



SAID BUSINESS SCHOOL, University of Oxford

SEMINAR SERIES / Hilary 2012

Convenor: Felix Reed-Tsochas, CABDyN Complexity Centre, Saïd Business School

For further information please contact the Cabdyn Administrator:

info.cabdyn@sbs.ox.ac.uk

01865 288785

Seminar webpage:
www.cabdyn.ox.ac.uk/complexity_seminars.asp

Sandwiches and drinks will be provided

Please note: although the seminar programme detailed was correct at time of printing, seminar arrangements are subject to change - for the latest information, please check the seminar webpage.

'Social influence and drift in collective behaviour'

Professor Alex Bentley

Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Bristol

Tuesday 6th March 2012, 12.30 -14.00
Seminar Room 13, Saïd Business School

Alex Bentley is Professor of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Bristol. He also is Deputy Director of a 5-year, interdisciplinary program to study 'Tipping Points' in the environment and society, a project that integrates work on climate change, the banking crisis, and the spread of fashions. Bentley has applied his research in projects with the British Department of Health, the Gates Foundation and commercial organizations. His new book, with Mark Earls and Michael O'Brian, is "I'll Have What She's Having: Mapping Social Behavior" (MIT Press).

ABSTRACT:

Generally speaking, social sciences explain changes in collective behaviour by focusing on the individuals. Human decision models often begin with individual, cost-benefit analyses as the basic behavior, with any social influence as a secondary add-on. This often underestimates social influence among humans, whose brains have actually evolved to handle social relations. In fact, a better starting point in many cases may be to assume that people base their choices (consciously or not) primarily on the decisions of those around them. As captured by experiments and simple evolutionary drift models, undirected social influence models do remarkably well at capturing the large scale dynamics of popular culture change. Network structure (e.g., kinship or social networks) can be added incrementally to such models. The goal is to offer an explanation for the irrationality and unpredictability to collective behaviour, with implications for anthropology, psychology and economics.



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