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# HOW TO DESIGN RELATIONAL WORKING CULTURES IN HYBRID ENVIRONMENTS

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While modern industrial work organization was based on the principle of synchronizing bodies and minds in centralized working spaces such as the factory, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century production processes became more and more fragmented and distributed over distant regions. As a consequence, synchronicity, as a principle, was transformed from a precondition for efficient work organization to an ideal that eventually would never be attained. Agile management and the ever-increasing necessity and intensity of communication constitute principles according to which work organization is characterized by fragmentation, de-synchronization and the continuous readjusting of strategic aims.

Virtual and hybrid forms of working create environments that can be considered the next generation of spatiotemporal arrangements in which organizational relations unfold. These spaces are co-constituted by embodied, affective experiences as the basis for new types of cooperation that are yet to be defined as fully-fledged teamwork. The paper lists a series of suggestions on how to form, organize and maintain teams in hybrid working environments.

**Keywords:** Organizational culture, virtual collaboration, embodiment, team cooperation, hybrid office spaces

## The emergence of the hierarchical organizational model

Historically, our societies owe their wealth, as well as many aspects of their design, to industrialization. In the context of our article, by ‘industrialization’, we intend not merely the technological progress in manufacturing, but also a model of designing organizational environments that profoundly changed the way of working together and relating to each other. Especially in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, working spaces were designed, and cooperation was organized, according to the principles of centralization and spatial concentration. The underlying idea of efficient organization was to bring workers together in big factory halls and to synchronize their tasks and activities. An iconic, albeit dystopic, representation of the modern industrial society is Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) that depicts a futurist urban environment in which masses of workers move to and from the factory in lethargic collective and synchronized movements.



Figure 1. Workers moving to and from the factory in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*.

As the title *Metropolis* suggests, this image of synchronizing individual bodies in form of collective choreographies,

representative of industrial work organization in big corporations, was transferred from the factory to the way spaces and movements are organized in modern cities. In his experimental documentary *Berlin – Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927), Walther Ruttmann, by drawing on the film avantgarde repertoire of cutting and collage techniques, ‘composes’ the city of Berlin as a metropole that is organized, in space and time, like a musical symphony. Like in the design of production processes in the factory, also in urban planning efficiency became the prevailing organizing principle for almost any spatiotemporal arrangement, governing individual and collective movements and rhythms.



Figure 2. People moving in the street in Walther Ruttmann’s *Berlin – Symphonie einer Großstadt*.

For many decades up to the second half of the 20th century, work used to be organized in a centralized and hierarchical way. ‘Hierarchical’ organization meant to neatly separate the diverse functions and tasks of cooperation: The planning of tasks was separated from the execution, strategy from implementation. In order to cooperate effectively, workers had to be first instructed to perform simple tasks that they would later execute during the shifts. Organizational cultures were characterized by the

submission of bodies and minds to pre-established choreographies.

### **The crisis and overcoming of the hierarchical organization model**

The big centralized corporation as the prevalent model of organizing work in modern industrial societies was eventually challenged in the 1960s and 1970s. On the one hand, the authoritarian mindset, characteristic of the modern societies in the first half of the 20th century, was questioned and rejected by younger generations, so that alternative modes of thinking and living evolved. People more and more refused to submit themselves to hierarchical settings, in workplaces as well as in school and in other social and political contexts (Hirschman 1970, Boltanski and Chiappello 1999). Furthermore, the effectiveness of organizing work in a centralized way was challenged by the petrol shock, inflation and the successful return of decentralized ways of organizing that had emerged in Japan and other Asian countries, but also in Europe (Piore and Sabel 1984). The centralized Fordist organization model was replaced by the so called Post-Fordist production mode, characterized by lean management, outsourcing, decentralized organization, and the globalization of supply chains (Revelli 1999 Bologna and Fumagalli 1997). All this led to a networked economy that was further boosted by the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies (ICT).



Figure 3. The global networked economy

The more work is organized in a decentralized way, the higher the importance of communication (Marazzi 1997). Still, not only the quantity of communication rises, it is also the quality of communicating within and across organizations that changes. Nowadays, if you ask people working at any level of an organization how much time they spend communicating with others, either directly or via e-mail and other channels, it is likely that they indicate shares beyond 70%, often 80% and more. Other than in the past, communication does not regard only orders, reports or the clarification of tasks. As Philippe Zarifian (1997) points out, work-related communication often consists in asking oneself and others about what's going on, i.e., in communicating with colleagues with the aim to cope with uncertainty and ambiguity. Strategic aims and processes cannot be pre-structured and then implemented as it was the case during the Fordist period. There is no more clear distinction between planning and executing, between working out strategic aims and their implementation. Rather, the planning and execution of projects and the performing of tasks have transformed into negotiation processes that require communicative efforts and blur the boundaries between functions, departments and different stages of the value chain. This is also due to the increasing complexity of projects and cooperation. Hence, a fundamental

openness in communicative processes is currently at the core of cooperating. Whether in temporary projects or in teams, it is necessary to coordinate not only at the beginning of a process, but also regularly during the stages of a collaboration. This is one reason why in management agile methods have been established that structure team collaboration by frequent short meetings and short working cycles (sprints).

One can state that the function of synchronization has profoundly changed in work organization. While in the classical industrial period it was a precondition of performing tasks and cooperating (the assembly line), it has now become an ideal objective that will never be attained, but should be approximated (agile management). What is to be synchronized are not, as in the past, movements or mechanical processes in production, but rather ideas, understandings and the ability to react to unforeseen changes and events. While in the industrial period, the synchronization of bodies and minds was the outcome of a preliminary design process and a long-term discipline, the lacking of synchronicity is currently considered as a source of value creation and a continuous challenge for the design of work-related cooperation processes.

## **Challenging the communication paradigm**

As communication has been gaining more and more importance in the Post-Fordist economy, a whole strand in organization studies emerged and has further evolved, labeled under the term ‘communicative constitution of organizations’ (Brumanns et al. 2014, McPhee and Zaig 2009, Schoeneborn 2011, Schoeneborn and Blaschke 2014, Schoeneborn and Vásquez 2017, Taylor and Van Every 2011). Starting from the late 1990s, many scholars have evidenced that communication is not only a means of coordinating work-related activities, it is in itself a work-related activity, a negotiation process. It represents an essential cooperation form if the task is to achieve results in complex economies.

So far, we have named some factors that explain the importance of communication for working contexts, answering

the question: Why do we communicate more, compared to the past, when we work together?

- Decentralized work organization
- Socio-cultural developments (1970s, claiming for autonomy, ...)
- Integration of basic needs of sociality and personality development
- into working contexts
- Complexity has increased
- Communication technologies, virtual spaces

Still, there is no evidence indicating a linear progress in the development from hierarchically structured big corporations to decentralized networks of smaller units that are distributed over distant regions (Dioguardi 2007). Rather, we have been witnessing an ambiguous development. Big corporations are still important in many sectors and businesses, despite the pressure towards lean and fast forms of producing goods and delivering services. With the rise of platform economy, the currently powerful tech corporations have coined business models for 'governing' the networks and ecosystems of small and medium enterprises that, in order to gain market-access and visibility, have to offer their services and goods on the virtual marketplaces and digital infrastructures owned by a very small number of giants.

Furthermore, many big corporations, especially in the manufacturing industry, struggle in the attempt to adopt recent organizational models like agile management and flat hierarchies. For many of these organizations, the new management practices have turned out to be appropriate only within certain limits. As a result of this ambiguous development, employees in big organizations have to cope with the tension between hierarchy and the pressure and complexity of markets and networked



cooperation in their daily work. They work inside hierarchical structures and at the same time are pushed to operate as if they were members of decentral organizations.

For many of them, the autonomy regarding the way how to fulfill tasks increases, but this does not go along with an increase of resources and decision power with respect to resource allocation, i.e., the opportunity to prioritize tasks, objectives and projects (Eichhorst et al. 2016). As a consequence of this overload, their communicative effort intensifies constantly, so that they are confronted with the alienating aspects of communication: too much, too fast, too mediated.

If employees enter the spiral of communicative overload without being able to prioritize according to strategic and operational decisions, they tend to focus on their immediate environment and base their interaction on emotional needs (stress regulation). In other words, they switch to the survival mode that implies a less open, less networked form of addressing work-related issues. While they are told to overcome silo-mentality, they often do not find the safe environment for thinking and acting outside the box (Edmondson 2018).

### **Point of no return: Future working spaces will be hybrid**

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply questioned the global production system. But not only the various lockdowns have reduced the confidence in distributed and networked value chains. Also, incidents such as the blocking of the Suez Canal by a huge TEU container ship in March 2021 have been evidencing the vulnerability of the global supply chain. On February 24th of 2022, the vision of an ever more integrated global economy and society was further shaken by the Russian attack against Ukraine. On a societal level, 'globalization' is being challenged in many countries by various groups, ranging from far-left to extreme right. As the basis of public debate has been severely undermined by fake news, conspiracy narratives and other techniques of disinformation and disorientation, it seems more and more difficult to build on a vast consensus regarding literally

any societal and political issue. Nevertheless, the major challenges like the threatening climate collapse and the multiple ecological crises can be resolved only at a global level, based on international cooperation. It is worrisome to observe that, while cooperation is required, people, groups and nations are tempted to withdraw from engaging in common problem solution processes.

For the context of organizational culture, we can state that an important paradigm that emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (an ever more globalized economy and society) has been going through a profound crisis that began with the crash of the US real estate business and the international financial crisis. While the networked global economy has proved to be vulnerable due to its high degree of interwovenness of businesses, regions, and technologies, the idea of disentangling global interdependencies appears to be equally problematic. Undoubtedly, in terms of sustainability, there are many steps to go in order to attain a fair global production and trade system. Yet, it would be harmful to renounce a crucial aspect of the networked economy and society (Benkler 2006) – that of a relational view on cooperation and society (Elias 1986). It is relationality, not autarky, that has to be strengthened if we want to survive as a global community that embraces mankind as well as all the other forms of life that are essential for the planetary ecosystem (Bridle 2022).

What are the implications of this global situation for the design of collaboration within and across organizations? Apart from the general picture of shrinking trust in a networked economy, the COVID-19 pandemic was a major stress test and turning point with respect to organizational processes and, as a consequence, to organizational culture. According to Stefan Kühl (2018), it is not possible to transform organizational cultures only by reflectively working on behaviors, values and other symbolic structures and patterns. Rather, changes in corporate culture are triggered by the changing of material or formal structures and processes. While corporate culture will not be changed only by carrying out workshops in which management and employees talk about values and behaviors, any change regarding the formal structure, production or service delivery processes will inevitably have its effect on the culture. However, a systemic view on

organizational processes and dynamics (Luhmann 2000) implies that it is not possible to completely control the way an organizational culture reacts to the changing of material or formal processes and structures (Kühl 2018). Any change process on the formal level will result in a reaction of the informal ways of behaving (the 'corporate culture') that affect the functioning of the newly established formal structures. One important reason why many change initiatives fail or are hampered lies in the fact that culture in terms of the informal patterns is not sufficiently considered and change is not supported by midterm or long-term measures in organizational development.

The transformations brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as such material or formal changes that have had an impact on a huge number of organizations over the world that could hardly be anticipated, let alone controlled. While collaboration in teams whose members operate from different places as well as remote work were not new to many teams and employees of international corporations, with the lockdowns these processes of virtualization and hybridization of working cultures have been spreading also in organizations in which before 2020 this had been unthinkable. Equally, after more than two years of experiences with new forms of working and collaborating, executives and middle managers in many organizations are aware of the fact that there will not be a 'back to normal'. Rather, they are forced to design collaborative spaces for the future that are apt to integrate physical and virtual environments. Hence, the issue of communication overload and the problems raised above are further aggravated by the fact that time and especially space acquire a hybrid dimension.

The changing from real to virtual spaces has become normal for many workers. Yet, they have to be able to integrate their cooperation, i.e., their lived experience of working in a team in this new type of cooperative time-space. It is a novel form of spatiotemporal arrangement that creates novel forms of communicating and synchronizing, as well as de-synchronizing, bodies and minds in cooperative efforts.

## **Working spaces are embodied environments**

Our view on organizational culture differs from that of social systems theory (in the Luhmann tradition). We assert that a working culture can be designed and shaped despite, or even because of, its informal nature. While a social system's theory approach is of high value in terms of differentiating essential aspects and dimensions of the social system in question (in our case organizations), it overlooks the subjective dimensions of the distinctions it draws. People in organizations act and live according to and confronting themselves with the formal as well as the informal dimension. They accept, oppose to, or transform contracts, hierarchies, strategic aims, projects, colleagues, and they do so by relating to these entities, be they abstract or concrete in their nature. It is therefore of high relevance to describe, for example, how people experience not only the legal, formal or technical, but also the spatiotemporal dimensions of the organization as part of their lifeworld (Schütz and Luckmann 2003). In other words, we look not only at the consequences of differences on the level of the systems, but on the way how subjects experience these differences in their daily interaction.

Hence, we consider the transformation of an organizational culture not only from the point of view of an unintended reaction and adaptation to formal interventions in organizational processes and structures. Rather, we would like to draw the theoretical and practical attention to the processes that regard the relational dimension of working together. This implies taking into consideration the needs and requirements of single persons within a collaborative setting, but also the atmosphere and the environment that frames daily cooperation. In this sense, also emotional aspects are of major importance, yet not as allegedly interior states of the humans involved, but rather as collective processes that evolve in physical as well as in virtual spaces (Demmerling and Landwehr 2007, Schmitz 2019, Vidolov 2021).

In this sense, any communicative situation is experienced, by the persons involved, not only as a temporary event that affects their supposedly interior psychological state, but also a spatial arrangement. It is a situation in the strict sense of the term, in that it *takes place* by unfolding at a particular time in a particular

space. Yet, it is not only the objective physical dimension of time and space that determine when and where a communication takes place. Equally, the persons involved engage in actively *situating* the communication, by ascribing roles to each other, by asking and responding, by signaling social and cultural differences, by making gestures and referring and relating to the context as well as to other situations, and also by negotiating the topics of the discourse. Actually, 'topic' derives from the ancient Greek term 'topos', i.e., 'place'. As the phenomenological tradition has shown, any form of spatiality grounds in an embodied, affective exposure, a *Being-to-the-world* that is not reducible neither to the objective position a concrete body occupies nor to the physiological and neurological processes at the basis of the subjective experience (Merleau-Ponty 1945, Waldenfels 2000, Fuchs 2000). Being exposed to the world in form of our embodiment implicates that we co-construct time and space with the others, so that atmospheres are part of the spatiotemporal arrangement we experience. There is not 'the objective physical space' on the one hand, plus some feelings we might have about a situation on the other hand, without being clear what 'situation' exactly means. There is always a lived space in which situations and therefore atmospheres evolve.

Let us illustrate the interwovenness of spatiotemporal experiences in social situations, particularly in organizations, by referring to a concrete example: In team meetings, often only some of the participants do take actively part in the conversation while others only listen or, even worse, do not pay attention. In this sense, 'presence' is a complex phenomenon that is socially constructed by the negotiation and distribution of shares with respect to the interaction. People who dominate a meeting do not only take time-shares, they also occupy more 'room' than the others in terms of attention and acknowledgement. The others' gazes are directed upon them, and while they dominate the space by their movements and gestures, others tend to withdraw and sometimes congeal. Their withdrawal is real, also without them actually leaving the meeting space, because it is an integral part of the situation that is created by the team as a whole. It is a response to the others' dominant behavior, can have an impact on the dynamics of the social situation and—if similar dynamics occur repeatedly—transforms into a pattern, i.e., a collective behavior that characterizes the team's culture. In this way, an

apparently neutral spatial environment becomes stratified and loaded with atmospheric tension (Bulka 2015). While in team collaboration a certain tension is necessary to create a productive atmosphere characterized by curiosity and joint attention, it can be detrimental if it results in the longing for domination by a few participants and the respective submission or withdrawal of the rest. This situation will remain unchanged or even worsen as long as it is not addressed explicitly by one or more members of the team. To actually address such negative dynamics is experienced, by the people involved, as a reopening of the situation, i.e., of the communicative space. It can help to do so by introducing a formal mechanism (like the ‘minute round’, see below), but this is not sufficient for changing the collective pattern. All team members will have to change attitude, and this means to engage in reshaping their respective behavior: the dominant ones by holding back and the silent ones by learning to assert and express themselves. Again, the term ‘communicative space’ is not a mere metaphor in that it is lived by the people involved in the situation (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). It is the particular embodied environment that emerges by the history of the team collaboration.



Figure 4. In many team meetings, one person dominates, and the others are either bored or intimidated.

These atmospheres may be palpable to everyone in working contexts characterized by physical presence (offices), but they are also effective in virtual and hybrid settings. We have argued that ‘presence’ is a complex phenomenon even if one considers the traditional form of being together in a physical space. Words, gestures and feelings can unite us as well as they can divide us, and this happens in physical proximity as well as in the mediated forms of gathering we are now used to, such as video conferences or virtual communities. This is not to say that there is no difference between these forms of being together. Obviously, there are essential differences. Nevertheless, people live computer-mediated encounters as experiences of togetherness in the strict sense of the term, as a shared space in which any form of emotional contagion is possible. Recent phenomenological studies provide evidence, for example, of how affective states or dynamics are perceived and propagate in virtual working environments (Vidolov 2021). Even in computer-generated environments where people interact via avatars, psychological states are precisely grasped by the humans engaging in these interactions, such as multiplayer games or virtual communities (Ekdahl and Osler 2023, Osler and Zahavi 2022, Osler 2022, Osler 2020). There is not ‘the virtual world’ on the one hand, and ‘the real world’ on the other, while humans switch from one world to the other as some Science Fiction suggests. Hybridity, from our point of view, means the interwovenness of apparently immediate togetherness—which is in itself a complex arrangement of spatiotemporal experiences related to past, future and contemporaneous situations—and technologically mediated forms of communication.

## **Suggestions for designing hybrid working environments**

In this sense, working environments are designed not only by architects, by the executive management and by the organigram of an organization. They are co-designed by the people (and technologies) involved in the collaboration. Just as the Post-Fordist paradigm is characterized by the fact that planning and execution cannot be neatly separated, the design of collaborative spaces in the current economy is not separable from the interaction that takes place in these spaces. To separate the

architectural or organizational design from the ways of experiencing collaboration would amount to an incomplete notion of 'working environment', and this applies also to the environments created by digital technology, i.e., virtual and hybrid communication spaces. The fact that even these spaces are constantly co-created by our interaction—and only by that become environments—points to the fundamentally relational dimension of human existence, in general, and of working together in organizations, in particular. When we work together, we do not only fulfill tasks and apply our personal knowledge and expertise to pre-established programs, processes and plans. By doing so, we contribute to a common endeavor in which we cannot participate if we do not establish and develop relationships. By working together, we inevitably accept relating to each other, this applies to personal as well to anonymous types of collaboration (Durkheim 1893). Undoubtedly, the relational dimension of work and of organizational culture in terms of proximity and personal relations has been challenged and weakened through the lockdowns and forced remote working. Therefore, it is important for team or department leaders, in an age where virtual forms of collaboration are not likely to disappear, to consciously manage the relationships between organizational members in order to create a productive atmosphere in which everyone is heard and seen and gets their share within ever more hybrid spatiotemporal arrangements that appear to be our future offices, shops, and production sites.





Figure 5. Virtual and hybrid meetings can be joyful encounters.

In the following sections, we list a series of issues that are common in team collaboration, but have to be addressed partly in a diverse or new way in hybrid working contexts. The design options are thought as elements for the construction of a relational working culture in hybrid environments. As we have argued, our concept of design implies that any option must not be taken as pre-established, as separated from the process of interacting and relating to each other. For this reason, by design, on the one hand, we intend measures for structuring meetings, building up and maintaining teams, networking communicative practices, methods and instruments for decision making, conflict solution, feedback and appraisal. On the other hand, these measures should be taken in the full sense of their appearance in organizational life, i.e., as formal structures and interventions that have their informal counterpart: the culture. As outlined above, by ‘culture’, we intend the material dimension of organizational life, the patterns, collective behaviors, and modes

of interacting. By dealing with organizational culture, we do not need to draw on ‘unconscious’ hypotheses or assumptions in order to explain collective patterns of behavior or shared values and ideas (Schein 1985). In our view, it’s all there, in the daily modes of relating to each other. These are dynamic and can be subject to change. Still, it is the material process that counts, not the single measure or intervention on the formal level.

## **Team formation and structure**

In times of shrinking labor force supply, *recruiting and onboarding* are crucial activities for organizations. If the aim is to build up a relational working culture from the beginning, particular attention has to be laid on the integration of new members of the organization. People have to be supported in order to integrate well from the start. They have to be provided with access to critical knowledge, they have to be able to find their place in the respective department, project or team. What’s more, they have to experience that they contribute to the team’s success with their knowledge and experience.

Thus, becoming a member of the organization is a process that has to be curated. ‘Onboarding’ means to welcome people by framing the experience of the new member as a meaningful passage, e.g., by creating events and spaces of encounter between and building up the relationship with a successful candidate even before they start. Especially for younger people, organizations should conceive of this stage in terms of narratives, drawing on social media or even virtual and augmented reality in the communication with applicants and new members.

The *formation of new teams* is an equally challenging task for team leaders. They have to facilitate the building up of relationships between the members of the team as well as the creation of a trustful and supportive relationship between themselves and every single member. If the team works together in a hybrid form, it is essential that the virtual space be used not only for work-related topics, but also for personal exchange. It is this affective and social dimension that people missed particularly during the COVID-19 lockdowns. In many teams, rituals like the

“virtual coffee” were introduced to compensate the social and affective exchange that almost naturally evolves if people work together in office spaces. On a more formal basis, team leaders should introduce regular common reflection rounds on how the cooperation is experienced by the team members.

A team does not operate in an isolated manner, but constitutes a *network* that is in itself embedded in larger organizational networks. In terms of relationality, the aim should be to take advantage of the openness and embeddedness of the team’s relationships and, at the same time, to maintain a certain robustness (Burt 2005). As to the internal dynamics, a team works better if its network structure is dense and decentralized. If single team members only relate to the central figure of the team leader, this could result in an overload and a lacking robustness of the network. In this sense, team leaders (and also the members) should suggest or create occasions of exchange without the leader being present. This helps to create the robustness of the team’s network even if the exchange is not focused on work-related issues. Furthermore, the team leader should invite members to coordinate in a decentral way, signaling by that their trust in the members’ competences.

## **Work organization**

Human resources departments and especially team leaders have to adjust to *novel requirements* expressed by new generations of employees, as well as by employees that have been adapting to hybrid working arrangements during the pandemic. Other than in the past, people attribute at least equal, if not higher, importance to private life, so the management has to come to terms with the process of *individualization* with respect to work organization (work-life balance). In this sense, the spreading of remote work has contributed to a further entanglement of professional and private life. While at the beginning of the pandemic, people were forced to find arrangements between their private situation and the rhythm of working life, in the meantime many people (obviously not in all professions and sectors) claim flexibility with respect to job and private life requirements. How should the management and especially team leaders react? Acknowledging the shift in how working and private life

intermingle in the spatiotemporal experience of the employees amounts to adopting a relational view on the own culture of working together. It is therefore recommendable that departments and teams initiate reflection processes and collectively decide on the organization of the working structure (remote/presence, flexibility of working hours and shifts). In order to establish a productive atmosphere, it is important to dialogue on the needs and necessities of every single person involved. This potentially raises the mutual understanding between the team members for the colleagues' situation. There are a number of reliable instruments for this type of collective decision making, such as the sociocratic method of "consent" (Rau und Koch-Gonzalez 2018) or the "systemic consensing" (Schrotta 2011).

Another aspect of work organization in hybrid environments is the fact that people do have *diverging needs with respect to physical presence* while engaging in teamwork. Some people opt for a quiet working place where they can concentrate on their tasks, which may be easier to achieve at home, but not necessarily, e.g., if employees have little children or other care exigencies. Others need the company and communicative situation of an open, common office space and have suffered considerably from the isolation during the lockdowns. The task for a team leader or for the team as a whole is then to create physical and hybrid spaces that allow different types of working and communicating. This includes also rooms or zones where people can work in silence without being interrupted or disturbed by people rushing in or by conversations in open office spaces.

## **Atmosphere**

In order to create an *atmosphere characterized by active participation*, a certain equilibrium with respect to the distribution of time and attention is necessary. Such an atmosphere contributes to the maintaining of a group identity, the readiness to contribute and the quality of the teamwork's outcomes. A simple, but effective instrument to establish a participatory team culture is the minute-round. During a meeting, the team leader, or any other team member, can establish a question or raise a topic and invite the other members, one by one, to express their view in a 60 to 90 seconds' statement.

No interruptions and comments are admitted. By repeatedly applying this method, team members exercise being concise, assertive and, conversely, learn to listen attentively to the others. In other words, they collectively train two of the most important social skills, i.e., the ability to assert oneself and actively contribute in collective processes and the ability to take others' perspectives and display empathic behaviors toward others.

However, working together can also lead to *conflicts*, especially when diverging approaches and views or diverse personalities encounter. It is normal that conflicts emerge in teamwork, still they do not disappear if they are not addressed and linger, negatively affecting by that the group functioning and the wellbeing of the members. Methods for addressing conflicts can be taken from communication psychology or approaches like nonviolent communication (Rosenberg 2015, Mastrogiacomo and Osterwalder 2021).

For team leaders as well as for colleagues it is important to consider the personal situation of the other team members. *Keeping in touch* on a personal level in order to promote psychological wellbeing and safety creates the conditions for trustful cooperation. It has been shown that psychological safety is one of the major presuppositions for sustainable cooperation (Edmondson 2018). Therefore, it is recommendable for the team leader to deliberately create occasions (also in virtual meetings) for asking team members about their personal situation, especially when they are working remotely. In most of the cases, such a dialogue between the team leader and a single member, or between two team members, should take place separately.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing the question of how to design relational working cultures in hybrid environments, we intended to shift the focus from the objective givenness of organizational arrangements and technological developments to the way how they are lived and experienced by the people working under these conditions. As we argued above, this is not to be mistaken as an account of alleged “psychological effects” of spatiotemporal designs and their

extension by communication technologies. By holding meetings in hybrid environments, people experience the particular spatiality of these novel forms of working together *as such*. If we aim to assess the importance and the value of new cooperation forms in hybrid environments, we have to consider the way how humans co-shape these environments by living them.

In a more radical sense, we have been stating that it is not possible to speak of 'hybrid environments' if we are not able to phenomenologically describe the experiences that constitute these environments as communicative spatiotemporal arrangements. There is no 'hybrid environment' if the embodied, affective dimension is left out in the analysis, and a purely linguistic or neuropsychological account of the respective experiences would be reductive and therefore incomplete.

Embodiment, in the phenomenological sense of the term (Husserl 1952, Merleau-Ponty 1945, Waldenfels 2000), is also the pre-condition of relationality. In this sense, relational working cultures are the result of designing embodied encounters and affective exchange, no matter if they take place in physical, in computer-mediated or in hybrid environments. In our recommendations, we therefore foregrounded the human dimension of cooperation. We are well aware that technology and human efforts are, and will be more and more, interwoven in working processes. Nevertheless, organization as a process cannot renounce the relational dimension, even in its most mediated and extended modes. Otherwise, it would run out of its purpose, i.e., to structure collective human endeavors according to a meaningful investment in shared and divided space and time.

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#### Films

- Metropolis* (1927). Director: Fritz Lang. Screenplay: Firtz Lang, Thea von Harbou. Producer: Erich Pommer. Germany.
- Berlin – Die Sinfonie einer Großstadt*. (1927). Director: Walther Ruttmann. Screenplay: Karl Freund, Carl Meyer, Walther Ruttmann. Germany