

The Use of Metaphors in Organizational Analysis

by

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the utility of metaphors in organizational analysis. Many of the scientific breakthroughs in organizational studies have emerged from insights resulting from the use of a new metaphor. Organization theory has advanced as a result of borrowing the *open systems metaphor* from biology, the *social contract metaphor* from political science, the *transactions cost metaphor* from economics, and the *force field metaphor* from engineering, to name a few. Each time a new metaphor is used, certain aspects of organizational phenomena are uncovered that were not evident with other metaphors. The logic of metaphors has important implications for organization theory, for it suggests that no one metaphor can capture the total nature of organizational life. A conscious and wide-ranging theoretical pluralism rather than an attempt to forge a synthesis upon narrow ground emerges as an appropriate aim. Different metaphors can constitute and capture the nature of organizational life in different ways, each generating powerful, distinctive, but essentially partial kinds of insight. The logic suggests that new metaphors may be used to create new ways of viewing organizations which overcome the weaknesses and blindspots of traditional metaphors, offering supplementary or even contradictory approaches to organizational analysis.

However, the role of metaphors in theory development has been a controversial issue in organizational sciences. For some organizational theorists, the virtue in having so many metaphors is that they add to understanding by calling attention to other-

wise unapparent aspects of the organization. But some organizational theorists believe to the contrary that metaphors are misleading and counterproductive. Consequently, the use of metaphors in organizational scientific discourse is either overemphasized or underplayed. One of main purposes of this paper is to survey the history of non-cultural metaphors of organization in order to develop a basis for appreciating the unique qualities of the cultural metaphor. This paper, in an attempt to reconcile both perspectives, begins with the examination of the functions of metaphors in scientific theory, and, secondly, surveys the metaphors employed in organizational discourses. Four influential groups of metaphors are reviewed. Three of them are *non-cultural groupings*: the non-human classical metaphors, the humanistic metaphors, and the positivistic, systems metaphors. One of them is *culture metaphors* in organization studies. Thirdly, it discusses the problems associated with the use of metaphors, advantages as well as disadvantages, and finally draws a conclusion accordingly.

Key Words: Analogies, Disciplined Imagination, Literal Language, Metaphor, Metaphorical Language, Paradigm, Puzzle Solving, Scientific Discourse, Similes, Symbolic Constructs, Theoretical Pluralism.

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喻象在組織分析中的應用

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摘 要

本文的主要旨趣，係探究「喻象」在組織分析中的應用。晚近，組織理論的研究，因為喻象的應用，出現許多突破與進展。組織論者，或從生物學借用系統喻象，或從政治學借用社會契約喻象，或從經濟學借用交易成本喻象，或從工程學借用力場喻象，或從人類學借用文化喻象，均對組織現象的解析，提供了迥異於傳統的觀察方式。新的喻象一旦成功地為論者援引，舊有喻象所忽略的分析層面，常能因此得以揭現。喻象的邏輯對組織理論而言，有其重要意含。迄今為止，尚無單一喻象，能全然地含攝組織生活的本質與形貌。每一喻象的解釋力容或相異，但在本質上，其範圍終屬部份真實與畛域識見而矣。是故，嚴謹而廣博的理論多元主義，乃成為論者在解析組織現象時，所需依循的重要原則。論者透過多元喻象，較能克服傳統組織分析中的理論盲點與不足。

然而，組織論者對喻象在理論發展中的角色，歷來迭有爭論。持正面觀點的論者認為，多元喻象不但拓展了組織分析的理論視野，並且彌補了單一論證可能產生的窄化窘境。持反面意見的論者則指出，喻象內部所蘊含的虛幻特質，容易誤導組織分析的方向，阻礙有效的理論建構。是故，在組織分析的科學對談中，喻象的角色若非為論者過度強調，即為論者刻意漠視。本文的目的，在試圖調和兩者。本文首就喻象在科學理論中的功能與限制，予以闡述；次就組織理論中的「非文化喻象」論證與「文化喻象」論證，進行歷史分析；最後提出結論與建議。

關鍵詞：類比，訓練精良的想像，直敘語言，喻象語言，典範，解謎，科學對談，明喻，符號建構，理論多元主義

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