



Episode 3: “Playing Cards That Can Save Lives & Other Qualitative Research Stories”

with Kerri Buschel, Director of Experience, Marketing, and Insights at WorkSafeBC.

With a storyteller like Kerri Buschel leading the charge, it is no surprise that WorkSafeBC is a leader in innovation when it comes to qualitative research. From online discussion boards to interviews to focus groups, Kerri talks about how WorkSafeBC uses qualitative research to understand the problem, the population, and their barriers to action.

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 Calling DIBS on Kerri Buschel, Director of Experience, Marketing and Insights at WorkSafeBC. And you're in for a real treat today because Kerri is an outstanding communicator and also an amazing leader in our regional BI community of practice. And I've been fortunate to watch Kerri drive the use of BI at WorkSafeBC and work on initiatives together, like our annual BIG Difference Conference and developing our Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights. And selfishly, I'm always glad for another reason to talk to you and be inspired by Kerri. So, Kerri, welcome to the Podcast.

KERRI BUSCHEL, GUEST: Wow, Kirstin, that was so kind. I am so excited to be here. Thank you very much for having me and I am equally as excited for any opportunity to be able to speak with you. So, thank you for inviting me.

APPELT: Awesome. So, can you start by telling us a little bit about yourself and your role at WorkSafeBC?

BUSCHEL: Sure. I joined WorkSafeBC about eight years ago and I had the opportunity to work in the marketing and brand area and we quickly discovered that there was a huge opportunity within WorkSafeBC, as there are within many government and government agencies, to be able to use insights and market research to better understand the people that we serve, so that we can better connect with them on the important messages that we share and the services that we deliver.

APPELT: So, what led you to finding and using behavioural insights?

BUSCHEL: I have always loved the crossroads between psychology and brand, and the idea of watching people who seek to better understand other people. I've always been inspired by people who are able to do that, either as professors at universities or as tremendous speakers on TED talks. I've always tried to find a way to be able to better connect with the people that I have the opportunity to speak with. In reading about Fowler and all of his work, and just in watching and learning from so many incredible professionals, I had seen some really cool examples along the way of that intersect. And people called it many different things, you know, 8, 10, 15 years ago they didn't all call it nudge theory. But that intersect of psychology, behavioural psychology,

understanding people, marketing and the theory and practice of it all became just very, very interesting to me. And I loved all the examples popping up all over the world.

APPELT: Well, that's a good segue. What is a favourite example or case study that you've come across?

BUSCHEL: I use one in particular all the time when I start talking. But I mean, the famous ones are the, you know, the fly in the urinal at the Amsterdam airport. Everybody knows about that one or the big bin, little bin, like the idea of having your recycling or your organic bin be much larger than your garbage bin. And the very salient example of organ donation, where -- what was it? About 30 percent of people were opting into organ-to-organ donation, but when they made it an "opt-out", they found it only 10 or 15 percent of people actually took the time to opt out of organ donation. And therefore, in many regions, numbers increased by like 50 percent plus.

So just to see the impact of all of those things is incredible. But for me, because I also have small children, I really love the example that I saw in the U.K. that was done around apples, and it was done in the school system in the UK, where they were giving out apples at the school system to children and they were finding that kids weren't eating them. And so, they made this simple choice of cutting half of the apples and not cutting other ones and then seeing how many more were consumed of those cut apples versus not. And just by making that simple movement, they found that 70 percent more apples were actually consumed on the playgrounds.

So, to me, those little things that don't force people into decisions but actually make the positive, healthier decisions easier to make, those are the examples that I think, "Oh, my gosh, you're brilliant!" So that's amazing! And I think that's the most exciting part for me about all of this, is the way that we can all learn from each other with all of those really interesting examples, where you're not forcing compliance, and where it really is all about positive behaviour change.

APPELT: Absolutely. I love that example, but I'm also a bit embarrassed about it because that totally works for me, too. If you chop up fruit, I will eat it more. And if you put like caramel dip next to it, that also does wonders.

BUSCHEL: I'm very much exactly the same, so there you go.

APPELT: Well, so talking about how you've been influenced, I also think that WorkSafe has been influential. It's been a bit of a pioneer in B.C. in using BI. And I think you touched on this a little bit, but can you speak a bit more about why WorkSafe started using the BI approach?

BUSCHEL: Yeah, absolutely. There is a wonderful thing about the people that work at WorkSafeBC. They are there because of what everybody kind of circulates around this noble cause of wanting to make a difference for workers and employers in the province. And if you talk to employees at WorkSafe, they truly, with their gut, with all of their passion, they want to really help people. And so, when we are brought in to be able to support our prevention unit in preventing accidents or issues from happening, or even in things like claims, with helping to support the recovery of workers, we are often looking for all of our toolsets.

It might be awareness. It might be a better sense of advertising. It might be the way that we convey our options. It might be the prickly end of the stick in some cases. But recognizing that behavioural insights is an option that we have at our fingertips, and can use in different ways, was something that was a bit game-changing for us at WorkSafe. And we started off very small, like many organizations do, with just letter

rewriting. For us that was all about how do we personalize, simplify, and frame in letters in a better way, to be able to make that information more consumable and understandable? And then we went from there.

APPELT: And have you seen that bit be valuable? Have you been able to kind of assess how helpful that's been?

BUSCHEL: Yeah, absolutely. So early on, when we did the letter rewriting, we have about a thousand different templates of letters, and that might seem like a lot to some people, but if you were to talk to many government agencies, they would say the same things. Business is complicated, but it doesn't need to be complicated for the people that we serve. And so, one of the early things that we recognized we could do was A/B testing with our letters. How do we make, if we recognize, and we did this.

We actually did research early on with people that received our letters, and we heard that huge barriers for them were that they literally weren't getting past the first or second line, because they just didn't understand what we were trying to say, and it was also complicated and jargony and legalistic, and that was the feedback that we constantly got.

So rather than rewriting the letters to what we thought was best, what we did is we rewrote them and then we did iterative research all the way along. And we constantly tested and we did A/B testing, and we did it in such a way that we swapped the A/B regularly until we got to a point where letters were not only more understandable, but people got what they needed out of it, and knew what they had to do next. And then, we recognized that if you look at that quotient of, you know, "am I being efficient or am I being effective? Am I being emotionally supportive?" That emotional piece was massive for people, especially in dealing with the services at WorksSafeBC. We were resolving a lot of the concerns emotionally for people because they could understand. And that was a huge, huge piece for us.

So, testing from the beginning, doing the research at the beginning, at the outset, to understand what the barriers were for people, testing along the way, and then also testing the outcome results of it. Are we actually getting greater compliance to the health and safety regulations or to people returning to "return to work" practices? Those are the long-term indicators that show us that, yes, these things are working.

APPELT: That's amazing. And, I think that's starting to get to one of the big ideas I want to talk about with you today, which is how you have used user research. And I know across a number of projects, user research has really been fundamental. So, how have you used user research?

BUSCHEL: I think for us, user research has been imperative in being able to meet people where they're at, so that we can help to change the health and safety landscape of a group, of an industry. I think one of your, and my, favorite examples are in the fishing industry.

One of the things that we did there, is we were asked to create a poster for fishermen, because fishermen were still drowning on boats, and the idea being, you know what, as a fisherman, you need to wear your PFD, you have to wear your life vest. We said, "Are we able to take a very quick step back, and do a little bit of user research with these fishermen?". Now, you and I both know that we're not going to get to fishermen by using a survey, and that we're likely not going to get them on an ODB. So, what we did is we sent our teams out to the docks all up and down in B.C. We did it very quickly. We did it very cost effectively. We sent team members out that were already in regions with a consistent set of questions. We asked them about their job, what a day in the life is like, what their barriers are. What are some of the things that they would want us to understand, as we were trying to communicate with them, and things that we learned were, I mean, the very obvious things about their job. They're out there for long shifts at a time. They don't have access to their

phone while they're out, to the Internet, while they're out in the middle of nowhere. Oftentimes, while they're waiting for weather to pass, or for a catch to come in, they have spare time on their hands. And so, what is it that they do when they have that spare time on their hands? They play cards!

So, for us there, you know, instantly there's all of these things that come up and we recognize, you know, a poster is probably not going to solve this problem, but maybe something that could solve this problem is meeting the fishermen where they're at. And we also recognize that they said -- "We don't love a lot of words. We're people that are to the point people. Get in, get out, you know?". What we tried to do with the fishing example is recognizing that the message that we have is you need to put your PFD on when you're onboard the ship. It doesn't matter how long you've been on the job, it doesn't matter how safe you think you're being, because you're just stepping out there for a second. Accidents happen. They happen to the best of us. Just be safe.

We actually ended up creating a deck of cards and all the face values of the cards. All those faces, are all the different faces of fishermen and fisherwomen. But everybody likes to be referred to as a fisherman, throughout our province. And there's a very simple message on the back of it, and it just says, "On deck, put it on." We did get the weatherproof posters that we attached to the fencing at all those local marinas as well. We also got waterproof mats because one of the other things that you learn is that fishing is a very wet endeavor, and they all change on waterproof mats, which typically are the marketing mats for the fishing industry. So, we partnered with FishSafeBC. They were a phenomenal partner with us. And we went out and we gave out these decks of cards for free and we gave out the mats for free. And the message was very simple. The message was just, "On deck, put it on," and it had the logo of a life vest on it, and the decks of cards similar.

And the feedback that we got was absolutely phenomenal to it in terms of the salience of that message, in terms of fishermen feeling like "Wow, you actually got me". And we did go back out. We did go back out and do research to understand, "Are you actually even using these decks of cards?" "Did you receive them?" And then "Do you have any behaviour change as a result of that?". We recognize that in this case it was attitude change before behaviour change. we were measuring attitudinal change first, and I think that comes to one of the biggest struggles for us, is oftentimes behaviour isn't immediate. So, we're looking at, you know, the leading versus the lagging indicators around behaviour, and for us, a lot of times we're measuring attitudes and thought process.

APPELT: I love that example. I think it's, you know, a perfect example of where the "Aha moment" came from: user research. And if you haven't done that, I certainly wouldn't have come up with a deck of cards, on my own, without having heard that from that population. And then I think it's also great because it pulls in this idea that you heard from them, but it's also pulling on these behavioural insights like normalizing something. And so, the more you see it, if it's in playing cards, if it's everywhere around you, it normalizes it. It's taking something from the user group, and then adding your behavioural insights expertise and putting those together that made this so interesting and so successful.

BUSCHEL: Yes, and then as you and I both know, oftentimes what will happen with that kind of success is people will say, "This is awesome, we need a deck of cards for the construction industry, and the hospital industry, and the restaurant industry". And then it becomes about that education around "Okay, no, that user research at the beginning is what is such an important component of understanding how to meet these people where they're at", which will be different for many of us.

APPELT: Absolutely. So, it sounds like there you were doing interviews. Do you find the interviews are a common tool you use for user research?

BUSCHEL: Yeah, we will use whatever is necessary to, in the most cost-effective way, be able to best understand. So sometimes we're using secondary research, if that already exists on the end user group. Oftentimes for very sensitive issues, we'll use ODBs, online discussion boards. We've been doing a lot around mental health, and around substances. And for those, we will use ODBs because it allows us to get out to a larger group of people in it in a confidential way, where people feel safe.

APPELT: I'm sorry, could you just back up for our listeners who don't know much about ODB, and just give it like a two sentence about how those work?

BUSCHEL: Yeah. An online discussion board allows people to opt in, you send out invitations to a large group, just like a survey. They would opt in and they would have confidential name that's assigned to them. You're asked a series of questions, and you're given 24 hours or 48 hours to be able to respond to those. And then based on that, in the background, we're able to live-see those feeds so that we can adjust our questioning and then ask another series of questions, and it might be a one-day ODB or a two-day ODB. And that allows us to be able to be a little bit more nimble than a focus group, where you really only have that hour, hour and a half.

APPELT: Great. Thank you. So, I think you've already started to dive into this, but what do you see the advantages of ODBs being?

BUSCHEL: I love an ODB for really being able to dig into the most sensitive issues that often become our biggest problems, our biggest opportunities, especially in our field. We are really looking at the field of mental health and how that impacts people's well-being while they're at the workplace, and that's a very difficult topic for people. We know everyone is willing to talk about their brother, or their uncle, or their friend who suffers from mental health, or who is feeling mentally unwell. But it's very difficult to see from a personal perspective. And what an online discussion board does for us, is it anonymizes you so that you can really feel very open in having that conversation at a very real level that allows us to get much deeper than we could through other means.

APPELT: And so, do you see pretty good participation numbers on those ODBs?

BUSCHEL: Yeah, we really do. We do use, I think we've mentioned this a little bit, we do use a lot of different methods. What we tend to do is try to figure out who it is that we're talking to, in what industry, and what age group that we're targeting, and we adjust our research methods accordingly. So, we will do text message surveys in the construction industry or with young people. We will do one-on-one interviews in health care. We recognize that there's different methods that work better for different people, and so we try to do a quick profile, first of all, to best understand that user group that we're getting -- the end group that we're getting to. Then, we choose our research method, and I'm speaking with you predominantly about online discussion boards today, only because I feel like there is an ability for us to get to a large breadth of our province, and a larger group of people with more sensitive questions. And so, I feel like it's one of the tools that we see ourselves pulling out quite a bit more often now.

APPELT: And in a COVID world, it's the tool for the times.

BUSCHEL: It sure is. It sure is.

APPELT: I think you've really done a great job of illustrating how "it's not a single tool" is the answer. It's the tool that matches the population. So, what are some disadvantages of user research that you've seen, whether it's some specific methods or just limitations of user research, generally?

BUSCHEL: I think the limitations of user research is that it provides one portion of the view of the issue for us. And so, if we were to just solve an issue based on user research, and not based on the statistics that might help to fulfill the rest of that picture, or the business goals, or recognizing what's potentially in our case, what the legislative requirements are, those are all very important components to filling out the entire picture of what our strategy is. And while I think user research is a very important component, it on its own does not create the full picture for us. We do have to be really, really careful with that, that we're just not relying too heavily on one piece of the puzzle.

APPELT: Yeah, absolutely. I love that metaphor of the piece of the puzzle. I think that really drives home how it's crucial you can't have the puzzle without it. But it's not the puzzle, it's just one of the pieces.

BUSCHEL: Absolutely.

APPELT: So, given all of these multiple tools you've used, what are some of the tips you have for successfully conducting user research?

BUSCHEL: I think the biggest tip that I would have for successfully conducting user research is to start with fully understanding your problem statement or your opportunity statement. Really dig into it, because I think often times, we start with what we think is a problem or opportunity. "Hey, we need to make this mechanism to change this person's behaviour or this group's behaviour." But if you ask more questions, you dig in deeper to where the root of that problem or opportunity is.

And then the second key component is doing a persona built. So being able to understand who it is, truly who it is, and get into the feet and minds and hearts of the people that you're trying to reach out to before you design what your research is to be able to engage with them on the questions that you have, because we're all people. We're all people who consume services and we can all tell when it's not genuine. So just like you and I know when somebody hasn't done their research to be able to kick something off, everybody else does, too, and it's really, really important that you pay people that respect to begin with.

APPELT: Absolutely. I think that's really, really important points to keep in mind and also just-- it's only valuable when it's done correctly. Just like anything else, it can be done well or done poorly. And if you spend the time to do it right, then user research can just be so valuable for the project.

BUSCHEL: Yeah. And I think you actually raise a really great point. It's only valuable when it's done correctly. And I think many of us have been asked in the past to conduct to user research as a way of communicating something with people. So, I'm you know, I'm going to do user research with you, but really, I'm telling you that this is something that's coming down for you and it's kind of a communication channel and that isn't the right way to do user research. The right way is to really seek to understand first.

And so constantly, I think our job and I love, that's part of why I love all of the work that you do, Kirstin, is to help to educate people that really if you're wanting to do user research, you have to take the time to do it right, and you have to try to do it in as unbiased a way as we can. Recognizing we all have our biases, but try not to ask people if they really love their ham sandwich that they're eating. Ask them what it is that they actually want for lunch.

APPELT: Absolutely. Yeah. And I like that point you made, too, about you know, it sounds like user research is always by nature a dialogue, because you're interviewing or whatever. But a lot of times it's kind of a

superficial dialogue and it has to be a true dialogue where you actually take into account what they say and then do something with it. Otherwise, you can burn those bridges.

BUSCHEL: So quickly. Yes.

APPELT Well, taking a step back and looking at the larger picture of BI in BC, since you've been someone who's been involved in our growing BI community of practice over the last several years, since really, we started. What do you think are the current and upcoming job opportunities for people with BI skills and knowledge?

BUSCHEL: I think that's a really interesting question. I have loved watching the evolution of what you guys have done with DIBS. I think DIBS is, you know, that came out, how long has this been around now, Kirstin?

APPELT: Depends on what you use as a start date. But I would say about five years.

BUSCHEL: Okay, about five years. So, five years ago, no one would have thought that would have been an opportunity coming out of, and we all know about the brilliance that comes out of UBC, but no, the opportunities that DIBS is creating, the opportunities that BC BIG is creating, I know that Heather is another person that you have interviewed, and the opportunities her group generates in this province are incredible.

And then you see, you know, organizations like ours and I know there's a lot of other organizations like ours. BCHydro has been using behavioural insights for a while, and I know many others are. And it is really interesting to see those opportunities arise, and more than just consulting.

I think the whole idea of customer experience, of employee experience, of stakeholder experience, of service design as a whole, those are becoming really salient careers for people, that have behavioural insights as a background. And I know personally right now, I am I am looking to hire two positions, both of them are in experience design.

APPELT: You heard it here first! They're posted currently.

BUSCHEL: And I'm really very interested in the applicants that have behavioural insights in their back pocket, because that's a huge part of being able to design the services that we create for our stakeholders, whether internal or external, is being able to have, to first take a step back and apply all of those theories of behavioural insights.

APPELT: Absolutely, yeah, I think it's really important to see it as part of your skillset and that it can be used and really taken advantage of, in so many different opportunities. There's just so many ways it can be applied.

BUSCHEL: Yes. And it's funny, like in our organization, I have people that reach out to me from our insurance department, from our I.T. department, from our prevention department. There are so many people that are interested in behavioural insights or who have read the book, or who have like, been interested in taking the course that UBC is providing, and I love that, because that to me shows that you don't have to had to be a psychologist or a marketer to take this on and that you can apply all of the learnings from behavioural insights in whatever field it is that you are in.

APPELT: Absolutely. Do you have a message for our BI practitioners in training?

BUSCHEL: Yeah, I think the greatest message, first of all, is congratulations for taking the step to take a program like this. It's a huge commitment of yourself, to challenge yourself, to expand your own tool belt and

recognize it's just one of many tools that you have. But also, I would say take this opportunity over the course of the next year, to learn from and absorb the practices of as many as possible while you're taking in all that coursework and learning so much.

Also make sure that you take the opportunity to learn from all the different physical examples that are out there, because there are so, so many of them. And those are the really cool, inspiring pieces that might help you to help your organization to think in a completely different way about a problem. And I think that's really, really exciting for all of the organizations out there that they have you taking this program.

APPELT: Yeah. And just the ability to learn from one another with everyone coming from such different backgrounds. I think we have over 20 different degree areas that people are coming from, different sectors, so just the wealth of knowledge that you can learn from your peers as well.

BUSCHEL: That is. I totally agree. Do you have time for one more quick story?

APPELT: Yeah, absolutely.

BUSCHEL: OK, so one of the very first times that we actually ever got the opportunity to use behavioural insights that WorkSafeBC was because of precisely that. There was an issue that we had with log truck drivers, and it was just there was a cluster of incidents that had happened. There were log truck driver accidents that had happened and there's just a grouping of them. And so, again, we were told, "Hey, you need to write a letter, and you need to tell all of these log truck driver operators what the rules are and what's happening". And we said, "Can we take one week to be able to do a little bit of research with the group, first of all", and the log truck driving industry came back to us and said, "We're so excited that you've taken this opportunity to take a step back and to figure out what it is that will resonate with our industry".

And they were unbelievable in helping to facilitate us doing very, very quick interviews with a whole bunch of log truck drivers where we learn things like the log truck drivers are cousins and brothers and uncles of previous log truck drivers. They work up mostly in small town British Columbia. They are community guys. They are guys. They are the macho of the macho of that community. They are a part of the Rotary Club. They run Little League or the local hockey association, and they're incredibly proud of their vehicles. One of the early ideas that that we had together with our prevention team was we're going to create decals that they're going to stick on their windows and we're going to build on to that machismo. But then as we did these interviews, very, very quickly in the first week, these guys said to us, "Oh my gosh, like I take off my boots before I get into the cab of my truck when it's slushy or snowy outside". That's how much they care about their vehicle.

So, because of everything that they told us, we ended up by creating something totally different, which was a decal like you would get from your ICBC, or your you know, where you could just peel it on or peel it off, and it didn't have the WorkSafeBC logo on it because we recognized that that was something that maybe wasn't seen positively in that industry. But what we were getting to was the whole idea of wanting to ensure that they were healthy and safe at the end of the day. And so, we applied this, and the whole idea was that "Real truckers stay safe on the road", and there was a picture of, you know, a macho guy showing, flexing his muscle, and then we sent a letter, not to the log truck driving companies, but to the families of every log truck driver, because we recognize that for most of them, they're sole proprietors and it was their wives that run their businesses. And we said, unfortunately, there's a cluster of incidents happening in your community, and it's being caused by three things. One, two, three. This letter was half a page long. It's being caused by speed, by load weight and by maintenance of rig. We know that you're a part of this community. We know that this

matters to you, and we want to make sure that you're aware of this so that you can help keep everybody safe in your community.

And the impact of that, in that community, resulted from log truck drivers across small communities in BC, putting their hands up to say, "I want to be on the face of this going forward". So as a result, the province of British Columbia put up these incredible signs together with us that have these pictures of these men, who are these, you know, the strength of their, the pillars of their community who happen to be log truck drivers, talking about safety, and talking about making sure that they're safe on the road. And this has been, I mean, that was eight years ago, and these things are still prevalent in each of their small-town communities. And, you know, a huge component of that was because the log truck driving industry said to us, "Holy cow, are we ever happy that you're taking this step back? Let us enable you as quickly as possible". And so, it's really cool to see the ins that you can pull with people when you just take that step back and that breathe to ask those questions and to be curious.

APPELT: That's an amazing story. I think that really continues to drive home this idea that you have to take that step back. And if people know that you're listening, that's really a really powerful invitation.

BUSCHEL: Yeah, I totally agree.

APPELT: Well, this has been phenomenal. I raised really high expectations at the beginning of our chat, but unsurprisingly, you exceeded them. I feel like I learned a lot. I had some good laughs. So, it was a typical Kerri conversation. And I hope everyone listening enjoyed it as much as I did. Thank you for listening to Calling DIBS.

BUSCHEL: You are far too kind, thank you so much for having me, I really appreciate it.
