IRRATIONAL LABS

The 3B Framework

Designing for Behavior Change

Rooted in latest behavioral science research, the 3B framework will help you come up with actionable recommendations to achieve behavior change

Behavior change is hard.

If it wasn't, we'd all be uber-fit beacons of productivity, trading our Netflix subscriptions for a kindle and a stationary bike.

Alas, this is not the case (for most of us).

Good news?

There are dozens of companies trying to help us improve our health, wealth and happiness.

Bad news?

They often fall short for predictable reasons. Humans (us!) don't always act in our best interest.

The 3B Framework

That's where the 3B framework comes in. The 3B framework is a scientific approach to behavior change. It distills the complex human psychology into a simple framework that designers, marketers and managers can use to build better products.

There are three key elements to behavior change:

BEHAVIOR	BARRIERS	BENEFITS

✔ By rigorously studying the environment of decision making, identifying these core elements and designing your product around them, you can achieve real behavior change.

✔ The 3B framework distills Irrational Labs' decade of experience applying the principles of behavioral economics to drive product success.

✔ It incorporates the most important principles from psychology into something you can use on a daily basis to drive design and strategy decisions.

✔ The 3B framework has been taught to hundreds of product managers at dozens of companies spanning all sizes and industries, like Google, the World Bank and Aetna.

Questions you'll be able to answer after applying the 3B framework

➡️ How can I increase uptake of a new feature or program?

➡️ Why are people dropping off midway through the sign up flow?

➡️ How can I increase the chances that someone will engage with my product or service?

➡️ People say they want this thing, but then they don't use it. How can I change that?

> "
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> *For product managers, designers and researchers, behavioral science is a shortcut to building successful solutions. It unlocks the psychology behind why our customers act (or don't act) and gives us the roadmap on what to build and test.*
>
> **- Kristen Berman**, Co-Founder of Irrational Labs

Behavioral Design Course

If you want to dig deeper, check out our self-paced, online Behavioral Design course. We've curated the most impactful insights from the field of behavioral science and will guide you through making them actionable.

Learn More: https://behavioraleconomicsbootcamp.com/

STEP 1:
Identify ONE Key Behavior

The first step to changing behavior may sound simple but requires thoughtfulness, thoroughness and specificity. In this step, you need to define the exact behavior you want someone to do and when in the flow they should do it.

For best results, you'll want to get uncomfortably specific—if you're not a little uncomfortable defining your key behavior, you're doing it wrong! See examples below.

Questions to Ask during this Step

- What one action do you want your users to take?
- Is this the single most important behavior for them to do to meet business goals?
- How often do you want the user to do this behavior? (Some behaviors only need to happen once, but some require habitual engagement.)

Examples of Key Behaviors

- Open up a savings account during first in-person visit to the credit union.
- Answer our health questionnaire within 30 days of starting a new job.
- Eat salad for lunch every weekday.
- Complete 30 minutes of cardio every Tuesday and Thursday morning.

As managers, we're really good at aligning our work to outcomes. You're probably already tracking conversion, active use and retention numbers!

We are asking you to go a step further. Go deeper.

What action does someone have to do in order to drive your outcomes? It's time to start rigorously tracking that behavior.

The most important step to behavior change is tracking the behavior you actually want to change!

Common Mistakes to Avoid during this Step

- **Not being specific enough.**

  "Eating healthy" is not going to cut it. Aim for the more clear-cut, "Eat one apple every weekday morning." Tip: Add timing. When should someone do this behavior?

- **Mistaking an outcome for a behavior.**

  An outcome is "losing 10 pounds" or "reducing acquisition cost below $16." What is the behavior that will help produce the outcome?

- **Designating "Log-in" and "Sign-up" as behaviors to design for.**

  These aren't behaviors you should be optimizing for; instead, think about what you want users to do after they've logged in or signed up.

- **Not aligning with all stakeholders on an agreed-upon behavior.**

  Often, we find that people within the same organization don't align on the same behavior, at least initially. Make sure everyone is on the same page to save time and headaches down the line.

- ## What if I don't know the key behavior?

    A key behavior is the most important part of behavior change. So it makes sense if you're not 100% confident on Day One what that behavior is! And, getting it wrong has consequences. If you design a system with the wrong Key Behavior, you won't actually drive your outcomes.

    Imagine you wanted to help your customers/users lose weight and you identified a key behavior to walk for 10 minutes a day. While a 10 minute stroll may have some health benefits, it won't take off the pounds.

    If you're not sure what the behavior is, we suggest you prioritize a few hypotheses that are informed by

    > 1) data about how people behave today

    > 2) academic literature about the domain and

    > 3) a behavior map that outlines the steps you think your customers are taking.

Now that you have your hypotheses prioritized, start testing! See if your key behavior drives the desired outcomes.

The Key Behavior I'm designing for is:

_____

_____

_____

_____

STEP 2:

Reduce **Barriers**

Barriers are steps a user has to take and the decisions the user has to make in order to achieve the key behavior. The thinking process of deciding where to go out for dinner is a psychological barrier. Walking or driving to a restaurant is a logistical barrier but involves a decision as well.

To create the path of least resistance for any key behavior for your user or consumer, you'll want to remove or simplify as many decisions as possible. The path of least resistance in your product should ultimately be the path leading to your desired key behavior.

> **TAKEAWAY:**
>
> Barriers are points of friction! Any friction will slow us down.

Humans are often guilty of taking the path of least resistance—whichever action is easiest is the action we're most likely to take. To design for behavior change, barriers should be reduced or removed entirely.

While there are countless barriers in the form of cognitive biases, we've listed some common themes here along with questions to ask in order to get at your true list of barriers.

Common types of Barriers & the Questions to ask for each

- **Attention Bias**

  People have limited attention spans. Life is busy and it's easy to miss important details. Ask these questions to see if attention bias is a problem for your key behavior.

  - Do people remember it? (Availability bias)

  - Do people see it? (Saliency bias)

  - Do people want to see it? (Information avoidance)

  Example: You're trying to get employees to fill out their time reports at the end of the work week. It's Friday and all people want to do is head off to Happy Hour. You have an Attention Bias barrier.

- **Cognitive Overload**

  We're wired to limit our cognitive effort. When given higher levels of decision difficulty or faced with a more complex set of choices, we can procrastinate or opt out of taking action altogether, even though a rational human should enjoy more choice. Is cognitive overload a problem for your key behavior? Ask these questions to find out:

  - Is the best option clear? (Choice Overload)

  - Do people lack time/energy? (Scarcity, Depletion)

  - Do people lack the confidence to make the decision now? (Procrastination, Decision Paralysis)

  Example: You're helping people refinance their home to save money. They have to navigate which offer is optimal. If there are a lot of options to choose from, people will likely act like deer in headlights and freeze (i.e., put off the decision until later!)

- ## Status Quo

  We have a natural bias toward the present state of affairs and not changing anything. We often view a change from the status quo as a loss. Is status quo bias a problem for your key behavior? Ask these questions to find out:

  - Do people realize the opportunity cost of staying in the status quo? E.g. what are you missing out on by not changing things up? (Opportunity Cost Neglect)

  - Are there potential losses from moving away from the status quo? (Loss Aversion, Regret Aversion, Sunk Costs)

  - Is it easy for people to switch? (Cognitive Overload, Decision Paralysis)

  Example: You're designing a way for people to re-sell their old clothing. People don't know the value of that 1 year old dress in their closet. The status quo behavior is to keep it in their closet and not do anything.

- ## Mental Models

  Our preconceptions for how something works (our understanding of the surrounding world) can bias our actions and social behaviors. Mental models are often based on incomplete facts, visible norms, past experiences, and even intuitive perceptions. These mental models can help shape actions and behavior. They influence what people pay attention to in complicated situations and define how people approach and solve problems. Are mental models a problem for your key behavior? Ask these questions to find out:

  - What are people's pre-existing attitudes and beliefs?

  - Do these pre-existing attitudes and beliefs align with the key behavior?

  - Are there assumptions different from what's being presented?

  Example: You work at a company offering online therapy to people who have daily anxiety. Counseling/therapy may have a negative stigma around it preventing people from signing up.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **Forgetting that a decision point is actually a barrier**

  Every time a user has to make a decision, regardless of how trivial, it adds friction that could decrease the likelihood of completing your key behavior. Every click, every field, every signature, every step and every call is a barrier. That may not be a bad thing (see below), but all decision points should be documented nonetheless.

- **Dismissing all friction as bad**

  In some cases, friction serves an important purpose, whether it's changing a mental model or reducing perceived friction. Read up on other cases where friction may not be a bad thing.

Some barriers to completing the key behavior that my users might face are:

_____

_____

_____

Now that you have identified the barriers, it's time to prioritize them. Take your top barriers and brainstorm how you could:

REMOVE them entirely   -- OR --   ## SIMPLIFY the Decision

We once removed one open text field from a sign-up form and increased page over page conversion by 40%! The field asked people a question about their business. The question appeared simple, but it required customers to think a little. Because it wasn't critical to the onboarding experience, the team was able to remove it.

Any small step is considered a barrier. If you can't remove a step because of regulatory requirements or because the information provided improves the accuracy of a recommendation algorithm or similar, consider using a default.

If removing choices to get rid of barriers isn't an option or a little choice is helpful (many times it is!), then consider helping your users with the decision. Here are ways to simplify:

- Recommend an option. If you think you know the best option for your audience, use a 'Recommended by ____.'

- Provide information on what choice other people make (like a "Most Popular" tag).

- Add (brief) helpful information that describes the option in an easily relatable way, like a "Best if you come 3+ times/week" tag on a fitness class package.

- Reduce the number of options. Instead of 5 options, can you reduce the choice set to 3?

STEP 3:

Amplify **Benefits**

Where barriers add friction, benefits add the motivation to completing a key behavior.

But all benefits are not created equal. Given two similar rewards, people tend to prefer the immediate one and discount the value of the later reward. While we may intend to do something for our future self, in the moment we generally pick what's immediately most enjoyable.

Just think about what's in your Netflix queue right now.

For the future, you've probably picked out documentaries and award-winning artistic films. But what happens when you get home at the end of the day, you're tired, and you flip on the TV to relax? You're much more likely to end up with a light-hearted and lowbrow Zoolander when choosing for right now.

This, in a nutshell, is why weight loss is so hard—we don't start shedding the pounds the day we start dieting, it takes time. There is no immediate benefit to dieting. If you've ever bought french fries instead of a salad you likely can appreciate this.

So what does this mean for you, as you're trying to change behaviors?

You need to make any existing benefits of your product salient and immediate or create new ones, and make sure they outweigh the costs/barriers. If you are trying to drive longer-term benefits like weight loss or financial gain, you should focus on creating a perceived immediate benefit from a non-immediate one.
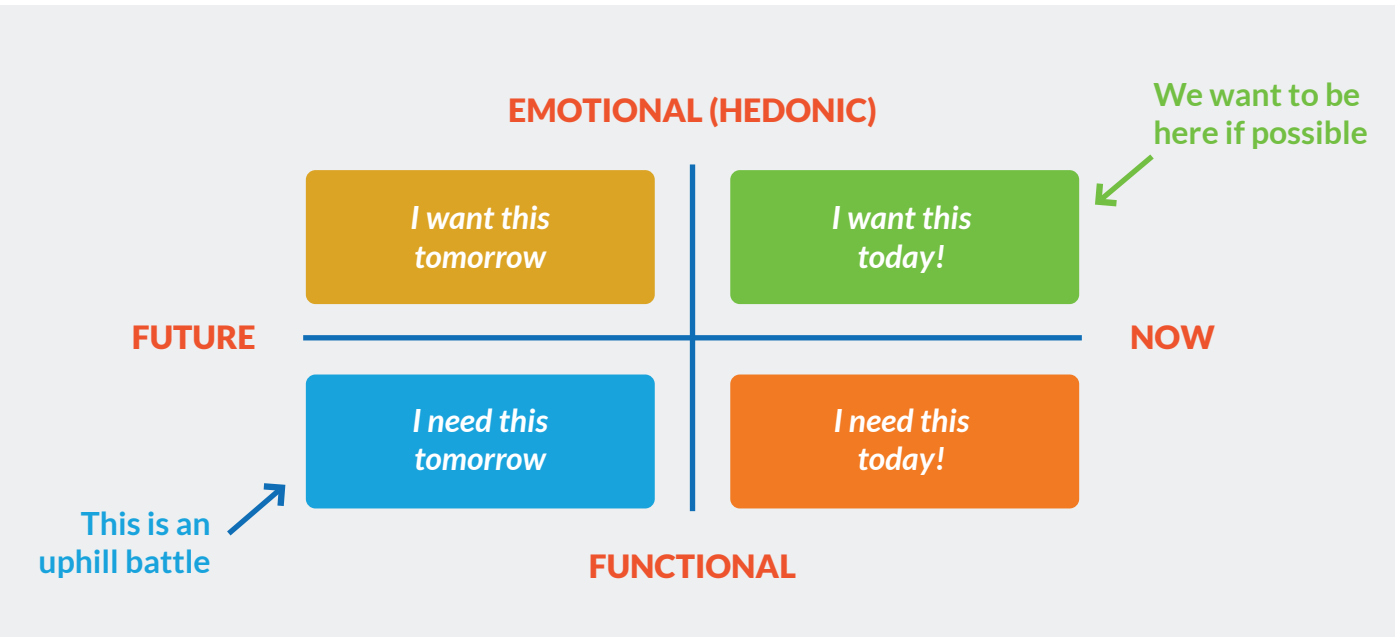
What are we talking about?

Good dental hygiene is a long-term benefit, but is that actually why we brush our teeth? Of course not. The reason we use toothpaste is to have fresh-smelling breath now. Brushing our teeth gives us an immediate and tangible reward, the main driver of consistent toothbrushing, while also contributing to the long-term goal of dental hygiene.

> Sometimes, we need to reframe our product and give people the right thing to do for the wrong reasons. Barriers are points of friction! Any friction will slow us down.

Keep in mind

"Benefits" don't always have to be literal, like money or goods. There are also psychological principles (like following norms, reputation, and altruism) that can serve as motivating benefits. In fact, psychological benefits are often the most powerful!

EMOTIONAL (HEDONIC)

We want to be here if possible

I want this tomorrow	*I want this today!*

FUTURE ———————————— **NOW**

I need this tomorrow	*I need this today!*

This is an uphill battle

FUNCTIONAL

Examples

- We have a new ergonomic keyboard that improves posture. While people know better posture is good for them, the immediate benefit we provide is faster typing.

- We are helping people pay off their car loan by splitting payments weekly. When people switch their payment frequency, we give them credit for free gas.

- We are a fitness app. We give people visible status immediately after they complete their first activity.

- We are a non profit trying to drive donations. We don't focus on the statistics of our cause, instead we highlight the powerful and emotional story of one recipient.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What would impact a user's life right now?

- Does the benefit appeal to someone's emotion?

- Is there a sense of urgency to act now?

- Do people receive a concrete benefit?

- Does the behavior of others signal what is socially acceptable?

- **Ignoring psychological benefits.**

  As we mentioned above, these benefits, like fitting in (following social norms), feeling good about yourself (altruism) and feeling good about the way others perceive you (reputation) are often stronger than more tangible benefits.

- **Overdoing it.**

  People will respond to deadlines or error messages. But over time they will catch on and you'll lose trust and customers. We recommend only using these tactics if the feature/behavior you're trying to encourage is mission critical to your product.

List out your existing benefits. How can you make them more immediate or concrete?

_____

_____

_____

Brianstorm new immediate benefits that you could create. What would motivate someone to take action now?
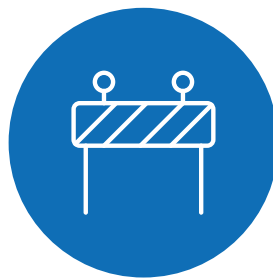
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3Bs

BEHAVIOR

The first B stands for Behavior (duh!).
We can't solve any problems without identifying the behavior that needs to be changed.

BARRIERS

The second B stands for Barriers.
Barriers add or decrease friction to completing a behavior. TLDR: make it easy for me to do!

BENEFITS

The third B stands for Benefits.
Benefits add or decrease motivation to completing the behavior. TLDR: make me want to do it!

Time to start building new behaviors!

You're well on your way to impacting behavior change for good! With an understanding of these principles, you can create more effective solutions to improve uptake of your key behavior.

We believe Product Managers have a responsibility whenever designing environments that people are making decisions in. You are choice architects—with the power to influence people's choices whether you know it or not. That's why you need to educate yourself on the human psyche.

This is just a peek into the world of behavioral design.

If you're looking to expand your impact, check out our online Behavioral Design course, where you'll learn:

- How your customers make decisions.

- How to design small tweaks to subtly encourage them to adjust their behaviors.

- The behavioral diagnosis, a critical tool to assess human behavior.

- Customer research and how a behavioral scientist does it.

- The psychological biases affecting you and your customers on a daily basis

Learn more about the Bootcamp at https://behavioraleconomicsbootcamp.com/

About Irrational Labs

Irrational Labs is a behavioral product design consultancy. We have worked with dozens of top companies to incorporate behavioral design into their workflow. We have run over 50 experiments to identify effective solutions that drive business and customer metrics. We have conducted hundreds of trainings inside big and small companies.

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