Introduction

We start with an example. In 2008 the environment department of an English local council located near to Manchester faced a problem: how to get a group of citizens to recycle more of their household waste. This well-run authority, with considerable green credentials, wanted to do more for the environment. It had already been very successful in persuading many residents to separate their waste. But very little recycling was happening on some of its publicly owned housing estates, where many tenants made little attempt to sort out their rubbish into cans, glass, and paper. Instead, they put all their waste into refuse sacks and deposited them in the general waste collection bins. There was even one small estate where no recycling was happening at all.

To try to get the message across to the residents on this estate, the council's officers sent leaflets to households, and then put up large, colourful posters at the entrances to the buildings and on the walkways. But these acts of encouragement had no effect. In the end the officers became so frustrated they instructed the waste collection service not to pick up the rubbish for a few weeks. The idea was that if the people living on the estate saw the growing pile of refuse sacks they would be shamed into recycling. Instead of picking up the

rubbish in the normal way, the refuse collectors placed the sacks in the central grassed areas of the estate in full view of everyone. Over the weeks that followed, these courtyards became filled up with black refuse bags (the council regularly checked there was no public health problem).

Well, what happened? Did the citizens of the estate start placing glass, cans, and paper into their respective collection boxes? The simple answer is no. They ignored the message from the council. In the end the environment department gave up and the garbage trucks returned to their normal cycle of visits, collecting the black plastic bags with their unsorted waste. We do not know what the residents in the neighbourhood made of the mounting mountain of refuse. Was it clear to them that this was a form of punishment? Perhaps they thought the local council had failed them again? Maybe the collective action problem felt insurmountable? Regardless, the plain fact is that modern government, with its complex laws, access to finance, public relations/marketing skills, professionally trained employees, and information technology capacity – as well as the leverage it gets from democratic legitimacy – cannot get a group of citizens to behave differently if they do not wish to do so.

The story shows there are limits to what government can achieve with conventional means of bringing about change. It cannot command people to be more neighbourly or to save for their retirement, or to volunteer to help out in their community or – in this case – contribute to the environment by recycling more of what they dispose of. The kinds of problems that many societies now need to solve require changing the behaviour of citizens, whose private actions are hard to regulate by laws and commands alone. Even when these top-down tools of government work, there are some moral qualms about using them too much. Citizens in Western industrial democracies have come to value their individual freedoms, lifestyle choices,

and right to have a say. They are less deferential, less automatically inclined to accept the claimed wisdom of experts, and more willing to challenge those in authority. Modern citizens want to be active choosers, or at least as much as they can be, and as a result top-down commands or crass incentives to change their behaviour are less likely to be effective and acceptable. The use of laws and commands, which was the normal reflex action of policy-makers in previous years, is no longer such an attractive option, at least when done without other complementary means of encouraging civic action. It is also possible for governments to provide financial incentives to support new behaviours, but even copious amounts of public funding need some citizen help to get the best value from public policies.

The important complements to finance and laws are what may be called the softer tools of government. These involve working more closely with citizens, understanding how they are thinking, and encouraging them to take – and to own – better decisions. It would involve a 'nudge' rather than a push or a shout, and would incorporate a 'think', that is, government and other public bodies allowing citizens to debate and to deliberate so they can decide what is best. We aim in this book to find out whether these alternatives can work.

Nudges are about framing choices. Citizens now live in a complex world, with many signals about what is the best thing to do. Given that people have only a limited amount of time to process all the information they get, it may be more practicable to use social cues to help decide what to do. In so doing, it may not take much effort to change individual behaviour, especially as citizens can take account of what others are doing. The nudge idea is about governments, working in cooperation with citizens, shaping the multiple daily choices people make in ways that could be better for society. It relies on citizens believing these social cues are right.

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Think refers to another broad set of tools – stretching from consultation to handing over decisions to citizens – which have become prominently and widely established in the world of governance since the 1990s. Broadly, these multiple forms of public engagement rest on the assumption that citizens – given the right evidence, enough time, and an appropriate context – can come to the best judgement about what is good for them and their fellow citizens and then act. Solutions can be found to challenging issues, and the pathways to behaviour change can be illuminated and smoothed because citizens have been involved in the construction of the answer and perhaps even in the framing of the issue. Both the legitimacy and likely effectiveness of any solution are thus increased, and its chances of being adopted are maximized.

This book is about these softer tools of intervention and asks two questions. What are the underlying mechanisms that these tools depend on? And will policies that use them work – that is, will their use lead to changes in behaviour that bring public benefit or value? In answering these questions, the book breaks new ground. It is one of the first accounts of these new tools of governance that at the same time seeks to find out whether they work or not. There are plenty of books that advocate the use of new kinds of public management by government, starting from Osborne and Gaebler's *Rethinking Government* (Osborne and Gaebler 1993), with its famous dictum that government should do more steering and less rowing (more commissioning and less direct provision), and reviews of new tools of governance (Salamon 1989, John 2011).

Central and local governments have been quick to adopt this kind of thinking, as they have the newer doctrines of behavioural economics and nudge, inspired by the book *Nudge* (Thaler and Sunstein 2008). The prime mover in this important public policy development is the UK's Behavioural Insights Team, which was formed by

the 2010–15 Liberal Democrat and Conservative coalition government in the UK as a unit in the Cabinet Office, which applies behavioural insights to public policy (Halpern 2015). It was then spun out of government as a social purpose company. Its success shows the rapid rise and development of nudge, which has become a familiar policy tool delivering concrete benefits to policy-makers. Similar developments occurred across the world in countries as diverse as Germany, Singapore, Australia, Finland, Japan, and Peru to name a few examples (see John 2019). We return to these innovations, which have occurred since the publication of the first edition, in the final newly written epilogue to this book as well as in the empirical chapters that follow.

We are able to offer something different from standard defences of behavioural public policies: an analysis of the underlying thinking behind the most prominent new forms of intervention. While supporting many of the nudge initiatives, we argue that think complements them and deepens and broadens out the behaviour change programme. Think helps deal with the potential lack of legitimacy of nudge and its appearance of being manipulative. In general terms, nudgers should consider incorporating some elements of think into their interventions.

Most of all, and uniquely, we provide a systematic and rigorous approach to the study of the effectiveness of both nudge and think. This book reports the first attempt in the UK to show how randomized controlled trials can reveal what works when it comes to changing citizen behaviour. Experiments allow a reliable inference to be made between a cause and its effect. When it comes to introducing new medicines in Western industrial democracies it is expected that they will be the focus of rigorous randomized controlled trials before they are introduced. That is, the research measures the difference between a sample of the population who receive

the treatment and those in a control group who do not receive the intervention. The same logic of testing should be applied to interventions in the non-medical field and specifically when governments are trying to change citizen behaviour. Policy-makers can construct simple randomized controlled trials or experiments to test what forms of nudge might work or what forms of think-based interventions are efficacious. This book not only offers particular examples of interventions that have made a difference, but makes a case for a general approach to testing what works, which is rigorous and achievable. In cooperation with thousands of citizens and dozens of local governments, community groups, and non-profits, we have been trialling practices and ideas about how to stimulate different kinds of citizen behaviour, and this book reports the findings. One brief word of definition before we proceed: when we refer to citizen or civic behaviour in this book, we mean behaviour that is primarily oriented towards the collective public good, rather than towards individual wellbeing per se, although of course many citizen or civic behaviours do bring individual benefits, including physical, social, or psychological benefits. We elaborate on this further below on the section 'Defining the good citizen'. However, broadly speaking, citizen or civic behaviour refers to prosocial acts that are primarily for the benefit of other people, society more widely, or the environment, but which may also bring additional benefits for the individual.

Plan of the book

The first part of the book examines nudge and think, before setting out our preferred methods of investigating them: randomized controlled trials and design experiments. Chapter 1, 'Nudging and thinking', discusses nudge and think in some depth. It explores the assumptions of nudge and think strategies and what they can offer

to the challenge of stimulating citizen behaviour. It also engages with normative questions about whether the state or other public agencies should nudge citizens or encourage them to think. Chapter 2, 'Testing', is about how to find out what works. It argues that policy-makers and others should adopt an experimental approach when they do not know the answer about how to achieve their goals. The randomized controlled trial and its qualitative cousin, the design experiment, provide robust methods that can ascertain whether interventions designed to change citizen behaviour work or not. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 set out the main message of the book: policy-makers should experiment to find out the most effective way of encouraging better citizen behaviour.

The second and more substantial part of the book is about the key outcomes that policy-makers are interested in; this part reports and discusses experiments aimed at shaping citizen behaviour. It starts out looking at mostly nudge-based strategies and then examines some think interventions. These empirical chapters examine some of the existing evidence (both observational and experimental), provide tests of our original and innovative interventions in different areas of citizen behaviour, and come to judgements about the state of the current understanding of how best to stimulate citizen behaviour.

Each of the empirical chapters takes a similar structure: first explaining why we should study this topic, whether it is recycling, donating, or another activity; we review what is already known about it; we describe the interventions and convey what we have found out. Finally, we set out the lessons for nudge or think and recommend additional literature so the reader may explore the topic further.

Chapter 3, 'Recycling', is about how to encourage household recycling of waste. A detailed case is presented of a nudge strategy that involved canvassing people on their doorsteps, encouraging them to recycle their waste and comparing the results with a randomized

controlled trial. The findings show the strength of nudge in that the canvassing increases recycling, but it also shows the potential weakness of nudge as the effect reduces three months later. The chapter contains a second experiment that examines the role of feedback in encouraging recycling. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for the advocates of the nudge strategy.

Chapter 4, 'Volunteering', reviews the evidence on promoting volunteering and ask what a nudge strategy could offer. The chapter contains details on a design experiment that asks citizens complaining to a local authority telephone call centre to undertake some civic-minded acts. What do these findings indicate about the challenge of promoting volunteering? By changing the choice architecture, is it possible to turn complainers to volunteers?

Chapter 5, 'Voting', shows how experiments can test a variety of strategies for mobilizing the vote in a Get Out the Vote campaign (GOTV). There is a vast literature on getting citizens to engage politically, but could nudge offer some additional insights? We report on an experimental intervention about how to get citizens to vote and reflect on its implications for stimulating citizen behaviour more generally.

Chapter 6, 'Petitioning', is about another individual political behaviour: signing a petition, a simple and powerful way for the voice of the citizen to be heard by those in power, made much easier by online tools. We report on an experiment which alters the information that people receive when making an e-petition. We seek to find out whether allowing people to view the number of other e-petitioners affects their willingness to sign.

Chapter 7, 'Giving', asks if a nudge, through creating social pressure to do something, can encourage people to follow through their good intention to give to charity. The experimenters asked people to pledge to donate a book from their home to help children in Africa.

Chapter 8, 'Donating', discusses an experiment about donating organs. We ask whether the nudge strategy of changing the choice architecture can encourage people to agree to donate their organs after their death. We then outline a second experiment testing whether a booklet alone or a booklet combined with a discussion (think) would cause people to be more willing to donate their organs. In this experiment, we are able to test elements of think and nudge together.

Chapter 9 is called 'Debating'. The idea of deliberation is well established as a think strategy. But can it deal with controversial issues of public policy in an online environment? This chapter reviews the literature on this subject and reports a unique experiment in large-scale online deliberation involving 6,000 citizens. Drawing on evidence from these online debates on community cohesion and youth anti-social behaviour, we show how online engagement can influence knowledge and opinions about public policy options.

Chapter 10, 'Including', finds out how public authorities use media technology (in this case a DVD) to raise the profile of excluded voices as part of a decentralization initiative. The design experiment highlights the crucial, but difficult, role of facilitation, in particular the impact it can have in creating more inclusive dialogue.

Chapter 11, 'Linking', is about the wider institutional context of public decision-making, which may need to be reformed if think is going to work. Thinking requires linking, and only makes sense if the ideas that citizens come up with are reviewed and judged openly by the policy-makers. Why participate if no one is listening? This chapter presents findings about how citizens link to government and reveals the extent of the gap between citizens and local representatives. It may be the case that the difficulty of linking elites to citizens

is the central limitation of the think strategy. We report the results of an experiment that tests how responsive policy-makers are to requests from a citizen's interest group.

Chapter 12, 'Summary of key findings', brings the insights from the various empirical sections together, and draw out the implications for policy-makers. It is here we make the case for more experiments that can help us understand what drives citizen behaviour and then assess the best way governments can intervene to promote it. With robust evidence to hand, governments can thereby achieve better policy outcomes. We advocate a local and decentralized approach to citizen involvement and behaviour change that reflects how we applied the experimental method and the way we used partnerships with local interest groups and public bodies to develop a genuinely creative and evidence-based form of local policy-making. In this way, we argue that the leverage of nudge and creative potential of think can be brought together.

The final chapter, 'Epilogue: the future of nudge and think', is newly written for this second edition. It reviews the field since the book first came out and assess the future for the two ideas in light of the book's findings and subsequent developments in public policy. It has been a fast-moving agenda, especially for nudge, which has transformed from being the newcomer to an established policy tool; but it has also been important for think too, which has matured as a form of governance. This chapter asks whether policy-makers have followed our earlier recommendation for nudge and think to work closer together. We make a proposal for a modified version of nudge, called nudge plus, which incorporates elements of think, and takes forward our vision of a decentralized citizen-active form of nudging, which we argued for in the first edition.

Defining the good citizen

Before getting to the core argument about think and nudge, and our tests of what tools drive changes in citizen behaviour, we need to address a prior question: what kind of behaviour should governments and public agencies be encouraging? This is not a straightforward question to answer, for what makes for good citizen behaviour is temporal, unfixed, and dynamic. The good citizen of Athenian democracy was one skilled in the art of soldiering; the twenty-first-century good citizen might visit their elderly neighbour, engage in making decisions about local public spending, or help support their local park friends group. Civic behaviour can manifest itself in several ways (John et al 2011). We can think of examples of individual political action where individuals seek to influence decision-making through signing a petition or voting in elections. Also familiar is the practice of collective political action, where people work together to influence decision-making, perhaps in a community meeting to think through a tricky issue that seeks to define priorities and actions for an area. We can also recognize many examples of citizens adopting a do-it-yourself attitude and practice, when individuals act in the wider public interest, for example by driving an elderly person to the doctor, recycling household waste, or volunteering to do hospital visits. There are also collective forms of this kind of citizen behaviour, which could include being a member of a community group to clean up a local park, forming a social enterprise to run a community facility, or pledging to exchange favours formally via a time-bank (Richardson 2008). For this reason, governments and public agencies need to recognize a wider set of behaviours than they have done hitherto.

Having established what kinds of behaviour are important to encourage, what are the main motivators of civic action that we

need to establish before intervening with experiments? Each individual will have potentially multiple motivations for engaging in citizen behaviour, some more self-oriented and some more regarding of others. For example, people who volunteer may be interested in helping their neighbours; or they do it out of loyalty to the area; or because their friends are involved and asked them; or they turn up to community events because they want to meet people and make new friends. Others may enjoy the challenge of getting a project off the ground and winning against the odds; or some may see it as a route to employment in the third sector. Individuals may have one reason or many, which may vary according to the task involved. Engaging in civic action can be about protecting a person's interests, or those of others, or can be about both.

Citizen behaviour requires effort. Exercising self-restraint and personal responsibility, becoming informed about issues that affect communities, and participating in consultations, or changing entrenched habits for collective ends all demand considerable exertion by individuals. The basic idea is that to have the society that people want, they need to agree to give more back, which has been echoed in statements from people as diverse as Bill Gates and Barack Obama. But voluntary acts might not happen without some external support and intervention. Of course, there are some self-organizing activities, such as neighbourhood support, families whose members care for each other, and various forms of local organizing, such as petitioning and campaigning; but in many cases, actions will not take place effectively and on a large enough scale without some intervention by an external agency. Most people engage civically in many ways in their lives. Citizens do things individually and collectively. The scale of citizen behaviour is already substantial but people could do more if were approached in the right way. At least that is the proposition we aim to test in this book.

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