IS NUDGE NEW OR JUST A NEW LABEL? THE POLICY MAKERS
PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Nudging is an approach to public policy development which changes the decision making environment to encourage citizens to make a particular choice. Nudging has been described as a new approach, yet others have argued it is simply the application of Nudging to government that is new. Nudging may simply be a rebranding of old tools. The perceived newness of Nudging may influence its acceptance and uptake by the public service, yet to date, these perspectives have not been included in these debates. This paper was written for the ICPP conference in 2017, and reports on original research exploring how policy workers, those involved in designing and developing policies, understand Nudge as new, or simply a new label. An interpretive approach is adopted, with qualitative interviews undertaken with those working in and with government in Australia. This research identifies two broad interpretations of Nudging; that it is

INTRODUCTION

Nudging is an approach to public policy development which changes the decision making environment to encourage citizens to make a particular choice (Thaler and Sunstein 2008).

The term Nudge was coined by Thaler and Sunstein in their book *Nudge : Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness*, which was released in 2008. The Nudge book is widely credited with being the impetus behind the increasing use of Nudges in public policy throughout the world. Nudging has been used in New Zealand and Brazil (Pykett et al., 2011), Singapore, Canada and the EU (Ly and Soman 2013), Sweden, Netherlands, France and Denmark (Oliver 2013). It is in the UK in particular, and also Australia, where Nudging has been particularly influential.

The enthusiasm with which Nudging has been received, and the establishment of units and teams to implement the approach hints at a particular novelty about the phenomenon. Formal government reporting on Nudges have reinforced this notion using terms such as 'new' and an 'additional tool'. In the academic literature Nudging has been described as a new approach (Loewenstein et al. 2012, Bonell et al. 2011) or contrasted to traditional tools (Heilmann 2014). Others have pointed out that Nudges draw on research and theories that go back decades (Bogliacino, Codagnone, and Veltri 2016, Cheung and Ardolino 2011) with some suggesting that Nudges novelty rests in the application of these insights to government (Jones, Pykett, and Whitehead 2011, Quigley 2013, John 2013). Nudges may simply be a new name for old techniques, providing impetus and momentum to the approach. Claims on Nudges novelty have not included empirical research with policymakers. Policy makers' interpretation of how different Nudge is may influence its use or uptake. Perceptions of newness may generate enthusiasm for its use, or see it rejected as a fad. It can also lead to a loss of insights, as previous knowledge, may be disregarded or not considered (Vallgarda 2012).

This paper reports on original research exploring how policy workers, those involved in designing and developing policies understand Nudge as new, or simply a new label. Interpretive research offers a useful approach for exploring the multiple interpretations and meanings of policy makers (Wagenaar 2014). Qualitative interviews were undertaken with those working in and with government in Australia. Australia provides a useful case study as it was at the forefront of the Nudge adoption and has strong links to the teams in the UK.

This paper has been written for the ICPP conference in Singapore in 2017. It presents analysis and ideas from the first phase of a research project exploring Nudging. It therefore offers preliminary analysis on one aspect of the research, and it is hoped that the conference presentation will generate debate and discussion of the ideas to inform the next phase of analysis. This further research will then be reported in academic work and articles.

Nonetheless, it is hoped that this paper will contribute to policy scholarship and practice. The experiences of policy workers in this field have been remarkably exempt from the Nudge literature, and the paper thus makes an important contribution to empirically informed scholarship. Similarly, it is hoped this research also supports critical reflection by practitioners on the use and influence of Nudge.

This paper proceeds by reviewing the literature on Nudging, with particular reference to the aspects that are seen as new or otherwise. It highlights how the perspective of those developing and

designing Nudge policies are central to these issues, yet not explored in the literature. This paper asks in what ways do policy workers perceive Nudge to be new or not new? The paper goes on to describe the qualitative methods used to generate and analyse the data. The findings of how policy makers view Nudge are then outlined, and the paper concludes by reviewing the key research questions and a discussion on limitations and further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section I review the literature on the newness of Nudging. However, it is instructive for those not familiar with Nudge, to first outline the concept and provide some examples of its use and popularity.

WHAT IS NUDGE?

Nudges, as proposed by Thaler and Sunstein (2008), involves the application of the principles of behavioural economics and psychology in understanding human behaviour to public policy. The principles underlying Nudging are that people are subject to a number of different cognitive biases and heuristics that results in citizens sometimes making poor choices. By changing the way decisions are presented, policy makers can 'Nudge' citizens to make particular choices. Thaler and Sunstein (2008) use the phrase 'choice architecture' to explain the role of context, or environment in choice, arguing that the way a choice is presented to citizens will influence the decision they make. Making a particular choice the default, for example, can powerfully influence the number of citizens who select that particular option (Thaler and Sunstein 2008).

Advocates of Nudging argue that policy makers are choice architects, who should design policy to help citizens make the 'right' choice. Here the 'right' choice, as defined by Thaler and Sunstein (2008), is the decision that people would make if they were not limited by cognitive capacity, time or subject to cognitive biases and heuristics. Nudging, is proposed to sit within the philosophy of libertarian paternalism, suggesting governments role is to encourage particular behaviours, whilst still leaving citizens free to make other choices. In this way, policy makers are able to guide citizens to make better choices, for themselves and society

Thaler and Sunstein (2008) propose that Nudges are an effective and cost effective tool to address some of societies big challenges, such as obesity, with Nudging providing a more effective form of governance. However, both the effectiveness and ethics of Nudge have been questioned. Although not the focus of this article, it is worth noting that the use of Nudges is for some particularly controversial, as it is seen as manipulating citizens choices (see (White 2013, Goodwin 2012).

The definition of Nudging is contested. The definition provided by Thaler and Sunstein is broad, and described as unclear (see (Selinger and Whyte 2011, Hansen 2015). The book *Nudge* mainly uses examples to define the concept of Nudge (Hausman and Welch 2010) and these can contradict stipulations from Thaler and Sunstein themselves. In the book *Nudge*, case studies of Nudges that include economic incentives are included, whilst Thaler and Sunstein simultaneously exclude fiscal measures as a form of Nudging (Baldwin 2014). For example one Nudge is designed to encourage firms to release their pollution record, to enable a 'environmental blacklist', however this would in

fact entail significant financial sanctions (Hausman and Welch 2010). Likewise incentives, or the provision of information or persuasion are sometimes considered as Nudges, whereas others exclude these interventions from the Nudge category (Hansen 2015). The confusion is added to by the erroneous labelling of anything that changes behaviour as a Nudge, following the release of the seminal book in 2008 (Gigerenzer 2015).

Although Thaler and Sunstein are explicit on the origins of Nudge, and clearly draw upon existing bodies of knowledge in psychology and behavioural econcomics, the approach has been described by some governments and academics as new. In the following section, I outline the literature on the 'newness' of Nudging, but first I provide examples of its use and popularity.

THE RISE AND POPULARITY OF NUDGE

The release of the book Nudge in 2008 is widely credited as spawning the popularity of Nudging in government and public policy. And it does indeed seem to be popular. Whitehead et al. (2014) found evidence that 136 states had applied behavioural insights to public policy.

In the UK the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT), set up in 2009 by David Cameron's Conservative Government, has been incredibly influential. Commonly known as the 'Nudge unit' (Quigley, 2013), the unit worked with almost every government department, as well as local government, not-for profit organisations, and overseas administrations. Behavioural insights were so central to the UK government's governance approach, that it became required training for civil servants in 2012 (Strassheim, Jung, and Korinek 2015). BIT is now an independent company, part owned by the UK government, an innovation charity and its employees, yet still most of its work remains with government (Rutter, 2015). Nudging has been adopted so enthusiastically in the UK it is has been described as the default option for policy makers (Jones, Pykett, and Whitehead 2014).

In the USA, Cass Sunstein, one of the authors of Nudge, was appointed to Obama's administration in 2008 (Kosters and Van der Heijden 2015), and in 2014 the administration established its very own Nudge unit - the Social and Behavioural Sciences Team. The team was recently closed with the election of the Trump administration, but prior to this, worked in the areas of retirement security, improving college access and affordability, and criminal justice reform.

The Australian government is also Nudging. In New South Wales (NSW), a Behavioural Insights Unit was established in November 2012, in partnership with UK Behavioural Insights Team. The unit is situated within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, perhaps to signify its centrality to the NSW government's policy approach. Since its inception, the NSW unit has worked in a range of areas, including cancer screening behaviours, private health insurance uptake and return-to-work programs. (Behavioural Insights Community of Practice 2014). More recently, the Unit has worked in the areas of childhood obesity and domestic violence (Behavioural Insights Unit (NSW) 2016).

In Victoria, a similar unit to the NSW DPC Behavioural Insights Unit was established in 2016, and in November 2015, the federal government also announced a unit specifically for applying and testing behavioural insights to policy (Easton, 2015). Nudges were introduced as a 'new tool in the public service kit bag' at the launch of the Behavioural Economics Team Australia group by the federal

Turnbull Government. The unit began working in early 2016, with a focus on designing and testing policy that reflects 'real human behaviour' (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017).

The enthusiasm with which Nudge has been received, and the establishment of units and teams at the centre of government responsible for advancing Nudges suggests that there is something novel in the approach. Indeed, the discourse government uses suggests it is seen as new. For example, in reports released from the NSW Behavioural Insights Unit, Nudging is described as a *'new way of looking at public policy challenges...'* (The Behavioural Insights Unit 2014) (p2). On the Victorian Behavioural Insights webpage, the government talks about 'a*n additional tool'.* In the excerpt below use of the terms 'additional' and references to broadening available approaches clearly signify that there is something different in the approach.

"Behavioural Insights is a valuable addition to policy maker's toolkits. The public sector faces increasingly complex challenges. Behavioural Insights has the potential to help policy makers address these challenges by surfacing new insights, broadening the tools at our disposal, and improving the outcomes for all Victorians." (Department of Premier and Cabinet (Vic) 2017)

POLICY MAKERS AND NUDGE

In Nudges, policy makers design the decision making environment, with Thaler and Sunstein (2008) labelling the policy makers choice architects (as mentioned above). It is the policy makers responsibility to design the environment in such a way that it help citizens make the 'right' decisions for themselves (Hansen and Jespersen 2013). Policy makers may hinder the adoption of Nudge policies, as they may be resistant to new policy approaches, an often found situation with new policy tools (Stoker 2012). Policy makers then are central to the concept of Nudge but to date discussion on the role of policy makers have been largely theoretical. The perceived newness of Nudge has implications for its use and uptake, but what is clearly missing in the academic literature is an empirically informed understanding of whether the approach is perceived by policy makers as new or different.

A NOTE ON TERMS AND CONCEPTS

A recent report from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre suggested that behavioural economics, behavioural insights and Nudging are not the same concepts (Sousa Lourenço et al. 2016) , yet academics and government seem to use the terms without distinction. For example Libertarian Paternalism and Nudge are often used interchangeably in the literature (Gigerenzer 2015) and Nudging is also located as behavioural economics, behaviour change or as behavioural sciences (Amir and Lobel 2008, Angner 2015, Leggett 2014, Sleek 2013). Nudges, behavioural insights and behavioural sciences also seem to be used without precise differentiation in academic journals and articles (see (Hansen and Jespersen 2013, Codagnone et al. 2014).

Government appears to use the terms interchangeably. Government in the UK and in Australia often use the term behavioural insights and the units established to test Nudges in the UK and are called

the Australian states are the 'behavioural insights' units or teams. However the term 'Nudge' is used by government outside of formal publications. For example, the NSW Behavioural Insights Unit and the Institute for Public Administration Australia (IPAA) presented the 'Behavioural Insights in Action Forum' where examples were given of behavioural insight policies alongside discussions on the politics and limitation to Nudge (Institute for Public Administration Australia and Department of Premier and Cabinet 2013). Dr David Halpern, who established the Behavioural Insights Team in the UK has written a book, 'Inside the Nudge Unit'. Likewise, 'behavioural insights' and 'behavioural economics' also seemed to be used interchangeably by government in Australia. The federal governments BETA (Behavioural Economics Team Australia) website refers to the NSW's behavioural insight team's work as behavioural economics.

The broader research undertaken for this project investigates how Nudges and behavioural insights are understood as the same or different by policy makers. This paper deliberately and for simplicity uses the term Nudge. As such, only examples relating to Nudging are described below.

IS NUDGE REALLY NEW? THE LITERATURE'S PERSPECTIVE

Whilst the Nudge approach has been described as potentially revolutionary (Barrett 2011), there are debates about how new the use of Nudging really is. This section identifies three broad arguments in the novelty of Nudging.

1) That Nudges are new – outright stated
2) That there is nothing new in the approach for government
   a. Rather it is a new label for ideas that have been used previously
3) That it is Nudges application to government that is new
   a. That Nudge has been used outside of government in marketing
   b. As such it is a new policy tool

There is a section of literature which suggests Nudging is new through inferences or implications. Nudges are often introduced in papers as a new approach (Loewenstein et al. 2012, Bonell et al. 2011, Loewenstein et al. 2014). As it is not focus of the papers, this 'newness' is not expanded upon, and it is unclear if the authors are referring to the concept of Nudge as new, or its use in government. Yet clearly the authors see something original in the approach.

Much of the literature however suggests either a) there is nothing at all new in the phenomenon of Nudge, but it is rather a new label, or b) whilst the principles of Nudge are not new, and have been used outside of government previously, the application of these insights to government is new. In the remainder of this section I detail these arguments.

One argument suggests that Nudges are nothing new, and this approach has been used in governments previously. Gigerenzer (2015), for example provides specific examples of policies that might be considered Nudges. By including a time and date in the invitation letter for mammography screening, government is effectively opting in women to screening, an approach which has been used for a 'long time' before the popularity of Nudging. This example illustrates that while the argued that while the term Nudge may be new, Nudge–like interventions can be traced as far back as 2001 in the UK (Jones, Pykett, and Whitehead 2011). Nudges may simply be a 'new incarnation' of

behaviour changes policies that previous governments (that is prior to Cameron's Conservative government) have implemented (Quigley 2013). John (2013) draws attention to reports hinting at Nudges that go back to 2004. For example David Halpern, who later became the head of the Nudge Unit in the UK, first released a document in 2004 *Personal responsibility and changing behaviour: The state of its knowledge and its implications for public policy* (Halpern et al, 2004) championing the use of behavioural theories and knowledge to develop better policies (John 2013).

Rather than something fundamentally new, Nudging is simply a new label. This rebranding has provided visibility and momentum to the approach. Indeed many of the insights used in previous policies seem to have been gathered systematically under a new label, with more attention drawn to empirical examples and foundations than previous 'inventions' of Nudge. This can help to create enthusiasm and may encourage participation as people are excited they are trying something new (Vallgarda 2012).

Other academics draw attention to the theories or principles of Nudging as evidence it is not new. Strassheim, Jung, and Korinek (2015) suggest that any perception that Nudge is somehow original is 'puzzling' given that the knowledge and insights underpinning Nudge, such as behavioural economics, go as far back as the 1950s. The authors go further, arguing that behavioural economics has always considered public policy. For example, Tversky and Kahneman discuss the impact of biases and heuristics on public management. Indeed the academic foundations of Nudge are provided as evidence that Nudging is not new. For example the work of Adam Smith in the 18th Century (Bogliacino, Codagnone, and Veltri 2016) and Tversky and Kahneman's work on System 1 and 2 thinking cited as an example of how the principles of Nudge are not new (Cheung and Ardolino 2011). Nudges have also been widely and historically used in marketing and communications, and this is sometimes put forward as reasons why it is not new. Cheung and Ardolino (2011) highlight that marketing has been using the principles of Nudge for 'a very long time' (Cheung, p142) (also see (Gigerenzer 2015). Goodwin (2012) also suggests that these techniques have been used by advertisers and retailers, but in these cases for their own financial benefit.

But while this literature suggests the principles of Nudge, or its foundations are not recent discoveries, other academics argue that it is application of these principles being applied systematically in and by government that is new (Quigley 2013). For example in their review of Nudging practices around the world, Whitehead et al. (2014) locate the behavioural sciences in a range of disciplines including psychology and economics, highlighting that the behavioural sciences themselves are not new, but they are increasingly drawn upon in public policy. The authors talk about how behavioural insights are an 'emerging influence' and the 'global spread' of Nudges in public policy, which suggests they see the application to government as new. They also repeatedly refer throughout the document to the 'new' behavioural sciences. This is one example of the way in which the literature suggests that it is the application that is new, rather than the sciences themselves.

Yet it may be simply that there are aspects of Nudge that are new and some aspects that are not new. For example while Nudging draws on established psychological and sociological theory, there are new factors, including that it helps to explain why people do not act rationally, and that it is rooted in the philosophy of libertarian paternalism. (Goodwin 2012, Marteau et al. 2011, Vallgarda 2012).

With this new application to government comes with suggestions it is a new tool, contrasted to traditional tools such as regulation or economic incentives. For example Stoker (2012) contrasts Nudge strategies to conventional tools of government, and discusses how Nudge can be a complement to other approaches, such as regulation, persuasion or incentives. By comparing and contrasting Nudge to traditional or conventional tools, these authors indicate they see Nudge as new and different. There are other instances of Nudge being compared to other tools of government. For example, Kosters and Van der Heijden (2015) see Nudges as an 'additional strategy' that provides novel instruments to governance. And Nudging is also described as a new and discrete mode of governance, separate to heirachy, markets, network and persuasion (Mols et al. 2015). In this way it is asserted that there is something different about Nudge. The literature suggests then that while the foundations are not new, there is something about Nudge and its application to government that is different. Many of the insights from behavioural economics and psychology seem to have been gathered together and labelled as Nudge in such a way that government sees a use in its application. However how policy makers perceive the newness of Nudge is yet to be explored.

Whether Nudging is fundamentally new, or simply new to government has been discussed and debated in the literature. However the perspectives of those designing, developing and implementing these policies have not been included in these debates. This paper asks whether Nudges are interpreted as new by policy workers, with a specific focus on those involved in the design and development of Nudge policies. This is important, as the perceived novelty of the approach may influence its uptake, utility and influence in the public service.

METHOD

In this research, I am concerned with how policy makers understand the newness of Nudge, and it is important to anchor these understandings in the context in which the policy makers are situated. Because of the lack of clarity around the definition of Nudging (in both academic and government publications) it is perhaps open to interpretation by policy makers. Therefore, a research approach is needed that focuses on meaning - here the meaning of Nudge as understood by policy makers. This research adopts an interpretive approach with a focus on meaning and who is making the meaning (Yanow 2007). An interpretive position regards policy as rooted in, rather than existing independent of, the historical and cultural context (Yanow 2006). In interpretive research, people are social actors, actively constructing concepts (Yanow 2006). In this research, I seek to understand and map the many varied and different perspectives of policy makers.

As is typical with interpretive research, qualitative interviews were undertaken. In this research I have used Colebatch's theory of policy workers to guide the research design. Colebatch, Hoppe, and Noordegraaf (2010) argue that it is not just the public service that is involved in developing policy, but policy workers. This includes those working in the public service, and those external bodies, such as NGOs, think tanks, industry bodies, that bring their knowledge to policy. For my research, I interviewed academics involved with Nudges and behavioural insights, who had consulted to or advised government. I also interviewed consultants who had worked or were working with government in the Nudge area. I interviewed a range of public servants, working in departments,

agencies and regulatory bodies across different levels of seniority (referred to here as policy officers). All participants were based in Australia.

Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling approach, and many of the participants were familiar with the concept of Nudge and its application to government. In depth interviews lasted approximately one hour, though in some cases longer. The interviews were open-ended, and guided by participants. Where possible they were undertaken face to face. Data generated from 16 interviews was analysed for this paper, and thematic analysis was undertaken using Nvivo 11.4.30.

The specific projects and policies discussed have been anonymized or obscured for the purposes of reporting, however the policy areas discussed included health, environment, water and community/social policy issues.

The following section describes the perceptions of policy makers on how new Nudging is, drawing on detailed quotes to support the emerging themes.

FINDINGS

This research identifies two broad interpretations of Nudging by policy workers: that Nudge is not new, because it has been used outside of government. Here policy workers perceived a rebranding of the principles for use in government, which allowed Nudge to be marketed to the public service. This new label generated enthusiasm and excitement to encourage the use of Nudge. There is also an interpretation that Nudge is not new, but rather an extension of governments role in influencing behaviour. Here, those advocating the use of Nudge are hesitant to emphasise its newness, as it then encounter resistance. Across these two broad interpretations however there was a sense that although Nudge was not perceived as technically new, or fundamentally new, there was a sense that there was something new, either in the momentum behind its use, or a newness that could not specified.

Policy workers drew attention to the use of Nudges in the marketing and communications industry as evidence that Nudges were not new. As one consultant involved in the design and development of policy commented:

"Marketers, marketing has been using this kind of stuff for ages and they use it for their own benefit." Consultant

For these policy workers, their past experiences with marketing and communications projects, either in the industry, from their education backgrounds, or from working outside of government, seem to have influenced their understanding of the novelty of Nudge. These experiences in and out of the public service were compared and contrasted to untangle the questions of if and how Nudge was different to traditional policy approaches. Other policy workers, particularly those who had educational or academic backgrounds in psychology or economics, didn't see Nudge as new because it was built on principles from academic theory, such as behavioural economics and psychology. This suggests that the myriad of educational and professional backgrounds that are brought to the public service influence how Nudge is understood and perceived.

For these policy workers, the term 'Nudging' was simply seen as a new language, a new brand that was being applied. This branding or labelling permitted the once disparate ideas on defaults or social norming for example, or ideas not used commonly in government, to be pulled together and, in essence, marketed to the public service. It is unclear whether this was seen by policy workers as a deliberate strategy by those advocating the use of Nudges, but this labelling was seen to encourage its use.

"Most of psychological findings can be applied by someone benevolent or not to influence peoples decisions and marketers have been doing it for a long time as well. We just haven't called it Nudged. I think the word Nudge is more specifically associated with policy and government….Taylor and Sunstein wrote, packaged the knowledge in such a way that it became clear to policy makers that oh, we could actually use this. - Academic

Here we find support for the idea proposed by Vallgarda (2012), that this new label is creating enthusiasm for Nudge for some in the public service. Policy workers saw that the marketing of Nudges as new served a particular purpose; it generated enthusiasm for the approach and created a feeling of excitement, of being in on something new.

"Just a new way of framing it. Now it's got some force behind it now that everybody's aligned with the idea that there's this thing called behavioural economics and choice architecture and Nudging. Now that we have a name and a brand, we can push it through." Academic

"More importantly it's driving, sort of saying people feel like they're part of a community of people who do Nudges and report the Nudges and apply discipline". Policy officer

The positioning of Nudge as novel then, was almost seen as a deliberate strategy that could create impetus for its uptake. The creation of a label 'Nudge' and effectively rebranding the insights used outside of government, appeared to assist in the 'selling' of the ideas into government.

The second interpretation understood Nudges as simply an extension of governments role in influencing behaviour. These policy workers tended to agree that Nudging was a new label, but contrasting to the interpretation described above, sees that the ideas have been used in government for a long time. Here policy workers referenced governments involvement in policies and projects that are designed to influence behaviour. For example, reducing crime rates, improving environmental outcomes and minimising drink driving were all held up as examples of the type of projects where government had a role in influencing behaviour.

There was a sense that governments involvement in changing behaviour had always existed as part of its core role and competencies, and this was simply an new application of that role. Indeed, some workers went further, arguing that much of governments purpose was to change behaviour. To that end, Nudge is not particularly different from what has come before. As one academic proposed:

"so much of government business is about behaviour change…A huge percentage. I don't know what department … all of them is about behaviour change. If it's regulation for you, it's about getting people to be compliant. If it's, you know, persuasive areas … be good citizens, or be good members of society or community." Academic

Positioning Nudge as not radically new in government, but rather as something a little different, was seen to be a strategy that would resonate with those in the public service who are cautious of change. Those interviewed who were more forthcoming in supporting the use of Nudging were sometimes hesitant to emphasise great novelty in the approach, as it was seen to jar in the culture of a public service they saw as traditionally conservative. In this environment, Nudge as new was seen to create uncertainty about the approach, and a reluctance to engage in an 'untested' approach. It may be for this reason we see an emphasis on the evidence base for Nudging.

"And even just the culture of trying new things isn't necessarily available in more entrenched government spaces" Policy officer

"It's also, as with any change, change is really uncomfortable for people and a public service, it's thousands and thousands of individuals who have all been often trained in a very similar way. There's a very strong culture attached to it and very defined, and there are good reasons for it, but very well established processes that people tend to follow to manage those areas. When you're introducing something new, it's always better to demonstrate and showcase the value of something and build it up over a period of time. Because I think the things that do come in and get the big fanfare often disappear quite quickly". Policy officer

Despite perceptions that the principles of Nudge have been used outside of government, or even within government previously, and therefore were not 'technically' new many of the policy workers still saw something new in Nudge. For some it has been the application of Nudges in a more systemised way at the heart of government that is seen as new. As one policy officer, who was familiar with the academic foundations of the principles commented;

"I guess I do think it's new and certainly the prominence of it in government is certainly new… I think there are elements of the field that have a longer history …I don't think it's new as a concept. I think it's being systemitized… I don't think that it was commonplace". Policy officer

Another policy officer suggested that;

"I think it probably was bubbling away and absolutely different parts of government were probably differently attuned to it in different ways. So yeah, anyone who worked in the whole promotion space would be pretty, slightly aware of the importance of behaviour change and different ways of influencing policy. I don't think it was present at the heart of government or taken seriously at the heart of government." Policy officer

Here the momentum behind Nudge was seen to be new. The enthusiasm with which it had been received, both by policy officers, but also those more senior in the public service, indicated that there was something different about the phenomenon.

For others, there was a 'newness' to Nudging that could not always be defined or specified. Some would say it was new, but when asked what it was that was new were unable to articulate this, it was more a sense that something different was occurring.

"No, there's new in ... There's nothing new in testing a hypothesis; there's nothing new in experimentation; there's nothing new in having well known design interventions; there's nothing new in understanding cognitive science. It's really hard to answer. Despite all that it is new, and not like

recent new, but because it's got its own set of boundaries and parameters and disciplines to it."
Policy officer

Given the government reporting publicly emphasising the novelty of the approach, it may be that policy workers have absorbed this notion that it is new but are unclear in what way, based on their practical experience, it is new. For example, the focus and attention it has received from government, and the establishment of units and teams to 'Nudge', particularly as some are located in 'innovation' for example implies that this is different to past approaches. Yet this contradicts the sense of familiarity that some aspects of this have been seen before (e.g. changing letters to make them more persuasive).

The contested definition of Nudge means that how Nudges are understood and defined by policy workers will likely influence whether it is seen as new. The precise definition of Nudging, as described in scholarship, is unclear (see (Kosters and Van der Heijden 2015) (Hausman and Welch 2010) (Selinger and Whyte 2011). Nudges have also not been clearly defined in government or in the literature, and it may be for this reason that policy workers have been unable to suggest precisely why Nudges are new. If the boundaries of what is or isn't a Nudge are unclear (for example are incentives a Nudge or not) there may be a sense that some aspects are new, but without clearly being able to define what it is.

Understanding the concept of Nudge as a construct however may be helpful in this instance. If Nudge is a construct, actively contested and created through its use by policy workers, there may be elements that are both new and not new, that differ based on the interpretation of Nudging. Preliminary analysis of the interpretation of Nudge provides some insight that are briefly outlined here.

Some policy workers see Nudge as an intervention – changing a default setting, altering the choice architecture or framing choices for citizens. These policy workers tend to believe that Nudging is new to government, as the systematic application of these interventions to influence choice is different to traditional tools of government. Other policy workers constructed Nudges as an approach that sought to influence citizen's behaviour for the greater good. For these policy workers, Nudges were seen as an extension of the roles and activities of government.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper began with an overview of Nudges, and some of the academic debates on Nudging, before reviewing the academic literature on Nudging as new. This paper then identified two broad interpretations of the newness of Nudging by policy workers; that it is not new as it was used outside government, and it is not new as it has been used in government previously just not labelled as Nudges. Both were underpinned by a sense that there is something new here, the momentum it has in government or something less easily defined.

This paper makes an important contribution to scholarship, as it reports on original research on the perspectives of policy workers on Nudge, a perspective that to date has been remarkably absent from the literature. This paper has argued for more of a focus on the interpretation of Nudges by

policy workers – those involved in the design, development and implementation of Nudges. This not only assists with understanding the meaning of Nudge to those in and working with the public service, but helps understand how interpretations of Nudge and its newness may be influencing its use and uptake. It is hoped this research has also encouraged reflection by practitioners on the use and influence of Nudge, with attention drawn to whether there may be evidence on the effectiveness of Nudge from previous policies otherwise labelled.

This research relied heavily on a snowball sampling approach, and as such many of the policy workers were at the forefront of the Nudge movement and in some instances advocated for its use. How policy workers outside of this group, who may be more hesitant and questioning about the approach, see Nudge as new or different is yet to be explored. Moreover, many of the policy workers interviewed had academic backgrounds or education in this area. These policy workers may have been informed by the academic literature on Nudging, hence why their perspectives mirrored the themes found in the literature review. Again, it will be interesting to understand how policy workers outside of this group interpret the novelty of Nudge.

There was also an emerging sense that Nudge has been deliberately marketed and branded into the public service. This raises interesting questions about who is pushing the use of Nudges, for what purpose and to what end.

This paper is drawn from a larger research project which explores how Nudges are understood, and whether it is perceived as distinct from other terms in the area used by government such as behavioural insights. Research undertaken by this author will unpack how the construction of Nudges, and the difference or otherwise to behavioural insights, has influenced the influence and uptake of the approach. Understanding these terms in more details, and how, if they are distinct, they are seen as new or different will further scholarship in this area.

Understanding Nudges as a construct, and its perceptions and influence rooted in the particular governments' contexts suggests that Nudges, and the newness of Nudging will be interpreted differently in other countries. Exploring and comparing the ideas in this article beyond the Australian experience will further our understanding of this public policy phenomenon.

While there is much more to do, it is hoped that this paper will generate discussion and contributed to understanding of the newness of Nudging in the public service.

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