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Running Wild with Metaphors: Rethinking the Evolution of Social Enterprise

Introduction

According to the OED a metaphor is “A figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that which it is literally applicable.” Berger (2004) explains metaphors cleverly, and self-referentially, by saying that they act as both lenses and as maps. Whether an individual views metaphors as lenses or maps will then influence how they are used and the properties ascribed to them. She also notes that they are simultaneously grounded, since they typically explain the abstract with reference to the concrete, yet imaginative, because learning to see one thing as another depends upon us leaping beyond the literal. Early academic consideration of metaphors tended to be either limited to linguistics, or applied “fundamentalist” criticism of them as false, misleading and dangerous to use beyond the realms of poetry and other literature. This view was challenged by Richards (1936) who first argued that metaphors went beyond mere devices of language and literature and were fundamental to thought and perception.

With the publication of the book “*Metaphors We Live By*”, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) decisively shifted the academic consideration of metaphors beyond their traditional domain of linguistics to explore how they frame or shape the way we think. Their contemporary theory of metaphor argued that the metaphors we use are symptomatic of deeper cognitive processes that understand the world by linking between different “domains” to find connections that help to explain and express new knowledge. Thus metaphors represent conceptual models upon which we build our understanding of the world and the phenomena that we encounter within it, and that therefore shape how we respond to new ideas and experiences, or as Lakoff and Johnson (1980, page 145) express it “*New metaphors have the power to create a new reality*”.

This potential power of metaphors to create and explain phenomena was translated into the organizational studies field by Morgan, particularly through his 1986 landmark book “*Images of Organization*”. Morgan argues that analysing the metaphors we use to conceptualise and describe organizations can improve how we both understand and manage them. He began with the metaphor most commonly used to describe organizations, the machine metaphor, and then worked through a selection of other “images”, including the organization as organism, brain, culture, psychic prison, politics, instrument of domination and field of flux and transformation.

The genesis of Morgan’s breakthrough was serendipitous. He had been working on sociological paradigms and their underlying assumptions, with the aim of challenging conventional organizational theory. An invitation to take up a visiting position at Penn State University to further this work came with one unwelcome string attached, the requirement to teach an undergraduate course in organization theory. As he expresses it: “*I had absolutely no idea how I could teach a conventional undergraduate management course while being true to the principles of (his co-authored book) Sociological Paradigms. Then it hit me. I could teach organization theory through metaphor, illustrating a range of different theories by presenting them as metaphors, each of which had both strengths and weaknesses.*” (Morgan 2011, page 460). What he describes (metaphorically) as a “flash of insight” changed the course of his research and career, and also how we think about thinking about organizations.

This paper also has a serendipitous origin in that it came as the result of an invitation to provide a keynote presentation at an event focussing on *The Evolution of Social Enterprise* (SE). I had previously been involved in a review of the field of SE undertaken by the UK’s Economic and Social

Research Council to inform their strategy for funding research in the area (Peattie and Morley, 2008 a). I had also more recently been involved in two projects that explored the use of metaphors in the field of sustainability (a field in which SEs and I share an interest). In searching for a suitable topic for the keynote address, the idea of extending my attempts to understand SEs by applying the basics of metaphor theory occurred. Morgan (2011, page 462), in explaining his approach, claims modestly that: *"I just 'ran with the idea' of theory as metaphor without too much regard for the formal details presented in the literature."* That could also accurately describe my approach to developing the keynote address, and this paper represents an attempt to introduce a little more formality and literature into its arguments in order to make it (hopefully) more useful.

Organisations and/as Metaphors.

Building on the work of Lakoff and Johnson and of Morgan, organizational scholars have used metaphors as a lens/map through which to view/explore organizations' behaviour, development, structure and communication (see Cornelissen et al., 2008 for details). Whether we talk about corporate culture, strategic targets, organizational memory, cash cows or a learning organization, we are using metaphors. Morgan (1980) points out that the term "organization" is itself metaphorical, but like other commonly used words in business (like "market") it represents a "dead metaphor", one whose usage has become so commonplace that it is accepted in its own non-metaphorical right.

Despite the popularity of metaphor use within organization studies, it has proved controversial in terms of both ontology and epistemology (for a review see Palmer & Dunford, 1996). Metaphor based approaches have been criticised for their potential to distort or mislead (e.g. Carr & Leivesley, 1995; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982) and Mangham (1996) views some of Morgan's metaphorical images as simplistic and superficial. They are also vulnerable to criticism by being over-stretched or for providing only a selective or partial view of organizations (since if they provided a complete correspondence, they would no longer be metaphors). While some authors argue that multiple metaphors may be required to adequately understand something (e.g. Morgan, 1980; Rindfleisch, 1996), others argue that multiple metaphors increase the risks of confusion and misunderstanding (e.g. Reed, 1990).

The generally agreed benefit of applying metaphors is that they can provide a fresh perspective, aiding the process of creative problem solving because they can *".. 'make the familiar strange' in order to increase the possibility of gaining new insights into problems"* (Proctor, 1989 page 34-35). By providing supplementary and contradictory approaches to analysing and understanding organizations (Morgan, 1980), they have the potential to challenge and reconsider taken-for-granted ideas and "de-ossify" entrenched ways of thinking (Chia, 1996). This may be particularly important in SE scholarship, which Dey and Stayeart (2012) criticize for lacking diversity and imagination and being hampered by an over-reliance on a range of untested assumptions.

This paper therefore aims to "play" with multiple metaphors that could be employed to express and understand things about SE (either as a field of study or as a type of organization) with the hope of stimulating some of the diversity and imagination which Dey and Stayeart (2012) see as lacking.

Metaphors and Social Enterprise.

Metaphors are frequently used when discussing or analysing SEs. These will often be ones commonly applied to other types of organisation. The idea of SE development using metaphors of movement or

of being a “journey” is commonplace (Seanor & Meaton, 2007; Seanor et al., 2013), for example in 2015 the RSA hosted a series of six events exploring “*Stories of the Social Enterprise Journey*”. Such a metaphor casts the SE as vehicle and implies a destination and a choice of routes to get there. Other metaphors may be more specific to SEs such as “bottom of the pyramid” business models, or more esoteric, such as Trexler’s (2008) exploration of SE as “algorithm”. As well as linguistic metaphors, visual metaphors may be utilised by SEs to express themselves, their business models or products as part of a process of knowledge visualisation that may be particularly valuable for those operating in poorer countries with low literacy levels (Bresciani & Eppler, 2013).

Although the discourse on SE is saturated with metaphors, analysis of SE using metaphor theory is surprisingly uncommon. One approach that has been adopted to understand SE as a field of study, and as a type of organization, is through biological metaphors and the concept of ecosystems in particular (e.g. Grassl, 2012; Hazenberg et al., 2016; McMullen, 2018). Hazenberg et al. (2016) develop this metaphor to show how each ecosystem type has its particular genetics (represented by traditions and traits) and epigenetics (reflecting environmental conditions) that combine to affect the emergence of different phenotypes (SE organizational forms). McMullen (2018) takes this logic even further to apply the principles of evolutionary biology to SEs in considerable depth, and concludes by pondering somewhat mischievously whether, in certain circumstances, SEs might represent an “invasive” species.

Metaphors of SE are often “deductive metaphors” (Palmer & Dunford, 1996) imposed or projected upon SEs by academics or experts seeking to build useful theory through analysis (e.g. Grassl, 2012; Hazenberg et al., 2016; McMullen, 2018). However metaphors can also arise inductively from the way that participants naturally speak about their organizations, for example the analysis by Seanor and Meaton (2007) of the language used by the entrepreneurs that lead SEs to describe their organizations and the work they do. Parkinson and Howorth (2008) in exploring the language of social entrepreneurs analysed the types of metaphors they used to describe their roles, which were mainly in terms of being “protectors and champions”, but without recourse to the “hero” metaphor that tends to predominate in written discourse about entrepreneurship (social or otherwise).

The application of metaphors to SE seems to be most common when it comes to defining SEs and what differentiates them from conventional businesses, and the varying sub-types that make up the SE universe. This is perhaps because controversies over definitions and classifications has absorbed a great deal of energy within the field of SE scholarship and hampered its development (Peattie & Morley, 2008 a). As Young and Lecy (2014, page 1309) put it: “*Some consensus exists on the nature of social enterprise, but only at a high level of abstraction. Most scholars and practitioners agree that social enterprises are organizations or ventures that combine a social purpose with pursuit of financial success in the private marketplace. However, this is where the consensus ends*”. They seek to understand SE discourse to date by discussing three common underlying metaphors:

1. The SE principles promoted by the EMES network as a “North Star” or lodestone that guides SEs. This worries less about organizational forms and more about “direction of travel”;
2. SE as a spectrum, emphasizing the trade-off between pure profit-making and social impact, with all organizations located along a continuum (as per Dees, 1996);
3. SEs as disruptive social innovations whose organizational form or relationship to profit is less important than their ability to disrupt the status quo and create positive social change.

Having concluded that none of these metaphors captures a sufficient range of important elements needed to understand SE, Young and Lecy (2014) develop their own engaging metaphor that combines elements of biology, business and social institutions by imagining SE as a zoo: “*containing*

distinctly different types of animals which seek different things, behave differently from one another, and indeed may (or may not) interact with one another in both competitive and complementary ways" (page 1320). This metaphor casts the social entrepreneur as zookeeper or curator and raises a range of interesting question about cohabitation of species, regulation, public safety and conservation that equate to potentially important avenues for SE research. Young and Lecy (2014) tentatively propose their zoo metaphor as a "meta-metaphor" within which others can be accommodated. However, they also acknowledge that Morgan and others working in the field of metaphors and organizations stress that the application of multiple metaphorical lenses to the same phenomenon can improve our understanding. It is in this spirit that this paper proposes some additional metaphors to supplement and challenge those discussed so far.

Social Enterprise as an Animal.

The SE as zoo metaphor, and the earlier ecosystem metaphors, naturally invite the question of *"What species would best represent SEs?"* and in doing so builds on the organization as organism metaphor developed by Morgan (1986). This metaphor is one that is popular because animals are: *"... useful to point to the contrast between properties like weakness and strength (e.g. mouse versus elephant) or slowness and speed (snail versus cheetah)"* (Keizer and Post, 1996, page 95). Seanor et al. (2007) for example encountered the metaphor of SE as "chameleon" as social entrepreneurs articulated their organizations' ability to adopt a flexible identity and move between sectors. The range of animals used to represent organizations can be surprising, and goes beyond the obvious one like those mentioned above. Others encountered in the broader literature include jellyfish, dinosaurs, labradors, hyenas, centipedes, peacocks and worms (Billups, 2011; Keizer and Post, 1996; Oswick & Montgomery, 1999; Smith, 2010).

Although different types of SE might resemble different types of animal, my choice by way of best-fit answer would be the duck-billed platypus. This isn't because of the scepticism with which their discovery was treated (Hall, 1999). The first specimens sent back to England in the late 18th century were treated as a hoax, with the zoologist George Shaw writing: *"It naturally excites the idea of some deceptive preparation by artificial means"* in the earliest scientific description of the platypus (Shaw, 1799, page 384). SEs have been treated with some scepticism, particularly in terms of their efficacy in delivering social benefit or their sustainability as businesses (or as Arthur et al., (2006, page 1) put it: *"Ten years or so ago it would have seemed like an oxymoron to amalgamate the terms social and enterprise"*), but they are generally accepted as existing. Like SEs, academic scholarship about the platypus gave rise to considerable controversy about issues of classification, and quickly generated a strong belief that they represented a paradox (Hall, 1999).

Part of the reason that platypus resemble SEs is that they are good at developing unusual solutions to the common survival problems that confront animals. Using their bills to electrolocate prey in muddy water, lactating to feed their young without nipples, and using gravel held in cheek pouches to do the work of teeth in breaking down food are just some of their innovative adaptations. As such, they embody the tradition of SE as innovators (Young and Lecy, 2014), and also as unusually resourceful problem solvers (Peredo and McLean, 2006). Perhaps the strongest reason why this analogy appeals, is the platypus's nature as a "hyper-hybrid" which gives it commonality with SEs. In 2008, when an analysis of the platypus's DNA was completed, it was discovered that (although recognized as species in itself and therefore not literally a hybrid), as well as the expected mammalian DNA, it also had elements from reptiles and birds (Warren et al., 2008) which helps to explain the male's venomous spurs and the egg laying. The concept of SEs as hybrids usually applies

the spectrum metaphor (Dees, 1996), but in a very one-dimensional way with a single spectrum relating to purpose between the purely profit-focussed and the purely social. Other studies have argued that the hybridity of SEs is far more multidimensional, Hines et al. (2008) for example sought to map different types of SE within waste industries using a set of 9 continua. Such hyper-hybridity is what brings the platypus to (my) mind.

Social Enterprise as a Car

A logical development from the frequently encountered *“social enterprise as a journey”* metaphor, is to think of a SE as a car, an idea that also partially conforms with Morgan’s image of organization as machine. This casts the social entrepreneur as driver and stimulates ideas about direction of travel and whether regulations and conditions that differ between the US, Europe and the UK (Peattie and Morley, 2008 a & b) explain/require different models and specifications. It also prompts the alternative to *“What animal would best typify a SE?”* of *“What car would best typify a SE?”*. Although cars may seem to lack the diversity of animals, they can still vary in a wide range of qualities such as size, speed, efficiency, economy, safety, environmental orientation, reliability, durability, luxury and practicality that may resonate with organizations including SEs. My car (as SE) choice would be the Nissan Qashqai, which featured as one of the 25 most influential cars of the past thirty years listed by motoringresearch.com and was one of Top Gear’s *“20 Cars that Changed the World”* for inventing the “crossover” category. This sense of hybridising the pre-existing saloon and hatchback categories is one reason why it could be argued to be SE-like, given the SE as hybrid theme explored above. Another is that it broke away in design from a parade of “family cars” that were increasingly indistinguishable from one another as isomorphic pressures linked to the pursuit of a low-drag, aerodynamic profile combined with others such as common regulation and industry benchmarking.

My argument is not that SEs are free of isomorphic pressures, a phenomenon explored by a number of authors (e.g. Nicholls and Cho, 2006; Seanor et al., 2007; Sud et al., 2009). It is also not that all for-profit enterprises end up looking the same. Mainstream enterprises range from sole traders practicing a craft to diversified global titans, and from operations hewing rocks and minerals from the earth to virtual knowledge-based enterprises. However, for-profit enterprises share the isomorphic pressure of having to generate a profit, which SEs lack (although they still face pressures to generate income and stay financially viable). The pursuit of “shareholder value” through profit generating activities and an increasingly common set of “best practice” management theories promoted through business schools and consultancies has arguably led to increasing similarity in companies structures, strategies and governance (or at least it did for many years until a range of corporate scandals rather undermined the thinking behind them (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017; Ghoshal, 2005)). Leiter (2005) went looking for such isomorphism amongst a random sample of Australian non-profit organisations (not a perfect proxy for SE, but from the description used it is clear that many of them were SEs). The study found an unexpected lack of isomorphism amongst the sample, beyond some driven by increasing organizational formalisation in terms of use of written documents. Leiter explores several possible explanations for the lack of isomorphism encountered, but ignores one obvious potential contributor, that the removal of profit as an over-arching priority also removes some of the isomorphic pressure that conventional businesses face.

The designers of the Qashqai resisted the isomorphic pressures of the received wisdom about market segments and car classifications to create a new hybrid that is widely viewed as rescuing Nissan as a company and which revitalised and reconfigured the family car market. As Paul Willcox, Nissan’s Vice President for Europe explains: *“Back in 2007, the introduction of the Qashqai was a*

risk. It was defining a new segment that didn't exist and therefore we were uncertain as to what the reception would be. But it's been unbelievable, from launch right the way through to today. We have won many press awards, the industry has followed our lead and every competitor has brought a crossover into the segment" (Bremmer, 2017). SEs have perhaps similarly used their comparative freedom from the profit imperative, and their status as "outsiders" in relation to conventional business wisdom, to create innovative and distinctive business organizations that also may have the potential to revitalise whole markets. Nicholls and Cho (2006) and Sud et al. (2009) both consider whether the role of social entrepreneurs as innovators and system disrupters may make them able to resist institutional pressures to conform. It is likely that the lack of a profit imperative helps to provide the freedom for them to innovate, disrupt and develop distinctive approaches to success in their markets.

Social Enterprise as a Forest

Young and Lecy's (2014) SE as zoo metaphor is one that brings different "species" of SE together within one managed system. The types of question this means they reflect upon include issues of "who eats whom" and which species could pose a threat to the public. There are perhaps other managed systems of collected species that offer an alternative metaphor for SEs such as forests or orchards. The zoo metaphor suffers from a number of drawbacks, zoos aim to bring together a small number of as wide range of species as possible, while Young and Lecy's outline zoo only contains seven species which will exist in large numbers. Zoos have negative connotations linked to captivity and the treatment of specimens and have a rather mixed purpose combining business, entertainment, scientific conservation and public service (although this could be viewed as a strength or weakness). The forest or orchard metaphor shares many of the advantages of the zoo metaphor in the bringing together different species in which there is potential competition for space and light, but without the risk of individuals escaping or eating one another.

There are also potential additional benefits of a forest metaphor. One is the potential to stress the symbiotic benefits that can exist between SEs. In a zoo, interactions (including any scope for competition) between species is planned, controlled and facilitated by the zookeepers. In a forest, even a managed one, individual trees may compete for resources (of light, water and nutrients) but may also benefit from colocation (the fallen leaves of one tree may provide nutrients for another, and the windspeed within a forest will be lower and less threatening to an individual within it than to a single tree out in the open plain). The usefulness of the forest metaphor increases as we move beyond the traditional folk-tale view of forests (as dark places containing creatures or witches quite likely to eat unwary children) to more contemporary understandings of forests as complex communities. Peter Wohlleben's (2016) forest-floor breaking book *"The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate"* reveals how trees use released gasses, electrical impulses and fungal networks to communicate and cooperate. The purpose of this cooperation? To ensure the survival of the forest as a whole rather than just the individual trees. In this way, even trees of different species, and theoretically competitors, will actively share nutrients to ensure communal survival. This type of place-specific, collaborative behaviour is characteristic of SEs in a way that is expressed through the emerging Social Enterprise Places movement (Samuel, 2018).

Other aspects of a forest may give it advantages over a zoo as a metaphor. A key feature of a zoo is clear (and often unbridgeable) delineations between the zoo and the outside, and between the different "enclosures" within it. SE is a field where boundaries tend not to be rigid and distinct. Dart (2004) for example refers to social enterprise as *"blurring the boundaries"* between non-profit and

for-profit, Gassl (2012) views their boundaries as “fuzzy”, and Peredo and McLean (2006, page 61) argue: *“that the border proves to be not only vague but porous”*. As an ecological system, the boundaries of a forest may be indistinct (at what density of trees does a “forest” begin?), deep, porous, dynamic and maintained by both deliberate action and environmental processes (Strayer, 2003). This seems to reflect the controversies over SE definitions and scope that Young and Lecy (2014) amongst others see as characterising the field (Morley & Peattie, 2008 a & b). Overall, SE as forest or orchard may lack some of the “fun” of the zoo metaphor, but it is worth noting that in Clarke and Holt’s (2017) exploration of the visual metaphors that entrepreneurs used to express their business venture through drawings, it was the one social entrepreneur quoted in their findings who represented her business venture by drawing a tree.

Social Enterprise as a Farm.

Another alternative metaphor that is closer to a zoo than a forest, but perhaps shares some of the advantages of both, is that of a farm. Like a managed forest, a farm concentrates typically on a small number of species, but with large numbers of individual specimens. The word “farm”, considered literally, can conjure up a range of images from monolithic monocultures covering thousands of acres, owned by multinationals and managed via satellite images and robotic machinery, through to tiny subsistence ventures where people in poorer countries eke a living from the land. Farms can also literally be SEs, and agricultural cooperatives represent one of the most enduring and widespread forms.

Metaphorically speaking, it is the idea of a “family farm” that is most relatable (they represented 96.2% of European farms in 2013 according to Eurostat) and also most relevant when thinking in terms of representing SE (either as a field or an organization). Family farms are notable for their embeddedness within their local cultures and territorial networks and they tend to spend most of their income within local and regional economies thereby supporting their local communities, according to the UN Food & Agriculture Programme’s “Family Farming Knowledge Platform”. Family farms are frequently equated with small farms, although their distinctiveness is less to do with scale than with approach. They are viewed as contributing more to environmental sustainability, preservation of traditional values, and economic resilience than large non-family farms (van der Ploeg, 2013).

The similarities between family farms and SE are multi-faceted. They both frequently achieve viability through a mixture of earned income and government grants and are therefore very sensitive to the policy environment. They share a status as beyond profit organizations with an emphasis on the provision of local livelihoods. They even share the isomorphic pressures to professionalise and commercialize: *“Nowadays it is en vogue to talk about the ‘need to make family farming more business-like’, in other words that it should be oriented towards making profits”* (van der Ploeg, 2013, page 11). The relevance of family farms to SEs’ experience is related to both words. In relation to “family”, Peattie and Morley (2008 b, page 103) note that: *“It may be that SEs will have the most to learn, not from the ‘usual suspects’ in the commercial sector, but from small firms and family businesses in particular”*. As for the value of the farm metaphor, it is perhaps significant that among the most common metaphors Parkinson and Howorth (2008, page 301) observed amongst social entrepreneurs when describing their work was: *“... shepherding (getting things moving, bringing them in/round/on board, getting people through gateways and barriers, going round and round and round)”*.

Social Enterprise as a Brain

The organization as brain is one of Morgan's (1986) original metaphors, which emphasises distributed intelligence and organizational learning in helping to develop emergent strategies and self-organizing control systems. Morgan also stresses that organizations, like brains, are "holographic" in that they are comprised of many "whole" pictures of the organization understood from differing perspectives: *"Different elements are involved in systems of 'parallel processing,' generating signals, impulses, and tendencies that make contributions to the functioning and character of the whole...despite this distributed character there is also a strong measure of system specialization. The brain, it seems, is both holographic and specialized!"* (page 73)

This notion of needing to understand the brain holistically as well as in terms of specialisms is reflected within medical research in neurology. A recurring theme is that the reductionist research tradition has produced increasing insights into the role of individual areas of the brain, and even individual neurons, without shedding much light on the overall functioning of the brain and how it relates to what we might call the "mind". As Adolphs (2015) frames it, we may now understand how an individual neuron computes, but we may never answer the bigger neurological questions such as *"How does the human brain compute?"* or *"How and why does conscious experience arise?"*. Although the difference is less stark in SE research, it may be similar in providing a better understanding of the constituents of the SE universe/zoo/forest/farm than of the whole. Mark Beam's visualisation of the "capital market for good" as an attention curve (reproduced in Kickul et al., 2015) suggests that on the dimensions of both "visibility" and "maturity" the field of SE lags behind other fields that would tend to be considered as components of, or areas of operation for, SEs. These include Fairtrade, local produce and affordable housing. Peattie and Morley (2008 b) found that putting into Google Scholar the search terms "Fair Trade" and "Co-operatives" produced four and five times more results respectively, than the term "Social enterprise" (with a very similar result achieved by the same exercise undertaken eight years later). As with our understanding of the brain, one avenue for future progress is to improve the understanding of the whole compared to our understanding of individual parts or functions. It is perhaps not surprising that in order to take neurology forward: *"A large range of analogies has been summoned to describe the way in which the brain computes: classical computers, dynamical systems, and the syntax of language, to name only a few"* (Adolphs, 2015, page 174). For the field of SE the application of a large range of metaphors will also hopefully bring new insights and progress.

Discussion and Conclusion.

McMullen (2018) describes his application of the evolutionary biology metaphor to SEs as a "thought experiment" and this label can be applied to all the various attempts to use metaphors to consider and better understand SEs, including those set out above. It would be fair to say that the choice of these metaphors (and some others not included here) was influenced by the needs of constructing a keynote address, which meant trying to balance academic relevance with being entertaining and, to an extent, provocative. This perhaps prompts the question of whether it matters what metaphors we use to discuss particular phenomena, and whether entertaining particular metaphors has significance beyond providing an intellectual diversion. The practical value of metaphors is perhaps most easily demonstrated by pointing to their use as a tool in the hard-nosed world of business consultancy and the Boston Consulting Group's *"Strategy Gallery"* of metaphors that contains: "...

text or text-and image exhibits related to biology, history, philosophy, anthropology, and many other disciplines. BCG consultants are invited to wander freely among the exhibits and select those that seem stimulating points of departure for imaginative strategic thinking” (Gray, 2003, page 92).

Although from an academic perspective all metaphors have their particular strengths and weaknesses (Morgan, 1986), their application may also have real-world consequences. For example, it has been shown that the metaphors used to express an organization’s identity influences the extent to which employees identify with the organization and impacts their self-esteem and job satisfaction (Dutton, et al., 1994). If popular metaphors can have real world consequences, then it should be a cause for concern that the predominant metaphor for understanding business strategy and marketing for many years has been warfare (Rindfleisch, 1996). This metaphor has been criticised for promoting business as a zero-sum game in ways that encourage competitive rather than collaborative behaviour, and which through an “all’s fair in love and war” mentality may be responsible for the ethical failings often observed in business leadership. If business is seen as equivalent to war, the risk is that negative outcomes for “civilians” and the physical environment become simply “collateral damage” in the efforts to “defeat” an “enemy” in order to “win” (Peattie, 2005). The longstanding use of the business as war metaphor may be in retreat, and it may not be responsible for all the corporate mis-deeds of recent years, but it has likely been a contributor.

The potentially negative impact of metaphor choice in the field of SEs, may be associated with the most pervasive metaphor within SE discourse, that of SEs as hybrids (the literature concerning which is reviewed by Doherty, Haugh and Lyon (2016)). The idea of a hybrid originates in nature and is understood as the outcome of combining two different species. In the organizational literature it is used to describe organizations that span institutional boundaries (Pache & Santos, 2012) and operate in multiple functional domains (Ruef, 2000). However, in relation to SEs, there is a danger that the metaphor of hybridism is misapplied in a way that is misleading and potentially damaging (one of the risks associated with metaphor-based analysis).

As Grassl (2012) explores, there are a variety of ways that hybridisation is achieved amongst plant and animal species including mimicry, grafting, cross-fertilisation, transplantation and mutation and these all have the potential to act as metaphors or models for SE organizational development. However, the commonplace conception of SEs as hybrids uses none of these natural archetypes but instead applies a more physical metaphor from the SE as spectrum perspective. This metaphor envisages SEs as existing on a continuum with profit making and social contribution positioned at polar opposites of the spectrum. As Grassl (2012, page 39) notes, this follows a tradition in which: “... *the social sciences have generally understood hybridity as a simple mixture of characteristics on a continuum between two opposite poles (Brozek 2009)*”. An implication of such a metaphor reduces the internal dynamics of a SE to trying to “force together” incompatible polar opposites, with all the implications of friction, distortion, stress and struggle that this metaphor entails. This may be one explanation for the questionable but widespread perspective that SEs’ hybrid nature is inherently paradoxical (e.g. Smith et al., 2013). This notion of SEs as paradoxical hybrids may not reflect the experience of practitioners. Seanor et al (2007) and Seanor et al. (2013) when asking social entrepreneurs to visually express and then explain their ideas about SE found that they often tended to reject the spectrum/hybrid model as simplistic and unrepresentative of their reality.

Hybrids in nature are mostly found amongst plants, but also exist within a range of species drawn from birds, bats, big cats, dolphins, elephants, sharks and crocodiles. Hybridisation can bring disadvantages, many hybrids are sterile for example, but it can also confer advantages of the type sought by commercial plant growers seeking to develop new and superior cultivars. The fact that they are hybrids is not a source of apparent disadvantage or stress to the European bison, the

savannah cat or the clymene dolphin. Perhaps it is time for those who manage or study SEs to reconsider their status as hybrids as simply a fact of life, rather than necessarily a burden or source of undue stress.

Applying a metaphor like zoo, car, animal, brain, farm or forest to try to generate insights into individual SEs or the field as a whole might sound strange, challenging or simply trivial to people. These individual metaphors will vary in terms of the qualities or attributes of SE they focus the discussion on, and in how well they seem to fit. One of the mistakes that people often make in the application of metaphor analysis to a field, is an assumption that the best metaphors are those that seem most “natural” or complete, and which require the smallest leap of imagination. As von Ghyczy (2003, page 88) notes when writing about the use of metaphor in *Harvard Business Review*: “Aristotle recognized that a good metaphor is powerful often because its relevance and meaning are not immediately clear. In fact, it should startle and puzzle us. Attracted by familiar elements in the metaphor but repelled by the unfamiliar connection established between them, our minds briefly ‘lag behind’, engulfed in a curious mixture of understanding and incomprehension. It is in such delicately unsettled states of mind that we are most open to creative ways of looking at things.” As such, metaphors should not be regarded as right or wrong, or as models to be followed and tested, but as conversation starters and catalysts for creativity and new insights (von Ghyczy, 2003).

Ultimately, although they should be appreciated for their ability to provoke or unsettle, because the metaphors we use to understand things can determine how we relate to and behave towards them, they are best when used reflexively and with care (Carr & Leivesley, 1995; Palmer & Dunford, 1996). It is perhaps not surprising that Young and Lecy (2014), in developing their metaphor of SE as zoo, and with all the associations of zoos with captivity and constraint, ended up by proposing their metaphor as one that could accommodate all others as different specimens, suggesting that doing so: “... would concentrate scholarly effort more productively and lead to greater progress in the study of social enterprise” (page 1330). Although there is much to commend their SE zoo and the questions about SE that it sparks, SE metaphors are perhaps more like party guests in that the rule of “the more the merrier” applies.

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