

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

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Themes

- Civic behaviour
- Nudge
- Think
- Comparisons

Changing civic behaviours

- There is an increased public debate about interventions from the state that shape and direct individual and collective choices for the wider benefit of citizens and society.
- Politicians of all political hues appear to have overcome their liberal qualms in order to try and change our civic behaviour.
- American Democrats and British Conservatives have embraced the challenge as have governments in many other countries.

Table: Classification of civic behaviour

		<i>Type of activity</i>	
		Influencing institutions	DIY
<i>Level of Activity</i>	Individual	Individual political action	Individual DIY
	Collective	Collective political action	Collective DIY

Civic behaviour 1

- Civic behaviour can manifest itself in four ways. (a) *Individual political action*, where individuals seek to influence institutions by complaining, signing petitions or contacting politicians; (b) *collective political action* where people work together to influence institutions by marching on parliament, attending health forums or joining political parties;

Civic behaviour 2

- (c) *Individual DIY*, when individuals act in the wider public interest by reducing their consumption, recycling household waste or shopping ethically;
- (d) *Collective forms of DIY civic behaviour* include being a member of a community group, forming a social enterprise, pledging to exchange favours formally (e.g. via a timebank) or informally (mutual aid) or becoming a volunteer.

But do we know how to change civic behaviour?

- The evidence base is too under-developed and the state of our knowledge is too much in its infancy for us to alight on one type of intervention and argue that it is the right thing to do in all circumstances.
- Rather policy makers need to take a step back and develop a broad heuristic to enable them to see the choices that are open and to allow some estimate to be made of the likely success of interventions in different circumstances.

Towards a heuristic

- NUDGE stems from behavioural economics and psychology and argues that citizens can be nudged to act with a broader civic benefit in mind
- THINK comes from the very different intellectual stable of normative theory and political science. It posits that citizens, given the right context and framing, can think themselves collectively towards a better understanding of problems and more effective collective solutions

The only games in town?

- Nudge versus think is not the only take on what governments can do to encourage civically-minded behaviour.
- Incentives tools can pay citizens or punish them for civic actions.
- The law can be used to compel people to be civic, such as in compulsory voting, for example.
- For the governments wanting to connect with its citizens the choices really are nudge or think.
Or maybe nudge *and* think

Table : nudge and think compared

	<i>Nudge</i>	<i>Think</i>
View of human nature	Fixed	Malleable
Cognitive model	Cognitive misers/use of shortcuts	Capable of reasoning/reflection
Costs to the individual	Low	High
Unit of analysis	Individual-focused	Group-focused
Change process	Cost-benefit led	Value led
Civic conception	Doing one's bit	Addressing the general interest
Role of the state	Customise messages	Create new institutional spaces, respond to citizens

Table : Strengths and weaknesses of nudge and think

	<i>Nudge</i>	<i>Think</i>
Strengths	Goes with the grain of decision-making, low cost, renewable, wide application	Addresses the root of the problem, new ways of thinking, may lead to the changes needed
Weaknesses	Does not address fundamental divisions, overall modest outcomes	Time consuming, dangers of false consensus, minority sport, short-term effects