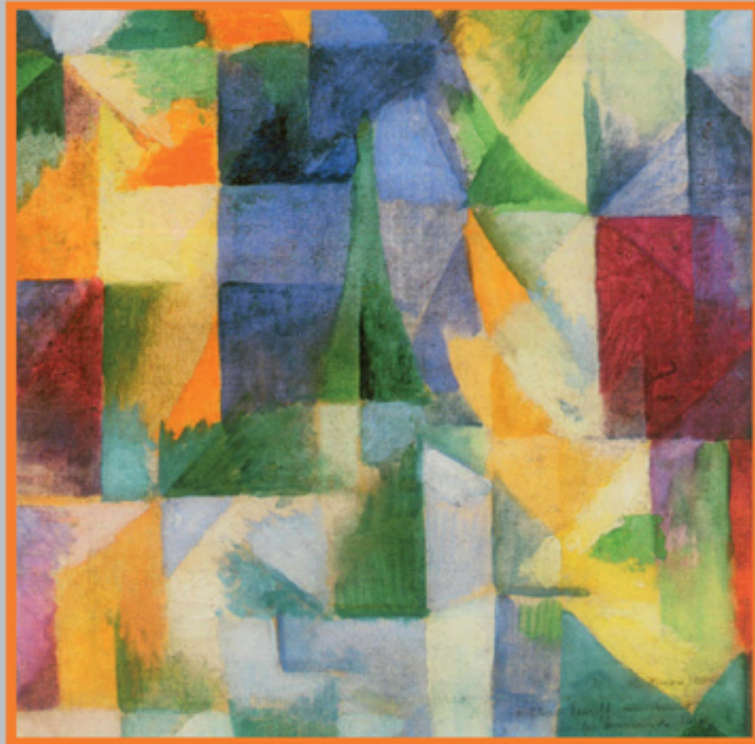Östen Ohlsson and Björn Rombach

The Tyranny of Metaphors

Pathways to Freedom

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Contents

1. The Power of Metaphor

Not understanding is a form of insight. This being the case, we have a great many deep insights into the question of how organisations are constructed and how they work. The question of management, in other words. We have a good grasp, and yet there is much that we do not understand. We do not believe that this is because we are stupid or ignorant, rather that it is due to the deficiencies of the explanations offered.

This book is emancipatory in its purpose. The aim is to provide release from the repression of inadequate explanations. The idea is that we should get a better picture of how organisations work by trying out various methods for reading them better. Our attempt to reveal or render intelligible[1] what happens is based on the fact that what happens within organisations, as in their construction, is so often expressed using suggestive descriptions or images. In short, metaphors.

Metaphors make description more comprehensible and easier to sell. But when it comes to organisations, metaphors also suppress our reasoning and our feelings. They control what we are able to see, and how we interpret what we see. It is from this tyranny of metaphors that we will try to liberate ourselves. Often, metaphors themselves will be the tools we will use for revelation. Our liberation will therefore be only partial.

Originally this book was written in Swedish for a Scandinavian readership. It should not have mattered too much, because even if metaphors change somewhat

between languages they are often quite similar. Hazy ideas and rock-solid convictions are hazy and rock-solid in both Swedish and English. What is more, we are against hazy ideas and sceptical towards rock-solid convictions, which does not prevent us, of course, from being encumbered with such defects ourselves. Be that as it may, we have made only slight adjustments to the original text for our English readership. We believe that the differences are so small that anything odd our readers find in the text will not spoil their reading. On the contrary, these might add a bit – just a little bit – of exoticism to the reading experience. For example, the text still retains a number of quotations by classic Swedish poets – in translation of course!

For a time we were concerned that the organisational pyramid is a metaphor which is much more widely mentioned in Swedish and Scandinavian literature than in English, but we still came to the conclusion that the argument works well anyway. Pyramidal hierarchies are fairly well known everywhere.

This book is aimed at all those active professionals who are not yet able to vote through solutions without first knowing what the problem might be. Those who have grown tired of simply relying on their gut feeling and who want to understand before saying 'No, I don't agree with that' or 'OK, I'll go along with that'. These members of organisations who are more critical in their thinking cannot be few in number.

At the same time, we also address colleagues carrying out research and higher education students. We believe that the time has come to throw out much of what has been written about organisation and the process of organising. The field is bogged down by a great many theories and models that have lost the explanatory power they once held or may have held. This book aims to be one of the new voices after the clean-up.

Our approach fluctuates between two methodological extremes. We sometimes employ intellectual tricks such as

semiotics and critical theory to unpick these metaphors. But equally often we try more brutal methods instead. Examples of the latter include simply saying the opposite. This approach is experimental, and we give no guarantees that we will always achieve our goals. But where we fail to make sufficient progress, we hope that the reader will be encouraged to continue turning the matter over in his own mind.

The important thing to point out is that our aim is not pedagogical. It's not a matter of disseminating a text in which we announce to the reader what we have long known. Writing is largely about our own liberation. The text is new to us, too. We regard the reader as our travel companion rather than our student.

The language of management: A problematisation

We all allow ourselves to be misled by the words and expressions we encounter. When we are not confused, we are convinced. But that's hardly any better. Many books we have read – and much of what our colleagues and acquaintances say – are based on a certain word or a certain designation having a specific ability to explain things to us. Some time ago, we presented a study of how information technology affects the work and organisation of schools.[2] When talking or writing about information technology, we all know that we call it 'IT'. Yet once we had finished the presentation, someone in the audience said that we should use the correct expression, 'ICT', meaning 'information and communication technology'. We were not unfamiliar with the expression, and indeed had chosen not to use it, but for a moment we had been caught with our trousers down. Surely ICT means much more than old familiar IT? On closer analysis, it turns out to be hard to find

anything signified by ICT that is not also signified by IT. It is not particularly clear what exactly IT is, and the added 'C' emphasises rather than reduces the lack of clarity.

Language and words are assumed to describe and explain reality to us, but we often wonder which reality the words represent. We don't want to appear naïve. We do not believe that words should represent reality in any absolute sense. Words create reality while at the same time representing it. This is a book about management and organisation, not a book about linguistic philosophy, but it is still a curious state of affairs having all these words and concepts relating to organisation and management. We believe that there's something fishy[3] about the language of management, and that it prevents us from becoming wiser.

In principle, organisational concepts are always borrowed from fields or areas close to concrete experience. We have structures and pyramids. There is management, and there are strategies. Not to mention forces of change and inertia. Many people want learning organisations that contain dynamic mechanisms. In extreme cases, people want start-up companies and cutting-edge expertise. Head-hunting continues unabated without anyone sniggering, although we've stopped taking seriously those who talk about organisational machineries or bleeding.

The fact that these loanwords should be interpreted as something other than what the words originally meant can hardly have escaped anyone's notice. Nevertheless, it sometimes seems as if people have forgotten that there ever was an original meaning. A glass ceiling can often be something that benefits us. A glass ceiling above a shopping arcade improves conditions for those of us at street level, and means that we can enjoy a latte at a street café, whatever the weather. And for those who grow cucumbers, the glass ceiling of a greenhouse is indispensable. In an organisation, however, a glass ceiling is incompatible with a

culture of growth.[4] Despite being strongly in favour of glass ceilings in our own garden, we vigorously condemn them in the workplace.

We are not alone in maintaining that metaphors control our understanding of organisations. According to Gareth Morgan's book *Images of Organization*, this is obvious to those who have read up on how organisations should be understood.[5] If we can find a new ingenious simile – 'the organisation is a fishing rod' – we have also contributed a new understanding of how organisations work. The language of love appears to be full of strained metaphors, and organisational theory is not far behind.

For our part, we have been unable to refrain completely from writing the odd piece of poetry, but here we will focus instead on a critical approach. We will discuss how we can gain a better understanding of organisational phenomena where we have got the wrong end of the stick. (Ah, the wrong end of the stick – a classic among metaphors!) We wrote 'phenomena' in an attempt to illustrate the fact that metaphors are hard to differentiate from what they represent. Metaphors tyrannise us in various ways. Consequently, there will be times when we avoid metaphors and times when we use them.

Take leadership, for example. This is something that many people want more of in companies and administrative bodies. In any case, the word 'leadership' meets with strong approval in large groups. The question is simply what exactly it is. We will contend in a later chapter that the word 'leadership' as used in organisations must be understood as a metaphor. The metaphors that are used as if they are primary designations rather than expressive images are interesting. 'Leadership', as mentioned, or 'change' are far more deceptive and treacherous than 'smoke screens' or 'cemented structures'. Organisational cement is obviously not real. We see that this is an analogy. The fact that there

could be a problem with the word 'leadership' is far less obvious, but it does resolve a number of issues when we realise that 'leadership' – just like 'organisational cement' – is a metaphor. Leadership as a metaphor has at best certain qualities that can be compared to the mythical 'leadership' from which the metaphor has obtained its descriptive power.

Other metaphors are more obvious, but still exercise power over our thoughts. The pyramids that have needed to be torn down for so long are one example. In order to shrug off the compulsion to demolish them, we introduce two metaphors which we can use to place these pyramids on a scale. This trick enables us to see organisational pyramids of different heights as more or less reasonable compromises between two extremes that have – or lack – height and breadth.

What is a metaphor?

Some readers may worry that this book will place undue emphasis on what we call 'metaphors'. What is necessary and unnecessary is hard to tell, but we will now devote a couple of pages to the actual concept. It won't be any worse than that.

According to *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*, 'a metaphor is an imaginative way of describing something by referring to something else which has the qualities that you are trying to express'.[6] It is a figurative means of expression. The degree of figurativeness is all about how much of the original meaning is activated[7] when we use the metaphor. There may be significant differences in terms of figurativeness between linguistically related metaphors. Jan Svanlund addresses the two abstract concepts of 'balance of payments' and 'striking a balance' (between different interests). 'Balance of payments' has a low degree of figurativeness, while 'the metaphorical use of striking a

balance... shows a strong degree of figurativeness'.[8] Someone who strikes a balance between different interests is achieving a balance in a completely different way to ensuring a balance of payments.

   Such subtleties do not prevent any of us from using a large number of metaphors when speaking or writing. Referring to Aristotle, Anna Miller maintains that '... all thought is metaphor'.[9] But if everything is metaphor, metaphor becomes an useless concept. Still, we would like to believe that the classical philosophers had something particularly radical to say on the subject, but when we try to find a more original source we end up with scientific essays which all assert that Aristotle regarded metaphors as comparisons. With reference to *Metaphor and Thought*, edited by Andrew Ortony,[10] we can dismiss an otherwise fairly appealing quotation. If Aristotle ever made such a statement, it was a mistake. Whatever the case, that point of view is unreasonable. We take the view that not even language consists solely of metaphors.

   If we are still to follow in the footsteps of Aristotle for a while, as presented by Paul Ricoeur, he does contribute some clarifications. A metaphor is the use of a concept which differs from the normal. When Gerlinde Baumann writes about marriage as a metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel, she is thinking of a more normal use of the concept of marriage.[11] The metaphor is borrowed from another domain in which the concept is normally used, and replaces a concept that could have been used in its place.[12] To further complicate the concept of metaphor, you are not supposed to be too explicit about it. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, metaphor is a 'figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities, as distinguished from simile, an explicit comparison signalled by the words 'like' or 'as''.[13] It is not cool to inform your

audience that you have introduced a metaphor. Perhaps it is not even a metaphor anymore if you do.

Language can also be used 'literally'[14], which in turn is a metaphor and a label. We all understand that the figurative expression 'the sun is a jewel' is different to the literal 'the sun is a star'.[15] However, the question of whether the figurative expression, or in our case the metaphor, differs in any fundamental way from 'normal language' is of no relevance to our argument. But it is tempting to quote Albert Katz, a researcher into figurative language, who makes two references to Ortony to raise the possibility that the metaphor occupies a unique position.[16] It should be said that Ortony is a professor of education and psychology, and that metaphors are perhaps his most prominent field of research.

> … metaphors may not only be nice, they may in fact be necessary in many situations. That is, metaphor might be intrinsically related to the human ability to invent new – and meaningful – concepts that might not be explicable by recourse to some more basic literal description (*e.g.*, "black holes" or "transformer toys"). So one might argue that metaphor might play a central role in translating thought, especially novel thought, into language (see Ortony, 1975). If this position is correct, then metaphor is serving a function that cannot be served by literal language.[17]

Andrew Goatly's point of view is, perhaps, more reasonable when he notes that '… the distinction [between literal language use and metaphorical language use] is often a matter of degree'.[18] In our case, the pyramid is a metaphor. When we talk about the organisational pyramid, few people would think that we mean an 'Ancient Egyptian royal tomb with a quadratic ground plan (with the corners oriented

towards the four points of the compass), ascending in a step-like formation (42–57 degrees), so that the walls meet at the top',[19] even though this is what the dictionary definition suggests.

The concept 'label' belongs to a group of concepts which surround – and sometimes merge with – metaphors. The pyramid may be a well-established way of using a metaphor to describe an organisational structure, but it can also be a label for an Ancient Egyptian royal tomb.

Metaphors create myths about how organisations are and work. The myth about the boss as a hero[20] presupposes, for example, that one has a working metaphor for 'hero'. Over the years there has been widespread interest in myths to do with management language[21], while we for our part are curious to know how two Swedish organisational theorists[22] from the past, Sven-Erik Sjöstrand and Gunnar Westerlund, used the term. Their myths are concepts and constructs.[23] The authors discuss myths that affect activities in organisations in an undesirable way. They introduce anti-myths and alternative myths to disarm overly strong organisational myths. Let us illustrate this with an example from the 'list of myths and legends' given by way of conclusion in their book:

- myth: the myth of management as mediator in the organization
- anti-myth: the myth of management as creator of conflicts of interests
- alternative myth: the myth of management as one interested party[24]

Myths can be both good and evil. Sten Jönsson and Rolf Lundin demonstrated in an article about myths and wishful thinking as tools for corporate management[25] that it can be hard to manage a business without myths. There is a

duplicity in concepts such as myth and metaphor. They maintain that on the one hand myths should be exposed and metaphors explained, while on the other hand exposure and explanations involve the use of new myths and metaphors. Without myths, the world would be both dreary and hard to understand.

We could over-complicate the definition of metaphors, presenting even more related concepts. In an otherwise interesting book, we find a definition that may be well justified in its context, but which illustrates in this case our point about complexity.

> A metaphor occurs when a unit of discourse$_{4.2.1}$ is used to refer$_{4.2.2}$ to an object, concept, process, quality, relationship or world$_{4.5.5}$ to which it does not conventionally refer$_{4.2.3}$, or colligates with a unit(s) with which it does not conventionally colligate$_{4.2.4}$; and when this unconventional act of reference or colligation is understood$_{4.5.2}$ on the basis of similarity or analogy$_{4.4}$ involving at least two of the following: the unit's conventional referent; the unit's actual unconventional referent; the actual referent(s) of the unit's actual colligate(s); the conventional referent of the unit's conventional colligate(s)$_{4.2.5.}$ [The numerical references refer to sections in the book.][26]

In this quotation we missed the point – if there actually was a point. We could also make light of metaphors ad infinitum. We should exercise a degree of moderation when it comes to both taking pleasure in definition and making distancing wisecracks about the actual text. For the sake of our argument, it is sufficient to rely on the everyday meaning of metaphor as 'figurative expression'.[27] There is a great deal to suggest that a usable and strict definition cannot be

found.[28] Svanlund notes the following in the introduction to his thesis *Metaforen som konvention* ('Metaphor as Convention'):

> The vast breadth of metaphor literature shows a striking difference of opinion when it comes to what constitutes the actual object of study. Nor is there an accepted definition of the concept.[29]

'Linguistic artefacts', or words and expressions as they should properly be called, affect life within organisations and the change processes within them, just as they affect life in general. A good metaphor helps us to understand something through references to something completely different.[30] Metaphors simplify not only explanation but also argumentation. They also affect our way of thinking and our way of acting.[31] Metaphors create attitudes and reactions.[32]

Moreover, metaphors also help us to misunderstand things. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson discuss this in terms of 'highlighting' and 'hiding'.[33] Goatly observes the same phenomenon when he deals with 'highlighting' and 'suppression'.[34] Metaphors can be used by politicians to convince us,[35] by leaders to control or even change us,[36] and by salesmen to persuade us[37]. Of course, there is manipulative use of metaphors[38] but there are also instances when we entirely unintentionally use metaphors to render the world incomprehensible[39] or are guided by them in a direction in which we do not actually want to go.

Hyperreality

Let us now move on to what metaphors mean. If we say that the organisation is a hill or a house in a social landscape,[40] this leads us to think about what a landscape might look like and what sorts of structures might fill it. This can be an

entertaining exercise in which we find rewarding and surprising analogies.

However, once we have established that the organisational social landscape exists, the slightly awkward question arises of what phenomena such as the organisational bush represent. We assume that for every word there is an equivalent in reality. The words mean something. The French postmodernist Jean Baudrillard claims that our existence is increasingly filled with concepts – ideally attractive concepts – which are completely devoid of actual content.[41] We use all these concepts to create a hyperreality for ourselves, which increasingly involves addressing the same empty words and concepts to a world containing simulated experiences. A world in which it is important to talk about ICT – not IT.

In this hyperreality, the organisational bush can give rise to a new professional practice. More and more people in society are engaged in developing hyperreality from inside. And it is not only within language that hyperreality is created. The media and the experience industry are key co-creators. A decade ago, we were able to marvel at the widespread public interest in films such as 'The Matrix'[42], which portray a future where everyone lives inside an illusion. These days it is instead Facebook and video games such as 'the World of Warcraft'[43], a phenomenon that makes us wonder whether people actually need or want that which those of us who are older and wiser would call reality. The question of what all these metaphors mean is crucial, and we cannot be certain that even our own favourite metaphors are anything other than an attractive facade.

Sufficiently metaphorical

Within the field of management, metaphors are often clearly visible. Jacques Jimenez and Timothy Johnson identify six

main metaphors in the (American) business world. In this male-dominated world, they found male metaphors: 'the gambler', 'the warrior', 'the athlete', 'the farmer', 'the craftsman' and 'the engineer'.[44] It could be argued that the degree of masculinity varies between these. Writing a dictionary of metaphors around a group of metaphors does not actually sound entirely hopeless. The book *Metaphors at Work* also has a certain entertainment value at times. For example, 'lowball' is a slang expression used when someone intentionally tries to underestimate costs. The intention may be to trick a customer or an investor.[45] However, lowball can also be a kind of poker or an alcoholic drink with ice in a short and wide glass. We just don't know which of these is the metaphor.

We often imagine that metaphors are a harmless way of expressing ourselves. Jimenez and Johnson make their *Metaphors at Work* appear sexist, stupid and trite. Perhaps the idea behind the dictionary is a poor one or has been poorly executed. Or perhaps it reflects a reality where most of the metaphors used so frequently in the workplace really are sexist, stupid and trite. In any case, the authors succeed in showing that figurative metaphors are not necessarily a dignified way of expressing ourselves. Peter Dobers and Stefan Tengblad point in the same direction when reaching the conclusion that 'metaphorical control does not make the management of organisations more human'.[46] Veronika Koller goes into greater depth about what the masculine metaphors of business mean for women. It is clear that these metaphors assign qualities which in the case of men are often considered the norm, while they exclude women from what they have turned into a male arena.[47] She advocates the use of gender-neutral metaphors, and believes that business journalists should take on this responsibility instead of imitating and flattering their readers with masculine metaphors.

Farid Muna's book *Seven Metaphors on Management* presents metaphors which, in the opinion of the author, are of use to 'managers in the Arab World'.[48] The book is not sexist, but this broth of platitudes (relating to 'the candle', 'the iceberg', 'the tripod', 'the transit lounge', 'the mosaic', 'the helicopter' and 'the bridge') can, if anything, be seen as a kind of racism.

In purely general terms, metaphors are '… a risky communicative strategy, not always easily interpretable'.[49] If someone does not know what a jab is, or cannot link the difference between a jab and a hook to different marketing strategies, a metaphor based on this will be entirely worthless. The same applies when we note that 'our competitors clearly want to return to the London rules, when the Queensberry rules are bad enough'. The degree of reach makes the metaphor risky.

Sometimes, the metaphor chosen can be downright misleading. For example, we should not use jazz as a metaphor for freedom. The metaphor might have been more effective in the 1920s. It may also be bound to a culture to which we do not belong.[50] Or it could be that we need to know more about jazz than we actually do in order to see the connection with freedom. To us, swing – as discussed in Mike Zwerin's book subtitled *Jazz as a Metaphor for Freedom* – appears to be an unfree and strictly regulated practice in which the musician who improvises freely is deemed to be playing something completely different.[51]

If we allow ourselves to digress further on the same theme, there is a feast of culinary metaphors. These include both strong images and others that do not work at all. In their book *Appetite*, Phyllis Stowell and Jeanne Foster have brought together female poets who use food as a metaphor for all sorts of things. It makes for terrifying reading for those of us who are otherwise poetic omnivores. And nor do the editors do equality any favours when they allege that:

'Sooner or later each woman finds her sense of herself and her perception of the world around her clarified by her relationship to food'.[52]

Even more technical – or, rather, linguistic – factors affect the reach of metaphors. For example, Goatly argues that speech has a role to play.[53] He maintains that nouns are easier to visualise and give rise to richer interpretations, while adverbs and prepositions are limited in their reach.[54] Verbs and adjectives occupy an intermediate position.

In another relevant book, Raymond Gibbs presents a little test of researchers' interest in figurative language, including metaphors, that he worked on for a considerable amount of time. The test, which is presented in *The Fight Over Metaphor in Thought and Language* should not be overinterpreted, but should instead be seen as an illustration. Around 1990, Gibbs used to go to the university library's periodicals room and choose a publication at random. His hypothesis was that at least half the selected publications contained an article on some aspect of figurative linguistic usage. On the whole, his hypothesis was confirmed.[55]

The percentage would certainly have been lower if he had chosen from among the journals on management. However, linguists and organisational researchers have spent a great deal of time in each other's company ever since the prefix 'post' came to signify that the Modern Project no longer held any new answers. With organisational theory, the usual thing has happened. We have included and incorporated that which has seemed useful, leaving the rest to fate. This text follows the same pattern.

How thought and language are connected is part of what we leave to fate. Albert Katz has undertaken research which points to a functional disconnection and also research which points to language controlling thought.[56] These are two extreme points of view. Not unsurprisingly, Katz takes a

middle approach. We concur, and believe that it matters how the world is presented.

I argue that an alternative version deserves serious consideration. In this variant the suggestion is that language, rather than merely serving a communication role, is a form of representation of the world.[57]

Living and dead metaphors

Metaphors do not have eternal life. The metaphor works and survives as long as the image is sufficiently expressive and has desirable associations. This means that the metaphor might indeed be unsuccessful as a description yet still work as an image.[58] But if a man says to his girlfriend that she is a flower, or says to his research colleagues that organisations are machines, the metaphor becomes trite. These metaphors are inactive, and do not work. We can call more or less inactive metaphors tired, dormant, rigid, fossilised, frozen, dead and buried.[59] Dead metaphors can be resurrected.[60] Tired and dormant are therefore the best metaphors for weak metaphors. Resurrecting the dead is a tricky metaphor, especially if the dead are already buried.

There are many reasons why metaphors can lose their power. One reason is that they are figurative expressions which become worn down or increasingly faded with overuse. One clear example from our research tradition is the message that yet another thing is a social construction.

The metaphor of social construction once had excellent shock value, but now it has become tired. It can still be liberating suddenly to realize that something is constructed and is not part of the nature of things, of people, or human society. But construction analyses run on apace.[61]

It is not self-evident that we all see the tiredness of metaphors in the same way. If we were to choose a figurative expression for freedom or yearning, a sailor's suit would not be our first choice. But for others, that metaphor lives.

> The image of the sailor with three stripes on his collar, his short jersey, his bell-bottomed trousers, his rolling gait, his narrow hips and his fluttering hatband have retained their charge and are universal. The seaman in uniform is a metaphor for both the sea and freedom, and well as a yearning for adventure and home.[62]

Some images never become a successful metaphor. If we say to our boyfriend that he looks like a beetroot sprout or tell our colleague that the organisation is a ham pie or a seesaw, this would hardly result in great rejoicing. Such metaphors are tired as soon as they are created. The seesaw is taken from Bo Hedberg *et al.*,[63] and according to Barbara Czarniawska 'is not really illuminating'.[64] We agree, even if her own metaphor has seen better days…

We would call a metaphor that has lost its vitality a platitude. There is no criterion or test which shows whether or not a metaphor works. So Donald Davidson wrote back in the 1980s.[65] According to him, we have to trust our taste. But we're not so sure. Why can't that ham pie be tested?

Is this science?

In social science, the question of method seems to be much more debated than in natural science – or proper science if you wish. There are many convictions held, but we prefer a more sceptical attitude. And yet we still think it's science – sort of. Someone – we've forgotten who – once said that scientific knowledge is systematic knowledge that has been

created using a formal method. That sounds reassuring – the scholar produces knowledge that is better and more certain than other knowledge by following a set of established rules for how scientific work should be carried out. And if you just follow the rules to the letter, scientific knowledge is assured. As you may have already guessed, we do not agree.

We believe that methods cannot be anything more than a certain amount of help when seeking knowledge. Methods cannot do our job for us. A desire to understand is also needed. Those who lack such a desire risk indulging in mechanical methodology. This approach obviously cannot create knowledge, but it can be used to build an academic career.

Some believe that formal methods create a kind of mental prison.[66] We are more cautious. We believe that there is a type of metamethod which should be more widely used. We can call this metamethod critical analysis. However, there is no established rule for how to apply this method. Instead, critical analysis is a tool for breaking up old fossilised methods in a rational manner. And within this critical analysis, the use of every imaginable idea or piece of information is permitted, provided that this lays itself open to argument. In this way, we now have a definition of what critical analysis is. It is the production and delivery of good arguments. Admittedly, what exactly constitutes a good argument varies in different situations, which Thomas Kuhn, for example, was able to demonstrate in his description of the development of scientific study,[67] but it is not entirely arbitrary.

We subscribe to Richard Rorty's idea that the quest for knowledge should be understood as a resource in the endeavour towards human happiness – not as a goal in itself.[68] We can perhaps thereby avoid futile brooding over the outer reaches of knowledge and good arguments.

However, if we were to seek a rational explanation which legitimises critical analysis, Karl-Otto Apel makes the valid point that the desire for communication in itself assumes that we have a common set of values against which arguments can be assessed.[69] This set of values is all about confidence in rational argument.

This is as far as we intend to go for now. Confidence in human reason already exists by the very fact that we are writing a text and you are reading it. Without having such confidence, we never would have been able to devote ourselves to critical analysis. And without such critical analysis, all scientific study would be in vain. Scientific work begins and ends with critical analysis. At least, we believe that this should be the case.

It is up to the reader to judge whether our arguments are good ones. However, we are convinced that the arguments are good enough if the reader understands them. If the reader simply agrees completely with everything we say, the point has been in part lost. The aim of critical analysis is to encourage the reader to reflect for himself, rather than to convince.

Our text can be likened in its form to an outpouring of discussion in which arguments will occasionally interlock and one build upon the other. However, we will also allow ourselves unnecessary digressions, retakes and fresh starts. Ideas that amuse us will sometimes be followed along the way, while things that we find boring will certainly be abandoned early on at some point. It should also be pointed out that the methodology and tools of critical analysis lead not infrequently to making points that can be entertaining – we hope. Any such entertainment value does not diminish the stringency of the analysis or any claim of truth. On the contrary.

About notes and sources

At the end of this book there is a list of notes, which is preceded by references. These pages are aimed at two types of reader. Firstly, they are aimed at those who want to understand how we know something that we assert. We have looked things up and we explain where we found them. Where we have borrowed something or think we have found an interesting comparison, we specify the source.

   Secondly, the notes and sources are also aimed at those who want to know more. One alternative would have been a list of those books that we believe are more intelligent and a list of those containing disinformation. If a food magazine[70] can sample all the wines for sale at the Swedish state-run off-licence chain, then we ought to be able to sample all the management books:

> Burns & Stalker 1961: Interesting and well-documented study, with a few roughly drawn conclusions. Suitable for basic strategy seminars.

> Maslow 1952: Sickly-sweet and falsely ingratiating motivational model with unreasonable consequences. The best before date has long since passed. Possibly suitable for use as a deterrent.

However, such a list would be long and would need to be supplemented with an extensive text explaining how the sampling process had been carried out. Otherwise, why trust our taste? Besides, the list would soon become outdated. New books come out all the time, views of previous knowledge evolve, and we would never manage to carry out an annual sampling. Instead, the text is our centrepiece and the sources a complement to it.

The rest of the book

In this chapter, we have tried to sell the structure of the book, say a few words about our approach, and take a detour around metaphors. There now follows a number of chapters in which methods for reading or gaining a better understanding of organisations are tested. This is done in different contexts and particularly in different ways. The book concludes with a chapter in which we round off and give the only advice we are actually willing to endorse: think for yourself!

In *Chapter Two*, we begin our review of methods that enable us to gain a better understanding of organisations and organisational methods. Here we attempt to create alternative images by placing the normal image of organisational practice alongside its counterimage. We ask the stubborn question: Why not the opposite? By examining the state of things and goals and metaphors, it is easier to question them.

In *Chapter Three*, we try replacing metaphors and making full use of the new metaphors. In this way, we can question some of what we know about organisations. The healthy organisation is compared with its sick counterpart.

In *Chapter Four*, we investigate what happens if leadership is seen as the metaphor it is. We also apply a simple model for facilitating the process of critical discussion: the two-by-two matrix.

In *Chapter Five*, we compare different ways of reacting to change. One means of testing these is to change foot and see which one others are standing on. We also present three Ancient Greeks who provide a few useful starting points.

In *Chapter Six*, we go into more depth by using a specific technique for questioning a change of direction. We try to add to metaphors and place a metaphor at the end points of a scale of change. If flatter pyramids are desired, we should be able to identify complete flatness and the height of the peaks. More knowledge about the end points of the scale gives a better basis for deciding on a change of direction.

In *Chapter Seven*, we relate the labelled to the label. Here, we compare the metaphor with the reality, in other words, another metaphor. Market-rate pay is a metaphor that is now used in many contexts as if it reflected reality. But does the metaphorical assertion that the market sets salaries really increase our knowledge? It is confusing when a metaphor is mistaken for reality, particularly when it is ill-chosen.

Again in *Chapter Eight*, we can be said to change metaphors in order to gain a better understanding. But here we use a well-known replacement where sound knowledge is also to be found. We try to see a school's management organisation as a bilingual environment. With new metaphors comes knowledge that can be introduced and tested in new contexts.

In *Chapter Nine*, we should perhaps present a manifesto which, if followed, would liberate us all. However, we do not offer any complete liberation from the tyranny of metaphors. Our hope is to lay a foundation for those who want to greater freedom. Besides, in this context freedom is nothing more than a metaphor for something, that being perhaps the destination that makes the journey worth the taking.

2. The Art of Complaining Constructively

If our concept for understanding and dealing with organisations could be misleading, we must ask ourselves which concept might put us back on the right track. We do not have an answer to this question. What we can offer is something more modest, but also more complicated.

Instead of correct concepts which could give an accurate picture of how organisations work, we offer instruments for creating alternative images, supplementary images and sometimes even better images. But images and metaphors are not true or false in a way that permits them to be proven or disproven. Rather, they are more or less usable as tools for thinking. Anyone who only has one image has a woefully inadequate toolbox.

In this chapter, we will discuss the simplest method for creating alternative images.[71] We contradict. It isn't hard, and we readily acknowledge that it's great fun to tell others that they are quite simply wrong. For example, we maintain that flat organisations are characterised by a concentration of power, not by decentralisation. Once we have said this, we can take a step backwards and add a cautious: 'sometimes'. This is often the way when presenting counterimages.

When we contradict and say that the matter is the opposite to what others say, we test the critical approach. However, it is not reasonable to believe that everything is exactly the opposite. It is only hooligans, dogmatists, teenagers, political extremists and various confused

organisation members who believe that. The actual question of whether things really are the opposite is, nevertheless, productive since it places things on their head and thereby brings to our mind a counterimage.

We start by dealing with the image of the present time. We often hear wise people saying that things are starting to go downhill. Consequently, we maintain that everything is great and things are only getting better. Thinking about how satisfied or dissatisfied we have reason to be is a useful exercise. This leads to discussion of what constitutes a good argument. We then examine the extent to which one can be against standardisation.

The conclusion is that the method of saying the opposite works, but that it only takes us part of the way. If we want to get any further, less blunt methods are needed.

Things are great…

There's a great deal to suggest that things aren't as bad as people say they are. The affluent Western world in which we live works well on the whole. From a practical point of view, most of us have the essentials such as food, housing, healthcare and culture. But in order to be entitled to all this, you need to be young, old, sick, employed or unemployed. Out of these alternatives, employment appears to be the most attractive – but also the most problematic. We can determine how old people are without too much difficulty, and assign rights, like pensions, according to their age. But what people do at work to justify a salary is, these days, often a mystery.

Our world also works in such a way that we think we understand it sufficiently well. Science has supplied us with explanations. Of course, we don't understand everything; we understand to varying degrees and in different ways. We can very well imagine that the order of things has been