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METAPHOR IN ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH: AN INTRODUCTION, SYNTHESIS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

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Abstract

We provide a general overview of previous work which has explored the use of metaphors in organizational research. Differences in focus and form of research on metaphors are noted. Work in organization theory (OT) and organizational communication (OC) generally features prescriptive metaphors that aid the practice of theorizing and research; research in organizational development (OD) tends to use metaphors for intervention in individual and group decision-making; while studies of organizational behavior (OB) emphasize the metaphors-in-use within individuals' sensemaking accounts of critical events within their organization. Alongside these differences in focus, the form of metaphor analysis also differs across these contexts, ranging from text- and discourse based analysis to the analysis of non-linguistic modalities such as pictorial signs, gestures and artefacts. Based on our overview of previous work, we call for greater attention to methodological issues around metaphor identification and analysis and outline a number of directions for further research.

There is a continuous and growing interest in the study of metaphor within organizational research (e.g., Grant & Oswick, 1996; Putnam & Boys, 2006). This interest has been spurred in recent years by an increase in the volume of theoretical and empirical work that explores the role of language and discourse in organizational life (e.g., Grant et al., 2004) as well as by developments on metaphor theory and analysis in cognitive, linguistic and discourse work across the social sciences (e.g., Cameron, 2003; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Pragglejaz, 2007). As well as using an assortment of methodologies, work on metaphor in organizational research also spans multiple disciplinary domains and literatures – ranging from organizational behavior (e.g., Gioia et al., 1994; Greenberg, 1995; El-Sawad, 2005) and organizational development (e.g., Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990; Oswick & Grant, 1996) to organization theory (e.g., Cornelissen, 2005; Morgan, 2006; Weick, 1989) and organizational communication (e.g., Putnam & Boys, 2006; Taylor & Van Every, 2000)[1].

Whilst drawing upon different traditions, the interest in metaphor across these domains shares a view of metaphors as being central to human discourse and understanding (e.g. Cassirer, 1946). Metaphors connect realms of human experience and imagination. They guide our perceptions and interpretations of reality and help us formulate our visions and goals. In doing these things, metaphors facilitate and further our understanding of the world. Similarly, when we attempt to understand organizations (as scholars or as people working within them), we often use metaphors to make organizations compact, intelligible and understood. Metaphors often have this role as they supply "language with flexibility, expressibility and a way to expand the language" (Weick, 1979: 47).

[1] We restrict our focus here to the study of metaphor in connection to (re)presenting and understanding organizations. There is of course also an ongoing interest in metaphor research in adjacent management areas such as, for example, consumer research and marketing (e.g., Cotte et al., 2004).

Against this background, we organized a track on the topic of metaphor (entitled "Metaphor, Tropes and Discourse: Implications for Organization Studies") at the 2006 EGOS conference in Bergen with the explicit aim of (a) bringing together strands of metaphor-related scholarship in OB, OD, OC and OT and (b) advancing metaphor theory and research. It is testament to the breadth of interest in such a project that nearly 30 manuscripts were submitted for presentation at the track. Space considerations meant that we could only publish exemplary papers from the track and our final selection focused on two submissions that most clearly met the brief of promoting innovative theorizing about metaphor in organizational research.

Our aim in the present paper is to conceptualize these two contributions in light of research on metaphors more generally. To give this shape we first present an overview of existing work on metaphor and organizations. We analytically position prior work in order to uncover differences in focus and methodological approaches. We contextualize these differences and proceed by advancing theoretically important distinctions between metaphors in the modality of (spoken and written) language versus other (sensory) modalities such as a perceived or constructed visual resemblance between artifacts and aspects of organizational life (Hatch & Yanow, 2008; Heracleous & Jacobs, 2008). We also make a number of recommendations regarding the identification and analysis of metaphors across the modalities of language, gestures and artifacts that are a central feature of much research on metaphors in organizational behavior, entrepreneurship, strategy, change and organizational development. These recommendations include (a) clear criteria for metaphor identification, (b) sensitivity to the context of language use or to the context of the medium (e.g., film, artifact, gesture) in which a metaphor is located,

and (c) using reliability analysis (multiple coders, comparison with another corpus) for the grouping of metaphors and for attributing significance and meanings to a metaphor. Finally, we point to further directions for research on metaphor in different disciplines and topic areas across the field of organizational research.

MAKING SENSE OF AND THROUGH METAPHORS

Given the size and diversity of the literature on metaphors and/in organizations, a comprehensive review is beyond the scope of the present treatment. Instead, we draw on the work that is showcased in this thematic section and on other representative work to map the terrain of organizational research on metaphor. Figure 1 below represents a summary framework for organizing the literatures based on the relative positioning of work along key dimensions of analytic focus ("projecting" metaphors versus "eliciting" metaphors-in-use) and analytic form (cognitive linguistic ("de-contextual") versus discourse ("contextual") approaches).

Projecting or Eliciting Metaphors

The first dimension refers to the focus or basic orientation in metaphor-based research. A basic distinction here is whether metaphors are "imposed" or "projected" onto an organizational reality (as seen by scholars or experienced by individuals working within an organization) or whether such metaphors naturally "surface" within the talk and sensemaking of individuals and can as such be identified or "elicited" by organizational researchers. Grant and Oswick (1996) and Palmer and Dunford (1996) refer to this distinction in terms of "deductive" metaphors that are imposed and applied to

organizational situations versus metaphors that are "inductively" derived from the *in situ* natural talk and discursive interactions of people within organizations. In the area of organizational development (OD), for example, researchers and practitioners have employed metaphor as an intervention device in groups to "unfreeze" particular established ways of thinking and to elaborate alternative scenarios for an organization (e.g., Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990; Marshak, 1993). The "deductive" use of metaphors or their "projection" onto organizational reality is also central to work on organizational theory and the theory-building process. Morgan's (1980, 2006) classification of theories of organization in different root categories of metaphors, for example, assumes to describe and illustrate the variance in (actual and potential) theoretical perspectives in the field. Palmer and Dunford's (1996) classification of metaphors of organizational change processes, whilst not removed from actual accounts of change processes in organizations, imposes a classification and set of diagnostic questions that can aid organizational researchers in the application of metaphors in their theorizing about change. Similarly, Putnam et al. (1996) and Putnam and Boys (2006) identified eight metaphors of organizational communication which together are meant "to reveal the assumptive ground of different research programmes and to cut across different levels of analysis and theoretical domains" (Putnam & Boys, 2006: 541-542). Work in OT by Cornelissen (2005, 2006a) and Weick (1989, 1998) sets out guidelines for how organizational researchers can develop and build theories through the use of metaphors, which when they are projected onto organizational reality (or rather observations of organizational reality) may describe and explain aspects of it. Much if not all work on organization theory and theory-building has such a "projection" focus on metaphor because the

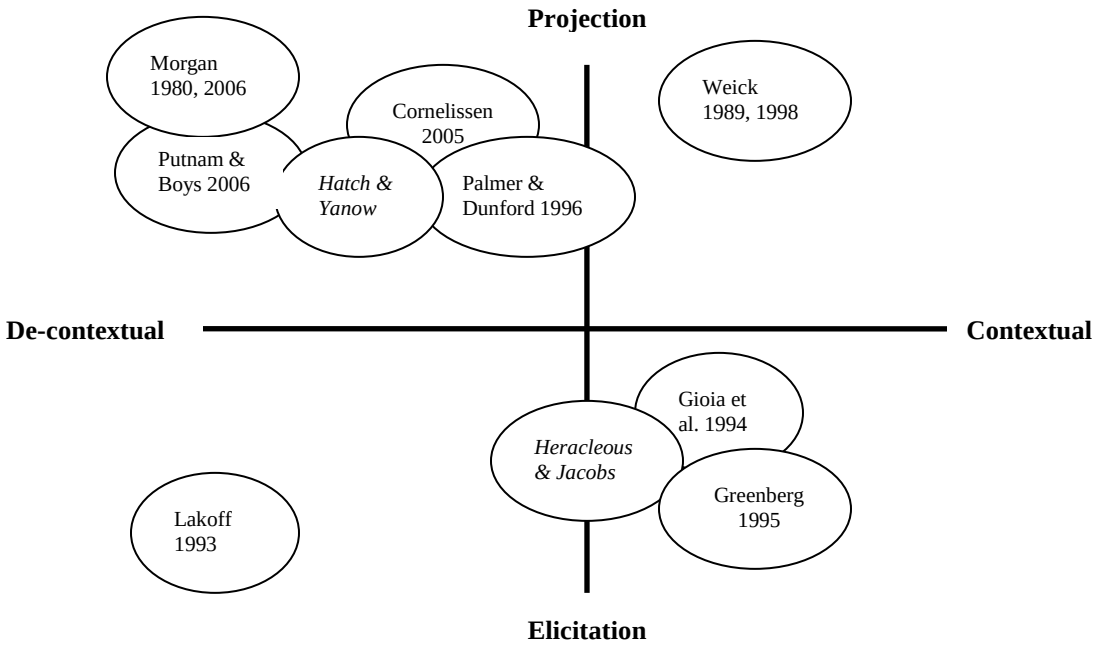
purpose of much theorizing is essentially to identify and abstract "second-order" constructs which when related or projected onto empirical settings describe and explain the "first-order" lived experiences of people within organizations (Van Maanen, 1979). The article by Hatch and Yanow (2008) also has a "projection" approach to metaphor. They suggest that a close understanding of painting practice (in terms of issues of representation) may when projected onto the practice of theorizing help organizational researchers understand issues of ontology, epistemology and methodology. They demonstrate how the painting metaphor facilitates our understanding of the importance of synchrony between a researcher's ontological, epistemological and methodological choices and of the pitfalls that may occur when such synchrony is lacking.

In contrast with such a "projection" approach, much research in organizational behavior has followed a more "inductive" approach in identifying processes of meaning-making around metaphors that are elicited at the level of people's language use. For example, Gioia and his colleagues published a series of articles on a particular metaphor that the incoming President of a university used when he called for a "strategic change" to "enable the university to pursue a path of selective excellence" in order "to make [it] a 'Top-10' public university" (Gioia, 1986; Gioia et al., 1994). Much of their research has been around exploring the particular impact of this path metaphor and associated notions of "world-class" and "excellence" on people's sensemaking at various levels within the university. The "elicitation" approach in this and other work involves identifying metaphors in the context of people's language use and examining their uses, meanings and impacts. The objective is to identify the symbolic and interpretive uses of metaphors in people's sensemaking and communication with one another. These metaphors

therefore feature as "data" on organizational reality and as symbolic devices that can be pinpointed and interpreted by an organizational researcher. They do not, in contrast with much organization theory, feature as theoretical constructs or devices at a second-order level. To illustrate, when Gioia and his colleagues abstracted theoretical dimensions from their research surrounding the use of the path metaphor, these dimensions did not concern the metaphor per se but related to the general use of symbols and metaphors within processes of sensegiving and sensemaking. Similarly, Greenberg (1995) examined the way in which a managerial decision to divide teams of organizational members into "blue" versus "gray" during a restructuring led to members unpacking these terms metaphorically in terms of the two sides in the American civil war. Her analysis demonstrated that symbolic processes of sensemaking play a critical role in reestablishing understanding after a restructuring or organizational change even when organizational leaders or managers are not explicitly directing these symbolic processes. Heracleous and Jacobs' (2008) paper also follows in the "elicitation" tradition. Contrasting themselves to the "projection" focus of much of the work on metaphor in organization theory and organizational development, they talk about how they induced metaphors from the artifacts that people produced in strategy workshops. The novelty of their approach to organizational development is twofold: first, while the use of metaphors is partly prefigured by the material (bricks) that were made available in these workshops, they do not as such impose metaphors. Whereas much work in organizational development research works towards developing or identifying metaphors which individuals can work with as tools in a change process or strategic intervention (e.g., Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990), their approach stays rooted in the *in situ* sensemaking of participants during the

workshops. Second, they elicit metaphors from a different modality (namely, constructed artifacts that can be seen and manipulated) than the language or text modality that features in much research on metaphors.

Figure 1: The focus and form of metaphor-based organizational research



Contextual versus De-contextual Approaches to Metaphor

The second dimension of Figure 1 refers to the form or methodological approach to the study of metaphor. On the basis of published organizational research on metaphor, we can make a broad distinction between cognitive or cognitive linguistic approaches to metaphor on the one hand and discursive or discourse analysis approaches on the other (see, e.g., Cornelissen, 2006b; Oswick & Jones, 2006; Oswick et al., 2004). The first set of approaches tends to "de-contextualize" metaphors in that the focus is on identifying metaphors that are used *across* speakers and contexts of language use and on *abstracting* cognitive meanings that are shared

across such contexts. The other discursive set of approaches tends to "contextualize" metaphors in its emphasis on identifying locally specific uses and meanings of metaphors and their interaction with other elements of discourse (e.g., other tropes such as metonymy). Whilst these two approaches may not be contradictory, and can be combined as complementary methodological approaches (e.g., Cornelissen, 2006b; Oswick & Jones, 2006), they do characterize a basic distinction to the study of metaphors.

The "de-contextual" cognitive and cognitive linguistic approaches stress that metaphors, far from being simply a figure of speech or embellishment of spoken or written language, function as organizing principles of thought and experience. The best known theoretical exponent of this view is conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) (Lakoff 1993; Lakoff and Johnson 1980) which suggests that patterns in everyday linguistic expressions suggest the existence of a system of conventional conceptual metaphors, such as 'love is a journey', 'argument is war', and so on. Lakoff (1993) makes an important distinction in this respect between the linguistic and conceptual "level" of a metaphor. In his approach, a metaphor as "a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system", in our thinking, can be traced as "a linguistic expression (a word, a phrase, a sentence) that is the surface realization of such a cross-domain mapping" (Lakoff, 1993: 203). For Lakoff, a metaphor is first of all significant at the level of conceptual thought where as conceptual and cross-categorical patterns of thinking they are central and conventional to much of our day-to-day thinking and reasoning. To get at such conceptual metaphors, Lakoff (1993: 210) emphasizes the importance of systematic linguistic correspondences as a basis for claims about the existence of conceptual metaphors. In other words, if many linguistic metaphorical expressions point to the same underlying conceptual metaphor the correspondence is systematic and hence significant as a

conventional way of talking about and understanding a certain subject. Following Lakoff's approach, most claims about the existence of particular conceptual metaphors have been based on lists of de-contextualized sentences, all supposedly realizing the same underlying mappings in the minds of the speakers of a language (Semino, Heywood & Short, 2004). There are many examples of organizational studies that similarly have made abstractions from local instances of metaphor use to more general categories of organizational metaphors (e.g., Cornelissen et al., 2005; Morgan, 1980, 1983; Palmer & Dunford, 1996). Putnam and Boys (2006), for example, categorize metaphors for communication processes within and across organizations on the basis of selected sentences from academic articles. In their approach, they de-contextualize the use of particular metaphors (at the linguistic level) within individual academic articles by bringing them together in coherent categories of conceptual or cognitive meaning. Morgan's (1980, 2006) classic work on dominant metaphorical images of organizations equally assumes that such images and the understandings that flow from them are rooted in the socially shared reality of theorists, managers and employees, and express shared 'natural' or conventional ways of thinking about organizations. In summary, Morgan, CMT and the other works that are aligned towards the "de-contextual" end in Figure 1 all share a focus on *identifying* metaphors that are used across different speakers and social contexts and on inferring and *abstracting* cognitive meanings that are shared across such contexts.

This focus on the culturally shared repertoires of metaphors in a de-contextualized way contrasts with discourse theory and discourse analysis (e.g., Edwards, 1997) which "emphasizes the indexical or situated nature of social categories in linguistic interaction" (Weatherall & Walton, 1999: 481). Within discourse theory and discourse analysis,

metaphors are seen as devices or units of language that are deployed within particular conversations and contexts. Discourse analysis of empirical texts or talk is "contextual" in identifying locally specific uses and meanings of metaphors and in examining the interaction of metaphors with other elements of discourse. This contextual sensitivity then lends itself to making informed interpretations about the specific uses of a particular metaphor *in situ* that may range beyond psychological or cognitive uses (understanding) to sociological uses of, for example, impression management, normative judgments and legitimacy. Discourse analysts insist that the uses or meanings of a single metaphor may differ across speakers and contexts of language use, and that one therefore needs to consider the locally specific reasons for the choice and appropriation of one metaphor over another and the ways in which metaphors may link together to form "chains of associations" (Oswick et al., 2004; Putnam & Boys, 2006). The discursive view thus sees metaphors not only as available sense-making devices that are triggered by events, but also as actively employed to "manage" interests in social interaction. Hence, while cognitive linguists focus on cognitive meanings of a metaphor at a general and conceptual level, discourse analysts stress the importance of discursive practice, and of the functions performed by the use of a metaphor in that discourse. Examples of this approach in organizational research include the sensemaking studies (Gioia et al., 1994; Greenberg, 1995) discussed above which focus on the discursive practices and locally specific sensemaking around a particular metaphor. Weick's (1989, 1998) work on the use of metaphors in theorizing also displays a sensitivity to discursive practices of organizational scholars. Implied in much of his work has been the point that as scholars

we need to keep thought moving by discursively producing, alternating and inter-locking different metaphors of organizations (see also Hatch, 1999).

Both the Hatch and Yanow (2008) and Heracleous and Jacobs (2008) papers are not avowedly cognitive linguistic or discourse analysis papers. However, they can be placed along the "de-contextual" versus "contextual" continuum. Hatch and Yanow's paper is placed towards the "de-contextual" end of the axis because it involves the development of a metaphor outside of the context of the discursive practice of those (organizational researchers) for who the metaphor is intended as an aid. Heracleous and Jacobs' paper is placed in the middle of the continuum. There are two reasons for doing so. First, their study does elicit metaphors in the context of strategy workshops and may be seen to express the lived experiences of participants. Hence, one may say that there is an emphasis in their research design on the local context in which these metaphors are produced. At the same time, their study involves a set of staged strategy workshops which present a simulated and controlled environment away from the day-to-day office life of participants. As such, one could argue that the metaphors that are produced in the building of artifacts may not necessarily reflect the *in situ* experiences of participants. Heracleous and Jacobs also abstract categories of metaphors from these artifacts taking them somewhat out of the context of how a particular metaphor featured in the sensemaking of a single participant.

MODALITIES "BESIDES" LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE

Traditional work on metaphor in organization studies has been primarily concerned with metaphors in language data. Heracleous and Jacobs (2006) extend this work by

demonstrating that metaphors may also occur non-verbally and in a different modality; namely in sculpted artifacts (see also Doyle & Sims, 2002). The idea that metaphors may be "invested" in other modes besides language resonates with anthropological research on metaphorical symbols (e.g., Bateson, 1972) and has recently been the focus of much research within the social sciences (e.g., Forceville, 2006). Besides language and discourse (linguistic or verbal metaphor), other modes or modalities include pictorial signs and images (image metaphor), gestures (metaphoric gestures), constructed artifacts (metaphoric artifacts), and sounds or music (sonic metaphor). Forceville (2002, 2005), for example, has examined the use of pictorial metaphors where visual signs stand in for emotions in surrealist painting and in cartoons. Cienki (1998) has examined the use of gestures alongside speech; gestures that are produced by the hands and forearms and which often coincide with linguistic or verbal metaphors. An interesting observation in relation to much research on pictorial metaphors and metaphoric gestures is that these metaphors often instantiate or mark well-understood and idiomatic linguistic or verbal metaphors. Forceville's (2005) identified pictorial anger metaphors in the Asterix cartoon such as bulging eyes, smoking ears and a red face appeared to extend widespread verbal metaphors of anger as increased heat, as internal pressure and as correlated with strong physiological effects (e.g., Kövecses, 2000). Similarly, Heracleous and Jacobs (2008) metaphoric artefacts may be seen to express idiomatic metaphorical models around seeing strategy or change as a journey and seeing organizations as machines. Whilst the materials that participants used to sculpt these metaphoric artefacts may have primed particular metaphorical models, these models do not exist "outside" of language. Instead, these metaphorical models were explicitly verbalised by participants during the workshop

and may also be seen to instantiate well-understood and idiomatic verbal or linguistic metaphors (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

While we do not argue that linguistic or verbal metaphors are the predominant mode of metaphor use or that other modes of expression can be reduced to language, it does seem feasible to suggest that language has an important mediating role in the construction or articulation of metaphors in these other pictorial, gesture, artefacts and sonic modes (see also Cassirer, 1944, 1946). The implication of this argument is that instead of simply looking at a single mode such as artefacts it may be more useful to adopt a multi-modal perspective on metaphor. That is, a metaphor is likely to be cued and represented in more than one mode simultaneously as metaphoric gestures often coincide with linguistic metaphors and as sculpted artefacts may extend linguistic metaphors. In the first case, a metaphoric gesture may be seen to *mark* the use of a linguistic metaphor to a listener by stressing and visualising the idiom. In the second scenario, a metaphoric artefact or pictorial or sonic metaphor may *instantiate* and *extend* linguistic metaphors in the context of a different mode of expression and understanding.

In the light of the possible connections between language and other modes of expression, research methodologies for examining multi-modal metaphors would have to combine audio-visual recordings of sculpted artefacts, gestures or sounds with transcribed verbal accounts. Heracleous and Jacobs (2008), for example usefully combined visual recordings of the sculpted artefacts with interview data and field notes gathered during their intervention. In summary, researching metaphors multi-modally appears to be a useful next step in research on metaphors in organizational settings; a

development in which theory should go hand in hand with robust methods towards metaphor identification and analysis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

We have categorized different approaches to the study of metaphor based upon whether metaphors are projected or elicited, whether they are interpreted contextually (at the first-order level of language users) or de-contextually (at a higher level of abstraction in terms of second-order theory or shared categories of language) and whether they are studied in language or in other modalities such as pictures and images, gestures and artifacts. In doing so, we have made salient connections and differences between previous organizational studies on metaphor. Our categorization also highlights a number of areas for further metaphor-based research.

As a first step, we recommend further research on the study of metaphor that identifies patterns and meanings of metaphors in discourse in different organizational contexts. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that metaphors play a crucial role within processes of sensemaking of top managers, strategists, entrepreneurs, middle managers, administrators and blue collar workers (e.g., Carlsen, 2006; Christensen et al., 2007; Gavetti et al., 2005; Gioia et al., 1994; Ward, 2004), they are not always noticed or systematically studied for their role within discourses across such contexts. Because of this lack of awareness or a systematic focus on metaphor, the existence and role of metaphors is often also insufficiently distinguished from other sensemaking devices such as the classic tropes of metonymy, synecdoche and irony (e.g., Cornelissen, 2008;

Oswick et al., 2002) and from other cognitive processes of analogical imagination and symbolic association (e.g., Carlsen, 2006).

An intensification of research on the uses and functions of metaphors across different contexts and literatures should we think go hand in hand with greater attention to methodological issues around metaphor identification and analysis. So, in concluding this article, we emphasize some key methodological points for metaphor-based research.

First, metaphor scholars in organization studies and the social sciences often do not provide an account of how they specified what is and what is not metaphorical in the context of their research. This is problematic, we feel, because variability in intuitions and lack of precision about what counts as metaphor diminishes the internal validity of a particular empirical analysis as too many or too few metaphors may be identified. It also complicates the basis for making more broad-based theoretical inferences about the frequency of metaphors, their uses and functions in discourse and social interaction as well as possible relationships between metaphors and other figures of speech such as metonymy (e.g., Cornelissen, 2008). Fortunately, one of the major developments in metaphor research over the past years has been the development of protocols for metaphor identification (e.g., Cameron, 1999; Pragglejaz, 2007). The advantages of using and reporting such a protocol is that it (a) offsets a researcher's biases and intuitions regarding metaphors in a context of language use (e.g., a text, speech or recorded conversation) and (b) allows the researcher to identify metaphorically used words in a context of language use with greater precision; which in turn (c) enables a more systematic comparison of different empirical analyses. Cameron (1999) and Steen (1999) present applied linguistic protocols that define metaphor as a "figure of speech in which a

word or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable" (Oxford English Dictionary). Starting from this definition, both Cameron (1999) and Steen (1999) suggest to work through a transcribed text and identify for each sentence or utterance (spoken sentence) all those words and expressions which activate meaning(s) "which cannot be literally applied to the referents in the world evoked by the text" (Steen, 1999: 61). The Pragglejaz group of metaphor researchers recently suggested another protocol that starts with a focus on lexical units (single words or combinations of words in the case of entire expressions or proper names) in a text and to identify whether the meaning in context of that unit is different from its basic and most conventional meaning (in normal language use). In cases where the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning and is not simply another basic sense of the word (polysemy) the word may be seen as having a metaphorical sense (Pragglejaz, 2007). All of these protocols define metaphorical sense as contrasting with the literal and basic sense of words in the context of a spoken or written sentence in line with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980: 3) starting point of metaphor as "the understanding of one thing in terms of another". Whilst these protocols have been developed with verbal metaphors in mind, there is no reason for why they could not be developed into comparable procedures to study metaphors in other modalities such as, for example, pictorial metaphor, metaphoric gestures and metaphoric artifacts. Cienki and Müller (in press), for example, adapted the Pragglejaz procedure to study metaphoric gestures.

Second, metaphor scholars in organization studies and the social sciences need to stay as close as possible to the life-world of the people that they study when they interpret the meaning and uses of a particular metaphor. Doubts have often been expressed when

scholars extrapolate too readily from identified metaphors in a text to suggestions of systematicity in metaphor use or of cognitive structure, particularly when different linguistic communities are involved (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Cameron, 1999). The danger of course is that when a scholar makes such leaps that the gains in generality (abstraction within and across texts) are offset by losses in accuracy (a close fit with the data in context) (Weick, 1979). Oswick et al. (2004: 121) articulate this danger as follows; "researchers often develop a laundry list of metaphors, ones that are detached from their constitutive context and their dynamic relationships" within a text. This is not to say that one cannot group or categorize linguistic metaphors and make more general theoretical abstractions regarding the uses or cognitive meaning of metaphors; however, we do wish to make the point that when researchers group and interpret metaphors they should (a) stay as close as possible to the words used by individuals and should (b) involve feedback to these individuals as a way of strengthening interpretations and to check against alternative interpretations (Lee, 1999). Lakoff's (1993) discussion of the metaphor of "a purposeful life is a business" illustrates the potential danger of a loss in accuracy because of a focus on generality. Lakoff (1993: 227) argues that the following conventional expressions instantiate the same metaphor: "he has a rich life", "it's an enriching experience", "I want to get a lot out of life", "he's going about the business of everyday life" and "it's time to take stock of my life". Indeed, some of these expressions relate fairly un-controversially to the source domain of business (e.g., "it's time to take stock"). Others are less straightforward exponents of business. The expression "I want to get a lot out of life", for example, does not clearly relate to the source domain of business and could in fact be related to other source domains such as, for example, consumption.

The consequence of the focus on generality as in this case is that it may lead a researcher down a particular interpretive route when other interpretations for individual metaphorical expressions are equally possible and indeed may be the meaning that is actually primed when individuals use the expression in context.

Third, and following on from our first recommendation, we think that it is good practice to incorporate reliability assessments into the processes of identifying, categorizing and interpreting metaphors. Assessing the reliability of identifying metaphors and coding them in terms of particular source domains is important as it offsets the shortcomings of individual intuition and biases and provides an evaluation of the reproducibility of the way in which metaphors have been identified and are distinguished from one another. Reliability assessments can be done in relation to each of the following stages of analysis: metaphor identification, categorization and interpretation. One way of assessing the reliability of metaphor identification is to examine the overall degree of difference between researchers by measuring the number of cases (i.e., words or word combinations) that analysts have marked as metaphorical or not and then comparing these proportions between analysts. When the differences between proportions are too great and beyond chance, the identification is seen as insufficiently reliable. Similarly, an assessment for the categorization of metaphors into groups of source domains may equally be calculated in terms of the pair-wise agreement among coders making category judgments, correcting for expected chance agreement. The traditional test statistic for this measurement is Cohen's Kappa (K) (Cohen, 1960; Carletta, 1996). A K of about .80 is often equated with reliability in identifying and categorizing metaphors between coders (Carletta, 1996). Reliability of metaphor

identification and categorization will also be enhanced by our first two recommendations; i.e., using clear criteria for metaphor identification and staying as close as possible to the data when categorizing metaphors into coherent groupings of source domains. The interpretation of metaphors, finally, has traditionally been based upon the intuitions of native speakers and individual analysts. In principle, comparing the intuitions of individual analysts regarding the meaning(s) of a particular metaphor provides some form of reliability assessment. In addition, we think that it is often useful to consult external sources, such as dictionaries (Steen, 1999), lists of existing metaphorical expressions and conventional source domains (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) and other corpus materials such as the British National Corpus (e.g., Cornelissen, 2008) which can be used as a frame of reference to check individual intuitions regarding the conventionality and potential meaning(s) of a particular metaphorically used word or expression. The use of external sources may reduce the variability between analysts and the degree of error, thereby increasing the reliability of the overall interpretation of metaphors.

Using these methodological guidelines and reporting them in published research may improve the quality of metaphor-based research across the organizational domain. The potential for further metaphor-based research in strategy, entrepreneurship, organizational behavior, organization theory, organizational communication and organizational development is metaphorically speaking *huge*. The two papers in this Special Topic Section signal interesting advances in metaphor-based research and hopefully will spark off a new stream of research on metaphors in language and in other modalities such as painting or sculpted artifacts.

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