BEHAVIOURAL INFRASTRUCTURE TO FOSTER ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE: PERFORMANCE IN VIRTUAL, MANAGERIAL, AND PROJECT CONTEXTS

By

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Abstract

Nudge theory posits that subtle alterations in choice architecture can predictably guide behaviour without restricting options or changing economic incentives (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). This integrative review synthesises three complementary empirical studies to demonstrate how digital and behavioural nudges enhance organisational resilience across global virtual teams, managerial decision-making under risk and uncertainty, and large-scale project performance. Seeber et al. (2024) found that in 96 culturally diverse GVTs (N=235), both weekly digital reminder nudges (DRN) and team-based interventions (TBI) significantly boosted psychological safety, with TBI fully mediated by improved coordination quality and DRN exerting a direct effect. Renz et al. (2023), in a 3×2 experiment with 298 U.S. managers, showed that a simple pro-neutrality recommendation nudge delivered before or after initial decisions reliably reduced risk and uncertainty aversion by counteracting loss aversion, status-quo bias, and blame avoidance. Bukoye et al. (2022), drawing on interviews with project professionals, identified 21 nudge tools (defaults, feedback loops, social norms, framing, etc.) that help mitigate planning fallacy, decision paralysis, and coordination failures, thereby improving iron-triangle outcomes of time, cost, and quality. Collectively, these studies highlight three shared mechanisms salience, simplification, and social proof that operate through enhanced coordination, bias reduction, and behavioural alignment to deliver higher psychological safety, decision neutrality, and project performance. The paper advances an integrative framework that repositions nudges as scalable behavioural infrastructure, offering theoretical refinement and practical, low-cost toolkits for organisational leaders and project managers, while outlining directions for future multi-level, longitudinal, and AI-augmented research.

Keywords: *nudges, digital reminder nudges, psychological safety, risk, uncertainty neutrality, project performance management, iron triangle, global virtual teams, and behavioural interventions.*

Introduction

In an era of accelerating globalisation, digital transformation, and pervasive uncertainty, organisations face interconnected challenges, including eroded psychological safety in global virtual teams (GVTs), systematic biases in managerial decision-making under risk and uncertainty, and persistent failures to meet the iron-triangle of time, cost, and quality in large-scale projects. Traditional remedies such as training, incentives, and hierarchical controls have proven costly, limited, and often unsustainable, particularly in dispersed and temporary organisational structures. Behavioural economics offers a compelling alternative through nudges

subtle alterations to choice architecture that predictably influence behaviour without restricting options or altering economic incentives (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Synthesising three recent empirical studies, this paper demonstrates the versatility of nudges: Seeber et al. (2024) show that team-based interventions and digital reminder nudges significantly enhance psychological safety in culturally diverse GVTs; Renz et al. (2023) find that framed pro-neutrality recommendation nudges reduce risk and uncertainty aversion among managers; and Bukoye et al. (2022) illustrate how various nudges mitigate behavioural barriers to iron-triangle performance in complex projects. Despite operating at different levels (team, individual, and project), these interventions converge on three core mechanisms salience, simplification, and social proof, thereby improving coordination, reducing biases, and enhancing overall outcomes. By integrating these studies, this paper relocates nudge theory into core organisational scholarship, advances the nomological networks of psychological safety, principal-agent governance, and project management, and offers leaders a low-cost, scalable, liberty-preserving toolkit to build organisational resilience. The paper proceeds with theoretical foundations, detailed study analyses, an integrative framework, implications, and directions for future multi-level, longitudinal, and AI-augmented research.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to develop an integrative theoretical framework that elucidates the role of nudges as a behavioural infrastructure for fostering organisational resilience across three interrelated domains: global virtual teams, managerial decision-making under risk and uncertainty, and large-scale project performance. Specifically, this research pursues three interrelated aims:

1. To synthesise the empirical findings from three recent, high-caliber studies Seeber et al. (2024) on digital reminder nudges and team-based interventions in global virtual teams; Renz et al. (2023) on pro-neutrality recommendation nudges in managerial decisions; and Bukoye et al. (2022) on nudge tools for iron-triangle performance in projects, identifying convergent mechanisms (salience, simplification, and social proof) and domain-specific pathways.

2. To advance nudge theory by demonstrating its applicability beyond traditional policy and consumer contexts to nested organisational systems, thereby enriching the nomological networks of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), principal-agent governance (Eisenhardt, 1989), and project-performance management (Bourne et al., 2018).

3. To derive theoretically grounded and practically actionable implications for choice architects, while delineating boundary conditions and charting a future research agenda centred on multi-level, longitudinal, and AI-augmented nudge interventions.

By addressing these objectives, the study bridges hitherto siloed literatures and

positions nudges as a scalable, low-cost lever for mitigating the cognitive and relational frictions inherent to virtual collaboration, managerial judgment, and project execution.

Methodology

This investigation adopts an integrative review and abductive synthesis approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Torraco, 2016), deliberately chosen to facilitate theory elaboration and framework development rather than mere aggregation of findings. The method is particularly suited to synthesising heterogeneous empirical evidence, quantitative field surveys, controlled experiments, and qualitative interview-based insights into a coherent multi-level model

Three peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2022 and 2024 were purposively selected based on four explicit criteria: explicit use of nudge theory or choice architecture, relevance to organisational resilience outcomes (psychological safety, decision neutrality, and iron-triangle performance), methodological rigor, and complementarity across levels of analysis (team, individual, and project). Data extraction and synthesis occurred in three iterative phases: independent coding of each study using an Input-Mediator-Outcome framework and Thaler and Sunstein's (2008) taxonomy, cross-study thematic synthesis to identify shared mechanisms (salience, simplification, and social proof), and abductive integration to develop a unified multi-level framework. Trustworthiness was ensured through transparent inclusion criteria, direct grounding of claims in original results, and maintenance of an audit trail, while ethical considerations were addressed by relying solely on publicly available peer-reviewed sources cited according to APA 7th edition. This focused methodological approach enables a rigorous, complementary synthesis that transcends the limitations of individual studies and delivers both theoretical advancement and practical insights for organisational practice.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical edifice of the present inquiry rests upon the confluence of three interrelated streams of scholarship: nudge theory as a micro-level mechanism of behavioural guidance, team-effectiveness frameworks that illuminate emergent states such as psychological safety, and the behavioural economics of managerial decision-making under conditions of risk and uncertainty. These streams converge in the domain of project performance management, where the classical "iron triangle" of time, cost, and quality serves as both an evaluative criterion and a site of persistent behavioural friction. By anchoring the empirical syntheses that follow in these foundations, we demonstrate that nudges function as a unifying behavioural infrastructure capable of operating across individual, team, and project levels of analysis.

Nudge Theory: Choice Architecture, Libertarian Paternalism, and Dual-Process Cognition

Nudge theory, as articulated by Thaler and Sunstein (2008, 2009), posits that subtle modifications to choice architecture, how alternatives are presented, ordered, or framed, can predictably alter behaviour without forbidding options or materially changing economic incentives, embodying the principle of libertarian paternalism that preserves individual autonomy while steering people toward better outcomes. Grounded in dual-process models of cognition (Kahneman, 2003; Stanovich & West, 2000), nudges exploit the dominance of fast, heuristic-driven System 1 thinking under conditions of bounded rationality, time pressure, and cognitive overload, making behaviour susceptible to biases such as availability heuristics, status-quo preference, loss aversion, and social proof (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). In organisational settings, nudges take forms such as digital reminder nudges (DRN), team-based interventions (TBI), pro-neutrality recommendations, defaults, feedback loops, and social-norm cues (Seeber et al., 2024; Bukoye et al., 2022). Recent research highlights the context-dependent nature of nudge efficacy, influenced by risk versus uncertainty, cultural orientation, and perceived effectiveness (Renz et al., 2023; Hauser et al., 2018). The present synthesis advances this field by demonstrating that nudges operate through three universal core mechanisms salience, simplification, and social proof that effectively transcend domain boundaries in team, managerial, and project contexts.

Empirical Analyses

The following sections provide a rigorous, theory-driven examination of three complementary empirical studies. Each analysis situates the investigation within its disciplinary context, delineates research design and methodological rigour, explicates key findings with reference to underlying mechanisms, and evaluates theoretical advancement and boundary conditions. Collectively, these studies furnish convergent evidence that nudges whether digital, peer-generated, or recommendation-based serve as potent behavioural interventions across virtual teams, managerial cognition, and project ecosystems.

Nudges and Psychological Safety in Global Virtual Teams: Seeber et al. (2024)

Psychological safety (PS) is defined as a shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999). Within the Input-Mediator-Outcome (I-M-O) framework, team inputs such as virtuality, cultural diversity, and asynchronous communication influence coordination processes, which in turn shape PS as an emergent state (Ilgen et al., 2005; Mathieu et al., 2008). In global virtual teams (GVTs), the development of PS is especially challenging due to geographical dispersion, reduced non-verbal cues, and relational fragility (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006; Glikson & Erez, 2020). Meta-analytic evidence highlights supportive contexts, peer support,

and role clarity as key antecedents of PS (Frazier et al., 2017). Nudges address these antecedents through team-based interventions (TBI) that foster mutual adjustment and digital reminder nudges (DRN) that enhance salience and signal organisational support.

Seeber et al. (2024) examined the impact of these nudges on PS using a longitudinal field study involving 235 members across 96 culturally diverse GVTs engaged in a seven-week virtual consulting project. Teams received weekly digital reminder nudges (DRN) via structured Monday emails, while TBI consisted of peer reminders, progress checks, and mutual support. Data were collected through matched pre- and post-project surveys, with PS measured using a refined version of Edmondson's scale and coordination quality assessed via Hoegl et al.'s (2004) instrument. Structural equation modelling revealed that both TBI ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$) and DRN ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$) significantly increased psychological safety. TBI's effect was fully mediated by improved coordination quality, whereas DRN exerted both direct and indirect positive effects.

Theoretically, the study extends prior meta-analytic work by showing that low-cost, technology-mediated and peer-driven nudges can effectively cultivate PS in virtual environments. Methodologically, its ecologically valid longitudinal design with pre-post measurement advances the field beyond cross-sectional studies. Despite limitations such as self-reported nudge measures and a relatively young, student-heavy sample, Seeber et al. (2024) provide strong evidence that simple digital and team-based nudges serve as powerful, low-cost levers for building psychological safety in global virtual teams.

Pro-Neutrality Nudges in Managerial Decision-Making under Risk and Uncertainty: Neutrality, Aversion, and Principal-Agent Dynamics: Renz et al. (2023)

Managerial decisions often occur under risk (known probabilities) or uncertainty (unknown probabilities), as distinguished by Knight and Keynes. While shareholder value maximisation prescribes risk-neutral, expected-value decisions, managers frequently deviate due to principal-agent misalignment. Agents exhibit risk and uncertainty aversion driven by behavioural biases such as loss aversion, anticipated regret, blame avoidance, and status-quo bias, especially salient in middle and lower management, where career risks are high. Nudges address this misalignment by introducing external reference points that steer decisions toward neutrality without altering incentives. Pre-decision nudges reduce inertia, while post-decision nudges enable reconsideration, positioning nudges as a low-cost complement to traditional monitoring and incentive mechanisms.

Renz et al. (2023) empirically test this proposition using a 3×2 between-subjects experiment with 298 U.S. managers. Participants chose between a safe option ($2.00 payoff) and a risky/uncertain alternative across 11 product scenarios, with treatments including no recommendation, pre-decision

recommendation, and post-decision recommendation with re-evaluation. Results show that both types of nudges significantly reduced constant-relative-risk-aversion (CRRA) coefficients in risk and uncertainty contexts ($p < .01$), with pre-decision nudges slightly more effective. These effects remained robust after controlling for numeracy and individual traits. The study demonstrates that recommendation-based nudges can reliably reduce behavioural biases and align managerial decisions with risk-neutral benchmarks, offering a scalable behavioural governance tool despite limitations such as sample generalisability and lack of longitudinal evidence.

Table 1. Constant Relative Risk Aversion (CRRA) Coefficients and Reversed Switching Points (Renz et al., 2023, p. 13-17)

Switched at Product	CRRA Coefficient	Reversed Switching Point
1	∞	11
2	3.76	10
3	1.86	9
4	1.00	8
5	0.65	7
6	0.52	6
7	0.40	5
8	0.31	4
9	0.22	3
10	0.09	2
11	0.00	1
No switch	-0.09	0

Nudge Tools and Iron-Triangle Performance in Large-Scale Projects: Bukoye et al. (2022)

Project performance has long been evaluated through the iron triangle of time, cost, and quality (Atkinson, 1999). While control systems and technical tools are essential, project success is increasingly recognised as a behavioural challenge shaped by planning fallacy, decision paralysis, and coordination failures in complex, temporary multi-stakeholder environments (Bourne et al., 2018; Bukoye et al., 2022). Traditional interventions often fall short in addressing these cognitive and relational frictions. Nudge theory offers a powerful behavioural lever by subtly redesigning choice architecture to influence System 1 thinking without relying on rigid controls or costly incentives.

Bukoye et al. (2022) explored this potential through semi-structured interviews with project professionals involved in large-scale multinational projects across infrastructure, energy, logistics, and public sectors. Drawing on choice-architecture principles, the authors identified 21 nudge tools, including defaults, feedback loops, social norms, message framing, and layout changes. Their analysis revealed three core mechanisms through which these nudges improve iron-triangle performance: salience and feedback

to counter planning fallacy, simplification via defaults to reduce decision paralysis, and social proof through norms and recognition to enhance cooperation and quality adherence. These interventions operate indirectly by mitigating behavioural frictions in settings where formal authority is limited.

Theoretically, the study extends nudge theory from individual and policy domains into the complex reality of project management, positioning project managers as choice architects who can deliberately shape decision environments. Methodologically, its qualitative, practice-oriented approach complements the quantitative findings of the previous studies by offering ecological validity and actionable design principles. Despite limitations such as self-report bias and lack of objective performance data, Bukoye et al. (2022) demonstrate that nudges provide a flexible, low-cost repertoire for improving project outcomes. Together, the three studies converge on the effectiveness of salience, simplification, and social proof, paving the way for an integrative framework.

Table 2. Exemplars of Nudge Tools and Their Possible Applications in Projects (Bukoye et al., 2022)

Nudge Tool	Brief Description	Possible Application in Projects
Defaults	Setting default options according to preferred outcomes	Default enrolment into project reporting templates
Expecting error	Designing systems to be forgiving of user errors	Digital nudging in project management software
Explanatory mappings	Mapping complex information into familiar units	Translating budget figures into daily burn-rate visuals
Giving feedback	Providing timely performance information	Real-time dashboards showing time/cost/quality status
Structuring complex choices	Identifying key attributes for trade-offs	Simplified decision matrices for scope changes
Incentives	Making incentives salient	Group-based recognition for on-time milestone delivery
Social norms	Highlighting what others are doing	Peer-comparison messages on team performance
Changing layouts	Modifying physical/digital environment	Reordering agenda items to prioritize critical tasks
Message framing	Configuring how messages are presented	Positive vs. loss-framed updates on project risks

Synthesis, Theoretical and Practical Implications, and Limitations

Integrative Framework: Nudges as behavioural Infrastructure for organisational Resilience

The three empirical studies, despite their methodological heterogeneity and distinct levels of analysis, converge on a parsimonious causal architecture that positions nudges as scalable behavioural infrastructure capable of mitigating the cognitive, relational, and structural frictions endemic to contemporary organisations. We formalise this convergence in an integrative framework that links nudge inputs to mechanisms, intermediate processes, and higher-order outcomes across individual, team, and project domains.

It presents a multi-level model wherein nudge inputs TBI and DRN (Seeber et al., 2024), pro-neutrality recommendations (Renz et al., 2023), and the broader repertoire of 21 tools including defaults, feedback, social norms, incentives, and message framing (Bukoye et al., 2022)—operate through three shared mechanisms: (1) salience, which leverages the availability heuristic to render deadlines, roles, and neutral options attentionally prominent (Caraban et al., 2019); (2) simplification, which reduces cognitive load via structured choice sets, defaults, and pre-formatted recommendations (Johnson et al., 2012); and (3) social proof, which harnesses peer support, normative cues, and group-based recognition to foster accountability and cooperation (Cialdini, 2001; Hamari & Koivisto, 2015).

These mechanisms feed forward into three domain-specific intermediate processes. In GVTs, salience and social proof elevate coordination quality (role clarity, mutual adjustment, predictability), fully mediating TBI's effect on psychological safety while DRN exert an additional direct pathway (Seeber et al., 2024). In managerial decision-making, simplification and salience counteract aversion biases (loss aversion, status-quo preference, anticipated regret), shifting choices toward risk- and uncertainty-neutrality irrespective of informational context (Renz et al., 2023). In project ecosystems, the full triad of mechanisms mitigates behavioural frictions such as planning fallacy, decision paralysis, and coordination slippage, thereby aligning temporary multi-stakeholder actions with iron-triangle imperatives (Bukoye et al., 2022).

At the apex of the framework reside the focal outcomes: elevated psychological safety (emergent state enabling voice, learning, and innovation in virtual settings), decision neutrality (alignment of managerial judgment with shareholder value maximisation), and iron-triangle performance (realisation of time, cost, and quality targets). Moderators identified across the studies cultural context orientation, nudge timing (pre- versus post-decision), and perceived effectiveness highlight boundary conditions while underscoring the framework's robustness. The model thus extends Thaler and Sunstein's (2008) original choice-architecture logic from isolated individual decisions to nested organisational systems,

demonstrating that nudges function as a unifying behavioural substrate capable of operating simultaneously at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

Theoretical Implications

The synthesised framework advances nudge theory in three substantive ways. First, it relocates nudges from their traditional policy and consumer domains into the heart of organisational scholarship, establishing them as a generalisable mechanism for addressing bounded rationality in team, managerial, and project contexts. By demonstrating domain-general efficacy across risk and uncertainty (Renz et al., 2023) and across internal (TBI) and external (DRN) delivery modes (Seeber et al., 2024), the present inquiry resolves lingering questions of context dependency (Hauser et al., 2018; van Kleef & van Trijp, 2018) and extends the nomological network of libertarian paternalism to temporary and geographically dispersed structures.

Second, the framework enriches the psychological-safety literature by identifying low-cost, scalable antecedents peer-enacted TBI and technology-mediated DRN—that operate beyond traditional leadership or training interventions (Donovan & McAuliffe, 2020; Frazier et al., 2017). The full mediation of TBI via coordination quality and the direct effect of DRN refine Edmondson's (1999) emergent-state model, showing that PS can be cultivated through deliberate choice-architecture redesign rather than solely through interpersonal or structural redesign.

Third, the integration bridges principal-agent theory with behavioural interventions. By showing that pro-neutrality nudges realign managerial judgment with shareholder interests without costly incentive overhaul or monitoring (Renz et al., 2023), the framework offers a parsimonious complement to Eisenhardt's (1989) governance mechanisms. Simultaneously, Bukoye et al.'s (2022) mapping of nudge tools onto the iron triangle extends project-performance scholarship (Bourne et al., 2018; Pesämaa et al., 2018) by demonstrating that behavioural levers can operate indirectly and efficiently within the constraints of temporary organisations.

Collectively, these contributions position nudges as behavioural infrastructure a foundational layer that undergirds coordination, judgment, and execution thereby furnishing a unified theoretical lens for organisational resilience in an era of virtuality, uncertainty, and project-based work.

Practical Implications

The framework offers actionable guidance for choice architects across organisational levels. For leaders of global virtual teams, the routine use of weekly digital reminder nudges (DRN) combined with encouragement of team-based interventions (TBI) such as peer check-ins and mutual reminders provides a near-zero-cost approach to significantly enhance psychological safety and coordination quality in asynchronous environments (Seeber et al., 2024). Senior executives and

governance bodies should institutionalise framed pro-neutrality recommendation nudges, particularly pre-decision, within risk and uncertainty committees, decision templates, dashboards, or AI-assisted processes to reduce bias without modifying incentives (Renz et al., 2023). For project managers in large-scale, multi-stakeholder settings, Bukoye et al. (2022) offer a practical repertoire of 21 nudge tools including feedback dashboards to counter planning fallacy, default templates to reduce decision paralysis, and social-norm rituals that can be iteratively refined in a dynamic "nudge toolkit" aligned with iron-triangle performance metrics. Across all domains, nudges stand out for their cost-effectiveness, scalability via digital platforms, and ethical defensibility, as they preserve individual autonomy while requiring minimal resources. Organisations that embed nudge literacy into leadership and project management training will therefore gain a strategic edge in building safer collaboration, more neutral managerial judgment, and more reliable project delivery.

Limitations of the study

Notwithstanding the rigour of the three studies, several limitations constrain the generalisability of the proposed framework. The temporal scope remains limited, as Seeber et al. (2024) examined effects over only seven weeks and Renz et al. (2023) used a single-session experiment, leaving questions about the long-term persistence, decay, or compounding of nudge benefits unanswered. Sample characteristics also impose boundary conditions: Seeber et al.'s predominantly Gen Z/Millennial student participants, Renz et al.'s U.S.-based managers, and Bukoye et al.'s (2022) reliance on self-reported qualitative data may limit applicability to seasoned professionals and diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, reliance on perceptual measures raises risks of common-method and social-desirability biases, while ethical concerns regarding cumulative nudge exposure, transparency, and potential power asymmetries in high-stakes settings remain under explored. Finally, the integrative multi-level framework, though conceptually robust, requires formal multi-level modelling and empirical cross-level validation. Despite these limitations, the studies offer convergent high-quality evidence that nudges represent a potent, low-cost lever for organisational resilience. Future research should address these gaps through longitudinal, multi-level, and AI-augmented designs to better understand the boundary conditions and sustained efficacy of behavioural infrastructure in complex organisational environments.

Conclusion

The present synthesis of three complementary empirical studies (Seeber et al., 2024; Renz et al., 2023; Bukoye et al., 2022) demonstrates that nudges represent a powerful, versatile form of behavioural infrastructure capable of simultaneously enhancing psychological safety in global virtual teams, promoting decision neutrality among managers under risk and uncertainty, and improving iron-triangle performance in

large-scale projects. Operating through the mechanisms of salience, simplification, and social proof, these subtle changes to choice architecture effectively mitigate cognitive, relational, and structural frictions in modern organisations. By relocating nudge theory from policy and consumer domains into core organisational scholarship, this integrative framework enriches the understanding of psychological safety, principal-agent governance, and project performance management while offering choice architects a low-cost, liberty-preserving set of interventions.

In an era marked by virtual dispersion, accelerating uncertainty, and project-based work, nudges emerge as foundational capabilities that foster safer collaboration, more neutral judgment, and more reliable project delivery without relying on expensive incentives or rigid controls. Future research should prioritise multi-level investigations using hierarchical modelling to examine cross-level dynamics, longitudinal designs to assess temporal stability and potential decay, and the integration of AI for adaptive, personalised nudging, alongside cross-cultural replications and comparative effectiveness trials. Ultimately, this work positions nudges as a unifying behavioural infrastructure for organisational resilience, with significant potential to help organisations thrive amid complexity when the proposed research agenda is pursued.

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