

Insights *for* Impact

The annual report
of the Policy Research Group
in the Department of Psychology

2018

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Downing Street

Cambridge

CB2 3EB

reception@psychol.cam.ac.uk

www.psychol.cam.ac.uk/pol-res-group

Edited by Kai Ruggeri

Authors:

Kamilla Knutsen Steinnes, Alessia Cottone, Thomas Lind Andersen, Felicia Sundström, Adriana Gonzales, Hannes Jarke,, Sahana Quail

This report is the third of a three-volume series . Any comments made are solely for the purpose of presenting findings already disseminated through standard scientific channels. Their presentation or representation should not be considered as original research property of those involved in the report, the Policy Research Group, the Department of Psychology, the School of Biological Sciences, or the University of Cambridge. They are strictly for engaging audiences and do not constitute an endorsement of quality, validity, or value.

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in the third and final annual *Insights for Impact* report from the Policy Research Group in the Department of Psychology in University of Cambridge. As with the 2016 and 2017 reports, the current volume is mainly produced by early career scholars in psychology enrolled in the Junior Researcher Programme as well as other team members within the PRG.

The value of psychological insights in applications to policy has only grown since we developed the first edition, and this volume highlights key cases from the past few years. First, we highlight major studies from psychological sciences from around the world. In the final section, we highlight findings from our collaborators in Cambridge as well as from within our own lab.

Behavioural Insights are knowledge obtained from the social sciences, including psychology, which identify behavioural patterns that challenge traditional and widely accepted assumptions surrounding rationality. Major examples of these include how social norms have influenced households to reduced energy consumption, or how small charges for single-use bags at grocery stores reduced plastic waste substantially. Some of the most influential national and international organisations have even established their own behavioural insights units for addressing major global challenges, including the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank, and multiple branches of the United Nations. Both the European Union and multiple member states across the continent also have their own behavioural policy units.

As interest grows, so has the need for improved methods of communicating those insights between academics, policymakers, and the general public. This is not a simple process and requires constant concern for the balance between making information accessible without making it inaccurate or incomplete. Along with the increasing calls for greater transparency in research, greater reproducibility of experimental findings, and greater power in psychological methods, we include here only the broad information from selected studies. We strongly encourage readers to be vigilant about these findings, primarily through further exploration of any information deemed relevant.

Based on the tremendous success of the 2016 report, Routledge invited the PRG to produce an extended textbook version, covering the history of psychology in policy, major theories and cases, and future directions for the field. This volume, entitled *Behavioural Insights for Public Policy: Concepts and Cases*, was published in August of 2018 and is now widely available. With such a comprehensive version in circulation, *Insights* reports were reduced to focus on the most recent and relevant findings, and 2018 will be the final volume. Future activities will involve making an interactive tool available to those interested in further exploration of relevant studies – significant or not – and we will emphasise its use once complete.

This final report for 2018 is therefore a condensed and narrowed focus on major findings in the same themes produced in the textbook: financial choice, health and healthcare, energy and environment, education, and workplace. We hope you find these a compelling story for considering the value of psychological science in practice, and encourage you to seek out further evidence from those responsible for each study.

Canada | Health & Healthcare

Members who were given loyalty points - used for purchasing flight tickets - for exercising visited the gym 17% more often

Denmark | Education

Children whose parents have been taught about growth mindsets had a greater improvement of their reading skills compared to controls

USA | Communication

59.8% more requests

Pictures of completed public services sent by the government were followed by higher public engagement



South Africa | Environment

Receiving messages stressing responsibility and competition was followed by a reduction in energy use

Australia | Workplace

Combination of interventions..

- Simplified Communication
- Recovery Priming
- Timeliness
- Personalisation
- Goal Setting
- Doctor Engagement

...was followed by quicker and safer return to work

Bolivia, Peru, & The Philippines | Finance

Increased saving goals after reminder messages

Insights

Reminding individuals about their savings goals may increase goal commitment. Bank customers who committed to individual savings goals received randomised reminder messages to stay committed to their goals either via letter and/or text messages¹. Savings goals were more likely to be met by those who received reminders via both letter and text messages.

Finance

Health

Loyalty point programmes can be used as incentives to increase physical activity. Air Miles were rewarded to individuals who exercised at fitness facilities². Following the intervention, Individuals that joined the Air Miles incentive programme visited fitness facilities 17% more often than other members of the facilities, who did not join the programme.

Messages utilizing social comparison and assigned responsibility can contribute to reducing energy use by encouraging energy efficient behaviour. Staff at a government building received email messages comparing energy use between floors and assigning responsibility for energy use to individual employees³. For messages including competition combined with individual responsibility energy use was reduced by 14%.

Environment

Education

Parents who believe their children's learning abilities are fixed tend to interact with them in a non-constructive way. In a low-cost intervention, parents were taught that their children's reading skills were malleable rather than fixed⁴. Children whose parents received information about malleable skills had a greater improvement in reading skills compared to children of parents receiving no such intervention.

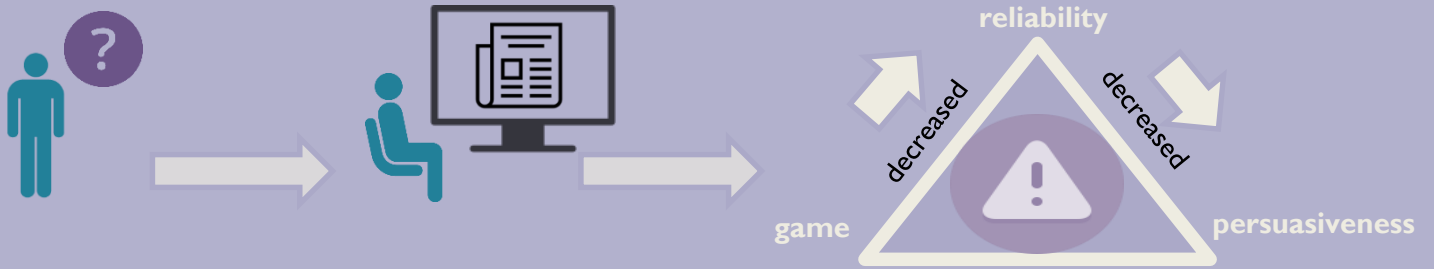
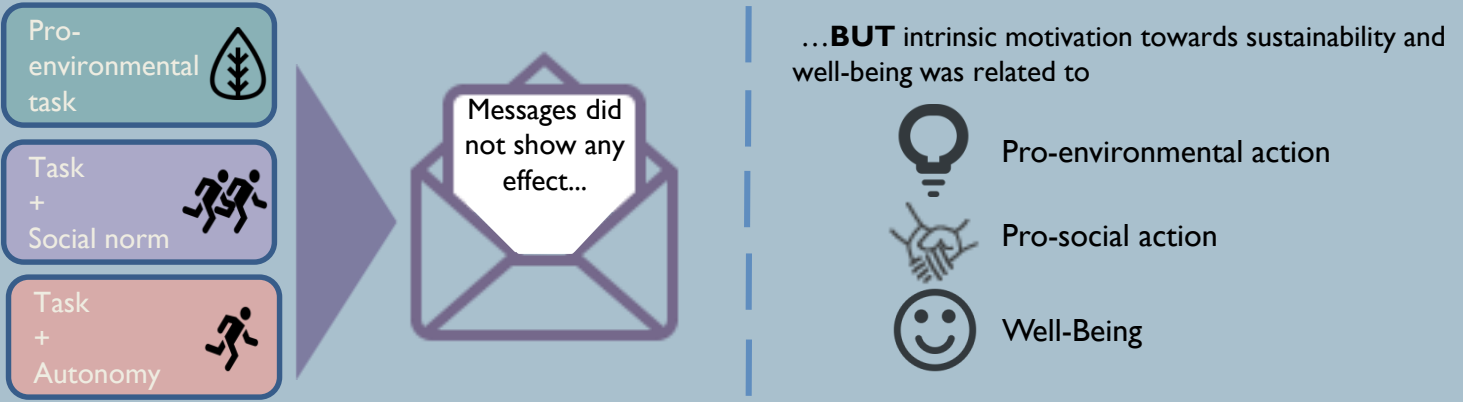
A safe and quick return to work is beneficial to employees' physical and psychological health as well as to employers. An intervention using simplified communication, personalisation, recovery priming, timeliness, goal setting, and doctor engagement aimed to facilitate the process of returning to work⁵. Workers in the intervention returned to full capacity quicker than those who did not receive such treatment.

Workplace

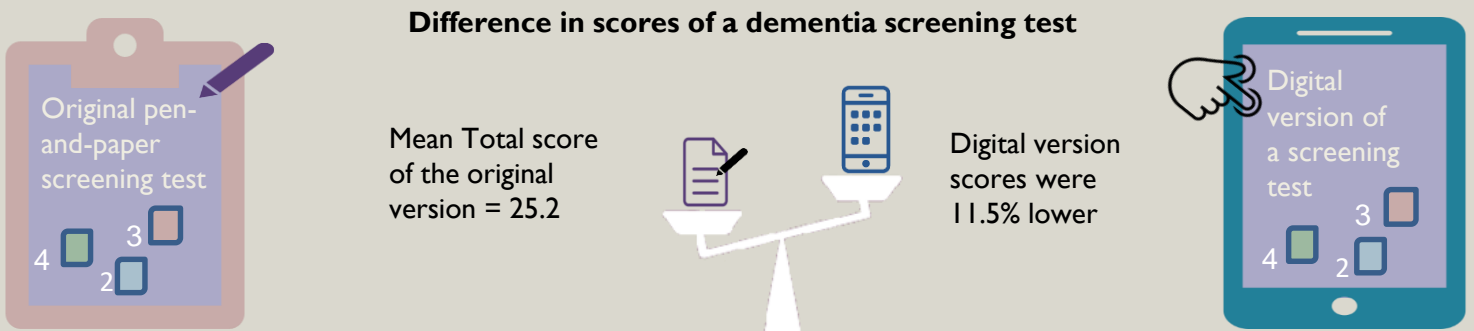
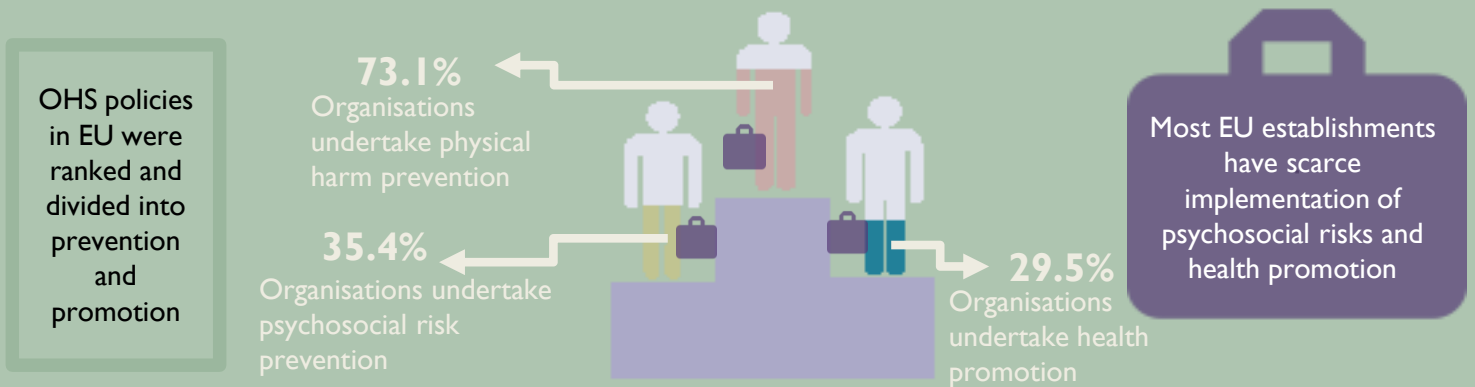
Communication

Transparent communication of governmental work to the public may promote a positive perception of government and commitment towards it. Citizens submitted service requests through a mobile application to their government⁶. Residents who received images of their service request being addressed were more likely to engage with government again than people receiving no such images.

¹Karlan, D., McConnell, M., Mullainathan, S., & Zinman, J. (2016). Getting to the top of mind: How reminders increase saving. *Management Science*, 62(12), 3393-3411. ²OECD (2017). Behavioural insights case studies: Health and safety. In *Behavioral Insights and Public Policy: Lessons from Around the World*. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264270480-en. ³OECD (2017). Behavioural Insights Case Studies: Energy. In *Behavioral Insights and Public Policy: Lessons from Around the World*. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264270480-en. ⁴Andersen, S. C., & Nielsen, H. S. (2016). Reading intervention with a growth mindset approach improves children's skills. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(43), 12111-12113. doi:10.1073/pnas.1607946113. ⁵NSW Premier & Cabinet Behavioral Insights Unit, NSW Government Education, & Allianz (2016). Applying behavioural insights to return to work. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2wtPrfE> ⁶Buell, R. W., Porter, E., & Norton, M. I. (2017). Surfacing the Submerged State: Operational Transparency Increases Trust in and Engagement with Government. Retrieved from <https://hbs.me/2LXRdzC>



Participants who created fake news in a game rated fake news articles as less reliable and in turn less persuasive



Health

Many people now travel abroad to receive healthcare. When prospective medical travellers were presented with hypothetical travel scenarios, they considered the quality of the treatment as the highest priority factor, together with cost and waiting time. Building on these results, policies concerning quality, information, cross-country records, and implementation among others should be implemented to reduce unnecessary risks.

An alternative to using external motivators is to elicit internal motivation. To increase sustainable and pro-social behaviour, messages were framed in an autonomy-supportive way, or contained social norms. While no actual behaviour change was observed following the messages, intrinsic motivation towards sustainability and well-being were related to pro-environmental behaviour. Given the potential of leveraging intrinsic motivation, other ways of elicitation need to be discovered.

Environment

Education

As consumers increasingly receive and share their news through online sources, false information are spread faster and to a broad audience. The participants of a fake news game, in which they themselves had to present information in different misleading manners, rated the perceived persuasiveness of fake information as lower through reduced judgment of the reliability of the information compared to participants who had not partaken in the game.

Occupational Health and Safety policies are important factors in promoting healthy lifestyles at work. Across the EU, preventive measures against physical harm were found to be the most frequently implemented, followed by psychosocial risk prevention procedures. While preventive measures are being taken, promotion of health at work is a largely discussed topic and policies that actively improve health and well-being are largely missing.

Workplace

Communication

The translation of pen-and-paper versions into computerised neuropsychological assessment devices is growing within the healthcare sector. When compared, pen-and-paper versions of two multidomain dementia assessments were not found to be equal to the mobile platform versions. This suggests that the mobile versions are at risk of measuring other cognitive functions or with a different sensitivity, calling for new scoring approaches and standardisations for these versions.

