

Part 5

Cultural media in organisations

“The behaviour of the value-assigning personality determines culture in the event of conflict”¹

Efforts by the organisation to provide a value system different to that which the leading personality can authentically represent are accordingly a vain endeavour. This shows how important people are in organisations. Consequently it can be assumed that people in organisations are a cultural medium.² In this regard the personal psychological perspective can also be applied to the culture of organisations. In this paper, the question of how people build organisations with one another and which forms of organisations are appropriate for which culture are second to the evaluation and description of behavioural patterns, since they limit the variety of options for action and thus reduce complexity.

Communication as social interaction

When people are the cultural medium in an organisation, it is necessary to observe how their “culture” is shaped. As early as childhood, the values and behavioural norms for “proper” behaviour are programmed.³ This also has an impact on all levels at which human beings come into contact with one another. The behaviour displayed is largely unconscious, but is interpreted by the counterpart according to his/her own value system – usually without questioning this assessment.⁴ The model by *Hofstede*⁵, for example, shows how the individual

¹ Sprenger (2007), p. 32.

² In Corporate Philosophy (CP) the CI approach also makes an effort to keep the “spirit” of the founder(s) alive. Through this there is the hope of maintaining the energy with which these people “drove” the organisation and allowing the inspiration to stay alive. This is difficult because organisations, like people, have lifecycles and as they “become adults” organisations need a different kind of management than what was sensible and continuative at the beginning.

³ Cf. e.g. Vester, (2001), p. 38, Bau

⁴ Cf. Chapter 2.1 *Trompenaars* – Underlying Assumptions.

⁵ See Chapter 2.3 and cf. *Hofstede* (1991), p. 6.

arrives at his/her set of values. Communication – i.e. the transfer of information between a sender and a receiver – in this case two people, is thus dependent on the various types of conditioning. From a psychological perspective the term “communication” can be described as “the most important form of social interaction”⁶. Simplified, social interaction – the foundation of cooperation – can be defined as “behaviour towards one another”⁷ by two or more individuals. In organisations this is the prerequisite for cooperation. This is where differing value systems always collide. Chapters 3.3 and 3.4 show how it is possible to deal with these differences.

Trust is an important prerequisite for cooperation.

“I don’t know of any speaker who doesn’t preach of trust as the key to value-oriented corporate culture.”⁸

The question of whether trust can be positioned in the sphere of culture or human nature simultaneously generates the next question: can trust be learned or is it inherited?

Marston has already tried to find an answer to this question.⁹ He describes trust and distrust (fear) as one of the basic orientations of personality – in the DISC model by *Geier* this dimension then becomes “human orientation” versus “task orientation”.¹⁰ It can thus be determined that “trust” is considered a part of personality in personality models. Furthermore, these models suggest that the basic orientation of personality significantly influences behaviour. This can also be observed in organisations: while companies such as Lidl, Schlecker and Deutsche Telekom allow their employees to be spied upon¹¹, other companies, such as the

⁶ *Ries* (1998) p. 446.

⁷ *Graumann* (1972), p. 1009.

⁸ *Sprenger* (2002), p. 8.

⁹ *Marston* (1928) *Emotions of Normal People*; (1931) *Integrative Psychology*.

¹⁰ Cf.: *Siewert/ Gay* (1997).

¹¹ E.g.: <http://www.zeit.de/2008/16/Was-weiss-mein-Chef>.

DM drugstore chain offensively rely on trust¹². More and more companies have placed trust into their vision as a standard of their business.¹³

Actions as the foundation of cooperation

In the psychology of action, the term action is distinguished from “one’s own behaviour” and includes those forms that do not take place in a purely reactive, reflexive or involuntary manner, but rather in which – at least potentially – a relationship to oneself, others and the world is expressed that is conscious, discursive and able to be voluntarily influenced.¹⁴

Social interaction has three parts.¹⁵ Two or more subjects are simultaneously related to an object of interaction. In doing so, three levels are spanned:

- The factual level of the objects of interaction (the present environment)
- The interpersonal level of relationships (social environment)
- The historical level of concepts directing the actions – this also includes the orientation towards the value and norm catalogue of one’s own culture (subjective inner world).

Two of these levels also appear in the cultural dimensions. This conformity makes the influence of culture on the action apparent. But the third level of the inner experience – as shown above – is also culturally influenced. Consequently the entire action is influenced by cultural conditioning.

This interaction is registered in two ways – on the one hand from one’s own perspective and on the other hand from the perspective of the interaction partner. Interaction difficulties then appear when the system gets out of balance, which can occur, for example, if the supposed views of A about B do not correspond to

¹² “Trust makes you strong” – Statement on the company’s home page: http://www.dm-drogeriemarkt.de/dmDHomepage/generator/dmDHomepage/Unternehmen/RedeBuchbeitr_C3_A4g/RedeBuchbeitr_C3_A4ge.html

¹³ Google: approximately **240,000** hits for Maßstab des Handelns Vertrauen (standard of business trust) – primarily Christian organisations – but also Swiss companies first!

¹⁴ Cf. *Layes* in: *Allhoff* (ed.) (2001), p. 113.

¹⁵ Described e.g. in *Bühler’s* organon model (1934), in the balance-oriented contemplations by Heider (1946) and in *Newcomb’s* AXB model (1953).

the actual views.

This is when actions that are neither in the interest of the person acting nor in the interest of the interaction partner occur in “anticipatory obedience”.

Nevertheless, from this view basic types of actions and reference points can be derived, which are helpful for the classification of cooperation:

actions can be differentiated according to the way in which they refer to the world.¹⁶

Goal-oriented	The actor believes to be able to bring about his/her target situation.
Rule-governed	The actor acts or refrains from actions because as a member of a group he/she does certain things in a certain way.
Narrative	The action is in the overriding context of a story. This also includes creative actions.

This results in the following combinations

Reference points of an action

Basic type of action	Present environment	Social environment	Subjective inner world
Purposive-rational	Instrumental	Strategic	Autochthonous
Rule-governed	Regulative	Normative	Self-regulative
Narrative	Analytical	Explorative	Self-reflexive

Fig. 5 Actions depending on the basic type and reference point¹⁷

¹⁶ Presented in *Straub* (1999).

¹⁷ Cf. *Layes*, in Allhoff (ed.) (2001), p. 119.

The fields show how the actions are controlled according to the underlying basic type. Simply stated, an actor with a purposive-rational orientation will use the things in his/her environment to strategically structure his/her relationships to other people and keep his/her inner life to himself/herself. Here it becomes clear that the actor can only manage to reify a partner into an object if the actor has the power to do so.¹⁸ *Krewer* refers to such an action orientation as the “intercultural strategy” of “conquering”.¹⁹ One’s own point of view is made absolute and the goal is the domination or submission of the partner. This is a realisation of one of the action patterns depicted in the model. A person acting with social cooperation in mind will try to incorporate the interaction partner and initially find out how cooperation can be devised via external structures. A joint strategy or the establishment of rules should facilitate actions. In summary, it can be determined that human actions follow observable and describable patterns depending on the attitude of the actor and the reference point. □ Cooperation is fed from these patterns.

Options in dealing with cultural differences

Intercultural differences exist equally between individuals and organisations. Even within organisations, encountering various value systems is commonplace. Four basic patterns can be observed in intercultural interactions:

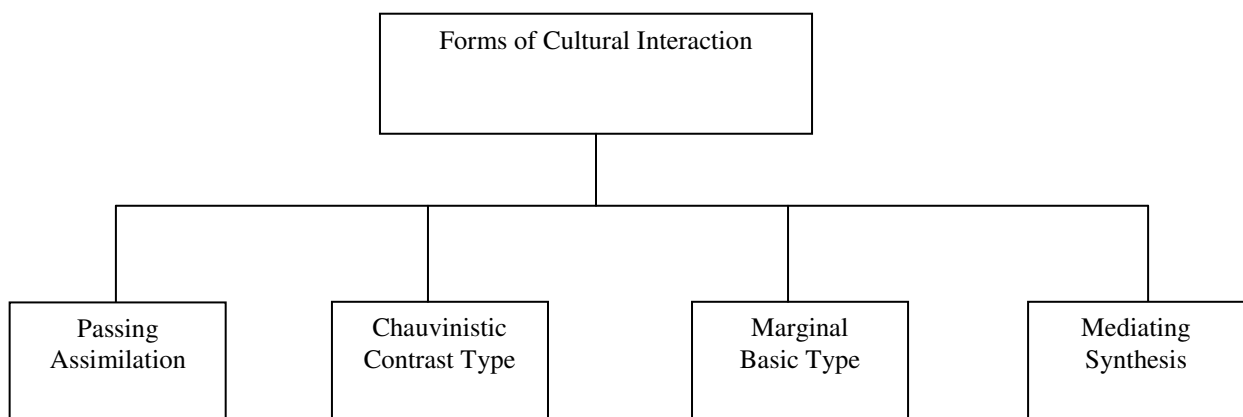


Fig. 6 Forms of cultural interaction²⁰

¹⁸ On power and power patterns: *König* (2007).

¹⁹ Cf. *Krewer* (1996), p. 154.

²⁰ Cf. *Bochner* (1982), p. 7.

The following observation takes place on two levels:

On the one hand a description of the type – which is important since regardless of the handling in the environment within the organisation, all of these types are present as people. The second level briefly describes how this typology can be translated to organisations and how it is expressed there.

3.3.1 Assimilation type

The assimilation type radically rejects one's own culture and has no problems accepting the values and norms of the foreign culture. This leads to the loss of one's own cultural identity. When applied to organisations, this primarily means a loss of knowledge – mostly social knowledge and informal contacts. This often irrecoverable radical renunciation signifies a loss of consciousness.

3.3.2 Contrast type

The contrast type experiences the differences of their own and the foreign culture very clearly. He/she rejects the other culture and holds on to the old values and norms, which to some extent are lived out "underground". When applied to organisations, this means that the old culture lives on. If employees are asked, they refer to themselves with the old name of the company and "hero stories" are cultivated. This nostalgia prevents the company as a whole from adjusting to the new circumstances. This orientation can be seen, for example, when employees mention the name of the "old" company when interacting with one another and stories about "the good old days" prevail in the company.²¹

3.3.3 Basic type

The basic type experiences both cultures as media of important values and norms. However, since they are incompatible for him/her and he/she is unsuccessful at integration, he/she alternates undecidedly between both cultures.

²¹ For example: in the organisation ContiAutomotive Systems the old names of the acquired companies continue to live on: teves, temic, motorola... and the employees continue to identify with the "old" culture.

In organisations this indecisiveness ties up energy and leads to stagnation. An atmosphere of paralysis can be perceived. Work loses its momentum. An “identity schism” can also be observed. Depending on the situation the employee takes on the identity that he/she assumes to be appropriate and reasonable.²²

3.3.4 Synthesis type

The synthesis type is able to merge the levels of both cultures that are important for him/her into a “new whole” such that this is an enrichment of his/her personality development. For an organisation this means leaving behind customs and rituals and consciously selecting the values and norms that should shape the corporate culture in the future. In doing so, the individual attitudes of the members of the organisation are reconciled. To what extent the members of an organisation are capable of leading this selection process significantly depends on their personal degree of maturity and their willingness to make adjustments.

²² As observed in a training session: The question “Which values characterise the company” – and “Which values do you and your colleagues live out in the company” led to completely different results.