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‘Work in progress’: analysing a facilitated behaviour change process through the lens of social practice theory

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1. Introduction

This paper makes an original contribution to debates about behaviour change by reporting on ethnographic research into a pro-environmental behaviour change initiative in a workplace. Existing attempts to change behaviour rest on relatively narrow theoretical assumptions (Burgess *et al* 2003). They expect that changing individuals’ environmental attitudes/values or social norms will be sufficient to encourage the spread of more sustainable consumption across all lifestyle areas. Social practice theory reveals this to be naïve (Reckwitz 2002). Practices and the inconspicuous consumption they entail (Warde 2005), are always locally reinvented (Shove and Pantzar 2005) therefore we must expect different drivers of consumption in different social contexts. Røpke (2004) analyses the distinctive work-related drivers of consumption and reveals the domestic focus of existing attempts to change behaviour. What is still lacking is an attempt to observe the specific dynamics of practice in operation in non-domestic contexts. This paper, based on Hargreaves’ ongoing PhD research attempts to do this in a workplace through detailed observation of Global Action Plan’s ‘Environment Champions’ initiative.

Global Action Plan UK (hereafter GAP) is an environmental charity which formed in 1993 with the aim of encouraging practical environmental action amongst the public. Over the last 14 years, along with its sister organisations across Northern and Western Europe, GAP has experimented with several methods to encourage pro-environmental behaviour change (Staats and Harland 1995; Hobson 2002; GAP 2004). In recent years its 'EcoTeams approach', based on auditing environmental impacts and facilitated group discussions, has received significant academic and policy attention (Georg 1999; HoC EAC 2003; Michaelis 2004; Staats *et al* 2004; Hargreaves *et al* in press). This attention, however, has concentrated solely on GAP's domestic 'EcoTeams' programme. For the first time this paper gives sustained attention to the manner in which the same EcoTeams approach functions in a workplace under the name 'Environment Champions'.

The paper begins with an outline of the core theoretical assumptions which underpin the dominant approaches to behaviour change over the last 30 years. Critiquing these as excessively individualistic and cognitivist, section 3 presents emerging models of 'social practice theory' and argues for their empirical application through the work of Spaargaren and Van Vliet (2000) and Shove and Pantzar (2005). Section 4 then presents empirical evidence which tells the story of an attempt to change waste disposal practices in a behaviour change initiative. Finally, section 5 draws some tentative conclusions about the application of social practice theory to behavioural change.

2. Dominant Approaches to Behaviour Change

Over the last 30 years, the two dominant approaches to consumer behaviour change have rested on narrow individualistic and cognitivist assumptions (Burgess *et al* 2003). Initially, attitude-behaviour connection (A-Bc) models which assumed causal links between attitudes and behaviours justified the use of mass-media campaigns such as 'Helping the Earth Begins at Home' (Hinchliffe 1996; Blake 1999) or 'Are You Doing Your Bit?' (DEMOS 2003). Raising general levels of public awareness was designed to create cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) amongst the public and pro-environmental behaviour change was expected to follow. Despite the increasing sophistication of these

models (see Jackson 2005 for a review), and significant expenditure on mass media campaigns, the value-action gap (Blake 1999) remains wide open.

In the last 5 years, social marketing approaches have moved policy away from attempting to raise general levels of awareness, and towards targeting the social norms which are assumed to motivate consumer behaviour (McKenzie-Mohr and Smith 1999; McKenzie-Mohr 2000). Drawing on economic theories of universal human needs (Maslow 1954; Max-Neef 1991; Jackson and Marks 1999), and anthropological and sociological work identifying the ‘social logic’ of consumption (McCracken 1988; Douglas and Isherwood 1979), social marketing approaches carefully segment their target audience and aim to “start[.] from where people are” (SCR 2006, 14) using advertising techniques to shape social preferences. These approaches have achieved some success in precisely targeted trials (Peattie and Peattie 2003; Haq and Whitelegg 2005, in press) suggesting that in specific cases, specific groups of people may respond to specific messages. Yet, despite recognising that social norms influence preferences, they still ultimately aim to change individuals’ cognitive outlook, assuming that this is the most important determinant of behaviour. They thus retain the individualistic and cognitivist assumptions of the A-Bc models, even if they do produce more sophisticated and better targeted campaigns.

Both of these approaches have ultimately assumed that changing attitudes or shaping social norms to influence preferences will link in a linear manner to changed behaviour. Perhaps unwittingly, they have both focussed on making changes in domestic contexts on the assumption that as long as the message is correct, top-down communications campaigns will cause behavioural changes to cascade throughout all areas of a lifestyle. This narrow individualism has been critiqued by an emerging third perspective which no longer assumes that the individual is the most appropriate “site of social change” (Hobson 2003, 103). Instead, variants of ‘social practice theory’ (Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000; Southerton *et al* 2004; Warde 2005) address the formation of everyday conventions and levels of expectation as properties of social practices.

3. Social Practice Theory and Consumer Behaviour change

“Social-psychological models are strong in stressing the importance of the values and beliefs human agents adhere to. They are, however, weak in connecting individual (motives for) action with the ‘wider society’. In other words, they lack a proper scheme for analysing the interplay between ‘action’ and ‘structure’ or between ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ levels.” (Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000, 52).

An emerging body of work is explaining the interplay between action and structure by considering how bundles of social practices, consisting often of inconspicuous habits and routines, are held in place by broader systems of provision (Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000; Shove and Warde 2002; Burgess *et al* 2003; Spaargaren 2004; Southerton *et al* 2004). In this section we outline the dominant features of ‘social practice theory’ and, following Spaargaren and Van Vliet (2000) and Shove and Pantzar (2005) suggest a means by which it might be applied empirically.

Reckwitz (2002) outlines an ideal model of practice theory drawing together the work of Giddens, Bourdieu, Latour and others. He argues that economic and social theories which focus on aggregates of individual preferences and on collective norms and values neglect the shared and tacit substratum of cognitive-symbolic structures from which these preferences and norms/values are derived. Instead, shared culture guides what is considered appropriate and desirable behaviour. Reckwitz sees the key difference between social practice theory and other forms of ‘culturalist theorizing’ as lying in where they ‘locate the social’ and what they take to be the smallest unit of analysis. Where other approaches look to mental structures, social texts or social interaction to identify the basis of social order, social practice theory locates the social in practices themselves, in their common configurations and routinised performance.

3.1 Defining ‘Practice’

Despite these theoretical developments it remains difficult to define and delimit specifically what is meant by ‘practice’. Several definitions exist, the most cited being Reckwitz’s (2002, 249):

“A ‘practice’ is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental

activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.” Alternatively, Schatzki (1996, 89) sees practices as nexuses of doings and sayings existing in three forms: i) as shared understandings of how to behave, ii) as explicit rules formally constraining behaviour, and iii) as ‘teleoaffective’ structures defining appropriate ends and levels of emotional engagement.

Christensen and Røpke (2005) argue that the abstract nature of these definitions makes them hard to apply empirically. Identifying where one practice ends and the next begins remains difficult, and these definitions say little about how practices are formed, performed, change and ultimately die. Further, Warde argues that they assume “an unlikely degree of shared understanding and common conventions” (2005, 136) within and between practices, neglecting the roles of conflict, dis-sensus and social interaction in the performance of practices. By ignoring the dynamics of practice (Shove and Pantzar 2005), the definitions provide a static picture which reifies practices as abstract entities (Schatzki 1996).

As evidence mounts of the environmental damage which occurs as an often inconspicuous side-effect of social practices, it is especially important to identify the ‘impact oriented’ (Stern 2000) elements of practice and attempt either to eradicate certain practices altogether, or at least reduce their detrimental consequences. To date, however, relatively few empirical studies have utilized a practice-based approach. Those that have rarely address issues of encouraging more sustainable consumer behaviour (although see Burgess *et al* 2003; Spaargaren 2004). It is therefore critical that empirically applicable variants of social practice theory are developed and applied to this issue.

3.2 Applying Social Practice Theory

“The study of consumer behaviour should start with the social practices in which actors are involved when pursuing their daily routines” (Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000, 51). As shown above, however, most variants of practice theory fail to grasp the dynamics of practice on the ground. Long traditions of work in social theory (Giddens 1984, 1991;

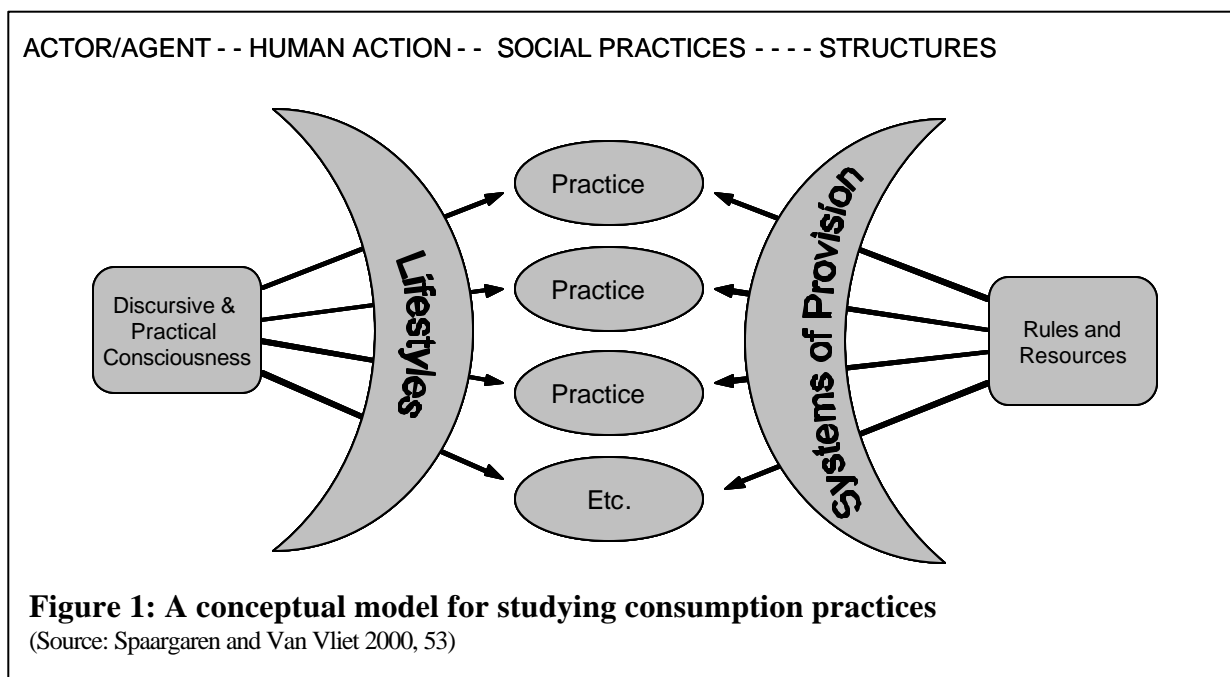
Bourdieu 1984, 1990) have identified that practices are made up of certain forms of competence (skills), and certain meanings (images, discourses). Shove and Pantzar's (2005) empirical study of 'Nordic Walking' develops these ideas in two ways. First, they emphasise the contribution made in science and technology studies (e.g. Callon 1986; Latour 1992) which reveals material artifacts (stuff) to be a crucial third component of practices. Second, they go beyond conceiving of practices as stable or closed entities, to seeing them as dynamic *processes of interconnection and integration* between these elements which must be constantly reinforced through performance (2005, 45). As long as practices can recruit sufficient practitioners they continue to exist and develop. If links are broken or practices fail to retain practitioners they may die out, potentially leaving behind 'social fossils' (Shove and Pantzar 2007). Their study thus illustrates that development and change in practices necessarily involves local reinvention by specific 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998) which may involve both consumers and producers. In concordance with geographical work on 'cultural hybridization' (e.g. Jackson 1999), they thus conclude that "Practices... are always 'homegrown', woven together, maybe with new ingredients, but always against the backdrop of previous, related and associated ways of 'doing'" (Shove and Pantzar 2005, 62).

Seeing practices as *processes* of integration between elements represents a significant advance on the earlier, more static conceptions of practice and encourages further empirical research into the detail of these dynamic relationships in specific contexts. There are however, two ways in which this model of practices might be developed to assist in applying it encouraging more sustainable consumption. Christensen and Røpke (2005) observe, first, that this model neglects the manner in which practices are embedded within wider social systems¹. Describing the specific configurations of elements within a practice and how they vary across different contexts fails to uncover the rules and resources (Giddens 1984) or the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu 1986; 1990) according to which practices unfold. This approach may therefore help in revealing the dynamics of unsustainable practice, and in identifying which elements of practice should

¹ Although in more recent work Pantzar and Shove (2006) have attempted to address this micro-macro problem through the concept of 'circuits of reproduction' which sees the dynamics of practice as essentially the same regardless of the scale at which the practice is performed.

be challenged in efforts to reduce environmental impacts, but it says little of the broader systems of provision which constrain the potential for change. Second, whilst Shove and Pantzar’s focus on the material components of practice is a much needed development, attempts to encourage more sustainable consumption must address the meanings and discourses surrounding the currently non-material impacts of consumption behaviour. For example, they must consider how distant and often invisible environmental damage such as climatic change or ozone holes which currently exist only in the form of ideas and discourses can have real impacts on local, routine and very practical practices. How can non-material ideas influence practices and potentially even encourage their de-materialisation (Carolan 2004)?

Spaargaren and Van Vliet (2000) overcome these challenges by providing a model which situates practices at the meeting point between broader systems of provision, and individual lifestyles (see Figure 1).



Drawing heavily on Giddens (1984; 1991) this model sees practices as the negotiated outcome between ‘lifestyles’ shaped by individuals’ conscious and unconscious desires, and broader ‘systems of provision’ (Fine and Leopold 1993) which provide the rules and

resources constraining what is possible. Encouraging more sustainable behaviour therefore demands innovations in systems of provision which ‘slot’ in with existing bundles of practice and lifestyles (Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000, 73). It is therefore critical that interventions to change behaviour are aware of both sides of the diagram simultaneously, and how they ‘slot’ together in existing bundles of practices. So far, however, this has not been the case.

The dominant approaches to consumer behaviour outlined in section two concentrate solely on the left-hand side of this diagram in the realm of individual attitudes and desires and miss the manner in which these are shaped by broader systems of provision. The majority of studies applying practice theory to sustainable consumption concentrate solely on the right-hand side looking for points of intervention from which to ‘nudge’ and ‘steer’ systems of provision in different directions (Shove 2003, 2004; Southerton *et al* 2004) and miss the moments of potential change created within communities of practice. Finally, Shove and Pantzar’s (2005) model explores the dynamics of the practices in the middle, but could perhaps look outwards in both directions. Very few studies have attempted to address the whole model to observe how the images, skills and stuff of practices are shaped simultaneously by the communities of practice on the left-hand side, and the systems of provision on the right.

In addition, despite the more holistic nature of practice-based approaches in comparison to the dominant models of consumer behaviour, the ‘domestic’ focus of attempts to encourage more sustainable consumption remains. Studies have considered domestic energy or water consumption (Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000; Shove 2003; Southerton *et al* 2004) leisure pursuits such as digital photography or Nordic Walking (Shove *et al*, in press; Shove and Pantzar 2005) but none have used this approach to address work-related drivers of consumption (Røpke 2004).

In the rest of this paper we address these challenges by analysing a single case study of a work-based behaviour change initiative through the lens of social practice theory as developed by Spaargaren and Van Vliet (2000) and Shove and Pantzar (2005). We

consider what happens when a small group of people attempt to intervene in the practices performed in their workplace in order to reduce their environmental impacts.

The paper draws on Hargreaves' ongoing PhD research which is using ethnographic methods to develop a picture of the dynamics of practice in an Environment Champions initiative being conducted at an office-based company called Burnetts (not its real name). As the research is ongoing, this paper aims only to make preliminary observations and point towards emerging lines of enquiry with regard to what practice theory can offer to the study of behaviour change. Specifically, this paper will concentrate on one episode which ran throughout the Champions initiative, an attempt to reduce waste and increase recycling rates by holding a 'No Bin Day' in the offices.

4. Environment Champions organising 'No Bin Day'

Burnetts is a national company with 3,500 employees spread across different sites in England and Scotland. During 2007 it opted to undertake the Environment Champions initiative to address energy use and waste production in its head office, with a view to spreading the key lessons of the initiative more widely across the business. Roughly 300 people are employed in the head offices spread across 3 different buildings/work units on a single site and conducting mostly office based work. A team of 17 Environment Champions, including staff from different buildings and different departments (e.g. human resources, estates, accounts, health and safety etc) was drawn together in January 2007 to carry out the Champions initiative throughout the year. As this paper is being written they are still in the process of carrying out the initiative.

An audit of energy use and waste production was conducted in January/February 2007, the results of which informed the development of a campaign (to run from May to August) to encourage colleagues to reduce their environmental impacts. This campaign includes both structural elements e.g. using lower wattage strip lights, as well as communications techniques to spread key messages beyond the team. In September, at the end of the campaign, a second audit will be conducted to identify any savings that have been achieved. Throughout the initiative, the team of Champions are being supported by a trained GAP facilitator who attends many of the team meetings at which

the campaign is planned. This is the standard Environment Champions approach (see Hargreaves *et al*, in press for more detail) based on facilitated group discussions (the meetings) and monitoring environmental impacts (the audits). On average, Environment Champions initiatives have achieved reductions of 37.96% in waste to landfill, and 12.07% in energy consumption (GAP 2006).

In this section, based on participant observation and interviews with the Champions, we track this initiative through the various meetings and events the Champions team organised. Specifically, we concentrate on events relevant to the team's attempt to organise a 'No Bin Day' – removing people's under-desk bins for a single day.

4.1 Conducting the initial audit

The initial audit of waste production and energy use was conducted in January-February 2007. This involved taking meter readings, conducting 'spot checks' of appliances left on at lunchtimes or overnight, and collecting, separating and weighing all waste. This occurred weekly for a period of three weeks. At a meeting in April, many of the Champions team mentioned how dirty and smelly the process had been, but also that it had been fascinating to see exactly what was being thrown away. Linda stressed that "you feel rude looking over people's shoulders and in their bins, especially if they're still in the office as it's hard to hide what you're doing"*²

The process of conducting the audit forced the Champions to engage with usually hidden aspects of their daily routines. In particular, it revealed how their existing practices rest upon unsustainable systems of provision and encouraged them to question these inter-relationships in the light of pro-environmental concerns (see for example Kaika and Swyngedouw 2000). This process made them 'feel rude' as it introduced a new pro-environmental concern (image/meaning) to everyday practices which challenged the existing connections between images, skills and stuff (Shove and Pantzar 2005) and the moral order which has formed around them.

² Hereafter, an asterisk (*) denotes specific observations taken from Hargreaves' fieldnotes.

4.2 The Audit Report and Training Day

The audit results, collated by GAP, were fed-back to the team at a ‘training day’ in April. The offices emitted 297 tonnes of CO₂ annually, and of 11.7 tonnes of waste being sent to landfill each year, 58% could have been easily recycled. As these results were revealed there were many gasps and other expressions of genuine shock and surprise that their day-to-day activities added up to such large environmental impacts. In interviews, many of the team reflected on the importance of the audit in helping them understand their personal impacts. The local and personal nature of the results was seen as crucial in motivating change. Many of the team were well aware of global or even regional environmental issues, but the impersonal and external nature of this information made it hard to do anything about (see also Kurz *et al* 2005). The audit results were the first time they could see clearly how their personal practices and routines caused damage to the wider environment.

The GAP facilitators used this shock and surprise to encourage the team to set demanding targets to reduce their environmental impacts (10% reduction of energy use and 35% reduction in waste to landfill) and then elicited a broad range of ideas of ways to reduce environmental impacts. Many different suggestions were offered, for example putting posters up, talking to people face-to-face, circulating the audit results across the site, creating sculptures out of waste etc. Most focused on communicating the audit results more widely in the belief that changing attitudes would lead to behavioural changes (see section two). More radical ideas involved shocking people out of their current routines by changing the systems of provision on which these inconspicuous practices depend. For instance one Champion suggested a ‘No Electricity Afternoon’ to make people aware of just how much their practices depend on electricity. Another suggested holding a ‘No Bin Day’ to encourage people to think about what they throw away and force them to begin using new recycling facilities that the group intended to put in place. These suggestions invoke Spaargaren and Van Vliet’s (2000) ideas about de- and re-routinisation, aiming to make systems of provision more visible and encourage greater reflexivity in everyday practices. The remainder of this section focuses entirely on the no bin day suggestion.

At the time each employee had a 'general waste' bin by her/his desk, and by photocopiers and in kitchens there were paper/cardboard recycling bins, plastic cup recycling bins, and blue bins for 'confidential' business waste which was shredded before being recycled (See Pictures 1 and 2) The general waste bins were emptied on a nightly basis by sub-contracted cleaners, and recycling bins and confidential waste bins were emptied into designated onsite skips by the sites' estates operative.



Pictures 1 and 2: Existing Waste disposal facilities

All suggestions were welcomed at this initial meeting, but these more radical ones provoked more immediate reactions. David expressed concern that removing waste bins would breach the terms of their cleaning contract as it would leave less work for them*. The group therefore immediately recognized that the systems of provision which underpinned their waste disposal practices also supported waste collection practices. Attempting to change a single system of provision might therefore have knock-on effects across whole bundles of seemingly unrelated social practices. There was also concern that these coercive strategies might put people off the whole Champions initiative. These

issues were not resolved at this meeting. Instead, the group was divided into three smaller working groups (Energy, Resources, Recycling) each of which was charged with taking these ideas forwards and designing one month each of a three month communications campaign to spread messages to other staff. This would run between May and July.

4.3 Resources Group Meeting

Responsibility for the no bin day idea was assigned to the ‘recycling group’, however, related issues were discussed at a resources group meeting two weeks later (mid-April). David suggested that general waste bins should be replaced with desktop recycling trays. Melissa recalled that Brian, the estates manager for the whole site, had previously attempted this in order to ‘reduce clutter’ from desks and maintain a tidy and professional appearance. The trays, however had “all disappeared within a month”^{*} because desks were too small to accommodate them. Later, Linda commented that before removing bins they would need to have adequate and working recycling facilities in place, otherwise people might be put off the initiative. Afterwards, David emailed these suggestions to Brian for approval.

Prompted by the audit results, the Champions constantly reflected on how the practices they perform fitted together with existing systems of provision and what alternatives might succeed. They quickly recognised that changing waste disposal practices (not using their under-desk ‘general’ waste bins) would necessitate prior changes in broader systems of provision. Without changed systems of provision to ‘slot’ into, the new disposal practices would lead to waste building up, excess desktop clutter, and may end up deterring rather than attracting new practitioners. Further, the discussion at this meeting reveals the groups’ profound awareness of the constraints on their practices. Attempting to introduce desktop recycling trays may seem like a simple matter but the manner in which they will be received depends in part on how they are likely to interact with other ‘materials’ involved in other practices, such as the size of their desks and the clutter they help to clear (see Shove *et al*, forthcoming). It also depends on collective memories of previous practices, or at least previous attempts to change them. Melissa’s recollection of a failed previous attempt to introduce recycling trays implies that existing practices are

informed and shaped by ex-practices (see Pantzar and Shove 2006). Changes to existing systems must therefore distinguish themselves from previous failures in order to overcome any cynicism. The Champions thus appear very aware that the ‘slots’ from within which they can nudge and steer systems of provision in more sustainable directions are narrow indeed.

4.4 Launch Day

Following this initial planning, the campaign was launched at the beginning of May. A ‘launch day’ was held in the staff room with activities including a quiz based on the audit results, a pledge board, GAPs ‘Energy Bike’ (See www.globalactionplan.org.uk) and Carbon Reduction’s ‘Energy Bus’ (See www.cred-uk.org) as a means of communicating the aims of the initiative and encouraging other employees to change their behaviour. Whilst setting-up David told Sally that “as soon as I sent the email [summarising the resources group meeting - see section 4.3] Brian came straight to my office saying ‘what’s this about paper?!’ so I explained what I thought Steven [the board level sponsor of the initiative] had said we could do, and he told me apparently we can’t throw anything away if its got a name or address on it because it breaches data protection”*.

Gradually as the Champions team made suggestions for no bin day, they uncovered more and more complex ways in which their waste disposal practices slot into different systems of provision. Brian’s objection revealed to the team that the specific properties of the material being disposed determine which system it should slot into. So it can be shredded, confidential waste must enter a different system of provision than either general waste or general recycling. In turn, this confidential waste system was itself constrained by national data protection laws and the manner in which they have been interpreted at the site by Brian. Attempting to change practices or the systems of provision on which they depend is thus fraught with difficulty. Existing practices are constrained and bins anchored in place by complex sets of power relations.

The Launch Day itself was very well attended by staff from across the site. As they participated in the various activities many pledged support for the campaign and, shocked

by the audit results, said they would make behavioural changes. In general, attitudes and values amongst those who attended would suggest that the awareness raising campaign was unnecessary. Despite their support, however, several participants shared stories which suggested they were cynical about what could be achieved, and aware of the limits to their own agency. One lady mentioned that there was nowhere in her office to store recycling during the day so she had “to put it in the general waste bin just so it doesn’t clutter everything up”*. Others reflected on being told to “just put it in with general waste” when trying to recycle at the local civic amenity site. These common stories (meanings/images) illustrate that even with supportive attitudes or values, people are cynical about the extent to which they can change their practices within existing systems of provision.

4.5 Recycling Group Meeting

Overall responsibility for no bin day fell with the recycling group. At its first meeting in mid-May, Graham said he felt a no bin day would be a great way to launch the recycling month. The group generally agreed but were wary that it might “get people’s backs up”* and put them off the whole initiative. The group was very aware that daily routines are closely bound up with existing systems of provision and that changing them could easily upset or offend people. In particular, for certain individuals who sat a long way from the central recycling points, such changes could cause significant disruption to other work practices.

To avoid putting people off the campaign, Sally suggested having a ‘bin amnesty’ instead, so people could choose whether or not to give up their bins. However, Graham argued that “the one thing you’ve got to make sure is that there’s no exceptions, because it just takes one senior person to say ‘oh but I need a bin’, or ‘it takes too long to walk to the central point’, and the whole thing goes to pot”*. Graham’s concern raises two crucial points. First, introducing more sustainable practices *alongside* existing waste disposal practices is likely to fail as, for reasons of convenience, the new practice, with associated changes in routine, is unlikely to attract and retain sufficient practitioners. Second, without sufficient practitioners, changes to systems of provision are unlikely to endure.

Practices and the systems of provision which support them simultaneously (re)produce one another through regular performance. For either new systems of provision, or new practices to survive, it is therefore imperative that they slot in with one another closely.

To ensure simultaneous development of both practices *and* systems of provision, the group considered how they could change systems of provision without disrupting existing routines, and without offending people. First, they proposed to identify ‘strategic’ locations for new recycling facilities – in kitchens, corridors, the staff room – to ensure they would mesh nicely with existing routines. Second, they considered ways to achieve ‘buy-in’ from other staff by communicating the changes carefully. They felt that face-to-face discussion would appear less dictatorial than posters or emails, and Linda even suggested dressing up as burglars whilst taking the bins as a light-hearted way to win support*. Sally later sent their proposals to the rest of the Champions team and to Steven and Brian for their approval.

This discussion illustrates how the Champions team attempted to think through the existing practices and routines they perform. They identified links between images, skills and stuff and how these slotted into existing systems of provision. They then considered which links needed challenging, in this case removing bins (materials/stuff), and proposed ways to win support for these changes by simultaneously making them compatible with existing routines (skills/forms of competence) and using communication strategies which offered new meanings/images to justify the changed practices. This represents a significantly different approach to attempts to change individuals’ attitudes or social preferences.

4.6 Champions Update Meeting

A week later, the whole Champions team met up with the GAP facilitator to evaluate how the campaign was developing. For the first time serious objections to the no bin day proposal were raised by Louise. Sally introduced the idea and Louise immediately asked if Brian had given his permission without which the idea could not proceed. Sally said he had, so Louise suggested they would need to make absolutely certain that adequate

recycling facilities were in place well in advance if the idea was to be a success. Sensing her objections, Craig encouraged Louise to support the idea because “it’s all about mindset”* and removing peoples bins was a good way to challenge the mindset that it’s fine to throw everything away and send it to landfill. Louise then argued that taking people’s bins away was ‘an invasion of privacy’ and referred to another initiative in the company that was “all about encouraging people to *choose* the right thing, and then we’re taking bins away and not offering them a choice”*. She went further, imagining a scenario in which the Chief Executive was with a high profile client who’d sneezed and had a dirty tissue “is he supposed to say, ‘oh just go to the bin at the end of the corridor’?”*. She suggested they offer people a choice of whether or not to relinquish their bin.

The atmosphere in this meeting was relatively tense, but Graham, keen to support the plan, argued that “there’s a piece of legislation coming in [presumably the new Waste Strategy for England – DEFRA 2007] which basically demands that all businesses separate out their waste streams. So we can either do it gently now, or we can *slam* it in later when we have to because it’s law”*. Louise suggested that the legislation could ‘transfer the blame’ away from the Champions team. The group eventually agreed that offering no bin day as an experiment, with a choice of whether or not to participate ran less risk of putting people off the whole campaign.

As the no bin day proposals progressed, the manner in which under-desk bins mesh together with complex systems of provision, power relations and even social interactions was increasingly revealed. Louise’s objections and Graham’s justifications for the proposal show how current configurations of waste disposal practices are enmeshed with what is considered acceptable business practice (e.g. the Chief Executive with the dirty tissue), represent the local enactment of national level waste policies, and are implicated in a moral order in which the use of bins is a matter of ‘privacy’ and challenging practices is likely to incur blame. Reckwitz (2002, 251) observes that social order exists in practices and these discussions illustrate the groups’ tacit awareness of this. Changing even a single element of existing waste disposal practices could have knock-on effects

across a variety of seemingly unrelated practices and systems. It is therefore unsurprising that practices are so hard to change.

4.7 Recycling Group Meeting 2

In mid-June, Michael received some feedback from Brian. Brian had told him it is “someone’s right to expect [a bin] as part of a normal office”*. Sally mentioned that Brian had spoken to her about the proposals and made it clear that for health and safety reasons there was insufficient room in the corridors to store the proposed new recycling facilities*. Unable to put adequate alternative recycling facilities in place, the group was therefore unsure of how to proceed with their plans to give staff the choice of giving up their bin.

Hargreaves’ presence at this meeting was significant as he was asked how the University dealt with waste. He explained that the desk-side bins within his offices at the University were for recycling only, and next to each group of six to eight desks there was a clearly labelled ‘landfill only’ bin. Being unable to remove them altogether, Sally liked the notion of re-labelling the general waste bins as ‘landfill bins’ as it would be an important symbol to change how people thought about waste disposal*.

The teams’ no bin day proposal was increasingly watered down as existing configurations of practices and systems of provision revealed themselves. So much was invested in the existing status quo (health and safety, data protection, power relationships, moral order etc.) that the points of intervention between practices and systems of provision appeared all but closed. Being unable to directly change their existing waste disposal practices, the team therefore looked elsewhere, to the University, for alternative ways in which practices and systems of provision could be slotted together. Aware that they couldn’t adopt the University’s set-up wholesale, the group seized upon ‘landfill bin’ stickers as an acceptable means of challenging relationships between practices and systems of provision. What had started out as an attempt to challenge systems of provision, was becoming an attempt to change attitudes and values by attaching new meanings to existing waste disposal practices.

4.8 Champions Update Meeting 2

The next mention of no bin day occurred sometime later at a meeting of the whole Champions team in mid-July. Sally told the group that for data protection reasons they were unable to put alternative recycling facilities in place, and therefore the plans had ‘fizzled out’*. Instead they would be distributing desktop recycling trays with instructions on what type of waste should go in which bin (See Picture 3).



Picture 3: The end result of No bin day

The initiative is ongoing as this paper is being written so it remains to be seen exactly what influence, if any, the groups’ proposals will have. This paper has attempted to show how social practice theory changes the manner in which behaviour change initiatives are understood. The following section outlines some tentative suggestions for how this type of analysis might be taken forwards.

5. Some tentative conclusions

This paper recounts an attempt to change systems of provision as a means of encouraging more sustainable waste disposal practices. Throughout the Environment Champions

campaign, the no bin day proposals were systematically worn down as the implications of changing systems of provision for health and safety, data protection, social relations etc were increasingly uncovered. Similar, although similarly idiosyncratic, stories could be told for many of the Champions' proposals. Crucially, the application of social practice theory yields a significantly different reading of this attempt to change behaviour than would be produced by the dominant approaches. This reading moves beyond individual attitudes and values and instead concentrates on the systems of provision and the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu 1990) which structure everyday practices.

What this analysis reveals is that the rules of the game structuring workplace behaviour are quite unique, and certainly very different from those in play in domestic settings (Røpke 2004). Practice theory illustrates that these rules do not derive from individual attitudes and values, but from context specific inter-relationships between the images, skills and stuff of practices, between practices and systems of provision, and between practitioners themselves. Further, it reveals that individual practitioners are themselves very aware of the rules and resources which structure their behaviour (see Burgess *et al* 1998). They can reflect on them critically and identify how they need to change. Even with a group of committed individuals, assisted by GAP, and in a supportive workplace, the attempt to introduce a pro-environmental component to those rules was defeated and a lowest common denominator approach was eventually taken. The rules themselves remain unchallenged, and the proposals to change them have been transformed into something which ultimately serves to reinforce them.

Ironically, many of the bureaucratic rules and systems which prevented change are themselves efforts to manage risk but have instead created new environmental risks. Environmental damage thus appears as an unintended consequence of existing bundles of social practices and attempts to manage them. It is systematically built-in to existing systems of provision making it ever more important that they, rather than individuals, are brought under closer scrutiny.

This paper has shown that interventions to change behaviour are bound up with context specific bundles of social practices and the systems of provision on which they depend. Rather than attempting to change individual attitudes and values, behaviour change initiatives should therefore be seen as posing a challenge to social order. The individual is most certainly not the most appropriate “site of social change” (Hobson 2003, 103), and attempts to change behaviour must recognise this. Social practice theory provides a much needed alternative to the dominant approaches to consumer behaviour change. It offers a much more complex and holistic analysis, and one which realises that removing people’s bins is not the simple act it first appears.

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