BOOK REVIEW

A review of *Images of Organization, by* Gareth Morgan, 2006. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, xv + 504 pp. ISBN 1-412-93979-8. $66.95 USD

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This is the most recent edition of a book, first published in 1986, and it reflects the significant changes in the corporate world over the last two decades. As we reflect on the economic crisis of 2008 and 2009, it seems clear that recovery from a disaster of this magnitude will be lengthy and require that organizations reinvent themselves and radically change the manner in which they do business. This book is written for organization and management practitioners, but will be useful for leaders in educational institutions who find themselves challenged by the complexity and rapidity of such necessary change. It is also an extremely useful reference for graduate students in business.

We are in an era of adaptive problem solving, one in which there are few "off the shelf" solutions. Creativity and innovation are required and leaders must stimulate ideas and potential solutions from every level of their organizations. Change management can be one of a leader's more challenging tasks, but Gareth Morgan's book, *Images of Organization*, offers the simple metaphor as a means to that end.

Dr. Morgan, professor of organizational behaviour/industrial relations at the Schulich School of Business at York University in Toronto, notes that effective leaders and managers possess the ability to approach complex situations with new ways of thinking. They are able to remain open and flexible and generate a wide range of possibilities for action. Morgan believes that one can better understand organizations by recognizing that organization and management theories are based on images or metaphors that prompt one to view organizations through a particular lens. A metaphor facilitates the seeing of certain characteristics of one thing in another to better understand it. Metaphors, although useful, must be used cautiously because by their very nature they create only partial insights that can mislead if relied upon too heavily.

Effective leaders and managers understand the limitations of metaphors and employ them to generate different perspectives and, hopefully, unique and sustainable solutions.

The book is divided into three sections: a brief introduction; an extended section in which various metaphors are introduced and explained; and a final section that examines the implications of using metaphors in practice. This last section also includes a useful case study in which several metaphors are used to better understand an organization in the midst of a significant cultural change.

Morgan looks at organizations using the metaphors of a machine, an organism, the brain, a culture, a political system, a psychic prison, flux and transformation, and a domineering entity.

The metaphor of the machine is one that is deeply ingrained in society's larger understanding of organizations and how they function. The Greek term *organon* means tool or instrument; with the appearance of the Industrial Revolution, the workplace became bureaucratized and routinized. The ideas developed by Frederick the Great, to improve the operational efficiency of his army, found their way into factories seeking to find an organizational framework for machine technology. In the late-19th and early-20th centuries, Frederick Taylor brought scientific management to organizations and advocated standardizing work activities and shifting responsibility from the worker to the manager. This metaphor is most applicable to organizations that are highly mechanized and routinized and where machines are reliable. The best examples come from the fast food industry that puts a premium on speed and reproducibility and little on the skill of the worker. Human capacity is not taken into account and the goal is to mold the worker to the organization's needs.

Each subsequent chapter enriches one's understanding of the organization by seeing it refracted through the prism of various other metaphors. Many are familiar but Morgan looks at each in depth and provides an important historical context to their development and evolution. The longest and most challenging chapter in Morgan's book involves viewing the organization through the metaphor of flux and transformation. He quotes the Greek philosopher Heraclites that "Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing is fixed…It is in changing that things find repose."

Morgan explores the nature of change by first employing the systems theory of Maturana and Varela who argue that all living systems are closed and self-referential. An organism's interaction with its environment is, for the most part, a reflection of its own organization. They employ the term *autopoiesis* to refer to an organism's capacity for self-production through a closed system of relations. Using the metaphor of autopoiesis to understand organizations, Morgan notes that organizations try to shape their environments as extensions of themselves. Environmental problems encountered by organizations are often related to this attempt to maintain their identity. The evolution of organizations must take into account factors that embrace both the organization and the environment. An organization gets into trouble when it views the environment as somehow separate from it. Such egocentric organizations see their survival as predicated

on a narrow set of characteristics defining their identities rather than evolving a more open identity with the entire system to which they belong.

The theory of chaos and self-organization along with complexity theory help form a more holistic view of the change process. In organizations, order and organization come to be viewed as emergent properties. Patterns need to evolve: they cannot be imposed. The managerial role becomes more passive and less controlling, allowing the creation of contexts where self-organization can arise. In some cases in which a dominant attractor is responsible for an undesirable state, the manager may have to become comfortable allowing a certain degree of instability to occur that may allow the emergence of a new pattern of behaviour.

Managers will benefit from becoming skilled at identifying the paradox between the current state and the desired future state. This paradox is a point of tension that can be leveraged to undermine the status quo in favor of the alternative future. Managers must learn to be content not with controlling every function but recognizing that one can only gently prod a process in the desired direction and shaping the factors that may influence the evolutionary process. An openness to new metaphors will help better conceptualize the task.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the tension of opposites may underlie all change. Morgan notes that Marxist ideology focuses on how opposites stimulate social change: that is, how societies destroy and transform themselves because of their inability to contain such changes. Any desired future represents a conflict with the present and the tensions within this paradox must be managed successfully if a transformation is to occur. A first step is recognizing that there are elements in the contradiction that have merit and that one can minimize the paradox by emphasizing and retaining the desirable qualities of both.

The book concludes with a case study that emphasizes how metaphors can be used effectively to better "read" and understand what is occurring within an organization during times of conflict and change.

Morgan advocates using the metaphor as a helpful tool to better understand organizational dynamics. He fully acknowledges its limitations and frequently emphasizes that while a metaphor may generate valuable insights it also may be "incomplete, biased, and potentially misleading." The insights can become distortions and the way of seeing becomes a way of not seeing. Yet, metaphors give way to other metaphors that generate both competing and complementary insights. The skillful use of this common figure of speech can be invaluable for anyone deeply involved with organizational change and leadership.