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Metaphors

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Falcon Media is suffering from a stagnating and increasingly incompatible business model where what was before a spurring organization with free flow of creative thoughts has been consumed by the same forces as it set out to be an alternative to. As a result of a disagreement on the future direction of the organization, two of the four founders have left and although it remains financially sound, the organization has lost its edge. In an effort to change the quo, this essay will seek to provide advice for the managers of Falcon Media by looking at the organization through four different metaphors and critically assess the pros and cons of these metaphors when applied to organizations. The findings will be presented as a set of recommendations to the management of Falcon Media.

When we look at an organization as a living organism, there are four connotations that become immediately obvious. A living organism, and any other *breathing* entity will cyclically expand and contract. It signifies something dynamic, *growing*, *adaptable* and evolutionary, both in the short term and in the longer picture. In order to accomplish both this breathing and the growth, the entity needs to be *nurtured* through a steady inflow of nutriment (Morgan, 2006). This metaphor highlights the dynamic nature of organizations and it provides a clear picture into how an organization is constantly evolving, adaptable or responsible to its environment and requires its staff to be providing for it as well as a steady input of input in the form of clients of a market. It caters to the human element of organizations and understands the dynamism and importance of social relations and social fabric under the findings of the Hawthorne studies (Ibid.; Dale & Willey, 1984). Another aspect of this metaphor and its relation to its environment and change is in terms of the dangers these pose to an organism—before it so responds. Some dangers are very incidental and would clearly fall under a force majeure while others are foreseeable, preventable and mitigable (Morgan, 2006). If one doesn't respect the dangers and adapt to the changes, an organism will stand the chance of dying and fading away as it never existed, and so would organizations in relation to technology, to market shifts and to competitors. As organisms balance its activity, it does so in regards to the dangers and changes that it experience and to, under the best attempt, serve optimally for all of its subsets (Ibid.).

To contrast this metaphor of an inherently dynamic entity that adapts to its surroundings, we will look to organizations as machines. This metaphor makes one connote the processes and systems of organizations; how they function, how they interconnect and how they provide a step towards the one, or multiple, end results of these organizations. It connotes a structurally static entity with little room for unplanned customization and clear specificity of task and job purpose. The metaphor efficiently highlights the bureaucracy and paper- and email-shoving of the organization through focusing on a means-end relationship and neglects the dynamism and fluidity of the processes, employees and available inputs (Morgan, 1980; Zhong & House, 2012). Put back-to-back the metaphor of a machine is inherently more firm and rigid in its materials and in its ways, and while we may easily connote bureaucracy as a negative force, it does provide

necessary structure. Just as a machine needs supporting structures to keep its parts organized and connected in a specific way, so does an organization and we then, through this lens might in a firmer sense than in the previous see the structures as explicitly necessary (Ibid.; Morgan, 1980; Smith, 2016). This phenomena can provide value and insight, but can also work in to an expectancy of what an organization has to be and thereby also simplifying the understanding of the organization. A machine further very well denotes to the nature of organizations with a purpose that has been explicitly set at a point in time and where the performance of every aspect, function and detail can be measured against this purpose and objective in a tayloristic manner (Koenig, 2016). Taylor himself saw to the symbiotic relationship between man and machine in the factory and our understanding of the metaphor and its intrinsic focus on function fits very well in this picture (Morgan, 2006; Taylor, 1911; Green, 1986).

Beyond these clear set metaphors, we will also look at organizations as political systems. Although the properties that one would apply from a political system and on to an organization is clear, it is harder to disentangle what is a transposing of properties from the metaphor and what we inherently consider an organization to be; there is a difficulty in disentangle the connotations from the denotations as society denote organizations as political. Political systems surround moving the entity that it is governing in the direction of the interest of its members, much like how an organism seeks to stretch towards its purpose (Morgan, 2006). Political systems comes in many shapes and forms, but for the sake of simplicity we can divide between those who take into account, and should explicitly stand to serve, its members and those who more implicitly stand to serve its leaders. In other words the democratic against the authoritarian and dictatorial and the interests of the many against the interests of the few. The benefit of a democratic system is that it immediately sets out to be of benefit to its members and that it then aims to include their opinion in shaping the direction and the backing for the use of power, rather than ignore, suppress and override as we will see in the next metaphor and in dictatorial systems. The backside of just the same benefit is when coalitions of interest gain power on backchannels and informal networks (Clove & Goldsmith, 2001; Morgan, 1980; Morgan, 2006). Well serving political systems—following any version of the principle of separation of powers and Montesquieu—also provide a stronger sense of mutual accountability (Ahmed & Fatima 2013; Bufacchi 2011). Not always in the short run, but decisions and actions running downstream, can hold accountability to those upstream. This ensures that the process as a whole can be self-governed and instils trust into those downstream that the decisions follow good faith. Imperative to the function of a political system is some form of bureaucracy and this is some of what Weber spoke to (Weiss, 1983; Smith, 2016; Allen, 2004). With the metaphor of organizations as political systems we are putting a great amount of emphasis on the structural relations in a formal sense, but it doesn't necessarily account for the function of the social fabric and does well neglect externalities. Political systems are practical, rational and pragmatic and the metaphor is able to highlight the friction between the wants, interests conflict and power relationships of the different parties both laterally and

vertically (Morgan, 2006; Örtenblad, 2016). On the aspect of authority, privilege and power we can in the simplistic view look to the authoritarianistic versions of political systems where the interests of the collective in larger part is secondary to the interests of the one or the few and where the interests can be overridden by power privilege. Power systems denotes action and intrinsic compliance, and it suffocates and subsumes autonomy in its act of exerting power. That said, we have many shades of explicitness of agency in these exertions, as we can see from the methods of political activity; autocratically, bureaucratically or technocratically (Morgan, 2006).

Lastly, we will look at organizations as systems of domination where one become coerced through the exertion of direct threat or force. In many ways, political systems and systems of domination are each others flip side in that the one focus on concerning interests while the other purely exert power in an effort to dominate. It can also be carry subtler forms or be merely purporting, but may nonetheless be effective in its execution. Weber identified three types of social domination or forms of authority which he called charismatic, traditional and rational-legal and we can with these see traces of political systems, less they only assume domination through means that are not necessarily manifested in the interests of the ruled (Morgan, 2006). The metaphor connotes an automatic legitimacy, a true or purported rightness and succumbing to someone else's view and way. As a way of action, it can be well suited under pressure situations but that, albeit maybe legally correct or utter rational, can be morally or ethically questionable. From Weber and his critique of bureaucracy, domination of power over others is a result of a logic-driven society and the potential for utter rationalization (Ibid.; Allen, 2004; Weiss, 1983; Laiz & Schlichte, 2016). In this we can get a good glimpse at one of major the drawbacks of this metaphor; it turns pragmatism and rationality into the driving force and sums the organization's activity down to binary transactions; without any middle ground or nuance and which limits our understanding of the organization (Koenig, 2016; Fantuzzo, 2015; Allen, 2004; Smith, 2016).

If we look at Falcon Media as a living organism, we see that the initial model of the client centered approach stood to create an adaptable organism with plentiful reasons to grow. Whereas the employees each were free and incentivized to develop further experience and competencies, or farther reaching and more diverse roots in the ground, the organization was free to grow its stem, grow bigger and attract more engagements from new and larger clients looking for the creative edge. But with size also comes complexity. Each leaf or subsystem of current business grew larger and became increasingly harder to point and channel towards the optimal source of nutriment inflow and it became harder to maintain a creative edge. In addition, the difference in views on the future direction of the organization would necessarily be difficult under a fluid and homeostatic entity; one adaptable to changes in its surroundings, its milieu and in itself. For a living organism to work efficiently, it needs to understand its own structure and gradually fight or circumvent entropic tendencies. It needs to adapt and breathe; it needs to inhale new inspiration, talent and clients, and exhale what is old and needs to be changed in order to stay

afloat. Falcon Media grew to stagnate in trying to inhale and grow without realizing its inherent need to cyclically also exhale. The changes made by Jim and Eddie stood to formalize its current structure, it stood to create supports for its tall but fragile shape rather than to release leaves and exhale in order to be able to grow and inhale. At the same time, it did so without taking into consideration the full spectrum of the needs of its subsystems, and we see this in that there was no consideration for the creative output in the decision, only monetary value.

What the organism metaphor neglects, the machine metaphor highlights. If we think of each staff member as a cog wheel, a team as a set of cog wheels, each departmental function as a distinctive repetitive pattern or process and each churned output as a product of the cogs interacting with the input; we see a static system. The creativity of Falcon Media becomes not an adaptable or interactive function, but a pure repetitive result of the ways in which you can act on the input. Falcon Media stagnates as a limitation to the number of combinations in which the parts of the machine can be put together. And as this becomes apparent to its market, it loses its attraction. If we now in a new iteration of the machine designed it so that the main churning, the conversion or the creative process, could be swapped out with a new configuration Falcon Media would be able to provide its clients with a broader set of creativity. Now this was even already done, but on a further micro level; the initial business model encouraged each individual to insert new or reconfigured elements into their own internal churning. What now needs to happen is to ensure that this happens for the organization as a whole by replacing people either on a team level or from the organization itself. As such a reconfiguration would in a smaller or larger sense change the way in which the machine reach a product, than that would still be of the same type, but through new internal dynamics, it would be a new machine (Morgan, 2006). Hopefully a more efficient machine that would be able to better cater to the needs and to generating creative output.

As any organization looking to function inherently will also want to set a purpose or goal and a way of reaching or at least truthfully navigate towards it, it has a direction at which to measure interests against. Falcon Media sought their interests to be in providing creative solutions to its clients, and do so with more edge and panache than its competition. The conflict that arose between the four founders illustrated a difference in interests between the two pairs where Jim and Eddie wanted the established business to generate the best financial output and Bill and Jesse wanted the best creative output, and as would presumably also the creatives within the organization. In solving this conflict, and through the lens of a political system, the pairs of founders decided on the basis of their interests and not the collective's. For the power aspect, where structure fuels power divides and where the lower level members have to succumb to the authority of the upper ones. Falcon Media started out with a fair plan to be relatively flat, but as the founders saw, this created a larger burden on the ones that are heightened above others in the structure. A more hierarchical and formal structure delegates power down an established chain and releases immediate burdens at the same time. For the aforementioned conflict and standoff, it

was solved purely through the execution of power privilege by the largest shareholders. Although it was their prerogative and they had seniority in experience, it did override the interests of the other partners and again presumably larger parts of their staff. It is still possible to argue that one situation where power comes into play is under stress or when a situation comes to a stand-still, and that it then was their categorical imperative to act as they did. The case does not go enough into the details of how immediate their situation was beyond the fact that action had to be taken, making it hard to instill whether or not this scenario was truly the case with Falcon Media.

As we finally look at Falcon Media as a system of domination, we see one glaring example and we have already touched on it, namely the conflict between the founders. Again the decided course of action seemingly have means that are not explicitly the same as the organization's. The organization would stand best to thrive from growing in more regards than in primarily the monetary output of the largest shareholders. Jim and Eddie acted on their power in an effort to load shift the managerial responsibilities in Falcon Media and sharpen the organization's structure. They did so by using their managerial prerogative to override the opinions of Bill and Jesse—effectively forcing their view by the use of veto. With this decision made, Falcon Media would formalize communication, responsibilities and decision making. It would also increase the power distance of themselves against the ground staff, and to these, increase the authority of their opinions. Jim and Eddie's priorities resonates well with Marx' view that the need and want for domination is in the quest of surplus value and the accumulation of capital (Morgan, 2006; Weiss, 1983; Marghlin, 1974).

In terms of recommendations, it is first of all important to understand that we do not see that there was an immediate problem in the original business model of Falcon Media. But attraction comes and goes, and so does creativity. This can either be fought or one can try to adapt to the changes that are happening in the surrounding milieu. After looking at Falcon Media through the lens of an organism we saw that its aspirations may have outgrown its foundation and without having adapted to the fact that it can no longer provide for its tall stem, it now suffers. It's existential purpose is diminishing and it will have to change its ways in order to be viable to its environment. Adding to this the idea of the necessity of procedural structure in a machine and we can with ease see that Falcon Media also would benefit from increased formality in their activities. Falcon Media should in our view seek to provide a better balance between this necessary formality of business and the autonomy necessary to provide the best creative output. As we know the important benefits of fluidity and dynamism in work of a creative nature, Falcon Media should embrace change in the form of designing for adaptability rather than to formalize with a static view on reality. Namely, we again propose that the advantages of the initial model be kept intact for the ground creative staff when planning the future direction. From the viewpoint of a power system, we can also recognize Jim and Eddie's prerogative to act autocratically, but in understanding the conflict from the outside we think that such conflicts could be resolved with

interests intact by trying to reach a resolution that every party could be comfortable with. The main issue in this conflict is that it should be recognized that these differing of interests present in the founders may be present throughout the organization and that it would be strategic to include these interests in the equation for it to be able to effectively grow internally in the future. Therefore we also are of the firm belief that there are important aspects of déjà-vu in what Bill and Jesse saw as the future direction.

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