

Chapter 3

Reflecting on the Orchestra Metaphor: Aligning Business Models Simple Views

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the potentialities and limitations of metaphors, as simulation techniques applied for decision-making businesses process. A special look is given to the orchestra metaphor, as it is possible to consider one of the most cited method for decades. Approaching orchestra formation definitions, a study of orchestra characteristics and peculiarities was conducted, resulting in an interesting inside view of the orchestra. A brief theoretical analysis about modelling techniques and its application in business process is also developed, allowing, at the end, to discuss how the orchestra metaphor can be applied in a useful way, encompassing several of the aspects we pointed in the text. This results as an orientation for the reader to understand how this specific technique – orchestra metaphor – can be effectively applied in decision-making processes of any level for organizations, escaping from mistakes usually committed when simple views for musical orchestras are adopted.

INTRODUCTION

Business literature, as it happens with other research fields and its related themes, usually approach the main subject adopting metaphors. Methods like these are used to promote understanding of a specific topic, aiming a better comprehension through a routinely view of the world, based on regular, normal facts and events, associated with leisure, sports, organizational reactions, military victories and other manifestations which can become of common perception by the learner. Although valid as instruments of discussion and motivation, metaphors are not meant to promote a complete analysis of the main topic, a deep notion on how its parts are integrated, how they interrelate to perform and what are the definitions of the final solution implementation, among other limitations.

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It is possible to verify that proposals for metaphors usage for Strategy and other business topics are frequent, suggested by influential authors, consultants, teachers and researchers, just in the way to promote an easier way to discuss the comprehension of complex subjects. For instance, a consultant can try to associate an organizational decision with a “winner score” in a sport, like a basketball three-point throw, a soccer goal or a marathon completion, theoretically, making it easier to understand the most relevant implications and outcome for that specific decision.

Unfortunately, as a more accurate exam allows, metaphors are good to initiate or point out some specific events in a discussion or research, but not to provide a complete development of scenarios in some cases, turning into an incomplete depiction of a context, leaving questions unanswered. This will result in sometimes precarious level for those decisions.

This chapter intends to develop a better understanding of metaphors application for business studies, mainly addressing one of the most used techniques in recent managerial contents: Symphonic Orchestras. The Orchestra metaphor is frequently adopted to debate several business-related concepts, such as leadership, departmental organization, bureaucracy, autonomy, initiatives, expertise, creativity among many others. In this text, we analyze how an orchestra is usually composed, its regular relations, similarities with other artistic enterprises and the exercise of various of its features: leadership or conduction, expertise, interpretation, organizational structure and managerial aspects for competencies, such as knowledge creation and performance alignment.

Although extremally valid in some aspects, it is argued that this metaphor is mistakenly applied, practiced as a formal guidance towards planning and project management, observing its insertion on analyzing business issues and, finally, as a conclusive study, inadequately magnifying the metaphor enabling for simulations, communication and organizational dynamics.

When we think about corporative context, the concepts of hierarchy, structures and bureaucracy (in its structural, formal, a demanded definition) sound as a familiar, usual background. But if we think about an orchestra, is it possible to apply these concepts in the same way? This chapter intends to promote an additional light when answering this and other related questions.

For this purpose, we start analyzing how one orchestra can be defined, a view of its artistical composition. This discussion aims to level the understanding about some of the most common behaviors, relationships, capabilities and possibilities for managerial decisions regarding musical concerts. After this definition, a reflection is done about metaphors – approaching some trends, from classical usages to the modern arenas of storytelling and gamification, a situation of actual opportunities for simulations to be applied to allow fast decision-making. Then, through a literature review, potentialities and restrictions of modelling adoption is evaluated, allowing the final development around risks, limits and possibilities of metaphor adoption for businesses application. This last part constitutes the reflection intended in the chapter.

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AN ORCHESTRA AS A MODEL: A NAÏVE VIEW

For this section, references are enrolled at the appropriate final section of the chapter, although we choose not to cite it explicitly in the text.

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