

The Use of Metaphors in Management

Dumitru BONTAȘ,
George Bacovia University, Bacau, ROMANIA

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Abstract: The use of the metaphorical style in management was observed almost ten years ago by the American professor Mary Jo Hatch. This style has been adopted lately by numerous authors; this shows that it is useful and worth being analyzed.

The paper brings to the attention of theoreticians and practitioners in the management field new arguments and examples to support the development of the metaphorical style of specialty knowledge analysis, evaluation and synthesis. Therefore there are emphasized metaphors associated to the currents of thought manifested in the history of the scientific management or of some phenomena or conjectural factors that have determined evolutions and changes in the managerial systems.

The increasing mobility of environment parameters as well as the globalization tendencies of the products and services markets are universally recognized phenomena. The metaphor has an international circulation value and is successfully used in the technical, economic, social communication environments worldwide. This paper brings new arguments justifying the interest for the development of the metaphorical style as a presentation and explanation style of the new tendencies in the scientific management.

Researches in management have been developed and diversified in the context of the historic evolutions of the environmental factors, by means of the various schools and currents of thought, starting from the second half of the 19th century. However, management was practiced until then empirically, by communicating the successful experiences from one generation to another, using the metaphorical style in formulating the principles and rules that had to be observed by leaders. The same metaphorical style came back in the present language practiced by numerous researchers and professionals in management.

In the Romanian Explicative Illustrated Dictionary, Eugenia Dima et al. (2007) defines metaphor as a figure of style that ensures the transfer of semantic characteristics between two different terms, by implied comparison, with the purpose of creating a new, figurative meaning, a new image.

The metaphors used in management are, as the specialists in the internet forums, www.kappa.ro (23.01.2006) state:

- expressive, suggesting a new light on the finality in management;
- exegetic, able of describing and interpreting high complexity aspects;
- explicit, elucidating and vision-creating;

- exploratory, emphasizing the potential of creativity and innovation in management.

The same source of information, www.kappa.ro (23.01.2006) brings to our attention a series of definitions attributed to metaphor by great scientific personalities. Thus, metaphor is:

- “the bridge between what we know and what we don’t know.” (Warren K Wake);
- “the way of obtaining a real body for an impression difficult to express” (Gerard Bachelard) ;
- ‘symbolic system that allows us to partially understand an unusual expression in the terms of other usual experiences’ (Kyong Liong Kim)

The utility of the metaphorical demarche, as an expressive way of understanding the evolution of thought in the scientific management was suggested for the first time, in our times, in 1997 by Mary Jo Hatch, professor at the University of Virginia, The United States of America, fact observed by the very young Valeria Anghelache (2004) from the Dunarea de Jos University of Galati. In this sense there are identified four metaphorical perspectives of the thought evolution in the management scientific field: *the machine metaphor*, from the classical thought perspective; *the organic metaphor*, from the modern thought perspective; *the cultural metaphor* from the symbolic representative thought perspective, practiced in the modern era; *the collage metaphor*, from the post-modern thought perspective.

The machine metaphor emphasizes the role of industrialization and of management in the organizational changes process. This metaphor substitutes people with *the robots built by the manager* with the purpose of meeting pre-established objectives. The manager is seen as an engineer concerned with projecting, realizing and ensuring the highest capacity functioning of these *intelligent machines*. This metaphor is associated with F. Taylor’s approaches at the end of the 19th century and constituted the generator of the organizations’ bureaucracy.

The organic metaphor substitutes the organization with the environment biologic organisms, dependent on the resources it discovers in order to live. The central idea implied by this metaphor is that of emphasizing the dependence of organizations on the environment where they function. The more adaptable to their environment the organizational species are, they more they succeed in developing. The supporters of this metaphor are T. Parsons and J. March who emphasized the four organic functions of the organization: the generation of values and norms appropriate to social purposes; the attraction of the resources necessary for the accomplishing of purposes; the processing of resources; the repartition of the added value in order to harmonize the organization’s internal and environmental interests.

The cultural metaphor was supported by J. March, H. Simon and K. Weick in the second half of the 20th century. The study of organizations was realized by observations and ethnographic interviews with emphasis on the human behaviour. The interhuman relationships are characteristic to each organization and are founded by beliefs, values, norms and attitudes assumed by the organization’s members. Their lives are influenced by the cultural phenomena, fact the renders the human communities the characteristics of the collective ethos.

The collage metaphor was supported by M. Croizier, E. Fridberg and R. Sainsaulieu in the second half of the 20th century. Seen from the organizations’ postmodern perspective, this metaphor emphasizes the quality of the dynamic informal structure in order to ensure the flexible and autonomous evolution of organizations with a low number of individuals. Considering that within the modern organizations there is not a clear delimitation of the structural components, the postmodern theoreticians consider the collage metaphor as representative in art, a way in which the objects are reordered for

creating new forms. The fundamental questions to be asked are: In what degree are the organizations able to change? What exactly activates the change? The possible answers take into consideration the crisis phenomena, generating a major disequilibrium that upsets the functionality of organizations' rigid mechanisms.

The environment is a fundamental concept, used in all management scientific approaches, defined by the binomial reality where all objective and subjective phenomena of human existence take place. As far as the subjective component of the global environment is concerned, the young Swiss researchers Jonas Riderstrål and Kjell Nordström, specialists in management at the Schools of Economics in Stockholm, use a series of very well chosen metaphors, with explicit, exegetic and exploratory characteristics. Their paper, "Karaoke capitalism – management for humankind" (2003a), suggests even by its title phenomena eroding the humankind progress potential and at the same time it shows the way to follow in order to set free from imitations and to write the *songs* of the humankind's future.

The fundamental institutions of the human communities are revealed by Jonas Riderstrål și Kjell Nordström (2003a) by three metaphors: *the temple*, *the tower* and *the central market*.

- *the temple*, traditional institution of the system – religious, philosophical, ideological, as an entity by means of which empathy and/or the ethical behaviour is ensured;
- *the tower*, the institution of the legislative system, representing the entity that ensures the public administration and order;
- *the central market*, the institution of the economic system as a form of manifestation of supply and demand in real time between the active factors, by means of which the delimitation between efficiency and inefficiency is ensured.

In the karaoke environment, as the above mentioned authors observe, organizations and regimes are capable of blindly copy somebody else and the problem is that too many people try to change into *somebody else* instead of being themselves. The consequences of such behaviour are metaphorically seen like this: *the temple is more and more marginalized; the tower has no longer impact on large masses of people; the central market conquers, but above all it divides*.

A solid society supposes, in the authors' vision, a balance between *the central market*, *the tower* and *the temple* – between the economic system, the ideological system and the legislative one. History shows that when one of these pillars is manifested in a greater measure (*as the Vatican Temple was in medieval times, or as the soviet communist tower in modern times*) things can go out of control. For this balance Jonas Riderstrål and Kjell Nordström (2003b) suggest giving up the karaoke copies. The successful regimes, corporations and persons showed us that *a first class version of our own ego* is always preferable to *somebody else's second hand ego*.

The second work of the same authors, *Funky Business*. Talent makes capitalism dance, Nordström, K., Ridderstråle, J., (2003b), is another demonstration of the fact that metaphor represents a means of observation, analysis and discovery of some modern management principles. The two researchers are classified on the first place in Europe and on the 9th place in the "Thinkers 50" world top of management thinkers. It means recognizing the fact that metaphorism is a new way of thinking and creation in management.

The Funky Business metaphor suggests for the management specialists a new style that appeals to the "*help your self*" formula. The central idea of this metaphor is avoiding the market traps by means of *imagination and human emotions and less by reason*. The questions that managers should ask themselves every day are: *Do we love our products, colleagues and clients? And they, do they prefer us?*

In order to argue the characteristics of our times environment, the *funky* metaphor emphasizes the existence of competition for *anything and anywhere*, where the main resources are *creation and innovation*. The forces of these times are *technology, resources employers* (firms, institutions, associations etc) as well as *the values regarding work in collation with freedom*. We live in the society of surplus, in the context of global auctions, of the social stratifications and where *the winner takes it all*.

In this context the funky firm has to know how to focalize, needs to have the capacity of action by knowledge and regeneration, to know that success comes from being unique and being ready to change on the fly. A firm has to know that being competitive does not mean being in competition with everybody in the same course of talents because people would find it difficult to distinguish it. The funky firm has an authentic leadership that makes it unique by life long learning and by new connections.

The strategies in Funky Business catch people's attention - employees, clients, collaborators, investors - by ethics and aesthetics. In the era of abundance, ethics shows the way to differentiation. Ethics is seldom exploited by competitors as the inevitable transparency of our times reveals those without scruples and who want to be one step ahead without having special merits. Aesthetics appeals to the exterior aspect of products and services by cultivating beauty and love towards people. *Fashion rules the world and her only victims are those who do not keep up*. These are the main characteristics of the *funky strategy* towards the competitive classical strategy.

The creation of the *Funky Business* organization is based on the fact that emotions always build imagination. This reaction is not obtained rationally. There are four ways to send emotions, no matter whom we address to: *reason, affection, intuition or desire (RAID)*. In order to get success, the target has to be lowered from head to the rest of the body - heart, stomach, sphincters. Satisfied people work better if the firm's mission includes goals such as *happiness and fun*. An indicator of performance is *the daily number of laughters per employee*.

A funky manager can easily perceive the disequilibrium between *the temple, the tower and the central market* and looks for support-systems in order to change the future. He appeals to imagination and feelings, regardless of the age, sex, geographical origin and education, in order to create *temporary monopolies by means of which he can constitute the only natural choice for the aimed clients*. The uniqueness can come from anything - the business logics, new presentation ideas, and people's culture. The opportunities have to be searched, as well, in the places where competitors pass because they may not have observed the emotional relevance for inhabitants. A last argument in the search for success is *to try not to be bloody normal*. In order to succeed we have *to surprise people by means of emotions and imagination*, because by imitation (*karaoke*) we will be taken out of the game.

The above emphasized metaphors suggest indirectly the orientation towards excellence in management. A direct explanation of excellence is revealed by Jim Collins in his well known work "Excellence in business" published by Curtea Veche Publishing House and translated by Eugen Damian (2007). After a research of five years (1996-2000), done by a team of 20 specialists under the guidance of Jim Collins, at over 1400 American firms, only 11 were selected, those which met the excellence criteria. The changes that these firms went through from the "good reference firms" category to the "excellent firms" category are synthesized in the flywheel and the destiny chain metaphor. This metaphor makes us think to the machine metaphor associated with F.Taylor's approaches at the end of the 19th century that constituted the generator of organizations' bureaucracy. As you will see in the following paragraphs, the flywheel and the destiny chain metaphor represents a complex development of the classical currents vision in a new evolution cycle of management thought.

Long-lasting developments that lead to business excellence, shows Jim Collins, follow the predictable model of accumulation and breach suggested by the mechanical laws of the flywheel functioning. By sustainable and persistent effort, permanently oriented in the same direction, the flywheel accumulates energy that finally creates the breach to the great performance. Similarly, the 11 firms that reached excellence after 15-20 years of accumulations realized a sustainable growth potential leading to the breach towards the great economic performance.

Reference firms, with good results, at an average market level have been following the process suggested by *the destiny chain*. Instead of acting by sustainable effort, they avoid accumulations and pass directly to breach by great and erroneous acquisitions. Obviously, this causes a petard effect that produces a short illumination and afterwards everything disappears.

Most of the time, people inside the excellent firms are not aware of the proportion of changes to be produced in the breach. Only later, looking back, everything appears very clear. The leaders of excellent firms, as compared to the leaders of good (reference) firms, do not consume resources trying *to create alignment, to motivate the troupes or to manage the change*. All those mentioned *develop themselves*. *When you let the flywheel speak, you are not allowed to communicate your goals with too much enthusiasm. People can just extrapolate the flywheel's enthusiasm*. The leadership created by the metaphor guarantees the continuity of development while the metaphor of the *destiny chain* shows that the leader's retirement is followed by disappointing results.

By means of *the destiny chain and the flywheel metaphor* there is emphasized the importance of the leaders' and human resources quality, to the conformation of the managerial process with reality, of the aesthetical and ethical strategy adoption, of the promotion of the firm discipline culture and of the accelerating role of technologies in the accumulation and breach processes towards excellence.

Concluding on the metaphorical style promoted by the new currents of thought in management, I can emphasize the following aspects:

- in the last ten years the metaphorical style has been reactivated in management as a method of analysis and research of the managerial process and not as a collection of empirical rules transmitted from generation to generation;
- metaphor creates a new, suggestive, explicit and comprehensive image on the evolution of thinking and practice in management, starting with the second half of the 19th century and up to our days;
- by means of metaphor there is emphasized the great potential of vision, creation and innovation of the common communication language of human beings – karaoke, temple, tower, central market, funky, flywheel etc. have every where in the world the same meaning;
- The metaphorical style is convincing as it appeals to paradigms rediscovered and promoted in the public opinion as elements with value of social, ethic and aesthetic symbol.

The use of metaphors in management creates a new behaviour and a new attitude in the human interrelationships, with stimulating effect in assuming the responsibilities of permanent adoption of the patrimony-organization-management (pom) structures to the temple, the tower and the central market parameters variations so as to ensure a sustainable development in conditions of social community excellence.

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