

Workshop 1

Challenges and approaches to achieving appropriate behaviour change around sentience

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The draft Sentience Bill requires Ministers to have ‘regard to the welfare needs of animals as sentient beings in formulating and implementing government policy’. The RSPCA has suggested that the definition of sentience should be along the following lines: ***Sentience is the capacity to have positive or negative experiences such as pain, distress or pleasure.*** Recognition of animal sentience and welfare needs at this level makes it essential to consider what ‘being sentient’ actually means for individual animals in real life situations and how this could and should be addressed in and across society.

Addressing animal sentience therefore requires an understanding of the root causes of human behaviour, which results in many harms to animals. However, traditional approaches to improving animal welfare have focussed on providing a service, such as accessible veterinary treatment or campaigning for people to change their consumer habits. The understanding of why people do what they do, don’t do what you’d like them to and more often than not do not change their behaviour, is the holy grail of anyone with something to sell, a campaign to promote or a desire to improve the world. For this reason, human behaviour change has been studied by experts in marketing, psychology, development and health and education programmes. Understanding human behaviour is important for anyone with an interest in helping the world to be a better place for humans or animals.

Research from a variety of fields demonstrates that awareness is not enough to promote sustained behaviour change. As demonstrated by the ‘value-action gap’, our behaviour does not always (or even often) reflect our ethical values. By understanding the underlying causes of behaviour, using effective communication strategies and recognising barriers to change, campaigners and policy makers can more effectively instil new forms of practice in citizen-consumers that are better for animals. Common barriers can include confirmation bias, institutionalised and legalised norms and regulations, cognitive dissonance, the physical environment (how items are presented and organised) and social and cultural norms.

This workshop will draw on behaviour change theory to explore some of the challenges and approaches to achieve not just a recognition that animals are sentient but behaviours that mirror this recognition. This builds on our four principles: (1) Change is a process; (2) Understanding psychology is key in driving change; (3) The environment influences change; and (4) Change must be ‘owned’.

A variety of behaviour change models have been used by researchers and non-profits, including the first comprehensive model – the Behaviour Change Wheel by Susan Michie, Lou Atkins and Robert West. Simpler models can help begin the process of understanding how to create targeted campaigns and policies, with the most popular being the Transtheoretical Model, created by Prochaska, Diclemente and Norcross. Working through these and other models, this workshop will give participants concrete, adaptable tools in helping them to promote and achieve behaviour change.

Questions:

1. What are some of the behaviours that may need to change to reduce human-inflicted harms on sentient animals?
2. Why might information campaigns focused on raising awareness not be the most effective way to change behaviour?
3. What is something that seems obvious to you but other people don't seem to 'get'? *E.g. using a reusable coffee cup.*
4. What are some of the barriers to changing people's behaviour you encounter in your own work?
5. In your area of work, what sort of approaches would be most likely to have an impact on you or your colleagues' views and behaviours with respect to animal welfare?

Summary of the discussion:

To start the discussion, the group looked at a HBCA video about smoking cessation to illustrate how difficult behaviour change is without support and information, and also **how difficult it can be to change our own behaviour even when it's for our own benefit, or for the benefit of those we love.** Sometimes, information provision alone can be limiting and people need social support to achieve change.

We discussed the messaging in the video and the assumptions we may make in our communications about making change, notably that "people aren't sponges"; you cannot expect them to soak up messaging that just tells them to change. When it comes to how people interact with animals, personally or professionally, it is unlikely that they will take on suggestions. Furthermore, making suggestions can be more likely to cause conflict, e.g. **just telling someone that something is not good for animals probably will not result in behaviour change.** A specific example from experience within the anti-whaling movement highlighted that Icelanders were sensitive to criticisms on their level of domestic consumption of whale meat, as the vast majority of whale meat is consumed by tourists having an 'immersive' Icelandic experience on holiday.

You need to think about the values that people hold, and we talked about '**Empathetic Communications**' which include recognising and reflecting in dialogue the other person's feelings, needs and requests. Doing this well means listening properly to what is being said and is crucial in helping you recognise the specific barriers to change. Some examples from the discussion included someone who worked on a farming helpline and found that listening, rather than trying to find solutions, was more effective in changing behaviour. They highlighted that their **preconceptions changed in light of the ability to listen and helped them adapt what they had initially perceived to be the 'perfect' solution.** An example from a press office highlighted how difficult it is to balance messages to the general public without coming across as preachy, what feels 'obvious' to the animal welfare community can be deeply challenging for the general public.

We reviewed the following challenges in 'values' for achieving behaviour change:

1. **Value Action Gap:** Experts' own actions may not reflect the values that they teach. A specific example came from a zoo, which is a challenging environment in which to get the public to think about welfare, especially if the facility offers animal produce from poor welfare backgrounds in their catering. The same issues were highlighted in the 'hypocrisies' in the welfare and conservation communities, whereby the actions and the decisions individuals take negatively impact on their field of work. How can we get external communications right, when our own internal communications and priorities are so challenged?

2. **Confirmation bias:** We look for things that reflect and influence what we believe; this can also influence **non-critical thinking**, e.g. assuming balls are what seals want to play with because this is what we commonly see.
3. **Cognitive dissonance:** Having to compromise your values in order to reduce your own discomfort, e.g. choosing to ignore ‘troubling’ welfare in a TV show so that it could still be enjoyed demonstrates how people can rid themselves of their own personal responsibility depending on the scenario.
4. **Presentation:** For example, the words and terms we use influence how people interact with them, e.g. how animal products are presented will affect how people think of them, interact with them and purchase them.
5. **Social and cultural norms:** How we learn about animals from our upbringing and surroundings; e.g. this could include ideas about purebred dogs being more high status, when compared with institutional norms.
6. **Institutional norms:** For example, this is how I treat this purebred dog in this research facility because it is normal; demonstrates the value of my role; helps me fit in and be taken more seriously; demonstrates the value of that dog.

We discussed overcoming the above with education, e.g. some people do not make the connection between meat (bacon) and animals (pigs) because it is not taught, or communicated or marketed like that. A first-hand approach within social and cultural norms can help people change their perspectives. The challenge is getting people to (safely) engage with animals in way that they can appreciate their intrinsic value, interest, sentience, complexity, etc.

We discussed the above list in the light of how **campaigners and policy makers do not necessarily want to address behaviour because this can challenge personal values**, and thought about how the above issues play into this. For example, does traceability and higher welfare labelling mean that people abdicate their personal responsibilities rather than critically consider the wider implications, e.g. what happens to a ‘higher welfare’ dairy cow at the end of life? We discussed a key part of behaviour change highlighted by the values action gap, that **if change is difficult or complicated to do, if there is an underlying moral challenge, we can be paralysed by making (or changing) decisions, and in fact we work hard to avoid making difficult decisions**. Some of the support and information needed can be provided by assurance from a third party, but some of the social/cultural norms highlighted that ‘ethical’ food is perceived to be only for those who are time or cash rich so that they can research or purchase untroubling products. This particular example demonstrated that, when it’s not necessarily cheaper to be vegan or vegetarian, we need to find social/cultural norms that resonate with the majority.

Reviewing the role of policy makers, we discussed why they even provide choices in some areas that cause harm. For example, you can choose to save money by buying eggs from caged hens, but you cannot choose to save money by opting for cheaper non-humane slaughter. Policy makers have drawn a line there, but why not on cages? If, as we believe, that most people are ‘on board’ with wanting animals to have good lives, is it just inertia of policy makers by claiming ‘choice’ rather than implementing challenging policy?

Changing what someone does every day is more challenging than trying to change occasional behaviour. **We discussed how social and cultural norms and societal changes occur**, e.g. smoking in public and plastic bags are more and more unacceptable, whereas wearing fur has been ‘vilified’, but will that happen with foie gras? **This is where labelling has a role, because foie gras is considered ‘elite’ and ‘luxury’ and therefore desirable**. Taking Elon Musk as an example, he wanted to promote electric cars for environmental benefit and so manufactured Tesla cars to be incredibly luxurious, cutting edge technology and therefore desirable. It created huge demand for his cars, and

whilst the environmental benefit remained, it was secondary to the desirability. The success of his model (and by making the technology freely available to his competitors) meant that he opened the market to huge upswell in electric vehicle manufacturing. We also looked at the success of products like 'Beyond Meat' which aren't marketed as vegan, but as cutting edge, nutritious food. Taking into account these marketing successes for positive change, it was thought that the animal welfare world could do more in conjunction with people in marketing.

We looked at the **behaviour change wheel**, where the middle of the wheel showed the source of the behaviour (capability, motivation and opportunity) and the second tier showed potential interventions to change behaviour (and the third tier potential policy). We also looked at the **transtheoretical model of behaviour change** which reviews the steps for change (e.g. precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance or relapse) and thought about what we can do to provide for people at each stage. Examples from a zoo environment detailed having members of the public write down a pledge at the end of their visit (e.g. commit to a beach clean up, or plant a tree). They found it helped people visualise what they needed to do for animal welfare. A positive example came from [Humanity House](#) museum in the Hague which, upon exiting, asks people to consider what type of 'activist' they wanted to be for change. The system then follows them up with tailored emails for encouragement, advice, etc. This was reported to have yielded positive change.

Contemplating the transtheoretical model, an example from a press office showed how different audiences are at different places within the steps, e.g. general media audience can be at a precontemplation stage, where social media followers are generally already taking action to improve welfare. This means that the organisation in question is trying to target non-traditional supporters to meet people in the early stages of precontemplation, and it will change how they present the messaging. Some messages are difficult regardless, e.g. non-stun slaughter. The Behaviour Wheel was considered more useful for policy, because preventing relapse at the end of the transtheoretical model remains challenging.

Key points:

- A research based approach to behaviour change, that often means meeting people where they're at, socially, culturally, etc., is more effective than a more didactic approach.
- Solutions need to be made easy for consumers; choice and knowledge can be overwhelming and companies are often worried about excluding consumers by drawing 'hard lines'. There is a gap whereby welfare and behaviour change scientists can help commercial organisations reframe some of these discussions.

Workshop held at:

Animal Sentience: science, policy and 'real world' application
2 May 2019, Friends House, Euston

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