

interviewed content managers perceived the new release as an opportunity to improve their work and its outcomes, and fundamentally believed in this narrative of success. As strong e-commerce growth required many rapid changes, they had developed a common culture of trial and error, which they all ascribed to themselves. This mechanism is closely linked to the insight that success and particularly project success is socially constructed and perceived by different stakeholders [5, 8] and can be linked to organizational culture [33]. The specific aspect of narratives of success has also been raised in previous research on IS projects [13, 34].

Furthermore, employees in FASHION's e-commerce department show a great deal of synergy and loyalty to each other, as well as to the department head. These are the aforementioned characteristics of a good team [21, 22]. However, in this situation, the mechanism of **hierarchical groupthink** was present on the basis of belief in the e-commerce department's narrative of success. The following quote of the department head illustrates his power in setting an agenda: *"We have spent the last three quarters with very intense discussions and got a lot of scolding: Everything was better before [with the system before PIMS]. I have heard [this] so often, but all have to agree to it or have to engage with it, because there is no alternative. Now everyone agrees with it."* Janis [35] provided six criteria to identify and determine a situation of groupthink: 1.) *Little or no consideration of alternate plans:* Management at FASHION did not have a back-up plan for a failed migration or further technical issues. For instance, downtimes were seen as a given. 2.) *Risk is not assessed:* Management and Technicians at FASHION did not assess the risk for the operations of the difficult migration that they planned. Subsequently, the migration and go-live of the new release failed. If people raised issues, it was stated that the project simply "had to be done in this way". 3.) *No review is taken of rejected plans:* There was just one option: The execution of the initial plan. This was further enforced by commercial arrangements for the release change, which had been designed by management inflexibly to save money. The failure of the first renewal attempt for the new release occurred, because the software of the new release had not been ready. 4.) *Advice from outsiders is not sought:* Management did not feel able to fund a specification project by technical experts from a consultancy. 5.) *Facts that support the plan are acknowledged, facts that do not support the plan are ignored:* This was observed in management's attitude to end-users input regarding project success. From management's point of view end-users simply focused too much on the negative. 6.) *Contingency plans are not created:* There was no alternative plan created for the renewal project and the implemented solution. The technology is a 'Ferrari' and simply not used properly. The described groupthink had the effect that content managers bought in to this assessment and that significantly influenced, how they made sense of the renewal project.

As aforementioned, there were four different levels of information: technicians, managers, content managers, and purchasing department end-users, who were not informed about the particularities of the project. These different groups had different sensemaking experiences. This is due to the different points in time at which they received their inputs. At first, the technicians became aware of the issues with the initial implementation. This was crucial for other parties' sensemaking. As the

management was made aware of the technological issues, the deputy department head commented: *“If you turn one stone, you have to turn them all.”* This meant scope creep and a more comprehensive change than initially anticipated, but also a change of priorities. As a consequence, the aforementioned list of requirements remained unknown to the lead in-house technician till one of the researchers presented it to him after the end of the project. The end-users realized a dawning failure based on the results they perceived in their daily work. A content manager commented: *“It became evident during the run of the project that our [the content management] team’s wishes [...] were difficult to implement.”* The content management team reacted with not focusing on the wishes and expectations anymore. This can be described as the mechanism of **inherent fatalism** of end-users. Instead, they realized that the renewal project was a threat for their productivity. Overcoming the threat and the difficult phase was therefore a great success. According to a team lead, the new attitude to the project became: *“It simply had to be done.”* She described their experience with the adversity as a *“state of war”*. She went on to say: *„It is a positive experience to go through such difficult periods. It is an opportunity to grow personally and to see what you are capable of.“* We interpret the described personal growth and experience of performing against the odds as the seed for the perception of success that end-users reported. This appears to be at the heart of their sensemaking process. It overshadows the project and its original purpose over time. The other team lead stated in the third rounds of interviews: *“I do not know [how many requirements were met]. I have no idea. [...] You get used to situations and if something is suddenly missing from the tools that you use, you find other ways. [...] Whenever you get used to something you stop questioning it. Hence, I do not know what can be improved at the moment.”* The hallmark of success in such a scenario became reaching the previous level of performance and they abandoned the goal of renewal. As a group, the users at FASHION developed a reliable system, similar to those described in the literature [23], to cope with the adversity that they perceived because of the technological glitches in their work environment. Overcoming the situation as a group also gave them a collective mind and a collective feeling of success. This finding adds to previous research which has identified the importance of organizational culture for IS project success in general [33]. Aspects of inherent fatalism as a mindset, its antecedents, and its consequences have featured in previous research. For instance, research on perceived organizational support and psychological contracts of employees with their employer [36] has investigated conditions that might lead to inherent fatalism on the part of the employees. Part of the process to readily accept the situation in the workplace is the rationalization process of individual end-users. More specifically, motivated reasoning [37, 38], which is the reliance on a biased set of cognitive processes, is likely to be important for explaining end-users ability to focus on the aspects under their control. The end-users could have been motivated to avoid a reasoning that would stain the embraced narrative of success of FASHION. As a consequence, such an approach allows them to remain motivated to work [39] at FASHION. The organization relied on the described combination of mechanisms, which has its roots in the instilled organizational narrative of dynamism and success, to motivate users to overcome the problems in daily use. As a result, the deputy department head believed that all people involved were satisfied and summarized: *“The users found ways to deal with the performance problems.”*

6 Conclusion

A CR approach enabled us to develop a better nascent theory for the understanding of various perceptions and evaluations of success of IS projects in organizations. Our explanation of the link between the mechanisms identified above is the main contribution of our study. We use them to explain the discrepancy between end-users' perception and real renewal project success: For *end-users*, the perceived success of overcoming the adversity of the renewal project was a good match with the overall groupthink, and the predominant organizational narrative. They perceived themselves as the group of people that was working in a dynamic market environment and as those who successfully struggle with its dynamism. Overall, their sensemaking of the situation had a fit with FASHION's organizational narrative. From this, we draw the conclusion that overcoming the adversity of a project's ramifications is a big factor in the perception of successful projects by end-users. This creates a feeling of unity and resolve in good teams. The greater purpose of being part of something interesting (a growing and dynamic business – fitting the organizational narrative) is also an important aspect. For *management*, the resilience of end-users, who are motivated in such a way, is crucial to ensure relative success to their adjusted objectives. As observed in our case, managers seem to adapt their level of perceived success based on the information they receive from the technicians, who are closest to the matter at hand, but are not necessarily aware about the overall story that has been told by management about the project they are working on. Thus, there is a wider disconnection in the sensemaking of individuals in an organization about the success of a project. As long as management dominates the perception of the business environment and end-users buy into the derived organizational narrative, it is likely to influence the sensemaking process of end-users. In our case, this means that the adversity of the initially *planned* technological change is seen as inevitable on the level of end-users. End-users seem to consider the greater cause inherent in the organizational narrative and respond with a fatalistic and resilient attitude and form a reliable system, which allows them to cope with the adversity related to technology project in their organization. For *technicians*, this means that their sensemaking is constrained by time pressure and in our case the inevitable lack of experience with the PIMS. In this situation, they had to make sense on the fly. Furthermore, they did not feel empowered to manage relationships with end-users and expectation management on their own. Overall, this led to the described situation in which the perception of the business environment and the resulting organizational narrative dominated the perception of a project's success. We think that this theoretical understanding is generalizable as the organizational narrative, which informs perception, is likely to depend on the organizational environment.

A possible limitation of a single case study is always generalizability. We deem a single case as appropriate for exploratory research and aim to challenge generalizability of our results on the basis of multiple cases in future research. It is a practical implication of this paper that managers should make sure that they actively nominate someone, who plays the role of a devil's advocate [22] to manage the expectations related to a synchronized plan. This will alleviate the problem of groupthink based on a similar perception of the environment and the resulting organizational narrative. In our particular case, the common believe led to a lowering

of expectations which allowed to reinterpret failure as success in meeting adjusted expectations. This is a benevolent outcome. It is also possible, that the organizational narrative further aggravates end-users. A narrative told to motivate employees can ring hollow if it is not backed up by reality. Thus, management and technicians should communicate more directly and more transparently with end-users about the underlying technology. Even if they do not understand the technology in detail, they are likely to welcome the gesture of inclusion and the possibility to participate. In a different environment as in our case, users can resort to adverse behavior such as user resistance [40, 41]. The circumstances of this can be at the center of future research.

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