Behaviour Change: practical suggestions from an impractical academic

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Nudge marketing

The systematic use of influence technology and choice architecture to achieve behavioral change and increase social or individual good, when the marketplace alone does not supply enough of the desired behaviour.
What do we want people to do?

• Stop a bad behavior
  – Quit cocaine; pay taxes; Stop littering
• Reduce a bad or overindulged behavior
  – Eat less sugar; Consume less packaging
• Increase a desirable behaviour
  – Exercise more; switch off the lights
• Start a good behavior
  – Regular testicular self-examination; recycle; Weigh portions
Why is it hard to change behaviour?

- When the market is not already supplying “enough” of a desired behaviour, the price is too high for the benefit provided.

This chocolate bar weighs 1.5 oz and costs £169.
The **PRICE** of being good

- **We ask people to do what they would not ALREADY doing.** This can cost...
- Money
- Time
- Discomfort
- Fear of failure
- Reduced pleasure
- Embarrassment
- Inconvenience
- Disgust
- Loss of dignity
Sometimes the market does provide

The ideal “nudge” is one that people are willing to pay for …
Typology: Level of perseverance

• One shot behaviour
  – Buy a fridge; choose a mortgage

• Behaviours carried out repeatedly for a finite period
  – Complete a course of medication; train for a marathon

• Behaviours carried out repeatedly forever
  – Dieting; measuring food portions; washing hands; cooking food to the required temperature
Typology: Personal control

• Out of control
  – Drive or social context overwhelmingly supports old behaviour

• In control
  – No conflict between new behaviour and habits, social norms, ..
  – Change easy to implement
What works depends on the strength of the countervailing pull

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Give information</th>
<th>Nudges or reminders</th>
<th>Make consequences salient</th>
<th>Threats or promises</th>
<th>Offer alternatives</th>
<th>Denial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Cigarettes increase the risk of cancer.’</td>
<td>‘I wouldn’t smoke that if I were you.’</td>
<td>‘If you don’t smoke you’ll feel much better.’</td>
<td>‘Smoking will increase your insurance premiums’</td>
<td>‘Have a nicotine patch instead.’</td>
<td>‘You can’t have a cigarette.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In control

Out of control
Typology: System 1 versus System 2 Nudges

• System 1: Automatic, unconscious, parallel, associative
  – Defaults, Crowding out, Impatience
• System 2: Controlled, conscious, serial, logical
  – Information, reminders, planning
Rule 1: Make interventions scalable

- Will the effects “span” the problem?

Musical staircase

Fly encased urinal
Rule 2: Reduce barriers to desired behaviors
Amendment to Rule 2: Definitely don’t increase barriers
**Rule 3:** Simple, specific, doable, effective behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support your child to walk to school at least 1 day a week.</th>
<th>Take a special strength and balance fitness class.</th>
<th>Test toilets for leaks.</th>
<th>Apply for an absentee ballot.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not offer after-school snacks high in fat and sugar.</td>
<td>Don’t buy the latest flip-flop shoes.</td>
<td>Install water softening systems only when necessary.</td>
<td>Do not submit an application if you have a permanent absentee ballot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage your child to order sliced fruit instead of french fries with a fast-food meal.</td>
<td>Rise slowly from a sitting position.</td>
<td>Time your shower to keep it under 5 minutes.</td>
<td>Read details about candidates and issues before voting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use fat-free cooking methods like baking or steaming.</td>
<td>Don’t walk downstairs without holding onto a handrail.</td>
<td>Use a broom instead of a hose to clean your driveway or sidewalk.</td>
<td>Don’t wait until the last minute to mail your ballot.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

... As much as possible (examples from Nancy Lee)
Rule 4: Self efficacy beliefs

• “How capable am I or organizing and executing this course of action?”

• Unless people believe they can perform the desired action, they have little reason to try or persevere – even if they desire the goals and believe the actions could achieve the desired effect.

“They are able who think they are able.”
Virgil
Rule 5: Free choice

• If people believe they are constrained by circumstances, their attitudes will not change, even if their immediate behaviour does.

• (But at the same time a skill acquired under constraint remains a skill.)
What justifies "nudging?"

- **Internalities**
  - Those nudged want to be nudged
  - There is a clear personal benefit to those nudged

- **Externalities**
  - There is a strong social benefit from nudging
Libertarian paternalism

• Attempt to both change behaviour
• And respect freedom of choice

• The choice set is unaffected, but the context in which the choice is made is changed.
• Not all nudging falls under this heading.
• And there remains controversy over any attempts to modify behaviour.
National Everything Awareness Day

If we nudge one behaviour, we may be “un-nudging” others

Applies in particular (but not only) to System 2 nudges.

If we add another issue into the mix, do we subtract more benefit from all other issues than we add with ours?
Avoid deception

Norms are recognised as powerful levers of change.

But this could tempt us to exaggerate or lie.
Important figures and concepts

- Lewin: Channel factors
- Festinger & Carlsmith: Cognitive dissonance
- Mischel: Discounting and self control
- Bandura: Self-efficacy and social learning theory
- Kahneman & Tversky: Loss aversion; heuristics and biases
- Cialdini: Principles of influence
- Ross & Jones: Fundamental attribution error
- Sunstein & Thaler: Nudge
Cialdini’s six principles of influence

- Reciprocation
- Commitment and consistency
- Social proof
- Authority
- Scarcity
- Liking
Some texts