

Challenging Organisations and Society

reflective hybrids®

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Journal "Challenging Organisations and Society . reflective hybrids® (COS)"

COS is the first journal to be dedicated to the rapidly growing requirements of reflective hybrids in our complex 21st-century organisations and society. Its international and multidisciplinary approaches balance theory and practice and show a wide range of perspectives in and between organisations and society. Being global and diverse in thinking and acting outside the box are the targets for its authors and readers in management, consulting and science.

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Maria Spindler and Gary Wagenheim

Editorial

Positive Deviance: Sparks that ignite systems change

A surprisingly small spark can ignite a combustion process that creates large systems change. Positive deviance is that spark; unusual behaviours combined with the right energy that illuminates brightly enough to create transformation. Our primary goal in this Issue 4.1 of COS is to be that spark for our readers, to inform them of multidisciplinary approaches that enable social systems to make successful and sustainable transformations. Our appreciative assumption is that social systems—groups, organisations, and society—require an awareness of positive deviance dynamics to evolve in new and better ways.

Positive deviance dynamics is typically a “grassroots” self-organising unit, within teams, organisations, networks or society yet often outside the formal structure, that has a different, even contrarian, perspective of the social system. Such deviants can be considered holons that contain all the characteristics of the whole system to which they belong yet operate with an entrepreneurial independence. This autonomy and unique perspective allows them to observe the system’s blindness and realise different solutions. New processes of development that prove successful are often institutionalised by the prevailing system, creating sustainable transformations. In this way, we see positive deviance as a collaborative strength-based alternative process that enables social systems to discover successful transformative processes developed, tested, and operationalised from within.

In response to challenges facing managers and consultants as they cope with the growing demands of a complex global world and an uncertain future, positive deviance offers alternative ways for systems to adapt and thrive. The purpose of this issue is to highlight ways we can better understand positive deviance dynamics to help managers and consultants better support change and development in social systems.

In assembling this collection of articles about positive deviance we asked authors to use a reflective multidisciplinary approach linking theory and practice. We encouraged them to explore aspects of positive deviance including its elements and characteristics, the impact of group dynamics, the conditions that foster its emergence, the role of leadership, and other issues that they discovered in their own theoretical and practical work. Our authors reveal how they define positive deviance and the unique ways they make sense of and use the phenomenon in their theoretical concepts and professional practices as consultants, scientists, educators, and managers.

For this issue authors contributed six articles that focus on social systems groups, organisations, and society.

In “Creating Inclusive Organizations: The OD Consultant as Guerilla Change Agent” Anne Litwin explores her own positive deviance using so-called guerilla approaches with a client to produce both unstated and stated outcomes to create a more inclusive corporate environment for women. Anne reflects on how her own development as a feminist brings focus, commitment and passion to her work on gender equality issues. She shares suggestions for ways others can facilitate similar positive deviance interventions to create sustainable change in their organisations.

In the article “Whole and New. From Creative Impulses to New Structures” Andrea Schüller focus on the interrelation of the interactive body and larger social structures. “Body” and “process” as specific, underlying concepts are presented and extrapolated into organisational life and its challenges in terms of recreation, renewal and wholeness. Responsible creators of organisations might raise awareness and get a taste of how positively reinforcing tiny new sparks lays the groundwork for a shift from external, functional overstimulation to a creative mode.

In their article “Management Plasticity: Neuronal Networking as the Organizing Principle for Enterprise Architecture to Unfold Human Potential and

Creativity” Franz Röösl, Michael Sonntag and Doug Kirkpatrick introduce the concept of management plasticity that challenges the underlying beliefs that shape traditional organisational structures. They illustrate in a case study how the principles allow for development and connectivity, learning and memory, creativity and leadership as well as innovation.

“Emergent Deviance: Development of an Informal Coalition” external consultants Keith Ray and Joan Goppelt explore positive deviance in the case of an informal coalition of middle managers, unsupported by top management, who met regularly to develop new actions for collaboration and leadership development within the organisation. They offer micro-practices for managers and consultants to consider in nurturing similar successful and sustainable positive deviance in their organisations.

In “Consulting on the Edge: Use of Strategies Rooted in Nature” Alice MacGillivray explores how boundary strategies inspired by nature can be positive deviance for change in complex social systems. She suggests that reframing our mechanistic perspective of systems to include a naturalistic perspective will offer alternative strategies to increase the likelihood of facilitating positive deviance toward sustainable organisational change.

Co-leaders as space-providers and invaders for collective development are the focus of “Deviant Leadership in Group-Dynamics Trainings”. Maria Spindler and Ganesh Anantharaman elaborate co-leadership conditions that support awareness-based collective action, co-evolving and embodying one’s own social situation as a whole. The trainer in her/his “leadership function” establishes and fosters a challenging space that invites the participants to co-create the future as collective in the here and now.

With this COS Issue 4.1 we wish you deviant sparks; new ideas that impact you and your social system. May you gain more access to positive deviance and use it for renewal, change, and growth. Keep in mind: sparks can start fires. 😊

About the Authors

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The future is an unknown garment that invites us to weave our lives into it. How these garments will fit, cover, colour, connect and suit us lies in our (collective) hands. Many garments from the past have become too tight, too grey, too something...and the call for new shapes and textures is acknowledged by many. Yet changing clothes leaves one naked, half dressed in between. Let's connect in this creative, vulnerable space and cut, weave and stitch together.

Our target group is reflective hybrids – leaders, scientists, consultants, and researchers from all over the world who dare to be and act complex. Multi-layered topics require multidimensional approaches that are, on the one hand, interdisciplinary and, on the other hand, linked to theory and practice, making the various truths and perspectives mutually useful.

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Volume 4, Issue 2

**Title: Elaborating the Theory – Practice Space: Professional
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