



Strategies for changing behaviour

Research shows that changing people's behaviour requires an intervention that is carefully planned. There are myths and barriers that need to be overcome. This fact sheet outlines the key elements required for successful interventions in changing the way people act or think.

People learn behaviour from their surrounding culture. There are many reasons for trying to change that existing behaviour, such as working towards greater energy efficiency or less greenhouse gas emissions in our buildings. Changing behaviour requires intervention - a specific action or actions to drive the change and create a supportive environment for that change.

Before people can change behaviour, they must:

- understand basic facts about the issue
- adopt key attitudes
- learn a set of skills
- be given access to support and resources.

Interventions should be part of a wider comprehensive initiative and not a single action. They need to empower people, giving them more control over their lives, rather than just telling them what to do.

Myths about behaviour change

Myth 1: We just need to educate people

Focusing on a knowledge gap and just giving information misses a key point. People need to experience the benefits of the promoted behaviour and feel engaged with it.

Myth 2: If people want to change, they just need to decide to do so

Strategies need to shape the environment to make practising the desired behaviour easier, highlighting the good things that people are already doing.

Myth 3: Change of attitudes will change behaviour

Understanding attitudes is important, but focus also needs to be placed on what people do.

Myth 4: Good communication will change behaviour

Good communication is important, but successful interventions focus on removing barriers to adopting the desired behaviours.

Barriers to behaviour change

Early models of behaviour change focused on individuals weighing up costs and benefits. This failed to appreciate the impact of social relations, material infrastructures and circumstances on behaviour. Successful interventions today acknowledge that an individual's attitude, values and beliefs are part of a wider complex social system.

Barriers may stop people adopting new behaviours. These are three common barriers:

- Discounting the future - people may prefer a smaller reward today over a large reward in the future. One of the barriers to energy efficiency improvements is that benefits come over a long period of time while costs such as better insulation are immediate.
- Social norms - people are heavily influenced by others around them.
- Defaults - individuals tend to go with the flow of preset options or defaults, often regardless of whether these maximise their wellbeing.

Scale of behaviour interventions

Interventions can be targeted at different levels:

- Downstream interventions focus on individuals.
- Midstream interventions focus on groups, such as communities in a specific area or people sharing a particular culture or in a particular socio-economic group.
- Upstream actions are more structural, environmental and policy approaches, aiming to affect large populations through regulation or economic incentives.

Focus of behaviour interventions

When determining what action to take, distinguish between interventions - activities aimed at changing behaviour - and policies, which are actions on the part of responsible authorities that enable or support interventions.

Be aware too that interventions could perform more than one behaviour change or

create unintended consequences.

Interventions should be ethical and should avoid:

- victimising or using excessive social pressure
- promising more than can be delivered
- promoting a behaviour with unproved effectiveness
- creating demand without adequate supply

- ignoring existing positive behaviours
- changing a behaviour without trying to understand it
- culturally insensitive interventions.









The structure of many effective interventions includes circling back to earlier steps throughout the project, gathering more data and generating more solutions.

Table 1. Some possible interventions.

INTERVENTION	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE	
Education	Increasing knowledge or understanding	Providing information to promote better home insulation	
Persuasion	Using communication to induce feelings or stimulate action	Using imagery (e.g. black mould) to motivate people to clean and ventilate better	
Incentivisation	Creating an expectation of reward	Using financial subsidies such as Warmer Kiwi Homes to encourage the uptake of insulation	
Coercion	Creating expectation of punishment or cost	Penalties for rental home owners who do not meet the healthy homes standards	
Training	Imparting skills	Training on how to use thermal simulation software	
Restriction	Using rules to reduce the opportunity to engage in unwanted behaviour	Placing restrictions on who can install home insulation and outlining required training and experience	
Environmental restructuring	Changing the physical or social context	Creating advocacy groups (e.g. the Superhome movement) to improve house performance	
Modelling	Providing an example for people to aspire to imitate	A builder constructing an innovative demonstration building or practice (e.g. the first Homestar 10 building)	
Enablement	Increasing means/reducing barriers to increase capability or opportunity	Free advice and resources for consumers to ask their builder about building beyond Code	
POLICIES	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE	
Communication / marketing	Using print, broadcast and digital media	Conducting mass media campaigns	
Guidelines	Creating documents that recommend or mandate practice, including changes to service provision	Producing and disseminating new weathertightness protocols	
Fiscal	Using the tax system to reduce or increase cost	Tax-based incentives for higher-performing buildings	
Regulation	Establishing rules or principles of behaviour or practice	Establishing voluntary agreement on building performance	
Legislation	Making or changing laws	Introducing climate change into the Building Act 2004	
Environmental/ social planning	Designing and/or controlling the physical or social environment	Using urban planning	
Service provision	Delivering a service	Establishing services like Eco Design Advisor with local government to help build better-performing homes	

Adapted from Michie, van Stralen and West (2011).

Table 2. Implementing behaviour change.

STEP	WHAT	WHY
Frame	Frame the challenge to understand the target behaviour, target audience and describe their context. What is the change required and why?	Focus efforts on behaviours and audiences that will have a meaningful impact on goals. 
Empathise	Aim to gain deep insights about the target audience's relationship with the target behaviour, including motivations and challenges.	Successful interventions depend on the ability to reach people in ways that are meaningful to them. Use similar language and try to understand their world view. 
Map	Organise insights about the target audience into behavioural motivations and challenges.	Understanding the target audience's behaviours will lead to more-effective interventions. 
Develop ideas	Generate, group and prioritise intervention ideas.	Consult and co-create with subject matter/technical experts and experts from the target audience to gain feedback on what may or may not work. This will help select interventions to pilot. 
Prototype	Select the most appropriate intervention idea and develop a small prototype that captures its essential features.	Create a small-scale version of the intervention to experiment and estimate success without investing a lot of resources. 
Test	Test the prototype with the target audience. Revise based on feedback and experience.	Before launching the intervention at scale, get feedback from selected members of the target audience in non-judgemental discussion. 
Launch	Plan and launch the full-scale intervention. Measure the impact.	Launch and implement the intervention. Prepare for measuring progress and its goal in the next step. 
Assess	Assess the impact of the intervention and reflect on potential improvements.	Evaluating the intervention will provide insights into why or why not it was successful and provide learnings for future interventions. Aim to assess: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effort – available resources, resources used by the intervention, activities carried out and the relationship between intervention activities and resources • effectiveness – outcomes achieved • efficiency – benefits to the target audience • efficiency – achievements relative to costs • execution – adequacy of process and design, delivery, accessibility quality and target audience satisfaction. 

Adapted from Rare and The Behavioural Insights Team (2019, p. 53).

Conclusion

- Changing behaviour requires intervention - a specific action or actions - to drive the change.
- Simply providing information is not enough - information is just one part of a wider set of actions.
- Interventions need to create a supportive environment and empower people - it is about working with people, not doing things to them. Bring the target audience along with you and ensure that they have input.
- Behaviour change needs to focus on the interactions between individuals and the wider system.
- Actions should be tested and evaluated. An iterative process is more effective and provides valuable insights.
- Implementing an intervention can be challenging and requires patience and persistence.
- Be open to new ideas, different world views and pragmatic experimentation.
- Many people are influenced by those around them and may not have the resources or capability to change.

Further reading

Bell, M. & MacGregor, C. (2020). *Models of behaviour change relating to energy and the built environment: An analytical review*. BRANZ Study Report SR439. Judgeford, New Zealand: BRANZ Ltd. Health Education England. (2020).

Behaviour change development framework. Retrieved from <https://behaviourchange.hee.nhs.uk/>
 Michie, S., van Stralen, M. M. & West, R. (2011). The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Science*, 6(1), 42.

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 Schmeid, P. (2017). *Behaviour change toolkit for international development practitioners*. Prague, Czech Republic: People in Need.