

<https://doi.org/10.53656/phil2024-04S-04>

## THE ROLE OF NUDGE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN JOB SATISFACTION AND BURNOUT OF HEALTH WORKERS

**Elissavet Frengidou**

*Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”*

**Abstract.** This article is a literature review that examines the application of Nudge Theory in HRM to enhance job satisfaction and lessen burnout among healthcare professionals. Nudge HRM techniques are used to increase productivity and well-being by means of focused interventions that do not limit employees' freedom, but instead motivate them to make wiser decisions. The essay explains the fundamentals of Nudge Theory and emphasizes its significance for healthcare workers, who frequently experience high levels of stress and burnout as a result of their demanding jobs. Also, it focuses on applications of Nudge Theory in HRM practices, which provide employees with higher flexibility and support for self-care. It analyses as well how improved working conditions that foster mental health, can help to reduce burnout. The article draws a conclusion that workers' well-being and the scope of the healthcare they deliver, can both be enhanced by modest, but focused measures.

*Keywords:* Nudge practices; job satisfaction; burnout; health workers

### Introduction

In contemporary healthcare industry, maintaining high standards of service and welfare of employees depend heavily on efficient human resource management (Blštáková & Palenčárová 2021). Healthcare professionals, including physicians, nurses, and other staff members in clinics and hospitals, deal with a lot of stress, a lot of labour, and a lot of emotional strains. These difficulties cause stress levels to rise, burnout to develop, and productivity to decline. It is more important than ever before to develop new HRM methods in this environment. Using the ‘nudge hypothesis’ is one of the most creative techniques to human resource management. The behavioural science-based nudge approach employs brief, but focused interventions to change individual behaviour and decisions without restricting their options. When applied to human resources management, Nudge HRM tries to promote the well-being of employees and raise their productivity in a subtle way by providing a more supportive and encouraging work environment (Vlaev et al. 2016).

This article examines Nudge Human Resource Management techniques that are applicable to healthcare practitioners. Also, it examines how these techniques can reduce burnout and improve job satisfaction by assisting in overcoming daily obstacles. HR management can foster a more productive and pleasant work environment by analyzing employees' behavior and putting focused interventions into place. This will improve the satisfaction of employees and the quality of care they give patients.

### **The Nudge Theory**

Nudge Theory is a behavioral economics and psychology concept that aims to modify people's behavior without placing restrictions on their options or radically altering their reasons for doing so. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein coined the term “nudge” in their 2008 book *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. The main thesis is that, while maintaining their freedom, people can be guided toward better decisions by means of little, calculated interventions (Chapman 2017).

‘Libertarian paternalism’ serves as the foundational ideology behind nudge theory, skillfully combining the principles of personal freedom with gentle guidance (Hollands et al. 2013). This sophisticated approach upholds individual autonomy while supporting the role of choice architects who subtly steer decisions in ways believed to improve personal well-being. This method harmonizes two seemingly conflicting ideas: it is ‘libertarian’ in strongly protecting an individual's right to make their own choices and ‘paternalistic’ in allowing authorities or policy-makers to subtly encourage decisions, that promote overall welfare.

Some proponents argue that nudges are benign and non-intrusive, presenting them as a balanced alternative to more forceful interventions and preserving the freedom of choice. Additionally, the paternalistic nature of nudges is debated; some scholars challenge the paternalistic label, suggesting that a person’s favorable response to a nudge does not necessarily make the intervention paternalistic. This perspective has sparked an engaging discussion about the true nature and implications of nudging within the context of libertarian paternalism (Hausman & Welch 2010).

The nudge theory is predicated on the idea that people don't always make perfectly logical judgments. Rather, a range of cognitive biases, emotional responses, and social influences impact their decision-making. Subtle cues known as “nudges” are used to assist people overcome their biases and make decisions, that are in their best interests. Individuals are influenced by the way their alternatives are presented and have a tendency to follow default choices. Also, freedom is not restricted by nudges (Soled 2021). Rather, it only modifies the surroundings such that individuals are more inclined to select something that is beneficial to them.

The low-cost effectiveness of Nudge is one of its key benefits (Takebayashi et al. 2022). Nudge interventions leverage human psychology

to modify behavior instead of requiring significant financing or changes to the law. But there are also difficulties. The main one is the moral question surrounding the application of nudges. Some contend that without providing enough information, these interventions could influence people's behavior. Transparency and the inclusion of free will are therefore necessary for the ethical application of the theory.

Numerous industries, including public policy, health, and human resource management, have found use for the nudge idea. The implementation of nudge theory in human resource management (HRM) can result in beneficial changes in employee behavior (Miller, Williams & O'Neill 2018). For instance, encouraging staff members to engage in group activities or take regular breaks can have a positive impact on their mental and physical health as well as productivity. One specific example might be the usage of self-care reminders, which help prevent burnout and enhance concentration by reminding staff members to take brief walks or breaks. Employee engagement and morale can also be raised by publicly praising work and offering modest incentives.

Assessing the long-term impact of nudges and their potential to foster lasting values is vital for measuring their success. Yet, many critics of nudge theory challenge this view, asserting that people should fully understand the reasoning behind lifestyle changes and the behavior being promoted to ensure these adjustments become lasting habits (Goodwin 2012). A prominent critique focuses on the potential for nudges to be manipulative, raising complex issues about their legitimacy as non-coercive measures. Detractors are particularly concerned with the paternalistic aspect of nudges, arguing that they may undermine rational decision-making by subtly guiding individuals toward specific choices, often without their conscious recognition (Wilkinson 2013).

Like any form of intervention, nudging can produce unintended negative outcomes along with its advantages. Immediate negative effects might occur due to consumers' quick responses to such measures. For example, labeling foods as healthy or offering a default choice alongside healthy menu items can unintentionally lead to overconsumption (Rose, Khaw & Marmot 2008). Although nudges are typically intended to be broadly effective, relying too heavily on them can detract from more extensive, community-level approaches that might yield better results, resulting in what is known as indirect harm.

The nudge theory in particular, is an effective strategy for influencing people to make better judgments (Chapman 2017). Organizations can build settings that enhance people's health, well-being, and performance without restricting their freedom of choice by implementing tiny, deliberate interventions. Whether it's public policy or human resource management, nudge has the ability to revolutionize the way we interact with the world around us, delivering beneficial consequences in a subtle way.

### **Nudge HRM practices and job satisfaction of health workers**

The interpretations of Human Resource Management (HRM) are various, highlighting its evolving and dynamic nature as perspectives change over time. One definition views HRM or Human Resources (HR) as an all-encompassing system that includes actions, strategies, and procedures. They are aimed at helping an organization attract, retain, and effectively manage skilled employees who drive productivity and operational success. Another perspective describes HRM as involving the processes of attracting, selecting, developing, employing, and accommodating employees in the workplace, with the goal of improving job satisfaction and boosting organizational performance (Papalexandri & Bouradas 2003).

The operation of an organization directly affects the standard of patient care and the welfare of health professionals, making health human resource management an essential component of that functioning. The health industry is known for its high stress levels, hard working conditions, and emotionally taxing employment (Chan, Nwaogu & Naslund 2020). The implementation of Nudge theory in this situation can offer creative ways to raise employee satisfaction and improve their whole work experience.

The principal dynamics within mental health professional teams, that contribute to job satisfaction, is encompassing the following items: support from the team, the freedom of autonomy, collaborative efforts, active involvement in making decisions, personal belief in one's competence (self-efficacy), dedication and reliability in project execution, the skill to finalize tasks, and the adaptability of staff members to evolving circumstances, along with effective conflict resolution within the group (Verhaeghe & Bracke 2012). Moreover, mental health practitioners are expected to adapt to new methodologies that might limit their professional autonomy and presuppose a broad range of competencies to navigate these challenges (Acker 2010).

For healthcare workers, job satisfaction is essential as it impacts their personal health and the standard of care they give patients. Healthcare personnel can manage stress, gain more professional confidence, and foster a more supportive work atmosphere by implementing Nudge HRM practices. Small interventions are the foundation of the nudge hypothesis, which was first brought forward in academia by Thaler and Sunstein. Their goal is to impact positively people's behaviour without restricting their freedom. Nudges can be used in the context of human resource management (HRM) to assist healthcare workers in making decisions that will improve their productivity and well-being (Miller, Williams & O'Neill 2018).

Health professionals sometimes overlook their own well-being in hospitals and health centers due to time constraints and stressful work environments. Nudges, such as hydration alerts or reminders to take quick breaks (Nemec et al. 2021), can be used to urge employees to take care of themselves, which lowers stress and boosts job satisfaction. Simultaneously, it has been demonstrated that

acknowledging employees' contributions is a significant contributor to their job happiness. Interventions like praising professionals publicly or giving little symbolic gifts to recognize their accomplishments foster a healthy work environment, where employees feel appreciated for their contributions (Viale 2022).

For healthcare professionals, it is essential to have a supportive network and a sense of community in order to maintain their mental health (Yoong et al. 2020). HR managers can put in place nudges to promote social contact, such as setting up common areas for breaks or planning get-togethers. These kinds of interventions reduce emotional suffering and improve individual sense of belonging. One essential component of work happiness is having a feeling of autonomy and control. Giving workers options about their schedule or how to complete a task without adding to their workload might make them feel more confident and contribute to their professional well-being. This promotes equal employment opportunities. This crucial function involves adherence to legal standards, ensuring all potential and current employees are treated equitably, free from bias, discrimination, or favoritism. The goal is to guarantee that every individual, with the prerequisite knowledge, skills, and abilities, receives a fair chance at employment opportunities.

Opportunities for ongoing education and training improve both employee happiness and professional development. HR managers can stimulate participation in training activities, which contributes to the development of professional confidence and satisfaction, by employing nudges, such as reminders for training sessions or recommendations for new skills that can be acquired. The use of Nudge HRM techniques in the healthcare industry is a novel and efficacious strategy that can provide numerous advantages for the workforce and the healthcare system at large. Healthcare workers can improve their well-being and contentment with small, targeted interventions, which will increase their productivity and care quality (Müller, Böhm & Renz 2023). Continuous education and the acquisition of specialized skills are deemed crucial for aligning with the organization's needs, adapting to changes, ensuring strategic flexibility, and maintaining the organization's competitive edge through a committed and skilled workforce. The application of nudge principles to human resource management presents novel opportunities for fostering a more compassionate, humane, and supportive work environment in the health industry.

The evaluation of employees is a crucial element in any healthcare organization, as it directly impacts staff performance and consequently, the organization's success. Evaluations can be conducted through various methods, with periodic reviews being one of the most common. These assessments, carried out at different intervals depending on the organization, aim to evaluate employee performance against established goals. This underscores the importance of setting specific, measurable objectives and defining clear expectations for employee performance. Another widely used method is 'Management by Objectives' (MBO), which emphasizes

results and relies on the completion of well-defined tasks (Ogbeiwi 2021). This forward-thinking approach aligns individual objectives with the organization's strategic goals, adding considerable value. Regardless of the method chosen, the primary aim of employee evaluations is to foster continuous development and workforce improvement. Therefore, such evaluations should be based on objective and transparent criteria to ensure fairness and promote ongoing growth and professional development among employees.

### **The role of Nudge HRM in reduction of burnout of health workers**

A significant issue for healthcare professionals is burnout (Cohen et al. 2023). This condition is produced by high stress, long working hours, persistent emotional demands, and the constant need to offer care. Professionals who are experiencing burnout are less productive and committed to their work, which has an impact on both their well-being and the standard of healthcare services (Soled 2021). Using Nudge HRM methods, which use incremental, deliberate interventions to enhance employee well-being and better behaviors without imposing radical changes, is one way to assist lessen this issue.

Many times, healthcare professionals require a sense of control over their work. Nudge HRM practices can offer options that provide flexibility. For instance, the opportunity of giving employees the flexibility to adjust their shifts or set their own hours, when given the right information, increases their sense of autonomy and reduces their risk of burnout. Having greater control over the work schedule and being able to adjust it, when necessary, increases job satisfaction and lowers burnout. In parallel, healthcare professionals may disregard their breaks due to the pressure to deliver care continuously. HR managers can create cues, like frequent breaks or the usage of quiet rooms or other relaxation areas, where staff members can go to unwind for a bit, to help professionals remember how important it is to take breaks (Rudnicka et al. 2022).

The experience that employees have at work is greatly influenced by it. It is possible to use nudges to alter the physical surroundings in a way that reduces stress. Simple treatments that can lift spirits and lower stress levels, include putting up posters with calming words or images, increasing the use of natural light, and developing green areas inside the hospital. There are several advantages of implementing Nudge HRM techniques in the healthcare industry, including a decrease in burnout. Employees believe that the system supports them and enables them to handle stress in healthy ways since it fosters a more cordial and helpful work atmosphere. Employees' mental health and job happiness are both improved by little, focused prods, which also aid to improve the quality of health services (Soled 2021; Vlaev et al. 2016).

Healthcare workers are frequently on the front lines of the fight for patient care, under the cost of a significant personal sacrifice. Nudge HRM techniques, which

foster an atmosphere, where professionals feel valued, encouraged, and at ease, provide a versatile and successful way to lessen burnout (Öztürk & Arun 2024). Small, focused nudge interventions have the ability to foster environments that encourage flexibility, self-care, and teamwork, which lowers burnout and enhances the general quality of life for medical professionals. As a result, putting these strategies into practice improves the services that staff members offer to patients in addition to improving employee well-being.

In 2018, Papakosta-Gaki, Tsounis & Kafetsios conducted a study on the job satisfaction of 323 mental health professionals employed in primary and secondary psychiatric care settings. The study provides scanning of the dynamics between the mental health staff and service users. It explores their interactions, attitudes, prevailing stereotypes, and biases concerning mental illness. Along with it goes the analysis of principles of attachment theory, namely how professionals establish and navigate their interpersonal relationships. The research articulates that professional contentment is realized when individuals feel their job performance aligns with their personal values and expectations related to their specific role.

Additionally, a 2019 study by Metsiou et al. in 445 public health workers identified several key elements that influence job satisfaction or dissatisfaction and lead to burnout conditions. These included the rotating work schedule, the organizational structure, the specific work department, how conflicts were managed, the level of communication and the sense of collegiality among employees. These factors were identified as critical in determining overall job satisfaction in the health care setting.

The factors influencing the job satisfaction and burnout of mental health professionals were identified as their own psychological well-being and elements like compensation, recognition, a supportive work environment, effective guidance and supervision, the organizational management structure, a positive communicative atmosphere, alignment with the organization's goals and vision, a sense of security and fairness, active participation in decision-making, and well-defined roles. The findings underscored the critical role of job satisfaction in enhancing the functionality and productivity of mental health services and emphasized the societal need to evolve beyond outdated perceptions and stigmas associated with mental health.

For healthcare professionals, it is essential to have a supportive network and a sense of community in order to maintain their mental health (Yoong et al. 2020). HR managers can put in place nudges to promote social contact, such setting up common areas for breaks or planning get-togethers. These kinds of interventions reduce emotional suffering and improve individual sense of belonging. One essential component of work happiness is having a feeling of autonomy and control. Giving workers options about their schedule or how to complete a task without adding to their workload might make them feel more confident and contribute to their professional well-being. This promotes equal

employment opportunities. This crucial function involves adherence to legal standards, ensuring all potential and current employees are treated equitably, free from bias, discrimination, or favoritism. The goal is to guarantee that every individual, with the prerequisite knowledge, skills, and abilities, receives a fair chance at employment opportunities.

### **Conclusions**

The application of Nudge Human Resource Management (HRM) techniques in the healthcare industry can significantly enhance healthcare workers' well-being, boost their level of job satisfaction and reduce burnout. Without restricting employee autonomy, the small, deliberate actions that define the nudge approach seem to be especially successful in fostering favourable work environment. These procedures not only improve the health of staff members, but they also raise the standard of patient care (Vlaev et al. 2016).

Finally, reducing burnout and raising job satisfaction in the healthcare industry, can be achieved by implementing Nudge HRM techniques. However, the success of these treatments involves adaptation, thorough evaluation, and transparency, as well as the support of a general culture of well-being (Miller, Williams & O'Neill 2018). The successful application of these techniques can be ensured by future research and investment in the training. It may improve further by building upon the responsibility of individuals, thereby increasing the quality of patient services and the everyday lives of healthcare workers. Although, nudge treatments have been shown to be successful, a thorough analysis of their results in various healthcare contexts is still required. Subsequent research endeavours may center on doing both quantitative and qualitative assessments of the decline in burnout and rise in job satisfaction subsequent to the adoption of nudge tactics.

### ***Acknowledgments & Funding***

This study is financed by the European Union-NextGenerationEU, through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, project SUMMIT BG-RRP-2.004-0008-C01.

### **REFERENCES**

- ACKER, G. M., 2010. The challenges in providing services to clients with mental illness: Managed care, burnout and somatic symptoms among social workers. *Community Mental Health Journal*, vol. 46, pp. 591 – 600.
- BLŠTÁKOVÁ, J. & PALEŇČÁROVÁ, J., 2021. Human resource management in healthcare. In *SHS Web of Conferences*, vol. 115. EDP Sciences.



- CHAN, A. P., NWAOGU, J. M. & NASLUND, J. A., 2020. Mental ill-health risk factors in the construction industry: Systematic review. *Journal of construction engineering and management*, vol. 146, no. 3.
- COHEN, C., PIGNATA, S., BEZAK, E., TIE, M. & CHILDS, J., 2023. Workplace interventions to improve well-being and reduce burnout for nurses, physicians and allied healthcare professionals: a systematic review. *BMJ open*, vol. 13, no. 6.
- GOODWIN, T., 2012. Why we should reject 'nudge'. *Politics*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 85 – 92.
- HAUSMAN, D. M. & WELCH, B., 2010. Debate: To nudge or not to nudge. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 123 – 136.
- HOLLANDS, G. J., SHEMILT, I., MARTEAU, T. M., JEBB, S. A., KELLY, M. P., NAKAMURA, R. & OGILVIE, D., 2013. Altering micro-environments to change population health behaviour: towards an evidence base for choice architecture interventions. *BMC public health*, vol. 13, pp. 1 – 6.
- METSIOU, M., TOSKA, A., MALLIAROU, M., SARIDIS, M. & SARAFIS, P., 2019. Professional satisfaction and attitude towards conflict of health professionals. *Interscientific Health Care*, vol. 11, no. 1.
- MILLER, R., WILLIAMS, P. & O'NEILL, M., 2018. *The Healthy Workplace Nudge: How healthy people, culture, and buildings lead to high performance*. John Wiley & Sons.
- MÜLLER, M. M., BÖHM, K. L. & RENZ, E., 2023. Pay or nudge employees into change? A theoretical and experimental investigation of the effect of nudging for organizational change. *Managerial and Decision Economics*, vol. 44, no. 6, pp. 3666 – 3695.
- NEMEC, P. B., SWARBRICK, M., SPAGNOLO, A. & BRANDOW, C. L., 2021. Nudges to Support Health and Wellness for Individuals Served by Behavioral Health Programs. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services*, vol. 59, no. 1, pp. 21 – 28.
- OGBEIWI, O., 2021. General concepts of goals and goal-setting in healthcare: A narrative review. *Journal of Management & Organization*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 324 – 341.
- ÖZTÜRK, A. & ARUN, K., 2024. Nudge theory on intrapreneurship: a conceptual view. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*.
- PAPAKOSTA-GAKI, E., TSOUNIS, A. & KAFETSIOS, K., 2019. The effect of mental health professionals' attachment orientation on their mental illness attitudes and job satisfaction. *Archives of Hellenic Medicine/Arheia Hellenikes Iatrikes*, vol. 36, no. 2.
- PAPALEXANDRI, N. & BOURADAS, D., 2003. *Human Resources Management*. Athens: G. G. Benou Publications.

- ROSE, G. A., KHAW, K. T. & MARMOT, M., 2008. *Rose's strategy of preventive medicine: the complete original text*. Oxford University Press.
- RUDNICKA, A., COOK, D., CECCHINATO, M. E., GOULD, S. J., NEWBOLD, J. W. & COX, A. L., 2022. The end of the active work break? Remote work, sedentariness and the role of technology in creating active break-taking norms. In: *Proceedings of the 1st Annual Meeting of the Symposium on Human-Computer Interaction for Work*, pp. 1 – 13.
- SOLED, D., 2021. Public health nudges: weighing individual liberty and population health benefits. *Journal of medical ethics*, vol. 47, no. 11, pp. 756 – 760.
- TAKEBAYASHI, M., YOSHIIKE, N., KOYAMA, T., TORIYABE, M., NAKAMURA, H. & TAKEBAYASHI, K., 2022. Validation of the most cost-effective nudge to promote workers' regular self-weighing: a cluster randomized controlled trial. *Scientific Reports*, vol. 12, no. 1.
- YOONG, S. L., HALL, A., STACEY, F., GRADY, A., SUTHERLAND, R., WYSE, R., ANDERSON, A., NATHAN, N. & WOLFENDEN, L., 2020. Nudge strategies to improve healthcare providers' implementation of evidence-based guidelines, policies and practices: a systematic review of trials included within Cochrane systematic reviews. *Implementation Science*, vol. 15, no. 1.
- VERHAEGHE, M. & BRACKE, P., 2012. Associative stigma among mental health professionals: implications for professional and service user well-being. *Journal of health and social behavior*, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 17 – 32.
- VIALE, R., 2022. *Nudging*. MIT Press.
- VLAEV, I., KING, D., DOLAN, P. & DARZI, A., 2016. The theory and practice of “nudging”: changing health behaviors. *Public Administration Review*, vol. 76, no. 4, pp. 550 – 561.
- WILKINSON, T. M., 2013. Nudging and manipulation. *Political Studies*, vol. 61, no. 2, pp. 341 – 355.

✉ **Elissavet Frengidou, PhD Student**  
Sofia University  
1504 Sofia  
15, Tsar Osvoboditel  
Bulgaria  
E-mail: elli\_kilkis@yahoo.gr