

Topic 6 Part 2: What external or contextual factors influence behaviour and why?

Aims:

- Identify and define external factors that influence environmental behaviour
- Explain theories about how external factors influence environmental behaviour?
- Discuss relative influence of external and internal factors on behaviour
- Suggest implications for how to encourage positive environmental behaviour
- Appreciate challenges of ensuring claims about causal relationships are appropriate
- How to analyse qualitative data

Structure

Three approaches to thinking about how external and internal factors influence environmental behaviour:

1. What is the relative importance of internal and external factors in influencing behaviour?
2. How do external factors influence behaviour?
3. What does this suggest for how we can encourage behaviour change?

Perspective 1: Behaviour Approaches

How important are internal and external factors in influencing behaviour?

- External or contextual factors are all that matters
- Internal factors such as attitudes and values are irrelevant
- Geller 2002

Why are external factors key?

- The 'ABC' contingency: Activators > Behaviour > Consequences

Activators	External existing things that precede behaviour	discriminant stimuli	eg. Media, signs, demonstrations
Consequences	External outcomes of behaviour that reward or punish	reinforcing stimuli	eg. Feedback, financial outcomes

Why are external factors key?

- Winter and Koger 2004
- Operant conditioning: experiences create associations between a behaviour and outcomes
- Behaviour followed by a favourable consequence is 'stamped in' (positive reinforcement)
- Behaviour followed by an unfavourable consequence is 'stamped out' (punishment)

Activators	Use discriminant stimuli to activate behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close to site of behaviour• Noticeable, polite• May instruct - explain how to act	eg. prompts, signs, demonstrations
Consequences	Use consequences to reinforce or 'stamp out' behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May be financial or social outcomes• Rewards more effective than penalties• Consequences should be soon and certain	eg. Rewards or penalties

What does this suggest about how to encourage positive environmental behaviour?

- Combination of activators and consequences used depends on analysis of the individual actors behaviour
- Competent or incompetent
- Self-directed, automatic etc.

3 general forms of shift:

1. From unconsciously incompetent to self-directed positive behaviour
 - Eg. I didn't know I was doing the wrong thing
2. From self-directed incompetent behaviour to self-directed positive behaviour
 - Eg. You are right, I really should start doing the right thing
3. From self-directed positive to positive habits (automatic)
 - Eg. Use modest consequences (positive feedback) to support behaviour to be consistent

Perspective 2: Goal-Directed Approach

How important are internal and external factors in influencing behaviour?

- Both external and internal factors influence behaviour **but** external factors can be a significant barrier or limitations on achieving our goals
- Schultz and McKenzie 2014
- Diverse environmental behaviours can be characterised on a unidimensional measure ranging from easy to difficult
- Kaiser and Wilson 2004

Relatively Easy	Relatively Difficult
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiting until having a full load before doing laundry • Reuse shopping bags • Collect and recycle paper and bottles • Leaving picnic site without litter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy seasonal produce • Read about environmental issues • Point out unecological behaviour • Buy solar panels • Be a member of a car pool

- Motivation and effort are interdependent:
 - A person's motivation to achieve a goal is most obvious in the face of their unwillingness to take on increasingly demanding obstacles or accept progressively painful sacrifices - Kaiser, Midden and Cervinka 2008
- The attitude-behaviour relationship is strongest when contextual factors are neutral and approaches zero. When contextual factors are strongly positive or negative, effectively compelling or prohibiting the behaviour in question - Stern 2000

What does this suggest about how to encourage more positive environmental behaviour?

Behaviour change programs should seek to:

1. Remove or reduce barriers eg. Make action more convenient, cheaper and simpler
 2. Strengthen benefits - help build desire to engage in a behaviour eg. Creating incentives, enhancing social desirability, education, prompts and feedback
- Whether and how we reduce barriers and strengthen benefits is guided by analysis of action setting and actors:
 1. Are barriers to action relatively low or high?
 2. Are benefits of action considered high or low by people involved?

Perspective 3: Ecological Psychology Approach

How important are internal and external factors in influencing behaviour?

- It is not meaningful to distinguish between external and internal factors
- It is better to think about ecological properties of human-environment systems
- Understanding environmental action within an ecology or system
- Dynamical systemic coupled relations between animals and their physical environment
- Complex, interdependent
- Systemic - multiple causes and effects, mutually influencing

Affordances: attributes or dispositions of setting/environment that provide potential for action

- Unique to relation between animal and environment
- Disposition of environment must be complemented by an effectivity of organism

What does this suggest about how to encourage more positive environmental behaviour?

- Think about behaviour within a dynamic system
- Analyse the behaviour capabilities arising from emergent properties of system
- Identify leverage points in the behaviour system where sustainable action is not afforded
- Design system to maximise affordance of sustainable action

Gulf of Execution: when actions afforded by a system do not match those intended by a person

Eg. Structure does not support intended action like recycling --> change system to provide possibility of recycling

Gulf of Evaluation: when a system does not provide physical representations that can be directly perceived and interpreted in terms of intentions and expectations of a perceiver

Eg. Recycling is possible but there are no 'feedforward' showing how --> change system to signal possibility of recycling

Research Reflection:

How can we understand cause and effect in research?

- These theories predict what kinds of external factors influence behaviour: cause and effect
- The causal relationships proposed contrast strongly
- Behaviourist approach: cause and effect
- Stimuli leads to response
- Allows clear hypotheses about cause and effect
- Goal-directed approach and ecological approach
- Interdependent or mutually influencing relationships
- Complex cause and effect within systems
- Forming and testing hypotheses is less clear cut

What external or contextual factors influence behaviour and why?

What external factors influence behaviour?

- Rewards and penalties
- Prompts
- Barriers to action
- Environmental affordances

Why?

- Behaviourist approach: external factors serve to activate or reinforce behaviours through operant conditioning
- Goal-directed approach: external factors can be barriers that people may not be sufficiently motivated to overcome - external factors can compel action
- Ecological approach: 'external' environment affords or does not afford behaviour

Topic 6 Reading

Understanding Individual's Environmentally Significant Behaviour, Stern 2005

Introduction

- Individuals now play key role in reducing pollution
- Understanding and better informing individuals' environmentally significant behaviour is top 5 priority research areas
- Individual behaviours shaped by individual will and other factors

Types of Environmentally Significant Behaviour

Committed Activism

- Active involvement in organisations and political demonstrations supporting public policies that affect the - environment

Non-activist Support

- Support of environmentally relevant public policies
- Financial contributions to organisations and support for policies that affect the environment
- These 2 classes support policies that preserve or alter environmental systems
- Affect the environment indirectly
- Still large effects

Influence on Environment by Affecting Organisations

- Bankers, engineers, maintenance workers have opportunities to be environmentally friendly or not
- Have great impact because organisational actions are the largest direct source of environmental problems

Personal, private-sphere Behaviour

- Purchase, use and disposal of personal and household products
- Major focus of interest among consumer researchers and psychologists
- Infrequent decisions eg. Buying a car, have a great impact than changing level of use in same equipment
- Private-sphere behaviours have direct environmental consequences
- Public-sphere behaviour have indirect effects

Table 1. Variables Influencing Environmentally Significant Behaviors

Contextual Factors (constraint and facilitation) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Available technology• Embodied environmental impact, e.g., energy efficiency of buildings, vehicles; materials in consumer products• Legal and regulatory requirements• Material costs and rewards (payoffs)• Convenience, e.g., of public transit, recycling• Social norms and expectations
Personal Capabilities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial resources• Literacy• Social status• Behavior-specific knowledge and skills
Habit and Routine
Attitudinal Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal values• General environmentalist predisposition (abstract norms)• Behavior-specific (concrete) norms and beliefs• Nonenvironmental attitudes, e.g., about product attributes• Perceived costs and benefits of action