

Nudging workplace equality

How can we use behavioural science to improve equality of opportunity at work? Using the Behavioural Insights Unit's

'**EAST**' framework, here are some practical ways organisations and individuals can nudge behaviour towards everyday workplace inclusion.



Make it EASY



Behavioural principle

Example nudges in action

Harness the power of defaults

Humans have a strong tendency to go with the default, as it's easy to do.

- Automatically enrol colleagues in initiatives shown to promote inclusion – for example, women's networks, mentoring programmes, diversity initiatives. Having to opt out instead of in will likely lead to improved participation and outcomes.
- When colleagues become parents or need to care for elderly relatives, prompt discussions with both genders around how they might require some flexibility like part-time work or internal facing roles.
- Use technology to set your default expectations around working hours – for example, you could set the default to be no meetings around school drop off or pick up times, or make core hours 10-4 to allow flex at the start or end of the day.

Reduce the hassle factor

Reducing the effort required to do something can increase take-up.

- Flip the default of flexible working – make it available for everybody, so it's the organisation that has the responsibility to design flexible work solutions, rather than making it something the individual must request.
- Make mentoring or other beneficial career-advancement initiatives easy to access rather than creating complicated forms or clunky systems that become a barrier to take up. Remove friction to increase participation.

Simplify the message

Break down something that might be seen as a 'complex goal' into smaller, easier chunks.

- Show career paths in easy-to-complete stages. Think of the 'Couch to 5k' running app – something that might seem unachievable can be re-framed when 'chunked'.
- Align business objectives with diversity objectives – inclusion is good for business. Organisations need employees at all levels that reflect society.
- Communicate inclusion messages regularly – in a straightforward and meaningful way. Let them echo what your business needs to hear. "We need more women's voices at senior level in our business"; "We want more men to work part-time".



Make it ATTRACTIVE



Behavioural principle

Example nudges in action

Attract attention.

We are more likely to do something that our attention is drawn towards.

- Design personalised and flexible career paths. Show individuals how they can become leaders, one move at a time. Humans like personalised offers, designed especially for them.
- Champion role models of both genders. Look for female leaders who have progressed without sacrificing family-life, power, status or income. Look for male leaders who promote flexible working.
- Male allies – amplify women's voices in your organisation; get them on panels, in networks, as event speakers, acknowledge their ideas and initiatives. Make it attractive for junior women to get involved.
- We all have a bias to support 'people like us' – if you're mentoring or sponsoring someone, don't just choose a 'mini-me' – a behavioural hack to is find someone very unlike you, which if everyone did it would promote diversity across your business.

Use rewards wisely

Design rewards and sanctions for maximum effect – financial incentives work, but highlight other benefits too.

- Reward productivity (greater impact in fewer hours), and penalise "all hours" culture (eg working evenings or weekends, overselling in pitches, overdelivering at the expense of colleague health). The crushing culture of overwork - whilst trying to balance family life - is more detrimental to career advancement life than anything else. This applies to both genders!
- Share research about the negative aspects of long hours – decreased performance, increased cost of sick leave.

S Make it SOCIAL



Behavioural principle

Example nudges in action

Show that most people perform the desired behaviour.

Describing what most people do in a particular situation encourages others to do the same.

- Social norms are important. Men – leave work loudly! If you're going to pick your kids up from school, watch a school play, or care for an elderly relative; show that men have family responsibilities too. This makes it easier and more acceptable for women, who still do the majority of 'caring' tasks.
- Work out who does the office 'housekeeping' – check the gender split of those who are making coffees, organising cards, sorting out lunch orders. Remove any gender bias before it becomes your social norm.
- Provide universal access to part-time and flexible working – champion those who work flexibly and climb the ladder.

Use the power of networks.

Networks prompt collective action, provide mutual support, and encourage behaviours to spread peer-to-peer.

- Encourage female colleagues or minority groups to share their experiences – we are all influenced by the people we like, and more likely to apply for a promotion or speak at an event if encouraged by our own 'tribes'.
- Negotiate on behalf of others – for pay, for promotions. Under-represented groups often 'just don't ask' but are happy to negotiate on behalf of others. Certain groups have 'suppressed a sense of entitlement', so peer networks can help build their sense of self-worth.
- Male allies – share research with your own networks about the benefits of inclusion and championing female senior leaders. Make inclusion part of your identity – not just a 'women's issue'.

Encourage people to make a commitment to others.

We often use commitment devices to voluntarily 'lock ourselves' into doing something.

- Design initiatives that encourage commitment and use social pressure to get people out of their comfort zone! For example, getting junior colleagues to speak at an event that benefits others might be the social nudge they need to say yes.
- Mentoring can be the nudge that some people need, it helps those lacking in confidence to identify and act on opportunities. A shared commitment with a mentor helps people stick to a career plan, despite changes to working lives.



Make it **TIMELY**



Behavioural principle

Example nudges in action

Prompt people when they are likely to be most receptive.

The same offer made at different times can have drastically different levels of success.

- Behaviour is generally easier to change when habits are already disrupted, such as around major life events. Don't shy away from career and ambition discussions when returning from parental leave – arguably, it's just the right time!
- Organisations should practice finding the right time to present new opportunities – humans are more likely to agree to accepting new challenges when they are feeling good about themselves, so after a successful project rather than midway through a stressful period.

Consider the immediate costs and benefits.

We are more influenced by costs and benefits that take effect immediately than those delivered later.

- If you're a parent, then there's an immediate benefit to part-time or flexible working. But what about the long-term cost of that decision? Does the organisation penalise those who choose necessary 'accommodations' brought on by family responsibilities? Make data available to people so they can see the lifetime cost of their decisions.
- Companies should try and nudge staff towards reasonable hours and question gruelling schedules. Temptation is to create a culture of overwork – we are naturally more drawn to short-term gains from brilliantly delivered projects; but the long-term cost is losing talent later on.

Help people plan their response to events.

There is a substantial gap between intentions and actual behaviour.

- We're more likely to act favourably if we've planned our response. Help underrepresented groups practice taking on more responsibility. Coaching and mentoring programmes help people identify barriers and develop a specific plan to address them.
- Call out everyday sexism and microaggressions as they happen. Practice finding the right language to address this in your workplace – for example, not accepting interruptions or talking over women in meetings, calling out sexist 'jokes' – it all needs to be acted on, particularly by male allies. It's not okay.