DISCIPLINING CLIENTS: THE USE OF ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH METAPHORS IN A CONSULTANCY SERVICE PROSPECTUS

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ABSTRACT
Consultants are often given an important role in the distributing of management ideas to the industry. Management ideas are important since how a well working organization is understood have consequences for the life in organizations. One way of altering the understanding of organizations is through the use of metaphors. In this paper I investigate the use of a health metaphor in a consultancy prospectus where the idea of healthy organizations was used to illustrate well functioning organizations. This investigation is based on a constructionist perspective and the assumption that the understanding constructed in the prospectus may be part of a more general discourse around organizations and the consulting process, which sets the boundaries within which the consultant-client relationship unfolds. Specifically the purpose of the paper is to investigate what kind of organizations the use of the health metaphor constructs and further what kind of consultant-client relationship this construction makes possible. Related to this I also reflect on how the healthy organization construction effects the perception of the consulting service.
INTRODUCTION

“Introduce a health programme to infuse fresh blood into your IT business applications and let it pump new energy into your business.” (Quote from consultancy prospect, Cap Gemini Ernst & Young)

In my studies of consultancy companies I some time ago came across a consultancy service prospectus on the Internet promising “the best health programme ever”. It was produced by the IT and management consulting firm Cap Gemini Ernst & Young. Initially my reaction was that finally also the big organizational consultants have recognized the importance of caring for the employees, and that not only through giving them more money as motivation or compensation for working harder\(^1\). From the title I expected advice for how to set up a health center in the organization, for how to improve both the physical and social work environment and for strategies of long-term commitment to care for the employees. After a closer look at the prospectus, however, I realized that my associations had been totally wrong, maybe even naïve. Health was, thus, used in a metaphorical sense. Instead of referring to the health of the employee the appealing title of the prospectus referred to the health of the organization, in terms of functioning systems and applications. Instead of referring to the soft parts of the organization such as people and human relations, it discussed the harder parts consisting of computer systems and databases. After realizing this my curiosity refocused to trying to understand what the use of what I here will call the “health metaphor” meant, why it was used and what implications it could have in the consulting process.

In this paper I will investigate what kind of organizations the use of the health metaphor in the consultancy prospectus constructs and further what kind of consultant-client relationship this construction makes possible. Related to this I will also reflect on how the healthy organization construction effects the perception of the consulting service.

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\(^1\) A note needs to be made here that neither “real” employee health programs are all good since health management activities fit in to processes of discipline of our bodies in society including a growing pressure on employees to preserve their health and to demonstrate fitness in order to increase company productivity and show motivation (cf. Haunschild 2003).
The rest of this paper is divided into four sections. The first section I will outline the framework for the analysis, which includes a discussion on the discursive relevance of constancy prospectus texts, the role of metaphors in organizations and organization analysis and the prior treatment of human bodies in organization theory. The second section I introduce the consultancy prospectus and how the health metaphor is enacted in the text. This section also includes a discussion on the methodology behind my analysis. The third section consists of the analysis of the prospectus and the metaphor used in it. This section includes three subsections: one discussing the kind of organization constructed in the prospectus, a second discussing the following consultant-client relationship and a third discussing the following perception of consulting services. The last section I conclude the findings of the analysis and suggest some future research topics.

FRAMEWORK

In this section I discuss the framework for this paper. First I discuss why the consultancy prospectus would matter as a base of analysis. Second I review some previous understandings of the role of metaphors in organizations. Third, since the health metaphor is a metaphor that draws from an image of the human body I refer back to how the human body has been treated in organization theory.

Why Would the Consultants’ Prospectus Matter?

The role and importance of consultants, especially management consultants, has been disputed in academic writings. The question posed is whether consultants really can offer true knowledge to its clients or whether they say anything just to be able to sell and convince of their worth (Salaman, 2002; Werr & Styhre, 2002-3). The claim is that consultants trade in performance and empty rhetoric in peruse of managing an impression of knowledgability and indispensability (cf. Salaman, 2002). Others have however seen consultancy as a phenomenon which exposes the nature of management. The idea is that consultancy is an externalized form of management and that there exist a parallelism between consultancy issues and central managerial structures and processes (Fincham & Clark, 2002-3). The subsequent question here is whether consultants are subjected to the
ideas existing in the client organizations or whether it is the client organizations and the industry at large that are subjected to the ideas of the consultants.

A common theory is that consultants are the producers of or have an intermediary role in the development of management fashion (cf. Scarbrough, 2002-3; Fincham & Clark, 2002). This is based on the notion that management ideas and techniques are subject to swings in fashion in the same way as for clothes, music etc. The role of consultants is here to attempt to convince fashion followers that a specific management idea is rational and at the forefront of management development and research (cf. Abrahamson, 1996).

From this point of view consultants, clients and the rest of the management fashion following industry is subjected to the power of the consultants as the consultants take part in dictating how the clients should view their organization, what should be seen as problematic and how these problems should be solved.

This have particularly been discussed by Czarniawska-Joerges (1988) in a study of consulting projects where she found that one important aspect of consulting is to help the client organizations find relevant words, a specific rhetoric, to use in order to understand their organization in new ways and to facilitate change. She also emphasizes that one of the most effective ways of influence is to have the power to modify the meaning other give to what happens. Therefore to service an organization with a rhetoric for understanding of itself could be seen as an act of power which can have an significant effect on the life in the organization.

The focus of this paper is on the use of a health metaphor in a consultancy prospectus. A relevant question in investigating this use is what role a service prospectuses produced by consultants may have in the consulting process. Theoretically prospectuses could be produced both for external and internal purposes. For external purposes a prospectus could be used to market the consulting firm and to inform clients and potential client of the offered services. It is however unclear if the existence of a prospectus per se might bring customers to the firm since consultancy services most often is sold through personal relations between individuals in the consulting and the client organization (Maister, 1993). A prospectus could, however, serve a limited purpose in this personal relation. Prospectuses on the Internet could also have an overall image-creating purpose toward the media and toward potential new employees. For internal purposes the
information on the Internet, including the prospectuses, could be used to develop an internal self-image of the organization and thus have symbolic value in the organizational culture. In spite of the ambiguity of the purpose of corporate Internet presentation the discourse produced on consulting firms Internet sites have previously been treated as an important location for the construction of consulting services (Bäcklund & Werr, 2004). This construction of consulting services may thus be seen as part of a more general consulting discourse which sets the boundaries within which the consultant-client relation in practice may unfold.

Regardless whether the prospectus have any practical use or not it will in this paper be treated as a partly separate text encompassing its own understanding of organizations. It is only partly separate since it could be assumed to be interlinked virtually to other texts and understandings present in society. The use of the metaphor of healthy organizations for well functioning organizations can therefore be found in other texts, both those written by researchers and practitioners (Birch & Sadati, 2004; Cooper & Williams, 1994; Dive. 2004; Newell, 1995; Verschoor, 2003). These particular links will not per se be developed further in this paper. However in discussing the kind of organizations constructed in the prospectus, the following consultant-client relationship and the perception of consulting services I make the assumption that this understanding may be part of a more general discourse around organizations and the consulting process.

The Role of Organizational Metaphors

In Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. Sixth Edition the word metaphor is defined as “a word or phrase used in an imaginative way to describe somebody or something else, in order to show that the two things have the same qualities and to make the description more powerful”. This means that there is a comparison of treats between one phenomenon and another in order to reframe one of them or both. Metaphors can, thus, be used more or less consciously.

On a conscious level metaphors can be used to promote an alternative understanding of a phenomenon or situation. In organizations metaphors can, for example, be used to

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2 The metaphorical meaning of a healthy organizations thus differs from implying a pure well functioning organizations to implying an organization where health of employees are promoted (Haunschild 2003).
promote organizational change through offering new mental pictures of either an image of a future state or an image of the change process per se (Sackmann, 1989). They can also fill the important role of mediating ideologies, through stimulating fantasies about new meanings and reducing insecurities in facing change (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1988).

On a less conscious level metaphors are used as part of the language where figurative meanings get cemented into fixed expressions. Sometimes metaphors become root metaphors meaning that they loose their reframing role and instead become more like an ideology than a conscious metaphor (Morgan, 1997). In both cases the choice of metaphor mirrors deeper values and worldviews in the context they are used (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1988). Root metaphors thus structures perception and are betrayed in language in the images chosen for describing the world (Inns, 2002).

Inns (2002) has developed a taxonomy consisting of six different ways metaphors are used in the organizational analysis literature: 1) Examination of the root metaphor of a subject. By tracing the root metaphor of a subject it is possible to explore the hidden assumptions of an area within, for example, organization analysis. 2) Metaphor as a qualitative research tool. Focusing on metaphors used by organizational members can give the researcher access to hidden perceptions or feelings that the members may either not be aware of or may not wish to acknowledge. 3) Metaphor as a generative tool for creative thinking. Metaphors enable powerful re-framing of the meaning organizational members or researchers give to organizational life. 4) Metaphor as a hegemonic tool to influence perception and interpretation. Top managers or other powerful actors may use transformational metaphors in the stimulation and appropriation of the emotions for specific ends (cf. Clark & Salaman 1996, on the use of metaphors by management consultants). 5) Metaphor as an explicatory teaching tool. A metaphor can be used to describe something abstract in a more concrete way, or something inexpressible, and can also help people to explore the unfamiliar by using a metaphor which stems from a domain which is more familiar to them. 6) Metaphor as a tool for ‘deconstruction’ and the questioning of embedded assumptions. Metaphors allows continuous construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of reality. Using metaphors in organizations can also be empowering, allowing individuals to be self-reflexive and to recognize the limitations they impose on themselves, by exploring their metaphors-in-use. Summarizing these
different uses we can see that focusing on metaphors can clearly be a tool both for shaping and for understanding perceptions and worldviews.

Even though organizations have been seen from a numerous of perspectives, basically two root metaphors have been claimed to be the most influential for our understanding of organizations: seeing the organization as a machine and seeing it as an organism (cf. Dale, 2001; Cummings & Thanem, 2002). According to Morgan (1997), the machine metaphor gives us an overall understanding of organizations as ideally routinized, efficient, reliable and predictable. Organizations are seen as instruments created to reach other ends, thus its existence is not a goal in itself. The bureaucracy, with its unity of command, span of control, division of labour etc., can be given as an example of how the mechanistic organization is materialized. Seeing organizations as machines gives us an understanding of the organization where every part has its role and purpose in the organization, just as a cog in a machinery. In the mechanistic organization human beings are more or less moulded to fit the requirements of the organization rather than the organization being build around the strengths and potentials of the individuals in it.

The organism metaphor (Morgan, 1997) gives us a slightly different understanding of organizations. Here organizations are seen as living creatures adapting to their environment. Organizations are further seen as born, growing, developing, declining and finally dying. Organizations can here also belong to different spices, why different kinds of organizations may function differently. Compared to the machine metaphor, the organism metaphor does, according to Morgan, encourage a more open and flexible view of what an organization is and how it functions. But still the metaphor has weaknesses. In the organic organization there is a tendency that people are seen as resources to be developed and used rather than human beings who are valued in themselves as who they are.

The clean cut division between the machine and organism metaphor for organizations has, however, been criticised (Cummings & Thanem, 2002; Dale, 2001). For example according to Cummings and Thanem (2002), when the discipline of organizational studies began to use the organism metaphor as an alternative to the machine metaphor the definition of organizations did not change much. The reason for this, they claim is that the understanding of the organism is a mechanistic one. One evidence given for this
statement is that the organism referred to in the use of the metaphor is a hierarchical one where mind are put over matters in the duality between mind (representing reason, control etc.) and body (representing both physical labour and emotions). The nature of organizations have also not changed since there are still a major focus on external purposes of existence, on specialization and coordination of activities and as such for ever greater efficiency. The authors suggest that a postmodern alternative to the mechanical organism, that is a “truly” organic organism metaphor should construct an organization where both boundaries of ascribed functions and identities should be transgressed (Cumming & Thanem, 2002). Later in this paper I will discuss what kind of understanding of organism is implied in the use of the health metaphor in the consulting prospectus. Understanding this will further help us understand the kind of organizations constructed in the prospectus, the following consultant-client relationship and the perception of consulting services.

The Human Body in Organization Theory

Since “health” derive from and is most often used when talking about the condition of the human body it is reasonably to conclude that using the health metaphor for organizations includes a comparison of the organization with the human body. Before we examine the kind of organizations constructed in the prospectus, the following consultant-client relationship and the perception of consulting services I will look at some broader tendencies of how the body have been treated in social and organizational theory previously.

According to Dale (2001), when talking about the body we most commonly refer to the body as it is known by the biological and medical sciences. The body is here an object of the world which it is possible to collect objective and universal knowledge about. That the knowledge of the body is seen as universal means that, although some differences between different bodies are acknowledged, deviations of a particular lived body from that which is defined as the norm are classified as abnormal and pathological.

In western sciences the body is further understood through the process of anatomizing it into “distinct parts and systems” (Dale, 2001: 9). This is done in order to understand the body as a set of structures and functions. This anatomizing discourse of the body
dominates in biology, social sciences as well as in organization theory. It is further shaped by the Cartesian dualism between body and mind/soul (cf. Casey, 2000; Dale, 2001). The differentiation between body and mind follows with an association of the mind with knowledge and reason while the body, including emotions, is associated with the problematic domain of nature, i.e. unreasonable and irrational inner sensations, instincts and desires (Casey, 2000). As the body is seen as solely passive material the mind is seen as the active manipulator of the body. In the modern society of science and industrialism the control of the spontaneous and disorderly body (ones own or others) is a virtue.

In social and organization theory matters of bodies have been marginalized. The body is said to have “an absent presence” in the study of the social world, meaning that the existence of human bodies tend to be taken for granted in analysis of social life (Hassard, Holliday, & Willmott, 2000). Studies of organizations therefore rarely study or acknowledge human embodiment of organization or the presence of bodies at the workplace. When the human body does come into focus it is as an object of control (Dale, 2001). The use of the organism metaphor further create a reduced status of the body as merely an organism. Both the human body and the organization are thus constructed as bounded and structured entities which are differentiated and separated from the environment. This results in a construction of an organised, structures and hierarchical body and organization.

A further interesting perspective on organizations and bodies has been outlined by Linstead (2000). He claims that the organizational body image, which is embodies in structures, systems and relations in existing organizations are not gender-neutral. Rather is the organizational body a male body, associated with dryness, solidity, firmness and containment. Ever since the ancient times male bodies have been seen as “mastered and controlled and sealed-up against penetration”, Linstead claims. The female body however is associated with “changeability and fluidity” which is a threat to order and stability. Since the male body have been the norm “good” organizations are today defined as well structured into distinct parts, disciplined and controlled.

In the analysis of the consultancy prospectus I will discuss whether the kind of organization constructed by the health metaphor, through which the organization may be
seen as if it where an organic body, is influenced by the general view of human bodies in organizations and organization theory. But first I will look closer at the text in the consultancy prospectus.

**THE CONSULTANCY PROSPECTUS**

The focus of this paper is to investigate the use of a health metaphor in a consultancy prospectus. The consultancy prospectus analysed is developed by the global IT- and management consulting firm Cap Gemini Ernst & Young\(^3\), and particularly the division for outsourcing and application management. In Cap Gemini Ernst & Young the consulting business is divided into three parts: Consulting Services, including strategic and business transforming consulting services; Technology Services, including services in IT-solutions and infrastructure; and Outsourcing Services, including services in operating IT-systems of the client. One particular area of service offered in outsourcing is Application Management, a service where Cap Gemini Ernst & Young offers to take a hold of the operation of the entire application management system in the client organization. It is this service which is presented in the prospectus.

The title of the service presentation under scrutiny is *Application Management. The best health programme ever*. The service is described in a prospectus published in a pdf-file on the company website. Parts of the text can thus also be found on the overall website of the application management area on the Cap Gemini Ernst & Young international homepage\(^4\). The presentation consists of six two page standard size A4 fliers: one overall presentation of the Application Management (AM) service and five specifying presentations of the different parts of the service. These parts are AM Healthcheck, AM Fitness, AM Vitality, AM Lifetime and SAP Run. The fliers are provided with illustrative pictures. On the general presentation of Application

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\(^3\) Since the beginning of my analysis Cap Gemini Ernst & Young have changed name to Capgemini. The websites from where the prospectus is taken have however not changed in content. After the change of name there is however two versions of the prospectus, one referring to the company as Cap Gemini Ernst & Young ([http://www.cgey.com/outsourcing/am/media/AMGENERIC.pdf](http://www.cgey.com/outsourcing/am/media/AMGENERIC.pdf)) and the other referring to it as Capgemini ([http://www.se.capgemini.com/upload/dokument/produktblad/AMGeneric_nov04.pdf](http://www.se.capgemini.com/upload/dokument/produktblad/AMGeneric_nov04.pdf)). Since the layout of the prospectus have change from the old to the new I have chosen to concentrate on the old version not taking those changes in consideration.

Management we find the picture of a male chest with a white shirt, white coat, a tie and a stethoscope, the head is cut off from the picture. On the presentation of AM Healthcheck we find a close up picture of an arm on which a male hand takes the blood pressure. The presentation of AM Fitness is illustrated with the picture of a crawling female swimmer in a pool. The woman is wearing a swimsuit, swimming glasses and a swimming cap. The presentation of AM Vitality is further illustrated with the picture of a dancing young woman smiling happily. On the presentation of AM Lifetime we find the picture of a little girl holding a man’s hand. They are both dressed in white. Finally on the presentation of SAP Run we find a blurred picture of what looks like an electrical circuit.

Methodology
In the discussion of metaphors above we saw that metaphors can be used both to shape and to understand perceptions and worldviews. A standpoint in this paper is that the health metaphor used in the prospectus may shape the worldviews both of clients, of the consultants themselves and of the business world in general. Taking this standpoint means that I choose a constructionist perspective (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1966) on consulting. The transforming function of metaphors may be seen as part of discourse structures (cf. Van Dijk, 2001) where text and talk have the function of shaping perceptions and consequently also controlling actions. My aim here is to investigate the discourse used in the consulting prospectus. The focus is particularly on understanding the kind of organizations constructed in the prospectus, the following consultant-client relationship and the perception of consulting services. In order to bridge the text and discourse structures I have been inspired by critical discourse analysis as an analytical tool providing a way of moving between close analysis of texts and social analysis of different types (Fairclough, 2001).

In the first step of the analysis I read through the prospectus to get an overall understanding of the massage given by the text, guided by the question: what kind of organization does the text construct and what role does the metaphor of healthy organizations have in this? In the second step I highlighted all statements in the text that in some sense entailed the health metaphor. Through this process I ended up with 13 statements. In the third step I went over the text again to highlight other statement or
words which were central for the overall message of the text. In a fourth step I divided the statements into themes and reconstructed a narrative of the healthy organization found below.

The Construction of Healthy Organizations and of the Way to Get There

In the prospectus organizations are described as patients in need for a doctor’s appointment including a “healthcheck” and a “diagnosis”. If illness is found and if it is severe there might be a need for a surgery. If some parts are too damaged or nearly dead they need to be transplanted.

A rapid diagnosis of your Application Management (AM) environment to measure its maturity and health and to recommend a pragmatic treatment programme.

Chances are, your assessment of how well your IT business applications support your business will be mixed. Some areas will be in good shape and in excellent condition. Some will need minor reconditioning and energy transfusion. Some will be candidates for radical surgery or transplant

Cap Gemini Ernst & Young’s AM Healthcheck can accelerate the diagnostics, jump-start treatment and lay down a pragmatic roadmap to answer your fundamental ‘How Tos’.

In the role of patients in need of healthchecks and medical care organizations are further described as organic bodies with a number of organs. These organs are supported and maintained by “the lifeblood” of IT application. It is described as important to look after the health of this organism and to help it prosper.

Your IT applications are the lifeblood of your business. Cap Gemini Ernst & Young’s family of Application Management (AM) services is the best health programme ever for breathing new life into your business.
The health of the organization is seen an important determinant for what can be done with this “body”, making it a prerequisite for the organization to strive toward its purposes or reason of existence.

*IT applications are becoming the lifeblood of any enterprise, supporting every aspect of how business is planned, managed and executed.*

One of the measurements for a better health is, though, described to be “fresh blood” from the outside. It is thus not enough to try to heal the body through a better condition of the existing organs and tissues. The body needs refreshment through blood transfusion, that is, the old, used “blood” need to be exchanged with, or at least complemented with, new blood from someone healthier.

*Introduce a health programme to infuse fresh blood into your IT business applications and let it pump new energy into your business.*

But getting a “healthy” organization is not all about visiting the doctor to make sure there are no severe sicknesses. It is also described as important to take care of your health through “tuning” the body. As in going to the gym and do physical exercise - lifting weights and burning fat – the organization needs to tune its bodily parts to be lean and fit.

*Your customized health programme is all about tuning: Tuning your level of risk, tuning your degree of flexibility, tuning your rate of change, tuning the volume of business value, tuning your total cost of ownership – tuning according to your business strategy and needs.*

All this is about controlling the body/organization. It is implied that it is not healthy or sound to loose the control and let the body go loose. The risk that the organization would develop in irrational or inefficient directions is too high. It might gain in weight, the muscles might loose shape and get slack, the strength and flexibility might be lost. But taking care of the health of the organization and of the body must be an individual choice.
To make that choice it is important to have objectives of where you want to go and you need a plan of how to get there.

*Your customized health programme is all about choice: What needs treatment and why – what’s broken and how is it hurting you? Where do you start and where do you want to go? When do you need to get there and how fast or slow must you go? Where to focus your energies and where do you outsource or enlist help? Whom do you bring in or whom do you outsource to and how?*

The effort to stay healthy and fit is further described as a life long commitment. This commitment should be holistic focusing on balancing the priorities of organizational life. At the same time it is recognized that an organization may grow older, age and finally die. Prolonging life and postponing aging is a matter of staying fit. Keeping fit becomes a way of life.

*A long term service partnership with full responsibility for the complete applications life cycle – a holistic and life-long applications health programme for balancing your risk, adaptability and costs.*

*This alignment must be part of an underlying strategy which takes a long term and holistic view of the applications life cycle – covering both tactical and strategic alignment on a day-to day basis as well as over the long term.*

Further in the prospect the consultants themselves are implicitly given the role of alternatively a personal fitness coach or a doctor and surgeon. As a personal fitness coach they encourage you/the organization to work out harder and give advices which exercises is best to do though a lot of the hard work the client organizations are encouraged to do themselves.

*Cap Gemini Ernst & Young’s AM Fitness is an innovative approach for managing and alleviating today’s integrated blend of operational pressures. Unlike*
traditional outsourcing – we share responsibility for IT applications and AM services. You maintain the control and ownership.

Sustain but inject new energy into your IT applications environment and you gain revitalizing agents to help your business thrive.

We jointly and proactively plan for current and evolving service needs for both the standard and extended package. Our mutual objective is to keep costs down and business value up. But it is you who decides which services parameters to put in place when to meet these objectives in the various business areas.

As a doctor the consultants describe themselves as experienced and as an authority on the area of curing organizational diseases and improving organizational health.

Decades of AM experience provide unique insights. These form the basis for the customized treatment recommendations and associated estimated cost savings.

Our maturity level measurement is gauged against Cap Gemini Ernst & Young’s AM best practices – recognized by the industry as leading edge and repeatedly proven in the real world – it’s what we do ourselves for about 10% of the AM outsourcing market worldwide.

DISCUSSION
As we have seen above the text in the consultant service prospectus uses the metaphor of healthy organizations in the argumentation of the value of the service. In a closer look through a critical discourse analysis we have gained some deeper understanding of how the metaphor is used in constructing a certain kind of organization. By using the term “lifeblood” for the organizations IT-systems it is implied that organizations are seen as organic bodies built up by fatal organs which need the nutrition and support the IT-systems can offer. It is emphasized that the wellbeing of the organization should be taken care of in order to secure “vitality” and a long and healthy life. This should be done in a
proactive and controlled way. Sometimes it is emphasized that it is the client that should maintain this control. One way of controlling the health status of the organization is thus to let the consultants “diagnose” and conduct “surgery” on the client organization. If the health is very poor there might even be a need for a “transplant” or a “transfusion”, i.e. we could guess a change of either people (organs are the parts of the organization) systems (the organizations “lifeblood”). An organization should be proactive in that they act preventing through “tuning” the organization and making shore that all parts are in harmony and that there are “holistic” balance. Tuning and fine-tuning certain aspects of the organization (in the prospect: level of risk, degree of flexibility, range of change, business value, and cost of ownership) implies that there are optimal values of these aspects to opt for. Seeing the organization as an organic body also implies that the organization should be treated as something dynamically living with its own “life cycle”. This in turn means that it is an essential part of organizations to grow old and die, but recognizing this also highlight the goal to stay alive, i.e. to postpone the aging process and “revitalize” the organization. The consultants describe themselves as indispensable in securing the health of the organization as they are giving themselves the experienced role of expert.

Given that the text makes a clear connection between healthy organizations and physical attributes such as the presence of organs to transplant and blood to transfuse we could see the health metaphor as an example of an organic metaphor (cf. Cummings & Thanem, 2002; Morgan, 1997). Using an organic metaphor means that the text constructs the organization as a living creature, being born, growing, developing, declining and dying. This dynamics of life we also see referred to in the prospectus. Taking an organic metaphor to its extreme organizations could be seen as belonging to different spices which may function in fundamentally different ways. This point was however not made in the prospectus. Even though organizations are treated as individuals taking account of differences of situation, the species is the same.

A “truly” organic organism metaphor would, according to Cummings and Thanem (2002), also construct an organization where boundaries of ascribed functions and

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5 To “diagnose” is a word used both by doctors and by mechanics. Czarniawska-Joerges (1988) argues that the implications of this particular use of metaphor depend on the overall view of the organization as either an organism or a machine.
identities would be transgressed. This would mean that the boundaries between the managers and the managed, between different functions and even between client and consultant would be lessened. In the prospectus however organizations are divided into different areas where some “will be in good shape [and] some will need minor reconditioning”, functions and systems can be transplanted separately from the rest of the organization and there is emphasis on the need to “manage” both people and the situation. This implies that we can argue that the health metaphor used in the prospectus is using a mechanical understanding of organisms and of the human body (cf. Dale, 2001), where the organization is “anatomized” into distinct parts and systems and structured according to a hierarchical logic in an organized structure. This also implies that the organization constructed in the prospectus is made into an object which it is possible to collect objective and universal knowledge about. Collecting this knowledge is made into the role of the consultants since they are the objective “experts” who can “diagnose”, “assess” and “measure” the organizational health. Giving the consultants this role may also give them the power to define what is normal and what is pathological and in need of treatment in the organization.

In the description of organizations in the prospectus we can also identify a Descartianlike differentiation between mind and body of the mechanically organic organization (Casey, 2000; Dale, 2001) in that it is required that some members of the organization (supposedly the top management team) have the role and ability to distance themselves from the organization in order to plan and control the rest of the organization. Making this distinction also lead to the emphasis of restraining spontaneity and emotions in the form of irrationality, instincts and desires in the organization in benefit of mindful control, rationality and efficiency.

Below I will look closer at some implications this overall use of the health metaphor has on the construction of organizations, the following construction of the consultant-client relationship and on the perception of consulting services.

**The Disciplined Client**

The use of the health metaphor in the prospectus text highly emphasizes meticulous control of organizations and it clearly defines what is seen as healthy organizational
behaviour and what contrary to this is pathological and in need of curing. Through emphasizing the necessity for proactive help and self-help together with close control of organizational parts the organization constructed in the prospectus is a complying organization, subdued, exploited and transformed into perfection. My argument in this paper is that the construction of the client organization as in need for cure and medical treatment or for bodily tuning results in a situation where the client is disciplined (cf. Foucault, 1977), both by the consultant and by self-help practices, into becoming a certain type of organization, i.e. a healthy organization. In the process of mastering the organization consultants are given the role of offering a constant surveillance of the organization forcing the organization to control itself according to the norms of a healthy organization.

The discursive practice of discipline, discussed by Foucault (1977), could be seen as a set of practices which produces docile bodies, i.e. bodies that are useful and intelligible. A docile body is a body that “may be subdued, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, 1977: 136). Constructing a docile body and making it intelligible as such means that the body is in grip of strict power. It is divided both from other bodies and internally into bodily parts which movements and efforts are calculated and controlled in order to reach economy of effort and efficiency. Prior organization studies research has investigated the discipline of human bodies in organizations (cf. Townley, 1993, 1994; Haunschild, 2003). However, since the consultant prospectus constructs organizations as bodies the metaphor imply that we can talk about disciplining of organizations as if they where bodies. Organizations, and in particular the client organization, are in the prospectus, hence, constructed as docile entities which should be subdued, used, transformed and improved. In order to enable this meticulous control the construction of the organization have three essential characteristics: 1) the organization is constructed as a bounded entity, separated from other organizations, including the consultants’, 2) the organization is constructed as consisting of internal parts that may be organized in different ways, 3) the organization is constructed as having a subjective agency (top management represent the subjectivity of the organization) which makes it possible to directly influence organizational development, i.e. the functioning and organization of the internal parts of the organization. These three characteristics make it possible to make
“health” a “lifestyle commitment” for the organization in which a form of subjectivity is produced in the organization which controls itself according to the norms connected to this for the organization “healthy lifestyle”. (cf. Haunschild 2003, for analysis of individual health promotion in organizations).

The subjectivation and control also entail the assumption that it is possible to receive objective knowledge about the present state of the organization (cf. Townley, 1993). According to Townley (1994: 83) “to be manageable, workers must be known; to be known, they must be rendered visible”. The same should be the case also for organizations: to be manageable the organization need to be made visible and known, something which happen to be the specialty of the consultants. Even though flexibility and situation specific solutions are promised in the prospectus text it proposes that the consultants through careful examination, i.e “diagnosis”, can offer universal truths of what is the problem and how to fix it and improve the organization.

It is further proposed in the prospectus that if the organizational “head” fails to proactively control “the body” the later will start functioning in irrational ways, by for example getting to big, loosing strength or going lacy. Spontaneity and natural growth of the body is seen as irrational in organizational settings since organizations are traditionally not perceived as a place for inner sensations or instincts and certainly not for desires and passions (cf. Fineman, 2000). The most rational, efficient and docile organization is assumed to be the one that is manipulated by the top management or by consultants from the outside. In order to assist in this manipulation, consultants can be brought in to facilitate discipline and compliance through offering examination and surveillance.

The prospectuses emphasis on being “proactive” as a lifestyle and of constant “tuning” may also implies that the intended management and control of the organization need not merely be an activity for the top management, but also a general mindset in the disciplined organization. According to Grey (1999) the existence of an identifiable group of people who are labeled “managers” has been one of the most significant aspects of the organization of work and society since at least the last hundred years. A resent development is however that management is disseminated into being the main activity of
every person, that all kinds of activities by all kinds of people are recognized, described
and understood in managerial terms.

“Instead of engaging in human relationships, we manage those relationships; instead
of caring for ourselves, we manage our health; instead of governing, we manage the
economy; instead of acting spontaneously, we manage and plan.” (Grey, 1999: 577)

Management has become a central and universal activity of human life while other forms
of meaning or being in the world become marginalized. This limits human experience
while promoting a form of experience which is disciplinary as it degrades and confines
the individual. In the construction of the client organization in the consulting process in
the prospectus the disciplinary activity of management may be located at three locations:
1) by the consultants, as they have the role of examining the client organization and
implement certain changes (i.e conduct surgery); 2) by the top management, as a
representation of the subjectivity of the organization as a unit; and 3) as a general
mindset, as the norms of a healthy organization is proactive self-management and
constant tuning and change (this mindset can further be observed in the ideal forms of
“slim” or “lean” organizations operating according to the principals of for example just-
in-time or TQM, see cf. Hackman & Wageman, 1995, Womack & Jones, 1996). Management on these different locations becomes an important contributor to the
discipline of the client organization.

In the prospectuses use of the health metaphor for organizations we can further find
some assumption about normality and abnormality in the organizational functioning, or
more specifically a distinction between what is seen as healthy and what is seen as
unhealthy or even pathological in organizational life. As mentioned before, the healthy
organization is put under meticulous control and management. In this way the healthy
organization could be seen as a male body that is sealed of and controlled (cf. Linstead,
2000). But it is also seen as healthy to want to change and improve. It seems to be normal
to always strive towards perfection and unhealthy and pathological to fail to align and
control all parts of the organization. It is unhealthy when some parts of the organization
loose strength or growths to big. But even though you do not have full control it does not
have to be that way because the unhealthy can be cured or strengthened and reduces by consultants. These norms will be further discussed as I identify two different constructs of the consultant-client relationship figuring simultaneously in the prospectus.

**Two Constructs of the Consultant-Client Relationship**

As we have seen above the organization constructed in the prospectus has a need for support in disciplining the organization as it should have as a general mindset to constantly improve. In order to improve the organization is advised to be assisted from experts outside the organization for surveillance and control. This constructed need creates an entrance for the consultants into the client organization.

A contradiction to the emphasis on control in the constructed organization could be found in the statement that organizations are advised to “infuse fresh blood” into the organization. Traditional organization theory and management discourse often emphasize the importance of making the organization a closed system by sealing the outside of the organization off from the internal organizational mechanisms (cf. Furusten, 1996; Thompson, 1967). This has been emphasized more or less both by organizational theories adopting a mechanical and organic view (Morgan, 1997) (even though there might be some exceptions in theories around organizations as open systems). Having organizations sealed-up against alien penetration is also seen as a virtue considering the male norms of organizing outlined by Linstead (2000). To recommend the organization to open up could be seen, though, as a necessity for the consultants since they need to include an entrance for themselves in the ideal organization they construct. In practice the tension between the manager’s need of a close relation to the consultant and the need to protect their turf and sovereignty might be solved through mixing different discourses (cf. Berglund & Werr, 2000; Werr & Styhre, 2002-3).

Taking the nuances of the text seriously we can see that in the prospectus the consultants are implicitly given sometimes the role of doctor and surgeon and sometimes the role of personal fitness coach, representing two discourses on the consultant-client relationship that are mixed in the text. In the role of doctors the consultants examine their patient, make a diagnosis of what is wrong and suggest a cure. Since the consultants do not only want to sell the diagnosis but also to be able to sell a cure it is very likely that
the cure to the diagnosed problem is one that they themselves can offer. In the prospectus it is argued that these cures might be “blood transfusion” (changes in the IT application system) or “surgeries” and “transplants” (outsourcing some organizational units or reengineering of the organization). But, based on the diagnosis the consultant can also suggest finer “tuning” of the organization by a fitness coach. In the role of fitness coach the consultant may also coach the organization in order to prevent it from giving up its hard work toward perfection. The consultant is also the one outlining what exercises is available, though, it is emphasized that the organization should stay in control and dictate their needs. Even though the general metaphor of the organization as a human body is common when describing the role of the consultants, there are some important differences between these implied roles as they are described either in terms of doctor and surgeon or as a personal fitness coaches. Below I will discuss these two alternative health metaphors in terms of their implied views of the nature of the consultant-client relationship. The differences between these roles are summarized in table 1.

<table>
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<th>Personal fitness coaches</th>
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<td>As sick or dying, in need for medical treatment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Role of the client</strong></td>
<td>As passive receiver of change</td>
<td>As active changer of self, needing self-discipline</td>
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**TABLE 1:** Two different roles of the consultant in the consultant-client relationship.

**Doctors and surgeons**
Using the metaphor of the consultant as being a doctor and surgeon triggers a number of interesting associations about the potential relationship between consultant and client and about the consulting process. Describing the role of the consultant in these terms has, for example, the consequence of giving the client the role of a patient. Since the help of the consultant/doctor is needed the client/patient must be sick or, in worst cases, near death and hence in need of medical treatment. The role of the consultant is to be the expert and to treat the patient through being an active agent of change on the client organization. The consultant is also responsible for the success or failure of the treatment. The role of the client is to passively be treated and the change is done from the outside as the consultant/doctor examines the bodily functions of the client/patient. If the illness is considered severe enough by the consultant/doctor there will be a need to transplant some organs or to transfuse blood. Translated to an organizational setting connotation here goes to replacing resources such as personnel or hardware. In the situation of the surgical procedure the consultant/surgeon has an overview of the entire client/patient and the client/patient may be monitored through external devices such as respirators. The consultant/surgeon is the one in control. The treatment is done through cutting up the body, removing some organs and replacing them with new alien ones. Here there might be a risk of rejection of the organs, i.e. rejection of the change inside the organization. If a blood transfusion is done there might be a risk for contaminated blood, i.e. changes that bring new illnesses into the organization. According to this view of the consultant-client relationship if the treatment is the right, the organs are not rejected and the blood not contaminated, after the treatment is done the patient should be cured. We could here also associate to eternal sicknesses and organizational death which proposes that in some cases the organization can not be improved or saved. Seeing the consultant-client relationship as that between a doctor and his patient is not new however (cf. Czarniawska-Joerges, 1988). Also scientists in business administration have seen themselves as doctors trying to find cures for the sick organizations in the world.

**Personal fitness coach**

Describing the role of the consultants in terms of being a personal fitness coach bring some other associations about the potential relationship between consultant and client and
about the consulting process than those above. Within this view the client organization is seen as potentially unfit, fat or sloppy, something seen as irrational and ineffective. The problem is not that of curable sickness, but rather is there a constant need to keep the organizational body in good shape. In doing this the organization need to have self-discipline and control in order to loose weight, i.e. become a lean and slim organization and by keep from gaining extra weight\(^6\). The role of the consultant/coach is, thus, to suggest which exercises the client organization should do and to supervise the efforts. The responsibility here lies on the client to self manage the changes why it also is the client that is responsible for the success or failure of the process. But since it is the consultant/coach who judges the need for change and whether ultimate fitness is reached, the client organization may not be in control of the decision of what need to be changed or when the change is done. Following the logic of the metaphor we could also speculate in institutionalized norms in society which define what a fit and healthy organization should look like, regardless of the uniqueness of the individual organization. Seeing the consultant as a personal fitness coach could be seen as in line with a general trend in society to view the human body more and more as something which should be managed and sculptured into a specific form (cf. Bordo, 1993). This trend can be observed in a number of reason television shows such as “Extreme Makeovers” where the participants undergoes plastic surgery and engages in extensive exercise and “Dr. Phil’s UltimateWeightLossChallenge” where the participants get meticulously controlled eating and exercise schedules. If this trend is taken seriously also in the consultant-client relationship we should be expecting to see something equivalent to cosmetic surgeries on organizations. In this case, however, the consultant’s role as doctor and fitness coach unite. We should also watch out for the risk of anorexia and bulimia among organizations where the efforts to stay fit and lean could become an obsession beyond the initial purpose of health.

The role of the consultant as doctors and fitness coaches in the relation with the client in both cases gives the consultants a power advantage. The combined tasks of making the diagnosis, suggesting measurements and delivering the cure gives them control over the

\(^6\) There is of course also a corporate strategy that advocates lean organizations (Womack & Jones, 1996). The concept “lean” in lean organizations has been describe in terms of “a lot of muscles but no ‘unnecessary’ fat (Karlsson & Åhlström, 1999).
entire process. Even if it is emphasized in the text that the client always will stays in control of the process the expert knowledge of the consultants always seems to give them the advantage of having more knowledge, both in general terms and as the examiner of the client organization. The consultants also have the advantage of defining the knowledge, both in terms of problems and appropriate solutions (cf. Bloomfield & Best, 1992). In the role of offering surveillance of the client organization consultants can be expected to have a big part in the formation of what is as normal and abnormal organizational functioning. In their effort of disciplining the client through diagnosing and suggesting cures the consultants’ construction of what is problematic and what is a reasonable cure is transferred to the client. Below I will discuss how the discipline of a docile client and the two different consultant-client relationships make consulting services indispensable.

Consulting Services Made Indispensable
Since the prospectus analyzed in this paper is produced by consultants as a potential aid in image creation and sales we can fairly safe assume that the construction of the client organization and of the consulting process is formulated in order to make the consulting service appear as indispensable as possible. In this section I will discuss the effects the construction of organizations through the health metaphor has on the perception of the consulting service.

Previously in this paper we have seen that the organization constructed in the prospectus through the health metaphor is a disciplined and docile organization which is in need of being made visible through examination and controlled through self-management and surveillance. A healthy organization is further described as having a general mindset to constantly improve its organization and seek perfection. Since striving to be healthy is seen as normal and the failure to do so abnormal and pathological, choosing not to subdue under these norms is not an alternative for organizations. This construction creates an entrance for the consultants into the client organization as the client need help both to be examined by an objective outsider and to have an outsider judge and assess the improvement process. As the need for improvement is constant and
inevitable there will also be a constant need for the help of the consultant, i.e. the consulting service is made indispensable for a healthy organization.

In a study of the construction of the viability and desirability of consulting services on global management consulting websites Bäcklund & Werr (2004) found that the consultants attempt to establish themselves as “obligatory passage points” by emphasizing the universalism and global nature of their knowledge and, hence, services. Through constructing the responsibility of management and through establishing management as a knowledge-based expert activity the manager is defined as a legitimate help taker who legitimately can acquire help from experts such as consultants who are at the forefront of knowledge development (ibid). Disciplining the client into always in need of improvement mean that consultants are not only seen as someone managers should pass through but also as eternal companions in the everlasting quest for perfection.

As we have seen in the discussion of the two different roles of consultants in the consultant-client relationship the privileged role of the consultant is further strengthen by the fact that they are made an expert both of management in general and of the client organization. In the consulting process this expert role of the consultant can be framed either as being that of an active agent of changing the client organization or through being the supervisor of change. In both cases the consultants can define both what the problem is, what a suitable solution is and how this best can be implemented in the organization. Given the two different roles, the consultants can choose to portrait themselves in terms of whether or not they also have the responsibility of the results of the change (whether they are doctors of coaches).

As the discussion above show the construction of the disciplined and docile client engaged in the consulting process may be seen as an image created by the consultants in order to legitimate its value for the client. The impression management of consultants has previously been discussed by a number of researchers. Clark & Salaman (1998) argue for a view of management consultants as “systems of persuasion”, crating compelling images which persuade clients of their quality and worth (see also Alvesson, 1993). In this persuasion impression management is a core feature. An essential condition for consultants’ impression management is that consulting services are seen as intangible and therefore difficult to evaluate the quality of, both priori and ex ante delivery (Clark &
Salaman, 1996). This gives consultants the opportunity to create and project a particular image of the service that benefits them the most. One prerequisite for clients to perceive consultants as valuable is argued to be that the consultants succeed in persuading clients that the identified problems are solvable and that the consultant are rendered the natural solver of these problems (Bloomfield & Best, 1992; Werr & Styhre, 2002-3).

The image of the consulting process created in the prospectus is one in which the client, with the help of the consultant, can take control of their problems. Through the disciplining practices of constructing the client organization as a bounded entity consisting of internal parts a base has been laid for analysis of the organization. The health metaphor further emphasizes the possibility to “diagnose” and “assess” the client organization together with the ability of the consultant to undertake this diagnosis in the role of doctor. The solutions to the problems are also made possible through the reference to cures such as “surgeries”, “transplants” and “transfusions”. The risk however always remain that the operation fails or that the disease is incurable, even though this is not articulated in the prospectus.

Another prerequisite for clients to perceive consultants as valuable is to construct a favorable image of the consultant service buyer, i.e. the identity of the manager, as a proactive, competent and strong leader (Sturdy, 1997; Werr & Styhre, 2002-3). In the prospectus the separation of mind and body of the organization lay emphasis on the agency of the manages as representatives of the subjectivity of the organization. This implies that the managers are seen as at least theoretically able to think rationally and take control over the rest of the organization, i.e. the body. While maybe facing the fear of finding out that their subjective agency as representatives of the organization is a myth managers in the managers of the client organization may be comforted by the image given in the prospectus of the manager as proactive shapers of the organization (cf. Salaman, 2002).

CONCLUSIONS

Consultants are often given an important role in the distributing of management ideas to the industry. Management ideas are important since how a well working organization is understood have consequences for the life in organizations. One way of altering the
understanding of organizations is through the use of metaphors. In this paper I have investigated the use of a health metaphor in a consultancy prospectus where the idea of healthy organizations was used to illustrate well functioning organizations. This investigation is based on a constructionist perspective and the assumption that the understanding constructed in the prospectus may be part of a more general discourse around organizations and the consulting process which sets the boundaries within which the consultant-client relationship unfolds. Specifically the purpose of the paper was to investigate what kind of organizations the use of the health metaphor constructs and further what kind of consultant-client relationship this construction makes possible. Related to this I have also reflected on how the healthy organization construction effects the perception of the consulting service.

My argument in this paper has been that the construction of the client organization as in need for cure and medical treatment or for bodily tuning results in a situation where the client is disciplined, both by the consultant and by self-controlling practices, into becoming a certain type of organization which is considered to be well functioning, i.e. a healthy organization. Organizations are further constructed as docile entities, which means that they should exist in a state where they are constantly subdued, used, transformed and improves. To be made manageable the organization also need to be made visible and known, something the consultants in their roles of diagnosing and assessing the client organization can assist with. In this process the consultants can be seen as given the role of offering a constant surveillance of the organization forcing it to control itself according to the effectiveness and efficiency norms of a healthy organization.

Investigating the nuances of the use of the health metaphor I identified the discourse on two different consultant-client relationships in the consultancy prospectus. One discourse focused around seeing the consultant as a doctor and surgeon and the other around seeing the consultant as a personal fitness coach. First, through seeing the consultant as a doctor and surgeon the view of the client organization was consequently that of a sick or dying body, in need for medical treatment. The role of the client was hence to be a passive receiver of change while the role of the consultant was to be an active agent of change in the client organization. This resulted in a consultant-client
relationship where the consultants had the main responsibility for success and failure. Risks involved in this discourse include rejection of organs and contamination of blood. Second, through seeing the consultant as a personal fitness coach the view of the client organization was that of an unfit, fat or sloppy body in need for work-out and tuning. The role of the client was hence to be an active changer of self in need for self-discipline, while the role of the consultant was to be the supervisor of change. This resulted in a consultant-client relationship where the client has the main responsibility for success and failure. Risks involved in this discourse include anorexia and bulimia where the client gets obsessed with change beyond the initial objectives. In both discourses the consultants have a power advantage through their role of experts as they thus can define both the client’s problems and the appropriate solutions to these problems.

The image created by the consultants in the prospectus is in this paper further seen as a part of the consultants’ impression management, i.e. efforts of legitimating the value of consulting services for the client. The construction of the client organization and the consultant-client relationship through the health metaphor constructs the consultancy service as indispensable for organizations. Constructing the organization as a disciplined and docile organization in need of constant surveillance creates an entrance for the consultant into the client organization. As the healthy organization is defined as an organization constantly seeking further improvement the need of the consultants help in examination and judgment of the organization is constant. Consultants can thus be seen as eternal companions in the everlasting quest for perfection. Consulting services are further made meaningful for consumption as the construction of an organization with external boundaries, with internal distinguished parts and with a subjective agency at the top, makes problems solvable and organizations manageable.

In this paper the investigated prospectus has been treated as a partly separate text encompassing its own understanding of organizations. At the same time the standpoint has been that a metaphor, such as the health metaphor, may shape the worldview of both client and consultants if it is accepted as a “true” ideology. This suggest that if the use of the health metaphor is extensive enough it will effect the general view of organizations and how they should be controlled and managed. The construction of organizations through the health metaphor is however probably not very different from the prevailing
assumptions in organization theory in general (considering the emphasis on control and efficiency). Still it would be interesting to further investigate how the construction in a prospectus like the one analyzed is interlinked to organizational and consultancy practices.

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