



The Danger of Unbalanced Incentives and Negative Expectations

Description

I recently saw a news article that certain parts of America were trialling an incentive program to try and encourage more people to get the COVID-19 vaccine. The idea was that individuals could earn \$100 by getting vaccinated.

If you have ever read any of my work, you will probably know that I am not a big fan of large incentives to do things that should be done for intrinsic reasons. To me staying safe and keeping people safe is reason enough to take the vaccine – but hey – we are not all the same.

Very quickly I started to see people on Twitter complaining. Not that this was a bad idea, but that they wished they had not taken the vaccine already and could be eligible to get the free money!

In isolation that may not seem an issue, however, it does have a potential knock as effect should anything like this ever happen again as a negative expectation has been set. Rather than people taking the vaccine early, they will wait until the Government gets desperate and starts to incentivise people to take it – after all, that is what happened the last time.

I accept that this probably seemed like a good idea at the time, I mean, when do politicians ever think about unintended consequences!?

How could this be prevented then?

Well, I'm glad you asked! If you think you will need to incentivise behaviour, do it at the start and reward positive and early action higher than late. This sets the expectation that being early is better than being late. For instance, a parking ticket encourages you to pay quickly or the fine doubles!

In our vaccination example, set the initial incentive as \$100 if you get it in the first round and drop it to \$50 if you are late.

However, even better than that, educate people more effectively. Provide simple, truthful and unsensationalised information that explains the benefits and potential risks whilst shutting down

conspiracies and silliness as early as possible.

In gamification, we know all of this. You only incentivise when you absolutely have to and you make sure that the most positive and constructive actions are highly rewarded compared to other behaviours and actions.

Category

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Tags

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