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# Why don't people do what we want them to?

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All blogs

Behaviour change is the essential but elusive key to success in MSD.

Indeed, systemic change could be defined as a series of related behaviour changes that are sustainably maintained. A successful MSD programme depends on figuring out why people behave as they do - what behaviour changes are needed to achieve programme goals? And what would it take to do this sustainably?

Or, to put it another way, success in MSD programming requires accurately identifying and effectively leveraging people's incentives and capacity to change their behaviour. In theory, if people have (and know that they have) sufficient incentives and capacity to change their behaviour, they will do so.

In practice though, people don't always change their behaviour in the ways we expect them to. Why is this? What are the blockers? And more importantly, what should we do about it?

A recent Springfield Centre paper - Unpacking incentives and capacities - answers these questions by using the Mechanisms of Social Change framework to break down incentives and capacities.

People's incentives and capacity are multi-faceted. They are affected by factors we don't always consider in MSD programming, despite research in other fields. They can act as hidden factors that block behaviour change, leaving a programme stuck.

This paper introduces a simple tool to help quickly analyse these different Actor Behaviour Change (ABC) factors in programmes. It clearly sets out the ABC factors

that make up an actor's incentives and capacity. It is also a reminder of the factors that affect incentives in programmes.

Incentives lie in our expectations of the future. They are particularly affected by ways in which people perceive and calculate uncertain future outcomes. This provides a comprehensive but accessible typology to help practitioners identify specific enablers and blockers of any particular behaviour change.

Understanding these ABC factors that enable or block behaviour change – and so enable or block systemic change – is essential. It informs how we decide who to partner with, what innovations to introduce, and what support will be required to embed the change in the system. The ABC factor tool will help programmes underpin these decisions with deeper and more accurate analysis.

Why don't people do what we want them to? It's as simple as ABC…

> Read the paper Unpacking incentives and capacities: factors affecting actor behaviour change