

BEYOND COMPARE: METAPHOR IN ORGANIZATION THEORY

JOEP P. CORNELISSEN
Leeds University Business School

Despite the increased salience of metaphor in organization theory, current perspectives are flawed and misguided in assuming that metaphor can be explained with the so-called comparison model. I therefore outline an alternative model of metaphor understanding—the domains-interaction model—which suggests that metaphor involves the conjunction of whole semantic domains in which a correspondence between terms or concepts is constructed rather than deciphered and where the resulting image and meaning is creative. I also discuss implications of this model for organizational theorizing and research.

Metaphor is both important and odd—its importance odd and its oddity important (Goodman, 1979: 175).

Commentaries on the role of metaphor in organization theory are in good supply these days (Inns, 2002; Oswick, Keenoy, & Grant, 2002). This situation appears to have been triggered by the frenzy of new metaphors in our field in recent years, including those of chaos (e.g., Thiétart & Forgues, 1995), jazz (e.g., Zack, 2000), organizational identity (e.g., Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000), and organizational mind (e.g., Weick & Roberts, 1993). However, despite increased acceptance and relevance, the major theoretical works on metaphor (Morgan, 1980; Oswick et al., 2002; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982; Tsoukas, 1991) are still falling short in offering an informed and grounded account of metaphor's workings in organization theory and research. Specifically, these works have been highly selective in their treatment, sourcing the comparison model as the sole account of how metaphor works. They have also, I suggest, been misguided, given the overwhelming research evidence in cognitive science that refutes this model (e.g., Eubanks, 1999; Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Gibbs, 1992a,b; Glucksberg & Keysar, 1990; Katz, 1992; McGlone & Manfredi, 2001; Shen, 1997; Tourangeau & Sternberg, 1981).

I therefore take a broader perspective in reviewing the major theoretical approaches to

metaphor, and I outline and illustrate a new model of how metaphor operates—the domains-interaction model. This model suggests that the basic mechanism involved in the production and comprehension of metaphors is not the selection of pre-existing attributes of the conjoined terms, as the comparison model implies. It is, rather, the generation and creation of new meaning beyond a previously existing similarity. Metaphor involves the conjunction of whole semantic domains in which a correspondence between terms or concepts is constructed, rather than deciphered, and the resulting image and meaning is creative, with the features of importance being emergent.

My purpose in this whole exercise is twofold: (1) to arrive at an enriched understanding and deeper appreciation of the role of metaphor in organization theory and (2) to provide a model of how metaphor operates that is more grounded and valid and, thus, more useful from the point of view of organizational theorizing and research. In what follows, I first discuss the role of metaphor in organization theory more generally, before moving on to present a critical review of the comparison view of metaphor that has dominated thinking and research within the organizational field. The deficiencies of the comparison model as an explanatory account of metaphor, as identified by this review, led me to pursue alternative models of how metaphor operates. These, in turn, provide a framework around which a specific model—the domains-interaction model—can be structured. This domains-interaction model and its key characteristics are then described in detail and illus-

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trated, by way of example, through a dissection and discussion of two dominant metaphors in the organizational field: the "learning organization" and "organizational identity" metaphors. I conclude the article with a discussion of theory and research implications, positioning the domains-interaction model within the wider realm of organization theory, and suggest research applications.

CONTEXT: THE ROLE OF METAPHOR IN ORGANIZATION THEORY

Debates on the Role and Use of Metaphor

After initial neglect, metaphor has, over the last two decades, attracted the attention of some of the best minds in our academic discipline, especially those with an interest in how language and metaphor represent organizational life (Daft & Wiginton, 1979; Morgan, 1980). In its early days, this interest in metaphor consisted of debates about whether metaphor *should* exist and *should* play a part in our theorizing (Bourgeois & Pinder, 1983; Morgan, 1980, 1983; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982). More recently, scholars have accepted that metaphor clearly does exist in organizational theory (Oswick et al., 2002; Tsoukas, 1991) and that our concern should be with figuring out how it operates to aid theorists and researchers (Bacharach, 1989; Weick, 1989).

The initial criticism leveled at the use of metaphor in organization theory was based on the view that if science is about exactitude and a continuous process of testing and falsification, a concept that is applied in a figurative sense cannot be of any use to scientific investigation (Bourgeois & Pinder, 1983; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982; Tsoukas, 1993). Pinder and Bourgeois (1982), proponents of this view, criticized metaphor for being inherently imprecise, ambiguous, and lacking an exact theoretical definition of whatever it is being studied. Because of this imprecision and ambiguity, which they contrasted with "literal" language that would enable connections to be made between observable phenomena and theoretical constructs, Pinder and Bourgeois argued that metaphors cannot be tested and falsified, since they "are stated in terms that do not have enough clear content to be falsifiable" (1982: 643). This view of metaphors as rhetorical devices that are inexact and potentially misleading, and therefore need to be

purged from scientific language, is in line with an image of organizational science that denounces figurative devices in favor of descriptions in more literal terms (Daft & Lewin, 1990; cf. Ortony, 1979b).

Morgan (1980, 1983) and Weick (1989), among others, have challenged such an image of organizational science by pointing out that all language is figurative to some degree (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They have also suggested that metaphor effectively plays a quintessential role in the early stages of theory development, before more rock-bottom hypotheses and observables are worked out and become the subject of examination. From this point of view, metaphor and its role in theory development should not be confused with formal theory testing and empirical research. Metaphor, instead, should be seen as operating in the realm of heuristics, in that it acts as a precursor to more formal theory and research; as a provisional way of organizing and seeing organizational reality, it lays out the lines for extended theorizing and observations (Bacharach, 1989).

Thus, within the early phases of theoretical development, a metaphor is heuristic and suggestive, and not yet declarative, of a particular organizational phenomenon. The metaphorical image of organization as a kind of machine illustrates this point well. The machine metaphor had initially suggested an image of organization as comprising a series of mechanically structured, interconnected parts. Over time, and as theory and research progressed, this view of organization became so taken for granted that the prefiguring image disappeared from view, leaving a number of residual concepts (including the "structure" concept) for extended theorizing and research (Morgan, 1996).

Characteristics of Metaphor and Its Use Within Organization Theory

Locating metaphor as an important device within the early stages of theoretical development is also central to Weick's (1989) concept of "disciplined imagination." This notion suggests that, when constructing theory, organizational theorists engage in a number of mental experiments or thought trials, where they iterate among reviewed literature, preliminary analyses, background assumptions, and their own intuition. In doing so, as Weick (1989) illustrates,

theorists consider a rich cascade of metaphorical images and representations of the subject in hand ("imagination") before selecting and deciding on one metaphorical image that serves as a starting point for further inquiry into it ("discipline"). As such, Weick also charges metaphor with an important heuristic role in theory construction—a view that resonates within the larger scientific community (e.g., Danziger, 1990; Holton, 1978).

Schön (1993) closely resembles Weick's views in his reference to the "generative" quality of metaphor. In Schön's view, metaphor operates as "a process by which new perspectives on the world come into existence" (1993: 137) and, as such, lays out the lines for investigation and understanding. And Soyland (1994) dubs this generative quality of metaphor a "promissory note": metaphor is credited as a device that is used to signal and open up a new research direction. "If a promissory note is accepted," Soyland suggests, "future research will be aimed at fulfilling the promise" and will promote and direct research in a certain direction, "at least until the prospects of such a fulfillment are described as 'unattainable,' or perhaps 'misconceived'" (1994: 37).

While each of these authors has put his own slant on the subject of metaphor and how metaphor works, they all concur in ascribing it a heuristic role, for its capacity to open up new ways of understanding and to lay out the groundwork for extended theorizing and research. Metaphor has this capacity, and therefore figures so prominently within theory construction, for three main reasons.

First, metaphors can express what alternative, literal expressions (including similes) cannot (Ortony, 1979b), providing theorists and researchers with a vocabulary they can use to express, map, and understand a particular, often complex and abstract, organizational phenomenon (Tsoukas, 1991; Weick, 1989; cf. Glucksberg & Keysar, 1990: 15; Lakoff, 1993: 244). Such phenomena (including the many social practices and mental activities that take place within an organizational context) raise the utility of plausible, inexact reasoning, including metaphorical reasoning, as more precise inference is unmanageable or not yet possible. Thus, when theorists and researchers think about an abstract or complex idea concerning organizational life, they can use metaphor to transfer a

more concrete concept to understand and relate to the idea, a process that "allows us to refer to it, quantify it, identify a particular aspect of it . . . and perhaps even believe that we understand it" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 26).

Second, in correlating terms, metaphor exhibits a plurality and openness of meaning—an "interpretive viability"—that has advantages over standard so-called literal language, which, being fixed in a particular coding system, limits interpretation and, thus, is both constrained and constraining (Van Maanen, 1995). Forceful metaphors in organizational theory building are not rigidly constrained to one sense or a single interpretation but, rather, have a heuristic quality in opening up new and multiple ways of seeing, conceptualizing, and understanding organizational phenomena.

Third, metaphors have positive semantic qualities that lend them special effects and therefore make them irreducible to nonmetaphorical language (Morgan, 1980, 1983). Especially noteworthy are the sensory and imaginative qualities of metaphors, which endow metaphorical expressions with a fresh, immediate, and raw form, and the semantic anomaly and incongruence involved in a metaphor, which invite theorists and researchers to view organizational phenomena in a new light and to recognize conceptual distinctions that were inconceivable before (Morgan, 1980, 1983, 1996).

Given all of these background assumptions, one would expect to find substantial attention being paid to the workings of metaphor within organization theory, as well as evidence of an informed and guided use of metaphor by theorists and researchers. A review of the organizational literature, however, suggests otherwise. The heuristic value of metaphor within organizational theory has indeed become recognized in the slipstream of Weick's (1989) work (e.g., Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990; Chia, 1996; Inns, 2002; Morgan, 1996; Tsoukas 1991, 1993). Yet much empirical research on metaphors in the organizational field (such as organizational identity and the learning organization) continues to refer to the metaphorical qualities of these concepts only in passing, if at all (Argyris, 1999; Cornelissen, 2002). And only a few theoretical models of how metaphor works (Tsoukas, 1991, 1993) have since been proposed.

In the following section I take up this issue in more detail and look more closely at what has

been said about the way in which metaphor operates within organizational theorizing.

ORTHODOX ACCOUNTS OF METAPHOR: THE COMPARISON MODEL

The Comparison Model in Organization Theory

In all, since Morgan's (1980, 1983, 1986) inspiring discussions of organizational metaphors, which, admittedly, lacked any metacriteria for evaluating and using them (Morgan, 1983: 381; Tinker, 1986), Tsoukas (1991, 1993) has been the only theorist to take up the challenge of suggesting a full-blown model of how metaphor might operate. In Tsoukas's (1991, 1993) transformational model of metaphor, metaphor is transformed into a scientific model so that "explicit" scientific knowledge about organizational behavior is generated and "the gap between metaphorical insights and scientific models" (Tsoukas, 1993: 336) closes. A metaphor thus becomes "unfolded" or "operationalized," in Tsoukas's (1991) view, by explicating the analogies that are inherent in the entities conjoined in the metaphor, with the eventual purpose of inferring the "deep structure" or "identity" existing between them (Tsoukas, 1991: 574).

Following in Tsoukas's (1991, 1993) steps, Oswick et al. (2002) recently have reiterated the argument that a metaphor draws out mere aspects of sameness, since, they suggest, the focus in metaphor is primarily on the similarities or overlapping ground between entities and not on the dissimilarities or "tension" that may exist between them (Oswick et al., 2002). As such, they conclude, metaphor is best seen as a means of elaborating and explicating already existing knowledge, since, in its focus on similarities and resemblances between entities, it merely makes "the familiar more familiar" (Oswick et al., 2002: 295).

Underlying both these accounts, with their emphasis on explicating the similarity that exists between two terms or entities conjoined in a metaphor, is a comparison model of how metaphor works. In this model, which goes back to Aristotle's (1991) earliest writings, metaphor interpretation is assumed to involve a comparison of objects or domains to determine what discrete properties or relations applying to one term can also apply to the other in the same or a similar sense. In short, metaphor is seen as a compari-

son in which the first term, A—that is, the target—is asserted to bear a partial resemblance (i.e., the ground) to the second term, B—that is, the source (Katz, 1992; Shen, 1997)—the resemblance being insufficient to sustain a literal comparison. As with any comparison, there is always some residual dissimilarity (the tension) between the terms involved in the comparison. But, importantly, comparison theorists such as Tsoukas (1991, 1993) and Oswick et al. (2002) tend not to emphasize this dissimilarity (see Katy, 1992, and Tourangeau & Sternberg, 1982):

The sole difference between metaphors and similes is, according to this [comparison] view, their overt form: similes include explicitly comparative phrasings; metaphors do not (Tourangeau & Sternberg, 1982: 205).

In the comparison view, the understanding of metaphor is assumed to depend on finding a feature (or set of features) *already present* in the representation of the target, albeit one that might, at least initially, be of low salience to it. Metaphor comprehension then consists of seeking out the "ground"—namely, those features shared by the target concept and the source concept of the metaphor.

Challenges to the Comparison Model

As appealing as this view is, a vast amount of literature in cognitive science (and carried over into linguistics and philosophy) now indicates that it cannot account for the fact that metaphors generate inferences beyond the similarities required for their comprehension (e.g., Eubanks, 1999; Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Fludeni, Freeman, & Freeman, 1999; Gibbs, 1992a,b; Glucksberg & Keysar, 1990; Katz, 1992; Shen, 1992, 1997; Tourangeau & Sternberg, 1981, 1982). In many (if not all) cases, metaphoric understanding is *creative*, with the features of importance being emergent (e.g., Camac & Glucksberg, 1984; Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Keysar & Glucksberg, 1992; McGlone & Manfredi, 2001; Turner & Fauconnier, 1999), and the basic mechanisms involved in the production and comprehension of metaphors are the generation and creation of new meaning beyond a previously existing similarity (e.g., Black, 1962; Shannon, 1992; Shen, 1997).

A paper by Tourangeau and Rips (1991) is a case in point. These authors found that the fea-

tures associated with a target in a metaphoric context cannot be predicted by the properties associated with that same target out of context. Consequently, they suggest, there appears to be a mechanism that does not merely activate pre-existing qualities of the target concept but that also permits the person receiving the metaphor to attribute properties to it. Equally, a series of studies by Verbrugge (1980), Tourangeau and Sternberg (1981, 1982), Gentner (1983; Gentner & Markman, 1997), Katz (1992), Shannon (1992), Shen (1992, 1997, 1999), Fauconnier and Turner (1998), and McGlone and Manfredi (2001) has suggested that subjects do not interpret metaphors by inferring grounds that consist of familiar features shared by the target and the source. In interpreting a metaphor, we infer an abstract ground for it, and this ground does not consist of shared features, previously associated with the target and source, but is something new altogether.

Ortony (1979a,b), in his acclaimed work on salience imbalance in metaphors, has also shown that metaphor differs crucially from literal comparison (i.e., simile) in the relative salience of the shared features. Therefore, it cannot be explained, as comparison theorists do (see Miller, 1979; Oswick et al., 2002; Tsoukas, 1991), by reducing it to a simile (after a metaphor has been recognized as false and paraphrased into a comparison statement). Ortony's (1979a,b) work suggests that metaphor is frequently used to lend features to a concept that previously were not present, or to reinforce features that previously were considered not salient. This suggestion reiterates Goodman's point that simile would "reduce rather than explain" metaphor (1976: 77). Ortony (1979a,b) and others after him (Shen, 1997; Tourangeau & Sternberg, 1982) have instead suggested that—in contrast to literal similarity statements, in which the shared features are highly salient for both terms—metaphorical comparisons always involve salience imbalance. That is, imbalance in a metaphor is said to occur when a common feature is of high saliency to the source but of low saliency to the target concept. This happens because, in metaphor, the target is seen in terms of the source and the dimensions important for the source are the ones that therefore receive the most weight. This asymmetry is evident in the observation that, when put in reverse order, metaphorical comparisons become anomalous—that is, com-

parisons to which it is relatively difficult to assign an interpretation. Consider, for instance, the organizational identity metaphor paraphrased as "organizations are like identities" (e.g., Albert & Whetten, 1985; Christensen & Cheney, 1994; Cornelissen, 2002; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). Reversing the order of this metaphorical comparison into "identities are like organizations" yields an anomalous comparison (cf. Shen 1992, 1997) and an entirely different interpretation.

The Need for a New Model of Metaphor

Ortony (1979a,b) and others after him have established that it is this imbalance that leads a statement to be recognized as a metaphor, suggesting that, to understand metaphor, both common and distinctive characteristics of the juxtaposed concepts or terms are considered and needed. With this analysis of the salience of features, Ortony (1979a,b) has accounted for the role of semantic anomaly triggered by the presence of dissimilarity between target and source (i.e., the presence of tension), which "nudges us into noting something" (Davidson, 1984: 253). Semantic anomaly, Ortony (1979a,b) suggests, thus needs to be seen as crucial in metaphor comprehension and not just ornamental, as Oswick et al. (2002) would have us believe. Metaphor invites us to see similarities and differences between two concepts, and to see the one concept in terms of the other, making its meaning inherently more profound and exotic than a rendering of the pre-existing similarities between the conjoined concepts might suggest.

In sum, this evidence against the comparison view of metaphor points, if anything, to the need for opening up, instead of—as Oswick et al. (2002) recently suggested—closing down the debates on how metaphor works in organizational theorizing. The current adoption and entrenchment of the comparison view of metaphor in organizational writings in particular seems a premature conclusion, indicating that organization theory has been rather insulated and not sufficiently informed by theoretical developments and research on metaphor in cognitive science. I therefore continue my discussion with a broad theoretical sketch of the various models of metaphor that have been suggested in recent years, which serves to put all these models in perspective and to draw out the key assump-

tions behind them. I then continue the article by developing and illustrating a specific model of how metaphor works—the domains-interaction model.

METAPHOR IN PERSPECTIVE

The Comparison Model versus the Interaction Model

By and large, traditional models of metaphor considered in philosophy and cognitive science, and carried over into organization theory, assume that metaphor is a relationship between two given entities whose attributes are defined prior to the relationship established between them (e.g., Gibbs, 1992a,b; Katz, 1992; Shannon, 1992; Shen, 1997; Tourangeau & Sternberg, 1982). That is, authors of traditional accounts have, as already indicated, followed Aristotle (1991) in treating metaphor as primarily a function of feature mapping that is deciphered and comprehended as a comparison (Miller, 1979; Tourangeau & Sternberg, 1982; see also Oswick et al., 2002, and Tsoukas, 1991).

The so-called interaction model pioneered by Black (1962, 1993) provides an alternative perspective, proposing that metaphor cannot be reduced to well-defined features or attributes because, when these are specified, one does not get the metaphorical effect in question. The characteristics or features of the source cannot be applied directly to the target, since the features they "share" are often only shared metaphorically. Thus, Black (1962) suggests, metaphor comprehension cannot be reduced to antecedent literal meanings or to rule-governed extensions or variations on those meanings. Instead of considering metaphor as functioning by likening the target to the source, Black (1962) argues that the conjunction of the target and the source brings forth a particular selection of each constituent's semantic aspects and reorganizes them. That is, the presence of the target stimulates the hearer to select some of the source's properties and to construct a "parallel implication complex" to fit the target, which, in turn, produces parallel changes in the source (Black, 1993). As a consequence, the interaction theory of metaphor suggests that understanding a metaphor creates similarity (as correspondences are constructed), instead of simply emphasizing and reporting pre-existing (but previously unno-

ticed) similarities in the features of the constituent concepts (see also Ortony, 1979a,b). A simpler comparison model, as Morgan (1983) also points out, misses this interactive process of "seeing as" or "conceiving as," by which an emergent meaning complex is generated.

Scientific Support for the Interaction Model

Recent models of metaphor in cognitive science, including structure mapping (e.g., Gentner, 1983; Gentner & Clement, 1988), domains-interaction (e.g., Tourangeau & Sternberg, 1981, 1982), metaphoric structuring (e.g., Murphy, 1996, 1997), class inclusion (e.g., Glucksberg & Keysar, 1990; Shen, 1997), and cognitive blending (e.g., Fauconnier & Turner, 1998), have accounted for this idea of an emergent structure of meaning, as first conceived in Black's (1962) interaction model. These models have effectively extended and validated Black's (1962, 1993) central premises that metaphor involves conjoining whole semantic domains instead of just features of constituents and that metaphor works through considering both similarities and dissimilarities between correlated domains.

Tourangeau and Sternberg (1981, 1982), Gentner (1983), and Fauconnier and Turner (1998), among others, have demonstrated in this respect that there is an initial "inherent structure" between the domains conjoined in a metaphor. In metaphor, concepts in different domains are seen as occupying analogous positions (i.e., having analogous features), which, in being often specific to a domain, must be transformed (i.e., seen in a new way) if we are to find correspondences across domains. One way to interpret this is in terms of a skeleton analogy, whereby each domain has a skeleton—a framework—that is directly represented: the inherent structure of the domain. This framework identifies the general structure of the conjoined concepts (although, in some cases, this is quite fragmentary), but because they are difficult to directly conceptualize, it leaves many of the details blank. The framework, then, is the direct representation, and the metaphor adds the "flesh" to this by filling in information that is initially seen as dissimilar and not directly represented—in many cases, the bulk of the content of the concepts. In this way, the framework does not explicitly assert a likeness but again provides us with a template for constructing or

"blending" correspondences (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998), invites us to make comparisons for a further "filling in" or specification (Scheffler, 1979: 129), and directs our attention to "unexpected or subtle parallels and analogies" (Davidson, 1984: 256).

In sum, rather than selecting a particular profile of features or senses from a given set, the metaphoric conjunction of concepts (and their associated domains) creates new features and senses (Camac & Glucksberg, 1984; Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Shannon, 1992). Indeed, in terms of this characterization, I suggest that metaphor may be regarded as an extension of the phenomenon of similarity. Similarity is a specified relation established by bringing certain entities together (cf. Camac & Glucksberg, 1984; Goodman, 1972); metaphor consists of a more heterogeneous and less constrained matrix of relationships between concepts that are juxtaposed. The domains-interaction model that I outline in the remainder of the article is in line with this characterization of metaphor. Furthermore, the model is grounded in evidence from cognitive scientific research on how metaphor actually works and, as a consequence, will be more valid and useful for organizational theorizing and research than what has gone before. I provide illustrations of the domains-interaction model through a discussion of two dominant metaphors in the organizational field: the learning organization (e.g., Argyris, 1999) and organizational identity (e.g., Gioia et al., 2000).

THE DOMAINS-INTERACTION MODEL OF METAPHOR

Background to the Domains-Interaction Model

The domains-interaction model of metaphor that I propose is based on the two observed components of metaphor comprehension I have already referred to: a *structural* analogy drawn between concepts in their respective domains, followed by an emergent meaning through a further blending of the concepts involved. As recent work suggests (e.g., Eubanks, 1999; Gentner, 1983; Gibbs, 1992a,b; Glucksberg & Keysar, 1990; Murphy, 1996, 1997; Shen, 1997; Tourangeau & Sternberg, 1982), a distinction between higher-order conceptual domains and lower-level instance-specific information is important to metaphor. That is, when a metaphor is first

encountered, the concepts trigger their respective higher-order domains. This assumption is empirically driven by the type of data that suggest that, on encountering a metaphor, domain-level knowledge is automatically engaged in and guides further processing (e.g., Gentner, 1983; Shen, 1992, 1997; Tourangeau & Sternberg, 1982). A semantic domain refers to a vast organization of knowledge, such as our knowledge of travel, life, work, or organizations. A semantic domain has a basic structure of entities and relations at a high level of generality (e.g., the semantic domain for travel has roles for the traveler, starting point, route, destination, and so on). Within metaphor, this structure becomes correlated and mapped from one domain (the source) onto another (the target).

Importantly, once such structural similarities between concepts in their semantic domains have been identified, these structural correspondences then dictate which specific instance dimensions become active. Put simply, as Katz (1992) and Murphy (1996, 1997), for instance, have shown, metaphor processing works by considering the target's and source's (constructed) structural similarities, then making an inference about instance-specific relationships from this. In this way, metaphor goes beyond analogy, which is about transferring only that information that is associated with the common structure of the domains conjoined (Gentner, 1983; Gentner & Markman, 1997). It is worth re-emphasizing that it is the structure of the concepts in their respective domains, rather than superficial properties, that is similar on this account and that this constructed similarity provides a framework for the further transfer and projection of specific information.

Fauconnier and Turner (1998) have illustrated this projective process with their studies of the blending involved in metaphor. In their studies of metaphor, they found that whatever structure is recognized as belonging to both the target and source concepts in their domains constitutes a generic space, which, in turn, provides the framework in which further connections and comparisons take place. With these further comparisons, a blend emerges and is further completed and elaborated on. This blend, because of the combination of elements from the target and source and further completion and elaboration, makes relations available that did not exist

separately. The blend thus contains emergent and more specific meaning, but it can nonetheless affect cognition, leading us to modify and change our view of the target and source concepts. For example, the blend of the organizational identity metaphor cannot be reduced (and therefore explained) by referring to its constituent parts ("organization" and "identity"), but it is conceptually connected to them (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998: 145–146). This enables us to consider the way in which meaning and inferences developed in the blend of organization as identity translate back to the target and source and provide an "insightful" perspective on the targeted subject of "organization." In sum, within this domains-interaction model of metaphor, metaphors are understood in several stages.

Phases of the Domains-Interaction Model

This staged process can readily be described with three elementary phases of metaphor comprehension, and it is further illustrated below with two examples: the learning organization and organizational identity.

1. Development of a generic structure. First, on encountering a metaphor, its terms are encoded, the relevant domains are inferred, the structures to be seen as parallel are found, and the correspondences between these structures are mapped. These cognitive activities correspond to the first phase of metaphor comprehension, which I label here the *development of a generic structure*.

2. Development and elaboration of the blend. After a generic structure is constructed, further instance-specific information is transferred from the target and source concepts and is elaborated upon. This process of blending composes elements from the target and source concepts, and, furthermore, leads the comprehender (i.e., the theorist) to complete and elaborate on the composition made. I term this second phase of metaphor comprehension the *development and elaboration of the blend*.

3. Emergent meaning. Then, finally, the meaning (ideas and conjectures) that emerges from the blend is linked and translated back to the input target concept. There is new meaning in the blend that is not simply a composition of meanings that can be found in either the target or source concepts. Nonetheless, as mentioned, such blended meaning can be referred back to

them. I therefore label the final phase of metaphor the *emergent meaning*, which is linked back to the input target and source concepts and, in particular, forces us to see a target subject such as organization in a new light.

EXAMPLE 1: THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Context of the Learning Organization Metaphor

The learning organization metaphor is, at least in part, infused by and carried over from the practitioner discourse on organizational learning. It was adopted within academic theorizing in the early 1980s (Dery, 1982) and, since the popularization of the concept by Senge (1990), has become relatively widespread in organizational learning theory and research (Easterby-Smith, 1997).

One explanation for why this metaphor has gained such dominant status in the academic community is that it resonates with the central problem of how learning and cognition at the collective and organizational level take place in the postmodern landscape, where organizations are characterized by distributed "learning sites" (e.g., Easterby-Smith, 1997; Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Schneider & Angelmar, 1993; Walsh, 1995). The early 1980s had already seen some discussion of how cognition and learning take place at the collective and organizational levels (Hedberg, 1981; Sandelands & Stablein, 1987). Yet, prior to the more widespread uptake of the learning organization in academic theorizing, there basically had not been, as Weick and Roberts have suggested, a "language of organizational mind that enables us to describe collective mental processes in organizations" (1993: 357). It is for these reasons that the learning organization metaphor caught on within academic theorizing, together with other metaphors of organizational cognition and learning, such as "organizational mind" (Sandelands & Stablein, 1987) and "organizational memory" (Walsh, 1995; Walsh & Ungson, 1991).

Explication of the Learning Organization Metaphor

Following the steps of the domains-interaction model, we can reconstruct that, on encountering the learning organization, the generic

structure of both concepts ("organization" and "learning individual") in their respective domains is triggered, and a structural analogy between the structures of the two domains is inferred. In the case of the learning organization, the structural similarity between the concepts of organization and learning individual in their respective domains is that learning takes place within both entities. That is, cognitive, mental activities are engaged in for both entities—organization and individual—in response to an environment, and acquired information and knowledge are stored and acted on (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1978; Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Huber, 1991):

An entity learns if through its processing of information, the range of potential behaviors is changed (Huber, 1991: 89).

This point—that learning takes place in relation to both entities—is structurally shared between the target and source (and involves the first phase, development of a generic structure), providing the generic framework for the blend concerning the further input of specific-level information of both the target and source concepts. The further connections that are forged in this second phase (development and elaboration of the blend) revolve around the way in which learning takes place in organizations and the effects that result from it. Specific information from the target and source concepts is combined, and further elaborated on and completed. The meaning that subsequently emerges in the blend (organization as a learning individual) involves an image of knowledge and learning at the organizational level as essentially an actively constituted process in itself, not merely an aggregation of the cognitions of its individual members (e.g., Jones, 1995; Schneider & Angelmar, 1993).

Triggered by the implication of "individual agency" from the source, many authors have blended this implication with the type of learning that takes place in organizations. They have further elaborated on the distinct, higher-order pattern of interrelated behavioral activities and cognition that is then seen to emerge at the collective level and that, while being grounded and related to cognition at the individual level within organizations (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1978; Schneider & Angelmar, 1993; Weick & Roberts, 1993), can and should be considered an entity of its own. Following on from this blended mean-

ing, Levitt and March (1988) and Miner and Mezias (1996), among others, have elaborated further on this notion of an agency being ascribed to collective learning. They discuss how an organization can become "adaptive" through all the connected learning behaviors and activities that it professes with respect to its environment, and how this type of learning can become a "sustainable competitive advantage" (Miner & Mezias, 1996: 90).

As a result of such an agency being ascribed to a collective whole (organization), the learning organization metaphor has also introduced into the academic discourse a return to "functionalist" and "systemic" accounts of organizational learning (see Senge, 1990). This, perhaps "in contrast with the established tradition [of organizational learning]" (Easterby-Smith, 1997: 1086), with its primary focus on cognition and learning as constructed and psychological processes, emphasizes a managerial perspective on motivating and guiding employees toward shared frames of reference and mindsets that are conducive to achieving corporate objectives. This functionalist perspective, which is not so much concerned with how people learn at an organizational level but, rather, with making sure that they learn in a manner conducive to the organization, has indeed been taken over and further deliberated on by a considerable number of scholars (e.g., DiBella, Nevis, & Gould, 1996; Miner & Mezias, 1996; Simonin, 1997).

Within the third phase of the domains-interaction model (emergent meaning), the blend (organization as learning individual) and the meaning that has emerged within it are identified and "spelled out" (Montuschi, 1995: 317). The emergent meaning is then related back to the target concept to see whether it is indeed insightful for describing and understanding learning at the organizational level that goes "beyond anything we could infer simply by observing learning processes in isolated individuals" (Simon, 1991: 126). In this third phase of the domains-interaction model, theorists and researchers consider the new image or emergent meaning that has resulted from the learning organization metaphor, assess its heuristic value for providing new and interesting insights into organizational learning, and start working with it.

It is, however, beyond the scope of this article to reconstruct and fully assess the heuristic

value of the learning organization metaphor, since my purpose at this point is simply expositional. In this vein, I continue the discussion with a second illustration of how metaphor works.

EXAMPLE 2: ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

Context of the Organizational Identity Metaphor

Ever since the early 1980s, concepts such as organizational identity and corporate culture have come to the fore in organization studies, following a surge of interest in symbolic and ideational dimensions of organizational life (e.g., Pondy, Frost, Morgan, & Dandridge, 1983). The watershed article by Albert and Whetten (1985) raised the issue of whether we can metaphorically project the idea of an identity on organizations. Since then, the organizational identity metaphor in particular has received a huge amount of academic interest as a device for capturing and explaining these symbolic and ideational dimensions of organizational life (e.g., Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Christensen & Cheney, 1994; Gioia et al., 2000; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). Yet, remarkably, despite the obvious metaphorical precepts of the concept, very few theorists and researchers have considered organizational identity as a metaphor (Cornelissen, 2002; Gioia et al., 2002). As a result, the conceptual integration and multiple projections involved in this metaphor have not only gone largely unnoticed but have also not yet been fully articulated and drawn out.

Explication of the Organizational Identity Metaphor

When conjoining the concepts of organization and identity in the organizational identity metaphor, theorists and researchers are prompted by the metaphor in the first instance to map onto "organization" the structural information of "identity" that is shared between them. On reconstruction, this structural similarity is that, within a public context, third parties ascribe identity traits to both entities—organizations and individuals—in order to form an image of them. Cohen and Basu (1987) point out in this respect that stakeholders of an organization are inclined to perceive it in corporeal terms and to

ascribe traits holistically (where they perceive relationships among features, and also configurational properties beyond merely correlated features, to make up for a perceived intact entity). They also effectively credit that organization with identity traits, just as they would an individual person. This structural similarity—that identity traits are being ascribed—between the organization and identity concepts corresponds to the first phase of the domains-interaction model, the development of a generic structure.

On the basis of this generic structure, which in a way has warranted further projections of specific-level information from the target and source concepts, a raft of implications from the identity domain in social psychology subsequently has been transferred and blended with elements of organization (e.g., Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia et al., 2000; Levitt & Nass, 1994; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). The transfer and blending of these identity implications with organization refers to the second phase of the domains-interaction model, the development and elaboration of the blend. Most notably, authors have elaborated here on the notion from social psychology that, in displays of personhood—of our singularity as psychological beings—we express "a sense of personal distinctness, a sense of personal continuity, and a sense of personal autonomy" (Apter, 1983: 75; see also Harré, 1998). They have then blended these ideas with the subject of organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia et al., 2000; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998).

Albert and Whetten's (1985) frequently cited definition of organizational identity includes these transpositions, referring to the (1) claimed central character (features that are seen as the essence), (2) claimed distinctiveness (features that distinguish the organization from others), and (3) claimed temporal continuity (features that exhibit sameness over time) of an organization. Working from this definition, which clearly signals the composition of elements from both the organization and identity concepts, theorists have further elaborated on the centrality, distinctness, and temporal continuity in the blend. They have reworked and completed these aspects to form an image of organizations as unique, coherent, and stable sets of activities, values, and people (e.g., Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia et al., 2000).

Such selective borrowing—or, rather, projection—is, as mentioned, not merely composi-

tional. Instead, new meaning emerges from the blend that is not a composition of meanings that can be found in the input concepts. Nonetheless, as mentioned, such emergent meaning can be referred back to the target and source concepts. This point is essential, because the *emergent* meaning, although “fantastic” from a literal interpretation point of view, is supremely efficient for the purpose of transferring the intended inferences back to the target concept, and thereby making real-world inferences about the nature and dynamics of organizational life. In this third phase of the domains-interaction model (i.e., the emergent meaning), theorists and researchers consider the meaning that emerges from the organizational identity metaphor (as explicated above) and start considering its implications and suggestions for conceptualizing the nature of organizations and their members. Instrumental to such further consideration of the theoretical value of a metaphor is, as mentioned, a spelling out of its meaning through the domains-interaction model. The following section proceeds from this point in providing a number of broader ramifications of using the domains-interaction model within organizational theorizing and research.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

My purpose in this article has been to create an enriched understanding and deeper appreciation of metaphor in organization theory. To this end, I first outlined the importance of metaphor to the process of theory construction, before moving on to present critical reviews of the major theoretical strands on metaphor and of its specific treatment in earlier work within the organizational field. The review of the organizational field pointed to the limitations of the comparison model that, it turned out, has been fairly commonplace within organizational theorizing and research.

Subsequently, I went on to suggest an alternative model of how metaphor operates—the domains-interaction model. This domains-interaction model, based on evidence from cognitive science, suggests that concepts and whole semantic domains from which concepts are drawn are juxtaposed in metaphor, and the resulting meaning is creative, with the features of importance being emergent (rather than pre-

viously existing, as the comparison model would suggest).

The introduction of this domains-interaction model provides several contributions to our understanding of how metaphor works and how it can be used to benefit organizational theorizing. First, the domains-interaction model provides a fundamental theoretical understanding of how metaphor operates within organizational theorizing that is more valid and grounded than what has gone before. Although systematic empirical analyses of the use of metaphors by organizational theorists and researchers are yet to be carried out, the evidence from cognitive science in support of the domains-interaction model is strong and abundant.

Second, the domains-interaction model not only theoretically underpins the recognized yet underdeveloped role of metaphor in organizational theorizing but also offers a specific framework for how metaphor can be used by organizational theorists and researchers. The suggested three phases of metaphor comprehension (i.e., development of a generic structure, development and elaboration of the blend, and emergent meaning) enable theorists and researchers to retrace and spell out the meaning that any one metaphor produces and to consider more fully the ideas and conjectures that it suggests for thinking about organizational life. Rather than simply accept a metaphor for its vividness, beguiling connotations, or some conceived likeness between the conjoined concepts at a surface level, researchers and theorists may find that the domains-interaction model enables a fuller representation of metaphorical meaning and its implication for organizational theorizing and research. An important direction for further research in this regard is to map and spell out the meaning of those metaphors that currently dominate organizational theorizing and research. Besides the learning organization and organizational identity metaphors, which I have spelled out in some detail here, other metaphors, including chaos (e.g., Thiétart & Forgues, 1995), organizational memory (e.g., Walsh & Ungson, 1991), and jazz (e.g., Zack, 2000), now readily qualify for such an exercise.

Third, the domains-interaction model may be of importance to the practice of organizational theorizing and research, since it indicates a set of heuristics or judgmental rules in relation to

the selection and use of metaphors. These heuristics follow from the position that the distinction between higher-order semantic domains and lower-level instance-specific information is central to metaphor production and comprehension. Tourangeau and Sternberg (1982) and Katz (1992) initially formulated these heuristics on the basis of experiments in which metaphors were found to be more apt and fitting and to create stronger and more meaningful imagery when they related concepts from more diverse or distant domains (between-domains distance), and when the correspondence between the target and source concepts was conceived as more exact (within-domains similarity).

Both the learning organization and organizational identity examples discussed above meet these two formulated rules. The source concept is, in both metaphors, considered exact (in a structural sense) of the target concept of organization. Also, the semantic domains conjoined within both metaphors are considerably distant (i.e., the social world of organizations versus the psychological world of cognition, personality, and identity formation). Both metaphors, for these reasons, are "apt" and have indeed forced organizational theorists and researchers to create resemblances between concepts and their respective domains that did not seem particularly related beforehand.

Building from these two examples, the heuristics suggested by the domains-interaction model—search for a high level of between-domains distance and within-domains similarity in metaphor—may, in a general sense, be useful to theorists and researchers in their selection and evaluation of metaphors in the organizational field. They may also help scholars harness the productive potential of metaphor for sparking inquiry and for directing researchers to explore links that would otherwise remain obscure.

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Joep P. Cornelissen is a senior lecturer in corporate communications at Leeds University Business School (UK). He received his Ph.D. from the Manchester Metropolitan University (UK). His current research focuses on the use of metaphor in management and organization theory and practice.

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