Behavioural insights in employment services

Evidence review

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The ReAct Partnership

About Us

The ReAct Partnership is a new, industry-led, active collaboration to support a continuous improvement community in the Restart programme through action research, shared and iterative learning, and the development of applied, evidence-based resources.

The Partnership is co-funded by six of the 'prime providers' for the Restart programme — FedCap Employment, G4S, Ingeus, Maximus, Reed, and Serco — and is being managed by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES), working alongside the Institute for Employability Professionals (IEP) and the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA).

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Contents

Introduction

For the past decade or so, there has been growing interest in how we can use models of behaviour change to improve service delivery and outcomes across various sectors. In many respects, these models have codified and made more systematic many of the techniques and practices that have been used in employment services for decades. But the focus on understanding the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of behaviour change has helped services to innovate, test incremental improvements, and to understand what works.

Within the Restart Scheme, there has been significant interest in how these insights could be used to support higher engagement, build positive relationships, and improve employment outcomes. So, for this research project, the ReAct Partnership has reviewed a range of evidence on how behaviour change techniques have been used in different contexts in order to improve outcomes and make services work better. This report sets out the findings from that research and identifies how these can be implemented in the delivery of Restart.

The report is in two sections. The first section provides an overview of behavioural insights as an approach to policy and programme design and implementation. It begins by exploring the underlying principles of behavioural insights. Then it discusses existing behavioural science frameworks used in the development and implementation of behaviourally informed interventions. This section also lays out a process that can guide the application of Behavioural Insights in public policies and programmes.

The second section then explores the application of behavioural insights specifically toemployment support services. It presents concrete insights from relevant literature on employment services across different countries. Given time constraints, a rapid evidence review was done. After screening through 1,073 results, a total of 24 studies were included in the final list, from which this report draws its primary insights. The insights emerging from the relevant literature informed the recommendations set forth in this report.

What are 'behavioural insights'?

How understanding behaviour can improve policies and programme

Summary

The behavioural insights approach identifies factors that drive behaviour with the aim of creating behaviour change.

Small changes in the environment – 'nudges' – are an inexpensive way of influencing individuals' behaviour without limiting their freedom of choice.

Nudging makes individuals more likely to opt for more desirable choices, even when they have limited time or are presented with an overwhelming amount of options.

Nudges are most effective when they get people thinking about why they behave the way they do.

Context is important in nudging: a nudge that works in one context will not necessarily work in a different context.

MINDSPACE lays out different factors that motivate human behaviour: Messenger, Incentives, Norms, Defaults, Salience, Priming, Affect, Commitment, Ego. However, in implementing behaviourally informed interventions, MINDSPACE should not be treated as a checklist – you don't need all the factors for behaviour change to occur.

The COM-B model also helps us think about the drivers of human behaviour: the Capability to act and the Opportunities available to an individual influence their Motivation, and in consequence, their behaviour.

Successful behaviourally informed policies and programmes are focused – that is, hey select one or two behaviours and try to change those behaviours using insights from the available evidence base.

Understanding behavioural insights

Behavioural insights draw on research into human behaviour and decision-making to design and implement policies and programmes. Deriving primarily from the fields of psychology and behavioural economics,(1) **this approach seeks to identify factors that drive behaviour in order to produce behaviour change**.

Behaviourally informed approaches have become increasingly prominent amongst public policy organisations over the past decade. The (UK's) Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) was set up in 2010,(2) and since then, other countries[1] have established their own teams dedicated to the application of behavioural insights in public policies and programmes.(3,4) These public agencies have also come to be known as 'nudge units', named after nudge theory, a concept in behavioural science that has heavily influenced the practice of behavioural insights.

'Nudging' behaviour

In Thaler and Sunstein's seminal work, first published in 2008, the authors described 'nudges' as small changes in the environment that predictably influence individuals' behaviour, without limiting their choice and without altering their economic incentives.(5)

A well-known example of nudging is the use of traffic-light labels to indicate the nutritional value of food products. Traffic-light nutritional labels use our reflexive emotional associations with certain colours to influence our food purchases. That is, red is dangerous and best avoided whilst green is safe for consumption. Evidence has shown these traffic-light labels to be effective in encouraging consumers to purchase healthier food options,(6) and they are very cheap to implement.

Humans process information in two distinct ways: fast and slow thinking.(7) Nudge theory is anchored on this notion. **'Fast thinking' pertains to snap judgements** – made automatically and with little effort – which are very susceptible to the influence of cognitive biases and environmental cues.(7) On the other hand, **'slow thinking' is characterised by deliberate, reflective, and effortful decision-making**.(7) When individuals have little time or are presented with too many options, they usually 'think fast',(8) which can result in suboptimal actions and decisions. **Nudging modifies the environment such that, even when 'thinking fast', an individual is more likely to opt for a desirable choice.**

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[1] According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there are at least 202 public agencies around the world dedicated to the use of Behavioural Insights in policy and programme design and implementation.

However, **different kinds of nudge interventions have demonstrated varying degrees of effectiveness**. A systematic review of nudge interventions across six areas (energy, environment, finance, health, policymaking, and privacy) found that 62% of a total 308 interventions reported significant effects.(9) [2] [3]

The effectiveness of nudges depends, at least in part, on whether they get people reflecting about their choices.(10) Nudges appealing only to fast-thinking were less effective and less sustainable than those that also made people think about the reasons behind their decision-making.(10) The traffic-light labels mentioned earlier belong to the latter category since they are easy to understand, provide a reference point, and directly connect nutritional facts to health outcomes.(10) In other words, traffic-light labels lead consumers to think about what motivates their desire to purchase differently – the motivation, in this case, being to improve their health.

There is also a degree of **contextual specificity** in the effectiveness of nudges: **one nudge might work in a certain context but fail to produce results in another.** For instance, text messages have successfully nudged a sample of Ugandan adults to repay their loans,(11) but they did not help improve the academic achievement of university-aged Canadian students.(12) Given differing results across various contexts, nudge interventions on their own are not enough: **behaviour should be seen as a system influenced by context**.(13)
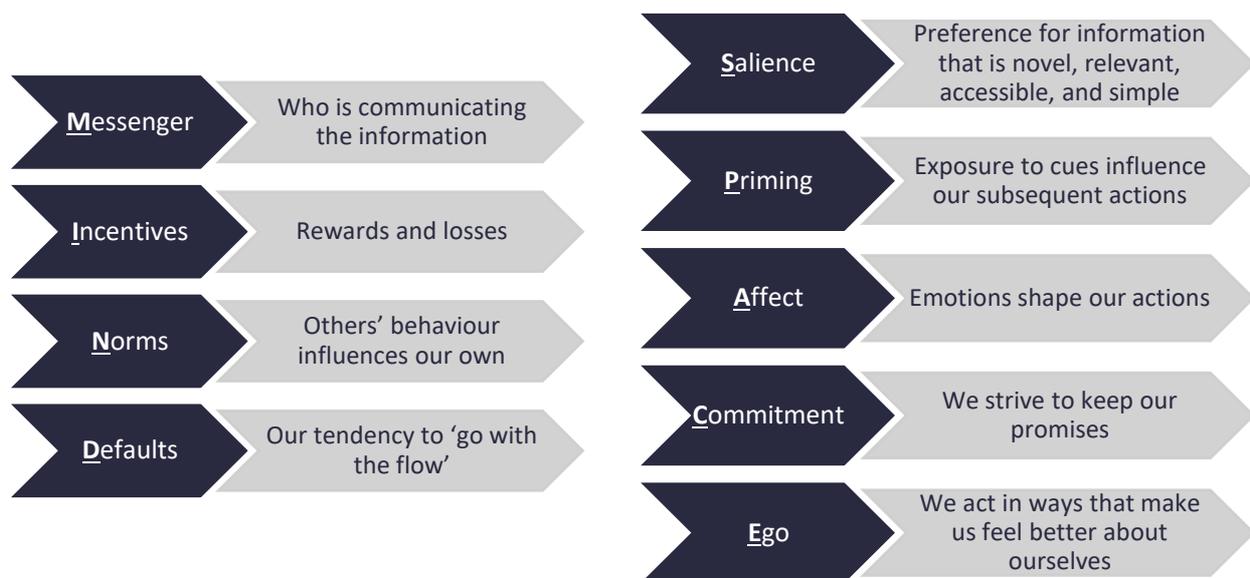
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[2] The median relative effect size was 21%. Reported effect sizes ranged between 0% and 1,681%.
[3] One must consider publication bias when looking at these results: academic journals are less likely to publish studies reporting non-significant results.

Examining behavioural contexts

The MINDSPACE framework lays out various factors that motivate human behaviour and decision-making.(14) MINDSPACE is an acronym that encompasses the motivational factors laid out in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. MINDSPACE Framework

|			
Messenger	Who is communicating the information	**S**alience	Preference for information that is novel, relevant, accessible, and simple
Incentives	Rewards and losses	**P**riming	Exposure to cues influence our subsequent actions
Norms	Others' behaviour influences our own	**A**ffect	Emotions shape our actions
Defaults	Our tendency to 'go with the flow'	**C**ommitment	We strive to keep our promises
		Ego	We act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves

This framework complements nudge theory by filling in the motivational contexts missed by the latter.

However, **MINDSPACE should not be treated as a checklist**. It is often unnecessary, even counterproductive, to address all elements of MINDSPACE. Interventions should be designed and tailored based on an understanding of which factors drive the target behaviour.(15)

MINDSPACE articulates the motivations that influence behaviour, but motivation is itself subject to the influence of various personal and environmental factors. **An individual's capability to act and the opportunities available to an individual are equally important in motivating their behaviour.**(16) This is shown in the Capability-Opportunity-Motivation-Behaviour (COM-B) Framework,(16) illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. COM-B Framework
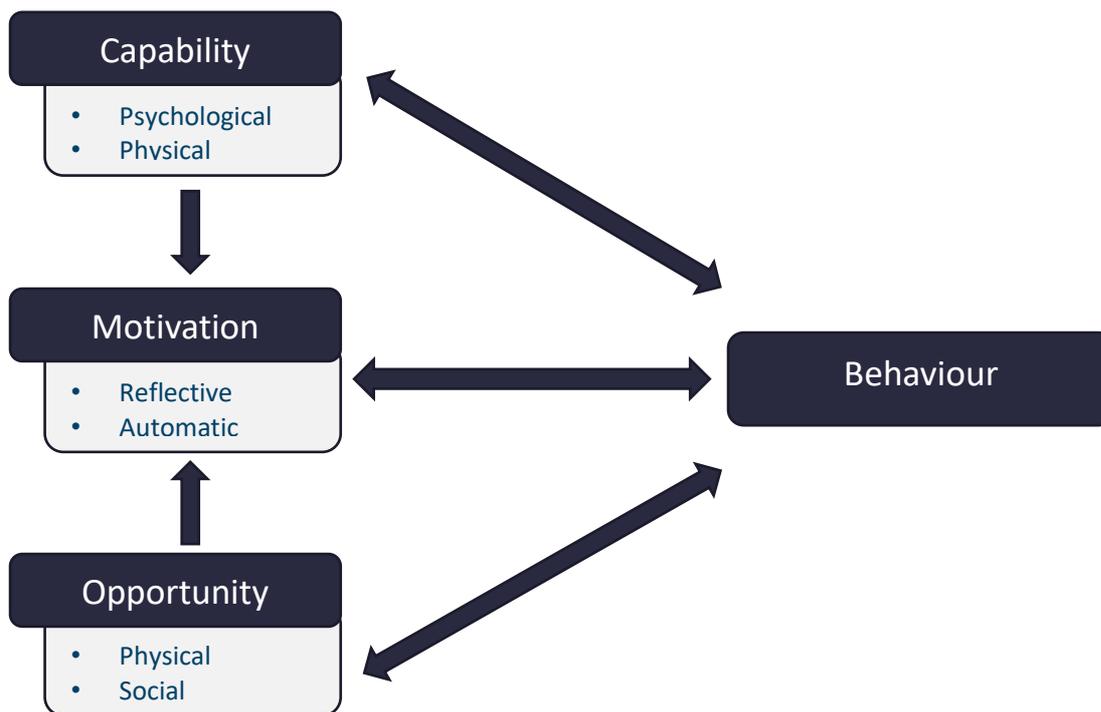
Capability: individual's physical and psychological capacity to perform a given action. This includes their knowledge and skills.

Opportunity: environmental factors (i.e., external to the individual) that prompt or hinder a given action. This includes physical infrastructure (e.g., transportation, training facilities) and social capital.

Motivation: conscious and unconscious cognitive processes that direct behaviour.

The arrows indicate the direction of the relationship between the framework components: both capability and opportunity influence an individual's motivation, whilst behaviour can influence capability, opportunity, and motivation, and vice versa.(16)

For instance, an individual who wishes to find a new job (motivation) attends a training session (behaviour), which then leads to acquiring new skills (capability) and networking with others (opportunity). The new skills and increased social capital could then, in turn, increase the jobseeker's motivation, which results in more proactive job search behaviour. This example is illustrated in Figure 3 overleaf.

Figure 3. COM-B example: participation in training programme
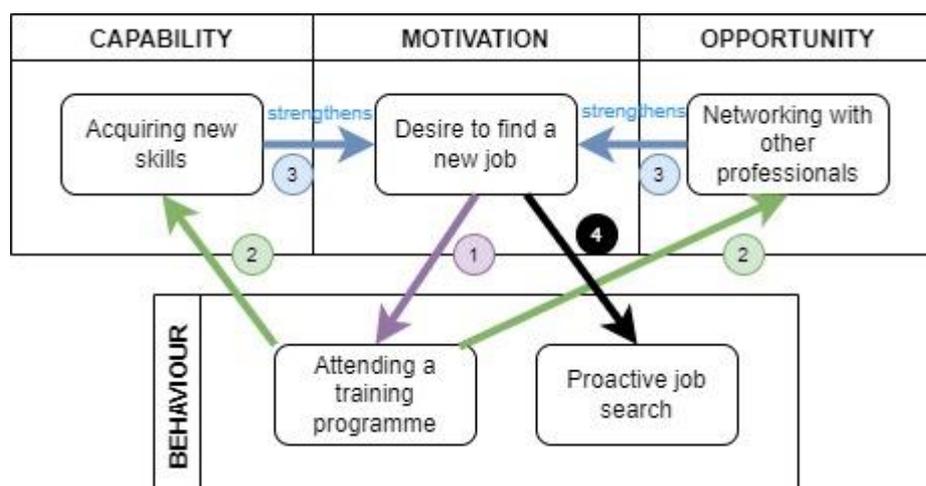
The COM-B framework can serve as a 'consistently coherent basis on which people understand the reasons for their decisions and how they enact them'.(10) Having this **consistent, coherent** basis for decision-making is important, especially since nudge interventions are more effective and sustainable when they cause individuals to reflect on why they act the way they do.(10)

The concepts described above can help policymakers design and enact behaviourally informed interventions.

Implementing behaviourally informed interventions

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has laid out a five-step process for the design and implementation of behaviourally informed policies and programmes.(17) The five steps of this process, termed the Behaviour-Analysis-Strategy-Intervention-Change (BASIC) Framework, are illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. BASIC Framework for implementing behaviourally informed interventions

Behaviour				
Identify the policy issue	**Analysis**			
	Review the available evidence to identify behavioural drivers	**Strategy**		
		Translate insights from evidence into behaviourally informed strategies	**Intervention**	
			Design and implement intervention to test different strategies' effectiveness	**Change**
				Plan measures to scale and sustain behavioural change
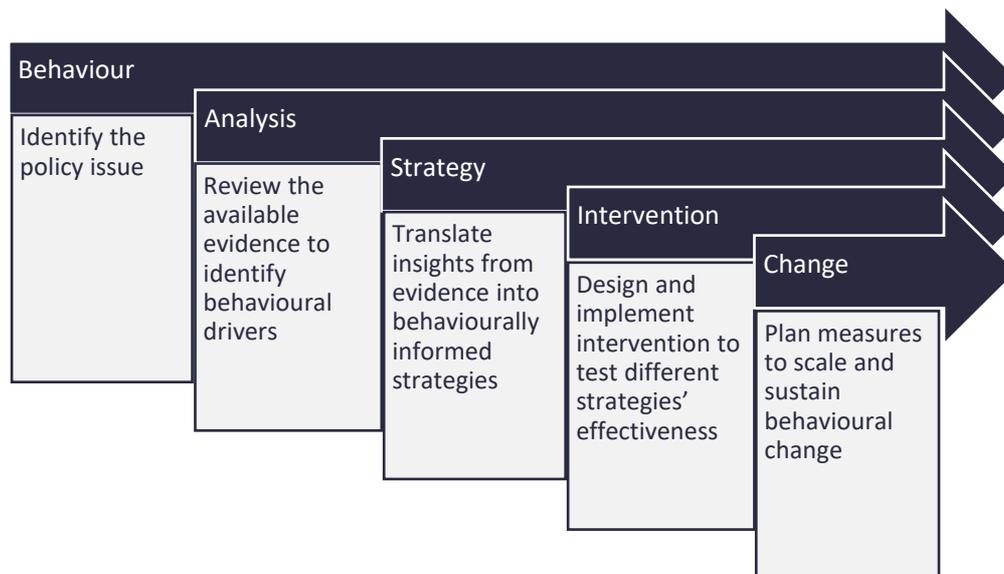
Successful policies and programmes are focused: they select one or two target behaviours and try to change those behaviours based on the available evidence. It is also important to note that behaviourally informed interventions are not the only way to produce change in behaviour. Behaviourally informed policies work best in conjunction *with* – and therefore do not replace – more traditional policy tools such as regulation and provision of information.(3)

Furthermore, the implementation of behaviourally informed interventions comes with its own set of challenges and limitations.(2) The most common ones are outlined below.

Challenges and limitations in implementing behaviourally informed interventions(2)

Long-term effects: There is a relatively small evidence base regarding the long-term impact of behaviourally informed interventions.

Resilient behavioural shifts: In some instances, individuals might continue a desired behaviour even after the trigger stimulus is taken away.

Repeated exposure effects: Evidence on repeated exposure effects also remains limited. This is an important gap in the evidence base. Without further examination of repeated

exposure effects, it is difficult to ascertain whether the effect of an intervention is only due to novelty and, therefore, continued exposure would yield diminishing returns – or if it creates lasting change.

Spill-over effects: Some interventions might generate unintended consequences, such as changes in outcomes that were not originally targeted.

Cultural variability: A majority of the available evidence on behaviourally informed interventions concerns Western societies. This could imply potential limitations regarding the applicability of the evidence to different ethnic groups.

Replication crisis: The results of many laboratory studies in the behavioural sciences fail to be replicated in subsequent experiments. This signals a need to replicate an intervention in a real-world setting before scaling it to a larger population. Otherwise, there is risk of investing in an intervention that does not work.

How can we use behavioural insights to improve employment services?

Practical and actionable examples from the research evidence

This section presents actionable insights regarding the use of behavioural insights in the provision of employment services. To do this, a review of relevant literature on employment services across different countries was conducted. This literature was analysed in accordance with the conceptual frameworks discussed in the previous section, namely: COM-B, MINDSPACE, and nudge theory. The chapter is structured around the Capability, Opportunity, Motivation framework, before concluding with some observations on how these examples and insights could be used in programme provision.

Strengthening capabilities

As previously established, capability refers to an individual's physical and psychological capacity to perform a task.(16) Capability encompasses physical constraints (e.g., illness, disability) and the set of knowledge and skills relevant to the task at hand. The literature included in this review examined various forms of behaviour change interventions targeting the capabilities of different stakeholders: specifically, employers; jobseekers and employees; and employment support workers.

Employers' capabilities

Main insights

- There is limited evidence documenting the relationships between employers' capability and employer behaviour.

Evidence regarding the relationship between employers' capability to support disadvantaged individuals and change in employers' behaviour remains limited. In the literature we analysed, there was only one study of employer capability and the resulting behaviour change. This study examined an online multimedia intervention in the Netherlands, which sought to help employers facilitate cancer survivors' return to work.(18) The intervention used the following strategies:

- web-based delivery to allow flexible access to instructional content;
- succinct, tailored information;
- interactive video content;
- conversation checklists; and
- links to credible external sources.

These strategies were based on the results of a needs assessment with Dutch employers – which informed the development of a programme theory of change – and on existing theoretical evidence regarding the mechanisms of behaviour change.(18) However, since the study concerned an ongoing intervention, it did not report programme outcomes.

Jobseekers' and employees' capabilities

Main insights

- Work readiness programmes raised the self-efficacy and feelings of preparedness amongst unemployed jobseekers.
- Individuals on long-term sickness absence experienced less anxiety and felt more ready to return to work, following participation in a work readiness programme.
- Self-reflection helps build jobseekers' resilience, which is, in turn, associated with a higher likelihood of finding employment in the medium term.
- Personalised support is an important contributor towards changing jobseekers' and employees' attitudes and behaviours towards work.

Work readiness programmes were one approach used to develop knowledge and skills. Three of these work readiness programmes focused on unemployed jobseekers. More specifically, the programmes aimed at unemployed jobseekers studied the following initiatives:

- a group intervention for mature-aged people with disabilities(19)
- a sports-based intervention(20)
- an optional placement year for university-level business students(21)

In all three work readiness programmes that targeted unemployed jobseekers, participants reported feeling greater levels of self-efficacy and preparedness for work.(19–21) In addition, the sports-based work readiness intervention also yielded social benefits, with participants feeling a stronger sense of community and relatedness with others.(20) In the placement year study, students who participated in the optional placement year reported feeling more motivated, more confident, and more prepared for the future.(21)

Another work readiness programme targeted employed individuals who were on long-term sickness absence due to musculoskeletal conditions.(22) Similarly, these workers experienced positive outcomes after participating in a work readiness programme. They felt more prepared to return to work, experienced less anxiety, and perceived themselves to be healthier, following their participation in a structured three-week programme, compared with another sample that only received advice regarding work placements.(22)

However, whilst the previously discussed studies found positive changes in participants' beliefs and attitudes regarding work, those same studies provided little detail on *how* the interventions studied facilitated those changes. Furthermore, they mainly focused on cognitive changes (i.e., beliefs and attitudes). Whilst cognitive changes can indeed lead to behavioural changes, the previously discussed studies did not explore this process in depth.

A study conducted by Cowls and Galloway focused on employees on long-term sickness absence due to mental ill health.(23) Their qualitative findings showed that equipping clients with psychological tools to recognise maladaptive behaviours as they occurred helped clients develop behavioural coping strategies.(23) Moreover, clients with mental health conditions, who were able to return to work successfully, partnered with an occupational therapist to create a concrete, personalised return-to-work plan.(23)

Gloster and colleagues' study regarding benefit claimants' participation in training, claimants' current skills, qualifications, and work experience influenced claimants' job search efficacy and training participation.(24) In addition to the knowledge and skills of benefit claimants, their physical condition also influenced their attitudes and behaviours towards training, with disability and ill health being important barriers to training participation and, more generally, to securing employment.(24) Where benefit claimants were most successful in overcoming said barriers, they received support that took stock of their current level of knowledge and skills and their health conditions.(24)

Aligned with the findings of Cowls and Galloway,(23) a study by Sanders and colleagues remarked how engagement in strengths identification and expressive writing exercises resulted in increased benefits off-flow amongst unemployed British jobseekers.(25) **These self-reflection exercises built jobseekers' resilience, resulting in a higher likelihood of finding a job over the medium term.**(25) These findings further reinforce the notion that self-reflection contributes to behaviour change.

Supporting the conclusions of both Cowls and Galloway(23) and Gloster and colleagues(24), **personalised discussions about the job search process also had a statistically significant positive effect on participants' employment outcomes.** However, the ability to hold such personalised discussions depended on advisers' workload. Employment support workers' capability and opportunity to provide personalised support are discussed in later sections.

These findings show how cognitive factors (e.g., knowledge, skills, and beliefs) could hinder or facilitate behavioural changes in the workplace. These studies also underscore the importance of personalised support and action planning. Given how tailored support was most effective in addressing the needs of participants in all three studies – and consequently, in improving their employment outcomes – **personalised support becomes an important contributor towards changing behaviours and attitudes towards work**. Of course, it must be recognised that the provision of personalised support depends in large part on the capability of the person providing support.

Employment support workers' capabilities

Main insights

- Self-efficacy and actual skills influence the behaviours and practices of employment support professionals.

- Since professional development opportunities can increase the skill level of employment support workers, these opportunities can contribute towards behaviour change.
- The ability of employment support professionals to provide personalised support to their clients depends, at least in part, on their workload.

Three studies examined the relationship between i) knowledge and skills of individuals who *provided* employment support and ii) their professional practice. These studies focused on the following support workers:

- secondary teachers providing career education(26)
- occupational physicians helping employees on long-term sickness absence(27)
- vocational rehabilitation professionals serving rural American jobseekers with disabilities(28)

The first study tested the effect of a teacher training intervention in the Netherlands on teachers' practices during career conversations with students. **Teacher training recipients showed significant behavioural changes in their career conversations.** These changes included allocating more time towards discussing students' career plans and prompting student reflection**.**(26) However, the study did not examine how changes in teachers' behaviour influenced students' behaviour. Nonetheless, given the previously discussed positive effect of self-reflection on behaviour,(23,25) it would be reasonable to expect positive changes in student behaviour to accompany the aforementioned changes in teacher behaviour.

The second and third studies both emphasised how employment support professionals' **self-efficacy and actual competencies influenced the way they negotiated workplace adjustments** for individuals with specific health and disability-related needs.(27,28) In addition, both studies recognised the **importance of individualised support**, but also reported that professionals' *ability* **to personalise support influenced their actual practices**.(27,28)

The findings of the three studies discussed above reinforce the link between skills and behaviours. However, as previously established, **workload is also an important determinant of the extent to which employment support professionals could individualise their service**.(25) In addition, the two studies conducted with occupational physicians and with vocational rehabilitation professionals, respectively, acknowledged the importance of modifying the physical configuration of workplaces to accommodate the needs of individuals with disabilities or health conditions. As such, the ideas emerging from the studies discussed in this sub-section support the COM-B framework's proposition that opportunity – that is, **the environmental context – is just as important as capability in producing behaviour**.

Expanding opportunities

Opportunities may be physical or social.(16) For instance, a lack of training facilities within a locale limits the (physical) opportunity to participate in training. On the other hand, regular networking (social) events expand possibilities for jobseekers to meet potential employers and fellow jobseekers. Both physical and social opportunities appear as behavioural determinants in the literature included in this review.

Physical opportunity

Main insights

- The available infrastructure – such as institutional arrangements, facilities, public transport, and financial support – influences the behaviour of jobseekers and in-work employees.
- Flexible support arrangements helped promote positive behaviours amongst certain populations (e.g., clients with childcare responsibilities).
- Streamlining administrative processes frees up time for employment advisers to provide personalised support to their clients. In turn, personalised support results in better employment outcomes for clients.
- Modifying the physical configuration of workplaces and employment support facilities influences the behaviour of both jobseekers and in-work employees.

Five studies alluded to the influence of the physical environment on the behaviour of various stakeholders in employment support services.(24,25,27–29) In these studies, different environmental configurations either facilitated or impeded the enactment of certain behaviours.

For instance, Gloster and colleagues found that the available infrastructure was linked to differences in training participation amongst benefits claimants across job centres in the United Kingdom.(24) Available infrastructure pertained to institutional factors such as training opportunities accessible to benefits claimants in their respective areas and financial support to fund the cost of training, as well as elements of the built environment, such as public transport and the proximity of training facilities.(24) Flexible support arrangements were also found to promote positive behaviours amongst certain populations; for instance, flexible schedules encouraged training participation amongst claimants with childcare responsibilities.(24) Castillo and colleagues noted similar hindrances faced by rural American jobseekers with disabilities.(28)

Similarly, employment support professionals' practices can be constrained by their environment. These practices can influence their clients' behaviours and resulting employment outcomes. For example, Sanders and colleagues observed how reducing bureaucratic 'sludge' (i.e., heavy administrative paperwork) freed up employment advisers' time, which then allowed advisers to provide more

personalised support to jobseekers.(25) In turn, jobseekers who received personalised support showed significantly greater off-flow from benefits.(25)

In addition to the physical environment of employment support facilities, studies also discussed how workplace configurations influenced the behaviours of jobseekers and in-work employees alike – especially those with disabilities or additional needs. For example, environmental modifications at work enabled a successful job search for adults with autism supported by Australian employment services.(29) Temporary work modifications also facilitated return-to-work for employees on long-term sickness absence.(27) Organisational structures were also found to be important, with supportive leadership and flexible working arrangements noted as conducive to work-related success for the said populations.(27,29)

These studies underscore the importance of a conducive physical environment, as well as supportive institutional arrangements, in the provision of employment services and in securing work. As such, it becomes important for both employers and employment support providers to be cognisant of the needs of disadvantaged jobseekers and employees and to reconfigure their offerings and facilities in accordance with those needs. However, environmental factors that affect employment outcomes are not limited to physical opportunities. The social capital of jobseekers and employees also influences their job search and in-work behaviours.

Social opportunity

Main insights

- Social capital is an important determinant of success for jobseekers, employees, and employment support workers alike.
- A trustful relationship between clients and employment advisers influences the behaviour of the former. On the other hand, lack of client-adviser trust results in client disengagement.
- Having honest, personalised discussions is one way of building a trustful client-adviser relationship.
- In some instances, excessive contact with advisers could make clients feel singled out, which in turn adversely influences engagement.
- External peer support can also influence clients' engagement and participation in an employment support programme.
- The strength of the relationship between employers and employment support workers also influences the latter's behaviour.

Eight of the studies included in this review discussed the role of social opportunities in shaping the behaviour of employment programme stakeholders.(24,25,27–32)

The nature of the relationship between jobseekers or employees and their employment adviser is an important social opportunity that influences the former's behaviour. As established earlier, personalised discussions between adviser and jobseeker are associated with a statistically significant increase in jobseeker off-flow from benefits.(25) Advisers' recognition of their clients' individual abilities and limitations helps disabled jobseekers negotiate more flexible working arrangements with their employers; conversely, lack of a positive adviser-client relationship caused clients' disengagement from work.(30) Following entry into employment, disabled jobseekers were more likely to stay in their job if they had a trustful relationship with their employment adviser – a relationship characterised by clear, congruent, and honest communication and a focus on the client's strengths.(28)

However, it is important to note that excessive attention from employment advisers could potentially have an adverse effect on jobseekers' engagement. For instance, in a study concerning individuals who were either rescued from human trafficking or were adult children of sex workers in India, Umashankar and Srinivasan observed how increased intensity of client-adviser contact had a significant negative effect on newcomers' adjustment to a vocational intervention.(31) In such instances, excessive contact made newcomers feel singled out by the employment adviser.(31) That said, other social factors influenced newcomer adjustment.

Peer influence from other programme beneficiaries moderated the relationship between contact intensity and newcomer adjustment.(31) Umashankar and Srinivasan also reported that family, friends, and other external sources of social influence had a direct relationship with newcomer adjustment: **if external social circles were supportive of an individual's participation in the employment programme, the individual was more likely to successfully adjust to the intervention**.(31)

The importance of the social environment was also observed by Gloster and colleagues, who noted a link between interpersonal support and positive behaviours (such as training participation) amongst benefits claimants in the UK.(24) Beatson and colleagues reported a similar tendency amongst young adults with disabilities, drawing a direct relationship between levels of social support and attitudes, level of perceived behavioural control, behavioural intentions, and actual behaviour with respect to independent travel to work.(32) For individuals already in employment, the social environment is equally important. For instance, one study showed how having supportive co-workers, and more broadly, a positive organisational climate, enabled adults on the autism spectrum to successfully transition into their workplace.(29)

Social capital is equally important to employment support workers. For example, occupational physicians serving employees on long-term sickness absence were more confident and able to negotiate temporary work modifications for their clients if they had a sustained, pre-existing, positive relationship with the concerned employer.(27)

The findings discussed above reveal a need to consider the social environment of jobseekers, employees, and employment support workers when implementing employment support programmes. Together with

strengthening stakeholder capabilities and improving infrastructure and institutional arrangements, building social capital is a powerful tool to induce behaviour change. It is important to note, however, that developing capabilities and opportunities requires larger-scale efforts and time investments. As these larger-scale endeavours are on course, employment support programmes may consider implementing small-scale changes – nudges – to bolster motivation and create more immediate behaviour change.

Nudging motivation

Information works best when preceded by self-reflection

Mühlböck and colleagues conducted an experiment that tested how self-reflection and provision of information influenced employment outcomes amongst Austrian young adults with little job experience.(33) The experiment involved four treatment groups:

1. a group that only watched an informational video;
2. a group that only responded to an online survey about their job search process, including their skills, beliefs, and motivations;
3. a group that watched an informational video and then responded to the online self-reflection survey; and
4. a group that responded to the online self-reflection survey and then watched an informational video.

Participants who only watched an informational video did not experience any change in their attitudes towards work or, consequently, in their employment outcomes.(33) All participants who at some point took the self-reflection survey saw positive changes in attitudes and employment outcomes, but this was statistically significant only for those who completed the survey before watching the informational video.(33) These findings are illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 5. Information provision is most effective when preceded by self-reflection
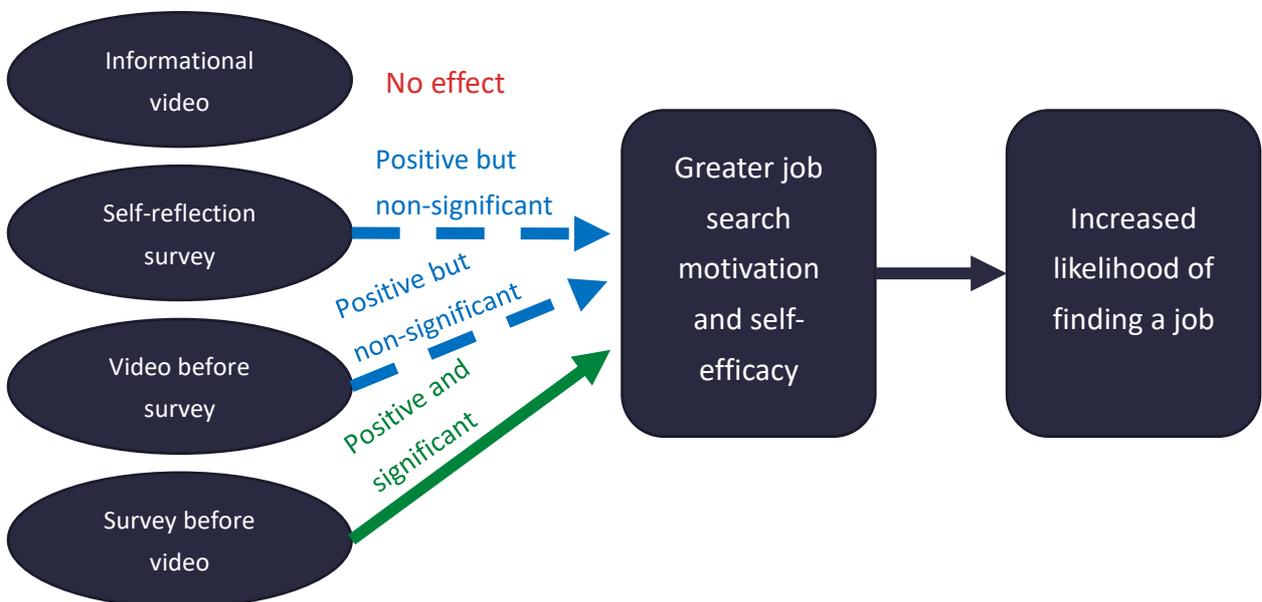
The effectiveness of prompting self-reflection before introducing information may be attributed to Priming and Salience, as described by Dolan and colleagues in their MINDSPACE framework.(14)

Answering the self-reflection survey could have served as a priming nudge. By getting participants to first think about their existing skills and their broader job search process, they could apply information from the video to their own context – making the video more relevant, and thus more salient. The importance of self-awareness in behaviour change, similarly observed by Cowls and Galloway(23) and Sanders and colleagues(25), corroborates Mühlböck and colleagues' findings regarding the role of self-reflection in the job search process.

This interaction between Priming and Salience provides guidance on how employment support can be structured and sequenced to improve jobseekers' outcomes. Priming and Salience become even more powerful cues for inducing behaviour change when coupled with commitment devices.

Committing to change facilitates actual change

Through a randomised controlled trial (RCT), Gross and colleagues compared the effectiveness of traditional counselling approaches and motivational interviewing in facilitating injured workers' sustainable return to work.(34) Whilst traditional approaches focus on improving work abilities, conducting educational workshops, and planning out the return-to-work process, motivational interviewing seeks to help clients articulate their own motivations and intentions to help them lay out concrete steps to return to work.(34) In sum, an effective motivational interview comprises three elements:

- talking about the client's motivations to change;
- having clients verbalise their intentions to change; and
- developing an implementation plan.

The RCT found that injured workers who were coached using motivational interviewing techniques were significantly less likely than those coached using traditional approaches to reclaim disability benefits, which indicates a more sustainable re-entry into employment.(34) These findings are illustrated in Figure 7 below.

Figure 6. Motivational interviewing facilitates sustainable return to work
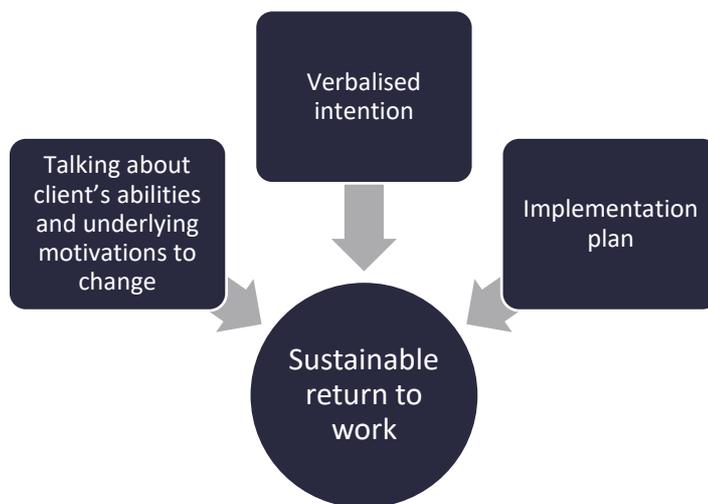
The effectiveness of commitment devices, such as implementation plans, was also demonstrated in the experiments conducted by Sanders and colleagues(25) and Ho and Yeung(35). For instance, jobseekers who wrote a declaration of their implementation intentions showed significantly greater off-flow from benefits than those who did not.(25) In addition, translating those implementation intentions into a checklist of activities also positively influenced off-flow from benefits.(25) Having a checklist of activities that breaks down bigger actions into smaller tasks promotes clients' self-efficacy and makes clients feel more capable of realising their intentions.(25)

Ho and Yeung reported a similarly positive effect of commitment devices on employee behaviour; in their study, they examined employees' participation in training to remain competitive in the broader job market.(35) Employees who made a written pledge to attend specific trainings were significantly more likely to attend those trainings than those who did not write a pledge.(35) Furthermore, those who wrote a pledge also attended significantly more training sessions.(35) These findings align with those of Gross and colleagues(34) and Sanders and colleagues,(25) attesting to the power of commitment devices in shaping behaviour.

But Ho and Yeung's study provides additional insight into another behavioural driver: incentives.

Loss aversion can direct behaviour

In addition to their conclusion about the power of commitment devices, Ho and Yeung also found that the way an incentive is framed can result in behavioural differences.(35) In their experiment, employees were assigned to one of two incentive groups. One group was offered a $60 reimbursement to offset the cost of their training whilst the other group was given a $60 cash reward. Those who received a reimbursement were significantly more likely to attend the training sessions which they committed to participate in; they also attended significantly more trainings.(35)

Ho and Yeung's findings illustrate an important point about incentives: **loss aversion exerts a stronger influence on behaviour than the desire for gain**.(14) The strong influence of loss aversion on behaviour is also demonstrated by Wright and colleagues'(36) study.

Wright and colleagues found that when unemployment benefits are suspended as a consequence of a jobseeker's failure to attend required appointments, a jobseeker was significantly more likely to attend subsequent appointments.(36) In addition, this change in behaviour was lasting and was equally strong even with clients who had a history of non-compliance.(36) These findings are illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 7. Benefits suspension deters non-compliance

The findings of Ho and Yeung(35) and Wright and colleagues(36) present some implications for the way incentives are administered in employment support programmes, based on the strong behavioural response generated by loss aversion. Ho and Yeung demonstrated how incentives can be framed to maximise clients' fulfilment of their commitments. Given the stronger behavioural effect of loss aversion than desire for gain, clients could receive cost reimbursements instead of one-off rewards to encourage positive behaviour. On the other hand, Wright and colleagues built a case for conditionality. Since the threat of sanctions is a powerful disincentive against non-compliance, they could be used – selectively – to encourage jobseekers to positively change their behaviour.

Having now discussed different kinds of cues that can induce behaviour change, it is also important to examine how the change process could be best structured and sequenced.
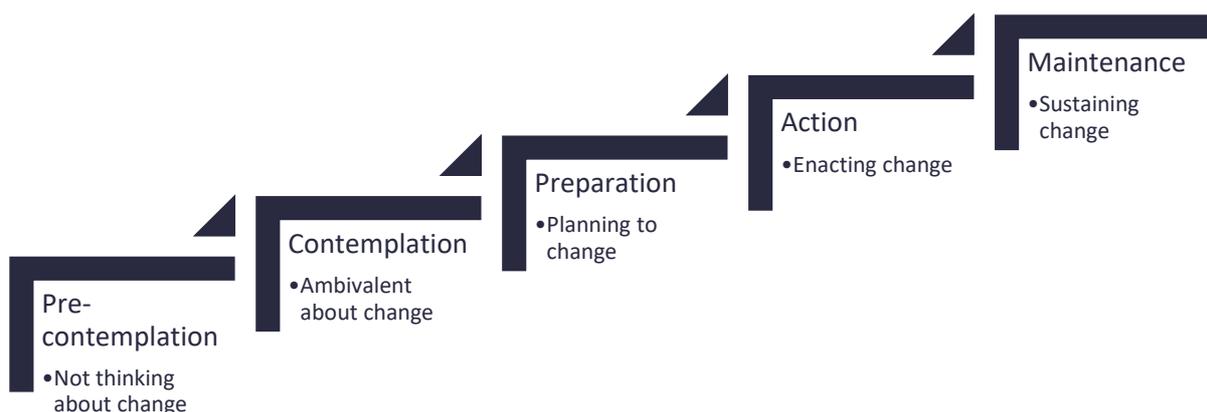
Staged, intentional change is more effective

By conducting an RCT with a sample of German jobseekers with at-risk levels of alcohol consumption, Haberecht and colleagues found that interventions subscribing to a staged, intentional model of change were more effective than non-staged change interventions.(37) Clients who participated in the stage-tailored intervention significantly reduced their alcohol use, and this was true even for jobseekers who initially had low motivation to change.(37) Whilst participation in the staged intervention did not have a direct statistical effect on employment status after 15 months, reduced alcohol use did.(37) As such, conducting a staged intervention presented an indirect influence on employment by reducing at-risk jobseekers' alcohol consumption. Furthermore, the staged intervention was still able to produce positive

behaviour change and therefore still offers potential guidance for structuring employment support services.

The staged change intervention studied by Haberecht and colleagues followed the transtheoretical model of behaviour change.(38) This model is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 8. Stages of intentional change

Pre-contemplation
•Not thinking about change

Contemplation
•Ambivalent about change

Preparation
•Planning to change

Action
•Enacting change

Maintenance
•Sustaining change

The staged intervention provided clients with regular feedback letters tailored to where they currently were in the process (as illustrated above). The feedback focused on how a client compared to others (thus appealing to norms), and how much a client has changed since they last received feedback (which made them good about themselves, appealing to their affect and ego). For instance, at the pre-contemplation stage, a client might receive feedback on how their alcohol consumption compared against the national average to nudge them towards the contemplation stage. At the contemplation stage, a client could be given feedback regarding how much other intervention participants have reduced their alcohol consumption since joining, to persuade them to act. At the action stage, a client could be given feedback about how much their consumption has reduced three, six, or nine months since they first joined, to encourage them to continue. The effectiveness of this kind of feedback attests not only to the influence of personalised support but also to the power of Norms, Affect, and Ego, as laid out in the MINDSPACE Framework(14), in shaping individual behaviour.

Applying the evidence to employment services

The research evidence presented in this chapter provides guidance on how employment services can harness behavioural insights to improve outcomes for jobseekers and currently employed individuals. As previously established, the key to changing behaviour lies in strengthening stakeholders' capabilities, expanding their opportunities to access employment services, and boosting their motivation through small-scale changes in their environment.

The insights emerging from this evidence review point towards:

• making it easy for potential clients to access and participate in employment support programmes;
• making service offerings more attractive to current and prospective clients;
• building social capital and using social norms; and
• ensuring timely service provision.

Figure 9 below uses the EAST framework(39) to summarise the behaviourally informed recommendations that can be drawn from this review to improve the delivery of employment support services. In practice, successful employment services already use these insights, but this report has organised these insights in line with the existing body of pertinent research on behaviour change.

Figure 9. Summary of recommendations

Easy	Attractive	Social	Timely
•Expand avenues for participation •Make next steps explicit, clear, and specific •Reduce 'hassle' (e.g., by streamlining processes)	•Personalise (e.g., through personalised emails and progress reports) •Use rewards and sanctions	•Build a trustful adviser-client relationship •Leverage social norms ('other people like you have already joined the programme') •Use commitment devices •Develop peer support networks	•Develop a plan and identify barriers to action •Prompt people when they are most likely to be receptive •Change prompts depending on stage of the programme

The most obvious way to improve participation in employment support programmes is to provide more avenues for participation. Where multiple service offerings and support facilities exist, there is likely to be greater uptake of employment services. However, expanding employment services in this fashion incurs costs and could be prohibitively expensive for service providers with limited financial resources. As such, employment service providers may look to other ways of expanding access.

Flexible schedules that accommodate the different needs of jobseekers and individuals at work are one option to encourage participation. For instance, schedule flexibility would benefit jobseekers with childcare responsibilities. Online (or hybrid) service delivery is also likely to encourage participation, especially for jobseekers who have limited transport options to reach commercial centres where employment support facilities tend to be concentrated. However, **in providing online options, providers must consider that certain populations might not have a reliable connection or access to the Internet**.

For individuals who are already benefitting from employment support, outlining clear next steps helps ensure that agreements are fulfilled. **Developing an action plan that breaks down large tasks into smaller activities** makes clients feel more able to fulfil their commitments, thus boosting their self-efficacy. Since self-efficacy is linked to improved employment outcomes, it is in the interest of both clients and advisers to boost self-efficacy. However, it must be noted that **action plans are effective only if they are personalised to the individual needs of clients**. As previously discussed, advisers' ability to personalise support depends in part on their workload. As such, streamlining administrative processes becomes important.

Simplifying administrative processes also frees up time for employment advisers to personalise support for their clients, which in turn helps develop trust between client and adviser. Furthermore, streamlined administrative processes can encourage participation in employment support programmes. For instance, seemingly trivial inconveniences in the enrolment process could spell the difference between a potential client's decision to participate in an employment programme and them indefinitely delaying their participation.

Personalised service provision makes employment programmes more relevant to prospective and existing clients. By ensuring that action plans fill in clients' competency gaps, clients are more likely to fulfil their commitments and, in consequence, find employment. Personalisation can also take the form of flexible arrangements, as previously mentioned. Clients have different life circumstances, and employment programmes that enable to participate and still attend to their responsibilities outside work are therefore more attractive.

Existing clients of employment support programmes would also benefit from receiving **regular, personalised progress reports**. Progress reports illustrate the extent to which clients have improved and have attained their objectives. This sense of progress not only boosts self-efficacy but it also incentivises clients to keep working towards their commitments.

Where possible, employment support programmes should also consider **designing rewards and sanctions to incentivise positive behaviours**. The evidence reviewed in this report has shown that loss aversion is more powerful than the desire for gain. As such, incentive schemes should draw on this insight. Instead of offering cash rewards, providers could alternatively consider **reimbursing clients' participation costs**. Adding some form of **conditionality** to benefit schemes would also be a strong disincentive against non-compliance. Of course, **rewards and sanctions should be exercised reasonably**,

and what can be considered reasonable for the individual circumstances of any jobseeker or employee should be based on the judgement of the adviser. For this reason, a trustful adviser-client relationship is very important.

Leveraging social norms is another way to encourage positive behaviour. Communicating to potential clients that others in their community have benefitted or are benefitting from employment support is likely to at least pique their interest. Existing clients, on the other hand, might be encouraged to adopt positive behaviours if others in their social group do so as well.

The evidence has also demonstrated the power of commitment devices in facilitating the production of positive behaviours. Since individuals generally want to follow through on their public promises, **having clients declare their commitment in writing makes them more likely to fulfil agreements** they have made with their advisers. When accompanied by a concrete plan that lays out clear next steps and identifies measures to overcome barriers to action, commitment devices become an especially powerful tool in employment service provision.

Finally, it is important to note that, at any given point in time, **a jobseeker or employee will feel differently towards changing their behaviour**. This is important to consider when recruiting potential clients or encouraging individuals at work to take on more responsibilities. For instance, a jobseeker under severe familial or financial stress is less likely to be receptive to employment support, unless the support they receive also lays out steps to overcome those external stressors. Employees with very young children would likely be less willing to take on additional work-related responsibilities; as such, lateral, instead of vertical, movements within an organisation might be a more viable option for in-work progression.

In sum, applying behavioural insights in the provision of employment services is a complex, multifaceted issue. As with all other aspects of employment support, **there is no one-size-fits-all solution to producing positive behaviour** change in programme stakeholders. **Any behaviourally informed intervention should take stock of individual circumstances and should be tested with a representative sample from the target population before it is rolled out at a larger scale.** Nevertheless, this evidence review has laid out some actionable insights that could inform the development, implementation, and improvement of current and future employment support programmes.

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