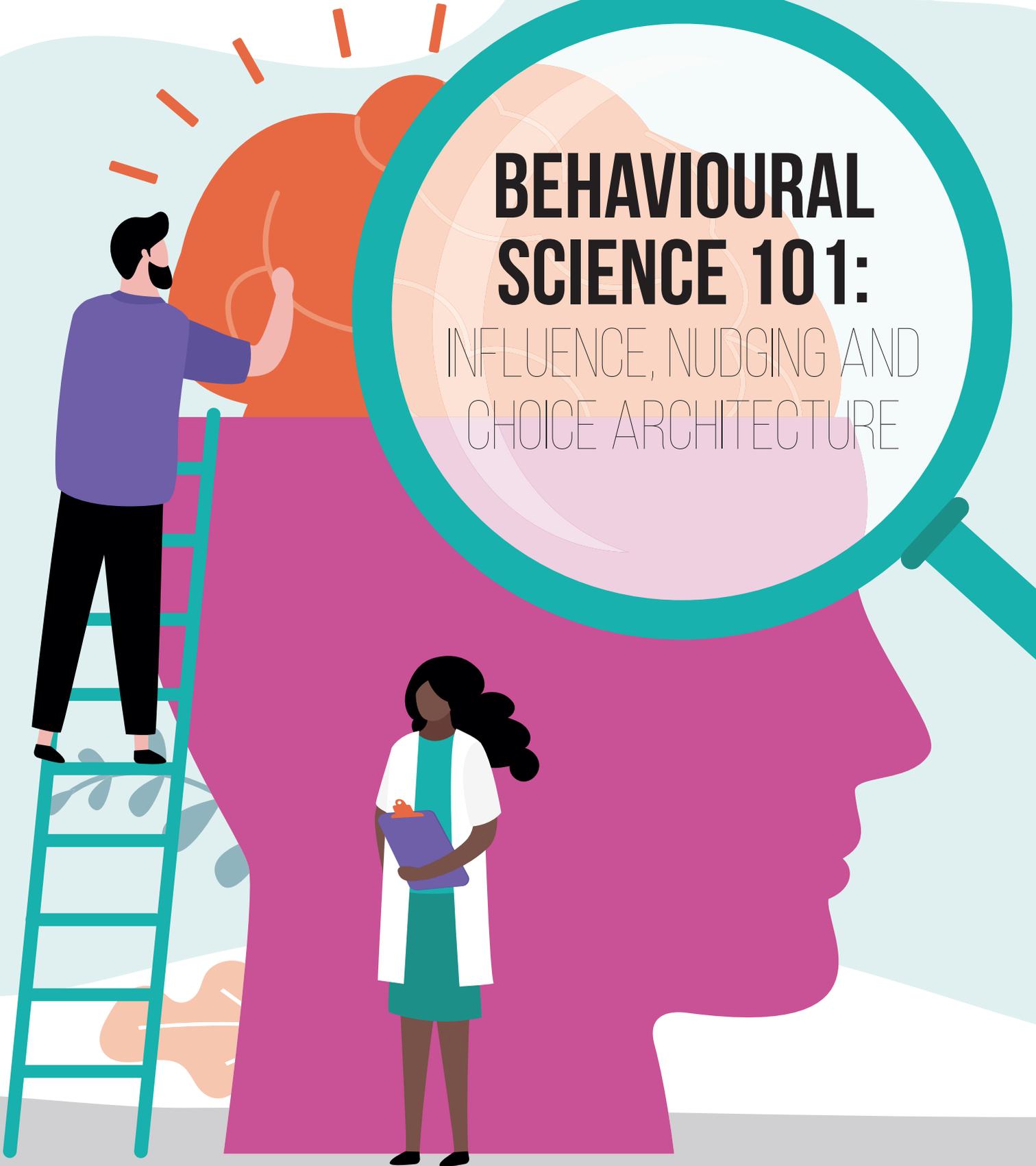




# BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE 101:

INFLUENCE, NUDGING AND  
CHOICE ARCHITECTURE



Your organisation is having a conversation with its users every day. Are you doing everything you can to nudge those users in the right direction? Because if you're not, you're leaving success on the table!

In this series, we get into the nitty gritty of how to use language, structure, and heuristic bias to influence decision making.

This article introduces our crash course in behavioural science, starting with the importance of influence. Read on to discover why you should care about influence and 'nudging', and what this means for your customer journey!

## Influence

You are a wielder of influence. You're wielding it in favourable conversations about workload with colleagues, when you put your authority behind a resolution you believe in and when you send emails outlining your preferred plans for a project. But you're also subject to influence: when you navigate the menus of your favourite website, stamp a loyalty card at your local coffee shop and especially when you're deliberating with a partner about where to eat out! But don't be alarmed – all of these things are okay! Because, for the most part, being a subject and wielder of influence is a key part of normal social and professional life.

Recognising influence in decision making and becoming a better wielder of positive influence is important! Commanding influence has serious benefits: you're more likely to successfully negotiate a pay rise, you can enhance your business by implementing a better customer journey, and you can improve the productivity of your team through carefully framed language and priming.

But there's a problem.

Influence is a notoriously tricky phenomenon to pin down. First thoughts about it tend to be rather Orwellian – brainwashing political prisoners,

doublethink, that sort of thing. All very dramatic! But the reality of influence is not nearly that frightening or dystopian. It's everyday things.

It's peer-pressure at work, 'recommendations' from an online retailer, conversations with friends and other normal things like that. You see, influence can be a lot blander on the surface than what you'd probably expect, and it's everywhere...

This is a key feature of influence in the digital age, and what makes it a sophisticated driver of human behaviour. The truth is, we're all subject to some level of influence all of the time. It's happening right now. And that's what makes influence in a general sense subversive – it's hard to track or quantify – which makes influencing, nudging and priming difficult without the right skill set.

## So, what exactly is influence?

Influence has many facets, as we shall see over the course of this series, and it's important to recognise them. In the context of this post, we're considering influence at a high level: as useful language to describe what occurs when behaviour is modified, by something beyond a subject's control. In the next post, we'll get stuck into some specifics, but for now, let's introduce some initial distinctions:

### Influence may be positive or negative

It doesn't seem obvious how influence can be positive, and it's quite a paternalistic notion, but often we're being influenced for our own benefit. "Smoking Kills" labels on cigarette boxes and "Change your password" reminders being some straightforward examples.

On the other hand, without realising it, you may be pushed in a direction you'd





rather not have gone. It's common practice online – websites often gain compliance on tracking cookies and privacy policies by exploiting our habitual biases and using misleading UI. This is known as dark patterning, which we'll explore deeper in a future post.

### **Influence is imbedded within the technology we use every day**

The imbedding of social media, online ads and big data into the lexicon of our everyday lives, serves as an enormous source of influence and not always in the ways you might expect. Worry less about “Influencers” on Instagram, and instead consider how user-data, cognitive biases and clever UI design can be used to manage your behaviour. Here's a hint: decision structures set the parameters for choices.

### **Influence can be covert and subliminal or overt and directive**

Covert influence is deeply related to the technological factors mentioned above, though it's always been a thing. Think about how you're shown or recommended certain products over others, or what results you're shown within a search engine. These are both examples of attempts to subliminally modify behaviour. On the other hand, “click here” buttons and speed cameras are good

examples of overt influence. The difference is in whether or not you can actively perceive the intention to modify your behaviour.

### **Influence and your journey**

In the context of your customer journey, influence you exert is going to be positive. You're trying to help a customer do the right thing. And hopefully, it can be imbedded in your technology. But above all, it should be considered an environmental, personal, and social phenomenon. What a user perceives and interacts with within their environment may be a source of influence, as well as their beliefs, motivations, and individual differences. Adding further complication is a customer's interactions via conversations: with advisors, messaging services or artificially intelligent things – in ContactEngine's case, proactive conversational AI. These factors determine the context of the customer journey.

### **What about Nudges and Choice Architecture?**

Influence is a woolly and high-level concept. So, if you want to do it reliably, you must do so in a targeted and strategic way called ‘nudging’. If you're not familiar, this is the art of using behavioural insights to move a user towards choosing or doing certain things over others. It's influence

applied. Nudges are normally simple but very specific, taking place within a given choice architecture – the context and structure within which a decision takes place.

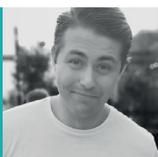
These concepts have been widely popularised by Richard Thaler, through his extensive academic work and excellent books – ‘nudge’ and ‘Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioural Economics’. As a method of mass behaviour change, tailored nudges have proven extraordinarily effective. The UK's own Behavioural Insights Team has expanded across 31 countries to help governments and NGOs nudge away major societal problems.

In your customer journey, a user navigates a series of ‘choice architectures’, with interactions likely happening across several different modes. Whether it's scrolling a webpage, speaking to an advisor, or responding to an email, these architectures come about within a mixture of reactive, and sometimes proactive, interactions. In reactionary customer journeys, it can be awkward to establish consistently effective and specific nudges. This is due to a lack of control over context, which leads to reduced nudging specificity.

### **How can nudges benefit your business?**

The better approach is to be proactive and use targeted, outbound conversations to influence the customer towards a successful outcome. By working within a proactive framework, it's possible to influence customers using tailored interventions at specific decision points. These interventions will use specific measures, backed by strong evidence, within a context that your organisation has already determined!

Identifying where a user is susceptible to influence in this process and how you can intervene to nudge your customer is the goal



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You can find out more about ContactEngine's work here:  
<https://www.contactengine.com/insights/how-leading-communications-service-providers-are-reducing-the-cost-to-serve-customers-with-proactive-communications/>

of this series of articles. By the end, you'll have the knowledge required to identify what kind of cognitive process is occurring, at any given decision point.

Your practical understanding of decision making, heuristic bias and error, and the methodology behind implementing nudges, will allow you to target these biases – for your business and users' benefit. You'll also better understand your decision-making processes and those of your team, which should help you avoid some very common heuristic errors!

At ContactEngine, we take decision making, influence and choice architecture very seriously. Because this is the approach we use when influencing our client's customers and users, and it's a vital component of our iterative process of improvement. At the heart of our solutions is an intelligent conversational AI, listening to and guiding users along a bespoke journey. This guided customer journey should proactively solve a problem for our client.

By using an advanced conversational AI, we are able to prepare tailored responses to a broad set of contexts and meanings that customers respond with. This allows us to prepare wise interventions, carefully select influential language, test different outcomes for success, and maintain control of context throughout the journey.

Understanding the power of the language you use is crucial because the way you structure conversations can secure powerful outcomes. We conduct communications at scale, so even small effect sizes can have enormous business impact. This means saving our customers anywhere between £10 million and £90 million pounds per year in op ex, reducing carbon footprints, and dramatically improving customer service.

### What's next?

Whether it's developing an appointment booking journey that reduces missed appointments, a troubleshooting solution that allows your customers to do without an engineer's appointment or messaging service which allows a user to engage with their government's services, these are the kinds of benefits you can expect, if you command influence within your customer journey.

In upcoming articles, I'm going to share with you the science behind how we organise conversations and the practical applications of behavioural science. In a nutshell, a few ways of enacting 'wise interventions', using 'nudges' and a limited understanding of choice architecture.

So far, we've been setting the tone and you should now have a preliminary understanding of these concepts.

In the next article, we'll delve into a three-minute crash course in

decision science, because understanding the systems people use to make decisions is vital when trying to manage them.

