Analogical Reasoning as a Practice of Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Analogical reasoning as proposed by cognitive scientists in general, and by organization scholars in particular, refers to the successful transfer of structural similarities from a source to a target domain. In strategic management, 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. presenting embodied aspects of analogical reasoning as complementary, equally relevant for such processes. Thus, we propose analogical reasoning as a practice of strategy and illustrate our claim with an empirical case.

INTRODUCTION

Analogical reasoning as proposed by cognitive scientists in general, and by organization scholars in particular, refers to the successful transfer of structural similarities from a source to a target domain. In strategic management, 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. Such emphasis might 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. presenting embodied aspects of analogical reasoning as complementary, equally relevant for such processes. Thus, we propose analogical reasoning as a practice of strategy and illustrate our claim with an empirical case of the leadership team of a large player in the packaging industry.

ANALOGICAL REASONING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Analogical reasoning has been proposed as 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 refers to two distinct relational characteristics 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). Thus, cognitive scientists have proposed structural similarity as the essential characteristic of analogical reasoning (Gentner & Markman, 1997).

Focusing on its relevance for organizational phenomena, 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 that they operationalize 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).

Reflecting on the functioning of metaphors in more detail, Tsoukas (1991) highlights the constitutive, yet partial nature of metaphors in the discursive construction of social worlds. The relevance of metaphors in

analogical reasoning is suggested because they allow capturing and expression of a continuous flow of experience whereas in contrast, literal language tends to segment experiences. Also, they provide the initial starting point for a subsequent process of exploring suggested parallels in a more systematic way. Furthermore, metaphors can be conceived of as proxies for accessing deeper – hidden or even unconscious – forms of knowledge by providing additional, image-rich expressive devices for such discovery.

In this respect, Tsoukas' (1993) typology of metaphors provides a useful framework for clustering metaphorical discourse in organizations. Drawing on Morgan's (1997 [1986]) initial set of metaphors, he proposes two continua for systematizing metaphors. Metaphors can be grouped with respect to their overall orientation to explanation or intervention. Similarly, they might also be grouped along their algorithmic or heuristic orientation. Subject to their orientations, metaphors in analogical reasoning might trigger imagination, provide proxies for alternative perspectives and consequently for alternative routes for action (1993: 325).

Outlining a process model of analogical reasoning, Tsoukas (1991) suggests three sequential steps[1] of a process model as illustrated in Figure 1.

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[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.

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 establishing 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: 574pp.). 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 sense-making potential of a metaphor is brought to bear.

In the field of strategic management respectively, the concept of analogical reasoning has been drawn on most prominently in strategic mapping (e.g. Bougon, 1992; Brown, 1992; Calori, Johnson, & Sarnin, 1994; Clarke & Mackaness, 2001; Eden, 1992; Hodgkinson & Johnson, 1994). The notion of a map being of metaphorical nature itself, 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. A map, we would argue from our conceptual perspective, allows for establishing and testing of structural similarities between map (target) and territory (source).

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 establishing an isomorphism between source and target domain. While acknowledging the explanatory power of this model, it seems though that both concept and application of analogical reasoning in organization and strategy emphasizes primarily its cognitive aspects. Yet, it is Huff who suggests that mapping 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 the more embodied elements of analogical reasoning that we intend to explore and highlight in this paper as we consider them equally relevant for understanding processes of analogical reasoning.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE LENS

Bourdieu's concept of practice (1990) provides us with 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 general task of translating Bourdieu's work into the discursive field of organizational theory requires significant effort and care. Recent attempts to accomplish this general task (especially Everett, 2002; Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2003; Mutch, 2003) therefore serve to guide our considerations here. Specifically, the

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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 refer to this set of considerations as the 'embodied' aspect of practice.

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

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[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.

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.

THE PRACTICE OF ANALOGICAL REASONING

The theoretical contribution of this paper is to present Bourdieu's concept of practice as a lens, which extends existing research focused on analogical reasoning. *We propose, in short, that analogical reasoning should be understood as a form of practice.* We have following Bourdieu identified three distinct aspects of practice (i.e., the embodied, performative, and

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[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 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

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, and we 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

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analogical reasoning, and furthermore, whether the many variations of such strategy-making might together comprise a field of 'strategy' as such.

be deeply engrained in organizational practice, remain always subject to change.

There are at least three examples of organizational research focused on analogical reasoning that provide us with some guidance for how to proceed with the development of theory that addresses analogical reasoning through 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 human capacity to establish and resonate on physical relationships of and 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 that it takes attention away from the speaker and focuses on the sculpture, which in turn allows meanings that would normally not be sanctioned to be tried out. 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 process consultant and 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 "analogs 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 imagery rich, multimodal process of sense-making that extends metaphors as 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 articles all appear to accept the basic premise 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 articles thus provide further justification for the use of practice as an integrated conceptual lens with which to understand analogical reasoning in organizations. Because one of the authors of this paper has been involved in the research focused on serious play, we now take the opportunity to explore the analogical reasoning processes involved in this particular approach.

THE CASE OF PACK INC.

A large player in the consumer packaging industry, PackInc's selling proposition was to supply a system for the processing, packaging, and distribution of consumer goods. The firm had some 10% share of the global market for this type of packaged goods, and was very profitable.

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 this service offering was currently a cost centre within PackInc, strong voices in the firm were continually arguing for it to become a profit centre. While one group of executives considered the challenge a non-issue not worthy of executive attention because the firm already dominated the industry, and because the technical support business did not represent a significant part of their revenue or profits. In fact, it was an increasing cost. The opposing camp saw many more worrying aspects, which they believed could pose a threat to their customer relationships. They argued that technical support people by definition have very strong relationships deep inside customer organizations, which influenced both repurchasing and purchasing decisions.

Given this ambiguous and uncertain setting, the CEO invited three fellow executives to a strategic conversation in order to explore the issue in more detail. These executives included the individual considered to be

second-most influential within the firm, due to his responsibility for all market companies (i.e., profit/loss responsible subsidiaries). The second participant was responsible for all production-oriented activities, including manufacturing plants in dozens of countries. The third participant was the vice-president of human resources, who had been in the firm for a very long time, and had recruited the CEO from his previous role as a country manager within the firm. He was well-known for his diplomatic skills, and the CEO wanted to invite him in an effort to smooth out potential conflicts between the market- and the production-focused executives.

A facilitated twofold-conversation[5] was designed to first try to extract, visualize and share the four executive's perceptions of the business and how they as leaders think they understand and deal with strategic issues. A first part of the facilitated discussion unfolded while they were sitting around a large table in the company boardroom. In a second part of the conversation the facilitators encouraged the four to elaborate freely about the after-sales issue. The focus of this part was on identifying and articulating the nature of the after-sales support threats, and agree on appropriate actions.

During the first part the facilitators invited the four leaders to express their "experience of the business." They shared the view that their business was stable to the extent they did not have any long-term plans, although they had these. They were also convinced that they themselves picked up important signals from the organization, and they claimed that they learned a lot from interfacing with customers worldwide.

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[5] Together with a fellow faculty member, the second author acted as process facilitator.

Overall these four leaders stressed the ease with which they could see the way forward, and the trust in their experienced-based "gut feelings" when it comes to taking the right decision and action. That gut feeling, they suggested, tended to coincide with what professional strategy consultants identified and recommended they should do. It also made them "flexible" as a leadership team and as a company. Yet, in view of the after sales support issue their experience and gutfeeling approach had not resulted in a shared understanding. In fact, the after-sales issue had fallen between the market- and production-focused executives, and neither of them saw it as a relevant issue. They expressed only limited interest in the issue, and it seemed that they had agreed to attend and participate in the meeting only because the CEO had asked them to.

For the second part of the conversation, LEGO materials were introduced as a communication tool. The four were asked to build a representation of PackInc in its industry, taking care to also represent the competition in their after-sales service business. They constructed PackInc as a hostile looking "fortress" or "castle" (in black and white) based on a solid platform. Their castle was full of chests full of gold and heavily guarded with cannons pointing in all directions. A palm tree on top should indicate 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 very solid 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.

In contrast to how they portrayed PackInc, they built a generic customer using many colors and placing it of four pillars instead of a platform. Instead of the black roof of PackInc, the archetype customer was full of figures of humans representing various facets of their business. Physically, the customers were elevated above PackInc. They also included the customer's customers into the landscape, the retailers that use PackInc's packages for their various products. Like the former, these were represented by a multi-colored construction with lots of friendly faces. As the retailers increasingly sought to have direct linkages with PackInc, the four leaders built such connections. These were more colorful and much more flexible (on wheels) in nature than the solid bridge between PackInc and its direct customers.

The conversation around this construction eventually focused on the sources of PackInc's competitive advantages and their core competencies as a firm. Although they all knew the official line about what these competencies were supposed to be, they did not appear to have a shared view of what they looked like. One participant had placed a sarcophagus brick in a larger solid box built of bricks that had been placed within the centre of the fortress. As the conversation continued, he pulled out the larger box from within the group's construction, slowly opened it, pulled out the sarcophagus, blew off the imagined dust, and opened it saying: "*This is our core competency.*" As participants looked inside, they saw that the box was empty.

When they were content with the way they had portrayed their own company in a landscape of customers and customer's customers, they turned

their attention towards competition for after-sales services. When asked to build a physical representation of a specific competitor, they settled for a pre-built platform of a mountain, and selected pieces of pirate set to build a pirate's nest that included a number of aggressive looking people armed with swords and guns, seemingly entering the competitive landscape. They placed skeletons around it to represent the hostility of the pirate's nest. The entire construction was about the same size as the one representing PackInc, and placed on the opposite side of the table. No connections sprung from the pirate's nest but it had very flexible connection points prepared. When they were content with their constructions they all rotated around the table, leaning over to take different vantage views, pointing, and calling upon the others to take notice of certain facets of the model (see Picture 1). During this review all of them moved back and forth between sitting around the first table (where they kept their notes and documents) and standing besides the table with their physical, LEGO construction.

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They continued to talk about *connections* when discussing what the after-sales activity was really all about. As they reviewed their own representation of the interconnections in their landscape the four leaders

agreed that the technical experts were primarily focused on quality, i.e., ensuring that the equipment worked. For these leaders, the term 'customer relationship' meant the relationship between the firm and the people who buy their products. As they had portrayed it, the only link between PackInc and the customers was a rigid, monochromatic bridge that had very little, if anything, to do with after-sales technical service. They claimed that the technical service people were focused not on customer relationships, but instead, on providing technical support.   In spite of their recognized knowledge about the firm's products, the technical people did not have a particularly high status or salary in PackInc. Moreover, they stressed that technical service was typically seen as a necessary evil by the P&L responsible throughout the organizations; it was a cost that did not generate much revenue.

As they reviewed these facts and perceptions one of them went to the flip chart and drew a complex image of boxes of various size, arrows and dotted lines chart that to them illustrated how the after-sales support might impact the business (see Picture 2).

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This image and the subsequent discussion increasingly lead participants to conclude that they had previously underestimated the strategic relevance of such "technical" after-sales service: "*It impacts the core of our business."* The CEO stressed that the new competitive threat had already happened "to our knowledge" in some small markets, and while pointing towards the table with the LEGO construction, he was convinced it was happening elsewhere right now. He listed three of the larger firms offering after sales service on PackInc's equipment, claiming, "*They do exactly what we do but cheaper…*". Finally, 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?"*

One of the participants suggested to form an alliance that would enable collaboration with, rather than competition against, other organizations that were positioned to supply their after-sales service business. This was met with very positive reactions by all of them. It seemed that rarely anyone had previously been able, or dared to explore such a radical idea in earlier conversations about the potential after-sales threat.

When debriefing, they concluded that they most likely had avoided to make some choices about the after-sales service activity because "these don't fit into the current structure"; that they needed "new frames" for how to deal with the competitive threat; and they as leaders ought to "sit in" during after-sales service work to better understand what was going on in the downstream "connection" between PackInc and customers.

Epilogue

Two weeks later, the CEO announced that he had sold in the idea of trying out an alliance with one of the big after-sales service suppliers, and had already been in touch with them to explore common ground.

DISCUSSION

For reflecting on the 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 Bourdieuian 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. In view of our overall suggestion, it is important to note the following. 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 competitor's structural elements in terms of his/her aggression, hostility yet high flexibility when entering the competition. 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 conclude a global, integrative isomorphic conclusion of the entire process. In view of Pack Inc.'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.

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INSERT FIGURE 2 about here

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We now reflect in more detail on the extent to which these processes of analogical reasoning present evidence of practice as we have defined 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, put their hands behind their heads in 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. Even while discussing the meaning of the models, they compulsively fiddled with individual bricks, turning them over in their hands.

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 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 expressed, perceived 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 surface some of its boundaries.

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 intends to sensitise for aesthetic, embodied aspects and processes that seem to have been neglected. 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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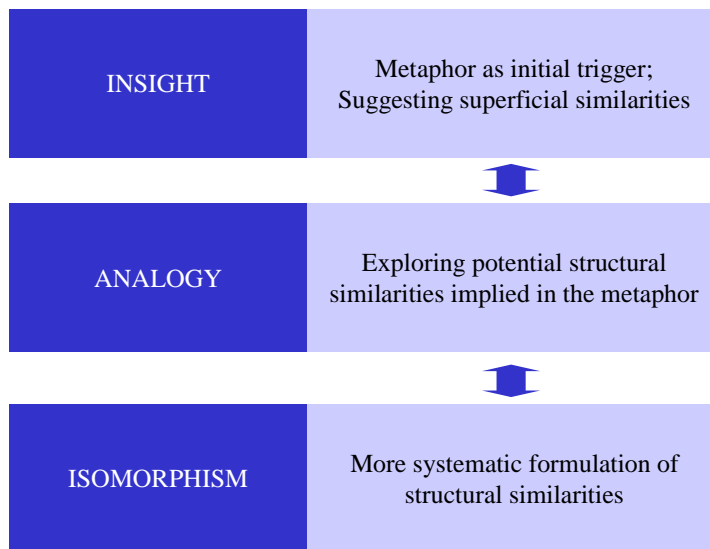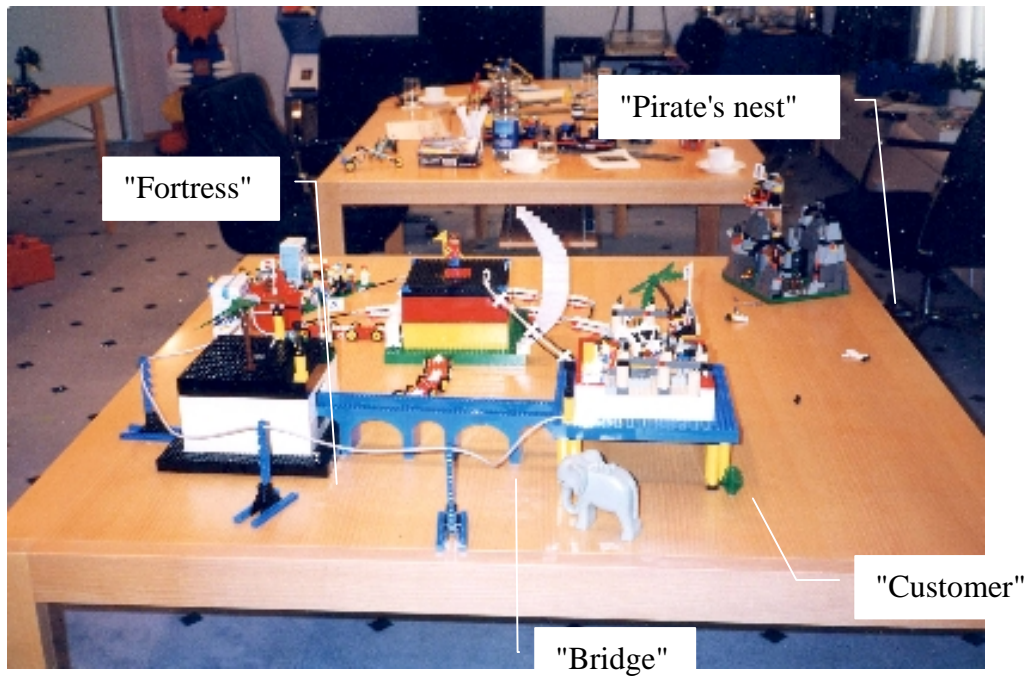
FIGURES

INSIGHT	Metaphor as initial trigger; Suggesting superficial similarities
ANALOGY	Exploring potential structural similarities implied in the metaphor
ISOMORPHISM	More systematic formulation of structural similarities

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

| Initial metaphor	Organization as fortress	Competitor as pirate nest	Core competencies as content of empty sarcophagus	Customer relationships as fixed bridge
Structural similarities	Wealthy, heavily guarded, but inflexible	Diverse, aggressive, progressive, hostile, flexible	Lack of content	Single, inflexible point of contact
Systematic, integrative conclusion	• Acknowledging after-sales service as a strategic issue • Identifying the current customer relationship practice as insufficient • Accepting that competition is more flexible than Pack Inc. on this • Suggesting to form an alliance with a competitor on after-sales			

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

PICTURES

Picture 1: Models of Pack Inc.
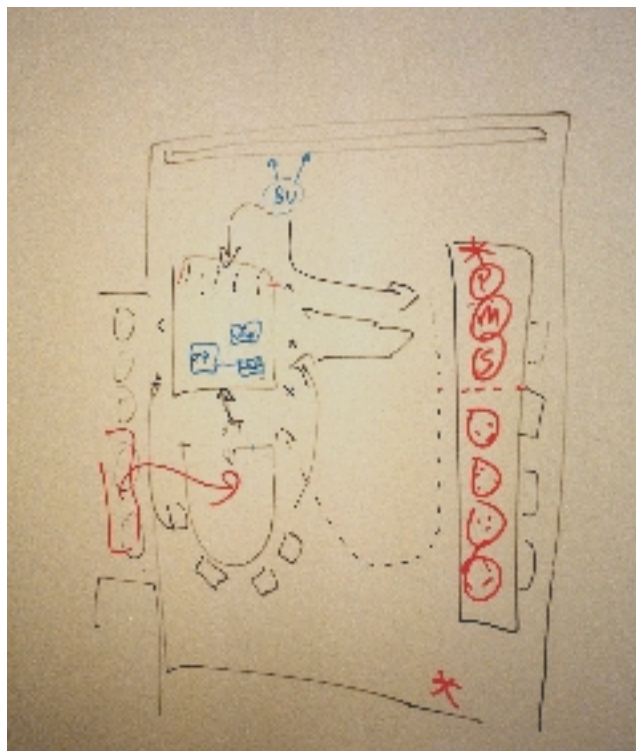
Picture 2: Schematic sketch of physical metaphors