
‘Wow! That’s so cool!’ The Icehotel as organizational trope

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Abstract

This article introduces the Icehotel, the world’s first and largest hotel to be constructed entirely of ice and snow, as a unique and generative organizational trope. As a trope (and metaphor, in particular), it both supplements and complements Morgan’s seminal book, *The Images of Organization*, and generates unique insights with regard to *surprise*, *unifinality*, *purity*, *eco-coreness* and *rebirth*. The Icehotel also serves as a lens for examining organizations through each master trope, that is, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Evidence of *metonymy* in language describing the Icehotel is presented. The case for *synecdoche* is made by arguing that the Icehotel is a species of two genera, that is, temporary organizations and paradoxical organizations. Also, the Icehotel is not only paradoxical (i.e. a form of *irony*), but also generates four other paradoxes, namely, the ways that organizations are *evolutionary yet revolutionary*, *negative as well as positive*, *different yet similar* and *unsustainably sustainable*. The Icehotel also exemplifies *serious play* – a particular approach for managing paradoxes. Finally, the article discusses implications for research and practice.

Keywords

irony, metaphor, metonymy, paradox, serious play, synecdoche

A metaphor is a figure of speech that takes one thing (referred to as the *source domain*) and equates or overlaps it with another thing (the *target domain*) for rhetorical effect, thus highlighting the similarities between the two (Alvesson, 1993; Ramsay, 2004). It is one of the four main rhetorical tools identified by the ancient Greeks, the other three

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being logic, facts and narrative (Ramsay, 2004). It is generally agreed that it is impossible to avoid using metaphor in organization studies (Oswick et al., 2004; Ramsay, 2004), and consequently the field, possibly more than any other scientific discipline, abounds with metaphors (Doving, 1996). Of all the works in this burgeoning research stream, arguably the most seminal and influential has been Morgan's *Images of Organization* (1986). Metaphor, however, is closely related to the other three master tropes: metonymy, synecdoche and irony (i.e. figures of speech that use words in nonliteral ways; Manning, 1979). In fact, recent work that uses metaphor to generate organizational theory incorporates features of multiple tropes (Cornelissen, 2008; Oswick et al., 2004). This article follows suit by examining an offspring or intermediate organizational metaphor, the Icehotel, as it exemplifies multiple tropes. It thus responds both to Morgan's (2011: 466) call 'to explore the possibilities of finding new (metaphors)' and the call in this Special Issue 'to extend the images used in current organization theory'.

All Morgan's (1986) metaphors are *root* or *deep* metaphors, which determine centrally important features of the idea or object being examined (Schon, 1993; Sternberg et al., 1993). However, Oswick and Grant (1996: 217) make the case for *intermediate* metaphors which 'have more than an isolated similarity, or fleeting resemblance, to the domain onto which they are projected', and their role 'is a more sophisticated one than that of mere embellishment or simplification' (Oswick and Grant, 1996: 217). According to Gribas and Downs (2002: 113), 'intermediate metaphors are consciously used, and we are fully aware of their symbolic functioning'. However, intermediate metaphors are not superficial figures of speech. They are rather broad and heuristic in that they allow for extending symbolic connections with second-order comparisons (Gribas and Downs, 2002: 623–624). Also, 'intermediate metaphors being cultural have a direct link into the discursive phenomenon, generating deeper levels of meaning, [and] enhancing creative theorizing' (Richman and Mercer, 2000: 623–4). This category of metaphors has been relatively neglected, and this article addresses this lacuna by introducing the Icehotel as an important intermediate metaphor in understanding temporary and often fleeting organizations.

As noted previously, metaphor is only one of several *tropes* – one in which 'language is used strategically and rhetorically to set up types of relationship' (Oswick et al., 2004: 107). Although the four master tropes account for the majority of the work across disciplines (Cornelissen, 2008; Manning, 1979), metaphor has received far more attention than the other three master tropes, both in linguistic studies and in management (Oswick et al., 2004). In the latter, 'if we disregard metaphor, research which examines the nature and application of tropes within the field of organization theory is scarce' (Oswick and Grant, 1996: 222). This article aims to fill this gap by analysing the Icehotel through the lens of each master trope.

Other efforts to use the same image as a lens for multiple tropes (cf. boxer as tiger, man and saucepan – Morgan, 1980) appear more contrived and less relevant to organizational research. This occurs because metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche are resonance tropes (i.e. they establish relationships through similarities) and irony is a dissonance trope (i.e. it reflects incongruities in organizational life), and it is difficult to find an image that can simultaneously function both through similarity and through incongruity (Oswick et al., 2002). The Icehotel, though, is one of those rare images that seems amenable as both a resonance and a dissonance trope because of its unique characteristics.

The Icehotel, located in Sweden, is the world's first hotel to be constructed entirely of ice and snow. The Icehotel functions as both an edifice (i.e. a man-made, more or

less permanent structure with a roof and walls) and as an organization. The Icehotel as metaphor, metonymy and irony largely draws upon the edifice perspective, whereas the Icehotel as synecdoche draws upon the organization perspective. Further, unlike other organizational tropes, it functions paradoxically as a form of irony in that *ice* connotes coldness whereas *hotel* connotes warmth and hospitality. Ironically, it is both real and ephemeral in that it appears and disappears with regularity. Thus, the Icehotel exemplifies Morgan's (2011: 467) view that 'organizations are multidimensional, socially constructed realities where different aspects can coexist in complementary, conflicting, hence paradoxical ways'.

The article is organized in the following manner. The section entitled *The Icehotel* provides a description of this image by highlighting its unique features and situating it as both an edifice and an organization. The next section examines this image as an intermediate metaphor through treating it as a concrete form that becomes mapped as an abstraction to provide insights on organizational surprise, unifinality, purity, eco-coreness and rebirth. Drawing on the linguistic literature, the following sections examine the Icehotel as metonymy and synecdoche. The penultimate section focuses on paradox, which is a form of irony. The Icehotel not only incorporates four distinct paradoxes but also exemplifies ways in which they can be reconciled, for example, *serious play* (Beech et al., 2004; Gergen, 1992). The final section summarizes the contributions of this article and discusses its implications for theory and for practice, particularly the relevance of this image to the *positive organizational scholarship* (Cameron et al., 2003) and *positive organizational behaviour* (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008; Luthans, 2002) fields.

The Icehotel

The Icehotel, located in Jukkasjärvi, Sweden, is the world's first and largest ice hotel. It has set the template for other ice hotels, thus confirming that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. (The organizational trope is the original Icehotel, rather than ice hotels in general, and hence has been consistently spelt as such.) The story began in 1989 when Yngve Bergqvist (founder, principal owner and chairman of the Icehotel), in order to create tourist traffic in the winter months, invited Japanese ice artists to visit the area and create an exhibition of ice art. The following spring (1990) a French artist, Jannot Derid, held an exhibition in a cylinder-shaped igloo in the same area, but one night, as there were no rooms available in the town, some visitors spent the night in the exhibition hall in sleeping bags on top of reindeer skin, thereby becoming the first guests of the 'hotel'. By 1992–1993 the Icehotel was established (Sarasvathy, 2010c) and is now 'one of the most amazing hotels on the planet' (*National Geographic 'Megastructures'* documentary, 2006). The edifice of the Icehotel refers to the man-made physical structure of ice and snow, whereas the organization refers to the entity comprising multiple people whose collective goal is to build and run the Icehotel.

Characterizing the Icehotel as an edifice

Location. The Icehotel is located in a remote, harsh landscape (i.e. the Tundra, 200 km north of the Arctic Circle) in the tiny town of Jukkasjärvi. It is not a place where one would expect to find Sweden's most popular tourist destination. The population of the town (700) is outnumbered by its dogs (800), which are mostly Alaskan huskies used for

dog-sledding. Yet, every year it welcomes over 50,000 guests from all over the world, including 40,000 day guests and 12,000 who will stay for at least one night.

Period of existence. The Icehotel only exists between December and April every year and is created afresh over the preceding six weeks. In April, as summer sets in, it begins to melt, the roof and walls gradually thinning, until it dissolves entirely, and leaves no trace of its existence.

Material. The entire hotel, including the bar (*Icebar*) and the glasses in the bar, is made out of ice and snow (apart from fibre optic and LED lights) that is harvested from the nearby Torne River. The source is crucial because ice from a frozen lake or ice that is artificially frozen would have trapped air bubbles. However, the speed of a river's flow strips the air bubbles out of the water so that when it freezes, its ice is as clear as crystal. The Torne is Sweden's longest river and one of Europe's most untouched; hence, the ice from the Torne is possibly the clearest in the world, which is vital for the Icehotel aesthetic. The walls are made entirely of ice or compacted snow held together using a substance known as *snice*, which has a snow-like appearance (e.g. white, soft) but ice-like physical characteristics (e.g. hardness, stability). Snice particles look like tiny pebbles and are three times denser and heavier than ordinary snowflakes. It bonds the ice blocks in the same way as mortar does the bricks of a traditional construction.

Timing. Every spring, around March, when the temperature is around -5°C , the creators of the Icehotel harvest ice and snow from the frozen Torne River and store it in a warehouse. The harvesting is done after the long winter because that is when the ice is at its thickest. Also, because ice cannot withstand high temperature fluctuations, it cannot be harvested in the winter. Further, harvesting the ice in spring allows it to settle and regain its internal strength, so that when construction begins, it is as strong as concrete. Around 100,000 tons of ice and 30,000 tons of snow are harvested, which is almost twice as much as is needed because once construction begins the builders cannot afford to run out.

Technology. The design and technology is a mixture of the classic and the inventive. The Icehotel's architecture is based on the classic catenary curve (i.e. the shape a chain assumes under its own weight when supported only at its ends) – one of the oldest and simplest shapes in the history of construction. It creates a structure that is self-reinforcing and stabilizing and is therefore used in the design of bridges and arches, so that forces do not result in bending moments. However, the unique challenges of constructing with ice and snow mean that conventional tools like saws and planes cannot be used. The Icehotel creators had to invent a highly specialized ice saw (to prevent the blade jamming), a snice-making machine, and an ice plane (like a wood plane) that comprises a board with hundreds of screws attached to it.

Characterizing the Icehotel as an organization

Purpose. The Icehotel functions as a hotel because it provides short-term, paid lodging for clients. But it does not fall under the typical categories of hotels (e.g. upscale luxury, full

service, motels). Instead it falls under the category of *speciality hotels* (e.g. bunker hotels, cave hotels, capsule hotels, straw bale hotels, treehouse hotels, underwater hotels). However, even within this niche the Icehotel stands out. Firstly, it is the only hotel that completely disappears every year and has to be rebuilt afresh. Secondly, it is not just a hotel but an art installation. It is unclear if the Icehotel's primary purpose is to provide accommodation or to be an art installation that also happens to house people. This duality is evident from the *National Geographic* (2006) *Megastructures* documentary, which says both 'it is without doubt a frozen wonder of the world' and 'one of the most amazing hotels on the planet'.

Every room has an ice bed, which is a large block of illuminated ice, and is an attractive, central design element that makes even the most basic hotel room (*snow room*) aesthetically pleasing. The rooms increase in size and/or aesthetic sophistication and include *northern lights suites* (which have glowing lights that simulate the *aurora borealis*) and *art suites* (which are hand-carved by artists handpicked from around the world and include imaginative lighting and ice sculptures). Thus, accommodation and aesthetic objectives are inextricably intertwined. Some other notable features include the *Icechurch* in which guests can exchange matrimonial vows, and the fact that the Icehotel is one of the best places to view the *aurora borealis*. There is little wonder, then, that it is listed as one of the Seven Wonders of Sweden. As Bergqvist (2006: 3), cited in Stromberg (2009), says, 'In truth, Icehotel is so natural, so unique and so genuinely exotic that you will never experience it elsewhere.'

Team. There are several distinct teams or workforces involved in the Icehotel. Each year it is conceptualized collaboratively by Arne Bergh, a sculptor and designer, who is the creative director, and Åke Larson, a world-renowned ice architect. It is then constructed by a temporary, non-hierarchical team that includes architects, builders and sculptors who come from all over the world. Every year hundreds of artists from all over the world apply to design an art suite at the Icehotel. From these applicants the jury selects a handful of artists, who are invited to Jukkasjärvi. The 2014 Icehotel featured artists from Sweden, Great Britain, France, Spain, the Netherlands, the US, Japan, Italy, Bulgaria, Lithuania and Brazil. Finally, there is a temporary workforce of guides, housekeepers and other staff that run the Icehotel for around three months.

Time pressure. Icehotel construction requires temperature between -5°C and -10°C and takes place between October and December each year. On occasion this window gets shrunk because, although the temperature is not suitable for the construction to begin, the deadline for completion cannot be changed as the guests have already made their bookings. For instance, in 2005 the construction began on 17 November, around three weeks late, and yet had to be completed by the end of December. This results in the team having to work long hours and improvise to get the construction ready on time. Further, as global warming results in shorter and warmer winters, the team gets progressively less time to achieve not just the same result but a higher one (as the creative team raises the bar every year). Even without these climate-related exigencies, construction is fraught with risk. If the metal forms (on which the snice is sprayed) are taken out too soon when the snice is weak, the whole structure could collapse, and if it is left too late, the forms could get stuck fast to the snice, and become virtually impossible to remove.

The Icehotel as an intermediate metaphor

This section largely focuses on the Icehotel as an edifice or a particular structure. Thus, the Icehotel as a metaphor for understanding organization can be stated as *organizations as Icehotels* (a temporary physical structure made of ice and snow), which is akin to saying *organizations as sandcastles* (a temporary physical structure made of sand). Other scholars have drawn on images that underscore the temporal nature of organizations. For example, Oswick and Grant (1996: 214) applied Perrow's (1974) metaphor of a *sandpit* (an image for the study of organizations) to the scholarly work on metaphor, in which they claim that the *sandcastle* built by Gareth Morgan is 'by far the biggest and most impressive' of the scholarly works that examine metaphors of organizations. As an intermediate metaphor, the Icehotel serves as an edifice or concrete entity which is mapped onto organizations, that is, the target or abstract entity. The section is organized in the following manner. First, I analyse the Icehotel metaphor, then I delineate the novel insights it contributes, and finally I mention some of its potential limitations.

Analysis of the Icehotel metaphor

In this subsection, I will first apply some of the extant analytical dichotomies to the Icehotel metaphor and then delineate some of its key features. Scholars have developed several dichotomies to facilitate the analysis of metaphors, i.e., *root* or *deep* versus *surface-level* or *superficial*, *strong* versus *weak*, *first-level* versus *second-level*, *dead* versus *live* and *decontextualized* versus *contextualized*. These dichotomies, along with their concomitant definitions, are presented in Table 1. As indicated in Table 1, based on the definitions, the Icehotel is an intermediate, strong, first-level, live, decontextualized metaphor.

The root or deep versus surface-level or superficial dichotomy is arguably the most fundamental of the various analytical dichotomies. Although the metaphors in the management literature are largely root or deep metaphors, the Icehotel metaphor is not one. But neither is it surface-level or superficial. It straddles this dichotomy by being an intermediate metaphor. This is particularly important as the burgeoning research stream on metaphors may have exhausted the stock of root or deep images. In contrast, the extant stock of intermediate metaphors is relatively limited. Examples include organizations as families (Oswick and Grant, 1996), rites of purification (Richman and Mercer, 2000), the timeline (Rosenberg and Grafton, 2013) and a bowl of granola, which is the intermediate metaphor (between the competing metaphors of the melting pot and the patchwork quilt) that comes closest to capturing both the historical and contemporary reality of the United States (Legomsky, 2010).

As is apparent even from this non-exhaustive list of intermediate metaphors, they could be strong or weak. Based on the definitions provided in Table 1, the Icehotel is a strong metaphor. It is both literally and metaphorically a vivid, compact image that lends itself to further elaboration and implications as laid out in this article. It shows that metaphors need not be root or deep metaphors to be strong metaphors. Further, although Oswick and Grant (1996) suggest that intermediate metaphors will typically be second-level metaphors, the Icehotel is both intermediate and first-level because it is explicit rather than hidden, produces a distinct image, functions in a generative way, and guides particular coherent perspectives. It thus clarifies the intermediate metaphor construct, showing that they are not necessarily second-level metaphors.

Table 1. What type of metaphor is the Icehotel?

No.	Type of metaphor – 1	Icehotel metaphor	Type of metaphor – 2
1	<i>Root or deep</i> : which determines 'centrally important features' of the idea or object being examined (Schon, 1993; Sternberg et al., 1993).	Intermediate	<i>Surface-level or superficial</i> : are based on a deep metaphor, provide embellishment or simplification (Oswick and Grant, 1996).
2	<i>Strong</i> : incorporates two key features: (i) emphasis, i.e. compact, vivid images; and (ii) resonance, i.e. lends itself to further elaboration and implications (Black, 1993).	Strong	<i>Weak</i> : is neither emphatic nor resonant, e.g. 'an unfunny joke, or an unilluminating philosophical epigram' (Black, 1993: 26).
3	<i>First-level</i> : are explicit and produce a distinct image, function in a generative way and guide particular coherent perspectives (Alvesson, 1993).	First-level	<i>Second-level</i> : are 'hidden' and structure the first-level metaphors (Alvesson, 1993).
4	<i>Dead</i> : 'so familiar and so habitual that we have ceased to become aware of their metaphorical nature and use them as literal terms' (Tsoukas, 1991: 568).	Live	<i>Live</i> : 'require both a context and a certain creativity to interpret adequately' (Fraser, 1993: 330), e.g. 'brains', 'psychic prisons', 'machines', 'organisms'.
5	<i>De-contextualized</i> : have cognitive meanings that are shared across contexts (Cornelissen et al., 2008).	De-contextualized	<i>Contextualized</i> : locally specific uses and meanings of metaphors and their interaction with other tropes (Cornelissen et al., 2008).

With regard to the dead versus live dichotomy, because the Icehotel is a newly introduced metaphor it is obviously not familiar or habitual, and so cannot be dead. Also, because it requires both context and creativity to interpret adequately, it is a live metaphor. Over time the Icehotel metaphor could be used so frequently that it does become familiar and habitual and therefore dead. Finally, with regard to the decontextualized versus contextualized dichotomy, although *prima facie* the Icehotel may appear to be a contextualized metaphor, it is actually a decontextualized metaphor. Although its context was crucial to its emergence (which suggests that it is a contextualized metaphor), the Icehotel has long since transcended its local environs. It has now spawned more than 10 clones across nine countries, and its sub-brand, the Icebar, is available in 30 countries. Thus, it is an image that is now universally understood. It is therefore a decontextualized metaphor and available to be drawn upon across geographical contexts.

Key features of the Icehotel metaphor. Apart from its location on each of the analytical dichotomies, the Icehotel can be mapped onto other characteristics. The Icehotel is not an underlying metaphor that is already in use, so it is not an *inductive* or *elicited* metaphor, but rather it is, through this article, being imposed on particular organizational

phenomena and is therefore a *deductive* or *projected* metaphor. Further, it has three notable features that enable it to make a valuable contribution to the literature – namely, it is schismatic, temporal and non-anthropological.

Schismatic metaphors. The schismatic metaphor construct ‘presumes that there is a fundamental tendency within organizations towards disintegration as a result of endogenously generated change’ and ‘specifically sets out to provide an alternative to the traditional mechanical and organismic metaphors which assume social systems are functionally unified and essentially stable’ (Morgan, 1981: 23). Although the Icehotel maintains a degree of stability during its operational period (like mechanical and organismic systems), its construction materials dictate that it has a fundamental tendency toward disintegration, and indeed, at the end of its operation, it disintegrates entirely (unlike mechanical and organismic systems). It could therefore be considered to be a rare example of a schismatic metaphor.

Time metaphors. Time metaphors have been relatively neglected (Cornelissen et al., 2005), and the Icehotel, with time as its core, brings welcome attention to this aspect. Further, it encompasses both cyclical time and linear time. Cyclical time focuses on the predictable, recurring and generalizable elements of time (Mainemelis, 2002) and was more fundamental in the pre-industrial, agrarian society (Munn, 1992). Linear time has been brought more into focus by industrialization (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002) and focuses on the irreversible flow of time, in which there is a fixed sequence rather than repetition or circularity (Munn, 1992). The Icehotel construction process, entrained as it is with the change of seasons, exemplifies cycle time, whereas its period of operation with its sequential passage of guests through its rooms exemplifies linear time.

Anthropological metaphors. Anthropological metaphors, in which organizations have anthropological features such as adapting, coping and seeking legitimacy, have dominated organizational theory (Mackechnie and Donnelly-Cox, 1996). The Icehotel being non-anthropological helps to correct this imbalance. Further, although the anthropological metaphor has a common-sense appeal, it has significant weaknesses, such as the attribution of emotions and rationalizations to the whole organization rather than to the individuals involved (Doving, 1996; Mackechnie and Donnelly-Cox, 1996), and the Icehotel being non-anthropological does not share these limitations.

Novel insights from the Icehotel metaphor

The earlier subsection established that the Icehotel image possesses some key features that address relatively neglected aspects of metaphors, such as being schismatic, temporal and non-anthropological. However, that is not enough of a justification for the Icehotel to be introduced as a metaphor into the literature. One of the key roles of metaphor is to give birth to new perspectives (Schon, 1993; Soyland, 1994), and this subsection addresses this aspect. Various features of the Icehotel offer new perspectives and novel insights for organizational analysis – from the idea (‘Surprise’) to construction (‘Unifinality’), to operation (‘Purity’), to death (‘Eco-coreness’) and finally to

re-construction ('Rebirth'). These five insights also happen to form the acronym SUPER, which aids memorability.

Surprise. The Icehotel symbolizes not just novelty for novelty's sake, but rather stands testimony to the power of creativity to consistently surprise and delight customers (as cued by the word 'Wow!' in the title of this article). The novelty is such that, for some people, spending a night in the Icehotel would be a dream come true – an item to tick off on their 'bucket list', as Bergqvist puts it (Von Essen, 2014). Moreover, this novelty is inextricably linked to customer delight. Customer delight is a strong, positive and emotional reaction which occurs when customers receive a service or product that not only satisfies but also provides unexpected value or unanticipated satisfaction (Chandler, 1989; Schlossberg, 1990). It is fundamentally different from customer satisfaction because evidence indicates that merely satisfying customers is not enough to retain them (Schneider and Bowen, 1999). Although a trip 200 miles inside the Arctic Circle during winter would typically be viewed as something only polar explorers would engage in, the Icehotel attracts between 50,000 and 60,000 ordinary people from all over the world to do precisely that. That the Icehotel has not fizzled out as a gimmicky 'flavour of the month' type attraction speaks to the power of the idea, the quality of its execution and the consequent customer delight.

Unifinality. Despite the surprising and creative idea that it is, if it is not implemented properly it will not have the desired impact. The Icehotel succeeds brilliantly in this regard, and in doing so introduces a new conceptualization, that is, *unifinality*, which is best understood as the opposite of the well-established *equifinality* construct (Gresov and Drazin, 1997). Drawing on Von Bertalanffy (1968), Morgan (2006) defined the *principle of equifinality* to imply that in open systems there may be different ways of arriving at a given end state. However, the Icehotel, despite being an open system, manifests unifinality (rather than equifinality), that is, only one way of arriving at a given end state. Specifically, the Icehotel metaphor contributes the *principle of unifinality*, which is defined as the uncompromising persistence, creativity and ingenuity required to achieve a particular end with particular means, as illustrated in the following paragraph.

The only way for the Icehotel to achieve its pristine, transparent aesthetic is to harvest the ice from the Torne River at a particular time of the year. The only way to harvest the ice such that it is useful for construction is to cut it cleanly and precisely with a special ice saw (whose design is an industrial secret), which was developed by the creators after they had failed with other technologies such as electrically heated wires, high-pressure water jets, and even laser beams. The only way for the harvested ice to be strong enough for construction is to allow it to settle for six months at a constant -5°C . The only form that allows the structure to be made of frozen water is the catenary arch. The only material that can be used to spray onto the metal catenary forms is snice (which is produced by special custom-designed machines), which hardens over a period of two days into a solid, strong casting. Thus, this series of very particular steps involved in its construction makes the Icehotel a metaphor for unifinality.

Purity. It is one thing to achieve the crystalline whiteness of the Icehotel, which symbolizes purity, virtuousness, integrity and authenticity in construction. It is quite another to maintain it while it is operating. The Icehotel manifests purity, both in its design and in its operation. In terms of design, ‘the believed intrinsic genuineness of the glacial water is the common denominator for the business. As a consequence, every activity and attraction connected to the Icehotel Company ought to be pervaded with such authenticity, like a radiating moral’ (Stromberg, 2009: 228). Robles and Wiberg (2011: 32) add that ‘in a design context that is so deeply committed to material integrity, any departures from or additions to the composition were subjected to rigorous aesthetic evaluation and debate’. They describe how a proposed collaboration between Icehotel and Swarovski was abandoned because of fundamental design incompatibilities (e.g. ice is temporary, but crystal is forever). They also describe an attempt to persuade its creators to introduce digital displays in the Icehotel, which failed because high-resolution screens would command inordinate attention, vitiating the immersive experience. As Robles and Wiberg (2011: 34) put it, ‘screens were potential threats to the integrity of Arctic ice’. Thus, the Icehotel symbolizes purity and a non-compromising approach to design, be it of organizations, products or services.

However, although design can be pure, when it encounters the real world, it could be compromised. The Icehotel’s white snow gets brown, grey and dirty very easily; hence, house-keeping staff constantly uses shovels, buckets and wheelbarrows to take out the dirty snow and to bring in fresh white snow. When they have changed the snow in the whole hotel, they start at the beginning again. This process could be considered the organizational analogue of an individual’s return to purity in a religious sense (e.g. confession for Christians, or bathing in the Ganges for Hindus), wherein the stain of sin is taken away and purity restored.

Eco-coreness. To paraphrase a popular phrase, the pure (like the good) die young, and in its death, the Icehotel yields another insight, that is, *eco-coreness*. When the forerunner of the Icehotel, an exhibition of ice art, melted because of unseasonal rain, Yngve Bergqvist, who organized it and has an environmental engineering background (Sarasvathy, 2010a), recalled thinking: ‘What are we doing? We are trying to preserve something that belongs to nature. Let it be destroyed and (let’s) make something new’ (Sarasvathy, 2010b: 2).

Thus, the Icehotel conceptualization at its core is meant to be natural, even though it is man-made. Further, the Icehotel metaphor would be particularly useful for scholars in the organizations and natural environment (ONE) research domain, which has been ‘marked by the use of particularly powerful metaphorical imagery and poetic technique. (Jermier and Forbes, 2011: 450)

It is an architectural analogue of such seminal literary works as Carson’s (1962) *Silent Spring*, Hawken’s (1993) *The Ecology of Commerce* and Merchant’s (1980) *The Death of Nature*.

The Icehotel metaphor draws attention to organizations that have ecology at their core. Unlike organizations that are described as *eco-friendly* because they engage in such practices as biodegradable products and packaging, using renewable energy and recycled materials, recycling waste, and reducing the carbon or environmental footprint, the Icehotel has ecology at its core.

Rebirth. After its eco-friendly demise, the Icehotel rises again to provide insights about *organizational rebirth*. All Morgan's (1986) metaphors, apart from *organizations as organisms* and *organizations as flux and transformation*, implicitly assume that organizations are permanent and ongoing. The organism metaphor focuses attention on the nature of life activity rather than death per se. Because every Icehotel is bound to die, death is central to this metaphor. It could, therefore, *prima facie*, be a metaphor for the population ecology perspective, which posits that organizations cannot adapt to environmental changes and therefore die. In the case of the Icehotel, this situation is not so. It is born again, rising from the frozen Tundra like a Phoenix, bigger and better each time, but essentially the same, thus shedding light on *organizational rebirth*.

The term 'organizational rebirth' does not have wide currency, and to the extent it exists in the literature it has been largely used in two senses: literal and metaphorical. The literal sense refers to corporate reorganization as a response to bankruptcy (e.g. Carruthers and Kim, 2011). The metaphorical sense, which is more appropriate for this article, refers to a quasi-psychological change in the organizational mindset (e.g. Zell, 2003). For instance, Zell (2003) found that the process of overcoming resistance to change (which was driven by environmental pressures) in the physics department of a large public university closely resembled that of death and dying identified by Kubler-Ross (1969) in her study of terminally ill patients. However, unlike this framing, the Icehotel's death is not triggered but planned, and its rebirth does not involve overcoming resistance. Thus, the Icehotel metaphor throws a new light on the critical features of organizational renewal from birth to death to rebirth. The cycle of birth–death–rebirth can also be viewed through the lens of Morgan's (1986) flux and transformation metaphor, which has the notion of circularity at its core. In a sense it manifests *autopoiesis*, which is 'the capacity for self-production through a closed system of relations' (Morgan, 1986: 243). Also, the Icehotel, despite being an entity, does not attempt to separate itself from its environment, and thus it manifests survival with (and never survival against) the environment (Morgan, 1986).

Potential limitations of the Icehotel metaphor

Having outlined some of its strengths, it would only be fair and germane to point out some potential limitations of the Icehotel metaphor. There is a danger that because some aspects of the Icehotel (e.g. eco-coreness) are very topical, it could be perceived as a *faddish metaphor*. Faddish metaphors promise 'to tackle specific problems or general issues of concern and remain current so long as they seem to provide a relevant way of thinking and/or delivering practical results' (Morgan, 2011: 470). However, the Icehotel itself is nearly 25 years old and is being introduced as a metaphor because it is unique, imaginative and generative, and not as a solution to the problems of global warming or climate change. Thus, it is not a fad but rather here to stay.

Another potential limitation could ironically be the purity of its purpose and uncompromising approach. If every entrepreneur decided to adopt a similar approach, then it is possible that there would be far more enterprise failures than there are currently, and the base rate of entrepreneurial failure is already quite high (Headd, 2003; Shook et al., 2003). Having said that, if one is going to fail, surely it is better that one fails gloriously. Yet, another

potential limitation is that it is most useful for specialist or niche organizations, which tend to make up a small (but distinctive) segment of any business category. Enterprises that are generalist, mass-market, and have more mundane objectives of making profits and keeping shareholders satisfied may (unfortunately) find the Icehotel metaphor somewhat irrelevant.

The Icehotel as metonymy

Having considered the most dominant master trope, that is, metaphor, I now begin the examination of the other three master tropes. The traditionally strong focus on metaphors has resulted in the role of other tropes, particularly metonymy, being neglected (Cornelissen, 2008; Putnam and Fairhurst, 2001). Metonymy and synecdoche are closely related, and considerable confusion surrounds both (Oswick et al., 2004). Some scholars define metonymy as part-whole substitution and synecdoche as whole-part substitution (Manning, 1979; Putnam, 2004). Others have considered synecdoche to be a form of metonymy (e.g. Forsyth, 2013), whereas still others (e.g. Seto, 1999) have argued that synecdoche should be independent of metonymy. The confusion results from the fact that both involve contiguous mapping (Cornelissen, 2008), and the 'part-whole' concept is typically used in both. Seto (1999: 91) has an entire chapter dedicated to 'distinguishing metonymy from synecdoche' in which he refers to entity-related 'part-whole' transfer (e.g. arm for body) as metonymy, and category-related 'part-whole' transfer (e.g. fir for tree) as synecdoche, and this delineation will be followed in this article. 'While metaphor creates new insights by generating images of "wholes", metonymy and synecdoche fragment and elaborate images in a definitional sense, "seeing" the parts that form the whole and their interrelations' (Morgan, 1983: 602).

Thus, 'metonymy is a referential transfer phenomenon based on the spatio-temporal contiguity as conceived by the speaker between an entity and another in the (real) world' (Seto, 1999: 91), whereas synecdoche 'is a conceptual transfer phenomenon based on the semantic inclusion between a more comprehensive and a less comprehensive category' (Seto, 1999: 92). Metonymy is an example of paronymy, that is, based on real-world constitutive relations, whereas synecdoche is related to taxonomy, that is, mental classifications or reclassifications of categories (Seto, 1999). Thus, Manning's (1979) example of 'red sails' to indicate a 'boat' would be metonymy and not synecdoche as he suggests. Seto (1999) distinguishes between different categories of metonymy, that is, spatial (e.g. *whole-part*), temporal (e.g. *preceding-ensuing*) and abstract (i.e. *object-property*), each of which may have one or more subtypes. Drawing on these conceptualizations, the description of the Icehotel as 'it is inspiration, frozen' (*Megastructures* documentary) could be interpreted as a metonymy because a part, or a property, of the Icehotel is used to refer to it as whole. In fact, in this case, there are two metonymies, namely, an abstract property (i.e. inspiration) and a physical property (i.e. frozen-ness) of the object (i.e. the Icehotel), are combined to refer to the Icehotel as a whole.

Frisson and Pickering (1999) delineate several subtypes of metonymy including *producer for product* and *object used for user*. Also, Paradis (2004) parses part-whole metonymy into two further categories based on role, that is, *constitution* (which includes the static aspects) and *function* (which includes the dynamic aspects). The Icehotel's description as 'a living piece of art' (*Megastructures* documentary) can be interpreted as

object–property (Icehotel-art) metonymy related to its *function*. The Icehotel’s founder Yngve Bergqvist tends to use metonymy frequently. For instance, his statement that it borrows the water of the Torne River, the Icehotel’s mother (Von Essen, 2014), encompasses several metonymies. Firstly, ‘it borrows’ refers to one part of the Icehotel, that is, the ice, and is applied to the Icehotel as a whole (*whole–part* metonymy). Secondly, it has aspects of *object used for user* and *preceding–ensuing* metonymy subtypes related to its *function*. Thirdly, the ‘Icehotel’s mother’ could be a *producer for product* metonymy related to its *constitution*. Again, Bergqvist in humorous reference to the ice glasses says, ‘have a drink in your ice’, which could be an *object–property* (ice glass–ice) metonymy with regard to its *constitution*.

Bergqvist’s frequent use of metonymy speaks to one of its key benefits for leaders: to facilitate the articulation of mundane organizational aspects in more sophisticated and sublime ways such that they inspire and motivate both employees and customers. It thus responds to Cornelissen’s (2008: 98) call for research on the role that metonymies play within language use across contexts, including individuals who work within the organization, such as CEOs. The Icehotel as metonymy also provides further evidence with regard to Cornelissen’s (2008: 94) research questions, that is, ‘What is the incidence of metonymies in talk about organizations?’ and ‘What different kinds or categories of metonymies feature in people’s talk about organizations?’.

The Icehotel as synecdoche

Whereas there are multiple subtypes of metonymy, there are only two subtypes of synecdoche, that is, transfer from species to genus, and transfer from genus to species (Seto, 1999). Examples of the former include using *walkman* for portable stereos, or *xerox* for photocopying, where the species, that is, Walkman or Xerox (which are proper nouns), have become common nouns for their respective categories (Seto, 1999). Examples of the latter include referring to fever as a ‘temperature’ or referring to a traffic ticket simply as a ‘ticket’, where ‘temperature’ and ‘ticket’ are broader categories than what they are referring to. The Icehotel organization is an exemplar of the former subtype, that is, transfer from species to genus. In time, the word ‘icehotel’ could become a common noun or generic term (like *walkman* or *xerox*) for temporary organizations or for paradoxical organizations (which will be discussed in the next section).

A *temporary organization* is defined as ‘a set of diversely skilled people working together on a complex task over a limited period of time’ (Goodman and Goodman, 1976: 494). The Icehotel construction team comprises a set of diversely skilled people (i.e. architects, builders, sculptors) who work together to build the Icehotel edifice (which is a complex task) over a limited period of time. Thus, the Icehotel is a species of the genus ‘temporary organization’. Bakker (2010) organizes her review of temporary organizational forms along four themes, that is, time, team, task and context, and each of these is germane to the Icehotel. It helps answer some of her key questions in each of these themes as follows: (i) *time* – ‘what is the effect of time limits on processes, functioning, behavior and performance?’; (ii) *team* – ‘how do groups of people in temporary organizational systems resolve issues of vulnerability, uncertainty and risk?’; (iii) *task* – ‘how do temporary organizational forms execute tasks more effectively?’; and (iv)

context – ‘what is the impact of embeddedness in the wider exterior context on interior processes of temporary organizational forms?’ (Bakker, 2010: 472).

Temporary organizations include those where both the team and the output is temporary, for example, theatre productions, as well as those where the team is temporary but the output is permanent, for example, construction projects (Bakker, 2010). Despite being a construction project, the Icehotel belongs to the former category, that is, both the team and the output are temporary. Yet, unlike theatre productions, which, barring some notable exceptions, run for a few weeks or months, the Icehotel is now 25 years old, which is the lifespan of a typical non-temporary organization (Porsander, 2000). It thus provides a template or blue-print for organizations that want to combine longevity with temporariness.

The Icehotel as irony

Paradox, along with sarcasm, satire, parody and understatement, are forms of the irony master trope (Oswick et al., 2004). Of the forms of irony, paradox has begun to appear increasingly in organization studies (Lewis, 2000), and the Icehotel which, as pointed out earlier, is paradoxical to its core, is a natural candidate to contribute to this research stream. The paradox intrinsic to the Icehotel is manifested in Bergqvist’s notes for his pitch to *Absolut* (the Swedish vodka that is the third largest spirits brand in the world), wherein he writes, ‘Here, have a drink in your ice ... not, ice in your drink ... Skol!’ (Sarasvathy, 2010b). Thus, like the T’ai-chi T’u, the Taoist symbol of Yin and Yang, the Icehotel ‘signifies a natural wholeness composed of contradictions; (Lewis, 2000: 762). Further, the opposing connotations of ‘ice’ and ‘hotel’ juxtaposed in the Icehotel shock audiences and undermine their set opinions and presumptions, thereby fulfilling Poole and Van de Ven’s (1989) definition of paradox. According to Poole and Van de Ven (1989: 563), ‘paradox designates a trope which presents an opposition between two accepted theses’ intended to cause the audience to re-consider set opinions or to throw into contrast taken-for-granted presumptions. Its impact stems from its shock value’.

The Icehotel organization could be considered to be a species of the genus ‘paradoxical organization’. The term *paradoxical organization* is not well-defined but has been used in the literature to refer to organizations that have a paradox, or an opposition between two accepted theses, at the core of their purpose or institutional logic. For instance, colleges and universities are paradoxical organizations because they are sustained by society in a sense to be critical of it (King, 1997). Similarly, non-profit hospitals are paradoxical organizations because they have to juggle economic sustainability along with their social objectives (Meyer et al., 2014).

Individual organizations, such as *The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFL-CIO)* (Kramer, 1962) and *Credit Mutuel* (Jardat, 2008) have been labelled as paradoxical organizations – the former because, despite being a ‘national’ union, it includes state, county and local employees (Kramer, 1962), and the latter because it is not only a typical retail bank involved in insurance and other financial service activities, but it also competes with corporations without being one of them (Jardat, 2008). Similar to these organizations, the Icehotel is paradoxical at its core, as is evident from the name which is a portmanteau that combines two words with opposing connotations: ‘ice’ (cold, harsh, dangerous) and ‘hotel’ (warmth, comfort, safety). Although a

hotel's primary function is to provide hospitality and comfort, Bergh insists, 'We would not like to make it too comfortable, then it is not an ice hotel' (*Megastructures* documentary).

Interestingly, the Icehotel is not only paradoxical but also illustrative of ways by which paradoxes can be addressed or reconciled. It harmonizes opposing elements (i.e. ice and hotel) and is therefore illustrative of synthesis, one of Poole and Van de Ven's (1989) four ways of addressing paradoxes (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989). It also illustrates Beech et al.'s (2004) *serious play* model of paradox resolution.

Drawing on Gergen (1992), Beech et al.'s (2004) model includes four key aspects: (i) not only rationality but also desire and emotion; (ii) not only conformity to rules but also creatively challenging them; (iii) jokes, puns and postures that rely on words and gestures having multiple meanings; and (iv) challenging normal boundaries through experimentation. The Icehotel exemplifies all these aspects, that is, rationality, passion, conformity, creativity, humour, and redefining 'normal' through experimentation. Martocchio and Webster (1992: 556) focus on cognitive or intellectual playfulness, which is relevant to the Icehotel's members' search for solutions to construction-related challenges. This is the 'serious' aspect. However, there is an aspect of tactile, childlike playfulness that may be even more relevant. Building the Icehotel as an adult is as much fun as building a sandcastle as a child, as these quotations from the *Megastructures* documentary testify. Dave Ruane, from Ireland, who has been a regular construction team-member says, 'Come here and play around in the snow ... it's like starting a second childhood when I'm 30'. Creative Director Arne Bergh says people are attracted to the project because 'it's doing what you do as a child, but as an adult, doing it as a profession'.

This playfulness is also evident in the humorous notices at the London Icebar that include, 'please don't lick the ice (you don't know where it's been ...)' and 'please don't remove your capes, gloves, or your undergarments' (the capes and gloves are provided by the Icebar). The Icehotel has become one of the coolest places to stay on the planet (Smythe, 2012), and the title of this article reiterates the pun on the word 'cool' and echoes the spirit of playfulness. Further, this playfulness and foolishness is functional because it contributes to exploration, which, in turn, counters the extreme exploitation-orientation of disposable organizations (March, 1995). The Icehotel also resonates with the emergent body of research on fun and engagement in the workplace (Bolton and Houlihan, 2009; Tews et al., 2014).

Apart from its core paradox, the Icehotel incorporates four other paradoxes, that is, evolutionary yet revolutionary, negative as a positive, different yet similar, and unsustainably sustainable, which are described in the following four subsections. These Icehotel-derived paradoxes exemplify system contradictions because they are related to such aspects as the goals and resource demands of the organization (Putnam, 1986).

The evolutionary yet revolutionary paradox. In a sense, the Icehotel is just a more sophisticated igloo. In fact, the first 'hotel' was a cylinder-shaped igloo. Yet, in another sense, the Icehotel is nothing like an igloo. An igloo is a type of shelter built by the Inuit. The Icehotel is not a house but a hotel. Whereas igloos are built by and for people who are native

to the area, the Icehotel is designed for guests from all over the world. Further, igloos are rather small, having up to five rooms. The Icehotel is spread over 6,000 square meters and has 65–80 rooms. Whereas the igloo is free-standing, the Icehotel comprises large domes supported by columns of blocks of ice. In addition, the Icehotel has continued to evolve. Thus, it is both evolutionary and revolutionary. Whereas the management literature has typically considered these two states as dichotomous (e.g. Miller, 1982), in the case of the Icehotel the distinction is not that sharp.

The negative as a positive paradox. ‘Instead of viewing the dark and cold elements of winter as disadvantages, Bergqvist treated the unique elements of the Arctic as assets’ (Sarasvathy, 2010b: 2). The Icehotel creators looked past the hostile environment to focus on the natural beauty, the light and the *aurora borealis* to create a warm and hospitable atmosphere. Guests sleep in thermal sleeping bags on mattresses and reindeer skins that are placed on beds that are blocks of ice. Apparently, most guests are surprised when they wake up because they have slept really well (*Megastructures* documentary). Gertner and Kotler (2004) delineate three distinct ways by which negative conceptions and attitudes toward a specific place could be overcome, that is, ignore it, turn the negative element into a positive element, and add new positive characteristics. They cite the Icehotel as an exemplar of the second strategy, wherein the extreme climate is used as an attraction, bringing business during the extremely cold winter months and promoting the area as a tourist destination.

The different yet same paradox. The stated goal of the Icehotel’s creators is that every incarnation of it is different from the previous one. Hence, one year they did not re-create the giant crystal chandelier which had been a recurring feature of previous Icehotels; however, this led to dissatisfaction on the part of the guests who had arrived expecting to see it (from seeing photographs). This reaction, in turn, resulted in the creators bringing it back the next year and overcompensating by constructing four chandeliers instead of one! The chandelier is now a permanent (i.e. recurring), defining feature of the Icehotel. This paradox suggests that even organizational design that is predicated on extreme innovation needs to have some design elements that stay constant. The challenge for managers and leaders would be to determine which changes would upset the customers and which changes would not.

The unsustainably sustainable paradox. The Icehotel could also be considered a *disposable organization* because every time it is created it is used for just one season and then disposes of itself. March (1995: 434) describes disposable (*throw-away*) organizations as those that have ‘considerable short-run efficiency at exploiting and refining current capabilities, but only modest adaptive durability’. The Icehotel, indeed, has modest adaptive durability, but unlike the organizations described by March (1995), this is by design. Hence, the Icehotel could be labelled more appropriately as a *disposable-by-design organization*. Also, although disposable organizations are problematic because they are inconsistent with social, political and moral systems, the Icehotel is completely consistent with its social context. It is not only highly profitable (Sarasvathy, 2010b) but also

creates employment for the local populace in the bleak, winter months. Further, it has made tiny, remote Jukkasjärvi a world famous tourist destination.

The Icehotel could be considered a single-use product, like plastic bottles and grocery bags, which tend to be the target of eco-warriors because, even though they are recyclable, they are not biodegradable, and disposing of them results in mountainous landfills and other problems. However, even though the Icehotel is a single-use organization, it does not have the negative consequences of disposability. Each Icehotel emerges from the Torne River and disappears into it at the end of its life, leaving no trace of its existence and leaving the environment as pristine as it was, despite the huge influx of visitors and all the concomitant activity. Also, it actually increases eco-tourism and celebrates the splendour of the natural world. Thus, though it is superficially unsustainable, at a deeper level the Icehotel promotes sustainability. This finding stands in contrast to the unethical practices of misrepresenting products so as to promote the perception that they are environmentally friendly when, in fact, they are not (*greenwashing*; see Laufer, 2003).

Discussion and implications

I organize this section around three sub-sections. First, I summarize the contribution of the Icehotel as an organizational trope. Then, I delineate the implications of the Icehotel trope for future research. Finally, I delineate the implications of the Icehotel trope for practitioners.

Contribution of the Icehotel as an organizational trope

The Icehotel uniquely contributes to the understanding and application of all four master tropes. It is thus simultaneously a manifestation and a validation of Morgan's (1983, 2011) view that all four master tropes are interconnected. Whereas work on these tropes has been typically empirical (Oswick et al., 2004), this article uses them to promote theory development. The Icehotel illustrates Morgan's (2011) view that organizations are multidimensional, social constructed realities that could encompass complementary and conflicting aspects.

Metaphor. The Icehotel not only extends the list of metaphors identified by Morgan (1986) but also complements them by nature of its being intermediate (rather than root or deep) and sparking further research on this neglected category of metaphors. It provides a new lens to examine both concepts that were included in Morgan's (1986) original eight metaphors (e.g. open/closed systems, homeostatis, flux and transformation, entrainment) and other existing constructs (e.g. bricolage, effectuation, duality of purpose). The Icehotel metaphor also contributes to the literature on *multiparadigm inquiry* (Lewis and Keleman, 2002) and the *meta-paradigmatic perspective* (Dewulf et al., 2009), and could help scholars learn to treat paradigms as detailing different layers of meaning (Morgan, 1983). Also, it could prevent scholars and practitioners from falling into the trap of adopting the assumptions of the underlying sociological paradigm of their preferred metaphor (Morgan, 2011).

Metonymy and synecdoche. The Icehotel draws attention to these relatively neglected master tropes. Further, it helps distinguish between these two frequently confused tropes. With regard to metonymy, it simultaneously adds to Cornelissen's (2008) work on the incidence of different kinds of metonymies in organizational studies, and responds to his call for further research on the role metonymies play in the language of CEOs. With regard to synecdoche, the Icehotel provides an exemplar of the species to genus subtype, with regard to two genera – temporary organizations and paradoxical organizations. It could therefore facilitate new perspectives and better understanding of these important forms of organizing.

Paradox. The Icehotel is not only paradoxical at its core but also manifests the synthesis and serious play approaches to addressing contradictions. Thus, the Icehotel symbolizes the power inherent in paradox when it is deliberately created rather than assiduously avoided. It spawns four new paradoxes including evolutionary yet revolutionary, negative as well as positive, different yet similar and unsustainably sustainable.

Implications for future research

Metaphors are paradoxical by nature because they are simultaneously both insightful and distorting (Morgan, 2011); but because the Icehotel metaphor is paradoxical at its core, viewing organizations through it could be meta-paradoxical or meta-metaphorical. Future research could attempt to find other meta-metaphors in the management field (cf. poetry as a meta-metaphor for narrative therapy; Snyder, 1996).

Further, the Icehotel embodies the triumph of the human spirit against all odds. Unlike Morgan's (2006) metaphors, which may be considered emotional or psychologically neutral (i.e. machines, organisms, brains, culture, flux and transformation) or negative (i.e. political systems, psychic prisons and instruments of domination), the Icehotel is inarguably positive, whether it is regarded as an enterprise or as an annual art installation. The Icehotel is an organization that enables positive experiences, such as hope, creativity, courage, confidence and perseverance. Yet, it also exemplifies the unity of the positive and the negative (Fineman, 2006). In this way it parallels some of the work done in the positive organizational scholarship (POS) (Cameron et al., 2003) and positive organizational behaviour fields (POB) (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008; Luthans, 2002).

Although metaphors have been used to describe the POS field as a whole (e.g. 'old wine in newer bottles', 'new restaurant': Luthans and Avolio, 2009) or to describe a particular aspect (e.g. 'tending wounds', 'organizational healing process': Powley and Piderit, 2008), work at the intersection of these research streams and organizational tropes is limited, and the Icehotel could fill this gap. The Icehotel in an understated but no less effective manner, along with brands such as Absolut Vodka, H&M and Ikea, has contributed to the national image of Sweden as a cool (no pun intended), design-oriented, ecologically conscious country. In fact, Saab, the Swedish automobile company, attempted to position itself as a creative Scandinavian company by associating itself with the Arctic coolness of the Icehotel (Stromberg, 2009). The relationship between an individual organization, especially if it is distinctive, contextually derived and highly successful, and its parent-country image is manifested in the Icehotel metaphor. Other cases

where a similar phenomenon has occurred include Coca-Cola (America) and the BBC (Great Britain). What makes an organization symbolic of its parent country is a question that could be explored in the future. Future work could unpack the characteristics of the Icehotel that enable it to provide this unique perspective, thereby spurring research into finding other images that could play a similar role.

Implications for practitioners

Each aspect of the Icehotel metaphor has implications for practitioners. ‘Surprise’ is embedded in such management shibboleths as *customer delight* (Oliver et al., 1997), *wowing the customer* (Leonard, 1987; Nowak et al., 2006) and *innovative thinking* (Harrison and Horne, 1999). ‘Unifinality’ resonates with concepts such as the ‘slow food movement’ (Leitch, 2003; Miele and Murdoch, 2002), ‘bespoke tailoring’ and other approaches that focus on selling uniqueness (Ross, 1996). It also speaks to the role of persistence, which has been found to be a trait associated with leadership (Stogdill, 1948). In particular, Stogdill (1948) found that great face-to-face leaders were characterized by ‘persistence in the face of obstacles’ and the ‘tendency not to abandon tasks from mere changeability’. ‘Purity’ reinforces the need for organizational authenticity, integrity and ethical corporate behaviour (Schwartz, 2001; Weaver et al., 1999). The Icehotel as an ‘eco-core organization’ would encourage entrepreneurs and leaders to find ways to design organizations and products creatively to be totally in sync with the environment. The concept of ‘organizational rebirth’ in its fullest sense could be a powerful metaphor for fundamental change, perhaps even more so than concepts like ‘organizational transformation’, because it would imply ‘death’ of the old and resurrection of the new (Zell, 2003). Interestingly, the Icehotel could also be a metaphor for Lewin’s (1947) classic change management framework, (i.e. *unfreezing–movement–refreezing*), which was also published in this journal.

The Icehotel also, uniquely, provides an exemplar of both a type of paradoxical tension, that is, *system contradictions* (Putnam, 1986), and an approach to reconciling contradictions, that is, *serious play* (Beech et al., 2004; Gergen, 1992). It could therefore provide a blueprint for entrepreneurs and founders to develop innovative organizations that productively incorporate contradictions at their core. Thus, the Icehotel encourages practitioners to embrace paradoxes and avoid linear approaches, such as over-focus on short-term profitability. It encourages them to identify and reconcile tensions that may emanate from multiple stakeholders in a balanced manner that is conducive to long-term organizational success (Dodd and Favaro, 2006; Kaplan and Norton, 1996). Finally, the uncompromising approach of the Icehotel’s founders and their success in turning a negative into a positive could provide valuable lessons to practitioners. These could include not just surviving but thriving in adverse environments, decision-making under conditions of risk, and leadership and teamwork under time pressures.

In conclusion, the Icehotel has many unique and idiosyncratic characteristics that lend themselves to its elaboration as a multifaceted organizational trope. It encompasses all four master tropes. It is therefore an important addition to the lexicon of organizational

images, and it provides not only breadth of perspectives but also depth of understanding in its important implications for both scholarship and practice.

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