

22 July 2013

Private Behaviour Change While Saving Public Money: Win-Win Behaviour Support Systems

As a government manager are you ready to step forward into a new class of solutions that may really make a difference in stakeholder's lives? Solutions that could make your agency a star with Ministers, Mayors, Treasury, taxpayers or ratepayers? Create leadership applications that tap the full potential of the Internet and model Government 3.0? Read on...

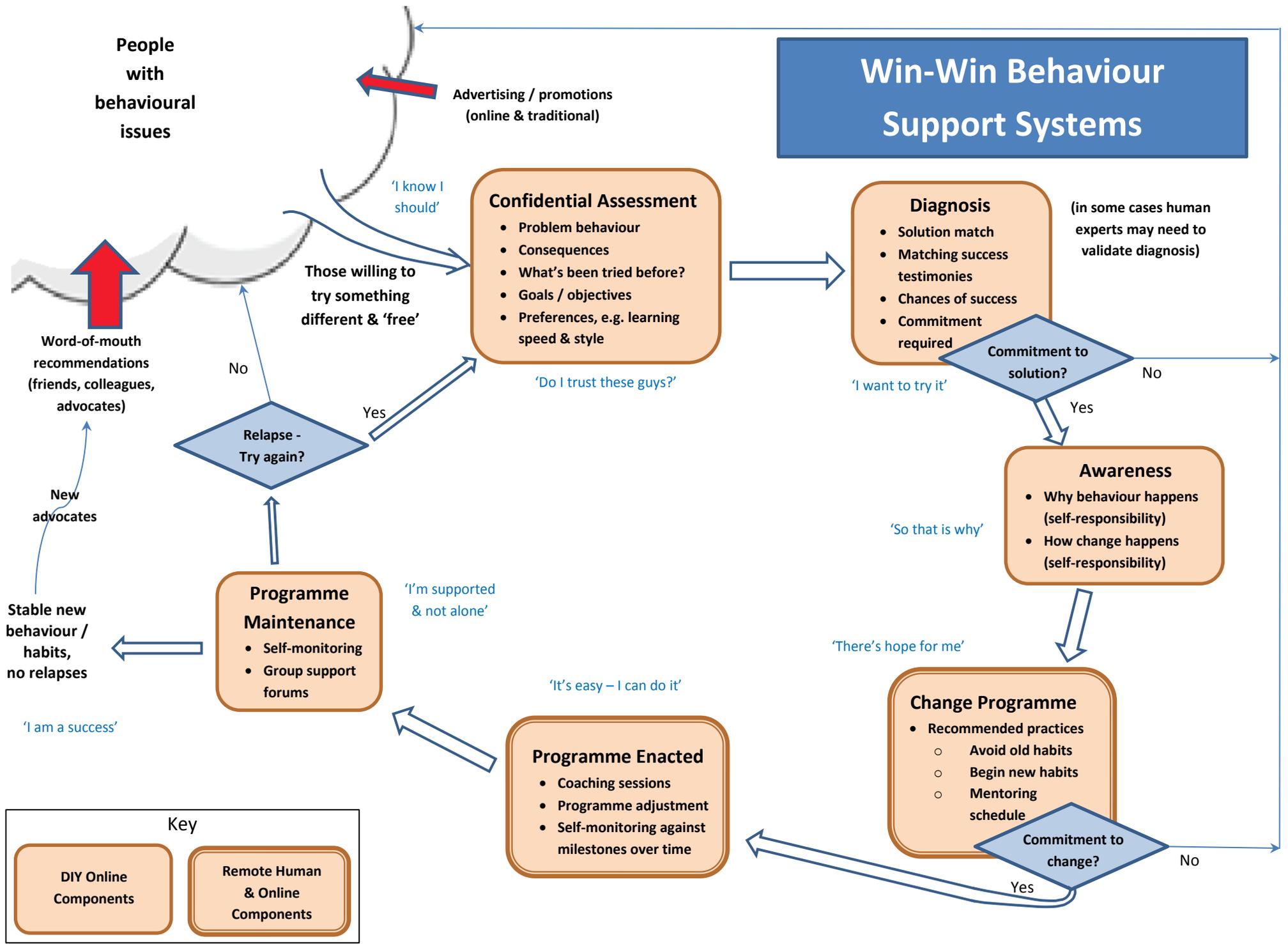
Some behaviours of members of the public trigger government interventions (and costs). For example poor eating, drug abuse, child neglect, dodgy building, pollution, crime, among others. Government has a large stake in these behaviours that have public consequences. Now it is possible to create a new type of carrot to complement any compliance sticks that are in place. New models of smart, low-cost online systems finally allow government organisations to create environments that support people in changing their behaviours if they choose to.

This paper describes a concept that may be named Win-Win Behaviour Support Systems (WWBSS). The idea is for clusters of online interrelated resources, information, tools, discussions, etc. that help people (governments' stakeholders) make groups of choices and decisions (behaviours) that benefit themselves and society. Under this model the emphasis in solution design is on people exploring problems, increasing self-awareness, lifting confidence that change is possible, taking responsibility for making changes themselves and even co-creating their own solutions.

No other medium than online can do this cost-effectively, especially linear media like print, audio or video. The closest could be sessions with a really good coach, advisor or client support person who tailor advice to individual circumstances and problems and encourage people to find their own solutions. However these sessions can be very expensive, don't scale well and have limited availability.

Built once and used many times, WWBSSs will tailor advice and resources. They will incorporate models for behaviour change with the main 'value add' being automating anything that can be made DIY and leveraging the involvement of human coaches through virtual communications, such as video conferencing, phone conversation, email and messaging. A sophisticated yet cost-effective blend of DIY systems and human advice is envisaged.

A generic process that illustrates the behaviour change process and its typical automatable and human components is as follows;



This is not about making people do anything they do not want to do in the sense of manipulation or propaganda but providing the opportunity to adopt behaviours that they find challenging or that they are divided in themselves in following through with. As largely do-it-yourself systems WWBSSs will be voluntary and require some self-motivation. Government, in effect, coming halfway by providing an environment designed to support change, may make all the difference.

Where someone is willing to change but is finding it difficult is the low-hanging fruit. Government can then apply its existing resources and add any other relevant content that can be matched to individual circumstances. Wherever individual circumstances are not unique is where shared best practices or co-created solutions could arise. Social media or collaborative features would allow for both an 'ask an expert' kind of facility as well as peer-to-peer 'what have you tried?' or 'how did it go doing x?' type support. With good moderation the useful new content arising in discussion can be cooperatively added into a growing pool of knowledge for all and not lost.

WWBSSs sit at a level between decision support systems for one-off decisions and study or training programmes for broad knowledge and perhaps a worldview. They address challenging and related groups of decisions that require broader context to address effectively while still be achievable. As highly scalable solutions they address a whole class of possible interventions that are nice to have but are too costly to deliver as face-to-face or phone solutions to date.

So what behaviours would best suit addressing with these systems? The conditions for strong business cases are;

1. where potentially adverse behaviours have the greatest impact, and
2. where there are reasonable prospects of change, and
3. where there are net benefits from the numbers of people likely to take up a change offer

Some examples of behaviours that may meet these criteria costs are;

- drink driving (or smoking or drug abuse generally)
- child neglect
- poor management of children with moderate special needs in mainstream classes and at home
- uncertainty when a family member is arrested or accused of a crime
- high risk diets / lifestyles, especially leading to obesity, diabetes, degenerative disease
- building or renovating a house sustainably and in compliance
- disease spreading after an outbreak close to other farms
- poor career and education selection
- non-preparedness for disasters
- non-sustainable work beside waterways
- poor selection for diversity and community representativeness on governance boards while keeping standards for governance skills high

While many of the components to WWBSS systems already exist in public websites, the hard part is create a structure to step the user through complex and interrelated decisions and feedback points over time while keeping the experience relevant and easy to use. As sensitive information is

requested as part of the process, privacy and other assurances of safety will also be required to sustain trust.

The scalability of online systems at minimal cost means affordability for proactive or preventative measures that often may not have survived budget prioritisation. Even the human interaction aspects of WWBSSs may be first served by crowd-sourcing from others in a similar situation and, if needed, then by expensive government staffers.

WWBSSs represent a critical opportunity for sophisticated government organisations to get into the transformation business, truly making a difference in people's lives that also has flow-on effects of helping society. It is like applying the experience and transformation facilitation of [The Experience Economy](#) to government with an online (and more for less) twist. The nearly clichéd term "engagement" has a home in WWBSSs where there are deep and meaningful purposes for both individuals and government in protracted multi-visit interactions with the purpose for wins for both sides.

The benefits of WWBSSs should include;

- cost-effective interventions to reduce long-term costs to government
- people make choices and take actions they want to take
- much greater likelihood of success than with existing programmes (if they exist)
- people are empowered by taking responsibility and being treated like adults
- potential solutions or options are broader coming from many sources not just the one official version

Comparisons of attributes across WWBSS and existing channels for supporting behaviour change could look like;

Medium / Channel	WWBSSs	Field Advisors	Chat Lines	Booklets / Brochures	Videos
Tailoring of Advice	High	High	Med to High	Low	Low
Extent of Solutions Pool	Broad (Government, private & community)	Government only typically	Government & community	Government only typically	Government only typically
Effectiveness	High	High	Medium	Low	Low to Med
Cost per behaviour change process	Low to Med	High	Medium	Low to Medium	Medium to High
Availability	Continuous - 24 x 365	Typically low	Up to 24 hrs. but often limited	Continuous (especially if online)	Continuous (especially if online)
Ease of Use	High	High unless personality clash	Medium	Low to Medium	Low to Medium
Scalability	Easy, low cost	Hard, high cost	Medium, medium cost	Easy, high cost	Easy, high cost

The risks here are relatively few but may include;

- selection of target behaviours for which there is insufficient willingness to try to change
- poor business case development
- poor system design, especially weak matching to individual circumstances
- use of personal information for other purposes than behaviour change support
- criticism of 'nanny state' intervention or undue interference countered by the voluntary factor, win-win criteria and the personal responsibility it requires

For politicians of all flavours there is much to like in WWBSSs. There are wins for the Right in encouraging self-responsibility and reducing unnecessary costs to government and to the Left in reducing social costs and government providing proactive support to people. As a digital solution WWBSSs are also Greener than any alternative solutions and probably the status quo.

WWBSSs may well be multi-level solutions including across local, regional or national levels. They may include companies or community organizations, whenever relevant. No unnecessary boundaries need be set.

Like making a great movie, producing good WWBSSs will be very challenging. Firstly, gaining the buy-in to approve resources and involvement of all players with relevant resources to offer or bearing the costs of target behaviours. Then, designing the system so to be slavishly devoted to be usable and valuable while also achieving organisation objectives. Following the needs of the stakeholder user is primary.

Independent facilitation is probably preferred in most situations unless a very experienced online architect is on staff who can cleanly design for users unbiased by organisational preferences. Multiple and iterative rounds of prototyping, development and testing will be pretty much essential. Field or mobile access may be important then requiring responsive design for the smaller screens.

Some early examples of government and commercial WWBSSs that are partial realisations of the broader concept are;

Example WWBSS-like application	Purpose	Functions	Blend of DIY online and human advisor
My Energy Coach (Genesis Energy)	To encourage power-saving	Goal setting, room-by-room enquiry and recommendations, how important? drives the speed of 'coaching'	All DIY, no human
My Sorted (Retirement Commissioner)	To save for retirement	Goal-setting, budgeting planner, mortgage repayments, debt / savings calculators, money personality, etc	All DIY, no human
My Healthy Cooking Coach (My Coach Games Nintendo)	To encourage healthy eating	Habits & preferences enquiry, shopping list recommendations, cooking instructions, matching recipes to available ingredients	All DIY, no human

My Personal Job Coach	To get a job	Personality typing, strengths and blind-spots, career satisfiers, key interests, skills, target jobs, interview tips	All DIY, no human
My Benefit Advisor	To guide employees through planning employee benefits	Costs per pay period, supporting documents, side-by-side comparison tool, submission of choices	All DIY, no human?
My Automated Conversation coach (MACH) (MIT)	To practice social interactions in face-to-face scenarios	A 3D character that can see, hear and make decisions in real-time, working on extension to treating Aspergers, social phobias	All DIY, no human

Examples of full expressions of this idea are not available yet, but a theoretical example in Appendix 1 tries to show a broader range of possibilities. Some live full examples will have to wait but will be needed to convince those who are not able to envisage the conceptual description offered here. So early adopters are encouraged to try some out and lead the way.

See Also:

WWBSSs fit very directly with many-to-one government as described in a previous paper: [More for Less Government is Many to One](#).

To discuss this possibility further, please contact

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Appendix 1

WWBSS Topic: Classroom & Home Management of Kids with Moderate Behaviour Difficulties

WWBSS Audience (s): school teachers, parents, community organisations involved with special education, doctors

Current Adverse Behaviour & Consequences: kids in large mainstream classes with unguided teachers fall between the cracks, are unsupported, act "naughty", and disrupt everyone's learning. Moderate problems do not qualify for specialised programmes. Parents don't know what to do to help their kids and feel like failures. Kids fall further and further behind and leave school unready for adult life, with the majority ending in court.

Behaviours Sought & Benefits: guided classroom management matched to the individual child's needs & condition(s) supported by congruent practices for parents of the same child. Kids feel relieved at being able to learn. Teachers and classmates get less disruption. Parents are confident they are supporting their kids. Kids continue learning & become productive adults.

ASK

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Profile for: **Liam**

Behaviours: ADHD (moderate), Autism (mild)

Completed

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- [About his Behaviour](#)
- [Liam's Perspective](#)
- [Curriculum Issues](#)
- [Learning Environment](#)
- [What's Been Tried](#)
- [Liam's Family](#)
- [Medical Issues](#)
- [Diet](#)
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- [Recommended Strategies](#)
- [Feedback on Strategies](#)

61% overall

Currently shared with:

Family: [Janice Stockton](#) (mother)

GP: [Dr Andrew Brown](#)

MinEd RTLB: [Karen Brooks](#)

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Forums for Similar Kids

[ADHD Kids Years 5 - 11](#)

[Kids with Autism](#)

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