IRRATIONAL
LABS

The 3B Framework

Designing for Behavior Change

Find actionable paths to behavior change using the latest behavioral science research

Behavior change is hard.

If it wasn't, we'd all be trading our Netflix subscriptions for a Kindle and a Peloton.

Good news?

Dozens of companies are working to help us improve our health, wealth, and happiness.

Bad news?

They often fail for predictable reasons. We humans don't always act in our best interest.

The 3B Framework

Enter the 3B framework. It distills human psychology into a model that can help designers, marketers, and managers build better products.

There are 3 key elements to behavior change:

BEHAVIOR

BARRIERS

BENEFITS

- ✔ By 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 draws on Irrational Labs' experience driving product success through behavioral economics principles.

- ✔ It incorporates key insights from psychology into a playbook for daily design and strategy decisions.

- ✔ We've taught it to hundreds of product managers at companies of all sizes and industries, like Google, the World Bank, and Aetna.

Questions You'll be Able to Answer Using 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?

> *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

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

Learn More: https://behavioraleconomicsbootcamp.com/

STEP 1:
Identify ONE Key Behavior

The first step consists of defining the exact behavior you want someone to do and when in the flow they should do it.

For the best results, be uncomfortably specific—if you're not a little uncomfortable, you're doing it wrong! See examples below.

Ask Yourself

- 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 only need to happen once, but others require habitual engagement.)

Examples of Key Behaviors

- Open a savings account during a first visit to the credit union. Answer our health questionnaire within 30 days of starting a new job. Eat a salad every weekday.

- Do 30 minutes of cardio every Tuesday and Thursday morning.

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

Now go a step further.

What action is needed to drive your outcomes? Track it rigorously.

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

Mistakes to Avoid

- **Not being specific enough.**

  'Eating healthy' won't cut it. Aim for the clearer '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 behavior will help produce the outcome?

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

  Don't optimize for these behaviors. Instead, define what you want users to do after logging in or signing up.

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

  People within the same organization often don't align on the same behavior, at least initially. Make sure everyone is on the same page from day one.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **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% sure on day one what that behavior is! And if you design a system with the wrong key behavior, you won't drive your outcomes.

  Imagine you wanted to help your customers lose weight and you identified a key behavior to walk for 10 minutes a day. While this may benefit health, it won't take off the pounds.

  Unsure what the behavior is? Prioritize a few hypotheses that are informed by:

  > 1) data on how people behave today

  > 2) academic literature on the domain, and

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

Now that you've prioritized your hypotheses, test if your key behavior drives the desired outcomes.

The key behavior I'm designing for is:

| 🧠 **Behavior** | 🚧 **Barriers** | ☑️ **Benefits** |

Reduce **Barriers**

Barriers are the steps and decisions needed to achieve the key behavior. The thought process of deciding where to go for dinner is a psychological barrier. Walking or driving to a restaurant is a logistical barrier but also involves a decision.

To create the path of least resistance for any key behavior for your user or consumer, remove or simplify as many decisions as possible. The path of least resistance in your product should lead to your desired key behavior.

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

Humans often take the path of least resistance—the easiest action is the one we're likeliest to take. To design for behavior change, reduce or remove barriers entirely.

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

Common Barriers and the Questions to Ask for Each

- ● **Attention Bias**

  People have limited attention spans and it's easy to miss key 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 each week. It's Friday and people just want to go 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 more complex choices, we often procrastinate or opt out of taking action even though this is irrational. 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 decide 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 lots of options to choose from, people will likely freeze (i.e. put off until later)!

● Status Quo

We have a natural bias toward 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? (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 old dress in their closet. The status quo behavior is to not do anything.

● Mental Models

Our preconceptions for how something works can bias our actions and social behaviors. These mental models are often based on incomplete facts, visible norms, past experiences, and even intuition. They influence what people pay attention to and how they problem-solve. Are they a problem for your key behavior? Ask these questions to find out:

- ○ What are people's pre-existing attitudes and beliefs?
- ○ Do these 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.

- **Forgetting that decision points are barriers.**

  Every time a user has to make a decision, it adds friction that could decrease completions of your key behavior. That may not be bad (see below), but all decision points should be documented nonetheless.

- **Dismissing all friction as bad.**

  In some cases, friction serves an important purpose. Read up on other cases where friction may not be a bad thing

Barriers to completing the key behavior that my users might face:

Now that you've identified the barriers, prioritize them. Take your top barriers and brainstorm how you could:

REMOVE them entirely -- OR --	SIMPLIFY the decision
We removed an open text field from a sign-up form that asked people about their business. The question seemed simple, but required customers to think a little. It wasn't critical to onboarding, so we removed it. Result: page-over-page conversion went up 40%. Any small step is a barrier. If you can't remove a step, e.g. due to regulatory requirements or because it improves the accuracy of an algorithm, try using a default.	If you can't remove choices to get rid of barriers or a little choice is useful, consider helping your users decide: • Recommend an option. If you think you know the best option for your audience, use a 'Recommended by ___.' • Share what other people are choosing (e.g. a 'Most Popular' tag). • Add brief, helpful information describing the option in a relatable way, like a 'Best if you come 3+ times/week' tag on a fitness class package. • Reduce options. Instead of 5 choices, give 3.

🧠 **Behavior**	🚧 **Barriers**	☑ **Benefits**

STEP 3:
Amplify **Benefits**

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

But all benefits are not created equal. Given two similar rewards, people tend to prefer the immediate one and discount the later one's value. 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 your current Netflix queue.

You've probably saved documentaries and arthouse films to watch later. When you need to relax after a long day, you're much likelier to watch a light-hearted and lowbrow Zoolander.

This is why weight loss is so hard—we don't shed the pounds instantly. Dieting has no immediate benefit. If you've ever chosen french fries over a salad, you likely can appreciate this.

So what does this mean for you as you try 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. To drive longer-term benefits, focus on creating a perceived immediate one from a non-immediate one.
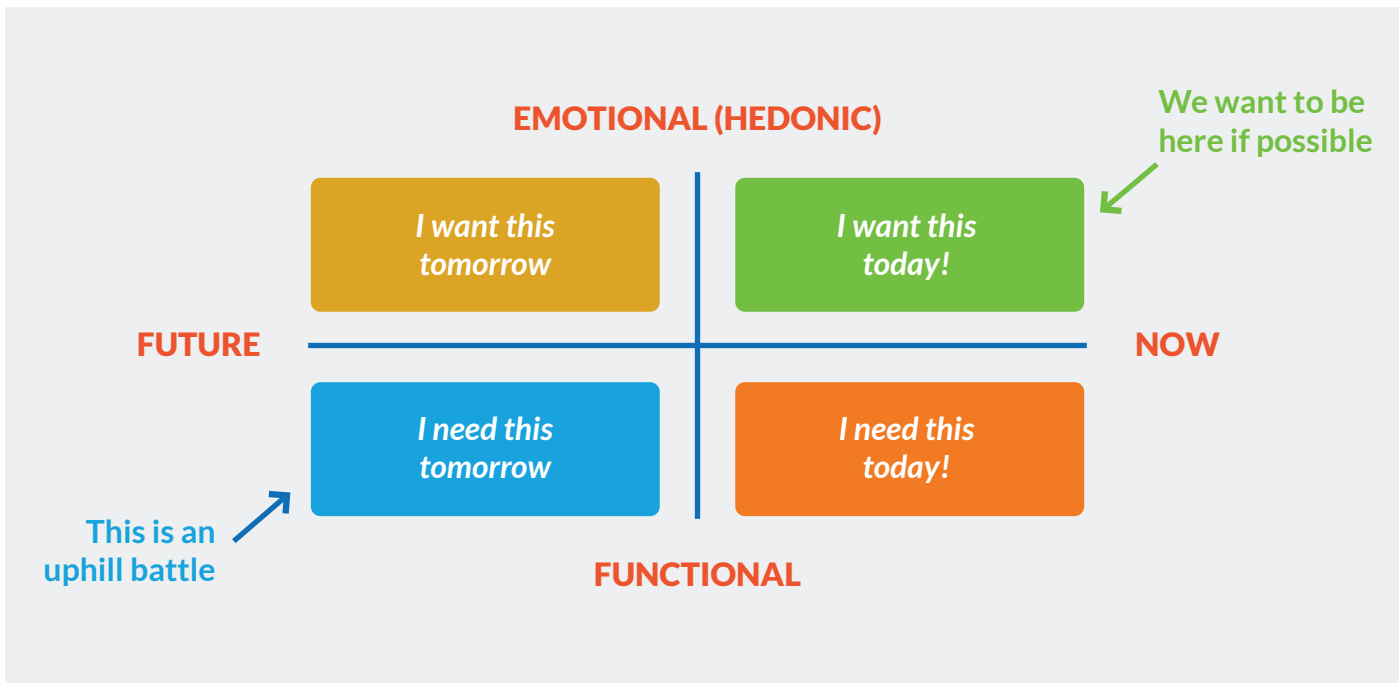
What are we talking about?

Good dental hygiene is a long-term benefit, but is that why we brush our teeth? Of course not. We do it to have fresh 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 choice for the wrong reasons. Barriers are points of friction! Any friction will slow us down.

Remember

'Benefits' need not always be literal, like money or goods. Psychological principles (like following norms, reputation, and altruism) can also serve as motivating benefits. In fact, the latter are often the most powerful!

EMOTIONAL (HEDONIC)

FUTURE		NOW
I want this tomorrow		*I want this today!*
I need this tomorrow		*I need this today!*

We want to be here if possible

This is an uphill battle

FUNCTIONAL

Examples of Benefits

- We have a new ergonomic keyboard that improves posture. While people know better posture is good for them, the immediate benefit is faster typing.
- We are helping people pay off their car loan by splitting payments weekly. When people switch their payment frequency, they get 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, but instead highlight the powerful and emotional story of one recipient.

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 mentioned above, these benefits, like fitting in or feeling good about yourself/your reputation, are often stronger than more tangible benefits.

- **Overdoing it.**

  People will respond to deadlines or error messages. But in 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.

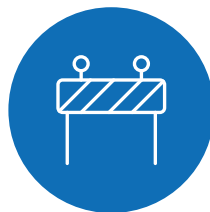**List your existing benefits. How can you make them more immediate or concrete?**

_____

_____

Brainstorm new immediate benefits you could create. What would motivate someone to take action now?

_____

_____

3Bs

BEHAVIOR

We can't solve problems without identifying the behavior that needs to be changed.

BARRIERS

Barriers add or decrease friction to completing a behavior. TL;DR: make it easy for me to do!

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 on your way to impacting behavior change for good! Your understanding of these principles will help you create more effective solutions to improve your key behavior's uptake.

Product Managers are choice architects. We believe you have a responsibility 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: https://behavioraleconomicsbootcamp.com/

About Irrational Labs

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

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