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Title: Bricolage as Positive Deviant Behaviour: Overcoming Discontinuous Disruptions to Maintain Organisational Performance

Summary: This paper aims to introduce bricolage as a form of positive deviant behaviour undertaken by employees operating outside of organisational norms in order to overcome unexpected problems. At the individual level, positive deviance and bricolage is a preventative behaviour that is demonstrative of resilience and flexible adaptation at the lower levels of the hierarchical structure. Such behaviours are typically unknown and potentially unrecognised by researchers and managers, yet they contribute to the effective functioning of the organisation and minimise or eliminate disruptions to performance. The practice of bricolage at the operational level prevents issues escalating into a more serious situation and into a problem that has a strategic significance. It is posited that this area is under-explored in the literature and, as such, this paper proposes a research methodology to illuminate bricolage practices within organisations.

Key Words: bricolage; deviant behaviour; organisations; employee; organisational performance.

Track: Organisational Psychology

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Bricolage as Positive Deviant Behaviour: Overcoming Discontinuous Disruptions to Maintain Organisational Performance

Abstract

This paper aims to introduce bricolage as a form of positive deviant behaviour undertaken by employees operating outside of organisational norms in order to overcome unexpected problems where a sense of urgency and/or resource constraints are primary factors. In overcoming unanticipated problems to maintain output and normal functioning, engaging in bricolage is demonstrative of a capacity for resilience (Weick, 1993; Coutu, 2002; Lengnick-Hall and Beck, 2009; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2010) where entities prevail following a negative situation or absorb an adverse condition without experiencing a discontinuous disruption. As such, individuals engaging in bricolage prevent minor issues escalating into more serious problems for the entire organisation such that performance is maintained and unplanned challenges can be managed quickly and effectively with a degree of flexible adaptation.

This article firstly distinguishes between planners (i.e. ‘ingenuer’), bricoleurs and improvisers and secondly, briefly articulates research regarding positive deviance behaviour. This paper considers the link between these behaviours and proposes the existence of these activities at the individual, employee level within the organisation as a potential source of resilience. As a developmental paper, this submission serves as a foundation to generate debate and to engage in further research. It is proposed that the following question will be addressed: How does Bricolage occur as positive deviance at the grass-roots level in organisations?

Introduction

At some point, we have all used a tool or device to complete a task for which the purpose of that tool or device was not designed for. This problem-solving practice is established in the literature and more commonly known as bricolage, which describes solutions to situations that involve temporal constraints and/or resource scarcity. Bricolage is an ability or practice which has received recurrent attention in the business and management literature, most notably entrepreneurship and crisis management. The concept offers an understanding of how solutions might be created in turbulent, novel and dynamic situations.

In order to engage in bricolage, individuals and organisations undertake activities that exist outside of normal practice with the intention to ‘make do’. Consequently, a discontinuous disruption is overcome and performance is maintained albeit potentially at existing or reduced levels. Whilst the extant literature on bricolage focusses on intra/entrepreneurship, the organisation and the situational (i.e. such as an urgent situation, resource scarcity or both), whereby activities are engaged at the management level, businesses and groups, little research has been engaged in the pursuit of bricolage at the individual, employee level. Two seminal papers propose bricolage at the employee level, albeit in groups (Bechky and Okhuysen, 2011) and at the individual level (Weick, 1993). Therefore, the concept of bricolage undertaken at the employee level (i.e. non-managerial) remains under-explored (see Table 1). For example, following the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear facility on 11th March, 2011, it was widely reported through media outlets and subsequent investigatory reports that operators scavenged vehicle batteries (from vehicles damaged by the earlier tsunami) and connected them to the instruments in the control rooms because the back-up diesel generators failed (e.g. National Research Council, 2014). Yet it is apparent that this activity is not articulated in the operator manuals of nuclear power plants. Hence an abnormal situation, created a novel problem requiring a tailored novel solution. Employees therefore engaged in positive deviant

behaviour (Galperin, 2001) because no rules or guidance exist, no protocols are broken but the activity exists outside of the norms of what should be done.

The context of the situation plays a role in employee behaviour as well as the license implicitly granted to employees to operate outside of what is deemed to be normal. In the Fukushima Daiichi example, employees engaged in actions intended for the greater good, however, had the action failed and the instruments were damaged, then this would fall under negative or destructive behaviours. The literature surrounding deviant behaviours separates positive and negative behaviours, but there needs to be more research into whether the outcome was intended (planned) or unintended (unplanned) because the end result can be judged positive or negative, irrespective of the original intention.

Literature Review

Bricolage

An early foundational definition of bricolage is “doing things with whatever is at hand” (Levi-Strauss, 1966 p17). Baker and Nelson (2005 p333) specify bricolage as “making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities”. Bricolage is employed when organisations re-combine their resources to create a solution when things do not go as planned (Wagner, 2000), where temporal constraints are evident and resources are scarce (Halme, Lindeman and Linna, 2012). The practice of bricolage is different from the role of a rational resource planner in that a planner or ingénieur (Levi-Strauss, 1966) diagnoses the resources required and applies them to the event (Cunha, 2005), while the event remains a normal problem. Bricolage begins with an acknowledgement of the resources to hand and then re-combines the existing resources in order to generate a solution (Levi-Strauss, 1966). It should be noted, however, that bricolage should not be considered as the absolute opposite of the ingénieur or planning as responses to situations are placed “somewhere between the two” (Duymedjian and Ruling, 2010 p139).

Bricolage is viewed as an integrated component of the improvisation framework (Gardner, 1973, in Berry and Irvine, 1986; Moorman and Miner, 1998; Weick, 1998; Kamoche, Cunha and Cunha, 2002; Duymedjian and Ruling, 2010; Leone, 2010). Improvisation is the simultaneous conception and execution of action (Miner et al 2001; Kamoche, Cunha and Cunha, 2002) where formulation and implementation occur simultaneously (Crossan, Cunha, Vera and Cunha, 2005) hence improvising occurs during action (Miner et al., 2001) and there is no cessation of activities to consider the best solution to an issue or opportunity. Hence the difference between bricolage and improvisation is temporal availability and expected outcomes. In bricolage, there is temporal availability albeit potentially limited and the outcome is known, whereas improvisation involves the distinct absence of a temporal gap between design and execution and where there is less certainty over the outcome. Therefore, an individual, undertaking bricolage, has time to design an adequate response, to recall previous episodes from a repertoire of routines and to co-ordinate and re-combine those resources already to hand. Bricolage is therefore a design precedes execution (D.P.E.) process (Baker et al, 2003).

The Mann Gulch case study cited by Weick (1993) describes a situation which (according to Weick) is an example of improvisation and bricolage, in which a team of firefighters were faced with a fire in Mann Gulch which was rapidly catching up with them. One member of the team lit a small fire and instructed the others to follow suit, with the intention to lie down in the ashes and to allow the fire pass around them. Three firefighters survived, including the firefighter who lit the escape fire. The other two firefighters hid in a crevasse in a ridge. Here the firefighter who lit the escape fire created a method to survive a fire by using the materials

to hand. Those materials would include tangible and intangible resources, involving a method to light the fire (e.g. matches), the combustible substance (dry grass) and the knowledge of how these elements interact to create a life-saving situation. Although the speed of decision-making suggests a degree of spontaneity consistent with improvisation, the knowledge and theory possessed by the surviving firefighter suggests that the escape fire was lit by design, with a known outcome and the express intention to make do by surviving (given that there was an increased risk of injuries being sustained during the process). To ‘make do’ therefore means to prevail over constraints and limitations rather than seeking a more advantageous objective (Steffens and Senyard, 2009). Moreover, spontaneity would indicate that the firefighter would have to act once the fire was upon him (reaction) whereas this is evidence of bricolage in a time critical situation. The Mann-Gulch case study is a typical example of bricolage at the individual (employee) level. The normal human behaviour when faced with a life-threatening incident is the fight or flight response, doing something else is evidence of deviant behaviour.

Table 1 Empirical Studies of Bricolage; Individual, Organisational, Entrepreneurial

Paper	Bricolage Practice	Ind	Org	Ent
Weick (1993)	Single case of the Mann Gulch Disaster	✓		
Rerup (2001)	Single case study of the Apollo 13 incident		✓	
Baker (2007)	Single case study of a business start up			✓
A Garreau and Ardot (2009)	Single case study of the 2003 heatwave crisis in Paris, France		✓	
Bechky and Okhuysen (2011)	Two case studies involving a SWAT team and a Film Production Crew		✓	
Cartensen (2013)	Single case study of Denmark and the financial crisis		✓	
de Klerk (2015)	21 interviews of entrepreneurs in the creative industries			✓

Positive Deviance

The positive deviance behaviour can be found to be of various forms from helping the co-workers by breaking the organizational rules, to whistle blowing that is performed to be beneficial toward the organization (Dahling et al., 2012). Those behaviours that are generally not positive but which are done with honourable intentions are said to be under the positive behaviour category. Contrary to the belief that individuals are self-interested performers, there are studies that have identified the socially desirable behaviours of the employees, which are beneficial to the co-workers or the organization. The employees can help the co-workers with their tasks and extra effort can be made to complete a job to be a better representative of the organization (Brief & Motowildo, 1986). It has been emphasized that the rule breaking can be pro-social, only if this behaviour helps the organization in an honourable fashion without any individual gain.

Thus the paper aims to explore how bricolage can be seen as part of positive deviance as it lies in the unexplored grey area of the deviance literature where involving in an activity that is not part of the job role would lead to the effective functioning of the organisation. Our contribution therefore lies in this area.

Methodology

We propose to conduct interviews in the healthcare sector because the job roles are narrowly and clearly defined whereby involving in bricolage would be seen as deviance. We will use the random sampling method and focus on front-line employees. They will be contacted by the author to take part in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews at a time and location of their choice. The interviews would last approximately one hour and will be audio-recorded and transcribed professionally. This approach is located in a constructivist interpretivist paradigm where there are multiple, constructed realities which aligns with the exploratory nature of the research. A thematic coding approach will be adopted (Bryman, 2008) where a number of transcripts will be examined to identify key concepts and categories using Nvivo 10 software. Having completed the literature review, we anticipate disseminating our initial findings at the BAM conference in September, 2019.

Expected outcomes

We expect that bricolage, when undertaken by employees, aligns with positive deviance behaviour. The intention of the bricoleur, when faced with a problem (combined with resource constraints and/or temporal limitations) is to fix the issue at hand in order to resume normal organisational functioning. A bricoleur is able to recall a repertoire of routines of previous known fixes and yet is also able to draw on re-combining resources in order to produce a new solution to a new problem. Such behaviour deviates from what is expected of employees, given that employees have narrowly defined job descriptions. However, although the intention is honourable and the outcome works to produce positive deviance, should the outcome fail then this would be deemed to be unintended negative behaviour.

Conclusion

This paper aims to introduce bricolage as a form of positive deviant behaviour undertaken by employees operating outside of organisational norms in order to overcome unexpected problems. Such behaviours are intended for the greater good and to maintain organisational performance, in that challenges can be quickly and effectively overcome such that productivity levels are not disrupted (at best) or minimally disrupted. Bricolage and positive deviant behaviours exist at the individual level and in situations of an operational nature, yet empirical evidence point to cases involving entrepreneurs and novel situations that exhibit a more serious significance for the organisation. At the individual level, positive deviance and bricolage is a preventative behaviour that is demonstrative of resilience and flexible adaptation at the lower levels of the hierarchical structure. It is proposed, therefore that bricolage is not just an activity confined to entrepreneurs and organisational managers/groups and novel urgent situations. Employees also engage in bricolage at the grass roots level of the organisation, and in doing so, they are operating outside of their job descriptions and normal routines to minimise potential disruption and to overcome operational challenges.

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