

ON THE STATE OF A POLITICAL PARTY OF A REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF A CRISIS AND EXPLORING WAYS TO DEVELOP NEW PERSPECTIVES

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KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

Organizational Analysis,
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Communication Skills

JEL CLASSIFICATION
D02, D83, L39, M14

This paper summarizes the results of the 2018 internal retreat on the then current organizational state of a local social democratic party at the municipal level in Austria. The aim of the survey was to gather personal experiences of party officials and the challenges of working together against the backdrop of an organizational crisis. An experimental research design was developed for the data collection, which used participatory methods of moderated public participation. The collected units of analysis in the form of Post-Its, author's memos, and other methodological artifacts were interpreted, categorized, and summarized. Furthermore, items were additionally weighted by frequency for illustrative purposes. A clear organizational crisis was evident. Considerable knowledge deficits regarding contemporary organizational leadership and communication work can be suspected. The results should help to stimulate future research on organizational cooperation in predominantly volunteer-led and socio-demographically heterogeneous local parties against the background of contemporary communication practices.

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

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INTRODUCTION

This research report describes the crisis-ridden situation of a local-community party organization in rural Austria. The organization of the Austrian Social Democratic Party was examined. To avoid drawing conclusions about the local party and its actors, the organization, and the municipality as its sphere of activity are not mentioned by name.

The party organization has been active for decades in a municipality with a population of around 3,000. After decades of political leadership in the municipality, the local party suffered a massive electoral defeat in 2017. Due to the election results, the Social Democratic Party lost its claim to leadership in the municipality. The office of mayor as well as most votes in the municipal council went to the election winner, the Austrian New People's Party. For attentive observers of the dynamics of local politics in the municipality, this emerging change was already noticeable in the run-up to the elections for the office of mayor and the municipal council. This change was expressed in the quantity and in the quality of public appearances and not least in the communication activities of the parties campaigning for election. The party officials of the local party studied seemed to be divided within the organization. On the part of the author, it was reasonable to assume that the significant electoral loss might have to do with the social structure within the local party. Individual personality characteristics (age, profession, education, schooling) and their influence on the media competence and ICT competence of the players could be related. The average age of the active party functionaries was 48 at the time of the survey. The youngest party functionary was 36 years old at the time of data collection. In comparison, the new mayor, in office due to his own electoral defeat, was 4 years younger. In short, the municipality was turned upside down overnight.

Although it was not the author's original intention to produce a case study, the summary of the self-assessment conducted can in some ways be considered as one. The data collection originally took place during the internal retreat. At the time of the survey, the elections had already taken place a year ago. In preliminary discussions held by the author prior to the retreat, a variety of reasons and causes for the electoral defeat were formulated by the officials. On the part of the author, it was suspected that this bitter election loss had led in the meantime to internal and partly also hidden power struggles within the organization.

- Party functionaries felt powerless or helpless in the face of election-winning political competition
- Political issues and positions were not worked out and agreed upon in a coordinated manner on the part of the party organization under investigation
- Internal working agreements were only partially in place or were experienced as rather non-binding
- Possibly due to the fatal experience of electoral defeat, the self-confidence of group members was weakened

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- General communication practices were described as uncoordinated
- The organization's political mission statement could not be communicated as such, either internally or externally
- The organization's vision, mission, values, and goals were not available in the written form and could not be communicated verbally during preliminary interviews
- The local party was publicly underrepresented compared to the activities of its political competitor or was on the defensive in terms of the timing of its activities.
- Stakeholder collaboration was limited to face-to-face meetings
- Dislocated collaboration through digital communication channels was perceived as uncoordinated or useless
- The use of digital tools, e.g., to create communication materials such as printed materials, was not of the same quality as that of political competitors.

The problem given here is, thus, complex and multifaceted. However, neither the originally written retreat report nor the research report derived from it claim to be a complete organizational analysis as offered by Joachim Kahmann (2013) or also Ulrike Froschauer and ManFred Lueger (2012).

Peter Kruse (2010) suggests that every complex problem system needs an equally complex problem-solving system. In the exemplary case, the complexity of the problem could already be anticipated from preliminary discussions with the actors of the organization on several aspects: according to individual reactions on the part of individual functionaries, the local party was not prepared for such an organizational crisis. Other representatives of the organization had doubted this view. After all, the leading candidate of the political competition was not a newcomer, but already a member of the municipal council and vice mayor. Nevertheless, the possibility of losing the election was apparently not considered a realistic scenario. In this respect, there were no organizational measures or significant strategic considerations to prepare for such a change. The communication practice of the democratically legitimized new mayor was unusually strongly focused on external effects in the municipal political context. The representatives of the local SPÖ party organization had obviously underestimated the abilities of the political competitor regarding his measures of political PR in the municipal political context. This was also communicated in preparatory conversations with officials of the local party prior to the data collection. Cooperation within the local party under study was also not characterized by clearly agreed upon work procedures and knowledge in the use of ITC. Knowledge in the use of modern working tools and the production of contemporary communication tools seemed to be low. The willingness to further educate oneself in special areas (e.g., graphics) was equally non-existent. Qualitative differences became apparent in comparison to the political competition. The opposition's control function, as envisioned in the democratic system, could not be translated into new action-related strategies even after a year in the opposition role. All these perceptions gradually became

clear in conversations in the months following the election defeat and were articulated out of frustration.

The basis for the organizational self-assessment was the commitment of the organizational leadership as well as the individual actors of the organization. A problem-oriented self-assessment appeared suitable for clarifying the misunderstandings and personal perceptions about the need for change, the goals of the process work, and the start of change management in the joint work as an initial step. Thus, the survey primarily served to open a discussion about the problems described. Manifest problems and challenges were to be worked out together in the team and to be clearly named. At the same time, initial ideas for finding solutions were to be developed in joint work. To promote this openness, established formats for moderating small groups were utilized. The methods also used in publicly moderated citizen discussions and citizen participation were chosen. In the end, three moderation formats were chosen to help the participating actors find answers to specific guiding questions.

For the author, it seemed promising to follow a path that would also be viable at the macro level for a local political party in terms of participation and solution orientation toward the citizens.

Two category systems were developed deductively in order to structure the individual contributions from the participation formats in a meaningful way for the following evaluation. The first category system is dedicated to the general structure and management of organizations. The second category system is dedicated to concrete fields of action within the organization to structure future actions and point them out to the actors. Both category systems were created during the preparation of the original retreat report.

METHODS

The data material collected during the retreat consists of Post-It notes, flipchart sheets, and handwritten memos by the author. The data analysis follows an experimental, qualitatively oriented, category-guided text analysis according to a hermeneutic procedure. The procedure used here is said to be justified by the fact that the evaluation of the units of analysis was not initially planned at the time of implementation according to a qualitative content analysis. This is because the systemic approach of helping a group of people to solve a problem was in the foreground. The experimental research design that emerged from the situation at that time shall be described here.

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A) An experimental methodical approach of data collection using participatory methods

In the following, the experimental research design for this study will be described, which contributed to the data collection and the subsequent interpretation and presentation of frequencies.

Based on specific guiding questions about the experience of the organizational work, the feedback of 10 actors of the local-municipally operating party organization were collected, interpreted, and presented in their weighting based on two category systems in 3 survey steps on one day. Subsequently, the author evaluated and summarized the results in a detailed document. The document included the description of the methodology of the execution and evaluation, the summary, and recommendations. The retreat report was handed out to all participating stakeholders during the second meeting. As a final step in the process, an online forum available only to stakeholders was created to allow participants to provide feedback on each evaluation based on the assigned code items. However, except for two contributions, the online forum was not used. The planning, implementation, summary, and reflection back to the stakeholders of the organization took place over the course of six months.

i. Method 1: Little carousel

The method is modified from the principle of the World Café and is a moderated discussion format for dividing participants into small groups of five to six people. Work ideas and concepts are developed together on prepared worktables. The carousel offers the participants the possibility to give space to different argumentations, to enable mutual understanding, to record this and to visualize it. The method is suitable to bring together the knowledge and perspectives of the participants to set the basis for the exchange of ideas and to stimulate new ideas and solutions. Through the principle of rotation, the participants are given the opportunity to actively participate in different topics. This principle encourages diverse input on one or more given topics.

The preparation and implementation of the small carousel as the first step of data collection proceeded as follows:

In the run-up to the closed meeting, the author held informal one-on-one discussions with the chairman and other functionaries of the party organization. Three guiding questions were formulated:

- *How can internal communication be improved?*
- *How can general cooperation be improved?*

- *How can the public relations and media work of the party organization be improved?*

At the beginning of the retreat, the three guiding questions were presented to the participating actors. Subsequently, three table moderators were appointed, to whom the questions were distributed. The table moderators led the discussion and took notes in key words of the participants' contributions. After the time was up, the participants changed tables. The table moderators summarized what had already been discussed. This allowed new actors who had joined the table to add further contributions to the respective topic. After all participants had visited all tables, the first method was completed. The table facilitators summarized the inputs and ideas on each question and presented them to all participants. All artifacts were then documented and collected for later analysis by the author.

ii. **Method 2: Open regular's table**

In the second step of data collection, a variation of *Open Space Conference* (Ruhsmann, 2021) was used as a method. The variation and renaming of the method is due to the company nonconform. Nonconform has successfully made a name for itself as an architectural firm in the D-A-CH region for the process-oriented design and methodical support of citizen participation processes. Nonconform itself maintains an educational workshop program, called nonconform Academy. This institution imparts knowledge and skills for the design of idea and participation processes of people in communities. Mostly, these are communities in rural areas whose inhabitants are new to such approaches rather than used to them (*Nonconform.At*, n.d.).

Open regular's table as a method is derived from the principle of Open Space Conference. This method offers all participants the opportunity to introduce topics that are important to them and to work on them in small groups. Self-responsibility and self-organization of the participants are essential components for the success of the method. The principle of the open regulars' table or Open Space is based on the principle of the "organized break". A basic approach of the methods is "The Law of Two Feet". This is intended to express that participants should only remain in a working group as long as they are willing to do so. It is not only allowed, but even desired to change the working group. (Ruhsmann, 2021)

For the methodological introduction, all participants were asked to sit in a circular arrangement. This arrangement was also repeated in the closing session. Prepared slides were used to explain the principle and the procedure. One question was set per table and working group. Participants remained at one table the entire time or changed tables at will. Only the table leaders remained at their table. Data collection took a total of one hour. A bulletin board was placed in the room, which later served as a "marketplace"

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for the topics and ideas submitted. A blank grid was prepared on two flip charts for the topics to be collected. Work tables were prepared for group work and set up in the room. A guiding question, the leading topic, was prepared by the moderator (author):

"How would you like to shape teamwork in the future?"

This guiding question was shared with all participants during the introduction to begin the topic. Along this topic, the participants were motivated to contribute and collect ideas. These were collected and clustered at the prepared marketplace (pinboard). Subsequently, the three most strongly represented idea clusters were identified and the provider of the idea was determined for each. Then, the three most strongly represented idea clusters were identified. A table leader was assigned to each of the three tables provided. Each participant had the choice of remaining at one table with one topic/idea or moving from table to table after the elapsed time. Those who had said all they needed to say about a topic could move to the next table. The respective table leader documented the course of the discussion with personal notes. These were then written down in keywords on individual cards. The moderator or the author changed from table to table to ensure the course of the discussion or to stimulate the discussion with his input or questions. At the end of the discussion rounds, the table leaders gave brief presentations summarizing the results for about 5 minutes. The moderation cards with the keywords were fixed on the pin board, photographed, and documented by the author. After a joint lunch break, the third and last method, Dynamic Facilitation according to Tim Rough, was applied.

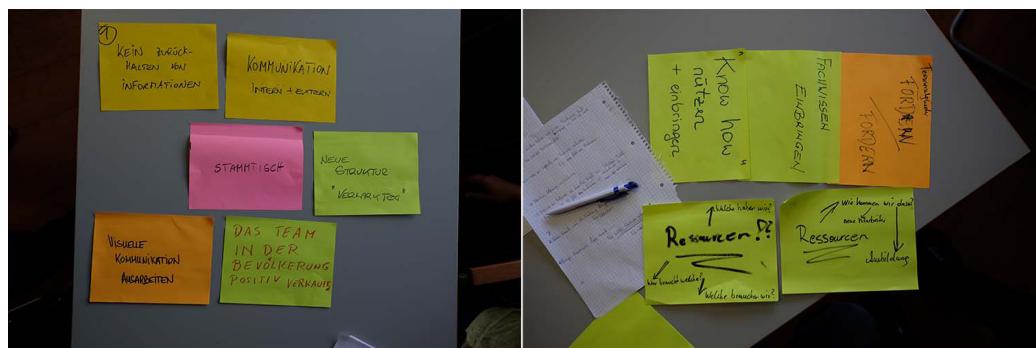


FIGURE 1. POST-IT CONTRIBUTIONS (SOURCE: THE AUTHOR'S ARCHIVE)

iii. Method 3: Dynamic facilitation

Dynamic Facilitation is a very dynamic and solution-oriented format and is mainly used in the Citizens' Council method. The goal of the method is to reach a common understanding of a topic and to build a common culture of discussion. This is necessary to build shared trust. The concerns and thoughts are sorted into four categories and noted down by the facilitator during the process for all participants to see:

- Challenges
- Concerns/objections
- Solutions/ideas
- Information/Viewpoints

The goal here was to minimize challenges and concerns and maximize possible solutions. A prerequisite, or at least helpful, for the success of this format is the personal commitment of the participants. The method is particularly popular when there are differences among the participants and the situation is deadlocked in the group or on the issue, leaving little hope for creative breakthroughs. All ten actors attending took part in Dynamic Facilitation. (Rough, n.d.; Zubizarreta, 2014). The implementation lasted just under two hours.

In the run-up to the implementation, the topics were again narrowed down. This was done in consultation with the chairman and members of the board of the local party. Two questions were prepared:

“How can we regain the trust of the community population?”.

“How can we become more professional as a group and trust each other again?”

Essential for the implementation of Dynamic Facilitation is the dynamic participation of people. Therefore, the specific questions were discussed before the implementation began. It was left to the participants to decide whether both questions or only one selected question should be worked on. It was decided to work on both questions.

At the end of the Dynamic Facilitation, after a break, a first feedback discussion was held. Finally, the author provided the further process steps for summarizing and reflecting.

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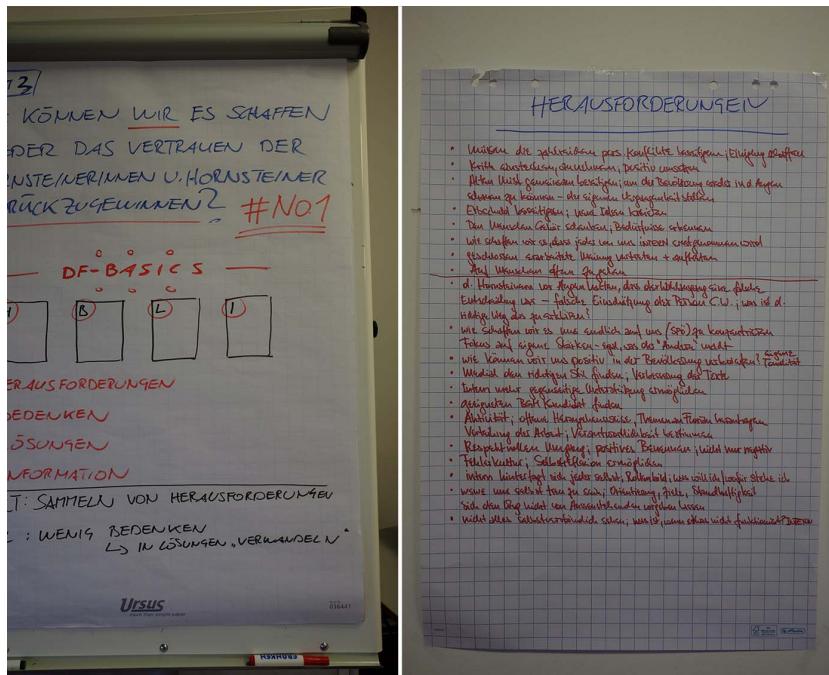


FIGURE 2. DYNAMIC FACILITATION CONTRIBUTIONS
(SOURCE: THE AUTHOR'S ARCHIVE)

B) Experimental approach to data evaluation

To provide a basic understanding of the evaluation, we will present the experimental procedure of the evaluation . According to this scheme, the written contributions were coded, interpreted, or paraphrased in a certain way and the frequencies of the codes were presented. At the end, concrete suggestions for action were formulated. Two category systems were created deductively before the data collection began. The categories were partly derived from the literature and partly narrowed down from preliminary discussions with the chairperson.

i. Methodical approach

In the first step of the evaluation, the contributions were reviewed (while the data were still being collected), structured on a flipchart sheet and reflected collectively by the group of participants. Handwritten memos were prepared by the author on the spot. In the course of the first data collection methods, the participants of the retreat wrote down their thoughts on Post-It stickers.

In the second step, in the wrap-up of the retreat, all contributions were interpreted in the course of the evaluation in independent work by the author, taking into account the memos, and possible measures were derived. Finally, the analysis units of the 3 survey steps were assigned to the categories of both category systems. Individual units of analysis were assigned to multiple categories on a case-by-case basis.

First, the steps for evaluating the units of analysis are to be presented.

Note: During the two survey methods “Open Regulars’ Table” and “Small Carousel,” topics with similar content were surveyed. Due to the similarity in content, the author decided to summarize the analysis units of the first two survey steps in a single evaluation step.

Stammtische & Karussell – Beitrag 1.5

KODE			
1.5.1	POST-IT-BEITRAG	Visuelle Kommunikation ausarbeiten	
1.5.2	INTERPRETATION/ ABLEITUNG	Neues Erscheinungsbild entwickeln, neue Handschrift entwickeln. Tonalität entwickeln (mehr als das Erscheinungsbild)	
1.5.3	KONKRETE MASSNAHMEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interne IST-Analyse und Bewertung der bestehenden Kommunikationsmittel (Zielgruppen, Qualität, Tonalität, Narrativ) • Konzeption des Kommunikationsmix auf Basis der Zielgruppenanalyse • Entscheidung über die Kommunikationsmaßnahmen, auch hinsichtlich Regelmäßigkeit und Machbarkeit (Skills, Ressourcenmanagement) • Neue Fotos erstellen (sich weniger „corporate“ geben, stattdessen eher die persönlichen Attribute zeigen) • Visitenkarten herstellen • Bildwelt entwickeln (Fotos suchen/buchen, der über ein Jahr zu allen Jahreszeiten Sujets in gleichwertiger Qualität und Stilistik entwickelt) – sollen als Pool angelegt werden (idealerweise Adobe Lightroom-Presets) inklusive → selbsterklärende Bearbeitung neuer Fotos • Prozesse definieren der klar beschreibt, wie zukünftig Kommunikationsmittel qualitätsgeichert werden bevor Sie veröffentlicht werden (Redaktionsteam -> Produktionsteam) • Modernes Basisdesign entwickeln für Print, Web und Social 	
1.5.4	HANDLUNGSFELDER	Produktion, Know-how-Zuwachs	
1.5.5	ORGANISATIONSENTWICKLUNG	Ziele, Strategie, Prozesse, Workflow, Ressourcen	

FIGURE 3. CODING, INTERPRETATION, DERIVING MEASURES AND CATEGORIZATION OF A POST-IT CONTRIBUTION
 (SOURCE: ORIGINAL CASE REPORT)

In the next step, the units of analysis were weighted by frequency, tabulated, and numerically reported there as summed numerical values. In a final step, the resulting weights were interpreted. Before this step is presented in the key results section of this paper, both category systems shall be introduced.

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iv. Category systems

Two category systems were created deductively. The categories were partly derived from literature, partly narrowed down from preliminary discussions with the local party chairperson.

The first category system *Organization* summarizes typical dimensions of a general organizational management. This topical field complements them with the areas *Processes*, *Workflow* and *Resources*. (Ellebracht, 2011; Rüegg-Sturm, 2003; Schwarz, 1996; Thommen & Achleitner, 2012). The second category system introduced serves to allocate the units of analysis about possible areas of action for the description and the intended optimization of the joint work within the organization.

The following graphic shows the areas of the organization that were created.



FIGURE 4. 1ST CATEGORY SYSTEM: ORGANIZATION
(SOURCE: CASE SUMMARY REPORT 1)

All contributions of the three survey methods were assigned according to these categories. Several categories could be applied to the individual units of analysis.

Vision, Mission and Values form the mission statement and reflect the organizational identity (Werther, 2015). Objectives and strategy are dedicated to strategic concerns of the organization. Processes, workflows, and resources address the process organization (Niederhäuser & Rosenberger, 2017, p. 43). In order to make the formation

of the categories comprehensible, the categories will be underpinned with questions in the following: (Niederhäuser & Rosenberger, 2017, p. 24)

- Vision: What is the vision for life in the community from the perspective of the organization?
- Mission: How do we describe our path that leads us to our common vision?
- Values: What is the value foundation of the organization and at the same time the value base to be communicated to the community?
- Mission statement: How do we want to make our values and basic principles clear to offer orientation?
- Objectives: What do we have to do concretely to be able to realize our vision? (Note: Organizational goals and communication goals)
- Strategy: What actions must be planned to achieve our goals in a controlled and measurable way? (Note: organizational and communication goals)
- Process: How do we plan and organize our common work fundamentally?
- Workflow: How do we work together on a detailed level and which tools and skills do we need to be more productive?
- Resources: What resources do we have at our disposal, how do we use them and how do we gain new resources?

The following graphic shows organizational levels of action.

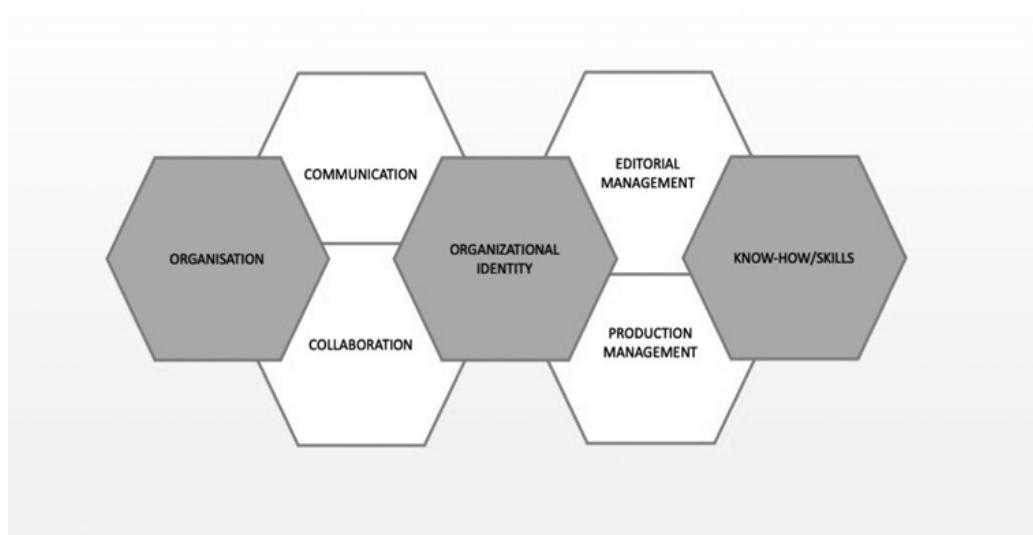


FIGURE 5. 2ND CATEGORY SYSTEM: (SOURCE: CASE SUMMARY REPORT)

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These categories were also created deductively from the literature. The categories of all three survey methods were assigned to the units of analysis of all three survey methods. Again, multiple coding to individual units of analysis was possible.

The following guiding questions will help to better understand the categories:

Organization

- *What are the requirements for the organization?*
- *How is the work organized in the team to increase motivation and productivity?*

Communication

- *How are the citizens (target group) addressed?*
- *What are the characteristics of this target group?*
- *What are the components of communication work?*

Collaboration

- How is joint work made internally transparent and comprehensible?
- Which processes are needed?
- Which tools help to establish low-threshold and reasonable workflows?

Organizational identity (Organizational Identity)

- *What are the political positions of the local-municipal party organization?*
- *What are the core messages?*
- *What distinguishes the party organization from political competitors?*
- *How is the credibility and relevance of the organization communicated?*

Editorial Management

- How are messages created in line with the organizational identity in the course of text and image production?
- How is content created for different target groups and media channels on different occasions?

Production Management

- How are communication materials produced in line with target groups and in commercial quality?
- What resources are needed for this and what are the workflows (processes) about it?

Know-how (Skills)

- Which requirements demand further training?
- How is internal knowledge management organized?
- What does willingness to learn mean?
- Which tools help to increase productivity?

With this information about the framework of the methodological approach, the evaluations and results will now be summarized.

RESULTS

In the following, the results of the data analysis according to the described experimental approach of the contributions from all data collection methods using two category systems is presented:

Interpretation and frequencies in the dimension organization

In *Table 1* below the first column shows the categories, the second column shows the frequencies of the *Small Carousel* and *Open Regulars' Table* methods. Column 3 shows the frequencies of the categorical assignment of the contributions from *Dynamic facilitation*.

TABLE 1. AREAS OF ORGANIZATION

Categories	Carousel & Open regulars' table	Dynamic Facilitation
Vision	3	6
Mission	7	4
Values	12	9
Mission Statement	4	6
(Org.) Goals	7	5
Strategy	4	4
Processes	5	4

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Workflow	9	3
Ressources	9	7

Note: Total items in Carousel + Open regulars' table n=20 and Dynamic Facilitaion n= 11

The largest proportion of categorical assignments from the *Small carousel* and *Open regulars table* methods were in the *values* category. Contributions relating to the political *vision* were hardly represented in the actors' feedback. The topic of *goals* ranked in the middle. This indicates that there is no clear thinking or direction from organizational leadership in this regard. However, deficits with regard to the political vision, the *mission statement* and a general strategic approach became apparent in the course of the discussions during the retreat. In this respect, it can be assumed that a need for action was identified in this regard. However, the corresponding contributions had a rather diffuse character. The high frequencies in the areas of *workflow* and *resources* could indicate unfulfilled wishes on the part of the function holders for an improved *process* organization to structure the joint work. In addition, it would have to be clarified which resources are necessary to improve the process organization and whether the actors in the organization would also take advantage of offers for further training.

The most frequent assignments of contributions from *Dynamic Facilitation* could be made in the categories of *values*, *resources*, and *vision*. This allows the conclusion that the desire for a common value base is strong. The theme of resources is equally strong here, although the nature of the missing resources was not clearly identified from the contributions to the discussion. It remained unclear whether it was a lack of material resources, for example, or time for more volunteer work.

Interpretation and frequencies in the dimension fields of action

Again, in Table 2 the first column shows the categories, the second column shows the frequencies of the *Small Carousel* and *Open Regulars' Table* methods. Column 3 shows the frequencies of the categorical assignment of the contributions from *Dynamic facilitation*.

TABLE 2. AREAS OF ACTION

Categories	Carousel & Open regulars' table	Dynamic Facilitation
Organization	17	8
Communication	11	5
Collaboration	14	5
Organizational Identity	4	7

Editorial Management	4	2
Production Management	5	2
Know-How/Skills	8	2

Note: Total items in Carousel + Open regulars' table n=20 and Dynamic Facilitation n= 11

In the category system *Areas of Action*, most of the contributions of the data collection methods *Small Carousel* and *Open Regulars' Table* could be categorized with *Organization*, *Cooperation* and *Communication*. In addition, contributions could quite often be assigned to the category *Know-How/Skills*. Bringing up the rear in terms of categorical frequencies are the contributions in the categories of *Organizational identity*, *Editorial management* and *Production management*. This is interesting insofar as these categories in particular would be highly relevant for addressing the target group. The political profile would ultimately have to be communicated via actions in the areas of editorial work and production. This circumstance could indicate that there is no pronounced awareness of these fields of action. This is a somewhat paradoxical situation, because without a clear political profile and corresponding competencies for editorial and production measures, the implementation of target group-oriented communication activities might not seem very promising. Measures that are nevertheless carried out can therefore only be successful "by chance". Obviously, there is no thematic, targeted or strategic basis for the actions of the organization.

Contributions from *Dynamic Facilitation* could be assigned to the categories *Organization*, *Positioning*, *Communication* and *Collaboration* particularly frequently. The categories *Editorial Management* and *Production Management* were never specifically named in the contributions but were indirectly derived from the context of meaning and were therefore assigned to two contributions each by the author. In the interpretation, it is assumed that these categories were assigned less often, possibly because these aspects had not played an extremely conscious role within the local group in the past. In comparison, the verbal contributions on *organization*, *communication*, and *collaboration* stood out more clearly. The perceived organizational crisis was obviously expressed more clearly here than via those aspects that had previously played a role - if at all - rather on the sidelines.

Following this interpretation, the desire for improvements within the organization or cooperation within the team can be assumed. The local party's own communication performance was probably also questioned. Here, a certain perplexity or disagreement regarding the ideas about the type of organizational communication towards the external stakeholders could be interpreted at the moment of the data collection. This picture blends with the issue of political positioning, although the distinction between

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these two categories was probably not clearly given within the team. In comparison with the derivations from the two other survey instruments *Open Regulars' Table* and *Small Carousel*, the question of *Organizational Identity* definitely played a clear role in the *Dynamic Facilitation* format. Obviously, the question of the content-related (political) orientation towards the population of Hornstein and as a demarcation from the political competition was finally brought to light. Competitor in the end, however, brought to light.

CONCLUSIONS

This article describes an experimental approach to a self-assessment of a local political party organization in an organizational crisis. The author was responsible for the design, implementation, and evaluation of this case study. The experimental approach existed insofar as the author aimed for a low-threshold solution orientation. This was explained by the heterogeneous social structure of the mainly volunteer actors within the organization. Furthermore, the time frame of the main part of the implementation of the retreat was limited to one day.

For the collection of the data three moderation formats were used which were brought to application in consequence of the methodology of the qualitative content analysis. Two category systems were developed. The feedback (items) was interpreted by the author and then categorized according to both category systems, allowing for multiple categorizations.

The key findings drawn from the interpretation of the contributions can be summarized as follows:

- The problems have grown and existed before the election defeat;
- The common desire to improve organizational work was formulated;
- The organizational crisis is largely self-inflicted;
- A clear desire for an agreed value base was formulated;
- A lack of appreciation between the actors is evident;
- A political mission statement for the organization is considered important, but perceived as a deficit;
- Willingness to learn in the sense of further training for political PR could not be clearly derived as an aspect of self-reflection;
- Concrete suggestions for the improved design of process organization were hardly formulated or made clear.

Although the results of this individual case study cannot be generalized, the question arises as to which characteristics should be fulfilled by local political party organizations in rural areas for target-group-oriented communication work toward the

electorate in order to achieve a contemporary quality of communication. This has, on the one hand, an organization-theoretical perspective in the context of the honorary office and/or the political NGO. On the other hand, it also opens up a communication-theoretical perspective with regard to political communication work. In this respect, this paper is aimed at people within these research fields. Moreover, political academies can use the results of the shown experimental research approach to conduct similar interventions or build on them.

The study places the question of the actors' ability to act in local political party organizations at the center of future questions. The individual actor is supposed to set beneficial actions within an organizational framework. The form and quality in which this can take place will be the goal of future research. In a next step, a qualitative multi-case study can be conducted to examine local political party organizations in rural areas with regard to their organizational structure, communication practices and internal cooperation. Ultimately, the creation of a maturity model for the classification and evaluation of the performance capabilities and performance limits of such micro-organizations would be desirable.

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