

# Rethinking Behavioural Public Policy: How to do Nudge Plus?

---

Peter John

Professor of Public Policy

King's College London



[peter.john@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:peter.john@kcl.ac.uk)



[@peterjohn10](https://twitter.com/peterjohn10)

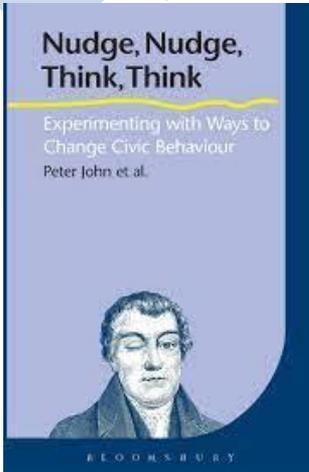
article

## Rethinking the role of experts and expertise in behavioural public policy

Peter John, [peter.john@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:peter.john@kcl.ac.uk)  
King's College London, UK

Gerry Stoker, [Gerry.Stoker@canberra.edu.au](mailto:Gerry.Stoker@canberra.edu.au)  
University of Canberra, Australia and University of Southampton, UK

Nudge and behavioural public policy tools have won support from governments across the world for improving the effectiveness of public interventions. Yet nudge still attracts strong criticisms for promoting paternalism and manipulation as legitimate government actions. To move beyond this divide, this paper offers a comprehensive reorientation, which is necessary because the intellectual foundations of the policy are at fault. A more secure foundation can be achieved by expanding the cognitive scope of behavioural policy, and ensuring that it does not rely on the narrow assumption that intuitive reasoning is flawed and that expert advice is always preferable. This shift in the cognitive range of nudge moves behavioural policy toward citizen reflection and initiative, pointing away from expert-led interventions. It amounts to more than incremental advances in nudge practice. As a result, nudge can escape the charge of not respecting individual autonomy. What we call 'nudge plus' would link more closely with other types of governmental intervention that embrace citizen involvement.



## Chapter 1

# Rethinking the Origin of the Behavioural Policy Cube With Nudge Plus

Sanchayan Banerjee  
London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter goes beyond classic nudges in introducing public policy practitioners and researchers worldwide to a wide range of behavioural change interventions like boosts, thinks, and nudge pluses. These policy tools, much like their classic nudge counterpart, are libertarian, internality targeting and behaviourally informed policies that lie at the origin of the behavioural policy cube as originally conceived by Oliver. This chapter undertakes a review of these instruments, in systematically and historically comparing them. Nudge pluses are truly hybrid nudge-think strategies, in that they combine the best features of the reflexive nudges and the more deliberative boosts (or, think) strategies. Going forward, the chapter prescribes the consideration of a wider policy toolkit in directing interventions to tackle societal problems and hopes to break the false synonymy of behavioural based policies with nudge-type interventions only.*

*Behavioural Public Policy* (2021), 1–16  
doi:10.1017/bpp.2021.6

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

### ARTICLE

## Nudge plus: incorporating reflection into behavioral public policy

Sanchayan Banerjee and Peter John\*

Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics, London, UK and Department of Political Economy, King's College London, London, UK

\*Correspondence to: Department of Political Economy, King's College London, Bush House, 40 Aldwych, London WC2B 4PH, UK.

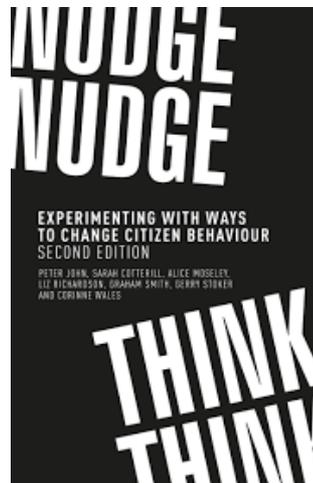
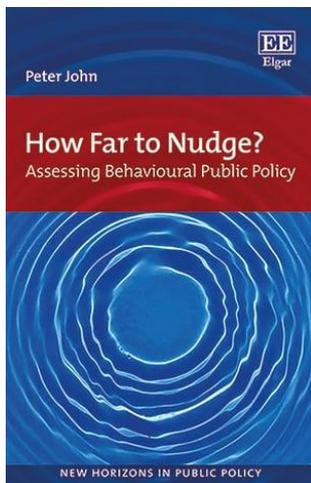
E-mail: [peter.john@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:peter.john@kcl.ac.uk)

(Received 6 May 2020; revised 22 December 2020; accepted 10 February 2021)

### Abstract

Nudge plus is a modification of the toolkit of behavioral public policy. It incorporates an element of reflection – the plus – into the delivery of a nudge, either blended in or made proximate. Nudge plus builds on recent work combining heuristics and deliberation. It may be used to design prosocial interventions that help preserve the autonomy of the agent. The argument turns on seminal work on dual systems, which presents a subtler relationship between fast and slow thinking than commonly assumed in the classic literature in behavioral public policy. We review classic and recent work on dual processes to show that a hybrid is more plausible than the default-interventionist or parallel-competitive framework. We define nudge plus, set out what reflection could entail, provide examples, outline causal mechanisms, and draw testable implications.

**Keywords:** nudge; nudge plus; think; dual-process theory



# The Disciples



# Limits to nudge

- Are nudges limited to easy-to-test activities with RCTs, messages, large transactions, one-off changes, rather than radical long-term behaviour change?
- Can nudge deal with the big issues, e.g., climate change, extremism/racism, migration, housing costs, inequalities, long-term unhealthy lifestyles
- Can more happen, do we need to rethink nudge to make it more radical?

# Beyond System 1 and 2



- In order to move beyond the dichotomy between nudging and thinking, it is important to return to the important distinction between system 1 and system 2 thinking.
- Here none of the proponents say there is a hard and fast distinction.
- It is true that different parts of the brain are involved and there is secure knowledge in neuroscience behind these findings.
- But it is not possible to say that automatic processes are only engaged with nudges and that other parts of the brain are not working to a small degree.

# Why Nudge+



BALANCED HYBRID  
SYSTEM 1 AND 2  
COGNITION



NOT PATERNALISTIC :  
TOKEN TRANSPARENCY,  
AUTONOMY



CITIZENS CAN OWN  
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE  
PROCESS



REFLECTIVE PLUS  
ENABLES PERSPECTIVE  
TRANSFORMATION



CAN NUDGE PLUS BE  
THE WAY FORWARD  
THEN?

- Deals with critiques of nudge as short-lived and may be manipulative
- The secret of more radical nudges is to consider public policy in terms of how citizens perceive their own actions and those of public officials, especially as they unfold over the long-term.
- Incorporates more conscious thought as part of nudge, while at the same time encouraging a bottom up and decentralised approach to formulating and authorising nudges

# More on Nudge+

- The aim with nudge, boost or nudge plus is not to use a behavioural insight to create a one-off change, but to create a state or environment whereby these interventions can help establish a new equilibrium of self-reinforcing and beneficial behaviours, whereby all benefit, and there is not a huge daily effort to keep the new behaviours in place.
- Collective action prominent

Dimension	Classic Nudge	Nudge Plus	Boosts
Psychological Paradigm	Heuristics and Biases	Heuristics and Biases	Simple Heuristics
Cognitive Structure	Dual Process Theory	Dual Process Theory	Malleable cognitive structure
Reversibility	Reversible	Persistent effects	Persistent effects
Opacity	Usually opaque	Transparent with the plus element	Completely transparent
Autonomy	Reduced autonomy and agency	Autonomy comes with the plus element	Complete autonomy
Bias Awareness and Control	No Awareness and Control	Control given with the plus element	Agent is aware and in control of the biases
Social Planner's information about end goals and benevolence	Social planner is assumed to be benevolent and aware of end goals	Social planner must be aware of end goals, but decision is left to the agent. Can be rent seeking	No need for social planner to be aware of the goals. Social planner can be rent seeking
Cognitive error of Social planner	Must not be error prone	Can be error prone	Can be error prone
Motivation and competence of decision maker	Not required. The decision maker is a cognitive cripple	The decision maker must be competent and motivated to act.	The decision maker must be competent and motivated to act.

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Stating Appointment Costs in SMS Reminders Reduces Missed Hospital Appointments: Findings from Two Randomised Controlled Trials

Michael Hallsworth<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Dan Berry<sup>3</sup>, Michael Sanders<sup>2,4</sup>, Anna Sallis<sup>5</sup>, Dominic King<sup>1</sup>, Ivo Vlaev<sup>1</sup>, Ara Darzi<sup>1</sup>

**1** Centre for Health Policy, Imperial College London, London, United Kingdom, **2** The Behavioural Insights Team, 33 Greycoat Street, London, United Kingdom, **3** Department of Health, Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London, United Kingdom, **4** Harvard Kennedy School, 79 John F. Kennedy Street Cambridge, MA, United States of America, **5** Public Health England, Skipton House, 80 London Road, London, United Kingdom

\* [m.hallsworth11@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:m.hallsworth11@imperial.ac.uk)

### Abstract

#### Background

Missed hospital appointments are a major cause of inefficiency worldwide. Healthcare providers are increasingly using Short Message Service reminders to reduce 'Did Not Attend' (DNA) rates. Systematic reviews show that sending such reminders is effective, but there is no evidence on whether their impact is affected by their content. Accordingly, we undertook two randomised controlled trials that tested the impact of rephrasing appointment reminders on DNA rates in the United Kingdom.

Hallsworth et al (2015) randomised SMS messages to outpatients in the NHS with a treatment messages that indicates the costs of missing an appointment and which led to less people missing their appointments.

It could be that this is purely automatic, activating a norm of attendance.



CrossMark  
click for updates

### OPEN ACCESS

**Citation:** Hallsworth M, Berry D, Sanders M, Sallis A, King D, Vlaev I, et al. (2015) Stating Appointment Costs in SMS Reminders Reduces Missed Hospital Appointments: Findings from Two Randomised Controlled Trials. PLoS ONE 10(9): e0137306. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0137306

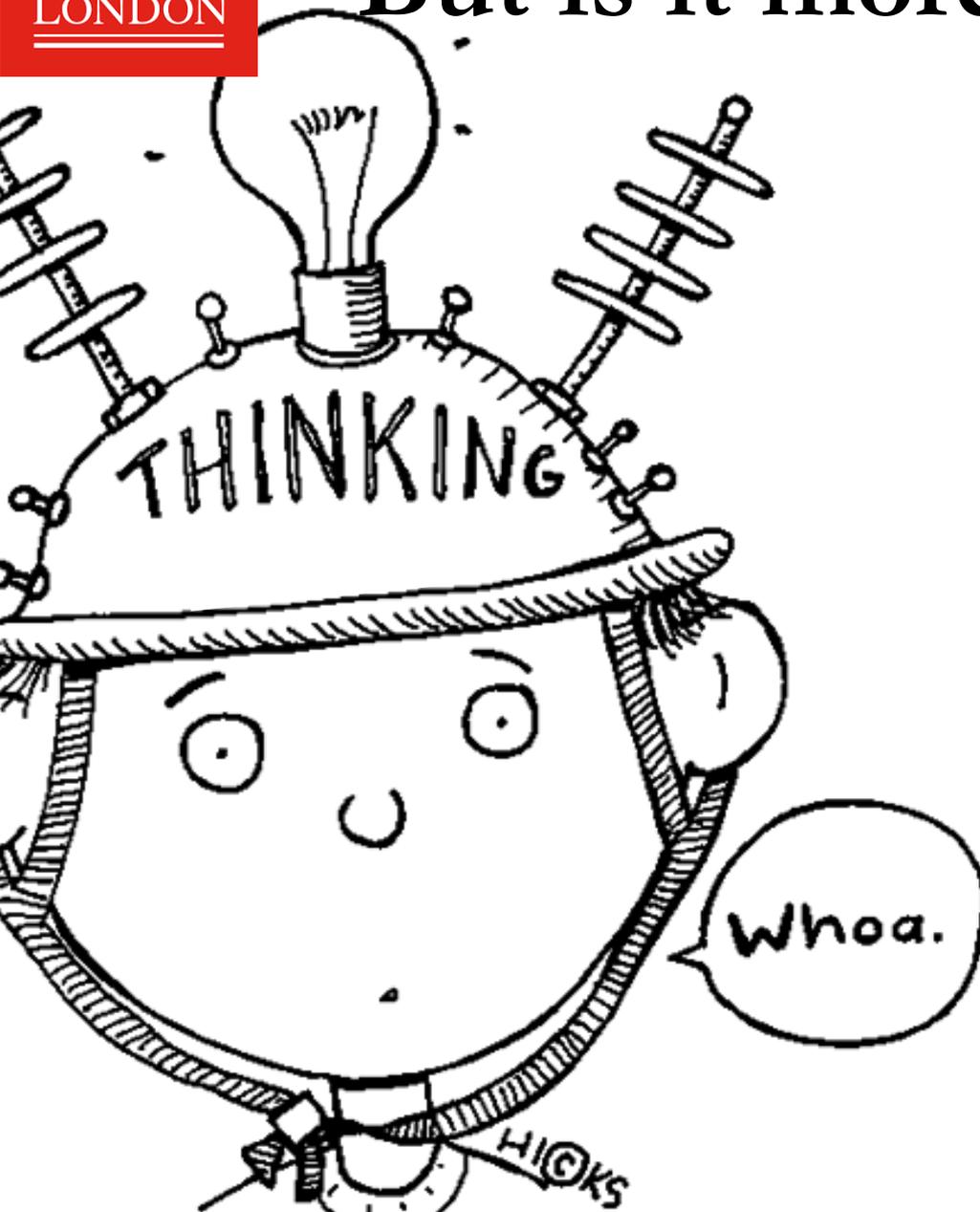
**Editor:** Vineet Gupta, University of California San Diego, UNITED STATES

**Received:** February 15, 2015

**Accepted:** August 13, 2015

**Published:** September 14, 2015

# But is it more complex?



What is happening here is that patients are being asked to think about the consequences of their decisions.

It is not a simple nudge based on an automatic response, at least not in full, but requires the respondent to understand the argument that missed appointments cost money and that turning up helps, acts which cannot just be seen as purely system 1 even if system 1 needs to be in play to a degree.

**MOST NUDGES HAVE SOME FORM OF PASSIVE REFLECTION IN THEM.**

**IN NUDGE PLUS WE MAKE IT ACTIVE!**

# Commitments as Thinks

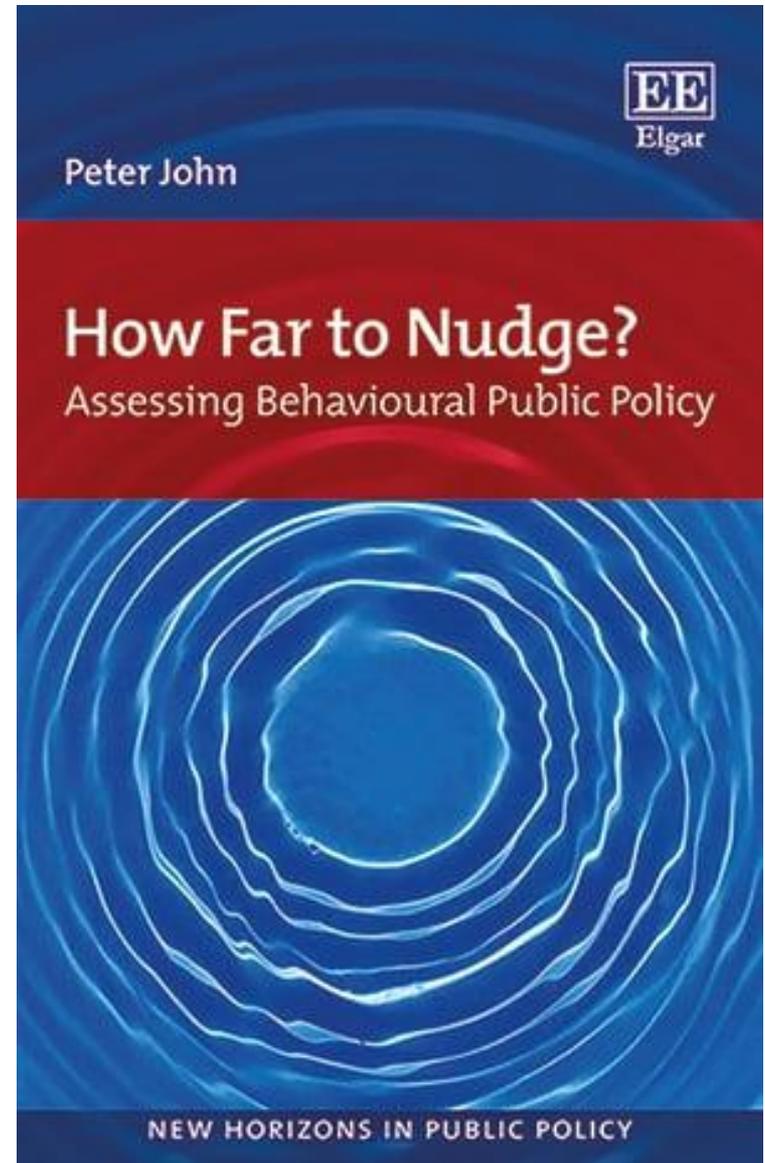
Consider commitment devices (Thaler and Shefrin 1981).

- These are concrete and public commitments people make or are encouraged to make to do an action so as to commit themselves
- Although the nudge operates through the psychological sense of commitment and not wanting to go back on something for fear of feeling guilty
- In order to enter into commitment device, it requires some degree of thought and understanding of what a commitment device is in the first place.

# Thinking about the Nudge

## REFLECTION ABOUT THE NUDGE OR YOUR ACTION CAN INCREASE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

- Consider the humble placement of healthy options next to the tills in cafeterias.
- The automatic nudge works like this: people are stimulated to buy chocolate and sweets as they are near the till.
- They have made their main food choices and are waiting to pay. Their eyes focus on the products conveniently placed at eye-level. The love of chocolate and sweet things plays a role in that the consumer almost subconsciously places the bar on the tray. It gets paid for and eaten pleurably later on.
- Now fruit is placed near the checkout. Unless someone has a craving for fruit (perhaps is a fruiter?), then they will see the fruit, but they will not be prompted in the same way.



# Thinking about the Nudge

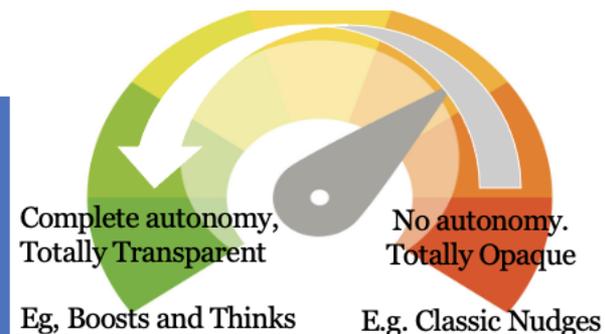
- The person sees the fruit and then must think along the following lines: 'Well, have I had enough fruit and vegetables today, my five portions per day so it is ok not to buy more fruit' or they could say 'No, I had better have some fruit as I only had some cereal this morning. I'd better take some fruit'.
- They feel a lot better from having fulfilled a moral commitment, which is consciously acted upon, even though they are nudged when waiting to pay for their food.
- There is no benefit, especially in long-term, on people half-accidentally putting fruit on their trays. They will probably leave the fruit behind when they come to stack their tray.



# Operationalising Nudge+

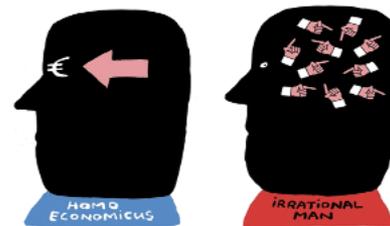
Banerjee and John (2021)

## The basic idea of Nudge+



	Simultaneous	Sequential
One-part (Single)	Global positioning system (GPS)	Dual-self pledge cards
Two-part	Default with an information signal to opt-out	Traffic lighting scheme either preceded or followed by a pledge

- Nudge+ embeds a reflective strategy into the classic nudge
  - This could be either a one-part or two-part device
- Plus could come before, after (sequential) or along with the nudge (simultaneous)
- The nudge and the plus could be administered by the same or different agents.



# Going beyond Nudges with Nudge+

## Thaler and Sunstein's Fantastic 7

The Default

Campaigns

Commitments

Information Mechanisms (Salience building)

Transactional Shortcuts (e.g., GPS)

Design Strategies (e.g., Traffic Lights)

Warnings and Reminders

## Banerjee and John's Fantastic 7 PLUS

The Default **with design transparency**

**Active choice** campaigns

**Dual-self** commitments

Information Mechanisms (**Reflection inducing**)

Interactive shortcuts with **built-in prompts** (GPS with bots)

Traffic Lights with **design transparency**

**Norm comparisons** (social v/s personal) **with conformist pledges**

The key to the plus: Either enable citizens to **THINK about the nudge** OR **THINK about how to act if they take the nudge.**