

**Exploring reports of employee misbehaviour within narratives of organisational change**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from an interpretivist study of employee experiences of organisational change with specific emphasis on reports of misbehaviour. Acts of misbehaviour are reported by employees as being a consequence of management behaviour throughout periods of change rather than resistance to the change process itself. Participants reported that management failed to communicate information about change to employees and were unwilling to accept feedback from staff, which employees suggest was contradictory to organisational norms. Findings suggest that differences between resistance to change and engagement in misbehaviour aimed at addressing dissatisfaction caused by change need to be addressed and that further studies of the impact that both management and employee behaviours have on organisations as well as other staff are required.

*Key words: Misbehaviour; organisational change; responses; narratives; management misbehaviour; change communication.*

This paper discusses reports of organisational misbehaviour contained within retrospective employee narratives of organisational change. Findings discussed in this paper form part of a larger interpretivist qualitative study focusing on a narrative analysis of employee experiences of change, from which the theme of misbehaviour was derived through thematic narrative analysis. Misbehaviour, which is defined by Kidwell & Martin (2005, p. 5) as ‘voluntary acts that break major organizational norms and threaten the welfare of the organization and/or its members’, can take place in many forms ranging from more covert non-violent forms of hostility through to violent physical aggression (Griffin, O’Leary-Kelly & Collins, 1998). Within this paper employee reports of misbehaviour focus on hostility and aggression aimed towards management and co-workers as well as voluntary withdrawal of effort from work.

Although misbehaviour is often associated with employee deviance (cf. Kidwell & Martin, 2005), Ackroyd and Thompson (1999, p. 75) argue that it is also a ‘characteristic artifact of...managerial regimes’ thus arguing that in some instances employee actions may be a direct consequence of management behaviours and actions. Participants featured in this paper openly admit to behaving “dysfunctionally” in an attempt to address issues of uncertainty which were attributed to a lack of

communication and information from their managers throughout the change process. Participant narratives featured within this paper also place emphasis on issues of intent associated with misbehaviour, drawing attention to reasons why they engaged in dysfunctional behaviours. In comparison, whereas many studies of misbehaviour focus on the nature of employee acts and their consequences, without developing an exploration of why such behaviours were present (cf. Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997; Griffin, O’Leary-Kelly & Collins, 1998; Sackett, 2002). Exploration of justifications of employee misbehaviour suggest that, similar to Ackroyd & Thompson’s argument, misbehaviour as documented in this paper is likely to be a consequence of management actions – or inactions – rather than a response to the imposition of organisational change itself. The paper explores this argument and suggests that employee narratives of misbehaviour are far more complex than they initially appear, and calls for further discussions and investigations around concepts such as “resistance to change” as well as the role that managers play directly or indirectly in organisational misbehaviour.

## **MISBEHAVIOUR IN ORGANISATIONS**

Misbehaviour in organisations can occur in many forms including, but not limited to, acts such as theft, sabotage, fraud, bullying, neglect and drug abuse (cf. Kidwell & Martin, 2005, p.3). Although misbehaviour is argued as being in its infancy conceptually (Griffin & Lopez, 2005), examples are evident in early management studies such as those of Taylor (1911; 1964) in which employees were recognized as restricting output through conflict, resistance and recalcitrance in response to bureaucratic management control or the mechanization of work (cf. Bolton, 2005; Edwards, 1979; Grint, 1991). . In the past decade, researchers such as Ackroyd & Thompson (1999), Griffin, O’Leary-Kelly & Collins (1998), and Vardi & Weiner (1996) have redefined and re-conceptualized misbehaviour as an area of research, leading to a multitude of contemporary definitions. Vardi & Weitz (2004, p.3), for example, describe misbehaviour as workplace acts that intentionally ‘constitute a violation of rules pertaining to such behaviors’. Similarly, Ackroyd & Thompson (1999: 24) define misbehaviour as ‘non compliant or ‘counter productive’ practices’. While similar in their definitions, other authors have developed different

terms to represent misbehaviour including organisational deviance (Kidwell & Martin, 2005), counterproductive behaviour (Sackett, 2002), and dysfunctional behaviour (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997). On a more sinister note, misbehaviour has also been referred to as the “dark side” of organisational behaviour (Griffin & O’Leary-Kelly, 2004). Throughout this paper, the terms ‘organisational misbehaviour’ or ‘dysfunctional behaviour’ will be used interchangeably.

While Kidwell & Martin (2005) suggest that there is a lack of consensus regarding what constitutes organisational misbehaviour, a review of the literature indicates that common characteristics exist across various studies. Commonly, intent to misbehave and the presence of behaviour that is counter-productive to organisational norms and harmful to the organisation and/or the people within it encapsulates the misbehaviour incident (cf. Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997; Sackett, 2002; Vardi & Weiner, 1996). A further characteristic of misbehaviour studies lies in the tendency of the research to focus on employee levels of the organisation, with little emphasis on the actions of management. Such a theme potentially suggests that misbehaviour is a problem associated with employees rather than being more widespread in organisations. However, Ackroyd & Thompson (1999) argue that employee misbehaviour is not always associated with intentional malice. Rather, they suggest that misbehaviour is a natural byproduct of everyday interaction between people in organisations who ‘get up to all sorts of tricks’ (p. 8). Nevertheless, with its emphasis on rule violation, misbehaviour may arguably be mistaken as an overt act of defiance or resistance, particularly when excessive management control is used to maximize worker efficiency during periods of organisational change. Knights & McCabe (2000) emphasise the complexities of the relationship between employee behaviour and management control by suggesting that self-discipline and self-effort also play a role in an employee’s behaviour... Such theories indicate that misbehaviour is likely to be a combination of different internal characteristics as well as environmental factors in the workplace and is possibly more complex than individuals being merely resistant to change. For example, behaviours such as ‘joking...sabotage...and escape’ (May, 1999, p. 769) may be tactics

utilized by employees in an attempt to reconcile boredom at work (Ackroyd & Thompson, 2000) rather than outright attempts to resist management actions or change.

Vardi & Weiner (1996) view dysfunctional behaviour through a different lens by arguing that some acts of deviant behaviour are performed intentionally for the benefit of organisations. For example, the act of whistle-blowing deviates from organisational norms and has the capacity to be damaging in the short term. However, it also has the capacity to expose immoral or illegal practices, thus benefiting the organisation, individuals within it and wider society in the long term. Thus, the complexities of individual acts of misbehaviour need to be thoroughly analysed in terms of their intent and consequences prior to being written off as merely inappropriate or wrongful behaviour. This paper also argues that an understanding of intent, or 'why individuals elect to pursue behaviors that...would classify as undesirable' (Griffin & Lopez, 2005, p. 995), is imperative in developing an awareness of why dysfunctional behaviour exists in organisations. The remainder of this paper explores employee reports of misbehaviour within the context of organisational change, highlighting the issue of intent by exploring justifications of such actions. It then theorizes about the possible relationship between management practices and employee misbehaviour arguing that the motivation of individuals to engage in misbehaviour within this study is a likely consequence of what may be deemed as misbehaviour by managers themselves.

## **RESPONDING TO ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE**

Organisational change can create varying responses amongst individual employees, some of which may be considered as positive and beneficial to both the individual and the organisation (cf. Bryant & Wolfram Cox, 2004), and others that are more disruptive (Mossholder, Settoon, Armenakis & Harris, 2000). Organisational change is a subjective experience in that an individual's personal characteristics and work history play a role in how they perceive and react to it. Consequently, it is not surprising that individuals appraise change differently cf. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Perrewe & Zellars, 1999), often in accordance with perceived levels of threat or harm that change may create for the attainment of personal goals.

Within such situations individuals may adopt problem-focused coping strategies (Lazarus, 1993) such as the active use of voice (Bryant, 2006; Zhou & George, 2001) in which information about change is sought from superiors. Such problem-focused coping styles may be adopted in an attempt to realign individual efforts with transforming internal demands of the organisation during change (cf. Woodward & Hendry, 2004). Similarly, problem-focused coping might be aimed at maintaining individual performance and wellbeing (Perrewe & Zellars, 1999; Woodward & Hendry, 2004), in which employees actively seek information about change that might be used to alleviate their concerns.

It is also possible that employees become more overtly reactive to change in the event of “change fatigue”. Stensaker, Benedicte Meyer, Falkenberg & Huaeng (2002, p. 298) argue that employees can become ‘dysfunctional as a result of too much stimulation’. Specifically, employees within the ranks of middle management and below have to cope with the direct effects of change implementation which are additional to performance of normal daily duties. Employees at these levels of the organisation are also less likely to have access to the same information as their senior management counterparts, thus increasing the likelihood of receiving partial or distorted information. Such contingencies play a role on the creation of an environment of uncertainty, which may lead employees to develop more overt strategies to cope with change, as well as reactionary responses, which might often be mistaken as resistance.

Within studies of organizational change, dysfunctional behaviour displayed by employees is largely recognized and attributed to resistance to change (cf. Bovey & Hede, 2001; Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Piderit, 2000). It is arguable that resistance, or the deliberate use of strategies to slow or halt the change process (Pardo del Val & Fuentes, 2005), incorporates dysfunctional behaviour. However, a major limitation of resistance to change studies is that they largely fail to provide a clear distinction between resistance and other behaviours aimed at seeking information about change. For example, using voice to challenge management or seek information, or withdrawing from work in an attempt to highlight concerns about change (cf. Bryant, 2006; Dent & Goldberg, 1999) are significantly different from deliberately

attempting to stop or slow change implementation. It is understandable that dysfunctional behaviour displayed by employees during periods of change can be mistaken as resistance, for both involve activities and actions that are counterproductive to the achievement of an organisation's goals. However, before dismissing dysfunctional behaviours displayed by employees during change as simply acts of resistance, it is essential that issues such as intent and justifications for such behaviour are further explored. Understanding why employees behave in particular ways provides a contribution of the management literature by further distinguishing between employees' resistance strategies and strategies aimed at decreasing levels of dissatisfaction associated with change, for it is arguable that employees can experience dissatisfaction within their work environment without necessarily being resistant

## **METHODOLOGY**

Employee experiences of change were researched using an interpretivist approach in which the aim was to develop an understanding of different experiences of change in accordance with individual realities (cf. Guba & Lincoln, 1998). To control for context, the study was conducted in a regional location in Victoria, Australia where large-scale organisational change, such as restructuring, privatisation, downsizing and amalgamation had occurred within a period of up to five years prior to the interviews being conducted. Participants were recruited from major employer industries in the region including healthcare, education, water, electricity supply, and paper manufacturing using a stratified cross-industry sample to obtain a wide variety of accounts. Six organisations within the above industries were approached initially via letter which explained the nature of the study and called for participants who were hierarchically positioned at levels beneath lower level management. Of the six organisations approached, four allowed direct contact with staff while in the workplace, while the remaining two allowed contact with staff out of the workplace. Staff in the first four organisations were recruited through an organisation-wide general email. However, the latter two organisations preferred not to be directly involved in the study but identified key employees, who provided a starting point for a snowball sample. While such a recruitment strategy could lead to managerially-biased accounts of change, participants from

the latter two organisations did not appear to construct narratives of change that were more or less managerially-oriented than others. As the research was focused on individual experiences of change rather than experiences of change that were unique to one particular industry or organisation, individual participants formed the units of analysis (Yin, 2003).

A total of twenty-two individuals volunteered to participate in the research, consisting of eight females and fourteen males. The participants reported their experiences of organisational change through semi-structured qualitative research interviews that were of approximately one hour duration and were audio-taped and transcribed. Within the interview process, participant reports of change are often constructed in a non-linear and fragmented format. Narrative analysis provides an analytical method that can bring such data into a 'meaningful whole' (Czarniawska, 1998, p. 2) by imposing a structure that enables researchers and readers to make sense of participants' interpretative recollections. Firstly, a plot analysis investigated the events that are linked together to form the structure of the narrative (Boje 2001; Ricoeur 1984). Secondly, an inductive theme analysis explored how employees 'sort[ed] their stories' (Boje 2001: 123), thus exploring common threads that emerged from the narratives. Organisational misbehaviour as discussed in this paper was one of the prominent narrative themes that emerged from the data analysis.

## **REPORTS OF EMPLOYEE MISBEHAVIOUR**

Initial findings from the narrative analysis suggested that those involved in this study did not consider themselves to be resistant to change. Rather, support for change was widespread and evident in comments such as 'we were not concerned about change itself, we have been through plenty of changes' (20)<sup>1</sup>; 'I for one welcomed some of the changes because the place needed a real shake-up' (15); and 'change is no problem...its more like when we're not going through change everyone gets nervous' (2). Rather than being associated with the process or idea of change itself, misbehaviour was reported in all of the narratives as being a consequence of management behaviours during change, specifically, failure to

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<sup>1</sup> Indicates direct statements made by participants. Each participant has been allocated an individual numeric code.



communicate and disseminate information to staff, or accept feedback. This may not be entirely surprising for it is possible that if a similar study of managers were to be conducted the focus may be on employee behaviours that impacted on management experiences.

While management actions of this nature may not be considered unusual during change, a common report amongst all of the narratives is that during prior change programs employees were able to communicate with management and were privy to information and the use of feedback mechanisms. Furthermore, 17 of the 22 participants reported playing a role in previous change programs providing advice or expertise in situations where change directly impacted on their departments or work groups. Consequently, participants reported confusion as to why these change programs were managed differently and suggested that management actions – or inactions – created environments of uncertainty and frustration in which participants reported what they refer to as unusual responses in an attempt to signal their dissatisfaction.

### ***Management actions during change***

Trevino & Brown (2005, p. 70) argue that managers and leaders ‘should be able to influence followers’ ethical behaviour’ by providing clear guidelines for acceptable behaviour from which employees can model themselves. Throughout the experience of organisational change, participants reported different types of management behaviour that they attributed to a decline in positive employment relationships they had enjoyed prior to the period of organisational change after which they were interviewed. One participant suggested that power imbalances became evident where employees were ‘at the whim of management decision making rather than being directly in control of [their] own work’ (14). Another reported of an ‘atmosphere of distrust that was never [previously] there’ (19). Other participants spoke of more sinister management behaviours such as aggression and bullying that commenced alongside the introduction of change, which are discussed at length elsewhere (Bryant & Wolfram Cox, 2003). In comparison, several participants reported being witness to aggressive behaviour but either ‘kept [their] head down and stayed out of it’ (2), or were ‘not singled out and left alone’ (6). Regardless, a common

theme across the narratives was that management behaviour during organisational change created high levels of stress, frustration and confusion, which was attributed mostly to lack of communication and dissemination of information about change to employees.

Initial attempts to seek information about change were conducted using a number of strategies described as being 'mature approach[s] to let managers know...what we wanted to know' (11), or 'information seeking rather than being critical about them' (9). For example, 'we would approach management and tell them that we wanted to know where we stood in terms of our jobs but also that we would support them throughout the change' (1). One participant reported that management initially appeared 'grateful that we stated what we did and didn't like about the change' (7). However, approaches to management were described by others as 'falling on deaf ears' (11) or 'being a waste of time...They just didn't want to hear about how change effected us' (13). A further participant reported, 'I think management got sick of us questioning them all the time...about the consequences of change' (1), while another believed that managers confused employee information seeking as 'resistance [or] unhappiness with the current situation [or staff] trying to get in their way' (4).

A further sense of frustration was evident in participants' reports of double standards concerning expected behaviour within their respective organisations. Employees perceived that they were expected to behave in a particular way while at work that seemed to differ from management behaviour, particularly concerning communication in the workplace. For example, one employee argued that staff were expected to 'keep management informed of day-to-day operations' (22) relevant to their divisions, while managers were supposed to inform staff of any changes relevant to their job functions, which 'never seemed to happen' (22). Another participant stated that 'the organisation prides itself on open and honest communication between staff and management' (18), but questioned 'why workers have to do it when the boss can get away with not telling us anything' (18). A further two participants raised similar concerns. One suggested that 'the so-called "open door" policy was a farce; we had to keep our doors open, but they

[managers] kept theirs locked' (12), while another told of a 'poster on the wall that outlined the organisation's goals and codes of conduct. One of the things that is said was "clear and transparent communication and action at all times is expected of management and staff", but that never happened' (4).

Such actions of management were described as causing frustration amongst staff, which 'developed slowly...over a period of a year or two, possibly more' (4). Furthermore: 'we tried to get information about change for almost three years...but after that long we started to get a bit agitated' (8). These comments suggest a relationship between management behaviour and the emergence of dysfunctional patterns of employee behaviour. They also begin to highlight the complexity of employee responses to change, further justifying the need to focus on the intent, cause and aim of dysfunctional behaviour before making an assumption that is based on resistance to change.

### ***Employee Responses: Abuse and Hostility***

In response to frustrations attributed to lack of communication about change, employees reported engaging in misbehaviour predominantly in the form of non-physical behaviour such as hostility towards colleagues and managers, verbal abuse and aggression, go-slows, purposely decreasing productivity, and in one case, sabotage. Initially, misbehaviour was justified through comments such as: 'I think that trying to handle that sort of situation...which was non-stop confusion and fear, for such a long time eventually brings out frustration and aggression in yourself and other people' (8); and 'because of the intense environment...it [was] not an uncommon thing for workers to be okay one minute and then all of a sudden snap' (7). A further participant suggested that change was a 'damned if you do or don't' [situation in which] your hands are tied, management won't tell you anything so it's hard to do your job effectively, but you're reprimanded for not doing your job effectively' (5). Consequently, 'after a while you start to show your frustration and anger towards your workmates' (5) or, as a second participant explains, 'in the end...you've just got to let your feelings out...and unfortunately you tend to turn it to those closest to you' (13).

Frustrations associated with change were commonly manifested into verbal abuse, which was reported as being aimed primarily towards colleagues. However, participants argued that verbal abuse was ‘something that just happened’ (2), rather than something that was intentionally planned and was therefore manifested in the form of hostility towards colleagues. For example, ‘tiffs between [people would] happen all the time’ (1), which was reported as one participant as being common in workplaces where ‘people were easily fired up’ (14).

It was bloody panicky in there. It was hatred. It was hatred for everyone. It didn’t matter who you were. I hated my boss and he hated me. And I hated my tradesmen. You would hear information and you would interpret it the way you wanted and pass it down to someone else. So the [next] person misinterprets it and thinks you’re having a shot at him. So there was a lot of that “you step out of the gate” type thing (18).

A further participant reported being witness to and victim of physical violence between colleagues and described being thrown ‘clean across [a] room [and ending] up in hospital with a broken cheek’ (9). However, the participant argued that his group of colleagues, including his attacker, remained close and supported each other throughout the period of organisational change. Rather, such episodes of aggression were reported as being caused by not being included in change combined with lack of information about change:

We were told absolutely nothing [about change], we had increasing feelings of job insecurity and [were] suffering extreme levels of boredom...It was a feeling of uncertainty, unsurety [sic], a lot of frustration...Aggression between people...was out of disputes. And disputes were only brought up because people were frustrated!’ (9).

Other participants reported of more subtle forms of abuse and hostility towards colleagues suggesting that colleagues would ‘start rumours about people’ (16), ‘whisper and giggle behind [your] back’ (17) or ‘make smart remarks like “look at that bitch, she thinks she owns the place”’ (3). While such behaviours were documented as being inappropriate or ‘unfair to others experiencing the same stressors’ (3), they were attributed to feeling ‘the strain of change’ (18) or with having ‘difficulty dealing with uncertainty combined with no answers and no way out’ (9).

The act of directing frustration towards colleagues during organisational upheaval is documented by Duffy (1995) and Farrell (1999a; 1999b) who both argue that such behaviours occur when employees are unsuccessful at venting concerns to management, or have been unable to seek information from or challenge management. Referred to as ‘horizontal violence’ (cf. Farrell, 1999b; Freshwater, 2000; Jackson, Clare & Mannix, 2002), studies within female dominated industries such as nursing (cf. Chaboyer, Najman & Dunn, 2001; Farrell, 1999a) suggest that misbehaviour in the forms of ‘overt and covert non-physical hostility such as criticism, sabotage, undermining, infighting, scapegoating and bickering’ (Duffy, 1995, p. 9) are common amongst female employees. However, other studies have found (for example, Sweney & McFarlin, 1997; Bryant & Wolfram Cox, 2003) that such forms of misbehaviour are not necessarily specific to females and occur across male and female occupational groups. Although this paper does not focus specifically on misbehaviour between males and females, employee narratives suggests that abuse and hostility was experienced within both sexes, as were manifestations of misbehaviour in the form of withdrawal of effort from work activities.

### ***Withdrawal of effort from work***

In response to the dissatisfaction and uncertainty created by organisational change, participants also reported experiences and observations of misbehaviour in the forms of withdrawal of effort from work activities. Withdrawal of effort has also been referred to in the literature as shirking (Jones, 1984) or neglect (Rusbult et al, 1988). Both shirking and neglect emphasise the ‘tendency to supply less effort’ (Bennett & Naumann, 2005, p. 114), which can lead to a deterioration of work conditions ‘through reduced interest or effort’ (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers & Mainous, 1998, p. 601). Such behaviour has been termed “production deviance” by Robinson & Bennett (1995), which Turnley & Feldman (1999) argue is a destructive passive response to dissatisfaction that is likely to lead to even less favourable conditions in the workplace rather than success in altering unfavourable circumstances or increasing job satisfaction.

Similar to reports of abuse and hostility, reports of withdrawal were attributed to ‘managers not caring about staff during the change’ (11) or ‘having the decency to communicate what we were meant to be doing [during] the changes’ (1). Employee narratives also suggest that more overt manifestations of misbehaviour were a strategy to seek the attention of managers, with one participant stating that ‘managers had to sit up and listen when working conditions started to deteriorate’ (21). As a result of the inability to express concerns to management about change, it was ‘not uncommon for some people to start to do devious things...such as go slow’ (14), ‘only do what was in their job descriptions’ (13), or ‘just sit back and do bugger all’ (18). One participant stated that ‘we didn’t refuse duties. We’d just say it was too unsafe or that we didn’t know this trade properly’ (15), while another added that ‘we tried to be careful and keep things within the law so to speak. We tried to make things hard for management but not to the point that we could be sacked or anything like that’ (10). An employee who observed rather than participated in dysfunctional behaviour suggested that ‘things like bans, go slows...sabotages...were always going on’ (20) during the period of change. A further participant also stated that he would normally ‘be a watcher rather than a doer’ (7), but explained that frustration surrounding the lack of information about change caused him to participate:

I was quite scared [of the consequences], but I got involved in...a go-slow type of thing. I would just make sure that every single thing was done to perfection. It was funny because I remember the boss being so pissed off...but what could he do? The quality of what I what I was doing was perfect...I think he got the point though. (7)

By withdrawing from particular duties, quality of work was described as ‘beginning to slide’ (22) and ‘productivity declined’ (1). Out of the twenty-two participants only one described deliberately ‘not doing...anything [to] improve the company’ (11) as well as becoming involved in sabotage through ‘sabotaging a piece of machinery’ (11). Other participants were adamant that they did not want to ‘ruin the organisation’ (13) or ‘wreck the livelihood of the company’ (9). Rather, misbehaviour in the form of withdrawal of work effort was documented as being a way of coping when ‘things got to be really bad’ (9), to ‘stop the bullshit for...five seconds’ (19), or as ‘a really poor way of trying to gain some semblance of control over a chaotic situation’ (12).

Akin to Turnley & Feldman's (1999) findings, employees reported that withdrawal of work effort was an unsuccessful strategy in gaining management attention, or changing the work situation during periods of organisational change and were described by two participants as not 'scoring any points with managers' (13) and 'a good way to allow yourself to be seen as a trouble maker' (20). Furthermore, 'it probably would have paid off to be more passive during change...because people who [were not] were picked on as being trouble makers' (19). Besides being perceived as creating trouble in response to change, participants also noted that misbehaving was 'mentally and physically exhausting' (1) and was not 'necessarily a good way to cope with change' (21). Furthermore, 'it gets so bad when you are fighting with colleagues all the time...it becomes boring' (22). Subsequent to realizing the lack of affect of misbehaviour on management practices, participants reported withdrawing further in a different sense, by distancing themselves through passivity from 'demands of authority...[and] from the organization and its prevailing power structure' (Collinson, 1994, p. 25). Participants reported 'getting to the stage where nothing I did could achieve anything positive' (3) and 'having to take a step away from the situation...to stop myself resenting people' (17). A further participant came to terms with his misbehaviour after he found himself metaphorically 'looking down the barrel of a loaded gun and my life relying on whether they'd pull the trigger' (4), while another 'finally realized that I had no power over anything at work, let alone change' (5). In moving from overt misbehaviour strategies to covert withdrawal participants reported that 'it was easier to switch off' (14), 'disengage' (6), 'deal with [everything] by pretending to deal with it' (22), 'turn your mind off the situation' (1) and 'not be noticed for the wrong reasons' (1), with a further participant suggesting that 'at the end of the day management had control over your future regardless of what they said and did' (12).

## **LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Although the findings of this study are only briefly presented within this paper, analysis of employee narratives highlight two particular issues that are worthy of further exploration. Firstly, this paper argued

through the analysis of employee narratives that misbehaviour is not necessarily synonymous with resistance to change. Employees can experience declining levels of dissatisfaction which are derived from various characteristics of change and its management that are arguably different from deliberate attempts to slow or halt change programs completely, and differences between resistance and dissatisfaction as associated with change should be explored further. At a surface level it is understandable that misbehaviour and resistance might be confused, for comments made by participants could be interpreted as being indicative of attempts to halt or slow the change process. However, a more in depth analysis of the narratives and an exploration of the intent of dysfunctional behaviours suggests that a relationship between frustration and confusion caused by management actions and inactions during organisational change and employee misbehaviour exists. Such a relationship warrants further investigation, particularly in exploring the complex phenomenon of organisational dynamics during periods of upheaval such as change, and more specifically, the complexities of issues surrounding resistance to change.

A second recommendation is that the actions of management themselves should be further explored so as to determine the impact of management behaviour, whether intentional or not, on the behaviour of employees during change. The work of Trevino & Brown (2005) cited earlier in the paper links management and leadership practices to employee behaviour and goes so far as to suggest that it is the responsibility of management to ensure that clear behavioural guidelines are provided and modeled for employees if they expect employees to act according to organisational expectations. Participant reports highlighted throughout the paper indicated that a standard of behaviour such as open and honest transparent communication was expected from employees, but open lines of communication were not practiced by management, which was largely attributed to dysfunctional behaviour. Findings from the narratives suggest that more open communication would more than likely have played a role in overcoming problems surrounding organisational misbehaviour.



A limitation of this study is that by not including management stories it is only possible to speculate about relationships between management actions and employee misbehaviour. For example, it is possible that management strategies not to openly communicate with staff during organisational change are a deliberate response to previous employee behaviours. A second limitation lies in the use of an interpretivist research approach in that it is possible that stories of poor management behaviour were constructed to justify individuals' own behaviour retrospectively and that they themselves were to the sole contributors to their actions during organisational change. Regardless, further studies of employee experiences of change are warranted, particularly those that focus specifically on relationships between management and employees throughout the process of change, as well as studies that explore the impact of both management and employee behaviours on the organisation and other staff within it.

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