



# Applying the SHIFT model of behaviour change to executive education

**UNICON's Team Development Conference 2022**

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“Most people want to be sustainable, but they have a hard time taking the necessary actions.”



Kate White, Senior Associate Dean,  
Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Sustainability



Research shows that consumers and citizens want to be sustainable. We can see by the goals and commitments they make that businesses aspire to be sustainable. Leaders and managers want to be sustainable. Universities and executive education units want to be sustainable, to promote sustainable business practices - and so do the teams and people working inside them.

**We know this from our own daily experiences. There is a lot of good will, a lot of good intention, a lot of buzz.**

## THE BIG QUESTIONS FOR EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

How can executive education close the ***'intention-doing' gap*** and convert this momentum into action?

How can we design and deliver learning initiatives and programs that make ***a positive difference*** to society and planet?

## THE MODEL

**S**

Social  
influence

**H**

Habit  
formation

**I**

Individual  
self

**F**

Feelings &  
cognition

**T**

Tangibility

**Professor Katherine White's SHIFT model\* illustrates the various social drivers of behaviour change we have at our disposal in executive education to find answers and solutions to these questions.**

\*The SHIFT model has been developed by Katherine White, University of British Columbia; David J. Hardisty, University of British Columbia; and Rishad Habib, University of British Columbia

01

# Social influence

Social norms and the behaviour of others affect our own behaviour and friendly competition can encourage positive change. For example, when someone learns they are using more energy than their peers, they decrease their own usage.

## EXECUTIVE EDUCATION APPLICATION

How might we increase social observability and encourage friendly competition between stakeholder groups in executive education?

### **Businesses context:**

**Clients, Competitors, Cross-sector**

#### *Examples*

Diversity hiring; accessibility; reducing or offsetting emissions; sustainability-focused L&D investment.

### **Business education context:**

**Universities, Executive Education, Cross-discipline**

#### *Examples*

Sustainability focus in the curriculum; collaboration with businesses on sustainability challenges; sustainability-focused research output.

02

# Habit formation

'Old you vs. new you' is an effective framing for individuals and organizations alike because breaking bad habits is desirable. But 'old habits die hard' – so when and how do we do it?

## Make it easy

Try making the desired behaviour or choice the default option.

## Personalize feedback

Before you can set a target, you need clear benchmarks.

## Prompts and reminders

Keep on the radar.

## Incentives and penalties

Research shows these can work in moderation, but it is nuanced. For example, what happens when the incentive is taken away?

## EXECUTIVE EDUCATION APPLICATION

How can we 'make it easy' for our various stakeholders in executive education to break old habits or create sustainable new ones?

### EXAMPLE 1

Prompts and reminders for faculty to address sustainability challenges in industry.

### EXAMPLE 2

Sustainability modules as core, default curriculum offerings.

03

# Individual self

An appeal to the self is a powerful driver in behaviour science. Messaging that speaks to the self-values we hold dear. It's important to appreciate how self-values vary between consumers, brands, and stakeholder groups.

## FOR EXAMPLE

Patagonia's 'Don't buy this jacket' campaign appeals to green values. While Nike's recycled materials campaigns appeal to values of innovation and technology use.

patagonia  
**DON'T BUY  
THIS JACKET**



Source: Patagonia.com



Source: Nike.com

## EXECUTIVE EDUCATION APPLICATION

How might we tailor our marketing, messaging, or positioning in executive education to appeal to the specific self-values of different audiences, personas, or industries?

Do you know what those self-values are in the case of certain personas or audience segments? How might you research them?

04

# Feelings & cognition

Research shows that negative emotional appeals (e.g. an appeal to guilt or fear) can work in moderation. However, extreme examples can have diminishing or even adverse results as people shut out the message and mentally or physically 'change channel.'

## POSITIVE EMOTIONAL APPEALS INCLUDE

### Self-efficacy

"I believe I can do this action"

### Outcome efficacy

"I am confident my actions will have an impact"

## FOR EXAMPLE

In recycling campaigns, telling people what their recycled material would become made them three times more likely to recycle.

## EXECUTIVE EDUCATION APPLICATION

How might a self-efficacy appeal apply to the marketing of a new sustainability program? Do the skills, benefits, and workload seem achievable and attainable for your target audience in the given format?

How might an outcome efficacy appeal for the same program differ? Can you be clearer about the outcomes, results, or takeaways in your value proposition?



05

# Tangibility

ESG discussions have a tendency to feel vague, or abstract, or psychologically distant.

**TO COMBAT THIS THERE ARE WAYS WE CAN TRY TO MAKE THE SUBJECT MORE TANGIBLE:**



**Communicate in concrete terms**



**Use data and specific examples**



**Make it personally relevant**



**Draw relevant comparisons**

## **EXECUTIVE EDUCATION APPLICATION**

Sustainability in executive education can be an umbrella term covering many different issues. How might we break this down into more tangible areas of focus?

### **EXAMPLE 1**

Highlighting concrete sustainability-related areas of upskilling and reskilling needs for managers.

### **EXAMPLE 2**

Identifying problem or challenge areas within business where executive education can provide solutions.

**UNICON's Team Development Conference 2022**

**Helping you apply the big ideas from this year's conference to your own challenges, innovation efforts, ESG and growth strategies.**

