

# Choice Architecture

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## RECOMMENDED CITATION

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Choice architecture describes the way in which decisions are influenced by how the choices are presented (in order to influence the outcome), and is a term used by Cass Sunstein and economist Richard Thaler in the 2008 book *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. Parallels are drawn between choice architecture and traditional architecture.

### **'Choice architecture' concept**

Several ways of presenting choices and the way that presentation affects outcomes are explored in *Nudge*. The book proposes that default outcomes of a situation can be arranged to be the outcome desired by the person or organization presenting the choice. According to the authors this is an underused method. For example a greater supply of transplant organs could be created by a system of presumed consent followed by an opt-out process rather than opt-in. Another principle suggested is laying out various outcomes of a decision in a way that is easy for the choice-maker to understand.

Choice Architecture as outlined in *Nudge* has a broad remit, from personal decision making, to medical options, to social policy. There have been comparisons with many theorists, including the work of B. J. Fogg on computers as persuasive technologies, and the concept of permission marketing as described by Seth Godin. Choice Architecture is similar in spirit to the concept of "heresthetics," or manipulation that changes outcomes without changing people's underlying preferences. This concept has been explored by political scientist William H. Riker.

Thaler and Sunstein are former colleagues at the University of Chicago of US President, Barack Obama, and have been described as "informal advisors" by ABC News.

### **Terminology**

**choice architect** The person who frames the options, for example someone who chooses how allied products are displayed in a supermarket.

**libertarian paternalism** The idea that it is both possible and legitimate for private and public institutions to affect behavior while also respecting freedom of choice.