**Dorian Cave** - **Complex Contagions & Behavior Change**

* **Tightly-knit, clustered social groups (such as groups of mutual friends) fostering strong relational ties are key to the spread of new norms and complex behaviours.** Conversely, weak ties connecting huge numbers of less-familiar people across a network are mostly useful to spread information, memes, or viruses (via simple contagion) - but not the adoption of new norms, behaviours or practices that entail some element of risk. Overcoming this risk requires constant affirmation, ongoing maintenance, and reinforcement from multiple points of contact around oneself who are undertaking the same changes - otherwise it’s easy to grow discouraged and abandon the change. **Creating a sense of social confirmation is critical to the spread of “complex contagions”.**
* **For a contagion to spread from one clustered group to another, “wide bridges” (multiple interpersonal ties between people in different groups, neighbourhoods, etc.) are essential.** “Narrow bridges” (connecting just one broker from one group with another broker from another group) are not enough. In fact, brokers’ privileged structural position can actually hinder the spread of innovative practises.
* So i**t is much more efficient to cultivate social incubators of innovation locally, than to try relying on central influencers to spread complex changes in behaviour.**
* **Participants who start off most resistant to embracing a complex change often become the most committed to this change once they do embrace it:** the same factors that make a behaviour complex also make it “sticky.”
* **The more connected people are, the less likely they are to adopt a new idea of behaviour** - because humans tend to assess ideas/behaviours in terms of the fraction of people in our network who have already adopted it (not by the absolute number). So if I’m connected to thousands of people, and only a small percentage of them have embraced this idea, it has very little legitimacy for me: the non-adopters act as countervailing influences on me.
* So **it is much more likely that someone at the periphery of a network, with a more modest number of connections, will embrace a complex change:** their adoption threshold will be lower. It is therefore possible for an innovation to take hold, gain momentum, and spread through the periphery until it becomes impossible to ignore, even for people at the network’s centre. **Across a variety of contexts, the network periphery is needed to spark and support meaningful social change.**
* Therefore, **a key strategy for spreading new norms and behaviours in networks is to foster tightly-knit groups of adopters in a local, peripheral setting,** who will mutually reinforce each others’ choices as they cultivate social change. Then, wide bridges with other tightly-knit groups should be built for these social innovations (or social movements, like the #BLM example) to spread more widely.
* For innovations that require more social proof that something will be useful, or else emotional excitement, loyalty, or solidarity, then **similarity** among reinforcing contacts is key. But for change that requires legitimacy (the sense that sth is widely accepted), then **diversity** among adopters is critical: otherwise it will look like the innovation only concerns a particular clique/type/social class.
* **When the proportion of activists committed to overturning a particular norm in a network exceeds 25% of the population, they succeed every time**. A social tipping point then occurs.
* **Teams of diverse, complementary people who function in clusters that do not exchange information so freely among themselves, are much more innovative than teams in which everyone is connected to everyone else:** this leads to everyone looking at the problem in the same way by focusing on “easy/obvious” solutions.
* **Overly centralised networks tend to allow the people at the centre to spread their biases (as memes/viruses/information) across entire populations**. In contrast, challenging ideas, as complex contagions, typically emerge at the egalitarian, moderately-connected network periphery\*\*, away from the overwhelming countervailing influences faced by those at the centre. **Influencers can spread simple contagions, but not complex ones.**
* **Egalitarian network structures for exchanging opinions can have incredibly powerful effects in helping people overcome their biases.** This is all the more noticeable when voices are brought in from the network periphery.

This provides food for thought and confirmation in terms of what I think many of us have been doing in DAF…  For example:

* fostering small crews, communities of practice, and local community groups appears essential to cultivating social innovation and nurturing the spread of a “DA mindset”. Conversely, if one is left on their own, it is easy to grow discouraged by all the people around who are *not* embracing this change;
* if innovations are to travel from DAF into other places, network-weaving between our networks/community and others should not be left to just one or two people, but should involve multiple people creating mutually reinforcing relationships;
* having a less centralised network structure in DAF also appears essential to foster social learning and creativity across various clusters doing their thing.

Lots more to explore I’m sure. Any comments/feedback welcome 