A journey through our surroundings

A study of organizational metaphors in Metasaga

Emil Josefsson

Stockholms universitet

Abstract

According to recent cognitive science, our perceptive senses help develop human cognition, and the process of organizing our inner representations of the world around us. As a result, conceptual metaphors are deemed to be essential to our understanding of abstract entities; how we perceive an organization depends for instance on what metaphor is used to describe it. Thus, conceptual metaphor theory has been given a lot of attention in the past thirty years. The Metasaga philosophy was established on the Shetland Islands in 2008. The idea is for participants to explore the environment and create reflective questions involving metaphors which can be used for reflective purposes in connection to work, school, businesses or other organizations. In this paper, linguistic metaphors involving organizations in 228 reflective questions were studied. The linguistic metaphors were sorted according to which organization conceptual metaphor they appeared to belong to. A broad category called Organization Is Physical Structure was set up, and the name was taken from Joseph Grady's list of primary metaphors in Lakoff and Johnson (1999 pp. 50-55) Four sub-categories of organization metaphors were subsequently established: Organization Is An Artificial Structure, Organizational Help Is Support, Organization Is A Plant and Organization Is A Living Creature. Almost 55 % of the reflective questions involving organization shared the common theme of a description of an organization as some kind of artificial structure. Thus, it seems likely that we often think of organizational arrangement as some kind of concrete structure and also that we use different metaphors depending on how the organization is structured.

Keywords

Contents

1. Introduction

"A perception, sensi-motor learning (habit etc.), an act of insight, judgment etc., all amount, in one way or another, to a structuring of the relations between the environment and the organism" (Piaget, 2001, p. 5). According to the renowned Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, we develop cognitively and emotionally in intimate relationship with our surroundings. Furthermore, more recent cognitive scientists suggest that our perceptive senses help to develop our cognition in relation to the world around us (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 59). The Metasaga philosophy emphasizes that students can learn about culture, heritage and nature in an authentic and interesting manner through the exploration of our surroundings.

Our environment is filled with artifacts and natural elements on which much of human thought structures, language and organizations are based. We say ideas are *rooted* in our brain, that there is a *stem* of an organization and that it has *branches*. Hence we can appreciate the way nature permeates the way we think quite generally. On the other hand, it can be described as having separate *parts*, being *efficient* and having a solid *foundation*, which invokes an image of it as a machine or a man-made construction. Thus, not only elements of nature are used to describe organizations, but also man-made artifacts. This should make us realize that all parts of an organization are important if it is to function as efficiently as possible, much in the same way as a tree or a machine would not function without its separate parts and their relation to each other.

According to conceptual metaphor theory, thought structures, and also language meanings in general, are intrinsically constructed upon metaphors involving different aspects of our environment. Consequently, our surroundings have an active part in our understanding of the world, not only literally but also figuratively (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 212). This is clearly related to why some people question methods of teaching used in today's schools. Why read about the world in textbooks when we can explore it ourselves? Since our surroundings are so influential in our way of thinking and reasoning, they could be an effective asset in educational situations.

2.   Research questions

In the past thirty years there has been a growing interest in metaphors and their function and importance within the use of language. According to Morgan (1998), the metaphors which are used to describe an organization dictate to a certain extent the manner in which it is operated (p. 8). The perception of metaphors has thus changed, from being thought of as an ornate and exclusively linguistic apparatus, to a powerful, useful and basically conceptual tool which governs the way we think, speak and even act.

The Metasaga philosophy was established in 2008 in the Shetland Islands. The idea is to allow participants in the Metasagas to create their own reflective questions by constructing metaphors based on the exploration of their surroundings. In this study I will investigate what images of organizations are conveyed in the reflective questions of the Metasagas presented on www.metasaga.wikispace.com. My research questions are: Is it possible to distinguish a general group of organizational metaphors, based on the same underlying cognitive connections, from the particular linguistic metaphors dealing with organizations in the reflective questions? If this is the case, how can these conceptual metaphors be described? The linguistic metaphors in the reflective questions will thus be analyzed and categorized according to the image of organization they appear to be connected to.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Metasaga

The concept of Metasaga was established in 2008 by Kate Coutts, a primary school teacher from the Shetland Islands. The whole idea is for participants of Metasaga groups to find personal places of interest in the physical environment where they can create their own reflective questions and metaphors in order to explore the history, heritage and culture related to that specific place. The concept is not solely used for educational purposes, but also in team building, when developing leadership and in coaching:

> The first group Metasaga took place in Unst, Shetland in June 2008 and brought together senior
> leaders from the Education Services of Orkney and Shetland. Since then it has been developed in
> Orkney to create a 'Medley of Metasagas' to enhance student leadership and staff professional

development. These Metasagas, created by pupils, allow the individual to explore their own development through the rich tapestry of the Orkney landscape (Koutts, 2008, p. 2).

The method of Metasaga is rather straightforward. A group of students (or leaders) identify 5 or 6 places of interest along a decided trail or path. Each stop has to be significant for the individuals in the group and should centre on a specific feature of the landscape. The features are used as metaphors in order to explore the individual and group development needs.

> At each stop the feature is used to consider the values it suggests through metaphor. The next step is to discover the questions that arise from the exploration of both the place and the metaphor. The guide suggests a few questions, but members of the group are encouraged to develop their own questions, thus increasing their ownership of the learning experience. The story or narrative related to the landscape is shared, resulting in further exploration of values and questions, but moves on to identify skills or attributes suggested by the narrative (Koutts, 2008, p. 3).

Accordingly, the aim is to come up with reflective questions which relate to the stop at hand and not to find answers to the questions. The fundamental notion in Metasaga is to "allow deep thinking and reflection at an individual level while providing an opportunity for collective responses to be shared if appropriate" (Koutts, 2008, p. 4). According to Koutts, a guide or facilitator is important for a successful outcome of a Metasaga. The guide decides the route and has to be familiar with the stops in order to tell a story about them.

> On a metasaga in Grandtully, Perthshire the group stops at an oak tree. The guide tells of the special place of the oak within nature and also within the myth and legend of the Scottish culture. The experience is deepened through reference to the Judaic story of the Israelites hiding their idols in the roots of the oaks of Shachem. The question then asked by the guide is "What would you hide in the roots of this oak tree?" (Koutts, 2008, p. 4).

In this case the Judaic story of the Israelites hiding their idols in the roots of their trees can be interpreted as an extended metaphor for what the participants of the Metasaga consider to be their personal valuables, both literally and figuratively.

3.2. Conceptual metaphor theory

3.2.1. Conceptual metaphors and linguistic metaphors

The etymology of the word *metaphor* is *meta + phorein,* which in Greek means 'to carry over' (Carver & Picolo, 2008). A metaphor is thus a transfer of some of the features of (A) to (B), where the target domain (B) is often abstract and is described by our understanding of (A). For example, we say that Life (B) Is A Journey (A) or Argumentation (B) Is A Battle (A), whereby we project the tangible concept of a journey and a battle on to the more abstract notions of life and argumentation (Kövecses, 2005, p. 19). We understand a journey, for instance, as something exciting, difficult and unpredictable, and these words are also used when we talk about life. A battle is fought between two opposing sides and is sometimes won, sometimes lost, and sometimes drawn. However, in the conceptual metaphor Argumentation Is A Battle some features of a real battle are suppressed or ignored, such as the likelihood of being wounded or killed, posttraumatic stress disorder and similar negative aspects.
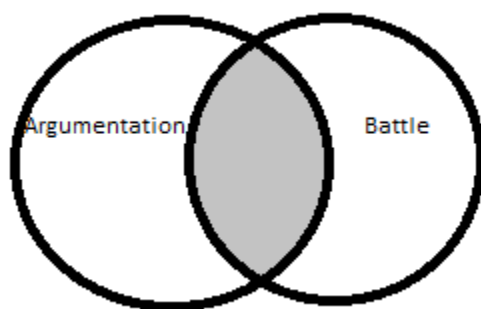
Figure 1. "Metaphor invites us to see similarities but ignore the differences" (Morgan, 1998, p. 5).

In addition, cultural conceptions of the source domain often decide what features are mapped on to the target domain. In other words, not only physical or behavioural traits are mapped from the source to the target, but subjective values are also often transferred (Alm-Arvius, 2003, p. 21; Black, 1962, p. 40). Accordingly, similar metaphorical expressions in different languages, or even in different parts of a country using the same language, may take on different meanings. This suggests that a metaphor not only gives us a more complex image of the target domain, but in fact also widens our perception of the source domain, as we attribute additional features to it in this process. According to

Black (1962), this implies that metaphors are symmetric to a certain degree, since the target domain as well potentially influences our perception of the source domain.
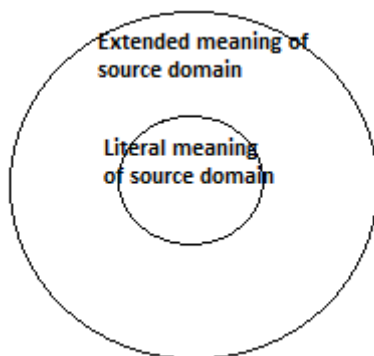

Figure 2 The target domain is according to Black(1962) an extended meaning of the source domain.

Conceptual metaphor theory is based on the notion that our perceptive senses, and the conceptualizations developed on the basis of them, set the framework for language. More specifically, the integration between sensorimotor experiences and our subjective reactions to them has an influential impact on the way we think and reason. Hence these analysts argue that our thought structures are *embodied*, which means that our mind is intrinsically integrated with our bodies. According to Christopher Johnson's theory of conflation, there is no distinction for young children between their subjective experiences and judgments, which constitute target domains, and their sensorimotor experiences, the source domains, since they are so regularly conflated. When we become older, we start to distinguish between the target domain and the source domain of a conceptual metaphor, and Christopher Johnson calls this stage *differentiation* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 46). Thus, conceptual metaphors seem to be generalized understandings of concepts and thought patterns which are expressed in language as linguistic metaphors. Furthermore, they seem to help us to see the connection between embodied experience and metaphorical language.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that conceptual metaphors comprise such an intrinsic part of our thought patterns that we tend not to reflect on their existence (pp. 58-59). We use metaphors unconsciously in everyday speech, but they also have a fundamental and explicit effect on the way we perceive the world. Consequently, if we change the source domain of a metaphor to a different entity, the whole structure will

alter and take a different form. For instance, if the metaphor describing an organization changes from Organization Is A Machine to the idea that Organization Is An Organism, it will alter the way we think about the organization as a whole (Morgan, 1998, p. 36). In other words, changing the source domain from A1 (machine) to A2 (organism) will alter the fundamental target concept of B (organization). This coincides with what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) refer to as *metaphorical framing*.

The distinction between linguistic metaphors and conceptual metaphors has to be emphasized in order to successfully accomplish the aims of this paper. Linguistic metaphors are actual language expressions, oral and written. (Deignan, 2005, p. 27) In other words, they are explicit language expressions, and consequently they can be directly observed in speech and writing. Conceptual metaphors, on the other hand, are what Lakoff and Johnson (1999) define as "mappings across conceptual domains that structure our reasoning, our experience and our everyday language" (p. 47). Accordingly, cognitive scientists argue that conceptual metaphors are the cross-domain mappings on which linguistic metaphorical expressions are based. As a result, a conceptual metaphor can be expressed in different linguistic expressions, or by different linguistic metaphors.

3.2.2. Primary and complex conceptual metaphors

According to conceptual metaphor theory, there are two kinds of conceptual metaphors: primary metaphors and complex metaphors. These terms were suggested by Joseph Grady, who saw the connection between abstract experience and subjective perception (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 46). Cognitive scientists argue that primary metaphors are the conflation of general types of physical sensorimotor experience with subjective judgments, and this has a fundamental effect on the way we reason and express ourselves. One example is the primary metaphor Knowing Is Seeing in which the sensory experience of seeing is mapped on to the subjective target domain of knowledge and understanding, as in the expression "I see what you mean". According to these analysts, this is because when we are children we primarily receive knowledge from the sense of sight. Thus, the concept of knowledge is inherently related to our visual experiences, and this is reflected in the way our language has been constructed.

A primary metaphor is what Lakoff and Johnson (1999) refer to as "an atomic component of the molecular structure of complex metaphors" (p. 49). Accordingly, primary metaphors are the constituents of complex metaphors, and the process of constructing them is called conceptual blending. For example, the complex conceptual metaphor A Purposeful Life Is A Journey is based on the primary metaphors Purposes Are Destinations and Actions Are Motions. "People are supposed to have destinations in life, and they are supposed to move so as to reach those destinations" (p. 61). Complex metaphors are thus comprehensive thought structures and consequently the notion of underlying conceptual mapping is referred to as conceptual metaphors.
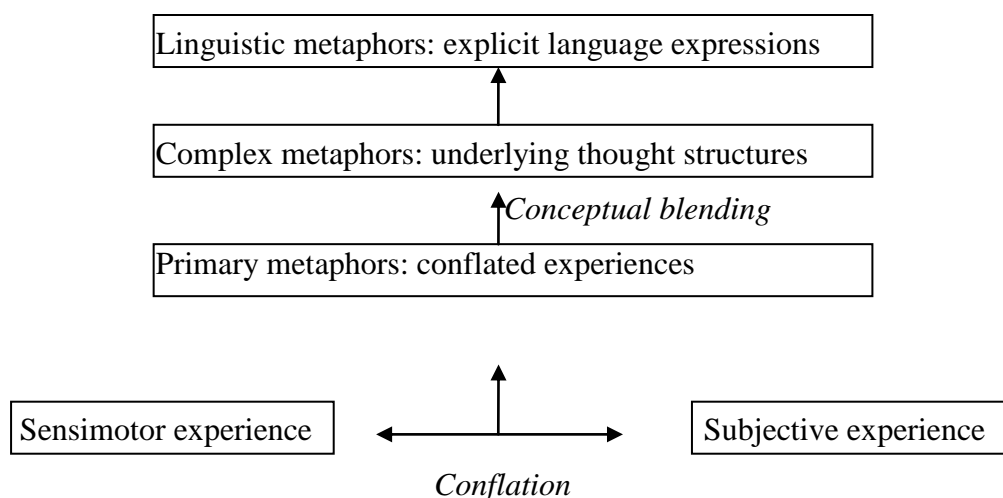
Figure 3. My own model of the construction of conceptual metaphor

3.2.3. Criticism of conceptual metaphor theory

Conceptual metaphor theory has not been accepted by all linguists. One argument against it is that it often is difficult or even impossible to connect linguistic metaphors to given primary metaphors. Alm-Arvius (2003) problematizes the existence of primary metaphors and writes: "In fact, there seems to be no way of empirically verifying the existence of such underlying primary metaphors" (p. 111).

In addition, some linguistic metaphors (i.e. actually occurring language expressions) may involve concepts which are of an ambiguous nature and not obviously related to the connection between sensorimotor domains and subjective experience in the way that primary metaphors are said to be constructed. As has been pointed out, linguistic metaphors are actual language formulations and should be distinguished from

conceptual metaphors, which are based on underlying embodied thought structures. (Deignan, 2005, p. 27) It has been assumed that conceptual metaphors can be expressed in different linguistic metaphors, but the distinction between the two is vague and surrounded by uncertainty. The question is whether or not we can claim that all linguistic metaphors are based on conceptual metaphors. Consequently, a number of questions regarding conceptual metaphor theory emerge:

- How can we relate specific linguistic metaphors to conceptual metaphors?
- How is it possible to distinguish a primary metaphor from a complex metaphor?
- How are primary metaphors established?
- How can we empirically prove that these underlying thought structures actually exist?

There seem to be no generally accepted answers to these questions, and they appear to be surrounded by analytical and methodological problems.

A further classificatory issue is whether the connection between the target domain and the source domain in a so-called primary metaphor ought to be described as metonymic rather than as metaphorical. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that children at an early age develop *experimentally grounded mappings* from which primary metaphors later emerge (p. 47). Thus there are primary metaphors such as Important Is Up, Affection Is Warmth and Change Is Motion. The issue here is that when we are children, at the stage of conflation, we experience the target and the source domain as occurring together, which means that such relations would appear to be metonymic rather than metaphorical (Alm-Arvius, 2003, p. 110). Hence, even when we are fully grown, these sense relations have the same conceptual mappings and the basic metonymic relation is still present.

3.3. Images of organization

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), the subjective domain of an organization is "abstract unifying relationships" (p. 51), and they give the following example: "How do the *pieces* in this theory *fit together*?" Thus, the term organization in this study

represents a group of people working together as well as individual, scientific and social structures such as thought patterns, theories, ideas and personal relationships.

Fundamental notions within experiential domains such as heritage, culture and science are sometimes described using metaphors in which some features of natural entities (plants or organisms) are mapped on to the target domain. For instance the metaphorical idea that Organization Is A Plant seems to be rather frequent. It is evident in the way we say that a company has its *roots* in a specific country. It can *seed* and *grow*, *branch out* or even *wither*, and organizations can have *symbiotic* relationships. Additionally, organizations are sometimes described as being living organisms, as there often is a *heart* in an organization; it has *organs*, a *skeleton*, and can have *daughter companies*. It sometimes needs *healing*, and can also be *in good health.* As a result, the conveyed image depends on which source domain is being mapped on to the target domain.

Often the source domain is not explicitly mentioned, and our perception of the target domain is decided by collocates. For example, when mentioning that a company has *branches*, we automatically, by inference, think of the company as being like a tree, since a branch is prototypically a part of a tree, much in the same way as a branch office is part of the organization. However, when referring to an organization as in need of *nutrition*, the source domain is ambiguous, since it could refer to vital substances taken up either by a living creature or by a plant. Regardless, the images they give rise to are similar, and concern flexible and interactive organizations which are "open to their environment and must achieve an appropriate relation with that environment if they are to survive" (Morgan, 1998, p. 38).

By comparison, a more traditional image of an organization is that of a machine; a company has to be *efficient*, *reliable* and *predictable* in order to maximize *output* (Ibid. p. 13). The employees often work *mechanically* and *repetitively* and can be *replaced*. In this case, features from industrial factories are mapped on to the organization domain, which means that we get the perception of an organization as being more rigid, hierarchical and production oriented.

3.4. Metaphor and culture

According to Kövecses (2005) it is reasonable to argue that metaphors in different cultures are fairly similar, at least on an underlying conceptual level. This stems from the idea that metaphors are often derived from "bodily experiences and neural activity in the brain" (p. 34). Kövecses and other cognitive scientists suggest that human beings share similar experiences in childhood, and thus the same primary metaphors arise naturally in everybody from the conflation of embodied experience with subjective experience. That is not to say that the complex metaphors which derive from these primary metaphors are the same, only that they share a common ground.

However, if the concept of time is taken into consideration, this theory is not generally applicable, since time is differently perceived in different cultures. In the western world we use linguistic metaphors which seem to be connected to certain underlying primary metaphors, such as Time Is A Resource and Time Is Money, in which time is institutionalized and thus conceptualized as a possession or value. These metaphors are essentially hollow in cultures where time is not conceptualized as a resource (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 164).

The metaphors that arise from the complex metaphor Life Is A Journey also differ in various cultures. In many west European languages, expressions similar to the following examples are common:

(1) We have to go separate ways.

(2) We have come to a crossroad.

(3) We have come to a standstill.

In these sentences, the subject is performing, or have performed, the action and this gives an impression of people having an active part in their destiny. Conversely, in Hungarian it is common to use expressions that can be translated as "the road separates us". This expression gives rise to a more fatalistic impression and the image of a predestined future (Gibbs, 2010). The difference in the way fate is perceived could be regarded as evidence of cultural and ideological variation. Thus, culture and ideology seem to intrinsically permeate the way we construct language and metaphorical thought.

3.5. Limitations in constructing metaphors

A question that may arise is whether or not human beings are capable of constructing linguistic metaphors arbitrarily in order to attribute certain features to a given object or notion. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), every individual has since childhood developed a fundamental network of basic mappings involving certain concepts (p. 46). Hence, conceptual metaphor theory suggests that basic neurological connections set a framework within which people can construct individual metaphors. However, the assumed existence of set frames, deriving from childhood experiences, may seem to be contradicted by the fact that we are nevertheless able to construct new and individual metaphors.

An extended implication of the theory of conceptual metaphors seems to be that creativity in general may be limited if language is to a certain extent constrained by these underlying thought structures. As a result, individually constructed metaphors should be of a schematic or linguistic nature and appear to be based on existing conceptual thought patterns. For instance, there are many linguistic metaphors that seem to be based on the conceptual primary metaphor Important Is Big. Here the source domain of physical size is mapped on to the target domain of the subjective experience of importance:

(4) He is a *huge* figure in the field of linguistics

(5) That is a *big* idea

(6) The *enormity* of the issue is astonishing

(7) That was a *great* moment

The construction of metaphors which oppose basic conceptual metaphorical mappings seems rare, according to cognitive linguists. In other words, it would be irrational to construct a linguistic metaphor in which importance is conceptualized as something else than *big*. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), our entire thought structure is based on conceptual frames and the constant construction of new primary metaphors; we construct and use metaphors in order to understand and simplify the world around us (p. 57). Hence, even though we are able to construct linguistic metaphors individually, we need to connect them to comprehensible and general concepts. This has resulted in the

perception of metaphors as being more than means of communication: they facilitate the process of constructing and organizing individual thoughts.

4. Methodology

4.1. Material

During the two years since the Metasaga concept was founded, a number of Metasagas have been produced in different places in Scotland, Orkney and the Shetland Islands. In this essay the 12 Metasagas available at the webpage will be studied. These texts have been produced in different parts of the UK by primary school pupils, university students, teachers and health care professionals. One of the main constituents of a Metasaga is the production of reflective questions. Since the workshops were conducted with people of various ages and backgrounds, different reflective questions have been produced. These questions involve metaphors in which different artifacts or other landmarks in the environment have been used as source domains in order to visualize thoughts and ideas. Hence, many metaphors involve for instance nature, water, paths and buildings, all depending on where the Metasagas took place. A number of reflective questions are present on the webpage, and they constitute the material of this study.

4.2. Method

The linguistic metaphors included in each of the reflecting questions about organization will be listed and sorted according to which more general conceptual metaphor category they seem to be connected to. Some of the categories are primary and complex metaphors suggested by Lakoff and Johnson (1999), but others are my own. This is done in order to uphold the distinction between the conceptual themes of the linguistic metaphors in a clear and effective way. All questions that are not regarded as being of a metaphorical nature will be excluded.

One emerging issue is the difficulty to establish whether certain questions are metaphorical or not. For example, a reflective question in one Metasaga is:

(1) Where do you go to be alone?

This could be either a metaphorical question, i.e. a question regarding a state of mental health to which one temporarily withdraws, or a question concerning an actual location

to which the person in question goes in order to find solitude. Consequently, the possible metaphorical nature of such a question cannot be established. It can therefore not be categorized and included in the study. However, seemingly similar questions, such as:

(2) Where do you feel secure and sheltered?

will not be rejected, since the meaning here is likely to be figurative.

5. Results

In all, 228 questions contained at least one linguistic metaphor, and 20 categories of conceptual metaphors were established.

Category	Number of metaphors	Percentage of total
<u>Life Is X</u>	(46)	(20.4)
Life Is Related To Water	10	4.4
Life Is A Path, Road, Way	7	3.1
Life Choices Are Doorways, Changes	8	3.5
In Life Some Things Are Abandoned	6	2.6
Other	15	6.6
<u>Organization Is Physical Structure(LJ)</u>	(71)	(31.3)
Organization Is An Artificial Structure	39	17.1
Organizational Help Is Support	11	4.8
Organization Is A Living Creature	9	3.9
Organization Is A Plant	12	5.3
Personal Features Are Possessions (LJ)	14	6.1
Purposes Are Desired Objects (LJ)	51	22.4
Causes Are Physical Forces (LJ)	4	1.8
Important Is Big (LJ)	2	0.9
Knowing Is Seeing (LJ)	7	3.1
Time Metaphors	10	4.4
Difficulties Are Burdens (LJ)	3	1.3
Sound Metaphors	7	3.1
Miscellaneous	13	5.7
Total:	228	

Table 1. *Number of reflective questions in the corresponding conceptual metaphor categories. (LJ) indicates that the conceptual metaphor category is a primary metaphor present in Lakoff and Johnson (1999).*

However, only the organization categories have been dealt with in more detail. Table 2 below shows the number of linguistic metaphors in the empirical material that connect to the conceptual metaphor categories of organization used in this study. All questions with metaphors are listed in thematic conceptual categories in the Appendix.

Category	Number of reflective questions	% of total	% of Organization Is Physical Structure
Organization Is Physical Structure(LJ)	(71)	(31.1)	
Organization Is An Artificial Structure	39	17.1	54.9
Organizational Help Is Support	11	4.8	15.5
Organization Is A Living Creature	9	3.9	12.6
Organization Is A Plant	12	5.3	16.9

Table 2.

5.1. General comments on results

During the analysis of the empirical material in this study, some issues started to emerge concerning the categorization of linguistic metaphors under more general themes. Some linguistic metaphors were difficult to categorize, usually since it seemed reasonable to put them in more than one conceptual metaphor category, as (3) below.

(3) Do you give yourself space and time to reflect?

This specific linguistic metaphor was considered to be connected to the category Time Metaphors, but it also has evident connections to Purposes Are Desired Objects, since space and time are conceptualized as concrete notions, which can be "given". Furthermore, some of the reflective questions contained two metaphors, whose mappings related to different source domains. One example is the question:

(4) What can we do to support people at times when new growth seems something that happened in the past?

In this question, there are connections to two conceptual metaphor categories. First, the linguistic metaphor "to support people" obviously connects with the primary metaphor Help Is Support, in which help is conceptualized as though it were physical support. Second, the metaphor "new growth" maps the concept of natural increase in physical size on to the target domain of creativity and new ideas. In order to facilitate the process

of categorization I chose not to include the same reflective question in two different categories. In this case, the metaphor of growth seemed to be the most relevant aspect in the question, and it was thus considered to be more closely connected to Organization Is A Plant.

5.2. Analysis of Organization Is A Physical Structure

About 31 % of the linguistic metaphors in the reflective questions involved some sort of connection between an organization and a physical structure. It seemed reasonable to relate these linguistic metaphors to a broad conceptual metaphor category called Organization Is A Physical Structure, given as a primary metaphor in Lakoff and Johnson (1999, pp. 50-54).

The need for more precise sub-categories emerged during the analysis of the reflective questions containing metaphors related to Organization Is A Physical Structure. The linguistic metaphors in these questions seemed to give rise to different images of organization in which the source domains were all some kind of physical structure: plants, living organisms and artificial entities (e.g. buildings). Additionally, there were some linguistic metaphors where the notion of help was connected to the physical support of an organization. Hence, under Organization Is A Physical Structure, an additional subset of taxonomic categories was created, each concerning different aspects of organization metaphors. They were called Organization Is An Artificial Entity, Organization Is A Living Creature, Organization Is A Plant, and Organizational Help Is Support. These four categories cover the different views and images of organization that the metaphorical questions give rise to.

5.2.1.   Organization Is An Artificial Structure and Organizational Help Is Support

Roughly 55 % of all the reflective questions sorted in the conceptual metaphor category Organization Is A Physical Structure convey an image of organization as being like an artificial structure, such as a building or some other man-made construction. Thus, the frequency of metaphors in which some features of an artificial structure are mapped on to the target domain of organization prompted the recognition of a sub-category which I

call Organization Is An Artificial Structure. The reason why Organizational Help Is Support is treated in the same section as Organization Is Artificial Structure is that the linguistic metaphors in the former category often refer to a supporting entity in an organization, as in the questions below:

    (5) Is your organization supporting you?

    (6) How are you supporting those around you in your team?

    (7) Does your organization offer sufficient support?

In (5), there is a duality in the metaphorical nature of the question. First, the question directly relates to the primary metaphor Help Is Support, in which the source domain of physical support and sustainability is mapped on to the target domain of help and assistance, because "some people or entities require physical support in order to continue functioning" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 52).

In this study 11 questions seem to be connected to the primary metaphor Help Is Support, and most of them concern organizations (hence the name Organizational Help Is Support). Furthermore, the notion that an organization has the ability to support its members and employees, which is expressed in (5), (6) and (7), connects to the concrete image of a physical structure with supporting features. Accordingly, the question suggests that an organization is like a concrete structure in which the foundations are supporting the people working in it. There is an abundance of similar metaphors, all of which give organizations the attributes of a physical structure. For example:

    (8) What are your foundations like?

    (9) Are any boundaries in your work useful?

    (10) What are you building towards?

    (11) What might leave you vulnerable, what might you be open to?

    (12) What is the structure that supports you in your life and work?

These linguistic metaphors include expressions which literally stand for concrete human constructions, such as foundations, barriers and boundaries, and their vulnerability, openness and support. This prompts the image of an organization as a structure with a rigid and stable foundation. According to Morgan (1998), the word *organization* stems from the Greek word *organon*, meaning tool or instrument, and, accordingly, there is a traditional view of an organization as a mechanical and goal orientated entity (p. 21).

5.2.2. Organization Is A Living Creature

This conceptual metaphor category was considered necessary due to references to living organisms in some reflective questions. The source domains of the linguistic metaphors in this category represent some kind of animate organism. Below are three examples of reflective questions which were put in this category:

(13) What is at the heart of your organisation?

(14) What is poisoning your organization?

(15) What needs healing?

Question (13) could be perceived in two different ways. It either refers to the people in charge, who give directions to their employees, or to the central moral or structural values on which the organization is based, which resemble a heart that pumps oxygenated blood to the rest of the body. In order for an organization to work, it has to have a central unit, either consisting of the leaders, engineers and consultants, or the notions, ideas and possible moral foundations the organization is striving for. If the heart of an organization is the moral or cultural values which are strived for, the leaders will try to impose these values on their employees. Consequently, it seems reasonable to use a metaphor with *heart* as the source domain to describe either the central unit of leaders or the central theme or idea of an organization. A heart is also thought of as the central unit of an animate organism, vital for its continuing functions. The organization is thus seen as a unit with a central part that is crucial for its survival.

Furthermore, (14) refers to poisoning, a word prototypically used to describe the intake of a dangerous substance that will harm or even be lethal for an organism. The reference to a poison seems to invoke the image of an entity exerting harm to the organization. It is not mentioned whether the force which is harming the organization is internal or external, but the consequence of that question is the image of an organization as an organism. Simply by using the verb *poisoning*, the person formulating the question conveys the image of an organization as being like a living creature. Hence it can be poisoned, or healed or injured as in (15).

The consequences of perceiving an organization as a living creature could be substantial. First of all, we then think of the constituents of an organization as internal organs which, as it were, consist of tissues and finally of cells. The internal constituents

are all important, just as the organs in a body are vital for the survival of a living creature. The parts have different tasks but are still connected to each other. This whole extended metaphor pictures an organization as a complex of intertwined constituents. If this view is contrasted to the view of an organization as a machine or a building, with rather rigid and mechanical parts, one can understand why metaphorical studies within the field of organizational theory is important (cf. Morgan, 1998).

5.2.3.   Organization Is A Plant

A frequent organizational metaphor is found in the following reflective questions:

(16) What has been chopped off your organization?

(17) What needs to be cut away?

(18) Where are your roots?

In these examples, an organization is implicitly described as a tree or a plant. In fact, almost 17 % of the Organization Is A Physical Structure metaphors included references to a plant of some sort. Thus, it seemed reasonable to recognize a conceptual category including linguistic metaphors that connect the image of an organization to that of a plant, prototypically a tree. This nature metaphor is common, not only when describing organizations, but also when referring to culture, science, philosophy, and many other areas. As stated before, we say that an organization can set *roots* in different countries, that an organization has a *stem* of and *branches*. The branches of a tree can represent, among other things, structural hierarchy, and the metaphorical nature of reflective questions like (16) and (17) must be understood by the recipients if they are to comprehend their meaning. The question could refer to a local issue, e.g. removing redundant personnel or working strategies, or it could concern global matters such as eliminating local branches of a vast organization.

Morgan (1998) states that "organizations, like organisms in nature, depend for survival on the ability to acquire an adequate supply of the resources necessary to sustain existence" (p. 57). Thus, the linguistic metaphors in the category Organization Is A Plant seem to share an underlying conceptual ground in which some features are mapped from the source domain of plants on to the target domain of organizations. If an organization is indeed conceptualized as being like a tree, we think of it as in need of

nurture, as affected by environmental conditions and as having found a niche. Hence, metaphorical questions in one Metasaga were for instance:

(19) Are the relationships you are involved in symbiotic or parasitic?

(20) What can you nurture?

(21) How do I adapt to my own niche at work?

In other words, not only organizations, as in local or global companies, are given plant-like features, but also thoughts, ideas and people in relationships. In Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the conceptual metaphor Ideas Are Plants was introduced. When applying it, features of plants and seeds are used to describe ideas and other abstract notions such as imagination and thoughts (p. 47).

Actually, there seems to be a general relationship between the metaphorical use of organisms and the context in which they appear. When referring to financial or organizational increase, or growth, there seems to be a consistent trend to use the image of a tree or a plant, as in:

(22) Do we consciously seed ideas or do we trample new growth as it starts to develop?

(23) What do we seed along the way in our leadership roles?

However, the plant image can also be used when referring to a lack of change and stagnant creativity, as in the question:

(24) What keeps you rooted and grounded?

The occurrence of plant metaphors of different kinds in opposing images of development, in this case the antonyms growth and stagnation, suggests that we use different stages of the lifespan of a plant in order to describe opposite notions. The metaphorical use of age appears to have a congruential relationship to the plant metaphors, in the sense that aging results in difficulties to learn new things. The idea that age involves rigidity seems to permeate the source domains regardless of whether they consist of living beings or vegetable things. In other words, it appears as if we subconsciously relate the negative aspects of age to a declining ability to change and to develop new behavioural patterns.

6. Discussion

An emerging issue from this study is the question whether it is possible to categorize metaphors in an objective manner. For example, to which primary metaphor category does the metaphorical question "who are the sharp people in your life?" belong? Here there is a conceptual understanding of intelligence as sharpness, but in other instances, intelligence may be thought of in terms of speed, knowledge or brightness.

Consequently, linguistic metaphors with similar contents may contain mappings from different source domains, depending on what images a speaker or writer wants to exploit. Thus, some metaphors seem to be individual or new, and the fact that we can create metaphors in very imaginative ways suggests that the categorization possibilities outlined in conceptual metaphor theory may be too restrictive. Alm-Arvius (2003) questions the claim that all linguistic metaphors need to be based on preexisting conceptual metaphors: "surely metaphorisation is a far too creative mental potential to be tied down and restricted this way?" (p. 111).

Furthermore, the perception of metaphor as an effective image creating device is supported by this study. Metaphors often give rise to vivid and complex images by using one domain to describe another, which is why they are deemed such a powerful linguistic tool in various fields. One may wonder whether the application of concrete, natural source domains to abstract notions such as organizations, relationships and thoughts is an automatic result of our intricate relations with our environment, or if we consciously create such conceptual mappings in order to facilitate our understanding of these concepts. It seems as if there is no general consensus regarding this question. However, the reflective question in (16), repeated below as (25), is an interesting example, since there seems to be two distinct approaches as to how it, and metaphors in general, can be analyzed.

(25) What has been chopped off your organization?

The first approach is that the question requires a pre-established concept of an organization being like a tree for a reader to comprehend it. Although the reflective question was written for the specific participants of a Metasaga, and the metaphor is implicitly formulated, outsiders also understand what is meant by it. Therefore it may seem logical to presume that language users indeed share an underlying conceptual

mapping between a plant and an organization. That is, the conceptualization of an organization as a plant is a generally existing and natural phenomenon that is deeply rooted in our brain.

On the other hand, the explanation could be that if we hear the words "chopped off" in the same context as the word "organization", this will lead us to think of an organization as a tree, or as any other structure which can have its parts chopped off. In other words, our perception of a metaphorical concept is dependent on the words used to describe it, which Lakoff and Johnson (1999) refer to as framing (p. 116). The same applies to the metaphorical questions in the category Organization Is A Living Creature, in which the source domain is implicitly indicated to be a living creature. This suggests that even though we understand the metaphorical nature of the question itself, the image it gives rise to may not at all be a pre-existing neural, synaptic connection, but in fact a cross-domain mapping which is created the moment we hear the question. For instance, if the question instead was "what parts have been repaired in your organization?", we may instantly think of an organization as a machine or structure which has had faulty parts. This seems sensible, since we appear to be capable of understanding and creating a large number of metaphors without necessarily making use of pre-existing underlying thought structures.

7. Conclusion

To summarize, the reflective Metasaga questions that have been examined more in detail in this study appear to convey three images of organization, and they can be described as:

- Organization Is An Artificial Structure
- Organization Is A Living Creature
- Organization Is A Plant

The occurring images of organization in the Metasagas seem to correspond to metaphor types that are commonly used to describe organizations. Many linguistic metaphors seem idiosyncratic, even though they can often also be connected to a specific conceptual metaphor category. Thus, it seems likely that some linguistic metaphors are founded on pre-existing and generally shared conceptual connections, while others seem

to lack a connection to what could be outlined as an underlying conceptual metaphor. Thus, the notion that all conceptual metaphors, A, can be expressed in linguistic metaphors, B, is obviously true. Thus, A=A∩B for all conceptual metaphors. However, not all linguistic metaphors can be connected to an existing conceptual metaphor, B≠A∩B for all linguistic metaphors (see figure 4 below). However, it seems unlikely that the presumed existence of these conceptual metaphor categories can be empirically verified.

B:Linguistic metaphors

A:Conceptual metaphors
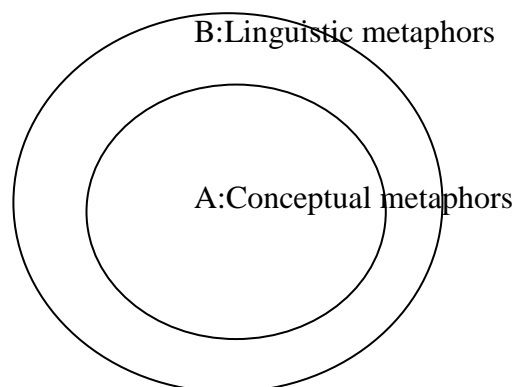
Figure 4. The relationship between conceptual metaphors and linguistic metaphors.
Moreover, it seems as if metaphors have the ability to shape and frame images of the target domain. The use of a metaphor with a particular source in a reflecting question decides what image of the target domain will be transferred to the recipient. This is what Lakoff and Johnson (1999) refer to as framing, meaning that the constraining of thoughts is done through metaphorical impressions and other linguistic devices. Framing consequently results from the possibility to map multiple source domains on to the same target domain. For instance, an organization can be described as a building, but also as a plant or a living organism, each of which has different connotations. Kövecses (2005) writes: "the metaphorical conceptual system is not monolithic – target concepts are not limited to a single source concept" (p. 27).

However, the majority of organizational metaphors in this study, 55 %, convey an image of a building of some sort. No conclusions can be drawn from the results regarding the general view of organization among human beings, but it seems likely that we use different metaphors depending on the type of organization involved. A well organized and structured organization may be more likely to be perceived as a building or a machine, whilst a creative, inspiring and adaptable organization may be viewed as a plant or a living organism.

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Appendix : Reflective question sorted under categories

Category	Number of metaphors	Percentage of total
<u>Life Is X</u>	(46)	(20.4)
Life Is Related To Water	10	4.4
Life Is A Path, Road, Way	7	3.1
Life Choices Are Doorways, Changes	8	3.5
In Life Some Things Are Abandoned	6	2.6
Other	15	6.6
<u>Organization Is Physical Structure(LJ)</u>	(71)	(31.3)
Organization Is An Artificial Structure	39	17.1
Organization Is A Living Organism	9	3.9
Organization Is A Plant	12	5.3
Help Is Support	11	4.8
Personal Features Are Possessions (LJ)	14	6.1
Purposes Are Desired Objects (LJ)	51	22.4
Causes Are Physical Forces (LJ)	4	1.8
Important Is Big (LJ)	2	0.9
Knowing Is Seeing (LJ)	7	3.1
Time Metaphors	10	4.4
Difficulties Are Burdens (LJ)	3	1.3
Sound Metaphors	7	3.1
Miscellaneous	13	5.7
Total:	228	

Table 1. (LJ) indicates that the conceptual metaphor category is a primary metaphor present in Lakoff and Johnson (1999).

Life Is X

Life Is Related To Water

Who is in the boat with you?

Who is the cox and what are they using to guide and direct you?

What storms and disasters have you faced?

What do you know about this course?

Who would you have in your boat to help you row?

Can you see the horizon?

What anchors you?

Have you ever felt you were drifting away?

When do we go with the flow and when is it worthwhile to challenge the thinking of the group?

What channels are you keeping open?

Number of questions:10

Life Is A Path/Road/Way

Can you develop mutually beneficial ways of working with colleagues, across different disciplines?

Is there a different way to get around an obstacle in your work place?

What treasures might we discover if we were brave enough to step off the track?

What draws us away from the set path?

What way is closed to you?

How do I find the courage to know when to step away from the path?

In what ways have you explored something new?

Number of questions: 7

Life Choices Are Doorways/ Changes

Are you keeping the doorway to change open?

Is there an open door ahead of you and are you wanting to go through it?

What can you see at the other side of that doorway?

How can we get it moving/ effect change?

How do we change as we move away from safe territory?

Are you willing to take a risk and enter the wild woods?

What is stagnant/ unchanging in life/ work?

Are you standing on the threshold, doubting the way ahead?

Number of questions: 8

In Life Some Things Are Abandoned

Will we move more freely if we leave it behind?'

What have you abandoned?

What have you had to leave?

Who have you left behind?

What methods of communication have you abandoned or forgotten?

What do you want to bury and leave?

Number of questions: 6

Other

How are you leading the field?

What would be your precious cargo?

Where have you gone to in the world and why?

Have you explored your family history?

Have you ever avoided a really ugly situation?

Would you carry a red flag and march to remember those who stood up for what they believed in?

Where is your life leading?

Would you prefer an exciting or a peaceful life?

Is it frightening or is it an adventure?

Why is the order to follow the direction of the arrow unclear?

Is it dangerous? '

How do we help probationers pay attention to what is happening ahead to help them plan?

What are you being guided to?

How do you escape from the world?

Where are you from and where are you going?

Number of questions: 15

Organization Is A Physical Structure

Organization Is An Artificial Structure

Where does the energy come from in your organisation?

How inclusive is your organisation?

Do you have a leadership position within your community, what is it?

Do you feel excluded (from your organization)?

How can your organisation be more inclusive?

If we were to write the epitaph for your organisation what would it say?

What are your foundations like?

What barriers, real or perceived, are presented in your work – perhaps in relation to upcoming change?

How might these be overcome?

Are any boundaries in your work useful?

Are you someone who will push against the boundaries?

What has caused instability in your organisation?

What might leave you vulnerable, what might you be open to?

What view are you looking at in your organisation?

What is ornate but useful in your organisation?

How can you make your organisation more accessible for all?

Are you allowed to choose a different path in your organisation, if not why not?

What motto would suit you or your organisation?

What is the structure that supports you in your life and work?

Where would you plant a peace pole in your organisation ?

What effort are you putting in?

Are you part of a community?

Is your organisation a community with common values?

Who are you excluding from your group?

Are you pulling together as a team?

How are you connected to other people?

How can your communication be blocked?

When do you feel cut off?

How do we help probationers have a sense of where they fit in the landscape of the class, the school and the education system?

What is your legacy to your organization and/or the sector or what would you like it to be?

What are you building towards?

Do you contribute to activities going on in the community you live in?

How does it make you feel when you do something for your community?

Who would you have in your squad and why?

What succession leadership do you have in place?

What limitation am I putting on myself and my work by not embracing the latest developments in my field?

What do you hide beneath the surface?

What do we have on display and what is hidden?

Number of questions: 39

Organization Is A Living Organism

Who needs healing?

What needs healing in you or your organisation?

What is at the heart of your organisation?

What is poisoning your organisation?

Is there anyone in your life been like a pirate or bonxie?

What animal or bird captures your personality?

Are the relationships you are involved in symbiotic or parasitic?

When were you last rubbed the wrong way?

Is there midgie behaviour in your organisation?

Number of questions: 9

Organization Is A Plant

What can you nurture?

What would this tree have seen in its lifetime?

Where are your roots?

What would you bury in the roots of the Oak tree?

What keeps you rooted and grounded?

Do we consciously seed ideas or do we trample new growth as it starts to develop?

What do we seed along the way in our leadership roles?

Place a thankfulness leaf on the tree of gratitude

What can we do to support people at times when new growth seems something that happened in the past?

What has been chopped off your organisation?

What needs to be cut away?

How do I adapt to my own niche at work?

Number of questions: 12

Help Is support

What sustains You?

How is your organisation supporting you?

How are you supporting those around you in your team?

Does your organisation offer sufficient support?

Who supports you?

How can you support someone else in this way?

How and what do you provide for those around you?

How do you provide life and shelter for those around you?

Who do you go to for support?

Is your work lasting and sustainable?

Will it endure?

Number of questions: **11**

Personal Features Are Possessions

Which of your colleagues has the most sense of fun?

What skills do you have to pass on?

What positives can you take from them in to your present situation?

What aspects of practice would you like to borrow or 'thieve' from others?

What aspects of your own work would others be likely to want to borrow or 'thieve'?

What is my best contribution?

What have you learned from them?

Have you had a change of heart?

Are you using all your talents?

How can I increase my awareness of what impact my actions and behaviours make?

Do you feel confident enough to share your talents with other people?

What are you missing?

What do you have to balance?

What is your legacy?

Number of questions: 14

Purposes Are Desired Objects

How do you attract attention?

What in our personal and professional lives is set in stone?

What would you turn into stone?

When was the last really looked at the things right under your nose?

What brings you hope?

How do you really let off steam?

How adaptable are you in the face of change?

What good learning experience have you had in the recent past?

What thing stands out for you in the school and why?

If you could give one piece of advice to the young people of Uyeasound, what would it be?

What do you put effort in to?

What feelings and memories come to you as you sit here?

What item or object stands out for you and why?

Praise- when was the last time you received some?

Where do you go to find peace?

How would you use this space?

How do you renew your energy?

How do you renew your energy, especially when things are tough?

What significant work are you failing to notice?

What opportunity are you missing?

Have you ever changed something ordinary into something extraordinary?

What is your legacy as a team?

What is your legacy in work?

Where do you find real peace?

How resilient are you in the face of change?

What opportunities does this upheaval open up?

Have you moved to follow your profession?

What or who are you aligned with?

Who/ what in your work and practice do you know you can trust?

Where is the new life coming from?

How do you act when the red mist descends and you get angry?

Do you bring colour to a dull grey environment?

What do you consider to be unlucky?

How do you react to solitude?

Would you move for work?

What limitations am I putting on myself because of the technology I use?

How good am I at transforming what I offer to meet the changing needs of my client group?

What risks am I prepared to take for something that is really important?

Where do I go to find some space for quiet reflection?

What is our openness to risk and opportunity?

Of all that I do, when does my energy and heart soar?

How deep are our conversations in action learning?

How can we create balance in our professional lives?

What brings sweetness to your life?

What are the assumptions that we, as leaders, make when staff do not perform as we would wish?

How do you deal with conflict?

When did we last feel the curiosity as we did when we were children?

Where do you go for excitement and where do you go to find peace and quiet?

Would you feel jealous if someone in your team was given more praise than you?

What words of wisdom would you share with others?

What brings you hope?

Number of questions: 51

Causes Are Physical Forces

What makes you feel better about yourself?

Who makes you feel better?

How would you make someone feel better?

What is it that makes us curious?

Number of questions: 4

Important Is Big

What has been a big day in your life?

Do you stand tall?

Number of questions: 2

Knowing is seeing

Can you see the big picture?

What can you not identify?

What is your vision for your work and your life?

How do I let more light into my life and work?

What do you focus your attention on?

When did you last stand back and appreciate the opportunities and challenges from a different perspective?

What is it that I am seeking to create?

Number of questions: 7

Time metaphors

How do you spend your summers?

Are you emerging from a dark winter?

Do you feel alive and growing into a new season?

Do you think the past is important?

Do you think we should be proud of our history?

What does our past give us in terms of baggage, entrenched positions?

What do you look forward to?

How can we move to acquiring the effortless shift around the annual cycle of learning and teaching?

How do we adapt as times change?

Do you give yourself space and time to reflect?

Number of questions: 10

Difficulties Are Burdens

How do you survive under the weight?

What warts do you have?

How could you remove them?

Number of questions: 3

Sound Metaphors

Who only half listens to you?

What soundtrack do you hear at work?

What is the soundtrack of my life and work?

What will be your tune that will capture your visit to Shetland?

What values do you hear?

Is there a voice that is not heard?

What music would you fill this space with?

Number of questions: 7

Miscellaneous

Is there a Viking in your team that has a bad reputation but underneath there is a different story?

How do you stand out from the crowd?

What would you make a stand for?

What do I stand for?

How are you suited to your environment?

Do we let them lie fallow or do we seek to re-engage them?

What is your role in the universe?

Have you ever had to stand your ground when people didn't believe something you said?

When do you feel on fire with passion about something you do?

Who would you invite into this space to help you celebrate?

What languages would you put on your peacepole and why?

Who are the sharp people in your life?

Who or what would you hang out to dry?

Number of questions: 13