

Influence of workers councils on employee engagement

An Action-Research approach to
influence employee engagement
through workers council initiatives

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the
University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration
by Marc Valentin Augustin

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Abstract

Title: Influence of workers councils on employee engagement – An Action-Research approach to influence employee engagement through workers council initiatives

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An organisation is a complex entity, being made of its employees, the management, and the overall structure. The German principle of co-determination adds another complex structure that influences the way how employees experience the whole entity. This principle includes the details how workers councils may influence the organisations' decisions. Thinking more about employee binding and engagement as well as the overall satisfaction at the job created the question about how the co-determination system adds to the employees' satisfaction and engagement level during work. In general, while observing the organisation, I encountered many different layers being present that might endanger the overall job-level satisfaction of employees. While observing those layers, it seemed obvious that, if a workers council is present, employees might relate to their presence and actions within an organisation.

Based on the observations, my objective within the research was to examine whether workers councils may influence the employees' engagement within their daily work. Furthermore, my goal was to examine how this engagement, as well as the overall satisfaction, can be positively altered through different initiatives and actions related to the council's presence within the organisation.

By using an action research approach, I started thinking about the way workers councils can influence the overall satisfaction of the workforce present within an organisation. This led me to the main questions if the satisfaction engagement of employees is linked to and influenced by actions as well as the presence of a workers council and how employees experience the availability of a council within the organisation. Having my organisation as the total target population, I started with a

qualitative approach by conducting interviews with different employees from within the company.

Within a learning set approach, by using the council members as learning set members, I introduced an agile working method, using principles and methodical approaches common in agile software development. Based on this approach, actions were defined with the set members and different first ones introduced within the organisation during a first sprint, while still holding further actions in the backlog. After a certain amount of time, those actions were reviewed in interviews again with the participants of the study and the results were discussed within the learning set.

Together with the learning set, the different steps within action research cycles were introduced and followed. The learning set, while adding the agile framework, constructed different actions that should be introduced within the organisation.

My first objective within the study was to examine if workers councils can directly take influence on the organisation's culture, its environment as well as how employees experience both, the organisation in general as well as the council's presence. Following the research, the satisfaction and engagement level of the employees is strongly tied to how the council acts within the organisation.

The research did show, that introducing simple actions like regular newspapers, enhancing communications and using different channels to communicate and by introducing round table talks as well as regular employees' meetings, especially in a more familiar way without inviting the CEO of the company, sharply increases the overall satisfaction of employees.

Besides those positive outcomes and findings, the research did also reveal that the general benefit an organisation could draw from the actions is strongly tied to the overall organisational culture and openness to change.

Concluding, I can say that if the organisation, in this case, represented by the employees and the council, is open to adopting this approach, a benefit can be experienced. However, this fact can also be a drawback within an organisation if it

lacks the openness required to introduce the approach. As with agile methodology within software development, a willingness for organisational change is mandatory within the organisation. Adaption has to occur if the results are transferred to other organisations.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
List of Abbreviations	xii
Dedication	xiii
Acknowledgement	xiv
Author’s declaration	xv
Chapter 1	1
1.1 Context of the research	3
1.1.1 Organisational context.....	3
1.1.2 Background of the researcher	4
1.2 Research problem	4
1.2.1 Key issues	4
1.2.2 Research scope	5
1.2.3 Academic approaches	7
1.3 Focus of inquiry.....	8
1.3.1 Method of problem solving	8
1.4 Structure of the dissertation.....	9
1.4.1 Chapter 2 – Literature review	9
1.4.2 Chapter 3 – Methodology	9
1.4.3 Chapter 4 – Research practice and findings	10
1.4.4 Chapter 5 – Action Research Cycles.....	10
1.4.5 Chapter 6 – Outcomes and Conclusion.....	11

1.4.6	Chapter 7 – Reflections from the researcher	11
Chapter 2	.....	12
2.1	Introduction	13
2.2	Historical context and current structure	13
2.3	Organisational Behaviour	16
2.4	Employment Relationship.....	18
2.5	Employee Engagement	20
2.6	Employee Participation.....	23
2.7	Employee Representation	26
2.8	Reflections on the theoretical base	30
2.9	Conclusion.....	31
Chapter 3	.....	33
3.1	Research paradigms and frameworks	34
3.2	Research methodologies	38
3.2.1	Research frame	38
3.2.2	Research approach	40
3.2.3	Sampling strategy	44
3.3	Action research	48
3.3.1	Definition	48
3.3.2	Different approaches to action research	49
3.3.3	Action research within this project.....	50
3.3.4	Action research cycles.....	52
3.4	Research instruments	59
3.4.1	Data collection	59
3.4.2	Analysis	62
3.4.3	Software-based tools	64

3.4.4	Generate data to inform actionable knowledge.....	65
3.5	Ethical issues and Limitations	66
3.6	Summary.....	68
Chapter 4	.....	69
4.1	Overview	70
4.1.1	Statistical figures.....	71
4.2	Coding	76
4.3	Reflecting on the hypotheses	85
4.3.1	H1 and H7 – positive organisational behaviour and taking care within the organisation.....	85
4.3.2	H2 – reactions at organisational levels	87
4.3.3	H3 and H4 – positive influence on employee engagement and participation.....	88
4.3.4	H5 – new forms of communication can enhance the relationships	89
4.3.5	H6 – role dualities between trade union and councils	91
4.4	Discussion of interpretation.....	92
4.5	Moving to learning sets	94
4.6	Conclusion.....	95
Chapter 5	.....	96
5.1	Action Research Cycle 1 – Construction	98
5.2	Action Research Cycle 2 – Planning	101
5.3	Action Research Cycle 3 – Taking Action – Core Action Research.....	103
5.3.1	Core AR Cycle 1 – Construction.....	103
5.3.2	Core AR Cycle 2 – Planning	105
5.3.3	Core AR Cycle 3 – Taking Action	112
5.3.4	Core AR Cycle 4 – Evaluating Action	118

5.3.5	Going back to the field.....	118
5.3.6	Interview evaluation	119
5.4	Action Research Cycle 4 – Evaluating Action	120
5.5	Conclusions	121
Chapter 6	.....	123
6.1	Fulfilment of research objectives	124
6.2	Outcomes for the organisation.....	126
6.2.1	Workers Councils viewpoint	128
6.2.2	Employee viewpoint	128
6.3	Implications for future practice	128
6.4	Implications for future research	130
6.5	Limitations of the research	132
6.6	Closing remarks.....	133
Chapter 7	.....	135
7.1	Autobiographical nature of the project.....	136
7.2	Influence of Action-Research during the project.....	138
7.3	Learning process of the researcher during the project	140
7.4	Reflections from the researcher	142
Appendix A	.....	144
Appendix B.....	.....	146
Appendix C.....	.....	150
Appendix D .....	.....	154
Appendix E.....	.....	157
Appendix F.....	.....	160
References .....	.....	163

List of Tables

Table 2 - Adapted from Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Perry, Riege and Brown (1999)
.....37

List of Figures

Figure 1 - Relationships between core and action research projects (Zuber-Skerrit & Perry 2002)	53
Figure 2 - own Picture (adapted from the theories presented by Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002)	54
Figure 3 - Action research cycle 1 - Construction (own image)	54
Figure 4 - Action research cycle 2 - Planning (own image)	56
Figure 5 - Action research cycle 3 - Taking action (own image)	57
Figure 6 - Action research cycle 4 - Evaluating Action (own image)	58
Figure 7: Trade Union organisation	72
Figure 8: Workers Council members	74
Figure 9 - First coding cycle.....	79
Figure 10 - Second revision of my coding list	81
Figure 11 - Final coding list	82
Figure 12 - List of codings	83
Figure 13: Memoing example in MaxQDA.....	84
Figure 14: Code-Matrix	85
Figure 15: Action Research Cycles within the research project	97
Figure 16: PEST analysis	108
Figure 17: Relationships analysis	109
Figure 18: SWOT analysis.....	110
Figure 19: Backlog Example	115
Figure 20: Backlog before first sprint.....	116
Figure 21: Sprint planning - Social Media page	117
Figure 22: Sprint planning - Newsletter.....	117
Figure 23: Sprint planning - Intranet site	117
Figure 24: Sprint planning - summer event	118

List of Abbreviations

DGB *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*
PCF *Participant Consent Form*

RIS *Participant Information Sheet*

Dedication

I dedicate this research study to my grandfather, who died before I started the programme. He was a great inspiration for me, and we had many interesting discussions packed full of advises and experiences. The topics discussed within here would have been interesting for him and he would have been proud of hearing that I started the programme – and finally finished it. And to my father-in-law, who died way too early and did not have the chance to meet his granddaughter. He was curious and open to hear and learn about everything and always had encouraging words for his family. And finally, to my daughter, who is four months now. Be curious and open while exploring the world, be kind and strive for knowledge.

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Author's declaration

The principal researcher, Marc V. Augustin, hereby declares the Workers councils and trade unions in Germany: Conflicts of interest and role duality in labour agreements – creating unsatisfied employees through bargaining [Short title: Workers councils and trade unions in Germany] to represent original research that has not been submitted previously for publication.

The researcher served as the sole author for the study, which was completed under the thesis supervision of Dr. Irene Kafeza as a requirement for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration from the University of Liverpool. When drawing upon the work of others within the existing literature, the principal researcher has provided appropriate referencing and acknowledgement to the sources.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The world is changing, and so is Europe. When looking at the global economic change that is going on, it seems evident that social equality is getting more and more important in Germany. Votes and recent studies show that politics are promoting social equality as a focus topic to gain satisfaction among the population. Richard Hilmer from Infratest, for example, stated: “The elections were all about securing Germany’s prosperity – partly also about social equality” (Pop 2013). Those results are mirrored again when looking at 2019’s elections of the European Council.

The Economist adds here by providing examples of what later happened in Germany. The Bundesrat pushed a federal minimum wage; youth unemployment is at Europe’s lowest rate of only 8% (Economist 2013).

With those two current examples of how important Germany and the population itself sees social equality, is it no wonder that there is a robust system that deals with equality and co-determination within the labour market. Co-determination here is mainly but not only about wage negotiations, working hours and job security and has remarkably high power in Germany compared to other countries. Due to the strong representation of councils and unions within organisations as well as the power given to the institutions by law, management-decisions can be altered, or even avoided. As the German law enables workers councils to participate in management-decisions and also places members in the board of directors, the power councils can execute, if they exist, is far-reaching (Helm 1986). The power that stands behind this system can be best understood when looking at significant strikes and the figures behind.

The six-day Lufthansa strike in 2016, for example, made the carrier cancel around 4,500 flights, affecting more than half a million passengers. According to Lufthansa, this strike led to a loss of €100 million in total (Local 2016). Even more expensive was the five-day strike at Deutsche Bahn in 2015, the longest strike in the organisation’s history. This strike cost the German economy about €750 million, as nothing could be transported, like steel or cars, making this €150 million per day (BBC 2015).

What is it, that leads to those strikes, that create such enormous costs? The answer is simple: the fight for social equality, equal pay, wage increases and better working hours and conditions. The actors in those fights are workers' councils, trade unions and their members.

The fact that the actors are clear poses the question: What can they do? Within this dissertation, I want to research how workers councils can influence the employee's experience within an organisation and how specific actions can increase the satisfaction of employees.

1.1 Context of the research

1.1.1 Organisational context

This research study takes place in a consulting and IT-service oriented company in Germany. The research is limited to a small site of the company, employing about 100 employees. The organisation in focus has a long industrial history and relation. The organisation itself was established in 1996. Before this year, the organisation was part of a large coal mining company in Germany, responsible for the internal IT related services. The roots of the organisation go back until 1956, with predecessor organisations reaching back until early 1751. Based on this, the organisation is strongly tied to the development of the German co-determination system that originated from coal-mining and steel industries. While the related industry changed from serving the coal-mining specific industry internally, independence in 1996 brought a shift to an externally focussed service and consulting related industry belonging.

Nevertheless, the coal-mining history is strongly present due to the belonging to the mining-related trade union IGBCE. Around 90% of the employees still working at the site in focus are related to these "old" days – meaning all of them worked within the coal-mining industry in former years. Some even were working below ground for several years before reskilling into IT-services. Based on those observations, there is a strong binding between co-determination, the organisation in focus and the

employees working at the site. Also, organisational culture is strongly coined by mining culture and values like responsibility or welfare.

1.1.2 Background of the researcher

The researcher is working at the research site for almost 15 years. He started working within the company as a consultant specialized in the HCM module for SAP before he started managing sub-projects and moved to project management activities in recent years. With this background, the researcher is not directly disciplinary responsible for employees being present at the site. Instead, he is, depending on the currently managed project, technically responsible for employees not only related to the site but the organisation German-wide. At the moment of writing and undergoing this research, the author is responsible for a project team of 30 people, of which five are working at the site being researched. As those employees are not chosen within the sampling approach, no direct managerial connection will exist between the researcher and the participants of the research study. In addition, no member of the project team the researcher is responsible for is currently a member of the workers council under research. This further minimizes potential biases and role conflicts during this research. In addition, the current role of the researcher allows him only to act as consultant and advisor while planning and taking action. The final step of taking action within the organisation will be triggered from within the learning sets and executed by the workers council members.

1.2 Research problem

1.2.1 Key issues

The research issue is based upon the engagement level of employees at the workplace, having a direct influence on their satisfaction at work, and the potential intention to quit. Based on the existing literature on workplace management, human resources management including aspects of employee representation, employee engagement and commitment as well as employer relations, a primary

focus is drawn on the influence of managers and how they can influence the experience at the workplace.

Within this dissertation, I want to move a step back from the management perspective and link different theoretical thoughts to the presence of workers councils within the organisation. As councils have certain rights within the German system of co-determination, they are able to exercise a certain amount of power within the organisation. Furthermore, do I see them more often in a closer relationship to the employees than managers and third are they elected by the employees. The council gives them voice and employees might not fear possible conflicts based on power issues if they address management related to issues that occur.

Therefore, I extend the literature concepts about the influence of managers on employee engagement, satisfaction and commitment to the workers council and research whether the council is able to positively influence the levels experienced by employees within my organisation.

Summarizing this, my key issue is the potential influence of workers councils on aspects like employee engagement and commitment and the question of how workers councils can positively influence this issue to enhance employee satisfaction at work.

1.2.2 Research scope

While initially planning the research, I thought about researching how trade unions might also influence the experience of employees at their workplace. This scope shifted during my initial research stage. At this point, I realized that I thought about researching the influence of an external organisation on employees from within my organisation. This initial plan introduced some potential conflicts as well as biased problems. First of all, I wouldn't have been an insider action researcher, as defined later, because of the fact that I would research an external organisation. This further introduces the problem, that I cannot execute any actions within the trade union, as I don't have the access, I would need, especially as only a small portion of the organisation might be related to the issue. Employees might not benefit from any

action, as they are not directly reflected within the organisation, but might only be present during wage negotiations.

As the workers council has a more direct impact of the employees from within the organisation, I decided to move to the position of the complete insider action researcher and work in close collaboration with the council as a learning set. Although I had trade unions in my mind while working on the research project, as they are a fundamental part of the German co-determination landscape, I mostly excluded their impact from the research. By focusing on workers councils, I started by looking at the general research available on workers councils within the German field of co-determination as well as the field of employee representation. Coming from those areas, I broadened my view to include concepts of employee relationship, employee engagement and employee commitment. To further include concepts being present within the organisation, I looked at organisational behaviour and later internal marketing and communication, which was added during the learning set work, when we realized that different theoretical concepts might be worth being explored.

As mentioned, I did exclude the concepts of trade unions as I feel that the influence is less than relevant for the research project. I did further not look at what happens if councils change. Every workers council in Germany is elected for four years (*Works Constitution Act* 2016), after this period, new elections are held. As a result, the council or individual members could change. This fact was not covered during the research, as I tried to create a more general action plan that is not bound to individual people. I also did not directly take into consideration how the council is seen by employees. I did, however, look at what employees think about the work done by the council, but this does not include potential personal conflicts with individual council members. This fact, excluded during the research, might create potential resistance of individual employees related to the introduced actions. In the worst scenario, employees could reject actions, even if they agree with them, simply based on the personal conflict with the council in general.

1.2.3 Academic approaches

Looking at the academic papers available, most researchers focus on a quantitative approach, mainly based on available survey data collected within Germany. A panel collects surveys from selected organisations covering different aspects of the workplace, including the co-determination and representation area. Similar concepts are used across Europa and for the European Union. With the majority of the available research being based on quantitative approaches, the authors even added that further qualitative research is needed to gain a better understanding from within the concept of co-determination then possible from the survey data.

While reviewing the literature, I realized that using the panel data might introduce wrong percentages of organisations having workers councils present. At least there are contractive researches, stating figures between 10% and 47%. The low figures relate to the Germany based panel data, where 47% are calculated by the author based on European Survey data. As mentioned in more detail in chapter two, I researched that the panel survey looks at 16,000 organisations in Germany, being about 0.8% of Germany's total number of companies, following the statistical department. Those figures, combined with the call for more qualitative insights, made me choose a qualitative approach surrounded by the action research framework. Although the available research tries to generalize the findings and concepts, do I see the spread of 37% as too much, compared to the overall results gained from the generalized data.

By using action research as an insider within a companies' site having about 100 employees, I further feel a qualitative approach more suited as this gives me the opportunity to extract deeper meaning from the narratives of the participants. Introducing a mixed methods based approach would not add much content, based on my feeling, as the survey data based on 100 employees will not release much more meaning than could be extracted from the interviews of a qualitative project. Nevertheless, based on the concepts of action research, does the research project itself not follow to 100% the classical definitional of the research approaches but borrow research instruments from different approaches if they could be of benefit for the research. More is given in detail in chapter three.

1.3 Focus of inquiry

Following Ramsey (2014), an idea or the potential solution of an issue is not more than a simple suggestion, unless it was subject to rigour and evaluation. Furthermore, is the trial and error of different ideas and solutions not scholarly. What is needed here is the surrounding by a robust, intentional, and evaluative inquiry. It is the focus on inquiry during the research project that differs between a simple trial and error and a potentially relevant action research-based research project. This inquiry will describe the base for the undergoing method of problem-solving within this project.

For me, based on my learning throughout the program while being an insider action researcher, writing the thesis and working on the project feels like writing a narration. My narration of what I experienced and what I went through during the project. Combining this with the methodological background and the academic theoretical base introduces the needed rigour, and evaluation Ramsey talks about.

1.3.1 Method of problem solving

As presented above, the research project aims at generating methodologies to positively influence employee engagement and satisfaction through actions implemented by the workers council. Therefore, the moments of inquiry being present within this research project need to be identified. By having inquiry underpinning the research, the presented methods to solve the issue within the thesis can be seen from a scholarly perspective and taken to the practitioners' world.

During the literature research, I came up with several hypotheses I derived from concepts I found within the academic theories. Those hypotheses can be seen as simple ideas, following Ramsey (2014). To make those ideas relevant, testing is needed. A first step to involve rigour is done by taking academic concepts further and developing further hypotheses. During the actual analysis of my interview transcripts, the hypotheses are further linked and tested against the themes that were drawn from the interviews. Those meanings extracted agree or decline with the hypotheses created. This step can be seen as the first testing and evaluation to

add rigour and transform the simple idea to a scholarly concept. The second testing step was done by implementing actions derived from the hypotheses and testing them within the organisation by implementing them.

Based on the action research approach, the cycle of testing and evaluation was repeated throughout the whole research project, adding the needed focus on rigour, as suggested by Ramsey (2014).

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

Within the following subsections, I will provide a brief overview of the structure of the thesis and the chapters following this introduction into the topic.

1.4.1 Chapter 2 – Literature review

The literature review will present the current state of research related to the research project. The chapter will give a general overview of the research on co-determination in Germany. Following, I will present different theories and research projects dealing with the main topics being relevant for the project. This will include current research papers on employee representation, employee engagement, employee participation, as well as organisational behaviour and employment relationships.

Furthermore, as the study is built upon the Action Research approach, I will give a brief overview of what Action Research is and how it can be applied within a research project. Within the conclusion of the chapter, I will summarize the current research being presented within the review and draw links to other fields of academic work that will enrich the overall outcomes created by the study.

1.4.2 Chapter 3 – Methodology

Within the Methodology Chapter, I will provide the general structure of the actual research being done within the research project. This will include the overall presentation of different research paradigms as well as presenting the research methodologies being used. I will further present the approach that I chose and

explain my sampling strategies within the project and justify why I decided to follow the presented path.

Furthermore, after presenting different approaches of action research, I will give a detailed overview of the planned action research cycles within the organisation as well as discuss the parallel usage of the concept of core action research and thesis action research as presented by Zuber-Skerrit and Perry (2002).

Before concluding, I will present and justify the usage of the selected research instruments by describing how I will collect data, how this data is analysed, and which tools are used to support the analysis.

Finally, I will discuss ethical issues being related to the chosen approaches as well as present some limitations that might occur by using those instruments and methodologies.

1.4.3 Chapter 4 – Research practice and findings

Research practice and findings is the core chapter used to discuss what was revealed during the analysis from the interviews. The key themes being derived from both the observation of the issue as well as the literature reviews will be presented by having the key themes of the project in mind.

Furthermore, will the research questions, being presented within this introduction, be linked to the findings, drawn from the analysis. Each question will again be researched, based on what was found within the interviewees' responses. Concluding this chapter, I will present potential actions that were either explicitly mentioned by the interviewees' or derived from the analysis section and being related to the key themes and research questions.

1.4.4 Chapter 5 – Action Research Cycles

Chapter 5 will further present a detailed discussion of the action research cycles used within this project. The discussion will discuss each step from an action research approach and link the previous chapters and their content together under the general action research approach. Being an insider action researcher allowed

me to incorporate the flexible approach offered by action research and react in an agile way while collecting data, analysing, and planning as well as taking action within the organisation.

This chapter furthermore will give a detailed presentation of how action research was implemented within a learning set session inside the organisation to plan, create and take actions within the organisation. Concluding the chapter, I will present how actions were evaluated and adjusted, following the general action research approach.

1.4.5 Chapter 6 – Outcomes and Conclusion

After having gone through all action research cycles within the organisation and research project, this chapter will serve as a final evaluation cycle, which discusses again the fulfilment of the research objectives presented within this introduction. The chapter goes one step further than the presented analysis in chapter four and includes the observation and evaluation of actions taken within the organisation, as described in chapter 5. Generally said, the chapter describes the process of linking the qualitative analysis to the action research cycles and outcomes in order to derive solutions and approaches to fulfilling the research objective.

Beneath this final evaluation of the research objectives, I will also present the outcomes the organisation could draw from the research results as well as discuss potential benefits for both, the future practice within an organisation as well as the academic literature. This chapter closes the loop action research tries to present by linking the practitioner's world to the academic theoretical approaches. Furthermore, the limitations of the study will be presented, and implications for further research will be given.

1.4.6 Chapter 7 – Reflections from the researcher

Within the final chapter, I will present my personal development throughout the research project. I will show how my project has been influenced by action research and how the project, as well as the action research approach, altered my personal learning and helped me to develop further as a researcher.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The organisational problem being researched within this Action-Research based study relates to the bigger picture of employee engagement and commitment at the workplace. Employees find themselves in a complex world at work, made up of multiple relationships from within and outside the organisation. The experienced relationships and power distributions directly influence how employees perceive the environment they work in. The intention of this research is to find out, to which degree workers councils as part of the co-determination system in Germany can influence how employees perceive their workplace and whether initiatives of councils can increase the experienced satisfaction, which might positively influence the productivity of the organisation.

To begin the literature synthesis, I will give a brief overview of the historical context of co-determination in Germany, to build a foundation for the theoretical framework. To introduce the academic conceptual theories, I will build my research upon, I begin with reviewing relevant literature within the fields of organisational behaviour and employment relationship. The base of the underlying theory will be built upon current research within the fields of Employee Engagement, Employee Participation and Employee Representation.

To conclude the chapter, I will reflect on the presented theoretical fundamentals and derive my research questions based on the assumptions drawn from the literature.

2.2 Historical context and current structure

The co-determination system in Germany has a long history going back for almost 200 years. The system, build upon a combination and collaboration between trade unions and workers councils is based on the democratic, mutual and solidary values of guilds and unions that were promoted since the middle ages (McGaughey 2015).

During the industrial revolution, the concept known today was “born”. Academics created initiatives to establish workers’ committees in factories. Ernst Abbe, for example, introduced independent representations of workers in the Carl Zeiss

factories in Jena (Müller-Jentsch 2008). The first legal proposal for factory representation was introduced by the Frankfurt Constitution in 1849, following the German revolutions (Müller-Jentsch 2016). The proposal called for the establishment of committees at factory level but was never put into effect, due to the short lifetime of the parliament (Page 2011).

It took about 50 years until the next big step in the field of co-determination was done. The Prussian government introduced committees in coal mining organisations as a voluntary body in 1892 and made them obligatory in 1905 for organisations with more than 100 workers (Müller-Jentsch 2016), following the Bavarian model, which introduced obligatory committees in 1900 (Müller-Jentsch 2008). This movement and the establishment of the first committees within the coal mining industry not only plays an essential role within the history of co-determination in Germany but also within this research study, as the organisations being studied originates from the coal mining industry and is connected to the Ruhr area. Although the research site is located in the Saar area, coal mining and the steel industry have been the most important industrial sector within the region, quite comparable to the Ruhr area. Another link to the origins of the co-determination system within this research is the fact, that the Saar area in those days belonged to Bavaria, which also introduced obligatory committees within organisations.

During World War I, workers' committees were set up in all organisations with more than 50 employees, based on a law giving them consultation rights in social matters within the establishments (Michel 2007; Page 2011). The early version of the system that we know today in Germany was introduced in 1920, following World War I, with the Works Council Act. This act introduced the first real co-determination rights like participating in dismissal decisions and being seated in the supervisory board as a fully equal member. The later right created the need for a further law, the Supervisory Council Act, passed in 1922 (McGaughey 2015; Müller-Jentsch 2008). The introduction of the system further marks the beginning of the dualistic German system of employee's representation: co-determination in establishments and collective bargaining by trade unions. The threshold for the establishment of councils within organisations was decreased to 20 workers (Michel 2007).

During the Third Reich, the system took a step back, when Adolf Hitler became chancellor in Germany, as all forms of co-determination were eliminated, and trade unions were dissolved. After World War II, in 1946, the allied forces did re-introduce the system of co-determination as well as committees with the Allied Control Council Act No 22 and based on the Works Council Act of 1920. After the Allied occupation, the created the Act on co-determination in the mining and steel industry in 1951, followed by the Work Constitution Act in 1952, which is still the base for today's structure of co-determination in Germany. The act is based on the regulations of 1920, and the threshold of employees was lowered again to a minimum of 5 employees (McGaughey 2015; Müller-Jentsch 2016).

The act was further extended to cover the public sector in 1956 and introduced group level co-determination and the inclusion of managerial employees in 1976. In 2001 and 2004, amendments modernised the act further and included regulations and directives of the European Company of the EU (Michel 2007; Page 2011)

The unions in Germany are mostly structured among the industries they represent. The biggest include IG Metall for the metal industry, IGBCE for mining, chemistry, and energy as well as ver.di for service-related organisations and retail. All unions are further grouped and represented under the umbrella of the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB) (DGB 2017). By being a member of a trade union in Germany, a monthly fee has to be paid, which is roughly about one per cent of the gross wage of the member (IG Metall 2017; IGBCE 2012; ver.di 2017). As goods, employees receive coverage and support of the union, free law consultation as well as strike pay, just to name some of the benefits (Goerke & Pannenberg 2007). The overall union density and coverage in Germany is seen as declining by the academic world, whereas smaller and independent organisations beside trade unions are growing over the last years, leading to a dual system of formal union representation as well as union-like organisations (Addison, Schnabel & Wagner 2007; Burgess & Symon 2013). Those organisations are created based on the demand of workers. They do not feel to be represented by the big unions, often not present within their specific industry. The market is following the demand of the employees and new forms of representation are created. This movement can be drawn from current

research within the fields of organisational behaviour and employment relationships, which will be addressed in the following sections.

2.3 Organisational Behaviour

Although the studies of organisational behaviour do not directly address and focus on co-determination concepts, can the concepts being found within the studies be valuable to lay a foundation of how workers councils can act and behave in relation to the employees within the organisation.

Following Muchiri, Shahid and Ayoko (2019), leaders play an essential role in the development of a positive workplace. This observation includes that the social process of leadership is devoted to the enhancement of the employee's confidence and efficacy and communication. They suggest focussing on different actions created and introduced by managers to increase the self-efficacy of the workers. Those actions should further help them to focus on the efforts to achieve goals and to find different ways of achieving. Self-confidence, trust, and hope among the employees should be created.

In general, organisational behaviours studies look at how people interact within groups and within the organisation itself to create more efficient institutions. The central ideas are that the scientific approach can be applied to the management, an approach I am also following within this dissertation by taking different academic suggestions into the practical world at my workplace (Hunter 2018). As Hunter states, organisational behaviour studies are used to derive human resource practices, I'd like to add the concepts suggested by Ampuh et al. (2018), who showed how human capital can be optimised through positive organisational behaviour. Following their research, organisations need employees who are engaged within the organisation, who are dedicated to what they do. This engagement, following their research, is enabled if companies have a culture of positive need for organisational behaviour. This means that this behaviour is needed to maximize the human capital of the organisation.

If the human capital within an organisation, which is based on knowledge, talent, understanding and experience of the employee, is established in combination with positive organisational behaviour, Ampuh et al. (2018) found that competitive advantages within the organisation can be found. This leads to the conclusion that human capital can be able to increase the productivity of the organisation. Following their theory further, they define human capital as a combination of the character of the employee, the ability to learn, and the motivation to share information and knowledge. If those aspects work together in a positive way, employees in regard to their human capital can be optimized to increase the performance of the organisation. Taking a step back and looking from the researchers perspective at this theory by also including thoughts on workers councils, let me think that not only leaders can add to a positive organizational behaviour within the organisation but also workers councils can increase the effects organisational behaviour has on human capital and the performance of the organisation.

H1: Workers councils can create and increase positive organisational behaviour within the organisation, which will also optimise human capital.

Wienclaw (2019) takes this even a step further, by not only looking at the human capital but the different levels within an organisation, that influence the organisational behaviour experienced at the workplace. For her, not only the human capital is studied but the organisation as a whole. Following her, it should be an attempt to understand and even predict the influence of the behaviour at all levels, meaning the individual level, being comparable to the single human capital optimisation Ampuh et al. (2018) presented. She goes further by investigating the team and organisational level, meaning how teams are formed and how the organisation works, as well as how each subsystem within it works together to create the organisation. As it is the workers councils' primary interest to maintain a working and effective organisation, looking at all levels presented by Wienclaw (2019) should be an essential task for council members when performing actions

within the organisation. Organisational behaviour seen in this way tries to improve the effectiveness in the organisation in all levels, not only on the profitability side. It is further essential to have the contingency approach in mind as actions do not always have the same consequences. It depends on the situations, and different reactions can be the result.

H2: Every action taken by the council or council members will introduce reactions at all organisational levels, that should be taken into account.

2.4 Employment Relationship

The concept of employment relationship can be drawn back to the theories of Marx, who sees employment relationship as the hub of the capitalist business. Looking more into the details, employment relationship in Marx theories describe the moment when worker's labour-power is consumed by an organisation before it is being remunerated. It is finally the relationship that makes the wages, which are vital to social relations and help to reproduce the living conditions of the worker. (Dieuaide & Azaïs 2020) As Marx theories and concepts were created in the 1860s, a translation to today's concepts and terminology is needed for them to be applicable to the current workplace. Marx classifies the participants into capitalists, which can be translated into today's employer and workers, today's employees. As Marx sees the relationship as the maker of wages, one has to include the concept of co-determination within this theoretical approach of the capitalist business. Following further Dieuaide and Azaïs (2020), they also transferred the concepts of Marx into today's workplace, which suits my assumptions above. They see the meaning within the relationship as a semantic and political battle between different social groups. This battle can be interpreted in a way that not only employers and employees are involved, but also more parties. In Germany, this would include workers councils and trade unions. Looking from the inside of the organization, one can conclude that workers councils also can execute influence on the employment relationship within an organisation.

This battle and the relationship I concluded from Dieuaide and Azaïs (2020) is further presented in the research by Bray, Budd and Macneil (2020) where they state that both, workers and their representatives, as well as employees and their representatives, face pressure which threatens the co-operation relationships. This pressure and the ongoing battle lead to more self-interested relationships among the groups, making it evident that some mediation needs to be done. In my opinion, the workers council as an institution between employers and employees is best to be a mediator in this case. Following the Works Constitution Act, §74 states that workers councils should meet with employers at least once a month to discuss important topics with the goal to find solutions that will suit both sides, the employer and the employees (*Works Constitution Act* 2016).

The mediation suggested here should be used further to remove central tension within the co-operation in the organisation that is created by the duality between mutuality and self-interest. As there is no clearly accepted definition of co-operation within the academic world, I will follow Bray, Budd and Macneils (2020) definition, which, for my understanding, also seems to be the most common understanding of the term. Co-operation, in this sense, means working together to the same end. This includes all stakeholders at work, as well as their ongoing relationships. Within this sense, the workplace can be seen, based on their research, as a consultative unitarism, including formal participatory structures. Within those structures, interest-based problem-solving groups are formed, which involve workers in the decision-making and consultation process nevertheless is the final decision-making authority retained by managers (Bray, Budd & Macneil 2020). This observation corresponds to the German system of co-determination, where workers councils are involved in the decision-making process and provide consultation for both employers and employees, but the final decision-making authority is by the organisation.

Budd (2020) goes even further within the discussion of employment relationships by looking at the psychological aspects and alternative models. By researching and using alternative models, one can overcome the potential pressures related to self-interested relationships that Bray, Budd and Macneil (2020) discussed. According to

his research, the growing psychologization of the relations leads to less possibility for really understanding the relations under question. The attention is pulled away from the nature of employment relationship, and a focus is laid on the analysis of interpersonal and leadership dynamics. While earlier researchers tried to understand the formal organisational policies, Budd (2020) argues that today, with the more psychological aspect, human resource management practices are more emphasized. Therefore, he suggests considering alternative perspectives when thinking about employment relationships. Four perspectives dominate here in the academic world: neoliberal egoist, unitarist, pluralist and critical employee.

The neoliberal egoist perspective assumes that employers and employees are rational agents that pursue their self-interest in markets that approach competitive conditions, while the perspective of the critical relationships is the opposite. It looks more at conflicts of interest among unequal groups. By this thinking, the conflicts are intentionally constructed by a dominant group to maintain their superiority. The pluralist mixes the before mentioned perspectives but rejects the assumption of ideally competitive markers from the egoist perspective. Here, a mixture of shared and conflicting interests between employers and employees is assumed. The unitarism finally is more or less included within the pluralism, but it assumes that a balance of interests between the groups should be achieved. Mutuality here is the key and conflict is seen as not healthy.

With a focus on my research, I see the unitarism perspective best related to the thinking of workers councils as conflicts should be avoided, when I think about their work. This is further emphasized with the before mentioned paragraph of the Works Constitution Act that emphasizes collaboration between employer and council to create solutions best suited for both, the employees, and the organisation. Nevertheless, should all perspectives be known and kept in mind.

2.5 Employee Engagement

While thinking about the unitarism perspective and the fact, that workers councils should strive to find the best solution for the organisation as well as the employee,

keeping employees bound to the organisation seems to be necessary. By linking the concepts of employee relationships and organisational behaviour mentioned before, human capital is vital for the organisation to stay healthy. But this state can only be reached and maintained if employees are engaged within the organisation. Following Bhatt and Sharma (2019), building a strong employer brand is essential, but also one of the biggest challenges. The most important point within this challenge is to retain employees, a key aspect also when thinking about how human capital will maintain the organisation's productivity. But this retaining is only possible if the organisation provides employees with a good culture at work and an environment to let them show their best abilities. While organisational behaviour and employee relationships looked more at the interplay between different groups, my focus now turns more to the employee in general. Based on the concepts found in literature, more hypotheses will be created on how workers councils can positively influence the relations and behaviour at the workplace. Interestingly, following Bhatt and Sharma (2019), the research field within employee engagement is taken over by practitioners, academics are lacking behind, which is a strong contrast to other fields.

Employee engagement starts for them with on-boarding and might lead to higher levels of employee satisfaction. Following a survey among HR professionals, employee satisfaction and retention are the most critical issues. Employee engagement can be increased by training and career development, giving employees the opportunity to do the work they do best and by creating a more challenging work environment. Although workers councils cannot directly change the work environment, they still can influence how employees experience their work and increase engagement. By the increase of engagement, the commitment of employees to the organisation will increase correspondingly. This two-sided increase leads to overall job satisfaction and better performance of the employee. But it is not only on the employee side; the increased performance finally creates a competitive advantage for the organisation. Although employee engagement is seen as multidimensional, Bhatt and Sharma (2019) state that not all dimensions need to be engaged. The dimensions include employees being engaged physically, cognitively, and emotionally.

Thinking more about the connection between employee engagement and employee satisfaction, Dinh (2020) emphasizes that employee engagement should not be confused with concepts like employee satisfaction or commitment. For him, being satisfied does not mean being committed or engaged. As this is the complete opposite of Bhatt and Sharma's (2019) observations, I feel that first satisfaction needs to be defined, before judging about the two theoretical approaches on employee satisfaction.

Within this research project, I will follow Herzberg's theory as presented by Syptak, Marsland and Ulmer (1999) combined with the results presented by Shmailan (2016) in mind. Herzberg defines two dimensions that make up employee satisfaction: hygiene issues and motivators. Hygiene issues can dissatisfy employees if they are absent, where motivators can satisfy employees if the individuals' need is fulfilled. Motivators can be the work itself or recognition and responsibility; hygiene issues are, for example, the salary and the working conditions. Shmailan (2016) further sees a strong connection between employee satisfaction and performance. The organisation will benefit from satisfied employees, as they are more engaged and willing to perform better.

This observation by Shmailan (2016) in combination with Herzberg's definition of employee satisfaction does agree with the thoughts of Bhatt and Sharma (2019) and proves that engagement seems to have a relationship with satisfaction at work, even involving commitment and performance. Although this research disproves Dinh's (2020) thoughts, I believe that there are still valuable concepts being present within his research that can be used for this project. For him, employee engagement also is essential to increase business performance, so I would argue that the term of satisfaction is defined and used differently by Dinh (2020) than it is done within this research project. For him, employee engagement can be described by the working conditions provided to employees, as engagement occurs when employees know what to expect and feel that they play an essential role in the organisation. A positive work-life balance can also influence the engagement level at work. This direct link to work-life balance and working conditions enables workers councils to influence the engagement level at work.

H3: Workers councils can positively influence employee engagement at the workplace and therefore increase employee satisfaction and commitment by engaging at least one of the dimensions.

While looking at the research by Tong et al. (2019) further undermines my hypothesis as they also show that employee commitment and engagement are related to each other. Furthermore, do they also focus on the three dimensions being mentioned above to positively influence employee engagement. Whittington et al. (2017), as well as Samo et al. (2020), follow the majority presented here that see a link between engagement and satisfaction by add that people want to be involved into something bigger. To have them engaged, creating meaning is essential.

A different viewpoint relevant today is added by Imperatori (2017), who acknowledges the changing world related to demographics. This ongoing change will have significant effects on the workforce, as the number of workers per older citizen is expected to fall from three to five to about 1.5 by the mid of the century. This figure can be further checked by looking at the calculations of the German Statistical Department, which comes to the same result. The generational mix will change as baby-boomers will enter retirement. This generational mix will also add to the experience of employee engagement, and the differences have to be understood.

2.6 Employee Participation

Combining the so far mentioned research results, nothing within an organisation will function without employees and their involvement. For the organisation to be successful, for the workers councils to exists and for the employer to survive on the market, human capital is critical, referring to Marx, and this is made off employees. Having employees in focus, everything can be narrowed to how they participate within the organisation. Scholars within the human resources field as well as the

employee relationships field stat that empowering and engaging employees lets them increase their human capital and improve their performance at the workplace. Scholars differentiate here between formal and informal participation. Informal participation on one site depends on the eye of the beholder. It can exist, even if formal participation is absent. Research has shown that informal participation is positively associated with job satisfaction and productivity, which also influences performance. Formal participation, on the other hand, is strongly related to workers councils, as the term formal participation mainly refers to formal prearranged structures. This means that a prearranged form of participation within the organisation is used. Based on the co-determination system in Germany, the workers council within the organisation will be the structure representing the formal participation. The informal participation, without formal structures, is many seen as a product of management style or a specific set of behaviours within the organisation. Although informal participation can exist without formal participation, both types depend on each other to function properly. With formal participation in place, workers councils can overview and influence actions and behaviours within the organisation, which might alter the informal participation, but, if taken to the extreme, the participation types can even undermine each other's effectiveness. Although I agree with Litwin and Eaton's (2018) observations here related to formal and informal participation, I'd like to challenge the way performance is measured within their research study. Following their methodology, they measure operational performance by how long a patient sits in the waiting room.

"We can construct this from information reported by the patient – the number of minutes past one's scheduled appointment time that a patient must wait – on a post-visit patient satisfaction survey." (Litwin & Eaton 2018)

With a response rate of 35% for the post-visit patient survey and the fact, that time is experienced subjective, creates a weak variable for measuring performance in my mind. People might feel that they waited for more or less than they actually did, especially if they don't know beforehand, to pay attention to the waiting time. Furthermore, the waiting time might even depend on what is performed during the appointment and what happens. If I wait for treatment and some unforeseen

accident comes into the practice, the whole schedule of the day will be scrambled. As the performance aspect within their research is a relatively weak point, in my opinion, I will exclude the relations to performance found during their analysis, when thinking about my research project in relation to their results. Especially the informal participation type is further confirmed, for example, by Wohlgemuth et al. (2019), showing that these informal dimensions, as well as trust, are relevant a trigger of employee participation. Employees need the trust and also the behaviour within the organisation to be engaged in participation.

Within the workplace, four regimes regarding co-determination can be identified, where I would link 2 to the institutions present in the German system: workplace regimes with bargaining and without participation correspond to the German trade unions, while participation without bargaining refers to the German workers councils. The councils take a special role here, as they find themselves within a triangle of relations and powers. Councils have to position themselves between the representation of their employees, the loyalty towards the employer as well as the solidarity towards the corresponding trade union (Ziltener & Gabathuler 2019). This triangle will be used during the later learning set work to help the council members to identify where they are at the moment. Further, can this triangle be used as a tool to examine that a vital equilibrium between the three sides is maintained in the future.

Looking at the employee side of the triangle, workers councils are there to care about the employee, to give them a voice within the organisation and to resolve conflicts. Employee voice, in this sense, is connected to fairness at the workplace, especially on participation in decision-making (Van Gramberg et al. 2020). This participating is ensured via workers councils, which indirectly transport the voice of their employees into the decision-making process. The participation can be made even more direct by addressing and talking to the employees before important decisions are made. Providing employees with this voicing mechanism has further the ability to reduce intentions to quit, related to potential conflicts (Tran & Pham 2019; Van Gramberg et al. 2020).

H4: Workers councils can influence how employees participate within the organisation and reduce potential intentions to quit by representing their voice and communicating directly.

A potential tool for the workers council to collaborate and interact with the employees can be an enterprise social media network, which is also available within my organisation. Through the network, employees are encouraged to exchange information with each other and to engage with their colleagues. The network should be seen as a mean to share information and express use, which might introduce a potential to satisfy employee interests. Many academic studies further show that social media use at work has a positive impact on the job performance of employees. If used to the right moment, social networks can help employees to become more productive and professional (Diamond & Freeman 2001; Lu & Pan 2019). Furthermore, does the use of social networks positively influence younger generations, who enter the workplace, as shown earlier by Imperatori (2017).

H5: The use of social media and new forms of communication can further enhance the relationship of workers councils with their employees and positively influence the experience of employees at work resulting in increased productivity.

2.7 Employee Representation

Following the literature in the German co-determination field, a decline of unionisation can be felt across the country as well as an increase of alternative forms of representation (Addison et al. 2013; Addison, Schnabel & Wagner 2007; Addison & Teixeira 2019; Burgess & Symon 2013) Taras (2002) within this field shows, that different circumstances define if employees are attracted to unions or not. Four different categories affect workers in this sense. First, employers are transforming at the moment. There is a decline in manufacturing going on, which is still the backbone of unionism in Germany. With this decline comes an increase in the

service sector, which is not much represented by unions, mostly by ver.di. Second, are individual employees changing. As already mentioned, are organisations facing a demographic change, which introduces needed thoughts on psychographic considerations, to face all different generational aspects within the organisation. The demographic change and the generational transformation introduce a weakening of attachment to individual employers without a corresponding lessening of commitment to the job. Employees are not bound to an employer anymore; they can be committed to their job, no matter where they do this job (Taras 2002). For me, this further introduces a potential loss of unionisation, as unions are often related to the employer. If an employee will not benefit from the union, based on a new employer, why should the employee still pay? The third aspect into consideration is the employment itself, as organisations have pushed the measurement of productivity, work has intensified. Furthermore, long term effect like burn out are more present these days. The last aspect looks finally at public policies and the labour market. An employment-based safety net can affect workers, but should not be considered within this research project, as this is more or less present from the governmental side in Germany. More relevant are budget cutbacks, which might influence the effectiveness of employees.

While Taras (2002) includes trade unions into the term of employee representation and calls for alternatives, I'd like to exclude them, as the German system of real workplace representation focuses mainly on workers councils. In addition, there are alternatives to trade unions in Germany, like working chambers, which offer almost the same services. Furthermore, in the state the research is conducted in, all employees must pay working chamber fees, which leads to some employees paying double. Nevertheless, do workers develop an attachment to the status quo within an organisation, which is also proved by Diamond and Freeman (2001) and can be further found within my organisation, where many employees hold a long time permanent job and are members of the present unions. Looking further at Taras (2002) the idea of associate memberships, meaning to benefit from unions but not being a member, is not thinkable in Germany, as the Works Constitution Act defines who might benefit from unions.

Following the academic literature related to the German system, Hauser-Ditz, Hertwig and Pries (2013) state that only 10% of private companies have existing working councils in Germany. This figure is also presented by Jirjahn and Smith (2018), Skorupinska (2018) and Addison, Schnabel and Wagner (2007) while Forth, Bryson and George (2017) give 25% of workers councils in Germany. Addison and Teixeira (2019) even state that in about 47% of German organisations have workers councils, which is based on the author's calculations based on the European Company Survey. Looking closer at the figures let me challenge the results found by the studies giving only 10% of councils in Germany. Looking at the data section of the studies, each of them used the IAB panel survey data to determine how many councils exist in German organisations. The survey is conducted in 16.000 organisations randomly chosen in Germany. Following the statistical department in Germany, there are two million organisations in Germany that might fall into the size of the ones chosen for the IAB survey. Having those figures shows that 0.8% of the German organisations are surveyed. Also, the data, the research articles refers too, might be biased in some way; there are still theoretical concepts that can be applied to my research project and help me solve the organisational issue.

Following van den Berg, van Witteloostuijn and Van der Brempt (2017), workers councils are more important in Germany than unions and promote employee commitment and effort in Germany. Although there are several studies that focus on German works councils, almost all of them are based quantitative. Given the potential bias in the used data, as stated above, leads to not generally applicable results, but more suggestions and approached that have to be tested further within organisations in a qualitative way. Another problem within the quantitative research is present when looking at van den Berg, van Witteloostuijn and Van der Brempt (2017) as they present that trade unions play no part in the establishments. By using qualitative approaches, I as a researcher will get a more in-depth insight into the organisation in order to find out from an insider perspective how the relations in the German co-determination system are perceived – especially as trade unions are allowed to send representatives into the organisations.

H6: Workers councils, as well as trade unions, play a role within the organisation as there might even exist role dualities being present.

Looking and linking employee representation to the impact on the organisation's performance, most research is done in the Anglo-Saxon context, which cannot easily be transferred to Germany, demanding for further explicit research in the German context. Another not clearly defined point within literature is the question whether workers councils might have an effect on profitability within the organisation. Van den Berg, van Witteloostuijn and Van der Brempt (2017) give that an increase in productivity might lead to higher profit, based on the actions of the council. Increased wages, on the other hand, will lower the profit again, leading to an unclear or neutral effect on the profitability whereas Jirjahn and Smith (2018) show that workers councils increase the overall productivity, which leads to an increase in profitability. Looking at the efficiency within workplaces, Hasle, Seim and Refslund (2019) found that a high degree of involvement is found to be more efficient related to improving the work environment.

The form of workplace representation found in Germany is referred to being a single channel council, as it only consists of workers' representatives (Commission 2006). Although no representative of the employer is part of the council, like done in many other European states, council members sit in supervisory boards in Germany. Rosenbohm and Haipeter (2019) argue that this fact does not ensure that employee representatives can influence strategic decisions. This leads me to theorize that also the formal existence of councils ensures not that employees are well represented.

Looking again at Jirjahn and Smith (2018) shows that the German system is quite popular, the US, for example, is looking for the idea of German-Style councils. Based on their research, they support the general observation that employee representation can help to improve the firm's employee policies. From this improvement, benefits within the workforce as well as for the employer can be found. To those benefits belong reduced turnovers, increased employee motivation

and cooperativeness. Jirjahn and Smith show that employees who are not satisfied with the firm's policies may exist instead of exercising voice (Addison & Teixeira 2019; Jirjahn & Smith 2018). This means for my project that learning from the voice enables employers to learn from employees' dissatisfaction and exit. Therefore, workers councils can act as mediators and further negotiate between the organisation and the employee. It is more about this mediating and exercising voice, as many working conditions are more or less public goods, and the free-rider problem occurs. This is especially the case in Germany, where working conditions are negotiated by trade unions for their members but given to all employees by the employer through bargaining agreements (Jirjahn 2013; Pyhel 2004). Furthermore, do some employees withhold some forms of effort and cooperation as most promises to employees are not explicitly spelt in contract, something councils will look after and take care off. Following their research, works councils lead to increased welfare, but, based on the theoretical viewpoint presented, empirical studies are needed.

H7: Workers councils should care for the employees within the organisation. Through taking care, employees are given voice and satisfaction can be raised, leading to increased performance, and reduced turnover rates.

2.8 Reflections on the theoretical base

Although not explicitly stated within the literature base, going through the topics presented above shows, that there is some connection present among the topics. While thinking about organisational behaviour literature shows links to employee relationships, which finally also includes topics of human resource management, employee engagement or participation. Especially the field of employee representation shows direct links to all other topics, as this area is quite broad and will finally include different concepts from more expansive academic fields.

The review of existing relevant literature related to my workplace-based issue helped me to define the following hypotheses to be tested during my research project:

H1: Workers councils can create and increase positive organisational behaviour within the organisation, which will also optimise human capital.

H2: Every action taken by the council or council members will introduce reactions at all organisational levels, that should be taken into account.

H3: Workers councils can positively influence employee engagement at the workplace and therefore increase employee satisfaction and commitment by engaging at least one of the dimensions.

H4: Workers councils can influence how employees participate within the organisation and reduce potential intentions to quit by representing their voice and communicating directly.

H5: The use of social media and new forms of communication can further enhance the relationship of workers councils with their employees and positively influence the experience of employees at work resulting in increased productivity.

H6: Workers councils, as well as trade unions, play a role within the organisation as there might even exist role dualities being present.

H7: Workers councils should care for the employees within the organisation. Through taking care, employees are given voice and satisfaction can be raised, leading to increased performance, and reduced turnover rates.

2.9 Conclusion

Looking at the broad academic field, studies are dominated by union-related ones, as unions predominate in the Anglo-American and British context. The topic of non-union employee representation is more or less unexplored in the employee satisfaction literature, and the majority of early union-related studies find a negative

correlation between job satisfaction and unionization, pointing to ineffectiveness of unions. Newer studies, on the other hand, show a neutral to positive association between unions and employee satisfaction. Thinking about this observation lets me transfer the field to my research issue related to works councils. As union-related tasks are hard to influence actions within the organisation, workers councils should be in the focus of needed research (Rafael et al. 2019). Following the new research on non-union employee representation in the employee satisfaction literature, makes it evident, that workers councils related research is needed and will add to the academic body.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Within this chapter, I will present different research paradigms and frameworks and link my philosophies as well as this study to the presented approaches. Next, I will discuss the research approach being used in this study and present an overview of the sampling strategies being relevant here. Following this general insight into the research process, I will further define and present the action research approach being key for this study. Within this chapter, I will further present how action research is used within the project and describe the planned and used action research cycles. This chapter will be concluded by presenting the research instruments used to collect and analyse the data. A subsection will further present the software and tools used to support the data collection and analysis section.

3.1 Research paradigms and frameworks

To be able to define and decide upon the different research approaches, it is first necessary to define the term paradigm and to elaborate on the different paradigms, to choose among them and find a suitable approach for the research plan. Following Guba and Lincoln (1994), a paradigm can be seen as a fundamental belief or as to how the world is viewed from, in this case, the researcher. This view defines the nature of the world, the individual's places, and the different relationships within this world. Having this in mind, it is evident that the individual's paradigm influences the way research is interpreted and that the paradigm used within a research project will influence the results of the research.

Perry, Riege and Brown (1999) even push this further and link the paradigmatic system, which they present as an overall conceptional framework, with philosophical assumptions. Within this section, I will briefly present the, according to Perry, Riege and Brown (1999), four most used and found paradigms: positivism, critical theory, constructivism and realism. I will position myself within those paradigms and furthermore position the described research issues within the paradigms. This enables me to further define the used research approach within this research project. Important within the paradigm discussion is, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), their ontological, epistemological and methodological position.

After briefly summarising the different paradigms, I will present a table, which gives a general overview of the paradigms.

Positivism:

The positivist approach believes that the world is measurable, and everything can be known, understood and categorised (Guba & Lincoln 1994). The research in this paradigm is often coined by analysis of relationships between variables. The data collection, based on the already mentioned analysis method, is more related to the quantitative approaches, including surveys. The researcher, in general, is “outside” of the setting, not intervening and not interacting with the setting and participants, seeking for generalisation (Perry, Riege & Brown 1999). The world is seen as through a one-way mirror, and replicable findings are “true” (Guba & Lincoln 1994). From a social science perspective, this view seems to be inappropriate then researching phenomenon and experiences as researchers separate themselves from the research, while other paradigms believe that it is essential to be part of the researched phenomenon in order to understand the relationships better (Perry, Riege & Brown 1999).

Critical theory:

This paradigm assumes that reality is not created in the very moment but was shaped in the past, over time. History influenced what is believed now and what is now taken as real. The researcher and the research object are linked together, leading to an influence of the researchers beliefs and values. The research form behind this believe requires a dialectical dialogue between researcher and participant in order to transform biases into valuable knowledge (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

Constructivism:

A constructivist believes in truth being a construction that is related to the beliefs held in a particular context. There are multiple realities present, which depend on and are constructed by the rational thoughts of individuals. Constructivists see that knowledge is something that goes beyond “findings”. Within an interview setting,

for example, knowledge depends on the interaction between the researcher and the participant. The way questions are asked construct the current reality and truth (Perry, Riege & Brown 1999). Constructions are not ultimately true or false but depending on the setting. They can be altered as well as the associated realities. During the research, based on the mentioned link between researcher and participant, knowledge and findings are created, not discovered. As the constructions can only be altered through the interaction between participant and researcher, combining different constructions can construct further knowledge and findings, valuable to the outcomes of the researcher's project (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

Realism/Postpositivism:

Realism or also Postpositivism is stepping away from positivism as it claims that reality exists, but imperfectly and commonly shared among individuals. There is a distinction between reality and different perceptions. Instead of believing in multiple different realities, realism only acknowledges one reality and sees the need to use several perceptions of that reality to generate knowledge and an understanding of the world (Perry, Riege and Brown; 1999). The approach settles on the quantitative approach used by positivists but adds further qualitative aspects to understand individual perceptions experienced during the research (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

Paradigm	Ontology how is reality created?	Epistemology how is knowledge created?	Methodology
Positivism	Reality is real and unique; no perceptions are present, only one truth and reality	Findings are true	Quantitative, surveys, verification of hypotheses
Critical Theory	Reality is shaped by historical values and over time	Value-dependent knowledge and findings. The truth of knowledge is influenced by past values	Qualitative, dialogues. The researcher transforms the world of participants by changing values.
Constructivism	Multiple realities exist that are constructed out of the moment	Findings are created through interaction and believe of the researcher	The researcher is also a participant and therefore “creates” results, qualitative, dialogue
Realism/Postpositivism	Reality is real and unique, but different perceptions exist	Findings and knowledge are true, depending on the perceptions and community	Quantitative with qualitative links, falsification of hypotheses, triangulation

Table 1 - Adapted from Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Perry, Riege and Brown (1999)

Although the postpositivist approach is mentioned by Guba and Lincoln (1994) to be suited for grounded theory, this research project will be based on the constructivist approach. As there will be interviews with different participants, I believe that many truth and realities will be explored here. Every participant having experienced the issue will have different assumptions and explanations within this context. Those beliefs will construct their truth. It will be essential to understanding those truths or construct them with the participants in order to be able to create further approaches for action research in the later research.

Every participant has a different background and different experiences related to the organisation, its culture, and the issue in general. Although one could argue that critical theory could be applicable based on those historical experiences, I believe that the interviews and discussions about a topic long being “accepted”, will create further truths, assumptions, and opinions. I do not see an existing reality being present here, but more a construction site that will create multiple different realities that need to be linked during the research to be able to be discussed within the action research frame settings. With this paradigm in mind, the general research approach, naming the qualitative research approach, including interviews, is set for the context of this research.

3.2 Research methodologies

3.2.1 Research frame

The hypotheses, defined in chapter 2, create the variables and themes the research, as well as the methodology, is based on.

H1: Workers councils can create and increase positive organisational behaviour within the organisation, which will also optimise human capital.

H2: Every action taken by the council or council members will introduce reactions at all organisational levels, that should be taken into account.

H3: Workers councils can positively influence employee engagement at the workplace and therefore increase employee satisfaction and commitment by engaging at least one of the dimensions.

H4: Workers councils can influence how employees participate within the organisation and reduce potential intentions to quit by representing their voice and communicating directly.

H5: The use of social media and new forms of communication can further enhance the relationship of workers councils with their employees and positively influence the experience of employees at work resulting in increased productivity.

H6: Workers councils, as well as trade unions, play a role within the organisation as there might even exist role dualities being present.

H7: Workers councils should care for the employees within the organisation. Through taking care, employees are given voice and satisfaction can be raised, leading to increased performance, and reduced turnover rates.

Looking at the hypotheses, my interviews will be mainly informed by the following terms:

- Employee satisfaction and commitment
- Communication and representing voice of the employees
- Role duality between institutions within the organisation
- Taking care
- Positive influence on employee engagement and organisational behaviour

The interview questions within the interview guide will be built around those terms to engage in discussion with my participants in order to find out their narrative on the issue. Furthermore, will these terms be used as a starting point for the coding process during the initial analysis and during the presentation of the analysis within the first learning set meetings. The interviews will, therefore focus on the communication of workers councils within the organization and how employees experience the councils in general as well as different aspects of their work. The following questions taken from the interview guide are directly influenced by the

themes identified from my hypotheses. The complete interview guide is given in Appendix F.

Q1: “How do you see the workers council within this organization?”

Q2: “Are you satisfied with the amount of communication before, during and after negotiations?”

Q3: “Are you satisfied with your work in general?”

Q4: “Are you satisfied with the work of our workers council?”

Q5: “Could the council increase your overall satisfaction at work?”

Q6: “Should the council be more present within the organization?”

Q7: “Do you think the workers council is related to the outcomes of the negotiations?”

Q8: “According to your beliefs, is it the workers council or the trade union that fights for the people in the negotiations?”

Looking again at the hypotheses and the derived questions, the following table shows an estimation on which hypotheses might be answered and linked to which question:

Hypothesis	Questions
H1	Q1, Q3, Q4, Q5
H2	Q1, Q4
H3	Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6
H4	Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6
H5	Q2, Q6
H6	Q7, Q8
H7	Q4, Q6

3.2.2 Research approach

The nature of my research project deals with the behaviour of the workers councils within my organisation and how the council can positively influence the organisational culture. Whereas culture in this sense is seen as a mixture of different organisational terms including organisational behaviour, employee engagement,

employee satisfaction and employee commitment. Generalising, this leads to the issue of how workers councils can positively influence the human capital of an organisation to increase the performance and positively alter the profitability. Based on the nature of this organisational issue, I see a qualitative research project best suited to really get the understanding of the processes being carried on within the organisation.

As there are different approaches available within the qualitative world and different authors differ in their listing of possible approaches, I will follow Creswell's (2013) five approaches and decide based on his comparison and overview of the different approaches. Although other authors mention almost the same approaches (compare, i.e. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011c), who avoid the Phenomenological approach but add Action Research, Feminist Research and Critical Research), I feel that Creswell mentions and describes the most commonly used approaches as those approaches seem to be shared among different authors and publications. The approaches presented by Creswell are also presented and described among general literature related to qualitative approaches.

Following the comparison Creswell provides, both Narrative Research, as well as Ethnography, can be excluded here, as the topic of this research thesis is not related to one single individual, nor a culture-sharing group. A Narrative Research approach focuses on telling a story, a narration of one individual. As a larger group of people experiences the issue being researched, having a narrative approach, focussing on one single person will introduce further limitations to the research and therefore seems to be inappropriate. Ethnography furthermore is more directed to researching the cultural experiences within a group and how they experience their cultural concepts. The main topic of co-determination, in combination with workers councils work, falls out of the common understanding of what can be experienced as a cultural aspect.

I am looking here in the direction of a Grounded Theory approach, developing a theory from data collected in the field and further work on this theory by applying

techniques coming from the action research approach. Nevertheless, I will also include different characteristics of the phenomenological approach, as the population in my research all share the experience of the same phenomenon and it is crucial to gain the understanding how and why different individuals experienced the phenomenon differently. Therefore, there will be a mixture of concepts related to both grounded theory and phenomenological research approaches.

I feel that the approaches are interconnected, and they share a common ground, as all of them deal with experiencing an issue. It is mainly about the researcher and what needs to be found and constructed, that will determine the chosen approach. Although not chosen, a Narrative approach is somehow present as the interviewee is telling a narration, their story of individual experiences. The phenomenological approach, as said above, adds that every participant shares one phenomenon and has experienced this.

Furthermore, coming back to the ethnographic approach, although there is no direct cultural aspect to research, it is nevertheless the organisational culture that might have influenced the individuals' experiences. Culture, although not directly researched in this context, always influences the experiences and behaviour of all individuals.

Based on this observation, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011b) help me in getting the reasoning for the chosen mixture of research approaches. Following them, most of those approaches are used as methods in parallel, making a broad mixture of those approaches and methods possible. Looking further at action research theory, methods are further mixed during the different cycles within an action research project, to create potential solutions for a problem, that can be tested during the action cycles and reflected on in later steps. (Greenwood & Levin 2007)

The primary approach chosen will nevertheless share the most characteristics with the research itself. Therefore, I will stick to the Phenomenological approach for this research project and develop a theoretical framework related to workers council work within the specific context of my organisation. This approach helps to create potentially actionable suggestions that can be applied and tested in other settings

by further research as well as be generalised during a bigger, possibly mixed research project. Nevertheless, does this approach limit the research result to the specific context within my organisation and mainly provides suggestions, ideas, and stimuli to apply the findings in other organisations.

Where the Phenomenological approach deals with a specific phenomenon in general (Creswell 2013), the Grounded Theory approach should not mainly create a general theory but more such theories that are related to specific aspects of a social phenomenon instead of big ideas dealing with abstract aspects (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2011b).

Following their definition further, I see also a link between grounded theory and action research approaches, making it even more suitable for this specific research project. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011b) describe that grounded theory is based on a constant overlap and interplay between data collection and data analysis. The theory created from this approach should emerge as a process. Creswell furthermore links the research practice of the grounded theory not only to process but directly to actions. By repeating the analysis and defining macro and micro conditions influencing the phenomenon that form directions between each other, I see a direct link to action research cycles, that are repeated and reflected on.

The grounded theory approach for me is some form of an action research cycle and the outcome, following Creswell, may be tested for verification, in this work by action research methods (Creswell 2013).

This research project will thus, based on the elaborated theoretical approaches, following a constructionist framework using methodologies and approaches derived from grounded theory research, including phenomenological assumptions and aspects. Based on the underlying Action Research approach of this research, no clear concrete qualitative research approach will be chosen, but different concepts will be combined to support the research process.

The research instruments, as also described in more detail in a later section, will follow the grounded theory approach and consist of interviews and observations

which are based on the researchers own experiences. Within the action research section, the usage and application of learning sets will be further discussed.

3.2.3 Sampling strategy

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2017) defines sampling as „the act, process, or technique of selecting a representative part of a population to determine the parameters or characteristics of the whole population.“. Thompson (1999) takes this definition and refines the contents by stating that research focuses on a defined group of people. A sample in research represents a part of the total population related to the research issue. Having this in mind, sampling means to study a proportion of the population, instead of studying the whole one. Depending on the sampling process, the researcher is, by this technique, able to generalise the outcomes of the research project.

Within the quantitative theories, probability sampling is the most common approach being used. This approach claims that the researcher has access to all members of the total population and that every member has an equal chance of being selected. An alternative to probability sampling within quantitative approaches is random sampling, where the researcher does not select percentages from the chosen population but uses a random choice approach to select participants and the final sample (Thompson 1999). Although the quantitative approaches follow the definition presented above, researchers agree, that this definition differs from the underlying understanding of qualitative researchers and their approach to sampling and research (Gentles et al. 2015; Marshall 1996; Thompson 1999).

This clear statement is based on the nature of qualitative approaches. A qualitative research project is not concerned with generalising from a sample to the whole population. Instead, the goal is to inform and create an understanding of concepts that contribute to the issue being researched. Theoretical understanding is more relevant to qualitative research than statistical inference (Thompson 1999). When sampling within qualitative research projects, the researcher intends to identify specific groups of people that seem to be relevant to the phenomenon being

studied. Marshall (1996) supports Thompson's observations by stating that random sampling is inappropriate for qualitative studies as this is more used to generalise results and not to develop an understanding of an issue. Furthermore, using smaller samples, as it is common within the qualitative approaches, sampling errors and biases are inevitable when using random sampling.

Within the qualitative field, Marshall (1996) mentions three different main approaches for sampling. By using convenience sampling, the researcher "takes what is there". Available resources are used with no particular criteria applied. The judgement sampling (also purposeful sampling) is the most common technique used in the qualitative world. By using this technique, the researcher selects the most productive participants to answer the research question. Adjustments at a later stage are possible here, based on the outcomes of the research. Also, Coyne (1997) mentions purposeful sampling as being the most common within the qualitative domain. For him, the sampling process here is shaped by both the researcher and the project in general. The technique selects people according to the aim of the research, meaning the samples are chosen based on the purpose they should follow. Both authors (Coyne 1997; Marshall 1996) also present theoretical sampling as a basic sampling technique within the grounded theory approach in the qualitative domain. The base of this technique is to build theories on the data collected and resample again for further data collection. Nevertheless, the initial sampling stage is still based on purposeful sampling. Also, Glaser (1978) defined theoretical sampling as a base of grounded theory; there seems to be a different understanding among other researchers about the sampling techniques. Many do not see theoretical sampling as a specific individual technique but related to and being a variation within the domain of purposeful sampling (Corbin & Strauss 2008; Morse 1991; Patton 2002; Sandelowski, Holditch-Davis & Harris 1992).

When starting to implement a sampling strategy practically, I follow Emmel's (2013) more general approach of considering the theories of different sampling techniques and basing the decisions on available resources as well as the purpose of the research. Looking at a more detailed approach, Daniel (2012a) suggests starting with deciding between a census and sampling before choosing a nonprobability or

probability approach. Within those approaches, it is up to the researcher to further choose the sampling type and finally determining the sample size.

Looking in particular at my research project, based on the qualitative nature, sampling seems to be appropriate. Following Thompson (1999), Gentles et al. (2015) as well as Marshall (1996), qualitative approaches use a small sample size, therefore, taking a census will not be a right decision here. Following further the qualitative nature, a nonprobability sample design will be the base of the sampling within this research, because, as already mentioned, the sample should support the research project and help understand the phenomenon identified (Daniel 2012a). Daniel further defines four major sampling strategies that mostly relate to what other authors presented. Especially Marshall's (1996) three different approaches can be linked to what Daniel (2012b) suggests. The first suggested approach is availability sampling, being related to Marshall's convenience sampling. What is available will be sampled. The second approach, being purposive sampling, is the most common approach used in the qualitative world. The other presented approaches, quota sampling and respondent-assisted sampling seem to be more a subcategory of purposive sampling.

Having sampling techniques differ more or less, depending on the cited author, I will follow Coyne's (1997) thoughts for sampling in this research project. Following him, all sampling done within the qualitative domain is more or less purposeful. Coyne follows Patton in the view that as long as qualitative research is involved, sampling is done purposefully. As qualitative research deals with understanding a phenomenon, it seems essential to purposeful sample in order to be able to gain understanding. Furthermore, following Coyne here, can theoretical sampling also be seen as a form of purposeful sampling, why I will not divide this further in this research project. Although Glaser (1978) explicitly demands a theoretical sampling approach for grounded theory, I will use the simplified purposeful approach within this research project (Creswell 2013; Daniel 2012b; Locke 2008). Based on the standard figures available in the literature for grounded theory, the sample size will be between ten and 30 participants (Creswell 2013; Daniel 2012b). With the ongoing sampling process being present in grounded theory studies in mind (Locke 2008), I

will focus on an initial sample size of ten participants that can be extended based on the outcomes and further research cycles.

Looking at the organisation in focus, sampling also seems preferable to taking a census or the whole population. Although the target population is about 100 employees, following qualitative suggestions, having a small sample size should be sufficient to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. As the researcher knows the individuals that are forming the total population, it is feasible to select those participants in the initial sampling process, that might add best to the general phenomenon. Furthermore, based on this mentioned knowledge, it is also possible for the researcher to select few participants that might provide different views on the phenomenon, supporting the decision to use a purposeful sampling approach within this research project.

The purposeful sampling, as chosen for this research, will be based on all employees working at the research site as the target population. Based on this, the target population within this research is formed by 160 employees. Within this target population, based on the internal organisation, three groups of employees can be further identified. Those groups consist of 80 employees working as a consultant, 60 employees working as technicians and engineers and 20 employees doing administrative work. Based on the relevance of working hours and overtime related to this research as well as workers council's work, the group of consultants will be the most important within this research. The administrative group can be neglected, based on the small number of overall employees and the usual regular working days. The experienced phenomenon related to the research questions will be highest within the consulting group, based on a high load of working hours and much working travel required. Following will be the technical group, also dealing with a high workload but who might have experienced the phenomenon less directly than the consulting colleagues. Therefore, the primary focus will be on the consulting colleagues, a weight of two thirds will be on the side of this group. Thus said, the sample population will be based on 140 employees, including all consulting and technical employees. All employees from this sample group will receive an invitation

to participate in the study. From the responses, a random sample of seven consultants and three engineers will be selected.

3.3 Action research

3.3.1 Definition

Following the Sage Dictionary of Qualitative Management Research(Harris 2008), Action research is defined “as an informed investigation into a real management issue in an organisation by a participating researcher, resulting in an actionable solution to the issue.” Although this definition is relatively short, it includes the main concepts of action research. The history of action research goes back to the 1940s when Kurt Lewin is argued to be the first who coined the term action research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2011a; Fernie & Smith 2010). During those days, Lewin experimented within industry-related environments and did include employee groups within his research. Following his explanation, action research helps in developing powers of “reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on private troubles”. He further defined: “No action without research; no research without action” (Adelman 1993; Bradbury et al. 2008). Those short excerpts nevertheless underline the above-given definition of action research by showing that real-world issues are researched by a group of people leading to a real solution that can be executed. Coming back to the Sage Dictionary, another point is essential. Utilising both theory and action differentiates this from business consultancy. The action research and the researcher base their findings and solutions not only on practical discussions but also on theoretical research and findings (Harris 2008).

Since the first implementation in the 1940s, action research has been interpreted in various ways, by different groups in multiple research domains (Fernie & Smith 2010). Based on this development, there exist multiple different approaches within the action research world, that can all be summarized with this term.

Using further the general approach and taking the definition of Lewin as a base, the general action research process as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2014) is

related to three different perspectives (first-, second-, and third-person) as research, in this case, is seen as something influential for myself as the researcher, the group I am working with during the research project and the others that might benefit from the research. Action research, following the central terms within the definition above, is split into different cycles. Each cycle is based on four different basic steps:

1. Constructing
2. Planning action
3. Taking action
4. Evaluating action

The constructing step is the essential step in which the issue is identified and constructed. The main context and framework are set here. Within the following planning step, theories are analysed, and actions are planned before, as, in step three, the actions are implemented. In the last step, the outcomes of the action implementation are evaluated. Based on this evaluation, the cycle continues, and another constructing step is started (Herr & Anderson 2005b).

3.3.2 Different approaches to action research

As already mentioned within the definition, action research can be seen as a broad term to summarise the different approaches that have been formed over the years. The most common approaches to action research in my point of view are participatory action research, action science and action learning (Herr & Anderson 2005a).

Action learning within the approaches can be seen as a combination of self-development and change in action. Within the action learning domain, the participatory concept of the researcher being inside the research seems to be most emphasized as it is also the researcher who develops during the research. Revans, as one of the creators of action learning, emphasizes that action and learning are tightly bound to each other, and one cannot exist without the other. The general action research approach being presented above is in this approach mirrored to the learning while implementing action during the reflection stage, the researcher

learns about the action and its relation to the outcomes and develops further (Pedler & Burgoyne 2008).

The participatory action research approach bases the approach on whole communities and is strongly related to the power distributions and issues related to power within those groups. Social transformation is here in focus that is based on critical knowledge (Herr & Anderson 2005c; Swantz 2008).

Action science is based on human meaning-making, which is linked to theories that create the social world. Argyris (1980) used the term to describe research that can explain a phenomenon and still informs practice (Friedman & Rogers 2008). Argyris' usage of Lewin's action research also highlights the strong connection of action research to the constructionist framework. Following Gergen and Gergen (2008), there is an apparent link between constructionist theory and action research. The constructionist approach, as already presented within the paradigms section, sees the world and truth as being constructed from assumptions, beliefs and the moment. The attention within this framework is shifted from the individual to relationships, as already presented within the interview discussion: interviewer and interviewee create or construct knowledge due to their interaction and relationship. Linking this to action research and general scientific research, it is not possible to remain distanced from ideology and politics as all research is a contribution and interpretation of different domains and meanings. The researcher is positioned within the project and therefore adds to the construction of knowledge within the research project.

3.3.3 Action research within this project

Although I see all of the presented approaches within the action research domain as interconnected, action learning also includes elements of action science, so does participatory action learning, the project will be mainly based on action science and the general definition of action research. Action science as a refined approach is chosen because of the nature of the research project, which makes use of human meaning-making about an identified issue. Thinking further about the general action research approaches, I as a researcher am acting as an inside action research

researcher. Based on Coghlan and Shani (2011), I am a full member of the organisation being researched and seek to introduce change. Furthermore, experiences of myself underpin the action research project conducted here, as given by Wicks, Reason and Bradbury (2008).

During the action research approach in this project, I will use learning sets to discuss and reflect on actions, action plans and actionable knowledge. Learning sets are groups of individual people from within the organisation chosen to participate in the research process. The members of the learning sets within my research project will be taken from the workers council, as the outcomes of the interview analysis will form the basic discussion topics on which action steps shall be created with them. The set will further discuss findings coming from reflections after taking action. Within those learning sets, the members will discuss the findings related to the interview analysis and propose different steps to take actions. In addition, further theoretical aspects and concepts will be taken into account in order to address what was mentioned in the interviews. The learning set will create actionable steps and evaluate actions that can be introduced by the set members themselves without the need of further higher management involvement. This will lead to immediate action and directly measurable change. In Chapter 5, the learning set work, including the planned actionable steps, will be further elaborated.

Reflecting on this description, the core action research will take place during the work with the workers council as a learning set. The data collected during the interviews will, in this form, help to demonstrate how employees might engage if workers councils introduce actions that have been discussed and created during the learning set meetings. Following Ramsey (2014), an idea, in general, is not scholarly, as long as the engagement with an idea is not embedded within robust, intentional and evaluative inquiry. The inquiry Ramsey (2014) is presenting reflects in some way the action research cycle. First, the idea is researched; one engages in learning about the issue, the idea in focus. This learning process is followed by planning and taking actions, as the learning only gives an insight that needs testing and refining. Therefore, the theoretical concepts are taken to the practical side and tested via

implementing actions. The results of the actions taken have to be validated and reflected on. This concept will be applied to the core action research cycle as well as the over spanning cycle that represents the thesis, as presented in the following section.

3.3.4 Action research cycles

Before describing the different cycles present within this research project, I will introduce Coghlan and Brannick's (2014) meta-learning. Following them, there are two parallel action learning cycles present within each action research project. The first cycle is the already mentioned four-step cycle, as it was defined above, also called the core cycle (Zuber-Skerrit & Perry 2002). The second cycle can be seen as an action research cycle about the action research, called thesis cycle. Inquiring on those cycles is essential to creating actionable knowledge and the learning process in general (Argyris 2003). Thinking about this also introduces part of action learning into this thesis; one reason why I state that action research cannot entirely be divided into different single approaches. This cycle in cycle principle is what makes action research different from everyday problem-solving and introduces the concept of learning about learning or meta-learning (Coghlan & Brannick 2014).

Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1994) demonstrate further the link between the core and the thesis action research cycle. Within their definition, the thesis will switch between cycles presented in both action research project forms. The following image tries to emphasize this connection.

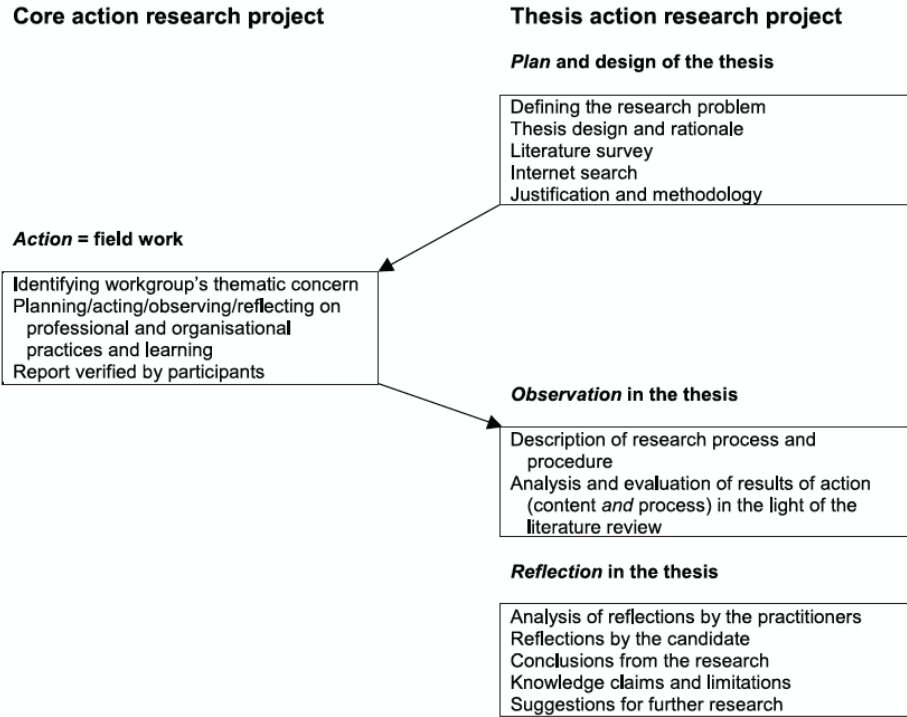


Figure 1 - Relationships between core and action research projects (Zuber-Skerrit & Perry 2002)

Based on the meta-learning approach presented here and in the style of action research used within the theses of Thuku (2016) and Grave (2016), I will present a core action research cycle within this project, surrounded by a thesis cycle.

The core cycle will involve planning, taking action and reflecting on the action, which will be discussed in the following chapters. The thesis cycle will be presented within the following diagram and briefly discussed afterwards.

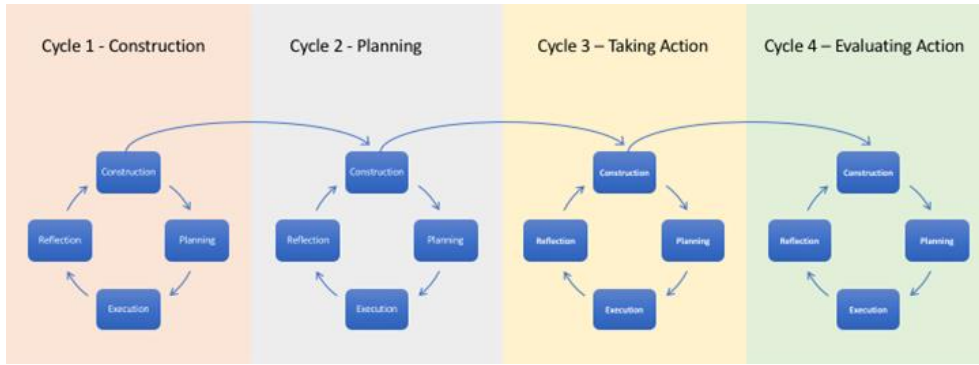


Figure 2 - own Picture (adapted from the theories presented by Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002))

Figure 2 shows the general meta-learning cycle present within this research project. Every state within a “standard” action research cycle will consist of a further action research cycle, involving the necessary steps linked to the research project. Following this approach, I will discuss each of the cycles in more details.

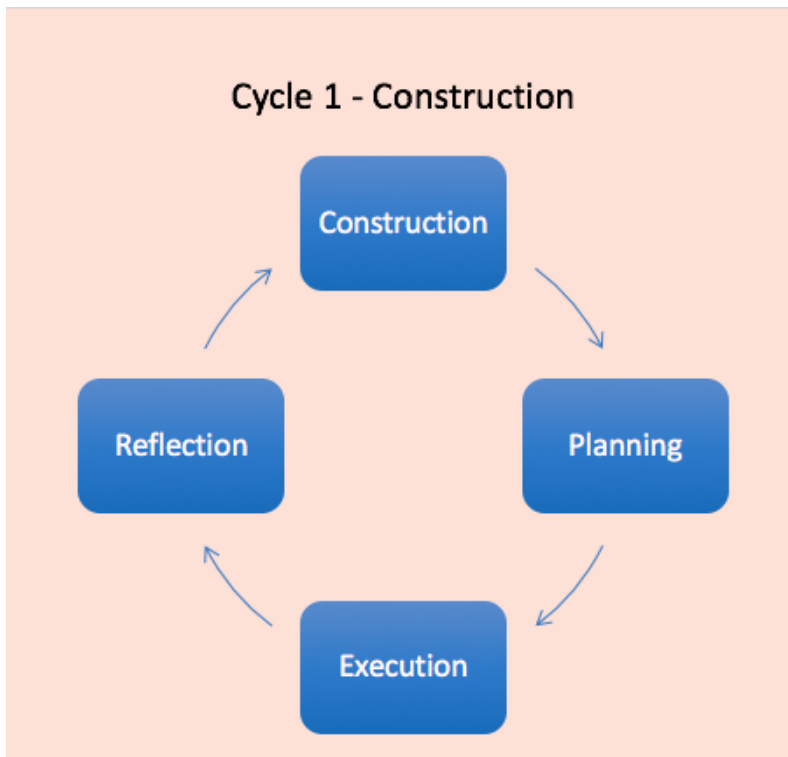


Figure 3 - Action research cycle 1 - Construction (own image)

Cycle one, as being the construction-related cycle, focused on gaining an understanding of the issue and finding out “what is it”. Following Coghlan and Brannick (2014), this step will provide the practical and theoretical foundation for the action research project and is the basis on which the project is planned. Based on this foundation, the step involves the pre-stages of the action research project. Thus, in the beginning, it was the general topic selection that started the construction cycle with another construction step. This topic selection emerged during the planning step in writing first proposal drafts as well as selecting a supervisor for being a partner in, as Coghlan names it, a “collaborative venture” (Coghlan & Brannick 2014). The execution and reflection steps are mainly coined by writing and reviewing the proposal. This step can be seen as the base foundation of the overall research process. During this stage, I came up with multiple ideas and did select and evolve those ideas based on discussions with several colleagues and managers. Furthermore, did this step include an initial reading on the topic, including the research and selection of appropriate literature to start thinking more about the identified issue.

Following the general action research philosophy and further the presentation of Coghlan and Brannick, the content of this initial construction cycle is still construction, that might change later during the research process, also based on the constructionist paradigms.

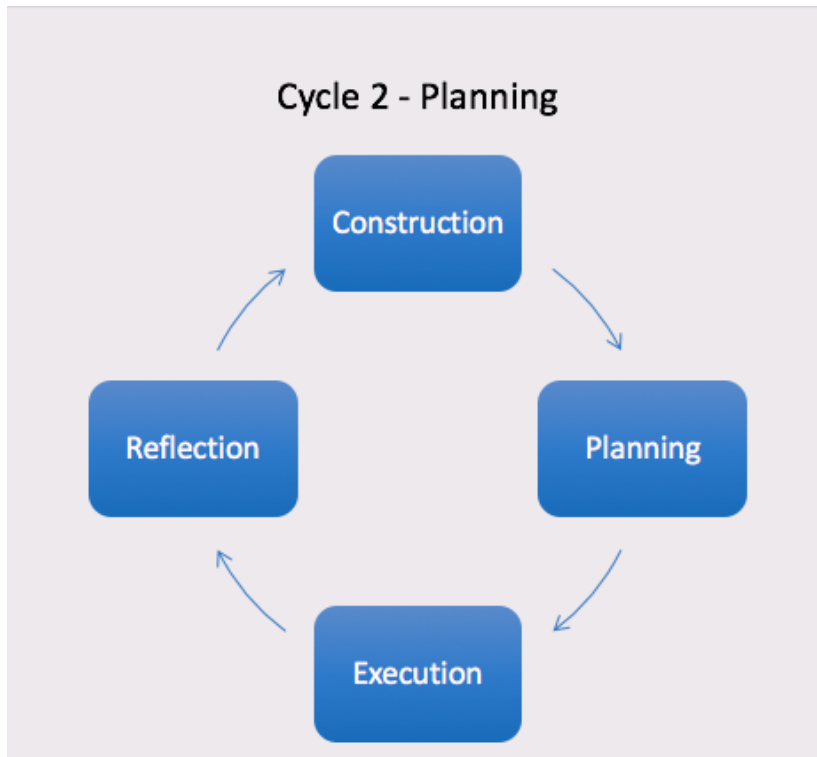


Figure 4 - Action research cycle 2 - Planning (own image)

Although Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) summarize the construction and planning step within their thesis action research definition, I will split this into two single steps following the classical action research approach. Within this step, as also shown by Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, I will further define and refine the research problem and design the study. Literature is being reviewed and analysed to understand the topic further and plan the action research project. As an essential part of this planning stage, the methodology used for the project will be chosen and justified, based on the underlying paradigms and literature.

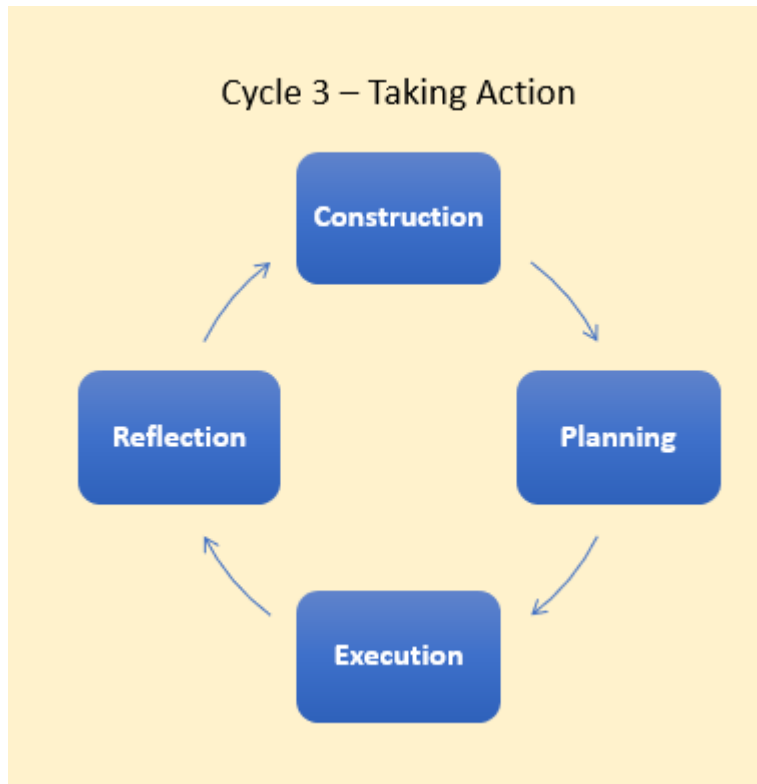


Figure 5 - Action research cycle 3 - Taking action (own image)

The action step will further combine Zuber-Skerritt and Perry's (2002) Action as well as Observation step. Following their model, I will do the planned fieldwork within this step. The construction and planning of this step will involve sampling and inviting participants as well as preparing the interviews in general. Furthermore, appointments are made, and participants that are willing to join are selected. The execution stage here represents the actual interviewing process. As already described above, this will also include collecting my own observations by also recording a self-done interview. The final reflection step within this cycle will meet Zuber-Skerritt and Perry's (2002) observation in the thesis stage. The interviews will be transcribed and analysed, the findings will be noted, and the whole process will be documented in the next chapter.

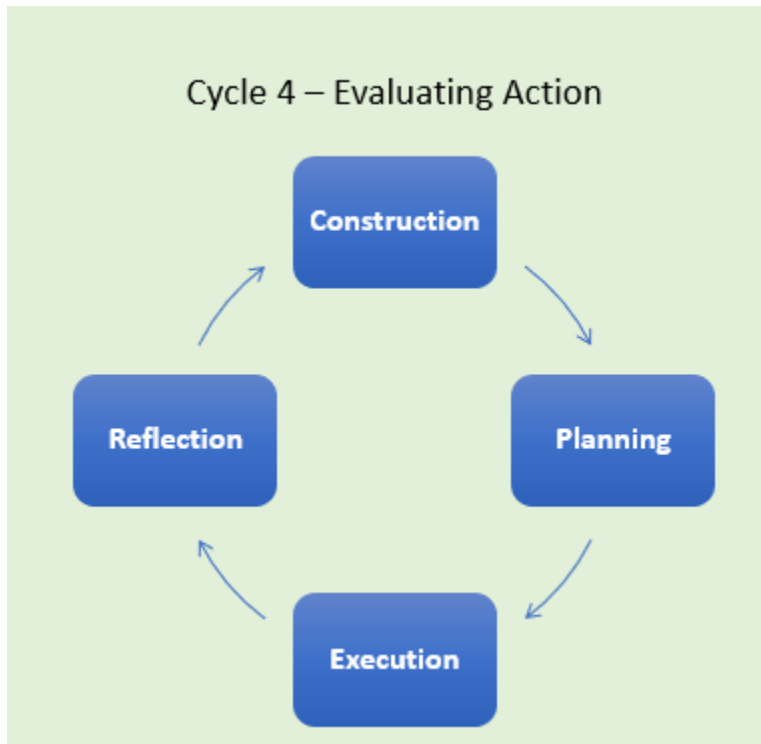


Figure 6 - Action research cycle 4 - Evaluating Action (own image)

Linking the evaluation to the last thesis action research step, the outcomes of the previous step will be discussed within the learning set, being formed by myself and members of the workers council of the organisation. The findings will be discussed, and possible actions to improve employee satisfaction and change the potential view of the institution will be defined and planned. Also, limitations and suggestions for further research will be identified and described.

In parallel to this meta-learning approach, also a core action research project is present within this research project, which can directly be linked to the action cycle of the meta-learning approach, as shown by Zuber-Skerrit and Perry (2002). For this research project, the presentation of the core action research project will be limited to the presentation of two cycles, based on the narrow timeframe related to the thesis project. The next chapter will present the first steps within the initial cycle. Taking action in cycle one will be based on my initially planned fieldwork – taking the interviews. Within this first cycle, I will prepare the interview protocol and select

the initial samples and participants. Having this in mind, the initial work of choosing and inviting participants can be linked to the construction stage, while the preparation of the interview protocol as well as the defined interview questions and their link to literature are related to the planning step. The actual interviewing and transcribing will be the action within the first cycle. My initial reflection on the interviews, the coding process, as well as the first analysis, will be related to the reflection stage. Within this step, I will also include the workers council, which will form the learning set and discuss the initial results of the first cycle with them. Based on those discussions, actions and policies will be developed during the beginning of the second action research cycle. This initial action plan will be created during the planning and construction step before the plan is applied to the organisation. The results of this application will then be reflected in the evaluation step of the second action research cycle. Based on the evaluation, adjustments will be discussed, and further actions are defined based on the adjustments needed. This will be based on the planning and construction stage of the third action research step, which will conclude this thesis project and lead to further research possibilities.

3.4 Research instruments

The main research instruments being used within this research project are based on interviews. In the following, the usage of this instrument will be further presented and defined.

3.4.1 Data collection

Interviews as a form of data collection are commonly used in qualitative and quantitative research projects but differ in type and form of execution. Nevertheless are interviews the primary data collection form within qualitative studies (Lopez 2008). Following the principle forms also in this research, I will base my primary data collection on interviews.

Across different research literature (Ayres 2008; Blackburn 2008; Firmin 2008a, 2008b; Lopez 2008; Morgan & Guevara 2008; O'Reilly 2009; Olsen 2012) three to four main differentiations occur for interviewing. The most common used interview

forms are divided into structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and group interviews as a special form within the interview domain.

Looking again at the general aspect, interviews should be done in private, and be seen as a conversation between the researcher and the participant. Although based on questions and dialogues, it is essential also to tolerate silence. Participants might think about their answer or work to keep their emotions under control. Besides the obvious talk between the participants, also the body language plays an important role, and it is to the researcher to look for mismatches between what is being said and how the participant behaves. Probing questions can support this and add a clarification (Lopez 2008; Morgan & Guevara 2008).

For this research project, I will prepare the interview guide in advance to the interview, following the question-based guide, as suggested by Morgan and Guevara (2008) and Ayres (2008). This means that the guide will be based on questions that I want to ask, which are derived from the research questions and the underlying theory. This is the opposite approach to the less commonly used topic-based guide, which only lists topics that should be discussed during the interview. Although suggested by Lopez (2008), I will not let the participants choose the setting, as this would add more complexity to the process. Instead, I will choose a neutral meeting room within the organisation, which is blocked for a reasonable time slot to avoid potential interruptions during the interview. This setting also ensures the privacy of the interview and allows the participant to focus on the content. As O'Reilly (2009) mentions, it is hard to give a direct guideline for the duration of the interview, I will calculate about one to one and a half hour for each interview, also based on his recommendation that if a topic is explored in-depth, at least one hour should be used (O'Reilly 2009). Following further the suggestions of Lopez (2008), the interview will start with the consent procedure and demographic information after having a little chat with the participant to get him used to talk and to help him relax in the situation.

Lopez (2008) semi-structured approach is further followed as the primary data collection instrument in this research project, as this kind of interview form provides

the most flexibility to gain essential data. An unstructured interview will not produce enough valuable data related to the research questions, while structured interviews are too strict, and a generalisation of the results is not needed and wanted at this stage. Therefore, using the semi-structured form, I can gain standardised data, enriched by further narrations based on probing questions.

Following Warren (2001) that semi-structured interviews' epistemology tends to be more constructionist, I will choose this form for the interviews being conducted within this research project. Within semi-structured interviews, participants are seen as meaning makers, leading to a construction of data as well as a certain reality and truth between the participant and the researcher (Ayres 2008), aligns with the epistemological assumptions that I hold and that I see present within the research project. As Kvale (2007) suggests that interviews should only be used if the sample size is not too large, I will further follow the recommendations found in grounded theory and phenomenology to use a sample size between ten and 20 participants. The questions used will be open-ended questions that allow the participants to select how they will orient themselves to the topic. Further details will be asked by using probing questions.

As the interviews will be recorded, transcribing them will be essential. Following Roulsten (2010), the interviews will be conducted and transcribed in the original language of the researcher. A translation of the data will take place after the analysis of the data and will be done by the researcher. Findings are generated and then translated into the language of presentation, in this case into English. This is mainly done because of two reasons. The first reason is the belief of the researcher that translation during the transcription might lead to losing valuable information that was collected during the interview. It is sometimes not possible to translate into another language without slightly changing the meaning. Also, special terms might not exist in the target language (Temple & Young 2004).

A good example is the synchronisation of movies into another language, that often leads to losing jokes and essential dialogues. The more important reason for this decision is nevertheless the fact that most of the participants and the target population do not speak English in general or not enough to participate in the

interview if this language is used. Following Poland (2001), verbatim transcriptions might not be enough. It is essential to maintain a certain quality and to pay attention to several important aspects while doing a transcription. Besides punctuation and adding observations and field notes, the recording device and its sound quality is also essential to get most from a recording.

Another essential point for maintaining a high transcription quality is the usage of transcription schemes and special syntax. The use and detail of such schemes depend on the individual analysis that is planned. For this study, and also following Poland's suggestion, which seems to be very close to the one Magnusson and Marecek (2015) suggest, I use the scheme, presented by them, but slightly modified. The scheme is based on a modified version of the Jeffersonian notation system (Paulus, Lester & Dempster 2014b). This scheme should give enough detail to capture the essential parts of the interview. If more detail is needed in some parts, those sections could be coded with more details again, as also suggested by Magnusson and Marecek (2015). After transcription of all interviews has finished, I will selectively review a few of the transcripts and compare them to the original recordings to recheck quality.

A secondary source of data will be observations by the researcher, presenting his own experiences. As this can be strongly related to the stories being told by participants during the interviews, I will collect this secondary data in the form of an autobiographic interview, being recorded and analysed. This will be based on the guide also used for other interviews. During the analysis, this particular form of first-person observation and experience will be included in the coding process and treated like other interviews. This means that the autobiographic interview will also be transcribed and included in the raw data underlying the coding progress.

3.4.2 Analysis

Following the general approach of grounded theory, I will focus on the more established form of analysis, including coding, categorising and reflecting on the different created categories (Charmaz 2001; Roulston 2010).

Although Roulsten (2010) argues, that a mix of inductive and deductive approaches is commonly used within qualitative studies, I tend to follow Charmaz (2006) presentation of using a more abductive approach within this study. By using different suited methods to analyse my collected data and come up with theories and assumptions developed based on that analysis, they can be further checked by the usage of action research and discussion in learning sets, as explained before.

The general analysis intended to this research will loosely follow Charmaz (2001) descriptions of data analysis within the grounded theory, including coding and memo writing, but be more related to what Kvale (2007) describes as bricolage: mixing different tools, methods and analysis approaches. My primary approach will follow the suggested steps by Magnusson and Marecek (2015). Following them, I will first derive sub-questions for the initial analysis, based on my research questions, the interview guide and a first reading through the transcribed interviews. This is loosely coupled with Charmaz (2007) suggestion of loose coding and the next step in this approach. Following the creation of sub-questions, I will read through the transcripts again, identifying parts that might be related to the created sub-questions. This procedure can be directly linked to the process of open and axial coding. Within the open coding stage, concepts and ideas are identified while reading through the text. In the following axial coding step, those initial concepts are confirmed, and relations between concepts are drawn. Those excerpts will be stored in individual files, related to each of the sub-questions. This reading and taking excerpts will be done twice, to make sure, everything is identified within the interviews. After the files have been created, the identified excerpts within the files will be re-read and briefly summarised by taking notes about each excerpt. What Charmaz (2007) describes as selective or focused relates to me to the following process of finding common ideas and meaning within the taken notes and re-assessing if the excerpt might be within the correct sub-question related file. The identified ideas will be saved in a second file, independent from the first sub-question related file. This “categorising” will then lead to a reflection on the identified themes and also a comparison with the initially defined and maybe during the research altered research questions. The collected ideas will be summarised again and linked to the questions and sub-questions (Magnusson & Marecek 2015).

Besides this analysis approach focusing on the meaning being generated within the interviews, I will also focus on some linguistic approaches and cultural meanings. A focus on language, only if the researcher is not a skilled linguistic, as pointed out by Kvale (Kvale 2007), can add to the interpretation and analysis of the contents of the interviews. Rhetoric means the way of talking or the words used can help to read between the lines and find different meanings than directly expressed. Witcraft, as it is called by Billig (1996) can help the researcher to identify some justification or feeling to prove what the interviewee is saying. Witcraft means that the participant makes a statement and immediately justifies the statement. Following this, metacommunications (commenting on the own statements), indirect speech, contradiction and contrasting can be examples for interview parts worth more consideration.

Another point, independent from the before mentioned analysis, will be the comparison of different groups and their meaning about the issues being studied. Therefore, besides coding in general, also category analysing and content analysing based on the study groups will be performed. An interesting approach is further given by Kvale (2007) as an example, where he notices in his study about grading in schools, that pupils with higher grades resulted in longer transcripts of the interviews. If there seems to be some significance within my research related to the interview lengths and the membership to different study groups, it might be worth investigating in this correlation further, but this is not part of the current research study and open to further studies.

3.4.3 Software-based tools

Moving further in the digital world, more and more tools are created and used to ease different tasks. Within the research world, there exist a couple of tools that help the researcher with multiple tasks such as transcribing, analysing, storing notes and references and organising the work. For this research project, I will also use different software-based tools to support different processes within the project.

Whereas quantitative analysis programs seem to be obvious based on the mathematical nature of the analysis, qualitative programs have developed over

time and are used more or less standardly now in qualitative research. Those programs can be used in multiple ways, allowing the researcher to implement different types of analysis and use multiple types of data. Creswell for examples describes how software can be used in all of the major different qualitative approaches to analyse the specific data collected for each of those approaches, no matter if it is a narration, an observation with field notes, an interview or a video (Creswell 2013).

For analysis within this research project, I mainly focussed on three popular tools: ATLAS.ti, MAXQDA and NVivo. All of them offer more or less the same functionality and provide the main features for any qualitative analysis such as the possibility to take notes, to code and to analyse transcriptions (Paulus, Lester & Dempster 2014a). MAXQDA will be the choice within this project, mainly based on their licencing model and the ability to transcribe within the software as well as to use their mobile apps to both analyse as well as to take recordings. Following Kuckartz (2014) as well as Paulus, Lester and Dempster (2014b) several tools also exist especially for transcribing interviews, such as F4 or the newer F5. As MAXQDA added support for basic transcription features as well as linking to time stamps and direct coding during the transcription, I will resign the usage of an extra transcription tool. This will also avoid further transformations needed between different software tools, as everything is done within one tool (MAXQDA 2017).

3.4.4 Generate data to inform actionable knowledge

Within this project, as presented in the previous chapter, the themes emerging from the literature review and my defined hypotheses have influenced the interview guide being used. Based on the interview guide, themes will be presented in the narratives of each participant. The themes will further form the first stage during the coding process, as they will give a basic starting point to identify meaning within the interview transcripts. Within the analysis, MaxQDA will be used as a software-based tool to process the interview files. With the build-in function of transcribing, I will start the analysis process within MaxQDA by transcribing the interview recordings. During the transcription process, memos will be taken within MaxQDA, if needed. After transcribing, the coding process of MaxQDA will be used to identify

the basic themes within the transcripts. Therefore, the initial coding list will be created; colour codes will be used to visually differentiate the coded themes. During different reflection cycles, as presented in the next chapter, this list was refined, detailed, and re-applied to the transcripts. With the help of MaxQDA's analysis tools, connections and relations between different codes will be visualized and presented. Those tools mainly represent the occurrence of codes within transcripts and link the occurrences to each other or analyse the occurrence of selected combinations. The usage of MaxQDA is mainly helpful to visualize the outcomes and analysis and to have a supporting tool for keeping track of codes and where they are applied. Furthermore, does MaxQDA offer the needed tools for the analysis process within one application without the need to switch applications to have a risk of losing data or information while switching applications.

With the themes identified and the refined coding-list ready, results are interpreted, and topics to be discussed with the learning sets are defined. If the interviews give the potential to already suggest potential actions or focus on a specific topic, this will be included in the learning set meetings and discussions.

3.5 Ethical issues and Limitations

Following Coghlan and Brannick (2014) as well as Coghlan and Shani (2008) doing action research within the own organisation, namely being an insider action researcher, always includes ethical issues and considerations. Depending on the different potential roles of a researcher, power conflicts, as well as conflicts related to data access, can arise from a research project. Having my position in mind within the organisation as well as the access that I currently have to different data, does not show a potential conflict related to roles, power, or data access. As already presented in Chapter 1, I am working as a consultant and project manager with no disciplinary power over potential participants within the study. In addition, as not being a member of the workers council, side effects, and potential influence during meetings within the council can also be ignored. Nevertheless, will any issue that might occur being reported within this research project.

Besides those implications related to the researcher, in general, do qualitative research projects involve further critical ethical implications, based on close collaboration with the participants. Within the qualitative studies, several basic principles are established and described by multiple different authors as being essential related to research ethics. Those principles include taking informed consent from the participants, giving them the chance to refuse taking part. Furthermore, should the privacy of the participants be respected. The leading principle during the research should be the accuracy of the data and the interpretation (Eriksson, Ivi & Kovalainen 2008; Flick 2007; Ryen 2004).

The commitment of the researcher to follow the ethical principles is acknowledged by the ethical approval gained from the ethical committee of the university. For this research project, all participants will have the possibility to withdraw from the study and interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable. No pressure will be built upon them, and their decisions are respected. The transcriptions are, as already described, anonymised to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. The files used within this research project are secured to ensure only the researcher has access to all the data.

The limitations present within the current study are mainly related to the small target population of about 160 employees present at the research site. This reduces the diversity from which samples can be invited and chosen. Being based on a qualitative study with an underlying constructionist paradigm, the biases that might be present within my thoughts might influence the analysis and interpretation stage. Although this can be seen as a limitation, I follow and emphasise the constructionist paradigm stating that everything is constructed and created. Therefore, as every analysis is based on different paradigms and methodologies, everything within a research project is interpreted, including the biases and assumptions of the researcher. Therefore, I would argue that every research might be biased in some way.

3.6 Summary

For the research presented here, I chose the purposeful sampling approach. Using this, the target population of the research study is formed by all 160 employees at the research site. Based on this population, the 20 employees being related to general administrative tasks were excluded as their relevance for the research topic can be neglected. The remaining employees, forming the sample, were invited to take part in the research study. Based on their belonging to either the consulting or technical group, a weight of 2/3 and respective 1/3 of participants were randomly chosen based on the willingness to participate. Based on this, seven consulting employees and three technical employees were chosen as participants. The participants of the learning sets were chosen based on their membership within the workers council because those members will work, decide on, and implement actions during the action research cycles.

The interviews conducted within the research are semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. The interviews are recorded and transcribed by the researcher. To maintain the original content, translations by the researcher are only done to summarise the outcomes of the interviews and to present important potential quotes.

The Action Research part of this research project is present twice. First, as the thesis action research project, consisting of one cycle, as presented, and second the actual research project, consisting of two cycles as shown.

Chapter 4

Research Practice and Findings

4.1 Overview

Within this chapter, I will present the analysis process of the interview transcriptions, which applied a form of coding to identify key themes within the meaning of the interview files. The themes were further refined during multiple coding cycles. The results of the coding process as well as the identified themes, will be discussed during this chapter and linked to the hypotheses created from the theoretical literature.

The general starting point concerning the engagement of the employees is related to their working environment and the work of the workers council in particular, which will directly be linked to satisfaction at the workplace. (Bhatt & Sharma 2019) During the interviews, it was evident that many participants linked their experiences at the workplace with workers councils directly to the presence and work of the trade union presented within our organisation.

While the authors and the literature presented in chapter two mainly generalised the findings and related them to the overall trade union and workers council world within the German system of co-determination, I aimed to dig deeper and relate those findings to a qualitative approach respecting the individual thoughts of employees. My intention was more focused on extracting the real meaning from the thoughts of employees instead of letting them fill surveys. While authors like Addison et al. (2013; 2007), Schnabel (2008a; 2008b) or Pyhel (Pyhel 2004) base their research on available figures and data related to previous research or the ALLBUS and IBA panel data (continuous surveys in multiple organisations), I followed a different approach and looked for deeper meaning within the world of co-determination especially in the context of my organization. This approach might be limited to the specific context within my organisation, but I'd like to argue that also the quantitative research based on the panel data might be limited due to the low figure of researched organisations, as stated in chapter two.

Before starting with the discussions, I will further present some statistical figures to get a deeper understanding of the structural belongings of the participants chosen.

4.1.1 Statistical figures

When conducting the interviews, my first intention was to collect some primary demographic and background data of the participants. This will include the age of the respondent as well as the length of employment in my organisation and the number of organisations the participant belonged to in the past. I will present those raw data also visually in the form of pie charts to demonstrate the overall distribution of the sample and participants within the different groups. Although the participants are distributed quite diverse, as shown by the charts, the answers often transported similar meaning across the groups. During the selection and sampling process, it was vital for me to generate a mixture of both council members as well as trade union members, including their combinations.

Following the history of co-determination in Germany and especially Müller-Jentsch (2008, 2016), who presented the coal-mining industry as one of the first to introduce the concept of co-determination and trade unions, I wanted to find out, if the participant is an active member in the coal mining trade union. Looking at the history of the organisation in combination with the literature, I assumed that the unionisation is still high in organisations with a mining background, like the one I work in. This assumption was mainly proven, giving general unionisation of 90% within the organisation and the following distribution being present within my interviews (see Figure 7).

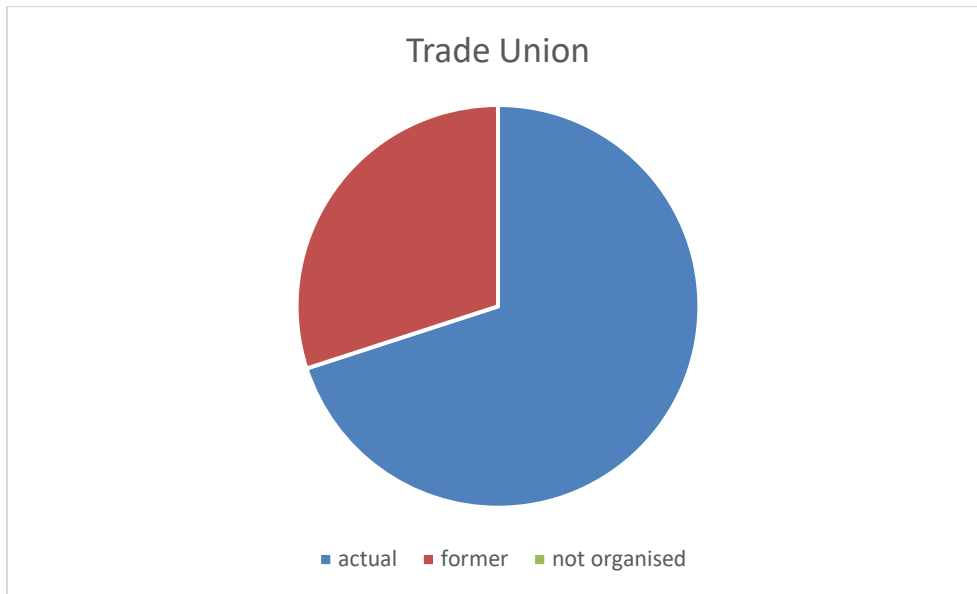


Figure 7: Trade Union organisation

It might be evident that the colleagues in the Ruhr area are well organised, based on the historical developments during the industrial revolution as presented by Müller-Jentsch (2008, 2016). Therefore, having answers to the degree of unionisation in the Saar area is even more interesting as this area belonged to Prussia and Bavaria when the concepts were introduced but were later part of France after World War I and even independent after World War II. The research showed that those acts of independence and country-belonging did not affect the amount of unionisation. This strong unionisation that I found is also linked directly to the traditional fields of mining and chemistry, exactly the fields our major trade union is active in, following Addison et al. (2007).

This high percentage of unionisation within the organisation is also being emphasized by participants explaining how the process to join a trade union worked in “older days”:

“I joined because of my father, who also was council and trade union member. In the earlier days, it worked in a way that you went to an onboarding training when you joined the company.

In this training, you also received your membership application to join the trade union – and you did.”

Others confirmed this in easier words:

“I am member since I work. I became member during the apprenticeship and stayed since then.”

The main reason to leave the trade union was related to the lack of taking care and looking after their members:

“I did leave because I got angry about them. I had a problem and they told me that it is not their part to help here, if the organisation made a problem, so I saved the membership fees.”

Another vital background fact in my research is the membership in the workers council. Therefore, I wanted to know further if the participant is a member of the institution and why or why not the participant decided to become a member of the institution. Linking this to the fact found in literature, that union density is high in the mining industry, I wanted to know further if the participant feels, that there is a strong link between the work of the council and the trade union representing the employees.

Figure 8 shows how the participants are related to the current workers council being re-elected in April 2018.

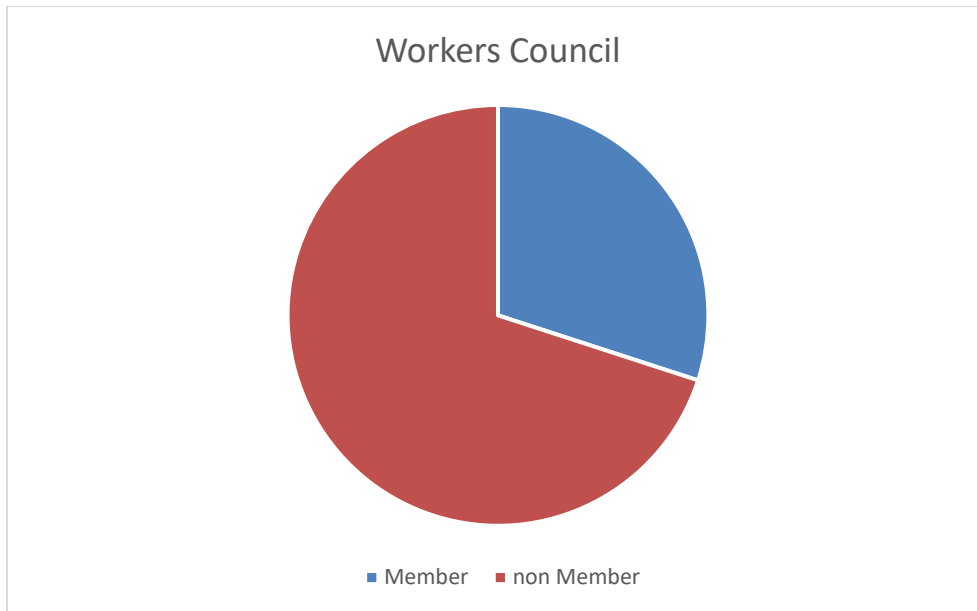


Figure 8: Workers Council members

As explained within my literature review, trade union members have to pay 1% of their gross wage as a membership fee. Nevertheless did my research reveal that there generally are also direct negotiations with trade unions possible: Employees pay a direct amount monthly to the trade union in order to be a member, divergent to the statutable fee they should pay as given for example by IGBCE (2012), IG Metall (n.d). or ver.di (2017).

Goerke and Pannenberg argue that one could compare a trade union membership with purchasing a good. My research in this point shows that one can mostly agree with their definition, but that it is nevertheless also possible to bargain with the trade union, comparing this not directly with a direct market but more like a bazaar. Following Addison et al. (2007), who show that the unions are still strong in their traditional fields like mining, my research proves their observation of the union world within Germany. As said before, with mining history and still related to the mining trade union, a union density of about 90% and a density of 70% actual members, as well as 30% former members within this research, underlines their statement. Even among younger employee not related to the history of the organisation, the density is still above the average in Germany.

Having an overall density within the organisation of about 90%, meanings of Addison, Schnabel and Wagner (2007) cannot be found within my organisation in general. We do not see a real decline in membership rates. In general, one can say that many of the theoretical literature available is looking at the topic too generally. My research shows that union Density, as well as unionisation and different behaviours, are strongly related to the unions involved and their acting within the organisation and the general environment. As was said by about half of the participants, having more than one union within the organisation led to power struggles within the organisation. Fights between trade unions were taken into the organisation and unions used to abuse their members to fight for the respective union within workers council meetings, leading to further separate meetings split among the unionisation. One participant made a strong connection here by pointing out how unions tried to exploit their members while discussing topics within the organisation.

One crucial point for me was to find out whether Pyhel (2004) is right by stating that the cost/performance ratio is lowering the attractiveness of trade union membership. This is especially interesting within the Saarland, where my company is located, as we have a working chamber, as every Bundesland in Germany has, but employees here are forced to be a member within the chamber if they work here. As the working chamber offers many of the benefits of trade unions in Germany, like insurances, legal advice, and consultation services, the two institutions can directly be compared based on the service they offer. It is mainly the strike benefit that separated the service of trade unions from the ones the working chamber offers.

Nevertheless, do the participants see a silent benefit within trade unions:

»If I compare this to travel insurance, I pay a certain amount per year and know something is there. I am glad if I do not need it, but just in case, someone is there to help. «

This can be found generally within my transcriptions and analyses:

» It is like household insurance; I pay €500 to €600 per year and have someone to help me but hope that I will not need it. I do not do any cost-benefit analysis; I just want to know someone would be there. «

As said above, this can hardly be generalised as done by Pyhel (2004), as it is strongly tied to the different unions as well as the historical heritage of the organisation. As mentioned earlier, the strong relation to the coal mining industry and the fact that many colleagues worked within this industry for years forms and influences the thinking of them related to “their” union. This is even more proved as this mindset is commonly shared among older employees within the organisation. This mindset is also present when the participants were asked why they are a member of the union. Younger employees talked here about the basic idea behind the union, like being represented and believing in the system, while older employees, being members for decades stated that they became members just because it was done this way in the early days. To support Pyhel’s (2004) statement on the other side, those who left the union several years ago mentioned that it was mainly because of the price they had to pay in contrast to what they received so far.

4.2 Coding

In my coding process, I went through the data, and my purpose was to extract patterns and themes. In this research, I followed the main principles of action research, as the coding process itself followed the multiple action research cycles, including planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. During the initial planning stage, I created an essential coding list, based on the main topics included within my interview guide and previous research and derived from the hypotheses presented in Chapter two and three (Dörre, Holst & Nachtwey 2009; Grund & Schmitt 2013; Hübler 2015; Müller-Jentsch 2008; Visser 2007). My initial coding list is as follows:

- Workers Council
- Trade Union
- Satisfaction

- Labour Agreements
- Information flow
- Influence on management
- Relationship between colleagues

While working on the initial coding list, I used a mixture of values coding and versus coding strategy. The last three codes in the initial list do not relate to the basic strategy used in grounded theory but relate to the a priori coding strategy. It was essential to include those three, as they will link the answers of participants to Hüblers (2015) as well as Grund and Schmitt's (2013) findings of their research articles. Moreover, this was one of the issues I wanted to test within my interviews.

During the next step, reflecting the acting stage in the action research cycle, I started to apply the initial coding items to the interview transcripts. After finishing my initial coding, I started going over the transcripts again and looking more closely at the assigned codings as well as the non-coded segments. While doing so, different codes and groups emerged, and I started to refine my initial list and add further subcodes if important content could be discovered in more than two transcripts. This stage is related to the observation as well as the reflection part. The reflection part further led me to refrain my coding list and creating a more detailed one. Figure 10 will show the second coding list after I went through the first cycle.

As a general approach, I went through the text and used a mix of word repetition and frequencies, as well as how words were used within a specific context. To gain information from that context, I included the preceding and following sentence. The themes covered and found within the text were marked with codes, where the text passage did not have to include the corresponding code keyword, but more is connected to the code within the meaning of the sentence.

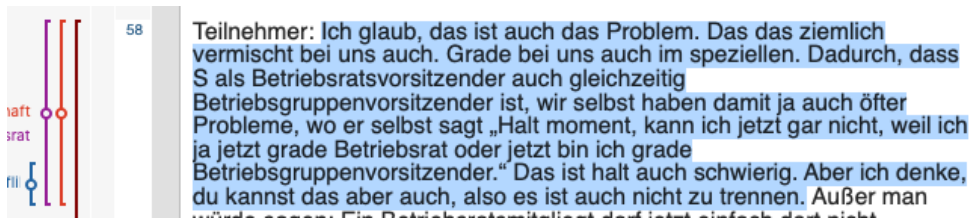


Figure 9 - Coding example

I started applying the initial codes to the segments relevant to them within the transcripts. Looking further, if the meaning related to the code was transferred, the segment is also coded.

“I think this is also the problem. It is quite mixed here, especially in our site. Because of A being head of the council as well as being head of the local trade union representations group. This is difficult, but I think one can divide between the roles.”

Looking at this example let me identify relations to both the trade union (which is represented by the red code in the figure) and the workers council (being represented by the purple code). Furthermore, the participant is talking about a conflict here between different roles. This theme of conflicts is found further in other interview transcripts:

“As a manager, you have a certain responsibility that is not directly equal to what you have to look for as a council member. You are between roles and have to differentiate.”

“The council is also prone to conflicts of interest. Being a manager and council member is difficult as both roles need to be satisfied.”

But also, the election system, which is mandatory in Germany, introduces potential conflicts.

“The current council is the same as the old one. Nothing changed. I have some problems with the current one as well as the previous one, with individual people. I think the council is too quiet, too few information.”

This observation introduced the need to refine the coding list in a further cycle.

Within the further analysis, I did only use the marked text, excluding the non-marked text. If needed, the non-marked text might have been included to define the context of the coded passage further. Within this process, the coding procedure was not limited to finding keyword within the text, but to dive more into the meaning and experiences the participants explained and expressed during the interview with their answers.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role conflicts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care • presence / notice • Strategies • Communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour agreement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation clause |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with Workers Council • with Work in general | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade Union <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insurance • Membership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information flow • Influence on Management • Relationship between colleagues |

Figure 10 - First coding cycle

Within this first revision, I recognised that the differentiation at the satisfaction level between satisfaction related to the workers council and satisfaction related to the workplace, in general, is needed to link the findings to the literature and to identify potential answers that might increase one of them but not both items.

This differentiation is needed, as participants did share different perceptions among their satisfaction level regarding workers council and work in general. One participant responded regarding the workers council:

“At the moment, I am very satisfied with the council’s work. I think the current constellation will also be very good in future.”

An optimistic and positive experience not directly linkable to the perceptions related to the work in general:

“There are things that make me less satisfied at work. But this is kind of special, I am not satisfied if I have work that makes me unhappy.”

Furthermore, related to trade unions, for example, the topic of seeing the membership as insurance was mentioned several times so that I saw this as an essential element for further satisfaction as well as reasoning to become a member.

“I don’t do a cost-benefit analysis. The council and trade union are for me something like a household insurance. If I need them, I am glad to have them. It is not my intention to say, that I want the fees back, that’s not the way I think about it.”

“It is like a solidarity group and I don’t have the need to receive support at the moment. It something, everyone has to decide himself. If I compare it to a travel insurance for example, I pay €8 per year. If I need this only once in the USA, it is worth the cost. It can be a lot to pay here for trade unions as the calculate per gross wage, but as I said, it is the solidary thought in focus here.”

With those enhanced codes in mind, I started the second cycle again by going through the transcripts and assigning as well as reassigning parts and answers to the newly created codes. Through the help of MAXQDA, I started each cycle by redefining my coding list. The software helped to keep track of already assigned codes and moved them within the new groups as I created and altered them.

After the second acting part, I started going through the transcripts again and began to observe and reflect. This led me to the third list, presented in Figure 11.

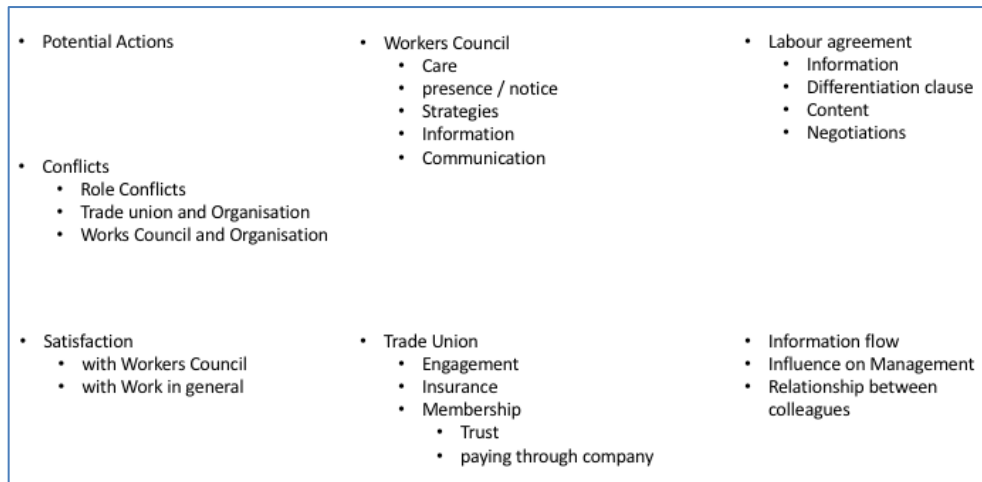


Figure 11 - Second revision of my coding list

The most important part of this revision was adding the “potential actions” code, as there were several suggestions on how to make workers council work better throughout the interviews. Those suggestions, for example, included:

“As many employees travel often, the best way to share information are newsletters in my opinion. It must not be big; it is simply to inform the employee what is going on in the organisation and what is the council working on.”

“A more agile workers council would be great. If they take care and look after the people. It would be interesting to have some open round where topics could be easily discussed.”

Furthermore, I needed to add more on the labour agreement side and especially on the trade union side, as multiple different suggestions and thoughts were raised on being a member or not. Nevertheless, I decided to let “Insurance” out of the Membership group as this is related to a fundamental concept, adding to Pyhel’s (2004) research and findings the ratio between price and performance related to trade unions.

During the third cycle of going through the transcripts and reflecting on the codes again, the coding list was altered again and lead to the final list I applied to the transcripts, as shown in Figure 12.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community • Newsletter • Employees Meeting • Conflicts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role Conflicts • Trade union and Organisation • Works Council and Organisation • with Trade Union • with Workers Council • between Workers Council and Trade Union • Satisfaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with Workers Council • with Work in general | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care • special exemption • presence / notice • Trust • Strategies • Information • Communication • Trade Union <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strike • Engagement • Insurance • Membership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • paying through company | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour agreement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information • Differentiation clause • Content • Negotiations • Information flow • Influence on Management • Relationship between colleagues |
|---|---|--|

Figure 12 - Final coding list

During the multiple coding cycles, the coding was refined, reordered, and also grouped to form codes and subcodes. The subcodes emerged from what the participants said during the interviews, as there were many familiar and similar thoughts found in the transcripts, being worth even to detail a coding into more sub coding to be able to derive the actual meaning of what was said.

The final structure that emerged from my analysis is structured, as shown in Figure 13.

- Potential Actions
 - Community
 - Newsletter
 - Employees Meeting
- Conflicts
 - Role Conflicts
 - Trade union and Organisation
 - Works Council and Organisation
 - with Trade Union
 - with Workers Council
 - between Workers Council and Trade Union
- Satisfaction
 - with Workers Council
 - with Work in general
- Workers Council
 - Care
 - special exemption
 - presence / notice
 - Trust
 - Strategies
 - Information
 - Communication
- Trade Union
 - Strike
 - Engagement
 - Insurance
 - Membership
 - Trust
 - paying through company
- Labour agreement
 - Information
 - Differentiation clause
 - Content
 - Negotiations

Figure 13 - List of codings

This list was finally applied in a last round to the transcripts and checked again in a validation step. In addition to the coding process described above, I used a form of memoing during the coding stage as well as during taking the interviews, in general, to extract meaning from what was said in the interviews, as described by Birks, Chapman and Francis (2008). Following their approach and definition, the researcher extracts meaning from data by filtering it through its interpretation. This agrees to the thoughts of Ford and Ford that all research may be biased and depending on the researcher in general, as all data is interpreted by the researcher and therefore depending on his beliefs (1994). Having this in mind makes me to an additional research instrument, adding to the ones used within this chapter. I mainly used the process of memoing as an analytical process to achieve abstraction, as also emphasised by Birks, Chapman and Francis with the help of the memo taking functionality presented by MaxQDA as this enables me to analyse the memos taken like the codes applied. Figure 14 presents an example note-taking during the analysis within the software. The screenshot shows a part taken from an interview dealing with trade union relationships and the comment I added that the meaning of the marked part is related to the trade union in question, it cannot be generalized.

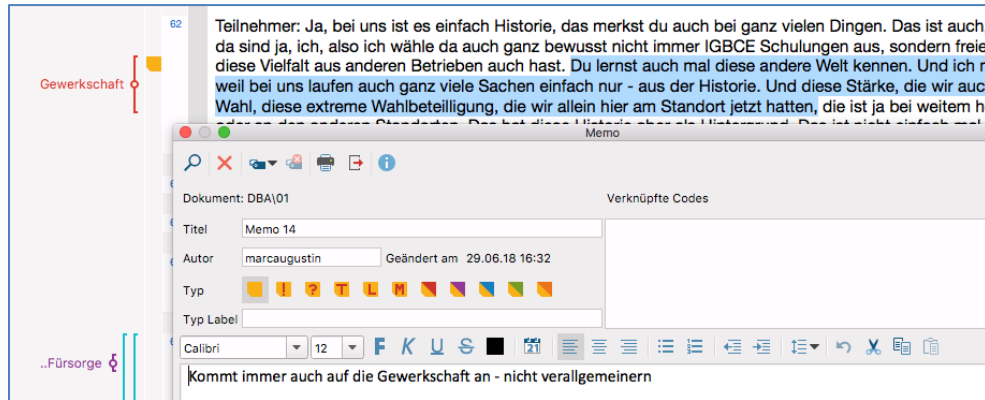


Figure 14: Memoing example in MaxQDA

As said in the last chapter, my transcripts were analysed within their original language to avoid potential translation errors. The memo shown above tells me that the code applied, and the context within the transcript cannot be generalised but is depending on the trade union present within an organisation and their specific behaviour.

I did a limited use of the automatic code detection available in MaxQDA. The main reason for this is the loss of context. At the beginning of my analysis, I used automated coding available through the lexical search build into MaxQDA to help me find occurrences of the main topics being relevant for my research. Nevertheless, as this only shows the occurrences of words, I marginally based my research on the feature because this lacks the context within the word was used. Furthermore, I reviewed every finding to determine if it is suiting or not. Not every word mentioned is also relevant for my research; the main reason why I switched to manually coding after the initial cycle. I went through the transcripts and decided whether the coding was appropriate or not. Furthermore, having metaphors and meanings hidden between the lines, I engaged in the manual cycles.

After finishing the coding process, the code matrix, seen across all applied codes, looks as it is shown in Figure 15. This represents the distribution of codes among the different transcripts that were analysed.

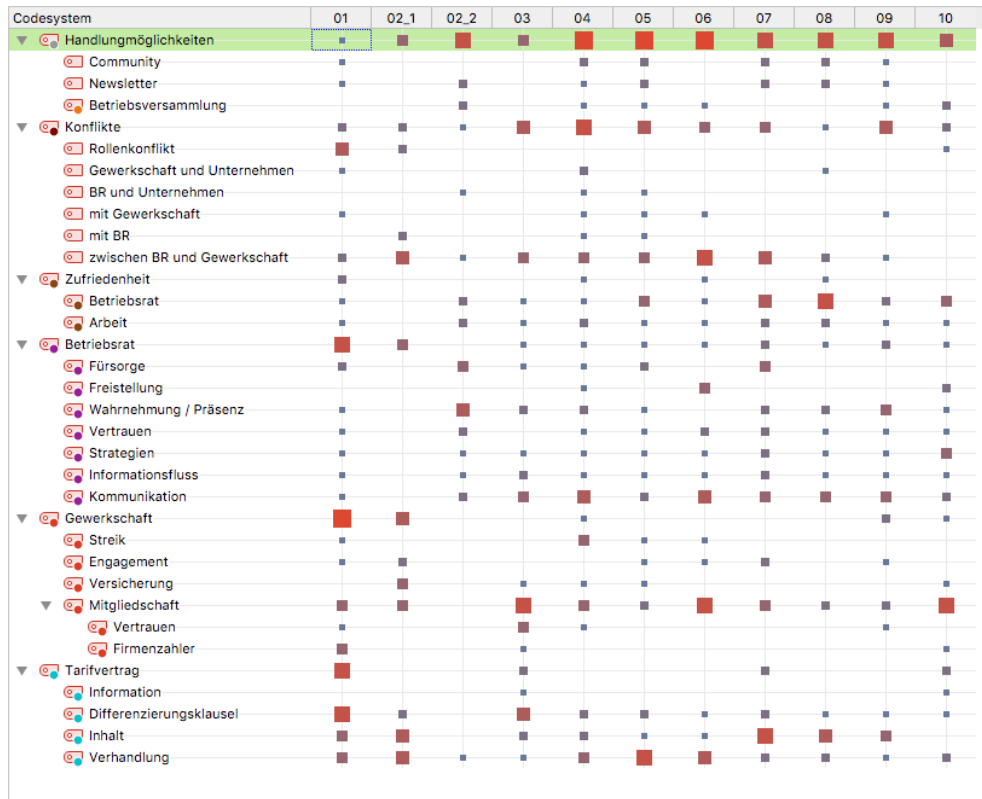


Figure 15: Code-Matrix

The figure shows the presented coding system, including subcodes and a hierarchy, based on the German expressions. The numbers above represent the different interviews being conducted. The size of the square in each column represents the distribution of the codes within the interview. A big square represents a code that is often found within that specific interview.

4.3 Reflecting on the hypotheses

4.3.1 H1 and H7 – positive organisational behaviour and taking care within the organisation

Workers councils can create and increase positive organisational behaviour within the organisation, which will also optimise human capital.

*Workers councils should care for the employees within the organisation.
Through taking care, employees are given voice and satisfaction can be
raised, leading to increased performance, and reduced turnover rates*

Thinking again about the literature, organisational behaviour relates to the interactions of the different groups within the organisation. Employees, seen as human capital are part of those groups and can be optimised if they are looked after if the groups collaborate and care. During the interviews, this caring was also mentioned and related to by different participants.

Council members stated: *“We have to think about how we communicate different decisions and outcomes of the organisation and, even if they might sound bad, how we can explain to you that they are good.”*

This shows, as beginning within this reflection, that the council members know about their roles and think about how they can use their roles to positively influence the organisational behaviour: *“It was and is our intention to make sure that the employees feel well and are satisfied”*.

Going further looking at the individual employees, the feeling of care is present, and employees seem to support my hypothesis, that the council can increase positive organisational behaviour:

“The council is included in the employer discussions. But this will not be a question if or if not, but a question when it will be done.” – Employees feel and know that the councils might care, but it might take time.

It is not only about knowing that something is done but more the knowledge someone cares.

“It was not the question if it is constructive, because I know that it will be positive. And I think it is a calming thought to know that someone is there, who might fight for my needs. But this does not mean I always have the expectation that a council can help myself. This won't be possible.”

Although employees demand some help and care, do they see the circumstances in a realistic way, knowing that not everything can be done by the council. Nevertheless, do they acknowledge that the council can positively influence their experience. One participant did quite well summarize:

“So far, it was the case that we said: <I don’t need the council, I can handle my stuff by myself.> But the fiduciary duty the council has related to employees, which act weaker or have personal problems, I see as important. That the council actively supports them in discussions with the employer. But the tasks have to be ... done, and the employee doesn’t have to remember that something is there.”

This summary perfectly describes and supports the hypothesis one I created by showing that the council can help to improve the behaviour, but the council has to be aware of this fact. Therefore, discussing this topic will be one of the points taken to the learning set sessions.

4.3.2 H2 – reactions at organisational levels

Every action taken by the council or council members will introduce reactions at all organisational levels, that should be taken into account.

Following the participants during my interviews, there should be a connection between the council and the organisation and actions taken should be accepted and supported.

“The council can be there as a mentor, to mediate. And I think that we have a good council on both sites. And a good management as well, which accepts the work done by the council.”

Following the participants, no institutions should and can be seen individually within the organisation. It is the network of different relationships that define what is going on within the organisation. Looking again at a quote given previously even emphasizes this:

“The council is also prone to conflicts of interest. Being a manager and council member is difficult as both roles need to be satisfied.”

And those roles will introduce different actions and reactions. Being a council member might need to react differently than being a manager, as different interests have to be followed. Participants mainly show that collaboration within the organisation is needed.

“I see this as a task of the organisation. But the council has to play part in this by demanding. The organisation should handle for the wellbeing of the employees.”

Participants see the organisation being responsible for the wellbeing, but the council can add to this.

4.3.3 H3 and H4 – positive influence on employee engagement and participation

Workers councils can positively influence employee engagement at the workplace and therefore increase employee satisfaction and commitment by engaging at least one of the dimensions.

Workers councils can influence how employees participate within the organisation and reduce potential intentions to quit by representing their voice and communicating directly.

Remembering the discussions of Bhatt and Sharma (2019), the dimensions to positively influence employee engagement are on the physical, cognitive and emotional level but not all of them need to be engaged. The more the employee engagement on one of those dimensions, the more is the personal engagement of the employee influenced.

Following their observations, I would argue if one of the dimensions is negatively influenced, the personal engagement of employees might suffer. Related to my interviews, especially the cognitive level, was something that caught my attention and might provide a potential to work up.

“There is this trend that one is more and more seen as a number. The number or figure one bills to the customer. And if this figure is too low, pressure is built, which is passed directly down to the employee, which is not pleasant because one loses motivation and engagement at work. Here, I would wish more engagement from the council’s side.”

Looking at the statement shows that the hypothesis points in the right direction. The council could work against the loss of engagement at the employee’s side by caring more at the emotional and cognitive dimension.

“If I look at the workplace and environment in general, my satisfaction is at about 50%. But the council is aware on this and working with me to increase it again, they are engaged in the process. They didn’t know about not being satisfied, so I don’t blame them.”

“In general, I am satisfied. Financially, everything is ok. The social benefits could be more, but they try over and over again, but it won’t last long. If it is about memberships in a gym, extra payments for lunch or language courses. The council could take those topics and move them forward, work on them.”

It is not only about work; the participants prove that the different levels could and need to be addressed to increase and influence their engagement at work. Fulfilling their needs might increase the overall productivity and lead to an increased benefit for the organisation.

4.3.4 H5 – new forms of communication can enhance the relationships

The use of social media and new forms of communication can further enhance the relationship of workers councils with their employees and positively influence the experience of employees at work resulting in increased productivity.

Social media within organisations is seen as a potential benefit for the organisation as well as the performance of employees. Therefore, transferring the concept of a general social media representation and using it within the context of workers councils to engage employees into discussions and to share information seems obvious. Especially within IT-related organisations with a bigger consulting range makes it hard to engage in face-to-face communications with every employee. The general idea of using modern electronic communication tools is also supported by the participants during the interviews.

“There is a huge potential for improvement, which could be made use of. I could think of electronic newsletters, virtual communities and pages of the council to share information and discuss topics.”

“The electronic way can be the preferred way, due to the fact that many are not often in the office, due to customer projects.”

Not only do those services help to reach the employees in general but also the discussion aspect will positively influence the relations between the council and the employees.

“Today, one only notices them if there are problems. Using online platforms to have a regular information flow and discussions might improve the relations.”

But not all participants do support enterprise social networks. The form of open discussions, as already present within today's social media, might not be suited for everyone. As the council's task is to take care of the people within the organisation, especially the weaker employees, might resign and avoid contacting the council through the new technologies.

“Thinking about the council and their work, mostly the weaker employees need their support. And I think they might have problems publishing their issues within such an open group or community. If the council stays on a private level related to modern communication means, might help and generate a certain effect.”

“I could think of such a platform, but I think that only those would participate who are unsatisfied. This brings a negative flavour, just how it is with social media.”

“Some will use it and others not. “

There seems to be no clear answer related to the hypothesis coming from the interviews. It might depend. Social networks might work well within startups or organisations, having many young employees. Within a bigger enterprise, it might be hard to get employees engaged within the discussions. One benefit still present for all employees is the potential of sharing information through social networks and reaching every employee, no matter where they currently are.

4.3.5 H6 – role dualities between trade union and councils

Workers councils, as well as trade unions, play a role within the organisation as there might even exist role dualities being present.

Based on the German co-determination system, if an organisation is related to bargaining agreements, trade unions are present within the organisation, at least during the negotiations. Councils furthermore can be present if employees demand them. Based on this, within an organisation fully equipped following the co-determination system, both organisations are present within an organisation. Following the interviews, this is experienced by the participants who see even more engagement on the trade union's side than only negotiating for wages.

“I think that employees see councils being equal to trade union is related to the old days. The co-determination introduced a collaboration between them, and the trade union was powerful.”

“In general, the council is enough within the organisation. One hopes that we do not need the trade union within the organisation, but for the bargaining. But I see it positively of the council is organised within the trade union and if there is a trade union present.”

“I think it is good, that a council has a trade union sitting in their back to support them. For example, if a lawyer for consultation is needed.”

The fact that there is a clear separation required by the German law seems to be hard to feel for employees, based on some role sharing of workers council members.

“If I look at the members of the council and the bargaining committee, those are the same people. “

“Yes, for me, the council is equal to the trade union.”

“There is no connection between the institutions, they are the identical.”

The participants see the role conflict that might be created by those constitutions, but there are role conflicts identified that are worse in the eyes of participants. As representants of the trade union cannot excess power within the organisation but only be influenced by knowledge gained as a union representant, they might not directly influence the engagement or productivity of the organisation.

“There might be a conflict of interested, but in my opinion, this is less significant than the one if I was a manager and would create potential problems by decisions made as a council member.”

Being a member of the council and in parallel, a manager might introduce a more critical role conflict, following participants, as both roles have a direct influence on the organisation and information gained in one role might influence decisions of the other role. This conflict can be compared to the conflict of an insider action researcher, as Coghlan and Brannick (2014) present.

4.4 Discussion of interpretation

As the interpretations presented here are based on the assumptions and observations that I experienced within the organisation, other researchers might

find rival positions within my interpretations and analysis of what was said during the interviews. I, for example, try not to weight the fact that councils and trade unions seem to be represented within the organisation equally, nor do the employees. Based on my experience over the past years working within the organisation let me see a form of co-determination that strives for harmony.

Most of the council members are members of the trade union being present within the organisation, and so are most of the employees, with an unionisation rate of about 90%. Nevertheless, did I not notice that trade union-related topics of discussions are taken to the workplace. Instead, a site group exists, being formed by members of the trade unions, a relatively common concept in the co-determination field in Germany. Organisations might have site groups of their trade unions as well as there are location groups in almost every city in our area. Within those groups, trade union specific topics are discussed and decided. The site group in our organisation, for example, helps in organising events after work for all employee, not looking at their unionisation level. The organisation furthermore accepts the site groups and gives them the possibility to meet in the organisation's buildings.

Looking more closely at the relationship between the organisation and the council, there is some peaceful collaboration being established.

"The last strike was in the early '90s."

"One notices that organisations are open to talk and to discuss solutions if the council is open. We don't seek confrontation but want solutions in collaboration with the organisation so that employees can benefit."

Those quotes show that I did not experience the classical connection of workers councils and organisations one might know or think off. This is more related to a collaboration on the same level, where both participating institutions work together to make the most out of the situations. Especially the long time span since the last strike emphasizes the overall positive narratives taken from the interviews.

4.5 Moving to learning sets

Looking back at the different hypotheses and reflecting on what was said in the interviews lets me create different concepts build upon themes derived from the analysis presented within this chapter.

Reflecting on H1 and H7, which generally deal with taking care within the organisation let me think about how this can be further enhanced and been reflected by the workers council. Following the interviews, the effect I stated within the hypotheses on caretaking seems to be reflected by the participants. By introducing potential actions that might help to realise the missing pieces will eventually introduce the expected reactions within the organisation.

Combining those observations with the hypothesis H5, being about the usage of new media helped me getting an idea. Reflecting on them was the point when I realized that the workers council could be seen as an organisation within the organisation. And how can organisations be more successful? Through advertising and public relations. What if I enter the learning set and we act like being an own organisation? I created the idea to use methodologies and techniques derived from the fields of organisational communications and internal marketing to further enable the workers council to engage with the employees. Therefore, during the next planning and construction cycle, further research within those academic fields is needed to develop potential actions and activities that will be introduced with the learning set.

Reflecting further on hypotheses H2 and H6 calls for some learning sessions with the council members. Those hypotheses reflected on the roles of council members in relations to trade unions as well as the organisation. While working with the learning set, one task would be to create learning paths for existing and new members to sensibilise them about their roles and their tasks.

Lastly, thinking about hypotheses H3 and H4 open the world of social responsibility. Although this also adds to the actions above related to learning, discussing with the learning set about different events seems to be best here. Employees need to be

also engaged on the emotional side, and different participants raised that events besides work helped them to get to know their colleagues better. If the organisation is not taking care in this domain, I think the council should not ignore that it is missing but instead take care by themselves. As this is linked to organisational communications and marketing as well as the mentioned learning, I will discuss the ongoing plan on what to engage with the learning set members in the first meeting.

4.6 Conclusion

While the initial coding process, different themes within the narratives of the individual participants were identified and further refined into a more detailed coding list during different cycles. As the themes created from the analysis were related to the hypotheses created during the literature review, I was able to directly look at the meanings and link them to my hypotheses. Based on different answers, I could either accept or decline the hypotheses based on the particular context of my organisation in which the research took place.

By giving an example of how the institutions collaborate within my organisation, I tried to give a reasoning and solid base to explain why I interpreted the interviews in the way I presented.

By reflecting on the hypotheses and the links drawn from the interviews, I created a plan on how to engage the topics with the learning set during the next action research cycles. I identified new research fields that should be taken into account when working on potential actions and solutions to the issue.

Chapter 5

Story of Action Research

Based on Lewin’s (1947) model of Action Research, I used the steps of Constructing, Planning Action, Taking Action and Evaluating to conduct the research presented within this thesis. While Action Research can be done and defined in multiple different ways, I follow the approach Zuber-Skerrit and Perry (2002) present by splitting the actual dissertation into the two distinct types of action research projects. The core action research project, following the classical approach of insider action research as presented by Coghlan & Brannick (2014) and the thesis action research project, in which I find myself within a learning set with my supervisor.

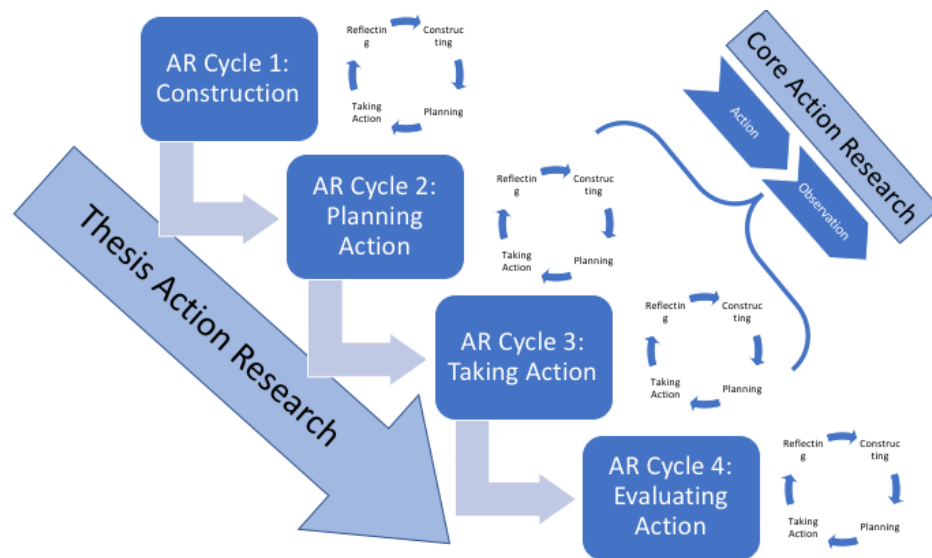


Figure 16: Action Research Cycles within the research project

Figure 16 shows the general structure that was followed within this research project. The thesis action research project follows the classical four cycles approach, consisting of Construction, Planning, Taking Action and Evaluating Action. Each of these cycles mirrors the action research cycles as well, by being built upon the same steps to create content within the cycles.

While the thesis action research project will follow the creation of the actual thesis, the core action research step will be closely linked to the third cycle of the thesis action research project, taking its planning cycles as the construction. The actual third cycle within the thesis action research project is split into subcycles, as

presented by Zuber-Skerrit and Perry: Action and Observation, whereas the action step involves actual fieldwork.

5.1 Action Research Cycle 1 – Construction

The beginning of my action research project was about identifying the issue being present within the organisation and to narrow the topic further down to be suited as an action research project, being small enough to fit within this research project. The identification of the final project – what can workers councils do in order to increase and positively influence employee engagement and satisfaction at the workplace level – was related to the previous labour agreement negotiated with the organisation. Furthermore, did several actions or the ignorance of certain facts by the council members lead to some dissatisfaction across colleagues.

While thinking about potential projects and narrowing them down, I initially wanted to research how trade unions can influence employee's satisfaction through bargaining results. While reflecting on the thoughts and researching about the nature, I realized that looking at the trade union alone might not work during the project, based on the fact, that the trade unions is an independent organisation. While being an insider researcher, I might execute potential influence within the organisation, but will not have an opportunity to implement change within another closed organisation. Therefore, I shifted my thoughts and moved from focusing trade unions to the workers council within the organisation. Following Syptak, Marsland and Ulmer (1999) money is not all that influences satisfaction at work, so I realized that focusing on the trade union might only represent a small amount of the real potential of the research. With this in mind, I looked more closely at workers councils within the organisation and came up with the idea that they might have a much more significant influence on the employees through their work than trade unions could have through bargaining negotiations.

Built on this primary issue, initial research was done to build up a research framework and to start with a research proposal, forming the base of the research project to be conducted during this project. Although a basic action research project

is started with a team, according to Zuber-Skerritt (2002), I decided to follow Coghlan (2008) by starting an insider action research project with myself as the researcher and including further participants during the third cycle of the thesis cycle as part of the learning set.

The initial construction of the research was based on my literature review, as given in chapter two. The literature leads to the creation of multiple hypotheses derived from existing research. Based on those hypotheses and the fact that the thoughts and feelings of the employees will be crucial within this research, I decided to take a qualitative approach to do the initial data collection, as also presented within this dissertation in chapter three.

This qualitative approach enabled me to go into a direct discussion with the participants and generate further meaning out of their contribution instead of having simple answers being related to a quantitative approach. Furthermore, after looking at the available literature, qualitative approaches, especially in combination with action research, are missing within this research domain in this particular German context which was also mentioned by different authors. Going further, as presented in chapter two, I'd like to challenge the quantitative panel data most research within the German co-determination context is based on, as the panel data, compared to statistical data in Germany, seems only to represent a non-significant part of the organisational landscape related to co-determination constructs.

To focus more on the action research and action learning paradigms, I decided to take the discussions and interviews derived from the qualitative approach and use this data as a base for further discussions and actions with a learning set, being constructed by members of the council in question.

Approval and informed consent

Nevertheless, I needed several approvals to conduct this research project. Before asking for official approval at university site, I did speak with the CEO of the organisation about the potential research project as well as with my line manager

and the workers council, as the council may also authorise such research project in Germany if employees are approached.

After getting final approval by the council as well as the relevant managers named above, I started the process of getting both overall and ethical approval by the university. By obtaining this approval, I started with my literature collection, as presented in chapter two of this dissertation.

Following the formal approval of the council and the organisation, I needed ethical approval to conduct the actual research. The main focus here, after following standard procedures related to data protection and privacy, was based on framing the potential risks participants might encounter and finding potential methods to minimise the possible risks.

Another important aspect during the ethical approval process was to create the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (Appendix B) and the Participant Consent Forms (PCF) (Appendix D) which explain the purpose of the research to the participants beforehand and also show them the options and rights they are granted during the research process. To give participants the chance to prepare, ask questions and also take their time to decide, if they want to take part, I distributed the PIS via e-mail as an attachment to the anonymised invitations.

Learning set construction

Learning sets are commonly used within the action learning field of action research and try to enhance the action research experiences based on group discussions, action plans and collective problem-solving. Within this research project, I use learning sets as part of the action research process applied to the research foundation. The sets will base their discussions on the findings related to the previous qualitative part of this thesis.

Thinking about the learning set in general, I will interact with the members of our local workers council to form a set. As 85% (6 out of 7 members) are also members of our trade union and involved in labour negotiations, I will not only discuss and

address all council-related issues but also the trade union and labour agreement specific ones.

Following Pedler and Burgoyne (2008), I meet with this setting their mentioned key points for learning sets. I have about 7 set members, depending on the viewpoint, and will discuss and take actions on real tasks and work problems. During the discussions, actions, as well as reactions and outcomes, will be questioned and reflected on.

Before presenting the outcomes and the base for further discussion to the set members, it is essential to let them know about the basics of action research and action learning. The central mindset is that they are learning instead of knowing.

In a first meeting, I presented the theory of learning set, action learning and action research to the council members and created together with them a learning set. We discussed their understanding of the process and defined a regular meeting schedule of every two weeks to discuss the work that was done and to evaluate the steps being taken. Within those meetings, actions will be planned, and findings, as well as learnings from previous actions, will be reflected on and discussed. Based on those observations, the set further discusses how future actions are implemented and if actions need to be adjusted and re-implemented. Based on the list of planned actions, smaller groups within the learning set were formed that worked on taking the specific actions. This approach is more comparable to the agile software development approach described later than to the individual action taking step, as described in the literature.

5.2 Action Research Cycle 2 – Planning

The literature review used within this research project partly follows the systematic literature review described by Pittaway (2008) as it serves the need being created within research projects. As stated in Chapter 2, I used a defined approach to build my literature list and conduct the literature review. Within this approach, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined and applied as well as strategies to find the relevant literature within the field. The research initially applied to this research

helped me to identify the current scholarly as well as practitioner knowledge being available related to the topic. Further, I was able to gain a broader overview of the topic and include linked research topics.

Based on the issue defined, I started researching literature written within the German academic community related to the concept of co-determination, before increasing the field to the general topic of employee representation. As the literature did reveal further concepts and links from employee relationship research as well as employee participation, I did further include those concepts and finally ended up mixing in research theories also borrowed from organisational behaviour and employee engagement fields.

Based on what I found during the literature review, I was able to identify a certain lack of closer qualitative research as well as action research topics that try to change something. Many critical and judging articles were available, most based on generalised quantitative data, ignoring the fact of the individual characters of institutions and employees within an organisation. The research on literature resulted in hypotheses that I created based on a mixture of my experience within the workplace and the assumptions and theories presented within the literature.

Furthermore, the review was conducted continuously, which means that I continued to review and research literature during all cycles of my action research. I did link the findings and continuous research with outcomes of evaluations, discussions, and the interview results. Furthermore, after the mentioned focus shift and adjusted frame during the initial literature review process, further review of new emerging topics helped me in getting a deeper understanding of the topics and the links created and allowed me to come up with potential actions that link different theoretical concepts to contexts outside of their original scholarly practice. It was for example during the analysis and early stages of the learning set work when I realized that further research within the fields of organisational communication and internal marketing is needed for specific actions to be applied successfully.

While writing on the literature review chapter, new thoughts emerged, and the lack of potential research within the field related to qualitative approaches and action

research became obvious. I tried to get a broad overview of the existing research on the topic, as described within the literature research and started to think more about what might be possible to change within the organisation related to the issue.

Based on the literature and hypotheses, an interview protocol was created, to guide the interviews and get answers to the related questions (see Appendix F). The planned interview was discussed with the council members again (without revealing the actual content) to get final approval by their side to approach the employees. Although the research is not conducted within my role as an employee of the organisation, the council and organisation have to agree that employees are interviewed. The presentation and agreement were given without discussing the final participants that were selected as well as the interview protocol in order to avoid the introduction of potential bias at this stage.

Before reaching out to the employees, a sampling strategy was created and applied within the organisation as presented within the methodology section of chapter three.

5.3 Action Research Cycle 3 – Taking Action – Core Action Research

5.3.1 Core AR Cycle 1 – Construction

Within the first action step in the thesis action research project and for the start of the core action research project, I decided to step into the field and conduct an interview covering the identified topics during the literature review, related to my research questions. Based on the lack of comparative qualitative research, also mentioned within the literature (Addison, Schnabel & Wagner 2007; Frick 2008; Schnabel 2008a) as well as the direct interaction and feedback from participants, I decided to start the initial data collection with interviews done within the organisation.

The core action research stage began for me with the definition of the methodology being used. As already presented in chapter 3, I decided to use a qualitative foundation, based on concepts of grounded theory and the phenomenological

approach, with semi-structured interviews as a primary data collection instrument. As participants for the interviews, sampling was applied within the organisation. As described in chapter three, purposeful sampling was used, based on the target population of 160 employees. From them, 10 participants were chosen to take part in the interviews.

After having defined the sampling strategy, I started with the recruitment of participants by sending out invitation e-mails and scheduling the interviews, having enough time blocked for more extended discussions. As presented within the methodology chapter, the interviews were recorded using a mobile device and later transcribed. The interviews, in general, took about one to one and a half hour and included several discussions related to the interview questions being presented within the interview protocol.

The participants were open during the interviews, being also related to the private atmosphere that was created at a neutral place and the anonymity and privacy granted to them based on the consent form and information sheet they received. To make it easier for the participants, the forms were translated into German, and the interviews were conducted in the German language. The forms can be found in Appendix C and E.

After the interviews have been conducted, the recordings were transcribed and anonymised as also described within the participant information sheet. Those transcriptions were then loaded into MaxQDA to start the final analysis and evaluation stage of this cycle.

Throughout the coding process, as described in chapter four, new ways to view the issue emerged and potential actions were discovered or directly given by the participants. Those views and actions were synthesised and summed up within a first presentation that was given to the workers council. The presentation aimed at giving them a first overview of what happened and how their work is seen, before going more in-depth and creating learning sets to analyse the overall outcomes of the coding process and to work together on actions within the set.

This first presentation, telling the council about hypotheses created and how participants' answer can be related to the hypotheses to prove or deny them, defined for me the movement away from the initial construction cycle to the planning cycle of my core action research project. As the analysis presented in chapter four will build the base upon which further research, as well as action creation, is done, I define this as still being part of the construction cycle. Further discussions with the creation of potential action plans with the learning set will result in the planning cycle, followed by the description of what happened within the organisation when action was taken.

5.3.2 Core AR Cycle 2 – Planning

During the initial discussion of the issues identified and presented in the last chapter, the learning set decided to form a task group, only dealing with marketing and public relation topics. As it is common within the world of workers councils in Germany to form such task groups for specific topics, this group will mainly deal with the identified communication and presence topics. Nevertheless, is this task group only the formal name within the council's hierarchy and still represents the learning set within this thesis project.

I support this decision as it works as a PR department within the workers council. As per my belief, individual parts within an organisation have to be seen as individual organisations in order to promote what they are doing, make them present within the organisation and tell people about what they are doing. Having silent departments, like it was done in earlier times, will result in resilience rather than in success. Times are changing and so are demands on organisations and parts of it. During this action plan and the introduction of potential actions, theoretical concepts will be used that are related to the organisation as a whole and transferred to the work of the council, by seeing the council as an organisation within the organisation. The task group in this plan will act as a department within the institution.

While discussions went on, the learning set decided to have a more in-depth look again at different theoretical concepts, mainly derived from the fields of internal marketing, public relations, and organisational communications.

Following Baines, Paul et al. (2003), the purpose of public relations is to create understanding. Moreover, it is this understanding that is needed as a base for further communication. The understanding of what the council is doing and what the members are working on seems to be missing in this case, relating to the results of my data collection. However, understanding (following Baines, Paul et al.) is not all, more important is mutual understanding here. Furthermore, do they describe that objective should follow the SMART principle, meaning that all objectives should be specific, measurable, actionable, relevant, and timely. This principle suits well into the context of action research, which indirectly relies strongly on the different aspects a SMART objective will have.

Looking deeper into the concepts presented by Baines, Paul et al., a public relations manager should be able to ascertain how satisfied employees feel. This satisfaction has been measured within the data collection stage and will be the foundation for the actions being defined in this first action research cycle. If employees do not understand the mission or vision of an organisation or an institution like the workers council, loyalty will be low, and therefore, employee satisfaction will suffer.

Public relations in this research action plan, as the main topic of the new to create task group, will borrow its leading ideas and activities from academic literature and research on proven concepts within the domain of public relations. Although distinguishing from marketing, this field will deal with the interaction of the workers council with the public, in this sense, the employees in the organisation. Through discussions, the members within the learning set share the common idea that even small parts within an organisation, like workers councils, should consider implementing at least some of the public relation concepts that are proven on the market and used by many more prominent companies.

An essential aspect of working public relations is internal communication. Following Baines, Paul et al. (2003), the climate has changed from old industrial behaviour

within an organisation to newer information and knowledge-based age. I believe that this change is essential to have in mind, as the organisation, in general, has a long industrial history but is now working with new technologies. The change that has been going through the organisation has to be installed into the minds of the employees. Change programmes in earlier years were seen as something needed but not as important as they should have been. Following the mentioned MORI research, about a third of all employees within the UK are brand-neutral, 22 per cent even brand saboteurs, showing that branding is getting more and more important. People have to identify themselves with the organisation, and the council has to act as an ideal within this domain. If people feel that the council seems to be not interested in the organisation or the site and what is going on, why should the employees? The council has to support the local labour force and transport the feeling that they care about the people and their problems. Although many organisations do care about their outside image, they do not pay equal attention to what is going inside. It is this gap that councils could fill with their internal PR work in order to maintain and even raise employee satisfaction.

Following further Edwards (2013), a practitioner often sees PR directly related to organisational communication. Within this field, there exist different definitions of PR, especially if comparing academics and practitioners. Based on the various definitions, PR can mainly be linked to excellent communication and the establishment of a mutual understanding between the organisation and its publics'. Based on this and seeing the council as a separate organisation, the understanding has to be transferred to the employees. They have to get an understanding of what the council is doing and why a council is acting in a certain way. This definition will be the base for further actions as it incorporates the presentation of the institution, involving marketing and communication concepts. Furthermore, is it essential to present the employee the real difference between the council and the trade unions, as, following my findings from the interviews, this difference seems to be blurry, if even existing.

Edwards suggests using different analysis instruments to plan further actions. The first step is described by defining the big picture, describing the macro environment,

forces the organisation has no control over but can impact on. One very well used analysis tool is the PEST analysis, which divides the environment into the categories **Political**, **Economic**, **Social** and **Technological**.

Within the learning set meetings, the key categories were written on a chart and discussed with the set members. Within those discussions, the set members defined the common understanding that is presented within the following figure. The environmental parts were perceived as important, relating to the set members and will be in consideration while thinking about potential actions that should be implemented.

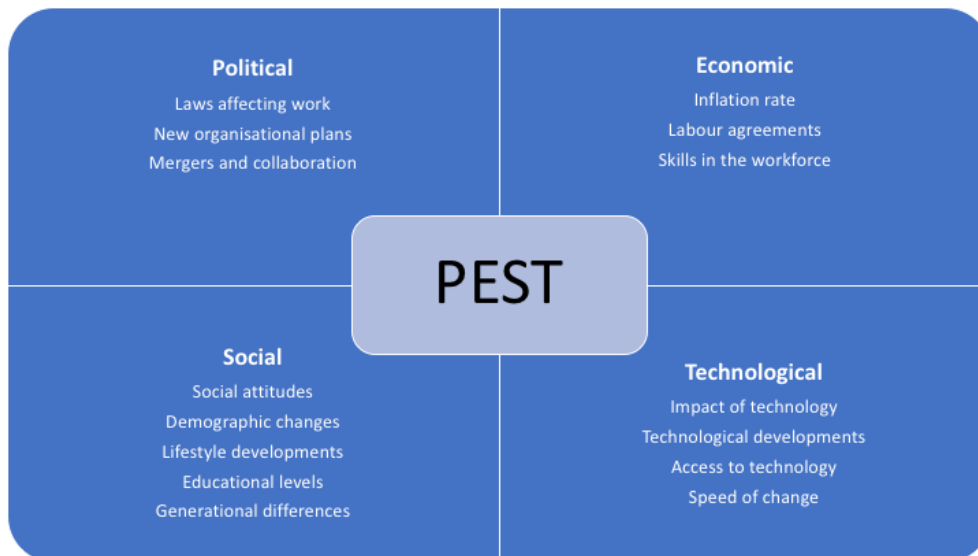


Figure 17: PEST analysis

Although PEST is seen as already outdated, it is sufficient within this research as the new fields related to the more improved EPESTLE, which are **Legal** and **green Environment** will only have minimal impact on the topic as discussed by the learning set.

While the political topics identified may have an impact on the council's work, it is more the social dimension that needs to be concentrated on. The social attitudes of employees that are changing as well as demographic changes, also leading to different generational aspects that need to be considered are essential when

thinking about how to reach the different employees. Having a mixture of different generations demands different approaches to making them more satisfied at work. This goes in hand with technological aspects. Although generational differences imply different usage of technology, the developments in this field can nevertheless be used to address all employees being within the organisation. The economic parts identified resemble many points being said during the interviews and a focus on the inflation rates related to the future labour agreements is essential. The following web of relational actors will further help to understand how the council as an institution is linked to different groups within the organisation:

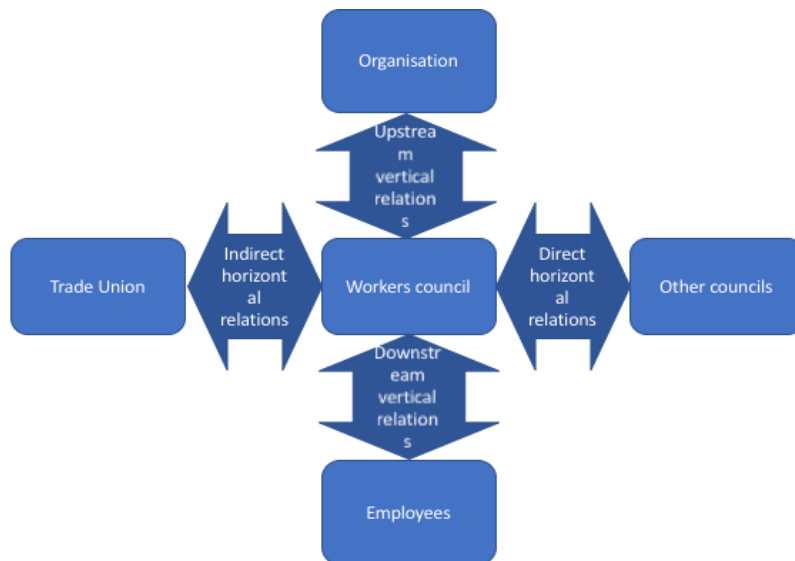


Figure 18: Relationships analysis

Based on the analysis of existing relationships, the horizontal relations are the most important within this issue, being researched in this thesis. The work of the trade union and especially of other councils will directly influence how the council is seen within the organisation. If labour agreements of colleagues, being related to other council and trade union institutions, are perceived as better, then employees will be less satisfied with the work of the current council. Those two initial observations helped the learning set members to define their shared understanding of where

they are positioned, and which forces might impact both their current work as well as the planned action implementations.

Following those two more describing analysis, Edwards (2013) suggest to include a SWOT analysis in order to identify the topics the organisation, in this case, the council has greater control over. This analysis was further done in a second learning set meeting. The timely differentiation should help the learning set members to understand and further observe their common understanding based on the previously defined PEST and relationship analysis. With this newly defined understanding, the set members engaged in the SWOT analysis to define their currently experienced and perceived Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

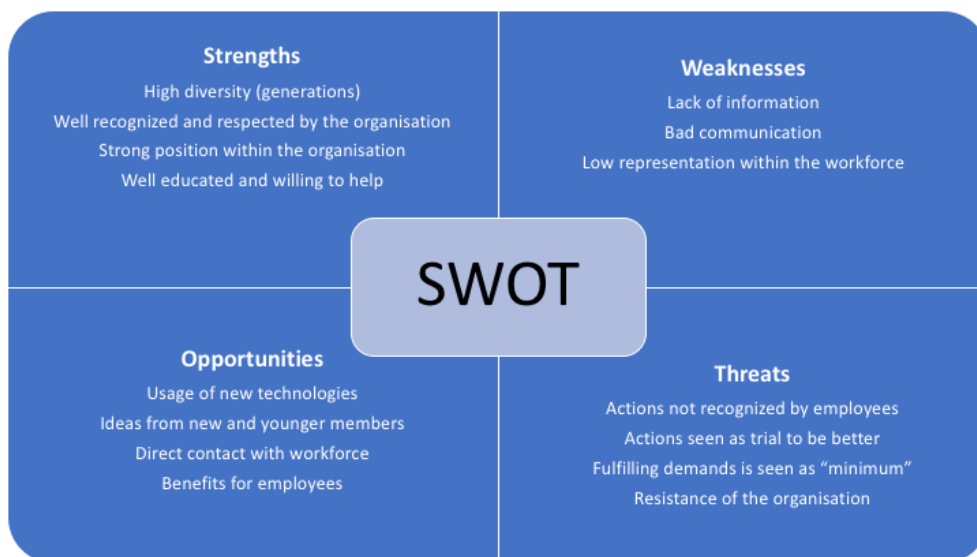


Figure 19: SWOT analysis

While working on the SWOT analysis, the council agreed to what was found within the interview analysis: it agreed that there is a lack of information and bad communication is happening as well as that the council is not present enough within the organisation. Nevertheless, did they identify some valuable strengths here? The high diversity seen from a generational aspect might help the council to address all

generations within the organisation and prevent that some employee feels left outside. A potential threat of feeling resistance of the organisation might be eliminated by the strengths that the council is well recognised and respected by the organisation. Potential opportunities to increase the overall satisfaction, besides better communication, and the usage of new technologies, will be the introduction of certain benefits for employees and the focus on ideas from younger members. Also, the usage of new technologies will be increased by offering the employees specific self-service tools like an electronic payslip, a project being done by the workers council in collaboration with the organisation. The planning approach for implementing and starting actions, which is described by Edwards as RACE (Research, Action, Communication and Evaluation) will follow the here used Action Research approach and be used through the learning set meetings (Edwards 2013).

Although borrowed from different “foreign” fields, the instruments presented helped the learning set to position them within the bigger context and get an understanding of the world surrounding them.

Thinking again at the communication aspect, De Nobile (2017), as well as Taljaard and de Beer (2019), show that communication, especially organisational communication can have a positive influence on employee satisfaction and engagement. Gautama So et al. (2018) further prove this by showing that organisational communication not only increases employee motivation but further influences employee performance, which will introduce benefit for the organisation. By transferring the communicational task also to the council, which, as Gautama So et al. suggest, can communicate openly, organisational commitment can be influenced and engagement increased, which will finally further affect performance and organisational behaviour, when referring the theories given in my literature research. Looking further at Dupe (2015), another aspect important for workers councils can be drawn from organisational communication, as she shows in her research that also conflicts can be reduced.

5.3.3 Core AR Cycle 3 – Taking Action

Based on the previously presented and discussed theoretical concepts, the initial action plan coming from learning set discussions will be presented within this section.

Based on the additional literature, that was presented during the planning stage, the learning set members decided to start working on the communication side to increase the employee engagement and the internal communication initiated by the council.

Therefore, the set decided to rework and recreate the internal workers council intranet site to represent the current council members and the work they are doing. Besides, multiple different information will be provided, for example, about the differentiation between workers councils and trade unions. In addition to this, a monthly newsletter was set up, informing all employees about the current work, the council members are doing. This information will be as detailed as possible and allowed, regarding the laws in Germany. The concept of the newsletter follows Gautama So et al.'s (2018) suggestions of openness during communication.

Looking closer at Ocak and Marangoz (2019), Balta (Balta 2018) and Chiu, Won and Bae (2019) internal marketing can be used as a measure to increase satisfaction and commitment of employees. Here, employees have to be seen as customers within the organisation. Their needs and wants need to be satisfied in order to create a positive feeling. Out of the different dimensions of internal marketing as presented by Kacarski and Kovachevski (2019), the motivational side is the one, the learning set agreed upon being most influenceable by the workers council. Based on the theories provided, the learning set sees the redesign and new intranet side as a starting point of a refined internal marketing strategy.

Combining marketing approach with the action research approach leads to a robust communicational approach, telling the employees about what is going on and presenting them the benefits they will have from different actions. Although these approaches form the necessary thinking of marketing, thinking more from an agile point of view seems even better suited for an action research-based project.

The agile view of marketing involves the definition of hacking the Facebook way. Mark Zuckerberg defined it as follows:

“The Hacker Way is an approach to building that involves continuous improvement and iteration. Hackers believe that something can always be better and that nothing is even complete. They just have to go fix it – often in the face of people who say it is impossible or are content with the status quo.” (Brinker)

Why is this important? The concept Facebook showed is scalable and nowadays present in terms like Scrum and Agile Development. Moreover, those principles can be transferred to almost every project and the task being worked on. The agile way can be seen as an emphasises of the action research approach used in the academic world. The division of tasks mainly characterises it into short phases of work and frequent reassessment and adaption of plans.

Moreover, it is this aspect that should be used within this action plan. It makes no sense to introduce all planned tasks in a usual big bang approach, as it takes time to plan and prepare. In other words, splitting some approaches into smaller parts will make it easier and faster applicable to the employees. Small sprints will be used here instead of the old-fashioned waterfall model.

The learning set has identified the creation of a new communication platform as well as a self-service toolset for employees as a starting point.

The steps to introduce those will involve designing a new intranet site as a landing page for all interested employees, regularly updating the news page with relevant information and creating a universal design to create some kind of corporate identity within the organisation – without logos of trade unions. The subtopic will further be enhanced through market research and regular surveys about the current work and expectations as experienced by the employees. Also, an important point will be the enhancement of presentations within employee meetings.

The toolset containing self-services will be split into smaller parts to be faster “on the market” and offer a direct benefit for employees. The first wave or sprint will introduce a time booking and time correction system for employees, an opportunity to be self-determined and not dependent on the HR-department within the organisation. A second step will further enhance this system by offering an electronic payslip for employees to be downloaded and printed whenever they like to.

Furthermore, our internal social network will be used as a secondary distribution tool to enable virtual discussions related to the topics being presented in the newsletters. This tool also serves as a base to start other discussions and introduce polls.

To tackle the additionally mentioned lack or presence among the council members, the learning set agreed to install a regularly round table meeting with the council members. This is done in a way that the meetings are offered weekly for a one-hour minimum duration. If discussions take longer, the duration could be adjusted. Within those meetings, employees can come and go as they like and listen or take part in the discussions. All topics can be addressed and discussed.

Following the agile approach, the big concept of reworking on the council representation will be realised by realising small ideas after each other in the form of smaller sprints. The learning set agreed to introduce a prioritised backlog, containing all tasks that will be approached during sprints. A sprint will have a duration of about three weeks, to be able to have a relatively fast implementation of the task. This quite long timespan is set because all members have to work on the tasks besides their regular work. Following the general procedure, there will be daily scrum meetings of about 15 minutes answering the following questions:

- *What did I do yesterday?*
- *What will I do today?*
- *Are there obstacles that prevent me or us from accomplishing the task and sprint goals?*

After the sprint ends, a sprint review, as well as a sprint retrospective, are done, letting the team members resemble on what went well during the sprint, what was achieved and what could be done better in the next sprint. As a next step, the next sprint is planned and the tasks to be accomplished in this timespan are assigned to the team members (Brinker).

To visualise, a Kanban board will be used, which is adapted to the agile process. Most simply, to avoid costs like setting up a server and implementing software, this can be done via cards and a whiteboard in the workers council office. The board resembles the backlog, presenting the prioritised ideas in a “To do” column. Tasks currently in progress are shown by their card in the “Progress” column, which is followed by “Review” and “Done”. With this board, everything can be tracked and directly visualised. In a further project, the usage of appropriate software tools for agile project management, like Jira, for example, would be a further option. Different colours and shapes of the cards will resemble teams and sprints, as shown in Figure 20.

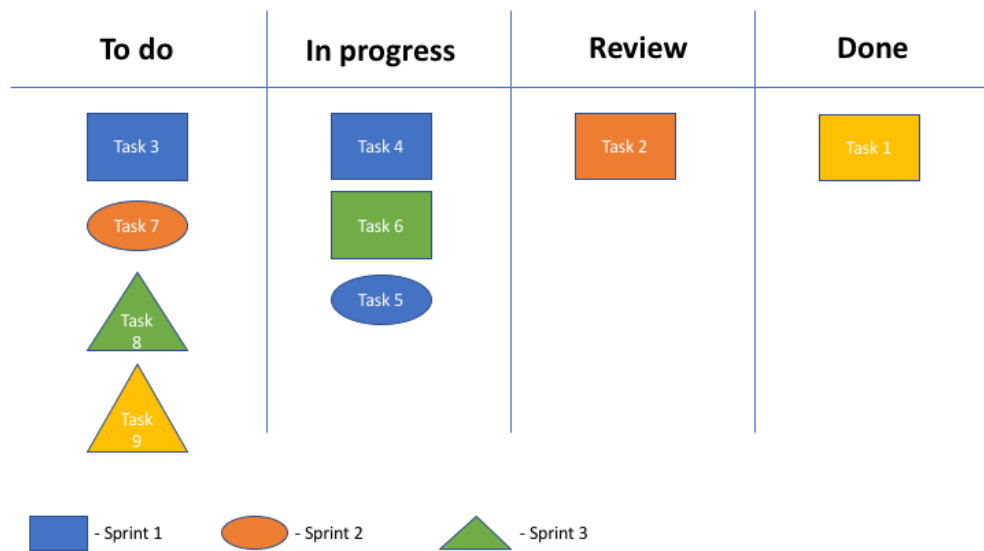


Figure 20: Backlog Example

Within the following section, I will look closer at what happened within the organisation. Therefore, I took a look at the backlog and agile board that was used by the learning set. While the initial brainstorming with cards was good enough,

things got messed up soon and had to be moved when the meetings were over. Therefore, the learning set decided to use an online board version provided by Microsoft Azure in their DevOps solution.

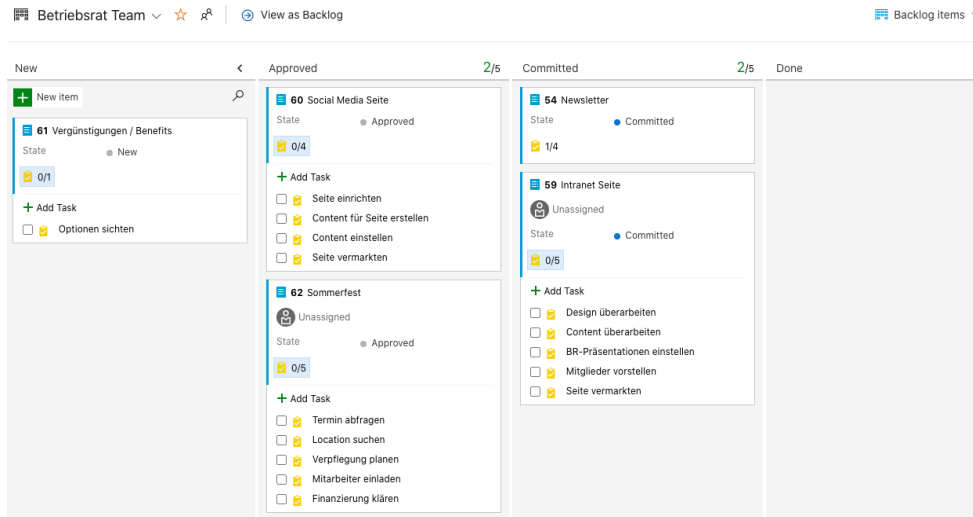


Figure 21: Backlog before first sprint

The figure above is representing the backlog before the first sprint, showing that the learning set committed themselves to work on the newsletter and the new intranet site as stated. The yellow points represent the individual tasks that were identified by the learning set member that need to be done to fulfil the backlog item. Furthermore, did the set members approve the implementation of a new social media page as well as the planning of a summer festival for the employees. The point of introducing several benefits as also suggested by the interviewees was considered as a new point, not valued at the moment.

Based on those items, the first sprint was planned. The following figures represent a work in process view during the first sprint. In the first figure, the social media page is represented. The initial creation of the page is already finished, the first content is in the stage of creation, while the marketing of the page has not started.

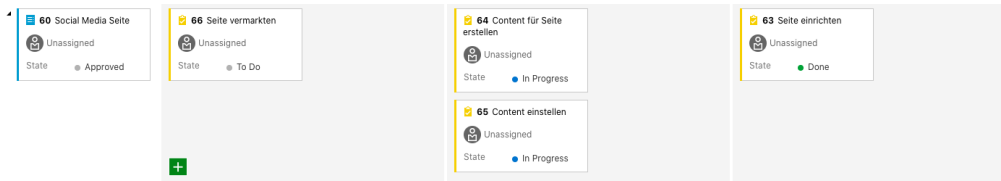


Figure 22: Sprint planning - Social Media page

The same can be seen for the newsletter and the intranet site in the next two figures. Here, the topics to present were decided, but the content had to be created.

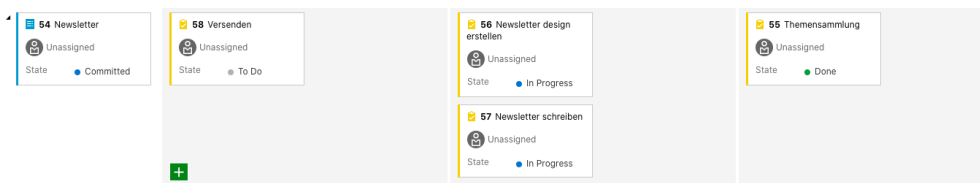


Figure 23: Sprint planning - Newsletter

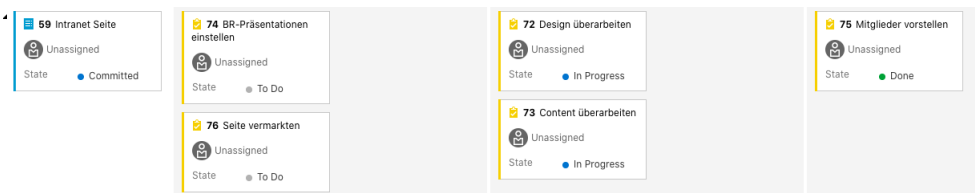


Figure 24: Sprint planning - Intranet site

A particular point is related to the summer festival. As participants called for more communication, more regular employee meetings, and different chances to meet besides work, the learning set decided to plan an employee meeting with a summer festival following the official part. During the sprint, the location was defined, and the employees were given a survey to decide upon a date via mail. After having an estimation of employees and a potential date, the learning set members continue to plan the food and beverages as well as how the festival can be financed.

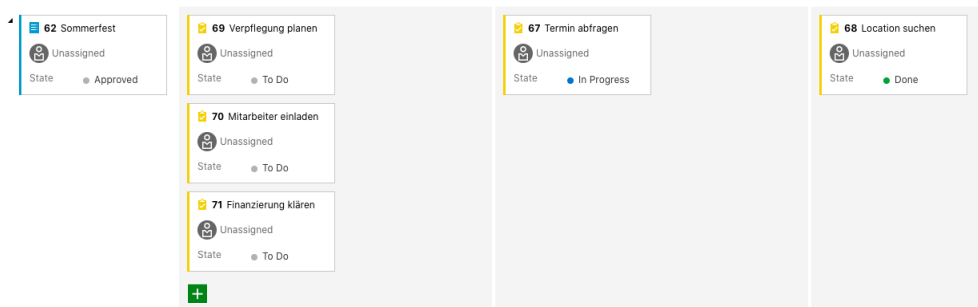


Figure 25: Sprint planning - summer event

5.3.4 Core AR Cycle 4 – Evaluating Action

Reflections on the planned actions or tasks are done within the sprint review and retrospective meetings. After implementing the first few steps, it seems that within the organisation, especially among the employees, the awareness of the council is rising. Employees seem to recognise that the council is working on a solution to be more interactive within the organisation and among the employees. Especially are the monthly newsletters recognised, and the feedback received so far is quite positive.

The next tasks following in other sprints will set up the round table meeting, which will be advertised within the social network and the newsletter. Also, the planning of more regular labour meetings started, and the information sharing among the employees is seen more positively.

5.3.5 Going back to the field

A couple of weeks after the first sprint and the first agile actions that were introduced within the organisation, I stepped back into the organisation and did talk again with the learning set as well as take another set of interviews with my participants. The interviews were more open, having only a few questions related to the actions, to have a more open conversation about how employees feel after introducing some change.

After talking to the learning set, they reported that the agile method proposed is working good for taking actions and working on different action items, still in their

backlog. Furthermore, they admitted that some training courses designed for workers council work seem to also suggest and present the agile method as one being able to support the work of councils and introduce fast changes and actions within the organisation.

A couple of weeks after introducing the first changes within the organisation and letting the learning set work on further implementations, I decided to go back into the organisation and review what has happened so far. Based on this, I decided to schedule interviews again with the initial participants and ask how they experienced the changes and if they noticed some change going on.

Therefore, I decided to do an open interview with minor guiding questions in order to dive right into a discussion with the participants. I asked for some specific actions after receiving the confirmation that they noticed some change within the organisation.

5.3.6 Interview evaluation

As already said, the interviews on introduced actions were conducted using the same participants of the original interviews. The interviews were again recorded and transcribed as well as anonymised afterwards. Again, MaxQDA was used to analyse and code the transcriptions for further evaluation and analysis.

Looking at the interviews being made as a reflectional part; all participants see and feel a change going on within the organisation. All of the participants stated that there is a change going on and that communication of the workers council has improved. Furthermore, some, but not all participants see that the presence of the council members is increasing. This is resulting from the actions being taken so far, as the actual presence at the organisation's site is still the same as before, only the experienced presence of the council has grown.

The newsletter for examples is seen as a perfect way to spread information across the employees, although some participants note that the content related especially for the site could be increased, as currently, the workers council presents a mixture of information related to the site and the whole organisation.

As the round table meetings were not regularly introduced so far, I asked the participants about their thoughts. Those that did not feel the presence being increased so far stated that those meetings would be great to have the possibility to talk directly to the relevant colleagues. All of them furthermore said that those meetings would be a great benefit because it would enable all colleagues to discuss problems in a more significant dialogue and share the different feelings and thoughts that might be present.

As also the first employee meeting, also as requested by law, was held without our CEO (according to the German Works Constitution Act, the CEO only has to attend at least once per year), people appreciated the open conversation and dialogue that happened there. According to the participants, the more private surroundings without the CEO made the council members talk more openly and enabled us to have an open, honest, and direct dialogue to share fears, concerns, and address problems.

To summarise the reflectional interviews, I did after introducing the first actions, I would like to cite one participant:

“If the development and change continue in the way it has evolved over the last couple of weeks, it should be enough. The actions workers councils are granted by law are restricted, so what happened so far is a great overall improvement.”

Looking at this comment shows me that the actions being taken so far are working and are increasing the overall satisfaction. The employees are noticing the change and react more open to actions being taken.

5.4 Action Research Cycle 4 – Evaluating Action

The last cycle within the action research project evaluates and reflects on the results and outcomes of all other cycles. The cyclical approach within this research project, allowed a continuous evolution of the topic and a quick adjustment of central themes if needed. Especially the learning set work, being based on theoretical concepts derived from different domains, seems to be a key driver within the action

learning and action research area. Stepping back and looking at the overall project, after implementing the actions and change with the council members, makes me see something happen, as also said by participants. The first-round table talks were held so far, and the participation of employees was relatively high. It was evident that employees enjoyed the possibility to have a quick or more extended chat with council members about topics they are interested in.

Coming originally from the software development domain, I had to think about the concept of continuous delivery (Dullmann, Paule & Hoorn 2018; Shahin et al. 2017) while working and especially while reflecting on this project. The process reminded me of this concept, especially the automation part. By having the roundtable talks, for example, employees are enabled to interact directly with the council in a way never known before. By this interaction, critics and requests for improvement can be expressed on which the council can work and implement. This is comparable to automated software tests and build processes. Furthermore, the whole project was for me as an ongoing development project. Every step adds, and each cycle might reveal problems that it fixes and introduces change to the whole product.

5.5 Conclusions

Deciding to take the agile approach used in software development projects and transfer it to the renewal of the council activities helped the workers council to be more agile. By dividing the big topics into smaller tasks that can be executed in a short period, the council can prove that change is going on without having a complex project managing structure and acting behind the scenes until everything is ready. The agile approach proved to give them a faster ROI in a more abstract sense of meaning. By using pools and asking for further suggestions and improvement ideas, the tasks for the next sprint can be directly adjusted within the sprint planning meeting. This way, the employees feel that the council is acting much faster and working more directly on what the employees are concerned. Using the agile approach means resolving one of the most prominent critics found during the interviews: the council is looking more at the big political picture and less at the employees.

Chapter 6

Outcomes and Conclusion

6.1 Fulfilment of research objectives

Thinking back at my initial objective, to find out if workers councils can positively influence employee engagement and organisational commitment, I can answer this question with yes – thinking about this objective, the research fulfils it. But this answer also depends, as it is not generalisable. Although the actions taken by the learning set and presented during the action research cycle within this dissertation introduced a change within the organisation that positively influenced the engagement at the workplace, the results depend on the specific setting. To experience an effect derived from the actions, employees, as well as council members, have to be open for change. Following Ford and Ford (1994), I would say it all depends on the attractiveness of the change to the individual. The results are strongly dependent on the setting, namely, the research site. Nevertheless, does the council and their attitude play an important role as well as the fact that a council exists. Further research with different settings will be needed to derive a more generalised theory, as explained later within this chapter.

Before closing the study, I will reflect again on the hypotheses created in chapter 2:

H1: Workers councils can create and increase positive organisational behaviour within the organisation, which will also optimise human capital.

As organisational behaviour within this dissertation follows the general definition of the interplay of different groups within an organisation, based on the context of the research did the workers council positively increase it through the implemented actions, as already assumed after analysing the interview transcriptions. As human capital is depending on employee satisfaction, increasing satisfaction through motivation and fulfilment of their needs, human capital will be optimised.

H2: Every action taken by the council or council members will introduce reactions at all organisational levels, that should be taken into account.

This is already based on the physical principle of action and reaction. Actions introduced within this research project proved that reactions were forced at the employee level. Furthermore, different reactions are even given by law, for

example, the requested employee meetings that require representatives of the organisation being present as well as regular meetings with the organisations' management.

H3: Workers councils can positively influence employee engagement at the workplace and therefore increase employee satisfaction and commitment by engaging at least one of the dimensions.

Taking the round table talks as an example here, the number of employees that participate shows that the engagement is positively influenced by the council's actions. This observation is further a mixture with the reaction hypothesis presented above, as the positive action taken by the council is accepted by the employees.

H4: Workers councils can influence how employees participate within the organisation and reduce potential intentions to quit by representing their voice and communicating directly.

H7: Workers councils should care for the employees within the organisation. Through taking care, employees are given voice and satisfaction can be raised, leading to increased performance, and reduced turnover rates.

I see a strong correlation between H4 and H7. Giving employees voice will introduce a form of participation within the organisation. If employees fear to directly participate and for example, engage management, giving voice will help them in raising their calls for equality. This support and care employees experience will raise the satisfaction level and increase performance. The round table talks, here again, are one possible mean to give employees voice, as different topics can be directly addressed and discussed. Those topics can then, if needed, be raised with the management by the workers council.

H5: The use of social media and new forms of communication can further enhance the relationship of workers councils with their employees and positively influence the experience of employees at work resulting in increased productivity.

The use of social media has several positive influences on the experience of workers. First, especially in the context of my organisation, employees positively realized that the council uses new methods to be able to reach employees on different channels. Furthermore, does this option give employees voice without standing in the crowd, by using private direct messaged, for example.

H6: Workers councils, as well as trade unions, play a role within the organisation as there might even exist role dualities being present.

There is no direct action linked to the hypothesis, which was proved within my context during the interview analysis. Nevertheless, did the council try to address the existing separation by sharing information about the German co-determination system in their digital media representations.

Coming back to my initially adjusted question, I can say that workers council initiatives can directly influence employee satisfaction. Adding small and soft actions and introducing small changes based on agile working paradigms, lead to continuous improvement and a higher maintained state of satisfaction of employees. I feel that employees need the certainty that someone is there to listen to them. Following the literature and even the law, this is one of the tasks of a workers council. One task that seems to have vanished over time, as the organisation grew and got bigger. With the additional workload put on councils, those tasks were neglected.

By coming back to the roots and concentrating on the topics mentioned within this research project, workers council can introduce an overall satisfaction level within an organisation that will also benefit the economic purpose of the organisation itself, making the workforce more productive. Giving employees the chance to talk, to interact and also to complain makes them feel more valued as an individual within the organisation.

6.2 Outcomes for the organisation

Within the organisation, one can see change occurring. This is not some subtle process of introducing change, but it is visible. The council tried to make them more

present within the company by introducing a new design concept. As we have seven council members, they bought seven little garden gnomes, each equipped with an exchangeable sign. They are placed directly in the entrance of the company as well as on each floor and in the recreation room. The signs give information about current important news, like employees' meetings, road blockings around the building or new agreements made with the employer.

The actual change that is ongoing, on the other hand, is more subtle. From my discussions within the learning set, I noticed that the council members know, something is not working right, but they found themselves within a status quo not easy to leave. They seemed to need motivation, an impulse to start working. Besides, as I work for an IT-company, using the agile framework to work on change makes it easier for the members to introduce change, as they can continue like their daily work.

Although not all of the change is directly related to the behaviour of the council, employees feel that something happened. During the interviews for my reflectional part, I noticed that employees started to change their mind about the council and valued for example an extended knowledge sharing that happened during the latest employee's meeting.

Concluding, I can say that the organisation directly benefits from an introduced change and actions introduced by the council members. However, this benefit must be seen on the personal, the emotional level. We, as employees, as well as the management within the organisations, have to get rid of thinking only about financial impacts. For sure, every action will finally result in a financial impact, but recognising and assessing actions only then is too late. The actions introduced during this research project, for example, will increase the overall satisfaction of the employees, which finally might lead to higher motivation and therefore higher productivity, enabling the organisation to increase the monetary turnover. However, the critical point here is not to wait, not to see this now as given, but to escape this current state of equilibrium and continue to introduce change, continue to work on actions. It is vital to introduce a continuous change in order to keep the impact high.

6.2.1 Workers Councils viewpoint

From the perspective of the workers council, after having several talks within the learning set, I must say that the council's view has changed. Through the interviews, the council received more or less direct feedback and reflection of how employees perceived their existence. One council member said:

"We know that we did too less, but no one started to change something."

Then the council found itself in a state of equilibrium they had to break through before something could change and happen. The research project was the starting point they needed to introduce change. From their perspective, the actions needed quite a few efforts compared to what they might bring as a potential benefit, not only for the council but also for the employees and the organisation.

It is now crucial for the council to get some routine with the actions implemented. The newsletters must be regularly, as well as the labour meetings and the information rounds.

6.2.2 Employee viewpoint

Thinking of what employees responded, they feel that something is different. Participants I talked with later confirmed that they see that the council is more present and cares about them. To be clear, it is not about taking more care, but about feeling that they take care of. This observation and experienced feeling gives the employees the feeling that something is happening within the organisation that people are listening and taking care of. Even if they do not get this feeling from the organisation, by having it from actions by the councils increases their satisfaction and engagement at the workplace, leading to better performance and higher organisational commitment.

6.3 Implications for future practice

Just being there, as it was in the "old" days is not enough. Organisations are changing, and so are institutions within the organisations. Addison et al. (2007) said

that trade unions have to think about their presentation, their strategies and the change they are experiencing, and I am adding: so, have workers councils within the organisation. It is not enough to merely focus on the whole organisation but to narrow the focus on individual parts and make them act like small organisations within the bigger one.

It is this old-fashioned thinking that is hitting a changing world, which is facing enough other problems like generational conflicts and more stress at work. Our private lives are rapidly changing; people are getting used to immediate information and immediate access to all resources worldwide in their private environment. Facing an old-fashioned thinking and information culture at work will lead to dissatisfaction among the employees, different negative meanings are amplifying each other, making this movement even worse. The workers council should be the institution that could introduce a change directly, involving the employees and showing them that they care. It should be the councils own and direct interest to stand up and change something, to introduce a new way of teamwork and cooperation and to adapt to the changing world.

It is on the councils and institutions to think about the change they want to bring into their organisation and to enhance the relationship to the employees. Every council member must think about how they can interact more successfully with the employees and how they can introduce benefit to the workforce. The council is the institution elected by the employees to help them, so the re-thinking needs to start here. The collaboration within the organisation is essential to face a re-thinking of how they work. Although the actions presented within this work have to be seen as examples that worked in a specific environment, the original context being presented is that the workers council should look beyond their noses and be brave enough to take concepts from very diverse and foreign areas. Using an agile approach taken from software development, no matter what industry the organisation is working in, will enable them to implement changes quickly and, much more important, test and review them without high expenses.

It might be interesting for councils to look aside from the convenient roads. Taking different pieces of training, not directly offered to council members, will introduce

new and fresh ideas. Taking an agile training, for example, even if none of the members is related to software development, will introduce an entirely new way to look at their work. There are many quantitative studies dealing with workers councils and their perceptions within organisation and studies are demanding a more qualitative and detailed approach to look into the organisations and not only derive meaning from figures of surveys (Addison, Schnabel & Wagner 1999; Addison, Schnabel & Wagner 2007). I tried to deliver a first beginning point to look into organisations and to find more about how councils are perceived by simple employees within organisations.

6.4 Implications for future research

Having talked before about what creates a weak council will open the discussion for further research as well as introduce implications for other settings. Organisations and councils, in general, should ensure that every member is trained well and has received the knowledge needed for the position. One cannot influence elections as this would also harm the democratic idea, but one could ensure that every elected member is well trained to create a strong council.

Thinking about the future of this topic and potential further research, I can say that more research is needed in other organisations with different constellations: other trade unions, other types of councils, non-unionised organisations with a council or organisations with multiple unions present. As those factors will influence how people experience their council and union as well as how different methods might work within an organisation, further qualitative research, ideally in the form of further action research-based studies in collaboration with the councils, is needed. I want to emphasise here especially the term “qualitative” and ideally in any form of action research, as most studies related to workers councils and trade unions in German focus on figures and present broadened results quantitatively. I believe that my study and findings show, that this thinking and generalising of simple survey figures, as well as mainly quantitative analysis in the classic “outside” way, is not applicable to gain an understanding of what is going on. Outside quantitative analysis will not give any details about *“people that are in the council but would not*

have been employed in the current stage” or “I do not distinguish between trade unions and workers councils, they are one, I do not care”. Being within, being an insider will reveal more relevant information related to the success and concept of co-determination in Germany than any quantitative study based on panel data would be. Thinking about the bias, I follow Ford and Ford (1994) by believing that every data is biased in some way. As soon as we start to analyse and interpret data, we add a bias in some way to it. Following Coughlan and Brannick (2014), being an insider will reveal much more information than numbers could do, at least within this domain. There are too many small differences and differentiations to think about, that cannot be measured during a quantitative study and would be neglected as some noise if even noticeable.

Generalisation within this domain and related to my research project might be possible, but, as previously discussed, adjustments are needed to suit the different contexts within the organisations. Depending on the constellation of trade unions and workers councils, different methods might be directly applied to increase employee satisfaction. Other aspects might need further research and adjustments. If there are, for example, various trade unions present fighting against each other through the corresponding members within the workers council, an additional level of dissatisfaction among employees could be created that needs to be analysed. One point open for further research is the creation of a more general action plan or framework to implement as a starting point within organisations. Furthermore, it might be essential to emphasise the overall importance to see different departments as single states and organisations within an organisation. To remain vivid, organisations must adapt and so have departments, institutions, and individuals.

Thinking further about research might also introduce researching the agile concept in different settings, as presented partly within this research project. As this will involve a more extended case study approach, further research on the success of this approach will be needed.

6.5 Limitations of the research

The first limitation within the research, although an essential figure for the kind of qualitative research chosen, is the number of people used as participants for the qualitative interview part. Nevertheless, although the ten participants were entirely different, they did share many common thoughts and assumptions. Furthermore, is the trade union being present here one of the most historic ones being present in German. The trade union belongs to the mining industry, which was the first industry developing a concept of co-determination. Having this in mind, it is quite apparent to see and find in the interview transcripts, that the union has an entirely different relationship to the employer than other trade unions in today's working environment have.

Sticking with the trade union, do the results of this study mainly depend on the presence of this one specific union within the organisation. Looking at the results and transcripts, participants describe times with two or even three unions being present within the organisation. In those times, the unions were mainly occupied with fighting each other within the organisation and having more members than the other. So, the overall results of this study are always linked to the union or unions being present within the organisation as well as how the union acts within the organisation. Furthermore, this concept is transferable to workers councils. The results will also heavily depend on the influence of the council within the organisation as well as the type of the council. If the council tries to be open and works collaboratively with the organisation's management, the results are more applicable than with a fighting council.

Kotthoff (2008) wrote that workers councils are a group of unsuccessful people within an organisation, seeking for an alternative career. I do not agree with him, thinking this way, but I agree with the concept behind this comment. One of my participants – council member and very actively engaged within trade union activities – said it that way:

“There are members in the council that I would not have taken
as employees.”

Although this sounds hard and similar, it is a different concept. Council members are elected by the employees and most of the time, are people elected that are popular, nevertheless if they care or know about the processes. Some members are engaged in learning, who do courses and attend seminars, who study economics and learn about laws, but there are also members who are not interested and only are in the position. This is dangerous for the organisation, as this results in a weak council.

With that in mind, not all concepts apply to every scenario and every council. Everything presented within this research project is limited to the particular setting the research was done for.

While looking at the organisational context, the site being researched has a strong relation to co-determination history, including a long history in general. Furthermore, the site's population of about 100-160 employees base the research on a relatively small target population with a participant sample of 10% of the target population. The site's population can be compared to larger startups and smaller organisations, while the strong relations to history and co-determination is more descriptive for older, traditional enterprises in Germany. This mixture might both include a limitation in the findings being presented here, but also offer a benefit and potentially interesting aspect to transfer concepts to both traditional and huge enterprises as well as to small startups with less co-determination or a lack of workers council.

6.6 Closing remarks

The study followed the first action cycle or sprint if I follow the agile wording. This means that there are some improvements, especially regarding satisfaction and perception of the council being recognisable, but the process is not finished with the end of this dissertation. The process is ongoing, and there will not be one final step or final milestone. As the actions must be reviewed repeatedly, the introduced change has to be seen as an ongoing process. Especially the election of a new council will demand additional work. If the council changes due to new elections, a

transition stage must be introduced, leading to an introduction of the established concepts and tools to new council members.

Chapter 7

Postscript

7.1 Autobiographical nature of the project

I am working within the organisation for 15 years. Within this time, I have been a member of the workers council for four years and an active member of the corresponding trade union for about ten years, before cancelling the membership. Having gained different insights into the academic world during my studies, I have always been a practitioner. It was this DBA programme that had the most influence on my personal development as well as my development as a doctoral practitioner.

When I started the programme, I felt like having only some basic knowledge within the academic domain, although having written other academic papers before. The programme changed my way of thinking and experiencing the world and helped me to position myself within the ontological and epistemological paradigms. Being able to live in both, the academic and practitioner's world helps to solve real-world problems, as one is not only limited to practical problem solving but also knows how to research and come up with theoretical concepts that could be translated to the faced problem.

When I started the programme, I would see myself deeply tied within the positivist paradigm. I was mainly related to numbers and hard facts, maybe based on my computer sciences background. I believed in one single reality, that is true for everyone while findings made by researchers are true. My beliefs or thoughts were like "if the figures tell this, it is true". While being in the programme, I was made thinking about the positions. Before, I was not even really aware of the other paradigms one could think about. Personally, I think Ford and Ford (1994) and their trialectics view, as well as their interpretation of change, made me really think about my position within the different paradigms. Seeing change and especially resistance not simply as something given but something that differs depending on the viewpoint made me think. For Ford and Ford, resistance simply means that the employee was not attracted to the change, so resistance is related to the individual viewpoints of employees. While reflecting on this definition that seemed understandable and comprehensible for me, I started to look at other paradigms. I cannot define the concrete moment when the switch in my mind happened, but I

began to feel that the constructionist paradigm seemed to suit the mindset I gained throughout the program. I began to see knowledge, and the perception of the world is gained through reflection and construction within our mind. The course of learning I experienced throughout the program as well as the different articles I read presented this construct even more in practice. Through learning and throughout the programme, my assumptions and observations of the world changed. While I was a figure guy, in the beginning, thinking now about qualitative observations opens an entirely new world. This fact, for example, shows me that the truth I experience and the world and reality in which I act is depending on my thoughts and interpretations. Reflecting deeper on this let me to the belief that even knowledge and research results are constructed. As everything, no matter if quantitative or qualitative research, is interpreted, the findings of every research depend on the viewpoints and assumptions of the researcher. This is something I also found with Ford and Ford, as they state that every research might be biased, as results are interpreted based on the beliefs and assumptions of the researcher. This does not mean that research is wrong or have failures but might not be interpreted the same way by other researches or used the same way by different practitioners. Assumptions might change over time, depending on different experiences. As those assumptions might change, perceptions and views will change. Therefore, I believe after what I experienced during the program, that the way we see the world is strongly related to what we experienced so far. We are changing, and so is the truth and reality we are experiencing.

However, it is not only this. Especially in the last weeks of this dissertation project, I realised how my thinking changed and was influenced by the academic world and the programme. I always liked to solve problems and finding suitable solutions, but as said, based more on a practical approach. Whenever I encountered a specific problem in the last weeks, I started thinking about researching the problem, identifying potentially relevant literature and theories, and transferring them to my problem to take action. It is a creeping process, which one will not notice. It simply happens, and one day, one realises it. That is what happened to me, it hit me, and I suddenly realised that I adopted the way of thinking the action research way. I included action research principles in my life and daily routine during the

programme. But not only related to this project. Whenever I face problems or issues in general, I include academic research and theory into my solution-finding process. I started to include academic theory into customer presentations and into building potential solutions for customers. While working, and especially in my practice as a consultant, I noticed that there seems to be an entirely new world that has opened for me. While working on concepts, linking academic theories, and transferring them to help me solve problems and propose potential changes within customer's organisations has helped me going further within my practice. It is this border that has been there for several years between the academic and practitioner's world, the border that separated potential answers on both sides from questions on the other side. I personally feel that while working on this programme and this research thesis project helped me to demolish this border and to unlock an entirely new world.

Maybe also the birth of my daughter a few months ago added further to this thinking and the beliefs. When I look at her, her reality exists mainly of my wife and me. We are here taking care, fulfilling her needs. As she grows, her world also grows, and she adds new people, new things she learned and new routines. Her world changes and her reality is adjusted by including other relevant people, later also friends and assumptions and perceptions based on what she learned. This reveals to me that the world we experience, the reality is constructed and depending on our mindset.

7.2 Influence of Action-Research during the project

When I first started learning about action research, it was hard for me to understand the terms and actual processes lying within this approach. While working on the research project, taking Zuber-Skerrit (2002) and Coghlan and Brannick (2014) into account, I realized that much of what we are doing seems to be already related to action research. Writing the thesis or an academic paper, in general, follows the process and cycles presented within action research.

With this changed and new mindset, stepping inside the organisation, developing action, and really taking those actions was a relatively new experience. It is this connection between academic theory and academic concepts, combined with real action and implementation of the developed theories that made this research project special in comparison to earlier academic work I did. By stepping inside and discussing with the learning set, theories are directly tested, and new viewpoints are shared, that the researcher would not have discovered, at least not in this early stage during a research project.

Action-Research helped me in my project to get hands-on the action and directly test the outcomes that the research delivered. In comparison to other research approaches, the researcher can directly develop theories and approaches that can be tested, something generally done in further research projects.

This was somehow like when I first learned about Scrum. The processes used in agile development and especially within the Scrum framework are quite common in many development processes and projects. Things are sometimes done intuitively, without having them planned. What makes it then a Scrum-based project is closely following the framework and implementing all the defined steps within the process. I would like to link this to the principles of action research, how I experienced and learned them. We often reflect on things we do in our daily practice and might also adjust our actions. Looking at children, for example, we call this learning from failure. If something went wrong, we learn and do it differently. Reflecting on what I did, I realize that also parts are used within project management. When I think about lessons learned workshops, I could compare this to the reflection and observation cycle within action research as those workshops are intended to create learning from what went wrong, to adjust things during the next project.

Thinking again back about actions during my project, the interpretations I draw from the interviews helped me to create different actions with the learning set members. The actions presented that were implemented were relatively easy to implement and helped the workers council to gain a better reputation among the employees. Nevertheless, it was challenging. Having a background within the domain of software development, I am more hands-on than planning too much. I never was

much into a documentation of my code or writing long text-based concepts. Based on those characteristics, the initial planning and construction process took quite long for me and challenged me within the project. During my times as a practitioner, I was more used to research while implementing projects, like doing a quick Google search to find a solution instead of really researching academic papers and building or constructing upon the theoretical concepts being presented. But going through the process multiple times in the presented cycles helped me to learn that this can be more efficient. Having this solid plan and construct to build upon is more reliable and might even introduce faster results and solutions than the hands-on approach I was used to. It was a challenging change of thinking and acting, but, reflecting on it, I can say it was worth the challenge and effort.

7.3 Learning process of the researcher during the project

The learning set work that was done during one cycle of my action research project was quite interesting for me from the position of a learner. Thinking about life-long learning and action learning where every participant evolves within self-learning, I noticed that there is always a will for change being present among people. Everyone seems to be open to change, to learn and to take action, if an initial impulse is present.

The learning set members, for example, seemed to know about some of the lacking actions that participants claimed, but found themselves being within an equilibrium, not able to start a change by themselves. It seemed that an external impulse, in this case, given by the researcher, was needed to start the introduction of change. After this first ignition of the process, new ideas emerged, and everyone was more and more passionate to continue the journey. Ignition seems to be a useful metaphor here, as it is comparable to a motor. The mixture of fuel and air needs an impulse to start burning and producing force, but after this initial impulse, it keeps running until the fuel is exhausted.

Stepping back from the learning set mentioned here, my learning started with the very beginning of the project. As mentioned in the previous section, I always was

more hands-on and planning and constructing was a challenge for me. Nevertheless, did this challenge introduce learning and new viewpoints for my perspective to consider in my daily life. The whole project was for me about learning. Of course, the organisation and its members did learn, but the development I personally went through, introduced the most significant learning, from my perspective. The development I have undergone during the project brought some shifts of my mindset with me. I finalized more or less the shift mentioned in the paradigms I believe in and further experienced the power of planning from the academic perspective. While planning and doing customer workshops, this new mindset opened multiple different approaches and perspectives I can include during those workshops. The learning set work and the ongoing reflection I experienced during the programme and project are particularly useful to be applied in customer workshops. Furthermore, the ability to include academic research and transfer outcomes into the practical side at work adds another depth to the topic. Transferring the outcomes of the academic research to a real-world organisational issue and working with a learning set on the issue to create actionable knowledge was a new process that presented to me an immersive potential for future projects and issues I might face during my career as a consultant, as a manager or as a project manager.

Following Ramsey's (2014) presentation of rigour within research projects and management learning, I have to say that I experienced how thin the line could be. Following her, a simple idea or different thoughts can be no more than this, even if presented in an academic paper. It needs testing of the concepts and evaluation of the results to make the concepts scholarly. To make them differ from being just a simple idea. This viewpoint correlates for my understanding strongly with the concept of action research, where every action is tested and evaluated. The outcome of those steps further defines if the action can be used in a scholarly way or not. Action learning and action research for me are some guidance on adding inquiry to an idea while solving a problem.

As mentioned within the introduction, I feel like telling my own narration of my path throughout the project, which is mixed end enhanced by academic theories and

methodologies to add to the academic world and create benefits for future research and practice.

7.4 Reflections from the researcher

Having worked with many different people in my organisation during the development of this study, it was one statement that I regularly heard, no matter whom I talked to about my study. This statement was: *“This has nothing to do with IT, why did you choose this topic?”*

Reflecting now about this statement, I have to say: it is a good one. For the most time of my life, I have been fascinated by IT, sometimes almost obsessed. I have completed a diploma in business informatics related to the creation of a software product supporting the payroll processing, a Bachelor of Arts and a master of science related to IT security topics and am now researching about something as far away from IT as it could be: Co-determination in Germany.

It is a good and obvious one, but I also feel connected to those “non-IT” topics, to the economic world and processes going on within the organisation. I have been a member of a trade union for over ten years before I decided to quit and was a member of a council for four years after I was re-elected. Therefore, and by looking at the changing environments, I felt that change was needed and thought about what might be possible.

It is this feeling and the interest that guided me through developing this research project, but finally, it was this feeling to help people, like a participant said: *“to make this world a little better”*.

Overall, the whole programme introduced a huge self-development path that I dealt with over the last years. The process was kind of smooth so that no change is experienced daily, instead, there were moments when I realized that my mindset had changed or my way of thinking or approaching issues changed. As mentioned already at the beginning of this chapter, the change of paradigms for me is crucial for everything I learned and experienced during this project. There were moments I struggled and moments I thought about possible failure, but the support I received

as well as the new mindset helped me to go through the process. It is not about having the next big ideas worth a Nobel prize; it is more about introducing change about changing something in the organisation and making it better. Nevertheless, am I also an academic, so this change needs to be recorded, tracked and analysed. This is presented within this thesis, and I leave it for further projects to transfer my thoughts, my findings, and my actions to other contexts or even a generalized theory. My mindset did evolve, and I believe that my future paths will benefit from my new thinking and the academic skills I learned throughout this program.

Appendix A

Ethical Approval of the Research study

Dear Marc Augustin,

I am pleased to inform you that the DBA Ethics Committee has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below:

Committee Name: DBA Ethics Committee

Title of Study: "Works councils and trade unions in Germany: conflicts of interests and role duality in labour agreements – creating unsatisfied employees through bargaining"

Student Investigator: Marc Augustin

School/Institute: School of Management

Approval Date: 22 July 2016

The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

- The researchers must obtain ethical approval from a local research ethics committee if this is an international study
- University of Liverpool approval is subject to compliance with all relevant national legislative requirements if this is an international study.
- All serious adverse events must be reported to the Sub-Committee within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the Research Integrity and Governance Officer (ethics@liv.ac.uk)
- If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Committee of the amendment.

This approval applies to the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Committee should be notified.

Kind regards

DBA Ethics Committee

University of Liverpool Management School in Partnership with Laureate Online Education

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Title of study:

Influence of workers councils and trade unions on employee satisfaction – An action research approach to increase employee satisfaction through workers council initiatives.

Introduction:

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends or relatives if you wish. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to analyze the influence of workers councils and trade union work and activity on the employee's satisfaction. The study aims at creating initiatives and potential policies to increase the overall satisfaction and to antagonize potential conflicts and dissatisfaction. Further will this study also analyse potential relations between employee satisfaction, experienced council work, labour agreements and the outcomes of wage negotiations.

Who is the researcher?

The researcher in the study is employee of Atos IT-Dienstleistung und Beratung GmbH but has no supervision or management role related to the participants taking part. Therefore, no implications regarding the voluntary participation are created and no pressure is executed on any of the participants to take part in the study. Participation is completely voluntary.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

Based on the methodology and research design, a total of 10 - 20 participants will be invited and interviewed for the research project. The participants will be chosen based on a purposeful sampling approach. This means that individual participants will be chosen based on their ability to add to the research topic. As the research is taking place at the site of the researcher, all employees might be potential participants. Therefore, a random selection is invited, from which the interview participants will be selected.

Do I have to take part?

The participation in the study is voluntary, so you don't have to take part. Although you have been invited, it is up to you, if you want to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time during the study without any explanation and without incurring any disadvantage.

What will happen if I take part?

Data will be collected during the research project in the form of open-ended semi-structured interviews. This means that key questions will be used, but the interview in general will be more of a discussion than a simple "question – answer" game. The interview itself will be audio recorded and later during the analysis stage transcribed and anonymised.

If you take part in the research, I will conduct an interview with you as participant in a locked room in a form that privacy and anonymity is ensured. The minimum time needed for the interview will be half an hour, the maximal time will be set to a time span between 2 and 2.5 hours. As this is planned as an open-ended interview, those time spans are approximately and should be more seen as an estimation. The real duration will depend on the actual progress of the interview itself. Your responsibilities as participant is to answer the questions honestly and openly, anonymity will be ensured during the research process.

During the research process, you might also be chosen to take part in a learning set. This learning set is meant for discussing the findings of the research data collection and to create actionable plans and policies that might engage the issue. The learning set will be formed by a group of participants (8 to 10) with different backgrounds. The participants in the learning sets will be invited based on the voluntary participation in the study. The purpose of this set is to discuss the findings from both theoretical literature and the interview analysis. The goal is to create actionable knowledge and action plans that will help solving the issue. Discussing the interview analysis and linking this to theories found in literature will finally create different actionable plans that might be used to create a framework in the set.

As all participation in this study is voluntarily, participating in the interview doesn't mean that you have to be part of the learning set, as the participation is independent

Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no awaited risks in the study. The researcher undertakes to ensure that all possible risks are identified and eliminated. The researcher secures the participants right especially their anonymity.

Thus, your participation in the research guarantees the protection of all your rights including your right to anonymity. The design of the research lays down the conditions under which the research will be conducted and these conditions have been drafted so there will be no expected risks for the participants. The participants will not be deprived from his freedom of thought and speech and this is reflected in the measures that will be in place to secure these freedoms. All the information that researcher will receive from participants, will be proceeded exclusively to achieve the goals of this study.

The researcher's goal is to investigate and reveal how different actions of workers councils and trade unions as well as labour agreement negotiations influence employee satisfaction during the daily work schedule. To achieve this goal opposite opinions and thoughts are expected from the participants to challenge the researcher's positions and the action research approach is adopted to apply and deeply check the findings. Therefore, participants with different opinions and thoughts are requested and expected in this research. The study awaits participants to hold their freely expressed opinions without any discomfort. Based on this approach there will not be any negative outcomes or any discrimination for the participants. Your participation is on a voluntary basis, it is your decision to participate and there are no consequences if you choose not to participate. Moreover, if you don't want to participate after a point of time or you feel that your participation has an impact on your working or social life, or for whatever other reason , you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time without any harm.

To ensure the effective and risk-free process of the research, the researcher has taken measures to secure that participants will not inference with any risks. For example, there will be anonymisation measures of collected data , confidentiality measures that prevents the reveal and disclosure of the information received by participants in confidence. The participants will not be identified by the information he/she will provide in the research as well it will not be possible for anyone to identify the participants in any other, direct or indirect, way.

The researcher after collecting the data will anonymise them in order to process them for his results. Thus, to achieve participant's anonymisation he will remove all the elements of the information received that can identify the participant - for example name, address etc. The removal of these elements will achieve the anonymisation of data since when the information that identifies the participant is removed these data are no more personal data. The research, in order to further eliminate risks for the participants in the study, will not encrypt the elements that identify the participants because the encryption is a form of pseudonymisation which is not anonymisation of data. The researcher will remove all elements that identify the participants therefore he will anonymise the data so no one can be identified in any direct or indirect way.



The research process will not involve special categories of data such as sensitive data. Thus questions related to racial, ethnic origin, religious or political or other beliefs, or health or sexual life, will not be requested.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

Based on the current research project, there are no direct benefits that might be created during and after the research project from your individual participation.

Are there any expenses or payments associated with the research project?

There are no expenses or reimbursements associated with your participation in the study. Furthermore, there are also no expenses or reimbursements associated directly with the study.

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let me know by contacting me (details are given below) and I will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to me with then you should contact the Research Governance Officer at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

Name: Marc Augustin
Mobile: +49 174 9901490 (hours: 08:00 – 17:00 CEST)
E-Mail: marc.augustin2@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Will my participation kept confidential?

The data for the research project will be audio recorded during the interviews. In parallel, interview protocols will be written. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed and anonymized. Further observations based on the interview protocols will be added. At this stage, anonymity will be ensured.

The data (both the transcriptions and recordings) will be kept confidential and stored in a secure manner. The storage will be on encrypted devices that only the researcher is able to access. After the transcription, the audio files will be deleted. The transcriptions and data will be stored for 5 years and only used for the described purpose of the data.

What will happen to the results of the study?

You as participant will not be identifiable through any part of the research results. The results will be made available through the doctoral dissertation that is written. The resulting dissertation can be made available to you as participant, if requested. Furthermore will the resulting work be published and accessible through the British Library and the Library of the University of Liverpool.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

If you want to stop taking part of the study, you can withdraw at any time, without any explanation. Results recorded up to the withdrawal will be used in the study, if you are happy with that. Otherwise, you might request that those data are destroyed and no further use is made of them. As the data is anonymized during transcription and analysing, you can only withdraw prior to this anonymisation process.

Who do I contact if I have further questions?

If you have any further questions that are not answered in this information form, you can contact me via E-Mail or mobile phone:

Name: Marc Augustin
Mobile: +49 174 9901490 (hours: 08:00 – 17:00 CEST)
E-Mail: marc.augustin2@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Thanks for taking time and reading this participant information sheet.

Appendix C

Participant Information Sheet (German version)

Informationsblatt für Teilnehmer

Titel der Studie:

Einfluss von Betriebsrat und Gewerkschaften auf die Mitarbeiterzufriedenheit – Ein Action-Research Ansatz zur Steigerung von Mitarbeiterzufriedenheit durch Betriebsratsinitiativen.

Einführung:

Sie wurden ausgewählt an einer Studie teilzunehmen. Bevor Sie über Ihre Teilnahme entscheiden, ist es wichtig zu verstehen, warum die Studie durchgeführt wird und was die Teilnahme beinhalten wird. Bitte nehmen Sie sich die Zeit, die folgende Information gründlich durchzulesen und stellen Sie mir jederzeit Fragen, sofern Sie mehr Informationen benötigen oder es etwas gibt, was Sie nicht verstehen. Wenn Sie möchten, können Sie über die Inhalte dieser Studie auch mit Freunden und Verwandten diskutieren. Ich möchte an dieser Stelle nochmals betonen, dass Sie zu einer Teilnahme nicht verpflichtet sind und diese Einladung nicht akzeptieren müssen. Sie sollten die Einladung nur dann annehmen, wenn Sie an einer Teilnahme interessiert sind.

Was ist der Zweck dieser Studie?

Zweck dieser Studie ist es, den Einfluss von Betriebsratsarbeit und Gewerkschaften auf die Mitarbeiterzufriedenheit am Arbeitsplatz zu untersuchen. Die Studie zielt auf die Erstellung passender Initiativen und potenzieller Regelungen, um die allgemeine Zufriedenheit der Mitarbeiter zu erhöhen und Konflikten und Unzufriedenheit entgegenzuwirken. Weiterhin möchte die Studie potentielle Zusammenhänge zwischen Mitarbeiterzufriedenheit, Betriebsratsarbeit, Betriebsvereinbarungen und Tarifiergebnissen untersuchen.

Wer ist der Forscher?

Der Forscher in der Studie ist Mitarbeiter der Atos IT-Dienstleistung und Beratung GmbH, hat jedoch weder Personalverantwortung, noch eine Managementrolle in Bezug auf die Teilnehmer der Studie. Daher gibt es keine Auswirkungen auf die Mitarbeiter, bezüglich der freiwilligen Teilnahme. Auch wird kein Druck auf einen potentiellen Teilnehmer ausgeübt, damit dieser an der Studie mitwirkt. Die Teilnahme ist vollständig freiwillig.

Warum wurde ich zur Teilnahme ausgewählt?

Basierend auf dem methodischen Design der Studie werden 10-20 Teilnehmer zur Studie eingeladen und interviewt. Der mögliche Teilnehmerkreis wird basierend auf ihrer Fähigkeit zur Studie beizutragen, ausgewählt. Hieraus erfolgt anhand einer Zufallsauswahl die Einladung zur direkten Teilnahme an der Studie. Da die Studie am Standort des Forschers durchgeführt wird, sind alle dort ansässigen Mitarbeiter gleichzeitig potentielle Teilnehmer.

Muss ich teilnehmen?

Die Teilnahme an der Studie ist freiwillig, Sie müssen also nicht teilnehmen. Obwohl Sie eingeladen wurden, bleibt es Ihre Entscheidung, ob Sie teilnehmen möchten. Auch wenn Sie sich dazu entschließen, haben Sie jederzeit die Möglichkeit von der Studie zurückzutreten, ohne hierfür Gründe angeben oder Nachteile befürchten zu müssen.

Was passiert, wenn ich teilnehme?

Während der Studie werden Daten in Form eines Interviews gesammelt. Hierbei handelt es sich um ein offenes, semi-strukturiertes Interview. Das bedeutet, dass definierte Schlüsselfragen genutzt werden, das Interview selbst aber mehr in Form eines Dialoges oder einer Diskussion, statt einem klassischen „Frage-Antwort Spiel“ geführt wird. Das Interview selbst wird aufgenommen und später in der Analysephase niedergeschrieben, anonymisiert und ausgewertet.

Wenn Sie an der Studie teilnehmen, wird das Interview in einem vorab reservierten Besprechungsraum durchgeführt, um Privatsphäre und Anonymität zu sichern. Die Mindestdauer des Interviews ist mit ca. 30 Minuten angesetzt, die Maximaldauer mit 2 bis

2,5 Stunden. Im Schnitt wird das Interview ca. 1 bis 1,5 Stunden dauern. Da das Interview als offener Dialog gestaltet ist, sind dies geschätzte Zeiten. Die eigentliche Dauer ist abhängig vom aktuellen Fortschritt des Interviews selbst. Ihre Aufgabe als Teilnehmer ist es, die Fragen ehrlich, wahrheitsgemäß und offen zu beantworten. Die Anonymität während der Studie wird jederzeit gewahrt.

Während der Studie werden sie gegebenenfalls gefragt, an sogenannten „Learning Sets“ teilzunehmen. Diese Gruppen dienen zur Diskussion der Studienergebnisse und der Planung weiterer Schritte, wie beispielsweise der genannten Erstellung und Planung möglicher Initiativen zur Steigerung der Zufriedenheit. Die Gruppen setzen sich aus 5-8 Teilnehmern zusammen. Die Teilnehmer der Gruppen werden basierend auf einer freiwilligen Teilnahme eingeladen. Zweck der Gruppen ist es, sowohl theoretische Konzepte, als auch die Ergebnisse der Interviews zu diskutieren und zu verknüpfen.

Da jede Teilnahme innerhalb der Studie freiwillig ist, muss eine Teilnahme an den Interviews nicht automatisch zu einer Teilnahme an den Learning Sets führen, da diese unabhängig voneinander sind.

Entstehen durch die Teilnahme Risiken?

Es gibt keine zu erwartenden Risiken in der Studie. Der Forscher hat alle notwendigen Maßnahmen unternommen, um alle möglichen Risiken im Vorfeld zu identifizieren und zu eliminieren. Der Forscher wahrt die Rechte der Teilnehmer, speziell deren Anonymität.

Ihre Teilnahme an der Studie garantiert den Schutz all Ihrer Rechte, einschließlich Ihrem Recht auf Anonymität. Das Design der Forschung definiert die Gegebenheiten, unter denen die Studie durchgeführt wird. Diese Gegebenheiten wurden so entworfen, dass es keine zu erwartenden Risiken für die Teilnehmer gibt. Die Teilnehmer werden nicht in ihrer Meinungsfreiheit eingeschränkt. Alle Informationen, die der Forscher während der Studie erhält, werden nur für die in der Studie verfolgten Ziele genutzt.

Ziel des Forschers ist es, herauszufinden, wie Betriebsratstätigkeiten, Gewerkschaften und Tarifverhandlungen die Zufriedenheit der Mitarbeiter am Arbeitsplatz beeinflussen. Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, werden unterschiedliche und gegensätzliche Meinungen und Gedanken von den Teilnehmern erwartet, welche den Standpunkt des Forschers herausfordern und es ermöglichen, verschiedene existente Theorien zu prüfen. Die Studie erwartet von den Teilnehmern, dass diese ihre Gedanken frei und ohne Unbehagen äußern können. Darauf aufbauend wird es für die Teilnehmer keine negativen Ergebnisse oder Formen der Diskriminierung geben. Ihre Teilnahme basiert auf der Freiwilligkeit, wodurch es in Ihrer Entscheidung liegt teilzunehmen und es wird keine negativen Auswirkungen haben, wenn Sie sich gegen eine Teilnahme entscheiden. Vielmehr können Sie, wenn Sie der Meinung sind, dass die Teilnahme Auswirkungen auf Ihr Berufs- oder Privatleben haben könnte oder aus beliebigen anderen Gründen, jederzeit von der Teilnahme an der Studie ohne Konsequenzen zurücktreten.

Um den sicheren und risikofreien Prozess der Studie sicherzustellen, hat der Forscher Maßnahmen getroffen, dass die Teilnehmer keinen Risiken ausgesetzt werden. Zum Beispiel werden die gesammelten Daten mittels geeigneter Methoden anonymisiert. Teilnehmer werden nicht anhand von mitgeteilten Informationen identifizierbar sein, weiterhin wird es ebenfalls nicht möglich sein Teilnehmer in anderer Weise zu identifizieren.

Der Forscher wird die Daten nach der Datensammlung anonymisieren, um sie anschließend weiter zu analysieren. Hierfür werden alle Elemente aus den Daten entfernt, welche Informationen beinhalten, mit denen ein Teilnehmer identifiziert werden könnte, zum Beispiel Namen oder Adressen. Die Studie wird keine sensitiven Kategorien beinhalten, wie Rasse, ethnische Zugehörigkeit, religiöse oder politische Ansichten.

Entstehen durch die Teilnahme Vorteile?

Aus dem aktuellen Forschungsprojekt werden sich keine direkten Vorteile für oder Auswirkungen auf die Teilnehmer ergeben.

Sind irgendwelche Ausgaben oder Zahlungen, mit dem Projekt verbunden?

Es sind keine Ausgaben, Zahlungen oder Vergütungen, mit der Teilnahme an der Studie verbunden.

Was ist, wenn ich nicht zufrieden bin oder es ein Problem gibt?

Wenn Sie nicht zufrieden sind oder es ein Problem gibt, können Sie mich kontaktieren (Details siehe unten) und ich versuche Ihnen zu helfen. Wenn Sie dennoch nicht zufrieden sind oder eine Beschwerde haben, die Sie nicht an mich adressieren können oder wollen, sollten Sie den Research Governance Officer unter ethics@liv.ac.uk kontaktieren. Wenn Sie den Research Governance Officer kontaktieren, geben Sie bitte zusätzlich den Namen des Forschers und eine Beschreibung der Studie mit an (damit die Studie identifiziert werden kann), sowie den Grund und die Details Ihrer Beschwerde.

Name: Marc Augustin
Mobil: +49 174 9901490 (Zeiten: 08:00 – 17:00 CEST)
E-Mail: marc.augustin2@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Wird meine Teilnahme vertraulich behandelt?

Die Daten für die Studie werden während der Interviews als Audiodatei aufgenommen. Zusätzlich werden vom Forscher Interview-Protokolle angefertigt. Nach den Interviews werden die Aufzeichnungen transkribiert und anonymisiert. Beobachtungen, basierend auf den Protokollen, werden anschließend hinzugefügt. Zu diesem Zeitpunkt ist vollkommene Anonymität gewährleistet.

Die Daten (sowohl die Audio-Dateien, als auch die Transkriptionen), werden an einem sicheren Platz verwahrt. Die Aufbewahrung wird auf verschlüsselten Offline-Geräten erfolgen, auf die nur der Forscher selbst Zugriff hat. Nach der Transkription und Anonymisierung werden die Audio-Dateien unwiderruflich gelöscht, eine weitere Aufbewahrung wird nur für die anonymisierten Transkriptionen für 5 Jahre durchgeführt.

Was passiert mit den Ergebnissen der Studie?

Sie als Teilnehmer werden in keinem Teil der Studienergebnisse identifiziert werden können. Die Ergebnisse werden im Rahmen einer Dissertation veröffentlicht. Die Dissertation kann Ihnen als Teilnehmer auf Wunsch zugänglich gemacht werden. Weiterhin wird die Arbeit veröffentlicht und ist über die Britische Bibliothek, sowie die Bibliothek der University of Liverpool öffentlich zugänglich.

Was passiert, wenn ich nicht mehr teilnehmen möchte?

Wenn Sie die Teilnahme an der Studie beenden wollen, können Sie jederzeit, ohne Angabe einer Begründung, von der Studie zurücktreten. Daten, die bis zu diesem Zeitpunkt gesammelt wurden, werden jedoch in der Studie weiterverwendet, sofern Sie damit einverstanden sind. Sie können aber auch verlangen, dass die Daten vernichtet werden und somit keine weitere Nutzung erfolgt. Da die Daten während der Transkription anonymisiert werden, kann eine Vernichtung nur vor dem Anonymisierungsprozess erfolgen.

Wen kontaktiere ich, wenn ich weitere Fragen habe?

Wenn Sie weitere Fragen haben, die in diesem Informationsblatt nicht beantwortet wurden, können Sie mich gerne per E-Mail oder Handy kontaktieren:

Name: Marc Augustin
Mobil: +49 174 9901490 (Zeiten: 08:00 – 17:00 CEST)
E-Mail: marc.augustin2@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Vielen Dank, dass Sie sich die Zeit genommen haben, das Informationsblatt zu lesen.

Appendix D

Consent Form

Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Influence of workers councils and trade unions on employee satisfaction – An action research approach to increase employee satisfaction through workers council initiatives

Researcher(s): Marc Augustin

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated December 2017 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.
4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant Name	Date	Signature
Marc Augustin		
Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
Marc Augustin		
Researcher	Date	Signature

Principal Investigator:
 Marc Augustin
 Schlossbergstraße 15, 66701 Beckingen
 +49 174 9901490
 marc.augustin2@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Optional Statements

- The information you have submitted will be published as a thesis; please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy.
- I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications.
- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research and understand that any such use of identifiable data would be reviewed and approved by a research ethics committee.
- I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes:
 - Transcribing the records
 - Analysing the anonymised transcription and coding/comparing with other data and results
- I understand that I must not take part if
 - there are any doubts
 - I feel uncomfortable and want to withdraw
- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.
- I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
- I understand and agree that once I complete the interview, it will become anonymised and I will therefore no longer be able to withdraw my data.

Appendix E

Consent Form (German version)

Komitee für Forschungsethik

Teilnehmer Einverständniserklärung

Titel des Forschungsprojekts: Einfluss von Betriebsrat und Gewerkschaften auf die Mitarbeiterzufriedenheit – Ein Action-Research Ansatz zur Steigerung von Mitarbeiterzufriedenheit durch Betriebsratsinitiativen

Forscher: Marc Augustin

1. Ich bestätige, dass ich das Informationsblatt vom Dezember 2017 zu oben genannter Studie gelesen und verstanden habe. Ich hatte sowohl die Möglichkeit die Informationen zu bedenken, als auch Fragen zu stellen, welche dann zufriedenstellend beantwortet wurden.
2. Ich habe verstanden, dass meine Teilnahme freiwillig ist und dass ich jederzeit, ohne Nennung von Gründen, von der Studie zurücktreten kann, ohne dass meine Rechte eingeschränkt werden. Zusätzlich steht mir frei, bestimmte Fragen, die ich nicht beantworten möchte, zu überspringen oder abzulehnen.
3. Ich verstehe, dass ich, bezugnehmend auf das Datenschutzgesetz, jederzeit Zugang zu den von mir gegebenen Informationen beantragen kann und dass ich jederzeit die Löschung der von mir gegebenen Informationen beantragen kann.
4. Ich stimme zu, an der oben genannten Studie teilzunehmen.

Teilnehmername	Datum	Unterschrift
Marc Augustin		
Name der Einverständnis nehmenden Person	Datum	Unterschrift
Marc Augustin		
Forscher	Datum	Unterschrift

Hauptforscher:
 Marc Augustin
 Schlossbergstraße 15, 66701 Beckingen
 +49 174 9901490
 marc.augustin2@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Optionale Zustimmungen

- Die Informationen, die Sie angegeben haben, werden als Dissertation veröffentlicht. Bitte geben Sie an, ob Sie eine Kopie erhalten möchten.
- Ich verstehe, dass Vertraulichkeit und Anonymität während und nach der Studie gewahrt werden und dass es nicht möglich sein wird, mich in Publikationen wiederzuerkennen.
- Ich stimme zu, dass die von mir gesammelten Informationen in zukünftigen Studien genutzt werden dürfen und verstehe, dass eine Nutzung dieser Daten vom Komitee für Forschungsethik geprüft und freigegeben wird.
- Ich stimme zu, dass meine Teilnahme an der Studie als Tonaufnahme festgehalten wird und stimme der Nutzung der Aufnahme für folgende Tätigkeiten zu:
 - Transkribieren der Aufnahme
 - Analyse der anonymisierten Transkriptionen und Vergleichen der Ergebnisse mit anderen Aufzeichnungen.
- Ich verstehe, dass ich nicht an der Studie teilnehmen muss, wenn:
 - es irgendwelche Zweifel meinerseits gibt
 - Ich mich unwohl fühle und die Teilnahme abbrechen möchte.
- Ich stimme zu, dass gesammelte Daten in zukünftigen relevanten Studien in anonymisierter Form genutzt werden dürfen.
- Ich verstehe, dass meine Antworten streng vertraulich behandelt werden. Ich erlaube den Mitgliedern der Forschungsgruppe den Zugang zu meinen anonymisierten Antworten. Ich verstehe, dass mein Name nicht mehr mit dem Forschungsmaterial verknüpft sein wird und dass ich in den daraus resultierenden Arbeiten nicht identifiziert werde und nicht identifiziert werden kann.
- Ich verstehe, dass die Daten, nachdem das Interview beendet wurde, anonymisiert werden und es daher keine Möglichkeit mehr gibt, die Daten löschen zu lassen. Ich selbst kann jedoch jederzeit von der Studie zurücktreten.

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

What is your age?

Since when are you working here?

In how many companies have you been working before?

Are you a member of a trade union?

If Yes: Of which?

Why did you choose this one?

If No: Why not?

If not council member: Have you ever thought of being member of a works council?

Why?

Why not?

If council member: Why are you member of a works council?

What do you think about the last labour agreement?

How do you feel about it?

How do you see the differentiation clauses present in the agreements?

Why do you think so?

Do you think that the workers council is related to the outcomes of the negotiations?

According to your believes, is it the workers council or the trade union that fights for the people in the negotiations?

How do you see the workers council in this organization?

Why do you think so?

Are you satisfied with the labour agreements?

Why?

Why not?

What should change?

Are you satisfied with the amount of communication before, during and after the negotiations?

Why?

Why not?

What should change?

Are you satisfied with your work in general?

Do you think that the council could help you being more satisfied?

Are you satisfied with the work of our workers council?

Could the council increase your overall satisfaction at work?

How?

Should the council being more present within the organization?

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