



**International Research Project:**

**On the Interdependent Constitution of Corporate Culture,  
Corporate Identity and Business Ethics  
Symbolic and Normative Integration in the Automobile Sector**

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*Project approach*

The aim of the sociological research project, to be funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), is a qualitative-empirical, comparative cultural analysis of constitution processes of corporate culture, corporate identity, and business ethics in three different companies in the automobile branch. The study will focus on Toyota, Daimler AG and General Motors (GM). Although the examined firms operate on a transnational basis, it can be assumed that the 'life-world' phenomena of corporate culture, corporate identity and business ethics, which differ from the systemic-functional level of instrumental-rational action, are defined by the culture of the country, in which the respective firm has its origins. The aspired cultural and company comparison with regard to the three analyzed phenomena shall convey insights on the specific forms of integration in the companies dependent on their cultural background. Moreover, contrasts drawn between the three case studies Toyota, Daimler AG and General Motors shall reveal the fundamental relationships between corporate culture, corporate identity and the corresponding business ethics by means of sociological analyses. From the perspective of sociology of knowledge, the symbolic constitution of the corporate culture – the "inner life" –, the corporate identity as an 'image'-conveying "external representation" and the normative constitution of the represented business ethics of these automobile companies will be investigated empirically. This specific research focus concentrates on the tensions between individuals and the collective, i.e. individual actors – managers, executive directors, employee representatives etc. in the present case – in their relationship to the organization.

The approach pursued in the project results in the following sociological questions: How does a specific corporate culture, which is responsible for the symbolic integration of an

organization, develop in symbiosis with the respective cultural context, i.e. in simplified terms the German, Japanese, and American cultural context? How do individual employees identify with the firm and how is a collective sense of cohesion created? Is a specific corporate identity – again based on a cultural context – established for the representatives of the firm and for a global market? What values and what notions of business ethics guide the actions of the representatives and are they specific for a particular organizational context? To what extent are actions geared towards market interests and when are market interests subordinate to interests beneficial to society as a whole? Or is it possible that both orientations, which operate according to entirely different logics, positively complement each other?

In an exploratory stage in 2008, Dr. Jochen Dreher will conduct interviews with GM, Toyota and Daimler executives (including different work hierarchies and employee representatives) to organize the international research project as well as an academic investigation network with Waseda University, Tokyo (Japan) and with a potential renowned university in the United States.

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