

## Communication Cultures, Organisational Culture, the Importance of Interculturality

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### ABSTRACT

At the level of the individual, the organisation and a society, the communication process, the prevailing communication style, the accepted and applied signals are significantly influenced by the cultural framework and roots of the given community. The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of this issue, in the course of which the role of cultures is highlighted at the social, organisational and individual levels.

The chapter also discusses about the definition of culture, the role on the field of negotiation styles, and the importance of organisational culture, especially when it comes to interactions between or within organisations.

### KEYWORDS

organisational culture, communication culture, communication negotiation styles, concept of good governance, democratic techniques, interculturality

The reason for communication barriers and blockages is often none other than the difference in the field of culture. This can be just as problematic when talking about interpersonal interactions as it is when talking about inter-organisational or intra-organisational communication.

### 1. The Concept of Culture

The *concept of culture* is present in the literature in many approaches<sup>1</sup>. The term itself comes from the Latin word to work, cultivate, which was initially used in the context of agricultural activity and only later was it filled with the indirect meaning of elaborating people, developing their knowledge, skills, abilities or character. As a result, the content of the term has been known for centuries, but its specific meaning depends to

1 Csemáné Váradi and Jacsó, 2018, pp. 85–94.

Erika Váradi-Csema (2025) 'Communication Cultures, Organisational Culture, the Importance of Interculturality' in Erika Váradi-Csema (ed.) *Interdisciplinary and Child-Friendly Communication*. Miskolc-Budapest: Central European Academic Publishing. pp. 167–177. [https://doi.org/10.71009/2025.evcs.iacfc\\_12](https://doi.org/10.71009/2025.evcs.iacfc_12)

a great extent not only on the given historical and geographical environment, but also on the aspect from which it is approached. Thus, for example, culture can mean the common state of consciousness of a defined circle of people within a given environment, while according to other conceptions, it does not express the environment of individuals, but rather their typical and characteristic patterns of behaviour and lifestyle. If we try to grasp the concept in the broadest sense, we can distinguish between material and symbolic culture. While the former encompasses material goods and beings arising in connection with the activities of the given community, such as monuments, furniture or buildings, the latter mainly covers the so-called symbolic beings. It is the totality of individual consciousnesses that constitute elements of their consciousness in all personal aspects of the given community, and consequently the affected people believe that this also exists in relation to the other members of the community, and based on this, a common system of symbols is attached to it, which guarantees the intelligibility and clarity of the interaction<sup>2</sup>.

Important components of culture include, therefore, in addition to symbols, common cultural values, rules, beliefs or knowledge, including everyday and scientific knowledge.

However, it is also important to mention that the concept of culture is also greatly influenced by the fact from which field of science and within it we want to approach it. A good example of this is the sociological approach, in which a normativist-creativeist, structuralist approach can appear as well as a creativeist or rationalist approach. These are marked differences in terms of their content. For example, according to the normativist conception, all the actions of an individual within a society are related to values, rules and roles jointly created and accepted by the members of the society. It follows from this that social phenomena are actually indirectly determined by the common culture of society itself, influencing its frameworks, directions and centres of gravity. In contrast, according to the structuralist approach, culture primarily influences social phenomena by conveying the conditions of the given society and the determining effect of a structure. An important difference in approach to these is the conception of the creationist approach and culture, which assigns a much greater role to the weight of actions and interactions, and according to which there is no pre-existing culture, it always develops in a specific situation and only applies to it.

## 2. Culture and Communication

In addition to the sociological side, culture can also be approached from an anthropological, psychological and communicative perspective. Accordingly, the content of the concept changes.

The concept of culture can also be encountered depending on whether it approaches the terminological issue primarily at the level of the community and from

2 See more for example in: Farkas, 2005.

the point of view of the phenomenon to be defined, or whether it focuses primarily on the specific person who is under its influence and partly shapes it. According to the former, “culture is the sum of material and spiritual values created by mankind, an area of culture, or the manifestation of a people in a certain era”<sup>3</sup>. According to the latter approach, “culture is the sum of all the knowledge, values, reflexes, behavioural models and schemes, habits and beliefs that the individual can partly observe and acquire in the course of socialisation in the environment that raises him/her”<sup>4</sup>. According to Judit Hidasi’s approach, culture is “an intellectual and material world owned, used, shaped and mediated by a given community, which is interpreted in the same way by the members of the community”<sup>5</sup>.

The *significance of culture* is vividly expressed by Judit Hidasi in her book when she writes that “our perception of reality and our relationship to reality is determined by our culture, and more specifically by the language of the given culture, and we interpret and understand the information we receive through its filter”<sup>6</sup>.

Culture thus plays an important role both in terms of the prevailing style of communication and in terms of the ability to correctly identify the content of the messages sent. This is especially important when interpreting non-verbal messages that are decisive for communication.

However, the specific cultural norms to be followed depend significantly on the current position of the individual and the circumstances of interpersonal interaction. Different rules of communication must be followed during an informal or formal meeting, just as the specific protocol and language of communication are developed in the case of certain professions.

Intercultural competence has two components. On the one hand, it encompasses knowledge about other cultures and, in a narrow sense, soft skills. It is the ability to communicate and cooperate effectively with people from different cultures despite differences.

A prerequisite for this is a personal attitude towards the other culture. That is, striving to understand cultural differences, openness to understanding and accepting the interests, needs, and perspectives of others, and respect for differences and diversity.

Compared to some other competencies, an important element of intercultural competence is therefore knowledge of different cultures, their behaviours, customs, norms, etc. This also includes accepting the typical communication style of the other culture.

Interculturality is a priority at both international and EU level. For example, it could be read in the relevant document of Council of Europe:

3 Korpics, 2011.

4 Józsa, 1976, p. 143.

5 Hidasi, 2004, p. 14.

6 Ibid., p. 28.

„The “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” presented here, emphatically argues in the name of the governments of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe that our common future depends on our ability to safeguard and develop human rights, as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, democracy and the rule of law and to promote mutual understanding. It reasons that the intercultural approach offers a forward-looking model for managing cultural diversity. It proposes a conception based on individual human dignity (embracing our common humanity and common destiny). If there is a European identity to be realised, it will be based on shared fundamental values, respect for common heritage and cultural diversity as well as respect for the equal dignity of every individual.”<sup>7</sup>

Intercultural competence can be developed. And this must be kept in mind already during education, as indicated by UNESCO’s 2006 guidelines on education:

‘Interculturality is a dynamic concept and refers to evolving relations between cultural groups. It has been defined as “the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect.” Interculturality presupposes multiculturalism and results from ‘intercultural’ exchange and dialogue on the local, regional, national or international level.’<sup>8</sup>

### **3. Organisational Communication Culture and Two Types of Negotiation**

Communication is also important in specific situations, such as communication and exchange of information within or outside an organisation, but in a professional capacity.

When working as a professional, particularly when resolving problems and conflicts of interest within or between organisations, two major communication styles are typically used: interest-based negotiation and positional (position-based) bargaining. It is important to note, however, that these communication panels are also used by individuals when it comes to family disputes or even neighbourhood disagreements.

People mostly negotiate from a position<sup>9</sup>. They choose a position, argue for their standpoint, and then concede to meet halfway. A classic example of this is the bargaining mechanism, where opposing parties take up different positions in succession and try to hold on to them as long as possible.

In the meantime, they can decide between two roles: the gentle negotiator or the tough negotiator.

7 Council of Europe, 2008.

8 UNESCO, 2006, p. 17.

9 For more information see e.g.: Kertész, 2010.

The “gentle negotiator” is always looking for an agreement, so he/she will make concessions to maintain a good relationship. He/she trusts the other person, often changes his/her position with offers and will even take a one-sided loss to reach a deal that the other party will accept.

The “hard position defender”, on the other hand, aims to win, does not trust the other person, and fights for the solution that suits him/her best by threatening, demanding unilateral advantages, and keeping his/her underlying interests in the dark. Whichever style of communication is taken by the “hard position defender”, in practice it always results in a “win-lose” or “lose-lose” position, so in the event of conflicts or conflicts of interest, it never leads to a real solution.

The interest-based (“gentle”) negotiation technique developed in the Harvard Negotiation Project, however, has the potential to lead to a “win-win” solution. Here, the parties aim to find a solution on the merits and seek mutual benefits where possible. Of course, interests may also conflict; in this case, they seek to base the agreement on a set of criteria independent of the will of the parties<sup>10</sup>.

The essence of the Harvard method is that the goods involved in a conflict are merely embodiments of the parties’ interests, but are not identical to them. The range of goods corresponding to interests is in reality much wider. Thus, accepting this basic proposition allows the range of possible goods to be extended. Since we also function as human beings as professionals, a number of subjective elements may already play a role in the preceding processes. These must therefore be taken into account when negotiating and seeking solutions.

At the same time, it is a very important criterion for effective communication that the parties are able to put aside their emotions and to assess the specific professional issue or problem objectively. Even if there is a disagreement between the parties about the other person, this should be kept separate from the subject of the negotiation. The values behind the emotions are the defining assumptions of the individual’s subject and world view, which are formed over a long period of time during personality development, and cannot be changed by a negotiation meeting. However, the interests that correspond to the values that the parties consider important can be expressed in various ways. Finding common ground makes it possible to engage in a principled discussion, i.e. one that corresponds to their moral principles and defining values, rather than a positional (position-based) bargaining.

10 Fisher, Ury and Patton, 1998, pp. 10–12.

**Table 1.** Main elements of negotiation styles<sup>11</sup>

	<b>Position-Based (Positional) Bargaining</b>	<b>Interest-Based Negotiation</b>
<b>the negotiating parties</b>	opponents	negotiating partners
<b>interpersonal relationship</b>	is put at risk because of the offensive behaviour	is reinforced by cooperative behaviour
<b>contact</b>	present-focus	future-oriented
<b>trust</b>	not required	the establishment of a necessary precondition
<b>interests of the parties</b>	are mutually exclusive	can be satisfied at the same time
<b>information</b>	are being suppressed	are mutually shared
<b>goods</b>	limited	expandable
<b>accessed at</b>	win-lose (maximum trade-off)	winner-winner
<b>attitude to problems</b>	maintaining, and if possible strengthening, the position	finding a common solution that is acceptable to all stakeholders
<b>focus</b>	the goal is profit, the pursuit of self-interest	the aim is a common solution, to this end the identification of needs and interests (problem focus)
<b>duration</b>	fast in the short term, but not durable	time-consuming but durable results in a solution
<b>psychological satisfaction</b>	no satisfaction, or only on one side and in the short term	longer-term satisfaction on both sides

Since the party choosing a positional (position-based) bargaining approach defines in advance what it wants to achieve and aims to win as much as possible, which it compares to its initial negotiating position (i.e. how much it has conceded or won in relation to it), it does not share the information it has available to it when communicating with the other party, but rather focuses on discovering the other party's shortcomings and weaknesses (even before the negotiation).

In contrast, a party to an interest-based negotiation seeks to take into account and, where possible, satisfy not only its own interests but those of its partner. It therefore shares the information available to it in its communication in order to identify needs.

The two styles of communication are characterised by a different psychological climate, which has a knock-on effect on the quality of communication and the subjective well-being of the parties. While the main feeling in positional (position-based) bargaining is distrust, hostility and a corresponding atmosphere, in interest-based negotiation it is trust. And this effects not only the clients' long-term feelings and the subjective well-being in connection with the concrete case, but also how psychologically satisfied they are when they leave the negotiating table.

11 Based on Csemáné Váradi and Gilányi, 2010.

#### 4. Communication and Organisational Culture

The style of communication that professionals use depends very much on the *organisational culture* of the institution.

*In general*, it can be said that conflicts within an organisation can be different in nature and for different reasons, depending on the nature of the organisation and the personnel involved. Thus, they may arise from external opposition: between the organisation and other institutions (whether in a subordinate, co-subordinate or subordinate-to-inferior relationship); between the organisation and a specific person or group of persons; and internal conflict: between the organisation (head office) and a department or between individual departments; between individuals, regardless of their departmental affiliation, or between an individual and a group of individuals.

Accordingly, some of the conflicts may be structural in nature and may arise, for example, from differences in decision-making competences. In contrast, in interest-based conflict situations, hierarchical affiliation does not necessarily play a role, but rather the perceived or real conflict between the parties due to the finite nature of resources. But it can also include situations where one party within the organisation tries to secure its own needs at the expense of the other. As an organisation is necessarily also a sum of individuals, there can be a significant degree of relational, needs-based or informational conflict, where the conflict between the parties may arise from lack of information, the different needs of the parties concerned or even inadequate communication.

However, an organisation always operates within the framework of a society. It is therefore – partly directly (e.g. because of the legal framework) and partly indirectly – significantly influenced by the environment in which it operates.

In connection with the latter - partly also taking into account the possible conflict situations related to administrative legislation and the application of law by public authorities – a theoretical question may arise: “can a society be able to name interests and needs, to create a system of values and norms that overrides the individual interests and needs of the persons existing in it, and is capable of uniting them, of leading them in one direction? Is this achievable as a voluntary commitment by those concerned? Or is this a mere illusion, and the suppression of current individual priorities and interests can only be achieved under duress?”<sup>12</sup>

According to the proponents of the integration theory<sup>13</sup>, it is precisely through small units such as workplace communities or the family that societies are able to act as an integrating force towards their members. And this force is sufficient to induce a state of equilibrium, ensuring that a society can function essentially without great shocks. This is where shared values play a key role as an important basis for cohesion.

12 See in more detail: Csemáné Váradi, 2013, p. 11.

13 Dahrendorf, 2019.

In contrast, domination theory takes the view that these small communities exist only because of a kind of constraint, such as a subordinate or dependent situation between the workplace manager and his/her colleagues, or between the father and his/her family members. But this is not able to ensure continued stability, given that shared values are pushed into the background, giving way to interests. The temporary nature of hierarchical structures keeps processes in constant motion, which is further strained by the tensions arising from the situation in the actors.

The way in which members of society relate to particular social structures is significantly influenced by their values or interests. The former presupposes a more durable attachment, stronger loyalty and, through value identity, more integrated behaviour with the structure, while an interest-based relationship is much less stable and durable due to the volatility and temporary nature of needs and wants.

Accordingly, the effective functioning of an organisation and the frequency of conflicts have a significant impact on whether its employees are connected to their workplace on a value or interest basis. It also has a significant impact on the ability of the Hungarian public administration to cope with the many challenges posed by the new developments of recent years in particular.

It is a feature of democratic states that they guarantee a wide range of opportunities for citizens to express their opinions and assert their interests. This in itself requires a change of attitude on the part of any organisation with the power to use coercive means – especially in view of the constant expansion of citizens' rights. In Hungary for example the recent years have brought a real change for the national administration. The idea of good governance now sees citizens and other actors in society as partners. A well-functioning, efficient system of relations cannot be imagined without the so-called “good governance”. This cannot be achieved without the inclusion of so-called “democratic techniques” and their incorporation into everyday behaviour – particularly when it comes to conflict management.

However, conflicts can arise not only with the public administration's immediate or wider environment, but also with society<sup>14</sup>. The institutional system itself can also generate conflicts. These can be within the organisation; between persons or interpersonal conflicts.

## 5. Personal Communication in the Organisation

Conflicts *within an organisation* arise from the antagonism between different departments. However, it also includes cases of disagreement between large groups of people within an organisation, regardless of the internal structure, or the exclusion of one person, even within an organisation. *Interpersonal* conflict situations differ from the former not only in the number of people involved, but also in the dynamics of the conflict and the methods used.

14 Csemáné Váradi, 2014, pp. 9–29.



*Intra-personal* conflicts may not only take the form of a decision-making dilemma; they may also arise, for example, from a difference in value priorities between the individual and the organisation. But also beyond that: an employee's feelings about the organisation<sup>15</sup> are significantly influenced by what he/she considers more important: the adequacy of his/her job or the organisation as a whole, the realisation of the interests of the individual or the workplace community. But equally important are whether the individual is relationship-oriented or task-oriented, plans for the long or the short term, requires weak or strong control, or belongs to the risk-takers or risk-averse group.

They also partly determine the extent to which an employee is able to meet the role expectations of his/her status within the organisation.

In addition to social roles, it is the so-called acquired roles related to the position and job within the workplace that have a significant impact on the daily life of the individual. Knowing and following these roles – especially in a changing and evolving institution – can be difficult, and deviating from them or not complying with them sufficiently can generate conflicts in the environment. The more diverse or complex an organisational structure, the more diverse the role expectations may be. Different competencies are required for subordinate, managerial or co-worker behaviour, so it is very difficult to meet them all at the same time.

While it is social roles – such as the typical female or male role expected in a given society – that can have a fundamental impact on all other roles an individual plays, the impact of acquired roles is not negligible. A set of values or personality expectations linked to a worker's status may over time become so ingrained in the worker's behaviour patterns that they are followed even when they are in their social role (e.g., as a husband, they may express themselves at home as a boss at work, or as a wife, they may communicate with their husband as a teacher communicates with young students).

In addition to the identity of value priorities and the employee's feelings about the organisation, the chances of internal or external conflict are also significantly influenced by the quality of the organisational climate.<sup>16</sup>

Subjective perceptions play a more important role in the assessment of the workplace climate. Tensions stemming from deeper conflict, cultural or attitudinal differences otherwise hidden by everyday behaviour complying with the role expectations of the workplace also affect the employee's "well-being".

Polite workplace communication will make it invisible to others how badly you are perceived and disturbed by, for example, the other person's frequent phone calls, "too much talking and too much talking", well-known jokes, boring games, attitude towards your own position or even contempt for your customers. The negative feelings, the thoughts that are not expressed – because they are considered unspeakable – the tension and inner conflict that the situation creates, precisely because it is not

15 See more on this in Bakacsi, 2004.

16 For more on this see: Szőke-Milinte, 2006.

being dealt with or resolved, are constantly growing and can destroy the sense of a good working atmosphere that was initially perceived as good. Yet, a good working climate can significantly reduce even the tension that arises from role conflict. An individual's anxiety is caused by doubts about his/her ability and capacity to meet the expectations – actual or perceived – of the position or job.

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