Behavioral Science and the Environment: The Human Dimension

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Abstract
A substantial amount of resources are currently geared towards finding economically viable and technology-based solutions to help society transition to a more energy efficient and low carbon future. These approaches, however, often fail to recognize that many global environmental challenges are driven, at their core, by human behavior and decision-making. Moreover, psychological research has shown that people often do not interact with energy efficient technologies as expected and that many such solutions may actually have unintended effects on human behavior and decision-making. Behavioral science is in a unique position to offer key insights into how to change and reverse unsustainable habits and consumption patterns. This talk will illustrate that lessons from psychological science can be leveraged to design simple, scalable, and highly cost-effective behavioral solutions. The focus will be on how people process information, form judgments, and ultimately, make decisions about the environment. The contribution of behavioral science research to a number of key environmental problems will be highlighted, including local energy consumption, water scarcity, and global climate change.