

## **The Metaphor of Machine and the Format of a University Essay: The Great Mould?**

### **Introduction**

To maintain the university system in order, university policies must control certain aspects of a student's life with help of certain mechanisms and regulations. Prior to joining a university, every student takes note of the application process, i.e. a system that needs to be followed; otherwise, (s)he is denied the entry to a university. There are documents to be filled in and submitted, and a fee to be paid up before one expects to receive an email.

These are certain processes of which organizations and those wishing to join an organization are aware of and must adhere to. Indeed, the established rules were proposed as managerial rhetoric that plays an important role in effective university governance.

On the above-mentioned premise, this paper will explore an organizational experience of a university in general, applying metaphors of machine to the latter. In the given paper, a number of the features of organizational experience and identify that experience will be discussed. In the given research, a metaphor which enables the author to explore its subtleties such as studying in a highly competitive environment characterized by top down management and heavy reliance on regulation and procedures, will be sought and considered. The given research will also take into account subtle differences in experience such as ethical trading position.

### **Discussion: Humans and Machines**

Norbert Wiener described the study of control and communications in the human nervous system as well as automatic machines, referring to steering engines

of a ship as “the earliest and best developed forms of feed-back mechanisms” (Wiener, 1948, p. 19). He also called human nervous system a “cybernetic” which is governed, and a communications system which is a mathematically-based analogy of the real-life situation. This metaphor has evolved so much that even a human body is associated with a machine-governed mechanism controlled by a dominant personality.

### **Organizational Structure of a University Machine**

A university usually has the organizational structure close to the one shown in Appendix A. Just like any form of a machine, a university has a head perched up above the body, the Vice Chancellor. Below the Vice Chancellor, there are five departments (however, there can be more of them, depending on the structure of a given university). The above-mentioned five departments are the Chief Operating Officer, the PVC Education, PVC Research, the registrar, and the VC’s Portfolio. It is usually under the Registrar that students are served, or governed under the Academic Services, Student Administrative Services, Student Support Services and Health and Counseling Centre. Under the VC’s Portfolio manages the faculties, and various learning colleges. The structure itself is mechanized in such a way that there are divisions and subdivisions splitting the entire organization into intertwined parts.

The staff is placed on their position with certain purpose. While there is no formal agreement with an overarching aim to produce “profit” within the university organization, most organizations today are perceived as having the need to be independent in existence, thus, self-sustaining. This sustenance is then taxed on those who should be bringing in money, namely, the clients. Students, instead of being considered internal parts of the organization become clients that help in the sustenance and maintenance cycle of the machine.

It has been proposed for years to recast images of organizations in order to adhere to the models in social sciences or language-based concepts (Putnam, 1999) towards a progression of organization grounded in discourse consistent with change. Metaphors are embedded in actions and interactions, just the way the vision of a man is influenced by experiences and understanding of the world. As Hogler *et al.* proposed,

The form “A is B” is not arbitrary because metaphors display directionality: A less clearly delineated object or event, A, is structured by the more clearly delineated experience of a second object or event, B. The conceptual power of metaphor comes from this directionality. (Hogler *et al.*, 2008, p. 395)

It goes without saying that within the university organization, changes or challenges in one department are connected to another. The same can be said about tuition increases, financial problems, among other fiscal challenges experienced by both administration and the student body in any given university. The case in point touches upon the recent report of Lewin (2009), about the new analysis of colleges and universities as overstaffed. The report noted, “Neither the report nor outside experts on college affordability went so far as to argue that the increase in support staff was directly responsible for spiraling tuition” (Levin, 2009). In response to Levin’s observation, one auditor-turned professor wrote,

Many colleges publicize their faculty-to-student ratio as an indicator of academic quality. It would be useful if they also publicized their staff-to-student ratios (“staff” meaning any employee who does not engage in teaching or research). Such a figure would be an indicator of the costly inefficiencies that are ultimately passed on to students. The ability to compare these ratios across colleges could prove useful in coaxing them toward greater fiscal responsibility and thus reining in tuition increases. (Fisher, 2009)

The discussion, even though opened up by adversely affected students ever since, has caught attention and finally got in the limelight. Though figures of the sliding enrollment statistics globally indicate needs for reforms, continuing changes in and outside organizational machines are used as leverage for taxing students at the

university. Taxation at the university has become as global as it could be, since campus issues escalate to other equally important issues.

These on-going debates correspond to Hogler (2008) who states that “metaphor represents one way of seeing as is possible [...] In the “work is a game” metaphor, work comes to be seen as a game, with players, losers, good moves, and strategies” (p. 396). Metaphors emerge in everyday language to be used as tools reflecting organizational practices, ambiguities in goals, motives and meanings in covert practices under power relationships through emphasis of certain issues while other issues are suppressed (Hogler *et al.*, 2008, p. 396).

Lack of university funds is justified by the lack of governmental support, whereas there is a continuing struggle between universities and states to be independent from one another when it comes to charters, policies and even governance. At the losing end there are students who wish to enroll and get educated, namely, those who have to shoulder university costs under the spur of global and home economics shrink and deflate capabilities. Postmodern positivist philosophy offered to address the problem of dualism by rejecting all forms of “foundationalism” based on the scientific method of the physical sciences, as Best and Kellner (1997) say. Clegg, Hardy, & Nord (1996) insist that, “With postmodernization, signs signify everywhere. No space remains innocent of meaning, of style, of ambiguity, of irony. In matter of style, appearance and reference are everything” (p. 701).

The postmodern proposal about realism in organizational structure reflects the nuances as well as blatant challenges in a university. It is obvious that in the university system, there is a refusal to acknowledge certain parts of the mechanism within the organization as malfunctioning, which causes another part of the body or

the machine to be overloaded with tasks. Students are forced to become the most challenged end of the system, which results in malfunctioning, such as over-staffing of unnecessary management support, or even overspending by trusted officials.

### **Personal Experience**

Metaphors of machine are part of the day-to-day experience of an individual of which (s)he learns in order to belong to the society. One experience that can be referred to is the one we students sometimes discuss, namely, formatting essays. According to Morgan (1986), metaphors are illustrative devices that aid in understanding social and organizational processes. It is rather desirable to believe that formatting essays has something to do with organizational processes; in my own opinion, for tutors and teachers to scan papers or essays submitted by students easily, essay formatting can be used. One blogger I stumbled upon wrote,

Why all the rules governing how I am required to write my paper? Why do you think they are so picky about how your paper is formatted? [...] The rules are there to stifle creativity and individuality. The goal, it seems, of nearly all colleges and universities is to turn [their] students into more cogs of the same bland, boring, and homogenized machine of workplace despair. This is only perpetrated by lazy, and sometimes inept professors who only want to sit in their chairs of imaginative power ... I feel safe in the knowledge that the best teachers I have had all retired successful from their chosen profession to pass on the information that they learned to a generation that desires to succeed and flourish in society, not rot in the stench of inept failure. (Rumble, 2009)

Learning the peculiarities of formatting, citation of source, and referencing causes certain problems for students, which is even more aggravated when the “plagiarism” program (or machine) called “TurnItIn” was created and numerous Internet users started to resort to this program. Some forum posters I have encountered lament the fact that even simple sentences turn out “plagiarised” as reported by “TurnItIn”. It has become an ultimate monster that not only stifles creativity, but has also turned each complete sentence (or even incomplete sentences) “owned” by previous publishers who “were there first” to upload it on the Internet and, therefore, are considered its

ultimate owners. Of course, “legality” is another metaphor machine which makes other seeming harmless or even beneficial actions as “illegal,” thereby, a crime.

Different referencing formats have their own peculiar requirements that every student must follow. Other teachers assign “points” to formatting alone, so that in an essay, student grades depended on the level of authenticity that the plagiarism program is going to find. Sometimes, it is impossible to believe that students actually went through a long list of required reading as well as minimum required sources for an essay. In fact, the very essence of an original paper boils down to quoting the page where ideas copied or written actually came from. And students sometimes wonder if teachers actually check on the papers submitted, checking the page, the idea, the year the paper was published, or if each detail of the essay or even the reference list actually matter a bit.

Civilizations rose from Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and China, long before the Western civilization which actually started “legal” claims on about anything and everything including lands, cultures, and now, languages and everything that comes with it (ideas, printed words). The question is, how about the un-written works of those old civilized nations?

This kind of experience is baffling, trivial, but still mind boggling for students like me. Scholars cannot undo no matter how much is written for or against a system, a machination “metaphored” in a lifestyle and society that has been embraced and acceptable to a majority. However, since we have accepted the concept of metaphors of machine, we cannot but accept the inevitability of having to conform on what a university administration or management wants, including essay formatting. Students have made it clear to be interested to join the university, thus,

agreed willingly, too, to adhere to its system of which non-conformity is understandably a ground for expulsion.

Hogler *et al.* (2008) proposed that metaphors influence the way we experience and understand an organization we belong to, from commonsense and conceptual perspectives (p. 395). As a metaphor of a machine in an organization such as the university, essay formatting provides uniformity, an agreed-upon presentation that all students in a class follow in order to be informed as well as assured that each will be using the same and expect to be following that requirement. This is a legitimised action that each university teacher, instructor or professor also follows and requires their students to obey certain prescriptions. The metaphors of machine “contribute to theory construction, help to structure beliefs and guide behavior in organisations, express abstract ideas, convey vivid images conceptualizations, transfer information, legitimate actions, set goals, and structure coherent systems” (Hogler *et al.*, 2008, p. 396). These systems are agreed upon deliberately by all members of any given group prior to adopting it as a regulation, so that it could represent a developed system distinguished from clearly delineated and shared life experiences, with metaphors forming abstract concepts. The metaphors that touch upon the metaphor of machine or are related to anything mechanical and involving the machine-mould aspect of society are spatial, ontological, and structural.

As a machine metaphor, students function as guided upon by a higher being, and fueled by the need to learn and become contributing members of a society outside the university and in a bigger organization. Likewise, the metaphor of machine in a university serves as an instrument to socialise or orient new comers, enhance identification processes, serve a managerial role, and a necessity for control (Hogler *et al.*, 2008, p. 397).

It is not to say that I am outside the issue about tuition increases or the affordability of college education. While there is the internal issue on my part to take a grip on being a part of a machine or an organization, there is also the argument to become as hopeful as possible, as if a university degree could insulate me from the realities of overwhelming meltdown of economies, or as if global metaphors were less indicative.

All these arguments lead to the need to maintain the image of an organization as a self-sustaining machine with the independent capability to produce its own fuel and energy. Likewise, it has a production or output that equals, and even surpasses “outside” standards as fitted upon by faculty and staff on the students who became parts as well as products of the university organization. This, however, is another metaphor, with one or more meanings beyond what can be perceived, or, on the contrary, refused. The problem remains on the beholder and the machine stakeholder.

### **Conclusion**

There is going to be a continuing debate embracing all pros and cons concerning adherence to organizational practices such as the payment of exorbitant tuition, university expenses and requirements, on seemingly trivial essay formatting in universities, as well as other implemented rules and regulations that spell the metaphor of machine. These are reflected in open and covert discussions within and outside organizations where offended members air their grievances, or remain in silence and keep their feelings and ideas amongst themselves.

Systems representing the machine, however, have a history that cannot be easily removed, which makes these systems similar to concrete walls, just as hard to demolish and eventually create some space. In the meantime, these “walls”

experience vandalism, just like concrete walls are covered with tasteless graffiti; however, some of the systems would call for freedom of expression, creativity and other features that suit a university best.

But following a rule of the thumb, if one does not feel good inside an organization, (s)he should stop badmouthing the organization (s)he is involved in and abandon fast. Otherwise, a member bears policies and requirements not as a punishment, but as a conformity that shapes and disciplines in order that the member get out of the organizational machine's campus as a better individual. With that, the machine did its responsibility well. By instilling obedience and discipline to students, university essay formatting is a lesson learned that could be handy outside the university, in a bigger organization. It could easily guide a student to create a business report when the time comes.

There is the second idea, however, with the postmodern positivism ideas that with or without metaphors, the university machine could not be separated with other machines that have started to break down. What the given definition involves is the failing and closing institutions, business organizations that the university has been preparing its products for. There is a need for a continuing re-evaluation of global and local needs to address challenges that is also in contact with the student's capabilities. Amongst universities, their answer to the needs is to "equip" the student machine further with an arsenal of "specialized" knowledge through additional immersion in university life, through graduate or further studies. This means additional expenses on the students, as if the machine student could produce more funds after earlier preparation called college education. Metaphorically speaking, we could only wish. To be realistic, we wish the government of the machine to wake up finally and start operating.

### **Recommendation**

There is a considerable need to address reality with careful regard to the machine of the university organization, to be metaphorical. Academics and their administration need to change their view and stop treating organizations as “businesses” that need to yield profits in order to maintain power and independence. Fuel and all other possible sources of energy should be diversified as well as realistic, in line with global changes.

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## Appendix

### The High School Hierarchy

