

Dear readers,

In this Special Issue, we are pleased to bring together the themes of nudges and heuristics. We are honoured to start with a contribution from Cass Sunstein, who unravels misconceptions about nudging underlying some of the more simplistic critiques of behavioural public policy. We still need to have a constructively critical approach, especially in building-up robust empirical evidence about the efficacy, or not, of different types of nudges, but we also need to start from a good understanding of what nudging really involves. Shabnam Mousavi has provided another fresh perspective on nudges and their links with heuristics, unpicking another common canard in critiques of heuristics –that they are all about irrational decisions-making– when in fact they are useful decision-making tools, not just from an individual perspective but also from an evolutionary perspective.

Gigi Foster’s contribution broadens the debate with a plea for theoretical development alongside the empirical contributions. She challenges us to move beyond what has, so far, been a largely empirical literature about nudging towards explaining the findings “to a degree that is both intellectually satisfying and internally consistent”. Brendan Markey-Towler takes up this challenge in providing some theoretical insights, building on an analysis of the ways in which new understandings of nudges and heuristics could be built around a deeper understanding of the network structure of the mind –focussing specifically on the properties of salience, chains and anchoring. Similarly, Carsta Simon and Macro Tagliabue urge us to do more to embed older insights from behaviour analysis to complement the relatively new contributions from behavioural economics to behavioural public policy.

In the final two contributions, we have some practical discussions and examples of nudges and their alternatives. Samuli Reijula and colleagues explore nudges and boosts, as two competing approaches to combining psychology, decision-making and policy. They suggest that combining different tools –amalgamating nudges, boosts and better policy designs– can magnify the welfare benefits of the different behavioural public policy instruments. Following this thread, we conclude this thought-provoking collection with Ajla Cosic, Hana Cosic and Sebastian Ille’s study of how

nudging tools can be used in the very important context of improving environmental decision-making, particularly for our younger generations of students. Cosic et al's evidence about the power of combinations of nudges in encouraging students to recycle supports the assertion of Reijula and colleagues that combinations of approaches are more powerful than any single approach alone.

Overall - as behavioural public policy grows and develops we need new models and theories, more robust evidence and a clear link between them so that we can build our knowledge of which nudges work when and how. The theoretical literature on heuristics is a good place to start. We also need to recognise that nudges will not always provide the best policy solutions. Nudges designed on the basis of a deep understanding of decision-making heuristics are an essential tool but there are other tools in the policy-makers' toolbox too. When policy problems are about more than the psychology of individuals' decision-making, for example in the face of market failures and institutional rigidities, we should not forget that we have access to traditional economic policy tools, including taxes and subsidies. A combination of behavioural and economic public policy instruments is likely to be the most powerful policy approach of all.

MICHELLE BADDELEY & SHABNAM MOUSAVI

Guest Editors

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