

Theory and Principles of Behavioural Science

This section focuses on the theory of behavioural science and its relevance to commercial issues. It describes the basic principles and the main theories that underpin behavioural science.

The aim is to help readers to understand what behaviour is, how behavioural scientists describe and model behaviour, and how to use this knowledge to improve research, product and service development, and intervention design.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of behavioural science. It describes how the discipline of behavioural science developed from ideas emerging from social and health psychology, how these ideas challenged classical economic theory, and how they have been transferred, and successfully used by policy makers. It explores the main principles of nudge theory and suggests that there is more to behavioural science than ‘nudging’. The chapter concludes that businesses would benefit from applying the scientific method of behavioural science in the commercial sector, if they can overcome five major challenges to its implementation.

Chapter 2 focusses on the difficulty of predicting behaviour, explains the intention–behaviour gap, and explores why existing market research methods are not good enough at predicting behaviour. Conventional methods often fail to yield useful information because the data collected is often poor quality, data is confused with insight, the research fails to focus on the factors that drive behaviour, and the research is done to confirm existing biases rather than to prove or refute behavioural hypotheses. This chapter describes the barriers that prevent businesses developing a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour. It explains why businesses need

better research tools and methods that apply the principles of behavioural science if they are to design products and services that are intuitive to use and that people want. It clarifies the need for a good theoretical framework to allow researchers to find out what people really do, not what they say they do.

Chapter 3 describes the science behind behaviour and why theories and models are useful. They provide focus, help to cut through complexity, and guide decisions about what products, services and interventions to design and develop. It argues that too many businesses focus on changing attitudes and beliefs rather than on the behaviours themselves. Without a good theory or model of behaviour, companies do not know what activities to observe, or what is really important in influencing behaviour. It discusses what makes a good theory or model of behaviour and how organisations can use and develop models to understand specific challenges. It illustrates how theories, such as the COM-B and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology Model, benefit decision-making and how they can be used in practice.

Chapter 4 explores the application of theory to intervention design and explains why a structured approach is vital. It outlines a five-step process that can be applied in business, starting with defining the desired behavioural outcome, taking the reader through approaches for doing a behavioural diagnostic, prioritising the influences on behaviour, identifying suitable behaviour-change techniques, ideating products, services and interventions and prioritising them, and ends with how to test and evaluate them. It describes how a structured approach helps to refine a large number of options down to a small number of intervention ideas that have a good probability of success. It concludes that using a systematic process, which is grounded in evidence and theory, results in solutions that are more likely to be effective *and* acceptable to the consumer.