

WORK PSYCHOLOGY SERIES

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE IN ORGANISATIONS

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

At CRF we believe HR's purpose is to help the organisation build both people capability and an enabling environment, helping define and deliver a strategy that creates sustainable stakeholder value. Therefore, a key goal of HR practices and HR strategy more broadly is to shape employee behaviour in ways that contribute to the performance of the organisation.

Psychologists have studied behaviour at work since around the early 1900s. Work psychology¹ as a scientific discipline therefore provides much of the foundational knowledge for HR practice.

The purpose of the **Work Psychology Series** is to provide an outline of work psychology theory and evidence relevant to various areas of HR activity and consider implications for HR practice.

These reports contribute directly to the effectiveness of the HR function and HR professionals by providing a more detailed, elaborate and nuanced understanding of both the nature of the workplace behavioural phenomena HR is trying to shape and which practices or approaches are most likely to help do this.

As discussed in several of our previous reports – including [Evidence-Based HR: A New Paradigm](#) and [Driving Organisational Performance: HR's Critical Role](#) – the HR function's effectiveness depends on being able as accurately as possible to identify HR-relevant business issues and actions that will help resolve those issues.

The insights provided by work psychology research help us do both these things, taking us beyond the usually unhelpful notion of 'best practice' and instead to practices relevant to our business context and the specific issues our business faces.

¹ Work psychology is also known as organisational psychology, occupational psychology, industrial psychology and is more-or-less the same as organisational behaviour.

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He was previously co-founder and Scientific Director of the Center for Evidence-Based Management and has held positions at the Institute for Employment Studies, London School of Economics, Kings's College (University of London), Bath University and University of Edinburgh.

His research has focused on several topics including wellbeing, emotions, stress, ethnicity, the psychological contract, organisational culture and climate, absence from work, motivation, work-nonwork and everyday work behaviour.

Beyond academic research and teaching Rob helps practitioners and organisations make better use of evidence, including research evidence, in decision-making as well as encouraging academics to make scientific research more accessible. He has written for and presented to practitioners on many aspects of management, HR and organisational psychology and is now involved in many initiatives aimed at developing and promoting evidence-based practice. He has received several awards for his work in this area including the British Psychological Society Division of Occupational Psychology Academic Contribution to Practice Award in 2014 and topped *HR Magazine's* Most Influential Thinker list in 2016 and in 2019 received a Lifetime Achievement Award and was admitted to *HR Magazine's* Hall of Fame.



Behaviours are more than soft skills – they're strategic assets. When clustered and aligned with KPIs, they reveal individual strengths and development opportunities. At a broader level, they influence team and functional productivity, ultimately driving organisational strategy.

This whitepaper explores a powerful idea: HR's most effective lever isn't policy or programme, but the intentional design of behavioural interventions aligned with strategic goals.

APS believes that behaviour change is neither mysterious nor reliant on willpower alone. It begins with awareness – of how we behave, how others perceive us, and how those perceptions shape our impact. When development is grounded in understanding of beliefs such as individual values, aspirations, and emotional intelligence, people become more open to change. Real transformation occurs when individuals engage in targeted learning experiences and realistic scenarios that challenge assumptions and allow them to rehearse new responses. Knowledge alone rarely drives behavioural change; context, feedback, and practice make it last.

Rob Field, Learning and Development Director, [Advanced People Strategies](#)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The main purpose of HR is to help the organisation achieve its objectives. It does this largely through shaping specific employee behaviours so that they help meet these objectives. **This report focuses on interventions that deliberately and purposefully aim to actually change such behaviours.**



In the context of this report, employee behaviour refers to **specific, measurable and observable actions** rather than, for example, the outcomes or results of behaviour or employee attitudes.



Sometimes **HR focuses on broad and quite general descriptions of behaviour or pseudo-behaviours** (e.g., teamwork, flexibility, being proactive) which are difficult to define and therefore difficult to measure or change.



Identifying **specific and measurable employee behaviours that contribute to organisational objectives (also known as pinpointing)** is crucial in behaviour change.



Behaviour change can mean many quite different things including trying to elicit a new behaviour, eliminating an existing behaviour or increasing/reducing the frequency of a behaviour. Hence, **it is important to be precise about the behaviour change required.**



Other features of the behaviour change sought must also be specified, such as the speed of change and the importance of maintaining the change. In addition, the speed of change and what needs to happen once the behaviour change has been achieved needs to be considered.



There is **a large (well over 50) number of models and frameworks for understanding why and how behaviour changes.** We should not therefore just rely on a single or particular approach to behaviour change and use the context to help identify which is likely to be most useful.



Research on behaviour change has focused on many diverse contexts including the health behaviours of patients and general populations, offenders, children in educational settings, customers and consumer behaviour, drivers and employees. Each context offers different opportunities for controlling the environment, the specificity of the behaviour change required and the extent to which the behaviour change is required or needed.



An important point is that **we do not need to understand or intervene in the root causes of behaviour to change it.** Typically behaviour change interventions involve changing aspects of the immediate environment.



It appears that **HR deploys many practices that are hoped will change behaviour in relevant ways but probably do not.** This happens for a range of reasons, including that practices sometimes focus on pseudo behaviours rather than actual behaviours and that there may be insufficient distinction between performance or outcomes and the specific employee behaviours that drive them.



Two examples of **practices that are probably not particularly effective** are:

- 1 **Changing employee attitudes to change behaviour:** General employee attitudes are not particularly strong causes of behaviour; changing attitudes is difficult; **behaviour change causes attitude change, not the other way around.**
- 2 **Changing culture to change performance:** There may not be a single culture to change; definitions of culture typically include behaviour, therefore **culture is not a cause of behaviour but a description of it.**



Two examples of models and frameworks for thinking about how and why behaviour changes are the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the COM-B Model. **The Theory of Planned Behaviour** considers attitudes towards the specific behaviour, perceptions of subjective norms for engaging in the behaviour and perceptions of behavioural control as drivers of behaviour. The **COM-B Model** suggests that capability, motivation and opportunity lead to behaviour.

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There are around **100 different behavioural change techniques which means that there is no 'best' or most effective technique.** Which may be most effective depends on the context. Most behavioural change interventions combine several behavioural change techniques.

Three approaches to behavioural change are:

- 1 The **Behavioural Change Wheel**, which draws on the COM-B model, helps identify which of the nine intervention functions is required.
- 2 The **Behavioural Change Technique Taxonomy** presents a structured and comprehensive framework for choosing which techniques are most likely to be effective.
- 3 **Organisational Behaviour Management** is the only approach developed specifically for bringing about behaviour change in organisations. It focuses on antecedents and consequences of behaviour and places great emphasis on pinpointing specific employee behaviours that are required to meet organisational objectives.



CRF's eight step **Evidence-Based HR Behaviour Change Model** provides a practical framework for bringing about specific and measurable changes in employee behaviour that are likely to help the organisation meet its objectives. It draws heavily on the Organisational Behaviour Management approach and combines this with CRF's previous work on Evidence-Based HR and how HR can drive organisational performance.



By having some understanding of behaviour change theories and techniques, and, equally importantly, a very good understanding of the context and the organisational objectives, we vastly increase the chances that we will identify which specific behaviours need to change, to what strategic ends and how we can best bring about such behaviour changes.

INTRODUCTION

"Behaviour IS business.

All organisational results are the product of human behaviour."

Daniels & Bailey (2014)

The main purpose of HR is to help the business achieve its objectives. It does this largely through trying to shape and change employee behaviour so that it is directed towards meeting those objectives.

Often, HR practices are quite broad (e.g., compensation and benefits, development opportunities, employee value propositions, wellbeing programmes) and are put in place in an attempt to shape or influence a potentially very wide and usually unspecified range of general employee behaviours (e.g., job performance, discretionary effort, loyalty) that are thought to relate broadly to organisational success.

The links between these broad practices, a wide range of underspecified behaviours and organisational outcomes are not easy or perhaps even impossible to identify or evaluate.

In contrast to this approach, **HR also sometimes needs to deliberately and actually change – rather than just try to shape or influence – very specific behaviours** in teams and in particular roles (e.g., behaviours related to customer service or innovation) within the workforce when such behaviours are directly relevant to the organisation's strategic objectives.

Deliberately bringing about real and measurable changes in such specific and organisationally important behaviours can only be done through precise and targeted behaviour change interventions. This report focuses on these very specific behaviours and targeted interventions rather than general classes of behaviour and somewhat unfocused interventions.

The links between targeted interventions, specific behaviours and particular strategic objectives are easier to identify and evaluate.

The *Behavioural Perspective of Strategic Human Resource Management* (Jackson, 2013) provides a framework for thinking through how and why specific behaviours help drive organisational performance. It has the following six principles as described in the table.

Behavioural perspective of strategic HRM: Some fundamentals (adapted from Jackson, 2013)

- 1 The Focus Is On Desired Employee Behaviours:** *Which specific employee behaviours are desirable given organisational objectives?*
- 2 Different Organisations Need Different Employee Behaviours:** *Because organisations have different objectives, different structures and resources and are indifferent contexts.*
- 3 Organisational are More Effective in Meeting Their Objectives When Employees Behave as Desired:** *Because employees are exhibiting behaviours that are more likely to help the organisation meet its objectives.*
- 4 Employee Behaviours Reflect Situational Influences:** *Many factors affect employee behaviours (e.g., personality, mood) but the situation or context can exert a particularly strong influence. Hence behaviour change interventions often focus on changing the situation or context.*
- 5 Management Policies and Practices Including Behavioural Change Interventions Shape Employee Behaviours:** *Situational and contextual influences within organisations are determined by the decisions managers and HR functions makes about which policies and practices to implement.*
- 6 Effective Policies and Practices Support and Shape Desired Employee Behaviours:** *In order for these policies to be effective (i.e., drive organisational performance) they need to support and shape desired employee behaviours.*

As we will discuss later in more detail (and was also discussed in an earlier CRF report [Driving Organisational Performance HR's Critical Role](#)) in order for HR to help drive organisational performance it must start with a good understanding of the organisation's strategic objectives and how HR practices and policies can contribute to those objectives by shaping employee behaviour in ways that are relevant to meeting those objectives.

This table shows four different types of strategic objectives, and examples of the sorts of behaviours that behavioural change interventions might target in order to shape those employee behaviours that are likely to help an organisation meet each objective. Note that these are very general strategic objectives and behaviour change targets listed here would need to be made much more specific.

EXAMPLES OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND DESIRED BEHAVIOURS THAT COULD BE TARGETED IN A BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE INTERVENTION

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	TARGET OF BEHAVIOUR CHANGE INTERVENTION
- Developing new products - Improving quality - Retaining customers - Increasing revenue	- Behaviours around innovation - Error reduction behaviours - Behaviours related to resolving customer queries - Sales-closing behaviours

For example, a key strategic objective for a business may be to develop a particular number of a type of new product within a given time frame. Perhaps the business is falling behind its competitors in this respect or consumer expectations are changing. In order to develop these new products, we would need to consider which specific types of behaviours, and in which employees and teams, are most likely to help achieve this.

In this case, the most desirable behaviours would be those around innovation. Such behaviours include, but are not limited to, idea generation, collaboration, knowledge sharing, championing of ideas and idea implementation. Again, in practice, as will we go on to discuss, these behaviours would need to be specified in precise detail.

In this example, as is always the case, targeted behaviour change interventions focus on changing specific behaviours which should, in principle, help achieve a particular strategic objective. Whether this happens, even if behaviours have changed, depends on a range of contextual factors.

For HR, changing or attempting to change behaviour must always be done for a clear and important purpose. And that purpose is to help the business achieve its objectives.

Drawing on psychology theory and research from work psychology, other areas of psychology, organisational behaviour management and behavioural economics, this report addresses the following questions:

- What is behaviour?
- What behaviour change?
- How can we explain why behaviour changes?
- What techniques can be used to change behaviour?
- How can an Evidence-Based HR approach be used to design and evaluate behaviour change interventions?

+ COMMON PRACTITIONER CONCERNS

What about goal-setting and performance coaching?

While these are not behavioural change interventions in themselves, they certainly can play a very important role within a wider behavioural change intervention. In each case, they would have to focus on specific, measurable and observable behaviours that were linked to organisational objectives. There are, as discussed, many other techniques which may be useful in the context of a broader behaviour change intervention such as checklists, modelling and job descriptions, etc. However, the relevance and value of any of these and other techniques depends on the particular context and the focus of behaviour change.

WHAT IS BEHAVIOUR?

HOW DOES BEHAVIOUR DIFFER FROM OTHER WORK-RELATED PHENOMENA? HOW CAN IT BE IDENTIFIED?

Defining our terms and being precise as possible about the meaning of the things we are trying to do is an essential prerequisite for taking effective action. This is particularly true when the terms in question, in this case *behaviour* and *behaviour change*, are so familiar and used so often that we assume their meaning is obvious, we know what they mean and that meaning is shared.

2.1 WHAT IS BEHAVIOUR? AND WHAT IS NOT BEHAVIOUR?

The starting point for any discussion of behaviour change must be to say what we mean by behaviour. This table provides a definition of behaviour and includes examples of phenomena which are not behaviour.

Definitions of Behaviour and What Is Not Behaviour

(*Drawing on Daniels & Bailey, 2014, and Den Broeder & Kerkhofs, 2020*)

WHAT IS BEHAVIOUR?

- Observable, measurable and active (e.g., physically doing something, saying something)
- Conscious thoughts and feelings (as these are observable and measurable to the person) that occur at particular moments, although some definitions of behaviour exclude such internal and private phenomena.

WHAT IS NOT BEHAVIOUR?

- Outcomes and results of behaviour
- Attitudes (e.g., satisfaction, engagement, commitment)
- States (behaviours may result in states but are not states)
- Values (e.g., moral or work-related)
- Activities and tasks
- General vague categories of behaviour (e.g., teamwork, enthusiasm, communication, delegating, being proactive)

Definitions of behaviour heavily emphasise that it must be something observable and measurable. While there are some debates about whether unobservable and internal activities, such as thoughts, can be considered to be behaviour, **the key in the context of behaviour change is that the behaviour targeted for change must be observable and measurable.** If it not, it is not possible to target interventions, to provide feedback or to track changes in behaviour as it is not possible to see them or measure them.

This means we need to be as precise as possible about the behaviours we want to change.

Many examples from everyday life illustrate the importance of focusing on specific, observable and measurable behaviours if you want to achieve a particular outcome. Let's take the example of trying to get physically fit. Of course, we would also need to be much more precise about what that means, but let's assume we have already done this.

Getting fit requires us to engage in specific behaviours. However, as shown in the figure, we may actually do lots of other things in the belief or hope that they will help us get fit, but many will not.

FROM VAGUE GOALS AND AMBITIONS TO SPECIFIC, OBSERVABLE AND MEASURABLE BEHAVIOURS: THE CASE OF TRYING TO GET FIT.

FITNESS-ORIENTED BEHAVIOURS THAT ARE **LESS LIKELY** TO HELP YOU GET FIT



- Think a lot about being fit.
- Develop a 'fitness mindset'.
- Tell your friends you're going to get fit.
- Watch some fitness videos.
- Be more active (take the stairs a bit more)
- Buy a fitbit
- Get some books about getting fit.
- Try to walk instead of getting the bus.
- Buy new sportswear.
- Get a juicer.
- Join a gym.
- Go to the gym (and do some activity).
- Have an occasional jog.
- Do some lengths in the pool.
- Plan (and schedule) to go to the gym three times a week.
- Find a friend to go jogging with and commit to a schedule.
- Devise a gym routine (exercises and time) and keep a record.

FITNESS-ORIENTED BEHAVIOURS THAT ARE **MORE LIKELY** TO HELP YOU GET FIT

In the workplace, as in everyday life, if we want to change behaviour to get the outcomes we want, then we need to focus *on* behaviour and not on things that are *not* behaviour.

2.2 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BEHAVIOUR AND OTHER WORK-RELATED PHENOMENA

One common confusion is between behaviours and the outcomes or results. **Outcomes, results and work performance are in part the consequences of behaviour and are not behaviours in themselves.** For example, a salesperson may have closed four deals over the course of a week. This outcome or result is the consequence of many behaviours such as contacting clients, describing products and services, engaging in particular customer-oriented behaviours, following-up with clients and so on. Closing four deals is a result, not a behaviour.

This distinction between behaviour and results is even greater when we move beyond individual performance and consider the distinction between employee behaviours exhibited by many employees over a period of time and long-term organisational outcomes. Returning to the example of developing new products, a group of employees may, over months or years, exhibit many of the specific behaviours required for innovation, which may, over time, help new products to be developed and produced. The outcome or result is not the same as the behaviours that helped produce it.

This distinction is practically important, as shaping employee performance is not about trying to manage results or outcomes but rather about managing and changing behaviours, which in turn are likely to lead to the desired outcomes.

It is not possible to manage results or outcomes – this is way too late as it's the end of the process – but it is possible to manage behaviours that help produce outcomes.

Similarly, **activities and tasks are not behaviours** but rather constitute **a set of behaviours**, often performed in a particular sequence. Organising a meeting, for example, is a task composed of several behaviours including checking colleagues' availability, booking a room and devising an agenda.

It appears that many of the things HR attempts to change or influence in current employees, or are sought after in prospective employees, are not behaviours. In some cases, they describe characteristics or traits an employee might possess. In other cases, they describe employee states. Yet, in other cases, they seem to be subjective or value-based judgements of a person or their behaviours. But, in all cases, these are not in themselves behaviours. Examples of some of the things HR sometimes wants employees to be or to do that are not behaviours are listed in the table (adapted from Den Broeder & Kerkhofs, 2020).

Examples of things HR sometimes wants employees to be or to do that are *not* behaviours, and therefore not appropriate targets for behavioural change

- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| • Agile | • Dedicated | • Loyalty |
| • Assertive | • Delegate | • Mentoring |
| • Authentic | • Delivery-focused | • Motivated |
| • Aware | • Enthusiastic | • Open |
| • Business-oriented | • Engaged | • Ownership |
| • Coaching | • Empathic | • Proactive |
| • Collegial | • Energetic | • Professional |
| • Committed | • Enthusiastic | • Reliable |
| • Communicative | • Flexible | • Responsible |
| • Collaborative | • Helpful | • Results-oriented |
| • Coordinating | • Honest | • Safety conscious |
| • Creative | • Independent | • Self-managing/starting |
| • Curious | • Influencing | • Solution-oriented |
| • Customer-oriented | • Initiative-taking | • Systematic |
| • Decisive | • Inventive | • Trustworthy |

Trying to change or manage things that have unclear meanings and are hard to observe, let alone measure, is very difficult, if not impossible. For the same reasons, it's also impossible to know whether any of these things are related in any way to organisational objectives, and, hence we cannot know if they are important or relevant to what the business is trying to achieve.

Focusing on such pseudo-behaviours seems quite common in HR. This is unlikely to help the organisation.

It's noteworthy that **so-called leadership behaviours are also often *not* behaviours**, and are therefore difficult to change or develop for the same reasons. Good examples of pseudo-behaviours can be found in the [long list of leadership behaviours](#) provided by Brené Brown in relation to her work on daring leadership.

As we will discuss in much more detail later, **managing behaviour requires us to focus very closely on specific behaviours** and to not focus on other phenomena that are not behaviours.

2.3 IDENTIFYING AND MEASURING BEHAVIOURS

As emphasised throughout this and all Work Psychology Network reports, it is important to **start with our purpose**. What are we trying to achieve? In the case of identifying behaviours, the purpose is to identify those that are related to organisational objectives in order to deliberately change behaviour if that behaviour is not happening (or if a behaviour *is* occurring that makes it more difficult to meet organisational objectives).

In other words, to understand which behaviours are relevant and therefore need to be identified, **we first need to understand the organisational objective and how employee behaviours are or could contribute to achieving that objective**.

Let's take the example of a supermarket chain that has identified improving customer service experience in stores as a strategic objective. What would be the next steps? Here are some suggestions:

- 1 Identify the drivers of customer service experience in the stores (e.g., till wait times, availability of staff on shop floor, staff approachability, staff knowledge and ability to answer customer queries, complaint resolution).
- 2 Establish which drivers are most important for customer service experience.
- 3 Establish which of the most important drivers can most readily be addressed *through behaviour change* (e.g., availability of staff on shop floor may be more affected by staffing levels than employee behaviour and similarly staff knowledge may be more to do with training and selection than employee behaviour).
- 4 Taking each of these relevant behaviours make each more specific, active, observable and measurable.

Working with the example of staff approachability on the shop floor, it would then be necessary to understand which specific employee behaviours affect customers' perceptions of staff approachability. One way of doing this might be through examining existing customer service research to find out if there was existing evidence on what affects perceptions of staff approachability. Another way might be to talk to customers to find out which staff behaviours they feel make staff seem more or less approachable.

Through a process known as **pinpointing** within organisational behaviour management, we may discover that there are three key staff behaviours which strongly shape customers' perceptions of staff approachability on the shop floor:

- 1 **Making some eye contact with customers**
(so customers feel staff are aware of their presence).
- 2 **Smiling at customers**
(so customers feel staff are open to interaction and are taking an interest).
- 3 **Asking customers directly if they require help**
(so customers know they have an opportunity to ask questions).

In this example, it is these three behaviours that we would attempt to identify and measure. Initially, it would be important to establish a baseline to find out more about the extent to which these behaviours are already occurring and where and why there may be differences across, for example, stores, staff or times of day.

In other words, we identify and measure behaviours that are driving outcomes relevant to organisational objectives.

This example will be discussed in more detail at the end of the report when we consider an Evidence-Based HR approach to behaviour change.

2.4 UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOUR IN CONTEXT: THE ABC MODEL

One way of distinguishing behaviour from other phenomena is to think about behaviour in the context of its antecedents and its consequences.

One widely used model across various areas of psychology is the ABC model, which we will return to later. This model sets out, for any important behaviour, its antecedents and consequences.

Antecedents refer to anything that triggers a behaviour. Note that antecedents are not causes as such. Definitions from the organisational behaviour management literature include:

"Antecedents are stimuli in the environment that (because of their previous association with consequences) increase the likelihood that a certain response will occur... Antecedents do not literally cause behaviour... They communicate information about behaviour and its consequences."

Daniels & Bailey (2014)

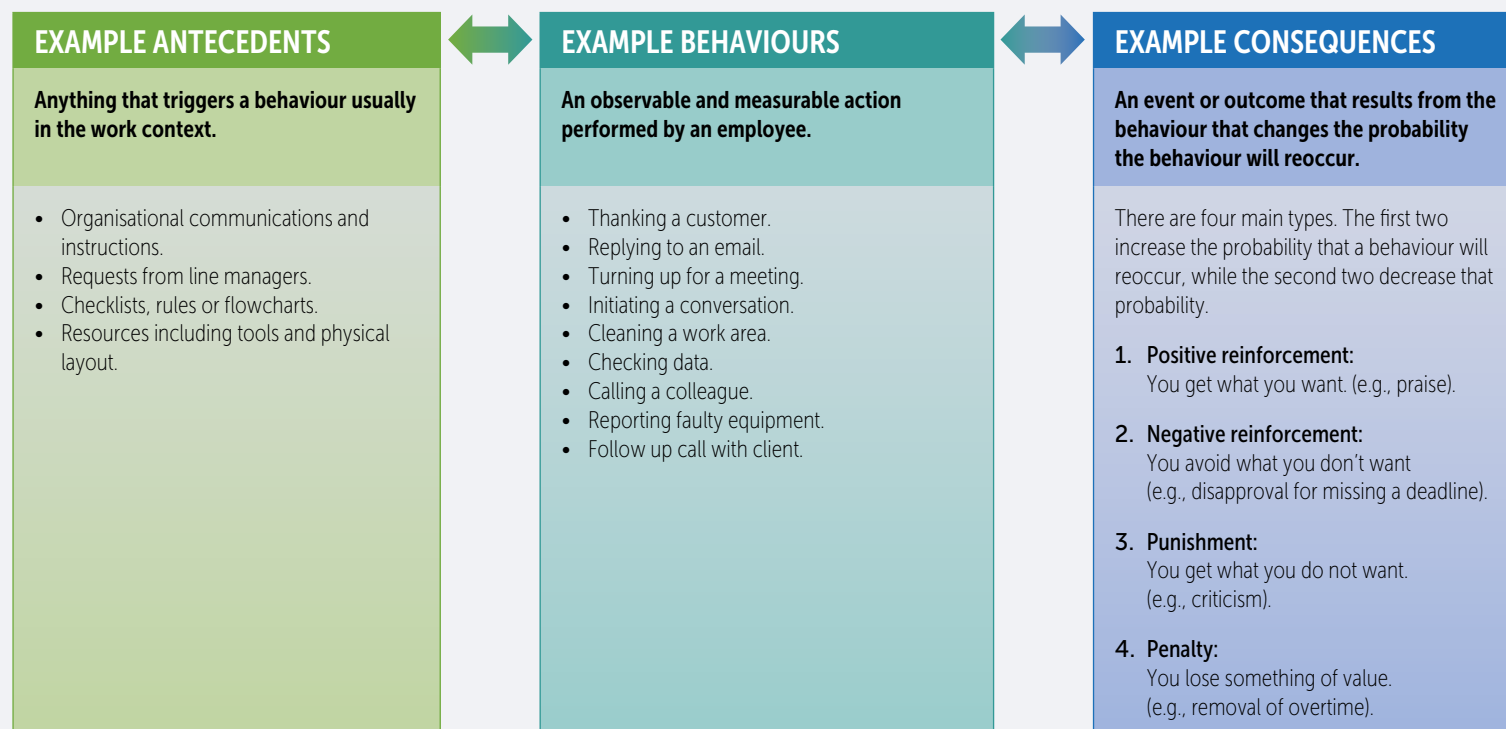
"Everything that precedes and prompts a behaviour. Antecedents also provide information about behavioural consequences contingent on that behaviour. Antecedents prompt behaviour, but there is no cause-effect relationship between the antecedent and behaviour. Antecedents are already present in the context of the performer before behaviour is emitted."

Den Broeder & Kerkhofs (2020)

As we will go on to discuss, **most approaches to behaviour change focus on changing the context or environment**. That is, they focus on the antecedents to behaviour found in the work context.

EXAMPLES OF ANTECEDENTS, BEHAVIOUR AND CONSEQUENCES OF BEHAVIOUR IN THE WORKPLACE

(drawing on Den Broeder & Kerkhofs, 2020; Daniels & Bailey, 2014).



Consequences are outcomes that occur as a result of specific behaviours.

"Consequences are events that follow a behaviour and change the probability that the behaviour will recur in the future."

Daniels & Bailey (2014)

Consequences that provide reinforcement (positive or negative) increase the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated. Consequences that provide punishment or penalty reduce the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated.

The ABC Model shows behaviour in the relation to its antecedents and its consequences and helps distinguish employee behaviour from possible triggers of that behaviour and potential outcomes that result from emitting that behaviour.

We will return to the ABC Model later when we discuss behavioural change techniques.

WHAT IS BEHAVIOUR CHANGE?

If we want to change behaviour, it is essential we are as precise as possible not only about what we mean by 'behaviour', but about what we mean by 'change' and how we see the process as unfolding over time.

As we will go on to discuss, it is also essential that we carefully monitor changes in behaviour to check if such changes are happening, and happening in the way intended.

3.1 MEANINGS OF CHANGE

When we aim to change behaviour, the change we may want to see can mean several different things:

- + Introducing a new behaviour:** When a desirable behaviour is currently not exhibited at all (e.g., collaborations across teams which has not been attempted before).
- + Eliminating an existing behaviour:** When we want to eliminate an undesirable behaviour (e.g., stopping a behaviour which is unsafe).
- + Reducing/increasing frequency of a behaviour:** When the behaviour is already taking place but too often or not often enough (e.g., missed calls from customers are usually, but not always, returned).
- + Reducing/increasing the intensity of a behaviour:** When a behaviour is already taking place but it is too strong or intense, or not strong or intense enough (e.g., editing and amending documents more than is necessary for the desired result).
- + Changing when a behaviour occurs:** (e.g., a response to an email always occurs, but not close enough to the receipt of the email).

These distinctions in what exactly we mean by 'change' are very important when it comes to identifying, as precisely as possible, not only the behaviours we wish to change but how we want them to change.

3.2 SPEED OF CHANGE

How quickly do we want the behaviour change to happen? Clearly, there may be costs, benefits and unintended outcomes if we try to bring about behaviour change either too quickly or too slowly. The most effective speed of change will depend on many contextual factors, including the nature of the behaviour change required, business objectives and individual and organisational resources.

3.3 WHEN THE CHANGE IS ACHIEVED: WHAT NEXT?

If the monitoring shows that the intervention has brought about the intended behaviour change, then the intervention has been effective. However, we need to consider also what might happen next to this behaviour change. This is part of what we need to consider when we define what we mean by behaviour change.

Our monitoring may show that the behaviour has changed and remains stable. Whether this is desirable or not depends on the impacts of the behaviour change. In some cases, it may be desirable and important that the behaviour change is sustained at the same level.

On the other hand, the monitoring may show that the behaviour is *still* changing, though in different ways.

First, the change may start to reverse or go backwards. For example, a behaviour that increased in frequency to a desired point may, over time, start to reduce in frequency. This is unlikely to be desirable, but, *specifying in advance* what reversals are acceptable or not can help plan for additional interventions to maintain the change.

Second, the change may keep continuing. For example, a behaviour that increased in frequency may keep increasing. This situation may be desirable if more of the behaviour is simply better. On the other hand, it may be undesirable if there is too much of a good thing. For example, asking waiting staff in a restaurant to improve the customer experience by checking whether customers need anything or are enjoying their meal may be effective but only up to a point. If staff start asking too frequently, this may make the customer experience worse.

Being as clear as we can about what we mean by behaviour change in relation to any specific intervention is important for helping us design that intervention but also for ensuring its working by bringing about changes in behaviour in the way we intended.

WHY AND HOW DOES BEHAVIOUR CHANGE?

MODELS AND FRAMEWORKS

The idea of behaviour change is so common and sounds so fundamental to many areas of individuals' lives and societies that we might assume that, after hundreds of years of research in psychology and other sciences, there is now some agreement about the few models and frameworks that seem most promising and have the greatest scientific support.

However, there are a very large number of such models. Darnton (2008) described over 60 models and theories of behaviour and behaviour change. In a scoping review, Davis et al (2015) identified 82 theories.

These theories are often quite different from each other and use different internal and external factors and mechanisms to account for behaviour change. In other words, they do not collectively form a clear or single framework with consistent practical guidance:

“Despite rapid growth in the empirical research on behaviour change, modern science has yet to produce a coherent set of recommendations for individuals and organisations eager to align everyday actions with enduringly valued goals.”

Duckworth & Gross (2020)

What does this mean practically for HR practitioners who want to change employee behaviour? The most important lesson is that **we should not just believe in or rely on a single and particular approach to understanding behaviour change**. We should also be highly sceptical of any model which claims to hold the 'secret' or the 'key' to behaviour change as no such model exists.

Another implication is that **the context is key to understanding behaviour change and what are likely to be the most effective interventions**. A framework which is extremely useful for explaining changes in a specific behaviour in a particular setting may be irrelevant for understanding changes in different behaviours in a different setting.

Why are there so many models and frameworks? One reason, as indicated above, is that explaining behaviour change depends on the behaviour and the setting. Psychologists and others who work on behaviour change are usually concerned with very different types of behaviours in very different settings. We discuss examples of these in the next section.

4.1 THE DIVERSE CONTEXTS OF BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

As mentioned, the idea of behaviour change is very common, and this is not surprising. In almost every context or setting in which people are engaging in behaviour, there will be attempts to shape or change behaviour. This usually means reducing behaviours that are regarded as harmful and/or increasing behaviours that are considered to be beneficial.

WHO?	EXAMPLES OF BEHAVIOUR CHANGE	EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS
Individual patient	Quit smoking. Exercise more. Eat more healthily.	Individual or group level counselling. Information.
General population (health)	Quit smoking. Exercise more. Eat more healthily.	Information. Campaigns. Changes in legislation. Increase access to resources.
General population (environment)	More recycling. Stop fly-tipping.	Campaigns. Punishments and fines. CCTV.
Offenders	Reduce re-offending.	Prisons and other penalties. Rehabilitation.
Young child	Toothbrushing. Potty training.	Information and education. Modelling. Reward charts.
Schoolchildren	Reduce disruption in classrooms. Accelerate reading and maths skills.	Traffic light system. Changes to teaching method. Introduction of teaching assistants.
Air passengers	Wear seatbelts.	Demonstrations. Modelling. Checking.
Customers	Switch to another product. Buy more.	Marketing. Design of purchasing websites. Supermarket design and layout.
Employees	Greater customer focus.	Training. Observing and feedback. Modelling.
Drivers	Safer driving.	Signage. Speed cameras. Points system. Campaigns.

These diverse behavioural settings – from a community to a classroom to inside a car – provide quite different opportunities and constraints for changing behaviour. In some cases, for example in schools or supermarkets, individuals who are the targets of behaviour change interventions are in environments which can be redesigned to bring about changes in behaviour. In other cases, such as working with individual patients or the general population, it is much more difficult to change the environment and, therefore, other approaches to behaviour change may be required.

In some contexts, the behaviour change is very specific (e.g., quitting smoking). It is reasonably clear what not smoking means as a piece of behaviour. In others contexts (e.g., eat more healthily) the behaviour change is more general and could involve many different behaviours.

Another important difference is that, in some contexts, we desire to shape the choices or decisions people make and accept that perhaps only a few will choose to make that behaviour change. These are contexts in which we would *like*, ideally, the behaviour to change. An example might be to encourage more green behaviours such as recycling. In other contexts, it is less about shaping choice and hoping that some will change their behaviour, but rather about ensuring that as many people as possible do so. We *want* and need the behaviour to change. An example of this is wearing seatbelts on a plane.

These differences in types of context and types of behaviour change required help explain why there are, and perhaps need to be, so many models of behaviour change. **Across these contexts, there are three main dimensions or continua of difference:**

- 1 The environment can easily be redesigned *versus* very difficult to redesign.
- 2 The behaviour change desired is quite specific *versus* very general.
- 3 The change in behaviour is needed or required *versus* preferred or desired.

But what about the workplace as a behaviour change setting? Work is a context where, in principle, the environment can be changed or manipulated quite considerably to change behaviour. Employees are physically or psychologically present in workplace for much of their working time. The workplace, compared to some other settings discussed above, provides plenty of scope to alter the environment to change behaviour.

And what about the behaviour changes we want to bring about in this context? As set out in the introduction, we are focused on changing very specific, observable and measurable behaviours which relate directly to organisational objectives. These are behaviours we actually want to change rather than behaviours we would ideally like to change.

4.2 DO WE NEED TO GET AT THE ROOT CAUSES OF BEHAVIOUR BEFORE WE CAN CHANGE IT?

This report is about behaviour change. It is not about what causes behaviour.

This distinction may sound strange, as in many everyday situations in order to change something we would consider its causes and then work on influencing, changing or somehow eliminating those causes.

However, when it comes to behaviour this approach is not necessarily helpful.

First, behaviour, both in general and at work, is caused by a huge range of potential factors. Such a list might include:

- Genetic influences
- Other aspects of biology and physiology
- Upbringing
- Family background
- Education and work
- Personality and disposition
- History
- Social norms
- Mood
- Conscious thoughts
- Unconscious or non-conscious cognitive activity
- Physical environment
- Behaviour of others

Typically, it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify the most important causes of behaviour, particularly as it is likely there are multiple causes which may be interacting in complicated ways.

In addition, many of these causes are not amenable to change. For example, even if it were possible to establish that a behaviour was caused largely by genetic influences, upbringing and family background, it is not possible to do anything to change these causes. In other words, they are not directly actionable.

Second, changing behaviour generally requires making changes to the environment and not trying to understand the deeper and more distant causes of existing behaviour. Rather than getting at and working with the root causes of behaviour, we change the environment in ways that will introduce new factors which will hopefully become causes of the behaviour change we seek.

In other words, changing behaviour does not require us to tackle its root causes.

4.3 SOME WIDELY USED MODELS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING AND CHANGING BEHAVIOUR IN ORGANISATIONS ARE *NOT* VERY USEFUL

Organisations and HR do many things that are vaguely aimed at behaviour change that are not particularly effective in bringing about specific behavioural change related to organisational objectives. They are not deliberate attempts to change specific behaviours. The list includes activities such as leadership development, organisational change and transformation, interventions around 'mindset' or 'values', coaching, culture change, team development and attitude change.

Of course, any of these activities *may* possibly change behaviour, but given they are not designed directly to do so, they are unlikely to be effective. For example, trying to help someone to do more exercise by buying them a gym membership, new workout clothes and telling them they should do more exercise is unlikely to work. Focusing on supporting them engage in specific exercise-related behaviours (e.g., going to the gym at particular times on particular days and following a detailed exercise plan) is much more likely to be effective.

But why does this happen? Why is it that HR deploys practices aimed to some extent at behavioural change which probably don't work? There are probably several reasons, some of which were mentioned earlier:

- 1 **HR sometimes tries to change pseudo-behaviours rather than behaviours.** Examples of such pseudo-behaviours were provided above and include being collaborative, communicative or proactive. Attempting to change these without saying what precisely they mean in terms of specific, measurable and observable behaviours is very unlikely to bring about any behaviour change.
- 2 **HR does not always implement policies, practices and change that focus on organisational objectives.** If it did, then it is much more likely to identify those specific employee behaviours it needs to change in order to help the organisation meet its objectives. Instead, HR sometimes focuses on practices that are intended, in some usually quite general or even vague way, to somehow affect a whole range of desirable but unspecified behaviours.
- 3 **HR as a profession does not necessarily have a well-developed understanding of behaviour change.** This is a gap this *Work Psychology Network* report aims to fill.
- 4 Because, reasonably, HR is quite focused on employee performance and outcomes, **it does not sufficiently differentiate between employee performance and the underlying specific employee behaviours that drive or constitute that performance.** We cannot manage performance directly, but we can manage the underlying behaviours that drive it.
- 5 Another possible reason why HR deploys practices which are assumed to change behaviour, but which probably don't, **is the more general long-term use of practices and approaches in HR that are widespread, become custom and practice but are not necessarily useful.** It is simply assumed that such practices are effective and remain unchallenged because 'everyone else does it' and 'we've always done it that way'.

Two examples of activities mentioned above that are intended to change behaviour, but are probably ineffective, are attitude change and culture change.

Does changing attitudes change behaviour?

Employee attitude surveys (including employee engagement and pulse surveys) are widespread and have become custom and practice in HR.

There are many reasons why we might choose to measure employee attitudes. One might be to give employees voice so they feel the employer is listening and is concerned.

However, a much more important reason when it comes to organisational performance is that it is assumed that more positive general employee attitudes (e.g., satisfaction, engagement, commitment) drive desirable employee behaviours. Hence, the logic is to improve employee attitudes particularly if they seem to be deteriorating.

However, there are some **profound limitations** to this approach:

- + **General employee attitudes are not particularly strong causes of employee behaviour** – particularly the specific organisational outcome-related behaviours we are interested in here (e.g., Kammeyer-Mueller et al, 2024).
- + **Changing people's attitudes is quite difficult.** This is another compelling reason for focusing on the specific behaviours you want to change, rather than on changing something that is difficult to change but only very weakly causes behaviour (if at all).
- + In general, **behaviour change causes attitude change – not the other way around.** Within many areas of psychology and organisational behaviour management, changes in behaviour are regarded as having strong influences on attitudes, not vice versa. If it is behaviour that drives attitudes, changing attitudes is unlikely to change behaviour. Even though some studies find there are probably reciprocal causal links between attitudes and behaviour (e.g., Kammeyer-Mueller et al, 2024), and attitudes may be a slightly stronger predictor of behaviour than the other way around, this still makes attempting to change them an unhelpful approach to behaviour change.

Of course, organisations may want their employees to have positive attitudes and to have a 'positive' employee experience. However, trying to change attitudes, thoughts and feelings is not a practical or useful mechanism if the goal is to change specific and important employee behaviours.

"Trying to solve a business problem by trying to change thoughts and feelings is a very inefficient and intrusive approach to changing performance. While everyone... has thoughts and feelings, and those thoughts and feelings seem concrete enough to the individual, we do not attempt to manipulate them in our... approach. What is going on in employees' heads is not the business of managers. The employees' behaviour is our business."

Daniels & Bailey (2014)

Does changing culture change behaviour?

Culture change has also become a widespread custom and practice within organisations. As with many other common practices, its value is rarely challenged.

But what is culture? 'Culture' is something we may feel particularly when we join a new organisation. We get a sense of the *typical* and *shared* ways people and groups within the organisation seem to behave, which can appear different to those typical or shared ways of behaving we believe we have seen in other organisations.

But what is it we are really experiencing? It's important first to note that we are pattern seekers. As humans, we have a cognitive bias towards looking for and finding patterns, structure and consistency in information and data which may in fact not be there. There may, of course, be some real differences in the behaviours we are observing in a new organisation, but this doesn't mean such behaviours are typical or generally found right across the organisation.

An everyday example of this is when people perceive that different cities or different areas of a country have different cultures, and are therefore very different from each other in terms of their typical and general behaviours. In the UK, for example, people who live in the North are regarded by some as much more friendly than people in the South. Some of you reading this – particularly if you are from the North – no doubt agree. But on what are such perceptions based? Of course, we can only observe very small samples of behaviour from a relatively tiny number of people on which to base this perception, given that millions of people live in each of these areas. What we tend to do is take this very limited data and see it as a consistent pattern and attribute it to, in this case, geographical location.

The first limitation of this approach to behaviour change is that there may not, in fact, be a monolithic 'culture' to change in the first place. There may be many different behaviours right across the organisation which are actually quite inconsistent. Or, there may be 'sub-cultures' where we can identify some consistent patterns of behaviour, but these exist in small groups or parts of the organisation. And, even within these groups, there may be 'sub-sub-cultures', and so forth. In this sense, culture is not 'a thing'.

A second, and more important, limitation relates to typical definitions of culture. It is often described as 'the way people do things around here'. In other words, as discussed above, it's about typical and shared ways of behaving. If we use this definition, then the argument for using culture change to change behaviour is as follows: **In order to change the way people do things around here (behaviour) we need to change the way people do things around here (culture).** In other words, it is a circular argument that doesn't really make sense. **Culture is not a cause of behaviour, it is a description of behaviour.**

Even if we consider culture to be behavioural norms – which do seem to influence behaviour – it still remains the case that we need to change behaviour to change such norms.

When organisations or their leaders say they want to change the culture, what they usually mean is they want to change employee behaviour, typically to remove or reduce undesirable behaviours and to increase or introduce desirable behaviours. Of course, it certainly does make sense, as discussed throughout this report, to focus on specific, observable and measurable behaviours. However, trying to change behaviour through the mechanism of changing culture is ineffective.

+ COMMON PRACTITIONER CONCERNS

What about habits?

Although the idea that, in order to change behaviour and sustain that change, we need to change habits is popular, it is problematic in several respects. First, evidence suggests that habit interventions are not as effective as is often thought (e.g., Gardner et al, 2024).

Second, 'habit' is largely descriptive rather than explanatory or causal. It simply describes what we observe when a new behaviour is learnt and then seems to persist when the antecedents, such as reminders or incentives, are removed. Classic examples are toothbrushing or car seatbelt use. The idea is that once learnt it then becomes something that is done automatically and unconsciously. However, 'habit' doesn't necessarily explain why this happens, or whether something needs to become a 'habit' in this sense for a change to persist.

Third, there are many other ways in which behaviours may be sustained after an incentive is removed apart from classic habit formation. For example, Volpp & Loewenstein (2020) identify eight other mechanisms, including learning (we enjoy doing things we are good at doing), information acquisition (we discover opportunities to engage in the behaviour), status quo bias (inertia may set in if there are no incentives to change), taste discovery (we find out we like the behaviour we've learnt) and shifts in social norms (if others around you are also changing behaviour in similar ways).

The formation of habits may play a role in sustaining behavioural change, but it is only one of many mechanisms and many interventions. The key, as ever, is understanding which mechanism and intervention is likely to be most effective given the specific behaviour and context.

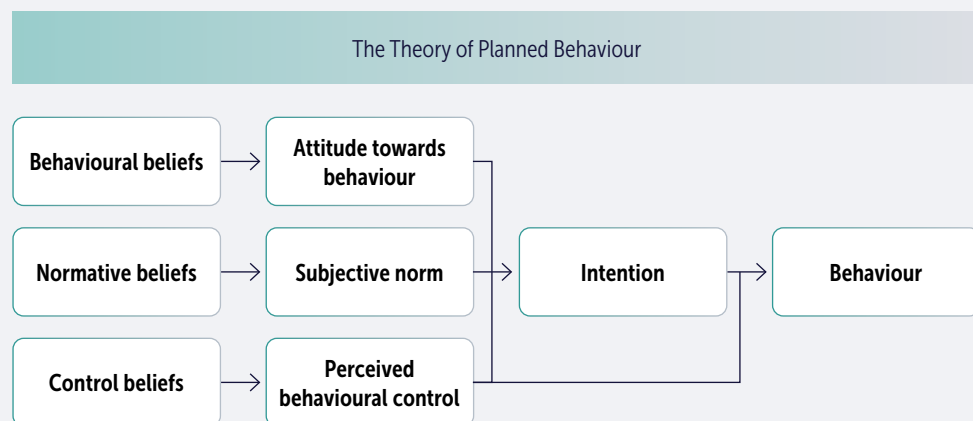
4.4 EXAMPLES OF MODELS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR THINKING ABOUT WHY AND HOW BEHAVIOUR CHANGES

As mentioned earlier, there are many dozens of behaviour change models and frameworks. We will consider a couple here for illustrative purposes.

Most of these models were **not** developed specifically to understand work behaviour. In fact, these, and many other models, have been developed in the context of health psychology to understand health behaviours. In addition, they relate mostly to changes in volitional behaviour – where people can choose or not to engage in the behaviour – rather than the changes in behaviours that are required to help meet organisational objectives, which is the focus of this report. However, we do also consider some of these models, as they still provide some insights into changing required behaviours in a work context.

EXAMPLE 1: THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR

Developed by Ajzen (1991), the Theory of Planned Behaviour attempts to explain the circumstances under which intentions may lead to a behaviour, and those factors that drive intention. It can also be used to design behaviour change interventions.



Drawing on a range of sources, Chen & Slade (2025) provide the following descriptions of the key constructs in the model (see article for sources):

- Behavioural beliefs:** The likely consequences or other attributes of the behaviour. For example, what might an individual believe are the consequences of the behaviour?
- Normative beliefs:** The normative expectations of other people. Will other people approve or disapprove of the behaviour?
- Control beliefs:** The presence of factors that may further or hinder performance of the behaviour. For example, features of the context such as constraints that may influence beliefs about whether are able to exert control over the behaviour.
- Attitude towards the behaviour:** An individual's positive or negative feelings about performing the target behaviour. Note that this is not the same as general work or other attitudes.
- Subjective norm:** A person's perception of what people who are important to them might think about whether they should or should not perform the behaviour in question.
- Perceived behavioural control:** People's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest.

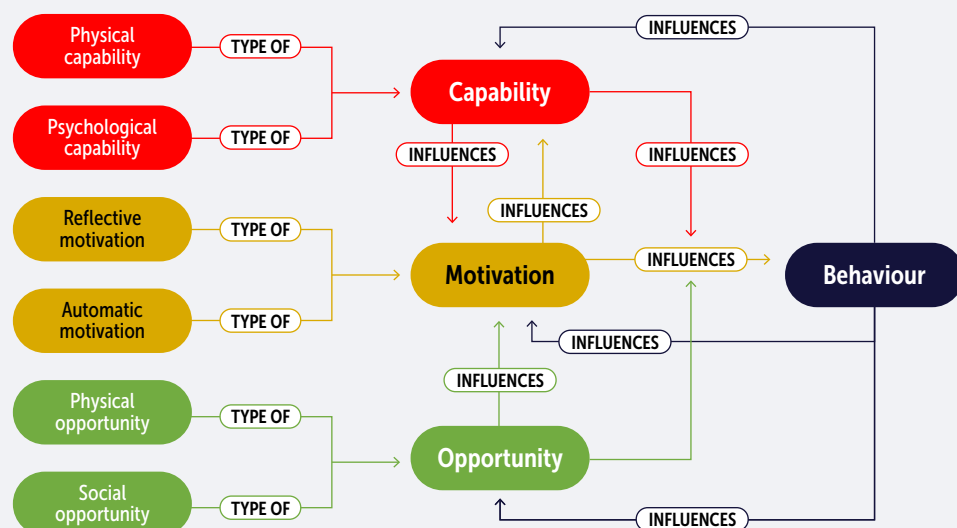
These factors lead to behavioural intentions which encompass how likely the person believes it is that they will perform or not perform the behaviour and the intensity (e.g., time and effort) with which they will do it.

According to the model, changes in behaviour are more likely to occur if any of the six antecedents change (or are changed through intervention), thus increasing behavioural intentions and the chance of the behaviour. In some situations it may be the case that it is possible to work on multiple antecedents simultaneously which may strengthen the effect of the intervention.

EXAMPLE 2: THE COM-B MODEL OF BEHAVIOUR

Like the Theory of Planned Behaviour, this model is also used to understand and predict behaviour, as well as design interventions. It identifies three factors that need to be present in order for a behaviour to occur: Capability, motivation and opportunity.

The COM-B Model of Behaviour (West & Michie, 2020)



- Capability is an attribute of a person that together with opportunity makes a behaviour possible or facilitates it.
- Opportunity is an attribute of an environmental system that together with capability makes a behaviour possible or facilitates it.
- Motivation is an aggregate of mental processes that energise and direct behaviour.
- Behaviour is individual human activity that involves co-ordinated contraction of striated muscles controlled by the brain.
- Physical capability is capability that involves a person's physique, and musculoskeletal functioning (e.g. balance and dexterity).

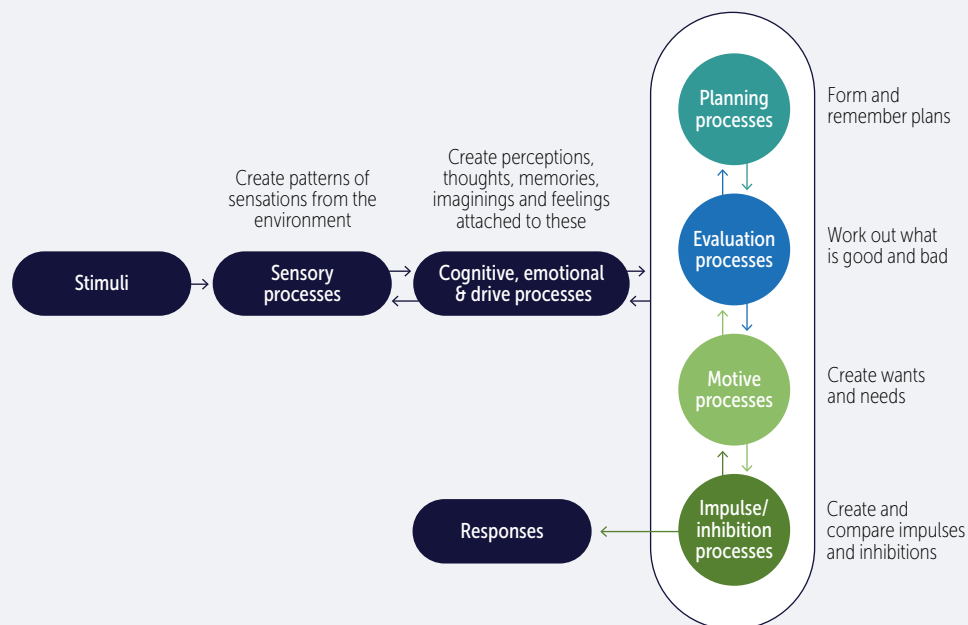
- Psychological capability is capability that involves a person's mental functioning (e.g. understanding and memory).
- Reflective motivation is motivation that involves conscious thought processes (e.g. plans and evaluations).
- Automatic motivation is motivation that involves habitual, instinctive, drive-related, and affective processes (e.g. desires and habits).
- Physical opportunity is opportunity that involves inanimate parts of the environmental system and time (e.g. financial and material resources).
- Social opportunity is opportunity that involves other people and organisations (e.g. culture and social norms).

West & Michie (2020) note several key features of this model:

- 1 Capability and opportunity influence the relationship between motivation and behaviour, but do not directly affect behaviour. They can be considered to be 'gates' that need to be sufficiently open for motivation to affect behaviour. In other words, someone may be highly motivated, but the behaviour will not occur unless there is also the capability and opportunity.
- 2 Capability and opportunity will affect motivation to enact a behaviour. If we feel capable and have the opportunity, the more we may want to engage in the behaviour. We are likely to be less motivated if both capability and opportunity are not present, with the possible exception of circumstances where we are attracted to doing the behaviour because it is difficult.
- 3 A very important part of the model is that behaviour feeds back to all its precursors. In other words, enacting (or attempting to enact) the behaviour affects future feelings of capability, motivation and opportunity. The behaviour involved in practicing a new skill, for example, will tend to increase perceptions of capability.
- 4 In this model, "motivation can be thought of as a quantity attaching to any behaviours that capability and opportunity would permit in any given situation." This means that in most situations a vast number of behaviours are possible. However, at any one time only a relatively small number will, in some way, be under consideration consciously or otherwise.

The central component of the COM-B Model is motivation. West & Michie (2020) also developed the PRIME Theory of motivation which attempts to combine the many existing models of motivation into one general framework or structure describing the human motivational system.

The PRIME Theory of Motivation (West & Michie, 2020)



They go on to describe some of the key components of the Theory:

**Responses:**

Behaviours

**Impulse/inhibition processes:**

Impulses are patterns of brain activity that coordinate and impel responses, while inhibitions are patterns of brain activity that work to prevent responses.

**Motive processes: Feelings of 'want' or 'need'.**

Wants are attraction to anticipated pleasure or satisfaction. Needs are attraction to anticipated relief from mental or physical discomfort. The fundamental principle of goal directed behaviour is that, at every moment, we act in pursuit of what we most want or need at that moment. Changing behaviour by changing motivation requires targeting momentary wants and needs experienced at the moment the behaviour is required.

**Evaluation processes:**

Beliefs that involve judgements about 'goodness' or 'badness': what is right or wrong, good or bad.

**Planning processes:**

Self-conscious intentions to engage in particular behaviours in certain circumstances, contained in diaries, physical or mental to-do lists or personal rules (e.g., always charge phone at night).

These two examples of models for thinking about why and how behaviour changes emphasise that **behaviour is the product of a sometimes elaborate process containing many possible stages and is driven by several quite different factors**. In order to change any particular behaviour we need to be aware of these processes and understand which factors we can shape in any particular context so we can design interventions that may change the specific behaviours we seek to change.

BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE TECHNIQUES: HOW CAN BEHAVIOUR BE CHANGED?

As discussed, explaining behaviour and why it changes is far from straightforward. There are different theoretical approaches, most of which suggest that behaviour is influenced through various processes which involve many different factors. Which explanation is most accurate will depend heavily on the specific behaviour we are considering and the context.

Given this, it is not surprising that there are also a great many behavioural change techniques. **Any behavioural change intervention is likely to contain several different techniques** rather than just one. As mentioned earlier, much of the work on behavioural change comes from work on changing health behaviours. Many of these behavioural change techniques have been developed and applied in this particular setting, though that does not mean they are not relevant to HR.

Two clear implications for HR is that there is no single behavioural change technique that is somehow the 'best' and that any effective behavioural change intervention is likely to require the use of several techniques.

Duckworth & Gross (2020) provide some examples of reviews that have attempted to identify the number of behavioural change techniques that exist:

- Michie et al (2015) identified **93 behavioural change techniques**.
- Kok et al (2016) catalogued **99 behavioural change techniques**.
- Knittle et al (2020) identified **123 self-management behavioural change techniques**.

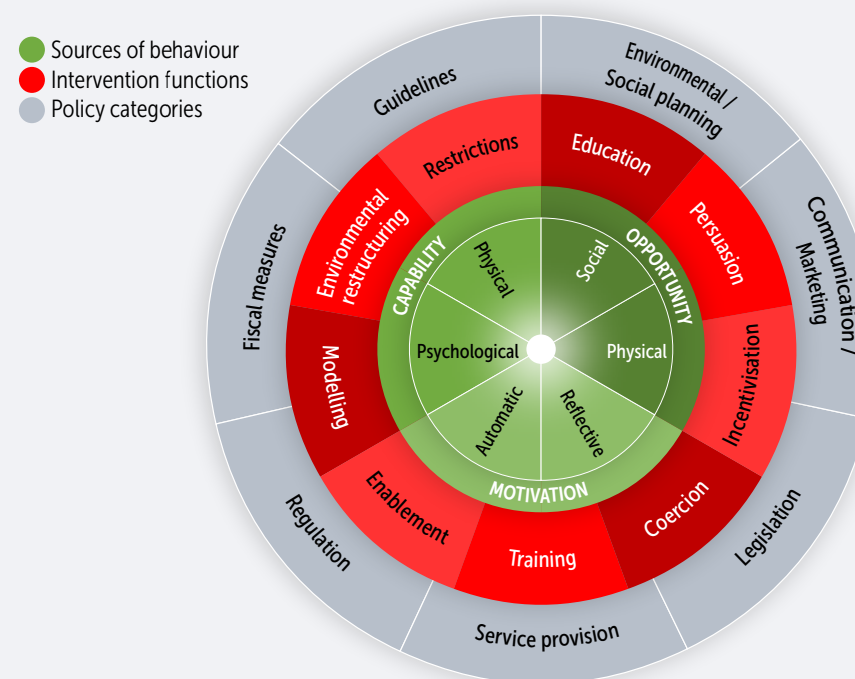
The sheer number of such techniques perhaps helps explain why there have been several attempts to categorise or develop taxonomies of techniques to make using them more manageable. Some examples of these are described below, which help us to understand the range of possible techniques and interventions. By understanding the range of techniques available, we will be able to make more informed choices when considering potential interventions.

EXAMPLE 1: THE BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE WHEEL

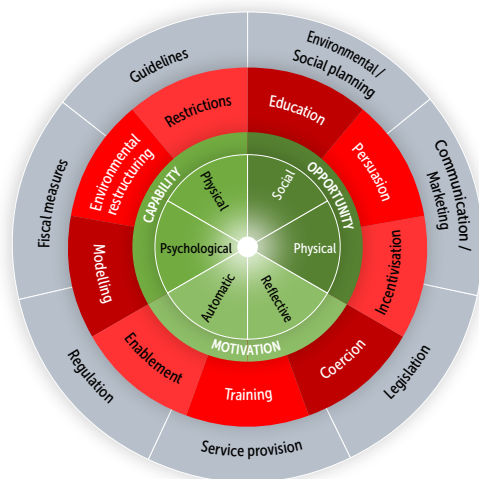
Drawing on the COM-B Model described above, Michie et al (2011) developed The Behavioural Change Wheel for "characterising interventions and linking them to an analysis of the targeted behaviour".

The Behavioural Change Wheel provides a good overview of the types of behavioural change techniques that are available, even if not all can be applied by HR in a work context. It also provides some guidance around how we can choose techniques given the specific behaviour we are trying to change and what might be effective given the context.

The Behavioural Change Wheel



Michie et al, 2011



THE INNER GREEN WHEEL

Contains **capability, opportunity and motivation** which are regarded as the antecedents to behaviour (described above when discussing the COM-B Model).

- + **Capability:** An individual's psychological and physical aptitude to enact a behaviour. It involves having the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to execute the desired action effectively.
- + **Opportunity:** The external factors and environmental conditions that facilitate or hinder behaviour.
- + **Motivation:** The individual's emotional and psychological drive to engage in a specific behaviour.

Drawing on Beltrani (no date) and Michie et al (2011) these are descriptions and definitions of the main components of the wheel.

THE MIDDLE RED WHEEL

Shows **nine intervention functions** that can affect one or more of the antecedents to behaviour – capability, opportunity and motivation.

- + **Persuasion:** Communication techniques to influence beliefs and motivations positively.
- + **Education:** Information and knowledge can enhance psychological and physical capabilities as well as reflexive motivation, allowing them to make more-informed decisions.
- + **Incentivisation:** Offering rewards to encourage and reinforce desired behaviours.
- + **Coercion:** Using consequences to discourage and deter unwanted behaviours.
- + **Training:** Skill development and practical training to increase physical and psychological capability.
- + **Restriction:** Limiting physical and social opportunities for engaging in undesired behaviours through rules or regulations.
- + **Environmental Restructuring:** Modifying the physical or social environment to make desirable behaviours more manageable and accessible.
- + **Modelling:** Demonstrating desired behaviours through role models and social influences.
- + **Enablement:** Providing resources and support to empower individuals and create opportunities for behaviour change.

THE OUTER GREY WHEEL

Describes **seven policy categories**, which are different types of policies that could be designed to include different intervention functions to shape behaviour. Most of these relate to government policy and wider society; however, some may be relevant to HR policy and organisations.

- + **Communication/marketing:** Using print, electronic, telephonic or broadcast media.
- + **Guidelines:** Creating documents or other media that recommend or mandate practice such as checklists.
- + **Fiscal:** Using the tax system to reduce or increase the financial cost.
- + **Regulation:** Establishing rules or principles of behaviour or practice.
- + **Legislation:** Making or changing laws Prohibiting sale or use.
- + **Environmental/social planning:** Designing and/or controlling the physical or social environment.
- + **Service provision:** Delivering a service.

The wheel is used practically by starting with the question: *“What conditions internal to individuals and in their social and physical environment need to be in place for a specified behavioural target to be achieved?”* (Michie et al, 2011).

This then requires a careful analysis of the behavioural target, where individuals are now and how capability, opportunity and motivation to enact that behaviour can be enhanced through whichever interventions and their functions are practical in that context.

Returning to the supermarket example described earlier, there are three key staff behaviours which strongly shape customer's perceptions of staff approachability on the shop floor:

- 1 Making some eye contact with customers (so customers feel staff are aware of their presence).
- 2 Smiling at customers (so customers feel staff are open to interaction and are taking an interest).
- 3 Asking customers directly if they require help (so customers know they have an opportunity to ask questions).

For each of these behaviours, we would examine current levels of these behaviours, where they might need to be, and then examine, using a range of methods such as observation and interviews, the extent to which staff have the capability, opportunity and motivation to engage in these behaviours. If any of these three factors was lacking in some way, the next step would be to consider the intervention functions to identify appropriate interventions.

If it were found, for example, that the third behaviour (asking customers directly if they require help) was not happening much, it may be discovered that staff feel they lack opportunity (because of busyness) and capability (because they are not used to talking directly to customers very much). In this case, interventions around environment restructuring and empowerment may help reduce busyness on other tasks so there is more opportunity to focus on talking to customers. And, interventions involving training and modelling could help to increase feels of capability around interacting with customers.

EXAMPLE 2: BEHAVIOUR CHANGE TECHNIQUE TAXONOMY (V1)

In a subsequent publication, Michie et al (2013) aimed to develop a consensually agreed (by experts), hierarchically structured taxonomy of behavioural change techniques used in behaviour change interventions. They found 93 such techniques, which they placed in 16 categories or clusters, such as goals and planning (nine interventions), feedback and monitoring (seven interventions), social support (three interventions) and shaping knowledge (four interventions).

Full details of the categories and the interventions are provided in Michie et al (2013); however, an app is also available (BCT Taxonomy) which is searchable and provides definitions and examples (available for [Android](#) and [Apple](#)).

EXAMPLE 3: ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

Another area which deals directly with behaviour at work, rather than across many different settings, is Organisational Behaviour Management. This field has also identified a number of behaviour change techniques which have some overlap with those already discussed.

This approach utilises the ABC (Antecedents, Behaviours, Consequences) Model discussed above.

ANTECEDENTS are anything that triggers a behaviour. They do not cause behaviour. They typically contain information about behavioural consequences and increases the likelihood the behaviour will occur.

CONSEQUENCES are events or outcomes that results from the behaviour that changes the probability the behaviour will reoccur.

Organisational Behaviour Management interventions focus on changing antecedents and/or consequences. In other words, **to change behaviour we can do something before people emit the behaviour (antecedents) and/or do something after the behaviour has been emitted (consequences)** (Den Broeder & Kerkhofs, 2020).

Daniels & Bailey (2014) define an antecedent as:

"...is a deliberate attempt to change or maintain behaviour by presenting some sort of stimulus before the behaviour occurs... An antecedent is anything a person senses (sees, hears, tastes, feels or smells) that contains information about behavioural consequences and increases the likelihood that they will respond."

Drawing on Daniels and Bailey (2014) and Den Broeder & Kerkhofs (2020), we will provide examples of interventions within each of these categories. It should be noted that a huge range of things could potentially act as antecedents.

EXAMPLES OF ANTECEDENTS IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT:

Organisational communications with information about goals, objectives, priorities, accountabilities, job descriptions, policies (e.g., a list of objectives or targets for the next six months).

Instructions about these communications and what they mean for behaviour shared in workshops or training (e.g., a team discussion of how it will organise itself to meet communicated targets).

Instructions and requests from line managers, coworkers and customers (e.g., a client asks if you can extend the scope of an on-going project).

Agreements and contracts (e.g., a detailed service level agreement)

Representation of procedures such as checklists, standards, rules, flowcharts, colour coding, scripts (e.g., room-cleaning checklists used in hotels).

Resources including tools, materials, physical working conditions, physical layout (e.g., automated reminders from project management software/app).

Behaviour of others which may result in modelling or engaging in an opposite behaviour (e.g., arriving early for meetings if coworkers do it or observing someone making a mess in a shared kitchen prompts you to be tidy).

Self-managed antecedents such as self-talk, physical states, mental images (e.g., visualising a completed report that you've almost finished).

As noted by Daniels & Bailey (2014) *antecedents are more effective if they:*

- 1 **Immediately precede behaviour:**
A request to engage in a particular behaviour now is more likely to result in the behaviour than a request to engage in that behaviour in several hours.
- 2 **Signal a consequence that is valuable or meaningful to the person:**
Opening an email that's just arrived that is likely to contain important information.
- 3 **Are highly correlated with the behavioural consequence that is associated with it:**
A reminder to complete a task will be more effective if the consequence of completing the task (e.g., praise from a manager) is very likely to happen.

From this perspective, behaviour change therefore involves changing antecedents to a behaviour and ensuring the antecedent is effective by pairing it with a consequence. For example, if we want employees to arrive in time for the start of team meetings we would want to ensure that the antecedent, such as a calendar invitation, triggered the behaviour to get to the meeting on time because doing so (or not doing so) would lead to a meaningful consequence (e.g., being thanked by supervisor for promptness in the case of being on time or being personally reminded of the importance of being on time if late).

Daniels & Bailey (2014 – emphasis added) **define a behavioural consequence** as:

"...events that follow a behaviour and change the probability that the behaviour will recur in the future."

In other words, a behavioural consequence is only a consequence because of its ability to change the likelihood of that the behaviour will be repeated. Many events may follow a behaviour but they only become consequences if they matter; that is, if they affect future behaviour.

As mentioned earlier when discussing the ABC model of behaviour, there are **four main categories or types of consequences**.

Consequences that **increase** behaviour:

1. **Positive reinforcement:** You get what you want. Something you value occurs as a consequence of performing the behaviour.
2. **Negative reinforcement:** You do not get what you do not want. If you perform the behaviour you avoid getting something you do not value or is unpleasant.

Consequences that **decrease** behaviour:

3. **Punishment:** You get what you do not want. Something you do not want to happen or do not value occurs as a consequence of performing the behaviour.
4. **Penalty:** You lose something of value. Something you already have and value is taken away from you.

EXAMPLES OF BEHAVIOURAL CONSEQUENCES IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT:

CONSEQUENCES THAT INCREASE BEHAVIOUR		CONSEQUENCES THAT DECREASE BEHAVIOUR	
1. Positive reinforcement The behaviour gets you... • Personal or public praise. • Respect. • Gratitude. • Formal recognition. • Gifts. • Extra leave.	2. Negative reinforcement The behaviour helps you avoid... • Disapproval. • Having to stay late to finish a task. • Embarrassment. • Disappointing clients. • Letting down colleagues.	3. Punishment The behaviour gets you... • Criticism. • Disapproval. • Formal reprimand. • Extension of probation.	4. Penalty The behaviour means you lose... • Promotion opportunity. • Overtime allowance. • Respect from others.

This approach to behaviour change, like the others discussed here, starts with an analysis of which specific behaviours need to be changed and then identifying, given the population involved and the context, which interventions – in this case around changing antecedents and consequences – are likely to bring about the required behaviour change.

The Organisational Behaviour Management approach will be discussed in more detail in the final section as we incorporate parts of it into our Evidence-Based HR approach to behaviour change.

One question people often have in relation to antecedents of behaviour change in organisations, and in society more widely, is the role of punishment or penalty in reducing undesirable behaviours. In organisations, both implicit and explicit threats of punishment may be used in an attempt to change employee behaviour. In society, punishments such as prison may be used in the attempt to deter criminal behaviour.

One general feature of the Organisational Behaviour Management approach is its emphasis on using positive reinforcement consequences rather than punishment and penalty consequences to bring about behaviour change. In part, this focus is driven by ethical considerations:

“Even though you can get performance through coercion, using such strategies is laden with ethical issues... Reliance on coercion, however subtle or slight, fundamentally corrupts relationships and reduces the potential of every human being who is managed (and manages) under those terms.”

Daniels & Bailey (2014)

However, they also identify a number of other advantages of positive reinforcement and a number of negative side-effects or disadvantages of punishment.

EXAMPLES OF THE ADVANTAGES OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT AND DISADVANTAGES OF PUNISHMENT CONSEQUENCES

(based on Daniels & Bailey, 2014).

SOME ADVANTAGES OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

- Can improve relationships between employees and line managers, increase loyalty and positive feelings towards the organisation.
- In everyday life, **positive reinforcement is in general something people like and seek out**. It's what people prefer and want.
- Can help create a **climate of positive accountability** which helps people feel responsible for their performance, to welcome feedback and appreciate attempts to support their performance.
- It is **consistent with organisational values and ethics that reject threat-based approaches** to behaviour change.

SOME DISADVANTAGES OF PUNISHMENT

- May **lead to escape-and-avoidance behaviours** such as defensiveness, blaming other people or factors, hiding the truth and avoiding the punisher.
- Can **decrease desired as well as undesired behaviours**. A punishment such as criticism can reduce the undesired behaviour but generalise to and start reducing other behaviours, such as making extra effort.
- **Cannot ever increase desired performance**, only reduce undesired behaviours.
- May **increase aggression** as can induce feelings of wanting to retaliate.
- Do **not lead to longer-term changes in behaviour**, as if punishment is removed behaviour may return.

Now we have considered examples of three approaches to behaviour change, the final section provides the outline of a practical Evidence-Based HR approach to behaviour change.

AN EVIDENCE-BASED HR APPROACH TO CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

As stated in the introduction, the main purpose of HR is to help the business achieve its objectives. It does this largely through trying to shape and change employee behaviour so that it is directed towards meeting those objectives.

This means that the **starting point for any HR activity must be the strategic objectives of the business**. This idea, and how you move from this starting point to helping the business achieve its objectives, is discussed in detail in two of our previous reports [Driving Organisational Performance HR's Critical Role](#) and [Evidence-Based HR: A New Paradigm](#).

In this section, we present a framework which draws on these two reports and the Organisational Behaviour Management approach discussed earlier.

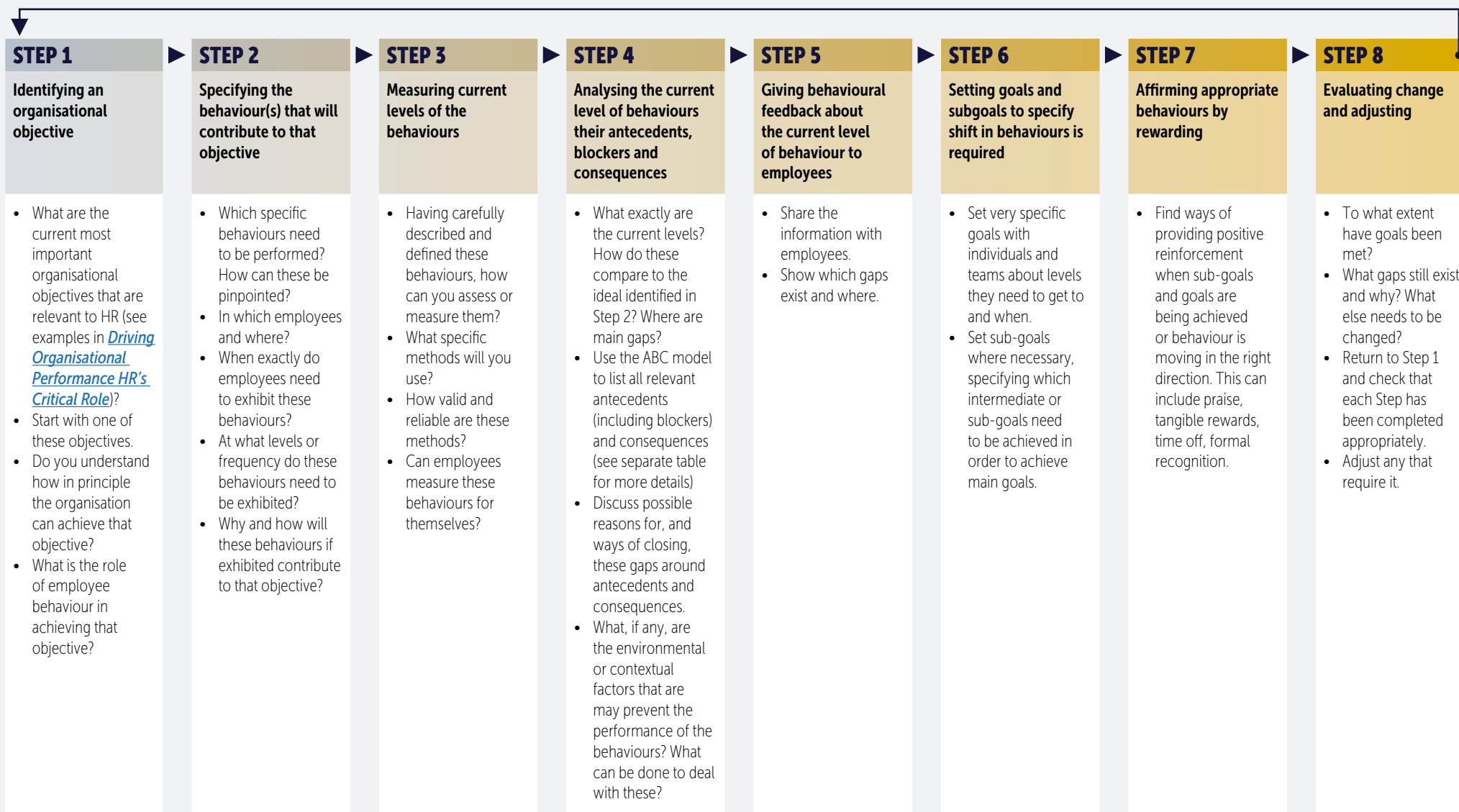
As mentioned throughout this report, there are a number of essential characteristics of the behaviours we aim to change. They are:

- 1 **Specific, measurable and observable behaviours.**
They can be precisely defined and assessed.
- 2 **Behaviours that contribute to or drive the organisations objectives.**
Not behaviours that do anything else.
- 3 **They are behaviours we deliberately and purposefully want to and need to change.**
Not behaviours we perhaps want to influence a little, shape a bit or simply would prefer or like.

Of course, HR or management *can* choose to influence other behaviours, and there may be good reasons for doing so. However, we are focused here solely on how HR can contribute to organisational performance, and it can only do this by focusing on behaviours that have these three characteristics.

Another important point to note is that **behaviour change requires us to understand in detail how work actually gets done and how specific employee behaviours contribute to organisational objectives**. As discussed earlier, many HR and management approaches to behaviour change are not based on such a detailed understanding of work behaviour in the context of a work process. Rather, they often seem to focus on changing quite high level and rather abstract phenomena (e.g., culture, engagement, attitudes) in the hope that these will somehow, in an unknown way, affect employee behaviour in ways that are important for the organisation. In other words, quite a hands-off distant approach. In contrast, **behaviour change means getting our hands dirty as we need to dig into how work really works**.

CRF EVIDENCE-BASED HR BEHAVIOUR CHANGE MODEL (drawing on Den Broeder & Kerkhofs, 2000)



STEP 4: MORE DETAILS OF THE ABC ANALYSIS

(based on Den Broeder & Kerkhofs, 2000)

To identify ANTECEDENTS OF BEHAVIOURS	Talk to employees to identify events, circumstances or factors that prompt or influence the performance of the behaviour. Consider as many as possible.
To identify BLOCKERS OR THINGS THAT ARE MISSING THAT PREVENT THE BEHAVIOURS	Talk to the group to identify blockers and consider possible solutions. Ask them what prevents them for engaging in that behaviour. For example could it be: • Job descriptions, process descriptions, rules and procedures, instructions? • Supervisor and colleague behaviours? • Shortages of time and other resources? • Physical aspects of working areas? • Instruments and tools? • Knowledge and skills? • Motivation? • Availability of staff? • Ability to cooperate and coordinate?
To identify CONSEQUENCES	Talk to employees to ask them to identify what happens after they have engaged in the behaviour. Consider as many as possible.
THIS ANALYSIS ALLOWS US TO	1. Why we see the <i>current level</i> of the behaviour 2. Why we do <i>not yet</i> see the <i>desired level</i> of behaviour

+ COMMON PRACTITIONER CONCERNS

What about nudge?

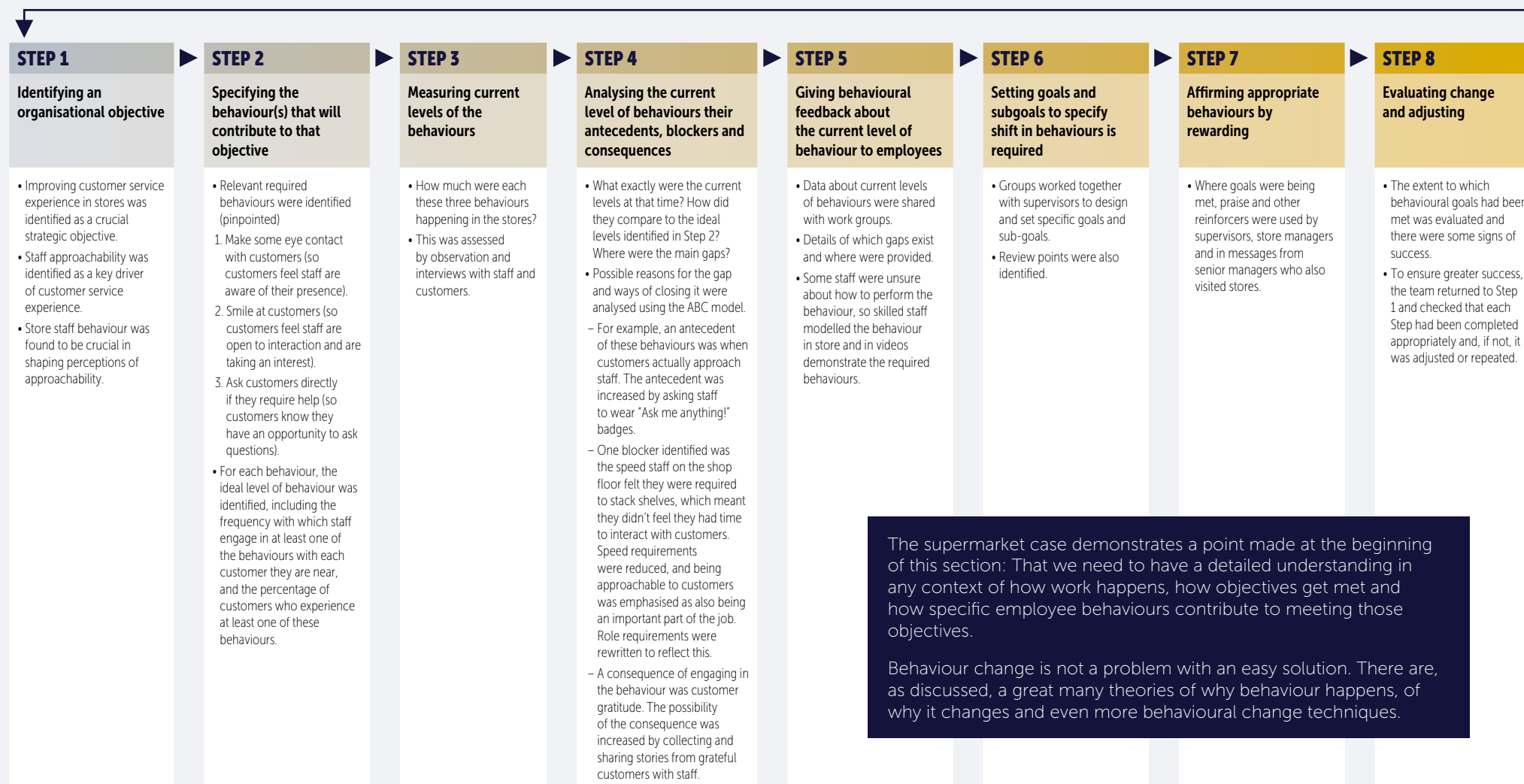
Nudge has become a very popular and quite fashionable technique for bringing about behaviour change. However, from an Evidence-Based HR perspective, we never start with wondering if an intervention might be useful. Rather, we start with the problem or issue, as only then can we start to consider what might help resolve it.

The focus of this report is on deliberately and purposefully bringing about changes in specific behaviours that are required. Nudging is not about this. Rather, it is concerned with shaping choice and hopefully nudging people towards making a different choice and engaging in a different behaviour. In this sense, nudge is not, in principle, relevant to this report.

In addition, it's worth noting that several recent reviews of the evidence have suggested that, in general, nudges may have quite weak effects (e.g., Hummel & Maedche, 2019) and even no effects once publication bias is taken into account (Maier et al, 2022).

Earlier we discussed a hypothetical case of a supermarket chain. We will return to this case to further illustrate the steps in the Model.

APPLYING THE MODEL TO THE SUPERMARKET CHAIN CASE



CONCLUSION

By having some understanding of these theories and techniques and, equally important, a very good understanding of the context and the organisational objectives, we vastly increase the chances that we will identify which specific behaviours need to change, to what ends and how we can best bring about such behaviour changes.



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