

# Q BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

JULY 2022

## SHARING RESEARCH EFFECTIVELY

This is a behavioural science perspective on **sharing research effectively**. We take you through different **influences on behaviour** and a **simple behaviour change tool** that you can use to share better.

Have you ever had that awkward experience of emailing your colleagues an article or research paper that you find really exciting and relevant, only to hear, well... crickets?? You are not alone! More than ever before, the amount of information that people are exposed to can be overwhelming and make it very hard to engage deeply with any one thing.

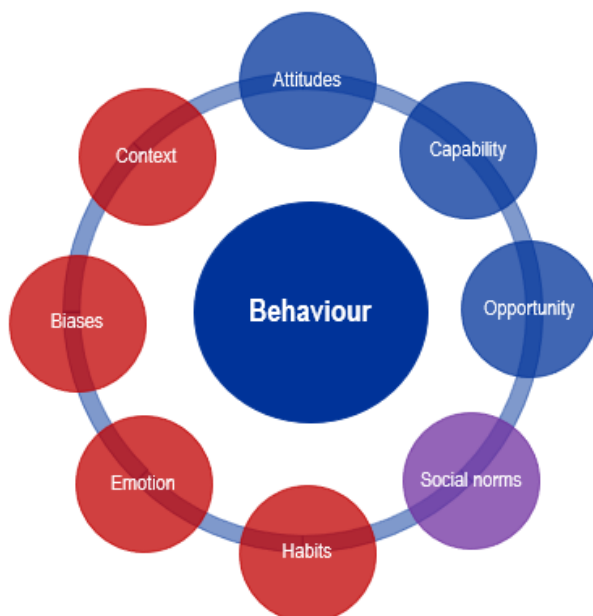
There are a number of **behaviour change principles** that can help you to **share research evidence** with others in ways that increase the chance they will actually **engage** with it.

### WHAT INFLUENCES BEHAVIOUR?

In previous Q Suites, we introduced you to the role of [social factors](#) and [time barriers](#) on quality use of research in Australian schools – these examples reflect just a few of the different influences on people's behaviour. Given the diverse range of potential influences on people's behaviour—which can be overwhelming to wrap our heads around—a number of useful **syntheses of behavioural influences** have been developed based on reviews of psychological theories and models of behaviour. For example, The Theoretical Domains Framework ([Cane et al., 2012](#)) identifies 14 categories (or 'domains') of behavioural influences from a review of 33 psychological theories.

At BehaviourWorks Australia (BWA), we tend to work from **eight broad categories of behavioural influences** (adapted from [Darnton, 2008](#)), which we've summarised below (see Figure 1). You can read more about [influences on behaviour here](#).

**FIGURE 1: CATEGORIES OF BEHAVIOURAL INFLUENCES**



<b>Attitudes</b>	Overall favourable or unfavourable evaluation of engaging in a behaviour.
<b>Capability</b>	Personal physical, financial or psychological capabilities to undertake the behaviour.
<b>Opportunity</b>	Factors or circumstances beyond the individual that provide them with the means to carry out the behaviour.
<b>Social norms</b>	Social rules that indicate what are the common, expected and acceptable behaviours in a particular situation.
<b>Habits</b>	Repeatedly performed behaviours in stable contexts with little thought or deliberation.
<b>Emotion</b>	Actual or anticipated feelings in response to performing a behaviour.
<b>Biases</b>	Systematic and unconscious tendencies to think, decide and behave in certain ways, leading to predictable deviations away from a perceived standard of rationality or good judgement.
<b>Context</b>	Structures and architecture in the environment that influence behaviour Shared social and cultural expectations that exist beyond any individual or single behaviour.

\* More deliberative, thoughtful decision making  
 \* Can be more automatic or more deliberative depending on the context  
 \* More automatic, peripheral decision making

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### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SHARING RESEARCH EVIDENCE EFFECTIVELY?

To bring this back to the challenge of sharing research effectively, **this means there could be a number of factors that influence whether or not a colleague engages with the research that you share**: For example, it could be attitudinal (e.g., *'I [do/don't] see the value in this material'*) or emotional (e.g., *'I [love/hate] receiving new material to read'*), it could be related to opportunity to engage (e.g., *'I [can/can't] access the material that's been shared'*), or contextual (e.g., *'I [do/don't] have the time to engage with this right now'*).

The factors that influence whether or not your colleagues engage with research you've shared will be somewhat unique to each of your colleagues—for example, you may notice that some colleagues are capable but less enthusiastic about engaging with research ('Attitude' barriers), while others are highly enthusiastic but less skilled in accessing and appraising it ('Capability' barriers). Furthermore, since different schools may have different levels of access to research this will produce variability in colleagues' engagement with what you share (due to differences in 'Opportunity'). This kind of variation in influences is why before designing behaviour change interventions we generally prefer to take a 'Deep Dive' approach to identify which unique influences are at play for the specific behaviour of interest – this allows us to develop tailored interventions, which are more likely to be successful.

Although we prefer to conduct a 'Deep Dive' before developing behaviour change interventions, sometimes this isn't practical (or a 'Deep Dive' may not be appropriate for reasons that are beyond the scope of this piece). This is when we draw on general principles of behaviour change.

### INTRODUCING THE EAST FRAMEWORK

[The EAST framework](#) is a useful, generic behaviour change tool which was developed by the Behavioural Insights Team in early 2012. The framework proposes that behaviour change is more likely to occur if you make it **Easy, Attractive, Social** and **Timely**.

These four principles can be applied to encourage greater engagement with research evidence. This applies to both how the material and any associated calls-to-action are presented when sharing, but also applies to the research itself that is being shared.

On the next page, we elaborate on each component of the framework and provide questions to guide how you share research with your colleagues.

#### BOX 1: GENERIC BEHAVIOUR CHANGE TOOLS EXPLAINED

##### What are generic behaviour change tools?

- We use this term to refer to 'off the shelf' approaches, which are based on behaviour change principles that tend to apply across a variety of contexts.<sup>1</sup> Some examples of influencing factors that are often drawn upon are social norms, incentives, and commitments.

##### How can I find out more?

- You can read more about generic behaviour change tools, including the EAST and BehaviourWorks Australia's INSPIRE framework [here](#).

<sup>1</sup> They are in contrast to a 'Deep Dive' approach, where we identify interventions that align with the unique barriers and facilitators to a behaviour of interest - this is explained more in our earlier piece on *'Time as a barrier to quality evidence use'*.

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### HOW CAN YOU APPLY 'EAST' WHEN SHARING RESEARCH?



**Make it Easy:** People are more likely to do something when it is relatively easy in terms of thinking and capability. This means that reducing the effort required can increase uptake. For example, can you reduce the number of click throughs required for someone to access the research, or could you paste the most important information or an engaging question in the body of an email, with the evidence attached? Similarly, making the message and any required actions clear can increase uptake. It can be useful to identify what it is that you want your audience to 'do' and to consider how complex actions can be broken down into simple steps.

**GUIDING QUESTIONS:** *How can you reduce the 'hassle' factor for others in accessing research? How can you simplify your message or any required actions - can a complex piece of research be broken down into simpler, easier elements?*



**Make it Attractive:** People are more likely to do something when their attention has been captured. This means it could help to make your sharing approach personal, relevant and meaningful, or to create a sense of urgency / scarcity, or to emphasise costs and benefits. You can make things stand out more by using images, colour and personalisation. Some examples when emailing colleagues include targeting specific colleagues – rather than sending a group email – and personalising the email to these individuals. Personalisation can be as simple as using colleagues' names, and could include linking the research to a current challenge that a team or the school is grappling with.

**GUIDING QUESTIONS:** *How can you draw people's attention - can you make something stand out or make something more personally relevant? Can you provide incentives or rewards?*



**Make it Social:** People are influenced by what others do and expect. This means it can help to draw on credible sources and contacts to support the call to action, and/or to highlight people who are already performing the required action (whether that be accessing the shared material or responding to a question posed). Examples of making things social include having someone in leadership send the email, changing language from 'I' and 'you' to 'we' and 'us', or presenting research to colleagues during a staff meeting and encouraging discussion rather than sharing via email.

**GUIDING QUESTIONS:** *How can you show that others in the school are also engaging with the research you are promoting? Are the majority of people engaging with it (if so, it could help to emphasise this) – if not, can you highlight any key, influential people who are engaging with it? Can you share the information through established networks and groups in the school, rather than an 'all-staff' email?*



**Make it Timely:** People are less likely to engage when you contact them at the wrong time. This means it's not only important *what* we share, but *when* we share it. A simple example could be to consider the timing with respect to the school term or year. Try to identify times when colleagues might be thinking about development, innovation and design (e.g., curriculum days, at the start of the year), rather than times when colleagues may be busy with implementation or exhausted at the end of the term.

**GUIDING QUESTIONS:** *When are people likely to be most (or more) receptive to what you're sharing - when are good times to prompt action? Can you share research at a time that leverages off other activities in the school, or when you already have a captive audience? Can you help people to plan their engagement?*

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### TIPS FOR CONTEXTUALLY RELEVANT APPLICATION OF EAST

Note that it may not be possible to apply all of these principles in an educational setting, and that applying them will take practise. We find that applying EAST well requires some understanding of your audience and some skills in perspective taking: try to look at your 'sharing' approach with fresh eyes and to put yourself in the shoes of your colleagues.

The recent Q Data Insight piece on "Educators' receiving and sharing research and evidence" can provide some useful ideas for engaging your colleagues based on **what other educators do** (Make it Social) and what **educators' preferences are** regarding what and how different research and evidence is shared (Make it Attractive).

### IMPLICATIONS

Some common barriers to colleagues engaging with research that is shared could be: it is perceived as **difficult to engage with**; it is perceived as **low in relevance or attractiveness**; it is not perceived as social or there is a **low expectation that others will engage** with it; and it is perceived as being **shared at an imperfect time**.

**To encourage engagement with the different research and evidence that you share, consider:**

*What might be some barriers to people engaging with what you're about to share and how you're sharing it?*

**Then consider how these barriers could be overcome, using EAST. Namely, how can you:**

- Make it easier for them?
- Make it more attractive or personally relevant to them?
- Link it to others, make it more reputable or social or require a social commitment?
- Ask at a time when they may be more able or receptive to act?

### NEXT STEPS

While we've introduced you to EAST, there are a number of additional generic behaviour change tools out there. For example, check out the [INSPIRE framework](#) that was developed by BWA researchers for improving response to written communications.

To connect with us, please visit:



[Q Project Website](#)



[@MonashQProject](#)



[MonashQProject@monash.edu](mailto:MonashQProject@monash.edu)