

When and How to Use Technology Nudges to Nudges People at Work

Author: Nyasha Ziwewe . January 2020

Nudges, based on principles of behavioral economics, are small, low-cost, timely interventions that can help people think and act differently. For digital nudges to work, they should reflect the context in which people make decisions. To effectively change behaviors, divide nudge efforts into discrete steps, make sure they dovetail with accepted group behaviors and hold people accountable. Digital nudge campaigns need buy-in from leaders, clear goals, and an initial small-scale test before rollout.

Nowadays the majority of activities and processes are going digital. Nudging is one of the areas in which technology is being adopted. This is referred to as digital nudging. Digital nudging is the use of user-interface design elements to guide people's behavior in digital choice environments. Digital choice environments are user interfaces, such as web-based forms and ERP screens that require people to make judgments or decisions. Different forms of communication can be used in the process such as emails, web notifications, popups, WhatsApp messages and so on.

The email from the benefits team reminding employees to update their health care preferences, that is a nudge. Therefore, are the notifications managers send workers on their smartphone telling them when their next shift starts. As are group texts from people in a leadership training class reporting their progress. According to Research Gate's [research](#), only 62% of nudging treatment is statistically significant. Nudges have a median effect size of 21% depending on their nature and context.

Mobile devices, enterprise social network tools, and other workplace apps have made it easy to deploy such digital nudges to encourage behaviors that benefit both employees and the organization. Companies are using nudges to reduce absenteeism, increase productivity, improve communications, meet individual and team objectives, and boost performance in other ways.

According to behavioral economics, nudges should appear when people are open to making a change. They should be connected to small steps that are easy to take and reward people's accomplishments rather than point out their shortcomings. Nudges are more successful when there is a plan behind how they're used, they're social, they hold people accountable in some way, but don't emphasize on penalizing them and offer small incentives for reaching intended goals.

Small steps can make a big difference. People overestimate their ability to change by failing to translate lofty goals into the incremental steps they need to take to get started. Digital nudges can be tied to those smaller commitments. Celebrating desired behaviors works better than highlighting negative organizational norms. When attempting to change behaviors, organizations can sometimes unintentionally emphasize an accepted, negative practice, which can promulgate the undesired behavior.

Getting started with nudges

Nudges do not work in a vacuum, organizations can't use them effectively without doing some necessary background work, including cultivating open communication about the issues that need to be changed and experimenting to see what works.

Three principles should guide the use of nudges:

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

Understand why employees will or will not use nudges. To use digital nudges as part of change management, leaders must be comfortable with asking employees to behave in different, specific ways and with designing, testing, and scaling nudges that help employees do so. Leaders also need to be comfortable trying new ways of doing things.

Pinpoint the behaviors that need to be changed. Identify and prioritize areas that need improvement, and then create the steps needed to help people make the desired changes. For nudges to work, goals and steps must be as specific as possible. “Be better at collaborating” does not do the cut it because they are not specific. A goal such as “Invite a representative from the procurement department to all supply chain meetings” is better because they are specific and unambiguous.

Pick a nudge and test it. Try a digital nudge for a specific goal with one group, office, or business unit. A pilot can be a short, low-cost experiment. Monitor individuals' progress and use the data analytics built into applications and other digital technologies to gather information on results. Study what works to see how you can replicate it in a larger nudge campaign.

Make people accountable. Because people care about what others think, tie nudges to some form of third-party accountability. That does not mean making people check in with their boss. It could be having employees pair up as goal friends and commit to regular check-ins to see what progress they are making towards the goal. Alternatively, use a group email, text, or mobile application to post results on a digital leaderboard that everyone can see.

Learn from successes and failures to roll out a larger digital nudge program. Some pilot projects might fail and that is okay. Failure is an important part of experimentation, and committing to digital nudges means accepting the possibility that a particular nudge will not work. When digital nudge prototypes do not produce a change in performance, use the failure as a conversation starter. What does it tell you about your organization? Can you tweak the nudge to make it more successful?

Nyasha D Ziwewe is a Business Consultant and Systems developer at Industrial Psychology Consultants. Email: nyasha@ipcconsultants.com Mobile 0783462251. LinkedIn: [Nyasha D Ziwewe](#)

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