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# Beyond Morgan's eight metaphors: Adding to and developing organization theory

human relations  
2016, Vol. 69(4) 875-889  
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0018726715623999  
hum.sagepub.com  


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## Abstract

This introduction examines the contributions of articles in this special issue to organization theory, especially efforts to rethink or add to Morgan's metaphors and to generate new organizational images. In general, the articles in this issue offer new metaphors and sub-metaphors and enrich specifications for two of Morgan's images. Moreover, they address ways of rethinking Morgan's images through developing meta-metaphors and comparing his images with other sets of metaphors. In addition, the contributors to this special issue rely on a number of ways to generate new metaphors, namely through evaluation and critique, empirical and experiential observations, fantasy, and conceptual development. This introduction concludes with an appeal for scholars to increase their knowledge of Morgan's metaphors, especially what they are and what they entail.

## Keywords

four tropes, *Images of Organization*, Morgan's metaphors, organizational theory

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**Figure 1.** Gareth Morgan. Photo taken by Heather Morgan, January 2016.

It has been 30 years since the publication of the first edition of Gareth Morgan's seminal book, *Images of Organization* (Morgan, 1986). It was a ground-breaking book in many respects, not the least because it was an unusual and thought-provoking text on organization theory. The book has been cited 15,496 times (Google Scholar, 2015) and translated into 14 languages (Morgan, 2015). Its first edition sold over 250,000 copies (Oswick and Grant, 2015), and the 1996a and 2006 versions sold more than 100,000 copies (Maggie Stanley, SAGE, August 2015, personal communication) [all citation and sales figures are for the English version only]. After 30 years, the book is still quite popular.

*Images of Organization* offers scholars and students a comprehensible overview of organization theory and a set of diverse perspectives to guide research. It also embraces a multidimensional view of organizational life and urges readers to broaden their perspectives based on the complexity of organizing. Such an influential book definitely deserves to be celebrated. But celebration, in the academic sense of the word, moves beyond praise to focus on assessing, developing and even adding to Morgan's appreciated work. Thus, for this special issue of *Human Relations*, entitled 'Beyond Morgan's eight metaphors: Adding to and developing organization theory', we build on Morgan's work with the aim of contributing to future ways of conceptualizing organizations. In keeping with Morgan's overall aim, we see the articles in this special issue as adding to organizational theory. Therefore, in addition to making explicit connections between metaphors and organization, we believe that scholars in organizational studies, organizational behavior, management, sociology and other disciplines will be interested in this issue.

The call for papers for this issue highlighted organizational theory as a key theme for submissions rather than focusing on metaphor per se – a subject that has been addressed extensively in other publications (see, for example, Cornelissen et al., 2005, 2011; Grant and Oswick, 1996; Morgan, 1996b, 2011; Oswick et al., 2004). Specifically, we wanted to explore the development of organization theory in light of the eight metaphors that Morgan

originally presented in 1986. In fact, he has retained the same eight metaphors in the 1996a and 2006 editions of his book, but he extended them with major updates in 1996b and 2011. These metaphors are: (i) organizations as machines – the *machine* metaphor; (ii) organizations as organisms – the *organism* metaphor; (iii) organizations as brains – the *brain* metaphor; (iv) organizations as cultures – the *culture* metaphor; (v) organizations as political systems – the *political system* metaphor; (vi) organizations as psychic prisons – the *psychic prison* metaphor; (vii) organization as flux and transformation – the *flux and transformation* metaphor and (viii) organizations as instruments of domination – the *instrument of domination* metaphor. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between organizational theory and metaphor analysis because Morgan urges readers to think of *organization* as metaphor. Moreover, Morgan has argued that all organization and management theory is based on metaphor (Morgan, 2006), and some scholars contend that all knowledge (Brown, 1976) and language (Brown, 1977) fundamentally is metaphorical. Thus, in this introduction, we provide an overview and critique of Morgan's metaphors and then we examine the articles in this special issue in terms of: (i) contributions to organization theory; (ii) rethinking or adding to Morgan's set of metaphors and (iii) generating new metaphors. The contributors to this special issue offer new metaphors and provide ways of extending existing ones. They also make suggestions for reinterpreting Morgan's eight metaphors. The final section of the introduction focuses on directions for future research on metaphors and organizations. However, first, we present a synthesis of Morgan's book and how it has been used and critiqued.

## Overview of Morgan's metaphors

Each of the eight metaphors that Morgan presents in his book incorporates a group or cluster of organizational theories, as described below:

1. The *machine* metaphor encompasses such theories as Taylor's scientific management, Weber's bureaucracy and views of organizations that emphasize closed systems, efficiency and mechanical features of organizations.
2. The *organism* metaphor depicts organizations as open systems that focus on the human relations and contingency theories.
3. The *brain* metaphor focuses on the cognitive features of organizations and encompasses learning theories and cybernetics.
4. The *culture* metaphor emphasizes symbolic and informal aspects of organizations as well as the creation of shared meanings among actors.
5. The *political system* metaphor encompasses stakeholder theories, diversity of interests, and conflict and power in organizations.
6. The *psychic prison* metaphor draws from psychoanalytical theories to examine the psyche, the unconscious, and ways that organizations entrap their members.
7. The *flux and transformation* metaphor emphasizes processes, self-reference and unpredictability through embracing theories of autopoiesis, chaos and complexity in organizations.
8. The *instrument of domination* metaphor draws from Marxist and critical theories to highlight exploitation, control and unequal distribution of power performed in and by organizations.

In addition to using the eight metaphors to incorporate diverse theories and ways of making sense of organizations, scholars also treat them as practical tools for diagnosing and addressing organizational problems and gaining a 'comprehensive understanding [of what is] possible' for any particular organization (Morgan, 2006: 349). Moreover, Morgan (1993) has developed an interest in the role of metaphors in general (not just the eight in *Images of Organization*) and how they can be used to conceptualize organizations (rather than organizational theory).

Other scholars have drawn on Morgan's images as starting points for research. To mention a few, Alvesson and K oping (Alvesson, 1995; Alvesson and K oping, 1993) have conducted empirical studies on one or several of Morgan's metaphors. Other researchers have used Morgan's set of metaphors to categorize literature within a particular area of study, such as software process improvement (M uller et al., 2010) and organizational scenarios (Lang, 2008). In effect, the eight images have served as ways of deciphering organizational problems, as starting points for research, and as frames for classifying literature in the field.

Even though scholars employ Morgan's metaphors for a variety of purposes, researchers also critique the assumptions that they see underlying them, particularly notions of relativism and pluralism. In particular, Reed (1990: 38) contends that Morgan's set of images promotes 'a form of cognitive relativism and theoretical pluralism that can be defended only on the basis of a social ontology which maintains that social reality is constituted through shared symbolic representations'. In Reed's (1990) view, Morgan's relativism marginalizes the economic and material realities of organizations, even for images that embrace political and domination metaphors of organizations. In effect, Reed (1990) sees Morgan's images as grounded in a social as opposed to a realist ontology.

In a similar way, Tinker (1986: 364) claims that Morgan has institutionalized a type of 'supportive, tolerant, uncritical, scientific free-for-all' in his set of metaphors. Thus, McCourt (1997), who draws on Reed (1990), claims that Morgan's images surface as ready-made products that are too easily consumed. This pluralism, in essence, homogenizes the ideological roots of different metaphors by treating them as optional lenses for viewing organizational reality.

The issue of pluralism points to concerns about whether each of the eight metaphors has equal weight. In particular, Tsoukas (1993) contends that Morgan emphasizes the usefulness of all eight metaphors while implicitly favoring some of them over others.

Other scholars aim their critiques at his treatment of metaphor itself – its usefulness, links to creative thinking and common sense views of organizational reality. From its inception, researchers have challenged the applicability of metaphors in administrative science (Bourgeois and Pinder, 1983; Pinder and Bourgeois, 1982) and the value of this approach, given the difficulty of evaluating metaphors (McCourt, 1997). For some scholars, the power of Morgan's creative thinking appears in his more recent works on imaginization (Morgan, 1993) and in subsequent editions of *Images of Organizations* (Morgan, 1996a, 2006). Even then, some scholars question whether metaphorical analysis has generated any truly new ways of thinking about organizations (Oswick et al., 2002).

In effect, both the utility and plurality of Morgan's metaphors generates acclaim as well as criticism. Scholars criticize both the relativism and pluralism linked to Morgan's

typology, his implicit bias toward certain metaphors, and the overall value of this approach to theory building as well as organizational problem solving. We view both the contribution and the critique of Morgan's metaphors as forming the foundation for future work, especially studies that capture advances in organizational theory and metaphorical analysis. This special issue contributes to these advances through extending and building on Morgan's eight images, adding complexity to metaphorical dimensions, and developing meta-metaphors as ways of enriching organizational theory.

## Developing organization theory

The articles in this special issue add to organization theory through expanding the map for understanding Morgan's set of eight metaphors. More specifically, several of the articles in this issue offer new metaphors that have the potential to extend organizational theory. These new metaphors were either not included in Morgan's original eight or they transcend them. To illustrate, Jonathan Pinto's (2016) image of an *Icehotel* focuses on the temporal nature of organizations; that is, how they die and become reborn, disintegrate again, and then become reconstituted. In his article, "Wow: That's so cool!": The Icehotel as organizational trope', Pinto demonstrates how this image, read through applying the four tropes, functions as a paradoxical organization that is simultaneously temporary and permanent, evolutionary and revolutionary, and different yet the same.

In a similar way, Darren McCabe (2016) adds the image of *Wonderland*, in which irrationality exists as the normal organizational state rather than an anomaly. In his article, "Curiouser and curiouser!": Organizations as Wonderland – a metaphorical alternative to the rational model', McCabe argues that all eight of Morgan's metaphors implicitly overemphasize rationality by implying that organizations can avoid irrationality (e.g. showing how organizational members can escape psychic prisons). As an alternative, McCabe offers the metaphor of *Wonderland* in which absurdity, uncertainty and disorder infuse organizational experiences, thus taking center stage in organizational studies. Relatedly, Linzi Kemp (2016), in her article, "Trapped" by metaphors for organizations: Thinking and seeing women's equality and inequality', contends that Morgan's metaphors are genderless and consequently fail to address concerns about women's inequality. She proposes two new images – *femicide*, which attends to women's inequality, and *justice*, which privileges women's equality. These new metaphors extend organizational theory through unpacking the hidden, paradoxical, irrational, and often absurd aspects of everyday organizational life.

Rather than suggesting new metaphors, other articles in this special issue develop offspring to one of Morgan's eight metaphors. In particular, Dennis Schoeneborn, Consuelo Vasquez, and Joep Cornelissen (2016), in their article on 'Imagining organization through metaphor and metonymy: Unpacking the process–entity paradox', explore three offspring of the *flux and transformation* metaphor, namely organization as *becoming*, as *practice*, and as *communication*. They compare and contrast the three in terms of their dynamics, directionality between target and source, and the degree of concreteness. In this way, they provide an analytical grid to capture the dialectical and paradoxical nature of organizations.

Also developing offspring to one of Morgan's metaphors, John M Jermier and Linda C Forbes (2016) in their article, 'Metaphors, organization and water: Generating new images for environmental sustainability', set forth two new sub-metaphors that fall into Morgan's image of organization as *instrument of domination*. They identify the image of *water exploiters* as a risky trend in which organizations continue to deplete natural resources, and then derive two new images, *water-keepers* and *true partners*, as metaphors that move organizational practices toward environmental sustainability. With a goal of extending theory, they envision under-explored, nature-inclusive organizations as linked to ecocentrism. Thus, the articles in this special issue contribute to organizational theory through offering new metaphors, developing offspring and sub-metaphors, and explicating specific features for two of Morgan's images.

## Rethinking Morgan's metaphors

These articles also offer insights for rethinking Morgan's metaphors, especially how scholars interpret and treat them. To explore these contributions, we have developed three categories for comparing sets of metaphors: (i) *set-internal comparisons*, which focus on distinctions among metaphors and sub-metaphors within a particular set of images; (ii) *meta-metaphors*, which use one particular metaphor to depict the entire set; and (iii) *set-external comparisons*, which examine a particular cluster of metaphors and contrast the set with other images. We offer these categories as an original typology for comparing and contrasting any cluster of metaphors. Thus, for this issue, authors who employ *set-internal comparisons* distinguish among Morgan's eight metaphors; *meta-metaphors* refer to singling out one metaphor from a set and treating it as an overarching one or an umbrella for understanding other images; and *set-external comparisons* differentiate Morgan's metaphors from other clusters or sets of images. The articles in this special issue do all three: there are examples of set-internal comparisons, ways of rethinking Morgan's images through the use of meta-metaphors, and comparisons with metonymy and other images.

Comparisons among sets of metaphors seem to occur through specifying *dimensions* or key features of the organization–metaphor relationship. Dimensions, then, are particular characteristics of this relationship that become prevalent in making comparisons within and across sets of metaphors. In this way, dimensions privilege the organizational side of the target–source relationship – for example, using a metaphor of a flowing river to refer to the fluid nature of organizational structuring privileges the organization. In effect, scholars use particular dimensions or characteristics to make set-internal, meta-metaphor and set-external comparisons of the source–target relationship.

No doubt, scholars could develop a long list of dimensions that could be used to make comparisons among sets of organizational metaphors. In this introduction, we focus on how the articles in this special issue use *time*, *frequency of use* and *values* to make set-internal comparisons among Morgan's eight metaphors. Next we examine meta-metaphors that contributors employ based on the *dominance*, *utility* and *overarching cast* of one particular image. Finally, we examine how authors employ *inversion* or *oppositional forces* to make set-external comparisons between Morgan's metaphors and other sets of organizational images.

### Set-internal comparisons of images

In their efforts to distinguish among Morgan's eight metaphors, scholars often compare and contrast them based on *set-internal* features, such as *time period*, *frequency of use* or *values*. Specifically, in the classroom, a teacher might compare Morgan's eight metaphors on the dimension of *time* by suggesting that each image refers to a school of organization theories that were prevalent during a certain period of time. In this way, scholars could array the metaphors in a chronological order (see also Morgan, 2016).

Other scholars might compare Morgan's metaphors based on the dimension of *frequency of use*. They might argue, as Jermier and Forbes (2016) do in this issue, that theorists and practitioners rely more on some metaphors (e.g. *machine* and *organism*) than they do on others (e.g. *psychic prison*) to depict the nature of organizations.

A final dimension for making set-internal comparisons is the notion of *values* or *evaluation*, particularly focusing on interest-based values that surface in enacting each metaphor. Interest-based values refer to whose interests are served in the recurring use of a particular metaphor. For example, Jermier and Forbes (2016) and McCabe (2016) imply that the *machine* and the *organism* metaphors privilege values of profit maximization, efficiency, and effectiveness that align with managerial interests whereas the *instrument of domination* metaphor highlights how these interests exploit and control organizational members.

Kemp (2016) also employs a *value* dimension to conduct her set-internal comparisons of Morgan's (1986, 2006) metaphors. Treating metaphor as ways of thinking and seeing, she examines the language-in-use that underlies implicit gender-related values in the eight metaphors. Her analysis suggests that masculine practices become privileged over feminine ones. For example, in the *machine* metaphor, 'leaky pipelines' become aligned with women leaving the workforce, and in the *political* metaphor, 'warriors fight corporate battles' and women emerge as 'stags that contest leadership of the herd'. Both images privilege male values of contestation. She points out that *organizational cultures* often enact macho values with men doing the 'heavy lifting' and women providing the 'support systems'. Even in the *instrument of domination* metaphor, women often respond to sexual domination by leaving the organization. Her analysis reveals a sub-metaphor of *femicide* that characterizes gender inequality in ways that scholars employ Morgan's eight metaphors.

Analysis of values draws attention to the *evaluative dimension* of images, namely whether a metaphor is viewed as negative, neutral or positive. For the most part, scholars cast Morgan's metaphors as either neutral (e.g. *organism*, *flux and transformation*) or negative (e.g. *instrument of domination*, *psychic prison*). However, the articles in this special issue incorporate an evaluative dimension to make set-internal comparisons by casting water exploiters (see Jermier and Forbes, 2016) and instrumental rationality (see McCabe, 2016) in a negative light. New metaphors, however, emerge in these articles to capture the positive nature of metaphors, such as the benefits of being temporarily permanent (Pinto, 2016), disorderly organized (McCabe, 2016), the same yet different (Pinto, 2016), a process as entity (Schoeneborn et al., 2016), an ecological collective (Jermier and Forbes, 2016) and justice as caring (Kemp, 2016).

### Meta-metaphors as overarching images

Meta-metaphors emerge when scholars cast a particular image as an umbrella or overarching way of employing a set of metaphors to think about organizations. These meta-metaphors are often implicit and may even characterize set-internal or set-external comparisons. Specifically, for Kemp (2016), the *psychic prison* image functions as a meta-metaphor of gender inequality in that patriarchy forms a prison that infuses and shapes other metaphors. Relatedly, McCabe (2016) treats the *machine image* as a *meta-metaphor* because it drives instrumental rationality that forms the foundation for Morgan's metaphors. He contends that scholars and practitioners embrace a practical tools approach to the use of Morgan's set of metaphors. That is, they apply them instrumentally to diagnosis problems, chart strategies and release individuals from organizational constraints.

In a similar way, Jermier and Forbes (2016) treat the image of *instrument of domination* as a meta-metaphor that justifies taken-for-granted ways in which organizations become severed from their natural environments. They suggest moving away from this meta-metaphor toward organizations as spheres of conviviality that become ecocentric in partnership with the natural environment.

Other articles in this issue examine the ways that meta-metaphors shape organizational thinking. Specifically, Schoeneborn et al. (2016) treat *flux and transformation* as the mainstream metaphor that casts organizations as dynamic interplays rather than objects. They seek to understand which image of flux best addresses the process–entity paradox and the dialectic between constituting and being constituted. In effect, these articles purport that organizational scholars often cast particular images as meta-metaphors or ways of viewing the entire set of Morgan's eight metaphors.

### Set-external comparisons among images

A third way to extend Morgan's metaphors is through set-external comparisons, or ways of comparing a cluster of metaphors to other images. As an example, Morgan's set of eight metaphors may make sense in a 'western' context but may not necessarily apply in 'eastern' cultures. Thus, using a set-external comparison, organizational actors might contrast metaphorical thinking based on the dimension of national culture.

This process is similar to Oswick and Grant's (2015) suggestion that elaborating on or projecting a new metaphor typically involves articulating the inverse or the opposite of an image – for instance, western versus eastern patterns of reasoning. Many of these comparisons are implicit in an author's use of suggested metaphors.

The articles in this special issue highlight particular set-external comparisons through incorporating opposites as a dimension to aid in rethinking organizational metaphors. In particular, oppositional pairs that surface in the articles published in this special issue include: permanent versus temporary organizations (Pinto), rational versus irrational practices (McCabe), inequality versus equality in gender images (Kemp), entity versus process as the image of organization (Schoeneborn et al.), and exploiter versus partner as organizational roles in sustainability (Jermier and Forbes).

The authors point out that organizational images in general and Morgan's set of eight in particular tend to privilege the first term in the dichotomy over the second pole of the



binary. New images, such as *femicide* and *justice* (Kemp), *paradox* (Pinto, Schoeneborn), and *disorder* (McCabe), offer the potential to rethink Morgan's original eight images and to challenge the very nature of what constitutes an organization. In essence, the articles in this special issue contribute important set-external dimensions to aid in rethinking Morgan's set of metaphors as well as assessing other organizational images.

## Generating metaphors

In addition to rethinking Morgan's metaphors, the contributors to this special issue rely on a number of approaches to generate new metaphors, namely evaluation and critique, empirical and experiential observation, fantasy, and conceptual development. Evaluation as a way of generating metaphors begins with critique and centers on the deficiencies of particular organizational images.

A scholar who uses an empirically-focused approach gets inspiration for new metaphors from her/his own experiences, research or observations, whereas the fantasy-focused approach relies on fiction, the fine arts, or imagination to generate new images. McCabe (2016), for instance, draws on his own empirical observations to critique Morgan's set of metaphors and then he generates the image of Wonderland by turning to fiction for inspiration. Thus, McCabe employs a combination of evaluation, empirical observation and fantasy-based approaches to generate a new metaphor.

In a similar way, Jermier and Forbes (2016) also rely on evaluation and empirically-focused approaches to propose new metaphors. Specifically, they critique the *machine* and *organism* metaphors and draw from case-based research to create second-order metaphors that extend *instrument of domination*, moving from organizations as water exploiters to water-keepers and then to true environmental partners. Similarly, Kemp (2016) relies on evaluation and empirical observations to propose new metaphors through arguing that the existing ones are primarily organization-centric rather than oriented to human beings. Pinto (2016) also incorporates a mixed approach through combining empirical and experiential images of the Icehotel (i.e. as an edifice and an organization) with fantasy and imagination 'to play' with metaphor as imaging.

Another way of generating metaphors is through conceptual development in which scholars propose new images through using models or relying on comparisons with other tropes. That is, rather than taking inspiration from the literature, empirical works or imagination, a theorist generates new metaphors in the act of comparing tropes with existing ones. To illustrate, Schoeneborn et al. (2016) propose new sub-metaphors through the creative, conceptual interplay between metaphor and metonymy. They suggest two dynamics, namely *metonymy within metaphor*, in which metonymy specifies a broad metaphor, and *metaphor from metonymy*, in which meaning first develops through metonymy and is metaphorically mapped onto another domain. They argue that the latter form of interplay between metaphor and metonymy has the greatest potential to enrich organization studies.

Similarly, scholars might generate new metaphors by extending the relationship between the source and the target domains – for example, exploring how organizations operate as political systems (Brown, 1977). Another way to generate metaphors is to focus on the source domain alone, often through the use of several levels of metaphors

(Alvesson, 1993). For instance, a second-order metaphor for the *political system image* might be a multiparty process. Specifying this source domain de-emphasizes less relevant images – for example, elections or parliaments. Jermier and Forbes (2016) employ the latter approach to extend the *instrument of domination* image to three different types of second-order metaphors (i.e. organizations as water exploiters, organizations as water-keepers and organizations as true partnerships).

## Future directions

This introductory piece highlights the contributions that articles in this special issue make to advancing Morgan's *Images of Organizations* through proposing new metaphors, extending existing ones, and offering ways to rethink these images. Yet, to what extent do these articles generate new deep-level root metaphors that go beyond Morgan's original set of eight images? Clearly, the metaphors that form offspring for existing ones do not go beyond Morgan's images. Moreover, the new metaphors presented in these articles, although descriptive, do not function at the same level as Morgan's images. Even though Morgan has suggested the *global brain* and *organization as media* as potentially new metaphors (Oswick and Grant, 2015), the critical point is whether his original eight metaphors form a relatively complete set of images (but see Morgan, 2016, for a contrasting view).

Nonetheless, the articles in this special issue (2016) contribute to Morgan's mapping of organizational theory through offering new categories for comparing sets of metaphors, new dimensions and second-order images. Our description of these contributions, however, treats Morgan's metaphors as operating at the same organizational level and type.

An alternative approach would be to deconstruct the eight metaphors as potentially existing on different organizational levels with diverse types. For instance, some metaphors cover an alive but narrow purview in organizational theory (e.g. the *political system* metaphor), whereas others encompass macro-organizational arenas but seem dead or frozen (e.g. the *culture* metaphor). As Pinto (2016) argues, some of them are neutral whereas others are negative, or as Jermier and Forbes (2016) and Schoeneborn et al. (2016) point out, many of Morgan's metaphors refer to entities (e.g. *machine*, *organism*, *brain*) whereas one of them refers to processes (*flux and transformation*). With some metaphors, knowledge is reused to think about organizations (e.g. the *organism*), whereas others do not reuse information from the source domain (e.g. the *machine*).

Thus, we advocate increasing our understanding of Morgan's metaphors, especially what they are, what they entail, and the extent to which they differ in level and type. Only when we have such knowledge can we make fair judgments about newly proposed metaphors and the contributions they make to organizational theory. In undertaking this special issue, we encourage scholars around the world to explore the relationship between new and existing metaphors and to generate metaphors through evaluation, critique, empirical or experiential observations, fantasy, and conceptual development. Perhaps some of the ideas and concepts in these articles will facilitate this engagement. To this end, we provide a synopsis of the articles in this special issue.

## Outline of the special issue

In the first article, “‘Wow! That’s so cool’”: The Icehotel as organizational trope’, Jonathan Pinto describes the key features of the actual Icehotel (located in Sweden), both as an edifice and as an organization. Pinto (2016) then analyzes how the *Icehotel* functions as an intermediate metaphor for organizations through examining the ways that it fits key characteristics and generates novel insights. To expand on these insights, Pinto then examines the Icehotel as metonymy, synecdoche and irony, and concludes that this image is a species of a paradoxical organization, one that embraces resonance with dissonance. He then shows how the metaphor of the Icehotel links to the current thinking on positive organizational behavior, organizational resilience and organizations as eco-systems.

In the second article, ‘Imagining organization through metaphor and metonymy: Unpacking the process–entity paradox’, Dennis Schoeneborn, Consuelo Vasquez and Joep Cornelissen explore the constitution of organization through combining metaphorical and metonymic analyses. They depict how the metaphor–metonymy connection yields criteria for examining the directionality and concreteness of images. Then, they use their model to compare three offspring or sub-metaphors of the *flux and transformation* image: organization as becoming, organization as practice, and organization as communication. They conclude that the communication sub-metaphor offers the most potential to address the process–entity paradox through capturing bi-directionality and the concreteness of the relationship. Their article demonstrates how the metaphor–metonymy comparison forms an analytical grid that can be used to examine other organizational images.

Darren McCabe, in the third article, “‘Curiouser and curiouser!’: Organizations as Wonderland – a metaphorical alternative to the rational model’, argues that Morgan’s eight metaphors implicitly align with rational views of organizations, ones that purport managerial perspectives. To counteract this model, he draws from Lewis Carroll’s work on Alice’s *Adventures in Wonderland* to draw attention to the ridiculous, irrational, disorderly, contradictory and nonsensical aspects of everyday organizational life. He then compares the *Wonderland* metaphor with Morgan’s eight images to illustrate what this new *meta-metaphor* adds to organizational theory. Drawing on Carroll’s book, he delineates 10 reasons to adopt the *Wonderland* metaphor – for example, to accentuate the unexpected, the inherent contradictions involved in change, and the inevitability of absurd situations.

In “‘Trapped’ by metaphors for organizations: Thinking and seeing women’s equality and inequality’, Linzi Kemp analyses how Morgan’s *Images of Organization* captures the role of gender in organizations. She contends that Morgan’s eight metaphors are cast as *genderless* and rooted in views of organizations that entrap theorists and practitioners into neutralizing gender. To counter this pattern, Kemp argues that organizations need to embrace representations of equality and inequality, particularly through images of *femicide* that highlight inequality and notions of *justice* that center on equality. These images, grounded in society writ large, give rise to new metaphors and enrich organizational theory in ways that reach beyond simply including women in organizations.

In the final article, John M Jermier and Linda C Forbes, in 'Metaphors, organization and water: Generating new images for environmental sustainability', argue that scholars and practitioners have relied too heavily on the *machine* and *organism* metaphors. In doing so, they neglect Morgan's *instrument of domination*, particularly the potential of this image to reveal important concerns about the natural environment. Similar to McCabe, they contend that instrumental rationality leads organizational actors to minimize the role that organizations play in the devastation of the natural environment. Drawing from the *instrument of domination* metaphor, they develop two second-order images: one that reflects a risky trend ('organizations as water exploiters') and the other that centers on conservation and restoration of nature ('organizations as water-keepers'). Then, they move beyond domination to generate secondary metaphors in which organizations are land-ethnic communities that partner with nature as ecological collectives. Similar to Kemp (2016), Jermier and Forbes illustrate how developments in society give rise to new organizational images – in this case, the urgency of addressing water problems.

The final part of this special issue includes a commentary from the scholar who is the very reason for this celebration, namely Gareth Morgan. Morgan underscores the importance of the relationship between metaphor and metonymy in constructing meaning in organizational life. Specifically, he demonstrates how each of the articles in this special issue stems from metonymical development that contributes to constructing new metaphors. In doing so, he cautions scholars to avoid relying extensively on spatial images, treating metaphors as lenses, and becoming wedded to concepts such as root metaphors.

Instead, he urges theorists and practitioners to focus on the generative power of metaphor and on clusters of images that offer insights about organizational phenomena in different ways. Finally, he cautions scholars to move away from excessive classifications and treating metaphors as removed from the situations in which they were generated or used (i.e. stand-alone metaphors). Instead, he advocates a flexible interpretive approach in which metaphors are 'living, practical frames for engaging and shaping the ontological dimensions of organizational life' (Morgan, 2016: 1039).

## Acknowledgements

We want to thank all the reviewers who have kindly and helpfully commented on the articles that were submitted to our call for papers for this special issue of *Human Relations*:

Frank Barrett  
Gavin Baxter  
Emma Bell  
Larry Browning  
Boris Brummans  
Timothy Clark  
Lawrence Corrigan  
Miguel Pina e Cunha  
Richard Dunford  
Mats Eklöf  
Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist  
Peter Fleming  
Stephen Fox

Michal Frenkel  
Jeremy Fyke  
David Grant  
James Grumig  
Loizos Heracleous  
Alfred Kieser  
Matt Koschmann  
Ludovica Leone  
Stephen Linstead  
Sharon Livesey  
Alfred Marcus  
Raili Marling  
Joan Marques  
Cliff Oswick  
Daniel Robichaud  
Dan Sage  
Graham Sewell  
John Shotter  
John Sillince  
André Spicer  
Jacky Swan  
Torkild Thanem  
Susan Vinnicombe  
Jo Anne Yates

We also want to say that Gareth Morgan kindly agreed to comment on the contributions in this special issue. He has not been involved in the selection of the articles, the review activity, or the editorial process.

## Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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