

Nudging gone wrong?

Quality control in nudge production

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Outline

1. What goes on inside nudge units and why should we care?

- Examples of misnudging
- Nudging in theory vs. in practice

2. How is nudging actually done?

- Heuristics
- Experimental methods

3. Risk factors in nudging

4. Our survey & findings

1. What goes on inside nudge units & why should we care?

Some nudge units...

GOVERNMENT UNITS



EXTERNAL UNITS



INTERNAL UNITS WITHIN ORGANISATIONS



1. What goes on inside nudge units & why should we care?

The debate about nudging is incomplete.

- The **goals** and **products** are usually public:
 - e.g. **Goal:** increasing vaccination rates. **Product:** personalised reminders.
- **How does the nudge unit arrive at the product?**
 - How does the current practice relate to the original nudge theory (*“as judged by themselves”*, Thaler & Sunstein, 2008)?
 - Misnudging: may the interests of clients and nudgees be misaligned?

1. What goes on inside nudge units & why should we care?

Examples of misnudging (unintended consequences)

- Nudging for **weight loss**: innovative calorie labelling have small effects (VanEpps, Downs & Loewenstein, 2016)
- Nudging for **retirement savings**: default options can leave people financially worse off (Chater & Loewenstein, 2022)
- Nudging for **climate change**: green defaults crowd out systemic change (Chater & Loewenstein, 2022; Liebe, Gewinner & Diekmann, 2021)

2. How is nudging actually done?

Current guidelines are heuristics (developed by The BIT):

- **MINDSPACE** (Messenger, Incentives, Norms, Defaults, Salience, Priming, Affect, Commitments, Ego) (*mechanisms*)
- **EAST** (Easy, Attractive, Social, Timely) (*intervention*)
- **APPLES** (Administration, Politics, People, Location, Experimentation, Scholarship) (*project*)

The risk of misnudging?

2. How is nudging actually done?

Lab experiments:

- Potential confounders are controlled for
- Artificial environment
- Little control over sample
- No follow-ups
- Publication bias

RCTs:

- Potential confounders are partially controlled for
- Higher ecological validity (field, sample)
- No follow-ups
- Publication bias

Long term effects? Generalisability? Scaling up? Is the right mechanism identified?

3. Risk factors in nudging

A snapshot of behaviour recorded...

- unsure if it will be repeated in the future
- unsure what caused the reaction

Nudgees are not involved...

- What about ✨*“as judged by themselves”*✨?

Is the intervention right?

- Generalisability of previous interventions
- Who is responsible for change: the individual or the system?

4. Our survey

Pre-
RCT

1. How is the problem selected?
2. How is the sample selected?
3. What kind of already existing pieces of evidence are selected and how?
Is there an internal literature review process?

RCT

4. How is the RCT run?

Post-
RCT

5. How are the results of the RCT evaluated?
6. What is the aftermath of the RCT?

4. Our findings

Pre-RCT	During RCT	Post-RCT
Preliminary data collection	Registering the experiment	Evaluation: data types (qual, quant)
Gathering local insights	Data privacy measures	Evaluation: setting multiple outcome variables
Design from literature review		Evaluation: predicting effects for different groups (segmentation)
Co-design (w/ nudgees)		Evaluation: involving nudgees
Co-design (w/ client or other organisations)		Evaluation: long-term effects (sustainability; unintended effects)
Designing and testing multiple hypotheses		
Testing environment in multiple environments		
Second opinions (e.g., internal or external review board)		

All of our participants said they would like to run follow-up studies, but cannot!