

CASE STUDY 02

Narrative Integrity Review - Workplace Conflict

Synthetic case created for demonstration purposes. No real individuals or confidential client information are represented.

1. Original synthetic statement

I have worked with Daniel for around eight months on the same team, although our roles are different and we normally have little reason to interact directly. Until last month, I had never considered it necessary to raise any formal concern about his behaviour.

On 14 July, during an online meeting that began at 10:00, we were discussing changes to a presentation intended for a client. Six people were present. At one point Daniel challenged a figure I had entered on slide 12, saying that it did not match the version approved the previous week.

I explained that I had used the document that was in the shared folder that morning. Daniel replied that the correct version had been uploaded the day before and added: "You should check before editing material intended for the client."

I found the comment inappropriate, particularly because the folder contained several versions of the same document and nobody had told me which one should be used. I nevertheless replied that I would check after the meeting, and the discussion continued.

Around twenty minutes later Daniel referred to the slide again, telling the other participants that it would be useful to introduce a clearer version-control system to prevent "situations like this" from happening again.

I did not respond. I did not want to turn a technical issue into a personal discussion in front of the team.

After the meeting, I sent him a private message asking whether we could clarify what had happened. He called me around ten minutes later.

During the call I explained that I had perceived his comments as unnecessarily critical and that it would have been preferable to discuss the mistake directly with me rather than refer to it a second time in front of the others.

Daniel replied that he had not intended to criticise me personally and that he was simply trying to avoid problems with the client. He also said that, in his view, I was "reading too much" into an ordinary work discussion.

At that point I reminded him that it was not the first time he had used a tone that could come across as belittling. I gave the example of a conversation several weeks earlier, when he had asked whether I was sure I could complete a task by the deadline.

Daniel said he remembered the conversation but had not considered it problematic. He added that he had asked because the project was behind schedule.

The call ended without us reaching any real agreement. There were no insults or threats and Daniel did not raise his voice. However, I was left with the feeling that my concerns had been

minimised.

We did not speak directly during the following two days.

On 17 July, during a conversation with Sarah, I discovered that Daniel had spoken to our manager about the issue. Sarah had not been present for the conversation, but told me that she had the impression Daniel was worried that I might make a complaint about him.

That same afternoon, the manager messaged me asking whether I had five minutes to talk.

During the call he asked generally how the project was going and then whether there were any problems within the team. I replied that there had been a disagreement with Daniel, but that I had not yet decided whether any formal action was necessary.

The manager told me that Daniel had already mentioned that we had had a disagreement and that he thought it would be useful to clarify the situation before it became bigger than necessary.

At that point I began to worry.

Until then I had considered the episode unpleasant but manageable. The fact that Daniel had chosen to involve the manager before I had made any report seemed to me like an attempt to establish his version of events first.

I cannot know what his intention was, but I consider it relevant that he chose to speak to the manager without informing me, particularly after I had explained that I felt publicly criticised.

I later checked the shared folder. The document I had used had indeed been modified the day before, but the previous version was still present and had an almost identical filename. There was no message in the project channel notifying the team of the update.

I kept screenshots of the folder, the message history and the message I had sent Daniel after the meeting.

I am not claiming that Daniel deliberately tried to harm me. However, considering the comment made during the meeting, the subsequent minimisation of my concerns, and the fact that he involved the manager before I did, I believe there is a pattern that deserves examination.

My main concern is to prevent a similar situation from happening again or an inaccurate impression of the way I work being created before I have had the opportunity to explain the context.

2. Initial observations from the analysis

A technical problem becomes a personal problem

The initial event is concrete: a slide contains a figure that does not match the approved version. Proposing a clearer version-control process is, in itself, a plausible organisational response. The statement nevertheless shifts the centre of gravity progressively from process to interpersonal conduct.

"I did not want to turn a technical issue into a personal discussion"

The sentence presents the narrator as intending to keep the matter technical. Immediately afterwards, however, the issue is moved onto a personal level through a private discussion about tone, criticism and previous incidents perceived as belittling. This is not necessarily a contradiction, but it marks a change of frame.

"Unnecessarily critical comments"

This is a subjective evaluation. The reported facts show a challenge to a figure and a proposal to improve the process; they do not, by themselves, establish that the comment was unnecessarily critical or personally demeaning.

"A tone that could come across as belittling"

The wording is cautious but indeterminate. No information is provided about volume, additional words, facial expression, sarcasm, interruptions or other observable features that would allow a third party to assess tone.

The deadline question

Asking whether someone is sure they can complete a task by the deadline may be experienced as belittling, but it may also be a routine operational check, especially if the project is behind schedule. The statement does not provide enough context to distinguish between those readings.

"Without reaching any real agreement"

The expected agreement is not defined: an apology, acknowledgement of inappropriate tone, a change in communication style, or something else. The phrase creates a sense of unresolved conflict without specifying the concrete object of agreement.

3. Perceptual language and evidential value

The statement repeatedly uses formulations such as **"I perceived"**, **"I was left with the feeling"**, **"I began to worry"**, **"it seemed to me"**, **"impression"** and **"my concerns"**. These may describe genuine internal states, but they do not automatically constitute evidence of the other person's intention or conduct.

Narrative risk arises when a subjective perception is progressively treated as if it increased the probability that the underlying interpretation is true. Feeling belittled is evidence of the narrator's experience; it does not, by itself, establish that Daniel behaved in a belittling way.

4. From episode to pattern

The statement links the slide incident to an earlier question about meeting a deadline and concludes that there may be a **pattern**. Two episodes do not automatically establish a pattern, particularly where both have plausible operational explanations. Frequency, context, comparators, exact wording and further consistent incidents would be needed.

The closing statement that the narrator wants to prevent "a similar situation" from happening again implicitly anticipates recurrence before recurrence has been established.

5. Involving the manager: fact and inference

The verifiable fact is that Daniel informed the manager that a disagreement had occurred. The later interpretation is that he wanted to **"establish his version of events first"**. That is an inference about intention, not a necessary consequence of the fact.

An equally compatible alternative is that Daniel considered it prudent to inform the manager after a private conversation he perceived as potentially escalating. The statement offers insufficient independent evidence to distinguish between the two hypotheses.

The subtler risk is an almost non-falsifiable structure: if Daniel does not inform the manager, he might be accused of concealing the problem; if he does inform the manager, the same action can be read as an attempt to construct a pre-emptive narrative. When almost any behaviour can confirm the hypothesis, particular caution is required.

6. A real problem that risks being obscured

The later check identifies a concrete process problem: the correct version had been modified the previous day, the old version remained available under an almost identical filename, and there had been no project-channel notification. Those facts support the hypothesis of unclear document management.

A proportionate response might therefore concern version naming, archiving obsolete files, update ownership and notifications. The narrative, however, tends to transform the procedural issue into an assessment of Daniel's character or intention.

7. A cautionary disclaimer that still preserves the accusation

The sentence **"I am not claiming that Daniel deliberately tried to harm me"** increases the appearance of balance. Immediately afterwards, however, the statement aggregates the meeting comment, alleged minimisation and manager involvement in support of a claimed pattern. Withdrawing the strongest accusation therefore does not remove the overall direction of the narrative.

8. Operational distinction

Observable facts: the challenged figure, multiple document versions, Daniel's reported wording, the version-control proposal, the private call, manager involvement, absence of an update notification, and retained screenshots.

Perceptions and inferences: unnecessarily critical comments, belittling tone, minimised concerns, an attempt to establish a version first, and the existence of a pattern.

Missing information: a recording or full record of the meeting, tone and context of the statements, comparable previous incidents, the exact Daniel-manager conversation, the narrator's concrete expectation regarding an "agreement", and team norms for error management and escalation.

9. Analytical summary

The statement contains real and potentially verifiable facts, but the narrative risk arises from the way subjective perceptions, ordinary workplace events and inferred intentions are progressively combined into a broader **pattern** that the reported facts alone do not establish.

The cautious conclusion is not that Daniel is right or that the narrator is lying. It is that **the available evidence supports a process problem and an interpersonal disagreement more clearly than it supports stronger conclusions about intentional belittling, premeditation or a behavioural pattern.**

10. Possible concise portfolio version

Case Study 02 - Narrative Integrity Review

A synthetic workplace complaint in which verifiable process failures, subjective perceptions and inferred intentions become progressively combined into a broader behavioural narrative. The review separates observable facts from interpretation, identifies evidential gaps and tests whether the claimed pattern is supported by the available information.

Possible public labels: **Subjective interpretation, Unsupported intent attribution, Pattern inflation, Process issue vs behavioural claim, Missing evidential context, Non-falsifiable framing.**

For the website version: show only a small number of highlights and general comments. Avoid publishing the full analytical reasoning or a step-by-step methodology.

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