



The Hero-Villain-Fool Narrative Construction Method: Assessing hidden organizational phenomena

Enno Freiherr von Fircks¹

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Abstract

In the following paper, I present the hero-villain-fool narrative construction method in order to assess hidden organizational phenomena. Psychologists can analyze organizations in two ways either by focusing upon formal networks (e.g. organigram) or by taking a closer look into informal networks. The present paper tries to help organizational psychologists to generate meaning making within informal networks. These informal networks are important semiotic spaces where knowledge is generated that lies in the taboo zone of talking for the formal networks. Thus, my open interview guide proposes a flexible method that can reverse the taboo zone of talking and expand the talkability zone. As a consequence, meaning making is generated that bears conflicts showing urgent – yet not fulfilled – needs within the organization. The proposed method is instanced by a microgenetic analysis of a single case study showing that the hero works as a meta-organizer for adaptive trajectories that lead into a multilateral negotiation of concrete strategies fulfilling urgent pressing needs within organizations. Limitations are made explicit such as by arguing for expanding the research design into focus groups inviting various employees and leaders to the generation of meaning making that operates between the talkability and taboo zone of talking.

Keywords Hero-villain-fool method; informal networks · Taboo zone of talking · Microgenesis · Organizational semiotics · Intertextuality · Heteroglossia

Organizations between Formal and Informal Networks

Phenomena in organizations such as within enterprises are difficult to assess (Casell & Symon, 2011). On the one hand psychologists/managers that are interested in the general mood of their staff are confronted with formal networks that are

✉ Enno Freiherr von Fircks
ennovonfircks@googlemail.com

¹ Sigmund-Freud-University, Vienna, Austria

composed by various employees (Stevenson 1990). Examples of such formal networks are official mentor-apprentice relationships such as between leader and follower. These relationships can be institutionalized through official meetings for example within an annual evaluation (e.g. Arvey & Murphy, 1998). Moreover, these institutionalizations can be illustrated by enterprise-related policies in regards to interpersonal communication/cooperation such as in the example of a leader working with an open door for his employees to step in, freely and voluntarily. These formal networks operate within a top-down approach of implementing an organizational culture (Baldursson and Schmitt 2023). Conventions, norms and rules are defined for example from a particular management board and then publicly disseminated such as in forums/bulletin boards or via mass e-mails (Clement & Puranam, 2018) – hence made accessible for the general employee.

It becomes obvious that these formal networks operate in a vertical manner communicating from the top to the bottom (Valkiainen and Jakobs 2023) with no or only a small amount of horizontal cooperation. Formal networks show the disadvantage of a small group (management board) deciding important enterprise-related policy-briefs that account for the total staff. From a semiotic perspective (Lotman, 1990), a specific text gets enriched by multiple people contributing to the text generation and alteration based on highly divergent needs and goals. This is called intertextuality within literature (Clayton, 1991) but can be expanded onto the general notion of human beings living with each other, interdependently (Egan-Robertson, 1998). The issue is that within such a vertical text generation, the actual text is based on a small number of needs and goals from a small group of important people. Consequently, the text might talk across the actual staff's needs as it only takes into account one perspective. The formal networks are – defined in a negative way – the negation of multilateral (democratic) cooperations between employees themselves as well as between employees and their supervisors.

I am aware that the above-mentioned sounds abstract to some readers. Hence, we need an illustration. Let us take a famous study by Engeström (2000) carried out within a Finish hospital. Staff and psychologists were interested how they could handle chronically ill patients that have appointments with various doctors from several specializations. With the whole staff, the Finish psychologists worked out a procedure that does justice to the issue of non-cooperation between various medical departments based on the staff's needs. Importantly, Engeström (2000) identified multiple agents within his intervention and tried to incorporate the multiple needs of multiple agents – such as doctors, nurses, patients, relatives and so forth – within a newly developed procedure. Here, a text became negotiated between multiple agents and their unique teleology (Stern, 2020) – thus their relatedness towards a specific object. Engeström and Engeström (1986) as well as Fircks (2021a, 2021b) argue that this multi-perspectivity is the key for a sustainable change within an organization as change can be only mediated longitudinally if it meets the peoples' divergent needs. It becomes evident that needs must not be defined here in a negative interdependent manner in a way of them contradicting each other but by being complementary to each other (von Fircks, 2022a). A text will only be used if it can be appropriated and re-structured, personologically (Zweig, 2013). The basic problem with the formal networks is that they not only deny intertextuality to come into being but that they

essentially operate within monoglossia – thus cultural-linguistic patterns from a specific group defining the cultural patterns for other groups. Thus, they not only ignore heteroglossia – thus different cultural-linguistic patterns interanimating each other (Bachtin, 2010) – but they superimpose their monolithic cultural-linguistic patterns onto the rest of the staff. Speaking with Bachtin to illuminate the term heteroglossia:

[The organization] can be defined as a diversity of different social speech types (...) and the diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. (...) [The organization] orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. (2010, pp. 262-263)

The consequence of an organizational approach ignoring the above-mentioned value of heteroglossia is a uniformist world that does not path the way for institutionalized tensions that can be made fertile for the enrichment of a specific text. Thus, there is no center/periphery relationship of the specific semiosphere¹ (Lotman, 1990) within the enterprise as the communication with the periphery is not only denied but made impossible by supposedly knowing their needs and goals. An organization that is necessarily a pluralistic universe (James, 2009) becomes an echo chamber supporting one language and promoting specific cultural work-patterns. The consequence is that the organization necessarily turns authoritarian (Marrow, 1957, 1964) – thus one author becoming the puppet master of the whole enterprise with its various social groups.

From the above-described paragraph it becomes necessary to contrast the formal networks – in organizations and beyond – with the informal ones. As the name already implied informal networks operate within relationships that grow not through an official organigram but that emerge bottom-up (Orbach et al., 2015). When we were talking about the formal networks being vertical, we need to juxtapose them with the informal ones being born horizontally. Importantly, they are not institutionalized nor publicly recognized by the enterprise itself (Cross et al., 2002; Rank, 2008). They form each other based on similarities in the need hierarchy of specific people and function as a way of elaborating jointly specific need-fulfillment strategies. People – within these informal networks – meet in non-official settings such as in the kitchen when drinking coffee, in the cafeteria when having lunch, down the corridor when going to a colleague's office, in the lift when going to the toilet, in the bathroom when washing one's hands. The staff is aware of the non-formal setting as the enterprise's officials often come not across those places. They might have a kitchen, toilets, lunch spaces, corridors for themselves that makes it

¹ There is always a huge debate about the notion of semiosphere as indicated by Lotman (1990). While there are some social scientists such as Valsiner (2014) arguing that the concept of semiosphere means the totality of the signs and sign-making processes of all individuals and groups, Lotman himself (1990) was not shy in arguing that the semiosphere exists of different sub-semiospheres. The organizational domain of living is such a wholistic but independent action domain (Handlungsbereich) of specific signs that stand for work-related issues. I use the notion of specific semiosphere to underline a specific action domain that uses particular signs being distinct to other domains such as one's leisure time, for example.

even impossible to come across the actual team of employees. Thus, they operate in different semiospheric settings – that I have called sign-manifolds² (von Firecks, 2020). Because the periphery does not meet the center in these semiotic spaces,³ the employees do feel free of discussing conflicts, misunderstandings, critique, issues – and so forth – between themselves as well as potential circumvention strategies that might address the closure of a specific need. The temporary absence of the center makes the periphery strong to consolidate their place within the enterprise and to elaborate on specific taboo zones of talking (see Valsiner, 2005). The informal networks do enlarge the talkability zone and make incorporate taboo zones of talking within the talkability zone (on taboos see Cassirer, 2015 or Bruner, 1990). Informal networks are thus promoting sign-manifolds that reverse the equation of what is taboo and of what is part of the talkability zone. If we take a look more closely onto those informal networks for example in a group of regulars or within a Carnival session, black humor, insults, aping one’s supervisors, complaining about one’s leaders – among many other things – are part and parcel of these semiotic spaces (Bachtin, 2008, 2010). Importantly, all these issues are not likely to be addressed if the center would be listening to the text generation of the people.

I want to explain myself briefly about the termini taboo zone of talking and talkability zone. Every smaller or bigger culture – mediated by personal agents – have taboo zones of talking, thus themes that must not be talked about or addressed. This accounts for the public as well as personal sphere as the simple contact with the taboo can be already poisoning for the respective person (Cassirer, 2015) or his social environment (family, friends). Importantly, those taboo zones are psychophysically neutral which means that thinking about as well as acting towards the taboo are strictly forbidden. Thus, cultures have specific semiotic blockages – inhibiting the psychological and physical contact with those taboo zones. Sexuality is still a major taboo zone of talking and acting for many cultural settings which results in parents not allowing their children to watch films with sex scenes or to have a boyfriend/girlfriend before they turn 18 or 21, for example. In contrast to the taboo zones, every culture consists of zones of promoted actions or talking (Lewin, 1933a, 1933b), thus themes and actions that are not only not blocked but encouraged to talk about or act out such as sports-related topics, football for instance.

² I am following here Valsiner’s (2017) definition of a sign when he argues that a sign represents something for someone. Thus, we are in accordance with Peirce triadic notion of a sign when object, interpretant and sign are strongly interconnected with each other (see Valsiner, 2014). Within the present manuscript, I mostly speak of symbolic signs relying on Cassirer’s work of symbols (2015). The German philosopher argues that a symbol works at the cleavage of a what-is condition and a what-should-be condition uniting personal fantasems (Boesch, 2021) with a sensorical entity (the sign). Fantasems indicate personological ideas about I-world-equilibriums and the trajectories to reach those.

³ With semiotic spaces, I mean spaces of meaning generation of multiple people implied. Importantly, these semiotic spaces are openly structured which means that people can relate to social meanings with personal sense. Here, we are in line with Boesch (1975) and Mead (2015) arguing that the individual is the higher function of the social. When I speak about semiotic spaces, I want to indicate the opportunity of an individual personality expanding and transforming a given social meaning which alters the social meaning, personologically (Stern, 2020).

Informal Networks as a Pluralistic Universe: Beyond the Talkability Zone

The important characteristic of the informal networks is its pluralistic stance towards a to-be-defined text. An employee might meet his colleague in the kitchen when having a coffee asking whether he noticed that their supervisor in common is generally in a bad mood and delegating time-consuming activities to the staff. Here, in the kitchen they might discuss jointly how they would address the issue in order for a specific need to be closed. They might plan a concrete strategy (or trajectory) how to circumvent the present issue. The crucial feature of these networks is that the kitchen is open; other colleagues might join their informal reunion and decide to contribute something to the discussion if they have encountered a similar conflict with the respective supervisor. That being said, these informal networks operate under the premise of heteroglossia, different cultural-linguistic patterns interanimating each other (Bachtin, 2010). This means that different employees – with different work-related demands and potentially different positions – might start to discuss a specific text, generate meaning and negotiate that meaning with their colleagues. What unites them is their specific focus on a jointly encountered issue that results in the emergence of specific needs towards which a particular strategy needs to be developed. Thus, the informal networks are functioning intertextually. One colleague might say XY has a bad day because he lost a major customer; another might verbalize that XY is under pressure because of some competition with a younger colleague; still another might explain that XY thinks about leaving the company. All these details are feeding into the potential text generation (and alteration) that might result into the translation process of the text into action, thus into different trajectories that might give closure to the pressing need. Informal networks are henceforth highly democratic in their composition as they allow a multitude of perspective to come into being; they are essentially pluralistic as employees are united within a common ground-theme (von Fircks, 2022a) that allows each subject to contribute to the actual Gegenstand.⁴ Again, the major characteristic of these informal networks is heteroglossia (Bachtin, 2010); thus, they operate with different languages interanimating each other. This means that the cultural-linguistic pattern of the informal network might comment, criticize, parody, praise – among many other performative linguistiheic acts – on the cultural-linguistic pattern of the formal network (Bachtin, 2008). The crucial feature is here that the cultural-linguistic patterns are in a vivid

⁴ Gegenstand can be translated by object (Valsiner, 2014). But an object bears not only denotative (its material, for instance) but also connotative meaning (Boesch, 1991). Let's take a chair, for example: A chair is a thing I can sit on. It consists of a specific material that can hold a person's weight by its particular construction. However, a chair is also a thing to relax on, for instance if I come back from work fully exhausted. We interact with objects due to urgent needs. We structure the environment based on our needs and goals (Lewin, 1926) and the environment bears different meaning depending on shifting needs – figure/ground relationship. A blank paper is another example that can bear different meaning depending on urgent needs. It can become a contract in a specific situation; it can be used as a paper plane by children; it can be used to escort a bee to the garden and so forth. The Gegenstand gets transformed by its personal appropriation (Lewin, 1933a, 1933b).

relationship to each other that needs to be specified by for example the organizational psychologist. A critique, a parody or a praise are different multi-voiced text generations – and alterations – and unfold different consequences within the respective life-space of the employees and leaders. A specific sign unfolds consequences in the ecology of multiple actors implied (Lang, 1988, 1992, 1993) – this is especially true if sign-processes are fundamentally contradictory to each other.

So far, we have gathered theoretical semiotic evidence for the informal networks to work under the premise of heteroglossia. They operate in a multi-voiced space – based on overlapping life-spaces between multiple employees – and enrich a specific view on a *Gegenstand* based on multi-perspectivity or multi-relatedness. A text emerges that is inherently intertextual. Yet, what remains important to say is the fact that the texts are not a mere juxtaposition, but they are interanimating each other, thus they catalyze a new text generation based on democratic negotiation (von Fircks, 2021a). The crucial feature of the informal networks is that they change the dynamics of the talkability zone – thus what might be brought into discussion – and the taboo zone of talking. The informal networks that are characterized by their respective distance to the actual formal center of the enterprise become courageous to incorporate specific taboo topics in their spontaneous meetings. Thus, unknown territory is confronted in these informal networks and made accessible. The unknown becomes known by voluntarily facing the respective taboos by the employees trying to make sense of them, jointly (Peterson, 2002).

The Hero, Villain and Fool as Figures Trigger Meaning Making of the Taboo Zone of Talking

Three basic figures emerge in this process. First, we need to point out the hero who is voluntarily leaving known territory and confronting the unknown while dealing with major setbacks, doubts and fears (Boesch, 2021; Peterson, 2002). Then, there is the villain trying to counter the moves of the hero – catalyzing doubts, fears – and who makes the journey of the hero hell (Boesch, 2021; Peterson, 2002). Lastly, there is the fool who parodies the known and unknown as well as the journey from the known to the unknown. The fool is allowed to criticize each and everything regardless of position or status – there is literally no taboo for the fool (Bachtin, 2008, 2010). Importantly, these three figures – present in every story or narrative (Bruner, 1997) – are not merely co-existing next to each other but they are in an ongoing – organic – relationship. This means that they are always interanimating each other, thus, they are symbiotically intertwined, and this symbiosis alters the basic text generation of the story or narrative (at work) (Bachtin, 2010). What is crucial for the present topic is that the informal networks are not shy in elaborating on the role of the villain and the fool while they are also trying to work out a specific hero narrative that overcomes hell-like characteristics within the enterprise. The journey from the known to the unknown only becomes possible because the informal network works out jointly the specific location of the issue (where is our problem?), the specific nature of the problem (what is our problem?), the major counterpart of solving the problem (who is the villain? How does he act?) as well as the basic need

fulfillment strategies (how to address the problem?) regardless of any major taboos. I argue that meaningful organizational phenomena can only be assessed when getting a glimpse into the informal networks that do show jointly shared notions about the known, the unknown, a hero that is bridging the gap between the known and unknown,⁵ a villain who tries to make that journey quasi-impossible and the fool who constantly pushes the boundary of the taboo zone of talking which expands the actual talkability zone.

Presenting an Open Interview Guide to Assess Hidden Organizational Phenomena

In the following, I present a specific interview schedule for organizational psychologists to assess the intertextual meaning generation of informal networks. The interview schedule will draw on the above-mentioned theoretical elaboration. It serves the aim of reversing the talkability zone in order to incorporate major features of the taboo zone of talking within it. It is situated within the knowledge generation of participants acting and inter-acting in an informal network.

The proposed methodology operates within micro-genetic cultural psychological research designs (see for example Valsiner, 2017). It does so by focusing on the joint meaning construction between researcher and participant who are trying to make sense of several issues/situations, equally (Valsiner 2005). Thus, the focus is on the emergence of meaning that is dialogically investigated by the researcher (see also Buber, Rogers, May, and so forth) and the participant. Importantly, we focus on a circular (hermeneutic) meaning making process that covers the following: question, interpretation, answer, interpretation, question, interpretation, answer, question and so forth (Valsiner, 2017). Hence, the proposed interview schedule must not be confused with so-called standardized interviews that do not allow any deviation from a-priorarily defined questions in order to enhance reliability and validity. Again, the focus lies on the joint meaning construction between two persons coming together and trying to make sense of a particular situation.

The design is called micro-genetic because I am interested in the particular *Vorgestalten* (Sander, 1928) or antecedents that give raise to a certain interpretation. The process that leads to an answer, that is never linear but that takes on many detours while encountering fears, doubts, confirmations and so forth, lies at the foreground

⁵ The mechanism of overcoming the unknown and conquering it which makes the unknown known territory might need further clarification: The hero is thrown in a particular situation that becomes unbearable for him (Peterson, 2002). The present – what is condition – becomes stressful when relying on psychological termini. Thus, the hero decides that the status quo needs to be changed because it means suffering not only for himself but for a bigger social group. For that purpose, he gathers his strength in order to leave known territory and face some challenges in order to fight for a specific what-should-be condition. For sure, there are obstacles and enemies on his way that want to see him fail during his journey because they profit or enjoy the status quo. To remain in Gestalt psychological theory, the hero realizes that his present environment cannot address his urgent needs, so that he needs to change the social field in order to make other need fulfillment strategies more likely (see also von Firchs, 2022a). The outer world is changed to make it more compatible with one's inner world (Boesch, 2005).

of the present scientific inquiry. Thus, we are not satisfied by a simple answer but in accordance with phenomenological research methods while trying to bracket the initial answer, we try to investigate the emergence of that particular answer (Valsiner, 2017). The generation of meaning is of central value for the present paper, and this must be essentially mirrored by our present research design. This in its very nature is called validity: the accordance between phenomenon and scientific inquiry (von Fircks, 2022b). Yet, structure is the basis for deviation. This means that the interview does not take place in an empty space but that it draws on several guiding questions that pre-define the direction of the joint meaning construction that is in line with our theoretical elaborations. This is in line with Valsiner's approach towards the generation of questions and interview schedules: every question is to a certain degree a leading question (2017); yet the very guidance of a question does not deny its co-construction on the side of the research participant.

Before presenting the respective questions, I want to make explicit the above-mentioned elaboration: The present research design operates with a semi-standardized interview schedule that is interested in the joint meaning construction of organizational phenomena. It is called micro-genetic as it is interested in the emergence of meaning in a circular (hermeneutic) way. Thus, it works mostly with What and How questions (Adams, 2019). It operates with leading questions that function as a meta-organizer for the general direction of the interview which does not deny its very own co-construction. Structure and the deviation of exactly that structure are mutually dependent.⁶ Further it is loosely in accordance with the popular cultural psychological research design called Trajectory Equifinality Approach that operates with a historically-structured invitation – thus the qualitative sampling of participants that present valuable – firsthand – insights into the generation of meaning (Sato & Tanimura, 2016; Sato et al., 2009).

Participants are chosen based on their meaningful past and their close location to a theorized Equifinality Point, thus a pre-defined (cultural) goal that can be reached by many different trajectories (Valsiner & Sato, 2006) that are chosen personally. As the Equifinality Point is pre-defined, the present research design needs to work with the historically structured invitation (Valsiner & Sato, 2006).

For our present scientific investigation this means the invitation of a person who is part of an informal network at work and who discusses a present conflict or misunderstanding. How the trajectories (need fulfillment strategies) emerge is the major question of the scientific work.

The advantage of TEM is its developmental characteristic that operates between past, present and future reasoning (Zittoun & Valsiner, 2016). In the analysis, we are going to operationalize a specific goal – called the Equifinality Point. This goal can be reached by many different trajectories. However, each

⁶ This needs some further explanation. Structure in an interview is guaranteed by specific questions that are orientated by specific themes, theory-wise. However, this structure needs to be understood in an open way: Participants are allowed to follow the lead as they understand the question, personally. This means they deviate from the structure in very personally peculiar ways. The interviewer will then take up this deviation and adapt his further questions accordingly. This is in contrast to standardized interviews that deny any deviation from pre-given questions (Valsiner, 2017).

trajectory comes with specific social consequences because they operate within different sign-manifolds (Fircks, 2020). For example, doing homework can be done by being disciplined and interested in good results while it can be also done in a superficial manner. However, the second trajectory will be more likely met by the teacher's discontent while the first trajectory might lead to approval and appreciation. For the present scientific inquiry, we are interested how a specific organizational goal-pursue comes into being. This includes our interest in how trajectories are chosen and which consequences they unfold for a specific community. Concretely, we are interested in the elaboration of a particular conflict at work especially between the formal and informal networks. Here, we want to point out the Equifinality Point (question 1 in Table 1).

As above-mentioned the organizational psychologist (or semiotician) deepens the nature of the conflict insofar as to understand its background (figure-ground-relationship). Thus, the psychologist needs to be genuinely aware of establishing the circumstances of the conflict, for example the culture in which the conflict arose. This is in line with Boesch's methods of an ecological psychology (1971, 1977, 1991, 2021). The second questions should trigger the meaning making generation within an informal network. As the psychologist is having a conversation with the employee outside of the natural space and time (chronotype) of his/her work, the research participant should be guided to answer the questions regardless of any formal ties to his supervisor and his authority. Thus, the question intends to enlarge the talkability zone within the interview setting. If problems emerge such as a low degree of *Einfühlung*, the research participant will be invited to use the empty-chair method (switching chairs and role-playing the answer of an imagined generalized other). The third question establishes the hero narrative for the present scientific inquiry. It does so by asking about potential (ideal) actions or trajectories that lead into the satisfaction of a pressing need as well as the personal relation to that hero figure. As storytelling is a deeply cultural activity that involves embodiment of knowledge (Boesch, 2021; Bruner, 1997; Peterson, 2002), this question should make pre-reflexive knowledge reflexive. It invites the participant to conscious embodied knowledge. Something similar happens in regards to the third question. Yet, this question goes down the road to the taboo zone of talking thematizing the potential conduct of a villain at work. Thus, it is interested in the question how a conflict should not be handled and ultimately asks for the specification of trajectories that make the conflict worse. The participant gets the opportunity to elaborate on potential taboos with that question. The villain operates as a promoter sign-manifold to incorporate a major area of the taboo zone of talking within the talkability zone. Again, the story telling facilitates consciencing of embodied knowledge, a specific kind of knowledge that is actually taboo at work. The last question works under a similar premise because it tries to incorporate major areas of the taboo zone of talking within the talkability zone. It is interested in the humorization of the conflict that includes jokes, parodies, aping one's conduct at work, black humor and so forth. Thus, it tries to work with different cultural-linguistic patterns interanimating each other (Bachtin, 2010) while working as a promoter sign-manifold that catalyzes the jump from the taboo zone of talking to the talkability zone. For a summary of the questions, I refer to Table 1.

Table 1 Interview Schedule and its Function

Number of Question	Question	Function
1	What is one of the major conflicts at work? (For example, between you and the leader)	Working out jointly the EFP
2	What do you say to a colleague about the conflict if you are certain that none of your bosses listens to your conversation? What does the colleague reply?	Triggering meaning making within an informal network
3	What does a hero do at work in order to address the conflict? What are his/her actions to solve the conflict? What do you say to the hero?	Working out ideal trajectories to address the conflict. The Vorgestalten of the conflict's resolution
4	What does a villain do at work in order to worsen the conflict? What are his/her actions to add further obstacles to the conflict? What do you say to the villain?	Promoter sign-manifold in order to make embodied knowledge of the taboo zone of talking reflexive such as trajectories that worsen the conflict
5	What does a fool do at work in order to parody the conflict? What are his/her actions? What do you say to the fool? What does a fool parody at work? How does he do that? About what does he make jokes? Who is he aping?	Promoter sign-manifold in order to make embodied knowledge of the taboo zone of talking reflexive

It is worth repeating that the interview guide operates in the Valsinerian method of joint meaning construction including the cycle of question – interpretation – answer – interpretation – question, while the whole cycle begins anew. Concretely, this means that a question leads to an interpretation while this interpretation leads to a particular answer. Now, the interviewer needs to unravel the interpretation of the question that is implicit in the answer while again this is an interpretative endeavor leading to a follow-up question. This specific interview focus is implicit when looking at Table 1.

Analysis: TEM of a Young Seller in a Bakery

For the present study, a 25-year-old psychology student was recruited who worked part-time for multiple enterprises. For example, she worked for a restaurant and a hospital. Currently, she is employed as a seller-assistant for a bakery chain in Germany. She agreed openly to participate in the interview as she was also interested about the emergence of conflicts. Asking her about a conflict within her work setting, she answered the following:

I believe open communication is one point that is very important. I have one situation in my mind where one colleague was transferred to another store, and she should change the store, or it was planned that she should go to another location. But this was not communicated to her. Yet another colleague who has strong ties with our boss, she knew that it was planned and then she spread the message. We talked as a team about that and within the team the message was spread. However, the person concerned did not know about the respective transfer. And it was planned by the boss. (...) Yet, this person was the last one to get that information. And that colleague was really upset because she was disappointed by her boss not communicating with her as well as my friends in the team, they should have talked to me. And she was upset about both the supervisor and her colleagues. That's why communication is central. Moreover, she did not want to go to another store. (Catherine, 2023, ll. 5-14).

If we analyze the quote within the Trajectory-Equifinality-Modell we get the following diagram (see Fig. 1). At the end of the diagram, all actions result in the transfer. Thus, the transfer is a fixed entity. Yet, how the transfer emerges diverges drastically in regards to specific trajectories. On the basis of the except, two major pathways emerge how the transfer comes into being. On the one hand, we see how the leader handled the transfer in a non-transparent way by ignoring the colleague, not talking to her about the nature and the details of the transfer as well as talking about the transfer with another colleague that was not directly concerned by it. This results in a decision that is non-transparent. Thus, it is an action that bracketed the inclusion of the employee who was concerned by that action which results in her disappointment. The transfer was handled in a top-down approach not taking into account the needs and goals of the employee who was concerned by that decision. However, our participant also provides us with an idea how the conflict could have been handled, otherwise. Talking to the employee directly as

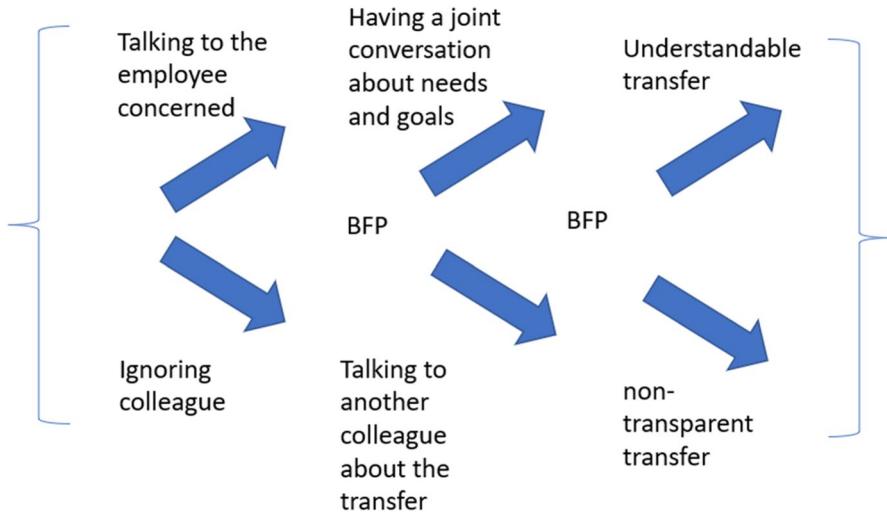


Fig. 1 The emergence of a work-related conflict (EFP=is the communication about the transfer which can be reached by divergent paths)

well as getting to know her goals and needs within the work-related culture, is for the participant the royal road to deal with an action (decision), appropriately even if it is in actual dis-accordance with what she actually wants. Here, transfer is again the ultimate result, but it comes with another sign-manifold, a sign-manifold of open communication and interest in the need hierarchy of the employee.

Asking the second question to the participant – what she would tell the employee when no official person listens to the conversation, she answered the following:

I would say that this is shit and that this is not okay. This is not how you deal with your employees because you are the one working in another store and you need to feel comfortable and make your money. (...) I am the opinion that you do not deal with employees like that no matter whether this is a friend or an employee. It is important to talk openly especially when it concerns you. And I told that to my colleague. (Catherine, 2023, ll. 21-25)

Triggering meaning making within an informal network was the predominant hypothesized function for the second question. We see that this function appeared, evidently. This is especially mirrored by the first sentence of the participant, *this is shit*, showing that she uses colloquial, direct language in order to evaluate the nature of the conflict. Moreover, appeals become obvious in the given excerpt (*this is not how you deal with your employees*) and show that the participant speaks freely to me as an interviewer. Open, honest and authentic evaluation comes into being by triggering meaning making within an informal network. It shows the open dissatisfaction of the participant with the actions by the leader; she criticizes the leader without making no bones about it. Feeling comfortable and recognized for what the employee is actually accomplishing is the royal road for verbalizing such critique.

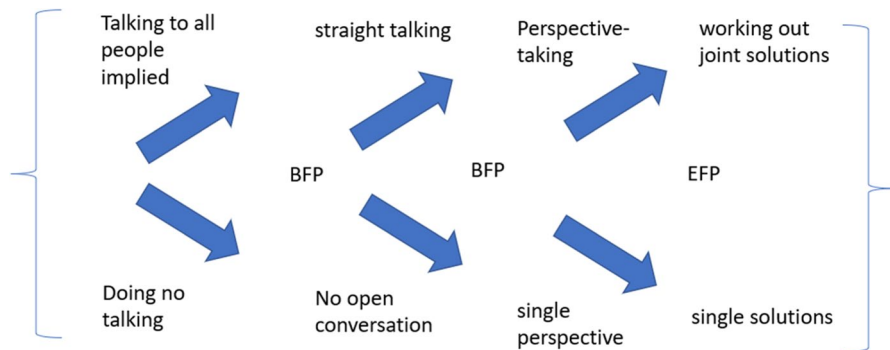


Fig. 2 Hero and Villain TEM

Asking the participant about the hero narrative of the conflict, she explained the following:

He would talk to the boss, sit her down with all the colleagues implied, especially with the employee concerned as well as her friend to whom she was talking. It would be important to talk with all people who were involved in the conflict. And then, the hero would do some straight talking (*Tacheles*). What did go wrong? What was not that cool? In order for the boss to understand and that the employee could say I felt bad in that situation. Maybe she thinks it is not a problem to change the store. The boss should know this was a strange situation for me. (...) She [needs to] gets aware that this situation was shit for me. And that maybe next time you phone her and ask if the colleague works and that you then talk to her, openly (*quatschen*). (Catherine, 2023, ll. 39-47),

Analyzing the hero narrative question in regards to Fig. 2, we perceive the participant providing solutions for the conflict at stake. Importantly, the participant remains within an informal network which triggers a particular meaning making process. The reason why is because the participant re-applied colloquial language at multiple times such as straight talking (*Tacheles*), cool, a shit situation or talk openly (*quatschen*). Interestingly, the hero narrative question triggers a concrete strategy how to address the roots of the conflict. Yet, this strategy is accompanied by a complex *Einfühlungsprozess* as the participant tried to see the conflict and a potential solution from the side of the employee who was concerned by the conflict. This becomes especially obvious when Catherine felt into the situation of her colleague using the personal pronoun *me* (*a strange situation for me, it was shit for me*). The borders of I and colleague disappear in that process because the conflict and its potential resolution are not only central for one employee but denote an issue that is significant for the whole team. Thus, the situation becomes a complex sign (*Sinnbild* in German), a symbolic picture for the whole miscommunication within the team. It is representative for many different conflicts that deal with the issue of miscommunication: In this regard, it is no surprise that the participant connected a foreign conflict with a conflict occurring to her (ll.

30–34) and instances another example how communication went wrong within the team. The hero operates as a promoter sign how to address the conflict and to not only suggest a universal recipe for its resolution, but it comes with a concrete plan how to do justice to the needs and goals of multiple actors implied within the conflict. Thus, it operates between a what-is and what-should-be condition that can be bridged by the courageous involvement of the hero. The hero narrative becomes thus a pragmatic tool proposing solution-oriented conflict resolution that is accompanied by a complex Einfühlungsprozess between situations occurring to the participant as well as to her colleagues.

The villain question shows the bottom of Fig. 2. The participant answered the question in the following manner:

Then you would decide everything top bottom without talking to anyone and without getting to know another opinion despite them not working at the front and having another perspective. She just sees the numbers but does not know how it is like to stand there and to sell baked goods and which products are asked for. And this boss would only decide based on her knowledge. And this is not always good. She has her particular lens. (Catherine, 2023, ll. 50-54)

It becomes obvious that the participant criticized the leader openly by means of the villain question. Interestingly, the villain question separates leader/follower and shows how both are interpreting specific events within their particular personological lens. The boss was guided by economic interests for the participant, an interest that cannot provide a whole picture about what happens in the daily business. Numbers become specific signs for the participant, and it is with the signs (customer relationship, team climate and so forth) that the participant dealt, primarily. Importantly, the participant advocated for her opinion to be valid as the sellers are experiencing the daily business, ongoingly. Thus, they do perceive conflicts, misunderstandings and all sorts of issues in contrast to a leader who is only scarcely penetrating their action domain and understanding their needs and goals. Thus, the villain narrative operationalized a critique that would be difficult to communicate to one's boss because of social desirability or of being afraid to lose one's job over the course of that critique. Asking the participant about what she would say to the villain, she argued for the following:

Listen to me, it would be good to look right and left and to take off your glasses because we all do have blind spots. And we are not alone in this world. And we only get to the best results if we have the same target and work for that in common. (Catherine, 2023, ll. 58-60)

Again, this is directive speech, close to particular appeals by the follower. Addressing the villain is confronting the leader's actions that caused harm for the whole team. Yet, this critique was not verbalized in a personal offending way by the participant. Importantly, the participant remained constructive in answering

the villain question and advocated a more pluralistic leadership conduct applied to the organization. Interestingly, she verbalized a common goal and the means how to pursue that goal (by working together). Thus, the villain question helped to operationalize concrete strategies how to address the conflict without being afraid of overstepping any psychological borders. Thus, it expanded the talkability zone. It helped to go down the taboo zone of talking and to constructively criticize the leader. That constructive critique emerged from triggering meaning making within the taboo zone of talking is helpful for the enterprise as a whole, a critique that is straight-forward without being insulting or personal offending.

Asking the participant, the last question whether humor could play a major role in such a conflict, she explained the following:

Of course. Humor is a particular way to deal with difficult situations, especially when dealing with clients. But in regards to our supervisor, I would joke about her openly with my colleagues. For example, if boss XY says that we need to do that. Because sometimes we have formal things to execute without us seeing the personal sense for that purpose. But if they say that from the top without them knowing the front, then of course we do that (funny, ironic voice). So, we joke about the blind spots. And we joke about the meaninglessness of our work even if we have to do that and even if we wanted to act differently. So, you are in a conflict with yourself, but you do it, nonetheless. However, you can do that. No fucks given. It does not make any sense, but we do that. (Catherine, 2023, ll. 64-71)

Again, the excerpt shows that the participant remains in the informal network of meaning making construction by using colloquial language (e.g. *no fucks given*). Thus, she freely elaborated on issues at the workplace without being afraid of punishment. Here, she imitated with her colleague some of the boss' (linguistic) actions while ironizing them. Importantly, they did this when the leader was out of sight. The participant and her colleagues used again critical incidents within the leader–follower relationship, incidents that showed them their actual meaninglessness in their work. Again, this addressed the issue of communicating something from the top to the bottom without actually knowing the bottom. Humor is for the participant a personological weapon to deal with the meaninglessness of such leader conduct, to distance oneself from a single voice wanting to impose something upon them and to show illustratively joint criticism that would be hard to expressed, otherwise.

However, humor is more than a personological weapon to deal with meaninglessness or non-sensical situations at work. It helped the participant to distance herself from a critical incident, but this distance also created an intra-personal conflict. The reason why is because using humor to criticize something and to distance oneself from an incident makes it also necessary to re-think one's coping strategies. The issue can be solved by means of relying solely on humor (thus humor as an intrapersonal coping strategy) or by using humor as a semiotic promoter sign to actually

ignore instructions and to resist the leader in a particular situation. The distance that accompanies humor helps in such an instance the follower to realize that humor is not enough as it does not change the situation for oneself or for one's team. Thus, humor⁷ brings the necessary distance to enable resistance to emerge, afterwards. It can become a catalyst for change.

However, coming back to our initial humor narrative, the question served as a promoter sign to trigger knowledge of the taboo zone of talking. And this emerged throughout the interview as the participant freely elaborated on a perceived meaningfulness in her work, a very personal critique that is difficult to operationalize within organizations, generally (Johner et al., 2018). Asking the participant after the interview took place how she felt during the questions, she answered that it helped her to perceive her work (conflicts, issues, misunderstandings) in a new light and that she never thought about these issues as deeply as she did during the interview. For a concise summary of the analysis, I refer to Table 2.

Discussion: The Hero as Meta-Organizer in Organizations

The present analysis has shown us something highly significant. The hero bridges the known with the unknown and expands the latter while facing the villain and several issues, obstacles and so forth during that process (Peterson, 2002). As he struggles with the current status quo, he dives deeply into the taboo zone of talking and acting and looks for ways how to conquer the unknown and to make it a home (comfortable place) (see also Boesch, 1998). Thus, the hero has the potential of reversing maladaptive trajectories within the organization. Yet, he does that by being an active partner of the employees and to shift the perspective to things that have been taken for granted. Most importantly, the hero confronts the villain; he does so by meeting him as authentically as possible. Getting straight about one's strengths and weaknesses is central in that process in order to know how to face the malevolent. The hero shifts thus the attention to a pathway that conquers evil authentically; straight talking, perspective taking and joint solutions (a hero never works on his own) are the royal road for him to go into the unknown and to conquer it within organizations.

I hypothesize that every organization needs such a hero, and it can become an official position in an enterprise. If there is an issue at stake, people should approach the hero, openly. In contrast to the hero, the employees might fear negative consequences when talking about specific issues that might be taboo within the organization. That's why an independent figure should exist that can be approached by all people implied. This person gets multiple reports by all people implied within the conflict and should do some straight talking with the leader, colleagues and other figures and enable concrete solutions that can be worked out jointly. Importantly, the solutions should not be based on one perspective but should be a combination

⁷ Humor is a sort of critique (Bachtin, 2010). It makes fun of a given object (for example leadership at work) which might underline encrusted routines at the work place that are at the heart of a joke or a parody. Thus, humor is a meta-perspective onto a specific Gegenstand, a personal comment of conduct.

Table 2 Interview Schedule and its Function

Number of Question	Question	Function	Analysis
1	What is one of the major conflicts at work? (For example, between you and the leader)	Working out jointly the EFP	How to communicate a transfer, adaptively?
2	What do you say to a colleague about the conflict if you are certain that none of your bosses listens to your conversation? What does the colleague reply?	Triggering meaning making within an informal network	If situations have been handled in a bad way, calling out this situation openly (this is shit) and feeling into the person
3	What does a hero do at work in order to address the conflict? What are his/her actions to solve the conflict? What do you say to the hero?	Working out ideal trajectories to address the conflict. The <i>Vorgestalten</i> of the conflict's resolution	Straight talking (<i>Tacheles</i>), perspective taking and working out joint problems – in order to go into the unknown
4	What does a villain do at work in order to worsen the conflict? What are his/her actions to add further obstacles to the conflict? What do you say to the villain?	Promoter sign-manifold in order to make embodied knowledge of the taboo zone of talking reflexive such as trajectories that worsen the conflict	Top–bottom decision making, unilateral solutions, blind spots
5	What does a fool do at work in order to parody the conflict? What are his/her actions? What do you say to the fool? What does a fool parody at work? How does he do that? About what does he make jokes? Who is he aping?	Promoter sign-manifold in order to make embodied knowledge of the taboo zone of talking reflexive	Humor as a means to ironize instructions but also to create intrapersonal conflicts to deal with

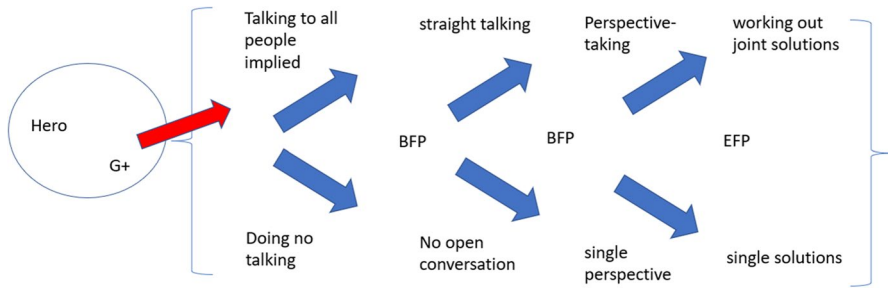


Fig. 3 Hero as Meta-Organizer for TEM ($g+$ = quasi-need (goal) by which environment is transformed, personally)

of multiple needs and goals of several actors that contributed to the emergence of the conflict. The hero is interested in a multilateral tackling of the conflict because a conflict does not only imply one person. All good resolutions facilitate a reconciliation of interest where the interests are not only complementary but united into a new adaptive whole that can circumvent the total field of the conflict.

The hero as an independent figure does not fear any negative consequences and thus can be courageous to illuminate the conflict by talking straight, enable perspective taking and can confront malevolent voices within the organization. When assembled, he can negotiate with all people implied a joint solution for the conflict. Thus, the hero functions as a meta-organizer of authentic and honest pathways to choose, illuminating hidden aspects of the enterprise that have been previously stuck in the taboo zone of talking (see Fig. 3 for understanding the hero as meta-organizer).

I believe that an organizational psychologist can fulfil this special role as he operates between management and staff. As he is interested in the mental health and well-being of all people in the enterprise, he is not prone to preferring particular people in the organization. I am convinced that this psychologist should at least have some formation within conflict resolution and peace psychology such as Morton Deutsch (see Coleman & Deutsch, 2015) combined with some deep insights of the ecological emergence of conflicts at work (see Marrow, 1957).

In short, the hero is the incorporation of heteroglossia; he assembles multiple cultural-linguistic patterns and tries to negotiate by means of back-and-forth translation a common adaptive trajectory that satisfies the motifs hiding behind the specific languages. Importantly, the differences between those languages and the cultural patterns implied are not perceived in a negative way but as enriching for the common resolution of a conflict (von Fircks, 2022c). The hero within an organization is thus not only the enabler for heteroglossia to take place sustainably but he is the driving force for intertextuality – texts that are referring and relating to each other and that by this process create a new text because of the interanimating characteristic of multiple languages coming together.

The present study shows as one of the first studies how to overcome the taboo zone of talking and how to expand the talkability zone within organizational psychology. It does so by advocating for a hero figure in organizations

that enables heteroglossia to take place that functions as a means for intertextuality to come into being. He does so by being a meta-organizer for genuine dialogue: Talking to all people implied, straight talking and perspective taking as well as a pragmatic perspective how to deal jointly with a current pressing need are part and parcel of that process. In this process, the hero is also not shy about taking into account the villain aspects of the conflict and tries to shed light onto the strategies how to deal with that. As we know from great stories (Frozen by Buck & Lee, 2017), the hero never acts on his own but is supported by friends who enlarge his action potential by specific skills that the hero does not possess. The hero is aware about his limited perspective onto an object; that's why he does not superimpose his way of perceiving the conflict but is interested in assembling a multitude of perspectives that mirror the totality of the psychological field in regards to the conflict. The hero is no lone wolf – not in stories nor in organizations.

The second major aspect of the study is related to the fool question. Humor helped the participant to distance herself from meaninglessness instructions at work and to criticize them in a specific manner. Humor helped to verbalize taboo zones of talking and to openly cope with them. By humorizing those events, the issue at stake lost its seriousness. It becomes tangible and can be dealt with. Thus, humor helped the participant to do the necessary work even if not wanting to do it because of another perspective; for the participant it was an instrument to cope with nonsensical situations at work that lost their threatening character by jointly ironizing it. If the issue travels to the talkability zone by the means of humor, it becomes approachable and once approached the participant (and her colleagues) realized that the issue can be coped with. Humor becomes thus a personological weapon, but it can also turn out to be a social weapon as the necessary distance in the humorizing process helps employees to not only approach the issue but to resist the related aspects. Once the conflict becomes more approachable, it can also be more openly resisted and counter acted. It is in this way that humor can create an intrapersonal conflict where humor might be perceived as not sufficient to deal with one's situations but that the nature of the problem needs to be changed and not the stance towards it. The fool question helps to verbalize taboo zones of talking and to produce valuable knowledge where conflicts are hidden within the organization and is beyond that a stimulant for change within the organization. I argue that organizations need to make more use of such questions in order to shed light onto taboo zones of talking that are difficult to express by other methods.

Limitations: Some Thoughts on More Dialogue for Future Studies

So far, we have only highlighted the positive aspects of the present study. Yet, we must not close our eyes for its limitations. The study claims to be a dialogical one. However, the dialogical focus remains underrepresented. The reason why is that I only invited one participant for the study. This participant reflected about a conflict being central for the whole team. But the colleague who was most concerned

by the conflict did not get any opportunity to express herself about how she saw the conflict and its potential opportunities for resolution. This colleague might have presented valuable insights into the conflict and importantly how she felt. Moreover, it would have been interesting to hear her opinion about an independent hero figure within her work-related action field and whether she thinks that this could lead into sustainable change for dealing with such conflicts. Thus, dialogical ambition and reality diverge in this regard. Here, future studies might be more beneficial when initiating focus groups that by their dialogical nature produce more dialectical knowledge. Participants can be also invited to reflect about an independent hero figure and his/her related role in the organization in such focus groups. Concrete, pragmatic strategies how to deal with conflicts sustainably would be then the central issue of such focus groups, thus the realization of the hero figure within an organizational setting, practically.

Moreover, when presenting a new method, we are also inclined to present a comparative analysis. A new method needs to show incremental value in contrast to other methods. Thus, future studies should investigate whether my proposed hero-villain-fool narrative method might produce comparatively more knowledge than more sterile, non-story-like, questions. By that I mean that the method should show originally that it catalyzes more meaning making from the taboo zone of talking than other methods targeting meaning making within organizations. This might be also a necessary proof for organizations to incorporate these questions into their daily operation and heightens its academic and practical credibility.

Furthermore, we have not gathered information about the leader and her perception onto the conflict. Again, this is a dialogical limitation. Unfortunately, the study dichotomized between leader and followers and painted a rather negative picture about the leader. It would have been not only interesting but important to get information about the leader's reasoning in regards to the transfer and her employees feeling badly communicated with. In addition, it would be central to get the leader's input about her ideas regarding a hero figure in the organization, thus to be interested in her perspective not only onto the conflict but also about its circumvention. What does the leader think about a hero? How can approach the leader the hero? How can the hero do justice to the leader's position without decreasing the input from the side of the employees? How can the hero reconcile leader's and follower's interest? Does the hero act as another meta-organizer for the followers than for the leader? These are all important questions that deserve further research. In further studies, I do see the need of expanding the research design by focus groups not only constituted of various employees to do justice to the dialogical imperative for the study but to invite equally various types of leaders to these focus groups. A more democratic research design that is not as dichotomizing as the present study would do justice to heteroglossia and intertextuality and would also produce more heteroglossic and intertextual results. A more wholistic research approach is thus needed for future studies.

Conclusion: Analyzing Heteroglossia and Intertextuality in Organizations

The present study has shed light onto the process of heteroglossia and intertextuality within organizations. In particular, informal networks work under the premise of meaning making that incorporates major areas of the taboo zone of talking and expands significantly the talkability zone. Thus, informal networks – in contrast to formal ones – work predominantly in a heteroglossic way. Yet, what was rather missing within the literature is a flexible method that can trigger this specific meaning making in organizations. I proposed a cultural psychological research design – the hero-villain-fool narrative method – catalyzing meaning making within the informal networks. The method was instanced by a single-case study triggering meaning making from the taboo zone of talking as the participant relied on colloquial (sometimes vulgar) language. Within the analysis of the single-case study, it became obvious that a hero in organizations functions as a meta-organizer for stimulating dialogue from all sides. Thus, the hero is the incorporation of heteroglossia and makes intertextuality possible. Based on these results, I propose to create official hero workspaces (and places) that can be consulted if a major conflict emerges. This conflict can be then tackled sustainably if all actors implied have the opportunity to talk to each other as honestly as possible while trying to understand the other side – which is the basis for the construction of a joint resolution. However, the present study also comes with some limitations such as a neglect of dialogue as only one person was interviewed for the present study. Moreover, the leader's perspective was completely bracketed in the present study dichotomizing artificially between leader and follower. Lastly, the method needs to be compared to other, more formal, organizational methods that want to create knowledge of hidden organizational phenomena in order to show whether there is an incremental value of the proposed study. All these limitations are significant and demand that researchers dive more deeply into the hero-villain-fool narrative method while expanding my proposed methodology. In the end, this is the goal of research: not to find the philosopher's stone but to construct it in cooperation (von Fircks, 2022d).

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Transcript I: What is one of your major conflicts at work, for example between you and the leader or between you and a colleague?

P: What I think does not go without any conflicts?

I: Do you have a specific situation?

P: I believe open communication is one point that is very important. I have one situation in my mind where one colleague was transferred to another store, and she should change the store, or it was planned that she should go to another location. But this was not communicated to her. Yet another colleague that has strong ties with our boss, she knew that it was planned and then she spread the message. We talked as a team about that and within the team the message was spread. However, the person concerned did not know about the respective transfer. And it was planned by the boss. (...) Yet, this person was the last one to get that information. And that colleague was really upset because she was disappointed by her boss not communicating with her as well as my friends in the team, they should have talked to me. And she was upset about both the supervisor and her colleagues. That's why communication is central. Moreover, she did not want to go to another store.

I: What would you say to the colleague if no one of your leaders were listening to you? What would you say to her?

P: What do you mean if she does not listen to me?

I: If you were in a one-to-one meeting with her?

P: With my supervisor?

I: No, with your colleague and you know that no one listens to you.

P: I would say that this is shit and that this is not okay. This is not how you deal with your employees because you are the one working in another store and you need to feel comfortable and make your money. (...) I am the opinion that you deal not with employees like that no matter whether this is a friend or an employee. It is important to talk openly especially when it concerns you. And I told that to my colleague.

I: How did she react?

P: She said, this is how I felt. She felt betrayed and this is not okay how people deal with me.

I: Did she try to talk to the leader?

P: I do not know. I think she was not brave enough. I guess she did not.

P: And there is another situation concerning me: In my work schedule, it was planned for me to work in another store but this was not communicated to me. This was not that bad because it was only four hours. But I was confused because it was in our application because we have an online system, but

no one told me about that or tried to communicate with me. It was just decided. And no one talked to you. I did not like that.

I: If we take a look back, what would you say about a hero narrative? What would a hero do in order to solve the conflict?

P: You mean when the conflict has emerged?

I: The conflict has already emerged? But what would a hero do to address the conflict?

P: He would talk to the boss, sit her down with all the colleagues implied, especially with the employee concerned as well as her friend to whom she was talking. It would be important to talk with all people that were involved in the conflict. And then, the hero would do some straight talking (Tacheles). What did go wrong? What was not that cool? In order for the boss to understand and that the employee could say I felt bad in that situation. Maybe she thinks it is not a problem to change the store. The boss should know this was a strange situation for me.

I: That you let the boss experience your situation?

P: Yeah, that she gets aware that this situation was shit for me. And that maybe next time you phone her and ask if the colleague works and that you then talk to her, openly (quatschen).

I: (...) What is the villain narrative in order to let the conflict escalate? How would a person behave in a contradictory manner?

P: Then you would decide everything top bottom without talking to anyone and without getting to know another opinion despite them not working at the front and having another perspective. She just sees the numbers but does not know how it is like to stand there and to sell baked goods and which products are asked for. And this boss would only decide based on her knowledge. And this is not always good. She has her particular lens.

I: Without referring to other opinions?

P: She would not be interested in other opinions. And she would decide all alone.

I: What would you say to the villain?

P: Listen to me, it would be good to look right and left and to take off your glasses because we all do have blind spots. And we are not alone in this world. And we only get to the best results if we have the same target and work for that in common.

I: Now, we get to another, more complex question. How could one joke about the situation? Is there something funny in your experience? Could you joke about some participants of the situation for example the boss?

P: Of course. Humor is a particular way to deal with difficult situations, especially when dealing with clients. But in regards to our supervisor, I would joke about her openly with my colleagues. For example, if boss XY says that we need to do that. Because sometimes we have formal things to execute without us seeing the personal sense for that purpose. But if they say that from the top without them knowing the front, then of course we do that (funny, ironic voice). So, we joke about the blind spots. And we joke about the meaninglessness of our work even if we have to do that and even if we wanted to act differently. So, you are in a conflict with yourself, but you do it, nonetheless. However, you can do that. No fucks given. It does not make any sense, but we do that.

I: So, you do use irony? (...).

P: Correct. This is really important. We do that all the time.

I: How do you do that when dealing with clients?

P: We are aping our clients and aping our mistakes from their perspective. example: Pay attention how you wrap up the cake (ironic voice) and we are aping such conduct because one time one client showed us how we needed to wrap up the cake. So, she took the cake and showed us how to do that. That was funny. And we thought who is behind the shelter? You or me? Do you want to come over and show me (ironic voice)? And then we are joking about that. This is so funny.

I: That's all. Thanks a lot.

P: Thank you.

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