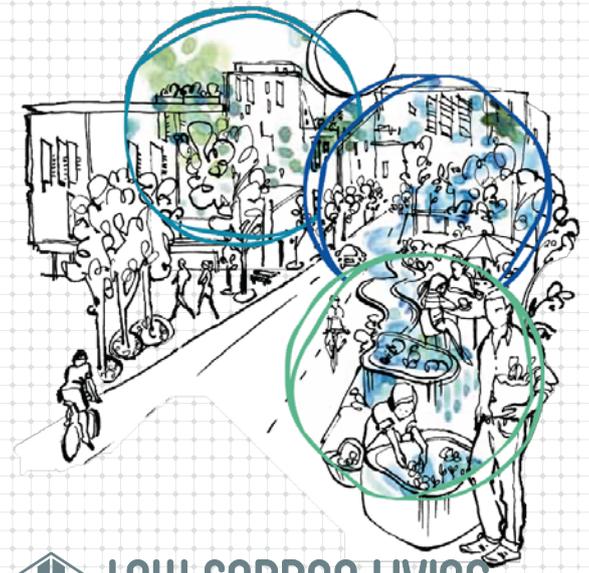# USING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE INSIGHTS TO TRANSLATE RESEARCH INTO POLICY & PRACTICE

Guide Note for CRCLCL researchers

LOW CARBON LIVING CRC

PURPOSE

This guide note has been provided to assist our researchers in enabling greater uptake and use of their research by applying insights from social and environmental psychology.

THE RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Our research projects are all about change. They advance new and innovative ways of doing things ranging from the simple to the transformational. Change can be exciting but also confronting because it alters the status quo and requires the investment of time and other resources during the transition. Those resources can be put to best use by knowing what to address, when and how. That's where our research comes into play.

THE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

For our research to make a difference, we need to manage and support the change that end users must undergo to use it. However, changing behaviour can be tricky: people can resist change for emotional reasons, do not always act rationally, and can act differently depending on the context. People often say one thing, and do another. However, our research in behavioural economics and social psychology reveals that there are a number of matters that we can address to help support the uptake and use of our research.

WHY CHANGE CAN BE DIFFICULT

Our lives are filled with many different activities or practices that are intertwined in a complex equilibrium. So, we try to maintain our daily activities in equilibrium with each other and with those of others (Fig. 1). Thus, changing behaviour upsets this equilibrium and requires us to adjust our activities to keep things in balance.

When we ask a person to change a behaviour, we are asking them to navigate change in two layers. One is implementing change in the practices described above (Fig. 1). In a state of equilibrium, this layer is generally regulated thinking which is fast, efficient and

Fig. 1: Hypothetical Network of Individuals and their Activities

☐ :a person. P_1, P_2, etc.
● :a practice.
— :enabling or constraining relations between practices.
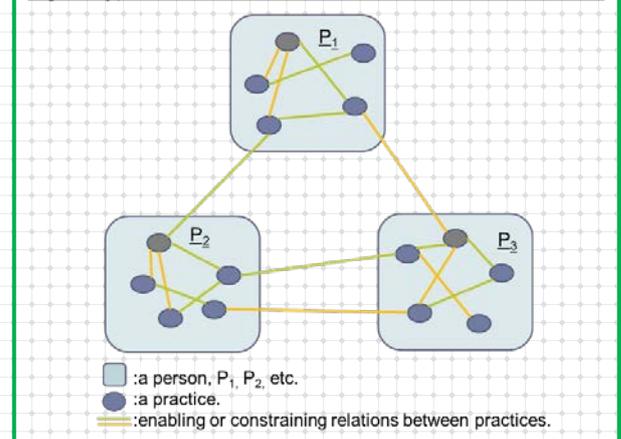
habitual (Type I) where we use the best combinations of practised behaviours to maintain equilibrium and meet daily demands.

However, we cannot change our practices without first making the necessary changes in a second layer, namely that of our 'concepts'. This is the network of beliefs, attitudes, aspirations, goals and intentions that accompany our practices, day to day activities and interactions with others. Changing concepts requires us to invoke a more cognitively demanding type of thinking, namely a more deliberate and reflective assessment of what the change will achieve and how we can best achieve it (Type II thinking).

According to the reasoned action approach (Fishbein & Ajzen 2010) our intention is an important factor in determining what we do and how those actions can be changed. Intention, in turn, is influenced by a dynamic interaction of a range of psychological factors, namely:

- attitude (formed from our beliefs, goals, values and emotions)
- injunctive norms (what we think we should do)
- perceived social norms (what think others do), and
- perceived control (whether we think we can do it).

These psychological factors also interact with their context - the surrounding personal, social, institutional and physical factors both in time and space that dictate whether, in the circumstances, we have actual control to influence outcomes and change behaviour.

We talk with our friends and interact with others in our social networks to learn new ideas, to negotiate with others, and be encouraged by them to take on a new challenge. In doing, so we weigh up the 'costs of change' to ensure that we have the necessary physical and psychological resources (competencies, materials, equipment and an understanding of the change and its benefits) and can achieve a new equilibrium.

Therefore, we can encourage change by minimising these 'change costs' and highlighting the personal and inter-personal benefits of the new regime. Further, to sustain a change, we need to ensure that people repeat the new behaviour until it becomes routine within a newly formed equilibrium. This moves us from the 'costly' deliberate Type II thinking back to the more efficient, fast and sustainable Type I thinking.

INSIGHTS FROM OUR RESEARCH

A combination of audience-focussed actions is more likely to bring about a desired change. As a rule of thumb, taking the following steps may assist the uptake and use of your research:

Focus on resolving problems and play up the research strengths, making clear any limitations. Don't be overly concerned about perfection - people seek solutions that offer a satisfactory or adequate outcome, rather than expending additional resources on achieving an optimal solution.

Engage with and listen to stakeholders to understand what they value, how they operate in day to day life, what barriers might exist to the uptake of your research and who they associate with (and whether these 'associates' help or hinder the uptake and maintenance of the new behaviour). In sum, knowing the range of criteria that potential stakeholders use to make decisions around a new behaviour allows us to tailor our approach. More specifically:

- Keep things simple because when we get overwhelmed by decisions the cognitive effort increases and we tend to replace rigorous analysis with simple rules and to seek advice from others, thus resorting to norms and recommendations.
- Recognise that some people are more ready for change than others, so prioritise and target stakeholders based upon their motivational profile - spanning from a basic desire to an internalised commitment, considering values that people communicate as well as those which they act on. Be mindful of signals and body language that can indicate the level of commitment. At least in early stages, target the 'converted' and 'early adopters'.
- Be knowledgeable of individual differences in motivation. Identify, understand and relate to users' personal intrinsic and extrinsic values to capture those who identify with relevant mental models. Appeal to (a) hedonic goal frames (short-term, low effort), (b) gain goal frames (building resources) and (c) normative goal frames (doing it for 'the team').

Overcome knowledge and practical barriers. Boost the capabilities and other resources that users need to use your research, e.g. via a guideline, user manual etc. Adopters need to understand and feel comfortable that they have the capacity to adopt a new approach.

More specifically:

- Clarify the pathway of adoption in simple language including in relation to relative advantage, compatibility, simplicity, trialability, observability and sustainability.
- Promote benefits that do not emphasise sunk costs (costs that have already been incurred and cannot be recovered). Sunk costs can inhibit future choices if a person feels regret from not having benefitted from the original choice and rather than rationally comparing marginal costs and benefits, they may invest further resources to reinforce an initial decision.
- Present contextual cues to overcome the inertia of habits. Automatic responses to contextual cues are difficult to change, but can be shifted by changing the context, so that routinized behaviours are not triggered by relevant cues. This is sometimes conceptualised as 'unfreezing' undesired behaviour and then 'refreezing' with new cues when the desired behaviour is achieved.

Know and promote the costs and benefits (outcomes) of adopting your research. Outcomes are not only economic but span psychological and social ones such as a sense of empowerment, comfort, convenience or opportunity for socializing. Factor in potential impacts on the comfort, convenience, sense of empowerment and social interaction of others. More specifically:

- Associate the research with feel-good values - understand and promote not only the instrumental function of your research but the also the symbolic and emotional ones.
- Provide more immediate rewards – users respond better to immediate rewards than future ones.
- Nudge uptake through positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions
- Use positive message frames that also emphasise good social impacts and the potential losses of not adopting the research rather than the gains of doing so. Use imagery and other cues to evoke emotions.
- Generate a buzz around the innovation by providing normative messages, and distribute them via social networks, peers and trusted opinion leaders. People are often strongly influenced by the perceived views of close and trusted others.
- Model and demonstrate the benefits of your research, and ideally allow users to experientially trial and test it, thus allowing them to take ownership.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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