

**The New School**  
**Parsons School of Design**  
*The Journal of Design Strategies*

## Call for Papers

*The Journal of Design Strategies*, a peer-reviewed publication of Parsons School of Design in New York City, welcomes submissions for its Spring 2020 issue, addressing the theme “The Design of Influence.”

The awarding in 2017 of a Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences to Richard Thaler, a leading proponent of the field of economic theory known as behavioral economics, registered the increasing impact of research on human psychology, cognition, and emotion in the context of economic decision-making. Other prominent figures who have contributed to the growing field of behavioral economics include the psychologists Dan Ariely, Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (another Nobel laureate), and the legal theorist Cass Sunstein, Thaler’s co-author of the popular book *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. These authors have helped to show that, contrary to pervasive and long-standing assumptions about human beings as rational maximizers of their own self-interest, people are actually subject to a range of systematic distortions, biases, and prejudices in their understanding of the world around them and the risks and opportunities they face. In effect, these biases have been revealed as aspects of human nature that can be studied, categorized, and intentionally activated in the service of specific outcomes: in Ariely’s phrase, we are “predictably irrational.”

The findings of behavioral psychologists and economists are of particular relevance for designers. For that research has shown that people’s choices can be profoundly influenced by the way those choices are presented and framed – that is, by how they are designed. To cite a widely-discussed example: a cafeteria floor plan that foregrounds healthy fruits and vegetables, while making chips and sweets more difficult (though not impossible) to access, will in fact encourage measurably healthier eating habits among the cafeteria’s patrons. In this case, a behavioral tendency toward a kind of inertia or laziness – a “status quo bias” – is used for people’s own benefit.

“Nudges,” in other words, can be ways of leveraging typical human cognitive and perceptual biases for our own good; and this is precisely the recommendation that Thaler and Sunstein make to “choice architects” of all kinds. But the same cognitive and perceptual biases that can be activated for individuals’ own benefit can also be activated to serve other purposes, including commercial ones that primarily seek to benefit companies and investors, or governmental ones that may conflict with citizens’ expectations of privacy and liberty. In their paternalistic and sub-rational modus operandi, therefore, nudges raise a host of potential ethical, legal, and political concerns.

This issue of *The Journal of Design Strategies* invites exploration and analysis of the design of actual or possible nudge initiatives, with a special focus on ethical dimensions of those initiatives. How does recent research on human behavior and decision-making change our understanding of the power or agency of design and thus of the ethical obligations of those involved in the design professions? Submissions may include cases or examples of product development processes that attempt to leverage the “predictably irrational” behavior of human customers, clients, or users; case-study reports on attitudes about nudging in general, or reactions to a specific nudge initiative; or assessments of the overall effectiveness of such an initiative. Also welcome are more theoretically-oriented proposals to analyze or categorize nudge techniques from an ethical or

political standpoint in an effort to identify specific parameters or criteria for the responsible development and implementation of these techniques.

The editorial goal for this volume of *The Journal of Design Strategies* is to promote informed reflection on the appropriate design of products and services, and on the framing of public policies, in light of the increasingly problematic status of widespread and deep-seated assumptions about human rationality and autonomy associated with classical economic theory. The envisioned volume will be of interest to design professionals addressing nudge-related issues in the contexts of their careers, but is primarily intended for the *Journal's* broader, nonspecialist readership. Accordingly, clearly written, non-technical submissions that illuminate practical and ethical issues around one or more nudge initiatives, whether actual or hypothetical, will be prioritized.

For more information and to view past issues of the *Journal*, visit:

[www.issuu.com/journalofdesignstrategies](http://www.issuu.com/journalofdesignstrategies)

### Key Dates

- **Monday, April 1, 2019:** deadline for submission of abstracts (English language, 500 words maximum)
- **Monday, April 15, 2019:** all respondents informed of the status of their submissions
- **Monday, July 1, 2019:** deadline for submission of complete contributions

### Respond To

Submit abstracts as Word or pdf file attachments emailed to:

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