Strategy and organizational culture – Conceptualizing the interplay of key concepts in communication

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Abstract: Strategy and organizational culture have had a long and varied history in communication research. Different definitions go hand in hand at several levels to analyze their nature and impact. The cultural roots of organizations and the need for flexible strategic communication raise the question: *Do the generic similarities between strategy and organizational culture impact organizational communication, and if so, how can this be conceptualized?* Both strategy and organizational culture are embedded in dynamic environments and cope with complexity. They seem to be two sides of the same coin – combining stability from the past and flexibility for the future. But strategies cannot be implemented without culture being considered. Therefore, this article contains three main parts. First, it will use a literature review to discuss the resemblance between definitions of strategy and organizational culture as patterns that evolve over time. Second, the generic similarities will be applied to the CCO (communication constitutes organizations) principle, whereby strategy and culture are both an outcome of the *four flows of communication* and influence the constitution of an organization as well as its identity. Finally, this article will explain how organizational culture goes hand in hand with strategic communication and how this yields insights for science and practice. In short, this research will merge two important concepts of organizational communication. Finally, and as an essence of the interplay of strategies and organizational culture, the *four flows of communication* and five core categories will provide access to research and a way of advising companies in terms of organizational communication.

1. Introduction

Organizational culture is rooted in history and has been considered in a variety of ways (Schein 2010). Moreover, strategy has its origin in an age long before Christ (Evered 1983: 58-59). Both are important concepts in today's business world, as well as within the fields of organizational theories and communication science. Therefore, organizational communication is not conceivable without strategic communication in the organization's day-to-day business and separate from the cultural roots of the organization itself. Along this line, Allaire & Firsirotu (1984) pointed out that organizations are social systems, comprised of processes, norms, and structures. This process of socialization takes place within organizational culture, where culture means a collection of social conventions (Miller 1995; Ventresca & Kaghan 2008; Schein 2010). In addition, strategies are described as a process that surrounds interactions and as a channel routing organizational members toward their objectives (Gray 1999a). Thus, if we look at organizations as social phenomena, they are "constituted by interactions, language patterns, sensemaking, and symbolic processes" (Putnam & Nicotera 2009: ix). This process of constitution is strongly connected with an organization's prevailing culture and applied strategy. The development of strategies affects organizational culture because of the overarching presence of culture. "Culture is the context that 'surrounds' and the context that 'weaves together'." (Gray 1999b: 59)

An example from history might help to underline the need for a conceptualization of the interplay of strategy and organizational culture. Looking at a map of Alexander the Great's conquered territory shows more than geography. His campaign from Greece to India illustrates that conquering different political and cultural areas also depicts a pattern of a strategic maneuver. The use of a strategy cannot neglect the specific cultural background of the place. Consequently, the

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map may also look like a specific pattern of both a (military) strategy and a cultural terrain. The strategy itself has to take into account that the opponents belong to different cultures and subcultures, so different styles of campaign must be applied. This example makes it clear that there is an obvious connection between strategy and culture. While strategy has its roots in military practice and developed from a function toward a process (Evered 1983; Mintzberg & Quinn 1991), culture has its origin in the field of botany, where culture means "to cultivate something." (Cheney et al. 2004: 76) Both concepts are strongly interwoven within business and organizational communication today. Now the cultural roots of organizations come up against the need for flexible strategic communication within a turbulent environment, which is made up of complexity, globalization, and different stakeholders (Waters 2001; Nothhaft & Wehmeier 2007). All this requires a thorough understanding of the above-mentioned interplay. Hence, stability meets flexibility: the past has to deal with the future, and routines guard against ongoing uncertainty. Therefore, this article will try to examine to what extent strategy and organizational culture are similar and why it is important to consider one together with the other.

The following comparison of both definitions will provide an understanding of each concept. Based on this, this article asks: *Do the generic similarities between strategy and organizational culture impact organizational communication, and if so, how can this be conceptualized?* In detail, this overarching research question will be threefold:

1. What are the generic similarities between strategy and organizational culture?
2. How do the concepts influence each another?
3. What consequences arise from the interplay of the concepts for organizational communication?

This article uses the CCO principle to conceptualize the generic similarities between strategy and organizational culture. Furthermore, the point of view that *communication constitutes organizations,* applied as a basic framework, allows a profound comparison and discussion of the interplay between strategy and organizational culture based on the *four flows of communication* (McPhee & Zaug 2000). Lastly, this research aims at yielding insights for further considerations.

2. Definitions
2.1. Cultural concepts and understanding
"Culture is both a 'here and now' dynamic phenomenon and a coercive background structure that influences us in multiple ways." (Schein 2010: 3) Cultural concepts can be distinguished through two general concepts. They define culture as an institution of society and as a system of meanings. The former version sees culture as an overarching concept. It produces interactions, enables predictions, and gives stability for organizational activities. In this sense, culture can be seen as an element of management insofar as it is organized and controlled by leadership (Cheney et al. 2004; Schein 2010). Assuming culture as an institution of society allows an organization to be defined as something that *has* a culture (Miller 1995). On the other hand, culture as a system of meanings requires a more dynamic understanding, which includes persons or groups interacting within several subcultures. From this sociological and anthropological perspective (Allaire & Firsirotu 1984), culture is seen as a guideline that accepts inconsistencies and change. "Based on this wider interpretation, culture is a system of meaning that guides the construction of reality in a social community." (Cheney et al. 2004: 76) This interpretative view defines culture as a mosaic or pattern of opinions and subcultures, which evolves over time (Cheney et al. 2004; Schein 2010). Therefore, an organization *is* culture (Smircich 1983; Miller 1995).

In a more detailed look, Smircich (1983: 344) described culture "as social or normative glue that holds an organization together." Furthermore, Schein (2010: 18) established culture as a learned

and shared pattern of basic assumptions, values, behaviors, and artifacts, which consists of interactions and is held by a social group. In line with this, these patterns can be described as emerging through the constitution of interactions through languages, contexts, identities, and relationships. Within these interactions, culture can survive over time and space (Alvesson 1996: 459, 2002: 177), and is manifested in myths, rituals, stories, legends, and language (Smircich 1983: 344). Thus, culture is socially created through interactions of organizational actors (Miller 1995). The above-mentioned thoughts tend toward an interpretative understanding of culture, which is used for further discussion and is part of the understanding of organizations as being socially constructed. The article finishes by defining culture as a system of meanings, according to Cheney et al. (2004):

> Another reason to question the idea of using culture as a management tool is that culture develops through numerous kinds of social interactions. Organizational cultures typically have been developing over many years; they are embodied in different employees; they are reproduced daily through rituals and ceremonies; and they are often influenced by developments in the general culture of society or by conditions within a specific industry. (Cheney et al. 2004: 92-93)

Consequently, *culture can be conceptualized as a pattern that evolves and endures over time and space through social interactions*. Because of the overarching nature of organizational culture, strategies cannot be implemented without recognizing the cultural rules of the company.

2.2. Strategy discourse

"Strategy is a pattern, that is, consistency in behavior over time." (Mintzberg et al. 2005: 9) The term strategy developed from the Greek word *strategos* – which means a commanding general of an army – to become a concept of business management. While strategy referred in the age of Alexander the Great "to the skill of employing forces to overcome opposition and to create a unified system of global governance" (Evered 1983: 58-59), strategic planning approaches have in common that they are goal-focused, rationalized, and articulated guides to actions (Mintzberg et al. 2005: 13). Nevertheless, while strategies are strongly interwoven with management science and practice, it is still unclear what a strategy is and for which use strategies should be applied. Mintzberg & Quinn (1991: 3) pointed out that it is impossible to define strategy by using one correct answer. But even if there are different meanings of the key features, such as objectives, goals, and programs in the field (Mintzberg & Quinn 1991: 3), "the essence [of strategy] lies in the realm of the consequences of actions for future outcomes" (Gray 1999a: 18). Following Evered (1983), the development and understanding of strategy can be described generally in three parts:

> Strategy, in the *corporate management* field, is seen as a process for generating viable directions that lead to satisfactory performance in the market place, given a variety of legal constraints and the existence of competitors. … In the *military field*, strategy is viewed as the art of winning a protracted struggle against adversaries. … In the *futures research* field, strategy is viewed as a joint task of appreciating a complex of environmental changes and making core existential choices in situations of massive change. (Evered 1983: 70-71 [italics in original])

While many management scholars see strategy as a formal and a planning process, critical approaches discuss strategy in a more dynamical manner. Mintzberg (1993) questioned the formal planning school of strategy, because of the guiding principle "to be in hell is to drift; to be in heaven

is to steer" (Mintzberg 1993: 32) and by contradicting the predictability of the future. This tension exists also in the field of strategic communication. Strategic communication can be defined "as the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission" (Hallahan et al. 2007: 3). However, "underlining the self-dynamics in social systems goes hand in hand with skepticism toward linear planning and controllability" (Nothhaft & Wehmeier 2007: 160). Argenti et al. (2005: 83) illustrate the tension of strategic communication between being aligned with the overall formalized strategy and enhancing the position of the organization through ongoing modifications. Thereby, an overall formalized strategy is strongly connected with the culture of the companies. This raises another tension challenging organizational communication to be aligned with culture when implementing a new strategy – especially in crises and situations of organizational change.

Mintzberg (1978, 1991) and Mintzberg et al. (2005) compared five different views on strategy, called the *5 P's for strategy*, for a constructive orientation within the discussion of different definitions. The first is aligned with the planning school and sees strategy as an intended course of action (*plan*). This view ignores the influence of the environment, and assumes predictability. Thus, strategy brings the organization from here to there (Mintzberg et al. 2005: 9). Furthermore, and connected with the military field, strategy can be a specific maneuver to outwit and overcome an opponent (*ploy*). A more flexible understanding sees strategy as consistency in behavior, and views the term "strategy" as a result of interactions (*pattern*). Single interactions become a consistent pattern over time. This view allows openness concerning new learnings within a dynamic environment (Mintzberg et al. 2005: 24-25). While a framework is still given, the details can emerge based on the situation and occasion. Two other options assume that strategy locates a product in the environment (*position*) and strategy as a concept inside the organization (*perspective*).

> [A]s position, strategy looks down – to the 'x' that marks the spot where the product meets the customer, as well as out – to the external marketplace. As perspective, in contrast, strategy looks in – inside the organization, indeed inside the heads of the strategists, but also looks up – to the grand vision of the enterprise. (Mintzberg et al. 2005: 13-14)

Within these discussions of different meanings and uses of strategy, the concept of strategy develops from a plan toward strategy as a pattern (Mintzberg et al. 2005). The uncertainty and unpredictability of the future and the need for goal-orientated activities require that strategies "combine some degree of flexible learning with some degree of cerebral control" (Mintzberg 1994: 110). When this is translated to organizations, it can be assumed that organizations make plans for the future, *and* emerge through patterns of the past. Intended strategies exist beside emergent strategies and can become realized strategies over time. Unrealized strategies can also arise because of a changing environment (Mintzberg 1978).

"[E]ffective strategists mix these in ways that reflect the conditions at hand, notably the ability to predict as well as the need to react to unexpected events." (Mintzberg et al. 2005: 12) However, the article defines strategy *as a pattern that evolves over time through the interplay of intended and emergent strategies and interactions*.

Based on the fact that strategy is also a social process, which is rooted in culture (Mintzberg & Lampel 1999), the following discussion aims at revealing the generic similarities between strategy and culture. Not least because of the unambiguous essence of strategy, "[t]here is always a cultural dimension to strategical behavior." (Gray 1999a: 28) Moreover, and much the same as for strategies, organizational culture at every level is also a part of the organization as coming from the past and pointing to the future. Subsequently, the use of the *four flows of communication* (McPhee & Zaug 2000) as a basic framework clarifies the connection between both concepts, and elucidates

the importance of recognizing the interplay in the daily business of organizational communication.

3.   The CCO principle as a basic framework

As the above-mentioned definitions highlight, strategy and culture are both rigid and dynamic. The emphasis lies in the emergence of interactions shaping the organization in an ongoing process. This can be combined with the CCO principle, according to which authors "avoid reifying the organization as a static entity, a fixed structure, or an omnipresent agent" (Putnam & Nicotera 2009: x). This perspective sees organizations as social phenomena constituted by interactions, language, patterns, sensemaking, and symbolic processes. Inside and outside organizational boundaries, members guide, act, and coordinate their activities through and in patterns of communication (Cooren & Taylor 1997; Fairhurst & Putnam 2004; Putnam & Nicotera 2009). Therefore, strategy and culture create a pattern, which becomes a structure over time and changes within this structure at the same time through interactions (Giddens 1984). Communication is the constitutive force of the past *and* the driver for future outcomes (McPhee & Zaug 2000, 2009). Thus, constitution can be defined as "a pattern or array of types of interaction [that] constitutes organizations insofar as they make organizations what they are, and insofar as basic features of the organization are implicated in the system of interaction" (McPhee & Zaug 2009: 27).

3.1.   *Introducing* the four flows of communication

Taking a more detailed look, McPhee and Zaug (2000) assumed that the process of constitution appears through four different types of interactions – namely through *the four flows of communication*. The organization emerges through the interplay of the following communicative processes: membership negotiation (a), their self-structuring (b), activity coordination (c), and institutional positioning (d). First, organizations are made up of their members, which negotiate their roles, functions, and positions. "Organizations exist when they draw members in, and lead them to take part in and understand the interactional world unique to the organization." (McPhee & Zaug 2009: 35) Second, leaders steer and guide the organization by solving problems and deciding its future direction. "In short, organizations are the objects not merely of reflexive attention but of reflexive control and design – of self-structuring." (McPhee & Zaug 2009: 35) Third, common interactions proceed in a process of coordination of the daily business, which is a kind of "mutual adjustment" (Mintzberg 1979). Lastly, the organization cannot be considered divorced from a relationship with its environment, which means that the organization is embedded in a larger social system (McPhee & Zaug 2000). "The focal organization must actually connect with and induce return communication with important elements of its environment, and vice versa. It must establish or negotiate an image as a viable relational partner – customer, supplier, neighbor, for example." (McPhee & Zaug 2009: 40)

The CCO principle can be used to analyze the interdependence of strategy and culture, because both can be understood as patterns which evolve through communicative interactions. Thus, communicative activities are the *modus operandi* in which strategy and organizational culture evolve and endure over time and space. In this sense, they are outcomes of *the four flows of communication* (McPhee & Zaug 2000, 2009) and shape the past as well as the organizational future. Cultural roots, values, and norms influence the constitution as well as the identity of organizations within the strategic process. Based on an integrative and interactive understanding of both concepts (Hallahan et al. 2007; Schein 2010), the following analysis provides the CCO principle as a bridge between strategy and organizational culture. *The four flows of communication* are applied as a key concept to analyze the strategy-making process depending on culture through the lens of organizational communication.

3.2. *Organizational change as a key situation*
If these communication flows are applied, the similarities between strategy and organizational strategy can be analyzed. For a vivid description, the case of organizational change will be used as a key situation and example. Organizational change challenges the process of strategy-making and dealing with organizational culture simultaneously because "[t]he environment in which organizations operate is increasingly turbulent – changing rapidly and unpredictably with the globalization of markets and increased competition." (Cheney et al. 2004: 313) Therefore, change and change-related communication are valuable examples, since change implies consistency and flexibility at the same time (Cheney et al. 2004: 313-317).

> As some organizations have experienced, the more they emphasize permanence and stability, the harder it is for them to depart from established practices. … On the other hand, the more an organization strives for continuous change, the more difficult it can be for members to feel a sense of stability, especially when the changes do not follow logically or organically from established missions and strategic plans. (Cheney et al. 2004: 317)

Alvesson & Sveningsson (2008) describe organizational change as a complex process. Following their argument, organizational change is strongly interwoven with an alteration in *time*. Moreover, they claim the notion of environmental change as a presupposition for organizations who go through a change process (*institutional positioning*). This ends up as a *need* to change. The environment shapes the *context* for organizational change, which can arise at different *levels*. A change solely of processes or activities at the micro level might also be conceivable, as well as an alteration in society at the macro level. Additionally, the authors highlight that the *actors* within change situations play a key role in the progress of change (*membership negotiation + activity coordination*). Finally, studying organizational change requires selecting a *theoretical perspective* (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2008: 4-7). Change is an organizational phenomenon often stimulated by management (*self-structuring*). Thus, change can be understood as:

> a … process of social construction in which new realities are created, … sustained and modified in the process of communication. Producing intentional change, then, is a matter of deliberately bringing into existence, through communication, a new reality or set of social structures. (Ford & Ford 1995: 542)

Aligned with the CCO principle, this perspective implies that change "occurs in a context of human social interactions, which constitute and are constituted by communication" (Ford & Ford 1995: 542), and that communication is the *context* in and the central means by which change occurs (Cheney et al. 2004: 232). When summarizing this, change can also be conceptualized as a product of social interactions and as the result of communicative activities. Thus, the situation of change will be an example for analyzing the impact of the generic similarities between strategy and organizational culture for organizational communication.

3.3. *Analyzing the interplay between strategy and culture*
Strategy and culture are both open to different members, functions, and positions, and able to create an identity for organizational members and potential applicants. They can be connected to membership negotiation (a) insofar as strategies depend on different members and on the collaboration of different departments concerning the process of strategy development and implementation (Hallahan et al. 2007), and insofar as organizational culture includes the struggle

and negotiation between old and new members with different subcultures (Schein 2010). *Openness* and *identity* are the two categories connecting the internal organization with its external environment. If a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) grows and transforms into a large company, it will implement new structures and departments, employ more and new personnel and struggle with a new organizational climate. At some point in time, a person or even a department who is solely responsible for communication will be employed (Zerfass et al. 2015). Consequently, the strategy must consider the tension between the old and new members as well as the struggle between organizational culture and new subcultures. In such a situation, the challenge for organizational communication within the SME is reaching an understanding between the owner and the newly employed communicator (Fischbach & Mack 2008: 170). At the same time, communication will be the *modus operandi* including the actors of change, transferring information, and negotiating between old and new conditions.

Concerning the process of self-structuring (b), the organization has to communicate in a *consistent* manner (Mintzberg et al. 2005) and with a high level of *awareness* toward the change inside the organization (Schein 2010). Organizational leaders have to decide the communication strategy, as well as playing a core role when organizations create and apply culture. In this sense, to a certain degree strategists reflect the organizational culture at all times, not least because of the cultural instinct, which is manifested in their mind (Gray 1999b). The interdependence of leadership and culture illustrates that the above-mentioned flows of communication are connected and emerge through their interplay:

> (C)ulture is ultimately created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated by leaders. At the same time, with group maturity, culture comes to constrain, stabilize, and provide structure and meaning of the group members even to the point of ultimately specifying what kind of leadership will be accepted in the future. … These dynamic processes of culture creation and management are the essence of leadership and make you realize that leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin. (Schein 2010: 3)

In the case of change-related communication, self-structuring processes are mostly stimulated by management. When thinking of a growing SME, it might be conceivable that the growth itself implies a change in the management situation. Often large companies employ external managers when founders and owners are no longer able to lead the organization on their own (Hamer 1990: 39). Then the self-structuring force is stimulated by the new manager who is responsible for strategy implementation. This will be strongly interwoven with the flow of membership negotiation, where leaders have to deal with the tension of new strategy and the established organizational culture when making decisions about the future and recognizing the past. Their awareness concerning the internal change and their communication skills will be a key factor in the situation of organizational change and will be crucial for the acceptance of change.

The dualism of structure and process is evidenced also by the activity coordination (c) between the tension of *flexibility* and *consistency* (Giddens 1984). Strategic communication is structured and coordinated to combine solely communicative activities to a framework of corporate communications. Flexible communicative work patterns exist alongside overall formalized strategies (Mintzberg et al. 2005; Hallahan et al. 2007). This reveals once again the combination of strategy as a plan *and* as a pattern. Moreover, organizational culture is a result of the interaction of organizational members whose behavior is shaped by cultural rules (Cheney et al. 2004, Schein 2010). In addition to that, organizational culture is a guideline for the coordination of activities allowing change and adaptions. "Culture is not primarily 'inside' people's heads, but somewhere 'between' the heads of a group of people where symbols and meanings are publicly expressed, e.g. in work group interactions, in board meetings but also in material objects." (Alvesson 2002: 4)

Consequently, culture is implicit on the one hand, and on the other hand becomes explicit in organizational activities (Allaire & Firsirotu 1984: 199). Thus, organizational members have to be included in the process of change as part of the implementation of strategy (Mintzberg et al. 2005). The participation of organizational actors in planning *and* implementing a new course of action can enable a balance between organizational culture and new subcultures and the acknowledgement of the new leader. Furthermore, communication in the form of conversations enables the coordination of activities aligned with the culture and the formalized strategy. The challenge for organizational communication within a change process is to be consistent on the one hand, and on the other hand stay flexible because of the uncertainty und unpredictability of the future. This makes it clear that communication is not only an intended mode of social action, but also a complex phenomenon of interaction flows – evolving and struggling in the context of change (Ford & Ford 1995: 542). In reference to the example of a growing SME, the strategy concerning activity coordination should consider that all activities were mostly adjusted through direct communication and spontaneous conversations in smaller organizations. With an increasing size, the mode of adjustment changes insofar as project groups and meetings will increase while spontaneous conversations decrease (Zerfass et al. 2015). Thus, activity coordination must take into account the previous culture within new communicative strategies, e.g. through combining old and new instruments of internal communication.

According to Freeman et al. (2010) and Schneider (2002), the organization has to cope with its environment as well as with complexity and change by interacting with its stakeholders permanently and creating values for long-term relationships. This implies two key variables of the process of institutional positioning (d). While organizations have to be open toward their environment, they also need a strong identity to create trust and credibility. The process of strategy-making has to cope with the organizational identity and the influence of the environment. Furthermore, organizational culture lies between the external perceived image and the internal experienced identity. The art of this communicative flow seems to be the *openness* concerning the changing environment by preserving organization's *identity*. "(O)rganizational boundaries shift consistently depending on who is talking about it and strategy emerges through the daily practices of organizational members" (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2013: 79). This means that communicative strategies have to cope with ongoing change and have to oscillate between the past and the future. When a company is going through change, it requires openness by monitoring the environment and staying flexible concerning the planned activities (Cheney et al. 2004: 317-318). Additionally, as it cares about the stakeholder relationship, the organization should not neglect its identity within the change process. For example, SMEs are characterized by strong contact management with regard to their business partners and by strong roots in local communities. If an SME is growing and transforms into a large enterprise over time, it will be necessary for it to preserve the identity of the organization. Direct and personal communication with stakeholders cannot change overnight to a range of new digital channels. Rather, organizational communication should adapt gradually to new communication instruments. All this highlights that the generic similarities of strategy and organizational culture are not without consequences for organizational communication. The above-mentioned similarities between both concepts are summarized in the Table 1.

The analysis of both concepts has shown that strategy is aligned with culture. Whereas strategies can be contrary to solely cultural norms, they cannot be acultural. Both are, in a specific way, learned and programmed from the past as well as being developing forces for future outcomes. In this sense, strategy is inescapably cultural (Gray 1999b). Strategic culture can be understood as a guide to strategic actions, when actions are defined as social interactions constituting patterns of enduring assumptions about strategic matters (Gray 1999b; Putnam & Nicotera 2009). While communication is "the very medium within which change occurs" (Ford & Ford 1995: 542), the oscillation between formalized strategies and organizational culture is an ongoing challenge for

companies. Culture as a pattern of assumptions arises in the context of communication and is the framework in which strategy implementation occurs. Those patterns warrant cultural discussions of strategic communication (Gray 1999b).

Table 1: The common ground of strategy and organizational culture

Similarities	References
No single definition	Mintzberg & Quinn 1991 Schein 2010
Enduring over time and space Emerging from the past and indicating the future	Alvesson 1996 Cheney et al. 2004 Mintzberg et al. 2005 Putnam & McPhee 2009
Linking micro (insight and internal) and macro (framework and external) perspectives	Taylor 1993 Cheney et al. 2004 Putnam & McPhee 2009 Schein 2010
Symbolic components	Smircich 1983 Alvesson 1996 Hallahan et al. 2007
Emerging through ongoing communicative interactions/trends in negotiation	Schneider 2002 McPhee & Zaug 2000, 2009 Schein 2010
Described as patterns of intended and unintended behavior	Smircich 1983 Mintzberg & Quinn 1991 Mintzberg et al. 2005 Schein 2010

4. The essence for organizational communication

Weick (1985) has already shown that strategy and culture are very similar. Moreover, he illustrated the difficulty of discriminating between the two concepts via a joke. He asked the readers of the article *The Significance of Corporate Culture* to fill in the word in the gaps in the following sentences:

> __evolves from inside the organization – not from its future environment.
> __is a deeply ingrained and continuing pattern of management behavior that gives direction to the organization – not a manipulable and controllable mechanism that can be easily changed from one year to the next.
> __is a nonrational concept stemming from the informal values, traditions, and norms of behavior held by the firm's managers and employees – not a rational, formal, logical, conscious, and predetermined thought process engaged in by top executives.
> __emerges out of the cumulative effect of many informed actions and decisions taken daily and over years by many employees – not a 'one-shot' statement developed exclusively by top management for distribution to the organization.
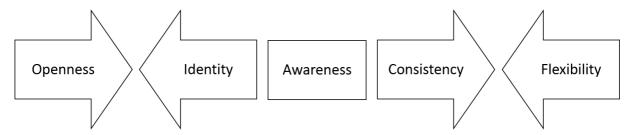> (Weick 1985: 381-382)

He solved the quiz with the answer: "Anybody who answered organizational culture failed the test.

The proper word is strategy." (Czarniawska 1992: 170)

Embedded in a turbulent environment and coping with flexibility and unpredictability, organizations have to rethink the connection between strategies and organizational culture for successful communication (Nothhaft & Wehmeier 2007; Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2013; Ebert 2014). Overarching cultural roots and the need for strategies within the business require a combined consideration of both organizational concepts (Gray 1999b). An analysis of strategy and organizational culture has revealed that the concepts are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, strategy and organizational culture were built on stability from the past as well as having to deal with the uncertainty of the future. While culture can be seen as stable and ongoing as a result of traditions and change, strategy is stable (plan) and dynamic (patterns) simultaneously.

As an outcome of the application of the CCO principle and the four flows framework, Figure 1 highlights five elements of the interplay of strategy and organizational culture:

Figure 1. The essence of the interplay between strategy and organizational culture

First, both concepts deal with change and with the relationship of an organization with the environment (*openness*). Furthermore, the *identity* of organizations is a key driver for successful communication, when the organization faces the formation and acknowledgment of its own structure. Identity can be used as a frame within rapidly changing environments. The *awareness* is needed to span boundaries (Grunig & Hunt 1984), because an organization has not only to be aware of the internal norms and values but also of the further development of the environment. Defining strategy and organizational culture as a pattern shows that both are outcomes of conformity in behavior. Moreover, strategy is aligned with culture and can never be acultural. "The strategy must not present mutually inconsistent goals and policies." (Mintzberg et al. 2005: 27) Therefore, *consistency* can be claimed to be the fourth element, but not only concerning behavior. Connected with *awareness*, it means that "the consistency … is important, not the intensity of attention" (Schein 2010: 237). Finally, *flexibility* is part of the concepts, because strategy and organizational culture have to cope with adaptions influenced by change and have to deal with new members. Seeing the organization as a flexible pattern of ongoing interactions challenges the formulation and implementation of strategic communication as well as the development and maintenance of organizational culture.

5. Conclusion

This article conceptualized the interplay between strategy and organizational culture. Based on the *four flows of communication* and by using the example of organizational change and change-related communication, it summarized the generic similarities between the concepts and revealed their impact on organizational communication. The analysis of the similarities based on each flow highlighted that organizational communication lies between the tension of openness and identity and the tension of consistency and flexibility. To be aware of these tensions seems to be one of the biggest challenges for organizations.

A successful interplay between both concepts of organizational communication is able to

create credibility, trust, and a strong stakeholder relationship (Cheney et al. 2004: 22; Putnam & Nicotera 2009: 6; Freeman et al. 2010). Moreover, the framework from McPhee & Zaug (2000, 2009) allow the interplay between strategy and organizational culture to be analyzed, e.g. in further research. The four flows can be used as categories within content analysis, in-depth interviews, or observations. This might be necessary for organizational communication, because strategic culture is the context in which communication emerges and will continue (Gray 1999b). At another level, communication is the medium within which the oscillation between strategy and organizational culture occurs. When practitioners understand that strategy and culture are strongly interwoven, and accept both sides of the coin (stability and flexibility) as a given, it can improve the acceptance of organizational members within a change process and the rate of reaction in dynamic environments, and overcome cultural boundaries within ongoing globalization.

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