

Morality and Speed Cameras – Picturing more than the Surface Behaviour

Background

Those who have read my TRIZ accounts before will know I like to use TRIZ to explore a wide range of issues in any situation where some kind of innovation is desired.

Over the last year I have been exploring using TRIZ to deconstruct what is meant by companies and individuals when they use the words, Values, Ethics and Morality. So sessions have been run at conferences and workshops, using participant created plays, and after watching the plays we have used TRIZ to work through ideas about how to solve, for example, the Contradictions that may have become obvious. As an illustration of use of TRIZ and Morality, I have written some ideas on using TRIZ on an issue of importance and prominence in the UK, the rapid growth in use of speed cameras at the sides of roads, to such an extent that the majority of drivers in the UK will have a criminal record by the time they retire!

The power of TRIZ to deconstruct the Morality Contradictions has been very obvious, and with it comes the ability to solve those Contradictions, assist in decision making as a collaborative exercise and assist in the process of devising explanations of policy decisions, an important activity particularly in public services.

TRIZ, Morality and Speed Cameras

An example of a TRIZ approach to Morality can be taken with something as simple as the adoption of speed cameras. To illustrate this I will make up a story.

Summex County Council has a meeting on ‘speed and road safety’ in which all agree that with all the adverse publicity on speed cameras and their desire to find real solutions to safety issues, they will ‘think out of the box’ for once.

Someone suggests looking at the issue from a TRIZ perspective. The first stage is recognition that the problem of reducing traffic speed may exist at many different levels. They see the speed camera as a **system** level solution, with the camera as a device to supply information to the Authority on who is speeding and that information having an impact on people’s behaviour, albeit in a kind of indirect way.

There is evidence that a **subsystem** solution might be available, with potential control of cars’ speeds by roadside devices on entering an urban area, but this is as yet unproven technology and take up initially would be limited.

They created a few ideas on this, such as funding gadgets for residents’ cars for installing the speed control devices and potentially reduction in rates for those applying. As most accidents are within a few miles of where someone lives this did seem a future option and the possibility is to be pursued by the council.

At a supersystem level they examined the TRIZ concept of 'Resources'. The aim would be to get people to voluntarily keep down their speed in urban areas.

A short resource list with ideas included tarmac colouring, lamppost marking, different speed signs, roadside grassing (reducing the width of road with hardy grass).

There was a recognition that the standard solutions for speeding created some Contradictions, another TRIZ term. People distracted by speed signs, road colourings, and especially speed cameras (people looking more for the cameras than children) are more likely to have accidents. So they tried some of the TRIZ 40 Principles to see which might overcome those Contradictions. One TRIZ Principle is 'Reverse it'.

Could they take away all speed cameras and reduce speeds of vehicles? Another TRIZ Principle is 'Self Service', and these two applied together would suggest that they might have a year's moratorium on use of speed cameras, advertising widely that Summex County Council is trying a period of TRUST, for one year, during which local speeds would be monitored and accident figures collected, and if the people driving through the area kept speeds down and if accidents reduced then their county would stay speed camera free.

They adopted this approach which they saw not only as innovative but potentially overcoming the Contractions and yielding results. It was also felt to be the most mature approach to a general programme of good citizenship that the council was adopting (thus supporting an approach based on the super-supersystem).

This system was adopted for a year and the results were....

Well, you can only guess.

I hope this illustrates how TRIZ can be applied to a social problem, which is of great importance (life and death) and is bringing in Moral Issues at many different levels. There is the 'Morality' of getting a good solution (one which delivers results rather than just a political solution), there is the 'Morality' of appropriate relationship building between the authority (which has legal responsibilities but wishes to engage in a partnership with its local population) and the 'Morality' of building relationships (not just maintaining them) in such a way that other problems can be solved at a supersystem level, with maybe more proactive engagement of the population in health and care issues, environmental monitoring and developing, and business development.

The approach above demonstrates the power of TRIZ, when used with Morality Plays, which expose deeply and more directly the issues involved.

Simple Creativity exercises might generate ideas, but, as you may have yourself experienced, the ideas generated seem high on innovation but low on reality. An example can be generated as another account of Summex's meeting:

"A more whacky idea generation included local vicars on patrol, school children's sit down protests, a name and shame campaign in local newspapers and an Internet site showing daily photos of cars travelling through the urban areas, with speeds."

It may be that these ideas could yield better results than the TRIZ session. Who knows. But my evaluation, maybe my instinct, is to go with the TRIZ solutions!

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In partnership with PartnershipsWork, (see www.partnershipswork.co.uk) we are intending to introduce “Morality Plays” into various areas of business and public service, particularly where Moral Contradictions are likely to be uppermost in people’s consideration of action (for example, in the public health services).