UBC Decision Insights for Business & Society
Annual Report for the 2024-2025 Academic Year

UBC SAUDER
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

DIBS
Decision Insights for Business & Society

Overview of UBC Decision Insights for Business & Society

Decision Insights for Business & Society (UBC-DIBS) is a behavioural research and policy solutions initiative at UBC Sauder School of Business. Our mission is to improve outcomes across major societal and planetary challenges by improving our understanding of decision-making, encouraging long-term behaviour change, and working together toward an environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable future.

Why Decision Insights

Every day we make hundreds of small decisions—what to eat, how much to save, how to commute, etc. With 8 billion people making these decisions 365 days a year, the impacts of these small, individual decisions can add up to big, societal problems. As a result, individual human decisions are a critical part of both the cause *and* the solution for our most urgent societal and planetary challenges (e.g., the climate crisis, income inequality, and decolonization).

The behavioural and decision sciences (e.g., psychology, consumer behaviour, economics, and related fields) use the scientific method to explore why and how people make decisions and behave. They combine economic incentives and psychological factors to build and rigorously test theories of decision-making and behaviour. The applied field of behavioural insights (BI) draws on the behavioural and decision sciences to "nudge" people to make choices that are better for themselves and the world.

What We Do

This report summarizes the 2024-2025 academic year (June 2024-May 2025) and covers:

- *Our Behavioural & Decision Science Research Projects*, which build and test theories of decision-making and behaviour in the lab, online, and in the field. We also collaborate with partners in the public, private, and non-profit sectors to apply research insights to real-world problems.

- *Our Behavioural Insights Training Programs*, which help working professionals develop and practice the BI knowledge and skills to tackle problems and create positive behavioural change by designing behaviourally-informed solutions, rigorously evaluating solutions, and using BI ethically.

- *Our Behavioural Insights Events & Resources*, which support a growing interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral BI community that connects academic researchers, policymakers, executives, and BI enthusiasts and experts across the public, non-profit, and private sectors in British Columbia and beyond.

Land Acknowledgment

UBC-DIBS is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. We gratefully acknowledge these peoples, who for millennia have passed on their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next in this area. As behavioural scientists, we are committed to closing the intention-action gap by working toward an anti-racist, Indigenized practice of behavioural science.

Funding

Behavioural & Decision Science Research

Featured Research: Using Carrots Rather than Sticks for Climate Action

Humanity has only six years to halve greenhouse gas emissions to prevent the worst effects of climate change.

Messages like this are accurate, but are they impactful? Messages steeped in despair and doom often fail to motivate collective action. UBC-DIBS co-founder, Jiaying Zhao (JZ), is leading a radical paradigm shift: A fusion of happiness science and climate science designed to ignite widespread climate action by tapping into the power of joy. The "Happy Climate" project researches how a focus on happiness can lead to climate action and how to nudge actions that reduce carbon emissions *and* promote happiness.

Below we profile a handful of "Happy Climate" projects from the past year. You can also see JZ present this work briefly in her popular TED talk, or in more depth in her 2024 BIG Difference BC keynote address.

Reward climate action: Operant conditioning creates a connection between certain behaviours and rewards or punishments. Used widely in learning, operant conditioning can inform climate policy and galvanize collective climate action in areas such as transportation, food, waste, and housing. We present a framework that also provides an explanation for the spillover effects that can come from behavioural interventions, and helps fine-tune future efforts to drive eco-friendly action.

For more details:
Zhao, J., Radke, J., Chen, F., Sachdeva, F., Gershman, S., & Luo, Y. (2024). How do we reinforce climate action? *Sustainability Science, 19,* 1503-1517.

Ask people to "do more good": Calls for climate action typically ask people to reduce harmful behaviour. Rather than framing climate action as a sacrifice, what if we asked people to do more good? Across two experiments, participants expressed more willingness to take climate actions when the actions were framed as increasing eco-friendly behaviour (e.g., eating more plants) rather than as reducing harmful behaviour (e.g., eating less meat).

For more details:
Radke, J., Guan, S., Dunn, E., & Zhao, J. (2025). *Eat more plants vs. eat less meat: Do-more-good frames increase climate action likelihood and anticipated happiness compared to do-less-bad frames.* Manuscript under review.

Use "happy climate" frames: Calls for climate action often focus on avoiding impending disaster. Could presenting climate action as an opportunity to improve our lives and systems help motivate people? Participants were shown one of four messages: a positivity-focused "Happy Climate" frame, a disaster avoidance frame, a neutral climate change facts frame, or a control message. Participants in the "Happy Climate" condition expressed the most willingness to take climate action. This effect was especially pronounced for climate skeptics, suggesting that this framing could be useful across the ideological spectrum.

For more details:
Radke, J., Dunn, E., & Zhao, J. (2025). *Mentioning happiness increases willingness to take climate action.* Manuscript under review.

Use lotteries to increase reuse and recycling: Incentivizing consumers to reuse and recycle could be key in combatting pollution. We tested probabilistic rewards (a.k.a. lotteries) where people have a chance of a big payoff (e.g., a 0.01% chance of winning $1,000 per bottle recycled or a 5% chance to win a gift card per cup re-used). Across a mix of field and lab studies, people preferred the probabilistic recycling refund (compared to a guaranteed, smaller reward of $0.10 per bottle) and recycled more bottles when it was offered. Similarly, across multiple field studies, café customers used significantly more reusable cups when probabilistic rewards were offered. Lotteries may be a useful tool in promoting circular economy behaviours.

For more details:
Sheppard, S. B., Argentopoulos, S., Ware, J., Swearingen, A., Winfield, J., Radke, J. & Zhao, J. (2025). *Probabilistic rewards increase the use of reusable cups. Resources, Conservation & Recycling, 212,* 108001; Radke, J., Argentopoulos, S., Dunn, E., & Zhao, J. (2025). *Probabilistic refunds increase beverage container recycling behavior.* Manuscript under review.

2024-2025: Our core team published 19 peer-reviewed journal articles, presented 20 conference talks, was awarded over $2,000,000 in grant funding, and gave many invited talks and media interviews. We also collaborated with partners on a number of field experiments and quasi-experiments.

Behavioural Insights Training

UBC's *Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights* || Class of 2025

Fundamentals of Behavioural Insights

Created by Tippawan Sookruay
from Noun Project

Our three-week online course introduces behavioural insights, experimentation, and ethics to working professionals. The course is offered multiple times per year.

2024-2025: We welcomed a record 114 students from government (42%), academia (15%), and other parts of the public (13%), private (20%), non-profit (7%), and other sectors (3%).

Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights

Our nine-month, part-time, online program combines coursework and a capstone project to teach working professionals how to create behaviourally-informed, evidence-based solutions that change behaviour and nudge for good. See our brochure for details.

2024-2025: We celebrated the graduation of 12 BI practitioners! Working with partner organizations, teams completed projects promoting cybersecurity, equity, and public safety.

BIG Difference BC Scholarships

UBC-DIBS co-administers the BIG Difference BC portfolio of scholarships for BC-based working professionals in the public or non-profit sector. To make access to BI training more equitable, priority is given to people who identify as IBPOC, 2SLGBTQ+, and/or persons with disability.

2024-2025: We were pleased to award a $5,000 certificate scholarship to Syju John Suchitha. We were also pleased to offer brand-new $800 *Fundamentals* scholarships to Ann Chou and Jennifer Smith.

Behavioural Insights Events

Featured Event: BIG Difference BC Conference
Each year, we partner with the BC Behavioural Insights Group (BC BIG) and WorkSafeBC to cohost our free, online conference, which celebrates using BI for positive impact across topics and sectors in BC and beyond.

BIG Difference BC 2024: In 2024, we explored "Applying Behavioural Insights to Urgent Challenges" with 1,530 registrants from 48 countries. Registrants represented federal, provincial, and local governments, universities, and a variety of other public, non-profit, and private sector organizations.

- Our own Dr. Jiaying Zhao (UBC) delivered a keynote address on "Nudging Climate Action & Happiness".

- Our special session on "Responding to the Climate Crisis" explored behavioural elements of three interconnected climate-related challenges: planetary healthcare, conservation, and disaster preparedness and response. Carl Jensen (BC BIG) moderated a conversation between Andrea MacNeill (Vancouver General Hospital), Don Carruthers Den Hoed (University of British Columbia & PARKS+ Collective), and Naureen Naqvi (UNICEF).

- 14 lightning talks and micro-presentations shared projects applying BI to:

  - **Health emergencies**, including encouraging organ donation registration, harm-reduction behaviours, HPV vaccine uptake, healthier food consumption, and use of personal protective measures against infectious diseases.

  - **Climate challenges**, including increasing wildfire resilience, uptake of agricultural programs, energy conservation, resistance to climate misinformation, and support for climate policy.

  - **Financial and labour challenges**, including increasing uptake of apprenticeship programs, increasing emergency savings, and improving financial aid administration.

  - **AI adoption**, including combatting AI-enabled scams.

BIG Difference BC 2025: Save the date for our eighth annual conference on Friday, November 7, when our theme will be "Changing Behavioural in Complex Systems".

Behavioural Insights Seminar Series

Our seminar series invites researchers and practitioners to share their field and lab projects using BI to "nudge for good". Details of upcoming seminars and recordings of past seminars are available on the [BI Wiki](#).

2024-2025: We hosted 7 seminars that drew an average of 140 registrants, including faculty, staff, students, alumni, and members of the public. We learned about projects using BI in the contexts of inclusion, energy conservation, and gambling. We also discussed the practice of BI, including scaling nudges, mainstreaming behavioural public policy, using antiracist methods, and applying BI in the public sector.

Research Lab

Our lab meetings provide an informal venue to share, discuss, and provide feedback on emerging research ideas and projects in progress. To provide a supportive, collegial environment for sharing early work, lab meetings are reserved for UBC-DIBS members and partners

2024-2025: We convened lab four times to discuss work in progress from a mix of UBC faculty and practitioners from partner organizations. Topics included human-wildlife conflict, diversifying award nominations, supporting decision-making by leaders, and how perceptions of time impact decision-making.

Behavioural Insights Resources

Featured Resource: Calling DIBS Podcast

This year we released the 100th episode of our *Calling DIBS* podcast, which is a glimpse into the world of behavioural insights through interviews with BI enthusiasts and experts from BC and beyond. The podcast is available on the [BI Wiki](#) as well as [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), and [Amazon Music](#).

The inspiration. The podcast started in fall 2020 as a way for students in our BI programs to hear from a wider set of voices beyond those of the handful of program faculty. The podcast also supplemented course readings, given that most textbooks don't cover all phases and aspects of BI projects in equal depth. As a result, early episodes focused on specific phases of the BI project lifecycle, like scoping, exploratory research, and scaling. Additionally, we sought to provide examples of using BI in applied settings, such as local, provincial, and federal government, Crown corporations, the private sector, and internal and external consulting roles.

The journey. At the end of the first season, we had requests to make the podcast available to alumni and folks outside our BI programs. In response, we took the leap to share the podcast publicly via our wiki and the major streaming platforms. From there the podcast has grown to include 100 episodes over five seasons. We've invited 82 guests spanning program alumni, behavioural science researchers from UBC and universities around the world, practitioners from BI units across Canada and beyond, and numerous folks weaving BI into their day-to-day work across sectors. We've covered a wide range of topics including introductory BI concepts, new behavioural science research and hot topics, tips for conducting BI projects, intersections between BI and other disciplines, different ways BI is used beyond standard BI trials, BI careers and community, and applications of BI to challenges like the climate crisis, public health, and EDI.

The acknowledgements. As we close out our fifth season, the podcast has amassed over 11,000 listens. We want to thank all of our guests, student and staff assistants, and listeners for contributing to and supporting *Calling DIBS.* What a delight it is to host a podcast chatting with folks we like and whose work we admire. We're already looking forward to next season!

2024-2025: This year, the podcast received over 3,000 listens. We met our accessibility goal of adding closed captions and transcripts for our entire back catalog of episodes. We released a special 100th episode reflecting on 5 years of the podcast and 16 episodes focused on what's new in the world of applied behavioural science:
- **How the practice of BI is evolving and improving**, including episodes on personalizing nudges (#99), using antiracist methods (#98), combining approaches (#93 and #84), using digital methods (#92), and applying BI within organizations (#91 and #90).

- **Projects applying BI to challenges** such as the climate crisis (#97), reducing sludge (#95), the opioid emergency (#94), the safety of technical systems (#89), and human-wildlife conflict (#85).
- **How BI complements and can be combined with other disciplines** including planning (#96), service design (#88), social marketing (#87), and opinion research (#86).

Behavioural Insights Wiki

Our BI Wiki is an online resource repository for BI enthusiasts and experts. It includes a newsfeed, podcast episodes, seminar recordings, working papers, a library of recommended BI reads/watches/listens, tools for conducting BI projects, and learning and career resources.

2024-2025: This year, we updated our BI infographics about learning pathways and intersections with other disciplines. We also compiled stats resources for folks wanting an introduction to data or a deeper dive into statistics. As in previous years, we added an average of 3 wiki posts each week, for over 160 items this year. The wiki auto-sends the latest posts to 100+ subscribers on a weekly basis.

BIG Difference BC Community & Resources

UBC-DIBS works with the BC Behavioural Insights Group (BC BIG) to manage BIG Difference BC, a network of BI enthusiasts and experts from government, academia, and across the public, non-profit, and private sectors in BC and beyond. A cross-sectoral advisory board provides strategic oversight as well as creative and logistical input. In addition to our annual conference, UBC-DIBS and BC BIG also collaborate to deliver:

BIG Difference BC Newsletter: Our joint monthly newsletter shares news, "choice events", "choice reads", "choice tips", and other highlights from across our network.

BIG Difference BC Blog: Our joint blog features a variety of content, including glimpses of how practitioners use BI, examples of BI in the wild, case studies, topical issues, and guest posts from community members.

2024-2025: The BIG Difference BC website saw over 11,000 visits. We released 10 issues of our newsletter to over 4,200 newsletter subscribers. We published 5 blog posts which together saw over 1,800 views.

Our People

Core Team

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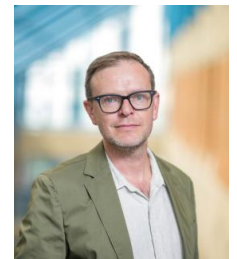*Assistant Professor, Stockholm School of Economics*

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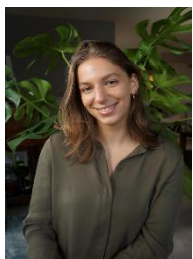*Master's Student, UBC Department of Psychology*

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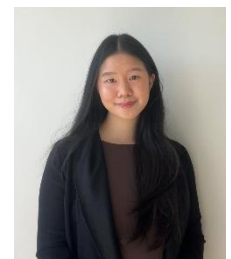*BCom Student, UBC Sauder School of Business*

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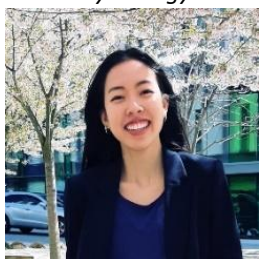*BA Student, UBC Department of Psychology*

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