Centre for Work-based Learning
‘Nudge Psychology’ and workplace research engagement
Priorities

• Successful vocational learning and training to prepare Scotland’s workforce.
• Transferring learning from theory to practice.
• Practitioner agency and engagement with evidence.
• Sector readiness for Industry 4.0:
  • Cloud computing
  • Internet of things
  • Wearable and mobile tech
Example problem:
How should careers advisors structure the advice they give to make it more likely to be followed?

Example problem:
How can teachers draw on evidence to make good decisions about what kind of homework to set?

Example problem:
How can planners and designers employ evidence about human-decision making when this is non-obvious?

What these problems have in common is that they relate to evidence-based practice in the workplace. But how do we encourage workers to engage with evidence?
Rationale

- Most workers are already motivated to do a good job, but may be put off from research engagement by minor obstacles, time costs, and administration.

- Some may simply never get around to research engagement, despite good intentions.

- Nudge psychology aims to motivate research engagement by making it simpler and smoother to do.

- Instead of a reward, nudges involve reminders, emotional engagement, and removing of barriers. A nudge could also draw on a person’s workplace identity.
One of the main criticisms of nudge psychology:

*It is sneaky and undemocratic to subtly influence people’s decisions (e.g. Dobson, 2014)*

However, there is no reason that nudges need to be covert. People often choose to **nudge themselves**, for example by...

- Hiding temptations such as cookies
- Setting reminders on their phone
- Opting in to notifications
- Automating processes such as savings
- Making public declarations of their goals (accountability)
Our data suggested three main ways that practitioners can be ‘nudged’ to increase their engagement with evidence:

- **Cognition**: tools involving reminders/memory, boosts to understanding of processes, and better access to information.

- **Identity**: tools which make it appear relevant, safe, and integral to their workplace identity. They must see it as *their sort of thing* (and this is best done overtly).

- **Motivation**: tools which stimulate practitioners to use the research. It must be interesting, engaging, and make them feel good about their practice.
Another important finding from our research is that evidence and research are seen in multiple ways, depending on the field of work.

Two main forms include:

- Evidence concerning how to practice the job effectively.
- Information concerning the field of work, such as technical specifications in engineering, employment data for careers advisors, etc.

Mentors fully taking on board this broad range and finding ways to share and discuss evidence will be in itself a form of cognitive nudge.
A ‘toolkit’

- Drawing on this evidence and the previous research literature, we have prepared a nudge psychology toolkit.
- Aimed at employers and mentors
- 26 different tools, each constituting a ‘nudge’ towards better research engagement.
Importantly, the toolkit is non-coercive, long-term, and does not rely on practitioners finding extra time, attention and willpower to engage with research.

In short, it is practical and easily applied.

By using reminders, engaging identity, and boosting motivation, mentors and employers can help to ensure that their workers want to engage with evidence, and find it easy to do so.
- Default opt-ins
  Ensuring an assumption that employees will engage (e.g. in a research-based discussion group) with the onus to actively opt out rather than having to opt in.

- Reminder emails
  Messages which either prompt employees to spend time on research-based reading or tasks, or give practical evidence-based suggestions (such as a ‘tip of the week’).
• The toolkit will be available in pdf and paperback format, and downloadable for free (and without logins, credit card details or other anti-nudges!)

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