What is Behavioural Science at the LSE?

by Heather Kappes, Assistant Professor, Department of Management

Even as Behavioural Science has emerged as a field of study, it has not been clear that it means the same thing to everyone. This may be a good thing! Disciplines that are broadly defined and that allow for different interpretations are inherently more likely to serve as useful umbrellas under which people with common—but not identical—interests can congregate. Below, some of these people, working and studying across several departments at the LSE, share what behavioural science means to them.

Matteo M Galizzi is an Assistant Professor of Behavioural Science at the Department of Social Policy, working on lab-field behavioural experiments in the area of health and social policy. "I am an economist by background, and I see myself as a behavioural scientist. What is Behavioural Science at the LSE for me? It is the cross-disciplinary, open-minded science of understanding how people behave. It cross-fertilises and brings closer together insights and methods from a variety of fields and disciplines, from experimental and behavioural economics to social and cognitive psychology, from judgement and decision-making to marketing and consumer behaviour, from health and biology to neuroscience, from philosophy to happiness and wellbeing research. Behavioural scientists at the LSE use a broad range of methods to understand how people behave, particularly randomised controlled experiments in the lab and the field."

Chiahuei Wu is an Assistant Professor of Management, who studies organizational behaviour, including proactivity, personality development, work design and employees' subjective well-being. "Behavioural science at LSE is to rely on knowledge of social science to understand causes of behaviour of individuals, groups and organizations at/across different levels."

Tara Reich is also an Assistant Professor of Management studying organizational behaviour. Her research focuses on the psychology of workplace incivility and mistreatment. "Behavioural science is the systematic study of human behaviour. Behavioural scientists at the LSE use observation, interviews, surveys, and experiments to develop and test theories that explain when and why individuals behave as they do. For example, when, how, and why would an individual who witnesses someone being rude to another get involved? Answers to these types of research questions aim to help policy makers develop strategies to improve the wellbeing of individuals throughout the UK and compliment the predominantly social science tradition of the LSE."

Maciej Halbryt is a 3rd-year student on the BSc in Management degree, who is currently torn between advanced study in behavioural science, and starting a business. "Economics never made sense to me, because I found its most fundamental assumption, rationality of agents, inherently wrong. And then Behavioural Economics and Behavioural Science were introduced to me. It was like a bridge between economic models and what was actually going on in the world as we could observe it.

Behavioural Science, to me, is much more than an emerging discipline of science. It is a blend of a bunch of great disciplines, which individually seem to be lacking something. Economics, Psychology, Neuroscience, and Sociology are all fantastic realms of science, but separately they do not provide a complete picture of human behaviour and reasons for decisions we make. But combined, under the umbrella of Behavioural Science, they provide a comprehensive toolset to analyse our irrationality. And this is what Behavioural Science is to me: a comprehensive, if not complete, toolset allowing us to understand why we behave the way we behave and make decisions we make. It is also a facilitator for making better decisions which is equally valuable."

Dario Krpan is an LSE Fellow in Behavioural Science at the Department of Social Policy. Before coming to LSE, he completed an MPhil and a PhD in Psychology at the University of Cambridge. "Whenever I hear the expression "behavioural science", I think of the term "behaviourism". Behaviourists were interested in studying human behaviour because at the time they thought that thinking cannot be scientifically measured, so they assumed that thinking is irrelevant to understanding behaviour. Although contemporary behavioural scientists have developed many different ways of measuring human thinking, they know that there are many situations when

behaviour is not shaped by people's thoughts, but by contextual effects that are difficult to understand and need to be discovered through rigorous scientific experimentation. Therefore, I define behavioural science as the science that investigates circumstances under which thinking does not lead to behaviour."

Barbara Fasolo is Associate Professor of Behavioural Science. She currently serves as Head of the Behavioural Research Lab and Director of the Executive Master in Behavioural Science. "I come from an area of study called behavioural decision making, but I realized I was actually studying much more than how people make decisions. For me, behavioural science is a field that describes how people actually do think and act, rather than how they *should*. When we teach behavioural science at the LSE, we focus on the science of understanding, predicting, and influencing how people behave."

Tamara Ansons is the Administrator for the Behavioural Research Lab; she has a PhD in cognitive psychology and previously worked as an Assistant Professor in Marketing at Warwick Business School. "In my view, Behavioural Science is about understanding the drivers of human behaviour by testing theories from various disciplines – mainly economics and psychology – in a laboratory environment and using these insights to shape policy and impact practice. From this interdisciplinary perspective, it is focused on investigating how small changes can produce reliable changes in human behaviour.

LSE is well positioned for Behavioural Science with its Behavioural Research Lab, where researchers can conduct controlled studies, and forge strong links with business leaders and policy makers to have an impact in the field. What makes Behavioural Science at LSE especially appealing is the diversity of researchers' expertise and interests, which creates a vibrant, collaborative interdisciplinary research community. Further, Behavioural Science researchers at the LSE are at the forefront of knowledge creation in their field, so students are exposed to cutting-edge findings directly from the researchers that generate these insights. This gives students the opportunity to not only develop a deep understanding of the findings but also allows them to develop the skills needed to use Behavioural Science research methods to better understand the causes of human behaviour. Ultimately, Behavioural Science at LSE is about providing current and future business leaders and policy makers with theoretically-grounded, evidence-based insights and skills that can be used to shape practice and policy so that individuals can make better decisions."

Laura Zimmermann is a PhD candidate in the Department of Management, where she is currently exploring how regular physical activity can bolster people's goal pursuit and willpower in different contexts – such as consumer choices. "What is Behavioural Science? Well, it's definitely a popular buzz-word at the moment, and seems to be a goldmine considering all the self-help books published recently under this label… But what does 'Behavioural Science' mean at LSE?

Behavioural Science is an umbrella term which includes research and methods from several other disciplines. It's the short way of saying "Let's take a bit of psychology, some neuroscience, a bit of sociology and behavioural economics and some other disciplines and mix it all together".

What connects all these parts is their interest in the empirical investigation of human behaviour as individuals and in groups. But not just in a descriptive way – Behavioural Science at LSE also puts a strong emphasis on how this research can be applied to the real world (for example in management, social policy or health), sometime even with normative focus (nudging people to do certain things).

It is an interdisciplinary field of research, which is great because we get the chance to work together with researchers from different departments like Management, Social Policy and Social Psychology here at the LSE and elsewhere. I ♥ BS"

Ilka Gleibs is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Psychology, particularly interested in social identity and research ethics. "Human behaviour is at the core of understanding today's pressing problems such as climate change, intergroup conflict, social inequality etc. To understand the full extent of human behaviour we need a multidisciplinary perspective that includes knowledge from psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology, political science, social policy and economics. Why this multidisciplinary perspective is important can be demonstrated when want to understand the strength of trends towards inflation, for example. It is not enough to know the laws of supply and demand—the power relations of groups, the ideology of the governing bodies and the value system of individuals are important to understand as well. Psychologists, like me, add to the behavioural sciences by providing a toolkit of concepts and methods for understanding the psycho-social processes that mediate behavioural outcomes in particular settings. Importantly, I believe that behavioural sciences should not only focus on the individual, who are for example conceived as fallible decision makers (as per the 'bounded rationality' model), but should engage with people's social experiences and the perception of humans as social beings. Thus, in the tradition of Kurt Lewin I think that groups or the social environment in which individuals interact (organisations, teams, societies) are key for understanding behaviour and behavioural change. Another key feature of behavioural science as a multidisciplinary field is the wide range of methodologies that can be applied to examine human behaviour as a whole using techniques ranging from scientific experimentation to observation (controlled or naturalistic). This, and the exchange of my perspective as a social psychologist with those of economists, political scientists or business scholars all looking at the wide array of human behaviour, is what is particularly exciting about behavioural science at the London School of Economics and beyond."

And finally, Paul Dolan is Professor of Behavioural Science and Director of the Executive MSc in Behavioural Science. "One of my most impactful pieces of work was the MINDSPACE checklist which sought to show how nine "nudges" can be used to change people's behaviour. I don't want to be held to this because it's a very crude distinction of disciplines and methods and so I'm bound to upset someone, but Messenger, Norms and Ego are largely insights from tests and observations in social psychology, Incentives, Defaults and Commitments are largely insights from field experiments in economics, and Salience, Priming and Affect are largely insights from lab experiments in cognitive psychology and neuroscience. I think MINDSPACE is a good representation of what constitutes behavioural science in action. As for a more succinct definition of behavioural science at LSE, well that's easy – it's the science of understanding and changing human behaviour, conducted at one of the world's leading institutions."

As Paul notes, at LSE, the work done by those above, and many other colleagues, is united by a common respect for grounding knowledge in research, by shared interests in methodology—for instance, when and how to study complex phenomena in the laboratory—by collaborations across

disciplines in research and teaching, and by shared passions for translating empirical results to the worlds of implementation and policy. There is no better place to engage with Behavioural Science.

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