

Nudge and choice architecture

A nudge is a change in how options are presented that makes a behavior more likely, without banning anything or changing incentives.

In Spanish

Nudge y arquitectura de decisión

Origin

Thaler and Sunstein (2008)

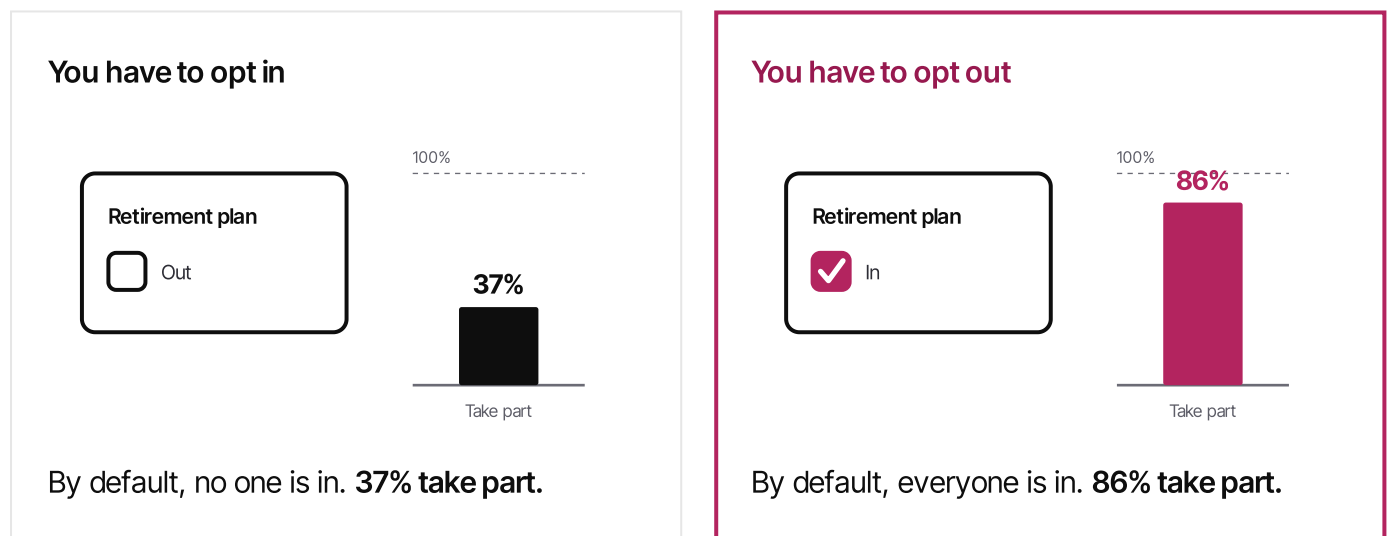


What problem it addresses

It addresses how to help people choose what they themselves would want, like saving or looking after themselves, without taking away their freedom to choose otherwise.

An example

A US company changed how new employees enrolled in its retirement plan.



No one was forced to do anything. Only the default option changed.

Why it happens



Every choice is presented in some way. There is no neutral design.



We tend to follow the easiest path, like leaving what comes preselected.



Designing that path changes what is chosen without removing any option.

Applications in design

Use it like this
Make the option the person would want the easiest one, by default, within reach and at the right moment.

Avoid
Using design to push toward what suits the company rather than the person.

Don't fall for it
Ask yourself what you would choose if all options were equally easy to find.

37% → 86%



What the research says

Participation in the retirement plan before and after automatic enrollment (Madrian and Shea, 2001).

Debated evidence. In practice the effect is usually smaller. In government nudge units, the average improvement was 1.4 points, versus 8.7 in academic studies (DellaVigna and Linos, 2022).

Connections

Used in

- Design for policy
- Behavioral design
- EAST framework

Related to

- Bandwagon effect
- Default effect
- Deceptive patterns (dark patterns)
- Principles of influence
- Bounded rationality
- Present bias

Authors and works

2008	Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein	Coined the terms nudge and choice architecture.
2001	Brigitte Madrian and Dennis Shea	Measured the effect of automatic enrollment in a retirement plan.

Sources

Original sources

- Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2008). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Yale University Press.
- Madrian, B. C., & Shea, D. F. (2001). The power of suggestion: Inertia in 401(k) participation and savings behavior. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 116(4), 1149–1187. [View source \(https://doi.org/10.1162/003355301753265543\)](https://doi.org/10.1162/003355301753265543)

Academic reviews

- DellaVigna, S., & Linos, E. (2022). RCTs to scale: Comprehensive evidence from two nudge units. *Econometrica*, 90(1), 81–116. [View source \(https://doi.org/10.3982/ECTA18709\)](https://doi.org/10.3982/ECTA18709)

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

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