Chapter 6
The “Intensification–Quality Paradox” in ICT Organizations

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ABSTRACT
Paradoxes and system contradictions in organizations may expose employees to tensions and contradictions, which they can only partially resolve, and from which they may only partially escape. Exposure to double-bind situations leads to stress, anxiety, and other symptoms of behavioral, affective, and cognitive disturbances. When employees are caught between paradoxical injunctions and organizational defensive routines, metacommunication is hindered, and some employees develop dysfunctional coping strategies and end up being burned out. During a phenomenological PhD research on the burnout experience of 14 ICT employees in France and Norway, a stress-inducing pathological communication pattern was discovered and named the “intensification-quality paradox.” The research participants had experienced two conflicting demands as a double bind: “do more with less” and “be excellent.” The employees with high standards and ideals spent excessive personal energy to do more with less while keeping the quality constant. They got increasingly exhausted, ineffective, and finally burnt out.

INTRODUCTION
There is broad consensus that the working climate has become more intense and demanding. Increased globalization, competition, and increased uncertainty of employment are identified as some of the causes for HR exploitation (Brödner &

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Forslin, 2002). The emphasis of profitability and permanent restructuring create an organizational climate of pressure and insecurity in workers. These workers are more susceptible to stress and deterioration of their physical, psychological and mental well-being (Aubert & Pagès, 1989; Dejours, 1980). The negative side effects are stress symptoms, self-exploitation tendencies, blurring boundaries between work and private life, burnout, and eroding trust in management (Brödner & Forslin, 2002).

The antecedents of burnout are researched on widely and many organizational and personal factors are identified. Interestingly, the most influential models do not have communication as a single root factor behind burnout. In this paper, it is proposed that there are pathological communication patterns in the organizational culture that push some employees to burnout. One such pathological communication pattern is paradoxical communication and double bind in particular.

In Evenstad’s phenomenological PhD research conducted in the period of 2012-2016, the role of communication behind work stress and burnout in the ICT sector in France and Norway was explored. It was found that the job-related stress factors that are used in the burnout models do not exist independently, but they arise out of stress-inducing communication processes (Evenstad, 2016). This research identified three major paradoxes that the research participants have experienced: ‘acceleration-deceleration paradox’ (work fast in a slow organization); ‘intensification-quality paradox’ (‘do more with less’ and ‘be excellent’); ‘autonomy-control paradox’ (be autonomous under the control of management). These paradoxes trapped them in a double bind and eventually led them to burnout.

The ‘intensification-quality paradox’ is a double bind where there are two conflicting demands on the employees: ‘do more with less’ and ‘be excellent’. The injunction of ‘be excellent’ is the total quality and excellence ideal (Peters & Waterman, 1982) with a message that only the best performing organizations, those that produce the best quality goods and services, can survive, grow and be profitable. Later, with globalization and outsourcing jobs, the other injunction came along: ‘resources are limited; you have to do more with less; if you give all, you will keep your job’.

This type of dominant discourses is based on hegemonic ideologies like free market capitalism, neoliberalism, technicism and managerialism. They shape the organizational and managerial discourses and even the intrapersonal discourses, i.e., the intrapersonal communication or the inner speech that takes place within an individual (Evenstad, 2016). Organizations have a tendency to take on self-sustaining, self-directing lives of their own, to evolve values and goals contrary to societal interests, to impose those values upon society and to “colonize the life-world” of the individuals they employ (Clegg & Dunkerley, 1980; Habermas, 1984). Thus, these discourses colonize individuals’ life-worlds and establish a cultural control through the internalization of excellence demands.
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