

Value action gap  
outcomes  
management essay



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The value-action gap is a term used to describe the gap that can occur when the values or attitudes of an individual do not correlate to their actions. More generally, it is the difference between what people say and what people do. This discrepancy is most associated within environmental geography, as usually attitudes affect behavior; however the opposite often seems to be the case with regard to environmental attitudes and behaviors.

The outcome is that there is a gap between the high value people place on the natural environment and the relatively low level of action taken by individuals to counter environmental problems. (The outcome is that there is a disparity between the value placed on the natural environment and the level of action taken by individuals to counter environmental problems. ) This disparity has been termed the 'value-action gap', or occasionally, it is referred to as the 'attitude-behavior gap' (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002).

Therefore, it is not a change in attitudes that is required, but a fundamental shift in behavior towards the environment and individuals' use of natural resources, to ensure sustainable development and conservation of the environment.

Debates surrounding the issue of the value-action gap have mainly taken place within environmental and social psychology. Research is often based within cognitive theories of how attitudes are formed and how this affects individuals' behavior (Blake 1999). The research suggests that there are many internal and external factors that affect behavior and the reasons behind consumer choices. Therefore, it can be difficult to identify the exact reasons for why this gap exists, as it can be due to a number of reasons.

When purchasing a product for example, many attributes are assessed when making decisions. Dickson (2000) suggests that the most significant factors affecting the reasons behind buying behavior are; price, quality, convenience, and brand familiarity. Young et al (2010) argue point out that the gap can also be due to “ brand strength; culture, finance; habit; lack of information; lifestyles; personalities; or, trading off between different ethical factors” (p22). Therefore, environmental or ethical considerations are often not taken into account, regardless of attitudes people have regarding the environment. Time or convenience is usually a major determinant of consumer behaviour, and therefore a gap between values and behavior is understandable.

Moreover, Chatzidakis et al (2007) argue that consumers use neutralisation techniques to justify pursuing their more selfish goals instead of purchasing environmental friendly or ethical products. Therefore, environmental values are usually less dominant in the decision-making.

Development of the idea:

Summary:

The usual theories of reasoned action argue that values and actions are related. The theory of reasoned action states that behavioral intention is dependent on attitudes surrounding that behavior and social norms (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). This means that a person acts or behaves in a way that correlates to their attitudes towards that behavior. Therefore, a person's voluntary behavior can be predicted by his/her attitudes and values on that behavior (Kaiser et al 1999). Homer and Kahle (1988) argue that attitudes

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influence behaviors and therefore values can explain the reasons behind human behavior. However, the opposite appears to be the case for certain actions, especially those related to environmental or ethical actions.

In recent decades, public support for environmental protection measures has grown and, according to Barr (2004), there has also been a growing interest in ethical consumption. This has been fuelled by pressure groups, consumer groups, and even businesses (Young et al 2010). Furthermore, increased media coverage of environmental disasters and social problems has also resulted in a heightened concern of such issues. This was given a political boost by the publication of the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (Stern 2006). Therefore, people are more aware of environmental issues, such as global warming or climate change. It is often reported that many people have a high concern for environmental issues and ethical consumption, for example, Dunlap (2002) states that 54% of Americans agreed environmental protection was a key priority, even if economic growth was restricted. Furthermore, Banerjee and Solomon (2003) also argue that the general support for Ecolabels and ethical foods is high among the public.

With these studies in mind, it is expected that there would be an increase in pro-environmental behavior, such as recycling, or limiting energy usage (Flynn et al 2010). However, these positive attitudes have not translated into a large increase these behaviours and ethical consumption is still relatively low (Aguilar et al 2009). Thus, attitudes are not always a clear prediction of behavior, resulting in the 'value-action gap'. For example, the market share for ethical goods is low as according to Young et al (2010) the market share of ethical foods is only 5% of total food sales in the UK. Furthermore,

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as Dickson (2000) points out, ethical labelling initiatives such as legally logged wood, and fair-trade products, often have market shares of less than 1%. Thus, consumers' buying behaviour does not reflect their positive attitudes toward ethical products (De Pelsmacker et al 2006). This means that other factors are more significant than values relating to the environment.

Factors that affect behavior:

There are many factors that lead to an individual's behavior, and therefore it is not just personal values that affect behavior. There are many different theories regarding how consumers make decisions. These can be applied to try and explain why there is a value-action gap for some behaviors.

For example, microeconomic theory (consumer, household theory) states that, " humans make decisions that maximize their utility" (Sammer and Wüstenhagen 2006: 188). Therefore, if buying ethical or environmental products does not maximize their utility then they will not purchase them, regardless of their attitudes towards these issues. Making these decisions requires a comparison of the costs and benefits of alternative actions, rather than about certain values, within their budgetary constraint. This means other factors, such as price or quality, are still more important.

Vermeir and Verbeke (2006) suggest that the three main determinants of behavioral intention with relevance to sustainable consumption are; values, needs, and motivations; information and knowledge; and behavioral control. They argue that consumers are passive when it comes to supporting environmental improvements within their budget.

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Behavior is often based on habit and therefore values concerning the environment are often not taken into consideration. Therefore, this can account for the low market share of sustainable products (Minteer et al 2004). These theories can explain the gap that appears between attitudes and actions.

Application (Further explanation and examples):

Even though many support ethical trade in principle, this is often not taken into consideration as a purchase criterion. Cohen and Murphy (2001) argue that for around 40% of consumers the environmental friendliness of a product will never be a factor in purchasing decisions regardless of positive attitudes towards ethical consumption.

There are many studies which support the existence of a value-action gap. Mostly these can be found within the field of environmental geography. Lane and Potter (2007) found a discrepancy between attitudes and behavior regarding the adoption of cleaner vehicles. They reported that concern for the environmental impact of cars did not result in behavioral changes at the individual level. Thus, what consumers reported as their intended actions or concerns often did not translate into their actual behavior.

Furthermore, Vermeir and Verbeke (2006) also found that positive consumer attitudes towards sustainability were not consistent with their behavioral patterns. They found that attitudes were positive whereas intentions to buy sustainable dairy products were low. They also found that people's perceptions of the availability of sustainable dairy products was low, which might explain why attitudes were positive yet intentions to buy were low.

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Additionally, evidence of this gap has been found with organic food as illustrated by Hughner et al (2007) who show that despite 46-67% of the population expressing favorable attitudes for organic food, the actual purchase behavior is only 4-10% of different product ranges.

Three/four main issues/debates described below:

Information gap:

One explanation for the discrepancy between attitudes buying behaviour is the perceived lack of availability of certain products and lack of information (Dickson 2000). Therefore, because there was a lack of information about environmentally friendly behavior this caused the gap between values and attitudes. Traditional thinking supported the idea that increased knowledge tended to encourage favorable attitudes which, in turn, lead to pro-environmental action. Burgess et al (1998) called this the 'information deficit model'.

Therefore, increasing knowledge and awareness surrounding environmental and ethical issues should result in behavioral changes. Burgess et al (1998) argue that filling the values-action gap with information would lead result in a change in public behaviors towards the environment. Furthermore, Owens (2000: 1142) argues that "if people had more information about environmental risks, they would become more virtuous". Some are that to increase environmental action there needs to be educational marketing campaigns on the ethical and environmental issues

Thus, the main motivations for actions are self-interest rather than altruistic. Therefore, to increase environmental action products must aim to change perceptions by using. McEachern and McClean (2002).

However, so far no one has been able to confirm the validity of such a model (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). As a result, the decision-making process could be considered as almost unpredictable: positive attitudes were not necessarily followed by positive intentions. Therefore, attitudes alone are a poor predictor of intentional behavior. As such, there seemed to be many more factors that influenced pro-environmental behavior.

Barr and Gilg (2002) argue that just increasing information will not lead to behavior change that would close this gap. Due to the increased media attention surrounding environmental issues, and products such as Fairtrade having a high profile, it could be argued that there is already a lot of information on these issues, and many are aware of the issues. It is genuinely considered that many have a high regard for environmental issues. Sammer and Wüstenhagen (2006) point out that while people may be aware of ethical and environmental issues and products that attempts to solve these issues, this does not necessarily mean that it plays a major role in their buying decision.

. 99% of respondents in both surveys reported that they had heard the terms “ global warming” and “ climate change”, and most respondents said they knew “ a fair amount” about these terms (Thornton, 2009)

Yet, because the market share of these products and level of environmental action is quite low, there is exits a gap between attitudes and behaviors.

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Therefore, the key issue is why our attitudes often fail to materialize into concrete actions (Barr 2004).

Blake (1999) many national policies are based on this idea of an 'information deficit' model of participation. For example, Going for Green (GFG). It is considered the most effective means to overcome the 'value-action gap' is by translating environmental concern into pro-environmental behavior. This can be done through increasing information. The core assumption is that the main barrier between environmental concern and action is the lack of appropriate information. The GFG argue that the most effective way to encourage people to act is to give locally relevant information and highlight a few facts. Environmental concern and basic environmental action (such as recycling), are now becoming widespread throughout the population. However, few people take environmental actions which involve changes to their lifestyle. This may mean that environmental actions people take may be unrelated to the particular concerns that they express about the environment. This environmental value-action gap is clearly of key importance to environmental policy, not least because it is repeated at other scales, involving different actors: thus local or national government, business and even international organizations have policies whose effects fail to match up to the environmental concerns people are expressing. the attitude-behavior relationship is moderated by two primary sets of variables: the structure of personal attitudes themselves; and external or situational constraints. . Attitudes are likely to be better predictors of behavior if the attitudes in question are strong relative to other (possibly conflicting) attitudes, and based on direct experience. Situational

constraints mainly refer to whether the behavior is in line with the individual's favored social norms, which in turn are influenced by different social, economic, demographic and political contexts. . Research has shown that people do not have a fixed, rational and ready-made set of values that will be activated by particular calls to action; rather people's values are negotiated, transitory and sometimes contradictory.

these findings suggest that the ' value-action gap' cannot be overcome simply by using an ' information deficit' model of individual participation, as " empowerment of individuals to act does not of itself guarantee action without an appropriate institutional location within which action is located", policy turns from raising environmental awareness to promoting pro-environmental behavior, possibly involving lifestyle change, Blake 1999

As Eden (1996) has argued: policy still fails to appreciate the huge gulf between information and action, between understanding as awareness and understanding as the cause of behavior. Policy-makers seem to assume that environmental education, drawing from scientific work, will lead to people making the link between policy and action and acting in order to meet policy objectives, (p. 197)

Barriers to behavior:

Ajzen & Fishbein have developed an additional theory of ' reasoned action' and ' planned behavior'. they argue that individual attitudes must include an intention to carry out a specific action that reflects a reasoned evaluation of the likely consequences of that action. Ajzen, I. & Fishbein, M. (1980)

Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall).

other researchers have pointed out that these intentions are related to more general values, worldviews and beliefs (e. g. Stern et al, This theoretical approach has also been the dominant influence on public and policy research into public attitudes,

Different people will interpret and respond to the same environmental information in unpredictable and often highly variable ways, at times producing a quite opposite interpretation to the one expected by those (often in the policy community) who promulgate the information (Myers & Macnaghten, 1998).

Thus “ individuals must accept responsibility for the future, but conditions, institutions and their own day-to-day responsibilities constrain their actions” (Myers & Macnaghten, 1998, p. 346). Myers, G. & Macnaghten, P. (1998) Rhetorics of environmental sustainability: commonplaces and places, Environment and Planning A, 30(2), pp. 333-353.

The causes of this gap between attitude and behavior can be explained in terms of personal, social and structural barriers to action. Different barriers often overlap or work in conjunction to limit behavioral change. However, these barriers can be tackled,

It is considered that there are numerous barriers of motivations for individual action.

microeconomic theory (consumer, household theory), “ which says that humans make decisions that maximize their utility” (Sammer and Wüstenhagen 2006: 188).

Furthermore, many people act impulsively and in ways that do not correspond to their declared evaluations and goals (Boulstridge and Carrigan, (2000).

Attitudes often derive from social norms.

For example, Schwartz (1977, cited in Jackson, 2005) has suggested in his Norm Activation

Theory that the intention to perform a proenvironmental or pro-social behaviour is based on the acceptance of personal responsibility for one’s actions and an awareness of their consequences. (p166)

Blake (1999)- three different categories of obstacles that exist between the sphere of ‘ concern’ and that of ‘ action’: individuality; responsibility and practicality. that both psychological and institutional factors affect individual action. Which factors are important in any one case will vary for different individuals, environmental actions, and social or institutional constraints. individual barriers refers to what social psychologists would call personal attitudes or cognitive structure. Environmental concerns are outweighed by other conflicting attitudes. wrong type of person to do certain types of environmental actions, such as campaigning. people’s perceptions of institutions and responsibility. At present, despite general environmental concern, that evaluation is often negative. Even if ‘ individual’ factors would

support environmental action, people may still not act because they do not feel that they (as individuals) should take the responsibility for helping to solve environmental problems. practical social or institutional constraints that may prevent people from adopting pro-environmental action, regardless of their attitudes or intentions. These include lack of time, lack of money and lack of physical storage space (in the case of recycling), as well as lack of information, encouragement and pro-environmental facilities such as recycling and adequate public transport provision. Some people may also be physically unable to carry out some environmental actions. Clearly, there will be overlaps between the three sets of obstacles, and the reasons why people do not engage in pro-environmental action will not always fall into such neat categories. classification shows is that at a particular moment, and in a particular place, distinctions can be made between different types of barriers that may prevent individual environmental action, and that policy will need to respond in differentiated ways. policies need to also tackle other individual, social and institutional barriers. Not just provide more information or recycling facilities. organizations that are trusted more by the public, such as environmental NGOs, are likely to be most successful.

The factors involved in making people willing to reduce environmental damage are fundamentally different from the factors involved in making people take active steps to reduce damage and to improve the environment.

The gap dilemma:

Market-based mechanisms.

Solutions:

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Criticism:

4 See also

Attitudes, behavior, cognitive psychology, social psychology, theory of  
planned behavior