METAPHORS IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Relationship Between the Environmental Management and other Business Areas: With Scales and Swords?

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Abstract

Metaphors do not only play an important role in poetry, they also have important functions in the field of sciences. Above all they offer the opportunity for new and unusual aspects. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors affect both our language and our acting, they function as a kind of "furniture of the mind". If we assume that language reflects the values and attitudes of the sender we can conclude from the analysis of the language on the underlying thinking structures.

This paper deals with the way metaphors functions and analyses the images environmental managers use to describe the relationship between environmental management and other business areas. The most commonly used metaphors describe a conflict or a reduced acting. Especially the additional costs and the work load are regarded as the most problematic issues. The results show that environmental management is still considered to be a business task, that means first of all an increase in costs and work.

1.   Introduction

The term "metaphor" originates from the Greek language and stands for a transmission or transfer process. A word or a group of words is transferred from its original context into a different one in a purely figurative sense. In other words metaphors are used to describe something by transmitting comparable features from one thing to another. The literal translation is senseless, e.g.: black music.

Metaphors are an important element of our language but for most of the time they were regarded as embellishing but misleading accessories which should only be used in poetry. Since Aristoteles formulated a first metaphor theory metaphors have always appeared to be reprehensible for not being neutral and clear. For Aristoteles and also for representatives of the modern science like Bacon and Descartes there exists a natural order of things. In their understanding metaphors disturb this natural order and releases uncontrollable effects of transfer and interpretation. Therefore metaphors should only be used in the context of literature. In contrast to literature and poetry the terminology of science should be as clear and definite as possible.

However, when taking a more differentiated view, metaphors do not only play an important role in literature and poetry. Beyond the mere literal explanation metaphors offer the opportunity to look at things from a different angle, by presenting an object or topic in a new or different light. The transfer of certain features and qualities from one thing or field to another is one of the main characteristics of a metaphor. In heuristics this characteristic trans-mission is very useful for we tend to master unknown topics or objects intellectually by comparing them with those we already know. Having a closer look at the words "energy field" or Newton's "light particles", what else are they but metaphors? Beside describing new objects, metaphors can also be used to let something appear in a new light. These examples show that sometimes the use of metaphors allows a cognitive approach to description which is not always achievable by a mere literal transmission.

Metaphors can function in different ways. First of all they state something about the object itself, simply by describing it. In this manner a metaphor helps to present something more vividly and to understand the underlying meaning. In addition, depending on the imagery we choose to describe something we can establish priorities in what we want to express. By using metaphors the user emphasises certain aspects and views and whereas other aspects fade in importance.

The usage of metaphors is a more or less conscious process. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1996) the largest part of our conceptual system, how we think and act is basically metaphorical. Therefore we can conclude that we can find out more about the senders views and

attitudes by analysing the metaphors used in his speech. Thus the usage of metaphors reveals the user's underlying patterns of thought. The sender's attitudes are marked by the socio-cultural background he belongs to. Therefore his attitudes and consequently his usage of the language and choice of expressions reflect on the one hand the sender's personality traits and on the other hand certain features and characteristics of the society he lives in.

The analysis of metaphors through different years show, that the metaphors depend on the epoch and are influenced by socio-cultural change, for example the industrialisation leads to more technical metaphors. To sum up, we see that metaphors are more than an embellishing means of discourse. They do not only lead us to think about the metaphor itself but also about the world behind the metaphor.

2.   Metaphors in economic

Lakoff and Johnson illustrate in their book "Metaphors We Live By" (1996) that almost every conversation and linguistic way of expression contains metaphors. So it is not surprising at all that we also find metaphors in the terminology of economics. In his book "The Rhetoric of Economics" (1985) McCloskey points out the usage of metaphors in the scientific language of economics. And still - most economists would probably not even recognise metaphors in a technical text: who would think of a metaphor describing a conflict by meeting an expression like "business strategy" or "competition"? Many specialist feel quite captivated in their own technical terminology that they do not longer question the imagery and expressions they use. We often do not even realize that we actually use metaphors in our speech.

This phenomenon makes it interesting to have a closer look at the way we deal with the images in our own science. How different images of enterprises can influence the organi-sational structures shows Gareth Morgan in his book "Images of Organization" (1997). Morgan assumes that our theories and explanations of organisation procedures are based on metaphors. These metaphors structure the way people think and act within a business context. In his book Morgan describes models of organisations and their specific forms. Morgan gives various examples of terms and images with which organisations are usually compared with: for example: organisation functions as a machine, an organism, a culture, a political system, a instrument of domination or …. He also quotes terms which describes the course of processes within an enterprise like for instance "flux and transformation"..

Equating an organisation for example with a machine will automatically have an impact on how the work routine is structured. Also the role and function of the employees can be influenced by this. Especially this mechanistic approach is strongly shaped by the industrial revolution. Often enterprises are built in the same way machines are constructed. The work process is structured and determined according to the various functions and tasks. The employees are supposed to function as cogwheel and this way they can easily be replaced if

necessary. These structures are supported by a strong hierarchy. Although there are nowadays quite a lot of different views of the way businesses function this proceeding can still be found in some fields, as for example with fast-food restaurants with the underlying principle of exact planning and calculation of actions and processes. Partly the images Morgan presents in his book reflect the development in organisational theory. Whereas the classical approaches of organisational theory, represented for instance by Taylor and Fayol, see organisations in a mechanistic way, the more humanistic oriented approaches of Argyris and Herzberg have more the image of an organisation more as a living being or organism.

3.　　Metaphors in environment management

The analysis of metaphors is also of interest in the field of environmental management. The analysis of metaphors in the technical terminology of environmental management gives us a hint how environmental problems are dealt with. We can also draw conclusions on the role environmental management plays in the enterprise and on possible conflicts.

Within the framework of a transdisciplinary project the metaphors as well as their hidden implications used in the technical terminology of environmental management have been investigated. The analysis is mainly based on the following core questions:

- Which metaphors are used in the field of environmental management?
- In which way do metaphors have an impact on the activities of environmental managers?
- What are the differences and similarities in the usage of metaphors in speech and in technical texts?

The investigation is based on an empirical survey and literature analysis. In autumn 2000 thirty-eight environmental managers in German and Swiss enterprises were interviewed on the basis of a half-structured questionnaire. The evaluation of the transliterated interviews was carried out using qualitative content analysis. Next to proper metaphors also images of language in general were considered in this investigation. In a multi-level analysis procedure the images and metaphors used by the interviewees were combined and structured in categories. These categories are representative for the concepts which form the basis of the senders language and his actions.

The investigation does not include metaphors which occur only once or twice for the aim is to identify general basic images and metaphors in the various topics of environmental management. We did not intend to give a comprehensive and complete list of all conceivable metaphors.

In addition to the representation and analysis of the results themselves it is of further interest to examine whether the categories we could identify are combinable in semantic fields or

whether they are independent from each other and rather unlinked. Furthermore the metaphors and images used by the interviewees were examined with regard to their conventionality. We can distinguish between common and often used metaphors and those who are being used in a new and vividly descriptive way.

The questionnaire which forms the basis of the interviews is subdivided into specifics heading such as:

- Organisation of environmental management in business
- Role of the environmental manager
- Role of the top management
- Role of the staff
- Aims of the environmental management
- Relation between the environmental management and other business areas

Finally we compare the categories of metaphors we found out in the interviews with those we can extract from the current literature on environmental management.
The topic "relation between environmental management and other business areas" will be presented in the following.

4.   Results

Many environmental managers described the relationship between environmental management and other business areas as difficult and ambiguous. The dominating metaphors highlight that the position of the environmental management within the business is regarded as a permanent source of conflict.

We can classify the following categories which were used by the majority of the interviewees to describe the relationship between environmental management and other business areas.

- Struggle and fight
- Acting within limits
- Journey with obstacles
- Balance between two poles
- Applying the brakes

Struggle and fight
A relatively large group of interviewees describes the relationship between the environmental management and other business areas and aims as a kind of fight, almost as a military conflict. In this category, constructed by the usage of words like fight and war, we can also summarize those statements which do not explicitly contain the above mentioned terms but which are semantically related, expressing the usage of physical force.

- *it is a **battle***
- *it **clashes** somehow*
- *how always **fighting**, **struggeling** about the question how much money we can spend for this and that… a every day **fight***

Acting within limits

The second largest category is formed by metaphors describing the scope of action as acting within limits. The central aspect in this group is the spatial limitation for the environmental management:

- *There are discussions, where one has to set **limits***
- *a question of money and expenses, there are some **barriers***
- *the whole must remain in a economic **frame***

Journey with obstacles

Another category contains mainly metaphors which describe the relationship between environmental management and other business areas as a journey with obstacles. In contrast to the previous category which highlights mainly the spatial limitations in this category the aspect of locomotion is crucial point:

- *where do I find the problems on the **way**, it never works without frictional resistance, opposition, **obstacles***
- *in our industry, we cannot **go too far***
- *from environmental management we would have to take **way** A, however we must take **way** B, perhaps temporary we have to take **another way***

Balance between two poles

A forth category is built by statements including metaphors for a balance between two poles. The relationship between environmental management and other business areas are described either as a game or as a matter of negotiating and weighing up.

- *An **interplay** between economics and ecology*
- *Each decision must to **weight up***
- *We have two partners, who **deal** things **out** between themselves*
- *Of course, one always has to **settle** things*

Applying the brakes

Finally we can combine those metaphors in a fifth category which reflect the idea of applying the brakes and holding back a development. In this respect we distinguish between statements expressing that the environmental management itself is restricted in its scope of action and those metaphors standing for the idea that environmental management holds back the enterprise.

- *It never works without **frictional resistance***
- *One hast to make sure, that the **flow** of the production is correct, that nothing is **braking**, which would increase the cost of the product*

5.   Analysis of the results

The categories we have worked out from the interviews show clearly that environmental managers tend to describe the relationship between environmental management and other business areas by using metaphors reflecting the idea of a conflict and restricted action. The most dominant concept is the metaphor of conflict. The frequent usage of this metaphor may not surprise since metaphors of war and conflict are per se one of the most commonly used metaphors in our language. Especially in economics this image is one of the core concepts for marketing which is reflected by expressions like "business strategy" and "positioning at the market". Another central aspect is to equate the idea of a relationship with the image of scales, as a reconciliation between two opposed sides.

On the whole we can establish, that the relationship between environmental management and other units within an enterprise are mostly described as two diametrically opposed sides. Environmental management is often regarded as a an opponent to the actual aims of a business. The relationship is described as bipolar and the statements illustrate the fear that the establishment of environmental management will automatically lead to an increase in expenditure and cost which contradicts other mainly profit-oriented business objectives. The financial aspect and the increasing work load are regarded as the most problematic issues. This conflict is also reflected in the way environmental manager describe their own role within the business. Some describes their role as fighters but the dominant idea emerging from the interviews is the identification with a paternal figure.

If we analyse the results in respect of possible semantic links between the categories we have worked out we can determine that the categories are strongly linked and not form clearly separated independent semantic fields as for instance the categories "fight" and "building" could represent. In particular the categories "acting within limits", "journey with obstacles" and "applying the brakes" are strongly linked. The core idea that is expressed in each category describes the role of environmental management within a business with metaphors for limitation, mostly in the way of being restricted by physical barriers. Another link we can work out is the one between the categories "struggle and fight" and "acting within limits" since the imagery of fight is closely associated with the idea of territory and the protection of boundaries.

Regarding the more or less frequent usage of the analysed metaphors we can establish that the imagery used by the interviewees is mainly vivid and lively though not particularly creative or innovative. If we compare the images with the metaphors which the environmental managers

use to describe their own role, such as an tamer or conductor, the metaphors for the relationship between the environmental management and other business areas are less surprising.

6. Conclusion and prospects

Studying and examining the usage of metaphors the question arises what kind of alternatives are conceivable. As far as we can see the metaphors the interviewees preferably chose to describe their situation contain mainly negative connotation. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1996) scientific discussions are often seen as situations of war and conflict, this is illustrated for instance by the expression "his argument was shot down". It would still be likely to choose other metaphors than the ones that express a negative attitude towards the relationship between environmental management and other business areas, why not describing this relationship with images of a dance?

What are the alternatives? Do we also find models in the terminology of environmental management expressing the idea that environmental management is rather a part and enrichment of the business than its opponent? It is perfectly possible to achieve competitive advantages with the help of an integrative environmental management, contrary to the conventional imagery of restriction. Instead of regarding the relationship as a bipolar one it is also possible to create the image of a co-operation with the opponents acting as partners, acting in concert or the image of a game, regarding the persons involved as members of the same team. Occasional these more positive images were also used during the interviews as for example reflected in the statement of one of the interviewees:" *business and environment going **hand in hand***".

The investigation shows clearly that the usage and choice of models and comparisons plays a crucial role when it comes to analyse the position of environmental management within an enterprise. Language does not only represent our convictions and ideas of the world but also creates realities.

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