Harnessing the Power of Nudge in Research Translation

Nudge can be an effective tool for altering a behavior to achieve a desired behavioral outcome. It can be used in any of the four pillars of the Embedded Research Translation Model where a behavior to change has been identified, but is perhaps most salient when designing translation products and conducting dissemination activities. As you engage in research translation projects, consider utilizing these techniques to help influence behavioral change towards evidence-based practices. We hope this guide and associated learning modules will help you to use nudge to achieve your research translation goals and reach impact in your research projects.

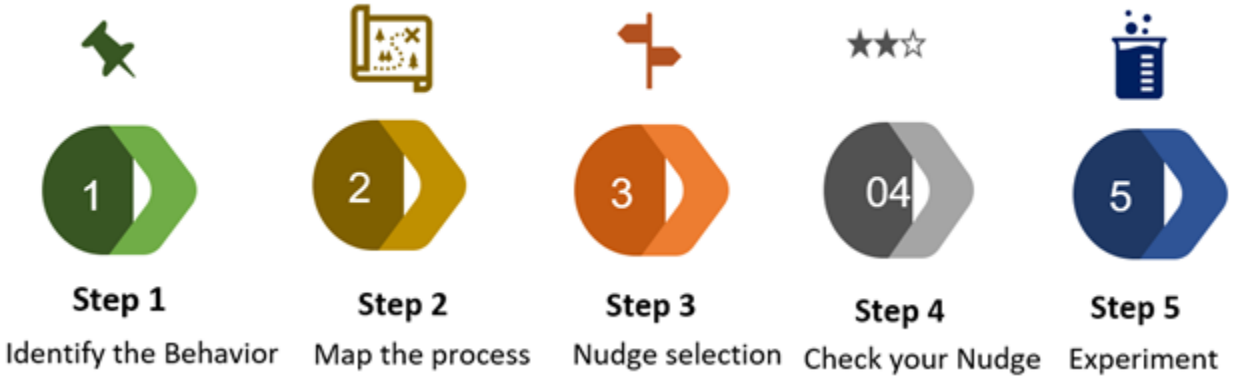
Behavioral Economics and Nudge

Behavioral economics studies how the decision making of individuals and people are affected by the combination of economic incentives and psychology. It assumes that people often do not make decisions in a rational fashion, their thoughts and choices are influenced by their environment or the context of a situation, and that two separate brain systems operate when making decisions. System 1 often makes quick decisions that are unconscious and intuitive, and reflects a large majority of our daily choices. System 2 makes decisions that are reflective, rational and conscious. People, particularly the stakeholders of your projects, process information most often in quick and unconscious ways. As a result, they are most likely not making decisions based on rational arguments.

Choice architecture or choice design is presenting stakeholders with choices in different ways in hopes of influencing their decision-making processes. The power of behavioral economics and choice architecture is often harnessed through the use of a nudge, defined as ***any aspect of choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding other options or influencing their decision with money or prizes***. A nudge is largely used to impact one's system of decision making, which is quick and primarily based on intuition. Influencing this level of decision making can help you achieve greater impact as a result of your research.

How to Nudge: A Step-by-Step Process

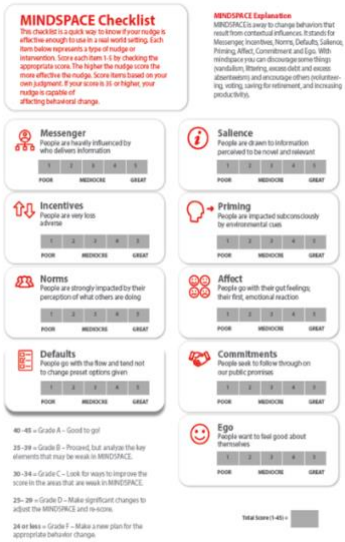
A variety of nudges exist that can be used to indirectly influence decision making. To properly identify when, how and what kind of nudge to use, a step-by-step process can be used to guide you:



Step 1: Identify the Behavior to Change and the Desired Target Behavior. The first step in being able to change any behavior is to ***clearly determine what the behavioral problem is and identify the target behavior desired***. You can identify the behavior to change by observing a group or individuals in action, similar to an observational study. If this is not an option, you can rely on data trends to point you in the right direction and follow-up with local research partners or universities to conduct focus groups or interviews to pinpoint the specific behavior in need of change.

Step 2: Map the Process Leading to the Problematic Behavior. Once the behavior to change and desired target behavior have been identified, map the choice architecture to help determine what is leading to the current problematic behavior. Follow these three steps:

1) *Map the choice architecture or choice process that is ultimately leading to the behavior you seek to change. Identify:*
    a. *Any default options selected*
    b. *Alternative choices that are available but not selected*
    c. *Actions taking place that contribute to the problematic behavior*
2) *Identify the people in the environment who are contributing to the behavior you seek to change.*
3) *Determine the target audience for the nudge.*



Step 3: Select a Nudge. Once you have properly assessed the behavior that you seek to change, it is time to select a nudge. A list of nudges can be found here. As you select a nudge or design your own nudge, remember the **EAST** acronym. Keep the nudge **E**asy, **A**ttractive, **S**ocial and **T**imely.

Step 4: Check the Potential of your Nudge. Once you have identified a nudge that you believe might influence a behavior, you can assess its potential effectiveness by using the Mindspace Checklist. The Mindspace Checklist (right) is a quick way to know if your nudge is effective enough to use in a real-world setting. Score each item based on your own judgment from 1-5 by checking the appropriate score. The higher the nudge score, the more effective

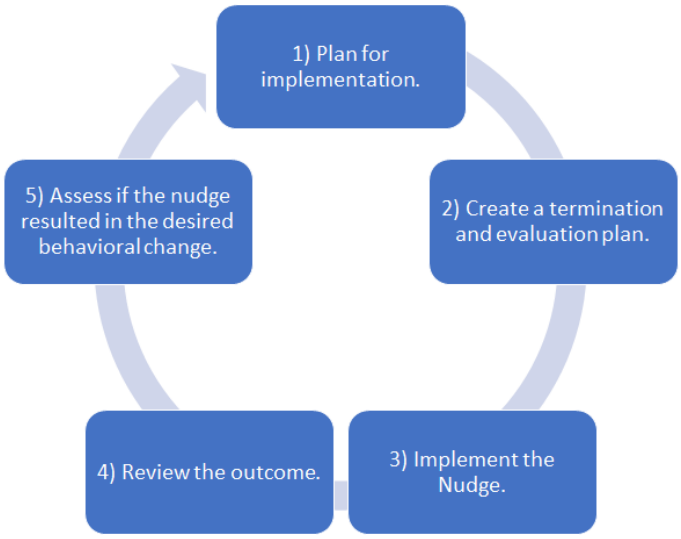
the nudge will likely be. If your score is 35 or higher, your nudge is capable of affecting behavioral change.

Step 5: Experiment Using the Selected Nudge. Now that the nudge has been selected, a user can experiment by running a nudge sprint, a process for quickly planning, implementing and reviewing the outcome of a scenario to determine if a process is able to result in the user's desired outcome. This is an iterative process to plan, test, and assess in a rapid manner as to quickly determine if the desired outcome is achieved.

Process to Implement a Nudge:

1) *Plan for implementation.* Determine when the nudge will take place, how it will be implemented, the length of time to run the experiment, and establish a measurement or sensor in the system to determine if the nudge is working.

2) *Create a termination plan and evaluation plan.* Determine a metric for measuring if the nudge is working and a plan for terminating the approach if you are unable to see a change in the metric that you have selected. Generally, select a measurement that is sensitive to a change in the system. For example, measuring calories burned after exercise.



3) *Implement nudge.* Once the nudge has been planned, run a sprint experiment for a designated timeframe. Monitor the measurement that you have selected to assess if the sprint is working.

4) *Review outcome.* After the sprint, review the process. Create time and space with your team to reflect on what worked, what could have been improved, what data your measurements collected, and if you observed the target behavior you sought to achieve from the target audience.

5) *Assess if nudge resulted in a desired behavior change.* After reviewing the information gathered from the sprint, determine if the desired behavior change was realized. If yes, then the nudge was successful, and one should continue to monitor if the nudge is successful in the long term. If not, then one should assess the information gathered from the first nudge sprint, adjust, and run another sprint with a new nudge or an adjustment to the process. The process is agile as it is flexible to the changing nature of the situation or the adaptation to evolving human behavior.

Conclusion

Nudge is a powerful tool to influence behaviors of key stakeholders in development. Whether you are working in agriculture, education, health, environment, or other fields of development, consider using concepts and steps outlined above to design and implement nudges to help contribute to or facilitate your research translation efforts and achieve greater impact.

Works Referenced

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