

Original Contributions - Originalbeiträge

Valerian Warmuth & Jakob Mair

Corporate Culture Analysis Based on Morphological Psychology – A Case Study

1. Introduction

Pandemics, crises and digitalisation are forcing companies to constantly change. This ‘new normal’ is pushing many of them to their limits. Corporate culture is increasingly seen as a decisive factor for corporate success (Bea & Haas, 2013). Studies show that many managers recognise the importance of culture in organisations but rarely put this knowledge into practice (Capgemini Consulting, 2017; Porsche Consulting, 2020). Change projects often fail due to cultural barriers such as resistance, identity issues or a lack of fit between measures (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Culture acts as a link between hard and soft factors and is therefore key to successful organisational development (Janes & Schober, 1992). Despite its high relevance, there is often a lack of the external perspective that would be necessary to recognise deeper dynamics (Fröndhoff, 2020). Morphological psychological consulting attempts to fill this gap. Corporate culture is recognised as a central but difficult-to-measure success factor (Endres & Salber, 2001). However, with a sound theoretical foundation such as morphological psychology, culture in organisations can be made tangible in its work of psychological self-treatment and translated into “methodical ‘versions’ of analysis and counselling” (Fitzek, 2014, pp. 21-23). In the previous article (Mair & Warmuth, 2025), the theory and method of morphological psychology was described in comparison to Schein’s cultural model in its Gestalt psychology tradition. This article presents a case study to illustrate how a morphological organisational analysis can be developed. The case is based on a study conducted as part of Mr Warmuth’s master’s thesis in business psychology at the BSP Business & Law School Berlin, on the basis of which further implementation strategies for corporate development were carried out. The corporate culture of *Energy Market Solutions GmbH (EMS)* is described.

2. Theoretical framework and methodological approach

In the planning discussion prior to the study, EMS defined its central challenge as how to position itself stably in times of the VUCA world. This concern was taken into account in the evaluation, but was translated into a more

open scientific question. The study examined how the corporate culture of EMS GmbH is structured as an ‘a-personal impact unit’. The research aims to open up new perspectives on strengths, weaknesses and potential and help to initiate cultural development processes. The evaluation follows the approach of four versions of morphological object formation, whereby the research object of the impact unit is understood as an overarching psychological treatment process that gets caught up in certain “self-hindering constructions” (Endres & Salber, 2001, p. 80; Fitzek, 2007). The aim is not only to describe, but also to initiate potential development and counselling processes. To this end, the study reconstructs initial treatment-logical dynamics that enable intervention and further development (Fitzek, 2009). The morphological versions structure the analysis process into four stages of morphological description, which iteratively reconstruct the psychological events and thus make “dynamically structured Gestalt formations” tangible (Fitzek, 2010a, p. 99; Fitzek, 2010b). Each version focuses on different aspects of the self-treatment of organisational culture. From first impressions to “overdeterminations, counter-movements and paradoxes of everyday logic” (Fitzek, 2010b, p. 693).

The evaluation method of morphological psychology is based on the premise that by describing phenomena from different perspectives, the subject can be approached step by step and explored a little further with each turn (Fitzek, 2010b; Salber, 2016). The first version (Gestalt logic) describes the initial overall atmospheric perception, namely a symbolically condensed early form of organisation (Fitzek, 2010b, pp. 698-699). The defining atmosphere is not assessed neutrally, but results from the dynamics of the first contact, including artefacts, self-statements and moods. The first dominant and first contrasting qualities together form the basic structure and are also referred to as the basic quality (Fitzek, 2009; 2010b). The second version (Gestalt figuration) describes how this structure is psychodynamically organised through relationships, tensions and opposites. This sphere of influence is not a neutral description, but rather an expression of an inner field of conflict. This work uses the hexagram model, which reconstructs six Gestalt traits in three tension relationships (Salber, 2007). The third version (Gestalt construction) recognises archetypal narrative structures in the phenomena described, mostly based on fairy tales, myths or other cultural archetypes (Fitzek, 2010a; Salber, 2018). The central question is: Which core conflicts of transformation shape the organisational culture’s self-image? Finally, the fourth version (Gestalt paradox) describes a “typology that provides individual solutions” to the problem of transformation (Fitzek, 2010b, pp. 701-702). The findings are not understood as a solution, but as an offer of dialogue for development (Endres & Salber, 2001, pp. 74-76). The aim is not an intervention tool, but a culturally sensitive, psychologically sound development perspective.

3. Research design

To implement the theoretical and methodological approach presented, the study design was constructed step by step. The survey took place between April and June 2022 and documented all company contacts, from initial discussions and observations to interviews, in an analysis diary. The study began with a half-hour initial meeting and planning discussion with the managing director. This was used to derive an interview guide and determine the sample. In addition, research was conducted on the EMS company (website, Google, company presentation). After an introduction to the staff, a quantitative questionnaire on corporate culture (FAOK) according to Denison (1999) was distributed to gather initial impressions of the organisational culture. Over time, four observation sessions were added (three via Teams, one on site), during which various team meetings were observed in order to record working methods and dynamics. Four morphological in-depth interviews were conducted, the results of which were presented in an interim conclusion. Based on this, a group discussion on team dynamics and three further individual interviews were held to validate the analysis results obtained so far. The interviews lasted 90 minutes each, and the group discussion lasted 120 minutes. After completion of the survey, an additional interview was held with an industry expert to incorporate an external perspective on the energy market. The data obtained using the multimodal approach (Mayring, 2023) was made scientifically accessible through morphological description and evaluated as part of the unifying description. A presentation of the results was held at the company in early September 2022.

The sample was composed in such a way that, as far as possible, all departments, hierarchical levels and genders were represented. The length of service was also broadly represented, from new employees to long-standing members of the 14-strong core team. Different roles (IT, accounting, team leadership, management, communication) were also taken into account. Both managing directors were included in the survey.

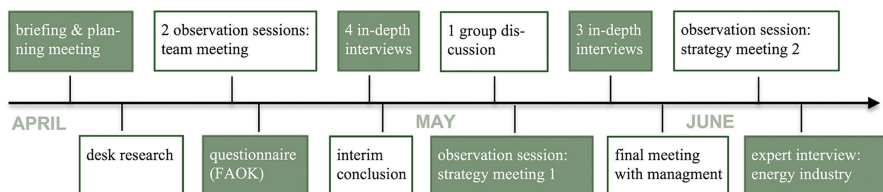


Fig. 1. Study procedure (own illustration).

4. Empirical study

Before presenting the key empirical findings, the company is first introduced to the reader and an initial pre-figurative character is described. The corporate culture is then examined using the central evaluation method of the morphological versions in order to describe the psychological core and architecture (Fitzek, 2010a).

4.1 Company overview

Energy Market Solutions GmbH (EMS) is a Berlin-based company in the energy sector that offers digital solutions to support the energy transition. The focus is on smart electricity tariffs, billing solutions, tools for using self-generated electricity (e.g. from solar panels) and e-mobility offerings. EMS operates in the B2B, B2C and B2B2C sectors.

The company's history dates back to 2011, when the team began operating under the name "Grundgrün Energie". Following liquidation, the joint venture Digital Energy Solutions (DES) was formed in 2016 with the participation of Viessmann and BMW. At the beginning of 2021, this gave rise to EMS. Today, ENTEGA AG and HEAG are shareholders. At the time of the study, EMS employed 24 people, including two managing directors. One managing director is responsible for customer service, the other for IT, innovation and sales. The team is complemented by a head of finance, accounting and staff positions in IT and communications. The average age is around 40, with a few students also employed. With losses despite rising sales, EMS finds itself in the economically challenging environment of the company's investment and growth phase. The company is headquartered in Berlin-Mitte. The company can be classified in the cultural field of the energy industry, which is characterised by political control, abstract markets and complex value chains from energy production to customer service. The energy transition and digitalisation are creating additional change, but also bringing opportunities. According to EY (2021), demand for green energy is expected to grow. At the same time, the volatile legal situation is forcing companies to be highly adaptable (PwC, 2019). The current energy crisis is exacerbating uncertainties, but it can also act as a catalyst for the transition to renewable energies (Tuschy, 2022).

First impression of the company

Before the actual evaluation by the morphological versions, a preliminary non-scientific initial impression of the corporate culture at EMS is outlined in this step. The pre-figurative qualities are condensed into an initial overall picture. Direct quotes from the present study are indicated with double quotation marks.

The first contact with EMS was quick and uncomplicated. A personal recommendation led to immediate contact by email. The managing director responded

in a friendly and direct manner the very next day. An initial meeting was quickly arranged via Microsoft Teams, which conveyed a certain openness and dynamism on the part of the company. Despite the tight schedule, the atmosphere during the meeting was relaxed and open. The subsequent preliminary research after the order was placed left a modern, tidy impression. The website was clear and well structured. On the one hand, EMS conveyed an agile, future-oriented start-up mentality, while on the other hand, there was a noticeable strong internal cohesion, supported by values more reminiscent of a traditional company. Overall, communication was reliable, but with varying dynamics. The individual interviews were easy to coordinate, while organising joint group discussions proved more difficult. The willingness to participate was noticeably higher in individual situations. At the same time, it was noticeable that some feedback was provided late in the evening or even from holiday, indicating an above-average level of commitment. The basic dynamic in the contact was always friendly and inviting, but sometimes remained superficial. Critical or stressful topics were addressed rather hesitantly. In meetings of specifically composed expert groups, deeper, sometimes dramatic issues were discussed, for example in connection with hacker attacks or specific crisis situations. There, a kind of tangible seriousness in the corporate culture became increasingly apparent.

The evaluation of the FAOK questionnaire confirmed the image of a committed, high-performing team. The empowerment was rated at 86 per cent, a strong score. At the same time, potential for development in other areas were revealed. Consistency was rated at 72 per cent, customer orientation at 64 per cent and competence development at 67.5 per cent. Despite a high level of team orientation at 85 per cent, there is therefore potential for improvement, particularly with regard to long-term structures, targeted training opportunities and a stable foundation of values.

It was striking that the research process did not require a lengthy search for an initial pre-figurative character, but that the company itself offered a picture of its self-image. “*The fast dinghy*.” This metaphor was taken up internally as a distinction from *the “big tanker”* of the shareholders, who are established conservative energy companies that want to explore new waters and need a manoeuvrable dinghy to do so. It refers to a small, agile team that drives innovation and builds together with the shareholders, but which also runs the risk of capsizing in the stormy seas of a highly competitive market environment. In a next step, this initial approach will be further differentiated as part of the morphological versions.

4.2 First version: Gestalt logic – basic quality

The company’s own image of the “*fast dinghy*” can be helpful as a first approach to gaining a better understanding of the case. However, in order to reveal deeper

psychological insights that are inherent in this image and go beyond it, an in-depth reconstructive formation process is now undertaken using the morphological versions. The first of the four versions describes the Gestalt logic. In summary, this reveals a pivot point of the basic quality between “*performance and professionalism*”. These terms were also taken verbatim from the in-depth interviews, but they reveal a deeper logic of the culture.

Performance

The first side of the basic quality describes the idea of working together as a team to drive forward the energy transition. The aim is to protect oneself, others and the world from crises and to promote progress. EMS presents itself as a “friendly helper” that wants to become a hero through visionary performance.

Concise friendliness

The starting point for the heroic self-image is a strong sense of friendliness. The EMS high-rise building in the government district near the Bundestag looks like the home of a busy bee colony. The area does not appear young or hip, but rather established. In contrast to the grey facade, upon entering, one is surprised by an unexpectedly warm welcome. A fluffy miniature poodle takes over the greeting and jumps around happily. During the tour of the open-plan office, some employees appear friendly, while others do not look up. In the interviews, EMS presents itself as a “green and friendly helper”. The emphasis is on “friendly, open cooperation and flexibility”, also characterised by flat hierarchies and open communication. The description of the imaginary planet EMS is: “lots of water, lots of greenery”, “carefree into the future”, “no envy” and “harmony”. Everyone is in the same boat. This creates a sense of connection, but also obligation. EMS is like a “family” that “puts its heart and soul into everything it does”. The company grew from 14 people, who are still there today. Personal closeness is central and can seem “alienating” to new employees. But team events show how important this sense of community is when everyone is happy to see each other again in person after the Corona period.

Heroic goals

The responsible self-image continues to be supported by the vision of driving forward the energy transition. It is about enabling a better future for children and for ourselves. The tools for this are software and algorithms that are designed to make complexity manageable. To this end, the company also wants to “bring the big players on board”, for example shareholders and major customers, even if that means joining forces with established energy suppliers. In this way, challenges and problems can be interpreted as heroic trials. New laws, price fluctuations,

the coronavirus pandemic and the associated payment difficulties of customers, as well as uncertainty regarding the stability and success of the company, are thus addressed. The company faced liquidation three times. It was a matter of survival. “The hot potato, who wants to catch it?” And on the horizon, the next challenges are already waiting in the form of war and rising energy prices. How do you deal with such setbacks? You try to remedy the situation by working even more disciplined and effectively.

Electrifying mentality

Achieving the goals described above therefore requires superhuman performance. The energy transition: “We’ll do anything for it.” Employees are electrified and sometimes forget to pay attention to their own energy resources. How long is their power renewable? Using projective techniques such as representation as a human being or planet, EMS is portrayed as friendly and accessible, but employees do not describe relaxing on the beach, but rather “busy quarries, ore mines”. A high workload is demanded and overtime is not uncommon. To-do lists can quickly pile up. Leaving work behind and setting boundaries becomes a challenge. As a result, two approaches emerge. One camp pushes its own boundaries for the sake of collective progress, while the other draws a clear line despite the pressure.

Misunderstood pioneers

The extraordinary goals and high empowerment to perform at EMS are driven by their self-image as pioneers, but at the same time, this also serves as a relief. Because pioneers have a reason why something doesn’t work. It is not that you are taking the wrong path, but that you are simply too far ahead of the world. This belief allows for hard work. In order to move a project forward, long days may sometimes be necessary. Paradoxically, EMS’s liberal pioneer mentality also makes it dependent. Due to its innovative projects, the company needs financing that makes it dependent on shareholders. EMS wants to be a pioneer, but the market has its demands. As a result, some forward-looking ideas are not accepted by customers because they are too far ahead of the zeitgeist. This creates a balancing act between vision, shareholders, laws and market needs. A constant in-between.

Professionalism

The second side of the Gestalt logic describes the competing qualities that oppose performance. Although this side is not dominant, this quality runs like a thread through the descriptions, especially as an antagonistic counterpart to the desire to “save the world”. On the first side of the performance, EMS shows a facet of the fast dinghy, which tries to protect itself from boredom, meaninglessness and

restrictions through performative empowerment. However, it is precisely these qualities of professionalism, which are initially more associated with the image of the “big tanker” of the shareholders, that are a central component of the corporate culture and even vital for survival in terms of establishing a market presence and stabilising structures and sales. Slow processes, hard facts, sales skills and self-reflection offer the company inherent but as yet untapped potential.

Slow progress

Although the terms performance and professionalism may sound similar, the following examples show the extent to which a certain level of over-performance can also be unprofessional and that it is a sign of professionalism to be able to shift down a gear from time to time. When asked about a normal working day, the managing director replies with a laugh: “Then I come up with new tasks.” The company tries to prevent any downtime or boredom from arising. After all, EMS combines the joy of exciting projects. There are normal phases, but they make you sluggish. “You don’t get into the flow – disaster!” As ambitious as these attitudes are, at certain points, good things take time. However, this wisdom is sometimes overshadowed at EMS. As a result, further training comes short in daily business and onboarding processes are rapid. At the same time, there is a need for a slow but steady progress, as seen in long-term projects and space for reflection.

Hard facts

In order to maintain dynamic performance, attempts to introduce more structure are met with resistance in some cases. Professional structures are being introduced step by step to prepare the company for planned growth. Team leader structures are being established and a dual leadership is being created with a second managing director. The changing roles and the necessary formalisation raise questions about the rigour of processes and the relationship between prioritisation and planning. In this development, processes remain fragile in some areas, prioritisation replaces planning, and tickets can remain unprocessed for longer than usual. “You can only prioritise, otherwise you’d be working night shifts.” EMS values independence and flexibility and thus resists rigid management. Structures that are too rigid could be interpreted as mistrust. A certain amount of batch processing, which is necessary to cope with the high workload, is partially discouraged, as it does not fit in with the dynamic self-image of innovators that the company thrives on.

Selling oneself

The Gestalt of the saviour is not only served by softening hard facts. Selling oneself is also experienced as ambivalent. Very good products and services can

only sustain a company if they are accepted by customers through proper marketing and sales. EMS still has potential here. This is evident in the fact that the company does not want to see itself as an unscrupulous salesperson, but as a trustworthy partner. EMS often generates orders through its network and sometimes implements white label projects. The conservative energy industry meets a team committed to integrity and ethics. However, expert meetings reveal a different side – professional, sober, conflict-competent – but this remains largely hidden from the outside world.

Power limitations

The desire to achieve big goals, which stems from the performative side of the basic quality, contrasts with what is feasible. It is difficult to ask for help and to admit one's own limitations. The high ideals of the energy transition compete with the need to stay in the black in the long term. There is a high-quality offering, but it is not yet profitable. This confrontation with reality can be hurtful. The professionalisation that has begun has been supported by the new shareholder and organisational growth, but it has also taken away some of the revolutionary spirit. "Then it's no longer kamikaze." Not quite as electrifying, but more sustainable, as you divide your energy between your work and don't risk overloading yourself.

Basic quality: between performance and professionalism

As Figure 2 summarises, EMS stands between an interplay of *performance* and *professionalism*. Although these two constructs appear similar at first glance, they mark a wide gap between the image of the performative saviour and the distant figure in the form of professional humbleness. On the one hand, it was described

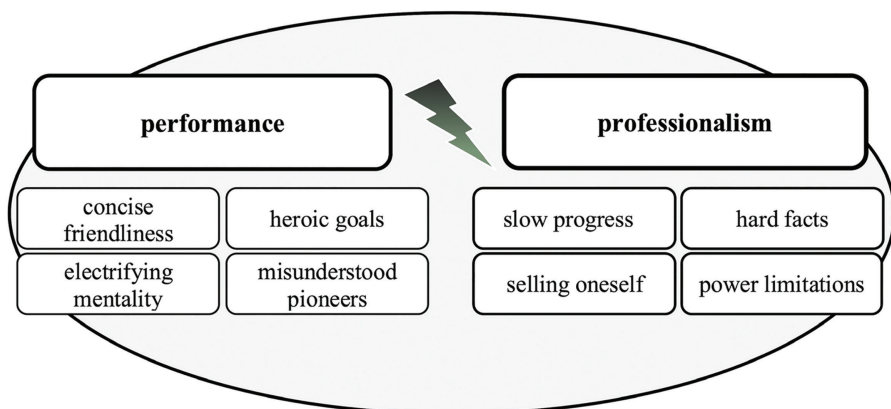


Fig. 2. Basic quality (own illustration).

that EMS is initially characterised by a performance that is marked by a friendly and strong team spirit, heroic goals, exceptional work performance and an innovative pioneering spirit. On the other hand, a shift from over-performance to an unprofessional fog is described, which competes with the clear tangibility of limiting professionalism. Qualities that are otherwise more likely to be attributed to the “big tanker” of established shareholders, such as patience, dealing with hard facts, sales skills and admitting one’s own limitations, are in conflict with the image of the electrifying professional saviour. But those who are constantly electrified avoid confrontation with reality. This is where a strict and professional grounding opens up new perspectives.

4.3 Second version: Gestalt transformation – impact space

With an understanding of the Gestalt logic, the second version now aims to create a figurative arrangement of the qualities that have been identified. The basic quality *‘between performance and professionalism’* will thus be further examined in terms of figurative tendencies. The phenomena are assigned to the impact tendencies of the hexagram and described in their contextual meanings and inherent tensions.

Close-knit community

Within the impact space, the “close-knit community” plays a key role. It ensures stability and tradition and at the same time forms the emotional backbone for the arduous mission towards the energy transition. This community offers support, but can also lead to a form of operational blindness that limits clear self-perception and perception by others. The team is like a ship’s crew that, after undergoing initiation rituals, navigates through calm and stormy times together. They laugh, cry and fight together, year after year. This intense bond creates a sense of identity and motivation, but at the same time leads to excessive demands when the feeling prevails that the team must not be let down. Loyalty is so strong that even obvious overload does not lead to change, but is cushioned by feelings of guilt. This community appears exclusive to the outside world. “On any other ship, there would have been a mutiny. But that didn’t happen.”

Let there be light

The perspectives and aspirations at work in the corporate culture can be distilled into a shining vision of bringing light into the darkness through the energy transition. “That’s how you find your life’s work.” “We are all working together on something bigger.” This vision is electrifying, creates meaning and community, but also gives rise to a diffuse exaggeration that blurs the view of what is feasible.

In this narrative, employees appear as “superheroes” who achieve the seemingly impossible with a “roll up your sleeves” mentality, working overtime if necessary. The hope is that their own actions will not only bring about the energy transition, but also fulfil their personal purpose in life. The desire to make a bigger difference is strong. But this philosophy also inhibits professional realism. Belief in the big and good protects against criticism, but makes it difficult to implement in concrete terms.

Tunnel vision

In order to deal less with their own limitations, a “tunnel vision” is cultivated, focused on achieving their goals. There can be a lack of breaks, reflection and sustainable use of resources. “We ride every wave. We have to be careful not to lose people when they fall out.” Success is celebrated, but overshadowed by new demands. Some employees withdraw more, becoming more professional, but risking team cohesion. While the boat sails on the rough seas of a highly competitive market, holes in the day-to-day business often have to be plugged by hand. Goals can usually be achieved, but sometimes only because extra work is done, which in turn costs a lot of time and effort. “But everyone is aware that if that doesn’t work, the boat will sink.” This leaves less time for strategic development, which increases self-exhaustion. “It’s always surprising what people can block out and just do, even though so much is changing around them.” When everyone is bogged down in day-to-day business and shields themselves in order to work through the mountain of tasks, “silo thinking” emerges. This does not fit into the narrative of saving everyone together. But ultimately, it is essential for survival. “The processes cost millions, so you have to block out everything else.”

Green backdrop

The green vision of the energy transition is stabilised by a backdrop that partially remains blurry. Although the services offered are purely digital, because no solar panels are actually being built or electricity produced, there is a desire for comprehensive global improvement. This fact is obscured by sometimes abstract self-descriptions. The tangible reality, such as the nature of the products, is pushed into the background so as not to jeopardise the company’s own narrative. Furthermore, the emphasis is repeatedly placed on being fast, agile and independent, but as a result one falls into dependency. For example, the support of shareholders is needed to finance innovative projects. One needs the “lifeline to the tanker”. The culture is in a state of limbo: on the one hand, there are innovative niche products, such as managing the electricity produced by customers or digitising heat pumps and electric charging stations. This trend is representative

of the beloved self-image of the progressive green start-up. “We are on the good side of the market.” On the other hand, there is the established trade in electricity, which is purchased on the stock exchange and distributed to customers. This side, in turn, represents the harshness of the economy, associated with a dry, limited working day, as well as “rigid” corporations and their shady dealings. EMS is neither one nor the other. “Stuck in the middle.” “Too big to die, too small to survive.” Looking at the competition, it becomes visible. For each offer, there are ten different electricity contracts to choose from among the various providers. “Finding a niche there is not easy.” For about five years now, there have been more and more competitors in the market. Many have overtaken EMS. They are bigger, have more customers and have collected more money. They usually work in a more modular way, with standard packages and sophisticated marketing.

Remaining small

If EMS were to be described as an animal, it would be “perhaps something very small”. The bee comes to mind. It is hard-working, harmless and important for the ecological balance. This creates a conflict. On the one hand, busy worker bees, working for the queen and nature. On the other hand, the wish of maintaining creativity and joy of play. Projects are started even though knowing they are hardly feasible. “It won’t work, it’s not feasible. But we’re going to do it anyway!” You do “a little bit of everything and nothing” real. The shareholders take on the role of parents, forming a safety net in case of possible failure. External factors such as legal situations, digital infrastructures or processing times are also cited as reasons for one’s own failure. The childlike “wanting everything” thus inhibits the great potential for maturation in growing up. Security is therefore sought in the size of one’s own vision, even if this means having to keep oneself small. There is scepticism about a change towards becoming a large company, in order to prevent a loss of the joy of creativity and freedom. “Do we want something else?”

(Re)creation

On the one hand, innovation and renewal are overrepresented by the performative side of EMS. On the other hand, people are stuck in this image, so that the potential for sustainable creation only reveals itself in a currently underdeveloped state of recreation. Creative work is successful, but in a partially over-excited mode. There is constant performance, improvisation and design, but this makes actual transformation more difficult. “Heading for a safe harbour would be too boring.” The company is aware that it cannot remain in a state of over-performance forever. However, creating space has so far been pursued through even greater optimisation. Meetings are held in order to become more efficient. Allowing oneself to feel exhausted is something that is more readily accepted by newer

employees, such as the second managing director. For her, challenging situations as a manager are moments when you notice how employees “break down”. To avoid this, you have to hold many one-on-one conversations and “protect the team”. “I like those who do a great job during regular working hours best.” Then it’s a case of “take care, make sure you take enough breaks, switch off sometimes”. Recreation, which could also harbour potential for renewal, is currently used primarily as a cushion against excessive demands. What is needed is a culture of regeneration, sustainable development and professional rethinking. Amidst constant activity, creative depth remains underdeveloped, an aspect that would be essential in a future-oriented transformation. What is clearly lacking when working from home, but has always provided relief and variety in the past, is having fun with colleagues and laughing together. People would like to see more events in the future. These could include currywurst meals, group sports, excursions or other work-related activities.

Making the (im)possible (im)possible

The quote “we want to make the impossible possible” provides a concise image of the Gestalt transformation as a whole. The performance aspect is to be defended in the sense of a dominant main figuration through the Gestalt traits of a close-knit community, grand visions and a tunnel vision (see bold print in Figure 3). However, the performance demands can also turn into hyperactivity, which ultimately leads to a lack of professionalism. The underlying secondary figuration is thus revealed in a consolidation mechanism through the effect of a green backdrop, a tendency to keep things small and recreation. Two paradoxical strategies thus emerge: on the one hand, making the impossible possible. Large and complex projects are pursued under challenging conditions. This leads to an

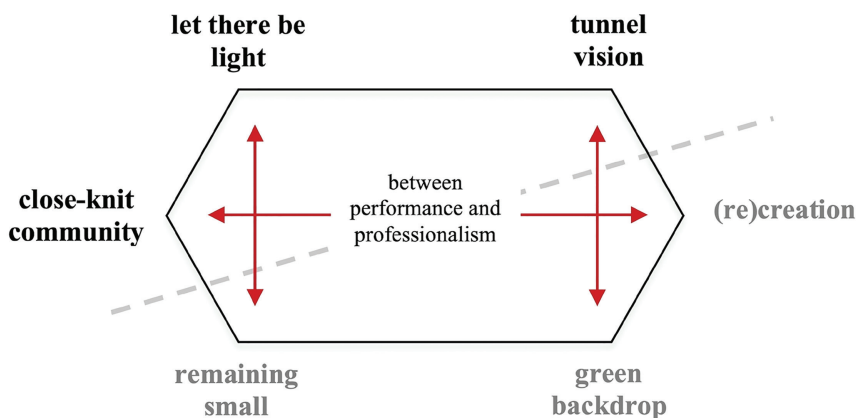


Fig. 3. Impact space (own illustration).

outstanding work ethic and empowerment. On the other hand, making the possible impossible. What is actually possible is made more difficult by this dynamic, as it inhibits a more realistic perception of one's own limitations.

4.4 Third version: Gestalt construction – transformation pattern

The third version highlights the core conflicts of transformation, which distils the meaning structures identified in the first two versions into a fundamental pattern. Morphological psychology uses especially fairy tales, among other things like myths or legends, in which different qualities of an impact unit can be reflected (Fitzek, 2010a; Salber, 2018). Here, the fairy tale 'Mary's Child' is chosen to illustrate the transformation pattern of EMS's corporate culture. Below is a brief summary of the story by Wilhelm Salber.

The fairy tale – Mary's Child

"The Virgin Mary takes a small child to heaven and allows it to enter all the rooms of the kingdom of heaven – except for one, the thirteenth room. The child cannot resist the temptation to look into this room: the thirteenth room is filled with the splendour of the Trinity. The child lies when Mary asks her if she has been in the forbidden room, even though she has a golden finger because she touched the splendour of the Trinity. As a result, she is banished to a wasteland and punished with muteness. A king finds her in the forest and makes the girl his queen. When she gives birth to three children, Mary appears and gives the young queen the choice of telling the truth or losing her child. Since she does not want to tell the truth and cannot explain where the children have disappeared to, she is sentenced to death at the stake. Mary asks the question again, and this time the woman admits to having been in the thirteenth room. She is saved" (Salber, 2018, p. 68).

Wilhelm Salber analysed the psychological structure of the fairy tale in his work 'Märchenanalyse' (Salber, 2018). This interpretation of the psychological circumstances will be referred to from now on. Salber's interpretation of the main figuration represents the entrenched core conflict of transformation, while the secondary figuration described points to possible solutions. Viewed holistically, the story of Mary's Child describes a greed for universal transformation that shifts the psyche into a monstrous, indecisive and intangible everything. But those who want everything end up with nothing. The fairy tale tells of a child who wants to transcend its earthly existence in order to realise its dreams in heaven. However, in doing so, it inevitably encounters limitations, which it attempts to deal with (Salber, 2018).

At the heart of the fairy tale, the fundamental problem of wishing for omnipotence is symbolised by the exploration of the heavenly rooms. The child takes pleasure in testing its possibilities and going beyond earthly limits. But it cannot get enough and, despite being forbidden to do so, enters the thirteenth room, where it beholds the splendour of the Trinity. Similarly, the corporate culture displays a claim to omnipotence driven by the quality of saving everyone together. Every room – that of the world, of fellow human beings and that of oneself – is to be opened up. The accomplished energy transition becomes the target image. People hold on to the big vision in small ways so as not to lose the illusion of omnipotence. The golden finger stands for outstanding special projects and for stories of altruism and pioneering spirit against the backdrop of green start-ups (Salber, 2018). But the fragility of this claim to omnipotence is exposed. Just as Mary convicts the child, the curtain is lifted at EMS. At the latest when projects fail, losses are incurred or stronger competitors emerge, it becomes apparent that one is chasing an ideal. The tension between aspiration and limitation remains and leads to recurring patterns of challenges (Salber, 2018).

After crossing the line, the child of Mary is “banished to a wasteland and punished with silence” (Salber, 2018, p. 68). Clinging to claims of omnipotence therefore lead to self-destructive limitations. This dynamic is also evident at EMS. There is a risk of creating a restless community that is blind to its own shortcomings, loses sight of its customers, overburdens its employees and takes refuge in ever new projects. Furthermore, restrictions are used to avoid having to face the realisation that one is not omnipotent. One stylises oneself as a “child of disaster” (Salber, 2018, p. 68) who suffers under adverse circumstances and thus maintains one’s own heroic narrative. This attitude leads to hardening. Others are to blame: customers, shareholders, politicians or employees. Only when there is an existential threat do limits become apparent. Like the child of Mary, who must tell the truth, EMS recognises the seriousness of the situation when faced with the threat of liquidation or burnout. “It’s not the clients who pay the price, it’s paid from below.” Then the “ripcord is pulled”. Initial measures follow: new team structures, larger projects, experienced employees and a second managing director. But the desire for the unrestricted remains. This dream releases energy, while at the same time, like the child of Mary, one tries to escape limitations. One still has one foot in the start-up world and at the same time longs for stability and established structures, which leads to inconsistencies. One moment one is the independent dinghy, the next the child who is dependent on parental care.

But the fairy tale not only describes the core conflict of transformation, it also offers a solution: twelve rooms may be explored if the thirteenth remains locked. Grace is granted when the lie is admitted (Salber, 2018). For EMS, this means acknowledging the postponed coming of age with its hurtful limitations. Then

the gifts, such as exploring the rooms, the transformation into a queen and the offer of mercy, could also reach EMS. Translated, this means that by acknowledging the limitations, EMS would have the potential to find a firm footing between start-up and corporation without having to give up their dream. Rather, by finding a new common identity, previously separate regressive and progressive elements could be brought together. This would not shorten the path to the energy transition, but it would make it more sustainable and more stable in the long term.

4.5 Fourth version: Gestalt paradox – solution types

Building on the Gestalt construct presented above, the fourth version now introduces prototypical solutions that can be derived from ways of dealing with the core conflicts of transformation. Conditions and limitations must be accepted so that the restrictions of self-treatment can be overcome on the way to grand visions. Instead of clouding, denying, overreacting, isolating and keeping things small, there is a need to consciously close off, but also transparently open up to creative opportunities in order to ultimately make resilient decisions.

Closing

A first step for development is evident in the tendency to close, which puts the open-endedness of the hero's journey into a realistic light. Away from the "bunch of wildly can-do people" and towards a team with more structure and grounding. Emotional world-saving takes a back seat to economic seriousness. The goal is to "become profitable" and "stay afloat". To achieve this, processes must be redesigned, routines established and outdated practices adapted. Like a forest, which can only grow healthily as a whole if trees are felled from time to time. "To do this, you have to slow down." Demands must be adjusted so that they do not come at the expense of human resources. "We don't want to end up dead." One solution would be to not accept every project and do less, but correctly. Then it is also possible to "postpone deadlines" and reject products "where you know in advance that you will be overwhelmed". "You mustn't put yourself under unnecessary stress."

Opening

In addition to closure, a solution in the form of openness is emerging, as was evident in the Gestalt construction as an admission of uncomfortable truths. Management should communicate with more "transparency". It takes "confidence to find solutions and address fears openly". In this way, the workforce's desire to make decisions more comprehensible can also be heard. "I don't know what they're doing up there." In addition, successes should be celebrated openly and even small achievements

should be recognised. Furthermore, in order to turn participants into stakeholders, a unifying narrative can be created together in communication. What defines EMS and what connects the culture? In a collaborative process of rediscovery, each individual becomes more aware of their responsibility, but also has the opportunity to have their individual experiences heard and to help shape the culture. This openness can transform the closed and exclusive proselytising into an inclusive dialogue. In such a culture, conflicts can now be addressed more openly, customer requests for service improvements can be taken on board, and decision-making processes can be implemented in a more holistic manner.

Deciding

The interplay of closing and opening gives rise to new qualities of decisiveness. A starting point can be the recognition of internal diversity. Different cultures within the company allow for conscious compromises. New employees bring professional expectations with them, but encounter existing values: “They come into a system that somehow works ... but they also get the job of typical requirements management, accounting, you name it.” EMS is faced with the decision of where to open up and where not to. “Then there is a point in time x. And then we ask ourselves, did that actually work ... if not, we won’t continue.” In certain cases, clarity is needed to separate, in others, a willingness to come together. “We are the greatest opposites imaginable.” On the one hand, there are the “world savers”; on the other, there are those who “simply do the best job they can in the time available and then say, ‘now I’m going to do something else. I’m going to get on with my life’”. What connects both sides is the vision. The big dream of saving the world needs to be translated for those who work between reminders and invoices. “The real vision can only be understood from day-to-day business.” The energy transition can only realistically move closer through professionalisation. “Every area is interlinked with the others.” The crucial question is: What identity does EMS want to cultivate? What remains of the adventurous start-up? What will be taken over from the established corporation? What is needed to live and what is needed to survive? Decisions already made follow the premise: Create, but not from nothing. We are content to “make the possible possible.” The goal is to have a team with long-standing loyalty for an exclusive clientele and greater visibility in the market. “Now we can focus on ourselves.” Economic independence is to be strengthened in order to possibly still put the big dream of the energy transition in the right light with small, concrete steps.

5. Recommendations for action

Against the backdrop of the results, and also in view of the company’s problem of positioning itself in the VUCA world, the following recommendations for action

can now be identified. First of all, employees' concerns about impending and existing excessive demands should be taken seriously by adjusting the expectations of making the impossible possible and replacing them with realistic corporate goals, as well as expanding human resources. Furthermore, general awareness of the needs and concerns of employees should be enhanced. The key here is to remove any taboo surrounding conflicts and criticism, and to bring performers and professionals closer together by highlighting their differences and similarities. An improved market overview in the form of a well-founded competitive analysis and customer orientation can help to break down tunnel vision. Tendencies towards the formation of fronts and silos between performers and professionals should be counteracted. As a possible solution, it should be communicated that the shared vision of being a pioneer of the energy transition can only succeed if both sides complement each other synergistically and compensate for their respective limitations. In the spirit of growing up, it makes sense to translate the visionary idea into concrete and factual terms, for which tasks and responsibilities must be clearly defined and transparently bundled at central contact points. At the same time, care must be taken to ensure that no bureaucracy is created that diverts resources from the substantive work. At EMS in particular, there is concern that innovative teamwork will be stifled by excessive administrative tasks. Exchange formats in which solutions are worked on in an interdisciplinary manner must be maintained, especially in the digital space. Given the high degree of flexibility and agility in everyday work, maintaining performance is crucial. Rest periods and routines must be specifically planned to prevent exhaustion.

Ultimately, EMS needs to sharpen its collective identity. On the one hand, it makes sense to adapt the visionary image of the heroic saviour so that it is less holistic, but still subject to the mission of creating meaning, as this image can provide hope and support, especially in the current zeitgeist cultural powerlessness. On the other hand, they should ask themselves which unpopular aspects of the rejected image of an established energy supplier they can allow in their own culture in order to secure their economic viability and thus decisively pursue their goal of energy transition. Such a discovery process could be set in motion in joint workshops and implemented in a strategically designed and, in the best case, professionally supported change project.

6. Subsequent development

Building on the cultural analysis, EMS was able to further develop its corporate strategy in the following years. Based on the study results, subsequent workshops and continuous self-reflection, the team underwent a holistic maturation process and independently developed a concrete catalogue of measures. Immediate measures focused on strengthening the feedback culture, commitment and

cooperation. In the short term, quarterly priorities and a central decision-making list were introduced. In the medium term, systematic project reviews are carried out using a checklist and supplemented by training and professional development. In the long term, the team is working on a better understanding of roles and constructive conflict management with the aim of leveraging diversity as a strength. In addition, the company decided to seek further external consulting services by networking with the 'Mittelstand-Digital Zentrum Zukunftskultur' (SME Digital Centre for Future Culture). A report on this can be found on the centre's [website](#). Based on the analysis and recommendations for action, the team was able to define three core areas in a preliminary discussion with the centre that they wanted to work on in suitable workshop formats. As a result, two workshop days were held on the topics of resilience, stress management and mindfulness. In a follow-up meeting at the end of 2024, EMS was able to demonstrate substantial success. This is reflected, for example, in an expansion of the workforce to 35 employees and more open communication processes. The company was also able to further establish itself in the market, which was accompanied by increased sales. In addition, adapted management structures were implemented and the focus of strategy meetings on long-term orientation was strengthened.

7. Conclusion

The study ultimately revealed that the corporate culture at EMS is undergoing a process of self-treatment that releases a great deal of energy and dynamism, but is also stuck in certain areas and reaching its limits. On the one hand, the company benefits from visionary performance driven by an idealistic vision of saving the world. This cultivates a self-image that only allows for good, clean and friendly qualities. However, this mindset leads to a narrowing of the emotional space for creativity and to painful reversals. As a result, the company suffers from excessive busyness and a narrowed view of the environment. On the other hand, a certain grounded professionalism is kept out of the self-image of the culture, which is associated with limitations and powerlessness. This exclusion marginalises traits of assertiveness and consistency that are essential for organisational survival. The overarching core conflict that results from these creative tendencies can be summarised as a struggle between fantasies of omnipotence and restrictive realities. For everyday business life, development potential can therefore lie in adapting utopian and abstract visions into realistic target agreements. Furthermore, it is advisable to humbly accept one's own limitations and weaknesses, which can be translated into professional work routines and adapted value systems. Particular attention should be paid to building a new identity that, through a common leitmotif, achieves a decisive positioning between dynamic start-up qualities and the stabilising traits of established work structures.

Limitations include that the study was conducted by a single researcher, which may have led to blind spots despite supervision. The analysis also remains limited due to the decision for a specific scientific method, but hopefully stimulates discussion and further development. However, actual development can only come from within the organisation itself. And EMS has proven that it is exploiting its potential. Its corporate history is a success story. Through self-reflection, clear goal definitions and concrete implementation strategies, the organisational culture has entered a sustainable maturation process and, with the help of guiding structures and conscious boundary setting, has come one step closer to its goal of being a pioneer of the energy transition.

Summary

Morphological psychological corporate culture analysis is dedicated to the reconstruction of Gestalt formation in the context of organisations. This article describes a case study in which the culture of a company is analysed, psychological mechanisms are examined and development potential is identified. The company under investigation, *Energy Market Solutions GmbH*, offers digital solutions in the energy industry. The internal problem defined by the company was stable positioning in the context of the VUCA world (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Seven in-depth interviews, a group discussion, four observations of team meetings, an expert discussion and a quantitative questionnaire were conducted for the analysis. The evaluation was based on the morphological versions (Fitzek, 2010b). The result is that the corporate culture centres on visionary performance in conflict with defensive tendencies towards limiting professionalism. Development potential lies in sharpening a new identity that mediates between start-up dynamics and stable work structures.

Keywords: *Corporate culture, cultural analysis, consulting, morphological psychology, Gestalt psychology*

Zusammenfassung

Die morphologisch psychologische Unternehmenskulturanalyse widmet sich der Rekonstruktion von Gestaltbildung im Kontext von Organisationen. In diesem Beitrag wird ein Fallbeispiel beschrieben, indem die Kultur eines Unternehmens analysiert, psychologische Wirkmechanismen beleuchtet und Entwicklungspotenziale aufgezeigt werden. Das untersuchte Unternehmen, die *Energy Market Solutions GmbH*, bietet digitale Lösungen in der Energiewirtschaft an. Als unternehmensinterne Problemstellung wurde das stabile Positionieren im Kontext der VUCA-Welt definiert (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Zur Analyse wurden sieben Tiefeninterviews, eine Gruppendiskussion, vier Beobachtungstermine von Teammeetings, ein Expertengespräch sowie ein quantitativer Fragebogen durchgeführt. Die Auswertung erfolgte anhand des morphologischen Versionengangs (Fitzek, 2010b). Als Ergebnis steht im Zentrum der Unternehmenskultur die Gestalt visionärer Performance im Konflikt mit abgewehrten Tendenzen einer begrenzenden Professionalität. Entwicklungspotenzial liegt in der Schärfung einer neuen Identität, die zwischen Start-Up-Dynamik und stabilen Arbeitsstrukturen vermittelt.

Schlüsselwörter: *Unternehmenskultur, Kulturanalyse, Organisationsberatung, Morphologische Psychologie, Gestaltpsychologie*

References

- Bea, F. & Haas, J. (2013). *Strategisches Management*. UTB GmbH.
- Beer, M., & Nohria, N. (2000). Cracking the code of change. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(3), 133–141.
- Bennett, N. & Lemoine, G. J. (2014). What VUCA really means for you. *Harvard Business Review*, 92(1/2), 27–33.
- Capgemini Consulting. (2017). „Culture First!“. *Capgemini*. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from https://www.capgemini.com/de-de/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2022/08/Culture-First-Capgemini-Invent_web.pdf
- Denison, D. R. (1999). *Denison Organizational Culture Survey* (R. Sichler, Trans.). Denison Consulting.
- Endres, N., & Salber, W. (2001). Analytische Intensivbehandlung (IB). *Gestalttherapie*, 15 (2), 59–81.
- EY. (2021). Grüne Energieprodukte - ein nachhaltiges Geschäftsmodell. Wie die Dekarbonisierung Energie und Industrieunternehmen bis 2025 prägt. *EY*. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from <https://www.ey.com/content/dam/ey-unified-site/ey-com/de-de/insights/decarbonization/documents/ey-gruene-energieprodukte-ein-nachhaltiges-geschaeftsmodell.pdf>
- Fitzek, H. (2007). Organisationskulturen - Kulturpsychologische Forschung und Beratung in öffentlichen und privaten Institutionen. In K. Rausch, R. Kröger, & A. Näpel (Eds.), *Organisation gestalten. Struktur mit Kultur versöhnen. Band zur 13. Tagung der Gesellschaft für angewandte Wirtschaftspsychologie e.V. am 2. und 3. Februar 2007 in der FH Osnabrück* (pp. 47–63). Pabst.
- Fitzek, H. (2009). Organisationsentwicklung als Kultivierungsprozess - Ein Fallbeispiel. In G. Raab, & A. Unger (Eds.), *Der Mensch im Mittelpunkt wirtschaftlichen Handelns* (pp. 201–216). Pabst Science Publishers.
- Fitzek, H. (2010a). Gestaltpsychologie. In G. Mey, & K. Mruck (Eds.), *Handbuch Qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie* (pp. 94–107). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Fitzek, H. (2010b). Morphologische Beschreibung. In G. Mey, & K. Mruck (Eds.), *Handbuch Qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie* (pp. 692–707). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Fitzek, H. (2014). *Gestaltpsychologie kompakt*. Springer VS.
- Fröndhoff, B. (2020). Unternehmensberater kommen schneller aus der Krise als gedacht. *Handelsblatt*. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from <https://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/dienstleister/branchenumfrage-unternehmensberater-kommen-schneller-aus-der-krise-als-gedacht/26251980.html>
- Janes, A., & Schober, H. (1992). Neutralität und kultureller Wandel in Organisationen am Beispiel von zwei Strukturentwicklungsprojekten. In R. Wimmer (Ed.), *Organisationsberatung. Neue Wege und Konzepte* (pp. 179–204). Gabler.
- Mair, J., & Warmuth, V. (2025). Tracing the heritage and evolution of Gestalt psychology in morphologic organisation analysis. *Gestalt Theory*, 47(2-3), 241–259.
- Mayring, P. (2023). *Einführung in die qualitative Sozialforschung* (7. Rev. ed.). Beltz.
- Porsche Consulting (2020). Change Management Kompass 2020. *Porsche Consulting*. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from https://www.porsche-consulting.com/sites/default/files/2023-04/change_management_kompass_2020_c_porsche_consulting-v3.pdf
- PwC. (2019). Energiewende und Digitalisierung. *PwC*. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from https://www.pwc.de/de/energiewirtschaft/Studie_Digitalisierung_und_Energiewende.pdf
- Salber, D. (2016). *Wirklichkeit im Wandel: Einführung in die morphologische Psychologie* (3rd ed.). Bouvier.
- Salber, W. (2007). *Wirkungseinheiten*. Moll & Hülser.
- Salber, W. (2018). *Märchenanalyse* (3rd ed.). Bouvier.
- Tuschy, I. (2022). Wärme aus Sonnenenergie – Ausweg aus der Energiekrise?. *idw*. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from <https://idw-online.de/de/news797982>

Valerian Warmuth (1998) studied business psychology (B.Sc. & M.Sc.) at the BSP Business & Law School Berlin. He has experience in market research and consulting projects in the areas of corporate development, FMCG, and health care, as well as in project management regarding digitalisation of SMEs for “Mittelstand-Digital”. He currently works as a lecturer in business psychology at the BSP, systemic coach and psychological consultant.

E-mail: valerian.warmuth@bsp-campus-hamburg.de

ORCID: 0009-0007-9147-017X

Jakob Mair (1985) studied Economics (B.Sc.), Cultural and Business Psychology (B.A.), and Personnel and Organisational Psychology (M.A.). He attended postgraduate programmes in Analytic Intensiveberatung and as a Balint group leader. He gained professional experience in market research, PR and user experience testing. Currently, he works as a Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter and lecturer in Cultural and Organisational Psychology at the Business School Berlin. In addition, he supports companies and individuals in transformation processes. For his PhD, he is developing a framework for organisational consulting based on Morphologische Intensivberatung.

E-mail: jakob.mair@businessschool-berlin.de