for change was present – in spades. What seemed to be missing was the ability to negotiate solutions to the *social* dilemmas posed tobacco use. Listening to the focus groups, the agency team began to hear how some Arabic-speakers were innovating their own solutions to the problem. One woman put up no smoking signs. Another described how her husband decided to offer sweets instead of cigarettes. These spontaneous social innovations became the seed of the agency’s campaign.

The agency hired Arabic-speaking copywriters to create 30 second radio spots in the form of miniature soap operas that demonstrated alternative ways of negotiating tobacco use.

Here’s an example (in colloquial Arabic):

> Guest: Cigarette? (offering to host)
>
> Host: No thanks … where are you these days?

> Guest: I am here and at work… Cigarette?
>
> Host: No. No thank you.
>
> Guest: Have you given it up or this is not your brand?
>
> Host: My wife does not smoke and because of the kids I smoke outside. This does not mean you shouldn't. Smoke man smoke. Shame on us if you don't.
>
> Guest: Shame on me if I do. Your coffee is more than enough.
> Host: More sugar Hanan (to wife). Thousand welcomes! (to guest)
>
> Reproduced with permission from Sydney South West Area Health Service. The Arabic scripts were created by multicultural advertising agency, Independent and General. Full details and results will be published in an upcoming issue of *Health Promotion International.*

The key line was "Shame on me if I do. Your coffee is more than enough". It offered a face-saving solution to a common and frustrating social dilemma.

Notice that the ad was not about health risks. It didn't even mention the frustrations mentioned in the focus groups. It didn't need to. When people are in a state of anguished frustration there's little need to remind them about it. They are already looking for answers and the change agent's role is simply to provide solutions that are easy to adopt.

The campaign, consisting mostly of short radio spots intensively aired over 3 years, became one of the most successful anti-smoking campaigns in the agency's history. It coincided with a 5.3% decrease in smoking prevalence and an 7.8% increase in smoke-

free homes amongst Arabic-speakers in Western Sydney, far ahead of changes in the general population.

So, the first step in designing a sticky product is to see what makes people unhappy. The second step is to answer that unhappiness.

Three über-wants

I'm using the word "solution" here to mean the behaviour or product you want people to adopt, [†] like "install a thermostat" or "fence your creek", "use a nicotine patch" or "come to the meeting".

Keep in mind that solutions are never as simple as they sound. The solution "leave your car at home", for instance, is really a direction to use different modes of transport, so the design of those modes of transport is inevitably part of the solution, right down to their comfort and safety, fares, timetables and frequencies, ticketing systems, the location of bus stops, the quality of bus shelters, the amount of traffic congestion along bus routes, as well as intangibles like commonly held beliefs about the safety of the bus system. In this sense behaviours and products are almost always complex packages with lots of variables that can be manipulated to increase their adoptability. Changing these variables is what it means to "design" a solution.

Could there be any general rules for designing the kinds of behaviours or products that people will *want* to adopt?

I think so, but before I get to the rules, I want to knock on the head one common assumption about what makes people *want* things.

[†] Diffusion of Innovations theory uses the term "innovation" to mean the same thing.

I'm willing to bet that, if you ask almost any group of people about their hot wants, "saving money", if it appears at all, will be low on their list of priorities.

It's true that cheapness sells groceries. All other things being equal people will choose the cheaper of two different brands of cheddar. But behaviour change is not a marginally different kind of cheese. It's a new and often quite scary departure for the self. For most people saving money alone is a weak justification for the risk and effort involved in personal change. That doesn't mean that economic incentives don't affect behaviour. *Losing* money,[6] in particular, can certainly be a strong motivator. But when the financial motives of real groups of people have been compared with their non-financial motives, "saving money", or even being given money, tends to pale in significance compared to other motivations.

It's been shown, for instance, that:

– Voting in Congressional elections is more influenced by party loyalty, perceived risks to the environmental and health, and altruism ("doing the right thing"), than by the economic self-interest of voters.[7] [8]

– Farmers' decisions to adopt conservation practices are more influenced by attachment to the land, wanting to make their farms appear well managed, and aesthetic appreciation than by financial incentives.[9] [10]

– Public transport patronage is more influenced by frequency and convenience than by the price of fares.[11]

– Recycling is more influenced by consumer knowledge and environmental commitment than by financial incentives.[12]

The common assumption that "saving you money" is a strong motivator for new behaviours turns out to be an instance of Man is Bad Bias. As we noted, that bias tends to blind us the richness of motives that really drive human behaviour.[‡]

There are, however, three über-wants that practically everyone is turned on by: wants they can never get enough of; wants they will gladly shell out hard cash for; wants that, if your change project delivers on even one of them, will give you peoples' allegiance and affection plus a devastating advantage over your competition. The power of these wants is so fundamental that should your project threaten even one of them you could easily end up with a violent resistance movement on your hands.

Those three über-wants are control, time and connection.

Control

I used to be a lousy gardener. My gardens were patches of dry dirt with stunted vegetables poking up through a scatter of weeds. The chasm between the garden of my dreams and the garden of my reality had made me frustrated for years.

Then I discovered mulch. To be more accurate I was asked to write a brochure advocating the "Marvel of Mulch" to my fellow citizens. The discrepancy between my brochure and my garden finally

[‡] It's often true that corporations and individuals who feel economically threatened can get into a cost-cutting mood. If that's the case, they can be motivated by credible offers to "save money". But they're an exception to the rule.

overwhelmed me and so I decided to get some mulch. I figured I could keep weeds down and have a neat, trendy-looking garden at the same time. So I ordered a load of mulched tree bits and spread it out. Nice. Neat. Fashionable. It was months before I discovered what the marvel of mulch really was. In the middle of a drought, when I hadn't watered the garden for weeks, the soil beneath the layer of mulch was moist, warm, black and full of worms and bugs. Mulch had given me more control over my garden that I had imagined possible. It can plant what I want, where I want, and get great results with a high level of certainty.

Mulch is supposed to be "good for the environment" but, frankly, that's just a collateral benefit. I keep using it because it gives me mastery over my garden.

I like to maximize my freedom-of-action and minimise uncertainty. I'm a bit of a control freak, but aren't we all?

The human need to maximise personal freedom and reduce uncertainty explains the competitive advantage enjoyed by most successful products. It explains why people prefer cars to trains; trains to buses; iPods to Walkmans; cell phones to land lines; drip irrigation to open trenches; owning to renting; detached houses to apartments; driving to walking; democracy to dictatorship.

People have a profound need to feel in control their lives. It's well established that feeling in control of one's work has a strong effect on the well-being of workers.[13] Lack of control causes stress, burnout, and physical illness.[14] [15] For example, a well known study by Michael Marmot and colleagues at University College London found that the incidence of heart disease in workers varied directly according their degree of control over their work. Compared to

workers with the highest degree of control, those with middle control had 20 per cent more heart disease, while those with the lowest control had 50 per cent more.[16]

The drive for control also explains why people like democracy. Nations that protect individual liberties and rights score higher in well-being than those that don't.[17] Swiss economist Bruno Frey compared the happiness of citizens in Swiss cantons which had the *most* frequent citizen-initiated referenda, with the happiness of those in cantons which had the *least* frequent referenda. When all other factors were excluded, the difference in happiness roughly equaled doubling peoples' income.[18]

The drive for control also explains some regrettable aspects of Western civilization: SUVs. Air conditioners. Firearms. Security systems. Gated communities. Domestic violence. Anorexia. Human Resource Management. Neo-conservatives.

Control is about how you get results. The more control you have the more certain you are of getting the results you want with a minimum of disruption, delay, danger, doubt and uncertainty.

Put simply, any gadget, technique, process or skill that increases people's *certainty* of getting their wants fulfilled is destined to spread, and any one that doesn't will almost certainly languish and die.

Time

Time is the ultimate, finite, non-stretchy, non-bendy limit on what we can do with our lives. The average person has 16.5 hours of consciousness to play with each day. Though we may try to borrow more from the Time Bank, by not sleeping, sooner or later we have to pay it back. Because time doesn't stretch, the only way to improve our lives is to adopt behaviours and products that require less of it. That means there's a huge premium on any idea or invention that shortens the time it takes to do something. Saving time is the breakthrough quality that guaranteed the success of some of the great inventions that define the twentieth century, from Rudolf Diesel's internal combustion engine (1897) and Johan Vaaler's paperclip (1899) to the ATM machine (1967).

Diffusion scholar Everett Rogers, tells a nice story about the difference a time-saving innovation can make:

"'Thump-thump-thump' is the usual sound heard in an African village as women pound grains and nuts with heavy wooden pestles. But recently this sound changed to 'chug-chug-chug' in one West African village, Sanankoroni, Mali. A woman brings a sack of peanuts into a small mud-brick shed that houses a diesel engine and a variety of contraptions that it powers. She pours her load into a funnel that leads to a grinder and blender, pays 25 cents, and ten minutes later, scoops thick peanut butter into a dozen jars. The woman says it would previously have taken her all day to pound and grind the sack of peanuts. Now she can sell the jars of butter in the village and then take a nap.

"The women of Sanankoroni, who own and operate the durable, uncomplaining machine, refer to it as 'The Daughter-in-law Who

Doesn’t Speak’. It was invented ten years ago by a UNDP development worker in Mali to ease the domestic labour of women.

“A forty-five kilogram sack of corn that required three days pounding is now ground in fifteen minutes. Girls who previously had to stay home to do domestic work can now go to school. Mothers now have free time to enroll in literacy classes or start a small business. The men of Sanankoroni approve of the women’s progress. One said, ‘Our wives aren’t so tired anymore. And their hands are smoother. We like that’.” [19]

Here’s a kind of research result you hear a lot these days:

“A recent survey conducted by Newspoll shows that overall 48 percent of mothers with young children claim they have two hours or less a week for themselves, including 20 percent who say they have no time at all.” [20]

I read somewhere that that consumers in developed countries are supposed to have less time for leisure, family, friends and community than at any time since the middle ages. (And what do they spend that leisure time doing? TV and shopping: two activities guaranteed to increase their dissatisfactions. Great system eh?)

Today, just about everyone is stressed over time. Merciless corporate competition and technological change mean that most of us are now doing jobs that were once done by several people. And, to emphasise the sheer heartless cruelty of it all, there are now so many more thrilling and “must-do” things to squeeze into our miserable shrunken stubs of leisure time.

Frozen food, microwave ovens, automatic dishwashers, online

banking, cheap flights are successful because they replace tedious drudgery with free time. (And, once there's enough bandwidth, online conferencing will be huge for the same reason).

Unfortunately most environmental, social and health changes seem to require *more* of people's time. Cycling to work, mulching the garden, volunteering, turning off unused lights, insulating a home, voting, and driving under the speed limit all take more time. This limits their stickiness. But there's a solution: although these activities may look like they have fixed speed limits, what really slows them down is often not the activity itself, but the *hassle rate*. Hassles are the annoying disruptions and obstacles that get in the way of actually doing something. Like the number of times your car gets stopped in traffic. Solution: a car pooling express lane!

Make your innovation less fussy and you'll increase the likelihood people will do it. People hate being forced to think or plan so the less of that the better. Simplifying instructions and paperwork are ways to minimise the hassle rate. So is reducing the number of choices people have to make.

Even if we can't *give* people time, we need to take away as little as possible. The less time we take, the more people are likely to get involved in our programs.

A nice example is the evolution of Weight Watchers.

The Weight Watchers method originally involved counting calories, a laborious, time consuming task. Then, to make it quicker and easier, Weight Watchers introduced a "Points Value" system, so for example, an apple is one point and a cup of rice is four points. People are given a goal, say 25 points per day. If they stay under it

they are told they will lose weight. The system is flexible because people can add extra points for special treats or outings and average them out.

But it still takes time and discipline to count points and stick with plans.

So Weight Watchers innovated an even simpler system: a “no-count” diet called the Core Plan. On the Core Plan, people don't count points but simply eat wholesome foods in variety. It was designed for those who don’t have time to plan meals or who are just too busy to think about points. It’s so easy practically anyone can do it. (And check the Weight Watchers’ “Satisfaction Plan” launched Jan 2009. It’s even easier).

Time and control together explain why most people drive cars everywhere, despite the appalling costs and stresses. In a survey of Dutch drivers, for instance, “rapidity” and “independence” were rated as their top motivations for choosing cars over public transport. Significantly, that study was in Gouda, a city with excellent and pervasive public transport. Even there, cars had the edge over public transport in the terms that counted.

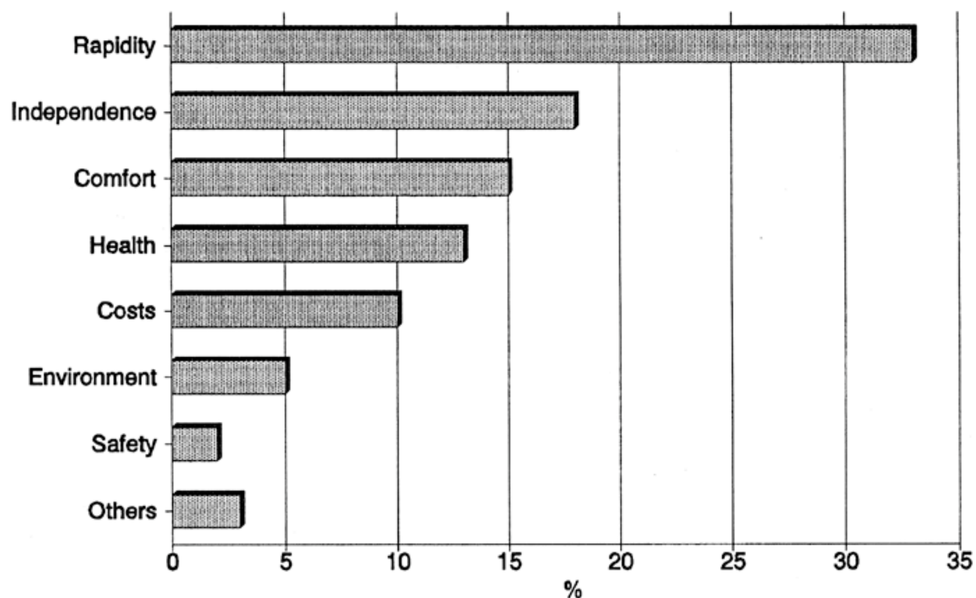


Fig. 1. Most important aspects in relation to car use, as mentioned by the participants in a preliminary study ($N = 418$).

Why people drive. Speed and control trump comfort and health. Environment and safety hardly rate.
Source: Tertoolen, G. et al (1998) [21]

The lesson for public transport authorities is: if you want more people to catch trains then comfort, health, safety and environment are nice optional extras, but it's speed, reliability and frequency that will make the difference.

Connection

One of my students told me how pleased she was to have recently purchased a house with a chook shed and a family of chooks. I asked her about the satisfactions of owning her own chooks. With commendable personal insight and candor she replied, "They make me interesting".

Is it possible that happiness is social?

When happiness researchers Ed Deiner and Martin Seligman examined the characteristics of the happiest individuals, they found

without exception they were highly social, had stronger romantic relationships, were more extraverted, more agreeable, and less neurotic, than less happy individuals.[22]

People have a need for relationships. They seem to be essential for self-esteem[23] and are associated with better cardiovascular, endocrine and immune systems.[24] "Although lay people probably understand that close friends and family are correlated with happiness, they may not realize that they are *necessary* for happiness, as well as for health and optimal cognitive functioning," wrote Ed Deiner and another happiness researcher, Shigehiro Oishi.[25]

On the other hand, broken relationships cause some of the most extreme stresses in life. This explains why divorce and unemployment have disastrous emotional effects. Studies tracking people's journey in and out of employment show that the emotional impact of financial losses pales in significance compared with the loss to self-esteem and dignity from ceasing to be needed.[26]

Self-esteem, of course, depends to a very large degree on what others think about us. It's no wonder, then, that we are always on the lookout for excuses to engage with others and present our best selves. Products and experiences are essential props in this process. As a result they have "social value" quite apart from their practical utility. They help us interact with people, express our dynamic specialness, brag about our successes, and demonstrate our social status.

How we consume the social value of objects and experiences is by buzzing about them with important people in our lives, hence the surprising answer to the question about the satisfactions of owning

chooks. Half the fun of shopping, for instance, is telling our friends about the fantastic bargains we discovered or the delicious luxuries we afforded. A study of 364 Finnish shoppers at a large department store compared three shopping motives: pleasure, utility and social value. It found that utility and social value were about equal influences on the decision to purchase (both slightly ahead of pleasure), except on Saturday, when social value exceeded both utility and pleasure together. [27]

Social value is important even in seemingly mundane household tasks. A fascinating study of 60 households in Santa Cruz County, California, sought to explain why homeowners spent thousands of dollars on solar water heaters, wood stoves, insulation and greenhouses, but ignored caulking and weather-stripping – simple actions that were just as effective at warming homes and lowering heating costs. Even when caulking was offered for free people were reluctant to take it up.

The reason, the researchers found, was that caulking and weather-stripping were seen as dirty jobs, lacking in glamour compared to the highly visible and heroic business of house renovation. Americans, they observed, were proud of improvements that add value to their homes. Caulking, by comparison, suggested a leaky or old house. It was something people couldn't talk about it without feeling slightly ashamed. It had no social value. "…other energy retrofits are visible to neighbours, serving social ends," they wrote, "the gurgle of water in hot water pipes is seen as rewarding and is pointed out to guests, as is the heat from a woodstove, even when hands are burned and the room smells of smoke. Weatherization [by comparison] offers little feedback and few opportunities for bragging." [28]

Intriguingly it appears that experiences tend to have greater social value than objects. In a national survey, a cross-section of 1,279 Americas were asked to compare the happiness they obtained from experiences and products: 57 percent rated experiences as more happiness-making than products but just 34 percent said material objects made them happier.[29] Even accounting for income levels, "not a single segment reported being happier with their material buys," wrote the researchers. They speculated that the difference may be partly due to the higher social value of experiences: a game is easier to share than a chandelier, and because experiences typically have a beginning, middle and end, they make better stories. Interestingly, the same researchers later observed university students having conversations about objects or experiences they'd purchased. The students who talked about experiences liked each other more than those who talked about material objects.[30]

Volunteering, sport, political activism, and gardening are examples of experiences whose social value generally exceeds their utilitarian value. The same, unfortunately, goes for smoking[31], drinking, drugs, speeding, littering, unsafe sex, tanning and every other kind of risk-taking behaviour.[32]

Objects and experiences also confer social status. In prehistoric times a good hunter might wear a tiger tooth around his neck as a sign of courage and strength. Now it's a Lexus and ski holidays in Switzerland. These things are desired because they demonstrate social rank.[33] No one spends $21.95 on a salmon and pesto foccacia with drizzled balsamic vinaigrette just because they're hungry.

Remember the deluded self? The self that must, in order to optimistically face each tedious new day of anxieties, trials, and

humiliations, not to mention the existential terror of death and annihilation, maintain a vainglorious image of it's own splendid character and illustrious destiny. Self-deception is so much easier to maintain when others agree with us. That's why it can be desperately important to have the jeans, car, phone, recreational drugs, and solar water heathers that we think others admire and want for themselves.

Most human beings know that *every* observable object or behaviour in their lives will be assessed by their peers as a sign of their position in a social pecking order. Those objects and behaviours therefore have the capacity to threaten or enhance social status and the self-esteem that's attached to it. If Californians believe that owning a Ford Super Duty F450 pickup makes them a better person than owning a Fiat Bambino (and if Europeans believe exactly the opposite) then that's the landscape change agents have to work with. If people believe that a Toyota Prius confers social status, then that subjective belief is just as important as its objective fuel efficiency. In fact, if we want people to reduce their carbon emissions, it may be more important.

If you accept this, you'll agree that the social value of a solution matters a lot. In short, if people think a new behaviour makes them cool it will take off, if they think it makes them uncool it will crash and burn.

Fortunately, since social value is simply a belief, it's quite malleable. There are lots of ways to raise the perceived social value of an otherwise uncool innovation. Here are three proven techniques that marketers use every day.

Rarity: Objects and experiences that are hard to get or "hot off the

press" have extra status. Owning a rare one suggests that you too are rare and exceptional. Like the must-have Wattson electricity meter, that gives you a real-time display of household energy use. It's sleek, iPod-esque, hip and gorgeous, but what's really great about it is that your friends don't have one.

Expense is a good proxy for rarity, but not the only one, for example those fabulous thrift shop bargains can confer just as much self-esteem as more expensive buys.

Association: Think like Nike. If high status people want it, own it, or endorse it, some of their status will rub off. This is the method-of-choice to promote objects that are virtually indistinguishable from their competitors - like cars, sneakers, beer and politicians.

Story: Some things come with inherently interesting back-stories that add to their buzz value. As we noted in Chapter 4, unexpected stories with emotional impact tend to create their own buzz and spread contagiously. Just enter "Free Hugs" or "Numa Numa" into YouTube and see what I mean.

The danger of heroic solutions

Control, time and connection seem like the sure-fire universal qualities of successful solutions. But are they really?

Remember Heroic Agent Bias? It's the belief that we know best. Everett Rogers, one of the founders of diffusion research, called it "pro-innovation bias". He issued a stern warning against righteous change agents imposing their half-baked ideas on the world.

Pro-innovation bias, he said, is the assumption that an innovation is good, that it should be spread, that it has no disadvantages, that it should not be reinvented or rejected. Rogers called this a “troublesome and potentially dangerous” intellectual failure that causes change agents to ignore evidence of rejection and overlook possibilities for reinvention.[34]

The fact is, many solutions don’t deserve to succeed.

Some are naïve.

The direction to simply “Quit Smoking” is an example of a naïve solution. It fails to acknowledge the benefits smoking provides, like stress relief, social connection, and weight control. And it ignores the great challenges and discomforts involved in beating an addiction. It also assumes people live in a bubble whereas in reality smoking and quitting are socially driven behaviours. That’s why many anti-smoking campaigns now only ask people to consult the pharmacist, call a Quit Line, or use nicotine replacement patches, instead of just quitting.

Some are dangerous.

Anthropologist Lauriston Sharp recorded the disastrous effects of the introduction of steel axes by missionaries to the Yir Yoront people of the Cape York Peninsula, Queensland in the 1930s.[35] The Yir Yoront were a nomadic people who travelled in small groups across a vast territory in search of game and other food. The stone axe was a central tool in their culture, it was indispensable for food production, constructing shelters and heating homes. Stone axes were a symbol of respect and masculinity. Only men owned them, although mainly women and children used them. Stone axes were

borrowed from fathers, husbands or uncles according to a customary system of social relationships.

When missionaries arrived they distributed steel axes as gifts and as payment for work performed, in the hope they would improve people's lives. They gave them indiscriminately to men, women and children. The steel axes were superior and quickly replaced the stone variety. Young men were more likely to adopt the steel axes than the older men, who did not trust the missionaries. The result was the disruption of status relationships and confusion of age and sex roles. The inter-tribal feasts that accompanied the trade in stone axes declined. The social organization of the Yir Yoront began to breakdown. To the horror of the missionaries they observed men prostituting their daughters and wives in exchange for the use of other people's steel axes. For the Yir Yoront, the unexpected consequences of this new technology far exceeded it's practical advantages.

And some are just plan wrong.

Everett Rogers recounts this mea culpa: "In my 1954 Ph.D. dissertation research, I gathered data from 148 farmers in an Iowa farm community about their adoption of such agricultural innovations as 2,4-D weed spray, antibiotic swine feeding supplements, and chemical fertilizers. These chemical innovations were recommended to farmers by agricultural scientists at Iowa State University and the Iowa Agricultural Extension Service. I accepted the recommendations of these agricultural experts as valid. So did most of the Iowa farmers I interviewed. One farmer, however, rejected all of these agricultural chemicals, because, he claimed, they killed the earthworms and songbirds in the fields. At the time, I personally regarded his attitude as irrational. He was

classified as a laggard on my innovativeness scale."

By the 1970s, however, the US Environment Protection Agency had banned 2,4-D and antibiotic swine supplements because biomagnification in the food chain made them dangerous to human health.

"Today, looking back five decades," wrote Rogers, "the organic farmer I interviewed has had the last laugh over agricultural experts. My 1954 research classified him as a laggard. By present-day standards he was a superinnovator of the then-radical idea of organic farming."[36]

Just because we think an solution is right, just and better, doesn't mean it is. We all have a tendency towards Heroic Agent Bias. There is really only is one way to control it. That is to directly involve users in the development and testing of new solutions.

How to be sure a solution fits

Once you think you've got a solution to people's problems, it's therefore vital to do some testing. Testing the workability of your ideas is a basic insurance policy against Heroic Agent Bias.

One way is to watch people trying out your innovation.

Surprisingly, some of the most wholehearted advocates of rigorous testing have been tax authorities. The Australian Tax Office, for instance, constructed a state-of-the-art simulation centre in Brisbane to design new tax forms. It recreated a real office environment with people in one room trying to fill in the forms while in another room tax staff attempted to decipher and process them.

One-way mirrors and cameras allowed designers to observe the bewilderment, dithering and panic that resulted. The ATO claims to have used 30 user clinics, eight creative retreats and 54 observation sessions to create just one suite of tax forms. “Nothing goes out without assurance that users were involved in creation” said one tax officer.

Probably you needn’t go to such lengths to observe users trying your idea. Just observing them on the farm, factory floor, pub or health centre may be enough.

Or you could talk to users directly. That’s what focus groups are for. Simply talking over your idea with potential users can avoid fundamental design flaws and also give you great ideas for improvement.

Another way is to try it yourself.

A road safety educator told me how she found out what was stopping truck drivers taking rest breaks. Her method was: she climbed into a big rig and drove a thousand or so kilometers in the passenger seat. She discovered that whether truckies take rest breaks had a lot to with the quality of the rest stops provided by the state road authority. Many were on sloping ground, or in the boiling sun, or lacked water. Suddenly the issue of rest breaks stopped looking like a behavioural problem and more like an infrastructure problem.

Watching users, talking to users, or doing it yourself are essential insurance policies against the effects of Heroic Agent Bias.

Another reason (as if there needs to be one) why audience research

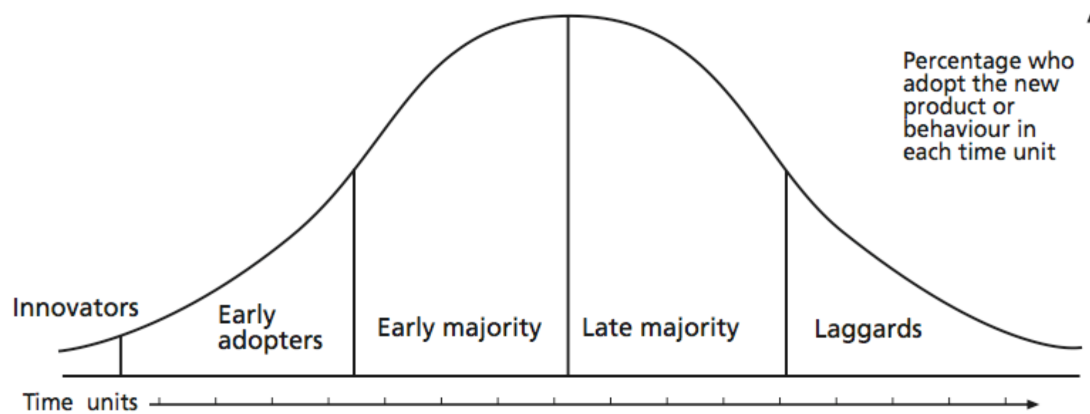
is vital is that there can be huge diversity inside neighbourhoods, socio-economic groups, professions, age groups, cultures and sexes. As an example, studies of Canadian households showed that people from different incomes tend to have different energy-saving behaviours. Those on high incomes tend to pay more for energy to maintain their existing high consumption lifestyles, those on middle incomes tend to choose more efficient products (like home retrofits or more efficient cars), while those of low incomes tend to wear jumpers, undergoing hardship as a result.[37]

I've stayed away from individual and cultural differences in this book because I'm trying to keep a lid on its complexity, but it goes without saying that any change program must account for these kinds of variables, and user involvement in design and testing is the best way to do it.

A peak at Diffusion of Innovations

Remember Ryan and Goss, the Iowa University researchers who practically invented Diffusion of Innovations theory back in 1943 when they studied the spread of hybrid corn seed across the US midwest? It's almost impossible to have a discussion about the spread of new ideas without the concepts that first emerged in their work and were refined by later scholars. So let's briefly look at those ideas. Skip this section if you're already acquainted with diffusion theory.

Diffusion researchers believe that, no matter what the idea, product or behaviour, a population can be broken down into five different segments, based on their propensity to adopt a particular innovation: innovators, early adopters, early majorities, late majorities and laggards.



Source: Rogers (2003) p281

Each group has its own personality, at least as far as its attitude to that particular innovation goes.

The adoption process begins with a tiny number of visionary, imaginative *innovators*. Tech evangelist Guy Kawasaki calls them "thunderlizards" (I'm not sure why but it captures their out-there-ness). They are few in number: 1% or less in a given population. They often lavish huge time, energy and creativity on their inventions. And they love talking about them. Right now, they're the ones busily constructing stills to convert cooking oil into diesel fuel, and making websites to tell the world about it. They have enormous energy and focus although their one-eyed fixation on the new behaviour or gadget can make them seem dangerously idealistic to the pragmatic majority.

Their risky plunge into a new activity sets tongues wagging. People watch to see whether they prosper of fail dismally. Meanwhile the innovators are ironing out the chinks and proving the new idea (or not).

Once the benefits start to become apparent, *early adopters* leap in.

They are typically around 16-20% in a given population. They love getting an advantage over their peers and they have time and money to spend. They're often fashion conscious and love to be seen as leaders: social prestige is one of their biggest drivers. Their natural desire to be trend setters causes the take-off of the innovation. What's more, they become the new test bed, reinventing the innovation to suit more mainstream needs. They tend to be more economically successful and hence socially respected and well connected. And they like to talk about their successes. So the buzz intensifies. What early adopters say about an innovation determines its success. The more they crow and preen, the more likely the new behaviour or product will be seen positively by the majority of a population.

Fortunately for us early adopters are an easy audience. They don't need much persuading. They are on the lookout for anything that could give them a social or economic edge. When you call a public meeting to discuss energy-saving devices or new farming methods, they're the ones who turn up. They're the first people in your block to install a water tank, or mulch their garden, or buy laptops for their kids, or install solar panels, or buy one of those pretentious iPhones.

Some authorities talk about a "chasm" between visionary early adopters and pragmatic majorities.[38] They think the chasm explains why many products are initially popular with early adopters but die before they reach mass markets. Everett Rogers disagrees[39] with the idea of a chasm. He thinks early adopters and majorities form a continuum, although *most* early adopters still have radically different interests and needs from *most* majorities. So even if there's no real chasm it's a useful mental construct that warns us against the easy assumption that one size fits all.

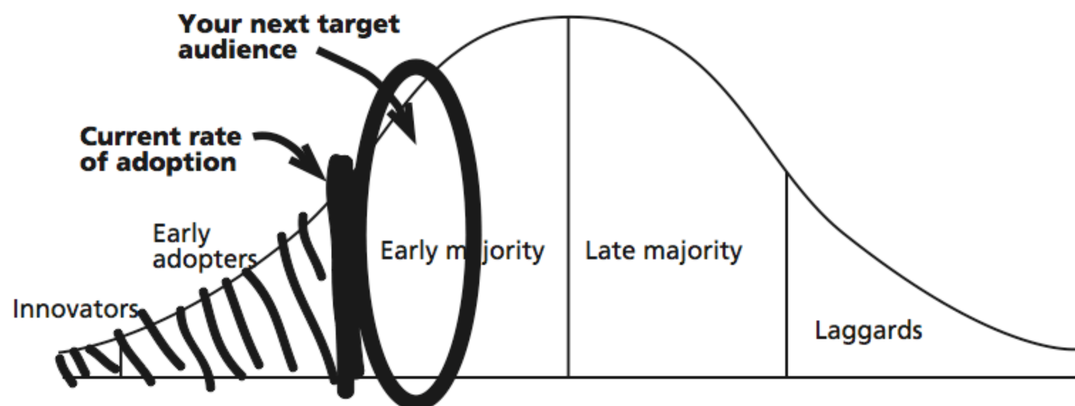
A lot of new gadgets and lifestyle practices that become popular with early adopters stop at the edge of the chasm and fail to spread further. Or worse, they fall into a chasm and are never heard of again. What makes products or practices bridge the chasm is not persuasion. It's reinvention (which I'm about to describe).

Assuming the behaviour of product leaps the chasm, it may eventually spread through *majority* audiences: typically around 60% of a population. Majorities are resistant. They haven't got time to think about your product or project. They're too busy getting the kids to football and running their businesses. If they do have spare time they're not going to spend it fussing around with complicated, expensive, inconvenient products or behaviours: they want to hear "plug-and-play", "no sweat" or "user-friendly". Also, they're cost sensitive, they want "value for money". And they are followers, they want "industry standard" and "endorsed by normal, respectable folks".

Meanwhile *laggards* hold out to the bitter end. They are often around 20% of a population. They are people who see a high risk in adopting a particular practice. Some of them are so worried they stay awake all night, tossing and turning, thinking of arguments against it. And don't forget there's always the possibility they are right! They may be laggards for very good reasons.

Each of these adopter personalities is very different. It's vital to know which one you're addressing (and no, you probably can't address them all at once. Why? I'll come to that.) You only need one simple fact - the percentage take-up – to tell you which adopter personality you're talking to. That one fact alone tells you a great deal about how to design your product and how to pitch your

invitation. So, for instance, if 20% of a population have already taken up an innovation, it means the early adopters are already fully engaged, so your *next* target audience are the early majority; people who may be open to your idea in theory, but in practice risk-averse and cost-sensitive, as well as distracted and time-poor, instantly giving you valuable cues to the design of your change project.



Of course, no one is an innovator or a laggard all the time. It would be too exhausting. In reality, most people are majorities about most things, and only innovators or laggards about certain specific things. We wouldn't say "John is a laggard", we'd say "John is an *iPod* laggard" or "George Bush snr is a *broccoli* laggard".

Why reinvention is more important than persuasion

Even after user participation, don't expect your solution to be perfect. Most great ideas start out clunky and only gradually evolve to fit the needs of more and more people. The way solutions evolve or reinvent themselves reveals an important and counter-intuitive fact about social change, which is that the spread of solutions is primarily due to changes in the solutions themselves, not to changes in people.

Consider the cell phone.

In 1983 Motorola introduced the world's first consumer cell phone, the DynaTac 8000X. It weighed two pounds and cost $3,995. It had no display, had 35 minutes of talk time and took 10 hours to recharge. Also, there was practically no one to talk to.

In 1995 I bought my first mobile, a Motorola, for $A499. It was an analog phone with lots of irritating drop-outs, but I could get coverage in any city. The nickel cadmium battery had one hour talk time and took seven hours to recharge. It was too big to comfortably fit in my pocket so I clipped it to my trouser belt, which was quite cool at the time.

When it died I bought a Nokia: a shimmering blue egg-like object. It fitted in my pocket, which was just as well as it had now become pretentious to hang a phone on your belt. The price was right: it was free, with a two year contract (which cost about $200 a month). It was digital so the reception was better and, best of all, the lithium ion battery took just one hour to charge for 7 hours talk time.

My next phone was a Samsung 330. I bought it in 2006 for $A99. My call charges were capped at $49 per month, but if that was too much I could pay-as-I-go. It had a "fun box", an organizer, a camera, room for 1000 phone numbers and, oh yeah, it made phone calls.

From luggable "brick" to pocket-sized mini-computer in 13 years. In the same period the number of users exploded from 30 lucky New York businessmen to over 2 billion souls worldwide.

In January 2007, Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple Inc., stood up at the Macworld Expo in his blue jeans and tasteless white joggers and transformed every one of those 2 billion mobile phones into dated technology with his announcement of the iPhone, a fully featured desktop computer the size of an iPod, that also (how handy is this?) makes phone calls.

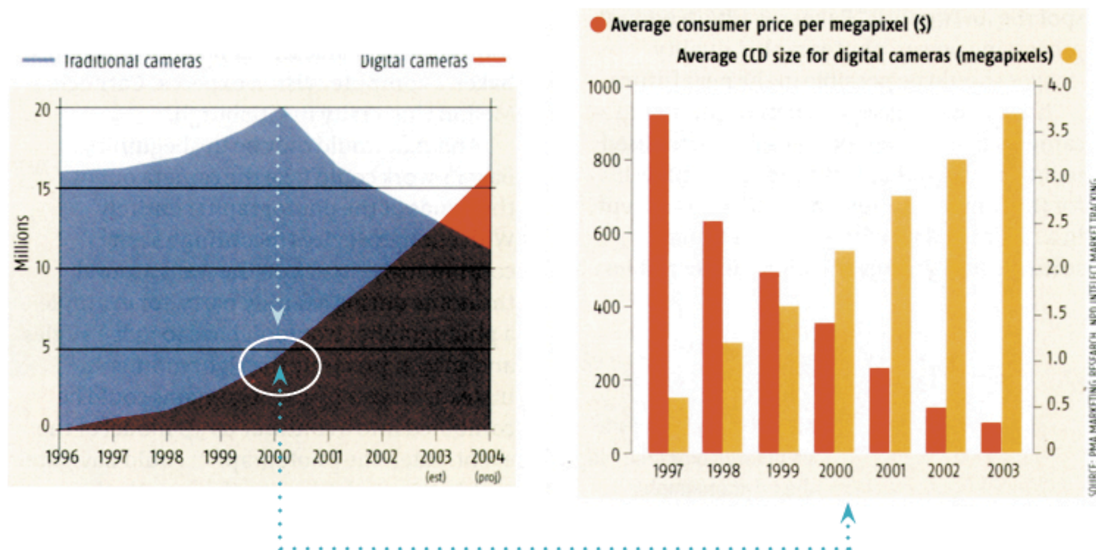
Now here's a big question. What changed? Did people change or did the mobile phone change? Of course, the answer is that the mobile phone did the lion's share of the changing. It started off as a ponderous block. Then it started evolving. We humans, on the other hand, stayed pretty much the same – busy people, separated from our loved ones, business partners and customers, who just wanted to talk.

The counter-intuitive point is that most social changes don't involve people changing. Probably I should say that again. *Most social changes don't involve people changing.* People's hopes, wants and motivations stay pretty much the same. Instead what drives change is the capacity of a gadget, service or behaviour to evolve and gradually become easier, quicker, smaller, hipper, more powerful and more useful.

The evolution of the recycling bin followed a similar progress, from crumply bag, to messy hand-held bin, to big, tidy wheely bin, and the participation rate leapt at each stage.

Just to rub the point in, here's an interesting graph I found. It shows the evolution of the digital camera. From its introduction in 1996 the pixel resolution steadily increased as the price fell. Notice how the take off point was reached when a two megapixel camera

fell below $400. From that point sales of conventional cameras collapsed.



Source: Mullins, J (2004) The next generation, *New Scientist* 16 Oct, p25

The mobile phone, the recycling bin, and the digital camera demonstrate that persuasion is probably the least important driver of change. What really drives change is *reinvention*.

It's therefore a mistake to assume that, just because you have a few per cent of early adopters taking up your solution that you can just keeping rolling it out as if it's perfect for everyone else. It's not.

The solution that appeals to an early adopter almost certainly won't work with an early majority, and the solution that works with an early majority usually won't work for a late majority. That's because early adopters care about your issue and late majorities don't and you can't make them. Instead your solution has to continually reinvent itself, getting easier, simpler, quicker, cheaper, and more functional, to fit more and more demanding, time poor and distracted users as it spreads.

The next time hear a colleague moaning that people aren't taking up into their supposedly desirable product or behaviour, you could ask them: "How could you evolve that product or behaviour to make it a better fit for those peoples' lives"?

Learning from innovators

The best and easiest way evolve a product or behaviour is to watch what innovators are up to, then cherry pick their ideas.

In the Arabic smoking case study we discussed earlier, notice how the focus groups allowed the project team to hear stories of Arabic women who had already innovated their own solutions to the problem of tobacco use at home. Those stories became the basis of a successful campaign.

A classic story of user reinvention is Skin-So-Soft body lotion. Avon produced Skin-So-Soft to soften skin. But Royal Marine commandos guarding a submarine base in Scotland found it repelled midges. The story spread, but instead of being affronted, Avon rose to the occasion. They mixed a real insect repellent, Citronella, into the formula, and later added a block-out as well. So you can now buy *Skin-So-Soft Bug Guard Plus Insect Repellent Moisturizing Lotion SPF 30.*

Some computer games are now built with the intention that they will be modified by enthusiastic users. Says consumer behaviour expert, Francine Gardin, "They're actually participating in the design of the game. These consumers are really passionate about the game – it's almost like a cult. They have an incredible sense of loyalty and ownership of that brand. Instead of complaining, they

fix the product."[40]

Technology evangelist Guy Kawasaki says "Communities can't just sit around composing love letters to your CEO about how great she is. This means your product has to be 'customizable,' 'extensible,' and 'malleable.' Think about Adobe Photoshop: if it weren't for the company's plug-in architecture, do you think its community would have developed so quickly? However, giving people something to chew on requires killing corporate *hubris* and admitting that your engineers did not create the perfect product. Nevertheless, the payoff is huge because once you get people chewing on a product, it's hard to wrest it away from them."[41]

It's possible to go one step further and invite the users to help you design the product from the ground up. This approach is popular in overseas aid projects, rural extension work and health policy development where it's variously called "participative action research", "participative learning", "rapid rural appraisal" or similar permutations.[42]

The essence of participative design is simple: make the users into partners in devising the solution.

Here's how Professor Steve Sussman at the University of Southern California invited high school students to help him design probably the world's most effective teen smoking cessation program. He first ran a series of focus groups with troubled students in California's Continuation High Schools, asking them what activities they thought would engage other teenagers like themselves. They suggested activities that focusing on the benefits of quitting while young, on alternatives to smoking, on yoga, and looking on ex-smokers as strong people. Steve's team then took these ideas and built them

into 26 classroom activities that included games, puzzles, Oprah-like talk shows, and non-intellectual activities like yoga, "healthy breathing" and anger management. He then invited students in four schools to test the activities and rate the ones they liked most (the top-rating activity was a talk show that emphasized quitting while young). The top 14 activities were then re-tested on yet another group of students to determine their immediate impact. The top eight activities that survived this brutal elimination process were kept in the program. The eventual program, called Project EX, was rolled out with 355 smokers in twelve Continuation High Schools. Three months after the program finished 17 percent had quit, compared to only 8 percent in a control group.[43]

Incidentally, a secret to improving solutions is to be on the lookout for *unexpected* results. They always have useful messages for us.

Let's imagine you're an environmental educator and you decide to hold a "clean water fair" and invite the local community along. When you do this you notice that practically no one pays attention to the 3-dimensional pollution diorama and the weed display but families flock in droves to the hands-on water bug demo and the canoe tour. You didn't expect this and so it's got a message for you. It's telling you to dump the pollution diorama and the weed display and ramp up the hands-on living exhibits and river adventures. And it's telling you to reframe your fair as a "river adventure and bug festival". If you do that a lot more people will come next year, your fair will prosper, and it's educational impact will increase. Ignore this unexpected message and your fair will shrivel and vanish.

Why "critical mass" and "tipping point" are unhelpful ideas

And while I'm at it, this is a good place to mention a popular but

useless idea.

“Critical mass” or “tipping point” is the beguiling idea that when a certain number of people adopt an innovation, further adoption is self-sustaining and somehow inevitable.

Critical mass is an idea from physics. When critical mass is reached in a sufficiently dense lump of radioactive uranium, a run-away nuclear reaction happens, and you get a big bang. The shape of the take-off curve for internet use and consumer products certainly resembles the exponential take-off of a nuclear reaction.

One justification for the idea of critical mass is the idea that adoption itself can increase the value of an innovation. Take email: as each new person adopted email, its usefulness increased for those who had not yet adopted it making it more likely they would.[44] Another argument involves peer pressure, as people begin to fear being left out.

“Critical mass” and “tipping point” are seductive ideas because they suggest that if we could only reach a certain magic number we could sit back and watch our work take off without having to put in much more effort.

“Critical mass” and “tipping point” are unhelpful ideas for exactly that reason - they encourage complacency. They miss the most important cause of take-off: reinvention. Take email again. Did you ever try to configure an old fashioned dial-up modem? If you did, you probably recall hours of crazy-making torment until you gave up and found a friendly geek to do it for you.

Email’s seemingly inevitable rise-and-rise was only partly due to a

critical mass of users. Its main cause was remorseless and imaginative software innovation and massive infrastructure investment that made it increasingly inexpensive and easy.

What will cause the spread of your behaviour or product, therefore, is not a particular magical number of adopters of Version 1.0, but whether you are observant, imaginative and courageous enough to abandon your apparently successful Version 1.0 and invest in an improved, and apparently risky, Version 2.0. And then an even better Version 3.0, and so on.

The hard news for change agents is that social change doesn't get easier once you pass some mythical "tipping point". As our innovations move along the bell curve, we are faced with progressively less interested more distracted people who care less about our innovations and more about just getting on with their lives. The amount of time, energy, enthusiasm, cash, skills they have to invest gets smaller and smaller. Hence the obligation never leaves us, as change agents, to continually reinvent our innovations to fit their lives.

Leaping the chasm: when price matters

At the start of this chapter we made the point that saving money alone is rarely the reason why people adopt new products or behaviours. People usually adopt for other, more interesting, reasons. However, once people *are* motivated to adopt a new product or behaviour, then price becomes a consideration, not as a motivator of action, but as a potential obstacle.

Here's a story that illustrates the point.

Nic Frances is a youthful ex-priest who resigned as CEO of the Brotherhood of St Laurence in 2003 and decided to do something about global warming. With his friend, Chris Tierney, he set up a company called Easy Being Green with the aim of helping people retrofit their homes to make them more sustainable. They bought a few pallets of compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) and began selling them at a discount price at open-air markets around Sydney. People seemed interested but sales were poor. Nic and Chris were charging $10 for a pack of 6 CFLs which was good value compared to, typically, $20-40 at the supermarket. But the most they ever sold in one day was 91 packs. In desperation they lowered the price to $5 but sales didn’t improve.

Then, while talking with a Greenpeace campaigner, Nic had an ah-hah moment. NSW had introduced a mandatory carbon trading scheme in 2003 (it was one of the first states in the world to do so). Doing the sums, Nic figured out that the dollar value of carbon abatement from a single CFL was greater than its purchase price. In other words, by funding the purchase of CFLs through an emissions trading scheme he could give away the CFLs for *free*. In fact he could cover the program management, distribution, and advertising costs and still come out ahead.

Ambitiously, Nic tied up a deal with NSW’s biggest daily newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, for a CFL giveaway campaign that would become the one of the largest carbon trading projects ever undertaken in NSW.

Easy Being Green gave away 3 million CFLs (in packs of six plus a water saving shower head) to about 500,000 households, aggregated the carbon savings, converted them into carbon credits and sold the credits to pay for the whole project.

After that massive effort, Nic decided the Sydney CFL market was saturated. Which was true enough: by late 2006 Easy Being Green and other players had distributed free CFLs to about 70 percent of NSW households.[45] Nic adopted a "my work here is done" attitude and decided to export the model overseas. He started another company, CoolNRG, and repeated the exercise in the United Kingdom, this time distributing 4.5 million CFLs in a single day ("The Great British Light Switch").

In July 2008 he signed a deal to buy $300 million worth of CFLs from China's biggest manufacturer – probably the largest single light bulb purchase in history – for similar schemes in China and Mexico (to be funded through the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism. Nic points out that, by saving a million poor Mexican families the equivalent of two weeks wages a year in energy costs, it could also be one of the largest poverty-reduction projects in Mexican history.)

Nic is a born-again market evangelist. He thinks capitalism is the most powerful mechanism for driving human behaviour ever invented. In his view, we can use markets to reward people for going good just as easily as we can reward them for doing evil. It only takes a little imagination and, of course, governments that have established carbon emission trading systems.

I met Nic at a conference and asked him, "Installing a CFL is just about the easiest thing we can ask someone to do, but what about the hard stuff: leaving cars at home, retrofitting homes, becoming active citizens. How can the market help there?" Quick as a flash he shot back "Any human activity that reduces carbon, and can be

measured, can be turned into cash. We could literally hand someone a cheque for leaving their car at home two days a week."

He has a point, and he's busy proving it. There's a stack of lessons in Nic's story (told simply and inspiringly in his book *The End of Charity, Time for Social Enterprise*) but the one I want to draw out is about the role of price in a social change project.

There's a time in the evolution of products and behaviours that price matters, but it's not at the beginning. Price matters little to early adopters. For them it's all about the dream. Costs aren't costs, they're investments in passionately-desired futures. But when we ramp up our efforts to go beyond early adopters into majority audiences (that is, when we exceed about 20 percent take-up in a given population) the rules change dramatically.

What stymied Nic's early attempts to sell CLFs was that around 30 percent of NSW households already had them. The enthusiastic early adopters were already on board. That left Nic with a tough audience: the pragmatic majority.

Once they had Nic's free CFLs in their hands, four out of five installed them within 12 months[46] which shows that the majority did actually appreciate the CFLs and understood the benefits. They apparently wanted them but just not enough to fork out $5 for a pack of six.

The 60 percent or so of people in the "majority" are tough customers. They care about health, the environment and the future of world (so research says) but their passion is lukewarm. They almost certainly do have passions in their lives, it's just that they don't intersect with your particular project. They might be

passionate about coaching their daughter's soccer team, or becoming the world's No1 Wikipedia editor. But when it comes to saving the environment (and money) by installing a CFL bulb their motivations are cool. Majority audiences are easily distracted, price-sensitive, risk-averse, and they hate complexity and inconvenience. Those adventurous early adopters might buy the Beta version of any software they think will give them the edge, but majorities buy Microsoft.

In other words, when you are working with majorities, that is, once you pass about 20 percent take-up of a new behaviour or product, cost and convenience really start to matter, and the further you move into majority markets, they matter more. By the time you move into "late majorities", that is, past 50 percent take-up, you really need to have pared the cost down to a bare minimum, and ramped up the ease and simplicity to a maximum.

Nic Frances and his team found it practically impossible to sell CFLs in a market where CFL take-up was already around 30 percent. The early adopters already had their CFLs. Nic had to leap across the chasm into the majority market, and, since installing a CFL was already as simple as it could be, price was the key. By giving away CFLs for free, he found the way to leap the chasm.

Conclusion

There is no universal formula for designing a sticky behaviour or product.

Everyone is different, and we can't possibly know what wants a particular group has until we ask them. That's what focus groups are for. But if, for some reason, you don't want to organise focus

groups, then just try chatting with people. When you do, find a way to slip some "unhappiness" questions into the discussion: "What's not working for you?" "What would you like to improve?", "What's your biggest frustration?" These questions will take you to their hot wants. Then, and only then, you can start thinking about constructing solutions that might answer their frustrations.

Chances are, your solution will need to pass these tests:

- Will it give people more control over their lives ie. increase their certainty of getting their wants met?

- Will it save them time or at least not take more time?

- Will it give them something to talk about with their peers or raise their social status?

- And for majorities: is it as cheap, easy, and simple as it could possibly be?

It turns out that changing the world isn't really about persuasion. Persuasion might get people to try a new idea once but sustained use depends on our creativity in designing and delivering solutions that stick because they make a sustained difference in people's lives.

Like Noel Kesby, you have to make your goal the equivalent of to "giving farmers the edge" and deliver on it.

The fourth condition for social change is STICKINESS

Stickiness means that the behaviour or product is a good fit for people's wants. In other words, it answers their real frustrations and dissatisfactions. Stickiness is far more important than persuasion. Persuasion may get people doing something once. But to keep them doing it, the behaviour or product will need to actually improve their lives.

To create sticky behaviours or products:

• Start by getting to know the frustrations of your audience. Talk to them. Find out what's not working in their lives. What frustrations or dissatisfactions could your possibly offer a solution to.

• Look for spontaneous innovators. Someone out there has probably already created a better solution. You might just need to find it.

• Keep in mind three über-wants: control, time and connection. Find a way to increase people's supply of these and your project will almost certainly prosper.

• Beware Heroic Agent Bias. Trial the innovation before you launch it. Is it an easy fit for people's lives, or is re-engineering required? Don't be afraid to go back to the drawing board.

• Expect your innovation to evolve. Watch how people use it in practice. Keep your eyes peeled for unexpected modifications. Look for ways to make it easier, quicker, faster, cheaper and more powerful.

• If the behaviour or product doesn't take, don't blame the users. Instead invite them to become partners in creating a solution that's a better fit for their lives.

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