

# To Distinguish the Origin from the Mechanism

When conducting an investigation onto a specific behavior, we tend to focus our attention towards the final action. After going through extensive research on this final action, and believing there's enough information about the target to change its behavior, it's time for an intervention focused in our objectives. However, despite the fact we've made thorough research, sometimes the result stays unchanged – the final action doesn't change. But, why? Probably all our research was correctly done, but sometimes, instead of focusing in the final action or the mechanism that leads to this action taking place; we must turn towards the origin of the action.

Changing only the mechanism, won't guarantee a change in the final action. You must remember the mechanism is only the mean by which an action takes place, and there can be different mechanisms that lead to a single action. The origin of an action is then the cause or motive by which an action or effect takes place, and modifying it implies a compulsory change in the mechanism (the means) and hence, the final result. There are times when

the origin of an action can be confused with its mechanism, leading us to believe that its nature is changed, when actually the mechanism is being changed, but still leads to the same result.

In order to correctly define the origin of an action, we need to be very clear on what we're trying to explain; define what is the "big puzzle" of what we're trying to discover. But still, we must go deeper, we must go from just asking "why?", to trying to identify under what conditions a certain action happens. Instead of asking "Why people do this?", "Why people buy that?", we must ask "Under what conditions people do this?", "Under what conditions they buy that?".

It seems to be a simple syntax change, but when we really consider the specific conditions under which certain behaviors take place, it is possible to contemplate in a more easy and panoramic way the effects that condition and influence a certain behavior. This way the answers are oriented to the origin of the action, helping it differentiate from the mechanism.

For example, let's suppose that a new product in its category hits the market. It is an innovative product, and it is estimated that people will find it attractive and have good sales. But despite the marketing efforts, the product isn't reaching the sales target. After analyzing the situation, we discover that the main problem is the "high" price of the product. You could ask "Why do people perceive this product as expensive?", which may produce a lot of answers that describe the mechanism by which people do not buy the product, but these answers don't always give a clear idea of the motive (origin) of why people consider it expensive. However, if you ask "Under what conditions people perceive this product as expensive?" we can find more specific and direct answers that lead us to the origin of the problem, like the fact that being a new product people don't have a reference point, so they perceive it as expensive. In this case, the origin of the problem could be the fact that people aren't conscious of the real value of the product.

Remember people need to compare prices to assign value to things. Now, what would happen if a reference point were set to make them understand the real value of the product? This can go from a simple sticker showing the advantages of using it, like the amount of money saved by using the product compared with other ones in the same category, to

the launching of a bigger and more expensive version of the same product that makes the original one seem cheaper, but with the same features (like Williams-Somona did successfully with their bread-baking machine).

There are times in which a behavior can't be changed just by tangling with the mechanism; the origin has to be modified. To face a problem in a deeper and more concrete way, the origins must be differentiated from the mechanisms that affect an action, and it's imperative to understand how the mechanisms connects the origin with the final result. Instead of just asking why?, we must find and understand the conditions under which people behave; a simple change in syntax, but a big perspective change.



## About NUDØ

We are a group of consultants based in Mexico City specialized in designing behavioral nudges. We are always looking to generate innovative ideas and solutions with a solid scientific and theoretical background, complementing this with empirical experimentation.

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