

The Art of Designing Behaviour

You are what you do.
Not what you say you'll do.
– Carl Jung

ASTRID GROENEWEGEN

THE ART OF
**DESIGNING
BEHAVIOUR**

Mastering a practical method
to influence decisions and
shape desired behaviours

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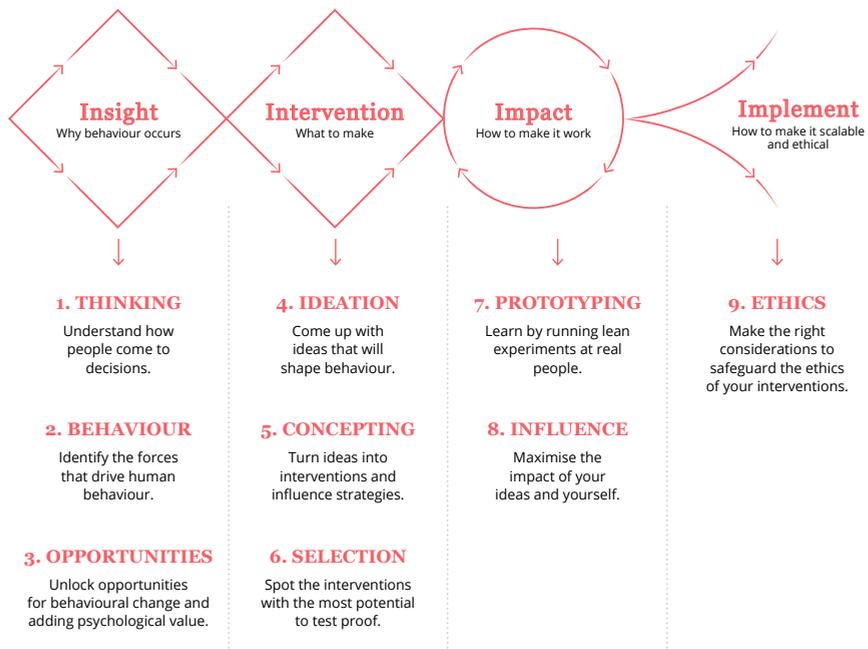
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How to turn ideas into a success

SUE | Behavioural Design Method[©]



INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Let me guess. At this point, you have probably read the book blurb and have quickly flipped through the pages to scan whether this is a book worth buying and reading - which means I have only a few paragraphs left to convince you to do so. Let me cut to the chase then, as the selling pitch of this book boils down to one simple thing. We all want to experience success in our lives. It could be that you want to raise your children to become great human beings. Or it could be that you desire to get your business to expand. Or perhaps you will experience success when people embrace your ideas, plans or policies. Triumph to you might be if your company teams perform far above average. Victoriously transforming an organisation could also be your definition of success. Yet it may also be more personal. Perhaps you want to stick to some sporting activity or healthy eating habit. Perhaps it's even more 'philanthropic', and you would like to contribute to a better world.

The bottom line is that all of these things have to do with behaviour. Just think about it for a minute. If you want your children to be the best versions of themselves. They need to behave politely, do their homework, be explorers, show curiosity. If you want your business to thrive, then people will have to buy your products, recommend you, and come back for repeat sales. If you want your plans to happen, then you need someone to approve or back them up. If you're going to set up successful teams, you will need your talent to develop more innovative ideas or act more agile. If you want to bring organisational change to a successful end, you need people to stop resisting and start moving in the right direction. If you're going to live more healthily, you will need to start exercising and buy different food. If you want to make the world just a bit more beautiful, you need people to recycle, eat less meat and make donations.

The key to success is understanding how behaviour is shaped (or isn't)

I am not saying behavioural change is easy. In fact, it is very hard. There's no magical recipe to change people's opinions or behaviours overnight with one formula. We, as humans, are far too complex for that. But the fact is also that we have potentially far more influence on successful outcomes than we realise. The key is to grasp some basic (but fundamental) science on how our brain works. How we as people make decisions. How we are triggered to do things, or what the things are that hold us back. Suppose we start to understand how human psychology and human decision-making works. In that case, we can begin to understand what interventions we have to develop, or what techniques or mechanisms we can implement in order to influence behaviour successfully. With that, you gain a far stronger position to make both your personal and business goals a success. The powerful realisation is that behaviour can be designed, and this book will teach you a method to do so based on behavioural science. Or, as I like to call it: *the science of influence*.

The Missing Layer: Why even brilliant ideas fail

Although there isn't one clear-cut formula that applies to everyone, the science of influence provides a clear insight into how humans arrive at decisions, and how you can influence their minds to shape desired behaviours. The know-how is out there, but not many people have mastered it. When you think of it, this is crazy: we all spend so much time, energy, money, and shed sweat – and sometimes tears (and I hope not too much blood) as to our ideas, without very little know-how about human decision-making. This is crucial knowledge if you want to turn your ideas into a success. You need to know how you can make people choose for you. You need to understand how you can move people in the direction in which you want them to move. You need to know how to get people to start (or stop) doing things. Or to get yourself to do so.

The truth is, we all roll the dice and hope that things will turn out for the best. I don't mean this in a demeaning way. Most of us simply weren't taught how human decision-making works, or how behaviour is shaped. Behavioural economics wasn't part of our education, or integrated into our daily work practice. Some of us may have read or heard about the theory, but it got lost in the practical translation. And there we are: we all tend to put our expertise and experience

into everything we do, but we haven't got the one crucial – though so essential! – part of the puzzle that will help us to make better decisions: *behavioural science*. This book adds a 'Missing Layer' to your existing expertise. It will provide you with an extra tool in your mental toolbox. It is all about giving you the method to uncover that hidden, irrational logic in human decision-making which is the key to moving people into the right direction. And it will show you the evidence-based principles from behavioural science to reinforce your ideas. This book is your guide to help you unlock the power of the science of influencing, which is crucial in getting more control over your successful outcomes.

It is all about influence

I know that some of you are immediately put off by the word *influence*. However, this is a book about influence. But think about it for a moment. Influence is not a bad word or verb. Or influencing behaviour isn't evil. Influencing is something that we as people are constantly doing. We are trying to shape people's behaviour all the time. If you have kids, you try to teach them socially accepted behaviours. If you want your manager to sign a budget, you are trying to influence his or her approval behaviour. If the government puts recycling containers in your street, then they are trying to influence your recycling behaviour. If you get flirty with that nice-looking person at the other side of the bar, you are trying to influence someone with a sweet *Barry White*-style love-making act. The way supermarkets position the products upon their shelves, is an attempt to influence your buying behaviour. When you give someone a gift or a compliment, you influence his or her 'liking behaviour'. Well, you get my point. Influence isn't a bad thing; it is a natural human condition. Every request we have, every cooperation or connection we seek, requires influencing someone's behaviour. Even if you want to invite a friend to a movie, or want friends to come over to your dinner party. Influencing behaviour is everywhere. We are just not that good at it. Or to put it better: we are not very well-equipped for it.

Although influencing behaviour is our daily mechanism to cope, learn, progress and connect in life, we have a blind spot for how influence works

‘Why is not everybody using it right now, then?’, I can almost hear you think. Well, there is more than one answer to that. First of all, more people and organisations are already using behavioural science on you, than you might realise. Therefore, it is intriguing and relevant to know more about Behavioural Design, as we are all continuously surrounded and influenced by it. Most of the time, we don’t realise it. We all tend to think that we make our own decisions based on our own free will every day. However, most of our behaviour is thoughtfully triggered, and our choices are carefully designed.

Do you check your phone or email when you see the red notification light up? Do you go for the mid-priced wine on a restaurant menu? Do you follow the route in an Ikea store? Eat a whole bag of potato chips, instead of having just a few crisps? Buy something while you didn’t have the budget for it? The way you buy, vote, walk, eat, work, interact, shop, react, look, is often discreetly designed and carefully crafted, using the science of influence. You might think you are calling the shots, but you usually have less control over your own decisions and behaviour than you assume. In this book, I will give you examples, so you’ll see it happening in the future, and so that you’ll come prepared then. Therefore, knowing more about behavioural science will be a very important eye-opener. Next to that, many people are fascinated by behavioural psychology. Many are reading about it, but few have adopted it in practice. This is your chance to become a frontrunner in this field and outsmart the competition, whether that is your competitor, boss, colleague (or your significant ‘other half’).

Behavioural science made practical

However, a lot of the knowledge from behavioural science is quite theoretical, and is arrived at in academic research settings. That doesn’t make it very easy to apply for us ‘hands-on mortals’. We have a strategic innovation company called SUE | Behavioural Design, which specialises in using behavioural science to influence minds and shape desired behaviours. It took its name from the Johnny Cash-song *A boy named SUE*.¹ We started out as a creative agency; however, we noticed that the most exciting progress wasn’t in creative industry but in behavioural science. We also noticed that in Silicon Valley, the winning companies were those that took humans and their behaviour as a starting point. At that

time, there were a lot of fascinating insights about human behaviour and decision-making, but they felt like pieces of a puzzle that didn't fall into place. There was no easy method to apply them in practice, yet this was what we desperately needed. We, as SUE, had clients looking for ways to develop next-generation, people-centred products, services, campaigns, or policies that people would embrace. We needed a way to leverage all the exciting know-how on human behaviour and the psychology of decision-making in practice.

We've studied the academic books and articles that gave us the latest insights into human psychology and behavioural science over the last few years. We've read hundreds of research papers, submerged ourselves in psychological experiments, visited conferences and talked to experts – all this with one goal: to make that powerful know-how actionable, helping our clients solve complex challenges with tangible results. That's why (and how) we developed our *SUE / Behavioural Design Method*[®]. It is built upon the groundbreaking insights from behavioural science that are most frequently replicated and acknowledged. These insights have been translated into a method with three easy-to-apply steps. The word *method* is essential. It's not magic; it's not alchemy, it's a structured process revealing how people (often unwarily) arrive at decisions, and turn this deep human understanding into validated ideas that will trigger behaviour. It's a method that you can master. This book will take you through all these steps of the Behavioural Design Method and will help you to apply the method yourself.

Principles of persuasion alone won't do the trick, aka 'what this book is not'

Before you decide to read on, you need to understand what this book is not. There is a common misunderstanding that Behavioural Design is about applying a set of persuasion principles.² You probably know the principles from hotel-booking websites, such as *social proof* ('this room was already booked 235 times, and had an 8.7 rating') and *scarcity* ('only three bedrooms left'). These are powerful principles, but sometimes they are mere 'tricks' up a designer's sleeve in order to boost sales. If you want to be successful, you need to realise that just adding some principles won't do the trick of turning your ideas into a success. You first need to know *why* people do things, and why they don't. Successful

influence begins with a deep understanding of the human decision-making that shapes behaviours.

Every behaviour starts with a decision. People must make the decision to start or to stop doing things

Just let me give you an example. I am a Berlin lover. And I regularly go there (as a matter of fact, I am writing these words in Berlin as we speak). I flew in here. But I must admit that, from an ecological perspective, I feel rather guilty about taking the plane. There is a train going from Amsterdam to Berlin – the ICE. You can throw social proof, scarcity and authority at me. Telling me that it runs 90% on time, transports 2,000 happy passengers a day, including many business travellers who give it a 9.7 rating. But I just won't get onto that train. As long as you don't dispel my irrational beliefs that the train will be crowded with noisy travellers, the Wi-Fi will suck, and that I won't have a decent place to work during the seven hours of having to sit on that train. Every idea or intervention will simply bounce off me. To get me on the ICE, you need to understand my (irrational) decision-making, and understand which forces hold me back from or move me onto the train. And then you can start coming up with ideas. So, if we are talking about Behavioural Design, we are talking about understanding what people genuinely need, and what is going to help them to progress in life. For this, you need to have three elements:

1. Insight into the psychology of human decision-making
2. Understanding the forces that shape people's behaviour
3. The ability to turn deep human understanding into the ideas and strategies that can shape the desired behaviours

The SUE | Behavioural Design Method

The question remains: How does one do this? How do you influence decisions and shape desired behaviours? Scientific knowledge can be overwhelming, and difficult to translate into daily life. It often lacks all creativity, making it hard to fit it in with your brand or personality. The good news is: you are holding the answer. This isn't just a book; it's a masterclass with an extensive toolbox. It's

a ‘very hands-on’, practical guide that will help you to start using Behavioural Design right away – to develop strategies and ideas that are going to change your behaviour. It will help you to *power up* your existing ideas with the science of influence step-by-step, from start to finish. In order to make this book work for you, it isn’t packed with fancy, complicated theories or eloquent wording. It consists of short, easy to read chapters, with examples, tools and tips for you to skip through, and to use as a quick reference. You don’t need to have a sales, marketing or advertising background. You don’t need any technological skills. You’ll be just okay if you want to learn how to influence people positively, and if you are a curious, forward thinker. This book will show you how to apply behavioural science systematically and pragmatically. You’ll learn the SUE | Behavioural Design Method that will help you to influence minds and shape behaviour predictably. So, Lady Luck can take a break. Or at least you don’t need to depend too much on her anymore – though she’s always welcome to the party, of course.

The beauty of it is: the SUE | Behavioural Design Method works! It is not just a concept I manufactured for this book. At our Behavioural Design-consultancy,³ we have been applying this method for over ten years now, in order to help national and international organisations to improve their design choices, and to aid them in shaping positive behaviours. The Behavioural Design Method has allowed us to develop validated solutions for financial institutions, NGOs, startups, FMCGs, healthcare organisations, public governments, service providers, retailers, hotels, and leadership teams. The method has been applied to a wide range of challenges. To give you some examples: We have helped youngsters to get out of debt and banks like ABN Amro and ING to make sure that people take steps now to secure financial safety for the future. People drive more safely by not using their phones in traffic. People with diabetes use the new medical technology of Medtronic to help them live a more carefree life. Mortgage owners are aided to avoid future financial problems. UNHCR to gain more support and donations for refugees. We have helped a Dutch political party design as to voting behaviour, in order to fight the rise of the extreme right. And have aided nurses in developing their ambitions within their present workplace. We have helped to build strong company cultures that attract talent and retain it. And co-workers to accept organisational change. We have assisted organisations, such as eBay, Roche and Orange, to transform their teams in order to

become genuinely human-centred, and helped them to embrace the habits of high-performance teams. We have helped SportCity to aid people in creating a lasting exercise regime. Dutch municipalities to boost the recycling behaviour of citizens, and Heineken to design for sustainability by developing behaviours that result in zero plastic waste at festivals. Besides assisting multi-disciplinary teams to become more creative, and organisations to create future proof positioning and propositions – to name but a few things.

We have taught exactly the same Behavioural Design Method to over 1,500 people from more than 45 countries by way of our *SUE | Behavioural Design Academy*® – an officially accredited educational institution. In short, what you'll read and learn in this book has been test-proofed in practice on real cases. Our work has helped us to test, validate and optimise the Behavioural Design Method in real-life situations. You might ask yourself: 'What kind of people use the SUE | Behavioural Design Method?' So far, we have worked with leadership teams, politicians, business owners, marketers, policymakers, innovation managers, UX-designers, architects, hotel owners, HR consultants, physical fitness-trainers, health care-professionals, CMOs, researchers, copywriters, fundraisers, finance experts, innovators, product owners, strategic planners, CEOs, and many more. So, your motivation to pick up this book could be to learn what your competitors may already be using, or in order to stay ahead in the game. But to put it simply: if you want to know more about human decision-making, and learn the skills to influence minds and change behaviour positively, you're holding the right book.

This isn't so much a book, as a masterclass and a toolbox

This book comes with downloads and videos to further boost your ability to apply behavioural science. It comes with easy-to-use tools, cheat sheets, and my guidance. To give you hands-on directions and instructions in order to apply what you've learnt right away. This isn't so much a book – as a masterclass and toolbox that will help you to start practising Behavioural Design. Therefore, by purchasing this book you are actually not buying just a book but a genuine learning experience. That will give you a 24/7-online access to an exclusive website, where you can find downloads and videos which you may use at will.

From a Behavioural Design perspective, this was not just a cute gimmick or add-on to this book – it has been essential. In psychology, there's a well-known phenomenon called the *use-it-or-lose-it* principle. One thing that happens in all of our brains is called *pruning*.⁴ Our brain clears out the grey matter we do not use, which simply gets eliminated. That sounds scary, but it is hopeful. Whereas we used to think that we all face the decline of our cognitive ability as we age, that is in fact not always the case.⁵ If you keep using your brain, it can stay in good health for a long time. And learning new things makes for a perfect brain training. However, if you want the learnings from this book to stick, you must keep using them in order to avoid getting pruned. But that is again great news from a Behavioural Design-perspective: If you do things repeatedly, it turns them into habit through automatic behaviour, in other words: by using the tools and templates from this book, you not only keep your brain healthy, but you will also turn using this newly acquired know-how into a habit – helping you to apply Behavioural Design effortlessly. So, how's that for a pitch in order to use the downloads and tools in this book?

I therefore sincerely hope that this book will become your guide to the fascinating world of applied behavioural science. Earmark your pages, highlight your sentences, scribble your findings on the side-lines, and instead of reading it from beginning to end, occasionally skip ahead or come back to read some parts again. I hope you will put in 'sticky notes' to add your cases and learnings. Making it not just another book on your bookshelf, but your own *Behavioural Design-playbook* that will be your trusted companion in designing for behavioural change. So, there you go. If you're looking to gain more control as to successful outcomes by unlocking the power of Behavioural Design in practice, this book and everything that comes with it is a definite 'keeper'.

Astrid Groenewegen

PS.: Did I use Behavioural Design on you in this introduction? Yes, I most certainly did. I have connected with your job-to-be-done. I have highlighted pains, taken away anxieties, and used authority and other persuasive principles. Do you want to know what all this means and how it works? Please, read on, and you'll find out soon enough.

