

Metaphors for organisations

Adapted from: Tietze, Cohen and Musson, 2003, p.39.

Metaphor	Features; applications	Value	Weaknesses
Culture	National cultures; corporate culture and subcultures; meaning systems; shared beliefs and values; norms and rule; enacting shared realities; organisational change; corporate culture writers	Quest for meaning	Underplays role of fragmentation, ambiguity and complexity of cultural dynamics; leads to mechanistic culture management
Organism	Open system; changeable; adaptation; relationship with the environment; organisational needs; good fit; human relations approach; contingency thinking	Natural selection	Ascribes agency to the environment; ignores the role of conflict
Brain	Self-organisation and creative action; double-loop learning; learning throughout the organisation; holographic; decision-making; cybernetics; learning organisation	Learning	Overlooks realities of power and control; overlooks role of inertia as based on existing beliefs
Political system	Limited resources; conflicting interests; distribution of power; wheeling and dealing; negotiations; analysis of power and conflict; sources of power	Distribution of power	Can generate cynicism and mistrust; pursuit of personal interest; can overstate power of individuals



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