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TITLE:

**Managing the Interplay of International Organisations
by Using the Method of Organisational Constellation**

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ABSTRACT:

The paper proposes to apply the innovative systemic method of the "Organisational Constellation" for managing the interplay of international organisations. The interplay is a complex and dynamic social process between organisational systems. Due to the fact that this process is designed, managed and carried out by human beings, interferences occur in the relationships. The interplay can not be planned and managed like technical systems.

The innovative systemic method of "Organisational Constellation" is a problem solving tool to visualise and simulate social systems, in particular the interplay between their elements. It is designed to simulate and solve specific concerns, issues and conflicts within social systems. The method does not need any paper, yet people. A group of 5-10 people and a trained facilitator is needed. It is practically approved in organisations since the mid-90es, yet the scientific research as well as the exploration for political and societal change processes are still due.

The paper refers to the research results of a project at the Institute of Economy and the Environment at the University of St.Gallen (2003-04). 7 Case Studies have been generated in a company in order to implement the company's strategy of sustainable development. The focus was mainly on the interplay between the company and its various suppliers of the global textile production chain and their customers and other stakeholders. The paper will transfer the research results to the questions of managing the interplay of international organisations. The author concludes that the method can be very useful for political and societal processes in regards to manage the global environmental change.

1. Introduction

In the recent years politics, international organisations, NGOs and companies have set Sustainability or Corporate Social Responsibility (Sustainability) as goals and strategies. To translate them into practice, these organisations often **face difficulties**. It seems that writing brochures and delivering lip services is easier than the clumsy reality of changing the societal life. Hence the problem in society and markets is the realisation of sustainable development (e.g. Linne & Schwarz 2003; Steger 1997, Birke & Schwarz 1997). In many cases difficulties occur as complex and intransparent situations. Mostly they are related to problems in organisational relationships, to social conflicts, to interferences when people are working together or against each other.

How to solve this realisation problem? This question is the main focus of the latest research of the Institute for Economy and the Environment (IWOe-HSG) at the University of St. Gallen (cf. Gminder 2005). Its objective was to find out more about strategy implementation supported by the tool of Organisational Constellation. Thus it was a mix of looking at the “hard” facts and the “soft” facts of the realisation problem. The findings explained and reported in this paper has two dimensions. There are theoretical findings through literature analysis and empirical findings through analysis using the systemic method of Organisational Constellation. The approach is qualitative applied management research. Together with corporate partners problems of reality are analysed and solution paths are developed. In this project the author carried out Organisational Constellations in a partner company of the textile industry, documented, analysed and evaluated them. The company Remei AG, Switzerland, India and Tanzania, is the world leading organic cotton supplier. Because of its business in developing countries, its fair trade and organic strategy, many typical issues of interplay in international work and of cooperation with politics and NGOs are touched. And the company is one player of the human dimension of global environmental change.

The **results** show that the organisational constellation provides sufficient potential to help to overcome the mentioned problems of social interplay. In particular the “soft” problems related to human interaction, organisational and personal relations as well as cultural fit. It is a tool that has been developed to analyse complex relational problems and develop and simulate solutions for the future. Hence it provides a methodology to bridge the gap between the strategic and operative levels of organisations, in particular the non-technical management and the relations of international organisations.

Objective and outline of the paper is to explain the Organisational Constellation, to show an example of applying it in order to solve a problem in a developing country. In the end a conclusion is drawn on the usefulness of the tool for using it .

2. The Organisational Constellation – Tool for Research and Implementation Support

The innovative and exceptional **systemic method of Organisational Constellation** can help to solve or to clarify diffuse and complex Sustainability problems, in particular problems regarding business relationships, informal, cultural and structural factors. It originates in the area of Personal and Organisational Development as well as Psychology. The Organisational Constellation (cf. Weber 2000, Horn & Brick 2001, Ruppert 2003, Rosselet 2003, Wade 2004) is a method or an instrument to analyse concerns and to generate impulses to solve or handle these concerns (cf. Figure 1).

Concerns can relate to general issues like solving problems or conflicts, like supporting decisions or achieving an objective, like simulating future scenarios. Or they can relate to specific questions and

subjects of a firm, a business unit or a department. The issue or subject is stated by a person or a group and is also related to him, her or them.

Concerns and the pictures created during a constellation refer to an **organisational system**. Such a system can be a project, a team, a NGO, a company, a government as well as a market, a country or the political or societal system. It depends on the concern. Therefore the Organisational Constellation is a systemic method which shows more the interactions and effects between the members and elements of a system, rather than the action and performance of a single person or element.

The method is **carried out** with a group of people thus focussing and training the human interaction in order to work on interplay issues. It needs 1-2h time, 5-10 people, 20m² space and a trained facilitator.

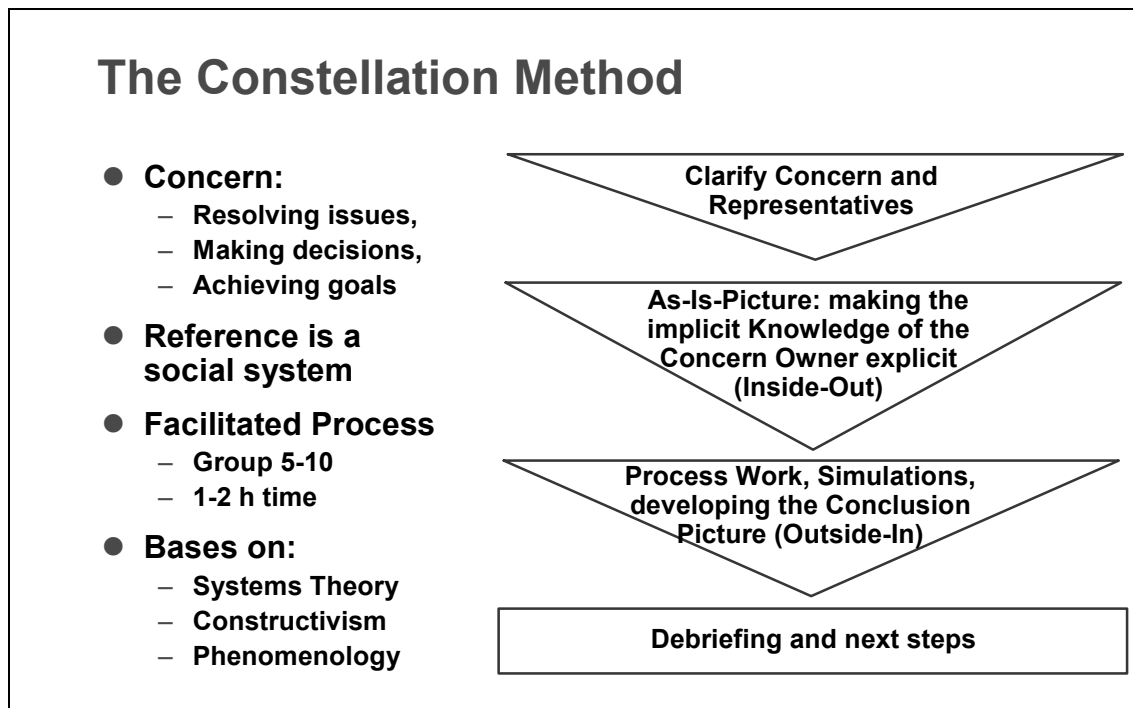


Figure 1: Introducing the Constellation method and its procedure

The Organisational Constellation follows a **defined procedure**: It starts with a solution focussed interview of the person who wants to arrange a concern ("client"). The facilitator interviews this "concern owner" and collects the necessary information of the status quo. The concern is written down in a sentence on a flip chart which expresses the objective for the constellation. Client and facilitator define the social system and its elements. As elements persons are chosen. In consultation with the concern owner the facilitator proposes the persons, groups, subjects and objects relevant for the concern. The people of the group are assigned to these roles, they get "representatives" e.g. for the Colleague A, the boss C, the subject "Environment" or the object "Management System".

In the next step the client arranges the representatives in the room according to his/ her inner picture of the situation (**as-is-picture**). By doing this the client visualises his inner picture of the situation. He makes his implicit "tacit" knowledge explicit (inside-out). The representatives have 1-2 minutes to perceive their personal impression at the position they have been placed and to observe the relations to the others representatives. They should also check whether they would like to change their position. The facilitator interviews the representatives, the process owner watches the whole

procedure from the outside ("It is so great to watch the system in which you are in for 24h a day from the outside," was once a comment of a concern owner). Now the so-called "As-is-picture" is complete.

In the next step, the so-called **process work**. The As-is-picture gets transformed into a Conclusion Picture. The transformation is mainly done by testing and changing positions of the representatives, sometimes also dialogues between particular representatives are necessary to work on relationships. Options, solutions, decisions can be simulated in a lively manner. This process is guided by the facilitator, but powered by the self-organisation of the representatives in the system. They have astonishing appropriate feelings and perceptions about the correct orders, places and things necessary to say in their role of a system element. Having progressed to an appropriate conclusion, the client steps into the picture and replaces his or her representative. She/he can reverse the explicit solution into implicit knowledge (outside-in) and can memorise the idea of a possible solution for the concern.

The Organisational Constellation is finished by a **debriefing**, where the representatives can add comments from their role perspective. Intended purpose of the debriefing is to interpret the events of the constellation and to extract results. Sometimes the conclusion picture itself is so rich that further discussion is not necessary. Yet most of the times many phenomena have occurred, so that a longer discussion and transformation of the area, sensual and relational scenes into language is important. Interpretations and hypotheses are expressed and discussed by the client, the facilitator, the representatives and external spectators. So the perceived feelings in the constellation get transformed into manageable next steps.

Organisational Constellation is an intensive, powerful and open method rich in results. Why? It combines **particular techniques** like visualisation, explication of implicit knowledge, interaction, simulation, communication and a specific kind of perception occurring in the constellation. All these techniques are only partly available in discussions or paper work. With the constellation the group simulates a social system and therefore develops and simulates solution options for issues in this system. How the sometimes impressive impact of the Organisational Constellation arises is not yet fully and clearly researched. Fact is that people not knowing anything about the role they represent and the system they act, express feelings, statements and actions which are mostly very similar to the clients reality. For the client the constellation is in 90% understandable, plausible and useful. One helpful concept of explaining this "representative perceptions" might be a type sense human beings have. Another one might be the "Emotional Intelligence" notion of Goleman 1997. The power of the right part of our brain is used in constellations in opposite to most of the "rational" management tools which address the left part of our brain by calculating, discussing, analysing, writing etc. To experience the power of the constellation work, the author recommends participating once in a Organisational Constellation. Some consultants and trainers offer open seminars at the weekend. This experience has more power of explanation than many pages of description.

The Organisational Constellation can serve several **purposes of the management** of the interplay of international organisations. It can be used as analytic and creative tool for the Strategic and the Change Management. It can be used for Micro political Analysis as well as for the Organisational or Human Resource Development, for the work on the changing organisational culture and last, but not least, the various issues of politics, i.e. the management of negotiations, societal and political relations and the commitment of citizens, governments, NGOs and business.

In addition it enhances the **capabilities** of the people using the method regarding their communication, their team work, their empathy and perception of social situations and issues. Therefore it can be recommended as well as a training tool for developing human capital for

Sustainability in the area of acting knowledge. Due to the fact of its generic design as social simulation and issue solving instrument it has enormous potential to be used not only on the micro-level of organisations, but also on the meso-level of markets and societies or even on the macro-level between countries in order to work on topics and issues at these levels.

The **scientific epistemology** of the Organisational Constellation bases on three notions of social sciences: the Constructivism (cf. Watzlawick 2002, Dachler & Hosking 1995), the Phenomenology (cf. (Bühl 2002, Gergen 1991,)) and the General System Theory (cf. Müller 1996, Willke 1991), in particular System-oriented Management (cf. Ulrich 2001) and the Systemic Psychotherapy (cf. von Schlippe & Schweitzer 2003).

3. Constellation Case: Violation against Rules of Organic Farming

In this section an **example of a Organisational Constellation** is described and analysed (cf. Gminder 2005: 196-208). Firstly it illustrates the method and secondly it shows the potential of the method for international and intercultural work in order to simulate interplays and to solve issues. It is an example from the case study of the textile partner company, briefly described in the introduction. The Organisational Constellations were conducted every 4-6 weeks by the author and carried out with the CEO and the 11 employees of the Swiss Headquarter (a so-called "Inhouse" Constellation).

The following **"Farming Constellation"** refers to a problem the company had last year with a substantial part of their organic farmers. The company owns two "projects" for organic cotton farming, one in India and one in Tanzania. In India there are ca. 1000 farmers, in Tanzania ca. 500 farmers under contract. They produce 3000 tons of organic cotton. In India the certifier who checks the farms whether the rules for organic farming are kept discovered by soil samples that 30% of the farmers have used synthetic fertiliser. A strong problem situation for the company. Beside big financial loss (the cotton can not be sold as organic anymore) the main questions for the future are: How to react? What to do with these farmers? Why did they do this? (The reason might be compensating their low harvest results of the last year) How to prevent such violations in the future? The CEO decided to execute a Organisational Constellation in order to gain first insights of the problem and ideas how to solve it.

In the preceding interview the objective, the concern, the representatives and other details of the Organisational Constellation are clarified. Objective was to generate hypothesis of the implications of the problem and to generate solution ideas. The concern was phrased as: **"How can we handle the farmers who violated in order to keep our credibility and the purpose of organic farming?"** As representatives the parties of the supply chain were chosen, because all of them are affected by the violation. The following roles were defined:

1. the company as focus – "Focus"
2. the „good“ farmers, who stuck to the organic rules – Good F.
3. the „bad“ farmers who violated against the organic rules – Bad F.
4. the project manager in India – PMgmt.
5. the customers of the company – Cust.
6. the organic certifier – Certif.
7. the competitors of the company – Comp.

Analysing the concern, the situation was suitable for executing a Organisational Constellation. The problem had a high immediacy (was "brand new") and a high importance (violation against the core values of the company plus a big financial loss). This imposed a high emotional attention of the

problem. Also the complexity of the problem can be rated as high: the violators work far away, live in a completely different culture and belong to a different profession. In addition it was a problem of the corporate organisation. The internal audits obviously failed thus the external auditor discovered the issue. The violation against organic rules proposed a strong link to the problems occurring when implementing Corporate Sustainability. In “traditional” cotton business this issue would have been no issue. Non-organic cotton farming uses a lot of synthetic fertiliser. The relational aspects of the issue are strong as well: the “bad” farmers took advantage of the trust of the parent company, the control was not sufficient and the rules of cooperation were violated. The question was now how to react coherent to culture and relationships?

The **CEO** was the person who arranged the “As-is-picture” of the constellation (“client”), i.e. he assigned employees as representatives and placed them in the room, even the problem is a company wide one. But it needs one person to make the arrangement and the CEO is the one who has to decide in the end how to treat the farmers.

The **As-is-picture** (cf. Figure 2) shows the “good” and the “bad” farmers, the project management and the certifier in a square. This seemed to be the system in India. The European participants like the company, the customers and the competitors had more a role of external spectators. When interviewing the representatives about their perception in the picture, the strong position of the “bad” farmers astonished. They showed no regret, no pangs of conscience, no insight that they made a mistake. Neither towards their “good” farmer colleagues, nor towards the project manager. The representative for the “bad” farmers grinned and said: “Why are you so upset? This was no severe incident.” But the “good” farmers found it severe, felt weakened and were very angry regarding the behaviour of their colleagues. The reaction of the representative for the Indian project manager was ambivalent: on the one hand he wanted to have the parent company by his side in order to strengthen his position. On the other hand he wanted to keep it away due to the fears of being punished. He was trapped between his loyalties. This resulted in a weak position against the “bad” farmers, obviously they were not afraid of him.

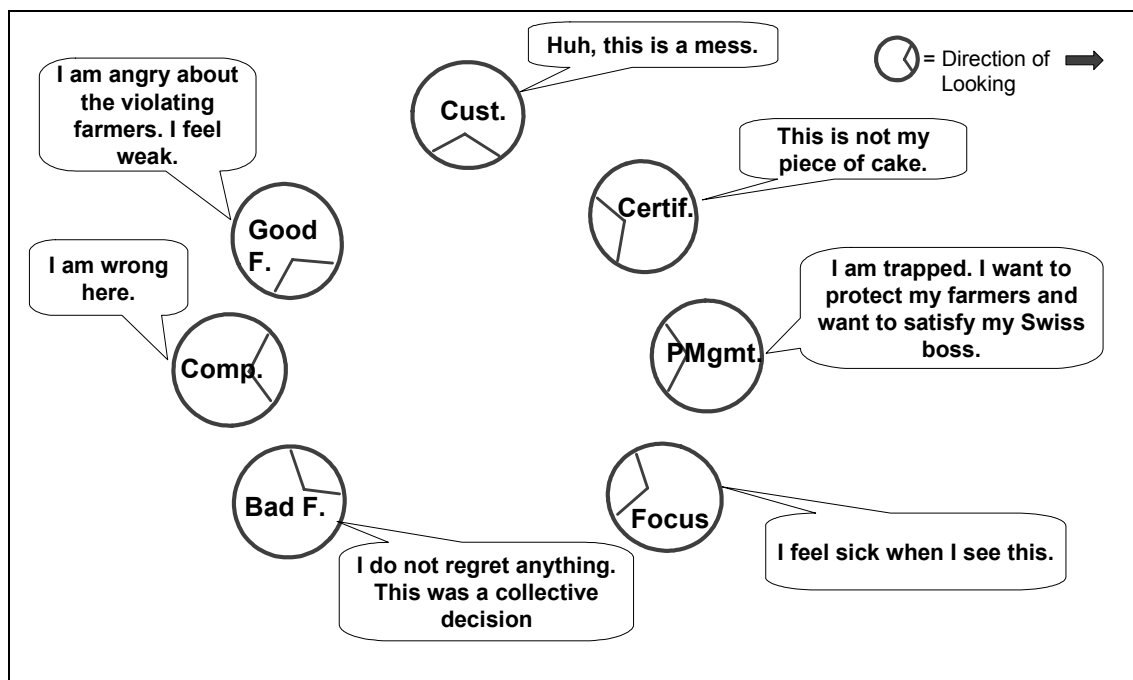


Figure 2: As-Is-Picture of CEO regarding the problem with farmers

In the phase of the **process work**, changeovers and a great number of clarifying dialogues were used. Dialogues from link to link of the textile supply chain have been necessary in order to come up with an applicable “Conclusion picture”. After having communicated and informed about the incident along the whole supply chain and after having clarified that this incident does not affect the future of cooperation, the “bad” farmers felt pressure for the first time. Their representative mentioned: “Now it is our turn, we have to do something!” At this process stage the constellation could be finished. The pressure of the complete supply chain, beginning with customers (these are mainly retailing chains) followed by the company and the project management could be felt. Attempts to come to a solution in the Indian part of system did not succeed. Dialogues between the “good” and the “bad” farmers, the latter and the project manager had no significant effect for the constellation. The conciliation between the “good” and the “bad” farmers could not be realised. Very interesting was the gesture of putting a resource in the back of the good farmers. This strengthened their position and reduced their anger against their colleagues. Important were dialogues between the company and its subordinate, the Indian project manager, as well as between the customers and their subordinate, the company. The competitors were taken out while this internal clarification proceeded. They came back to watch the conclusion picture and commented: “This supply chain looks clear and strong.” The organic certifier did not play an important role any further; he was more a spectator of the happening.

The **Conclusion picture** (cf. Figure 3) shows a Y formation: the supply chain lined up clearly and is now powerful enough to put pressure on the “bad” farmers. The last step of the constellation is incorporating the concern owner in the conclusion picture. He replaces the focus person; in this case the CEO replaces the representative for the company. He assimilates the constellation arrangement and states that he needs more latitude. On the one hand he wants to be integrated in the supply chain, on the other hand he wants to step aside to the left in order to be active if necessary. He seems to need the option to interfere if the Indian project management is too weak.

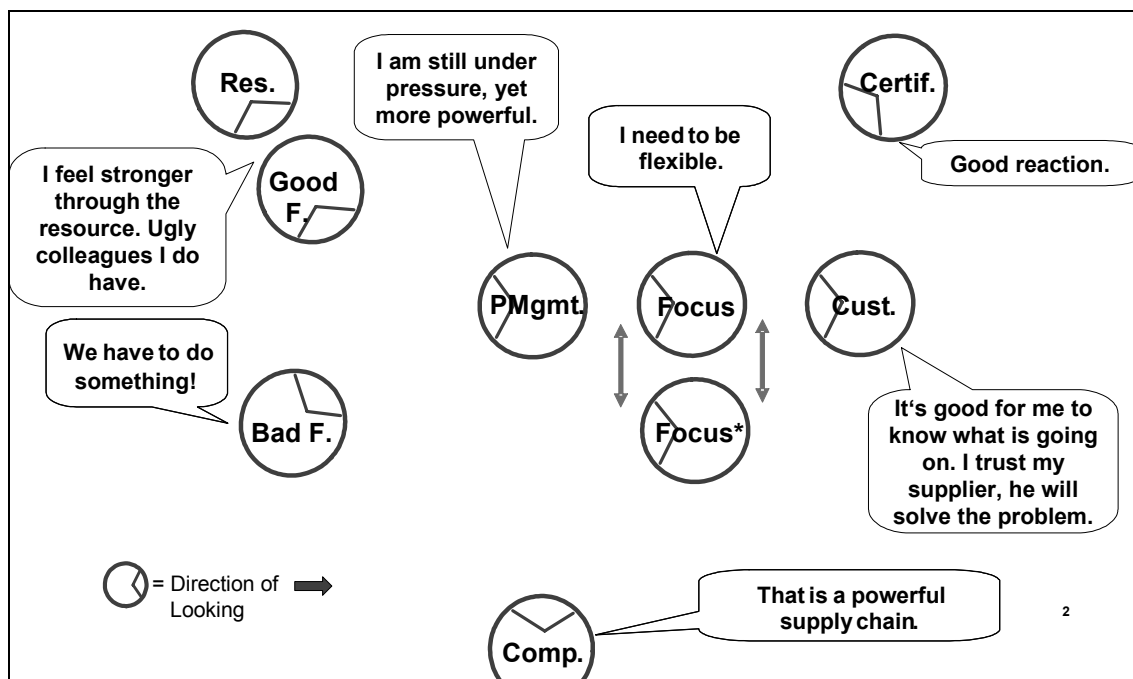


Figure 3: Conclusion Picture of the Organisational Constellation

In the consequent **debriefing** the employees were satisfied, one pointed out: “I found it very interesting what has happened. I was very sceptical at the beginning.” A particular team dynamic emerged due to the work on an urgent company issue. All of the employees have been working on it, not only the

Executives (“A great exercise for the community of employees”). Particularly impressive was the tight line up of the supply chain, the understanding for the “bad” farmers and the necessity for putting the “good” farmers a resource in the back. A discussion was kicked off what this resource could be, e.g. shares of the project company in India or a kind of “thank you” gesture for sticking to the rules.

The CEO who arranged the constellation mentioned first the emotional **effect** on him: „I have gained a reassuring distance to the problem.” Secondly he pointed out the visual effect: “Pictures are perfect, I like to work with pictures.” Thirdly the possibility to change the positions, do tests and simulations, see how the representatives react to the phrases other tell them was conceived as a good way of working on such a problem: “The issue was lively, you could work on it like in reality. It is a useful tool in order to simulate business relations.”

In the **analytic view of the author**, this example shows how such an economic-environmental conflict can be solved through communication and formation of the supply chain. The customers must express how important the organic rules are for them. And only sticking to them strictly keeps the credibility of these sustainability related production process. For the company as link in the middle of the chain it makes sense to communicate the problem frankly and work on it in a transparent manner. This keeps credibility high.

As **evaluation** of the Organisational Constellation, a given time after the constellation the concern owner is asked about the impact the Organisational Constellation had for him. In this case it was after 6 weeks later after the CEO visited the project in India and talked directly to the project management and some farmers. He remembered particularly the “good” farmers in the constellation. “I paid only attention to the bad ones before; Due to the constellation I focused in India especially on the “good” ones and tried to empower them.” On a scale from 1-10 (1 very low, 10 very high) he rated the effect of the constellation at 9. “It crystallised my thoughts. Many things got clearer. I was more encouraged dropping the „bad“ farmers and supporting the „good“ ones. The “good” ones are happy to have the “bad” ones out, yet they can come back in regret.” The “bad” farmers were excluded from the project and their cotton was not bought by the company for the guaranteed price. In addition the CEO wrote an information letter to the main customers and to partners of the project.

The **employee’s feedback** pointed out the possibility to participate in the solution process of a company’s problem and to share the view of the CEO. Although they could not use it directly for their work, the employees gained understanding for the problems of the producers of organic cotton: “Even trading cotton every day [on paper and phone] I never thought of the farmers. But without them and their work no cotton would be there for me to manufacture textiles.” Another fact was the communication, how important communication is in the supply chain. Also there was a lot of communication about the constellation the weeks after, in coffee or lunch breaks. Deliberately business topics were discussed. It seemed to help to shape and deepen the corporate identity.

In the **authors evaluation** the “Farmer Constellation” generated a high density and quality of solution. The ideas have been put into action later and the time of realising them was quite short, because it was a pressing problem. Regarding content, it has a high relevance for Sustainability. For classic cotton there is no need of production rules, only price and quality are relevant. For organic cotton there are production rules, even the synthetic fertiliser can not found as a residue in the product (compared to pesticides or other chemicals). Thus it is a very particular and exceptional form of supply chain rules: the customer not only declares criteria for the product, but also for the production. In addition he sends external inspectors in order to control the production. The constellation gave hints: It was good management, not to punish just the violators, but also to encourage the ones sticking to the rules. Both facts need attention. The dialogue with the customers showed how relevant transparency is for

sustainability oriented products. Customers are very sensitive towards credibility, because they can not check, test or taste the sustainable production in the product. Therefore trust is a high value for sustainability oriented products. This trust is enhanced if problems and the solution process are openly reported and managed. If companies try to keep problems secret and other institutions discover it or it is reported too late, it may have disastrous effects for the whole notion of Sustainability. In 2002 the German Nitrofen scandal was such a lesson learned. Organic crops were contaminated with the pesticide Nitrofen during their storage in a contaminated warehouse. Despite this contamination the crops were processed further down the value chain. But then the baby food producer Hipp discovered and reported it to the authorities and organic associations. But nothing happened. Weeks later foreign producers discovered and published it. The damage of the image of organic food was enormous, organic food sales dropped 20%, in particular because of the attempt to keep it secret.

4. Implementing Sustainability Strategies - Results of the Case Study Research

The Organisational Constellation (OC) was applied to concerns arising during the implementation of Sustainability in a globally working company. Through research seven in-depth single case studies about the execution of constellations are described and analysed. The following **four conclusions** are drawn about the implementation of Sustainability Strategies in particular for companies. They can be transferred to the interplay between international organisations how the last chapter shows (cf. Gminder 2005: 214-234).

[I] In all constellations, **successful business and work relationships** are highly relevant for a successful implementation of Sustainability Strategies. Sustainability changes business relationships within the company and relationships with external business partners in 7 dimensions:

1. Sustainability **increases content, volume and complexity** to be dealt with in the business relationships. Social and environmental get added to the existing economic ones (e.g. more items to be negotiated). OCs help to clarify and understand complex contexts and situations.
2. Sustainability leads to **process requirements** towards the suppliers. At the moment a company defines product requirements for the products its suppliers manufacture. To set process standards (like fair trade or organic rules) is not common in the supply chain and requires more transparency and effort from suppliers. The case explained in the chapter before showed this. An Organisational Constellation helped the company to cope with this difficult situation.
3. Sustainability requires **more transparency** in the relationships. Another player enters the supply chain: organic and social certifiers are checking the suppliers in charge of their customers. There are two effects: One is the control - the supplier is no black box anymore. The other is the increasing complexity of the relationships due one or several new players. OCs can help to handle these new relationships.
4. Because of this transparency Sustainability leads to **more openness** when issues occur. This is necessary in order to keep the credibility of the company in the view of the end consumer. Sustainability is a product quality of trust. The consumer can not check it directly at the product. He needs to trust and request evidence from the producer. OCs can help solving such issues of credibility by simulating communication processes and their impact.
5. Sustainable Products require **coordination and good relationships** along the whole supply chain. A company is not able anymore to solve Sustainability issues on its own. It is restricted

to its production sites. With the support of OC supply wide actions and measures can be developed and simulated immediately.

6. Through the broader and more complex requirements, the **likeability of mistakes** and misunderstanding is higher, too. These can weaken the relationships as happened in one case study about supplier problems. OCs help to gain insights in such processes and develop new attitudes for fruitful Sustainability business relationships.
7. [II] Five out of seven case studies confirmed the trend that after long years of focussing the environmental dimension, **social sustainability** stands in the foreground. In opposite to the environment which can be optimised more scientifically and technically, the social dimension needs more effort in establishing, handling and managing fair business relationships, in „soft“ areas like culture, teamwork and management. Organisational Constellation can help to solve „soft“ issues which can not be optimised technically through new production lines, processes or machines.

[III] In times of globalisation and shifting of production, the **cooperation with developing countries** (in the case studies India and Tanzania) plays a more and more important role. All three dimensions of Sustainability are touched by this fact. The economic one of efficiency when producing clean and fair in developing countries. Foundations can play a major role for bridging the gap between world market competitiveness and social and environmental minimum standards at the moment. Understanding the people is necessary when adapting our values and ideas about social well-being, welfare and “good” environment in these countries. Many times other ideas need to be respected and accepted. The case studies show that constellations train intercultural understanding and communication.

[IV] A professional and **better marketing** and market strategies are required for selling sustainable products. Two case studies show this. In particular the experiences of the 1990es made clear that such products neither sell better nor sell more expensive. Their additional environmental and social benefits need to be communicated positively and depending on the product proactively or even very subtle. E.g. in the textile business „organic“ or „environmentally friendly“ seems more to be a constraint rather than a resource. Due to bad experiences of the early organic clothing, the consumer has deeply stored the image of organic apparel being expensive, having bad quality, non fashionable colours and design (cf. Schneidewind 2003). Using OCs, market strategies and communication for Sustainability oriented products can be formed and tested regarding the reactions of the customer. OCs support a clear and attractive marketing of these products.

5. Conclusions for the interplay of international organisations

The results of the conceptual research as well as the empirical case studies lead to the conclusion that the organisational constellation is a general for modelling and simulating interactively social systems and the relationships within such a system. Hence its usability in order to support the interplay of international organisations seems to be quite high. Yet it needs further research: on the one hand conceptual research transferring the approach developed and described from corporations to societal and political international organisations. The *raison d'être*, this mission and the objectives are different and the way of translating them into practice. In addition the issues and topics differ. On the other hand empirical research needs to be done, either qualitative or quantitative, applying organisational constellations for concrete issues in the work of international organisations.

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