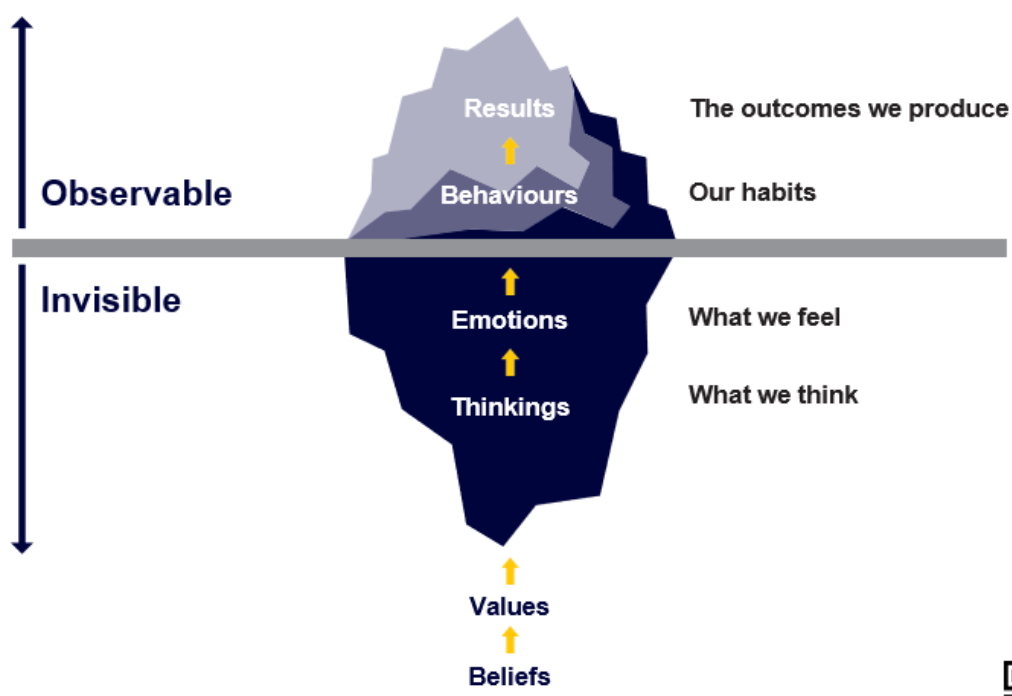




The Iceberg Model of Behaviour User Guide

The model



The results we achieve are usually at least partly the result of our behaviours. If we want to achieve different results, we might look to do that by changing our behaviours. The Iceberg Model of Behaviour is a representation of the range of things that influence those behaviours. This model helps to illustrate that there can be much more to changing our behaviours than simply telling ourselves to do different things.

The influences included in this model are:

- our emotions
- our thinking
- our values
- our beliefs.

The model represents those as influencing each other in sequence – our beliefs influence our values, which influence our thinking, which influences our emotions, which influence our behaviour – but this is an over-simplification. In reality, there are interactions in all directions between all of those influences, and our behaviours can themselves influence the ‘influences’.

The model should not, therefore, be regarded as a literal depiction of how behaviour is influenced. It is a metaphor to help us develop understanding.

Learn more about the art of asking powerful questions by watching this [animated video](#) on YouTube.



How we use the model

When we are trying to change a behaviour, drawing on the Iceberg Model of Behaviour means we start by trying to figure out the impact on the behaviour you are trying to change of how we think, what we feel, what we believe, and what is important to us. There will be things in each of those categories that has some bearing on the behaviour, and the categories may influence each other.

Gaining an understanding of those various influences helps us to determine what might need to be different if we want lasting behaviour change.

If we have not done a lot of this sort of exploration before, none of those impacts is likely to be especially obvious to us, and, even if we have, the nature of the relationships will not always be clear and without complications. For this reason, if we are looking to shift anything more than a recent, superficial behaviour, we should move with care and caution in seeking to shift deeply held beliefs, genuine values, ingrained thinking processes, and strong emotions. We should conduct safe and modest experiments to better understand the relationships so that we have more awareness of the full range of impacts our substantive changes might have before we choose to make them.

Why the model is useful

The Iceberg Model gives us a more realistic basis for approaching behaviour change than an approach that relies on telling ourselves to just do something differently. It gives us a broader perspective of the range of influences that we need to consider, meaning we have a better chance of figuring out how to set ourselves up for lasting behavioural change.

In addition to this advantage, the use of an iceberg as the metaphor allows for the distinction between the things that are usually visible to others and the things that generally, only we are aware of. This distinction is especially helpful in thinking about why it may seem that other people do not seem to understand us, or why other people sometimes surprise us, i.e., we do not fully understand them.

What it looks like in practice

A lot of attempts to change our behaviour adopt a 'New Year's Resolution' model of behaviour change – that is, one where our approach is reliant on logic and 'desire' (*"It makes sense that I should change and I really want it!"*), and an assumption that it is then merely a matter of willpower. And, like most new year's resolutions, that type of approach to behaviour change usually fails. The Iceberg Model of Behaviour helps us to recognise that there are several other, deeper influences that need to be addressed for change to succeed. This helps us to develop the right types of intervention to increase our likelihood of successfully changing the behaviour.

To illustrate the difference between these two approaches, consider a situation where a coach developer, Sarah, is struggling to meet the level of demand for her to support groups of early-stage coaches. Being unhappy with that result, she recognises that her behaviour of re-designing all of the session materials she has been given takes up too much time and needs to change. Using the New Year's Resolution approach to behavioural change, she would tell herself that it makes lots of sense to change, so she should just use the materials she's been given. That may or may not work out.

If Sarah used the Iceberg Model, she might consider what it was that contributed to her behaviour, discovering influences like a belief that her effectiveness as a coach developer comes from personal connection and the associated thought that connection is only possible through personalised materials, her value of self-reliance, and a deep-seated fear of using unfamiliar materials and being caught out not being able to explain them. Clearly Sarah can't 'willpower' her way out of those influences and would need to do some serious internal thinking.

How to know if it's working

You will know that you are making good use of the Iceberg Model when you are looking 'below the waterline' to maximise your chances of successfully changing your behaviour, not just telling yourself to change and hoping that willpower will see you through.

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Other useful tips

The Iceberg Model can serve as a stimulus when you are trying to change your behaviour or to help others to change their behaviour.

When you are supporting another person in their development, if you recognise that they are finding it difficult to understand why people around them act as they do, you might help the person you're supporting recognise how much of their own behaviour is influenced by things 'below the waterline'. You could then help them apply that realisation to the people around them. For example, you might be supporting a coach who is frustrated because an athlete is not acting on seemingly clear advice to change how they engage in training. Helping that coach realise that there is probably a lot going on below the surface for that athlete could encourage the coach to learn more about what the athlete values, and how that influences how the athlete thinks and feels, before seeking to change those behaviours.

If the description of a lot of change failing because of the 'new year's resolution' approach resonated with you, you might be interested in learning more about Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey's 'Immunity to Change' process. [Refer to this video which explains the process.](#)

Self-reflection and action learning

Use the [Action Learning Guide](#) to practice applying the models and techniques in your specific context and situation.