



[Episode 43: "Using BI to Find the Simplicity Buried in the Complexity"](#)

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

Kerri Buschel returns to the podcast to talk about the value of BI for employees, employers, organizations, and other choice architects. We talk about how the Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights enables folks to hone their BI knowledge and skills and apply them directly to their capstone projects. We also discuss the special magic of working across disciplines, sectors, jurisdictions, and tools to tackle crunchy problems.

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 Kerri Buschel.

Kerri is the Director of Experience, Marketing and Insights at WorkSafeBC. And this is the highlight of my week because Kerri is always at the forefront of BI in BC. She and her team at WorkSafe do really incredible projects applying behavioural insights. She's a fantastic speaker and an all-around amazing person who I'm fortunate to have opportunities to work with here and there, including co-hosting the annual BIG Difference BC conference. So welcome to the podcast, Kerri. Thank you for joining us.

KERRI BUSCHEL, GUEST: Oh my goodness, Kirstin, I want to come over there and give you a hug. That was the best introduction ever! I'm very excited to be here with you.

APPELT: Well, thanks for joining. So many of our listeners will know you, but for those who don't, can you just tell us a little bit about yourself and your role at WorkSafe?

BUSCHEL: Sure. So our team at WorkSafeBC is the Experience, Marketing and Insights team, as you said. So the idea behind what we do is we use research, mostly behavioural research, to try and better understand the people we serve. In British Columbia, that's that the 2.3 million workers and 250,000 employers out of British Columbia, understand what they need, what they perceive about their own health and safety, and about WorkSafeBC and how we can better serve them.

And then we create strategies together with the business units at WorkSafeBC, so either in prevention or in claims or in insurance to be able to meet the needs of the people we serve, and also in understanding where biases exist, to be able to help people to navigate new ways to be the healthiest and the safest that they can be while they're in the workplace.

APPELT: Thanks, and last time you were on the podcast, we talked a little bit about how WorkSafeBC was starting to use behavioural insights and the way you really neatly incorporate exploratory user research into projects. So I highly recommend folks listen to episode three to hear about what fishermen, playing cards, truck drivers and decals all have in common. But I thought this time we could go a little different direction and talk about how WorkSafeBC has been a leader in the space in a different way, which is you've been on the

steering committee for the Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights since its inception. So what drew you to the idea of a certificate in behavioural insights and why did you want to be involved in the development?

BUSCHEL: Really honoured to be on the committee with you, Kirstin, in the development of that certificate. I think it's a really important piece in the BC landscape to demonstrate that we value education in this field. And I think when we talk to researchers, especially behavioural researchers who specialize in insights or when we talk to marketers or psychologists or people and in behavioural economics, we recognize that everybody has their niche focus.

And what I loved about the certificate program is that it really pulls together the expertise from multiple different areas and then kind of focuses it in, I think, in that behavioural insights lens. And lots of people would say, "I'm interested in this, but I don't know what to do next" or "I don't have the basics in how to design the research, or don't know what and RCT is". I think I was really excited to be able to play a role in this because I think what this does is it democratizes that knowledge a little bit more and it allows more people, especially in public service, but across all different types of organizations, to really get that base understanding of the value and the potential for behavioural insights and then how to apply it in their own workplace.

APPELT: I love what you said about the focus, because one of my favourite parts about the cohort so far, and right now we're in our second cohort, is that they are so interdisciplinary, so they're bringing their own lenses and perspectives. And there's something really special about bringing those different perspectives together, and behavioural insights at its heart is very interdisciplinary because it's already bringing together behavioural science, decision science, real world problems. So I think that's a really special marriage that happens in the program.

BUSCHEL: I totally agree, and I actually think it sets up a lot of the future of where many of our fields are going. They're not going to stay stagnant in terms of each running in our own lanes. There really is going to be this intersection and you have to be willing to look up and see the ability for us to be better by creating those intersections. And I feel like this program is one of the things that enables them.

APPELT: Yeah, it's really neat to see behavioural insights as another tool in the toolkit, and we think it's one of the best tools of the toolkit, but it's one of the many tools and they really work so well in complementarity.

BUSCHEL: I have always loved how you have talked about BI as a tool in the toolkit, and I think that that's a really important distinction to make about it. When we can stop looking at BI as a shiny object and start looking at it as one of the tools, or I think as one of our speakers said, as a lens to apply to how we look at the problems, I think that really helps to bring BI to shine in its true possibility and light, which is it's not the be all end all solution, but it in complement with many other tools and lenses, can really help us to get to that better place at the end of the day.

APPELT: Yeah, or if we wanted to be hip, we could talk about how it's like a new filter you can put on the photo to add the bunny ears.

BUSCHEL: We should create that filter, that would be amazing. Maybe at the conference, everybody come to the conference.

APPELT: Love that. And so compared to other professional development opportunities, and maybe you've spoken to this a little bit, but what do you think the value of the certificate is?

BUSCHEL: I actually think about this quite a bit, because on my team, we often talk about professional development. We recognize that in a world, I'm going to go off topic, I apologize, but in a world where it's really tough to keep employees engaged in workplaces and where we know loyalty is a bit of a tricky thing, we are constantly looking at, well, what is it that keeps our employees feeling engaged in their jobs?

And I don't think we can ever value enough the opportunity for growth and for education. And so we're constantly looking together at those opportunities for professional development. What I love about this certificate and is different than other certificates or other pieces is that it actually allows you the real world application. So you can put the theory together with your actual work in your actual workplace, and you can further a project that you really have in real life. And to me, that's a tremendous amount of value because that's the real world application and that's enabling that growth and that education in a way that really supports an employee to shine down a new path.

APPELT: Yeah, I love that. And kind of on the flip side, so that's the bit on the student experience, but WorkSafeBC has had some employees in each cohort. So from the employer perspective, what's it been like having employees go through the program? Has it benefited WorkSafeBC?

BUSCHEL: I think it absolutely has. I'm not going to lie it takes up a lot of mindshare of the people while they go through the program, and students have to be prepared and employers have to be prepared to really support the time that it takes to learn the material and also to be able to apply it through the project, which is a big one.

What I found in terms of the value and I've talked to a few other employers who have found something really similar is the idea of increasing capacity in your organization for the knowledge of the potential that BI has. So when there's only a few of us who are really passionate about this space and we're, you know, one off helping people with specific projects, it limits the amount of capacity we have and it limits the influence that BI itself can have in the organization. But by participating in a program like this, the people that are actually in the program are the ones that are then becoming like the evangelists to other parts of the organization about why this is a valuable tool to use and how.

APPELT: Absolutely. And so each year, WorkSafeBC students have been fortunate to work on a WorkSafeBC problem as their capstone project, and they each take in a different facet at this core problem, which is helping workers return to work after an injury. So can you share a bit about that and how that problem got chosen, how students applying a BI approach has helped with that problem.

BUSCHEL: Essentially, what we challenged our students who were going through the program to do is to take a look at our strategic plan and take a look at what the key initiatives were for the organization. So make sure that we're aligning to what would drive value to the organization, and then understand if there are any specific real problems that needed to be tackled in those initiatives. And when we think about injured workers recovering and returning to work, there's lots of different pieces that we knew that we could help to be able to support it in a better or different way.

And so we then encouraged those students, our employees to have conversations with leaders across the field of claims and really understand if using research and the journey mapping research at the beginning to better understand the problem and then applying a potential solution and measuring the results of it would actually help them to further their initiative along. And we ended up with a really good, I would say, like a juicy, short list of problems that BI as a lens or as a tool could really support in complement to other tools that we needed to pull out at the same time. And I can talk for hours about the project that's going on right now. I think it's unbelievable.

APPELT: Yeah. So one thing I'm curious about the project is I've heard from the students and from you a bit about the Capstone project other than specifically tackling the problem, there have been other impacts on WorkSafeBC of having other people involved in conversations around the Capstone project. So can you talk about that a little bit?

BUSCHEL: Yes, absolutely. But to let the cat out of the bag on our Capstone project, essentially Summer and Laura, who are leading this and are brilliant and wonderful individuals, they have taken on the challenge of taking a look at our ability to be able to text injured workers a reminder about filling out a form so that we can help move along their process faster, essentially. And it sounds simple, and it sounds like something that we should just be able to do. But it involves so many different groups at WorkSafeBC and so what that helped I think these two individuals to do was to raise awareness about the value of BI across WorkSafeBC and then also to problem-solve across many, many different levels, very quick.

And so, you know, the things that we might not be thinking about are privacy impact of asking for people's cell phone numbers so that we can text them. Taking a look at what our ability is to send out a mass text versus not, what do we do if people want that to stop? What do we do if we need to test following up in different ways? How does this work on the employee's time, who are having to send out these messages because it's not the two employees from the project that are having to send those pieces out? What kind of training is involved? And then all of the different facets, as well as the measurement of success and what can be directly attributed versus what is like peripherally attributed. And then how does that impact overall experience? Because my team is in charge of trying to help our organization to create better experiences for people. So if this feels like it's a pain in the butt to get a text, we don't want to be creating a negative experience for people. So it's all of those things, it's all of those different things.

And so that's meant that those two people in particular have had to have conversations at a lot of different levels that I don't think that they had anticipated originally, but I do think has helped them to do their job and to see the landscape of the complexity of the work that we do in a completely different way. But it's also helped all of these different groups like they were telling me that they had touched more than 12 different groups at WorkSafeBC, like significant size groups at WorkSafeBC in developing this project plan. And all of those groups are coming in talking about the applications of BI and other things that they're thinking about now. So it's great. It raises that awareness, right?

APPELT: Yeah. And I think that's so true of every project. The students or project partners will come in and say, "Okay, it's this really simple problem, we're just going to X". And whether it's like, develop a new sign or send emails for the first time or try text messaging, when it comes down to it, it's like, "Oh, well, we have to get this group involved in that group involved. And hey, it's not going to be automated. So someone's actually going to have to do the thing", and they end up all being just these massive projects.

And then it's-- I try to reassure students by saying, you know, this is the nature of BI projects because they are so cross-functional, cross-sectoral. So on the one hand, the good news is that it's not you, you've not done anything wrong. On the other side, all BI projects are like this and this isn't going to be the first time you're having these cross-functional discussions trying to just figure out how you can do what seemed like a really straightforward thing.

BUSCHEL: I think that as people, we would love for things to be straightforward and clear. And as soon as they're not, it's like, "Oh, what's going wrong?". But I think you hit the nail on the head. This is the way these projects go, and I think the faster that we can learn that it is just that big, hairy knot of different pieces. And

you have to, you know, slowly and carefully untangle some of them, and the few others you can pull out faster in order to make it all work. That is just the nature of the beast. But it's all worth it.

APPELT: Yeah, and I think it's often true that a simple experience is buried in complexity. So like if we want the user experience, the worker experience, the citizen experience, the shopper experience to be simple, it usually means that it's really messy behind the scenes because you're taking that on for them.

BUSCHEL: Can you repeat that because I feel like that's the most important thing for anybody looking at this or listening to this to hear. What did you say? A simple experience is buried-

APPELT: Yeah, in complexity. Yeah. It's like someone has to do the complicated part. So if we don't want it to be the shopper, the citizen, the worker, it has to be on the choice architect side.

BUSCHEL: I couldn't agree more. And I think so often we spend time trying to figure out how to simplify your own jobs. And in doing that, we end up by creating unnecessary complexity for the people that we're now doing this experience to, and that we need to show that perspective. Again, I love that BI has started to do that.

APPELT: Yeah, hopefully we make some good progress on that and eventually things are simpler. Well, zooming out a little bit from WorkSafe, do you have advice for other companies or managers who are considering encouraging their employees to think about the program or for managers thinking about hiring students out of a program like this?

BUSCHEL: Okay, I'm going to take the second part first, so for managers, considering hiring students out of a program like this, I think asking the students to concisely, you know, in five 10 minutes, be able to describe to you what their problem was, what the unexpected incidents were that happened as they worked through their problem and then what the outcome and the learnings were. I think that will tell you a lot about those individuals. And I think the experience I have had very pleasantly in watching all of the presentations throughout the last couple of years, it's been really incredible to see how much the students have grown through each of these projects. So I think that that's an incredible question to ask.

In terms of advice for companies or managers who are considering encouraging employees to consider the program. I've done it in the Buddy system. And we have found that with our employees so far, that's really worked well. So the idea that if you have a couple of people that have interest, especially, I think if they don't have exactly the same background, it actually works out even a little bit better. So maybe you've got somebody that's more of a researcher or more analytical in nature and somebody who's more of a marketer or more of a communicator or more of a problem solver with a specific environmental focus or whatever it is, they can match up their skill sets in that way, and they can lean on each other as well through the program. And that also helps you to leverage if you do choose a capstone project within your own organization that really helps you to leverage your own expertise within there.

I think being aware that it is actually an investment. It's an investment of their time, of their mindshare and seeing that you as a manager support that and maybe even throw in a couple of coffees to ask them how it's going along the way, I think that that would mean a lot. You'll get a ton out of it. There's no question you will get a ton out of your employees being a part of this program, but it does take showing that you support them through it because it is a huge learning curve.

APPELT: Yeah, I really think having you as a kind of champion behind the students has made a world of difference for them. And I really like how you have the buddy system, like you said, because I think that's nice.

The program often is very new for folks and having someone going through it at the same time. And obviously, you can always lean on students outside of your organization, but when someone's applying it in the same way as you are and coming from the same organizational setting, I think it really helps you have that buddy for conversations and exploration and questions.

BUSCHEL: Yeah, absolutely.

APPELT: So for program graduates who are coming out of the program or a similar program and looking for roles, what are you seeing? What advice do you have, thoughts for recent grads?

BUSCHEL: I think it's a growing field, and I think many organizations still don't really understand how to articulate what they're looking for when they are looking for this skill set. And I think we're seeing lots of different language out there. But as we talked about at the beginning, the whole idea of the crossing of multiple different paths through a certificate like this one, through a focus like this one, I think that's where the future of skills that organizations really need lies.

And so advice I would have for program graduates would be to apply for a job working with WorkSafe. Would honestly be to take a look at where they can help to shape the experiences of people in their chosen field. So whether again, whether that's working with people, whether that's working in environmental studies, whether that's working in a field like ours, which is health and safety, understanding that that skill set is hugely valuable and finding the way to articulate it as a lens as opposed to a stand alone skill set, I think is really powerful.

And in terms of what we see out there, I think you're seeing the same thing as I'm seeing, we've had these conversations before, people are struggling with what to call it. But this is where the world is going in terms of what's needed. We need for people to see first to understand what the world is like for us, where the barriers exist and what would make things better or easier or more clear in order to help us to be more financially sound or safer or healthier or whatever it is at the end of the day.

APPELT: Yeah, and I think you really hit the nail on the head there, I think it's hugely growing, but sometimes that growth is masked, because even though behavioural insights has like its ethos to make things simple, we have not made searching for jobs or advertised jobs this space simple, because is it behavioural insights. Is it behavioural science? Does 'behavioural' have a 'u' or does it not have a 'u'.

BUSCHEL: Yes, yes, I totally agree. And then I've also heard people say, like, "Oh, you're talking about behavioural psychology? Oh, you're talking about OB. You're talking about this?" And it's no, it's actually it's a mix of all of these different pieces, and it's pulling together those disciplines through a more common lens across them. Absolutely. Yeah.

APPELT: Yeah, yeah, it's very interesting. Like, when I was in my Psychology PhD program, someone asked me if I would consider myself a behavioural economist and with my academic glasses on, I was like, "Absolutely not, I am psychology and I have a background in economics, but I'm not technically a Behavioural Economist". And then you get out and then you realize, "Oh, terms are used differently in academia than they are in applied settings. Sure, I am a Behavioural Economist, I'm in that space, sure.". But yeah, the way it's -- I think the interdisciplinarity is a huge benefit. But then it also makes it a hindrance because people use terms differently in the different sectors and disciplines.

BUSCHEL: Absolutely. It's funny. I am a marketer. I love brands. I love understanding what the perceptions are of anything. Not, you know, not the way you might traditionally think about brand, but what is your personal brand? What's the brand at an organization? What makes you think about them differently? What is it that

motivates you around them? What do you think about values? All of those pieces. Well, there's so much about behavioural economics that is tied in to that. And when you work, especially in a government field like my own, the word marketing becomes a bit of a bad word people say like, "Oh my gosh, why would you need marketing? Like that doesn't make any sense". And so it's interesting. Like I've seen the application of so many different words to articulate what I've always felt was this field of marketing and brand.

But then, as I learned more and more about the application of insights, predominantly behavioural insights and the whole field of behavioural science, and that lens over top of it, I thought, "Okay, now this is where we actually need to be going". Especially in public sector, it is about designing better experiences for our own employees, for the people that we serve. And ultimately about helping people to feel good at the end of the day, while they're making good or better decisions. And that's really the end goal. So call it whatever you want, although it is fun to see what some people do call things.

APPELT: Absolutely. So we talked a bit about how the certificate has filled the gap, because previously, which I don't think we even set up from, but previously before the certificate, there were kind of these boot camps, which are great for an early taste, but you don't really have enough skills to do a project yourself. And then on the other end of the spectrum, we had PhD programs which, having been through one, I can testify, are very intensive, five, seven years.

And so the certificate was meant to fill this gap between the two, and I think we can see that it is doing so. We're producing cohorts of BI practitioners who are at that sweet spot where they have enough skill and training to be able to do BI projects, but they're able to continue working full time. But I know that there's also interest growing in the idea of a BI Master's, and I think that's something you're interested in. So thoughts there? Why do you think a Master's degree, maybe in applied behavioural science, would be a valuable addition to the landscape?

BUSCHEL: I think this is just a continuation of the conversation we've just been having, I think. I think there's a need out there, within Canada, and would love to see it happen within UBC in particular, of leveraging the experts that we do have in UBC academia, together with the applications in real world and business to showcase an Applied Master's. And I think it is just the natural next step to doing the certificate program that we're doing. And it's for those people, and I won't be shy about it, the people like myself who are just really interested in taking their knowledge to the next level. And the reality is we have to be humble about what we do know and how much more we have to learn. And we have to recognize that this field is huge and because it involves so many different disciplines, there is no shortage of things to learn.

And so, as we've now developed the certificate and we've seen how popular it is and how interested people are in it, I think there is going to be a hunger for "Okay, great, this is awesome. And now what's next?". Because I would like to continue to hone my skills or my knowledge in that area, and I fall under that bucket. There's so much I don't know. And I would be so keen to learn from experts in so many different fields that I think pull all of this together. And I think it's fantastic that UBC is starting to potentially think about that.

APPELT: Once we all recover from the certificate. I certainly think it would be fantastic. And that's one of my favourite things about behavioural insights and behavioural science is because there's so much there. It's so interdisciplinary it can be applied to so many problems. You're always learning. Even if you've been working in it for 15 years, 20 years, there's still more and more to learn. And I think it would be really neat to be able to, the certificate does draw across disciplines, but you can only do so much in a year long program. With a Master's being able to draw more on the Psychology, and the Economics and public policy, and everything would be, I think, would be really interesting.

BUSCHEL: I totally agree, and I think it would help to rocket the field into that next level as well and to help us get to where we know the BI community we see has the ability to get to.

APPELT: Well, on that note, what do you see on the horizon for the BI community in BC as it continues to grow? We've seen a huge explosion of growth in the last five years. So what do you think's on the horizon?

BUSCHEL: I'm really excited about the horizon for BI in British Columbia as a whole. I think as you've talked about that explosion of growth, I think what that's also help to do is to normalize a little bit the understanding of what BI is and what it can do. And I think I talked about it being a shiny object, as with, if you listen to the other podcast, the fishing cards, the deck of cards for fishing, you do a deck of cards and it resonates really well and has the impact you want, and then everybody wants a deck of cards, I feel like BI is a little bit the same. "Oh, we have to apply BI here." Well, it's not always the best tool to use, but if we look at it in the context of everything else, you know, maybe it is the great tool over here, or use it to a lesser degree or in concert with other tools or applications over there.

And what I'm seeing more and more, is that normalization, and I'm really excited about that because then I think it helps each tool to be able to grow and shine in its own way. And you've just talked about it. I think the way that BI is evolving and behavioural sciences are evolving, it needs the space to be able to continue to grow and for us to continue to be curious about the possibilities of it.

I also really do believe that the future in British Columbia isn't just behavioural psychology or OB or marketing or an economic lens or a business practice process lens. I think it is the intersection of all those things. I call it experience. Other people might call it something different, but I think looking at the applications of the tools and the adaptations that we use through that BI lens will really help us to be able to get there. And I think that that's the future of where we're all going, which is exciting because it means it's more than just that narrow subset. It means so many of us with so many different background disciplines coming together.

APPELT: Yeah, absolutely. I love that. And I think part of what's neat is that captures what can happen in BI but also across. So like within BI, we talk about BI as a tool in the toolkit, but within BI, there's also a set of tools. And right now, because it's newer, everyone's using the fork, the default, the social norm. But as we get deeper into the space, we can use the different tools and it's about the marriage of the tool to the problem, like you said. So even within BI, that applies.

But then, like you said, it's also BI and other tools and the larger toolkit, the macro toolkit, all those intersections and the figuring out what, it's not the cookie cutter, it's the fixing the solution to the exact problem.

BUSCHEL: Yes, I totally agree, I love that.

APPELT: And maybe in the next few years we can land out what we're going to call it.

BUSCHEL: And for some reason, I have a picture that I'm drawing in my head as you're talking about what this toolkit looks like and a sub-tool kit and how nicely colour-coordinated it all is. We should do a different podcast at some point on bullet journaling, because that could really help, as well.

APPELT: Bullet journaling for BI, watch this space.

BUSCHEL: Yes.

APPELT: Well, before we wrap up, do you have a message for our BI practitioners in training, the folks currently going through the program?

BUSCHEL: I do. One, I think you're inspirational. I think we know how hard it is to put yourself through a program as rigorous as this at the same time as doing your everyday work. And it's not easy and you're challenging yourself in a significant way. And I think that's awesome. So congratulations for making that happen.

And two I really look forward to seeing what you learn and to you sharing with all of us what you've learned out of the program that would also help us to make the program even better as it continues to evolve and develop. And we're only a couple of years into this. The people that have designed it are absolutely brilliant. The one that I'm speaking to in particular. But I think the beauty of the designers of the program is that they're really looking to continue to evolve it and make it better. And so learning from you along the way, like not just from what you've learned, but from how you would do things slightly differently going forward to keep evolving this is awesome.

APPELT: Yeah, absolutely love playing the evidence based lens internally and learning from the data of the first two cohorts. I know, the first cohort is bummed that their year didn't have a break, and now we've introduced a break. I think your message about how amazing it is for them to take this on top of everything else going on in their lives and including a pandemic, I think that message is perfectly timed because I know a lot of students are just getting their projects into the field and it's been a bit of a slog. It's that part of the BI project where it's a bit contentious at times. So I think that is really good for everyone to remember that they're doing something huge and take a moment to appreciate the journey that they're on.

BUSCHEL: You know, as you say that I am thinking about Laura and Summer on my team and they shared with us a picture of the two of them out for dinner, just cheers-ing the fact that they actually got their project out in field. And they did an incredible job of working through so many different problems to get to that point, big and small. And as a result, I think that they have brought along with them a lot more people at WorkSafeBC who are interested in BI and the application of it. So they're going to see success in so many different levels. So I hope that everyone who's in the project right now has somebody that they can go raise a glass with, and give a little cheers to themselves for making it to this point and getting their project out there.

APPELT: Absolutely well-deserved glasses or snacks for everyone.

BUSCHEL: Yes. Yes.

APPELT: Well, thank you, Kerri. I was, as you know, eagerly anticipating our chat, but as usual, it exceeded my expectations. Could chat for hours and the BI community is so fortunate to have you among us. So thank you for sharing your time and wisdom today.

BUSCHEL: Thank you so, so much for having me. I always loved talking with you as well, and obviously learning from you. And I really look forward to listening in on other podcasts.

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