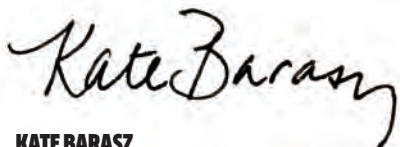


A nudge to do more



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Want to know a simple way to increase people's effort levels on tasks? Group individual tasks together and frame them as being part of a set. Because people

tend to feel the urge to complete sets, they do more than they would otherwise in order to feel a sense of completion – even with no additional reward.

This was borne out in experiments, where “pseudo-set framing” – grouping in even arbitrary sets – was shown to motivate people more, all else being equal.

To better understand this framing concept, look to gestalt psychology, which claims we intrinsically perceive a whole as greater than its individual parts. So, tapping into a desire for wholeness and completion, framing tasks in sets can provide a nudge at the moment of decision-making and affect our choices.

The same idea applies to purchases. After all, how many times do you buy five cans when they are grouped as a six-pack, even with the same per-can cost?

So what does this idea look like in practice? My colleagues (**Leslie K. John**, **Elizabeth A. Keenan** and **Michael I. Norton** of Harvard Business School) and I carried out several research experiments.

Two of our studies looked at completing tasks with – and without – visual representations of progress as part of a pie chart, with four, five or seven pieces. In both cases, seeing progress as part

of a pie chart motivated our study's participants to put in more effort without more compensation.

The pie chart intervention is a very simple idea, but it actually materially changes people's effort levels and makes for very predictable drop-off points.

Another two studies tackled volunteer work and charitable giving, in situations where donors may already be motivated by the real-world impact of their efforts or money.

In one, participants were asked to write holiday cards to seniors in nursing homes. They could write as many (or as few) cards as they wanted. When progress was measured in pseudo-batches of four cards, many more people finished at least four cards and they also finished more cards, on average, than the people who were not presented with batches to complete.

We also conducted a field study, working with the Canadian Red Cross on its 2016 online holiday campaign. By offering thousands of people the option to donate a full “set” of useful items, people were more likely to donate all six available items, which was more than they did when items were presented individually.

In all of these contexts, we found set-framing can be a powerful tool to inspire and motivate workers, leaders and volunteers to get things done, and to commit more to the task or donation at hand.

Source: “That Missing Piece: Playing to Our Need to Complete Sets,” www.ieseinsight.com.