

Behavioral Diagnostics

The Behavioral Approach

The Behavioral Approach brings psychological, social, and contextual explanations of human behavior to policy design and provides innovative, complementary and usually inexpensive solutions for policy improvement. The aim of the approach is to identify potential bottlenecks in existing systems and mechanisms of service delivery by giving emphasis to design details.

	Traditional Approach	Behavioral Approach
What drives behavior?	Fixed preferences, values and monetary incentives	Context, variable preferences, values, costs and benefits
How is behavior changed?	Provide information and incentives	Remove barriers and create easier channels for decision and action
Reasons for inaction	Lack of value (preferences) or need for resources	Preferences, needs, context complexities or barriers
Approach to Poverty	Investigate deviations from assumptions or structural barriers	Investigate effect of poverty and context over decisions and actions

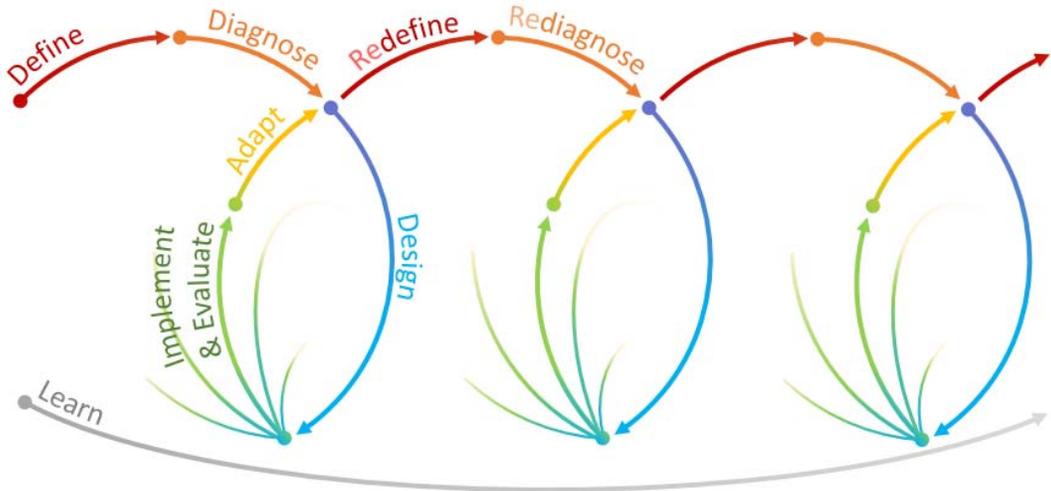
Adapted from Ideas42 (2015)

The approach follows a simple cycle of implementation:

1. The first stage is to **define** the problem by identifying the stakeholders, their relevant behaviors, and the context.
2. Then, the following stage is to **diagnose** the bottlenecks that prevent stakeholders from attaining the desired behavior. For this, the context is carefully examined to then provide hypothesis about which psychological concepts may cause the problem.
3. Once potential bottlenecks and drivers have been identified, it comes the time to **design** interventions to address the challenge.
4. In the **implementation and evaluation** stage, multiple interventions are carried out and assessed.
5. Subsequently, after drawing lessons from the interventions comes a stage to **adapt** the initial assumptions. The problem statement, hypothesized bottlenecks, and potential interventions are **redefined, re-diagnosed, and redesigned** until an effective intervention has been identified.

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Under the iterative and adaptive process of the behavioral approach, the definition of problems, diagnosis of bottlenecks, and design of solutions become the fundamental stages to achieve an effective policy. Lastly, this is a learning process in itself, on that brings information, knowledge, experience, and most important, policy lessons.



Adapted from WDR (2015)

Define Problems

Defining a problem is a challenging task. Problems are multi-faceted and are caused by various factors that are usually intertwined. Furthermore, these root causes are often distorted and difficult to identify, because we tend to formulate problems in a way that subsumes our assumptions.

The elements of a clearly defined problem statement are the following:

- A **stakeholder** or an identifiable actor whose behavior we want to change,
- A well-defined **behavior** (or few key behaviors) that we are aiming to change in order to meet the desired outcome,
- A **setting** and explicit **assumptions** that could bring further information on the bottlenecks that are preventing the desired behavior.

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Some tactics and questions to ask when defining a problem in terms of a behavior are:

Change the scope. Problems too broadly defined could fall out of the reachable scope of the project, and those defined too narrowly could yield to irrelevant outcomes.

Zoom in:

- What are the components of the problem?
- Of these, what is the highest priority and achievable?

Zoom out:

- Is this part of another problem?
- Would fixing this problem just be one of many other fixes necessary to solve that other problem?

Change representation. The idea is to approach the problem from all the relevant stakeholders' perspective and to assess it. In particular, is fundamental to think of the problem from the end user's perspective and from those who interact or who influence decisions of the user.

- How do the stakeholders view this situation?
- Would they think there is a problem?
- How would they define it?

Remove assumptions. By asking "how" we could open up the range of possible solutions to try out.

- Instead of asking "Why is something happening?",
- ask "How could that something happen?"

References

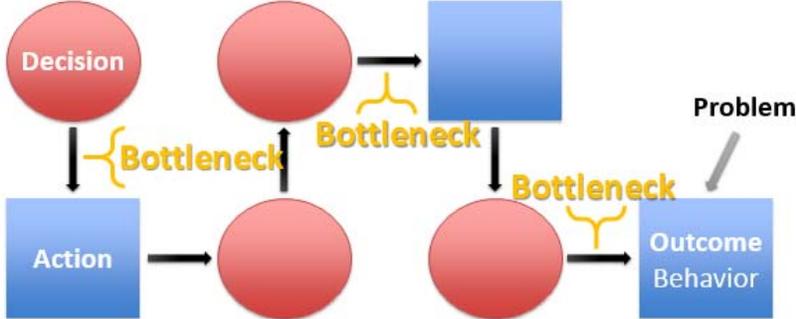
- Helpful Tactics to Define a Problem, The BETA Project, 2013
- Poverty Interrupted. Applying Behavioral Science to the Context of Chronic Scarcity, Ideas42, 2015.
- World Development Report 2015: Mind, Society, and Behavior, The World Bank, 2015.

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Diagnose Bottlenecks

The Behavioral Process Map

Is an analytical tool that represents through a flow chart the necessary steps an end-user has to undertake in order to attain a desired behavior or policy outcome. The goal of the map is to diagnose possible barriers, drop-out or stress points, known as bottlenecks, that prevent users from achieving the outcome, and that could potentially become entry points for intervention.



Source: BI team

In the map, each step is classified between decisions (moments of choice) or actions (moments when something is accomplished). The making of the decision-process is depicted consecutively and linearly until the desired outcome is finally reached. All assumptions are made explicit in order to guarantee the validity of the map's representation. Finally, an identified bottleneck will be represented on the map as a barrier that prevents users from continuing to the subsequent step.

For each of the elements of the process map, there are several questions that should be asked in order to identify bottlenecks, following the *Decision Process Checklist* proposed by Ly, Mažar, Zhao, and Soman (2013).

Decisions

- How is the choice perceived by the end user? Is the decision important or does it receive little attention?
- What moments or events motivate an end user to act on the decision?
- Is the choice an active or an automatic, passive one?
- What is the field of choice? How many options are available? What is the default option if an individual decides not to do anything?
- Is feedback available and is it received immediately?

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- What are the incentives? Which ones are most prominent, which are not?
- What are the associated costs (financial, social, and psychological)?
- How does the person understand the consequences of her choice? How are the consequences of her choice valued?

Actions

- Is there time for the individual to change her mind?
- Does the person comply with the action or postpones it at a later time?
- Are there any resources necessary to make the action?
- Does it depend on someone else's decisions or actions?

Features of the mindset

- Are the benefits of making a good decision delayed or experienced immediately?
- Is the decision usually made when the individual is in an emotional state?
- Does the decision require the exertion of willpower or self-control (such as in the domains of smoking, dieting, exercising)?

Sources of information

- What knowledge or expertise is needed to make a decision?
- How is information or knowledge communicated to the individual (visually, verbally, in a text)?
- Does the information flow sequentially? What information is presented first? Presented last?

Context, environmental and social factors

- Is the decision made in isolation or in a social environment?
- Is the decision influenced by what is presented in the media or by expert opinions?
- Are peers a major source of information?
- Is there an application process and is it difficult to navigate?

References

- A Practitioner's Guide to Nudging. Kim Ly, Nina Mažar, Min Zhao and Dilip Soman, 2013