

Kaufmann, Lutz; Schreiner, Moritz; Reimann, Felix

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Narratives in supplier negotiations—The interplay of narrative design elements, structural power, and outcomes

Lutz Kaufmann  | Moritz Schreiner  | Felix Reimann 

SCM Group, WHU – Otto Beisheim
School of Management, Vallendar,
Germany

Correspondence

Lutz Kaufmann, SCM Group, WHU –
Otto Beisheim School of Management,
Burgplatz 2, 56179 Vallendar, Germany.
Email: kaufmann@whu.edu

Abstract

In buyer–supplier negotiations, both parties shape the relational and contractual dimensions of their collaboration. Being able to influence the other party during negotiations is therefore vital to improve performance outcomes. This research takes a configurational approach to investigate how buyers can use narratives in different power situations to influence suppliers and improve their relational and economic negotiation results. In our first study, we conduct narrative writing workshops to identify typical design elements of such narratives. In our second study, we employ fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis to determine how different configurations of these design elements influence narratives' effectiveness in different power situations. Our theoretical contributions are twofold. First, we expand narrative transportation theory, showing that narratives consist of interlinked design elements and that narrative effectiveness is a causally complex phenomenon. Second, for the field of supply chain management, we develop theory by introducing narratives as an additional means of influence in buyer–supplier negotiations and by examining the interplay between narrative design elements, structural power, and negotiation outcomes that are specific to the buyer–supplier relationship. Based on the configurations of narratives that we found were effective and ineffective in different power situations, we derive propositions to advance theory on buyer–supplier negotiations.

KEYWORDS

buyer–supplier negotiations, configurational theorizing, fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis, narratives, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Negotiations between buyers and suppliers are a critical activity in supply chains. They direct the collaboration and distribute profits between the involved companies. In fact, they represent “the heart and core” of supply chain

management (SCM) (Zachariassen, 2008, p. 764). By influencing each other during negotiations, buyers and suppliers seek favorable agreements on a variety of factors, including product specification, price, delivery, and payment terms (Thomas et al., 2021). In addition to their economic outcomes, negotiations also can have

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psychological consequences, such as satisfaction with the negotiation, and relational consequences, such as trust in a partner (Thomas et al., 2018).

Prior research on buyer–supplier negotiations has investigated two broad groups of influencing mechanisms: (1) structural influence that stems, for example, from power dynamics and dependence (e.g., Smeltzer et al., 2003), and (2) behavioral influence based on the use of tactics such as logical persuasion or appealing to friendship (e.g., McFarland et al., 2006). One approach that spans both categories and that often is used to influence negotiation counterparts has received scant attention: the use of narratives. The dearth of studies on use of narratives in negotiations is remarkable, in that practitioners already recognize the real-life prevalence of narratives in SCM (see, e.g., Supply Management, 2016, 2018). Also, in the academic literature outside the field of SCM, narratives have been studied as an important tool of influence in various contexts (e.g., Escalas, 2004; Shiller, 2017).

Narratives, often also labeled stories by scholars, are defined for our purposes as an oral or written presentation of causally linked states, events, or actions in a chronological order (e.g., Auvinen et al., 2013; Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015).¹ Narratives are used “to stimulate the concerns or emotions of others, and/or [...] to advance self-interest” (Shiller, 2017, p. 968). Studies have shown that narratives play a role in a wide range of objectives: making a stronger case in court (e.g., Pennington & Hastie, 1992); providing more intriguing health messages (e.g., Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007); facilitating change (e.g., Boje, 1991); improving leadership effectiveness (e.g., Boal & Schultz, 2007); producing more compelling advertisements (e.g., Escalas, 2004); collecting funds for entrepreneurial ventures (e.g., Martens et al., 2007); selling more effectively in a retail setting (e.g., Gilliam et al., 2014); and explaining global economic phenomena (e.g., Shiller, 2017).

We suggest that narratives can play an important role in buyer–supplier negotiations as well as a means to achieve buyers’ objectives. Our qualitative research is therefore inspired by narrative transportation theory (NTT) (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000), which provides an important foundation for understanding how narratives work. NTT posits that the recipient of a narrative can form expectations about the future based on the narrative, without having actually experienced the

described events in reality. Green et al. (2004) refer to this phenomenon as vicarious experience, which can even include emotions that the characters in the narrative are feeling. Similar forms of vicarious experience are well documented in SCM research. For example, Ried et al. (2021) show that a supplier who learns about an information leakage between a buyer and another supplier experiences the leakage vicariously so that trust in the buyer declines, even though the focal supplier is not directly affected by the leak and its negative consequences. We therefore suggest that buyers can use narratives to purposefully transport a supplier into a desired mindset and emotional state and thus to effectively influence the supplier’s behavior in a negotiation.

Constructing and using narratives is a complex task for buyers in their negotiations with suppliers. Narratives, in themselves, are a multifaceted construct that comprises distinct interlinked elements (Bal & van Boheemen, 2009). Further, interdependencies may exist between the different narrative design elements, the contingent factors of the negotiation, such as structural power, and the negotiation outcomes. In light of these interdependencies, we argue that considering single narrative elements in isolation and linking them with certain negotiation outcomes using linear approaches (e.g., regressions) can lead to an incomplete and overly simplistic picture. Instead, the study of narratives in buyer–supplier negotiations lends itself to a configurational approach and thus to fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), which acknowledges conjunction, equifinality, and asymmetry (Ketchen et al., 2021; Ragin, 2008). Conjunction implies that the joint presence or absence of narrative elements leads to a certain outcome. In producing results based on configurations of elements, fsQCA avoids misrepresentation of the effects of individual causal conditions. Thus, rather than suggesting that a certain causal condition “A” has a significant impact on the outcome, fsQCA establishes that causal condition “A,” in conjunction with one or several other causal conditions, leads to the outcome of interest. Equifinality means that multiple, different configurations can lead to the same outcome. Asymmetry acknowledges that if causal condition “A” is part of a configuration that leads to a particular outcome, researchers cannot conclude that the absence of causal condition “A” would lead to the nonoccurrence of the outcome.

The objective of our study is to advance theory by uncovering the complex interplay of factors determining narrative influence in buyer–supplier negotiations. To establish the relevance of our research, we started by conducting 24 exploratory interviews with procurement professionals from different industries. Findings from these interviews suggested that buyers actively use a range of

¹Most scholars use the terms story and narrative interchangeably (e.g., Auvinen et al., 2013; Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015; Shiller, 2017), whereas some scholars argue that stories and narratives are distinct concepts (see, e.g., Boje, 2006, and Gabriel, 2004, for a detailed discussion). In this paper, we use only the term narrative, in line with the definition provided.

narratives in their negotiations with suppliers and consider them to be a useful tool, especially early in the negotiation phase.² Given this apparent relevance of buyer narratives in supplier negotiations, we aim to provide deeper insights into how buyers use narratives in this context. Specifically, we investigate the following two research questions.

- RQ1: What typical design elements of narratives do buyers use in the starting phase of buyer–supplier negotiations?
- RQ2: How can these design elements be combined to create narratives that work effectively in a buyer–supplier negotiation context?

To answer these research questions, we use the following scope of investigation: We first explore the use of narratives by the buyer in the starting phase of negotiating with a new supplier. Buyer–supplier negotiations typically are complex and go through different stages. The starting phase is a clear-cut episode of every supplier negotiation, and it is particularly important because it can shape the mindset of the counterparty for all subsequent negotiation phases (Campagna et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2015). To explore the effectiveness of the narratives, we consider both a relational outcome—the supplier's trust in the buyer—and an economic one—the willingness of the supplier to compromise financially. We focused on the outcomes of trust and willingness to compromise because they have particularly strong consequences for the further course of the negotiation (Campagna et al., 2021).

We use a developmental mixed-methods research design (Davis et al., 2011). In our first study, we conducted narrative writing workshops with managers to generate 96 buyer narratives. To answer our first research question, we analyzed these 96 narratives qualitatively and identified typical narrative design elements. In our second study, we studied the behavior of the targets of such influencing attempts, B2B sales professionals, to evaluate the effectiveness of each of the narratives obtained through these writing workshops. Each sales professional received only one of the 96 narratives, and we presented each narrative to four *different* sales professionals. Thus, our sample for Study 2 included 384 sales professionals (96×4).

To answer our second research question, we then analyzed the sales professionals' responses using the

fsQCA method (Ragin, 2000). The narrative design elements used by participants in Study 1 became the causal conditions, and the evaluations of narrative effectiveness by the B2B sales professionals in Study 2 became our negotiation outcomes. Based on this analysis, we identify several effective and ineffective configurations of buyer narratives that influence the investigated relational and economic outcomes.

This configurational research contributes to theory in two ways: (1) by expanding NTT and (2) by building theory on buyer–supplier negotiations. First, we challenge the current direction of the narrative research stream by questioning the use of traditional linear models. Instead, we find narratives to consist of interlinked design elements and identify narrative effectiveness as a causally complex phenomenon, thus revealing limitations in the prevailing understanding of narratives and their effects. Specifically, we build on NTT by showing that narrative effectiveness is influenced by a host of narrative design elements and additional contingent factors that interact in complex ways. We further demonstrate that the same combination of narrative design elements but with different contingent aspects can influence outcomes in distinct ways. Therefore, we advance the understanding of narrative effectiveness as a complex phenomenon and suggest that, in light of shortcomings in linear approaches, a configurational approach more closely represents the empirical reality.

Second, our building of theory on buyer–supplier negotiations is a result of our research process. After identifying key design elements of narratives used in buyer–supplier negotiations, we conceptualize narrative effectiveness as causally complex and then empirically investigate effective and ineffective combinations of narrative design elements and power situations using fsQCA. Interestingly, narratives seem to affect both relational and economic negotiation outcomes, but potentially in contradictory ways. These findings demonstrate that a buyer's narrative in a supplier negotiation is no panacea; it can also lead to unintended consequences. We capture these insights by formulating seven propositions about the nature of buyer narratives in buyer–supplier negotiations. These propositions are readily actionable for practitioners.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Influence in B2B negotiations

Negotiation outcomes are broadly affected by two factors: the structural attributes of the negotiating parties and the influence tactics used by these parties. The first set of

²Due to space constraints, we do not present this part of our research in this paper. Instead, we provide a short overview of our interview partners, along with proof quotes, in online supplement A, Tables A1 and A2.

factors, structural attributes, includes the power balance (Björgum et al., 2021; Ganesan, 1993), relationship types (Kaufmann, Esslinger, & Carter, 2018; Zachariassen, 2008), and relationship histories (Thomas et al., 2015, 2021). These structural attributes are recognized as frame-setting, contextual factors for a negotiation.

The second set of factors, influence tactics, comprises the concrete activities that an actor undertakes in a negotiation to change the behavior of a target (Frazier & Summers, 1984). These specific behaviors, or influence tactics, have been further differentiated to allow for in-depth investigations of what they are and how they work. Scholars have developed several taxonomies of influence tactics (cf. Frazier & Summers, 1984; Kipnis et al., 1980; McFarland et al., 2006; Yukl & Tracey, 1992). A common distinction made by these taxonomies is to differentiate coercive tactics from noncoercive tactics. Coercive tactics typically involve the use of pressure, threats, or promises. Noncoercive tactics involve rational and emotional tactics, which typically entail information sharing or recommendations and personal or inspirational appeals, respectively (McFarland & Dixon, 2019). Rational tactics aim to persuade the counterpart by making an argument the target accepts, thus causing the counterpart to internalize the argument (Kelman, 1958). Emotional tactics rely on an identification mechanism (Kelman, 1958)—for example, one that makes the actor more likeable to the target (McFarland & Dixon, 2019).

All influence tactics intend to affect the target's decision-making process (McFarland et al., 2006), but different types of tactics have been linked to different types of outcomes. For example, coercive tactics were found to be more effective in gaining compliance (Gelderman et al., 2008), but they also have detrimental effects—for example, on supplier collaboration (Nyaga et al., 2013) and commitment (Zhao et al., 2008).

Most research in the SCM domain that relates to influence in B2B negotiations has been grounded in the power literature, rather than in the literature on behavioral influence (e.g., Maloni & Benton, 2000; Nyaga et al., 2013). Such studies generally rely on social power-based theories (French & Raven, 1959) and define power as the ability of an actor to influence a target (Emerson, 1962). Exceptions include two SCM studies on internal negotiations, which draw on the principles of social influence (Cialdini, 1993). The two examine project champions' use of influence tactics to gain commitment for environmental projects (Gattiker & Carter, 2010; Wichmann et al., 2016), the latter in a social network context.

We suggest that an investigation of narratives can provide new insights to the study of influence in B2B

negotiations. Narratives engender a distinct type of influence that does not fit well into the traditional taxonomies. Instead, a narrative comprises a set of elements that occur in conjunction and that, in complex ways, can lead to different negotiation outcomes. In line with recent negotiation research in the field of SCM, we include relational and economic negotiation outcomes in our investigation (Thomas et al., 2021).

Narrative transportation theory

NTT, the prevalent theory in research on narratives, stems from the fields of communication and psychology (Green, 2008) and posits that narrative persuasion occurs when a recipient of a narrative becomes “absorbed into a story or transported into a narrative world” (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701). This transportation is conceptualized as “a distinct mental process, an integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings” (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701), during which recipients experience “vicarious cognitive and emotional responses to the narrative as it unfolds” (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p. 409). This “convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative” (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701), causes strongly transported individuals to be fully immersed in the narrative world. As a result, these individuals accept the events and their consequences described in the narrative rather than comparing them to their real-world experience and knowledge (Green & Brock, 2000). To illustrate, Green and Brock (2000) constructed an experiment in which participants were asked to identify so-called “false notes” that had been randomly placed in a narrative text (Green & Brock, 2000). The results showed that participants who were fully immersed in the narrative world found significantly fewer “false notes” than participants who were less immersed. The immersed recipients were significantly less critical toward the content of the narrative (Green & Brock, 2000).

The process of transportation into a narrative may affect the real-world beliefs of the recipient (Green & Brock, 2000). As Gerrig (1993, p. 11) suggests, “[t]he traveler returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey.” Because transported individuals are more likely to accept the narrative world, they are less likely to engage in counter-arguments when parts of the narrative seem to contradict their real-world facts or beliefs (Green & Brock, 2000). Similarly, transportation during negotiations can reduce counter-arguing and resistance to the narrating party's attitudes or beliefs that contradict the counterparty's attitudes or beliefs (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), thus ultimately facilitating persuasion.

Narratives' potential to induce narrative-consistent changes in beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013; Braddock & Dillard, 2016) can support buyers in their quest to sway their supplier counterparts. This property is the litmus test for persuasive narratives because ultimately the quality of a narrative has to be judged by its success (Green & Brock, 2000)—in our case, the ability to lead to improved relational and economic negotiation outcomes.

Narratives in management research

In several fields of management, researchers have investigated the use of narratives. Depending on the context, the studies have identified a diverse set of outcomes that narratives can affect, as well as characteristics contributing to the narratives' effectiveness. Research in consumer marketing has shown that narrative elements in advertisements can have the intended effects, including raising consumers' evaluations of products and their purchasing intentions (e.g., Escalas, 2004, 2007). Marketing research also has investigated the effects of narratives in personal interactions. For example, Gilliam and Zablah (2013) found that when retail sales professionals use narratives about product characteristics and product success narratives in sales encounters, the narratives increase the purchase intentions of consumers. Gilliam et al. (2014) found that narrative relevance, humor, and the ability to tell a narrative are positively correlated with consumers' purchasing intentions. In an interview-based study, Gilliam and Flaherty (2015) explored how sales professionals use narratives in their interactions with buyers and identified suppliers' motives for using narratives, such as the wish to inform, bond with, or persuade a buyer, as well as the characteristics of the narratives, such as being personal or business-related narratives, and potential outcomes, such as appreciation or skepticism of the recipient.

More recently, Bonnin and Rodriguez (2019) investigated the use of narrative strategies by technology brands in their case study research, identifying so-called meta-narratives that these firms use to coordinate their marketing activities. For example, Cisco uses a meta-narrative that aligns its marketing activities with the way individuals are confronted with a variety of everyday problems (Bonnin & Rodriguez, 2019). Furthermore, Anaza et al. (2020), in a mixed-methods survey and interview-based study, analyzed the linear effects of narratives in B2B advertising.

These studies corroborate the multifaceted, context-dependent nature and effects of narratives. However, most of these studies follow correlational thinking and

investigate effects of narrative design elements one by one. We depart from this approach and engage in configurational theorizing, which is new both to the research field on influence in B2B negotiations and to the literature on NTT.

Next, we explain the steps in our mixed-methods approach. In a first study, we collected buyer narratives in writing workshops and used inductive coding following the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013) to identify typical design elements of these narratives. In a second study, we assessed the effectiveness of these buyer narratives with B2B sales professionals as the targets of the narrative influence. We measured the narratives' effectiveness using both a relational outcome and an economic negotiation outcome. Finally, we linked the narrative design elements as causal conditions and the evaluations of narrative effectiveness as outcomes using fsQCA (Ragin, 2008), thus determining effective and ineffective configurations of narrative design elements.

STUDY 1: DESIGN ELEMENTS OF BUYER NARRATIVES

Data collection

The first step in our research identifies typical elements of narratives that buyers use in the first phase of their supplier negotiations. These design elements constitute causal conditions in the final step of our research, the fsQCA analysis. To identify these elements, we collected buyer narratives through a scenario-based vignette, in which we asked participants to take the role of a procurement manager in a consumer goods company. In that role, participants were preparing for an upcoming first phase of a negotiation with a potential new supplier for packaging materials—specifically, bottles for fragrances. In using a vignette, an element borrowed for our qualitative work from experimental research design, we were able to provide a standardized stimulus, to increase external validity (Eckerd et al., 2021), and to abstract from other potentially relevant factors, such as relationship history and importance of the negotiation, in our subsequent analysis (Verbeke et al., 2019).

The vignette provided common background information on the buying company and on the negotiation partner, with whom the buyer had no previous relationship. The only factor that we manipulated in the vignette was the power balance between the buying firm and the supplier. In the varied scenarios, the buyer was more powerful, the supplier was more powerful, or the two were balanced. Participants received a short briefing, including our definition of a narrative in buyer-supplier

negotiations. Participants were then asked to craft a narrative, based on the scenario they received, that could be used to influence the supplier in the first negotiation phase. Their goal in creating the narrative, they were told, was to achieve better negotiation outcomes for the buying firm. After submitting their narratives, participants were debriefed and thanked.

The vignette was carefully designed in cooperation with buyers from a consumer goods company, was based on existing vignettes (e.g., Esslinger et al., 2019), and followed accepted guidelines for vignette creation (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Rungtusanatham et al., 2011). We conducted two pilot tests: one with 20 business students and one with 75 managers. We then refined the instructions and procedure for the narrative writing workshops and confirmed the overall realism and clarity of the vignette. The full scenario descriptions are provided in online supplement B.

Sample and checks

We recruited 109 participants from an open program for managers at a business school in Europe. These participants were well versed in procurement strategies—for example, regarding local/global sourcing or innovation sourcing; in the management of supply and price risk; and in procurement processes, such as e-auctions, negotiations, and procure-to-pay. In addition, to ensure that all 109 participants had up-to-date knowledge of procurement and negotiation concepts, the narrative writing workshop took place after participants had successfully completed multiday modules on both negotiations and procurement (Krause et al., 2006). Participants in the final sample had, on average, 8 years of work and negotiation experience and averaged 32 years of age, and 42% were female.

We conducted manipulation and instruction checks to ensure that participants understood the subject of the negotiation and that our power manipulation was effective. We excluded four submissions that failed one of the checks. We then conducted qualitative analyses on the remaining 105 submissions to ensure the validity of our narrative sample for our research question. Two researchers and two experienced procurement managers independently read all submissions obtained from the writing workshops and indicated whether the writings satisfied the definition of a narrative in a buyer–supplier negotiation, as provided in the introduction. Narratives were only included for further analysis if all four readers independently found the definitional criteria to be satisfied. As a result, nine submissions were excluded in this step, leading to a final sample size of 96 narratives. The

narratives in our final sample had an average length of 299 words (max 391 and min 210).

Analysis procedure

For the inductive analysis of the 96 narratives, we used the Gioia coding method (Gioia et al., 2013), identifying core narrative design elements that would be used as causal conditions in the later fsQCA. From the inductive analysis, three major categories of elements emerged: perspectives considered in the narrative, rationales provided in the narrative, and tone of the narrative. Each of these categories had corresponding subcategories. We applied the following steps in identifying these categories.

First, we looked for elements that have sufficient abstraction to meaningfully describe a wide range of business narratives. For example, we found it meaningful to categorize narratives based on whether they included an economic rationale, but categorizing narratives based on whether they refer to a specific place or situation would not have been meaningful. Second, we extracted elements that could be used to differentiate effective from ineffective narratives, which meant they had to be present, to varying degrees, in our sample of narratives (Basurto & Speer, 2012; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). Previous research had identified relevance as a factor that influences narrative effectiveness (Gilliam et al., 2014). However, given our vignette structure, relevance could not be used as a differentiating factor because all the participants' narratives were designed for and relevant to the supplier negotiation context.

Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the derived categories, the narrative design elements identified, and exemplary underlying quotes from the narratives. The inductively derived aggregate dimensions and open codes were related to extant literature, as is typical for the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013; Smith, 2014). Together, the open codes form the set of causal conditions for the fsQCA analysis.

Perspectives considered

In our analysis of the narratives, we found that a main differentiating factor was the perspective conveyed or taken in the narrative. Some narratives in our sample considered the perspective of the buying company by describing its needs or ambitions; some narratives

TABLE 1 Representative quotes for our inductive analysis of narrative design elements

In vivo codes	Open codes	Aggregate dimensions
<p>“At Cotriva, we strive for quality and innovation. These core values run deep in the DNA of our company, so to speak. Our founder, Sam, always asked these two questions when someone proposed a new product idea: “Is it truly good?” and “Is it novel?” Sam wanted to excite people with our products and provide them with truly excellent quality so that nobody would be left dissatisfied. Leaning on those two pillars, the company achieved leading market positions in the United States and Europe. Now, Cotriva is a well-established brand in its focus regions, providing the highest standard of quality to its customers. By living up to our values, we have accumulated expertise in our field, and we have the resources for further growth.” <i>Narrative 40</i></p>	Buyer perspective	Perspectives considered
<p>“Therefore, we at Cotriva made it our ambition to help people make the most of themselves. Our fragrances accompany millions of people in daily routines and improve their life experience by raising their self-esteem. However, our product itself is inconspicuous. As a result, we rely on the packaging to deliver exactly this message about the feeling that customers can gain after purchasing our product.” <i>Narrative 62</i></p>		
<p>“Just as we pay attention to selecting our attractive bottle, you also should be careful in choosing the ‘genie’ you would like your bottles to host. What I want to say is this: Cotriva and SPLR could form a truly mutually beneficial partnership. We acknowledge that you have remarkable designs and innovative technologies for bottles. And we have the perfect contents for it. We have a renowned brand and a loyal customer base all around the world. Together, we will be able to achieve great success.” <i>Narrative 95</i></p>	Supplier perspective	
<p>“Just picture SPLR, not just the go-to company for packaging in Asia, but a truly global player—a global player that faces future challenges not alone, but as part of a team of global players. Let’s explore this future in more detail to determine whether we can each provide what the other needs.” <i>Narrative 82</i></p>		
<p>“That’s when I knew AVA [a different supplier from Cotriva] was the one. It wasn’t only the company’s focus on North America; it was also this man’s proactiveness and willingness to help in regard to our expansion that convinced me. He was looking for more than a quick win: He was looking for a relationship where buyer and supplier learn from each other. Fast forward four years, and our business in North America has tripled. AVA has increased its revenues by around 20% by working with us. We have held multiple workshops together to share information on industry trends, marketing practices, and other initiatives. And I believe this collaboration will continue for many more years to come. And I believe SPLR has the potential to write a similar success story together with Cotriva.” <i>Narrative 61</i></p>	Dyad perspective	
<p>“We had a great cooperation with the Terzo [a different supplier from Cotriva] team and went on to deepen our relationship on further projects. As a matter of fact, the company’s performance led us to make them our primary supplier for all our subsequent skincare product plastic containers in the Americas and Europe. Under our cooperation, Terzo has grown considerably. They have actually just opened a new state-of-the-art plant in Tuscany. You see: With all of our existing suppliers, as well as with new ones, we strive to build up a long-term relationship, to the benefit of both parties.” <i>Narrative 42</i></p>		
<p>“I think about 4.4 billion people who are buying, on average, 2 fragrances a year. I think about thriving economies with an average growth rate of 5%, and I think about our CEO, who wants to capture a 15% market share within two years. For me, this line of thought means that I need to make sure that 6.6 billion high-quality bottles with changing designs find their way to our Asian factories. That equals a purchasing volume of around US\$660 million over the next three to five years. In my mind, I am already seeing our products on the supermarket shelves of Singapore” <i>Narrative 57</i></p>	Economic rationale	Rationales provided
<p>“To develop and strengthen these plans, we recently decided to re-assign our budget on overall packaging materials so that we might collaborate with highly innovative and reliable suppliers. Therefore, we are searching for a new supplier who can provide the</p>		

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

In vivo codes	Open codes	Aggregate dimensions
materials for fragrances—our best-selling products, which have a market share of more than 50%, roughly 100 million bottles per year. In addition, our market research shows that the growth potential for the fragrances category is likely to be even higher than our growth potential in other segments.” <i>Narrative 92</i>		
<p>“When a small regional manufacturer decided to build a plant close to Deborah’s town, people in her community were able to get better paying jobs, and to improve the health of its workforce, the company even invested in the town’s infrastructure to improve its water utility.</p> <p>Because of the huge impact this manufacturer had on Deborah’s family, she decided when she founded Cotriva that a fundamental element of the company’s DNA would focus on being socially responsible in every location where the company has a presence. The same expectations apply for each one of our current partners: These businesses also must be committed to social causes.” <i>Narrative 22</i></p>	Social rationale	
<p>“But at Cotriva, we took things seriously. Understanding that our industry ecosystem was not designed to implement animal-friendly measures, we mobilized our partners to bring solutions. We organized a scientific committee and openly shared solutions for replacing animal tests. We also partnered with European authorities to create an ingredients database for which safety data was available. Thanks to our cooperative spirit, we established cruelty-free best practices.” <i>Narrative 89</i></p>		
<p>“We are looking for suppliers that can offer the best packaging for our products. We admire SPLR’s work and portfolio; we admire the quality and the innovations you bring. We want to find a collaborator to dive into this new opportunity, and I, with all my experience, truly believe that working together with SPLR is the best partnership for both of us right now. It will represent a revolution in the business; it will be a cooperative alliance of the best firms, a large-scale cooperation.” <i>Narrative 96</i></p>	Warmth	Overall tone
<p>“I immediately decided that I wanted to meet with you today and to start a conversation to find out if we could become reliable business partners for each other. Obviously, we both appreciate delivering high value and quality with a touch of innovative design. So I truly see no reason why we cannot make this work.</p> <p>Of course, we could have just started going through the agenda, listing our demands, and having a discussion about pricing, but we wanted to give you a sense of our appreciation for your work and profile before jumping into these discussions.” <i>Narrative 19</i></p>		
<p>“We have met with some of your competitors, and our discussions have been quite fruitful. The reason we want to meet with you is that some of your past products seem to correspond to the quality that we are looking for. Surely, a few tweaks would be necessary, but in general, they are quite satisfactory.</p> <p>One of the major aspects to which we want to devote more attention is the design and innovation of the packaging. Before taking our talks further, we need to know that you can demonstrate a willingness for flexibility and innovation. Maybe you can send us a portfolio of your past works or even some sketches (or a prototype) that reflect what you think we are looking for. We appreciate any gesture that might convince us that you are the right partner for Cotriva.</p> <p>We are continuing to meet with the remaining suppliers on our list, and we expect to hear from you by the end of next week.” <i>Narrative 18</i></p>	Toughness	
<p>“We have already talked with eight suppliers that are highly agile, that drive innovation, and that are known to be reliable.</p> <p>Sorry to be in a rush, but I have to leave now. I am catching a plane to our new Asian headquarters in Shanghai.</p> <p>Do you mind letting my assistant know, by the end of today, if we can count on you during this tender? Be fast—we are running out of time!” <i>Narrative 5</i></p>		

incorporated the perspective of the supplier; and others provided a dyadic perspective, outlining what could be jointly achieved if a relationship was successfully established. The three perspectives also were found to be used in different combinations in that, for example, some narratives combined a supplier perspective and a dyadic perspective. From our inductive investigation of the narratives, we thus concluded that buyer narratives can feature three different elements with regard to perspective: buyer, supplier, and dyad.

Rationales provided

The narratives in our sample typically provided a conclusive rationale for why the supplier should act in a certain way—for example, to engage in the buyer–supplier relationship or to provide a competitive offer. We found that the rationales could be differentiated into two categories: economic reasons and social reasons. This categorization is closely related to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). The narratives in our sample show that buyers can signal a supplier about their focus and the kind of interaction they would like to pursue with the supplier. Economic rationales in the narratives emphasized financial aspects, such as sales growth, profits, or efficiency, whereas social rationales were used to portray socially desirable actions, such as emphasizing justice, support, and other prosocial behaviors either in the proposed buyer–supplier relationship or in its broader context. Thus, we included two distinct narrative elements under the category of rationales: economic and social.

Tone of the narrative

Buyers delivered their narratives using different language, and this language created a certain atmosphere or tone in the communication. We found two general tones in the narratives: a warm and friendly tone and a rather tough and firm tone. A warm and friendly tone used certain formalities, such as “I appreciate your taking the time”; indirect requests, such as using “could” and “would”; and positive words, such as “great” and “good.” A tough and firm tone tended to waive the formalities and use direct and directive language—for example, “send me your offer by 4 pm.” Findings on the effect of communication styles on negotiation outcomes are mixed. Previous studies found an open and clear style to be linked to integrative bargaining (Krause et al., 2006) and improved negotiation outcomes (De Dreu et al., 2000). In contrast, Jeong et al. (2019) found that

communicating in a warm and friendly manner actually reduces economic outcomes in a distributive negotiation. Further studies have linked communication style to the perception of a negotiation counterpart. For example, Belkin et al. (2013) found that when a counterpart uses a tone characterized by negative affect, this approach typically is associated with the perception that the counterpart is more powerful. Accordingly, we conclude that the tone of a narrative differentiated as warm versus tough, in combination with other elements, might influence the narratives’ effectiveness.

Existing research on narratives in a retail selling context has identified that the perspective in terms of personal versus business narratives could be a differentiating factor (Gilliam & Zablah, 2013); however, we found that, in a buyer–supplier negotiation context, a differentiation between buyer, supplier, and dyad perspectives is needed. Similarly, prior research found that the topic of a narrative—for example, private narratives about hobbies versus business narratives about products—was a defining attribute (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). In contrast, we found that narratives told with the aim to influence a supplier all provided some specific economic and/or social rationale. Finally, although Gilliam et al. (2014) discovered that the degree of humor used can indicate how the narrative was delivered, our inductive analysis suggests that tone of the narrative—more specifically, a warm or tough tone—is best suited to describe how a buyer narrative is presented in a B2B negotiation. These findings also challenge the prevailing linear view on narratives. Instead of describing a narrative as having a business context, we argue that it is necessary to describe a narrative holistically along all the three newly introduced dimensions of perspective, rationale, and tone. Therefore, we posit:

Proposition 1. Buyer narratives in negotiations with suppliers can be profiled along three dimensions: whose perspective is used (buyer, supplier, and dyad); what kind of rationale is provided (economic and social); and how the narrative is delivered (warm vs. tough tone).

Although the power balance is not part of our inductive data analysis of narrative design elements, this element in buyer–supplier negotiations was found to frequently influence negotiation behavior and outcomes (e.g., Habib et al., 2015). Therefore, we manipulated the power balance between the narrative-using buyer and the supplier in our studies as a structural, frame-setting component. We included it in the fsQCA as two causal conditions: buyer dominance and supplier dominance. This

operationalization with two causal conditions was necessary because fsQCA does not allow the modeling of three power manipulations (supplier dominant, buyer dominant, and balanced) with a single causal condition. We explain the rationale for this operationalization in more detail in online supplement C.

STUDY 2: ASSESSMENT OF NARRATIVE EFFECTIVENESS

Data collection

Our aim in Study 2 was to determine the effect that the narratives from Study 1 had on B2B sales professionals. We later used the results of this second study in the fsQCA as the outcomes. For this second study, we integrated the narratives from Study 1 into a scenario-based vignette that was the mirror image of the one used for the writing workshops. We assigned participants the role of a professional B2B sales manager who works for a glass bottle manufacturer and is participating in the first phase of a negotiation with a potential new client. The participating sales professionals were randomly assigned to one of three different power manipulations: The buyer was more powerful, the supplier was more powerful, or buyer power and supplier power were balanced.

Our rationale for using such a vignette was to have a setting in which the design of the narratives and the manipulated power structure were the only differences between the observations. Further, this design allowed us to observe the effect of the same combination of narrative design elements and power constellation on several sales professionals, enhancing the reliability of our findings. We undertook a pilot test with 314 sales professionals, which confirmed the realism and clarity of the vignettes and led to some changes to improve the precision of the language. The modular scenario is provided in online supplement D.

After reading the base scenario on the simulated first encounter with the buyer and one of the three power manipulations, participants answered questions to determine their base level of trust toward the buying company and their level of willingness to compromise on their financial demands in reaching the negotiation outcome. After this baseline assessment, each participant received the module with one buyer narrative. After reading this narrative, participants again answered questions to indicate their level of trust toward the buyer and their level of willingness to compromise financially over the course of the negotiation. Afterward, respondents answered demographic questions,

realism checks, and open-ended questions about their perception of the narrative. We held the relationship type and history between the companies constant by clearly stating in the scenario description that the companies had no prior interaction. By structuring the research design so that the narratives were embedded in a standardized vignette, we also were able to keep constant other potentially influencing aspects, including the importance or complexity of the products (Verbeke et al., 2019).

Sample and checks

We assessed the effectiveness of our narratives by drawing on a pool of carefully vetted sales professionals, using a pre-screening study through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), and adhering to established best practices (Aguinis et al., 2021). Samples from MTurk frequently are used to investigate SCM phenomena (e.g., Cheng et al., 2021) and have recently been shown to produce high-quality data (Kees et al., 2017; Peer et al., 2014) and results that consistently replicate laboratory studies (Lee et al., 2018). Based on these findings, we concluded that a rigorously pre-screened MTurk sample is appropriate for our research purposes (Eckerd et al., 2021).

Through the pre-screening study on MTurk, we identified eligible sales professionals with B2B negotiation experience (Ried et al., 2021). Specifically, 28,000 US citizens registered on MTurk and, with an approval rating of at least 97%, were invited to participate in the pre-screening study. Among those we contacted, 6555 participants replied. We first asked them how much work experience they had in different business functions, such as finance, marketing, and sales. We excluded participants who indicated they did not have at least 1 year of experience in marketing and sales. Second, we asked the remaining 2106 participants to indicate the number of B2B negotiations in which they had participated over the course of their career and the number of years they had been involved in B2B negotiations. Third, participants who had B2B negotiation experience were then asked five multiple-choice questions about SCM and negotiation-related topics (Cantor et al., 2014). Questions covered their understanding of a purchase order, force majeure, e-auctions, supplier development, and requests for quotation and had only one correct answer. Participants who answered at least four questions correctly qualified for our main study. After applying these three filters, we had a pool of 804 potential participants. For our actual study, we randomly invited participants from this pool of 804 pre-screened participants until we collected

exactly four valid assessments per narrative. Thus, our final sample comprises 384 respondents (96 narratives \times 4 assessments). Working with four assessments per narrative avoids single-response bias (Ketchen et al., 2018) and goes beyond the practice in similar fsQCA studies of, for example, asking interviewees' supervisors to assess performance (Timmer & Kaufmann, 2019).

Assessments were considered invalid if they failed our instruction, manipulation, or attention checks. Specifically, we asked participants to indicate their role in the scenario and how they would best describe the power situation, as well as to select a specific answer choice for each of the attention checks. The 54 respondents who failed one of these checks were excluded (Abbey & Meloy, 2017) and replaced with additional respondents to reach the goal of four valid assessments per narrative. Our final participant sample had, on average, 21.49 years of work experience, 9.12 of that in sales. Participants answered 4.36 out of 5 pre-screening questions correctly; 48% were female; and the average age was 44.3 years. In addition, 60% of respondents currently worked in a service industry, 25% in a manufacturing industry, and 15% in the retail industry, and 82% of respondents held a bachelor's degree or higher.

We evaluated the four assessments of each narrative to determine how similar they were. We computed $r_{wg(j)}$ and found that most assessments for a specific narrative were highly similar and thus had high $r_{wg(j)}$. That is, all four participants reading a specific narrative had a very similar impression of the effectiveness of the narrative. Accordingly, we found a saturation effect that made additional assessments unnecessary; increasing the number of assessments per narrative would not have changed the overall calibration of a narrative as either effective or ineffective.

We further conducted realism checks (Dabholkar, 1994; Thomas et al., 2021), asking participants to indicate their perceptions about whether the scenario was realistic and whether they took their role seriously. Participants answered three questions on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"), with the following results: (1) "I had no difficulty imagining myself in the situation" (\bar{x} = 6.04, std. dev. = 0.99); (2) "The situation described was realistic" (\bar{x} = 6.01, std. dev. = 0.93); and (3) "I took my assumed role seriously" (\bar{x} = 6.51, std. dev. = 0.66).

Measures

We measured a narrative's effectiveness by assessing two outcomes that have particular relevance for

subsequent stages of the negotiation: trust as a relational one and willingness to compromise financially as an economic one. To measure trust, we adapted an existing five-item scale (Kaufmann, Esslinger, & Carter, 2018; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Thomas et al., 2021). To measure the economic negotiation outcome, we used a five-item scale for "willingness to compromise" to reflect the willingness of the supplier to accept a lower-than-expected economic outcome. The construct is based on a scale from Wee (2013); all items of the scale were adapted to reflect the specific context of a buyer-supplier negotiation. We also discussed the scale with 10 scholars who have experience in the SCM field to ensure face validity and comprehensibility (DeVellis, 2016). We chose willingness to compromise as the economic negotiation outcome over measuring an actual financial outcome, such as profit or price, because we considered only the first phase of what potentially would be a multiround negotiation. Confirmatory factor analysis shows an overall satisfactory model fit according to standard indices (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Shah & Goldstein, 2006), as well as satisfactory validity and reliability of the constructs (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2005; Kline, 2000). All items and details regarding model fit, validity, and reliability analysis are reported in Table 2.

Because we were interested in determining the change in each of these constructs that could be attributed to the effect of the narrative, we calculated our outcomes as the difference between the second and first assessment of the respective constructs, with positive values indicating an increase and negative values indicating a decrease (e.g., Esslinger et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2014). We collected data on these outcomes on the level of the individual sales professional; however, because the unit of analysis in this study is the narrative and we collected four responses for each narrative, we calculated $r_{wg(j)}$ (James et al., 1984) to assess the level of interrater agreement for each narrative. We followed established guidelines (Biemann et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 2014) in selecting a triangular null distribution to compute $r_{wg(j)}$ indices, assuming a normal distribution of responses to the narratives (Meyer et al., 2014). Median $r_{wg(j)}$ values were 0.91 and 0.88 for a change in trust and for a change in willingness to compromise, respectively, indicating high levels of agreement. In addition, we performed sensitivity analyses using different null distributions, such as the uniform and different skewed distributions; all analyses resulted in median $r_{wg(j)}$ values well above the established threshold of 0.7 (Meyer et al., 2014). Therefore, we found that aggregation of individual answers to the narrative level was justified, and we proceeded accordingly.

TABLE 2 Construct and reliability assessment

Construct and scale items	Item-to-total correlation	SFL	SE
Willingness to compromise (based on Wee, 2013) CR = 0.926; α = 0.923, AVE = 0.715			
For this potential customer, I am willing to ...			
... make financial sacrifices to win their business.	0.817	0.862	0.072
... settle for less than expected to win their business.	0.834	0.865	0.077
... make price concessions to win their business.	0.844	0.896	0.071
... accept smaller margins than expected to win their business.	0.846	0.899	0.073
... compromise on our expectations to win their business.	0.669	0.688	0.076
Trust (based on Kaufmann, Esslinger, & Carter, 2018; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Thomas et al., 2021) CR = 0.925; α = 0.922, AVE = 0.713			
Cotriva ...			
... has high integrity.	0.766	0.813	0.047
... can be counted on to do what is right.	0.845	0.896	0.050
... is sincere in its promises.	0.834	0.878	0.048
... is a firm that SPLR can trust completely.	0.747	0.778	0.059
... will treat SPLR fairly and justly.	0.819	0.852	0.050

Note: $N = 384$. Model fit indices: $\chi^2 = 95.141$, d.f. = 34; $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 2.798$; RMSEA = 0.069; CFI = 0.979; GFI = 0.954; AGFI = 0.925; NFI = 0.968; and TLI = 0.973.

Abbreviations: AGFI, adjusted goodness-of-fit index; AVE, average variance extracted; CFI, comparative fit index; CR, composite reliability; GFI, goodness-of-fit index; NFI, normed fit index; RMSEA, root-mean-square error of approximation; SE, standard error; SFL, standardized factor loading; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index; α , coefficient alpha.

EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE BUYER NARRATIVES: CONFIGURATIONAL ANALYSIS

Analysis procedure

In the final step of our research, we combined the findings from Study 1 and Study 2 in a configurational analysis to identify configurations of elements that constitute effective and ineffective buyer narratives. Specifically, we used fsQCA as a set-theoretic method for data analysis, introduced by Ragin (1987) in the social sciences. Initially employed in management research by Fiss (2007) and Greckhamer et al. (2008), fsQCA has since gained traction in both general management studies (e.g., Fiss, 2011; Gupta et al., 2020) and the SCM field (e.g., Arellano et al., 2021; Karatzas et al., 2016). This analytical approach can work with both types of data: qualitative, as from our narrative coding, and quantitative, as for our outcomes (Ragin, 2000). The underlying idea of fsQCA is to show the relationships between combinations of so-called causal conditions (akin to independent variables in regression analyses) and a certain outcome of interest (akin to the dependent variable in regression analyses) (Ragin, 2008).

The process of fsQCA typically consists of five steps (Arellano et al., 2021). First, the outcome of interest is defined. In our research, we look at two negotiation outcomes measured in our Study 2: change in trust and change in willingness to compromise.

Second, causal conditions must be defined. In our case, we consider the power balance and the narrative design elements—that is, the perspective(s), rationale(s), and tone, which we identified in our Study 1. Our creation of causal conditions, based on the Gioia method, follows the approach of an inductive fsQCA, which aims at creating new theory. We thus derive causal conditions based on the underlying empirical data and then link them back to the extant literature (Misangyi et al., 2017). The number of causal conditions is restricted by two factors: (1) the overall sample size (Marx, 2010; Marx & Dusa, 2011) and (2) the increasing complexity of interpreting results as more causal conditions are added (Ragin, 2008). Our use of eight causal conditions is adequate for our sample size (Greckhamer et al., 2013; Marx & Dusa, 2011) and is in line with previous fsQCA studies (Marx et al., 2014).

Third, because fsQCA works only with values between 0 and 1, the outcome and causal conditions have to undergo a process of “calibration” (Ragin, 2008),

which we describe in the next subsection. During the calibration process, all qualitative and quantitative data are calibrated to contain only numbers between 0 and 1, where values above 0.5 are associated with the presence of a condition/outcome and values below 0.5 with its absence (Ragin, 2008).

Fourth, a “truth table” is constructed on the basis of the calibrated conditions and outcome. This truth table contains all logically possible combinations of the causal conditions studied (Greckhamer et al., 2018). It lists how often each combination of causal conditions is present in the sample and how consistently each combination leads to the same outcome (Ragin, 2008). Before the actual analysis is conducted, the truth table is reduced on the basis of the number of observations of each combination of causal conditions—the so-called frequency threshold (Ragin, 2008). Combinations that do not reach the specified frequency threshold are deleted from the truth table and thus are not considered in the fsQCA.

As a fifth and final step, configurations of causal conditions are derived on the basis of the reduction of the remaining combinations of the truth table using Boolean algebra (Ragin, 2008). We described Steps 1 and 2 in previous sections of this paper, and in the next section, we explain how we conducted Steps 3 to 5.

Calibration of outcomes and causal conditions

Calibration of outcomes

Our two quantitatively measured outcomes, change in trust and change in willingness to compromise, were calibrated into fuzzy-set scores using the direct approach (Ragin, 2008); the calibrations were based on the distribution of the values (Arellano et al., 2021; Fiss, 2011) and calculated using fs/QCA software Version 3.0 (Ragin & Davey, 2016). We used the 90th percentile of the distribution as the threshold for full membership in the set of highly effective narratives, the median as crossover value, and the 10th percentile as the threshold for full non-membership in the set. This distribution implies that a narrative that induced a positive change in willingness to

compromise, registering a value of more than 0.38 (the crossover value), will be considered highly effective in influencing economic negotiation outcomes. All values above 0.93 (threshold for full membership) will be considered fully in this set, whereas values between 0.38 and 0.93 indicate a lesser degree of membership in the set of highly effective narratives that can change economic negotiation outcomes. Table 3 provides an overview of the descriptive statistics and calibration values for our outcomes.

Calibration of causal conditions

Two of the eight causal conditions—buyer dominance and supplier dominance—were determined through the structural power manipulation in our scenarios; thus, they were coded as binary crisp sets and did not need to be calibrated to reflect degrees of membership. High buyer power was coded as “1” for buyer dominance and “0” for supplier dominance; low buyer power was coded as “0” for buyer dominance and “1” for supplier dominance; and a balanced state was coded as “0” and “0.” The calibration procedure of the other six causal conditions—whose perspective was used in the narrative (buyer, supplier, and/or dyad); what kind of rationale was provided (economic and/or social); and how the narrative was delivered (tone as either warm/friendly or tough/firm)—followed the indirect approach (Ragin, 2008). Thus, the researchers assigned values of 0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, or 1 to each case to reflect its degree of membership in the respective causal condition.

Two researchers independently coded all 96 narratives for all causal conditions. Causal conditions were coded on the level of the entire narrative (Lumineau & Henderson, 2012) because doing so allows for “capturing a more accurate meaning of the text because the coders can see the context in which words, phrases, and sentences reside” (Tangpong, 2011, p. 633). Because fsQCA requires that exactly one numeric value be entered for each of the causal conditions, all disagreements in coding the causal conditions were resolved by a panel of three researchers, leading to a forced interrater reliability of 100% (Reimann et al., 2017; Timmer & Kaufmann, 2019). Before engaging the panel members on cases of

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics and calibration values for negotiation outcomes

Measures	Max	Mean	Min	SD	Fully in (1)	Neither fully in nor fully out (0.5)	Fully out (0)
Change in trust	1.35	0.38	−0.25	0.36	0.78	0.35	−0.05
Change in willingness to compromise	1.85	0.38	−0.80	0.46	0.93	0.38	−0.05

disagreement, we got a sense of their initial agreement by computing a weighted Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1968) for each of our coded causal conditions, based on the initial and independently conducted coding (Tangpong, 2011). Weighted kappas for all six causal conditions were between 0.644 and 0.814, with an average of 0.723 for linear weights, and between 0.772 and 0.914, with an average of 0.842 using quadratic weights. These results indicate a substantial to almost perfect agreement and highly satisfactory interrater reliability (Landis & Koch, 1977). Online supplement E provides a table with exemplary quotes of our calibrated causal conditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We conducted a necessity analysis before conducting a sufficiency analysis (Ragin, 2008) and found no causal conditions that were necessary for achieving either outcome, employing a consistency threshold of 0.9 to reach high or low levels of change of trust or willingness to compromise. The necessity analyses are reported in online supplement F, Tables F1–F4. Thus, no single causal condition was required to reach any of the outcomes, lending additional support to our configurational sufficiency analysis. As is typical for our sample size (Greckhamer et al., 2013), we used a frequency threshold of 2, a raw consistency cutoff of 0.8, and a proportional reduction of inconsistency cutoff of 0.5, thus adhering to standard consistency thresholds for the sufficiency analysis (Ragin, 2008). Table 4 provides the results of the sufficiency analysis for reaching high levels of change in trust and negation of trust. Table 5 reports results for changes in willingness to compromise. We found three configurations leading to high levels of change in trust and four configurations leading to high levels of change in willingness to compromise. In addition, we found three configurations leading to low levels of change for each of the two outcomes. All respective truth tables are reported in online supplement G, Tables G1–G4.

Unlike regression analysis, which is assessed via significance and effect sizes, fsQCA results are evaluated via the set-theoretic measures of solution consistency and coverage (Misangyi et al., 2017). Because our solution consistency was above the commonly used threshold of 0.8 for all four analyses, our results indicate a high degree of reliability (Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2010). Coverage indicates the percentage of observed cases that the current solution explains (Ragin, 2008). For example, in the case of reaching a high level of change in trust (Table 4), our solution covers 46% of all narratives in our sample that lead to high levels of change in trust, which

is in line with previous studies using fsQCA (e.g., Azadegan et al., 2020; Fiss, 2011).

We also performed several additional robustness tests. For example, we applied looser and more rigorous consistency thresholds of 0.75 and 0.85, respectively; we set a higher frequency threshold of three cases, rather than two; we used alternative calibration values of ± 5 percentile points; and we used the average as the crossover value. We provide an overview of our robustness tests in online supplement H, Tables H1 and H2. Overall, these robustness tests show very little variance; in fact, most show no changes in configurations, indicating very stable and reliable findings. We also include three complete narratives for illustrative purposes, one effective narrative for each power situation, in the online supplement I1–I3.

In the following sections, we first lay out and discuss our results for a change in trust and then our results for a change in willingness to compromise. For each outcome, we compare the results for effective and ineffective configurations and draw conclusions about key differences between these configurations. Based on these insights, we develop three propositions for each outcome, laying out the composition of effective buyer narratives in light of the underlying power balance. We label the identified configurations with tangible names that try to “capture the whole” (Furnari et al., 2021, p. 790) of the configurations. The names we use describe the impression that the narrative creates of the narrating buyer in the eyes of the sales manager. Note also that we refer to configurations reported in Table 4 as “T-Highx” (trust–highly effective narrative #) or “T-Lessx” (trust–less effective narrative #). Similarly, we refer to configurations in Table 5 as “WtC-Highx” (willingness to compromise–highly effective narrative #) and “WtC-Lessx” (willingness to compromise–less effective narrative #).

Building trust in a strong power situation: The benevolent buyer versus the paternalistic buyer

Table 4 (T-High1a, T-High1b, and T-Less1) shows that powerful buyers can be successful at increasing trust through the combination of two specific narrative design elements. First, they use their own perspective—for example, by laying out what they expect from the supplier or highlighting what assets and advantages they bring into the relationship. This approach might be perceived as logical and consistent with the situation because the buyer as the stronger party will likely play an important role in defining the future relationship. Second, they use an overall warm and friendly tone that has the potential to create the impression of a benevolent

T A B L E 4 fsQCA results for a change in trust

Outcome “change in trust”	Highly effective narratives (HEN)			Less effective narratives (LEN)			
	The benevolent buyer (T-High1)		The opportunity-creating buyer (T-High2)	The self-confident buyer (T-High3)		The paternalistic buyer (T-Less1)	
	a	b		a	b	a	b
Configuration	Buyer more powerful	Buyer more powerful	Supplier more powerful	Balanced state	Buyer more powerful	Supplier more powerful	Supplier more powerful
Perspectives considered							
Buyer perspective	●	●	⊗	●	⊗	●	●
Supplier perspective	⊗	⊗	●	⊗	●	●	⊗
Dyadic perspective	⊗	⊗	●	●	●	⊗	⊗
Rationales provided							
Economic rationale	●	⊗	●	●	●	●	●
Social rationale	⊗	●	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	●
Tone of the narrative							
Tone (0 = warm; 1 = tough)	⊗	⊗	⊗	●	●	●	⊗
Consistency	0.84	0.87	0.82	0.80	0.88	0.83	0.90
Raw coverage	0.16	0.08	0.10	0.15	0.07	0.10	0.09
Unique coverage	0.13	0.05	0.10	0.15	0.07	0.03	0.05
Solution consistency	0.82				0.85		
Solution coverage	0.46				0.38		
Narratives	7, 17, 20, 24, 39, 76, 77, 90	22, 25, 50, 58, 75, 80	19, 29, 42, 64, 95	2, 38, 40, 53, 56, 65, 79, 92	66, 74	12, 15, 48, 52	3, 10, 62, 71, 93
							9, 26, 27, 34, 35, 57, 67, 72, 96

Note: “●” indicates core causal condition (present); “⊗” indicates core causal condition (absent); “●” indicates peripheral condition (present); and “⊗” indicates peripheral condition (absent).

TABLE 5 fsQCA results for a change in willingness to compromise

Outcome “change in WtC”	Highly effective narratives (HEN)			
	The underdog buyer (WtC–High1) Supplier more powerful	The opportunity-creating buyer (WtC–High2) Either supplier more powerful or balanced state	The self-confident buyer (WtC–High3) Either supplier more powerful or balanced state	The “it’s simply in your interest” buyer (WtC–High4) Balanced state
Configuration				
Configuration’s power distribution				
Perspectives considered				
Buyer perspective	●	⊗	●	⊗
Supplier perspective	⊗	●	⊗	●
Dyadic perspective	●	●	⊗	●
Rationales provided				
Economic rationale	●	●	●	●
Social rationale	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Tone of the narrative				
Tone (0 = warm; 1 = tough)	⊗	⊗	●	
Consistency	0.86	0.85	0.83	0.85
Raw coverage	0.14	0.18	0.24	0.07
Unique coverage	0.08	0.08	0.18	0.01
Solution consistency	0.86			
Solution coverage	0.47			
Narratives	23, 32, 46, 83, 84	1, 19, 29, 42, 64, 82, 95	2, 12, 38, 40, 52, 53, 79, 92	1, 61, 82, 94

Note: “●” indicates core causal condition (present); “⊗” indicates core causal condition (absent); “●” indicates peripheral condition (present); and “⊗” indicates peripheral condition (absent).

TABLE 5 (Continued)

Outcome “change in WtC”	Less effective narratives (LEN)			
	The dominant buyer (WtC–Less1)		The inauthentic buyer (WtC–Less2)	
	a	b	c	The self-centered buyer (WtC–Less3) Either buyer more powerful or balanced state
Configuration				
Configuration’s power distribution				
Perspectives considered				
Buyer perspective	●	●		●
Supplier perspective	⊗		●	⊗
Dyadic perspective			●	●
Rationales provided				
Economic rationale	●	●	●	●
Social rationale	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Tone of the narrative				
Tone (0 = warm; 1 = tough)		●	●	●
Consistency	0.89	0.90	0.87	0.91
Raw coverage	0.26	0.23	0.10	0.14
Unique coverage	0.06	0.02	0.01	0.09
Solution consistency	0.87			
Solution coverage	0.47			
Narratives	5, 6, 7, 17, 18, 20, 24, 30, 39, 43, 68, 76, 77, 90, 91	4, 5, 6, 8, 18, 30, 43, 45, 54, 68, 86, 91	4, 66, 74, 86	22, 25, 41, 50, 58, 63, 75, 80, 87 6, 30, 43, 56, 65

Note: “●” indicates core causal condition (present); “⊗” indicates core causal condition (absent); “●” indicates peripheral condition (present); and “⊗” indicates peripheral condition (absent).

buyer. In doing so, these powerful buyers can use either an economic or a social rationale in this situation—for example, either by highlighting potential economic gains or by portraying themselves as a fair and ethical partner. These results are highlighted by the answers sales professionals in Study 2 gave to the open question on their perception of the narrative. For example, one sales professional who received Narrative 76 explained that the narrative created the perception that “the company will treat us right.” A sales professional who received Narrative 90 wrote, “I perceived it as trying to find the right solution for both parties when one party had more influence.”

Powerful buyers who were ineffective in increasing trust via narratives (T-Less1) used a tough tone in the narrative that seemed to assert additional dominance (Belkin et al., 2013). In this case, the tough tone, in combination with a focus on the supplier's perspective (e.g., telling the supplier what is good for them and how they should behave), seemed to be perceived as an attempt to coerce or trick the other party and was inconsistent with the aim of increasing trust. To illustrate, a sales professional who received the less effective Narrative 66 wrote, “It made me a bit wary.” Accordingly, we posit:

Proposition 2. A buyer in a strong power situation can increase the supplier's trust when using a narrative outlining the buyer's own perspective in a warm and friendly tone.

Building trust in a weak power situation: The opportunity-creating buyer versus the overconfident buyer and the amateur buyer

When buyers were in a relatively weak power position, successful narratives concentrated as much as possible on the perspective of the supplier, while also highlighting benefits of the dyadic relationship (T-High2). Similar to the findings for a strong buyer situation, a focus on the stronger party was perceived as credible and evoked the other party's trust. Furthermore, these effective narratives had a warm and friendly tone and focused on only an economic rationale (T-High2). Meanwhile, a focus on the perspective of the buying company did not provide the intended results from this weaker power position, regardless of the rationale used or the tone of the overall narrative (T-Less2a, T-Less2b, and T-Less3). Overlooking the dyadic perspective appeared particularly counterproductive. According to our results, suppliers preferred that buyers acknowledge the greater power of

the supplier by putting its perspective, and consequently its needs, first and by setting the right tone. A participant who received Narrative 42 explained that the buyer's narrative did “show its trustworthiness to earn a partnership,” and similarly, a sales manager who received Narrative 19 wrote, “I think that there is a good business relationship developing in this.” Both quotes highlight the focus of the narrative on the relationship and show that the buyer was trying to earn trust and thus did not use a tough tone.

In contrast, a sales manager who received the less effective Narrative 10, which used a social rationale, wrote, “I perceived the story as manipulative.” In addition, a sales manager who received Narrative 12, which focused on the buying company, wrote that “[i]t was a long, drawn out ‘war’ of Cotriva speaking about the goals they are looking for in a company to do business with, and what other companies are bidding for them.” This quote in particular highlights the perception of an overly confident buyer whose actions are perceived as not matching with the underlying power situation and the expected behavior. Thus, we posit:

Proposition 3. A buyer in a weak power situation can increase the supplier's trust when using a narrative that prioritizes the perspective of both the supplier and the dyad and that provides an economic rationale in a warm and friendly tone.

Building trust in a balanced power situation: The self-confident buyer versus the amateur buyer

Interestingly, when neither party has an edge over the other, results indicate that effective buyers follow a different negotiating approach to improve trust. Although buyer narratives were successful when they conveyed a warm and friendly tone in both the low- and high-power situations, in balanced situations, the narratives seemed most effective when they conveyed a tougher tone (T-High3). In addition, effective narratives focused on the buyer's own perspective and used an economic rationale.

Meanwhile, narratives were ineffective in a balanced situation (T-Less3) when a warm tone was combined with an economic rationale and lacked attention to the dyadic or supplier perspectives. We interpret these results as indicating that, in balanced situations, a no-nonsense, straightforward approach was perceived as credible and respectful to the other side and, at the same time, as indicating a healthy level of confidence. A sales manager who received the effective Narrative 38 wrote, “I

perceived the story as a situation that would mutually benefit both companies.”

In contrast, a sales manager who received the less effective Narrative 35 wrote, “[i]t was interesting, but not enough to change anything.” Similarly, a sales manager who received the less effective Narrative 67 said, “It was cute and meant as an ice breaker,” indicating that buyers in a balanced power situation need to provide clear guidance with their narratives to have a positive effect on trust and to avoid appearing amateurish and unprofessional. This leads us to posit:

Proposition 4. A buyer in a balanced power situation can increase the supplier’s trust when using a narrative that prioritizes the buyer’s own perspective and that provides an economic rationale, and when using a tough and firm tone, instead of a warm and friendly tone.

The literature on trust creation provides an additional theoretical basis to explain why certain narrative configurations worked well in increasing trust whereas others did not. In particular, the literature on swift trust can provide an important perspective in this regard. Swift trust is not formed over a longer period of time based on experiences with a person but instead is rather quickly created on the basis of external and behavioral cues (Meyerson et al., 1996). For example, Kroeger et al. (2021) show that role clarity and affiliation with a certain institutional category affect the creation of swift trust in temporary groups. These two aspects are of particular interest for our analysis because they likely would change in the eyes of the supplier in accordance with our power balance manipulations. In particular, buyers in a relatively weak power situation likely would be seen as belonging to the institutional category of “weak buyers,” and suppliers would probably expect a different behavior from a weak buyer than they would from a strong buyer. Accordingly, the supplier’s trust in the buyer should increase if the behavior of the buyer is perceived as authentic and matches with the respective role of the buyer. Similarly, a recent study by Thomas et al. (2021) found that a mismatch between expected and observed negotiation behavior can impair negotiation outcomes. Overall, these studies suggest that to increase trust, the buyer’s narrative should be in line with the supplier’s expectations of the interaction. Specifically, suppliers seem to expect that powerful buyers will put their own perspective first, whereas the opposite holds true if the supplier is more powerful.

In addition to the considered perspective, the tone of the narrative seems to be a decisive factor in many

configurations. We find that the use of a tough and firm tone in many situations is detrimental to the creation of trust. One explanation is that it is perceived as coercive, given that the narratives using a tough tone often tried to put pressure on the supplier by demanding a certain behavior (McFarland et al., 2006). Coercive behavior typically undermines trust (Ireland & Webb, 2007), which could explain why configuration T-Less1 was not effective, even though coercive behavior may be expected from a more powerful buyer.

Interestingly, a tough and firm tone was the decisive factor in increasing trust in a balanced power situation. The reason might be that the supplier has less clear-cut expectations about the buyer in a balanced power situation and thus is more receptive to influences during the negotiation itself (Elfenbein, 2021). Specifically, in a balanced power situation, the parties may be uncertain about the roles and respective behavior of each party. Uncertainty or ambiguity can cause psychological discomfort and induce decision paralysis (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006; Sarin & Weber, 1993). If the buyer takes the lead and provides clear guidance, this uncertainty is reduced (Lipshitz & Strauss, 1997); the process and the partner seem more predictable, which improves trust. Corroborating this view, Anderson and Kilduff (2009) found that dominant behavior is often perceived as trust-inducing in groups that have no predefined hierarchies. Accordingly, buyers in a balanced power situation could choose to use a tough and firm tone to reduce role ambiguity, signal dominance, and thus improve trust.

Increasing willingness to compromise as a powerful buyer: No effective configurations

As Table 5 shows, for a powerful buyer, no configuration of narratives emerged that consistently led to high levels of change in the supplier’s willingness to compromise. We found only configurations that consistently did *not* lead to the intended outcome (WtC-Less1–3). This result suggests that using a narrative might not be the approach of choice for a powerful buyer trying to improve the economic outcomes of a negotiation. Powerful buyers wanting only to improve their economic negotiation outcomes have more traditional tactics at their disposal. Suppliers might simply believe that powerful buyers would resort to the forces of the market to get the best deal from them, so the use of narratives would not lead to additional willingness to compromise. The open responses from the sales professionals shed additional light on this finding; they suggested that narratives of powerful buyers often were perceived as arrogant or condescending, as the

following quote highlights: “I perceived the story from Cotriva to be a little heavy handed ... as if they were a prize and without fully respecting the value that my company would bring to the table” (Narrative 30). Accordingly, we posit:

Proposition 5. A buyer in a strong power situation is not likely to increase the supplier’s willingness to compromise when using a narrative in a buyer–supplier negotiation.

Increasing willingness to compromise in a weak power situation: The underdog, the opportunity-creating buyer, and the self-confident buyer

Relatively powerless buyers used one of three effective narrative configurations to improve their economic negotiation outcome in their negotiation with the supplier. In the first configuration (WtC–High1), buyers use a dyadic perspective and a rather friendly tone to transport the supplier, describing what could be achieved economically through the relationship. Similarly, weaker buyers are effective (WtC–High2) when addressing the perspective of the supplier—in combination with a dyadic view, an economic rationale, and a warm and friendly tone. Note that this configuration of narratives consistently and simultaneously produced high levels of change both in trust (T–High2) and in willingness to compromise (WtC–High2). Accordingly, power-disadvantaged buyers could improve both relational and economic negotiation outcomes using this combination of narrative elements.

Open answers from sales professionals corroborated these findings. For example, “I came to understand that my company would benefit greatly if this negotiation went well, as would Cotriva” (Narrative 83), wrote one respondent; and “I thought it was an intelligent strategy to try to convince me to work with them in the negotiation and perhaps concede more in hopes of high sales for 2021–22” (Narrative 32), wrote another. These reports highlight that the narratives in this configuration focused on how the supplier could benefit from the relationship. These quotes further highlight how the “underdog” buyer could improve its relative stance by portraying future benefits for the supplier and thus could create new opportunities for both companies. A third configuration that enabled relatively weak buyers to improve economic negotiation outcomes resembled configuration T–High3 to a certain degree; it required a self-confident focus on the perspective of the buying company in combination with a tougher tone (WtC–High3). Thus, we posit:

Proposition 6. A buyer in a weak power situation can increase the supplier’s willingness to compromise in two cases: (1) when using a narrative that prioritizes the dyad perspective and provides an economic rationale in a warm and friendly tone and (2) when using a narrative that prioritizes the buyer’s own perspective and that provides an economic rationale in a tough and firm tone.

Increasing willingness to compromise in a balanced power situation: The opportunity-creating, self-confident, and “it’s simply in your interest” buyer versus the inauthentic and self-centered buyer

Buyers in a balanced situation have three options for designing an effective narrative to improve their economic negotiation outcome. Two of these configurations are the same ones discussed for weak power situations: WtC–High2 and WtC–High3. These two also appear to work well for situations of balanced power. The additional configuration, WtC–High4, is characterized by a strong focus on the perspective of the supplier in combination with a dyadic perspective and explicit use of an economic rationale. This finding is also exemplified by a quote from the sales professionals who received Narrative 82: “I thought it was refreshing to see someone expressing a desire for a mutually beneficial relationship,” thus showing that the supplier’s engaging in this relationship would be in its best interest as well. WtC–Less2 and WtC–Less3 seem to be counterproductive in balanced and strong power situations. Therefore, similar to Proposition 6, we posit:

Proposition 7. A buyer in a balanced power situation can increase the supplier’s willingness to compromise in two cases: (1) when using a narrative that prioritizes the dyad perspective and that provides an economic rationale in a warm and friendly tone and (2) when using a narrative that prioritizes the buyer’s own perspective and that provides an economic rationale in a tough and firm tone.

In summary, we suggest that improving a supplier’s willingness to compromise using a narrative effectively depends on altering the perception of the supplier regarding the expected value of a potential buyer–supplier relationship. In particular, suppliers form expectations about the negotiation and the future potential of the buyer–supplier relationship based on the information available

to them, prior to the negotiation (Elfenbein, 2021; Thomas et al., 2015). The buyer's narrative provided during the start of the negotiation causes the supplier to adjust this initial evaluation to the new information. Our results indicate that less powerful buyers and buyers in a balanced situation were especially effective in improving their economic negotiation outcome through narratives. This finding makes sense because nondominant buyers typically have less economic leverage over the supplier. Accordingly, using a narrative to highlight the future economic value of the relationship might increase the supplier's evaluation of the buyer's overall contributions (Kim et al., 2005). This view, in turn, would give the buyer more negotiating power by increasing suppliers' expectations of future revenue (Krajewski et al., 2005) and thus could lead to a supplier's greater willingness to compromise in the present.

However, powerful buyers were not effective in increasing willingness to compromise using narratives. We suggest two reasons for this result. First, relatively powerless suppliers typically are already at risk of not receiving an appropriate share of value (Alvarez & Barney, 2001); this perception could hinder their willingness to accept fewer resources, regardless of the use of a narrative. Second, suppliers who are aware of the power differences might already have low expectations regarding their economic negotiation outcomes; in this case, some of the narratives might have had an effect on the supplier that was opposite from the one intended. Specifically, most narratives underlined in one way or another how the supplier might benefit from the interaction. For suppliers with low expectations of their potential outcomes, this approach could have created a perception that they actually were in a better position than they had assumed. This approach by the more powerful buyer could create a mismatch between expected and observed negotiation behavior (Thomas et al., 2021) and thus provoke the supplier to actually increase expectations regarding economic negotiation outcomes.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Our study both expands NTT and further develops theory on buyer-supplier negotiations for the SCM field.

Although we found the initial inspiration for our qualitative comparative study from the basic tenets of NTT, we change the direction of the narrative research stream by departing from the prevailing use of correlational approaches and introducing a configurational perspective. In doing so, we build on NTT by contrasting and specifying narrative effectiveness as a causally complex phenomenon that cannot be fully understood using

linear models (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017). Prior research in the narrative research stream generally has relied on traditional correlation-based approaches (e.g., Anaza et al., 2020; Escalas, 2004; Gilliam et al., 2014) that use net-effects thinking (Ragin, 2008), in the sense that an increase in variable x leads to an increase in variable y (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013). In contrast, fsQCA uses set-theoretic thinking (Ragin, 2008), which considers the effect of causal conditions in combination with each other. Based on our findings, the configurational approach seems useful for scholars conducting research on narrative design elements, contingent aspects, and their joint transport capabilities.

For the SCM field, we demonstrate that narratives are indeed an effective, yet so far overlooked, means to exert influence in buyer-supplier negotiations. However, narrative effectiveness in negotiations with suppliers, as a research phenomenon, is found to be causally complex, requiring configurational theorizing (Furnari et al., 2021; Ketchen et al., 2021; Ragin, 2008). Our configurational study uncovers the interplay between buyer-supplier specific narrative design elements, the structural buyer-supplier power situation, and negotiation outcomes. That is, the effect of buyer narratives depends on the design elements of the narratives, as well as on contingent factors specific to the SCM context (Carter, 2011). The seven propositions derived, therefore, represent the core building blocks of a theory specific to the buyer-supplier negotiation context. This part of our work is theory building.

Our detailed configurational findings also offer practitioners important guidance on how and how not to design narratives depending on the underlying power balance and the intended negotiation outcome. We show that very similar configurations of narrative design elements can be effective in one power constellation but ineffective in another (e.g., WtC-High1 and WtC-Less1a). In addition, we show that similar configurations of narrative design elements can affect relational and economic negotiation outcomes differently and even in contradicting ways (e.g., T-High1a and WtC-Less1a). This effect underscores our finding that in a buyer-supplier negotiation context, a narrative cannot be considered a panacea that would improve outcomes across the board.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

In this section, we discuss limitations of our research approach and highlight potential avenues for future research. We organize our proposed research agenda items using the "5W + H" format in Table 6, following Cao and Lumineau (2015).

TABLE 6 Proposed research agenda

What?	Who?	Where?	When?	Why?	How?
Area to investigate	Dispositional variables	Contextual variables	Temporal variables	Relevance	Managerial interventions
Key concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional design elements • Safeguarding mechanisms against narrative influence • Narrative effects beyond the immediate negotiation outcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation environment, power, firm culture, national culture, product complexity or specificity, relationship, network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing of narratives in the negotiation process, influence of time on type of narrative used, effect of narratives over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antecedents to narrative effects, potentially important applications of narratives in supplier management beyond negotiations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on the use of narratives and mitigation strategies, to be incorporated into sourcing teams' negotiation training
Possible research questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there other important narrative design factors? • How can procurement managers mitigate the effect of a sales manager's narratives? • Are nonfactual narratives considered to be deception? • Do narratives affect other behavioral elements in the dyad, such as opportunistic behavior and conflicts? • Can narratives be used to mitigate trust loss in the supply chain following a disruption or psychological contract breach or to restore trust afterward? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do contextual factors (e.g., power) and individual factors interact in a complex way to influence narratives' effectiveness? • Does the method of communication (e.g., email, phone, and face-to-face) influence the effectiveness of narratives? • To what extent does firm or national culture influence the use and effect of narratives? • Are narratives more effective in dealing with complex/specific products/services? • How does the relationship length and quality of the interacting managers and/or firms affect the use and effect of narratives? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are different configurations of narratives used in different stages of a negotiation or a buyer-supplier relationship? • How do narratives' effects change over a longer period of time? • To what degree is an actor held accountable over time for the promises made, implicitly or explicitly, in a narrative? • How are vision narratives that fail to play out as told considered in hindsight? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What motivates procurement managers or other sourcing team members to engage in narrative negotiations, and what hinders them from doing so? • How do experiences with narratives affect buyer-supplier dyad members' receptivity to narratives? • Can narratives make a difference in supplier compliance and commitment? • Can narratives facilitate supplier integration into new product development? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can telling effective narratives be taught and incorporated into the negotiation training of procurement managers and sourcing teams? • Are there effective mitigation strategies that individual sourcing team members can use to reduce the negative effects of salespeople's narratives?

(Continues)

TABLE 6 (Continued)

What?	Who?	Where?	When?	Why?	How?
Area to investigate	Dispositional variables	Contextual variables	Temporal variables	Relevance	Managerial interventions
Promising theories and references	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personality in narratives (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2008); firm maturity (Kor & Misangyi, 2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Institutional theory (Zucker, 1987); environmental factors in buyer-supplier relationships (Jap, 1999); relationship history (Thomas et al., 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time in management research (Ancona et al., 2001); timing in negotiations (Okhuysen et al., 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977); vicarious learning (Manz & Sims, 1981); commitment in the supply chain (Chae et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2008); supplier integration into new product development (Petersen et al., 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994)

Theory has to strike a balance between three aspirations: generalizability, accuracy, and simplicity; achieving more of one often leads to achieving less of the others (Weick, 1979). Configurational theorizing inherently is rather accurate, less generalizable, and less simple (Ketchen et al., 2021). Similarly, although our sampling for both studies followed stringent requirements, the results cannot be considered representative beyond the context of the study. In addition, our results might not be transferable to different cultural contexts or apply to all individuals to the same degree. The in-depth investigation and comparison of personal attributes, such as culture (including national, industry, and firm culture), age, gender, experience, and individual personality type, was beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, our first limitation is the lack of generalizability that stems from our prioritizing a targeted, highly conditional approach. Accordingly, future research could investigate how narrative effectiveness is subject to such aspects, yielding additional important insights for narrative negotiation research and contributing to the generalizability of our findings.

We have collected narratives based on a uniform stimulus, using vignettes, to identify important factors of narratives in buyer–supplier negotiations—factors that serve narrators well and other factors to rule out. Using this approach and the vignettes as constructed, we were able to exclude other contingent factors of negotiations, such as relationship, product type, product complexity, and industry norms. The approach also allowed us to observe the effectiveness of the same narrative on multiple targets, raising the reliability of our findings. A next step in such research might be to observe the real-life use of narratives in buyer–supplier negotiations through ethnographic studies. This approach would allow researchers to identify additional contingent and situational factors that are relevant to the use and effectiveness of narratives.

Another limitation is our conceptualization of willingness to compromise as an economic outcome measurement. Although the variable is apt for our context, which focuses on the initial phase of a negotiation, it does not capture the eventual decisions about prices or concrete offers made by the supplier; rather, it simply captures an intention to act in this manner. Nevertheless, research suggests that concrete behavior is driven by such intentions (Ajzen, 1991; Gino & Pisano, 2008) and, as such, can be evaluated using vignettes (Eckerd et al., 2021). In addition, Morales et al. (2017) argue that such an approach is useful for developing theory, whereas a more realistic approach, including concrete behavior, is more suitable for testing theory.

In Table 6, we outline specific questions about the use of narratives in negotiations that we see as next steps in this research stream, and we identify literature that could serve as a starting point to conduct the investigations. For example, one future investigation could focus specifically on weaker buyers' influencing attempts in supplier negotiations. Our research found no configurations that were consistently ineffective but three that were consistently effective at improving suppliers' willingness to compromise with buyers in this weaker power situation, suggesting that especially weak buyers might benefit from using narratives.

Our research results on narratives in buyer–supplier negotiations also have implications for other areas of behavioral SCM research. Most importantly, we have provided evidence that narratives can change a supplier's level of trust in a buyer. A large body of behavioral SCM research is linked to trust, and this research stream could therefore benefit from incorporating a narrative perspective—for example, in the areas of relational governance (Lumineau & Henderson, 2012), conflict resolution (Lumineau et al., 2015), or perceptions of justice (Narasimhan et al., 2013). In addition, investigating how narratives are involved in the formation of psychological contracts or the breach of such contracts (Eckerd et al., 2016) could be interesting. If narratives can be used to create expectations (Thomas et al., 2021) and to form psychological contracts, they also might be useful in repairing trust after the breach of a psychological contract (Kaufmann, Esslinger, & Carter, 2018) or to make relationships more resilient to transgressions.

Finally, we encourage researchers to conduct more configurational research, particularly in relation to B2B negotiations, and also in SCM more generally. Such work could help to advance SCM-specific theorizing (Carter, 2011; Flynn et al., 2020; Ketchen et al., 2021) and to improve our understanding of causally complex phenomena in organizational research (Fiss, 2007, 2011).

ORCID

Lutz Kaufmann  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9203-6611>

Moritz Schreiner  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5565-8147>

Felix Reimann  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9590-6811>

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