

# SOCIAL CHANGE

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Corporation



**A guide on**

# THE COM-B MODEL OF BEHAVIOUR.



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# INTRODUCTION.



**There are a number of models of behaviour, each one designed to help us better understand what drives behaviour and how decisions are made. Having this knowledge is key when trying to facilitate behaviour change. If we do not understand behaviour, how can we know what it takes to change it?**

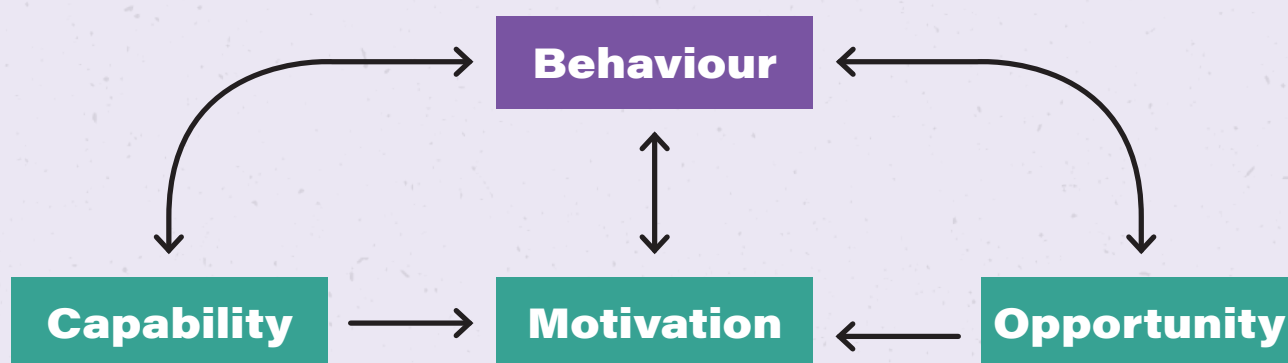
The COM-B model provides insight into three components, which it suggests play a pivotal role in producing, and therefore changing, behaviour. Below we explain what this model is, its three components and how it can change behaviour.

# THE COM-B MODEL.



The COM-B model proposes that there are three components to any behaviour (B): Capability (C), Opportunity (O) and Motivation (M). In order to perform a particular behaviour, one must feel they are both psychologically and physically able to do so (C), have the social and physical opportunity for the behaviour (O), and want or need to carry out the behaviour more than other competing behaviours (M). As each of these components interact, interventions must target one or more of these in order to deliver and maintain effective behaviour change.

**Fig.1:**  
**The COM-B Model.**



As can be seen in figure 1 (see above), capability and opportunity influence motivation, and not only do all three influence behaviour change but are also influenced by the change which occurs. For example, the opportunity component may be targeted to encourage someone who is inactive to be active, i.e. providing social and physical opportunity through free, group exercise sessions. If this individual initially thought that they did not have the appropriate skills to take part in an activity (capability) but were still provided with the opportunities to attend a class, then by going to this class they reinforce the idea that they do have the capabilities required. This suggests that this is an interactional model, and that by changing behaviour we are also impacting on determinants of behaviour, which allows for long-term behaviour change.

Each component of the COM-B model can be broken down into further components, which are as follows:

## Capability



**Capability refers to whether we have the knowledge, skills and abilities required to engage in a particular behaviour. Its two components are:**

- Psychological Capability: our knowledge, psychological strength, skills or stamina
- Physical Capability: our physical strength, skill or stamina

## Opportunity



**In the context of this model, opportunity refers to the external factors which make the execution of a particular behaviour possible. Its two components are:**

- Physical Opportunity: opportunities provided by the environment, such as time, location and resource
- Social Opportunity: opportunities as a result of social factors, such as cultural norms and social cues

## Motivation



**Motivation refers to the internal processes which influence our decision making and behaviours. Its two components are:**

- Reflective Motivation: reflective processes, such as making plans and evaluating things that have already happened
- Automatic Motivation: automatic processes, such as our desires, impulses and inhibitions

## Putting COM-B into practice.

According to the model, one or more of its components must be changed in order to facilitate effective and long-standing behaviour change. By changing both perceived capabilities and opportunities, we can influence a person's motivation for executing a particular behaviour and therefore encourage behaviour change. If this change is powerful enough, it will impact on their determinants of behaviour and lead them to favour the new behaviour over other competing behaviours, therefore reinforcing long-term behaviour change.

Below we have provided an example of how the COM-B model can be utilised for behaviour change. This example involves encouraging an inactive person to be active.

### Capability.

The inactive individual may not think they have what they consider to be the appropriate physical skills (physical capability) or knowledge of exercise techniques (psychological capability) to take part in physical activity. This perception of not having the capability to carry out a particular behaviour would negatively impact their motivation to do so. In order to change this, the individual needs to be given the physical and psychological capabilities they think they need to engage in physical activity – they may already have these capabilities, so it may be a case of helping them to realise this.

When considering psychological capability, workshops or training sessions can help an individual develop their knowledge or skills in a particular area. In this case, a personal trainer or training app could show them what exercises they will benefit from and how to complete these. With regards to physical capability, individuals need to be reminded that there are classes available for all skill levels, and that strength, stamina and skill will improve over time.

### Opportunity.

The perceived cost and time constraints on an individual (physical opportunity) alongside the lack of a companion (social opportunity) may be barriers to their participation in physical activity. In order to overcome these barriers, individuals need to be shown what opportunities are already available or, alternatively, opportunities need to be provided which encourage individuals to take part in physical activity.

An individual may already be aware of the opportunities available but feel unable to utilise these. This could be due to monetary issues (physical opportunity) or because it may not be something that any of their friends take part in (social opportunity). Providing free exercise classes which encourage people to attend with a group of friends may override these barriers, making physical activity seem more feasible and opportune for the individual.

## Motivation.

With regards to motivation, an individual's lack of capability and opportunity may result in their 'need' to be physically active being overshadowed by their 'want' to relax and remain inactive; being inactive is likely to be a behaviour that they have high capability and opportunity for. However, if the above changes are made to the individual's perceptions of capability and opportunity, then their motivation to carry out the behaviour may be increased.

Based on this assumption, the key to behaviour change would be to establish physical activity as something the individual not only 'needs' but also 'wants' to do. This can be done by encouraging the individual to consider the long-term benefits of physical exercise (reflective motivation) and use these benefits to make physical activity seem the more desirable option as opposed to inactivity (automatic motivation). Framing physical activity as something they both need and want could motivate them to execute the behaviour, and override the competing behaviour of remaining inactive.

## Behaviour.

If the above interventions are successful, the individual's behaviour will change and they will be more physically active. By engaging in physical activity, the individual may improve their skills and knowledge of exercise (capability) and begin to see the activity as a normal part of their routine (opportunity). Alongside this, they may experience a range of health and social benefits as a result of being physically active, making it something they see as a positive and therefore desirable activity (motivation).

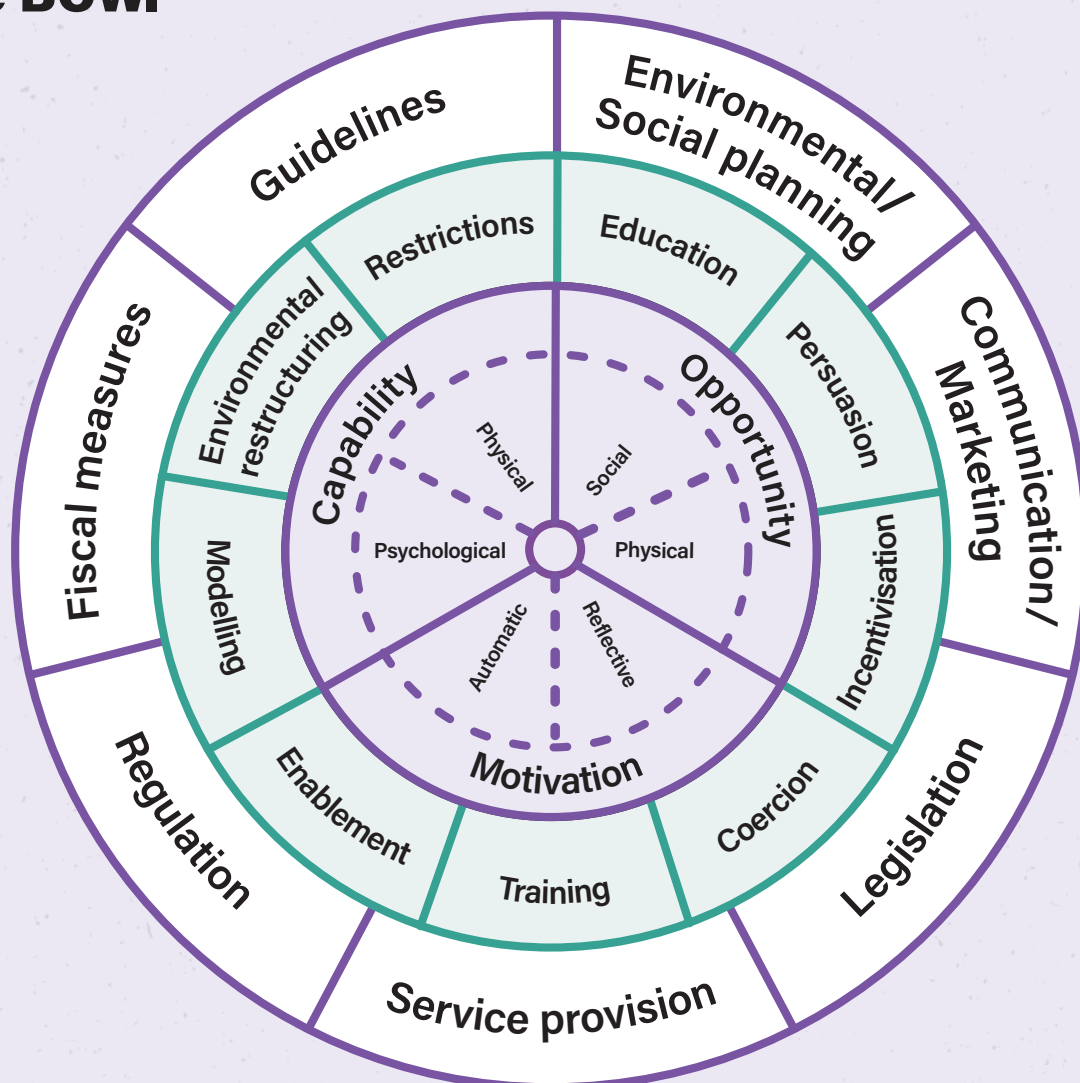
This shows how successful behaviour change can link into maintaining the new behaviour, as it is not just the behaviour that is changed but also its determinants. These changed determinants may then go on to have an impact on other behaviours, making behaviour change even more widespread.

# THE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE WHEEL.



The COM-B model proposes that there are three components to any behaviour (B): Capability (C), Opportunity (O) and Motivation (M). In order to perform a particular behaviour, one must feel they are both psychologically and physically able to do so (C), have the social and physical opportunity for the behaviour (O), and want or need to carry out the behaviour more than other competing behaviours (M). As each of these components interact, interventions must target one or more of these in order to deliver and maintain effective behaviour change.

**Fig.2:**  
**The BCW.**





# CONCLUSION.



The COM-B model is an appropriate starting point for any social marketing campaign, as it provides insight into the determinants of behaviour and how changes to these can encourage changes in behaviour. Once this model has been used to understand what needs to be altered to facilitate behaviour change, it would be beneficial to use the BCW model to understand how this may be possible.



The Behaviour Change Wheel (BCW) and COM-B model was developed from 19 frameworks of behaviour change identified in a systematic literature review by UCL, Centre for Behaviour Change:  
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