

DOING A BEHAVIORAL DIAGNOSIS

The process of figuring out how well something is designed to encourage a key behavior is what we call a **Behavioral Diagnosis**. It is a **detailed, step by step analysis of how users actually behave**, and it starts once you know what your key behavior is (For a recap, check out our summary of the [3B's Approach](#)).

Who is this for? The Behavioral Diagnosis is a tool that product managers, marketers and designers can add to their toolkit. It's an approach to solving behavioral questions and improving well-being that allows for a deeper understanding of a user's context.

WHY DO A BEHAVIORAL DIAGNOSIS?

A behavioral diagnosis is an approach to problem-solving that starts with deeply understanding the important influence of the environment on people's decisions.

By zooming in to each step and every detail of the whole process surrounding the key behavior, it becomes much easier to figure out the where, when and how of tweaking the environment.



A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO THE BEHAVIORAL DIAGNOSIS

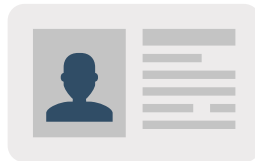
1 PICK YOUR “START-END POINTS”



Let's say you're trying to get people to bike to work more frequently in a city. You'll want to narrow the behavioral diagnosis to include specific “start-end points” of the biking to work experience.

For example, you could focus on people who already have bikes, requiring the diagnosis to start when a person wakes up in the morning. Or you could focus on people who don't own a bike, requiring the diagnosis to start at the bike shop. This is an assumption you're going to have to make based on what data is available to you and based on the users you are targeting.

2 CHOOSE YOUR USER

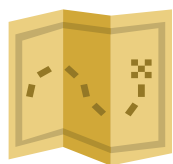


There are different types of cyclists (such as hard-core vs. commuter only). There are different routes these cyclists take to work. Which one should you choose for your behavioral diagnosis? Do you need to do a different diagnosis for each type, or do you just care about one type of cyclist? This is another assumption that should be informed by data when possible.

Instead of going through a segmentation exercise focused on demographic differences such as age or gender, try to segment based on a user's mindset. For example, a hard-core cyclist will be more confident in his bike routes and gear than the person who just uses their bike for commuting. Confidence is a mindset.



3 MAP THE FLOW



Be aware of what the ideal flow would be, but focus on how people actually behave. When designing a product or service, it's natural to design for how you think people will interact with it. However, since people aren't always rational, designs that assume "optimal" user behavior can miss the mark.

Use data to observe how users behave and then map out their *actual* behavior rather than how you think they *should* behave.

For an online product, you don't have to literally observe a user going through it. Instead, you can look at your analytics to map out the behavior on each page. How long do they linger? What do they interact with? When you don't have the benefit of step-by-step analytics, try to find other data that helps uncover actual behavioral patterns to help narrow down your diagnosis.

Get your experience flow on paper. Actually drawing out and carefully writing down each step of the process will help you visualize it. It will also help you make sure you haven't skipped anything. Remember that every decision is a step. As you complete the behavioral diagnosis, you need to get **uncomfortably specific** to avoid missing any steps. This means that every page, every field, and every click counts as a step.



4 MARK IT UP



Once you have your experience flow on paper, use the [3Bs Approach](#) to identify the barriers and benefits to doing the key behavior. Are there any steps that make it hard to do the key behavior? What are the benefits that motivate the user to do the key behavior? Are the benefits immediate and hedonic?

Go through each step and circle the barriers and benefits to doing your key behavior, as well as the assumptions you're making about the behaviors you are seeing. Where are the opportunities to make changes that will improve the experience?

The next step is to pick a main barrier you want to remove or a key benefit that needs to be amplified and design a controlled experiment around this change.

5 START EXPERIMENTING



Simplifying the process by removing the barriers you've identified is often something you can "Just Do". This means that you can implement some of the easy and low-cost/low-risk changes without carefully experimenting to isolate the effect of removing each barrier. However, for most changes, you will want to use [experiments](#) to review how and why they work.

A key aspect of experimentation is having carefully chosen control groups and intervention groups. By comparing the interventions to your control, you can figure out why something worked.

Once your intervention works, implement and scale it.



The environment matters, so in order to change it, we need to understand the small details of how people interact with it.

Drawing out all aspects of an experience and rigorously testing our interventions are key components of the behavioral diagnosis.

When used carefully, it is one of our most powerful tools!

