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Corporate Dieting. Persuasive Use of Metaphors in Downsizing**

This paper considers how companies use their own mass communication media to create, with the aid of metaphors, a legitimizing image of their practices. The analysis is based on the example of two banks, both of which undertook massive staff and cost reductions between 2001 and 2003. Downsizing measures like theirs are often met with resistance if they conflict with the interests, values or worldviews of stakeholders. Companies approach this threat of resistance by building a linguistic façade of legitimacy that suggests conformity with prevailing ideas of good or correct managerial conduct. Our metaphor analysis, which covers all publicly accessible texts of the two banks' own mass communication, identifies nine metaphoric concepts, which we further condense into three persuasive meta concepts: concealing metaphor, euphemistic metaphor, and urgency and control metaphor each fulfil different persuasive functions and vary systematically according to the conditions surrounding the managerial practice.

Key words: **metaphors, rhetoric, symbolic management, legitimacy, downsizing, layoffs, banks** (JEL: D83, G21, J63)

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1. Background and objectives

If companies are ailing economically or doing "too well" in the sense that they have gained "excess fat", they are "put on a diet". This at least is according to the modern management myth of "lean management". The result is downsizing, a process usually associated with cost savings and massive job losses. Yet it is not as uncontroversial as the corporate language used to describe it may suggest. Downsizing is therefore seen by the stakeholders of the company either as an efficiency drive or – above all in the case of mass layoffs – as a sign of corporate crisis or immoral practice. In this "battle of meanings", companies have an interest in presenting a specific image of their practices: an image that makes the practice appear legitimate, i.e. desirable, proper or socially appropriate (cf. Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Legitimacy is created by influencing the perceptions of the actors through communication. Especially large companies generally have numerous communications media at their disposal, which are used to build a certain corporate image and justify concrete managerial practices. This particularly applies for in-house mass communication media like employee newspapers and business reports, because these media reach large numbers and groups of actors and organizations have complete control over the content of communication and the form of expression. Therefore, these monological mass media are important channels for creating and maintaining hegemony over interpretation by building a façade of legitimacy with linguistic means.

The importance of language in creating legitimacy was recognized long ago, for example in neoinstitutional research. Meyer and Rowan (1977) drew attention to the significance of the "legitimated" vocabulary in building a façade of legitimacy, i.e. the use of language that suggests conformity to institutionalized rules (cf. Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 349). To date, however, little has been done in organization research to take a more concrete look at the use of linguistic means. One branch of "Impression Management", for example, is more concerned with relatively general communication strategies, such as denials, apologies, excuses and justifications (cf. Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981, p. 131; Elsbach, 2003, p. 307). However, although metaphors have become more important in organization research and a frequent topic of investigation, little research has been done so far on their persuasive content (an exception being Charteris-Black, 2005). But metaphors can be a powerful tool in managerial strategies of legitimacy. Therefore, the analysis of metaphors can add to our understanding of managerial control and the creation of organizational identity.

The present paper sets out to narrow this gap in the research. In doing so, it has two objectives: firstly, it aims to develop a theory of how metaphors persuade, and what persuasive functions they fulfil in the process of persuasion. Secondly, it examines empirically the persuasive use of metaphor by two major banks: how do organizations use their own mass communication media to create a legitimate image of their downsizing practices with metaphor, and what persuasive functions does this fulfil?

While the explorative nature of the case study analysis is in the foreground, the study also offers some initial, more generally explicative insights into what kind of metaphors are used under which conditions.

2. Theoretical background

Any analysis of symbolic management begins with the audience, or more precisely, with the question of the extent to which actors can be influenced. People are only rational to a point; they neither possess all "objective" information nor can they adequately process all the information at their disposal (cf. March, 1978). This bounded rationality makes it necessary to rely on mechanisms of complexity reduction. Therefore, the interpretation of reality is a cognitive process. Through such processes of interpretation actors, for example, paint their own "image" of an organization. This definition of a situation (cf. Coleman, 1990, p. 10; Esser, 1991, p. 45) is a function made up of two fundamental elements: on the one hand it depends on the communicative framework of the situation. How is the situation presented to the stakeholders, for example, which elements of a managerial practice (e.g., its goals or how it is implemented) are placed in the foreground? On the other hand the definition of the situation depends on the actors' cognitive-normative structures, i.e. their existing belief systems, values and norms. Persuasive language use – rhetoric – picks up on both of these points.

Rhetorical means are used to produce meaning through language, and thereby also legitimacy (cf. also Green, JR, 2004, p. 653, p. 658). Rhetoric works by using linguistic means to connect a specific (objectionable) practice with an accepted broader system of reference of legitimate rules (cf. Lamertz & Baum, 1998, p. 95). Here prevailing opinion (or "endoxa" in classical rhetoric) takes on a special role (cf. Renon, 1998, p. 100), because persuasion works more by being based on existing cognitive-normative structures than by creating new ones (cf. Charteris-Black, 2005, p. 10): people are essentially sceptical towards change, and for this reason successful persuasion usually has to connect the persuasion object with something familiar the addressee already believes in. Therefore, rhetoric needs an "anchor" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1986, p. 26) in the addressees' cognitive-normative structures. The classic tool rhetoric uses to do this is argument: arguments persuade – more or less explicitly – by referring to generally accepted topoi, e.g. the assumption "the end justifies the means".

But argument is not the only rhetorical device, metaphors also impart meaning. For a long time, metaphors only played a relatively insignificant role in rhetoric: in classical rhetoric, they were considered purely linguistic ornament (cf. Ricoeur, 1978, p. 20). The cognitive theory of metaphor (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) changed this view. According to this theory, metaphors are not a purely linguistic phenomenon but structure the way people think and act, since people organize reality according to the model of mental images (cf. Hofbauer, 1995, p. 141). Therefore, metaphors are the rule rather than the exception in language, as natural everyday language is full of them (cf. Klein, 2002, p. 222).

In metaphors, a relationship between two different objects is created by associations: A "target area" is seen through (or as) a "source area". In the cognitive theory of metaphor, metaphors are understood to be entire groups of expressions that share the same source and target area. For example, the metaphoric concept "downsizing as a slimming regime" is created using different metaphorical elements: companies are made "fit" for the future by being put on a "diet" and shedding "excess fat". In this

way beliefs about diets and health are transferred to the organization: only efficient organizations, in other words those without surplus staff, are healthy. This works by the cognitive structuring aspect of "highlighting" and "hiding" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 10): metaphors always stress certain aspects of an object and neglect others. In this sense, metaphors represent mental models of reality (cf. Moser, 2000, p. 49), triggered by metaphoric expressions. Interpreting a metaphor is an individual process, but most metaphors are not interpreted differently by different people, since a "system of associated commonplaces" (Black, 1962, p. 40) produces shared understanding. This is why the use of metaphors can be seen as discursive practice that reflect and reproduce an existing ideology or an existing discourse (cf. Koller, 2005, p. 206). A single metaphoric expression presumably does not have the "power" to effectively influence people's thinking. But frequent repetition and variation in the individual expressions can turn such ideological metaphors into powerful or effective practice. This is particularly the case when they achieve hegemony, that means actors have no alternative information at their disposal (cf. van Dijk, 1996, p. 85). It is no surprise, then, that metaphors have increasingly become the object of critical discourse analysis (cf. for example Charteris-Black, 2004).

Metaphors are persuasive because they create a specific communicative framework for a managerial practice by intensifying certain perceptions and ignoring others, and by doing so they encourage desired definitions of a situation and make unwanted ones less plausible (cf. in a similar context Edelman, 1972, p. 67). They establish a connection between a concrete practice and the general criteria for legitimacy: associated commonplaces are the anchor for metaphors to the cognitive-normative structures of the addressees. The value judgments made here often go unnoticed (cf. Wesel, 1995, p. 209) because many metaphors have become so commonplace that we no longer see them for what they are (cf. Moser, 2000, p. 36). Highly conventional metaphors such as "streamlining measures" are very suggestive in the interpretation they offer. They are effective precisely because the ideological or persuasive content they transport is latent and not immediately perceived for what it is. By contrast, novel and provocative metaphors arouse attention and as a result are more likely to be challenged (cf. Goatly, 2007, p. 29). Similarly, empirical studies show that metaphorical language has a greater persuasive effect than non-metaphorical language (cf. for example Hitchon, 1997, Sopory & Dillard, 2002).

From a rhetorical point of view, metaphors are able to fulfil various persuasive functions in legitimating a concrete managerial practice (and can do so simultaneously). Metaphors can *firstly* encourage positive judgments by creating positive associations, that is, by euphemizing a practice (*euphemizing function*). Metaphors are employed to detract from negative denotative characteristics by attracting attention towards certain aspects of an object and connecting them with a positively associated source area. For example, organizations are "slimmed down" or "streamlined", they do not "lay off staff". Metaphors *secondly* are able to embed a practice – relatively diffusely – in an existing ideology (*ideological embedding function*), as in the lean organization myth: the use of diet metaphors also suggests that the practice corresponds to the general management myth of the "lean organization" or lean management, according to which organizations should get rid of all "excess" cost units (employees, branches, sections of

the company). *Thirdly*, metaphors can transport a concrete argument (in favour of the practice) in concise and implicit language (*argument function*), for example stating why the management has chosen the practice it now wishes to legitimize (e.g. the term "staff savings" implies that employees are laid off to achieve the goal of reducing costs).

3. Data and methodology

The study is based on data from two case studies focussing on the linguistic legitimation of staff reductions (cf. for further details Hoßfeld, 2011). The field of analysis is the German banking sector between 2001 and 2003. In response to structural problems and the "New Economy" speculation bubble bursting in 2000, above all the private banks decided to take extensive downsizing measures entailing massive cost reductions and staff cuts – all of the major private banks reduced the number of employees by more than 20 percent in the period examined.

Within this sector and time frame two organizations were chosen that differ very significantly in terms of their respective situations and conditions: Deutsche Bank and Commerzbank. At the beginning of 2001, Deutsche Bank embarked on a far-reaching transformation of the company, which in addition to structural changes also involved a cost-cutting programme and staff cuts. The organization remained "in the black" throughout and at times even reached "record profits". Not so Commerzbank, where deteriorating financial conditions led the bank from autumn 2001 to focus its activities on two "cost offensives", which brought with them a massive reduction in staff. The bank temporarily suffered some substantial losses during this period, which prompted occasional reports of corporate crisis in the press. The choice of very different organizations in this respect makes it possible – as far as this is viable within a small case study – to examine whether organizations rocked by crisis attempt to legitimize their practices differently from those who are doing economically very well. Empirical studies show that downsizing is mainly perceived by employees to be unfair or illegitimate if they feel that it is avoidable (cf. Brockner, DeWitt, Grover, & Reed, 1990, p. 393; Brockner, 1994, p. 346), in other words not a reaction to corporate crisis.

The study did not only look at the language relating the staff cuts at the two banks. In both cases, staff reductions were not isolated measures but part of more far-reaching decisions. The analysis therefore looks not only at the metaphors relating to staff reductions, but also those concerning cost cutting (both banks) and large-scale restructuring (Deutsche Bank only). In this way it was possible to examine differences according to the persuasion object. Although they are inextricably linked as part of the companies' overarching strategies, differences should be apparent between them. Staff reductions, for example, should be perceived to be far more objectionable than "mere" restructuring, as the former are associated with direct, negative consequences for the workforce.

The text corpus analysed in the case study comprises all the publicly accessible texts from the two banks' own mass communication between 2001 and 2003, in other words the press statements, investor news, speeches, employee newspapers, business and quarterly reports. Most of the texts are in German, with just a few of the Commerzbank speeches and a large number of Deutsche Bank's IR news in English. The

entire corpus of the study comprises a total of around 1.3 million words. The persuasion objects (staff reductions, cost cutting, restructuring) were not addressed in all the texts, leaving around a 330,000-word section of the text corpus relevant to the research question.

This text corpus was analysed for persuasive metaphor to a large extent following the method of Systematic Metaphor Analysis (cf. Schmitt, 2003; Schmitt, 2007). This method allows to identify all metaphors of a corpus and categorize them into metaphoric concepts. In short, first all metaphoric expressions that are used in the context of the managerial practise(s) are collected and then they are systematized into metaphoric concepts by bringing together all the metaphoric expressions with the same image source and the same target area under the heading "Target is source", e.g. "the managerial practice is a slimming regime". These concepts instead of individual metaphors are the focus of a Systematic Metaphor Analysis (reducing the danger of over-interpreting singular expressions).

But in Systematic Metaphor Analysis Schmitt analyses metaphors – like Lakoff and Johnson (1980) – as primarily unconscious linguistic constructs representing certain worldviews of the speaker. Accordingly, Systematic Metaphor Analysis is primarily used to identify these notional constructions – as with the metaphors of helping (cf. Schmitt, 1995) or peoples' self-images (cf. Moser, 2000). The conscious, persuasive use of metaphor does not play a role here. By contrast, in the present study metaphors are analysed for their persuasive content, i.e. they are examined in terms of the associations they can or are intended to induce in the text's audience. We therefore went a step further by categorizing the metaphors according to their persuasive content and/or purpose (Charteris-Black, 2005 uses a similar approach).

So, expanding on Schmitt's method, we add a *third* step to make a further categorization: although the metaphors originate from very different areas of meaning, they also have – from a persuasive point of view – a number of similarities. For example, some metaphoric concepts are primarily considered to be euphemisms, as they draw attention away from negative, undesirable aspects, while others highlight a particular aspect of the persuasion object. We therefore condense the metaphoric concepts found in the text into persuasive "meta concepts". Classification here refers back to the persuasive functions of metaphors identified earlier:

- Euphemizing function: which aspects of a practice are emphasized using metaphorical means, and which are hidden?
- Ideological embedding function: which general ideologies is the practice embedded in?
- Argumentation function: what arguments are implicitly articulated using metaphor?

The following chapter looks at the results of our analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Results of persuasive metaphor analysis

Systematic metaphor analysis revealed a total of nine different metaphoric concepts which relate to one or more of the persuasion objects examined here (s. Table 1).

Table 1: Metaphoric concepts

Persuasive meta concept	Frequency (n = 864)	Attributed metaphoric concepts
Urgency and control metaphor	538 (62.3%)	• Transport and journey metaphor (15.6%) • Repair and craft metaphor (15.9%) • Military metaphor (24.3%) • Surgical metaphor (6.5%)
Euphemistic metaphor	234 (27.1%)	• Health metaphor (5.2%) • Savings metaphor (16.4%) • Freedom metaphor (0.9%) • Progress metaphor (4.5%)
Concealing metaphor	92 (10.6%)	• Hiding the persuasion object

These concepts were grouped into three meta concepts, each of which can be assigned to different persuasive functions, i.e. highlighting and hiding various aspects, making connections with value judgments, and referring to various myths and argumentation.

Urgency and control metaphor

The first meta concept identified here is made up of four metaphoric concepts: transport and journey metaphor, repair and craft metaphor, military metaphor and surgical metaphor.

Metaphors from the *transport and journey* source area (combined here) are generally of great importance in everyday language usage, since they relate to people's omnipresent spatial experience. Various aspects of human experience are therefore made tangible by metaphors of the path or journey (e.g. "life's journey", cf. Baldauf, 1997, p. 139). In the text corpus we examined, this type of metaphor is used to describe managerial practice as part of some means of transport, for example "emergency brake" ("*Notbremse*", COM EN 5/01, for further details see the references to the corpus at the end of this article). Here, the organization is described as a dynamic object that is either moving too fast or has lost its way. This implies an immediate need for action: with the aid of the managerial practice, a "rapid turnaround" ("*schnelle Kehrtwendung*", COM AR 01) or a growth-oriented "realignment" ("*Neuausrichtung*", DEU AR 00) must be achieved. Here, a special role is assigned to the manager who is at the wheel, since he or she is the company's "helmsman". He takes control of the situation that has gone "off course" by "pulling the emergency brake" ("*Unternehmensleitung zieht die Notbremse*", COM EN 5/01) or by "putting a throttle on costs" ("*Drosselung der Kosten*", COM PR 16.10.01).

Repair and craft metaphor likewise simplifies the organization by objectifying it: in place of a complex, intangible phenomenon, it becomes a tangible – and thereby also manageable – object. This object is either broken or exposed to the destructive forces of nature (e.g. the "flood of costs" ("*Kostenflut*", COM PR 09.08.01)), making "renovations" ("*Renovierungsarbeiten*", DEU EN 1/02) necessary. The concrete metaphoric expressions may come from different realms of meaning, but they all have one thing in common: the metaphor of repair and craft implies that the bank's problem can be solved manually. The organization or its management "*turns the cost-cutting screw*" (COM Speech 13.11.02) and decides on "*cost containment measures*" (DEU IRR 27.06.02), or the costs are quite generally "driven down" ("*gedrückt*", COM IRR 31.03.03), or "limited" ("*begrenzt*", DEU AR 00) at a low level. Here the manager is described as a craftsman who brings the "clearly" difficult initial situation under control, and the managerial practice is the appropriate, manageable instrument with which to do so. This view is particularly apparent from the term "*cost management*" (DEU IRR 31.01.02), which is often used as a synonym for the cost-cutting programme.

Military metaphor is another important metaphoric concept in everyday language (see for example the metaphor "Argument is War" in Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 4) – particularly in an organizational context: companies develop "strategies" and "tactics" in "takeover battles". So it is not surprising that the same applies to the text corpus we examined, where 210 metaphoric expressions (or 24 percent of the text) make military metaphor the most frequently used metaphoric concept. One reason for the high level of use is that Commerzbank refers to its two cost-cutting programmes as "cost offensives" ("*Kostenoffensiven*") and uses the term (in the same or similar form) frequently. However, other military metaphors are also used, for example to depict the organization as part of a war zone that is under threat. In this context, "*strict cost discipline*" (COM Speech 07.05.03) is to be used to "attack the cost base" ("*Kostenbasis in Angriff nehmen*", COM EN 2/02), and the organization must "zero in on the cost limitation target" ("*auf das Ziel der Kostenbegrenzung einschießen*", DEU EN 6/01). Fittingly, "*Task Forces*" (DEU EN 6/01) are created for this purpose, and the "*Chief Operating Officers*" (DEU EN 2/01) have overall responsibility for the cost-cutting measures. In addition to creating a common enemy, the military metaphor used here also symbolizes the decisiveness with which the managerial practice is implemented. The "cost offensive" is not simply part of "static warfare" or "defence" in the face of an over-powerful adversary, and no "retreat" will be made. It is more part of a "war of aggression", in which the initiative lies with the management. In this way, metaphor is used to emphasize how – although forced to cut costs – the management at no time loses control over them or the economic situation of the bank and is working actively on its "recovery". This metaphor is rarely used to (explicitly) connect the negative aspects of the war with the persuasion object – and then only in relation to staff cuts: for example, "jobs are being sacrificed to the cost offensive" ("*der Kostenoffensive fallen 190 Stellen zum Opfer*", COM EN 2/02), with the management stressing that the bank is "not in the front line" ("*nicht an vorderster Front*", COM EN 5/01) where staffing reductions are concerned.

Surgical metaphor works by personifying the organization as a sick organism or a patient in need of healing. However, while the "healing" process is referred to euphe-

mistically in health metaphor (s. below) as a "regime" or "cure", this is not the case in surgical metaphor: here, managerial practice is described as an incision or cut ("*Einschnitt*", DEU PR 04.09.03 or "*einschneidende Maßnahme*", COM EN 5/01). This creates an image of the persuasion object as a surgical intervention, with the management wielding the scalpel and operating on the "patient" organization. Here too there is an implicit acknowledgment that the type of treatment (the managerial practice) is connected with negative consequences – reinforced by the use of fitting adjectives (e.g. "painful" and "radical" incisions). It is nevertheless necessary, and recovery is certain: like in the famous metaphor of "chirurgical bombing" in the metaphoric concept of "War is Medicine" (cf. Fabiszak, 2007, p. 159), the association created here is of absolute control over implementation of the practice.

Although the four metaphoric concepts come from very different source areas, they share a number of similarities here in their concrete usage. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Urgency and control metaphor

Metaphoric concept	**Transport and journey metaphor**	**Repair and craft metaphor**	**Military metaphor**	**Surgical metaphor**
Definition of the practice	The managerial practice is a part of a means of transport	The managerial practice is a craft	The managerial practice is a military manoeuvre	The managerial practice is a surgical procedure
Definition of the organization	The bank is a means of transport that is out of control	The bank is a broken object or under threat from outside	The bank is a theatre of war	The bank is a sick patient
Definition of the management	The manager is a helmsman	The manager is a craftsman	The manager is a general	The manager is a surgeon
Causality (account)	Action needed because the organization has gone off course	Action needed because the organization is broken or out of control	Action needed because the organization is under threat	Action needed because the organization is (seriously) ill

All four metaphors focus on two aspects of the managerial practice – its cause and its implementation – and connect them with similar associations. In doing so, they paint an image of the organization that is in urgent need for action, because it is "sick", "broken", "has lost its way" or is confronted by an "enemy". The causes are externalized, the managerial practice is not self-inflicted but has become necessary because of environmental disasters, or because defects have crept in of their own accord. At the same time, there is an acknowledgment that implementing the solution to the problem will have some negative effects. Either an explicit reference is made to the pain inflicted by the measure, or the difficulty of the path ahead is at least not denied. In this way, the meta concept corresponds to the metaphorical counterpart of the verbal account "excuse": an excuse acknowledges the inappropriateness of a behaviour but denies the actor's responsibility for the negative consequences – there is a "pressing reason" for the managerial practice. In the examined text corpus, this is that the organization has gone out of control. Because this suggests an urgent need for action, for which, however, the management bears no responsibility, this form of argumentation

not only strengthens the legitimacy of the practice itself but also that of the management. In the absence of a viable alternative, the management has no other choice.

However, there is also a risk here: if a company's behaviour is perceived as arbitrary, without management influence, this may result in a loss of legitimacy and confidence on the part of the stakeholders. Presumably for this reason, this meta concept also focuses on the control and/or controllability of success: even if the organization has (temporarily) gone out of control, the management is still capable of "leading" it back to success. This metaphor implicitly refers to another popular management myth, that of controllable success. It says that the success of a managerial practice depends primarily on how it is implemented: the organization itself – and not the environment – determines the success or failure of the measure. If implemented with enough determination, success will follow "of its own accord". Success, in other words, is in the hands of the helmsman, the craftsman, the general, or the surgeon.

Euphemistic metaphor

The second meta concept identified here is similarly made up of four metaphoric concepts: health metaphor, savings metaphor, freedom metaphor and progress metaphor. In a similar way to surgical metaphor, *health metaphor* also sees the organization as a sick patient and the managerial practice as an appropriate way to heal the patient. The sickness, however, (mostly) consists of "excess weight", and the managerial practice is a "slimming" or "streamlining regime" ("*Schlankheitskur*" or "*Entschlackungskur*", COM IRR 16.10.01). The management uses this language to pick up on the popular management myth of the lean organization mentioned earlier. It promises to produce a healthy organization, making the bank "*leaner and more agile*" (DEU IRR 31.01.02) and "fit for the future" ("*für die Zukunft fit*", DEU Speech 22.05.02). This implies that its present state is rather sickly and immobile. Because slimming or streamlining is additionally a euphemistic synonym for increasing efficiency, the metaphor also carries a pragmatic argument: the goal of the practice is desirable, so the path taken to achieve it is as well. In contrast to surgical metaphor, this path is also described with a euphemism: the goal of slimming is achieved by following a "regime", which places the rationalization process in a positive light because a "regime" has far less unpleasant associations than a painful surgical intervention.

Savings metaphor also focuses primarily on the goal or purpose of the managerial practice and creates positive associations with it. The managerial practice thus becomes a "savings programme" ("*Sparprogramm*", COM IRR 2/02) or a "cost saving initiative" ("*Kosteneinsparungsinitiative*", DEU AR 02). In western societies, austerity is considered a positive virtue anyway (cf. Gerbig & Buchtmann, 2003, p. 97) – and contrasts with the negatively loaded idea of "waste". From a persuasive point of view, replacing the word "cutting" and/or "reducing" has a functional role. Economically speaking, reducing costs is essentially positive. Yet reductions or cuts – as opposed to investment or attempts to expand markets, for example – may be interpreted as a sign of crisis. Western societies also use the "Good is up; bad is down" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 16) metaphor for general orientation, as reflected in expressions such as "reaching the low point" and "the business trend is picking up". These metaphors have become highly conventional, yet from a persuasive point of view there may be

functional reasons for avoiding such expressions and using terms with more positive connotations in their place. Savings metaphors generally have a euphemistic function. However, if they are used in the context of staff cuts, the persuasive content is not restricted to just this. Referring to "staff savings" ("*Personaleinsparung*", COM IRR 3/01) can also be interpreted as a very implicit linguistic realization of a pragmatic efficiency argument: staff cuts are being made to lower costs.

Another euphemism here is used only in relation to one of the persuasion objects: *freedom metaphor* replaces the (rather neutral) "staff reductions" with terms such as "employee releases" ("*Mitarbeiterfreisetzungen*", DEU IRR 01.11.01) or "employees will be released" ("*freigesetzt*", DEU EN 1/03). This reference to the generally accepted high-value word "Freiheit" (freedom) obscures the individual consequences of staff reductions: according to this (implicit) analogy, employees are not dismissed from employment into unemployment, but are released into "freedom". Particularly in contemporary managerial discourse, the metaphor "Personalfreisetzung" (release of personnel) has become a common synonym for job cuts and highly conventionalized as such. Yet its effect is debatable, especially outside managerial discourse, since employees often regard it as cynical. This may be one reason why this particular metaphor only plays a very minor role here, with just eight occurrences (about 1%) in the text corpus we examined.

Progress metaphor is similarly used with only one persuasion object, restructuring (only Deutsche Bank): it is not so much a simple change of structure as a – semantically enhanced –"next stage of development" ("*Weiterentwicklung*", DEU EN 1/02) or the "*PCAM Evolution*" (DEU EN 8/01). Very implicitly, an image is created of an organization that, like a biological organism, is subject to natural evolution (cf. on this metaphor also Morgan, 1986, p. 39). This goes hand in hand with a modern progress myth, the belief in ongoing development towards a diffuse, salutary ultimate goal. Part of this myth is the widely held view in society as a whole that humans must serve this anonymous progress (cf. Krause, 2004, p. 149). And the alternative to progress "can" only be standstill (or even regression). As a result, any rejection of restructuring would be synonymous with supporting standstill and opposing evolution.

The similarities shared by these four metaphoric concepts are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Euphemistic metaphor

Metaphoric concept	**Health metaphor**	**Savings metaphor**	**Freedom metaphor**	**Progress metaphor**
Definition of the practice	The managerial practice is a slimming regime	The managerial practice is an instrument of austerity	The managerial practice is a gateway to freedom	The managerial practice is a motor of progress
Definition of the organization	The bank is someone who wants to get fit	The bank is a place of efficiency	The organization is a prison	The organization is a living organism
Causality (account)	Fitness is (generally) desirable	Austerity is (generally) desirable	Freedom is (generally) desirable	Ongoing development is (generally) desirable
Implicit alternative	Sickness	Wastefulness	Imprisonment	Standstill/ regression

In contrast to urgency and control metaphor, which foregrounds the causes and implementation of the managerial practice and thereby paints a specific picture of the manager, euphemistic metaphor concentrates on the positive (overall) value of the practice. This type of metaphor emphasizes the "ultimate goal" of the practice while obscuring the path towards achieving it. In this way, attention is diverted away from denotative characteristics and their negative connotations: employees are released, not removed against their will; slimming down is in the foreground, not the increase in efficiency. It also implicitly imparts – sometimes more, sometimes less clearly – a pragmatic argument: the end justifies the means (s. also the metaphor "freedom fighter"). Euphemistic metaphor thus corresponds to the account "justification". It acknowledges the actor's responsibility but denies that the behaviour is objectionable (cf. Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981, p. 281).

The euphemisms in the examined text corpus acquire persuasive power on the one hand by connecting the managerial practice with generally accepted myths, values and virtues: freedom, austerity, progress and health (or fitness) are in themselves desirable social values. Any practice serving these values thus has its own claim to legitimacy. This is reinforced on the other hand by the bipolarization implicitly associated with these terms. The alternative to savings can only be a waste of resources. By dividing the world into polar opposites in this way (sick-healthy, austere-wasteful, freedom-imprisonment, development-standstill), the complexity of the world is reduced, and an alternative becomes unthinkable.

Concealing metaphor

"Concealing metaphor" refers to a particular, "extreme" form of euphemism: whilst euphemistic metaphors purely conceal certain denotative characteristics, here they conceal the persuasion object itself, obscuring the fact that that is actually what the statement is about. It only becomes clear here in context that a "further decline in our employee numbers" ("*weiterer Rückgang unserer Anzahl der Mitarbeiter*", DEU IRR 1/02) actually refers to the ongoing programme of staff cuts. Likewise, there are for example no references to mass releases, only "staffing measures" ("*personelle Maßnahmen*", COM AR 01) or "capacity adjustments" ("*Kapazitätsanpassungen*", COM EN 4/02). This kind of concealing is a special case among the metaphoric concepts considered here, as the corresponding expressions do not originate from a specific source area and therefore do not directly follow the "target is source" logic. As such they are not metaphors in the narrower sense, but they are still metaphorical in that they have more than a simply literal meaning. Concealing metaphor – unlike the other two persuasive meta concepts – does not refer to higher myths and arguments. It works above all by the function of "hiding", diverting attention from the managerial practice.

Concealing metaphor is almost exclusively used in relation to staff cuts, especially when it is necessary to talk about their consequences (e.g. in business reports). Thereby, the language not only drives attention away from the practice itself but also from what is happening to the affected employees: They are only "*affected*" (DEU IRR 27.06.02) or "touched" ("*berührt*", DEU IRR 2/02) by restructuring. This use of language also shifts the management's responsibility for the job losses far into the background: employees are not being removed because of a management decision, it is

happening to a certain extent "of its own accord". This is supported by a consistently highly deagentified style of language (absence of an agent, cf. for instance Busch-Lauer, 2009, p. 1731) around the subject of staff reductions.

4.2 Determinants of metaphor use

Persuasive metaphor analysis has made it possible to identify three meta concepts, each of which fulfils very different persuasive functions by highlighting and hiding different aspects of managerial practice. The metaphors either draw attention away from negative features of the managerial practice by emphasizing the positive aspects and creating a connection with general views of legitimate action (euphemistic metaphor), or they divert attention away from the practice itself by hiding the fact that staff or cost reductions are happening at all (concealing metaphor). Urgency and control metaphor is alone in acknowledging the negative aspects of a practice, both in its implementation ("painful incisions") and its cause (necessity due to an internal or external threat). At the same time, this type of metaphor still stresses that the company's problems are under the management's control.

But what determines the use of metaphor? From a practical perspective, a company should generally have no interest in its practices being portrayed negatively, which is why it should try to paint an exclusively positive picture of them and hide any negative aspects. However, organizations are not alone in determining the image of managerial practice, and some are considered a priori or in certain situations to be more or less objectionable. In such cases, it is not possible to conceal their negative aspects entirely. Organizations then have an interest in weakening or diluting these aspects or – if the practice is particularly objectionable and doing so is viable – keeping quiet about it.

The empirical material supports this assumption if the use of metaphor is broken down according to the persuasion object (s. Table 4).

Table 4: Metaphoric concepts by persuasion object[1]

	Staff cuts (n=144)	Cost programme (n=625)	Restructuring (n=106)	Total (n=864)
Urgency and control metaphor	**25.0%**	**74.2%**	**43.4%**	**62.3%**
Transport and journey metaphor	10.4%	13.1%	39.6%	15.6%
Repair and craft metaphor	-	21.8%	0.9%	15.9%
Military metaphor	4.2%	32.5%	2.8%	24.3%
Surgical metaphor	10.4%	6.9%	-	6.5%
Euphemistic metaphor	**25.7%**	**22.4%**	**56.6%**	**27.1%**
Health metaphor	5.6%	2.9%	19.8%	5.2%
Savings metaphor	14.6%	19.5%	-	16.4%
Freedom metaphor	5.6%	-	-	0.9%
Progress metaphor	-	-	36.8%	4.5%
Concealing metaphor	**49.3%**	**3.4%**	-	**10.6%**

[1] A single metaphor can refer to more than one persuasion object. The number shown under "Total" (864) is therefore lower than the sum of metaphors per persuasion object (875).

A dominance of purely positive meaning is only apparent in restructuring. Here euphemistic metaphor dominates and occurs more than twice as often as the average. The image of the managerial practice as a slimming regime or a "motor of progress" prevails in this context. This is not the case for the other persuasion objects, presumably because they per se are more negatively loaded. In relation to staff and cost reductions, euphemisms are used much less frequently, and if at all then primarily in the form of very mildly euphemistic savings metaphors. By contrast, at 74% urgency and control metaphor clearly dominates in connection with the cost programme. This has a persuasive function, since (cost-)reducing measures are often associated with crisis and metaphors emphasizing the controllability of success lessen this impression. Staff reductions are presumably even more negatively loaded, as they are associated with direct negative consequences for employees and may therefore also prove socially difficult. Interest in concealing the practice should therefore be great. The managerial language also reflects this, with concealing metaphor – language that diverts attention away from the object itself – dominating at just under 50 percent. The tactic of concealing or diverting attention away from staff reductions is mainly possible because in both banks they were subsumed under – or hidden behind – other, more far-reaching decisions. In the corporate communication, the focus is placed on the less objectionable practice. This is supported by the fact that cost cutting is addressed far more frequently in the text corpus than staff reductions (also reflected in the far smaller number of metaphors in this context).

The impression that organizations attempt to conceal precisely highly objectionable practices is reinforced if the use of metaphor is broken down by bank (s. Table 5).

Table 5: Metaphoric concepts by bank[2]

	Staff cuts only		Cost programme only	
	Deutsche B. (n=69)	Commerzb. (n=75)	Deutsche B. (n=208)	Commerzb. (n=485)
Urgency and control metaphor	**7.2%**	**41.3%**	**49.0%**	**86.8%**
Transport and journey metaphor	5.8%	14.7%	7.2%	16.1%
Repair and craft metaphor	0.0%	0.0%	25.5%	19.9%
Military metaphor	0.0%	8.0%	12.5%	42.4%
Surgical metaphor	1.4%	18.7%	3.8%	8.4%
Euphemistic metaphor	**29.0%**	**22.7%**	**40.9%**	**13.2%**
Health metaphor	8.7%	2.7%	3.4%	2.6%
Savings metaphor	8.7%	20.0%	37.5%	10.6%
Freedom metaphor	11.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Progress metaphor	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Concealing metaphor	**63.8%**	**36.0%**	**10.1%**	**0.0%**

2 The figures for restructuring are not listed here as they only apply to Deutsche Bank.

Because, unlike Commerzbank, Deutsche Bank is not in crisis in the period examined and is in fact achieving record profits, it is fair to say that staff reductions by Deutsche Bank will be perceived by employees in particular but also by the public as tending to be or potentially more objectionable, as the bank in this case does not have "no other choice". Deutsche Bank indeed attempts more frequently to conceal its staff cuts, with concealing metaphors accounting for two thirds of all metaphors as opposed to just one third at Commerzbank.

Conversely, an organization that is considered to be in crisis is more likely to have a legitimation problem in that the legitimacy of its own conduct is at risk. This occurs above all if the management is no longer considered capable of protecting the company from harm. Accordingly, urgency and control metaphor dominate (almost 90 percent) the Commerzbank texts, above all in reference to the cost-cutting programme. The bank acknowledges its (obvious) problems but lessens their impact by indicating that the management has the situation under control and will "lead the company back onto the road to success" ("zurück auf den Weg des Erfolges führen", COM IRR 3/01). This is particularly apparent from Commerzbank's use of the term "cost offensives" to refer to its two cost programmes.

From this contextual analysis, it is clear that the use of metaphor depends significantly on the type of managerial practice and the situation of the organization.

5. Conclusion

Metaphor analysis is a useful instrument for examining how organizations "frame" their practices in language and which ideological premises they draw on to help them create a legitimate image of managerial practices. However, it remains unclear whether metaphor is used strategically – in other words with the conscious aim of persuading – or is rather an expression of the unconscious ideologies of the management. In most socioscientific metaphor analyses, metaphors are used to understand the mental constructs of the speaker. Metaphors are, in fact, deeply rooted in society and largely artefacts of social discourses. It is fair to assume that conventional metaphors, those which have become part of language as fixed expressions, tend to be used unconsciously (cf. Moser, 2001, p. 20), while neologisms such as "cost offensive" are indicative of a more conscious use of language.

It appears, then, that a metaphorical choice of words can be both things: it can represent the unconscious worldviews of the speaker, and it can be created strategically to achieve an intended pragmatic effect. Here, the same applies to language policy as to (other) managerial strategies: it can be the product of a rational decision, and it can emerge "of its own accord". The persuasive content of language, and thereby also the (potential) effect on stakeholders, nevertheless exists independently of the speaker's intentionality.

However, the fact that the use of metaphor in the present study is not entirely arbitrary becomes apparent in the analysis of context. This is particularly true of the identified meta concepts, which vary very systematically according to the contextual conditions we examined. The use of concrete metaphor may be more or less unconscious, i.e. there is no strategic plan behind the use of conventional path or craft associations in the language. But the question of whether language is used that euphemizes

a particular practice, or whether an attempt is made to avert attention from it through language, should belong to an intentional language policy. This is supported by our results, which show a functional use of metaphors from a persuasive point of view.

To what extent the use of metaphor is intentional or unconscious is nevertheless impossible to conclude on the basis of the present study, as the question cannot be answered purely by text analysis. The same applies to the effect of persuasive language. Metaphor analysis alone can only reveal the persuasive content of managerial rhetoric, but it is not able to offer any conclusions as to its effects.

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