

U4 Helpdesk Answer 2018:11

Behavioural changes against corruption

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Query

Are there any best practices where corruption was countered through triggering behavioural change in local actors and, if yes, how exactly? Furthermore, are there any research results, which indicate what approach should be taken in the future to achieve anti-corruption through behavioural changes?

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Summary

Behavioural change approaches have increasingly gained ground in policymaking as they aim to influence how people behave and make decisions. In anti-corruption policies, these approaches contribute to understanding how people decide to act towards and engage in corruption. That requires first an understanding of the psychology of corruption, and second a holistic approach to influence both the mind and the environment in which the individual makes decisions.

Studies show that the cost-benefit calculations of engaging in corruption or not are not only based on logic. Often, they are influenced by mental shortcuts, false intuitions, how individuals process and organise information, emotions and social norms. A behavioural approach against corruption is based on an understanding of corruption, and it takes into account communication and social

aspects. Behavioural practices can take several forms, such as information campaigns, collective deliberations, promotion of intrinsic motivation and civic engagement, among others.

1. Background: understanding corrupt behaviour and “behavioural change”

In 2010, David Cameron set up the Behavioural Insights Team in the UK cabinet office (Rutter 2015). In 2015, Barack Obama hired the Social and Behavioural Sciences Team and ordered all federal agencies to use behavioural sciences for public policy (Marron 2015). Behavioural change is increasingly becoming key in policymaking (Lunn 2014).

The use of behavioural science in policymaking helps to design policies based on how people behave and make decisions. That requires an understanding of why people do what they do and what influences their decision to behave in a certain way. In the case of anti-corruption policies, that implies being aware of the behavioural influences that contribute to engagement in corrupt behaviour and in fighting it.

Understanding why people are corrupt

The psychology of corruption

A growing body of empirical research in social psychology and behavioural economics shows that decision-making is influenced by people's overreliance on faulty intuition and mental shortcuts (Rusch 2016), as well as social pressure. This does not mean that individuals do not make decisions based on a rational cost-benefit calculation, but the definition of costs and benefits is perhaps less based on logic and more based on emotions.

Following Kahneman's (2011) dichotomy between a mode of thought that is fast, instinctive and emotional and a mode of thought that is slower, logical and deliberative, Kahneman identifies key types of faulty intuition and mental shortcuts that can influence individuals in participating in corruption (Rusch 2016):

- **The overconfidence effect:** when a person's subjective confidence in his or her judgements is greater than the objective accuracy of those judgements. This can evolve into deforming the self-perception on ethical issues and create a gap between how people believe they would behave and how they actually behave, especially in ambiguous or high-pressure circumstances (Rusch 2016).
- **Reciprocation:** the idea of repaying what another person has done for us can become an easy entrance to influence individuals and drag them into corruption.
- **Scarcity:** the fact that a key asset or resource is available for a limited period of time can trigger human weaknesses for shortcuts, especially when individuals perceive that their free choice in something of value is threatened, making

them want it even more (Rusch 2016). When there is scarcity and time pressure, unethical behaviour becomes more likely.

- **Commitment and consistency:** this mental shortcut makes us behave consistently with a commitment made in the past, sometimes independently of how ethical that commitment was.
- **Social proof:** occurs when people assume others' behaviour is correct in a given situation. In ambiguous situations when people do not know the appropriate way to behave, the individual is driven by other people's behaviour assuming that they know more and better. For example, if in a situation where there is a risk of becoming corrupt and nobody does anything to prevent it, it might be understood that it is not worth doing anything and, therefore, lead the subject to decide not to take action either.
- **Confirmation bias:** is the tendency to search and favour information that confirms one's pre-existing beliefs. This can prevent or limit an individual to act on his or her perception of questionable ethics in certain transactions, and instead make that individual look for and accept more innocent explanations for corrupt actions.

In addition, the literature on the psychology of corruption identifies factors that influence how individuals mentally interpret, process and organise information, such as power and risk perceptions, personal gain and self-control, emotions and rationalisation narratives (Dupuy and Neset 2018). According to the literature, individuals in positions of power, as well as those standing to gain personally and having lower self-control, are more likely to act corruptly (Dupuy and Neset 2018). Rationalisation narratives seem to make corruption more acceptable, and certain

emotions, like guilt, may make the decision to act corruptly less likely (Dupuy and Neset 2018).

Social norms and the social dimension of corruption

If mental shortcuts are internal psychological processes influencing how individuals face corruption, social norms are external influencers of the extent to which individuals engage and expect others to engage in corruption. Social norms are informal norms resulting from cultural values, customs and traditions that shape people's social behaviour and expectations of what people should do. They are embedded in personal, local and organisational contexts, and they explain psychological justification processes of corrupt behaviour (Kubbe and Engelbert 2018).

In some cases, engagement in corrupt practices might be justified by certain social norms around social status and recognition, as well as around promoting solidarity and reciprocity. For example, in Uganda, to acquire and share wealth with the group brings social respectability and status, independently of how the wealth has been earned. If the expectation of the network is not fulfilled it might be a reason for shame, social isolation and even physical violence (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017). Nevertheless, the same social norms of solidarity and reciprocity represent the potential of communities to engage against corruption (Baez Camargo 2018).

Another aspect of the social dimension of corruption is how extended and rooted corruption is in a society. In some societies, embedded corruption becomes a reference point that creates social expectations. When there is the expectation that everybody is corrupt, to be corrupt becomes part of the identity, which determines an automatic decision-making that justifies corruption (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017).

Components of a behavioural approach to anti-corruption

Components that define a behavioural approach to anti-corruption are, among others:

- A complex understanding of how individuals make choices: a behavioural perspective looks not only at the decision to act corruptly or not, but at how the individual makes that decision. To understand the rational decision-making based on a cost-benefit calculation, a behavioural approach adds complexity in deciding what are the costs and the benefits. As explained above, not only logic but also emotions, in-built mental shortcuts, default solutions to problems, and social and cultural expectations of acceptability, independently of legal and administrative incentives (Baez Camargo 2017), play a role in framing the decision-making of individuals facing opportunities for corruption.
- A contingent understanding of corruption: from a behavioural perspective, corruption is seen as a collection of individual behaviours (Wills Silva and Day 2016). So, rather than a single problem, corruption decisions are made in a specific way, at a specific time in a specific context. The anti-corruption target then is to intervene in those specific decisions more than overarching impersonal sets of policies (Wills Silva and Day 2016).
- A consideration of forms of communication as a trigger for change: how information is framed and presented and having the right kind of information can push citizens from having a passive attitude about corruption to engaging against it (Baez Camargo 2017). It has been shown that the right information is not only about the costs of corruption, but about dismantling the beliefs associated with

corruption when it is seen as a norm (Baez Camargo 2017). Also, messages about rights and the importance of enjoying access to high quality public services have proved to have positive results (Baez Camargo 2017).

- It takes into account the social dimension of corruption: the social context affects corrupt behaviour in different ways (Lindner 2014). For example, increased corruption in a society lowers the trust and expectations of honesty in public institutions, which in turn might increase the belief that corruption is the only solution to get what citizens need. It might also enhance the belief that corruption is the only way to get the individual's needs satisfied and ensure quality service delivery. In addition, social norms and pressures, for example, to reciprocate favours also explains corrupt behaviour in some contexts. In the same way as social norms might tolerate corrupt decisions, they can be a powerful anti-corruption tool due to their great influence to shape behaviour in certain societies.

One of the main challenges in behavioural change is how to make positive behaviour change stick (Van der Linden 2015). The source of motivation is a crucial aspect in this regard: when the change is motivated externally, it is generally of short duration since, once the external stimulation is gone, the behaviour might easily revert to the old pattern. This explains the limited effect of awareness raising campaigns or competitions. Those strategies can be very efficient in producing the change in behaviour but not necessarily to sustain it or to awaken the right reasons to change. Competitions, for example, might not have the motivation to act for a good cause but in one's self-interest (to win) and not for the interest of the collective.

When the change is motivated internally, its duration is considerably longer. An intrinsic motivation is related to acting altruistically and to helping others. Those actions are known to produce an emotional reward. It has been scientifically demonstrated that doing good or the "right thing" can make a person feel good both psychologically and physically (Van der Linen 2015).

2. Behavioural practices and approaches against corruption

The inclusion of behavioural science in policymaking has evolved in the use of different types of behavioural informed interventions. Below are some of the practices and approaches to behaviour change regarding corruption.

Information campaigns

Campaigns can challenge conventional belief systems that consider corruption as normal by, for instance, disseminating stories of its negative consequences. They can also present alternative ways of thinking and acting, for example, reinforcing positive role models. And they can be used to raise awareness about the rights and duties of citizens. Requirements for the success of those campaigns are: disseminating the information in trustworthy, legitimate and likable ways; to account for power asymmetries among participants and include the different groups; and to provide tutoring to model correct behaviours and attitudes.

A powerful example is the information campaign against corruption developed in Paraguay – one of the most corrupt countries in Latin America – called the anti-corruption suit. Tired of how politicians stole public money, a tailor created a suit without pockets. Named after deputy José María Ibáñez who was known for his abuses of power, "The Ibáñez Collection" tried ironically to stimulate politicians and public officials to buy the

suit in the hope that the lack of pockets would impede them from stealing public money. The collection of “pocket-less suits” caused a sensation in Paraguay and abroad. More information at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19BbBtU-4NU>

Collective deliberation and commitment

Getting the parties involved in a discussion to reach a consensus, to weigh the different options and to determine future actions, beliefs and attitudes about a situation or topic creates an open and transparent space of participation and can break with given and unquestioned patterns of thinking and behaving. A requirement for the success of this strategy is to encourage the participation in the deliberation and the incorporation in the discussion of national standards or other ideas on the topic so participants are aware of the alternatives.

One of the challenges of this strategy is the heterogeneity among the participants. According to a field experiment developed by Björkman and Svensson (2009) in primary health in Uganda, the heterogeneity among the participants of community-based monitoring groups represented in income inequality and ethnic fractionalisation, adversely impacted collective action for improved service provision. Creating an open space in which all the points of view are acknowledged and respected will help to create an open attitude to reach a consensus.

Addressing reciprocity and moral obligation with closed networks

This strategy is especially relevant in societies in which favours and obligations to relatives and close networks is more important than laws and formal regulations. The power of social networks to perpetuate the questionable exchange of favours,

can be redirected using the same energy of reciprocity to promote behaviour to counter corruption. Considering that part of the purpose of networks and reciprocity is to help each other in solving problems, one way to put reciprocity and social networks to work against corruption is by defining corruption as a collective problem that affects the group and that they need each other to solve it.

Another way of harnessing the anti-corruption power of networks is by means of a “peer effect” where the chances of an individual adopting a certain behaviour increases if he or she has a friend or relative who has already adopted that behaviour (Stahl and Baez Camargo 2017). One way to facilitate this is by enlisting individuals in their communities to become anti-corruption champions.

Reframing the cultural environment and identity

In societies where corruption is a part of daily life, there might be a subconscious belief that corruption is part of the cultural identity. In those cases, corruption might act as a reference point that shapes expectations and decisions in social interactions, since those exchanges are part of the foundation of that society. Practical steps to address this kind of situation are, first, to identify and acknowledge those belief systems and acknowledge them as based on practices but distant from the collective identity. Second, highlight and promote the values in that culture that go against corruption and attach the collective identity to those through public discourse, media campaigns and formal and informal education methods.

The anti-corruption policy undertaken by president Paul Kagame in Rwanda is an example of how the problem of corruption is framed in the bigger

picture of how the country wants to become and how Rwandan identity should be defined after the genocide in 1994. In the governmental discourse, to be corrupt is detached from the “new” national identity as Rwandan based on pre-colonial values. Thus, identification with the national identity magnifies the stigma and negative consequences of being corrupt as going against what it means to be Rwandan.

At a practical level, this was manifested in an emphasis on education in values using both formal and informal mechanisms (Heywood et al 2017). The formal strategies included the incorporation lessons on anti-corruption and crime, gender issues, as well as culture and values in the school curriculum. National radio shows were used to disseminate the message, and public institutions held anti-corruption weeks to educate Rwandan citizens on the negative consequences of corruption. Of particular importance are *itorero*, a pre-colonial style training camp where participants spent several weeks learning Rwandan history, pre-colonial values and national policies, as well as issues of direct relevance to their particular profession (Heywood et al. 2017).

Leadership and installing a culture of integrity

Increasing attention has been paid in recent years to the importance of leadership in setting the right framework for integrity in the public and private sector. The importance of leadership in changing behaviour is twofold: leadership inspires behaviour, and without leadership it is not possible to establish a culture of integrity (Heywood et al. 2017).

Often, corrupt behaviour is justified with the sentence, “if they [the government] do it why shouldn't I?” Hence, the importance of having leaders and authorities that represent high

standards of integrity, honesty and transparency. “While institutions and rules provide the background context and can help to frame social action, it is the living-breathing culture that determines how they operate in practice and how people act in the many situations not covered by formal rules” (Mulgan and Wanna 2011).

An example of leadership by example in the private sector is Jim Sinegal, chief executive of Costco, an American multinational retail company. Unlike other executives in the corporate world, Sinegal is known for his integrity, his discipline, lack of showiness and reasonable salary despite his success, and for putting his employees before the numbers even in times of recession (McGregor 2011). An example of the latter is when he gave each employee an added stock when Costco had to raise its health care premiums to its employees after nine years without raising them. Another example of his commitment to his values is to have as a mantra that any product should be marked no more than 14% to 15% above cost (McGregor 2011). This culture of integrity has set the ground for how Costco operates, and is being followed for by executives in the company.

Promote intrinsic motivation

The promotion of intrinsic motivation to change corrupt practices should be oriented to produce in the individual the “warm glow” or emotional reward obtained after doing something “right” or for others. There are at least two ways in which that can be achieved: i) by appealing to the leader and responsibility in each of us to improve our societies, and reinforcing the idea that what is done at the individual level matters; ii) focusing, not only on preventing corruption but on promoting integrity and actions to make the institutions or society better for all. The logic behind this is to not put energy into not doing the wrong things but put

into doing more of the right things. Those actions should be concrete to produce tangible results that, in turn, fuels the motivation.

Behavioural research has shown the short durability of behavioural change motivated by extrinsic incentives. For instance, the Doing-in-the-Dark campaign promoted by Princeton University, where students were encouraged to reduce their energy consumption for one month showed that, as soon as the competition stopped, energy levels bounced back to where they were before the competition (Van der Linden 2015).

Moreover, extrinsic incentives might undermine intrinsic motivation. For instance, emphasising the financial benefits for enrolling in an energy-saving programme can decrease environmental concern and reduce the willingness to care about it (Van der Linden 2015).

Civic engagement

The engagement of citizens in anti-corruption efforts is in principle a very direct way of leading behaviour against corruption. The challenge, though, is how to engage citizens in that enterprise. As experts on the topic argue that, to get more people involved in countering corruption, it is necessary to design incentives that leverage the different dimensions of human behaviour (Frag 2018). Frag (2018) presents 15 ways to leverage rational, internal and social incentives.

For example, among the strategies to leverage rational incentives are: to offer rewards and limit cost, to not make engagement a waste of time, and make it informative and valuable, and to use quick wins to demonstrate impact. Ways to leverage internal incentives are to focus on what people will lose not on what will gain, to leverage the power of habit, to play on the self-image of people, to visualise and make a plan on how they are going to

engage after committing, and to simplify the engagement process. Social incentives will be leveraged when engagement is social and fun and when people can see that others are already engaged. (For more strategies of citizen engagement and concrete ideas of how to implement them see Frag 2018).

An example of how to make engaging activities fun is to organise sport events, for example, the marathons against corruption in Afghanistan (Saifullah, M. 2013). An example of leveraging the power of habit is, as in Nairobi, to organise informative sessions where people gather to watch football and have the information session before the football match.

3. Assessment of behavioural approaches against corruption

Little empirical evidence exists on the impact of behavioural approaches against corruption. The lack of research results makes it difficult to suggest what behavioural approaches should be taken in the future to prevent corruption. Nevertheless, there are important ideas to consider when it comes to choosing an approach to change behaviour.

The lack of results of behavioural strategies in the short term does not necessarily mean that those strategies are not working. Behavioural change is a long endeavour that requires changing belief systems and routines. That change might take generations or it might happen faster due to contingent circumstances. The case of the municipal government in La Paz (Bolivia) is an example of the latter. In early 2002, a flood caused by two weeks of heavy rain killed 68 people and left a total of 1,581 people affected in the city. A massive communal effort was required to help flood victims and repair the damage, and the municipal government led by mayor Juan Del

Granado made an enormous, highly visible contribution. The resulting public gratitude for their efforts bolstered the morale of city officials who had long been derided by the public for their rent-seeking and predatory behaviour. The experience encouraged them to put public good before individual self-interest (Zúñiga and Heywood 2015).

In addition, the change might be more or less permanent depending whether the motivation to change behaviour is internal or external. For instance, a reward scheme for good behaviour in the civil service might trigger fast change. Nevertheless, that change might last as long as there is a reward scheme and disappear when the scheme is cancelled. Internal motivation to change might take longer but last longer since it does not depend on an external source beyond the control of the subject.

Contextual and cultural aspects can also play an important role in determining what behavioural approaches might be more or less effective. Hofstede (2011) identifies six dimensions of national cultures that might affect how people behave:

1. Power distance: the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations/institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.
2. Uncertainty avoidance: society's tolerance to ambiguity and to what extent a culture programmes its members to feel uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured and uncertain circumstances.
3. Individualism/collectivism: the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups.

4. Masculinity/femininity: masculine societies are those considered assertive and competitive, whereas feminine societies are those more modest and caring.
5. Long/short terms orientation: short-term oriented societies focus on the present or the past; they value tradition, family imperatives, short-term material gratification and universal guidelines on what is good and evil. A long-term society focus on the future and values persistence and the capacity of adaptation. In this case, what is good and evil depends on the circumstances.
6. Indulgence/restraint: in an indulgent society there is more space for relatively free gratification of basic and human desires to enjoy life, whereas in a restrained society gratification of needs are strictly controlled by social norms.

Thus, strategies involving competitions to see who is the best civil servant might work better in masculine societies than in feminine ones. In the latter, strategies to counter corruption might be more successfully framed as part of caring for the collective. In an indulgent society, behaviour might be triggered by presenting corruption as an obstacle to enjoying life, whereas in a restrained society corruption might be presented as wrong and against the norm. Trying to change behaviour at the individual level or as a group is an important consideration depending on whether the society is individualist or collectivist. And the use of leadership and hierarchies will be more or less effective in accordance with the conception of power distance in that society or group.

Religious values also exercise, consciously or unconsciously, a significant influence in behaviour and moral judgements. Several studies show a relationship between religion and corruption

(Treisman 2000; Serra 2006; Sommer et al. 2013). According to Treisman (2000), religion might affect the perceived cost of corrupt actions through conditioning attitudes towards social hierarchy. When hierarchical religions, such as Catholicism or Islam, dominates, challenges to office holders are rarer than in societies where a more equalitarian religion, like Protestantism, prevails. Religion can also influence loyalties to family as opposed to other citizens, affecting the levels of nepotism (Treisman 2000). Being aware of these differences helps to decide the best behavioural approach to counter corruption.

Collective action potential in communities is another variable that may be conducive for a behavioural approach. Community attributes such as horizontal social networks, levels of participation in voluntary associations, communitarian or individualistic patterns for problem solving, and social norms like solidarity, reciprocity and gift-giving, are expressions of the social capital conducive to collective action (Baez Camargo 2018) and, therefore, key for choosing the right behavioural approach.

Finally, considering the diversity of aspects determining behaviour and interacting simultaneously, such as through rational calculations, emotions, social relations, values, culture, needs, demands and motivations, among others, a successful approach to counter corruption through changing behaviour requires a combination of simultaneous strategies acting upon those different aspects. In other words, it has to involve actions that influence decision-making, change the environment, communicate in effective ways according to the subject's belief systems, and to appeal to both the rational and the emotional mind.

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