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# Nudge FORGOOD: Ethical Aspects of Behavioural Public Policy

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RESEARCH | ANALYSIS | EVIDENCE

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# Agenda

1. Motivation
2. MINDSPACE For Ethics
3. Discussion
4. Case Studies

# 1. Motivation

# MINDSPACE

(Dolan, P., Hallsworth, M., Halpern, D., King, D., & Vlaev, I. (2010). MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour for public policy.)

- “The sheer volume of results emerging from the behavioural economics literature... can make it difficult to see which effects have common characteristics... and hard to sort robust effects from one-off results.
- MINDSPACE is a mnemonic for thinking about the effects on our behaviour that result from contextual (rather than cognitive) influences.”

# MINDSPACE



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## Influencing behaviour: The mindspace way

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### ABSTRACT

The ability to influence behaviour is central to many of the key policy challenges in areas such as health, finance and climate change. The usual route to behaviour change in economics and psychology has been to attempt to 'change minds' by influencing the way people think through information and incentives. There is, however, increasing evidence to suggest that 'changing contexts' by influencing the environments within which people act (in largely automatic ways) can have important effects on behaviour. We present a mnemonic, MINDSPACE, which gathers up the nine most robust effects that influence our behaviour in mostly automatic (rather than deliberate) ways. This framework is being used by policymakers as an accessible summary of the academic literature. To motivate further research and academic scrutiny, we provide some evidence of the effects in action and highlight some of the significant gaps in our knowledge.

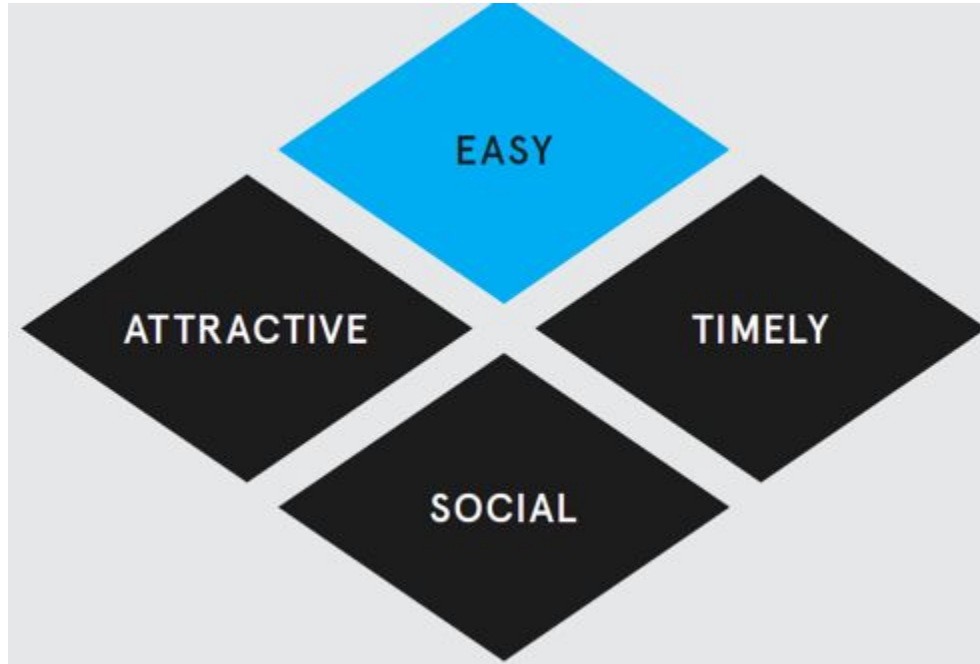
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# MINDSPACE

Messenger	We are heavily influenced by who communicates information.
Incentives	Our responses to incentives are shaped by predictable mental shortcuts such as strongly avoiding losses.
Norms	We are strongly influenced by what others do.
Defaults	We 'go with the flow' of pre-set options.
Salience	Our attention is drawn to what is novel and seems relevant to us.
Priming	Our acts are often influenced by subconscious cues.
Affect	Our emotions can powerfully shape our actions.
Commitments	We seek to be consistent with our public promises and reciprocate acts.
Ego	We act in a way that makes us feel better about ourselves.

# It was too complicated → EAST

(BIT, 2014, EAST: Four Simple Ways to Apply Behavioural Insights)



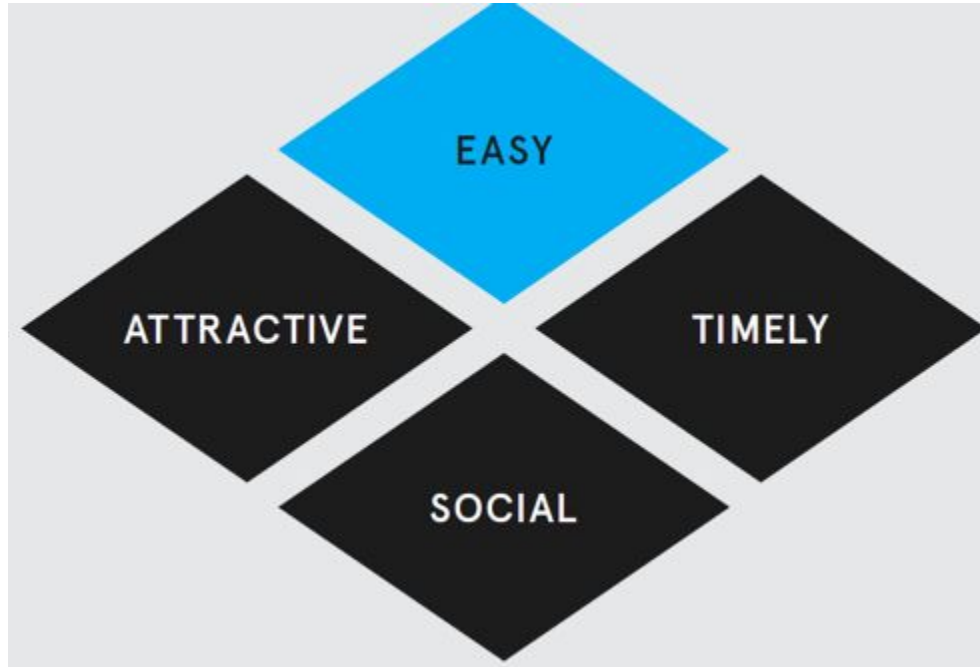
# Dark Nudges





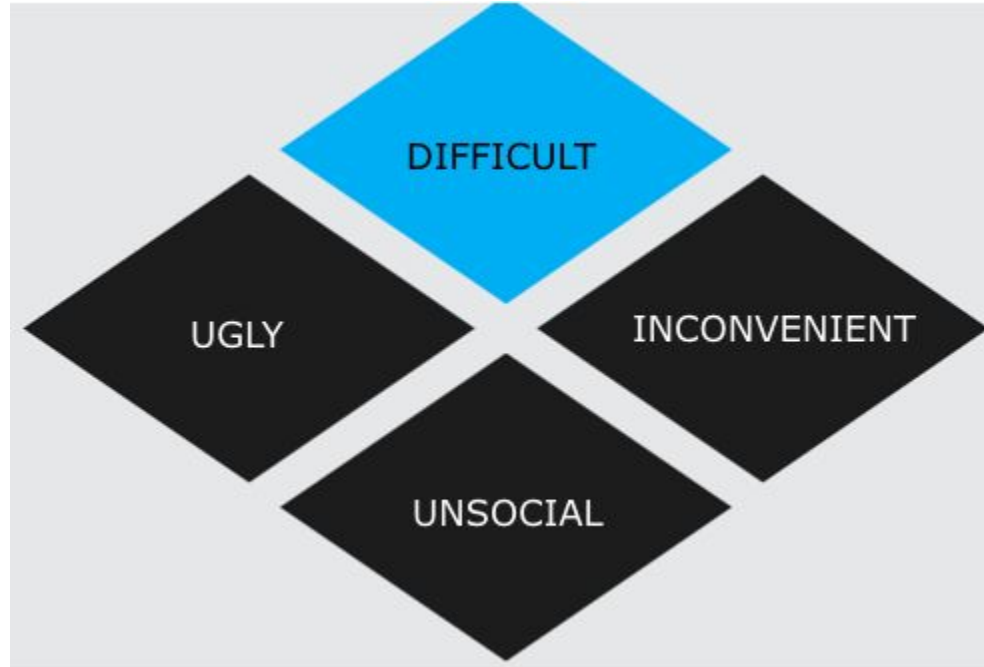
A Dark Nudge  
is a user interface  
that has been carefully  
crafted to trick users into  
doing things...[or] an experience  
designed to exploit cognitive biases  
and covertly influence customer  
behaviours. **Darkpatterns.org**

# Dark nudging\*: Making bad choices EAST



\* Thaler calls this sludging.

# Sludging: Making wise choices DUUI



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# Nudger or Dark Nudger?

# How to evaluate paternalism?

- Cost & Benefits!
- No extreme position such as “All Nudges are good/bad”, no “radical anti-paternalism” or “anti-anti-paternalism”.
- In spirit of asymmetric paternalism (Camerer et al 2003):  
$$(p * B) - [(1 - p) * C] - I + \Delta\Pi > 0$$
- What is the currency of Benefits and Costs?
  - Usually: **Welfare** and/or **Autonomy**

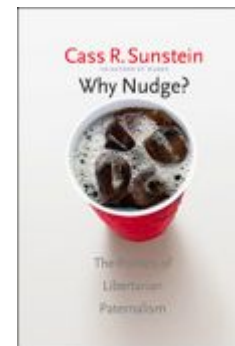
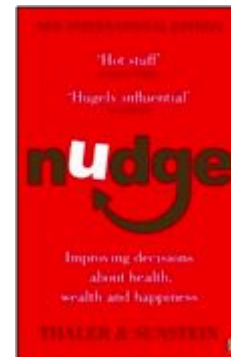
# Today...

- ... we do **not** deal with how behavioural interventions work.

“Can nudges change behaviour?”

- ... we deal with whether it is good or bad that they work?

“Should nudges be used to change behaviour?”



# Questions

How can **we** differentiate between nudges, dark nudges, and sludges?

How can **behavioural science teachers / CEOs / policy-makers** distinguish ethical from non-ethical behavioural science applications?

## 2. MINDSPACE For Ethics



# MINDSPACE for Ethics

- The sheer volume of ethical arguments in favour of and against nudging emerging from the “nudge debate” can make it difficult to see which nudges might be ethically unacceptable.
- We aim to develop a mnemonic for thinking about the ethics of using behaviourally-informed policies.
- A pragmatic guide for policy-makers who do not have the time to go through the philosophical nudge debate.

# What is a MINDSPACE for Ethics?

- An aid (not a requirement) for the applied behavioural scientist to think about ethics. Not prescriptive.
- Directs the nudge practitioner to potential ethical issues.
- Allows nuanced, case-by-case discussion about what kinds of nudges might have ethical issues (BBP is here to stay).
- Not about the ethics of implementation (e.g. not about importance of evaluating behavioural policies).

# Thaler

Three principles should guide the use of nudges

1. All nudging should be **transparent** and never misleading.
2. It should be as easy as possible to **opt out** of the nudge, preferably with as little as one mouse click.
3. There should be good reason to believe that the behaviour being encouraged will improve the **welfare** of those being nudged.

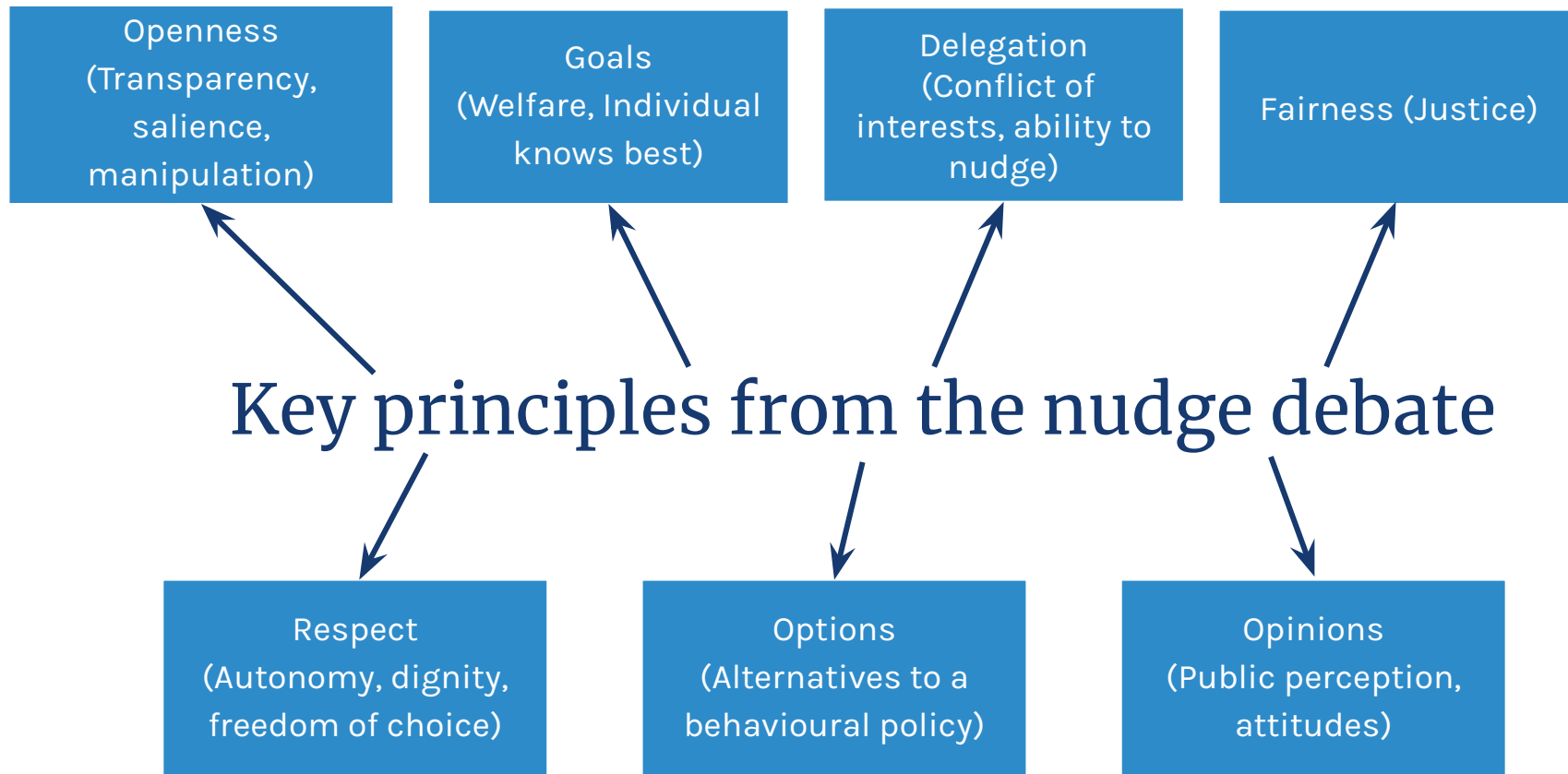
# “Nudge for good”

Is that enough?



# What does ‘for good’ mean?

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Re-organising this leads to...

# Nudge 'FORGOOD'

Seven Ethical Dimensions	Key Questions to Consider Before Nudging
<b>F</b> airness	What are the redistributive effects of the nudge?
<b>O</b> penness	Is the nudge open or hidden and manipulative?
<b>R</b> espect	Does the nudge respect people's autonomy, dignity, freedom of choice and privacy?
<b>G</b> oals	How does the nudge influence the welfare of all parties involved?
<b>O</b> pinions	Do people agree or disagree with the means and the ends of the nudge?
<b>O</b> ptions	Should other policies be used instead of the nudge?
<b>D</b> elegation	Do the policy-makers have the right and ability to use the power delegated to them?

# 3. Discussion



# Discussion

1. Did we miss important principles?
2. Do we need a MINDSPACE for ethics?
3. What are the dangers of such a mnemonic?
4. How should FORGOOD be used?
5. Alternatives from the literature?

# 1. Did we miss important principles?

- Welfare (~ Goals)
- Manipulation (~ Openness)
- Autonomy (~ Dignity)
- Trustworthiness and intentions of policy-maker
- Administrative discretion. Who nudges the nudger? Government errors
- Effectiveness and unwanted side-effects
- Harmfulness (meta principle)
- Learning (development of capacities)
- Vulnerability
- Privacy
- ?

## 2. Do we need a MINDSPACE for ethics?

- We think yes.
- Ethics might not be particularly salient for many practitioners.
- It is difficult to talk about ethics in applied contexts.
- FORGOOD can give some guidance and encourages an organised discussion.

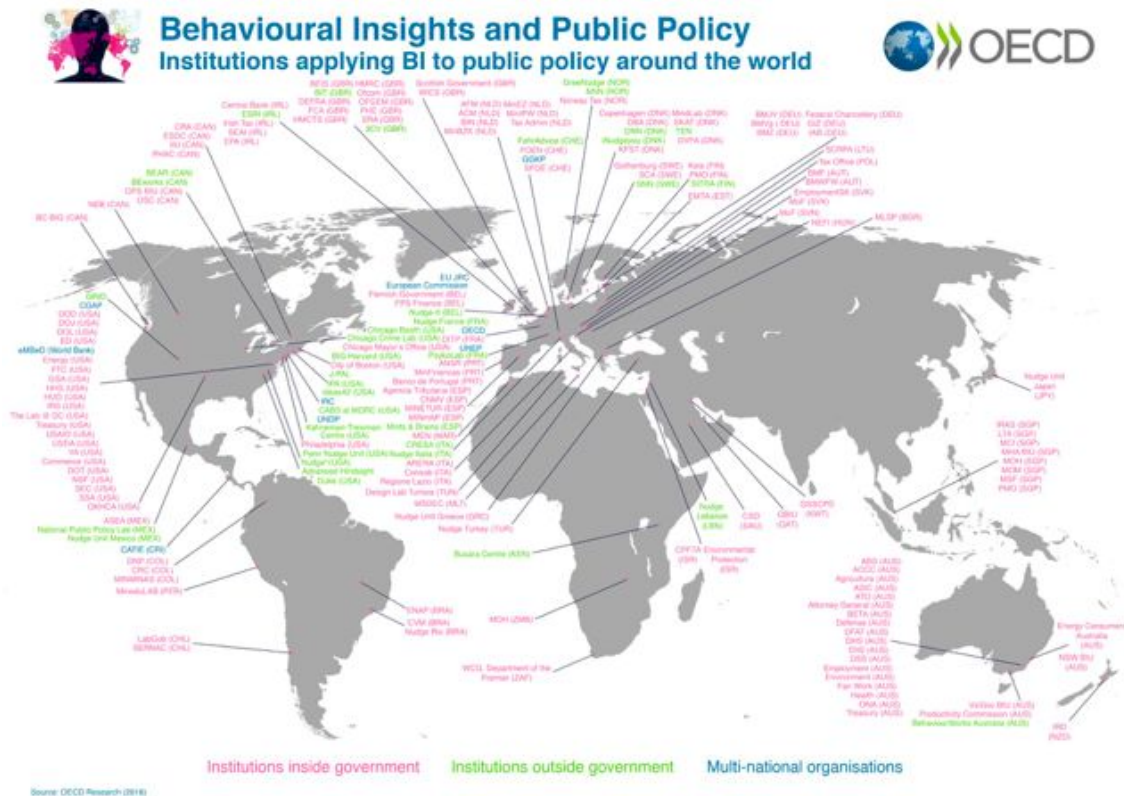
### 3. What are the dangers of such a mnemonic?

- Misguided frameworks misguide policies.
- Ethics is a discussion, not a checklist.
- Suggests possibility of trade-offs (?)
- Is such a framework FORGOOD?

## 4. How should FORGOOD be used?

- Not as an ethics review with approval. (In the future?)
- Not a basis to calculate an acceptability-index. (Impossible?)
- As an aid to think about the ethics of nudging and an encouragement to develop domain-specific frameworks.
- As a basis for professional standards. (Teaching, industry.)
- Academic paper & Non-academic guidebook. Policy-reports.

# 4. How should FORGOOD be used?



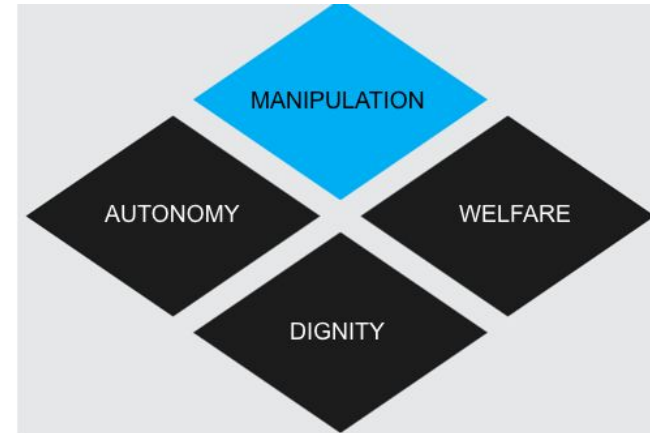
## 5. Alternatives from the literature

Clavien (2018): Alleviate autonomy concerns by focusing on: (i) Goals; (ii) Inevitability of nudging in non-ideal world; (iii) Shared preferences about goals; and (iv) Consent over means.

Renaud and Zimmermann (2018):  
Applied to security & privacy:  
(i) Retention; (ii) Transparency; (iii) Goals, (iv) Fairness (v) Scientific integrity; and (vi) (un-)anticipated consequences.

Fabbri and Faure (2018): establish rules of the game for behavioural policy-making through “constitutional-type” guiding principles.

Sunstein (2015):



## 4. Case Studies



# Simpler disclosure



Fairness

Openness

Respect

Goals

Opinions

Options

Delegation

# The cafeteria



Fairness

Openness

Respect

Goals

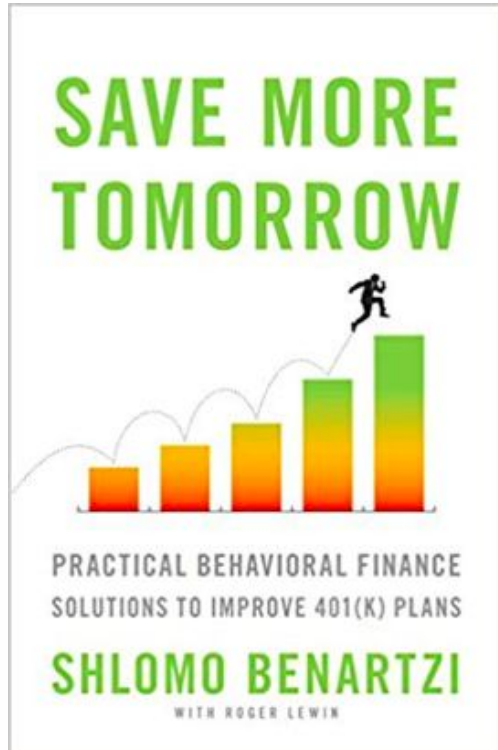
Opinions

Options

Delegation

But development of capacities?

# Save more tomorrow



Fairness

Openness

Respect

Goals

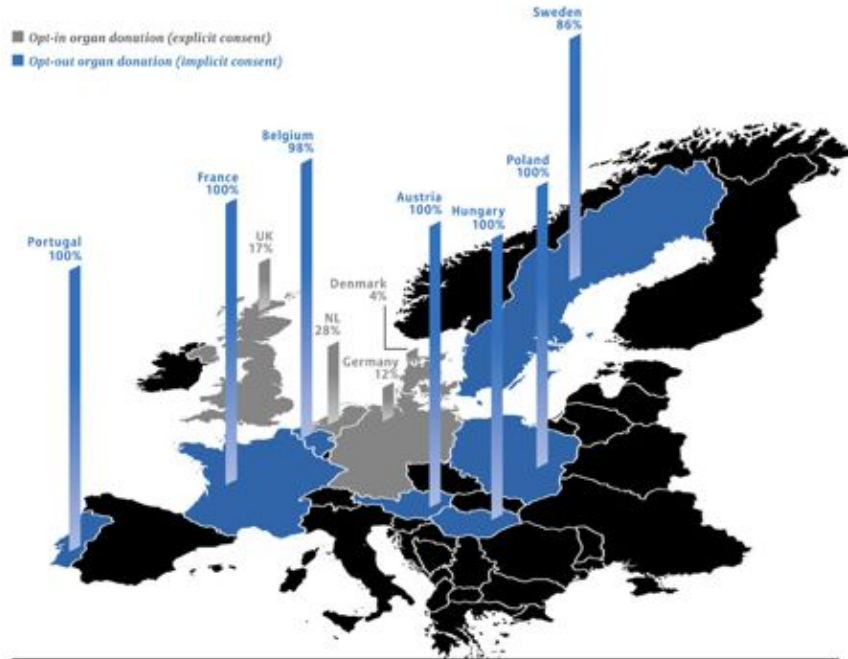
Opinions

Options

Delegation

# Opt-out organ donation

THE DEFAULT OPTION AND EFFECTIVE CONSENT RATES (FIGURE 1)



Source: Johnson and Goldstein, 2003.

Fairness

Openness

Respect

Goals

Opinions

Options

Delegation

# Password choice

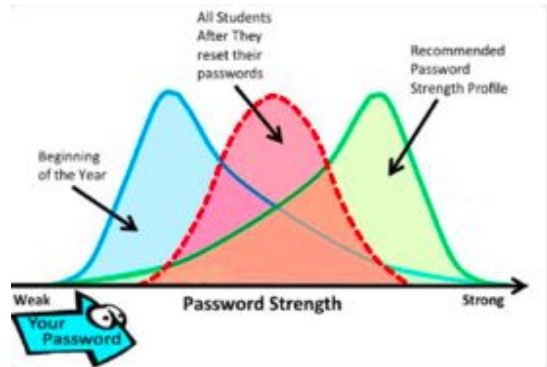


Figure 1. Exemplary Visual Nudges used in Study Conditions a) Expectation Effect + Feedback and b) Social Norms

Fairness

Openness

Respect

Goals

Opinions

Options

Delegation

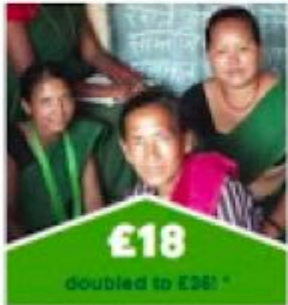
Renaud, K., & ZIMMERMANN, V. (2018). Nudging folks towards stronger password choices: providing certainty is the key. *Behavioural Public Policy*, 1-31.

# Nudging and chugging

**DONATE**

Call 0300 200 0002

I want to make a  donation of:



**Donate now**

Fairness

Openness

Respect

Goals

Opinions

Options

Delegation

# DWP fake tests

Jobseekers made to carry out bogus psychometric tests

Unemployed people are told they risk losing benefits if they fail to carry out meaningless questionnaire



Fairness

Openness

Respect

Goals

Opinions

Options

Delegation

# Implementation of benefit sanctions



Fairness

Openness

Respect

Goals

Opinions

Options

Delegation



# Labelling NHS prescriptions



**Fairness**

Openness

**Respect**

**Goals**

Opinions

Options

Delegation

# Go home vans



Fairness

Openness

Respect

Goals

Opinions

Options

Delegation

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Thanks for your attention.

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