

METAPHORS IMPACT DAILY DECISIONS BY MANAGERS AND LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

In a world filled with complexities, people have turned to metaphors to provide a meaningful way to comprehend and communicate what they experience. In recent business literature, metaphors are used to describe organizations, and even guide the diagnosis of problems, because of their power to draw attention particular aspects of real situations. Extensive literature exists promoting various metaphors in this role or reviewing the efficacy of their use. What has not been explored is whether people in organizations also use metaphors, often without conscious thought, in ways that influence their decisions. The assumption here is that metaphors operate like powerful paradigms that have associated values, beliefs, language, and actions. This research explores the following questions: Can metaphors and associated paradigms be identified? Can preferences for particular metaphors be measured using preferences for particular sets of values, beliefs, language and actions? In a sample of 176 students, the researcher was able to provide an answer of “yes” to both of the questions. People do have preferences for particular metaphors, even if they have not named them. Those preferences, through the associated values, beliefs, and actions, impact the practical decisions that are made in organizations.

JEL: M100

KEYWORDS: Business Administration, Management, Metaphors, Decision-Making

INTRODUCTION

In a world filled with complexities, people have turned to metaphors to provide a meaningful way to comprehend and communicate what they experience. Because metaphors have their own associated information, their use focuses attention on similarities between the metaphor and the real world. Other information about the real situation is often then ignored. This simplifies what needs to be understood about the actual situation. Metaphors have traditionally been used in literature; the most famous use may be Shakespeare’s referring to *all the world’s a stage*. In business, Adam Smith’s *Invisible Hand* is one of the most commonly used metaphors. Because of their power to draw attention to particular aspects of real situations, in more recent business literature, metaphors are used to describe organizations, and even guide the diagnosis of problems. Extensive literature exists promoting various metaphors in this role or reviewing the efficacy of their use.

In this researcher’s over 40 years of experience as a manager in organizations and organizational consultant, he has been struck by the consistent use of language that can be associated with metaphors. Organizations are often described as growing or dying. They “learn,” or are “political,” express “values,” or have “finite capacity.” These are all examples of statements made from particular metaphoric perspectives. Observations, such as these, become part of the fabric of thinking within organizations. But, like the air breathed, they are taken for granted rather than consciously considered.

What has not been explored in the literature is a practical reality that people in organizations use metaphors, most often without conscious thought, in ways that influence their decisions. In this use, metaphors operate

like powerful paradigms that have associated values, beliefs, language, and actions. Is this statement true? If it is, can metaphors and associated paradigms be identified? Can preferences for particular metaphors be measured using preferences for particular sets of values, beliefs, language and actions? This research seeks to confirm whether metaphors in use do function as paradigms and whether preferences for particular metaphors can be identified. Participants have the opportunity to rank features of particular metaphors to reflect their metaphoric preferences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature exploring the use of metaphors in organizations has rarely addressed the use of metaphors by people within organizations as they consider situations and make everyday decisions. This literature has focused on both proposing metaphors to help in understanding organizations and in validating the usefulness of such metaphors. Two classic books on the topic of metaphors in organizations were Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* in 1980 and Morgan's *Images of Organization* in 1986. Both books have been updated with later editions, 2003 and 1998, respectively. Lakoff and Johnson observed, "We have seen that metaphor pervades our normal conceptual system. Because so many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.), we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (spatial orientation, objects, etc.). This leads to metaphorical definition in our conceptual system." (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, pg 115).

This basic premise is repeated in in Morgan's books (1986 & 1998) and in journal articles by authors such as, Pesqueux (1999), Davies, Chun and Rui (2001), and Steen (2002). A large proportion of the literature accepts this approach and proposes various metaphors to aid in the understanding of organizations and the roles of managers and leaders. In his original book, Morgan (1986) proposes eight metaphors to describe organizations. These range from the more concrete to the more abstract: machine, organism, brains, cultures, political systems, psychic prisons, flux and transformation, and instruments of domination. He discusses each of these in detail, including strengths and limitations, as tools for better understanding how people experience organizations.

Many authors use Morgan's and Lakoff and Johnson's works as reference points as they propose metaphors to better address particular organizational issues. For example, military and war metaphors were discussed by David and Graham (1997), Mutch (2006) and Whysall (2001). Sports metaphors were explored by David and Graham (1997) and Bokeno (2009). Dancing was the focus for Belasco (1990), Kanter (1989), Ropo and Sauer (2008), and Atkinson (2008). Four authors were exploring various aspects of knowledge management using metaphors: Rowe (2005), Koskinen (2005), Andriessen and Prusak (2006). Eppler (2006) explores visual metaphors. Career paths and development were explored by Lajoie(2005), Liedtka (2000), and Crowley-Henry (2012).

A number of authors focused their attention on using metaphors to help their undergraduate and graduate students better understand both management and organizational behavior. Taber (2007) has students identify metaphors to describe their own organizations. Luechauer and Shulman (1998) offered a set of animals for students to choose the one that most represents the culture of their organizations. Weick (2003) used metaphors to help students take a more creative view of the strategic process. May and Short (2003) thought of on-line education as gardening in cyberspace, while Gross and Hogler (2005) challenged the growing use of the consumer metaphor in management education.

Several authors chose to narrow their exploration of the use of metaphors to those they thought would be most helpful to consultants in better understanding the dynamics of their client organizations. Massey (2003) explored the more general use of metaphors as a consultant diagnostic tool. Denton (2003) described the use of metaphors as a tool in training in conflict management. Perren and Atkin (2000) presented how

they used metaphors to change a client organization’s management assumptions. Illes and Ritchie (1999) shared how they used metaphors to change the dynamics of a change process.

Additionally, the literature explored the use of metaphors as a communication tool within organizations. Stephens (1994) analyzed a series of speeches to see how metaphors were used. Monin and Monin (1997) examined how, linguistically, metaphors used by companies exaggerated particular aspects of the company, such as using a war metaphor for these businesses. Grisham (2006) sought to better understand how metaphors can help business leadership gain trust across cultural differences. Griffin (2008) probed how organizational development professionals use metaphors to influence change processes in their client organizations. Watkins (2010) analyzed how metaphors can be used to help companies tell a more effective story about their companies to both internal and external audiences.

The range of metaphors discussed in the literature is wide. Table #1 presents examples of the range of metaphors used. This variety demonstrates the very different perspectives possible using metaphors.

Table 1: Examples of Metaphors Presented in the Literature

Metaphors	Authors	Metaphors	Authors
Animals - Various	Oswick	Literary Drama	Monin
Boundaries	Dreachlin	Machine	Morgan
Brain	Morgan, Garud	Magic	Kaarst-Brown
Bridge	Muna	Meteorology	French
Candle	Muna	Military	Mutch
Culture	Morgan	Mosaic	Muna
Dance	Atkinson	Organism	Morgan
Design	Liedtka	Personification	Davies
Epic Stories	David	Physics	Behn
Factory	Mastacche	Place	Walck
Families	Rosenblat	Political Systems	Morgan
Flux & Transformation	Morgan	Process	Rowe
Helicopter	Muna	Psychic Prisons	Morgan
Iceberg	Muna	Sports	David, Bokeno
Instruments of Domination	Morgan	Transit Lounge	Muna
Intergenerational Family	Rosenblat	Tripod	Muna
Iron Cage	Klagge	War	David, Whysell

Table #1 provides a summary of the many metaphors referenced in the literature. The first column contains the metaphors and the second column contains the names of the first authors who used the particular metaphors.

The literature on metaphors in organizations is focused on the analysis of organizations using various metaphors. Many researchers have proposed a variety of metaphors for use in this analysis. Several researchers have explored the teaching of particular metaphors to people within organizations to enable them to better complete analysis. What is more scarce in the literature is investigating what metaphors are already being used in organization, with or without conscious thought about the metaphor. Perren and Atkin (1997) thought that by identifying the metaphors owner-managers actually used might provide insights into their decision-making. They asked these individuals to identify which metaphors they use and accumulated a list of 85 metaphors. The authors concluded that the metaphors did impact decision-making. Gaddefors (2007) looked at the use of metaphors in the entrepreneurial process. They found that the metaphors used significantly impacted how entrepreneurial opportunities were identified. Wibeck (2012) examined how the choice between two metaphoric perspectives changed how people in an organization viewed their Management By Objectives process. Cobo, et al. (2012) examined how frequently Morgan’s eight metaphors were evident in 61 Brazilian companies. They found that “organism” was most common while the least common metaphors were “political system” and “instrument of domination.”

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This research has been designed to build on the foundational work by Gareth Morgan, but rather than focus on metaphoric tools to be applied from outside of an organization, the research seeks to explore the more organic metaphors actually being used by the people of organizations. In this way, this research is most similar to the approach applied by Cobo, et al. That research used an existing 35 question survey that had participants rate, from strong presence in their organization to virtually no presence, each of the descriptors. Cluster analysis was used to rank the use of the machine, psychic prison, political system, instrument of domination, organism, brain, and flux and transformation metaphors. The authors considered Brain and Culture to be similar and were treated collectively.

Both the Cobo, et al., research and this research is founded on the assumption that metaphors in use do not have to be consciously identified by an individual in order for them to have influence. On this basis, the metaphors being used can be identified and named by the researchers. The data collected by the earlier research provided the information necessary for them to evaluate the metaphors being used.

The most significant difference between that approach and the one used here is in the approach to Morgan's metaphors. Here, the metaphors were assumed to be paradigms, as described by Kuhn (1996). Building on Kuhn and Barker (1993), paradigms contain a set of values, beliefs, assumptions, language, and behavior. The behaviors are those already worked out solutions to problems, as defined by a paradigm. Unique paradigm sets were developed from the ideas presented by Morgan in both editions of his book.

This researcher also made modifications in Morgan's list of metaphors. Acknowledging that Morgan described his metaphors as tools for gaining insights into organizations, his metaphors were assessed to estimate which ones would most likely be used by people within an organization and impact their behavioral choices. Psychic prisons, instruments of domination, and flux and transition were set aside. An additional pair of linked metaphors were added based on language that has often been observed by the researcher in organizations. These additional metaphors are aristocracy and serf. These present opportunities for people to report on their experience of privilege and power.

Research Instrument

A new instrument was created that required participants to make forced choices among sets of four values, beliefs, assumptions, language, or behaviors. In each set, one choice is neutral. Participants ranked the four choices from "most believe to be true" to "least believe to be true." All metaphoric perspectives were equally represented in the 56 sets presented in a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed so that two versions of 28 sets each could be identified to allow for assessment of split test validity.

Metaphoric Content

Each of the metaphors used in this research was operationalized reflecting key elements of a paradigm, as described by Kuhn. These included values, beliefs, and assumptions associated with that particular metaphor. The metaphors used in the research are presented in Table 2. The statements were identified, drawing initially on Morgan (1986) and then the professional experience of the researcher. Notice how the first pair of metaphors represent the opposite sides of a common system that assumes the presence of the other side. The remaining metaphors each stand on their own with unique sets of statements of values, beliefs, and assumptions. These statements, building on their association with particular metaphors, were then used as the basis for the instrument.

Table 2: Metaphors and Examples of Paradigm Features

<p><i>Aristocracy and Serf Metaphors:</i></p> <p>Organizations are similar to the aristocracy/serf relationships. Aristocracy/serf relationships have certain characteristics, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small group or class of people control and benefit from the work of a much larger number of people There is a clear distinction between those in controlling group and those who are not The controlling group expends whatever resources necessary to maintain control by the group There appears to be an opportunity for those not in the controlling group to join it due to loyal and/or distinguished service <p>Those who identify more with the aristocracy have certain characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because of capability or class position, some people are ordained to rule Those not in the controlling group are expected to fulfill their roles without complaint Membership in this ruling group is important <p>Those who identify more with the serfs have certain characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals seek to join the group in power, join with others to counter the top group's power, or resign themselves to their situation Labor, not dedication, is exchanged for money and other rewards Life outside of work is much more important than work
<p><i>Brain Metaphor:</i></p> <p>Organizations are assumed to be similar to the brain. Brains have certain characteristics, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collects and processes information Makes decisions based on information Initiates and processes communication Learns from the collected information Holographic - all parts contain the capability of the whole
<p><i>Culture Metaphor:</i></p> <p>Organizations are similar to cultures. Cultures have characteristics, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values operate as the foundation for the activities and aspirations of the people Heroes personify the culture's values and provide tangible role models for individuals Ceremonies and rituals tie people together and provide visible and potent examples of what the culture stands for Standardized expectations of each other become the norms guiding daily activities People identify with and feel a part of a culture Cultures endure through generations providing continuity
<p><i>Machine Metaphor:</i></p> <p>Organizations are assumed to be similar to a machine, such as an automobile engine. Machines have certain characteristics, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed to produce something Made up of parts - when one fails, it is simply replaced with a part with identical capability Parts do their job without a consciousness of what is being produced or why Parts act as intended Machines have a finite capacity, when that capacity is exceeded, add more machines or have them work more hours
<p><i>Organism Metaphor:</i></p> <p>An organization is similar to a living organism. Organisms have certain characteristics, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are alive and seek to stay alive Different species have adapted to different environments Success of the whole is dependent upon the activities of interdependent parts Have needs which they seek to satisfy Interact with and adapt to their environment
<p><i>Political Metaphor:</i></p> <p>An organization can be viewed as a political process. Political processes have certain characteristics, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals seek to increase their personal influence Political campaigns are long-term activities Additional influence can be gained by exchanging favors Political bases must be constantly nurtured People are always waiting in the wings to exert their political power

Table 2 provides a summary of the metaphors used in this research. The features of each metaphor are drawn from the elements of paradigms

The instrument was created by systematically identifying sets of three of the above statements plus one neutral statement not related to the metaphors being explored. All of the above statements were used in the instrument. The order of the presentation of the metaphor-related statements was randomized within each set. See Appendix 1 for examples of how these sets were presented to participants.

The instrument was administered to students in two different undergraduate Industrial-Organizational Psychology courses at the University of California, Irvine. In each course, students were allowed to use a portion of a class to complete the instrument. Students in each course had a single opportunity to participate. A total of 195 students were offered the opportunity to complete the instrument. Participation did not

impact their grade in the courses. In exchange for participation, each student was offered a personal report of their results. To maintain anonymity, participants could use any identifier, including a number or fictitious name. 176 students participated. The reports were generated and returned to students the following week. The data was tabulated and metaphoric preferences determined.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research sought to confirm whether metaphors in use in organizations do function as paradigms and whether preferences for particular metaphors can be identified. Participants had the opportunity to rank features of particular metaphors to reflect their metaphoric preferences.

176 respondents completed their instrument in a form that allowed for tabulation. The forced ranking of four choices per set was a more complex set of instructions than 12 students were able to understand. They completed the forms in an unusable manner. Nine students chose not complete the forms.

A total of 63 males and 113 females completed the forms. They ranged in age from 19 to 26 years of age. Most identified their occupation as “student.” A few worked full or part-time in retail or other entry-level positions. The results did not differ significantly between any of these demographic categories. The results of the two versions of the instrument were also not significantly different. The instrument has had excellent results in both the split-test reliability and test-retest reliability. Because of the construction of the instrument, it was possible to have a number of metaphors rated as stronger, moderate, or minimal. The most common pattern of response was to have two metaphors rated 30 or above, three rated 15-29, and two rated at below 15. The highest rating attained by anyone in this sample was a 44 (aristocracy). There were also two brain and two culture rated at 40 or above. These five people reflected an extremely high preference for their favorite metaphors. At the other end, the lowest rated metaphor had just one point (Serf). Only the Serf and Political metaphors received ratings of 5 or less (Serf six times and Political nine times). These fifteen people reflected an extremely low preference for these metaphors.

The results of the instrument are presented in Table 3. As might be predicted in a population where psychology students predominate, the most common stronger preference was the Brain metaphor. 63% of the respondents preferred the Brain-related statements resulting in a Brain score of 30 or higher. Culture (39%) and Organism (38%) were also frequently stronger choices. Less than a quarter (24%) of the respondents chose Machine frequently enough to rate 30 or more. Serf (4%), Aristocracy (2%), and Political (2%) metaphors were rarely chosen enough to place them in the strongest category.

The Machine (73%) and Aristocracy (72%) were the most common choices for moderate preferences. Organism (61%), and Culture (57%) all garnered moderate preferences for more than half of the respondents. Serf (40%), Political (40%), and Brain (35%) were chosen less frequently. The Political (58%) and Serf (56%) most frequently appeared in the minimal preference category. The Aristocracy (26%) was still a more common choice, especially compared to the very low frequency of the Culture (4%), Brain (2%), Machine (2%), and Organism (1%). A concern when looking at this data is whether these metaphors are measuring similar preferences. In looking at the correlation between all of the combinations of metaphor preferences, the highest positive correlation was 0.327 between Brain and Culture and 0.226 between Brain and Organism. Nearly all of the other correlations were negative. The strongest negative correlations were -0.513 between Brain and Political, -0.479 between Brain and Serf and -0.476 between Culture and Political. This data is reported in Table 3.

After the results of the instrument were tabulated reports were generated for each of the participants. An example of such a report is included in Appendix B. The reports summarized their particular preferences and, based on those preferences, what the participant tends to believe about organizations and the people in them, what they likely or unlikely to observe, and what outcomes they will tend to take action to achieve.

These reports were returned to participants using whatever number or name they choose to use. This research affirmed that participants could differentiate among the features of the different metaphors and consistently rate – high, medium, or low- preferences for particular metaphors.

Table 3: Total Preferences Reported (N=176)

	Strongest	Moderate	Minimal
	≥30	15-29	<15
Aristocracy	3	127	46
	2%	72%	26%
Serf	7	71	98
	4%	40%	56%
Brain	111	61	4
	63%	35%	2%
Culture	68	101	7
	39%	57%	4%
Machine	43	129	4
	24%	73%	2%
Organism	67	107	2
	38%	61%	1%
Political	3	71	102
	2%	40%	58%

Table 3 presents the relative preference for each of the metaphors. Choosing a particular metaphor as “most believe” at each opportunity would result in a score of 45. Selecting incremental values of 15 (<15, 15-29, and ≥30) produced a report that was both readily understood and approximated a standard distribution. Relative preferences were clearly evident.

Table 4: Correlations among Preferences

Aristocracy & Brain	-0.364	Culture & Machine	-0.065
Aristocracy & Culture	-0.490	Culture & Organism	0.198
Aristocracy & Machine	0.052	Culture & Political	-0.476
Aristocracy & Organism	-0.262	Culture & Serf	-0.225
Aristocracy & Political	-0.145		
Aristocracy & Serf	-0.102	Machine & Organism	-0.118
		Machine & Political	-0.335
Brain & Culture	0.327	Machine & Serf	-0.263
Brain & Machine	0.077		
Brain & Organism	0.226	Organism & Political	-0.338
Brain & Political	-0.513	Organism & Serf	0.466
Brain & Serf	-0.479		
		Political & Serf	0.235

Table 4 presents the correlation of the preferences for all pairs of metaphors. Column 1 lists the pairs of metaphors. Column 2 presents the correlation coefficients for each of the pairs.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This paper examines whether metaphoric preferences could be differentiated using statements related to sets of values, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors. To examine this issue, a sample of undergraduate industrial/organizational psychology students were used. A total of 176 students completed the survey instrument in the Fall of 2005. The results indicate that it is possible to differentiate metaphoric preferences using such statements. Specifically, the results show the statements associated with each metaphor were consistently rated in a similar manner to the other statements in the same associated set. The next challenge was whether the reports generated based on individual instruments would be meaningful. These reports provided a graphic presentation of the degree of their metaphoric preferences. For their highest preferences the report indicated a summary of their beliefs, what they tend to see in the organization, and what action they tend to take. For moderate metaphoric preferences, the report presented moderately held beliefs, what

they may see but are less likely to explore further, and what action they might take with less enthusiasm. For the least preferred metaphoric preferences, the report noted what they tend not to believe, see, or take action. These reports were based on a more extensive description of each of the metaphoric perspectives. In discussions with participants after they had received their reports, there was a consistent affirmation of what was said about them. This was additional face validity for the instrument and the reporting process. The participants reported that the information felt familiar to them but that they had not thought about these perspectives in this way.

This research is an early exploration of the practical use of metaphors within organizations. It has two primary limitations. The first is that it used an approach that can be refined based on the lessons learned in this effort. The second is that it used a convenient sample of college students. It is difficult to judge whether similar results will be obtained from individuals at all levels of organizations. Future research should be directed to this population rather than restricted to further academic participants. It is in exploring this subject with people working in a variety of organizations that the validity and usefulness of the research will be realized.

This research was an initial step in exploring the practical, daily use of metaphors in organizations. The research adds to the body of literature by venturing into an area that has been minimally explored. One of the key purposes of the research was as a validity test for the instrument and the larger premise that people do have metaphoric preferences that impact the way they see their organizations and the priorities for actions to be taken. Recognizing that this research was completed with undergraduate students in an Industrial-Organizational Psychology course, the instrument will next need to be tested in organizational (for-profit and not-for-profit) settings. It will be in this context that the prevalence and impact of metaphors on everyday decisions will be more evident. Will the preference patterns from the students be repeated in real, work situations? If they are, that will be important information. If not, that will also be useful information.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Examples of Portions of the Instrument

The instrument was constructed to facilitate participants to check the strength of their belief in the sets of metaphor-related statements. Nearly all participants were able to follow the directions and record their preferences in the expected manner.

Example A: Example of the Way to Complete Instrument

		Most Believe			Least Believe
A	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Organizations are most effective when everyone wears blue
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Successful organizations require people to work in the same location as other employees
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Organizations are most efficient when they have new buildings
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Organizations are most productive during the Spring

Check only one in each column for each group of four statements.

Example B: Weaver Metaphor Instrument ©

		Weaver Metaphor Instrument ©			
1	Most Believe	Least Believe			
					Conflict with others can be useful, especially if I win
				There may be many different ways to achieve the same end	
				Getting people involved creates a sense of ownership and responsibility	
				It is fair that the top decision making group has significantly higher rewards	
2	Most Believe	Least Believe			
				It is fair that top decision making groups has signifcantly higher rewards	
				Knowing my organizacion’s mission provides focus to my work	
				People need to be able to do a variety of jobs so we can cover if people are away	
				I expect the top decision making grups to avoid having contact with others.	

Appendix B: An example of a report provided to a participant as follow-up on completing the instrument

Weaver Metaphor Instrument©

Report on Your Results

Name: Date completed: Record #:

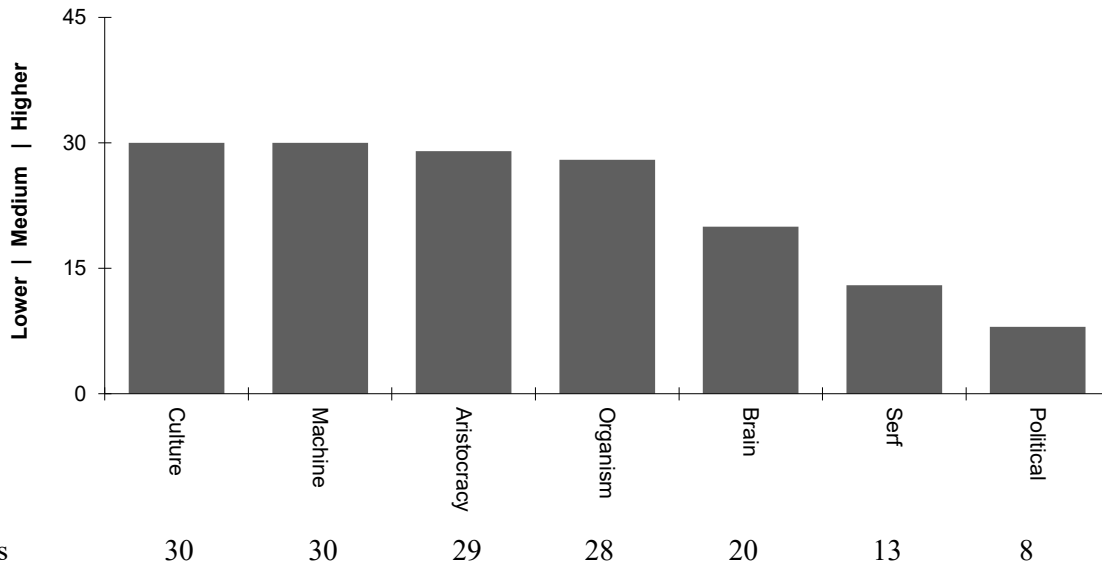
Metaphors

Organizations are so complex that we all reach for simpler ways of thinking about them. We look to our life experiences to find entities and approaches in which we identify similarities to organizations. These entities and approaches begin to represent organizations. These metaphors become more than symbols for the organization. Often, when we think of organizations, we use the language and beliefs that are associated with the metaphor. We begin to assume that whatever is true for the metaphor is also true for organization. We are also less likely to consider information that does not fit the metaphor we prefer to use.

There are a number of metaphors commonly in use. People tend to prefer using one or a combination of two or three metaphors. Each metaphor has beliefs, values, words, and behaviors associated with them. Each metaphor leads to a unique set of desired outcomes, types of problems and strengths identified, and recommended action. Each metaphor has environments where it is particularly effective and organizational dynamics and conditions that it just does not see.

Seven of the most commonly used metaphors are: Aristocracy, Serf, Brain, Culture, Machine, Organism, and Political. The Metaphor Instrument measures the preferences people have for these metaphors. The stronger the preference, the more likely that metaphor will influence the observations, decisions, and actions of the individual. The weaker the preference, the less the metaphor will influence the individual.

Your Preferences



Higher Preference

Culture Metaphor

You tend to strongly believe the following

Alignment of individual and organizational values and beliefs result in higher productivity

A shared sense of mission and vision for an organization provides a focus for the work of each individual

The cultural norms of the organization may either support or hinder its willingness and ability to change
Higher levels of involvement and participation create a sense of ownership and responsibility among those who are a part of an organization

What the organization has been in the past has a large influence on the present and future of the organization

You strongly tend to see the following

The degree of alignment of values and beliefs

The degree of shared ownership in the organization's well being

The degree of alignment of individuals with the organization's mission

The degree to which the organizational norms support adapting to changing conditions both within and outside the organization

How ceremonies and celebrations are used within the organization

You take action that seeks to achieve

Clarification and agreement on the shared values and beliefs

Clarification and agreement on the organization's mission and vision for the future

Reinforce organizational norms that support the organization being most productive

More productive use of ceremonies and celebrations within the organization

Machine Metaphor

You tend to strongly believe the following

- Organizations can and should operate in a rational manner
- Organizations should focus on improving the quality and quantity of the products or services it produces
- Creation of standards and adherence to them will lead to success
- People higher in the structure are in a better position to make the best decisions
- If individuals do not work out in their positions, they can be easily replaced
- Stability is most important, therefore periods of instability must be weathered until the stable periods return

You strongly tend to see the following

- Where too many resources are being used to produce at a particular level
- Where desired levels of quality are not being achieved
- Where particular individuals are not producing as expected
- Where action can and should be taken to increase stability

You take action that seeks to achieve

- Evaluating the efficiency of an operation
- Improved quality and quantity levels
- Increased compliance with expectations
- Increased stability within the operation

Medium Preference

Aristocracy Metaphor

You tend to moderately hold some or all of the following beliefs

- You have a right to the power while others do not
- Others should serve your group and your ends
- Maintaining the status quo maintains the position of the group in power

While you may notice the following, you are less likely to learn more about them

- Where resources are being used effectively
- Where activities proceed in an orderly fashion
- Where there are challenges to the position of the group in power

You tend to place a moderate priority on taking the following action

If you are part of the group in power, you tend to seek:

- Ways to maintain the current approach to operations
- Ways to reduce discontent by those not in power
- Ways to improve benefits to those in power

Brain Metaphor

You tend to moderately believe the following

- Successful organizations depend on the effective collection and distribution of information
- Given the required information, people perform better

People closer to the source of information are usually in a better position to make decisions related to that information

Individuals and organizations can learn from experiences

Organizations benefit when people can do more than one job

While you may notice the following, you are less likely to learn more about them

Whether you and others are receiving the information relevant to the work to be done

Whether you and others have the information required to make the best decisions

Whether you and others have learned from experiences

Whether you and others have the capability and opportunities to perform alternative jobs

You tend to place a moderate priority on taking action that seeks to achieve

Improved collection and distribution of information

Improved use of information to perform jobs, including making decisions

Increased learning from individual and organizational experiences

Organism Metaphor

You tend to moderately hold some or all of the following beliefs

Organizations must interact regularly freely with their environments

Organizations are made up of many parts that must function well together for the whole to thrive

There may be many different ways to achieve the same end

Organizations must evolve, adapt, and change if they are to survive

Change is a process that can be influenced but not controlled

While you may notice the following, you are less likely to learn more about them

The degree to which organizations adapt to their environments

The degree to which individuals and groups cooperate and collaborate

The degree to which groups create enough synergy

The degree to which there is sufficient exchange between internal areas of organizations and their environments

You tend to place a moderate priority on taking the following action

Improvement in the fit between the organization and its environment

Improved interaction and exchanges between parts of the organization and with the organization's environment

Increased alignment between individual and group needs and the capabilities and needs of the organization

Improved health of relationships within the organization and with people in its environment

Lower Preference

Political Metaphor

You tend not to believe that

Organizations are arenas where the goal is more personal influence

Influence can be developed through personal relationships control of resources, control of information, and access to others with more power

Influence can be increased by the shrewd trading of favors and taking action that diminishes the influence of others

Conflict is helpful only if you win and increase your influence

Informal influence is just as useful as formal position-based influence

You tend not to see

- How others develop and use influence
- How growth in parts or all of the organization create opportunities for influence
- How the organization influences its environment
- How rivalries affect the success of the organization

You tend not to take action to

- Increase your personal influence
- Increase the influence of your organization on its environment
- Increase the acceptance of using influence within your organization
- Smooth transitions of influence from one person to another

Self Metaphor

You tend not to believe that

- You have a duty to serve those who have the power
- You could, through exceptional work, join the group in power
- You can only counter the power of the top group through organizing others who are excluded from power

You tend not to see where

- Exploitation is taking place of individuals and/or groups
- Opportunities for advancement are not equally available
- Activities take place to keep the work force from unifying

You tend not to take action to

- Join the group in power
- Influence the group in power
- Collectively counter the power of the top group

With your combination of preferences, you are most challenged in seeing:

- How groups of individuals in the organization are exploited for the benefit of a few
- How positioning for individual power can distract individuals and groups from the purpose of the larger organization

You may or may not see the following

- How a group is able to maintain its control or influence over an organization
- How to create continuous learning and broad based ability to complete particular work
- How the whole organization must respond to its environment to thrive and how parts of the organization are interdependent

You most likely to see the following

- How the people in the organization are affected by the beliefs, values, and rituals propagated within the organization.
- How to create increased efficiency and improved quality

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