



Episode 65: "Hitting Snooze, Taking Out the Trash, & Other Everyday BI Opportunities"

with Kirstin Appelt, Research Director of UBC Decision Insights for Business & Society (UBC DIBS)

Guest host Lindsay Miles-Pickup puts Kirstin Appelt in the hot seat to answer which BI-based superpower she would like to acquire, where she succeeds and fails in using BI in daily life, and which everyday inconvenience she would love to tackle with BI. We also tackle more traditional topics like how people can integrate BI into their work, exciting applications of BI, and why "surprising" behaviour isn't always so unexpected when you dig deeper.

Transcript:

LINDSAY MILES-PICKUP, GUEST HOST: Welcome to this edition of Calling DIBS. I'm your guest host, Lindsay Miles-Pickup, Methods Specialist with the BC Behavioural Insights Group and a graduate of UBC's Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights.

As you know, Calling DIBS explores the fascinating world of behavioural insights with leading experts. And we, as listeners, have been lucky to have these conversations led by Dr. Kirstin Appelt, Research Director at the University of British Columbia's Decision Insights for Business and Society, as well as the Academic Director of UBC's Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights. Kirstin is also a Behavioural Science Consultant who has worked with a number of organizations, including our own BC Behavioural Insights Group.

In these episodes, you've heard Kirstin's passion for using behavioural insights to make a positive difference in the world. Kirstin, we have been so lucky to have you lead these conversations about the field of behavioural science. But it's been a while since we've called DIBS on you. So, for this very special episode today, we're "calling DIBS" on DIBS. So, Kirstin, welcome to your podcast.

KIRSTIN APPELT, GUEST: Thank you, Lindsay, for having me and for your very kind introduction. It feels weirdly self-congratulatory for a guest host to be complimenting me. I feel like I just need to point out that this was not my idea. I'm more than happy to go along with it, but it was not my plan.

MILES-PICKUP: Well, Kirstin, we're going to throw some fun questions at you today, but I wanted to start by asking you one of the tougher questions, and that is, who has been your favourite Certificate graduate and why was it me?

APPELT: Hahaha, love it. Obviously, you and all of your cohort mates. But all jokes aside, I do want to say that we have been so lucky to have such amazing students in the Certificate Program, and I've gotten to teach at various levels at UBC in the Master's programs, the Undergrad programs, But there's really something special about the cohorts that come together in the Certificate.

I really love how these different people are coming from different backgrounds, different locations around Canada and the world, and everyone has the common goal: learning how to use Behavioural science to nudge for good. So, I think I'm in the fortunate position of having 87 favourite certificate students and counting.

MILES-PICKUP: That was a very politically correct answer. Thanks for that Kirstin, but I concur. I've been so lucky to meet so many of the graduates myself, and there really are an amazing group of people who've gone through the program. Kirstin, you have been such a pioneer in this field and you've been a mentor to so many of us. You've provided so much guidance to individuals, whether it's in their educational journey, or in some cases, including very much my own, you've provided incredibly valuable career advice and guidance.

So, I'd love to know, can you provide an overview of your own journey in this career and how you got started in the field of behavioural insights?

APPELT: Using my own question against me. I love it. Yeah, happy to have supported other folks and hopefully haven't led too many people astray. For me, I majored in economics in university, and then I paired that with a minor in psychology because I couldn't manage the credit schedule to have a double major.

But for me, I was fascinated by these two different ways of looking at the world. I started with economics, and that was this very microeconomic model of what people should be doing to maximize outcomes. And then when I found psychology and these theories of describing what people actually do, I realized that these were just two different ways of looking at the same world.

And then in my senior year, I had an economics seminar, and the professor introduced us to "Save More Tomorrow" by Richard Thaler and Shlomo Benartzi. And I think maybe we even had a preprint because to date myself, this was 2002, 2003, and for me it was just an electrifying moment, reading the way Thaler and Bernartzi combined psychology and economics to help people overcome these barriers, which in this case were towards saving for retirement. Just absolutely resonated with me in a way that the psychology and the economics alone hadn't.

So, this idea of behavioural economics as a bridge between the rational and more human actor models of the world, really just made sense to me in a way nothing else had. So, I took that and wrote a class assignment that brainstormed all of the different psychological insights that could be used to help people save, to the point where my professor said "Okay, you can choose one at a time. You can't do it all at once.", which maybe is like a motto I should have carried with me more in life. But anyway, that was it. And I was hooked on applied behavioural science from that moment on.

From there I went on to a Ph.D. in psychology that was focused on the science of decision-making. And then I did a couple of post-docs at Columbia, one with the Center for Research on Environmental Decisions and one with the Center for Decision Sciences. So all very decision-making oriented, then spent some time focused solely on the consulting side while I was living in California. And that really helped crystallize for me what I wanted to be doing.

I realized that I liked having one foot in the academic world, and one foot in the applied world, a.k.a. the real world. And I didn't want to be in one or the other. I wanted to be in both, I guess, similar to how I didn't want to be in psychology or in economics. I wanted to be in both. I just like to be in everything. Luckily for me, when I came to BC, I was able to do just that and I now get to work as a "pracademic" straddling the academic and the practitioner worlds.

MILES-PICKUP: You have such an interesting background, and I always find it interesting, we often say in the field of academia, people often study things that they cannot do, so, where making a decision between two majors may have been difficult, led you down to this field of studying judgment and decision-making.

APPELT: I always say don't go to dinner with behavioural scientists, decision scientists, because none of us can ever choose anything off the menu.

MILES-PICKUP: But it is truly one of the most fascinating parts, I think, of behavioural science, because so many of us have such diverse career backgrounds and we bring so many different pieces into the field. And I think that really speaks to the diversity of perspectives that this field has and makes it such a stronger field overall.

The Save More Tomorrow study is also a fun one because I think they've had not only a huge impact on people's financial returns, but also just a huge impact on the field of the subject area overall, because so many of us have had that as our first introduction to behavioural science.

So earlier, Kirstin, you mentioned your role at the University of British Columbia. And I'd love to know more about what led you to your role as Research Director with UBC DIBS. So, what inspired you to build the field of behavioural science in British Columbia and most importantly, to support the development of new practitioners? And I must warn you, please don't judge me on all my triple barreled questions here, because clearly not employing the greatest of research methods.

APPELT: Just like me who can't choose anything. You also are too excited and choose too many things at once. I love it. Ah, well, first off, of course I want to stress that it wasn't that I built the field of behavioural science in British Columbia. I am not that awesome. But it wasn't a one-woman quest.

But really, it was a hugely massive group effort. And we've been supported by so many different folks who I'll try to mention as I talk a little bit. But everyone has really come together around the idea of supporting the growth of the field and the journeys of individual BI practitioners. So, I'm just lucky to have been at the right place at the right time and surrounded by the right people.

As for how we started working in the space in 2014, my colleagues at UBC and I started to form UBC Decision Insights for Business & Society. And fun fact, we are almost called Behavioural Insights for Business and Society. That was the common term at the time, but we didn't really like BIBS as an acronym, that sounded like we were doing something for babies.

So many of us came from this decision science background. We thought maybe Decision Insights for Business and Society. And thank goodness, because the word play has been so much better. But anyway, so Dale Griffin, Kate White, Jiaying Zhao, Dave Hardisty and I, we all worked together to create DIBS. And I think it came from the fact that all five of us have always been very keen for our research to have real world benefits and not just be stuck in the lab.

When you do research on helping people, including our own selves, in our own decisions, which as we've already discussed, is something we all need, you don't want that research to stay in the lab. You want it to actually help other people, save more, protect the climate, be healthier, or tackle whatever problems they might face. And you can really only bring research out of the lab when you have three things on top of that basic research.

First, you need partner organizations to work collaboratively with to apply BI to problems outside of the lab. Second, you need a community of like-minded individuals and organizations who are keen to have knowledge exchange about these topics. Third, you need to support others in their learning journeys. We don't want to be the only individuals who are doing behavioural insights. We want to be part of an entire army of people who are using BI to tackle problems.

So with those as our goals, we looked at what we could do, and we knew we had a great program of academic research. You look at the CVs of Dale, of Kate, of JZ, of Dave. But we were having trouble with the application piece at that time because there weren't other organizations who were really leading the space in BC.

But fortunately, a couple of years later, the BC Public Service in 2016 decided to start a Behavioural Insights Unit and tasked the one and only Heather Devine with that job. Heather connected with us and for us, adding Heather to the mix was really a game changer. And having the BC Public Service as a collaborator in the BI space was equally important, and the rest is kind of history.

In 2017, we really started laying the groundwork for our next steps. In 2018, we started the BIG Difference BC Conference, which was supposed to be just a one-off conference and now is in its sixth year. In 2020, pandemic aside, we kicked off the Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights with the help of people like Lindsay as our fearless pilot students who were okay being in a program that was being built as it happened. And since then, we've been continuing to ideate and innovate to figure out how we can support the application of BI to the problems we all face.

And again, like I said, this has really been a group effort. There's students, faculty and staff at different parts of UBC, our partners in the BC Public Service in the BC Behavioural Insights Group as well as other ministries. Our amazing collaborators at WorkSafeBC and City of Vancouver, and then supporters and co-conspirators across Canada, a number of organizations.

I won't take the time to name them all because this isn't my Oscar's acceptance speech. But anyway, maybe I'll stop there because I don't want to run out of time for the entire podcast just based on my introduction.

MILES-PICKUP: Cue the music. I actually love this answer. It's always great to hear the history of how these started, but I think even more so, it speaks to the village that it takes to undertake behavioural science. So, some might disagree with me, but I don't think you would, Kirstin, that it really takes all of these people working together to build a unit, to participate in different initiatives, to undertake experimentation, and even more so to translate those outcomes into real world opportunities. It really speaks to just how important partnership is. So, I think that was a great answer. Thanks, Kirstin.

APPELT: One thing I've noticed is sometimes students are like, "Oh, do we really need to do a group project?" and I always just say, that's what behavioural insights is. It's groups coming together from different sides of the problem, working together. And so, it's just really a fundamental part of behavioural insights.

MILES-PICKUP: Absolutely. And the group project was by far my favourite part of the course as well. So, Kirstin, there is so much we could talk about in the field of behavioural insights, whether it's evolving, changes in the field, a continuance of the discussion with Dave Hardisty about combatting data fraud or even new ways that we could use behavioural insights.

But I thought for today's episode in particular, we could have a little fun. So, I think we've all seen the power that adding fun can have to our lives. Not only can it help us learn, but it can help us create relationships and even help with behaviour change. In fact, both Cass Sunstein and Dr. Laurie Santos have done really fascinating podcasts that speak to the power of fun.

So, I thought we could focus on some fun and unusual ways to discuss behavioural insights, while also spending some time getting to know a little bit more about you. So, what do you say, Kirstin? Shall we have some fun?

APPELT: Feel like this is one of those improv situations where you're supposed to say "yes, and" so let's do it.

MILES-PICKUP: Let's kick things off with a little bit of imagination. So as has been discussed in many of the Calling DIBS episodes, there are so many different ways that we can use behavioural insights. But I'm curious to know if you could apply behavioural science to solve any everyday annoyance or inconvenience, what would it be, and how would you tackle it?

APPELT: Oof, this is such a good one. And I feel like, I mean, there's so many throughout the day. But, I think one that stands out for me and certainly it was something I experienced just last night. So, one of the best name phenomena in recent years is "revenge bedtime procrastination." This idea that we delay going to sleep because we feel like we haven't had enough free time, our fun time earlier in the day. And I am definitely guilty of this.

And of course, there's so many factors at play, like with any behavioural challenge. But to me, at least for my own situation, I think some of it comes down to the planning fallacy, this idea that things often take longer than we plan. And so we don't think we are going to be so busy, we don't expect so many new tasks to pop up throughout the day. You don't expect that the contractor is going to come tomorrow, and you need to go out and buy paint on top of also needing to do laundry, and having that deadline that is at 8 a.m. Yada, yada, yada.

And on a workday, you might not realize you have so little time to actually do things because you're spending time in meetings and commitments. And so whatever, which one of these is happening or if it's all of them, we just don't build this into our daily planning. And then we're surprised at the end of the night that it's bedtime and we haven't had any time to just decompress. And then we feel exhausted, and we want some downtime. And so, we end up staying up, and then we regret it in the morning, or at least I do, when the alarm goes off and my husband swears against snooze. So, it's a problem. And I would love to figure this one out so that I would get to bed on time.

As for how to tackle it, I think this one would be tricky because it is a behaviour that's at the home. So, for folks who know the misfit framework to analyze problems, the measurement could be tricky. But I would go through the normal steps of the scope, RIDE, scale process, and I would see if we can learn more about the behaviour and potentially get a sample of people to share their phone data so we could see their plan bedtimes, their actual bedtimes, and how much of the time between those two times is spent on social media, shows, and games. And then I think we could probably design some behavioural insights interventions to tackle it. And maybe I can submit myself as the first participant and let you know how it goes.

MILES-PICKUP: I am so guilty of this. I often find myself also staying up later because I feel I haven't had enough time to wind down and that my body needs rest. But in reality, I just literally need rest. So, if you ever set up this experiment I'd definitely be your second subject. Perhaps we could set up an app where instead of doomscrolling through Instagram before you go to bed, it's just an app that repeatedly tells you to go to bed. You could test that.

APPELT: Love it.

MILES-PICKUP: Okay, switching gears here a little bit, Kirstin. Actually, going back to TV and things that help us procrastinate, in your opinion, what's the most entertaining or mind-boggling behavioural experiment that could easily become a game show or reality TV challenge?

APPELT: Another good one. I think I'll take this one in a slightly different direction, which is to suggest that there's a channel that is already doing this very well, and that is HGTV. I think if you look at any HGTV programming, you'll see a number of biases and decision shortcuts or heuristics coming into play.

For example, they cover planning fallacy so many times, home renovation projects that take longer and cost more money than we expect, they cover reference points, they always show something crazy to make the "just fine" option look better. Sometimes that's showing a total fixer upper to make a home with a few fixes look more manageable. Sometimes it's showing something that would totally blow your budget to make a house that's just a little pricey seem reasonable.

So, I think they're doing a lot of work in this space. I've yet to see them default people into homes, and see if the endowment effect happens, but I bet it would work. And probably that's coming next season. So, we should all stay tuned to HGTV.

MILES-PICKUP: That's fantastic and a really great example. It makes me think of I think it was House Hunters International or one of those shows where they would do exactly that. One that was in your price range, but pretty garbage, one that was amazing, but totally outside of your price range. And then one that's "mehhh" at best. And, you know, seeing how people would make decisions about those houses using the Decoy Effect, the Goldilocks effect, the Compromise Effect, all of those in terms of our home renovation and home purchasing decisions. It would be fascinating to explore that in more detail.

Okay, Kirstin, let's turn this to something a little more personal. So, can you share a personal anecdote where your knowledge of behavioural science helped you in a fun or unexpected way, such as in your personal relationships, or your daily routines?

APPELT: Well, I can certainly tell you about a case where it didn't work, and that was when I tried to nudge my husband. And I find that if your husband is also a behavioural scientist, he immediately catches on to what you're doing. And that's when we get what you call "A Backfire Effect," where it goes the wrong direction.

But in terms of successes, I think for me, one of the biggest lessons of behavioural insights, more generally, is just the importance of the choice environment. And sometimes I forget that and I try to reiterate it to myself. And when I'm thinking about it, and I know that the environment or the set up matters, I try to set up my environment more intentionally in ways that help rather than hinder me.

For example, I'm not someone who tends to remember numbers and birthdays very well, so I automate it. I have birthdays in my Google Calendar, so that I'm not relying on my faulty memory. And similarly, I've moved around a lot, so I have friends and family across the globe. And when you have that many people that far away, you really want to keep in touch via the phone. But then it's really easy to let time go by and not talk to people as regularly as you hope.

So, I actually have recurring calendar items to make sure that I check in with different people before I let months go by. And I think the reminders are working and I'm doing a decent success rate at keeping in touch. But, you know, we'll see if anyone listens and disagrees and says, I haven't heard from you in months.

But yeah, for me, it's just the little things about kind of the hacks to make your own life go more smoothly by changing your choice environment so it works for you, rather than against you.

MILES-PICKUP: You heard it, everybody. We're going to check back with Kirstin in June to see if she remembers my birthday. But really, this one makes me laugh quite hard. I know folks can't see me laughing

quietly in the background, but I also tried behavioural science on my partner, and also received a Backfire Effect. Except, my partner isn't a behavioural scientist.

So, for quite some time I would gently nudge my partner to take the garbage out, by leaving it near his shoes when he would leave the house. But he clearly has become wise to my tricks because now he just leaves the garbage not near my shoes, but on top of my shoes. So, word of caution to listeners out there. Be wise in knowing when and how to nudge your partners, or it could lead to some very soggy shoes.

APPELT: Maybe we should have done more in the exploratory research phase to understand the population.

MILES-PICKUP: Or I can try and figure out a good nudge for your partner and you vice versa. We can see how this works. So, speaking of "not-great" ideas at nudging people, we as humans are notoriously bad at predicting our own behaviour, and sometimes the behaviour of others clearly as in me and my partner and his "garbage-taking-out" times. Can you share an example with us, Kirstin, of a situation where people's actions surprised you or defied common assumptions?

APPELT: Another good one. Yeah. I feel like this is another one where there's just so many. And I think probably for a lot of us in this space, that's what got us into behavioural sciences where like, "Well, that's weird, why are people doing that?" or "Why am I doing that?" as the case may be.

I think for me, one of them is just, when people start focusing on what they're doing rather than what other people are doing, they tend to think that what they're doing, as long as they provide information, that will be enough.

So, the kind of "if you build it, they will come," but realistically, that's not as true as people expect. Just by building a great product or a great service, other people are not going to automatically start using it. So whether it's a new product, a new government benefit, or a new program, just informing people isn't enough. You have to do more than that. You have to speak the right language. You have to share the right information at the right time. You have to make it easy to use.

And so, I think that's an easy one where people can start integrating behavioural insights. It's just realizing that there's a mismatch between what you know about your thing, whether it's a product or process and what other people know about it and how easy it is for them to use it.

MILES-PICKUP: This is when I find myself reflecting on quite a bit, as I have an economics background as well, prior to coming into the certificate, but having worked in social services as well as government, I found myself falling into that trap quite consistently. That if we needed something done, or something wasn't working, the first answer was always to provide information and knowledge, and by attending the certificate, it sort of reinforced this idea that that isn't always the case.

And so, I think that's one of the most valuable pieces to come out of behavioural science, even if it's not all the other aspects. Just a good reminder that information alone is not enough, and just how often we rely on information.

APPELT: Yeah, I think we're all drowning in information these days, and awareness is certainly important. You can't do something if you're not aware of it, but it's only step one, you need to do the rest of the work for people. It should be harder for the choice-architect than it is for the decision-maker. It's our task to take on the work so it's easy for them.

MILES-PICKUP: Exactly. It's such an important thing for us all to remember. So Kirstin, behavioural science often explores behaviours that we assume individuals should be doing but aren't. Can you tell us about a behaviour that at first glance seems like people should be doing and aren't, but in reality makes perfect sense when you understand the underlying psychology of it?

APPELT: I think I can just repeat myself and say, yes, there's so many. It's my answer to every question is where do I start? But yeah, actually, I think this question is a great complement to the previous question, because sometimes people's behaviour is surprising at first glance. And so, you think, "Why are people doing this?". But then once you learn more about why it's happening, whether it's the underlying psychology of the people or the underlying set up of the situation, it all starts to make sense. So, I mean, that speaks right away to the importance of the exploratory research phase, which you and I failed to do with our partners.

But for a basic example, where psychology in particular is at play, I'll go with one of my favorites, which again, I'm just picking on ones that I am particularly bad at, which is why do people use the snooze button? You know, a perfectly rational person sets the alarm for the exact time they want to get up and they know that that will maximize sleep quality and so they get up at that time. But what most of us actually do is press snooze one or more times. And for some people, you know, they enjoy the feeling of pressing snooze. So this is actually is their best outcome.

But for a lot of people, it's, you know, doesn't seem like it makes sense. But then when we think of the psychology of how these things work, it does start to make sense. You can unravel the puzzle. So, one way Richard Thaler characterizes this is we have little people in our minds similar to the angel, the devil on people's shoulders. You have your "planner" and your "doer".

And so, the planner is the one who's optimistically setting the alarm the night before when they're thinking about what they have to do that day. So, you know, I have to get up at 7:00 because the contractor is going to be here at 7:30, and then I have a meeting at 8:00 and yada, yada, yada. And so I need to get up and get going. But the planner isn't the one who wakes up in the morning.

The one who wakes up in the morning is the doer. And they hit snooze because they're feeling really sleepy. They may not even be fully awake. And so, if we think about these two perspectives actually, if the planner felt sleepy like the doer, they might have set the alarm later. If the doer was thinking more about all they had ahead of them that day, like the planner was, they might get up a bit more quickly.

So, the point here is that at different times, different thoughts, feelings and even circadian rhythms are more and less prominent. So, using the snooze button, while not strategic for our sleep quality, it does make sense. We can understand why people are using it.

MILES-PICKUP: I have to admit, Kirstin, I'm a recovering snoozer myself. For a long time, I was really hard on myself about hitting the snooze button. I would tell myself that in order to be productive, I needed to be getting up when I said I was going to be getting up.

I subscribe maybe foolishly, to that notion that the first thing you should do in the day is make your bed, because then you've got one thing ticked off your list and it helps you be productive for the rest of the day. But I would always get really hard on myself when I couldn't get up in the mornings. I felt like I was letting that planner self down and having a partner who sleeps in a lot later than me put the social pressure on myself to get up.

But in reality, there are days when it just makes sense to hit the snooze button. So, if you wouldn't mind letting my employer know that I'm going to be late for work, that would be great, because I feel a snooze button in my near future if you will.

So, speaking of self-reflection, Kirstin, I'm curious if you could have any superpower that's related to understanding human behaviour, what would it be and how would you use it in your research or everyday life?

APPELT: These are such fun questions. I think for me it would be perspective taking. It's a surprisingly hard skill. It comes late in life, and it's actually something we tend to lose later in life, but it's such a hugely valuable skill. The idea of theory of mind and being able to step out of our own mind and think about what others are doing. And it really helps explain a lot of behaviour.

And again, going back to this idea of the exploratory research phase, that's why we do that phase, to put ourselves in the minds of other folks and to ask them, get their opinion, because we don't know what's going on for other people unless we ask.

And so, in terms of my own life, I try to do it when I can. I try to remember, for example, that everyone has a lot going on and things are about us a lot less than we assume, you know, someone cutting us off in traffic. Is it probably because they want to annoy us? It's probably they're late or they're lost. Someone not responding to emails might be sick or taking care of a sick loved one. They're probably not purposefully holding up your day and all of your workflow. But I think I fail at this more than I succeed, which is why I am calling it a superpower that I strive toward.

MILES-PICKUP: This your way of saying we should be asking our partners why they don't take the garbage out? I think this is such a great answer and it's so easy for us to forget both in the field of behavioural science, but also just in every day of our lives. It's so easy for us to develop a hypothesis or just become overconfident in our assumptions about why people do the things that they do.

So having this perspective taking not only can we create better experiments, but also just allows us to have more empathy for those around us. With the exception of the garbage that I'm not dropping.

APPELT: Yeah, I think it's one of those things where we're in System One, we tend to forget. But if we can kick ourselves into System Two and think through someone else's perspective, it usually has beneficial outcomes for both them and for us. So, it's usually helpful. Doesn't mean it's any easier to do, and I'm still not any better at it.

MILES-PICKUP: It is a difficult one to master. So, looking beyond my partner and his garbage taking—

APPELT: I can't wait for him to listen to this episode.

MILES-PICKUP: Sorry, Jim. The field of behavioural science has such broad applications, whether it's conservation or those daily routines in our house, water consumption, all of these different applications that the behavioural insights can take part in. What I'd love to know is what's an area or industry outside of your own expertise that you find really fascinating and would like to explore using behavioural insights?

APPELT: I feel like this one has a correct answer, and the correct answer is how can we get your partner to do the garbage correctly? Supposedly there's a whole world of the BI beyond that, so if I can think of something. Let's see. Let me think.

Oh, well, I mean, for me, I'm just I love learning. And part of that's what I love about behavioural insights is that you're constantly exposed to new areas, new industries, new acronyms, even. And so, I really enjoy applying the BI to new areas and industries. And lucky enough for me, going back to when I was talking about you build the environment around you, I've built myself an environment where I get to do exactly that and I get to work on a lot of different BI projects.

So, ones that I currently know a little bit about and I'm getting further into, and I'm really passionate about, applying the BI to the climate crisis, which touches most industries and areas. So, it's not an industry or area specifically, but a topic that touches on many different ones. And I'm excited to see how we can work with industries in areas we haven't yet worked on, on climate-related matters. Health and wellbeing, which is of course related and has impacts on the climate crisis and vice versa.

And then another one that's really important to me and that I have been fortunate to get to start to do a little bit of work on in the last couple of years is equity, diversity, inclusion and reconciliation, which again cuts across industries and areas. So I think this is one of those where I twisted your question a little bit to suit to myself, because really it's all industries and areas, but certain topics within those industries and areas.

MILES-PICKUP: These are all really important areas. I, for one, have enjoyed watching the DIBS team and how they've been expanding on a lot of these areas. In particular, it's been really interesting to learn from the engaging speakers of the Justice, Equity, Diversity, Decolonization and Inclusion initiative at UBC. There's just so much to explore here, particularly how and where behavioural insights can do things like build trust.

I've also really enjoyed seeing the work of JZ and Elizabeth Dunn on the Happy Climate Initiative. For those who haven't seen it, there's an excellent TED talk where JZ speaks about feng-shui-ing her fridge. For those who do know me, I'm very passionate about food security and food waste, and this has helped to certainly bridge my intention-action gap.

Speaking of intentions versus actions, behavioural science often explores the intention-action gap with respect to our behaviour. Can you recall a personal situation as a scientist where you found yourself experiencing an intention-action gap? What did you learn from that experience?

APPELT: While we're cataloguing my failures of revenge bedtime procrastination and staying up and then snoozing. I think, I mean, this is one I'm going back to just the idea you mentioned before of empathy. Being a behavioural scientist isn't because we're better at these things, it's because we experience them and it makes us curious. It's not like we're any less susceptible.

So yeah, one for me certainly is intending to exercise, but spending time on the interwebs. More broadly, a big one for me is climate action. I've gotten decent at composting. I've cut way back on red meat, but I'm still buying more new things than I would like to be doing, I'm driving more than is ideal.

And I think for me, having these intention-action gaps again, of course it just inspires my interest in behavioural science, but it also helps us think of places where behavioural science hasn't yet solved the problem and where behavioural science continues to offer new ideas, ways to help us make our decisions in line with our intentions. And think about how we can change the choice environments to make climate actions easier.

So, you mentioned JZ's TED Talk on Happy Climate, featuring her adorable rabbit, Greenwich as another teaser for folks who need more prompting. But I think one of the really important takeaways of that project is, you

know, it's really easy to get feel downtrodden about the climate crisis, but it's important to find, find hope and happiness. And so, she has a lot of strategies for that. But I think also just looking around and where we see problems. Of course, feeling frustrated about the problems, but also realizing that those problems are opportunities and thinking about how we can design behavioural insights solutions to help overcome them through intentional changes, through individual behaviour, system action, etc.

MILES-PICKUP: That's great. Thanks, Kirstin. So, speaking about opportunity, as we started the conversation by speaking about your dedication to the field, particularly with respect to the work that you've done on the Certificate, lots of opportunities for people to participate in the program, but also the opportunities that exist for them beyond that.

So, Kirstin, as you enter into this fourth cohort of students, which I can't believe we're already at four years, I'd love to know what do you see as the future of the certificate? What are these opportunities? In particular, where and how do you see these amazing graduates using this new knowledge and these new skills?

APPELT: It's hard to believe we're on year four. It feels like just yesterday that you were working with your team of "Hippos", your own acronym for your project back in the first year. So, it's incredible to see how well the program has been received and it's just such a fun program to work on. And again, it really highlights a lot of what I love about BI like I said before, the bringing together different people.

But something else is the idea that behavioural insights isn't just a subject area, it's a tool or a lens, depending on what terminology you want to use. But the point is that it can be applied to different problems in different ways. And with 87 Certificate students and counting, I think there's 87 ways to use BI, it's been awesome to see some students go on to lead behavioural insights units. It's been lovely hearing from students for whom BI becomes their full-time job as the BI Specialists, Method Specialists, whatever terminology may apply in their organization. It's been super cool to see students combining BI with other skill sets in novel ways, the way people have been combining product management with BI, or user experience or change management or marketing or design, or any number of other toolsets.

It's also rewarding just hearing about how students of all job descriptions are integrating BI right into the work they do every day, whether it's big projects or small. And honestly, it's just a win to hear when students are using BI to think about behaviour, even in the small things like sending emails, creating deadlines and reminders for themselves and others, communicating with colleagues and clients, thinking about how to move beyond awareness to action like we talked about before.

And of course, just like I said, with my own life and hacking my own life, just recognizing, seeing how trace architectures are operate in their lives. So, I love when students start to see BI all around them and they send in examples of a bus stop, or a walk down the neighbourhood street and looking at the parking signs or other signs.

So, with these things, sometimes it's that they're recognizing them and they can respond more intentionally. They're not feeling susceptible to creative marketing techniques, for example. Sometimes it's them figuring out how BI isn't being used, and it could be used to do something better. And it's something that's been really fun on the podcast for me when I'm not being 'called DIBS' on myself, is uncovering the way students are using BI, because I mean, you all are experts on how to use it in your own career path. And I'm just fascinated to see all the amazing work everyone is doing.

So, it's just a fun ride for me.

MILES-PICKUP: I so enjoy seeing where everybody has taken this new knowledge and skills in their own careers. I know I took a bit of a more traditional path out of the certificate, being lucky enough to join BC BIG as a Methods Specialist, as well as having a short-term opportunity to lead the unit.

But there are so many ways to use behavioural insights outside of just gaining employment with a specialized unit. I see so many exciting opportunities to integrate this knowledge into more traditional roles like program management, policy, product development, and communications, in particular. I know you noted just even your ability to communicate with colleagues or change emails. It has made a substantial difference in the way that I work with others and I, for one, am really, really excited about opportunities for behavioural insights in communications, which we're going to be talking about at our special session at the upcoming BIG Difference BC Conference on November 3rd. If people haven't already set aside the date, you should. It's going to be fantastic.

But, Kirstin, as we look to wrap up today, I'm sure a lot of people would be interested to learn more about what DIBS is working on. Can you reveal an exciting project or experiment that you're currently working on that our listeners should keep an eye out for in the near future?

APPELT: Mm hmm. Yeah. But yeah, actually, first, I just want to say one more thing on the previous topic, which is I think sometimes when you're in the program or just coming out of the program, you start to think of BI as this like monolith? And like, "How do I add BI to my job?". And it feels like a big task, but it can be helpful to take a step back and remembering that behavioural insights is about understanding behaviour. And almost everything we do involves behaviour. And so, when we start to approach it from that lens, it becomes more obvious how we can apply it to what we're doing.

And then, like you said, these opportunities like communications and other things, kind of become more obvious. It's not just this huge thing. How do we apply it, but how do we start to unpack what we're doing and think about where behaviour weaves its way in? So maybe that's a project to do.

But yeah, in terms of things, I've got a few fun things in the hopper right now. I kind of mentioned some of my current areas of interest, but right now in the climate space we are planning a new project with BC Hydro. I know everyone's heard me talk to death about the Laundry Decal project, but we have a new one that's going to look at another facet of home energy use, which we're still in the lit-review phase, so stay tuned to hear what specific behaviours we work on in which specific tools.

But I'm really excited about that one. It's something where we're looking at ways to bring the decision-maker more actively into the role of choice architect. So, ways of kind of combating them or paternalistic aspects of behavioural insights.

In the health space, I've got some work on reducing antibiotic prescribing in different medical, dental, etc. situations, which has been some fun work with new partners. Looking at other ones in the health realm, working with surgeons on surgical procedures.

Going back to some of what we said at the very top of the podcast, like we said, this is improv and you always have to circle back around, right, I've always got too much going on and they're all over the place. And so, one last piece is that I will soon be advising one or more capstone projects which could be in any area TBD, but they're always really fascinating and I'm really excited to see which group of students I get to work with this year, more closely.

And hopefully all of these different projects will make their way into future either BIG Difference BC conferences or seminars or, dare I say it, my own podcast, if Lindsay gives it back to me, we'll see.

MILES-PICKUP: I, for one, am looking forward to all of this, but in particular, I hope this work leads to more photos of cute animals in sweaters. I can't even begin to describe the long-term impact that original study with BC Hydro has had on my own laundry behaviour.

APPELT: If no one else's behaviour has changed, my own laundry behaviour has changed massively.

MILES-PICKUP: Well, that's two. So that's something. We failed at garbage, but we won at laundry. Speaking of garbage, I feel like before I wrap up, I need to put a little disclaimer. I have a wonderful partner. He does a lot of helpful things around the house. Garbage may not be his forte, but he's wonderful in every other way.

So thank you, Kirstin, for joining us today on this very special edition of Calling DIBS. It has been such a pleasure delving into the fascinating world of behavioural science with you. On behalf of Certificate graduates, as well as someone who is part of the larger behavioural science community, thank you for all that you do. You have been such a great mentor and a leader in the community and have helped build the field in ways that you will probably never truly know. So, we can't wait to see how your work continues to unravel the complexities of human behaviour and how importantly, you continue to inspire and grow the next generation of behavioural science practitioners.

So, thank you for having a bit of fun with me today, Kirstin, and thank you to everybody for listening to this episode of Calling DIBS. This is Lindsey Miles-Pickup, signing off.
