

8 Capability

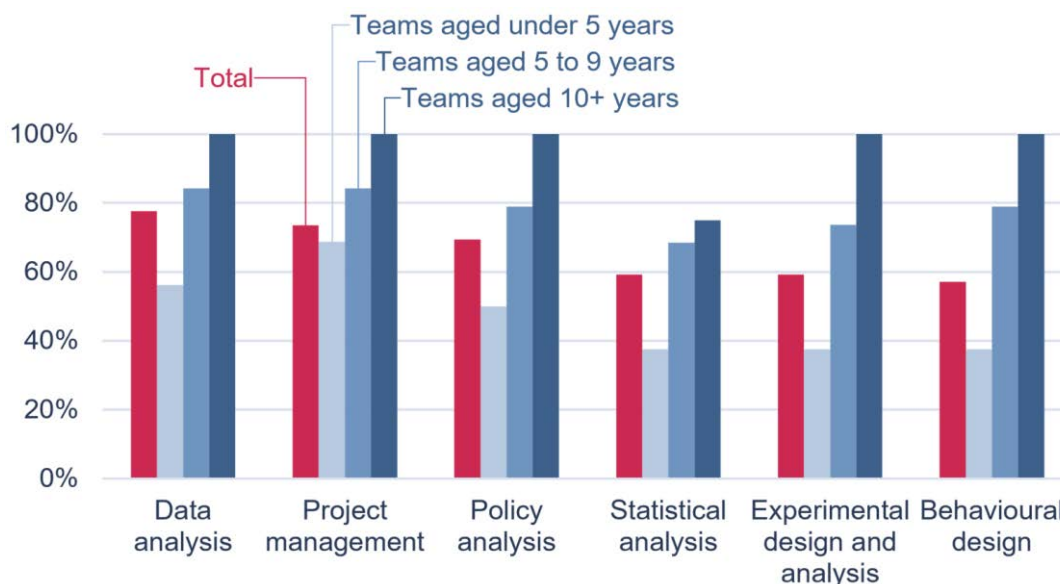
Behavioural science entails a complex body of knowledge and an array of evidence generation methods. The craft of policy making is similarly nuanced. Bringing behavioural science into policy making is therefore a difficult activity that requires a diverse range of skills. **The principles in this section call for policy makers to know when behavioural science might help and to have sustainable and ready access to behavioural science experts.** They also call for mechanisms to bring behavioural science evidence into the policy process in a way that is relevant and useful, and to share knowledge and practices among practitioners.

Why this matters

Respondents to the OECD's surveys report their teams having a variety of different skills. The most commonly reported skills were data analysis, project management, and policy analysis. We hear in our qualitative engagements with practitioners that this mix of research-related skills and government-related skills is critical to the effective integration of behavioural science evidence into the policy process.

Figure 8.1. Skills in government behavioural science teams

Common skills include data analysis, project management, and policy analysis



Note: What are the skills the members on your team possess? n=49 total (16 teams aged under 5, 19 teams aged 5 to 9, 4 teams aged 10+)

Survey respondents engage with a range of other partners. They most commonly partner with other government agencies, reflecting the interconnectedness of policy issues and the common involvement of multiple agencies in implementing research and policy. Non-government partners are also common, with

4 out of 5 respondents reporting they work with either consultants, academics, or international organisations. Teams of all sizes and ages engage with these external partners, with older teams appearing to be more likely to do so.

Table 8.1. Behavioural science experts' partners

Survey respondents partner within government and with external experts

Age of team (years)	10+	5 to 9	Under 5	Total
Other government agencies	75%	63%	73%	66%
Academics	100%	83%	40%	64%
External consultants (behavioural insights specialists)	75%	56%	47%	47%
International organisations	50%	44%	27%	38%
External consultants (such as major firms)	75%	11%	40%	30%
I do not work with others	0%	6%	0%	6%
n=	4	18	15	47

Note: Apart from your team, who do you work with and who else contributes to delivering behavioural science work? Age not known for all respondents' teams.

When we asked survey respondents why they worked with these external experts, the most common response was simply to increase the resources they have available to deliver work. This was particularly the case for using consultants. But external experts were also used for specialised skills, peer learning, and capacity building. The 3 in 10 respondents who turned to non-behaviourally-focused consultancies often did so to access specialised skills that their team did not have. Academics were approached for a range of reasons, while international organisations were most commonly seen as a source of peer learning (perhaps because these surveys were conducted through the OECD network of behavioural insights experts in government).

Table 8.2. How behavioural science experts use external partners

Survey respondents often use different external partners for different purposes

External partner	Academics	External consultants (behavioural insights specialists)	International organisations	External consultants (such as major firms)
Increase resources to deliver work	80%	86%	78%	86%
Peer learning	70%	77%	83%	57%
Specialised skills that my team does not have	57%	55%	61%	86%
Capacity building	50%	55%	61%	43%
n=	30	22	18	14

Note: What is the added value of working with this group?

While external partners are sometimes used for capacity building purposes, survey respondents often do this themselves. Almost 7 in 10 respondents reported that their teams delivered education and training (n=134, see Table 5.1).

Good practice principles

11. Managers build policy makers' capability to apply a behavioural science lens to their work.

Policy makers working on issues involving human behaviour should know how to look at those issues from a behavioural perspective, and when it would be useful for them to seek advice from behavioural science experts. These capabilities are part of the *policy advisory skills* and *commissioning skills* that the OECD has identified as necessary for a high performing civil service that creates public value (OECD, 2017^[1]). Knowledge, skills, and confidence are necessary enablers of policy makers' uptake of behavioural science evidence (Jakobsen et al., 2019^[2]; Curtis, Fulton and Brown, 2018^[3]).

Policy makers should adopt a behavioural science perspective wherever this is relevant, just as they should adopt an economic or legal perspective wherever it is appropriate and useful to do so. Policy makers can be familiar with general insights from the behavioural sciences, including that choices and behaviours are: underpinned by both conscious, reflective processes and non-conscious, automatic processes; influenced by social and cultural contexts; and encouraged or constrained by environmental factors (WHO, 2021^[4]). Policy makers can also be familiar with research; research skills "have been found to be an enabler to evidence uptake" (Lecouturier et al., 2024^[5]).

Box 8.1. Ways policy makers can apply a behavioural science lens

In a government or organisation that has mainstreamed behavioural public policy, policy makers working on topics that involve human behaviour would be able to:

- empathise with citizens or users and consider the varied experiences of different subgroups
- structure a problem in behavioural terms (such as breaking it down into component behaviours) and identify specific behaviours to change
- use tools and resources like templates, behavioural journey maps, decision aids, and simple frameworks such as EAST (BIT, 2014^[6]) and COM-B (Michie, van Stralen and West, 2011^[7]) to suggest causes and possible solutions
- identify behavioural outcomes to measure the success of a solution
- seek evidence from systematic reviews
- seek ad hoc advice from behavioural science experts
- commission behavioural science expertise to contribute to decision-making
- commission stand-alone behavioural science research.

Source: Authors' elaboration of (West and Gould, 2022^[8])

Policy makers can also recognise the threshold when they need additional behavioural science expertise to help them understand a problem or design and test a solution. Policy makers are experts in their policy topics and the craft of advising governments; it may not be feasible for them to become intimately familiar with behavioural science knowledge and research methods. The OECD has noted that policy makers would ideally have the "skills for understanding, obtaining, interrogating and assessing, using and applying evidence" (OECD, 2020^[9]), but even these activities are difficult for policy makers operating under resources and time constraints. Deciding whether to recommend a previously successful policy intervention, for example, involves identifying the mechanism behind why it worked, judging whether that would apply in the new context, potentially testing that judgement, and using that evidence to make the

case for intervention (Linos, 2023^[10]). There are risks that policy makers only partially trained in behavioural science might incorrectly or inappropriately apply their limited knowledge or methods at each stage (Lecouturier et al., 2024^[5]).

The threshold for when a policy maker might need expert support will differ across organisational and policy contexts. Policy makers may be able to analyse problems and diagnose behavioural barriers, then involve behavioural science experts when trying to design and test potential policy solutions (OECD, 2019^[11]). Behavioural science experts can help tailor promising solutions to the context and rigorously test them before final decisions are made. But the threshold for approaching experts may come even earlier in the policy process if the issue is unusual or complex, or if existing literature is sparse or poorly synthesised.

Attempts to build policy makers' capability in behavioural science can start with broad awareness raising, paired with inspirational and motivational messages about the value of the approach. Policy makers' interest in and understanding of behavioural science can drive its use, but their social environment is also critically important (Moffat, Cook and Chater, 2022^[12]; Jakobsen et al., 2019^[2]). It can be helpful for an organisation's staff to share a "common vocabulary" about behavioural science (Baggio et al., 2021^[13]).

Practical skills and competences will be more likely to be applied in policy makers' day-to-day practice if they are excited about the potential of a behavioural lens to improve outcomes they care about. Training and promotional communications can share inspiring case studies, inform about strategic directives and requirements, establish emerging social norms, and encourage peer comparisons. Educational activities can be conducted by in-house behavioural science experts or external partners; governments can also work with educational institutions to ensure a behavioural lens is embedded into public administration courses (Aayush Agarwal, 2023^[14]). Training and communications will be more effective if messages and lessons are tailored for particular audiences. Policy makers might need practical tools to help them adopt a behavioural science lens day-to-day; managers who are responsible for particular policy topics or deliverables might need convincing that behavioural science can be readily integrated into their areas with great effect. Regardless of the audience, capability building activities should always discuss the responsible and ethical application of behavioural science insights and methods (OECD, 2022^[15]) (see Principle 9).

Mechanisms for capability building include training courses, written resources (such as handbooks), accessible tools (such as guidelines, checklists, or diagnostic aids), events (such as showcases of recent projects), informal communications (such as newsletters), project-based collaborations with experts (United Nations, 2021^[16]; Moffat, Cook and Chater, 2022^[12]), and requiring research skills when recruiting new staff (Jakobsen et al., 2019^[2]). It may be effective to focus on building the capability of whole teams to adopt a behavioural approach, rather than – or in addition to – training isolated policy makers dispersed throughout the government. Organisations may benefit from creating their own "learning and competencies strategy" (Shaxson, 2019^[17]) that reflects their context and their maturity in mainstreaming behavioural public policy.

Box 8.2. Examples of broad capability building

In the **United Kingdom**, the Government Communication Service's (GCS) Behavioural Science Team, based in the Cabinet Office, specialises in building behavioural science capability across UK government communications professionals. The team has published a series of guides for how to apply behavioural science to a range of topics, including crisis communications, mis/disinformation, the design of behaviour change campaigns, as well as how to screen behavioural interventions for negative unintended consequences. The guides are aimed at non-experts with the goal of empowering civil servants across government to use behavioural science in their day to day jobs. To help boost adoption of the skills these guides promote, the team has delivered hundreds of training workshops across

government in the use of behavioural science in both policy and communications for topics of priority importance to the UK Prime Minister. Most recently, the central GCS team has launched an introductory e-learning course on the principles of behaviour change communications which is available to all staff in any department with a communications role.

In **France**, the dedicated team of behavioural science experts at the centre of government has collaborated with major French universities to build a pipeline of future policy makers with relevant behavioural science skills.

In Rotterdam in the **Netherlands**, a dedicated behavioural science team showcased the policy makers they partnered with on projects as “learners, rather than clients or informants for intervention development”. They treat collaborations as learning experiences that build policy makers’ capability to “apply behavioural insights independently” (Dewies et al., 2022^[18]).

In British Columbia, **Canada**, the dedicated behavioural science team has moved towards seeing policy makers as partners rather than clients. As part of their mandate, the unit engages, educates, and co-develops solutions with policy makers throughout the process. The team also:

- Has collaborated with a local university and behavioural science partners to develop and support a behavioural science practitioner program, the cost of which can be covered for internal policy makers through a central grant program.
- Runs internal courses at different levels that aim to increase awareness of and knowledge of behavioural science (such as monthly introductions and a five-day advanced course).
- Holds open office hours to allow policy makers to meet the team and ask questions.

In **Türkiye**'s Ministry of Trade, behavioural science experts have focused on enhancing the visibility of behavioural science in the policy system and fostering communication between policy makers. They organised the country’s first behavioural public policy conference with more than 300 participants from various public institutions to discuss principles and use cases. They also drafted a book that covers relevant theory, the story of how they started applying behavioural science, and many use cases from different sectors and countries. They used the conference and book as platforms to engage with senior leaders and connect with policy makers across the government. The team also organised bootcamps on behavioural science with students in four local universities, and joined live radio and television programs.

In the **Netherlands**' national government, in-house behavioural scientists organise an annual ‘Day of Behaviour’ where policy makers from central, regional and local government, researchers from academia, and behavioural consultancy companies can attend lectures and workshops on the application of behavioural insights in policy. Over the last seven years the ‘Day of Behaviour’ has grown into a well-known event with more than 700 participants. Internal courses are also run throughout the year.

The Behavioural Economics Team of the **Australian** Government (BETA) has capability building as part of its mission statement. They have developed online courses for understanding and applying behavioural insights to public policy and running behavioural science projects. They also developed an online ‘Behaviour Discovery Tool’ to help policy makers unpack their policy issue from a behavioural perspective. Recently, the team started offering mentoring to support policy making teams undertake their own behavioural science projects.

At an agency level, the dedicated behavioural science function in **Australia**'s independent financial regulator ASIC has developed a set of internal resources to assist policy makers in adopting a behavioural lens, coupled with advice from ASIC’s behavioural science experts. They have also

conducted regular roadshows to show policy making teams what value behavioural science can bring to their current priorities.

In the **Norwegian** Tax Administration, a dedicated behavioural science team has contributed to an online course about behavioural science and impact evaluations targeted at leaders and other policy makers.

12. Managers develop sustainable ways for policy makers to access behavioural science expertise.

Policy makers do not have the time, skills, or operating context to effectively and efficiently conduct and manage all the behavioural science evidence generation they need to inform their work. Policy makers therefore need access to behavioural science expertise, in a way that is tailored to their operating environment and that can adapt to their dynamic needs. This involves getting access to behavioural science experts (this Principle) and having that expertise translated to be useful in the policy process (Principle 13 on knowledge brokerage).

Accessing behavioural science experts who are separate people to policy makers is primarily a practical necessity. Behavioural science entails a complex and ever-changing body of knowledge, as well as a wide spectrum of evidence generation methods. Policy makers have their own expertise and cannot be expected to master behavioural science as well. Having accessible experts with some degree of autonomy can also be beneficial to policy making by enabling the “possibility of opposition” (Jonkers and Tiemeijer, 2015^[19]): helping counter the potential for groupthink and confirmation bias among policy makers by giving discrete experts space to experiment and to challenge widely held assumptions (OECD, 2019^[20]).

Synthesising and generating relevant and reliable behavioural science evidence requires a diverse mix of skills, including social research methods, data analysis, project management, and behavioural intervention design (Barrows et al., 2018^[21]). Skills in communications, graphic design, evaluation, design thinking, systems thinking, digital technology, and many others can also help achieve meaningful and sustainable impact, depending on the activities being undertaken. This diversity means that behavioural science experts working on public policy almost always need to work in multi-disciplinary teams (OECD, 2019^[11]; Lecouturier et al., 2024^[5]). Expert teams also benefit greatly from having some policy making experience and expertise (Soon, 2017^[22]).

At an early stage of behavioural science maturity, it can be pragmatic and effective to source expertise from outside the government (Lecouturier et al., 2024^[5]). But many governments have experienced various positive impacts of developing in-house expertise, where they have the resources to do so. Being inside the organisation enables experts to build long-term relationships with policy makers, find an effective way of working within the organisation’s unique operating environment, develop a body of knowledge over time, get involved early in the policy process, focus on iteration and continuous improvement, provide ad hoc advice, and adapt to emerging priorities (Jonkers and Tiemeijer, 2015^[19]; Barrows et al., 2018^[21]; Byrne-Davis et al., 2022^[23]). Even governments that are very well advanced in mainstreaming behavioural public policy will benefit from outsourcing work occasionally and seeking input from external advisors; internal experts can help ensure this is done effectively (Baggio et al., 2021^[13]).

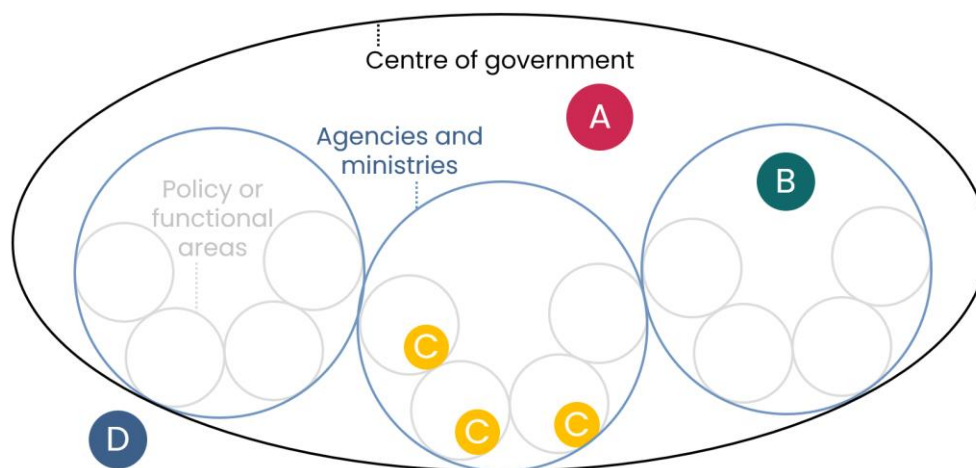
In-house expertise can be built in various ways, starting with directly recruiting new expert staff (United Nations, 2021^[16]). Alternatively, managers can develop existing staff members (such as policy makers or staff working in related research and analysis functions) through training, collaborations with external partners, mentors and advisors, and interactions with networks of behavioural science practitioners (such as those convened by the OECD and the World Health Organization) (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2022^[24]). A scan of the organisation may reveal pockets of expertise that already exist (WHO, 2023^[25]). More creative resourcing strategies can include embedding visiting scholars in the organisation (United

Nations, 2021^[16]; Aayush Agarwal, 2023^[14]) or establishing flexible work arrangements that enable staff in other areas to devote some of their time and experience to behavioural science activities (Dewies et al., 2023^[26]).

Options for where to locate behavioural science expertise are summarised in the figure below. The following sections discuss these options in more detail. Governments can consider which option – or combination of options – would be most effective within their particular institutional context. A clear vision (Principle 3) and oversight (Principle 6) can help coordinate expertise located in various places in the policy system (OECD, 2020^[27]).

Figure 8.2. Possible locations for behavioural science expertise in government

Managers can enable policy makers to access behavioural science experts internally or externally



Note: (A) Experts grouped as a dedicated team in a central government agency; (B) Experts grouped as a dedicated team for a specific organisation; (C) Experts dispersed throughout organisations in particular policy or functional areas; (D) Expertise accessed from outside government.

Dedicated teams

Dedicated teams (options A and B in Figure 8.1) – often referred to ‘behavioural insights teams’ (Mukherjee and Giest, 2020^[28]) – can effectively co-locate the mix of skills necessary to do rigorous and reliable behavioural science work (Jakobsen et al., 2019^[2]). They can be particularly useful at the early stages of behavioural science adoption, as they can provide experts space and time to develop practices and ways of working that are effective in the unique context of the government or organisation.

Dedicated teams benefit from having clear mandates and responsibilities, such as the scope of policy topics they work on, the stages of the policy process they are involved in, and how specific project work is balanced with broader efforts to mainstream behavioural public policy throughout the government or organisation. Some teams are mandated to integrate behavioural science with other policy making perspectives, such as human-centred design or systems thinking. This integrated approach can help the team offer a comprehensive problem analysis and solution design offer to policy makers, while being careful to maintain the unique perspective, theoretical lens, and methodological rigour that characterise behavioural science (OECD, 2019^[11]; Ewert, 2019^[29]; Frame, Milfont and More, 2023^[30]).

The choice of where to place a dedicated team can be made with consideration to the institutional context and the government’s strategy (see Principle 3). Ideally, a dedicated team would be located somewhere where it has access to diverse evidence users, authority to take responsible risks and secure cooperation, and agility to think quickly and try new things (Barrows et al., 2018^[21]). The choice of location almost

inevitably shapes the kind of work the team takes on and the kind of impact it can have (World Health Organisation, 2024^[31]). For example:

- Placing a dedicated behavioural science team in a central government agency or cross-cutting function within an organisation can signal the importance of behavioural science, increase opportunities for experts to influence senior decision-makers, and facilitate coordination across agencies and levels of government.
- Teams situated in strategy or policy areas may find opportunities to provide rapid and responsive input into policy decisions.
- Teams in science or research areas may have more space to do rigorous but time-consuming work.
- Teams in transformation or innovation areas may be able to contribute to structural and systems changes.
- A dedicated team could be placed within one particular policy area identified as a priority for behavioural science. At least in a dedicated team's early stages, putting bounds around its work in this way could boost behavioural science experts' visibility to particular policy makers and managers, help them to contribute to policy design processes, demonstrate the value of behavioural science, enable a more sustained focus on particular issues, and build the capability of a particular set of policy makers.

A larger, more mature team will probably be more effective if its members bring diverse skills, backgrounds, and knowledge. Managers could consider pursuing a mix of specialisations within the team, across dimensions like:

- Academic disciplines (such as psychology, economics, anthropology, neuroscience, and so on)
- Research methods (qualitative and quantitative)
- Stages in the policy cycle (such as problem analysis, intervention design, or evaluation)
- Professional experiences inside and outside government organisations
- Lived experiences and diverse identities
- Policy topics.

Dedicated teams are unlikely to be sufficient to fully mainstream a behavioural approach across the policy system. If they lack influence with key stakeholders across the policy system, and are not effectively integrated into processes and decisions, they can struggle with getting their evidence and advice implemented in practice (DellaVigna, Kim and Linos, 2022^[32]; Battersby, 2021^[33]). A poorly managed strategy and mandate can sometimes lead to conflict with other functions or the impression that the dedicated team is pursuing its own agenda. A single team may struggle to sustain specialisations across a broad range of policy topics, types, and stages. Finally, a discrete team can also be at risk of being cut after organisational restructures or elections (Jones, Head and Ferguson, 2021^[34]; Hallsworth, 2023^[35]; Gandhi, 2021^[36]).

Dispersed expertise

Instead of bringing experts together into a discrete team, another option is to disperse behavioural science experts throughout the policy areas and functions where they can be most useful (Option C in Figure 8.2). In this model, the government or organisation may have an overall behavioural science strategy, but individual experts are accountable to particular areas that are directly pursuing the government's strategic objectives (Gandhi, 2021^[36]).

This option has the benefit of enabling a behavioural science perspective to be deeply integrated into the activities of particular areas. Dispersed experts could potentially offer value earlier in policy processes,

proactively identifying opportunities for the production and consideration of behavioural science evidence before the policy system converges on a preferred solution. Being integrated with the staff responsible for creating or delivering a policy may also make it more likely that behavioural science evidence will be adopted and implemented.

It may be difficult for isolated, dispersed experts to conduct the full range of behavioural science evidence synthesis and generation activities on their own, limiting the potential impact of behavioural science activities. Dispersed experts could be supported by external experts, or by colleagues in their host areas with complementary skills. Dispersed experts could also support each other through a network or community of practice (see Principle 14 on knowledge sharing) (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2022^[24]).

Dispersed experts can coexist with a dedicated team. A dedicated team can act as a reference point for the experts working in particular policy areas or functions (Baggio et al., 2021^[13]), providing shared structures, guidelines, and protocols. Such a mixed model could combine the influence and convening power of a central team with the specialisation, local access, and credibility of distributed staff. The dispersed experts could even be formally affiliated with both their host area and the central team, in a 'matrix' or 'satellite' model (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2022^[24]). In this model, experts report to both a local manager and a dedicated behavioural science manager, enabling them to drive projects and build capacity in specific policy areas or government functions while also remaining connected to a dedicated team responsible for setting good practice, maintaining expertise, and driving behavioural public policy more broadly.

External partnerships

For a government or organisation turning to behavioural science for the first time, it can be effective to seek support from external experts, such as international organisations, academics, think tanks, not-for-profits, or consultancies. If resources allow, a plan can be developed for bringing that expertise in-house over time; external experts could start as direct practitioners but slowly transition to a coaching, mentoring, and train-the-trainer role (United Nations, 2022^[37]). Alternatively, for some governments or organisations with limited human resources, strategic partnerships with these external bodies may offer a way to build sustainable access to behavioural science expertise even in the longer term, without needing to find or develop this in-house (Buttenheim, Moffitt and Beatty, 2023^[38]). Even governments or organisations with mature internal capabilities, however, can enable their internal experts to access external advice and support, which can expand their impact, address more priorities, and continue to drive upskilling (United Nations, 2021^[16]; Aayush Agarwal, 2023^[14]).

Strategic partnerships with external experts could include formalised collaboration with universities or research institutes. Such collaboration enables internal experts to stay up to date with academic developments and produces opportunities for joint evidence generation activities that maintain high quality standards (Aayush Agarwal, 2023^[14]). At a minimum, academics could be included on an organisation's technical advisory group (see Principle 6 on accountability).

Access to external expertise could also be facilitated by flexible procurement frameworks with private sector or academic providers. Selecting preferred providers fairly and transparently in advance (for example through umbrella agreements or non-binding contracts) means that policy makers can then procure quality services rapidly when they are operating within short policy windows (World Health Organisation, 2024^[31]).

Box 8.3. Examples of accessing experts

In **Germany**, a dedicated team is located in the Federal Chancellery. This in-house team in the centre of government collaborates with a network of other behavioural science experts across federal ministries and academia (Mukherjee and Giest, 2020^[28]).

In **Canada**, while a dedicated behavioural science team is located in the Impact and Innovation Unit at the Privy Council Office, which sits at the centre of the federal government, the team also recruits, hires, trains, and supports a large cohort of Behavioural Science Fellows – individuals with technical skills and expertise in the application of behavioural science to public policy who are brought into the federal government of 12-24 month terms – in applying the science across multiple federal departments and agencies. This is accomplished by embedding fellows with various teams across the federal government. In addition to advancing behavioural science research projects in support of their host teams, fellows provide training in behavioural science and offer consultation on how behavioural insights could be applied to different areas across their host department or agency, as means of mainstreaming the science. In addition to the dedicated team at the Impact and Innovation Unit, there are now at least 15 departments and agencies that employ their own dedicated behavioural science teams or behavioural scientists on staff. Some teams are smaller (2-3 individuals), while others are larger (10+ individuals).

In the **Netherlands**, each ministry hires its own in-house behavioural science experts. A page on their shared network's website lists all the experts and their departments, making it easy for policy makers to find the right experts for their problem. The number of behavioural science experts differs per government organisation. In general, the number of experts is lower in the policy departments compared to implementation and supervisory agencies. Furthermore, given that most teams are small, behavioural consultancy companies are regularly hired to assist on well-defined research projects.

In **Australia's** independent financial regulator ASIC, behavioural science experts are located in an area focused on consumer policy and also serve as a resource across other parts of the organisation.

In Rotterdam's municipal government in the **Netherlands**, a dedicated team was created by bringing together policy makers and academics on part-time contracts. The team is jointly managed by a municipal project leader and an academic head (Dewies et al., 2022^[18]). In the **United States**, the Office of Evaluation Sciences has brought on behavioural scientists seconded part-time or full-time from academic institutions and non-profit organisations to serve as project managers, technical advisors, and analysts. Standard processes and arrangements for these secondments are provided by the United States' Intergovernmental Personnel Act (Office of Evaluation Sciences, 2022^[39]).

Türkiye's Ministry of Trade began adopting behavioural science by conducting a major project with a not-for-profit. It then signed a memorandum of understanding with the World Bank to enable collaboration with the Mind, Behavior and Development Unit (eMBeD). In the **United States** in 2010, the Department of Health and Human Services similarly began adopting behavioural science by conducting a large-scale demonstration project in collaboration with a non-profit social policy research organisation (Office of Planning, n.d.^[40]). Further projects followed, as well as a grant program to support scholarly dissertations applying behavioural science lens to social policy.

In **France**, a small behavioural science team in the Interministerial directorate for public transformation (DITP) has longstanding contractual relationships with behavioural science consultancies. They have also recently established an interministerial *marché public*: an arrangement that enables other policy makers to directly access these consultancies' expertise with only minimal monitoring and quality checking from the central team. The World Health Organization has long-term arrangements with suppliers to facilitate timely access to external support and expertise (WHO, 2022^[41]), and the dedicated team in British Columbia, **Canada** is also looking at simplified procurement methods to augment their in-house resources and capacity.

13. Managers ensure that behavioural science evidence can be useful to inform policy making processes through quality brokerage.

It is rarely obvious how insights from the behavioural sciences can and should be used to inform policy decisions. Scientific findings, data, and analysis need to be repackaged to be useable by policy makers and decision-makers (Mukherjee and Giest, 2020^[28]). ‘Useable’ evidence is accessible, relevant, timely, salient, and actionable, and it appears legitimate and credible (Contandriopoulos et al., 2010^[42]). The activity of introducing, moving around, translating, and recontextualising evidence to facilitate its consideration in the policy system is often referred to as ‘knowledge brokerage’ (Feitsma, 2018^[43]). Brokerage ensures that policy makers have access to evidence that is appropriate to the policy concern, addresses multiple political considerations, and is useful to achieve policy goals (OECD, 2020^[44]). In the process, knowledge brokers often step away from technocratic or purely scientific logics (Feitsma, 2018^[43]; Hallsworth, 2023^[35]), instead producing advice that is as accurate as possible within the “often messy reality of how actual policy-making occurs” (OECD, 2020^[9]).

Discussions of evidence use in public policy often rely on the metaphor of two communities – researchers and policy makers – that speak different languages (Newman, 2020^[45]). While this oversimplifies the diversity of roles that exist between academics and elected decision-makers, it remains a helpful metaphor, and one that resonates with the lived experience of many policy makers and behavioural science experts.

Many have noted the lack of strong empirical evidence for what strategies are effective at brokering knowledge between these two communities (Newman, 2020^[45]; Breckon and Dodson, 2016^[46]; Lecouturier et al., 2024^[5]), with some even suggesting that “context-independent evidence for the intrinsic efficacy of knowledge exchange strategies” may be impossible (Contandriopoulos et al., 2010^[42]). But the personal views and experiences of policy makers and behavioural science experts suggest some combination of skill development, dedicated roles, relationships, and communication channels.

It can be effective to **upskill** behavioural science experts in policy making practices, or to hire experienced policy makers into a dedicated behavioural science team. The skills required to make change in government include project management and interpersonal communication (Jones, Head and Ferguson, 2021^[34]) (Aayush Agarwal, 2023^[14]), as well as “navigating politics and power, operating with constrained resources and the pressure of public scrutiny, and generally being keyed-in to the needs and norms of your community” (Barrows et al., 2018^[21]). Informing or encouraging policy change with evidence also relies on experts being able to identify and seize politically feasible opportunities for this to happen (Mukherjee and Giest, 2020^[28]; OECD, 2020^[9]). Behavioural science experts may also need to upskill in the activities necessary to make their evidence, or plans to generate evidence via an experiment or other research activity, palatable within the values and processes of decision-makers; for example, they may need to conduct cost-benefit analyses of their recommendations or tailor experimental methods to the circumstances of a particular policy area.

Upskilling policy makers in the uses and relevance of behavioural science evidence can also facilitate knowledge brokerage, including by helping them identify opportunities to draw on or commission behavioural science early in the policy process (United Nations, 2021^[16]; Aayush Agarwal, 2023^[14]) (see Principle 11 on policy makers’ capability).

Another option is to invest in specific **individuals or teams** who are explicitly mandated to serve as knowledge brokers (Dewies et al., 2023^[26]; Newman, 2020^[45]; Jakobsen et al., 2019^[2]; Lecouturier et al., 2024^[5]). These boundary workers may work within government or in intermediary institutions like think tanks or clearing houses (Jacobzone and Picalarga, 2023^[47]). Knowledge brokers help policy makers “parse through the evidence, weigh more rigorous studies more heavily, and consume the results of those studies in a manageable way” (Linos, 2023^[10]). In-house behavioural science experts are often knowledge brokers as much as they are evidence producers (Feitsma, 2019^[48]); the most common activity reported in the OECD’s surveys was providing advice relying on existing evidence (see Table 5.1). Several OECD

countries mandate particular individuals, such as Chief Scientific Advisors, to identify policy makers' evidence needs and communicate evidence to them (OECD, 2015^[49]).

Encouraging direct interpersonal **relationships** between experts and policy makers can also facilitate knowledge brokerage. Rich interactions between behavioural scientists and evidence users over sustained periods can enable productive projects; build genuine willingness to implement advice once delivered; ensure that advice is targeted, feasible, and scalable; and create allies to advocate for behavioural science throughout the public sector (Contandriopoulos et al., 2010^[42]; Jakobsen et al., 2019^[2]) (Lecouturier et al., 2024^[5]). Senior leaders can help by encouraging policy teams to engage with behavioural science experts. Over time, trusting, productive, and collaborative partnerships – involving genuine investment from policy makers – can help drive evidence adoption and implementation (Newman, 2020^[45]; Hallsworth, 2023^[35]) (Aayush Agarwal, 2023^[14]). For example, an evaluation of Rotterdam's dedicated in-house behavioural science team found the most common explanation for the team's advice being implemented was policy makers playing an active role in co-producing that advice (Dewies et al., 2023^[26]).

Mechanisms for coordination and a broader culture of collaboration within the government or organisation may also help. High levels of connectedness, trust, and knowledge of others' work can facilitate the adoption of new ideas (Kumpf and Jhunjhunwala, 2023^[50]). Policy systems are interdependent, with each component affecting the functioning of other components (Kaur et al., 2022^[51]). Designing and implementing effective and feasible solutions therefore requires multiple policy areas, and multiple types of experts, to communicate and collaborate effectively.

Finally, **communication** between policy makers and behavioural science experts can be clarified, sped up, and facilitated in both directions:

Research results and practical guidance for policy makers can be communicated effectively in ways that are clear, succinct, and readily accessible (OECD, 2019^[52]; Newman, 2020^[45]) (Moffat, Cook and Chater, 2022^[12]). This could involve a combination of compelling written materials and verbal engagements. Policy makers can consider explicitly requesting these knowledge dissemination and translation activities when commissioning behavioural science evidence from experts.

Integrating behavioural science in the policy process allows for regular and institutionalised brokerage of evidence between policy makers and behavioural science experts. (See Principle 8)

Publishing the results of behavioural science projects publicly can allow behavioural science research to be found during evidence scans conducted by policy makers. This in turn may result in policy makers proactively contacting behavioural science experts who have worked in a particular area for support (See Principle 9).

Policy makers can also be more explicit and active in sharing their evidence needs with behavioural science experts, for example through a formal plan or learning agenda. Mechanisms to inform behavioural science experts about upcoming priorities would enable them to do time-consuming primary research that "produces insight on the outcome that policymakers value" (Linos, 2023^[10]). Several OECD countries require departments or agencies to annually consider their future evidence needs and share these in research or evidence plans. These evidence planning activities could similarly be conducted as part of developing specific strategies or white papers.

Box 8.4. Examples of knowledge brokerage

In British Columbia, **Canada**, the dedicated behavioural science team includes a mix of skill sets including scientists, policy specialists, and knowledge translation strategists. This mix enables them to ensure their interventions would be feasible to implement at scale, and that their advice is accessible to policy makers and the public.

In Rotterdam in the **Netherlands**, policy makers were recruited on a part-time basis into a dedicated behavioural science team to serve as ‘policy domain advisors’. These advisors “stood in-between case proposers and researchers, mediating between them to integrate needs from research and policy” (Dewies et al., 2023^[26]). Working part-time in their regular roles enabled them to maintain their networks and information channels.

In the **Netherlands**, two specific staff members have been allocated the task of encouraging in-house behavioural science experts to work together with policy makers. To help policy makers experience fewer barriers to include a behavioural science approach, they share best practices and enhance tools for the mandatory quality requirement to take into account citizens’ capacity to act (see Principle 8 on standard procedures).

Israel’s Ministry of Finance found it effective for policy makers to control collaborative projects, rather than the behavioural science experts. This approach helped identify and overcome obstacles to implementation because the policy makers had a better understanding of the dynamics of the real world (Shapsa Heiman and Israel, 2022^[53]).

In the **United States**, the Office of Evaluation Sciences writes short summaries of their research findings for a policy audience. They have also experimentally tested how presenting evidence in different ways can influence the conclusions drawn by policy makers (OES, 2021^[54]).

The **United Kingdom** offers policy training for academics, explaining how policy works in theory and in practice, and what tactics academics can use to influence the decision-making process (Open Innovation Team, 2023^[55]).

14. Managers build mechanisms for dissemination and knowledge sharing, such as networks of behavioural science experts and supporters.

Enabling behavioural science experts and policy makers to share their knowledge can be an effective way to build and maintain a common level of capability across the policy system, ensure consistency of quality, and reduce duplication of effort (United Nations, 2021^[16]). Useful knowledge can be explicit – such as actual behavioural science evidence or research findings – but also tacit – such as experienced practitioners’ practical wisdom about effective ways to influence policy with evidence.

Networks or communities of practice enable members to make personal connections and contacts, and share to resources, lessons learned, and best practices (Byrne-Davis et al., 2022^[23]; Curtis, Fulton and Brown, 2018^[3]). Networks can facilitate activities such as workshops, lectures, online platforms for asynchronous communication, and informal social engagements. Networks can also encourage the mobility of behavioural science experts between teams via temporary or permanent deployments, which can encourage knowledge sharing across the organisation. In some administrative cultures a network may be more sustainable and effective if it is formalised to some extent, such as by providing it with some allocated funding and official institutional arrangements. The European Commission’s Communities of Practice Playbook provides useful guidance on how to design, govern, and manage productive communities that learn creatively together and deliver integrated policy work (Catana et al., 2021^[56]).

A network's membership should reflect its intended purposes. A network could focus on improving experts' practice and knowledge; providing a safe space to troubleshoot common issues; breaking down silos across agencies or levels of government; or keeping a behavioural lens front of mind for policy makers. These different purposes may be best achieved through multiple networks operating hierarchically or in parallel. For example, all behavioural science enthusiasts could be connected in one network, with a subset of more experienced staff also engaging in an expert network for more focused discussions. The optimal balance is likely to depend on the government's size and maturity in adopting behavioural science.

In-house behavioural science experts or enthusiasts can also be encouraged to network with external experts, such as academics (OECD, 2019^[11]; WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2023^[57]). These connections help experts and policy makers stay informed about new research and can lead to fruitful collaborations (Barrows et al., 2018^[21]). Multinational networks of behavioural science practitioners in government, such as those facilitated by the OECD and WHO, can also be useful for identifying best practices and generating ideas.

Managers could also consider establishing a shared repository of behavioural science work conducted across the government, either in conjunction with a network or separately (United Nations, 2021^[16]; Jakobsen et al., 2019^[2]; Curtis, Fulton and Brown, 2018^[3]). This could serve as a knowledge base to guide and inspire behavioural science experts and policy makers with case studies and best practices relevant to their context (Aayush Agarwal, 2023^[14]). Once a repository is well established, behavioural science experts could consider synthesising evidence across previous projects, where this would produce relevant and useful advice for policy makers.

Box 8.5. Examples of networks for knowledge sharing

The Behavioural Insights Network in the national government of the **Netherlands** (BIN NL) is a large and active network that coordinates and promotes the mainstreaming of behavioural public policy. Enthusiastic individual experts in various agencies began meeting informally to share insights, advice, and tools, before the BIN NL was formally established in 2014 (Mukherjee and Giest, 2020^[28]). It conducts regular meetings for in-house experts and an annual conference for policy makers; provides an online portal for in-house experts to engage with each other between meetings; runs its own public-facing website; collects experiences and lessons learned in publications and online decision tools; and publishes behavioural science projects and evidence from across the government (both regularly online and in a periodic publication) (Behavioural Insights Network Netherlands, 2021^[58]). All ministries contribute funding, and these dedicated financial resources have enabled practitioners to broaden and deepen the impact of the network.

In **Australia**, the dedicated behavioural science team at the centre of the federal government chairs a practitioners' network (convening in-house experts across government organisations to share research, project examples, and best practices) and previously ran a champions' network (convening policy makers who had some degree of training in behavioural science insights and methods).

At an agency level in **Australia**, the federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water is establishing an internal Behavioural Science Enthusiasts Network open to all staff in the organisation. Based on similar initiatives in other departments, the network will publish a newsletter and run monthly events with presentations, guest speakers, and interactive sessions on particular policy topics. The network will focus on specific themes each month timed to be relevant to policy activities happening across the organisation at that time of year.

In **Canada's** federal government, communities of practice bring together behavioural science experts working in specific domains; for example, the Government of Canada Behavioural Science Community of Practice invites leaders in behavioural science to speak at (virtual) events, holds showcases with

presentations of behavioural science studies led by individuals across the federal public service, and organises workshops on new behavioural science methods. In-house experts across the federal, provincial, and municipal levels also meet regularly at the leadership and staff levels to share experiences and opportunities.

In **Argentina**, behavioural science experts in government have established a common network with partners in academic institutions and research organisations to share knowledge and connect researchers with policy makers.

Some OECD countries have formalised professions as a way of grouping together public servants with similar roles. In the **United Kingdom** various analytical professions support evidence-informed policy making, including the Government Social Research Service, the Government Communication Service, and the Government Economic Service (OECD, 2020^[9]). Although behavioural science hasn't been professionalised in the same way, the extensive network of behavioural scientists across UK government organisations comes together on a quarterly basis to share knowledge and expertise with the aim of upholding a high standard of behavioural science practice across the government.

Assessing Capability principles

Governments may be interested in how they, or an external reviewer, could assess their implementation of these principles. The table below outlines questions to ask to understand the extent to which a country or public organisation has the capability to embed behavioural science in policy making.

Table 8.3. Questions to assess Capability principles

How familiar are policy makers with when and how to use behavioural science insights and methods?
Do policy makers know how to analyse a problem from a behavioural perspective?
Are policy makers familiar with simple, readily applicable tools and frameworks that help them adopt a behavioural lens?
Do policy makers and managers understand when and how behavioural science can be useful for their policy making practice?
How is behavioural science incorporated into post-secondary education and professional development programs for policy makers?
How can policy makers access behavioural science expertise?
How are in-house behavioural science experts organised, structured, and managed?
How can behavioural science experts draw on the range of scientific and government-related skills necessary to produce relevant and impactful evidence?
Are policy makers familiar with what behavioural science expertise is available to them and how to access them?
How is behavioural science evidence made to be useful in the policy process?
Are there individuals or institutions with a mandate for brokering behavioural science evidence into the policy system?
How is behavioural science evidence disseminated to policy makers and decision makers?
Are findings and insights from behavioural science communicated clearly?
Is the behavioural science evidence that is sought or commissioned made applicable to policy decisions?
How is behavioural science knowledge and practice shared across the government or organisation?
How do in-house behavioural science experts exchange knowledge and experiences amongst themselves?
Do behavioural science experts across government have access to a shared portal or repository for sharing knowledge?
Can policy makers and behavioural science experts readily access examples of previous behavioural science work done in government?

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