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# THE ART OF THE NUDGE: AN OVERVIEW

## WHAT IS THE ART OF THE NUDGE?

Based on a [practitioners' guide](#)<sup>1</sup> that was collaboratively developed by [Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence \(UCalgary\)](#) and Human Services professionals, The Art of the Nudge (AOTN) approach is designed to enhance gender equity and reduce gender-based violence in male-oriented environments (e.g., policing, military, oil & gas, trades, technology, etc.).<sup>2</sup>

## HOW DOES THE APPROACH DIFFER FROM TRADITIONAL APPROACHES?

The approach differs from traditional gender equity efforts in a few key ways:

**Customized and Collaborative:** A one-size-fits-all approach is not effective in reducing gender-based discrimination and harassment (e.g., what works for firefighters doesn't necessarily work for police).<sup>1</sup> Shift works with organizations to co-develop a change process that is customized to their specific culture, structure, strengths, priorities, and challenges. The co-creation process combines 'outsider' research and insights with 'insider' knowledge and influence, and helps to ensure that the approach can be sustained beyond the engagement of the University.

**Draws on Nudge Theory and other Evidence Based Approaches:** Typical approaches to gender equity, diversity, and inclusion focus on changing minds (e.g., attitudes, intentions, etc.) through psychoeducational training and programs. However, research shows that this type of training is largely ineffectual and can often backfire. Instead of focusing on changing minds, the Art of the Nudge focuses on changing contexts: by making very small, evidence-informed changes (nudges) to work processes (e.g., Standard Operating Procedures, forms, policies, data collection), we can cue more equitable and prosocial behaviours and mitigate backlash.<sup>2</sup>

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**Focused on Changing Culture and Social Norms:** Culture and social norms play a significant role in shaping behaviour, so they are an important component of this work. We support groups to surface problematic social norms, and then work with key influencers to shift those norms through small social nudges (e.g., respectfully challenging someone when they make a homophobic remark and helping them to understand why it's harmful). We also help key influencers to signal equity, safety, and belonging in small, everyday ways.

**Involves a Longer-Term Commitment:** Research shows that one-off trainings or workshops are ineffectual and often backfire.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, we avoid limited-term engagements, and work with groups over several months or years (depending on the size and complexity of the organization or group). A longer-term commitment is also needed because culture change takes time,<sup>4</sup> and customization (i.e., tailoring the approach to the group or organization) requires a significant upfront investment in developing relationships, learning how the system is organized, understanding the language and culture, and co-creating interventions that are specific to the organization.

## WHAT DOES THE AOTN PROCESS INVOLVE?

**After orienting ourselves to the group/organization, reviewing internal data and documents, examining relevant academic and practice-based research, and conducting one-on-one interviews, we work collaboratively with internal stakeholders to:**

- Surface cultural dynamics that may contribute to inequity, discrimination, or gender-based violence
- Identify potential change points within the organization, including processes that would benefit from a nudge approach (e.g., recruiting or promotions processes) or social norms that might need to shift (e.g., norms that promote retaliatory behaviors directed towards victims of sexual harassment)
- Co-develop evidence-informed changes to processes, policies, physical environments, etc. (i.e., organizational nudges)
- Work with key influencers to strengthen adaptive norms and reduce harmful ones (e.g., social nudges)
- Implement, evaluate, and scale the approach across the organization

## HOW HAS AOTN BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN CPS TO THIS POINT?

Our work within CPS is focused on two key areas: building a more inclusive talent pipeline and preventing/addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. Over the past 16 months, this has included:

- Workshops with members of the ELT/SLT that resulted in 13 evidence-informed leadership nudges
- 28 nudges related to recruiting, promotions, performance reviews, and decision-making processes within CPS
- 5 workshops with File Managers and Pre-screeners to co-develop nudges designed to enhance recruiting processes and collaboratively design a curriculum to onboard new staff
- 21 Recommendations for changes to CPS' recruiting website to draw more women and diverse populations to the organization
- The development of a joint submission (UCalgary and CPS) to the Government of Alberta with recommendations for enhancing the Police Act to prevent and address gender and sexual harassment in the workplace

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<sup>1</sup> Research emphasizes the importance of developing a context-specific understanding of the dynamics that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and harassment in order to develop more effective interventions. See: Alexander-Scott, M., Bell, E., & Holden, J. (2016). *DFID guidance note: Shifting social norms to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)*. London: VAWG Helpdesk. p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> A good example of a policing nudge comes from the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVPD). Data showed that most LVPD use of force incidents were associated with foot pursuits, so they changed their policy so that the pursuing officer is no longer the first one to lay hands on the suspect. (Instead, they call for backup so that another officer can place handcuffs on the suspect). This small change, which helps to manage the impact of adrenaline and heightened emotion e.g., anger or frustration, has resulted in a "23 percent reduction in total use of force and an 11 percent reduction in officer injury over several years, on top of reducing racial disparities" (<https://www.vox.com/2020/6/1/21277013/police-reform-policies-systemic-racism-george-floyd>).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see: Dobbin, F. Kaley, A. (2020). "Why Sexual Harassment Programs Backfire" *Harvard Business Review*. May-June 2020. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2020/05/why-sexual-harassment-programs-backfire>

<sup>4</sup> Katzenbach, J.R., Steffen, I., Kronley, C. (2021). "Cultural Change that Sticks." *Harvard Business Review*. July-August 2012. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2012/07/cultural-change-that-sticks>