Talking about work, an experiment

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The origin of the project

In the chemical industry, there is a lot of *behavioural based safety* approach

But they are sometimes windows of opportunities for ideas such as SII, that there is more in practices than procedural compliance, this is the story of one experiment

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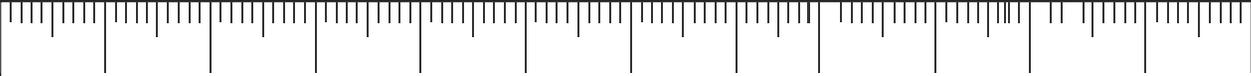
A question

How to design or engineer spaces in organisations to discuss, exchange and debate about the gaps between work as imagined and work as done?

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The origin of the project

This question was formulated following a safety ethnographic study in a chemical plant in France performed 2015-2016, and pursued in 2017 as an action research (with Michèle Dupré, a colleague sociologist)

- Site of US group in France
- 250 employees
- In a middle size city
- Seveso II, high risk of explosion, toxic release
- Highly mediatised event in 2013

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The origin of the project

Study consisted in **12 weeks** observations, interviews and document analysis. The aim was to bring a human and organisational factors analysis of daily operations

We came up with a number of insights and perspectives based on a sensitising model of safety

The origin of the project

Several feedbacks sessions were organised in late 2016 and addressed a wide range of issues ranging from **strategy**, **change**, **safety department**, **teams interaction** etc in relation to operational activities
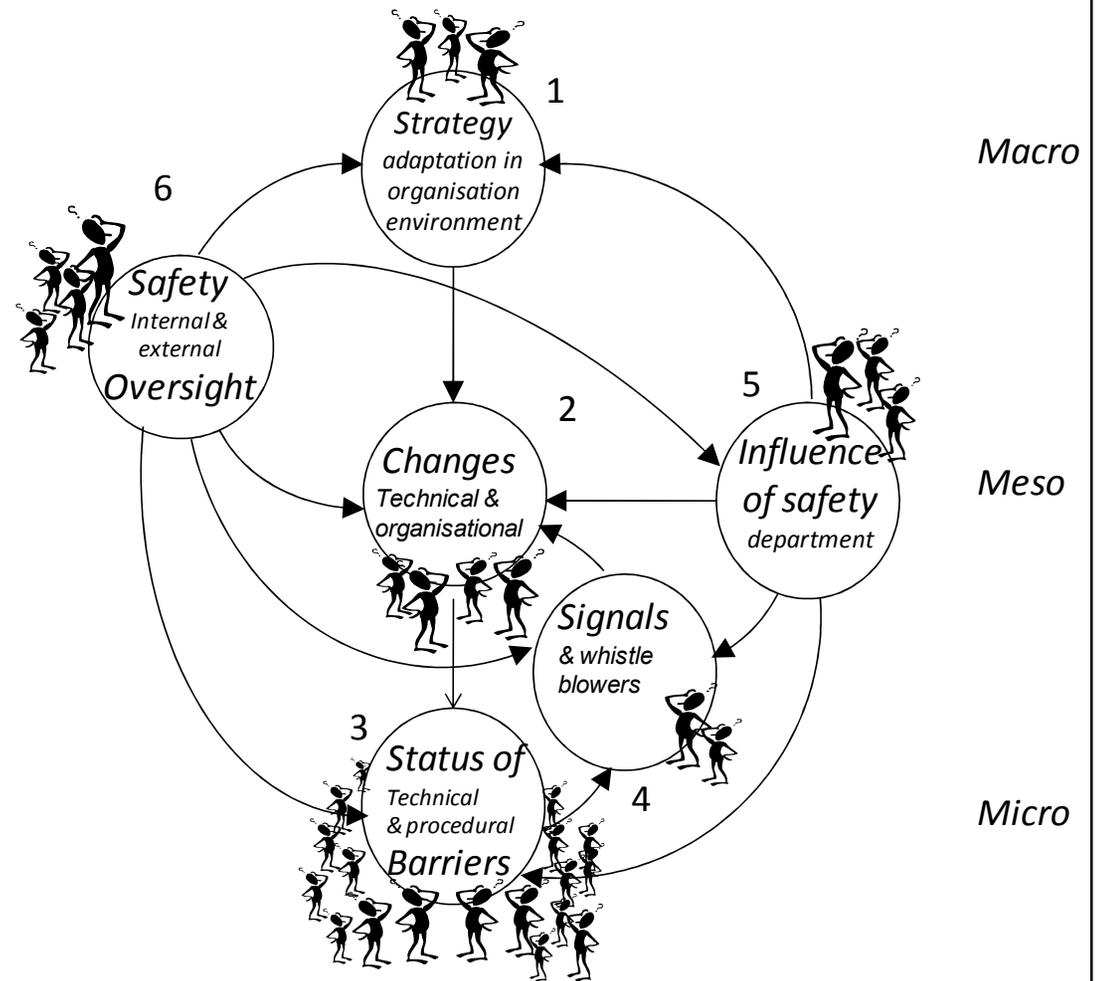
The origin of the project

Many topics caught managers' interest, and they asked for further support:

- One concerned the status of human error, and the different views at site and corporate levels of decision making

- Another concerned what they called their 'causeries', namely 'talks'

The origin of the project

Part of our study indeed questioned the way a particular moment of their week was handled …

Every Wednesday, at 4 pm, they gathered in the control room to create a moment (around 1h/1h30) of discussion between management and workers

Five hierarchical levels were brought together, about 20 people:
- The site manager (1)
- The production manager (1)
- The teams leader (1)
- The foremen (2)
- The workers (15)
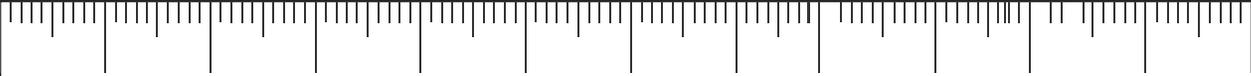
The origin of the project

Our observations about this particular moment consisted in several points (1/3):
One was about the dynamic of the discussions, debates and exchanges between management:

- We described the complex interactions between the site manager, the production manager, the team leaders, the foremen and workers
  - We showed that it was not always favorable to workers' expression
  - Their role plays between managers favored a top down approach of this moment
    - The team leader often played an interface role which shadowed workers' expressions
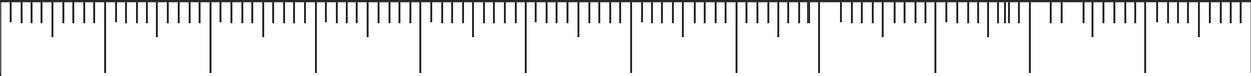
The origin of the project

Our observations about this particular moment consisted in several points (2/3):

One was about the dynamic of the discussions, debates and exchanges between management:

- We also referred to the fact that they never considered workers from the point of view of their activities
  - They did not spend time to try to understand workers' practice
  - They tried to solve problem without knowing much about real practices
  - They tended to approach the problem through plea for more rigor, for more attention to details
  - They often invited people to talk but without much success, depending on the team and the day
  - There was a feeling of wasted time by workers, also described as '*the shower*', to stress the top down flow of information

The origin of the project

Our observations about that particular moment consisted in several points (3/3):

Another one of our concern was therefore the status of this weekly moment, was it:

- A moment to bring information to workers?
- A moment to reassert the proximity of managers with workers by showing up and shaking hands?
- A moment to share views ?
- A moment to hear about problems?
- A moment dedicated to any topics, including safety?
- A moment to decide about actions?

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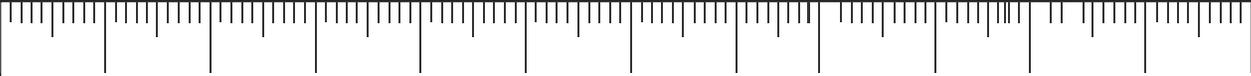
The origin of the project

Based on these insights and questions, the site manager wished to improve these talks, and to make them opportunities for people to speak up rather than listening to top down discussions

They asked us to provide some principles to improve the situation, and we organised **two workshops** with the management team in order to build a **format to redesign the principles of interactions during these moments**

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Designing a solution

We came up with a certain number of design ideas

Principles

Rules

Practicalities

Pendant la Causerie – principe

Principes :

La causerie doit se centrer sur la notion de s
individuelle et collective et le professionnali

Lors des discussions portant sur des inciden
comme une explication. Existant à tous les n
conséquences doivent être comprises dans l

Les décisions d'actions sont reportées à d'autres instances.

Le choix de l'instance, la plus pertinente pour traiter du point discuté, peut être
abordé lors de la causerie.

Pendant la Causerie –

Règles :

Les sujets abordés et la durée d
d'échange ne doit pas excéder 1

Les règles d'interactions vertue

- o La parole est libre et l'e
  formulation de jugeme..., dans un esprit d'écoute et de compréhension
  centrés sur l'activité

- o Les points de vue sont reformulés et débattus dans un esprit d'ouverture et
  non de sanction ou de jugement afin de favoriser les échanges d'information
  et les boucles vertueuses d'apprentissage collectif.

L'activité de tous les participants peut être abordée et questionnée.

Une synthèse brève est faite par le rapporteur de la séance (10 mn y sont
consacrés en fin de causerie).

Après la causerie

Pour que l'échange serve de base à une dynamique d'amélioration continue :

On garde une trace des éléments de synthèse retenus .

L'information est donnée sur l'instance retenue pour traiter les questions et
prendre les décisions informées.

Le délai entre le moment de discussion et les suites éventuelles est réduit autant
que faire se peut.

Un retour est fait en causerie sur les suites envisagées.

On informe des actions à engager : dans quel cadre ? Avec quel délai ?

On informe aussi des raisons pour lesquelles aucune action n'est engagée.

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Designing a solution

Principles

The talk must be centred on real activities of people, their expertise, collective actions and team professionalism

Errors are expected, and must be contextualised, errors can be made by anyone, and are indication of systemic issues

Decisions are made elsewhere, not during the talk
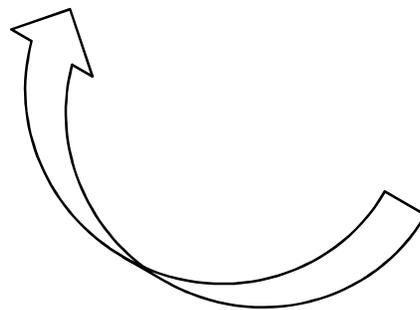
Pendant la Causerie – principes et règles

Principes :

La causerie doit se centrer sur la notion de situation de travail, la notion d'expertise individuelle et collective et le professionnalisme des équipes engagées.

Lors des discussions portant sur des incidents, l'erreur humaine n'est pas prise comme une explication. Existant à tous les niveaux de l'entreprise, l'erreur et ses conséquences doivent être comprises dans le contexte qui les rend possibles.

Les décisions d'actions sont reportées à d'autres instances.

Le choix de l'instance, la plus pertinente pour traiter du point discuté, peut être abordé lors de la causerie.

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Designing a solution

Rules

Duration of talks is determined a the beginning

Vertuous interactions rules (free speech, no judgmental comments…)

Openmindness, collective learning
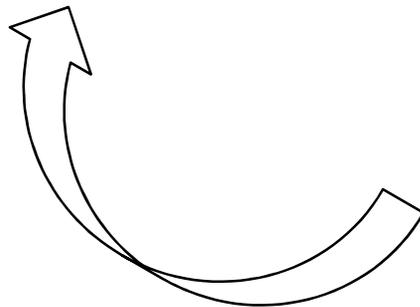
Pendant la Causerie – principes et règles

Règles :

Les sujets abordés et la durée des causeries sont fixés en début de séance. Ce temps d'échange ne doit pas excéder 1 heure (30) (??).

Les règles d'interactions vertueuses sont rappelés systématiquement:

- o La parole est libre et l'expression des points de vue est valorisée, sans formulation de jugement, dans un esprit d'écoute et de compréhension centrés sur l'activité

- o Les points de vue sont reformulés et débattus dans un esprit d'ouverture et non de sanction ou de jugement afin de favoriser les échanges d'information et les boucles vertueuses d'apprentissage collectif.

L'activité de tous les participants peut être abordée et questionnée.

Une synthèse brève est faite par le rapporteur de la séance (10 mn y sont consacrés en fin de causerie).

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Designing a solution

Practicalities

Keeping traces of exchanges

Feedback during the next talk about follow up

Giving reasons why things do not change to people who brought up things
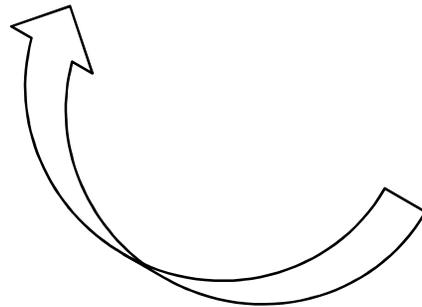
Après la causerie

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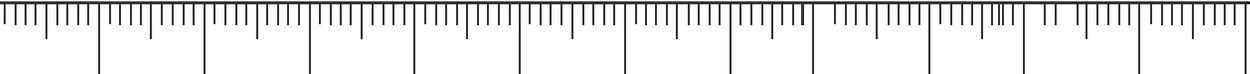
Implementing a solution

These principles, rules and practicalities were implemented, and we observed their use in different services a few weeks later.

Clearly, each service used this design in a way that "moulded" their specificities

- their type of operations (e.g. maintenance, production, hse, logistics)
- The managers, their style but also already established practices
- The established social interactions within and between teams

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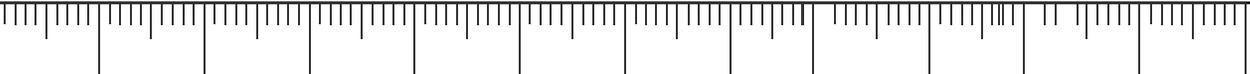
Implementing a solution

And observations and feedbacks were diverse:

- o Keeping the duration as intended, but which duration?

- o & « *No need to talk when there is not much to say*»

- o Maintaining the meeting even if difficult, and not considering it as secondary

- o Great satisfaction about degree of listening and exchanges obtained

- o Importance of following up from one talk to another

- o An ambiguity remaining whether the talk is only safety focused or not

- o Discussing, or also finding solutions? Still unclear

- o To receive proposition rather than proposing topics

- o Keeping up with the number of topics, issues and problems identified

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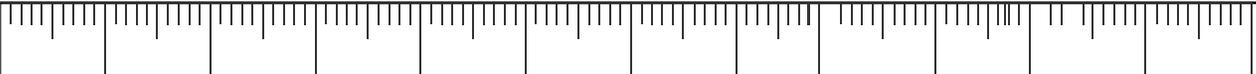
Implementing a solution

Site managers and managers were quite satisfied with the principles, rules and practicalities associated with the new talk, and workers also even if one needs to admit a certain degree of imperfection

Moving to another site, the site managers translated these principles into his new context, and found it extremely useful to get acquainted to his new organisation

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Back to the initial question

How to design or engineer spaces in organisations to discuss, exchange and debate about the gap between work as imagined and work as done is an important question

Our experience turned out to be quite well conceptualised in a recent literature on the topic of **discussion engineering**

- When

- How

- Where

- What

- Why

MATHIEU DETCHESSAHAR (coord.)

L'ENTREPRISE
DÉLIBÉRÉE

Refonder le management par le dialogue

Préface de Yves CLOT

Nouvelle Cité
GRACE
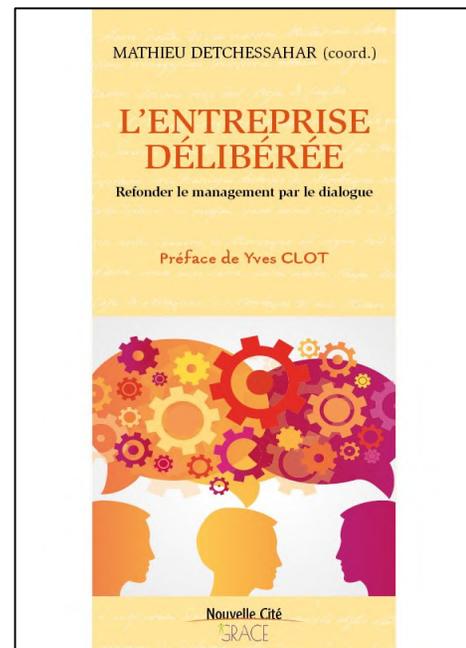
# Back to the initial question

Strong connection with topics of **just culture** or **psychological safety**
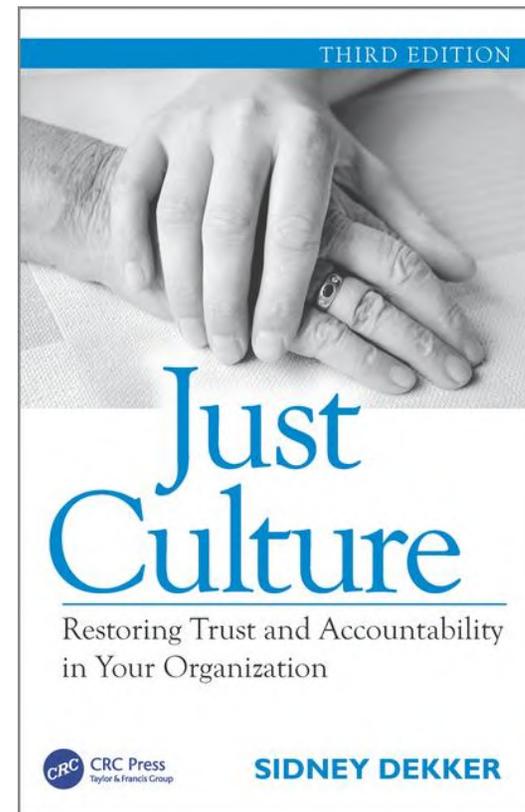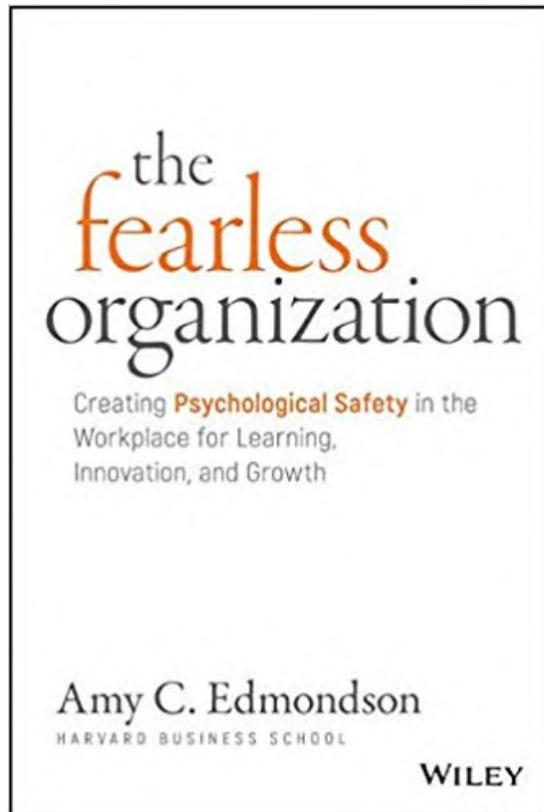
Implementing a solution

This, of course, is partly an issue of organisational design, which in turn is a question of companies' strategy...

....a good topic to expand the scope of our discussion

Macro

Meso

Micro
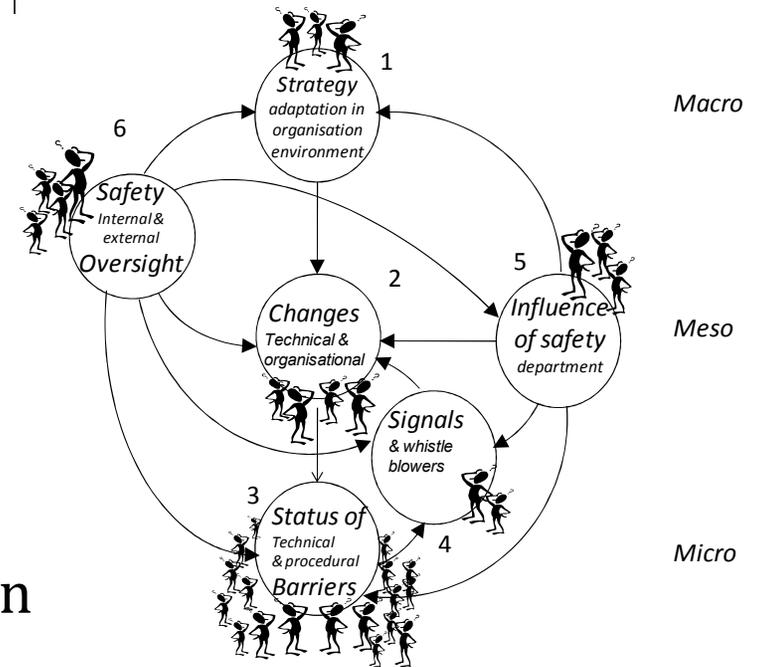
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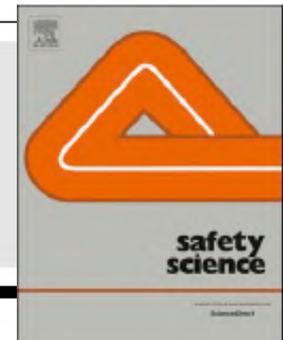
Safety as strategy: Mistakes, failures and fiascos in high-risk systems

Jean Christophe Le Coze

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THANK YOU