BUYING CARBON OFFSETS

Designing Behavior Change

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THE OPPORTUNITY
We see opportunity to shift the norm for emissions.

Purchasing carbon offsets is one of the most immediate, affordable, and high-impact actions an individual can take to address climate change. For less than $20 a month, an individual can remove the equivalent of an average American's carbon footprint. And there are now high quality standards of accountability and third-party oversight to ensure the excellence of carbon offsets.

Despite the affordability, immediacy, and effectiveness of carbon offset projects, most individual consumers remain unfamiliar with carbon offsets and how to purchase them. In some instances, there are misconceptions and negative biases associated with corporations buying carbon offsets.

How can we overcome these obstacles so individuals see high-quality carbon offsets as one of the immediate actions they can take to help reduce and reverse the effects of climate change?

> "Today's carbon offsets are designed more for corporations than for individuals. Seeing carbon offsets as a journey of adoption reveals a new set of principles based on saliency, normative beliefs, trust, and tangibility."

– John Whalen
Catch Carbon Co-Lead, Rare's US Climate Change program

# Changing this behavior requires shifting beliefs.

Changing behavior is rarely easy. However, behavior science provides insights on what levers best drive behavior change. What a person believes about a behavior is critical. And an important lever for changing that belief is the social influence from key relationships.

A particular personal internal belief and the related external social influence is what we call a psycho-social state. For any behavior, if select psycho-social states are shifted, the likelihood of behavior change increases.

For example, that is to say, if others in your reference network—people whose beliefs and opinions you care about—believe a behavior is important or good, you begin to believe it too, and you're then much more likely to engage in that behavior.

Psycho-social states are the beliefs to change.

To drive behavior change, Rare brings together essential disciplines. First, behavioral science uncovers the key psycho-social states required for the change. Second, service design works with behavior science, marketing, and additional experts to develop interventions capable of shifting the psycho-social states and driving the behavior change.
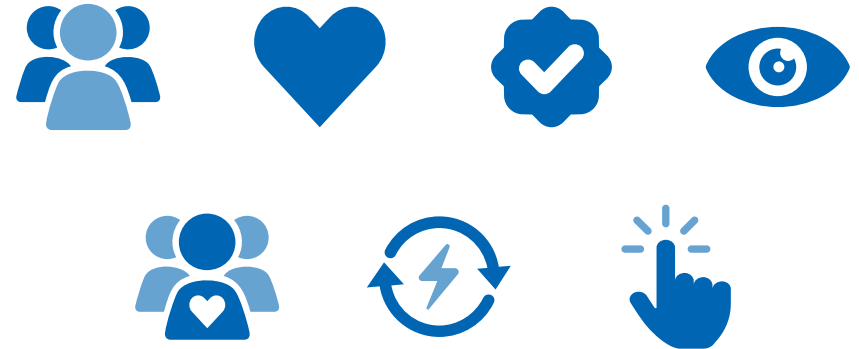
THE APPROACH

Identify, prototype, and test the way to shift psycho-social states.

The first step to identifying the psycho-social states is to analyze existing research, looking for factors that evidence suggests will drive behavior change.

These factors are formatted in the following form: "If _____, then I will be more likely to buy carbon offsets." These statements are affinitized and analyzed by behavioral scientists to yield the psycho-social states contributing to behavior change.

Carbon Offset Psycho-social States

These are the psycho-social states to shift.

Empirical Expectations:
I believe that those in my reference network are contributing.

Normative Expectations:
I believe that those in my reference network think I should contribute because it is the right thing to do.

Personal Normative Beliefs:
I believe that people should contribute because it is the right thing to do.

Saliency:
Contributing is a relevant part of my decision context.

Trust:
I believe that projects have the impact they represent to have.

Tangibility:
I feel as though I can experience the impact of my actions.

Observability:
I believe that others will find out if I contribute.

Ideating and prototyping interventions

The psycho-social states are reframed as opportunities for interventions. For example, "How might we affect the belief that those in my reference network are buying carbon offsets?"

Guided by these opportunity framings, multidisciplinary teams do rapid sketching to generate intervention concepts for each psycho-social state. The initial concepts can be shared, examined through the lenses of multiple fields of expertise, and improved through interdisciplinary collaboration.

The strongest concepts that will yield the most learning are developed into prototypes to be tested with research participants. The participants are invited to respond to the ideas, and give their thoughts, feelings and ideas for improvement.

Conducting field research

For our research sessions sixteen people were recruited to participate in a ninety minute research session. They represented a range of ethnic backgrounds, income levels and regions of the United States.

Each session included an interview and an exercise to help the team understand the research participant's beliefs and attitudes related to finances and climate change,, both independently and in how they may intersect. Then the participant was shown the intervention concept prototypes and asked a series of questions: How likely would they be to engage with the concept, and why? What would make them more or less likely to engage? How would engaging with the concept affect other people's opinions of them? What would they think of other people who engaged? For the most compelling concept, participants were to talk about the location and timing of the concept, to learn more about contexts where the intervention might be most effective.

What We Learned

The research turned up valuable insights.

An important insight concerned the framing of the journey itself. While all participants believed human-caused climate change was happening, a significant number of people—and in our small sample more of those who lean right politically—were not convinced carbon reduction was the most effective response, compared with, for example, finding effective technologies for coping with the changes. But when the emphasis was placed on planting trees or protecting forests, alignment appeared to be more possible across a wider range of the political spectrum.

For this reason, the journey was given a mid-project renaming: the Nature Projects Journey.

Other important insights included the importance of providing interventions that could not be construed as being greenwashing, virtue signalling or token actions more useful for easing a person's conscience or building their public image than making a substantial positive impact. The interventions needed to demonstrate real commitment and have real, tangible benefits.

"I mean, purchasing carbon offsets—I just don't know enough about that. I'm always a little wary that stuff really works, or where that money goes, or if it's just a scheme to make you feel good."

– Jack

"I kind of feel like I'm the roommate of the Earth, and so I've got to be a good roommate and do my part... I don't really have a bleak or dark vision of the future, I really do think that people can persevere. But I do want to do my part."

– Zoe

Attention Moment

▼

Activation Moment

▼

Adoption Moment

▼

Affirmation Moment

The Behavior Change Moments

The process of behavior change can be viewed as a journey, divided up into different moments. The person going through the journey, known as an actor, may experience only some of these moments.

Each moment of the journey represents a design challenge: giving the actor a reason to engage while also positively affecting their psycho-social state.

It's possible to engage the actor in the journey if they are willing to invest a certain amount of time, effort, money or social capital to get something of value in return: information, progress toward some goal, emotional gratification, a feeling of connection, etc. A successful intervention must meet these functional and emotional needs, while also shifting their psycho-social states.

Of course, these moments are only a small part of the actor's life, and they only influence behavior, not determine it. But the goal is to address the needs of the moment as effectively as possible in order to effect maximum change.

The challenge of each moment is summarized to help shape the design of interventions that support the goals of the moment.

Attention Moment

In the Attention moment, our actor notices a nature project and perceives it as relevant. Our actor spends some time and energy learning about the cause and begins to believe that this project is worth looking into.

In this moment it is important to offer the opportunity to be involved in the project in a context where it is relevant and convenient.

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Activation Moment

In the Activation moment, our actor takes first, tentative steps toward involvement in the cause in order to learn more, and after learning what the project is and what its impact will be, and seeing that it is legitimate and not just greenwashing theater, is convinced that this project is worth investing real resources (time, money, effort, social capital).

In this moment it is important to emphasize the social aspect of involvement in the project.

Adoption Moment

In the Adoption moment, our actor becomes fully involved in the project, and eventually becomes sufficiently committed to the project to feel ready to signal their involvement in the project.

In this moment it is important to reinforce the actor's involvement in the project and to deepen their feelings that it is a worthwhile cause.

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Affirmation Moment

In the Affirmation moment, our actor signals involvement in the nature project to their reference network, who notice the involvement and begin to see involvement in nature projects as admirable and normal.

In this moment it is important to intensify the actor's passion toward and confidence in the project so they are eager to spread the word.

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Developing Interventions and Journeys

Guided by the insights from the research, the behavior change interventions are revisited. Intervention concepts that test well are retained or used to inspire improved versions. Often, the research inspires new intervention concepts that address considerations learned in interviews.

The new set of interventions is sequenced across the four behavior change moments, and then connected together and developed into a continuous designed experience, expressed as a story from the future.

Of course, when the interventions are developed, released and experienced by real people, each experience will be different. They might experience only some of the interventions, and they might experience them in a slightly different order. The story from the future is intended to illustrate an ideal typical experience where an actor interacts with all the interventions, to make it easier to understand how the interacting with the interventions across the moments comes together as a single experience.

"Carbon Offsets offer an immediate action an individual can take. This journey ultimately opens up a set of behaviors they can consider and take action on as well. This is not about taking one action. It's not about whether one starts with carbon offsetting as their first action. It's about considering multiple actions that in concert can help them be a contributor to reversing climate change."

– **John Whalen**
   Catch Carbon Co-Lead, Rare's US Climate Change program

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE
A journey of committing and contributing to nature projects.

To bring about behavior change, it ultimately has to work in the context of people's lives. Therefore, it's useful to imagine what these moments and psycho-social shifts look like from the perspective of an actor.

On the following pages is "a story from the future" which illustrates the behavior change journey we have envisioned. In this story we will follow our protagonist, Emma, as she moves through each of behavior change moments, at each step becoming more committed to contributing to nature projects and spreading the word about the projects she supports

Individual Journey

Attention Moment
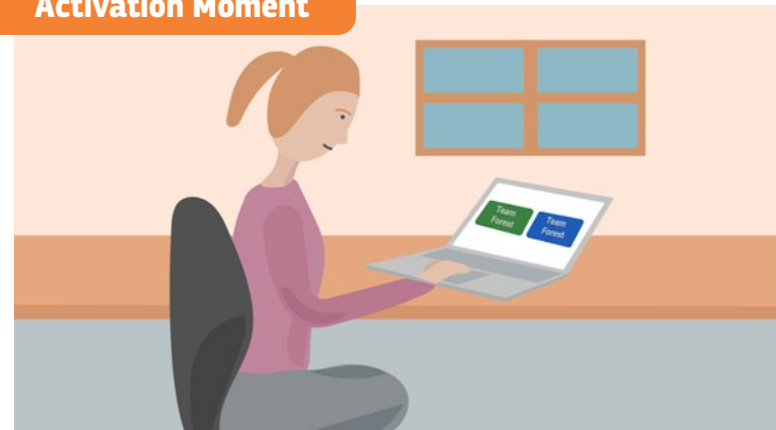
Emma signs up for a running event and pays extra for a nature donation at checkout.

Psycho-social state: Saliency

Activation Moment

Emma selects her donation type, as opposed to the default amount. She directs her donation to a forest fund—and now she is a part of Team Forest. She selects an option to allow Rare to contact her to ask about her reason for supporting Team Forest.
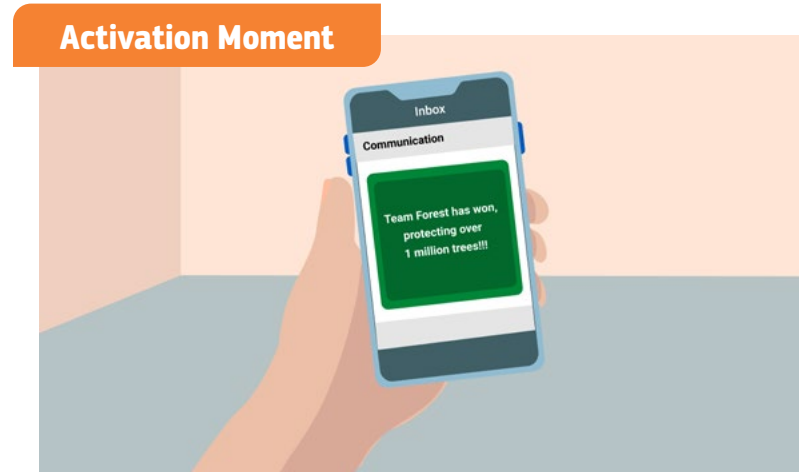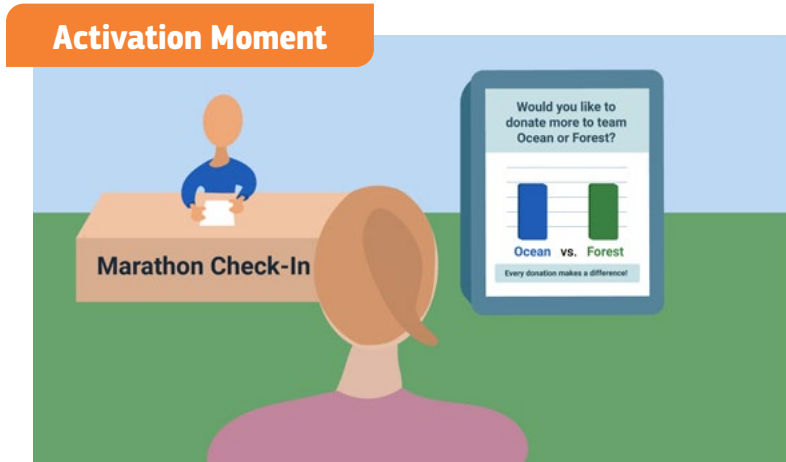
Psycho-social states: Empirical Expectations, Observability

Individual Journey

At the event the sponsor sets up a call-to-action competition to make a donation on the spot over mobile.

Psycho-social states: Empirical Expectations, Observability

Activation Moment

Emma gets texts/emails updating her on how her team is doing. Emma adds to her donation so her team will win. After stiff competition from the other teams, Emma's team wins.
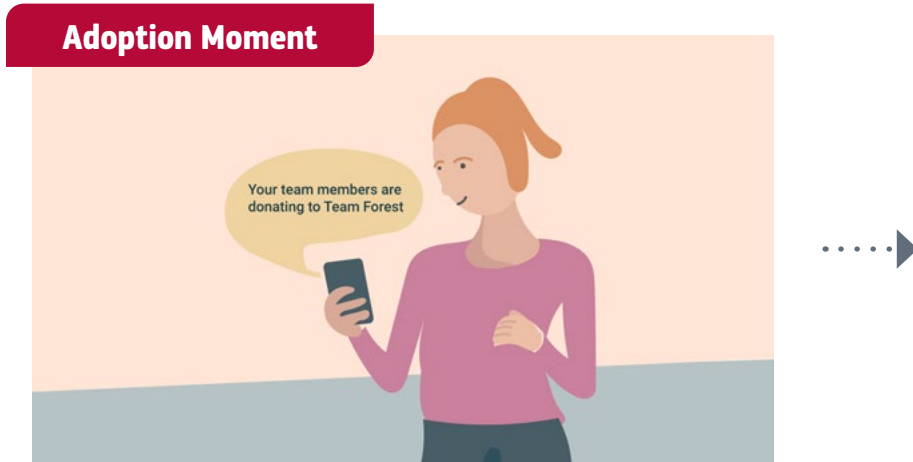
Psycho-social states: Empirical Expectations, Observability

Individual Journey

Adoption Moment

Emma continues to get updates from her Forest Project. She sees some of her team members have subscribed to continue giving to the Forest Project. Emma subscribes to her Forest Project.

Psycho-social states: Empirical Expectations, Normative Expectations, Personal Normative Beliefs, Saliency, Trust, Tangibility, Observability

Affirmation Moment
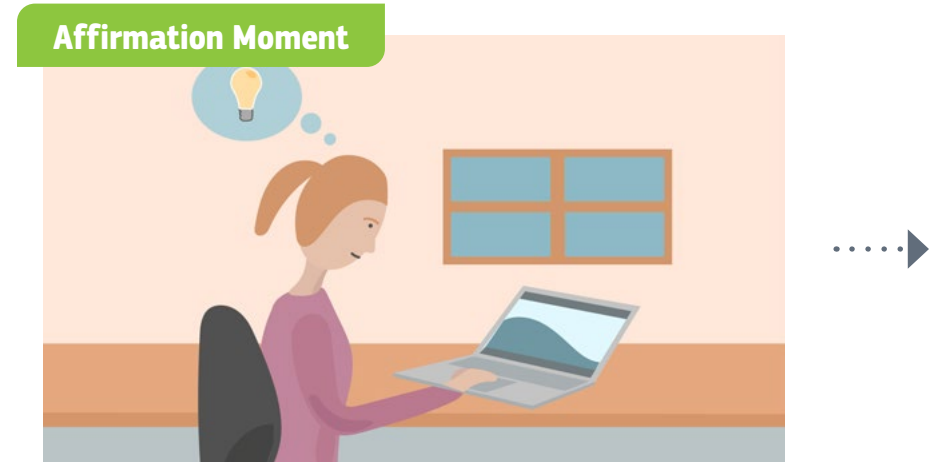
The publicity attracts new campaign-sponsoring organizations.

Psycho-social states: Personal Normative Beliefs, Trust, Tangibility

Individual Journey

Emma shares her story and reason for donating to Team Forest.

Psycho-social states: Personal Normative Beliefs, Trust, Tangibility

Blueprinting the Journey

A key part of the process of developing the sequenced interventions into a story from the future is blueprinting the experience delivery. This method is adapted from one of the core tools of service design, service blueprinting.

In the experience delivery blueprint, the question is asked: how, concretely, will this experience be actualized, both frontstage, where things are experienced directly by the main actor (whose behavior we wish to change), and backstage where the experience is supported behind the scenes.

The frontstage of the experience includes touchpoints encountered by and interacted with the main actor, as well as other people who interact with the actor and help shape the experience.

The backstage includes all the actions, processes, policies, technologies, etc. that support the experience behind the scenes.

Creating an experience delivery blueprint places the story under a microscope and allows the team to think carefully about the practicalities of the experience. How likely is it to work as intended? And what organizational capabilities are required to make the experience happen as envisioned.

What's Next?

The behavior change journey is now in its first iteration. The capabilities identified in the experience delivery blueprints are being mapped to existing solutions, developed to bring about change. And so most importantly, Rare is interested in connecting with people and organizations who see themselves as part of the solution to bring about behavior change.

Rare's role in this space is to both share the behavioral solutions in this book and to offer end-to-end fulfillment of carbon offset purchases by consumers—a service we call Catch Carbon. Catch Carbon offers a curated inventory of high-quality compelling carbon credit projects that can be illustrated through photos and stories and narrative to educate the individual consumer and drive them to consider taking immediate action. Catch Carbon supports Rare's campaigns to reach individual consumers as well as works with external partners to present carbon credit projects in their third-party applications.

Drop us a note at
mip@rare.org
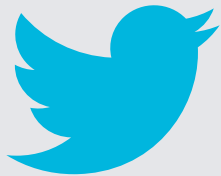
Follow and message
us on social media at
@rare_org

LET'S CONNECT
These are just some of the reasons to connect with us.

- You have a service or product that could offer consumer-grade carbon offsets, and you'd like to know more about Catch Carbon

- You see your capabilities and solutions as a part of the journey

- You're already working in this space and want to bring behavior change design to your work

- You have some questions or feedback on this book

- You want to get involved or just follow along

Thanks

Rare inspires change so people and nature thrive.

Rare is an international non-profit organization specializing in social change for people and the planet. With a people-centered approach rooted in behavioral science and design thinking, Rare has inspired and empowered millions of people in over 60 countries around the world to shift their behaviors and practices so both people and nature thrive. Now, Rare seeks to inspire people to take actions that have the greatest potential for measurably moving the meter on climate change right now.

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