

Levers of Behavior Change

ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

For decades, the traditional environmental toolkit has consisted of these common levers to change behavior: information, rules and regulations, and material incentives.

These levers can be effective. But information does not necessarily lead to action, incentives can backfire or send the wrong message, and rules can be difficult to enforce. Research from behavioral science tells us about other powerful insights that could drive behavior change. For example, people make decisions based on their emotions, what other people are doing and expecting them to do, and how we structure the context for decision-making.

By expanding the toolkit with additional levers, we can design solutions that reflect people's full range of behavioral motivations. These include emotional appeals, social influences, and choice architecture. Read about each of the levers here as well as principles and strategies for applying them.

Learn more at behavior.rare.org.



INFORMATION

Providing information about what the desired behavior is, why it matters, and how to do it

Provide step-by-step instructions

- Offer training on the desired behavior
- Provide materials that give instructions on how to do the desired behavior

Build awareness and understanding

- Provide informational forums, meetings, or materials that describe the desired behavior and its importance
- Communicate about the desired behavior in a clear, concrete, and unambiguous way
- Give feedback on performing the desired behavior



RULES & REGULATIONS

Enacting rules that promote restrict a behavior

Mandate behavior

- Enact mandates that require or encourage the desired behavior

Prohibit behavior

- Enact prohibitions that limit or forbid the undesired behavior



MATERIAL INCENTIVES

Increasing or decreasing real or perceived costs, time, or effort for doing a behavior

Make it easy or the alternative hard

- Make the desired behavior more convenient and accessible to do (e.g., remove barriers, provide substitutes)
- Make the undesired behavior more difficult to do (e.g., create friction points, barriers)

Give rewards or penalties

- Incentivize or reinforce the desired behavior
- Penalize or fine for cases of the undesired behavior

EMOTIONAL APPEALS

Using emotional messages to drive behavior

Leverage emotions in specific contexts

- **Pride:** Use to motivate people to show others what they have done when they have engaged in reputation-enhancing behavior
- **Hope:** Use to motivate people to start a behavior when they can achieve a desired outcome while facing a threat
- **Fear:** Use to motivate people to avoid risks when they experience uncertainty or an immediate threat
- **Anger:** Use to motivate people to confront others when they experience or witness something that goes against their values
- **Interest:** Use to motivate people to seek information when something is novel and complex
- **Prospect of shame:** Use to motivate people to avoid a socially-undesirable action when others might find out

Personalize the message

- Put a human face on campaigns and focus on a single story over abstract statistics
- Tailor messages to make them personally relevant, relatable, and appealing

SOCIAL INFLUENCES

Leveraging the behavior, beliefs, and expectations of others

Make engaging or not engaging in the desired behavior observable

- Publicly broadcast who has and has not engaged in the desired behavior
- Provide a way for people to show they are doing the desired behavior

Make the desired behavior the perceived norm

- Highlight possibility of social sanctions for doing the undesired behavior
- Share that people are currently doing the desired behavior
- Create conversation around shared beliefs and expectations
- Promote cases of success with the desired behavior
- Leverage credible and trusted messengers doing the desired behavior
- Facilitate peer or community exchanges where others can observe and gain support for the desired behavior

Eliminate excuses for not engaging in the behavior

- Encourage public commitments or pledges to drive the desired behavior
- Provide visible indicators that signal support for the desired behavior (e.g., hats, badges)

CHOICE ARCHITECTURE

Changing the context in which choices are made

Direct attention

- Make the desired behavior the default option
- Draw attention to the desired behavior by making it salient

Simplify messages and decisions

- Streamline complex decisions to focus on key information or actions
- Provide shortcuts for a behavior with many steps or options

Use timely moments and prompts

- Target moments of transition and habit formation
- Provide prompts and reminders about the desired behavior

Facilitate planning and goal setting

- Provide support in making a plan to achieve the desired behavior
- Encourage commitments in the present that limit future decisions