

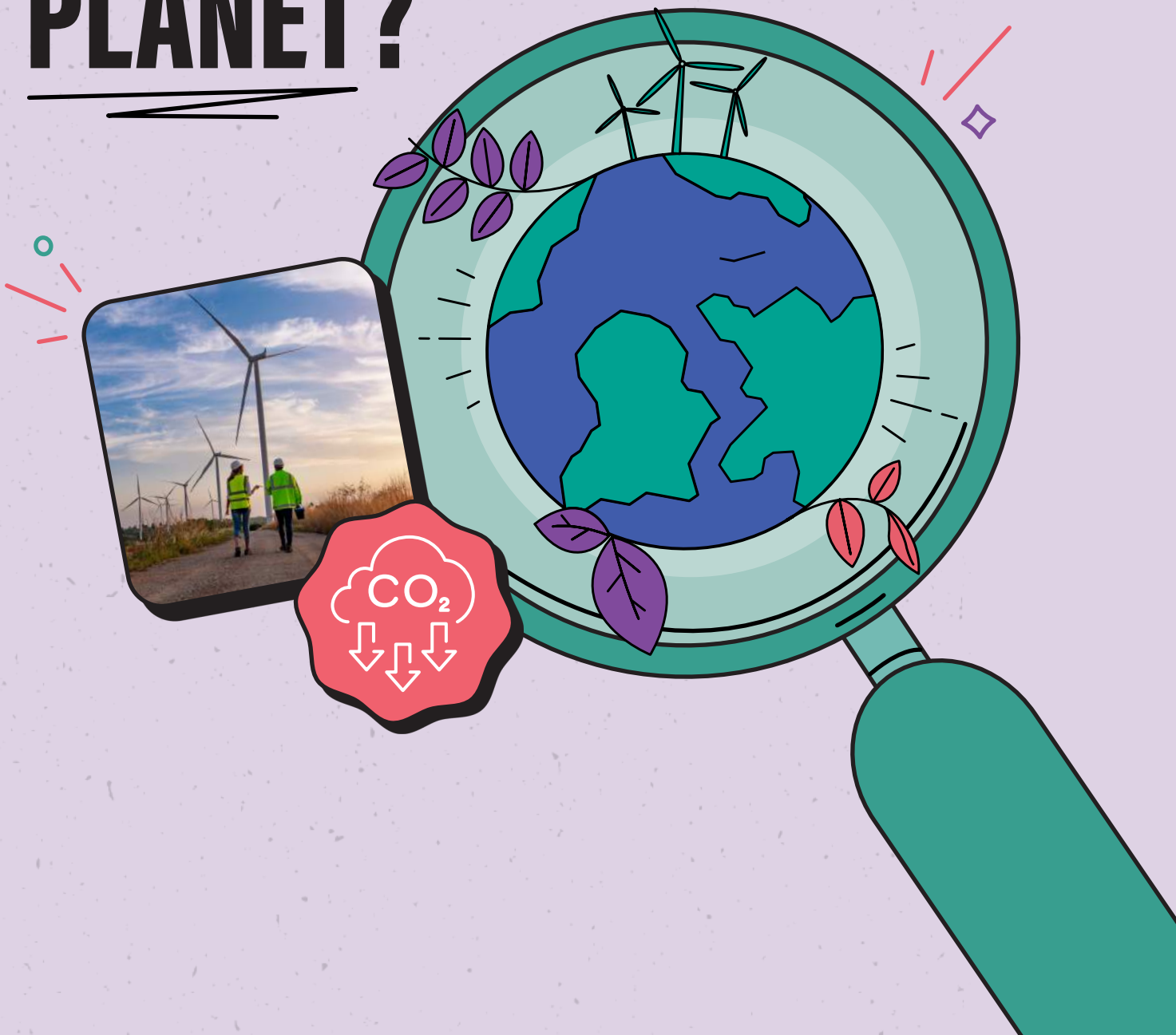
**SOCIAL
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COULD BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE SAVE THE PLANET?



Could Behavioural Science Save The Planet?

Did you know

That **62%** of all future emissions require human behaviour change?

We are [mostly] all aware that climate change is an issue we must address. Urgently. Humanity is **NOT** on track to meet our climate commitments. What most people don't know, or are perhaps not considering, is a need to change our behaviour and reduce human demand for high-carbon infrastructure, development, systems, and products. It's a big ask, but one we must insist on. It means changes to our lives as we know it, to cut emissions quickly and sharply to secure a safer, sustainable world.

What sort of changes are needed?

The very clever people on the IPCC – that's the Intergovernmental panel on climate change, featuring scientists from 195 countries - have published 60 personal actions we need to take to reduce carbon emissions. Some will deliver a significant impact, but some only provide marginal gains.

Those actions that deliver a significant impact require us to change 'our way of life' such as giving up our car or flying less and are not easy to implement, but necessary to secure our future.

At Social Change, we have started to look at the Behavioural Science that could help make behaviour changes possible. But before we begin, let's take a look at some of the personal actions proposed.



How we travel



One less flight

- Attend virtual conferences + meetings
- Vacation locally/regionally
- Combine business and leisure trips

Less car transport

- Take public transport to work
- Walk/cycle short distances
- Subscribe to bike sharing service

Shift to active transport

- Buy a bicycle/scooter
- Walk/cycle short distances
- Subscribe to bike sharing service

Telecommuting

- Default business meetings to virtual
- Create home-office
- Upgrade home internet



What we buy



Less packaging

- Buy re-fillable products
- Purchase products in bulk
- Opt-out of multiple shipments for online purchase

**Fewer purchases/
more durable items**

- Invest in higher quality, longer-lasting textiles
- Buy used items
- Repurpose old furniture

Less textiles

- Purchase used clothing
- Share clothing with friends
- Rent specialised outfits

Less paper

- Purchase digital-only media subscriptions
- Opt-in to paperless billing
- Use cloth instead of paper towel/napkins



How we live



Refurbishment and renovation

- Insulate hot water pipes
- Upgrade/replace window seals
- Install LED lightbulbs

Renewable-based heating

- Purchase roof-top solar panel
- Install a ground-source heat pump
- Wrap water heater in blanket

Lower room temperature

- Keep shades drawn in Summer
- Turn down AC on hot days
- Install better insulated windows

Fewer appliances

- Unplug unused appliances
- Purchase multi-functional appliances
- Sell infrequently used appliances



What we eat



Sustainable diet (unspecified)

- Purchase locally produced products
- Cook meals using locally produced products
- Buy seasonal fruits and vegetables

Food waste reduction

- Take food inventory before shopping
- Store leftovers in air-tight containers
- Freeze portions of prepared food

Less processed food/ alcohol

- Cook own food
- Bring food to work
- Find non-alcoholic beverage options

Food waste management

- Use in-home or backyard composter
- Separate organic from inorganic waste
- Buy compostable bags for organic food



The barriers: Why aren't people taking action?



So, if everyone knows about climate change (and its devastating impact), why aren't we doing more and changing our behaviour? Most people say they care, say they'll take some of these actions, even say they'll pay more for sustainable products...then they don't. We call this the **say-do gap**. But this is not a reason to not invest in these actions or put in place the infrastructure that makes it **fun, easy and popular** to take these actions – our formula for success.

Do you want to know more?





Tell me more...



There are a whole host of reasons why we may not be doing “our bit”. Firstly, we tend to see the “sustainable swaps” that we are encouraged to engage in (e.g., having a “Meat-Free Monday” every week) as a loss, rather than a gain, focusing on what we are missing out on, rather than celebrating something new we are trying.

Secondly, we don’t tend to get much feedback when taking positive action, which may lead us to question why we bothered in the first place, or whether our actions actually make any difference in the grand scheme of things. This creates a false sense of security, a trap that we may fall into if we can’t see the devastating effects of climate change playing out in front of us at this very moment in time. In fact, we may dismiss it altogether, because we don’t consider it an imminent threat to us and our way of life.

It isn’t the case that people need to be better informed about the dangers of climate change to take action. People are just resistant to changing their behaviour or may not know how to implement lasting and impactful change, which makes the task even more difficult.

Other things in the way of action include:

- **Price:** Can I afford this?
- **Shame:** Is it embarrassing?
- **Availability:** Can I find it?
- **Habits:** Do I have to change what I do now and what do I have to sacrifice?





Here are five behavioural science concepts that can help to explain why people are struggling to adopt climate-friendly behaviours.

Defaults.

We look for clues and cues in our environment as to what is a “normal” way to behave. For example, if you’re ordering a hot drink and the barista hands you it in a plastic cup, you are unlikely to question it. Fortunately, many drinks outlets have now taken action in this themselves, switching up the default option to a recyclable cup, or providing incentives for bringing your own reusable receptacle (which are another powerful driver of human behaviour!).



Psychological reactance.

If we are bombarded with information about climate change and the information is delivered in a confrontational or instructional manner, we may rebel against the desired behaviour, as we feel our behavioural freedoms are threatened. Research has concluded that scientific messages about climate change can cause reactance, particularly among individuals who question the existence of climate change in the first place.





Confirmation bias.

People who are sceptical about the existence of climate change (as described above) may be particularly susceptible to confirmation bias, whereby they seek out further information to support their existing assumptions. This could be as simple as reading Facebook threads from others who share conspiracy theories about climate change, further convincing you to dismiss the views of others, such as ignoring government calls to take action.

Risk aversion.

We humans tend not to want to take risks, unless of course you're Bear Grylls or one of those very brave people who decides to abseil down skyscrapers for fun. When it comes to changing our behaviours, we are understandably wary of alternative behaviour that would require us to leave the security of our comfort zones. The same goes for opting for a "greener" commute, such as walking or cycling to work. You could argue that you're safer in your car than you would be on your rickety second-hand bike or crossing busy roads on foot, and that it isn't worth the risk.



Sunk cost bias.

Coming back to the “greener commute” example, why on earth would you cycle to work if you’ve just forked out for a shiny new car? Or it’s pouring down with rain? After all, you only bought that car because you wanted to pull up into the office car park and turn heads – not get drenched! This is a prime example of sunk cost bias, or “the sunk cost fallacy,” which you may have also heard it referred to as. Sunk cost bias occurs when we continue to engage in a behaviour as a result of previously invested resources. To give you a slightly larger-scale example, the sunk-cost fallacy could also help explain why some countries continue to rely on fossil fuels as a primary energy source, because they have invested a great deal of time, energy and resources into this method of energy production.



So, now we know why people aren’t doing more to fight climate change, what can we (and behavioural science) do to change that?

The barriers might feel too big. But there are a number of ways in which we could encourage climate-friendly behaviours according to behavioural science.



5 ways we can encourage climate-friendly behaviours

Framing.

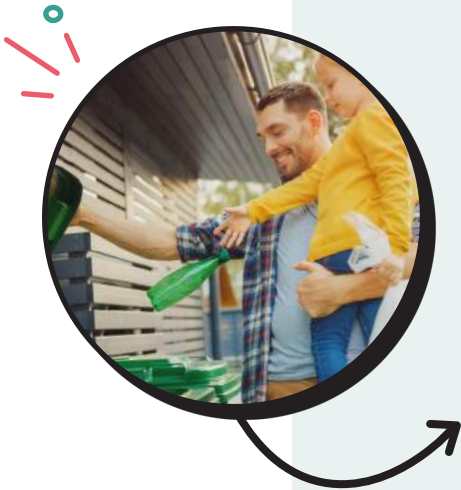
The form in which information is presented to us can influence the decisions that we make. For example, rather than constantly repeating the negative impacts of climate change to the economy and forcefully telling people to take action (which could provoke psychological reactance, as described earlier), making people aware of the impacts to a particular wildlife species (think of the bees) may evoke more feelings of concern and motivate them to take action.



Storyteller Bias.

Another way we could encourage people to pay attention to the impacts of climate change is to share stories from those who are directly affected. For example, if we read a news article about the poor farmer whose entire livelihood is at risk due to climate change and feel sympathy towards them, we are more likely to consider changing our behaviour.





Limited Choice.

We are more likely to make a decision if our options are limited, as being presented with too many options of how to behave can contribute to choice overload. For example, if we encourage people to make a small change in one area of their life, as opposed to listing 100 different ways in which they could change their behaviour [sorry – we did this above to show you the sheer number of actions we can take], they are more likely to feel confident in their ability to make such a change (also known as self-efficacy), and consequently do so. So don't list all these changes as it will overwhelm people – let's pick one and try and move people towards this one change.

Research has shown that receiving information about 20 behaviours (compared to receiving information about 10 or less) to fight climate change can make people feel overwhelmed and less likely to alter their lifestyles.

Ego.

The Ego principle states that we act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves. Have you ever walked an elderly person across the street in order to give yourself a pat on the back for your act of kindness, or even have them pat you on the back to express their gratitude? There's no shame in that, and it's definitely helpful to be mindful of how we can use it for social good. If we know we are going to be rewarded in some way, be this with a tangible gift or simply with positive feedback, the more likely we are to engage in the behaviour. For example, the app PIPs (Positive Impact Points) congratulates app-users for behaviours such as walking to work, using renewable energy, or sustainably-made clothing by providing rewards in the form of points.





Social Proof.

We tend to follow or copy the actions of other people in an attempt to reflect the “correct” behaviour in a given situation. For example, if every household on your street has invested in solar panels for their roofs, you may feel obliged to follow suit, to gain external validation and avoid being “the odd one out.”



So, there we have it.

Ten ways in which behavioural science could inform the adoption of “climate-friendly” behaviours. There are many more – and some will work with some actions and others will fail. If you want to see an action work and a behaviour changed, talk to us about how you can use behavioural science to make it happen. We have a dedicated in-house behavioural Insights team ready to take on any behavioural challenge.



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