

Organizational Inquiry as a Rhetorical Process: The Role of Tropes in Organizational Theory and Methods

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Abstract: We develop a discursive understanding of organizational inquiry in order to challenge the status quo characterized by a positivistic approach to organizational inquiry. Specifically, we re-conceptualize organizational science as an inherently rhetorical process. We propose that the language of theories and methods used within a particular paradigm move from figurative to literal and back to figurative, following a distinctive topological sequence from metaphor to metonymy to synecdoche to irony. We also link the researchers use of four master tropes to particular types of scientific reasoning as well as to particular types of scientific tools. We discuss the research implications of the rhetorical model of organizational science.

Keywords: rhetoric, positivism, semiotics, theory, method

1. Introduction

Although positivism has been discredited by many philosophers of science (see for example Bhaskar 1989), some of the assumptions and principles of positivism, such as verificationism and falsificationism, a pro-observational stance, that reality exists independently of our perceptions of it, and that language represents reality, still dominate mainstream organization theory (Chia 1997: 688-690). In this paper, we develop a discursive understanding of organizational inquiry in order to challenge the status quo characterized by a positivistic approach to organizational inquiry. Specifically, we focus on the positivist or representationalist assumption that theories about reality and methods are independent, and that methods tests theory (Brown 1976;Gergen and Thatchenkery 1996;Morgan 1980). To accomplish our purpose, we re-conceptualize organizational science as an inherently rhetorical process. We bring attention to the power of language to represent and construct, as well as obscure and clarify.

Moreover, we try purposefully to develop a positivistic framework (i.e., a framework with empirically testable hypotheses to test theory) to question positivism. Put differently, we use language to develop a positivistic model that shows the limits of language for developing positivistic models. Thus, the more you are convinced of our model, the more contradictory our model should appear. This is purposely done in order to create a provocative and critical space to reflect on how organizational scientists use language to recursively reflect and construct the process, objects, and findings of organizational inquiry. The systems of truths uttered in this paper are either inconsistent or incomplete. If it is viewed as complete, the audience will realize that it is inconsistent; if it is viewed as consistent, the audience will realize that it is incomplete. This is a natural consequence of the irony of questioning positivism with positivism: If (A) and (Not A) are simultaneously true, we must drop either (A) or (Not A) for consistency, but this leads to incompleteness.

We are also well-aware that the scientific process is way messier than our model suggests. Thus, the tropological sequence we suggest is just that: a suggestion. But if you dig deeper we also suggest that scientific life is a mess. We try to show that science cannot be decoupled from ethics and aesthetics. In fact, we view science as a house of cards. The whole edifice may be brought down if one card is moved. We exemplify this quality of science in our own paper. We try to write the paper in such a way that every section builds on an earlier section, and each paragraph and sentence in each section mirrors paragraphs and sentences in other sections. There is strong symmetry in our writing. To some, symmetry is one of the guarantors of truth. But at the same time, too much symmetry or perfection should create doubts in the audience: Nothing is so perfect. Similarly, to some, logic or logical reasoning is one of the guarantors of truth. The arguments in our paper are logical. But they end up with a logical contradiction. Nonetheless, it is this contradiction that allows human choice and judgment, and it is that contradiction that allows us to realize how integral a part ethics and aesthetics plays in science. In short, the purpose of this critical, complex, and self-referential paper is to bring attention to the power of language to both represent and construct, to make researchers more self-

aware, morally reflective, and skeptical about the language they use, as well as raise questions about the role of language in the conduct of organizational science.

2. Rhetoric in organizational theories and methods

The positivist narrative suggests that theory and method are independent, and that method tests theory (Brown 1976; Gergen et al. 1996; Morgan 1980). Theories are characterized as direct representations of empirical phenomena, and methods as procedures needed to evaluate how well theories mirror or correspond to external reality (Alvesson and Karreman 2000: 138; Astley and Zammuto 1992: 444-445; Bourgeois and Pinder 1983; Brown 1976; Pinder and Bourgeois 1982). Critics suggest that this conceptualization is flawed and is a result of using a view of language as representation (Alvesson et al. 2000: 141; Astley et al. 1992: 444; Gergen et al. 1996: 361).

These critics argue that a representational view of language distorts and obfuscates our knowledge of organizations. It portrays theories and methods as having only denotative value and underemphasizes how theory and method are deeply entwined conceptually and in practice. As a result, the process of organizational analysis becomes over-concretized as researchers treat organizational theories and methods as descriptions and tests of reality (Manning 1979: 661; Morgan 1980: 619). Such pretension may tend to anaesthetize us to the way in which the language of a community sustains tacit agreement to dominant paradigms, thus shaping and influencing scientific inquiry (Chandler 2002: 124; Kuhn 1970; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Morgan 1980: 613). For example, we sometimes forget that the labels and categories we invent such as “OB” and “OT”, or “micro” and “macro”, are only that: human inventions to manage organizational phenomena. Moreover, sometimes we reify these categories; we take them as literal or “real”, ignoring their figurative and metaphorical aspects (Pondy and Mitroff 1979: 21).

2.1 A rhetorical view of theory and method

Focusing on discourse and its role in organizational science may solve many of the aforementioned problems (Alvesson et al. 2000: 138-140; Astley et al. 1992: 444-445; Gergen et al. 1996: 361-362). We argue for a rhetorical view of organizational science that details the role of rhetoric in theory and method. Rhetoric is “discourse calculated to influence an audience toward some end” (Gill and Whedbee 1997: 157). A rhetorical perspective emphasizes the role of language in scientific inquiry, and views theory and method as essentially discursive acts (Feyerabend 1993; McCloskey 1998). From a rhetorical perspective, theoretical terms are more than simply labels that correspond with facts disclosed by experience. The rhetoric of a theory contributes to the construction of facts by shaping our perception and experience (Brown 1990; Enos 1996: 438-439). Similarly, methods are not tools for evaluating the correspondence of theoretical statements to external reality. Methods are rules for connecting two sets of discourse: theoretical statements and observation reports (Brown 1976: 183-184; Campbell 1957; Feyerabend 1993; Hacking 1975: 118-120).

We argue that rhetoric in general and tropes in particular shape theories and govern the connection of theoretical statements to observation reports. Following Manning (1979), Morgan (1980; 1983), and Tsoukas (1991; 1993) among others, we view tropes as more than merely literary devices or figures of speech. Tropes are *figures of thought*; they constitute and establish ‘objects’ (Burke 1969b; Manning 1979; White 1978). Tropes are inextricably linked with cognition (Enos 1996: 439-443; Lakoff 1987; Lakoff et al. 1980), and thus with the development of organizational science. Within this framework, organizational science is viewed as an act of persuasion and organizational scientists as rhetors using tropes to create theories and methods.

For the sake of brevity, we focus on the four master tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. We develop propositions that show links between the variation in the four master tropes and how we rationalize theory and method – and ultimately, how we institutionalize organizational paradigms. We use the term paradigm in a Kuhnian sense to describe the consensus among scientists over exemplary research problems and solutions (Kuhn 1970: 13). We propose that scientific discourse moves from figurative to literal and back to figurative, following a distinctive sequence from metaphor to metonymy to synecdoche to irony. For instance, we theorize that the frequency of metaphor use in scientific discourse is highest at the beginning of new paradigms, and the frequency of irony use in scientific discourse is highest when researchers suggest transitioning from old paradigms to new ones. Finally, we discuss the implications of our model for scientific research.

3. A rhetorical theory of organizational science

3.1 Rhetoric of inquiry

Although some scholars suggest that language in general and tropes in particular play no part in creating that which they describe (Brown 1976: 171; Enos 1996), the rhetorical perspective used here proposes that tropes are unavoidably implicated in the construction and comprehension of the world because perception itself is embedded in linguistic conventions (Burke 1969a; Burke 1969b; Lakoff et al. 1980; Nietzsche 1990; Ortony 1993; Richards 1965; Sapir and Mandelbaum 1949: 162; Vico 1984; White 1978; Wittgenstein 1963). Building upon these ideas, we suggest that tropes are essential for the conduct of science, because their use is essential for engaging, organizing and understanding the world (Brown 1976: 178; Lakoff et al. 1980; Manning 1979; Morgan 1983: 601; Nietzsche 1990: 888-896; O'Neill 1997: 217; Oswick, Keenoy, and Grant 2002: 295; Tsoukas 1991; Vico 1984). Tropes generate 'imagery' with connotations over and above any 'literal' meaning (Ortony 1975; Schon 1993). Once employed, a trope becomes part of a larger system of associations beyond our complete control (Chandler 2002: 124; Nietzsche 1990). Just as tropes orchestrate the interactions of signifiers and signifieds in discourse (Enos 1996: 439; Silverman 1983: 87), we propose that tropes shape the interplay of theory and methods because each trope determines what can be known and how we can know it (Foucault 2002; Manning 1979; Morgan 1983: 601; Nietzsche 1990: 888-896).

3.2 The role of rhetoric in theory and methods

Trope as theory: Trope as theory shapes knowledge because it "turns" imagination and understanding, constructing parts of world as meaningful and other parts as insignificant (Manning 1979: 662-663; Morgan 1983: 602), emphasizing one of many interpretations that the scientist will "discover" (Astley et al. 1992: 448; Manning 1979: 661-669). Thus, different theoretical explanations may be attributed to different tropes used by the theorist (Astley et al. 1992: 448). For example, a strategic choice theorist might view a corporate merger as an organization adapting to and shaping the environment, whereas a population ecologist might view the same corporate merger as organizational death through environmental selection (Astley et al. 1992: 448).

Trope as method: Trope as method also shapes how we know (Morgan 1983: 602), because embedded within each trope are tools to investigate and obtain knowledge about the world (Nietzsche 1990: 888-896). In contrast to positivism, a tropological understanding of science suggests that methods are incapable of testing the correspondence of theoretical terms to reality (Brown 1976: 178-184). Methods actually test the correspondence of two realms of discourse: theoretical statements and observational reports (i.e., data) (Brown 1976: 183-184; Campbell 1957; Hacking 1975: 118-120). Within this formulation, theoretical discourse makes predictions about observational discourse as opposed to predictions about reality (Brown 1976: 180; Feyerabend 1993; Nietzsche 1990). Tropes provide the methodological rules and procedures for connecting these two discourses (i.e., theoretical statements and observation reports), and the criteria for judging the persuasiveness of this connection (Brown 1976: 180-186; Manning 1979: 661). Methods are conceptualized as essentially tropes or discursive acts, and each trope provides a different set of rules for making sense. For example, using statistical analysis or a sample to represent the whole often involves tropes that imply a probabilistic understanding of phenomena. Similarly, using narrative analysis or telling a story to describe the world often involves tropes that imply a plausible understanding of phenomena.

The relationship between theory and method: The relationship between theory and method depends upon the trope used. Tropes embedded in organizational theories influence the use of organizational methods, and tropes embedded in organizational methods influence the use of organizational theories. For instance, using a machine trope to create a theory will connote a view of reality as a concrete external structure, whereas using a theater trope may connote a view of symbolic structures and aesthetic interpretations (Morgan 1980: 493). Each trope invokes images for evaluating the connection of theory to data (observation reports) (Tsoukas 1991: 571). Thus, theories using an organization as machine trope may resonate with methods using tropes connoting external and behavioral variables. In contrast, theories using a theater trope may resonate with methods that use tropes that connote cognitions, feelings, and interpretations.

Similarly, tropes embedded in organizational methods will privilege theories using certain tropes. For instance, consider the dominance of the visual trope within modern ways of knowing (Derrida 1974; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996: 168). This visual trope suggests that the world as we see it is

superior to the world as we hear it, feel it, or dream it (Derrida 1974; Kress et al. 1996: 168). The visual trope dominates conventional scientific methods, favoring theories that are 'observable': empirical in a visual sense. This relegates theories that emphasize ethics, intuitions, feelings, interpretations, and non-visual phenomena to a lower status. In sum, when researchers use tropes, they propose what is salient about the world as well as commit themselves to particular methods of investigation (Brown 1976; Burrell and Morgan 1979: 2; Morgan 1980: 493).

Tropological sequence: Building upon a tropological sequence first identified by earlier rhetoricians (Vico 1984; White 1973), we argue that the type of trope used in scientific discourse follows a distinct and measurable sequence: from metaphor to metonymy to synecdoche to irony. At initial stages, tropes are generative and figurative; they evaluate and make the unfamiliar familiar (Chandler 2002: 124; Harr e 1985: 172; Tsoukas 1991: 571). Over time, the way tropes familiarize and evaluate is forgotten or taken-for-granted as cognitive limits render the interpretation created by tropes to appear literal (Brown 1976: 175; Burke 1969b: 506; Chandler 2003; Nietzsche 1990: 888-896; Tsoukas 1991: 568-569). This resonates with arguments suggesting that the tropes we use to understand organizations "often become taken-for-granted such that the prefiguring image disappears from view, leaving the residual concepts as seemingly literal, objective features of organization" (Morgan 1996: 230). In sum, language is essentially figurative, yet over time it often appears literal (Nietzsche 1990: 888-896).

We propose that the language of science moves from figurative to literal and back to figurative, following the distinctive sequence from metaphor to metonymy to synecdoche to irony. This sequence illustrates how tropes as theory and method produce and validate social and organizational facts. We further argue that a tropological understanding of organizational science provides far more insight into how knowledge is institutionalized for scientists and their audiences than about the 'external reality' under investigation (Cassirer 1953; Manning 1979: 660-669; Morgan 1980: 610; Nietzsche 1990: 888-896).

In the following sections, we describe, how, at different stages of scientific inquiry, the four master tropes (i.e., metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony) operate as theory and method. We use Charles S. Peirce's model of logic and scientific inquiry as semiosis: the relationship of signifier and signified in the methods of abduction, deduction, and induction (Peirce, Houser, and Kloesel 1992a: 186-199; Peirce, Houser, and Kloesel 1992b: xx, 106; Peirce and Ketner 1992c: 146). We use Peirce's model because he describes scientific inquiry as a series of distinct stages, and associates each stage with a method of reasoning. We add to Peirce's formulation the dialectic method (Mitroff and Mason 1981). We argue that the interplay of theory and methods follows a particular sequence of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. Each of these tropes is often connected to a particular type of discursive reasoning. Metaphor resonates with abduction, metonymy with deduction, synecdoche with induction, and irony with dialectic. Note that the tropological sequence is also consistent with Charles S. Peirce's sequence of scientific method (Peirce et al. 1992b: 106). According to Peirce, a scientific theory begins with an abduction or a hypothesis; the next phase involves deducting the consequences of the hypothesis; and the third phase involves inductive testing of the hypothesis (Peirce et al. 1992b: 106). Thus, the type of trope exhibited by a theory or method illustrates the dominant type of discursive reasoning taking place. Finally, we construct four propositions that show how theory and method follow the tropological sequence and model the institutionalization of organizational paradigms.

4. A tropological model of theory and methods

4.1 Metaphor

A metaphor is a tool for knowing one thing in terms of something else, by bringing out the "thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this" (Burke 1969b: 503; Lakoff et al. 1980). It triggers a particular mode of thought or perception (Burke 1969b: 503; Jakobson 1971: 494; Lakoff 1990: 47-51). Metaphor combines at least two "semantic domains," creating and constructing new meanings (Cornelissen 2004). Metaphor is also "a basic structural form of experience through which human beings engage, organize, and understand their world" (Brown 1976: 170; Morgan 1983: 601). For example, organizational researchers use metaphor when they describe organizations as machines or organisms (Morgan 1983: 614-615). The trope of metaphor operates as theory, explaining and highlighting plausible relationships between two sets of discourse: theoretical terms and observation reports (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Brown 1976: 180; Tsoukas 1993: 325). For example, the

mechanistic metaphor employed by the rational systems paradigm emphasizes design and calculation, whereas the organic metaphor employed by the natural systems paradigm emphasizes evolution and spontaneity (Scott 1992: 28, 75). Within this framework, a new theory is essentially a metaphor and the connotations it evokes determine its persuasiveness (Harr e 1985; Keeley 1980; Tsoukas 1991: 570). The trope of metaphor also operates as method. Metaphor provides methodological rules for connecting two sets of discourse: theoretical statements and observation reports. These rules are essentially discursive practices that evaluate the plausibility of hypothesized relationships between theoretical terms and observation reports (Brown 1976: 180-184; Morgan 1980: 611-612; Tsoukas 1991: 570). This evaluation process resonates with the method of abduction (Peirce et al. 1992a: 186-189). Where abductive inference plausibly connects two premises (facts/observation reports) through an explanation (Peirce et al. 1992a: 186-200), metaphor plausibly connects the signified of the source (one premise) with the signified of the target (another premise) (Enos 1996: 439-441; Tsoukas 1991: 573).

Population ecology arguments (Hannan and Freeman 1977; Tsoukas 1991: 580) describing organizations as organisms provide an excellent example of theory and method as metaphor. For instance:

Premise 1 (Observation Report): Species of organisms (A) are subject to variation (C)

Premise 2 (Observation Report): Species of organizations (B) are subject to variation (C)

Metaphoric or Abductive Inference (Theoretical Statement): Species of organizations (B) are like species of organisms (A)

As graphically shown in the metaphor column of Figure 1, the signifier Organisms, represented by circle (A), and the signifier Organizations, represented by circle (B), are connected to the same signified Variation, represented by circle (C) (see Figure 1). Specifically, Premise 1 connects the signifier Organisms (A) to the signified of Variation (C), whereas Premise 2 connects the signifier Organizations (B) to the signified of Variation (C).

| Trope | Metaphor | Metonymy | Synecdoche | Irony |
|--|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Method of reasoning | Abduction | Deduction | Induction | Dialectics |
| Premise 1 | | | | |
| Premise 2 | | | | |
| Inference | | | | |
| Conclusion | | | | |
| Inference | Plausible | Certain | Probable | Contradictory |
| Relationship between the signifier and the signified | ~ (is like) | => (implies) | = (is) | ≠ ~ => = Self Referential |

Figure 1: Tropological interplay of theory and method

This allows the researcher to infer that the two signs, Organisms (A) and Organizations (B), are related in a plausible way. As theory, this metaphor explains the less familiar sign "Organizations" with the more familiar sign "Organisms" (Tsoukas 1991: 573). Within this metaphoric argument, the

signifier and signified of the unfamiliar sign “Organizations” are loosely coupled. Connecting the signified of Variation (C) to the sign of Organizations (B) and the sign of Organisms (A), allows for the syllogism¹ to slide the signified of Organisms under the signifier Organizations in the abductive claim that “species of organizations are like species of organisms” (Peirce et al. 1992a: 186-199).

This metaphorical or abductive syllogism also demonstrates the methodological rule for seeing one thing (Organizations) like another (Organisms). Specifically, two subjects, Organizations and Organisms, are connected to the same predicate Variation in order to make one subject Organisms the predicate of the other subject Organizations. Methods such as narrative analysis and grounded theory often operate under this methodological rule (Ricoeur 1984). For example, narrative analyses connect subjects or seemingly independent aspects of social phenomena: events, causes, and characters, into a predicate or coherent story, helping researchers see new patterns, develop new hypotheses, and make abductive inferences. The validity and reliability of narrative analyses are based on the plausibility, not the certainty, of these inferences. Thus, narrative analyses are flexible enough to handle uncertainty and to elicit the imagination of the audience (See Table 1).

Table 1: Tropes and the type of method

| Trope | Metaphor | Metonymy | Synecdoche | Irony |
|-----------|---|--|---|---|
| Inference | Abduction | Deduction | Induction | Dialectics |
| Tools | Narratives, Stories and anecdotes, Metaphorical analysis, Grounded theory | Algorithm, Simulation, Optimization, Mathematical modeling, Linear programming | Experimentation, Case study, Content analysis, Interview, and Statistical methods such as sampling, regression, variance analysis | The Socratic method, Satire, Ethics, Aesthetics, Epistemology, Ontology |

As shown in Table 1, each trope is categorized by its particular type of inference or discursive reasoning, as well as the organizational methods that utilize these discursive rules.

Conceptualizing metaphor as theory and method provides insight into the interplay of theories and methods, as well as into the types of theoretical and methodological constructs that dominate various stages of paradigm development. For instance, at the beginning stages of new paradigms, metaphors provide lenses through which researchers make sense of the novel (Giddens 1993;Manning 1979: 661;Morgan 1983: 602;Morgan 1996: 228;Tsoukas 1993: 324-325;White 1978: 72). At this stage, researchers build their own perspective from scratch for there are no common, institutionalized, taken-for-granted set of values, beliefs, techniques, and guidelines (Kuhn 1970: 13). Applying these ideas to organizational inquiry suggests:

Proposition 1: The frequency of metaphor use in theory and method (e.g., narratives, stories, anecdotes) will be highest at the beginning of new paradigms.

Metaphors require enormous cognitive resources and interpretative efforts (Brown 1976: 173;Chandler 2003;Oswick et al. 2002: 299). As researchers become familiar with the new phenomenon, and their understanding begins to institutionalize, they begin to take-for-granted certain aspects of the metaphor (Chandler 2003;Morgan 1980: 612;Nietzsche 1990: 896). We suggest that the researcher’s language changes to reflect this increased taken-for-grantedness. Specifically, researchers’ overall use of metonymy begins to increase, which demonstrates a more specific and detailed relationship between the target and source of the metaphor (Tsoukas 1991: 573). In sum, metaphors prefigure the subject under study, creating the context for further elaboration and specification by metonymy, synecdoche, and irony (Brown 1976: 173;Manning 1979: 661;Morgan 1983: 602-603).

4.2 Metonymy

Once a metaphor provides a plausible framework for making sense of unfamiliar phenomena, scholars elaborate and analogize the conceptual scheme implied by the metaphor, moving from

¹ A syllogism is an argument consisting of three stated propositions: a major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion (Aristotle, 1991)

similarities to more concrete and literal identities (Tsoukas 1991: 572, 581). Where metaphor unlocks a domain of understanding and implies a relationship of similarity, metonymy elaborates the details of structural correspondences and shows relatedness through direct association or contiguity (Chandler 2003; Cornelissen 2004; Jakobson 1971: 91-95; Morgan 1996: 228-231; Oswick et al. 2002: 295). For example, the organization-as-machine metaphor might elicit the metonymic phrase 'managers fix organizational problems' (Morgan 1983: 60). This metonymical phrase directly associates engineers with managers, and breakdowns with problems. If an organization is like a machine, then managers fix organizational problems like engineers fix mechanical breakdowns. This builds upon the metaphoric similarity of machines and organizations, and details how machines are related to organizations by directly associating managers with engineers.

The trope of metonymy operates as theory, elaborating the plausible relationships implied by metaphor. This elaboration arranges theoretical statements such that observation reports are predicted (Brown 1976: 180). In a sense, the plausible explanation of metaphor is transformed into a prediction that is logically certain (Brown 1976: 180; Tsoukas 1991: 582).

The trope of metonymy also operates as method. Like metaphor, metonymy provides methodological rules for connecting theoretical statements and observation reports. These rules are essentially discursive practices that evaluate the certainty of predicting observation reports from theory (Brown 1976: 180; Tsoukas 1991: 577, 581, 582). This evaluation process is consistent with the method of deduction (Peirce et al. 1992b: 216). Where deductive or metonymic inference moves from whole to parts, predicting with certainty an observation report from two premises (Peirce et al. 1992a: 186-200), metonymy connects two signifieds in a contiguous or direct relationship of whole to parts (Burke 1969b: 506; Manning 1979: 661; Morgan 1983: 602; Oswick et al. 2002: 295).

Prefigured by the metaphor of organizations as organisms, population ecology predictions of organizational extinction provide excellent examples of theory and method as metonymy (Hannan et al. 1977; Tsoukas 1991: 580). For instance:

Premise 1 (Observation Report): Species of organisms (A) go extinct (C)

Premise 2 (Theoretical Statement): Species of organizations (B) are like species of organisms (A)

Metonymic or Certain Inference (Predicted Observation Report): Species of organizations (B) must go extinct (C)

As graphically shown in the metonymy column of Figure 1, the signified of Extinction (C) is connected to the signifier Organisms (A). The signifier Organisms (A) then becomes the signified of the signifier Organizations (B). This allows the researcher to infer that the signified of Extinction (C) is connected to the signifier Organizations (B) in a distinct and certain way. Within this metonymic argument, the signified of Extinction (C) is deduced or necessarily implied by the signifier Organizations (B). Connecting the signifier Organisms (A) to the signified of Extinction (C), and the signifier Organizations (B) to the signified of Organisms (A), allows the syllogism to connect the signified of Extinction to the signifier Organizations in the deductive prediction that "species of organizations go extinct" (Peirce et al. 1992b: 216; Tsoukas 1991: 580).

This metonymical or deductive syllogism demonstrates the methodological rule for having one thing (Organizations) imply another (Extinction). Specifically, Extinction is made a predicate of the subject Organisms, and Organisms is made a predicate of the subject Organizations. This allows the researcher to infer that the Extinction is also a predicate of Organizations. Methods that make use of mathematical models or simulations often operate under this methodological rule (Lakoff and Nunez 2000: 74-75) (see Table 1). Specifically, behaviors, properties and relationships are made into predicates of subjects like variables, constants, and functions. These variables, constants, and functions are then made predicates of subjects like simulations or mathematical models. This allows for simulations or mathematical models to stand for behaviors, properties, and relationships in the social phenomena. Researchers, without knowing the particulars of each case, interpret changes in the mathematical models or simulations as deductive (certain) inferences and predictions about social phenomena. For example, sensitivity analyses and objective functions are often used to describe and predict organizational outcomes.

Theoretically and methodologically, accepted metonymies move us one step further along the process of inquiry (Tsoukas 1991: 572;Tsoukas 1993: 339). Initially prefigured by metaphor (Morgan 1983: 603;Oswick et al. 2002: 296), metonymy as theory reduces the similarity implied by a metaphor to a more literal or related sense (Burke 1969b: 506). This allows us to build a more scientific or exact theoretical model from the metaphorically created conceptual model, because metaphors cannot directly explain or predict (Tsoukas 1991: 572- 582;Tsoukas 1993: 339). Applying these ideas suggest the following:

Proposition 2: The frequency of metonymy use in theory and method (e.g., simulation, mathematical modeling) will be highest during the development phase of paradigms.

In sum, metonymic models are a necessary step in turning metaphorical insights into scientific knowledge about organizations and furthering the maturation of a new paradigm (Tsoukas 1993: 336). Assuming that the paradigm is progressing and not in decline, the transition of metaphors to metonymies indicates that researchers are beginning to take for granted the substitution of one sign for another sign (Morgan 1983: 603). This increase in taken-for-grantedness mirrors the increase in the familiarity and naturalness of the metonymy (Lodge 1977: xiv). Overtime, metonymic models become taken-for-granted as researchers' explanations institutionalize into synecdochic or apparently literal and concrete descriptions.

4.2.1 Synecdoche

The definition of synecdoche varies from theorist to theorist (Burke 1969b: 508;Chandler 2002;Enos 1996: 712;Jakobson and Halle 1971: 95;Manning 1979: 661). We define synecdoche as the substitution of the parts for the whole, where the elements are linked to something wider (Chandler 2003;Morgan 1980: 602;Oswick et al. 2002: 295). Synecdoche is often associated with representation and quantification, and reflects the closest link that a signifier can have with a signified (Burke 1969b: 503;Chandler 2003). Any attempt to represent reality by treating a single example as the microcosm of a larger whole can be seen as involving synecdoche (Manning 1979: 662). Organizational researchers use synecdoche when they expand meaning from a part to a whole (Manning 1979: 661), for example when they interpret a change in stock price as a change in organizational performance.

As theory, synecdoche operationalizes the metonymy or conceptual scheme prefigured by the metaphor (Manning 1979: 661;Morgan 1980: 607). The conceptual scheme is collapsed or reduced into its measures (Brown 1976: 181;Burke 1969b). This connects the particulars of actual observation reports to more generalized hypotheses (i.e., theoretical statements) metonymically deduced from the metaphor.

Like metaphor and metonymy, the trope of synecdoche also operates as method, providing methodological rules for connecting the theoretical and observational discourses. These rules are essentially discursive practices that evaluate the probability that the actual observation reports support the theoretical statements (Tsoukas 1991: 572). This evaluation process is consistent with the method of induction (Peirce et al. 1992a: 186-199). Where inductive inference moves from parts to whole, deriving theoretical statements that follow probabilistically from two premises or observation reports (Peirce et al. 1992a: 186-200), synecdoche connects signifieds into a probable relationship where "the part is taken as an accurate reflection of the whole" (Barthes 1974: 162;Chandler 2003;Jakobson et al. 1971).

Prefigured by the metonymic inference "species of organizations go extinct", population ecology tests of organizational bankruptcy as organismic extinction (Hannan et al. 1977;Tsoukas 1991: 580) provide an excellent example of theory and method as synecdoche:

Premise 1 (Predicted Observation Report): Species of organizations (B) go extinct (C)

Premise 2 (Actual Observation Report): Species of organizations (B) go bankrupt (A)

Synecdoche or Probable Inference (Theoretical Statement): Bankruptcy (A) is extinction (C)

As graphically shown in the synecdoche column of Figure 1, two signifieds Bankruptcy (A) and Extinction (C), are connected to the same signifier Species of Organizations (B). This allows the researcher to infer that the two signs Bankruptcy (A) and Extinction (B) are related in a probabilistic

way, because at least some species of organizations have gone bankrupt and extinct. Within this synecdochic argument, the signifier Species of Organizations (B) is connected to the signified of Bankruptcy (A) and the signified of Extinction (C). This allows organizational bankruptcy, a likely form of organizational extinction, to operationalize or represent organizational extinction. Connecting the signifier Species of Organizations to the signifieds of Extinction and Bankruptcy simultaneously, allows for the syllogism to represent the signified of Extinction with the signifier Bankruptcy in the inductive claim that “bankruptcy is extinction.”

This synecdochic or inductive syllogism demonstrates the methodological rule for taking the part (Bankruptcy) as an accurate reflection of the whole (Extinction). Specifically, two predicates, Extinction and Bankruptcy, are connected to the same subject Species of Organizations in order to make one predicate Bankruptcy the subject of the other predicate Extinction. Methods such as statistical analysis, case studies, and experimentation, which proxy and test hypothesized and predicted relationships with actual observation reports often operate under this methodological rule (see Table 1). For example, hypothesized and predicted social behaviors, properties, and relationships are made into predicates of subjects like populations. Similarly, samples, experiments, and case studies are also made into predicates of subjects like populations. This allows us to make predicted social behaviors, properties, and relationships a predicate of subjects like samples, experiments and case studies. Researchers interpret the information contained in the samples, experiments, and case studies to make inductive (probabilistic) inferences about the social behaviors, properties, and relationships in the population.

Conceptualizing synecdoche as theory and method moves us another step in the process of inquiry. In the early stages of an organizational paradigm, metaphor creates new insights that are conceptually modeled with metonymy. Over time, the initial metaphor and the metonymic implications prefiguring synecdoche are institutionalized and thus taken-for-granted. The use of synecdoche implies a relationship of quantitative and representational convertibility (Burke 1969b: 508), where the signifier is equated with the signified. The signifier and signified appear denotative or literal as the figurative aspects of earlier tropes are forgotten (Morgan 1980: 612). Applying these ideas to organizational inquiry suggests:

Proposition 3: The frequency of synecdoche use in theory and method (e.g., statistical method, case study, experimentation) will be highest during the maturity phase of paradigms.

In the conduct of normal science, metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche institutionalize a paradigm by transforming figurative and connotative explanations into literal and denotative descriptions. However, literal descriptions provide the foundation for anomalies (i.e., tolerable aberrations from the ruling belief system) — observation statements that violate “the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science” (Kuhn 1970: 52). Anomalies offer a “means of exploring previously unthought, overshadowed, or marginalized possibilities” (Oswick et al. 2002: 296). As anomalies increase, organizational researchers may begin to realize the limits of their theoretical explanations, eventually questioning the initial metaphor and its taken-for-granted aspects in radical and novel ways (Oswick et al. 2002: 296). This leads to the use of the trope of irony, which questions the institutionalized or ‘literal’ connection of the signifier and the signified (Enos 1996: 357; Manning 1979: 662; White 1978: 73).

4.3 Irony

Irony is the “most radical of the four master tropes” (Chandler 2002: 134) as it typically signifies the opposite of its literal signification (Enos 1996: 355-357). It juxtaposes opposites “such that in the silence between the two, the deeper meaning of both may emerge” (Brown 1987: 173-174). For example, consider Willmott’s assertion that managers empower subordinates who then act in accordance with management’s expectation (Oswick et al. 2002: 299; Willmott 1993). The connotations of our normative understanding of empowerment are juxtaposed against the connotations of empowerment taking place in organizations. The writer entreats the reader to take a perspective of perspectives. As theory, irony allows us to comprehend difference in similarity and involves the interplay of opposites that create insight through paradox and contradiction (Brown 1989; Oswick et al. 2002: 296). For example, when we talk about anarchy as an organizational form (Morgan 1983: 602), we recognize that the connotations of anarchy are in contradiction to the connotations of organizations. This takes the audience to the “cognitive discomfort zone” (Oswick et al. 2002: 299),

challenging conventional assumptions (Putnam 1992: 109). Consider another example: Pondy and Mitroff argue that the metaphor of an open system is insufficient to understand organizations, and therefore, we need to go “beyond” it (Pondy et al. 1979). But what is *beyond* an *open* system? The writers place the connotations of these terms in contradiction, creating both a new perspective and a perspective of perspectives. In sum, there are two conversations, two contexts, two perspectives. Thus, the connotations of the ironic sign are derived from more than its context, but context of contexts, demanding “an intuitive *reflexivity* about the deceptive character of appearances” (Oswick et al. 2002: 299).

The trope of irony also operates as method. Like the other tropes, irony provides methodological rules for connecting theoretical statements and observation reports. These rules are essentially discursive practices that evaluate how hypotheses connect as well as fail to connect to observation reports. Specifically, irony allows the researcher to see a paradigm “from the viewpoint of its antithesis” (Putnam 1992: 108). This evaluation process is consistent with the method of dialectical reasoning (Brown 1987: 172-173; Burke 1969b: 503). Where dialectic infers a contradictory theoretical statement from two premises, irony connects a signifier to diametrically opposed signifieds. This shows that something is and is not, revealing the power of language both to obscure and to clarify (White 1973: 37).

For example, consider the following argument,

Premise 1 (Observation Report): Bankrupt organizations (A) are extinct organisms (C)

Premise 2 (Observation Report): Bankrupt organizations (A) are not extinct organisms (C)

Irony or Contradictory Inference (Theoretical Statement): Species of organizations (A') are species of organisms that don't go extinct (C')

As graphically shown in the irony column of Figure 1, the signifier Bankrupt Organizations (A) is and is not connected to the signified of Extinct Organisms (C). This allows the researcher to infer that the signifier Bankrupt Organizations (A) has and does not have the property signified by Extinct Organisms (C). The contradictory connection between the signifier Bankrupt Organizations (A) and the signified of Extinct Organisms (C) also triggers a conversation about conversations, thereby allowing the researcher to question the plausibility of the organism metaphor and to realize that the sign Organizations (A') is and is not connected to the sign of Organisms (C').

The ironic syllogism demonstrates the methodological rule for the juxtaposing of opposites. Specifically, the subject (Bankrupt Organizations) is and is not connected to the same predicate (Extinct Organisms) in order to initiate a conversation in which the taken-for-granted connection between the subject (Organizations) and its predicate (Organisms) is contradicted. The Socratic Method and methods such as satire operate under this methodological rule. These methods often initiate self-reflective conversations that question the ethical, aesthetic, and scientific aspects underlying researchers' choice of theories and methods, or research problems and solutions. Researchers interpret these conversations to make dialectical inferences about scientific theories and methods, and their scientific community.

Theoretically and methodologically, ironies move us another step along the process of inquiry by destabilizing old paradigms, and creating space for new metaphors and paradigms (Brown 1989: 172). Where synecdoche reflects the solution of puzzle solving activities such as hypothesis testing (Morgan 1980: 606), irony indicates the rise of anomalies. Specifically, as anomalies are detected, researchers may use irony to question the community's taken-for-granted conceptions underlying normal science research and/or its practical implications (Enos 1996: 357; Kuhn 1970: 62-64, 82; Oswick et al. 2002: 299). This questioning does not result from a Popperian falsification (Popper and Bartley 1993) or an inability to connect theoretical statements to reality, but from a Kuhnian discursive re-interpretation of theoretical statements and observation statements within a different paradigm or metaphor (Kuhn 1970: 77).

As theory, irony demonstrates that “any signified can become a signifier” (Brown 1987: 187; Eagleton 1981: 160). Where the other tropes shift what is being referred to, irony refers to itself or the act of referring (Chandler 2002: 134-136). It creates a sign for the act of signification. This invites a

conversation about conversation, decoupling interpretation from the interpreter, evaluating the intentions and perceived truth status of a paradigm (Chandler 2002: 135;Oswick et al. 2002: 301). Irony allows researchers to interpret inconsistent results as more than just an anomaly, thus increasing the potential development of new paradigms. Applying these ideas to organizational inquiry suggests:

Proposition 4: The frequency of irony use in theory and method (e.g., satire, the Socratic Method) will be highest when researchers suggest transitioning from an old paradigm to a new paradigm.

Irony reminds us that the Cartesian method for deriving absolute truth is a fiction (Nietzsche 1990;Quinn 1996;Taylor 1991), because paradigm choice cannot be “forced by logic and neutral experience” (Kuhn 1970: 150). This does not mean that paradigm choice is an irrational act. On the contrary, scientists must be persuaded to accept a new paradigm, and this persuasion involves more than scientific arguments such as accuracy, precision, and generalizability. It also involves a broader notion of reason that includes arguments based on aesthetics, ethics, and emotions (Kuhn 1970: 152-155;McCloskey 1998:30;Taylor 1991). Irony also focuses attention to the incommensurability of paradigms, highlighting the socio/psychological factors underlying the choice of research problems and the acceptability of particular solutions (Kuhn 1970: 111-126 & 148-160).

4.4 The sequence of tropes

Propositions 1 – 4 describe a distinct relationship between language and the conduct of organizational inquiry. Figure 2 illustrates this relationship. The Y1-axis represents the taken-for-grantedness of a paradigm (see Green Jr. 2004, for rhetorical techniques that may be used to operationalize taken-for-grantedness). The Y2-axis represents the change in the frequency of trope use over time.

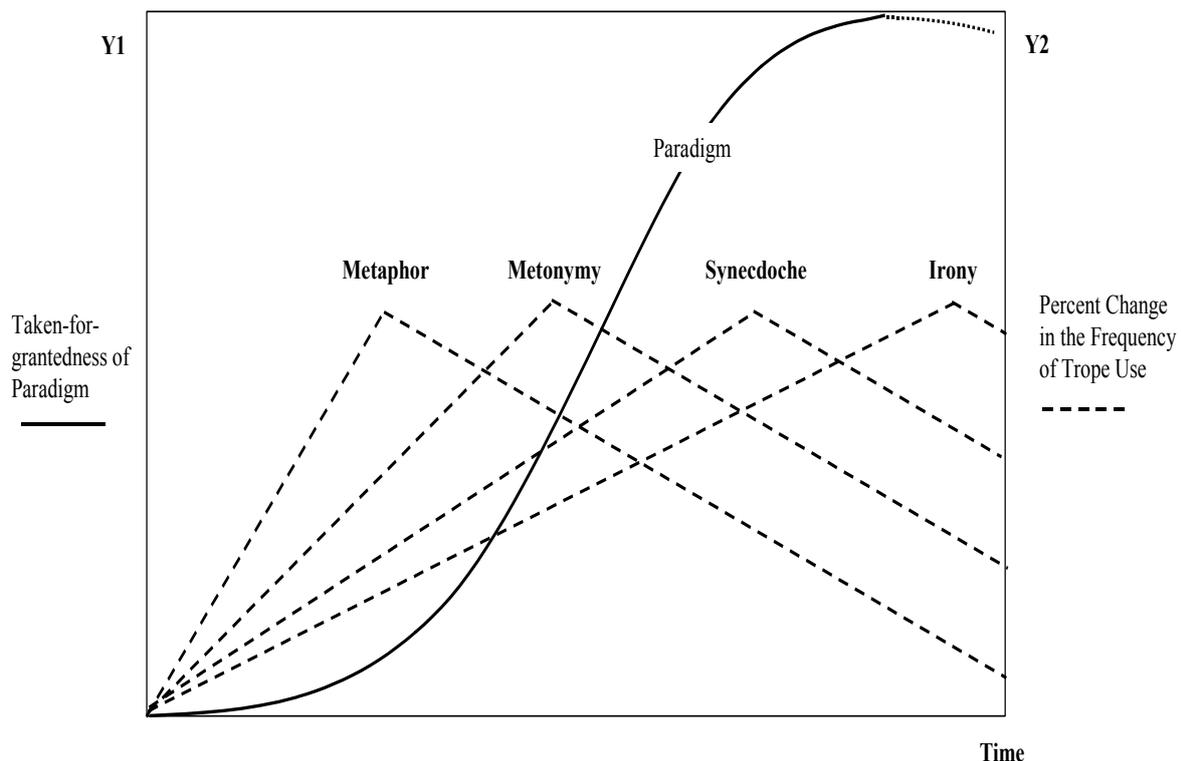


Figure 2: The tropological sequence

The beginning of a new paradigm is marked by increased use of metaphor to create new theory that explains the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar. At this stage, the method of abduction dominates. Thus, plausible stories and narrative analyses are more persuasive vehicles for making sense. At the development stage of a paradigm, researchers within the paradigm take the metaphor for granted and use metonymy to create conceptual models for relationships. The use of metonymy indicates an increased familiarity and comfort with the metaphor. At this stage, the method of deduction dominates,

and mathematical models or simulations that emphasize certainty are more persuasive. As the paradigm reaches its highest level of institutionalization, researchers use synecdoche. Synecdoche operates as denotation, measuring, quantifying, operationalizing, and testing the generality of metonymic explanations. At this stage, the method of induction dominates, and experiments or statistical analyses are more persuasive. This provides a probabilistic test of whether patterns in the actual observation reports can serve as proxies for metonymic explanations. The use of synecdoche indicates the strongest connection between a signifier and a signified, and thus reflects the highest level of taken-for-grantedness. In sum, researchers move from a tenuous belief in a paradigm to a highly institutionalized and taken-for-granted acceptance of a paradigm. Within this framework, the use of metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche may comprise what Kuhn has described as “normal science” (Kuhn 1970;Morgan 1980: 607). As shown in Figure 2, the level of taken-for-grantedness, or proportion of research studies as percent of all research studies, peaks during this period as more and more scientists engage in normal science research.

Proposition 4 suggests that the trope of irony may mark the transition from normal science to revolutionary science (Brown 1989: 173-174;Oswick et al. 2002: 299). Although the tropes underlying a highly institutionalized paradigm appear frozen, the use of irony unfreezes the literal and denotative aspects of the paradigm, highlighting and emphasizing the paradigm’s figurative core (Enos 1996: 357;Manning 1979: 669). Researchers realize that normal science proceeds by ignoring the figurative characteristics of language (Brown 1987: 114-115). At this stage, methods that trigger self-reflective conversations help researchers reinterpret established paradigms.

In sum, the tropological sequence suggests that scientific language is initially metaphorical or figurative, yet over time its figurative aspects are taken-for-granted reflecting a more literal or denotative scientific language, reducing, abstracting, and segmenting experience (Berger et al. 1966;Nietzsche 1990;Tsoukas 1993: 337). As a paradigm institutionalizes, concepts and conceptual relationships appear more and more literal and denotative of the world. Finally, the use of irony uncovers the illusion of this literalization created by metaphors, transformed by metonymies, and operationalized by synecdoches. In a sense, the tropological sequence suggests that scientific knowledge is built like a house of cards. The foundational cards are taken as literal. Yet, there is always the possibility of transitioning back to a figurative state and thus reweaving the scientist’s *web of belief* (Quine and Ullian 1978;Tsoukas 1993: 339). In Table 2, we apply the tropological sequence to Scott’s threefold typology of organizational paradigms: rational, natural, and open systems (Scott 1992: 28). Table 2 illustrates the generalizability of our framework, by showing a set of syllogisms that model the tropological sequence for each of these three paradigms.

5. Discussion

5.1 A rhetorical theory of organizational science

The rhetorical theory of organizational science developed here attempts to make explicit the role and power of tropes in the inquiry process. This is important for the training of new researchers because an increased awareness of tropes in scientific language (theoretical statements, observation reports, and methods) marks the difference between using tropes and being used by them (Brown 1976: 175). For example, a deeper understanding of connotations triggered by different tropes may help researchers define more persuasive research constructs and variables, and understand why some research problems and solutions are more persuasive than others.

Implications of the sequence: The tropological sequence suggests that the familiar parts and source of metaphors may be closer to the center of the scientist’s *web of belief*—taken-for-granted or highly institutionalized—but no closer to the truth than the unfamiliar parts and target of metaphors (Nietzsche 1990: 888-896;Quine et al. 1978). Theories, methods, and the knowledge they produce are made truthful through language (Brown 1990). This stance resonates with arguments that conceive of truth as discursively produced (Burke 1969b: 503;Feyerabend 1993;Foucault 1984: 72-75;Nietzsche 1990: 888-896;Wittgenstein 1963). It also rejects the illusion of a fixed method of scientific inquiry and the notion that empirical observations are self-evident (Bartunek, Bobko, and Venkatraman 1993: 1366;McCall and Bobko 1990: 412;McCloskey 1998: 22-23). In other words, ‘facts’ and empirical observations do not ‘speak for themselves’: organizational researchers use rhetoric to rationalize and legitimize their ontological and epistemological status (Brown 1976;Manning 1979: 661, 668;McCloskey 1998: 51-52). The persuasiveness or truth of a fact is determined by the paradigmatic interpretations or social conventions of a community (Astley et al. 1992:445;Brown

1976;Foucault 1984;Kuhn 1970;Nietzsche 1990). Thus an organizational ‘truth’ produced by organizational science provides far more insight into what is persuasive to organizational scholars and their audiences, than it does into the features of organizations that scientists anthropomorphically deemed salient.

Table 2: Examples of paradigms as tropological arguments

| | Rational | Natural | <i>Open</i> |
|-------------------|--|--|--|
| Metaphor | Machines (A) are designed to attain specified goals (C) Organizations (B) are designed to attain specified goals (C) Organizations (B) are like machines (A) | Natural systems (A) grow and evolve (C) Organizations (B) grow and evolve (C) Organizations (B) are like natural systems (A) | Open systems (A) interact with their environment (C) Organizations (B) interact with their environment (C) Organizations (B) are like open systems (A) |
| Metonymy | If machines (A) have mechanical parts that have no meaning and no function separate from the machine (C) And organizations (B) are like machines (C) Then organizations (B) must have mechanical parts that have no meaning and no function separate from the organization (C) | If natural systems (A) satisfy their essential needs (C) And organizations (B) are natural systems (A) Then organizations (B) must satisfy their essential needs (C) | If open systems (A) adapt to their environment (C) And organizations (B) are open systems (A) Then organizations (B) must adapt to their environment (C) |
| Synecdoche | Organizations (B) have mechanical parts that have no meaning and no function separate from the organization (C) Organizations (B) have employees (A) Employees (A) are mechanical parts that have no meaning and no function separate from the organization (C) | Organizations (B) satisfy organizational needs (C) Organizations (B) have structures (A) Organizational structures (A) satisfy organizational needs (C) | Organizations (B) adapt to their environment (C) Organizations (B) increase differentiation and integration (A) Organizational differentiation and integration (A) are adaptations to the environment (C) |
| Irony | Employees of an organization (A) are parts of a machine (C) Employees of an organization (A) are not parts of a machine (C) Organizations (A') are and are not machines (C') | Structures of organizations (A) satisfy organizational needs (C) Structures of organizations (A) do not satisfy organizational needs (C) Organizations (A') are and are not natural systems (C') | Differentiation and integration in organizations (A) are adaptations to the environment (C) Differentiation and integration in organizations (A) are not adaptations to the environment (C) Organizations (A') are and are not open systems (C') |

In addition, the tropological sequence questions the privileged role of skepticism in the conduct of science. Specifically, the sequence emphasizes the way metaphors engage the imagination, metonymies elaborate scientific models, and synecdochies operationalize hypotheses (see Brown 1976: 176). These processes require assent to many assumptions that may not be demonstrable. From a rhetorical perspective, a full-fledged skepticism appears to take place only when researchers transition from an old paradigm to a new paradigm. This transition is marked by the use of irony, which questions pre-ordained categories and un.masks metaphors (Brown 1976: 176;Oswick et al. 2002: 299). Remarkably, this emphasis of assent over skepticism resonates with philosophers of science who argue that conventional views of science overemphasize the role of skepticism at the expense of the role of assent in scientific inquiry (Booth 1974;Duhem 1954;McCloskey 1998;Quine 1980).

The relationship between theory and method: A rhetorical perspective sheds light on the complex relationship between theory and method. Specifically, a rhetorical perspective argues that ontology and epistemology are inseparable, and thus, theory and method are deeply connected. Furthermore, this connection is embedded in figures of thought such as tropes, which shape what we know and how we know it (Chandler 2003: chapter 8;Manning 1979: 661). In other words, tropes make knowing, and hence theory and method possible by providing both form and content to thought.

As shown in Figure 1, the tropological interplay of theory and method takes four different forms. Specifically, each trope differs in the way that signifiers and signifieds are substituted (Chandler 2003: chapter 8). This substitution reflects changes in the context of reasoning (i.e., abductive, deductive, inductive, and dialectical); thus, the interplay of signifiers and signifieds mirrors the interplay of theory and method. In a sense, the connotations of each trope provide a creative and predictive logic that simultaneously enables and constrains how researchers reflect on organizations. This resonates with formulations that suggest that methods and theory are profoundly interconnected (Bartunek et al. 1993: 1364; Drazin and Kazanjian 1993: 1374). As mentioned above, many scholars argue that theory and method can generate and shape each other. At the very least, the choice of a theory entails a particular set of methods, and the choice of a method privileges a particular set of theories. A rhetorical perspective aims to show that these choices and the mutual interaction between theory and method are deeply embedded in language, and can be tracked empirically by focusing on the tropes researchers use and the connotations these tropes trigger. Such empirical knowledge of trope use in a scientific field may help researchers improve the development of both theories and methods.

Alternative tropological sequences: The tropological sequence used in this paper resonates with previous sequences for the conduct of science and history (Peirce et al. 1992b: 106; Vico 1984; White 1978). Nonetheless, the sequence is not automatic or context independent. Alternative sequences are possible. For example, some of the qualitative methods such as grounded theory often follows a sequence which begins with a “symbiosis” of abduction (metaphor) and induction (synecdoche), and ends with deduction (metonymy), and verification (synecdoche and irony) (Rennie, 1998:111). Which sequences are most common is an empirical question for researchers. Researchers may also look at the relationship between the level of taken-for-grantedness of a paradigm and the tropological sequence it follows. We believe that the tropological sequence (from metaphor to metonymy to synecdoche to irony) creates the highest level of taken-for-grantedness for a paradigm. Researchers may also include other tropes such as simile, hyperbole, aporia, and personification. Studying and integrating these tropes into the current framework may prove useful in understanding further the relationship between theory, method, and scientific paradigm.

6. Conclusion

Rhetorical theory provides a unique analytical framework for understanding the role of tropes in organizational inquiry in general and theory and methods in particular. It must be emphasized, however, that our perspective is neither relativist nor irrationalist. We do not advocate that certainty in the pursuit of truth is impossible. That claim would undermine its own credibility and certainty. Rather, we advocate studying how organizational researchers persuade: focusing on how the tropes embedded in theory and method make sense of the world. An awareness of tropes and the tropological sequence enables researchers to manage scientific inquiry better. This view suggests that researchers need to learn more than sciences. They must also learn arts and morals because the artful and moral creation and employment of tropes will increase their ability to understand and influence organizations (Pondy et al. 1979: 30). Perhaps the most important implication of a rhetorical theory of organizational inquiry is its emphasis on morality. “‘Normal science’ is by definition literal science (Brown 1987: 114) and a literalist view of reality is apolitical and amoral (Brown 1987: 116). A rhetorical perspective sheds light on the ideological underpinnings of organizational science, emphasizing the moral and political choices researchers make in constructing knowledge claims (Brown 1987: 117). It does so by demystifying the dominant positivist paradigm through an ironic realization that the advocacy of amorality is itself a highly moral act (Brown 1987). This creates room for self-reflection and triggers an awareness of the power of language to both obscure and clarify (Brown 1987). The positivist view of theory and method is a persuasive and highly institutionalized perspective. In fact, our model is positivistic in that we can operationalize, measure, and test the four propositions to determine if scientists’ language follows the tropological sequence. Within our framework, however, it is a rhetorical construction, and thus a powerful trope about the correct way to *trope*. We raise serious questions about a positivistic view of science, theory, and methods. In other words, we question positivism in a positivistic way. If on one level you are persuaded by this model, on another level you should not be persuaded. This is self-contradictory, yet we hope it illustrates the contextual, self-referential, and ironic nature of a rhetorical perspective. In a sense, it is our willingness to go beyond positivism that makes it possible to create a truly positivistic science. How ironic.

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