On the Conceptualization of Organization within a Group of Teachers in a Business School

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Abstract

This paper reflects critically upon the findings of an exploratory research, which aimed to identify the concepts that a group of teachers in a Business school associates with the concept of organization, and that are by definition the concepts they reproduce and socialize in their praxis in the classroom (through program justification and objectives, mandatory or elective readings), and in the teachers’ intellectual produce (through articles, books, interviews). Teachers describe organizations as a living biological system, a person and an moral and ethical individual. These three metaphors have different implications for the construction of organizational knowledge that are not entirely complementary. The implications are examined against a background of content and of vocabulary, language and discourse tools and devices (e.g., definitions, analogies, concept transfer, concept displacement and misplacement, metaphors and allegories). The portrait they make of the organization is ambiguous and equivocal. As discourse, they practice what RAMOS (1981) called cognitive politics.

Part one. Introduction. This paper reflects critically upon the findings of an exploratory research, which aimed to identify the concepts that a group of teachers in a Business school associates with the concept of organization, and that are by definition the concepts they reproduce and socialize in their praxis in the classroom (through program justification and objectives, mandatory or elective readings), and in the teachers’ intellectual produce (through articles, books, interviews). They are discussed against a background of content and of vocabulary, language and discourse tools and devices (e.g., definitions, analogies, concept transfer, concept displacement and misplacement, metaphors and allegories). Data collecting included a questionnaire, and two, in-depth, loosely structured interviews with each teacher.

The questionnaire had three parts. First, a glossary (a list of 109 terms drawn from the index of three, widely adopted books and one counter-mainstream work) presented different, contrasting or opposing conceptual perspectives for the organization. In part two, the teachers were asked to select ten words from the glossary they evaluate as the most pertinent ones to their conceptualization of organization. In part three, the teachers could add words they felt missing in the glossary. Answers to the questionnaire were assembled through simple statistical procedure (Table 1: Complete Conceptual Continuum for the Conceptualization of Organization).

The interviews departed from the teachers’ answers to the questionnaires. Following G. ROSE’s (1982) concepts of operational sample and qualitative representativeness, which express the qualitative measure of the soi-disant sample in terms of redundancy of empirical material, 32 teachers from three different school departments (management, accounting and finance) were interviewed. In terms of the study’s structure, the questionnaire was meant to induce the teachers’ written approach to the conceptualization of organization, while the interviews were meant to induce their oral approach to it. This proved wise because the conceptualization of organization through the written answers to the questionnaire, and oral are radically different. The research was conducted in a highly prestigious Business School in Canada.
Part Two. Describing and discussing data

The table. Some 65% of the terms are present in Table 1\(^2\) suggesting the teachers were not able to achieve neither a synthetic nor a shared representation of the organization. The representation of organization is at the same time (1) a composite of, and a (2) discursive arena, for conflicting assumptions about organizations.

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<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Change</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>Dynamics, Responsibility</td>
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<td>Knowledge</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Communication</td>
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<td>11-20</td>
<td>Society, Team, Energy, Complexity, Contingency, Information, Motivation, Process</td>
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<td>Decision, Environment, Boldness, Learning, Reality, Determination, Direction, Emotionality, Group, Savoir Faire</td>
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<td>Discipline, Structure, Soul, Brain, Policy</td>
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<td>1-10</td>
<td>Tool, Elite, Adaptability, Agent, Appropriation, Art, Attachment, Authority, Feedback, Common Sense, Organism, Planning, Production, Routinization, Technology, Transformation, Chance, Economy, Order, Logic, Supervision</td>
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*Second item of the Questionnaire: All ten concepts selected according to the pertinence to the concept of Organization.

These findings are not unexpected. The theoretical literature about organizations has never reached a consensual conceptualization of its object. There are so many types of organization that a common concept is hard to extract from research, observation or narratives. Therefore, a tendency for abstraction (ETZIONI, 1987) has proved to be the way out from conceptual inertia. A common conceptualization implies in homogenous analytical categories to assess the organization like, for instance, organizational goals, as GEORGIOU (1987) advocates, which has not been proved to be possible. Scholars abandoned the quest for an unifying conceptual paradigm, and the field has entered a fully analytical phase in which micro research objects and categories where adopted, and further fragmentation of the field became accepted as inevitable. However, this fact may riddle the teachers’ discourse in the classroom and praxis with paradoxical, contradictory and excluding elements.

As a group, as the findings are discussed, the core notion in the teachers’ conceptualization of Organization is Change: 43% of the teachers chose it. Meaning (chosen by 36% of the teachers), Dynamics, and Responsibility (32%), Knowledge (28%), Leadership, Strategy and Vision (25%) and Creativity, System and Power (21%) complete the portrait of organization.
Change is a concept that implies in organizations as organism (MORGAN, 1986). Change follows from exchanges with the environment that allow the organism to keep, adapt and increase its energy levels necessary for survival and reproduction. Evolution underlies both meanings. The drive to be more energy-efficient is characteristically organic. It is inscribed onto the genetic core of the being in the form of an inescapable destiny.

System qualifies the choice of Change. System and organization are themselves metaphors of order (SMIRCICH, 1983). Order, and orderliness are traditional concepts in organization and management studies, OMS (MEADOWS, 1967: 78; SMIRCICH, 1983: 341). They have been responsible for the analytical effort concerning collective or plural entities because they encompass two different types of entities, organisms and mechanisms, under the same mental picture that imposes form into praxis. The Table suggests that the teachers value change through order and orderliness. It qualifies the Organization as a living biological system.

Living beings are self-regulatory, self-referential, and apparently autonomous systems (MORGAN, 1986). Evolution as adaptation is associated with learning in the biological sense of the concept, meaning the alteration of behavior by contingency and/or experience (RAVEN and JOHNSON, 1989). Much animal learning is innately guided by instinctive learning programs that facilitate the learning of specific items (RAVEN and JOHNSON, 1989: 1121). One of the basic instinct of living beings is foraging, that is, the propensity animals show for the maximization of energy intake over energy expenditure implying a variety of individual/environment trade-offs. The foraging behaviors of most animals are far from random, with individuals selecting prey in a highly efficient fashion (RAVEN and JOHNSON, 1989: 1129). As they mature animals tend to improve foraging efficiency. This modification does not originate better foraging skills through learning or some other biological improvement strictly speaking, as, for instance, better eyesight. At the edge of living and non-living entities, L. Douglas KIEL (1996) suggests that organizations can be viewed as biological or chemical systems.

In view of the fact that Responsibility, Knowledge, Leader, Strategy and Vision cannot be said to belong in Nature (except in an ex post facto discursive rationalization), they require not only the anthropomorphization but also the personalization of the organization that leads to a moral connotation. Responsibility authorizes this assumption de per se. Some of the remaining concepts reinforce it. The vicinity of Leader, Strategy and Vision suggests that the teachers support Henry Mintzberg’s concept of strategy as a vision (MINTZBERG, 1988), which, in its turn, is positively connected with leadership (MINTZBERG, 1989; 1990). The place of Knowledge in the Table reflects the visibility Knowledge and convergent concepts (like, for instance, learning, knowledge management, learning organization,) have presently in OMS.

The interviews. The teachers frame the organization within the student’s career by underlining the continuum school-organization in the finishing of the manager's education. They reinforce the classical division of the manager's education in ‘practical’ and ‘non-practical’ contents, dyads characterized by complementariness (i.e. theory versus practice).

Size (the Organization is big) and Structure (the Organization is a bureaucracy) characterize the Organization. The comprehension of bureaucracies and big organizations as learning environment for skills, behaviors and values supports the teachers’ approach. The Organization is big means the opportunity to be exposed to many organizational aspects under the fire of the battle. The Organization is a bureaucracy means it is a highly structured environment, which offers the student the possibility of having his personal qualifications rewarded in a merit-oriented type of professional environment, from a stage to the next in a natural way up. The teachers view bureaucracies, and big organizations as a permanent presence in the contemporary economic environment as a necessity or an unavoidable
evil. Bureaucracies being, by definition, highly structured entities, organizational flexibility to cope with contemporary widespread economy (implicit in the relative high frequency Change and Creativity have in the conceptualization of Organization) seems to be in a highly vulnerable position. School itself has a structuring characteristic of permanence that is expressed by the reproduction of social values (BOURDIEU and PASSERON, 1990).

An outstanding fact the interviews unveiled was the teachers’ imperviousness, or indifference to deal with one of the most important, constitutive dimensions of the living being: mortality. The subject did not seem to be implicit in the organic portrait they made. Some of the organizational forms it may metaphorically assume (bankruptcy, merging, owner’s death, market or technology injunctions) if mentioned, were seen as rare managerial issue concerning the management of the internal or the external environment. Many connected terms arose (health, state-of-the-art management, disregarded operational items). Yet, the assumption is that organizations were meant to survive, to be successful, to grow and to make money and to develop. Organizational mortality is an accident de parcours.

Part three. Reflecting on the findings. The findings lead us to the identification, analysis and interpretation of the Organization through three dimensions: first, Living Biological System; second, Person; third, Moral and Ethical Individual.

The Organization as living biological system. From the 1930s until about the late 1950s, the focus of organizational analysis shifted towards conceptions of the organization as an evolving natural organism (CLEGG, 1990: 53). However, in the mid-sixties, BENNIS (1966) coined the notion of organizational health, and D. KATZ and R. L. KHAN (1966: 336) said people, have either assumed that organization was like a single individual, or that there was a single problem of motivation for the entire organization with a single answer, or that the organizational structures and processes could be ignored in dealing with the psychology of the individual. In the nineties, a re-birth of naturalistic viewpoints of the organization happened. The firm can be viewed as a human body, HAMMER says (1997). There is a great fit between what happens in the natural world and what happens in complex organizational relationship KELLY says (2000 [1]: 14). Complexity is a biological attribute (KELLY, 1997: 286). Although one third of the famous 500 Fortune corporations do not exist any more seven years from their nomination (HANDY, 1997: 35), business strategy is described as strategic means of perpetuation (PRAHALAD, 1997). COVEY (1997) suggests that the conservation of business dynamics relates to natural principles that gravitate around trust. By suggesting that the best way to understand businesses as biological organisms is to look at the beehive, KELLY (1997: 287) defines work as performed by genetically performance-oriented individuals.

Accordingly, organizational practice must have status of physiological principles. PRAHALAD’s (1997) concept of competition and KELLY’s (1997) concept of work organizing import the vocabulary of natural sciences. COVEY’s (1997) concept of business dynamics is a bucolic metaphor: managers are peasants who decode simple hints from nature.

These are paradigmatic approaches in the Kuhnian sense of it, that is, general statements that do not build a science in and by themselves (KUHN, 1970; MASTERMAN, 1979). They are, strictly speaking, pre-science and lead further reasoning and questioning. In the sense that they imply in a metaphorical causal chain of precedence, they become a matter of ideology, a set of unquestioned and presupposed assumptions, taken as the core of a normative corpus under the form of so-called scientific axioms and philosophical, ethical and moral values (CHAUÍ, 1980; CHAUÍ, 1990; FEYERABEND, 1970). As paradigmatic approaches, they are also a culture and a language (BEN-DAVID, 1975).

From a disciplinary point of view, biological systems are classified externally according to descriptive laws, which are a normative discourse in the sense that (1) the notion
of adaptation is central to achieve a comprehensive pattern for form and behavior, and (2) that all the possible adaptations are selected under evolutionary laws. In organizational terms, sequentially historical adaptation means organizational change. In terms of Biology, evolutionary change is a patterned change from simplicity to complexity (RAVEN and JOHNSON, 1989), what makes the presence of Complexity in the Table somewhat redundant.

From the evolutionary perspective of living beings, an interesting aspect of the evolutionary bilateral symmetric structuring of the body, is that it produced sets of duplicate organs in the human body, which can thus survive and reproduce without one of them (RAVEN and JOHNSON, 1989). Therefore, an organic metaphor legitimates both the creation of un-necessary organic dual elements and the extirpation of any of them if another can perform the functions of the un-necessary organ.

In Biology, systems of evolutionary history of a group of elements are called phylogenetic systems that reflect the cognitive approach based in evolutionary differentiation. In relation to the organization, this fact is a parti pris in itself, because they assume that an evolution leads to better performance linearly as in a causal chain in terms of the adoption of more sophisticated techniques for energy exchange, and of more efficient reproductive behavior. As phylogenetic systems authorize classification from speculation on evolutionary evidence ex post facto, organization classification may and actually shall incorporate concepts (like modern organization, post-modern organization, learning organization, global organization, and so forth) as desirable generalizations, although successful adaptation does not lead to homo sapiens necessarily. Insofar it relates them to biologically evolutionary business success, organization phylogenetic classification induces an ideological point of view. Insofar it does not relate them to human reproductive behavior and death, it clearly omits constituent aspects of the metaphor.

The organization as person. Leadership, Vision, Creativity, Motivation, Learning, Power, individualizing concept, makes the teachers’ organization a person, in the biological sense and in the sense of a self-conscious individual. In addition, as the organization is also a place for learning experience, we can imply that the learning, which is expected to occur, originates from, and develops as a part of the internal dynamics of the organization-as-person. Some personalizing attributes are still rather open issues in OMS (Leadership, Vision). Others, like Creativity and Power, are complex, sometimes debatable, concepts in the original domain. However, as part of the individuation of the organization, Power may be said to be personal power: the right to rule, to determine; the exertion of normative authority; the definitive, major influence.

RAMOS (1972; 1976; 1981) points to the theoretical flaw the naturalistic and personalistic approach induce in OMS: it psychologizes the organization. BENNIS’s behavioral model of organization equates it in a structural level with a who-with-severalselves, whose congruence is achieved through the executive’s action and role. Symmetric to the understanding of the organization as a living biologic entity that must comply to the basic premises of Biology, psychologizing the organization should satisfy the basic premises of Individual and Social Psychology. The approach should deal with controversial issues (from the point of view of content) exactly as that, experimental methods (from the point of view of methodology), the core notion of mental structure and functioning (from the epistemological point of view) and the connected notion of mental health (from the point of view of pragmatic achievements). The approach brings into OMS highly discussable notions in their original domain (personality, learning, intelligence, soul, mind, spirit, feelings) that led OMS into a twilight zone dangerously close either to cultural, moral, religious or spiritual beliefs (soul, mind, spirit) or to taken-for-granted, so-called-universal truth (like well-being, for instance). Instead of amplifying the epistemological and methodological possibilities of OMS, they not
only aggregate new questions to the scientific approach of organizations but also upgrade
them to the realm of the highly immaterial domain of values inserted in beliefs.

One exemplary illustration of this is the essentialist psychological concept (as all of
the American Psychology is [Walter R. NORD and Suzy FOX, 1996]) of motivation (the
individual’s activation and degree of persistence in undertaking goal-directed behavior
[ADLER et al., 2001: 102]). Omar AKTOUF (1994: 203) says motivation theories applied to
OMS are inferences upon the works of MASLOW (1954), MAYO ([1933], 1945), and
an essential element of organizations is the willingness of persons to contribute their
individual efforts to the cooperative system. [...] The contributions of personal efforts, which
constitute the energies of organizations, are yielded by the individuals because of incentives.
[They] must be induced to cooperate, or there can be no cooperation. In the early eighties,
HOFSTEDE (1980) showed that what AKTOUF (1994: 280) calls the three conceptual pillars
of traditional management school (motivation, leadership and organization) are not universal
concepts, and ZSOLNAI (1998) did the same with business ethics. They are highly dependent
on culture and acculturation. The (American) concept of motivation embodies the (American)
business values and interests in the sense that it functions as connective tissue for concepts
like participation, commitment, order and control taken as management tools (SIEVERS,
1994: 3). It aligns the stick-and-carrot kind of metaphor that assumes a causal link between
motivation, behavior and the overriding myth of American society, the Machine (Michael
NOVAK, 1968: 9; SIEVERS, 1994: 3). In other words, motivation is a cultural and political
concept. However, attempts to make it a soi-disant scientific issue persisted. HACKMAN and
OLDHAM (1975, 1976; 1980) associate enhanced motivation/performance/enriched work
environment. Motivation gained an unexpected momentum in the eighties as Japanese firms
were scrutinized by American scholars and practitioners during what SIMON (1988) called
the organizational culture fashion years. The intent resulted quite questionable (AKTOUF,
1988; SMUCKER, 1988; DEAL, 1986; SCHEIN, 1986). The same happened with the job and
task enrichment fashion (HACKMAN and OLDHAM, 1980; ADLER et al., 2001).

The organization as moral and ethical individual. Responsibility implies in reflexive
attitudes and behaviors, and in the acceptance of, and the belief in consciousness as an
organizational constitutive feature, and to accept as legitimate the OMS endeavor to answer
two essential questions, Do organizations have conscious values, virtues, and visions? Do
organizations have a consciousness? Organization responsibility is regarded in connection
forms of responsibilities act within the organization: consumer, employees, staff and CEOs,
shareholders, society and nation responsibility related to internal and external organizational
harmony and cooperation when these are seen as convergent to organizational efficiency.
Organizational responsibility implies in determining what is to be done by the organization
and getting those things done that should be done (GLOBERMAN 2000: 46). Instrumentally
rational, functional, and/or analytical approaches to organizational growth, development and
differentiation establish responsibility implications involving acting against or in favor of the
interest of the organization that mirror the perception of the manager’s role (WATERS and
BIRD, 1989). Organization responsibility has two different dimensions. First, the moral
aspect of the organizational practice which as seen under the logic of both lay (PRUZAN,
2001) and religious (MCCANN, 1997), and philosophic issue embedded in business Ethics.
Second, a cognitive object in, and of some organizational approaches (cf. WALKER’s [1997]
stakeholder paradigm; KAKU’s [1997] kyosei credo, and HO’s et al. [1997] focus on the
importance of cognitive moral development in ethic models in marketing).

Mirror of the more general concepts of Ethics and Moral, Responsibility can be part of
a religious as well as a philosophical conceptual context (GILMAN, 1996), in addition to
Political Science. Personalized, it pertains to the intellectual domain of Morals. As a behavioral frame for action, it falls into the domain of Ethics. This multiple-root situation makes it a contentious issue connected to values and value-oriented actions.

Organizational responsibility requires the acceptance of two preconditions. First, collectivities can act coherently as individuals, and second, as collectivities, they import moral standards of individual morality in a given society. Thus, collectivities must have competencies normally attributed to individuals, i.e., to reflect, evaluate, learn and make considered choices (PRUZAN, 2001). However, Corporate social responsibility, along with values and codes of ethics, are terms bearing a terminological conflict or lack of clarity (PRUZAN, 2001: 272). The roots of this inappropriateness is to be found in the prototypical American approach to the teaching and practice of Business Ethics, [which] is designed to motivate the individual to be aware and capable of dealing with conflicts of interest arising from the desire to promote economic efficiency while behaving in what the individual experiences to an ethically acceptable manner. [This] individual-oriented teaching method is typically to confront the student with a series of case studies which place him/her in contexts characterized by a leader having to make choices when facing moral dilemmas (typically where economic rationality is challenged by ethical considerations). The emphasis is on decisionism. (PRUZAN, 2001: 202-203).

The interviews reinforced the understanding of Responsibility as a personal attribute, and as part of the psychological profile of the manager-to-be, like Creativity, and Vision, Communication and Team. It has to be in place before the manager’s education starts.

PETER F. DRUCKER and MILTON W. FRIEDMAN doubt of, or vigorously oppose to the appropriateness of business ethics and organization responsibility as organizational or management disciplinary features. For the Father of the Chicago Boys –who had declared in 1996 that a common currency in Europe could not become reality (BROUSSEAU, 1996)– the OMS business ethic and corporate responsibility trends are a suicidal impulse. [They] strengthen the already prevalent view that the pursuit of profits is wicked and immoral and must be curbed and controlled by external forces. (FOSTER, 1999: C 7). Although DRUCKER’s consumer satisfaction criteria, and product quality through the skillfulness paradigm (ANDREWS, 1999; DRUCKER, 2001; BOWMAN and WITTNER, 2000) could at first glance evoke concern for corporate social responsibility and business ethics, he denies the relevance of business ethics because he feels impossible to postulate a discipline which purports to study the inherent immorality associated with work, as business ethics does (SCHWARTZ, 1998: 1685).

PRUZAN (2001) equates the logic of organization responsibility and organizational consciousness: the acceptance of the vested authority, which is fundamental to virtually all notions of bureaucracy, hierarchy and control (PRUZAN 2001: 274). The fact that the teachers’ organizations is big and bureaucratic qualifies the discussion: it includes an ethical dimension, which can only have a logic insertion in the organization conceptualization if it refers to actions that are delegated to the members by who has the vested authority to reflect on, implement and evaluate the results of those actions through authority lines of communication via a top-down process (PRUZAN, 2001: 273). Therefore, the ethics of the organization is the ethics of the action of the top management taken as such. In the asymmetry of the political forces within the organization that is induced exactly by the conflict of interests between the diverse social strata in the contemporary bureaucratic firm, it is unlikely that an ethics of the firm represent shared values (specially as accepted beliefs) outside bureaucratic control.
Conclusions

Ambiguity and equivocality in the conceptualization of organization. The problems with the use of metaphorical discourses in science in general, and in OMS in particular, are that, first, metaphors as paradigmatic, internally logical and consistent discourses and narratives cannot be endlessly stretched to fit the phenomena they are trying to describe (KUHN, 1970). Second, if over stretched, they tend to demand for heavy editing under the form of essential omissions and/or rearrangement of logical steps, otherwise they risk to be severely questioned from within, thus exposing the whole approach to unsustainable inconsistency (KUHN, 1970).

In relation to the conceptualization of Organization, two sources of ambiguity and equivocality can be detected. First, the naturalistic approach to organizations should be independent of any moral and/or ethical connotation, for morality and ethics are outside the conceptual universe of natural sciences in general. The teachers would certainly subscribe to KELLY’s (2000; 1997) approach when he compares organizations to beehives. According to RAVEN and JOHNSON (1989: 1137 ), bees are organized into societies in which specialization is so extreme and their organizing so rigid that they exhibit many of the properties of an individual organism. Only one component of the beehive, the queen, is involved in the reproduction of the colony and all the members of a hive descend from an individual queen. A colony has up to 50,000 sterile females, 5,000 male drones, and a single female queen who lays all the eggs. The queen maintains her dominance in the hive by drugging all other females: she secretes a pheromone that she feeds the females with, which suppresses the development of the ovaries in them, turning them into sterile workers. When needed, some female members do not receive a sufficient quantity of queen substance; queens begin to develop, and the colony prepares for swarming. The old queen acknowledges the presence of the new queens by making a pulsating sound known as ‘quacking’, the most mature of the developing queens respond with a ‘tooting’ sound, and then the hive is silent until a worker returns with directions to a new hive site. The old queen and a swarm of females and male drones leave to the new hive. Left behind, the new queen emerges, kills the other candidate queens, flies out to mate, and returns to assume the rule of the hive. Contrary to hives, to imply that organizations can be individual organisms is absolutely inaccurate.. Or, as ALVESSON and DEETZ (1996: 199) put it, in naturalization, a social formation is abstracted from the historical conflictual site of its origin and treated as a concrete, relatively fixed, entity. As such, reification becomes the reality rather than life process. Through obscuring the construction process, the institutional arrangements are no longer seen as choices but as natural and self-evident. The illusion that organizations and their processes are ‘natural’ objects and functional responses to ‘needs’ protects them from examination as produced under specific historical conditions (which are potentially passing) and out of specific power relations. Naturalization means a mechanical organizational development imposed by instinct, that imply in actions that cannot be accepted within the contemporary human society juridical code, because they deal with what would be in human societal terms autocracy, dictatorship, blind obsession and killing as an strategic act for organizational change. In History, the mechanization of human survival and economic growth is a reduction of human beings to machines, through its political equivalent, regimentation, and its sociological and development counterpart, slavery (SCHURMAN, 1989; ARENDT, 1958; MUNFORD, 1934). In this sense, the natural organization results necessarily more a pre-market-era, pre-industrial organization than a contemporary firm. By omitting these facts in his analogy, KELLY (2000; 1997) gives a clear example of heavy editing. Editing means to prepare for publication or public presentation; to assemble as a moving picture or tape recording by cutting and rearranging; to alter, adapt, or refine, especially to bring about
conformity to a standard or to suit a particular purpose (Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition, 1993: 367). Editing out means delete.

A second source of ambiguity and equivocality is an insistent presence of what the old primary school teacher would call abstract nouns: Vision, Responsibility, Common Sense, Leadership, Meaning, Creativity, System. This study suggests that the immateriality of this conceptual universe is a cultural content that infuses the concept of organization with immateriality. This suggestion rejoins the idea according to which the Business School is not evaluated as the best way to respond to contemporary economic and organizational imperatives in the sense that manager’s education is seen as theoretical, abstract, un-real, loosely connected to the pragmatic universe of the firm (GLOBERMAN, 2000; FRISBEE, 2000; HARMON and WHITE, 1989; LINSTEAD and HARRIS, 1983). While the anthropomorphization of the organization shows the ideology of the manager’s education from an internal point of view in the sense that it legitimates the management action in terms of (formal, that is, bureaucratic) political power to get things done according to the top management’s perception of the values involved in those actions, the denial of the materiality of the organization is an external dimension of the ideologization of the Manager’s education, because it shades the management action with the colors of an idealized universe. Organizations that act according to general built-in laws of evolution that de-humanize the organization inhabit this idealized universe.

The conceptualization of organization as cognitive politics. Knowledge construction through systematic language transgressions in general (BARTHES, 1970.), language abuse in OMS (AKTOUF, 1994), and mainly text edition are exemplary illustrations of what RAMOS (1981) calls cognitive politics. Cognitive politics [consists of] a conscious or unconscious use of distorted language, the intent of which is to induce people to interpret reality in terms that reward the direct and/or indirect agent of such distortion (RAMOS, 1981: 74).

The organization that results from a naturalistic portrait should integrate and assume not only the flagrant amorality of the natural universe but also the irrelevance of ethical and moral discussions about it. In nature, instinct dominates and survival and reproduction stand as the strongest drives for behavior. It seems pointless to imagine organizational harmony and goal convergence in natural collectivities that strive to perform according to instinctive forces. It is simply unimaginable. However, the obstinate, self- legitimate, blind behavior of the animal seems full of mysterious meanings for some of the organization scholar.

To make the personalistic approach to the organization palatable, one faces a faux dilemma. Can nature have an intrinsic morality based on instinct? Alternatively, can the person be totally an animal and a moral individual at the same time? The first alternative would imply in an enormous epistemological project already successful in Walt Disney, ultra human animal characters. Nevertheless, as a Walt Disney character they require an ultra indulgent audience, namely children or, in other words, non-academic, specialized, sophisticated audiences.

The idea of an instinctive behavior that jeopardizes social harmony and cohesion is acceptable in the universe of the idol and of the solitary individual, but then the OMS scholar risks to fall into myth mania. This does not seem to be a restrictive issue for the American mainstream literature on OMS. This approach would have the additional advantage of incorporating political dimensions of, and inherent to the organizational universe, like power. In an article published in the Wall Street Journal on March 22, 1993 (cited in Classics in American Business Schools, 1993), the following comparisons were made: Henry V would come back as Lee Iacocca at the head of Chrysler Corporation; Agamennon as James Duth at Beatrice Foods; Karl von Clausewitz as Michael Quinian at the head of McDonald’s; Cordelia, the heroic daughter of King Lear, as Christie Hefner at the head of Playboy Enterprise; and Ulisses as Kenneth Olsen at the head of Digital Equipment Corporation.
These somewhat incongruous but revealing parallels were developed at Hartwick College. They were then presented as case studies (complete with guest speakers and professional moderators) in universities and businesses throughout the United States (AKTOUF 1995: 136-137). AKTOUF’s argument is that the literary discourse on political power is hard to dispute in the face of the boundless power of the leaders of some of our large corporations and institutions, not to mention the owner-manager who enjoys inalienable right to manage his property as he sees fit, regardless of its size (AKTOUF, 1995: 134). Corporate managers are trapped in the same deeply rooted illusion of omnipotence, immortality and corporal duality of the kings (AKTOUF, 1995: 137). The problem with the mythical approach is that it does not turn into science easily.

Therefore, the conceptualization of organization must omit some parts of the naturalistic metaphor and some elements of the moral-and-ethical-individual metaphor. The result is what AKTOUF (1995) would call a literary discourse. The ambiguity and the equivocality of the conceptualization seems therefore to be intentional. That is cognitive politics.

Back in 1970 (!), TOWNSEND (1970: xxi) said that we are but mortals trained to serve immortal institutions. This is not our natural state. Survivors of this era will understand this to be one of the most perverse side effects of OMS cognitive politics.

Notes


2Teachers added 14 terms to the list. They were not considered because all but two had just one mention. Yet, they reinforce the fact that the teachers need a large number of terms to conceptualize the organization. The complete list of associate concepts totals 85.

3BARNARD’s assumption becomes ‘scientifically’ legitimate ex ante facto, by definition if the reader relates it to labor maximization as energy intake.

4Peter F. DRUCKER is a controversial personality in OMS. GORR (undated.) says he modestly calls himself a management consultant. SCHWARTZ (op. cit) says he claims (immodestly) to have influenced management theorists: Douglas MCGREGOR developed no new ideas but formulated ideas Drucker had put forth (DRUCKER, 1973: 231). HERZBERG's incentive and hygiene factors were first noted in The New Society, published (1973). PETERS and WATERMAN JR., merely expressed ideas in The Frontier of Management (1986). BEATTY (1998) says he invented modern management or the Corporate Society. However, ANDREWS (1999) says corporate America and Dr. Peter Ferdinand Drucker have fallen out of favor with each other. Drucker still has his disciples, but at the bleeding edge of business, the old master’s lifework is commonly seen as simplistic, portentous, off the mark, idealistic, out of date.

References


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