

Prof. Philip Zimbardo on **hein**

“It takes the negative emotions out of potential power relationships”

Zimbardo met Jules Heijneman (joint creator of the hein concept with Kim Reuser) at a conference. After just a brief conversation, the professor asked Jules to present hein to all of the conference attendees, as an additional speaker. Zimbardo introduced him by saying, “He blew me away.” But how exactly?



About Philip Zimbardo

Professor Philip Zimbardo achieved worldwide fame as a result of his Stanford Prison Experiment. That experiment is part of his standard works on psychology, which are studied by students around the world. A movie was also made about the experiment. Zimbardo graduated summa cum laude in psychology, sociology and anthropology. Later, he received his doctorate from Yale University and went on to become a professor at Stanford University. He has also served as the president of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Zimbardo: “One of the hardest things in organizations is telling people in higher positions that something that they value is not working, or not as well as they thought it was. That is really difficult. Most people do not feel comfortable enough to offer that criticism, but it is very important that they speak out, because negative things keep evolving. So you’re better off getting rid of them at an early stage. What struck me: hein is a new way to get people to express criticism, and a new way for people in positions of authority to begin to open themselves to constructive criticism.”

How is that possible?

Zimbardo: “It separates ego from action. Usually you say: ‘I think...’ But with hein – in a funny way – it’s not ‘me’ anymore, it’s ‘my

hein’ who’s talking. That’s an interesting way to tell others what you’re thinking and feeling. It is non-threatening. And it only takes a little while to learn the ‘hein language’. People also need to learn to respond to it in the same way. But they can, because everybody has a hein, everybody has this inner voice. Essentially it reduces egocentric confrontations: it takes the negative emotions out of potential power relationships.”

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The hein program originally focused on safety...

Zimbardo: "The physical well-being of workers is very useful, but it is only a narrow area to focus on. Workplace safety should be just one of the domains. Because hein is applicable to all sorts of relationships."

You used the word 'funny'. But is the concept attractive for managers?

Zimbardo: "A lot of managers tend to reject new things, even when the old things are failing. Systems typically retain their power by not allowing outsiders in, and certainly no outside criticism. There are exceptions: the organization is losing lots of money and/or gets in the news in a negative way... But you

don't just want to wait for disaster to strike. This means managers should be open to considering new ways, whatever they are doing. They don't want people to just sit and say 'That's a nice idea.' Managers want people to say: 'We'll stop doing A and we'll start with B.' What we're talking about is a framing game, about creating narratives that change thinking and, ultimately, behavior. The hein concept has the potential to reach that point. It is such a creative idea. Just look at the name of it. I first thought hein was a Dutch word and thought: 'Does it mean hero, or challenge, or...?' No! It doesn't mean anything! And so it could be used in any language and an any culture."

Stanford Prison and human decency

Say you put young men voluntarily into a simulated prison – 12 as prisoners and 12 as guards. What happens next? That's how the Stanford Prison Experiment started. By six days in, it was so out of control that it had to be prematurely called to a halt. The experiment showed that the system in which you function has a very strong influence on your behavior. The experiment has been the subject of several movies, the 2015 version in collaboration with Professor Zimbardo.

Results

Professor Zimbardo has indicated that he is very curious about the results that hein achieves within organizations. These results can be viewed on the website, for example, in interviews with managers and directors who use or have used the hein approach, and naturally, who have recorded the effects of the approach. However, at the time of the meeting between hein and Professor Zimbardo, these videos were only available in Dutch, which meant they were inaccessible to him. The professor therefore gave the above interview purely on the basis of his introduction to the concept, without any further information about that follow-up processes that permanently anchor the effects of hein in the organization.



wat zou hein zeggen?