



Keeping Wales Safe: Covid Behaviours Programme Phase Two

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Final Research Report
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Introduction

The Keeping Wales Safe: Covid Behaviours Programme (KWS) is a Welsh Government funded programme focussed on exploring how to embed a person-centred, collaborative approach to co-design and testing, based on behaviourally informed approaches, that can explore complex place-based challenges. The research team at Y Lab, in partnership with the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) and the People Powered Results (PPR) team at Nesta, worked with a range of public servants in Wales to explore how they can be supported to adopt a behavioural insights approach to policy making and policy implementation.

This report documents the research undertaken as part of the second phase of the Keeping Wales Safe programme. In the first phase, the delivery partners supported three place-based teams to use behavioural approaches to Covid-19. This work showed there could be organisational barriers or facilitators to adoption. Links to phase one outputs can be found in the appendix. As part of this second phase, we wanted to explore what support might be necessary for civil servants to adopt the approach to any area of policy. Y Lab were asked to explore civil servants' perceptions of behavioural science and its potential role in Welsh policy and public services. Welsh Government wanted to understand the barriers and opportunities to wider use of behavioural approaches to policy.

The Y Lab research focused on the following questions:

- *What are the perceived opportunities and barriers to the use of behavioural science in policy making and implementation across Welsh Government?*
- *How do civil servants assess the potential to adopt the approach, in relation to capacity, capability, and governance?*

We conducted a brief review of the literature to identify a range of barriers and used this as the basis for an interview schedule. Five civil servants were then interviewed, and the results analysed. The report covers both these stages of the research. This is a small-scale study, but its findings are broadly consistent with the literature we reviewed.

Literature Review Summary

Y Lab reviewed both academic papers and grey literature (e.g., Government-published guidance) to identify the essential conditions for individuals and public sector organisations to produce effective behavioural interventions. The literature mostly focused on national level policy making, but the discussion will have relevance to policy making and implementation in all parts of the public sector. The following pages summarise the key themes arising from the review.

The themes are organised using the COM-B model as a framework. West et al (2020) recommend a series of questions for each of the three parts of the model (Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation) to help understand what might prevent or promote a desired behaviour. These questions have been adapted to help summarise the themes, which are in **bold**.

Several of the themes re-occur as barriers to capability, opportunity and/or motivation. We have tried to place them in the framework in a way which reflects how they are discussed in the texts, but this is not always clear. In addition, many of the barriers are identified by the literature at one level of social analysis but could apply through all: micro (individual), meso (organisational) and macro (societal). For sake of simplicity, we have tried to report how the barriers are discussed by authors. Readers may want to consider how themes might function at different scales.

Capability

1. To what extent do public sector staff know what a behavioural approach to their work is?

None of the literature raised awareness as a possible barrier, noting instead the enthusiasm around it, even while it is not routinely used in policy making. The major barrier implicit in the literature around awareness was that those involved needed to agree on definitions. There was significant disagreement about what a behavioural approach to policy is (and is not). There is a risk this is echoed among policy makers.

Two examples of this were around its scope and methods. Some authors argued targeted behaviours should strictly be at the level of individuals, and some said group or organisational behaviour could also be included. Policy tools may be ‘nudge’ only (e.g., changing defaults or communicating norms), or they may include more traditional levers (e.g., fiscal or judicial). **There may be a range of views about what it means to think behaviourally in the policy making process.** Without a shared understanding of what the approach is, embedding it may be hindered by communication difficulties. Indeed, some of the barriers identified later may only apply to certain definitions.

There is a second potential barrier around awareness of the desired behaviour. In this case, what is being encouraged is a mode of thinking, or a way of approaching policy problems. **What this mindset translates into in terms of tangible action may be unknown to policy makers.** The literature is clear that there is a great deal of complexity to implementing behavioural approaches. Guidance, like that produced by West et al (2020), still leaves gaps where the desired behaviour will be difficult to determine, for instance where specific context means judgement or experience are more relevant.

2. Do public sector staff have the skills required?

The literature identifies a wide range of skills, attitudes and knowledge which might help individuals. They should have training in the **tools and methods associated with behavioural approaches**. These could be relatively light touch, such as the [APEASE](#) option assessment framework, or more technical,

such as policy evaluation. Some authors mention that they could benefit from an understanding of an academic field which feeds into behavioural science (e.g., behavioural economics, psychology, or another social science).

Individuals should have a **knowledge of the context in which they are working and how to navigate it**. Understanding of the policy area(s) where they are working (or of the local context) is named as a useful skill. They would benefit from an up to date understanding of relevant behaviourally informed policy developments to adapt locally or inspire new ideas. Implementing behaviourally informed policy development and learning from the outcomes, may require a strong understanding of the political context of the institution where they work, so a strategic mindset is recommended.

They may benefit from a **wide range of methodological skills**. In addition to policy evaluation, mentioned above, an understanding of how to conduct and interpret the results of Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs), as well as other quantitative methods is raised in the literature. Qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups and ethnography are also mentioned, as well as an understanding of how to bring together mixed methods. Some authors raise knowledge of participatory approaches as key for understanding behaviour. Access to methodological skills is discussed in the Opportunity section.

The literature identifies a group of skills and attitudes that could be called **design-based approaches to policy making**. Public servants are expected to be able to clearly define a policy problem and focus on solutions. They should have a willingness to iterate on ideas, as well as being systematic and open-minded. An ability to communicate and collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders is seen as important, as is a focus on citizen or service user needs and perspectives.

Individuals also benefit from a commitment to, and an understanding of, **scientific rigour and ethics**. They should be evidence-oriented with an understanding of where behavioural approaches are most useful and where their limitations lie. There should be an understanding of scientific standards such as researcher independence and the value of being self-reflexive. Research ethics, with a particular understanding of how they relate to behavioural sciences, is also said to be important.

3. Do public sector staff understand how to use behavioural approaches in their work?

The potential complexity of the approach has already been mentioned above, but the literature is clear that training, guidance, and support are key barriers. **Individuals are unlikely to know how to think behaviourally and apply the approach**. It is acknowledged that the range of required skills is large and so availability of expertise, particularly around academic knowledge, research, and literature, is mentioned.

Opportunity

1. Do public sector staff have the required time, financial resources or professional seniority?

The literature touches on **the requirement for sufficient time and resources**. As some literature recommends what could be potentially extensive processes (e.g., applying the behaviour change wheel), adopting a new pattern of thinking and behaviour may require more time. Behavioural thinking may require some additional costs too. Expertise and experience, both professional and lived, might need to be accessed, for instance. Policy makers and leadership should be aware that more effective policy may involve greater upfront investment in time and resources.

The processes recommended imply a level of **professional seniority or organisational authority**. Bringing together teams from across and outside the organisation, for instance, will likely be beyond

the job role of some people. People working at different levels will have varying opportunities to use behavioural approaches.

2. Do public sector staff have the social support required?

The literature identifies the need for advocates inside and outside government as key to successful behavioural interventions.

Some authors mention supportive leadership as a key factor. **Leaders should generate a supportive environment for behavioural approaches.** They should have a respect and appreciation for evidence and experimentation, with an understanding that certainty about the outcomes of a behaviourally informed and a behaviourally tested intervention will likely be different.

Individuals may require **access to specialist expertise within or outside their organisations.** They may need to be able to call on people who can complete original research on their behalf (e.g., participatory research, policy evaluation or international policy reviews). Appropriately qualified academics (or consultants) may also be needed for their access to up-to-date knowledge and networks. One author also noted the importance of the implicit knowledge about a behavioural intervention, making continuity of staff on a project important.

Ethics is seen as a key part of a properly implemented behavioural intervention, as well as the foundation for wider public acceptance. It is suggested that **organisations should form part of ensuring behavioural work is ethical.** They can put in place internal processes and safeguards ensuring projects meet ethical standards. It was also suggested that this ethical review could be completed independently to maximise legitimacy.

The literature discusses **support across society to embed these approaches.** One paper mentioned how civil society had adopted the way of thinking and this had encouraged government. Support from the public was an implicit barrier. Participation was seen as an important part of building effective interventions that are properly accountable. This requires a willing and engaged public who trust that behavioural interventions are being developed in ways which are compatible with democratic values.

3. Are behavioural approaches seen as normal in public sector workplaces?

The literature implies that **behavioural approaches might run counter to the norm in some organisations** and contexts. Ideally, the political context should see policy makers working in a 'behavioural government' where all levels of activity, including politician's priorities, were behaviourally informed. This includes a political willingness to pursue difficult or expensive policy interventions if they are indicated as the best solution for a policy problem. At the same time, there can be an over-enthusiasm about behavioural approaches which can 'politicise' them, encourage their mis- or overuse or lead to a reliance on 'nudge' interventions.

Motivation

1. Do public sector staff find using behavioural approaches genuinely more attractive than competing approaches to policy?

The literature did not discuss the attractiveness of using behavioural approaches but there were implicit downsides which could be discouraging. These might apply to policy experimentation more broadly.

Firstly, some authors felt iteration and reflexivity were key parts of a behavioural process. There is some professional risk and personal discomfort implicit in these ways of working. **Individuals working in environments in which perceived failure is unwelcome or psychological safety is low may find it difficult to work in these ways.** Similarly, interventions will have varying levels of behavioural evidence behind them. Organisations should understand what that means for their likelihood an intervention will produce positive outcomes.

As previously mentioned, the literature implies that implementing this approach may be time consuming. **Time pressure may result in individuals defaulting to their current policy development practices.**

2. Is it an established routine in public sector work?

The literature clearly favours establishing routine use of behavioural approaches. Making sure **standard working practices incorporate behavioural thinking** is a focus. Guidebooks lay down clear processes to follow and tools to use without which the approach may struggle to become the default.

The literature also mentions the strategic direction of the organisation too. **Behavioural thinking should be a clear priority from the leadership.** If staff are not clearly expected to use the approach, they may not do so on a day-to-day basis.

3. Do public sector staff understand why it is important for them to use the approach?

The literature raised a series of criticisms **about the use behavioural sciences in policy making** that, if echoed in civil servants' beliefs, may mean they are less motivated to use it. These criticisms included the idea that behaviour change may not have sufficient public consent or that it could place unjustified limits on freedom of choice. Individuals may thus believe the approach is inherently unethical, undemocratic, or illiberal, or that it can be used in these ways. Beyond personal beliefs, if the approach is perceived to not fit with the organisational or strategic values then literature suggests it may not be prioritised.

Alternatively, individuals may believe the approach is of limited usefulness. It might be thought of as associated wholly with the use of RCTs to test competing options, excluding other methodologies or stages of the policy making process. Some may believe it can only be used to address individual choices instead of tackling complex social problems. There may be misconceptions about its ability to fit into a wider policy agenda.

Interviews

Y Lab used the above literature to develop an interview schedule designed to draw out beliefs and perception of behavioural science among civil servants. The interview questions focused on issues likely to be of importance to these civil servants including: the 'what' and 'how' of behavioural science, leadership, norms and working practices. Questions were also asked about the interrelationship between behavioural sciences and collaboration and involvement in policy since this had been a particular focus of the place-based parts of KWS.

It was intended the interviews represent a range of views and personal experiences using behavioural sciences. Interviewees did not need to have any knowledge or experience of behavioural approaches, but we did not want to only hear from these people either. Those who have a personal interest or expertise had the chance to contribute as well. We also sought interviewees with experience across different policy areas and/or who had some oversight of policy development. Welsh Government identified five individuals who were asked to be interviewed. Those who did not consent to be interviewed were asked to identify a colleague who could be. Five interviews were conducted. Because of the small scale nature of the study, we would encourage caution in interpreting the findings presented below, although we still believe the findings provide a valuable starting point for the Welsh Government.

The interviews were automatically transcribed by the video call software and the transcriptions corrected as necessary. Interviewees had the opportunity to take anything out of the transcript which they felt was inaccurate, sensitive or could be used to identify them. Transcripts were uploaded to NVivo qualitative research software for analysis. Codes were derived inductively through rounds of coding. The themes are presented here using COM-B as a framework. There were also direct suggestions made about improvements civil servants would like to see and these are noted separately.

Capability

To what extent do public sector staff know what a behavioural approach to their work is?

Definitions - There was some agreement between interviewees about the definition of behavioural science. Almost all participants clearly mentioned two elements: (1) the use of science, (2) to understand or change behaviour (or motivations). This definition represents little more than a restatement of the term 'behavioural science,' so it is not clear the extent to which there is a clear joint understanding. These two elements may be judged sufficient for cross-organisational work, however.

Behavioural science is quite simple: it's how you use human psychology to change human behaviour

There are two reasons why there might be more work to do on developing a shared definition. Firstly, interviewees had varying levels of confidence. One interviewee came out with the above quote straight away, indicating a comfort with the terminology. But they were alone; no other interviewee gave as clear a definition as quickly. One interviewee, who seemed the least confident, was openly uncertain about the phrase. In response to another question, they replied "well, it depends, whether I've got my definition right." The rest fell between these two extremes, although tending towards confidence.

Secondly, definitions given, or implied, included a broader range of elements than those two picked out above. One interviewee referred repeatedly to person-centred policy making. While this is not

unrelated to behavioural science, the interviewee did not clearly articulate a distinction, indicating work may still be required to clarify the concept.

A lot of people see behavioural science as a means of helping to identify what communication messages should be pushed out

There were signs of another possible problem in some interviewees' answers. Most interviewees noted, unprompted, what they saw as a common misapprehension that behavioural science is an approach to communicate policy rather than make it. While no one directly espoused this view, some did tend to discuss the use of the approach in relation to communications. One interviewee defined behavioural science as "insights into the way in which information is processed, information could be presented, to have the kind of impact that you hope." This may indicate an ongoing issue with how behavioural science is commonly defined.

There were indications that some interviewees were uncertain specifically about the idea of 'behaviour'. One interviewee began to see the relevance of the term 'behaviour' during the interview, applying it to their policy goals when they had not before. Another interviewee, who was thinking behaviourally in some areas of their work, described an area they had thought the approach was irrelevant for. During the interview they began to question this view. There may also be a related issue, not just about what counts as 'behaviour', but who counts as having them. The former interviewee's answers implied they may not readily conceive of public sector colleagues (including fellow civil servants and policy makers) as proper targets for behaviour change, only end users of services or the public. The scope of the term 'behaviour' appeared to be an issue for some interviewees.

Activity - Interviewee's ideas about the tangible action required for behavioural science work clustered around two areas. Four interviewees spoke about contacting experts, either in their organisation or outside, for advice. Three of these also mentioned critically engaging with that expertise, for instance, by comparing it to other evidence or their own understanding of policy issues. Beyond engagement with experts, three spoke about understanding users as a key goal but without necessarily giving much detail about what activity that might involve.

Outside of these two elements, a variety of other activities were mentioned. They included working with partners in government and other parts of the public sector and changing the culture of public services. While these might form part of behavioural science work, they are not unique to it, perhaps indicating a lack of clarity in some interviewees' minds about the activities involved in using the approach.

One activity that was notably only raised by two interviewees was applying behavioural science tools and frameworks, such as [COM-B](#), [EAST](#) or [Mindspace](#). One named them unprompted, but the other mentioned these types of frameworks felt overwhelming. This may indicate a lack of behavioural science *thinking* (as opposed to engagement with evidence and expertise) among the interviewees. There may need to be a change in mindset, so these models come to mind more easily for civil servants when they think of behavioural science.

Do public sector staff have the skills required?

Although they were not asked specifically if they could recall the tools and methods mentioned above, that they were not named in four out of five interviews may indicate that the participants may not have these skills readily to hand. Further training and familiarisation may be required.

The interviewee who felt overwhelmed by frameworks and models was relatively specific about where they felt ill-equipped. Another was less clear about how the skills they felt they lacked related to behavioural science. For instance, they said “I think we as a Civil Service have struggled [...] to try and use the words of people,” a more generic skill. This may imply some interviewees not only lacked skills but also knowledge of what the required skills might be.

All interviewees agreed that they, or the civil service in general, had gaps in their knowledge of how to use or apply behavioural science. “We do need to upskill our policy makers” said one, and “I think they should be part of a civil servant policy professionals core skill set,” said another. Views about where exactly the problem was were not as clear. This may make sense if the interviewees are not familiar with what the core competencies are.

Interviewees’ ideas about what skills were lacking clustered around two ideas. Firstly, there was the interface between behavioural science experts and decision makers. Two interviewees spoke about difficulties in applying evidence or advice to their work. What they had seen could be “complex” or “broad brush,” each resulting in a difficult job deciding what to then do. One of these also pointed out there could be negative consequences if advice was taken at ‘face value’ by colleagues without the necessary skills to interrogate this kind of specialist expert advice.

Second there were a group of concerns around public sector partners. Two interviewees noted the distance between policymakers and policy delivery. One felt that contractors working on policy delivery were a weak point in the chain and that they needed skills too. Another referred to the dependence they had on frontline public service organisations to deliver policy as intended. These comments draw attention to the importance of improving skills across the public sector.

Opportunity

Do public sector staff have the required time, financial resources or professional position?

All five interviewees, even those who were very enthusiastic about the approach, agreed that time pressures are a barrier. Some spoke about working patterns in the civil service across the board indicating that behavioural science is not felt to be uniquely time consuming. Some focused on specific tasks. Two spoke about understaffing making user involvement difficult, for instance. Others, like the interviewee quoted, spoke more specifically about fearing the pace of their work might mean a behavioural approach is dropped. One participant also spoke about broader resource issues, doubting there was funding available to pay for increased access to behavioural science expertise, internally or externally. Interviewees were concerned about whether there is sufficient time and resource.

So if we're turning around something really quickly [seeking behavioural science advice] might get left out

Do public sector staff have the support required?

Leadership support - There was a mixture of responses to questions about whether leaders have created a supportive environment. Two interviewees said there was strong support for the approach among leaders in general. Both appeared to be referring to the senior civil service. Another interviewee gave an example of a particular civil service manager who they felt was supportive. These interviewees are experiencing some support for behavioural scientific work.

Interviewees also reported more qualified support. One who otherwise said there was strong support for the approach, identified the urgency of policy change as sometimes being more important. They said “I think there’s a mixed message we’re getting... Ministers want us to employ it,

and they see it is extremely important, but it can't hold up critical [...] policies that need to be delivered." Another mentioned an instance they had heard where a Minister had decided something was in "very poor judgement, even though it was 100% insight driven." In these examples though, the interviewees did not report having been put off from using behavioural science. They clearly still felt the approach had a level of support from leadership, even if it was not always the priority.

In responding to questions about politicians, interviewees had different ideas about the role of political motivations in shaping support. One felt there was an interest in behavioural evidence, if not quite general support for it, because "that's the game we're all in [...] everyone wants to know that we're saying the right thing, and we're motivating people in the right way." Another said they felt politicians were supportive because "they're politicians, they're about the people." These answers might imply that these interviewees see political support for the approach as being somewhat dependent on it producing popular policy.

Others talked more explicitly about the potential of political motivations and goals trumping support. Two interviewees discussed initiatives they believe were driven by politicians without a clear behavioural scientific basis. One interviewee implied lack of political support could be a major barrier to wide scale adoption of the approach because this could result in "shutting down programmes wholesale and causing electoral problems unforeseen." However, it does appear to have some support, as another interviewee discussed their success in using behavioural evidence to dissuade politicians from certain courses of action that lacked a behavioural scientific basis.

Access to expertise - The interviewees tended to be able to access specialist expertise. Most interviewees mentioned that they had communicated with behavioural science experts. Another interviewee discussed research they had seen which, in their view, would have been improved if it had a behavioural scientific basis, implying they had some familiarity with the field themselves or with accessing this kind of expertise. Specialist expertise appears to be accessible to most of this group.

Having someone [...] focused on behavioural science was extremely helpful

Behavioural scientific advice also appears to be generally presented in a useful and timely way. Although it should be noted that there is a risk that interviewees answers were influenced by the nature of the sampling process, perceptions of advice received were positive. All of those who mentioned accessing advice raised unprompted how useful the advice was and the impact it had had on their work.

Perceptions of behavioural scientific advice were not exclusively positive, however. There were some comments made about pace, clarity and applicability. Two participants spoke about pace with one saying that generally advice was timely, but occasionally there could be an issue. Some interviewees mentioned the clarity of advice, raising either its lack of specificity or the range of views offered. One interviewee said, "Can we just get one piece of advice please?" Applicability could also be a problem, with some interviewees saying they had some difficulty translating advice into action. No interviewee mentioned feeling these issues were unmanageable or unique to behavioural science specifically.

There were concerns voiced about the small number of the behavioural scientific experts who were relied on. Most interviewees felt that there should be greater access to behavioural scientific advice, either through recruitment, training existing staff or increasing access to external experts. A corollary idea was also raised by two interviewees. One joked about dependence on an individual expert, “As long as [individual] is around, we’ll be okay.” Another, while understanding a broader pool of experts was being consulted, questioned if this reliance was “healthy from a scientific perspective.” Although only two interviewees mentioned this, and it was acknowledged this capacity tended not to impact on the timeliness of advice, it might become a more significant barrier if there is ambition for a greater use of behavioural science.

It felt like everyone deferred anything on behavioural science to [individual]

either through recruitment, training existing staff or increasing access to external experts. A corollary idea was also raised by two interviewees. One joked about dependence on an individual expert, “As long as [individual] is around, we’ll be okay.” Another, while understanding a broader pool of experts was being consulted, questioned if this reliance was “healthy from a scientific perspective.” Although only two interviewees mentioned this, and it was acknowledged this capacity tended not to impact on the

Are behavioural approaches seen as normal in public sector workplaces?

Interviewees were equivocal about the extent to which behavioural approaches were routinely integrated into the organisation’s work. One interviewee felt that it had been “mainstreamed,” but it appears they were likely to be referring to broader trends in policymaking. Another interviewee said of the approach in their own team “I think that’s kind of bread and butter for us,” but went on to express a fear that without attention they might “go back to what we used to do.”

Interviewees did mention ways that the approach is not the norm. Some interviewees, like the one quoted, spoke about the civil service or public sector broadly, as having conflicting norms to those of the approach. Others reflected revealingly on their own experiences, with one saying “no one said the word behavioural sciences to me, until this morning, probably for about 15 years.” It seems quite clear that using this approach is not the norm.

We are far too magical thinking based [...] in the public sector and we expect our policy aims to materialise out of nowhere without having done some groundwork in the psychology

One conflicting norm may have been in evidence too. One interviewee noted what they saw as a common assumption across the public sector that lack of information was the key to changing user behaviours. This did emerge to an extent in the other interviews. While acknowledging that communications were more advanced than this, one interviewee said “there is a little bit of [...] as soon as they understand it they’re all going to be happy with it.” Another interviewee echoed this. There may be a particular problem around the norms of communication, which could be related to definitional issues discussed above.

There may be an opportunity to create a new norm around behavioural science. Three interviewees mentioned how the perceived success of the approach in dealing with the pandemic has resulted in leaders or colleagues seeing its importance or breadth of applicability. One did caution, however, that the pandemic has been an unusual historical moment with which behavioural science has been a good fit, and that there may be disappointment that the same success is not evident in other policy areas. COVID-19 has not made behavioural science into the norm, but it may have made space for it to become one.

Motivation

Is it an established routine in public sector work?

Standard practices - Interviewees spoke about some limited ways that behavioural thinking has been incorporated into standard working practices. One mentioned a training programme, but only

raised it to say that it alone was insufficient. As raised above, participants spoke about helpful, if limited, internal expertise on offer. A staff network which has been established in one topic area was raised by one interviewee too. There was no other evidence of the approach being institutionalised or incorporated into standard working practices.

Interviewees did raise areas that the approach could be incorporated into working practices but was yet to happen. It was mentioned that behavioural thinking is not part of advice and guidance to policy makers in how to go about their work, part of induction processes or individual work goals. Interviewees reported working in new ways to generate their own behaviourally informed evidence, access appropriate advice and train themselves in this specialism. This happened in a somewhat ad hoc way, so better overarching structures and governance processes may help the approach become more routine. It appears there are opportunities to greatly expand the extent to which this approach is made standard.

Leadership priority - There were mixed perceptions of leadership support for the approach, discussed above. There was also a mixed picture about the extent to which leaders are motivating staff to adopt it by making it part of routine work. Discussing advice sent to Ministers, one interviewee said "I think they would expect to see [...] some insights from behavioural science informing any interventions that are intending to elicit behavioural responses." They did not feel this expectation would always be effective in encouraging engagement with behavioural science among colleagues, however. No other interviewees reported this experience. Three disagreed, noting that it was not an expectation. One of these spoke about the need for a clear prioritisation of the approach from the very top if it is to become more mainstream. Whatever expectations may or may not be being set, they do not seem to be consistent.

There is a further demotivating factor related to leadership. Interviewees tended not to mention the potential of the approach to unearth politically difficult evidence, e.g., that a particular service is not producing the behavioural results expected, or a key policy is premised on a sub-optimal behavioural model. In questions about what behavioural science is, even enthusiasts took time to understand how it could be used as a tool for evaluating existing policy - possibly reflecting an apprehension around the power of the approach. There could be room for leaders to make clear that behavioural science should be part of established routine, even if it indicates a need for difficult changes.

Do public sector staff understand why it is important for them to use the approach?

Despite questions, no interviewee mentioned any conflict between the approach and personal or organisational values. Each interviewee was asked about the fit between behavioural science and the ideal of involving citizens and stakeholders in policy making. Responses indicated that they did not believe the approach could be unethical, undemocratic, or illiberal. A clash of values or beliefs does not appear to be a barrier to wider use of behavioural science currently. While this may be seen as a good thing, the appearance that participants were not aware of issues of ethics could indicate a potential problem. If it is accepted that behavioural science-informed policy can contravene liberal democratic norms around, for instance, consent or limits on freedom, then policymakers should be able to make judgements about what is and is not acceptable. If these criticisms are not accepted, there remains a risk that policy encourages these views among partners and the public. One interviewee raised the reputational risks of a misuse or miscommunication of this approach to policy. It did not appear that personal or professional values would demotivate civil servants, but a possible lack of ethical literacy could lead to other potential problems. Civil servants may benefit from ethics training or governance to help them manage actual or perceived risks.

Some appear highly motivated to adopt the approach. One participant, who is quoted, repeatedly mentioned the impact they felt the approach could have but did not appear to believe their view was widely shared. This sense of being somewhat alone is also evident in another interviewee's responses, when discussing having to find their own resources and networks to learn about behavioural science. Some people can see why it is important for them to use the approach, and they appear highly self-motivated to do so, but it appears they need this self-motivation to continue because of a lack organisational support.

I think it's got a massive contribution to make to the future of Wales

There was some, perhaps mild, scepticism of the approach expressed. Two interviewees spoke briefly in wryly humorous ways about the advice they had received. One joked about the differences of opinion between experts, saying "Obviously it's not a science. It's a [...] bit of an art form as well." The other reported smiling on hearing a common suggestion that "people are fine dealing with nuance and detail if you just explain it well, and at the same time [...] keep it really simple. You're kind of going: 'well, which one is it?'" While these mild comments do not represent a barrier to motivation, they may represent the kinds of responses which could arise if there is an attempt to encourage wider use of behavioural science.

Suggestions

In interviews, participants had the opportunity to suggest possible changes that might encourage the use of behavioural science among civil servants and the wider public sector. These are summarised below.

- Case studies
- Shadowing
- Clear leadership priority
- A maturity model for behavioural science
- A policy community
- Training - for analysts and policy
- Mandatory part of working practices
- Making it fun
- A 'how to' guide, with structured prompts
- A new model for accessing academic expertise
- A behavioural science team for Wales, helping with training and connecting people

Selected bibliography

The research team used a snowball literature sampling method for the brief literature review. It was based on a list of key texts suggested by the Welsh Government. The snowball process stopped once new possible barriers or facilitators stopped being found. The original list provided, along with some key further reading identified, is supplied below:

Bogiatzis Gibbons, D. et al. (2020) Applying behavioural insights to cross-government data sharing. The Behavioural Insights Team: London. (<https://www.adruk.org/news-publications/news-blogs/report-applies-behavioural-insights-to-cross-government-data-sharing-329/>)

Bolton, A. and Newell B. (2017) Applying behavioural science to government policy: Finding the 'Goldilocks Zone'. *Journal of Behavioural Economics for Policy*. (1). P.9-14.

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Related Outputs

[Evidence Review](#), Y Lab, (2021)

[Keeping Wales Safe: Covid Behaviours Final Report](#) (Phase One), Nesta, (2022)

[Keeping Wales Safe: Covid Behaviours Final Report](#) (Phase Two), Nesta, (2022)