

Beyond Lip Service: A Council Approach to Planning for Behaviour Change

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Abstract

The Council of the City of Sydney – like many other councils around Australia – has embarked on a whole-of-council approach to establishing sustainable behaviours amongst its residents. In developing its *Residential Environmental Action Plan* - designed to motivate and bring about real change in resident choices and behaviours - the City sought to base its planning on a significant knowledge base.

It undertook a project which asked two fundamental questions: *What does the literature say about behaviour change in the community?* and *What do the residents of the City of Sydney local government area say about the best ways to influence community behaviour?* A review of behaviour change models and the conduct of focus groups and other informant interviews across the key demographics of the City of Sydney local government area, yielded two sets of criteria for behaviour change programs. Not surprisingly, both sets were similar and for ease of use they were merged into one shorter set of twelve criteria. These are useful in informing the design of programs or assessing whether existing programs are capable of affecting behaviour. The key claim in this paper is the importance of understanding both the theory and the local community at the design phase of any program. Good planning of behaviour change programs enables graceful interventions, the magic of co-learning and the power of adaptation.

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Introduction

Now that many people, organisations and governments are waking up to the finiteness of the Earth's natural resources and the potential changes caused by global warming, most agree that urgent action is a necessity, and governments and businesses alike are increasingly interested in how to motivate and support changes in behaviours and practices toward sustainability. (Department of the Environment and Heritage 2006; UNESCO 1997; UNESCO, 2003).

It is clear that large scale changes to the way we do business and live our lives are required. The community needs to be highly engaged and prepared to make some

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difficult choices in the future - choices that require more effort and commitment than is needed to put the kerb-side recycling bins out every week. Some of the tough changes that people will need to make on a whole community scale include: reducing the reliance on cars; using water more appropriately; drinking recycled water; changing consumption levels and habits; using significantly less energy at home and at work; confronting choices about sizes of houses; and the use of air conditioning.

There are also broader sustainability issues that society will need to grapple with. In responding to these specific challenges, the community must find ways to: strengthen personal and community well-being; build participation in local and regional decision-making processes including building the communication systems to enable participation; and ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth. Changes of this magnitude will not just happen – people will need to be educated - informed, convinced, shown, motivated and supported - to shift their behaviours, and encouraged and enabled to be adaptive and creative.

Behaviour change is complex, and people change for their own reasons; hence efforts must be made to understand those reasons and to develop approaches that influence that reasoning and support the change that communities want to make (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Rejeski, Brawley, McAuley, & Rapp, 2000; Resnicow & Scott, 2008). This paper describes the approach taken by the City of Sydney to understand the implications of the change models described below and to move its community down the path towards sustainability.

Essential Thinking

This paper argues that unless sound planning underpins the development of focused, strategic and purpose-built sustainability change programs, the resultant actions will be graceless, sterile and powerless. In the face of the need for urgent solutions to pressing sustainability problems, haphazard, ill-thought-through, ad-hoc and under-resourced initiatives are simply not good enough. Indeed, and not least because they are in full view of public accountability for program expenditure, local councils and other government agencies can no longer afford to just act without clear purpose, direction and process.

Human actions and behaviours – whatever their cause or motivation – have created the environmental (sustainability) problems. Human actions and behaviours need to be the causes of the solutions (UNEP, 2007). Ways must be found, therefore, to identify the changes necessary for a sustainable society and appropriate ways to help bring them about. This is neither simple nor straightforward, and we know that changing behaviour is complex (Tilbury, Stevenson, Fien, & Shreuder, 2002).

Individuals have choices over some of the changes that need to be made: the use of water and energy, the way waste is managed at home, decisions made at the shops and points of purchase. Great change can occur through individual choices and behaviours. But people are not just resource-users, and shifting towards a sustainable society will require individuals to act in different ways at different levels (Robottom & Hart, 1993; Fien 1993).

Local Government Authorities (referred to as Councils for the remainder of this paper) that take an interest in helping their communities to become more sustainable need to be thinking of programs and approaches that do more than skim the surface of the substantial changes needed. They need to work at many levels and include elements that build advocacy skills, critical thinking (critical consumption) and personal commitment to achieving a sustainable society (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999; Janicke, 2004). The programs and support mechanisms that accompany them need to:

1. build understanding and capacity of individuals to make the changes over which they have direct control (e.g. shorter showers);
2. build understanding of where their choices and actions fit within the broader society;
3. build knowledge about how change can be effected within society and the roles people can play to achieve change. Coupled with this is the need to build skills so that they can participate in bringing about change; and
4. build skills in peeling back the assumptions behind the way society conducts itself (e.g. critical thinking skills); at this point, the paradigm of growth that drives personal, social and political decisions comes under scrutiny.

In other words, these programs need to understand systems, and the roles individuals play in bringing about change at all the different levels within those systems (Sterling, 2005).

Motivating Behaviour Change

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that people's behaviour is influenced by a number of factors and that education or other motivating factors are but a part of the mix. Factors including upbringing, socio-economic status, financial capacity, education level and capacity to act on available choices, form some of the context in which behaviour occurs. Often the literature refers to these factors as "social determinants" and substantial literature is available to describe this concept. The World Health Organization describes these as follows:

Disadvantage has many forms and may be absolute or relative. It can include having few family assets, having a poorer education during adolescence, having insecure employment, becoming stuck in a hazardous or dead-end job, living in poor housing, trying to bring up a family in difficult circumstances and living on an inadequate retirement pension. These disadvantages tend to concentrate among the same people, and their effects on health accumulate during life. The longer people live in stressful economic and social circumstances, the greater the physiological wear and tear they suffer, and the less likely they are to enjoy a healthy old age. (World Health Organization, 2003, p. 10)

Motivating behaviour change is thus contextual. The context needs to be well understood by the program developer before the intervention can be planned or delivered. Effective education does not occur in a vacuum (Browning & Thomas, 2005).

Many education programs contain objectives related to behaviour change, but they are often confused about what is meant by "behaviour change", or what behaviours need to change. A scattergun approach is not what is required. Planning and precision based upon theory and comprehension of what works, with whom, and in which circumstances, are necessary.

In the world of behaviour change, the following myths are often out there:

- *All that is needed is to change the laws and make people change what they do.* This might be right some of the time, but it is difficult and expensive to enforce law and sometimes law just will not work. How do you regulate for a shorter shower?
- *All that is needed is to tell people and they will change.* It is clear from our experiences in attempting to motivate social change, that increasing knowledge alone will not necessarily change behaviour. Is there a smoker in Australia who does not know that smoking is a health hazard? The sustainability landscape is littered with long wordy brochures but how much change does this generate?

- *All that is needed is to give people incentives and then they will change.* Perhaps this is correct if the incentive is large enough and desirable enough. Is Government really going to pay the total procurement and installation costs for a sufficient sized rainwater tank in every Australian residence?
- *If children are educated at school, they will pass on the messages to their parents.* Is this known – does it happen in all families? Will the parents listen and respond? Do the school programs build student capacity to communicate about sustainability with their parents?
- *Changing public policy will change behaviour.* Policy needs to be communicated, supported and reflected in law, education and communication before it can have an influence.

Clearly all of the motivators for change - regulation, education, incentives, policy, and infrastructure - have a part to play in driving behaviour change. But they are only useful when they are planned effectively and implemented in an integrated fashion. In most cases no one strategy is effective on its own, and in some cases, with more complex problems, the use of a single strategy might be counter-productive.

A number of examples of integrated programs exist. For example, in Australia, the successful *Click Clack Front and Back* seatbelt campaign used an integrated mix of policy, infrastructure, enforcement, monitoring and education. The education targeted drivers and adult passengers with direct messages about safety and fines; it also targeted them indirectly through a catchy phrase often repeated by children in the car – *Click Clack Front and Back*. Significant fines apply for not wearing seatbelts and the police enforce this very strongly. It is interesting to note that, although specific messages evolve and change, the program continues more than 20 years after it commenced.

Planning Approaches to Promote Behaviour Change

For behaviour change to be achieved, education programs must be well planned. A planned approach means that the nature of the problem and the specific behavioural solutions are investigated fully. Then, the most appropriate mix of strategic programs is introduced in order to obtain the optimum shifts in behaviour from the maximum number of people in the target audience (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999). Planning is not a one-off exercise done prior to commencing an intervention. Quality planning is responsive, and, to a certain extent, it occurs throughout: each *next* stage is contingent to a degree on what has gone before (ICLEI, 2007; UNESCO, 2005).

Good planning for behaviour change means using the appropriate intervention, and using the intervention appropriately (Kroger & Scott, 2007). Councils thus need to know the problems, know the tools available to address those problems (and how to use them), and know whether they are having any effect on solving the problems. Importantly, they need to know their communities. Programs need to be contextually relevant and sufficiently resourced. Expecting change of the magnitude detailed above on a shoe-string, just won't work. The community might as well save the money and spend it elsewhere.

What did the City of Sydney do to Plan its Approach to Residential Behaviour Change?

The Context

Sydney is a city with a strong economy and quality of life built on its mild climate, cultural diversity, outdoor lifestyle and recreational opportunities. The role of the

Council of the City of Sydney is to manage the social, economic and social sustainability of the City and its eight villages.

At the pinnacle of a number of City of Sydney planning documents is *Sustainable Sydney 2030*. This provides a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. Sustainable development is not just about the physical environment, but about the economy, society and cultures as well. *Sustainable Sydney 2030* establishes a vision of a “Green, Global and Connected City”: **Green** with a modest environmental impact, green with trees, parks, gardens and linked open spaces, green by example and green by reputation; **Global** in economic orientation, global in links and knowledge exchange, global and open-minded in outlook and attitude; and **Connected** physically by walking, cycling and high quality public transport, connected “virtually” by world-class telecommunications, connected to communities through a sense of belonging and social well being, and connected to other spheres of government and to those with an interest in the City.

The Project - It's All About Behaviour

Set within the context of *Sustainable Sydney 2030*, the *It's All About Behaviour Project* focused on a number of areas:

- Review and analysis of behaviour change models;
- Consultation with community on prime environmental and sustainability issues, opportunities for change, barriers to change, preferred approaches, existing knowledge, skills and motivators for change;
- Review of existing government and non-government sustainability programs against criteria identified as part of the project; and
- Recommendations and advice on programs, directions and approaches for a detailed *Residential Environmental Action Strategy*.

In general terms this investigation asked two key questions:

- What does the theory say about changing community behaviour?
- What do the residents of the City of Sydney local government area say about the best ways to influence community behaviour?

What Does the Theory Say?

In order to gain an answer to the first of these questions, the City contracted a review of eight behaviour change models that were identified from the literature. An additional four approaches were also identified and reviewed. An outline of each of these is provided below:

Stages of Change (Prochaska, 2005). This model proposes that people progress through a number of stages in making change. Prochaska argues that whatever the type of behaviour that is being considered, each individual is somewhere on a continuum from not interested/caring to undertaking and intending to maintain the new behaviour. The five stages are:

- *Pre-contemplation*. People are not intending to take action on the particular issue in the foreseeable future. They may be un-informed, under-informed, demoralised because they have tried to change previously with a negative outcome, or just plain apathetic;
- *Contemplation*. People are interested in the issue, open to changing behaviour and “intend” to take action in the next six months;

- *Preparation*. People are intending to take action in the immediate future. They have often taken related actions in the immediate past and need prompting and support to take the next steps;
- *Action*. The new behaviour is taken at this stage; and
- *Maintenance*. The new behaviour continues over time. It is often [and best] supported by others also behaving in that way.

Community-Based Social Marketing (Mackenzie-Mohr, 1999). Community-based social marketing enables program developers to better understand their communities and especially their perceptions of benefits and barriers to desired actions. It is important to understand what people/communities perceive to be the benefits and barriers of action. People make choices about behaviours and they will tend towards actions with high benefits and few barriers.

This model relies upon knowing the audience, particularly the difference between those who already practice the desired behaviour and those who do not. This requires the program manager to promote the most appropriate action to the appropriate segment of the community. The specificity of both the audience and the behaviour enables community-based social marketing techniques to be successful. It is important in this approach, to tailor the message, provide appropriate information, create commitment, and utilise incentives.

Health Belief Model (Rosenstock, 1974). Individuals will take preventative action for their health (and it can be postulated that this will occur for the environment as well) if they believe that: they are at personal risk of contracting illness (personally susceptible); if they are convinced that the changed behaviour will be effective in reducing the impact (or risk); and if they decide that the proposed changes are do-able for them. This model focuses on the attitudes of an individual as they relate to their knowledge of a disease (in a health context) or an environmental issue or problem (in a sustainability context).

Tipping Point (Gladwell, 2000). The Tipping Point offers a new way of understanding why change so often happens as quickly and as unexpectedly as it does. Gladwell postulates that education messages, incentives and products sometimes spark rapid and widespread behaviour change, just like outbreaks of infectious disease. Tipping points are social epidemics and those involved in social change need to identify ways of getting people to the tipping point.

Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers) (similar to the **Amoeba of Change Theory** (AtKisson. Both in Kerr, Weitkunat, & Moretti, 2005). This model sees change as a sort of *wave* motion moving through society. It provides an explanation for how innovations (an idea, practice or object perceived as new by its audience) are taken up in a population; and it considers the different paces at which individuals take up and take on change, which is not uniform through the community. In this model, the adoption of an innovation in any given population follows a fairly predictable pattern. A change starts with an innovator who is often a single individual with a new idea. After its conception, an innovation spreads slowly at first - usually through the work of “change agents”, who actively promote the innovation - then picks up speed as more and more people adopt it. Eventually it reaches a saturation level, where virtually everyone who is going to adopt the innovation has done so.

Ottawa Charter (as quoted in World Health Organization, Milestones in Health Promotion, 2009). The Ottawa Charter on Health Promotion was developed by the

World Health Organization at an International Conference on Health Promotion in Ottawa, Canada in 1986. It states that in order to be effective, Health Promotion must address five core elements of practice in an integrated manner. The model postulates that failure to develop programs containing all elements will reduce the possible impact of activities on the problem. While this model has a particular orientation towards health, its general principles also apply to education for sustainability. The five hub elements are: Build healthy public policy; create supportive environments; strengthen community action; develop personal skills; and re-orient health services.

Education for Sustainability (UNESCO, 2005). This approach proposes principles of good practice within environmental education, education for sustainability and education for sustainable development. Education for Sustainability is not a model as such. Instead, it is the culmination of many years of social change education in nature studies, environmental education, systems thinking and a range of other areas including health, peace, civil rights and liberation education.

Rational Choice Theory (Jackson, 2005). Rational Choice theory has been around for some time and has often been used to support consumer marketing and advertising. This model is based on the premise that as consumers, people behave in ways that maximise their expected benefits. Hence retailers run post-Christmas or half yearly sales, car dealers hold run-out sales and offer accessories at no cost, and we can always find “specials” at the supermarket. Most people, most of the time, weigh up expected benefits from each option and then choose one. At times choice is based on a personal view of the highest net benefit when considered against the lowest net cost. Individuals make a choice based on rational deliberation which is framed within a view of available income; the relative price of goods or services; consumer taste and/or preferences; and the expected utility of the service or product (for example, how long will it last? how far will it go? etc.).

The models and approaches outlined above were selected because they focus on behaviour change, and have an established reputation. None is universally agreed as the definitive change model, but each has been positively received. The models relate to behaviour shift by individuals and/or groups within systems, and they were selected across this spectrum so that the criteria developed could reflect the range of possible target audiences for programs. Some of the selected models are about community segmentation and what works for each (Stages of Change, Diffusion of Innovations); some are about the broad nature of required interventions (Ottawa Charter/Sustainability Education); others focus on individual determinants or drivers of behaviour (Rational Choice); and others on the nature of the motivation towards behaviour shift (Health Belief). The review provided the City with a good understanding of the theory underpinning behaviour shift. It also enabled the development of a set of criteria for behaviour change programs drawn from each theory (see below).

What Did the Community Say?

The City also wanted to hear from its community. But who is the community and who needs to be asked? This project did not seek to get a truly representative sample of the City of Sydney community: the diversity and transience of the City community would have made this a much bigger project. Instead, a sample that reflected the demographics of the community was agreed on. This was based on an examination of known data about residents' age, cultural background and location. The consultation sought to get a sense of community understanding about change, sustainability issues and the sorts of actions that are required for the City to be sustainable.

A range of qualitative methods was used to collect data from the community. The following table provides summary information about each of the strategies used.

Method of data Collection	Number of Consultations – Occasions of Service	Number Contacted - People Who Contributed
Focus Groups of one and a half to two hours in duration.	Fifteen in total	One hundred and fifteen people plus Aboriginal community members at a community lunch.
Quantitative Telephone Survey	One hundred City of Sydney residents, drawn at random	One hundred people in all. Five to Seven minute telephone survey conducted under sub-contract by Woolcott Research.
Follow-up telephone survey	Twenty four residents	Twenty four people in all. Follow up and in-depth phone calls.

The consultation enabled direct resident input from almost two hundred and fifty people. This process enabled the development of a set of criteria for behaviour change programs drawn from the community's view of what works (see below).

What Makes an Effective Behaviour Change Program – the Criteria?

From the investigation of what the community says works and the review of the relevant literature on behaviour change theories and models, the project developed criteria that could be used to: **assess** existing activities and programs to determine their likelihood to change behaviour; **adapt** existing activities and programs to improve the probability that they will change behaviour; **and develop** new programs and activities that will impact upon behaviour.

Two sets of criteria were delivered to the City. The first, a very detailed list, included twenty-four criteria drawn from the behaviour change literature and a further sixteen criteria which were drawn from the community consultation process. This was an exceptionally comprehensive listing of criteria and it was felt that only personnel particularly interested in behaviour change would work through all of these in the development of their programs. In order to make the process user-friendly, a short list of twelve criteria was proposed:

Colloquially, this list is entitled *If You Use Nothing Else*. So whether City of Sydney staff are assessing, adapting or developing behaviour change programs, at the very least they need to use the following criteria in order to determine the impact on possible/potential/actual behaviour motivated by the program. According to the theory and to the community of the City of Sydney, programs motivating behaviour change should:

1. Target the interests and capacities of individuals and local communities – streets, neighbourhoods, facilities, events – or specific groups of people (CALD, Public housing residents) and, as far as possible, involve them in the development of the program.
2. Be appropriate to the stage of change that people are at in relation to the problem, and offer actions that help people make changes at the pace and level they can.

3. Be linked to the community's view, concerns and understanding of the problem.
4. Be founded on a clear purpose and an agreed set of objectives, and promote the development of a local vision.
5. Be ongoing/ continuing and adapt to changing needs.
6. Use a range of approaches/messages that tap into head, heart, hip-pockets and practical action motivators for change.
7. Recognise achievement and provide the public with feedback on the results of their efforts.
8. Support and build on the work of early adopters, local volunteers, spokespeople, champions, networks and advocates.
9. Demonstrate the City's leadership through good practice, public modelling, integrated policies and an articulated sustainability ethos.
10. Demonstrate an understanding of change theory and how behaviour change happens.
11. Focus on building competence and commitment beyond the life of the program.
12. Use evaluation as an integral part of the design and delivery of the program and the development of future programs.

To test the effectiveness of these criteria, a review of ten existing behaviour change programs was undertaken. In essence this was a quality assurance process to determine whether the criteria were useful in determining the extent to which a program might influence behaviour. Following this review, slight wording changes were made to the short list of criteria.

What the City is Doing Now

The processes described above have informed the development of the City's Residential Environmental Action Strategy (REAS). The REAS will help the City deliver and communicate the Sustainable Sydney 2030 vision through working with our communities to build sustainability capacity and celebrate community change. Prioritised actions are being developed around identified target groups within the community including public housing residents, multi-unit dwellings, CALD communities and local villages.

Conclusion

Motivating behaviour change for sustainability is a complex process whereby the intervention must be based on established theory and it must be appropriate to the audience and their needs. Sustainability change programs need to be planned in detail in order to move behaviours – change towards sustainability does not just happen. Criteria have been devised by the City of Sydney to assist program developers to plan and deliver the best possible range of programs, resulting in the greatest degree of impact on the behaviour of people in the community. These have proven useful to the City in assessing whether current programs and initiatives are likely to change behaviour; adapting existing activities and programs to improve the probability that they will change behaviour; and developing new programs and activities that will impact upon resident behaviours.

Keywords: Behaviour; change; local government; education for sustainability; education planning.

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