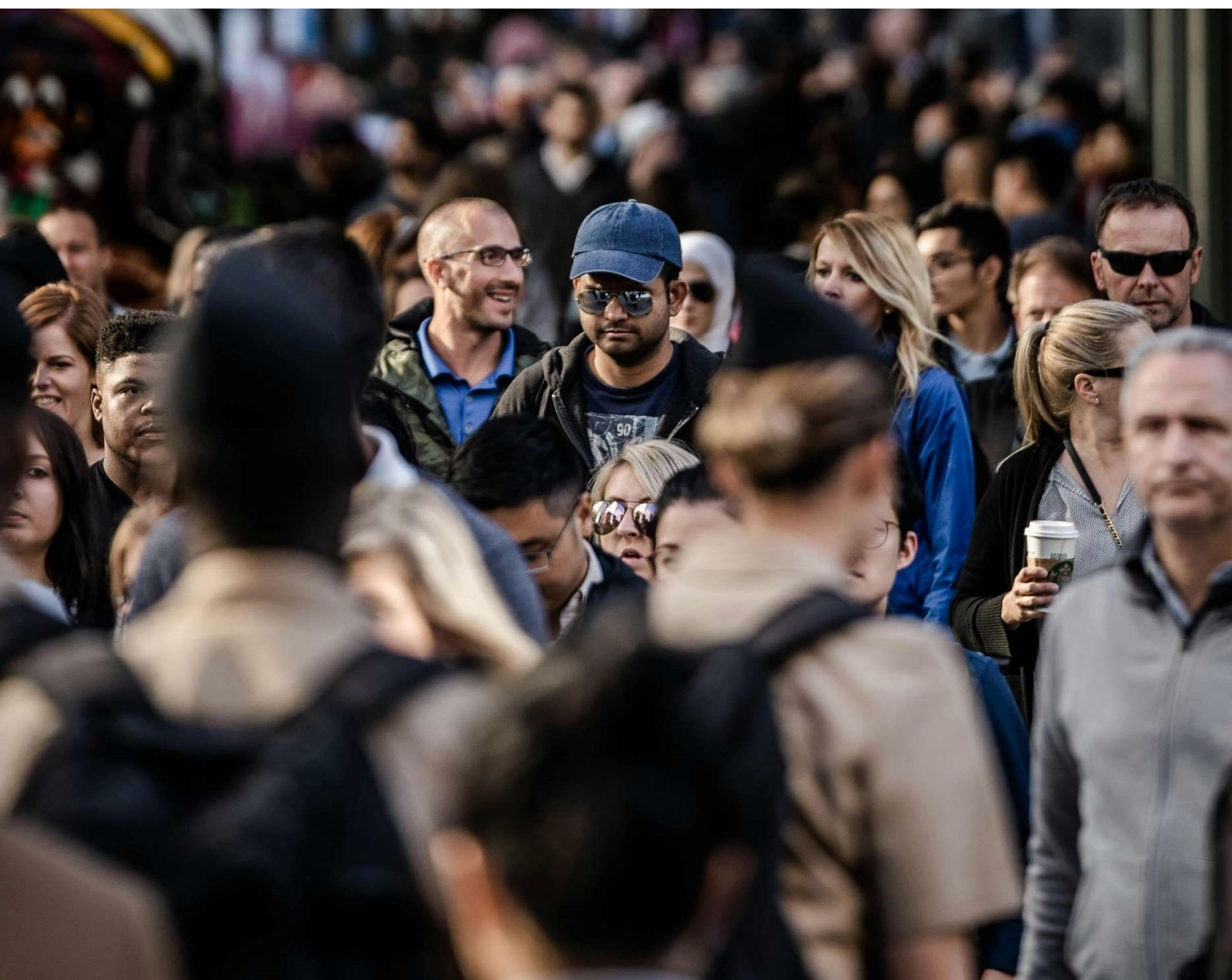




## <Report>

### **Why we are failing to change the world**

And how human insight can help us succeed



*This report explores how the latest insights into human thinking and behaviour can transform our efforts to create a better world. Specifically written for anyone seeking positive change - such as policymakers, progressive leaders, charities, campaigners, and fundraisers - this report shows how human insight can not only reshape our vision of a better future, but also empower us to be more effective at gaining the change we want to see.*

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## Introduction

Those of us seeking a fairer and more sustainable world over the last few decades have got it all wrong.

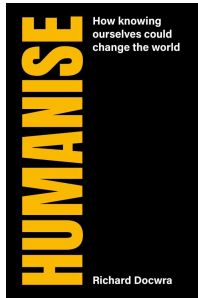
Why?

Because most of us have a completely inaccurate picture of how human beings think and behave. This leads us to set unrealistic expectations for ourselves, build societies that actually harm us, and struggle to solve the major problems facing our species.

This report provides a quick, accessible summary of how the latest insights about human thinking and behaviour can transform our vision of what a better future looks like, and make us much more effective at gaining the change we want to see in the world. It is aimed at anyone involved in seeking a better world, including policy makers, progressive leaders, charities, campaigners and fundraisers.

The report is simply intended to be a starting point to signpost the enormous potential of human insight in the search for social, political and environmental change. To find out more, discuss its conclusions and explore how we can help you to take the next steps through consultancy, coaching, training and creative services, [contact Richard, our director, on richard@changestar.co.uk](mailto:richard@changestar.co.uk) or on 01273 96418.

The ideas in this publication are adapted specifically for the social change sector from the book '[Humanise: how knowing ourselves could change the world](#)' by ChangeStar director Richard Docwra.



The book sets out the latest thinking on how human beings think and behave and how we can use this knowledge to address some of the challenges we face as a species, including prejudice, the obesity crisis and climate change, as well as to build a better future more generally. It shows that much of our thinking and behaviour is determined by the situations and environments that surround us, so we need to build structures in society that help us flourish – in other words, we need to humanise the world.

The book explores many of the points in this report in much greater detail.

'[Humanise: how knowing ourselves could change the world](#)' is available from Amazon and all major bookshops. To hear a summary of the book, listen to [Episode 19](#) of the podcast series 'Humans & Hope'.

## What is human insight?

ChangeStar are experts in human insight. This includes:

- **Understanding how human beings think and behave**, using evidence from psychology, neuroscience, sociology, political science and other academic disciplines.
- **Understanding the human condition**, including how people perceive the world and experience life, using thinking from philosophy, coaching and other sources.

These could be characterised as 'hard' and 'soft' skills.

At ChangeStar, we believe the wisdom provided by human insight is a priceless asset - a resource that could change lives, organisations, societies and our effectiveness at seeking positive change. Yet it is one that very few policy makers, organisations or individuals have made use of to seek a better world or better lives. We want to help people and organisations apply it to seek a better world and better lives.

## **Why does human insight matter?**

It seems obvious to suggest that we can't hope to build a better world or change human lives effectively without first understanding how human beings think and behave. Yet, for most of human history, we have been trying to do these things with an inaccurate view of human beings - and we are still doing so.

Our lack of understanding of human beings has caused a lot of damage. It has led us to build a world that is, in many ways, hostile to the creatures we really are. And it has led those of us seeking political, social and environmental change to seek either the wrong solutions to our problems (such as ineffective or destructive policies) or ineffective ways of implementing our solutions (such as in how we communicate with the public - from messaging to the detail of how to present fundraising appeals).

It has also led us to accept and maintain structures, institutions, ideas and policies in our societies that are actually hostile to the creatures human beings really are and that prevent people from flourishing or exercising their capacities fully.

So, to build a better future, we need to start by understanding human beings better. ChangeStar can help you do this through its strategic, training and coaching services. It can also help you embed these principles in your communications through creative services.

The next sections of this paper will provide a short overview of some of the principles of how human beings think and behave, and the type of societies we need to build as a result, as well as what this means for anyone seeking political, social and environmental change - both in terms of the aims they should be seeking and how they can seek them more effectively.

## How do human beings think and behave?

Most people, including leaders, the public and those seeking a fairer and more sustainable world, assume human beings to be rational, self-determined creatures who can just think for themselves without any limitations or restrictions. This commonly accepted view is the one that has surrounded us for 300 years since the Enlightenment period. It is however out of date and inaccurate.

Over recent decades, our knowledge of human beings has moved on considerably, driven by evidence from psychology, neuroscience and other disciplines. Experts now broadly see human beings as creatures that have evolved to a) simplify and make sense of the world around us, and b) respond to the context, situations and people around us.

These two factors bring significant consequences for our thinking and behaviour. Point a) can lead us to limitations, inaccuracies and biases in our thinking, such as the anchoring effect - our tendency to rely on the first piece of information we receive about a subject when making a judgement about it. Point b) means that we don't think for ourselves anywhere near as much as we believe, because much of our thinking and behaviour is influenced by the presence or views of other people, and the situations and contexts we are in.

The latter point in particular is a profound one that should make us re-evaluate who we really are as a species and as individuals. It may be more accurate to see ourselves as 'contextuals' than as individuals, as our thinking and behaviour is not just dependent on our capacities as individuals, but also on the context, situations and people that surround us.

These findings in turn have big consequences for how we should build our societies and seek change. They show that most human beings are neither 'good' nor 'bad' but have traits that can be activated or repressed by external factors

into these behaviours. The context that surrounds us (including structures like political systems, institutions, social norms, physical environments and even specific situations) is therefore critical in driving human thinking and behaviour.

Human minds evolved to live in the small hunter-gatherer tribes our ancestors lived in for most of human history, up to 12,000 years ago when we started forming agricultural societies. We didn't evolve to live in the modern world, which has changed out of all recognition from that previous world, and in such a short time frame that we have not adapted to deal with it. As a result, we are struggling to deal with the modern world that we have built and the challenges we face within it.

This is exacerbated by the fact that we are living in a world that's hostile to human beings, given the creatures we now know we are, as many of the structures that surround us either neglect to provide the support we need (for example, many people lack the adequate nutrition or safe homes they need) or actually exploit our cognitive vulnerabilities rather than protecting them. An example of the latter is advertising, which seeks to encourage people to consume as much as possible in order to maximise corporate profits. It does this by exploiting human cognitive biases and vulnerabilities, often manipulating people into decisions and behaviours they would not have otherwise chosen, and can result in negative consequences for them, including bad health from eating unhealthy foods.

We allow these harmful structures like advertising to exist partly because we think human beings can cope with them (due to us having an inaccurate view of how humans think and behave) and partly because we are prioritising other things (such as profit and economic growth) above human flourishing. We need to change this, and build a world in which human flourishing is the priority, within the natural world we are part of.

We can see such a world as one that enables people to lead healthy, happy and meaningful lives and gives them the freedoms that matter to the creatures they



are - to live the lives they want, express themselves and make full use of their abilities.

To enable human beings to flourish, as well as address the challenges we face, from climate change to violence, our key task as a species is to change the structures and context around us to better fit the creatures we are, as we can't afford to wait for evolution to change us instead, as this takes millions of years. In other words, we need to humanise the world.

## **What are the consequences of this new picture of humans?**

As you can see, this new picture of human beings gives us a new perspective on the situation we face in the modern world and the challenges we face as a species - from climate change to prejudice and violence.

As will be shown below, it also suggests we need to make some significant changes to the societies and structures around us in order to make them appropriate for the creatures we are. This in turn means that any organisation, institution or policy maker seeking social, political or environmental change needs to rethink both the goals they are seeking and how they undertake their work, to ensure they are seeking the right goals in the most effective way, given this more accurate view of the creatures we really are.

This section will initially explore some of the steps we need to take to make the world fit for human flourishing, given the creatures we are. It will then show the scope of how this might affect different aspects of society and our lives, including some examples in different areas. Finally, it will summarise the consequences of all this for any agent (including policy makers, organisations or individuals), involved in seeking change or to build a better society, including the aims they should be directed towards and how they can operate more effectively.

### **10 ways to humanise the world**

What action can we take to apply our new insights about human beings to build a better world?

Below are ten recommendations provided in Richard Docwra's book 'Humanise' on steps we can take to move towards a world in which human beings can flourish, given the creatures we really are, and within the one planet we have. These are very short summaries of each recommendation - please [see the book](#) for more details.

**1. Start with the human** - overall, we should learn to see ourselves with greater humility and accuracy – as LASID (limited, adapted, simplifying, influenced and deceived<sup>1</sup>) creatures – and ensure that the consequences of this flow into policy making and our daily lives to support human flourishing. For example, instigating public awareness campaigns to build people’s understanding of how human beings actually think and behave, and how it affects our lives.

**2. Give every child a good start** - evidence shows that the early years of a child’s life, including their prenatal period, are critical in shaping their later lives, including their physical and mental health, emotional development and tendency towards aggressive behaviour. Supporting parents and children in this important period of human development therefore represents an essential investment that will pay off many times over in the long term. For example, promoting breastfeeding and giving additional financial support to parents to pay for nutritious food.

**3. Extend the content and duration of education** - there may be no more important area of scaffolding in our lives than the education we receive. We should therefore rethink it to be useful for the creatures we really are. For example, teaching an understanding of how human beings think and behave, how to seek accurate sources of information and how to manage our minds effectively.

**4. Build a more equal society** - evidence shows that inequality is a key driver of many of the problems we face as human beings, including health, prejudice and violence. We therefore need to give everyone the resources for a healthy, dignified and self-determined life, as well as equal access to opportunities, services and environments, including local sports facilities, education and jobs, as well as opportunities for a greater say in politics.

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<sup>1</sup> Humanise: how knowing ourselves could change the world, Docwra R, Big Idea Publishing, Lewes, 2024.

**5. Make information useful for humans** - our information environment is an important aspect of our context that influences our thinking and behaviour. We therefore need to stop information being used as a device to manipulate people in order to gain profit or power, and make it accessible and useful for individuals to help them make better decisions and lead better lives. For example, making it harder to share misinformation and using human-focussed information design for statistics and financial information.

**6. Adjust our environment to protect rather than exploit our mental vulnerabilities** - our thinking can be influenced by the structures, ideas and messages in our environment in ways that have negative consequences for us. We therefore need to reduce the power of external influences to manipulate us and exploit our mental vulnerabilities, and repurpose our environment to support us and protect these vulnerabilities. For example, banning manipulative advertising and reshaping how social media companies work, away from a model that incentivises people's attention.

**7. Adjust our environment to promote our cooperative capacities and reduce our tribal instincts** - we need to realise the power of the situation to influence our thinking and behaviour as a species – and take steps to promote situations and environments that activate the traits that are useful in the modern world (such as cooperation) and not the ones that aren't any more (such as negative tribalism). We also need to build people's ability to recognise negative situations and how to take control of their behaviour in them. For example, monitoring and penalising negative and stereotypical representations of people and groups, including by politicians and the media.

**8. Adjust our environment to support our cognitive capacities and save time and energy** - we should introduce initiatives to reduce people's cognitive load and make our use of cognitive energy more effective, thus increasing our cognitive ease and promoting our flourishing, as well as giving us time and energy to do more of the things we want. For example -

a food shopping and nutrition app to help people choose the meals they can eat each day in order to meet their nutritional, calorific and budgetary needs and not go beyond them.

**9. Repurpose the economy as a means to our ends** - we need to move away from the current extreme finance-led version of capitalism, which is based on an inaccurate view of human beings as purely rational creatures, and suggests that economic growth is all that is needed for human flourishing, and is therefore essentially the same thing. Given the creatures we actually are, our economy needs to be human-led; the servant of human beings rather than the master, and one of several means we use to reach the end of human flourishing, rather than prioritised above everything else as an end in itself.

**10. Apply new political priorities and cultural ideas** - we need to establish some new ways of thinking about ourselves as a species, as well as the conditions we should live in and the values we should hold. For example, promoting cooperation rather than competition, seeing ourselves as part of one human 'tribe', and a new view of freedom that recognises that human beings need certain structures and regulation in their societies in order to protect their cognitive vulnerabilities and live self-determined lives.

These are broad principles, but they provide a framework for thinking about how we can adjust the structures that surround us, including the policies we need to build, the institutions we need to establish, the way organisations need to operate and the conditions that those seeking social, political and environmental change need to seek.

### **How could this affect our lives and society?**

These principles are ambitious and wide-ranging, and they affect most areas of society and our lives in multiple ways. Below is a broad outline of how various aspects of life in a humanised world might look and feel like. They run from the

broadest scope (international institutions) through to the finest detail (such as situations we find ourselves in as individuals).

The consequences of applying this new view of human beings to our world are so broad and deep for society that we can only scratch the surface and provide a couple of examples below for each area. But they provide an illustration of what a 'humanised' world might look and feel like.

- **Individuals** - each of us would have the resources we need to live a dignified life, including nutritious food, a safe, warm home and a universal basic income. We would all have access to safe and healthy environments, regardless of our financial situation, including outdoor space, leisure facilities, supermarkets, education, healthcare and libraries.

We would have access to objective information about the world, a global information charter that would monitor and regulate misinformation, and the biases of different channels of information around us (such as television channels or websites) would be flagged up to us. Products and services would be labelled in a way that enables us to make informed decisions and prevent us being manipulated by packaging or advertising. Overall, information would be presented in ways that are clear and useful to us, rather than seeking to exploit us.

Social media would be regulated to minimise and flag up biases and misinformation. Smartphones and social media would not be available to children until 16 years old, and they would be educated in how to manage their use of them and think critically beforehand.

- **Organisations (including companies, charities and others)** - organisations would embed the aims of promoting human flourishing and operating within strict environmental parameters as core principles in their constitutions, beyond other aims, such as financial goals. This would lead to our working environments and practices being adapted to work for us

rather than against us, including flexible working hours and conditions, arrangements that enable parents of young children to focus on this important phase of a child's life, and team structures and working practices that promote collaboration and activate our capacities for cooperation rather than competition.

Workplaces, shops and other organisations would be structured to help people make better decisions, and would include signposting to make people aware of situations in which their thinking and behaviour might be influenced by external factors, and how to manage this. For example, signage in a meeting room to help people avoid behaviour that conforms with the majority, or in a supermarket entrance to flag up how the layout of the shop can influence their buying choices. Manipulative advertising would be banned, and organisational communications, information and environments adapted to make it easier for people to make better decisions.

- **Institutions** - as well as our existing curriculum, our children's education would include learning how human beings think and behave, the biases and tendencies this results in and how to manage their minds effectively. This training would be continued and refreshed throughout their lives as adults. Children would also be trained in information literacy so that they can make better decisions for themselves, including how to evaluate the information they receive for biases or validity, how to find trusted sources of information and how to think critically.

The promotion of life-long mental and physical health - including the provision of more physical exercise and nutritious food for all children - would be seen as a central responsibility of the education system. Teaching methods would also evolve to use collaborative methods of teaching, learning and working to promote cooperation and support rather than competition between children.

- **Governments and policy makers** - policies would be based on an up-to-date understanding of how human beings think and behave, and would focus on seeking human flourishing within the limits of the natural world we are part of. Economic aims would fit within these parameters and be a means to these ends, not an end in themselves. This would affect a wide range of areas - from international rules to daily life. For example, there would be stronger global regulation and taxation of international companies, and the definition of 'critical infrastructure' in all neighbourhoods would be reviewed to include access to sports facilities, public transport, good schools and nutritious food, and ensure that this is provided equally across all communities, regardless of economic profile.

Democracies would be strengthened by making citizen participation and discussion a more central part of our politics, and by ensuring that the information and communications from political parties, the media and individual politicians and journalists are regulated and monitored to minimise biases and misinformation.

- **International institutions** - the number of global institutions would increase, in order to promote peace and cooperation between nations and build the sense of a common humanity between people of different cultures and backgrounds.

Overall, a more humanised world would feel safer and healthier for us, with less pressure on our minds and less need to defend ourselves from information and other people. We would have more energy and mental capacity to focus on things that were more important to us, and would feel encouraged to build better relationships with other people - from those immediately around us to those we may never meet. This world would feel more hopeful, and give us more of the freedoms that really matter to us. Critically, it would also be environmentally sustainable.



There is much more work to do to extrapolate how our new picture of human beings could affect details of life and society, and it is up to every agent seeking a better world to build on these initial examples and show how the principles apply in practice as policies and goals in their own areas of specialism and interest.

## **How could this knowledge be applied to seek a better world?**

These findings about human beings and proposals for how to improve the world have a significant impact on how anyone seeking social, political or environmental change should go about their work - from the theories of change they are adopting to the way in which they operate - whether this is as institutions, policy makers, organisations or individuals.

### **Definitions**

Let us first define who we mean by 'anyone seeking social, political or environmental change':

- Policy makers (including governments and think tanks)
- Institutions (including education, health, environment and other sectors)
- Organisations (including charities and campaign groups)
- Individuals (including individual campaigners and politicians)

Each of these agents may be concerned with seeking a more just and sustainable world, and finding the most effective ways to do this. There are of course many other agents that may be seeking the same goals, from journalists to members of the public, but for reasons of brevity we have highlighted the key groups above.

### **Principles**

There are some simple principles that follow from the findings and recommendations above that can be applied to the work of these agents. These essentially break down into two areas - the aims that social change agents should be directed towards (point 1 below) and how these agents can operate more effectively to achieve their aims (point 2-4):

1. **Focus your work on changing structures around people** - first, each organisation or individual needs to focus its work on seeking changes to the structures around human beings rather than just attempting to deliver their services or change human behaviour directly, as the evidence shows that the most effective way to achieve human behaviour change in the long-term is through changing the context around people.
2. **Use human insight to reconsider how you achieve your goals** - aside from placing more emphasis on changing the structures around people, each organisation or individual should use human insight to reconsider the methods they use to achieve their goals and how they execute them, in order to increase their impact and effectiveness.
3. **See your organisation and yourself as structures in their own right** - this means realising that your organisation, or even you as an individual, is a structure that has an impact and influence on other people, and therefore that you should operate in a way that is consistent with your goals to humanise the world.
4. **Build and protect your own capacity for flourishing** - for as long as we live in a world that is sometimes hostile to human flourishing, we need to ensure that we, and the organisations we are part of, build the skills and surround ourselves with the structures we need to enable us to flourish.

We will explore each of these principles in more detail below and some examples of how they might apply to organisations and individuals.

### **1. Focus your work on changing structures**

Any organisation seeking to create a better world should increase its emphasis on campaigning for structures around people that help to achieve its aims, as a core part of achieving its mission. This is alongside any work they already do to directly influence or help people - from service provision to providing resources through to campaigning.

This is because behavioural science shows that changing the context and situation around people is a bigger influence than we thought on their thinking and behaviour, and the other work of the organisation (such as service provision etc.) can be severely compromised within a society and structures that are not geared towards its work.

For example, a charity providing consumer information to the public should also be devoting a reasonable level of its resources to seeking a society in which information is made more accessible and usable for human beings, given the cognitive makeup of the creatures we are. It should also be seeking a world in which misinformation is prevented and in which the education system provides people with information literacy skills, such as critical thinking.

#### **How we can help**

ChangeStar can help you to use insights from behavioural science to review your vision, and the most effective methods to achieve your goals, through our [consultancy](#) services. To discuss how we could help you, contact Richard on 01273 964018 or [richard@changestar.co.uk](mailto:richard@changestar.co.uk).

## **2. Use human insight to reconsider how you achieve your goals**

Organisations seeking a better world do so using a variety of means. Insights from behavioural science can help them to choose the most effective methods to achieve their goals, as well as to execute them in more effective ways, in order to maximise their impact and effectiveness.

Below are some illustrative examples from a limited selection of areas:

- **Policy development** - for example, government, political parties or think tanks seeking to develop policies that address a problem, such as tackling prejudice. In this case, by understanding the psychological foundations of

prejudice, policy makers may seek to promote the teaching of new skills in the education curriculum, such as perspective taking and ‘thinking training’ to help people understand the creatures they are and the biases they hold - and how to manage these in day-to-day life. They would also look to change people’s context in a number of ways, for example, by campaigning for much stronger regulation of biased or divisive communications in society - including from politicians and the media. And, campaigning for changes to working practices in institutions such as education and workplaces to activate people’s co-operative tribal instincts and dial down their competitive tendencies.

- **Providing resources** - for example, international non-governmental organisations that seek to establish better health services in poorer countries. In this case, behavioural science could be leveraged to recognise the power of social pressure (both in person and online) to change behaviours and promote positive health practices.
- **Empowering beneficiaries** - for example, education charities that empower young adults with the skills to seek employment. Behavioural science would suggest that these charities focus not just on the mindsets and skills of the beneficiaries themselves but on changing the environments in which they live and work, to make them more supportive to the young people in developing the necessary habits and skills. For example, asking for support from parents, helping beneficiaries to change their home environment, social habits and groups to support their positive behaviour, and building a mentor network to promote positive role models for beneficiaries.
- **Behaviour change** - for example, local councils seeking to influence people to stop littering. In a campaign like this, behavioural science would suggest that councils should not simply focus on tactics directed at people who litter (such as influencing them with direct messages and providing more bins), but also changing the context around people. For example, ensuring that bins are emptied regularly and streets and road verges are kept clean

in order to provide social cues to people that binning rather than dropping litter is the norm, and having visible monitoring and penalties for dropping it - rather than simply warnings that penalties will be imposed.

- **Campaigning** - for example, environmental groups seeking to mobilise the public to demand policy change to address the environmental crisis. Rather than just asking people to sign a pledge and giving them a list of ways they can take action, campaign organisations could seek to build structures around people that make them more likely to take action, including bringing people together in local social groups to meet in person, which enables them to form 'tribes' on the issues they care about and which promote greater cooperation, commitment and action on these issues.
- **Fundraising** - most non-profit organisations need to raise money to continue, and some exist specifically as fundraising bodies (such as NHS Charities Together). Fundraising appeals can be made significantly more effective by the use of behavioural insights, partly through detailed 'nudges' to messaging and communications (such as reducing the number of fields donors need to fill in on an online form<sup>2</sup>), but also through broader steps such as creating a stronger sense of community and 'tribe' between a charity and its supporters, which builds their sense of identity, commitment and loyalty to this group.

**Beyond 'nudging'** - one of the points we want to illustrate in the suggestions above is that the use of behavioural insight (BI) is about a lot more than just 'nudging' people into better decisions or behaviours.

To date, the use of BI in the search for a better world has been limited to 'nudging' techniques that seek to change the decision context around people to promote positive individual behaviours, such as putting a high suggested gift amount before a lower one on a donation form in order to increase donation

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<sup>2</sup> Change for Good, Ross & Mahmoud, The Management Centre, London, 2018, p.106 - this book gives an example of how reducing the number of fields a donor needed to complete on an online donation form from 11 to 4 increased donations by 140%.

levels by making use of the anchoring bias - our tendency to rely on the first piece of information we receive about a subject when making a judgement about it.

As a recent report by the European Commission Policy Lab<sup>3</sup> notes however, individual nudges have often been found to have marginal effect, especially when they are implemented at a large scale, and may also fail to have long-term impact as they don't address the causes of our behaviours and decision-making processes.

The key point we are arguing at ChangeStar is that behavioural insight has the potential to address these wider causes, and have a much wider impact on the world, if it is applied at a wider, systemic level. This not only means using BI to inform our thinking about policies, services and how we should communicate with people, but also at the broadest possible level, to rethink and inform the vision of the better world we want to reach, and how we can seek it. This is the argument made by ChangeStar director Richard Docwra in his book 'Humanise: how knowing ourselves can change the world'<sup>4</sup>, which considers how we might build our societies, institutions and surroundings as human beings if we wanted to gear them to help us flourish as the creatures we really are, rather than the rational calculating machines that most people still erroneously believe us to be.

Our suggestion is therefore that individual nudge-type interventions can be useful and should be used by policy makers and organisations seeking change - for example, to make messaging more motivating and donation forms clearer. But it is also critical to apply our priceless resource of behavioural insight to much larger questions as well, starting with what sort of world we want to build for the creatures we really are, and then how we should build better societies, policies and institutions to meet this vision. This is a radical change to our current practice, but has the potential to transform the world for the better.

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Dupoux, M., Gaudeul, A., Baggio, M., Bruns, H., Ciriolo, E., Krawczyk, M., Kuehnhanss, C. and Nohlen, H., Unlocking the full potential of behavioural insights for policy: From influencing the individual to shaping the system, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025, <https://data.eu-ropa.eu/doi/10.2760/7367599>, JRC138028.

<sup>4</sup> Humanise: how knowing ourselves could change the world, Docwra R, Big Idea Publishing, Lewes, 2024.

### **How we can help**

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### **3. See your organisation and yourself as structures in their own right**

Viewing both your organisation and yourself as structures that influence other people's thinking and behaviour can be a powerful way to see the significant potential you have to change the world, even if large-scale change seems to be distant. One key action within your control is to operate in a manner that aligns with your goal of humanising the world.

To assess how much you or your organization are contributing to humanizing the world, and how you can improve your efforts, compare your actions with the 10 recommendations for humanising the world listed on page 10<sup>5</sup>. If you find areas where you can do more (and there is likely to be plenty of room for improvement!), you can take steps to implement those changes.

Below are some limited examples of how this principle could apply in practice, both for your organisation and you as an individual.

#### **Your organisation as a structure**

Our organisations and workplaces can have an effect on a large number of people and in many ways - some of which are outlined below. In each case, we have given an example of how an organisation can choose to act as a structure that promotes human flourishing rather than is hostile to it:

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<sup>5</sup> These are explored in much greater detail in: Humanise: how knowing ourselves could change the world, Docwra R, Big Idea Publishing, Lewes, 2024.



- **Business practices** - the way an organisation carries out its functions should be reviewed to ensure that these are having a positive influence on human flourishing overall - and not just for its beneficiaries. At a detailed level, this could mean using 'blind' recruitment practices to ensure that any irrelevant factors that may bias a recruiter's decisions about a candidate's suitability for a job (such as age, sex and race) are removed from the initial screening process to ensure human biases are eliminated as much as possible.
- **Culture** - even in organisations seeking a better world, it can be shocking to see how much workplace culture is hostile to human flourishing - for example, perhaps allowing negative tribal thinking and behaviours to take place rather than co-operative practices. One of many steps that can be taken to promote greater flourishing is to promote more co-operative working practices, including greater collaboration on projects and rewarding broader teams rather than individual performance. Organisations can also seek to embed an understanding of how human beings behave into their work and their teams' capacities.
- **Workplace** - there are many ways in which workplaces can promote the flourishing of the people within them. These include working arrangements that are built to be flexible and useful for staff, ensuring equality of pay and other benefits, and creating conditions that help to cultivate and activate rational capacities in staff, such as identifying situations in which people's biases or tribal tendencies could be activated and then either adjusting them or, if nothing else can be done, warning people about them and how to manage them. For example, placing signage in meeting rooms noting that people may feel pressure to conform or play certain roles in meetings, and how they can avoid this.
- **External communications** - ensure that you present information - whether to your staff or the public - in a way that is useful for them, rather than in a way that just benefits your organisation. Present your information and statistics in ways that reduce people's cognitive load and are easier to

understand. Remove 'information sludge' such as pre-filled tick boxes on GDPR consent forms that manipulate people into taking actions that suit the organisation rather than the user.

A significant step to promote human flourishing is to review your organisation's communications and advertising practices to ensure that they avoid manipulating people or exploiting their cognitive biases and vulnerabilities wherever possible. This point raises some interesting questions for organisations wishing to use human insight to seek change. For example, should they engage in activities that seek to exploit people's cognitive makeup, such as the fundraising techniques mentioned above? Advertisers and companies employ these tools all the time, but should organisations seeking a better world lower themselves morally to this level? It's a difficult question. Our suggestion is that, in a world in which those seeking progressive change are less powerful and influential than those maintaining the status quo, it could be argued that we need to be able to use these tools to seek the humanised world we are aiming for, otherwise it will be impossible to achieve it. And, once the structures around us are sufficiently humanised to be able to move away from this practice, we should do so immediately. We suggest this is not enough however, and that while organisations seeking change could continue to use these tactics, they should also make their use transparent, as well as help the public to defend themselves against such techniques from any source. This approach may be a compromise, but it is nevertheless enabling the organisation to play a useful contribution as a structure in its own right to humanising the world.

As an example of how this could be implemented in practice, a fundraising appeal using techniques from behavioural science to encourage people to donate could include an additional insert noting that the pack (and many other forms of communication) uses these techniques, and briefly explaining each of them, as well as how people can avoid being influenced by them. It could also explain how the charity is seeking to humanise the

world, and that making information more useful for people rather than manipulating them is part of this mission.

## Individuals

One way in which you directly have the power to humanise the world is through your behaviour as an individual. Below is a limited selection of examples of how we can each behave in ways that increase the flourishing of others:

- **As parents** - as parents we have a crucial role of setting the structures that surround our children and helping them develop into well-informed, compassionate adults. Our decisions and behaviour during this time, and particularly in the first 7 years of a child's life, from the point of conception onwards, have a significant impact on their flourishing throughout life and those of any other people they affect as they go through it. For example, we can empower our children with the understanding of how human beings think and behave and how to manage their minds in effective ways.
- **As friends, family and strangers** - how we communicate with others in day-to-day life has a direct effect on them - from those we know and love, through to those we will never meet again. If we decide to conduct ourselves in line with the 10 recommendations to humanise the world mentioned earlier, this could improve the lives of thousands of people over our lifetimes, including ourselves. For example, resolving to protect nature for its own sake and to avoid exploiting the biases of other people.
- **As work colleagues** - we can choose how we interact with our co-workers. This includes whether we choose to cooperate and collaborate with them or whether we choose to compete. It also includes whether we go to the extra effort of passing on information in a way that is useful to our colleagues, rather than framing or presenting it in a way that manipulates or misleads others and benefits us.

- **As communicators** - with the growth of social media, we each have a level of power as broadcasters that would have been unthinkable only 30 years ago, and only available to a select few journalists, authors, television presenters and others. We can therefore take greater responsibility for how and what we communicate - for example, what we choose to post, like or share on social media, and which networks we choose to join. We also have influence through our voting decisions and our willingness, or otherwise, to get involved in political issues. We can take steps to ensure that our choices help to build rather than prevent human flourishing within the one world we have.

#### **How we can help**

ChangeStar can support you in reviewing and improving your influence as a structure, either as an individual (through our [coaching](#) services) or as an organisation (through our [consultancy](#) services). To discuss how we could help you, contact Richard on 01273 964018 or [richard@changestar.co.uk](mailto:richard@changestar.co.uk).

#### **4. Build and protect your own capacity for flourishing**

The preceding three points in this section have focussed on how you and your organisation can take proactive steps to make the world better using behavioural insights. Evidence from human insight also suggests that we need to build our own capacities, both as organisations and as individuals, to flourish in a world that is sometimes hostile to human flourishing. We also need to ensure that the structures we choose to surround ourselves with are those that will help us to flourish, rather than erode our strength and clarity of thought.

##### **Flourishing as an individual**

What does it mean to flourish as an individual? We need basic resources like nutritious food, drink, warmth and shelter in order to survive. We also need education to equip us to lead independent, safe lives, and the freedom to be able

to live the lives we want, as long as they don't hurt others. But our new-found understanding of human beings suggests that we need more than this, as we aren't the robust, rational individualists that we might have thought we were. Instead, we are creatures with cognitive biases and blind spots, and who are massively affected by the other people, situations and context around us.

We therefore also need an environment that is psychologically healthy for us - one that supports us to be as rational and self-determined as possible, rather than exploiting our psychological vulnerabilities, and leaving us in danger of being controlled and oppressed. It also needs to support us to dial up our capacities for being cooperative members of groups and to dial down our tribal tendencies in a world in which they are often no longer useful.

Although many aspects of the modern world don't provide these things for us, we can deliberately choose to surround ourselves with structures that are psychologically healthy, and avoid those that are not. For example, we can find social groups that promote cooperation, connection and a sense of belonging without activating negative tribal feelings, such as sports clubs and community groups. We can avoid information sources that manipulate us such as advertising and social media, and choose those that don't and that inform us with multiple viewpoints, including libraries. We can build our own capacities to think critically, source information better and understand our thinking and behaviour so that we live better informed lives.

### **Flourishing as an organisation**

What does it mean to flourish as an organisation? This is perhaps a question we are less used to considering but it is equally valid and has parallels with our situation as individuals.

Organisations need basic resources such as financial sustainability and capable teams, but as they consist of human beings, they also need to operate within healthy psychological environments. Like individuals, this includes building their capacity (and therefore that of the individuals within them) to think critically about the world around them, understand human and organisational behaviour

and operate in well-informed ways that minimise their vulnerabilities to bias. Organisations also need to have access to reliable information, and limit their engagement with sources of malign influence or misinformation. They also need to ensure they are connected into strong and cooperative alliances within a broader network, and avoid rushing to costly conflicts based on negative ‘them and us’ judgements. These are just a small selection of factors to promote organisational flourishing, but to what extent could you say your organisation has even these?

#### **How we can help**

ChangeStar can help you to review your own capacity for flourishing, whether as an individual (through our [coaching](#) services) or as an organisation (through our [consultancy](#) services). To discuss how we could help you, contact Richard on 01273 964018 or [richard@changestar.co.uk](mailto:richard@changestar.co.uk).

## Conclusions

For many years, politicians, policy makers, charities and campaigners have been trying to respond to the major challenges that human beings face and the question of how to build a better, more sustainable world in which human beings flourish. We have largely failed to address these challenges, and we end up blaming each other for this - saying people are lazy, evil, stupid or faulty. In fact, we're just the creatures we are, with particular traits of thinking and behaviour.

This report argues that our best hope of building a better world is to build our society, institutions and organisational practices around the creatures we really are – not the fantasy creatures that we would like to be.

This report provides a quick, accessible summary of how the latest insights about human thinking and behaviour can transform our vision of what a better future looks like, and make us much more effective at gaining the change we want to see in the world. It has been written for anyone involved in seeking a better world, including policy makers, progressive leaders, charities, campaigners and fundraisers.

We hope it gives you a hopeful, exciting sense of the transformational potential of human insight - whatever your role or position in the sector. **If you have found this report useful, please feel free to share it with your colleagues and networks - both online and in person.**

## Taking action

This report shows that an enormous number of potential changes can be made to humanise our societies, policies and organisations, across a variety of levels. The potential scale of this transformation may seem daunting, but ChangeStar can help you begin this journey.

### How we can help

ChangeStar can provide insight-led consultancy to support you in the process of humanising your work and your organisation, regardless of its focus or role in the search for change. We can help you to review your vision, evaluate the areas in which you need to make changes, and decide which changes to make, as well as how to implement them most effectively.

We can also help you implement changes through our consultancy, creative services, training and coaching services. To discuss how we could help you, contact Richard, our director, on 01273 964018 or [richard@changestar.co.uk](mailto:richard@changestar.co.uk). We'd be pleased to arrange an initial meeting with you free of charge, to discuss where you're at.

Finally, you'll find a great collection of resources giving advice on all areas of seeking change – from organisational development to how to write successful fundraising appeals – on our website at [www.changestar.co.uk](http://www.changestar.co.uk). In the meantime, [sign up to our occasional newsletter](#) to receive news of our other free resources, including our regular free online workshops.