Metaphors in operations management theory building

Author Details

Cyril Foropon
Supply Chain Management, I.H. Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Ron McLachlin
Supply Chain Management, I.H. Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Corresponding Author: Cyril Foropon
Corresponding Author's Email: foropon@cc.umanitoba.ca

Biographical Details:

Cyril Foropon is an Assistant Professor of Operations Management at the I.H. Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba. He earned his Ph.D. in Management at HEC Paris. His research interests are in quality management. In particular, he is interested in quality management practices within ISO 9000 operations, process improvement initiatives within healthcare provider organisations, the quality of service provided by higher education institutions, and the use of metaphors in operations management theory building.

Ron McLachlin is an Associate Professor of Operations Management at the I.H. Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba. He is currently the Acting Director of the Transport Institute and Acting Head of the Department of Supply Chain Management. He earned his Ph.D. in Operations Management at the University of Western Ontario. He is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board for the Journal of Humanitarian Logistics and Supply Chain Management, an Associate Editor and the Canadian Regional Editor for Operations Management Research, and was an Associate Editor (1998 to 2008) for the Journal of Operations Management. His research interests are in operations strategy and supply chain strategy. His recent research addresses humanitarian supply chain management, with an emphasis on preparedness for responding to disasters.

Structured Abstract:

Purpose – This paper aims to illustrate the extent to which metaphors help to understand operations management research topics.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based upon a review of the role of metaphors in organisational theory building and the use of metaphors in operations management theory building.

Findings – Metaphors can contribute to an understanding of the situations being addressed by operations management researchers, and can play a role in the preliminary steps of the development of a theory.

Originality/value – This paper develops a metaphorical approach to ISO 9000 implementation.

Keywords: Metaphors, organisational theory building, operations management, ISO 9000 implementation

Article Classification: Conceptual paper
Metaphors in operations management theory building

Introduction
The impact of ISO 9000 standards on organisational performance remains controversial and researchers continue to debate the topic (Martínez-Costa et al., 2009; Sampaio et al., 2009). Most studies found a positive relationship between ISO 9000 certification and organisational performance (Adam et al., 1997; Boulter and Bendell, 2002; Curkovic and Pagell, 1999; Dick et al., 2002; Gupta, 2000; Lee et al., 2001; Maani et al., 1994; Mann and Kehoe, 1994; Ozgur et al., 2002; Quazi and Jacobs, 2004; Rao et al., 1997; Romano, 2000; Singels et al., 2001; Tari and Molina, 2002; Tari and Sabater, 2004; Terziiovski and Samson, 1999; Terziiovski et al., 2003; Wisner and Eakins, 1994; Withers and Ebrahimpour, 2000, 2001), while several others did not find evidence to support such a relationship (Conca et al., 2004; Lima et al., 2000; Quazi et al., 2002; Simmons and White, 1999; Terziiovski et al., 1997). Also, a number of moderating factors were also noted in some studies, such as motives (Gotzamani and Tsiotras, 2002, Poksinska et al., 2006; Zaramdini, 2007), employee involvement (Elmuti and Kathwalla, 1997; Jasni and Hazman, 2003), and the frequency of practice (Naveh and Marcus, 2005). Our study identified a further moderating factor, namely, the extent to – and the way in which – managers apply certain quality management principles while implementing ISO 9000 systems. This moderating factor may be better understood by considering various metaphors of organisations that managers and other stakeholders may naturally employ.

Metaphors are core components of cognitive processing which consists of the superimposition of a source domain onto a target domain (Cornelissen, 2005; Morgan, 1983). For example, the drum-rope-buffer metaphors help to understand the implementation of the Theory of Constraints in the operations management field, e.g. in order to maximise the system’s output, planning and scheduling activities are focused on exploiting the drum (or constraint), protecting it against disruption through the use of a buffer (or material release duration), and synchronising all other activities to the drum’s activity through a mechanism that is akin to a rope (or release timing). The use of metaphors is increasingly recognised for their creative potential in organisational theory building. Boxenbaum and Rouleau (2011, p. 274) noted that “organizational theories are composed of various building blocks, the most important being empirical material, theoretical concepts, and metaphors.”

In the next section, we review the use of metaphors in organisational theory building, followed by a section on metaphors used for operations management / supply chain management. Following, the third section addresses quality management principles and ISO 9000 implementation via various metaphors. This is followed by a concluding discussion.
Overall, metaphors play two key roles in organisational theory building. First, metaphors may be used as tools for understanding organisations, as they have an “explanatory impact” (Cornelissen and Kafouros, 2008a; Weick, 1989). Second, they may be used as tools for stimulating imagination (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and generating insights about organisations (Cornelissen and Kafouros, 2008a; Inns, 2002; Schon, 1993). They have a “generative impact” (Cornelissen and Kafouros, 2008a; Weick, 1989). For example, Boxenbaum and Rouleau (2011, p. 274) indicated that “the imagery conveyed by metaphors stimulates theorists to generate interesting new propositions about organisational life (Bacharach, 1989) that can later be sharpened into theory formulations and testable hypotheses (Cornelissen, 2005; Morgan, 1983; Soyland, 1994; Weick, 1989). By being idea generators (Cornelissen, 2005; Morgan, 2006; Schon, 1993; Weick, 1989), metaphors can contribute to a deep understanding of the situations being addressed by researchers, and can play a role in the preliminary steps of the development of a theory. In this regard, Morgan (2006) indicated that “the use of metaphor implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing that pervade how we understand our world generally. For example, research in a wide variety of fields has demonstrated that the use of metaphor exerts a formative influence on science, on our language, and on how we think” (Morgan, 2006, p. 4). Accordingly, the metaphorical approach is based on the following interpretation scheme: ways of seeing an organisation (images of organisation) lead to ways of thinking about its functioning (metaphors) which leads to ways of managing within it. A narrow link exists between image and action. Indeed, as Morgan (2006) indicated, “the metaphors and ideas through which we “see” and “read” situations influence how we act. (…). Favoured metaphors tend to trap us in specific modes of action” (Morgan, 2006, p. 340), and the author warned researchers that each metaphor creates partial insights with their own pattern of strengths and limitations.

The systematic use of different metaphors (Morgan, 2006), also called “disciplined imagination” (Weick, 1989), is a precursor to new theory formulations. In this regard, Boxenbaum and Rouleau (2011) stated:

“The partial and ambiguous applicability [of metaphors] to the object of study stimulates theory builders to be creative in their interpretations and to generate new insights. (…) We stressed the assembly of multiple metaphors as an expression of theoretical creativity. This creative component must be carefully integrated with theoretical concepts and empirical material to form a valuable new theory” (Boxenbaum and Rouleau, 2011, p. 291).

In the management literature, several studies illustrate the extent to which embodied metaphors help to understand organisations (Heracleous and Jacobs, 2008), such as the use of culture as a metaphor to understand aspects of organisational life (Smircich, 1983), or more recently the dominance of distance as a metaphor to understand the impact of culture in international management research (Shenkar et al., 2008). In the following section, we review the use of metaphors in the operations and supply chain management (OM/SCM) literature to illustrate the extent to which metaphors help to enhance the understanding of OM/SCM topics.

**The use of metaphors in OM/SCM theory building**

Meaningful metaphors have been used in OM/SCM theory building, such as the drum-rope-buffer metaphors used by Goldratt and Cox (1984) and Goldratt and Fox (1986) to...
describe the implementation of the theory of constraints, or the chain-pipeline-network-value stream metaphors used by Saunders (1995) to analyse the role of such metaphors in forming perceptions of the task of purchasing and supply management.

To illustrate the extent to which embodied metaphors help to understand OM/SCM research topics, we conducted a literature review in four major OM/SCM academic journals (Journal of Operations Management, Production and Operations Management, International Journal of Operations & Production Management, and Journal of Supply Chain Management) identifying major publications that used metaphors in OM/SCM theory building since 1998.

In the OM literature, a large variety of metaphors have been used for theory building purposes. These include the medical metaphor for professional service interactions (Lewis and Brown, 2011), the athletic metaphor for the relationship between lean and agile (Browning and Heath, 2009), the bottleneck metaphor for the interaction among motivation, opportunity, and ability driving knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees (Siemsen et al., 2008), the destination metaphor for experiential service strategies (Voss et al., 2008), the metaphor “a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step” helping to understand the differences between mission and project target in new product development (Rauniar et al., 2008), the landscape metaphor for the integration of sustainable development in the supply chain (Matos and Hall, 2007), the drum-buffer-rope metaphors for planning and control (Rahman, 1998; Watson et al., 2007), the computer programming metaphor for learning and knowledge creation in quality management (Choo et al., 2007), the theatre metaphor for new service design and service delivery excellence (Stuart and Tax, 2004), the theatre metaphor for the training process of rental sales agents (New, 2003), the fitness landscape metaphor for manufacturing competitiveness and strategy (McCarthy, 2004), and the anorexia metaphor for the process of lean implementation (Radnor and Boaden, 2004).

Likewise, in the SCM literature, various metaphors were used in several studies for theory building purposes. These included the network metaphor for the relationship between supply network complexity and the traceability of adverse events (Skilton and Robinson, 2009), the natural ecosystems metaphor for the sustainability of industrial symbiosis within supply chains (Bansal and McKnight, 2009), the natural selection metaphor for sources and consequences of bargaining power in supply chains (Crook and Combs, 2007), the value stream metaphor for the meaning of value in trading relationships (Ramsay, 2005), the chain metaphor for the field of supply chain management (Burgess et al., 2006), the chain metaphor for supply chain strategies (Frohlich and Westbrook, 2001), the metaphor of “light shining through mineral” for transparency in supply relationships (Lamming et al., 2001), and the head-pack-tail cycling metaphor for the relationship between supply chain collaboration and performance improvement (Vereecke and Muylle, 2006). Examples of the use of a few of these metaphors in OM/SCM theory building are summarised in Table I.

**Table I**
Examples of metaphors used in OM/SCM theory building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publications</th>
<th>Metaphors</th>
<th>Metaphors’ contribution in OM/SCM theory building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lewis and Brown (2011)</td>
<td>Medical metaphor</td>
<td>This study includes the medical metaphor for understanding professional service interactions as a process of diagnosis, inference and treatment. Diagnosis takes information in, treatment brings instructions back out but critically, inference is the reflective process that professional staff engage in when the connection between diagnosis and treatment is obscure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browning and Heath (2009)</td>
<td>Athlete metaphor</td>
<td>This study includes the athletic metaphor for understanding the relationship between lean and agile. Value is maximised by the most competitive athletes, not just the ones that weight the least. Greater uncertainty and instability will increase the proportion of “just in case” and “sense and respond” tasks and resources enabling agility in a value-maximising process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuart and Tax (2004)</td>
<td>Theatre metaphor</td>
<td>This study includes the theatrical metaphor for understanding new service design and service delivery excellence. Since many services rely on attributes of theatre-like performance, this study examines the process by which theatre plays are chosen, designed and developed with the objective of better understanding how performance excellence is achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsay (2005)</td>
<td>Value stream metaphor</td>
<td>In the purchasing field, the value stream metaphor creates an image of some thing or substance flowing from suppliers to customers, with buying or selling companies along the stream trying to hold on some of it as it flowed by on its way towards ultimate consumers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burgess et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Chain metaphor</td>
<td>This study presents the chain metaphor as the dominant metaphor for understanding the field of supply chain management. The network metaphor is suggested as a more realistic representation of the complexities inherent in supply chain management.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quality management principles and ISO 9000 implementation: a metaphorical perspective**

With a view to developing a comprehensive theoretical approach to the application of quality management principles through ISO 9000 implementation, this section is divided into two parts: (a) presentation of the organismic image of organisations emerging from the TQM literature, as well as the political and mechanistic images of organisations emerging from our study, (b) use of related metaphors in interpreting quality management practices through ISO 9000 implementation.

**Three images of ISO 9000 candidate operations**

This section illustrates how the specialised literature tends to view an ISO 9000 candidate organisation as an organism, how managers with an ISO 9000 mandate tend to view a candidate organisation as a political system, and how other ISO 9000 stakeholders tend to view it as a machine.

Viewing organisations as organisms is a prevalent image used by researchers in the TQM field. Indeed, Spencer (1994) in an extensive examination of the field, indicated that:

Although quality experts emphasized different aspects of the TQM methodology, its major components can be summarized as follows: Goal: TQM establishes quality enhancement as a dominant priority and one that is vital for long-term
effectiveness and survival” (p. 446). (...). The contingent approach to TQM is rooted in the organismic model adapted from von Bertalanffy’s (1950) work on general systems theory in biology. In this case, the organization is conceptualized as an organism whose purpose, survival, can only be ensured by growth. Contraction is believed to be synonymous with deterioration, decay, and eventual death” (p. 455).

Moreover, quality gurus refer implicitly to the image of an organism (Deming, 1986; Eisman, 1992; Feigenbaum, 1951, 1961; Garvin, 1984; Juran, 1951; Reeves and Bednar, 1994; Shewhart, 1931) by considering the satisfaction of external customers as the ultimate goal for quality-driven organizations. Indeed, an effective quality-driven organisation will likely keep its satisfied external customer base and will attract new ones, leading to growth, whereas an ineffective quality-driven organisation will lose unsatisfied customers and ultimately will disappear. In other words, the existence and satisfaction of external customers is a necessary condition to an organisation’s existence, a thesis defended by Drucker (1954) and Parsons (1960). By considering the growth, the survival, and the disappearance of an organisation, quality experts rather see an organisation as an organism.

Seeing ISO 9000 candidate operations as political systems is a dominant image used by managers with an ISO 9000 mandate, based on our research studying the application of quality management principles within two ISO 9000 candidate manufacturing operations. These managers tended to apply quality management principles in an unexpected way during implementation, in which they tended to see the effort to become certified as a political system. There were a number of indicators of this. First, managers tended to disclose the minimum information required by the quality standards in their procedures. Second, they tended to retain key information during the implementation process. Third, they felt that the system obliged them to contribute to the implementation process. Fourth, they tended to update their quality procedures in step with those implementation milestones that they cared about. Last but not least, managers used ill-advisedly their quality procedures during implementation, such as using procedures extensively during external audits with the intention of making a good impression on external auditors. Overall, by disclosing the minimum information within quality procedures, by feeling obliged to contribute to the ISO implementation process, and by updating quality procedures only at key milestones they care about, managers with an ISO 9000 mandate tend to see an ISO 9000 candidate organisation as a political system.

In contrast, the notion of ISO 9000 operations as machines is a dominant image used by stakeholders surrounding managers with an ISO 9000 mandate. ISO 9000 implementation comprises several milestones that are the responsibility of stakeholders (e.g., official audits and external auditors, quality review meetings and plant managers, internal audits and internal auditors). Study results showed that stakeholders surrounding managers do not communicate effectively concerning the ISO 9000 implementation process. Indeed, these ISO 9000 stakeholders insisted only that milestones be met (e.g., for internal audits, external audits, and quality review meetings), gaps between quality management practices and related procedures be identified before the occurrence of milestones, corrective action plans be developed for such milestones. Overall, they focused on demonstrating the effectiveness of ISO 9000 quality systems at only key milestones. The frequency and nature of information communicated by these
stakeholders led us to conclude that they see an ISO 9000 candidate organisations as machines.

*Use of related metaphors in interpreting quality management practices through ISO 9000 implementation*

The use of organismic, political, and mechanistic metaphors enhances our ability to perceive, understand, and interpret key aspects influencing the application of quality management principles through ISO 9000 implementation. What is at stake within ISO 9000 candidate organisations? What does the process of implementation consist of? What is the purpose of the formalisation activity of quality management practices? What does a quality management procedure represent?

The metaphorical approach in this paper relies on the following interpretation scheme: ways of seeing an ISO 9000 candidate organisation (images of organisation) lead to ways of thinking about its functioning (metaphors), which lead to ways of managing (appropriate application of quality management principles) within ISO 9000 candidate organisations. Quality experts, managers with an ISO 9000 mandate, and other stakeholders have different ways of viewing ISO 9000 candidate organisations. This leads them to think differently about the functioning of such organisations. From the previous section, quality experts tend to think via the organismic metaphor, whereas managers with an ISO 9000 mandate seem to use the political metaphor, and other stakeholders tend to utilise a mechanistic metaphor. In this section, the generative impact of these three metaphors (Boxenbaum and Rouleau, 2011; Cornelissen and Kafouros, 2008a; Weick, 1989) emphasises successively the organismic, political and mechanistic ways of thinking, which illustrates fundamental points of view of quality experts, managers with an ISO 9000 mandate and other stakeholders. This means different conceptions of the appropriate application of quality management principles for ISO 9000 implementation, increasing the gaps between their respective interests. Table II synthesises the organismic, political, and mechanistic ways of thinking about key aspects impacting quality management practices through ISO 9000 implementation, namely, stake of ISO 9000 certification, process of ISO 9000 implementation, process of writing management practices within procedures, and quality management procedures.

**Table II**

Understanding the application of quality management principles through ISO 9000 implementation: a metaphorical perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISO 9000 candidate organisation</th>
<th>TQM literature and the organismic metaphor</th>
<th>Managers with an ISO 9000 mandate and the political metaphor</th>
<th>Other ISO 9000 stakeholders and the mechanistic metaphor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stake of ISO 9000 certification</td>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
TQM literature and the organismic metaphor

Organismic imagery emphasises the understanding of relations between an organisation and its environment and focuses on systematic attention to the environmental “needs” that must be satisfied if the organisation is to survive (Morgan, 2006). This represents a primary preoccupation for management, as the organisation’s future is at stake. Specialised literature, based on the insights of the organismic metaphor, finds itself focusing on the demanding environment of ISO 9000 candidate organisations (e.g., external customers). The organisation’s future (growth, survival, disappearance) depends on the level of satisfaction experienced by external customers. ISO 9000 candidate organisations that are unable to provide the required levels of satisfaction face the risk of being out of business. In this regard, Anderson et al. (1999) indicated the pressure from external customers on suppliers is a key reason explaining the success of ISO 9000 initiatives.

The organismic way of thinking leads to reliability being considered the goal of ISO 9000 certification. Bell and Lilien (1994) indicated that reliability appears to be the key characteristic of quality assurance and Sussland (1995) stated that ISO 9000 certification has to demonstrate the reliability of an organisation. It reinforces the purpose of quality assurance, namely, to avoid making mistakes (Doucet, 1991) and assuring reliable transformation processes to survive.

Also, the organismic way of thinking leads to viewing the process of implementation being similar to an electrocardiogram. That is, it is like a stimulus-response biological scheme, within which messages (stimuli) from ISO 9000 stakeholders influence the managers’ application of quality management principles (responses). Frequent, clear and strong stimuli from ISO 9000 stakeholders are expected to lead to the subsequent appropriate responses from managers. That is, managers participate on a voluntary basis during the implementation process (application of the customer focus principle), managers update their quality procedures as soon as possible during the implementation process (application of the continual improvement principle), and managers use their procedures as often as necessary for training purposes for instance (application of the systems approach principle). The updating activity of procedures is expected to be independent of the implementation milestones (i.e., internal and external audits). When a gap occurs between quality management practices and associated procedures, it is assumed that concerned managers modify procedures as soon as possible.

Moreover, the organismic way of thinking leads to considering the process of recording management practices to be a capitalisation of know-how. Facing a demanding environment characterised by unexpected circumstances, managers with an ISO 9000
mandate deal with potential flows of errors. As the recurrence of existing errors does not belong to the TQM philosophy, it is assumed that managers will immediately apply appropriate corrective procedures upon the first occurrence of an error. By systematically formalising and updating procedures, managers would assure reliable transformation processes. Furthermore, under the organismic way of thinking, quality procedures are treated as decision-making tools, helping managers to take appropriate action.

Managers with an ISO 9000 mandate and the political metaphor

The political metaphor focuses on different sets of interests, conflicts, and power plays that shape organisational activities. It encourages seeing organisations as loose networks of people with divergent interests who gather together for the sake of expediency (e.g., making a living, developing a career, or pursuing a desired goal or objective), and organisational politics arise when people think differently and want to act differently (Morgan, 2006). In this section, the unexpected application of quality management principles by managers through ISO 9000 implementation is interpreted using Crozier and Friedberg’s (1977) analysis of political activity. They see organisations as systems of political activity where collective action is a social construct that relies on a structure assimilated to a power system. Their theoretical framework emphasises that power comes from relationships established within such structures of collective action and that actual practices are choices among a set of possible actions. Organisational members are aware of such choices and make decisions based on their individual interests rather than their organisation’s general interests.

Also, the political imagery adopted by managers with an ISO 9000 mandate leads them to treat their organisations as political systems, emphasising power as the stake in ISO 9000 certification. By focusing on potential conflicts between the organisation’s general interests and managers’ personal interests, this view leads to possible inappropriate applications of quality management principles. For example, although managers are expected to formalise their quality management practices within procedures, they consider such formalisation to be primarily in the organisation’s general interests. On one hand, stakeholders will say to "write what you do in your procedures and do what you write in your procedures!" On the other hand, managers do not consider such formalised procedures to make life easier for them.

Furthermore, this leads to a loss of power though a depossession of know-how. Managers feel obliged to disclose their know-how within written procedures and thus losing it as it becomes public within their organisation. Thus, the managers’ participation tends to be reduced to a minimal level during the process of implementation. They tend to retain critical information partly through fear of becoming easily substitutable by less experienced managers who would utilise any available written quality management procedures.

Moreover, this political view leads managers to consider the process of implementation to be a collective action structure of alienation. That is, the process of ISO 9000 implementation appears to be an organisational constraint that narrows managers’ scope of possible quality management practices. In this regard, one of the strongest predictors of work alienation for managers is the inability of work to allow for self-expression (Nair and Vohra, 2010).
Other ISO 9000 stakeholders and the mechanistic metaphor

Thinking of an organisation as a machine tends to expect the organisations to operate as routinised, efficient, and reliable machines and to expect the same of organisational members, including their obedience under any circumstance (Morgan, 2006). The mechanistic metaphor presupposes the existence of defined roles within organisations, focuses our attention on effective organisations relying on a set of written rules and specifications. It emphasises key management notions such as “set goals and objectives and go for them; organise rationally, efficiently, and clearly; specify every detail so that everyone will be sure of the jobs that they have to perform; plan, organise, and control, control, control” (Morgan, 2006, p. 26).

This mechanistic viewpoint leads stakeholders to consider the effectiveness of an organisation’s functioning as the purpose of ISO 9000 certification. In this regard, the completion of auditing activities (e.g., internal audits, external audits, quality review committees) at scheduled due dates as well as results at scheduled due dates (e.g., corrective actions from action plans, ISO 9000 certificates) appear to be the key activities.

The process of ISO 9000 implementation then tends to be a sequence of checkpoints, similar to examinations to pass. Stakeholders (i.e., plant managers, quality managers) will tend to communicate systematically with managers with an ISO 9000 mandate a few weeks before each “D-day” (e.g., external audits) and insist on the importance of being prepared for upcoming checkpoints. At the conclusion of external audits, both oral congratulations from external auditors and written congratulations from plant managers reinforce the idea of having passed exams.

The mechanistic way of thinking emphasises stakeholders’ routinised practices during the ISO 9000 implementation process, who then aim to demonstrate the effectiveness of their procedures to external auditors through routinised practices. Also, with this mechanistic viewpoint, managers with an ISO 9000 mandate will disclose their know-how within quality procedures without any restriction.

Concluding discussion

ISO 9000 certification aims to assure reliable transformation processes within organisations (Bell and Lilien, 1994; Buttle, 1997) in order to conform and exceed external customers’ expectations (Steeples, 1992). Made of several types of audits (ISO, 2005) representing milestones (e.g., in-house audits, initial official audit, and follow-up official audits), the process of implementation involves different stakeholders (e.g., managers, employees, ISO 9000 champion, internal and external auditors) who are expected to apply a set of quality management principles. This conceptual paper aimed at better understanding the application of quality management principles through ISO 9000 implementation by providing a theoretical framework built on legitimate metaphors to understand such phenomenon. Accordingly, we developed a comprehensive theoretical approach by adopting a metaphorical perspective which emerges from the TQM literature and a five-year-theory-driven empirical research studying the application of three quality management principles, namely: customer focus, systems approach, and continual improvement. TQM literature, managers with an ISO 9000 mandate and other stakeholders rather see ISO 9000 candidate organisations through three distinctive images - organism, political system, and machine - leading them to conceive differently the
appropriate application of quality management principles during the process of ISO 9000 implementation. First, the organismic way of thinking prevalent in the TQM literature emphasises on reliable transformation processes as a necessary condition for organisations’ survival, and focuses on a fit between quality management practices and related procedures on a continual basis. Second, the mechanistic way of thinking points out the effectiveness of organisational functioning, and looks for a fit between actual practices and related procedures at key milestones. Third, the political way of thinking points out power as the stake of ISO 9000 certification, and focuses on disclosing the non-critical know-how of quality management practices within quality procedures. In this paper, the generative impact of the organismic, political, and mechanistic metaphors generates propositions about the organisational life within ISO 9000 candidate organisations that can be formalised into testable hypotheses (Cornelissen, 2005; Morgan, 1983; Soyland, 1994; Weick, 1989).

This paper, of course, has a number of limitations. The comprehensive theoretical approach developed in this paper relies on the use of one metaphor emerging from the TQM literature (e.g., organismic metaphor) and two metaphors emerging from our theory-driven ISO 9000 study (e.g., political metaphor, mechanistic metaphor). Other metaphors are likely to enhance the understanding of the application of quality management principles through ISO 9000 implementation, and further research is suggested concerning the identification and use of meaningful metaphors in interpreting such phenomenon. As Morgan (2006) mentioned in his postscript to researchers, “in reading our organisations it is important to place ourselves in an active mode. We are not passive observers interpreting and responding to the events and situations that we see. We play an important role in shaping those interpretations, and thus the way events unfold” (Morgan, 2006, p. 365).

References


