

# EAST

## Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights

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# Preface

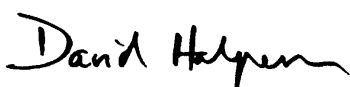
One of the key objectives of the Behavioural Insights Team at its creation in 2010 was to spread the understanding of behavioural approaches across the policy community. Alongside the policy work and trials conducted by the Team over the last three years, we have conducted many seminars, workshops and talks with policy makers, academics and practitioners. From these many sessions, together with our trials and policy work, has emerged a simple, pragmatic framework to help think about behaviour change.

In the early years, we often used the MINDSPACE framework, and indeed some of the team were centrally involved in developing it.<sup>1</sup> We still use this framework. But we found in seminars that its nine elements were hard for busy policy makers to keep in mind (itself reflecting 'cognitive chunking'). At the same time, we found in our day-to-day trials and policy work that some of the most reliable effects came from changes that weren't easily captured by MINDSPACE, or indeed by much of the academic literature. For example, we have often found that simplifying messages, or removing even the tiniest amount of 'friction' in a process, can have a large impact. For these reasons, we wanted to develop a shorter, simple mnemonic – the EAST framework.

The EAST framework was developed by the Behavioural Insights Team from early 2012. After initial testing in seminars given by members of the team with UK Civil Servants, the first public 'outing' of EAST in its final form was in a short series of lectures I gave in Harvard and Washington later that year. Since then, we have refined and developed some of the core concepts and ideas, based on new findings and feedback from those we have tested EAST with. I would stress that, like most of what BIT does, it is very much the work of the team, and many have contributed to it – not least our friend and colleague Richard Thaler whose mantra is to 'make it easy'.

We hope you find this guide helpful. Getting familiar with the EAST framework won't turn you into the world's leading expert on behavioural insight. There are more complex frameworks and typologies, and many subtle and fascinating effects that EAST does not cover. But if even a small percentage of policies and practices are adapted as a result, EAST should lead to services that are easier and more pleasant for citizens to use, and more effective and cheaper too.

David Halpern



Chief Executive,  
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# Executive Summary

If you want to encourage a behaviour, make it Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely (EAST). These four simple principles for applying behavioural insights are based on the Behavioural Insights Team's own work and the wider academic literature.

There is a large body of evidence on what influences behaviour, and we do not attempt to reflect all its complexity and nuances here. But we have found that policy makers and practitioners find it useful to have a simple, memorable framework to think about effective behavioural approaches.

With this in mind, the principles from EAST are:

## 1. Make it Easy

- ◆ ***Harness the power of defaults.*** We have a strong tendency to go with the default or pre-set option, since it is easy to do so. Making an option the default makes it more likely to be adopted.
- ◆ ***Reduce the 'hassle factor' of taking up a service.*** The effort required to perform an action often puts people off. Reducing the effort required can increase uptake or response rates.
- ◆ ***Simplify messages.*** Making the message clear often results in a significant increase in response rates to communications. In particular, it's useful to identify how a complex goal can be broken down into simpler, easier actions.

### *Example: Auto-enrolment into pension schemes*

In the first six months after employees in large firms were automatically enrolled into pension schemes, participation rates rose from 61 to 83%.

## 2. Make it Attractive

- ◆ **Attract attention.** We are more likely to do something that our attention is drawn towards. Ways of doing this include the use of images, colour or personalisation.
- ◆ **Design rewards and sanctions for maximum effect.** Financial incentives are often highly effective, but alternative incentive designs – such as lotteries – also work well and often cost less.

### *Example: Drawing the attention of those who fail to pay road tax*

When letters to non-payers of car tax included a picture of the offending vehicle, payment rates rose from 40 to 49%.

## 3. Make it Social

- ◆ **Show that most people perform the desired behaviour.** Describing what most people do in a particular situation encourages others to do the same. Similarly, policy makers should be wary of inadvertently reinforcing a problematic behaviour by emphasising its high prevalence.
- ◆ **Use the power of networks.** We are embedded in a network of social relationships, and those we come into contact with shape our actions. Governments can foster networks to enable collective action, provide mutual support, and encourage behaviours to spread peer-to-peer.
- ◆ **Encourage people to make a commitment to others.** We often use commitment devices to voluntarily 'lock ourselves' into doing something in advance. The social nature of these commitments is often crucial.

### *Example: Using social norms to increase tax payments*

When people were told in letters from HMRC that most people pay their tax on time, it increased significantly payment rates. The most successful message led to a 5 percentage point increase in payments.

## 4. Make it Timely

- ♦ **Prompt people when they are likely to be most receptive.** The same offer made at different times can have drastically different levels of success. Behaviour is generally easier to change when habits are already disrupted, such as around major life events.
- ♦ **Consider the immediate costs and benefits.** We are more influenced by costs and benefits that take effect immediately than those delivered later. Policy makers should consider whether the immediate costs or benefits can be adjusted (even slightly), given that they are so influential.
- ♦ **Help people plan their response to events.** There is a substantial gap between intentions and actual behaviour. A proven solution is to prompt people to identify the barriers to action, and develop a specific plan to address them.

### *Example: Increasing payment rates through text messages*

Prompting those owing Courts Service fines with a text message 10 days before the bailiffs are to be sent to a person's home doubles the value of payments made, without the need for further intervention.