Chapter 1. Introduction

Public integrity systems aim to generate decisions by public officials that align with the public interest. As a consequence, many integrity policies seek to directly or indirectly guide and govern human choices or behaviour. In spite of this, the behavioural perspective is still neglected in integrity policy making. Researcher in various scientific fields (including psychology, neuroscience, sociology and economics) on human cognition and behaviour has produced findings that offer valuable lessons and new perspectives. As a result, policy makers worldwide are increasingly applying behavioural insights to other areas of public policy (Economist, 2017[1]); (European Commission, 2016[2]); (OECD, 2017[3]); (World Bank, 2015[4]).

This report presents relevant behavioural insights for integrity policies. A broad variety of behavioural science literature was reviewed to identify the research most relevant to integrity policy making. Indeed, rethinking integrity policies from the perspective of human behaviour can make integrity policies both more effective and efficient. Behavioural policy design provides decision makers with a different perspective that takes into account two often overlooked aspects. The first relates to the ways in which individuals make moral choices: psychological shortcuts, misperceptions and temptations can often divert the best intentions. Understanding the dynamics and pitfalls of moral choice helps policy makers provide more effective guidance to promote integrity in the public sector and the whole of society. The second aspect relates to the ways in which social dynamics impact individual behaviour. Integrity is not just a question of individual moral choice; it is influenced by society, peers, neighbours and colleagues. Integrity policies function better in congruence with – and not against – the logic of social interactions.

Integrating these two core aspects can help policy makers address some of the key challenges of modern integrity policies: guiding moral choice making, overcoming the difficulties of collective action and reducing integrity risks. Chapter 2. and Chapter 3. present core findings from behavioural ethics and social interaction research, and examine the internal process of moral decision making and the relevance of external social dynamics. Based on these insights, they identify core precepts to guide policy makers. Figure 1.1 provides a schematic overview of how behavioural insights can improve understanding of ethical decision making in a given context and thereby inform integrity policies.
To help make the practical implications of these behavioural insights more tangible and concrete, Chapter 4 applies core precepts of behavioural science to the framework provided by the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Integrity (OECD, 2017[5]). Finally, this chapter examines the potential application of behavioural insights to public policy within an integrity system through changes in the choice architecture – an approach otherwise known as “nudging”.

Figure 1.1. Understanding behaviour for better integrity policies

Moral choice + Social dynamics + Context