

EDITORIAL

Leadership and Cultural Change

Last May, the Association for Behavior Analysis International hosted the Seminar on Leadership and Culture Change. This special selection of presentations, beginning the day before the 40th annual convention and continuing as an organized set of talks during the Saturday and Sunday sessions, was intended to help leaders promote socially significant practices in their organizations and to encourage additional behavioral research in this area.

Focusing on how behavior analysis finds common ground with other sciences by investigating the behavior of leaders—as well as the potential for collaborative research among academic groups, businesses, and communities—this seminar was divided into three subject-specific modules: organizations and the private sector, educational settings, and leadership and cultural change efforts in the field of behavior analysis. Due to the popularity of the program content, articles based on the seminar presentations were invited for publication in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management* and *The Behavior Analyst*.

We thank program committee co-chairs, Mark Alavosius and Timothy Ludwig, for their outstanding leadership and contribution to the planning and implementation of the seminar. In addition, the leadership seminar program committee worked with coordinators for the Community Interventions, Social and Ethical Issues, and Organizational Behavior Management program tracks, who provided support, dissemination, and funding to assist in integrating the seminar with the annual convention. Special thanks to the Organizational Behavior Management Network for providing additional support. Finally, we are also grateful for the assistance and hard work of the Association for Behavior Analysis International team, both on site and in the office.

Seminar speakers demonstrated how behavior analysis offers a powerful technology for shaping the world; social leaders were shown how a science of behavior can enhance the safety, ethicality, and effectiveness of organizations and institutions; and behavior analysts were challenged to adapt to an ever-shifting cultural landscape and to turn their knowledge and skills into actions that could influence and improve social institutions.

Social responsibility served as a unifying theme throughout the presentations and the articles selected for this special issue of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*. Social outcomes loom as key features of leadership decision making and citizenship behavior as the world's resources are depleted, health and education crises increase, and communities, societies, and cultures adapt to a new context. Social significance in this context not only relates to leadership and management practices that affect the well-being of organizational members (e.g., their safety, health, financial security) but also has a positive or negative impact on consumer practices and community well-being (e.g., education, obesity, cancer, safe or green driving, energy conservation, diversity-based health care). Leadership decisions within organizations that are oriented toward local outcomes also in many cases may have a profound impact at larger scales. Corporate decisions, for example, have often been made without adequate attention to externalities—the costs of those decisions that are paid by others. The struggles associated with the imminent need to reduce carbon emissions to a level that will prevent runaway global warming is one good example. Decision making in the businesses involved is largely responsive to the demand for short-term profit; externalities like carbon emissions that do not contribute to profit are often not among the immediate contingencies that shape those decisions. On the consumer side, both cultural values and the corporate marketing practices that sustain them encourage the high levels of consumption necessary to sustain corporate practices. On neither side, therefore, are values associated with sustainability, and ultimately cultural and human survival, integrated adequately into the associated decisions and practices. There is a genuine dilemma present here; networks of interlocking behavioral contingencies shaping and sustaining the actions of organizational leaders (whether in the for-profit or other sectors) support present systemic arrangements. Leaders can no more step outside contingency arrangements than can anyone else; as a result it appears that different contingencies, including some arranged by systems outside of existing sets of interlocking behavioral contingencies, are likely to be required to shift leadership practices. Behavioral systems are open systems, however; this is where the hope lies. Behavior analysis in collaboration with other concerned disciplines and groups may have the potential to contribute to the design of new repertoires and contingency arrangements consistent with survival and nurturing values.

Similar analyses can be made regarding highly probable impending crises regarding water resources, failing justice and corrections system, dangerous income and asset disparities, human rights violations, and global violence. As the noted activist physician Paul Farmer notes, although many of these issues have the potential to affect everyone over time, many are already resulting in excess mortality, disease, and basic rights violations for those in the most disadvantaged areas in the world, including what have been called the “sacrifice zones” in the United States. These effects, externalities

of existing structural arrangements that often offer short-term advantages to others, thereby constitute “structural violence” (Farmer, 2013, p. 150). When the challenges faced are of this scope, and current cultural systems are so poorly prepared to deal with them, advancing behavioral systems science supporting values of survival, justice, and caring seems worth a considerable investment. Given the limited work in these areas thus far, a shift toward priorities guided by such values will also require different kind of leadership practices within the behavior analysis discipline itself.

In order to explore the emerging applications of behavior science to these challenges (and to serve as an establishing operation for the expansion of such efforts), forthcoming special issues of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management* will showcase current scholarly work on leadership and cultural change. The selected articles will aid organizations and leaders in creating new models of stewardship and open up opportunities for innovation while adjusting to growing social upheaval, technological advances, and environmental concerns, as well as crises in the global economy, health, education, and environment. They will also address the potential of how collaborative research among academic groups, businesses, and communities can affect the well-being of populations and forestall crises. The limited current extent of such collaboration in areas of social significance, and the narrowness of focus that has often been present in work that has been done, clearly needs to be shifted. The promise of making a genuine impact on the world that initially brings so many young people to the field is now an urgent need, and one that we cannot meet alone. Leadership repertoires that support extensive and effective collaboration, establish marketing efforts for practices directed toward survival values, and encourage expansion of behavioral systems research directed toward our most pressing challenges are critical priorities for the global community, and for behavior analysis, over the next several decades. We need to be at the table, or supporting those who are. The present set of articles offers an encouraging start.

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REFERENCE

Farmer, P. (2013). *Repairing the world*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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