Positive Deviance and Extraordinary Organizing

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Positive organizational scholarship (POS) focuses on that which is extraordinarily positive in organizations—the very best of the human condition and the most ennobling organizational behaviors and outcomes (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). The foundation of POS includes positive deviance, which scholars view as an important mechanism to move beyond the ordinary to that which is truly extraordinary (Cameron, 2003). Yet while positive organizational scholars frequently refer to positive deviance (Quinn, 1996; Quinn & Quinn, 2002), the construct requires further theoretical and empirical development. The main purpose of this chapter is to provide more theoretical rigor to our understanding of positive deviance.

At first glance, "positive deviance" appears to be an oxymoron (Sagarin, 1985). "Deviance" is the label we reserve for society's criminals and outcasts. Quinn and Quinn (2002) note that when sociology majors become introduced to the field, the first class they take, "social order," emphasizes the existence of norms and the concomitant pressure to conform to those norms. The course that follows, "social deviance," addresses deviation from those social norms—objectionable, forbidden, and even perverse behaviors. Students learn about the madly insane, socially marginal, and abominably sinister. With so much attention on these unseemly characters, it is surpris-

ing that students do not learn about the positive cousin of "deviance"—the virtuous or excellent (Dodge, 1985). Our primary purpose in this chapter is to add intellectual structure to excellent behavior in organizations, encapsulated under what we call "positive deviance." First, we propose a definition of positive deviance. Afterward, we turn to a discussion of the psychology of positive deviance by examining the psychological conditions that facilitate the development of positively deviant behaviors. These psychological conditions together create the necessary mindset for stimulating positively deviant behavior. We end the chapter with a preliminary research agenda for learning more about positive deviance in organizations.

DEFINING POSITIVE DEVIANCE

The origin of the word *deviant* comes from two Latin words: *de* means "from" and *via* means "road"—so *deviate* means "off the beaten path." Deviant behavior is not expected—it is unconventional. Deviance departs from institutionalized expectations (Merton, 1968). Take an example of the behavior of a plant manager at a Fortune 500 company that would not meet the traditional definition of deviance but that falls under our initial formulation of positive deviance.

Employees at the plant were very concerned about their job security. The feelings of insecurity were creating a poor work climate and impeding the successful launch of a new product. As a result, the plant manager made the decision to promise lifelong employment to the union. This was a radical idea that would clearly not be approved at corporate headquarters. But the plant manager made the promise and proceeded because he knew it was the right thing to do for his people. Today the plant is a world-class operation on every major indicator. It's like there are new people in those bodies. The employees are full of energy. They walk around with a sense of intention. They care about the customer and each other.

We label this kind of extraordinary action as positive deviance (Wilkins, 1964). Like any normal distribution, the majority of organizational behaviors fall near the middle of the curve (Wilkins, 1964). At one extreme of the curve are negative behaviors such as sabotage or theft that depart from norms. These sorts of behaviors are the focus of the current literature on deviance in organizational behavior (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). In contrast, the positive extreme of the curve—that which focuses on the best of the human condition, the honorable and the extraordinary—has largely been ignored (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003).[1]

Within organizational behavior, scholars define deviance as intentional behavior that significantly departs from norms (i.e., shared understandings,

patterns or expected ways of doing things) (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). First, deviant behavior is intentional, or done with a purpose in mind. Deviance is also not an accident of circumstances or coercion by environmental forces (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It does not happen by chance or mistake. For example, an honest mistake on an expense account that results in an employee getting back double what he or she deserves is not deviance because deviance involves a conscious decision to depart from norms.

Second, deviant behavior involves a significant departure from norms, which is why it catches peoples' attention. For example, in the literature on negative deviance, taking a pen for use at home would not be considered deviant because the action is relatively minor and many individuals within organizations have performed this behavior. But stealing a laptop for a child to use at college would be considered deviant because this behavior involves a significant departure (a large quantity of money) from a norm (do not steal).

Extending to Positive Deviance

While most of the deviance literature focuses on negative behaviors, departures from norms can also be positive or constructive (Warren, in press). By "positive," we refer to honorable behaviors that improve the human condition. Thus we define positive deviance as intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways. We use the word "honorable" rather than "virtuous," though we see these words as interchangeable. Our use of the word "honorable" is in a labeling way (Becker, 1963)—that is, how individuals would label a particular behavior. We avoid the term "virtues" because of confusion between the labeling (or layperson's way of describing a behavior) and the theoretical view of virtues developed in psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2003) and POS (Peterson & Park, 2003). The theoretical view includes some virtues that are clearly not applicable to positive deviance and may even stand in contrast to positive deviance, such as prudence (i.e., not taking risks). Therefore, by "honorable" (or in the layman's sense, "virtuous"), we refer to behaviors that would be labeled as such by a particular referent group.

This formulation has several important implications. First, we use the word "honorable" because it is an evaluative term—it recognizes conduct that a referent group considers ought or ought not to occur (Clinard & Meier, 2001). Second, the definition understands positive deviants in relationship to norms (Clinard & Meier, 2001). Finally, if others become aware of the positively deviant behavior, they would label the behavior as "honorable" (Becker, 1963).

Understanding what behaviors exceed the norms of a referent group

starts with understanding what the expected behavior is in a given context. For example, in the job security example at the beginning of the chapter, the expected behavior was to tell people that they had to live with the job insecurity. The plant manager departed from common business norms by guaranteeing his people employment. Second, the plant manager's decision was voluntarily. There were no legal regulations or requirements that mandated the agreement to secure jobs. Finally, because the decision to secure jobs alleviated anxiety and took care of employees, most would label the behavior as "honorable."

One of the challenges in defining positive deviance is specifying whose norms are being departed from (i.e., what referent group). Prior research on negative deviance has focused on a variety of referents (Warren, in press). For example, Staw and Boetteger (1990) focus on deviance from norms about the work role. Robinson and Bennett (1995) focus on deviance from organizational norms prescribed by formal and informal organizational policies, rules, and procedures. Finally, Warren (in press) focuses on deviance from hypernorms (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1999), or norms that reflect a convergence of globally held beliefs regarding desired behavior.

We suggest that there are several relevant referent groups for positive deviance: unit, organizational, and business norms. *Unit* or *organizational norms* are the shared understandings of work values and behaviors among individuals within a unit or organization (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998). For example, the norms of a business unit might include treating employees in a collegial and supportive manner, while the norms of an organization may include a more competitive and aggressive treatment of employees. *Business norms* can include the norms governing conduct in a specific industry (such as manufacturing), a practice group (such as physicians), or general principles of business that are part of a culture or society. *Industry norms* regulate behaviors across vertical lines, practice groups across functional lines, and general principles across all lines. An industry norm for the pharmaceutical industry is to develop drugs for paying markets. Highly professionalized fields such as medicine have strong practice norms (e.g., the Hippocratic Oath for physicians). *General principles of business* also can act as a referent to deviant behavior. A general principle of business is to avoid making layoff announcements right before the Christmas holidays. While it is not illegal to announce a round of layoffs on Christmas Eve, it clearly would be deviant behavior for an organization to do so.

In addition to specifying a referent group for norms, it is also important to specify a labeling group. Proponents of shareholder theory (e.g., Friedman, 1970) would argue that no matter how much human suffering a particular behavior alleviates, if that behavior does not increase shareholder value it is dishonorable. Contrary to this view, we suggest that other stakeholders

(Freeman, 1984) in an organization can label a behavior as honorable, since stakeholders, by definition, are impacted by an organization's behaviors.

FACILITATING POSITIVE DEVIANCE

What does it take for people to exceed normative expectations? Social systems are designed to preserve the status quo. The pervasive influence of norms provides a means of control over what people say and do. Given the restriction on behaviors that norms imply, it is important to understand the psychological conditions that enable individuals to depart from norms to act in ways that are positively deviant. In this section of the chapter, we explore some of the most critical psychological conditions for facilitating positive deviance. These psychological conditions create the individual mindset that facilitates the likelihood of positively deviant behavior. Note that we are focused not on dispositional or personality characteristics that tend to be associated with positive deviance. Instead, we focus on psychological conditions that are conducive to positive deviance. These factors are more malleable and may be influenced by contextual changes.

Our approach in this section parallels others' efforts in POS to articulate a set of facilitators for positive behaviors. For example, Bateman and Porath (2003) discuss facilitators of transcendent behaviors, including courage. They define transcendent behavior as "self-determined behavior that overcomes constraining personal or environmental factors and effects constructive change, in oneself or one's environment." The outcomes of transcendent behavior include an increase in subjective well-being (Diener, 2000) and the achievement of high performance. While positive deviance and transcendent behaviors may share some facilitators, their theoretical constructions and outcomes differ. By delineating our facilitators below, we encourage other POS scholars to explore connections among facilitators that lead to positive behaviors across many different constructs.

Each of our facilitators draws on a different theoretical logic and proposes a link to positively deviant behaviors. While each condition is not absolutely required for a positively deviant behavior to occur, each contributes to an individual's willingness and ability to engage in positive deviance. We discuss the following psychological conditions: sense of meaning, focus on the other, self-determination, personal efficacy, and courage.

Meaning

Meaning involves deep caring that what people are doing matters to them in important ways (Spreitzer, 1995). A sense of personal meaning is an im-

portant psychological facilitator of positive deviance. When people care deeply about something, they have a desire to take action (Wrzesniewski, 2003). Meaning gives individuals a reason to risk departing the norms of a referent group.

The theoretical logic for why a personal sense of meaning should facilitate positive deviance is rooted in intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation does not come from external forces such as recognition or rewards. Instead, intrinsic motivation generates from inside the person (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When individuals are intrinsically motivated, they have a tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, and to extend and exercise their capacities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). They feel more vital (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sandage & Hill, 2001), are more likely to initiate new behavior (as opposed to being passive), and are more resilient in the face of obstacles (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). In short, having a strong sense of meaning puts individuals into a more proactive behavioral orientation where they have a desire for making a difference through their action.

To see how a sense of meaning stimulates positive deviance, consider the case of Tom Chappell, founder of Tom's of Maine. While corporate social responsibility is popular today, Chappell built his organization around social responsibility before most other organizations, more than thirty years ago. Chappell was driven by a strong sense of meaning—he wanted to find a way to merge his background in theology with his business enterprise by blending profits and principles (Chappell, 1996). The redesigned company concentrated on pursuing what is right for customers, employees, communities, and the environment. Consequently, the company created safe, effective, natural products free of dyes, sweeteners, and preservatives. The company also harvested, processed, and packaged with respect for natural resources. Moreover, Tom's of Maine donates 10 percent of its profits and 5 percent of employees' paid time to charitable organizations. At the time they were implemented, these actions stood in stark contrast to established business norms. But Chappell's motivation for these practices came from a strong sense of meaning—a personal calling (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) to invent a new model for business. His strong sense of meaning provided the intrinsic motivation that advanced his vision for a socially and environmentally friendly organization. Hence a strong sense of personal meaning is argued to facilitate positive deviance.

Other-Focus

When individuals choose to be positively deviant, they not only are driven by a sense of personal meaning but also are "other-focused" (Quinn & Quinn, 2002). Being other-focused is consistent with notions of servant

leadership (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002). Greenleaf suggests that the best indication of authentic servant leadership is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous?

The theoretical logic for why being other-focused is likely to facilitate positive deviance is grounded in perspective-taking and empathizing with the needs of others (Parker & Axtell, 2001). In taking the perspective of others, positive deviants are compelled by a desire to serve others rather than by a chance to achieve personal glory. Their intentions are not driven primarily by instrumentality (by being other-focused, I will look good in the eyes of key stakeholders and thus be rewarded in the future for my unselfish behavior) or exchange (I'll do this for you but expect you to reciprocate in kind in the future). Being other-focused enhances interpersonal facilitation, including cooperative helping behaviors (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986) and human social capacity (Mead, 1934). Other-focused relationships are life giving rather than life depleting—they allow the transfer of vital nutrients (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003).

Consider the case of Monique and Jerry Sternin, who worked with Save the Children in 1990 to alleviate malnutrition in Vietnamese children (Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2000). For decades, the common solution for malnutrition was to have outside experts diagnose children with a nutritional deficiency and then follow with massive infusions of supplemental nonnative foods. But when outside resources were withdrawn, as almost always happened, children reverted to their old habits and malnutrition returned. The Sternins brought a new approach that focused on identifying children who are the nutritionally fittest and scaling up a solution that is already working in the community. Their goal was to study healthy children and see what techniques made them healthy, and then apply those techniques to a more general audience. Instead of having a prescribed solution, the Sternins crafted a tailored solution relying on the intelligence and capacities residing in the village:

> Choosing four of the poorest villages, the team, which included Vietnamese staff, worked alongside villagers to weigh children and record their nutritional status to identify the . . . children who by economic logic should have been malnourished but were not. . . . The exceptional families were supplementing their children's rice-based diet with freely available fresh-water shrimp and crabs and with vitamin-rich sweet potato leaves. . . . Armed with the discovery, the Sternins sought to incorporate other villagers and induce them to reevaluate their children's eating habits. Villages sponsored workshops for mothers. Within six months, 85 per-

cent had "graduated" to acceptable nutritional status. . . . The approach was enlarged to include sixteen more villages. The concept was scaled up by discovering the unique solutions in each area—an approach that is very different from a typical "best practices" roll-out. (Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2001: 177)

This approach left a "soft footprint on village life." It respected the dignity of the people the Sternins were trying to serve—it had the "feel of a dance and a courtship, as opposed to a march and an invasion. Essential is, first, respect for, and second, alliance with the intelligence and capacities residing in the village (Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2001: 178). This attitude of discovery required humility and a quest for learning about the unknown.

A focus on the other can help develop the recipients of the positive deviance. In the case of the Vietnamese villagers, the process for joint discovery affected the social status of the very poor families in extremely positive ways. These family members found their voices and were recognized as community assets, thereby improving their status and sense of self-esteem. In many communities, these previously marginalized mothers grew into important community roles, such as health workers and even elected local officials. Some energized women started up cottage businesses or worked in the village schools to reduce illiteracy in the region. Consequently, being other-focused is argued to facilitate positive deviance.

Self-Determination

When people have a sense of self-determination, they feel that their behavior emanates from and is endorsed by oneself—they are autonomous and have an internal perceived locus of causality (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When one is autonomous, actions are characterized by feelings of freedom and choice. Goals are viewed as self-endorsed and thus worthy of more effort. When people experience self-determination, they see themselves in control of their own destiny—their reasons for taking action are internalized rather than coerced by external forces.

We expect that having more autonomy will create additional space for positive deviance. For example, Vandewalle, Van Dyne, and Kostova (1995) found that when individuals experienced a sense of autonomy, they were more likely to engage in extra-role behavior. Moreover, Frese, Garst, and Fay (2000) found that the amount of control provided in one's job is a strong predictor of initiative-taking. Consequently, we consider agency to undergird the theoretical logic for self-determination, which facilitates positive deviance. Agency involves not only the deliberative ability to make choices and action plans, but also the ability to give shape to appropriate

courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution. Put another way, agency links thought with action.

Recall that one component of deviance is volition. Deviant behaviors are not coerced by external forces such as a superior or required by a new work regulation. If a person's work is constrained by another person or rigid work rules (i.e., a very strong context for behavior; Mischel, 1980), the opportunity space for positive deviance becomes severely limited. In systems with tight external control, individuals are more likely to follow rules, leaving little room for behaviors that exceed expectations in a positive way. In more flexible contexts that provide freedom for individual discretion and choice, there will be more possibility for positive deviance. In a similar vein, Bateman and Porath (2003) suggest that self-determination facilitates transcendent behavior (i.e., behavior which goes beyond ordinary limits or constraints, surpassing standards or expectations).

Prior research has found that individuals with higher levels of *external* loci of control (i.e., low self-determination) have been found to emit more negative behaviors than people with lower levels of external loci of control (Perlow & Latham, 1993). Storms and Spector (1987) further found that locus of control moderated the relationship between organizational frustration and sabotage. Externals do not believe that things tend to be within their personal control and believe to a large extent that fate, luck, other people, and social structures determine what happens to them. As a result, they tend to be more maladaptive in their behavior.

Take the case of the doctor whose HMO allocates her patient load on the basis of ten-minute appointment times with each patient. To provide the care that patients need, she feels that ten minutes is not enough. As a result, she voluntarily extends her day by an extra two hours without additional pay, to extend the time that she can spend with each patient. She has the autonomy to determine the way that she conducts her practice and schedules her patients as long as she sees the requisite number of patients. In this case, the doctor deviates from the organizational norm, eight-hour workdays, with the purpose of providing extraordinary care for patients.

Personal Efficacy

Efficacy is a person's estimate of his or her capacity to orchestrate performance on a specific task (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). When individuals feel efficacious, they believe that the potential for success outweighs the possibility of failure. Research has found that high levels of self-efficacy are related to the setting of higher goals and firmer commitments to reaching those goals (Bandura, 1989). Efficacy beliefs influence a person's level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort she or he will exert in an en-

deavor and how long she or he will persevere in the face of obstacles. Strong levels of self-efficacy also cultivate interest and expand choice behavior (Bandura, 1977). When individuals feel efficacious, they have a hunger to grow and develop to their full potential as human beings.

The confidence that comes from being efficacious should facilitate positive deviance. Feelings of competence encourage individuals to set more ambitious goals for themselves, while increasing their commitment to attaining the goals. Because competence cultivates interest and expands choice behavior, it is also likely to help people to think out of the box in a way that allows them to defy norms of conventional business practice.

In 1978, Merck & Co., one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies, inadvertently discovered a potential cure for river blindness, a disease that inflicts tremendous pain, disfigurement, and blindness on the 85 million people who are at risk. The medication was first discovered as an animal antibiotic, but it quickly created a major dilemma when Merck scientists realized it could be adapted to become a cure for river blindness. Because river blindness was indigenous to the developing world, Merck would never recover the millions of dollars it would have to invest to develop the right formulation for humans and conduct field trials in the most remote parts of the world. Additionally, the company risked bad publicity for any unexpected side effects of the drug, which in turn could damage the drug's lucrative reputation as an animal antibiotic (Business Enterprise Trust, 1991).

But Dr. Roy Vagelos and his team of scientists had a strong sense of efficacy and a hunger for growth. Merck scientists were world-renowned as experts in parasitology. Drawing on their expertise, they were confident that a reformulation would be an effective treatment for river blindness and that they would encounter few serious side effects. They were confident their actions would have an extraordinarily positive impact on the developing world. And they were hungry for new knowledge as well—they wanted to learn as much as possible about a fledgling class of compounds, avermectins. Departing from norms in the pharmaceutical industry, Merck decided to manufacture and distribute the drug for free to the developing world, costing the company millions of dollars. Consequently, Merck helped eradicate river blindness, at its own expense.

Courage

Courage is a willingness to confront risk to do what one thinks is right (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, 1982). A typical measure of courage might be:

"I stand up for what I believe is right, even in the face of risk or ridicule" (Worline, in press). Without a sense of risk, there is no need for courage. Positive deviance often involves significant risk as individuals break out of the rigidity of norms and patterns of expected behavior. As Quinn (1996: 3) suggests, it requires "walking naked into the land of uncertainty." In Quinn's words, "Most people do not want to leave the path of least resistance. We seem to want to stay in our comfort zone, the place where we are in control and where we initially experience the least pain" (p. 34). Consequently, courage provides individuals with the backbone to engage in positively deviant behaviors. Positive deviants are not necessarily rewarded by and are often punished by traditional organizational systems because they go against the established social order (Heckert, 1998; Jones, 1998). In fact, there may be resistance, stigma, or even sanctions targeted at positive deviants from people who closely conform to the norms being violated. Consequently, those who follow established expectations might view positive deviants with suspicion or distaste (Katz, 1972; Mathews & Wacker, 2002; Posner, 1976). Furthermore, the organization will try to push the positive deviant back to behavior more consistent with norms (Quinn, 1996), even if those outside of the organization consider the action honorable. However, those outside of the immediate referent group will often view the positively deviant behavior as honorable, since the behavior adheres to a higher-level norm (Warren, in press).

Consider the risk involved in the case of Aaron Feuerstein, the owner of Malden Mills, which produces Polartec. Feuerstein made the deviant decision to continue paying his out-of-work employees for months after a devastating mill fire. Contrary to common business norms, Feuerstein made the decision to keep all 3,000 employees on the payroll, a clear departure from traditional norms of business. He was even more deviant when he chose to remain in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and build a state-of-the-art textile mill. The business norm in this case would have been to pocket the insurance proceeds and move the plant offshore to a country with lower labor costs. The obvious risk inherent in these positively deviant actions is whether the company can be profitable when it is being so benevolent. While the popular business press lauded him as a modern-day saint, business executives questioned his audacity. Indeed, early in 2002, Malden Mills was forced by its creditors to declare bankruptcy. However, the company plans to emerge from bankruptcy in 2003 because of loyalty from both its employees and customers. Yet the decision to be positively deviant certainly required courage on Feuerstein's part to do what he believed was the right thing to do.

Courage stimulates individuals to voluntarily confront this kind of risk as

they move outside of their comfort zone, beyond the boundaries of their psychological safety net. Courage helps individuals break from the routine flow of activity, to interrupt the tranquillity and stability of norms, roles, and routines that pattern organizational life (Worline, Wrzesniewski, & Rafaeli, 2002).

AN AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter focuses on the theoretical development of positive deviance, a key construct in the burgeoning field of positive organizational scholarship. If we want to understand what it means for organizations and their members to act in extraordinarily positive ways, we need a deeper understanding of positive deviance. We conclude this chapter with a research agenda that focuses on construct development and operationalization, the determination of additional facilitators of positive deviance, and the consequences to norms when challenged by positive deviant behaviors.

Further Construct Development and Operationalization

Our formulation of positive deviance suggests that it is part of a larger family of prosocial behaviors (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). For example, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) share the positive orientation of positive deviance. However, OCBs do not involve a significant departure from norms in a virtuous direction. Instead, they are minor deviations from job descriptions. In contrast, positive deviance behaviors are truly extraordinary because they represent dramatic departures from norms that exemplify praiseworthy behavior.

Another related concept is corporate social responsibility (CSR). Both CSR and positive deviance focus on behaviors that referent groups would label as "honorable." From the perspective of positive deviance, what is interesting about CSR is not only the kinds of honorable behaviors such as philanthropy, but also that these activities take place in environments in which the norms do not encourage such behaviors. OCBs and CSRs are only two of many different behaviors that are related to positive deviance. Others include whistle-blowing, tempered radicalism, and prosocial rule-breaking (Morrison, 2002). Research should focus on understanding how these constructs relate and how they differ, in terms of their facilitators as well as their outcomes.

Future research can also be accelerated with a rigorous operationalization of positive deviance. What is the most appropriate way to measure positive deviance for purposes of empirical research? Researchers should aim to create a scale to measure positive deviance and its key components: intentionality, departures from norms, and positive outcomes and praiseworthy labels. This will facilitate more empirical research on the topic and aid in the development of a nomological network of positive deviance in organizations. It will also make it easy to clearly identify if specific examples fit the criteria for positive deviance.

Additional Conditions That May Facilitate Positive Deviance

Beyond carefully defining positive deviance, this chapter also introduced several psychological conditions that facilitate the emergence of positive deviance. Our focus has been on the psychological factors that together create the necessary mindset that facilitates positive deviance. Future research needs to expand our understanding of a broader set of psychological conditions, which include personality dispositions such as risk-taking propensity (Howell & Higgins, 1990) or proactive personality (Bateman & Crandt, 1993). Additionally, further research needs to identify the contextual enablers that encourage or discourage the likelihood of positive deviance. Two contextual facilitators that appear particularly promising are transformational leadership and contexts of crisis.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders bring deep change to their organizations by elevating their followers' interest, stirring them to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of others (Bass, 1996). Quinn (1996) recounts a study of the courage inherent in transformational leaders in public organizations. The study focused on examples of leaders who took failing and even scandalous public agencies and turned them into extraordinary, even virtuous organizations. In every single case, the transformational leader had stepped outside of well-defined boundaries—regulations were ignored and directives were violated. In each case, the leaders found that in order to be extraordinary, they had to take significant risks and step outside of well-defined boundaries. They had to have the courage to continually create new possibilities for behavior that fell outside of current norms of ap-

propriate behavior. Thus, having exposure to transformational leadership is likely to enable positive deviance in followers.

Contexts of Crisis

A second contextual variable that is likely to enable positive deviance is a context of crisis. When people and organizations are under intensive threat, the requirement to follow rules and procedures becomes mitigated. When organizations are in financial distress, there is a greater expectation for innovation and creativity (Katzenbach, 1996)—people are expected to think and act "outside of the box" because the current modes of operation are not effective. Moreover, when individuals are in pain for personal (e.g., terminal illness of spouse) or professional (e.g., leading a set of layoffs) reasons, it is more likely that individuals will reach out and break the norms of common business practice in positive ways (Dutton et al., 2002).

Witness the extraordinary responses we saw in response to the events of horrific events of September 11, 2001. Many companies were incredibly generous to families who had lost loved ones in the terrorist attacks. Examples of generosity included: continuing to pay salaries and health benefits to deceased employees, flying in relatives from distant locations to participate in the search and provide comfort, and the dedication of corporate executives' time to assist victims' families in any way possible (Dutton, Quinn, & Pasick, 2001). These behaviors were clearly beyond the norms of expected behavior, but the unusual context of September 11 enabled positive deviance. In fact, the few companies that attempted to operate in a business-as-usual mode were lambasted by the press (Lutnick & Barbash, 2002).

Outcomes of Positive Deviance

Another important item for a research agenda is an expansion of the nomological network of positive deviance to examine its effects on individuals and organizations. It is important to understand how positive deviance can make a difference to both individual and organizational outcomes as well as generate a greater understanding how positive deviance may impact various stakeholder groups.

Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives affectively and cognitively (Diener, 2000). We believe that individuals who display positively deviant behavior are likely to experience greater subjective

well-being. Prior research has shown that individuals experience increased subjective well-being when they help others. Gratitude from those they help can further develop these positive feelings. This line of reasoning is consistent with Bateman and Porath's assertion (2003) that a key personal outcome of transcendent behavior is subjective well-being as captured in levels of life satisfaction and affect.

High-Quality Relationships

High-quality relationships are connections between individuals that are flexible, strong, and resilient (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). We believe that the relationship between the positive deviant and the recipient of the deviant behavior will be strengthened as a result of the positively deviant behavior. The recipient will appreciate the risk and courage inherent in departing from norms of behavior and feel positively disposed toward the positive deviant. For example, the patients of the HMO doctor in the example above will feel a strong level of commitment to the doctor, since she spends extra time with each patient. Similarly, the employees of Malden Mills have a strong devotion to the company.

Long-Term Effectiveness

Future research should also investigate the performance outcomes of positive deviance. We speculate that positive deviance will have implications for the long-term effectiveness of individuals and organizations. Positive deviance is likely to build stronger relationships as well as individual capability as positive deviants take risks for positive change. In this vein, Bateman and Porath (2003) suggest that transcendent behavior leads to optimal behavioral functioning (the achievement of desired high-performance goals at minimal costs to other goals). We also expect positive deviance to contribute to organizational effectiveness. The scientists at Merck and the employees at Malden Mills reacted with great pride to the witnessing of positive deviance. It made them want to work harder to contribute to their organization's success.

The Evolution of Organizational and Common Business Norms

Another issue that will need to be addressed in future research is the role that positive deviance plays in developing and evolving organizational

norms and common business norms. Consider this quotation by Salman Rushdie (1990), "One of the extraordinary things about human events is that the unthinkable becomes thinkable."

We wonder if acts of positive deviance raise expectations for future behavior so that norms become more positive over time. As they accumulate, do acts of positive deviance become the new norm, raising the bar about what is considered deviant in the future (Dodge, 1985)? Will one act of positive deviance begin to change the norms of the organization or of common business practices, or does it take many examples of positive deviance to change the norms of a system?

How we answer this research question may have a profound impact on positive organizational scholarship. Let's consider how positive deviance may lead to the evolution of common business norms (see Figure 14.1). While the decision of Tom's of Maine to become socially and environmentally friendly may have been deviant thirty years ago, a growing number of companies have recognized that sound social and environmental policies are sound business practice. Over time, as even more organizations take up this strategy, being environmentally friendly may become part of common business norms and thus no longer deviant.

Positive deviant actions help change common business norms and gear them more toward excellence. In turn, those revised business norms drive other organizations to catch up with the newly raised bar. At the same time that positive deviance leads to norm development at a macro level, individual organizations are also challenged to raise their own internal bars by positive deviants. Much how common business norms may change, as additional organizations become deviant, organizational norms may also be transformed as a growing number of members exhibit positively deviant behavior. As members within organizations positively deviate from an organizational practice, that deviant behavior may indeed become the norm. So positive deviance may lead to societal and organizational change through creative adaptation of norms (Douglas, 1977; Ben-Yehuda, 1990; Heckert, 1989; Mathews & Wacker, 2002).

Contributions of Positive Deviance to POS

In closing, this chapter brings two different streams of theoretical ideas together. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in counternormative behaviors at work (Morrison, 2002; Warren, in press). At the same time, positive organizational scholarship is receiving growing attention and momentum. By studying positive deviance, we can bring these two theoretical streams together to advance our understanding of both areas of scholarship.

Figure 14.1
Role of Positive Deviance in Evolving Norms over Time
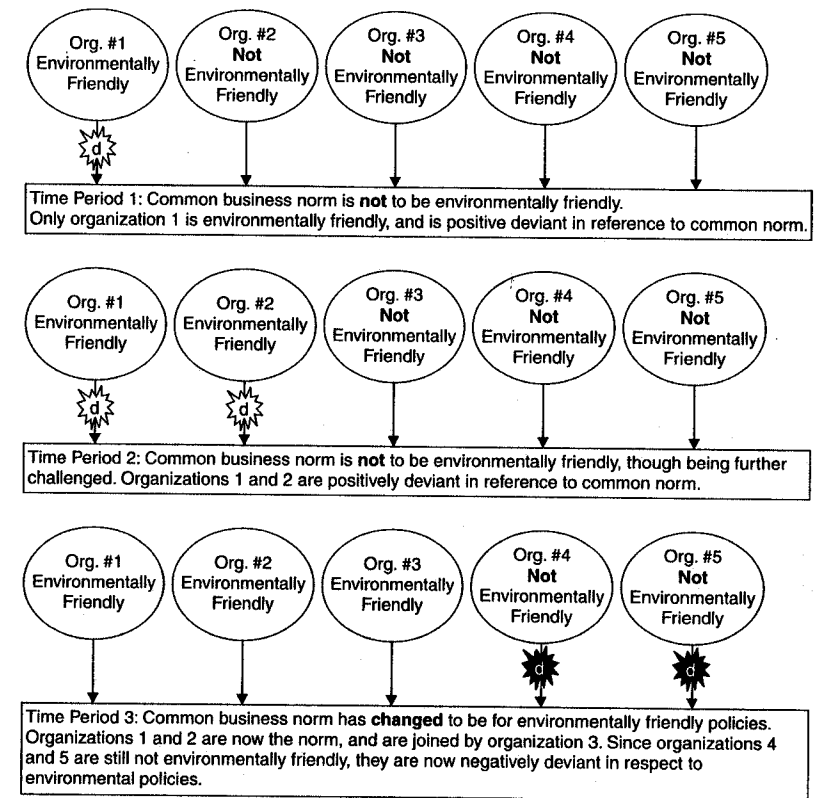
As described in our introduction, positive deviance is a foundational construct to the emerging field of positive organizational scholarship. POS is focused on that which is extraordinarily positive in organizations—the very best of the human condition and the most ennobling organizational behaviors and outcomes. It is through acts of positive deviance that organizations can become extraordinarily positive. We have taken an important first step in further understanding positive deviance by providing a rigorous definition and by introducing a key set of psychological conditions that facilitate positive deviance. Yet this chapter serves as only a starting point for understanding positive deviance. We have presented a research agenda that will advance our understanding of positive deviance. We now call on researchers to explore this underdeveloped area in organizational behavior, so that we

have increased theoretical tools and empirical data that demonstrate how organizations and their members can make positive contributions.

In particular, at this early stage of development, our conceptualization of positive deviance tends to focus on individual behavior rather than organizational behavior. In fact, most of the examples focus on the behaviors of individuals within organizations, though in several cases, these are the behaviors of the CEO. Because organizations are collectivities of individuals, we believe that positively deviant individual behaviors are the building blocks for positively deviant organizational behaviors. Nevertheless, future conceptual work on positive deviance should expand the focus to better understand positively deviant organizational behavior.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

NOTE

1. Our perspective on positive deviance is different from other sociological perspectives that equate positive deviance with supraconformity, or excessive conformity to norms (Hughes & Coakley, 1991), or with the reactive definition that says that deviance is defined by the negative reactions to a specific behavior (i.e., if no negative reaction occurs, then a behavior is not deviant) (Goode, 1991). Our conceptualization fits with what sociologists refer to as a normative definition, which focuses on how a specific type of behavior is evaluated according to norms (Goode, 1991).