

# Nudging us forward

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**Nudging us forward** | Picture for Nudging us forward - book cover of Behavioural insights for public integrity

**Most people probably believe they make decisions with integrity. Yet behavioural evidence reveals otherwise. Often, we're not even aware when we are deviating from ethical standards, simply because justifications and biased judgments affect our perception of what constitutes a breach of integrity.**

Policymakers traditionally create anti-corruption policies predicated on rational human decision-making, for instance, aiming for the higher goal, rather than the —alas!—lower reality. But a better approach may be to integrate human fallibility or irrationality into policy design instead.

While rational decision-making models produce policies that favour control and sanctions, policies based on behavioural insights aim to nudge an individual moral reflection and social dynamics to influence better behaviour and ethical choices. For example, the Secretaría de la Function Pública in Mexico, in co-operation with the research centre CIDE, tried sending different types of reminder emails to public employees requiring them to register their received gifts. As a result, the number of gifts registered around the Christmas period, compared to previous years and to a control group that didn't receive any message, increased. However, the messages reminding public officials of their legal obligations and

appealing to their impartiality and honesty were more effective than those referring to sanctions or registrations made by colleagues.

Behavioural insights can also point out problems in the ways responsibilities are assigned within an integrity system. When responsibility is widely shared among individuals, each feels less responsible in cases of joint misconduct: guilt is smaller when shared. For example, if an individual takes a test knowing that all the other candidates are helping each other, not cheating will put him at a disadvantage. He may then feel he had little choice in the matter. Such situations must be identified and addressed through interventions from outside the group and strict enforcement.

Policymaking has historically neglected natural human, that is, not always rational, behaviour, yet this approach can help nudge integrity and anti-corruption policies in the right direction, making them not just more efficient, but more human too.

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## References

OECD (2018), Behavioural Insights for Public Integrity: Harnessing the Human Factor to Counter Corruption, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264297067-en> <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264297067-en>