



# ETHOS

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## NUDGE AND SLUDGE: A CONVERSATION WITH DILIP SOMAN

### ALSO FEATURING

**Ong Qiyao**

*On principles for  
successful nudging*

**Lorenz Goette**

*On using nudges with  
standard interventions*

**Do Hoang Van Khanh &  
Low Weijian**

*On nudging student  
commuting*



# Editorial

by **Alvin Pang**  
Editor-in-Chief, ETHOS

The release in 2008 of Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler's seminal book *Nudge* has redoubled interest around the world in applying a deeper understanding of decision-making mindsets and behaviours to public policy goals. As public agencies explore and experiment with subtle behavioural interventions, or nudges, to encourage desirable outcomes among the public, a more nuanced understanding of how they can best be applied is emerging—including a realisation of use cases where they may be less appropriate or less effective, or even counterproductive.

In this issue of ETHOS Digital Edition, we have brought together perspectives on

how behavioural insights can contribute to policymaking and intervention in constructive ways.

[Expounding on the concept of sludge](#)—procedural, cultural or other impedance to desired behavioural change—Canadian scholar Dilip Soman points out that policymakers should be mindful of unacknowledged factors that could trip up otherwise well-intended programmes and initiatives.

In a similar vein, researcher Ong Qiyang, from the National University of Singapore's Social Service Research Centre, offers [three key principles that underlie effective behavioural nudges](#). She argues

that opt-out options are an important element in ensuring the effectiveness of behavioural interventions, because they allow individuals to tailor choices to their specific needs. Poor communication of opt-out options could breed confusion and mistrust, while counternudges by the private sector or other players could undercut the impact of nudge measures.

Economist Lorenz Gotte explains [how behavioural interventions stack up against more conventional measures](#), suggesting that the two forms of public policy action could usefully reinforce each other, particularly when individuals are given clear feedback about the impact of their actions.

Do Hoang Van Khanh from the Civil Service College and Low Weijian from the Land Transport Authority report from a successful [pilot study to shift student and parental attitudes towards public transport](#) travel to and from school. The initiative exemplifies how nudges, including gamification approaches, can be applied in real world situations to improve attitudes towards public transport.

As always, we wish you an engaging read and would love to hear from you if you have any comments or suggestions.

*Do also check out our [July 2018 full issue of Ethos](#), which traces Singapore's journey towards becoming a Smart Nation and the evolution of its digital governance.*