How to use behavioural science to build new habits

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This article explains the lessons from behavioural science about the formation of habits and lists six strategies that marketers can employ to build, maintain and disrupt consumer habits.

- Habits make up a huge proportion of our daily lives and once formed, they become such second nature that breaking or changing them can be near impossible.
- Habits can also explain why half of new products fail: When new behaviours – new products or services – are not adopted, the problem often lies not in a lack of awareness or knowledge in the consumer, or even a lack of intention to use, but in the failure to change existing habits or adopt new ones.
- The Behavioural Architects list six strategies that marketers should follow to steer people to build new habits: these include the need to create a stable, supportive environment for the new habit, making the new behaviour as easy as possible to do, and enabling people to create unique cues and rewards.
- Five case studies are included which tackle habits ranging from exercise routines, payment mechanisms, the purchase of fruit and vegetables, sanitation and kitchen cleaning.

This article looks at how best to leverage the latest scientific understanding around habitual behaviours in order that as marketers we can be more effective in building, maintaining and disrupting consumer habits.

Definitions

Behavioural science, in its simplest form, is the study of human and animal behaviour.

Behavioural scientists Bas Verplanken and Henrik Aarts define habits as 'a learned sequence of acts that have become automatic, unconscious responses to specific cues or triggers around us'.[1]

Where to start

Our habits make up a huge proportion of our daily lives – one study examining diaries of students and community members concluded that up to 45% of the activities and tasks we undertake in our day are habitual.[2] Once formed, they become such second nature, that breaking or changing them can be near impossible. The 19th century Scottish writer Samuel Smiles observed that *"To uproot an old habit is sometimes a more painful thing, and vastly more difficult, than to wrench out a tooth."*[3]

And it is because of this, that habits are in effect, the **marketing 'holy grail'**. Around half of new products fail[4] and it is habits that can explain why – and crucially how and why the few that become embedded in our lives succeed.

When new behaviours – new products or services – are not adopted, the real problem often lies not in a lack of awareness or knowledge in the consumer, or even a lack of intention to use, but in the failure to change existing habits or adopt new ones. And this is where insights from behavioural science – the rapidly growing scientific study of our behaviour and decision making which acknowledges and embraces the inherent biases and distortions that characterise human judgement and decision making – comes in. Behavioural scientists call this phenomenon the '**Intention-Action gap**'. For example, there is a proven gulf between intending to exercise daily and actually doing it. Most adults know exercise is good for them and would like to do more, yet global studies have shown that between 36% to 55% of people never manage to convert intention into action.[5] Similarly, other research has identified intention-action gaps for handwashing before eating; one study found that whilst the majority of people know it's important to do this, barely 20% actually did.[6]

A study looking at why consumers failed to adopt new products found that a *quarter* of the instances in which consumers failed to use a new product – in this case a new fabric refresher for clothing - were due to the interference of an existing habit.[7] Failure to use the new product was rarely due to disliking a product or finding it did not work properly; **they simply forgot to use the products, and automatically continued or reverted to existing habits.** Take a look through your kitchen cupboard or your bathroom cabinet and you're sure to find some relics that you bought enthusiastically, but forgot to ever use.

Experienced marketers will quickly note that to change behaviour once is not too difficult, but changing it for good is much harder. Behavioural scientists Katy Milkman & Angela Duckworth agree: *"…the biggest problem that needed solving was **figuring out how to make behavior change stick***."

Therefore, it's crucial for any marketer to be able to have a reliable and effective strategy for building new habits and making them stick. First, we need to develop a complete understanding of the habitual behaviour in focus, and then analyse how might it be built, maintained and broken or changed.

Fortunately, over the past few decades, valuable new insights from the rapidly growing field of **behavioural science** – including from psychology, neuroscience, and behaviour change techniques – have given us the concepts, frameworks and tools for us to not only better understand habitual behaviours but also to inform and inspire the development of a best practice approach to building or breaking habits.

So if a habit is 'a learned sequence of acts that have become automatic, unconscious responses to specific cues or triggers around us'[8] there are some key features of habits which warrant discussion.

- Firstly, let's look more closely at how habits are an '**automatic, unconscious response**'. The 18th century writer Samuel Johnson intuitively observed that *"The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken",* realising that habits are very much automatic behaviours.

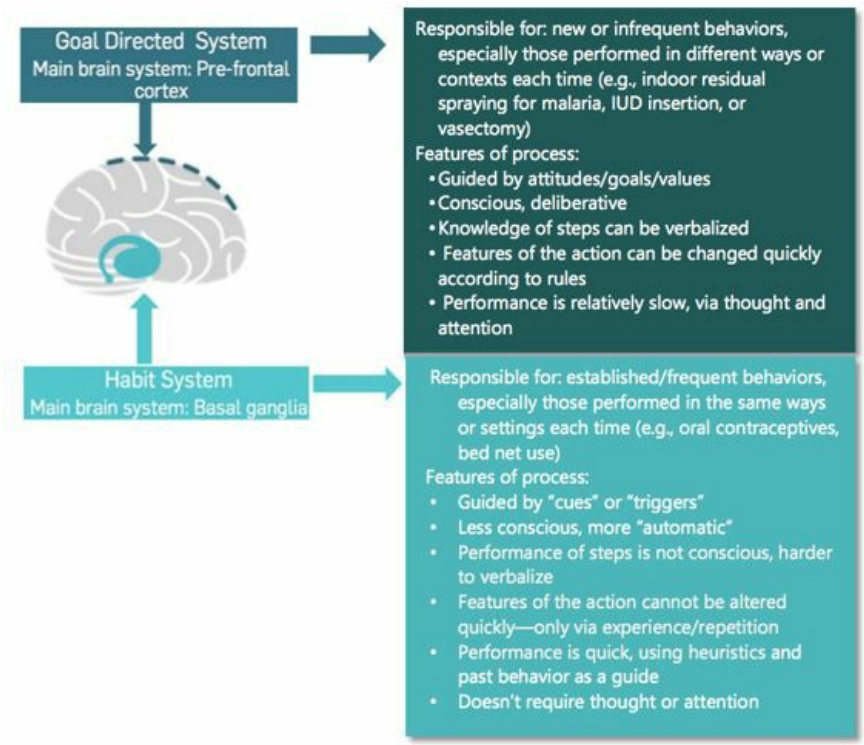

Figure 1: Different brain systems control goal-directed actions and habits. These two systems influence behavior independently of each other (Source: Neal D, J Vujcic, O Hernandez, and W Wood. 2015)[9]

Move forward 250 years and neuroscientific research now supports that observation. Any new behaviour begins with conscious deliberation and intention, drawing on what is known as our executive function or 'System 2' – the prefrontal cortex area of our brain. This is the brain area that does all our hard thinking - helping us do complex calculations, learn a foreign language or navigate our way to a new place. But as we learn and repeat the behaviour over time, our brain shortcuts our executive function and instead relies on the basal ganglia, a more primitive area of the brain which means that we are no longer conscious of the behaviour, but perform it without needing to thinking about starting it or continuing it.

- **Habits need a cue:** A second key feature is that habits are always **triggered by a cue**, typically in a context that is stable and consistent in our lives. The cue triggers our memory of doing the same action or routine previously and helps to initiate it again. Take making a cup of coffee, a familiar habit for many. We might be cued by a particular time of day (waking up), an object in our surrounding environment (a cafetiere) or being in the environment as a whole (the kitchen), a preceding behaviour (turning on the kettle), or even a person or sound (an alarm clock). When such an environment is stable and consistent – when we are in the same place at the same time of day - we are more likely to carry out a particular behaviour, deeply embedding a habit.

- **Repetition:** In addition, for a behaviour to become a true habit, it needs to be performed frequently and repeated many times over. Exact figures for how long it takes to build a habit vary, depending on the complexity of the behaviour, but a study conducted by Phillippa Lally and colleagues at the Health Behaviour Research Centre at UCL in 2009 found that it took anywhere between 18 days (2.5 weeks) and 254 days (over 8 months) to embed a new habit. The average time was 66 days.[10] And this assumes it is performed regularly – daily, or at least a few times per week. For example, a 2015 study looking at the time taken to embed exercise habits found that it took 6 weeks of going to the gym 4 times per week before the new habit was embedded.[11] So when starting a new habit, what can we do to drive and ensure repetition?

- **Rewards:** We can be motivated to repeat a behaviour if we believe we will reap some sort of reward. It is this element which can fix a behaviour in place so it becomes a habit – to the extent that we might not even need the reward once the behaviour has become automatic. We are motivated by many different types of rewards – from intrinsic to extrinsic, conscious and subconscious, physical to physiological, short-term or long-term, one-off or a reward that is cumulative and builds up over time. We may build a habit with just a single reward, or with a mix of different types of rewards.

With these three key features – a behaviour that is automatic, initiated by a cue or trigger, oft repeated and embedded via a reward – in mind, we can now construct a simple model of habits. The 'Habit Loop' model illustrated below helps to keep in mind the essential elements which are needed to set about building a new habit.

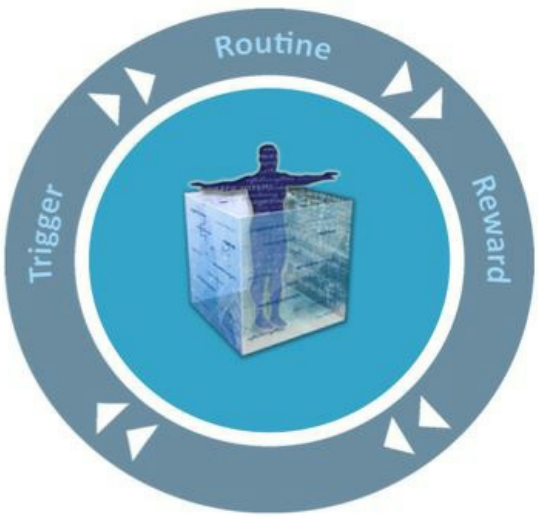

Figure 2: The habit loop, illustrating how the trigger initiates the routine which is followed by the reward. Source: The Behavioural Architects / Charles Duhigg

With this definition, key features and model outlined we will go on to outline some evidence-based strategies and techniques which can be used to build and embed a habit into people's routines.

Essentials

How can we steer people to build a new habit that is sustained over time?

We've looked at several different models and frameworks from practitioners such as Nir Eyal, B.J. Fogg and Charles Duhigg and academics such as Bas Verplanken, Wendy Wood and Ben Gardner, all of which aim to aid

understanding and/or build habitual behaviours. For us though, the best practice approach comes from David Neal, a psychologist at Duke University's Center for Advanced Hindsight, who outlines **six essential strategies** or techniques, each grounded in evidence from the behavioural sciences, which are effective for forming a new habit.

Six strategies for building habits:

Each of the six strategies are tiered in terms of their importance.

- One is an essential precondition – a 'must-have' right from the start – without it a consumer will ultimately fail to embed the behaviour in their lives;
- three are important; and
- two are 'good to have'.

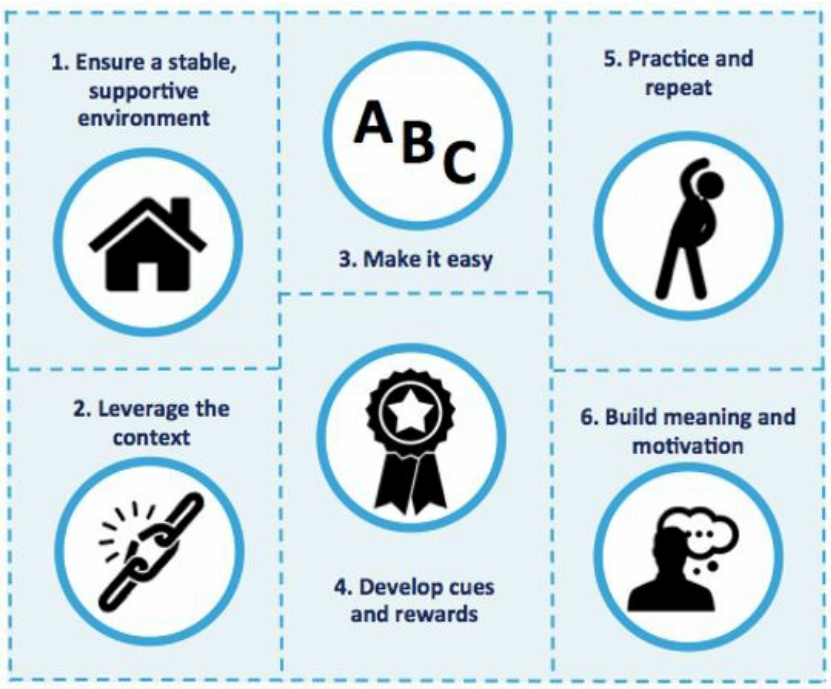

Figure 3: Six Strategies for Building Habits. Source: The Behavioural Architects 2017 based on Neal, D. "The Science of Habit" 2015

Strategy 1: Ensure a stable, supportive environment

(Essential)

As we discussed above, a supportive environment enables the creation of consistent cues which will begin to automatically initiate a new habit. This element is an absolutely essential precondition – if the context or surrounding environment is not set up for the desired habit, even the most determined, obstinate characters are going to struggle to even start a new habit, let alone embed it!

Take the example of an avid music fan, who listens to music via his long accumulated CDs and records. An online streaming service would love him to develop a new listening habit via streaming, but unless he has the supportive technology (a good quality tablet or laptop) with a fast, unlimited, reliable Wifi connection, he is unlikely to make the switch.

Or there might be the health-conscious person who would like to cut down on wine or beer on a weekday evening. Success might come from making sure there is little if any of either in the home and perhaps finding a different drink – maybe sparkling mineral water – to substitute instead. Making these small but effective changes to the context can help promote a new habit.

Another example is often the would-be gym-goer, whose life is quite unpredictable, involving lots of business travel meaning a frequent change of context and irregular leisure time, if any. Studies of exercise and healthy lifestyle habits have shown that having a regular and stable place to exercise – a local gym at home or near work, a regular class or a tried and tested running route will bed down any new sporting or physical activity the best.

Another illustration might be of the child encouraged by their schoolteacher to read more. Here, having suitable books available at school and in the home as well as having an allotted time to read – perhaps after bathtime, before bedtime – would be essential for building a habit.

Strategy 2: Leverage the context

(Good to leverage if possible)

This strategy is all about making the best use of *natural* opportunities already existing, or soon to exist, in a consumer's environment or general life - meaning we marketers don't need to do so much of the heavy lifting! This means analysing the specific context – are there opportunities to develop new habits if a) old ones are temporarily disrupted by a change or b) by piggybacking to existing habits?

1. **Leverage a disruption of the status quo:** One of the best opportunities to promote new habits is to intervene during a major, permanent, life change, such as a new job or career, moving house or the start of a new life stage such as going to university, having a baby or retiring. These occasions often involve a change in the surrounding environment and/or changes in daily routines which mean existing habits are not as automatic as they might have been previously. David Halpern, of the Behavioural Insights Team in the UK notes that successful behaviour change is often *"…about intervening at the right time. If you contact people within three months of them moving into a new house, it's highly effective – because behavioural patterns haven't re-established themselves yet*."[12] A study published in 2016, which analysed commuting habits of over 18,000 people in the UK, found that people were more likely to switch to more environmentally friendly means of transport *after* moving house – and if they already had environmental concerns - but that the effect decayed over time, so after a year they were more likely to commute by car. "*People have about three months, and then the opportunity for new habits diminishes*," says Gregory Thomas, lead researcher in the study. [13] Another study found that people who had attempted a life change were more likely to have succeeded if they had recently moved to a new location or consciously altered their existing environment in some way. Notably, failures tended to be characterised by efforts to engage willpower only or keep the status quo, making no changes to the context.[14] Both these studies highlight the window of opportunity to change behaviour after a change of context.

2. **Piggyback to an existing habit**: Whilst life changes are invaluable for promoting habit change, they don't occur that often! So other strategies which bolt a new behaviour on to an existing behaviour or routine can be easier and more effective than trying to replace a habit with a new one. For example, people were more successful at flossing their teeth when they did it after brushing their teeth.[15] Another study looking at factors associated with the adoption of innovative, new consumer products, such as a roasting bag for the oven, found that variables such as compatibility with existing habits and previous experiences predicted adoption far better than consumers' personal characteristics.[16] Cast your mind back a few decades and you might remember the craze for Kellogg's 'Pop tarts' – the ready-made breakfast snack which just needed heating in the toaster. By piggybacking onto British people's existing toast-making habit (or obsession), Kellogg's were able to build a new breakfast habit. Making a mental connection between the existing and new habit can aid our memory and help us to remember to perform the new behaviour. It follows that any new habit which *conflicts* with an existing habit or routine is unlikely to be successful without careful consideration or change to the context.

Strategy 3: Make it easy to do

(Important)

Behaviour change experts emphasise the importance of making any desired behaviour easy to do; this is no less important for habitual behaviours, especially when they are very new.

When learning a new behaviour, we have to think a lot more which takes more effort and so it can already seem harder to do. So minimising barriers or making it feel less daunting or simplifying choice can steer someone closer to starting and continuing a new habit.

This is especially important when the desired new habit needs to take place in an already demanding situation, where the cognitive capacities of the consumer are already stretched, perhaps with other distractions or limited mental bandwidth. For example, trying to change habits in the workplace can be difficult when people are already overloaded and often stressed.

Specifically, it's useful to think about three elements to make a new habit easier to get into place:

1. **Eliminate friction by reducing the number of decisions a consumer needs to make**: the easier the set up is, the more likely we will at least start the new behaviour. How many decisions are you asking someone to make before they can begin? Are they likely to know or easily find the answers or will the decisions just confuse and put them off?
2. **Chunk or reduce the steps to carry out the behaviour**: New behaviours and actions can seem daunting due to their unfamiliarity. If we can make the steps required for the routine simple and minimal (say no more than three), it's more likely a consumer will try and adopt.
3. **Reduce the perceived effort or any other potential barriers**: Changing the status quo and starting a new behaviour is always going to feel more effort, but if we can reduce any known barriers to the routine, we have more chance of success. For example, if you wanted to get citizens cycle commuting rather than taking the car, it would be a good idea to ensure that cycle lanes are in place and bike racks near workplaces are sufficient.

Strategy 4: Develop cues and rewards

(Important)

We've already talked about the importance of cues in a stable context. These can often be strengthened further by encouraging people to consciously identify a trigger which will help them to recall and initiate the new routine. Equally, rewards are also critical in building new habits.

a. Establish unique or personalised cues
This draws on a highly effective area of behavioural science called **implementation intentions** – simple 'if-then' plans which can signal when to take action. Setting out a rule of thumb 'If X, then do Y', can aid memory and make us feel more committed to carrying out a new behaviour. This strategy has been successfully applied in many different contexts.

Take dental flossing again. People who first outlined when and where they would floss each day flossed more frequently over the four week study than those who did not.[17] In another experiment, office staff were encouraged to recycle their plastic cups and old paper by considering when, where and how to recycle. Two months after making this simple plan, recycling levels were still higher than before and compared to the control group.[18]

It is similar to the piggybacking strategy outlined above, but more explicit, conscious and personalised and may help someone develop a feeling of commitment to embedding the new habit. Conversely, piggybacking may occur naturally without the individual being consciously aware of it, or may be created by the marketer or behaviour change practitioner.

b. Ensure there is a varied mix of rewards
Research suggests that getting some sort of reward during or after a new routine is essential for embedding a new habit as it helps to incentivise and motivate us to do it - and keep on repeating it. The best practice is to ensure there is a varied mix of rewards: some immediate, short term rewards, others more long term which accumulate over time as we repeat the behaviour. Some will be simple rewards – perhaps the glass of wine at the end of a long week; others less tangible and more subconscious, such as social interaction with friends or physiological – for instance the 'runners high' after exercise.

For example, take the important habit of handwashing. An immediate reward could be the pleasant smell of our skin after washing with soap. But over time, we may notice we are ill less often due to our improved hygiene and be aware of social approval from others.

Once the habit has been firmly established though there is less need for a reward to continue to exist since the cue and context will ensure we start doing it automatically without even thinking. For example, a study looking at what determined whether and how much people exercised found that for those new to exercise, intrinsic rewards were important, but those for whom exercise had become habitual rewards were less necessary, if at all.[19]

Strategy 5: Practice and repeat

(Important)

As we mentioned above, we form habits as we repeatedly perform a specific behaviour. Therefore, creating opportunities and occasions to practice the new behaviour so it can be repeated often is highly important.

This is particularly true if we are actually learning something **entirely new** to us, a new skill such as a martial art, how to use a new smartphone or app or even make up a new drink or meal. They can seem daunting and a

big effort as they feel so unfamiliar, so even if the intention to start is there, we may not ever begin. Therefore, opportunities to practice and try it out in a supportive environment can help to get us on our way.

Neuroscience and reinforcement literature shows that for new skills, we learn better through doing, and through trial and error than by merely watching. Studies have shown that those who get to practice a new skill or behaviour actually engage the habit system part of their brain and master the behaviour better. Those who only watch and observe don't engage the habit part of their brain.

This has all sorts of implications for the successful adoption of new products and services which may require the development of new skills – for example, using a smart meter, making a new type of breakfast, or learning a new language. Creating easy opportunities for consumers to practice a new skill may help to start embedding a new habit. Apple stores, which let consumers use and play around with their products are great examples of how a learning space can be created. Samsung recently opened a new flagship store in New York, designed as a 'living lab and digital playground', enabling consumers to see and try out the latest technology.[20] For food and drink products, we often see sample stands in retail stores inviting us to try a new product, but retailers are now moving to more experiential stores, such as those where people can cook in a 'do-it-yourself' restaurant.

New technology is even developing wearable neuro-stimulators which will guide and correct people's movements and actions, improving their performance by using electrodes to stimulate the motor cortex in the brain to produce temporary mental states primed for learning – think of a neurosurgeon in training, artists wanting to perfect their brush strokes, an elite athlete honing their technique, musicians wanting to improve their technical ability or a patient recovering from injury needing to complete intense physio exercises.[21] These technologies could be invaluable to the formation of new habits and skills.

Halo Neuroscience enhances learning of physical movement skills in elite athletes to hone good habits.

Strategy 6: Build meaning and motivation

(Good to have)

The final strategy is aimed at the individual who is now starting to form a weak habit. Their new behaviour is being prompted by a cue, is performed in a stable context and where there is some kind of reward in completing the routine. But to really embed the habit it can help to build greater personalised meaning around the habit, so that an individual identifies with it.

This is because we like to rationalise any behaviour we do; linking it to our identity and giving it meaning in our life. As David Neal says: "*People do not embrace the idea that we are creatures of habit. Instead, they prefer to view their actions as products of choices, conscious motives, preferences, and goals."* So if people can be encouraged to view their new habit as something with a deeper purpose – to try to post-rationalise and come up with explanations for why they do a new behaviour - it can act as a buffer against relapse. Practitioners can harness this tendency and encourage people who are on their way to building a new habit to give it a sense of clear purpose.

Take someone who has taken up running purely to help them lose weight, but now they have lost the desired weight, their motivation is waning. Before they started their running regime, they may not have identified with being a runner or realised the other benefits of running such as clarity of thinking, improved productivity at work, better physical health, enhanced mood and happiness as well as potential social rewards if they run with a friend or group. So looking for opportunities to engage the new runner and provide them with further explanations for why they run can help to embed the habit further.

This strategy can help to keep motivation levels high since often motivation to build a new habit flags after a while, frustratingly before the habit is fully embedded. So if we can just eke out motivation a little more we are likely to have more success in creating sustained behaviour change and preventing relapse. A new behaviour needs to be repeated until it is fully subconscious – until those cobwebs become chains.

These six strategies apply the latest insight and understanding to how to effectively build a new habit or routine. Grounded in findings from the behavioural sciences they provide a complete toolbox for the marketer or behavioural change practitioner to go out and help build a new habit in virtually any area. And if you are still not quite convinced, test them on yourself! You could change your life!

Reminder checklist

- Have you ensured or created a stable, supportive environment or context for your new habit?
- Are there any opportunities to leverage life changes or teachable moments?
- Are there any opportunities to piggyback the new habit to existing habits and routines?
- Have you made the new behaviour as easy as possible to do?
- Have you enabled people to create any unique cues, plans or reminders?
- Have you ensured a mix of short-term and longer term rewards?
- Have you created opportunities for people to try out or practice the new behaviour?
- Have you given people new meaning(s) they can attach to their desired habit?

Case studies

Below we have outlined five case studies which leverage one or more of the six strategies outlined above.

Applying Strategy 1: Ensure a stable, supportive environment

Building an exercise habit for children by ensuring a consistent context

Daily Mile Habit

- **Cues:** Presence of track in school grounds providing a stable context. Additional cues: time of day / restlessness of children
- **Repeated:** Daily, five days a week
- **Reward(s):** Intrinsic – love of movement, being outside with friends

Strategy used: Ensuring a stable, supportive environment

Both the WHO and the UK government recommend that children get a minimum of 60 minutes' physical activity per day. Not only does it increase fitness, but also physical and mental health and cognitive development. Yet a third of children aged 2 to 15 in the UK are overweight or obese. And the UK is one of the lowest ranked out of 38 countries for children's physical activity levels with only 15% of girls and 22% of boys achieving the recommended 60 minutes per day.

In 2013, St Ninian's School in Scotland initiated a rapidly growing scheme to improve these levels, realising that their schoolchildren were very unfit. They have built a new exercise habit called 'The Daily Mile'[22], getting children to run a mile in the school grounds each day – an activity that takes no more than 15 minutes during the school day. Teachers marked out a 'track' – a series of laps around or near the school - which the children can follow. Children are encouraged to run, jog or walk. No kit is needed – children run in their school clothes in almost all weathers. Not only does the children's physical fitness improve, but teachers report that their concentration levels are higher immediately after the 15 minute session and throughout the day.

The initiative owes part of its success to the fact that the run is always in the same place – in the school, on the pre-marked track – providing the stable, supportive environment required to build a habit.

Children running the Daily Mile

Sometimes teachers draw on **additional cues** too. Although teachers can take their class for it at any time during the school day, some choose a specific time – adding more stability to the habit, whilst others draw on a more subjective and flexible cue - if they feel the class is losing focus.

The rewards for the children are self-evident in their enthusiasm and the reward is undoubtedly mostly **intrinsic** – enjoyed for the sake of moving fast and freely outside with their friends. Teachers report that the Daily Mile is now something that the children look forward to each day.

Over 2500 schools now take part across the UK, and Belgium and the Netherlands. Rigorous evaluations assessing outcomes in schools are currently taking place, **but early studies show that the level of obesity at St Ninian's School is around 45% less than the national average.**

Applying Strategy 3: Make it easy

Building a payment habit, by making an online payment mechanism easier to use

Payment mechanism Habit

- **Cues:** Consistent, salient, visual cues in online stores, leading up to payment
- **Repeated:** For any online payment
- **Reward(s):** Ease and quickness of use. Secure payment.

Strategy used: Make it easy (to pay)

The Behavioural Architects worked with an online payment platform to strengthen usage of their payment mechanism and help build a stronger payment choice habit. Even though consumers often intended to use the

platform, their behaviour showed that they often used other payment mechanisms. By analysing and observing the user experience and asking consumers to describe their varied online payment experiences, we were able to identify recommendations to convert intention into action and promote greater use of the payment platform by **making it easier to select and use,** and in the process strengthening the cues to use the platform and making the rewards of use more self-evident.

For instance, one recommendation was to **create a more salient online cue** to use the platform when choosing how to pay. Webpages can be very cluttered and overwhelming and often important features and choices are not noticed by the customer. But making choices stand out better on the page and catch people's attention can increase use and reduce confusion. A good example of another salient payment process would be Amazon's 'one click' buy button.

A second recommendation was to **make the payment mechanism easier to use**, chunking up the process into clear, simple stages, to ensure customers understood what they needed to do next and feel less daunted by the process. This increased ease served as a reward too – consumers were motivated to use the platform because it allowed them to make quicker and easier payments with little effort. Both these recommendations helped **reduce perceived barriers** for consumers.

Applying Strategy 3: Make it easy

Increasing habitual purchase of fruit and vegetables by reducing perceived barriers

Purchase of Fruit & Veg Habit

- **Cues:** Salient messaging in-store and in packaging
- **Repeated:** Several times a week when shopping in store
- **Reward(s):** Short-term – cooking nice food. Long term – better health

Strategy used: Make it easy to buy and cook/eat

The Behavioural Architects worked with a UK retailer to help consumers live healthier lifestyles by eating more fruit and vegetables. Although consumers often intend to buy and eat healthier foods, their intention often does not translate into regular action and purchase can be sporadic, if at all. So we looked at how we might develop stronger in-store cues to purchase fruit and veg and develop immediate rewards beyond the longer term health benefits.

Our research, using both in-store observation techniques, intercepts with customers, interviews with staff on the shop floor and self-ethnographic research via an online platform with consumers revealed a two major barriers to buying fruit and veg. Lack of cooking know-how and inspiration for how to use or when to eat left customers inhibited and unconfident about buying. Secondly, consumers were unaware of the specific health benefits of different fruit and veg.

We worked with the retailer to look at how they could reduce the first barrier by developing **salient in-store messaging and merchandising** and empower consumers by giving **authoritative advice in cooking** and preparation. To reduce the second barrier we suggested **simple shortcuts and primes** to **communicate health benefits** to consumers in ways that they could quickly understand and absorb. All these measures ultimately made it easier for consumers to convert their good intentions into action and buy fruit and veg more

regularly.

Applying Strategy 2 & 3: Leverage the context & Make it easy

Improving sanitation habits by piggybacking a chlorine dispenser to a water collection point

Water purification Habit

- **Cues:** Dispenser at local water collection point
- **Repeated:** At least daily
- **Reward(s):** Short-term social approval from peers. Long-term health rewards.

Strategy used: Leverage the context & Make it easy

The Poverty Action Lab based at MIT wanted to improve water sanitation in Kenya by encouraging households to use chlorine tablets to purify their drinking water and reduce contamination and disease. Households had access to the chlorine tablets; in fact they were given out for free, but usage was poor and people forgot to use them or weren't sure how to use them.

They needed to build a new habit to get households using the chlorine tablets in any water used for cooking or drinking by identifying a consistent cue and finding more immediate rewards than the longer term health rewards.

Through in-context exploration, research and initial trials they discovered one of the most effective ways to promote use of chlorine purification was to install the dispenser at the local water source, **piggybacking** the new behaviour to a well-embedded routine. All households visited the water tap on a daily basis. By positioning the dispenser at the local tap, they created an **immediate social reward** for using chlorine. Desire for approval among peers motivated households to use the chlorine.

Further, by designing the dispenser so it gave out the exact amount of chlorine needed to purify the water contained in a household's typical water container, they **made the chlorine easy to use**, removing any need for calculating and measuring.[23]

Applying Strategy 4: Develop cues and rewards

How one brand created a unique social reward for a cleaning product

Kitchen cleaning Habit

- **Cues:** After family meal, after washing the dishes
- **Repeated:** At least daily
- **Reward(s):** Social rewards, pleasant smell, cleaner kitchen

Strategy used: Develop cues and rewards

The Behavioural Architects China worked with a consumer goods company to better understand how consumers might form an improved kitchen cleaning habit. Housewives in China mostly clean up after cooking the meal by

wiping down surfaces using the soapy dishwater. Whilst adequate, it often does not fully remove grease and cooking smells. Housewives did not enjoy the task and found it a chore.

We asked housewife respondents to try using the product and tell us about their experience. Ethnographic research in the home revealed a new reward from using the kitchen surface cleaner – after cleaning with the product the housewife's family were drawn into the clean and fresh smelling kitchen creating **an immediate social reward** for her. Not only was her kitchen now much cleaner, but she was less lonely doing her housework and felt more appreciated. The brand went on to use this insight in their marketing.

Further Reading

WARC Topic: **Behavioural Insight**

WARC Topic: **Behavioural Economics**

Neal, David "The Science of Habit" October 2015

Dean, Jeremy "Making habits, breaking habits", 2013, Oneworld Publications

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About the authors

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Crawford Hollingworth is co-Founder of The Behavioural Architects, which he launched in 2011. He was also founder of Headlight**Vision** in London and New York, a behavioural trends research consultancy. Headlight**Vision** was acquired by WPP in 2003. Following the merger between Headlight**Vision** and The Henley Centre to form The Futures Company he took on the role of Global Executive Chairman.

He has written and spoken widely on the subject of behavioural economics for various institutions and publications, including the Market Research Society, Marketing Society, Market Leader, Aura, AQR, London Business School and Impact magazine. Crawford is a Fellow of The Marketing Society and Royal Society of Arts.

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Crawford Hollingworth head up the company's Core Intelligence unit which is dedicated to furthering the application of the latest insights and findings from behavioural science to the world of marketing. She has co-authored with Crawford over 150 articles on behavioural science - including several publications about habits.

Prior to joining The Behavioural Architects in 2011, she was Deputy Director of Advisory at Oxford Analytica for 6 years. She has 12 years' global consulting experience and an academic background in Economics with a BA and MSc in Economics from Cambridge and Oxford University

About The Behavioural Architects

The Behavioural Architects is an award-winning, global insight, research and consultancy business with behavioural science at its core. It was founded in 2011 by Crawford Hollingworth, Sian Davies and Sarah Davies.

They were one of the first agencies built around the new insights coming from the behavioural sciences. This new thinking has inspired them to develop powerful frameworks that fuel deeper understanding of consumer behaviour and behaviour change.

They have offices in Sydney, Shanghai, London and Oxford and have worked with many global corporations, NGOs and governments – including Barclays, Google, Diageo, Mondelez, Diabetes UK, Lilly, Boots, GSK, Virgin and Sport England - together reinvigorating traditional research methodologies, alongside pioneering new ones. Their aim is always to make our behavioural insights both accessible and actionable for clients.

The Behavioural Architects invests heavily in its Oxford-based intelligence team dedicated to supporting our global teams, keeping them up to speed with all developments from the academic arena and the top BE practitioners.

In 2013 they won the Market Research Society (MRS) award for Best New Agency and in 2015, the highly competitive MRS Best Place to Work.

For more information, please visit **www.thebearchitects.com**

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