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Samen managen met beelden

Pennink, B.J.W.

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The central theme of this thesis is of the development of a management model in which images play a central role. Two questions will be examined. The first question is: *what forms do images take*? This question is answered in paragraph 3. The second question is: *what role do images play in cooperation*? This question is answered in paragraph 4. In paragraph 2 we begin with a description of the methodology used, and in the final paragraph we give a brief summary of the recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the multi-method approach we have developed. This approach comprises our own interpretation of the method developed by Brewer and Hunter (1989). Our approach in this explorative study is based on the use of empirical material gathered by ourselves as well as by others.

We advance three arguments to support this method. In the first place, a great deal of the research had to be carried out alongside other commitments. A considerable amount of time can be saved by using other researchers' material. The second argument is that we were – and are – convinced that it should be possible to use other researchers' material in our study. This extends the validity of empirical material. The third argument is that using the material of other researchers encourages one to develop one's own insights because, each time one uses such material, it is necessary to justify the use of a particular data set in one's own research.

Our study ultimately comprised 16 sub-studies, 4 of which we carried out ourselves (see section 2.5).

WHAT FORMS DO IMAGES TAKE?

The first question is: *what forms do images take*? The answer is in four parts:

The concept: image

The study assumes that managers have formed their own picture of their organization and its environment and that they use that picture and goal interpretations to formulate rational considerations for realising the goals.

In order to create a model of this type of 'picture', we have introduced the term 'image' (see section 3.2):

An image is a model in the mind of a manager, on the basis of which he will act (or is acting, or has acted) at a given moment.

By linking images to actions, we are following in the footsteps of Weick (1995). Weick concentrated in particular on the process of 'sensemaking' (see section 1.5.1); we concentrate on the result of a process.

Goal images

We can use management theory to sketch action as the result of considering information from within that system, external information, and goals. In this study we are concerned with images of the system and the external environment. We also introduce images of goals (section 6.2). The images of goals within the Control Organ Controlled System model are analogous to the images of system and environment that are the basis for management in the Control Organ. *Managers form images not only of information within and outside the organization, but also of their goals.* Just as with images of the organization and external environment, the similarities and contrasts between the goal images of different managers can also be considered.

With the concept of goal image we follow in the footsteps of Barnard (1945). In his work he emphasized that people have a 'view of the purpose' and that it is possible to have differences between these views (see section 5.3).

Eight properties of an image

In our study we developed eight properties based on a large number of cases (see Chapter 2). These properties relate to the images of a system and environment at least. The relevance of applying the properties to goal images will be examined later (see chapter 7).

The properties are divided into two categories. The first category relates to the structure of the image and the second category relates to how it is dealt with. The descriptions of the properties have been illustrated with managers' responses to the following question: what images come to mind when you think about your company? The structural properties are:

-   *The extent of the detail:* the extent of the detail relates to the number of

details used to describe the image. One of the managers answered: "Innovative, dynamic, young, aggressive, family company, technology-driven, specialist." This answer contains a whole series of qualifications. In the context of this study, the answer contains many details.

- *The number of dimensions:* the extent to which an image is expressed using one or more dimensions. One of the answers was as follows: "efficient organization, customer-driven approach towards purchasing as well as sales, and strongly committed employees." This is similar to the previous answer in that several qualifications are given. However, the first and the last relate to the organization, and the middle qualification relates to the company's approach to the external environment. In the context of this study, these constitute different dimensions.

- *Abstraction:* the level of abstraction used in a description. This is illustrated in the last part of the following answer: "competitive, modern, possibly too many overheads." In the context of this study, 'possibly too many overheads' is a less abstract description than the others.

- *Aggregation:* the extent to which the manager is aware of the aggregation level of the image. In the answer: "What comes to mind is a flexible and efficient organization in which I have a part to play", the manager indicates that he is aware of the existence of an organization, which he typifies as flexible and efficient (= his image), and that he is part of that organization. He thus distinguishes between his image of the organization and his image of himself.

- *Normative:* the extent to which the manager makes a value judgment. The following answer illustrates this property: "stable, decent, flexible, friendly." Each word is normative.

The properties relating to acting on images are:
- *Changeability:* the extent to which an image can change. One manager gave the following answer 'was: solution-oriented but expensive. Is: a perfect product, "always" on time'. Here, the manager indicates that his image of the company has changed.

- *'Gestalt':* awareness of a 'Gestalt'. One manager answered: "Young/small, but with a grown-up problem." In this answer, the manager describes a 'Gestalt': his image is based on an awareness that the company is in difficulty.

- *Reticulation:* the way in which the structural properties are combined, especially the first four: the level of detail, the number of dimensions, the

abstraction and the level of aggregation. In the answer illustrating the property 'detail', words such as 'dynamic' and 'young' are also normative. A qualification such as 'family company' can also be seen as another dimension, and 'technology-driven' is less abstract than the other descriptions.

Images and their channelling effect

We have described the relationship between the large amount of information and the resulting image as a process of 'distillation' (trechterwerking). The 'distillation' is the process by which a manager selects parts of the large flow of information he receives, and forms an image based on that selection (see section 6.3). The distillation process is not always a conscious process.

The distillation process that results in goal images requires further discussion. In this case, we refer to the process that takes place as 'reverse distillation'. The manager forms an image based on a goal or objective. The process of translating an objective into a concrete situation involves a 'broadening'. A limited description is used to form a broader description: the 'funnel' through which images are distilled is inverted (see paragraph 6.3).

THE ROLE OF IMAGES IN COOPERATION

The second question addressed in this study is: *what role do images play when people cooperate*? The answer has three elements:

The concept: image sphere

Describing how managers work together and think about images raises complex issues. Take, for example, a situation in which several managers are considering their own company and assessing the environment in which it operates in order to make decisions about which direction the company should take. In terms of images, we assume the following: managers have their own image of the company, they may have an image about the image that fellow managers have of the company, an image about the shared image of the company, and an image about others' images of that image. In short, many different images are possible.

In order to examine such situations systematically, we have introduced the term *'beeldruimte'* (image sphere). See paragraph 6.4. *This term denotes the psychological/virtual space occupied by the various images.*

The concept of image sphere can be of assistance when developing the process of

imaginization as described by Morgan (1993). Starting from the concept of image sphere, explicit attention is paid to the relationship between the mutual images of individual managers as well as to the relationship between the images of individual managers and the images of a team. Insight into these relationships can contribute to the process of imaginization, in which changes in thinking, and thus in images, are crucial.

What is the basis for cooperation?
Cooperation is more than interaction between people (see Chapter 5). When people cooperate, they have a *common goal*. We have also concluded that joint consideration is a basis for cooperation in terms of forming a common image on which to work. We define the third element of cooperation as 'connecting with each other', i.e. consultation, motivation and the creation of a common platform. Finally, cooperation implies that the parties involved expect each other to continue working towards common goals in the future. Cooperation therefore also implies commonly held expectations relating to future conduct.

This definition fits in well with the difference drawn by Habermas (1989) between strategic and communicative action. In strategic action, the acting manager takes account of others from his own rational standpoint, which is not a point of discussion. In communicative action, managers take each others' opinions into account, but are also prepared to discuss their own rational viewpoints and tailor them to each other (see section 5.4). Isaacs (1999) adds that conducting dialogue is a suitable form to realize the tailoring and creation of a joint goal. This joint goal does not create itself. The managers involved will have to work hard to achieve it (see section 1.5.5).

Management illustrated through 'Control Organ Controlled System' role-play
In this study we have extended the 'Control Organ Controlled System' role-play by incorporating the image sphere in the Control Organ and by replacing information flows with images (see section 5.5.4.). We have also extended this by distinguishing between situations in which managers act together strategically or communicatively (see section 6.2). In the former case managers make joint decisions about management measures. In the latter case, managers consult each other and make joint decisions on the management measures and their images of the system, environment and goals. To summarize, the additions consist of the concepts 'images', 'image sphere', a graphic representation and qualifying decision-making processes (strategic and communicative) resulting in management measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We have identified three possible areas for further research.

In the first place, it would be useful to expand the research methodology we have developed (see paragraph 7.4.1). Research can be carried out more efficiently by using the material of other researchers, thereby extending the validity of the research material.

In the second place, it would be useful to examine the basis of cooperation in more detail. What does cooperation involve? (See paragraph 7.4.2). In this context it would be helpful to develop the concept of the 'image sphere'.

Third, we would recommend further research, within the framework of management theory, into the management team as an executive body. Images, the distillation process and image sphere are concepts that may shed new light on the powers of a management team as an executive body (see paragraph 7.4.3).