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SHARING ERRORS WHERE EVERYONE IS PERFECT: CULTURE, EMOTIONAL DYNAMICS, AND ERROR SHARING IN TWO CONSULTING FIRMS

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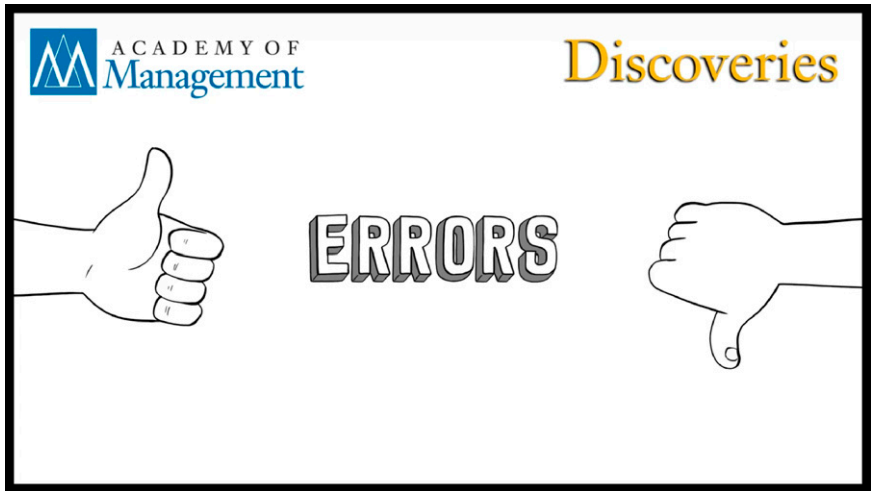

Providers of complex business services often focus on creating positive experiences to manage their clients' impressions and their consultants' self-esteem. This, however, creates challenges to sharing errors. Based on case studies of two consulting organizations, both explicitly committed to positivity, we explore how consultants make decisions about error sharing. We discover two versions of positivity (trait based and experience based), which are coupled with two different organizational mindsets (fixed vs. growth). These pairs shape an organization's view of errors, and they create different cultural contexts for error sharing. With trait-based positivity and a fixed organizational mindset, the predominant emotion when committing errors was shame; only costs of error sharing were seen, and errors were shared only with a small group of trusted peers. With experience-based positivity and a growth organizational mindset, the predominant emotion instead was guilt; both costs and benefits of error sharing were considered, and errors were shared more widely. These findings contribute to research on error management by laying the ground for further theorizing about the relationship between organizational norms and values, emotions, cost–benefit considerations, and decisions about error sharing. They also hold implications for managers regarding how to emphasize the positive without muting error sharing.

> We want to create a positive mood in the organization. This means that we do not share errors, because that could affect the mood negatively. (CC9)

> We should be perceived as successful. Problems are not natural here. We are positive and successful. There should be a facade that is positive and wise. We are consultants and we can handle all challenges. (LC8)

Errors and failures represent a threat to organizations and individuals, but they are also an important source of learning and development (Argyris, 1993; Sitkin, 1992). The literature on error

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Author's Voice:
What motivated you to undertake this research?

management has, for some time, argued that organizations—to minimize the negative effects of errors and maximize their positive effects—should engage in error management, including error detection, open communication about errors, damage control, and learning (Frese & Keith, 2015). The current paper focuses specifically on the communication of errors, as this has been suggested to be the most important error management practice (van Dyck, Baer, Frese, & Sonnentag, 2005) and a key aspect of an error management culture (EMC) (Frese & Keith, 2015; Gronewold, Gold, & Salterio, 2013; van Dyck et al., 2005). However, as illustrated by the opening quotations from the organizations we studied, this is not always easy to achieve, especially in organizations that provide complex business services. They often strive for positivity in order to manage their clients' impressions (Subramony & Pugh, 2015) and consultants' self-esteem and commitment (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). Positivity creates challenges to sharing experiences of error, as these are typically seen as negative events. These challenges, however, are not yet fully understood.

Despite the importance of error communication to the error management process, the current understanding of the mechanisms through which an EMC shapes decisions about error sharing, and how differences in EMC may be understood more specifically, is limited (Frese & Keith, 2015; Keith & Frese, 2011; Sutcliffe, Vogus, & Dane, 2016; Zhao & Olivera, 2006). This has led to calls for further investigations into the micro-dynamics of EMCs (Keith & Frese, 2011: 150). The current study aims to address this and add to previous research, in three ways.

First, we move beyond the focus in previous research on error reporting as a formal act toward managers or supervisors (Zhao & Olivera, 2006: 1012). While this formal reporting is an important part of the error management process, the consequences of errors might be mitigated and learning from them derived by sharing them more broadly with peers (van Dyck et al., 2005). Against this background, we focus on "error sharing" as the conscious and voluntary disclosure of self-made errors to others in the organization. Error sharing thus includes error reporting, but it goes beyond it by including communicating errors to peers, which may or may not have the primary goal of error management.

Second, we specifically focus on the emotions involved in error sharing, and how these are intertwined with individual and shared cognition (organizational culture). In line with previous research (e.g., Zhao & Olivera, 2006), we conceptualize the error-sharing decision as shaped by both cognition and emotions. The emotional dimension of error sharing has, however, been studied empirically only to a very limited extent.

Third, we extend the context of error management research from high-hazard organizations (such as health care and nuclear power plants) to complex business services, where the value of error management is less obvious and where error management faces different challenges related to employees' simultaneous needs to manage both impressions and errors (Gronewold et al., 2013). These services are characterized by intangibility, heterogeneity, and co-production between client and consultant (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). This induces ambiguity regarding the value provided by these services, and it makes them highly contingent on the consultant's ability to convey the impression of professionalism, competence, quality, and value to the client (Alvehus, Avnoon, & Oliver, 2021; Alvesson, 1993; Clark, 1995; Dinovitzer, Gunz, & Gunz, 2014; Harrington, 2017). Continuously projecting the image of the infallible professional puts the consultant in a vulnerable position (Sturdy, 1997), and it creates a challenge to the firm to support consultants' self-esteem and impression management (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006).

Studies have shown that one way to do this is by fostering an elite identity that emphasizes consultants' unique and superior performance and status (Kipping, Bühlmann, & David, 2019). This contributes to self-esteem, and fosters positive emotions, which previous research has found to be important in the service customer relationship (George, 1991; Subramony & Pugh, 2015). Consulting firms have consequently been shown to focus their socialization on emphasizing positivity (Kaiser, Muller-Seitz, & Creusen, 2008). In this paper, we explore error sharing in two consulting organizations that provide complex business services. Both focus on positivity, but they do so in different ways, creating different emotionality, cost–benefit considerations, and error-sharing behaviors.

A managerial focus on the positive to promote self-esteem, commitment, and performance is in line with key arguments in positive organizational scholarship (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Dutton, Glynn, & Spreitzer, 2008). This approach argues for a shift in focus away from "problems, threats, and weakness" and toward "strengths, capabilities, and possibilities." It has inspired both research

and management practices and generated normative conclusions such as:

> The bottom-line message is that organizational members should consider cultivating positive emotions in themselves and others, not just as end-states in themselves, but also as a means to achieving individual and organizational transformation and optimal functioning over time. (Fredrickson, 2003: 164)

This focus on the positive has the support of research, and it is attractive to contemporary organizations. However, it has also been criticized for muting and pathologizing negative events and emotions, which are a natural part of life and an important source of learning (Argyris, 1994; Fineman, 2006). A key question for error management in the context of complex business services thus becomes how focusing on the positive and supporting consultants' self-esteem and impression management may be combined with a focus on error management.

In line with Zhao and Olivera (2006: 1013), "errors" in the current study are defined as "individuals' decisions and behaviors that (a) result in an undesirable gap between an expected and a real state and (b) may lead to actual or potential negative consequences for the organizational functioning that could have been avoided." This definition highlights the subjective nature of errors, and it is well suited to the specific context of complex business services. While most error management research has conceptualized errors as deviations from an explicit (procedural) norm, in many contexts, such norms are missing. Organizations that thrive on creativity and innovation, such as providers of complex business services, often lack specific and well-defined procedural norms. Instead, adapting to the specific needs of each situation and client is viewed as characteristic of professional behavior (Kubr, 2002). This makes "improvisation" a key attribute of a successful professional (Furusten, 2009; Harrington, 2017). In this context, the "desired state" against which to define an error is elusive and subjective. An error in the current study is thus defined by the professional's perception of it.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON ERROR REPORTING AND POSITIVITY CULTURES

Error reporting has been viewed in previous research as a discretionary and potentially risky behavior. This implies that it involves a deliberate decision-making process that is affected by both individual and contextual factors (Zhao & Olivera, 2006). Zhao and Olivera (2006) suggested that, when individuals experience an error, they engage in a situation assessment to determine whether to disclose the error. This assessment has two dimensions. It is a cost–benefit evaluation that is shaped by emotional reactions.

In line with Zhao and Olivera (2006), we also acknowledge that "organizational culture"—the system of shared norms, values, and practices in an organization—shapes this decision-making (Lee, Yang, & Chen, 2015; Zhao & Olivera, 2006). In the following, we first review research on the relationship between error reporting and organizational culture. We then turn to a review of research on the considerations made by individuals when they make decisions about error sharing—that is, the cost–benefit evaluation and how this is influenced by emotional reactions.

Culture

Previous research on error management and error sharing has used the concept of climate or culture to discuss error management at an organizational level (Keith & Frese, 2011; van Dyck et al., 2005; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007; Vogus, Sutcliffe, & Weick, 2010). While culture is typically viewed as referring to values, norms, and practices (House, 2004), research on EMC has focused on the "practice" aspect of culture. Van Dyck et al. (2005) thus defined "error management culture" as "organizational practices related to communicating about errors, to sharing error knowledge, to helping in error situations, and to quickly detecting and handling errors" (van Dyck et al., 2005: 1229).

Previous research has shown that organizations may range from high EMCs to error-averse cultures (Gronewold et al., 2013; van Dyck et al., 2005), defined by employees' engagement in error sharing and how those committing errors are treated. In a "high" EMC, people openly and freely talk about their own and others' errors, and errors are greeted with acceptance as long as they create learning and are not repeated. "Error-averse cultures," on the other hand, are characterized by not talking about errors, blaming the person who acknowledges or causes an error, and punishing or excluding them (Gronewold et al., 2013; Homsma, van Dyck, De Gilder, Koopman, & Elfring, 2007; van Dyck et al., 2005). Gold, Gronewold, and Salterio (2013) found that a high EMC results in greater willingness of auditors to report a self-discovered error compared to an error-averse culture. Other studies of professional services firms show similar positive effects of high EMC on consultants' tendency to communicate errors with others (e.g., Grohnert, Meuwissen, & Gijselaers, 2017; Gronewold et al., 2013).

One limitation of previous research on EMC is, however, its focus on practices to the neglect of the

broader values and norms underpinning those practices. As the sharing of errors is typically viewed as a key aspect of EMC, this concept is of limited value for understanding variations in the sharing of errors and the mechanisms behind differences in error-sharing behaviors in different organizational contexts. This raises the question of what values and norms in the organization enable (or hinder) the sharing of errors and thus support (or hinder) error management. Two research streams in relation to organizational culture become salient in the context of complex services and their focus on positivity. They are research on positivity and research on organizational mindsets regarding the fixed or developmental nature of talent and ability, as these have been seen as shaping the normative context of error sharing.

Positivity. Positivity is a broad normative orientation anchored in research fields such as positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship, and positive organizational behavior. It may be understood as a three-pronged phenomenon comprising a focus on positive experiences and feelings (e.g., happiness, joy, flow), positive individual traits (e.g., love and vocation, courage, self-esteem, wisdom, and forgiveness), and organizations that enable and nurture these feelings and traits in the pursuit of organizational virtues (e.g., responsibility, civility) (Fineman, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2003). This approach is a reaction against a focus on negative deviations and thus engagement with problems, error detection, harm mitigation, illness, and "the worst things in life" (Fineman, 2006: 271).

Positive organizational scholarship identifies and shows the benefits of "positivity" in several areas, including creativity, interpersonal trust, productivity, health, stress management, and motivation (Cameron, 2008). Such findings have led to conclusions that organizations should focus on positive deviances, including individual positive traits and experiences rather than negative deviations, including errors (Fredrickson, 2003: 164). These normative conclusions have become popular among organizational consultants and HR practitioners, and this has spurred numerous management concepts built on the ideas of positivity. These include appreciative inquiry, empowerment programs, emotional intelligence programs, and fun-at-work activities (Fineman, 2006). Furthermore, as illustrated in the introduction to this paper, organizations delivering complex services often pursue such a general agenda of positivity, although exactly what this entails has seldom been studied (Kaiser et al., 2008).

Critics, however, have pointed out that the implicit neglect of negative experiences and feelings flowing from the well-intentioned focus on the positive creates unintended consequences such as amplifying impression management and stigmatizing errors as potential personal flaws. This impairs sharing and learning from errors (Bolino, Klotz, Turnley, & Harvey, 2013; Fineman, 2006). As argued by Argyris (1994: 79):

> In the name of positive thinking … managers often censor what everyone needs to say and hear. For the sake of "morale" and "considerateness," they deprive employees and themselves of the opportunity to take responsibility for their own behavior by learning to understand it.

A strong norm of positivity is said to induce a state of "antilearning" in organizations (Argyris, 1994). In the same vein, Armstrong (2009) argued that a "failure-phobic" attitude in the field of organizational development has represented a threat to learning and development. This makes positivity a potentially inimical normative context for error sharing. The relationship between positivity and its different implementations and error sharing, however, remains to be further explored empirically.

Fixed versus growth organizational mindset. The normative context of error sharing is further shaped by the organizational mindset. Canning, Murphy, Emerson, Chatman, Dweck, and Kray (2020: 627) identified the "organizational mindset" as "people's perceptions of the organization's belief about the fixed or developmental nature of talent and ability." It is a core belief that shapes organizational culture, including the propensity to engage with errors. They identify two contrasting organizational mindsets—fixed and growth—which create different normative contexts for error sharing (Canning et al., 2020; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Heimbeck, Frese, Sonnentag, & Keith, 2003).

A "fixed organizational mindset" is founded on the core belief that individuals' talent and abilities are fixed, inherent qualities that cannot be developed much. This drives cultural values that celebrate genius, brilliance, and achievement. It promotes behaviors that strive toward recognition for performance and competition with colleagues for star status (Canning et al., 2020; Murphy & Dweck, 2010). It also reduces motivation to engage with errors, as errors in this context may cast doubt on employees' abilities (Canning et al., 2020; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

A "growth organizational mindset," on the other hand, is founded on the core belief that talent and ability can be developed through hard work and persistence. This drives cultural values that reward learning and development and value errors as learning opportunities. It promotes behaviors such as engaging in learning from one's own and others'

errors (Canning et al., 2020; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Situation Assessment

Having discussed the cultural context of error sharing, we now turn to the individual's decision-making, which is understood as taking place within the context of those organizational beliefs, values, and norms, as these will shape the individual's interpretation of and reactions to discovering an error. Following Zhao and Olivera (2006), we assume that the situation assessment underlying the decision to share errors comprises a cost–benefit evaluation that is shaped by the emotional reactions to committing an error.

Cost–benefit evaluation. The "cost–benefit evaluation" of decisions about error sharing refers to people's perceived costs of sharing (e.g., impaired image) and its benefits (e.g., learning) (Gronewold et al., 2013; Zhao & Olivera, 2006). Previous research has shown that people tend to not report an error if the perceived costs outweigh the benefits (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Even if the individual sees the benefit of sharing with the group or organization, they may be reluctant to talk about the experience because of excessive individual costs (Baker & Norton, 2001; Cannon & Edmondson, 2001; Uribe, Schweikhart, Pathak, Marsh, & Fraley, 2002).

The "costs of sharing" include material costs, damage to one's image, effort costs, economic costs, and reputation costs (Zhao & Olivera, 2006). "Material costs" include people's fear of concrete costs related to themselves, such as monetary penalties, suspension, rewards deducted by the organization's incentive system, lack of career development, missing assignments, and job loss. "Damage to one's image" is about the fear of being perceived as less competent and less attractive in the eyes of others. "Effort costs" are about the perception that reporting errors consumes time and energy. When people find that reporting errors can increase their workload, it is likely that they will avoid it (Chiang, 2001; Uribe et al., 2002). "Economic costs" refer to financial consequences that the group or organization may suffer if the error becomes public—for example, by losing a client. "Reputation costs," finally, are about the person's fear that errors will adversely affect the team's or organization's standing.

Against such costs of sharing errors, individuals weigh potential benefits. These include sustaining self-image, personal learning, group learning, and organizational learning (Zhao & Olivera, 2006). "Sustaining self-image" is about the motivation to share an error if it confirms or strengthens self-image of, for example, being honest or altruistic (Pinder, 1998). Furthermore, people are more likely to report their own errors if they believe that this will benefit "personal learning" (Barach & Small, 2000). People can also be motivated to report errors if they feel that this will stimulate "learning at the team or organizational level."

Emotional reactions. Previous empirical research on reporting errors has primarily focused on the cost–benefit evaluation, so the emotional aspects of decisions about error sharing have mostly been discussed on a conceptual level (e.g., Zhao & Olivera, 2006). Error management research has shown that people inevitably perceive errors negatively, inducing emotions such as anxiety, anger, guilt, shame, and sadness (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Frese & Keith, 2015; Zhao, 2011). Zhao and Olivera (2006) thus proposed that emotional reactions are as important to understanding individuals' situation assessment in error sharing as the cost–benefit evaluation. Emotions, they argued, can affect behavior directly, but, more often, they have an indirect effect on the perceived costs and benefits of error sharing. The relationship between the broader organizational culture and the emotions stirred by error has, to the best of our knowledge, not been explored in previous research.

Zhao and Olivera (2006), in a conceptual paper, identified four potential emotions that may affect error sharing. The first is *fear* of an unpleasant or harmful outcome that individuals might not escape or avoid. This is said to create a pessimistic mode and thus draw attention to the costs rather than the benefits of sharing. Fear is also likely to induce flight from a problem rather than making efforts to deal with it (Zhao, 2011). Second, individuals may feel *embarrassed* by exposing the error to the public. This rather transient emotion is said to increase attention to socially desirable behaviors, which often include the benefits of sharing errors. Third, individuals may feel *shame*. This powerful emotion involves a negative evaluation of the self, based on a felt discrepancy between a desired and a perceived self. This may be experienced as feeling small, worthless, and powerless, and it can create a desire to hide or escape (Stoeber, Harris, & Moon, 2007; Tangney & Dearing, 2003). Shame is said to increase the salience of the costs of error sharing, especially costs related to damage of one's image (Zhao & Olivera, 2006). Fourth, feelings of *guilt* may arise when errors are attributed to specific actions or behaviors that led to the error (rather than an inadequate self). The experience of guilt may involve tension, remorse, and regret, and it may trigger desires to confess, apologize, or repair (Tangney & Dearing, 2003). Guilt may increase the salience of the benefits of error sharing as a way to preserve a positive

self-concept. Besides these four emotions, Zhao (2011) found that errors may trigger *sadness*, "resulting from the perception that a goal has been lost, without the possibility of restoration given one's current abilities" (Lench, Tibbett, & Bench, 2016: 13). Sadness can induce passivity, which is not likely to motivate restorative action (Zhao, 2011: 455), but may help to understand the cause of the error.

Against this background, the current study aims to contribute to the understanding of the micro-dynamics of error sharing in complex service contexts where impression management motives drive a focus on positivity, which may create an inimical context for error sharing. More precisely, the aim is to better understand the underlying mechanisms of decisions about error sharing (especially emotional dynamics) and how these interact with the broader organizational culture (including positivity and organizational mindset).

METHOD

Case Study Approach

Error sharing is an emotional and sensitive process (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Frese & Keith, 2015; Zhao, 2011). Individuals may thus be unwilling and unable to report the general reasoning underlying decisions about error sharing. This makes qualitative case studies a suitable approach, as it enables us to build rapport and explore decisions about error sharing in a specific context (Eisenhardt, 1989; Silverman, 2013).

Fieldwork was carried out in two consulting firms in Sweden that have committed to ideas of "positivity." One was a communication consulting firm (which, in the following, will be called "ComCon"), and the other was an organization and leadership development consulting firm ("LeadCon"). A crucial criterion for choosing the companies was that both had strong explicit ambitions to create "positive" cultures with a focus on excellence, strength, and possibilities.

Both organizations were also sensitive to errors, especially errors in client projects that could negatively affect their reputations and yet could contain important opportunities to learn about what works and what does not in different client contexts. The errors experienced by consultants were mainly at the client interface, and they included episodes such as a workshop in which participants refused to follow the suggested design, so intended outcomes were not achieved, and an accidental breach of client confidentiality that threatened an important client relationship.

Data Collection

Data collection included qualitative semi-structured interviews, observations of team meetings, and reviews of internal documents. We carried out 24 semi-structured interviews of 45 to 60 minutes in which we explored respondents' reasoning about their choices to share experiences of error, and, to have a contrast, success with their peers. We conducted 13 interviews in ComCon and 11 in LeadCon. The semi-structured interviews gave the respondents opportunities to shape the conversation, and, as rapport developed, respondents revealed their perceptions and the conditions that influenced their reasoning and decisions to share or not to share errors and successes. Talking about sharing both errors and successes was a way to create conditions for openness in the interview, as this created a safer atmosphere for participation.

In selecting the sample, we aimed to include as much variety as possible in terms of tenure in the company, age, experience, gender, and roles (see Appendix A, Table A1). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews focused on four different types of situations: (1) sharing of an experienced success; (2) sharing of an experienced error; (3) non-sharing of an experienced success, and (4) non-sharing of an experienced error. Before the interview, the interviewees were asked to think about a concrete situation representing each of the four types. The interviews then focused on exploring the nature of each situation, the factors and reasoning that led the respondents to the decision to share or not share, and the perceived consequences of that decision. In addition, we observed, audio-recorded, and transcribed two meetings at each organization. The meetings all had some elements of sharing experiences among participants. One meeting in each organization has been further analyzed for its error-sharing dynamics. The meeting analyzed in LeadCon was a two-hour project team meeting of 12 consultants. The objective of the meeting was to evaluate a service delivery to a client. In ComCon, the meeting analyzed was a one-hour weekly team meeting of six consultants, including the team manager.

In both organizations, we also collected documents that formulated and communicated the organization's espoused culture (especially values and norms). The most important document in ComCon was the employee handbook, titled "10 Reasons to Work at ComCon." It was written by the CEO, who referred to it as a summary of the culture of ComCon. This document was circulated among existing and prospective employees, and it formulated the culture in terms of 10 keywords/phrases: engagement, openness, efficiency, action, own responsibility, collaboration, customer value, learning, balance in life, and long-term orientation. These were thoroughly described in terms of the values they represented, as

Author's Voice:
How did the paper evolve and change as you worked on it

well as the actions through which they should be manifested. Consultants in the interviews often referred to this document as an accurate description of the culture.

In LeadCon, the key document formulating the espoused culture was the "LeadCon Strategic Framework," which had been developed in an inclusive process by the partner group to formulate the "basis and the agreed framework for us working at LeadCon in different roles and functions." It aimed to "serve as a framework and a reference for our everyday work" (LeadCon Strategic Framework). The document covered aspects such as mission, vision, business idea, and core values. Other documents collected in LeadCon included proposals to customers that presented the espoused culture and philosophy of LeadCon.

Data Analysis

The interviews with consultants were analyzed in a two-step process. In a first step, they were searched for factors that respondents considered in their reasoning regarding whether to share their error experiences. The episodes and observations were coded using NVivo11 coding software. Approximately 100 empirical subcategories emerged. These subcategories were then aggregated into the following empirical main categories: supporting (e.g., feedback culture, trust, formal arenas), hindering (e.g., internal competition, blaming, lack of routines and know-how), channels (e.g., e-mail, intranet, face to face), emotional reactions (e.g., fear, guilt, shame), coping (e.g., apologizing, problem-solving), type of error (e.g., lost customer assignment, failed client workshop), and consequences (e.g., learning, openness, image risk).

In the second step, we created three main theoretical categories inspired by previous research: (1) culture, (2) cost–benefit evaluation, and (3) emotional reactions. We then aggregated the relevant empirical categories generated in Step 1 into the theoretical categories and subcategories. For example, perceived costs and benefits such as learning and image risk were coded into "cost–benefit evaluation." As an indicator of the salience of experienced emotions in the two organizations, we counted the number of individuals mentioning the respective emotion in their reflection on whether to share an error. More individuals mentioning a specific emotional reaction was taken as an indicator that this emotion was more salient in that organization.

Author's Voice:
Was there anything that surprised you about the findings?

In the descriptions of the two organizations and their view and application of positivity, the interviews were complemented by impressions from the observed meetings and the internal company documents formulating the espoused values of the organization. Finally, we compared the two cases to identify similarities and differences. The findings from the data analysis are presented below.

FINDINGS

Case 1: ComCon

Context. ComCon, founded in 2000, had approximately 30 employees and a turnover of 4 million euros. It was one of the most successful companies in its industry. The organization had been profitable since the start and had received several awards, such as those pertaining to "most satisfied customers," "most satisfied employees," and "fastest-growing profitable company." The company operated mainly in the Swedish market and its services focused on media relations and lobbying. The mission was to increase the number of people involved in public debate on societal issues to support both democracy and social development.

Services were delivered mainly as projects, always staffed with at least two consultants to ensure knowledge transfer and learning. Each customer had a client manager appointed, and the projects were led by a project manager. The staffing process was decentralized; it took place in negotiations between the client manager, project manager, and consultant. Each consultant was accountable for their own utilization rate, which was followed up monthly by the CEO.

Culture and error-sharing practice. The CEO was strongly involved in building the culture of ComCon, and he viewed this as a key success factor of the organization. The company actively worked with what they called "a profitable kindness culture," which in its most condensed form was described as "wanting others well." A key underlying assumption was that, by creating positive experiences, employees would feel confident and be helpful to one another, cooperation would become more efficient, and creativity and quality would increase. In ComCon's employee handbook "10 Reasons to Work at ComCon," employees were reminded that they "have a responsibility to contribute to a positive mood," to "share their successes," and to "praise their colleagues." Positive feedback

from customers, so-called "customer bragging," was shared extensively to create positive energy:

> Successes are emailed to everyone when something is done well. It is a strong and conscious culture that has settled. In our company, you actively share "brags" with each other to boost yourself and others. (CC6)

> We are encouraged to share experiences of successes because, in this type of business, the climate affects the outcome. (CC13)

At the same time, the ambition to create positive emotions and experiences was also a reason not to share negatively tainted experiences and information:

> One does not want to negatively affect the positive culture. I feel we share errors relatively rarely compared to how we share successes. It happens, but not so often. (CC9)

> We want to create a positive mood in the organization. This means that we do not share errors, because that could affect the mood negatively. For example, the CEO stopped sharing information that could be perceived as depressing rather than uplifting, so he stopped doing that. (CC6)

The focus on positive experiences in ComCon was paired with a strong emphasis on feedback and learning. The employee handbook described ComCon consultants as having "high self-esteem, with all their human flaws, open and honest, willing to develop and continuously become a little better" and "proud but not satisfied. Nothing is so good that it cannot become better." Consultants were also encouraged to provide praise and constructive feedback to each other after each client meeting. Further, the employee handbook stated there is "zero tolerance against moaning" and claimed that this "zero tolerance helps us create a change culture where frustration and dissatisfaction are used to develop the business." The focus on a culture where there is always something to improve—articulated in the employee handbook—was confirmed in the interviews and legitimated failing and the sharing of errors as a source of learning and development:

> We are supposed to give each other feedback, it's a strong feedback culture. After a customer meeting, I ask myself the question: "What could we have done better? Although it went well, there must be three things we could do better." This culture helps us to be open and honest with things that went bad. … Making mistakes is not an error—rather, it helps us do better next time. (CC1)

> After customer meetings, we do follow-ups in pairs. Negative feedback is provided in individual conversations. I usually give constructive advice or recommendations. (CC8)

> We actively give each other feedback—and we are used to it. … I think that our feedback culture can help us share error experiences because we constantly give feedback to each other. … We often reflect upon how we work and how we can improve. (CC9)

ComCon had also established several arenas for sharing knowledge and experiences at the group, department, and company levels. These arenas could be "sharing lunches," during which consultants were encouraged to share relevant insights or experiences, and the week's "hit and shit," where both experiences of success and error could be shared and discussed:

> We invited everyone to a "sharing lunch." There we shared what happened, why things went well, and important lessons learned. (CC12)

> We have department meetings where you can share experiences. … We have had "hit and shit" as a weekly concept. (CC13)

These claims were also supported when we observed team meetings. In one meeting, a manager brought up an error in the recruitment process, with the explicit aim to learn from it:

> MANAGER: I will start the meeting by saying that consultant X has resigned after one month in the company. When a colleague resigns after only a month, it makes you think. How can we become better at creating the right expectations? We see that there are quite a few misunderstandings emerging toward the end of the recruitment process. We evaluate each recruitment round.

> CONSULTANT: I am curious. How do we do that? Just verbally, or do we document it somehow—like what went well and what went badly—so that we gather the knowledge?

> MANAGER: The CEO and I talk about how we should improve the process for next time. And then he summarizes this in writing.

Situation assessment. The situation assessment following an error and shaping the decision to share the error was concerned with "emotional reactions" and the "evaluation of costs and benefits." *Emotional reactions* were dominated by guilt (Table 1, Box 1; mentioned by eight out of 13 consultants), but also included sadness (Table 1, Box 2; mentioned by three out of 13 consultants), and fear (Table 1, Box 3; mentioned by three of the 13 consultants). Indicative of the emotion of guilt was the negative evaluation of specific actions, such as, "Am I as good *at this* as I should be?" (CC1) and "I had failed to understand the needs of the target group" (CC7). There was also a focus on reparative action: "I immediately began to

TABLE 1
Emotional Reactions in the Situation Assessment in ComCon

Emotional Reactions	Exemplary quotations
Guilt (mentioned by 8/13 consultants)	*Box 1* Some feelings of guilt, and your self-confidence gets hit—"Am I as good at this as I should be?" … I talked a lot with those I collaborated with, how it felt during the entire process. We talked: "What do we think about this? What went wrong? How can we avoid it happening again? What should we think of next time?" (CC1) And when it [the error] was discovered, I panicked and despaired. … Feelings of guilt overwhelmed me. … I immediately began to apologize to the customer. … Asked about how we could solve the problem. … I contacted the CEO immediately, and a colleague as well, and shared the situation. (CC4) I feel confident as a presenter, so, personally, I felt okay [as the presentation failed]. I focused on the content of the presentation. I had failed to understand the needs of the target group. I discussed this with my boss. We always evaluate each course with the key account manager, who also was my boss. (CC7)
Sadness (mentioned by 3/13 consultants)	*Box 2* It felt sad [that the client reduced their engagement] but still expected. This type of error is, in a way, part of everyday life. (CC9) It felt sad [to lose the client]—we liked them. Mostly because we believed that we could have collaborated well. … What makes it sad is that the client didn't give me any information about what we could have done better. (CC11) [*Commenting on the loss of a big assignment:*] We failed to understand what was most important [to the customer]. That felt really sad, disappointing. But it triggered me to understand what went wrong, what can we do better? (CC2)
Fear (mentioned by 3/13 consultants)	*Box 3* This is like an internal job market. Nothing is for free. Everyone needs to prove themselves. You constantly must sell yourself to colleagues. If you start to share errors, the risk is that nobody wants to work with you. The consequence is nobody shares errors—it's too risky. (CC2) [Interviewer: How did it feel to share the error with your boss?] It was of course tough. Part of me was afraid to be fired … the biggest fear was to lose my future income. (CC6) It can be a feeling that everyone is perfect here, sharing an error is not safe. That probably limits us. If everyone is always doing good stuff, what happens to other peoples' perceptions of me if I share something I have not succeeded with? (CC10)

apologize to the customer" (CC1) and "I discussed with my boss" (CC7). Sadness, as an emotion that is triggered by an error seen as impossible to repair, was in ComCon typically related to the loss of a client. This was viewed as being beyond personal control: "part of everyday life" (CC9); "the client didn't give me any information about what we could have done better" (CC11). When sadness was salient, we found no tendencies toward immediate reparative action, but, as predicted by previous research (Lench et al., 2016), there were efforts to understand the causes of error: "It triggered me to understand what went wrong" (CC2). Finally, ComCon consultants expressed fear that sharing errors would affect their image in the organization—the main cost in their cost–benefit analysis. Sharing errors was viewed by some as potentially "too risky" (CC2) and "not safe" (CC10).

Besides the emotional reactions to errors, the decision to share errors was guided by an evaluation of the potential *costs and benefits of sharing*. The main cost of sharing was potential damage to personal image and material costs following from the damage (Table 2, Box 1) and the potential harm to the positive culture (Table 2, Box 2). The potential benefits referred to the learning that could be derived by the organization from sharing an error (Table 2, Box 3). The costs of sharing errors, especially the potential damage to their personal image, were moderated by the relationship quality in the context of sharing. This was repeatedly described as a function of the format being a "personal conversation." In such conversations, characterized by trust and empathy, the costs of sharing were mainly mitigated, and this supported the sharing of errors in these contexts (Table 2, Box 4).

Case 2: LeadCon

Context. LeadCon, founded in 1999, had approximately 60 associated consultants and a turnover of 7 million euros. It was one of the largest leadership consultancies in Sweden. Its services focused on leadership and team development. The mission of leadership development was to "set free the leader in all individuals to realize their full potential and thereby contribute to a better future for society" (LeadCon Strategic Framework).

TABLE 2
Costs and Benefits Considered in the Situation Assessment in ComCon

Costs/benefits	Exemplary quotations
Damage to personal image	*Box 1* We have an internal market where I need to show myself [as] attractive. This may create incentives not to share [errors]. "Everything goes to hell in my assignments—work with me." Your value on the internal market can be affected if you share too many failures. (CC1) We are consultants and we face internal competition. Therefore, it is better not to share errors. Say if person A made three mistakes and shared them and person B made the same three mistakes but did not share them, the likelihood is that you will choose person B for your assignment. (CC3) If someone sticks an error on you, that isn't good for your development and image. (CC13) When thinking about whether to share an error, I consider the risk that people may see me as less competent rather than seeing it as an opportunity for learning. A good image is important for us. (CC7)
Harm to the positive culture	*Box 2* There is a risk that, if we begin to share too much of our errors, it could negatively affect our culture of success. This is a barrier [to sharing errors]. (CC10) You are expected to contribute with positive energy. It can be difficult to combine that role with sharing errors since it can negatively affect the positive mood. (CC13) The positive culture can be an obstacle [to sharing errors]. For example, I never share when we lose a bid. We need to appear positive and happy, and not negatively affect the positive mood. (CC4)
Learning opportunities	*Box 3* Yes, I have often thought about this situation [own error]. It motivates me to share this experience with new employees. I also often think about whether and how my experience would benefit the company if I shared it. (CC4) [Interviewer: What in the culture promotes the sharing of errors?] That we think there is a learning opportunity—there is nothing shameful or embarrassing to share errors. (CC11) I think we learn things from each other [when we share errors]—then we as human beings develop. (CC1)
Relationship quality	*Box 4* In personal conversations, and in smaller groups, where I feel trust, I have no problem sharing my errors. (CC1) In a personal conversation, it is easier to explain and get compassion, sharing personally becomes more intimate. (CC3) [I share with] people I work with and have worked with, people I feel more empathy with. (CC12)

Although LeadCon consultants were formally self-employed, they worked exclusively for LeadCon, and LeadCon invested in developing shared approaches and procedures and creating a shared company culture. Beyond collaboration in projects, LeadCon consultants met at least four times each year for mandatory "LeadCon days" in which short- and long-term issues for LeadCon were discussed and competence was developed. Considerable time and effort were also spent on the onboarding of new consultants. The external brand was strong, and clients typically believed that consultants were employed by LeadCon. The typical recruit was an experienced and often high-profile individual with a background in management and sometimes HR in the public, private, or non-profit sector. The consultants were attracted by the firm's image and mission, but they were responsible for generating their own income. This could be done by selling services externally to paying clients or internally helping colleagues deliver in larger assignments or engaging in internal management or development tasks. Staffing largely took place in bilateral negotiations between project owners and consultants.

Culture and error-sharing practice. LeadCon, in its consultation and internal operations, relied on ideas of positivity among personal traits, especially positive attitudes and "minds." A customer proposal describing the philosophy of LeadCon spelled out the commitment to and positive effects of individuals' positive attitude and mind as follows:

> With organizing principles based on a positive attitude, people often make smarter choices than those who are negative or cynical about life. … People with positive minds take greater responsibility for life and for the situation they are in. (Excerpt from a customer proposal)

A commitment to an emphasis on positive traits including strengths, capabilities, and possibilities was further illustrated by the "LeadCon Strategic Framework," which stated:

> LeadCon shall be the place in the world where the belief in the inherent power of every human is the strongest. (Strategic Framework)

Again, the positive orientation was described in terms of the *characteristics* of individuals. This was

in contrast to ComCon's focus on behaviors and actions that lead to positive experiences. It was about consultants having an exceptionally strong "belief in the inherent power of every human." The strategic framework further listed many positive traits of LeadCon consultants, including that they were wholehearted, compassionate, courageous, vulnerable, in possession of unlimited resources (to be unleashed), confident, creative, entrepreneurial, present, curious, generous, and collaborative. Not living up to these ideals was viewed as an error in LeadCon. In the words of the CEO:

> What is an error for a LeadCon consultant? To not be curious, to act like a victim, to blame others—that would be seen as an error by other consultants. But a workshop [with a client] that did not go well would be seen as a smaller error. (LC2)

The internal culture to be developed was characterized by "laughter, playfulness, dialogue, depth, creativity, and we support each other and challenge in a way that generates warmth, energy, joy and dedication" (LeadCon Strategic Framework). Beyond this, and in opposition to ComCon, very little was stated in the official documents describing how ideal consultants would behave. Furthermore, "success" was repeatedly inscribed as a characteristic of the LeadCon consultant in the company's strategic framework, which stated:

> LeadCon is an attractive company supporting successful leaders and consultants … Every consultant will grow into an attractive lotus flower in our "garden." She is the seed, the bud, and the flower at the same time … We deserve our external success. (Strategic Framework)

As opposed to ComCon, no statements relating to errors, improvements, learning opportunities, or other aspects indicating the existence of less-than-perfect performance could be found in the official documents. There were also no routines nor arenas for sharing failures within LeadCon.

> Unfortunately, we lack routines or processes for sharing errors, which means that there will be no collective learning—only for a minority of us. (LC8)

> Formal sharing arenas are not available. We miss the type of arenas where experiences of errors can be reflected upon. (LC3)

This denial of errors was further confirmed in our observation of meetings in LeadCon, where we found an active avoidance of engaging with consultants' own errors. In an internal meeting with 12 consultants regarding a struggling client project, no own mistakes were admitted, and no self-examination was performed. Instead, many shortcomings and errors linked to the client's organization were discussed. Protecting the image of being successful and excellent was an explicit theme throughout the conversation:

> I think we should be fair to ourselves. …. The way the change took place [within the client organization] you can still say was very good, and we should take some credit for it because we provided a forum to the client that was not planned for in advance. (Consultant A)

> I think it is important that we pat ourselves on the back and realize that the conditions were different from what was expected from the start. (Consultant B)

The overall focus on and concern with positivity as the traits of consultants and the ascription of success to LeadCon consultants were described as challenging error sharing:

> I think we want a culture of success here, which can be an obstacle [to error sharing]. We want to be perceived as successful. Problems are not natural for us here, we should be positive and successful. On the surface, we must be positive and smart. We are consultants and should successfully manage every challenge … There may be an expectation that we are more successful and balanced than others, and that we know ourselves well, and have come a long way in our personal development. That can cause errors to be left in the dark; that we are unsafe here. (LC8)

> I sense that, in LeadCon, compared to other companies I have worked in, another rhetoric is needed to address challenges that can be perceived as negative and problematic. We are opportunity focused and want to think positively. I express myself in a limited way—that is, I need to turn a challenge into an opportunity when I bring something up. (LC4)

> When I shared an error experience, and dissatisfaction with my contribution with my project team, and asked for their feedback, I got the feeling that I received no response. … a feeling of a non-open climate. It was not accepted to feel dissatisfied as a LeadCon consultant. LeadCon cannot be bad. We tell our customers that errors are important for learning, but we ourselves do not live as we learn. Although we say that we should be open and courageous, we are not—we do not practice what we preach. (LC1)

When consultants talked about the focus on the "positive," they confirmed the view that this was about personal traits: "we should be positive and successful" (LC8); "we are opportunity focused and want to think positively" (LC4); "it was not accepted to feel dissatisfied" (LC1).

These statements also indicated a discrepancy between the espoused values of the LeadCon culture

and what consultants experienced in terms of behaviors. The experiences reflected in those quotations were rather far from the "laughter, playfulness, dialogue" described in the LeadCon Strategic Framework document. As stated by LC9:

> We have a fantastic philosophy that we talk to customers about, but we don't use it internally. (LC9)

This discrepancy created some emotional stress for consultants that felt that they may not live up to being as "compassionate, courageous and vulnerable" as the official documents indicated they should be—and they would like to be (see also the quotation from LC8 above):

> I think we push ourselves pretty hard because we know very well when we fail, and thus judge ourselves harder. (LC5)

Situation assessment. The situation assessment foregoing error sharing in LeadCon was to a large extent shaped by *emotional reactions.* These were dominated by shame (Table 3, Box 1; mentioned by 9 out of 11 consultants) and fear (Table 3, Box 2; mentioned by 6 of the 11 consultants). Given the high ambitions and the large number of positive traits ascribed to the LeadCon consultants in the espoused organizational culture, consultants easily felt inadequate as individuals when experiencing errors. The ideal consultant was successful—"an attractive lotus flower," "deserving external success," "possessing unlimited resources" (Strategic Framework)—and possessed personal characteristics that should make the sharing of errors natural and easy: compassionate, courageous, vulnerable, generous (Strategic Framework). However, the experience of errors and any concerns regarding the sharing of errors triggered negative self-evaluations, especially shame (Table 3, Box 1). These emotions operated both on the individual level—"Am I good enough? Am I ok the way I am?" (LC8); "I felt insecure and doubted my ability" (LC9)—and on a collective level: "We fail to live our external approach … with ourselves" (LC3); "how we behave is contrary to our deeper values" (LC6).

TABLE 3
Emotional Reactions in the Situation Assessment in LeadCon

Emotional reaction	Illustrative quotations
Shame (mentioned by 9/11 consultants)	*Box 1* Shame can be an obstacle [for sharing] here. I failed with an assignment … both with a customer and with a colleague. I really haven't shared it with many. … I might realize that, truly, I should be somewhere else, since how we behave is contrary to our deeper values. A lot of shame and guilt can arise when people realize they are in the wrong place. (LC6) But there is always the question "Am I good enough?" in combination with high ideals—that we should be tremendously skilled, and that we ourselves realize that we are not capable of making our own internal development process work. … When thinking about whether to share errors, I feel some kind of uncertainty about what is ok [to share] and what is not. This is founded in a lack of confidence. "Am I good enough?" "Am I ok the way I am?" (LC8) We fail to live our external approach (such as being open, courageous, compassionate) with ourselves. One of the big questions and frustrations. (LC3) It happened [sharing of error] when I was new as a consultant. I didn't understand my role, what was expected, felt that my colleague was not so interested … The feeling was diminishing. I felt insecure and doubted my ability. It was frustrating not to be able to meet the customer's needs. (LC9) When sharing an error, I was struck by a strong doubt in myself that emerged in my thoughts, how bad I was as a consultant. (LC7)
Fear (mentioned by 6/11 consultants)	*Box 2* We feel fear to open up and show more of who we are as consultants and what our competence is. We fear not to be accepted. Especially in regard to errors. I don't know whether it is ok to talk about what is not going well. (LC1) There is a small group of people with a lot of power who decide who will be part of what assignments. Everyone relates to them and no one shares their shortcoming with that group because they fear being excluded. This is a question of survival … "Do I get assignments or not?" (LC5) I fear [when sharing errors] that people will turn their back on me, that they don't want to work with me, to be excluded. Our social relations are so important for whether I will get assignments or not. (LC6) [Interviewer: What hinders you from sharing errors?] Fear to be excluded and judged on our internal market in a negative way. (LC8) My fear is to be perceived as young and inexperienced … I am not so afraid of the immediate reactions [to sharing errors]. I am more afraid of the long-term effect, to not be asked to join assignments, or to not match the image I want to project of myself (LC11) Among the less established consultants, there may be a fear that, if I share an error, I may be less attractive or can be perceived as less attractive. (LC2)

LeadCon consultants also expressed fear triggered by their anticipation of potential negative consequences of sharing errors, especially in relation to how their internal image and attractiveness would be affected. Their fear of exclusion from the internal labor market was noted repeatedly (Table 3, Box 2; mentioned by 6 out of 11 consultants). In LeadCon, therefore, the sharing of errors took on an existential dimension. Errors not only raised questions about consultants' behavior in a single case. They called into question their perceived worthiness to be part of the ambitious and attractive LeadCon project and threatened their financial income. As LeadCon consultants were self-employed, the stakes involved in image damage were high.

LeadCon consultants' attitudes about sharing errors were further shaped by a *cost–benefit analysis*. As in ComCon, the main cost attributed to error sharing was the potential damage to personal image and the material costs of not getting assignments (Table 4, Box 1). This was seen earlier as inducing rather widespread emotions of fear. In addition, LeadCon consultants did not see any upsides of error sharing in the organization. Instead, they perceived a lack of interest from their colleagues to learn from their experiences, and this added to high effort costs of error sharing (Table 4, Box 2). To mitigate the potentially negative effects of sharing on their image, consultants shared their errors only with individuals whom they trusted and with whom they had strong relationships (Table 4, Box 3). The interview excerpts show that the number of trustful relationships was limited—"there are a handful of individuals I can share with" (LC6); "I share with a single person whom I trust" (LC7)—and the quality of relationships was built over time rather than being viewed as a function of the format of the relationship ("personal conversation"), as was the case in ComCon.

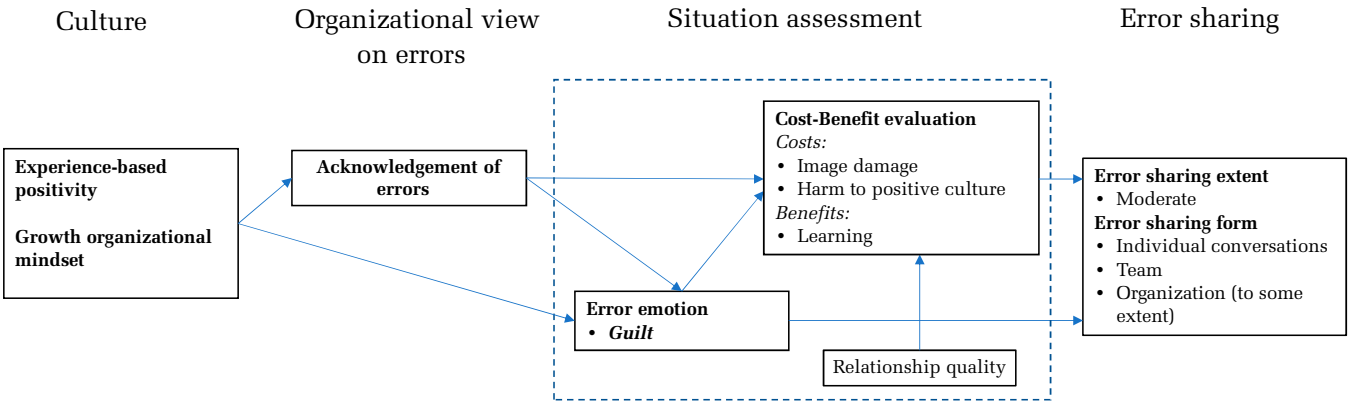
DISCUSSION OF DISCOVERIES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The current paper set out to contribute to the understanding of the micro-dynamics of error management in complex service contexts in which the aims of impression management often put a focus on positivity. Given that failures are perceived as

TABLE 4
Costs and Benefits Considered in the Situation Assessment in LeadCon

Costs/benefits	Exemplary quotations
Damage to personal image	*Box 1*
	I think about how often I have heard someone say, "I really screwed up. Can anyone help me solve this?" Never. It [sharing errors] becomes a question of position and status, how others perceive you. … I feel that we do not share our errors, because the consequence can be not to be selected. (LC5)
	If I share an error, it may be passed on to others; it's a feeling that I am assessed and judged. Some individuals I do not trust. The people I trust have been open with their shortcomings or showing me their vulnerability. I usually share errors, but it has hit back negatively on me, unfortunately. (LC7)
	I am very dependent on other peoples' perception of me as a competent and attractive consultant. Our internal marketing is extremely important. My knowledge and skills can easily drown among 50–60 peers. … Some of my colleagues think I shouldn't talk so much about my flaws, as this may become a truth among others. (LC6)
Lack of interest	*Box 2*
	I cannot tell if anybody is really interested in hearing my experiences. (LC5)
	I do not feel that there is the same interest, receptivity, motivation, or tolerance to have this kind of discussion [about errors]. (LC6)
	They, my peers, are not curious. … That's why I do not continue to share. The recipient must show interest. (LC8)
	[INTERVIEWER: You and your colleague never talked about what actually happened—how come?] We never got to it. I felt that my colleague was not interested. (LC9)
Relationship quality	*Box 3*
	I share my errors with those I feel trust and compassion from. In that context, I can raise issues. There are a handful of individuals I can share with. (LC6)
	Most often, I share with a single person whom I trust. Sharing errors in larger groups rarely happens. (LC7)
	[I share with] my colleague with whom I have a trusting relationship and who I know will not judge me negatively (LC3)
	I would share [an error] with those I feel that I have a close relationship with. (LC4)
	[You share with] those who are closer—not anyone … those you have worked with and know well and trust. (LC8)

FIGURE 1
Culture, Organizational View of Errors, Situation Assessment, and Error Sharing in ComCon



negative events and typically evoke negative emotions, positivity-oriented cultures are potentially inimical to error sharing. However, based on the two case studies, we find that positivity may have different versions, shaping emotional reactions and practices of error sharing in different ways. More specifically, in this section, we discuss two discoveries: (1) the enactment of different versions of positivity and organizational mindsets and how they shape different contexts for assessing both the costs and benefits of error sharing and error-sharing behavior; (2) the emotional dynamics involved in decisions about error sharing and how these are intertwined with the broader cultural context. The goal is to contribute to the literature on error management and positive organizational scholarship.

Different Versions of Positivity, Organizational Mindset, and EMC

In the context of delivering complex business services, the positive is emphasized both to manage client impressions and to support the potentially vulnerable services providers' self-esteem. Based on our study, we can identify two versions of positivity linked to different organizational mindsets. These shape different views on errors and influence the error-sharing decision in different ways (see Figure 1 for how this plays out in ComCon and Figure 2 for how it plays out in LeadCon).

As argued by Fineman (2006; see also Peterson & Seligman, 2003), positivity is a rather broad concept that includes a commitment to positive experiences and emotions and to positive individual traits. While these two aspects of positivity have been viewed as integrated and complementary, the current study shows that organizations may enact these two aspects differentially and thus choose to emphasize either positive experiences or positive traits. This creates very different conditions for error sharing. The two versions of positivity illustrated by ComCon and LeadCon reflect such a differential application: ComCon focuses its positivity culture on positive experiences while LeadCon focuses on positive traits.

Experience-based positivity and growth mindset in ComCon. In ComCon, the effort to create *positive feelings and experiences among consultants* reflects an experience-based positivity (Figure 1). Based on a shared understanding that, "in this type of business, the climate affects the outcome" (CC13), consultants are committed to "boost yourself and others" (CC6) by sharing positive experiences. Positive experiences and emotions are assumed to contribute to confidence and increase collaboration, energy, innovation, and quality.

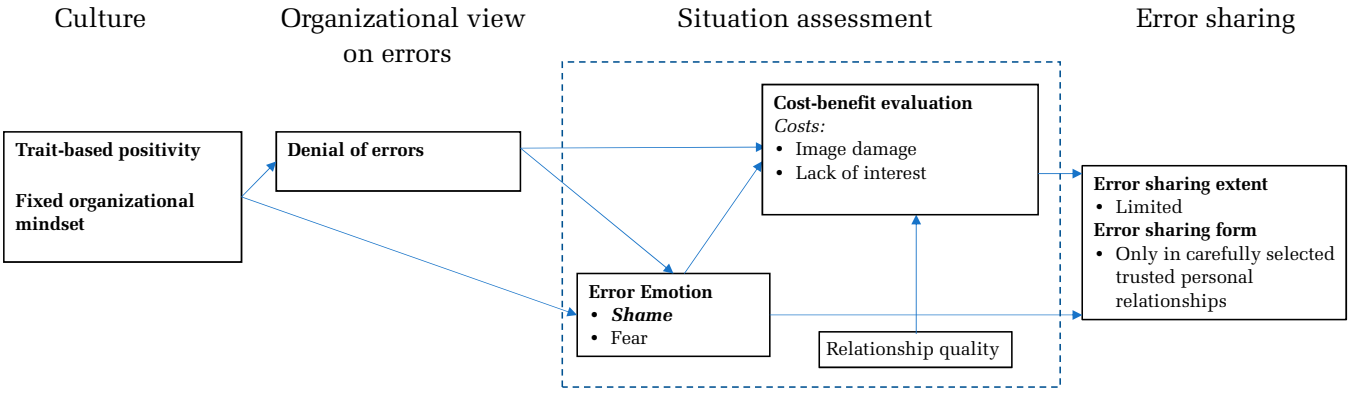
While this focus on positive experiences does not explicitly acknowledge the existence of errors, it also does not deny them. However, it creates a cost to sharing errors related to their negative impact on the positive experiences and emotions in the organization.

By combining the experience-based positivity with a growth organizational mindset, errors are framed as learning opportunities, and the benefits of error sharing emerge. By depicting the ideal consultant as "proud but not satisfied," "striving to become better," and committed to both provide and seek feedback, a growth mindset reflects a willingness to explore errors for organizational learning (Canning et al., 2020; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Heimbeck et al., 2003).

Taken together, the focus on positive experiences in combination with the organizational growth

Author's Voice:
What is the social relevance of your research?

FIGURE 2
Culture, Organizational View of Errors, Situation Assessment, and Error Sharing in LeadCon



mindset allows for the existence of errors and their value as a learning opportunity and, as a result, arenas and procedures for sharing errors, such as "sharing lunches" and "hit and shit." This organizational view of errors shapes the consultants' cost–benefit analysis in a way that learning is acknowledged as a benefit of error sharing and the potential harm of error sharing to the positive organizational emotions and experiences is considered as a potential cost. Experience-based positivity in ComCon, thus, does not mute the sharing of errors. Rather, it induces consciousness about its frequency—"We share relatively few errors compared to successes" (CC9)—and what errors to share: "I never share when we lose a bid. We need to appear positive and happy and not affect the mood negatively." (CC4). ComCon thus displays key features of an EMC—encouraging an "open, free and constructive communication about errors" (van Dyck et al., 2005: 1234) while acknowledging concern for protecting positive experiences and emotions. Like van Dyck et al. (2005), we also found that the EMC is consciously crafted by management, explicitly acknowledging the existence of errors and their potential value for learning.

Trait-based positivity and fixed organizational mindset in LeadCon. In LeadCon, positivity is instead viewed as a characteristic of the ideal consultant, reflecting a trait-based positivity. The LeadCon consultant *is* "positive and successful" (LC8) and is ascribed many positive traits such as "wholehearted," "courageous," "confident," "creative" and "entrepreneurial." This trait-based version of positivity, to a large extent, denies the existence of errors. The depiction of the LeadCon consultant as inherently successful also implies a fixed organizational mindset that celebrates genius and brilliance. The LeadCon consultant is "entrepreneurial and excellent," has extensive "inherent power" (LeadCon Strategic Framework), and is not allowed to "feel dissatisfied" (LC1).

In this context of trait-based positivity and a fixed organizational mindset, there is no natural space for committing and sharing errors, and arenas and procedures for sharing errors are therefore missing. This indicates a low EMC (van Dyck et al., 2005). This view of errors shapes the cost–benefit analysis of error sharing by emphasizing the costs of damage to personal image and revealing a lack of interest in sharing errors among colleagues (effort costs). It also mutes any potential benefits of error sharing. In a context where consultants are characterized by fixed positive traits, sharing errors represents a strong potential threat of damage to a consultant's image. These concerns about damage to one's image are further aggravated by the high stakes involved in the precarious employment context of LeadCon. While the consultants' image is important on the internal labor markets of both ComCon and LeadCon, the consequences of damage to one's image are more severe in LeadCon as it directly affects the self-employed consultants' income.

The discovery of two versions of positivity, and how they shape the sharing of error experiences among consultants who provide complex business services, contributes to the literature on both error management research and positivity in organizations. This latter research has pointed out that positivity may make it difficult for individuals to deal with negative experiences and events (Argyris, 1994; Armstrong, 2009; Fineman, 2006). The current study confirms these challenges, but it also shows that they are contingent on how positivity is construed. Previous research has pointed at two facets of positivity that highlight different aspects: positive experiences and emotions on the one hand and positive individual traits on the other (Fineman, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2003). While previous research has treated these two facets as complementary and coexisting,

our findings indicate that organizations may construe positivity based on either of these aspects, and they shape error-sharing behavior in different ways. A focus on positive experiences and emotions (an experience-based positivity) implicitly admits that errors are made, but acknowledges their costs to the positive experiences and emotions of communicating them. This is in contrast to trait-based positivity, wherein the existence of errors is implicitly denied.

These two versions of positivity, which shaped the view of the *existence* of errors, were combined with different organizational mindsets, which shaped the view of the potential *value* of errors. While a fixed mindset sees errors as potential threats to the celebration of genius and performance, a growth mindset appreciates errors as opportunities for learning at various levels of the organization. Thus, with trait-based positivity, only a fixed mindset is theoretically possible, as a growth mindset assumes that failures are acknowledged. However, for experience-based positivity, both fixed and growth organizational mindsets would be possible. In ComCon, a growth mindset combined with experience-based positivity shaped a view of errors in which communicating them was seen as learning opportunities. Furthermore, the value of this communication had the potential to exceed the costs of the threats to positive emotions and experiences. At the same time, a fixed mindset would have been possible. We can only speculate what would have occurred in such a cultural context, but where the existence of errors is not denied but errors are seen as a threat to the celebration of brilliance and achievement, we would expect extensive sharing of positive examples and experiences and a rather private discussion of errors.

The discovery that different versions of positivity can shape an organization's view of the existence of errors in different ways, and that an organizational mindset can alter the estimation of the value of errors, also adds to the literature on error management. It increases the understanding of values and norms in the broader organizational culture that shape error sharing and the micro-foundations of EMC. Thus, this answers the call for more research on what drives the establishment and effects of EMC (Keith & Frese, 2011). EMC has mainly been studied as an isolated aspect of organizational culture and with a focus on practices (e.g., Gold et al., 2013; Gronewold et al., 2013; Sutcliffe et al., 2016; van Dyck et al., 2005). Previous research has highlighted the open sharing and discussion of errors as a key aspect of EMC. This has left the question of what broader values and norms enable the communication of errors in these cultures mainly unanswered. The current study sheds light on the emotional and cognitive processes underlying error-sharing practices, and how these processes are shaped by the broader cultural context of the organization. It shows that error sharing is closely intertwined with specific values and norms regarding the nature of positivity (experience based vs. trait based) and the nature of organizational skills and talent (growth organizational mindset vs. fixed organizational mindset). These different values and norms shape the organization's view on errors and employees' cost–benefit analysis (what costs and benefits are considered) as well as their emotional reactions (which will be discussed below) and thereby their error sharing practices.

The Emotional Dynamics of Error Sharing

The emotionality of error sharing has been acknowledged in previous conceptual work (e.g., Frese & Keith, 2015; Vogus, Rothman, Sutcliffe, & Weick, 2014; Zhao & Olivera, 2006), but it has rarely been subject to empirical investigation. Our understanding of the lived experience of making errors has thus remained incomplete, hindering a full understanding of error-sharing behavior, a key element of an EMC. The current investigation fills this void and shows that the intensity and the kinds of emotions experienced when committing errors are shaped by organizational values and norms. This study also shows that the emotions experienced in relation to errors help to determine consultants' decisions about error sharing both directly and indirectly, through their effect on the cost–benefit evaluation. In the following, we discuss both these aspects in turn.

Different emotions in different cultural contexts. As the findings have shown, the emotions evoked by committing an error differed considerably in the two organizations. In the following, we explore how these different emotions are linked to different versions of positivity, organizational mindsets, and organizational views on errors (see Figures 1 and 2).

In ComCon, experiencing errors induces feelings of guilt and, to a limited extent, sadness and fear (Figure 1). The dominating emotional reaction is guilt (Table 1, Box 1; mentioned by 8 out of 13 consultants). Errors are understood in terms of failed actions (rather than failed selves). This may be explained by the experience-based version of positivity, which allows for the existence of errors, and a growth organizational mindset, which acknowledges the imperfect, improvement-oriented consultant and encourages the exploration of errors as learning opportunities.

In LeadCon, the emotional dynamics are instead dominated by shame (Table 3, Box 1; mentioned by 9 out of 11 consultants) and fear (Table 3, Box 2; mentioned by 6 of the 11 consultants). This limits error sharing both directly and indirectly (Figure 2). This shame-dominated emotionality follows from the trait-

based version of positivity and fixed organizational mindset in LeadCon, where the ideal consultant is viewed as having a fixed set of positive traits and abilities. The ideal consultant in this cultural context is viewed as "positive and successful" (LC8), and the sharing of experiences (including errors) should be unrestricted in the espoused (but not enacted) culture of "laughter, playfulness, dialogue, depth, creativity, and we support each other and challenge in a way that generates warmth, energy, joy, and dedication" (LeadCon Strategic Framework).

This trait-based version of positivity, reflecting a fixed organizational mindset, infuses errors with shame through dynamics on two levels. In the first dynamic, an organization's image of excellence and its consultants' fixed ability and talent leave little room for errors and learning. Thus, any errors are infused with shame and fear. As errors do not happen in LeadCon (and, if they do, they are not discussed publicly), they induce the shame of being the only one making errors and thus not having what it takes to be part of LeadCon. Errors also induce fear of being excluded from the internal labor market, which, in the precarious employment context of LeadCon, has direct consequences for the consultants' ability to support themselves financially. This strong negative emotionality of errors, and the prevalence of shame in LeadCon, is in line with the findings of Dweck and Leggett (1988) that, in a fixed organizational mindset, emotional reactions to errors are strong and include shame.

The second-level dynamic that induced shame in LeadCon is based on the mismatch between a consultant's emotions and the actions taken after making an error and the espoused values and norms of the organization. Considering the LeadCon consultants' positive traits of being able to deal with their own and others' errors and the culture's claims of supportiveness, consultants' experiences of shame and reluctance to share errors further drive the feeling of not living up to others' expectations, and this further increases their shame (Bagozzi, Verbeke, & Gavino, 2003). This second-level shame, founded on the discrepancy between a desired and a perceived self when it comes to sharing errors, operates not only on an individual level but also on a collective level. On the collective level, consultants know that they (as a collective) did not deal with errors in the way their organization's values suggested: "How we behave is contrary to our deeper values" (LC6); "Although we say that we should be open and courageous, we are not—we do not practice what we preach" (LC1). This created a sense of collective shame among consultants regarding how they, in the context of LeadCon, dealt with errors.

The direct and indirect effects of emotions on error sharing. As part of the situation assessment that leads to the decision about error sharing, the emotional experience of errors has been found to have both direct and indirect effects (Zhao & Olivera, 2006). This is illustrated and elaborated on by the current study. In ComCon, the prevalence of guilt has a direct positive effect on error sharing by inducing motivation for reparative action (Figure 1). Contrary to shame, guilt involves a negative evaluation of specific behaviors somewhat apart from the global self (Tangney, 1995). This allows guilt to create motivation in the person to repair their behavior in the form of recognition (and sharing) and apology, or by attempts to manage and undo the harm done (Tangney, Niedenthal, Covert, & Barlow, 1998). Consequently, the examples of guilt-infused errors experienced in ComCon are accompanied by efforts to fix them and their negative consequences, and sharing the errors is an integrated aspect (Table 1, Box 1): "we talked" (CC1); "I immediately began to apologize" (CC4); "I discussed this with my boss" (CC7). Thus, we suggest that emotions of guilt associated with errors in organizations have a direct positive influence on error sharing.

The prevalence of guilt in ComCon also indirectly influences error sharing through the cost–benefit analysis (Figure 1). Zhao and Olivera (2006) theorized that guilt may increase the salience of the benefits of error sharing that contribute to a positive self-concept. This is confirmed by the acknowledgment of "learning opportunities" as a benefit of error sharing in ComCon. Given the view of the ideal consultant as always "striving to become better," emphasizing learning from errors enhances individuals' self-concept. The perceived benefits of error sharing and guilt-induced sharing are, however, limited by a concern to have positive emotions and experiences in the organization and sadness, in some cases, about having lost clients and fear related to consultants' future attractiveness on the internal labor market (although mentioned by only 3 out of 13 consultants).

In LeadCon, the emotional reactions to errors mainly have a negative influence on decisions about error sharing. Shame triggers a desire to hide, become invisible, or flee from the situation (Lazarus, 1991; Lewis, 2000; Tangney, 1995; Tangney et al., 1998). Thus, it creates a direct emotional barrier to the public sharing of errors (Figure 2). As a result, errors are shared, if at all, only with a few, carefully selected and trusted colleagues. At the same time, the second-level individual and collective shame of not being able to live the organization's values limits any open, collective discussions of error sharing in LeadCon (Lickel, Schmader, & Spanovic, 2007; Tangney & Dearing, 2003). This creates a context of silence regarding both consulting practices (what went more or less well in assignments) and internal (error-sharing) practices. This restricts the sharing of errors to a few carefully selected and trusted individuals: "a

handful of individuals" (LC6); "a single person" (LC7).

The shame-dominated emotionality in LeadCon also affects error sharing indirectly through the cost–benefit evaluation. Zhao and Olivera (2006) posited that shame makes the costs of image damage more salient, and fear may make it hard to see any benefits of error sharing. These hypotheses are confirmed by our findings that the cost–benefit evaluation of LeadCon consultants is dominated by costs in general (no potential gains were seen) and costs related to image damage in particular (Figure 2).

These findings contribute to error management research by demonstrating how the emotions experienced when making errors play an important role in the error-sharing decision directly by creating barriers and indirectly by shaping the cost–benefit analysis. Our study also shows how these emotional dynamics are affected by the broader organizational culture and its different versions of positivity and organizational mindsets. Our findings suggest that experience-based positivity that allows for the existence of errors, in combination with a growth organizational mindset that acknowledges the value of errors for learning, affects an organization's view of errors, making it more open to error sharing. By contrast, trait-based positivity combined with a fixed organizational mindset creates an organizational view of errors that mainly denies their existence. The former cultural context induces a less intense and guilt-dominated emotionality that supports error sharing, while the latter context induces a strong emotionality dominated by shame and fear, which hamper error sharing. Our findings further contribute by pointing to the existence of both first-level shame (related directly to the error committed) and second-level shame (related to the felt reactions to the error: shame and fear, non-sharing). This shame is not in line with the positive traits of the consultant communicated by trait-based positivity. This shows that the emotionality surrounding errors is not only linked to the organization's view of errors but also to the organizational cultures' view of how individuals are to react to negative events, including errors.

Taken together, these discoveries regarding the relationship between organizational culture, emotional reactions to errors, cost–benefit analysis, and error sharing behavior lay the foundation for future development of theories about the cross-level dynamics of error management.

These findings also contribute to research on positivity by drawing attention to the emotional dynamics triggered by different versions of positivity. This adds to our understanding of the mechanisms underlying the tension between positivity and engagement with errors pointed out in previous research (e.g., Argyris, 1994; Fineman, 2006). The contrast of emotionality dominated by guilt versus shame under different versions of positivity and the different effects on error sharing call for future research into how positivity shapes emotionality in organizations and how this affects individual and organizational outcomes.

The current study also comes with some limitations. The qualitative case study approach provided deep insights into two rather different consulting organizations, and it allowed us to uncover the microdynamics of error sharing in these organizations. However, the generalizability of these findings should be established in research that involves a broader set of organizations and a survey-based research design. The conceptualization of the relationship between organizational culture (version of positivity and organizational mindset), organizational view of errors, emotionality, cost–benefit analysis, and error sharing proposed in this paper provide a basis for a broader survey-based study. Such a study might shed light on other combinations of positivity and organizational mindset (especially experience-based positivity and fixed organizational mindset, which was not covered in this study). Such a study should also pay attention to how the precariousness of the employment relationship might moderate the relationship between organizational culture and the emotionality and cost–benefit analysis underlying the error-sharing decision. The current study included some variation in this dimension, and we may expect stronger emotionality and higher perceived costs in a precarious employment relationship, as this increases the stakes involved in making errors.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on these findings, managers who want to maintain a positivity culture and still enable the sharing of errors may be advised to create a cultural context that emphasizes positive experiences (rather than the consultants' positive traits) and communicates the developable nature of individual abilities and talent. This may be achieved by actively communicating that positivity is about creating positive experiences and emotions that aim to support the self-esteem, loyalty, and energy of the consultants but does not deny that negative experiences like errors are part of organizational life. Positive experiences should thus be shared to maintain a positive energy. However, to avoid the communication of a fixed mindset, focus should be on communicating happiness and pride in the achievement, along with the hard work, engagement, motivation, endurance, and sacrifices underpinning the success.

Also, the existence and value of errors must be communicated together with the importance of positive experiences. This may be accomplished by effecting

an organizational growth mindset and emphasizing the developable nature of individual talent and ability. In effecting a growth mindset, managers may set learning goals rather than performance goals. They may also reward effort, initiative, and learning in addition to results and achievements in everyday feedback, performance reviews, and promotion decisions. The existence and value of failure as a source of learning may further be communicated by creating dedicated arenas for sharing errors—such as the sharing lunches or "hit and shit" meetings we observed in ComCon, or an annual failure day during which employees were encouraged to share their failure experiences with their colleagues we observed in another organization. Such an orientation toward both positive experiences and emotions and development is well summarized in the slogan "proud but not satisfied" that was communicated consistently by ComCon's management and ingrained in its organizational culture. Furthermore, management may engage in building strong and trustful relationships among employees, as these may moderate the perceived costs of error sharing.

The findings of the current study also show that celebrations of the ideal consultant as successful and in possession of positive traits, such as a positive attitude and mind in company documents and management communication, should be avoided. Although well intentioned to boost consultants' self-esteem and energy, the current study shows instead that this denies both the existence of errors and the negative feelings that come with them, creating a double shame that effectively mutes error communication.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

TABLE A1
Characteristics of Interview Respondents

Respondent	Company	Gender	Age	Role	Tenure
CC1	ComCon	Male	40s	Consultant	5
CC2	ComCon	Female	30s	Consultant	3
CC3	ComCon	Male	40s	Consultant	1
CC4	ComCon	Male	40s	Manager	11
CC5	ComCon	Male	50s	CEO	16
CC6	ComCon	Male	50s	Consultant	<1
CC7	ComCon	Male	40s	Consultant	2
CC8	ComCon	Female	40s	Consultant	3
CC9	ComCon	Male	40s	Consultant	4
CC10	ComCon	Female	40s	Manager	7
CC11	ComCon	Male	40s	Manager	8
CC12	ComCon	Female	40s	Consultant	5
CC13	ComCon	Male	40s	Manager	7
LC1	LeadCon	Female	50s	Consultant	4
LC2	LeadCon	Male	40s	CEO	7
LC3	LeadCon	Female	40s	Consultant	2
LC4	LeadCon	Female	50s	Consultant	<1
LC5	LeadCon	Male	60s	Consultant	9
LC6	LeadCon	Male	50s	Consultant	4
LC7	LeadCon	Female	40s	Consultant	3
LC8	LeadCon	Female	60s	Consultant	5
LC9	LeadCon	Female	60s	Consultant	4
LC10	LeadCon	Female	40s	Admin	6
LC11	LeadCon	Female	30s	Consultant	2

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