

A MANIFESTO FOR APPLYING BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE

By Michael Hallsworth



The behavioral insights movement has flourished over the past decade. Practitioners, teams, and academics are building on each other's work across the globe. Robust evaluation means that we know their work has made a difference to issues like school attendance, antimicrobial resistance and environmental sustainability.

The Behavioral Insights Team is proud to have been a pioneer of this growth. But we cannot ignore criticisms of the field that have emerged, such as overconfidence, ethical concerns, and limited impact.

Therefore, we spent two years exploring the challenges in depth, scrutinising our own work, and assessing cutting edge practices. The result is a Manifesto that offers ten actionable proposals to fulfil the potential of behavioral science to improve the lives of individuals, groups, and societies.

The Manifesto's 10 proposals are featured below with the full version available at www.bi.team/publications/a-manifesto-for-applying-behavioral-science/.

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1 Use behavioral science as a lens

Replace the dominant metaphor of behavioral science as a tool with a more expansive one: Behavioral science is a lens that improves the view of any public or private issue.

Build behavioral science into organisations

Talk less about how to set up behavioral science teams successfully and more about how behavioral science can be integrated into an organisation's standard processes.

3 See the system

Enhance behavioral science with insights from theories of complex adaptive systems. For example, this allows us to identify "leverage points" where small changes have wider effects

Put RCTs in their place

Strengthen randomised controlled trials to better deal with complexity by building in feedback and adaptation, anticipating potential harms, and engaging those who implement the intervention.

5 Replication, variation, adaptation

Identify the most reliable interventions, develop an accurate sense of the likely size of their effects, and avoid the weaker options.

Beyond lists of biases

Pursue theories of behavior that are practical. That means they are based on data and can generate testable hypotheses, but also offer actionable steps towards solving problems in the real world.

7 Predict and adjust

Develop the practice of predicting the results of experiments, and then receiving feedback on how your predictions performed.

Be humble, explore, and enable

Make deeper inquiries into behaviors in context, rather than making assumptions based on knowledge of common biases. Engage people to find the kinds of interventions that suit them.

9 Data science for equity

Use data science to identify the ways in which an intervention or situation appears to increase inequalities, and reduce them.

No "view from nowhere"

Find realistic ways to acknowledge and improve the reality that behavioral scientists do not have a neutral perspective and behavioral science is not value free.

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