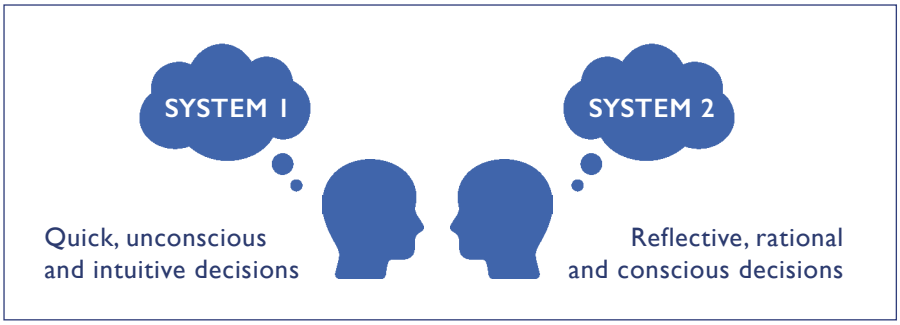
Harnessing the Power of the Nudge

A nudge can be an effective tool to alter a behavior to achieve a desired behavioral outcome. It can be used through the research translation process where a behavior to change has been identified, potentially when collaborating with partners or stakeholders, but is perhaps most salient when designing translation products and conducting dissemination activities. As you engage in research translation projects, consider using these techniques to help influence behavioral change toward evidence-based practices. This guide and associated learning modules (Overview and Simulation) will help you use the nudge to achieve your research translation goals and make an impact in your research projects.

Behavioral Economics and the Nudge

Behavioral economics studies show how the decision-making of individuals is affected by a 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 context, and that two separate brain systems operate when decisions are made. System 1 often makes quick decisions that are unconscious and intuitive, and reflects most of our daily choices. System 2 makes decisions that are reflective, rational and conscious. People most often process information in quick and unconscious ways. As a result, they are most likely not making decisions based on rational argument.

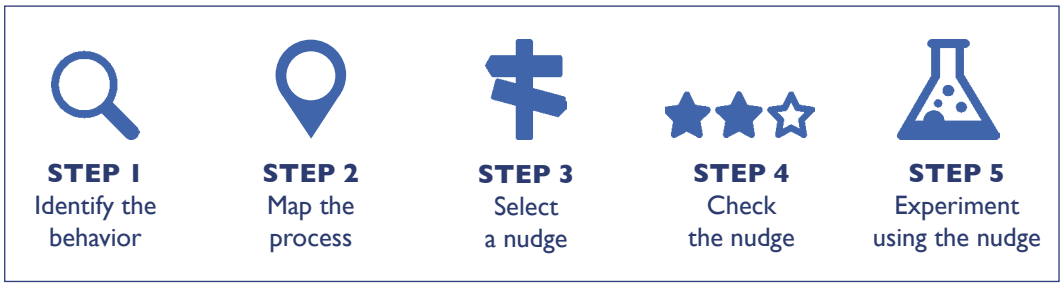


Choice architecture or choice design is presenting stakeholders with choices in different ways in the hope of influencing their decision-making processes. The power of behavioral economics and choice architecture is often harnessed through the use of the nudge, defined as ***any aspect of choice architecture 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 an individual's system of decision-making, which is quick and primarily based on intuition. Influencing this level of decision-making can help you as the researcher achieve greater impact as a result of your research.

Wozniak, J., R. Holden, M. Boustani, and C. Rice. Harnessing the Power of the Nudge. *LASER PULSE Research Translation Tools & Resources Series.* Center for Global Health Equity, School of Medicine, Indiana University. Produced for LASER PULSE, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.

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 what kind of nudge to use when and how, a step-by-step process can be used to guide you:



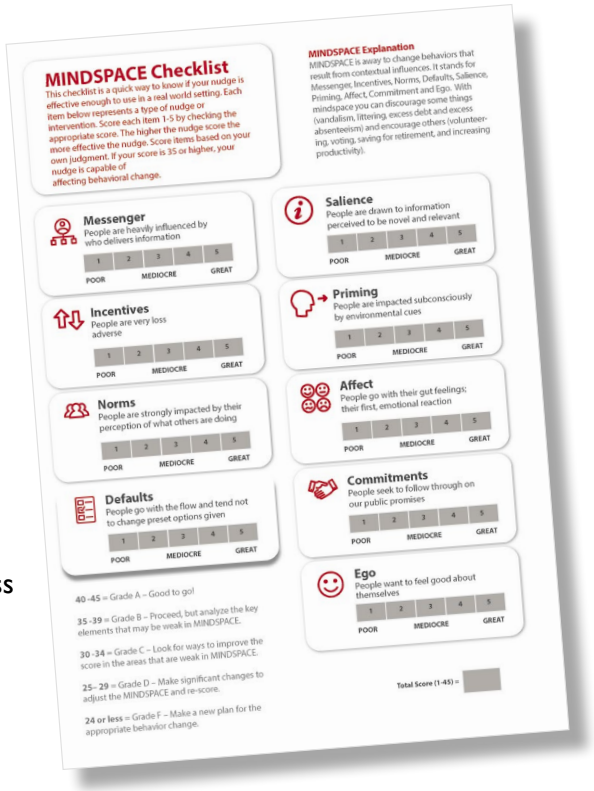
Step 1: Identify the behavior to change and the desired target behavior. The first step in being able to change any behavior is to ***clearly determine the current behavior and identify the target behavior desired***. You can identify the behavior to change by observing a group or individuals in action, 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 current 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 behavior.

- Map the choice architecture or choice process that is leading to the behavior you seek to change. Identify:
  - Any default options selected.
  - Alternative choices that are available but not being selected.
  - Actions taking place that contribute to the current behavior.
- Identify the people in the environment who are contributing to the behavior you seek to change.
- Determine the target audience for the nudge.

Step 3: Select a nudge. Once you have assessed the behavior 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.

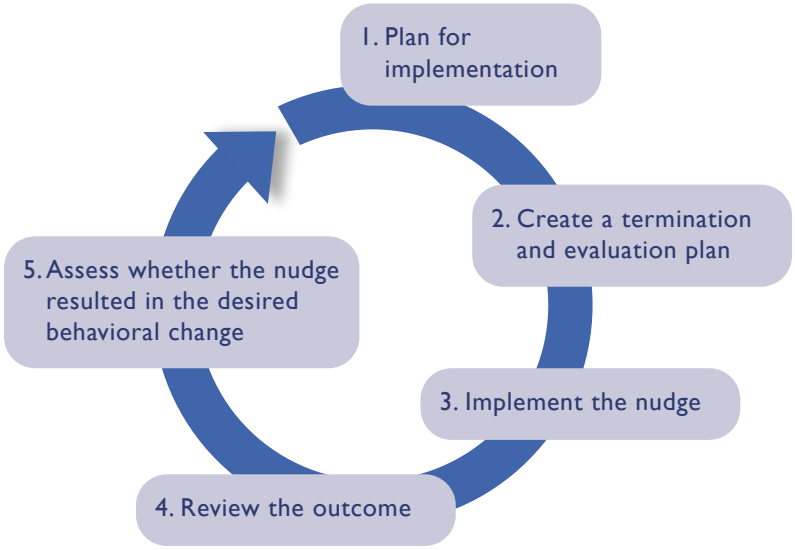
Step 4: Check the potential of your nudge. Once you have identified a nudge that you believe might influence a behavior, you can assess its potential effectiveness by using the Mindspace Checklist (right), a quick way to know whether your nudge is effective enough to use in a real-world setting. Score each item from 1 to 5 based on your own judgment 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 whether a process is able to result in the user's desired outcome. This is an iterative process to rapidly plan, test, and assess to determine whether the desired outcome is achieved.

Process to implement a nudge:

- ***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 whether the nudge is working.
- ***Create a termination plan and evaluation plan.*** Determine a metric to measure whether the nudge is working and a plan to terminate the approach if you are unable to see a change in the metric you have selected. Generally, select a measurement that is sensitive to a change in the system. For example, measuring calories burned after exercise.
- ***Implement the nudge.*** Once the nudge has been planned, run a sprint experiment in a designated timeframe. Monitor the measurement you have selected to assess whether the sprint is working.
- ***Review the 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 whether you observed the target behavior you sought to achieve from the target audience.



- ***Assess whether the nudge resulted in the desired behavior change.*** After reviewing the information gathered from the sprint, determine whether the desired behavior change was realized. If yes, then the nudge was successful, and you should continue to monitor whether the nudge is successful in the long term. If not, 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

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

Additional Reading

Boustani, Malaz, Jose Azar, and Andrew O'Brien. 2020. *Artifacts, Ritual, Nudges, Stories, & Group-based Non Verbal Video Production.* https://hii.iu.edu/resources/chiis-residency-oct-artifact-and-rituals---read-only.pdf.

Kahneman, Daniel. 2013. *Thinking, Fast and Slow.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Thaler, Robert H., and Cass R. Sunstein. 2009. New York: *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness.* Penguin Books.