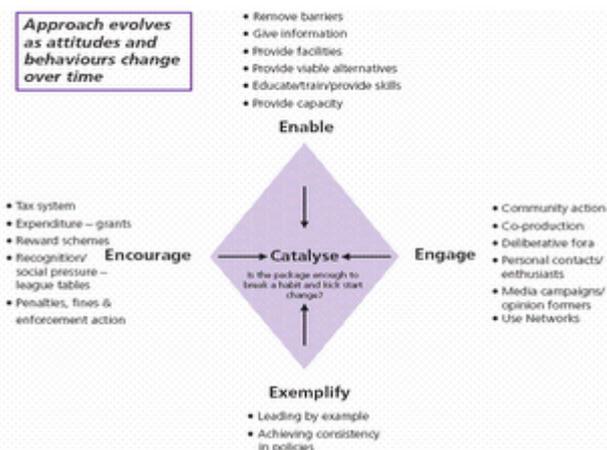


Soft paternalism - changing behaviour for the common good without giving orders

The Rutter Diamond – behaviour change model



Several interesting meetings last week... including with:

- the [Sustainable Development Commission](#) and [National Consumer Council](#) on their [I will if you will](#) report on sustainable consumption and production;
- the government's new [Office of Climate Change](#) on reducing carbon emissions from the housing stock [see interesting [40 percent house concept](#)];
- stimulating brainstorming session on the future of regulation with the [Environment Agency's 'modern regulation'](#) team.

And it turns out they all had a common theme, namely '**behaviour change**' - ie. recognising that people have considerable behavioural autonomy and governments can't simply legislate to achieve many of the key sustainable development outcomes, so more subtle persuasive models are needed. This is sometimes seen as a branch of [paternalism](#) known as '[soft paternalism](#)'. The Economist [[leader/article](#)] recently highlighted its rise - partly to disparage (it in that annoying way they have), but also approvingly to distinguish the soft from the 'hard' variety. I think it's an apt description of the role of the modern state in securing collectively-valued outcomes from an aggregation of individual behaviours.

While at the PM's Strategy Unit, I co-authored a swotty piece of work on [Personal responsibility and behaviour change](#), and there has been [good work done by Tim Jackson and others](#). Best of all, however, is the simple elegant model established in the [UK Sustainable Development Strategy](#) at [Chapter 2](#) – the essence is pictured above and widely known as the 'Rutter Diamond' after its creator, [Jill Rutter](#) of DEFRA (whose birthday the Bacon Butty is celebrating today).

What, then, are ingredients of a strategy designed to change the behaviour of individuals or businesses? Here's my list built on the Sustainable Development Strategy:

- **Seeking big changes secured over a long time** – because *“governments overestimate their power to achieve change in the short term, and underestimate it in the long term”* (see [Geoff Mulgan's Prospect article](#) for the coining of this particular wisdom)
- **Consistency & credibility of government action** – the long, loud and legal approach to policy, building trust and confidence sending clear signals of what is and expected to become normal, so creating markets, steering investment and influencing R&D. (see earlier [Bacon Butty post on credibility and consistency](#))
- **Strong but bearable incentives that grab the attention** – because people vote down unbearable incentives, and will only tolerate a certain rate of change in their circumstances before they refuse to participate. Businesses can leave the country, countries can refuse to sign agreements. Many NGOs overlook the importance of 'participation' in designing policies. For really strong measures, *time* is the answer, not draconian policies introduced on day 1.
- **Enabling measures to make it easy to respond**, based on insights into how people do change how they act – because incentives that you can't respond to are just deadweight charges. [London's Congestion charge was backed by an expansion of bus services](#). [Adair Turner's Pension Commission](#) proposals have an opt-in default for a good scheme, with an option to opt-out [[Final report- p16](#)].
- **Communications and engagement** – because it is important to draw the incentives and enabling measures together to create an attractive overall package, promoting the idea of a common enterprise and to implicitly disparage free-riding and 'deviant' behaviour.

- **Carefully focussed on a ‘target group’** – because it needs to be insights into their behaviour that shapes any programme or it might work better to start with a particular ‘first-mover’ group or because the aim is to target particular groups for whom other approaches fail.
- **Walking the talk** – because trust is a key ingredient in securing change, so for example government procurement and the behaviour of politicians and the public sector must be consistent with the ask made of the public and business.
- **Regulation where it is the best approach** – because rehabilitation of regulation from the ‘deregulators’ is long overdue – reduces information & transaction costs, free-riding, and provides ‘choice editing’ to set quality floors. See interesting observations on [Regulatory reform, capture and the regulatory burden](#) by Dieter Helm. The recent rapid rise in UK recycling is driven by a [little-known EU landfill directive](#), which has pressured local authorities to set up green box recycling schemes and caused much greater public participation.
- **Achieving normalisation of the positive behaviour** – because a programme to change behaviour needs to become self-sustaining, widely embedded in attitudes and everyday life – not least so that programme spending can be reduced to a top-up level or targeted.
- **Avoiding over-reliance on individual action and altruism** – because too much has been made of the green consumer, and people are rightly sceptical of personal sacrifice in a world of free-riders. It shouldn’t really be tried except where people should expect an individual benefit from individual action (and there are many examples of this, for example cycling to work). But it’s not so convincing to offer a collective benefit from aggregated individual sacrifice.
- **R&D shift into behavioural sciences** (behavioural psychology, sociology, economics) – because understanding why people do what they do is more use than designing new things they don’t do or won’t use.

I think very little real-world policy comes close to matching this framework – is that right?... Possibly some public health campaigns – smoking, drink driving... *maybe*.