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## Metaphor as diatextual yeast of organizational identity

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ABSTRACT: Metaphoric discourse enlightens the unstable and restless semiotic core of human condition/nature, which triggers simultaneously the dynamics both of thought and of language. The recent perspective of cognitive linguistics allows us to overcome the traditional stance aiming at aligning the special rhetorical and expressive strength of metaphor with its evident argumentative nature. The psycho-semiotic approach to metaphorical discourse moves precisely in this direction, framing each human event of sense-making within the notion of diatext, in order to highlight the never-ending dialogical tension between the "text" and the "context" of enunciation and/or of reception. Hence, the diatextual approach - here proposed as methodological option - focuses attention on the pragmatic orientation given to some of the patterns proposed by cognitive linguistics in metaphorology The aim of the present paper is to show through a corpus of empirical data collected within the organizational/professional context using narrative interviews how metaphors actually work as "yeast" for human discourses.

Key words: metaphor; organizational identity; psychosemiotic approach; discourse analysis; diatext

## Introduction

Metaphor is the lintel of the bridge which connects thought and language to human condition (ARENDT, 1978) since it is a meaning-making procedure whose aim is to produce the individual projects which shape the world (BATESON, 1979). Metaphor exercises a great attractive power on the human mind, in its rhetorical and poetical value, a point highlighted since Aristotle. Thus, it facilitates comprehension by stimulating the search for "a different

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meaning", where the code of language seems clumsy in the encounter with the unspeakable. To create and/or to understand a metaphor is to win a battle with what is inexpressible, which is what constantly challenges human life. Since our society is so obsessed by the rhetoric of quantity, it could be useful to know that, according to rough calculations, each speaker elaborates more than 26 million metaphors in the course of his/her life (CACCIARI 2001: 278). Certainly, this statistical data includes both "frozen" metaphors (21,4) and "novel" metaphors (4,7). Actually, it has no claim of correctness since it is simply a statistical average; nonetheless, it has the merit of indicating the degree of pervasiveness that metaphor has in daily life. This pervasive presence should not, however, hide the fact of the multiple functions of metaphor, among which could be mentioned its ability to "take care of us", as demonstrated by several psychotherapeutic practices with metaphors (KOPP 1995; LAWLEY & TOMPKINS 2000). Being a way of acting of the "meaningful man", metaphor works not only in the systematic horizon of language, but is also active in the processing horizon of discourse, which is supported by pragmatic and contextual coordinates. The agreement implied in the use of metaphor derives from the possibility that each communicative event might be ruled by the expectation of the intense cognitive and emotional participation of those who are grasping its meaning. Metaphors activate interest and involvement since they switch on the "open logic of the mind" (LICATA, 2008) by re-conciliating the opposites that define the complex texture of human intentionality. Thinking/speaking through metaphors then demands an "imaginative rationality" which is due to the discursive ability individuals use to point out regularity in the chaos of sensations and coherence in the web of what is unforeseeable (FISHER, 2006).

The main objective of the present paper is to show how a diatextual approach to the study of metaphor frames this device as a discursive resource of the mind, thus revealing its ability to highlight the meaning that real people in real contexts are experiencing in a specific communicative interaction. A diatextual analysis shows that metaphors could be at the same time a clue for subjectivity, argumentation and modality of discourse. To better fulfil this objective a corpus of discursive data coming from two studies which have collected metaphors of the organization into two different professional settings will be analysed through this methodological approach.


## 1.Metaphor and organization theory

Despite the increased salience of metaphor in organization theory, there are still very few conceptual efforts to capture and explain how metaphor creates and/or reorders knowledge within organizational settings. Moreover, prior work on metaphor has insufficiently accounted for the context of interpreting a metaphor. Many metaphors in organization theory, including the 'organizational identity' metaphor, have often been treated in singular and monolithic terms; seen to offer a similar or largely synonymous interpretation to theorists and researchers working along the entire spectrum of disciplines in organization theory. Nonetheless, the analysis of most of these contributions allows us to highlight at least two opposed research perspectives: the objectivist view and the image schematic view of metaphor.

According to the first view, metaphor is thought to be either a deviant form of expression or a non-essential literary figure of speech (ORTONY, 1979). In either case, it is generally not regarded as cognitively fundamental. The objectivist view suggests that the

world has its structure, and that our concepts and propositions, to be correct, must correspond to that structure. Only literal concepts and propositions can do that since metaphors, as a figurative and playful combination of concepts, assert cross-categorical identities that do not exist objectively in reality. Metaphors may exist as cognitive processes of our understanding, but their meaning must be reducible to some set of literal concepts and propositions (PINDER & BOURGEOIS, 1982). In this objectivist sense, metaphor is seen as a deviation from, or a derivative function of proper literal meaning. What are called 'comparison' or 'similarity' accounts of metaphor fall into this 'objectivist' category (CORNELISSEN, 2004). Comparison accounts treat metaphors in the canonical 'A is B' form as elliptical similes equivalent to the assertion that 'A is like B in certain definite respects'. In short, metaphor is seen as a comparison in which the first term A (i.e. the topic or tenor) is asserted to bear a partial resemblance (i.e. the ground) to the second term B (i.e. the vehicle) (SHEN, 1997). Our ability to process the metaphor then depends upon our seeing that the A-domain shares certain literal properties and relations with the B-domain. The distinctive feature of comparison accounts is their insistence that the similarities revealed through the metaphorical transfer exist objectively in the world and are expressible in literal propositions (OSWICK et al., 2002; TSOUKAS, 1991, 1993).

On the other hand, the so-called interaction model pioneered by Black (1962, 1979) provides an alternative perspective to the 'objectivist' comparison model and proposes 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 vehicle cannot be applied directly to the tenor since the features they 'share' are often only shared metaphorically, and 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 comparing the tenor to the vehicle, Black (1962) argued that the conjunction of the tenor and the vehicle generates a particular selection of each constituent's semantic aspects and reorganizes them. That is, the presence of the tenor stimulates the hearer to select some of the vehicle's properties and to construct a 'parallel implication complex' to fit the tenor which, in turn, produces parallel changes in the vehicle (Black, 1979). As such, 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 unnoticed, similarities in the features of the constituent concepts (see also ORTONY, 1979). A simpler comparison model, as Morgan (1983) equally pointed out, misses this interactive process of 'seeing-as' or 'conceiving-as' by which an emergent meaning complex is generated. Subsequent debate within the fields of philosophy, psychology and cognitive science has tended to confirm Black's claim that comparison theories are too reductionist and atomistic in their accounts of metaphor comprehension. Recent models of metaphor in cognitive science including 'structure-mapping' (e.g. GENTNER, 1983; GENTER & CLEMENT, 1988), 'domains-interaction' (e.g .TOURANGEAU & STERNBERG, 1982), 'metaphoric structuring' (e.g. MURPHY, 1996, 1997), and 'cognitive blending' (e.g. FAUCONNIER & TURNER, 1998) have accounted for this idea of an emergent structure of meaning as first conceived of by Black's (1962) interaction model. These models have also effectively extended and validated Black's (1962, 1979) central claims that metaphor involves conjoining whole semantic domains instead of just features of constituents, and 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, but rather the generation and creation

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of new meaning beyond any similarity that previously existed between them. Unfortunately, however, these advances in thinking about metaphor have not yet fully found their way into organization theory. That is, although the generative value of metaphor in creating new meaning has indeed become recognized in the slipstream of Morgan's (1980, 1983) work (e.g. CHIA, 1996; CLARK & MANGHAM, 2004; GHERARDI, 2000; HATCH, 1999; MORGAN, 1996; TSOUKAS 1991, 1993), there is still very little theoretical debate about how to capture and document the way in which metaphors *can* be creative. Moreover, prior studies on metaphor in organization theory have insufficiently accounted for the context of interpreting a metaphor. Many metaphors in organization theory, including the 'organizational identity' metaphor that is discussed below, have often been treated in singular and monolithic terms; seen to offer a similar or largely synonymous interpretation to theorists and researchers working in the field of organization theory.

In this paper it will be argued on the other hand that contextual variation exists in the interpretation of metaphors in organization theory, and needs to be accounted for. Both these aspects of interpreting a metaphor – the emergent meaning that it produces, and the variation in interpretation across individuals and research communities in organization theory – are addressed. This is done, as mentioned,  by developing and elaborating on a so-called image-schematic model of metaphor which suggests that the metaphorical comparison of concepts triggers certain image-schemata (abstract imaginative structures) – that may vary among individuals – and are then blended, completed and elaborated upon into a new, emergent meaning which is actually moulded through communication. In contrast to a reductionist comparison account, from an image-schematic perspective, metaphor is seen as a pervasive and cognitively fundamental way of structuring human understanding where meaning is created through the creative juxtaposition of concepts that are not normally interrelated. Therefore, an image-schema can be defined as a basic and abstract imaginative structure that is triggered by each of the two concepts conjoined in metaphor (e.g. 'organization' and 'identity') and that, when integrated, organizes our mental representations. In this sense, metaphorical mappings 'preserve the cognitive typology (that is, the image-schema structure) of the source domain [that positions the vehicle], in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain [that positions the tenor]' (LAKOFF, 1993, p. 215). Furthermore, once such image-schemata belonging to the tenor and vehicle concepts match with one another, further instance-specific information from the tenor and vehicle concepts is transferred in metaphor and blended with one another (e.g. EUBANKS, 1999; MURPHY, 1996, 1997; SHEN, 1997). 'Blending' composes elements from the tenor and vehicle concepts and, furthermore, leads us to complete and elaborate upon the composition made so that a new meaning emerges (CORNELISSEN, 2004, 2005; FAUCONNIER & TURNER, 1998). In the case of the 'organizational identity' metaphor, for example, this means that once it was established that in a structural sense 'organization' and 'individual identity' are alike since their image-schemata matched – i.e. the image-schemata that cognitive, mental activities are engaged in for both entities – further instances of specific information from both the tenor and vehicle concepts were sourced and blended. The implication of 'individual agency' from the 'individual identity' vehicle concept, for instance, was blended with collective identity within the 'organization' and has led theorists to complete and elaborate upon this composition by considering how collective identity can be imagined as an entity of its own (instead of being conceived of as an aggregate of individual identities), how an organization can display distinctive identity traits, can communicate with its several stakeholders and manage its image.

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## 2. Metaphors as discursive forms of life: for a psycho-semiotic approach to metaphor

Seen from this image-schematic view, each metaphor leads to meaning creation and provides for a particular understanding of the world of organizations. Due to this emergent meaning, metaphors may thus provide startling new images and new ways of understanding organizations that in any case were inconceivable before (CHIA, 1996; GHERARDI, 2000; MORGAN, 1980, 1983; WEICK, 1989). Accordingly, metaphors have both a structural power as they give concrete form to worldviews, and a generative nature, since through metaphors people are allowed to create totally new interpretative perspectives (LAKOFF & JOHNSON, 1980; ORTONY, 1993). In this sense, metaphors are precious and efficient resources that help people and/or communities to shape the network of interpretative pathways where their culture is recognizable. Actually, it is through discourse that personal and social identities are shaped and communicated. The semiotic and discursive approach to metaphors aims at highlighting its ability to create possible worlds, which is produced by the human desire to "go beyond" the logic of identity and exchange to share the "logic of otherness and excess" (PETRILLI 2006, p. 81). Metaphors create possible worlds since they intercept reasons of analogy between cognitive areas, but also because they enlighten the relational profile of interlocutors, disseminating traces of both the enunciator and his ideal addressee. A psycho-semiotic approach focuses on the discursive nature of metaphor, namely on its being an "effort after meaning" (MININNI, 1986). Such perspective might contribute to understand organizations as complex web of meanings, as discursive constructions, being metaphor one of its most important bricks.

## 3. Metaphor as a resource of diatextual analysis

Metaphor is one of the discursive resources of diatextual analysis since it opens unexpected views on the mysterious procedures which constantly translate claims of meaning into discursive modes suitable to specific situations. The *diatext* is a semiotic instrument for Critical Discourse Analysis aimed at catching the dynamic and negotiated nature of any communicative event. In their happening, texts are diatexts, for two main reasons which are recalled by the same word 'dia-text' (from the Greek prefix '*dia*', through). Actually, sense does not reside permanently within the texts; rather it goes through them as a result of the conjunct action of the enunciators, who negotiate the frame of the situation (stake) where they are actively involved. The notion of diatext aims at making explicit the principle organizing the links between "what is said by the text" and "what can be said through the text by those taking part in the dialog". The links take shape in three dimensions: "field", "tenor", "mode" (HALLIDAY 1985), that indicate topic, relational tone and style of the discursive event. Communicative events shape their sense (also) through their being "texts". The researcher respects the text so much that he refuses any systemic operation of cutting it in lower analysis units (words, phrases, paragraph, etc.), assuming that its meaning can be drawn only through an holistic attitude. Obviously, the analyst may focus on some segment of the "corpus", but his main interest is to enhance their contribution to the "spirit" of the text. Such a holistic approach is sustainable if the researcher is aware of his own fallibility and partiality. The diatextual researcher starts from the assumption/premise that the meaning of a discourse could be captured by answering three basic questions: Who is saying it? Why does he/she say it? How does he/she say it? These questions have an ethno-methodological valence since first of

all they guide the practices of comprehension of those who participate to the communicative event. To take part in a conversation (and/or to come into a dialogical relationship) means to grant such an enunciative contribution of sense, as to show who is speaking, what could legitimize what he/she is saying and which is its claim of validity. These questions do organize the interpretative procedures of a diatextual researcher, since they also shape the "SAM Model", that is a series of markers which allow us to point out the *Subjectivity*, the *Argumentation* and the *Modality* of discourses and thus to catch the meaning within the dynamic of reciprocal co-construction of text and context of enunciation. The first question (*who says what?*) aims at clarifying the way the text speaks of its speakers(/subjects), by weaving the complex link with the image the enunciator elaborates of him/her self and of the addressee. The traits of *subjectivity* which could be revealed through a diatextual analysis are *agentivity markers (*what shows if the enunciator is source or goal of action), a*ffectivity markers* (what highlights the emotional dimension of texts), e*mbrayage/debrayage markers* (what reveals whether the enunciator is involved or not). The second question (*Why does he/she say that?*) points out an axis of semiotic pertinence which allows the discourse to "articulate arguments", that is to organize "meanings why", to give voice to reasons and aims at why one says what says. The traits of *argumentation* which could be investigated through the diatextual analysis are: *the "stake/enjeu" markers (*aims and interests animating the text), *narrative markers (*scenes, characters, models of action), and the network of *logoi* and *antilogoi* activated within the several narrative and argumentative programmes. The third question (*how he/she says that?*) focuses on the articulation of the "*dictum*" and of the "*modus*" of discourse according to which the meaning is shaped, that is, acquires a *Gestalt* quality which could be evaluated as "good" or "bad", "nice" or "naughty", "effective" or "insipid" etc. The traits of modality which could be investigated through diatextual analysis are *meta-discursive markers (*expressions of comment and reformulation), *discourse genre markers* (reference to the typology of text and intertextual references), o*pacity Markers* (rhetorical figures, frame metaphors, etc). Diatextual analysis is a proposal for a "subjective" interpretation, with the explicit awareness of the particular and the fallible nature of its results. The analysed text links the subjectivity of the researcher to the subjectivity of enunciators. The researcher expresses his/her subjectivity first in a series of options which are previous to the data analysis, starting from the definition of the "topic", object of analysis, up to the selection and the collection of the *corpus* and to the focalization of the pre-theoretical point of view (or ideological orientation) to enter the text. Subjectivity in the methodological practice of the diatextual researcher is also congruent with the aim of investigating the presence of other "subjective" voices within the corpus, which is the identity position the text achieves for the interlocutors it meets. The text is like a mirror, since it shows who the enunciators are and how they act in it. The present contribution is aimed at showing only some of the procedures of the diatextual approach that are those with a greater *metaphorical* pertinence.


## 4.The study

### 4.1.Aims, participants and methodology

The "transfiguring charge" (MININNI, 1992: 89) of language reveals itself as a very useful device for concretely shaping meanings in the organizational context. Therefore, the

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analysis of metaphors might enhance the interpretation of how organizations are *told* through individual experience. In line with such assumptions, two different studies conducted with a group of 38 workers, belonging to two small medium-scale enterprises in the south of Italy are presented. Metaphors were adopted as one of the main diatextual clues used to trace the dialogical tension between "text" and "context" of enunciation and/or of reception (MININNI, 1992; 2003).

Both studies were research-interventions aimed at investigating organizational identity, through employees' satisfaction and sense of identification. In both cases, participants were invited to give us a representative metaphor of their organization. The first study involved a sample of 18 workers (2 women and 16 men) employed at the O.M.P. a mechanical small enterprises located in the south of Italy. The second study involved a group of 20 workers (10 women and 10 men) employed at the D.C.I., another small manufacturing enterprise in the south of Italy.

### 4.2. The metaphorical construction of organizational identity

The analysis of the analogical scripts used by the respondents in the first organizational context at the O.M.P. allows pointing out two opposite interpretations of organizational identity (objects versus relationships). The first pole focuses on the static metaphors of "**machine**" and "**condominium**".

1) "It is very difficult to find an image. A machine made up of different elements each element accomplishing its own task."
"Ritengo sia difficile trovare un'immagine. Una macchina composta di tanti elementi ognuno svolge il proprio compito" (man, 40 years old)

2) "Certainly a machine a working machine. This is the context of this organization family or not because the aim to produce takes all time and space it takes much time we are a family of singles."
"Una macchina sicuramente che si vuol fare funzionare. Questa è la realtà di questa azienda. Famiglia no perché il desiderio di produrre è così prende tutto, il tempo e lo spazio occupa molto tempo. Siamo una famiglia di single." (man, 38 years old)

3) "A condominium where there is an administrator and all inhabitants a condominium made up of 89 stages as much as the employees are each stage has its employee who knows the others but minds his businesses the administrator is G. the employer"
"Un condominio dove c'è un amministratore e tutti i condomini un condominio di ottantanove piani quanti sono i dipendenti ogni piano ha il suo dipendente che sì conosce gli altri, ma non più di tanto. L'amminsitatore è G. il titolare." (woman, 52 years old)

In this case, the organization is presented as a rigid structure determined by the com-presence of its parts rather than by their co-habitation. The use of such analogical repertoires gives to the organization a pure instrumental function (production), thus interpreting workers as rational beings whose unique aim is to contribute to global production.

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The second pole enhances a more relational interpretation of the organizational context. The most significant metaphor here is that of the "**family**". The organization is seen as a context where every worker might find support and collaboration to reach common goals.

The metaphor of the "**family**" develops other metaphorical scripts aimed at enhancing the relational value of the organization. For instance, the metaphor of the organization as a **"hand"**, that is an executive unit, made up of elements (the "fingers") having peculiar functions and features: it is their complementary nature that warrants the whole functioning of the organization (example 4).

4) "a family actually it is a family Certainly sometimes there are different points of view but in the end thanks to the collaboration of all of us we find a solution. As the fingers of a hand we are all different this is what happens in a family, in private life, in working life, etc." "Una famiglia, ecco in realtà una famiglia Certo a volte ci sono dei punti di vista delle divergenze a seconda del punto di vista però alla fine grazie alla collaborazione di tutti si arriva a concretizzare. Le dita della mano non sono tutte uguali questo succede in famiglia, nella vita privata, sul posto di lavoro, da tutte le parti" (man, 50 years old)

The shape of the hand functions as analogy of the reciprocal help expected in the organization, even because it recalls the idiomatic expression "to lend a hand". The frequent repetition of terms such as "help" and "collaboration" confirms the fact that the enunciator interprets the organizational action in terms of **reciprocal support**.

5) "a big family, since here the relationship with the employers is familiar the relationships are good friendly we joke also with the employers we have grown up together, there is a confidential relationship as in a family".
"Diciamo la paragono ad una grande famiglia, perché qui il rapporto che c'è con i titolari è praticamente come una famiglia perché i rapporti sono buoni sono amichevoli si scherza anche con i titolari siamo cresciuti insieme, c'è un rapporto confidenziale, cioè è come in una famiglia". (man, 44 years old)

Nonetheless, the metaphor of the "family" is so rich as to specify other meanings as suggested by example 5, where the interlocutors evoke the metaphor of the "big" and "enlarged" family, in order to underline the **process of growth** which leads a small family to become bigger as time goes by.

A different use of the family script is the one which compares the organization to a **"mother duck"** and the employees to the ducklings (example 6).

6) "An image linked to the organization a mother duck. You know like a big duck that embraces all our organization is this where all ducklings are always ducklings if one gets lost and leaves the pathways they get you they make you turn around as she wants they leave you a little bit of autonomy but as long as you do not go out the key points they establish to you". "Un'immagine legata all'azienda una mamma anatra come la grande anatra che abbraccia tutti quanti l'O.M.P. mi sembra questo. Dove tutti gli anatroccoli sono sempre anatroccoli alla fine,se uno esce dal tracciato ti riprendono ti fanno girare sotto di lei come vuoi però se uno esce ti riprendono. Ti lasciano un po' di autonomia, ma appena esci fuori certi paletti che hanno loro non esiste". (woman, 25 years old)

Such animalization is very interesting for the peculiarity of the behavioral routines such water birds display, as they generally move and explore the context collectively. Although there is a certain degree of freedom and autonomy, there is something special in the

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relationship between mother duck and ducklings which pushes the latter to stay closer to the mother. Something similar happens even to the "kids" of "mother O.M.P.". Though quite independent in their activity ("they make you turn under her as you like but"), each worker feels the power of his/her professional relationship, which invisibly links everyone to the organization coordinating collective action and avoiding any kind of anarchy. The use of such metaphor - the "mother duck" embracing her ducklings although encouraging them to move away - highlights the importance experienced by this group of workers of **sharing and belonging** to the same organizational culture, which is a secure base to explore and to develop one's own professional identity.

Quite different is the experience told in example 7.

7) "A familiar image we are 80 employees, nonetheless we are an organization narrow minded it is an hen conceived by them and they do not want give the egg to nobody since they feel deprived".
 "Un'immagine familiare. Siamo un'azienda con ottanta dipendenti, però in fin dei conti siamo un'azienda piccola di cervello è una gallina concepita da loro e l'uovo non vogliono darlo a nessuno perché si sentono derubati". (man, 36 years old)

The image of the "family" degenerates into the metaphor of the "**hen/egg**". The analogy between the organization and the hen is precious for the enunciator in order to comment on the narrow-minded behavior of the management.  In this case, the "family-metaphor" is used to evoke the sense of attachment felt by a mother toward her baby. Such feeling sometimes must be even ambivalent since it might become possession. This is what happens at the OMP. Actually, according to the worker interviewed, the management is very reluctant to separate from their "egg" since to rely upon skilled and competent workers would mean to lose a little bit of power ("they feel deprived"). Then, they often decide to keep material and symbolic resources for the self, thus hindering any chance for personal and professional development of its members and of the whole organization.

A different analogical script is the one comparing the organization to an "**oil platform**".

8) "Do you know the oil platforms in the ocean where coal oil id extracted? This is how I see this organization I see our country and this organization in the middle. A place of wellbeing, of wealth, a resource". "Hai presente le piattaforme petrolifere che estraggono petrolio in mezzo all'oceano? Così la vedo quest'azienda  immagino il nostro paese e questa azienda al centro un posto di benessere, di ricchezza  una risorsa". (man, 45 years old)

This image depicts the O.M.P. as the main source of prosperity of a wider national context, which is not particularly flourishing. The context which surrounds the organization is described as a huge expanse of water in the middle of which there is only a source of wealth: the O.M.P. Such analogical script describes the organization as the unique glimmer of hope in a *mare magnum* where everything appears shapeless and uniform. Actually, the image of the oil platform focuses attention on the productive function as a salient feature of the organization; nonetheless the enunciator follows a wider interpretative strategy. He underlines the contribution that his organization gives to the surrounding context, thus offering a future to the community thanks to its potentialities. Therefore, by defining the organization as a "resource" and thus marking the self-centered references to the context ("our country"), the

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enunciator constructs a text whose frame of meaning underlines the opportunity for development that the organization represents for itself and for the rest of the context.

The analysis of the organizational metaphors permits the revelation of how within the O.M.P. there are actually two cultures which live together: the first one which is strongly static and rationalistic, meaning individuals as tools to meet efficiently the objectives of a system which has already planned and decided its options, the second one which is highly dynamic and attributes value to each interactive action of its social agents.

## 4.3.Metaphorical fragments of organizational life

The analysis of this second context of exploration too shows how metaphors could be adopted as a discursive strategy aimed at constructing and organizing symbolically their personal version of organizational experience. From an operational point of view, metaphors do activate a comparison between different areas of experience which move from a source domain to a target domain. The source domain is projected into the target domain through the use of an icon. In this way, participants were invited to associate the meanings connected to both domains, thus specifying and constructing one' own object of discourse. The first experiential object which emerges from the diatextual analysis is **job**, which is associated to the importance attributed to one's own role, to shared goals and to common coping strategies. The importance of one's own role is evoked by the metaphor of the "**railway tracks**" and by that of the "**train**": one's own job is perceived as the tracks which are essential as to allow to the train-organization to continue travelling.

9) "My job is on the track where the train goes on, that is if you eliminate that track the train stops. Then if I do not accomplish my tasks, they cannot go on with their work and call for me anytime." "Io ho un lavoro che è uno dei binari su cui viaggia il treno, cioè togli quel binario e il treno si ferma. Quindi, se non faccio io un dato lavoro, giù si bloccano e ogni volta mi devono chiamare"(man, 50 years old)

Actually, the awareness of how important one's own role is implies a sense of **involvement and commitment** which is a precious part of the meaning people attribute to their professional experience: "downstairs they stop themselves and are obliged to call me at anytime, then I feel quite involved".

The domain of **union**, expressed through the metaphor of "**marriage"**, recalls the condition of **aims sharing**. This condition might be realized through participation and through a profound sharing of the future vision of the organization, which is thereby projected toward growth and development.

10) "I mostly espoused their vision, not simply the tasks they gave me" "ho sposato maggiormente il loro modo di vedere le cose, non tanto il lavoro da fare o meno" (woman, 47 years old)

The meaning attached to job involvement is further enriched by a playful metaphor: job is a "**game**", something which gives pleasure and fun as long as it is not seen as an obligation.

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11) "To me my job is almost a game, since it is what I like to do. As long as I will see it as a game I think I would like to do what I actually do" "per me io lo vedo ecco il mio lavoro finora l'ho sempre visto come quasi un gioco, perché è una cosa che mi piace fare. Fino a quando lo vedrò come un gioco penso che mi piacerà fare quello che faccio" (man, 60 years old)

A second experiential object constructed by the metaphorical resources emerged from the discourses of participants is organization.

12)*"As an iceberg (…) it has more inside rather than outside, than to let what is inside go out would be a great contribution to the strengthen the bases of what now is simply a top" "Come un iceberg (…) cioè di sommerso ha molto più di quello che emerge, quindi cercare di tirare fuori quello che effettivamente è sotto contribuirebbe a consolidare le basi di quello che adesso è solo una punta"(man, 49 years old)*

The participants choose to outline organizational identity trough metaphors evoking the idea of **superiority**. One's own firm is described as a winning organizational model as compared with the *competitors* living the market, not only because it is a leader at a national level within the specific product sector, that is wood window frames ("it owes prestige and is an undisputed leader at a national level"), rather even at a more general level ("as compared to the other organizations' managing models"). Nonetheless, such superiority might be better managed as organizational strategy if it would be given to the organization a greater outer visibility: customers who first enter the firm, confronting their previous ideas on the D.C.I., understand that "what is submerged is much more than what emerges". The base of this iceberg should be reinforced: this would allow the top to emerge, thus strengthening the trust customers put in the organization. To do this, it could be sufficient to show outside organizational identity ("what the organization actually is"). As a consequence, clearness of one's intentions is a fundamental tool as to reach such goal: the firm should clarify to its several external interlocutors the process of evolution which has led – through time- the D.C.I. to be the present organization.

When the focus of attention passes from the notion of organization as a collective entity to the single human resources who live and work in it thus supporting its growth, the metaphor used by the participants is that of **victory**: the single individuals are the actual strength point of the organization, the element which allows the organization to be successful on the market.

13)"Ah according to me one of the strengths of the organization are all the people work for it, then as I say, just to make an example, if the Ferrari wouldn't have had Schumacher would it have won the world championship?"
"Ah secondo me il punto di forza dell'azienda sono tutte le persone che ci lavorano all'interno, per cui diciamo:: io dico spesso, faccio un esempio, se la Ferrari non avesse avuto Schumacher non avrebbe vinto il mondiale, no?"(man, 35 years old)

As the Ferrari would have not won the world championship if it would have not had Schumacher, the D.C.I. would have never reached the goal sit had without the constant support of all the individuals involved in it. Actually, the growth of the firm is also

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represented through the metaphor of a **bubble**, which grows on thus also risking to explode if not converged into an adequate structure. This is what is happening at the D.C.I. Having reached high levels of growth and development in the few recent years the firm-bubble risks exploding if not efficiently and adequately supported in such a process, with severe and uncontrolled consequences for all those people who work there.

The nexus between the needs and the objectives of the individuals as well as of the organization is exemplified by the use of two metaphors: the **boat** and the **navy**.

14)"Then if the boat goes in a certain direction we should all know that we have to follow the same direction, because if we decide we go to the north and then the management change the direction and decide we should go to north east  without communicating this decision to us, we go on following the north since this was the agreement"
"cioè la barca se va in una certa direzione lo dobbiamo sapere tutti che dobbiamo andare nella stessa direzione, perché se oggi parliamo che dobbiamo andare a nord e dopo un po' la direzione decide di andare a nord est, però non lo ha detto agli altri, noi continuiamo ad andare a nord, sapendo che ne abbiamo parlato sei mesi fa che dobbiamo andare là, andiamo in quella direzione" (man, 39 years old)

Each worker follows one's own professional objectives on board of a "small boat". Nonetheless, the coordination of individual objectives and actions allows people to abandon the "boat" and to join the "navy-organization". Such a metaphor not only evokes a difference in terms of dimension (the navy is bigger than the boat), but also in terms of efficiency and success in the realization of specific aims (the navy is faster and thus might go farther). All such assumptions might be achieved only if there is a common view about the direction that the navy-organization should follow. Indeed, while the course and the speed of the boat depends exclusively on the autonomous decision of the individual; each decision about the destination and the route of the navy should be negotiated and shared.

15)"I was in a little boat that was all mine, a little boat where I had the control and everything worked than I decided to go and join a ship since I liked and shared its direction which was mine as well of course with my  little boat I would have never come to that point, then since there was this chance and I liked the people on the ship I decided to join them as to realise something bigger rather than staying alone and trying to get a bigger boat"
"stavo in una barca che era totalmente mia, una barchetta che comunque era mia e comandavo io, e andava bene, funzionava tutto bene, ho deciso di passare su una nave perché comunque mi piaceva il fatto che andava nella direzione giusta che andavo io con la barchetta però sicuramente io con la barchetta non sarei mai arrivato a quel livello, allora visto che c'è la possibilità e mi piace questa gente, perché vanno nella stessa mia ottica di vedere le cose preferisco accodarmi a loro e riuscire a fare qualcosa di più grande piuttosto che restare da solo e riuscire a farmi una barca un po' più grande"(man, 60 years old)

The metaphorical language is used by the participants even to position themselves with reference to the difficulties in communication experienced daily within the organizational context. Once more, the metaphor of the navy is used: its direction should be clear to everyone and should not be implicit. Actually, the difficulties in communication cause damage to the sharing of intentions: if the navy changes its direction without communicating such a decision, the single individuals would go on to follow the direction they think is the right one.

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Another important aspect is the lack of communication and information about the organization's processes, often generated by a lack of coordination. Starting from the source domain of lack of coordination, exemplified by the metaphor of **"two hands"**, participants complaint about the lack of any necessary information to adequately do their work.

16)"Nonetheless, there is not a sufficient communication among us, actually. uhm… yes sometimes the right hand does not see what the left hand is doing." "Però non c'è molta comunicazione, effettivamente. Uhm… si, a volte la mano destra non sa cosa sta facendo la mano sinistra." (man, 45 years old)

The feedback comes only at the end of the process, thus hindering the acknowledgement of the output of any intermediate phase and thus preventing people from giving their contribution to the improvement of organizational processes, producing on the other hand feelings of extraneousness and disengagement.

Finally, a last metaphor proposed by the participants to describe the organization is that of the **oasis in the desert**.

17)"Then if I go beyond this organizational context that is it is a sort of oasis in the desert, then we have golden wages" "se poi io faccio il discorso al di fuori di questa realtà, di questa azienda cioè è un'oasi in un deserto, allora gli stipendi che abbiamo qui sono degli stipendi d'oro" (man, 57 years old)

The organization is a rare case of positive climate and wellbeing; it is seen as an oasis within the deserted panorama of the local labor market, and as a consequence the workers interviewed define themselves as "privileged". Actually, any complaints about for example the economic condition rather than the improvement of some "soft" dimensions relative to the human resource management (communication being one of them) become less negative as confronted with the other organizational local realities.

The third experiential object constructed by the metaphorical discourses of participants refers to the collocation of one's self within the organizational context and then to the meaning attributed to one's own job.

18) "In the end you feel like a fly who goes back and forth to act as a stopgap and in the end it is absolutely useful"
"alla fine ti senti collocato cioè una mosca che va tappando tutti questi buchi che poi alla fine … non serve assolutamente a niente"(man, 32 years old)

19) "I accomplish two different tasks, the one having nothing to do with the other, in a sense they are two different planets." "Svolgo due mansioni molto diverse l'una dall'altra, non c'entrano niente, sono due pianeti diversi" (man, 37 years old)

A very impressive analogical frame recalls the experience of **disorientation** as "a fly who goes back and forth to act as a stopgap". Such a sensation should be connected to the lack of a precise definition of roles, tasks and assignments. Sometimes, the pressure to manage the complexity of all organizational practices and processes  lead to a temporary "collocation" of  workers in roles which are not theirs, thus deeply influencing work attachment and feelings of usefulness. To this sense of disorientation, a perception of

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disjointedness is associated, which derives from the great heterogeneity of tasks and assignments that sometimes "have nothing to do with each other, are two different planets".

The definition of professional identity is further highlighted by the definition of one's own competences in terms of "**cards to play**", which is as an important background on which the workers know they could count, since they are the result of pains, sacrifices and experience.

20)"I think I have the right cards, the abilities and the preparation to go on, on the other hand I see… eh! Nonetheless I go on sacrificing myself" "credo di avere le carte giuste, le capacità e la preparazione per poter andare avanti, invece vedo… eh! D'altro canto i sacrifici continuo a farli" (man, 57 years old)

Nonetheless, not always the organization manifests appreciation toward the engagement of individuals, even because the feedback on the job is a lacking element.

Most of the interviewed workers manifest a convinced involvement toward their profession, defining such feeling as a sort of "**vocation**" toward the organization and toward one's own job: as the priest who accomplishes his tasks led by his faith, the worker daily accomplishes his duties since he "feels it".

21) "a role should be felt, I mean like the priest who feels his role" "bisogna sentirlo il proprio ruolo, cioè il prete perché fa il prete, perché sente"(man, 52 years old)

The relationship with one's own job is discursively constructed through the use of metaphors that account for different *coping* strategies manifested through organizational action. For instance, the metaphor of the "**uproar**" is used to refer to the domain of impulsiveness and immediacy. Often, the unexpected events of organizational life impose the search for a rapid solution, thus overcoming a rational internalization of good practices, which are a fundamental premise to the s*ense making process.* In this sense, the metaphor of the "uproar" seems to be particularly adequate to represent the temporal dimension of the *problem solving* process which characterizes problematic and conflictual situations within the organization.

22) "I am a very direct and open person, at first I create an immense uproar, since I do not like this way of behaving, but in the end I try to come up with the data, going back and forth to find a solution" " io sono una persona molto immediata, molto aperta, nel senso che lì per lì faccio un polverone, perché non mi va che queste cose non si sappiano, però poi alla fine le faccio, cioè cerco di risalire ai dati, andando da una parte all'altra e risolvo il problema" (man, 47 years old)

Finally, the last analogical frame is relative to the self at work. It uses once more the metaphor of "**marriage**" to highlight the centrality played by work in the process of construction of personal and professional identity and thus to mark the salience of such experience in the definition of one's own project of life.

23)"The two things people choose for the life are work and maybe a wife or an husband (…) then, from an emotional point of view I chose the woman I love, since I have to spend the rest

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of my life with her (…) the same is for my job work" "le cose che tu ti porti avanti per tutta la vita sono il lavoro e magari la moglie o il marito (…) ecco, dal lato sentimentale ho cercato di scegliere la donna con cui mi sentivo più legato, visto che ci devo passare tutto il resto della mia vita (…) e la stessa cosa per il lavoro" (man, 38 years old)

Both experiences, that of marriage and that of work, are actually two very important and crucial steps in the individual process of development, two life choices which might deeply influence the course of future life. The relevance of such choices is linked to the temporal dimension, since they are both "things you go on with all life-long"; thus what is very important is the full conviction and consequently the responsibility to keep commitments and decisions made. In this sense, the use of such a metaphor allows us to grasp the profound meaning attached to work experience by the participants: the commitment undertook with the organization might be read as an index of motivation and satisfaction since it derives from a decision made with strong conviction.

**Concluding remarks**

Metaphorical discourse highlights, with the flash of an unstable bolt of lightening, the semiotic nucleus of human nature, thus stirring the dynamics of both thought and language. The fascination of metaphor constantly renews itself in the mystery of the mind which takes from the expression the pattern that most suits the experience of the world. Thus, the metaphorical discourse fully confirms the magisterial thesis by Bachtin (1928) according to whom *"it is not experience that organizes expression, rather it is expression that organizes experience, giving it a shape and an orientation"* (p. 88). Since metaphors are the "constitutive foundations of language" (JAYNES 1976, p. 70), when people use a metaphorical expression, no matter how upsetting it might seem, they attempt to prefigure a context which allows them to enter new scenarios of meaning. Thanks to metaphor, the human species throws the "heart of the mind" *over* the obstacle, challenging the unknown of what resists communication, thereby inviting it to arrange itself in some forms of language which are more familiar to us. With special reference to the case-studies presented in the paper, diatextual analysis has contributed to show that as yeast makes bread grow, metaphors might enrich discourses and allow the construction of a shared repertoire which is fundamental in order to develop and disseminate organizational culture.

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