

Behavioural Insights Community of Practice

Embedding the use of behavioural insights

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**The
Policy
Project**

Responsive today,
shaping tomorrow

Overview – the presenters

Embedding the use of behavioural insights in your agency

Behavioural insights has the potential to help us understand how people and organisations actually behave. We can use this evidence to implement more effective policies and to identify the best levers to use to effect change. The practice of behavioural insights in government agencies in New Zealand is still evolving. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and different agencies have adopted different approaches to introducing the use of behavioural insights in their agency.

The Community of Practice event provided an opportunity to share the experiences of three government agencies regarding how they have developed behavioural insights capability in their agency. The Community of Practice event featured presentations from the speakers below, followed by a question and answer session.



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Kamal Acharya shared her reflections on contracting in behavioural insights expertise from a consultancy to support the Client Experience and Service Design Team at the Ministry of Social Development.



Ministry for the
Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiao

Reed Inwood spoke about the experience of the Ministry for the Environment, in setting up and running a coalition of the willing to take on behavioural insights projects, including cross-agency work.



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
Tāhū o te Ture

Vee Snijders discussed her experience of setting up a behavioural insights team at the Ministry of Justice, which works across the organisation and the wider Justice sector.



Kamal Acharya explained how the Client Experience and Service Design Team at the Ministry of Social Development has been working with a behavioural insights consultancy, called the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), for the past 18 months.

“BIT spoke to senior leaders and other areas of the Ministry to explain the process and put people at ease.”

BIT initially ran a workshop to generate ideas on how behavioural insights could be used. A number of areas were identified that led to the following work being completed:

- A text message reminder to increase the uptake of clients within the In Work Support trial.
- A mixture of surveys and interviews to better understand the drivers of client behaviour to help inform programs administered by the Ministry.

Through this work, the team demonstrated to leadership and other areas of the Ministry the value of applying behavioural insights. The team is now taking more of a hands-on approach, working with BIT on projects to help build their internal capability.

Lessons Learned

- By contracting in BIT, the team had immediate access to a wealth of international knowledge and experience. The lessons learned from using a behavioural insights consultancy were:
- Don't underestimate the time and investment to change mindsets and established processes in your agency in order to apply behavioural insights.
- There will be differences in perspectives and culture between your agency and the consultancy and the best way to work through these is by communicating regularly.
- Co-locate the consultancy staff with your team to better enable working together as one team with shared goals and shared resources.

Ethics and Behavioural Insights

The Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government (BETA) has recently established an ethical framework for behavioural insights.

The Ministry for Social Development is engaging with BETA to explore how this type of framework could be applied in New Zealand.

Reed Inwood explained how the Behavioural Insights Group at the Ministry for the Environment operates: it is a coalition of the willing who donate their time to promote and apply behavioural insights to policy challenges. The group has focused on three areas:

Staff Development

Building skills and knowledge of behavioural insights

Project Work

Applying behavioural insights to projects (e.g. reducing waste, barriers to use of electric vehicles)

Behavioural Insights Panel

A cross-agency panel that provides advice and tests ideas for applying behavioural insights to projects

Advantages of the approach



The Behavioural Insights Group has proven effective at sharing discrete parts of a project across the group to distribute the workload. It also benefits from strong leadership support across the Ministry. The voluntary nature of the group means everyone wants to be there, and there is freedom to operate as they want.

Challenges of the approach



The voluntary nature of the group also means that:

- attendance and project uptake waxes and wanes with other work requirements
- marketing the group within the Ministry depends on interest and willingness to try new things
- the group is vulnerable to staff turnover and changing work priorities.

Behavioural Insights Panel

Are you considering using behavioural insights for a project but would like to test your thinking?

Contact the Behavioural Insights Panel at the Ministry for the Environment: behaviouralinsightsgroup@mfe.govt.nz



Veel Snijders described how the Ministry of Justice has formed a behavioural insights team to provide services to other teams within the Ministry and other Justice sector agencies. The team started six months ago and has two staff.

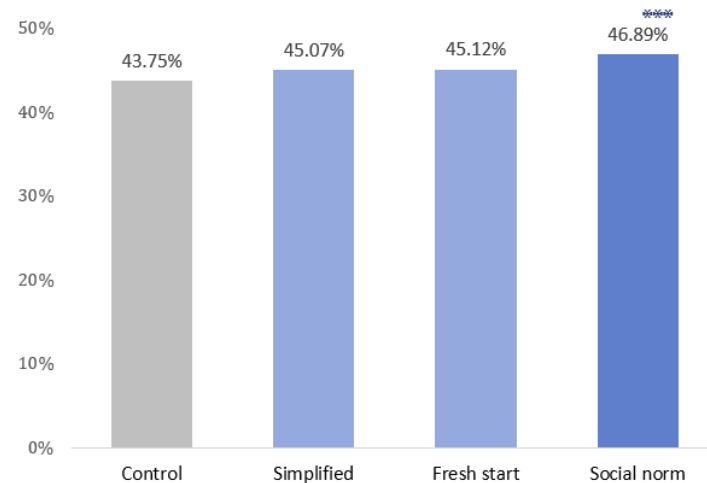
The following factors were central to establishing a behavioural insights team and demonstrating the benefits:

- Having people on the team with behavioural insights expertise to build credibility.
- Building trust at two levels – senior leadership and operational staff.
- Building a reputation by starting small with quick wins that are easy to implement, using behavioural insights that have worked elsewhere.
- Evaluating the findings to demonstrate the results and financial benefit.

Example: Unpaid Fine Reminder Letters

The problem: Not all people pay their court fines within the required 28 day period.

The trial: The team conducted a randomised control trial over a few months, applying different behavioural nudges to the content and format of reminder letters. The trial replicated international evidence on behavioural insights such as salience and social norms. The results of the trial are shown in the graph below – comparing the control group with the three letter options.



The results: The social norm letter increased the proportion of clients who paid by 7.2% (3.13 percentage points) compared to the standard letter (control). If the results are projected across the entire client group for a year, it would result in an additional \$300,000 to \$1.7 million in fine payments.

Early on to generate interest, the team met with other teams across the Ministry to explain the services they could provide and seek out projects.



By undertaking straightforward and 'easy win' projects the team could demonstrate the benefits of using behavioural insights. The success of the early projects built the team's reputation and credibility, with project teams now seeking out the team's services.

The vision for the future is to expand the size of the team and more actively work across the entire Justice sector.

Useful information

Keep up-to-date with what's happening in the world of behavioural insights by subscribing to the following publications:

www.freakonomics.com

www.behavioralscientist.org

www.npr.org/podcasts/510308/hidden-brain

Challenges moving forward

The team faces some challenges:

- People regarding the team as providing communications advice, given the early projects focused on applying behavioural nudges to letters. Moving forward, the team is keen to select projects that demonstrate the breadth of work that can benefit from behavioural insights.
- Securing ongoing funding is time-consuming for a small team.
- Being overwhelmed by demand, which requires the team to be clear about priorities and what can be delivered.
- Limited diversity given the small size of the team. The team is addressing this risk through reaching out to other areas of the Ministry to leverage different skill sets.
- Maintaining a focus on evaluation. There is more interest in applying behavioural insights, than evaluating the results. Processes also don't always allow for randomised control trials (e.g. automated process for generating letters).





The Community of Practice event concluded with a question and answer session with the panel and audience. The main points discussed are below.

- It is important to have a behavioural insights champion at the senior leadership level in your agency, to help create the authorising environment.
- Share the results with your Minister to socialise the methodology and demonstrate the value of using behavioural insights.
- When building your behavioural insights capability, start small with multiple, quick and replicated randomised control trials for quick wins.
- Be clear on the behaviour you want to change. Not all projects are suitable for using behavioural insights, and there will be some people whose behaviour you can't change.
- Applying behavioural insights often requires deep expertise and should be well evaluated to test what works in which situation.
- Behavioural insights has not yet become business as usual in the public service in New Zealand, but the interest in it is growing.

Want to get help or find out more?

For information on why you should use behavioural insights, what it involves, what you'll get out of it, when to use it, limitations, guidance and tools and existing expertise, check out the Policy Project's [Policy Methods Toolbox](#).

[Ideas42](#) is another useful source of information. Their mission is to use the power of behavioural science to design scalable solutions to some of society's most difficult problems. Check out their [playbook on how to set up a behavioural design team in government](#).

The Behavioural Insights Team's Wellington Office offers consultancy services to help you think about applying behavioural insights to your policy problems. Contact the Wellington office at info-nz@bi.team.

The Behavioural Insights Team's [website](#) also contains useful publications on behavioural insights. This includes the [test, learn and adapt framework](#) for running randomised control trials.

For any other help or to share lessons or training material please [email the Policy Project](#).