[*Calling DIBS*](#)

Episode 21: "So What? How Storytelling Can Help with Reporting and Scaling"

with Heather Devine, Head of the BC Behavioural Insights Group (BC BIG)

Heather Devine returns to the podcast to talk about how BC BIG approaches scaling and reporting. Recognizing that scaling is a nuanced decision for clients, Heather offers tips for what factors to consider and how to encourage scaling from project start to project end. Heather also talks about the importance of good, well-tailored communication. In particular, we discuss how storytelling can help share results, build a culture of experimentation, and even encourage scaling.

Transcript:

KIRSTIN APPELT, HOST: Welcome to this edition of Calling DIBS. I'm your host, Kirstin Appelt, Research Director with UBC Decision Insights for Business and Society, or DIBS for short. Today, we're once again calling DIBS on Heather Devine, Head of BC's Behavioural Insights Group, or BC BIG. We're fortunate that Heather has agreed to come back to the pod.

Last time we talked to Heather about the value of BI, and it's actually a great tie in to today's topics about leveraging and sharing the value of BI projects. And as usual, I am eagerly awaiting the fun of a chat with Heather, our local BI dynamo. So welcome back to the podcast, Heather.

HEATHER DEVINE, GUEST: Thanks, Kirstin, excited that you 'called DIBS' on me again. I'm really looking forward to chatting with you about scaling and reporting and all those great aspects at the end of a project.

APPELT: Awesome. And to kick us off, can you just refresh our listeners on your role?

DEVINE: Yeah, sure. So I am the Head of the BC Behavioural Insights Group or BC BIG. And we are a behavioural science unit in the Government of British Columbia. And so we're basically a team of behavioural scientists and practitioners and knowledge translators and policy professionals. And we advise ministry clients across government on a range of behaviour based business and policy challenges. So, just a small unit within government in the central agency and working with ministries across the full policy spectrum. We launched in the fall of 2016, so we've been around now for just over four years, and have had the privilege of working with Kirstin, and others in the DIBS community.

APPELT: So let's just dive right into scaling, because I think that's a big topic that we'll really try to get to grips with a bit. So like you just mentioned, BC BIG is in a bit of an interesting position because you typically belong to the same overarching organization as your clients, but they're typically in different ministries or branches within that same ministry. So how does BIG approach scaling?

DEVINE: Yeah, great question. Yeah, as a central agency or being a part of a central agency that serves client ministries across government, we're not in the ministries that we're serving. And so, you know, for us, I think our co-design model is something that's been really helpful in supporting our clients with scaling. So they're very much embedded in our project team. They work very closely with us on doing the qualitative research out there in the field. They work very closely with us on designing the interventions and working with their respective partners within their ministry or their stakeholders to help us with the design phase. And so I think just by virtue of co-designing with them, we or they build up a lot of expertise and confidence, so that by the time we report out findings and recommendations, they should be, ideally, well equipped to scale, if it makes sense for them.

So because they've been there on the ground with us and deeply involved in the logistics and mechanics of getting a trial into the field, they understand what's involved. So scaling should be just a matter of doing the same thing, but on a broader scale, with a full population.

APPELT: And is BIG's role mostly support? Is it giving recommendations about scaling or what's BIG's actual role in the scaling decisions and scaling support?

DEVINE: We usually talk about scaling right at the beginning with our clients to kind of socialize them to the ideas so they're aware that ultimately that's the place we want to get to. And so using kind of a concept from Stephen Covey, beginning with the end in mind, we start right at the beginning talking about what scoping might look like, what the expectations are, that we're not just going to do a project because it might be fun and interesting.

That's part of it as well. We want it to be kind of fun and engaging and interesting for the client, and something where they're learning new skills and tools. But also ultimately, we want to have an impact and we want to test something out on a small scale that, if successful, is something that we can feasibly scale to the whole population. So we have those conversations early on, because we're not in their ministry or their organization, we're not usually leading the implementation of the change required to scale.

But because, as I said, they've been involved along the way. You know, they're aware of what will be involved in terms of any labour impacts, any costs, any kind of logistical coordination that might need to happen on their end. They know what's going to be involved, so that by the time we get to the phase where we've offered the final results of the project and they know that a particular intervention works or doesn't work, they're well equipped to kind of take it from there.

Or if they're not, sometimes they don't have the capacity or sometimes they feel like they don't have the expertise and they need a little bit of additional support we would offer to, you know, draft a change management plan or capture some of the deep logistical details that they might need in order to carry it on and fully implement, or we walk through that phase with them.

So we kind of gauge at the end of the project and check in with them, you know, what would you need in order to scale this project? Because we're able to offer a variety of different supports to kind of bridge them into a full scaling of the successful intervention.

APPELT: It's great, I love how it's a theme from beginning to end of the project. That makes a lot of sense. And I think that's also a good segue to my next question, which is there are so many different and somewhat overlapping methods for evaluating whether to scale, whether it's cost benefit analysis, ROI calculation, thinking of the different types of significance, whether it's statistical or practical, managerial, effect size. How does BIG make the recommendation about scaling? Which types of metrics or calculations does BIG use?

DEVINE: It really depends on the project. I mean, ultimately, the decision to scale rests with the client and their decision is based on a variety of factors, some of which are some of the inputs or outputs that we capture through our intervention. And some of them are very much on their end related to corporate priorities or political timing or policy windows or other different factors that can have an impact on their end. And so while we might have a trial that's hugely successful and could potentially be really impactful at scale, there might be other factors on their end that, practically speaking, just make it impossible to move forward with that intervention.

But in terms of the kinds of information that we offer up, you know, obviously our recommendations are based on the qualitative and quantitative evidence that we've gathered through our desk and field research. And we're in that process gathering primary, secondary outcome measures, things like sometimes it's costs, sometimes it's accuracy, timing, there are a variety of different measures that we would capture, uptake through the through the intervention, and those are the kinds of things that we would want to use in estimating what it might cost for them to fully scale.

So they're going to want to know, you know, cost, obviously. So if there are materials required, if their system changes and there are costs associated with that, they're going to want to know. If there's time required from staff for training or just even in terms of implementing, if they need to work differently and there are timing or logistical labour impacts, they're going to want to understand what that might look like. If there are partners or stakeholders that would need to be involved in the process, they're going to want to know about that and to take all of those things into consideration as they're looking at full scale implementation. So we're trying to capture that along the way.

That's why at the very beginning, we want to have conversations about capturing measures, inputs, outputs, along the way, some of which are directly related to the intervention, and some of them are kind of secondary, but could still tell us part of the story in terms of whether it's feasible to scale.

APPELT: Yeah, it really points to how messy a decision scaling is. That it's not just a cost, it's time, and as you mentioned before, the political climate or the organizational priorities. So it is really a nuanced decision that you can come up with recommendations about. But ultimately, it's a tough call sometimes.

DEVINE: Absolutely. Yeah. I would say that our input is one input into their decision. And there are many other factors they need to consider, especially if it's something that's higher profile or of greater significance that involves more complex changes in the organization.

APPELT: And so maybe we've already touched on this, but even when all these signs point to yes, scaling can be tricky. And I think we often see that scaling, I don't know if fail is the right word, but scaling doesn't happen to the extent we would hope. What do you think are some of the reasons that scaling doesn't always work as we're expecting or hoping it will?

DEVINE: There's so many possible reasons, so many. Just some examples, I think failing to get the buy-in and support of key players within your client's organization, who kind of need to understand and support the intervention and possibly play a role in its implementation, either on the trial side or on the full scale implementation side or both, that can be a real risk to the potential scaling.

There are people who need to be brought along, who need to understand, who could raise red flags further on down the road that would have been nice to know earlier on so that you can make adjustments and work arounds. And there are others who just kind of can put up roadblocks or, you know, stop the project in its tracks. Or when you get to the point where you've found that there's something that's successful that could work and that you could scale they raise issues or concerns that make it then impossible to move forward with because there are certain practical considerations or other considerations that hadn't been factored in earlier on and hadn't they been engaged earlier on in the process.

And that's why when we work with our client ministries, we ask, “Who are your policy legislation, comms, IT, data people?”. All of those folks need to be at the table. They don't need to be at every project team meeting, but they certainly should be there at key stages along the way so that they understand what we're doing and that they can offer their expertise and their insights along the way so that what you're crafting in terms of an intervention is something that actually is feasible for all of those groups and all the considerations that they might bring to bear on it. So that's one.

Sometimes it can fail because it's too expensive or too time consuming to make the technical or the labour related changes. So sometimes, for example, there could be a system upgrade or system update that might be required or maybe staff need to be trained and it's simply too expensive to pull them off their daily tasks to be trained. Sometimes there can be difficulty kind of shifting at the individual level, beliefs or practices with managers or staff, they're just kind of resistant to doing things differently. They've always done it a particular way. They've got their methods and habits in place. And it's really difficult to shift towards something new and different, and same at the organizational level, there can be resistance to change.

So, you know, they might have done the intervention or might have done the trial and thought it was interesting, but when it actually comes down to looking at making some organizational changes, it sometimes can be easier to follow the path of least resistance.

Some other ones, sometimes people are too busy or don't have bandwidth to scale or implement. They might have had the time to be involved in the intervention, and, you know, a lot of times we do a lot of the project management around a project. So they're there to offer their insights and ideas and to work with us on it, but they don't necessarily have the capacity or the bandwidth or even sometimes the expertise to lead and implement the necessary change for full-scale implementation.

Big one is that sometimes there's not the executive sponsorship. Maybe it was there at the beginning. Maybe there was an executive that was willing to remove barriers and roadblocks along the way and were willing to champion the project through to scaling and implementation, but maybe they moved on. You know, executives move all the time. And someone who comes into that role might not see it as a priority.

You talked already about statistical significance versus practical or managerial significance. That's a really important one. So sometimes you might have the statistical significance, but practical or managerial significance isn't there. And then I think finally, something that we've certainly considered is we're working with our clients is fidelity. So if there's low fidelity, I think in the design or the prototype for the intervention and it doesn't closely match or it's not embedded in the system or the policy or the program, then it's that much more complicated to scale because you haven't really tested it in the system itself.

You've either been adjacent to or it's something that doesn't closely resemble the realities of the program or the policy, whatever it is that needs to be changed. And that means that then there's more time required to figure out how would we do this actually in the real world, with real staff, and real systems in process. So those are just a few examples of how and why scaling can fail.

APPELT: Absolutely. In some ways, I think it's more impressive when we do scale, given all the barriers to scaling.

DEVINE: Exactly.

APPELT: We should give ourselves more credit for the scaling success.

DEVINE: Absolutely. And what I think is great about this is these are the reasons why it can scale, but many of these things can easily be overcome with careful planning and with thinking about these things at the outset of our project. So by kind of flipping them into tips for how you can make scaling successful, I think it gives some hope that we actually can have some success.

APPELT: Yeah. And I think something you mentioned today, something that we've talked about with Sasha, is the idea that just scaling needs to be a part of the conversation at every step. You can't back-drawer it and say, “Oh, we'll get to that at the end of the project”, if you're consistent with it throughout, that certainly increases the likelihood. So having it in the initial conversations and then not dropping it along the way certainly changes the picture.

DEVINE: Absolutely. And that's why we've got it in our partnership agreement with our clients, it's a trigger or a prompt for us to remember to have that conversation and to manage expectations about what we're doing and also to just make sure that we've got that in the back of our minds as we're designing an intervention, that we're asking the client, and making sure that whatever it is that we're proposing to test is something that actually could be, with the information we have available, something that can be scaled, because we never want to invest a lot of time and effort into something that that isn't scalable, if we know that at the outset.

APPELT: Absolutely. So when scaling does occasionally end up being a no go, is there a plan B? Are there other ways to leverage that learning? How does BIG try to wrap up a project if it's not going to be something that's being scaled?

DEVINE: Well, I think as I mentioned, we do only try to engage in projects that the client is willing and able to scale. So we do have that conversation at the beginning. And, you know, we have had projects where after we've had a quick conversation, it became clear that it wasn't something that, either timing-wise or in terms of corporate priorities, might not be something that would be scalable, at least not now. Then we'd look at maybe doing a behavioural lens as opposed to an intervention. So we'd look at something, taking kind of a different strategy.

Yeah, it's such a tricky one. We have something that we call our RIDE guarantee. And RIDE is our model for behaviour shift. That's basically our project life cycle that we use when we're working with a client. And we always say that, you know, if we're not able to do an intervention, so if a client comes forward and really wants to work with us on a project and has a trial in mind, if it turns out that it's not actually a good fit or it's not feasible or not something that could be scaled, we always want to make sure that they're coming away with something from their engagement with us because we want to reward people who are interested in actually approaching their policy problems differently, who are interested in considering the behavioural dimensions of their business or policy challenge.

So whether that's a seat in a boot camp or whether it's doing a behavioural lens or behavioural audit. We always want to make sure that we leave our client with some information, as if there's some value in reaching out and considering doing a trial with us.

Some of the things, if we actually go through a project and we think we're going to have something that's scalable and it turns out for whatever reason it's not, then we really focus in on what are the key insights that we've generated or that we've gathered through our desk and field research, because we will have really rich qualitative and sometimes quantitative data that we can use, that can help with advising the client on some next steps that they can take.

So maybe we don't have the evidence from the intervention that's context specific, but we might have some signals from what other jurisdictions have tried or even from our qualitative research where we've talked with the target audience, so citizens, usually. And maybe that gives us some ideas for what could be done differently to improve a program or service.

So, I mean, for us, we're trying to build a culture of experimentation. So even just having our clients exposed to the BI concepts and tools and hearing firsthand from their key audiences, the citizens that they're serving, is a huge value add. So even if we're not able to scale, that's still of great value to our clients and maybe we weren't able to do a project this round or weren't able to scale something this round, there's certainly a good chance that they would be set up for success the next round, having gone through the experience with us, knowing what we're looking for, for scaling.

APPELT: Yeah, I think that's a really good point about the learnings can be about the specific project, but they can also be about the learnings, about the methodology, about what works with that ministry, about, you know, lessons for that ministry in terms of BI and lessons for BIG in terms of how to work with that ministry and how to adapt the toolkit to work in different contexts.

DEVINE: Absolutely.

APPELT: So switching gears a bit, the other main task at the end of a project, beyond scaling, is communicating. So sharing the knowledge learned. So how does BIG approach reporting? What channels does big use? What are BIG's strategies?

DEVINE: Yeah, I mean, this is such a huge, such an important part of the work that we all do in behavioural science, is communicating out what you're doing, sharing, contributing to the global evidence base, making sure people are aware of what you're learning and doing that in a way that you're reaching all of the key audiences.

So, we communicate with our executive sponsor at key points in our project lifecycle, and we share, we keep them up to speed along the way, and that's normally just through briefings. But we have a final report that we share with our executive sponsor and our client team at the end. And so that's sort of the more formal way of sharing the results internally with the project team and with the executive sponsor.

And then, of course, needing to translate those findings into key nuggets or key insights that can be shared with the broader behavioural insights community or behavioural science community. And there are lots of different ways that we do that. So, through blog posts and journal articles, talks, conferences, posters, websites, white papers, I mean, all of the things, we certainly try to find ways to communicate out, and we try to be thoughtful about, you know, what trials or what projects would, or I guess flipping it the other way, which channels would lend themselves best to telling the story of a particular project.

Sometimes it's, you know, working with the client that we've done the project with and doing a talk or webinar. Or it might be someone from the team who led the project, sharing the results in a poster session or at a conference, and it would maybe be more technical. Or we do something that's a little kind of less formal and we use a blog post, and that's where we're really talking about the experience of doing a project with a client. Not so much about the findings from the client. We're just using that as an example of a project to talk about the other dimensions of doing this kind of project work.

APPELT: And so you mentioned that you often use different channels for different projects. Do you often find that you do different channels for different audiences?

DEVINE: Yes. Oh, absolutely. Yeah. So we would we would target the channel for the particular audience. So for a technical audience, we would usually be looking at conferences, and journal articles, posters, those kinds of things. For a general audience, it'd be blog posts, talks or lectures or webinars, those kinds of things.

So, yeah, we definitely would be tailoring based on the audience just to make sure that we're not hitting a general audience with a super technical downlow of a project where, you know, we're talking about significance and key values and other things that may not be of interest, with lots and lots of tables that may not resonate as well with the general audience.

APPELT: Yeah, it really goes to the point about how different audiences are interested in hearing experiences and projects for different reasons and so matching those together. And so, thinking about different examples of reporting, do you have a favourite example of good reporting? Or is there anything about reporting that makes it stand out to you as being good reporting?

DEVINE: Yeah, I think I mean, there are lots of great examples of individuals and organizations that have done really strong, interesting, engaging blogs or white papers, I think BIT usually, the Behavioural Insights Team, usually has really great reports, plain language, really simple and clean. Very clear message. Very clear story.

So I always really appreciate BIT's work when they share reports. They're doing more short videos and they've always done lots of blog posts, so there's a variety of different ways that you can, and of course, they have their formal reports. I really like Katy Milkman's podcasts. I think she's a really great communicator and talks about science and talks about results of projects in a really engaging and clear way. So I think it really appeals to a general audience. And she's just a great communicator. Lots of excellent folks out there. Too many to name, too many to name.

APPELT: Absolutely. So on the flip side of the coin, and thinking anonymously of examples of bad reporting, what do you think it is that makes them bad? What are they doing that is not connecting?

DEVINE: I think anything that isn't calibrated it for the audience, so, you know, as I was mentioning, if you're making something too technical for a general audience, then that's not going to work. For example, if you're, you know, briefing executives, they may not need to hear or see all of the graphs. They really want to hear a story. So I think also anything that doesn't have sort of a clear story, a clear narrative, kind of loses people. We're hardwired to understand things in story. So, that can be a real miss.

And I'm always drawn certainly to the blog posts and podcasts and articles that that have a bit of a story to it, that draw me in. Anything that doesn't have kind of solid, rigorous evidence from a variety of sources that don't sort of cite, those or reference those in the reporting, I think, is a bit of a miss where it's too high level and it's kind of deviating away from science a little bit too far. So I think it's an opportunity anytime that you're reporting out to increase science literacy, but there's a way of doing it, a way of translating it so that it's understandable to a wide variety of people, but you're still at least grounding it in solid research frames and still making sure that the evidence is carefully cited.

APPELT: Absolutely. Yeah. And what you were saying about the story is reminding me of one of my experiences when I first started out consulting out of grad school. And in grad school, you're used to just showing someone the results tables and then they make that connection to the "So what? What does this mean?"But then when you do it in practical, applied work and you're communicating to different audiences, you have to take that step. You're the one who's responsible for making the translation and doing it in a way where they say, oh, that's the significance. That's the takeaway. And how important that is for reporting.

DEVINE: So huge. Absolutely. Especially with our client teams and our executive sponsors, really making sure that the so what there is really clearly articulated so that translation and interpretation of the results and what it means for their business, what it means in terms of scaling is a really important part of it. So, yeah, absolutely.

APPELT: Yeah. And I think that's going to be part of what the students are learning about in the L07 module with Dave, as we say, data analysis, but really, we're seeing data analysis, interpretation, visualization and those other steps. It doesn't just stop at here, we did the analysis, and this is what it is. Like we've just said, it is that interpretation, and the "so what" of it all is really key.

DEVINE: Well, I think you just raised a really important point as well for good reporting is having really compelling visuals. So there are lots of different ways to have data tell a story. And so really choosing the right graphs or the right data visualizations is going to be really important to telling the story because you don't have to include everything. It's knowing which ones to choose and to profile, and using a variety of images and keeping it somewhat visual can be really, really helpful.

APPELT: Absolutely. And you just brought up two things that I want to pull apart. I think they're really important and that I think sometimes we just assume and they're good to really call out because they are skill-based. One is knowing what to include and knowing what to exclude. Those are two important decisions.

A lot of times when we've done a project, we're so excited to tell everyone what we've done. We give them, you know, 70 pages or whatever. And knowing what to cut. So you are telling a clear story and you're giving the key details. And, you know, you might have other stuff in the appendix, but you have a single, clear story as the takeaway, especially when it's the execs and higher level.

DEVINE: Absolutely. Yeah. So on our team, I like to have the full report with all of the details, the full protocols, all of the tables, and that's for us internally. And then from there, we build out the shorter, punchy, sort of PowerPoint version of the final report for the client that has the highlight reel. It tells the clear story. It includes just the right amount of data visualization and storytelling and interprets the data and says the "so what?", but without all of the additional detail, we still got it there, and it's important for us, but the client doesn't necessarily need to see it.

APPELT: Yeah. And I find that that skill of learning what to include and what to exclude is something you develop over time. And initially you tend to err on the side of putting too much in and then over time you build, okay, this is the key story, those are the additional - those are in supplementary materials, they're not exec summary material.

DEVINE: Exactly. And some clients actually prefer more detail and they can, you know, checking in with them and asking do you want to see more detailed graphs? What's your appetite for statistics and data, and in some cases, they'll ask for more.

APPELT: Yeah, having that flexibility is key.

DEVINE: Yeah.

APPELT: And then the other day I wanted to draw out is you're saying good visualizations, compelling visualizations. And I think something that the students will also talk about and L07 is that visualizations can also be intentionally or unintentionally manipulated. So it's also important to learn how to identify good visualizations that are accurately telling the story and not, again, intentionally or unintentionally misleading, because it's easy to chop up the y-axis or to have some missing data points. And so learning both how to make good visualizations, but also how to identify when a visualization is maybe not telling the whole story so that you can be a knowledgeable consumer of visualizations.

DEVINE: Absolutely. Yeah, and doing it with integrity and making sure you're actually telling the accurate story.

APPELT: Okay, so we've talked about the good and the bad. One thing I wanted to talk about is we often say we want to use BI in how we communicate. What does that mean to you?

DEVINE: For me, I think, we use the phrase, you know, "walking the BI talk." And so that when anytime we're communicating out to our clients, whether it's even just through a simple email or it's through a client report or briefing or whatever it might be that we want to walk the talk. So the language we use, the format we use, the channel, you know, the timing, all of those things, we want to take into consideration what we know from behavioural science so that we're making it as engaging and interesting and relevant and timely and appropriate as we can for the audience. So I think that's something that's important to consider.

It just seems weird to be a behavioural insights team or a behavioural science practitioner and to send out a wall of text in an email, and not, you know, choose an appropriate subject line and make sure that you're chunking and you're getting your call to action right there up front and you're personalizing and all those other things that we know make for more effective communication. So, we definitely try to walk the BI talk as much as we can in the way that we operate internally and in the way that we engage with the outside world.

APPELT: Absolutely, it's useful to write it and then take a minute to do a BI check on yourself and see are you, like you said, are you walking the talk?

DEVINE: Yeah. Absolutely.

APPELT: And another point around communication that I wanted to raise or to ask about, is how do you think reporting and scaling can work well together? Do you think they can work well together to maybe encourage each other?

DEVINE: Yeah, absolutely, I mean, getting back to the need to be sort of persuasive and use good storytelling, I think in a report, whether it's a formal Word document type report or whether it's a PowerPoint briefing type report, which is what we use, bringing to life the experience of the citizens that we maybe have interviewed or the frontline staff that we've interviewed, pulling out quotes, testimonials, making the story come alive for the client, I think can help them feel a bit more motivated to do better by the client.

When you actually hear firsthand the voices of people who have experienced your service or program, that can be really compelling. Sometimes it's the first time our clients have ever heard from the people they serve and are hearing about the impact that their program or their service or their policies having on their target population. And no one intends to have, you know, people have a negative experience with something that they're responsible for administering or designing.

So that can be really motivating and knowing that there's something that they can do about it, that we've tested this thing out and this looks really promising. You've heard that this is the experience of your citizen or your target audience, here's a thing that you can easily do. You can scale it up. Here's what it's going to cost you. Here's what's going to be involved. Looks feasible. Here are the steps it would take for you to get there, and showing that there's a clear path for them to scale and to make it better for their citizens, because at least in the public service, there's no one that works in the public service that doesn't want to improve the lives of the people we all serve, which are our fellow British Columbians. So I think that's important.

And I think talking about scaling and implementation as being an important part of, and the last step in your research or experimental process can also really help because it can motivate them to actually complete the process. If set completion, or goal gradient, like you're almost there, the next step is just to get you to scale. So there might be some ways within the report to show them, you know, maybe even a checklist at the end of your report. You know, you've participated in the process. You've done the trial. You've got the results. You know what to do. Next step for you to tick the box and complete the process is to actually scale. So that's another thing that could be.

APPELT: I'm seeing a new visual added to all of our future reports.

DEVINE: Exactly, exactly. Yeah.

APPELT: Well, I think that's been really interesting, and you pulled in a lot of good things about communication. Are there any other advice about good reporting, good communication that you wanted to raise?

DEVINE: I think for us, you know, I mentioned that we're trying to build a culture of experimentation and government and trying to introduce science literacy to some folks who maybe, you know, don't have that background or it's been a while, or they haven't seen scientific principles or the scientific method or experimentation and testing used in sort of a policy environment. They've maybe seen it used in biology or in other areas, but say maybe not in social policy area.

So I think communication and the various channels that we can use, like blog posts and podcasts, short videos, things with really great visuals, really compelling stories can help us in building the culture of experimentation, building that scientific literacy so that people are approaching their policy problems. They might not even be doing a project with us, but as long as they take that away and, you know, as they're making improvements to their programs and services, they have a sense of what they need to be taking into consideration. You know, those human dimensions. Those behavioural dimensions. And so I think communication can be a really powerful way of helping us build that culture of experimentation.

APPELT: Yeah, I think that's a really good point. And that communication can serve so many different purposes and for many different audiences. And it can be slowly getting people towards that mindset. It might not be the first communication that does it, but, you know, being repeatedly exposed. So I think that's a really great idea.

DEVINE: And lots of different examples, as well. I think seeing their colleagues in other ministries and other program areas, particularly areas that may have traditionally been more risk averse or seem to be more risk averse and seeing that they've moved forward with a BI project and they're willing to kind of try something different or to use an innovative approach to encourage behaviour change. Hearing those stories, kind of socializing those concepts and ideas and normalizing it, I think will allow us to build that culture that we're looking to build. And so that people are interested in more evidence base, policy program design, looking at more data-driven approaches to solving problems.

APPELT: Absolutely. Talking about walking the BI talk, making it the social norm that everyone is doing it. Everyone's doing BI.

DEVINE: Exactly.

APPELT: Well, on that note, we're just about out of time. So do you have any other message or any less advice for our BI practitioners in training?

DEVINE: I think I'd end with just saying, you know, science is awesome, but science is also hard sometimes. Which is something I shared two conferences ago now. But it still holds true. And I would say, you know, don't be discouraged if you've tested something with a sample and it's really exciting and promising. And you shared it with your client and they tell you they don't want to scale or they've said “Yes, we're gonna scale”, and you stepped away two or three months later, they still haven't scaled. There are, as we mentioned in this podcast, lots of reasons why that can happen.

And, you know, as long as you're doing what you can to identify projects that are feasible for scaling and you're bringing your client along, and you are in the last mile encouraging them to take that next step and you're laying out the pathway to scale, you're more likely to be successful. So it happens to everybody that you design a really great intervention and it doesn't end up being scaled. And that's okay. We keep working at it and hopefully we eventually get there. And there's still value in the advice and in the insights that you've generated or that you've gathered and shared with your client.

APPELT: I think that's a perfectly timed message. I think with students in the midst of their capstone projects, a reminder that science is hard for everyone, but it's rewarding. It's just the perfect timing. So thanks for that message and thank you for joining today. As expected and as always, it was a true pleasure to chat and explore BI topics together. I always love to hear what you're thinking. So I hope our listeners also enjoyed it and are able to apply some of the BI wisdom to their own projects. So, thank you for joining us, Heather.

DEVINE: Thanks for the invitation!

APPELT: And thanks to our listeners for joining us for another episode of Calling DIBS.