Integrating Management Concepts into Human Service Organizations: A suggestion for using student produced video to understand Morgan’s metaphors

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Abstract
This paper presents a framework for developing a constructivist learning assignment. Students collaborate to construct an understanding of Morgan’s metaphors of organizations by producing a video. Students are asked to develop a newsroom story that compares the mechanistic views of agencies to one of four rival metaphors. Suggestions are provided for developing, implementing, and assessing the student produced video.

INTRODUCTION
Management and organization theory emerged, with inspiration from disciplines such as economics, sociology, psychology, and engineering, to explain the structure and processes occurring within organizations and the nature of the relations among organization members, and provide prescriptions for effective management. In fact, the need to understand how management works in agencies is important for the student of any human service discipline. For example, students of human service disciplines will often find themselves occupying supervisory and management positions in social agencies and becoming involved in the organizations functioning (Netting, Kettner, and McMurtry, 1993). By studying management theory and examining the nature of work in organizations students gain valuable insights into the workings of human service organizations.

One method of learning about organizations and management is through the study of metaphors. Metaphors promote learning by linking different images symbolically. Students gain knowledge about a new concept through its similarity to another, and thereby create meaning around that concept. When studying abstract concepts, student comprehension arises when theory is connected to more concrete understandings of other more familiar concepts. Although the literature offers a variety of theories on management and organizations, Morgan (1980) identified several metaphors that can assist the student in understanding different paradigms in the field. These metaphors provide distinct views of organizations, and support understanding by drawing connections between the theory and other more familiar objects. We chose a selection of metaphors described by Morgan based on their ability to provide a diverse range of useful perspectives on human service organizations. These metaphors include the machine, culture, political system, brain, and psychic prison.

MORGAN’S METAPHORS OF ORGANIZATIONS

Machine Metaphor: The machine or the mechanistic metaphor of organizations emerged from the tradition of classical and scientific management theory (Taylor, 1911), as well as sociological explanations of bureaucracy (Weber, 1978). Through the metaphor of organizations as machines, students recognize the mechanical nature of life inside human service organizations. Just as machines consist of clearly defined and often specialized component parts that fit together to achieve predefined ends, organizations often exhibit high specialization and division of labor in work processes and clearly specified goals (Smith, 1976; Fayol, 1949). In machines, parts are interchangeable and output specified by the engineer/designer, while in organizations employees are replaceable and structures and processes spelled out by managers with an interest in efficiency.

Ultimately, the mechanistic metaphor emerged as the classical organizational metaphor for human service agencies. Following the initial focus on mechanistic views
of organization and management, additional metaphors were developed that highlight additional aspects of organizational phenomena that were previously downplayed or ignored.

**Culture Metaphor:** Viewing an organization through the culture metaphor emphasizes the role of values and norms of its members, and the importance of the social meaning and symbolic nature of organizational phenomena. Shared expectations and understandings guide the behavior of individuals rather than formal rules and procedures. The basis of authority may lie somewhere other than position in a hierarchy.

**Political Metaphor:** From the political perspective, students see the organization as the nexus of different interests from various groups both inside and outside its boundaries. The organization serves to satisfy the needs of these groups, but often this occurs under conditions of conflict among contending interests and coalitions of groups (Pfeffer, 1981). Position in the organizational hierarchy contributes to power, but the bases of power may also rest on other factors (French and Raven, 1959).

**Brain Metaphor:** The brain metaphor depicts organizations as systems of information processing, learning, and decision making. Organizations are arenas in which information is shared and influences decision making practices among members. The ways in which interactions among members are constrained affects the effectiveness of problem solving. As knowledge is transferred and transformed among members, new practices are developed and adopted by the organization (Nonaka, 1991).

**Psychic Prison:** The psychic prison metaphor allows students to recognize organizations as expressions of the unconscious psychological characteristics of organizational members, where decision-making may be affected by deeply-rooted and unrecognized biases. Individual and social behavior can be strongly influenced by the personalities of key members (De Vries and Miller, 1986). Organizational practices can be pursued excessively, becoming pathological and constraining innovation in the face of poor performance (Miller, 1992). Some predispositions may be hard-wired into structure of the human mind (Nicholson, 1992).

**STUDENT PRODUCED VIDEO WITHIN A CONSTRUCTIVIST FRAMEWORK**

Video is a powerful medium that can convey settings, characters, and actions in a more lively fashion than written work (Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson, 1999). With today’s technology, students can create and produce their own video. The cost of video cameras and video making software has become affordable and consumer friendly. Software is available that offers easy to use interfaces in which students can dive right in and create sophisticated cinema.

Video production fosters a pedagogical approach called constructivist learning. Constructivists believe that individuals construct their own reality through interpreting experiences inherent in their world (Ludewig, 2001). For the student, knowledge is actively constructed through interaction with others and observing real situations (Jonassen et al, 1999).

Producing videos requires students to work in groups to become active participants in the learning process (Jonassen, et al, 1999). Students develop skills in critical thinking, cooperation, research, organization, visualization, and interpretation. By constructing a video, the students are challenged to develop a deeper understanding of the content, which will then possibly result in the ability to share the meanings and
understandings with their peers. Furthermore, placing a requirement set in a real world situation affords the student the opportunity to construct meaning grounded in reality.

INTEGRATING THE METAPHORS INTO STUDENT PRODUCED VIDEO

Metaphors gain their power when comparing similar but distinct concepts. Focusing on one metaphor emphasizes the similarities to the object of comparison but ignores differences, some of which might be crucial to a fuller understanding. Different metaphors of organizations and management reflect different assumptions about the object of study and the nature of knowledge and reality. For instance, the early emergence of theories emphasizing rational, goal-oriented, and strongly economic models of organizations resulted in the machine metaphor becoming orthodox in the field. Subsequent theoretical developments, which reflect other metaphorical understandings of organizations, often came about to address deficiencies that arose in relying on overly mechanistic explanations. Indeed, a great deal of insight on organizational problems can be gained by contrasting mechanistic interpretations with alternative accounts rooted in other organizational metaphors.

By studying a variety of metaphors and comparing alternative perspectives on organizations, students gain a more complete view of the organizations in which they intend to work and researchers build a more comprehensive understanding of organizational phenomena (Morgan, 1980). Academic assignments can have groups separately develop understandings of the conventional machine metaphor and the other alternative metaphors and present them at the conclusion of a semester in an attempt to create a comprehensive reality.

This paper proposes a constructivist learning assignment, in the form of student produced video, in which students working in groups apply the metaphors of management to a human service agency. Specifically, one assignment that lends itself to both video production and constructivist learning is the Newsroom assignment (Jonassen et al, 1999). Students work in groups to identify, research, write, and produce a news story. Stories can encompass a wide array of topics. These topics can range from current events to investigative exposé to debating hot topic items. News reports, video footage, and commentary can be used to tell the story. The newsroom assignment draws on multiple communication skills including reading, writing, presenting, and editing. The students take on varying roles including researchers, writers, cameramen and newscasters. The newsroom assignment can be assessed on its accuracy in the reporting, the writing of the report, the visuals, and the cohesiveness of the arguments.

THE ASSIGNMENT

The assignment suggested here asks students to complete the newsroom assignment by researching, scripting, and producing a segment which focuses on comparing one of four alternative metaphors to the conventional mechanistic metaphor within a human service organization. Then students will be asked to provide a brief debate on the pros and cons of the chosen metaphor. Students will develop their news footage by collecting interviews with the staff and clients. The successful implementation of the assignment is dependent on several factors such as choosing the agency, developing an understanding of the application of the mechanistic and alternative metaphors, generating a script, filming, producing, and viewing the news report. These factors will be expanded on below.
Choosing the Agency: The human service organization should be chosen by the instructor prior to the start of the semester. The instructor’s job is to provide the students with background about the agency. This information can include the agency’s mission, organizational chart, services provided, by-laws, and any other supporting documentation. Most important, the instructor needs to explain the assignment and secure permission from the agency so that students can complete their work. In addition, if clients are to be interviewed the institutional review board must be informed and informed consent needs to be obtained.

Understanding the Metaphors: The overarching premise of this assignment is for students to relate the mechanistic metaphor to the human service agency and present another metaphor as an alternative explanatory framework. In order to do so the student needs to develop a list of questions that are reflective of the metaphors. Some general questions for each metaphor are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Questions Raised by the Metaphors

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<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Potential Questions</th>
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| **Machine** | • How many levels are there in the organization’s hierarchy? Is this number comparable to other similar service organizations?  
• Where is most of the decision-making located in the organization? How much autonomy is given to case workers?  
• What are the controls in place governing organizational activities?  
• How specialized are job tasks in the organization? Do individuals need to have specialized training or certification? If so, what kind? |
| **Culture** | • What values and norms are prevalent in the organization? How are they expressed as behaviors among members? What factors drive the organization’s values and norms?  
• Are values and norms identifiable across the entire organization, or are they unique among smaller groups within the organization?  
• Are subcultures defined along occupational, professional, or structural boundaries of the organization? How does that affect cooperation and overall performance?  
• Do organizational stories, symbols, and ceremonies articulate the culture’s values? How do managers and members perpetuate those aspects of the culture?  
• How do new members of the organization become socialized? |
| **Political** | • Are there competing interests operating within the organization?  
• Does the organization cater to diverse interests from outside of the organization? Do those interests diverge from the needs of the organization’s clients?  
• How dependent is the organization on outside groups?  
• Are resource limitations a significant factor in the determining the direction of the organization?  
• What are key sources of influence for organization members and for outside groups? |
| **Brain** | • How are decisions made within the organization? What are the principal criteria used to make decisions? |
- How dependent is the organization on standardized procedures?
- How are different members of the organization coordinated to provide services to clients?
- What types of information do members need to properly serve clients? How do members communicate with each other? How do they communicate with clients?
- What information is not effectively handled by the organization? Is there sufficient feedback in the organization?
- How do members respond to exceptions in the work process? How are new procedures and work methods developed? Who develops them?

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<tr>
<th>Psychic Prison</th>
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<td>Are there any habitual organizational practices that members have difficulty justifying on technical ground (they are done because of “tradition” or because they are taken-for-granted)?</td>
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<td>Are any organizational activities driven by ideological concerns? Are organizational ideologies tied to any particular organization members?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do concerns about race or gender govern organizational activities? Are those concerns conscious or unconscious processes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are there systematic biases exhibited in the decisions of members? What are the sources of those biases?</td>
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<tr>
<td>When problems occur in the functioning of the organization, how do members handle the situation in the aftermath? Does feedback result in changes in practices?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do members often describe the organization in human terms? Are problems anthropomorphized as psychological phenomena (e.g., the organization is “paranoid,” “macho,” “helpless,” etc.)?</td>
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The instructor will act as a consultant and assist with the development of the questions by providing feedback. Ultimately, these questions will drive the script and the interactions the students will have with the agency.

**Scripting, Filming, Producing:** Students will need to use the questions about the metaphors to conduct interviews with staff and clients of the human service agency. With permission, these interviews can be filmed for use in the actual video. The script will need to provide a description of the agency and its organizational structure, how the mechanistic metaphor is accounted for, and how the agency can be described using the alternate metaphor. From the background research and the interview, the students can develop the script. During script development group members will take on specific roles such as news anchor, man in the street interviewer, and reporters debating the pros and cons of the chosen metaphor. Upon completion of the script the instructor should examine it for presentation of ideas, cohesiveness, and appropriate application of the metaphors.

Once the script is written and approved by the instructor, the students can start filming. Digital video cameras that use digital video cassettes are the recommended equipment for this assignment. Often times, students can work with computer labs or departments to check out the necessary equipment. Training can be provided by students within the class who have had experience using the equipment or from the IT staff that
supports the department, college, or university. Classrooms can be reserved ahead of time so that students have a location in which they can film in. Students are encouraged to film more than they will use as some scenes will be left out of the final product.

The next step in developing a product is to compile all the information into a coherent video. Nowadays, computer software, such as Apple iMovie and Windows Movie Maker provide easy to use interface that allows students to seamlessly create videos. The instructor should allow for scheduled training on the software. The group might select one or two members to attend the training and learn the software. In addition, these students might be selected as the producers and develop the final project. Students should plan on developing about 25 minutes worth of video for the newsroom assignment. More specifically, about five minutes can be devoted to introducing the metaphor, ten minutes to comparing the metaphor to the machinist metaphor, and about ten minutes to debate the application of the metaphor to the human service agency.

**Viewing the video:** The student produced video, upon completion, should be shown to the class. By displaying the videos, the whole class has an opportunity to see how all the metaphors can be used to explain the human service organization. Videos can also be uploaded to the World Wide Web for archiving and allowing students to have unlimited viewing.

**CARRYING OUT THE ASSIGNMENT**

The previous section outlined a framework or template for a student produced video that should assist students in constructing an understanding of Morgan’s metaphors. While the assignment is presented as a general framework, there are several important aspects that need to be addressed while carrying out assignment.

**Establishing a Timeline:** First, the instructor needs to develop a timeline for the project. The timeline needs to include due dates for completing interviews, developing the script, filming, and producing the final product. One recommendation for a 16 week semester is to ask students to familiarize themselves and conduct interviews with the agency within the first four weeks. The script should be finished in additional four weeks. The filming and the producing should be completed around the 12th week of the semester. Allocating the final four weeks of the semester allows plenty of time for students to present their videos and discuss how human service agencies can be explored using Morgan’s metaphors.

**Accessibility of Hardware and Software:** Access and training in the digital video camera and the movie making software is another important aspect that is necessary in the successful implementation of the student produced video. First, guidelines for use of equipment need to be provided for the students. For example, if the class has access to two cameras, then a checkout period needs to be established. In addition, stipulations need to be presented if the equipment is lost, stolen or broken. Also, students need to be made aware of computer lab hours, especially if the student does not have access to the video making software outside of the university. In addition to the usage guidelines, the instructor, along with the students should be trained on the camera and the software. The instructor can make arrangement with IT staff or computer lab managers to meet with the students. One recommendation is to appoint one or two students to learn about the camera and one or two students to learn the software.

**Ethical Issues:** A final responsibility of the instructor is to make the students aware of the ethical concerns that arise when conducting interviews and showing videos. For
example, the institution review board (IRB) must be solicited for permission to talk to clients and the agency’s management. In addition, informed consent needs to obtain from both the agency workers and agency clients. The workers and clients will need to be made aware of how their images and comments will be used. Finally, due to FERPA concerns, students will need to grant permission for their images to be displayed especially if the end product is placed on the World Wide Web.

ASSESSING THE STUDENT PRODUCED VIDEO

Assessment of the student produced video can occur at two levels. First, the end result needs to demonstrate successful completion of learning objects outlined at the beginning of a semester. More specifically, students need to demonstrate that they have constructed an understanding of how the machine metaphor exists within a human service agency and how an alternate metaphor can be used to explain the inner workings of the agency. Basically, students need to demonstrate a synthesis of the knowledge about Morgan’s metaphors. Second, the students constructed understandings of the metaphors need to be presented in a clear and articulate and accurate manner. In fact, when evaluating the newsroom project, Jonassen et al (1990) suggested that the newsroom project be evaluated on the accuracy, the structure, the writing, and the visuals. Overall, the evaluation process should be a continuous process (Ludewig, 2001) and could be built into the timeline of the assignment. Instructors should check in with the students at various times during the project. For example, students should receive feedback after the script is develop, during the production, and finally at the viewing of the video.

CONCLUSION

This paper proposes a general framework for developing a constructivist learning assignment. More specifically, in this assignment, students work in group to compare and contrast one of four metaphors as proposed by Morgan to the machinist view of a human service agency. In a future semester the authors will implement this assignment in a course offered within a management department and be able to provide feedback on the successes and drawbacks to such an assignment.
References