

Q BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

OCTOBER 2021

TIME AS A BARRIER TO QUALITY USE OF RESEARCH

This is a behavioural science perspective on **time** as a barrier to **using research well**. We spoke with **14 teachers and leaders** about their perceptions of the following research use behaviours:

1. Reading more than one credible research article. [Teachers]
2. Engaging with relevant colleagues (e.g., middle leaders) to adapt research to fit the classroom. [Teachers]
3. Trialling new research-based practices before putting them into practice. [Middle leaders / school leaders]

The interviews explored their current practice, what things they believe get in the way of using research well ('barriers') and what enables them and others to use research well ('enablers'). A quick explainer of 'behavioural influences' is provided in the Q & A box below.

TIME BARRIERS TO QUALITY USE OF RESEARCH

Preliminary interview analysis revealed, somewhat unsurprisingly, that 'time' is a barrier to using research well in practice. When discussing this, interview participants tended to talk about challenges associated with:

1. Competing priorities: This creates structural barriers and reduces opportunities for educators to use research.
2. New ideas or changes being introduced to the school too frequently: This can contribute to 'change fatigue', which reduces the opportunity and motivation for educators to use research well.

Some **examples** of how these themes were discussed by interviewees:

"I don't have a lot of spare time to do these kinds of things. Obviously, I have specific non-contact time, meeting time, that's really the only time I have to do it...And a lot of the time I have more important priorities. It limits the opportunity to even go searching for something, or even to think about it really." (Teacher)

"And I think a concern that we always have at [this school] is that we have tried a lot of things. And our staff, I anecdotally believe that they are experiencing significant change fatigue--it's just like one other thing." (Middle leader)

Q & A: BEHAVIOURAL INFLUENCES EXPLAINED

What are 'enablers and barriers'?

- **'Enablers'** are influences that make the behaviour of interest **more** likely to occur – they're things that tend to encourage or support the behaviour. **'Barriers'**, meanwhile, are influences that 'get in the way' or make the behaviour **less** likely to occur.
- They include: believing there are advantages or disadvantages to the behaviour (**attitudes**); believing the behaviour is common or uncommon or that other important people would approve or disapprove of it (**social norms**); and believing that the behaviour is easy or difficult to do (**perceived behavioural control**).

Why is it important and useful to understand enablers and barriers?

- So that we don't make assumptions about the reasons people do or don't behave in a particular way, which could lead us astray in designing effective interventions. Read more about going '[From insights to interventions](#)' [here](#).
- It helps us 'match' interventions that address barriers and/or harness key enablers, which increases their chance of success.

When and how are enablers and barriers identified?

- We try to understand enablers and barriers during a 'Deep Dive'. Read more about '[Understanding Influences](#)' [here](#).
- Typically, we explore enablers and barriers via semi-structured interviews, working from Azjen's (1985) Theory of Planned Behaviour.

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WHY ADDRESSING TIME BARRIERS IS IMPORTANT FROM A BEHAVIOUR CHANGE PERSPECTIVE

Using an example (recycling e-waste campaign), we can illustrate the importance of increasing opportunities for educators to use research.

A campaign was released to encourage Victorians to recycle their e-waste. However, at that time there were limited locations where people could take their waste to be recycled. This meant that the 'motivational' campaign was not effective—even if Victorians wanted to recycle their e-waste, many couldn't at that time—their opportunity to be able to recycle e-waste needed to be increased. The barrier was then addressed by providing a greater number of sites to recycle, increasing opportunity.

This example demonstrates that trying to support educators to use research well via skills-based or motivation-based initiatives alone will not be beneficial if educators do not have the *opportunity* to use research. Barriers that limit the opportunity for educators to use research need to be prioritised. Addressing 'time' barriers may also increase educators' motivations to use research; for instance, feeling that using research is now *more achievable* (e.g., when they feel they have less on their plate) or *more worthwhile* investing time in (e.g., when they feel that what they're working on will remain the focus for some time).

ENABLERS & POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED

Key **enablers** and **potential solutions** that **teachers** and **leaders** reported could support research use were:

1. Allocate time and formal opportunities for staff to use research (e.g., via professional learning time, formal meetings or focus groups, embedded use in the form of growth and development cycles); and
2. Review and prioritise current activities within the school (e.g., be discerning about which new initiatives are introduced and what could be removed, so that fewer activities are being completed simultaneously).

It is important to note that addressing 'time' barriers likely requires taking a whole-of-system approach (e.g., may require the provision of infrastructure from beyond the school)—some of the middle leaders and school leaders we spoke to acknowledged this. You can read more about '[Systems Thinking and Behaviour](#)' [here](#).

IMPLICATIONS

In conclusion, we highlight the following considerations **for leaders** to address 'time' barriers and facilitate quality use of research in schools:

Create opportunities for staff to use research in the form of allocated time so as to support and improve their research use (e.g., via formal, structured meetings or focus groups or via growth and development cycles).

Take an evidence-based approach to prioritising which activities are introduced to the school (and reviewing which can be discontinued), so that changes are made less frequently and space is created to help staff use research well (i.e., by increasing their opportunities and motivations to use research).

NEXT STEPS

As part of the Monash Q Project, our next steps are to validate the interview findings and to collaborate with teachers and leaders across Australia to design interventions that could support educators to use research well (using the [BWA method](#)).

Share your experiences and school's insights generated from **Q Conversations**. To connect with us, please visit:



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MonashQProject@monash.edu