

Why Day Zero was less nudge effect, more kick-in-the-butt effect

 By Leigh Andrews

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Ever wondered how nudges turn into true behavioural change that benefits society? With the Western Cape's recent #DayZero success as a prime example, all was revealed at SA's first-ever two-day #BI4Gov Behavioural Insights conference, held at the CTICC over 27 and 28 September 2018.



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MC Africa Melane, known for his velvety voice on CapeTalk, got us to stop the excited networking chatter by saying, "the guy with dreadlocks at the front of the room wants your attention."

He then got the programme moving along by saying he was personally looking forward to learning as much as possible from the two-day conference, as he knew nothing of behavioural insights (BI) when he was first approached to MC the event. In the interim, he has read up as much as possible on how BI is used by governments around the world to respond to society's contextual needs.

Ammaarah Martinus, director of policy, research and analysis for the department of the premier in the Western Cape Government took the podium next. She said she was pleased to see a full house in attendance as the event marks a momentous occasion, with attendees from every continent apart from Antarctica.

“ Great opening for [@Bi4Gov](#) - inspiring delegates to think through a different lens, push our own bias & be innovative.

When we develop & implement policy we need to think what human beings actually do! [#BI4GOV](#)

[pic.twitter.com/MirZqiChHk](#)— Sabrina Chesterman (@sabbychesterman) [September 27, 2018](#) ”

Sharing some context, Martinus said the Western Cape Government has been running behavioural insights since 2012, with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development or OECD's involvement key to their success as the embodiment of the spirit that **with collaboration and partnerships, something great can happen.**

Fittingly there was a focus on networking, meeting new faces and collaborating on ideas as we debated, learning about and effectively challenging how policy and interventions are implemented through a filter of inclusion and sustainability, particularly in the realms of access to water, energy and transport, health services, community safety, and youth policies and education.

What does society actually do?

Martinus said it's about thinking of policy through a behavioural lens, meaning we need to focus on not just what we *should* do but what we *actually do*, as that's often missing and crucial in effective policy implementation, meaning we also need to implement those behavioural insights in innovative ways.

Nick Malyshev, head of the regulatory policy division of the public governance directorate at the OECD also spoke a few words of welcome, stating that the conference marks a watershed moment for the OECD, which has worked on behavioural insights for five years now.

Malyshev called it a "a fascinating road", having worked with governments and allying with various bodies towards behavioural insights that result in better policies and outcomes alike for human lives.

Malyshev also mentioned last year's comprehensive study by the OECD, which formed the basis of how governments can synthesise and embed behavioural insights. He reiterated Martinus' words that the OECD's partnership with the Western Cape Government is key, and concluded by saying the OECD is often referred to as a 'think tank' in the press. Rather, it's an epistemic community that works with world leaders to instill best practice.

The nuances of nudge methodology

Next, current Western Cape premiere Helen Zille presented the morning keynote address, saying she was pleased there was a relaxed environment amongst attendees, as that makes it easier to hold serious discussions.



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Zille spoke off the cuff, admitting that she had become a bit jaded on the subject of behavioural insights over the past few years, as we just weren't seeing much actual change in this regard.

Then, the picture changed drastically with the Western Cape's large-scale behavioural change on water use.

Zille explained it's referred to as a 'once in 400 years' drought, not that they were measuring water levels 400 years ago, but rather based on the chances of a region seeing three years without decent rainfall.

Cape Town reduces water consumption by 60% in three years





7 Mar 2018



She added that the 'Day Zero' phrase was coined accidentally in a meeting, and became a watchword that instilled the fear of God or the devil (whichever you prefer).

The reason? The message was simple: Either stick to 50 litres of water per person per day, everything in - for hygiene, washing and drinking - or queue for 25 litres of water per person per day.

Those were the only two options and that's the message that was put out there in volume, repeatedly, to amazing effect: 70% of households that had previously used a large amount of water stuck to the allocated 50 litres per person per day.



Nudging the city and residents of Cape Town to save water

Leila Harris, Jiaying Zhao, Martine Visser 6 Mar 2018



In a few months, the city had gone from 1.2bn litres per day to just over 400,000 litres per day, almost a third of its previous use. Zille called that unprecedented behaviour change, for anywhere in the world.

“ On how and why it happened, Zille said the drastic drop in water usage was in part due to the dramatic price increase on water above the basic free allocation - this was less of a nudge effect than a kick-in-the-butt effect, which is often what's necessary for behavioural change at scale. ”

Looking at other factors, there's the point that the highest water users in the city tend to be the middle class, who use water for watering the lawn, topping up the swimming pool and excessive cleaning. So, the fundamental change was here, in the middle class usage of water, partly because the price went up - levels of education also play a role in people responding to nudges.

“ Getting people to save water or use less electricity is hard. Governments often just turn to things like rate hikes and posters. Understanding Behavioural Insights can help shape policy in a way that makes it easy and compelling to do the right thing. [#BI4Gov](#)— Dave Duarte (@DaveDuarte) [September 27, 2018](#) ”

The impact of those Newlands Spring-queuing pics

Zille says we also can't ignore the impact of pictures of people queuing for water at the Newlands Spring.

These were published far and wide, and made it look like the '25 litres per person per day' queuing was already happening, which made the potential Day Zero outcome of not saving enough water that much more vivid.

Suddenly, there was interest in not just using less water but also in physically storing and saving water through tanks and greywater systems for those who could afford them, with others implementing 'bucket systems' to repurpose the traditional flow of water in their homes.

Day Zero off the cards in 2019 for Cape Town

29 Jun 2018





Zille added that the notion of having had a success, as in this case, is critically important for BI.

She said that behavioural change on smoking has only been a partial success, with Melane himself mentioning in his housekeeping address that if attendees wanted to "fill their lungs with cancer", they could go stand in the rain to smoke or vape. Zille pointed out that it's embarrassing to do so, and as such being a smoker is now becoming a stigma, which is critical to behavioural change.

Keeping things accountable, victimhood and the role of stigma

Zille said government has been even less successful in changing people's sexual behaviour. Sure, people will test if they are HIV-positive, and we have the largest free ARV system in the world - we spend R2bn on it in the Western Cape alone, annually.

And yet, HIV transmission rates in girls aged 13 to 25 are going up and up, despite knowing that HIV is usually transmitted through sex - particularly sex with multiple partners and inter-generational sex.

“ We cracked open with sex, drugs and using behavioural nudges to solving middle-class problems is not how we roll here.

Plain-spoken power from Premier [@helenzille](#) (thank you!)

May the realness prevail [#BI4gov](#)— Maximillian Kaizen (@MaxKaizen) [September 27, 2018](#) ”

According to Zille, transactional sex is largely to blame here, with 'blessers' offering different levels of rewards - sadly, it's often just a lift to school, pair of cheap earrings or a cellphone. Zille said because there are different 'levels of blessers' who offer different rewards, this becomes an encouraged culture, with no stigma attached, and therein lies the rub.

On the importance of a culture of accountability, Zille said we don't take this seriously enough. While admitting she is just an amateur sociologist, she has been reading a great deal about the culture of accountability, so also spoke of culture overall and its role in behavioural change.

“ Culture eats strategy for breakfast every time - [@helenzille](#) [#BI4Gov](#)— David Perrott (@DavidPerrott_) [September 27, 2018](#) ”

Zille said South Africa is sadly not exempt from the emergence of a culture of victimhood, as is happening elsewhere in the English-speaking world. But how do you grow a culture of accountability in a culture of victimhood? She said you don't. **Stigma has a critical role to play in functional societies.**

“ 🚶💎💎 Take BI to the next level - get to big problems like HIV and gender-based violence - not just rearrange schools canteens! [@helenzille](#) [#BI4Gov](#) <https://t.co/YhWjR0a9D2>— Filippo Cavassini (@FilippoCavassi1) [September 27, 2018](#) ”

It's on all of us to make the change we want to see in the world. Zille concluded:

“ Don't run away from the hard issues. It's not all touchy-feely stuff, but it is fundamental to modern culture. ”

Follow the [#BI4Gov hashtag](#) for all the latest updates.

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