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## 17 Counseling

**Abstract:** This chapter describes counseling as a form of management communication whose function is to reflect on problems and to design possible solutions for them. The chapter unfolds a theory of counseling communication and analyzes the case of a single conversation and the case of a larger project drawn from the context of communication consulting. The focus is not on the aspects of institutionalization, but on the linguistic performances of emergent and interactive counseling processes. First, a distinction is made from other forms of management communication such as leading (Section 1). Then the chapter presents defining features of counseling communication as well as typical schemes and patterns of language use in this framework (2, 3). The focus on counseling communication raises new possibilities for research as well as for counseling practices in various professional fields (4).

**Keywords:** counseling communication; consulting; management communication; systemic approach; patterns of language use

Counseling communication is a form of management communication whose function is to reflect on problems and to create possible solutions. It thus supports other forms of management communication, such as leading or planning and controlling, respectively. Specific characteristics of communicative procedures are the prerequisites for the emergence of discursive consulting systems, which can provide services for processes of value creation. They serve to chain, link, and entangle various individual activities of counseling communication. Research on counseling communication can simultaneously expand knowledge about counseling and support the counseling praxis.

### 1 Leading and counseling

Management communication emerges in different forms of practice, each of which solves different problems in organizational value creation. Leading, for example, can be understood as a form of proactivity whose function it is to determine situational contexts, thus initiating and framing discourses (Fairhurst 2008, 2011; Fairhurst and Sarr 1996; see also Barge, as well as Jacobs and Perrin in this handbook). Meanwhile, counseling emerges in a reactive manner from situations that participants perceive as problematic and in which leading would be too risky or resources are still lacking. Thus, counseling is a variant of management communication that contributes to

organizational value creation by reflecting problems *ex-post* and creating possible solutions *ex-ante*. Herein, we find also a crucial difference to executive management, which deals with the simultaneity of value creation procedures (“From our many conversations [...] with executives we know: Either you can say the essentials in a few sentences or you are out of the race” (see Grand and Bartl 2011: 15)).

As leading and “managing executively” can be institutionalized, for example by training personal competencies, establishing professional roles and routinizing practices (it is then commonly called *leadership* (see Rumsey 2012), or *executive management* (see Grand and Bartl 2011)), so can counseling. In such cases, the term *consulting* usually is applied (Kipping and Clark 2012; Deelmann 2019). However, this terminology carries the danger of confusing the practical form of communication with its sturdy institutionalization. Thus, research on “consulting” repeatedly raises the question as to whether “management consultants are really helping their clients” (Czarniawska and Mazza 2012: 427). Furthermore, a common topic in the research literature is the “ambivalent roles of consultants in driving management innovation as well as management fashions” (Cerrutti, Tavoletti, and Grieco 2018: 902).

If we want to investigate emergent forms and success criteria of a communicatively constituted management practice, we do not first have to ask about its institutionalization, but about its empirical communicative performance. Hence, the term *counseling* is used here to describe the communicative processes of reflecting on problems and creating possible solutions by using language in organizational contexts. By doing so, it is not solely to McLeod (1998, 2007) that we owe this term. It is also inspired by the theory of the communicative constitution of organizations (Brummans et al. 2014), to the extent that we try to work out the organization-building and value-adding performance of communicative procedures.

Furthermore, we follow two important German-speaking variants of this approach (Kieser and Seidl 2013). On the one hand, a systemic approach (in the sense of Niklas Luhmann, see Kieser and Seidl 2013: 292–293) and, on the other hand, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s perspective on language games (see Kieser and Seidl 2013: 293). As far as we follow the systemic approach, we focus on the emergence of consulting systems (or “contact systems”) through the mutual “interactive openness” of client systems and consulting systems (Kieser and Seidl 2013: 295–296). Following Wittgenstein’s approach, we search for patterns of language use that can become “attractors” for such complex and dynamic discourse systems of counseling (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 163, matching the argumentation with regard to Wittgenstein, see Kieser and Seidl 2013: 293).

In this specific sense, we understand counseling as “not something done to one person by someone else; counseling is an interaction between two people” (McLeod 2007: 12). If so, the term refers to the “consulting process in action”, whereby the reciprocal action of those involved consists in seeking and giving help (Lippitt and Lippitt 2015: 3). We choose the term *counseling communication* to denote this linguistic object of study. Of course, counseling communication produces and reproduces patterns of

language use and thus attractors of organizational discourses (Cooren 2015: 3–8), which can also break the interactive dyad socially, temporally, and thematically. In such cases, counseling Discourses (*big D*) emerge from counseling discourses (*small d*) (Cooren 2015: 4–8). This can occur during press conferences, for instance, when someone uses the pattern “we face some huge challenges” or “something is meanwhile clear” – by speaking or by writing – and thus refers to preceding processes of internal consultations and their results. This can occur if collectively shared cognitive concepts are used in business reports and analyst conferences, for instance, such as *change management*, *megatrends*, *dynamic markets*, or *changing customer needs* and thus refer to analyses, for instance, that have been consulted in the process of decision making. It can also occur if members of organizations use single discourse markers as “we” in order to express that they have developed, through long series of controversies and processes of strategy development, a common sense of identity (see Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 161–195; and overall see Bamberger and Wrona 2012). Therefore, counseling communication consists of diverse practices that scale up and down between micro-, meso-, and macro-levels (Deppermann, Feilke, and Linke 2016: 12–13; for text production, see Perrin 2016: 431–434) and are entangled with other practices of management communication.

According to this understanding, the term counseling communication refers not primarily to the structures of the professional institutionalization of consulting, but to a form or genre of management communication in the sense of this handbook (see chapter “Introducing” by Cooren and Stücheli-Herlach as well as Fuchs 1994). In their interaction, counselors and their clients (who are seeking advice) thus develop linguistic attractors for a common discursive system, the *counseling system*. Essentially, the development of this system is promoted by the fact that the participants mutually grant each other the right to communicate (“permissions to speak”) and by the fact that they not only respect each other’s differences but also recognize these differences as trustworthy (McLeod 2007: 12–13). Counseling communication can be realized in explicit or embedded variants (McLeod 2007: 17–19), in rapid or extended executions (McLeod 2007: 19–20), within the organization or together with external participants (McLeod 2007: 17–20; Wohlgemuth 2010: 81–132; Heusinkveld and Benders 2012). And in these manifold manifestations, counseling communication has a significant influence on the “site and surface” of modern organizations and their communication (Taylor and Van Every 2000).

## 2 Defining features of counseling

If proactive leading in management communication is too risky or not possible, by reflecting on problems and jointly creating possible solutions, reactive counseling is the best way to help each other. Besides the execution of consulting being a com-

municative process, it is also assumed that the causes of the problem at hand and the possible solutions are communicatively constituted. At any rate, the aspirational capacity (Christensen, Morsing, and Thyssen 2013: 373), the organizing property (Cooren 2000), and thus the performative effect of counseling arise from the processing of this dilemma. Hence, we must assume a double functionality of counseling communication (similar to the case of leading with the defining interpretation of contexts as well as their framing by the same procedures): it has to display organizational problems and reflect them coincidentally. Furthermore, counseling communication must create new solutions and design them likewise in a communicatively viable manner.

Following such a systemic-linguistic understanding of the “helpfulness” of counseling communication, the emergence of this form of management communication can be explained in specific terms using a concrete example. Let us imagine that someone falls into a hole again and again when she is walking to her organization or her workplace (according to Radatz 2000: 29). Doing counseling in such a situation means neither describing this problem as naturally given – and therefore inevitable – nor helping the person again and again directly out of the hole without any longer communication-based assistance. Rather, counseling means entering into an interaction with the affected person with the aim of helping her by using communicative procedures of reflection and problem-solving to avoid the problem in the future.

Consulting communication can now be characterized as follows (Schützeichel 2004: 279–284, see also Radatz 2000: 29): it evolves problem-related reflections and possible solutions in time-limited sequences in order to avoid further systemic problems and let the client solve her problems communicatively in her own way. Thus, it differs from (didactic) instruction over longer curricula and it does not define and select the alternatives for action in advance. Moreover, it differs from care services insofar as it does not take away from the person who falls into a hole the decision about different alternatives but helps her reflect on them. In other words, neither does it present the person who constantly falls into a hole with the ready-made solution of filling up the hole with gravel nor does it instruct the person to bypass it in the future. However, counseling communication develops individual and communicatively viable solutions together with the client, lets the client try them out, and supports her in the evaluation of her attempts.

Through these characteristics, processes of counseling communication generate effects such as an awareness and rationalization of organizational practices and innovations, a clarification of responsibility (Schützeichel 2004: 280–284) as well as knowledge transfer (Enoch 2011). They do not replace but complement and support other forms and practices of management communication such as leading, planning and controlling, or strategizing. They also scale up and down through different levels of interaction (Fuchs and Mahler 2000: 359): organizations advise other organizations (as, for example, in political consulting) or they advise individuals (as, for example, in career development processes); individuals advise organizations (as, for example,

in management consulting) or they advise individuals (as, for example, in personal coaching for executives).

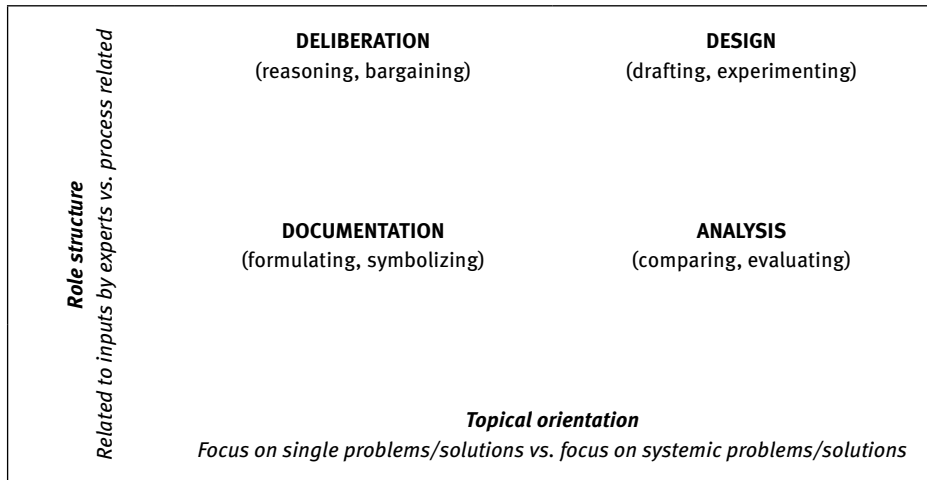
The characteristic feature of a counseling system on a social level (the level of relationships) is thus a discourse regulated by parity between those seeking and those providing help. On a thematic level, a counseling system not only answers directly and explicitly asked questions or sum up ready-made solutions to obvious cases but also searches for causal correlations in problematic situations and develops multi-variant, sustainable approaches for communicatively viable solutions. And on the temporal level, it is not a matter of permanent processes (that would already be collaborative executive management), but rather of limited sequences of interaction such as conversations or projects, which can be divided into separate phases such as opening, reflection, and solution development as well as closing (on the temporal structuring of appropriate conversations see Nothdurft, Reitemeier, and Schröder 1994, summarized in Habscheid 2003: 127–130 as well as Lippitt and Lippitt 2015: 17–52; on the structure of systemic counseling in general, see Steiner 2009: 89–105).

Although we emphasize the perspective of the manifold emergence of counseling communication (Taylor and Van Every 2000), it can be described exactly as a phenomenon of language use. Admittedly, its research has not yet had a long tradition (Preusse and Schmitt 2009: 78–79; Scherf 2011: 101). However, the robust practical-theoretical framework and linguistic empiricism make it possible to expand professional knowledge by means of case studies. The results will deepen the knowledge on the communicative constitution of organizations and its value creation practices.

### 3 Specific practices of counseling communication

Counseling communication results from the combination of different recursive practices, which combine specific language actions in specific roles, on relevant topics, and with suitable media instruments and artifacts. The identification of such practices (and their comprehensive categorization) plays a crucial role in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967: 1–2) as well as in all the recent research on the practice turn (Schatzki 2001; Hillebrandt 2014: 58–61). So far, research on counseling has distinguished between various “counseling architectures”, “counseling designs”, and “counseling tools” (Königswieser and Hillebrandt 2009: 54–101; on the “tools” see also Brüggemann, Ehret-Ivankovic, and Klütman 2007 as well as Schwing and Fryszer 2007), or it defines structures and principles of counseling interaction, which it understands “as exemplary communicative problem solutions that can, of course, be adapted to the context” (Habscheid 2003: 176). To further sharpen these previous approaches for linguistic research, we consistently follow the “flat ontology” of the practice turn (Schatzki 2016) and identify dynamic patterns of linguistic practices in complex discursive systems that constitute and permeate modern organizations (Larsen-Freeman

and Cameron 2008; see Figure 1). These practices are neither temporally delimited from one another nor are they always explicit to the same extent (as has to be expected in the “imperfect world” of language and communication; Knapp and Antos 2014: xiii). Rather, they can overlap, repeat, accelerate, and slow down in communicative procedures.



**Figure 1:** Practices of counseling communication according to topical orientation and role structure

Practices of documentation consist in the attempt to make communication problems and solutions available to the counseling system in singular appearance as “problematic” or “successful” “cases”. This can be accomplished in conversations by formulating (also explicating, structuring, illustrating, conveying, etc.) and in projects by documenting interviews, or other forms of data collection and evaluation such as analyses of the position of actors or organizations in their linguistic environment (see Dreesen and Krasselt in this handbook; Königswieser and Hillebrand 2009: 54–101).

Practices of deliberation consist in the attempt to work on communication problems and solutions not only in the interactive dynamics of a counseling system, but also by making purposeful use of these dynamics and controversies. This can be accomplished in conversations by arguing for or against certain positions (also animating, criticizing, moderating, etc.), in projects by negotiating and bargaining roles that are suitable for the process, or by defining goals and procedures of the process. Regarding the client that constantly falls into a hole, it would in any case be reasonable for a counselor to indicate that she unconditionally accepts her obvious plight – or, alternatively, the counselor could try to lure the client out of her reserve with targeted provocation in order to be able to bring up a fully new perspective on the case (“shaking up the client”) and establish a solution-oriented relationship in the system.

Practices of analysis consist in the attempt to reflect and evaluate communication problems and solutions in their systemic contexts and interactions. This can be done in conversation by using tools of comparison (also schematizing, categorizing, scaling, circular questions, etc.) and in projects by establishing sound judgment devices (also classifications, generalizations of problems and of possible solutions). In relation to the client, who constantly falls into a hole in the case study, it would in any case be reasonable for the counselor to determine in conversation what the deeper social or cultural reasons for the incidents might be (perhaps a strange ritual in the daily life of the client) and what precautions would have to be taken in the environment to resolve the problem (even this would only be a better explanation of the behavior for the client's peers).

Practices of design consist in the attempt to develop communication solutions for problems by creating perspectives that do not seem real or realizable in the given situation, but are indeed imaginable, potentially feasible, and, above all, desirable (on the concept see Schön 1983: 132; Simon 1996: 4). This can be done in conversations by using tools and techniques of design (as projecting, prototyping, fantasizing, etc.) and in projects by experimenting with possible solutions (simulating, testing, role-playing, etc.). The concept of design that is being proposed here thus goes beyond the design concept of systemic organizational consulting (in the sense of *counseling designs*, see above) and is based on the design-scientific idea of a collective development of discursive artifacts (Krippendorff 2006: 6) or, even more broadly, on "possible futures in a complex world" (Grand 2012: 165). In relation to the client, who is constantly falling into a hole, it would in any case be reasonable if the counselor could, through various measures, create the idea of a less painful or less irritating behavior in the future in order to motivate and initiate the process of finding solutions and develop concrete criteria for this purpose – even if the solutions still seem far away or almost unattainable at the moment of counseling.

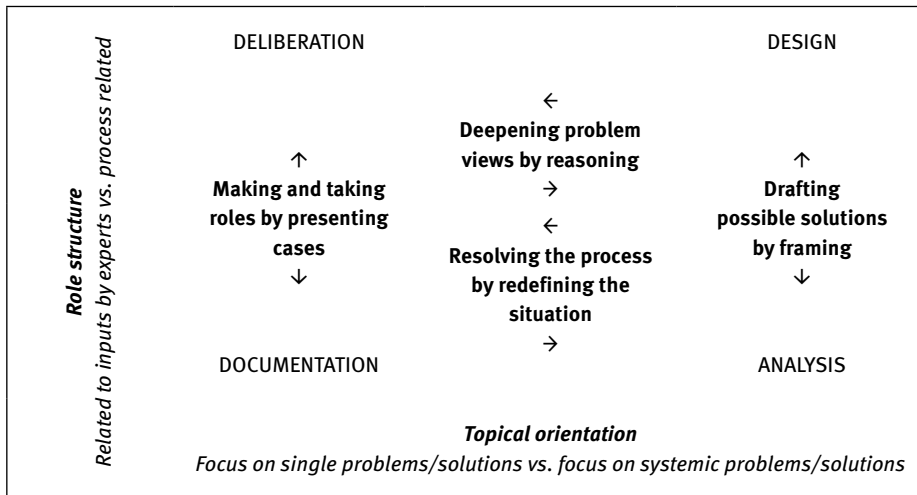
Competent contributions to counseling communication must be both appropriate and effective (Rickheit, Strohner, and Vorweg 2008: 25–26). Both the criterion of appropriateness and the criterion of effectiveness refer, on the one hand, to the situational conditions and thus to individual activities (individual turns in discussions, text contributions in projects) of counseling interaction. On the other hand, these contributions are expected to lead to a reflection on communication problems and to enable the development of sustainable, multi-variant systemic solutions. Thus, these contributions must be designed and controlled in such a way that the participants do not attempt to perform the counseling practices as separate accomplishments but in a way that links the practices to each other and even entangles them situationally. This can be done by a circular, recursive, and from time to time even partial performance of the practices.

## 4 Schemata and patterns of counseling communication

According to linguistic research, the concatenation and entanglement of specific practices in the course of a conversation or a counseling project follows certain schemata (Nothdurft, Reitemeier, and Schröder 1994, summarized by Habscheid 2003: 127–130). From the documentation of a case, those involved in counseling can switch to free deliberation about its interpretation and the further counseling process, its rules and goals, when they begin to analyze the case as a “problem” and when they clarify the mutual, at least provisional roles in the “contact system”. In the example of the hole case, this would mean that counselors and clients agree, in the course of a short analysis, on the negative consequences of the case and establish strongly asymmetrical roles (the client may have become aware of her strong need for help only by anticipating the analysis).

From a “later” or repeatedly performed deliberation, those involved in the counseling process switch again back to the analysis of the problem if they decide to deepen their understanding, e. g., theses on possible cause-effect relationships or comparative perspectives. In the case study, this would mean that counselor and client would try to make it clearer whether the problem was merely an oversight or whether the person concerned is suffering from a disadvantageous disposition, for example, in psychological terms. They progress from analysis to design when they try to draft desirable solutions and are willing to work them out. In the case study, this would mean that alternative solutions (structural measures, alternative routes, join forces with others, etc.) would be designed and weighed against each other. And from the design to the renewed documentation they change as they resolve the situation by presenting each other their assessments of the previous process and its provisional results and by jointly evaluating them, respectively. They then agree either to end the process or to start a new counseling sequence, in case, for instance, the chosen solution did not work (see Figure 2).





**Figure 2:** Interactive schemes of systemic counseling communication for linking and intertwining communicative practices over time

The deductively determined theoretical model of counseling communication can be sharpened and deepened on the basis of empirical data and findings. In doing so, it is important to address the related caveats that arise from the specifics of counseling research. In its field, it has to struggle with considerable communication, trust, and disciplinary barriers as a result of a lack of tradition, strong competitive pressure, and disparate professionalization in the respective professional fields (Scherf 2011: 103–106). Accordingly, we present here two case studies in an exemplary manner, each from different contexts. Both are of an auto-ethnographic nature (Denzin 2014). The first case study comprises several sequences of a consulting process between an expert in organizational communication and a student at the level of executive, professional training. The aim was to develop personal skills in management consulting in the corporate communications sector. The second case study is based on a collection of data from a project to develop a corporate newsroom in a large Swiss company in Switzerland (Seiffert-Brockmann and Einwiller 2020). Both case studies were conducted within the last six years under the direction of the first-mentioned author, while, the second-mentioned author contributed in a non-participating role to the analysis.

Our approach aims at developing a documentary reconstruction of linguistic patterns in which interactive schemes for linking and intertwining consulting practices are realized (Bohnsack 2008; Vogd 2009; Vogd and Amling 2017; on patterns of language use, see Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 79–114). The data are analyzed using conversation and thus sequence analysis (Deppermann 2008), which is based on individual cases (even just specific sequences of a conversation) and aims to develop a comparative typology (Deppermann 2008; Kelle and Kluge 2010). The theoretical

model outlined above serves as a sensitizing concept (Kelle and Kluge 2010: 28–30). Its application to the empirical data provokes deductive as well as abductive conclusions, which, in turn, have been and can be used for further qualitative sampling, further inductive coding, dimensionalization, and typologization of empirical data (Kelle and Kluge 2010: 21–40).

The investigated communication praxis is implemented by means of more or less sophisticated knowledge about counseling communication. This knowledge is accessible for professional practice in easily understandable formats (for example, Fiehler, and Sucharowski 1992; Ertelt and Schulz 2002; Migge 2005; McLeod 2007; Bachmair et al. 2011). However, in the field of communication consulting examined here, it has only been partially received and partially routinized (Stücheli-Herlach 2015: 7–8). Thus, the choice of auto-ethnographic methods entails both their opportunities and their risks, but it is typical of the current state of research and appropriate for the subject of counseling insofar as participating observations support the process of documentary and thus interpretative reconstruction of frameworks for action (Albrecht and Perrin 2013: 26–31). In both cases, we present some exemplary extracts from transcripts according to the GAT conventions (Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem, a conversation-analytic transcription system adapted for the German language, Deppermann 2008: 119–121). The numbering of the lines follows a document with the collected excerpts; information about the time course is inserted into the transcript itself (hours:minutes:seconds). Since counseling action is interactive action, we present here selected sequence patterns (Deppermann 2008: 76–78), consisting of several successive turns.

As a first example we present here the case of a counseling interview – conducted in Swiss German – between the first author as counselor (CO, in the Swiss German transcript RG, *Ratgeber*) and a communication consultant as client (CL, in the Swiss German transcript RS, *Ratsuchende*). Since the beginning of her professional career, the client has worked for a smaller public relations agency. The topic was an assessment of personal counseling skills in the context of digitalized communication management (Röttger and Zielmann 2009; Rademacher and Andersson in this handbook).

## 4.1 Recapitulating

After an introduction with an exchange about the spatial setting, CO/RG (from here on called CO) opens the main conversation. By asking specific questions, he tries to lead CL/RS (from here on called CL) to confirm agreements made, thereby linking the documentation process with the deliberation process. We call this pattern *recapitulation*. By using this pattern, it is possible to implement the scheme of creating roles and presenting the topics in the context of a given situation – in a way that opens up a perspective for the further course of the discussion. In the following, we present the

relevant excerpt from the conversation transcript and supplement it with a summarizing English translation:

- 29 RG: .hh und mier hend de gseid, mier machid en <<rall>> †`berater-  
sprächstOHD> #00:00:27-4#
- 30
- 31 RS: †`geNAU #00:00:28-0#
- 32
- 33 RG: und hend gseid, mier machid das mal FOIF `mal: [(.)] #00:00:30-  
9#
- 34 RS: [``mhhm] ((bejahend)) #00:00:30-2#
- 35
- 36 RG: a eis bis zwei †`sTUND #00:00:31-8#
- 38 RS: genau! #00:00:32-7#
- 39
- 40 RG: .hh ähm (3) <<p> und etz fangemer `ah:> #00:00:36-9#
- 41
- 42 RS: <<p> guet> #00:00:39-9#
- 43
- 44 RG: <<p> und jetzt chasch du mier doch mal e chli> †`verZÄHLE .h  
#00:00:41-5#
- 45
- 46 RS: söll [ich dier VERzähLE?] #00:00:42-8#
- 47 RG: [uf was es GAHT überhaupt] ((lachend)) #00:00:43-9#
- 48
- 49 RS: [.hhh] ((stark hörbares Einatmen)) #00:00:43-7#
- 50 RG: [.hh] #00:00:56-2#

### Summarizing translation

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- CO: We said that we will talk on counseling.  
CL: Right.  
CO: And we said that we would do it five times, each time for one or two hours.  
CL: Exactly.  
CO: And now we begin!  
CL: Good.  
CO: And now you can tell me a little bit about what this is all about.
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## 4.2 Conceptualizing

After CL's introductory description, CO leads into a discussion about the concept of counseling and counseling competences in order to realize the scheme of developing a problem view. This serves to link the practices of deliberation and analysis. After all, in order to ensure a successful systemic process, the problem analysis should not simply be done outside the counseling system but developed within it. This switching between deliberation and analysis, we call an interactive *conceptualization*. The pattern of verbal conversation is characterized by the fact that CO, based on a negotiated concept (the “counseling skills”), tries to lead CL to apply the concept to her own situation in such a way that different aspects of problems and approaches to solutions become apparent in that situation. One result of the pattern in the present case is that CL identifies two concrete aspects of “counseling skills”, namely the ability to “give quick advice” (line 59) and to “take a better overall view” (line 67).

- 55 RG: ähm (–) ETzt wäre total wichtig, wenn du chöntisch churz e  
chli beschibe,
- 56 was DU under beraterKOMpetenz [↓verstahsch.] #00:03:03-2#
- 57 RS: [mhhm] ((bejahend)) (.) <<all> also> BERaterkompetenz
- 58 hed für mich .hh ZWEI:: siite,
- 59 einersits ischs ähm (–) <<acc> de schnälli ↑`ratschLAG> (–) zu  
`JEDere `ziit (–) ähm (2)
- 60 dass ich us em us em stehgreif gwösssi (–) <<rall> BERatigs-  
frage> so chli klassischi
- 61 beratigsfrage `chan ↑`beantworde (–) ähm (1) ↑`SCHNÄller als  
ich das jetzt chan (.)
- 62 und INTUITiver als ich das jetzt ↓chan (2) das (.) beinhaltet  
au m meh ↓`sicherHEIT (–) und meh
- 63 sicherheit bedüted au (.) dass es bim chund (.) kompetenter  
achond (2) <<t> mini erfahrig
- 64 bis jetzt> #00:03:44-7#
- 65
- 66 RG: [mhhm] #00:03:44-5#
- 67 RS: [das ischs] ↑`EINte (–) und s andere isch .h ähm (.) en  
BEssere GSAMTblick ↑`öbercho (.)
- 68 gad i de strategische ↑`beratig (–) ähm (2) de WÄG:: ähh  
MEH gseh för de ↑chund (–)
- 69 meh MERke was för de chund guet wär und was för taktig dass mer  
chönti ↑neh #00:04:08-6#

## Summarizing translation

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- CO: Now it would be very important that you briefly describe what you understand by counseling skills.
- CL: For me, counseling skills has two sides. On the one hand, it is quick advice at any time; that I can answer certain questions, classic counselor questions so to speak, right off the bat, faster and more intuitively than I can today. This also means more security, and more security also means greater competence from a client's point of view. That has been my experience so far.
- CO: Mmmh [...]
- CL: That is one thing. The other is a better overall view, in strategic counseling especially. It means being able to better see the path for the client, to better understand what would be good for the client, and what tactics should be chosen.
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### 4.3 Staging

Towards the middle of the conversation, the actors analyze the concept of “counseling skills” with regard to the specific situation of CL on the basis of concrete examples of good communication counseling and concrete negative examples. In order to develop possible career prospects for CL (scheme of solution development), CO introduces a sequence in which CL is asked to develop a vision of her own future counseling activities. This sequence is introduced and executed in a pattern of *staging and dramatization* with specific features: CO's introduction is characterized by her imagination of the future, in a way that dramatizes the intended difference from the current situation by saying that CL should imagine a striking improvement. CL completes the scheme by developing the idea of a “smoother” project process (line 91), in the course of which work steps, but also content-related tasks, would be “easier to go through” (line 94). The “design” of a mental vision of the future is remarkable under aspects of sensual experience (“smoother”) and systemic networking of the solution in terms of content and time (lines 93 and 94).

- 74 RG: .h was glaubsch `DU (3) ALso agno mier schaffid jetzt ↑`DA: und  
ähmmm ((Schnalzen))
- 75 .h oder oder DU schaffsch no in andere KONtext (irgendwie)  
THEMene und ↓`FRage [mhhmm]
- 76 oder mier schaffid ZÄME no imne ↑`KURS oder imne (xxx) oder was  
au ↑`immer .h <<cresc> UF
- 77 jede FALL> 'agno (-)es passiert öbis (.) und du wirsch (.)  
plötzlich (.) Oder im lauf vo
- 78 dim ↑`prozÄSS .h plötzlich en <<cresc> marKANT!> BESSeri  
beraterin. (mhhmm) was passiert denn?
- 79 (-) i dim umfeld? (-) was seid denn de N. N.\*? (.) was säqid  
dini chU:nde? #00:12:08-8#

- 80
- 81 RS: .h ich bin NID sicher, öb sie das Sofort wörrdid merke. [mhhm]  
du seisch jetzt zwar ↑<sub>MARK</sub>ant (.)
- 82 [mhhh (.) mal agno] <<all> jaja> #00:12:19-5#
- 83
- 84 RG: mer schaffid en MARKante [sprung] #00:12:19-8#
- 85
- 86 RS: [GENau:] aso (-) ich bin NID sicher, öb mer  
das Sofort wörrd ↑<sub>merke</sub>  
87 oder s (.) öb mers eifach <<rall>> a de projektverläuf wör  
↑<sub>merke</sub>.> [ja] (.) aso ich hans gfÜHL (.)  
88 en (.) beratig wo ned <<rall> Optimal> 'isch (1) HEMMT de pro-  
jektverlauf und erschWÄRT verschieden  
89 projekt. [.h ja!] aso di di BESSeri beratig macht s projekt au  
↑<sub>Eifacher</sub> (.) es gid projekt wo IMM:er  
90 schwirig sind. [mhhm] Egal wie guet s de berater [mhhm] isch.  
.h Aber es gid sicher optimierigspotential  
91 (.) ZUM projekt so chli (.) gschmeidiger ↑<sub>mache</sub> ähmm (-) also  
ich säge jetzt mal, wenn du es guets  
92 projektmanagement ↑<sub>Hesch</sub> [mhhh] (.) denn ichs es projekt au  
eifach z ↑<sub>handhabe</sub> (.) und wenn du ebe gUET  
93 berA:tisch (.) au im hinblick uf de ablauf vom projekt, au im  
hinblick uf die uf die inhaltliche sache vom  
94 projekt .h `ja! ds es gAht eifach liechter `dure (3)  
#00:13:15-7#
- 95
- 96 RG: was heisst LIEchter ``dure? Wird's GÜNSchtiger? wirts  
SCHNÄLLer? #00:13:21-1#
- 101 RS: es wird es wird ↑<sub>schNÄLLER</sub> [mhhm] (.) es wird nöd weniger  
↑<sub>ufwändig</sub>. das [ja] wird's nie. [ja] (.)
- 102 A:ber es wird ähmm (1) es wIRD au för de chund ↑<sub>eifacher</sub>. (-)  
also [ja] es isch för MI::ch eifacher z
- 103 handhabe, well wells klari asage und meinige ↑<sub>gid</sub> [mhhh] und  
klari ↑<sub>awisige</sub> .h und för de chund ischs
- 104 eifacher (.) ähmm well er meh orientierig ↑<sub>hed</sub>. [mhhm] (2)  
inhaltlich wie au: (.) ↑<sub>projektverlauf</sub>.
- 105 #00:13:51-5#

\*Names of RS's supervisors

## Summarizing translation

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- CO: Let's say we create now, or you create here and in other contexts, on other topics and questions [...] or we create together in a class or whatever: either way, something happens and you suddenly – or in the course of this process – become a remarkably better consultant. What happens then in your environment? What does your boss say then? What do your customers say?
- CL: I'm not sure if they would notice it immediately. Now, you say "remarkably better" [...] suppose [...]
- CO: [...] We manage a striking leap [...]
- CL: [...] Exactly, so I'm not sure whether one would notice it immediately or whether one would simply notice it later in the course of the project. Well, I have the feeling that suboptimal counseling hampers the progress of the project and makes various projects more difficult. Better counseling makes a project easier. There are projects that are always difficult, no matter how good the counseling is. But there certainly is a potential for optimization to make projects a bit smoother. Well, let's say you have good project management, a project is easy to handle. And if you have good counseling, also with regard to the course of the project, also with regard to the content aspects, then it's simply easier to go through [...]
- CO: [...] What does "easier" mean? Does it become cheaper, does it become faster?
- CL: It gets faster. It will not become less complex, it never will. But it will be easier for me to use because there are clear announcements and opinions and clear instructions. And it's easier for the client because he has more orientation, both in terms of content and in the course of the project.
- 

## 4.4 Selecting

Towards the end of the conversation, the task is to come out of the designed future projection and to a conclusion but, at the same time, to secure the results for the subsequent systemic activities of CL, which in this case will consist of a further consultation. In this sense, the scheme for resolving the situation combines the practices of design and documentation. This is realized in the present case by *selecting* certain criteria, which the documented basics should meet for the next consultation.

- 110 RG: etzt nur zur ``hUUsufgab [genau] <<h> isch es guet [en huusufgab?>] #00:59:06-6#
- 111 RS: [ <<h> ja das isch guet, ja klar] #00:59:07-8#
- 112
- 113 RG: .h ähmm (2) ähmm (5) <<len> ich fendis GUET> wenn du dier ufs nächscht mal ↑`chöntisch (2) en (3)
- 114 <<len> ganz en kOnkrEte FALL schildere> [mmhmm] .h (-) wo du scho erläbt ↑häs (1) und de fall muess
- 115 zwEI bedingige ``erfülle (-) bedingig Eis isch .h de fall muss so gsi si, dass du seisch: DA wär

- 116 beratig (.) wECHtig †gsi [mhhm].h UND (.)DA hani si nÖd i dem  
mass chöne ebe †leischte (.) wieni hed
- 117 sÖlle [mhmm] oder wieni hed welle. [mhhm ja!] (1) [mhmm] .hh  
und de FALL wenn du de fall (.) chöntisch
- 118 †beschriebe (1) bitte (3) unter foni folgende †pökt: erscht-  
ens .h ähmmm wie wie isch dezue †cho?
- 119 [mmmhm] aso: wEr hed dich wie agrögt oder wie bisch <<acc>  
demit eifach konfrontiert worde
- 120 mit dem fall?> [mhhm].h zweitens was sind (.) vorussetzige gsi  
uf dinere chUNDe-
- 121 oder †klientesiite? (1) [mhmm].h DRITTens was sind vorus-  
setzige gsi be DIER!? (-) uf
- 122 dINere †siite? [mhmm] (3) h. (und) VIERTens (.) wie 'isch de  
`verlauf gsi (.) a dem †fall.
- 123 [ja!] aso wa was ISCH pAssiert? [mhmm] füre TIMELINE, e  
gschICHT (.) <<dim> oder so> [ja] (1) [mhmm]
- 124 <<all> du das> chöntsch †mache. [guet.] .h das chasch mache: du  
chaschs ders äh †überlegge und denn
- 125 mündlich †säge [mhmm] oder (.) chasch es au schribe<<f> GERN>
- 126
- 127 RS: [(mit notize ja)]
- 128 RG: [natürli.] oder chasch mers sogar vORher lah zuecho lah, denn  
(.) [ja] chöntemer under
- 129 umstände de chli zIIt äh [okay.] spare (.) natürli

### Summarizing translation

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CO: No, as a sort of homework [...] is that good?

CL: Yes, that is good, of course.

CO: I would like it if next time you could describe a very concrete case that you have experienced. This case must fulfill two conditions: condition one is that the case has made you say: counseling would have been important, but since (and that would be condition two) I was not able to provide it to the extent that it would have been necessary or I would have wanted. And if you could please describe the case under the following points: first, how did it come about? So, who asked you or how were you simply confronted with the case? Second: What were the conditions on the client's side? Third: What were the requirements on your side? And fourth: What was the process in this case like? So, what happened, on a timeline, a story or something. If you could do that. You are welcome to think it over, then report it orally or you can write it down.

CL: With notes, yes.

CO: Or you can send it to me beforehand, so we can save a bit of time.

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As a second case study, we summarize here some results of a documentary analysis of a project aimed at the implementation of a corporate newsroom by one of the larger enterprises in Switzerland. The project lasted for about seven months and struggled with a huge social and topical complexity as well as with a tight schedule. The following project map in terms of counseling communication (see Figure 3) is reconstructed based on project documents, a final qualitative interview with one of the project co-leaders, and protocols of participatory observation.

The schemata of counseling communication were carried out typically by *demanding attractive incisive slides* from the team of the client as well as from the counselors, by *interpreting and anticipating decisions* of a member of the top management (in the project called “sponsor”), by *launching and processing thought experiments*, and, finally, by *interrupting the process of organizational and competence development*. The top management decided to implement a top-down restructuring by using some of the results of the previous counseling process.

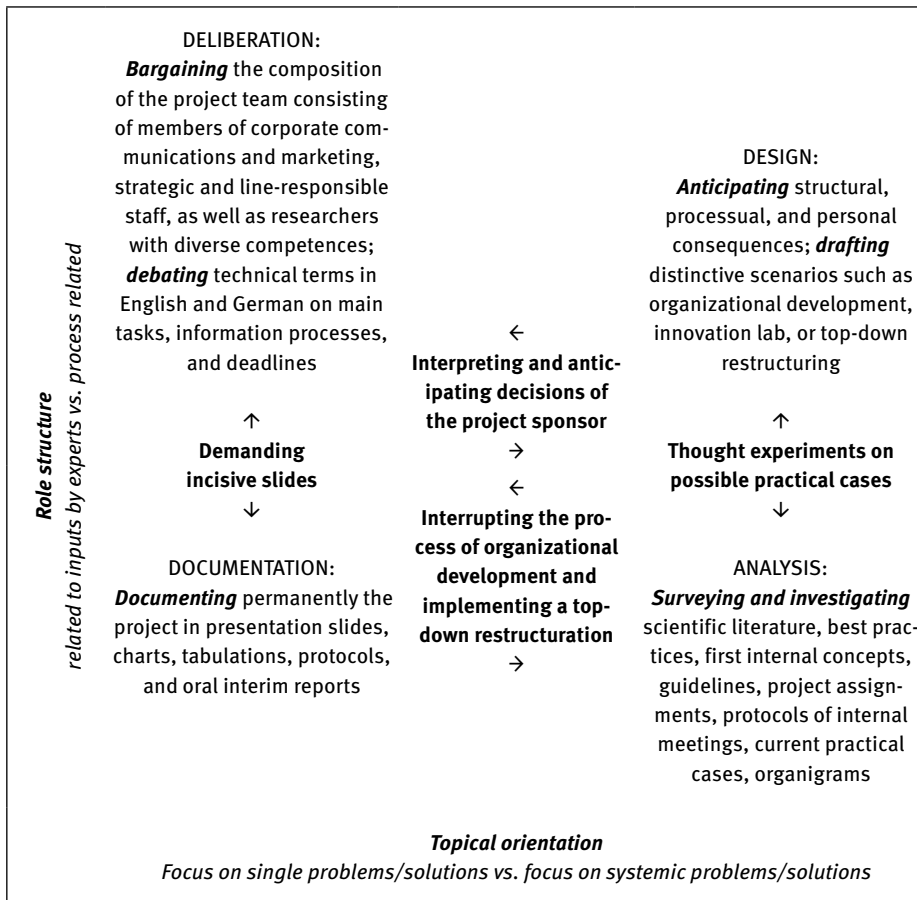


Figure 3: Project map of a counseling project to implement a corporate newsroom

It is possible to identify some patterns of language use that are typical for counseling communication not only on the level of the project as a whole but also on the micro-level of situative interactions. The following examples will demonstrate this. In the course of a more than one-hour discussion in the project team, the aim was to model future process flows in the company's corporate newsroom by "thought experiments" and role-playing (*in vivo* code from project documents, translated from Swiss German; here, this notion stands for the practice of design). The cognitive concepts repeatedly used by the participants to denote such case-based thought models were "examples" and "stories" (translated from Swiss German). The counselor motivated such design procedures recursively by using patterns of *invitations to design* ("Please tell us what could happen", "What happens then ...?", "Let's play through the different variants", "What does that mean in concrete terms?"; translated from Swiss German). The clients answered these in turn by thinking aloud using patterns of *self-questioning* (such as "Where are potential stories hidden and how do we get there?", by *adopting different perspectives, simulating process flows*, and by *imagining appropriate working tools and interfaces* for management practices. By doing so, participants could anticipate potential synergies between functional roles (such as newsroom managers and content producers), conflicts, and technical problems of the future corporate newsroom.

## 5 Perspectives for research and professional practice

Counseling communication is a form of management communication that complements and supports other forms such as leading or planning and controlling and is therefore one of the prerequisites for their success. Despite its importance for organizational value creation, this form is not always anchored and consolidated in institutional structures; rather, it emerges in a more or less explicit way in the manifold discourses/Discourses of an organization.

Scientific research can not only provide knowledge on counseling practices in specific domains. It can also provide valid problem-solving knowledge across the domains and disciplines. The pertinent form of this service could be called "scientific counseling on counseling communication for consultants". According to this understanding, counseling research is a variety of applied, transdisciplinary, and "engaged" communication research (Frey and Cissna 2009; Seibold et al. 2009: 346; Perrin 2012). It supports professional actors in practicing and establishing communicative procedures to reflect on systemic problems and create viable solutions, at the level of both individual discussions and entire projects. This is a contribution to narrowing the gap between the growing importance of counseling in organizational communication and the lack of scientific investigation to date (Preusse and Schmitt 2009: 77). In practice, this opens up the possibility of deriving specific competence

requirements for counseling in the context of value-added processes, which can contribute, among other things, to determining the current status of career development, evaluating organizational processes, or designing business models in the field of institutionalized consulting.

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