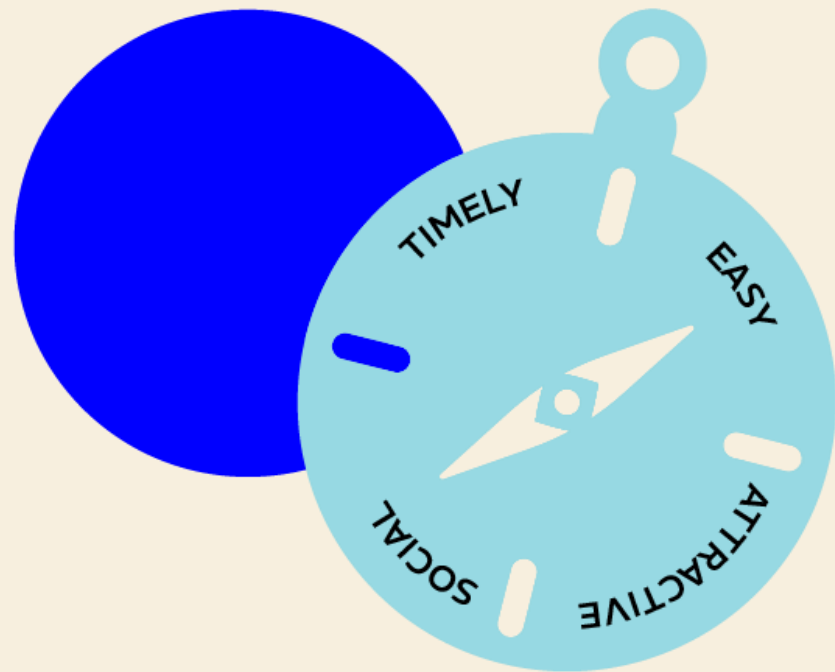




Why behavioral science matters for successful reforms

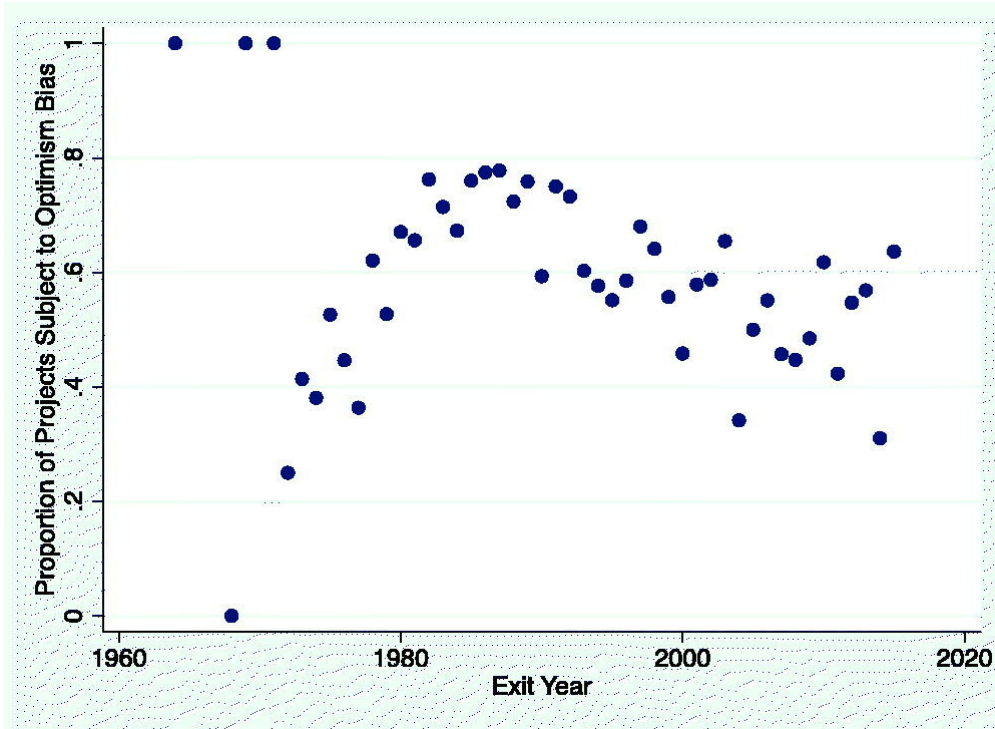
June 2, 2025

Michael Hallsworth, PhD



Why should I care?

Optimism bias



“Optimism bias reduces the chance of a satisfactory project performance rate at the time of evaluation by 17–20%...”

Framing affects our judgments

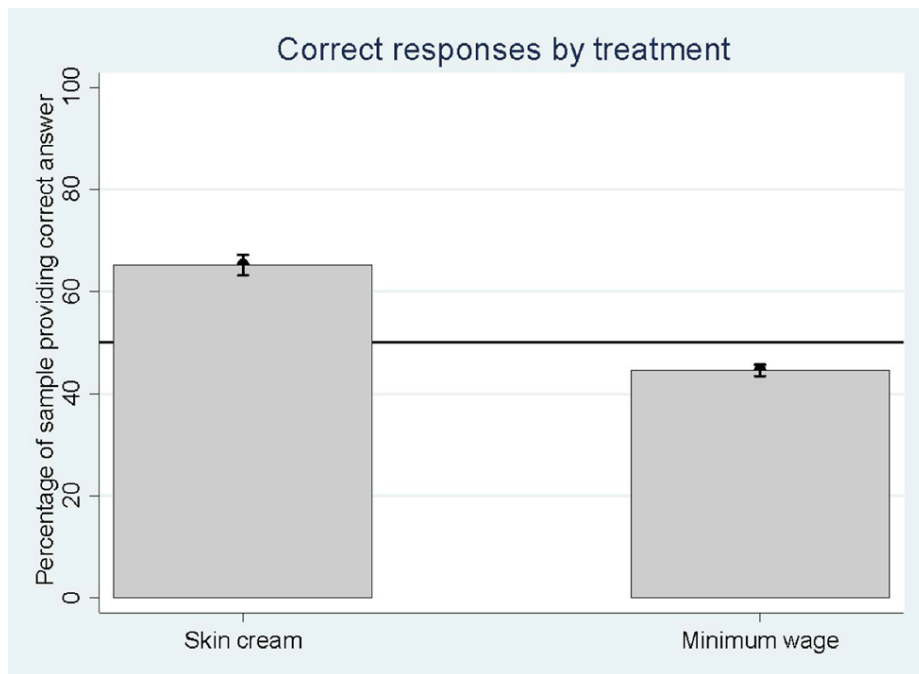


Table 2.

Data Presentation Template for Confirmation Bias Vignette

	Good outcome	Bad outcome
Individuals taking action X	223	75
Individuals taking action Y	107	21

“Respondents were 20 percent less likely to provide the correct response when exposed to the minimum wage frame ($p < 0.01$), across all specifications.”



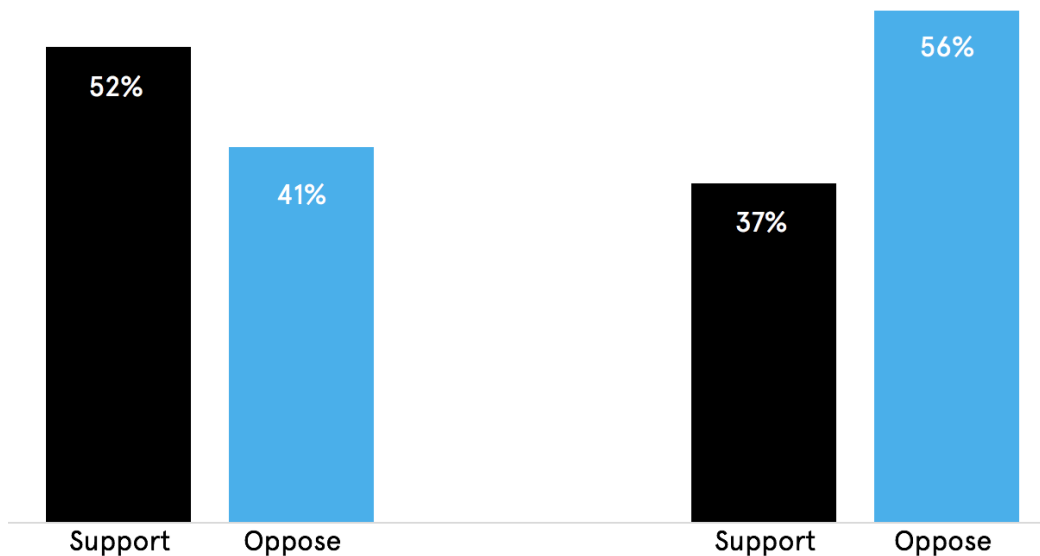
Banuri, S., Dercon, S., & Gauri, V. (2019). Biased policy professionals. *The World Bank Economic Review*, 33(2), 310-327.

Framing affects our judgments

Do you support or oppose...

...giving 16 and 17 year olds
the right to vote?

...reducing the voting age
from 18 to 16?



Ipsos MORI (2015)



**“Much of our behavior is
nonconscious, habitual, and
driven by cues in our environment”**

Hallsworth & Kirkman (2020) *Behavioral Insights* (MIT Press)

A high-angle photograph of a person walking away from the camera on a dirt path in a park. The person is wearing a dark jacket and carrying a red bag. To the right of the path is a paved walkway, a young tree, a bench, and a lamppost. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Human behavior

**How policies,
programs and
services are often
designed**

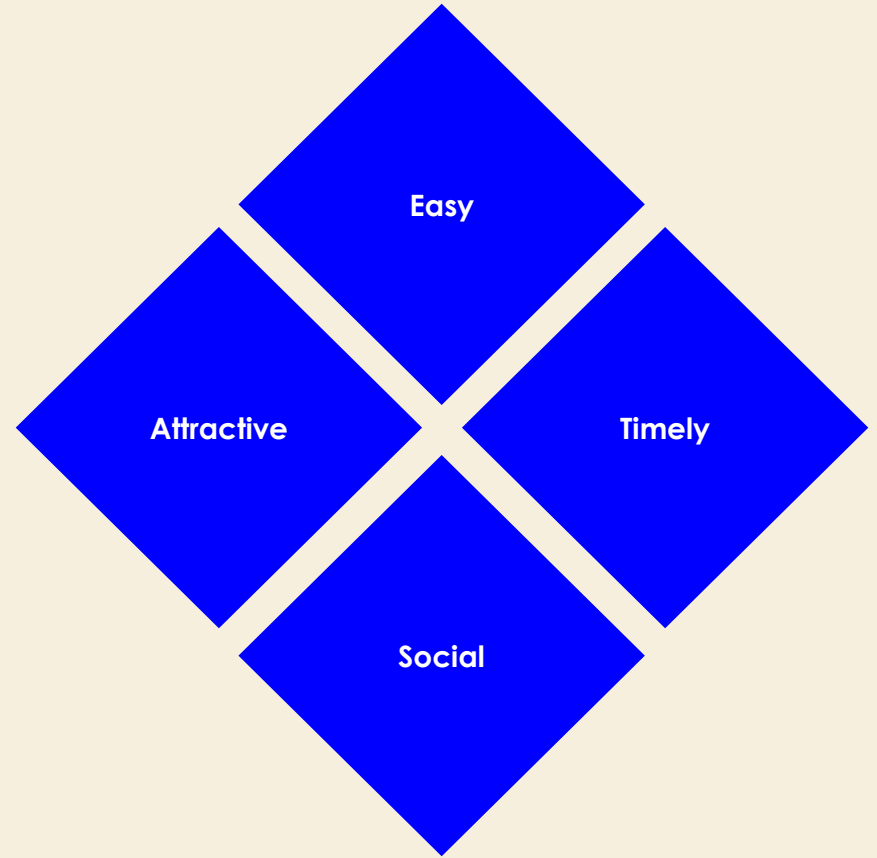
If you want someone to do something...

Make it **easy**

Make it **attractive**

Make it **social**

Make it **timely**



"Social proof" can be powerful

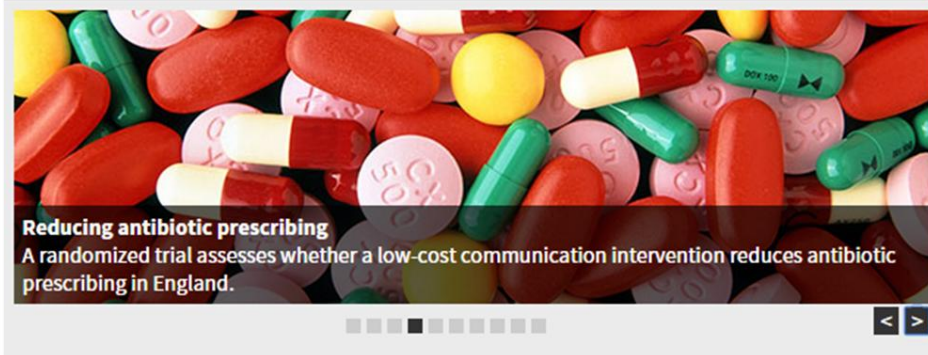
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Hallsworth et al. (2016) Provision of social norm feedback to high prescribers of antibiotics in general practice: a pragmatic national randomised controlled trial.

The Lancet [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)00215-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)00215-4)



The behavioralist as tax collector: Using natural field experiments to enhance tax compliance[☆]



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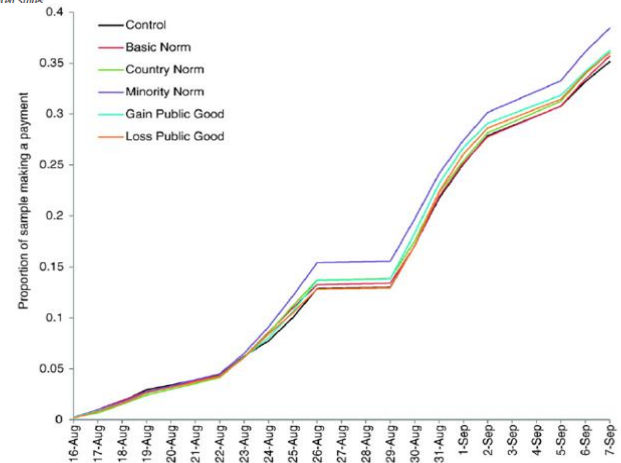


Fig. 1. Raw data on the cumulative percentage of people paying per day by treatment group for the first 23 days of the study period, Experiment One.

Why should you care?

1. Evidence matters for good policies, products and services
2. The success of most ventures depends on how people react
3. Scientific knowledge about behavior shows that several important assumptions are not accurate
4. There are practical frameworks for applying that knowledge to real-world issues
5. This not just about tweaks, and it's not a distraction from your core business - it is your core business!

Green energy defaults produce enduring shifts in consumer choices

Changes to road layout reduces left turn speeds; messages about crashes can increase crashes

Teaching simple rules of thumb boosts the ability of entrepreneurs to maintain accurate accounting by 10% points compared to traditional approaches

Pre-diabetes screening rates can be increased by making the offer at mosques during Ramadan - when people are fasting anyway

Giving a bonus that is lost if students do not reach targets is more effective than offering a bonus conditional on performance



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THE HYPOCRISY TRAP

HOW CHANGING WHAT
WE CRITICIZE CAN
IMPROVE OUR LIVES



MICHAEL HALLSWORTH