

Report Summary.

Why is it so hard to change people's behaviour?

The purpose of this report is to identify and examine a number of factors that make it difficult for many members of the public in the western world to change their attitudes and behaviour on 'ethical' issues. These factors do not appear to have been addressed by many of the organisations and individuals seeking change from the public on ethical issues, therefore the report also aims to suggest how this diverse range of causes (referred to hereon as the 'Movement for Global Change' or 'the Movement') can address these barriers.

The report suggests that, whilst current attempts to seek behavioural change from the public on ethical issues are useful to some extent, in themselves they are inadequate to achieve real change. This is because they fail to consider the real psychological position of the individual in the western world and therefore fail to deal with three of the biggest barriers to attitudinal and behavioural change that this individual faces – namely, the complexity of the modern world, our expanded 'moral radius' as individuals and the profound influence of the global economic orthodoxy and its cultural spinoffs (such as consumerism) on our mental worldviews as individuals.

We argue that these 3 barriers have a variety of profound effects on individuals that ultimately make it difficult for the Movement to gain attitudinal or behavioural change from the public. One of these effects is that the barriers lead many individuals to live in a 'bubble of delusion' regarding their lifestyles, ethical values, effect on the world, the effect of external influences on them, and many other areas. Quite simply, many people lack perspective about their situation as a creature and the world they inhabit. Given this effect alone, the Movement faces an uphill struggle to convince some people of the need for change in the first place, let alone to actually get large numbers of people to translate the sympathy they possess into significant changes in their behaviour.

There are however a number of things that the Movement can do in its direct communications with the public to help individuals overcome these barriers. A major component of an effective response to the barriers will be to empower members of the public with the intellectual skills, 'values awareness' and socio-political conditions that will enable them to become well-informed, intellectually independent and ethical global citizens. The development of these skills and conditions could not only help the Movement to gain a greater depth of behaviour change from larger numbers of people, but also for many thinkers represents an important element of a 'good society' generally.

Although the task of putting these conditions in place will need the involvement of the state and other parties beyond the Movement, the movement does have an important role to play in this process in its communications with the public. For example, it can make more of an investment in educating the public, place individual issues in a broader context, make its values more explicit and provide an overall vision. It can also do other things to address the 3 barriers, including establishing a global movement to cover the full range of values it represents, providing more support to those people making changes in their lives and adopting a more radical voice.

Full report available to download at www.changestar.co.uk/thinking_reports.htm
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