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Journal of Applied Behavioral Science 2006; 42; 207
DOI: 10.1177/0021886305284895

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Constructing Shared Understanding

The Role of Embodied Metaphors in Organization Development

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The authors present a novel metaphorical approach to organization development, the use of embodied metaphors, and in so doing extend current understandings and uses of metaphor in organization development (OD). The authors discuss an intervention technology that emphasizes induced rather than naturally occurring metaphors, builds on a developed theoretical base of collaborative diagnostic technologies, and can be employed in a targeted manner for issue diagnosis and intervention. Implications for the use of embodied metaphors in OD are discussed.

Keywords: embodied metaphors; organization development

We discuss a novel metaphorical approach to organization development (OD), the use of embodied metaphors, these being collaboratively constructed physical analogs. In so doing, we extend current understandings and uses of metaphor in OD by going beyond the dominant semantic-cognitive dimension to address the spatial and embodied dimensions. We suggest that embodied metaphors complement and extend traditional approaches to metaphor in organization development by emphasizing induced rather than naturally occurring metaphors, building on a developed base of diagnostic

We wish to thank the editor and the reviewers for their constructive comments on earlier versions of this article.

THE JOURNAL OF APPLIED BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE, Vol. 42 No. 2, June 2006 207-226

DOI: 10.1177/0021886305284895

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technologies, enabling a collaborative effort of metaphorical selection and diagnosis, and enabling the employment of embodied metaphors to address specific, targeted issues of consequence to participants. In addition, we suggest that embodied metaphors can enable politically contentious issues to arise and be decoded and debated, foster creative thinking, and facilitate organizational change by being occasions for collective sensemaking where important issues can be surfaced and debated.

We begin by discussing the role of metaphors in organization development as underlined by the broader linguistic turn in social science. In line with the social constructionist approach, we present metaphor as an essential element of agents' sensemaking and as a creative force that can potentially engender new understandings of situations and new types of actions based on these understandings.

In the next section we develop our concept of embodied metaphors, building on earlier cognitive/semantic and spatial views of metaphors (as captured in Figure 1); drawing from cognitive, phenomenological, and sensemaking perspectives; and outlining existing organization development approaches that have employed embodied metaphors. Our use of the term *embodied metaphors*, as elaborated on in this section, encompasses the two interrelated ideas that first, the literal construction of a physical object as an occasion for sensemaking directly involves the body in this process, but second and more important, the resulting physical metaphors can be touched, moved, examined from various angles, and serve as engaging occasions for sensemaking. We finally situate our notion of embodied metaphors within the organization development literature, noting that embodied metaphors emphasize induced or emergent metaphors arising from collaborative efforts and shared sensemaking, build on a developed base of diagnostic and intervention technologies, and can be employed for targeted issue diagnosis and intervention (as outlined in Table 1).

We then proceed by discussing an illustrative case of a management retreat of a Swiss bank to illustrate the use and operations of embodied metaphors where participants were invited to construct embodied metaphors so as to explore the meaning of the strategic concept "I Know My Banker," proposed by the CEO. Figures 2 and 3 portray selected embodied metaphors constructed by participants. In this section we also elaborate on the role of the facilitator and describe the process of collective sensemaking involved.

Finally, in the implications and conclusions section, we expand on the utility of embodied metaphors in organization development from political, creativity, and change efficacy perspectives. We suggest that actively induced embodied metaphors encompass underlying assumptions and tap into bodily, prereflexive forms of knowledge in the process of construction. Such recursive processes of sensemaking enable the generation of a shared expressive and linguistic repertoire that is constituted through shared meaning negotiation of a concrete metaphor in use. Due to their "posi-

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tive scapegoat” effect, they can make it easier for contentious issues to be placed on the agenda for discussion.

METAPHORS IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

The Linguistic Turn

The linguistic turn in the social sciences has portrayed language as fundamentally constructive and constitutive of social reality rather than merely representative and functional (Wittgenstein, 1967). In organization studies, the constructive view of language thus seeks to explore the communicative practices of organizational actors and their role in the intersubjective construction of meaning through social interaction (e.g., Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Barry & Elmes, 1997; Ford & Ford, 1995; Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Heracleous & Hendry, 2000). A conception of social reality as constructed and constituted through linguistically mediated processes places organizational discourse at the center of investigation (e.g., Barrett, Thomas, & Hocevar, 1995; Heracleous, 2004; Oswick, Keenoy, & Grant, 2000; van Dijk, 1988). In highlighting the context-dependent, teleological, and symbolic dimensions of discursive interactions in particular, discourse can be conceptualized as situated symbolic action (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004). In this perspective, communicative actions convey actors’ perceptions, values, and beliefs that shape frames for interpretation and guide social reality construction. Metaphors—here conceived of as the archetype for a broader set of tropes such as metonymy, synecdoche, simile, and analogy—play a central role in this process (e.g., Black, 1993; Lakoff, 1990; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Metaphor as a Creative Force

The literal view of metaphors, aligned with objectivist approaches in social science, suggests that metaphors are primarily ornamental, expendable linguistic devices that indicate similarities between a source and a target domain (Black, 1993); not only do they not lead to additional understanding, but they can distort “the facts” that should be expressed in literal language (Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982).

From a constructionist viewpoint however, this literal view of metaphors as unnecessary linguistic ornaments is rejected, and their central role in human sensemaking and understanding is emphasized (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors are viewed as primarily conceptual constructions that play a central role in the development of thought and intersubjective meaning making; they can allow actors to reframe their perceptions, or “see the world anew” (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990, p. 222). According to Lakoff (1993) for example, “The locus of metaphor is not language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another” (p. 203). In this respect, these conceptual similarities involve both ontological correspondences (target entities correspond in certain ways to source entities) as well as epistemic correspondences (knowledge of source domain is mapped on to knowledge about the target

domain) (Lakoff, 1990). Social constructionists suggest that these correspondences are created rather than just revealed by metaphor, thereby emphasizing the inherently creative dimension of metaphor rather than viewing it as something that can merely reveal an antecedently existing similarity (e.g., Black, 1993; Johnson, 1987).

Such metaphors have been described as “generative” in the sense that they can lead to novel perceptions, explanations, and inventions (Schon, 1993) or “strong” by virtue of possessing a high degree of implicative elaboration (Black, 1993). In this view, metaphors are potent as creative devices if there is neither too much similarity nor too much difference between the source and target domains (Morgan, 1980). Morgan’s work (e.g., 1980, 1983, 1986) has been seminal in helping organization theory challenge dominant mechanistic and organic metaphors that had guided theorizing within a functionalist paradigm through a conscious understanding of the impact of such taken-for-granted metaphors on organizational theorizing. Morgan (1983) has gone as far as to suggest that seeking to minimize the influence of metaphors is not only counterproductive but also infeasible given their integral role to theorizing and sense-making. According to Morgan (1996),

The linguistic aspect is just a surface expression of a deeper process. This is why I like to describe metaphor as a primal, generative process that is fundamental to the creation of human understanding and meaning in all aspects of life. (p. 228)

Morgan’s approach (and the stream of research inspired by it) has been criticized as potentially exercising a conservative rather than enlightening influence on theorizing because of the focus of metaphor on searching for similarities between the interrelated domains rather than highlighting differences and engendering “cognitive discomfort” (Oswick, Keenoy, Grant, 2002). The inherent ambiguity and imprecision of metaphors, in addition, entails some persistent question marks and disagreements regarding their usefulness in organizational theorizing. Pinder and Bourgeois (1982) for example have suggested that metaphorical statements do not fulfill a critical condition of social science, namely, falsifiability. Morgan (1983, 1996) responds by suggesting that this suggested approach in essence seeks to substitute the trope of metonymy for the trope of metaphor in social science theorizing. Furthermore, Palmer and Dunford (1996a) have raised unresolved questions such as whether a single or several metaphors should be used in interpreting a situation, the role of politics in metaphor use, the role and feasibility of “literal” language, and how to deal with incommensurable metaphors. Morgan (1996) accepts many of the critiques of his approach to metaphor and suggests that rather than dwelling on the limitations of metaphorical thinking, we should make productive use of this avenue for understanding, bearing in mind its limitations in terms of producing “partial truths” (p. 232) that may at times be ideologically biased or lack “rigor” as this concept is conventionally understood.

In spite of the aforementioned issues, the sheer influence of metaphorical reasoning in organization theory over the years (Morgan, 1980, 1983; Oswick & Grant, 1996) bears testament to the usefulness of metaphors as sensemaking devices that can engender or stimulate novel or at least different understandings of particular target domains through creating or eliciting correspondences with selected source domains. As Grant

and Oswick (1996) put it, "There can be little dispute about the inevitability of metaphor. Nor about its having a generative quality" (p. 2).

Metaphors in Organization Development

It has long been recognized that as primarily cognitive and semantic devices, metaphors play a vital role in the discursive construction of meaning in organizational change and development processes (Cleary & Packard, 1992; Marshak, 1993; Sackmann, 1989). According to Burke (1992), metaphors can be "windows into the soul, if not collective unconscious, of the social system" (p. 255). Metaphors are crucial dimensions of organization members' cognitive schemata, providing lenses for interpreting the world, embodying implicit evaluations, and implying "appropriate" actions based on the prevailing metaphors (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1992; Hirsch, 1986). Metaphors can help to concretize vague and abstract ideas, holistically convey a large amount of information, and foster new ways of looking at things (Sackmann, 1989).

Whereas a deductive approach to metaphors attempts to apply a generic set of metaphors to organizational situations, an inductive approach operates on the assumption that organizational members already generate and use metaphors in view of their context and experience that can be employed for the purposes of system diagnosis and change. Stated another way, deductive metaphorical approaches attempt to identify and suggest universal, archetypical sets of metaphors that in turn would then guide corresponding interventions (Morgan, 1986); in contrast, inductive approaches emphasize the emergent, local, and contextual nature of metaphors (Palmer & Dunford, 1996b). Both the concept as well as the technology of embodied metaphors operate from an inductive approach to metaphorical reasoning in organizations because organizational metaphors are intimately related to context and experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Embodied metaphors therefore inductively capitalize on the ultimately local, contextual, and situated nature of metaphor rather than being based on assumptions of metaphorical generality and universality.

Similarly operating from an inductive angle, Cleary and Packard (1992) suggest a two-phase process of assessment of metaphors and other symbolic aspects of the organization and then development of change goals and planning of action steps based on that assessment. Marshak (1993) in addition proposes that change agents can listen carefully to the metaphors used by organizational members as a means of diagnosing the organization, help them understand the implications of employing different types of metaphors by conducting relevant workshops, and try to shape the way people think about change by diffusing appropriate metaphors that align their conceptual system with the type of change that needs to be achieved.

Perhaps the potency of metaphor to effect change is related to its complexity and ambiguity that allows for multiple interpretations to coexist but at the same time can provide a shared direction. According to Pundy (1983), "Because of its inherent ambivalence of meaning, metaphor can fulfill the dual function of enabling change and preserving continuity" (p. 164). This complexity and ambiguity is often downplayed in accounts of the use of metaphor in OD interventions (Inns, 2002). Despite the advantages of using metaphor for diagnostic and intervention purposes, often

organization members may use mutually incompatible metaphors to describe the same organization, as Oswick and Montgomery (1999) found. In such cases, more extensive collaborative efforts need to be undertaken to explore the sources of contradiction and make further, improved diagnoses and interventions.

TOWARD EMBODIED METAPHORS

From Cognitive/Semantic to Spatial Metaphors

Metaphors are often based on characteristics found in the physical world, as illustrated by the three generic image schemata of up/down, container, and link or connection. This suggests that sensemaking emerges from the human capacity of establishing and mentally resonating with these physical relationships of and between objects (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Going beyond metaphors' verbal, semantic dimension, Weick (1990) highlights the relevance of spatial relatedness in terms of maps as two-dimensional devices of sensemaking employed in organizational practices. A map is a visual device signifying a territory that might either be spatially extended (then the map serves as a cartographic, spatial icon) or conceptualized as spatially extended (then the map is enacted as a spatial metaphor) (Robinson & Petchenik, 1976).

It is precisely due to their capacity to trigger such recursive processes of sensemaking that maps draw on the spatial dimension of metaphors by displaying relative sizes, relative locations, and interrelations among entities. Broadening the expressive repertoire of metaphorical thinking in organizations, cognitive mapping has operationalized maps as spatial metaphors that can facilitate organizational change and development (e.g., Bougon, 1992; Brown, 1992; Calori, Johnson, & Sarnin, 1994; Clarke & Mackaness, 2001; Eden, 1992; Hodgkinson & Johnson, 1994). Cognitive mapping involves the creation of maps as visual representations of a domain and its most relevant entities as cognitively perceived and portrays these entities within systems of relationships (Huff, 2002). Maps can serve as triggers or focal points of reference and meaning negotiation in open-ended conversations, and it is primarily the communication around the mapping process that seems to trigger fruitful conversations and insights. Given the recursive nature of meaning generation (Weick, 1990), a map does not solely represent but can rather construct the territory in important and consequential ways. Thus, a map does not merely reveal an antecedent order but can also instigate action that subsequently enacts a certain order or construct a shared reality leading to corresponding actions. Extending metaphors' cognitive, verbal, and semantic aspects by adding a spatial dimension can thus facilitate discursive processes of sensemaking in organizations.

Toward Embodied Metaphors

Phenomenology highlights the embodied nature of human experience and reasoning. In a radical rejection of the Cartesian dichotomy, the body is seen as mediating

human perception and experience of the world: "I am my body" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 159). Human embodied existence is experienced and expressed prior to conscious processes of thinking; thus, phenomena are not only purely cognitive but also enacted in and through the body.

Thus, human knowledge is rooted in and emerges from bodily experience of the world. Similarly, Joas (1996) reminds us of the body as the origin of prereflexive impulse to action. Thus, he posits, one should "challenge the presupposition that the body can be instrumentalised for the purposes of action and forces us to construe a non-instrumental relationship to the body" (p. 251).

Johnson (1987), in addition, reflects on the role of the body in human thinking from a cognitive science perspective. He views metaphorical image schemata as patterns of bodily experience that enable the structuring of bodily interactions with the world at more abstract levels. Image schemata—figurative, analogical, and nonpropositional in nature—emerge primarily from spatial relations and more particularly from perceptual interactions with the manipulation of objects. Human thought is organized through metaphorical elaborations of image schemata that form and structure experience and understanding. Thus, meaning is firmly rooted in and emerges from bodily experiences. As Johnson argues, metaphors become constitutive for structuring bodily experience and also emerge from this experience.

Echoing and complementing the constitutive role of bodily experience for human thinking, Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking refers to the ways people generate what they interpret: "What sensemaking does is address how the text is constructed as well as how it is read" (p. 7). Sensemaking is induced by a change in the environment that creates distortion in the routines or flow of experience engaging the people of an organization. It is these distortions, differences, and discontinuities that provide the raw data from the environment that the organization and its members have to make sense of. Weick distinguishes seven properties of sensemaking: Sensemaking is grounded in the construction of individual and organizational identity; retrospective in nature; based on enacting "sensable" environments to deal with; fundamentally a social, not an individual process; ongoing; focused on cues in the environment and focused by cues in the environment; and driven by the plausibility of possible interpretations (Weick, 1995).

Contentious issues can induce organizational ambiguity and uncertainty which in turn constitute two primary occasions for sensemaking. Whereas uncertainty refers to issues of ignorance that can be remedied by additional information, ambiguity relates to a confusion to a situation in which several different interpretations at the same time emerge and persist so that additional information cannot resolve the confusion, namely, imperfect understanding of the world. Multiple interpretations and meanings that create confusion call for social construction and invention in adequate conversational modes and settings (Weick, 1995). Thus, in an organizational state of affairs where additional, more detailed information does not remedy the inherent ambiguity, a sensemaking practice such as cognitive mapping is required that allows for multiple interpretations to be voiced as to come to shared understanding. In view of embodied metaphor, sensemaking could be paraphrased as "reading a metaphor while writing it."

Thus, the process of constructing embodied metaphors echoes Weick's properties of sensemaking (in the order discussed by Weick and as outlined earlier) in that it literally invites a physical construction of individual and organizational identity, draws on past experience and learning, encourages various perspectives to be brought to bear on collective reasoning, is ultimately a social construction process that taps into an ongoing conversation in the organization, facilitates the exploration of an enacted organization/environment boundary, and finally, allows for a collective, social plausibility check on the various interpretations and constructions.

In terms of sensemaking through embodied metaphors, several approaches have emerged over the past decade or so. For example, Barry (1994) draws on depth psychology and art therapy to introduce the concept of *analogically mediated inquiry*. An object or model created by participants (the analog) allows the process consultant and the participants to engage in a collaborative process of interpretation and sensemaking. Thus, analogically mediated inquiry engages the client actively in creating a spatial metaphor that is not only of a semantic, cognitive, or graphical nature but also importantly of a physical nature. This process allows literal, embodied engagement with otherwise elusive mental images and the relatively safe debate of alternative perspectives. Taking a psychoanalytical view, this resembles the process of surfacing conscious as well as unconscious aspects of participants' cognition that might have been projected onto the analog, whereby the analog absorbs and encompasses these projections and serves as a "positive scapegoat" for participants (Barry, 1994, p. 39).

Building on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) hypothesis that perception is bound up with figurative thinking, Doyle and Sims (2002) discuss *cognitive sculpting*, the construction of three-dimensional objects in the context of conversations for change. Participants are invited, using several objects on a table, to form a sculpture of an organizational issue at hand. This process involves verbal and nonverbal meaning negotiation that has both a mnemonic as well as a constructive effect. Paralleling the positive scapegoat effect of objects in analogically mediated inquiry, objects in cognitive sculpting also take attention away from the speaker and allow participants to focus on the collaboratively created sculpture, which in turn enables the exploration of meanings that could be politically contentious and would otherwise be undiscussable. The primary outcome of cognitive sculpting consists of developing a shared metaphorical language within a group that can be drawn on in subsequent strategic conversations. Finally, cognitive sculpting fosters a collaborative setting of shared sensemaking. When two or more groups work independently on the same theme, the groups can discuss the differences in features and genesis of the construction and critically reflect and comment on these differences. Cognitive sculpting results in an enhanced capacity to think and reason about a constructed concrete, physical object but more important, to debate and make sense of the organizational issues it represents.

Buergi and Roos (2003) in addition discuss *serious play* as a multimodal process of sensemaking that goes beyond metaphors as pure cognitive devices by similarly employing physical analogs. This process invites participants to configure and represent abstract organizational issues such as organizational identity or the landscape of an organization or team by means of three-dimensional metaphorical objects made of construction toys. The theoretical antecedents of this approach include both Black's

(1993) discussion of the creative potential of metaphors as well as Oswick et al.'s (2002) proposition to consider structural dissimilarities as origins for metaphorical reasoning. Drawing on Worren, Moore, and Elliott (2002) and Gardner (1993), in addition, the relevance of visual and tactile/kinesthetic knowledge as a complement to propositional knowledge or intelligence is emphasized.

Another distinct approach is what we might call *change drawings* (Broussine & Vince, 1996) whereby several groups of managers from different hierarchical levels are invited to participate in an iterative process of drawing their feelings and emotions about organizational change. Initially, individuals are asked to draw a picture that expresses their feeling about change at work. Individuals are then asked to comment on the reverse of their drawings. Both these data are subsequently made available for a peer group reflection. Then, these emotional data captured in drawings, individual comments, and group-level reflections are provided for an intergroup reflection. Finally, this transhierarchical group is engaged in a joint synthesis of the rich data set. Drawing-induced metaphor is an approach to diagnose and plan change as well as an opportunity to interact in a psychologically safe environment to explore emotional and preconscious aspect of change.

All these approaches exemplify and acknowledge the relevance of conceptual, creative metaphors and extend the generally accepted semantic-cognitive dimension of metaphorical reasoning by viewing constructed physical objects as occasions for shared sensemaking. In this process, participants are actively involved in constructing or sculpting metaphorical symbols. Size, spatial relatedness, variety of materials, haptic, and tactile aspects of the social construction process all contribute to the recursive process of sensemaking, involving the dynamic interpretation and reading of these embodied metaphors while constructing them. Even though these approaches draw from diverse theoretical underpinnings, they all share an attempt to surface participants' prereflexive knowledge, assumptions, and experience to develop shared sets of metaphors and shared interpretations.

Our term *embodied metaphor* thus encompasses two related ideas. First, the literal construction of a physical object as an occasion for sensemaking introduces the body in processes of creating and exploring metaphors. Primarily haptic, tactile, and kinesthetic aspects are involved in processes of cognitive sculpting; analogically mediated inquiry and serious play extend and complement the semantic and cognitive dimensions of metaphorical thinking. More important however, the resulting physical constructions are themselves metaphors in the flesh, tangible metaphors representing organizational domains of importance to participants. Agents thus get immersed in "practicing and 'doing metaphor,'" a promising avenue for innovation in the field of metaphor (Morgan, 1996, p. 240). Both the analogical creation process as well as the resulting physical constructions can be fruitful occasions for collective sensemaking and social reality construction, which can be immensely useful in processes of organization development and change.

In summary, we take as a starting point the cognitive and semantic aspects of metaphors in terms of their constructive role in meaning making as to then highlight two further dimensions. First, through the spatial dimension, operationalized in concepts such as cognitive or strategic mapping, the inherently spatial nature of metaphors

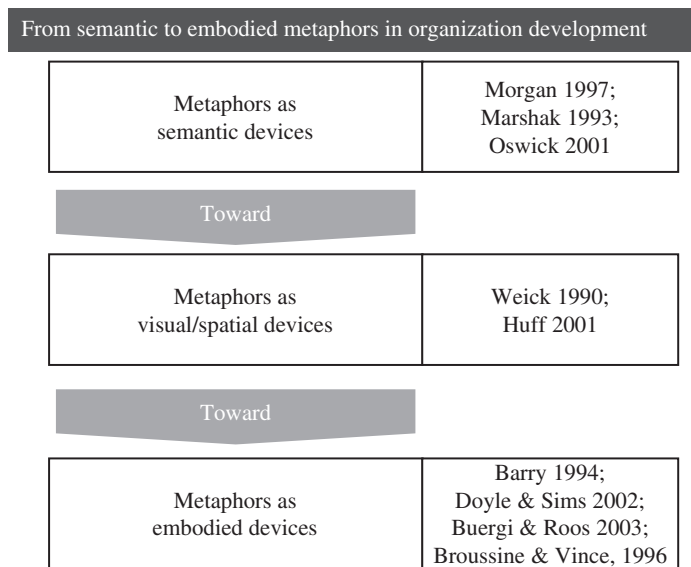


FIGURE 1: From Semantic to Embodied Metaphor—Synopsis

(image schemata) can be brought to bear literally. Second, through the bodily dimension, exemplified in concepts such as analogically mediated inquiry, cognitive sculpting, serious play, or change drawings, embodied metaphors can be brought to bear on processes of shared meaning construction and sensemaking about issues of shared concern. Figure 1 presents the views of metaphors discussed earlier and representative authors.

Organization Development Processes and Embodied Metaphors

From a traditional perspective of organization development as involving an analytical distinction of people and organizational processes on one hand, the human-processual approach, versus technology and organizational structures on the other, the techno-structural approach (Friedlander & Brown, 1974), an embodied metaphors approach lies within the human-processual domain. Organization development has from early on recognized the importance of people and cognitively related interventions (Alderfer, 1977). In addition, the organization development field has continuously encouraged new approaches. According to Friedlander and Brown (1974), "Broader applications of a theory of planned change will require expanded intervention technologies" (p. 335), and more recently Porras and Silvers (1991) note that "We encourage the use of new tools in OD, especially when those tools are derived from a sound theoretical base" (p. 65). Interventions based on embodied metaphors aim to expand organizational members' ways of seeing through active, collaborative construction of metaphorical structures, thus potentially leading to reframing, or change in perceptions of reality (Porras & Silvers, 1991).

TABLE 1
Traditional Use of Metaphor Versus
Embodied Metaphors in Organization Development (OD)

<i>Traditional Use of Metaphor in OD</i>	<i>Embodied Metaphors in OD</i>
Emphasis on naturally occurring, language-based metaphors	Emphasis on induced embodied metaphors
Relatively little available knowledge on diagnostic and intervention technologies, the how	Builds on a developed base of diagnostic and intervention technologies
OD practitioners select appropriate metaphors for change task and setting	Metaphors selected arise from collaborative effort
OD practitioners lead metaphorical diagnosis	Metaphorical diagnosis through shared sensemaking
Emphasis on whole system	Can be employed for targeted issue diagnosis and intervention

The dominant approach with regard to metaphors in organization development suggests that change agents should take a leading part in diagnosing the organization through an understanding of the language-based metaphors used by organizational actors and can foster change through diffusing appropriate metaphors given the context and type of change aimed for (Cleary & Packard, 1992; Marshak, 1993; Sackmann, 1989). Furthermore, the emphasis is usually on naturally occurring metaphor use rather than induced metaphorical creations. In addition, the emphasis is on a metaphorical intervention designed by the OD practitioner rather than a collaborative effort of jointly developing and interpreting metaphors with organizational members. Finally, metaphorical diagnosis is usually employed with regard to the whole organization rather than a targeted issue that the organization is facing.

As Howe (1989) notes, "At present, practice seems to be guided largely by intuition and accumulated experience" (p. 81). More than 15 years after this statement was made, there is still a lot to be learned about relevant intervention technologies. Acknowledging the wide range of OD approaches that advocate metaphorical reasoning with diagnosis and intervention to OD practice in general (e.g., Broussine & Vince, 1996; Clark & Salaman, 1996; Keizer & Post, 1996; Marshak, 1993; Morgan, 1996; Oswick, 1996; Palmer & Dunford, 1996b), the concept of embodied metaphors complements these approaches by emphasizing the relevance of actively induced metaphors, emphasizing the social dimension of such literal social construction processes, and orienting to a client- and less OD practitioner-driven intervention. In particular, our approach might contribute to OD practice by outlining how OD practitioners might elicit metaphors to assist with a targeted issue rather than a diagnosis and change of the whole system. Our use of embodied metaphors thus complements the current emphasis in organizational development by offering a means of accomplishing the aforementioned, as Table 1 illustrates. In the case section, we will draw on a management retreat of a bank in Switzerland to illustrate the use and operations of embodied metaphors.

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE: CONSTRUCTING SHARED UNDERSTANDING AT SWISSBANKCO

The CEO of SwissBankCo and his leadership team had recently agreed on the introduction and implementation of a change in their marketing strategy with broader strategic implications. The overall concept—I Know My Banker—was intended to enable a more customer-focused business practice throughout the bank. As part of a senior management retreat in 2003, a total of 47 managers of SwissBankCo, including the CEO, six heads of departments, and their direct reports, participated in a 1-day strategy workshop in which toy construction materials were employed in the process of meaning generation and sensemaking. The participants were divided into six groups, each including members from different departments of the bank. Following some warm-up exercises to familiarize participants with the material, the groups were invited to build models of what the recently developed strategic concept, I Know My Banker, meant to them and to discuss the consequences for their respective daily practices.

The process of sensemaking by means of induced, embodied metaphors involves three generic and iterative stages that take place at an individual and collective level (Buerger, Jacobs, & Roos, 2005). Apart from some exercises for participants to familiarize themselves with the material, the generic process consists of the following three central elements: first, individual construction; second, collective construction; and third, each of these is followed by debrief to peers and collective inquiry into the respective constructions. For instance, this respective exercise at SwissBankCo started off by inviting participants to build their individual model of the concept I Know My Banker. After having debriefed to their peers at each table, participants were encouraged to critically reflect on commonalities, differences, and blind spots. Ideally, the facilitator role models these steps at each table. Then, participants were asked to construct a joint model of the concept by integrating their existing individual models to a collective one. In particular, redundancies were to be eliminated, for instance if each participant has built a model of a customer, the instructions asked to agree on a single representation of customers in the final collective construction. These constraints catalyze meaning negotiation as they create a sense for univocality. The result of the collective construction process then results in six different collective constructions that are then again being debriefed in plenary. Similarly, commonalities, differences, and blind spots are to be investigated by fellow participants.

In constructing and discussing their models, participants created a variety of embodied metaphors. These physical constructions portrayed the need “to raise customers up to the same level” as bankers, to improve mutual understanding by “getting on the same wavelength,” or to develop a much closer relationship by even “getting into the jacuzzi” with customers. Figures 2 and 3 give two examples of these metaphors illustrating how participants portrayed the concept of I Know My Banker. Figure 2 shows a construction where the small circle represents the client and his or her needs, the large circle represents the bank and its machine-like organization, and the intersection between them shows the ground where client and banker meet and interact.



FIGURE 2: Example 1 of Embodied Metaphor of I Know My Banker Concept

NOTE: **Circle 1:** By putting oneself in the client's shoes, their needs and aspirations can be identified or anticipated. The different areas for example could be leisure or investing in real estate. This variety of needs is represented by the smaller circle encompassing the different needs of the client. **Circle 2:** The second circle represents the bank as a very complicated machine with its different functional areas of marketing, financials, logistics, IT, and so on. The nature and functioning of the machine itself is of no interest to the client. The front line should provide the client with the appropriate products that the bank has developed based on its expertise. The larger circle covers a much larger surface than the client's circle. **Intersection of circles:** Where the two circles intersect is where the encounter between banker and client takes place. Their heads are both connected in an attempt "to read the client's mind." The banker stands in front of a transparent wall through which the complicated machine can be seen. **Relationship:** The banker should be able to read the client's needs and provide them with an appropriate response that caters to these needs. The skillful reading of the client would then result in providing an appropriate product. The expertise and knowledge derived from the "complicated machine" should feed into such a relationship. Confidence and trust should result from such a service encounter. The essential message of this construction is the bank's overall capacity to adequately serve the client's needs. **Key characteristics of embodied metaphor:** The banker-client relationship seen as the need to match client needs and bank offerings; the focus is on responsiveness so as to read, interpret, and respond to the client needs appropriately and the bank's overall capacity to meet client needs. A machine metaphor of bank and its products is assumed.

Presenting a different portrayal of the concept I know my banker, the analog in Figure 3 portrays a growth in the relationship between banker and client as a five-stage progression moving from the first state of a huge gap between them to the final state of proximity and mutual understanding.

These constructions generated in a collective sensemaking process within each of the six groups illustrate the divergences of interpretations of the new strategic concept I Know My Banker. The building workshops that induced these metaphors provided a context within which these divergences of interpretations could be safely and effectively surfaced and negotiated in a group setting. For instance, the directional uncertainty of the concept was subject to a lively debate. Is the concept referring to ways through which customers can get to know us as bankers better? Or is the slogan just "a fancy twist to the notorious know-your-customer rhetoric"? Equally ambiguous was the target group of the initiative. Are we talking about all customers? Or do we focus on a yet to be defined subset of premium customers? If yes, who are they, and how do we identify them?

When faced with such incompatible metaphors and overall orientation, significant effort from the facilitator is required to explore these contradictions constructively by

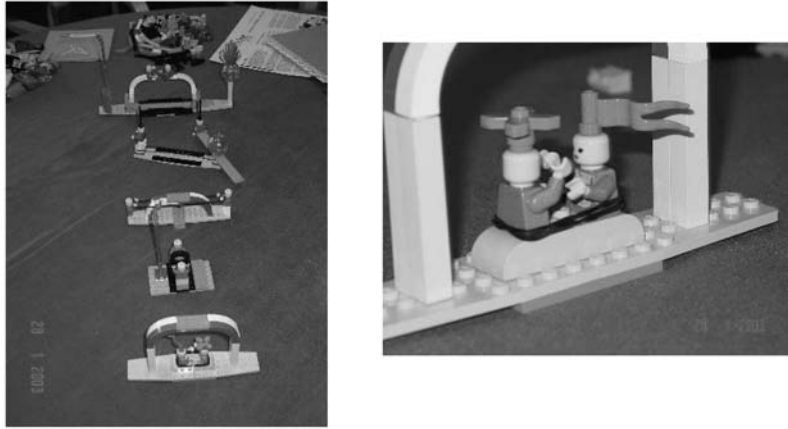


FIGURE 3: Example 2 of Embodied Metaphor of I Know My Banker Concept

NOTE: Stage 1: Client and banker face each other on the same level but are distanced. There is a huge gap between them. There seems to be no proximity, no mutual understanding. The ideas that the client has in mind are misread and misinterpreted by the banker. **Stage 2:** The banker sits on a carousel and tries to get his or her “head around” the client’s needs—with the ability of turning in all directions he or she attempts to pick up the “right” signals from the client. The goal of this endeavor is to find a means of understanding the client. **Stage 3:** The physical connection between the two is already established. The bridge cannot be crossed easily, it is full of obstacles, but the huge initial gap has been literally “bridged.” **Stage 4:** The client and the banker resemble each other. They seem to have a similar perspective, and they talk to each other face to face. They have a conversation around a wheel, having reached a stage where they can “turn the wheel together.” **Stage 5:** Client and banker are close to one another; they talk and understand each other under the protective roof of the bank. While the banker’s figure has a tree on her head, the client’s figure has a flag on his head. This highlights differences and potential misunderstandings between them. However, the client appears to smile and is happy that his initial idea is not only understood but also addressed by the banker. **Key characteristics of embodied metaphor:** Focus on the development/growth of the relationship; orientation to reaching mutual understanding to cater to the client’s needs.

surfacing the differences, critically debating the consequences of each alternative perspective, and inviting a more informed suggestion in terms of the potential to integrate certain perspectives or collective privilege one over the other. The physical differences make the conceptual differences literally tangible and therefore facilitate such processes of inquiry. A skilled facilitator would attempt to carve out structural similarities (e.g., pyramid and castle) as well as systematic differences. Furthermore, the fact that each participant has by design the right for airtime to debrief his or her construction to peers implies a certain democratizing effect because it invites silent voices to the conversation; it at least gives a sense of equality of airtime and invites for practicing listening as a central element in such conversations of development and change (Jacobs & Coghlan, 2005).

The occasion to collectively build three-dimensional, tangible models of a rather abstract strategic concept enabled participants to make collective sense of this concept. The nature of the customer-banker relationship could be made sense of, be “shown,” and be visually presented and remembered instead of only verbalized. Its fine features and details could be read and decoded by the groups from various angles. This collective process of constructing a physical model of a rather abstract strategic

concept triggered a set of narratives around these constructions and induced a variety of metaphors that drew on preverbal, prereflexive knowledge of participants and embodied their assumptions and understandings of the concept in its tangible outcome. The recursive process of reading an analog while constructing it has facilitated a process of rendering visible differences and commonalities that were to be experienced physically, beyond a purely discursive or cognitive access to the concept. Intragroup differences in interpretations could be surfaced in and through the process of construction, and intergroup differences could be discerned through differences in the resulting physical constructions. Metaphorical diagnosis about a specific, targeted issue that the client was facing was therefore made possible in the context of a collaborative, discursive, and embodied effort.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Embodied metaphors represent a metaphorical approach to organization development that is quite different but complementary to traditional approaches. This approach draws on metaphorical reasoning not only as a cognitive-verbal exercise but also as a tactile, bodily experience that results in collectively constructed metaphors, metaphors in the flesh. This approach encourages OD practitioners to not only carefully identify metaphors in managerial discourse and reflect on what they reveal about the organization but rather to actively induce embodied metaphors that encompass underlying assumptions and tap into bodily, prereflexive forms of knowledge in the process of construction. Embodied metaphors complement and extend traditional approaches to metaphor in OD in significant ways, as discussed earlier.

Reflecting on the process in view of Weick's (1995) generic categories of sense-making, we saw the collective construction of six different embodied metaphors to represent the concept of I know my banker. Each group drew on its past experience and learning in the bank and not only brought different manifestations of different perspectives to the surface but allowed these differences to be examined from various perspectives. The exploration of the contentious issue tapped into the ongoing conversation in the organization and brought so far silent voices to the plenary. It furthermore facilitated the exploration of taken-for-granted notions of customers, competitors, or other agents in the environment. Finally, debriefing the six models in plenary engaged participants in a collective plausibility check of the constructions. Sensemaking as a recursive process of interpretation and construction of embodied metaphors thus induces a shared expressive and linguistic repertoire constituted through shared meaning negotiation of a concrete metaphor in use. Table 2 illustrates the use of embodied metaphors by drawing on the application of metaphors to the SwissBank case.

Being in the presence of physical models that are embodied metaphors, or metaphors in the flesh, can enable OD practitioners to pose probing questions triggered by the model and its detailed features. Why is there such a gap between customer and banker? Why does the banker sit much higher than the customer—although you told us they should be equals? Why is the circle of the “bank machine” much larger than the customer's needs circle? Within-model, intragroup interventions can help individuals

TABLE 2
Using Embodied Metaphors in Organization Development (OD):
The SwissBank Case

<i>Embodied Metaphors in OD</i>	<i>Application to SwissBank Case</i>
Inducing embodied metaphors	Intervention process emphasized the construction of physical models of a strategic concept important to the client
Builds on a developed base of diagnostic and intervention technologies	Antecedents include analogically mediated inquiry, cognitive sculpting, and serious play technologies
Metaphors arise from collaborative efforts	Metaphors collaboratively developed by participants rather than selected by the facilitator formed the core of the intervention
Metaphorical diagnosis through shared sensemaking	This process helped to surface conceptual differences within groups in the construction process and across groups through differences in the resulting analogs
Emphasis on targeted issue diagnosis and intervention	Cognitive divergences embedded in analogs formed the basis for probing questions by facilitator and further interpretation and collective sensemaking by participants

or small groups in their local, collective construction processes, whereas cross-model, intergroup interventions can help to identify and explore differences and commonalities across models and within the whole participant cohort.

The role of the OD consultant and process facilitator is to encourage figurative rather than literal constructions; invite peer projections on individual as well as collective models; pose probing questions at the superficial, metaphorical, and organizational levels; invite a critical yet appreciative inquiry into the constructions; and help in exploring similarities, differences, and blind spots. Whereas the facilitator should be clear on the structure and constraints of the process, he or she should exercise a low level of directiveness in the construction and debrief sequences because ownership of both construction and interpretation lies with the participants. Being aware of group-specific play dynamics, a skilled facilitator can ensure for example that the embodied metaphor that is created is a genuinely interactive and community-based product. A facilitator would help the group effectively debate the structures that are created and their implications in terms of organizational action by honing in and inviting critical debate on potentially insightful aspects of the construction.

Pondy (1983) suggests that metaphors could facilitate change by providing a bridge "from the familiar to the strange" (p. 163). Embodied metaphors are particularly suited to serve as bridges between the old and the new because they represent, or embody, existing organizational elements as perceived by participants, as illustrated by the two examples of embodied metaphors discussed earlier. From an intervention perspective, this can guide debate to precisely the aspects that matter to organizational

actors (even if these were not the explicitly stated purpose of the workshop) and provide a nonintrusive and nonpersonalized way to address them.

Embodied metaphors are collective creations, and therefore from a political perspective, they can make it easier for contentious issues to be placed on the agenda for discussion. Individuals would not be likely to bring such issues up on their own, but as part of a group such issues are easier to surface. In addition, embodied metaphors can bring to the agenda contentious issues because these issues are not overtly represented, but they have to be “decoded” with the help of the OD practitioner. Initially, participants may not be entirely clear why they built a certain structure or what precisely it represents. Through the course of collaborative interpretation of the structure, new ideas and issues emerge. On a similar note, the process of constructing embodied metaphors enhances ownership and involvement. This is a fun and engaging way to address organizational issues, which makes it more likely that there will be active participation in this multimodal process of meaning generation.

One potential dimension for future research therefore would be further exploration into the political implications of embodied metaphors, especially as metaphorical theorization has been criticized as failing to pay due attention to political issues (Morgan, 1996). Do embodied metaphors tend to “democratize” the process of organizational diagnosis and sensemaking regarding the issues that have to be addressed and the direction to follow? If so, what are the specific features of embodied metaphors and their construction process that allow this beyond that they are collective constructions based on a specific technology of elicitation?

From a creativity, generative perspective, embodied metaphors can help organizational members engage in both more conservative, experience-based “thought imagery” as well as more unbounded, divergent, “imagination imagery” (Howe, 1989). In doing so, they can reinterpret and debate existing issues that their organization is facing, as was done in the SwissBank case discussed here, or more radically, imagine completely new possibilities, as can be done when participants are asked to construct analogs of how they see the future of their industry or organization. Such imagination imagery could thus fulfill the generative potential of metaphors not only in organizational theorizing but also in the applied domain of practitioners. One potential direction for future research therefore is the exploration of the relative generative potential of embodied metaphors as compared to other types of metaphorically based organization development interventions and whether different construction processes would be more suited to either thought imagery or imagination imagery.

From a change efficacy perspective in addition, metaphorical thinking is inherent in episodes of organization development and change. Embodied metaphors extend the traditional semantic and cognitive dimensions of metaphors by tapping into prereflexive knowledge contained in human bodily experience and interpretations embodied in the constructed analogs. Embodied metaphors are exceptionally vivid and memorable; photographs of structures (or actual structures) can be taken back to the organization and can serve as constant reminders of the issues that need to be addressed and the changes that need to be made. Embodied metaphors can thus contribute to developing and sustaining a shared set of metaphorical repertoires as well as shared understanding, vital to the success of organization change and development efforts. Further

research can therefore explore the process through which embodied metaphors can induce reframing of existing situations and the potential differences of this process from the way in which linguistic-based or map-based metaphors can induce reframing of perceptions or cognitive maps in the context of organization change processes.

For a process of constructing embodied metaphors to be effective, meaningful, and sustainable, sufficient time, appropriate workshop structure, flexibility to experiment, and mindful attitude of superiors are key resources in this respect. It must be organized and resourced adequately, simultaneously allowing for enough “foolishness” to emerge within a frame that aims to explore and deliver insights on pressing strategic issues. Sufficient time must be set aside because rushed sessions lose much of their effectiveness as functional and goal-constrained thinking tends to take over. If the CEO is involved, he or she should act as just one of the group and be conscious of the potential of any defensive or dominating behavior by them leading to the construction of “politically correct” structures, where the process risks degenerating into a meaningless exercise. Furthermore, to facilitate the emergence of imaginative metaphors and sustain excitement, interventions should be designed and carried out with a maximum variety in construction materials.

Even if the insights gained through embodied metaphors might be uncomfortable, companies should be prepared to face and capitalize on them in a productive and developmental manner. An indication of the impact of embodied metaphors might be the extent to which an organization takes such sessions seriously, endeavors to capture insights from the session, debate them, and take appropriate action. Often the colorful and evocative language inherent in the metaphors continues to inform strategic conversations long after the interventions have taken place. A vital element to sustain the intervention’s effect is to invite participants to take the actual constructions back to their organization or department and display them as an *aide-mémoire*, a reminder of the debate, issues arising, insights gained, and strategic directions decided on. The embodied metaphors become mutable mobiles that continue to trigger sensemaking—even beyond the actual intervention itself.

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