
Metaphors as Effective, Efficient, Accurate and Consistent Implements for
Organizational Communication

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By

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study to form a grounded theory on how metaphor can be used by organizational leaders to communicate effectively, efficiently, accurately and consistently. While metaphor is used in most forms of human communication whether artistic, scholastic, religious, or secular, metaphors in organizational theory are often used to describe how to conceptualize the organization as a whole. However, as a linguistic device, metaphor can be very useful to transfer meaning from one object to another to increase understanding of and accessibility to complexity in the object being described. Because of its common use in human language, metaphor is in use at the organizational level, both by leaders and organizational members. Yet if the leader and the organizational members do not have the same understanding of the metaphors in place or have different metaphors they use to conceptualize the organization, communication within the organization is difficult. This study attempts to assess characteristics of metaphors in use by organizational leaders to determine what can make them effective, efficient, accurate, and consistent, specifically in organizational communication.

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Masters Thesis Approval

The following project has met the approval of faculty for quality and scholarship as a culminating experience for the fulfillment of the Master of Science Degree in Organizational Leadership:

Type of project _____ Applied Business Research
 _____ Thesis _____ Case Study

Title:

Approved by:

Dennis E. Anderson, Ed.D
Program Lead Faculty

_____ signature _____ date

Dedication

To the amazing family and friends who have supported this educational experience with their encouraging words, time and prayers. I would also like to thank good friends Tim Kayser and Jon Taylor for their steady support and motivational influence throughout this process. A special thanks to my wife, Molly, my daughters, Keely & Kendra, and my father, Tom, for doing a lot of heavy lifting for the past year so I could pursue a degree. I am blessed beyond words!

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Appendices

- Appendix A – IRB Letter of Exemption
- Appendix B – Survey Instrument Example

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Copyright.....	iii
Master’s Thesis Approval.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
List of Appendices.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	viii
Chapter 1.....	1
Chapter 2.....	9
Chapter 3.....	14
Chapter 4.....	21
Chapter 5.....	32
References.....	39
Appendices.....	48

CHAPTER 1

METAPHOR AS AN EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, ACCURATE AND CONSISTENT IMPLEMENT FOR ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Introduction

Communication is a key element of organizational leadership that keeps the various pieces of the organization tied together in regard to information. Communication allows leaders to disseminate mission, vision, values, and structure to the organization, but with varying degrees of effectiveness, efficiency, accuracy and consistency. The use of metaphor, simile and analogy in this kind of communication, especially in defining the organization as a whole, has grown in popularity.

In the parlance of organizational leadership, there are varied applications of metaphor. In reframing, you have the four-frame model that uses structural, human resource, political or symbolic metaphors to describe the organization. (Bolman & Deal, 2013) However, reframing is used more as a tool for leaders to change their perspective of the organization so they can make decisions and judgements based on the different lens they are using.

While a helpful tool, the metaphors used in reframing are not necessarily communicated to the organization in part or whole and may not accurately describe the organization's structure or function in a way that should be communicated. Senge (2006) uses several metaphors to describe teamwork, creative tension and other concepts within the learning organization model. These metaphors single out a very specific characteristic or value, but do not describe the larger organization. Senge (2006) also warns of how mental models, or metaphors, can shape an

individual's perspective of the organization with negative results. These and other metaphors are used to describe organizational structures and to describe organizational leadership theories, but these are not produced or distributed into a context devoid of other metaphors. In other words, the metaphors that are prevalent in the study of organizations, leadership and their relationship to one another may be expressed into contexts with already existing metaphors that have stronger meaning and influence with the audience.

Statement of the Problem

This atmosphere of competing metaphors can have a dramatic effect on organizations, especially on internal communications. For example, if an organization is seen as a machine and described as such to the members of the organization, the relationship of those members to the organization is not explicit. Are they part of the mechanism or does their work constitute a piece of the machine? Is the organization a machine that they work on or are they actually part of the machine? It is a different relationship for someone to feel like they are a cog in a chain of gears versus an expert who makes sure the cogs keep moving.

Issues can also ensue when scope is not carefully considered. To say an organization is a ship is different than to say an organization is a ship on a journey through rough seas. In the former, one is drawn to the details of a ship. What do the sails represent? Do the positions in the organization correspond with the positions of the sailors? Is it a merchant vessel or a combat vessel? In the latter, the picture is more about navigation, safety, how to move forward and the vessel's relationship with an unfriendly sea. If the scope and detail of the metaphor are not

clearly defined, widely divergent views of the organization, positional roles and relationships within the organization can develop.

Cornelissen (2008) stated, “When we attempt to understand organizations (as scholars or as people working within them), we often use metaphors to make organizations compact, intelligible and understood” (p. 8). However, when individuals are making the determination about the implications of metaphorical language within the organization, communication is in danger of becoming ineffective, inefficient, inaccurate, and inconsistent. Morgan (2006) argued “that the challenge is to become skilled in the art of using metaphor: to find fresh ways of seeing, understanding, and shaping the situations that we want to organize and manage” (p. 5). This is the challenge of using metaphor and other symbolic language in organizational theory and communication.

Statement of the Purpose

Quin (2015) recognized the critical nature of communication in the function and form of organizations. This means that ensuring metaphors are effective, efficient, accurate and consistent is paramount. Metaphors are subjective and prone to misinterpretation for the reasons stated previously, therefore some might conclude that not using metaphor would be the best solution. This, however, would be nearly impossible as it is part of the way human language develops. We use metaphor without realizing we are using metaphor. The alternative is to consciously research and assess the use of metaphors to determine how to best use them in organizational communication.

The first focus of this study is to determine what kinds of metaphors work best in organizational communication. Metaphors fall into two main schools of thought: correspondence (or categorical) and comparison. These two views of metaphor have more to do with how a metaphor is chosen to describe an organization as a whole, and can give us insight into how metaphors are used. This author agrees with Oswick and Jones (2006) when they stated, “the comparison and correspondence (or categorical) approaches to metaphor can be seen as complementary insofar as they both contribute to organizational theorizing, but have different points of emphasis and illuminate different aspects of the process” (p. 485). Understanding whether the metaphor is going to add to the understanding of existing knowledge (comparison) or introduce a new idea or concept (correspondence) is an important first step.

The second focus of this study is to determine the characteristics of a metaphor that makes it effective, efficient, accurate and consistent. Without a mathematical understanding of metaphor, this determination will lean on the input of communicators with experience in the use of metaphor. Through surveys and interviews, an understanding of what makes a metaphor effective, efficient, accurate and consistent can emerge.

Finally, this study will utilize the existing research and the collected information from communication experts to develop a metaphor through the correspondence model and the comparison model to note the differences and similarities. This will also allow an opportunity to illustrate the contextual nature of metaphors as they will be developed for a specific organization and may not be directly applicable to another organization.

Research Questions

Two main questions are the focus for this study:

1. What determines that a metaphor is effective, efficient, accurate and consistent?
 - a. What variables should be considered when creating/choosing a metaphor?
 - b. In what ways can metaphoric language improve organizational communication?
2. How can leaders create and choose metaphors that communicate organizational vision, mission, values and structure?
 - a. Is there a process that can help leaders create or choose metaphors that meet the criteria of effective, efficient, accurate and consistent communication?

Significance of the Study

Theoretical Significance

While debate over and development of metaphors of organizational theory have been studied, this study will provide practical guidelines for organizational leaders on how to create and use metaphors for effective, efficient, accurate and consistent communication with the organization members.

Methodological Significance

This paper is grounded in the study of existing work on metaphor and organizational theory, and through surveying experts in organizational communication, to develop an informed and technical understanding of metaphorical language in organizational communication.

Practical Significance

Giving useful communication tools to leaders that allow them to capitalize on the power of metaphor in their communication with others about the organization, how it functions, what the mission, vision, values and structure are, and what relationship others have with the organization can help leaders and organization members have a cohesive understanding of themselves, the organization and how interact.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are provided in the author's own words to ensure the reader shares the perspective of the author in the context of this paper.

Metaphor

A linguistic device to describe one subject with a similar, but different subject. This is usually accomplished through a figure of speech construction such as, "That boxer is a machine." A simile adds the use of "like" or "as" in the construction to create lesser comparisons such as, "That boxer is like a machine." Mixing metaphors occurs when using incongruous metaphors within the same thought or idea such as, "Spread your wings and let the wind fill your sails as you travel down the road of life."

Organization.

A group of individuals, teams and structures organized for a set purpose.

Organizational communication.

The means of connecting the members of an organization through verbal, written and visual communications.

Effective.

Being able to accomplish the purpose for which something was implemented.

Efficient.

Being able to accomplish something with minimal investment of time, resources and work while still accomplishing the intended purpose.

Accurate.

Correct, truthful or on target.

Consistent.

Reaching the same results by the same method without deviation.

Comparison.

Finding the similarities between two distinct subjects, one being the metaphor and the other being described by the metaphor. Description goes one way from the metaphor to the subject being described.

Correspondence/Categorization.

A process of creating a metaphor where the subject being described and the metaphor may have existing similarities, but the metaphor is intended to also add new meaning to the corresponding subject.

Limitations of the Study

Language is complex and subjective and therefore avoids absolute statements. This study will not set the boundaries of what defines a good metaphor in stone, nor should it. This study is limited to providing reasonable guidance on determining the value of metaphors in communicating based on theory and expert opinions.

This study is also limited to an understanding of metaphor within a narrow cultural and linguistic context. How metaphors operate in other cultures and language groups will not be discussed.

Finally, this study is limited to the understanding and use of metaphors within a religious organization. This study will not delve into the psychological, social or more complex nuances of metaphor from a linguistic perspective.

Summary

This research attempts to provide useful tools to the organizational leader in choosing or creating metaphors that operate effectively, efficiently, accurately and consistently in communicating the mission, vision, values and structure of their organization to organization members and others.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Metaphor in Organizational Theory

Metaphor as it pertains to organizational theory has been described as a reframing tool (Morgan, 2006), a means of organizational development (Cornelissen, Oswick, Christensen & Phillips, 2008), a method of organizational change (Carr, 1997), a way of creating organizational models (Cornelissen, 2006a) and a foundation for understanding organizational studies (Jermier & Forbes, 2011). There are also differing views on what metaphors are most effective.

The bulk of research on metaphor in organizational studies is on what kind of metaphor best describes organizations. In this regard the argument is between a comparative view of metaphor and the correspondence view of metaphor (Cornelissen, 2005 and Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2002). Others see both views as viable and in operation within organizations (Haught, 2013). This view argues that metaphors can both describe meaning through comparison (realist) and create meaning (constructivist) by finding new connections between the metaphor and the organization (Heracleous, Keenoy, Oswick, et al, 2003). Glucksberg (2006) paraphrased the differences well in his argument in favor of a correspondence view:

The different forms of a metaphor — the comparison and categorical forms — have different referents. In comparison form, the metaphor vehicle refers to the literal concept, e.g. in ‘my lawyer is like a shark’ refers to the literal fish. In categorical form, ‘my lawyer is a shark’, the term ‘shark’ refers to an abstract (metaphorical) category of predatory

creatures. This difference in reference makes it possible for a metaphor and its corresponding simile to differ (a) in interpretability and (b) in meaning. (p. 360)

There is clearly an active and vibrant discussion regarding metaphor in the study of organizational leadership. This discussion so far has looked at the types of metaphors, their value in understanding organizations and their usefulness to leaders for viewing organizations through different frames. However, the literature is lacking in ways that metaphor can be used by leaders in organizational communication to explain and explore meaning within their specific context. Morgan (2006) sets forth the challenge:

Hence there can be no single theory or metaphor that gives an all- purpose point of view. There can be no “correct theory” for structuring everything we do.

The challenge facing modern managers is to become accomplished in the art of using metaphor: To find appropriate ways of seeing, understanding, and shaping the situations with which they have to deal. (p. 338)

Organizational Communication

The ability of a leader to communicate with the organization is critical. Blidaru and Blidaru (2015) summarized communication’s importance when they stated, “Communication within the organization is essential for the smooth running of things, for its continuous development, for the achievement of short, medium and long term plans (p. 43).” However, organizational communication as an area of study is diverse and eclectic (Jones, Watson, Gardner & Gallois, 2004). This diverse approach to communication deals with structure, means,

hierarchies and other ways of looking at the relationship between the organization, its members and how information moves in that context.

Some argue that organizational communication should be less about lab tests and more about direct observation in the organizational context to see what actually works in the field (Jones, Watson, Gardner & Gallois, 2004). This focus on how communication actually works rather than theoretical constructs designed by formula and applied in controlled contexts is an important shift. Issues like problem integration, meaning making, sense making and other key aspects of communication in organizations make the importance of communication tools critical for leaders. Barbour, Jacocks, & Wesner (2013) point to another critical element of communication when they state, “Message design is grounded in context. Communicators’ understanding of the context or situation is reflected in their goals and their communication design” (p. 357).

Using Metaphor to Communicate in Organizations

Organizational communication that is effective, efficient, accurate and consistent allows leaders to message the mission, vision, values and structure of the organization in persuasive ways. Sopory and Dillard (2002) provided six explanations for the use of metaphor over literal language in persuasive communication: “Of the six theories considered, the superior organization explanation of metaphor’s persuasive impact was most supported by the results” (Sopory & Dillard, 2002). This argues that metaphors communicate a stronger organization of thought on behalf of the communicator than literal language does. In other words, a communicator using metaphor will be seen as having organized the idea being communicated

more thoroughly than one who uses only literal description of the idea. Carr (1997) also proposed that, “In recent times it has been more widely advocated that we use metaphor as a device through which we explore, come to understand and transform organization and management activity” (224+).

The use of metaphor within religious organizations is prevalent. Within the population surveyed, there is an abundance of metaphor used in the source material (the Bible). Jesus uses the vine and branches (John 15:5) and family (Matthew 12:49-50), while Paul described believers as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12; 12:27), the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:31-32) and the house of God (1 Timothy 3:14-15). These only constitute some of the metaphorical language used in reference to the organization being described, namely the church. When including metaphors describing Jesus (bread of life, light of the world, lamb of God, etc.) and the individual (temple, sheep, salt of the earth, etc.), the list of metaphors becomes extensive. Hall (2012) espoused a view of metaphor as indispensable to the work of theology and the language of belief, and TeSelle (1974) argued that metaphorical language in scripture is a purposeful communication tool to push the audience to think at different levels than literal description would require.

Significance of the Study

Communication is a key component to organizational leadership and organizational development. The ability to disseminate information to organization members effectively, efficiently, accurately and consistently is critical to organizational health. While studies are numerous about specific metaphors in use for organizational development and organizational

identity, little has been presented on how metaphor is used to communicate at the organizational level.

Summary

Literature on organizational communication and on metaphor are numerous, and a growing body of work is developing on the use of metaphor in organizational studies, but work on how metaphor can be used in organizational communication is limited. A review of the research in those more developed areas and where they intersect will give focus to this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction to the Methodology

Metaphor is a part of human language that is used in art (poetry), psychology (cognitive development, psychoanalysis), religious teaching (parables, preaching, theology), training (mind mapping), and, most notably for this study, in organizational communication. Given that metaphor is widely used in human speech and cognition, it follows that it is also used in organizational communication and in the overall discussion of organizational theory. In organizational theory, research is considerable in how metaphor can either describe the organization or help in organizational development, but little is written on how metaphor can be used effectively, efficiently, accurately and consistently in organizational communication.

Research Strategy

With this in mind, this study looked at how metaphor is actually used by communicators in the field. Surveying leaders on their experience using metaphors in organizational communication was the first step. Surveys were created using Survey Monkey and were distributed via email with separate links to the two survey groups. This allows for a static polling group while still maintaining the anonymity of the respondents. By polling the two groups selected we can see how metaphor is used in different contexts and different organizational structures.

Research Population

Two populations were selected for their key communication and leadership roles within their respective organizations. The first group of forty individuals was selected from the American Association of Presidents of Independent Colleges and Universities where the student enrollment exceeded 2000 students in the academic year 2013-14. College administrators are keenly aware of the mission, vision, values and structure of their organizations and key communicators to organization members and external partners about those key elements of their institutions. The second group of twenty-one individuals was made up of district superintendents for the Christian and Missionary Alliance within the United States. The district superintendents polled are responsible for numerous churches within their districts and aligning those districts with the national office's mission, vision, values and structure as leaders and communicators, while supporting the specific needs of their districts. However, only three responses were received from the college administrator group and two were incomplete, so the study will only use and review the second group's responses.

Respondents represent organizational contexts where organization members are demographically diverse, affiliated by choice, seeking knowledge and participating in the organization at different levels. The respondents also have graduate degrees, have a history with the organizational structure they now lead in, and work with two populations (pastoral staff/congregants) within their organizations.

Sampling Methodology

Both groups were sent an email with a link to an anonymous survey. While the surveys were identical for both groups the results for each group were separately tracked, allowing for comparison within each group and between the groups. Surveys that were incomplete or did not answer questions thoroughly were also left out of the final data population. This resulted in the elimination of the college administrator group and a narrower focus on the religious organization leadership group.

Instrumentation

The survey was composed of the following series of questions:

1. Please select the metaphor that best describes your organization:
 - a. Tree
 - b. Hospital
 - c. Forest
 - d. Garden
 - e. Car
 - f. Ship
 - g. Country
 - h. Building
2. Was it difficult to choose a metaphor in question 1?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

3. Why was choosing a metaphor in question 1 difficult or not? (Open-ended response)
4. What characteristics of the metaphor you chose in question 1 connected well with your organization and why? (Open-ended response)
5. What characteristics of the metaphor you chose in question 1 did not connect well with your organization? (Open-ended response)
6. Which of the following have you communicated to organization members and stakeholders by using metaphor? (Check all that apply)
 - a. Vision of the organization
 - b. Mission of the organization
 - c. Values of the organization
 - d. Structure of the organization
 - e. I have not used metaphor to communicate these characteristics of my organization
7. In what ways have you experienced metaphor improving communication within your organization? (Open-ended response)
8. In what ways have you experienced metaphor degrading communication within your organization? (Open-ended response)

In questions 9-12 please provide your understanding of the term given as it relates to the use of metaphor in organizational communication. For example, question 9 lists “Effectiveness,” so you would provide your understanding of what makes a metaphor effective in organizational communication.

9. Effectiveness (Open-ended response)
10. Efficiency (Open-ended response)

11. Accuracy (Open-ended response)
12. Consistency (Open-ended response)
13. What are possible consequences of a metaphor becoming more important than what it is intended to explain? (Open-ended response)
14. In what ways is a metaphor stronger than literal description? (Open-ended response)
15. In what ways is metaphor weaker than literal description? (Open-ended response)
16. In question 1 you were asked to pick a metaphor for your organization from a list.
Considering the questions you have answered in this survey, what metaphor would you use to describe your organization that is not on the list? Please include as much detail as possible. (Open-ended response)

This series of questions was designed to elicit the respondent to think about their organization metaphorically and how that is best communicated. The questions also move the respondents from choosing from a set list of metaphors, then through consideration of the characteristics of metaphors to finally give a metaphor that describes their organization. These questions also ask respondents how metaphor has been used within their own organizational context.

Research Sample

There were seven responses from the CMA population constituting 33% of those originally invited to participate. Unlike the college administrator population that included institutions with diverse educational goals and values, the CMA group is more uniform due to their allegiance to an already existing set of core beliefs and values (doctrine/theology).

Therefore the seven responses constitute a significant sample for this population.

Method for Establishing Validity

The survey instrument was designed to assess the respondent's familiarity with metaphor and its use in organizational communication. Questions 1-5 assessed the ability to work with a metaphor by having respondents choose one, indicate if the choice was difficult and how well the metaphor connected with the corresponding organization being described. Questions 6-8 the respondents were asked to indicate their use of metaphor to communicate mission, vision, values and structure while also describing their experience with positive and negative aspects of metaphorical language. Questions 9-12 collected subjective views of what makes metaphors effective, efficient, accurate and consistent to determine if those characteristics were similar among the population polled. Questions 13-15 asked more in depth questions regarding the symbolic strength of metaphor, when literal description is stronger and how it can overshadow what is being communicated. These questions speak to a more nuanced use of metaphor. The final question (16) allowed the respondents an opportunity to express a metaphor of their own design to gather metaphors that can add to the understanding of organizations and how leaders communicate using metaphorical description.

Data Analysis Methodology

Analysis of the data primarily consisted of locating if there was agreement between the respondents on the characteristics of metaphor and how metaphor is used in organizational communication. By measuring the responses against the review of literature on organizational communication and the use of metaphor in organizational development, patterns and connections were drawn out.

Chapter Summary

This research was predicated on the idea that metaphor is already in use within organizational communication by organizational leaders. The survey used and data analysis provide insight into the way this operates within a religious organization while also providing metaphors in use that can be reviewed for broader use.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction to the Findings

In reviewing the responses from the survey group, patterns emerged and characteristics of metaphors could be defined. The chosen metaphors from question 1 show a trend toward organic metaphors (tree =2; forest=2; garden=2), while the metaphors offered by the respondents were more diverse in type and scope. When providing responses regarding the characteristics of a metaphor (effective, efficient, accurate, consistent), there was strong agreement. The subsequent tables will be used to consolidate responses to sets of questions while interpretation of the data will follow. A list of abbreviations is also included.

DS = District Superintendent

OER = Open Ended Response

RSP = Respondent

Table 1 – Selecting a metaphor (Survey question 1: Please select the metaphor that best describes your organization)			
<i>Tree</i>	<i>Forest</i>	<i>Garden</i>	<i>Ship</i>
		DS1	
DS2			
	DS3		
		DS4	
DS5			
			DS6
	DS7		

Table 1 indicates the different metaphors that were chosen by respondents from the available list: tree, hospital, forest, garden, car, ship, country and building. The metaphors were chosen to present different levels of complexity and both inanimate and animate options. Notable in this survey group is the preference of the animate options over the inanimate. This corresponds with the many metaphors within scripture that describe the church/church member as a living object (i.e., vine and branches). It is also of interest that DS6 indicated difficulty in selecting the metaphor “ship” because the metaphor primarily used in DS6’s organization is “family.” None of the metaphors offered in the list explicitly describe relationships between organization members. This was purposeful as member identity was not included in the scope of the study and adds several layers of complexity to the use of metaphor in organizational communication.

Table 2 – Evaluating the metaphor					
	<i>Was it difficult to choose a metaphor in question 1?</i>		<i>Why was choosing a metaphor in question 1 difficult or not?</i>	<i>What characteristics of the metaphor you chose in question 1 connected well with your organization and why?</i>	<i>What characteristics of the metaphor you chose in question 1 did not connect well with your organization?</i>
RSP	Yes	No	OERs	OERs	OERs
DS1		No	I've used many of these words to describe district ministry before	The expanse of the district with different regions giving each church its own distinct growth and pattern of ministry	(T)he image of garden means different things to the people in our district - some might take it as a flower garden while others think of it as a vegetable garden. Each one has limitations in their growing seasons and the length of time they exist
DS2		No	Not, because of the organic links between my regional office and the branches.	Same. The connectedness of branches. Also, the implication of growth	Branches are semi-autonomous, not quite fitting a tree.

				on the branches that are connected	
DS3		No	I have used the image of a jungle as a picture of the work of the Holy Spirit on many occasions. My point is that God gives life in abundance, and only he can give it. He calls his leaders to tend the growth. A forest is similar to that.	People have spiritual gifts which express themselves in various ways as exemplified in various plants. If we do not tend them, the plants may tend to choke each other or get in one another's way.	People are also responsible to tend the burst of spiritual life themselves.
DS4	Yes		I would not have described our district by any of those metaphors.	A garden needs to be cultivated. Some plants thrive others struggle. Some plants need lots of attention, others seem to grow without any. ETC	The metaphor lacks any sense of mission.
DS5		No	It's a picture we have been using	Growth of a living organism	not sure
DS6	Yes		I primarily use the metaphor of "family"	It takes a team to move a ship	Ship is not the best metaphor for a church or district
DS7	Yes		Because of the complex nature of the organization.	A forest is broad, complex, all are trees but all trees are different (type, size, age, health, strength, purpose, etc.). Scope can be massive and overwhelming. Care is needed for the forest and for the individual trees.	A forest doesn't move and we as an organization must always be moving forward.

In Table 2 we see that both comparison and categorization are at work. DS1, DS2, DS3 and DS5 experienced no difficulty in choosing one of the listed metaphors because the comparison was clear. However, DS4, DS6 and DS7 had difficulty because none of the listed

metaphors fit the category best suited to their respective organizations. Even though it was difficult to pick one from the list, each respondent was able to find ways the selected metaphor connected to their respective organization. This is a strong indicator that metaphor can be used to add significant insights for leaders into their own organizations by using correspondence to create connections between dissimilar objects.

Table 3 – Characteristics of metaphors				
	<i>Effectiveness</i>	<i>Efficiency</i>	<i>Accuracy</i>	<i>Consistency</i>
RSP	OERs			
DS1	it helps people identify the wonderful differences and opportunities provided within our district	it can make for a quick way of identifying a difficult concept with something known	this can take a hit if the metaphor isn't used correctly	it can make for a reliable way to identify over the long term the makeup and direction of the district
DS2	Pictures speak. They convey meaning.	Reduces verbiage. Cuts through long-winded descriptions that lose people and lack inspiration.	Not all parts of a metaphor are relevant. So we have to emphasize the main point that it makes, not press all the irrelevant details.	Not sure. I think in terms of durability and shelf-life, knowing that a metaphor may speak for a season, but get "tired" after a while.
DS3	Makes it both easy to see the point and communicates it in powerful ways.	A metaphor can reduce the number of words needed to explain a critical concept by communicating it in a conceptual way.	Sometimes a metaphor, picture, or story is the most accurate way to communicate the truth, especially when the truth is complex.	If a metaphor provides easy understanding of a key concept, it can be transmitted more easily across an organization and provide wide consistency of understanding.
DS4	A metaphor creates a picture and touches the heart and passions of people. It opens understanding and	It usually enables us to get on the same page quickl(y)	A metaphor may or may not help with accuracy depending on how the metaphor is communicated and what it	The metaphor can aid in consistency if we use it regularly and with clarity

	provides common language for conversation.		communicate(s) when we are talking in multi-cultural settings	
DS5	Visual reminder or prompt	Less words more meaning	Correctly chosen a picture can convey with accuracy	Once an idea has been conveyed every use of the picture repeats the message
DS6	It generates positive understanding and emotion in the audience	It quickly communicates	It only communicates the values, insights and emotion one desires	The generated effects in the audience is consistent
DS7	Repeated use of a metaphor for the organization strengthens memory and gives shared language and becomes a rallying point. It also is a door opener for clarifying dialogue. Metaphor can become a symbol.	Easy to remember and use over and over again.	Gives a framework for having clarity of what's being communicated.	The same metaphor used consistently bring(s) ownership and enhances memory.

In the table above (Table 3), the aspects of metaphors that make them effective, efficient, accurate and consistent begin to emerge.

Effectiveness

The overwhelming aspect of an effective metaphor is symbolic meaning. This is followed closely by common understanding. In other words, metaphors that do not have strong symbolism and are too ambiguous will be ineffective. A leader will need to know the audience well to choose the symbolic structures and common images that will speak most effectively within their organization. However, if a metaphor has strong symbolic presence, but may be

interpreted differently than the leader intends, repetition is given as another means of effectiveness.

Efficiency

One of the interesting connections here is with effectiveness. There is an interdependency between the efficiency of a metaphor and its effectiveness. One does not work without the other. However, the aspect most valued in regard to efficiency by the respondents was economy of communication. Metaphors allow the communication of information, often complex information, quickly and easily. In other words, if explaining the metaphor takes more time than explaining the idea through literal description, the metaphor has lost its edge on efficiency. This means that leaders need to avoid metaphors that are the equivalent to a linguistic Rube Goldberg.

Accuracy

The diversity in the responses regarding this aspect of metaphor speaks to the contextual nature of metaphors in communication. They also indicate that accuracy is seen in hindsight. Unlike the manufacturing of items on a production line where making adjustments in the process results in accurate production, metaphor creation and implementation will always have levels of subjectivity impacting accuracy. While great thought and consideration may go into the choosing or creation of a metaphor, those involved in the process cannot know all the associations the organization members have with the chosen metaphor. However, even this may not degrade accuracy if the connections between the metaphor and what is being described are explicit. The communicator will need to explain what the metaphor does and does not represent.

Consistency

It is in this area that deviation occurs from the other aspects of metaphor in that consistency is less an aspect of the metaphor itself, but a result of how it is delivered. This takes into consideration frequency, method and duration of use. One respondent hints at a possible aspect of metaphor in relationship to consistency. DS2 brings up the lifespan of a metaphor as a concern. He is alluding to the connection that effectiveness, efficiency and accuracy have with consistency. If a metaphor loses its effectiveness due usage over time that does not adjust to change, it is no longer consistent. A metaphor’s purpose in organizational communication is to describe the organization and its various parts (mission, vision, values, structure) effectively, efficiently and accurately until the organization changes. It becomes a question of applicability. The metaphor should not become more important than the organization it describes. This requires a willingness in leaders to reevaluate the metaphors they are using to see if those metaphors are still consistent with the reality of the organization and what needs to be communicated.

Table 4 – How metaphors are used in the organization				
RSP	Vision of the organization	Mission of the organization	Values of the organization	Structure of the organization
DS1	Vision of the organization		Values of the organization	
DS2		Mission of the organization		Structure of the organization
DS3	Vision of the organization	Mission of the organization	Values of the organization	Structure of the organization
DS4		Mission of the organization	Values of the organization	
DS5	Vision of the organization			
DS6	Vision of the organization	Mission of the organization	Values of the organization	
DS7	Vision of the organization	Mission of the organization	Values of the organization	Structure of the organization

All respondents save DS5 selected more than one component of the organization showing that metaphor is widely used to communicate mission, vision, values and structure. However, this does not mean that the same metaphor is used to communicate each component. While a complex metaphor may be able to communicate all four components together and their connections, organizational leaders may choose to deal with each component separately.

Table 5 – The pros and cons of using metaphor to communicate		
	<i>In what ways have you experienced metaphor improving communication within your organization?</i>	<i>In what ways have you experienced metaphor degrading communication within your organization?</i>
RSP	OERs	
DS1	it helps for people to understand what I do with Pastors and Churches	It can lead to confusion because of different backgrounds
DS2	Makes a picture that can be seen. And can be remembered and repeated by all.	None.
DS3	Metaphors provide sockets into which the gems of God's truth can be displayed to best effect.	All metaphors have limitations and may imply something which is not intended.
DS4	A metaphor creates a picture and touches the heart and passions of people. It opens understanding and provides common language for conversation.	When the metaphor is pressed beyond its reasonable use or becomes a substitute for the reality it represents
DS5	Pictures help to get an idea across	Limitations of pictures or concepts unless carefully selected can limit what you are trying to say
DS6	It creates a word picture to better communicate. It is an aid in communicating an abstract concept in a know(n) concrete image	If you use a poor metaphor or one that carries negative baggage in the minds of the audience
DS7	Word pictures are engaging, help with clarity and therefore are highly valuable.	Metaphor can be abstract for some and therefore lack in giving clarity.

Table 5 presents the pros and cons of using metaphors in organizational communication. The positive aspect of using metaphors is their ability to communicate at multiple levels in ways that literal language cannot. On the other hand, metaphors can just as easily miscommunicate

due to culture, the lack of shared characteristics between the metaphor and the subject, the associations people have with the metaphor that are contrary to what is being communicated and the possibility that the metaphor will supersede the subject in importance. The pros point to metaphor as an important and unique means of communication while the cons warn that the effectiveness, efficiency, accuracy and consistency of a metaphor should be clear before it is used.

Table 6 – Metaphors in use with the survey respondents	
	<i>In question 1 you were asked to pick a metaphor for your organization from a list. Considering the questions you have answered in this survey, what metaphor would you use to describe your organization that is not on the list? Please include as much detail as possible.</i>
RSP	OERs
DS1	Lighthouse; a train; a river
DS2	We use a trellis and vine metaphor. Our district office is like the trellis that supports a growing vine. The vine grows. It produces flowers or fruit. The trellis is in the background, providing infrastructure, support, tracks to run on. You can see it via the pic in your head.
DS3	I repeatedly tell the Northeastern District that we are a family first, and an institution second, but never an institution which is not a family. I explain that it is our relational connections which describe our ministry together, and that we will fail our mission if we do not pursue our work together as beloved brethren rather than secular co-workers. We do this not merely because it works better, but because it is true according to God's word (Eph. 4:11-16). The fact of our family relationship must be factored into every decision, even while following prescribed procedures for conformity's sake. I could write on this all day, and have done so.
DS4	I prefer to see us as a team on a mission, a community of people who have a clear mission from Christ and are seeking ways to fulfill that mission.
DS5	(No Response)
DS6	Family, team
DS7	Train tracks. It reveals forward motion and implies a destination and a journey. Our dream as a region of churches is to partner together to advance the Kingdom of God and reach the 7.3 million people who live within our borders with the love and grace of Jesus. Railroad tracks have 3 components that correspond to our 3 priorities in fulfilling our dream of advancement. 1. First rail is desperate dependence upon the Holy Spirit (who we are and how we posture ourselves). 2. Second rail has to be laid in partnership and conjunction with the first rail. It is what we call missional living (what we are to do). It is about mobilizing all the people of our district to follow Jesus' example of living incarnationally and going into our world in the rhythms of our lives to make disciples. 3. Rails set on the dirt will fail. In our analogy the railroad ties

represent godly leadership development. We must never stop laying the next ties so that we can continue to lay track and advance. No church or denomination is guaranteed to still be in existence when Jesus returns. The only way we will be is if we intentionally make disciplemakers and are consistently apprenticing and developing the next generations of godly leaders in our ministries.

Table 6 provides the metaphors in use by those surveyed. They are diverse in scope, detail and imagery. This indicates that even in a large organization with shared values can, in its more local expressions, require different ways to communicate the mission, vision, values and structure to organization members. While this study is intent on finding what makes metaphors effective, efficient, accurate and consistent, it is not possible to evaluate the stated metaphors on that basis since a detailed understanding of the requisite organizations is not available. However, those surveyed have a ready grasp of metaphor and what makes for a “good” one so we will assume the metaphors presented were scrutinized with the same criteria in their context.

Descriptive Statistics for Sample

The population group is made up of males aged 40 or older serving as district superintendents for the Christian and Missionary Alliance within the United States of America. All have graduate level education, are ordained within the denomination and have worked within the organization at different levels of leadership and location.

Hypothesis Test Results

It is clear from the survey results that metaphor is commonly used in organizational communication in the context polled. It is also clear that specific traits can be seen in the results

that improve the effectiveness, efficiency, accuracy and consistency of metaphors when they are used. This indicates that metaphors can be used as effective, efficient, accurate and consistent implements of organizational communication.

Chapter Summary

Metaphors are widely used by the survey population to communicate the mission, vision, values and structures of their organizations. The survey respondents have a clear grasp on the various characteristics of metaphors that give them communicative power and how they can be used incorrectly. They also show a great deal of agreement in many of the survey questions, indicating that this group has a fairly aligned view of metaphors and their use in organizational communication.

As a result of their responses, we can give credible guidance in what characteristics of a metaphor will strengthen its communicative ability. Respondents presented information that indicates the larger population would be a rich resource for research on metaphor in organizational communication.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Metaphor has been widely studied and researched as a method of describing organizational models and in developing organizational models, but little has been done in how metaphor can be used in organizational communication. This puts metaphor as it relates to organizational leadership in the area of theory and research and not practical use. Taking this into consideration, surveys were distributed to organizational leaders within the Christian and Missionary Alliance, an evangelical denomination in the United States. The survey polled the respondents on their understanding and use of metaphor, and the positive and negative characteristics of metaphor as a communicative tool.

Numerous studies suggest that as a communication tool, metaphor is incredibly versatile and powerful, allowing organizational leaders to communicate ideas like the mission, vision, values and structure of the organization with effective, efficient, accurate and consistent images. Hogler, Gross, Hartman and Cunliffe (2008) proposed that a shift in how metaphor operates in the postmodern world changed how it operated in organizations:

Metaphor translates an experienced reality into a perceptible object that has emotive import as well as discursive content, and neither quality is separable from the creative imagination and affective response that produced the object. Both the objectivity of physical phenomena and the subjectivity of human sentience are fused through an act of

immanent apprehension. In short, metaphor has meaning that goes beyond, and is not reducible to, either rational discourse or emotive utterance. (p. 394)

This movement to understand metaphor as something greater than its parts increases the need to understand how it can be best utilized by organizational leaders.

When taken together, the power of metaphor as a means of communication, the need for effective communication within organizations and the wide diversity of organizations in areas such as mission, vision, values and structure, the need for a method to create or choose metaphors that fit the bill (metaphor intended) escalates. The discussions in organizational theory circles are often about what kind of metaphor should be used. The two dominating schools of thought are the comparison view which suggests organizational identity is best served by metaphors that describe by similarity (i.e., our organization is a well-oiled machine), and the categorization school which suggests organizational identity can be re-conceptualized by using metaphors that reframe the organization by the category of the metaphor (i.e., our organization is a carnival). In comparison the connections are obvious in that organizations do have mechanistic characteristics and can run smoothly like a well-oiled machine. However, the categorical example pushes the thinker to re-consider the organization as something that it is not. This may elicit new insight or criticism and can be used in contexts where change needs to occur in the organization.

Unfortunately what can often get lost in the theoretical arguments and mathematical formulas for language is the human side of organizational leadership and organizational communication. In looking at what kind of metaphorical language is in use by organizational leaders we can see that both comparison and categorization have value. When organizational leaders need organization members to share an understanding of the mission, vision, values and

structure of the organization, comparison is a useful tool. If an organizational leader needs to invigorate member engagement in organizational change, categorization presents opportunities for abstracting new ways to understand the organization.

Conclusions

These applications of metaphor lead us to answer the research questions that were originally asked.

1. What determines that a metaphor is effective, efficient, accurate and consistent?
 - a. What variables should be considered when creating/choosing a metaphor?
 - b. In what ways can metaphoric language improve organizational communication?
2. How can leaders create and choose metaphors that communicate organizational vision, mission, values and structure?
 - a. Is there a process that can help leaders create or choose metaphors that meet the criteria of effective, efficient, accurate and consistent communication?

Due to the strong contextual nature of comparison metaphors, any assistance this research can offer is in guidelines toward determining the metaphor's effectiveness, efficiency, accuracy and consistency without naming specific metaphors. Comparison metaphors need to meet the specialized needs of the individual organization at whatever scale the organization communication is occurring. In other words, for our survey population, comparison metaphors can work well for both the whole district and for each individual member church even though they may be different.

Organizational leaders can use the following guidelines to assess the strength of the metaphor slated for use:

- **Effectiveness:** Consider the symbolic strength of the metaphor and the number of clear connections it has with the subject. Be sure to review how culture and audience bias might erode or add to the metaphor in negative ways. An effective metaphor is based on how well the leader knows the organization's mission, vision, values, structure, and members.
- **Efficiency:** Is the metaphor easy to communicate? This is a primary determinant of efficiency. If the metaphor is too complicated or takes too much explanation, it is inefficient. Metaphors are cognitive shortcuts to deliver complexity and increase shared understanding. Avoid Rube Goldberg metaphors that are far more complex than what is being described.
- **Accuracy:** Metaphor is subjective by default and therefore prone to interpretations unintended by the communicator. However, organizational communicators can use past experience, organizational member input and feedback to improve the accuracy of metaphors they use. This requires intentional follow-up by leaders when they have delivered a new metaphor to make sure it is more aligned with those it is communicating to in the organization. Much like course corrections in spaceflight, communicators need to be careful not to over or under correct.
- **Consistency:** This is also dependent on the leader following through with frequent delivery of the metaphor in different contexts and through different methods. Leaders also need to consider if a metaphor has run its course. Once a metaphor

becomes outdated or incompatible with the organization, its use is no longer consistent.

The preceding guidelines can give organizational leaders some assistance in the selection or creation of metaphors to communicate within their organizations.

Categorical metaphors offer an opportunity for organizations to find new ways of understanding mission, vision, values and structure that can both refine and redefine the comparison metaphor already in place. Where comparison metaphors are informative, categorical metaphors are transformative. For example, to borrow from the religious literature of the survey population, what can looking at an organization through the category of “person” offer to organizational leaders and their communication to the larger organization? A person has mental, emotional, physical and volitional characteristics, both as needs and capabilities. When conceptualizing the organization in this light organizational members can evaluate its personality, strengths, weaknesses, proclivities and other measurements of health. By offering this means of feedback from organizational members to the organizational leader, issues unseen by the leader can come to light.

This analysis-by-metaphor of an organization can offer numerous ways to understand the organization, member roles and their relationship. The metaphor of organization as person also gives a nuanced approach to measuring the mission, vision, values and structure as they are perceived by organizational members against how they are stated by the organizational leaders. The variance between what is stated and what is perceived can show where gaps are in the communication of the mission, vision, values and structure, and open the door to possible

changes. This metaphor also humanizes the organization without going so far as to anthropomorphize the organization.

As an assessment tool this metaphor provides opportunities for organizational leaders to frame questions about the organization differently than the standard “On a scale of 1 to 10” format. In asking organizational members to describe the organization as a person in regard to health, personality, performance of mission, adherence to vision, fulfillment of values and stability of structure, it engages the organization member in different ways. This can provide a narrative about the state of the organization that can be combined with the standard quantitative assessments to create a more detailed picture.

Metaphors can have a significant impact on organizational communication if organizational leaders are willing to put the time and effort into selecting, creating or reviving those metaphors with careful consideration of their effectiveness, efficiency, accuracy and consistency. They are powerful tools to inform and transform organizations by clearly defining them and giving rise to new ways to see and shape them. The study of metaphor in organizational communication holds incredible promise.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study offer several possible avenues of future research. First, expanding both the survey and the survey populations to get more detailed and diverse perspectives on metaphor as it is currently used in organizations. The expanded survey would need to include evaluation of the metaphors in use and require more detailed descriptions of how those metaphors connect with the organization being described. Including other populations

such as the college administrators, CEO's, non-profit leaders and others in the survey would also introduce the opportunity to compare how metaphor is used in the various organizations.

Second, a more thorough understanding of the life cycle of a metaphor could be researched by surveying organizations about their usage patterns. Comments from respondents indicated that metaphor was important in communicating new understanding which means new metaphors need to be selected, created or revived. To understand what indicators can help leaders know when metaphors are aging out or what can be done to revive them for continued use would also help organizational leaders in the area of communication, organizational development and change management.

Finally, organizational assessments that use literal or technical language may miss key perceptions held by staff that are more accurately described through metaphor. Organizational assessment tools that use metaphor as the diagnostic framework could produce significant insights for organizational leaders and consultants. Designing surveys and organizational assessments to gather that information from organizational members could be developed based on the characteristics of effective, efficient, accurate and consistent metaphors.

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Appendix A – IRB Letter of Exemption



Office of the Institutional Review Board

11255 North Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla, CA 92037-1011
(858) 642-8384 fax (858) 642-8734

DATE: November 2, 2015

TO: Chris Yeager
FROM: National University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [827965-1] Metaphor as An Effective, Efficient, Accurate and Consistent Tool for Organizational Communication

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: November 2, 2015

Chris Yeager:

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. National University Institutional Review Board has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to HHS Policy for Protection of Human Research Subjects 45 CFR 46.101(b). A determination that research is exempt does not imply that you have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research.

Exemption Category # 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

This decision is based on the following assumptions:

1. The application you submitted to the NU-IRB provides a complete and accurate account of how human subjects are involved in your project.
2. You will carry on your research according to the procedures described in this application.
3. If any substantive changes are made, you will resubmit the project for IRB review.
4. You will immediately report to the NU-IRB any problems that you encounter while using human subjects.

You may begin your research immediately.

If you have any questions, please contact Rebecca Moos at (858) 642-8134 or rmoos@nu.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Thank you for your cooperation in this process. The NU-IRB looks forward to your successfully completing your research.

Sincerely,

Brianne Mongeon, MA
IRB Analyst
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Kenneth Goldberg, DPA
Co-Chair, IRB
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Appendix B – Survey Instrument Example

Metaphor Research Survey - CMA District Superintendents

Welcome to the Survey

Explanation of survey and consent statement.

Hello, my name is Chris Yeager and I am a student in the Organizational Leadership department at National University (NU). I am conducting a study to identify how to use metaphors in organizational communication that are effective, efficient, accurate and consistent. You have been asked to participate in this survey due to the nature of your position and its requisite organizational communication responsibilities. The results will be reported in a thesis that I will complete as a requirement of my graduate program.

The following anonymous survey, which should take approximately 25 to 35 minutes of your time, asks questions about your experience with using metaphor to communicate within and about your organization. There are also some demographic questions for statistical comparison. To qualify for this study, you must be over the age of 18.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, your responses will be anonymous - that is, recorded without any identifying information that is linked to you. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact me at mrcdyeager@sbcglobal.net. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, or to report research-related problems, you may call the Institutional Review Board at NU for information, at (858) 642-8384, or irb@nu.edu. If you would like to take part, please click on the "Next" button below. Thank you for your time.

Metaphor Research Survey - CMA District Superintendents

Survey questions.

This survey is intended to gather your experience, knowledge and perspective on the use of metaphor in organizational communication. Metaphor is often thought of as a literary device used in poetry and prose, but it is an essential part of language and cognitive processing in every day communication. Specifically in organizational communication, metaphor is used to explain the organization as whole. Common metaphors for organizations are the machine, the mind or the organism. Each of these come with different nuances of meaning. To the leader these metaphors can be a way to understand how things are functioning within the organization. To the organization members, it can be a way to see how they are connected to the larger organization. However, if these meanings are not communicated, metaphors can deliver meaning that was not intended.

For example, if we look at an organization as a machine without explaining what that means to the organization members, they may define that relationship in different and unintended ways. Some may see themselves as part of the machine that can be replaced or repaired, while others may see themselves as mechanics who keep the machine running. If you have these different views active within the same organization, communicating effectively, efficiently, accurately and consistently becomes difficult. Your input and perspective in this survey can help find ways to use metaphors more effectively, efficiently, accurately and consistently in organizational communication. Thank you for your insight and perspective.

*** 1. Please select the metaphor that best describes your organization:**

- Tree
- Hospital
- Forest
- Garden
- Car
- Ship
- Country
- Building

*** 2. Was it difficult to choose a metaphor in question 1?**

- Yes
- No

*** 3. Why was choosing a metaphor in question 1 difficult or not?**

*** 4. What characteristics of the metaphor you chose in question 1 connected well with your organization and why?**

*** 5. What characteristics of the metaphor you chose in question 1 didnot connect well with your organization?**

*** 6. Which of the following have you communicated to organization members and stakeholders by using metaphor? (Check all that apply)**

- Vision of the organization
- Mission of the organization
- Values of the organization
- Structure of the organization
- I have not used metaphor to communicate these characteristics of my organization

*** 7. In what ways have you experienced metaphor improving communication within your organization?**

*** 8. In what ways have you experienced metaphor degrading communication within your organization?**

In questions 9 - 12, please provide your understanding of the term given as it relates to the use of metaphor in organizational communication. For example, question 9 lists "Effectiveness," so you would provide your understanding of what makes a metaphor effective in organizational communication.

*** 9. Effectiveness**

Metaphor Research Survey - CMA District Superintendents

Demographic Information

This page is intended to collect statistical information only. No personally identifiable information will be requested or recorded.

*** 17. Are you male or female?**

- Male
- Female

*** 18. What is your age?**

- 17 or younger
- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

*** 19. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?**

- Less than high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree

Metaphor Research Survey - CMA District Superintendents

Thank you!

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Your answers will be helpful in the research being done and add to the study of organizational leadership and communication.