The strange case of “Ugo Fantozzi robot”: When comics and Umberto Eco meet the organization

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Abstract
This article examines a graphic novel created by the management of an Italian banking company and periodically circulated via the company’s intranet as part of a training initiative directed at several thousands of employees working at the branch level. Theoretically, it draws on two main streams of literature: that on HRM systems as meaning-creating devices to govern the employment relationship, and that on the ever tighter relation between popular culture and organizations. In addition, it elaborates on Eco’s semiotic theory to decipher the ‘mystery’ represented by the negative reactions of employees and unions to the managerial initiative. On the basis of the available empirical material, ‘semiological guerrilla warfare’ (Eco, 1984) is advanced as a collective strategy to resist organizations’ internal mass communications. In the final part of the article, contributions, limitations and avenues for future research are discussed in light of the proposed theoretical and analytical framework.

Keywords
Critical HRM, employment relations, semiotics, Umberto Eco, comics, resistance