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Sustainable Behaviour Change: Can Personal Sustainability Practices (PSPs) Make it Work.

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Earth Overshoot Day 2018 is August 1, the earliest ever, suggesting we currently need to use the equivalent of 1.7 Earths to support human activity. At current rates, according to The [Global Footprint Network](#) (GFN) we will need 2 Earths to keep with the demand by 2030. Changing this trajectory requires significant shifts in both production and consumption patterns. Yet, the latter remains a considerable challenge – although we see growing focus on design for sustainable behaviour (DfSB), getting people to adopt sustainable behaviors remains extremely difficult even for large organizations (Deeply, 2017).

One reason may be the focus of DfSB on developing new products and business models (De Medeiros, Da Rocha, & Ribeiro, 2018), while tending to pay less attention to the role of the user. Another is that even when the user's role is acknowledged as we saw for example in P&G's campaign earlier this year, where consumers were encouraged to switch to colder and quicker wash cycles using suitable P&G's products, it is done using informational campaigns urging people to take actions, which are generally ineffective (McKenzie-Mohr & Schultz, 2014).

If we want to follow John Elkington's (2017) vision of creating "exponential (breakthrough) solutions to exponential (breakdown) challenges", we need to consider not just how to develop a more sustainable detergent or even a circular model for washing machines, but also how to ensure users actually utilize these opportunities effectively. Failure to acknowledge behaviour change is the weakest link in our transition plans and may put in jeopardy any scenario for substantial change and suggest the world may be a very different place in 2030 in terms of the challenges we face, but not so different in how we address them.

To do so we need to consider new approaches to DfSB, ones that are less grounded in top-down ('we know what motivates people') thinking, but more in joint work with people to recognize their agency in the world and how they can use it to enact change (Lockton, 2015). In my proposed paper, I present an empirical study conducted with 80 students to investigate such an approach, which is based on the adoption of a personal sustainable practice (PSP).

Inspired by a project seeking to make sustainability personal for Wal-Mart employees by asking them to develop a personal sustainable practice (PSP) to fix an unsustainable part in their life (Sacks, 2007), I developed a course assignment, where students are asked to choose and commit for the whole semester to one of 20 sustainability challenges. The challenges (or personal sustainability practices - PSPs) relate to different sustainability pain points, from single-use bags to food waste, and are aimed at generating positive impact on the environment, the students' community and their own personal health and wellbeing. The overall goal of the study is to learn if the PSP approach can generate substantial short- and long-term effect, in which sustainability dimensions (personal well-being, social, environmental) PSP fosters change more effectively and whether it can act as a catalyst for change. The paper will present and discuss the preliminary results of the study.

With the growing urgency to effectively address sustainability challenges it is clear that we have to push the envelope and take bolder approaches to influence and change behaviour. This study will shed a light whether PSP has the potential to be one of them.