6 Governance

Implementing a strategy to embed behavioural science into business-as-usual policy making takes effort and resources. Implementation will be more efficient and effective if there is a structure around how these resources and efforts are managed and organised. **The principles in this section suggest an individual or team can be held accountable for mainstreaming behavioural public policy and be appropriately funded to do so.**

Why this matters

Governments actively grapple with how to organise and manage their behavioural science initiatives. Most survey respondents told us there was discussion about governance arrangements when their team was set up. In free text responses, some told us they have "endless discussions about the pros and cons" of different models.

In 2017, the OECD identified three governance models which describe at least some of this diversity (OECD, 2017[1]). In our surveys between 2021 and 2023, 75 respondents described which of these models best applies to them:

- 24% identified with the **central model**: specialised units, usually within the Centre of Government (such as the prime minister's office), focusing on applying behavioural science across government.
- 39% identified with the **diffuse model**: units embedded within a department or specialised agency at the central government or local government level applying behavioural science.
- 13% identified with the **project model**: behavioural science applied for specific projects and initiatives.

These models overlap, co-exist, and evolve over time: 12% of respondents noted that their model is a combination of the three. These models also do not comprehensively describe the variety of governance arrangements being used, even in this focused sample: another 12% of respondents stated that their model is something else entirely. An alternative framework for considering how policy makers can access behavioural science expertise is introduced in Figure under Principle 12.

Discussion about behavioural public policy often focuses on the work of expert teams, often called 'behavioural insights teams' (Mukherjee and Giest, 2020[2]). But at least in our sample of government teams that apply behavioural science, almost 6 in 10 have fewer than 5 people doing so in the team. Sometimes there is only one person applying behavioural science in the team. These teams, whether they identify as 'behavioural insights units' or not, may include members who are not applying behavioural science to their work. The remaining 4 in 10 teams in our sample include 5 to 20 or more people applying behavioural science.

Figure 6.1. Size of government teams applying behavioural science

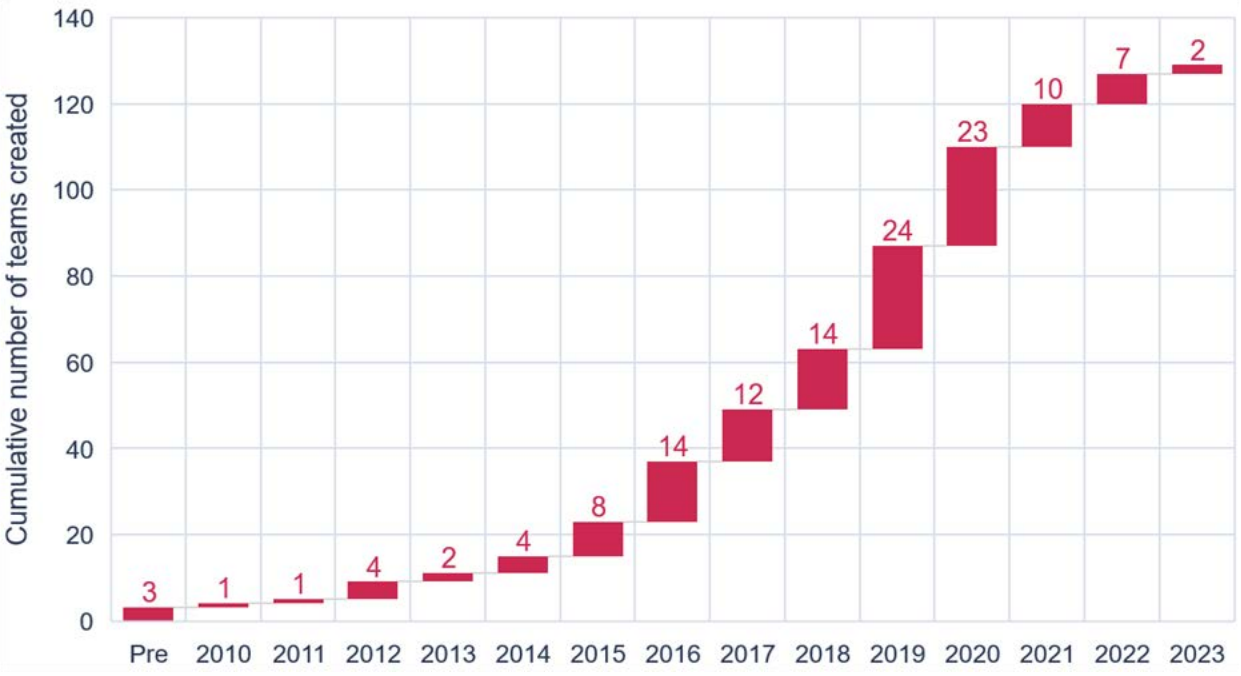
Most teams applying behavioural science have few people dedicated to behavioural science

Note: How many people, including yourself, apply behavioural science in your team? n=160

Many survey respondents work in teams that have turned to behavioural science recently. About half of respondents' teams were created in the last 5 years; another 4 in 10 are between 5 and 9 years old; and only 1 in 10 have been doing behavioural science work for 10 or more years.

Figure 6.2. Age of government teams applying behavioural science

About half of survey respondents' teams were created since 2019



Note: Approximately what year was your team created at your organisation? n=129

The most established teams tend to be slightly larger, but there is not a clear or simple relationship between age and size: there is an average of 7.3 people applying behavioural science in teams aged 10 or more years, compared to 5.4 in teams aged 5 to 9, and 6.6 in teams under 5 (n=128).

Most survey respondents report that their main source of funding is government funding through their organisation (86%, n=109). But some receive ad hoc funding from other government partners or external sources, which could include international or philanthropic organisations. Almost half of survey

respondents told us their team was funded for an initial time window (26 out of n=58). For most, this initial window was at least 2 years, but some were funded for up to 5 years.

Good practice principles

6. Senior leaders clearly allocate the responsibility for mainstreaming behavioural science and establish lines of accountability.

Evidence-informed and people-centred approaches to policy making have been progressively developed over the last decades, often challenging existing ways of working. Policy systems are path dependent and historically shaped, meaning they tend to reproduce the same patterns over time, carrying forward historical protocols, traditions, embedded understandings, and institutional values (Kaur et al., 2022[3]). As a result, innovative practices often need an explicit push to reach the mainstream. This involves a change management process (Curtis, Fulton and Brown, 2018[4]), which is likely to be more effective if a person or team is held responsible for driving that change (Kumpf and Jhunjhunwala, 2023[5]).

It may be effective to designate a particular government official who is responsible for mainstreaming behavioural public policy in line with the agreed strategy, enabling them to be held accountable – such as through performance indicators – for the change management process. This individual would have the authority to drive change and implement practices, as well as "the seniority to advise elected representatives on the use of evidence (Shaxson, 2019[6])". The responsibility for mainstreaming behavioural public policy could be treated as part of a broader government agenda, such as a move towards citizen centricity or evidence-informed policy making. This responsibility could be assigned to a political appointee who has influence with elected officials, or to a government official in the public service who may be more able to create structures and processes that are sustainable in the long term.

Mainstreaming behavioural public policy and implementing this report's various principles takes effort, which means dedicated staff can help make the change happen. The OECD has noted that "embedding evidence-informed approaches in policy making requires strategic and committed leadership, for example from the centre of government, or from units with a mandate for delivering the program of government" (OECD, 2020[7]). Central agencies have often had a role in promoting behavioural science (Jones, Head and Ferguson, 2021[8]), given their ability to access senior leaders and decision-making processes, influence government priorities and strategies, and identify connections and opportunities across policy topics.

Dedicated staff located strategically at the centre of government may help drive a cross-government mainstreaming process (OECD, 2019[9]); similarly, dedicated staff in a central function within a particular portfolio or department could drive a mainstreaming process within that organisation. These staff could be behavioural science experts themselves. But behavioural science experts may be organised and managed in a variety of ways, varying from dedicated teams, to dispersed or matrixed models, to strategic partnerships with external bodies. These options are discussed under Principle 10 (access to expertise).

Additional accountability arrangements may be useful in motivating and guiding the process of mainstreaming behavioural public policy. A steering or advisory group can help to prioritise efforts, connect different parts of the policy system, champion the approach, guide activities at a technical level, or enhance the credibility and reliability of the government's behavioural science work (World Health Organisation, 2024[10])) (Shaxson, 2019[6]; Aayush Agarwal, 2023[11]). The composition of a group – or multiple groups – should reflect its intended purpose. Steering or advisory groups could include internal or external stakeholders, managers from various agencies, academics, and so on.

Governments further into the journey of mainstreaming behavioural science could consider using independent oversight mechanisms to monitor and help drive uptake among parts of the public sector

where uptake is lagging (OECD, 2020[12]; Curtis, Fulton and Brown, 2018[4]). A function could check if policy makers are indeed seeking and implementing behavioural science evidence in line with the government's strategy (Jonkers and Tiemeijer, 2015[13]). Similarly, existing oversight bodies and processes – such as parliamentary committees, policy coordination teams in central agencies, evaluations, audits, and regulatory impact assessments – could assess policy makers' use of behavioural science when they review policies.

Box 6.1. Examples of allocating responsibility and accountability

In the **United Kingdom**'s international aid agency in 2014, senior leaders created a position responsible for the organisation's adoption of behavioural science (Kumpf and Jhunjhunwala, 2023[5]). The function has now expanded as part of the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, and a senior steering group of government officials shape the direction of priority behavioural science initiatives.

In **Türkiye**'s Ministry of Trade, a central team was given sole responsibility for helping other parts of the organisation embed behavioural science into their policy making. They established an academic advisory group to assist with promoting behavioural science and building capability among policy makers.

In **Australia**'s federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, senior leaders require regular reports from a dedicated behavioural science team. On a weekly basis, the team reports achievements across the focus activities agreed in the team's strategy: projects and data analysis; capability and partnerships; and behavioural communications and guidance. Additionally, every six months the team showcases its impact to senior leaders in a two-page placemat that includes metrics on attendance at workshops and presentations, returning customers and referrals, and access to the team's capability resources, as well as case studies about larger projects and other outputs.

7. Senior leaders and managers mobilise sufficient resources to ensure policy advice is informed by relevant and reliable behavioural science evidence.

It takes time and effort both to coordinate a people-centred, evidence-informed approach across the policy system and to conduct the actual activities needed to produce useful behavioural science evidence on particular policy problems (OECD, 2020[14]) (Jakobsen et al., 2019[15]). These activities are likely to require some combination of internal staff time, external partnerships, and practical expenses (such as data infrastructure, software, literature access, maintaining a website, or contracting a social research company to recruit research participants). Senior leaders need to ensure sufficient funds are allocated to these activities, and managers need to include them in their business plans. Funding can be aligned with the agreed strategy for what the government wants to achieve over what time frame.

Funding sources can include:

Direct allocation through central budget processes (Lecouturier et al., 2024[16]). Some funding at the centre of government can help support a coherent, cross-government effort to drive behavioural public policy that is strategically managed and steered. A central allocation could either be specific to behavioural science or one element of a broader program (such as a program related to evidence use, digitalisation, customer centricity, and so on).

Areas with discrete policy responsibilities, such as particular ministries or agencies. This arrangement can increase managers' sense of ownership over the work, potentially increasing the chances for meaningful impact on policy design and implementation decisions (Contandriopoulos et al., 2010[17]). Organisations could fund their own behavioural science experts or activities, or they could contribute funds

to a dedicated team at the centre of government. Agencies could fund the central team through regular and routine contributions to a shared fund, or on an ad hoc basis for particular projects or workstreams.

External funding sources. Programs that encourage capacity building in governments can be leveraged to access behavioural science resources, although these sources are often limited in scope and funding amounts. These programs can often take the form of academic groups aiming to encourage collaboration with governments, international organisations or federal governments seeking to build policymaking or research capacity in governments and government organisations, and philanthropic foundations partnering with governments to address particular policy (United Cities and Local Governments, 2021[18])

Some combination. For example, the staff costs of a dedicated team of experts could be funded centrally, with project costs covered by the policy making teams they partner with.

Senior leaders need to allocate sufficient funds to enable reliable, timely behavioural science advice based on rigorous, ethical methods across the spectrum of issues they are interested in. These activities include the following.

Reviewing and synthesising existing evidence can be valuable (WHO, 2021[19]), although even this takes time and effort to do carefully and rigorously.

Testing, learning, and adapting is almost always advisable to produce reliable and valid evidence for a particular policy problem, because human behaviour is considerably context dependent (Linos, 2023[20]; WHO, 2021[19]). This testing takes extra time and resources. A recent review concluded that behavioural science "has not yet produced generalisable and implementable practice guidance and intervention design strategies for determining what works, when, and for whom" (Buttenheim, Moffitt and Beatty, 2023[21]), meaning that new evaluation and testing is advisable each time to determine if a proposed solution will be effective in its intended context.

Interpreting and repackaging behavioural science evidence to be useful in contested and values-based policy development conversations takes additional work and time (Feitsma, 2018[22]; Lecouturier et al., 2024[16]) (see Principle 13 on knowledge brokerage). In an organisation that has fully mainstreamed behavioural public policy, any policy maker may have the skills to play that knowledge broker role; earlier in the adoption journey, however, it is likely that behavioural science experts will need to devote some of their own time to be involved in the policy process.

Supporting the broader system of behavioural science evidence production outside government organisations, including through allocating research funds to academics working in the social and behavioural sciences, can diversify sources of expertise and enrich public policy debates.

Finally, senior leaders can fund behavioural science experts in a way that confers a sense of psychological safety (OECD, 2019[23]). Any innovative approach to policy making entails risk, and testing solutions inevitably means determining that some do not work as hoped (United Nations, 2021[24]). Apparent failures should be expected and then embraced as learning opportunities. This applies to particular behavioural interventions, but also to the organisation's approach to behavioural science more generally. An initial funding envelope with a sunset provision can be an effective way to give behavioural science experts time and opportunity to experiment with their ways of working and find an operating rhythm that is effective in their context (Jonkers and Tiemeijer, 2015[13]), although a plan can be developed to enable the continuity of behavioural science work beyond this initial mandate.

Box 6.2. Examples of funding arrangements

The **Norwegian** Tax Administration has a dedicated behavioural science team that conducts data collection and research activities. Data collection and research activities are funded by the divisions that commission the analysis.

In **Australia**, the Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government (BETA) works across all policy topics. The central department that hosts BETA funds its staff costs, as well as some operational expenses such as ethical reviews and data management tools. Within particular projects, partner agencies cover other practical expenses, such as research recruitment costs and translations.

The staff in **Germany**'s central behavioural science team are funded by the Federal Chancellery, while ministries and authorities cover project costs. This approach ensures low barriers for ministries to initially access existing evidence from behavioural science. However funding, tendering, and contracting create some administrative burden for larger projects to create original evidence.

Türkiye's Ministry of Trade secured the funding of its first projects from partner countries and international organisations. The organisation's internal behavioural science team has the ongoing responsibility of seeking and arranging external funding opportunities.

Assessing Governance 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 effective governance arrangements to embed behavioural science in policy making.

Table 6.1. Questions to assess Governance principles

How are those responsible for mainstreaming behavioural public policy held to account?
Who is responsible for promoting the adoption of behavioural science insights and methods?
What oversight or accountability mechanisms help ensure progress on mainstreaming behavioural public policy?
Is the performance of senior leaders assessed on their consideration of behavioural science evidence?
Are there regular reviews or structured exchanges among managers about the government's adoption of behavioural science?
How are resources mobilised to enable the use of behavioural science?
What resources are devoted to using behavioural science?
What is the source of resources for behavioural science, such as central government, line agencies, external bodies?
How are behavioural science resources spent, such as in-house staff, external partners, operational expenses?
Are the resources devoted to behavioural science diverse and agile enough to respond to a variety of policy areas and methodological approaches?
Are the resources devoted to behavioural science stable and secure over time?

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