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Article

"Well, now they know": How mental illness identity management strategies influence leaders' responses

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Online-Appendix

"Well, Now They Know": How Mental Illness Identity Management Strategies Influence Leaders' Responses

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Junior Management Science 10(1) (2025) 176-200

Appendix A

Vignettes

Vignette I: Warning signs

Mr. Müller is an employee who has worked in your team for over 2 years. He has always been a responsible, enthusiastic, and solid performer, but his behavior and demeanor have changed in the last few months. He is often late for work, and when he arrives, he looks tense and exhausted, with bags under his eyes and an overall disheveled appearance. Nowadays, everything seems to take him very long: even tasks that he used to do with ease seem to be a struggle for him. You have also noticed that he has difficulty concentrating during meetings and remembering information. As a result, he is having trouble meeting deadlines and the quality of his work has decreased. He also seems to be interacting less with his colleagues and has withdrawn from social activities.

Vignette II: Transparency

During your conversation, Mr. Müller agrees that something is wrong and reveals that he has been struggling with a mental health issue. Because of this, he hasn't been sleeping well and feels exhausted nearly every day. He is aware that this situation is largely affecting his work performance. He also admits that he feels embarrassed about it, which is why he has been avoiding social activities.

Vignette III: Fabrication

During your conversation, Mr. Müller agrees that something is wrong and tells you that he has been having relationship problems. Because of this, he hasn't been sleeping well and feels exhausted nearly every day. He doesn't think that this situation is largely affecting his work performance. He also admits that he didn't want to talk with his colleagues about this, which is why he has been avoiding social activities.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hello [participant's name]. How are you doing today?

Before we start, thank you for taking the time to talk with me today and helping me out with my Master's thesis. The purpose of this interview is to explore how you as a leader perceive and react to different situations in your team. I am looking forward to getting to know you and listening to your thoughts and experiences.

Please feel free to express your honest personal opinions, there are no right or wrong answers. Everything you say here will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and used for research purposes only. That being said, are you ready to start the interview?

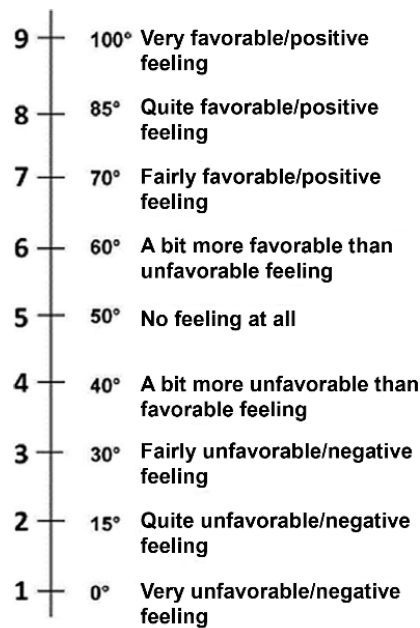
Part I: General background information

- What is your current position and role?
- How long have you been in a leadership position?
- How long have you been working in Germany?

Part II: Leader awareness

Please read the following scenario (*participant is presented with "Vignette I: Warning signs"*).

- How do you feel about this situation and toward Mr. Müller? Please rate this using the following feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorably and warm towards Mr. Müller, while ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorably towards him. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold in this situation, you would choose a rating of 50 degrees.

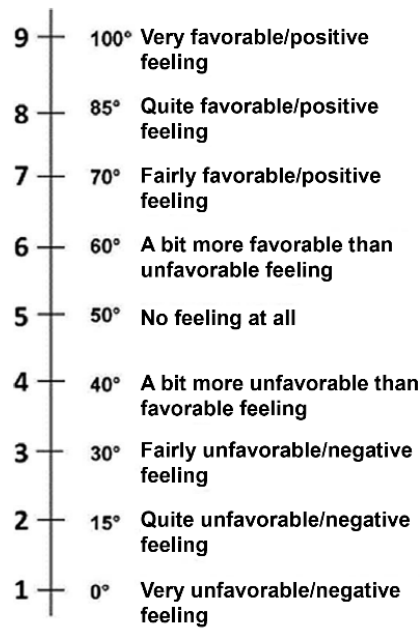


- What do you think should happen next?

Part III: Identity management strategy I

Imagine you talked with Mr. Müller about the situation, and he responded in the following manner - Please read the following scenario (*participant is randomly presented with either "Vignette II: Transparency" or "Vignette III: Fabrication"*).

- Please tell me 1 or 2 words that you would use to describe Mr. Müller.
 - *If the participant is having problems coming up with words:* If you'd like, you could also use a metaphor, a picture, or a place.
 - *If the participant seems stuck:* Let's move on to the next question. If you want to revisit this question at any point, feel free to let me know.
- Overall, how do you feel about this situation and toward Mr. Müller now? If we used the same feeling thermometer as before, would your rating change?

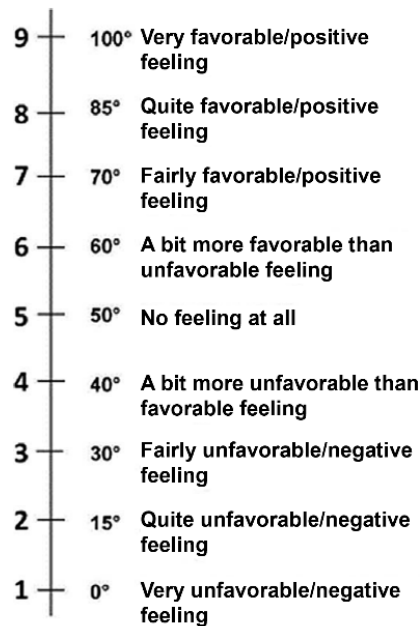


- How would you handle this situation?
- What would be your main concerns?
- What challenges do you foresee? What opportunities?

Part IV: Identity management strategy II

Now, imagine Mr. Müller reacted differently - Please read the following scenario (*participant is presented with the remaining vignette “Vignette III: Fabrication” or “Vignette II: Transparency”*).

- Please tell me 1 or 2 words that you would use to describe Mr. Müller.
 - *If the participant is having problems coming up with words:* If you'd like, you could also use a metaphor, a picture, or a place.
 - *If the participant seems stuck:* Let's move on to the next question. If you want to revisit this question at any point, feel free to let me know.
- Overall, how do you feel about this new situation and toward Mr. Müller? Using the feeling thermometer once again, would your rating change?



- Would you handle this situation differently?
- What would be your main concerns?
- What challenges do you foresee in this case? What opportunities?

Part V: Final questions and sensitive information

Company resources

- To the best of your knowledge, does your organization have any policies or resources to support you and your team if a situation like this were to happen?

Leadership training

- Have you ever participated in leadership training or coaching? If the answer is yes, was this provided by your employer, did you pay for it yourself, or other?
- If you had the chance to participate in a workshop/training on managing mental health issues in the workplace:
 - What would you like to learn specifically?
 - What would an ideal workshop/training look like? Think of methods that could be used in the training.

Experience with mental health issues

- We will now explore a couple of questions that refer to your personal experiences with mental health issues. Once again, I want to remind you that everything shared

here is completely confidential and you do not need to respond to these questions if you feel uncomfortable doing so.

- Thinking back to the scenarios we went through, have you faced a similar situation before? If the answer is yes, could you tell me what happened? (E.g., what did you do, how did the team react, did the employee stay with the company, etc.)
- Have you or someone close to you ever experienced a mental health issue before?

Demographics

- What is your age (in years)?
- How do you identify in terms of gender?
- What industry do you work in?
- How large is the company you currently work for?

Conclusion

Well, [participant's name], we have reached the end of our interview.

- Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share with me?

Thank you very much for all your insights and your patience today, this will certainly help with my master's thesis. I hope you have a great rest of the day.

Appendix C

Consent Form

Chair of Research and Science Management
TUM School of Management
Technical University of Munich



Consent Form

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview!
Below, we provide further information about the data collection procedure, our data protection policy, and contact information.

Procedure, privacy, and confidentiality

The interview is part of a Master's thesis, will be conducted in English, and recorded via Zoom. Your data, including video and audio recordings, may only be used for research purposes. No personal data will be stored in connection with the research data. The data are processed anonymously so that no conclusions can be drawn about individuals. This includes any identification of your person by the researcher or third parties. Your data will be stored in a secure TUM server (Leopoldstr. 139, 80804 Munich, Germany) and will be deleted after a year. All questions are voluntary. The data can be published in anonymous, aggregated form in scientific and/or practice-oriented formats.

The present consent to the processing of your data is voluntary, you can revoke the consent at any time without giving reasons and without disadvantages for you. You have the right to obtain information about the data concerning you, also in the form of a free copy. In addition, you can request the correction or deletion of your data. For this, please contact Paula Bao Quiero (paula.bao@tum.de) who is responsible for data processing.

Contact information

If you have a concern about any aspect of this interview and/or you would like to further discuss this Master's thesis, please contact Paula Bao Quiero (paula.bao@tum.de; student in the TUM Master in Management program) and/or the supervisor of her thesis Dr. Anna Brzykcy (anna.brzykcy@tum.de). They will do their best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint regarding data protection and privacy, please contact the data protection officer of the Technical University of Munich (beauftragter@datenschutz.tum.de).

Date: _____

First and last name: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix D

Transcription Protocol

Text formatting

Category	Procedure
Interviewer ID	Interviewer is coded as Interviewer (I).
Participant ID	Participant (interviewee) is coded as Leader (L), followed by an underscore and a two-digit identification number.
End of interview	Type "END OF INTERVIEW" in uppercase letters on the last line of the transcript.

Content

Adapted from McLellan et al. (2003).

Category	Procedure	Example statements
Sentence structure	Transcribe verbatim (i.e., exactly as said).	
Nonverbal sounds	Type in parentheses.	(laughs), (sighs), (coughs)
Mispronounced words	Transcribe as the individual said them and type the correct word in square brackets with forward slashes.	I thought that was pretty pacific [/specific/].
Reductions/contractions	Transcribe verbatim.	gotta, shouldn't, would've
Filler and repetitive words	Transcribe verbatim.	hm, huh, mm, mhm, uh huh, um, mkay, yeah, yuhuh, nah huh, ugh, whoa, uh oh, ah, ahah
Emphasized terms	Capitalize particularly emphasized terms.	It's VERY, VERY strange.
Word cut off	Insert a hyphen at the end of the last letter or audible sound.	He wen-, he went and did what I told him.
Inaudible information	Use "inaudible segment" or "unintelligible" in square brackets for small segments that are partially unintelligible or inaudible.	Identifying missing words in an audiotaped interview of poor quality is [inaudible segment].
Inaudible information	If a long segment of the recording is inaudible, unintelligible, or "dead air", indicate a time estimate in square brackets.	[Inaudible: 2 minutes of interview missing].
Overlapping speech	If there are short interjections, transcribe within the other person's text in parentheses using the corresponding initials.	I was new at the time (I: I see.) and therefore didn't know.

Category	Procedure	Example statements
Overlapping speech	If it is not possible to distinguish what each person is saying, insert "cross talk" in square brackets immediately after the last identifiable speaker and pick up with the next audible speaker.	Making it difficult to differentiate between one person's statement [cross talk]. This results in loss of some information.
Brief pauses	Use three ellipses to transcribe two- to five-second breaks in speech.	Sometimes, a participant briefly loses... a train of thought or...
Long pauses	Use "long pause" in parentheses to transcribe delays of more than five seconds.	Sometimes the individual may require additional time to construct a response. (Long pause) other times, he or she is waiting.
Questionable text	Place the text between parentheses with question marks.	I went over to the ?(club on Avalon)?.
Sensitive information	If an individual uses their own name, replace the information with the interviewee identification label.	My family always reminds me, "L_01, think..."
Sensitive information	If an individual provides others' names, locations, organizations, etc., enter equal sign before and after.	We ended up going to =O'Malley's Bar= over on =22nd Street=.

Appendix E

Coding Tables

Table E 1

Warning signs

Theme	Sub-theme	Definition of the sub-theme (coding rule)	Example quotes
Emotional reactions	Desire to help	Statements that express a desire and commitment to help Mr. Müller.	I would like to find a way to help him somehow. (Leader_10)
	Concern	Statements that express worry or care for Mr. Müller's overall well-being.	I would be concerned for the person. (Leader_08)
	Empathy	Statements that express empathy and personal understanding.	What I would feel it's empathy. Because I've been in that situation. I've been burned out. Or I've been with depression. So I know what it feels. (Leader_01)
	Sympathy	Statements that express sympathy or a sense of pity for Mr. Müller.	I feel sad for him, actually. (Leader_10)
	Surprise	Statements that express surprise.	And also surprised because it used to be so-, so different with him. (Leader_07)
Emotional evaluation	Favorable feelings	Evaluations above 5 (50°) in the feeling thermometer.	So I would say from 5 to up. 6, maybe, to try to understand what is happening. (Leader_05)
	Unfavorable feelings	Evaluations below 5 (50°) in the feeling thermometer.	I think I would point 4. A bit more unfavorable than... Yeah. (Leader_09)
	No feelings involved	Evaluations of 5 (50°) in the feeling thermometer.	I would not feel negative, maybe I'd be neutral and, because [...] I don't understand the-, the background and why he's behaving like that. (Leader_03)
Responsibilities of the leader ("What the leader should do")	Balancing employee well-being and team performance	Reflections on the role of the leader in maintaining a balance between supporting individual employees in difficult personal situations and ensuring that the work is carried out effectively for the benefit of the team and the organization.	As a leader you have responsibilities. And this is also that the employees are happy in the work and then that they bring the... Doing their job, right? (Leader_09)
Limits to what a leader can do	Involvement limited to work-related aspects	Reflections on how a leader can only inquire and intervene within a work context.	I think it's a thin line, right? You should not really... If it's something private, then you should-, I mean, it's difficult to-, to come to... Confront people with something private, obviously. (Leader_04)
Managing the situation	Sensemaking and problem-solving	Statements related to the dual process of understanding the reasons behind Mr. Müller's change in behavior and figuring out how to best help him.	I would have a talk with him and also show the tasks that we have and he has not been achieving, the targets, and try to understand why and if I can help with something. (Leader_03)
	Meeting one-on-one	Statements related to arranging and conducting a one-on-one meeting with Mr. Müller.	I'd probably arrange for a one on one meeting. You know, maybe even outside the office to take the pressure off a little bit and go for a coffee or something. (Leader_02)

Table E 2

Transparency

Theme	Sub-theme	Definition of the sub-theme (coding rule)	Example quotes
Emotional reactions	Desire to help	Statements that express a desire and commitment to help Mr. Müller.	I would, of course, try everything to help him get out of that situation, yeah. (Leader_08)
	Concern	Statements that express worry or care for Mr. Müller's overall well-being.	Well, my concern is really the mental health of Mr. Müller. (Leader_11)
	Empathy	Statements that express empathy and personal understanding.	Maybe that's the empathetic part, like human to human, but I would try to cheer him up a little bit. (Leader_05)
	Sympathy	Statements that express sympathy or a sense of pity for Mr. Müller.	I mean, I would be very sorry for him. That's, like, I say, "OK, it's sad that this happens to you". (Leader_06)
Emotional evaluation	Transparency engenders more favorable feelings	Positive changes compared to previous evaluations of Mr. Müller (higher rating in the feeling thermometer than previously).	It changes and my-, I think I'd go to up and positive, because I think due to the fact that the person's opened up with such a private thing and facing the problem, right? Do this brave thing, and I see as positive. (Leader_03)
Responsibilities of the leader ("What the leader should do")	Balancing employee well-being and team performance	Reflections on the role of the leader in maintaining a balance between supporting individual employees in difficult personal situations and ensuring that the work is carried out effectively for the benefit of the team and the organization.	I mean, there are like two sides. On the one hand, [...] he as a person. [...] So worrying a bit about like HIM just how he can get better. And on the other hand, [...] I already think about, "Okay, how can we solve that in the team?" (Leader_07)
	Focus on providing support	Statements that highlight a leader's responsibility to support their employees, including reflections on specific strategies and approaches to provide support.	So, I would try to do from the company side or from the task side. I would try to support him. (Leader_04)
	Managing communication with the team	Reflections on how to manage the communication of Mr. Müller's situation to the team to minimize the impact on team dynamics.	It's very difficult. I have to ask him how open we can talk about this issue. (Leader_12)
	Respecting confidentiality	Statements that highlight a leader's responsibility to respect their employees' need for confidentiality.	For sure without... Without revealing anything about what he said to me. (Leader_10)
Limits to what a leader can do	Support limited to work-related aspects	Reflections on how a leader can provide direct support only within a work context.	I could only offer help if he needs help in his business. It's not my business to help him with his mental health issue. (Leader_09)
	"I'm not a psychologist"	Statements that highlight that leaders are not mental health professionals and, as such, are not qualified to treat mental health issues.	But, I mean, of course, we can only support in a specific area. Because we're just the employer and, yeah, not his doctor's. (Leader_06)

Theme	Sub-theme	Definition of the sub-theme (coding rule)	Example quotes
Responsibilities of the employee ("What the employee should do")	Active engagement	Leaders' expectations of Mr. Müller actively trying to resolve his situation.	If he admits this, he has halfway solved the problem, he knows he's having a problem, so if he's not doing anything, then the situation changes. I mean, the conversation shifts. I mean, you're having a problem. Okay, I get it. But what are you doing to get over it? (Leader_01)
Supportive actions	Providing emotional support	Strategies focused on empathizing and providing reassurance.	And I'd try to calm him down and bring a bit more of understanding when it comes to the work and also make him aware that this is a disease, which can be treated. (Leader_03)
	Offering workplace accommodations	Strategies focused on adjusting work conditions, hours, and responsibilities.	I would check the workload and workflow and everything and try to manage his time. (Leader_05)
	Encouraging taking a break	Strategies that involve taking time off (days off, vacation, etc.)	So, there could be things like taking some time off because, you know, I mean, [...] it's an issue, right? So, probably he would not need to work for some time. (Leader_04)
	Encouraging seeking professional help	Strategies focused on encouraging Mr. Müller to seek appropriate (psychological) treatment.	We can advise him to do some mental health counseling or trainings. (Leader_13)
	Asking what the employee needs	Strategies focused on encouraging Mr. Müller to share his needs and ideas to improve his situation.	I mean, I can offer him any kind of options. So, if he prefers to keep doing the work he's doing because somehow it helps to keep his mind occupied, then we can do that. He prefers to be a little bit unloaded from work duties? We can do that as well. He'd prefer to take to take a period off? That's totally okay. So, we can tune the situation to what also he believes is the best for him. (Leader_11)
	Enlisting HR/P&O support	Strategies that involve asking HR or P&O for support.	And as I said, maybe, maybe loop in somebody from HR. See if they can provide some additional help. (Leader_02)
	Encouraging participation in social events	Strategies focused on encouraging Mr. Müller to engage in social activities.	And-, but like the example before, I can also give him these hints, "Do it. Go with your colleagues. Drink a beer". Or alcohol-free beer in a company term (chuckles). (Leader_09)
	Following up	Strategies that involve ongoing monitoring and follow-up support.	You gotta watch and monitor the situation. (Leader_08)
	Ease of resolution	Leaders' beliefs that mental health issues are more severe, complex, and could have longer-term effects.	It's not something that it's going to go away very fast or whatever. (Leader_01)
	Uncertainty of the cause	Reflections on the uncertainty of whether Mr. Müller's mental health issues were caused by work or by something in his personal life.	And with the mental health, for example, we don't know where it came from, right? It can also be a company issue. It could've been that he has too many tasks, too many, I don't know, tight deadlines, pressure from other colleagues, something like that. (Leader_04)

Table E 3

Fabrication

Theme	Sub-theme	Definition of the sub-theme (coding rule)	Example quotes
Emotional reactions	Desire to help	Statements that express a desire and commitment to help Mr. Müller.	He was doing a great work. Now since two years. And this is an unusual situation and I'd also be there for him in case he needs something. (Leader_03)
	Sympathy	Statements that express sympathy or a sense of pity for Mr. Müller.	It's not so much about feeling favorable or unfavorable. You can feel sympathetic, obviously, and open. And, you know, I would certainly be THAT. (Leader_02)
	Relief	Statements that express relief.	Well, I'm a bit more relaxed. Because it could be something much worse, right? Than this. (Leader_11)
	Frustration	Statements that express frustration or annoyance	I can understand his situation, but it's still unprofessional. Because your private stuff has not to interfere to your job. (Leader_09)
Emotional evaluation	Fabrication engenders more unfavorable feelings	Negative changes compared to previous evaluations of Mr. Müller (lower rating in the feeling thermometer than previously).	I think it would decrease. To be honest. So probably to 50 or 60. (Leader_04)
	Feelings do not change	No changes compared to previous evaluations of Mr. Müller.	Yeah, for me, it's a little bit difficult because so suddenly my feeling wouldn't change. (Leader_06)
Responsibilities of the leader ("What the leader should do")	Balancing employee well-being and team performance	Reflections on the role of the leader in maintaining a balance between supporting individual employees in difficult personal situations and ensuring that the work is carried out effectively for the benefit of the team and the organization.	My job would be to give them the space to and the support to resolve their, you know, their personal issue to the extent that it-, you know, they can, and to the extent that they can get them back into working effectively. (Leader_02)
	Focus on ensuring individual performance	Statements that emphasize the need to address Mr. Müller's performance issues.	I would go deep into the performance to get a clear scenario where we're both understanding the same. (Leader_01)
	Managing communication with the team	Reflections on how to manage the communication of Mr. Müller's situation to the team to minimize the impact on team dynamics.	But also the team, who may be affected because he's not delivering the work. So I'd try to be open and ask them to share with me. Really have one-to-ones. (Leader_03)
	Respecting confidentiality	Statements that highlight a leader's responsibility to respect their employees' need for confidentiality.	So, first of all, I will respect in case this person doesn't want to share with other colleagues. And keep that fully, fully confidential. (Leader_15)
Limits to what a leader can do	Support limited to work-related aspects	Reflections on how a leader can provide direct support only within a work context.	It's more of a personal issue. And there is no... There is not a lot that-, in we can change within, you know, within the team that would really support him with this. (Leader_04)

Theme	Sub-theme	Definition of the sub-theme (coding rule)	Example quotes
Responsibilities of the employee ("What the employee should do")	"I'm not a psychologist"	Statements that highlight that leaders are not mental health professionals and, as such, are not qualified to treat mental health issues.	But I wouldn't wanna put myself into a role of being their psychologist, right? Because, you know, that's not what I'm trained to do. (Leader_02)
	Active engagement	Leaders' expectations of Mr. Müller actively trying to resolve his situation.	But that I do expect that after some time he comes back to the performance level, at the motivation he had before. (Leader_06)
	Perceived controllability	Leaders' beliefs that it is Mr. Müller's responsibility to address and resolve his personal issues without letting them interfere with his work or that he should keep his personal and work lives separate.	In the first case, the health issue was the problem. In this case, Mr. Müller is, for me, the problem. (Leader_12)
Supportive actions	Providing emotional support	Strategies focused on empathizing and providing reassurance.	But he doesn't need to worry. I'm not going to fire him or her because of this. Of course not. Especially if he was a good performer. So is all fine. But that he needs to, you know, take it easy. (Leader_15)
	Offering workplace accommodations	Strategies focused on adjusting work conditions, hours, and responsibilities.	Obviously, what I can do as a boss is say, "Look", you know, I can reduce their workload so that they'd have more time to focus on their personal problem. (Leader_02)
	Encouraging taking a break	Strategies that involve taking time off (days off, vacation, etc.)	So, I would say, "Okay, when you are not able to work at all, then you have to think about, taking some time off or, yeah (chuckles), deal with your things that you have on a private side and then you have to come back to work and be on the same level that you had before." (Leader_06)
	Encouraging seeking professional help	Strategies focused on encouraging Mr. Müller to seek appropriate (psychological) treatment.	If situations like this go on for a long time, then I know it might be indelicate, but I can also suggest him to try to seek some help, because some of the patterns that we discussed before are patterns that may hint also to some form of depression. (Leader_11)
	Asking what the employee needs	Strategies focused on encouraging Mr. Müller to share his needs and ideas to improve his situation.	[...] then of course you need to talk to that person again and say "Your work is that much affected, that it drives down your teammates. So we need to find something... We need to mutually look for a solution. This is not gonna be continuing like that, so I can't let that happen. So what is your view, Mr. Müller? How we can change things?" (Leader_08)
	Following up	Strategies that involve ongoing monitoring and follow-up support.	And then we have to... We have to observe the situation over the next weeks. (Leader_13)

Theme	Sub-theme	Definition of the sub-theme (coding rule)	Example quotes
Concerns	Challenge if he does not "see" it	Reflections on the difficulties that could arise if Mr. Müller does not recognize that his situation is impacting his work.	Because he also, I mean, the most challenge, I think, is that he doesn't SEE that it is affecting his work, because I think if he would see it and be more self-reflected here, then there is a bigger chance that he would change. So this is, I think, the biggest challenge. (Leader_06)
	Challenge if he does not want to be helped	Reflections on the difficulties that could arise if Mr. Müller "puts up a barrier" and does not allow the leader to help.	If they want to open up, I'm clearer, I'm super open to it, but... If I read it that it's not the case, I just-. It's not the case, I mean... I don't see much opportunities. I mean, man, there's always an opportunity. Here I'm not seeing one. (Leader_01)