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## Organizational Metaphor Perceptions of Primary School Administrators and Teachers Towards the Institution They Work For

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate primary school administrators' and teachers' organizational metaphorical perceptions of the institutions they work in and whether metaphorical perceptions differ in their professional titles. For this aim, totally 311 people, primary school administrators and teachers, from 18 primary schools in the central district of Kastamonu were applied "The Organizational Metaphor Scale" developed by the researcher. The data gathered were entered in the computer and analyzed via SPSS (12) package program. In the study, it was concluded that school administrators and teachers generally express the institution they work in with more of a metaphor of organism.

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*Keywords:* Organizational metaphor, teacher, primary school, school administrator, perception of metaphor

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### 1. Introduction

Metaphor in Turkish means simile, figure of speech and analogy. It is referred in Turkish language dictionary as a word used in a different context different from its real meaning as a result of a reference or analogy and which is used in a literary way to connote various meanings apart from its real meaning (TDK, 1969). The exact meaning of metaphor in Latin is "to transform from somewhere to another place" (Anderson, 2005). It is a conceptual framework that intertwines with a notion carrying and discovering a meaning (Waguespack, 2010). The researchers that analyze the use of language claim that there is no other way than using metaphor to grasp the meaning of a notion (Becerikli, 1999).

It is used in Greek as a concept through which very intricate concepts could be elucidated (Dur, 2006). To put in a different way, metaphor is the relationship between two conceptual structures. This very structure may refer to a domain, space, category or conception. Along with this, it is not totally correct to name all connections between two conceptual structures metaphoric. The recent cognitive linguistics theories and researches show that metaphor, which is commonly known as the analogy between two conceptual structures, is very inclusive (Steen, 2007) and metaphor is a means of perception (Arnett, 1999). That is, metaphors enable one to unveil how the concepts analyzed are perceived (Cerit, 2008). In addition to all of these definitions, metaphor is used to convey symbolical meanings in a cultural context and to make an analogy between a situation and an action, object, idea or a word (Palmer and Lundberg, 1995). Gareth Morgan (1998) approaches metaphor to meditate on an organization or a quality of an organization. As Morgan underlines in his study, there is a close connection between ideas and actions. Making these relationships to be understood is significant to make sense of how organizations formalize an issue, how different areas they can adapt it to and how they create new organization models (Thomas and Allen, 2006). Metaphors may play a constructive role for managers to internalize, comprehend the situations and act accordingly. Metaphors associated with literature are analyzed as machine, organization, brain, culture, politics and means of domination and the prison of souls. Organization oriented metaphors have been analyzed in the same context in this study and an example of metaphor is explained below.

**Organizations as Machines:** The understanding that organizations could be constructed mechanically occurred with the Enlightenment Period and the institutional background was carried out as to comprehend the organizations (Tsoukas and Knudsen, 2003, 160). Although the approach of organizations as machines that prioritize stylistic qualifications in productivity growth contributed to organization theory to a significant extent, it was exposed to serious criticisms for its thought of human beings as a part of the organizational system (Özdemir, 2008, 1). The traditional organization theory associated with machine-organization metaphor is basically constructed upon non-human qualities of the organization. Human factor is backgrounded. This theory, as mentioned before, considers the organization an entity without human beings that are seen as a gear of the machine. That is, traditional organization theorists focused on the organizational structure more and regarded the organization in terms of its performance and efficiency (Peker, 1995, 72). Traditional organization theories are linked with the machine metaphor.

**Organizations as organisms:** The problems of mechanical organization understanding resulted in many organization theorists shift their focus from mechanical approach to biological approach. Organization theory was transformed to a kind of biology in time and molecular cells, complicated organisms, the differences between species and ecology, relationships and individuals, groups, organizations, the populations of them (their branches), the dichotomies between their social ecology and the similarities of the relationships were given priority within this understanding. The organization theorists espousing such an approach came up with many new ideas about the comprehension of organization processes and the factors affecting their well-being (Morgan, 1998, 45). The resemblance of the organization to an organism takes place among these new ideas and such a comparison resorts to the connection between the organization and environment. Environment is the atmosphere where the organization exists. When the environment is convenient, the organization can live and provides the nearby environments with necessary sources to survive. The organization is surrounded by other organizations whereby it has to be in a constant give and take (Hicks, 1975, Akt; Başaran, 1984, 74). Hatch, (1997, Akt; Nayır, 2008, 20)), compares the organization to an alive organism and supports the idea that they are bound to their surrounding likewise. What distinguishes the organization from creatures is that while creatures furnish themselves with food and accommodation, organizations acquire information, money, worker and raw material from its surrounding. Organism metaphor puts forward that

different organizations require different wishes and reactions. Thus, there is no “a mere best” for them, which forms the basis of contingency theory and hails open system theory.

**Organizations as Brains:** The aim here is to be able to make a connection between brain process and working principal. Knowledge is defined as acknowledged believes (Nonaka, 1994, Akt: Tunç, 2010, 74). Knowledge is actualized in the brain of the recognizant and it carries the traces of the values, experiences, culture and learning of the individual. Knowledge can exist overtly in organizational structures as well as in values, acceptances and evaluations covertly. This definition points at the vantage of knowledge that is not simple but complicated, subjective and individual (Sallisve Jones, 2002, Akt: Tunç, 2010, 75). Information flow is vital for organizations to survive. The word cybernetics “kubarnetes” which means steersman in Greek is used to mean the processes of information flow necessary for the organization’s existence and maintenance of routine besides the thinking and feedback processes of the system. As for March and Simon (1958), what determines the practices of organizations is the information necessity which will explain, interpret and eliminate the differences between aims and accomplished. Simon and March, through taking mechanisms’ decision making approach into consideration, claim that the individuals in an organization make their decisions on the grounds of limited information during decision making and communication; therefore, they can analyze restricted alternatives and they are not exactly certain about the results (Akt: Morgan, 1998, 93). Organizations are associated with information processing system and learning organization approach.

**Cultural Organizations:** Organization culture is pertinent to the nature of organization identity (Whetten and Godfrey, 1998, Akt: Taşdan, 2010, 252). A positive and receptive organization culture stimulates creativity and provides satisfying results. An organization adopts creative behavior by means of affective coordination and integration and helps construct a balanced system that enables the organization operate effectively. Thus, organization culture represents a system based on mutual change and understanding which consolidates creativity within the organization and the framework of reciprocal admissions (Chang ve Chiang, 2007, Akt: Balay, 2010; 59). The organization is the place where mutual actions are carried out and it is important that the individuals share some common meanings and values (Schein, 1985, Akt: Şişman, 2007). Total quality management in organizations is related to culture metaphor.

**Organization as Political Systems:** Political issues like pecking order are certainly focused on while mentioning management in organizations. Management can take different shapes in organizations. While some are authoritative, some are democratic. Organizations could be labeled as political since it is required to manage different people in pursuit of different benefits. The ones who regard organizations as political systems consider them loose structures made of various people with different aims and interests rather than rational and integrated unities. In this respect, political point of view focuses on issues such as power/ rulership, benefit, disagreement, coalition, collective agreement and distribution of sources (Bolman and Deal, 1991, Akt: Şişman, 2007). Management of organizations (democratic/ autocratic) and organizational approaches are related to the disagreement management.

**Organizations as Prisons of Souls:** Individuals in contemporary work life complain about their position since they suffer from the suffocating and boring atmosphere from where they cannot step aside. This situation may be the metamorphosis of what Plato asserts centuries ago as the imprisonment of souls as an allegory of the impossibility of freedom. It may be considered that when the individual in modern life can understand his essence and his position in the organization, he can live in conformity with the organization and the social life (Akar, 2008, 99).

The imprisoned souls metaphor aims at introducing certain control processes and models. These models are subconscious processes under the iceberg waiting to be unfolded. Also, these models fall short of satisfying people. One of the most outstanding analyses of the metaphor is its contribution to one's understanding of organizational changes dynamics and challenges (Morgan,1998). Changing processes in organizations is also associated with this metaphor.

Organizations as means of dominance: The first types of formative organization probably emerged in hierarchical societies where a social group generally made the other accept its own will via subjugation. With certain people's being in service of the administrator class as bishops, clerks, accountants, sellers; societies became more layered. These people who do not deal with producing necessary for maintaining their lives formed a medium level class between the administrative class and the villagers who have to produce. Organizations have been associated with the processes of dominance where individuals and groups found ways to impose their own wills on others. The best way to understand various organizations in the history and in the modern world is viewing them as means which reflect the changes in the same style as the dominance applied. Furthermore, the idea that organizations are always based upon a class arrangement may be grounded on a well-supported basis (Morgan, 1998, 339-345).

People are inclined to view organizations generally as rational managements aiming at satisfying everyone's benefits. Nonetheless, there is a great deal of evidence demonstrating that this view expresses an ideology more than a reality. Organizations are mostly used as means of domination which put the selfish interests of elitists ahead for the sake of others and there is a dominant element in all organizations (Morgan, 1998, 339). While mentioning organizations, it becomes impossible not to mention power. When power is of question, various types of it may be stated. If the concept of power is to be addressed in view of administrators, it may be defined as the power of having works done or the ability to control people. Administrators benefit from sources of power in directing employees so as to internalizing the purposes of the organization. As for the authority, it brings forth the linear hierarchical system. In such a structure, the uppers are at a more elitist level than the lowers, inequality and injustice are matters of fact, the process is in favor of the administrators in the difference of administrators and the ones administered.

Organizations are the systems established to actualize a target. The principal element directing a system is the human and actions by humans. It would not be wrong to state that school administrators and teachers mostly direct the organization/ school. School administrators both lead to the implementation of educational services and play a role for appropriate learning environment. Teachers have the important duty of conducting educational services efficiently. Undoubtedly, school administrators and teachers' perceptions styles of the institutions they work in would affect the quality of their jobs; in parallel to this perception, either the way for change and transition would be cleared or the repetition of the current situation would occur again. Therefore, teachers' and school administrators' perceptions of the institutions they work in with which of the organizational metaphors; from among the metaphors of machine, organism, brain, culture, politics, prison of souls or domination gains importance. Moreover, whether there is a meaningful difference between the perceptions of teachers and school administrators with different duties and roles on the institutions they work in appears to be another issue which needs investigating.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Study Group*

The population of the study consists of primary school administrators and teachers working in primary schools located within the borders of the central district under Kastamonu Directorate of National

Education. The total number of primary schools in the central district of Kastamonu is 51; 26 of which are in villages and the remaining 25 in the city centre. The number of teachers working in these schools is 781, the number of primary school administrators is totally 55; 20 of which are in primary schools in the villages dependent on the centre and 35 of which are in primary schools in the city centre. Considering that it would be appropriate to have 100 units in the bigger sub group and 25-30 units in each of the smaller sub groups during the surveys while obtaining samples (Balci, 2009), a survey was applied to totally 450 people from among the school administrators and teachers working in 18 primary schools randomly selected from 35 public primary schools located in the central district in Kastamonu for the study sample. The survey applied to 311 people were taken into evaluation 287 (92.3%) of the participants in the study were primary school teachers and 24 (7.7%) of them were primary school administrators. 172 (55,3%) of the participants were female and 139 (44,7%) of them were male.

## 2.2. Data collection tools

The data were obtained by using “The Organizational Metaphor Scale” and personal information form.

**Organizational Metaphor Scale (OMS)** was developed by the researcher. At the first stage, principal components factor analysis was applied for the construct validity of the scale. With the help of the factor analysis, the scale consisting of 74 items was detected to have been divided into 7 dimensions and that 25 of the items whose factor load value was over .50 were found to be appropriate to be included in the scale. Cronbach alpha values were checked for the reliability of the scale. The reliability coefficient of the scale developed is  $\alpha$  .80 and of the data collected within the context of the research is  $\alpha$  .86. The OMS was constructed via 5-point Likert scale ranging from “I absolutely disagree” to “I absolutely agree”.

**Personal Information Form** was developed in order to specify features such as the participants’ professional titles, gender, and level of experience.

## 2.3. Data Collection Method

The data of the study were collected during 2009-2010 academic year. After receiving the necessary permissions, the scales were conveyed to the schools by the OMS researcher and the scales which were filled in were re-collected by the researcher.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

In the study, the metaphors which primary school administrators and teachers use to express the school they work in and whether these metaphors differ in their professional titles were examined via SPSS (12) statistical package program. First, normality tests were conducted on the analyzed data and while t-test was applied to the data showing normal distribution, Mann-Whitney U test was applied to the data which did not show normal distribution. Statistical meaningfulness level was taken as “ $p < 0.01$ ”.

## 3. Findings and Comments

The t-test results regarding the metaphors which the primary school administrators and teachers participated in the study used to express the schools are given in Table 1.

**Table 1: The Distribution of the Metaphors Which the School Administrators and Teachers Participated in the Study Used to Express the Institution They Work in According to their Professional Titles and T-**

Test Results																																																																				
Metaphor	Title	N	$\bar{X}$	ss	Sd	Mean Difference	T	p																																																												
<b>Machine Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	1,90	,99	309	-,33	-1,46	,144																																																												
	Teacher	287	2,23	1,08					<b>Brain Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	3,49	1,15	309	,00	,02	,979	Teacher	287	3,48	1,11	<b>Culture Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	3,71	1,03	309	,32	1,56	,118	Teacher	287	3,39	,97	<b>Politics Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	2,14	,90	309	-,31	-1,42	,156	Teacher	287	2,45	1,04	<b>Prison of Souls Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	1,45	,89	309	-,37	-1,77	,077	Teacher	287	1,82	,99	<b>Domination Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	2,20	,98	309	-,14	-,61
<b>Brain Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	3,49	1,15	309	,00	,02	,979																																																												
	Teacher	287	3,48	1,11					<b>Culture Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	3,71	1,03	309	,32	1,56	,118	Teacher	287	3,39	,97	<b>Politics Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	2,14	,90	309	-,31	-1,42	,156	Teacher	287	2,45	1,04	<b>Prison of Souls Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	1,45	,89	309	-,37	-1,77	,077	Teacher	287	1,82	,99	<b>Domination Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	2,20	,98	309	-,14	-,61	,539	Teacher	287	2,35	1,14								
<b>Culture Metaphor</b>	Administrator	24	3,71	1,03	309	,32	1,56	,118																																																												
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As seen in Table 1, it is observed that the primary school administrators ( $\bar{x}$  : 3.49) and teachers ( $\bar{x}$  : 3.48) express the school they work in with the brain metaphor at the “most” level. There is not a meaningful difference statistically between the perceptions of the groups of the institutions they work in. It may be said that two factors underlie the fact that primary school administrators and teachers express their schools with the “brain” metaphor. The first one is that schools are the institutions where information is produced and stored. The second factor is that it is resembled to the operation of brain and is about the fact that negative experiences are not repeated (e.g. people do not make the mistake they have made before). The supervision and all other evaluation activities can be assessed within the context of this metaphor. This finding of the study also shows coherence with the results of other studies. In a study of Balcı (1999) where he examined the metaphors towards school, school is described as the place of information transfer and where the youth is educated; likewise, the same features are also included in the description of ideal school in the study of Aydoğdu (2008) mentioned above. Thus, this obtained finding may be said to be directly associated with the purposes of educational institutions.

It has been derived from the study of Güçlü and Türkoğlu (2003), the subject of which is on primary school administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions of the learning organization, that the perception levels of school principals and assistant principals on the learning organization disciplines such as personal expertise, mental models, shared vision, learning as a team and system thought are higher than those of teachers. This result is similar to the result obtained in this study stating that primary school administrators’ tendencies to perceive the school they work in as the brain metaphor are higher than those of teachers.

When the mean values regarding the groups’ **cultural metaphor** perceptions are viewed, it is observed that primary school administrators ( $\bar{x}$  : 3.71) expressed the institution they work in with the **metaphor of culture** at the “most” level but teachers’ ( $\bar{x}$  : 3.39) at the “medium” level (Table 1). The organization is the place where common actions are mostly actualized. The organizational climate, where the individuals to be included in common actions may share some common meanings and values, is created by school administrators. One of the strong sides of the cultural metaphor is that it points at administrators as the ones to create new changes and to actualize the decisions taken. Henceforth, the administrators’ perceptions of themselves as the ones to commence and continue the change is a result

consistent with their roles as administrators and this obtained finding show similar results to the findings of other studies. For instance, in the study conducted by Dönmez (2008) in order to describe the administrator metaphors in the education system, it has been concluded that school administrators are attributed characteristics such as leader, guide, and unifier.

Primary school administrators and teachers express the institution they work in with, respectively, the metaphors of politics, domination and machine at the “least” level; whereas the mean values of teachers are a little higher than the mean values of administrators, there is not a meaningful difference among groups (Table 1). When these three findings are evaluated altogether in view of both the perception of metaphors and the perception levels of teachers’ being higher than those of school administrators, it may be said that the results obtained show inner consistency individually. Moreover, groups’ or individuals’ interests are the matters of fact in an organization according to the political metaphor. In other words, the “self” is one step forward in the organization. Employees can abuse and take advantage of others for the sake of their benefits, conflict of interest is abundant. Rivalry is evident in organizations. No cooperative action can be possible. According to the domination metaphor, there exist two groups in the organization; administrators and the administered; the process continues in favor of administrators. In addition to a strict hierarchy, inequality and injustice are the matters of fact. Domination ways of organizations are similar to social imposition types. The meanings attributed to these three metaphors are more valid for the organizations established to make profit over exploitation of labor. Since schools serve for the purpose of creating social benefits, employees do not evaluate schools with this metaphor. These metaphors do not comply with humane values. Schools are the social institutions where humane values are created according to their purposes and which aim at providing students with these values.

The distribution of scores regarding the metaphor of organism which the participants used to express the institutions they work in according to their professional titles and Mann-Whitney U test results are given in Table 2.

Table 2: The distribution of scores regarding the metaphor of organism which the participants used to express the institutions they work in according to their professional titles and Mann-Whitney U test results

Metaphor	Title	N	Mean Order	$\bar{X}$	Ss	Mann Whitney U	Z	p
<b>Metaphor Organism</b>	of Administrator	24	210,98	4,05	1,03	2124,50	-3,137	,002
	Teacher	287	151,40	3,50	0,90			

As seen in Table 2, primary school administrators ( $\bar{x}$  :4.05) and teachers ( $\bar{x}$  ; 3.50) generally express the institution they work in **more** with the **metaphor of organism**. Along with this fact, the difference among the group means are statistically (MW-U:2124,50, Z:-,137 and p:0,002) meaningful.

The fact that primary school administrators and teachers compare the institution they work in, in other words the school, to an organism can be said to be based upon the fact that there is a kind of dynamism compatible with the purpose and structure of schools. According to the metaphor of organism which pictures an organizational model where human needs are cared; physiological, psychological and social needs of organization members are important. In organizations which are resembled to the metaphor of organism, informal human relations are attempted to be developed and the needs of the organizations’ employees and the needs of the organization are attempted to be integrated. Employees’ embracing their jobs, their creating a feeling of possession towards the organization and perceiving the

needs of the organization as their own needs can be accomplished with the human relations developed the values attributed to employees in the organization. In the organizations which are compared to organisms, what is meant by organism becomes the surrounding of the organization. School administrators' comparing schools more to an organism than teachers may be explained with administrators' feeling more responsible for these mentioned issues than teachers. Being inspired by this metaphor, educational institutions are defined as "open system" which receive inputs from their surrounding and give outputs. In the light of these explanations, the school administrators' and teachers' using the metaphor of organism at the utmost level among the metaphors of organization and administration in explaining the institutions they work in can be explained by the reasons that school administrators and teachers are in close relationship with their surroundings, each other, parents, other employees in schools, directorates of national education as required by their jobs, and their level of responsibility for these mentioned groups is higher.

Due to the fact that descriptions of school are generally focused on the theory of open system, it may be said that a result has been achieved consistent with this finding of the study. Furthermore, this finding also shows consistency with the results reached in other studies. For instance, in the study conducted by Cerit (2008) which examined the metaphors attributed to teachers; teachers are perceived as the ones enlightening others and as guides, in other words, the ones who respond to the learning needs of students. Such a definition is explained as the relationship between organization and surrounding in terms of the system theory.

In another study by Saban (2004) where the metaphors of education faculty students towards the teaching profession are investigated, the meanings attributed to profession of teaching are the characteristics like supporting the student, being the guide, the one conveying information and shaping the student. A similar result was obtained in the study of Aydođdu (2008) about the perceptions on ideal school. While the school is stated to be the place providing confidence and information; teachers are defined as the ones conveying information, providing confidence and protecting in the related study. All these are the results which can be explained in terms of the school – surrounding relationship and associated with the finding of the study which has been materialized through the metaphor of organism.

#### **4. Results and Suggestions**

In this study, with which metaphor primary school administrators and teachers express the institution they work in and whether their perceptions of metaphors differ in their professional titles were investigated. It was concluded in the study that primary school administrators and teachers generally perceive the institution they work in more with the organism metaphor. Even though both groups expressed the institution they work in with the metaphor of organism, primary school administrators' perceptions differ meaningfully from those of teachers.

The school's being compared to an organism in the study is about the schools' features of affecting and being affected. This obtained result is associated with the fact that education is societal, as well. Education's being societal cannot be explained with the cultural inheritance of future generations. Education is societal means how much aims, targets and principles of education comply with societal priorities in addition to creating a common societal benefit and responding to the educational needs of the society. In the past few years, especially with the effect of globalism, education systems have started falling behind the needs of the society. Schools play the principal role in societal changes and integrated with its surrounding. Management-based approaches towards the school and education (for example, total quality management) damage the human-oriented side of education, and disconnects the societal bond of education. The school may gain meaning only if it is integrated into the society it resides in. Apart from that, they cannot go beyond being mechanical places technically where information is loaded.



The fact that primary school administrators and teachers do still view the school as an organism is an indicator of their not evaluating (or inability to do so) schools as managements, as well. When the subject is addressed within this perspective, many more studies are required on “what” are the meanings attributed to schools over metaphors by school administrators, teachers, parents, different parts of the society. The studies to conduct will shed a light to educational sciences and educational scientists. Metaphors include perceptions and could make the up-to-then not thought of blind spots to be visible.

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