Turning Cobwebs into Walls

The Causal Attribution Journal as a Tool to Combat Mission Drift

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ABSTRACT

Bureaucratic institutions tend to become rigid and self-justifying. The thoughtless separation of routines from the goals they were once supposed to pursue is a kind of mission drift, and the way this process is seen, or not seen, is a kind of perceptual drift. The fictional world of Ursula LeGuin's Dispossessed *illustrates how perceptual drift can reinforce inauthentic governance, and what might be done about it. Using the experiences of the book's main character as our primary "data," we introduce an analytic tool— the causal attribution journal—that makes visible what perceptual drift obscures. The journal method is a phenomenological tool that promotes clarity and agency by bringing common but often obscured patterns into view. It illuminates the vital role of perceptual dynamics in efforts to secure democratic governance.*

The alienated man sees before him a tall, unyielding wall.

The man caught in an inauthentic situation feels entangled in a cobweb.

—Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society,* 1968, p. 633

We think of problems as noticeable irritants, but many social problems vex us precisely because we fail to see them at all. Our perceptions fail us: We learn how we *want* to see our world or how we *should* see it. Slowly how we *could* see it in more real and enabling ways tends to drift away. In this light, consider the perennial bureaucratic problem of mission drift. When

we use this term to describe an agency's trajectory, what we mean is that the procedures being followed or the goals being pursued have changed from what they were—what they should be—in ways that are not apparent to the practitioners. It may be that if they were aware of these changes, there would still be nothing that could be done about it—power is still power. However, if they had a way to notice that they are not doing what they intend to do, one important cause of mission drift is removed.

Etzioni (1968) made the seminal statement on how complex bureaucratic organizations systematically erode perceptual clarity, turning problematic but clear "walls" of alienation into more pernicious "cobwebs" of inauthenticity. In his distinction, alienation refers to "the unresponsiveness of the world to the actor, which subjects him to forces he neither comprehends nor guides" (p. 618). By contrast, "A relationship, institution, or society is inauthentic if it provides the appearance of responsiveness while the underlying condition is alienating" (p. 619). Both conditions are lamentable, but inauthenticity is more disabling because it is confusing. Our question is, How, if at all, might individuals find the means to counter inauthentic institutions? To combat mission drift and the perceptual drift driving it requires an ability to make visible and tangible what has become taken for granted and obscure. It requires a method for turning cobwebs into walls.

Our purpose here is to describe such a method and illustrate its potential utility for those whose work or lives are shaped by the bureaucratic experience (Hummel, 1994). Our tool, the causal attribution journal (CAJ), is designed to bring focal attention to matters that are routinely passed over. As refined over years of use in undergraduate classes, the tool has proven effective in helping students reclaim a sense of agency by becoming more aware of how their intentions are thwarted. Here we make the case that the method might usefully be deployed to defend against thoughtless mission drift in administrative organizations.

In developing our argument, we make use of the fictional world and characters in Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*. As Waldo (1968) states, "through literary treatments we can come more closely to grips with the psychological and moral aspects of administrative decision-making" (p. 8). In particular, he believed that certain novels illuminate the conflict between bureaucratic rationality and human response, often through portrayals of heroes whose conflict with a dominant organization provides the crux of the plot. In *The Dispossessed*, the hero is Shevek, a brilliant temporal physicist and committed patriot who finds it difficult to see how the anarchist teachings on which his society was founded have gradually given way to smothering consensus and creeping bureaucratization. Getting clear that this has happened—moving from the cobwebs of inauthenticity to the walls of alienation—is the hero's journey confronting Shevek in the book. What he needs is a way to give shape and form to routinely experienced constraints and frustrations, rendering them concrete

and generating enabling responses. In LeGuin's story, Shevek comes slowly and painfully to such an understanding, aided by his more alienated friends. In our account, we use Shevek's experiences as "data" to demonstrate how the CAJ might permit Shevek to come to activating awareness on his own.

CONFRONTING MISSION DRIFT: WHAT WOULD IT TAKE?

Defining the Problem

We assume the inherent value of democratic agency, marked by the ability to realize intentions. Democracy conceived in this way is an activating ideal, and bureaucracy could be a straightforward way of serving that ideal while adapting practices to the circumstances we encounter. Over time, however, bureaucratic institutions tend to become rigid and self-justifying. Institutions which are the agents of cultural or political intention begin to take on characteristics that do not further that intention. The thoughtless separation of routines from the goals they were once supposed to pursue is a kind of mission drift, and the way this process is seen, or not seen, is a kind of perceptual drift.

Examples abound of public agencies whose original intentions have been subject to drift over time. For instance, Porter (1995) describes how the Army Corps of Engineers found itself subject to hostile political attacks from competing agencies and private interests, leading to the implementation of rigid and blunt procedures of cost-benefit analysis that substituted for the more nuanced and careful situational judgments of its own experts. Zingale and Hummel (2012) show how NASA's detailed procedures unwittingly undermine its mission of discovery. Campbell (2012) notes that local workforce investment boards are given the mission of promoting collaborative regional approaches to employment, but the participating public agencies are hamstrung by administrative rules that have accreted over the years, blunting their ability to realize the mission and forcing them to deploy workaround strategies. Or consider an example closer to home. A school principal one of the authors contacted makes it a point to hire teachers who are not only competent, but innovative. What he notices is that—under the pressure of daily demands—even his best teachers move toward "teaching routines" over time. The principal is eager to find a way to help his teachers see just where their own practices begin to fall short of their best work and deepest intentions.

As the above examples suggest, there can be significant variation in the nature of the founding mission, the causes of subsequent shifts, and their larger significance. What is important to our purpose is what the examples share, which is connoted by the term "drift." Webster's defines it as "an aimless course," and emphasizes a gradual and thus often invisible unfolding over time. Ironically, recognizing that bureaucratic ossification is occurring can be particularly difficult for individuals who are most committed to the ideals

the bureaucracies purportedly serve—like the particularly able teachers, or in LeGuin's tale the patriotic Shevek. There is a tendency for the vocabulary expressing ideals to become a kind of perceptual prison, such that the clarifying experience of anomaly—the disjuncture of ideals and reality—is gradually eroded. We deny what is real and forget what is important, and then forget that we have forgotten. The implication is that inauthentic governance arrangements can persist without provoking appropriate challenges to their legitimacy. As Bertram Gross (1987) once put it (drawing on the poetic imagery of Robert Frost), what we confront is not authoritarian constraint but "the cat feet of tyranny" (p. 167).

Seeing this kind of problem at work is difficult. Sometimes artistic portrayals bring greater insight than science does (Waldo, 1968). This brings us to LeGuin's evocative fictional world, in which mission drift is a key plot device.

Seeing the Problem at Work: The Drift from Ideals on Anarres

In *The Dispossessed*, Anarres is the moon of Urras, given to the members of the International Society of Odonians as a place to live because they were seen as undermining the authority of law and national sovereignty on Urras. The Odonians, as followers of the philosopher Odo, were, after all, anarchists. The first Odonian immigrants to Anarres, the Settlers, knew that whatever they took with them from Urras to their new home would taint them, so they did everything possible to start over. In particular, they invented a new language with words they would need to counter un-Odonian tendencies. People who cared about owning property were called "propertarians." People who believed in the desirability of political power were called "archists." The settlers even did away with possessive pronouns—no Anarresti would say "my handkerchief," but rather, "the handkerchief I use." It was a culture oriented toward using, not owning; toward cooperating, not commanding.

As the central character of the novel, Shevek is placed squarely in the center of our interest as political scientists. He is a "true believer" in the principles of Odonianism, with all the intensity and rigidity that that phrase evokes. He has an acute sense of personal integrity, which, as he understands it, is not just "personal," but is the birthright of every Odonian citizen. Two additional characters—Bedap, his friend and critic; and Sabul, his primary threat—are indispensable elements of Shevek's world.

Sabul is Shevek's boss. That is completely impossible on Anarres, so great care is taken to name the relationship by other terms and to pretend that the Odonian philosophy permeates it. In LeGuin's world, Sabul personifies "mission drift." By the seventh generation of Anarresti, Odo's anarchism is never denied, but it is not practiced. Mediocre minds with comfortably Odonian vocabularies have learned to deny—to find un-Odonian—any behavior they

disapprove of or that upset the routines to which they are committed. There is a pivotal episode where Sabul prevents Shevek from sending his articles on temporal physics on the freighter to Urras, where they could be read by Urrasti physicists, the only ones with the intellectual capacity to understand him:

> He [Shevek] brought this matter up with the Physics Federation, which Sabul seldom bothered to attend. Nobody there attached importance to the issue of free communication with the ideological enemy. Some of them lectured Shevek for working in a field so arcane that there was, by his own admission, nobody else on his own world competent in it. "But it's only new," he said, which got him nowhere.
>
> "If it's new, share it with us, not with the propertarians!"
>
> "I've tried to offer a course every quarter for a year now. You always say there isn't enough demand for it. Are you afraid of it because it's new?"
>
> That won him no friends and he left in anger. (LeGuin, 1974, pp. 129–130).

Shevek comes to grief because he is, for most of the novel, unable to see that Odonian ideological principles have drifted over time toward the thoughtless routines of bureaucratic orthodoxy. Instead, he understands his problem in other, less helpful terms. For example, he views Sabul's adamant opposition to letting him share his work with Urrasti physicists as if it were only the odd unaccountability of one man—a man strangely connected to decisions about what is to be allowed and what is not, but still one man. That is a very limited attribution, and it points to a solution in which he would compromise with this one man to reach the best available outcome for his work. At other times he is so worn down by the smothering Odonian emphasis on brotherhood and cooperation that he is not able to declare an equally significant Odonian right to be free. The solution he chooses is to subordinate his personal needs to the communal definition. Neither of these solutions gets Shevek to where he needs to be.

Shevek's friend Bedap was raised as an Odonian just as Shevek was, but Bedap is not oriented to theory. Bedap follows closely the tragic life of their mutual friend, Tirin, a playwright. Tirin has produced a work of social criticism that Anarresti generally have found unpalatable. Tirin goes from one failure to another and winds up in an asylum on Segvina Island. It is Bedap who understands that "they" have driven Tirin crazy and then sent him to an asylum to get rid of him. It is the possibility that social actions on Anarres can be taken by any entity that can reasonably be referred to as "they" rather than as "we" that raises the specter of the drift from ideals. Bedap perceives the drift before Shevek because his focus is intensely personal. Shevek, as a theoretician, suffers from a kind of conceptual blindness, having learned to see what he should see rather than what is.

The turning point in the novel comes when Shevek runs into Bedap on the street and confesses his failure and discouragement (LeGuin, 1974): "I've changed, here. There's something wrong here. I don't know what it is" (p. 133). Bedap responds that Shevek has "come up against the wall," namely, Sabul and his bureaucratic functionaries, "the people in power." Bedap matters to LeGuin's story because the alienated Bedap clearly sees the walls Odonians have built, whereas Shevek experiences only the cobwebs of inauthenticity. In our journal analysis, we are going to pose (imaginatively) for Shevek the task of coming to recognize the predatory use of power without Bedap's help. If in the world of the novel the CAJ were available to him, we argue, he could do it himself. But why should that matter to analysts of contemporary administration?

Comparing Anarres to Contemporary Contexts

Shevek's dilemma can be viewed, we believe, as a kind of limiting case. In the ways it denies clarity and promotes mission drift, the Anarres context is like contemporary bureaucratic settings, only worse. Like them in that the constraints posed by bureaucratic demands are often especially problematic and confusing because they come with wrapped-in benevolent or banal disguises. Think of the way initiative or innovation is routinely met with "That's not how we do things around here," or "If we make an exception for you, we'll have to make it for everyone," or "We know the data are meaningless, but we need them to satisfy our funders."

At the same time, Shevek lacks certain advantages that contemporary administrators possess in confronting mission drift. Because the Anarres pioneers started from scratch in building a language that embodies their values, the contrast between original intentions and contemporary practice can be hard to disentangle. Edelman (1977) has described ways in which contemporary bureaucratic language can be similarly misleading, but it is also true that there is usually some way to build a contrast to present practices by referencing founding legislation, an original mission statement, the goals first stipulated by the consortium, and so on. This contrast provides a tool for realigning current practice with original intent. For Shevek, the language and explanations he uses and also that he credits are the same as the original ones. Bedap has to tell him that the explanations use the same words but no longer constrain practice.

In addition, in our context it is relatively easy for an administrator to point to an institutional counter-example and say that we should mimic its success. That is possible here because of the wealth of kinds of institutions. On Anarres, the question is the culture—the values of Odo and the institutions they entail. There are no other cultures, and all institutions are expected to operate within this tight frame. So Shevek has to do without that advantage as well.

Our point is that if Shevek, lacking these advantages, can envision the path beyond drift by using the journal method, it might be even more likely to prove a useful tool for contemporary public administrators and those with whom they routinely interact. But how would we know if the tool was working? By what criteria should we judge whether the journal method is effective in combating mission drift and promoting greater integrity between intention and behavior? The next section articulates criteria we find compelling, and identifies their roots in the literature of political psychology and democratic theory.

Key Criteria for Judging an Antidrift Tool

The CAJ method supports three interrelated aspects of essential human functioning: intention, clarity, and agency. The importance of these concepts for human functioning and democratic life is a staple of academic literature. Space permits us to note here just a few of the most prominent theorists on whose shoulders we stand.

The need of humans for effective agency—understood as the ability to formulate and realize intentions—was powerfully formulated by Bruno Bettelheim (1967) after he observed the relative absence of purposive behavior in severely autistic children. A more common reason for not intending and for not acting in accordance with your intentions—even amidst a society with democratic ideals—is that you have learned that nothing you do changes anything. Martin E.P. Seligman (1976**<1975 in References?>**) called this "learned helplessness" **<(p. XX?)>** and experimentally demonstrated the power of this idea as it pertains to monkeys, apes, fish, cats, rats, and dogs—and, of course, to humans. Lerner (1986)—addressing citizen incapacities—called this "surplus powerlessness . . . the set of feelings and beliefs that make people think of themselves as even more powerless than the actual power situation requires" (p. ii). Edelman (1977) draws out the political implications: "To experience the political world as a sequence of distinct events, randomly threatening or reassuring, renders people readily susceptible to cues, both deliberate and unintended; for the environment becomes unpredictable and people remain continually anxious" (p. 41). He critiques a purportedly democratic society that in fact systematically undermines the sense of clarity and control that its citizens need to pursue their intentions. Etzioni (1968) is careful to note that all societies are inherently alienating to some degree, but ours is better at hiding it in plain sight, leaving individuals confused. What is new in the post-modern condition "is the *scope* and *depth* of such false awareness" (p. 617)—believing society is responsive to the self when it is not.

In envisioning a path forward, we have found Christian Bay's (1965) understanding of freedom particularly useful. Bay speaks of potential freedom, which he defines as "the relative absence of *unperceived external* restraints on individual behavior" (p. 95; emphasis added). He asks:

> How can we insure conditions under which men can develop into what they have it *in themselves* to become. How can the growth of individuality be sheltered against institutional and reformist pressures—against being pushed into whatever harness is adapted toward the improvement and perfection, in some sense, of social and political institutions. . . . It is the ability to resist manipulation I wish to see increased, and this ability can best be developed in institutions in which not impartiality but controversy is fostered. (pp. 95–96, 98–99)

Bay's emphasis on the need to resist the manipulative power of constraints that are "unperceived" fits closely with our conception of mission drift. Among contemporary democratic theorists, Bay's emphasis finds an echo in Boyte and Kari's (1996) theory of "public work," which seeks to escape the tyranny of bureaucratic technique by freeing citizens in everyday settings to exercise agency by creating objects of public value through critical encounter with those with whom they disagree or who are different. In the same vein, McKnight (1995) seeks to revive community competence—the ability of neighbors to act on their own intentions—from the erosion of agency due to the colonization of local spaces by professionalized services. Morgan (1986) proposes replacing the word "organization" with "imagination," hoping to avoid passive acceptance of a reified world and to support the realization of imagined intentions via various means of coordination

From the discussion thus far, we can discern a few key criteria for judging an antidrift tool or method. It would need to provide a way to gain access to constraints on individual or collective intentions that are routinely disregarded. Further, it would need to help individuals categorize those constraints, turning the experience of dimly perceived hindrances or irritations into a clear obstacle (walls rather than cobwebs). Finally, having armed its users with newfound clarity, it would need to provide an opportunity to construct activating problems based on this clarity, in order to engender effective agency. The next section describes a tool with these basic characteristics.

THE CAUSAL ATTRIBUTION JOURNAL

Intellectual Roots

The causal attribution journal (CAJ) presupposes a meaningful lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Garfinkel, 1967; Habermas, 1984; Husserl, 1970; Schutz **<& Luckmann?>**, 1973). Our emphasis—as democratic theorists—is on the constraints this world imposes on *intention* and *action*. We do not invent our worlds from scratch; we are socialized into the kind of world that "people like us" live in. The bond that connects people like us is our taken-for-granted world; our presupposition that this world makes our life together possible.

The best starting point for understanding how the journal method reveals and thus clarifies the lifeworld is the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1970). Husserl introduced the idea of "bracketing," which enabled him to sidestep the philosophical controversies about whether the existence of a world outside the perceiver could be demonstrated. Those questions, Husserl argued, could be bracketed, could be set aside for the moment, so that the actual content of experience could be examined.

We use Husserl's device in a different way. Our argument concerns whether social constraints on understanding and behavior can be understood in a way that enables action. This leads to the question of just what is to be bracketed so that the true nature of constraints can be identified. Following Husserl's lead, Herbert Blumer (Blumer, 1969) argued that experience needed to be heeded. Indeed, he saw this as the fundamental principle of symbolic interactionism:

> the direct examination of the actual empirical social world rather than by working with a simulation of that world, or with a preset model of that world, or with a picture of that world derived from a few scattered observations of it, or with a picture of that world fashioned in advance to meet the dictates of some imported theoretical scheme or of some scheme of "scientific" procedure, or with a picture of the world built up from partial and untested accounts of that world. For symbolic interactionism the nature of the empirical social world is to be discovered, to be dug out by a direct, careful, and probing examination of that world. (p. 48)

Note particularly "a picture of [the] world fashioned in advance to meet the dictates of [a] theoretical scheme." This is precisely the difficulty facing Shevek and other inhabitants of self-justifying bureaucracies. The world that Shevek confronts still uses the terms of Odo's anarchistic theories, but the actual functioning of the culture has changed considerably. What Shevek needs to do is to find a way to make, in Blumer's words, a "direct, careful, and probing examination" of the world he lives in.

To identify an event or experience as something that needs to be explained requires that it be considered "unusual," which is surprisingly difficult (Emerson 1970). As Harold Garfinkel (1964) grasped, the features of this common world are "seen, but unnoticed" (p. 226). In Shevek's case, the picture he has of his society is false, even though it is shared by nearly everyone. If Shevek is to come to this realization, he will need to bracket the explanations he is given for the experiences he is having. Fritz Heider (1958) argues that it is possible to study "how people come to explain (make attributions about) the behavior of others and themselves" (p. 79). If there is a way to look at the routine grounds of everyday activities in order to focus on how these experiences are explained to oneself, then there is a way to get behind the experiences; to

formulate them not just as events, but as kinds of events; as recurring events; or as social structures. In Shevek's case, the experiences are toxic, and because they are explained by others in language he himself accepts as right, he has a very difficult issue with which to deal. If we are right, his dilemma is not at all unlike the confusion facing frustrated bureaucrats in everyday settings, who find themselves in a trap where language or precedents or routines are used to stifle new ways of looking at a problem.

A key feature of the CAJ is the presumption that the journaler is trying to do something. We call this presupposition "agency." As Zimbardo (1969, p. 10) shows, people who are not actively choosing a course of action—"subjects," he calls them—act differently than agents and explain their actions to themselves differently than agents. By contrast, when agents focus on their intentions, they find salient information about themselves and their circumstances. The journal directs agents who are doing so to use the simplest language available—"I was trying to accomplish x but I was not able to because of y." Since we are attempting to bracket the everyday world, the world that comes prepackaged with what one must do and should do, the journal must rely on the simplest, least morally entailed language available. Heider (1958) calls this "naïve psychology" because it relies on everyday concepts such as "may" and "can" and "trying." As we will see later, these fundamentals provide the direction of the records journalers produce.

Before explaining how the CAJ works, it may be worthwhile to distinguish our instrument from some others that are similar. The Hassles and Uplifts Scale (Kanner **<et al.?>**1981) is widely used as a record of stressful events. This instrument uses a standard scale of situations and asks about each whether it was a "hassle" or an "uplift." In studies using this scale, the presupposition of an agent who is monitoring the success of his or her intentional actions is absent or incidental, whereas it is fundamental to our work.

In the same way, the "experience sampling method" (Csikszentmihaly & Hunter, 2003) produces a record of what the participants in the study were doing at randomly chosen times during their day and how they were feeling at those times. The CAJ also uses random recording periods, but the data recorded by the participants have to do with what the participants were trying (and failing) to do at each of those times. It presumes both agency and failure.

Following the lead of the theorists we have surveyed, the journal method assumes that its users are agents with intentions. Gaining access to these intentions requires a way of focusing on concrete, unmediated experience, the goal of phenomenologists. The lifeworld the journal creates replaces confusion with clarity by making users aware of what previously they had experienced but did not notice. The activating potential of the journal is in opening up awareness. Our concern is with how individuals who live and work within bureaucratic settings might grow more aware of the drift from original ideals into thoughtless routines. We see in this awareness an activating democratic potential that

carries the possibility of an antidrift and antihelplessness strategy. We now describe how the journal method works to make all this happen.

The CAJ: What It Is and How It Works

The CAJ is a simple device: a record of things you have tried and failed to do, along with a reason for why you have failed. In preparation for using it as a way to understand and combat mission drift, we introduce the instrument and the sequence of choices it makes possible.

We will deal with four questions here: (a) the nature of "problems," (b) the necessity for "placement" of problems, (c) the nature of journal records that can capture and aggregate the elements of problems, and (d) the new reality that categorizing these records offers. The next task will be to apply them to Shevek and the dilemma he faces on Anarres.

The Nature of "Problems"

The quotation marks in the section heading indicate that *problem* will be used here as a technical term. For the CAJ, a problem is not a condition, like widespread hunger; it is a construct. A problem is not, in other words, something that is there; it is something you create. Barzelay and Armajani (1992) make a similar distinction, noting the power that comes when conditions experienced as fixed are redefined as problems amenable to alternative solutions.

The problem construct contains four elements that can be summarized in the notational form: $Wb_1(D)b_2$. There is the intention to do something, W; the reason for wanting to do it, b_1; the fact that you have not been able to do it (D); and the reason you have not been able to do it, b_2. For the sake of simplicity, we deal here only with "intention to achieve" rather than "intention to prevent." The latter form would move from the desire to prevent (W) to the reason, b_1, to the occurrence of the event, D, to the reason for failure to prevent the event, b_2. In either case the use of parentheses indicates a negative: W is a "want," whereas (W) is something you do not want to happen; similarly D refers to "doing something" and (D) to not being able to do it.

When you have described a situation in these terms, you have created a problem. The fact of widespread hunger is, from the journal perspective, a condition rather than a problem. To create a relevant problem, the journal entry might read: "I wanted to work a shift at the free food clinic because I want to help reduce hunger in my city, but I couldn't, because they don't need more help during the hours I am available." With the notation, it would look like this.

> $Wb_1(D)b_2$ *I wanted to work a shift at the free food clinic because I want to help reduce hunger in my city, but I couldn't, because they don't need more help during the hours I am available.*

How Problems Are "Placed"

It is important for journalers to understand that they have created the problem they are dealing with, because then they can see that they could have made one problem rather than another. The fact that the problem is the creation of the journaler means that the cause of the problem can be "placed" wherever the journaler wants it. In the food clinic example, the reason for the failure of an act, the b_2, can be placed within the person ("I should make more of my time available to work at the food clinic") or outside the person ("they should make more times of the day available to volunteers"). The reason why an attempt failed may be a single act by the journaler or someone else; it may be a consistent trait; it may be the nature of the social setting; it may be broadly systemic. These are the options journalers have when they "place" a problem within one or another scheme of causal attribution.

The Nature of Journal Records

So the CAJ is a record of things you have tried to do or to prevent, but in either case were not able to accomplish what you wanted. This simple record includes a placement of the problem. Three aspects of the CAJ make it especially useful. First, it presupposes the agent's perspective and intentions; the journaler is trying to do something. Second, the entries in the journal are short and formulaic. That is their strength. It allows the meaningful aggregation of large numbers of entries into meaningful patterns. Third, the events recorded are trivial failures and inconveniences. The CAJ offers a record of the least-processed cognitions the journaler has available. Over time and over hundreds of entries, certain patterns emerge. The journaler gives names to these patterns, and as a result they become categories into which later events may fall.

Consider, for instance, these causal attributions—the b_2 element of the problem. One journaler might keep a record that includes: (a) because I didn't try hard enough, (b) because I'm not smart enough, (c) because I didn't lay the groundwork adequately, and (d) because I didn't persist in my efforts. Another journaler might record b_2s like these: (a) because the director has never liked me, (b) because the standards are set so low that everyone qualifies, (c) because the program is not adequately funded, and (d) because my background makes me unacceptable to the other members of the team. Even in a set of four items, we can see habits of mind.

We move to the next step in the journal process, "aggregation," by asking the journalers to look over the array of problems they have created and placed. They begin to notice the patterns, the frequent recurrences of certain elements. As names are given to these patterns, categories are formed. Note, for instance, that the "causes" of all the failures recorded in the first journaler's work are internal; all those in the second journaler's work are external. This does not

tell us, it is worth remembering, *anything* about the conditions themselves. Problems are constructs. It does tell us something about the kinds of problems these two journalers are likely to construct.

The Journal Reveals the Lifeworld

By aggregating from everyday experiences, journalers name categories that help them see the structure of the world in which they are living. It is the categories into which we put our frustrations that tell us most about the size and shape of the world available to our intentions and actions. I may be constrained by internal norms; by inaccurate or outdated beliefs about the nature of my society; by opponents in my immediate environment; by a system of control that works perfectly, although only a few know that it is there. Those worlds, as they might be constructed by categorizing a series of CAJ entries, are the worlds that will be of interest to us in considering Shevek's experience on Anarres.

JOURNALING FOR CLARITY AND AGENCY

Shevek's place in the Odonian culture of his time confuses him and renders him inert. What would Shevek's use of the CAJ mean in the context of the dilemmas he faces and the problems he creates to help him deal with them? To accomplish this, we imaginatively construct journal entries for Shevek's character. We will focus on two elements of Shevek's habits of attribution: (a) the clarity that comes from accumulating journal entries, and (b) the active mindset that comes from focusing on external rather than internal causal attributions.

The Clarity Generated by Accumulating CAJ Entries

A sample CAJ entry for Shevek would look like this:

> $Wb_1(D)b_2$ *Wanted to sit down in Sabul's office, because I was tired, but I didn't, because there was nowhere to sit.*

The W clause includes the phrase "Sabul's office." Remember that the language spoken on Anarres has no possessive forms because no one possesses property. No one would unthinkingly use an expression like "Sabul's office." But people do call it "Sabul's office," and they mean it as a criticism. There is nowhere to sit (in the b_2 clause) because Sabul keeps all the available surfaces covered with books and papers; there is nowhere to sit because Sabul makes sure there is nowhere to sit.

We see here that even a simple statement of a simple want which was denied fulfillment can be surprisingly rich. We have something more in mind,

however. According to the understanding on which the CAJ was devised, there can be real merit in noting small hassles or seemingly insignificant failures. By refusing to toss events aside as insignificant (something many journal users find difficult at first), one can create enough journal entries to enable patterns and related categories to emerge. In this way, new clarity is possible.

Shevek could discover this—imagine a series of entries that have this form.

> $Wb_1(D)b_2$ *Wanted to ask Atro for a clarification of his theory, because I want a better look at where he might have made a mistake, but I was not able to ask, because Sabul refused to put my request for clarification in the physics slot on the next freighter to Urras.*

It is not hard to generate a dozen other entries like this one for Shevek in which the only substantial difference is exactly what he wants to ask Atro or To (both Urrasti physicists). Further, the reason Sabul gives for refusing could and does vary. At one point, he refuses because he wants to protect his own access to the freighter's mail slot from use by other physicists. At another, he says that a document must be printed and distributed on Anarres before it is "shared" with physicists on Urras. At yet another, he says he has to protect the existence of a mail slot on the freighter from the opposition of the PDC, a coordinating body that is as close to "government" as anything on Anarres. This set of reasons strongly suggests a category Shevek might name "Sabul's Opposition." This category name is clarifying because it deemphasizes the variety of the reasons for opposition and emphasizes the unity of one category with many instances.

The Power of External Attribution

LeGuin shows us that the real reason for Shevek's difficulty is the drift from the anarchism of the Odonian pioneers to the thoughtless bureaucratic thinking of Shevek's time. As users of the CAJ, we can quickly see that no set of internal attributions will help Shevek reach this conclusion. But, like many journal users, he often does focus on internal attributions (Rotter, 1966).

Shevek's health breaks because he tangles repeatedly with a web of causes and is unable to see them as a wall. Instead, here is the conclusion Shevek reaches in trying to understand his failure to succeed in his work:

> The work came first, but it went nowhere. Like sex, it ought to have been a pleasure, but it wasn't. He kept grinding over the same problems, getting not a step nearer the solution of To's Temporal Paradox, let along the Theory of Simultaneity, which last year he had thought almost in his grasp. That self-assurance now seemed incredible to him. Had he really thought himself capable, at age twenty, of evolving a theory that

would change the foundations of cosmological physics? He had been out of his mind for a good while before the fever, evidently. (LeGuin, 1974, p. 128)

Why has Shevek failed? In this passage, he ascribes his failure to attempting a task that is well beyond his abilities. Had he kept a CAJ, the entry would have read:

$Wb_1(D)b_2$ *Wanted to formulate the Theory of Simultaneity because it is the next step physics requires, but I didn't, because formulating that theory is beyond my abilities.*

This seems straightforward, but consider some alternative causal attributions— what Shevek might have said, but does not. He might have said that his isolation from his peers on Urras has caused him to fail. He might have said that the absence of warm interpersonal relationships has caused him to fail. He might have said that his physical strength is not up to the rigors of extended theoretical work. He might have said that Sabul's opposition has stopped him. He might have said that his failure, though real, is only temporary, and the next time he will come even closer. He might have said that he is not yet fully recovered from his recent illness. He might have said that the bargaining he is forced to do with Sabul has removed from him the resources that true Odonianism has always provided him. Every one of those attributions is external, offering him a way forward.

Eventually, Shevek is going to have to see the fact that Sabul is his boss— to note the completely un-Odonian possessive form of the term as well as the archist noun—and decide what to do about it. Sabul is the wall that constrains any forward movement by Shevek. To take any effective action against Sabul, Shevek will have to see that it is Sabul's position and intention that have stopped him. To do this, Shevek will have aggregated the small trivial examples of his journal into categories. He will have seen that Sabul has blocked him from independent access to the Urrasti physicists. He will see that Sabul is behind the Physics Federation's unwillingness to give him a class to which he could teach the principles of simultaneity. He will see that Sabul will allow him to publish his work only as redacted and only if he names Sabul as co-author. Someone like Shevek, an agent active on his own behalf, might very well see that Sabul is not a non-Odonian, but a lapsed Odonian. Sabul might, therefore, be brought to change his mind about the rights—the completely un-Odonian control—he has over Shevek's work. There would follow a series of entries like this.

$Wb_1(D)b_2$ *Wanted to show Sabul that his control of the physics slot on the freighter was a violation of the brotherhood expected of all Odonians, but I did not, because Sabul loves power more than he loves integrity.*

> $Wb_1(D)b_2$ *Wanted to persuade Sabul that his dominance over the Physics Syndicate is a perversion of Odonian cooperation because a dominated Syndicate weakens all of our society, but I did not, because Sabul can control rivals only through his dominance over the Syndicate.*

This brings Shevek to see Sabul clearly as "the wall," as Bedap said. It brings him also to the conclusion that Sabul cannot be induced to abandon his opposition by appeals to his Odonian conscience. These entries, formed into a pattern, would show Shevek that Sabul cannot be defeated within the current systemic rules. Sabul cannot be avoided either, within the system as it currently operates. Shevek could have come to this conclusion by following the process the CAJ offers him: careful recording of failures, grouping those failures into "kinds of failures," creating them as categories and giving those categories names, seeing new instances not as new issues but as additional instances of the categories he has already formulated.

CONCLUSION

We have sought to better understand a routinely experienced bureaucratic dysfunction—mission drift—from the unique angle made possible by phenomenological awareness. Mission drift ought to prompt searching questions: Do we want to continue to drift? Or do we want to engage in a long march back to our roots? Yet these questions don't even come up if we can't see the drift in the first place. What makes mission drift so problematic is that it is not, in any immediate sense, viewed as a problem at all. Instead, drift occurs when the introduction of goals and procedures that belie original intentions is happening in ways that are not apparent to practitioners.

It turns out that our ability to see mission drift, much less to understand it, depends on our being active to mitigate its effects. By construing ourselves as active agents with intentions, the journal method prompts clarity about just who or what is blocking their realization. It does so by creating a world of empowering limitations that are outside me (external), and proximal (close at hand). Even if they reflect powerful distal forces, limits defined in this fashion create an array of remedial options that would otherwise not appear.

Whether remedial efforts would succeed is another question. Bureaucratic personalities, forces, and requirements are still pervasive, powerful, and perverse. But if we are right, seeing walls is a better starting position than being tangled in cobwebs, confused about our true state. The liberating potential of removing perceptual blinders gives LeGuin's tale its emotional vividness—we feel both Shevek's bondage and his eventual freedom viscerally. Recreating that freeing potential for the denizens of bureaucratic organizations and societies is the hope driving journal work. Having suggested the possibilities of this work in a fictional case, we find ourselves curious about what might

occur in a real field test, outside the classroom settings where the CAJ has been used to date.

We end where we began, with Etzioni, who details the wide-ranging social and political costs of the continuing drift into personal and social inauthenticity. Among these, he highlights the "bottling up" of democratic energy:

> One major consequence of inauthentic democratic politics is that new societal power is not converted into political power, and, thus, new collective needs are not "proportionately" and quickly transmitted to the society's control centers. This leads to overdue and inadequate responses. . . . Societies tend to lose some of this capacity for the absorption of energy as their institutional structures become more rigid, especially as they become more complex, instrumentally oriented, and organizational. (Etzioni, 1968, pp. 637, 646–647)

Against this backdrop, we suggest that the CAJ can aid conceptual clarity, promote empowering categorizations, and activate personal energies. The journal record supplies the needed information, noting every contact with Etzioni's webs, encouraging categorizations that formulate the experiences of hindrances and irritation into wall-like obstacles, and placing problems in a manner that sustains agency (external and proximal). The tool holds particular promise for those who live and work within bureaucratic settings where inauthentic relationships prevail. By helping us construe the walls that constrain us from realizing our intentions, the journal method is a useful tool for promoting an everyday brand of heroism within bureaucratic institutions.

For theorists, the journal method illuminates the vital role of perceptual dynamics in efforts to secure democratic governance. Reformers have posited a number of strategies for the democratic renewal of bureaucratic institutions: promoting greater inclusion (Young, 2000), advancing service-oriented leadership (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007), engaging citizens in deliberative processes (Campbell, 2010), deploying smart technology (Newsom, 2013), to name but a few. None of these alternatives addresses an arguably more fundamental problem: perceptual drift that undercuts the sense of discrepancy between what we intend and what we experience; between our political ideals and bureaucratic reality. Before we can change the world, we must render it visible and legible, not in the simplistic fashion of large bureaucracies but in terms that reflect the complex contexts of individual experience (Scott, 1998). By turning daily frustrations into a source of insight and options, the causal attribution journal can enrich administrative theory and praxis.

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