

Complex organizations, semeiotics and culture

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Abstract: the present essay has as an end to provide a perspective to approach and comprehend the enterprising organizations from the processes of meanings they generate on the base of a complex and mobile panorama. It will allow understanding, on the one side, the complex frameworks of sense and relation which appear among the subjects involved in the enterprise and the productive-formal structures of it, with the options of intervention that the large companies can present by means of the understanding of the symbolic forms present inside the organization's different levels.

Key words: complex organization, culture, semeiotics, symbolic forms, meaning.

Resumen: El presente ensayo tiene como fin proporcionar una perspectiva para el abordaje y comprensión de las organizaciones empresariales, a partir de los procesos de sentido que ellas mismas generan sobre la base de un panorama complejo y móvil. Permitirá comprender, por un lado, los marcos de sentido y de relación complejos que surgen entre los sujetos involucrados en la empresa y las estructuras formales-productivas de la misma con las opciones de intervención que las grandes compañías pueden presentar, mediante la comprensión de las formas simbólicas presentes al interior de los diferentes niveles de su organización.

Palabras clave: organización compleja, cultura, semiótica, formas simbólicas, sentido.

Introduction

The state of the topic of enterprising organizations has considered, with growing interest, the role of the diverse elements, proper to cultural relations, as key factors to understand the processes of production and management of human resources. In this theoretical panorama, culture, exposed from categories of analysis linked to quotidian relations, becomes the support and axis for the transformation of complex productive organizations.

Based on the existing relation between organization and culture, the present essay has as an end to provide a tool to approach and understand the internal relations generated from the processes of meaning, erected upon the base of a complex and mobile panorama. Some categories of the semeiotic perspective by Yuri M. Lotman and Charles S. Peirce¹ will work as foundations to explain the nature of said processes, which allow understanding the process at two levels:

- On the one side, the frameworks of complex comprehension and relation that appear between the subjects involved in the enterprise and the formal-productive structures of it.
- And on the other, the options of intervention that large companies can present by means of appealing to symbolic forms inside the different levels of its organization.

In the first place, we will outline an approximation to the general concept of organization considering its nature in terms of its relation in complex contexts where there are diverse physical, environmental and cultural aspects. We will conceive, therefore, every organization as a social laboratory that enables exposing its essence in terms of the application of meaning criteria; which carry a distinction between order-disorder in terms of purpose, and thereby, allow understanding the multiple functional relations mediated by communication between the different cultural frameworks, levels and conditions of the enterprise.

¹ Authors for whom culture has a fundamental role; not only in the interpretation of the signs and discourses, but also in the generation of the dynamism that distinguishes every process of signification.

For the French theoretician Edgar Morin (1997) the term *organization* implies a relation that, because of its extension and reach, is related to different areas of human knowledge where there are coincidences in the arbitrary and relative character of the appreciation frameworks of physical, biologic and cultural life as the very notions of *order and disorder* (*idem*). The organization is placed on the mediation of said antinomic concepts. It is this mediation, guided by a specific criterion of pertinence and maintenance of dynamic flows of growth and development.

From the framework of the complex enterprise, disorder might be understood as a series of permanent occurrences alien to their regulations or their systemic reference parameters. Because of their entropic nature, it enables a growth of the possibilities of the organization.

Order, on its own, turns out to be foundation for all measurement, explanation and comprehension of the social world (demand, offer, supplies, legal conditions, administration trends, etc.) that surround the organization. Its action is dynamically undertaken starting from elemental distinctions between the present state of the enterprise, its past conditions and the sketched future plans.

“Order”, nonetheless, does not imply the same as “Organization”, since the latter can be characterized as a more complex process that implies both the course of initial sorting out, and the action —upon it— of conjectural events which allow constantly restating its pertinence. These events, from our perspective, would be understood as natural, since they father challenges or levels of adjustment the very enterprise must take. These manifestations of chaos or contingency are the ones which make the organization grow as they permit it to transcend its formal frameworks (structures) toward strategies capable of adapting the enterprise to the challenge of an ever changing environment (conjunctures).

In this logic, the organization manifests itself as that structured platform (of values and objectives, procedures and actions) that originates a whole logic of sense inside the enterprise, providing it with a “ground” or platform of meaning that will seek to adapt the challenges to the action of that internal culture.

From the “order-disorder” dichotomy every organization would be able to base its action in the double purpose of generating relative models of symbolic order that feed upon the action of entropy and its progressive incorporation to the productive ends. This reproductive action tends, on the one side, to uniform equilibrium or correspondence criteria between the different groups or individuals with common goals, and on the other to comprehend the processes alien to the parameters but that can influence on the growth or broadening of them in views of reaching goals.

In strictly operative terms the approximation to the term *order* represents the possibility to think of organizations as programs: formalizations based on schemas of functioning, limit and of functional relation or informational flow. This disregarding the influence the term might have on the criteria to evaluate the results from its activity in terms of standards (quality, promptness, security, leadership, etc).

On the other side, considering organization in terms of *disorder* or appearance of elements contrary to its program bring us closer to contemplate its possibilities to change and adapt to the context; to the comprehension of its capacity of transformation in function of external variables (economy, technologic development, but mainly to understand it as a social framework of possibilities of incorporation that includes to/of the worker, to/of the client, and to/of the supplier, to/of the extended social system, to/of the sociopolitical apparatus, et cetera).

Thus, among multiple and dynamic *disordering-ordering* positions the organization finds its own nature. It is, eventually, what is in the middle of both criteria, but which at the same time, determines them.

In spite of the aforementioned, if we were to state a question on the staring points wherefrom both order and disorder are generated, and if we were to look for the manner in which these redound on a particular organized entity, things would seem to complicate; it will be necessary to be aware of the criteria of transformation of the *chaos into cosmos* as the ways in which the latter can be understood, assumed and reproduced in the diverse sub-contexts by the individuals present in the organization.

It is from here that we state the implication of the semeiotics² as a theoretical possibility and propose the option to approach the productive organizations³ as a particular sort of texts: the specific object of this essay.

Relation of contexts: enterprise-organization

Speaking of enterprise implies dealing with a specific sort of social formation distinguished by being the frame of confluence of diverse organizing processes⁴ corresponding each other (in functional or dysfunctional manners and from a series of objectives), that are linked from relative ends such as:

- Generation of revenues
- Production of goods and/or services (physical or symbolic)
- Reproduction —transformation— adaptation both of the system and its function (processes destined to produce supplies and generate revenues).

Historic development of organizational thought has become visions that not only define the criterion of order and administration of a productive association, but also the roles and dimensions that the subjects, incorporated to them, acquire.

Ever since F Winslow Taylor⁵ achieves the comprehension of enterprises from the application of extreme rationalist criteria⁶, and in the framework of growth and expansion of the very factories,⁷ different conceptions of what organization is from an internal view (administrative) have been generated. This, according to Lucila Finkel (1995), has been developed from the following phrases or paradigms:

² As a discipline whose object of study is the mediation which the subject makes of reality in order to generate a shared order (meaning) that generates development (communicative) and leads to the satisfaction of a need, or a series of them.

³ Productive, this is to say, they pursue the generation of income by means of the action of production of goods or services to be incorporated into a context of interchange (market).

⁴ It is, they link the order and disorder in terms of their own growth and development.

⁵ “The principles of scientific management”, by FW Taylor, was published in 1911, and it became an influential treaty that analyzes how the productivity of labor can be radically increased dividing each process of work into partial movements and organizing the fragmentary tasks in accordance with rigorous patterns of time and with the study of movement.

⁶ Inherited from the sociological theories of the bureaucracy of Weber and the economicist criteria by Mill and Smith in terms of free competence and offer-demand relation.

⁷ Without a doubt, from the conjuncture of the two great wars.

Scientific organization

As a closed framework of production and administration that was based upon a mathematically designed and highly efficacious model of functioning that developed the potentialities of the enterprise inwards disregarding the environment, production agents, especially labor force; this organization has been identified, on occasion, with the metaphor of the machine, for its functioning was visualized as such: pieces and articulated movements, tightly controlled and specialized (*Cfr.* Morgan, 1998, chapters 1-2); a rigid bureaucracy.

Fordist organization

As a structured sphere of regulated relations where each individual has an immovable specific function in a production adjusted in accordance with sole criteria of benefit-cost and massing. The implications of this fordism in the United States had as a consequence a constant review of the administrative schemes, which indeed, became the conceptions of the organization, giving as a result “a scientific management in all of the facets of the enterprising activity (communication, interpersonal relations, training in the trade, commercialization, product design, the strategies to fix prices) became the distinctive feature of the bureaucratic rationale of the corporations (Harvey, 2004: 157). One can talk about a functional-structuralism based on variable administrative bureaucracies (able to control large stocks of materials and finished products in a non-differenced market or rather made hegemonic by the very corporations) or about a behaviorism founded on the stimulation of productivity (López, 1994).

Japanese Toyotist organization

In the face of an inventory issue, costly storage and a massing which were not sustainable in different markets, the emergence of a new paradigm of organization appeared from a model of systemic rationalization: the Toyota model. For this the organization is an adaptable system with capability to respond to localized and specialized demands from the environments. The very conception of the organization changes as it is not based on the limits of a single production plant but on different “productive sub-systems”,

which partially work in correspondence to one another so as to obtain a final result. This allowed a minimum stock and a reduction of stock expenses, yet it implied the conception of new methods of labor and the incorporation of the subject as an actor in the productive processes. From flexible organization concepts such as JIT (*Just In Time*) it appears as a process of supply that enabled thinking of the different productive plants as providers of the systemic “whole”. It is worth mentioning, specially for the ends of this work, that the appearance and demonstration of the effectiveness of this model or the productive way became an essential landmark not only in reference to the application of new ways of production, but also, and very importantly, in the ways of looking at, understanding, and fundamentally study organizations. As a consequence from this moment and productive model, studies on organizations more focused on cultural processes appear—i.e., local culture, the cultural implications of the environment—and their relation to the productive culture, giving way to productive precepts that characterize the current production in the world.

Flexible organization

As it has been previously approached, the model of mass production supported upon managerial methods, known as Taylorism and scientific organization of labor, retaken as part of the administrative planning by Henry Ford, were based on an organizational form structured in principles of vertical integration and characterized by organization charts and rigid functions whose fundamental objective was to increase productivity from the scale economies or mass production, derived from a mechanized process and productively organized along an assembling line, from which a typified product was obtained in conditions of control of a large market.

Nevertheless, when demand became unpredictable in quantity and quality, when the markets were diversified all around the world and transports and communication permitted the intensification of international competence, then the control on the markets became impossible and the organization had to adapt itself to a changing and competitive context. Then, that which some theoreticians call flexible production arises. Said production requires a system or organization able to produce in a different manner, therefore, administrate and organize in a less rigid manner, prone to change, in short: adaptable.

Beyond the aforementioned system, flexibility presupposes an auto-referential capability of the organization to transform itself in agreement with the demands from the environment. In this framework, the organization moves from a physically oriented environment of comprehension to another virtual, since in the development of the adaptive capabilities the enterprises change orientations, specific goals, modalities of work and rational conceptions of themselves (inwardly and outwardly) turning into corporations.

The peculiarities of such organizational proceeding might be articulated as follows:

- Redefinition of the borders between hierarchies by means of mechanisms of participation based on the knowledge of functions in different units of operation based on the so called: *know how*.
- Bureaucratic decentralization; extended among multiple functions, local branches, subsidiaries and/or associated enterprises.
- Establishment of joint ventures or collaboration agreements between enterprises, frequently based on goodwill covenants in views of reducing bureaucratic processes.
- Common projects of development with characteristics of flexibility and capacity to adapt to contingencies more recurrent by the day.
- Incorporation in an identity whole of different systems involved (suppliers, contractors, subsidiaries) and homologated in a common culture (Finkel, *op. cit.*: 37-40).

At the end of this process we are able to witness how the organization changes from a framework of labor where the consecution or achievement of objectives occurs based on the systemic comprehension of its context, the own objectives, philosophy, technologic necessities, cultural backgrounds, et cetera.

The four elements listed above make it clear the emphasis acquired — along the XX century— by the different elements that partake of the conception of what processes must be, the ends and ways to articulate organizations. From the emphasis on results, going through their adequacy (to productive and financial contexts) and reaching the rationalization of the processes of acquisition of supplies, of transformation and of market,

organizations have been presented to the scholar as actual laboratories of “the social” or micro-societies, from which something more than an idea of means and ends can be obtained: something that might outline the dimension of the individuals in labor frameworks or the approach of cultures inside the very corporations.

Despite the change of focuses, the perceptions or concrete forms of production the ends of the enterprise follow, as a transcendental goal, the generation of revenues and/or benefits in function of series of interchanges that are socially assembled and are regulated by economic and/or interchange criteria.

The scope of a complex characterization of this field of study will allow establishing another parameter more to examine and understand productive organizations in function of symbolic complex frameworks. Likewise, it will draw us nearer to establish correspondences between the cultural schemas proper to the subjects who are incorporated as workers, administrators, executives, counselors or CEO’s. Under this approach the organization cannot any longer be considered only as an environment of realities, positively, pragmatically of empirically measurable, or as the product of regulations headed toward producing, but as a complex social construct articulated from multiple relations of meaning, which may find their semiotic conception in the characteristic correspondence of senses that flow altogether in the framework of a text.

The enterprise as a complex organization

It implies a constant process of dialogue; this analogy would imply an alternative form of understanding and managing the operational dimensions of the organizations, since the processes are not understood as consequences from formats and rigid regulations any more, and are projected as flows of negotiation of meaning on the way and reason of doing something.

An “organizational semeiotics” could be put forward as a conceptual and methodological perspective which would enable the organizational theorization, comprehension as well as the fieldwork from disciplinary spheres such as anthropology, sociology, communication and psychology.

These social areas, articulated by the link of meaning,⁸ would approach the organization as a complex textuality where different levels of dialogue, discourse and verification of “reality” can converge. Nowadays, understanding the enterprise from the perspective of meaning, this is to say, from the articulation of discourses pragmatically and semantically oriented, would draw the researcher nearer to a new conceptual orientation to comprehend the human dimension of the organizations in a complex environment. As dimensions of the latter we understand:

- Administration (human resources, productive processes, leadership, operation management) and the pertinence of it according to different schemas of meaning between the subjects (interdisciplinary vision in the field of organizational studies that would include the anthropology of industry, the sociology of the enterprise and managerial psychology).
- Technology as a socially assembled construction and that acquires meaning in terms of precedent functional references and productive challenges.
- Cultural systems that interact with the organization (financial, market, governmental and socioeconomic-based movements).

Semeiotics applied to the field of study of “the organizational” would broaden the parameters of comprehension of the enterprise as a complex environment beyond its exposed formal dimensions. Characterizing the enterprise as a text would allow losing the traditional “linearity” of the reading on organizations and understanding the incidence that different involved actors (dialoguing voices) have on attaining the objectives of production.

⁸ The disciplines enunciated have already presented diverse appeals to “the symbolical” in figures such as Geertz, Lotman, Bordieu, Morin, Eco, and some others who recognize the axes of culture in ways of meanings that transcend the physical or material present in a context of study.

Meaning, principle of organization

Calling on the semantic correlation between the terms of the heading of this section, we will begin to restrict the dimension of the term “meaning” to that of their semantic equivalents: *direction or route*. Both concepts imply an orientation (order or coherence) of any text in function of a determinate objective (either by the context, by history, or in our case by the particular need of production).

In the organization, the founding criterion of order is determined by the ideas shared among the subjects on that which is sought to reach and the most suitable ways to do so⁹; disregarding they are formally established issues, implicit variables or valuing elements. Hence, the extent to which the objectives and procedures are compatible in terms of meaning inside an organization will be given by:

a) The correlation between both established in function of the formal dimensions of the organization and...

b) ... by the degrees of correspondence of the previous correlation with the different appreciations (in its formal and background dimension) of the subjects involved in the organizational dimension. These last will grant them a value and an application that will be appreciated, even at the level of their manifestations of behavior and schemas of appreciation alien to the formal framework of the enterprise.

Being a consequence of a series of agreements tending to generate stability, every form of organization is susceptible of interpretation. Its form and structure of discursive correspondences provide the first key to read it as though it were a text; in order to approach it in a mode analogical

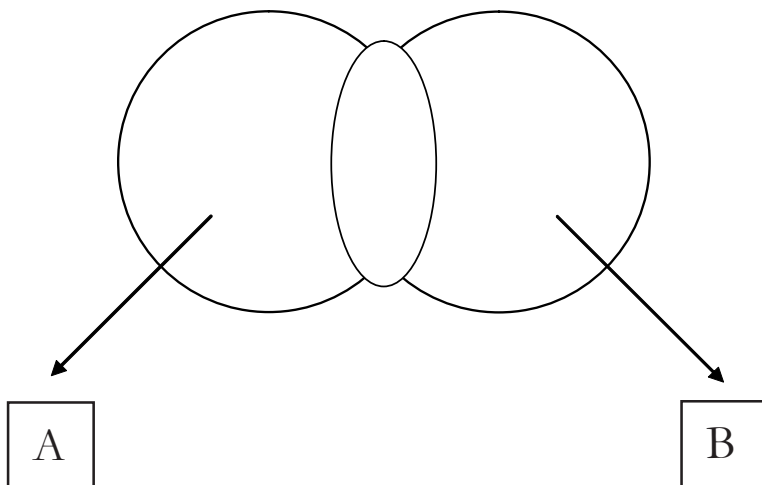
⁹ Not only the organizational telos would imply the plain and synthetic enunciation of a series of objectives and procedures, but also a whole correlative mythology wherefrom imaginaries, rituals, and schemas of value will arise, which will become the background of the particular culture of that productive entity. These non-formal symbolical forms either turn out to be not always appreciated —or even— understood by the organization, notwithstanding their consequences at the practical levels are definitive. In relation to their intentionality, direction and structure, the aforementioned elements might have an analogy with which, in the theory of the text we would call discourse; the discourse of the enterprise or of the specific organization.

to that of a changing dialogical framework that, through its changing discourses and many a times random, leads us to an end that does not ignore the anecdotes, moral regulations, prejudices, stereotypes or even entelechies that, going beyond the framework of “the real” allow a subject to deepen into the fields of the possible.

The relations of meaning in the organization will be determined by formalized agreements, yet only from a previous interaction in the different intellects that will generate, what Cassirer calls a “discursive understanding... [dependent] on two heterogeneous elements... [images and concepts]” (Cassirer, 1988: 91). The former understood from the formal dimension and the latter from the experiential or existential dimension that interprets them.

Under the semiotic approach of culturologic orientation with which we have framed the present essay, the previous relations can be graphically captured as successive intersections of circles that symbolize either the formal aspects or the background of the organizational logic.

Hence following the model by Lotman (1996), common sense or semantic novelty —term wherefrom we have to start to deal with communication inside organization— is nothing but the space of common communicant competence understood as the clash of the different figures (partial spheres of meanings).



Where, in a first case, “A”, would correspond —for instance— to a stated objective and to the formal procedures to accomplish it (the formal frameworks of reference present in the organization, exposed by managerial objectives); whereas the other, “B”, would imply the sum of myths, values, suppositions and conceptual structures of the subject (i.e., subordinates who have to make A’s expectations possible). Obviously, the correlation is not presupposed so very linear, the model can be extended to the interior of each category as much as this allows doing so, and toward the outside as much as the elements of discussion are accessible to the appreciation of a receptor involved in the process (either a researcher or an agent alien to the organization; this is to say, someone related to it informally and only from the relation with multiple social frameworks not necessarily immediate to the organization).

The conception of communication (commonly laid) in Lotman implies a series of key premises to explain this model. In Lotman’s own words:

The transmission of information inside a “structure without a memory” [presupposing the absence of meanings previously existing in an organization-subject relation] really guarantees a high degree of identity [not only does the subject make the organization their own, but they are the very organization]. If we picture the sender and the addressee provided with equal codes and totally deprived from memory, then comprehension between them would be perfect, however, the value of the transmitted information would be minimal, and the information itself rigorously limited [the possibilities of mutual development will be null and every function will become aberrant both for the subject and the organization]. Such a system cannot fulfill the diverse functions that historically are concerned to language [...]

The model of perfect comprehension is not even applicable to internal communication man has with himself [...] In the usual human communication and, what is more, in the normal functioning of the language, one starts from the presupposition of no-identity between the speaker and listener [a “no-identity” marked by the different cultural contexts and backgrounds of the historic and idiosyncratic kind].

Under these circumstances a situation of intersection of the linguistic space turns out to be normal [that allows a series of starting points to generate productive communication from the sense called common or shared] (Lotman, *op. cit.*: 16).¹⁰

It is natural to understand that the model which would illustrate the relations of dialogue between the different elements that integrated the complex organization would be that of an expansive intersection of sphere of meaning. Visualizing a perfect union of said spheres would be a logical problem of identity where, indeed, it cannot exist. How to think of a plenitude of the processes of identification between the subject and organization or between frameworks of historic knowledge and rational-operative fundamentals pragmatically oriented? It is not possible. The situation exposed by Lotman refers us to a constant effort for the expansion of the intersected field that, never, becomes an absolute union.

Organization-culture

When the concept of culture is defined, it is usually implied, on the one side, a relativist appreciation (culture as artistic diffusion; culture as education; culture as folklore, et cetera) and, on the other, another holistic or of hazardous generalizations such as: “everything is culture”, “culture is the second nature of man” et cetera.

To illustrate its reach in the present writing —and following the orientations the study of meaning define— we will take the conception by Lotman in this respect pointing out that in the cultural sphere, as any semiotic circumscription, is limited by boundaries of meaning with capability to translate variables or external significant elements to make them pertinent inside their very signification system. From this perspective, not only are both the elements of the general theory of systems (since they refer to delimitation and relation) and those of studies on meaning implied, but also a relation between both fields and constructivism is created as a dynamic

¹⁰ The marginal notes are ours and imply the translation of a model —eminently of literary analysis— to the possibilities of the organization as a complex text.

character appears, which enables seeing the delimitation frameworks as elements that proactively change in function of the objectives and goals.

Following this perspective, an organization can be understood as a specific cultural environment or system of sense that is formally integrated and capable of externally relating with other entities and internally with its constitutive agents. Within the organizational boundaries come together — as in the most anthropological visions— not only formal and material processes (its regulatory, constitutive, organic, functional schema, et cetera), but also of a mythical, linguistic, historic, rational and aesthetic nature (Cassirer, *op. cit.*).¹¹

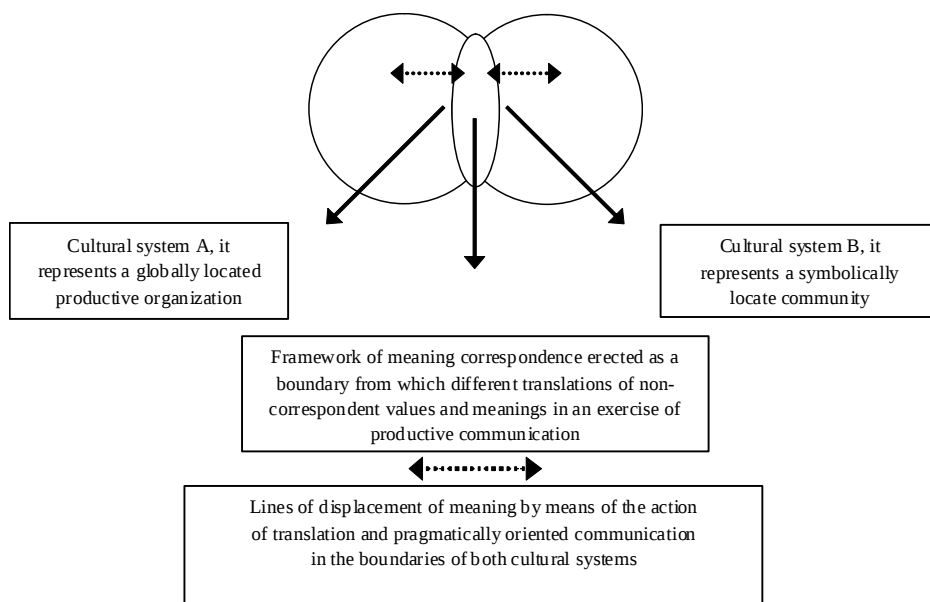
The problem derived from this demarcation of meaning complicates as this is formalized as identity and reality axis in the productive entity (Cháves, 1996)¹², and as it contacts other cultural parameters based on external symbolical forms whose “expansion and content axes” (Eco, 1995)¹³ become essentially differenced from those of the organization.

The aforementioned implies a typical phenomenon of the contemporary cultural encounters that historically have their origin in the expansion of models of thought, production, and interchange of the commonly called “globalization”: a process that was born, firstly from the discovery and exploitation of sources to access raw materials or materials necessary for the European transformer industry; then, from the systematic search of labor force which was scant in the enterprises that expanded their markets, and finally, from the need to take said expansion to worldwide scale in terms of capital and market (Acosta, 1997).

¹¹ The author develops an extensive definition of each of these conformations of meaning that beget levels of identification and explanation of the world.

¹² For this author there exist four fundamental dimensions from which we take out these concepts, namely: reality, communication, identity and image.

¹³ The text exposes the shaping of every semeiotic function (unit of meaning) in two of the elements of a linguistic function: a level of expression or formal, and one of content or background. In previous entries we have stressed the correlation that, in the text of organization, both can have.



Undoubtedly it is a logic historically determined by the essence of capitalism and production, a process that is symbolically and functionally identified by its relation to the benefit-cost relation, and that has nothing or very little to do with the characteristic ways of thought and productive signification of local cultures and determined by rationales closer to myth and tradition. In terms of the model by Lotman, the relation of the productive organizations at global scale (transnational) with the local contexts of insertion is expressed in terms of a relation of sets which by intersection of meanings and by means of constant processes of translation in their boundaries,¹⁴ mutually transform their natures, generating changes at the levels of expression and content of explosive or evolutive kind.

¹⁴ The concept of boundary in Lotman alludes to the possibility of making use of interpreters proper to a cultural framework in the appropriation and assimilation of elements from other systems of cultural frameworks. This is the fundamental principle of what, previously, we have called Productive Communication or the process by means of which two entities give a meaning (with a pragmatic purpose) to the information which starts from their different contexts.

Cultural change and organizations

The preceding argumentations have enabled us —at least in general terms— to approach the idea of organization seen, both in the sense of a common text and in that of a semiosphere or space of particular meaning whose nature has permitted, through a certain syntax, impose an order that mediates between a sum of particular and interdependent structures which have given part of their sphere of meaning in order to establish productive conventions leaning to reach common objectives.

Nonetheless, in this process appears the need to explain the changes experienced at the levels of signification proper to each of the demarcations implied in the contact. Lotman glimpses this in two semiotic ways:

a) *By means of an evolutive process of gradual development in which the boundary acts establishing semantic and syntactical relations conducive to enrich the space of intersection.* Hence, both systems undergo an expansive process in which their referential frameworks broaden because of a mutual transformation. Manifestations in which richness or ease of assimilation and degrees of correspondence with external environments or supra-systemic that enable the habilitation of a semiosphere upon the other are not alien to this sort of evolution, in terms of both semantics (background) and syntax (shape).

A crystal-clear case of this sort of relation is exemplified by the action of the transnational organizations on local context that have already had precedents of meaning, which facilitate their incorporation into new logics both of production and value and idiosyncrasy.¹⁵

b) *By means of a radical alteration of explosive character that, through a total break through of a framework of meaning, achieves the imposition of a new perspective.* This sort of change, which we dare call revolutionary, is infrequent,

¹⁵ The market expansion and its logic of interchange, worldwide spread, which as a semiosphere directs the subject toward the pragmatism of satisfaction of all kinds of needs via the interchange, enables the action of the entrepreneurial organizations promoter of means to be inserted into the market as a consumer or, why not producer or intermediary? In the face of this phenomenon, local rationalities give in part of their schemas of meaning that are not compatible with this new logic so as to have possibilities of coexistence.

and it generally brings along consequences where the destructive process makes a semiosphere spatially expand, however, it is not enriched absorbing the elements of meaning of other frameworks. Processes such as this one, nevertheless, have been historically documented in the action of certain schemes of productive organization, such as that which corresponded to the logics of production of slaveholder production in the XVII century and until the end of the XVIII.

Nowadays, an interdisciplinary access (anthropological, sociological and communicational) to the frameworks of culture with which the organization is related can facilitate the processes of negotiation of meaning between several instances and, thereby, the securing of the changes characterized by the increment of the possibilities of informative interchange.

What we have stated above can be translated into greater levels of knowledge (*know how*), satisfaction (motivational scale) and options for productive challenge in function of common objectives and goals (participative groups).

In the following section we will deal with the options of study on the sort of change evolutionarily assembled in function of the symbolic forms that can be distinguished not only inside an organization but also in any semiosphere or cultural context.

Symbolic forms and organization

The concept of culture we draw to in this document (based on fields of meaning) corresponds to the approach performed by Ernst Cassirer to symbolic matrices of every culture. He distinguishes five fundamental forms of meaning (categories) to articulate the second nature of man, it is, cultural life: myth, language, history, science and art¹⁶. These five symbolic forms are not alien to any demarcation of human relations —either temporary or

¹⁶ Ernst Cassirer structures his fundamental work (Philosophy of symbolic forms) upon this division that can work as the base for a conceptualization of culture as juxtaposition of texts. Calling on this author has a justification in his importance as an articulation axis of an anthropological perspective with the semeiotics of the text (cf. the cases of Geertz and Thompson, who in the so-called postmodern anthropology follow analogous procedures).

spatial—, and generate inside them the different variables or manifestations susceptible to be interpreted. Of course, the field of study of the organizations should not remain alien to the nature of this classification.

Myth and organization

The study of myth,¹⁷ as meaning framework, not only capable of explaining, but also generating logics of social action, has become necessary in a context where identity manifestations are juxtaposed and discourses abound. The organizations thought of as semiospheres¹⁸ delimited by a function and an objective are not alien to this hybridization where constantly not only are implicit perspectives, but also narrative- and axiological-founded world-views.

By and large, the presence of myth in the cultural contexts supports an intertextual and archetypical nature that, in our case, is not detectable in superficial examinations of the structure and logic of the organization. However, by means of an active participant observation, a full knowledge on the subjects and their habits and attitudes foundations of a subjacent logic can be extracted, which allows us to learn the why and the how of certain processes in the extension of the meaning of the organization and their relations with the different subjects.

Semantic elements proper to the rhetoric of productive organizations in recent years are plagued by meanings that clearly refer to mystifying functions. Let us take the case of leadership, a value upon which corporative literature has based a great deal of texts, and that presents, functionally exposed, unequivocal features of heroic figures that are alluded by other scholars of the myth such as Joseph Campbell:

¹⁷ Drifting apart from their undeniable correlation with the religious aspect, we limit ourselves to the conceptualization of the myths as logics of order and explanation of the world based on sympathetic procedures (Cassirer, op. cit.: 127), this is to say, diverse narrative modulations such as desire, illusion, kindness, lying, the dreams juxtaposed under the experiential schemas of each subject or community; for greater detail on these aspects refer to Lluís Duch (1998).

¹⁸ Systems of meaning; term coined by Lotman.

Because the mythological hero is the champion not of accomplished things but of the to-be-accomplished things; the dragon that must be slain by him, it is indeed the monster of the *status quo*: support and guardian of the past. From the darkness the hero arises, yet the enemy is gigantic and stands out in the throne of power; it is the enemy, the dragon, the tyrant, because it turns into an advantage the very authority of its position... (Campbell, 2001: 300).

Which are the things to be done? Which are the dragons that threaten the culture-system of the organization? Which is the *status quo* to be broken? Which is the dark past from which said context has to be freed from? Which are the internal and external tyrants?

All of the figures present in the dynamics of organizational relations and that impose action guidelines for each individual and the organization in the shape of a set of symbolic facings that are susceptible to be valued either positively, negatively or neutrally. The heroes (leaders) will be in correlation with their immediate framework of action, with their pragmatic particularities at the service of the former and tending to generate recognition and status in the participative subject.

Mythical dimensions in the organization might, nonetheless, go far beyond and be susceptible to provide the involved subject with a whole alternative logic to understand the surroundings that are empathic or opposed to those explanations that they had from their imaginary framework of insertion (local culture).¹⁹

The processes of myth creation appear from the tales that flow at formalized and spontaneous levels and that, generally, come from explanations to phenomena related to different contextual levels.

¹⁹ Levels of comprehension of symbolical variables such as safety, stability, development, fidelity, et cetera, might be completely redefined semantically from the process of clash and translation that occurs in the boundaries of the two systems.

A specific techne, a determinate form of modeling the uncultured nature and modeling the social and individual nature are proper to each god and goddess. Myths are somehow included in the genetic code of human being, yet at the time they belong, like works of art, legal systems, institutions, customs, the history of cultural forms. They are such as Cristoph Jamme points out, the expression of displacement of the boundary of the first to the second nature... (Duch, *op. cit.*: 90-91).

In the organization the meta-tales occur by the interchange of perspectives between individuals which are added to the argumentative logic of the organization: its mission, objective, processes, values, et cetera. We have inside the system a complex set of interchanges expressible by means of Lotman's model.²⁰

The mythic analysis will depend on the possibilities of understanding of the variables under the light of the logics of interpretation. This will lead to the option of an authentic hermeneutics of the organization where the viewpoints of the analyst, of the subjects and the characteristics of the context become involved in the dialogic game that allows a better understanding of that dimension of culture.

Language and organization

The second symbolical form stated by Cassirer implies the mechanisms by means of which meaning is spatially and temporarily shared within a framework of culturally oriented speakers (organization).

Language lays the bases for development not only intellectual but also productive in a cultural framework since:

a) It is the most suitable mechanism to extend the meaning inherent to the other symbolic forms synchronically present in the context.

b) It establishes the conductive translators or interpreters to make their possibilities grow through the contact with other frameworks of meaning.

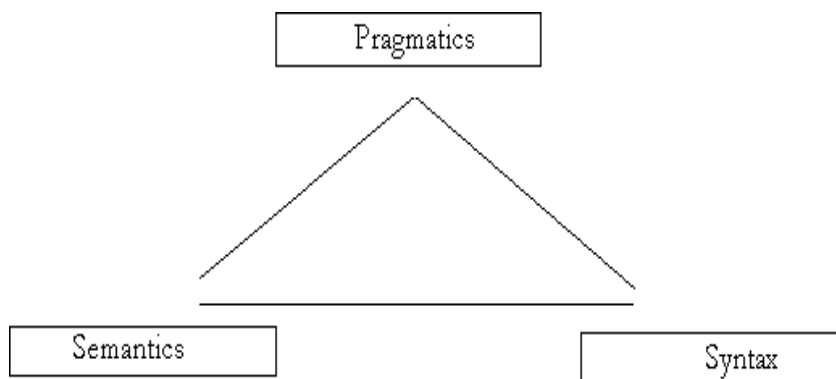
²⁰ It is a new logic where juxtaposed sets whose intersections will generate new sets and new possibilities when intersecting, at the time, with other intersections.

The constant breakage of the boundaries between the different cultural systems that interact in the contemporary dynamics has led the formation of complex environments to such extent that, nowadays, it is already idle to refer to that symbolic form in singular; because of this, we have to opt to recognize the presence of multiple languages that coexist in the framework of different spaces of cultural delimitation, in our case, the organization.

For ends of application in the study of organization, the variables related to the linguistic form will be able to respond to a mutual correlation that allows explaining the nature of the whole existing process in its formal and content dimensions (syntax and semantics), as well as the possibilities of adjustment to the immediate context and the successive adaptations of the discourse to new forms of emplacement of meaning produced under the light of the objectives, endogenous and exogenous changes of the productive organization (pragmatics).

Each of these variables is susceptible to be model of characterization of elements of communication in the enterprise, for not only do we understand as language the articulations derived from the spoken or written work, but also any other coded product which has as an end to generate options of discourse.

Hence, the organization can present forms officially established on the communication processes tending to obey its general pragmatics; whilst, among the different activity frameworks, processes semantically and syntactically differenced become evident, which are prone to obey the particular pragmatics.



Following Lotman's model we translate these encounters in three different levels of interaction of text and context:

a) Differenced semantic possibilities (of the different subjects), whose bounds of intersections arise from the recognition of variables of meaning which are common (objectives - motivations) in the framework of the organizational context.

b) A single discourse (function, procedure, regulation...) whose possibilities of expansion appear syntactically from the recognition of diverse possibilities of articulation, which are pertinent to the different subjects and systemic substructures that integrate the organization (alternative modes of structuring of messages).

c) Multiple pragmatic visions that are juxtaposed to one another and are partially mediated by the negotiation of "common" sense, and communicative production based on constant adequacies of syntax and semantics which work as boundaries.

This last entry may have two dimensions of correspondence: on the one side, the negotiation of pragmatic possibilities developed inside the organization; and the possibilities of interaction at different external levels, on the other (at formal and informal levels).²¹

Rationality (logos) and organization

We start from the preexistence of a myth—as a complex and intricate state of spirit where the foundational explanations are juxtaposed and tend to organize the world of life by means of casual relations and comprehensive visions generated from principles of classification and logic—which later will generate a rationality. In the correspondence between these two levels there had to be a mediation (of the language?) and a possibility to correlate through it the experiences accumulated in the core of a culture so that the alternatives to mythic thought become possibilities at the moment of wanting to answer to fundamental questions in man.

²¹ Formal—explicit, tacit, described in terms of function-objective; informal— inexplicit, implicit, ungraspable.

It is thus that science is developed as signaling mechanism of meaning generation and reaches the stage in which, under formal, pragmatic and content principles, it is systematized and extended temporarily and geographically, achieving an homologation of appreciations and explanations of the world. Unlike other symbolic forms, science as a system of signification achieves erecting itself as a boundary that constantly generates or translates the strange events in part of its linguistic capacity; all this from a coherent system of procedures (method) that generate determinations (laws) or possibilities (theory) that broaden its code and its capacity of ordering the contingency.

The tendency to order that the rationalization process pursues makes out of the processes emanated from rational thought (scientific or commonly accepted because of its legitimacy level) fundamental options to create and maintain the organizational acting; as a matter of fact, all of the formal options of an organization obey aspects that appear from a necessity resolved by means of certain scientific rationality that has been previously determined by a community.²²

I believe that rational behavior must be reduced to two steps: firstly, submitting it to the general capacity to solve problems rationally (this is to say, under an established precedent); and secondly, explaining such general capability by the functioning of natural selection (by the gradual adaptation of the precedents to the challenges of disorder) (Elster, 1995).

In order to study the correlation of the symbolic precedent form and the presence of rational-scientific thought (which from this moment and following Duch we will call *logos*), we will be based on the following quote:

²² We will not considerate the debate on scientificity extensively, so we opted for a semantic comparison for the concrete ends of this essay. The state of the art in relation to scientific thought socially or formally assembled is broad and may comprehend not only this, but also a complete essay corpus.

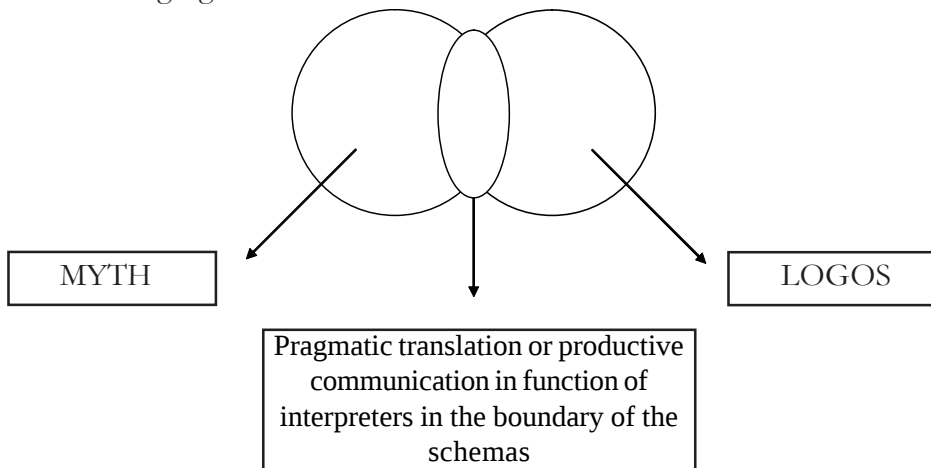
The question which in our opinion remains asked is: can logos here and now express that which previously was expressed by myth? Because, certainly, it is not two material ways of expressing reality, but of some dimensions of reality (and of man) that, intrinsically, have to be said making use of appropriate languages and that are hardly interchangeable and applicable to other spheres which are not proper to them. In the same way that mathematical language will never reach the field of signification (of affection) that can be expressed by means of amorous language, neither will ever mythic language be able to be subtracted by the language of mere rationalization... (Duch, *op. cit.*: 78).

Duch's conception is eloquent: it is impossible, in the world of human life, to characterize each one of the experiences that are susceptible to generate signification in a determinate meaning.

This is the conflict of the organization as a framework of interchange of postures of order: preserving the mythic-affective conception of the subjects and correspond it to the same logical-rational conceptions formally instrumented.

The coexistence of myth and logos, as well with any other form submitted to consideration in this analysis, is characterized in the framework of negotiation of meaning, productive communication and the possibilities of the translation boundary the model of intersection by Lotman implies.

Schematically this perspective could be established as it is observed in the following figure.



It is important that at this level the organization pragmatically and in function of the language seeks a propitious background, formal articulation, in order to achieve levels of empathy between local mythic dimensions and the configuration of the organizational *logos*.²³

Said logos could be expressed as an equivalent (at the level of contextual rationality) to what T.S. Kuhn calls “paradigm” or perceptual schema generator of functional models (Kuhn, 2001), which once legalized and regulated, generate successive mechanisms to approach the formalized functions (labor, planning, technological implantation, strategic design, procedures, et cetera) of the organization, and that allow their constant adaptation to the new necessities derived from the systemic contexts both internal and external.

This process is the one which leads to refer to a supposed “organizational rationality”.

History and organization

“History” is a term that we consider in function of the processes of change²⁴ in the conditions of the formal and informal logics of meaning through periods within a determinate cultural dynamics. Following Michel De Certeau, these processes of change are systematically understood and measured in two different senses which come from:

a) The framework of what is known (the evidence of the past documented from its consistency with the formal environments of the organization).

b) The framework of what is implied (the evidence of the past extracted from the quotidian practices of appropriation of meaning).

Evidently, following the periods or groups, historical science moves preferably towards one of the two poles.

²³ Not few are the cases of productive organizations that, in the search for better training, diffusions and extension options draw to the work anthropologists, sociologists of communicologists.

²⁴ Evolutive or explosive according to the notions already approached by Lotman, and which we have previously described.

There are, indeed, two sorts of history, according to the prevalence of the attention to one of the two positions of the real. And even if the cases where there is a mixture of the two sorts overcome the pure cases, each sort can be perfectly recognized. “A first sort of history wonders on that which is thinkable and on the conditions of comprehension; the other sort aims at reaching that which was lived, exhumed because of the knowledge of the past” (Certeau, 1993: 51).

Being aware of history at these two levels and inside the organizational framework leads not only to consistently understand and explain the individual or group behavior, but also to attain a perspective on the coherence that, along time, the crossings between the formalized frameworks of meaning have had (generally relative to hierarchy and officialdom of the organization) and which we might call “the everyday” (or dynamics of the relations of coexistence and interchange between the subjects involved productively or generatively inside it).

It is indeed this distinction that, Michel de Certeau considers twice: “every historical fact is the result of a praxis, sign of an act and therefore, affirmation of a meaning” (*idem*).

Reaching this state of perception of the organization becoming supposes, nonetheless, the access —at least in general terms— to the manifestations proper to other symbolic forms wherefrom the chronologic review of change can start. Each manifestation is equivalent to a variable, and each variable is susceptible to the measurements of the change processes —evolutive and/or explosive— both in qualitative and quantitative terms.

Understanding the successive transformations of processes, structures and schemas of meaning in the organization is not an issue realizable in linear terms; the deed must start from the establishment of relational parameters at different levels which vary from the interpersonal to the formalized one.

On the other side, said comprehension of change is indeed visualized as an effective option in the rationalization of the organizational functions of planning, in the framework of an interaction with other systems or in strictly cultural terms, with the external context.

Art and organization

Lotman defines art as the option of freedom the subject has at hand in their framework of reality. The definition seems simple, yet implies profound concepts, without which it would be impossible to reach the essence of the artistic phenomenon and its contextualization in productive organizations.

In the first place, in a semiotic manner every reality (the very organization) might be characterized as a conventionalism or construct that has been validated after a historic consensus²⁵, which is agreed between determinate members of a collectivity. For our case, said conventionalism can only be articulated as the reach of a common sense²⁶ that, after a series of norms legitimates and allows the recognition and tracking of coded patterns of behavior and activity that, in a successive and synchronic manner, extend in an organization and have repercussions on the way it performs its actions, structures its procedures and make its objectives pertinent. These norms or points of agreement, however, might generate two types of consequences in the relation the organization —as a system— maintains with the external world:

a) A high degree of balance and its internal procedures derived from an immovable and rigid tradition which, nonetheless, prevents the organization from advancing in conceptions, habits, customs, and patterns of the external world.

b) A high degree of mobility and change in the procedures of the organization that implies coherence with the external dynamics, however scarce pertinence with the production objectives outlined inside.

²⁵ From the thought of Ch. S. Pierce it is about the building of realities, from which he calls thirdness, i.e., the entire experiential amount and models of meaning culture inherits to each subject as a base to face the world of life.

²⁶ As a symbolical form (a myth, language, schema of rationality, a historic discourse or artistic creation).

In both cases the double implication —rather Manichaeic— that can only be mediated and understood as coherent to the extent to which the participation in different frameworks of life, from the subjects involved in the organization, allows realizing translations in the boundary of both frameworks of activity. Liberty will be then translated into creativity, and this may be the efficient link to match, as much as possible, both processes and internal and external objectives.

The expression of alternatives different to the historic consensus is the only way in which the organization —as cultural community— is able to overcome stagnation or lack of options to build or characterize reality and thereby, evolve. This implies change, which we have dealt with in two senses: evolution and explosion. The latter is infrequent in organizations, since generally the objectives are not altered. It is evolutive change, on the contrary, the one with the most pertinence as it is assembled in the conception of processes and objectives of specific nature; even so...

All of the forms of artistic creation might be represented as variants of an intellectual experiment. The essence of this phenomenon submitted to analysis is inserted into a system of relations that is inappropriate to them [the appreciation from a framework of particular reading of a worker]...[and] it is because of this that the occurrence goes by as an explosion, and consequently, has an unpredictable character. Unpredictability becomes the compositional core of the work [and allows the organization constant options of revision to establish coherence between the worker's worlds of life and the institutional frameworks]...(Lotman, *op. cit.*: 206).²⁷

The liberty is present every time as hypothesis determined by the laws of the world whereto the work introduces us...because of this the attitude of art will also be determined in the confrontations with reality [this is to say the awareness-acquiring of the new option in opposition to the context of its appearance], as it verifies the effects of the experiments of broadening of liberty or its limitation [valuing of the new possibilities] (Lotman, *op. cit.*: 204).

²⁷ Brackets are ours.

The art in the sense of breakage and the possibilities of changes generated from it is also approached by Umberto Eco (*op. cit.*),²⁸ who taking as a basement the existence of a system fully identified by its mechanisms of codification, sees the work as any factor that can:

a) Challenge the code by means of the insertion of an extra possibility to express new meanings or of a more functional possibility that extends the impact or immediateness of the original meaning.

b) Transform the code enriching it after recognizing the new possibility.

Translating the previous terms in function of a manifestation in the field of the organization, art becomes an evolutive device of it; the option before stagnation and internal collapse which appear as manifestations from creativity, and why does not of the improvisation on regulation? in order to achieve the productive transformation of the different rationalities of the organization.

Conclusion

A criterion of incorporation of order and disorder to the function or objective of a productive entity is the elemental base to the formation of the organization. From this rational function come the elements sufficient to refer to social life and, therefore, that second nature which distinguishes man, culture. This, as a sphere of vital insertion, conditions the spheres of socialization and gives the activities an indeterminate amount of options tending to accomplish certain transcendence. The organizations are not alien to that impact of the cultural and, similarly to any other product of the order, provide the frameworks of possibility for meaning and dialogue between the subjects who relate inside them.

An organization is, summarizing, a culture, an open system where rationalities, mythologies, languages, and diverse manifestations come together, which in views of coexisting, negotiate meanings to be intersected in more stable and broader productive frameworks —of course not free from differences and ruptures—, which allow them to develop. a way to

²⁸ *Cfr.* Chapter 3.7, where the aesthetical text is worked as a mechanism of intervention to express events of meaning unforeseen by a preexisting codification.

approach this cultural nature is provided by the studies of the processes of interchange of meaning inside the framework of the organization and between the different organizations. Communication becomes a fundamental tool to understand that said processes are non-linear and which might have different dimensions and implications in function of that which might be considered the rigid structure of the organization.

The model of cultural interaction by Lotman, through successive frameworks of intersection presented at the different levels, provides the options of limitations to the diverse processes of interchange of meaning to understand where the personal relations in the organization are regulated by mythic, linguistic, rational, historic or aesthetical schemas. Likewise, it allows the reconstruction of conversation spaces (Ikegami, 2000) and of meaning crossing between that which can be considered the formal and informal sphere in productive organizations.

The first of said spheres would be exemplified by the series of regulations, objectives and rationalities which come from the concrete managerial philosophy and, the second by the way in which these regulations, objective and rationalities are reinterpreted and translated in the quotidian practices inside and outside the enterprise-organization by the subgroups and individuals.

Under this approach, the possibilities of interdisciplinary work that the study of organizations opens are not only extended to the managers of the enterprise of public entities, but also to professionals of different social disciplines that are part of the study of a particular dimension of this intersected space of meaning or public space so as to pursue an end.

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