Behaviour change as a conditional ‘neuroliberal’ form of citizenship

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Image: © Marian Bantjes
Neuroliberalism at work in welfare-to-work programmes

Jobseekers' psychometric test 'is a failure'
US institute that devised questionnaire tells 'nudge' unit to stop using it as it failed to be scientifically validated

Shiv Malik
The Guardian, Monday 6 May 2013 12.39 BST
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The 'nudge' unit piloted the psychometric test in Essex despite being refused permission to do so. It has now been rolled out to other areas. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

An American psychology organisation has told a UK government agency to stop using a personality test on jobseekers because it is a failure.

The Behavioural Insight team, or "nudge" unit, which was created by David Cameron in 2010 to help people "make better choices," has been
Researching the impacts of the “new” behavioural sciences on public policy


Techniques of behavioural change

Social-Cultural

Community-Based Social Marketing
Connected Conversations

Life-Stage Intervention
Salience
Social Norming
Segmenting
Messenger: Peer-to-Peer
Education Entertainment

Social Marketing

Co-Design

Anchorining
Non-verbal priming
Choice Editing

Non-Verbal Framing
Choice Architecture
Data Streaming

Verbal Framing
Verbal Priming

Defaults

Communication

Design

Feedback
Charting the emergence of behaviour change in the UK

- An **anthropological** approach (qualitative interviews with policy strategists)

- A **genealogical** approach (discourse analysis of policy texts)

- A **geographical** approach (how is time-space reconfigured; where do policies emerge; how are they mobile?)

“I asked Danny Kahneman [a Nobel Laureate and a key figure in the field of behavioural economics] if he would drop by about 2001–2002 … So Danny came in, and we’d invited some people, just for a chat around the table, to talk about these things, because you know I think we should be really interested in this sort of new literature, and he comes in and he says … I’ve just been sent a draft of this paper, called libertarian paternalism … and he says it’s really interesting, I think it’s going to be a very important paper, and so that was the first time I came across it.”

Policy strategist, Cabinet Office, interviewed Oct 2009
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Academic and popular publications</th>
<th>Policy publications</th>
<th>NGO/Think Tank publications</th>
<th>People and Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2003</td>
<td>“Libertarian Paternalism is not an oxymoron” (Thaler and Sunstein)</td>
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<td>Richard Thaler, David Laibson, Sheena Iyengar and Shlomo Benartzi give talks to the DWP</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Daniel Kahneman visits the Cabinet Office (2001-2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>The Paradox of Choice (Schwartz); Fooled by Randomness (Taleb)</td>
<td>Personal Responsibility and Behaviour Change (CO); Choosing Health (DH)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tabloids hail ‘fat tax’ at publication of Personal Responsibility and Behaviour Change. Tony Blair assuages nanny state fears in conference speech</td>
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<td>Jill Rutter picks up same report at DEFRA and sets up Whitehall group for Behaviour Change</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>NHS Choices established</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Applying behavioural insights to reduce fraud, error and debt (BIT); Test, Learn, Adapt: Developing Policy with Randomised Controlled Trials (BIT)</td>
<td>Acceptable Behaviour? Public Opinion on Behaviour Change Policy (Ipsos Mori); Nudging citizens towards localism? (John and Richardson, British Academy)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sunset Clause to wind up Behavioural Insights Team reviewed by the BIT Steering Board in Summer 2012</td>
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<td>Tax and benefit policy: insights from behavioural economics (IFS)</td>
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Government departments and policy think tanks promoting Behaviour Change

BIT: Behavioural Insights Team (in Cabinet Office)
HMT: Her Majesty’s Treasury
CFEB: Consumer Financial Education Body
CO: Cabinet Office
COI: Central Office of Information
DECC: Department of Energy and Climate Change
DEFRA: Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DCLG: Department for Communities and Local Government
DfT: Department for Transport
DH: Department of Health
DWP: Department of Work and Pensions
FSA: Financial Services Authority
GSR: Government Social Research
HSJ: Health Service Journal
IfG: Institute for Government
IFS: Institute for Fiscal Studies
IPPR: Institute for Public Policy Research
LGC: Local Government Chronicle
LGID: Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly The IDeA)
LSX: London Sustainability Exchange
NEF: New Economics Foundation
NICE: National Institute of Clinical Excellence
NSMC: National Social Marketing Centre (DH and Consumer Focus)
PSI: Policy Studies Institute
SDC: Sustainable Development Commission
SFT: School Food Trust
SMF: Social Market Foundation
Policies negotiating the (un)conscious
“The Behavioural Insights Team, commonly known as the 'Nudge Unit', was set up in July 2010 with a remit to find innovative ways of encouraging, enabling and supporting people to make better choices for themselves”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Messenger</th>
<th>we are heavily influenced by who communicates information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incentives</td>
<td>our responses to incentives are shaped by predictable mental shortcuts such as strongly avoiding losses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norms</td>
<td>we are strongly influenced by what others do</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defaults</td>
<td>we ‘go with the flow’ of pre-set options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td>our attention is drawn to what is novel and seems relevant to us</td>
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<td>Priming</td>
<td>our acts are often influenced by sub-conscious cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>our emotional associations can powerfully shape our actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitments</td>
<td>we seek to be consistent with our public promises, and reciprocate acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>we act in ways that make us feel better about ourselves</td>
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</tbody>
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*Mindspace*, Cabinet Office, 2010
The emotionally literate state

“I mean I think that (perhaps it’s just me), but I think that from a behavioural perspective people are intrinsically selfish, which is quite Nudge? I think that economics and the recent experience of economics has also demonstrated that people are essentially emotionally-driven, irrational…”

(Department of Health Social Marketing Advisor, interviewed September 2009)

In some ways the most challenging and fascinating stuff in this whole territory [of behaviour change] is once you start asking how do you influence essentially the policy not only of a rational government, but also unconscious processing systems

(former Cabinet Office policy strategist (2), interviewed October 2009)

if you do train people, prepare them with learned optimism skills, resilience skills, cognitive skills on how to cope with life, they’re much better placed then to make choices which are actually in their interest, and you...may need less law and forcing and libertarian paternalism as well. So I think that one of the other missing chunks in the kind of standard behavioural economics things is that it just ignores that other strand of [positive] psychology and there’s now a fairly strong evidence base behind it

(former Cabinet Office policy strategist (2), interviewed October 2009)
“when I was in government after 97, it’s probably about 2 or 3 years later I tried finding out who were the experts of psychology and behaviour change in every department and we did the first exercise (probably in about 2000) of trying to find what..., as I say we were holding meetings across Whitehall with the experts and trying to analyse what was the shared knowledge base in different fields about what did and didn’t work. So in particular we were gathering together the Central Office of Information who led on their advertising campaign to drink driving, people from the educational world who were trying to persuade 17 year olds to learn more, and DSS (or whatever it was then) on Welfare to Work, DEFRA on recycling and energy change and so on. It proved pretty hard finding who knew about this and there was not a shared knowledge base at all – there was not a shared framework of theory. There’s a strong set of disciplines in British government, the economists, the social researchers, but not really a psychology or social psychology organised profession”

former Cabinet Office policy strategist (2), interviewed October, 2009
Going global...

1. Nudge is more global than you might think.

2. Nudge-type initiatives are prevalent in Less Economically Developed Countries.

3. The global spread of the new behavioural sciences is being facilitated by non-governmental international organizations and multinational corporations.

4. The insights of the new behavioural sciences are being applied to public policy in very different ways in different places throughout the world.
NGOs and International Bodies promoting Behaviour Change

A Little Bit of Hope
AusAID
BEHAVE
Behaviour Works (Australia)
Behavioural Architects
C-Change
Canyon Ranch Institute
Carribean HIV/AIDS Alliance
Centre for Communications Programmes
Change Hub
Change Labs
Common Cause
Communication Initiative Network
Corporate Culture
Danish Nudging Network (I Nudge You)
Deutche Bank
Euro Health Group
European Commission
Global Fund
Greenudge (Norway)
Hiam Health
Hygiene Central
Innovations Lab (Kosovo)
International Labour Office
International Medical Core
Japanese Social Development Fund

John Lewis
Manoff Group
Mindlab
National Social Marketing Centre (UK)
OECD
PATH Foundation
Population Services International (PSI)
Red Cross
Samoa Air
Sanitation and Water For All Partnership
Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SNV
Sustainable Brands
Tools of Change (Canada)
UNICEF
UNESCO
Unilever
United Nations Development Programme
United Nations Population Fund
University Research Co.
URC
USAID
World Bank
World Diabetes Foundation
World Economic Forum
Nudging around the world

States with centrally orchestrated behaviour change programmes
Ad hoc adoption of nudge-type policies

From: Nudging Around the World Policy Briefing, Mark Whitehead, Rhys Jones, Rachel Howell, Rachel Lilley, and Jessica Pykett (available soon from changingbehaviours.wordpress.com/)
Negotiating ‘neuroliberalism’

• Governing at the interface of conscious and unconscious thought and action that connects emotional response and rational deliberation

• From neoliberalism to neuroliberalism at the Chicago School (irrationality as a rationale for government)

• Neuroliberal policies are promoted as interventions that simply work experimentally