

System explained by Humberto Maturana

Distinctions between organisation and structure applied to a university

Speaker 1, Humberto Maturana:

SPEAKER 1: I've used these terms and distinctions of yours recently in writing a paper about my university, where I think these distinctions between organization and structure have been misinterpreted or not used usefully. I seem to recollect that you use an anecdote about your own university to exemplify the difference between organization and structure. Would you care to perhaps give some examples from some domains, different domains?

HUMBERTO MATURANA: Yeah, in this particular case of the university, it happened to me that I had to participate in the celebration of the 173rd birthday of the university. And I asked in some conversation, what is one celebrating? Because the persons are not the same, the lectures are not the same, the themes are not the same. So, one is celebrating the conservation of a particular configuration of relations inside and in the domain in which the university exists. And that is the organization university.

Now what is interesting here is that the system exists in the dynamic of conservation of the configuration of relations that is its organization. So, it does not have an independent existence of the dynamic of conservation of the organization and its realized, of course, through elements in the case of the case of the universities through professors, students, themes that are being dealt in teaching which can change. So, the structure can change.

But at the same time, professors, students are the elements, a structure that realized the university. So, the university does not exist outside a structure that realizes it. But these are elements of the university as long as they realize the organization university. So, the components of a system, a part of the structure exist only in the relation of the composition of the system that they compose. They do not exist independently of that.