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Abstract

To those interested in managing change in a large, rule-based organization, rule breaking is something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a change agent might need to circumvent old rules, written to pursue stability and predictability, without having to wait for the rules to be abolished or updated. On the other hand, a change agent in such an organization might need to rely on directives and rules to impose the change, in turn facing rule breaking as a mean of change resistance.

We have investigated how rule breaking is transferred between organizational members, and in particular how employees motivate their rule breaking behaviour. We do this by means of a multiple case study within six Swedish IT companies. We have focused on the diffusion of rule breaking norms onto organizational newcomers, in order to assure that our respondents would be able to more accurately report on the behaviour.

Our results show that subjects are typically not directed to break rules, but pick it up when given advice or through observation of other rule breakers. The motives for the rule breaking often regards the performance of their project and thus is in the interest of the organization at large, and our subjects are in general quite relaxed when discussing their 'crimes'. Thus, our findings support the advocates of the constructive type of rule breaking called 'pro social rule breaking'.

We discuss the existence of an interpretation system guiding organizational members on how to interpret rules and directives, the lack of feedback to the rule makers on why rules are broken, and the consequences for change agents.

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1 Introduction

As companies grow into large organizations they adopt rules and become mechanistic (Johnson 2013, Mintzberg 1980). The prevailing idea in research is that large organizations need rules to be steerable, and the traditional conception of rules is that they are triumphs of bargaining, symbols of order and artefacts of collective life (March, Schulz and Zhou 2000). Within research on creativity and innovation management however, the inherent problems of the mechanistic organizational structure are well established (Baucus et al. 2008). Bureaucracies are known to hamper creative problem solving and responsiveness to market forces, while innovation is hindered by overly rigid or unnecessary rules (Johnson 2013).

Rules are created by some part of the organization which perceive themselves as having greater experience, superior judgement and a better grasp of schedules and constraints than their subordinates (Baucus et al. 2008). However, rules are also generic and will elicit poor or even flawed outcomes in some situations (Baucus et al. 2008). At the receiving end of rules, employees are torn between rule following and creative problem-solving; two opposing interests put on them by their employer. Do employers expect the sought-after creative problem-solvers to abide blindly to rules? Naturally, we may expect them to be rule breakers, and there is also substantial evidence to show that they are (DeHart-Davis 2007).

When employees choose to break rules they are faced with making decisions on their own, unprotected by the decision-making hierarchy of the organization, yet evidence shows that organizational members on all levels break rules (DeHart-Davis 2007). Since rule breaking evidently occurs without organizations collapsing, we may expect that an organizational member understand what rules to break, under what circumstances to break them and how far to go in breaking rules. A failure of organizational researchers to recognize that rule breaking is occurring in organizations means researchers and practitioners have a poor understanding of how organizational members go about in answering these questions; essentially; how people learn to break rules.

Doubtless, most organizations struggle to provide a balance of clear boundaries coupled with freedom that enables employees to exercise independent thought (Baucus et al. 2008). Yet empowering rule receivers means distancing them from rule-makers who may have greater experience and a better grasp of high-level constraints and strategy. This study aims to benefit practitioners as well as research by investigating how members in project-based IT organizations act in relation to formal rules put upon them by management. We believe this to be of interest to all organizations, but in particular organizations where change agents need the support of a project-based organization to adopt new ways of working.

Specifically, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. Why do employees participate in rule breaking at the workplace?
2. How do employees break rules at the workplace?
3. Why would a rule remain even though it is frequently broken?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Rules

Rules in organizations are defined as actions, policies, regulations or prohibitions, which are in some sense collectively shared, and pertain to how members of the firm are supposed to

execute their jobs (March, Schulz and Zhou 2000, Desai 2010). Rules are directed towards improving organizational performance and most organizations develop rules, procedures, and processes to provide consistency and control over decisions and behaviour (March, Schulz and Zhou 2000, Baucus et al. 2008). Rules substitute managerial supervision while still allowing decisions to be made by managers on an upper level (March, Schulz and Zhou 2000, Baucus et al. 2008), but rules are not just for the benefit of management; they enable members of the organization to set expectations, and may also serve to protect the people who are subject to them (Desai 2010, Olin and Wickenberg 2001). Finally, rules serve a purpose of socializing new members into organizational activities (Desai 2010).

Rules are consciously created by some part of the organization that perceive themselves as having greater experience, superior judgement and a better grasp of schedules and resource constraints than their subordinates (Baucus et al. 2008). Some literature states that rules are created by managers (Baucus et al. 2008), while others (Mintzberg 1980, Galbraith 1979) talk about a rulemaking part of the organization called the technostructure, which contain people with specialized knowledge and experience. Brunsson (1989) points out that organizations have two distinct parts, one that cares about rules and one that cares about results.

Many rules in an organization are not recorded in written form, and many of those that are written are hardly connected to the actual behaviour of the organization (March, Schulz and Zhou 2000). Written rules require documentation and need to be updated to fit the organizational needs over time. Also written rules may be interpreted in different ways (March, Schulz and Zhou 2000). DeHart-Davis (2007) conclude in her study that written rules are obeyed to a greater extent than unwritten rules, because of the perceived objectivity of the written word.

2.2 Rules and organizational change

March, Schulz and Zhou (2000) see rules as dynamic entities, which change along with the organization and its environment. According to these authors, rules are social creations which evolve through incremental adjustments based on experiences using them; rules that are good will expand in use, while rules that have a negative impact on the organization will be used less and less until they eventually disappear. If a rule persists even though it is bad for the organization, it may be because there is a group within the organization that enforces it in order to protect their own interests.

Desai (2010) is also interested in rules as connected to organizational learning and change. According to him, organizations will have difficulty surviving if they do not adapt the rules to their changing environment, however organizations can also adapt too quickly to their environment; causing poor performance as a result of employees never being able to develop experience with the routines. Because of this, organizations tend to drift from alignment with their environment from time to time before rules and procedures are updated.

2.3 Norms

The terms formal and informal are crosscutting within organizational literature; the organization is generally described as consisting of formal and informal systems. There is formal and informal learning, and rules can be formal or informal. Informal rules are described as the rules of the informal organization (Granér 1994); the informal organization being the social structure and its rules within an organization. Most authors use the terms ‘norm’ and ‘informal rule’ interchangeably, while some treat norms as a certain kind of informal rule (Feldman 1984). Ouchi (1980) instead uses the term ‘traditions’ to refer to the implicit rules that govern group members’ behaviour.

Norms are informal rules that groups adopt to regulate group members' behaviour (Feldman 1984). Norms exist in the sense that group members usually act in a certain way and are often punished when seen not acting in this way. The existence of a norm is a matter of degree rather than all or nothing, which means that norms grow and decay; the extent to which an action is a norm depends on just how often the action is repeated and how often it is punished (Axelrod 1986). Norms emerge as patterns of activity in organizations are repeated and consensus develops about the appropriateness of particular behaviours (Desai 2010; also see Feldman 1984 for a thorough analysis of norm creation). In addition to being work-related, the norm system also accounts for strictly social occurrences, and instructs group members not only how to act but how to think and to feel (Granér 1994). Thus, established norms can exert tremendous and consistent power over behaviour (Axelrod 1986, Feldman 1984). They are an expression of our deeply rooted need for belonging and serve to stabilize the group by increasing the predictability of the members' behaviour (Feldman 1984). Groups also enforce norms that prevent interpersonal discomfort (Feldman 1984). Deviance from a norm is generally perceived as a threat to the group's stability and strength (Granér 1994).

For newcomers to a group, social proof play an important role in communicating and enforcing norms (Axelrod 1986). Social proof is a term from social psychology, and is the idea that we pick up clues from others about what behaviours are proper for us in a given situation (Axelrod 1986). As newcomers our environment provide information about how the group has been adapting to its environment (Axelrod 1986). By conforming to the behaviour of others we are not only more likely to perform in an appropriate way, we also fill our psychological need to be part of the group (Axelrod 1986).

Norms may either enhance or impair the group's performance (Feldman 1984). If the group feel that management are supportive, norms tend to be facilitating, while if the group antagonizes the management, the group is likely to develop inhibiting norms (Feldman 1984). Of particular interest is that norms tell people how to interpret and relate to rules (Granér 1994).

The terms formal and informal, although common, are debated. The line between unwritten formal rules and informal rules is blurred (Morrison 2006), and similarly to how Eraut (2000) argues against the term informal learning, it may be the case that informal rules is treated as a residual category to describe any kind of rules that are not formally communicated.

2.4 Rule Breaking

Even though there is substantial evidence that employees on all hierarchical levels break rules (DeHart-Davis 2007), rule breaking is a new and emerging topic within the field of organizational research. The behaviour can be split into actions that are considered selfless and selfish, in organizational research the focus have generally been that rule breaking is a selfish behaviour that is deconstructive for an organization (Morrison 2006). However, in this study we are interested in research that recognizes rule breaking as a potentially constructive behaviour. We have found only a few studies that explore this subject in depth (Dahling et al. 2012, DeHart-Davis 2007, Desai 2010, Kirke 2010, Morrison 2006, Olin and Wickenberg 2001). There are however a lot of research that are adjacent to or touch upon organizational rule breaking within a larger context, namely studies on deviance in organizations (Spreitzer and Sonenshein 2004, Warren 2003), studies on innovation and creativity management (Baucus et al. 2008), and research on pro-social behaviour. The latter is defined as "positive social acts carried out to produce and maintain the integrity of others" (Morrison 2006), and seems to have emerged as an organizational topic in the '80s, following considerable attention within the field of behavioural and social science (Brief and Motowidlo 1986).

We subscribe to the definition of rule breaking as an employee's voluntary and intentional departure of behaviour from rules that are explicit, active and top-down (Desai 2010, Morrison 2006). From this definition follows that rule breaking would not be considered as such if the employee is unaware of the rule she is breaking. This is a philosophically problematic definition, but a useful one in practice since it allows researchers to study an individual in separation from her organization. The definition of rule breaking is relatively straightforward, and even though the research field is new and emerging, none of the authors debate the term to any length (Dahling et al. 2012, DeHart-Davis 2007, Desai 2010, Kirke 2010, Morrison 2006).

So, why break rules? According to innovation management researchers Baucus et al. (2008), rule breaking in organizations is inevitable. Because it is impossible to anticipate all possible problems and to establish rules and procedures to guide in all situations; employees will face situations for which rules offer little guidance or may even elicit fundamentally flawed responses (Baucus et al. 2008). Bureaucratic rigidity lead to advice aimed at encouraging employees to break rules and avoid standard operating procedures (Baucus et al. 2008). Rules may be out-dated (Olin and Wickenberg 2001), rules may be bad from the start (DeHart-Davis 2007), and rules may not comply with norms that govern behaviour within a group (Desai 2010).

2.5 When norms and rules collide

The research field on organizational deviance is more established compared to organizational rule breaking. Deviance refers to intentional behaviours that depart from group norms, rather than formal rules (Spreitzer and Sonenshein 2004). Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004) use the term "norm" in its broader sense, which comprises not only social aspects but also informal instructions on how to perform work tasks, similar to Bass' (1990) definition; norms are shared group expectations about behaviour; socially defined and enforced standards about how the world should be interpreted and how one should behave in it.

Deviance and rule breaking are different in the sense that deviance may break something inexplicit; norms are fleeting notions that the group may not be aware of until they are broken, which makes deviance harder to define, and harder to grasp (Spreitzer and Sonenshein 2004). Norms and rules are also controlled differently; rule breaking is organizationally punished, while deviance is socially controlled (Granér 1994, Morrison 2006).

Social norms and rules are extremes at each end of an "explicitness-scale", but in actuality, they are too closely related to be considered separate. Norms concern how to abide to rules (Verkuyten 1994), norms intersect and collide with rules, norms and rules sometimes reflect different interests (Desai 2010, Brunsson 1989) and sometimes coincide (Desai 2010). Desai (2010) describes a group of fire fighters who know that they are not allowed to enter an empty burning building until backup arrives. However, they do so anyway if the fire is small and manageable. The fire fighters in this example break the rule but adhere to the norm; a behaviour Morrison (2006) would likely label as pro-social rule breaking. The example illustrates the interesting conflict that occurs at the receiving end of rules when the interests of rules and norms collide.

The social aspect of rule breaking in society is explored empirically by Verkuyten (1994); he accounts for a survey that investigates the level of consensus amongst citizens on when it is justified to break rules. The rules that Verkuyten (1994) investigates are citizen rules; stopping the car at a red traffic light and paying taxes. Almost all citizens agree that red traffic lights in principle should be obeyed, however every respondent also gave at least one description of a situation in which running a red traffic light is acceptable (Verkuyten 1994).

Verkuyten (1994) discovers a high level of agreement in beliefs and understandings about when a rule should be observed or may be violated, arriving at the conclusion that rule breaking is socially controlled. Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004) have a similar but at the same time opposing interest, as they suggest future work should study if positive deviance is contagious. Combining the two arguments; can deviance be contagious, so that a pattern of rule breaking develops, which becomes a norm – a rule for breaking rules? Or is deviance, if contagious, only contagious in the sense that group members break formal and informal rules at a whim?

Morrison (2006) draws the conclusion that pro-social rule breaking is contagious; employees glean clues from their co-workers about whether behaviour is likely to be tolerated or punished, thus if a rule has been broken before by someone else, a worker is more likely to break it herself. This is a subject that Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2004) show interest in, and which is theoretically explored by DeHart-Davis (2007) and Desai (2010).

2.6 Rules for breaking rules

When breaking rules, employees can no longer rely on authority to make decisions for them. According to Baucus et al. (2008), any employee that breaks rules would face a set of issues including; (a) which rules to break; (b) under what circumstances should rules be broken; (c) how far to go in breaking the rules; and (d) who gets to make or break the rules? The evidence of Verkuyten (1994), along with Axelrod (1986) suggests that employees rely on norms to answer these questions.

The result of Verkuyten's (1994) survey can be categorised into a three main reasons for rules to be broken in society in general, the most common being that rule breaking is justified when a principle involved takes precedence over the principle that the rule should be followed, for example; running a red traffic light is considered okay when there is a life-threatening emergency. Secondly, rule breaking is acceptable if circumstances make the rule irrelevant, such as a red traffic light is irrelevant at an intersection closed down for construction work. Finally, rule breaking may be justified as a "weapon of the weak" (Kirke 2010), as something performed as sabotage towards a more powerful party, for example some people claim that tax evasion is justified because taxes are too high and the government does not handle tax money adequately (Verkuyten 1994).

The reasons for breaking rules mentioned in Verkuyten's (1994) study appear in several other studies on rule breaking in organizations. Olin and Wickenberg (2001) phrase number 2 as "rules are generic; situations are specific". Morrison (2006) presents many examples of number 1, as is reflected in the two runner-ups in her summary of the most commonly mentioned motivations for breaking rules at work:

1. The employee is trying to more efficiently perform his or her job duties (most common)
2. The employee is trying to help another employee (almost as common as number 1)
3. The employee is trying to help customers (least common)

Yet another reason for rule breaking, that may itself be added to the list of rules for breaking rules, but which can simultaneously be used to explain any of the other reasons, is the simple one that rule may be bad. Rules may be bad from the start, because they are made by people who are imperfect (DeHart-Davis 2007), and who have personal interests to protect (Olin and Wickenberg 2001). Rules also become out-dated; "they stem from the past and seek to stabilize the present and future" (Olin and Wickenberg 2001 p18). The study of how rules may tell the history of a company as well as how they must evolve incrementally to adapt to

the organization's environment, is a research field all in itself which will only be touched upon here.

2.7 Rule breaking and organizational change

Desai (2010) in his paper on rule violations and organizational search treats rule breaking as an early indicator of organizational drift; rule breaking develops because that the organization is drifting from alignment with its current environment. By recognizing rule breaking and adjusting routines and practices accordingly, the organization may adapt to its environment again without serious shortfalls (Desai 2010). As such, rule breaking is an important source of information to the management of a company. However, rule breaking is likely to pass unnoticed until the company encounters performance problems (Desai 2010).

If rule breaking performed by employees is disregarded by management at first, it may become frequent and subsequently normalized; in which case it is unlikely to be acknowledged by management at all, and an opportunity to adapt the organization to its environment will have been lost (Desai 2010). Organizations will have difficulty surviving if they fail to adapt their routines to their changing environment. However, organizational change is a political process, which causes uncertainty for those that are affected and push them out of their comfort zones (Buchanan and Badham 2008). It is met by the self-interests and personal ambitions that collide with the planned changes, and is therefore challenged due to the will of preservation (Buchanan and Badham 2008).

Organizations can also adapt too quickly to their environment, so that employees never are able to develop competence with the routines (Desai 2010). Things that hinder organizational learning are lack of slack resources and a high density of rules, since many rules cause rigid organizations (Desai 2010). DeHart-Davis (2007) concludes that organizations with centralized management and many written rules increase the likelihood of rule breaking.

Morrison (2006) and Dahling et al. (2012) treat rule breaking as a sub-category of prosocial behaviour. They argue strongly against the 'old' economic view of employees as self-interested employees (Dahling et al. 2012). Olin and Wickenberg (2001) find that successful project managers break rules. DeHart-Davis (2007), on the other hand, while acknowledging that research has overwhelmingly focused on negative rule breaking in the past, challenges the term pro-social rule breaking with the argument that rule breaking is "individually favoured, but collectively feared".

Kirke (2010) claims that the "Ok-ness" of rule breaking is unofficially defined by agents of formal authority; superiors can use the formal apparatus of power and punishment to change the "Ok-ness" at any time. The sense of "Ok-ness" may be different at different levels of authority, but it is bound by organizational culture (Kirke 2010). According to Dahling et al's (2012) study on the other hand, supervisors are rule enforcers and in principle react negatively to rule breaking. Similar to Kirke's (2010) "Ok-ness" argument is the one that the perception of a rule breaking act differs on different levels in the hierarchy of an organization (DeHart-Davis 2007). For example, at an unemployment agency, the front-line workers may experience an increase in job morale by allowing jobless applicants to forego the mandatory time frames before which they may return to the agency. At a higher level of the company, however, managers may notice that the department gets flooded with applicants; to the front-line workers the rule breaking is positive, but to the managers it is negative (DeHart-Davis 2007).

The research on pro-social rule breaking is interested in conscious decision making (Morrison 2006, Desai 2010), however, as Nobel-prize winner Kahneman (2011) points out, humans are lazy decision makers. When we are confronted with a situation in which we have to make a

decision, we quickly generate an interpretation, a coherent story. If the story is good enough, and the stakes are low enough, we avoid thinking our decision through. It may even be the case that if we are presented with a hard decision, we masquerade it as a simple one to avoid putting effort in. This may be important to take into consideration when studying why people start to break rules.

2.8 Summary

This study relies on rule breaking being recognized as a potentially constructive force; be it as an indicator that the organization is drifting from its environment, or as a result of imperfect rules attempting to constrain creative problem-solving employees. When rule breaking is recognized as something to favoured rather than feared, we believe it opens up new possibilities of understanding how organizational entities actually operate.

Similar to several of the authors (Spreitzer and Sonenshein 2004, Morrison 2006, DeHart-Davis 2007, Desai 2010), we are interested in if rule breaking is contagious. In society, it is at least subconsciously well-known that widespread acts of rule breaking are controlled by "rules for breaking rules", the most common being "Break rules when a principle takes precedence over the principle that a certain rule should be followed" (Verkuyten 1994). DeHart-Davis (2007) statement that rule breaking is "individually favoured, but collectively feared", indicates that rule breaking has to be managed to an adequate level within organizations as well, and there is substantial evidence to show that rule breaking is socially controlled (Morrison 2006, DeHart-Davis 2007, Desai 2010, Spreitzer and Sonenshein 2004).

Baucus et al. (2008) says that when employees break rules they face a set of issues including under what circumstances to break rules, and how far to go in breaking rules. While Morrison (2006) touch upon the answer to the first of these two questions by concluding that the most common reasons for breaking rules are in order to perform one's job more effectively and in order to help other employees, we still have a very poor understanding of how employees actually go about in making the decision to break rules.

3 Method

This study has been performed as a holistic multiple case study (Yin 2004) which is exploratory and theory building. It investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and seeks not to produce statistical evidence but to provide a deeper understanding of how newcomers in IT organizations learn how to break rules. In order to explore how engineers construct and maintain complex software, we need to investigate not just the tools and processes they use, but also the human activities that surround them. Case studies benefit from combining several different data sources, such as interviews, observations, surveys and written sources and evidence may be either qualitative or quantitative (Yin 2004, Eisenhardt 1989). Several different data sources would enable triangulation of data, and Eisenhardt (1989) also suggests that several researchers should work together when conducting case studies; it not only increases the quality of data collection but also boosts the creativity of the data analysis process.

As an exploratory study, this thesis seeks to investigate the how and the why of organizational rule breaking. While some evidence suggests that rule breaking occur on all levels in organizations (DeHart-Davis 2007), to our knowledge there have not been any previous inquiries into whether newcomers to organizations break rules. Thus the subject is too unexplored to motivate descriptive or explanatory research. We decided on a case study research design in which the primary data source would be interviews. We defined the unit of

Company	Area	# employees (2012)	Subject	Role
Alpha	Automotive software	100+	Adam	Developer
Alpha	Automotive software	100+	Alex	Developer
Alpha	Automotive software	100+	Anna	Developer
Bravo	IT solutions	1000+	Bella	Business Analyst
Bravo	IT solutions	1000+	Benjamin	Business Analyst
Delta	Online gambling	500+	Daniel	Developer
Delta	Online gambling	500+	David	Developer
Echo	Technology consultants	800+	Eric	Developer
Foxtrot	Analysis software	100+	Frank	Developer
Golf	Communication solutions	1000+	Gabriel	Developer

Table 3.1: An overview of the cases

analysis; considering that workplace learning as well as rule breaking is concerned with behaviours by individuals, the unit of analysis was analogously defined as the individual new employee. The case in this study is equal to the unit of analysis, which is holistic and not embedded. This followed from the availability of interview subjects; since we could not get interviews with several newcomers at the same company, we could not treat the companies as embedded cases and the individuals as sub-units. This could possibly give us a biased reflection on how the situation is in the organization.

Theoretical sampling was used and cases were selected with the following criteria, in order to predict a similar result:

1. Companies should have at least a hundred employees
2. The newcomer should not have worked at their current workplace for longer than a year
3. The newcomer should not have more than five years of total work experience

The first criterion is based on the established theory that organizations, as they grow large, exchange control through mutual adaptation and direct supervision for control through rules, and become bureaucracies (Mintzberg 1980, Ouchi 1980). Since bureaucracies have more rules, we assume that they also have more rule breaking.

The second criteria is derived from what Nonaka (1994) says about knowledge becoming internalized with experience; we assume that it is easier for a newcomer to talk about how they learned and adapted, and are still adapting, to their workplace, compared to what it is like for an employee who has worked somewhere for a long time. More experienced personnel may have been able to provide us with more examples on how and why rules were broken. However, there is a risk that they have forgotten about their learning process and the knowledge on how it is to adapt to a new working situation.

Interviews were arranged with newcomers at a number of large Swedish companies in the Gothenburg region and a few in Stockholm. The study relies on a total of ten cases. The amount of data that could be collected about each case in this study was limited due to practical reasons; such as that we only hade the possibility to do one hour interviews. An overview of the cases in the study can be seen in table 3.1.

The majority of the interviews were conducted at the study subject's workplace, which meant that direct observations of the subjects reactions could elaborate the interview data as workplaces indicate something about the organization (Yin 2004). The interviews were an hour long and semi-structured; performed like guided conversations rather than structured queries.
An interview protocol was designed and tested on two pilot cases prior to conducting the actual interviews.

To gather data through interviews may not be the ideal method for achieving the purpose of this study, instead an observational study where employees' actions are recorded in their environment would have been preferred. The reason for this is that interviews tell us how the interviewees think they work. Which may be affected by what Kahneman (2011) defines as slow thinking, thus the actual intention behind rule breaking may remain unknown. However, the option of an observational study was not possible due to lack of time and resources.

Data was analysed through first handling each case individually. A note on each case was written immediately after the interview. The note was then elaborated through listening to the interview recording. Key points of interest were highlighted and obsolete information left out; key points being issues that touched upon our research questions.

4 Results

	Time in company	Prior work experience	Performed rule breaking	Diffusion of rule breaking	Gains for rule breaking	Legitimacy of rule breaking	Why is rule not changed
Adam (Alpha)	9 months	No	Yes	Observation	Save time	Others did it	
Alex (Alpha)	10 months	Yes	Yes	Initiative	Save time	Others did it	Laziness
Anna (Alpha)	10 months	No	Yes	Observation	Save time	Others did it	Good rule; others follow it
Bella (Bravo)	9 months	No	Yes	Initiative	Customer satisfaction	Autonomous	
Benjamin (Bravo)	11 months	Yes	Yes	Observation	Save time	Others did it	Uncertain
Daniel (Delta)	3 months	No	Yes, but did not recognize it	Observation	Save time	Others did it	
David (Delta)	8 months	No	Yes	Observation	Save time	Others did it	
Eric (Echo)	8 months	Yes	Yes	Initiative	Customer satisfaction	Autonomous	Economical constraint; stakeholder defend rule
Frank (Foxtrot)	6 months	No	Yes	Socialization	Save time	Told by manager	Hard to define exceptions to the rule
Gabriel (Golf)	10 months	No	Yes	Observation	Save time	Others did it	Stakeholders defend; maintained by norms; uncertain how to do

The above table presents an overview of the more interesting rule breaking events listed in the cases below.

4.1 Anna, Alpha

Anna has been working for the company Alpha over a period of 10 months. She is a software developer in a team consisting of three additional software developers. They work in an agile environment that consists of development periods, sprints, which last for two weeks at a time. Before the start of each sprint the group of developers get handed a set of requirements, and these requirements are then distributed to the individuals in the group by their area of expertise.

When describing the environment they work in Anna mentions their 'build process'; the process they use when they have written a piece of code and feel it is ready to be deployed for the application to be built. She defines the process as a rule but admits that they treat it more as a guideline. The process is described on the company intranet, and she was told by a more experienced colleague to look for the description there. She says that she personally follows the process description, but that her more experienced colleagues follows an undocumented, tailored build procedure rather than the process description.

Another procedure that Anna mentions is their peer code review procedure. Peer code review is the examination of code by fellow developer, with the purpose of ensuring that the code holds the wanted quality. She describes the peer code review procedure as a rule, and that the development teams must perform it before they are allowed to enter new code into the master library of the system. The rule is enforced by a web application. In this web application, the person doing the code review has to fill out an evaluation form stating what have been done and assessing the quality of the code. However, Anna describes that the form is most often not filled out properly; instead of filling it out according to the specified procedure they put in blank values or made-up values. She explains that the reason for this is that while they perform code reviews, the actual reporting of the review through the web application is overly time-consuming as they rarely find something that needs to be corrected. They feel that they would rather spend time on development than on code reviews. She concluded that she could break the rule when she learned that the other members of her team did it, which was easy to notice since they work so close to each other. She describes the way they break this rule as a sort of 'masquerade for upper management'.

Even though Anna describes the code review rule as repeatedly broken due to it being perceived as unnecessary, she argues that it is a good procedure that should in fact be used. She says that she would have used it if her older colleagues would have. When asked why the code review procedure is not removed due to the almost non-existent use, she explains that it is used throughout the company and is probably functional for other teams, thus it would be a bad idea to change it. She does not think it should be removed just for her team; it should either be removed completely or be used by everyone, and thus rather kept due to the rule essentially being good. She also thinks it is hard to change rules at the company in general, and she does not know who to approach when doing so, but believes that one have to reach quite far up into the organization.

Points of interest:

- Anna says her team consider the build process description as intended for newcomers
- The team breaks the code review rule since code reviews are not done properly (mandatory forms are filled with 'dummy' values)
- The team members' motivation for not doing code reviews is that they are time consuming and unnecessary
- Anna learned that the code review rule was broken by observing others
- Anna breaks the code review rule because the rest of her team do it

- Anna considers the code review rule to be essentially good and would not want to remove it

Analysis

It is a norm within Anna's work group that code reviews are skipped or not done thoroughly. We conclude that it is a norm because Anna picked up that the other group members were acting in a unified way. By observing how members of the group performed in the workplace Anna learned the norm and adapted to it.

When asked why she does not follow the rule, Anna says she feels that the rule does not generate any value to her work and that she can use the time to do other things; thus her motivation is to be more effective in her work. Anna contradicts herself when confronted with the choice whether to remove the rule or not; by stating that she would have liked to follow the rule because it is essentially good. Thus, Anna seems to disregard the code reviews because it is a group norm to think that code reviews are time consuming and unnecessary. Doing code reviews because she herself considers them as good would oppose the norm. It may be the case that Anna only describes code reviews as essentially good because she is forced to consider them from a larger perspective, or it may be that she would actually have liked to do code reviews in her day-to-day work but avoids deviating from the norm.

Anna's uncertainty on how rules may be changed within the organization indicates that such changes are unusual and that the organization may be rigid with a distanced rule-making part.

4.2 Benjamin, Bravo

Benjamin has been working at company Bravo as a business intelligence architect for eleven months. Before he started at Bravo he had a similar job at a smaller company. Benjamin is currently not working in a team but was before. He describes Bravo as a process-driven organization with processes that rule how people are to work. For each process there is a process owner who is responsible for the process. With the number of processes they have at Bravo it is hard to ensure that everything you do is according to procedure, and old and out-dated processes are an issue.

Benjamin says that when he encounters a problem for which the recommended process is not working, he generally steps outside the process and uses his informal network to solve the issue. This is often a faster way than following the process description. As an example of when he had to go against the procedure, he mentions a process that describes the correct way of installing database software on a server computer, a system critical to his work. The process describes step by step which script files to execute in what order. The problem that he encountered lied in one of the executable files that were not updated for the current version of the operating system. In this specific case Benjamin contacted a colleague and went to great lengths trying to solve the problem according to procedure before realizing it was 'impossible', thus time was wasted because of the out-dated process description. It was Benjamin together with his more experienced colleague who decided that they had to deviate from the rule.

Another mentioned example of rule breaking concerns how they should be in touch with their customers. During Benjamin's introductory training he was instructed development teams may only use a single point of contact with any customer; i.e. one person on the team should handle all requests or questions. However, Benjamin describes how this rule was broken in his first project, when any developer contacted the customer whenever an issue occurred, and customer representatives contacted team members directly regarding change of requirements. Benjamin learned to disregard the rule about single point of contact by observing other

employees breaking it. Management later tried to enforce the rule when they noticed how it was being disregarded, and that their enforcement was successful to some extent.

Benjamin says that a rule is something one should strive to follow, and if a process is not working it should be changed. He describes that if one wants to change a process, the process owner needs to be contacted, which is not always easy since the organization changes and people change workplace, and since it in some cases is not even documented who the process owner is. Benjamin explains that an attempt to change a process often ends up in a discussion about who the process owner is and the intention of the rule, but it rarely progresses further than that. He also says that even if the process owner was reached and the problem was aired, it is still not certain that something would be changed.

Points of interest:

- Bravo have a large amount of processes, intended to be managed by process owners
- With the large number of processes, it is difficult to ensure everything you do is according to procedure
- The 'single point of contact'-rule was broken, arguably in order for people to more effectively perform their work
- Benjamin learned to break the 'single point of contact' rule by observing his colleagues
- Benjamin says that in principle he does not have a problem with deviating from a questionable process description
- At the same time, Benjamin argues that in principle rules should be followed
- If a rule is not working, Benjamin thinks it should be changed, but he admits that changing rules is a lengthy process which requires you to first try and find the process owner

Analysis: Benjamin

Benjamin is contradictory in how he deals with rules; he says that deviating from process descriptions is not a problem On the other hand he on one occasion went through a lengthy process to try to install software according to the process. Thus it is hard to interpret Benjamin's general opinion of rule breaking.

The software installation example is interesting because it is evident, at least in hindsight that this rule needed to be broken; circumstances made the rule irrelevant (Verkuyten 1994), the rule was out-dated and inapplicable in this situation (Olin and Wickenberg 2001), and Benjamin would have been able to more effectively perform his job (Morrison 2006). Why did Benjamin not break the rule? There are a number of possible reasons; Benjamin may not have had a rule-breaking personality (although he seems to want to express that he does) (Morrison 2006), maybe Benjamin's supervisor enforced the rule (Kirke 2010, DeHart-Davis 2007) or maybe Benjamin perceived the installation process as more important than the 'single point of contact'-rule because the first was written while the latter was not (DeHart-Davis 2007).

We note that in the 'single point of contact' case other members of Benjamin's team had broken the rule before and therefore Benjamin could rely on the norm for information about breaking the rule (Morrison 2006), while when it concerned the installation process, rule breaking required more conscious decision-making on his part (Baucus et al. 2008). A final thing to note is that the installation process, had it worked, would have entailed an extra benefit to Benjamin because the installation would then have been partially automated; since

he deviated from the process description he had to install manually, which means the rule breaking action in this case meant more work compared to if the rule had worked properly.

Benjamin says that he thinks that rules that are not working should be changed, but admits that attempts to change processes generally are futile. Benjamin failing to apply the installation process description should have been an obvious indication to the company that this process needed to be updated, but it was not, and instead Benjamin was told to deviate from it. Supposedly, the process-owner model makes it harder for management to update and maintain processes, since the responsibility of maintaining is placed in the hands of an employee who perhaps is less aware that updates are necessary and less inclined to put effort into streamlining the work environment.

Benjamin says that they have a lot of processes at the company. According to Ouchi (1980) a lot of rules means the decision maker must know which rule to apply in a given situation. The management might perceive many rules as creating a more stable work environment when in fact they are underestimating the skills and experience necessary to correctly evaluate the situation and apply the right rules.

4.3 Bella, Bravo

Bella has been working as a business analyst at Bravo for nine months. She currently works in three different projects, but two of them she has started in very recently. In the third project she works with customer support as a "key user", and receives and handles requests, incidents and problems from users. Bravo has a lot of processes and as in Benjamin's case, she has to cope with process descriptions of varying quality aimed at regulating her work.

As a key user Bella works together with specialists whose job is to create procedures, guidelines, and templates for the key users to use in their communication with the customers. The specialists are a comparatively small group; Bella says that there are around ten specialists compared to a hundred key users. Bella likes some of the guides the specialists provide, but a number of them she finds are constraining her work; she is certain that her first priority is keeping the customers happy and that she does not accomplish that by following procedures by the letter. She says specialists have sometimes praised her for following a procedure properly, but that she is mostly complemented by her managers for keeping customers satisfied. She points out that the specialists are probably more inclined to promote rule-abidance because they are not working as close to the users.

Bella mentions the following example of when she deviates from the prescribed procedure; the specialists have provided a set of questions for the key users to ask the customers when they receive requests from them. However, she learned from her colleagues that it is often unnecessary and just causes frustration. She says her colleagues suggested she ignore the bullet points. She thinks this particular rule is in place just because "some manager high up in the company wants to see certain information in a report".

Another example of rule breaking is that when Bella is asked questions within a certain area of expertise, she uses her informal network within the company and asks a person that she knows is knowledgeable within that area instead of finding the information the prescribed way, which would be finding it on the intranet. Asking her contact persons saves time. She started using this informal contact after getting in touch with him at a meeting and now she encourages her colleagues to do the same.

When she talks about rules and rule abidance, Bella is contradictory and even points out so herself. On one hand she thinks that the company would work better if everyone followed rules and guidelines, and she says she would have liked to have more rules, if they were good.

On the other hand she says that she does not perceive herself as a "red-tapist", and is very certain that producing results matter more than adhering to rules. Red tape even seems to make her irritated. She does mention a theory about some rules and guidelines being meant mostly for newcomers, while more experienced employees are meant to work as they see fit. However, she states that if she would run into a written rule that she did not find sensible, she would discuss it with her manager or her colleagues to find out if she needs to follow it.

Points of interest

- At Bravo they have a large amount of processes
- Specialists creates procedures, guidelines and templates for Bella and her colleagues to use when communicating with users
- Bella's customers find some of the procedures frustrating
- Bella was explicitly told by her colleagues that she did not have to ask the customer the prescribed list of questions when handling a request
- The specialists complements Bella when she is working according to process description, while her managers complements her for keeping customers happy regardless of the process
- Bella thinks her main priority is to keep customers happy
- Bella thinks that the specialists are more in favour of rule abidance because they work further from the users
- Bella says that she thinks that the company would actually work better if everyone followed rules and procedures
- When users asks her questions within a certain area of expertise, Bella asks a knowledgeable contact of hers instead of looking up the answer on the intranet
- Asking her contact is much quicker
- She took initiative to ask the contact
- States that she would ask her network about rules

Analysis

In Bella's key user team, there seems to be a consensus that their first priority is customer satisfaction; it is encouraged through complements from management, and Bella was explicitly told by her colleagues to deviate from the prescribed list of questions when communicating with the users. Bella's workplace seems to be a typical example of when a team gets caught in the crossfire between the priorities of the rule-making part of the organization, the specialists, and the part that cares about actions and results (Brunsson 1989). For Bella however, it is evident to prioritize results in her day-to-day work rather than rule-adherence.

Bella mentions that she goes through a contact for information instead of finding it on the intranet. This example is interesting because Bella took initiative to break the rule; she got in touch with a knowledgeable person and realized asking him was much quicker; a more effective way of working. Recalling that rule breaking is easier if another employee has done it before (Morrison 2006), let us look a little closer at this particular instance of process deviation. The culture within Bella's team is suggesting that keeping key users happy is their first priority. The managers seem to be enforcing this culture. The fact that the process descriptions are coming from another direction than from the managers supposedly makes them easier to disregard when siding with the managers' opinions. Ouchi (1980) said that from the unified point of view that norms establish, members of the group can deduce to guide any situation, which is likely what happens in this example; based on customer satisfaction being their highest priority, Bella deduces that she can disregard the principle that

information should be found on their intranet. Other contributing factors are probably that Bella may have a rule breaking personality, that her job is autonomous and that she works close to customers (Morrison 2006). Finally, perhaps the rule-makers does not, in fact, have anything against Bella breaking this procedure, but the rule is designed the way it is because they are unable to provide a contact person to ask.

Interestingly, Bella says that the company would probably work better if everyone followed the rules and procedures. She even admits to contradicting herself. Supposedly, Bella prefers rules in a large perspective but dislike them on an individual level; essentially, people tend to like it if others follow rules but think themselves capable of making better decisions on their own (DeHart-Davis 2007). What speaks against this theory is that Bella encourages her colleagues to use her contact person for information. It may also be the case that Bella does not always think her decisions through on a day-to-day basis (Kahneman 2011), but when forced to do so she thinks that rule breaking is essentially bad for the company. This theory is further strengthened when she debates that she would ask her network about certain rules, and if they need following; when she earlier have stated that she did not do it this way. A final theory and one which Bella actually talks about, is that she perceives rules as guidance for newcomers, but that more experienced employees are expected to be able to make decisions on their own.

4.4 Adam, Alpha

Adam has been working as a software developer at company Alpha for nine months. He is working in a team consisting of nine other employees. They work in an agile environment and use scrum as a process. He points out that they are happy with how the process works and their amount of freedom and autonomy. The managers at the company acknowledge his team's agile process as particularly good and other teams look at it for improvement suggestions.

Adam does mention that they are not doing code reviews entirely according to procedure. The code reviews as such are enforced by the company, but the group themselves have also created a formal rule that states that each developer may only have one task at a time waiting for review by another team member. It is in particular the latter rule that is broken; they often have several code reviews pending. Adam describes how it has become gradually accepted to break this rule; it was followed in the beginning but became less complied with over time. He has broken it himself since he observed that others were doing it.

Adam says they break the rule about not having several pending code reviews because it ineffective to just wait for someone to review their code, so they take on other tasks while waiting and the tasks become stacked in the review system. When a team member has several code reviews pending, the others can see that in their intranet collaboration tool and usually give that person some remarks, such as "Well, how many reviews do you have pending?", but there are no other sanctions. The rule was implemented after Adam started at Alpha, following discussions during their sprint review meetings. It did not take long until people started breaking it. The group has even tried to introduce that particular rule once before and then eventually removed it.

Adam says that the important tasks always get reviewed sooner or later, but admits some other tasks never do. They are small tasks or fixes, and they are skipped because it is seen as time inefficient to review such minor things. This is actually a deviation from the code review rule as it is prescribed.

Points of interest

- The team's agile processes are acknowledged within the company as being very good
- The team has introduced their own rule about not having several tasks waiting to be reviewed
- The rule about not having several pending code reviews is frequently broken
- Adam learned to break the rule about not having several pending code reviews by noticing that others were breaking it
- They break the rule about not having several pending code reviews with the motivation that it is time consuming and unnecessary for them to just wait for code review to be done
- The rule about minimizing the number of pending code reviews has been introduced and removed once before
- Some small tasks are not reviewed at all because it is considered unnecessary

Analysis

Adam explains how a formal rule was created by the group to reduce the amount of pending reviews, but that the rule was broken soon after it was introduced and has become less and less complied with over time. Considering Morrison's (2006) and Desai's (2010) definition of rule breaking as an action that breaks an "explicit, active, and top-down rule", deviation from this rule is not actually rule breaking since the rule is not top-down. With this in mind however, considering both that the top-down requirement is debatable, and that breaking of a rule that the group enforce upon themselves entails some particularly interesting issues, we still want to study this instance of rule breaking.

The rule with the purpose of reducing the amount of pending code reviews functions as a local stage-gate system, in which the gate ("is the code review done?") is guarded not by a manager but collectively by the group. The rule is intended to make sure that code reviews are done, but if it was rigorously enforced it would actually stall work, which is in all likelihood a worse consequence for the team and the company than if code reviews would be left pending or forgotten. Adam quickly picked up that others were breaking this rule.

Since this rule about pending code reviews was created by the team they are aware of the intention behind it and are empowered to remove it themselves, so revising the rule would neither be complicated nor costly. The team still decide to keep the rule however and have even re-introduced it even though they removed it once before. Why is this? One theory is that the group may have two sub-groups, one that is in favour of keeping the rule and one that is in favour of rule breaking; Adam mentions one piece of information that indicates this, which is that a person who has a lot of code reviews waiting for review receives witty remarks about it. Witty remarks are a sanction intended to mitigate rule breaking (Granér 1994, Axelrod 1986). However, it is a mild form of sanction, which also indicates that the rule is not heavily enforced (Granér 1994). The rule may also be in place because the group want to present a more favourable face to the outside (Feldman 1984). A related theory is that the rule has a regulating effect even though it is frequently broken; keeping it signals to the group member that they should try to keep the number of pending code reviews to a minimum, which is enforced by the very mild form of sanction, while the rule-breaking norm simultaneously signals that following the rule should not be at the cost of stalling work.

4.5 Frank, Foxtrot

Frank has been working as software developer at company Foxtrot for six months. His team consists of designers, testers and other developers that use agile development methods. His team is autonomous; their project manager is new and is not completely familiar with the work the developers do, which allows them freedom to select tasks themselves. He says that

they always select tasks with the success of the product in mind, since they feel responsible for the product. Frank describes that in general he is probably quite unaware of the company rules, he has not put any effort into investigating which rules apply to him and he has not been taught rules that come to mind even though his introduction process was formal.

Frank says that code reviews are mandatory and that this rule is enforced by their collaboration system in which tasks are displayed as unfinished until the review has been done. He explains that code reviews are done except for if the task is a software bug that impacts several versions of the system, in which case the bug is fixed and reviewed for only one of the versions. He says that he was taught to break this rule by the leader of the engineering support team, whose responsibility is to release fixes to the market. Frank thinks that the rule serves a purpose in its simplicity even though it is broken in some circumstances, and he thinks that adding exceptions to the rule description would just cause those exceptions to expand.

Frank mentions some examples that indicate that his management are liberal in interpreting rules that apply to them. For instance; they use a stage gate model at the company, and after a stage called "feature complete" they are not allowed to add any more requirements to the update. However, the product management keep adding features even after feature complete.

Points of interest

- Frank describes his team as autonomous
- In general, Frank perceives his own work environment as unconstrained by rules
- He has an inexperienced project manager
- Code reviews are mandatory, but fixes of bugs in several versions of the system are only reviewed once
- Frank believes that reviewing the same fix for several versions would be "a waste of time"
- To not review bug fixes several times was taught to Frank by the leader of the engineering support team
- Frank describes how product management are liberal in their interpretation of rules that apply to themselves

Analysis

Frank explains how he was taught by the leader of their engineering support team not to perform code reviews more than once for bug fixes in several versions of the system, thus he was taught through a formal channel to break a formal rule, under the pretence that the rule is inadequate in certain situations. Frank seem to think that the rule is meant even by its creator to be broken when the situation calls for it, but that its serves a regulating purpose in its current simple and coherent form; that it would be broken even more if exceptions were added to it.

Frank also mentions how management disregard the company stage gate model. One can imagine that this would create a culture where rule breaking is seen as more accepted on the lower levels, but while Frank describe his work environment as autonomous and unconstrained, he does not mention many examples of rule breaking.

4.6 Daniel, Delta

Daniel has been working as a web developer at company Delta for three months. He is working in a team consisting of four other developers and one tester. He and his colleagues are able to choose their tasks freely from an already prioritized list of requirements. The product owner is the one who prioritizes. Daniel says that he thinks he has a lot of freedom in

his work since he decides how to solve his tasks, and since he are able to select the tasks he likes to work with.

Daniel does not give any examples of what he would define as rule breaking. About code reviews, he mentions that they are meant to do them, but that they often do them carelessly, and sometimes skip them altogether. They find it boring to do code reviews compared with their other tasks. It has even happened that the team have had pending code reviews upon delivery, but Daniel himself has never left code reviews pending for longer than two days. Daniel is reluctant to label skipping code reviews as rule breaking. Daniel describes his direct work environment as very informal. If he runs into problems in his work he always finds someone within the team to ask and tries not to spend long being stuck on an issue before asking.

Points of interest

- Daniel has only been working for three months
- Daniel and his teammates can choose tasks freely, but only according to the product owner's prioritization
- Daniel thinks that he has a lot of freedom in his work
- Even though he says that they are not doing code reviews as they should, Daniel cannot recall any examples of rule breaking
- Work environment is informal, Daniel learns through asking his colleagues

Analysis

Daniel discussed that they are careless about code reviews, which is an action that is a conscious deviation from a company procedure, but he was hesitant to call the action rule breaking. However, we are still stating the example as a rule breaking action. This due to that they have a clearly defined process that they are meant to follow but intentionally deviate from, which fits the definition of rule breaking by Desai (2010) and Morrison (2006).

Daniel was also reluctant to mention any examples of formal rules within the organization. Instead he wanted to call the "rules" guidelines even though he admits that some of them are forced on the group. Why is Daniel so reluctant to label anything rules or rule breaking? There may be several reasons. First, he may be reluctant to admit rule breaking during the interview, but it would not explain why he is unable to give examples of rules. A factor that most definitely contributes to his vague answers is that Daniel has only been working at the company for three months, thus supposedly he has not yet started to analyse or question his environment. An adjacent theory is that Daniel is currently pleased with the limited amount of freedom they have within their work team; he does mention that he perceive them as having a lot of freedom even though all strategically critical decisions are made outside the team.

Rules substitute direct supervision (Ouchi 1980), but the way Daniel's work environment is designed, he seem to be shielded from making any critical decisions. The way he is recommended to refer to someone else when he runs into a problem, and the fact that he cannot mention any examples of rules suggest that he may have a work environment which is controlled by a mechanism very near to direct supervision.

4.7 Gabriel, Golf

Gabriel has been working as a software developer at company Golf for ten months. His team consists of four other developers, three testers and a product owner. They have relatively recently replaced their old waterfall model with agile processes. The team is meant to be working fully according to agile principles, but they are restricted by old norms that still

remain. These norms for example limit communication between the roles within the team, since some members are still used to them having separate responsibilities.

At the start of each sprint Gabriel's team is assigned a bundle of requirements by the product owner. They are then free to distribute the requirements between the members of their team as they find suitable. While the requirements are based on customer needs, the management think far ahead; they use a strategic approach to customer requests rather than an agile.

Gabriel explains how the different teams at the company are independent; they have their own way of working and there is a strong "not invented here"-mentality. If a good practice would develop within one team it would not be transferred to another. A consequence of the team autonomy is that they have different repositories for information, which makes is hard to find relevant written material. Much of the written material is also out-dated because the repositories are not maintained.

Gabriel mentions an old checklist process as an example of an out-dated and rigid rule. Before launch of a completed software update, they had to gain signatures with approvals from different authority persons within the company that guaranteed the quality. This process caused a lot of lead-time for the team due to people being slow on signing off on the update, and it could take up to weeks until completed. Gabriel says some people used to skip the checklist to save time, but he never had to personally. The problematic process was brought up at a sprint retrospective meeting about six months ago and has now been replaced in Gabriel's team. Implementation of the new process in underway in other teams, but it takes time.

Another frequently broken rule that Gabriel mentions is that his team is not supposed to have any contact with any of their customers; instead management shall handle all contact according to contracts and other formal agreements. However, a customer representative recently joined Gabriel's team for a period of time, and they find themselves asking that person about change requests. Gabriel likes having the customer contact because he thinks it helps him to foresee what requirements the product management wants implemented in the future; thus it allows him to plan ahead. He describes that the initiative to ask the customer representative came as obvious to his entire team.

Gabriel says that management may perhaps recognize the value of being able to ask the customer representative about requirements, but that they are unable to change the rule about customer contact due to the formal agreements with customer, and besides management are more interested in long-term strategic decisions than accommodating immediate customer requests. He thinks that changing rules is hard at his workplace because people are so used to the way they are working that they are not motivated enough to bring about change. He thinks that if he really wanted to change something he would not bother with going through management, he would just try to change the way they work in his team.

Gabriel says that he thinks the lower management are opposed to removal of the old, rigid rules like the checklist because removing them means they lose control and insight. He also thinks people at the company in general are opposed to change because they are so used to working with their old rules.

Points of interest

- Gabriel perceive Golf as overly rigid
- Although Gabriel's team is meant to be agile, old waterfall norms still affect the way they work

- His team managed to bring about change of the checklist procedure which was old and out-dated and caused a lot of lead-time
- Gabriel's team are not meant to have direct contact with customers according to contracts, but they are currently working together with a customer representative who they ask about customer requests
- Gabriel and his team jointly decided to start asking the customer representative
- They ask the customer representative in order to be able to plan ahead and save time
- Gabriel thinks lower managers oppose changing rules because they are afraid to lose control and insight
- Gabriel notes how management care about long-term decisions while he and his colleagues plans for a shorter time frame
- Gabriel thinks that members of the organization oppose change because they have gotten used to the current rules

Analysis

Gabriel sees his company as rigid and seems to be frustrated with the amount of old norms that remain and constrain change. It is apparent that rules at the company are not changed through incremental adjustment, as is the ideal in the theory of organizational change (March, Schulz and Zhou 2000). He perceives his lower management as opposing agile practices because they are afraid of losing control. If bad rules persist it may well be because some part of the organization enforces it to protect their own interests (Desai 2010). Bad rules may also persist because it is costly to change them (Desai 2010).

Gabriel's scenario is complex and hard to interpret without breaching the boundaries of the topic of this study. While he feels constrained by both old norms and old formal rules, his team actually managed to change the out-dated checklist procedure. Perhaps the procedure caught management's attention since it caused lead-time and was thus an obvious performance problem; recalling Desai's (2010) theory on that companies look for new rules when encountering performance problems. Supposedly managing to change the rule would make Gabriel perceive his environment as less constrained, but he still perceives lower management as rigid and his colleagues as wanting to work according to old habits.

Gabriel knew he could have broken the checklist rule if he needed to because his colleagues taught him so. Regarding the other instance of rule breaking, they jointly decided to start asking the customer representative, they were being opportunistic and doing so was an obvious choice. This second scenario is also hard to interpret because it is difficult to understand the management intentions behind bringing in a customer representative to work on their team.

The fact that Gabriel suggests he would try and change the way they are working by promoting change within his team rather than going to management suggests that the teams really are autonomous and that the rigidness of the company should not cause him to feel constrained. Perhaps the actual problem lies within the established norms of the group which, recalling Feldman (1984) and Axelrod (1986), can exert tremendous power over behaviour.

4.8 David, Delta

David has been working as a web developer at company Delta for eight months. He is currently working in a team that consists of nine developers. They are using agile processes and he describes the environment as flexible. Like in Daniel's team, David's product owner has already prioritized the tasks and the team are free to select amongst the ones with the highest priority rating. The way they work is they select tasks, study them and break them

down into steps and then present the steps to the rest of the team during a planning meeting before doing any actual coding. About code reviews, David says that while they are mandatory they sometimes skip them and they are not done as consistently as they should be. He personally learned that he could skip code reviews because his teammates were skipping them. They disregard code reviews because they are not seen as important in their day-to-day work; they rather prioritize coding. He describes how the code review rule was introduced after he started at Delta and it is still very new. They have lately started to try and enforce the code reviews because they realize that they are good in the long run.

Points of interest

- David and his teammates can choose tasks freely, but only according to the product owner's prioritization
- Thinks he has a lot of freedom in his work
- David says that they sometimes deliberately skip code reviews
- David learned that he could skip code reviews by observing others
- They skip code reviews in order to save time in their day-to-day work
- The code review rule was introduced after David started at Delta and it is still very new
- David thinks that the code reviews are good in the long-run

Analysis

David's scenario is very similar to Daniel's; his team gets to select their tasks but only amongst the ones that the product owner has already prioritized and David thinks he has a lot of freedom in his work. Like Daniel's, our interpretation of David's workplace is that he is shielded from making critical decisions, but still has an adequate amount of freedom that suits him well this early in his career and his seems to be an ideal learning environment.

The code review rule is disregarded, but David recognizes that it should be followed because it is good in the long run. Teams seem to force a certain type of rules upon themselves in order to avoid shortsighted decisions much like an individual would to avoid fast thinking. Then of course we are reluctant to follow the rule since authority does not sanction breaking it.

4.9 Eric, Echo

Eric has been working as a software developer at Echo for eight months, and previously had a similar developer role at another large company for a year. He has also worked as freelancer. He is a consultant and works with short projects that the company builds for the customer in-house. His role is comprehensive and involves coding and software architecture as well as contact with the customer.

Eric usually works in teams, but the composition and size of the teams differ a lot for each project and he currently works alone. They have a process description, which suggests scrum practices, but Eric says that they apply the methodology they feel is right for each project, they would not use a procedure if they did not find it useful. They always try to incorporate some agile procedures however.

Eric says that the company has a lot of old, out-dated and inapplicable rules. For example, there are a lot of rules that restricts handling of customer data that would constrain his work to an unreasonable extent were he to apply them. They do not fit the organization or the technology they use today. He thinks that the reason why they are not updated is because of economical constraints, the company does not prioritize searching for new rules and procedures.

Eric thinks that there are probably good process descriptions at the company as well, but that they are stored in a company database which you rarely have time to check when you are involved in work. He also says that process descriptions are probably more important if you develop internally. For him working so close to customers makes it obvious that keeping them happy is his first priority. His work is constrained by customers and the customers' main priority is usually economic; Eric often has to work under tight time constraints. He wishes he could sometimes prioritize writing really good code, thus doing code reviews and other quality improving measures, but the customer is not interesting in paying for such "excess".

Eric is uncertain on how he knew how to break rules, but he believes it is because everyone else were doing it, and certainlyy because he has previous work experience. Eric is even familiar with the concept of pro-social rule breaking and has an interest in the rule-breaking personality. He thinks that people with work experience are generally more confident in breaking company rules; if you come to a workplace already knowing procedures that work you will have them to rely on.

Points of interest:

- Eric has an extensive role covering both coding and customer interaction
- Eric works in short projects that vary a lot in size and composition
- The company has many out-dated and inapplicable rules
- Rules are not updated because the does not want to prioritize it financially
- Eric's teams apply the methodology they find useful in each project
- Since Eric works so close to customers he thinks his priorities are obviously set by them
- The customer's main priority is usually to keep down the expenses, which means Eric works under time constraints
- Eric is aware of the concept of pro-social rule breaking
- Eric thinks his previous work experience makes him a lot more confident in breaking rules that need to be broken

Analysis

Eric is certain that his main priority is to make the customers happy, which leads to him having little regard for procedures that just slow down his work. He is very unconstrained by rules and practices and confident in that he makes the best prioritizations and decisions on his own. While he is actually caught in the crossfire between rules conceived by the company and customer demands he finds the decision to prioritize the customer as obvious. Morrison (2006) says breaking rules to keep customers happy is one of the most common motivations. Eric's confidence in prioritizing customer satisfaction probably comes partly from it being a norm amongst his co-workers, and partly from his superiors; he would likely be sanctioned if he failed to keep customers happy but he is not sanctioned for not following procedures. He says himself that his previous work experience gives him the confidence to be unbureaucratic, and surely if he knows procedures that work he can obviously rely on them rather than the company's prescribed methods.

Another contributing factor in making Eric confident to break rules may well be that some rules are obviously out-dated and inapplicable. Eric thinks that rules are not updated or changed because the company is not prioritizing it financially. Desai (2010) says that companies only search for new practices when they encounter performance problems, and since Eric and his colleagues seems to make a good job by disregarding bad and out-dated rules, the bad rules and the rule breaking is not going to catch managements' concern. Unless

the company encounters performance issues, the rules will likely become less and less connected to how members of Eric's part of the organization perform their work.

Eric makes an interesting point in arguing that he as a more experienced developer has less need for processes compared to a newly hired. One of the purposes of rules is said to be to socialize newcomers into the organization (Desai 2010), and obviously having experience of previous situation gives a person more confidence to make decisions.

While Eric is unconstrained by rules, he feels he is instead constrained by customer demands; thus even though he is autonomous he does not perceive himself as having latitude in how to perform his work. Eric could be perceiving himself as constrained because he is comparing his current work with previous experience as a freelancer, but more likely, accountability and responsibility are constraining.

4.10 Alex, Alpha

Alex has been working as a software developer at company Alpha for nine months. He is Chinese and has some work experience from China. He studied in Sweden for two years before starting at Alpha, and describes how he found Sweden very different from China to begin with; he had no idea what unions were for example. He had time to get used to Swedish society during his studies, but he still finds some parts of the Swedish work system as strange.

Alex's team is not using agile methodology. They have separate work roles and Alex is assigned requirements by his project manager. The project manager in turn receives the requirements from a higher hierarchical level. Alex never communicates with customers directly.

Alex says that while they have rules at his workplace they are not very strict; they tell you what to do but not how to do it. Compared to China this is a lot of lateral.

He appreciates that in Sweden rules can be discussed, in China everyone just follows rules blindly to avoid getting sanctioned with a salary reduction or unpaid overtime. He thinks it is much more effective to have few rules that are negotiable. He also says that as long as rules are logical, they should be followed because doing so reduces errors and saves time. He also recognizes however that some rules may be bad, and thinks that in such cases they remain just because people have gotten so used to them. He is not absolutely certain whom he would approach if he wanted to change a rule, but probably project management first.

Alex mentions that the code review rule they have is broken for several different reasons; first, he systematically disregards the rule in urgent cases when code needs to be checked in quickly, because he was told by his manager to do so. In such cases they do not even test the code. Alex says that in urgent or special cases rules may always be ignored. Alex has also checked in code without review because he assigned code review to a colleague who did not perform it for several days. In the latter case he was not told to break the rule, but since his colleague was not doing the review as he should have, he figured he had to check in the code anyway. When he checks in unreviewed code it is visible in their intranet system, but he did not receive any remarks about it so he figured that is was not frowned upon.

Points of interest

- Alex compares working in Sweden with his previous experience working in China
- Alex prefers the liberal Swedish work system over the strict Chinese one
- Alex thinks that workplaces function better if rules are negotiable
- Alex thinks bad rules remain because people get used to them

- Alex thinks that rules that are logical should be followed to reduce errors and save time
- Alex thinks that rules may be broken in urgent or special cases
- Alex has broken the code review rule in urgent situations because he was told by his manager to do so, it saves time
- Alex have also broken the code review rule because his colleague was too slow reviewing his code

Analysis

Alex has work experience from a country with a radically different approach to workplace rules. This makes his points of view interesting, but perhaps problematic to compare to the other cases. Alex explains how organizations in China force people to follow rules, with punishment as a tool to enforce rule abidance. He says that the liberal Swedish work system is more effective than the Chinese because employees are empowered to think for themselves and be innovative. His reasoning may be due to selfish incentives; it is obvious that the Swedish liberal rule system is better for the individual, and even though Alex says that it is the organization that benefits from it, he may be thinking that it is better from him.

Alex was told by his manager to abandon the code review rule when under time pressure. However, he has also deviated from it because a colleague of his failed to adhere to his part of the rule; because the colleague failed to review Alex's code within the expected time Alex checked in the code without review. It is hard to determine in this latter case to what extent he was "forced" to break the rule or whether it was initiative on his part. He states that it is justified to break rules in situation that are not accounted for, and he generally seem to have a very well-reasoned perception about when he thinks rule breaking is good or bad.

Alex thinks that bad rules may remain just because people get used to them, which complies with the statement about organizations tending to ignore early indications that rules drift from how people actually work in the organization (Desai 2010). One of the things he mentioned as positive about the Swedish work culture is that rules are negotiable, but at the same time he mentions how bad rules remain; perhaps what he actually appreciates is that people are empowered to be liberal in their interpretation of rules in some situations.

5 Discussion

All of the case subjects gave at least one example of an action, which we define as rule breaking, using the definition "An employee's voluntary and intentional departure of behaviour from rules that are explicit and active." This definition is based on Morrison (2006), but omits that rules need to be enforced top-down. Given that rules may be created by a rule making part other than management (see Bella's case) or by the team itself (see Adam's case), the top-down requirement is deemed irrelevant.

The number of examples of rule breaking actions provides a comprehensive foundation to analyse how people learn to break rules, why they break rules, and why the rules that are frequently broken are not changed or removed.

5.1 Rules Need to be Broken

Baucus et al. (2008) argued that rule breaking in organizations is inevitable because it is impossible for rule makers to anticipate all possible problems, and as a consequence employees will face situations for which rules offer little guidance or elicit flawed responses (Baucus et al. 2008). Rules are created by some part of the organization which perceives itself

as having greater experience, superior judgement and a better grasp of schedules and constraints than its subordinates (Baucus et al. 2008). However, rule makers are, no less than the receiving end of rules, affected by their limited perspective and a more or less conscious self-interest. Therefore rules are never infallible.

The opposite extreme of an organization with a rigid and heavily enforced rule system, would be an organization entirely without rules. However, rules are not just a means of management to control their subordinates, several researchers claim that they have other purposes; they serve to protect the people who are subject to them (Desai 2010), they socialize new members into organizational activities (Desai 2010), and we derive that they serve as a guiding mechanism even though they are frequently broken (see Adam's case).

At the receiving end of rules, rules guide, protect and create stability, but need to be negotiable by the people who are subject to them. Rules only actually hinder creativity and innovation when they are being blindly followed due to a culture that harshly punishes rule disobedience.

5.2 Rule Breaking is Learned Through Observation

Each of the ten case subjects gave examples of how they learned to break rules. The responses were largely uniform; most of the subjects said they learned to break the rule in question from observing someone in their environment breaking it. This indicates that how to break rules is tacit knowledge which is transferred through socialization (Nonaka 1994). This is hardly a surprising finding; the respondents were unaccustomed to talk about rule breaking actions, and it is a sensitive subject, which indicates that the knowledge is tacit and rarely talked about; rarely made explicit. Instead newcomers pick it up through observing and adapting to others' behaviour. Norms can be used to explain this; norms are the actual behaviour of the group coupled with expectations about others' behaviour. When the newcomer is observing someone in their environment breaking a rule and then adopting to that behaviour they are learning to adhere to a norm.

Verkuyten (1994) concluded that rules may be broken when a principle takes precedence over the principle that a rule should be followed. Both Bella and Eric indicated that they had a clear sense that their main priority was to keep customers happy. Supposedly they could deduce from this priority that breaking rules was appropriate. According to Ouchi (1980) members of a group can from norms deduce rules to guide them in any given situation, Bella and Eric both indicated that they had strong norms within their group about prioritizing customers.

Since a certain type of rule breaking actions are potentially beneficial for organizations, it is tempting to search for a way of teaching new employees to adapt to this behaviour; teaching them to engage in pro-social rule breaking, to use Morrison's (2006) term. We encountered two cases in which newcomers were told by their managers to break rules (Alex, Frank). However, Frank pointed out that the reason for management not to add exceptions to the actual written rule is because the rule would then be weakened, and subsequently even more broken. The result is that adding exceptions to rules makes them diminish in strength.

5.3 Employees are expected to learn to break rules

Eric argued that employees with more work experience have a higher tendency to take initiative to break rules. Other case subjects (Anna, Bella and Eric) argued that some rules were only intended to guide newcomers into the organization's practices, and that employees were later expected to abandon them. These statements indicate two things; that rule breaking is learnt through experience, and that employees are expected to learn how to deviate from or

abandon rules. It seems organizations expect newcomers to follow rules until they are able to decide when it is appropriate to make independent decisions.

In a sense, rule breaking is taught at the same time the rule is taught. The norm system, which interprets rules, is coupled together with how rules are communicated and whether rule breaking is sanctioned or not sanctioned. The cases have shown that rules are broken even though rule breaking is not explicitly taught or allowed. Instead, the norms interpret rules in such a way that they, the norms, allow rule breaking to some extent. Now imagine that making exceptions the rule would be brought up by the rule-maker as a viable option to following the rule. The norm would instantly change to allow for even more deviation from the rule. Thus, when interpretations are spoken of, the interpretation mechanism is influenced. Hence, we argue that the interpretation system is subjected to a mechanism similar to the Heisenberg principle of uncertainty; would management try to describe how to interpret rules, that description would itself be subjected to interpretation, and thus management would not know how the interpretation is done.

The interpretation system, like rule breaking, is tacit and communicated through socialization. It is normally not made explicit. If group members discuss how they interpret a rule, it leads to the rule being interpreted differently; if an interpretation is made explicit, it changes. The interpretation system is thus a frame of reference which is known by all members of a group but which can never be mapped out or documented because it would then turn into something different. There is also an individual aspect to the interpretation system since different persons are inclined to interpret rules differently.

5.4 The Norm is to Break Rules to Save Time

The case subjects' motivations for breaking rules were largely uniform. Motivations are defined as the benefits they perceived were to gain from abandoning the rule. Almost all of the respondents claimed that they broke rules in order to save time (all case subjects except Eric). All of the case subjects who worked close to customers answered that they broke rules in order to satisfy the customer (Bella, Eric and Gabriel). These results correspond with Morrison's (2006) findings on motivations for breaking rule, except she also found that colleagues broke rules in order to help their colleagues.

Several case subjects claim they broke the rule in question because they encountered a specific situation for which they deemed it inapplicable (Anna, Alex and Frank). These were either situations in which time was a critical factor, or it was situations in which the risk of breaking the rule was perceived as exceptionally small. A number of other case subjects say they broke the rule in question because it was out-dated (Benjamin and Eric).

Half of the case subjects (Adam, Anna, Benjamin, Daniel, David and Gabriel) admitted that they broke the rule in question because the rest of their team was deviating from it. This response may indicate that the case subjects' own rule breaking behaviour lacks in conscious interpretation and risk analysis. A number of the case subjects (Anna, Benjamin, Bella, Gabriel) even said that they liked the rule in question, and would have preferred to follow it. If rule breaking is part of the norm within a team, the consequence may be that newcomers adhere to it without understanding the consequence of their action. There are however two ways of interpreting the respondents' contradictory statements and behaviour; either they actually wish they could follow the rule, or they just decide that the rule is good when the interviewer forces them to reflect over it.

Reflecting is something Kahneman (2011) describes as slow thinking. In the moment when the case subjects break rules it may be that they do it out of habit; or fast thinking (Kahneman 2011). It is not until they are forced to use slow thinking that they realize the value of the rule,

and therefore express that they wish the team were following it. A variant interpretation is that the respondents perhaps want other people to follow the rule, while they consider themselves capable of deviating from the rule in appropriate ways (DeHart-Davis 2007).

5.5 There is Resistance Towards Improving the Rules

To consider why broken rules are not changed is relevant when studying rule breaking because then we avoid the simplification of antagonizing the rule making part. Only two of the case subjects had actually attempted to change a rule; Benjamin tried to change the installation procedure because he wanted it to work, and Gabriel's team had managed to bring about the removal of a cumbersome checklist procedure. Interestingly, inclination to change rules had no connection with whether the respondents were aware of how to change rules.

The case subjects were generally reluctant to the idea of changing or removing frequently broken rules. When posed with the option, the majority of the respondents answered that they actually like the rule in its current form. They appear as if they have gotten used to the rule and prefer to relate to it in its current form. While employees are reluctant to changing the rules that apply to them, managers are considered to put up resistance towards changing rules as well; as was perceived by both Gabriel and Eric. Gabriel thinks that they are reluctant towards it because they are afraid of losing power and insight. Buchanan and Badham (2008) describe how change can dislodge power from members of authority, who can thus be reluctant to allow change to happen. Eric thought his managers were reluctant to bring about change of outdated procedures because it would be costly. Eric's statement concurs with what Desai (2010) says about organizations only caring about rule breaking when they detect performance problems.

5.6 A broken rule may still be effective

There is a connection between the respondents thinking that the rule is essentially good, and they sometimes follow it. "Sometimes following" is a fuzzy definition, but means that they follow or break the rule based on some criteria; for example code reviews are skipped for small tasks or in urgent cases. The extent to which they follow the rule vary from frequently abandoning it to only doing so in very specific situations; compare Adam's case (frequent) to Frank's (seldom) for example. Thus, seven of the respondents were not abandoning the rule completely and they were neither interested in removing it. More interesting is that they were not interested in changing it either; they did not want to adapt the rule so that their actions were not considered rule breaking.

Verkuyten (1994) showed that people act in relation to laws even though the laws are frequently broken. For example; even if most people in Sweden always drive above the speed limit, they only drive slightly above it. We propose that the interpretation system allow employees to deviate to some extent from the rule. Depending on how rigorous or harsh the rule is considered, the extent of the rule breaking will vary. If the rule would be changed to accommodate the rule breaking behaviour, it would be even more broken. The employees are supposedly aware that this is how the interpretation system functions. In mundane terms they may say as Alex did, "People have gotten used to this rule". Essentially, that a rule is being broken does not mean it is useless; it probably still functions as a regulating mechanism.

Conclusion

The previous section made some propositions about how employees relate to rules. In this section we summarize the findings in relation to the research questions. This project was aimed at benefiting practitioners as well as research by investigating how organizational

members act in relation to formal rules. Therefore this section is concluded by summarizing our main contributions to industry and research.

The organization creates rules as control measures, but the rules are generic and the situations they are applied to are specific; thus they can not be used for optimal result at all times. We acknowledge that rule breaking may be both positive and negative to an organization. We also acknowledge that an effective employee understands when, to what extent and how to deviate from rules. Such an employee estimates what effect and possible implication a rule breaking action entails and can do a judgement call that benefits the organization. However, all rule breaking do not induce positive effects, even if the intention was positive. Our focus in the study has been the unselfish behaviour when employees act in a way they see as positive for the organization.

Our study has shown that people foremost become aware of rule breaking at the workplace by observing others performing such actions. The second most common reason is being told by colleagues or employers to break rules.

Very few of the rule breaking actions that we have studied have been from the initiative of our interviewees. We conclude that this requires experience and information about the rule and the consequences that will transpire when breaking it. This experience is something that newly hired usually does not possess. For newcomers to take initiative is more common if they work close to customers.

How do employees break rules at the workplace?

The cases show that employees break rules in relation to the rule, they do not completely disregard a rule because they observe that it is broken. Employees have a seemingly contradictory perception of rules; they think that rules are good even though they frequently break them. They largely let the norm of their group determine what rules may be broken and to what extent to break them. The norm allow for a certain extent of deviation from the rule.

Why do employees participate in rule breaking at the workplace?

Norms within the teams largely determine whether employees break rules, they are a powerful controlling mechanism. Employees break rules because they are bad or out-dated, but it also occurs that they are very determined to follow rules that are evidently bad. In the cases when employees took the initiative to break rules, they encountered a situation where they felt that the rule created a barrier that hindered them from doing a good job. Employees who work close to customers are more likely to take initiative to break rules. Employees are motivated to break rules by either wanting to save time, or by wanting to satisfy the customer.

Why would a rule remain even though it is frequently broken?

Changing rules is costly for the organization and is encountered with a lot of resistance. The change of broken rules do occur, but only when the organization encounters performance problems. Employees are uncertain on whom to contact to change rules, and are getting used to breaking the rules. Even if rules are broken, they still work as regulating mechanisms. Rules also help newly hired until they have found their own way to handle situations.

Implications for change agents

The employees studied in this project were empowered to take initiative and they broke organisational rules without deconstructive intent; they deviated from designated procedures because they found them to be inadequate, out-dated or inapplicable. Of particular interest is that although the employees justified their rule-breaking behaviour, they were not interested in informing the rule-maker of the deviation or suggesting any change to the rule; the rule

breaker does not tell the rule-maker that the rule is being broken. Rule breaking is a kind of feedback which is not brought forward to the rule-maker (Olin Wickenberg 2001), and the consequence is a lack of feedback to the rule-maker, and a gap in the rule maker's knowledge about how rules are being interpreted in practice. A consequence is that it would distort management's understanding on what is actually going on.

For a change agent, the implications would be two-fold. On the one hand, it means that a change agent has the opportunity to explore ways of circumventing some of the formal rules governing change activities as means for improving efficiency of the change work. On the other hand, it means that the change directives would be subjected to the interpretation system described in this text, and thus not necessarily implemented to the letter. Our findings indicate that members of a project-based organization are much loyal to the performance of their projects and the satisfaction of their customers, which means that change initiatives might be served by being pitched towards those interests.

While reporting that the interpretation system distorts management's ability to receive correct information on the work practices of the organization, we would also like to offer a functional work around, using this text as evidence. They told us. Thus, a scientific investigation can be a way to explore how the interpretation system works and how members of an organisation interpret, abide to or break rules. The procedure did not require hidden cameras, but simply our inability as external to the organisation, to critic the interviewee's actions. Rule breaking is not brought forward to the rule-maker, but to researchers (Olin Wickenberg 2001), and the fact that we were external to the organisation was undoubtedly important.

Thus, while rule breaking makes organisations function when the rules are dysfunctional, the rule breaking also distances the rule receiver from the rule maker. The result is a knowledge gap which we have managed in this study not to bridge, but to explore. Our main contribution to industry is that when employees know that they cannot be critiqued, they are able to provide otherwise hidden feedback about how rules are being interpreted. This ought to be of particular importance during the drastic procedural changes that many large IT organisations performing as they are transitioning to agile practices.

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