

What is "culturally relevant" in organisations?

*"The focusing of effort towards a common goal is the fundamental function of corporate culture."*¹

Using corporate culture to unite people under a single value system has been a trend in organisation development since the 1990s.² Corporate culture has become a kind of bracket, a badge of identification and a crystallisation point for globally operating multinational organisations. Despite adjustments for local market requirements, corporate culture remains a concise core expression of company identity.³

What happens when companies merge? Sound out those around you. What is the company name used by your colleagues when they introduce themselves? The values embodied by this name are those that guide them.

What does this mean for organisation development?

The targeted utilisation of culture is contingent upon understanding, on the one hand, what culture is, how it expresses itself, at which levels it has an effect and how these levels can be addressed. Then culture can be used to have an integrating effect.

Organisations must communicate culture in order to ensure that their identity can be seen, experienced and comprehended. This is accomplished professionally with respect to the outer world. Labels and business cards can be altered quickly, the new CI becomes binding. Efforts are also made towards the inside, to make the orientation to change easier for the employees.⁴ Co-operation culture is determined by people. Applying effective levels of communications⁵ to inanimate objects and processes can succeed only to a certain extent. Co-operation requires communication for information transfer and information is coded and decoded by individuals who have been marked by different environments. Not only content-specific data, but also social contexts are communicated. Proficiencies in decoding and accurately (i.e. with comprehension of the transmission system) interpreting social information are required for successful co-operation. People require a repertoire of variable treatment schemes for common interaction situations.

Intercultural co-operation increases this complexity with social information which corresponds to non-learned schemata. Communication is a precondition for co-operation and cultural imprinting determines forms and possibilities of expression.

The series describes how culture-specific information arises, which options and strategies can be used for comprehension, to what extent co-operation is culturally supported or supportive of culture and what role communications plays in this regard.

¹ Simon in FAZ (Ed.) (1999), pg. 6.

² Olbrich in FAZ (Ed.) (1999), pg. 38,43 and Haller, ibid. pg. 46.

³ readily seen among companies operating in the food market such as McDonald's, Starbucks, Coca Cola.

⁴ E.g. through the development and structuring of a corporate identity or brands.

⁵ Effective communication levels, e.g. in: Wagner (1997), pg. 24, Rupperecht-Stroell/Kaminski (1997), pg. 74.