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Organizations, Metaphors and Paradigms in

This article comprises two sections. The first commences with a definition of metaphor. It then goes on to familiarize the reader with two key areas of debate and discussion concerning metaphor's usage in organization science. One concerns the status accorded to metaphor. The other relates to attempts to place different kinds of metaphor into hierarchical and nonhierarchical typologies. The second section of the article focuses on paradigms. The section commences with a definition of paradigms and a discussion of Kuhn's seminal (1970) work. It then examines how organization theorists have developed Kuhn's work and explores its utility in the context of organization science. In so doing, an important link between metaphor and paradigm is highlighted—one which reiterates and demonstrates the pervasiveness of metaphor within the field of organization science. In short, paradigms related to the study of organizations are shown to be influenced by dominant, but often underlying, metaphors.

1. Defining Metaphor

Metaphors may be seen as the outcome of a cognitive process that is in constant use—a process in which the literal meaning of a phrase or word is applied to a new context in a figurative sense. In this respect metaphors have an important role to play where individuals attempt to make sense of their environment. Metaphors enable the transfer of information about a relatively familiar subject (often referred to as the source or base domain) to a new and relatively unknown subject (often referred to as the target domain). What is more, when people assert that 'subject A is, or is like B, the processes of comparison, substitution, and interaction between the images of A and B act as generators of new meaning' (Morgan 1980, p. 610). Metaphors therefore have a 'generative' quality (Schön 1993). More specifically, and in the context of this article, their generative quality can be used to bring into existence new perspectives on organizations.

2. Metaphor and its Status in Organization Science

The legitimacy and value of metaphor in the social sciences, especially in relation to organization science, have been the subject of considerable debate. The debate centers on the relevance and appropriateness of what a metaphor generates—whether it is anything that actually increases knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under consideration. Thus, and as Grant and Oswick (1996) have noted, it is not so much the existence of metaphors in organization science that is called into question by the literature, rather it is whether metaphors should be accorded a positive or negative status.

2.1 Positive Status

The suggestion that metaphors ought to be accorded a positive status in relation to organization science is based on the belief that metaphors are—in line with

their generative capacity—'liberating' in orientation. They entail using a combination of both language and thought to construct a nonliteral meaning and apply it to reality in order to shape and enhance appreciation of that reality. Seen in this light metaphors can be viewed as powerful educational devices that are highly correlated with learning. As such, they are important to the advancement of knowledge and understanding.

The liberating orientation of metaphors manifests itself in several ways. Three in particular merit attention. First, the application of a metaphor may lead to a familiar situation being seen in a completely new and highly informative light. It was this that led Tsoukas (1991, p. 566) to note how metaphors generate alternative social realities since they '…encourage different ways of thinking, which enable social scientists and lay people alike to focus upon, explain, and influence different aspects of complex organizational phenomena.'

A second interpretation of the liberating role of metaphors is one that focuses on the value of metaphor where it facilitates the learning of new knowledge. The emphasis here is not about metaphor's role in the reinterpretation of already known phenomena, but on its value where something is encountered that is a completely new experience. As an example Barrett and Cooperrider (1990, p. 223) discuss the case of a science student unable to grasp the structure of the atom. Getting the student to use the metaphor 'the atom is a solar system' portrays the electrons moving in individual orbits about a central nucleus and allows new understanding to emerge.

The third way in which metaphors have been described as liberating follows on from the first two interpretations. Its proponents emphasize that the application of metaphor to either new or existing phenomena is in itself a process of experimentation. In keeping with this line of argument, metaphor can therefore be deliberately used as an investigative tool. Such an approach is highly apparent in numerous analyses of organizations and more specifically the organizational change and development literatures (Barrett and Cooperrider 1990) (see *Organizational Change* and *Development: Organizational*).

2.2 Negative Status

The positive status accorded to metaphors is not one that is universally shared. Two main criticisms are apparent and both suggest that far from being liberating, metaphors can actually act to constrain knowledge. The first of these criticisms is that if science is about exactitude, then it follows that something which is applied in a figurative sense cannot be of any use to scientific investigation. In short, metaphors do not offer testable hypotheses and do not therefore allow 'truths' to be established. Taking this argument to its logical conclusion would mean that if metaphors are of no scientific value then the apparent reliance on

metaphor in the organizational literature means that the term organization *science* is a misnomer. Furthermore, the idea that metaphors are simply nonliteral devices that need to be purged from scientific language is in line with the nonconstructivist view of the world. It is a view under which science is the only route to understanding human lived reality.

Tsoukas (1993, p. 326) has argued that metaphor's scientific credentials and therefore its liberating value can be challenged in three further ways. First, metaphors are generally 'imprecise' in that they do not create a theoretical definition of whatever it is that is under scrutiny. Consequently, one cannot tell whether the characteristics of the phenomenon being studied are theoretically relevant or irrelevant. Second, there is no way of measuring the 'goodness of fit' of a metaphor. To work, it relies on recognition of how and why the source domain of the metaphor is useful when applied to the target domain. But quantifying the extent of its success in achieving this is difficult. Moreover, the application of a metaphor is in fact a personalized cognitive process. Thus, a particular metaphor may work well for one person, but not so well, if at all, for another. Third, there is the possibility that a metaphor can be pushed too far, especially where the source concept was originally developed for use in a different scientific field. The borrowing of a scientific concept needs to be 'informed,' but it is argued that most scientists have insufficient knowledge of other disciplines for this to be a realistic proposition. Metaphors are thus put to use with scant regard for their limitations and relevance and in such situations serve no useful scientific purpose.

The second criticism of metaphors is less concerned with their scientific credentials than with their ability to reify and act as ideological distortions (Tinker 1986). A number of metaphors used in organizational analysis might be construed as 'socially partisan' in that they play down structural conflicts and fail to identify inequalities of power. For example, representation of organizations as biological, organismic, or mechanical entities (see *Closed and Open Systems: Organizational*) means that they are expected to behave automatically in ways that are in keeping with such entities and that such behavior is accepted without question. The reality is that organizations are subject to the actions of management and the owners of capital. In short, metaphors create a 'false consciousness,' one that shields organizations from any critical social analysis. For those who subscribe to this view, metaphors will only be of value where they explain and recognize social inequality and domination.

3. Types of Metaphor

A second debate surrounding metaphor concerns types of metaphor (Grant and Oswick 1996). Those involved in the debate believe metaphors can be liberating and accord them positive status, but they

also believe that the extent to which metaphors achieve this is influenced by type. A number of typologies are apparent. In essence they can be broken down into two groups—hierarchical and nonhierarchical.

3.1 Hierarchical Typologies of Metaphor

Hierarchical typologies of metaphors start with those which most influence ways of thinking about and viewing the world, and work down to those which are of minor or peripheral significance. While this is helpful in differentiating each type of metaphor on the basis of its liberating tendencies, it is also a view that has its limitations and needs to be qualified. A hierarchy could imply that it is possible to measure the impact of one type of metaphor against another. This is an impossible task; the cognitive nature of metaphors combined with their reliance on figurative language means their effects are unquantifiable and unmeasurable.

Black (1993) presents a hierarchical typology of metaphors in which metaphors are either 'strong' or 'weak.' A strong metaphor incorporates 'emphasis' and 'resonance.' Emphasis is where the words used to apply the metaphor are so effective that they express the inexpressible and cannot be substituted or varied. Resonance means that once the metaphor is understood it lends itself to further elaboration and proves to have numerous further applications. In contrast, a weak metaphor is neither emphatic nor resonant and 'might be compared to an unfunny joke, or an unilluminating philosophical epigram' (Black 1993, p. 26).

An alternative example of a hierarchical typology is the distinction made between 'surface' and 'deep' metaphors (Schön 1993). A deep metaphor is one which determines the key features of the idea or object being examined. It forms the basis on which subsequent surface level metaphors are formed. An example of a deep metaphor might be the metaphor of the organization as a human entity. The subsequent development of surface metaphors such as organizational intelligence, behavior, and learning (see *Intelligence: Organizational* and *Learning: Organizational*) are all based on this deeper metaphor but in discussing them the word human is not used.

3.2 Nonhierarchical Typologies of Metaphor

Instead of imposing relative values on the different types of metaphor they identify, nonhierarchical typologies of metaphor focus on understanding how each type of metaphor works, and when and where each type is used. Two typologies merit attention. The first concerns dead, live, and dormant metaphors.

Dead metaphors are described as having 'become so familiar and so habitual that we have ceased to be aware of their metaphorical nature and use them as literal terms' (Tsoukas 1991, p. 568). An example of such a metaphor would be the 'teeth' of a saw. On their own, dead metaphors are unable to generate any useful insights about the particular phenomenon they describe. Thus, the dead metaphor of organization (taken from the Greek word *organon*, meaning tool), offers us few insights into understanding organizational phenomena such as training, development, leadership, and motivation. For this to occur we may need to use live metaphors. Live metaphors necessitate creativity on the part of those applying them—i.e., they require interpretation and need to be thought through in order to work. Their appeal is that 'they particularly lend themselves to further conceptual development' (Tsoukas 1991, p. 568). Dormant metaphors, while used as literal terms, are distinguishable from dead metaphors in that they are really semiliteral. At first sight, the metaphorical basis of the words and phrases they encompass is not obvious, but becomes quickly apparent. Consequently, they play a positive role in organization science—examples include organizational behavior or organizational structure. Dormant metaphors may develop into either dead or live metaphors.

A second nonhierarchical typology of metaphors concerns the 'deductive' vs. 'inductive' approach to their application (Palmer and Dunford 1996). The deductive approach involves imposing a metaphor on a particular organizational phenomenon and then seeing if it generates new knowledge, insight, or understanding. The inductive approach seeks to identify the underlying metaphors that are already in use and which influence people's ways of thinking and seeing.

4. Defining Paradigms

The term paradigm is derived from the ancient Greek *paradeigma* and refers to a framework, pattern, or model. Paradigms regularly feature in debates about organization theory. For example, there is a plethora of literature concerned with the idea of organizations moving from one paradigm to another in order to understand and cope better with changes in the business environment.

Although this article is concerned with the application of paradigms to an aspect of the social sciences—specifically organization studies—it is necessary to commence with a discussion of Kuhn's seminal (1970) work on paradigms in relation to the natural sciences. Kuhn was a historian of science. His basic premise was that the role of paradigms in scientific development was as 'universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners' (Kuhn 1970, p. viii). As such, paradigms determine the development of what Kuhn termed

'normal science.' Normal science requires scientists to extend existing knowledge within a known and accepted paradigm. The scientific problems they investigate are perceived as puzzles which are solvable within the pattern of rules and assumptions that exist within the paradigm. If the scientists fail to solve the puzzle, then it is their fault; the fault does not lie within the paradigm itself. Normal science is in contrast to relatively short bursts of 'revolutionary science' where the scientist encounters increasingly perplexing anomalies, 'whose characteristic feature is their stubborn refusal to be assimilated into existing paradigms' (Kuhn 1970, p. 97). This situation gives rise to a new theory or theories and with it a new paradigm such as occurred with the shift from the Ptolemaic system, where the earth was the fixed center of the universe, to that of Copernicus, with the earth and planets moving about the sun (Kuhn 1970, pp. 116–17). The theory underpinning the new paradigm permits predictions that are incompatible with those of its predecessor. In the process of being assimilated into the thinking of the scientific community, the new paradigm displaces its predecessor.

5.   *Paradigms and Organization Science*

Kuhn's work on paradigms has been subject to a number of interpretations within the social sciences. In the context of organization science, probably the most authoritative and influential application is that of Burrell and Morgan (1979). These two researchers explore the role of paradigms as views of social reality. For them, social theory in general, and organization theory in particular, is best analyzed in terms of four key paradigms—functionalist, interpretive, radical-humanist, and radical-structuralist—that represent four 'mutually exclusive views of the social world' (Burrell and Morgan 1979, p. viii). When applied to the study of organizations, each paradigm generates theories and perspectives, which are in opposition to those generated in the other paradigms. Each also reflects a group of related schools of thought. Though these schools of thought may take differing approaches and perspectives, they share common assumptions about the nature of society and more specifically organizations.

Burrell and Morgan apply the term 'paradigm' in a far broader sense than Kuhn. In so doing, they argue that social theory can be understood to comprise the four distinct but *coexisting* paradigms they identify. Under these circumstances, the sort of revolutionary shift in knowledge and thinking that Kuhn talked about is unlikely to occur since all possible paradigms are believed to be already in existence. Moreover, researchers within each paradigm are unlikely to be interested in, or have a detailed knowledge of, rival paradigms and instead continue to seek to extend, justify, prove, and defend the assumptions underlying

their own. This is a point disputed by, for example, Giddens (1976) who has argued that researchers are aware of other paradigms since in their efforts to understand their own paradigm they must also learn what that paradigm does not encompass. More recently, postmodernist interpretations of paradigms have encouraged the social scientist to move from one paradigm to another, to adopt a multiple paradigm perspective, and not to privilege any one paradigm at the expense of others (see for example Hassard and Parker 1993). Such an approach allows the researcher to understand and appreciate that alternative realities exist concerning particular organizational phenomena. Furthermore, it may also facilitate the generation of a new perspective on the phenomena under consideration.

6.   *Paradigms as Metatheories*

Underlying Burrell and Morgan's work is the belief that each of the paradigms they identify is underpinned by 'sets of metatheoretical assumptions about the nature of social science and the nature of society' (Burrell and Morgan 1979, p. viii). In a later work, Morgan (1980, p. 607) examined this issue in more detail suggesting that: 'any metatheoretical paradigm or world view may include different schools of thought, which are often different ways of approaching and studying a shared reality or world view.' He goes on to argue that: 'schools of thought in social science, those communities of theorists subscribing to relatively coherent perspectives, are based upon the acceptance and use of different kinds of metaphor as a foundation for inquiry.' Thus, the various research activities of social scientists are influenced by what can be termed the 'deep' metaphor (see discussion above) underpinning their particular school of thought. Furthermore, any insights into the various phenomena they investigate are generated in accordance with the explicit or implicit application of the deep metaphor to which they subscribe.

Social scientists need to practice a degree of reflexivity so that they are able to recognize that their research activities are linked to favored metaphors and therefore a favored view of reality. As Morgan points out, such recognition enables researchers to appreciate their role in relation to the social construction of social science knowledge especially where it pertains to organizations. Accordingly, he identifies a number of the key organization-targeted metaphors that are utilized by exponents of particular schools of thought within each one of the four social science paradigms (Morgan 1980, pp. 613–19). These may be summarized as follows below.

In the case of the *functionalist* paradigm, society is assumed to have a concrete and systematic existence that structures and regulates human activities and behavior and with it social relationships. Moreover, it

is believed to be possible to construct a social science research methodology that is both objective and value free. The functionalist view of the organization has dominated organization theory for over a century. The various schools of thought that it encompasses have been dominated by two metaphors in particular. The first concerns the metaphor of the organization as a machine and includes theories that portray the organization as 'rational' or 'goal' oriented (see *Rational Choice and Organization Theory*). The second portrays the organization as an organism, a living entity in constant flux and change as it seeks to interact with, and survive within, its environment. The ascription of 'organismic' status to organizations can be seen within the Hawthorne Studies, sociotechnical theories, and structural functionalism (see *Structural Contingency Theory* and *Technology and Organization*). These two metaphors have also been set up as a continuum. Thus, contingency theory seeks to contrast mechanistic and organistic organizations (see *Closed and Open Systems: Organizational*).

In contrast to the functionalist paradigm, the *interpretive* paradigm is founded on the assumption that the social world is based on a social reality that is highly subjective and personalized, so that one person's reality may be different from another. The interpretivist therefore seeks to identify those shared multiple realities that give the social world some kind of underlying uniformity and order. Research methodology is underpinned by a belief that objective social science is unobtainable, and that instead it is based upon concepts and rules that are subjectively determined and followed by researchers. Organizational metaphors underpinning particular schools of thought within this paradigm include those of language games where language becomes seen not simply as communicative or descriptive but as occupying an ontological status that facilitates the construction of the organization as a pattern of social activities. Other metaphors include the metaphor of sensemaking (Weick 1995) where members of organizations construct their realities through *post hoc* rationalization of key events, and the metaphor of identity which emphasizes the importance of identity as a construct of organizational study and examines the ways in which individuals identify with organizations (see *Individual Identities in Organizations*).

The *radical-humanist* paradigm, as with the interpretive, emphasizes that reality is socially created and sustained, but goes on to suggest that human beings are imprisoned within the parameters of the reality that they have constructed for themselves. Psychic and social processes imprison individuals in their reality and alienate them from their true potential. Radical-humanist schools of thought would, for example, see capitalism not as a form of social order (as might functionalists), but as a mode of ideological domination that alienates people from important thoughts and actions. In the context of organizations, radical-

humanist schools of thought seek to identify and challenge alienating features of organizational life (see *Organizational Control*). Here, the underlying metaphor is that of the psychic prison whereby members of an organization are viewed as prisoners of an ideologically formulated mode of consciousness. It is a metaphor that underpins the work of key social theorists, notably Marx, and more specifically those addressing fundamental features of organizational life such as power (see *Organizations: Authority and Power*).

The *radical-structuralist* view of social reality is, like the radical-humanist, based on the assumption that society is a dominating force. However, the social world is defined as comprising a variety of concrete structures and as being highly materialistic. Various elements of this world are in opposition to one another. The tensions that this creates are held in abeyance by those with power in society, for it is in their interests to keep social order as it is, rather than to allow radical social change. Thus, the radical-structuralist paradigm is based on metaphors that depict organizations as powerful instruments of domination and as part of a wider, seemingly inevitable, process of domination that exists within society overall. These include Michels' (1949) 'iron law of oligarchy' (see *Organizations: Authority and Power* and *Organizational Control*), Weber's (1946) analysis of the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy (see *Bureaucracy and Bureaucratization*) and Marxist examinations of organizational behavior such as those provided by Labor Process theorists. In addition, a number of radical-structuralist metaphors, such as Morgan's (1981) schismatic metaphor, have shown that despite management's best efforts to maintain the prevailing structure, there is a potential for the various contradictions, conflicts, and tensions within organizations to rise to the surface so that organizations implode, fragment, or disintegrate (see *Conflict: Organizational*).

7. Conclusions: The Value of Metaphors and Paradigms in Organization Science

As Morgan (1980, p. 612) has noted, 'no one metaphor can capture the total nature of organizational life.' In essence, each metaphor offers a partial understanding of the whole organization. This is not to underestimate the value of metaphors, nor the important meta-theoretical role they play within social science paradigms and their application to organization science. Different metaphors can be used to generate powerful and illuminating insights into particular organizational phenomena. Where applied, they often lead to a furtherance of knowledge and an increased understanding about the behavior and attitudes of organizations and their members. Moreover, the application of new metaphors has been shown to generate new ways of thinking about organizations and to overcome

the weaknesses and problems of more established, traditional metaphors. In short, new metaphors often throw up contradictory and thought-provoking analyses of organizational phenomena which cause reconsideration of what has previously been taken for granted. Similarly, literature in the field of organizational change and development (see *Organizational Change and Development: Organizational*), along with the management education programs that it informs, often encourages managers to recognize the particular paradigm (sometimes referred to as a frame of reference) and its associated metaphors in which they are operating and to switch to other paradigms and their associated metaphors (see especially Bolman and Deal 1991, Morgan 1997). This is believed to enable managers to appreciate better the complexities of organizations and to provide alternative perspectives and solutions to organizational problems.

See also: Boundaries and New Organization Forms; Design and Form: Organizational; Metaphor and its Role in Social Thought: History of the Concept; Myths and Symbols: Organizational; Organization: Overview; Organizational Climate; Organizational Culture; Organizational Culture, Anthropology of

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Organizations: Negotiated Orders

The negotiated order of an organization is the pattern of activities which has arisen or emerged over time as an outcome of the interplay of the variety of interests, understandings, reactions, and initiatives of the individuals and groups involved in the organization. To examine negotiated orders in any given organization is to turn away from the more traditional way of looking at organizations which give primacy of attention to the pattern or ordering of activities chosen (or 'designed') by those officially in charge of the organization. Instead, the influences of people other than administrative designers on structures and patterns are recognized. The influence and power of some individuals or groups will be greater than that of others, but the ordering of activities which arises in practice is always seen as resulting from the contributions of the plurality of parties to the organization as a whole.

1. Origins of the Concept

The concept of 'negotiated order' first appeared in a study of a psychiatric hospital (Strauss et al. 1963). At that stage, the researchers did not claim a generalized relevance for the concept. However, the leading researcher, Strauss (1978), later showed how it could be used more generally to understand organizational processes, including ones in industrial organizations, and its insights have subsequently been incorporated into a broad stream of thinking about organizations which focuses on processual aspects of organizational life. The approach emerged from the symbolic interactionist tradition of social psychology, a perspective that stresses the two-way relationship between human beings and their social context. People construct their realities through processes of interaction with others,

10965