
**Business Information Needs
Identification and Interpretation
with the Use of Metaphors**

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Problems around information needs analysis

- ☞ During IS projects analysts tend to concentrate on current requirements represented as a set of data rather than on future information needs.
- ☞ IS analysis is often seen as a description of existing processes with use of new tools.
- ☞ In rapidly changing environment it is difficult to foresee what kind of information will be needed in the future.
- ☞ Lack of common understanding and shared vision of the new organization among participating groups.

Definition of a metaphor

Metaphor is a language construction consisting of a suggested similarity, in which a word or phrase usually and originally referring to one thing is applied to the other.

(Webster's New World Dictionary: 1988)

Meaning of a metaphor

- ☞ **Metaphors** are synthetic wordings used to express inexpressible, measureless but observed, experienced and perceived.
- ☞ **Metaphors** are more than speech decoration. They enable to impart emotions, feelings and pictures to what one wants to say.
- ☞ Using a **metaphor** is a consequence of the way of thinking and perceiving, which drive our understanding of the world.

Organizational metaphors in literature

- ☞ Morgan (1997) points nine metaphors:
- ☞ machine,
- ☞ organism,
- ☞ brain,
- ☞ culture,
- ☞ political system,
- ☞ psychic prison,
- ☞ flux and transformation,
- ☞ instrument of domination.

Organizational metaphors in literature

Kendall and Kendall (1992,1993,1994) used nine metaphors in IS area:

<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Orientation</u>	<u>Environment</u>	<u>Leader</u>
Game	goal	order	Coach
Machine	goal	order	Designer
Travel	goal	chaos	Captain
Jungle	alternatives	chaos	Pathfinder
Family	alternatives	order	Head of family
Zoo	alternatives	chaos	Warden
Society	alternatives	order	Leader
War	goal	chaos	General
Organism	different	differentiation	Innovator

Metaphorical Identification and Interpretation of Information Needs (MIIN)

①	ANALYZE AN ORGANIZATION	
	CREATE LIST OF METAPHORS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS	
	INDIVIDUAL IDENTIFICATION	TEAMWORK IDENTIFICATION
②	Select metaphors Create company characteristics checklist Choose characteristics for metaphors	Suggest metaphors (individually) Discuss proposals Choose metaphors Create company characteristics checklist Agree characteristics for metaphors
	IDENTIFY METAPHOR FOR PRESENT SITUATION	
③	A Select the best metaphor for present situation of company Describe company from the perspective of selected metaphor	B Describe company Select the best metaphor for present situation
	IDENTIFY METAPHOR FOR EXPECTED SITUATION	
④	A Select the best metaphor for expected situation Describe company from the perspective of selected metaphor	B Describe company Select the best metaphor for expected situation
⑤	SPECIFY MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRESENT AND EXPECTED SITUATION	
⑥	INDICATE KEY AREAS TO CHANGE	

Metaphors used in research

☞ game

☞ machine

☞ ZOO

☞ journey

☞ family

☞ society

☞ jungle

☞ war

☞ expedition

☞ circus

☞ church

☞ brain

☞ farm

☞ agency/office

☞ theatre

☞ sanatorium

☞ cauldron

Presented metaphors were used in Polish culture

Characteristics used in research

- ☞ strategy (7'S model of organization by Mckinsey)
- ☞ structure (7'S model)
- ☞ systems (7'S model)
- ☞ staffing (7'S model)
- ☞ skills (7'S model)
- ☞ style (7'S model)
- ☞ leader (adapted from Kendall and Kendall)
- ☞ environment (adapted from Kendall and Kendall)
- ☞ shared values (7'S model)

Example – characteristics of „jungle”

- ☞ strategy - not defined, reactive strategy
- ☞ structure - inefficient formal structure replaced by informal relations, hybrid structure
- ☞ systems - lack of formalization and standardization, only key systems are compliant
- ☞ staffing - lack of employment policy, “unemployment is the best motivator”
- ☞ skills - lack of defined skills and expectations
- ☞ style - democratic, the leader transmits more signals than receives
- ☞ leader - the leader emerges in activity, source of power – nature
- ☞ environment - very chaotic environment, the organization can't influence it
- ☞ shared values - lack of common value system, individual values concentrate on survival

The main goals of metaphors application

- ☞ to learn about the organization,
- ☞ to diagnose it,
- ☞ to find out what are the most important characteristics,
- ☞ to settle the most suitable methods to apply to develop new information systems.

MIIN application

- ☞ Can be used individually or in teams;
- ☞ Can start with metaphor selection or depiction of characteristics;
- ☞ Can be used entirely or partly;
- ☞ Can be applied by the organization members or outsiders ...
- ☞ ...
- ☞ You have to use imagination and analogies.

Expected results of MIIIN

- ☞ The main organizational problems indication should be an expected result of MIIIN application.
- ☞ Pointing differences between present and expected metaphors (and their characteristics) should show key change areas.
- ☞ Shared vision of change directions (among participants) gives opportunities to better communicate and succeed during project.

General conclusions

- ☞ To diagnose an organization we need to look at it globally.
- ☞ To find out the clue we have to use imagination to understand the certain.
- ☞ To communicate with the users we have to speak in the same manner as they do.
- ☞ The common language can be (or is) a metaphor.

Thank you for your attention