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ORGANISATIONAL SELF-DECEPTION

Exploring the dynamics and implications of self-deception in organisations

(Part 1 of 2)

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Organisational self-deception

(Part 2 of 2)

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Organisational self-deception

Exploring the dynamics and implications of self-deception in organisations

Abstract

This article explores the phenomenon of organisational self-deception, arguing that organisations, much like individuals, can fall prey to self-deceptive beliefs that impact their functionality, decision-making processes, and ethical standing. This article develops a comprehensive framework for understanding how self-deceptive strategies become embedded within organisations by integrating insights from group epistemology, philosophy of mind, and organisational theory. Beginning with the general concept of self-deception and principles of organisational theory, the paper demonstrates how the social systemic nature of organisational interactions can foster an environment conducive to self-deception. This phenomenon, termed self-deception in organisations, can escalate into organisational self-deception, where the organisation itself becomes self-deceived. Expanding on group epistemological notions, the article argues that if groups can hold beliefs, they can also engage in self-deception, leading to complex multi-dimensional problems in the organisation. The implications for organisational behaviour, decision-making, and ethical standards are explored, providing a nuanced understanding of how self-deceptive practices permeate different organisational levels. The study concludes by identifying potential avenues for future research and opportunities for developing training programs to mitigate the effects of organisational self-deception.

Keywords: self-deception, organisational self-deception, organisations, organisational structures, group epistemology, group beliefs, irrationality

1 Introduction

Can organisations, like individuals, fall prey to self-deception? Most likely, everyone encountered examples where the answer was a definitive yes. This article argues that self-deception, typically viewed through the lens of individual psychology in the philosophy of mind, can also be a profound and pervasive issue affecting entire organisations, both at the individual and structural level. Venturing into this less charted territory, this article employs the principles of group epistemology to shed light on the subtle yet powerful ways organisations can cultivate and sustain self-deceptive beliefs. Understanding how groups—beyond the individuals composing them—form, maintain, and act upon collective beliefs can uncover the nuanced dynamics of self-deception within organisational frameworks.

Organisations are complex social systems committed to what Achterbergh and Vriens (2010, 2019) term "rich meaningful survival". This survival hinges not merely on external metrics of success but crucially on maintaining coherent and authentic belief systems and decision-making processes. However, the very premises that enable cooperation within these systems also open avenues for self-deception.

This phenomenon can manifest at various levels of organisational life, seeping from individual to group, travelling through different operational premises, and ultimately distorting truths far from where they first took root. These dynamics can lead organisations to employ strategies that significantly limit organisations from realising their explicit strategic goals, thus forbidding organisations from reaching rich meaningful survival. This problem motivates my research question, which is partially based on the group epistemological assumption that groups can hold beliefs: How do self-deceptive beliefs form and propagate within organisations, and what are their implications for organisational behaviour, decision-making, and

ethical standards? Ultimately, can organisations deceive themselves, and how is this different from self-deception in organisations?

In Section 2, I explore the general idea of self-deception by drawing on insights from Funkhouser (2019), Mele (1997), and Schwitzgebel (2001, 2002). Next, I will touch upon my position regarding the debate around the phenomenon of self-deception and offer some reasons why this position would serve us better in integrating self-deception into an organisational framework. Then, I look at how self-deception works and the reasons why individuals engage in self-deception.

In Section 3, I build upon Achterbergh and Vriens' general definition of organisations as social systems to develop my thesis further. I show how organisations, due to their inherently social nature and the interactions among their members, can be fertile grounds for self-deception. By examining the characteristics of these interactions, I demonstrate how self-deception can occur in organisations on the individual level.

In Section 4, I turn to the collective aspect of belief formation. Building on Lackey's group epistemological theories, I show how organisations can deceive themselves—a phenomenon I call *organisational self-deception*. By examining how organisations may officially endorse beliefs that contrast with the personal convictions of their members, I explore the mechanisms through which (self-deceptive) group beliefs are formed and propagated, influencing organisational effectiveness and accountability.

Through this exploration, this article aims to bridge the gap between individual cognitive biases and organisational behaviour, illustrating how group epistemology and philosophy of mind provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the intricate phenomenon of organisational self-deception. This inquiry not only raises critical questions about the nature of belief and truth within organisational settings but also offers practical insights for fostering more transparent, accountable, and authentic organisational practices. In Section 5, I

explain my answer to the article's research question and identify potentially important areas for future research.

2 Self-deception

2.1 What is self-deception?

Self-deception, in the most general sense, is a specific form of belief formation. It is usually considered to produce an irrational belief in the presence of a motivational attitude, even though the subject holding the false belief has access to evidence to the contrary (Barnes, 1997; Funkhouser, 2005; Scott-Kakures, 2012; Lazar, 1999; Mele, 1997).

Historically, self-deception has been modelled on interpersonal deception, where the *Deceiver* knowingly believes a proposition p to be false while intentionally leading the *Victim* to believe it (Deweese-Boyd, 2023). In such cases, deception is intentional and needs the Deceiver to believe $\sim p$. At the same time, the Victim ends up believing that p . This analogy helps distinguish self-deception from mere cognitive errors, emphasising the intentionality of the false belief's acquisition and maintenance and explaining why self-deceivers are held responsible for their deception. If self-deception mirrors interpersonal deception, self-deceivers intentionally convince themselves that p , while knowing or believing $\sim p$.

However, this model raises two paradoxes: the (1) *static paradox* questions how a person can simultaneously hold contradictory beliefs, and the (2) *dynamic paradox* questions how one can intend to deceive oneself without undermining one's own intentions. Philosophers generally adopt some sacrificial approaches to solve these problems (Funkhouser, 2019, p. 29-30).

These solutions may help address the theoretical paradoxes of self-deception but also sacrifice certain elements—often arguably—vital to the phenomenon. By instead examining what should be commonly agreed upon, we can find a more

comprehensive understanding of self-deception. Furthermore, avoiding the theoretical debates could help us focus on the practical applications of the phenomenon, for example, seeing it work within organisational contexts.

Self-deception involves a distorted form of evidence handling influenced by motivational attitudes. However, it is essential to distinguish self-deception from other forms of irrational belief formation, such as wishful thinking or weakness of the will, which can appear similar but involve different underlying processes.

Weakness of the will, or *akrasia*, involves acting against one's best judgment. It represents a form of practical irrationality with a conflict between thought and action. Unlike self-deception, which entails a conflict within one's thoughts and beliefs, weakness of the will is characterised by the gap between knowing what to do and actually doing something else. This misalignment between thought and action highlights a different kind of irrationality than the internal cognitive conflict found in self-deception (Funkhouser, 2019, p. 78).

Similarly, wishful thinking involves forming beliefs based on what one desires to be true rather than on evidence or rational considerations. This straightforward bias is driven by the influence of desires on belief formation, leading to false beliefs without the complex dynamics of intentional or semi-intentional evidence manipulation seen in self-deception. While wishful thinking and self-deception relate to a false belief, the mechanisms differ significantly. Wishful thinking is more about the power of desires directly shaping beliefs, whereas self-deception involves a more profound interplay of motivational attitudes and distorted evidence handling (Funkhouser, 2019, p. 79).

Understanding these distinctions clarifies the unique nature of self-deception and its specific mechanisms, distinguishing it from other forms of irrationality or biased thinking. Recognising these differences is vital for addressing self-deceptive practices within organisations. For further clarification, let us look at the Minimal Conception of self-deception proposed by Funkhouser (2019).

2.2 The Minimal Conception and radical deflationism

As we can see, there is generally no agreement between the different theories of self-deception. There is a general and constant fluctuation between the solutions being accepted or argued for over time. In this section, I will shortly present the Minimal Conception of self-deception as proposed by Funkhouser, as I agree with him that we need to see what points all theorists should agree on so our discussions can start from a joint agreement instead of getting caught up in never-ending debates. Then, I demonstrate my stance, radical deflationism, and explain why I find it one of the most applicable to organisational contexts.

2.2.1 The Minimal Conception – a way for alternatives

The Minimal Conception aims to simplify the understanding of self-deception by focusing on two core aspects: (1) irrationality in how evidence is handled and (2) the presence of a motivational state—whether it be desires, fears, biases, or other cognitive influences (Funkhouser, 2019, p. 54). Many traditional models of self-deception, often derived from the Freudian/Davidsonian perspectives, are seen as overly complex. The Minimal Conception bypasses these complexities by concentrating on the essential elements commonly acknowledged across various frameworks.

According to the Minimal Conception, self-deception does not necessarily involve starting with a true belief and ending with a false one. Instead, it focuses on the inherently motivated misrepresentation where the self-deceiver responds irrationally to the evidence available. For example, consider an individual with an overly optimistic view of their career prospects. Despite receiving constructive feedback indicating areas for improvement, this individual selectively focuses on positive comments and ignores or downplays any critical feedback. Their belief in their inevitable career success is not based on a thorough and unbiased assessment of all available evidence but rather on a motivated bias to see themselves in a

favourable light. This approach allows for incorporating both intentional and non-intentional elements of self-deception, making it a versatile tool for analysing complex organisational behaviour. This includes the evidence they possess and could have easily accessed without their motivational biases.

Choosing the Minimal Conception is particularly suited for my purposes because it captures how organisations can become self-deceived without their knowledge. It demonstrates how both intentional and non-intentional elements of self-deception can operate within organisational contexts. Intentional self-deception involves a conscious effort to ignore or interpret evidence to align with desired beliefs. This can be seen in organisational practices where decision-makers deliberately overlook negative data to maintain a favourable image. On the other hand, non-intentional self-deception occurs without conscious control, driven by underlying cognitive biases and motivational states. For example, a communication department might exclusively highlight positive results in their reports and press releases. If these biased communications are then used as input for a yearly performance report, the organisation as a whole could end up with an overly optimistic view of its success, thus engaging in non-intentional self-deception. Recognising these non-intentional elements highlights the need for organisations to be vigilant and implement checks and balances to mitigate the impact of unconscious biases on their operations.

Self-deception can manifest in ways that provide short-term benefits or serve adaptive functions within the organisational context, thus being particularly prevalent for several reasons (Funkhouser, 2019, p. 230). For instance, maintaining positive emotions or avoiding unpleasant truths can lead individuals to overlook internal issues, thereby preserving a facade of well-being (feeling good). Similarly, setting overly optimistic goals can inspire and motivate teams but may lead to overcommitment and burnout if those goals are unrealistic (staying motivated). Moreover, presenting oneself in a favourable light to stakeholders might involve downplaying setbacks, which can be effective in the short term but risk repetitional damage when the truth surfaces (selling yourself). Lastly, fostering a unified

narrative to promote social harmony can suppress necessary debates and critical thinking, leading to a lack of adaptability (getting along).

Ultimately, employing the Minimal Conception sets the stage for a more inclusive and comprehensive exploration of self-deception within organisations. It provides a common ground from which different theoretical accounts can be discussed and integrated, offering a flexible yet robust framework for understanding and addressing the pervasive effects of self-deception in organisational life. However, while the minimal conception is valuable, it also presents difficulties in identifying the resulting state as self-deception, as there is little agreement on this according to Funkhouser: “Self-deception might not require the original possession of true belief (*qua* Deceiver) or the acquisition of false belief (*qua* Victim).” (Funkhouser, 2019, p. 51) To mitigate these difficulties, I propose to employ my theory of radical deflationism to simplify the identification of the resulting state of self-deception. This approach aims to provide more straightforward criteria for recognising self-deceptive states, enhancing practical implications for organisational management and design.

2.2.2 Radical deflationism and why it is helpful in organisational contexts

As the Minimal Conception is not clear about the resulting state of self-deception, we need to add further to it to identify signs of self-deception in organisational settings easily. To do this, I borrow Schwitzgebel’s concept of *in-between believing* (2001), which has its grounds in his *phenomenal dispositionalism* (2002). According to this view, beliefs are better understood as tendencies to act, feel, and think in certain ways under certain conditions rather than as static, binary propositional states that are either true or false. Based on these assumptions, beliefs are not fixed states but can be captured as dispositional clusters consisting of behavioural, phenomenal, and cognitive dispositions. For example, consider an employee who believes they are a top performer: behaviourally, they take on new projects enthusiastically; phenomenally, they feel confident and proud of their

work; and cognitively, they strategise about their career progression and interpret feedback positively.

Phenomenal dispositionalism captures the fluid and context-dependent nature of beliefs. It acknowledges that individuals often show contradictory tendencies that do not resolve clearly into traditional notions of belief. For example, a person might verbally affirm their confidence in a project's success while simultaneously experiencing anxiety and taking actions that suggest doubt. This “in-between” state of belief is particularly relevant for understanding self-deception, as it allows us to recognise the presence of partially held beliefs influenced by situational factors and internal motivations.

Against this view, some argue that we are losing the act of deception and the doxastic tension present in the static paradox. However, it is essential to note that all other theories of self-deception also employ some form of sacrificial solution to address the paradoxes inherent in the phenomenon. This view fits well into Funkhouser’s minimal conception, which only requires some motivational state and some irrationality in evidence handling. By adopting Schwitzgebel’s phenomenal dispositionalism, we can see how beliefs associated with self-deception are better described as conflicting dispositional clusters of behaviour, phenomenal experience, and cognition. This approach conserves the inherent tension of self-deception in two ways: (1) as a specific “self-deceived” dispositional structure that exhibits an “in-between” state of belief (tension between two propositional cognitive states), and (2) as a result of desire-driven biasing of evidence (tension between some motivational state and reality).

This approach seems particularly useful in organisational contexts for two main reasons. First, by accepting that inherent, automatic processes distort evidence handling in the presence of desires or other motivational states, it is easy to imagine how this could negatively affect an organisation when the reality is not what decision-makers wish to see. For example, the desire to meet targets or maintain a positive public image can lead to selective attention, where unfavourable evidence

is ignored or reinterpreted to fit a preferred narrative. Recognising these automatic processes can help organisations understand that self-deception can occur without deliberate intention, driven instead by underlying biases and motivational states.

Second, assuming that self-deception results in an “in-between” state of belief, we do not need to look for a specific cognitive end state to identify self-deception. Instead, we only need to look for signs of inconsistencies in dispositional structures. This means observing behaviours, emotional responses, and cognitive patterns that suggest conflict in the propositional content of beliefs. For instance, an organisation might publicly commit to sustainable practices while internally continuing to prioritise short-term profits over long-term environmental goals. These inconsistencies can be detected through actions, decisions, and expressed attitudes that do not align coherently, revealing the presence of self-deception.

Organisations can more effectively identify and address self-deceptive practices by focusing on these observable signs rather than pinpointing a definitive cognitive state. This approach can provide a great theoretical means for developing practical tools for organisational analysis, but more on this later. Now that we see what self-deception can be, let us turn to two other important questions: how does self-deception happen, and why do we self-deceive?

3 Organisations

Having explored the mechanisms of self-deception at the individual level, we now turn to the second main point of my paper on organisational self-deception: organisations. Organisations, as complex social systems built on interactions between individuals, provide a fertile ground for self-deceptive beliefs to take root and flourish. Drawing on organisational sciences, which provide essential insights and definitions on the dynamics of organisational behaviour, the nature of social systems, and the processes of organisational regulation, we can better see how self-deception can be applied to organisational frameworks.

Achterbergh and Vriens' view on organisations is particularly well-accepted and influential in the field. Their comprehensive framework on organisational design and regulation offers valuable insights into how complex social systems operate and interact. Engaging in such interdisciplinary explorations is crucial, as it allows us to draw on the strengths of both fields to understand better and address the problems of self-deception within organisational contexts.

3.1 Organisations as social systems experimenting

According to Achterbergh and Vriens (2010, 2019), organisations are complex social entities that operate under two fundamental characteristics: they are experimental in nature, and they function as social systems. These characteristics are essential for understanding the dynamics of organisational behaviour and processes and are also relevant for establishing the connection with self-deception. The experimental nature can show us what organisations can deceive themselves about, whereas the social systemic nature—while providing additional topics for organisational self-deception—offers insight into where self-deception can enter organisations.

Firstly, organisations are inherently experimental. Every decision made within an organisation resembles a form of hypothesis testing, where goals, processes, and regulatory actions are continuously selected and assessed under conditions of uncertainty. This experimental approach is driven by the need for organisations to survive and thrive in their environments. Organisations constantly need to set and achieve their goals, adapting to disturbances and realising these goals through what can be described as 'transformation processes'. These processes translate inputs, such as raw materials or strategic reflections, into outputs, like finished goods or formulated strategies. These transformation processes occur at different organisational levels and details, ranging from operational tasks to strategic planning. However, these processes are subject to disturbances that must be

managed through ‘operational regulation’, ensuring that the organisation can still achieve its intended outcomes despite challenges.

By focusing on rich, meaningful survival, organisations can ensure that their experimental nature and goal-setting processes support their survival and enhance their broader contributions to society and the environment. Rich meaningful survival entails formulating and realising goals that significantly contribute to the organisation’s environment, ensuring that its existence is separate and valuable. This approach is vital because it helps organisations build resilience, maintain stakeholder trust, and contribute positively to the community and environment, ultimately helping people live more fulfilled lives.

Secondly, organisations are social systems characterised by dynamic interactions and communications among their members. The essence of an organisation as a social system is the network of interactions and communication that occur within it. These interactions are not isolated but are interconnected, influencing and shaping organisational decisions and actions. Each communication act within an organisation refers to and builds upon previous discussions and decisions, contributing to a systemic network that defines the organisational culture and operational modalities.

The interplay between organisations’ experimental and social systemic characteristics forms a complex system where decisions, communications, and actions are interdependent. This system is fundamental for the adaptation and evolution of organisations, allowing them to navigate the uncertainties of their operational environments effectively. Understanding this dual nature of organisations—both as laboratories for strategic experiments and as networks of social interactions—provides a comprehensive view of how they operate and adapt over time (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2010, p. 6-20), which is crucial for understanding how self-deception can permeate these systems.

3.2 Interactions and interaction premises

Kuntz and Delhin (2019) emphasise the social embeddedness of self-deception, proposing that it arises from the interplay of intrapersonal and relational factors within organisational contexts. They argue that self-deception is both a subconsciously motivated phenomenon and a result of ongoing interactions between individuals and their environment. This perspective highlights how organisational practices and social dynamics can reinforce self-deception, making it a collective phenomenon that affects group beliefs and decision-making processes. Their view soundly argues for the social aspect of self-deception, which makes it a good candidate for infecting social systems, such as organisations.

To understand how self-deception can occur in organisations, we need to dig deeper into the organisation's social systemic nature. Organisations are social systems created by and from the interactions of the individuals participating in them. Interactions can be considered the exchange of beliefs, as they are realised through communication. These interactions also determine the form of future interactions, highlighting two key points: (1) constant and meaningful interaction is vital among the members of an organisation, and (2) the interactions are regulated by 'interaction premises' (Achterbergh & Vriens 2019, p. 24). Interaction premises refer to the organisational conditions that determine these interactions.

Interactions are what makes an organisation social in nature; these interactions should not be just random interactions. To serve the organisation's purposes, they need to be meaningful. For these interactions to be meaningful, they must focus on specific activities rather than being random exchanges. Achterbergh and Vriens identify four basic activities determining the meaningfulness of these interactions that every organisation should perform to achieve meaningful survival (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2019, p. 25-27):

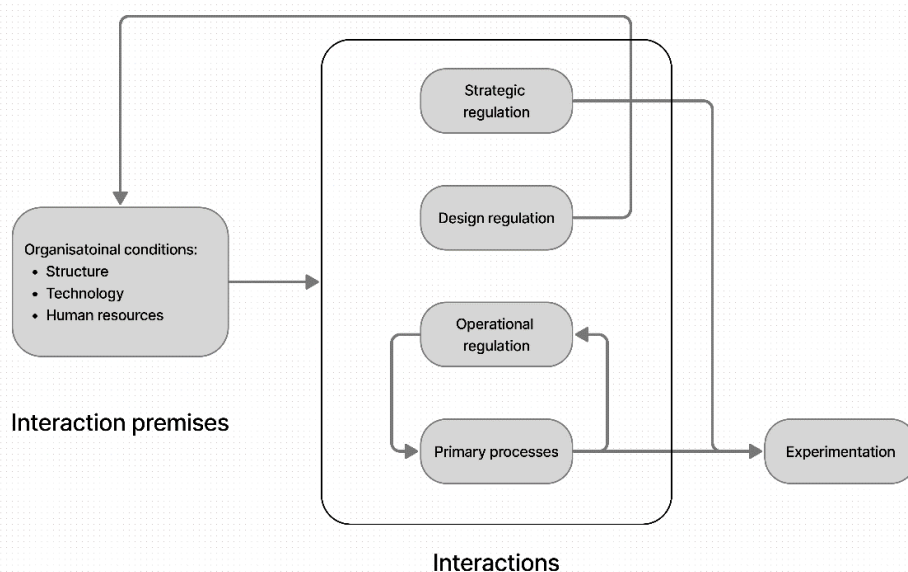
1. **Performing primary processes:** Transforming inputs into outputs ('transformation processes'), resulting in the organisation's products and services.

2. **Operational regulation:** Handling disturbances affecting the primary processes.
3. **Strategic regulation:** Setting goals related to the primary processes.
4. **Regulation by design:** Providing the ‘organisational conditions’ necessary for performing the first three activities.

The ‘organisational conditions’ that determine the execution of and are necessary for these activities include (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2019, p. 27):

1. **Organisational structure:** Defines how tasks are allocated and related, determining the actions and technology used to achieve goals.
2. **Technology:** Incorporates all non-human resources used in organisational activities, such as buildings, machines, tools, and computers.
3. **Human resources:** Refers to the individuals working in the organisation, their skills, knowledge, and motivation.

Interaction premises (organisational conditions) set the focus of interactions, creating a reciprocal relationship where interactions can redefine the premises. The diagram below shows the connections between organisational conditions and the four primary activities (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2019, p. 28):



Maintaining an organisation's existence involves constant experimentation within its interactions and interaction premises. This relationship between infrastructure (conditions) and organisational activities illustrates that interactions gain their meaningfulness with their self-referential nature, as the members of the organisation communicate about the organisational conditions and their activities. These discussions happen through the exchange of beliefs. Since beliefs drive and determine the outcome and future possibilities of these interactions, there is a significant potential for self-deception. For instance, individuals in an organisation might engage in self-deception for the reasons mentioned earlier (feeling good, staying motivated, selling themselves, getting along).

As beliefs are exchanged and propagated through these interactions and interaction premises, self-deception can enter organisational processes right where interactions happen, essentially at every organisational relation. Whether through biased communication or motivated misinterpretation, the very structure of these social systems makes them vulnerable to self-deception, affecting the decision-making of participating individuals. Understanding these relationships is essential to seeing how pervasive self-deception can become within an organisation, as it can travel through different premises, affecting several organisational units based on the exchange of only one self-deceptive belief.

3.3 Self-deception in organisations

In this section, I wish to show how self-deception can enter organisations and lead to distorted beliefs and irrationality in decision-making. To understand organisational self-deception, first, we need to see how self-deception occurs in organisations. It is necessary to distinguish organisational self-deception and self-deception in organisations. By organisational self-deception, I refer to the phenomenon where the organisation itself is the subject of self-deception, compared to instances where self-deception starts with individuals or at specific points in an organisational structure and permeates to other parts, consequently leading to organisational self-deception. This relation can be described as causal and systemic.

In other words, self-deception within organisations, originating from individual or departmental biases, can accumulate and spread, eventually causing organisational self-deception where the organisation as a system adopts distorted beliefs and self-deceptive practices.

Based on Achterbergh and Vriens' framework, the processes maintaining an organisation's existence through experimentation often presume that individuals act as perfectly rational agents. This assumption underpins analysing how organisations experiment with goals, processes, and regulatory activities within their complex social systems. However, empirical evidence from cognitive and behavioural sciences consistently suggests that individuals rarely embody the ideal of perfect rationality (for further reading on the matter, see Kahneman, 2011; Toth, 2013; Oaksford & Hall, 2016; Chan et al., 2021).

The nature of human cognition is fraught with irrational tendencies that can significantly influence practical reasoning, information/evidence handling, interpretive skills, etc. These cognitive imperfections can lead to self-deception within organisations, where individuals and groups may distort facts, overlook critical evidence, or rationalise failures that align with their desires or other motivational attitudes. Recognising the potential for self-deception is crucial in understanding how organisations might deviate from rational decision-making processes and how these deviations might affect their ability to achieve genuine, meaningful survival.

While organisational design is often intended to apply checks and controls to mitigate the effects of individual irrationality, these mechanisms are not immune to the same cognitive biases and errors they are designed to counteract. For instance, decision-makers responsible for oversight may fall prey to confirmation bias, groupthink, or overconfidence. Consequently, the processes intended to ensure rational interactions and decision-making can become infested by irrationality, leading to systemic self-deception. This highlights the complexity of maintaining

rationality within organisational frameworks, as the layers of checks and control mechanisms can also propagate cognitive distortions.

4 Organisational self-deception

Let us now turn towards the last part of my argumentation: *organisational self-deception*. In this section, I will connect the two concepts of my theory using group epistemology as a methodological tool. Just as individuals can become self-deceived, so too can organisations, with implications for their functionality, ethical standing, and long-term survival. The notion that organisations can deceive themselves originates from the group epistemological assumption that groups can have mental states, like beliefs. As we have seen, organisations are complex social systems with constant interaction among their members to realise transformation processes and reach goals. Interactions happen in such a way that beliefs are conveyed between individuals or different organisational units. Therefore, organisations can be a fertile ground for self-deceptive beliefs and even become self-deceived themselves.

4.1 Group beliefs as the primary operator for organisational self-deception

Understanding how organisations can self-deceive requires a robust conceptualisation of group beliefs or the group's propositional states in general. While individual self-deception can certainly influence organisational behaviour, organisational self-deception as a collective phenomenon hinges on how beliefs are formed, maintained, and acted upon at the group level. Lackey's (2021) work on group epistemology provides an essential framework for this part of my discussion, building on two main approaches to understanding group beliefs: the summative and non-summative accounts.

Lackey builds her own Group Agent Account (GAA) to resolve many of the problems posed by the former options. I use her framework as a starting point to

develop a detailed account of group self-deception. While Lackey's GAA works well for clear-cut group beliefs, I identify its limitations when dealing with in-between cases of group belief that result from group self-deception. To address this, I propose an adaptation called group dispositionalism, which builds on the considerations of the phenomenal dispositional account of belief I employed in my radical deflationist view.

4.1.1 Summative and non-summative accounts of group belief

Historically, the literature on group epistemology has taken two different approaches to explaining collective phenomena in general. One is a summative approach, which suggests that we can explain collective phenomena without needing new theoretical resources by relying on our understanding of individual phenomena. The other is a non-summative approach, which suggests that collective phenomena cannot involve the mere aggregation of individual phenomena.

The summative account posits that a group believes that p if and only if all or most of its members individually believe that p . This view suggests that group belief is merely an aggregate of individual beliefs. However, this approach encounters problems, such as when a group is said to believe something even though not all or most members hold that belief. For instance, a university president might declare that the institution believes the quarter system is detrimental to students' success, even if most of its members do not hold this belief.

In contrast, the non-summative accounts, such as the Joint Acceptance Account (JAA), argue that a group's belief is not reducible to the sum of individual beliefs. Instead, it requires that members jointly accept a proposition. According to the JAA, a group believes that p if its members jointly accept p , even if no individual member believes q personally.

Lackey critiques both summative and non-summative accounts, noting that summative accounts cannot account for cases where group beliefs diverge

significantly from individual beliefs. Non-summative accounts, while addressing this issue, fail to distinguish between genuine group beliefs and instances where groups collectively lie or engage in group bullshit. A group lie involves the group asserting a belief that p while actually believing that $\sim p$, with the intention to deceive. In comparison, group bullshit involves a group asserting a belief that p with complete disregard for the truth of p solely to serve the group's purposes.

For example, in the case of a tobacco company, the board of directors might jointly accept and assert that smoking is safe, despite believing it to be harmful, purely for financial gain. According to the JAA, this would count as a group belief, failing to recognise it as a group lie. Similarly, in the case of an oil company asserting that their oil dispersants are environmentally safe, despite having no regard for the truth, the JAA would again incorrectly classify this as a group belief rather than group bullshit.

Based on these flaws, Lackey suggests that the failure to distinguish between genuine group beliefs and group lies or bullshit in non-summative accounts is a decisive objection. This inability limits the epistemic and moral evaluation of group beliefs, making it challenging to hold groups accountable for the truthfulness of their assertions.

4.1.2 Group agent account

To overcome these shortcomings, Lackey proposes the Group Agent Account (GAA), which satisfies both the Group Lie and Group Bullshit Desiderata:

“A group, G , believes that p if and only if: (1) there is a significant percentage of G 's operative members who believe that p , and (2) are such that adding together the bases of their beliefs that p yields a belief set that is not substantively incoherent.” (Lackey, 2021, p. 40)

Operative members are those individuals within a group who play a crucial role in forming and expressing the group's beliefs. These members are typically involved

in decision-making processes and hold positions that influence the group's actions and statements. In an organisation, operative members could be key executives, board members, or other influential stakeholders who contribute to shaping the group's collective stance.

The second condition of GAA entails that the operative members' beliefs must form a coherent set when considered together. This means that the combination of individual beliefs held by these operative members should not lead to contradictions or inconsistencies. The coherence condition ensures that the group's beliefs are logically structured and can function as the basis for a rational agent. For example, suppose the operative members of an organisation believe that adopting a new technology will improve productivity. This belief must be supported by consistent evidence and rational justifications, avoiding any internal contradictions.

However, this account of group belief works well if the belief in question is clear and straightforward. The second condition of GAA conflicts with in-between cases of belief, such as those resulting from self-deception, as considered in the context of radical deflationism. The coherence requirement might be violated because in-between cases of belief seem inherently incoherent or conflicted. In radical deflationism, self-deception leads to a propositional structure based on which it is unclear whether the subject truly believes one proposition or the other, creating a state of ambiguity.

To avoid this violation regarding group self-deception as a form of 'in-between group belief', we need to take the GAA one step further and adopt a view that can be called group dispositionalism. Like individual dispositionalism, group dispositions can have similar structures and categories (behavioural, phenomenal, cognitive). Building on GAA, this approach could be formulated as follows:

Group Dispositionalism: A group, G, has the belief p , if and only if:

- (1) a significant percentage of G's operative members fit a dispositional structure in relation to p , $DS(p)$, and
- (2) the combination of their (behavioural, cognitive, phenomenal) dispositions that p forms a substantively coherent dispositional structure set.

Using Lackey's GAA as a basis, it becomes clear that relevant dispositions are those that reflect the collective tendencies, habits, patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and emotions that emerge from the interactions of its members. These structures are not merely a sum of individual members' dispositions but arise from the dynamic interplay of individual contributions within the group.

Dispositional structures can be categorised similarly to individual dispositions. Behavioural dispositions induce the group's typical actions and reactions in various situations, such as how a company responds to market changes or how a committee makes decisions under pressure. Cognitive dispositions refer to the group's thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving patterns involving the collective knowledge base, decision-making processes, and problem-solving strategies. Although challenging to attribute to groups, phenomenological dispositions can be considered as the shared emotional climate or collective sentiments, such as a company undergoing significant restructuring collectively exhibiting anxiety and uncertainty, which affects its overall mood, productivity, and decision-making.

This approach ensures that the dispositional structure captures the group's collective tendencies rather than just individual perspectives. The belief must genuinely represent the group, preventing cases where a belief is attributed based on a minority's perspective. Additionally, the combined dispositions of the members must form a coherent set, avoiding internal contradictions and maintaining the integrity of the group's belief system. A belief set that is substantively coherent allows for the group's beliefs to be logical and to function as the basis of rational decision-making.

With this, we have set the stage to move into the domain of in-between cases of group beliefs, which then can be formulated as:

In-between Group Belief: A group, G , is in an in-between state of belief regarding p and $\sim p$ if and only if:

- (1) there is a dispositional structure in relation to p and $\sim p$, $DS(p\&\sim p)$,
- (2) there is a significant percentage of G 's operative members who have either: (i) $DS(p)$, $DS(\sim p)$, or $DS(p\&\sim p)$, and
- (3) the combination of their (behavioural, cognitive, phenomenal) dispositions that p or $\sim p$ forms a dispositional structure set that consists of such a set of dispositions that it is not obvious which proposition is held by G or its operative members.

By focusing on the dispositions of operative members, we can ensure that the group's beliefs are a true reflection of its collective cognition. This is particularly important in complex entities where beliefs are formed through interactions among members. For example, a company's marketing team might believe that a product will succeed based on positive feedback from focus groups, while the finance team might be sceptical due to cost concerns. These varied dispositions—where some members are optimistic, and others are cautious—demonstrate the ambitious nature of collective belief formation. By examining these different dispositional perspectives, we can better understand the details of a group's overall belief and ensure it accurately represents its members' collective input and reasoning.

By adopting group dispositionalism, we can account for the complexities and ambiguities inherent in in-between cases of group beliefs, particularly in cases of group self-deception. This model helps us understand how groups can hold beliefs not placed on a binary scale, reflecting the often conflicted nature of collective cognition and decision-making. This approach aligns with the idea that beliefs, especially in large and complex entities like organisations, are not always straightforward and coherent but can exist in a state of flux and uncertainty.

4.1.3 Group self-deception

Building on our group dispositional account of in-between belief and integrating it with the principles of radical deflationism, we can construct a model of group self-deception. Radical deflationism posits that self-deception involves distorted cognitive processes driven by motivational states, resulting in an in-between case of belief. To formulate a radical deflationist account of group self-deception, I propose the following:

Group self-deception account: A group, G , is self-deceived that p if:

- (1) There is a group-level desire (or other motivational state) towards some state of the world, in this case, p .
- (2) Cold biasing mechanisms become “hot” in the presence of the motivational state, distorting the handling of evidence regarding p . For instance, operative members might selectively gather or interpret data to fit their desired outcome.
- (3) Parts of the group will end up in either: (i) $DS(p)$, $DS(\sim p)$, or $DS(p\&\sim p)$
- (4) The group forms a dispositional structure in relation to p that reflects an in-between state, $DS(p\&\sim p)$. This means that while the group may show dispositions towards p , it simultaneously exhibits dispositions suggesting $\sim p$.

Allowing the desire to operate purely at the group level, we acknowledge that groups can have collective motivational states that transcend individual members’ motivations. These collective desires can drive the group’s overall direction and influence how evidence is handled and interpreted within the group. For example, a company’s executive team may have a collective desire to portray the company as financially healthy to attract investors, even if some individual members have reservations. This shared desire can lead to biased interpretations of financial data, resulting in group self-deception.

By applying the group dispositional account, we move beyond Lackey’s Group Agent Account to accommodate the complex and often incoherent nature of group

beliefs. At the same time, we also ensure that group self-deception is not merely a collection of individual self-deceptions but a shared state influenced by the collective dynamics of group belief formation. This model allows us to understand how self-deception can become embedded in the fabric of organisational belief systems, leading to decisions and actions that are not fully aligned with reality. This understanding is vital for addressing and mitigating the impact of organisational self-deception.

4.2 Dimensions of organisational self-deception

Now that we have seen how self-deception can take place on the collective level, let us examine the different dimensions of organisational self-deception resulting from the structural characteristics of organisations. In this section, I will explore some critical dimensions of organisational self-deception: the interplay between individual and collective self-deception and the distinction between localised and systemic self-deception. By understanding these dimensions, we can gain insights into how self-deception manifests and affects organisational behaviour and decision-making. These insights can be valuable in identifying the affected organisational premises, which would help us design better intervention and prevention protocols.

4.2.1 Individual and collective self-deception

Having discussed the distinction between individual and collective self-deception, we now look at specific examples to illustrate how these phenomena manifest in organisational contexts. We aim to highlight the different dynamics and implications of self-deception at both individual and collective levels and show how these examples illustrate the interplay between individual biases and collective organisational practices.

Individual self-deception involves cognitive biases and distortions within a single self, such as ignoring evidence that contradicts a desired belief. In organisations, individual self-deception can aggregate and evolve into a collective phenomenon.

For instance, if multiple employees in a department individually believe that their team is performing exceptionally well despite evidence to the contrary, this belief can collectively shape the department's overall perception of reality. This collective perception is formed and maintained through specific organisational practices, such as regular communication (department-wide emails and newsletters) highlighting only successes and omitting failures. The organisational culture, reinforced through mission statements and values, emphasises the "can-do" attitude and success at any cost, discouraging employees from voicing concerns or criticisms. Leadership plays a crucial role in modelling this behaviour; for example, managers might reward employees who report positive outcomes while ignoring or even reprimanding those who bring up problems. In this case, self-deception starts at the individual level and is reinforced collectively through organisational practices.

Conversely, collective self-deception can influence individuals within the organisation. If the organisational culture promotes the idea that the company is an industry leader regardless of declining market share, employees might adopt this belief, further reinforcing collective self-deception. This culture is communicated through corporate communications, highlighting industry awards and successful projects while omitting market challenges. Leadership behaviours, such as public praise for those aligning with the positive narrative and ignoring those who raise concerns, create a clear message about what is valued. These combined practices and interactions ensure that employees internalise and propagate the belief in the company's exceptional status, perpetuating collective self-deception.

To further distinguish collective self-deception from individual self-deception, consider scenarios where self-deception emerges explicitly from collective dynamics rather than from a mere aggregation of individual biases. One clear case could be an instance of "groupthink", where the desire for harmony and conformity leads to irrational decision-making. Group members suppress dissent, ignore risks, and rationalise flawed decisions to maintain unanimity. While this phenomenon arises from group dynamics and social pressures, individual self-deception plays a crucial role, as individuals may convince themselves that their objections are not

important or well-founded, handling evidence irrationally due to the desire to conform and avoid conflict. This individual self-deception feeds back into the collective dynamic, reinforcing the overall pressure on individuals to conform. This illustrates well how individual biases can be both a product of and a contributor to the collective phenomenon.

Another example could be the development of organisational myths—narratives or beliefs collectively created and sustained to maintain morale or justify specific actions. For instance, an organisation might believe its product is the best despite evidence of superior competitors. This belief is reinforced through a combination of individual and collective self-deception (Kuntz and Dehlin, 2019, p. 135.). Individually, employees may focus on positive feedback about the product and disregard negative reviews or market data, convincing themselves that any criticisms are unfounded. Collectively, these biases are amplified through internal communications and corporate rituals, creating a powerful feedback loop where personal biases are validated and reinforced by the group, making the myth more resilient and pervasive. This illustrates that collective self-deception is built upon and perpetuates individual self-deception, creating a cohesive but potentially flawed organisational narrative.

Moreover, organisational self-deception can manifest as strategic blind spots, where collective overconfidence leads to ignoring critical threats or weaknesses. For example, a technology company might dismiss disruptive technologies due to a shared belief in its market dominance. This collective oversight is embedded in organisational strategies and decision-making processes.

It is beneficial to think of self-deception in both collective and individual terms because collective self-deception involves unique dynamics that are not present in individual self-deception. Collective self-deception is reinforced through social interactions, cultural norms, and shared beliefs, making it more resilient and pervasive. Kuntz and Dehlin (2019) emphasise that self-deception is deeply embedded in the social and organisational context, arising from the interplay of

intrapersonal and relational factors. This social embeddedness also supports the assumption that organisations, as social systems, inherently hold the potential for self-deception. Self-deception at all three levels—individual (intrapersonal), social, and collective—can reinforce itself at each level, highlighting the pervasive nature of self-deception within organisational structures. This interconnectedness points to the potential for organisations to self-deceive comprehensively, affecting decision-making processes, communication channels, and cultural norms.

Addressing collective and individual forms requires different approaches. Strategies to counter individual self-deception might include personal reflection, feedback, and cognitive behavioural interventions. However, there may be more effective strategies for collective self-deception, which group dynamics and organisational culture maintain. Instead, addressing collective self-deception might involve organisational interventions such as promoting a culture of critical reflection, encouraging dissent and diversity of thought, and ensuring transparent communication. Leaders need to actively manage and reshape organisational narratives and symbols to counteract self-deceptive tendencies.

When designing interventions (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2019, p. 104), taking self-deception into account can be beneficial for their success. Interventions should aim to create changes that lessen, mitigate, or prevent the potential for self-deception. For instance, fostering a culture of transparency and critical thinking ensures that decisions are based on comprehensive and unbiased information. Organisations can reduce the likelihood of collective self-deception by deliberately incorporating mechanisms to counteract cognitive biases and promote open dialogue. This can involve training programs that enhance employees' awareness of cognitive biases, creating systems for regular feedback that challenge prevailing assumptions, and setting up diverse teams to ensure multiple perspectives are considered in decision-making processes.

4.2.2 Localised and systemic self-deception

Here, we examine how self-deception can occur at specific points within an organisation (localised) or spread through various organisational units and premises (systemic). While the distinction between individual and collective self-deception focuses on the human angle—how self-deception manifests within individuals and groups of individuals—the distinction between localised and systemic self-deception addresses the structural angle, examining how self-deception can be contained within specific units or proliferate throughout the entire organisation.

Localised self-deception happens at the level of a specific organisational unit (e.g., strategic regulation), point of interaction (e.g., primary processes — operational regulation), or interaction premise (e.g., human resources). For example, a sales team might develop an overly optimistic view of their sales projections. This localised self-deception could result from selective interpretation of data due to the presence of some motivational factor, where the team only acknowledges information that supports their desired belief. Here, self-deception is contained within the sales team, affecting their immediate decisions and actions.

Systemic self-deception, on the other hand, begins at one premise and travels through different parts of the organisation. An initial self-deceptive belief in a particular unit can distort truths in other parts of the organisation, leading to widespread misinformation and misaligned strategies. For instance, if the sales team's inflated projections are communicated to upper management, this misinformation can lead to unrealistic financial planning and resource allocation across the organisation. The distortion of truth can travel from the sales department to affect budgeting, marketing, and even product development decisions, illustrating how a single occurrence of self-deception can have a cascading effect.

This systemic self-deception involves a dispositional cluster characterised by overconfidence, motivated reasoning, and confirmation bias within the sales team. Members may overestimate their performance and future sales due to a desire to

maintain a positive self-image and receive rewards or recognition. Once communicated, this belief influences other departments, each adopting and acting on the distorted information. For example, the finance team may develop budgets based on these projections, marketing may design campaigns assuming higher sales volumes, and product development might prioritise features believed to be more in demand based on these assumptions.

The presence of tensions remains as the organisation must reconcile these inflated expectations with actual performance. When reality diverges from these projections, conflicts and adjustments are necessary, revealing the underlying tension between perceived and actual performance. This ongoing tension can lead to a cycle of further self-deception or reactive measures to correct course, which may be resisted by those invested in the initial self-deceptive belief. In such cases, while the self-deception may originate in a specific unit like the sales team, its effects become systemic as other parts of the organisation adopt and act on the distorted information. This cascading effect illustrates how an organisation as a whole can become self-deceived rather than just the originating unit.

By understanding the dynamics of both localised and systemic self-deception, we can better appreciate how individual instances of distorted beliefs can evolve into broader organisational issues. This recognition seems vital for developing strategies to identify and mitigate self-deception at both local and systemic levels. Unlike the individual-collective distinction, which focuses on human factors, the localised-systemic distinction emphasises the structural processes within the organisation. Both perspectives are essential for a comprehensive understanding of self-deception in organisational contexts, highlighting the complex interplay between different levels of self-deception, whether positioned on the individual-collective or local-systemic axis.

5 Conclusion

I have argued that organisations can indeed fall prey to self-deception, a phenomenon that significantly impacts their functionality, decision-making processes, and ethical standing. This article explored the mechanisms of self-deception at both individual and collective levels, demonstrating how self-deceptive practices can distort organisational decision-making, hinder learning and adaptation, and lead to adverse ethical and societal effects.

Starting with the general idea of self-deception and principles of organisational theory, I showed that the social systemic nature of organisational interactions provides a fertile ground for self-deception. This can escalate from self-deception in organisations to organisational self-deception, where the organisation itself becomes self-deceived. By integrating insights from group epistemology, I developed a radical deflationist account of group self-deception based on a collective account of group dispositionalism. This approach is particularly useful in organisational contexts for identifying and understanding in-between cases of group beliefs.

The mechanisms of self-deception infiltrate organisations through cognitive biases, motivational attitudes, and distorted belief formation processes. These can occur both at the individual level and spread further to affect the entire organisation, leading to what I call organisational self-deception. Self-deception distorts organisational decision-making by causing motivated misinterpretations of data, selective information handling, and underestimating risks, leading to flawed strategies and poor adaptive responses. Additionally, organisations affected by self-deception fail to accurately assess their current status and learn from past experiences, perpetuating ineffective practices and obstructing necessary adaptations, ultimately leading to long-term failures.

Moreover, self-deception can result in a disconnect between an organisation's declared values and actual practices, damaging its ethical standing and public

image. Overestimating positive impacts while ignoring negative consequences undermines the organisation's contribution to societal well-being. Therefore, understanding and addressing the dangers of organisational self-deception is vital for maintaining transparent, accountable, and effective organisational practices that positively contribute to society.

Future research should focus on developing methods to identify signs of organisational self-deception, mitigate the risks, and prevent its harmful effects by investigating its root causes, namely, motivated irrational belief formation. By gaining a deeper understanding of how motivated irrationality affects cognition, strategies can be created to detect and address self-deceptive practices at both individual and structural levels. This will foster organisational cultures that promote rationality, self-reflection, transparency, critical thinking, and accountability. Addressing these areas in future research can help organisations maintain ethical integrity, improve decision-making processes, and foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, contributing to better organisational practices rooted in the general societal aim of living a fulfilled life.

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Research proposal

Organisational self-deception

1 Summary and aim of the project

This project explores the phenomenon of organisational self-deception, proposing that organisations, like individuals, can fall prey to self-deceptive beliefs that significantly affect their functionality and ethical standing. By integrating insights from group epistemology, the philosophy of mind, and organisational sciences, this research aims to understand better how self-deception becomes embedded within organisational frameworks. The objective of the project is to uncover the mechanisms of self-deceptive group belief formation and their implications for organisational behaviour and accountability, ultimately providing practical insights for fostering more transparent organisational practices that are less prone to irrational cognitive biases, such as self-deception.

Keywords: belief formation, organisational design, organisational self-deception, group beliefs, group epistemology, motivated irrationality, self-deception

2 Description of the proposed research

2.1 State of the Art

Organisational self-deception is a relatively under-researched area that bridges psychology, philosophy, and organisational studies. Traditional views of self-deception focus on the intrapersonal aspect. However, recent developments in self-deception theories (Kuntz & Dehlin, 2019) and group epistemology suggest that groups can also hold beliefs (Lackey, 2021). Assuming that self-deception is a type of motivated, irrational belief formation, it is likely that groups can also be self-deceived. This project aims to fill the gap in the literature on self-deception by examining how self-deception manifests within organisations and affects their ability to achieve meaningful survival.

2.1.1 Self-Deception

Self-deception involves maintaining a false belief despite evidence to the contrary, typically due to some motivational bias. Philosophers debate whether self-deception is intentional, moral implications, and cognitive underpinnings. Traditional models liken self-deception to interpersonal deception, raising paradoxes such as how one can unknowingly hold contradictory beliefs or deceive oneself (Deweese-Boyd, 2023). However, novel models stress that no intentionality is involved in self-deception; instead, it results from motivationally triggered cognitive processes, such as cold biasing mechanisms, that distort evidence handling (Mele, 1997). Others, like Schwitzgebel, also question the need to hold contradictory beliefs. This perspective introduces the concept of "in-between believing". It aligns with dispositionalism, suggesting that beliefs are not always explicitly contradictory but can exist in a dispositionally ambiguous state, where deciding what the subject actually believes is hard.

Funkhouser's Minimal Conception suggests self-deception involves irrational evidence handling and a motivational state. My radical deflationist account

(grounded in the works of Mele, 1997; Schwitzgebel, 2001, 2002) aligns with this, asserting that contradictory belief or intentional deceit is unnecessary. Self-deception can be understood through desires influencing cognitive biases, resulting in an “in-between” state of belief. This approach is helpful for my research because dispositional structures are easier to observe, allowing for a more practical and empirical analysis of self-deception. Schwitzgebel's view on belief provides a helpful framework for examining the nuances of belief states in self-deception, which will be further explored in the research aims.

2.1.2 Group Epistemology

Jennifer Lackey (2021) argues that groups, like individuals, can hold and propagate beliefs. Group epistemology examines how collective beliefs form and are maintained through social interactions and collective intentionality. This supports the idea that groups can also be self-deceived. In contrast to summative accounts, which reduce group beliefs to the sum of individual beliefs, Lackey proposes that we focus on the beliefs and belief bases of the operative members of a group. This perspective allows us to understand how group dynamics and individual beliefs interact to form collective beliefs. For instance, a company's management might believe in a failing strategy due to shared desires to appear competent despite contrary evidence demonstrating how group self-deception can occur.

However, this account does not explain in-between cases of group beliefs. Assuming that self-deception results in an in-between state, we must develop a dispositional account of group belief. This can then be further developed into a radical deflationist account of group self-deception, where evidence handling is motivationally distorted, resulting in an in-between state of belief at the group level. This approach would allow us to understand better and analyse the nuances of collective self-deception, bridging the gap between individual and group epistemology. Lackey's group epistemology is crucial for understanding how beliefs are formed and maintained at the group level, providing an excellent basis for the group epistemological aspect of my research.

2.1.3 Organisations as Social Systems

Achterbergh and Vriens (2010, 2019) describe organisations as social systems conducting experiments to achieve meaningful survival. An organisation is a social system composed of individuals interacting based on 'interaction premises', which include structure, technology, and human resources. These premises shape and are shaped by organisational interactions and continuously evolve to meet goals.

Meaningful survival goes beyond mere existence, requiring contributions to society, such as providing employment and addressing societal issues. Organisational self-deception can undermine this goal, as collective irrational beliefs impact decision-making and accountability. This framework is relevant for my research as it provides a comprehensive view of how organisational interactions and structures can foster environments where self-deception thrives, thereby affecting the organisation's ability to achieve meaningful survival.

2.1.4 Organisational self-deception

Since organisations operate on interactions akin to belief exchanges, they are susceptible to self-deception. Kuntz and Dehlin (2019) are among the few researchers who explore self-deception in organisations, describing it as involving intrapersonal, social, and collective components. They explain that intrapersonal self-deception arises from individual cognitive biases and motivational states, and social self-deception involves relational tactics that sustain self-deception through selective information sharing. Collective self-deception emerges from the interactions of individual and social self-deception, reinforced by goals and values.

Organisational self-deception can manifest at various levels, distorting truth and impacting accountability. For example, a company might publicly commit to sustainability while internally neglecting environmental standards due to a collective belief in its capabilities. This disconnect between public assertions and internal beliefs creates fertile ground for self-deception, affecting decision-making and ethical standing (Lackey, 2021).

While Kuntz and Dehlin provide a foundational understanding, some aspects require further exploration. My research aims to add to their ideas by examining the exact process of how organisational self-deception can start. By recognising that the social nature of organisations is inherently prone to self-deception, my work will investigate how self-deception can spread throughout the organisational structure, causing the organisation itself to become self-deceived. This analysis will help identify specific mechanisms and pathways through which self-deception permeates organisational levels, offering the potential for future development of preventive and interventional strategies against organisational self-deception.

2.2 Aims/Research questions

By integrating theories from group epistemology and the philosophy of mind, this project aims to construct a robust framework for understanding how self-deceptive strategies become embedded within organisations. This exploration addresses the mechanisms of group belief formation and their implications for organisational behaviour and accountability. Furthermore, it discusses the potential for organisations to achieve “rich meaningful survival” despite self-deception, offering a perspective on organisational dynamics that integrates philosophical findings (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2010, 2019).

This project adopts a three-fold approach to explore organisational self-deception. The research is structured into philosophical, organisational, and educational aspects to address the phenomenon comprehensively, from conceptual understanding to practical applications. Each aspect tries to address relevant objectives with different methodologies and approaches. The specific aims of this research are as follows:

1. Philosophical aspect: Provide a conceptual framework for organisational self-deception

- Develop a comprehensive definition and conceptual understanding of organisational self-deception.
- Analyse the conditions under which organisational self-deception occurs and its effects on organisational behaviour and decision-making processes.
- Examine the overall mechanisms and workings of self-deception within organisations, drawing on existing philosophical literature and theories from group epistemology.

This aim extends current philosophical discussions on self-deception by applying them to organisational contexts, thereby enriching the understanding of self-deception as a collective phenomenon and addressing gaps in how self-deception is conceptualised within groups. Specifically, it impacts debates on the intentionality of self-deception (Mele, 1997), the nature of "in-between believing" and dispositional states (Schwitzgebel, 2001, 2002), and the interaction between individual and collective beliefs (Lackey, 2021). By providing a detailed analysis of these aspects within the framework of organisations, this research offers new insights into how self-deception can be both an individual and a group-level phenomenon, thus bridging significant gaps in the literature.

2. Organisational aspect: Examine empirical findings on organisational self-deception

- Conduct a thorough review and analysis of existing empirical studies on organisational development and change.
- Identify and evaluate organisational and individual factors that contribute to promoting or preventing self-deception within organisations.
- Explore how organisational self-deception impacts an organisation's ability to achieve meaningful survival or employ episodic changes through intervention structures as defined by Achterbergh and Vriens (2010, 2019).

- Explore studies about self-reflective practices (e.g., mindfulness meditation, Alexander technique, etc.) in organisational contexts.

This aim seeks to enhance the current research on self-deception by systematically synthesising findings from various studies, potentially laying the groundwork for future empirical research. By providing a clearer picture of how self-deception manifests and is sustained in organisational settings, this analysis aims to bridge the gap between conceptual theories and practical observations. While the existing literature may only partially address some aspects of organisational self-deception, this project will identify critical areas for further investigation and development.

3. Educational aspect:

- Explore the potential development of interventions designed to mitigate self-deception within organisations, based on Actherbergh and Vriens's (2019) findings on designing episodic interventions to promote organisational change. These strategies will promote transparency, encourage critical thinking, and foster an environment where challenging evidence is welcomed.
- Incorporate mindfulness (or other self-reflective practices) as a core component of these interventions. Research by Ash et al. (2023) has shown that mindfulness meditation can reduce information avoidance by enhancing emotion regulation, which can help individuals and groups confront uncomfortable truths rather than avoid them.

This aim addresses the practical implications of organisational self-deception by exploring possible strategies and tools for organisations to prevent and overcome self-deception. By exploring the practical implications, this research provides a theoretical basis for developing educational materials and training programs. This can contribute to the applied side of organisational, self-reflective, and educational studies, facilitating the transfer of theoretical insights into practice. The inclusion of mindfulness practices is particularly relevant, given recent findings on its

efficacy in reducing information avoidance. By leveraging these insights, the possible interventions and training programs can help organisations improve decision-making processes and ethical standards, ultimately supporting their goal of meaningful survival.

3 Methodology

The four phases outlined below will provide a general structure for the research project, with each corresponding to a chapter of the final dissertation. In each phase, a general background to the issue will be provided, drawing upon secondary literature on self-deception, group epistemology, and organisational studies. The findings from each phase will be embedded in the provided theoretical context.

Phase 1: Literature review and theoretical framework development

Aim: To construct a detailed conceptual framework for organisational self-deception.

Approach:

- Conduct an extensive literature review on self-deception, group epistemology, and organisational theory.
- Synthesise insights from key philosophers and theorists, including Mele, Schwitzgebel, Lackey, Kuntz & Dehlin, and Achterbergh & Vriens.
- Identify and analyse existing theories and models of self-deception, focusing on their applicability to organisational contexts.
- Develop a conceptual model that explains how self-deception operates within organisations and impacts their functioning and survival.

Duration: 2 semesters

This period allows sufficient time to cover a wide range of literature, ensure thorough synthesis, and develop a robust theoretical model. While extensive, this

phase builds on my prior experience with the topic, which allows for efficient and focused research without compromising the originality of this part of the research. This phase is designed to provide a foundation for the subsequent phases rather than being an exhaustive standalone project.

Output:

- Comprehensive literature review document.
- Initial conceptual framework for organisational self-deception.

Phase 2: Analysis of existing empirical studies

Aim: To understand the empirical landscape of organisational self-deception and identify patterns that support or challenge the theoretical framework.

Approach:

- Conduct a systematic review of existing empirical studies on organisational self-deception, group belief formation, and related phenomena.
- Use established methodologies for literature reviews to ensure comprehensive and unbiased coverage.
- Analyse the findings from these studies to identify common themes, mechanisms, and outcomes related to self-deception in organisations.
- Assess how these empirical findings align with or challenge the developed conceptual framework.

Duration: 2 semesters

This duration is necessary to thoroughly review and analyse empirical studies, including potential expansion into related areas if direct studies are lacking. If such a gap is discovered, expand the review to include related areas such as cognitive biases in organisational decision-making or collective belief systems.

Output:

- Systematic review document.
- Analysis report summarising common themes and aligning empirical findings with the theoretical framework.

Phase 3: Integration and model refinement

Aim: To refine the conceptual framework based on insights gained from the theoretical and empirical analyses.

Approach:

- Integrate the findings from the theoretical review and the empirical study analysis.
- Refine the conceptual model to address discrepancies or new insights during the research.
- Ensure the model accounts for various factors influencing organisational self-deception, including individual, social, and collective dimensions.

Duration: 2 semesters

This timeframe allows for careful integration of findings and iterative refinement of the conceptual model to ensure comprehensiveness and robustness.

Output:

- Refined conceptual model.
- Integrated theoretical and empirical synthesis.

Phase 4: Exploration of practical guidelines and educational materials

Aim: Explore the practical implication of theoretical insights with the potential for developing strategies and training materials.

Approach:

- Conduct a literature review on existing educational materials and training programs related to self-deception and self-reflective practices.
- Examine how theoretical insights from the conceptual framework can be integrated into practical educational frameworks.
- Investigate the potential for incorporating self-reflective practices such as mindfulness (Ash et al., 2023), psychotherapy, and meditation into organisational training programs.
- Design exploratory outlines for interactive workshops and seminars to facilitate the practical application of these strategies within organisations.

Duration: 2 semesters

This period is allocated for exploring relevant literature and conceptualising how theoretical insights can be translated into practical applications without directly developing the materials.

Output:

- Literature review on educational materials and training programs focusing on self-reflective practices.
- Exploratory outlines for workshops and seminars.
- Conceptual framework integration document.

The proposed research focuses primarily on theoretical work, leveraging extensive literature reviews and analysis of existing empirical studies.

4 Scientific and social relevance

Understanding organisational self-deception has significant implications for both academic research and practical management. This project addresses gaps in the current state of the art and proposes novel contributions to both scientific knowledge and societal practices.

This research will contribute to the understanding of collective belief formation in terms of scientific relevance. Current research on self-deception predominantly focuses on individuals, leaving a gap in understanding how self-deception operates within groups and organisations. By integrating insights from group epistemology and organisational studies, this project will extend theories of collective belief formation. It will offer a comprehensive conceptual framework that explains how self-deception manifests at the organisational level, addressing the complexities and dynamics of collective beliefs that existing individual-focused models do not cover.

Moreover, this project advances the philosophy of mind by applying philosophical theories of self-deception to organisational contexts. This approach bridges a critical gap between individual and collective epistemology, refining and expanding existing models to account for organisational self-deception's unique challenges and mechanisms. The research will contribute to the discourse on the nature of belief, intention, and rationality within large, complex social systems, providing a richer understanding of how cognitive biases operate at multiple levels of analysis.

The social relevance of this project is equally significant. Organisations today face increasing scrutiny from stakeholders demanding higher standards of transparency and accountability. However, practical guidelines for addressing self-deception within organisations are limited or nonexistent. This project will develop practical strategies and interventions to recognise and mitigate self-deception in organisations, filling a critical gap in existing management practices. These insights, based on a robust theoretical framework and informed by a thorough

analysis of empirical findings, can potentially enhance organisational ethical standards and decision-making processes.

Addressing organisational self-deception is crucial for fostering a culture of ethical behaviour and integrity. This project will provide organisations with the tools to improve their decision-making processes, reduce biases, and enhance their ethical standards by translating theoretical insights into actionable guidelines and educational materials. Furthermore, fostering trust and social cohesion is a foundational element for organisations' effective functioning and relationships with stakeholders. Organisational self-deception undermines this trust by creating a disconnect between stated values and actual practices. Implementing the strategies developed in this project can help organisations align their internal beliefs and practices with their external commitments, thereby fostering greater trust and social cohesion.

This project represents a novel and practical contribution to the field due to the need for existing comprehensive guidelines specifically designed to address organisational self-deception. The interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from philosophy, psychology, and organisational studies, offers a holistic understanding of organisational self-deception that is both theoretically rigorous and practically applicable. While the project focuses on theoretical development and analysis of existing studies, it also lays the groundwork for future empirical research. The conceptual framework developed here will provide a solid foundation for testing and refining these ideas in real-world organisational settings.

In summary, this project addresses critical gaps in both scientific understanding and practical management of organisational self-deception. Its contributions will enhance academic discourse on collective belief formation and the philosophy of mind while also providing valuable tools for improving organisational practices and fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and ethical behaviour.

5 Timetable

Period	Research and education	Output
<i>sep24- jan25</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PhD course on research methodology • Literature review and conceptual framework development. • Focus on the historical and philosophical context of self-deception in organisations. • Integrate insights from group epistemology. • Identify and analyse theories and models of self-deception, focusing on their applicability to organisational contexts • Write draft of Chapter 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft of Chapter 1 of the dissertation • Review paper draft
<i>feb25- aug25</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse theoretical frameworks and integrate findings into the conceptual model. • Synthesise insight from key authors. • Develop a conceptual model that explains how self-deception operates within organisations. • Write Chapter 1. • Prepare a review paper based on the literature review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 1 of the dissertation • Review paper submission
<i>sep25- jan26</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select relevant empirical studies for analysis. • Conduct a systematic review of existing empirical studies on organisational self-deception, group belief formation, and related phenomena. • Select additional relevant literature. • Write a draft of Chapter 2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft of Chapter 2 of the dissertation • Prepare conference presentation
<i>feb26- aug26</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse the findings from these studies to identify common themes, mechanisms, and outcomes related to organisational self-deception. • Assess how these empirical findings align with or challenge the conceptual framework. • Write Chapter 2. • Submit a review paper to a journal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 2 of the dissertation • Review paper published • Presentation of findings at a conference

Period	Research and education	Output
<i>sep26- jan27</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate findings from the theoretical review and the empirical study analysis. • Refine the conceptual model to address any discrepancies or new insights. • Write a draft of Chapter 3. • Prepare a presentation of preliminary findings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft of Chapter 3 of the dissertation • Preliminary findings presented
<i>feb27- aug27</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select relevant literature or empirical studies on organisational training and interventions, and self-reflection practices. • Conduct a systematic review of existing empirical studies on organisational development and change. • Write Chapter 3. • Present findings at an academic conference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 3 of the dissertation. • Educational materials and guidelines • Conference presentation
<i>sep27- jan28</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse the findings from these studies to identify common themes, mechanisms, and outcomes related to organisational development and change. • Examine how theoretical insights from the conceptual framework can be integrated into practical educational frameworks. • Investigate the potential for incorporating self-reflective practices into organisational training programs. • Write a draft of Chapter 4. • Develop a publishable article based on the dissertation findings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft of Chapter 4. of the dissertation • Publishable article draft

Period	Research and education	Output
<i>feb28- aug28</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design exploratory outlines for interactive workshops and seminars to facilitate the practical application of these strategies within organisations. • Write Chapter 4. • Revise and finalise all chapters. • Prepare and submit the dissertation. • Submit final revisions if necessary. • Publish the article in an academic journal. • Develop a workshop based on the educational materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 4. of the dissertation • Submit dissertation • Article published • Workshop developed

6 Summary for non-specialists

Imagine a company that publicly commits to sustainability yet internally disregards environmental standards because its management collectively believes that its current operations are already efficient and effective enough. This overconfidence in their capabilities leads them to ignore clear evidence of environmental harm. This is an example of organisational self-deception, where a group, as a whole, holds onto false beliefs that impact its functionality and ethical standing. Unlike individual self-deception, which focuses on personal biases and false beliefs, organisational self-deception involves the collective beliefs and behaviours of the group.

6.1 What we already know

Research has shown that self-deception, where individuals convince themselves of false beliefs, typically serves psychological needs and desires. This phenomenon, driven by motivated and irrational belief formation, also occurs within groups and organisations, impacting their decision-making and endangering their survival. Additionally, group beliefs are shaped by the interactions and collective intentions of members, influencing organisational behaviour and direction. Organisations

operate as social systems where shared norms and values can lead to collective acceptance of false or irrational beliefs.

However, current research primarily focuses on individual self-deception, leaving a gap in understanding how self-deception operates within groups and organisations. While we know that self-deception can impair decision-making and ethical standards, we lack a comprehensive framework explaining how these processes occur in organisations.

6.2 What this project will do

This research project aims to bridge this gap by exploring how organisational self-deception forms and affects organisational decision-making and ethical practices. By examining how groups form and maintain beliefs, we aim to uncover how self-deception influences organisational behaviour, ultimately seeking to prevent it from happening.

- 1. Develop a Theoretical Framework:** We will review existing literature in philosophy, group epistemology, and organisational studies. This will help us create a conceptual framework for understanding how self-deception operates within organisations and impacts their functioning and survival.
- 2. Analyse existing studies:** Rather than conducting new empirical studies, we will systematically review and analyse existing empirical research. This will help us identify common patterns, themes, and mechanisms related to organisational self-deception. By examining a wide range of studies, we can build a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.
- 3. Create practical guidelines:** We will develop practical guidelines and educational materials using the insights gained from our theoretical and empirical analyses. These resources will be designed to help organisations recognise and mitigate self-deception. For

example, we will explore how self-reflective practices like mindfulness, psychotherapy, and meditation can reduce self-deception by improving self-awareness and emotional regulation.

6.3 Why this project matters

Understanding organisational self-deception is crucial for fostering more transparent and ethical practices within organisations. Self-deception can significantly impair decision-making processes, leading to unethical practices and eroding trust both within the organisation and with external stakeholders. This research aims to help organisations identify and address self-deceptive behaviours by providing practical insights and tools. Ultimately, this will benefit both the organisation and society at large by promoting ethical standards and effective decision-making.

By focusing on theoretical groundwork now, we lay the foundation for future empirical studies that can further refine and test these concepts. This approach ensures that our findings are well-grounded in existing knowledge and can be practically applied to improve organisational practices. Understanding and addressing organisational self-deception can lead to more effective decision-making processes, foster trust, and enhance the ethical standing of organisations, contributing to their overall success and sustainability.

7 Bibliography

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8 Curriculum Vitae

Personal information

- **Name:** Dávid Zsámboki
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- **Phone:** +36202618261

I am a professional Technical Writer since 2018, with strong experience in advising how to create written content independently of context. I have collaboratively produced both academic texts and technical documentation, developed information architectures in different frameworks, built technical writing workflows for teams of writers and experts, taught writers, and managed projects related to technical information. My academic interests lie in analysing the connections of philosophy of mind and organisational design, focusing on how organisational structures affect employees' lives, societal contributions, motivations, and environments that promote self-development and motivated belief formation.

Education

<i>sep20-</i>	ReMA Philosophy of Mind Radboud University Nijmegen Interim GPA: 7.41/10
<i>sep12-aug17</i>	BA Liberal Arts Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest, Hungary Major: Philosophy, Minor: English Final grade: 5/5

Relevant academic and professional experience

Role: Academic Writing Advisor (Sep 2014 – present)

- Help others to write thesis papers, essays, and other academic content, covering various topics including psychology, rural and urban development, and animation/film.
- Provide general advice on academic writing.
- Offer writing-related coaching, review, and idea formulation advice.
- Contributed to papers that achieved high grades, sometimes even 100% evaluation.

Role: Technical Writer (Feb 2018 – present)

- Worked for companies of various sizes (200-10,000+ employees, e.g., Revolut, PTC (former Intland Software), R&R Software), gaining familiarity with different work cultures.
- Gained expertise to progress in seniority from Junior to Senior positions.
- Close collaboration with experts from different fields.
- Involved in multiple projects with different roles, from general contributor to project manager.
- Develop structured authoring system that supports the creation of high quality content.
- Develop and manage documentation workflows that integrate with other teams' processes.
- On-board and train new Technical Writers
- Responsibilities included: tracing progress, project planning and execution, task assignment, resource management, quality assurance and monitoring.

Role: Freelance Technical Writer (Sep 2020 – Aug 2022)

- Worked with different clients as a freelancer via Upwork, focusing on developing content that supports IT projects.

- Participated in various technical writing projects including creation of user manuals, administrator guides, and API documentation.
- Created documentation strategies and frameworks that align with clients' goals.
- Built and managed internal knowledge bases to facilitate information sharing and project consistency.
- Provided training and guidance to new writers, enhancing their skills and contributing to their professional development.

Academic skills

- **Research and analysis:** Proficient in conducting comprehensive research, analyzing data, and synthesizing information across various disciplines.
- **Academic writing and editing:** Skilled in producing high-quality academic texts, including thesis papers, essays, and research papers, with a strong emphasis on clarity and coherence.
- **Teaching and mentoring:** Experienced in teaching and mentoring students and new writers, providing guidance on academic writing, research methodologies, and idea formulation.
- **Interdisciplinary collaboration:** Adept at collaborating with experts from diverse fields to develop well-rounded research and documentation projects.

Professional skills

- **Technical writing and documentation:**
 - Expertise in developing structured authoring systems to support the creation of high-quality content.
 - Proficient in creating and managing documentation workflows that integrate with team processes.
 - Experienced in writing and editing product documentation, user manuals, administrator manuals, API documentation, and ISO standards.

- Skilled in gathering and incorporating customer feedback to enhance documentation usability.
- **Project management:**
 - Successfully managed multiple projects, from general contributor to project manager roles.
 - Proficient in project planning, execution, task assignment, and resource management.
 - Experienced in tracking progress and ensuring quality assurance and monitoring.
 - Led and organized documentation teams, building cooperation with support, development, and test teams.
- **Training and development:**
 - Developed and delivered onboarding and training materials for new Technical Writers.
 - Conducted training sessions and provided coaching for new writers, enhancing their skills and professional growth.
 - Participated in hiring and interviewing processes, developing skill assessment materials for candidates.
- **Content strategy and information architecture:**
 - Created and implemented content strategies aligned with organizational goals.
 - Developed informational architectures in different frameworks to support content creation.
 - Built and maintained internal knowledge bases, ensuring efficient information sharing and project consistency.
- **Software proficiency:**
 - Experienced with a range of technical writing tools and software, including:
 - Swagger, Visual Studio Code, Python, GitHub, Stoplight, OpenAPI, YAML, JSON
 - DITA, XML, HTML, XSLT, Oxygen XML Editor

- Jira, Confluence, Postman, cURL
- Figma for creating design templates
- Microsoft Office softwares
- Language skills:
 - English (IELTS: 8.0)
 - Hungarian (native proficiency)
 - German (elementary proficiency)
 - Dutch (elementary proficiency)

Work-related certificates:

- Information Architecture (IA) Fundamentals (Udemy)
- Learn API Technical Writing 2: REST for Writers (Udemy)
- Learn API Technical Writing: JSON and XML for Writers (Udemy)
- The Art of API Documentation (Udemy)
- Information Security (freeCodeCamp)
- Quality Assurance (freeCodeCamp)
- Mastering CVSS v3.1 (Forum of Incident Response and Security Teams - FIRST)
- APIs and Microservices (freeCodeCamp)
- Learning DITA (9 courses) (learningdita.com)
- Data Analysis with Python (freeCodeCamp)
- JavaScript Algorithms and Data Structures (freeCodeCamp)
- Machine Learning for Absolute Beginners - Level 1 (StackSkills)
- Programming for Everybody (Python) (Coursera)