The Dragons of Inaction: Why We Do Less Than We Should, and How We Can Overcome

Robert Gifford
Professor
Department of Psychology
and
School of Environmental Studies
University of Victoria

Queensland University of Technology
July 16, 2010

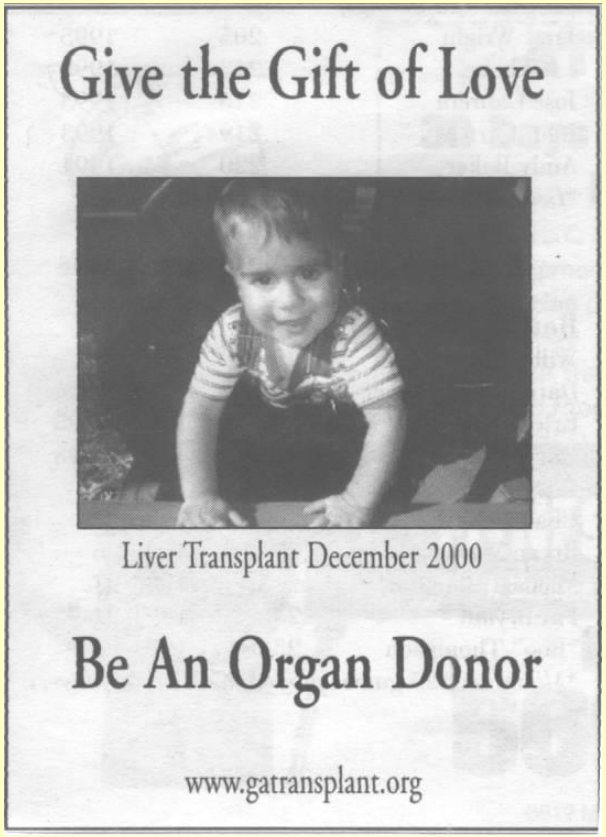
The Problem

Climate change inarguably is anthropogenic in part.

Social Dilemmas:

Commons Dilemmas

Public Goods Problems



What Causes This?

- Various structural influences, including
  - Geophysical factors (Live in Canada without heat?)
  - Economic factors (Marketing, advertising)
  - Technological factors (My ride is so comfy!)
  - Infrastructure problems (Ride a bike in traffic?)

Psychological Factors

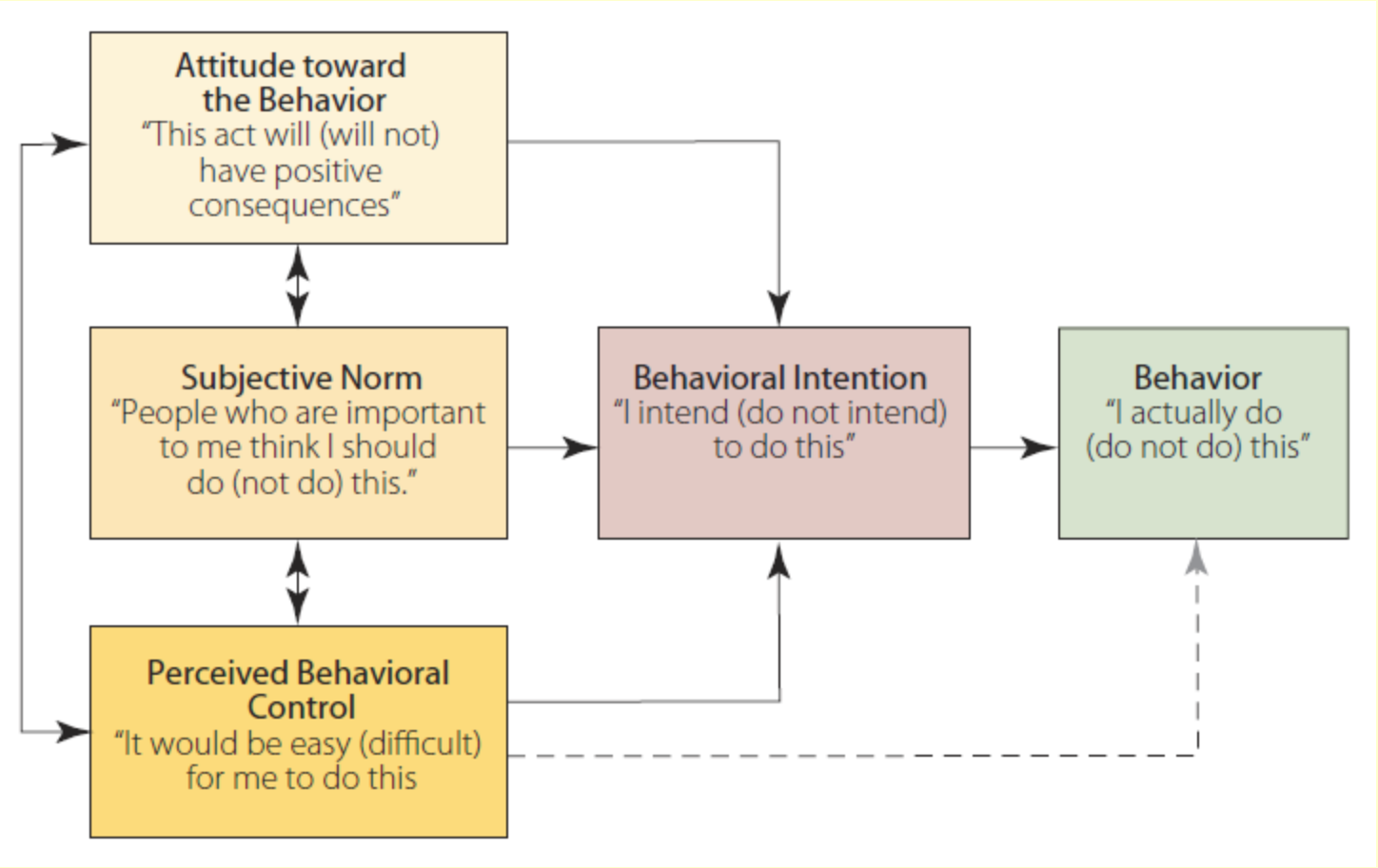
- **But also psychological factors, broadly:**

  --*Intra*personal factors (personality, values, attitudes, skill, aspirations)

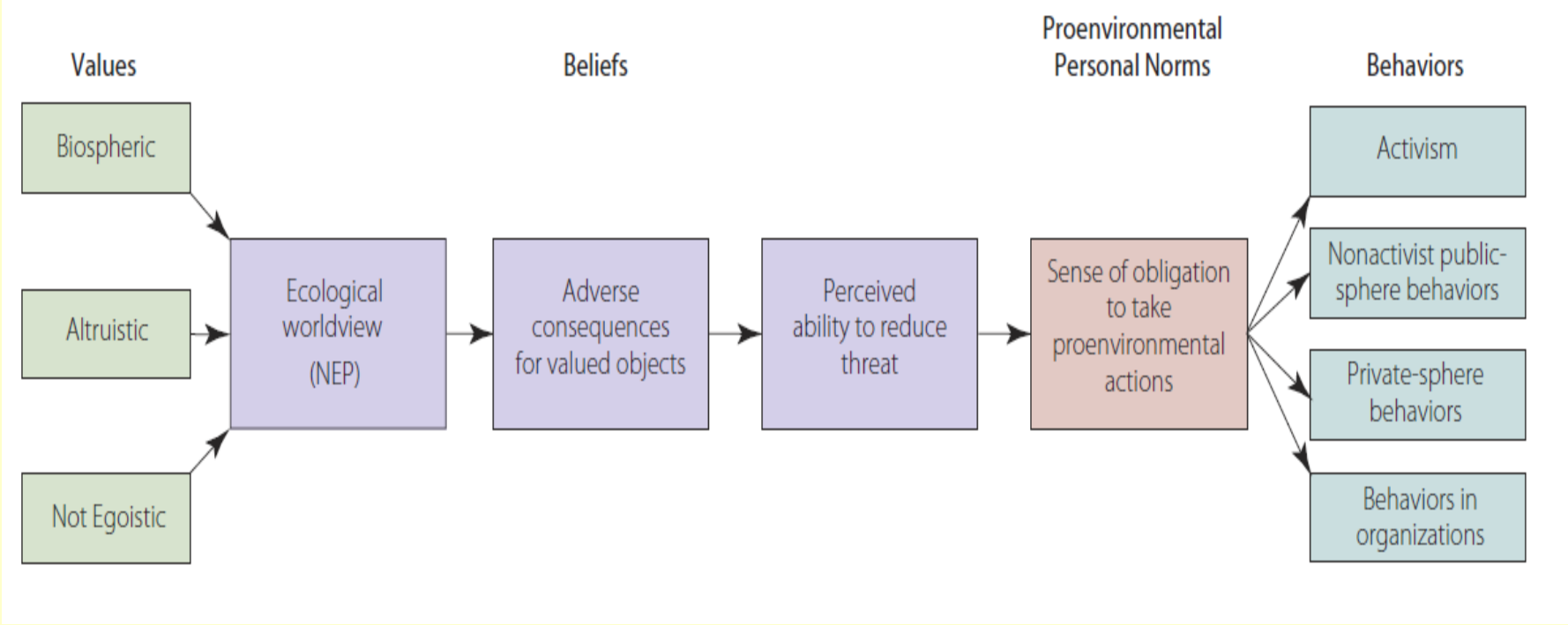
  --*Inter*personal relations (social comparison, trust, friendship, norms, etc.)

  --*Decision-making*: Each one of us, everyday, citizen or CEO, makes choices every day, and these choices matter in the aggregate

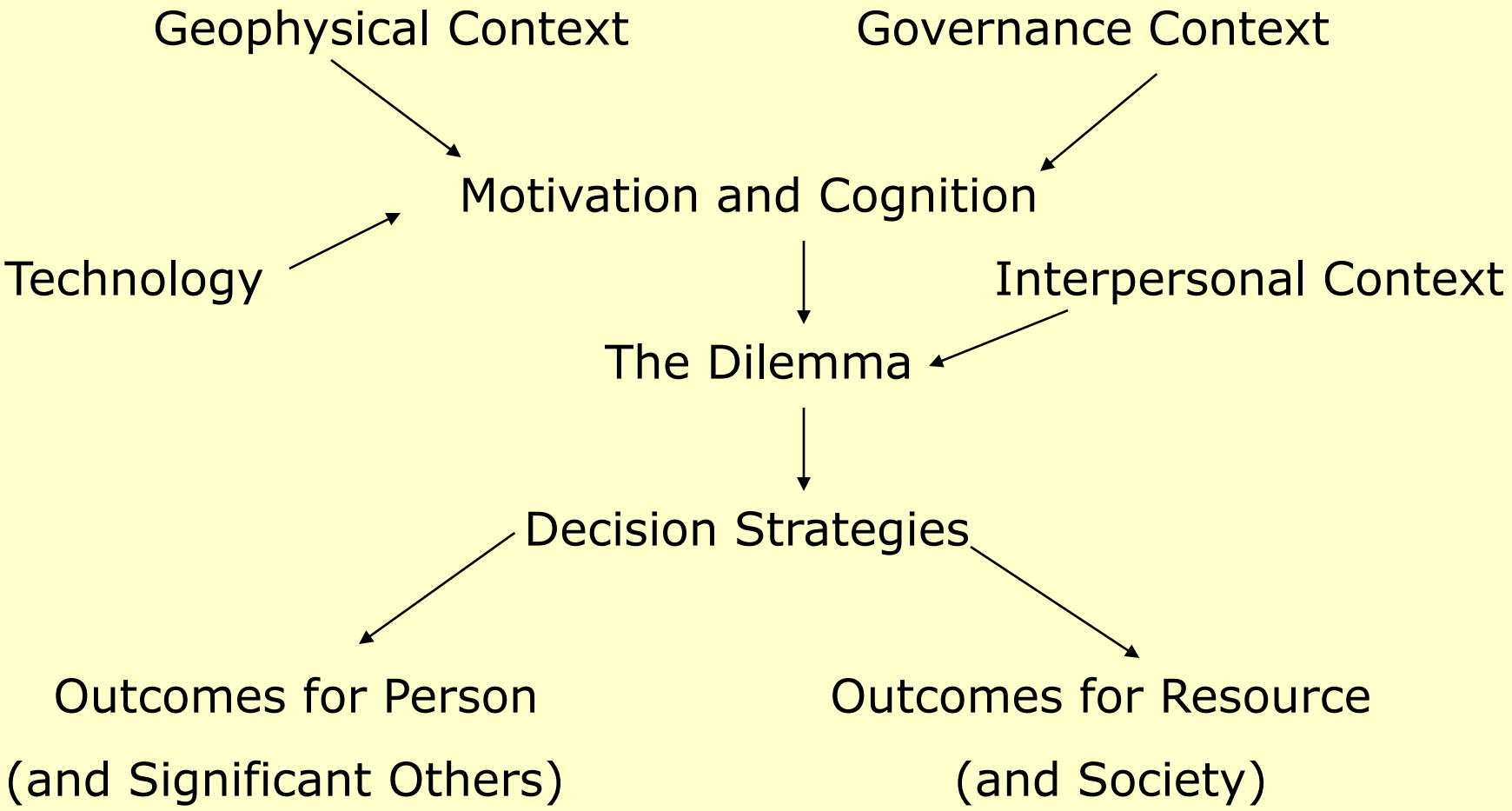
Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour



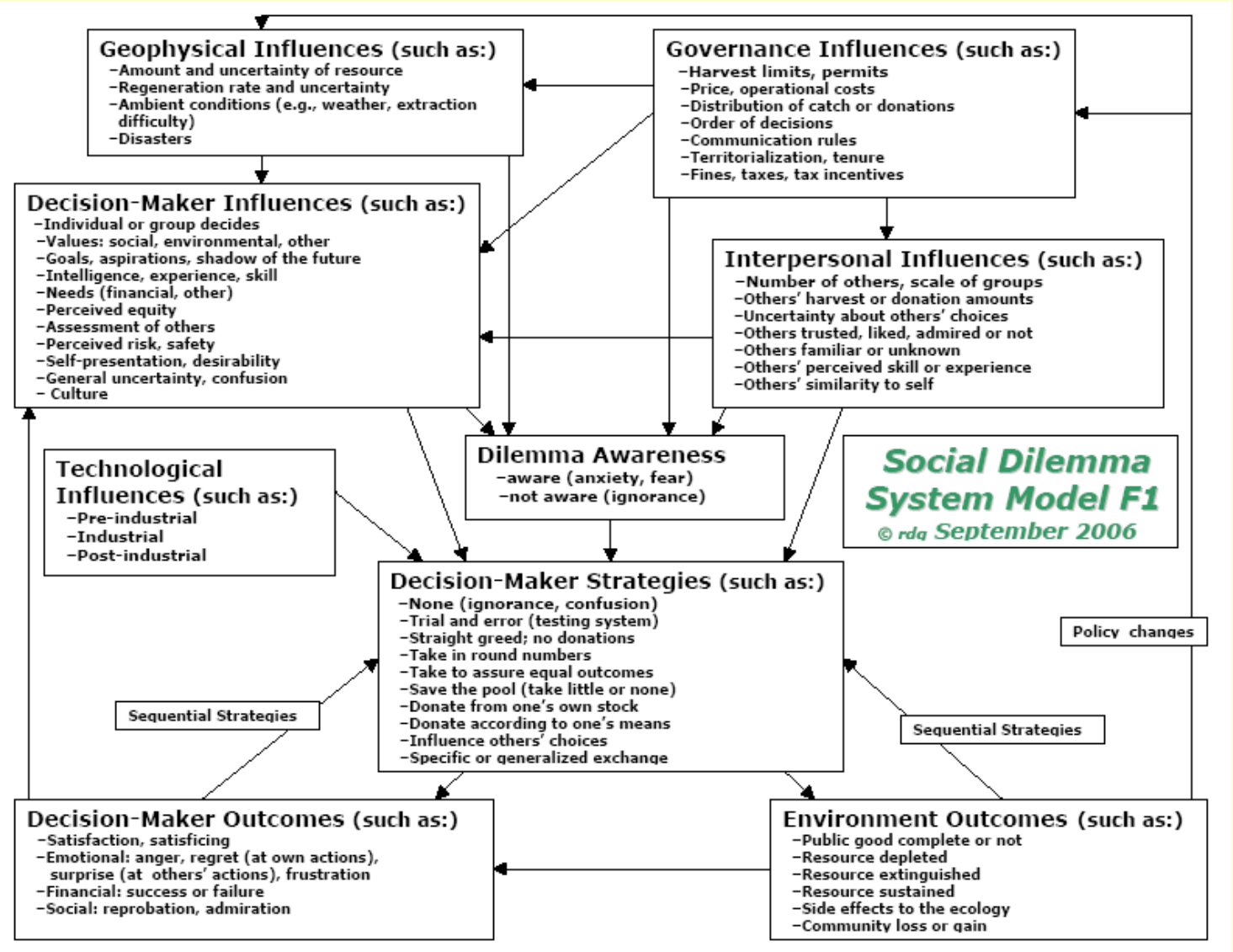
Stern's VBN Model



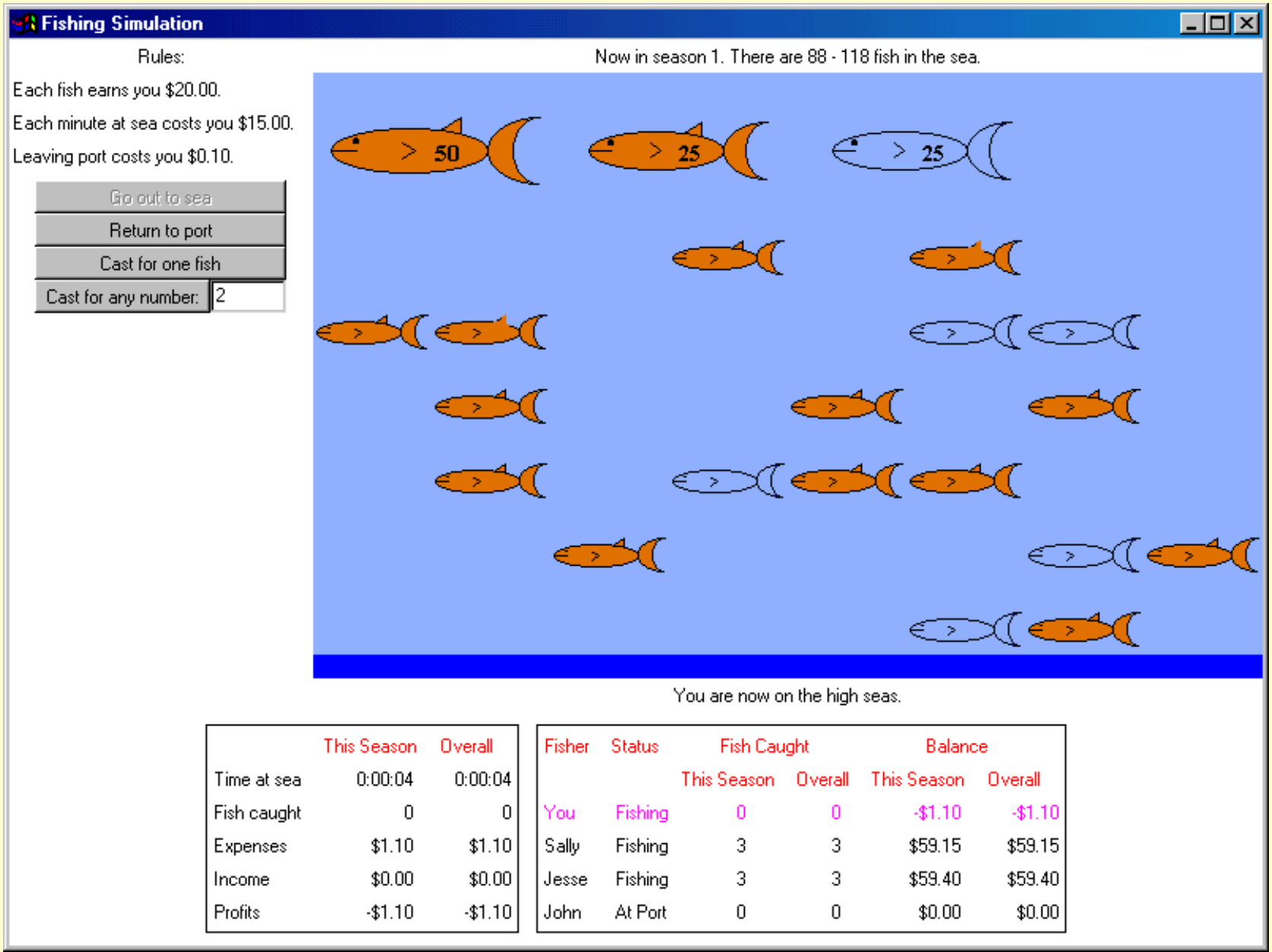
The Simple Form of the General Model



The Full Version of the General Model



FISH 3.1: A Microworld for Labs



Sample Output from FISH 3.1

fish.out - Notepad

File Edit Search Help

FISH 3.1 Simulation Summary: Tue Jun 20 16:05:00 PDT 2000

Fisher	Group	Season	NFInit	FTaken	Profit	IR	GR	IE	GE
Bob	1	1	120	80	$1548.75	-1	0	-2	0

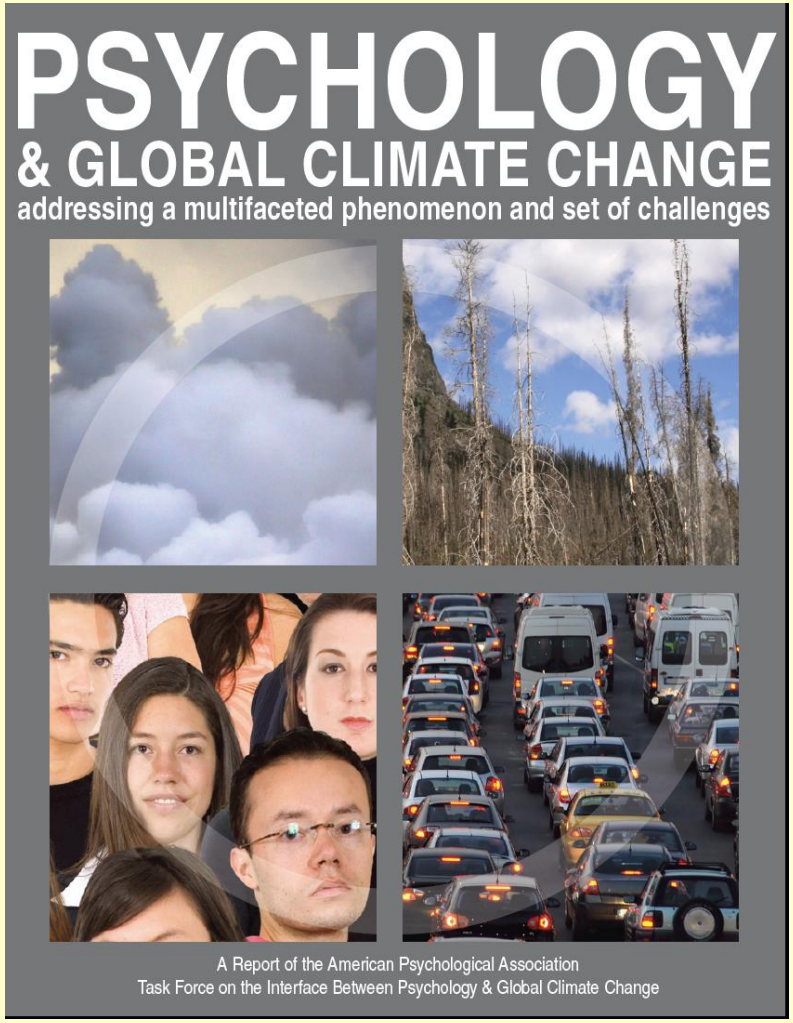
FISH 3.1 Simulation Summary: Tue Jun 20 16:12:58 PDT 2000

Fisher	Group	Season	NFInit	FTaken	Profit	IR	GR	IE	GE
Bob	1	1	120	0	$0.00	1	0.6667	2	1.3333
		2	120	10	$177.25	0.75	0.5833	1.5	1.1667
		3	120	0	$0.00	1	0.6667	2	1.3333
		4	120	0	$0.00	1	0.6667	2	1.3333
		5	120	0	$0.00	1	0.6667	2	1.3333

FISH 3.1 Simulation Summary: Mon Nov 06 11:50:19 PST 2000

Fisher	Group	Season	NFInit	FTaken	Profit	IR	GR	IE	GE
Bob	1	1	18	6	$2.90	0	0.3333	0	0.6667
		2	12	5	$2.39	-0.25	0.25	-0.333	0.3333
		3	6	0	$0.00	1	0.6667	1	0.6667
		4	8	5	$2.42	-0.875	0.125	-0.875	0.125
		5	2	1	$0.43	-0.5	0.5	-0.5	0.5
		6	2	0	$0.00	1	1	1	1
		7	4	0	$0.00	1	0.5	1	0.5
		8	4	0	$0.00	1	0.5	1	0.5
		9	4	0	$0.00	1	0.5	1	0.5
		10	4	0	$0.00	1	0.5	1	0.5

The APA Climate Change Report



Read it all here

http://www.apa.org/science/about/publications/climate-change-booklet.pdf

What to Do?

(These are from various websites)

Unfortunately…

**"Man (sic) is not a rational animal,
he is a rationalizing animal."**

Robert Heinlein in *Assignment in Eternity* (1953)

(Did you think Leon Festinger invented this idea?

**Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*.
Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.)**

We *Don't* Do (All) That We Should

(Not even all that we ourselves think we should!)
(Me too!)

Why not? This is the key question

The 7 Dragons of Non-Sustainability

Seven Dragon Genera

(incorporating 29 species in all)

- **Limited Cognition**
- **Ideologies**
- **Other People**
- **Sunk Costs**
- **Discredence**
- **Perceived Risks**
- **Limited Behaviour**

Limited Cognition

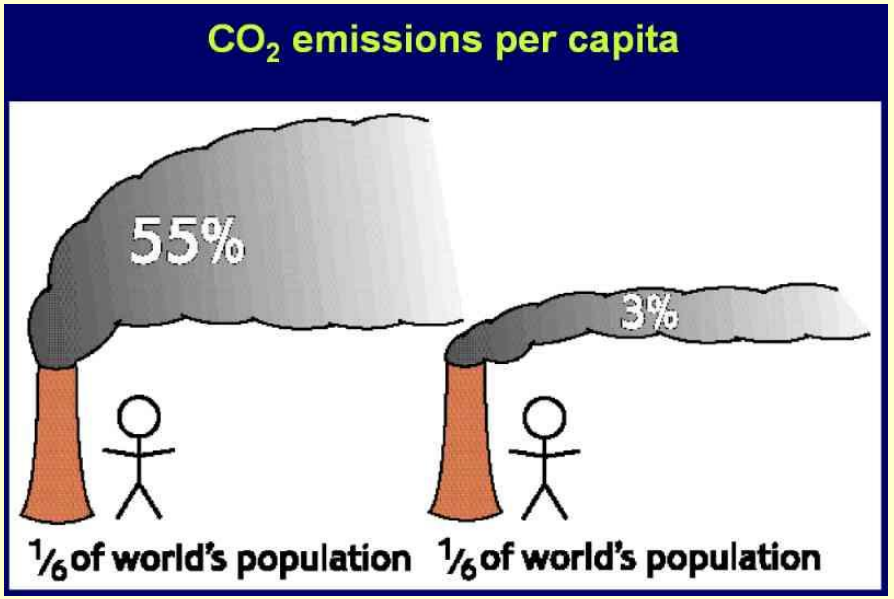
- Ancient Brain
- Ignorance
- Numbness
- Uncertainty
- Discounting
- Optimism Bias
- Lack of Perceived Control

Ideologies

- Political Worldviews
- System Justification
- Suprahuman Powers
- Technosalvation

Other People

- Social Comparison
- Social Norms
- Perceived Inequity

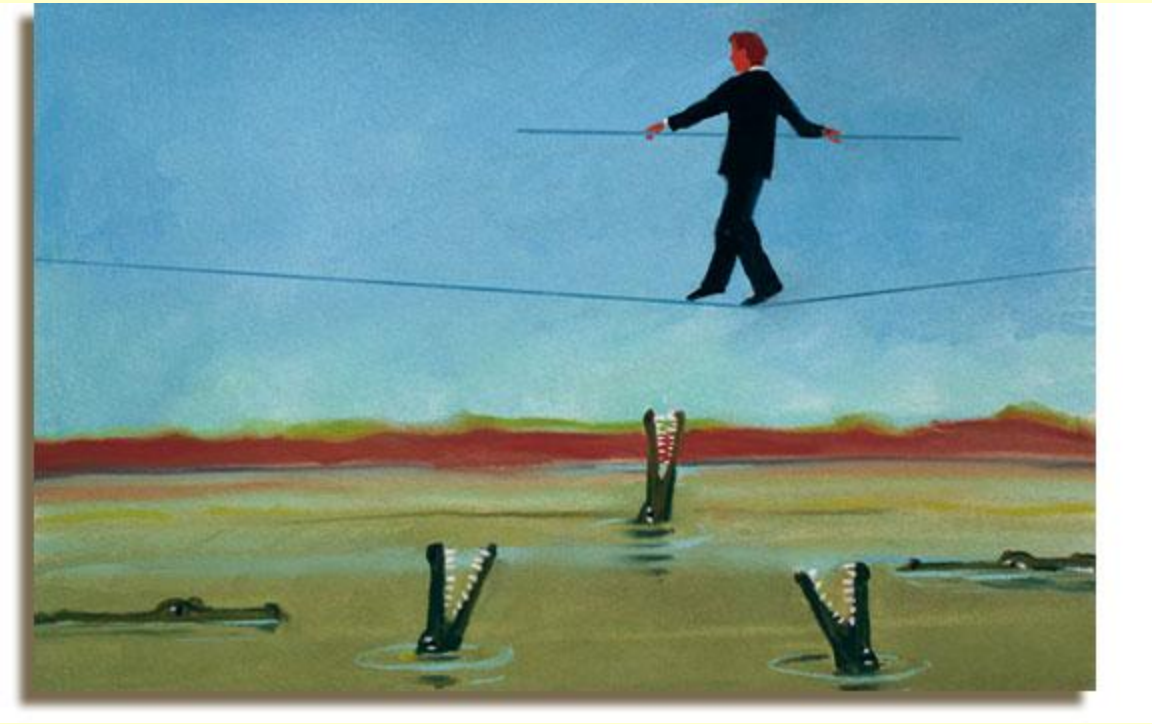


Sunk Costs

- **Financial Investments**
- **Behavioural Momentum**
- **Conflicting Goals and Aspirations**

Perceived Risks

- Social
- Psychological
- Financial
- Functional
- Physical
- Temporal



Discredence

- Perceived Program Inadequacy
- Mistrust
- Reactance
- Denial

Limited Behaviour

- **Tokenism**
- **Rebound Effect**

Psychology's Role

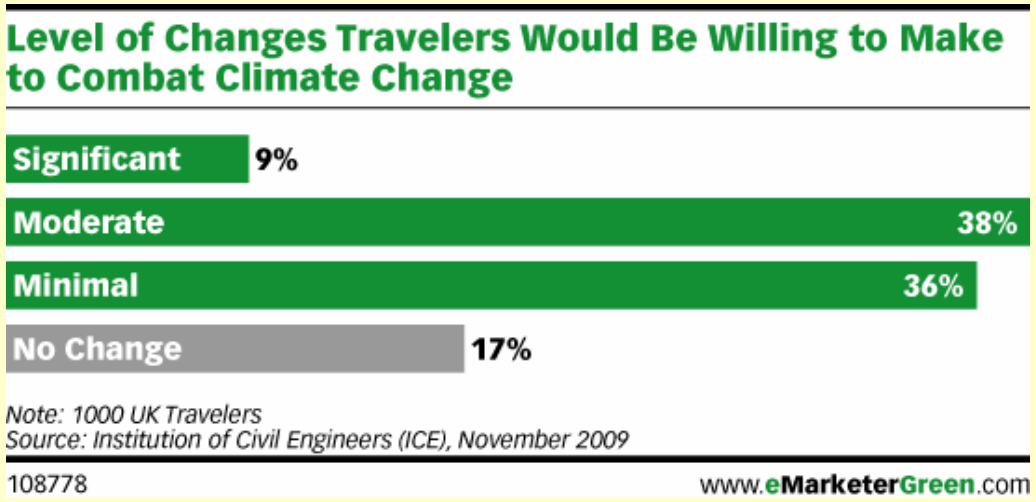
- **It can contribute in at least five ways**

Five Ways to Slay Dragons: 1

- **Develop understanding of impactful behaviours**
  - **What exactly do people do?**
  - **Which are the most impactful acts?**
  - **Learn variations in the rate of these actions**
  - **Learn what are the antecedents of these actions**

Five Ways to Slay Dragons: 2

- **Develop and evaluate interventions**
  - **Test information campaigns**
  - **Explore most effective forms of communication**
  - **Human factors for making good choices attractive**



Five Ways to Slay Dragons: 3

- **Work together with other disciplines**
  - **Better energy-use meters—but feedback issues**
  - **Zero-energy buildings, but occupant misuse**
  - **Green communities, but real participation?**

Five Ways to Slay Dragons: 4

- **Make climate change now (because it is)**
  - **-- Community-based diffusion**
  - **-- Facilitate amateur scientists**
  - **-- Develop social networks**

Five Ways to Slay Dragons: 5

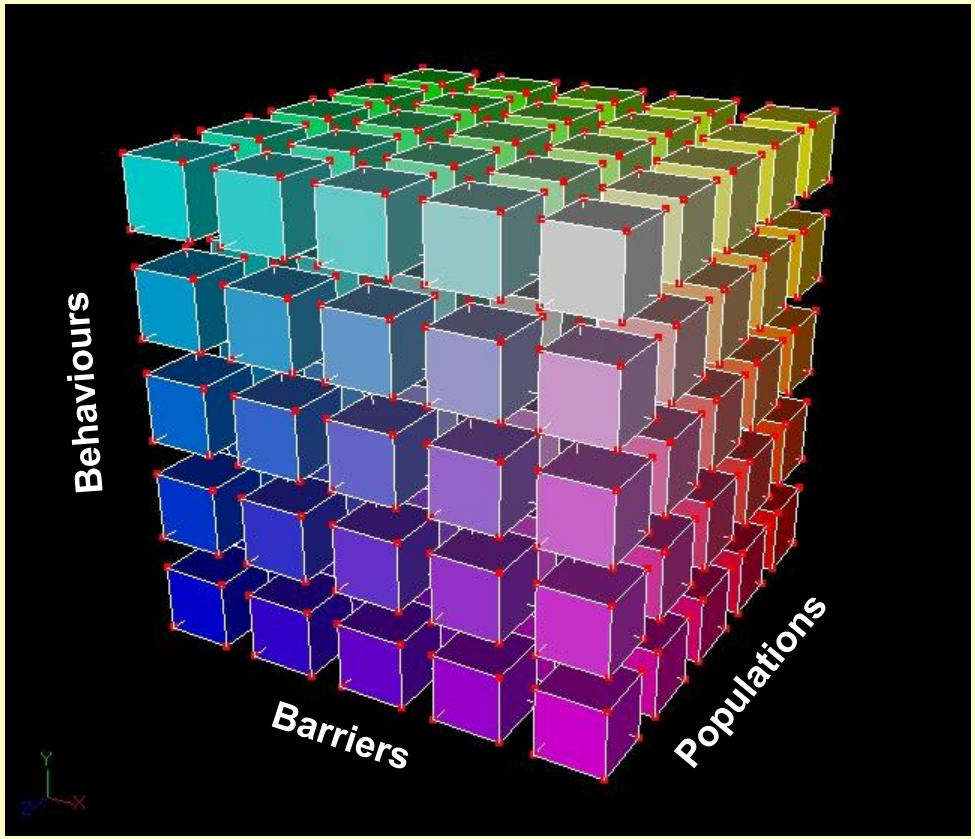
- **Join in the policy development process**
  - **-- Not at the table = Not in the policy**
  - **-- Choose your comfort level: organizational, neighbourhood, municipal, regional, state/provincial, federal—but do get involved**

One Size (Policy) Does *Not* Fit All

- ***Which*** **unsustainable behaviour?**
  In terms of sectors: Energy, transport, goods, and food
- ***Which*** **segment of the population?**
  Traditional consumer segments—age, education, etc.
- ***Which*** **dragon (barrier)?**
  29 different psychological barriers (although structural barriers also need attention)

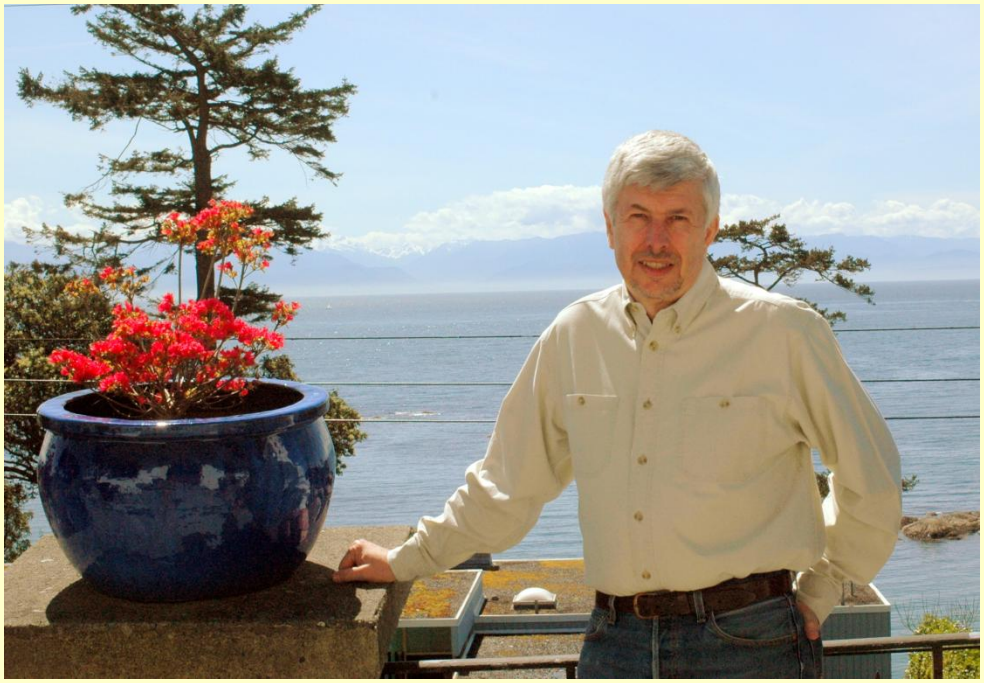
An important challenge for effective policy…

To maximize mitigation, policies and practices should be designed and targeted



Thank you for your attention!

Questions now? Here I am…



Or questions later? rgifford@uvic.ca