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Designer Deviance: Enterprise and Deviance in Cultural Change Programs

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Keywords

change, culture, deviance, Myers-Briggs, organizational development

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Designer Deviance

Enterprise and Deviance in Culture Change Programs

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Abstract

This paper explores the value of investigating cultural change programs as exercises in engineering deviance. It does so through a case study of an organizational development (OD) cultural change program at Sprogwheels, a large Australian corporation. Drawing on and extending the classic work of Becker (1966), the paper details how the program combined a moral crusade against what it sought to have labelled as the ‘deviant conservatism’ of the existing organizational culture with social support for ‘deviant radicalism’, in the form of a counter-cultural, self-enterprising, set of middle managers promoting corporate change. The paper explores the complex and contradictory ideas of deviance that are deployed in such programs, and examines the implications of a deviance analysis for an improved understanding of the dynamics of cultural change.

1. Introduction

Managerialist and pluralist approaches to the critical analysis of culture change programs dominate the literature on the management of cultural change (Morgan and Sturdy, 2000). Critical attention is focused on the failures and limitations of such programs, condemning their inefficiencies and dubious ethics (Pettigrew, 1985; Schaffer and Thompson, 1992; Dunphy and Stace, 1988; Dawson, 1994; Buchanan and Badham, 1999). Others adopt a broader view seeking to develop a more sociological understanding of the origins, dynamics and effects of such programs – whether as ‘fads’, ‘rhetorics’, ‘quasi-religious movements’, or forms of ‘identity regulation’. (Barley and Kunda, 1992; Adler and Borys, 1996; Turnbull, 2001b; Grint, 1997; Benders and Van Veen, 2001; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to improving our sociological understanding of cultural change programs by examining them as enterprises in engineering *deviance*. This analysis is not intended to supplant other sociological approaches, as change programs have multiple dimensions and are influenced by a variety of different social conditions. The paper does, however, argue for the value of incorporating a deviance perspective as another frame for investigation. In fact, given that organisational culture change programs are involved in activities traditionally studied by many sociologists of deviance – the creation and application of new rules of behaviour, or codes of right and wrong (Becker, 1966: 145) – it is surprising that a systematic application of the insights

from the deviance literature to the analysis of culture change in organizations has not already occurred.

One example of this neglect is that past sociological studies of moral panics have tended to characterise them as highly personalised and deep social value based movements, in explicit contrast to such 'economic' or 'utilitarian' activities as those carried out by organizations (Thompson, 1997). Such a view shows, however, a very limited understanding of the nature of organizational change programs. Similar to many campaigns against deviance, organizational change programs are often an active (Cornwall and Linders, 2002) component of socially constructed 'moral panics' about threats (rapid change, best practice competitors, increased competition etc.), and involve stereotyping and attacking 'folk devils' that are held responsible either for the threat itself or the organization's inability to cope with that threat (rigid bureaucratic structures, resistant middle managers, irresponsible unions, and so on). Management fads and change programs, as solutions to such problems, are far more deeply imbued with strongly held cultural values and quasi-religious exhortations than simple contrasts between personalised/value based and economic/utilitarian programs suggest. They are often far more akin to what Becker (1966) describes as 'moral crusades' against 'deviant' behaviour, promoting a social philosophy and set of values as an absolute ethic, a kind of holy mission. This has been exemplified, for example, in analyses of the American frontier ethos imbued in business process reengineering (BPR) (Grint, 1994) and the activities of 'evangelists', 'preaching the gospel', and 'souls of fire' in innovation and change programs (Stjernberg and Phillips, 1993; Beatty and Gordon, 1991), as well as the

quasi-religious nature of management development programs (Turnbull, 1999, 2001a; 2001b) and the role of visionaries and zealots in establishing OD ‘movements’ (Griffiths and Dunphy, 2001).

This paper explores the value of a deviance approach to organisational change through a case study analysis of the social dynamics of deviance construction and reconstruction in an organizational development (OD) style change program in a large Australian company (Sprogwheels). As documented in the case study, organisational culture change programs involve managerial groups selectively presenting, foregrounding and stigmatising features of the established organizational culture as now defunct and ‘deviant’. This condemnation of what is termed in the paper ‘deviant conservatism’ is, however, often accompanied by two alternative views of deviance. Firstly, the counter responses by adherents to the existing organizational culture, who seek to negatively label the promoters and converts of such campaigns as the true ‘outsiders’. Secondly, the employment of strategies by promoters of the culture change program to instil in its supporters, the converts to the crusade, a sense of themselves as an heroic vanguard, as ‘deviant radicals’, *positively* transgressing defunct and repressive cultural norms. The argument of this paper is that it is the interaction between such conflicting views of deviance, and the attempt by enterprising groups to make alternative definitions ‘stick’, that constitutes the dynamics of deviance in cultural change programs.

In arguing and illustrating this case, the paper draws strongly on what is possibly one of the finest sociological contributions to the analysis of deviance: the classical application

of the interactionist approach by Becker (1966) in his work *Outsiders*. Given the quite unwarranted scepticism that is often directed towards a resuscitation of ‘classics’ in organizational studies, and, additionally, the traditional criticisms made of symbolic interactionism, this choice requires some justification. Becker’s approach has been used (and developed upon) in this paper for four main reasons. First, the activities, achievements and problems of the OD program developers at Sprogwheels bear a remarkable similarity to the experiences that Becker (1966) documented as characteristic of the social dynamics of deviance more generally. Of most significance is the similarity between the OD program developers’ actions and the activities undertaken by *moral entrepreneurs* in moral crusades seeking to negatively label and stigmatise ‘deviant’ activities, and, the similarity between the experiences of the OD program in its attempts to positively label and support a set of so-called ‘deviant’ change agents and Becker’s view of the conditions supporting *deviant career paths*. Second, by adopting the interactionist ‘labelling’ approach, whereby deviance is regarded as a socially constructed label (‘stigmatised labelling’) rather than a pre-given social fact (‘norm violation’) (Dotter, 2002), the analysis is able to avoid the more or less crude functionalist view of workplace deviance (as theft, computer fraud, embezzlement, vandalism, sabotage etc.) that continues to dominate the literature in the field (Robinson and Bennett, 1997). The labelling approach makes it possible for the analysis to capture the ambiguities over, and conflicting interpretations of, deviance, and the multiple interests involved in such characterisation (Bruce, 1999: 38; Downes and Rock, 1998).

Third, following a symbolic interactionist labelling approach to deviance traditionally applied within the classical Chicago School focus on offbeat, dirty or minority occupations ('nuts and sluts' tradition) (Watson, 1997) can help to reframe research on organizational change programs in a way that draws on broader concepts and sources of data on cultural change – something that is essential for a vital and expanding field of cultural studies. Finally, the traditional view that such analyses are 'weak on power' can be addressed by integrating the insights provided with broader considerations of power and structural context. Most importantly, the traditional focus of the approach on interpretation and interaction can help critical sociology to develop a more rigorous and sophisticated approach to agency. In this regard, not only has the merging of symbolic interactionist and post-structuralist theory been advocated by proponents of 'late modern interactionist' studies (Katovich and Reese, 1993; Gagne and Tewkesbury, 1998), it has also been specifically merged in detailing key themes to be addressed in the analysis of deviance (Dotter, 2002) and organizational change programs (Garrety, Badham, Morrigan, Rifkin and Zanko, forthcoming).

2. Organizational Development at Sprogwheels

Sprogwheels is a large established Australian company that has traditionally displayed many of the features identified by Gouldner (1954) and Ezzamel, Willmott and Marchington, 2001) as an 'indulgency pattern' in its relationship with its employees. Enjoying captive markets, import protection and comfortable profits, it has been paternalistic in character, paid above average wages and salaries for the region, and often

been described as displaying many of the characteristics of a large scale public bureaucracy. In recent years, however, international competition has increased, the company has gone through traumatic periods of labour reduction, and the parent company has divided, establishing Sprogwheels as a more narrowly focused independent company in a difficult international marketplace. In an attempt to improve its overall efficiency and competitiveness, the company has initiated a number of interventions to transform its traditional bureaucratic structure and culture.

One influential consultancy report to senior management, by a group of OD consultants commissioned by the CEO, presented what was to become a widely shared view of the ‘problems’ with the traditional organizational culture. While seeking to praise the ‘positive’ dimensions of the traditional culture, the document also challenged what it saw as:

- ‘rigidity’ that threatened creativity’,
- ‘denial’ of problems in time honoured practices,
- ‘managing through systems’ rather than through a ‘values’ approach, resulting in an inability to relax control and empower employees,
- use of a ‘spectrum of exclusions’ that indicated a deep commitment to sameness, effectively excluding differences in dress, sex, nationality and sexual preference,
- a belief in its own knowledge and control that did not acknowledge uncertainty or allow risk taking, and precluded learning from failures or successes
- restricted communication that had to be conducted through superiors, was often downwards, and did not allow expressions of feeling and emotion, and

- an ethics and commitment to corporate image in which simply ‘being seen’ to be efficient, upstanding and ethical was more important than actually being so

In close collaboration with a set of consultants, the organizational development (OD) group established a cultural change program designed to change these assumptions and patterns of behaviour. As outlined by one OD manager,

“Previous programs had addressed the ‘rational’ side of change, with little effect. This program was not about systems, structures and processes. It went ‘below the green line’,ⁱ delving into values and emotions surrounding such things as identity, relationships, information and communication.” (Mick)

While formally described as ‘leadership training’,

“The course was never really about leadership, it was not intended to be. We just used this opportunity as a basis for doing what we wanted to do, to achieve a change in the culture. The idea was to energise a sufficient critical mass to change the culture....” (Mick)

In outline, the format established was a traditional OD one intended to ‘unfreeze’ the existing culture by creating a series of ‘T Group’ style workshopsⁱⁱ. In order to overcome ‘defensive reasoning’ (Argyris and Schon, 1974), these were designed, as Lewin put it, ‘to bring about deliberately an emotional stir-up’ in order to ‘break open the shell of complacency and self-righteousness’ (Lewin, 1951: 228-229). Every few months, a new intake of managers and other professional staff from different levels of the hierarchy and different areas in the company were brought together for two weeks at an off-site

location. The aim was to establish a version of what OD has described as ‘drastic unfreezing’ environments, designed to combat the anxiety of changing (‘anxiety 1’) by increasing the fear of not changing (‘anxiety 2’). This occurred through the creation of an environment in which participants were physically and intellectually distanced from their traditional social supports, encouraged to view their habitual ways of behaving as unworthy, and rewarded for behaving in new ways (Schein, 1968; Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson, 2001: 380-381). As participants commented,

“they make you confront things and that’s scary” (Sue), “it becomes very hard. You start looking at yourself and saying, “Shit, maybe I really am a bit more of a dickhead than I thought I was” (Samuel). and “I’ve been converted or the chip’s been programmed or whatever...” (Joe)

Making extensive use of psychological knowledge and techniques, emotionally confronting recollections of real-life incidents at work and at home, role plays and introductions to neurolinguistic programming and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the facilitators pushed participants into self-examination and confession, and explorations of relationships in ways that clashed strongly with the established ‘non-feeling’ corporate culture.

“It was obvious those who did not let down their front, and did not get involved. For example, in the session discussing a major event that had had an impact on you, one person said ‘when my budgerigar died’. The consultants began to get more and more aggressive towards people like that who did not buy in, and a small minority never did.” (Ross)

Unlike many programs of this type, this program survived for some time (1994 – 2001) and put over 1000 managers through the process. In an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the program's nature and effects, the research team conducted in depth interviews with program participants (25 transcribed interviews in 2000/2001). In addition, numerous less formal interviews were carried out between 1996 and 2002 through, firstly, conversations and discussions with program developers and critics made possible by a formal 6 year research collaboration between the university and the plant and, secondly, personal discussions and correspondence with managers and employees at one 500 person site within the larger plant as part of a 5 year participant observation study of cultural change.

3. Deviance by Design: The Critique of Deviant Conservatism at Sprogwheels

“Very dictatorial, autocratic, rough, barge-through, piss-em-off, all the words were bad.... I think that I'd actually been playing a role for all the years I'd been at Sprogwheels beforehand. I've often described it to people like—I took the mask off. People said I'd changed, but I don't think I did. I just became me.... I used to be one of the heroes of that old style.” Robert.

3.1 The Critique of Deviant Conservatism

Many such culture change programs adopt a planned approach that draws simple between an undesirable existing 'organizational culture' ('bureaucratic', 'rigid', 'rule governed', 'control oriented', 'coercive', 'fear based', 'blame oriented', 'defensive', 'weak', etc.) with an idealised future 'corporate culture' ('normative', 'purpose driven', 'values

based', 'commitment based', 'learning', 'strong', and so on) (Anthony, 1994). The traditional codes of conduct that were previously regarded as 'normal' ('efficient', 'doing a good job', 'responsible' etc.) are now presented as 'deviant' ('inefficient', 'rigid', 'uncooperative', 'irresponsible', 'corrupt' etc.). They then attempt to 'unfreeze' the existing culture. Organisational members are exhorted to expunge the deviant behaviours (that are now out of alignment with the new 'needs' of the organization), and remove the folk devils (that 'resist' change by promulgating or defending such behaviours). They are also asked to support the new entrepreneurial change initiators (change leaders, agents, champions etc.) in cooperative efforts to bring about the new 'designer culture' staffed by a new breed of designer employees (Casey, 1996; Thompson and Warhurst, 1997).

The intention is that 'by consistently promoting certain norms, values and beliefs, other cognitive and behavioural dispositions which the organization has defined as 'deviant' will disappear.' (Brown, 1998: 166) This is similar to other moral crusades against minority 'deviants' such as soccer hooligans, drug users, terrorists etc. A positive vision is given of how the group should behave, and opinion and action mobilised against those who 'deviate' from this vision. In this case, however, the moral crusaders have to present the status quo, and conservative defenders of that status quo, as the 'deviants'. What could be called 'deviant conservatism', a failure to 'move with the times' and 'falling behind' is the focus of their stigmatisation. As part of this enterprise, the crusaders develop a positive 'vision' of where the organization 'ought' to be, a 'fear of the status quo', and a clear view of model 'best practice' organizations, such that perpetuating past behaviour appears in the modern context to be immoral, irresponsible and out of touch

with 'new' emerging patterns of 'normal' behaviour. In so doing, the new 'leaders of change' (Kotter, 1996) are involved in a complex process of emphasising and stressing the positive nature of some elements of the traditional culture (need to be competitive and survive, pride in economic success and fear of the consequences of failure, ideals of organizational commitment and good work etc.) and mobilising these against other elements that they frame in a negative fashion (e.g. authoritarian hierarchies, rigid job demarcations, failure to generate and use employee's knowledge and motivation etc.).

While condemning previously accepted codes of conduct as now 'abnormal' and 'deviant', numerous attempts are made to portray those actively 'resisting' change as a deviant minority similar to other groups involved in forms of workplace deviance such as sabotage and absenteeism.' In Northern Factory, Ezzamell, Willmott and Worthington (2001: 1075) quote the Training Manager who was critical of a resistant 'small group', "we have some really good people who are being held back by the 'they're out to screw us brigade', the cynics, who know what they're doing, who know how to whip up the rest of the skilled men about this kind of thing'. In Sprogwheels, one OD consultant put forward his 'bell curve' model of resistance, whereby 10% are enthusiastic, 80% are generally followers, and 10% actively resist and will 'never change'. One shopfloor operator responded, 'the diagram is fine, but it is more like 90% who will actively resist!'.

A key dimension of culture change programs is, therefore, the attempt to impose a negative deviance label on pervasive features of the organizational culture that are

presented as antiquated, counter-productive and non-aligned with the contemporary needs of the business. Becker (1966) identifies five sets of enterprising agents promoting such moral crusades (see Table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

3.2 The Sprogwheels Case

Senior management at Sprogwheels appeared more like Becker's (1966) 'self-interested allies' than crusading reformers. While the CEO was greatly impressed by the early impact that the program had on the managers who went through it, both he and other senior managers were widely perceived as not having fully 'bought in' to the program. As one workshop participant commented,

... there is still, I feel, a lack of change in behaviour in our upper management to reflect that. And that was blatantly obvious on one of the days we were at the course. At one of the sessions, people from very senior management within [the organization] are invited to come and talk to the group. One of the guys there was the head HR person [...] He was right into the measurement of people, right into defining people's roles in a very metric way, I suppose. For an HR guy he seemed more like an accountant. Certainly, he came across, as lacking any people-type, not skills, but compassion I suppose... I couldn't help but feel that here's a guy that—Maybe something within him feels there's a need for it, and he's saying the right things but his actions aren't following through on what he's saying. (Simon)

The lack of clear and consistent enthusiasm for the change from senior management at Sprogwheels was later to have an influence on the degree of commitment exercised by various levels of line management (Becker's 'rule enforcers'). As one initially enthusiastic proponent of the program, (who later became sceptical) commented,

"Looking at the Fortune 500 companies over the last few decades, 40% of those who were there 20 years ago are no longer there. There must be something that stops them from changing with the times. I sometimes think it is the fact that those who get to the top of the company are those who are good at politics not other things. As a plant manager, you can try to keep up with changing markets and technology, or you can spend time involving yourself in politics. If you spend the time on real change projects, you don't have time for the other. But then you suffer. The course only addressed one level, the 'top 100' haven't attended the course. Those of us who attended the workshops, got enthusiastic, and spent out time on cultural change projects, we end up being shafted. Those who play the politics are those who get ahead. And the top 100 have not changed. "(John)

As Becker (1966) outlines, the exercise of initiative and enterprise by 'rule enforcers' (in Sprogwheels case, line managers in technical and operational roles) plays a key role in implementing and enforcing new rules of behaviour. The lack of enthusiasm on the part of senior management had a direct impact on these 'enforcers'. They were generally not very supportive of the change activities of workshop participants returning from the program with a general brief to 'change things'. As one observer commented,

'We have had enough of these management fads, the BOHICA (Bend Over Here It Comes Again) cycle. This was meant to be something new, but I am not sure that the managers on the ground

really bought in. When those returning from the leadership course came up against barriers, there were not enough managers prepared to support them and take them on.” (Tom).

In between the espousal of a new fundamental set of values, and the inevitably selective sanctioning of new rules by the organization’s ‘enforcers’, lies the task of creating workable new sets of rules of behaviour. As Becker (1966: 152) comments “When it comes to drawing up specific rules...he (the moral crusader) frequently relies on the advice of experts...the moral crusader, at some point in the development of his crusade, often requires the service of a professional who can draw up the appropriate rules in an appropriate form...(the) crusader himself is often not concerned with such details. Enough for him that the main point has been won; he leaves its implementation to others. By leaving the drafting of the specific rule in the hands of others, the crusader opens the door for many unforeseen influences.”

At Sprogwheels, this task was actively fulfilled by the OD group, consisting of a relatively small department closely linked with one consultancy firm. This group transformed general critiques of the old culture into a highly sophisticated attempt to translate new values into specific rules of behaviour to be adopted in the new organization. One of the main techniques for achieving such a translation was the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).

The MBTI classifies people into 16 different personality types, according to their preferences along 4 dimensions: degrees of Extroversion (E) versus Introversion (I), Sensing (S) versus Intuition (N), Thinking (T) versus Feeling (F), Judging (J) versus

Perceiving (P) (Briggs Myers, 1998). The MBTI was used within Sprogwheels as a subtle way of persuading employees of the validity, legitimacy and usefulness of the new values and rules of conduct promoted by OD (internal commitment and self-responsibility, self-learning and improvement, openness and honesty in interpersonal relations etc.). While the ‘metaphysical pathos’ against bureaucracy of OD-type philosophies would lead them to naturally side against the ‘ISTJ’ type (the more rational, rule-driven, bureaucratic personality identified by the consultants as the traditional Sprogwheels cultural type) and with the ‘ENFP’ type (the more emotional, value driven, enterprising person previously seen by the consultants as having been stigmatised by the Sprogwheels culture), the value of the ISTJ type was also emphasised in the culture change workshops and handbooks. The MBTI was employed more as a conceptual Trojan horse to enable ISTJ individuals to recognize the value of the ENFP-style personality types, skills and activities in the organization.

The MBTI was the self-analysis and self-discipline technique promoted in the workshops that was most widely mentioned as being valuable:

It’s amazing, you know, when you talk to people back here, you just compare the different types. The first question you’re asked when you get back, is “What’s your Myers-Briggs Personality Type?” and you can understand then why people behave like they do. And I suppose that has been a pretty significant development at work. Once upon a time you would say “That bloke’s just a dick head. He doesn’t know what’s going on”—arrogant, rude, blah blah blah. But now you can almost have a guess at his Myers-Briggs type and you can understand it. He’s not really rude and arrogant. It’s just the way he operates and that’s fine, that’s good. You just need to be aware of that when you talk to different people. (Steve)

Another widespread comment was, however, the fact that the workshops did not extend this knowledge of self and others into more specific information and advice on 'what to do' back in the workplace. As one participant commented,

"It left you in the air. The workshop was about understanding your self, but people questioned what was of value to the company.... The MBTI helped you in one area of your life, but there was nothing about what to do in other areas. That was what people wanted more of." (Ross)

This lack of translation of general values or personality classifications into specific contextualised rules of behaviour was often considered a fundamental stumbling block in implementing the new codes of conduct.

I found the course sort of interesting, but I think the usefulness of the course has gone over time as there's no follow up. You just don't go on the course and find suddenly you can use the techniques automatically. You learn a bit about yourself, and you've been given a few little techniques on how to modify your behaviour so that it doesn't affect your outcomes, that you're trying to do in your job. I'd have to honestly say a lot of people have probably gone back to the way they were before. There have been a few people that have changed (Sally).

Aware of such problems, the OD group initiated a number of follow up courses more directed towards supporting workplace teams to carry out change projects, and has supported a number of transformational workplace redesign activities. In the words of an OD manager and a line manager,

“We have provided the ‘seeds’, but you could say they have often not fallen on ‘fertile ground’, so now we have some transformational projects designed to help ‘till the soil’.” (Mick)

“We have been setting up a series of projects to spread the word. I see it as spreading a virus, infecting those we come into contact with.” (Peter)

4. Design by Deviants: The Promotion of Deviant Radicalism at Sprogwheels

4.1 The Promotion of Deviant Radicalism

During the course of a culture change programs such as that at Sprogwheels, multiple and shifting set of deviance labels and evaluations are likely to emerge as different individuals and groups struggle to impose and gain support for their view of how the organization should change. This phenomenon of alternative definitions and evaluations of deviant behaviour is commonly recognised in the deviance literature. As Heckert, (2002: 468) argues, “The same behavior and conditions can result in either positive or negative evaluations, or both simultaneously. Many innovative artists are often seen as disruptive and immoral by defenders of ‘high culture’ while being praised by their friends and posterity as ‘great’ artists; gifted children are negatively evaluated by their peers yet positively evaluated by parents and teachers; gang members who engage in a drive-by shooting may be positively evaluated by their fellow gang members and negatively evaluated by the legal system, and so on.

Thus, while the corporate culture, as promoted by the change program crusaders, attempts to stigmatise pervasive elements of the traditional organizational culture as ‘deviant’, individual and group adherents to the old culture may respond in like terms – condemning the values, practices and converts of the new program as ‘deviating’ from desirable established organizational norms and practices. As illustrated in the quote from the Training Manager of Northern Factory, these opponents of the change may seek to ‘whip up’ an opposing moral crusade, this time *against* the new corporate culture espoused by the change program. The result, as Turnbull observed (2001a: 5), many middle managers are unwilling to ‘play the game’ of aligning their personal development with the injunctions of culture change programs, for “fear of being ‘deviant’ and the subsequent consequences, thus leading to a preference for ‘play acting’ or ‘surface acting’” (also see Mangham, 1986; Mangham and Overington, 1987).

In recognition of this phenomenon, OD style culture change programs seek to add another group to the ‘cast of characters’ (Buchanan and Storey, 1997) outlined by Becker (1966) – a disciplined cohort of middle management ‘believers’ or ‘disciples’, who then ‘cascade’ (Anthony, 1994) the message down to other employees. The Sprogwheels culture change program, set out to establish such a cohort, and as part of this process sought to create a *positive* view of deviance from the established culture. In the words of one of the program developers,

“We were deliberately creating a set of deviants, a counter-culture” (Mick)

The program's attempt to portray deviance in positive terms contradicts the dominant usage of the term deviance, which has connotations of negative divergence from agreed group norms. In an overview of negative and positive approaches to deviance, however, Heckert (2002), argues for the usefulness of analysing two acknowledged 'positive' types of deviance: *positive deviance* and *deviance admiration*. By positive deviance, Heckert means 'overconformity' to positively evaluated group norms e.g. altruists, good neighbours, saints, attractive people etc. who are all viewed as deviating from the norm yet praised for this deviation. In contrast, Heckert defines deviance admiration, as deviance that is positively evaluated because of, or in spite of, the fact that the activities so described 'underconform' to group norms e.g. indulging in criminality is sometimes not only allowed but also actively praised in some contexts as heroic. Heckert refers to examples of deceit and killing sanctioned in wartime, and the heroic portrayal of characters such as Robin Hood, Bonnie and Clyde and Ned Kelly. Of most immediate relevance for our understanding of designer deviance approaches, has been a long standing tradition of deviance admiration for 'rebels', "those who break the norms of one era are often positively evaluated by a future generation for the fact that their heroism is rooted in their willingness to deviate from past societal cultural standards that are later perceived as needing change. Merton (1968: 238) explicitly explained that the rebel, revolutionary, nonconformist, individualist, or renegade of one era is often elevated into the cultural hero of another era.... conformists can come to be negatively evaluated and deviantized over time. Yet, sinners, rebels, misfits, mal contents, aliens, outsiders, and even criminals are sometimes admired and can become heroes of a later generation; heroes that endure over time and stand the test of time." (Heckert, 2002: 465)

OD culture change programs such as that undertaken at Sprogwheels can be seen as deliberately stimulating deviance admiration for underconformance to the established organizational culture, and creating a positive view of what could be called ‘deviant radicalism’ (in contrast to their simultaneous critique of ‘deviant conservatism’!). In contrast to rationalistic top down managerial change strategies, this involves instilling an appropriate ‘enterprise of the self’ (Rose, 1990) amongst middle managers, using a battery of ‘techniques of the self’ to convince and support them to seek personal fulfilment by continually developing and applying the new rules of conduct to *themselves* and their relationships with their colleagues. As we shall see, a central component of Sprogwheels OD program was the use of the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) to this effect.

While Rose emphasises the importance of the application of such techniques in workshop environments such as that employed at Sprogwheels, Grey (1994) argues that this analysis should be supplemented by an investigation of the conditions supporting the “willingness of subjects to discipline themselves” (Grey, 1994: 487). Grey relates such willingness to the ability of organizational members to identify their new behaviours as instrumental for their career development. The problems of the Sprogwheels program in sustaining the ‘willingness’ of middle managers to conform to the desired new values and behaviour appears to confirm Grey’s argument. While the OD workshops were widely seen as highly effective in initiating a transformational ‘enterprise of the self’ in line with the espoused values of the OD group, the provision of the ‘career paths’ necessary to

support long term sustained deviance from the established organisational culture was commonly regarded as partial and patchy. The discussion of the Sprogwheels case will examine this phenomenon using Becker's (1966) analysis of the typical 'deviant career' path followed by members of deviant groups who have survived over time. The analysis will explore the degree to which the conditions created at Sprogwheels provided a valuable and meaningful passage through the phases identified by Becker (1966): sporadic or tolerated rule breaking acts; the experience of being labelled deviant; the enjoyment and perceived value of deviance over time; and the establishment of a deviant sub-group or counter-culture.

4.2 The Sprogwheels Case

4.2.1 Workshops as Sporadic or Tolerated Rule Breaking Acts

Participation in the Sprogwheels OD workshops can be viewed as the initial stage in the breaking of rules, something that regularly occurs in organizations, and is often understood and tolerated. As Becker emphasised, people in all kinds of social arrangements regularly break rules for one reason or another but are not labelled as 'deviants'. The managers who participated in the workshops were introduced to an experience, and interpretation of that experience, that led them to attempt to be more honest and open with their peers, superiors and subordinates in both their actions and feelings *during the workshop*. At this time, they became more tolerant, even respectful, of ENFP type personalities and behaviours. This initial transgression of the 'feeling rules' of the organization was created and reinforced by the artificial sub-culture generated in the workshops. Managers were strongly pushed into forms of self-

examination, self-disclosure and confession, and explorations of relationships that strongly contradicted the established ‘non-feeling’ ISTJ culture. This phenomenon occurred, however, *during the workshop*. ‘Going back’ to the workplace was another experience.

4.2.2 ‘Going Back’: Experiences of being Labelled Deviant

Company personnel regularly attended workshops, and their colleagues were used to people returning with enthusiasm for the ‘latest fad’, only to lose that enthusiasm over time. As one manager commented,

“We have become experts in neutralising those with enthusiasm. The comments are always that ‘he will soon learn’ or ‘he will settle down’.” (Ross2)

Some workshop participants subsequently gave up on the ‘deviant’ activities that they had been introduced to, and indulged in, during the workshops, regarding them as too costly, stressful, non-rewarding etc. As one such participant commented,

‘It was like coming back from the mountain with the tablets of wisdom. They all said, how have you been brainwashed? What has happened to you? I tried to change things, and behave differently. I gave up my supervisor’s locker to an operator. But the other supervisor’s just thought I was weak as piss. I expect some things have changed, but it’s hard.’ (Joe),

Others persisted, however, some finding the experience of acting in the new way rewarding and of enduring value.

“I found when you did come back you do feel like a minority to some extent. But at the same time I felt an empowerment in myself to do things that *I* can do, to at least raise issues that I see that need to be raised in my forum to make things happen – to try to change the way we are.” (Mark)

4.2.3 Enjoying and Perceiving the Value of Deviance

Despite the diversity of views about the ability of the workshops to create sustained patterns of deviance, one of the most common themes was what was perceived to be the continuing value of the MBTI for self-development and improvement in relationships.

It increased my understanding of myself so that I haven't exploded since then, which I used to do on a regular basis—slamming the doors or throwing things. [...] So I was aggressive—Now I get the space calmly. I don't get aggressive. ... You don't send the e-mail straight away. You stop and think. You don't return the phone call straight away. You stop and think. OK, sometimes you still send the e-mail straight away. But it's taking that time out to—”Why did I react like that? Why has my brain just exploded? Hang on a minute”. It calms you down. That makes a huge difference to your interpersonal relationships... (Sue)

One of the major impacts of the workshops was the tailored use of the MBTI as a self-analytical tool that allowed the type of positive experiences that act to sustain deviance. Rather than simply criticising the bureaucratic engineering personality types (the ISTJs), the MBTI tool praised the qualities of these types while, *at the same time*, having a bias towards the conduct of more ENFP type activities (attention to feelings and relationships, creative non fearful approach to problem solving, critical self reflection etc.). This was made possible in three ways: by using a rational ‘scientific’ model as a conceptual Trojan Horse to legitimate discussion of feelings; by arguing for greater ‘balance’ in a healthy

organization (the need for more ENFP types and activities), and by supporting commitments to greater ‘diversity’ in assisting teamwork, cooperation, and social responsibility. It was, in this sense, an influential technology of the self that was not just imposed upon organizational members in order to transform their identity but was a tool that enabled those brought up in a rational bureaucratic culture to legitimate and support a change in their self-perception and behaviour.

They talk about how the below the green line type experiences are occurring -- the cultures, and the people, and I guess just really understanding them. We're still focussed very much on tools, systems and procedures —things above the green line. We've lost sight of some of the cultural things. It realigned my thinking. [.....] Some of the techniques and toolbox type things in terms of being able to read people's behaviours. Are they being open and honest or are they not? They were valuable tools. There are cultural things that really stand out—building the teams before you get into some of the activities, building relationships with the people, and the dynamics of people (Stan)

I found it was really good. It's just more learning about myself and why I behave like I do. Before I went on the course, I used to think ‘What is wrong with me?’ but now you can read about it every day. And when I can read about my type every day and it's normal, so I know why I think like I do and why I behave like I do. It's good. (Steve)

4.2.4 Establishing a Deviant Sub-Group or Counter-Culture

Several of the participants interviewed commented on the creation of a deviant sub-group, emphasising that having attended the workshop was like,

‘an initiation into a secret society’ (Peter).

They stressed the importance of networking immediately after the workshop,

“There weren’t a lot of people around in my immediate group that had been to the workshop. so you didn’t have a big network for support. You needed a period of debriefing to talk about the impacts. It’s good to have some people around who can take time to sit down with them afterwards to make sure that you are OK – see how they’re travelling essentially.” (John)

Some emphasised

‘getting the group together again...like a refresher course – to keep the momentum going.’ (Steve), and another explained

if you do it once you only pick up a little bit of it, and if you don't revisit it, it drifts away. And if you want to actually get the behaviour changes being really reinforced then you’ve probably got to go back in some way or other every—it might be even every six months, and it might be for a fairly long time, but you should keep going back. (Sean)

While others stressed the importance of networking over time,

“I try and keep reasonably good networks. I still maintain those networks. I guess that was another learning through the training. I’d make a discipline of ringing someone once a week to find out how they are, and what they have been doing. It think it’s good, but you have to work at it.’ (Jack)

Others believed that this could be achieved through ongoing individual contacts with ‘walk/talk’ partners from the workshop (Sebastian), or even the continuing help of HR facilitators in group workplace change projects.

I think collectively we've realised it's a really important thing and it's a journey. We know what we're looking for but we still have to ask for some help. (Stan)

In most cases, however, participants commented on the difficulty of sustaining such group activities over time, and the negative effects that this had.

One respondent emphasised the weaknesses in the deviant sub-group *because* of the attempt to portray them as a 'positive' set of deviants,

"We were set up as a group of deviants, radicals, working outside the established hierarchy. This was one of the problems; it attracted radicals who just wanted to be that. And we found out how strong the hierarchy is, the incredible number of ways it can preserve itself. Now there may be more concern to set up something that has more formal legitimacy." (Peter)

4.2.5 Deviant Careers and Traditional Careers

A final factor intertwined with progress along the deviant career path outlined by Becker (1966), were more traditional career ambitions i.e. whether or not promotion up the company's career ladder would be enhanced or undermined by working according to the new rules of conduct. Prior to the workshops, attendees were more or less subtly prepared for what was to come. Each of the divisions were allocated room for and asked to finance 12 participants, and selection to go on the course was perceived as a sign of career success. The process was highly secretive, partly imposed by the confidential nature of activities within the workshops. Previous participants had been encouraged not to talk about the process and had signed agreements not to divulge what had been going

on. The introductory materials did not reveal what actually occurred in the course, while forthcoming participants were quite aware of rumours about its emotionally stressful nature and the existence of cases of mental breakdowns and family break ups for a small number of course attendees.

Outside the workshop, the combination of secrecy and surveillance had a powerful effect. Participants were made aware of senior management's commitment to the program, both by the size of the financial commitment to the courses and the numbers going through and the attendance by senior managers at each workshop as invited speakers. In many cases it was the only opportunity that participants had had to 'rub shoulders' with very senior management over an evening meal and drinks. A number of participants noted of themselves and others that many saw the workshops as a networking opportunity. It was also clear that their division had a positive view of their future career from the very fact that they had been selected to attend the course. However, the degree to which their behaviour during and after the course would be monitored by human resource managers, or their own line managers, was unclear to the participants. Yet this all had an effect on how managers responded in the workshop. As one strong critic of the workshops commented,

“ I walked out onto the road, and was going to leave, but ultimately decided not to. The others stayed, as good company men. It has probably affected my career in the organization, but I don't know, and I don't care. I have only recently joined the company and am not a company citizen. It does not worry me as much as it probably does the others.” (Jim)

A number of participants in the workshops have commented about the way in which particular middle level line managers and human resource personnel have supported the new styles of deviant behaviour, praising, rewarding and promoting those who adopt more of the ENFP type skills and behaviours. On the other hand, a number remarked critically on the fate of these middle managers, and their likelihood of promotion to the higher levels of the company. A charismatic plant manager, a known ENFP and enthusiast for the new style of leadership, was widely seen by his subordinates as having lost out in a bid for a more senior position because he was

‘a threat to the system. It is safe to have him playing about in his patch, where they have control over him if things don’t work out how they want. But it is another thing to actually take what he stands for seriously, and change their behaviour.’ (Ross2)

Yet another,

‘was always known as a ‘hard nosed’ character, but he had a total conversion. He became ‘soft’ and supportive of his people, and his career died. He has now been sidelined.’ (Peter)

6. Conclusion

From a managerialist or pluralist perspective, the above analysis might be seen to suggest ways in which the ‘success’ of culture change programs can be improved. The Sprogwheels case illustrates some of the problems that result as weaknesses or ambiguities in senior management commitment cascade through the ranks of the coalition of moral entrepreneurs. Partially as a result of this phenomenon, the tendency for a

number of middle management converts to gradually lose the faith may be attributed to the failure of the legislators of change to ensure sufficient support for workshop participants 'going back' to the workforce – from sympathetic line managers, through more detailed rules about 'what to do', to the establishment of a 'natural' social infrastructure to support more cohesive group identity and interaction over time.

The main concern of the paper has not, however, been a relatively quick and easy leap into untested prescriptive models for cultural change. It has been more concerned with contributing to a greater degree of sociological understanding of the actual dynamics of such programs and the perspectives and experiences of those involved. In this regard, the analysis has uncovered a more or less *structured ambivalence* in the situation and consciousness of those involved in such designer cultural change programs.

A number of previous sociological analyses of the change to 'strong' value based, purpose driven, high trust, cultures of normative control have detailed the *ambivalent* consciousness of managers and employees living in the 'post-transition' (Casey, 1999; Gabriel, 1999; Kunda, 1992). Others have explored the *structural contradictions* within managerial strategies seeking to establish such regimes. These range from the inherent instability of both 'direct control' and 'responsible autonomy' strategies towards workforce control to the inherent tensions within initiatives that attempt to retain the benefits of 'gesellschaft' organisational techniques (reflecting the 'economizing' principles of industrial and post-industrial societies) while creating 'gemeinschaft' forms of corporate integration (incorporating the 'individualistic' and 'egalitarian' values also

embedded within industrial and post-industrial societies) (Bell, 1973; Badham, 1986; Friedmann, 1977; Barley and Kunda, 1992). In both cases there is a recognition of the uneasy 'unhappy consciousness' of 'pseudo-gemeinschaft' arrangements (Gouldner, 1952; Parker, 2002). Unable to remove the anomie, inequality and alienation embedded in contemporary modes of organization, they are also equally incapable of exorcising the romantic, individualistic and egalitarian values that reject the personal costs of such forms of organization and seek new forms of community.

What the analysis undertaken in this paper adds to such discussions is a greater understanding of the structurally embedded ambivalent consciousness of participants in designer change programs – managers and employees who are caught in a situation of discursive and practical conflict between competing discourses of deviance: firstly, between one condemning the established organisational ethos and codes of conduct as 'deviant', and the other criticising those attempting to bring about such a change as the 'outsiders'; and, secondly, the alternative conflicting, and sometimes confusing, evaluations of the deviance identified by such discourses, placing both positive and negative 'spins' on deviance – depending on whether the deviance occurs in regard to norms they support or condemn.

In regard to the latter point, the case study specifically focused on the attempt by the program promoters to instil in the converts or disciples of the program a view of themselves as a valuable and progressive counter-culture. What we did not have time to explore was the counter-response of supporters of the established culture, with their view

of those actively opposing or resisting the program as more or less heroic ‘rebels’. In this case praise was given for refusing to conform to the dictates and fashions of senior management and the social engineering intentions of the OD group. As one such ‘rebel’ (John) offered, when handing the first author a critical book on cult style managerial programs (Singer and Lalich (1995), *Cults in our Midst*), ‘there is a group of us that I could introduce you to, a kind of network, who would be only too glad to give you this alternative view of the program.’

Managers and employees assailed by such programs may be more or less confused by these conflicts and tensions, as they face alternating experiences of approbation and stigmatisation in their movement from one social field or world to another. However, as revealed in the Sprogwheels case, uncertainty and ambivalence amongst such managers and employees may be even more confused than this. Rather than being confronted with two clear competing discourses, each incorporating conflicting positive and negative views of deviance, managers and employees are often less certain about the ‘real’ commitment of the senior management coalition, the strength and sustainability of opposition to the program, and the effect of aligning with one side or another on their formal career or more informal standing in the myriad of organisational sub-cultures. Moreover, new ‘value based’ initiatives, incorporating techniques of the self such as the MBTI, often draw on some values in the existing culture while challenging others. It is rarely a case of simple rejection, and often one of exploiting differences and tensions in what Martin (2002) characterises as ambiguous, shifting and uncertain ‘fragmented’ cultures. Whether or not the political position, and value stance, that they adopt is

conservative or radical, conformist or rebellious, is rarely as clear cut as simplified categorisations might suggest.

The main purpose of this paper has been to develop and use a deviance analysis to help uncover and understand the character of these experiences and processes and how they unfold. If there is one value-laden message that could be derived such a sociological analysis, however, it might be the following. Greater self-understanding, openness and coherence might be gained amongst program promoters, participants and critics if they abandoned oversimplified prescriptive views of identities and experiences in the face of what will inevitably be uncertain, confused and ambivalent change processes.

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‘Crusading Reformers’

Moral crusaders committed to an absolute ethic, view existing rules as inherently evil, see their mission is a holy one, are concerned with ends rather than means, and regard the purpose of the crusade as to help people do what is right and good for them. Often drawn from the upper realms of society (or, in this case, the organization). Often in conflict with experts/legislators and rule enforcers who they see as compromising the pure ideals of the crusade.

‘Self-Interested Allies’

Those who support the crusading reformers as they see the outcome as supporting their own interests

‘Experts and Legislators’

Professionals who draw up the rules to implement the values espoused by the crusading reformers. This allows interpretation and influence by professional interests. They are involved in a protracted series of negotiations and compromises as rules derived from one set of values conflict with those derived from others, the concerns of different interest groups are incorporated, unforeseen consequences of new rules are addressed etc.

‘Crusading Organization’

During the course of a crusade, a crusading organization is created. Once the initial goals of the crusading reformers are achieved, an organisational structure remains that needs to adapt to its new role or find other quests

‘Rule Enforcers’

The new codes of behaviour have to be enforced by those in the population responsible for rule enforcement. Such groups tend to be sceptical about new fads, have imposed upon them more tasks than they can deal with, need to work with and keep the respect of those underneath them, and are in day to day contact (and negotiation) with what they see as the recalcitrance of those they seek to control and the lack of effect of various programs

TABLE 1 MORAL CRUSADERS

Compiled from Becker (1966)

ⁱ Both program developers and participants in the program frequently talked about going ‘below the green line’. This term originated from the use of a diagram developed by the MIT author and consultant Margaret Wheatley. This diagram distinguished between two dimensions of organizational life: the ‘rational’ world of systems, structures and processes (an area focused upon by many traditional performance improvement programs) and the ‘non-rational’ world of information, identity and relationships (the frequently neglected area of emotion and ‘deep’ culture). In an early workshop, one of the program consultants wrote this up as a spatial diagram, with systems, structures and processes at the top, and information, identity and relationships at the bottom. In between these two, he drew a line. As he happened to be holding a green pen at the time, the line was a green one. At that time, and subsequently, people began to refer to ‘going below the green line’ when discussions and actions moved away from a concern with the ‘rational’ world to address what was frequently regarded as the deeper and more basic ‘non-rational’ dimension of organizational life.

ⁱⁱ A T-group is a group session involving 10-12 members and a facilitator meeting for a few days to up to 2 weeks. The interaction of the group members, their actions, reactions and feelings, is the key source of data and learning. Material on communication skills, interpersonal relations, individual personality theory, and group dynamics is often part of the program. Learning objectives are increased competence in interpersonal relationships, self-knowledge, learning how others react to one’s behavior, and how groups operate. (French and Bell, 1999: 244)

ⁱⁱⁱ