

The Cycle of Understanding – a new approach to applying Behavioural Science

The MRS Behavioural Science Summit provided a great litmus test for the state of Behavioural Science (or BSci) in the UK. The picture which emerged was that BSci is being applied in a whole battery of ways using a confusing mix of proprietary and academic inspired theories, models and frameworks.

With over 200 identified behavioural effects or biases identified, some kind of framework is clearly useful, but which one to choose? It matters, because while theories or frameworks make applying BSci easier and more systematic, they can also constrain the potential solutions considered.

A practical response to this is provided by the Beyond Logic “Cycle of Understanding”. This is a systematic approach to designing and implementing a behaviour change intervention, campaign or programme. It has the following elements, though it is important to stress that these are not linear steps (if nothing else, BSci has shown that the world does not work in a linear way)-

A. Understand the current situation first:

- using existing data, observations, and research amongst stakeholders and the target audience.
- crucially, this requires understanding the environment and context which has a massive impact on behaviour.

B. Design the intervention taking into account audience segments and the wider context:

- to help with the design a framework, model or tool might be used (e.g. COM-B, EAST, MINDSPACE), but irrespective of

what is used, the different segments within the target audience and the contextual factors must not be forgotten.

C. Test before rolling out:

- testing is important because of the potential for unknown contextual factors to have an influence, and because we live in a rapidly changing world.

D. Implement with a clear plan:

- successful implementation requires clear objectives and targets, and a project plan with key dates and responsibilities.

E. Monitor & learn:

- monitoring and evaluation should be treated as an integral aspect of the intervention and built in from the start.

