



Performing Strategy: Analogical Reasoning as a Strategic Practice

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DR CLAUD JACOBS*
Research Fellow

DR MATT STATLER*
Director of Research

DR JOHAN ROOS*
Director

*Imagination Lab Foundation - Rue Marterey 5 - 1005 Lausanne - Switzerland
Tel +41 21 321 55 44 - Fax +41 21 321 55 45 - www.imagilab.org

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ABSTRACT

Analogical reasoning refers to the successful transfer of structural similarities from a source to a target domain. In strategic management research, this concept has materialized in approaches such as strategic mapping. Yet, the concept and its application seem to have emphasized primarily the cognitive aspects of analogical reasoning. Bourdieu's concept of practice allows us to explore analogical reasoning in a more integral manner, i.e., by presenting embodied aspects of analogical reasoning as complementary, equally relevant for such processes. Thus, we conceptualize analogical reasoning as a practice of strategy and illustrate this concept with an empirical case.

Keywords

Analogical reasoning, embodiment, metaphors, strategy, practice

INTRODUCTION

According to cognitive scientists in general, and organization scholars in particular, analogical reasoning refers to the successful transfer of structural similarities from a source to a target domain. In strategic management research, this concept has materialized in approaches such as strategic mapping. Yet, the concept and its application seem to have emphasized primarily the cognitive aspects of analogical reasoning. This emphasis might however limit our capacity to describe the function of analogical reasoning in organizations.

The purpose of this paper is to explore elements of analogical reasoning that extend beyond its cognitive aspects. Bourdieu's concept of practice allows us to explore analogical reasoning in a more integral manner, i.e., by presenting embodied aspects of analogical reasoning as complementary, equally relevant for such processes. Thus, we conceptualize analogical reasoning as a practice of strategy and illustrate this concept with an empirical case involving the leadership team of a large player in the packaging industry.

ANALOGICAL REASONING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Analogical reasoning has been considered a vital feature of human cognition. It involves applying knowledge from a relatively familiar domain (the source) to another less familiar domain currently being examined or worked with (the target) (Gentner, Holyoak, & Kokinov, 2001; Holyoak & Thagard, 1997; Vosniadou & Ortony, 1989). Furthermore, an analogy involves two distinct forms of relation between source and target. While superficial similarity simply portrays a correspondence in the features of the objects of source and target domain, structural similarity refers to semblance in the deep structures of relations between elements of source and elements of target – irrespective of similarity of the objects involved (Forbus, Gentner, & Law, 1995). Cognitive scientists have therefore proposed structural similarity as the essential characteristic of analogical reasoning (Gentner & Markman, 1997).

While a functional view of language portrays it as primarily representative, a constructionist perspective attributes to it a fundamentally constructive role in the constitution of social reality (Wittgenstein, 1967). Within the field of organization and management studies, the latter view emphasizes the communicative interactions in processes of intersubjective meaning generation (e.g. Alvesson &

Karreman, 2000; Barry & Elmes, 1997; Ford & Ford, 1995; Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Jacobs & Heracleous, 2005). A concept of social reality as a discursive construction and communal achievement frames discursive practices as situated symbolic action (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004) at the center of investigation. And in such discursive practices of meaning negotiation, analogies or metaphors play a pivotal role (e.g. Black, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1990).

In this respect, Tsoukas (1993; 1991) highlights the role of language and symbols in the constitution of the social world in general. Organizations as social systems face the challenge of developing, comparing and judging on various perceptual and experiential schemata. Analogical reasoning plays an important role in such processes of knowledge generation and sense-making processes in organizations. In turn, metaphors play a functional role in analogical reasoning, namely, by operationalizing analogical reasoning in communications. A metaphor introduces an initial, superficial similarity at the object level between source and target that is then to be explored and 'tested' for potential structural similarities through the process of analogical reasoning in a deeper, more systematic manner (Tsoukas, 1993: 342).

A literal, objectivist perspective on metaphors might suggest metaphors as primarily ornamental, expendable or even distorting in conveying "the facts" (Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982). In contrast, a constructionist perspective acknowledges their central role in social practices of sensemaking. Metaphors are considered as conceptual constructions that enable actors to re-frame their perceptions (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990). The analogical gesture in employing metaphors consists in suggesting conceptual similarities between a source and a target entity (Lakoff, 1993). Yet, and consistent with a constructionist perspective, these similarities are not simply revealed by the metaphor, but instead created by it. This generative potential of metaphors has long been acknowledged (Morgan, 1997; Schon, 1993; Black, 1993) by scholars seeking to more thoroughly understand organizational dynamics (Oswick & Grant, 1996; Morgan, 1980, 1983; Marshak, 1993).

Reflecting in more detail on the function of metaphors, Tsoukas (1991) highlights the constitutive, yet partial nature of metaphors in the discursive construction of social worlds. The importance of metaphors for analogical reasoning is that they capture and express a continuous flow of experience, whereas in contrast, literal (i.e., non-metaphorical) language tends to segment experiences. Also,

metaphors provide the initial starting point for a subsequent process of exploring additional similarities in a more systematic way. Furthermore, as we will see below, metaphors can serve as proxies for accessing deeper – hidden or even unconscious – forms of knowledge by providing additional, image-rich expressive devices for such discovery.

Tsoukas (1991) outlines a process model of analogical reasoning that includes three sequential steps,¹ as illustrated in Figure 1.

INSERT Figure 1 about here

First, an initial insight might be triggered by some metaphor that suggests a superficial similarity at the object level. Secondly, the implied similarity is inter-subjectively explored for further structural similarities that would lead to the establishment of an analogy. Through an oscillatory process of examining more thoroughly and systematically the plausibility of the suggested structural and relational similarities, a more fine-grained understanding is generated, i.e. an isomorphism – a correspondence or identity between structural features of source and target – can be claimed (1991: 574ff). Throughout this overall process "higher order semantic relations (i.e., relations between relations) are preserved at the expense of lower order relations or mere isolated properties" (1991: 574). It is through such an iterative 'drilling' process that the sensemaking potential of a metaphor is brought to bear.

While we acknowledge the value of an analytical approach to analogical reasoning in general, and the use of maps as analogues in particular, we see two domains in need of conceptual development. On the one hand, analogical reasoning has predominantly focussed on discursive interactions and has thereby excluded any materiality in social relations. Secondly, the underlying assumption of the classic approach to analogical reasoning pertains to deductively, decontextualized metaphors. We acknowledge the value of such a deductive approach, yet suggest to consider a more inductive approach that assumes that organizational actors are the ultimate experts when it comes to generation a experience-based, context-specific set of metaphors (Jacobs & Heracleous, 2005).

¹ We acknowledge that Tsoukas' (1991) initial concern is with the role of metaphors in knowledge generation of organization theory. Yet, we suggest that this generic reasoning process will prove equally useful at a more practical level of mundane knowledge generation in groups and organizations.

In summary, analogical reasoning has been portrayed as the process of successfully transferring structural similarities from a source to a target domain. More specifically, such processes involve an oscillatory drilling from an initial insight via an analogy to the establishment of an isomorphism between source and target domain. And while this model holds significant explanatory power, it seems though that both the concept and the application of analogical reasoning in organization and strategy is limited by its emphasis on cognitive, deductive and discursive aspects.

THE PRACTICE LENS

Over the last years, several shortcomings of current strategy research have been observed that are relevant for our consideration. For instance, an over-reliance on economics might have led researchers to take a somewhat detached approach to strategy practitioners (Whittington, 2003). Moreover, despite the conceptual success of the resource based view (Wernerfelt, 1984; Rumelt, 1987) in introducing the concept of dynamic capabilities, this success has only modestly been substantiated by empirical research (Johnson et al., 2003). In view of these opportunities, a growing number of strategy scholars call for studying the “micro processes” or “practices” of strategy (Johnson et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2004). Such a practice lens strives to reduce detachment by actually focusing on and investigating the strategy practices by managers and how they might influence strategy outcomes. Following this impetus, studies in the emergent field of strategy research should investigate “how skilled and knowledgeable strategic actors constitute and reconstitute a system of shared strategic practice” (Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004: 15).

Jarzabkowski (2004) draws particularly on Bourdieu’s concept of practice (1990), which provides a theoretical lens that includes other dimensions of experience alongside the cognitive in a more integrated conceptualization of how people act and make sense of their world. We must before proceeding acknowledge that the task of translating Bourdieu’s work into the discursive field of organizational theory requires significant effort and care. Recent attempts to accomplish this task (especially Everett, 2002; Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2003; Mutch, 2003) therefore serve to guide our considerations here. Specifically, the existing literature indicates that Bourdieu’s concept of practice appears to involve at least three significant elements that might extend and enrich our consideration of

analogical reasoning. These include: embodiment, performance, and the social structuration of cognitions.

It should be emphasized first and foremost that Bourdieu's concept of practice draws our attention to the physical, material, or we might even say, aesthetic aspects of human experience. This point can be made most clearly with reference to the practice of theory itself. Indeed, Bourdieu calls directly for a consideration of how those forms of human action, which appear to exist independently of any kind material interest, are in fact intricately entangled in them.² Leaving aside the question of how such interests might take shape or change, we emphasize the point that all practice, even the practice of theory itself, must be considered in terms of its embodiment according to Bourdieu. .

Secondly, Bourdieu is extremely careful to emphasize the extent to which practices cannot be fully captured by propositional logic, or even represented fully in language. Practices give no account of themselves, and to the extent that they acquire meaning as such, this meaning is importantly constituted by their rhythm, tempo and directionality (1990: 81). Such embodied practices are therefore literally encoded in gestures, postures, ways of walking, etc., and they "tend to take place below the level of consciousness, expression and the reflexive distance which those presuppose" (*ibid*, 73). But again, leaving aside the question of the extent to which social theory can in spite of the limits of representation develop knowledge about such embodied practices,³ we refer to this set of considerations as the 'performative' aspect of practice.

Finally, Bourdieu is careful to note that individual practices are always structured by, and at the same time, always provide structure to the social world. Indeed, following the example cited above, even precisely the embodied, performative practice of cognition itself is importantly structured by social forces and dynamics. Thus distinct from Simon's more familiar notion of bounded rationality, in which cognition is bounded by biological or ontological factors, Bourdieu's notion is that human rationality is bounded by social factors such as power and flows of economic, cultural and institutional capital.⁴ We refer to this structured/structuring relationship as the 'socially-structured' aspect of practice.

² Most relevant here is the essay "Is a Disinterested Act Possible?", in which Bourdieu interrogates art, philosophy and religion and insists that each of these social institutions involve the active preservation of very specific interests.

³ We will pick up on this theme again below in the implications section of this paper.

⁴ The further question of exactly how Bourdieu understands these structural dynamics in the social world take us beyond our present considerations, though it is relevant to note in passing that Bourdieu refers to the first order

THE STRATEGIC PRACTICE OF ANALOGICAL REASONING

A primary theoretical contribution of this paper is to present Bourdieu's concept of practice as a lens through which to view existing research focused on analogical reasoning. We propose to consider analogical reasoning – that is both inductive and embodied – as a form of performative practice. We have following Bourdieu identified three distinct aspects of practice (i.e., the embodied, performative, and socially-structured aspects), and we suggest that these three aspects are relevant to analogical reasoning processes. Moving forward, we suggest that theoretical and empirical research focused on analogical reasoning as a form of practice should take these dimensions of experience into account.

So if we then view analogical reasoning through this lens as a form of practice, what do we see? With respect to embodiment, we are drawn to consider the gestures, postures, and other bodily movements of people engaged actively in sense-making processes. We seek data, at an ethological level, concerning the behavior of individuals and groups in organizations. We additionally become aware of the physical space within which actual practices of analogical reasoning take place. With respect to the performative dimension of practice, we look beyond the veracity or accuracy with which any given metaphor may or may not correspond to some externally posited, objective reality. We look instead at the ways in which meaning is socially constructed, or more precisely, at the ways in which the organization as well as its environment are enacted via the collective sense-making of the actors. With respect to the socially-structured aspect of practice, we acknowledge first and foremost that any instance of analogical reasoning is structured by relationships between individuals, and by the patterns of activity that bring individuals together in groups. In this sense, the isomorphisms that are established through processes of analogical reasoning are always shaped by power dynamics and discursive regularities which, even though they may be deeply engrained in organizational practice, remain always subject to change.

The activity of cognitive or strategic mapping has been widely considered by strategic management researchers (e.g. Bougon, 1992; Brown, 1992; Calori, Johnson, & Sarnin, 1994; Clarke &

aggregation of practices as a 'habitus', and then to the second-order grouping of habitae as a 'field'. If we were to extend our analysis of analogical reasoning in light of these additional elements of Bourdieu's thought, we would find ourselves debating the extent to which the habitus of 'strategy-making' might for example be considered as an aggregation of distinct practices of analogical reasoning, and furthermore, whether the many variations of such strategy-making might together comprise a field of 'strategy' as such.

Mackness, 2001; Eden, 1992; Hodgkinson & Johnson, 1994). Huff (2002) recently portrayed a complex map as a visual representation of a domain with its most relevant entities and relationships that involves images of being “within” and encourages mentally moving among entities. Thus, such maps might allow for the establishment and testing of strategically important structural similarities between map (target) and territory (source). Mapping – according to Huff – makes “the issue at hand more transitory and plastic” (Huff, 2002: 8). For our purposes, this metaphorical reference to the plasticity of strategic issues can be interpreted literally, and thus our attention is drawn to other approaches that embrace more embodied and performative aspects of analogical reasoning. There are at least three additional examples of organizational research focused on distinct forms of analogical reasoning that provide us with some guidance for how to address it through a practice lens.

First, in their outline of *cognitive sculpting*, Doyle & Sims (2002) experiment with using three-dimensional objects in processes of strategy-making. Metaphors seem to indicate and to often make reference to physical objects and their spatial relatedness, e.g. generic schemas of up/down orientation, container and link or connection. Thus, sense-making seems to relate to the human capacity to establish and understand physical relationships between objects: “If metaphor is underpinned by an abstracted understanding of objects and our bodily relationship with them, then it may make sense to use objects explicitly to facilitate the use of metaphor and analogy.” (2002: 71). Furthermore, in cognitive sculpting, social self-presentation is affected insofar as the process takes attention away from the speaker and focuses on the sculpture, which in turn allows meanings that would normally not be sanctioned to be explored. The outcome of cognitive sculpting consists in developing a shared metaphoric language within a group that can be drawn upon in subsequent strategic conversations.

Secondly, Barry (1994) draws on depth psychology and art therapy to introduce the concept of *analogically mediated inquiry*. An object or model created by a client team (‘the analog’), allows the process consultant and the client to engage in a collaborative process of interpretation and sense-making. From a psycho-analytical view, this might be read as a process of surfacing conscious as well as unconscious aspects that might have been projected onto the analog. Analogically mediated inquiry lends itself to problem identification and analysis as “analogues allow manipulation of otherwise elusive mental images, safe testing of alternative solutions, and promote creativity through introducing structural

juxtaposition of disparate lines of thought" (Barry, 1994: 39) whereby the analog absorbs most projections and serves as a positive scapegoat for the client. In terms of the overall sense-making process, Barry (1994) identifies different forms and degrees of defensiveness, and emphasizes the importance of psychological and emotional safety.

Thirdly, drawing on three-dimensional analogs, Buergi & Roos (2003) portray the process of *serious play* as an image-rich, multimodal process of sense-making that extends metaphors beyond pure cognitive devices. They support Oswick et al.'s (2002) suggestion to not only consider similarities but actively search for dissimilarities that might hold potential for more creative forms of sense-making. Drawing on Worren et al. (2002) and Gardner (1993), they emphasize the relevance of narrative and visual knowledge to complement propositional knowledge as well as additional dimensions of intelligence. They call for "a multimodal approach in which superimposing or layering different modes of experience ultimately enriches the overall knowledge that people have of complex situations." (2003: 72).

These three approaches all share the basic premise of our suggested notion of analogical reasoning, to the extent that they explicitly involve the establishment of structural similarities between a target and source domain. Furthermore, they all appear to underscore the importance of a theoretical lens that includes a focus on objects, spatial and relations and physically-engaged processes of construction. In that respect, they appear to exemplify the embodied aspect of practice as we discussed it above. Furthermore, cognitive sculpting, serious play and analogically mediated inquiry appear to exemplify the performative aspect of practice, to the extent that objects and movements are involved precisely for the reason that they provide experience and carry significance for which language alone is inadequate. Finally, to the extent cognitive sculpting and analogically mediated inquiry both involve the establishment of a safe frame within which analogical reasoning occur, they implicitly acknowledge the importance of the social structuration of practice. This aspect of practice may be implicit in the concept of serious play insofar as the play processes described are themselves social, but this aspect is not developed fully by Buergi & Roos (2003). These conceptual considerations notwithstanding, we draw on an empirical case to illustrate how analogical reasoning as a strategic practice extends purely cognitive, discursive and deductive approaches to metaphorical reasoning.

THE CASE OF PACK INC.

A large player in the consumer packaging industry with 10% of share in global market, PackInc's selling proposition has been to supply a system for the processing, packaging, and distribution of consumer goods. In the late 1990's though, the firm's leadership had picked up signals that in some small markets other firms had replaced their own after-sales service function at client sites. PackInc's service business employed many highly qualified and experienced technical experts who travelled worldwide to resolve problems with PackInc equipment as they emerge in client organizations. Although the service business was at that time a cost centre within PackInc, strong voices in the firm were continually arguing for turning it into a profit centre. One group of executives considered the challenge strategically irrelevant, not worthy of executive attention. In contrast, another group of executives emphasized the strategic relevance of after sales service for their customer relationships since technical support people by definition have very strong relationships deep inside customer organizations, and thus influence on repurchasing and purchasing decisions.

Given this ambiguity, the CEO invited 2001 three fellow executives to a strategic conversation in order to explore the status of this issue in more detail. These executives included the individual responsible for all market companies; the responsible for worldwide production-oriented activities; as well as the responsible of human resources.

The facilitated conversation consisted of two parts, whereby the first part was designed to extract and share the four executive's perceptions of the business and their understanding of how to deal with strategic issues in general. The second part aimed at identifying and articulating the nature of the after-sales support threats in particular.

When asked about their experience of the business, participants described their business as stable to the extent they did not have any long-term plans. They were also convinced that they had the capacity to pick up relevant signals from the organization, and they claimed that they learned a lot from interfacing with customers worldwide.

The four executives stressed the ease with which they could read and predict future developments. They seemed confident in the reliability of their experience-based gut feel in this respect. Incidentally, that gut feel, they suggested, tended to coincide with the recommendations of strategy

consultants. Furthermore, they claimed that their gut feel seemed to allow for what they perceived as flexibility in the executive team and the company as a whole.

Despite this espoused congruence, the after sales support issue had received quite different and distinct assessments from the executive team members. Since the after sales issue functionally did not fall neither into the production nor the marketing responsibilities, neither of the respective executives considered it a relevant issue. Their attendance was primarily motivated by the CEO's invitation, not necessarily by a genuine interest in the issue.

In the second part of the conversation, toy construction materials were introduced as a means to facilitate and illustrate the strategic conversation. The four participants were invited to collectively build a physical model of PackInc as an organization, thereby also representing their industry as well as the competition in their after-sales service business. They collectively constructed PackInc as a fortress in black and white, based on a solid platform. This castle was full of chests full of gold and heavily guarded with cannons pointing in all directions. A palm tree on top indicated PackInc's attractiveness. The fortress had three ways in, of which two represented "windows of information" to the outside world. The third was connected to a single, large and solid monochromatic bridge that linked them with their direct customers. Parallel to this bridge, they were connected to customers via a flexible and thin "line of communications," through which information was informally "pumped" in both directions.

The physical model of PackInc's generic customer employed many colors and was placed on four pillars. The archetypal customer was full of person figures, representing various facets of their product range and businesses. Physically, the customers were elevated above PackInc. They also included the customer's customers, the retailers using PackInc's packages. These were equally represented by a multi-colored construction. Participants then built connections that were colourful and flexible representing a much more flexible customer relationship than the monochromatic, solid bridge of PackInc.

When constructing and playing out these models, the conversation revolved around the sources of PackInc's competitive advantages, and thus, the firm's core competencies. Knowing the official line on this issue, one participant challenged the state of the art. This participant had placed a sarcophagus brick in a larger solid box built of bricks that had been placed within the centre of the fortress. Suddenly, he pulled out the larger box from within the fortress, slowly opened it, pulled out the sarcophagus, blew off

the imagined dust, and opened it saying: “This is our core competency.” When the other participants looked inside, they saw that the box was empty.

Turning their attention towards competition for after-sales services, they built a pirate’s nest that included a number of pirate person figures, armed with swords and guns, literally ‘entering’ the competitive landscape. Skeletons were put around the model to represent the hostility of the pirate’s nest. Similar in size to the PackInc model, the pirate’s nest got placed on the opposite side of the table. No direct connections sprung from the pirate’s nest but it had flexible connection points prepared.

INSERT PIC 1 about here

Exploring the after-sales activity in this overall landscape, the group noticed that the technical experts were primarily focused on quality assurance and concerned with equipment support. In their view, customer relationship referred primarily the relationship between the firm and their direct customers. They saw how the single link between PackInc and its customers was represented as a rigid, monochromatic bridge with no after sales features. Participants equally realized that after sales employees were considered low in status and salary, and thus, that after sales was primarily discussed as a necessary cost that did not generate much added value nor revenue. When reflecting on these insights, one participant went to the flipchart and sketched out how the after sales support might impact the business.

INSERT PIC 2 about here

By exploring this sketch, participants increased their sensitivity for the strategic relevance of the after-sales service. In a provocative, yet conclusive turn, the CEO asked the group: “Are we just like the dance band on the Titanic, trying to keep spirits high after the ship has hit the iceberg?” Furthermore, participants discussed the previously contentious option to consider an alliance to supply their after-sales service business.

In conclusion, participants agreed to explore new frames to deal with this now acknowledged competitive domain as well as to better understand after-sales service and its implications for customer relationship development and retention. As a first result of such collective commitment, the CEO reported two weeks later that he had started to discuss the option of an alliance with one of the major after-sales service suppliers.

DISCUSSION

Reflecting on this case, we will employ Tsoukas' (1993) suggested generic process of analogical reasoning as a starting point that will then feed into a more synthetic gesture of the practice of analogical reasoning within the Bourdieuan framework of practice. Thus, we start by revisiting four main metaphors of the case as starting points to highlight the process of analogical reasoning in more detail. The metaphors employed were not only or simply expressed verbally, but physically constructed in a collaborative effort. Furthermore, these three-dimensional metaphors were then enacted by members' both verbally and non-verbally performative gestures. For instance, manipulating detailed features of the model or playing out certain elements of the model illustrate the performative nature of the process. Finally, we detect socially bounded aspects of the process, including the discursive regularities that impacted the extent to which after-sales services was considered a legitimate topic of discussion by the participants.

Building a model of the organization as a fortress triggered conversations, enactment and sense-making around some structural features of the organization as a wealthy, well-guarded, solid, but fairly inflexible entity. The pirate's nest as the initial metaphor – placed on the opposite side of the table, similar in size as the fortress – triggered a portrayal of the competition's structural elements in terms of its aggression and hostility yet high degree of flexibility. Furthermore, the empty sarcophagus portraying a potential lack in core competencies triggered a sense-making process around the gap between espoused and experienced core competencies of the organization. Finally, when exploring the nature of the customer relationship in view of the after-sales service, the single bridge resembled the perceived limitations and inflexibility of the current after-sales service within the customer relationship.

A thorough exploration of these elements led participants to gain a global, more integrative perspective of their business strategy. In view of PackInc's lack of an attractive, sustainable customer relationship and a highly flexible and adaptive competitor, participants acknowledged the strategic nature of the after-sales service. Furthermore, acknowledging after-sales as a strategic issue led participants subsequently to discuss an alliance with one of the competitors as a serious strategic option. Figure 2 illustrates this overall journey.

INSERT FIGURE 2 about here

We now reflect in more detail on the extent to which these processes of analogical reasoning present evidence of practice as we have defined it here. First, with respect to the embodied aspect of practice, the movement of participants back and forth from one table to another made certain aspects of their reasoning process distinct from one another. At one table, they sat down, talked, and put their hands behind their heads in a reflective posture. At the other table, where there were no chairs, they walked around, engaged with their hands in the construction of three-dimensional model, pointed to these models, described and narrated particular aspects of these models, changed them, ridiculed them, etc.

Second, with respect to the performative aspects of practice, the very fact that the after-sales issue was not seen as strategically important when they were discussing it around the first table, but then became a real issue for them when they constructed it, indicates that the process of analogically-mediated reasoning involved the enactment of pre-conscious knowledge. Moreover, they changed the way in which they talked about their competition and their customers. Whereas previously they had discussed these two groups in terms market analyses, accounts of purchasing behavior, and key accounts, when they engaged in the performative practice of analogical reasoning, they discussed them in terms of the simplified essential characteristics (see Fig. 2). As opposed to the abstract buyer-purchasing criteria, these characteristics were very tangible and laden with emotionally-rich significance. As Barry (1994) has emphasized, this apparent simplicity is actually what enables people to deal with structural complexity.

Finally, with respect to the socially-structured aspects of practice, it is interesting to note that prior to the analogical reasoning process, the executives expressed trust in the external expertise of consultants to verify their own gut feelings about the business. The impact of the consultants on the discursive regularity provided justification for their feeling that the after-sales service was a non-issue (albeit with the exception of the CEO). Following the analogically-mediated process, the leaders came to believe that after-sales service was a meaningful issue in spite of the fact that no consultant had brought it up. In this sense, the process enabled them to talk about the issue, acknowledge its relevance, and furthermore explore the idea of forming an alliance to address the issue – whereas previously all of these topics were blind spots, if not taboos. Indeed the radical nature of the suggestion to consider an alliance indicates that the process of analogical reasoning had not only involved socially-structured aspects of their experience, but furthermore transformed some of its existing constraints.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper, we set out to present analogical reasoning as a form of practice, and we have illustrated this theoretical suggestion with case data involving a team of executives struggling with a strategic issue. This paper being a first, imperfect cut on the subject matter, we suggest that the conceptual, practical, and methodological implications of this effort can inform the emerging discourse on a practices of strategy (e.g. Balogun, Huff, & Johnson, 2003; Hendry & Seidl, 2003; Heracleous, 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003; Regnér, 2003; Whittington, 2003). Indeed, we suggest that any attempt to understand ‘what managers really do’ should take into account the embodied, performative, and socially-structured aspects of the practice of analogical reasoning.

The implications of this conclusion are as follows: first, conceiving of analogical reasoning as a practice that involves embodied, performative and socially-bounding aspects has conceptual implications. Our focus in this paper on physical models of metaphors, and more importantly, on the processes through which people constructed those models, is of a descriptive and exploratory, not normative nature. While acknowledging the relevance of cognitive aspects of analogical reasoning, the paper additionally emphasizes the embodied aspects and processes that seem to have been neglected by previous researchers. In view of the practice of strategy, such a shift is vital as it allows us to more thoroughly

investigate processes of analogical reasoning in strategy in terms of setting, gesture, posture, nature and form of metaphors, etc.

Methodologically, we are drawn to pursue what Bourdieu calls 'participant objectivation', and reflect on the conditions of our own involvement with, and engagement in practices of analogical reasoning in the context of strategy-making. In particular, we recognize the importance for research focused on analogical reasoning of overcoming the 'intellectual bias' that "entices the researcher to see the world as spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; cited in Everett, 2002).

Finally, there is a normative implication for practitioners. As Smircich & Stubbart have argued (1985), the systematic variation of metaphors enables managers to better understand their respective organizations. Our paper indicates that any approach that allows not only the systematic variation of metaphors, but additionally, the active construction of those metaphors, can have significant impact for managers and organizational actors who seek to make new sense of their world.

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FIGURES

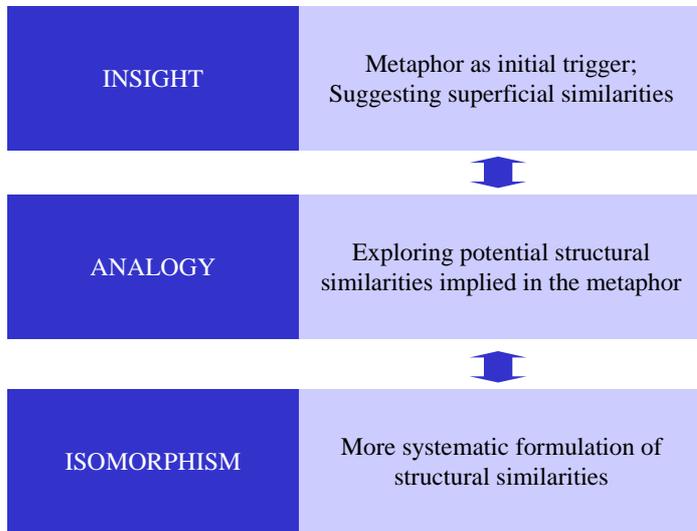
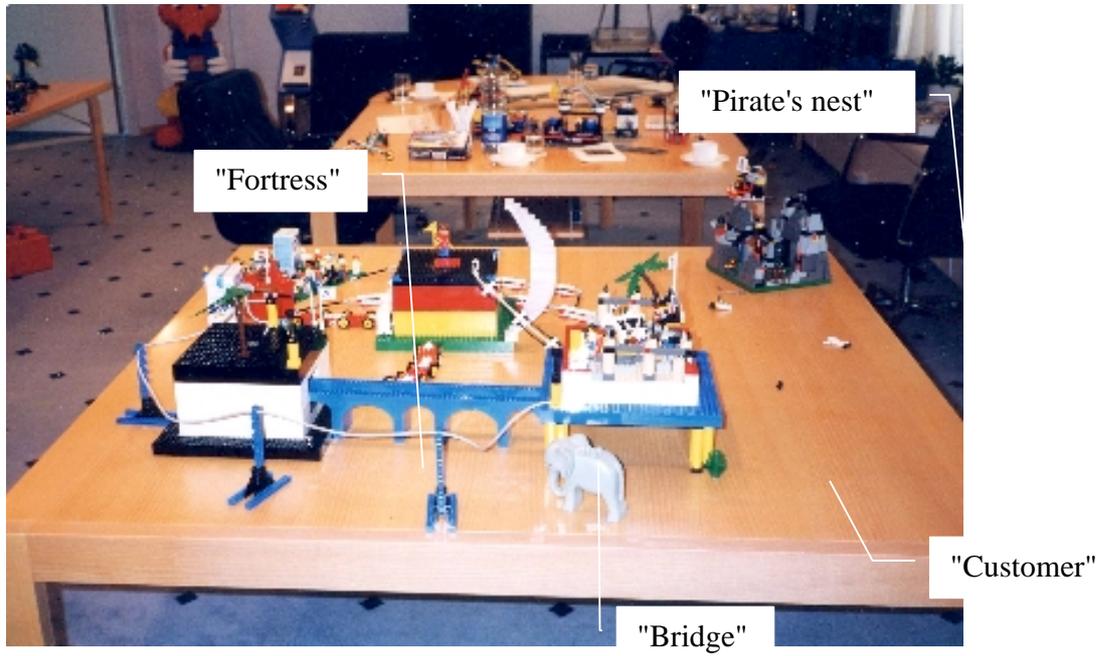


Figure 1: Process model of analogical reasoning (based on Tsoukas, 1991: 575)

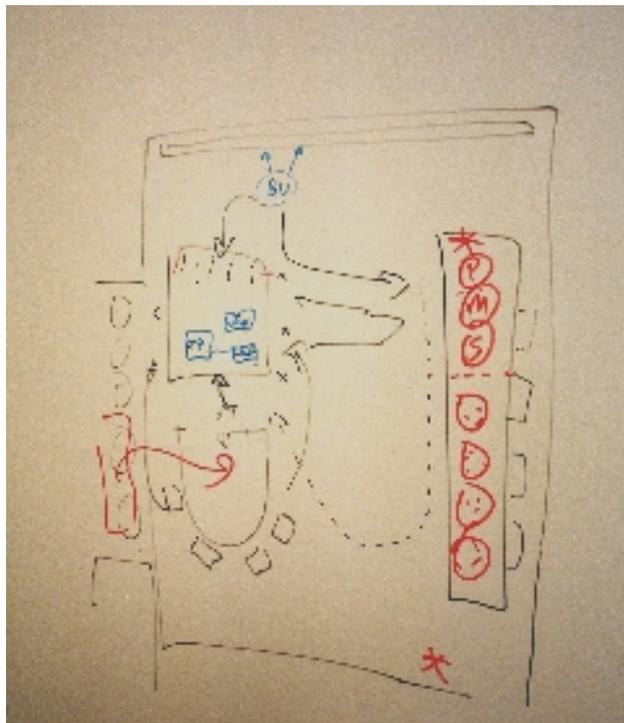


Figure 2: The practice of analogical reasoning in Pack Inc.

PICTURES



Picture 1: Models of Pack Inc.



Picture 2: Schematic sketch of physical metaphors