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Editorial: Design for Behaviour Change

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Addressing some of the biggest challenges in society, from physical inactivity to demands on healthcare, will require a change in how people behave in relation to themselves and others. The question of how to bring about this change is a prominent one for policy-makers and parents alike, with increasing recognition that information alone makes little difference. There is a need for practical solutions that help people overcome or go with the grain of their behaviour to turn good intentions into action.

Existing approaches include using regulation to eliminate or restrict choice, changing the physical environment in which choices are made, and providing tools to guide people through the decision-making process. The mindsets, methods and skills involved vary between approaches and each has different implications for the rights and responsibilities of individuals, and ethical considerations.

While designers inherently influence behaviour through their work, Design for Behaviour Change (DfBC) is a growing area that specifically focuses on the role design plays in influencing people's experiences, decisions and behaviours. While many of the methods and skills involved are shared with other disciplines, there are particular attributes that make the design approach distinct, in particular an open and iterative approach to development that values the wants and needs of the people for whom the solution is intended.

This track explores a) how DfBC relates to other approaches and disciplines, particularly behavioural science – the empirical study of how and why people behave the way they do; b) the development of new tools and methods to support DfBC; and c) how these methods have been applied to change specific behaviours. Together, they will help us construct a more coherent framework of how and when DfBC methods can, or should, be used and combined with other methods to be a catalyst for change.

The papers in this tract fall roughly into these three categories. Elizarova & Kahn explore a new methodology for solving complex problems that combines customer journey mapping and the COM-B model, for use by both designers and behavioural scientists. The COM-B ('capability', 'opportunity', 'motivation' and 'behaviour') model is used extensively to develop behaviour change interventions, however it is only one of many models.

In order use approaches from behaviour science, designers must navigate these models and determine which to use given the circumstance and underlying theory. Tromp, Renes & Daalhuizen address this challenge by presenting a set of heuristics for designers to determine which of nine behavioural design methods to use, given the task at hand, their personality traits and preferred paradigm for understanding behaviour.

Van Lieran, Calabretta & Schoormans build on the popular 'nudge' approach from behavioural science by proposing the use of 'rational overrides' in service design. Consisting of a toolkit of five templates, two card sets and two databases, this involves introducing micro-moments of friction into the customer journey to disrupt mindless automatic interactions, prompt moments of reflection and more conscious decision making.

Rather than integrating methods from behavioural science, Ronteltap, Bukman, de Jonge & Roscam Abbing investigate the use of existing design methods in DfBC, specifically the challenges of using personas to improve designs for behaviour change strategies in the public domain. They call for researchers to share their experiences of using personas in the order to address the challenges and create more standardised ways of development.

Arslan, Mols & Hummels introduce a novel tool called Teglen, to support reflection and behaviour change on both a personal and organisational level. The findings of their qualitative empirical study with civil servants in Eindhoven show that reflection benefits from the combination of cognitive and creative elements integrated in a dynamic and structured approach, with more research needed to explore the potential long-term benefits.

Levy explores opportunities to enrich the design of everyday rituals through a descriptive framework to 'read' and compose such rituals, developed using an autoethnographical approach. The value of the first-person perspective and the main dimensions of the framework are defined (place and time, essentiality, and strength) and discussed, drawing attention to the need for quick iterations and the consequences of design decisions.

John, Flyn & Armstrong apply models of design for behaviour change to two healthcare projects – the design of remote care for chronic heart and liver disease and reducing the rate of hospital acquired infection through better hand hygiene. They highlight factors such as ingrained social norms and low aptitude, exposing a systematic behavioural breakdown between need and desire, and the need for designers to better understand this complexity.

Karahanoglu, van Rompay & Ludden explore the use of design for behaviour change strategies in the context of sports and exercise. They draw out the need and importance of a shift in focus from new to existing exercisers when designing for physical activity tracking. They discuss the differences in the needs and underlying behavioural drivers of this audience, and the significance of designing for lifelong sports experience.

Finally, while DfBC is normally concerned with providing guidance towards a specific behaviour, Boon, Rozendaal & Stappers propose an alternative approach that emphasizes ambiguity and open-endedness, rather than directionality. Using two case studies in paediatric healthcare, they describe how interactions with ambiguous and open-ended playthings gave rise to the intended behaviour outcomes, opening up a new space for behavioural design.