



[Episode 86: Opinion Research & BI in Government](#)

with Brent Novikoff, Public Opinion Research Advisor with the Government of Canada

Building on his background in market research and public opinion research, Brent Novikoff helps us explore those fields, their intersections with BI, and opportunities to use BI in different roles. Brent also shares his takeaways from the Advanced Professional Certificate in BI, including the importance of ethics and the impact of removing barriers. Throughout the episode, we discuss a number of ways BI either is used or can be used to make life easier.

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 Brent Novikoff.

Brent is a Public Opinion Research Adviser within the Government of Canada. He's also a graduate of the most recent cohort of the Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights. I'm really keen to hear more about public opinion research in the public sector, and the interaction with BI and some of the opportunities in that space, so I'm really thrilled that Brent is on the podcast today. Welcome to the podcast, Brent.

BRENT NOVIKOFF, GUEST: Thank you very much for having me.

APPELT: Why don't we start with our just traditional easy, hopefully softball question. Can you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

NOVIKOFF: Absolutely. So, as you mentioned, I recently completed my program and I'm enjoying my summer with the night classes or Sunday work. I'm also a very new resident of Montreal. So after long four years in the pandemic, we made the move to Montreal from Canada's capital, Ottawa. We've been here just for the summer. As you know, Montreal is a very, very fun place in the summer, so just getting used to that.

As you mentioned, I'm a Public Opinion Research Advisor with the Government of Canada. I'm currently working at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. So I think when I started the program I was at ISED which is basically Industry Canada, it's the department for business. And I've been with the Government of Canada about eight years, and I've been fortunate to work at some of the more larger departments, such as Health Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Industry Canada.

On an educational background, I did my BA at Toronto Metropolitan University years and years ago. I did a minor in marketing and it was the marketing research courses that I took which eventually led to an interest in marketing research, where I ended up going back to school for a postgraduate certificate in marketing research that segued into the Government of Canada working on their public opinion research teams, which we call those POR teams. And now to the BI program.

APPELT: That's such a neat job that you get to embed with these different units in the government. I'm very excited to pick that apart a little bit.

So, public opinion research, I feel like the most common association many of us have is election polls and the snippets and news stories where you hear how many people have cats or how many people are interested in a topic. Can you tell us a little bit more about what public opinion research is? Is that what it is, or is it quite different from that?

NOVIKOFF: Yeah that's a really great question. So, and I've thought about this a lot because there's a few other words that circulate to describe this concept. So, for example, when I think of consumers, I think of marketing research. When I think about understanding a market such as Canada's tourism economy, I think of market research and public opinion research is really research on citizens that's related to governance and kind of public policy research. So it's not consumers, they're citizens. Whereas the word polling is very similar. But polling in my mind has to be more politics, more partisan research such as voting intentions, political views and support for the government. So polling and public opinion research are both based on citizens. But I generally think, polling is obviously more used in the news, and I have no idea where that word came from. But I generally think of polling as more of political polling.

And beyond that, you have things such as business intelligence. You know, big companies would benchmark themselves against their competitors, but then also kind of related to the government and maybe uniquely to the government, you have stakeholder engagement, which is more consultation based, so understanding how stakeholders feel. And so basically all that together, I think that encapsulates most kind of social science research in terms of in the measuring framework. And then, interesting enough, I just read about this recently, the idea of world opinion. So it's the idea that, you know, maybe somewhere in the distant future there'll be an efficient way to actually measure what the world is thinking. And you can imagine all the publications on there. So, I wanted to add that one in, because I think with that you have almost everything.

APPELT: Yeah. That's like, once we have Star Trek launched, then we do our world opinion research. Thanks for the definitions. That's really helpful because I think a lot of times, that's actually one of the things I love about BI, is a problem or an area seems very like small and clear, and then when you start to learn about it, you realize that that's this huge space and there's different little features within it, so it's really helpful to have that better sense of what public opinion research is. I'm curious, is it a fairly common function in the public sector? When and why would governments be using public opinion research?

NOVIKOFF: Yeah, so in the federal government, there's essentially a public opinion research, POR, team in every core department. So that's about 40 to 70 departments. And how you look at it, most teams are about 3 to 5, but 1 to 3 in the smaller departments. I think the biggest departments have up to ten people. So essentially, as I kind of mentioned, so all the research conducted in the public service, and I'm sure this is the same, and I think you'd have a POR team for consultation teams within provincial and municipal governments, and throughout the world, I imagine most of it's structured the same.

So, when you do public opinion research, taxpayer funded research is strictly nonpartisan. So there's very, very strict rules about like asking about political voting intentions or support or attitudes, opinions, beliefs about political parties. That's kind of like the main line. That's a hard line. And kind of asking how do they use this research, though? Some of the research is used, kind of whether it's like maybe Statistics Canada, which is more behavioural and demographic research, but it might be really scheduled research. So for example agriculture, we do a biannual survey of farmers. There's a lot of mandated public opinion research around advertising. So, a lot of focus groups around, you know, is the ad clear? Is the call to action clear? And then in order to ensure value for money, there's a lot of research done for ad recall, so asking, you know, the

Canadian population. Did you see this ad? What do you think about this ad and so forth. And on top of that, there's a lot of stakeholder surveys and employee surveys.

And essentially like at the political level, they're doing this research in order to stay in touch with citizens. And, you know, sometimes what you'd like to think is that, when there's an election, a party receives what we call the mandate to govern. And in between that, you're, you know, political parties are doing research to make sure that they're still aware of the top issues, and the top issues have been changed and how they're doing against those types of issues. So, you know, on some plane, you know, we like to say that next to voting, entering the poll is one of the most Democratic things you can do. It's, in some ways, it's a vote between votes.

That's speaking more on the political level, but on like that public service level, essentially why you're conducting research is really just to help the organization make the best decision possible by taking into account the opinions of those people who the decision affects, whether that's stakeholders or employees or the general population. You're just trying to make this, what they say, evidence-based decision.

APPELT: Yeah. So that makes a lot of sense and really starts to see the connections with BI which I think we'll get into in a minute. But first, if I could ask one more question about just how the public opinion research typically works, what are the typical methods you use? How do you usually conduct public opinion research?

NOVIKOFF: There's three core functions of any POR consultation team, and this is speaking to the teams that I've worked on. I can generally kind of extrapolate. This is how all POR teams in the government Canada work. Essentially, three ways.

So the first way is that we conduct our own research. So most people on these teams, if not everyone has formal training in conducting research, and we have survey software and so forth, and the big line that it comes to of us conducting our own research, if you have a contact list, as if you say Brent, here's a names of 100 employees.

The next activity within a POR team is buying research. So let's say Brent, we want to do a survey on 40 million Canadians. Well, in order to do that with any rigor, I'm sure you can put something-- you could put a survey link on social media, or you can mail in a survey, but there's no rigor to, you know, to that sampling. So in that case we buy research off, you know, Angus Reid or Ipsos or Environics or any of the big research suppliers that are in Canada, because they have the research panels or even the call centers to conduct that random digit dialing. So that's the line. So when we don't know the sample frame, we can't conduct the service. In that case we buy it.

And then the other way is really secondary research. There is a tremendous amount of research activities happening, and sometimes it's a stakeholder group that will survey its members and then send us the results, or survey its members and put out a news release or put it into the news or, you know, for example, when I worked at Health Canada, there's a lot of health related research being done by these research suppliers. I think that's how research suppliers market themselves. I think they conduct issue surveys on top issues, release that to the news, and you'll see things like new Ipsos poll, new Angus Reid poll. So we're doing, we're collecting a lot of that secondary research as well. And basically we're just trying to get the right results to the right people right away in the department. That's basically the function.

APPELT: Got it. And maybe just to elaborate a little bit, for folks who haven't thought about what makes a sample rigorous, I'll just pull that apart a little bit. So you mentioned if you do something like snowball sampling where you just put it on social media and people send it to their friends, you often get quite a

specific sample where it's a group who has a lot in common. So usually I would assume in your work you're trying to reach a representative sample of Canadians or whatever the group might be. And so, just for folks who aren't familiar with this, if you do something like random digit dialing or you have a vetted list, then you're able to get something that's more representative of the population, rather than just Brent and his friends and his friends' friends who then all have probably various commonalities and aren't representative of the larger population. Is that fair to say?

NOVIKOFF: Yeah, exactly. And we're, you know, all public opinion research, the accuracy is the name of the game, right. And I think the most simplest way is that you look at, does everyone within the population have a known and equal chance to participate? So I often use the example of let's say you want to rename a bridge in Kingston, Ontario. If you drop that survey to every third house, every person has a 1 in 3 chance of being selected. Whereas if you just did that snowball sample, you're going to hear a lot of people, but those people aren't going to represent the town in general, those people are going to represent people who have a vested interest in answering that survey. So there's a big difference, but as long as you know what you're collecting, all research is valuable. But you just have to understand what that research is.

APPELT: Yeah, absolutely. Well, as you've alluded, you're coming off of a year of doing public opinion research by day, behavioural insights by night and by weekend. Did you find that your public opinion research skill set was an asset in doing the BI program, and were there any phases of a BI project where it was particularly useful?

NOVIKOFF: Yeah, I think the research design and the statistical analysis, I felt comfortable in those areas. The teams were put together really well. Our team, I mean, even more so we were a great team from the start. And you saw people with different skill sets jumping in to their areas where they were comfortable. But we also kind of nudged each other to push ourselves and go into other areas where we weren't so comfortable.

But for myself, it was really in that scoping stage of that research, that exploratory research where I kind of jumped in and really had an impact. And for us, we did in-depth interviews, so we had to design interview guides. It's a bit of an art and science to do these interview guides. I think it's really easy to put a bunch of questions down, but to put the questions down thoughtfully and consideration of flow and order, asking the right questions in the right way. One of the rules that we kind of have, or not really rules, one of the ideas we have is that you can ask anything, but you can't ask everything, and you have to ask things in a certain way that they understand the question and control different biases and so forth. So not only designing those guides but conducting interviews, I felt more, more comfortable. And I think I really supported the team in those areas.

APPELT: Yeah, I would imagine that would be right up your alley. And like you said, not only creating the question guides, but also when you're in the moment and you're conducting the interviews, having the knowledge to know when to elaborate because there's a comprehension issue versus when it would become a leading question. So having that in the moment understanding of how the interview is going, I found for myself, at any rate, that that's something that takes a lot of practice to get right.

NOVIKOFF: Yeah. It reminded me of when we conducted these in-depth interviews, what we kind of learned in one of the courses, it's like the golden power of silence, of letting people take that extra chance to answer that question and just never not end a survey or a focus group or an interview by saying, any final thoughts? That's also a golden moment as well. And it's easy to kind of say that's just like kind of a catch-all at the end, but no, some of the best insights come in that moment of when they tell you something that you didn't ask or never thought they could know.

APPELT: Yeah, it's a real helpful tool in figuring out what you didn't know to ask. Yeah. And I think also, I would imagine in the exploratory phase, since you have practice with secondary research, that must have also been an area where you could draw on your background skills.

NOVIKOFF: The group that we work with had conducted a survey, I think it was with Ipsos, so we had when we started off with a quantitative survey, which really informed the in-depth interviews. And sometimes you do well before qual before quant because you don't know what to ask in the quant. And then sometimes qual complements the quant because you're able to explore things that came out that you didn't anticipate or really beg the question of asking kind of the why. So sometimes, like in a research design you might do the qualitative before the quantitative sometimes vice versa, maybe on both sides. I think it's really, all projects are different, so what comes up is unique as well.

APPELT: Yeah, they're very complementary in helping understand aspects of the population or the context that you don't already know.

Well so that was a little bit about how your background helped with BI. Flipping that question on its head, how can behavioural insights knowledge and skills be advantageous in public opinion research, do you think?

NOVIKOFF: Yeah. So, I'm doing a lot of thought like, is BI different than POR, is BI an extension of POR, is POR an extension of BI? And I think that there's not really any easy answers. It's just part of a toolbox collection of kind of understanding what motivates people and what they think and so forth. But I think more about BI I think of two main differences. BI starts with an irrational behaviour and often like an hypothesis around that irrational behaviour, where POR really starts with a research problem such as what don't we know or what do we think that we know that we want to confirm? And where POR is really hung up on the accuracy of capturing that, what are those core opinions, values, beliefs, whereas when it's engaged, is how accurate was the intervention in changing behaviour or not changing behaviour?

So when I think about kind of merging my current position as a POR advisor, when I think about how can I merge BI into that, I think of, for example, bringing more hypothesis testing in into public opinion research. I think of opportunities for testing communication, such as like for example, you could do like a split sample where you have half the sample sees the question, let's say for an environmental issue, you provide context around this environmental issue and then ask for an opinion. And whereas you don't provide that context, So you're doing a little bit of an experiment within a survey. But I think of, for example, communications testing but also just that research design with that experimental component built in the survey. So you get out of that a little bit less descriptive statistics and more about, you know, comparing groups or comparing a group that maybe saw an intervention, whether that was just context or the group that didn't.

APPELT: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And I think it can be really helpful to frame things as hypotheses, because for me, sometimes that helps me give myself some distance from it so I can see how my biases are affecting it because when we're wording hypotheses, we usually get a little more neutral than if it's just like, oh, I want to confirm something, an intuition we had. For me, putting it into that hypothesis language helps me evaluate it from multiple angles more.

NOVIKOFF: Exactly.

APPELT: And I'm wondering also, I'll say something and then I'm curious about if it was something that was on your radar before, or if it was something that came up in the course or how it landed for you was the idea that sometimes the answers we give in surveys and interviews don't reflect the actual underlying behaviour. Is that

something you'd previously seen, or is that something you're more aware of now? Or how did that land for you?

NOVIKOFF: Yeah, that's a really good question, and I think that kind of those are some of the limits of POR, right? And you have things like social desirability bias. I know for example, you can do a telephone survey or you can do an online survey and the functionality of an online survey, you can do things like ranking and you can, it's a little bit more dynamic. But how does that impact truthfulness and vice versa with a telephone survey?

So the telephone survey you're talking to a real person. So you have, you know, that social desirability comes up. And so there's always a degree of error in surveys. And I think that's a really good point on that behavioural insights lens is that yeah, you can ask a lot of opinions, but then you can explore the behaviours later. And I think yeah, that's the opportunity for a real enhancement on a research perspective. A lot of people say, yeah, I would do X, Y and Z, but the data that you have on the back end maybe doesn't support that, you can kind of complement each other.

APPELT: Yeah. It's always interesting. And I think there's certainly survey questions that are better and worse about getting people to reveal their actual behaviour, so I know there's a lot of tricks to get more similarity and complementarity between the two.

Well, moving more into some things from the certificate specifically thinking back, spring 2023, over a year and a half ago now, what was your motivation for applying for the program? What brought you to us beyond just the interest in BI?

NOVIKOFF: Yeah, so it was about a few years ago that whispers of BI started circulating in the Government of Canada, and I really think that this was connected to the success of the Behavioural Insights team out of the UK, because I think what the government of Canada has done has really tried to replicate that.

There is a BI function within the government of Canada, and the way it works is that it's a BI team that's based on what we call like the Prime Minister's Department, which is officially known as Privy Council Office or PCO. So they have that core team and they disperse BI practitioners to the various departments. So I first started hearing about BI then and then often the people who had been placed in our department in order to conduct survey research because we had the tools and software, you would start to interact with them. So that's how I first kind of heard about BI and sort of saw the BI show up in the Government of Canada operations.

My personal motivation for taking the program was a little bit more complex, a little deeper. So the way we work in the Government of Canada as a POR team is that we're basically research suppliers. Some people will come to us, ask us to conduct research, we conduct the survey, we work with them, we give them results, but we don't really ever know what happens with those results down the road, and we certainly don't really get a first hand feel of how those results are used and the impact of those results.

So the thing that I liked about BI and as someone who was thinking, you know, there's a few ways for me to kind of get involved in a BI role, whether it's in my current position or changing kind of where I'm housed. But what I really liked about the behavioural insights approach is that it's much more applied. You really start with that irrational behaviour, you really get your head around it. You stay with the project, you create an intervention, test the intervention and collect the data. And then if you're really successful, you can implement that solution. And if not, you could try again. So it's less kind of transactional, where someone will come and see me and say, hey Brent, I want to do a survey on X, Y and Z. You would design a survey then hand

off the results. But with BI my goal is to get with a significant problem and stay with it for a long time to really understand it.

I think it'll be more rewarding in terms of how much more you learn about a problem, but also more rewarding on the impact you could have on the problem. So my motivation was just to try to see, how could I take my work from something that's very kind of research supply or transactional and have it be a lot more satisfying for myself? And I haven't quite figured out exactly where to put myself. And I have a few ideas and we can talk about them later. But even if I stay a POR advisor, the idea of experimentation in research, design and that kind of an irrational behaviour, I think there's opportunities there. But I think the ability to kind of stick with a problem is, I think, exciting.

APPELT: That totally resonates with me. I love being able to see it through from start to finish, and just getting a little taste of it would be very tantalizing and in a tricky position to be in, so that makes sense.

We were chatting before the episode. You mentioned a few ways you tried to consolidate learnings from the program, and I thought these were really smart ways to use BI on the learning of BI, and I was wondering if you'd be willing to share some of your tricks, because I think future students would really love hearing them.

NOVIKOFF: Yeah. So as anyone who's considering taking the program, it was honestly one of the best organized and prepared and delivered educational experiences I've ever had. I remember speaking to you before and I said it was really easy to learn, and I don't mean that the content was easy. It's just so well organized that it just taught itself. and I think about not only how like the curriculum paralleled the capstone project, but you were doing things on an educational level the same time you were doing them in a project level.

And at the end of the program, I started looking back over the slides, and I had done this during the tests and so forth on the quizzes, and I realized that within these slides and within all this content was a fantastic blueprint in order to create or get off the ground a BI function within really any organization, whether it's, you know, you start with the big lens or the big project, and then you have the RIDE model and misfit. There was really just this, this core underlying blueprint of like how to deliver BI as a method.

So basically I just consolidated all the slides that I felt was like the Brent's choice slides, and I think from there I shared with other members of the team. And I think if you really stuck with this, not only could you succinctly explain BI to people would be interested into it, but you could really just look at these slides, and if you follow the instructions and the acronyms of the RIDE, you could really get a BI function off the ground.

APPELT: Oh that's awesome. Yeah, I will say we try to walk the walk. It would be not great if we were preaching about making things easy, attractive, social and timely and then we made our program the opposite of that. So that is our goal, it's good to hear that it's landing for some folks.

Well, from your Brent's choice master deck or from anything else, are there any particular BI concepts or skills that have really stuck with you?

NOVIKOFF: So many. Like I said, the content was so well organized. I think you'll be stuck with me for a very, very long time. I wouldn't even know where to start. I was just reviewing this master deck of slides before, because I anticipated you might ask me a question of like, what were some of the core themes that stuck with me, for one, like the BI lens versus the BI project, you don't always have the time, the money, or capacity to do a full fledged project, but it doesn't mean that you can't apply BI learnings such as EAST or the RIDE model itself. The RIDE model itself would apply to the BI project, where the lens and EAST, and sizing up a BI project

could be misfit. There's a slide in there with the ten core nudging techniques which are encapsulated within EAST but also a little bit expanded from there. Additionally, concepts such as framing, and I think that's how, you know, you could test like a communications testing, you frame the message one way, you frame the message another way.

Choice architecture is prevalent in really everything we do and I think that for example a lot of departments are designing policy, a lot of departments are designing programs, and some more so than others in different capacities. When you're designing these programs, how important choice architecture is and how easy it is to change choice architecture, which kind of brings up things like default, which is connecting to that system one, system two thinking.

And of course, what we talked about a lot is really ethics. There was many kind of concepts of ethics that we had discussed, but the one that I really liked, the one that spoke to me the most and I think for someone in the public service, is the publicity principle and the idea that if you're not willing to kind of stand up and say what you're doing, maybe we shouldn't be doing that. So I think that one will always really running the truest for me that I think, you know, if you're not, if you're not able to say what you're doing, I think that's a really good measure of you're on the right track.

The last one, I don't go too far into the weeds here, but we talked about Lewin's force field, and for most people listening to this, they won't know what that is, but for the students coming into the program, you will learn. Lewin's forcefield, I hope I get this right is about enacting change. And it could be change in an organization, but I think you could say change within anything, whether that's like a family or even like a person, is that in order to create change, you have to push change. And when you push change, it comes up against a resistance to change. Think of a bad habit: there's things that keep you in that bad habit, and there's things that you're trying to push that bad habit aside. And what Lewin's force field was, and the concept from the course is that it's better not to push harder, but instead reduce the resistance to the things.

And where I'm going with this, in that I think this is kind of a concept you could use when bringing BI to your organization. So a lot of people who are taking this program, they're like myself, who are in a research role that's just on the cusp of a BI function. And you could be looking to kind of pivot into that. Or maybe it's someone who's in an entirely different career who wants to kind of get into BI, where are you going to go BI is probably going to be a little bit new to that organization, right? And they might not really know what it's all about.

So I guess it took me a while to get here, but how I connect this to Lewin's force field is that BI is a lot about experiments. And, you might say, hey, I want to change this program. And someone will go, we're not letting it change this program, but you could say, hey, let's do a small experiment within this program. Let's do it every ten applications, for example, it's a different application. And let's see if people don't make that same mistake that causes a, you know, an analyst to go back and engage with them. So I think that Lewin's force field, in the sense that you can really kind of get BI into your organization by saying, hey, let's think within BI as experimental and let's do that experiment through a small segment of the population to get a sense of how the population could react. So it's a bit of a long winded concept there. And so I'm anticipating resistance to applying BI and I think through the experiments and could reduce the resistance.

APPELT: Yeah, I love that. So many good bits in there. That's a really great way to think about applying Lewin's force field in different ways and how removing the barriers in many cases is the stronger intervention than pushing harder. It's, why don't we remove the thing we're pushing against, rather than having to push more?

NOVIKOFF: Exactly, and I hope I got that Lewin's force field part right because it was something that jumped out to me as just a good way to enact change: reduce the barriers.

APPELT: And I also love that you brought up the publicity principle because I think that is if you take one ethics principle away, that one almost rolls up the others under it, because if you are nudging for bad, you're probably less likely to be willing to proclaim it. If you're harming vulnerable populations, you're less willing to proclaim it. So if you are willing to publicly proclaim what you're doing, there's a good chance you're hitting the other ethical components as well.

NOVIKOFF: Exactly. That's why that one was so succinct for me.

APPELT: Well, after this summer vacation, although, of course, you were busy moving, but hopefully you've had some time for reflection as well, which I've heard that already. What opportunities are you seeing for using BI, whether that's in life or public service? I know we've already touched on it a bit, but hoping you might have more to elaborate on there.

NOVIKOFF: I'm really interested on where is like the ripest area for BI within, kind of, government and public policy. I think I'll use the example of climate change. And I remember from one of the slides, you know, you're encouraged to start big, right?

So, on climate change front, you say, okay, we want everyone to kind of reduce their carbon footprint, for example. Is that too big? And then you look at it from the perspective, is that an S-frame? So is that a system problem? Like you can't jump on an electric plane right, or you can't not travel for example. Or is that an I-frame situation where, you know, you can make those choices. So when I look at BI, I think, a succinct way to describe it in most cases, but not all cases, that it really presents an opportunity to find simple solutions to massive problems. Where would be, whether kind of what's happening in this field or things or areas that you thought of, where there's a really present opportunity for by within the public service?

And I think if, for example, you know, I think everyone in the program will have learned or learn very quickly about organ donation and the power of defaults and that example. I really like the seatbelt example. Just like that annoying little ding works, right, when you hop into a cab or a car everyone puts their seatbelt on, you know, not even for your own safety just to get that noise out of everyone's head. I think that those are really simple examples or the idea of like the flashing, you know, you're going too fast around the corner. Where would you think would be, you know, in the industry, opportunities for BI that are just really well suited in the industry, in public policy issues where BI is really well suited?

APPELT: Yeah, that's a great question. I think for me, a lot of it comes back to your concepts that stuck with you as the Lewin's force field, like the examples you have, it's not where, um, I guess it's kind of how you frame it is that we're pushing harder, but a lot of times it's just making it easier to do the behaviour that we are hoping people that want to do and often that they want to do. Like most people do want to wear a seatbelt, it's just that you forget. And so a reminder at the right time, like reminding people in a TV campaign, isn't what successful. Reminding them when they're getting in the car is what's successful. So I find those things where you can do it at the right time, and it just makes it easy so that we don't have to think about it because we all have, you know, like 170 things in our mind at any given time, and so we miss things. So where there's opportunities to make the easy behaviour mindless.

So I think a lot of them, for me, come down to areas where there are just easy ways to make things easier. I think things like where you change the wording are often helpful, but those maybe are more short time helpful. Whereas if you can make it easier, that's something that maintains. Like the seatbelt, we don't have to

change the ding with a different intervention over time, because that one wears off. The ding of the seatbelt is always annoying, and so it's like an evergreen solution.

So for me, some of the ones that pop up most are around for when we think of government are just the ways we have to interact with government that are needlessly time consuming, where there's scope for automation in terms of like pre filling forms, or I know some governments are doing a new approach on taxes where they assume your taxes based on the information they know about you, and then you have the opportunity to correct them instead of having to spend all the hours it takes to pull together your information. So I love opportunities like that where we can just think of ways to take the time and effort off of people. And another one, just like a principle that I try to abide behind, is where we can it should be the choice architects who have a lot of effort and time going into it, not the end users. We want to make it so that we do the work so that they don't have to let's say.

NOVIKOFF: Yeah, I think about timely. When I was at ISED which is basically Industry Canada, the idea was that really big organizations had teams of people who could go after and take advantage of the programs where it was the smaller businesses, or the self-employed people that they just didn't have the time to.

I was thinking, for example, so there's tons of government programs and, you know, you think of like the really big ones in Canada like, unemployment insurance or employment insurance, Canadian pension plan, all these security... um, and I don't really know what the uptake of these programs are, and I would assume that they're pretty high because they're the main programs. My point is, there's so many programs that probably have a huge opportunity. And how do you better get people engaged with those?

And I think of like, that small business owner you may have heard about a program, comes to apply, and then maybe that generates a reminder for other programs, likewise programs because they're there. And it makes it easy, so if you find one, that could trigger a reminder for multiple programs. So in some cases it may not be, and then figure out why don't you apply to all these programs and why wasn't this one and so forth. So trying to understand, I think that the area for exploratory research, but I think there's, you know, there's huge opportunities in the public service for behavioural insights because it starts with that irrational behaviour.

Why would you not apply to this program? Maybe it's an awareness issue, maybe it's a complexity application, or maybe it's doubts on if you're going to, you know, if you said, hey, nine out of ten people who apply for this program successfully receive funding as opposed to like, no statement there. And how does that impact people's behaviour to apply? I think there's huge opportunity as well. Basically anywhere where you have an irrational behaviour, there's an opportunity to explore, understand it, intervene with it, collect data on it, and implement it if it works.

Running this kind of back to like, I just moved to Montreal and I'm really trying to work on French language skills. And I've been using Duolingo. And as we kind of mentioned when we were talking four weeks ago, just how much BI from my perspective is in there, whether it's the reminders or linking your account to someone else, and then you start to benchmark yourself against their progress. And the gamification of it. I think, if anyone here listening has tried Duolingo, I think it's a pretty good example of how all these little nudges, and just during this call, I got a little beep saying, hey, don't forget to practice today. And it starts to know when to send you those beeps because it starts to know when you do practice it. It's pretty clever.

It's going well so far, but I think that's a good example of kind of the private sector, that marketing research, not the public opinion side of how, you know, these little psychological nudges and tips and tricks can really influence behaviour. And kind of going back to the ethics, as long as you're doing it for, you know, the nudge for good, I think you're in good shape.

APPELT: Yeah. And I think there's so many opportunities. I'm sure we could carry on with this question for hours, but I know that we are actually coming up on the end of our hour, so I thought I would move on and ask if you have a message for our new BI practitioners in training, the next cohort.

NOVIKOFF: Oh, so on a couple fronts. So, on a workload level: as mentioned before, it's an extremely well-organized course. You will really enjoy it. Just to give you a little bit of the arc, it will start off really manageable. And then you're going to get into the project and things are going to heat up and you're going to feel, you know, if you're doing this with work on the side, you're going to feel a little overwhelmed. I'm sure everyone did, but hang in there because there's this period of data collection where your project is kind of like in the field, and that's a huge breather with a nice break over Christmas, and then it kind of heats up again. So don't be misled. It starts off manageable, gets a little intense, but then there's a few periods where it becomes manageable again and then there's the push to the finish line. So don't get discouraged in the middle.

The other thing I would mention was that, really communicate well with your team, really try to get along with your team, it's a teamwork heavy project and you know, if you have a happy team, you'll have a happy experience. We had an extremely happy team, and we're all very, very different people coming from very different areas. So we worked out really, really well. I really liked what you did in the fundamentals course and also how we wrapped up the certificate in general with the career paths, I think those were really clear, really interesting and really informative on, you know, if you're not in BI or a related role like where you can start and just kind of the options. I thought that was really, really clear and helpful and kind of gives you an idea of what to anticipate.

And then finally, we kind of mentioned earlier, you know, there's often times there's so many jobs that you would never hear of. So I kind of mentioned back, so, you know, if anyone's looking to kind of get into a research role, right. Like in the government of Canada, there's probably 40 to 50, you know, established POR teams. And I'm sure, you know, across the country at the provincial level there's POR teams. So, stakeholder engagement, consultations, public opinion research, it's a huge industry within the public service across Canada and North America, and I'm sure everywhere, right? And then you also have marketing research.

So that's what I kind of wanted to kind of go over when we first started this conversation between marketing research versus polling versus business intelligence is that, you know, in informing decision, that evidence based decision, or helping organizations make the best decision possible by taking into account the opinions of the people the decisions effect, that's a huge industry, so sometimes you might not know where to go or where you can be seated but basically every single organization is collecting data and trying to make decisions on that data. And it's a really fulfilling work. So just wanted to give kind of people who are in the program just an idea of what's out there, and that's just behind the veil of the federal government, whereas every organization, you can see that these functions do exist to a certain degree.

APPELT: Yeah, I think that's great because I think that's a role that a lot of folks would really enjoy but aren't necessarily aware of, so that's perfect. And we did already talk about the importance of asking a final open question. So I will practice what we preach. Any last thoughts, questions I should have asked and didn't?

NOVIKOFF: This is my second post graduate certificate that I've taken, and I found them, both of them, extremely rewarding. I remember a long time ago when I was trying to, I was kind of in between careers and trying to kind of get started, and I did the Bachelor of Arts in social sciences and humanities marketing minor. And we're talking this one time and they said, Brent, you really need a pin to pop a balloon. And that was one of the best career advice I ever got, because it was not long after that that I decided to go back to school for marketing since that first post graduate certificate, and it really was the pin that popped that balloon.

So I would really just be a huge endorser of, you know, these post graduate certificates that you can do while working. I think, you know, it really helps you kind of narrow in because I think a lot of jobs today are more specific, and we're going to be getting more specific going forward. So, you know, having that kind of generalist background, I think is a great foundation, but, you know, there's so many of these postgraduate certificates. So maybe you want to do it in behavioural insights or marketing research or any one of them. But if you're kind of at the point where you're not really sure, you're having trouble kind of getting into where you want to be, you know, these post graduate certificates could really be that.

APPELT: Further education is always a good message to end on, so thank you. Brent. You're someone who. I really appreciate how you give a lot of thought to new ideas, so I love that, and that we could chat about that today and the ideas that are coming forward. And I love all the opportunities you're seeing. So I can't wait to see how you take advantage of some of the opportunities you're seeing and how you nudge for good.

So thank you for joining us today. Thank you very much for having me. And thanks to our listeners for joining another episode of Calling DIBS.
