The relevance of culture-specific conceptualisation for organisational management: a cross-cultural study on the difference between German and Swedish organisational concepts

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Abstract

The article deals with the question how culture-specific ways of conceptualising (thinking) play a role in organisational and management theory from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Not only does this paper question the widespread idea that the language of science and economics is universally the same and that communication across cultural borders can be managed just by means of a *lingua franca*. This paper also shows by comparison of central verbal and non-verbal image-schemata in Swedish and German organisational theory how non-propositional image schemata are used in the above mentioned cultures. It is shown how cognitive linguistics (namely metaphorological analysis) can give insights into culture-specific knowledge. This is examplified through the kind of fundamental differences in the ways in which German and Swedish management deals with questions concerning hierarchies, leadership behavior, the ways of organising work processes, and the role of the individual in the organisational whole. It is argued that through culture-specific, non-propositional basic image schemata, interculturally relevant knowledge can be obtained for multicultural management.

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1. Introduction

In the ongoing process of globalisation, companies find themselves involved in a trend which leads to increasingly bigger units (so-called economies of scale), to ever more complex organisational structures with different national (among others) cultures having an impact on everyday organisational life. This means that management today not only has to take into account different 'external' preconditions – such as different market, company, or stakeholder cultures – to lead an organisation or to develop problem solving strategies of different kinds. It also means that management

more than ever has to deal with constant 'internal' change one such being the challenge which employees of different national cultures pose for the way organisational leadership is carried out. But the latter aspect is not only an issue for the relationship between management and ordinary employees. It is equally a potential problem area affecting higher ranking managers of different cultures, who may all come from different intellectual and professional traditions. One area in which these traditions are developed and systematised is the academic world of university education: the teaching of theory based knowledge can have a strong impact on future managers. The present paper will try to show in which way culturally determined academic traditions may play a role in management literature.

Specifically, it is argued here that the same basic questions concerning organisational principles, such as, the role of leadership, the kinds of possible hierarchies in organisations, the role of the individual within the organisation, the way of organising work processes between employees and other questions, are due to cultural traditions. It will be shown that these organisational aspects do not only vary between cultures, but that they can be systematically analysed through academic textbooks that are used for the education of future managers. This kind of text analysis can provide insights and can be of additional help when dealing with concrete organisational problems. How this is possible will be shown through the example of German and Swedish organisational theory.

Methodologically the present article grasps the area of managerial problems in an unorthodox way by not using questionnaires or interviews, which have largely been conducted in this field of intercultural research. Instead, on the basis of a holistic theory of the culture-relatedness of verbal categories in general (all verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal written communication), the cognitive models in organisational theory, that are prototypical for a given culture are outlined and described in their culture-specific function. This means that on the basis of different areas in cognitive linguistics *conceptual competence* for organising multicultural work places can be gathered. In recent years there has been a growing interest in the metaphorical basis of organisational theory.[1] However, the research into organisational metaphors has so far been carried out merely from a universal perspective, neglecting culture-specific issues. In contrast to research done so far in this area and from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the present article attempts to outline how culture-specific knowledge can be

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[1] Cf. for example Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2001, Morgan 1997, and Alvesson 1991.

gathered, when regarding metaphorical conceptualisation in organisational theory.

The empirical German and Swedish data has been chosen because the languages of these cultures are not only members of the same language family (i.e. Germanic languages) but also because both cultures are geographically very close to each other. These aspects are generally seen (especially by practitioners in international business) as criteria for a high degree of cultural similarity. It will be shown how fallacious these kinds of assumptions can be.

2. The theoretical frame work of the present study

The relationship between language and cultural standards or norms can be outlined by combining the cognitive theory of metaphor with the prototype theory and insights in intercultural communication.[2] The basic insight of the cognitive theory of metaphor is that it is not just a theory of metaphor, although it has been able to show how current theories of metaphor have to be revised. The main contribution of the cognitive theory of metaphor to social sciences lies in the fact that it has been able to show how communication in general is dependent on our way of conceptualising the world as we live it, which is a metaphorological issue, rather than merely a theory of metaphor. The metaphorological basis of this theory comprises both propositional ('direct' semantic content) and non-propositional (metaphorical, metonymical content) utterances (cf. figure 1 below). From an intercultural viewpoint this puts the focus on the kind of relationship between culture-specific and universal aspects of our conceptualisation of the world. This relationship can be explained and made useful for practitioners on a cognitive level, which is also one of the prolifent aspects for management skills.

According to the phenomenological tradition from which cognitive metaphorology has emerged, man makes constant hypotheses and constantly draws conclusions about how the world surrounding him is constructed. Seen from an intercultural perspective, there are certain basic rules in nature that are the same for all cultures. These universal rules are, for example, the basic rules of physics, like gravity; the kinaesthetics and motorical functions of the human body and the kinds of movements the human body can make according to these laws; the need for food, sleep etc. Being of universal

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[2] For earlier introductions to this theory see Schmidt 2001b, 2002b, 2002c, and 2003.

relevance without establishing any clear cut concepts, this level of experience will here be called the universal level of preconceptual experience (cf. fig. 1).
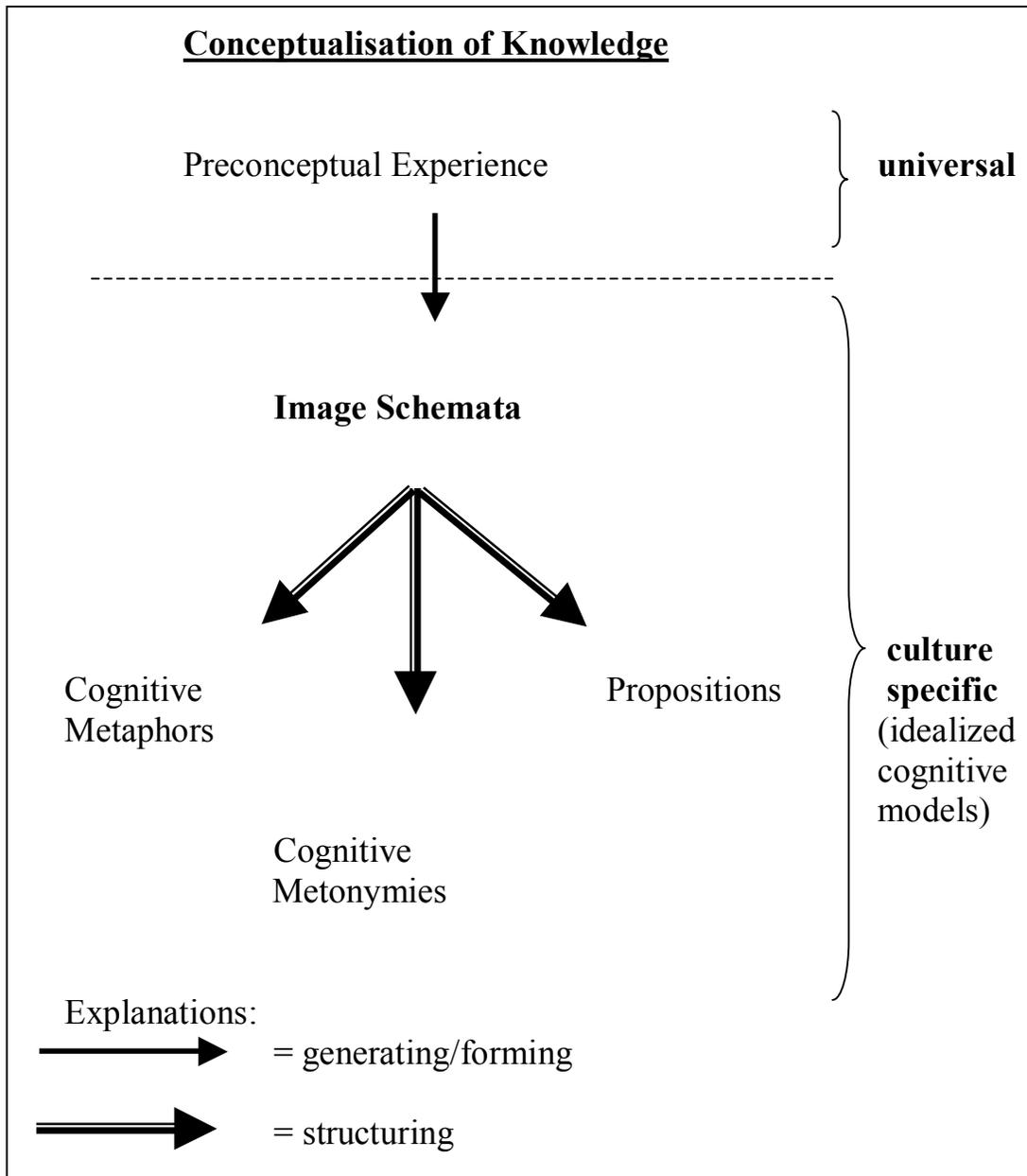
Conceptualisation of Knowledge

Preconceptual Experience — **universal**

Image Schemata

Cognitive Metaphors

Propositions

Cognitive Metonymies

culture specific (idealized cognitive models)

Explanations:

→ = generating/forming

⇒ = structuring

Fig. 1: Conceptualisation model

From an intercultural perspective, the decisive steps in the development of the cognitive theory of metaphor were not so much based on the initial work by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980, but rather the notion of *image schemata*, introduced by Johnson in 1987 and *the idealized cognitive models,* introduced by Lakoff in 1986. These both theories are highly

relevant for intercultural research, as fig . 1 shows, because they help not only to deal with concrete data but also to put basic intercultural issues in perspective (e.g. the relationship between the universal and the culture specific dimension). It is through the cognitive use of image schemata that we are able to communicate systematically about subject matters. The function of the image schemata then is to structure our way of thinking about things, in other words, to form our concepts. It is important to realise that they are not clear-cut images or propositional utterances about the world; but they structure our propositional and non-propositional utterances, be they of verbal, paraverbal, or non-verbal kind. According to Johnson, image schemata

> "… operate at one level of generality and abstraction above concrete, rich images. A schema consists of a small number of parts and relationships, by virtue of which it can structure indefinitely many perceptions, images, and events. In sum, image schemata operate at a level of mental organization that falls between abstract propositional structures, on the one side, and particular concrete images, on the other." (Johnson 1987: 29)

The 'cognitivity' of image schemata lies in the fact that they are situated at a more abstract level than verbal or non-verbal utterances because of their decisive structuring function. The same image schemata can be uttered (by means of different verbal categories) in very different ways:

> "The view I am proposing is this: in order for us to have meaningful, connected experiences that we can comprehend and reason about, there must be pattern and order to our actions, perceptions, and conceptions. *A schema is a recurrent pattern, shape, and regularity in or of, these ongoing ordering activities*." (Johnson 1987: 29; emphasis in the original text)

Johnson elaborates a number of examples for image schemata, e.g. the PATH image. Being an image schema it is not limited only to structuring non-propositional utterances. It can as well structure propositional utterances and thus become a main gestalt structure for communication on a cognitive level. Thus the PATH schema consists of three elements, such as A being the starting point of a movement, B as the terminal point and the vectorial movement as such from A to B. Because of the metaphorical function of image schemata, PATH can be underlying such different utterances as "(a)

walking from one place to another, (b) throwing a baseball to your sister, (c) punching your brother, (d) giving your mother a present, (e) the melting of ice into water" (Johnson 1987: 28). Being an image schema, PATH can be visualised in a simple way as follows:

A   B

Fig. 1: The PATH schema

Another image schema is the CONTAINER schema that can structure both propositional utterances, such as 'He got out of the car' or non-propositional utterances as 'Let out your anger'. This image schema can be visualised with the following gestalt structure (for a more detailed discussion see Johnson 1987):
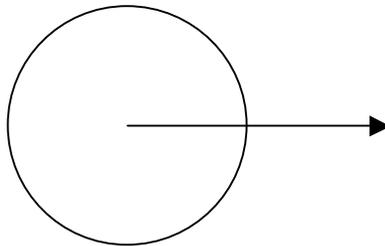
Fig. 2: The CONTAINER schema

Consisting out of a gestalt structure, image schemata can conceptually structure what is uttered (spoken and written), and can structure both smaller text units, such as sentences, or more complex texts. Herein lies the high validity of image schemata from an intercultural point of view: once we are able to localise and specify image schemata underlying the way of communicating about subject matters, we can obtain a picture of the culture-specific cognitive models that are used to deal with everyday experience, even in such complex fields as culturally dependant ways of conceptualisation in management. And because image schemata basically consist of a limited number of parts and relationships, it is possible to visualise them graphically in a given context, as shown above. This can be considered an important methodological advantage, as will be shown later in the case of organisational theory, because culturally dominant image schemata can thus be made easily and quickly understandable.

From the perspective of a multicultural organisation, effort spent on organising inner corporate life can be minimised when relevant management concepts depending on the national cultures dominant in the organisation can be presupposed. Of course this cannot be seen as automatic, but it provides handy starting points for the leadership to develop further problem solving strategies for staff management. The interrelationship between the intercultural dimensions of conceptualisation and the crucial role image schemata play for communication in general can be summarized as shown in fig. 1.

Figure 1 above shows the key role image schemata play for the process of conceptualisation. Traditionally, text analysis has been carried out mainly from a structurally orientated semantic or propositional perspective, not taking into account the conceptual dimension. What makes metaphorological research (here shown by the use of image schemata) interesting is its high interdisciplinary value, as results gathered through this kind of cognitive analysis can be of direct use for everyday problems, in this case in the area of management.

If image schemata are the structure of central concepts (cognitive models) in a certain field, they become culturally prototypical. This means that once we can describe prototypical image schemata, we have the central ideas about a subject matter expressed in manifold (para-)verbal and non-verbal ways, as the same prototypical concept is used for structuring innumerable utterances about a subject matter. Herein lies the high economic function of prototypical image schemata. How one expresses oneself verbally, para- or non-verbally within a language is not limited. But image schemata that are prototypical for a culture are extremely reduced in number, as one image schema can generate innumerous different utterances. The more relevant an image schema is for a certain culture, the more it will be used for cognitively structuring communication, be it oral or written. Seen from an intercultural viewpoint, such prototypicality can be considered a cultural idealisation of certain concepts, once they are generally accepted within a certain domain. In Lakoff's terms, these prototypical concepts have in this way become idealized cognitive models (Lakoff 1986 passim), where 'idealized' can be seen as referring to a given cultural dimension.

The idealisation of a cognitive model as a consequence of the process of conceptualisation within a given culture is as relevant in everyday communication as in communication about specialised subject matters (so-called LSP communication: language for specific purpose). This ubiquity in the role of image schemata is accompanied by the fact that these schemata

are generally the result of an enculturation process. As education is a form of enculturation, be it on a non-scientific or scientific level, even university studies are culturally bound in one way or another. This makes university text books interesting from a culture-specific point of view.

The more abstract a subject matter is, the more dependent we are on cognitive metaphors, cognitive metonymies or image schemata to depict these abstract target domains in the process of metaphorical mapping. Image schemata can be depicted alone, without specified cognitive metaphors or metonymies, or together with these. The process of metaphorical mapping itself is basically characterised by the cognitive principle that we use concrete experiential knowledge about our world as we know it through the process of enculturation to structure our way of communicating about abstract target domains of a subject matter.

It has become clear by now that the notion of metaphorical mapping goes far beyond any traditional theory of metaphor. Strictly speaking, it is not a theory of metaphor but a theory of the ubiquitous interrelationship between language and experiential knowledge, where the latter is primarily based on a holistic view of bodily experience of the world as we live it according to a given experiential context (cf. Johnson 1987). In which way this interrelationship can be grasped and systematised for corporate management will be shown below through the example of the cross-cultural study on German and Swedish organisational theory.

3. The analysis

Originally both German and Swedish academic or scientific text books dealing with organisational theory were analysed. This was done in order to find possible recurrent image schemata used as prototypical concepts for structuring both verbal and non-verbal descriptions of certain chosen management issues that may be of relevance in companies whose employees come from different national cultures. These abstract target domains are the role of leadership, the notion and kind of relevance of hierarchy in an organisation, forms of possible organisation of work processes, and the role of the individual in the organisational whole.

All quotations given below are translated into English. It is important here to note that these translations cannot be rendered into idiomatic English but have to preserve the conceptual logic of the original quotations, since otherwise the reader would not be able to follow the original conceptual logic of the material discussed here, i.e. the culture-specific image schemata

relevant for understanding management principles of the culture in question. In particular, key quotations which establish an image schema have to be as directly translated as possible. The image schemata actualised are given in brackets inside the quotations were they are established.

3.1 The German data

In the German material, the concept of CENTRIFUGALITY is used to describe the above mentioned target domains. This is done both verbally and non-verbally. As this image schema is either used to structure non-propositional utterances or is used to describe and clarify the above mentioned target domains, it can be considered as being prototypical for German organisational theory. Therefore, this image schema functions as an idealized cognitive model in the German data and can be considered as a multifunctional key for understanding German conceptualisation of the target domains in question. This conceptualisation is characterised by the principle of splitting an organisational whole (the organisational activity as such) into different parts. This split is conceptualised as a vectorial and centrifugal division of the parts in question. According to this concept, the organisation as a whole achieves a state of maximum efficiency by dividing and clearly delimiting different responsibilities, tasks, areas of competence etc. According to the logic of this concept, it is not until the principle of CENTRIFUGALITY has been implemented that the organisation becomes functional and lucid both for upper and for lower management levels. Even the role of the individual is inextricably interwoven with this centrifugal principle. This concept of CENTRIFUGALITY is systematically linked with another concept, that of VERTICALITY, because the centrifugal movement is understood as running down different management levels in a top-down fashion. The quotations given below exemplify both image schematic concepts:

> 1)   "Unter Organisation wird ein Sozialgebilde mit abgegrenztem Mitgliederbestand und interner Rollendifferenzierung (**CONTAINER + CENTRIFUGALITY**) verstanden, das bewußt und rational die Realisierung spezifischer Zwecke anstrebt (**VECTOR + CENTRIFUGALITY**)." (Golas et al. 1990: 255)
> [Organisation is understood as a social formation with secluded members and with internal role differentiation (**CONTAINER +**

CENTRIFUGALITY), which strives consciously and rationally at making real specific purposes (**VECTOR + CENTRIFUGALITY**)]

2) "Die Aufbauorganisation (**VERTICALITY**) gliedert zunächst die Gesamtaufgabe (Marktaufgabe) in Teilaufgaben und ordnet sie danach den Stellen zu (**CENTRIFUGALITY**). Damit werden Stellenaufgaben und Zuständigkeiten geschaffen, die auf Aufgabenträger (Stelleninhaber, Personen) zu verteilen sind (**CENTRIFUGALITY**). Eine Aufbauorganisation entsteht in Stufen (**VERTICALITY**) ... Die Aufgabengliederung beginnt bei der betrieblichen Gesamtaufgabe ... als der *Obergrenze* und schreitet fort bis zu zuordnungsfähigen Teilaufgaben ..., deren Unterteilung nicht mehr sinnvoll ist (*Untergrenze*) (**VERTICALITY + CENTRIFUGALITY**). Die Gliederungstiefe (**VERTICALITY)** hängt wesentlich von der Betriebsgröße und dem Grad der Arbeitsteilung ab. (**CENTRIFUGALITY**)" (Gönner et al. 1991: 204)
[The building-up organisation (**VERTICALITY**) divides the whole task (market plan) into divided tasks and distributes them to the posts (**CENTRIFUGALITY**). In this way objectives and responsibilities are created that are to be distributed to the persons in question (**CENTRIFUGALITY**). A building-up organisation is created step by step (**VERTICALITY**) … The task division is to be made at the level of the general organisational task …being the *upper boundary* and continues all the way to those sub-tasks that cannot be divided any more (*sub-boundary*) (**VERTICALITY + CENTRIFUGALITY**). The depth of subdivision (**VERTICALITY)** depends largely on the size of the organisation and the degree of task division (**CENTRIFUGALITY**)]

3) "Alle Organisationen gewinnen ihre Effektivität durch Arbeitsteilung. Das bedeutet Spezialisierung der Arbeitskräfte (**CENTRIFUGALITY**)" (Eisenführ 2000: 74)
[All organisations gain their efficiency through split of work. That means specialisation of the work forces (**CENTRIFUGALITY**)]

4) "In der Organisationsanalyse wird die Unternehmensaufgabe in verteilungsfähige Aufgaben analytisch zergliedert (**CENTRIFUGALITY**). Die dabei durchzuführenden Analyseschritte stellen eine logisch-analytische Zerlegung der Unternehmensaufgabe in

untergeordnete Aufgaben dar (**CENTRIFUGALITY** + **VERTICALITY**).” (Barth 2002: 89)

[In organisational analysis the organisational task is divided analytically into dividable tasks (**CENTRIFUGALITY**). The analytical steps carried out represent a logical-analytical split of the organisational task into subordinated tasks (**CENTRIFUGALITY** + **VERTICALITY**)]

The image schema of CONTAINER (cf. example 1) is a general concept in organisational thinking which is not only specific for the German culture. What makes quotation 1 representative for German organisational management is the way in which the inside of the CONTAINER is conceptualised. In the case above the focus is placed on the kind of functional combination of a “member” (as part of the container) and a specific role that comes with the member in question, where every member as part of the organisational whole has a different kind of organisational function. This inextricable interwovenness between the kind of organisational member (the organisational role of an employee) and its individually specified task is system-based in German organisational theory. It is a consequence of the centrifugality in the overall task-orientation of an organisation. According to that, the output of an organisation can only be made possible by means of centrifugal task division (see quotation 2), where the principle of centrifugality is seen as the precondition *per se* for organisational efficiency (see quotation 3). This centrifugal principle is terminologically referred to as the analytical organisational planning (see quotation 4).

The direction of the centrifugal movement is systematically described as a vertical movement from the top of the management down to lower levels, not vice versa:

5) ”die Planung (erfolgt) hierarchisch von oben nach unten (top-to-down) (**VERTICALITY**). Dabei werden durch die Führungsspitze der Unternehmung die Unternehmungsziele festgelegt ... Den nachfolgenden Managementebenen (**VERTICALITY**) obliegt es dann, diese globalen Vorgaben speziell für ihren Verantwortungsbereich stufenweise in detaillierte Teilpläne umzusetzen (**CENTRIFUGALITY**)” (Schierenbeck, 1989: 103)

[Planning is made hierachically top-to-down (**VERTICALITY**). The top management (cf. elsewhere ‘top of the pyramid’) decides on the objectives. … The lower management levels (**VERTICALITY**) have

to split these general objectives into detailed divided plans for their responsibilities (**CENTRIFUGALITY**)]

6) "Jede Tätigkeit enthält die beiden Bestandteile (**CONTAINER**) Entscheidung ... und Ausführung ... Die rangorientierte (**VERTICALITY**) Aufgabenanalyse trennt diese beiden Bestandteile und kommt damit zu Teilaufgaben mit unterschiedlichem Rang (**VERTICALITY** + **CENTRIFUGALITY**)". (Golas et al. 1990: 258)
[Every activity contains the two parts (**CONTAINER**) decision … and execution … The task analysis done according to the rank (**VERTICALITY**) divides these components and hereby gets parts of objectives with different ranks (**VERTICALITY** + **CENTRIFUGALITY**)]

From an organisational perspective it is obvious that mere centrifugality would not lead to consistent organisational output. There must be some sort of contrary movement to the principle of centrifugality in order to keep the organisational system together. That is also the case in German organisational theory. The issue is, however, that centrifugality is seen as a condition *sine qua non*, without which no organisational planning can be made possible. CENTRIFUGALITY as an organisational concept in this way structures even all coordinational work in the synthesis of the organisational output, as the centrifugal split into specific posts with specific responsibilities is seen as guaranteeing all synthesis:

7) "Die ausführende Tätigkeit des Organisierens kann am besten mit dem *Analyse-Synthese-Konzept* von Kosiol erläutert werden. Zunächst ist die allgemeine Ausgangssituation zu analysieren und in ihre Teilschritte zu zerlegen (**CENTRIFUGALITY**), um dann in einem weiteren Schritt unter Beachtung von Menschen, Sachmitteln und Informationen organische Einheiten zu bilden. Dadurch werden die kleinsten organisatorischen Einheiten, die Stellen geschaffen (**CENTRIFUGALITY**)." (Bernecker 1999: 32; emphasis in the original text)
[The activity of organising can best be explained with the *concept of analysis/synthesis* by Kosiol. First the general initial situation is to be analysed and to be divided into parts (**CENTRIFUGALITY**), in order to group in a next step organic units considering people, materials, and information. This is how the smallest organisational units, the posts, are created (**CENTRIFUGALITY**)]

But it is not only the image schematic CENTRIFUGALITY which marks German organisational theory. According to the function of image schemata, that is to structure more specific images, CENTRIFUGALITY and VERTICALITY are used to structure such metaphors as THE ORGANISATION IS AN EDIFICE or THE ORGANISATION IS A PYRAMID or THE ORGANISATION IS A PHYSICAL MOVEMENT. In the following examples the cognitive metaphors are written in normal capital letters. The image schemata are written in bold letters in order to differentiate them visually from the metaphors, which those image schemata structure.

8) "Aufbauorganisation" (**VERTICALITY**: EDIFICE) (numerous sources, passim) [building-up organisation]

9) "Ablauforganisation" (**VERTICALITY**: PHYSICAL MOVEMENT) (numerous sources, passim)
[running-down organisation]

10) "Die Aufgaben- und Kompetenzverteilung kann daher als ein Vorgang aufgefasst werden, der oben an der Pyramidenspitze (**VERTICALITY**: EDIFICE), beim Unternehmer bzw. Management, beginnt, wo alle Aufgaben und Befugnisse vorerst noch zusammengefaßt sind, und über eine ständig weiterzuführende '*Delegation von Aufgaben und Kompetenzen*' nach unten bis zur breiten Basis der Pyramide führt (**VERTICALITY**: EDIFICE)." (Golas et al. 1990: 277; emphasis in the original text)
[The division of tasks and competences can threrefore be understood as a process that starts above at the top of the pyramid (**VERTICALITY**: EDIFICE), with the employer or management, where all tasks and responsabilities are combined, before they get downwards to the broad basis (also: basement) of the pyramid through the principle of '*delegation of tasks and competences'* (**VERTICALITY**: EDIFICE)]

On the basis of such central image schemata as CENTRIFUGALITY and VERTICALITY culture-specific technical terms as e.g. 'Ablauforganisation', 'Aufbauorganisation', 'Managementpyramide' are structured, which are not common or which are completely missing in other cultural traditions on organisational theory. The explanation for this phenomenon is that we do

not have to deal with different terms in different languages alone but rather with different cultural traditions of experiential conceptualisation. In this way, the cognitive metaphor COOPERATION IS A PATH also marks a central cognitive metaphor in German organisational theory. The question of cooperation between different instances in an organisation is terminologically seen in this metaphor as a system of lines between different levels, which has formed such crucial terms for German organisational LSP as for example 'Einliniensystem' ('one line system') or 'Mehrliniensystem' ('multi-line system'). Terms like these are missing in Swedish organisational theory and it would be of futile communicational effect to use them in *lingua franca* interaction. Yet they do represent prototypical conceptualisations in German management:

11) "Der Idealtyp des Einliniensystems. … Die Vorgesetzten sind im Rahmen ihrer Leitungsfunktion für alles zuständig, was sie und die ihnen unterstellten Stellen betrifft (**VERTICALITY**). … Als Nachteil gilt die starke Beanspruchung der Instanzen, da der hierarchische Dienstweg (**VERTICALITY + PATH**) sowohl bei abteilungsinternen als auch bei abteilungsübergreifenden Problemen (**CONTAINER**) stets einzuhalten ist (**PATH**: PHYSICAL MOVEMENT)" (Schierenbeck 1989: 95)

[The ideal form of one line system. … The foremen are within their leadership function responsible for everything that concerns them and the posts below them (**VERTICALITY**). … The laborious use of the instances is a disadvantage, because the hierachical path of duty (**VERTICALITY + PATH**) concerning problems both inside a subdivision and between divisions must always be followed (**PATH**: PHYSICAL MOVEMENT)]

12) "Das Mehrliniensystem. Bei diesem System werden die Entscheidungsbefugnisse nach funktionalen Gesichtspunkten differenziert (**CENTRIFUGALITY**) ... Es werden also Instanzen gebildet, die jeweils für ihre spezialisierte Aufgabe zuständig sind (**CENTRIFUGALITY**). Mithin unterstehen die einzelnen Aufgaben-träger jeweils direkt *mehreren* Instanzen (**VERTICALITY**) ... Mithin unterstehen die spezialisierten Aufgabenträger jeweils direkt mehreren spezialisierten Instanzen (**VERTICALITY + CENTRIFUGALITY**)" (Golas et al. 1990: 283f., emphasis in the original text)

[The multi-line system. In this system decision-making is differentiated according to functional aspects (**CENTRIFUGALITY**)

… Instances are formed that are responsible for their specialized tasks (**CENTRIFUGALITY**). That means that single persons are subordinate directly to *several* instances (**VERTICALITY**) … Specialized persons are subordinate to several specialized instances (**VERTICALITY + CENTRIFUGALITY**)]

13) "Zugleich hilft das Mehrliniensystem, das Prinzip des kürzesten Weges zu realisieren ('Linie' = **PATH**)" (Schierenbeck, 1989: 95)
[At the same time the multi-line system helps to bring into being the principle of the shortest way ('line'= **PATH**)]

14) "Befehlswege ('Linien') (Linien = **PATH**) (Heinen 1985: 60)
[Paths of command ('lines') (lines = **PATH**)]

15) "Der Instanzenaufbau bedarf der Ergänzung durch einen festgelegten Weg (**VERTICALITY + PATH**: EDIFICE), auf dem Informationen, vor allem Anordnungen, die Stellen erreichen (**VECTOR**). In der Praxis haben sich verschiedene Möglichkeiten des organisierten Befehlsweges (Dienstweges) herausgebildet: die Leitungssysteme (Weisungssysteme) (**WEG**)" (Gönner et al. 1991: 216)
[The building up of the instances has to be completed by a fixed path (**VERTICALITY + PATH**: EDIFICE), on which informations, especially instructions, get to the posts (**VECTOR**). In praxis different possibilities of organised paths of command (paths of service) have been established: the systems of leadership (systems of command) (**PATH**) (from here omwards: 'systems of leadership' = 'one line system' ("Einliniensystem") and 'staff line system' ("Stabsliniensystem")]

The advantage of the cognitive theory of metaphor and with it the theory of image schemata and culture-specific conceptualisation is that this method of analysis allows one to gather interculturally relevant information from both verbal and non-verbal categories equally.[3] As far as organisational theory is concerned, all the above shown concepts also play a crucial role in non-verbal clarifications in text books, as for example in the visualisation of the concept of CENTRIFUGALITY in combination with the concept of

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[3] For other examples of gathering interculturally relevant information through verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal communication in the field of online marketing and PR see Schmidt 2002c, and 2003.

VERTICALITY in figure 4, where the organisational 'main task' ("Gesamtaufgabe") is vertically split into successively smaller ('elementary') tasks ("Elementaraufgaben"):
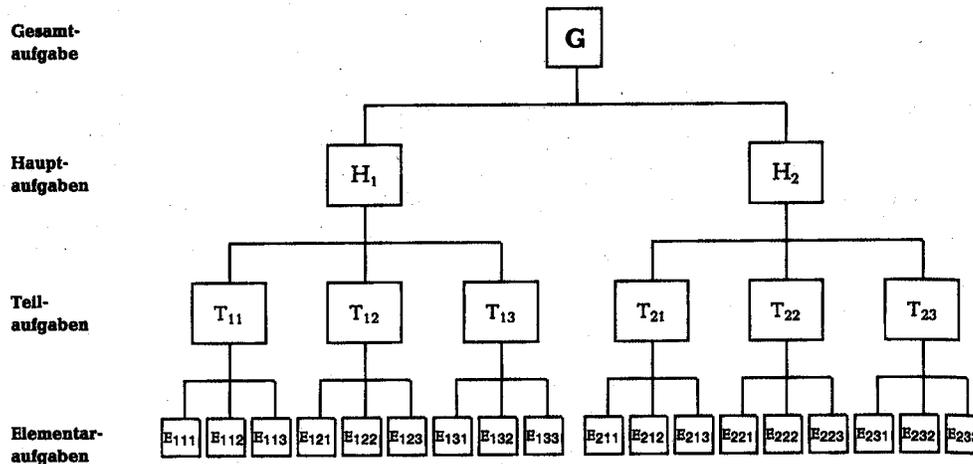

Fig. 4: CENTRIFUGALITY and VERTICALITY (Golas et al. 1990: 260)

The crucial impact that this conceptualisation has had on German organisational theory is reflected even in the parallelity of the verbal categories, where the generally used verbal form "Managementpyramide" (most sources) has manifold non-verbal parallels, both categories using the conceptual metaphor THE ORGANISATION IS AN EDIFICE (PYRAMID) (cf. fig. 5 and 6):
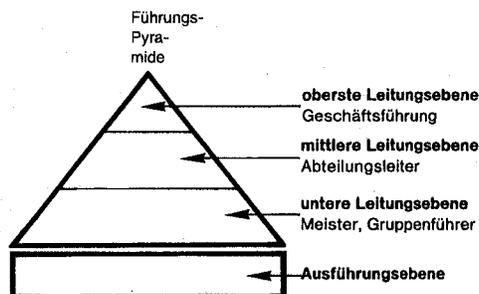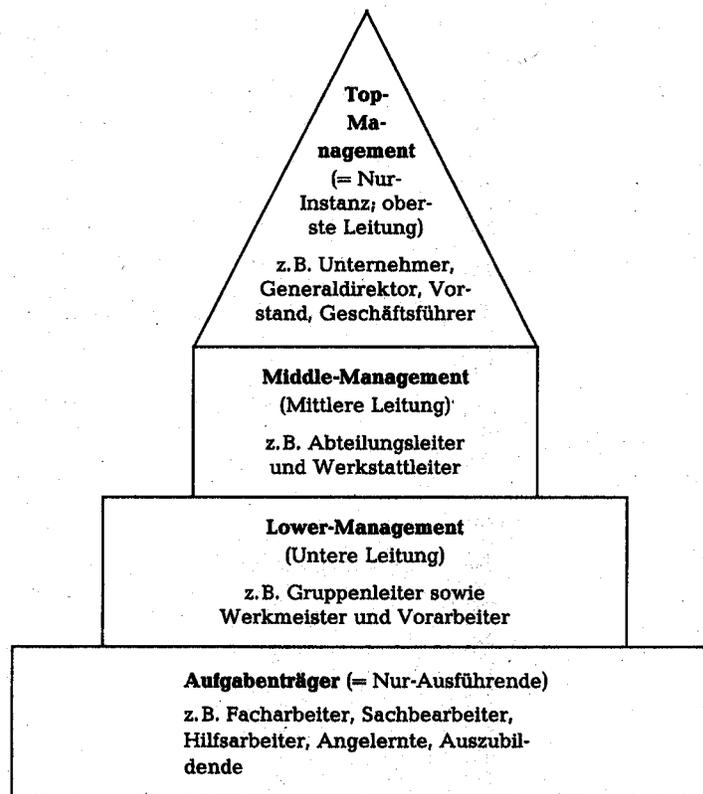

Fig. 5: Pyramid (Gönner et al. 1991: 216)

Fig. 6: Pyramid (Golas et al. 1990: 278)

The verbal and non-verbal examples above show the prototypical impact that the concept of CENTRIFUGALITY has, even non-verbally, on German organisational theory. On the basis of the verbal and non-verbal examples shown, this culture-specific conceptualisation can be graphically summarised. VERTICALITY also marks an important image schema in German organisational theory, but as the examples above show, it is to be seen as a complementary concept for CENTRIFUGALITY, i.e. marking the direction of the centrifugal movement in organisational planning. According to the principle that image schemata consist of parts and relationships, the prototypical image schema of CENTRIFUGALITY in German organisational conceptualisation can be graphically summarised as follows:
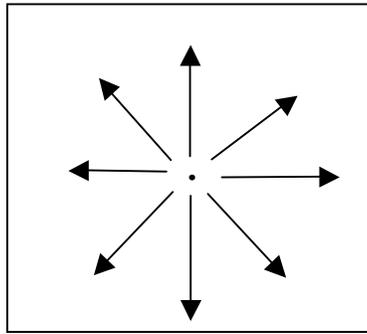
Fig. 7: The image schema of CENTRIFUGALITY in German organisational theory

The advantage of conceptual analysis as shown here lies in the fact that on the basis of simple graphic visualisation, complex culture-bound subject matters that play the role of relevant culture-specific 'idealized cognitive models' can be discussed and concretised.

3.2 The Swedish data

The culturally idealised cognitive model in Swedish literature on organisational theory is the exact opposite to the German data. If CENTRI**FUGALITY** was a German conceptualisation, then the prototypical Swedish conceptualisation can be summarised as CENTRI**PETALISM**. The vertical division of tasks etc. into parts is not essential here but, on the contrary, the clearly articulated opposite ideal is: that of combining all tasks and posts in the organisation towards a conceptual concentric middle. This is as much shown verbally as non-verbally. Consequently, we find different technical terms in Swedish organisational theory from those in German, as the quotations below show. It is important to notice here that with the difference in terminology there is also a difference in conceptualisation with all its practical consequences for everyday organisational management. The centripetal movement is reflected in such terms as "samspel" , "samverkan", "samarbete", which can be translated as 'coordinate activity', 'cooperation' or terms like "kollektiva resurser": 'collective resources' (all terms most sources).[4]

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[4] In his study on organisational management Fons Trompenaars (1993) attributes a "specific" role to employees in German companies (i.e a clearly distinguishable role beween the employees in order to optimize the work process) combined with a more vertical structure than Swedish companies. Swedish organisations are seen as being "diffuse" (in Trompenaars' terms), because

Formal organisation is therefore not understood as, for example, a vertical task division, but as the **centripetal vector** to 'influence the individuals' comprehensions in a certain direction' ("påverka individernas uppfattningar i en viss riktning"; Sjöstrand 1991: 149). The image schema of CONTAINER is also found in Swedish organisational theory but the way the organisation inside the container is conceptualised varies from the German sources. The centripetal concept is also shown non-verbally:
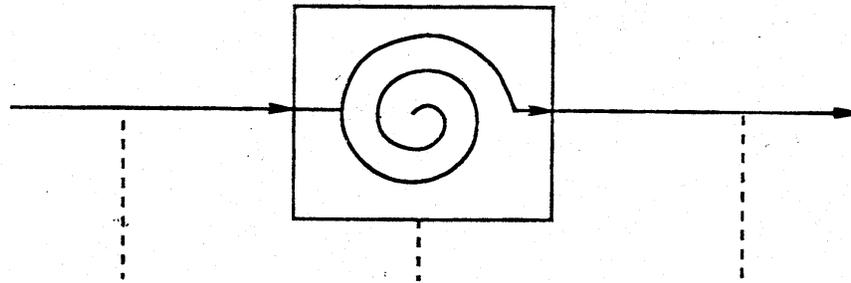

Fig. 8: Sjöstrand 1991: 153

This conceptualisation of CENTRIPETALISM is, for example, expressed verbally in the following quotations:

16) "Gemensamt för alla typer av ledarskap är samspelet mellan ledare och medarbetare (**CENTRIPETALISM**). ... Chefen agerar inte heller enbart som individ utan i samspel med vissa nära medarbetare (**CENTRIPETALISM**)" (Edström et al. in: Czarniawska 2000: 149)
[Common for all types of leadership is the interplay between the leader and the **co**-worker/**col**league (**CENTRIPETALISM**; emphasis by the author) … The boss does not act solely as an individual but in cooperation/interplay   with   certain   close   co-workers (**CENTRIPETALISM**)]

17) "Det föreligger åtminstone ett ytterligare starkt skäl ... till att företagsledare behövs på en mer kontinuerlig basis i organisationer (**CONTAINER**: EDIFICE). De behövs också för att bidra till organiseringen av ett i huvudsak kollektivt, hyggligt samordnat

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they result from a rather ad hoc process of work organisation and are less logically-analytically than in German organisations (Trompenaars 1993, 160). In Trompenaars study Swedish organisational culture is the most clear cut form of what he calls "Incubator" culture and German organisational culture being the most clear cut form of what he calls "Eiffel Tower" culture.

handlande (inklusive ett underhåll av detsamma) (**CENTRIPETALISM**). Företagsledningar förväntas m.a.o. verka för att organisationer skall kunna uppfylla sin unika funktion, nämligen **kapaciteten att handla kollektivt** (**CENTRIPETALISM**) (Sjöstrand in Czarniawska 2000: 30; emphasis in the original text)

[There is at least one further reason ... why company leaders are needed on a more continuous basis (basement) in organisations (**CONTAINER**: EDIFICE). They are also needed for contributing to the organisation of a mainly collective, coordinated acting (including its maintenance) (**CENTRIPETALISM**). Company leaderships are expected to act so that organisations can fulfil their unique function, i.e. the **capability to act collectively** (**CENTRIPETALISM**)]

18) "Det är genom koordinering av flera människors handlingar som organisationer får sin kraft och framstår som aktörer. (**CENTRIPETALISM**)" (Ahrne et al 1999: 20)

[By co-ordinating several people's way of acting organisations get their strength and stand out as actors (**CENTRIPETALISM**)]

19) "Arbetet med att strukturera en organisation har tre fundamentala (EDIFICE) kunskapskällor, nämligen: (a) meningen med eller orsaken till samverkan i organiserad form (**CENTRIPETALISM**), (b) legala förutsättningar och av lagstiftaren tillhandahållna/rekommenderade former för samverkan (**CENTRIPETALISM**) samt (c) samordnings- eller ledningsteoretiska överväganden (**CENTRIPETALISM**)" (Sjöstrand 1991: 150)

[The work of structuring an organisation has three fundamental (EDIFICE) sources of knowledge, i.e.: (a) the meaning of or reason for co-ordination in organised form (**CENTRIPETALISM**), (b) legal conditions and recommended forms for co-ordination (**CENTRIPETALISM**), and (c) theoretical reflections on co-ordination and leadership (**CENTRIPETALISM** as a prototypical concept)]

20) "Organisationen ses ... som en struktur som svarar mot och anpassar sig till en mängd olika intressenters krav, och som söker upprätthålla balansen genom att sammanväga dessa krav (**CENTRIPETALISM**). Organisationsledningen ... får ett slags medlarroll, rollen att jämka de olika intressenternas krav mot vararandra (**CENTRIPETALISM**)" (Abrahamsson 2000: 110)

[Organisation is seen ... as a structure that answers to and adapts to a lot of different demands and which strives to maintain the balance by combining these demands (**CENTRIPETALISM**). The organisational leadership … has a sort of mediating role, the role of adapting the different demands to each other (**CENTRIPETALISM**)]

21) "I många fall är högste (**VERTICALITY**) chefen den som representerar verksamheten utåt (**CONTAINER**) i förhandlingar m.m., medan en nära medarbetare står för den inre samordningen I verksamheten (**CONTAINER** + **CENTRIPETALISM**) " (Edström et al. in Czarniawska 2000: 153)
[In many cases the highest (**VERTICALITY**) foreman represents the activities outwards (**CONTAINER**) in negotiations etc., whereas a near co-worker handles the inner coordination (**CONTAINER** + **CENTRIPETALISM**)]

In contrast to the German data the use and conceptual role of VERTICALITY as in example 21 above is very limited in the Swedish data. Compared to the German conceptualisation the image schematic concept of CENTRIPETALISM shows even in its combination with other image schemata a striking difference as it is currently conceptualised together with HORIZONTALITY in the Swedish data; either keeping overtly or indirectly distance from vertical hierarchies:

22) "I stället för långa beslutsvägar och handläggare som arbetar som 'ensamvargar' kan det utvecklas plattare organisationer med grupporienterat arbetssätt (**HORIZONTALITY** + **CENTRIPETALISM**)" (Wilhelmson 1994: 37)
[Instead of long ways of decisions and administrators working as 'lone wolves' it is possible to develop flatter organisations with group oriented ways of working (**HORIZONTALITY** + **CENTRIPETALISM**)]

23) "Att vi talar om auktoritet här innebär inte att det måste vara en hierarkisk organisation. … Organisationen är alltså inte nödvändigtvis liktydigt med hierarki eller byråkrati. (**HORIZONTALITY** + **CENTRIPETALISM**)" (Ahrne et al. 1999: 15)
[Speaking of authority does not mean that it has to be a hierarchical organisation. … That means that organisation is not necessarily

synonym with hierarchy or bureaucracy (**HORIZONTALITY +
CENTRIPETALISM**)]

24) ”Det finns i det svenska sättet att utöva ledarskap en preferens för
teamwork med chefen som ’primus inter pares’(**HORIZONTALITY +
CENTRIPETALISM**)” (Edström et al. in: Czarniawska 2000: 157)
[There is in the Swedish way of practising leadership a preference
for teamwork with the boss as ‘primus inter pares’
(**HORIZONTALITY + CENTRIPETALISM**)]

25) ”En förändring av arbetsorganisationen mot ett mer
grupporienterat arbetssätt och en breddning av arbetsuppgifterna
minskar sårbarheten (**HORIZONTALITY + CENTRIPETALISM**)”
(Wilhelmson 1994: 40)
[A change in the organisation of the work process towards a more
group oriented way of working and a **widening** (c.f. the opposite in the
German data; emphasis by me) of the tasks diminishes the vulnerability
(**HORIZONTALITY + CENTRIPETALISM**)]

The kind of teamwork conceptualised out of CENTRIPETALISM and
HORIZONTALITY is also shown non-verbally in the Swedish sources,
when, for example, the CEO of an organisation seems to be omitted, as in
the following figure where the CEO is seen as being present not in a
hierarchical way but on the lower levels of the hierarchy, hereby flattening
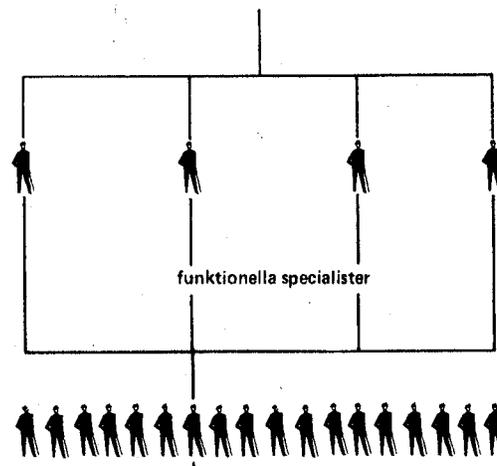hierarchichal structures and strengthening the horizontal dimension:

Fig. 9: Sjöstrand 1991: 158

Alternative systems to classical hierarchies are also discussed with the help of specific metaphors, as in the following case, where the metaphor THE ORGANISATION IS A PYRAMID is rejected in favour of the conceptual metaphor THE ORGANISATION IS A TENT CAMP in order to distance oneself from a vertical structure and to stress the importance of horizontal structure:
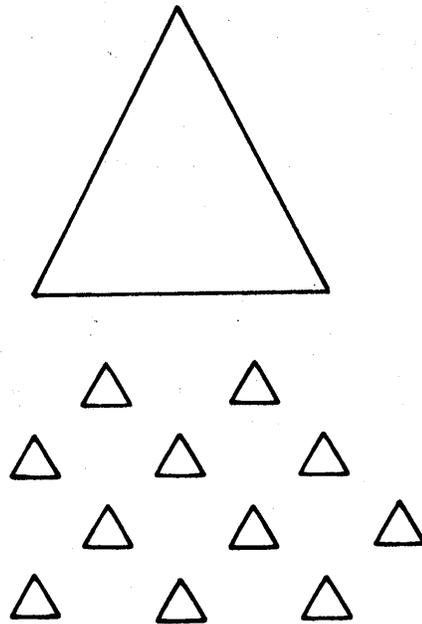
Fig. 10: Berg et al. 1979: 329

The image schematic conceptualisation of Swedish organisational management shows a contrary logic to the German one and can be graphically summarised as follows:
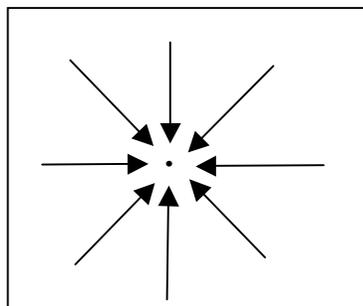
Fig 11: Image schematic conceptualisation of CENTRI**PETALISM** in Swedish organisational theory

4. Conclusions for management in multinationals

The image schemata shown above may serve as examples for the prototypical differences in German and Swedish organisational conceptualisation. In the present study the differences between Swedish and German organisational conceptualisation could be shown as being strongly *antithetic*, German conceptualisation dominated by the principle of CENTRI**FUGALITY** and Swedish conceptualisation by CENTRI**PETALISM**. The fact that two cultures are geographically and lingustically close to each other cannot serve as a basis for cultural similarity, as the present study shows in the case of the Swedish and German cultures.[5] Additionally, the study showed in which way the image schematic conceptualisations emerge in the textbooks. In the beginning of the paper, the statement was made that scientific education as a mode of enculturation has an impact on culture-specific ways of handling subject matters. This has become evident also in the history of those management concepts developed and carried out in the two cultures under scrutiny in this paper. If combined with the results of culture-specific conceptualisation shown in this paper, the culture-specific tendencies in management both on theroretical and practical level in Germany and Sweden can be put into a holistic perspective and become interculturally more understandable.

On the basis of the present results, it is, for example, not very surprising that the principle of individually split tasks (in other words the principle of centri**fugality**) was given up in favour of group oriented organisation of work processes (the principle of centri**petalism**) on a systematic basis quite early in Sweden in the end 60s/ early 70s, namely in the Volvo plants (Kalmar), where the organisational principle of systematised autonomous workgroups was introduced. It is important to note here, that the image schemata centri**fugality**/centri**petalism** are no one-dimensional culture-specific phenomenon. They comprise very complex culture-specific conceptualisations on the different aspects of management as such, whereby the present paper concentrated on the managerial dimensions of the role of leadership, the function of possible hierarchies in organisations, the role of the individual within the organisation, and the way of organising work processes between employees.

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[5] C.f. also Hofstede's dendrogram on the relatedness between cultures, where the German and Swedish cultures rate second furthest from each other on a global scale (Hofstede 2001:64).

Not only cross-culturally relevant conclusions for management for those cultures under scrutiny can be drawn on the basis of image schematic analysis. Retroactiveley, this study also explains, for example, why the so-called 'Harzburg Model' of management with its principle of the centri**fugal** splitting of tasks and responsibilities linked to those tasks could be developed into a management model that has had a strong impact only in German speaking cultures (especially in the 60s and 70s). Although it partly played a significant role in these areas, the 'Harzburg Model' has remained practically unknown outside these countries (cf. Ulrich 1981: 44f.).[6]

On the basis of the present study, it has become clear how cultural knowledge can be gained by conceptualisation through verbal categories. On a practical level, the results in this study show how the two management cultures discussed here can be contrasted and where possible problems in everyday experience between these cultures could be tackled in organisations. Of course, every method has its own possibilities and limits. Concerning the prototypical use of image schematic conceptualisation, the present study has shown in which way language can serve as a basis for systematically studying the conceptual basis for cultural differences. This method puts language in focus in a holistic way comprising verbal categories. Herein lies the advantage compared to traditional intercultural studies on the use of language, which tend to be limited to the lexical dimension. The limits of the method outlined in this paper lies in the fact that it cannot (and should not) take into account extraverbal dimensions in specific communication situations. Also the thory of image schemata cannot yet be considered as finished. It is through concrete text analyses (spoken or written) that this method can be further developed.

It should have become clear, though, throughout this paper that language can give much more insight into culture-specific dimensions than shown so far. The results of the conceptually determined use of language (the culture-specific role of image schemata) in this paper has consequences for communication in multinationals. Today the dominant role of English as a *lingua franca* not only in every day business life but also in other sectors seems to be a solution to the challenges that communication between different cultures pose. Moreover, the universalist ideal of (scientific) knowledge itself seems to be the fundamental basis on which culturally 'neutral' knowledge – 'knowledge *per se*' – could be developed,

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[6] The culture-specific historical relevance of this management model for German management history is not diminished by the fact that the Harzburg model also has been strongly critisized.

communicated and applied, provided that we use the 'right' terms for the 'right' subject matter translated in the 'right' way.

According to this mode of reflection, the terms used are not the problem. However, the user of the terms might be a problem if the 'wrong' terms for a specific subject matter are chosen. It is often assumed that the technical terms are the same in all languages. If we wanted to communicate a subject matter between different languages and cultures we would only need to choose the right 'engineer's' language between 'engineers' of different cultures. However, the results of the present study show how falacious an assumption like this can be.

Still, the majority of international companies have built their corporate foundations on the *lingua franca* principle: for instance, by allowing only the English language as a formal means of communication – even between non-native English speakers inside the company with the same mother tongue. This has, for example, become a growing phenomenon in the expanding companies of Northern Europe during the last decade in many branches. However, similar trends can be seen in other regions of the world as well.

One area in business life where the universalist theorem of culturally indifferent competence traditionally is presupposed, is the area of organisational structure and management. In Western cultures in particular, a good manager is often seen as having the 'right' *individual* predispositions, which emerge from her/his CV and which reflect the increasingly frequent career or job changes of today's professional world. It is evident that this aspect can play a crucial role when considering the ability to adapt quickly to new work surroundings. But is that the whole story? In which way does the difference in culture based ways of different management traditions of different cultures come into play when considering organisational structures? The general importance of culture for management is usually taken for granted in one's own company. This means that organisations generally do not consider culture-related issues a problem in their own case. But does reality match this self-assertion? Why then do we have so many failed joint ventures around the world; so many prematurely terminated expatriate assignments and internal corporate schisms? Different surveys show that the failure rate of expatriates is to be considered lying at least between 10-30% of all expatriate assignments (cf. Loiselle 2000: 16f.). Other surveys show even higher failure rates of 60 to 70%, depending on the regions. It is generally estimated that difficulties in adapting to culture surroundings (both inside and outside an organisation) make up at least two thirds of all failures (cf. overview in Apfelthaler 1999: 12f.). When looking

at cooperational skills of employees and managers across culture borders in the case of mergers, surveys show that bad communication skills alone and problems arising from principal differences between cultures total about 40% of all cooperation problems inside an organisation. If one adds the percentage of the problems relating to bad leadership, the total percentage for cooperational problems grows to over 70% (cf. overview in Ekwall/Karlsson 1999: 140) of all managerial problems. These figures concern both upper and lower management categories. These figures also show that the question of bad leadership cannot be attributed to individual aspects alone, but that it is a general problem in organisations and that it also has to be seen as a cultural issue.

The present paper showed that we have to bear in mind conceptual differences that arise through the use of a different language. This again questions the uncritical use of a *lingua franca*, as a *lingua franca* itself is not the sole solution for communication problems. It is also important to bear in mind that when using a *lingua franca*, we are not overcoming differences in conceptualisation the way they are expressed in a mother tongue. Conceptual differences have to be made understood on a conceptual level. Mere terminological translations are bound to fall short in this case. Here again, the issue is not simply a linguistic one. It is rather the kind of cognitive challenge that different conceptualisations, depending on different enculturations, bring about and the fact that they are expressed in their own conceptual ways through language. This puts the difference between languages conceptually in a new way into focus even for global management practice.

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