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Abstract

This paper adopts a performational approach to critical sensemaking to explore how organisational members enact innovation-related emotion rules through the performance of parody. The approach was motivated more by induction than deduction. During an action-research study in a small service company, humour, teasing and laughter were noticed in a workshop organized for the company. On closely examining the videotaped workshop data, it was noticed that parodic performances were used to make critical sense of the innovation-related emotion rules (and power relationships) within the company. Analysis of this study shows in detail how, through parodic and imitative performances, the leader and employees constructed three emotion rules: show your emotions, show your enthusiasm, and show your criticism in a nice way, which are set by the leader to promote innovation practice within the company.

Keywords: emotion rules, critical sensemaking, performativity, parody, humour, Goffman, innovation practice, power

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1. Introduction

The objective of this study is to enrich critical sensemaking (CSM) using a performational approach. During an action-research study, an extensive amount of humour, teasing and laughter was noticed in a workshop organised for a small service company. When examining the videotaped workshop data closely, it was noticed that imitative performances were given by the leader and the employees in which emotion rules were enacted to make critical sense of the innovation practice of the company. This study draws on Goffman’s (1959) performational approach to explain how critical sensemaking is done in the context of organisational rules (Mills and Murgatroyd, 1991) and especially emotion rules (Hochschild, 1979, 1983). More specifically, this study explores how organisational members enacted innovation-related emotion rules through the performance of parody, which is defined as verbal and visual imitation where ‘the original is placed “beside itself” and the copy is used as a joke’ (Hariman, 2008, p. 249). The analysis focuses on rules around the appropriate use of emotions and how three rules: show your emotions, show your enthusiasm, and show your criticism in a nice way, are performed through parody.

In recent years, the study of sensemaking has been developed through Weickian focus (Weick, 1979; 1995; Weick et al., 2005) from the social psychological ‘properties’ that individuals draw on to make sense through to CSM (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010) with its focus on rules, power and formative context on perceived notions of organisational life. Along the way, questions have been raised regarding both approaches and the role of emotions in sensemaking. For instance, several recent comprehensive reviews (Holt and Cornelissen, 2013; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2014) have suggested that emotions may play a key role in sensemaking and need to be researched further. Only a few studies have focused on the role of conversational humour or jokes in sensemaking (Dougherty and Smythe, 2004; Heiss and Carmack, 2012; Lynch, 2009; Tracy et al., 2006). However, none of those reviews make any allusions to the study of sensemaking in a playful context.

This paper aims to enrich the CSM perspective with the performational approach, which suggests that ‘organising-is-like-theatre’ (Brissett and Edgley, 1975; Goffman, 1959; Messinger et al., 1968). Erving Goffman considered the ways in which social action can be considered inherently dramaturgical in nature (Oswick et al., 2001). Only a handful of researchers have used a dramaturgical perspective to explore organizational emotionality (e.g. Bolton, 2001; Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Haas and Shaffir, 1982; Höpfl and Linstead, 1993; Rosen, 1985; Zurcher, 1982). One previous study focused on how healthcare professionals negotiated organisational norms through emotional performances (Morgan and Krone, 2001). There is a lack however of previous studies exploring how organizational members, through their playful performances, construct emotional reality of the organization.

The notion that organizations have norms about the emotions that members ought to express to others has been the central theme in the stream of management and organization literature (e.g. Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Hochschild 1983; Sutton 1991; Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989). Drawing from Goffman’s (1959), Hochschild analysed social norms that tell us what to feel, when to feel, where to feel, how long to feel, and how strong our emotions can be (Hochschild, 1979). Hochschild (1983) has suggested that in face-to-face interactions, the rule reminders are the
gentle and benign gestures of the other actors as well as different forms of encouragement or ridicule, which reminds us about feeling conventions of that context.

Based on the previous literature on emotion rules, there are research gaps this paper aims to bring new understanding. First, there is lack of empirical studies regarding how the specific emotion rules are enacted by organizational members through their playful constructions of the organizational reality. Second, previous studies have mostly focused on emotion rules that guide the interaction between the employees and their clients, whereas this paper has focus on rules guiding innovative behaviour between the leader and the employees.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. In the second section, the concepts of critical sensemaking, emotion rules, performational approach to parody as a verbal and visual imitation, which form the theoretical framework for this study, will be discussed. In Section 3, the methodology of the study, including descriptions of the service company context, the workshop and the interpretive analysis of video data through vignettes will be explained. Section 4 will present a detailed analysis of parodic performances through which emotion rules are made explicit by the leader and the employees. Section 5 will discuss the findings, and in section 6 the concluding thoughts will be provided.

2. Theoretical Background

For the purposes of this study, the concepts of critical sensemaking, performational approach, and parody as a verbal and visual imitation will be presented as the theoretical framework of this paper.

2.1. Critical Sensemaking and Feeling Rules

This study aims to enrich the critical sensemaking (CSM) perspective (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills and Mills, 2000, 2009; Helms Mills et al., 2010; Mills, 2008; Mills and Helms Mills, 2004; Thurlow, 2010) by adopting a performational approach. The CSM perspective evolved in part from Weickian sensemaking (Weick, 1979, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) in which individuals engage in sensemaking to understand complex and messy situations. CSM is a poststructuralist approach and, compared to Weickian sensemaking, incorporates critical issues of power relations, formative contexts, and the existing rules of the organization in understanding organizational events (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

In attempting to address the issue of power in sensemaking, Helms Mills et al. (2010) defined power as an outcome of structures and discourses, which mask the influence of power through routine social arrangements such as norms, expectations, and rules about the appropriate scripts and behaviours. Therefore, the CSM framework is based on the idea that control is achieved in organizations through rules that ‘formulate the structure underlying apparent surface of organizational life’ (Clegg, 1981, p. 545). An organization arises out of the desire of an individual to achieve certain goals, which creates pressure for the coordination and control of various activities in which people engage. This leads to the development of a series of rules experienced as defining, guiding, or controlling behaviour (Mills
and Murgatroyd, 1991), and processed by actors engaging in the processes of establishing, enforcing, misunderstanding, and resisting rules (Helms Mills and Mills, 2000). Based on Brown (1998), Helms Mills and Mills (2009) contend that rules contain differences of opinion, beliefs, and values, as well as tensions beneath the surface of those rules (Martin, 1992). Rules contribute to our understanding of what is an ideal and appropriate self in the workplace (Hilde and Mills, 2015).

This paper draws from the ideas of Hochschild (1983, p. 56) who defined feeling rules as ‘guiding our emotion work by establishing a sense of entitlement or obligation that govern emotional exchanges’. Some feeling rules are understood to be nearly universal, for example, expressing positive emotions and suppressing negative emotions is intended to result in friendly, polite and courteous interpersonal interactions, whereas some rules are unique to particular social groups. Hochschild (1983) emphasized the situational sensitivity of feeling rules, how each setting and each definition of the situation require emotional responses of a different kind according to which they are judged appropriate or not to accompanying events. In social relations, we recognize feeling rules by the way in which others react to what they think we are feeling. Hochschild (1983) suggested that in social interaction there are ‘rule reminders’, such as gentle and benign gestures and different forms of encouragement or ridicule (e.g. cajoling, chiding, teasing, scolding and shunning), which reminds us to put our feelings in line with the convention.

2.2. Parodic Performances as a Verbal and Visual Imitation

In order to understand parodic performances in face-to-face interaction, our study draws from the general idea of performativity ‘as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants’ (Goffman, 1959, p. 26). According to Goffman (1959), organizations are occasionally theatrical; that is, a business meeting, training seminar, or conference scene can sometimes turn dramatic, and the most successful performances are staged not by individuals but by teams. Schreöygg and Höpfl (2004) argue that theatre where actors play their roles can show how things are constructed, sustained, and managed. Kostera and Kozminki (2001) note that the theatre metaphor is valuable because it fits well with the constructivist approach, which examines the processes, networks of processes, and rules and patterns of social life. Westrup (1996) demonstrates that metaphors of drama assist in showing how the social processes are acted out.

Parody is understood as a verbal and visual imitation that aims to make fun of, critically comment on or ridicule the original (Hutcheon, 1985). Hariman (2008) defines parody as an act of duplication where the original is placed ‘beside itself’ and the copy is used as a joke. We are not able to directly laugh at the serious original, but we can laugh fearlessly at its more benign imitation, which makes an object of the imitation more familiar and, therefore, available for investigation. Therefore, parody can have a critical function; it helps us laugh at the powerful (Butler, 1990; Critchley, 2007), reveals limitations that others might want to keep hidden (Hariman, 2008), and leaves things open to interpretation (Westwood and Rhodes, 2007).

Parody offers a version of the past, where the elements have become mechanized or automatic, by giving them a new and often ironic context (Hutcheon, 1985). Hariman (2008) asserts that parodic
techniques involve various combinations of imitation and alteration: the direct quotation, alternation of words, substitution of subjects or characters as well as shifts in diction, class, and magnitude. Hutcheon (1985) emphasizes that the modern view of parody varies in the range of intent from the ironic and playful to the scornful and ridiculing. Even though parody may signal an ironic difference, the degree of criticism may vary. However, the use of parody is often not intended to be disrespectful. To work, parody must push that which is powerful, yet taken for granted, directly into the spotlight to be copied and displayed as a somewhat carnivalesque spectacle (Hariman, 2008).

3. Research Methodology and Data Analysis

3.1. The Company Context

The data for this paper was gathered during an action-research project called INWORK that focused on investigating the managing and measuring of innovation at work. The data were collected from a micro-sized rental and real estate agency located in Eastern Finland. The franchise-based company was established in 1999 by the current CEO, who participated in the company’s daily activities and led all operational work. This company was asked to participate in the research project because it had been rated as exceptionally innovative among a number of small firms in a pilot study of proactive female managers. During the period of data gathering, 2012–2013, the company had four full time employees.

The first author of this paper worked with the company intensively for two years, during which time, the participant observation for one week was conducted. This included 11 office meetings, two company development workshops (both lasting two days, four hours per day), and four interviews with the entrepreneur and one with all employees. Based on the intensive study period, it was noticed that the culture of the company allowed for regular, wide-ranging discussions between the leader and the employees on current business issues. For the leader, being innovative and continuously developing the company were the main reasons to be an entrepreneur and our research took place in a situation in which the leader initiated major changes in the business, for example, expanding into the real estate business. The larger scale innovative ideas (e.g., new service products) were generated by the leader herself, mostly in her leisure time, and then discussed with the employees at the office meetings. The on-going production of new ideas with business development potential was a matter of pride to both the employees and the leader, who considered the firm to be the innovation leader of the franchising chain.

3.2. Research Data

The main data of this paper consists of the videotaped two-day workshop, which was arranged as part of the action-research project at the university facilities. The aim of the workshop was to enrich the research data, and to provide the participants with a chance to reflect on their innovation practice. At the beginning of the workshop, the facilitators introduced the pre-planned workshop procedures. The participants were organized standing around the large tetragonal table. The interview citations based on the interviews held a month before were placed on the table, which revealed some tensions
between the leader and the employees around six themes: new ideas, leadership, customers, training, customers and innovation process. Then, participants were instructed to reflect on each theme from four perspectives: emotions, competence, objects, and doings (Reckwitz, 2002). For example, the first round focused on emotion and new ideas, the second round on competence and new ideas and so on. First, the participants were asked to write their individual reflections on post-it labels and then describe aloud their reflections both individually and collectively.

The company members who participated in the workshop were the owner-CEO, Paula, and three full-time employees (one full-time employee was absent because of travelling). Irene was the most long-standing employee with more than ten year work history and 15% ownership of the company. Emma had been working in this company for three years, and Anna was the most recently hired and youngest employee. The first author of this paper and the project manager (outside of this paper) facilitated the workshop, and the project assistant took care of the video recording.

3.3. The Analysis of the Vignettes

Organizational ethnographers use vignettes to provide plausible and authentic insights into the real-life world of the participants, which enables readers to experience the field (Erickson, 1986; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Humphreys, 2005; Humphreys and Watson, 2009). They also allow a theoretically elaborated understanding that is based on the interpretative, explanatory text produced by the researcher explaining what happens in the vignettes (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014).

This paper utilizes interpretive video analysis, which draws from the phenomenological and methodological assumption of interpretive social science in which actions are guided by meanings and cannot be directly observed. Knoblauch (2006) introduced the term ‘videography’ as a method that aims at interpretive video analysis by linking focused ethnography and video analysis (Knoblauch, 2012). The aim of videography is to understand sequentially reciprocal video-recorded interaction by the actors, which produces situational reality. Videography deals with visually detectable communicative modalities even when spoken utterances are also considered an important part of social interaction (Knoblauch and Schnettler, 2015). In videography, an understanding of the wider social context, which is based on the ethnographic data collection process that takes place prior to the video analysis, allows the researcher to carry on the subjective knowledge from the field under study (Heath and Hindmarsh, 2002; Knoblauch and Tuma, 2011).

In the first phase, all data were investigated with qualitative content analysis (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016). By both watching the videos and reading the transcripts from the workshop, 47 episodes were identified in which the participants imitated organizational reality in a playful manner and followed by the laughter of the other participants. Those episodes in which the leader and the employees collectively performed innovation-related emotions were selected for further analysis. In the second phase of the analysis, episodes were chosen that most clearly illustrated how the leader and employees enacted organizational emotion rules and, with their performances, made explicit respective emotional expectations. Three specific emotion rules were identified: show your emotions, show your enthusiasm, and show your criticism in a nice way. In the third phase, eight vignettes were chosen and analytical attention was directed to body language, gestures and movements, as well as
strength and tone of voice. In the fourth phase, the eight vignettes were analysed by focusing on the humorous and parodic features of the performances and on aspects of power in sensemaking.

4. The Vignettes – Performing Three Emotion Rules

4.1. Show-your-emotions rule

Vignette 1: ‘The spectrum of emotions in our office meetings’

1 At the beginning of the workshop, the facilitator asks the participants to reflect on the role of emotions in innovation practice. The employees share shy looks. Anna glimpses at Paula carefully. Silence.
2 Paula starts to talk in calm voice: Considering the spectrum of emotions, our office meetings form the core. The spectrum of emotions in our office meetings... Uhh...
3 Emma and Irene erupt in laughter. They begin to wave their hands in wide arching motions from side to side. They exclaim in unison: Everything!
4 Their exclamation causes the audience to howl with laughter.
5 Paula thrusts her arms out straight, bends her knees and exclaims: Everything! From one end to the other!

Vignette 2: ‘I am quickly taken over by my emotions’

6 Paula says that she is now going to describe her personal spectrum of emotions, when it comes to presenting new ideas. Eyes wide open, she raises her left fist high: Excitement! Yes! This is how we do it! This is great and grand! Then I’ll try to explain the idea...
7 Paula starts to imitate employees’ behavior. She lowers the corners of her mouth and her tone of voice gains a complaining character: Nooo, you say no, no! That is not gonna work.
8 Paula rises her voice and eyebrows, she looks baffled: Why?
9 Paula jerks her head forward and says with an irritated voice: Then – frustration and anger!
10 She glances at her employees and lets out an out-of-character comment in a neutral tone: As you know, my emotions are quick to change.
11 Paula begins to exhale slowly and says: Then I start to calm down...
12 The smiles on the faces of the employees widen.
13 Paula curls up in her chair: ... then embarrassment...
14 Her voice becomes murmured, full of regret and despair: ... oh damn it, was that too strong? Why did I say that...
15 Paula begins to sniffle, her face full of sadness. In the next moment, she is bawling her eyes out with her head down low: Oh, I wish I’d just kept my mouth shut!
16 The employees laugh and laugh.
Vignette 3: ‘There are a lot of those silent workplaces’

17 Paula continues in an amused tone: *My trust in you is so great that I can go through these emotional phases. I think it’s also a form of honesty to let your emotions show through. You know what I’m like. ‘Oh, it’s just Paula again’.*

18 Paula bursts into laughter: *Our workplace definitely isn’t lacking in emotion; that must be said. This work is guided by emotions!*

19 The employees laugh. As the room falls silent, Paula yawns, and speaks with a hushed tone: *During my studies, I did a lot of temping in different workplaces. You kinda learn to read the mood in a workplace.*

20 Paula leans back, her hands behind her neck, and lets out a deep sigh. As she starts to speak, her voice is amused, but it soon turns serious: *There are a lot of those silent workplaces, where people just mutter behind each other’s backs, which never leads anywhere, and everyone is terribly disappointed.*

21 Paula pauses. With her hands still behind her neck, she continues, pensively positioning her words: *I guess this is very… me… to be frank. I always try to tell people to be direct, and you really are good at that!*

22 The employees start laughing. With an amused tone, Irene says: *I agree with taking a direct approach when things are being turned around. I’d rather have that than a silent workplace.*

Vignettes 1–3 illustrate how the leader and the employees enact the show-your-emotions rule with their parodic performances. In the first vignette, the leader explains the wide spectrum of emotions commonly felt at the office meetings [2]. Two of the employees begin to imitate these emotions with their voices, body language and gestures by waving their hands in wide arcing motions from side to side and exclaim in unison ‘everything’ [3], which makes the other participants howl with laughter [4]. The leader joins the amusing play with her voice and body language [5]. This parodic performance illustrates the content, the strength and the place where emotions are expressed (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) and indicates that strong emotions, from positive to negative, are a constitutive part of the office meetings in the company.

In the second vignette, the leader enacts the show-your-emotions rule by imitating her own [6, 8-9, 13-15] and the employees’ emotions [7] in a situation in which she presents a new idea to the employees. The leader imitates several discrete emotions with her voice, facial expressions and gestures (i.e., enthusiasm, resistance, surprise, irritation and anger, embarrassment, regret, despair, and sadness). She also illustrates how these change quickly [10] and how she controls her negative emotions [11]. According to Hochschild (1979, 1983), emotion rules tell us how long it is appropriate to feel a certain emotion.

In the third vignette, the leader justifies the relevance of the show-your-emotions rule to herself by arguing that being direct and open with your emotions is a form of honesty that she appreciates in her company [17-18, 21]. She imitates ‘silent workplaces’ by yawning and talking with a monotonous voice about her early work experience [19]. She takes a static posture on her chair and a very deep
breath, and with her voice shows her amusement and dislike towards that kind of emotional culture [20]. One of the employees agrees by showing her amusement towards their current emotion culture according to which it is better to be honest than silent [22]. The third vignette illustrates how the show-your-emotions rule is a key element in the leader’s sense of what her company is and should be like.

4.2. Show-your-enthusiasm rule

**Vignette 4: ‘We do get terribly enthusiastic about everything!’**

23 During the break, the participants go through the interview material on the table. Paula takes a paper in her hand, and proclaims, with excitement in her voice: *That enthusiasm and excitement. Every time a new thing is discussed, every time - it’s there.*

24 Emma says, smiling: *We do get terribly enthusiastic about everything, and that makes you happy when everyone gets that oh – it’s a good thing!*

25 Irene turns to Paula, and with a serious tone, she says: *We’re so excited. We like this. We want to create a better company than what it is now. Good, right?*

26 Paula says, with excitement: *Mm, yeah. Grand. Just grand, I’d say!*

**Vignette 5: ‘Get enthusiastic! Or cry and get enthusiastic!’**

27 After the break, it’s Emma’s turn to reflect on the role of emotions in innovation practice. She plays with a felt-tip pen. With her eyes fixed on a post it-note on the table in front of her, she begins to read in a vibrant tone: *Then I put my idea here [on the post it label] about taking ideas through, no matter what…*

28 Emma continues with an amused tone. Her last syllables have gained a rising, chiming inflection: ... *by force, so to say.*

29 Emma begins to laugh, moving her gaze through the participants who laugh as well. Emma swings her chair and smiles.

30 Emma looks at Paula letting out short, mild bursts of laughter while speaking: *Sometimes we also try things even without everyone really being excited about them!*

31 Opposite to Emma, Irene straightens out her open left hand. She squeezes her right hand into a firm fist. Then she slams her fist from up high, down to her open left hand.

32 A smile shows on the Paula’s face. She smiles with a visible grin, and with amusement in her tone she says: *Get enthusiastic! Or cry and get enthusiastic!*

33 The employees laugh. Emma laughs and nods her head at Paula.

**Vignette 6: ‘We’re all just like – this many good ideas!’**
34 Later at the workshop, Paula gets an idea and passionately starts to talk how to implement it. Suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, she questions with a hesitant voice, how the company is adopting new things without criticism: ...we should...should we...do we...have too much of everything?

35 Simultaneously, Irene stretches out her arms to her sides in a wide, arching motion, and starts to speak with a high, chiming voice: *We’re all just like - this many good ideas!*

36 She spreads her arms again, this time in an even wider arch, and speaks with an even higher voice than before: *Let’s do all of these!*

37 Paula frowns. Irene shakes her index finger towards Paula: *And then we leave all our ideas unorganized, and we have this many!* Irene swings her arms around her sides in a wide arch.

38 Irene turns to a long monologue about how innovation practices of the company should be better organized. She insists that something should be done, making her suggestions with an emphatic tone: *I think we should prioritize and schedule our ideas better. We should elaborate on fewer ideas at a time, based on the action plan of our company. During this work, we should not adopt other ideas - even if they seem tempting.*

Vignettes 4–6 illustrate how the show-your-enthusiasm rule is performed through parody. In the fourth vignette, the leader explains with her lively talk and voice, how enthusiasm is a key ingredient in how new ideas are handled in the company [23]. The employees start to present themselves as very enthusiastic. One of the employees emphasizes how they ‘always get terribly enthusiastic about everything’ [24]. Then, with her serious tone, another employee uses irony in her short, self-empathetic comment ‘we are so enthusiastic...’ [25], although she often takes a resistive stance towards the leader’s ideas. With an ironic statement of just a couple of words (Butler, 1990; Westwood, 2004), the employee indicates how they are expected to show their enthusiasm towards new ideas.

In the fifth vignette, a critical parodic performance is used to illustrate how the show-your-enthusiasm rule is followed even in a situation when the leader pushes through and implements her ideas despite the lack of enthusiasm among the employees [27-28]. Showing her amusement, one of the employees presents the situation in a humorous rather than serious light [28–30], which according to Hariman (2008) is the core of parody. Another employee imitates the situation by slamming her fist down to her open hand, illustrating how leader takes through her decisions [31]. Hariman (2008) suggests that it is easier to laugh at the more benign imitation of reality. The employee’s slamming gesture makes the leader smile and summarize the emotion rule: ‘Get enthusiastic! Or cry and get enthusiastic!’ [32], which means that she expects that everybody must be enthusiastic towards new ideas in this company.

In the sixth vignette, one of the employees imitates the leader’s excessive enthusiasm making funny moves with her arms [35–36]. The employee further scolds the leader who, in her opinion, should prioritize new ideas instead of trying to implement all of them [37–38]. Scolding and teasing are forms of ridiculing (Hutcheon, 1985) that work as reminders of emotion rules (Hochschild 1983); that is, you are expected to be enthusiastic. In this sixth vignette, the employee also makes an effort to enact a new emotion rule according to which they should be able to tackle ideas more rationally
[38]. She does not receive any support for this new emotion rule as enthusiasm is preferred over rationality in this company.

4.3. Show-your-criticism-in-a-nice-way rule

Vignette 7: ‘Examining ideas critically; that’s what we’re really good at!’

39 At the beginning of the workshop, Irene presents innovation practices of the company from a flap board. She brings up how they examine ideas critically. Emma tackles the subject: 
*Examining ideas critically; that’s what we’re really good at!*

40 Paula laughs and says: *Mention Emma there!*

41 Irene points at Emma: *I thought I’d say E.N.!!*

42 Emma points at Irene: *And I.P. in the training!*

Vignette 8: ‘I’m going to be a dictator!’

43 A little bit later at the workshop, Paula starts to reflect how she feels about employees’ critical behaviour at the office meetings. She lays her head down and puts out her hands. With a sudden, snapping motion, Paula thrusts one hand forward: 
*I confess, that when I’m terribly excited about something...*

44 Paula looks at each of her employees in turn. She continues in a light tone: 
*And then I feel like you knock me down in the office meetings!*

45 Suddenly, Paula bends her knees and pushes her chin into her chest. She begins to growl loudly. As her hands tighten up into fists on her sides, her body trembles and her earrings shake.

46 Paula bursts into laughter and proclaims with an amused tone: 
*I’m going to be a dictator! We do things this way now!*

47 The following laughter of the employees dies down faster than before.

Vignettes 7 and 8 show how the show-your-criticism-in-a-nice-way rule is enacted through two parodic performances. In the seventh vignette, the emotion rule concerning the specific way of presenting critical comments that the leader expects from the employees is performed through teasing [40–42]. The leader and two of the employees playfully reveal who are the most critical ones towards new ideas without any comments regarding how nicely they present their criticism. In the eighth vignette, the leader illustrates the ‘nice way’ part of this rule by imitating her feeling of anger when she and her ideas become knocked down by the employees at the office meetings [44–45]. In a highly amusing way, she scolds the employees by threatening to become a dictator who does not care about others’ points-of-view in her decision making [46]. This is a strong emotion-rule reminder for the employees that they should provide their critical comments in a way that follows the convention of nice behavior (Hochschild, 1983).
5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to enrich critical sensemaking (CSM) using a performational approach. More specifically, it aimed to illustrate how the leader and employees enacted innovation-related emotion rules through the performance of parody (Hariman, 2008; Hutcheon, 1985). By drawing on the literature of critical sensemaking (CSM) (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010), emotion rules (Hochschild, 1983) and parodic performances (Hariman, 2008; Hutcheon, 1985) and by providing a detailed analysis of eight interactional vignettes from the video data, this paper provides new evidence of how parodic performances worked as emotion rule reminders in critical sensemaking and how parodic performances made explicit three emotion rules: show your emotions, show your enthusiasm, and show your criticism in a nice way.

Previous studies have mostly focused on discourses during sensemaking episodes and their research data has focused on gathering evidence about verbal communication through, for instance, interview transcripts, field notes, and archival materials. Yet, much of human communication is nonverbal (e.g., Choi et al., 2005). Sensemaking with its fundamental focus on ambiguous and unclear situations in organizations that push people to engage in sensemaking not only with their words but also with their voices, gestures and body language, highlights that there are methodological limitations in previous sensemaking studies in terms of utilizing other theories that are able to enrich sensemaking by focusing on the nonverbal features of face-to-face interaction as well as data gathering methods that enable the researcher to catch, in a more detailed manner, the performative elements of human interaction.

This paper illustrates how parody, as a verbal and visual imitation of the organizational reality, helps organizational members make critical sense of the emotion rules set by the leader. The rules perspective in the CSM framework is based on the idea that organizations rise out of the desire of some individuals to achieve certain goals (Mills and Murgatroyd, 1991). In this small service company, being innovative and continuously developing the company were the main reasons for the leader to become an entrepreneur. To ensure those goals, the leader set three emotion rules (show your emotions, show your enthusiasm, and show your criticism in a nice way) in order to guide and control proper behaviour to enhance successful innovation practice. The detailed analysis of this paper shows, how the performational approach to critical sensemaking of the organizational actors provided detailed information about the innovation-related emotion rules and how parodic performances worked as emotion rule reminders. Parody as a special form of verbal and visual imitation made emotion rules more explicit by helping 1) to make sense of the content, the strength and the place to express emotion [Vignette 1]; 2) to provide tight reflection about the wide scale of emotions [Vignette 2]; 3) to make sense of the preferred emotional culture [Vignette 3]; 4) to reveal the specific emotion rule through irony [Vignette 4]; 5) to reveal the managerial consequences of emotion rule resistance from the employee’s perspective [Vignette 5]; 6) to scold and tease the management about the emotion rule [Vignette 6]; 7) to play around the rule [Vignette 7]; and 8) to reveal the managerial consequences of emotion rule resistance from the leader’s perspective [Vignette 8].
Hochschild (1983) has emphasized how, in everyday social interaction, the rule reminders, which are gentle and benign gestures of the other actors in a form of encouragement or ridicule, guide us to bring our feelings in line with the acceptable convention. This paper provides new understanding regarding how the interaction at the workshop outside of the company premises offered fruitful circumstances for reminding the actors of the emotion rules. Parody as a special form of verbal and visual performance where objects are imitated in order to make fun of them, critically comment on the ridicule of the original (Hutcheon, 1985), provided a different mode of interaction where organizational actors were allowed to engage in more critical behavior with their words, voice, body language and gestures. Compared to more consensus-oriented laws of everyday face-to-face interaction where the general social conventions require us to avoid embarrassment (Goffman, 1979) and gentle and benign gestures remind us to put our feelings in line with the emotion rules (Hochschild, 1983), this study suggests that in an organizational setting, parody allows the organization members to enact more critical behavior. Like this study illustrated, parody’s capacity to work as an emotion rule reminder is based on the qualities that parodic performances push, which are powerful, yet taken for granted, directly into the spotlight to be copied and displayed as a carnivalesque spectacle (Hariman, 2008). Hence, parody as an act of duplication offered organizational actors the space for critical sensemaking because it helped to laugh at power relations (Butler, 1990; Critchley, 2007) and reveal limitations that remain hidden in everyday interaction (Hariman, 2008). In terms of ironic criticisms in face-to-face situations, Dews et al. (1995) found that irony, as a special form of interaction, was found to be less insulting than criticisms based on literal meanings. In the workshop, even though especially the leader became the target of employees’ parodic criticism, rather than showing herself as offended by the employees, she seemed to enjoy the playful and parodic elements of interaction.

There are many ways in which feeling itself and how it is expressed on face and body, can be experienced as fitting or misfitting a situation in a surprising number of ways. We can defend against the feeling rule when we seem to feel the wrong emotion, too much or not enough emotion, or feel the emotion for a too short or long a time. Also, we may misfit the feeling and placement when we ‘forget to feel’ in the presence of the others (Hochschild, 1983). Further, organizational actors are not passive executors of organizational expectations, and they engage in the processes of establishing, enacting, enforcing, misunderstanding, and resisting rules (Helms Mills and Mills, 2000). Abovementioned notions from Hochschild (1983) and Helms Mills and Mills (2000) as well as the findings of this study open rich starting points for the further research regarding how the specific emotion rules are enacted and resisted in everyday interactions and how those rule enactments shape the sensemaking process between the leader and the employees.

6. Conclusions

Adopting the performational approach (Goffman, 1959, 1974), the study focused on the parodic performances (Hariman, 2008; Hutcheon, 1985) and critical sensemaking (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010) between a leader and her employees. The study offered a detailed interpretation of eight vignettes as they unfolded during the video-taped workshop.
The contribution of this study to existing literature is twofold. First, it provides new evidence about how parody, as a verbal and visual imitation, provides an efficient way to tackle critical perspectives of organizational life. The eight vignettes illustrated how the emotional rules were enacted through parodic performances made by the leader and the employees. Second, this study has provided a methodological contribution to the CSM framework by focusing on verbal and visual elements of the organizational rule construction through the use of vignettes (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014) based on video recordings (Luff and Heath, 2012).

References


