

The basis of culture in organizations – a model

“Transfer” of knowledge is a way of getting away from the descriptive level of models and applying those models to organizations. This thought process is based on the “isomorphic structures” described in systemic theory for companies¹. Structures observable in parts of the system are also present in the overall system, and vice versa. This mental bridge allows the models to be applied to organizations, informed by the viewpoints of business administration and organizational psychology.

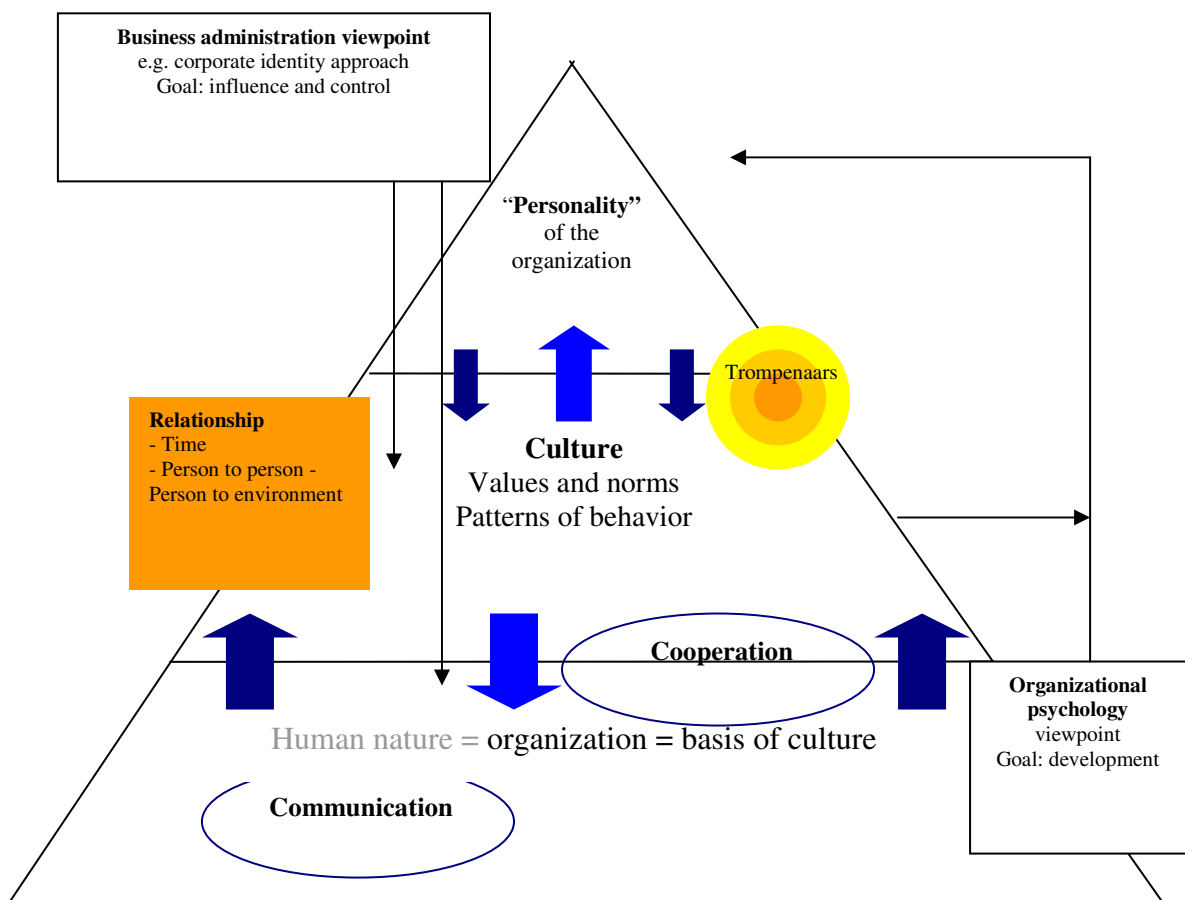


Fig. 1 Basis of culture in organizations

¹ For a look at Systemic Understanding in detail: <http://www.systemische-professionalitaet.de/isbweb/content/view/75/129/> - especially the articles: 054/000/004/010.

From this “transfer” to organizations, one can conclude that the nature of the organization is a basis of its culture, and that the personality of the organization is an expression of that nature, cultural peculiarities excepted. The levels are permeable and affect one another. In the attempt to answer the question of what the “nature” of an organization actually is, one can make use not only of definitions from business administration² but also of systemic dimensions.³ Which should have primacy in the “correct” description, analysis and use of organizational personalities, is a cultural question (because it relates to values and norms) but not one which can be resolved here. From the business administration point of view, the attempt is made to portray the corporate personality externally, in a manner adapted to market conditions and in line with the company's objectives, while simultaneously shaping the organization internally.

The company – and with it its employees – is deliberately developed in the set direction and all functions are subordinated to these objectives. This perspective, with its formal structuring, does not adequately take into account the informal relationships and information flows that are implicitly present. Competencies that go beyond skills utilized purely in processes are not adequately covered, if at all, and nor are the social interactions of the employees.

In contrast, organizational psychology observes and describes precisely these skills (insofar as they can be observed) but does not integrate them adequately into work processes. In particular, rituals such as e.g. office parties or staff trips are viewed as culturally important, but since their contribution to corporate objectives cannot be quantified, a concrete understanding of them for corporate control purposes is virtually impossible.

When it comes to the task of clarifying the extent to which communication and cooperation can be bases of culture, a model from the psychology of the individual is again applied.

Namely, the levels of motivation described by *Maslow*⁴. Clearly, communication should be assigned to the realm of deficiency motives, meaning that failure to fulfill this requirement impairs the basic viability of the organization. Cooperation too may be assumed to be vital to the survival of an organization, as most organizations come into being for precisely this purpose. If we keep to the pattern of thinking outlined above, it becomes clear that communication and cooperation are immanent in an organization and consequently act as “bases” of culture. At this point the observation remains abstract, without defining who or what actually provides the basis or vehicle for communication and culture. On the one hand, organizations are deemed to have

² The objective of the company is the strategic use of resources to produce a profit, e.g. *Eisenführ*(2004) p.5 i.e. controlled and targeted intervention in processes—always with an eye to optimization.

³ Together e.g. “success = remaining in the system” i.e. surviving in the marketplace—see also: *Gälweiler*(2005) p.34.

⁴ *Maslow* (2002); familiarity with the Maslow pyramid is assumed and it is therefore not presented here. **Deficiency motives:** basic needs, safety and security, belonging. **Growth needs:** social acceptance and respect, self-actualization.

personality⁵ but on the other hand, an intrinsic aspect of the model is that a personality requires culture and nature. So what forms the “nature of an organization,” the basis of its culture?

⁵ In the legal system, this distinction is embodied in the “natural person” and the “legal person,” which can both possess rights and duties./ Viewing groups of persons as one reduces complexity./ In business administration, organizations are portrayed as personalities by means of a corporate identity – an approach to the strategic control of a company’s image; e.g. in Herbst (2003).