

Professor Gerry Stoker – Nudge or Deliberate

Nudge, Nudge, Think, Think. Two Strategies for Changing Civic Behaviour.

www.civicbehaviour.org.uk

Why Politics Matters – Stoker’s book, highly recommended by Richard Wilson.

Professor Gerry Stoker

Working with the University of Southampton and the University of Manchester – SERC Funded project into ‘changing civic behaviour’.

Changing Civic Behaviour: 2 strategies

- Nudge
- Deliberate (Think)

State intervention in changing civic behaviour is debated, as is the role of government in shaping choices. The Conservative Party in the UK follow the nudge mentality - engaging people in ways that make them think and act differently.

Classification of Civic Behaviour

	Type of Activity		
Level of Activity		Influencing Institutions	DIY
	Individual	Individual Political Action	Individual DIY
	Collective	Collective Political Action	Collective DIY

Gerry promotes experimental methods of trying to change civic behaviour in these ways. However, the underlying theories of changing civic behaviour presently have too small an evidence base. It is underdeveloped – we therefore need to think of new strategies.

The development of Nudge and Deliberate

Nudge

Stems from Psychology and Behavioural Economics
Citizens are nudged into behaviour change – Cognitive Psychology for example helps us to understand why and how people make decisions.

Thaler and Sunstein (2008) through their research have captured the way this can make change in civic behaviour and hence policy.

Think

Developed from normative theory
Entertains the ideas surrounding greater participation and public engagement

- Together we have more collective solutions

Although the two theories have different intellectual antecedents they can often work together

The Only two?

In practice, there is dominance in society, so yes they are – however, they can work in different ways: Nudge or Think...or...Nudge and Think

Nudge and Think Compared

Nudge

- View of human nature is fixed
- From the cognitive model
 - o People are cognitive misers: they don't like to think. Instead, people prefer a shortcut
 - o For example – Chess masters. Studies have shown that a lot of their skill is not about 'thinking' it is concerned with pattern recognition
 - o Hence, we need to design interventions according to these cognitive shortcuts
 - o Cost – benefit led
 - o Role of the state therefore is to customise messages
 - o E.g. Randomised 'treatment' sample of door to door recycling advice
 - 8% increase in treatment condition
 - This was a nudge as the treatment condition subsequently went through a cost benefit analysis
 - The 'treatment' brought to the front of their mind what would naturally be at the back. Social Pressure may have also had an influence

Strengths	Weaknesses
Cognitive Psychology does seem to be right	Nudge does not really account for fundamental divisions
Numerous ways to nudge exist	

Think

- Human thought patterns can be changed, they are socially constructed beings.
- In the right setting, people are not cognitive misers – they are capable of reasoning and reflection.
- People are value led – what's good for the community as a whole, not just you.
- The state needs to develop a new institutional space where citizens can learn to behave in a new way. E.g. Online deliberation

Therefore, we have two very different philosophies with different working mechanisms.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Addresses fundamental problems within civic behaviour and can make a greater change	The evidence base for think is less developed

Stoker is trying to tease out whether:

- Nudge and think are helpful?
- Are they depicted effectively?
- How can they develop policy?

Questions

Q: Statement – Charlie Mansell: The Campaign Company

The distinction between the two is useful for practitioners – This is where the evidence base is built up, we need to make sure that we share the evidence base.

Response: Stoker explains that this is why they use the experimental methods in their research. Otherwise it is difficult to construct robust evidence. We need researchers to randomise more to increase the robustness of the evidence.

Q: Practise?

Practical examples where you have to choose between the two.
Sometimes this is a forced choice – for example counter terrorism

Response: In conflict situations perhaps we have to think beyond Nudge and Think. These are specifically developed for mature liberal democracies. Other choices and options have to be considered in other situations

Q: Mark Earls

People will make significant changes themselves without state intervention.

Response: The state needs to understand this better. However, not too much as this will then mean they become too involved and may interfere in the development of this process.

Stoker warns of the danger of a society without the collective implication of actions. He therefore defends the system on this level. The least worse system we have on collective engagement so far.

There is a place for Nudge and Think but we need to be modest with it. For example, marketing can work at the margins.

Q: Democracy and participation in Europe – Isabel Hoffman: Bertelsmann Stiftung

Can people deliberate without knowing each other?

Is Nudge on the secure side of political risk management and deliberate on the riskier side

Response: Stoker believes that people are able to get this personal level of deliberation online – he has experienced people making friends online. The analysis of online deliberation is highly important for future research.

However, online, people do tend to move to talk to people who are more like them, this is a possible weakness. Face to face this is less likely to happen,

Q: Alison Crowther: Sciencewise ERC

Online deliberation is more for those people influenced by right wing thought.

- For example climate change deniers.
 - o The visual cues aren't there to halt people, feel safer in your prejudice.
 - o Real deliberation therefore needs more than this.
 - o You are missing the one to one interaction that is what makes people happy.

Q: John Goodman: Co-operativesUK

Definitions –

- Nudging – is this simply delivering government targets
- Thinking – delivering own ideas – maybe against the government?

Response: Not an area that is easy to define. However, nudge is definitely not just about government targets. In comparison, Think can transcend into groupthink – for example the government could employ certain facilitators in order to develop a certain thought pattern. Again, nudge and think do therefore cross over.

To Conclude

Given that there is this consensus on behaviour change we need to make decisions that link the two.
However, is the research that we are doing really sufficient as the decisions that are coming up are so important.