THE MEANING OF THE ORGANIZATION
OR THE ORGANIZATION OF MEANING?
METAPHORS AS SENSEMAKING TOOLS
TO UNDERSTAND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE
MANAGEMENT

AMELIA MANUTI
MARIA LUISA GIANCASPRO
UNIVERSITY OF BARI

Within the last decades, language and discourse have entered the conception of organizing, meant as a process of sense-making where discursively based interpretations define agents, purposes, and organizations. The aim of the present paper was to connect sense-making theory with the study of metaphor, being the latter one of the most valuable and multifaceted linguistic tools, useful to catch, describe, and shape organizational identity. To this purpose, the focus of the investigation was on the sense-making processes used by employees to figure out their organization, analysing the metaphors they use when talking about it. Participants to the study were 115 employees working in a medium-sized company operating in the automotive sector and located in the south of Italy. At the time of data collection, the company was experiencing a great change due to a recent process of commercial expansion. Consequently, employees were engaged in managing great transformations of the organization, both related to its cultural vision and to the tasks and working modalities. Therefore, in-depth individual interviews were used to collect discursive data about the way employees perceived this transformation. The study was intended as an action-research intervention aimed at collecting data to support the HR function in dealing with these organizational changes. Practical implications for the development of work and organizational (W&O) psychology are also discussed.

Recent developments in the field of work and organizational (W&O) psychology have showed a renewed interest for the study of the sense-making processes, that concretely guide organizational behavior (Clark & Geppert, 2011; Cornelissen, 2012; Hernes & Maitlis, 2010; Monin et al., 2013; Rudolph et al., 2009; Sonenshein, 2007; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). Sense-making processes have been studied for their impact on several key organizational processes, such as change management and strategic decision making (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Rerup & Feldman, 2011), innovation and creativity (Drazin et al., 1999; Hill & Levenhagen, 1995), organizational learning (Catino & Patriotta, 2013; Christianson et al., 2009).

Originally developed by Karl Weick (1979, 1988, 1989), sense-making theory has greatly impacted on organization studies, inspiring the advancement of the social-constructionist, interpretative, and phenomenological perspectives in the field (Anderson, 2006; Colville et al., 2012; Colville et al., 1999; Coutu, 2003; Hodgkinson & Healey, 2008; Holt & Sandberg, 2011; Langley et al., 2013; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Miner, 2003; Oswick et al., 2011; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001).

According to Weick (2005) the "organization" is the outcome of an evolutionary process of organizing. Adopting a process-based language, he proposed a new way of thinking about how organizations are constituted and directed attention to the sense-making roots of this process (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Weick argued that organizing is a process in which individuals interactively enact, they make sense of the context they live in, and retrospectively organize their experience into meaningful chunks, labelling them, and connecting them to behavior. By this, individuals tend to retain experience in their minds in the form of cognitive maps, indicating what is crucial for their role and for their performance. Through the routine of daily interactions, individuals pattern their behavior over time, and, in so doing, they manage ambiguity, negotiating a consensus about their task, and how to handle with it.

A first elaboration of the sense-making theory emphasized the prominence of cognitive processes on the social ones, as long as "organizations exist largely in the mind, and their existence takes the form of cognitive maps. Thus, what ties an organization together is what ties thoughts together" (Weick & Bougon, 1986, pp. 102-103). However, further development of the theory led Weick to gradually shift from this cognitivist perspective to a more explicitly social constructivist one, maintaining that, rather than cognition, language is the locus of sense-making (Colville et al., 2012; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 2012). According to this view, sense-making is conceived as an ongoing constructive practice, engaging people in extracting cues and making plausible sense about events retrospectively, while enacting their identity (Weick, 2001).

Therefore, the process of sense-making is marked by some distinctive features: it is retrospective, social, grounded on identity, narrative, and enactive. Arguing for the retrospective nature of sense-making, Weick maintained that "people can know what they are doing only after they have done it" (Weick, 1995, p. 26). Differently posed, this assumption can be exemplified by one of Weick's most recurrent question: "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" (Weick, 1979, p. 133; 1995, p. 18; 2009, p. 143), meaning that sense-making is also a comparative process. In order to give meaning to the "present" individuals tend to compare it to a similar or familiar event from the past and to rely on it to make sense.

Sense-making is also social and grounded in identity: it is influenced by the real or imagined presence of others as well as by a person's sense of self. Who people are and the most meaningful factors that have shaped their lives influence how they see the world. Thus, identity construction is about making sense of the sense-maker.

This construction is narrative because it accounts for experience and is enactive because it arises from the need to undertake actions that could make sense of an experience within our environment.

In light with these assumptions, sense-making and organization are mutually constituted phenomena (Weick et al., 2005), being the organization a construction coming out from the sense-making processes that become concrete through language: "to make sense is to organize, and sensemaking refers to processes of organizing using the technology of language — processes of labelling and categorizing for instance — to identify, regularize and routinize memories into plausible explanations [...]" (Brown et al., 2008, p. 1055).

Accordingly, instead of focusing on organizational outcomes, sense-making provides insights into how individuals and organizations give meaning to events. The essence of sense-making is to provide an understanding of how meaning and artefacts are produced and reproduced collectively. At the same time, Weick pointed out organizational contexts and practices, where sense-making most probably manifests itself (i.e., in policy making, socialization, training), methodologies that could better contribute to catch and analyse sense-making (preferring qualitative methodologies to quantitative surveys), and "language that allows us to grasp the essence of sense-making as it unfolds (i.e., threats, opportunities)" (Weick, 1995, pp. 172-173).

This perspective largely inspired the theoretical debate about the relationship between organization and discourse. An "object orientation," where organizations are conceived as containers of human action and discourse an artefact located inside or outside the container, opposed to a "becoming orientation," arguing that organizing emerges as language in use and as an interaction process and finally achieved "a grounded-in-action orientation," affirming that organizations are discursive forms grounded in action (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). According to this view, "organizations are socially constructed through acts of languaging which create situations, objects of knowledge, social identities of and relations between people and groups of people" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). Therefore, individual and collective identities are linguistic accomplishments constituted within discursive regimes providing social actors with important symbolic resources for identity negotiation (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). Organizations are conceived as textual identities that is social spaces where a thick network of narrations and discourses are informally produced, thus shaping and featuring the most authentic dimension of organizational identity (Boje, 1995, 2000; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994; Gabriel, 2000). Rather than being independent entities, organizations are fluid discursive constructions constantly made and re-made in the several forms of communication (Coupland & Brown, 2004).

Moving from these evidences, the aim of the present study was to propose metaphors as a linguistic privileged tool to investigate the complexity of organizational sense-making.

Actually, after initial neglect, over the last two decades, the study of metaphor has attracted the attention of several scholars interested in investigating how language and metaphor might represent organizational life (Hernes & Maitlis, 2010; Monin et al., 2013; Rudolph et al., 2009; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). Overcoming a limited view of metaphors as mere rhetorical devices, inexact, and potentially misleading, Weick (1989) and Morgan (1980, 1986), among others, greatly contributed to show how metaphor analysis could fruitfully ally with organizational theory. The two authors outlined the complexity, the validity, and the creativity that images convey about organizations.

Weick recognized that metaphors have an important heuristic role in theory construction, because they allow the process by which new perspectives on the world come into existence and this quality is particularly important when tracking the organizational sense-making processes. Metaphors are a "magnifying glass" (Van Engen, 2008, p. 41) since they allow to "enlarge the pictures so that small details are clear" (Weick, 1979, p. 252). According to Weick (1979): "Organizations deal with streams of materials, people, money, time, solutions, problems, and choices. Streams can be a useful metaphor to portray the continuous flux associated with organizations (…)" (p. 42).

In a similar vein, Morgan (1993, 1998) conceived metaphors as devices precious to understand and to extend applications of organizational development. He argued for the value of metaphor that illustrates behaviors that in turn shape the organizational culture by presenting reality in a creative way, by creating new ideas, and by shaping vision (Morgan, 2011, 2016). Therefore, Morgan introduced eight different metaphors, namely images, of the organization, to explore how managers and employees think and talk about their organization, especially in times of change, thus encouraging new ways to cope with uncertainty and transitions.

Morgan's eight metaphors mirror the main organizational theories and unveil the interpretation of the dominant sense-making processes that guide organizational behavior. These vivid conceptualizations are described below:

1. The *machine metaphor* encompasses 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 psycho-analytical theories examining the unconscious processes used by the organizations to entrap their members.
7. The *flux and transformation metaphor* emphasize the unpredictable and fluid nature of organizations exposed to constant change and transformations; this metaphor recalls theories of complexity in organizations.
8. The *instrument of domination metaphor* draws on Marxist critical theories highlighting exploitation, control, and unequal distribution of power performed in and by organizations.

This authoritative classification has the merit to incorporate different theoretical perspectives and different ways of making sense of organizations. Moreover, it contributed to show how to treat metaphors as "practical tools for diagnosing and addressing organizational problems and gaining a 'comprehensive understanding [of what is] possible' for any particular organization" (Morgan, 2006, p. 349). Indeed, Morgan's work awakened the interest in the role played by metaphors in general, showing how these linguistic devices can be fruitfully used to conceptualize organizations.

Many other scholars in the field of organization theory have followed the route traced by these two giant scholars highlighting the benefits that metaphors could perform in organizations (Cornelissen, 2005; Cornelissen & Kafouros, 2008; Cornelissen et al., 2008; Inns, 2002; Oswick et al., 2002).

Yet, "metaphors help constitute the realities we live in (…) they give groups and organizations a sense of direction, history, and values" (Gerritsen, 2006, p. 12). Accordingly, metaphors could be beneficial in outlining a plan for action, giving clarity and direction especially in times of uncertainty and change. Metaphors could provide shared meaning to individual and collective behaviors, guiding them to common goals. Metaphors could also contribute to explain the organization's history. The story of the organization's life is disseminated in memories, texts, and in language. Therefore, metaphors are crucial because they catch the past and help individuals in organizing the future. Finally, metaphors are useful to clarify values. Metaphor shapes values and connects them to reality both inside and outside the organization.

Based on these assumptions, metaphors undoubtedly represent a sense-making tool to know and to understand organizations, because as a figurative language device they connect people, develop memories, stories, and relationships, and if properly connected with a coherent human resource management (HRM) plan could also produce organizational quality.

THE STUDY

At the time of the study, the company was experiencing a great change due to a recent process of commercial expansion. Consequently, employees were engaged in managing great transformations of the organization, both related to its cultural vision and to the tasks and working modalities that concretely give meaning to their daily job.

The study was part of a wider action-research intervention aimed at supporting the HRM function in dealing with these organizational changes. Action-research is one of the most popular qualitative approach in organizational analysis. With special reference to W&O psychology, this perspective is widely preferred by researchers and practitioners who wish to make organizational interventions aimed at impacting on employees' attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, the main assumption of action-research is the active participation of the workforce to the whole process of intervention: from the identification of the critical aspects that need to be considered to the conjoint definition of a strategic plan of intervention aimed at managing the process of change. To this purpose, action-research is generally aimed to collect employees' perceptions, representations, stories about the organization, in order to point out their critical experience and start from them to make concrete proposals about future developments (Greenwood et al., 1992; Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2018; McIntyre, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Action-research adopts many different qualitative tools to pursue these goals: in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observations being the main ones. Moreover, the use of storytelling and of organizational metaphors is widely considered a support to help employees in figuring out events and challenges and in proposing new unexpected solutions.

In view of the above, the present study reported only a part of the whole action-research intervention conducted in this organizational context, namely the analysis of the organizational metaphors that was a first step to understand how employees where experiencing change and how did they make sense of it in their ordinary professional life.

Participants to the study were 115 employees working in McTronic,[1] a medium-sized company operating in the automotive sector and located in the South of Italy. They represent the entire organizational population except for the top management. Employees were informed about the aims, the phases, and the steps of the action-research through their organizational email. Accordingly, they were invited to voluntary take part to an individual interview focused on the organizational change they were experiencing. The company provided a dedicated room where the research team met the participants assuring a protected and private space. Before beginning the interview, participants were also invited to sign an informed consent form explaining details about data processing for research purposes.
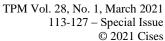
A first description of the main features of the group of participants showed that the 86.9% of them were men while only a 13.1% of them was composed by women with an average age of 40.1 years. The distribution of the levels of education confirmed the company's high-level technical expertise, which is its most distinctive feature strictly related to its core business. Yet, more than half of participants had a degree (51%), 46% got a bachelor, and only 3% had middle school diploma. As for their roles, participants belonged to different operative units: production, design, assembly, software, quality, administration, information technology, goods receiving, warehouse, commercial, purchasing, biomedical, human resources, and research & development.

The production unit was the most populated one in terms of workforces (65.4%), while the others were quite equally distributed. Finally, almost all employees had a long-term contract (97.7%) and only 2.3% had a fixed term contract.

In-depth individual interviews were used as a tool to collect data about the way employees perceived this transformation.

For the purposes of the study, the interview outline was articulated into three sections:

- Employees' perceptions about the organization: the questions of this area were aimed at to investigate the employee representation of the company. Participants were invited to choose and to explain a metaphor, that could describe how they saw the organization during this transition. They

were also asked to comment on the company's strengths and weaknesses in order to understand their knowledge of it.

- Employees' perceptions about their work experience: the questions of this area were aimed to analyse employees' job satisfaction, person/work/organization relationship, and their expectations about career development.

- Employees' perceptions about organizational climate and well-being: this area was related to investigate if and to what extent employees had a clear representation of the company's mission and vision, of what was expected from their roles, how did they consider the employee/leader relationship, the quality of organizational communication, of conflict, and stress management, and in general how did they think that the organization took care of their well-being at work.

For the sake of the present paper, data analysis focused solely on the metaphors used by employees to define their company which were chosen as a sense-making tool used by participants to manage and to cope with organizational change.

Data collection lasted approximately one month, because each individual interview took almost one hour. Participants were involved in interviews during their working hours. A first draft of the results was discussed with the management and was useful to plan further steps of the research intervention addressed to support the change management process.

THE METHODOLOGY

Individual interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The textual data collected were then analysed adopting the paper and pencil diatextual methodology. Actually, diatextual analysis is a qualitative discursive methodology precious to penetrate "how" did participants discursively constructed their experience with special reference to the focused topics of the study (Manuti et al., 2012; Mininni & Manuti, 2017; Mininni et al., 2014).

Diatextual analysis can be conceived as a special address of textual analysis, whose main aim is to reveal the relationship between subjectivities, texts, and contexts of talk. Accordingly, the term diatext (from the Greek "dia" namely "through") refers to "the context as it is perceived by the enunciators of the text, as it is imagined and considered by them" (Mininni, 1992, p. 63). According to this methodological perspective, sense is a dynamic and fluid entity that does not reside permanently within a text rather it goes through. Therefore, to study and to penetrate the sense that animates texts, scholars need to focus on some textual and discursive traces that concretely refer to three main analytical categories: subjectivity, argumentation, and modality. The acronym of these categories determines the S.A.M. model, a pragmatical support of diatextual analysis allowing to approach to texts by answering to some basic questions (Who is saying that? Why does he/she say that? How does he/she say that?) and consequently to organize the results according to some specific patterns of sensemaking associated to the extreme variability of actors, contexts, and topics of talk.

The first question (Who?) aims at clarifying how the interlocutor conveys his/her identity through discourse. Accordingly, with reference to the "subjectivity" dimension, diatextual analysis allows to trace back discursive markers of agency, affect, and the enunciative strategies adopted to signal his/her position toward the discursive context and toward the interlocutors (*embrayage/debrayage* strategies).

The second question (Why?) points out how the enunciator organizes the "meanings why," that is the reasons that are shaped through discourse and that concretely guide stances and claims about the topic

debated. Some discursive examples that could be found within this analytical category are stake markers (discursive markers signalling the aims and interests that animate texts), narrative markers (e.g., discursive cues referred to scenes, characters, models of action), and the network of logoi and antilogoi activated within the narrative and/or argumentative programmes featuring texts.

Finally, the third question (How?) focuses on the discursive modalities through which the meaning is shaped, namely it focuses on the stylistic and rhetorical options that make clearer the position and the subjectivity of the interlocutor. Typical traits of modality are meta-discursive markers (namely expressions of comment and reformulation), discourse genre markers (references to the typology of text and intertextual references), opacity markers (use of rhetorical figures, frame metaphors, etc.).

The present contribution is aimed at showing only some of the procedures of the diatextual approach that are those with a greater metaphorical pertinence. Accordingly, metaphor is one of the most salient discursive resources of diatextual analysis when scholars are interested in investigating "how," that is, in analysing the modalities through which meaning is exchanged and delivered.

DATA ANALYSIS

Morgan's classification of the organizational metaphors described above was used to analyse the discursive data collected. Five out of eight images were recurrent in participants discourses. Being a qualitative analysis, the occurrence of each metaphor was not considered as a quantitative index. However, it could be relevant to note that metaphors referred to the machine and to the family domain were among those that participants evoked most. Furthermore, some participants used more than one metaphor domain in his/her interview, thus highlighting the richness and the plurality of facets composing individual organizational experience.

The Organization as a Machine

A typical metaphorical frame used by participants to describe the organization was "the machine." This metaphor is traditionally adopted to refer to organizational efficacy and efficiency (Örtenblad et al., 2016). From a pragmatic point of view, participants chose different "objects" to convey this image of their organization. A trait common to all of them was the robustness and the strength as well as the perfection of the output or of the performance. However, a very interesting feature was the emphasis given to the indispensable role played by coordination, participation, involvement of all the partners/members for the attainment of the final goal: without the contribution of every single organizational member the organization could never be a perfect machine. Team group, support, commitment, and hard work were the main thematic networks that discursively shaped this metaphor, animating employees' experience. These were more than simple keywords; they are values inspiring individual and organizational behavior. Very meaningful to this purpose was the image of the organization as a ship that survived the storm (concretely the experience of change) thanks to the commitment and work of every single worker as well as the image of the orchestra composed by solo talents, who chose to collaborate to produce a unique melody.

"a *ship* attempting to survive to the storm (…) relying on the support of each member of the crew since everyone has a fundamental role and everyone is responsible for success" (AC2[2]).

"a huge *gear* that keeps on moving efficiently thanks to individuals" (IT1).

"a *robot* almost substituting men at work" (B5).

"*an orchestra* where all musicians give a relevant contribution to the melody, but could be also gifted solo artists" (B7).

"a *football team*, where everyone has its roles, and everything works unless egoism prevails" (B9).

"Masmec is like a *beehive* where people are hard-working, and are committed to a common goal" (B10).

"a sharp *chronograph*, beautiful as a Rolex, with sophisticated mechanisms that works perfectly given that they are always attended to" (S10).

The Organization as an Organism

The metaphor of the "family" was the most recurrent one within this domain, being it also a most traditional representation of the organizational identity (Gioia et al., 2000). In this case, it contributed to highlight the importance attributed by all organizational members to the "human" dimension the working context. The metaphorical domain of the "family" was discursively constructed around the thematic networks of the home and of life, that concretely referred to a sense of belonging and to identification with the company, both considered a prerogative for success and performance. Like in a family, where members are led to share values, responsibilities, and practices, most participants declared that they were engaged in working in order to manage the company's public image and reputation. Like in a family they enjoyed good times and also coped with the bad times, keeping together and striving for the same goal.

"it like *my home*, I cannot live without McTronic. I am attached to McTronic and I care about its image therefore I am committed to settle up everything so that when clients come, they can appreciate our company" (RU1).

"McTronic is my second *family*, here is my *life*" (A1).

"a second *home*, a huge *family*" (A4).

"a *family* since even if there are discussions between us, they serve to grow up, we are a *family* for the better and for the worse" (RM1).

"it is like my *family*" (B8).

The Organization as a Culture

The "cultural" metaphors are addressed to convey a highly symbolical sense of the organization. These representations contributed to create and to share meanings and behavioral patterns oriented by very clear organizational values (Alvesson & Berg, 1992). In this case, participants used very powerful "objects" to describe their organization and to paraphrase Schein (1985) "the way they do things around here." Accordingly, each of the image chosen contributed to focus on values and basic assumptions that concretely shaped the vision and mission of the company. Values such as stability, equity, solidity, and sense of sacrifice emerged as a meaningful and shared cultural code for employees, inspiring their organizational behavior.

"an *anchor* representing stability. I see McTronic as a company that is fast growing up and that even in this moment of instability could be a safe harbour where we can dock the ship" (A2).

"a *balance*, symbol of equity, justice and respect of rules" (A3).

"McTronic is a *colour*, *it is blue*: blue because it is in the middle between a dark colour, symbol for sacrifice (because working is always a fatigue) and a light colour, the light blue of the sky in a sunny day that is something nice" (M8).

"an *olive tree* like tradition, robustness, our land" (B2).

"a *constellation* that keeps you on the course" (B11).

The Organization as an Instrument of Domination

Beside the positive images of the organizations that contributed to focus on the consensual dimensions of the relationship with the company, there was also a group of metaphors addressed to frame this relationship in terms of conflict between the organization and its employees (Giroux, 1993). Therefore, these metaphors underlined the existence of a different perspective between employees' and organization about some core aspects of the organizational life. According to this view, the organization is meant as a context where the person/organization relationship could be differently shaped according to the reciprocal perceptions and expectations, producing different forms of organizational adjustment and different behavioral outcomes (Taris et al., 2006). The figurative domains that emerged with reference to this metaphor aimed at stressing the opposition of two groups of workers (an ingroup and an outgroup): those who work for the organizational goals (those who were interviewed), and those who profited from the situation and are protected ("the parasites"). The result is confusion about the criteria used to evaluate human resources and a sense of unfair consideration about employees' performance from some managers ("the puppets"). The "objects" used to animate this metaphor are eloquent with respect to these perceptions. The company was considered a promised land for those who were not willing to work and at the same time are under the company's protection like chicks under their mother hen. Further, the company was described as a cart which was too heavy to be pulled because only some contributed to this aim. Finally, the company was also compared to Italy, namely a country where according to a widespread populist view manifested by the same Italians, it is difficult to point out a vision of the future, things are generally confused, and few people take the responsibility of one's own actions. Therefore, participants used this metaphor to underline their perception of a biased HRM.

"the *promised land* for most parasites. Many people working in McTronic criticize with the company but they do not know how lucky they are because they do not know what's outside" (M5).

"a *cart pulled by all employees* that however sometimes is arrested by the weird attitudes and behaviors of some managers" (B3).

"I see McTronic as *Italy* since there is confusion, managers who are puppets and managers who have biases" (B6).

"McTronic is a *mother hen* because sometimes there are too many protections toward some employees …we would need a more careful and objective evaluation of our work" (B14).

The Organization as a Flux and Transformation

A final frame metaphor recurrent within the corpus of data collected was the one that compared the organization to a living organism, which is therefore constantly in change. Because of the special moment of the organizational life, being the company engaged in a change management process at the time of

the interviews, this metaphor emphasized employees' trust toward the potentialities of the organization that provided a warrant for a flourishing future. Transformation and change were framed by positive images such as the caterpillar becoming a butterfly, the flower blooming or the bread rising that encouraged individual and collective behaviors such as commitment to change and proactive coping with change (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). The company was also described as an erupting volcano, that is as a magmatic and thus generative context for all the employees as well as a cruise ship, a huge and sound vehicle that goes around the world, taking and offering opportunities, meeting people, and capitalising encounters, and always renovating itself.

This metaphor is particularly useful to collect employees' perceptions about change and to analyse their eventual responses to some organizational plans for development. The images used by the workers interviewed were encouraging because they mostly showed trust and reliance, that could be both positive predictors of positive adjustment.

"a *caterpillar becoming a butterfly*: we are experiencing a transformation therefore we can fly higher becoming butterflies" (AC3).

"a huge *cruise ship* travelling around the world. We stop in every harbour to meet people and to tell them about us. Someone takes the tender and goes alone but then we go and pick him up" (C2).

"a *volcano* continuously erupting" (C5).

"a *flower that is not completely bloomed*. It has many potentials that are still unexpressed" (RM1).

"it is like *bread rising*, it is becoming bigger and more important" (P2).

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR W&O PSYCHOLOGY AND HRM INTERVENTIONS

The analysis of the metaphors collected in the study highlighted some interesting conclusions useful both to further theoretical developments in the field of applied W&O psychology as well as to improve the potentials of HRM practices as a strategic tool for organizations to manage change and competitiveness.

From a theoretical point of view, results contributed to "enlarge the paradigm" showing how metaphors and most generally qualitative methodologies could integrate mainstream quantitative organization analysis, providing "powerful tools" (Gummesson, 2000, p. 1) for the management and for the organization researcher. Metaphors could help scholars in the field of W&O psychology in going deeper into some organizational processes adopting the employees' perspective and in understanding which are the cognitive and affective variables that might impact on desirable organizational outcomes in terms of performance, extra-role behavior, innovation, engagement, and commitment. In this vein, diatextual analysis and metaphor analysis specifically could allow a "journey" inside the sense-making processes employees use to figure out their organization. More simply the way they talk about their organization could be suggestive about the way they think about their organization and thus predictive about the way they behave. Yet, metaphors have a huge cognitive power, they contribute to shape meanings, in this case corporate identity, and consequently could differently impact on organizational behavior (Bhati et al., 2014; Cassell & Bishop, 2019; Cassell & Symon, 2006; Gummesson, 2006).

From a managerial point of view, results coming out from the present study gave concrete indications to the HRM function of the organization about how to positively manage employees' attitudes and behaviors toward change through dedicated development interventions. In this case, metaphors opened an unexpected perspective on the employees' perceptions and attitudes toward change, encouraging the management to take this challenge counting on the support of the workforce.

First, the recurrent frame metaphor of the family was very significant, it signalled a strong sense of community diffused in the organizational context that can be strategically managed to support change (Spreitzer et al., 2012). Indeed, several studies confirm that the sense of community positively relate to individual, organizational, and social outcomes such as psychological well-being (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Peterson et al., 2008), engagement, political participation, and civic involvement (Albanesi et al., 2007; Peterson et al., 2008; Prezza et al., 2009), that in turn could be considered antecedents of social change (Omoto & Malsch, 2005). Therefore, the recurrence of the family metaphor could encourage the company to plan human resource (HR) actions and interventions that could capitalize this strong sense of belonging, relying upon the fact that engaged employees who share the organizational vision, its norms and values like in a family will be more available to share also the need to change.

Moreover, the idea that the company is "technology, progress, and vanguard" [S3] suggested that employees are aware about the challenges that the company was going to face and were preparing to invest themselves in innovative behaviors. Furthermore, some also criticized with a too cautious attitude toward change. The company had difficulties in channelling its great and mostly unexpressed potentialities in a time of change and expansion as the one experienced during the study (e.g., "(the company is) a Ferrari persisting in driving like a 500" [M20]). In this case, metaphor analysis allowed to the HR function to investigate the employees' availability to change the organizational culture and to be ready to take the challenge of change.

Metaphors were also useful to indicate the way to follow to support change management: employees underlined the need to give the company a clear identity in terms of work organization and division of labour: "this is an anthill where there is confusion (….) sometimes there is no organization and those who are called to solve the problems transfer the problems to others" [M1]. There is also a problem with the distribution of responsibilities: "a kayak where only few row and many want to take control over (…) everyone wants to grow in his/her career but very few area available to work hard (…) there should be more people interested in producing and fewer in governing over the others" [S10].

Though a general and diffused sense of belonging emerged from data analysis, which was certainly connected with a previous strong organizational culture and with an enlightened HRM, the different metaphors and images of the organizations provided by the employees focused different perspectives on organizational change and thus different perceptions and experience of it. Beside the different metaphorical domain, the images collected focused on a general sense of estrangement. Most participants witnessed their proud to be part of the organization, highlight the many successes and goals it reached within the last years but at the same time underlined the confusion that currently dominated the organization. Change is a process that most participants define as a natural and necessary step to take, a process that is going on, and cannot be stopped (like the bread rising) however it is also experience as a jump in the unknown, as a new and unexpected scenario that could challenge organizational experience (e.g., in the metaphor of the volcano erupting). In this vein, metaphor analysis could be a useful tool also for HRM to investigate this experience, to be prepared to the employees cognitive, emotive, and behavioral responses that might emerge to change. This awareness could be precious to plan and conduct proper change management interventions.

The very pragmatic perspective showed by qualitative research also through the results of the study presented above allowed to indicate how these methodologies could be a way to gain insights into the "human side" of the organization, namely its most authentic force, thus developing sustainable performance and enhancing workers' wellbeing and quality of life (Porath & Spreitzer, 2012; Porath et al., 2011; Spreitzer et al., 2012; Sonenshein et al., 2013).

NOTES

1. For privacy's sake we used McTronic, that is a name of fantasy, to refer to the real company where the study was conducted.
2. The abbreviations quoted before each extract between the brackets refer to the different operative units where employees worked. The abbreviations are in Italian and stand for: AC = purchasing; B = biomedical; S = software; RU = human resources; A = administration; RM = goods receiving; M = warehouse.

REFERENCES

Albanesi, C., Cicognani, E., & Zani, B. (2007). Sense of community, civic engagement and social well-being in Italian adolescents. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *17*(5), 387-406. https://doi.org/ 10.1002/casp.903

Alvesson, M., & Berg, P. (1992). *Corporate Culture and Organizational Symbolism*. De Gruyter.

Anderson, M. H. (2006). How can we know what we think until we see what we said? A citation and citation context analysis of Karl Weick's the social psychology of organizing. *Organization Studies*, *27*(11), 1675-1692. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840606068346

Bhati, K., Hoyt, W., & Huffman, K., (2014). Integration or assimilation? Locating qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *14*(1), 98-114. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.772684

Boje, D. M. (1995). Stories of the storytelling organization: A postmodern analysis of Disney as "Tamara-Land". *Academy of Management Journal*, *38*, 997-1035. https://doi.org/10.5465/256618

Boje, D.M. (2000). Nike corporate writing of academic, business, and cultural practices. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *4*(3), 507-516.

Brown, A. D., Stacey, P., & Nandhakumar, J. (2008). Making sense of sense making narratives. *Human Relations*, *61*(8), 1035-1062. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708094858

Cassell, C., & Bishop, V. (2019). Qualitative data analysis: Exploring themes, metaphors and stories. *European Management Review*, *16*, 195-207. https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12176

Cassell, C., & Symon, G. (2006). Taking qualitative methods in organization and management research seriously. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, *1*(1), 4-12. https://doi.org/10.1108/17465640610666606

Catino, M., & Patriotta, G. (2013). Learning from errors: Cognition, emotions and safety culture in the Italian Air Force. *Organization Studies*, *34*(4), 437-467. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840612467156

Christianson, M. K., Farkas, M. T., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Weick, K. E. (2009). Learning through rare events: Significant interruptions at the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum. *Organization Science*, *20*, 846-860. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1080.0389

Clark, E., & Geppert, M. (2011). Subsidiary integration as identity construction and institution building: A political sensemaking approach. *Journal of Management Studies*, *48*(2), 395-416. https://10.1111/j.1467-6486.2010.00963.x

Colville, I., Brown, A. D., & Pye, A. (2012). Simplexity: Sensemaking, organizing and storytelling for our time. *Human Relations*, *65*, 5-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726711425617

Colville, I., Waterman, R., & Weick, K.-E. (1999). Organizing and the search for excellence: Making sense of the times in theory and practice. *Organization*, *6*, 129-148. https://doi.org/10.1177/135050849961006

Cornelissen, J. P. (2005). Beyond compare: Metaphor in organization theory. *Academy of Management Review*, 30, 751-764.

Cornelissen, J. (2012). Sensemaking under pressure: The influence of professional roles and social accountability on the creation of sense. *Organization Science*, *23*, 118-137. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0640

Cornelissen, J., & Kafouros, M. (2008). The emergent organization: Primary and complex metaphors in theorizing about organizations. *Organization Studies*, *19*(7), 957-978. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840608090533

Cornelissen, J. P., Oswick, C., Christensen, L. T., & Phillips, N. (2008). Metaphor in organizational research: Context, modalities and implications for research. *Organization Studies*, *29*(1), 7-22. https://doi: 10.1177/0170840607086634

Coupland, C., & Brown, A. D. (2004). Constructing organizational identities on the web: A case study of Royal Dutch/Shell. *Journal of Management Studies*, *41*(8), 1325-1347. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2004.00477.x

Coutu, D. L. (2003). Sense and reliability: A conversation with celebrated psychologist Karl E. Weick. *Harvard Business Review*, *81*(4), 84-90.

Czarniawska-Jeorges, B. (1994). Narratives of individual and organizational identities. In S. Deetz (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook* (pp. 193-221). Sage. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1994.11678884

Davidson, W. B., & Cotter, P. R. (1991). The relationship between sense of community and subjective well-being: A first look. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *19*(3), 246-253. https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(199107)19:3<246::AID-JCOP2290190308>3.0.CO;2-L

Drazin, R., Glynn, M. A., & Kazanjian, R. K. (1999). Multilevel theorizing about creativity in organizations: A sensemaking perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, *24*, 286-307. https://doi.org/10.2307/259083

Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as structure and process* (pp. 258-284). Sage.

Fairhurst, G., & Putnam, L. (2004). Organizations as discursive constructions. *Communication Theory*, *14*(1), 5-26. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2004.tb00301.x

Gabriel, Y. (2000). *Storytelling in organizations. Facts, fictions and fantasies*. Oxford University Press. https://doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198290957.001.0001

Gerritsen, L. (2006). *Metaphors of the organization: Discourse in public and private worlds* [Doctoral Dissertation, Tilburg University].
http://adaptknowledge.com/wp-content/uploads/rapidintake/PI_CL/media/LGerritsenDissert.pdf.

Gioia, D. A., Schulz, M., & Corley, K. (2000). Organizational identity, image and adaptive instability. *Academy of Management Review*, *25*(1), 63-81. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2000.2791603

Gioia, D. A., & Thomas, J. B. (1996). Institutional identity, image, and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *41*(3), 370-403.

Giroux, H. A. (1993). *Living dangerously: Multiculturalism and the politics of difference*. Peter Lang.

Greenwood, D. J., Whyte, W. F., & Harkavy, I. (1992). Participatory action research as a process and as a goal. *Human Relations*, *46*(2), 175-192. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872679304600203

Gummesson, E. (2000). *Qualitative Methods in Management Research* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Gummesson, E., (2006). Qualitative research in management: addressing complexity, context and persona. *Management Decision*, *44*(2), 167-179. https://doi.org/10.1108/00251740610650175

Hernes, T., & Maitlis, S. (Eds.). (2010). *Process, sensemaking & organizing*. Oxford University Press.

Hill, R. C., & Levenhagen, M. (1995). Metaphors and mental models: Sensemaking and sensegiving in innovative and entrepreneurial. *Activities. Journal of Management*, *26*, 1057-1074. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639502100603

Hodgkinson, G. P., & Healey, M. P. (2008). Cognition in organizations. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *59*, 387-417. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.59.103006.093612

Holt, R., & Sandberg, J. (2011). Phenomenology and organization theory. In H. Tsoukas & R. Chia (Eds.), *Philosophy and Organization Theory (*Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Vol. 32, pp. 215-249). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Inns, D. (2002). Metaphor in the literature on organizational analysis: A preliminary taxonomy and a glimpse at the humanities-based perspective. *Organization*, *9*(2), 305-330. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508402009002908

Kristiansen, M., & Bloch-Poulsen, J. (2018). *Inddragelse i Forandringsprocesser: Aktionsforskning i organisationer* [Involvement in Change Processes: Action research in organizations]. Aalborg Universitetsforlag.

Langley, A., Smallman, C., Tsoukas, H., & Van de Ven, A. (2013). Process studies of change in organization and management: Unveiling temporality, activity, and flow. *Academy of Management Journal*, *56*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.4001

Maitlis, S., & Christianson, M. (2014). Sensemaking in organizations: Taking stock and moving forward. *The Academy of Management Annals*, *8*(1) 57-125. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2014.873177

Manuti, A., Traversa, R., & Mininni, G. (2012). The dynamics of sense making: A diatextual approach to the intersubjectivity of discourse. *Text & Talk*, *32*(1), 39-46. https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2012-0003

McIntyre, A. (2008). *Participatory action research*. Sage.

Miner, J. B. (2003). The rated importance, scientific validity, and practical usefulness of organizational behavior theories: A quantitative review. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, *2*, 250-268. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2003.10932132

Mininni, G. (1992). *Diatesti. Per una psicosemiotica del discorso sociale* [Diatexts. For a psycho-semiotic approach to social discourses]. Liguori.

Mininni, G., & Manuti, A. (2017). A rose is more than a rose … the diatextual constitution of subjects and objects. *Text & Talk*, *37*(2), 243-263. https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2017-0005

Mininni, G., Manuti, A., Scardigno, R., & Rubino, R. (2014). Old roots, new branches: The shoots of diatextual analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *11*(4), 384-399. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.925996

Monin, P., Noorderhaven, N., Vaara, E., & Kroon, D. (2013). Giving sense to and making sense of justice in postmerger integration. *Academy of Management Journal*, *56*(1), 256-284. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0727

Morgan, G. (1980). Paradigms, metaphors and puzzle-solving in organization theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *25*, 605-622. https://doi.org/10.2307/2392283

Morgan, G. (1986). *Images of organizations*. Sage.

Morgan, G. (1993*). Imaginization: The art of creative management*. Sage.

Morgan, G. (1998). *Images of Organization: The Executive Edition*. Berrett- Koehler.

Morgan, G. (2006). *Images of Organization* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Morgan, G. (2011). Reflections on images of organization and its implications for organization and environment. *Organization & Environment*, *24*(4), 459-478. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026611434274

Morgan, G. (2016). Commentary: Beyond Morgan's eight metaphors. *Human Relations*, *69*(4), 1029-1042. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715624497

Omoto, A. M., & Malsch, A. M. (2005). Psychological sense of community: Conceptual issues and connections to volunteerism-related activism. In A. M. Omoto (Ed.), *The Claremont symposium on applied social psychology. Processes of community change and social action* (pp. 83-103). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Örtenblad, A., Putnam, L., & Trehan, K. (2016). Beyond Morgan's eight metaphors: Adding to and developing organization theory. *Human Relations*, *69*(4), 875-889.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715623999

Oswick, C., Fleming, P., & Hanlon, G. (2011). From borrowing to blending: Rethinking the processes of organizational theory building. *Academy of Management Review*, *36*, 318-337.
https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.0155

Oswick, C., Keenoy, T., & Grant, D. (2002). Metaphor and analogical reasoning in organization theory: Beyond orthodoxy. *Academy of Management Review*, *27*, 294-303.
https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2002.6588045

Peterson, N. A., Speer, P. W., & McMillan, D. W. (2008). Validation of a brief sense of community scale: Confirmation of the principal theory of sense of community. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *36*(1), 61-73. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20217

Porath, C., & Spreitzer, G. (2012). Creating Sustainable Performances. *Harvard Business Review*, *90*(1-2), 92-99.

Porath, C., Spreitzer, G., Gibson, C., & Garnett, F. (2011). Thriving at work: Toward its measurement, construct validation, and theoretical refinement. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *33*(2), 250-275. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.756

Prezza, M., Pacilli, M. G., Barbaranelli, C., & Zampatti, E. (2009). The MTSOCS: A multidimensional sense of community scale for local communities. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *37*, 305-326.
https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20297

Read, J. G., & Bartkowski, J. P. (2000). To veil or not to veil? A case study of identity negotiation among Muslim women in Austin, Texas. *Gender & Society*, *14*(3), 395-417.
https://doi.org/10.1177/089124300014003003

Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2008). *The SAGE handbook of action research*. Sage.

Rerup, C., & Feldman, M. (2011). Routines as a source of change in organizational schemata: The role of trial-and-error learning. *Academy of Management Journal*, *54*(3), 577-610.
https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.61968107

Rudolph, J., Morrison, J., & Carroll, J. (2009). The dynamics of action-oriented problem solving: Linking interpretation and choice. *Academy of Management Review*, *34*(4), 733-756.
https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.34.4.zok733

Schein, E. H. (1985). *Organisational Culture and Leadership*. Jossey Bass.

Sonenshein, S. (2007). The role of construction, intuition, and justification in responding to ethical issues at work: The sensemaking-intuition model. *Academy of Management*, *32*(4), 1022-1040.
https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2007.26585677

Sonenshein, S., Dutton, J. E., Grant, A. M., Spreitzer, G. M., & Sutcliffe, K. M. (2013). Growing at work: Employees' interpretations of progressive self-change in organizations. *Organization Science*, *24*(2), 552-570. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1120.0749

Spreitzer, G., Porath, C., & Gibson, C. (2012). Toward human sustainability: How to enable more thriving at work. *Organizational Dynamics*, *41*, 155-162. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2012.01.009

Taris, T., Capel, S., & Feij, J. (2006). Great expectations – and what comes of it: The effects of unmet expectations on work motivation and outcomes among newcomers. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, *14*(3), 256-268. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2389.2006.00350.x

Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. J. (2000). *The emergent organization*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2002). On organizational becoming: Rethinking organizational change. *Organization Science*, *13*, 567-582. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.13.5.567.7810

Van Engen, R. (2008). Metaphor: A multifaceted literary device used by Morgan and Weick to describe organizations. *Emerging Leadership Journeys*, *1*(1), 39-51.

Weick, K. E. (1979). *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (2nd ed.). Addison-Wesley.

Weick, K. E. (1988). Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations. *Journal of Management Studies*, *25*(4), 305-317. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.1988.tb00039.x

Weick, K. E. (1989). Theory construction as disciplined imagination. T*he Academy of Management Review*, *14*(4), 516-531. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1989.4308376

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Sage.

Weick, K. E. (2001). *Making Sense of the Organization*. Blackwell.
Weick, K. E. (2005). Organizing and failures of imagination. *International Public Management Journal*, *8*(3), 425-438. https://doi.org/10.1080/10967490500439883
Weick, K. E. (2009). *Making sense of the organization: The impermanent organization*. Wiley.
Weick, K. E. (2012). Organized sensemaking: A commentary on processes of interpretive work. *Human Relations*, *65*, 141-153. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726711424235
Weick, K. E., & Bougon, M. G. (1986). Organization s as cognitive maps: Charting ways to success and failure. In H. Sims, D. A. Gioia & Associates (Eds.), *The thinking organization* (pp. 102-135). Jossey-Bass.
Weick, K. E., & Sutcliffe, K. M. (2001). *Managing the unexpected: Resilient performance in an age of uncertainty*. Jossey-Bass.
Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science*, *16*(4), 409-421. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1050.0133
Whiteman, G., & Cooper, W. (2011). Ecological sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal*, *54*(5), 1265-1282. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2008.0843