

Campaigning With ATTITUDE

**Applying Social
Psychology to
Criminal Justice
Communication**

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Payback is a campaigning organisation which promotes community penalties for non-violent offenders.



• working with criminal justice agencies

Training and Consultancy Services are a group of forensic psychologists and psychotherapists working extensively in the criminal justice field. Their work includes research, training, consultancy, supervision, coaching and experiential learning opportunities.

Campaigning With Attitude is also available as a downloadable pdf from the Payback website – www.payback.org.uk/attitudes

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Preface

The need to sustain public confidence means that public opinion plays an important, albeit indirect, role in sentencing policy and practice.

It is obvious that those who are responsible for sentencing policy require a good understanding of what people know and think about sentencing.

In communicating to the public the reality of court practice and of sentencing decisions, the most challenging demands are in identifying ways of interrupting the processes which feed public cynicism. All commercial operations of any significance market themselves and most public institutions now do so.

From 'Attitudes to Punishment: Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey' by Michael Hough in July 1998

Introduction

Running any public awareness initiative about the realities of crime and sentencing is a challenging task. It may not be as tough as a campaign to reduce racist bigotry, or to convince smokers to quit, or to promote Uzbekistan as a tourist destination, but it's certainly up there with the best of them.

The difficulty is for two main reasons. First, there is the sensitive nature of the topic itself. Criminal justice issues touch on people's lives in a variety of ways and are often associated with ideas of 'harm', 'danger' and 'fear'. This sense of threat makes it harder for people to be willing to consider alternatives. The second, much more basic reason, is that attitudes are hard to change, whatever!

That is why this publication is all about attitudes and beliefs. In particular it's about understanding *why* people hold certain attitudes and *how* we might convince them to change. Here are some of the key concepts from the field of social psychology which we hope will improve the process and the outcomes of your public education work.

The theories and concepts in this resource shouldn't be regarded as 'definitive' or a 'blueprint' for a campaign. Several of them are controversial; all have had to be greatly simplified to fit them in. They overlap with other disciplines (especially social marketing and media studies) and sometimes even appear to conflict with lessons from these other fields. Hopefully, that just adds to the interest!

We hope that these concepts and ideas will:

- Provide hooks, and stimulation, for planning detailed aspects of a communications campaign, rather than be considered as rigid 'rules'
- Whet readers' appetites to learn more about social psychology and social marketing
- Reinforce the fundamental social marketing principle of approaching things from the perspective of 'consumers', or 'audiences', rather than the easier but much less effective product or message driven route
- Validate and make explicit some of the existing practices in criminal justice public awareness campaigns, while adding research-based explanations and a shared language to describe these processes
- Confirm, and sometimes challenge assumptions that are made about how target audiences might respond to particular messages and messengers

The guide is a practical introduction to the following areas:

- Attitudes, values and beliefs and how to change them
- Persuasion - how to 'do it'
- Schemas – what they are and why they matter
- Memory, forgetting and recall – how to create campaigns that are hard to forget
- Group behaviour – how attitude change works in groups

1. Attitudes, Values and Beliefs

Attitudes

The study of attitudes has become so important for social psychologists that at times this has almost defined social psychology itself. But what are 'attitudes', and how can we define them?

There is no actual consensus amongst social psychologists about the definition of an attitude, but in general, attitudes tend to be evaluative in their nature (good/bad, liberal/conservative, positive/negative, etc.) Here are some of the key features of attitudes that are common to all definitions

- We cannot see, touch or feel attitudes, but can only infer them from an individual's behaviour (what they do), speech (what they say), or non-verbal behaviour (how they look).
- All attitudes have a reference point; in other words attitudes are held towards something, often called a 'referent', or 'attitude object'. For example, one may have an attitude towards 'young offenders', 'community sentences', or 'prison'.
- Attitudes are learnt and represent a person's experience of different attitude objects. For example, if your only experience of 'young offenders' is when a 16 year old stole your car, you might develop a negative attitude towards that particular group of young people.
- Attitudes are not held in isolation but interlink with other attitudes to form 'attitude systems'. One's attitudes towards young offenders, community sentences, and prison will co-exist to some extent.
- Once formed, attitudes are relatively stable and notoriously difficult to alter!

Values

It has also been difficult to accurately and consistently define values, and how they differ from attitudes. Some of the key features of values are:

- Values have been described as what a person *wants* to be true.
- Values are often judgmental, and can be viewed as a sort of 'expected standard'.

Imagine Ms. Turner who has a value that everyone should be treated with 'fairness'. Ms Turner would set that as a standard for going about her everyday life, and she would tend to treat people with fairness in the supermarket, at work, if reporting a crime at the police station, etc.

- Values can be viewed as 'motivational' (give us a reason to act), and values also guide the behaviour of the individual.

The standard of 'fairness' would motivate Ms. Turner to wait in the supermarket check-out queue, rather than barge to the front, and to not mark one of her employees down in their appraisal just because she did not like them. Neither would she get irritated and abusive at the police station

if the officers were busy, and she could not be seen immediately.

- Values can act as a 'benchmark' to evaluate the behaviour of others.

It is clear that Ms. Turner would expect to be treated fairly by others in the supermarket, at work and in the police station.

- Values are enduring, and not particularly transient.

So 'treating everyone with fairness' would be a value that Ms. Turner has probably always held, and except in an extreme set of circumstances, this value would probably not change to any great extent.

- Values are extremely personal to the individual, and are developed through experience with the world.

Ms. Turner was probably brought up in a family where she was treated fairly, and therefore treated others with fairness too. In direct contrast to this, a child brought up in a family where they were the 'scapegoat' of the family, and were treated badly in comparison to their siblings and friends, would have very little understanding of the concept of 'fairness', and would be unlikely to treat others in this way.

Beliefs

Beliefs are much easier to define, and a simple dictionary definition will suffice: a belief is a 'conviction of the truth of some statement, or the reality of some being, thing or phenomenon'¹. In its simplest form then, a 'belief' indicates what someone *thinks* is true. A simple example of this may be the belief that there are such things as 'offenders' and they 'commit crimes'.

Components of Attitudes

Up until fairly recently social psychologists have subscribed to the 'ABC Model' of attitudes. This means that these researchers believed that attitudes were made up of three components, namely an **A**ffective, **B**ehavioural, and **C**ognitive part.

Affective Component

This refers to the emotions, feelings or moods associated with certain attitudes. We usually detect this by people's descriptions of how they feel.

For example, if one had a negative attitude towards young offenders, believing that 'All young offenders turn into adult offenders', 'They can not be re-habilitated', 'They enjoy offending', etc., then the emotions, feelings, and moods one experienced when this attitude is activated could be anger, sadness, despair, depression or frustration.

Behavioural Component

This refers to the way we act towards the 'attitude object', and this behaviour is usually fairly consistent. We generally detect this by observing how people act towards the attitude object.

1. Penguin New English Dictionary 2000

For example, if one held the attitude described above, one would be likely to behave with hostility or suspicion towards those suspected of being young offenders.

Cognitive Component

This consists of the person's thoughts, perceptions, beliefs and evaluations about the 'attitude object'. We usually detect this by what people say.

The example 'all young offenders turn into adult offenders' is a thought, and you may also believe that 'all young offenders come from bad homes'.

These researchers also believed that the more consistent the three components were with each other, the more stable the attitude, and this phenomenon will be explored in more detail later. However it will come as no surprise that the relationship between what we do (behaviour), and what we say (cognition/attitude) is at times inconsistent.

Mr. Marsden claims to have a 'positive attitude' towards young offenders and believes that they can be re-habilitated and change their behaviour. However Mr. Marsden writes to the Head teacher of their children's school, asking for a first time car thief to be excluded from that school.

Another difficulty about the 'ABC Model' is deciding whether the attitude causes the behaviour and affect, or vice versa, or is there some form of reciprocal arrangement?

Fortunately for criminal justice campaigners, they are mainly wishing to change attitudes towards crime and punishment. The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is more relevant and important to public health campaigns, for example where the success of the whole campaign will usually rest on effective and consistent behaviour change.

Attitude Formation and Development.

We are not born with a complete set of attitudes; therefore, at some stage of our development, attitudes form and subsequently develop. A basic understanding of the process of attitude formation and development is essential if one is to be able to even begin to attempt to change them. There are a number of ways in which our attitudes are created and modified. These processes can occur in isolation or several of them may be in operation at the same time. It is also interesting to note that the same processes that are in operation in the development of attitudes, can be used to change attitudes too.

Direct Experience

Having 'direct experience' with people, objects and events is probably the most easily understood way in which we form attitudes. Attitudes formed in this way are usually very salient, and we generally have more confidence in opinions and attitudes formed in this way than those formed in other ways. Attitudes formed in this way can usually be 'reactivated' by exposure of the people, object or event that helped to form the attitude in the first place.

If Carole Gold (aged 13), had just had a 'direct experience' of being mugged, it would be completely understandable for her to hold negative attitudes towards people who commit street crime, and these attitudes would be very real to her. Furthermore these attitudes would be easily activated for Carole Gold, if she read about street crime in a newspaper, or maybe walked past someone she considered a 'potential mugger' in the street when alone.

Exposure to Objects

Most individuals will react more positively towards familiar objects or events than to those which are unfamiliar. This is often referred to as the 'mere exposure effect'.

If people have had pets all their lives they may be more favourably disposed towards animals than those who have not. Similarly, it may be easier to persuade a person who has worked for a criminal justice agency to accept the opening of a pre-release or bail hostel in their community, rather than someone who has no direct experience of the rehabilitation of offenders.

Instrumental Conditioning

This refers to the way in which rewards² are used to re-enforce good behaviour. Instrumental conditioning is most easily evidenced by parents giving children sweets, burgers, comics, etc. to reward good behaviour. The behaviours that are rewarded then become the dominant behaviours or 'are strengthened', whereas the behaviours that are not rewarded 'die out'. It must be noted that the 'reward' does not have to be tangible, but could be 'verbal praise' or 'affection'; the key thing is that it is rewarding to the person. Behaviours are not only formed this way but are also maintained using the same technique. Exactly the same process is in operation in the development, 'shaping' and maintenance of attitudes.

Sarah, who is the child of a homophobic father, unintentionally expresses a negative attitude towards a gay person. Her father roars with laughter at this, and as there isn't much laughter in Sarah's house, she finds it incredibly rewarding to be able to make her father laugh. So, she says something similar later in the day and the same thing happens. It is quite easy to see how this process may shape Sarah's attitude towards gay people.

Whilst it is easy to see how this system operates in the formation of young children's attitudes there is research evidence to suggest that exactly the same system is in operation in maintaining and shaping our attitudes throughout our lives³.

² Different people find different things rewarding, this form of conditioning will only work if the 'reward' is actually rewarding to that individual. So for example some people may not find sweets or parental approval rewarding.

³ Only attitudes that exist in some form or other can be shaped in this way.



Socialisation and Social Learning

Our basic values and beliefs and subsequent attitudes are acquired from interactions with our family, peer group at school, and later colleagues at work. These situations and people are operating as a sort of social learning environment. It is therefore no surprise that we often hold the same or similar beliefs to our parents, siblings and friends. To elaborate on this point, having parents with 'pro-criminal attitudes' or being part of a 'pro-criminal gang' is significantly related to juvenile delinquency.

Observational Learning/ Modelling

This is very closely allied to the above, possibly explaining how social learning may come about. In its simplest form 'observational learning' means that we learn certain attitudes and behaviours by watching the attitudes and behaviours of others referred to as 'the model'. However the theory also states that we do not simply observe the attitude or behaviour but that we pay close attention to the consequences of expressing a certain attitude or behaving in a certain way.

A child, Joe, observes another child, Scarlet, being punished (either physically or verbally), for mocking a child with a very obvious physical disability. The theory states that in the future, Joe will evaluate the likely consequences for himself (i.e. punishment), before he decides whether he should tease or mock another child with a disability.

Although this example is based in childhood, it is presumed that we 'observe' others expressing attitudes all the time, and also the consequences of these expressions, and form our own views about the acceptability of such attitudes⁴.

The Functions of Attitudes

Almost all attitude theories adopt what is known as the 'functional approach', which means that attitudes exist because they serve a useful purpose. But what are the actual functions of attitudes? Why do we go to so much effort to form them? What purpose do they serve? Katz (1960) outlined four main functions of attitudes, and these categorisations, or variants of it, have become the most widely used and popular way of referring to the functions of attitudes

The Knowledge Function

The knowledge function of attitudes refers to how attitudes are used to mentally organise the vast amount of knowledge and information we all have about the world. Using attitudes in this way simply helps the world make more sense!

The Value - Expressive Function

This refers to the use of attitudes to express your values. This can be done by what you say, the clothes that you wear, the paintings you have on your walls, the magazines that you read etc. It is the use of attitudes to tell others who and what you are, as well as what you believe in.

⁴ This observing does not have to be actual; paying attention to the mass media can work just as well.

The value expressive function of attitudes can be demonstrated by the prisoner who gains great satisfaction from being seen in prison covered in tattoos, adorned with gold jewellery, wearing the 'best trainers', and boasting about being an armed robber, whilst loudly voicing negative attitudes towards say child abusers, 'nonces' and murderers.

The Utilitarian/Instrumental Function

This simply means that we can use attitudes to help us to adjust to the world, and obtain rewards and avoid punishment. This would explain why most people have positive attitudes to objects that provide rewards and negative attitudes towards punishing objects.

It is unlikely that you would volunteer to work with offenders if you had been the victim of crime and had as a result developed a negative attitude towards offenders and their needs. However you may be in a social group where private education for children is valued, and you would be rewarded by inclusion in that social group if you sent your children to a fee paying school.

Being 'politically correct' is also a good example of attitudes serving an instrumental or utilitarian function, and, of course, the expression of attitudes can change to suit the social milieu one finds oneself in.

The Ego - Defensive Function

This refers to the use of attitudes to help defend one's self image ('ego'). For example someone with a deep feeling of inferiority, who cannot accept this, may project inferiority onto another individual or group, thereby boosting his or her self-esteem or protecting his or her ego. It is not a huge leap to see how this could turn into 'bullying' behaviour. If attitudes are being used to defend one's self-esteem, it is proposed that the attitudes that will be projected or expressed will usually be negative or hostile.

There is a well validated 'hierarchy' of offences that exists amongst prisoners. For example, amongst prisoners an 'armed robber' is pretty much near the top of this tree, and should be respected, with drug dealers and murderers, somewhat below this, and sexual offenders are right at the bottom of this pile, and these offenders will be regularly taunted, abused and assaulted. However this is not the end of the story as, amongst sexual offenders, rapists are viewed less negatively than child sexual offenders. And even those are segregated between those who offend against girls (not that bad) and boys (bottom of the heap). There is very much an 'I am not as bad as him/ My offences are not as bad as his offences' attitude amongst this group. This is an example of how all people use their attitudes to make themselves feel better i.e. protect their self-esteem/ego. It has been argued that it is this use of attitudes that forms the basis of most, if not all, prejudice.

The implication for public awareness/education campaigns is that it may be helpful to establish the function(s) a particular attitude is serving, and bear this in mind when considering the optimal way to attempt to change it.

For example, a criminal justice campaign may establish that for some people the negative attitudes they express towards criminals may just be a result of the way in which they have organised their knowledge about such matters (**knowledge function**), and that these attitudes are serving no other function. These people may not have had a reason to develop a sophisticated understanding of criminals and the reason for their crimes. If this was the case, then the focus of the campaign may become the provision of reasons and explanations as to why offenders commit crime, to help them re-organise their knowledge.

Alternatively, other people don't mind holding punitive views and expressing such views forcibly to others, because this attitude expresses their values (**value-expressive function**). Altering this kind of attitude is much more difficult than simply giving them a few facts, because the attitude is so closely tied up with the individual's view of themselves. They might well express tough views on crime and punishment because they themselves wish to be seen as tough. To change this attitude would require them to change their perception of themselves and how they are viewed by others.

Others may use negative attitudes towards offenders to gain some form of reward (**utilitarian/instrumental function**). The attitudes might help them in gaining certain types of job or acceptance from a certain group. The approach with these people might be to try and outline the rewards associated with a more constructive or at least less punitive attitude towards offenders, for example demonstrating the lower re-offending rates gained through some community punishment and probation programmes.

Finally there are those who express negative attitudes towards criminals because, in reality, they are quite concerned that they themselves may not actually be that different from 'the average criminal' (the **ego-defensive function**). These people may make all sorts of assumptions about convicted criminals in an attempt to make the differences between 'us' and 'them' larger. For the criminal justice campaigner who finds themselves dealing with such people, it may be helpful to explore these assumptions, and provide disconfirming examples to the stereotype.

Attitude Change

Having considered what attitudes, values and beliefs are, how they are formed and what purpose they serve, the next logical step is to examine what psychology has to offer in terms of understanding how easily (or not), it is to change attitudes.

Attitudes generally change for the same reasons as they are formed; because it is useful to do so. Most theories of attitude change, say that any change usually follows the consistency principle. This means that humans have a desire to maintain consistency or stability between the three components of an attitude as described previously:

- **affective** (the moods, emotions and feelings that are experienced when thinking such thoughts)

- **behavioural** (how you react/ behave)
- **cognitive** (thoughts/ knowledge)

The reason we desire consistency is because, if one of the components changes, we experience feelings of inconsistency, discomfort, and stress. The argument then follows that individuals will seek to alleviate the discomfort by either reversing the change that has occurred in one of the components, or change at least one of the other two components to fall into line with the one that has changed.

In order to illustrate this point, let us consider the components of an attitude

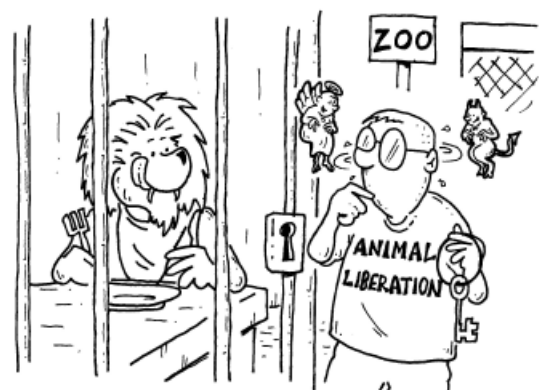
| The cognitive component may be | The affective component may be | The behavioural component may include |
|--|--------------------------------|--|
| 'All child molesters are sick/scum; deserve no sympathy; should be locked up forever; are unable to control their behaviour' . | Distaste, anger or hostility. | Merely verbalising such beliefs, through to signing a petition for reviewable sentences for sexual offenders, or taking part in anti-paedophile campaigns or marches, or attacking those suspected of being paedophiles. |

that most of us will have encountered, that is negative attitudes towards child sexual offenders.

Mrs Jilly holds the beliefs outlined above and sees a documentary on the difficulties faced by child sexual offenders attempting to re-integrate back into the community. Rather than feeling anger and hostility towards child molesters as before, she actually begins to experience some sympathy for them. Then Mrs. Jilly is asked to participate in an anti-paedophile march that is being held on her estate, and she now feels rather uncomfortable.

Festinger (1957) was one of the first attitude researchers to establish that the consistency principle could be used as an agent for attitude change, and he developed a theory of 'cognitive dissonance'. Cognitive dissonance refers to the objectionable feelings that occur when there is inconsistency between the components of an attitude, or between an attitude and actual behaviour.

Mrs Jilly's example shows how 'uncomfortable' it can feel when there is an inconsistency between affect, behaviour, and cognitions, and this may result in behavioural change. However it has already been established that in terms of criminal justice public awareness/education campaigns, behavioural change is not always desired or relevant. Therefore an example is given below of how this 'discomfort or



stress' can be experienced (or induced) if two cognitions (thoughts), are out of balance, and how this discomfort can be reconciled with thought change.

A commonly held strong belief is that 'it's wrong to take another life' but when presented with the scenario of a terminally ill person who is requesting pain relief that will kill them, some people would agree that it is acceptable to administer the drug. This sort of challenge can make people feel very uncomfortable.

Prison culture may dictate that 'it is always wrong to grass on someone'. However when presented with a scenario such as telling a parent if a younger sibling is disobeying rules that could result in serious injury for the sibling, some prisoners would agree that it would be necessary 'to tell', and as a result become uncomfortable with the two conflicting viewpoints.

Cognitive dissonance theory states that in order to deal with this state of tension we can do one of two things: we could either change one of the cognitions (thoughts), or add an extra one to try and explain away the discrepancy.

In the above examples the first person may change one of their thoughts to 'in a very few defined medical cases it is not wrong to take a life', and the prisoner might add the extra thought 'it is always wrong to grass on someone, unless they are in danger'.

This consistency theory approach provides the basis for most attempts to change attitudes. Furthermore most attitude change initiatives rely on techniques which include some level of persuasion designed to induce this kind of uncomfortable feeling that then has to be resolved.

From this, it might seem easy to conclude that changing the general public's attitudes, values and beliefs would be a relatively simple operation: a question of putting the public in a 'state of dissonance', by providing them with apparently contradictory criminal justice information. If only that were true! The complex nature of persuasion has resulted in a whole body of literature and research into the factors that constitute a persuasive message. So, what does psychology tell us about the best way to persuade people?

2. Persuasion

Persuasion

The New Penguin English Dictionary (2000), very helpfully defines 'to persuade', as 'to move somebody by argument, reasoning, evidence, or entreaty to a belief position or course of action'. Given this definition, it is no wonder then that persuading the general public to think differently about criminal justice issues is so difficult. Social psychologists have spent a great deal of time researching exactly which factors are relevant and important in the field of persuasion, and these factors are often examined in three distinct sections.

- **Source**

Where or who the message comes from (e.g. person, group or institution)

- **Message**

The contents and characteristics of the message

- **Audience**

The nature and characteristics of those who receive the message

Source

Credibility

The 'credibility' of the source, has been much researched, with the consistent result of many studies being that those that we admire, respect and believe to be speaking from a base of knowledge, are more influential and persuasive than those that lack credibility.

An offender describing the negative aspects of prison life may be more influential in doing so than for instance a wealthy magistrate may be. Similarly the results of the 'Prison, Me No Way!', campaign where prison officers go into schools, and tell children about the harsh realities of prison life, is another good example of how the credibility of the source influences persuasiveness of the message. It would be difficult to imagine the Head Teacher or a member of the Board of Visitors having quite the same impact!

Many studies have shown that this 'credibility factor' may only be relevant for a while, as often when people are asked later what they had remembered about a message, they can often remember what had been said, but not who had said it. This would suggest that a credible message source may be instrumental in achieving maximum persuasion when delivering the message but that people may not necessarily remember who persuaded them, just that they were.

Credibility also seems to be affected by what the audience perceive the intentions of the source to be. Communicators who are perceived to have nothing to gain from trying to persuade, or who are seen to actually argue against their own interests are actually perceived as more credible, and deliver a more effective persuasive message. (Bearing this in mind, ex-prisoners may not be the most effective advocates of community sentences.)

In seemingly direct contrast to this, researchers have also found that 'celebrities' are far more effective endorsers of some products than either 'professionals' (e.g.: the scientist who developed the product or Chairman of the company), or typical consumers (i.e. those who regularly buy the product). This is surprising, since few celebrities could be described as 'credible'. A recent example of how a celebrity endorsement can persuade the general public to buy a product is the increase in sales of Walkers crisps when Gary Lineker became the key backer. The explanation for this apparent discrepancy may depend on the type of message one is trying to convey, as well as the context of the message.

There is also what is called the 'halo effect', which is when one admired characteristic colours the way that people regard other characteristics. Attractive people, for example, are more likely to be regarded as honest and intelligent. Those whom the public trust in one area of life, are often used as spokespersons in other areas – simply because the public will go on trusting them. Indeed, Gary Linkeker was chosen to front the Walkers commercials not primarily for his footballing talent – but because he was perceived as being an honest, fair, 'nice' guy. The makers hoped that those kind of characteristics would rub off on their product.

To take this argument one step further, it may be unconvincing to have the Chief Medical Officer advertising crisps or selling a product, but it may not be so unconvincing with some audiences to have Gary Lineker promoting a serious health message. They already trust him in one area, and that trust might well carry over. (Interestingly, Gary Lineker is currently featured in adverts to encourage blood donation, because of his son's reliance on donated blood to help treat his leukaemia.)

Attractiveness

'Attractiveness' of the source has also been investigated as a possible factor in the persuasiveness of a communicator. Two aspects of 'attractiveness' have created the most research interest, that is 'physical appearance' and 'likeability' of the communicator. In terms of 'physical attractiveness' a direct correlation between attractiveness of the communicator and degree of persuasion has been reliably established from a number of studies. In other words, the more attractive the persuader is, the more persuasion they will achieve. In practice, however, choosing a physically attractive 'source' may be difficult, as perceptions of 'physical attractiveness', are individual and subjective. What a group of Bradford Asian teenagers may perceive as 'attractive' would probably be very different to what a group of white Kensington retirees saw as attractive. It has also been suggested that people are more persuaded by communicators they rate as 'likeable'. However this relationship may just be an experimental artefact, as people perceived as 'likeable' may just have higher self-esteem or better communication skills with which to persuade.

There are obvious implications here for the careful selection of the 'source' to deliver any public awareness/education campaign, including the need to tailor this to the views of each particular 'target group'.

Confidence

The confidence with which a message is delivered has been shown by a number of researchers to be an important factor in how persuasive that message is. The best way to illustrate this point is to look at one group of people who make a living out of delivering persuasive messages – barristers. If you were a member of a jury, can you imagine being persuaded to find a defendant ‘not guilty’ if his barrister looked nervous, was stuttering, and continually looked at his notes?

The Message Itself

The Whole Story

The issue of whether to give only one or both sides of an argument when trying to persuade an audience has also received a great deal of research interest, and it is easy to see why. Do we really want the audience to know that there is ‘another side’ to consider? Many researchers believe that this really depends on the nature of the audience. More specifically, if you have a ‘sympathetic’ audience who are partially on side anyway, giving only one side of the argument may be enough to persuade them. However, if your audience is more hostile, only giving one side of the argument may well be seen as either deceitful or as not crediting them with enough intelligence to evaluate the arguments for themselves.

Frustratingly, the opposite might also apply. An audience which is ‘on your side’ is likely to be sympathetic to a more rounded presentation of the faults. And giving a frank range of (sometimes conflicting) information to a sceptical audience could merely fuel their scepticism. This is a clear example of the importance of considering more than one element of ‘attitude’ when deciding how to create and deliver an information initiative.

If one were attempting to persuade people from minority ethnic groups to be volunteers on Young Offender Referral panels, an honest acknowledgement that there are some not wholly attractive aspects to the role (such as possible hostility from their community, and the amount of evening and weekend work), would imply that the potential volunteers were able to evaluate the importance of those aspects of the role for themselves. If one spoke only of the positive aspects of the role, the potential volunteers could well feel suspicious and or deceived.

It may also be helpful here to consider what is called the ‘Inoculation Effect’ (Lumsdaine and Janis 1953). Quite simply this means that some researchers have found that it is helpful to ‘inoculate’ your audience with the counter arguments to what you are trying to persuade them to do. This acts as a sort of ‘forewarning’ and ‘forearming’. What these researchers propose is that if you do not broach at least some arguments from the ‘other side’ what is to stop someone else coming along and telling your audience that they are wrong, then producing the counterargument, and persuading your audience to believe the opposite of what you intended?

If a 'pro-community sentencing advocate' decided not to tell the public that some offenders on community sentences *do* actually re-offend then he runs the risk of the public reacting badly should they hear 'horror stories' about offenders who had committed serious offences whilst serving their sentences in the community. Had accurate statistics about the occurrence of these events been provided in the first place, this audience would have been 'inoculated' or 'forewarned' about hearing this information later.

Clarity

The degree of clarity of the message, is also important. More specifically, there are questions over the degree of ambiguity or clarity that is required to produce the most persuasive message. We are probably all familiar with advertisements that require us to 'work out' the message or 'work out' which product is being advertised, and, on the whole, these types of advertisements tend to be more effective. One explanation for this lies in the fact that ambiguous messages require more 'mental work', or 'processing', and because of the work that has been put in, these messages are more easily remembered. There is a whole theory of memory called 'the levels of processing theory', which has direct relevance to 'the message ' and how it is presented (see page 29 for more on this).

Fear

The use of fear in the message has attracted a great deal of research interest, and some campaigns – particularly those focused on public health – have used this tactic quite extensively. Recent examples include the government 'Anti Drink Driving' campaign used both on television and radio, or the HIV and AIDS Campaigns during the 1980's.

There is no conclusive answer to whether fear is really effective. Some people seem to cope with induced feelings of fear by denying that the message is relevant to them. So for example a smoker faced with the recent anti-smoking images of diseased lungs may say 'I don't smoke that much', or 'I have not been smoking all my life', or 'I smoke Marlborough Lights'. Interestingly other people do respond to fear inducing messages such as these and do change their attitudes and behaviour. So what makes people respond differently?

One key factor seems to be to set up the campaign so that the audience is given most assistance to choose the adaptive response, i.e. change their attitude and behaviour, rather than deny the message applies to them. In this case this may mean having helpline numbers, practical information assistance, free remedies, etc. all readily available. In short this means removing any of the barriers that could be used as an excuse not to change. Rogers (1983), devised a whole theory to explain the success (or not) of 'fear campaigns' which suggested that the message must convince the audience of three things:

- First, that the threat is extremely relevant to them personally.
- Second, that there is a way to avoid the threat.
- Thirdly that they have the skills and competence to avoid it.

Rogers also states that if any of these three things are not present in the campaign it will fail.

Too Many Arguments

The number of arguments to be presented is also relevant. Despite the complexity of many criminal justice issues, it would seem fairly obvious that people can not cope with being bombarded with arguments. They may lose interest in the subject matter, or their concentration may wane.

The Audience

The receptiveness of the audience to the message is an important factor in persuasion, and it seems obvious that individuals will vary in their receptiveness to persuasive arguments. Some researchers have argued that a 'persuadeability trait' exists, and that at a fundamental level some people are easier to persuade than others. However this theory has largely been discredited now, and differences in receptiveness are now thought to be linked to a number of personal factors, such as level of education, the way in which people learn, what they already believe etc. Each of these characteristics will now be considered.

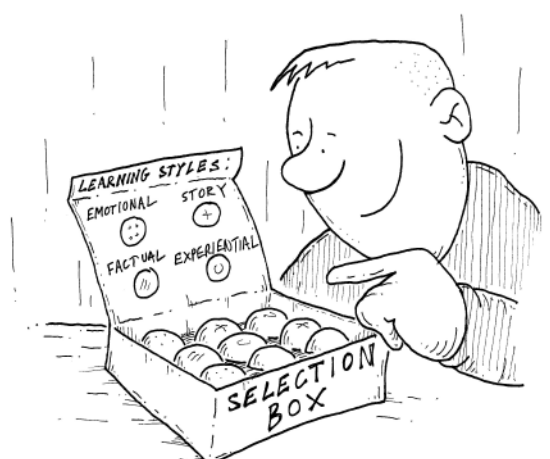
Education

Level of education is a personal factor that is highly relevant to persuasiveness. Most researchers have found that the better educated the audience, the more easily persuaded they are. The obvious explanation for this is that people with a higher level of education engage more with the message and can better understand the arguments being presented to them. However, it must be pointed out that a better educated audience will also be more able to challenge what is presented to them, will probably produce more counter arguments and as a result tend to be more sceptical.

Given the wide variation in educational level attained by the public that need to hear specific criminal justice information, the ability to pitch the message at the right level for all of these groups may prove extremely difficult. It may be more helpful to look at how people best learn information, as this will show less variability. Ideally campaigns would try to take into account both levels of education and learning styles, but this is a tall order if your target audience is of any significant size!

Learning Style

Individuals vary in their 'learning style'. A learning style is, as the name suggests, the way in which individuals prefer to learn things. The relevance of understanding something about different learning styles is obvious if one wants to present criminal justice information to the public in a way that they can best understand it, and that will consequently have maximum impact. Honey and Mumford (1983), propose that people tend to fall into one of four distinctive learning style groups, the 'activists', the 'reflectors', the 'theorists' and the 'pragmatists'.



- **The activists**

These people are open-minded, enthusiastic, and fill their days with activity. They are quite impulsive and 'will try anything once'. These people learn best when they are actively involved with the learning process (for example are engaging in a role play), are 'thrown in at the deep end', and there are a range of tasks to try out.

- **The reflectors**

These people like to watch and learn from themselves and others. They like to do 'thorough research' before committing themselves to anything, and therefore tend to procrastinate. These people learn best when they do not have a tight deadline, when opportunities for analysis exist, and when reflection can occur.

- **The theorists**

These people like to analyse things in a step-by-step way, to 'make the bigger picture'. They are perfectionist, and like principles, theories and models. These people tend to learn best when they are intellectually challenged, or given concepts that have intrinsic interest to them but may not be immediately relevant. In addition to this, the learning opportunity for these people must have structure and purpose.

- **The pragmatists**

These people seek out new ideas, and like to try out new things 'in practice' to see if they work. They like to act quickly and become impatient with long-winded discussions. These people learn best when they can see the link between theory and real world problems, are able to 'try out' what they have learned without delay. These people also need to be able to see the practical benefits of what they are learning.

While this is a well-established theory, it is worth pointing out that these are learning 'preferences' and in practice it is rare to find someone who, for example, always learns in only a 'pragmatic' or an 'active' manner.

- **The activists**

Would probably learn best from active demonstrations of the concepts in this document with the opportunity for participation in some exercise to bring the document 'to life'.

- **The reflectors**

Would probably want to read the resource for themselves, mull over the concepts, do some of their own additional reading around the area, and ask others opinions of the document.

- **The theorists**

Would probably get very excited about the publication as it was new, interesting, and was full of theories, principles and models. They may want to question some of the concepts or 'tidy up' some of the areas

to make it more precise.

- **The pragmatists**

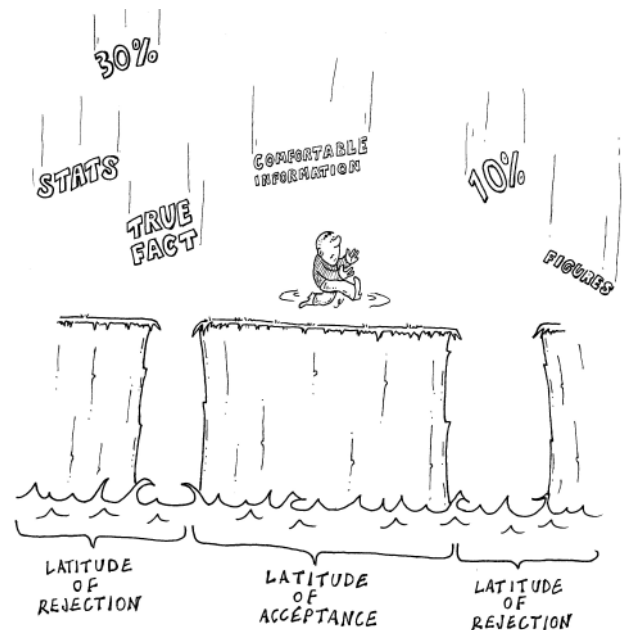
Would immediately seize on the sections that had relevance to their particular work area, and would be keen to put these concepts into practice as soon as they received the resource.

In terms of working with learning styles, a specific 'learning styles' questionnaire is available, but this would probably be too detailed and labour intensive for most public education campaigns. What may be more easily achieved is, wherever possible, to have a range of learning opportunities available for the audience, so that they can learn in the way they prefer.

Pre-Existing Attitudes

How individuals prefer to learn is extremely interesting, but what effect does an individual's pre-existing attitudes have on the ability to persuade them? Social Judgement Theory (Sherif and Hovland 1961), predicts that we will only accept a persuasive argument if it falls within our 'latitude of acceptance'. This means that we will only accept the message if it is similar enough to what we already believe in anyway. Conversely we will not accept a persuasive argument if it falls within our 'latitude of rejection'; an argument that is just too far away from what we currently believe is likely to be rejected. It may be helpful to think about the latitude of acceptance/rejection as 'zones'.

One other thing to know about this concept is that we tend to have a large latitude of acceptance for issues that are not that relevant or important to us (e.g. the colour of Wheelie bins!), and our latitude of rejection gets larger as issues get more personal to us or affect our 'ego'. (e.g. anything that affects our well-being, children or home).



Brown (1999), gives an excellent example of how the latitude of acceptance/rejection works in practice, using an extremely relevant criminal justice scenario. Brown reports on a study that found that people in general support treatment for sexual offenders. However, this support diminishes when it is suggested that the treatment may be provided in the community where they live. In terms of Social Judgement Theory the reason the level of support changed, was because once sexual offenders in the participants' own community was broached, this was suddenly very relevant to the people's ego or sense of self, and fell within their latitude of rejection.

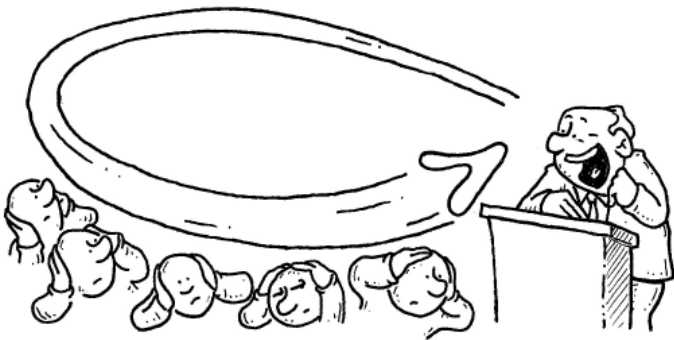
Many criminal justice issues will touch on areas that could affect the safety of our homes or families. The challenge for the criminal justice educator is to place their persuasive statements within the latitude of acceptance 'zone' that is acceptable

to the general public – or, at least, those sections of the public being targeted.

Gender Differences

Many researchers have suggested that gender differences exist between the ability to persuade men and women, with most studies reporting that females are easier to persuade than men. More recently, these studies have been re-evaluated and what seems to be the case, is that the material presented to the men and women was simply more interesting to the men than the women. Also, the men had more knowledge of the subject material, and existing attitudes towards it. Therefore the men were better equipped to reject the message. Few researchers now would suggest that gender differences were an important factor to consider when attempting to persuade the public to alter their perceptions and attitudes.

The Boomerang Effect



The 'Boomerang Effect' is an interesting concept, and it is a term devised to describe a less obvious but not uncommon way in which an audience can react to a persuasive message. The 'Boomerang Effect' describes a situation where an audience changes their attitude but the change is in opposition to the desired direction! Thinking about a teenager rebelling against the reasoning parent is a good example of this effect.

Various researchers have noticed the 'Boomerang Effect', and various explanations have been put forward for this phenomenon. For example it could be that people behave in this way when they feel 'under pressure' to change their attitude, or it could be that they feel their personal freedom is being threatened, they react, and exert their personal choice to stop this. In fact Brehm and Brehm (1981), call this effect 'Psychological Reactance'. However this effect is labeled, it exists, and it seems to manifest itself if people are put under too much pressure. This effect is one to be aware of, particularly given the passion some campaigners feel for their chosen cause, and the energy with which they attempt to persuade.

These findings provide very obvious pointers to consider when contemplating who could be the most effective 'deliverer' of a specific public education message and some clues about how the message could be delivered. There are obvious implications too, for considering who should be the receiver of the information. However this is not the end of the story as one important psychological factor in the persuasive process has yet to be discussed: that is the concept of schema.

3. Schemas

What is a schema?

As with the definition of 'attitude', there is considerable debate among social psychologists over the definition of 'schema'. For our purposes, however, we can define it as 'a mental structure which consists of knowledge and examples of a particular topic or referent, and which selects and processes information accordingly'. Schemas are very similar to attitudes, except that they are not necessarily evaluative, whereas attitudes have evaluation as their central and defining element. Often, a person brings together a collection or cluster of attitudes to form his or her schema.

Some of the agreed and relevant features of schemas are:

- Schemas (generally referred to in academic texts as 'schemata') are mental structures organised around a theme. For example you could have a 'prison schema', or a 'magistrate schema'.
- Schemas store expectations and knowledge about the world. This may include expectations and knowledge about people (e.g. your mother, your boss), social roles (e.g. a husband, a professor, a police officer), events (e.g. going to work, going to a wedding) and how to behave in certain situations (e.g. in court or at a doctors surgery).
- Schemas are used to 'simplify' the social world. More specifically schemas are used to assimilate, categorise and condense a vast range and quantity of information and knowledge about the world, to arrive at some basic rules and principles.
- Schemas 'direct' our actions, guiding our behaviour through these rules and principles.

For example, we expect to be asked for some form of payment when we purchase something from a shop and so we behave in accordance with this, and may get our payment ready. We would have a set of rules and principles that would guide our interactions with, say, our line manager, and, depending on your experience of line managers, these rules and principles may be anything from 'don't swear', 'don't challenge him' and 'smile a lot' to 'show your creative side', 'be pro-active' and 'guide the discussion'.

- The knowledge stored in schemas gives us 'predictions' and 'expectations' about what is likely to happen in our everyday lives. To illustrate this point imagine having to appear in court if one had no prior knowledge of the criminal justice system, including what the roles of police officers, lawyers, or judges were, what the function of a court was, how you were expected to behave, or what you were expected to wear.
- We often have new experiences, so new knowledge can be added to existing schemas at any time, and new schemas can even be created.

A recently pregnant woman in her late 30's with non-existent or very limited prior knowledge of pregnancy and child birth may use her experiences to create a new 'pregnancy schema'. This schema would be full of knowledge about morning sickness, baby clothes, ante-natal exercises, as well as newly created expectations about how midwives and obstetricians should behave.

- Occasionally our schemas can cause us problems, for example if a person does not behave as one expects him or her to, or an event does not go as planned.

An example of this could be a forensic psychologist having to assess a prisoner who has a PhD, or someone going to a wedding where the groom doesn't turn up. Most people's experience of both of these situations would be limited, and it is at times like this when schemas may have to be re-evaluated to be able to cope with the uniqueness of the situation.

- Because of all of the above, schemas are highly individualised, and no two people's schemas will be the same.

Why Is This Important?

The reason that understanding the concept of schemas is so relevant to social marketing and public awareness campaigns in the criminal justice sector, is that the 'general public' tend to think in uni-dimensional ways about the criminal justice system. They already have a schema in place. The challenge here, therefore, is to find ways of encouraging the public to 'add to', 'modify' or even create new schemas around the issues of crime and punishment, that incorporate much more complex and sophisticated views.

Origins and Development of Schemas.

Like the study of attitudes, if our aim is to change or modify schemas we must first understand their origins.

All schema theorists would agree that we are not born with 'a set' of schemas, rather they develop from birth onwards, as the baby, child, and later adult experiences the social world. It seems fairly obvious that as one gets older and experiences more and more of the social world, one's schemas would become more complex and sophisticated. Schema theorists also agree that as one's schemas develop and become richer, they are able to accommodate exceptions and contradictions.

But are all schemas constructed in the same way, and do they all serve the same purpose? Or, alternatively are there different types of schemas that can be differentiated from each other in some way?

Types of Schema.

In terms of function, it is generally understood that all schemas serve a similar purpose, and, in its simplest form, this purpose is to help interpret new

information, in the light of old information. However the leading schema researchers, Fiske and Taylor (1991), propose that there are different types of schema: 'role schemas', 'person schemas', 'self schemas' and 'event schemas'.

Role Schemas

In its simplest form, a role schema is the knowledge and expectations we have about people in certain roles. We use this knowledge and these expectations to deal effectively with others.

There are two types of role schemas.

- achieved roles which are roles for which one has 'trained for' or 'become', for example, doctor, policeman, or even offender, or alcoholic
- ascribed roles⁵, which are things that we usually can't control, for example, our gender or the colour of our skin.

Let's examine Mr. Smith's role schema for someone with a criminal conviction (offender). Mr Smith may expect 'offenders' to be, 'untrustworthy', and 'always looking for opportunities to offend'. Mr. Smith may also believe that offenders 'have no work skills', or 'are all drug addicts'. It can be seen that Mr. Smith, with this role schema for 'offender', would probably be reluctant to allow such a person to paint a home for the elderly, or to work in a drop in centre. This schema would require significant modification before Mr. Smith would see these work placements as a viable option for an 'offender'.

Person Schemas

Person schemas can relate to individuals we know (e.g. our father, or best friend), or equally they can be more general for example 'womaniser'. Again the expectations and knowledge held about these people guide our behaviour.

If you were taking your mother out to lunch you would use all the knowledge held in your 'mother' person schema, to guide your choice of restaurant. Similarly if you were asked out on a date by a man who seemed to fit into your 'womaniser' person schema this would guide your decision about whether to accept the offer.⁶

One of the commonest forms of person schemas are those built around race or religion. As anti-racist campaigners know only too well, overcoming these rigid stereotypical 'schemas' is exceptionally difficult, and generally cannot be achieved with information-based initiatives.

⁵ One other thing to note about role schemas and particularly ascribed roles is that they are usually much more salient, (man/woman, black/white, type of accent), and when meeting someone for the first time it is usually these roles that we first attend to. Some researchers have argued that it is these cognitive processes - grouping people by salient characteristics, and then expecting them to act in certain ways - that underlie most stereotypes and prejudice.

⁶ Person schemas are also implicated in stereotyping and prejudice in that a person schema may focus on what is unique about that person, but they can also allow for generalizations about the traits or characteristics of certain groups of people such as in the 'womaniser' example above.

Self Schemas

Self schemas concern the knowledge we have about ourselves. For example we may view ourselves as 'ambitious', 'compassionate', 'independent' or 'witty'. The things that we recognise in ourselves are the salient features of our self concept or identity. These constructs are usually fairly stable and are similar to what used to be called 'personality traits'. These self-defining constructs also help to guide our behaviour.

If you viewed yourself as 'unadventurous' it is unlikely that you would book a white water rafting holiday in Belize; you would be much more likely to look for a two week break in Wales!

Consider the recruitment of volunteers to be members of the new Youth Offending Referral Panels. Mrs. Abe wants to do some voluntary work, but her self-schema consists of things like 'I am very shy', 'I am too disorganised', 'I am not very bright'. She sees an advert for volunteers for the Youth Offender Referral Panel in her hometown, but the advert is over-specific about the qualities required for the post. The wording of the advert could activate Mrs. Abe's negative self-schema, making her feel she would be unsuitable for the role and potentially wiping out a possible volunteer.

Event Schemas

Event schemas are sometimes referred to as 'scripts', and in essence they are an ordered list of how things should happen in certain situations. It may be helpful to think about event schemas as a sort of 'routine' or 'behavioural sequence'.

The example that is usually given to illustrate an event schema is 'going to a restaurant'. We know the sequence is roughly, choose a restaurant, enter the premises, waiter or waitress takes order, food comes to the table etc. It is easy to see the similarity to a script.

Ms. Parkin has an event schema for 'getting a community sentence'. In Ms Parkin's 'script' the offender goes to court, offender plea bargains his offence down, offender offers false mitigating circumstances, offender cries in court, offender gets community sentence, offender laughs when he gets out of court, offender resumes normal life, offender picks up rubbish in park at weekends, offender steals my car.

This might be a tongue in cheek example, but it can be seen that the general public could hold all sorts of ill-informed or even dysfunctional event schemas that are guiding their expectations about community sentences, or other 'events' from the criminal justice world.

Having established what schemas are, what functions they serve, and how this may relate to negative perceptions of elements of the criminal justice system, in terms of changing this perception, it is vital to understand how stable schemas are, and what are the possibilities for change.

Schema stability and change.

Most schema researchers agree that once a set of schemas have been developed, and they are in active use, they tend to be fairly stable and settled entities. The stability of schemas has been demonstrated by the fact that at times schemas will remain intact even when salient contradictory evidence is present.

Mr. Vinney's 'prison' schema contains beliefs like 'all prisons are like holiday camps', 'offenders get better care than we do', and 'prison is too comfortable'. His prison schema has remained intact and stable for many years, despite a constant flow of contradictory evidence, such as damning Inspectorate reports, accounts of Dickensian conditions, and even the Director General of the Prison Service admitting severe failing in some prisons.

However there are times when schemas do change to accommodate inconsistencies and contradictions, and if we are to change the general public's 'criminal justice' related schema, understanding how these changes come about, is very important.

Weber and Crocker (1983) outlined three possible ways in which schemas may change:

The book-keeping model

The conversion model

The sub-typing model

The book-keeping model of change

This means that schemas will change slowly in very small ways over time as new contradictory information is presented or comes to light – a sort of 'fine tuning' operation. However if there is a high frequency of contradictory new information being presented, the change could be more substantial.

Mr. Site believes that crime is increasing and that this is the reason why there are more people in prison. A slow steady stream of accurate and credible information presented to Mr. Site about falling crime rates and increasing numbers of offenders in prison may produce this sort of change slowly over time.

The conversion model of change

This simply means that if a very significant or salient contradiction comes to light, the schema concerned may change considerably and quickly, or undergo a 'conversion'.

Imagine if Mr. Site – who holds a negative 'offender schema' – was to actually observe an offender actively working in the community in a constructive and helpful way. This offender may provide direct help to Mr. Site or a member of his family, say by digging the garden or teaching the local children how to fix their bikes. This experience may be salient and significant enough to disprove his existing schema about 'offenders' and his 'offender' schema could possibly undergo a sudden 'conversion'.

The sub-typing model of change

In essence this model of change refers to 'tolerating' rather than 'changing'. This model explains how small amounts of inconsistent evidence may produce a 'sub-type' of the schema rather than changing the original schema in any way. It's about people creating 'exceptions' which they can accept.

Mr. Site also believed that 'all young offenders turn into adult offenders'. Imagine Mr. Site's wealthy boss told him one day that his son had stolen a car as a youth but had never offended again. One can imagine how Mr. Site could create a 'sub-type' of young offenders who are like his boss's son, 'intelligent', 'come from a good family', 'got in with the wrong crowd', but his overall offender schema would remain intact.

But do any of these models of schema change actually work in the real world? Most studies have found that 'sub-typing' is the most common way for schemas to change; that is, when presented with contradictory evidence, a sub-type of the schema is created which holds and defines the 'exception', but leaves the overall schema as is.

Hewstone, Hopkins and Routh (1992) described an interesting criminal justice example of 'sub-typing involving the police. They reported on a project where a police officer was assigned to a group of secondary schools, as a liaison officer. Despite the salient exposure all the pupils had to their liaison officer over a year, few of them changed their 'police schema' in any significant way. What seemed to happen was that their liaison officer became a 'sub-type' of most pupils' 'police schema', and was viewed as 'helpful and kind'. In other words, the evidence that did not confirm the pupils' beliefs was assigned to a sub-type leaving the overall schema intact.

In keeping with this excellent piece of research most 'real world studies' have found that there is little evidence that schemas ever undergo dramatic 'conversion' types of change, but there is some evidence of gradual change as described by the book-keeping model.

So that is how we go about negotiating the social world, but there is a more fundamental level of knowledge that has to be received, processed, recalled and retrieved to make sense of the world, and this is the study of memory, to which we now turn.

4. Memory and Recall

If we are to spend time and money on providing accurate criminal justice information to the general public, it would be nice if they remembered the information! Most memories fade or 'decay' over time, and memories can also become distorted. It is therefore extremely important that we make our messages as easy to remember and recall as possible.

Two of the most relevant definitions of memory are as follows, 'The brain's or an individual's' ability to remember experience in general or to recall particular experiences', and 'The store of things learned and retained from an individual's experience'.⁷

The definitions of memory identified above emphasise learning, retention and recall. As this is exactly what we want the general public to do with criminal justice information, it would be helpful to outline a few of the most relevant findings that may have an impact on our ability to assist the general public re-evaluate their attitudes and perceptions in this area.

Two Types of Memory

We have two types of memory, a 'Short Term Memory' (STM), and a 'Long Term Memory' (LTM). Short-term memory is for 'processing' information before it 'goes to' the LTM to be stored. An easy way to think about the distinction is to imagine being given a telephone number to remember and not having anything to write it down on. You tend to rehearse the number over and over again in your STM before it is stored in your LTM, and can be recalled when necessary.

LTM is capable of storing information for a minute to many tens of years. Memories in LTM may be stored as 'words' (e.g. your address), 'pictures' (e.g.: your mother's face), 'knowing how' (e.g. how to play tennis, or make a cake), and 'knowing what it was like to X or Y' (e.g. what it was like in your neighbourhood as a child, or what it was like at your father's funeral).

Levels of Processing

Some researchers have argued that the ST/LT memory distinction is unnecessary, and what is really important in terms of memories to be laid down, is the amount of 'mental work' or 'processing' we do on information first (Craik and Lockhart 1972). So for example we may not actually be bothered about the person who has just given us their telephone number, and so don't actually 'try' to remember it or put any 'work' into remembering it, and the number would be readily forgotten. Whereas if this telephone number was the number of someone who may have a new and exciting job for us we would be more likely to 'do a lot of mental work' on that number to ensure that we remembered it. So one key thing here is that we have got to ensure the receivers of criminal justice information 'want' to remember the information they are hearing or reading, so that they will 'work on it' or 'process it', increasing the likelihood that it will be remembered.

⁷ New Penguin English Dictionary, 2000

A strong recent example of designing an information format which encourages 'processing' was the Home Office quiz which accompanied publicity about the Halliday review of the sentencing framework. This required a shift from 'passive audience' to 'active participant' and should have been more likely to make the information more enticing to look at and memorable and to have involved the target groups for longer than the traditional list of facts. Another way to encourage processing and therefore memorability, can be by making the information relevant to target groups in some way. The charity the No Way Trust do this very effectively in their materials for young people in schools, contrasting their experiences to those of children in prison.

Time-Scale

The time scale over which new information is presented also seems to be an important factor in the effectiveness of storing information. More specifically, massed practice (a long period of practice), seems to be less effective in this objective than spaced practice (a series of short practice sessions). This seems to be true for both learning physical skills such as tennis or machinery operation, as well as learning more abstract sorts of material. These findings have been replicated a number of times, and in a number of contexts, and the explanation could be that by allowing for short practice sessions with time for reflection in-between, memories have time to be processed, be evaluated, and then 'settle', before being worked on again. So timing of delivery of material may be important if planning a CJ campaign.

Setting

Some researchers say that memories are not forgotten, they are just not retrievable. Being in the same setting as when the relevant memories were first formed has been shown to increase the chances of recall. Police reconstructions are, perhaps, the best example of this. However this would be fairly difficult to achieve in the context of criminal justice education.

Active Involvement

Generally speaking, the more actively involved a person is with the information, the more they will remember. It has been estimated that people remember:

- 90% of what we read, hear, say and do
- 60% of what we do
- 50% of what we say
- 40% of what we see
- 30% of what we hear
- 20% of what we read

These percentages are estimates and vary from person to person. And, of course, the higher end of the scale really describes experiential learning in which the student is fully involved. Nevertheless, they are strongly indicative of an important trend and they are an example of using more than mere words to get

our message across and ensure it is remembered.

Criminal Justice organisations are developing a range of participative approaches, such as the sentencing exercises run by the Magistrates' Association's Magistrates in the Community project. Across the sector, there needs to be a continued emphasis on active involvement if the message is really to make an impact.

Primacy and Recency Effects

If are asked to remember a number of items on a list, we tend to remember the first (primacy) and last (recency) items and forget the items in the middle. The reason this is relevant to changing the public's attitudes to crime and sentencing is that this phenomenon seems to occur in a wider range of contexts than just if asked to remember a list of items.

The same process is at work when making 'first impressions' about people in a social situation, as we tend to remember the first and last things that they say, and base our impressions on this.

This effect could also be relevant to the order of arguments presented when trying to persuade the public to change their attitudes towards crime and punishment. The emphasis ought to be on putting the most convincing arguments first and last, and leaving the weaker arguments in the middle!

Sticking to the Story / Frozen Memories

Unfortunately people tend to stick to their memories or 'version of events' even when given opportunities to change their mind. This has been touched on already in the section on schema change, but this effect also seems to occur when remembering the written word.

Kay (1955) described an experiment where people were read a story and then asked to write 'their version of events'. Once a week for several weeks the experiment was repeated, and, after each trial, the participants wrote the same summary, even if their version of events was at variance to the original story. Their memories seemed to be 'frozen' on a version of events that they felt was acceptable.

Kruglanski et al (1983) studied this effect further, and propose that when people experience something new, on the whole they will choose a couple of explanations for what has happened, then settle with one explanation and discard the other. They will then stick to this belief and only change their mind for two reasons:

- Firstly if they are capable of changing their mind, (i.e. are actually capable of generating other explanations for what has happened)
- Secondly if they are motivated for some reason to do so. (Putting it another way, if they are not concerned about the topic they won't be bothered to change their mind).

A good example of 'frozen beliefs' in action is in the treatment of sexual offenders. Many sexual offenders will create a version of events to explain their sexual offending that they feel is acceptable. So in the case of Mr. X who is a child offender this may include things such as 'she came to me', 'she must have already been abused by someone else'. Mr. X was only able to change his beliefs about his offending, because in treatment he was encouraged to, and was capable of, generating alternative explanations for what actually happened. So Mr. X was brought to the understanding that yes the little girl did come to him, but the reason she did this was because Mr. X asked her to, and he gave her gifts if she did. Secondly, sexual offenders have to be motivated to change their version of events and explanations for what happened. With Mr. X this motivation was achieved by explaining the benefits of being more truthful to him. These benefits being understanding his offending better and therefore increasing the chances of him being able to prevent re-offending in the future, not creating any more victims, etc.

There are two main implications of the frozen beliefs syndrome for the sector.

Repetition May Not Work. I repeat, repetition may not work.

Firstly repeating the same criminal justice information over and over again may not be an effective way to alter the perceptions of the audience. The key thing may be to find novel and varied ways of presenting different information. However this is not to say that repetition of the same information may not be useful for 'familiarization' purposes, but it is unlikely to be instrumental in changing attitudes.

Give Reasons and Make it Worth their While

Secondly the only way to get people to 'unfreeze' their beliefs about something they have decided is true, is to get them to think of alternative explanations for what they believe in, and also to give them a reason to change their mind: in other words to 'make it worth their while' in some way.

The response to the Halliday sentencing review consultation, includes an interesting quote from the Hampshire Probation Board: "...to engage groups and individuals whose primary interest is probably not in crime, it is necessary to engage them in a more personal process over a longer period of time so that history and details can be explained and discussed."

5. Group Behaviour

It would be a rare thing to sit down with one individual and attempt to change their awareness of an issue, when it was the awareness of millions that required changing. It would be much more likely for any attempt at public education or awareness to take place in the context of a group setting, and psychology has much to offer in terms of understanding how people behave in such groups, which would be vital to informing an effective campaign.

The study of the 'behaviour of people in groups' is a massive topic and it is difficult to even find consensus about what a group actually is! The following are brief summaries of some of the effects on attitudes and behaviour that can be observed when people are put into groups.

Risky shift

If people are asked on an *individual* basis to make a decision about a problem, and then, as part of a group, they are asked to reach a consensus decision about the same problem, then the group will often make a more 'risky' decision than when individuals made their decisions alone. There have been many explanations for the cause of this well replicated phenomenon (Kogan and Wallach 1997), such as the group members 'diffusing' the responsibility for their decision amongst them, rather than feeling it was all their own responsibility. It is also possible that the courage required to make 'risky decisions' is regarded as a valued attribute and the group members are somehow rewarded for behaving in that way.

Imagine a group was set up to discuss and try and reach consensus about which types of offenders should be allowed to serve their sentences in the community, as opposed to prison. The group includes Tom, who believes that only those convicted of fraud should be allowed to serve their sentences in the community, and Ella, who believes that only 'drunk drivers' should be treated in this way, and so on. The theory suggests that, following discussion, the whole group would agree on a much longer and more comprehensive list of offences that were suitable for community supervision. Furthermore this list would probably include offences such as burglary which no individual alone felt were suitable for community sentences.

Group Polarisation

Other researchers (eg: Moscovici and Zavalloni 1969) have challenged the view that when a group are asked to make a decision that the move is always in the 'risky' direction. These other researchers have demonstrated that there is certainly a move away from the individual's decisions, but that this move may be a 'more risky' move, or it maybe a move to a more 'conservative' position. This type of group movement is called 'group polarisation', and means that a group decision will move towards one end of a continuum, but which way the shift goes depends on whether the group are generally more 'conservative' or 'risky' in approaching the original problem. Again there have been several explanations for

this type of group behaviour. It may be that some group members are undecided about the topic, and will therefore follow the group majority; it may be that the prior discussion will focus on reasons to be 'risky' or 'cautious' depending on the majority feeling, further emphasising a shift in that direction; or it could even be that the group will follow the lead of the more vocal or outspoken group members.

These sorts of study have implications for the composition of any criminal justice 'awareness' groups that may be set up with the objective of changing attitudes to crime and the CJS. You may want to consider having at least some people in these groups who already have accurate knowledge about the realities of crime and sentencing. Furthermore, given the British Crime Survey (1996) showed that simply giving the public information about the range of community punishments that are available induced many of them to then favour these types of sentences for non-sexual and non-violent offenders, then actually prompting these sorts of shifts using group behaviour may not be that difficult.

Interestingly, it has been shown that individuals can be induced to make these types of shifts in their beliefs without any discussion at all. Some studies have asked individuals to make their own decision about a topic, and then subsequent to this, the participants have merely been told what other group members felt. Because people have a tendency to compare themselves to others, and want to be seen in a favourable light (Social Comparison Theory, Festinger 1954), many group members 'adjusted' their beliefs to 'fit in' with what they felt was the most socially desirable response. The implication for the criminal justice sector is that, if we could make it 'socially desirable' to have constructive attitudes towards crime and sentencing using some of the methods already discussed, a sort of 'snowball effect' could then be possible, with more and more people changing their beliefs to fit in with the majority, socially desirable view.

Group Think

This refers to the tendency for groups to 'think more alike' and become more cohesive when they spend time together. More extreme views that may be held by some group members are usually 'toned down', and group members tend to reach agreement or compromise on more controversial issues. There can be a 'down side' if this cohesiveness becomes extreme, as groups can come to think

that they are 'invincible' and fail to see others points of view. However this phenomenon could be usefully used by the criminal justice sector if members of the general public with extreme views are put into group discussions with others with more temperate views.

Degree of Social Influence

Kelman (1958) identified three different ways in which people in groups can be influenced socially; **compliance**, **identification** and **internalisation**.



Compliance

This is where a person 'just goes along with it', and their core beliefs remain unchanged. In other words they are just publicly 'complying' with the majority, but in private they may hold quite different beliefs.

Identification

This is where a person becomes influenced to change their beliefs by another individual because of who or what that other individual is. In other words they 'identify' with that other person, and want to be like them.

An example of this is where a teenager may become a vegetarian, or begin to support Amnesty International because their favourite pop star has these values.

One option to adopt this type of influence is if we could identify advocates of positive criminal justice attitudes who are admired and respected by our target groups, and then we could ask them to promote the key criminal justice messages.

Internalisation

This is where a person truly changes their beliefs because they are persuaded that another viewpoint really is the one they agree with. From a criminal justice point of view this is the type of social influence we would hope for.

6. Conclusions

As you can see, changing attitudes is a complex, indeed, daunting, affair. Attitudes, schemas and entrenched views present us with an enormous challenge when it comes to criminal justice issues. But there are approaches that we can adopt and procedures that we can put into place. Rather than repeat much of the information contained in this publication, it would probably be more helpful to extract some of the main themes that have appeared throughout the text.

Start Young

Much of the research on attitude and schema formation emphasises the significant role that the immediate social world of the child plays in this developmental process. This immediate social world includes parents, teachers, and peers, T.V. programmes, etc. It would be great to have children growing into adolescents, and then young adults who had more positive attitudes towards crime and punishment, as well as more complex and elaborate criminal justice schemas, based on accurate information.

To promote this when children are young would seem an easier task than altering the entrenched views of the criminal justice world that many adults have. This is not to say that there would be no need to work with the attitudes and schemas of today's adults too, just that if more work were done with the children of today, then the enormity of the task for tomorrow would be greatly reduced.

Tailor the Initiative

The theme of tailoring the initiative to match the features of the audience seems very important, and the days of 'one size fits all' will now be over! Obviously different types of tailoring may be easier than others. So for example planning an initiative to take account of the audiences' 'educational level' may be much easier than working out the audience's preferred 'Learning Style' or where their 'Zone of Acceptance' lies. However if maximum effectiveness is to be achieved it seems likely that some form of tailoring of the message will have to take place.

Persistence and Tenacity

Another key theme that has emerged, is that attitude change is difficult, but not impossible. One may have to make repeat attempts at attitude change, making small changes all the time, before significant attitude change is observed. However these 'repeat' attempts must not consist of the same message delivered in the same way. Rather, novel and interesting delivery scenarios must be developed that will engage and hold the attention of the audience. Furthermore, if one of the devised attitude change methods doesn't seem to be achieving the desired effect or indeed any effect, then no matter how much effort and resources have been put into it, another method or message must be devised and implemented.

Evaluation

Much of the research that underpins the theories that have been discussed has taken place in a laboratory setting, and it is only more recently that research has tended to be conducted in a 'real world' setting. Moreover few of the concepts have had 'social marketing' principles directly applied to them, let alone the specificity of changing the public's attitudes to crime and punishment through the additional tools that social psychology offers. It therefore follows that the principles and concepts contained in this publication will have to be tested in the criminal justice domain, before any firm conclusions about their effectiveness in this arena can be deduced.

A planned, properly resourced, and thorough evaluation strategy, that also has clear, and appropriate goals and objectives will be necessary, to ensure that good value for money is obtained from any campaign that uses these principles.

Appendix 1: Glossary

A guide to some terms, as used in this document.

| | |
|--|---|
| Affect | Feelings, moods, the emotional component of an attitude |
| Attitude | An individual's fairly stable, positive or negative evaluation of some person, group, or social issue. |
| Beliefs | What a person <i>thinks</i> is true. |
| Boomerang Effect | The situation where an audience changes their attitudes in a way entirely opposite to that which you desire or intend. |
| Cognition | Knowledge, thoughts, understanding: the 'knowledge' component of an attitude. |
| Cognitive Dissonance | The state of discomfort caused when an individual perceives a discrepancy between either two thoughts relating to the same attitude or a thought plus the associated behaviour. |
| Compliance | The tendency of an individual to 'go along' with the group, even though their core beliefs remain unchanged. |
| Ego-Defensive Function | The use of attitudes to enhance and protect self-esteem. |
| Frozen Memories | The idea that people stick to their original memories or beliefs about a situation or person, even when they are given new evidence or enhanced information. |
| Group polarisation | The phenomenon by which group decisions move towards risk or conservatism, depending on the approach or membership of the group. |
| Group Think | The habit of groups to think alike, the more time they spend together. |
| Halo Effect | The assumption that people are better than they are, because of an association with positive experiences or values. |
| Inoculation Effect | The act of 'inoculating' your audience with counter-arguments, in order to prepare them for your own. |
| Instrumental conditioning | A form of learning in which positive or negative rewards are used to reinforce behavior. |
| Knowledge-function | The use of attitudes to 'make sense' of the world. |
| Latitude of acceptance/rejection | The difference between our existing attitude and the attitude that is being advocated to us. The closer the attitude is to our existing attitudes, the more it will fall within our latitude of acceptance. Equally, the further it is from our own views, the further it falls into the latitude of rejection, and the more likely it is to be rejected. |
| Long Term Memory | Memories which are stored for anything from minutes to years. |
| Observational learning | Learning by watching the actions of others and noting the rewards and consequences. |
| Primacy and Recency Effects | The theory that we will tend to remember the first and last items on a list, and forget the ones in the middle. |
| Referent | The object or reference point of an attitude. |
| Risky Shift | The phenomenon where groups take more risky decisions than the members would individually. |
| Schemas | Mental structures – memories, ideas, concepts, programmes of action – which are organised around a theme. These can relate to other individuals (person schemas), oneself (self-schema), events (event schemas, or scripts) and roles (role schemas). |
| Short Term Memory | A way of processing information before it goes to be stored in the Long Term Memory. |
| Social Learning | The theory that social behavior is primarily learned by observing and imitating the actions of others. |
| Social Psychology | The scientific study of how people think about, influence, and relate to one another. |
| Utilitarian/Instrumental Function | The use of attitudes to obtain rewards and avoid punishment. |
| Values | Enduring beliefs that transcend specific situations. What a person <i>wants</i> to be true. |
| Value-Expressive Function | The use of attitudes to express your values. |

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Appendix 3: Influence - A Payback Recommendation

In addition to reading this document, Payback would highly recommend the book 'Influence' by Richard Cialdini. It covers different ground, and is written for a general market, but contains much of interest for those involved in campaigning. Here's a quick digest...

Cialdini identifies six key principles or 'weapons' of influence. These are triggers – factors which those who want to influence us use to gain a knee-jerk response.

Reciprocation

“I scratch your back, you scratch mine.”

Reciprocity is the idea that if we receive a favour or a gift, we feel obligated to do or give something in return. From businesses offering corporate hospitality at events, to Hare Krishna devotees giving airport travelers a flower or a book before asking for a donation, the rule of reciprocation is everywhere. Interestingly, it can also work in reverse and Cialdini identifies the 'rejection-then-retreat' technique, where a negotiator will start with a high price and then make concessions, so that the prospective purchaser feels as though he has been given something already.

Commitment and Consistency

“I did it before so I must do it again.”

People have a strong need to remain consistent with their previous choices and behaviour. Once a stand has been taken, there is a natural tendency to behave in ways which are consistent with that stand. In practice, this means that if I can get someone to make a small commitment, he will be more likely to make a larger commitment.

From extreme initiation ceremonies to simply signing a petition, what matters is the simple fact that once someone has participated, he is more likely to participate again. In the words of researchers Freedman and Fraser, 'Once he has agreed to a request, his attitude may change, he may become, in his own eyes, the kind of person who does this sort of thing, who agree to requests made by strangers, who takes action on things he believes in, who cooperates with good causes.'

Social Proof

“Everyone else is doing it...”

People gain a lot of their information on how to act and behave from others, particularly in situations that are novel or uncertain. That is why television studios use canned laughter, or adverts describe products as "best-selling". Beggars on the street will put some coins in their hat to persuade passers-by to join in. The most extreme example is, perhaps, the Jonestown cult mass suicide where 910 people died.

Liking

“I had to buy it, the salesman was so nice.”

People are more likely to be influenced by people they like. Five factors which lead to us ‘liking’ someone are physical attractiveness, apparent similarity, flattery, contact and cooperation, and positive associations with other people or things which we like.

This is the theory behind a million Tupperware parties, where the salesperson knows the purchasers. It is why adverts use celebrities or models to promote their products. And beware the salesman who claims to have grown up in your town, attended your university, or who compliments you on your good taste in suits.

Authority

“You should always listen to the experts.”

We still have an inbuilt tendency to defer to authority. Those who want to influence us use figures such as doctors or people in uniform to back up their messages. And just as we are more likely to listen to those whom we perceive as having authority, we are less likely to listen to those without any recognised authority – even if what they have to say is well worth listening to.

Scarcity

“I got the last one in the shop!”

Rarity=value. People are always scared of losing out – which is why shops advertise ‘Closing Down – Everything Must Go’ (even though, a year later they are *still* closing down). Interestingly this idea of ‘I mustn’t miss out’ works on other levels. Doctors found that letters to smokers asking them to quit worked better when they emphasised the potential loss of years of life, rather than when they emphasized potential years gained from quitting.

This idea that rarity=value can also be applied to information. Research shows that information which is banned or censored is not only more attractive to receive, but is viewed as being more credible (hence people’s astonishing faith in various conspiracy theories). Cialdini calls it Psychological Reactance – in Yiddish it’s the Law of Davke and for the rest of us it’s Sod’s Law – the idea that no-one is going to stop me getting what I want. And the more you try to stop me, the higher price I will be prepared to pay.

If you found this digest helpful, then I recommend you purchase *Influence*, by Robert Cialdini¹. If you’ve read this far, then you can be sure that you’ll enjoy the book² – just as over 250,000 other readers have done³. Written in an honest, informal, down-to-earth style⁴, and endorsed by experts such as Tom Peters⁵, buy it now while stocks last!⁶

Nick Page & Marion Janner, Payback

Influence, Science and Practice, Robert B. Cialdini, Allyn & Bacon, London 2001, ISBN 032011473