

Give – It's contagious!

A summary of:

Fowler J. H. & Christakis N. A.: *Cooperative Behavior Cascades in Human Social Networks*. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2010 March 23; 107(12): 5334–5338.

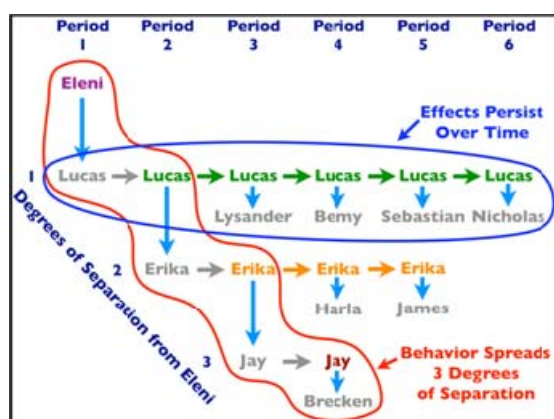
When testing out the effects of cooperative behaviour on teams, Fowler and Christakis found results underpinning the importance of being a role model. The effects on one person's behaviour were both long lasting and wide distributed.

Background of the study

Fowler and Chistakis ran 6 sessions with teams of 4 people. Nobody knew each other beforehand and the teams rotated in such a way that nobody met another team member more than once. The teams were playing *public good games* in which each team member had 20 monetary units (MU). For each session members would secretly decide how much each would like to contribute to the group. For each MU contributed to the group, all members would receive 0,4 MU. The individual, then would lose 0,6 for each contributed MU, while the group as a whole would earn 0,6. After the session the contributions of each team member was revealed and team members moved to new teams.

Results

The results of the study are illustrated with the figure below:



Good deeds spread across time and space...

The study indicates that cooperative behaviour (contribution of MU) transmits and spreads in two ways:

- The cooperative behaviour spreads three degrees of separation – the behaviour of one member influences another member's behaviour in the next session. This member's behaviour again influences a third member's behaviour in the following session.
- The transmittance of the cooperative behaviour lasts for 5 sessions.

So the effects of cooperative behaviour cascades in networks and lasts for a long time.

Practical applications

Fowler and Chistakis have previously showed similar effects on other areas as happiness and quitting smoking. Given that similar effects appear on several areas, this study documents the importance of being a role model.

As an example we can imagine a manager who wants her people to take more *responsibility* for the totality in a unit (cooperative behaviour: do what's right for the unit regardless what serves her). In such a case the first step for the manager should always be to start with herself: *To which extent do I take responsibility for the whole company regardless of what serves me?*

Or like Mahatma Gandhi expressed it: *"Be the change you want to see in the world."*

