GoldinKollar

Fifty ideas on human behaviour at work

One idea, one number and one action from each video of the Human Behaviour Crash Course, with its source.

Human Behaviour Crash Course · goldinkollar.com/videos/human-behaviour-crash-course/

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They know, and still don’t do it

Intention alone is not enough. Studies find intentions turn into action only about half the time, and the environment, not enthusiasm, makes the difference.

Sheeran & Webb 2016 · review · Sheeran 2002 · 422 studies · review of studies

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Behaviour is something you can count

A value written on the wall is not a behaviour. Write it as one sentence: who does what, when and where.

GoldinKollar · values → behaviours · GoldinKollar rule

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Diagnose before you push

Before you send another reminder: at which filter do people stop? The cue, the evaluation, the ability or the urgency? Each filter needs a different fix.

GoldinKollar · Action Funnel

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Two minds decide

The brain runs most of the day on its fast system. Make the first step need no thinking: one button, or one question.

Kahneman 2011 · Thinking, Fast and Slow · core reference

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What repeats disappears

What repeats in the same form drops out of attention. Habituation is a planning constraint, just like the budget.

GoldinKollar · habituation as a planning constraint · GoldinKollar rule

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Do too many choices stop people?

The famous jam study: 3% against about 30%. Later reviews found the average effect close to zero. The problem is confusion, not the number of options.

Iyengar & Lepper 2000 · Scheibehenne, Greifeneder & Todd 2010 · field study

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Much of your day runs on autopilot

About 40% of our daily actions are habits. A habit does not respond to persuasion, but to place and timing.

Wood, Quinn & Kashy 2002 · diary studies

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Feeling decides

People judge by feeling first and finish with logic. Open a change announcement with one person’s story, then the numbers.

Slovic, Finucane, Peters & MacGregor 2007 · theoretical review

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Losses hurt more

A loss hurts more than a gain, but less than the myth says: about 1.7 times after correction, not 2.25.

Tversky & Kahneman 1992 · λ = 2.25 · Brown et al. 2024 · 607 estimates · ≈1.74 corrected · a real effect, smaller than often claimed

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Nobody saw it

Not everyone who did nothing is uninterested; sometimes they never saw it. Put the cue in the first line, at the right moment.

Fogg 2009 · Behavior Model (B = MAP) · behavioural model

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What’s it to me?

People do not read the message; they read themselves in it. The first line must answer: what will change in your day?

GoldinKollar · Action Funnel · F2 · GoldinKollar rule

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Seven steps

Ability is set by the scarcest resource a person has in that moment. Instead of raising enthusiasm, remove a step.

Fogg 2009 · six simplicity factors · behavioural model

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Any time means no time

"Any time" means "no time". Present bias makes tomorrow always look better, until the deadline passes.

O'Donoghue & Rabin 1999 · present bias · behavioural economics model

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Four sentences that tell you the problem

I don’t know, I don’t like it, I don’t want to, I can’t: four sentences, four different problems. Listen to the sentence before choosing the fix.

GoldinKollar · four barriers · GoldinKollar rule

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Capability, opportunity, motivation

Not every behaviour problem is a training problem. Ask first: is it capability, opportunity or motivation?

Michie, van Stralen & West 2011 · COM-B · scientific framework

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The disablers

Sometimes everything is set and still nothing moves. Time pressure and uncertainty stall people, however good the request.

GoldinKollar · 6D Spectrum Model · disablers · GoldinKollar rule

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Not everyone is moved by the same thing

The right incentive speaks to the right motive. Know a segment's three strongest motives before designing any reward.

GoldinKollar · ten-motive model · GoldinKollar rule

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A reward can kill the wish

An expected reward can kill the desire. Children who loved drawing drew less after being promised a certificate.

Lepper, Greene & Nisbett 1973 · lab experiment

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Three needs

Autonomy, competence and belonging. Fix the goal, and let the team choose the way.

Deci & Ryan 2000 · Self-Determination Theory · a theory backed by much research

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Do people do what fits who they are?

"Be a voter" instead of "vote": a famous result that did not replicate in a much larger trial. A beautiful idea is not evidence.

Bryan et al. 2011 · PNAS · Gerber et al. 2016 · large field replication · no effect · warning: did not replicate

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Fairness before the number

People will lose money to punish unfairness. Explain the formula before you announce the number.

Güth, Schmittberger & Schwarze 1982 · ultimatum game · lab experiment

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Progress pulls

A card that started with two free stamps was completed faster: 10 days against 15. People move when they feel they have started.

Kivetz, Urminsky & Zheng 2006 · J. Marketing Research · field study

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Curiosity is a gap

Curiosity is a small, specific gap. Turn your subject line into a question people want answered, and close the gap in the first line.

Loewenstein 1994 · information-gap theory · theoretical review

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People look at people

"Most guests in this room reused their towels" raised reuse from 35.1% to 44.1%. People look at people.

Goldstein, Cialdini & Griskevicius 2008 · field study · one hotel

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The wrong norm

"Sadly, participation is low" teaches people that not taking part is normal. Say who took part, not who stayed away.

Cialdini et al. 2006 · Social Influence · field study

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The default wins

When enrolment became automatic with the right to opt out, participation jumped from 37% to 86%. The default is power; use it in the employee's interest.

Madrian & Shea 2001 · Quarterly J. Economics · field study

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Same number, different decision

The same number, a different decision: 72% against 22% depending on the wording. Choose the framing consciously, and do not hide the other number.

Tversky & Kahneman 1981 · Science · lab experiment

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The first number said

A random number from a wheel of fortune moved estimates from 25% to 45%. Whoever says the first number draws the field.

Tversky & Kahneman 1974 · Science · lab experiment

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What they build with their own hands

People value what they built themselves. Make part of the initiative with people, not for them.

Norton, Mochon & Ariely 2012 · lab experiment

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Start with a small step

A small request two weeks earlier raised agreement to the big one from 17% to 76%. Start with the smallest real step.

Freedman & Fraser 1966 · JPSP · field study

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Give first

Whoever gives first finds someone who gives back, as long as the giving is genuinely useful, not bait.

Regan 1971 · lab experiment

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Who says it

A message lands as far as people trust the person who says it. The highest title is not always the most influential.

Dolan et al. 2010 · MINDSPACE · scientific framework

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Scarce feels precious

Scarcity raises value, as long as it is real. One fake scarcity burns trust.

Worchel, Lee & Adewole 1975 · JPSP · lab experiment

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Remove a step

Every extra step loses people halfway. Every field has to earn its place.

Behavioural Insights Team 2014 · EAST · scientific framework

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Four questions before launch

Four questions before any launch: is it easy? attractive? social? timely? Review the action, not only the look.

Behavioural Insights Team 2014 · EAST · scientific framework

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Fresh starts

People start at time landmarks: the start of a week, a month, after a birthday. Put your launch on the nearest fresh start.

Dai, Milkman & Riis 2014 · Management Science · field study

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In front of their eyes

Water at eye level and next to every till: its sales rose and sugary drinks fell. What is in front of the eyes wins.

Thorndike et al. 2012 · American J. Public Health · field study

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Set the moment

A blank box asking "which day? what time?" raised vaccination by about 4 points. A reminder is not enough; set the moment.

Milkman et al. 2011 · PNAS · field study

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When and where?

"If..., then I will" plans have a medium-to-large effect across 94 tests. Intention says I want; a plan says when and where.

Sheeran & Webb 2016 · Gollwitzer & Sheeran 2006 · meta-analysis

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Friction that harms

If leaving is harder than joining, it is a trap, not a system. Silence here is not consent.

Thaler 2018 · Science · "Nudge, not sludge" · scientific article

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A habit is not 21 days

A habit is not built in 21 days. The median is 66 days, and estimates range from 18 to 254.

Lally et al. 2010 · Eur. J. Social Psychology · daily follow-up study · 84 days

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Shrink it and anchor it

Shrink the behaviour until it takes under 30 seconds, and attach it to something you already do every day.

Fogg 2019 · Tiny Habits · applied method

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Pair it with something you enjoy

Pair a pleasure you like with a task you put off. The effect fades over time, so use it as a start, not a permanent fix.

Milkman, Minson & Volpp 2014 · Management Science · field study

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The mirror

A report comparing homes with their neighbours cut consumption by about 2% with no incentive. People change when they see themselves next to the number.

Allcott 2011 · J. Public Economics · field study

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The quarter that tips it

In an online experiment the norm flipped when the committed minority reached about 25%. The figure may differ in companies, but the critical mass is real.

Centola et al. 2018 · Science · lab experiment

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Say what won’t change

People do not fear the new; they fear losing what they have. Open a change announcement with what will not change.

Samuelson & Zeckhauser 1988 · experiments and field data

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The manager is the channel

Managers account for at least 70% of the variance in team engagement. Equip managers before the big announcement.

Gallup 2015 · State of the American Manager · field study

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Culture is what gets rewarded

If you reward one thing and hope for another, you get what you rewarded. Your real culture is what you actually reward.

Kerr 1975 · Academy of Management Journal · classic article

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Nudge or manipulation?

The publicity test: could you announce what you did, and why, to the people you did it to? If not, it is manipulation.

Thaler & Sunstein 2008 · Nudge · ethical principle

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Measure the action, not the opinion

An open is not an action and a like is not an action. Measure what people do, and accept that the result may be zero.

GoldinKollar rule