

Central nervous system and metaphors

[Science](#), [Anatomy](#)



This essay explores the concept of an organization style metaphorically as professed by Gareth Morgan in his book *Images of Organizations* (1989). This essay provides examples of how the responsibilities and functionality of upper management within a corporation serve similar functions as to how the brain functions within the Central Nervous system. First, one must understand exactly what a metaphor is in order to understand how Morgan (1989) comes to his conclusion.

A metaphor is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (2009). Morgan (1989) discusses how the brain is a metaphor for a company's organization structure and behavior. He considers the organization as the brain and draws attention to the importance of information, learning, and intelligence, and provides a framework for understanding modern organizations. This style of organization has the capacity to be flexible and inventive with a continuous improvement mindset.

The brain stores and processes enormous amounts of information in its parts simultaneously thus the end result being able to speak and walk. To understand the brain like metaphor we have to understand that the brain is made of two hemispheres. It is understood that the left side of the brain is the more logical, analytical and rational side, much like the strategy and finance side of an organization whereas the right side is more creative and emotional much like the marketing and human resources departments of an organization.

Like the brain, an organization has areas that concentrate on particular parts of the business; however, the organization as a whole must work together. Each department can work on its own as can be seen in artificial intelligences such as Rodney Brooks' robot (Morgan, 1989). The functions of an organization such as Marketing, Human Resources, Finance, Operations, and Information Technology have a series of processes which result in the function of the whole organization. Each of these departments in an organization can be likened to a sensory input element to the executive “brain”.

Marketing, for example, can serve as the “eyes” of the organization by providing input to the brain related to the business environment, supply and demand and other market elements important to the navigation capabilities of the organization. The Finance department acts as the “skin” by providing information about the financial atmosphere and environment of the corporate body. The Finance department “skin” can tell the corporate brain whether conditions are financially cool, or hot. Also, the “skin” can indicate whether the organization is acting in a manner that produces “pain” in terms of financial difficulties.

Operations acts as the ears of an organization, providing information about the “balance” of the entire organization and allowing the brain of the leadership to issue the appropriate instructions to the organization to keep it moving without collapse. Human Resources acts as a taste mechanism for the organizational body, giving the brain an idea of the building blocks (personnel) that are being introduced to the organizational body. The IT department can be likened to the central nervous system. It is

this department that maintains the flow of information to and from the “ brain” of the organization.

The metaphor of the organization as a body with the corporate officers as the brain can be further understood with respect to what happens when there are breakdowns in any one of the parts composing the organizational body. Failure of the Human Resource department, for example, can lead to the ingestion of organizational poison: workers who are not qualified for the jobs they are assigned. If the “ skin” of finance fails, the infection of debt may set in, causing necrosis to various parts of the organizational body.

It is possible that such a result could result in a systemic infection that could kill the entire organization. The Operations department should malfunction; the entire organization could lose its balance and fall, destroying the organizational “ brain”. Perhaps most significantly, the failure of IT to properly move information between the “ brain” and the other appendages of the organization, the result is paralysis, as the messages the executive send get lost or misinterpreted. The organization-as-brain-and-body metaphor goes a long way toward explaining the interconnectivity of various aspects of organizations.

All the component parts contribute information to the executive “ brain” which can react quickly and guide the organization toward action that will make the most effective use of the information. The failure of any one of the component parts of the organizational body represents a hazard that threatens the organization as a whole, and the brain in particular. " Metaphor. " Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2009. Merriam-Webster Online. 17 April 2009

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