

Metaphors in organisation change: what can change consultants do?



Metaphors in Organisation Change: What Can Change Consultants Do?

Introduction

Metaphor, as a common rhetoric, works in interpersonal communication that refers to explaining one thing by mentioning another. It is a kind of figure of speech, which relies on the similarity between the two. Basically, an easy concept is utilised for vividly make a harder one understandable to others. In the contemporary workplace, the metaphor is turning into a functional tool for organisation consultants in assessment and implementing change.

According to Cleary et al. (1992), the use of metaphors in describing organisational culture and attempting to change organizations is a promising trend for organisational consultants.

Cliff and John (1999) indicate that, in a related survey, the results from the respondents clearly show effectiveness of using metaphors to evaluate company's features. Also, as the ongoing globalisation, the increasing diversity in a modern workplace is requiring detailed assessment and analysis of staff in it, in which metaphors could enhance these processes effectively for managers and other stakeholders. In this paper, what is the circumstances where the metaphors are demanded and get operative and how they resolve the existing communicative issues are discussed and analysed. A few limitations shall exist as the analysis is solely focused on a multiple culture environment or workplace and the significant of utilising metaphors is considered mainly from the points of change managers and consultants' views.

Theoretical Review

<https://assignbuster.com/metaphors-in-organisation-change-what-can-change-consultants-do/>

Recently researchers have contributed a lot in the role of metaphors in organisational change. Referring to an available change study, Lewin (1947) originally proposes a three-procedure model for social change, which is thought as compatible in organisational change as well. That is, an accomplished change requires ' mental unfreezing, group value changing and new level refreezing'. For the first aspect, solidified ideas in one group should be laid off whilst the level of acceptability of every employee is to be carefully examined to identify the changing feasibility. Change implementers is possibly to face intense resistance from each level of the organisation. In the next step, ' changing' occurs after internal staff get unfrozen and willing to move. People accelerate to accept new values and goals, and as they get more familiar with the change, change agents may critically recommend further assist to these recipients. The final stage ' refreezing' is actually a process of reinforcing or solidifying the change, like concrete. Managers ought to maintain the immutability after implementing change, rewards system and acknowledgement work in effect during this period of enhancement.

Afterwards, Burnes (2004) supplements that the Lewin's model assumes a stable stated organisation, which is considered more appropriate for a small-scale change plan. Burnes points out the ignorance of external interference in this model that is limited in the management area. Despite the limitation, this three-step model does briefly conclude the outline of group change.

Also, Medley and Akan (2008) suggest that, combining with other practices such as strategic planning, Lewin's model provides a practical and

theoretically insightful tool for nonprofits wishing to refine their missions and programs and engage in successful organizational change.

Aside from theories about organisational change, metaphors are the other factor to be analysed. Morgan (1983) underlines that metaphors ought to be utilised and play an important role in organisational theorising.

The significance it provides is enormous conceptual insights and clear classification into organisational theories and problems. Cornelissen (2005) outlines a domains-interaction model, in which metaphor involves the conjunction of whole semantic domains in which a correspondence between terms or concepts is constructed rather than deciphered, showing an intense feasibility of metaphors in organisation theories. Due to the importance of metaphors in opening up new avenues for understanding and enquiry, based on the concept of social change model, the utility of metaphors is to be deeply penetrated in the following.

Metaphors in Organisation

Cornelissen (2004) introduces a model, in which an organisation is compared to a theatre and states that metaphoric analysis works beyond than analogic one. That is, within analogical analysis, the only conjoined domain is about superficial information between the two objectives while the use of metaphors enables a deeper evaluation about structural similarities between organisation and theatre in this case. Specifically, it is, by a profound judgment deep into structural similarities, that metaphor works and a consequent implication about the connection of two objectives would be created. In short, metaphors used by individuals in a group tends to be

considered to reveal the essence of that group as a direct description could be of challenging and indistinct.

Metaphors also cause numerous ways of thinking upon organisation when users' appraisal starts from multi-angle. In a specific high culture-diversity workplace, the cultures always guide differing ways of thinking and judging. However, there tends to be objectives with the same or similar representations even in two entirely different cultures. Adopting metaphoric expression for people with numerous cultures background is considered to better lead to consistent understanding. Besides, in different cultures there exists types of culture metaphors or habits, like a day-to-day common sense, to ensure a commonly known meanings in culture groups. And communicating with other racial groups could result in broadening such culture metaphors. ' The culture metaphor highlights the symbolic significance within seemingly mundane aspects of organizational life, from the time and location of meetings to the color and arrangement of furniture.' (Jenkins, 2012, p. 32) Hence, the launch of metaphor using in personal communicational could not only obviously improve the gap of thinking and understanding, but also motivate employees' diversity in coming up creative ideas.

Analysis of Metaphors and Lewin's Change Model

By applying Lewin's change model, the analysis is divided into three aspects to discuss about how metaphor impacts in organisation change process.

Firstly, referring to 'unfreezing' stage, it is suggested that metaphors are a forceful tool to break the 'ice' that is the existing solidified state. Carlsson-

Wall et al. (2016) describes an elderly care case, where the planned change encountered a lot of resistance from members who have little knowledge about it. Faced a failure of encouraging employees, the plan consultants were then promoted to apply metaphorical representation of unknown accounting information among members, therefore members' comprehension was obtained by integrating relevant ideas and conceptually pushed the organisation to achieve an early beginning of change. Ultimately, this metaphorical representation of concepts linked the unfamiliar domain to a more familiar domain and provided rationales for organisational change. In short, it works for introducing employees with basic understanding about the link between the ongoing change and present work practices. Basically, metaphors play a role of intermedia here as it resolves an ineffective interpersonal communication or information asymmetry among the group.

During the second step of change model, it is critical as an organisation's new direction is about to be reached and it is when the change becomes real. It's also, consequently, the time that most people struggle with the new reality. That is, facing uncertainty and fear makes it the hardest step to overcome. According to Magala et al. (2007), a musical metaphor would be helpful in the middle part of changing. In-group individuals seek for stability, so the change process might be seen as miserable experience. However, as in musicological, Magala then demonstrates experience is regarded in terms of tension, and this tension resembles the pain that change brings to group members. Furthermore, a musicological metaphor in these situations can create harmony that relieves displeasure. Returning to organisational change, such harmony is

what change implementors search for to overcome employees' struggle and troubles. In other words, rather than group individuals themselves, the change consultants should utilise metaphor into their situations for the assistance with these individuals, by making sense of things they demand.

The third step, or the reinforcement of change, stresses that refreezing helps in turning the group into a more practical mode. Since the changes made in the group are almost accepted by each member, this step is thought to be especially important to ensure that people do not revert back to their old ways of thinking or doing prior to the implementation of the change. In Cornelissen's (2004) 'organisation as theatre' metaphor, the implication could be shown that employees play their own characters, like on the stage in a theatre. And as allocated with a unique task, each member would make efforts to adjust himself or herself into a new position as well as abandon the past ways. As a result, the whole organisation evolves into an enhanced new stage, as releasing updated dramas routinely, where metaphors guide a broader horizon for the organisation.

Tasks for Change Consultants

From the perspectives of change consultants, Armenakis and Bedeian (1992) proposed that metaphors, utilising as a diagnostic tool for organisations, can create new methods for consultants of analysing and thinking about their surrounding groups.

On one side, consultants are suggested to play a role of designer of organisational change by introducing metaphors. For example, they could set a group as a football team, in which members are placed into different

<https://assignbuster.com/metaphors-in-organisation-change-what-can-change-consultants-do/>

positions. These positions members own are according to their characteristics or tasks, idea providers or mission implementors could be set as attracters, or vanguards, while people responsible for logistics might be seen as the guards. Moreover, a supervisor as a goalkeeper could definitely become an insurance that avoids or remedies mistakes occurred by employees. At the same time, when one essential position is vacant, consultants subsequently complement it by causing a structuring change to functionally enrich the whole group's integrity and effectiveness. As creating such a metaphor model, consultants can evidently refer to a football team management mode to instruct the managing and change process.

Other than processing organisational messages for themselves, consultants could play a role of discoverer, transferring this method to the whole group members at the same time. It is assumed that each employee holds an own metaphor of the entire organisation, and reasonably those who imagine a similar metaphor are believed to possess a high compatibility. That is, they are able to easily communicate with each other and consequently work efficiently with each other. For instance, two employees consider their company as a great family where positive relationship is built and people work as a whole, they should comprehend the opposite side's needs and cogitation. As a result, by collecting data about everyone's metaphors upon the group, such members can be classified into numerous types and change consultants then evidently anticipate the possible reaction, supportive or resistant, from these types of people under a circumstance of change planning or preparation. Also, the metaphors used by employees indicate their attitudes towards the group to some extent, and through monitoring

the shift of the metaphors, consultants receive information about the satisfaction and their course of employing changes upon an ongoing change process, as one of the valid invisible feedbacks. Additionally, similar to members' metaphors, when clients using metaphors, enormous insights are also provided for the organisational consultants as feedback for a future improvement.

Conclusion

Overall, in this article a basic description of recent studies on the utility of metaphors in organisational change are proved. With the highlight of Lewin's change mode, a range of significance of metaphors is discussed. Findings demonstrate that metaphors are working more than a rhetoric or analogy, in the area of managerial science and in organisational change specifically. In short, metaphors could effectively reveal the reality of an organisation, and arouse thinking under a group with multiple culture. Primarily, the views for change consultants are analysed and the results show a demand for utilising metaphors in change process. Not only a diagnostic tool, metaphors work as, but also a guidance to arrange the organisation structuring and adopting change. In addition, metaphors are playing an evaluative role in change process. Yet, it is pointed out that misapplication of heuristics during the utility of metaphors may result in a series of diagnostic bias. Hence, change consultants are recommended not to entirely refer to metaphors during assessment and designing change, and wisely launching of such a key tool could strengthen in the three stages of change.

Reference

- Armenakis, A. A., & Bedeian, A. G. (1992). The role of metaphors in organizational change CHANGE AGENT AND CHANGE TARGET PERSPECTIVES. *Group & Organization Studies* (1986-1998), 17(3), 242.
- Burnes, B. (2004). Kurt Lewin and the planned approach to change: a re-appraisal. *Journal of Management studies*, 41(6), 977-1002.
- Carlsson-Wall, M., Kraus, K., Lund, M., & Sjögren, E. (2016). 'Accounting talk' through metaphorical representations: Change agents and organisational change in home-based elderly care. *European Accounting Review*, 25(2), 215.
- Cleary, C., Packard, T., Armenakis, A. A., Bedeian, A. G., Larwood, L., & Burke, W. W. (1992). The use of metaphors in organizational assessment and change. *Group & Organization Management*, 17(3), 229.
- Cliff O., & John. M. (1999). Images of an organisation: The use of metaphor in a multinational company. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(6), 501-523.
- Cornelissen, J. P. (2004). What are we playing at? theatre, organization, and the use of metaphor. *Organization Studies*, 25(5), 705-726.
- Cornelissen, J. P. (2005). Beyond compare: Metaphor in organization theory. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(4), 751-764.
- Lewin, K. (1947). Group decision and social change. *Readings in social psychology*, 3(1), 197-211.

- Magala, S., Mantere, S., Sillince, J. A., & Hämäläinen, V. (2007). Music as a metaphor for organizational change. *Journal of organizational change management*.
- Medley, B. C., & Akan, O. H. (2008). Creating positive change in community organizations: A case for rediscovering Lewin. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 18(4), 485-496.
- Morgan, G. (1983). More on Metaphor: Why we Cannot Control Tropes in Administrative Science. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28(4), 601-607.
- Jenkins, J. J. (2012). Community as metaphor: Dialectical tensions of a racially diverse organization (Order No. 3546914). Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection. (1267824143).