

Q BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

NOVEMBER 2022

SUPPORTING QUALITY USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE THROUGH 'OPPORTUNITY'

This is a behavioural science perspective on how different types of social and physical infrastructure can provide much needed **opportunities** for quality use of research evidence in schools.

When it comes to supporting teachers, and others, in the education sector to use research evidence more thoughtfully, we just need to provide them with information and knowledge about the issue, right? If we educate them about the importance of quality use of research evidence, and its related benefits, then they will immediately make the relevant changes to their teaching practices.

This logic is commonly followed when attempting to engage people on various issues. Namely, provide them with information and knowledge and that is enough to change behaviours. In a study conducted in 2011¹, social psychologist Icek Ajzen concluded that:

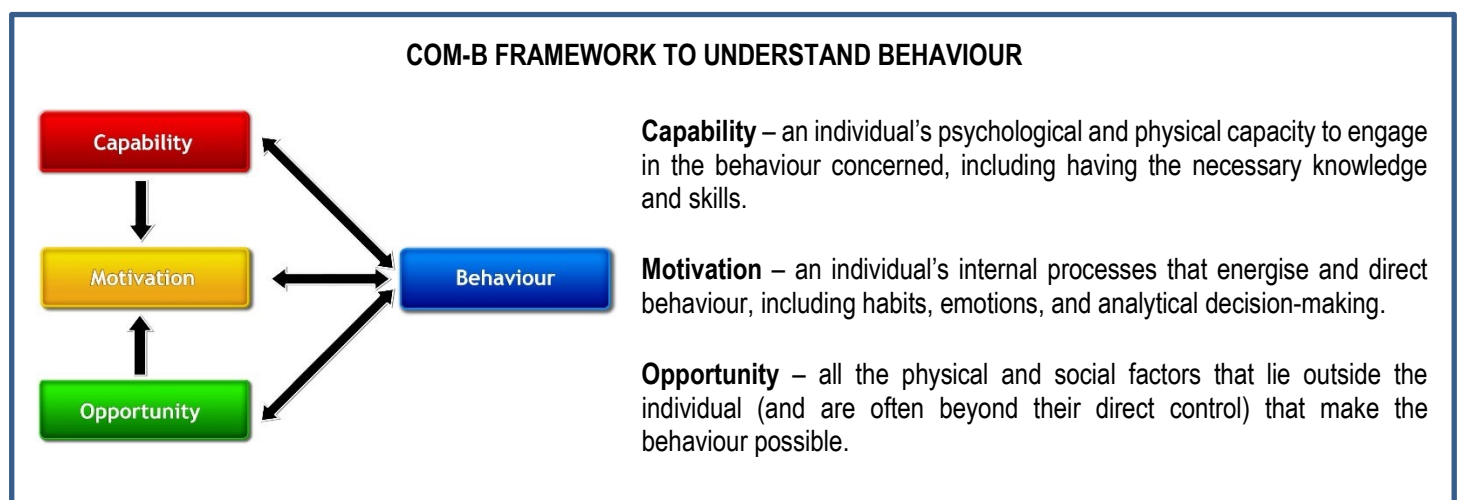
Many educational campaigns ... are focused on imparting accurate factual information of a general nature. It's expected once people have a good understanding of the issues, they will engage in [the] desirable behaviour. Unfortunately, more often than not, this approach ends in failure ... (p 116)

To change behaviour, simply providing people with information is not enough and can be completely irrelevant to the particular behaviour. This 'information – action' gap exists because, in addition to information, there are a broad range of other factors, such as social norms, emotions or habits, that can influence behaviour. This is something that we have spoken about in in other **Behavioural Insight** pieces, see **Sharing Research Effectively** for additional information. And one of these potential influencers is the **environmental or social infrastructures** that can support or enable a particular behaviour.

INTRODUCING THE COM-B FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND BEHAVIOUR

Before further discussing the behavioural influence of infrastructure on the use of research evidence in schools, and how it can be used to support quality use, it's worth introducing the COM-B framework as important background.

The framework was developed in 2011 by psychologist Susan Michie² and her colleagues and it argues that behaviour is often the result of interactions between an individual's **motivations**, **capabilities**, and **opportunities**. Each component of the framework is described in the section below.



¹ Ajzen, I., et al. (2011). Knowledge and the prediction of behavior: The role of information accuracy in the theory of planned behavior. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 33(2): 101.

² Michie, S., et al. (2011). The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Science* 6(1): 42.

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WE NEED TO PROVIDE *OPPORTUNITY* TO ENGAGE IN QUALITY USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE


The **COM-B framework** supports the argument about information, knowledge, and infrastructure made previously. A focus on increasing educators' motivation by providing information about the benefits of research evidence, or their capability through professional development on research evidence use, is not enough if they do not have the opportunity to engage in the relevant behaviours.

It's a little like encouraging people to use sustainable transport without a train station or bus stop in the neighbourhood. Infrastructure, either physical (such as access to research journals or databases) or social (such as research champions or lunchtime sharing sessions), that gives teachers an opportunity to perform the different behaviours related to quality use of research evidence, is an important ingredient when it comes to encouraging behaviour change.

WHAT DOES PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES LOOK LIKE?

We spoke with 14 school leaders and teachers about the different physical or social infrastructures that provide them greater opportunity to engage in different behaviours related to quality use of research evidence. Here are some of the things that they mentioned:

- Educators need to have access to academic research journals and databases (**physical infrastructure**).
- Educators need to have dedicated time to be able to embed research in practice. For example, through allocated resources (e.g., teacher release) and formalised frameworks (e.g., part of improvement cycles) (**physical infrastructure**), as well as setting aside meeting time to collaborate, discuss and share research with colleagues (**social infrastructure**).
- Research use can be facilitated by set times in the semester for subject specific, or year-level specific, teachers to come together to discuss research and consider how it might be implemented (**social infrastructure**).
- Having access to specific research experts or champions was important: this might be librarians within the school, 'research-use champions' or mentors, as well as collaborations with external (university) researchers (**physical/social infrastructure**).
- School processes and activities (such a curriculum or teaching planning) requiring the inclusion of research evidence to justify approaches and decisions (**social infrastructure**).

 *"We do have subscriptions to these [journals] that teachers can access [**increased physical opportunity**]. They usually don't [access them] that much, because of time [**reduced physical opportunity**]. Often, I'll be the one that will go through and find something for them, and send it over to them [**increased social opportunity**]." – Teacher.*

NEXT STEPS

If you are interested in supporting quality use of research evidence in your school, **in addition** to ensuring that teachers and others are motivated to use research evidence, and have the necessary capabilities, conduct a research infrastructure audit. Are there relevant social and physical opportunities in place for teachers to engage in the different behaviours related to evidence use?

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