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METAPHORIC IMAGES OF THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT CONCEPT: RESEARCH ON UPPER- AND MIDDLE-LEVEL MANAGERS

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explain how organizational actors create their own reality with their subjective perceptions and interpretations of organizational phenomena. In this context, strategic management, which is fed from many different disciplines, is examined in terms of what it means for its practitioners. In other words, it is questioned how the concept of strategic management is defined in the eyes of organizational actors.

Method: A qualitative research method was used to achieve the purpose determined in the study, as well as metaphor analysis, which is one of the qualitative research designs evaluated within the scope of discourse analysis. The data obtained from a total of 40 participants were subjected to content analysis and descriptive analysis.

Result: As a result of the obtained data set analysis, it was determined that the participants produced impressive metaphors while defining the concept of strategic management. In addition, it was noted that the participants defined the concept of strategic management with sometimes similar and sometimes almost the same metaphors.

Conclusion: According to the analysis results, the dominant images among the managers match the definition of the concept of strategic management. In addition, it has been concluded that the shared reality among organizational actors is regular, clear and understandable, and that the dominant images in the shared reality are strong. Furthermore, 1) this article reveals how the concept of strategic management defined by academics is perceived by practitioners, 2) it was observed that the participants exhibited consensus rather than conflict in their evaluations of the concept of strategic management, and 3) the different metaphors used are considered as proof that the strategic management field has a lively, active and broad intellectual content.

Keywords: Strategic management, strategic management perception, perception, metaphor, metaphor analysis

1. Introduction

The defining efforts exhibited at the organizational context level are basically based on the acceptance of differences. Despite the different meanings, the organization itself turns into a set of meanings through symbols and is reconstructed with some discourse patterns (Schultz, 1995). In fact, Wittgenstein (1968), who denied that organizations are concrete entities, stated that all organizational activities are much more than thoughts, words and actions, and organizational facts are nothing but symbols. As a result of the effort to understand organizations through cultural and symbolic approaches, anthropological expressions including values, ceremonies, beliefs, legends, myths and symbols and linguistic expressions including metaphors have started to take place in the relevant literature (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Smircich, 1983).

Based on the assumption that organizations are fixed and rigid, researches have been replaced by studies in which organizations are evaluated as dynamic and changing structures over time (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). This was the best research method at that time and its discourse has been replaced by methodological diversity. In fact, the ideas have been strengthened that using the same methods will narrow their perspectives and that using new, diverse and different methods will broaden their perspectives. With the linguistic expansion of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and the methodological contribution of Schmitt (2005), the concept of metaphor has inspired many studies (e.g. Morgan, 1986; Sackmann, 1989; Inns, 2002; Kendall & Kendall, 1993; Erdem & Satir, 2003; Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). The use of metaphors in studies on understanding such organizations and management has contributed to the diversification of organization and management discussions. At this point, the following questions about strategic management come to mind: What does strategic management, nourished by so many different disciplines, mean for its practitioners? In other words, how is the concept of strategic management defined in the eyes of the actors operating in the organization? On the other hand, how do practitioners create their own reality with their subjective perceptions and interpretations of organizational phenomena?

Based on the inspiration created by the information presented above, the purpose of this study is to

explain how organizational actors create their own reality with their subjective perceptions and interpretations of organizational phenomena. Therefore, what the concept of strategic management defined by academics means for practitioners will be examined through metaphors. For this purpose, data were collected through interviews with top and middle managers working in the Turkey representative office of an international company through a semi-structured interview. The data obtained from a total of 40 participants were subjected to content analysis and descriptive analysis. The emerging themes were classified and interpreted in line with the purpose of the research.

The fact that such a study has not been done before in the field of strategic management reveals the originality of the research in question, but it is expected that this article will make two main contributions to the literature: 1) to reveal how the concept of strategic management defined by academics is perceived by practitioners, and 2) to reveal how organizational actors create their own reality with their subjective perceptions and interpretations of organizational phenomena.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Efforts to define the strategic management area

When the intellectual roots in the field of strategic management are examined, it is seen that the first studies in the context of the business world were made in the 1960s. For example, Chandler (1962) focused on how the General Motors, DuPont, Standard Oil of New Jersey, and Sears companies grew, and with this study, he created the traditional strategic management understanding. Andrews (1965) made suggestions on how to construct good strategies based on the opportunities and the threats arising from the external environment and the strengths and the weaknesses of the companies by means of the still valid SWOT analysis. In his study, which is the main source of strategic planning, Ansoff (1965) made necessary suggestions for making strategic planning in various fields of an enterprise.

In the following years, for example, the relationship between growth and diversification strategies (Wrigley, 1970), the effects of diversification and organizational structures on performance (Rumelt et al., 1974), market conditions, the relationship between strategy and performance (Schoeff, 1972)

and issues such as relationship (Hatten et al., 1978) have been included in the studies in the field of strategic management.

When these studies are evaluated together, it will be seen that strategic management issues are approached as normative. However, in 1979, when Schendel and Hofer redefined the field of strategic management through the concept of business policy, and in 1980, under the editorship of Schendel, the Strategic Management Journal (SMJ) was launched, and there has been a strong shift towards the tradition of science (Rumelt et al., 1994).

With this shift, the definition of the concept of strategic management has also diversified. For example, Schendel and Hofer (1979) defined strategic management as the process of developing and using strategy to guide the growth, renewal and operations of the organization. According to Jemison (1981), strategic management is a process that organizations develop to coordinate the opportunities and constraints in their environment. Teece (1990) defined strategic management as the formulation, implementation and evaluation of a firm's managerial activities.

When these definitions are examined, it is seen that there are various definitions that express uncertainty about what the strategic management area is about and how it differs from the related areas, even though they do not fall apart from each other (Nag et al., 2007). The main reason for this diversity is that the field of strategic management intersects with disciplines such as sociology, psychology, economics, marketing, and finance (Hambrick, 2004; Bowman et al., 2002), and the academics working in the field of strategic management are trained in these disciplinary fields.

Although a general definition can be made based on the definitions specified, the meanings attributed to the concept of strategic management may differ. One of the most striking studies in this sense is a study conducted by Nag et al. in 2007. In this study, the authors aimed to determine a unique and distinctive definition of the field. To achieve this goal, they carried out their work in two mutually supporting phases. In the first stage, a large group of strategic management scientists was asked to evaluate the abstracts of 447 articles published in management journals. As a result of this evaluation, they determined that the evaluators achieved a high level of consensus. In the second stage, they

applied a questionnaire to 57 academics to confirm the agreed definition. As a result of these efforts, researchers proved the existence of a strong common bond in the definition of the strategic management field. In addition, they found that the field of strategic management is interested in a constantly changing set of theoretical and practical research. The authors stated that this study contributes to framing the discussion about what scientists working in the field of strategic management want the field to be and what the field will be like. In addition, the authors stated that the common definition acts as a filter, and scientific studies that do not comply with this definition will remain outside the field of strategic management and attract related studies like a magnet.

2.2 *Metaphor analysis as a way of defining the concept of strategic management*

These and similar efforts, exhibited at the organizational context level, are mainly based on the acceptance of differences. As such, approaching an organization only as adaptive mechanisms and purposeful means means mechanizing it, and this effort entails the danger of reductionism (Smircich, 1983). As Giddens (2005) emphasizes, the people who make up the organization are an integral part of these contexts beyond their interaction with social contexts. Therefore, human constructs a social reality with the spiral of interaction and relationships (Smircich, 1983). Reality is unique to the individual (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), resulting in individuals attributing different meanings to a similar phenomenon or situation (Schultz, 1995). Despite the different meanings, the organization itself turns into a set of meanings through symbols and is reconstructed with some discourse patterns. According to Foucault, discourse is a structure that shapes the whole world and actors and it consists of thoughts, beliefs, judgments, values, symbols, words, letters, institutions, norms, traditions and language, and contains a hierarchical structure and power relationship (Baş & Akturan, 2017). In fact, Wittgenstein (1968), who denied that organizations are concrete entities, stated that all organizational activities are much more than thoughts, words and actions, and organizational facts are nothing but symbols.

As a result of the effort to understand organizations through cultural and symbolic approaches, anthropological expressions including values, ceremonies,

beliefs, legends, myths and symbols and linguistic expressions including metaphors have started to take place in the relevant literature (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Smircich, 1983). By using these concepts, organizations can be analyzed as animated cultural values that bind their members.

When the related literature is examined, the concept of metaphor has started to take place in interdisciplinary studies with the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Criticizing Lakoff and Johnson (1980) for not proposing a systematic method, Schmitt (2005) discussed metaphor analysis as a qualitative research method and contributed to the development of the concept by proposing a procedure. The linguistic expansion of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the methodological contribution of Schmitt (2005), and the concept of metaphor have inspired many studies.

What distinguishes metaphors from other symbols in interpretative and symbolic analyses of organizations is that individuals can map the ways of transforming organizational life into a subjective reality by passing through the stages of perception and interpretation (Erdem, 2010). Metaphor is defined as an expression with its real meaning or a form of language in which it is adapted to a different context in order to define a concept (Sackmann, 1989). With the help of metaphors, abstract concepts can be relatively easily reconstructed to understand concrete concepts we are familiar with (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In addition, abstract concepts with obscurity can be transformed into known features (Lakoff & Johnson, 1982). While metaphors describe a whole situation, they turn words into a mental image. By means of this imagination, a whole situation is defined by a single image. Thus, metaphors turn into powerful communication tools (Sackmann, 1989).

Morgan (1986) states that metaphors are used for two purposes: descriptive and prescriptive. When used for descriptive purposes, a state is defined as it exists. The use of metaphors as a qualitative data collection method falls under this category (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). For example, a study conducted by Morgan (1986), which aims to reinterpret organizational theories through metaphors and triggers interest in metaphors, uses metaphors to define organizations as machines, as an organism, as culture, as political systems, as brains, and as psychological prisons.

When used to transform a process, metaphors are considered to be a means of change. When the related literature is examined, it can be seen that many studies have been conducted for this purpose. For ex-

ample, Sackmann (1989) examined how metaphors were used by managers of a private firm to explain their new strategies to employees. The results of this research show that metaphors such as fertilization, vaccination, and cutting are used effectively in transforming a new strategic decision into practice.

When the relevant literature is examined, it can be seen that metaphors are frequently used in studies on understanding organizations and management, and these studies contribute to the diversification of organization and management discussions. Inns (2002) examined the extent to which metaphors are used in organizational literature and revealed that metaphors are used in areas that direct perception and interpretation (hegemonic, instructional and explanatory tools) in understanding organizations (questioning established assumptions, qualitative research, deconstruction, creative thinking tools). In their study, Kendall and Kendall (1993) tried to explain managerial roles through metaphors, and it was determined that managerial roles were defined by metaphors such as captain, head of the family, commander, president, designer, guard, caregiver, president, and coach. Erdem and Satır (2003) examined the perceptions of organization members towards the cultural values of the organization through metaphors and evaluated the cultural values of the organization according to the criteria of strong, weak and positive. Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn (2001) examined how the group work established in organizations is defined by the members of the organization, and stated that the organization members use the metaphors of social community, partnership, sports, family, and army to describe group work.

Based on the assumption that organizations are fixed and rigid, research has been replaced by studies in which organizations are evaluated as dynamic and changing structures over time (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). This is the best research method now! Their discourse has been replaced by methodological diversity. In fact, the ideas that using the same methods will narrow their perspectives and that using new, diverse and different methods will broaden their perspectives have been strengthened.

Although metaphor analysis has a disadvantage in terms of obscuring the differences hidden in details (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006), it provides a versatile view of organization and management research, it gives flexibility (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Schmitt, 2005), and the opportunity for researchers to evaluate the organizational system from a holistic perspective (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006).

3. *Metaphor hunt in the context of a special organization*

The problems whose answers are sought within the scope of the study are those that can be answered in the light of the data obtained from the world. Efforts in this direction require that the research in question be built on an empirical basis of discus-

sion and that a descriptive and realistic picture of the subject is presented.

Qualitative research, which is a subjective research method, is a research method that offers more in-depth research on all dimensions of identified problematic issues and provides strong clues to understand why, how and which social events and phenomena are experienced (Silverman, 2005; Dey, 1993).

Table 1 An overview of the research method

Research process	
Research pattern	Discourse analysis
Analysis unit of the study	Managers at upper and middle level
Research universe	A total of 43 persons consisting of upper- and middle-level managers of an international company
Research sample	A total of 40 persons consisting of top and middle-level managers of the international firm
Data collection method	Interview
Data collection tool	Semi-structured interview
Data analysis	Content analysis and descriptive analysis based metaphor analysis

Source: Developed by the researcher

As summarized in Table 1, it is deemed appropriate to use the *discourse analysis* pattern as the research design in this study, which deals with the subject or event examined in depth and evaluates the facts about the individual within its own context and in a holistic manner. In this study, managers were asked to define the concept of strategic management through *metaphors* in order to learn their perceptions, definitions, thoughts, evaluations, knowledge, and opinions about the concept of strategic management.

The top management team plays a more active role in making and implementing strategic decisions compared to other organizational members. These actors are a group that strives to gain a corporate identity and build a corporate reality by giving strategic management the importance it deserves. Therefore, in this study, the parameters of applicability, accessibility, suitability and voluntariness (Creswell, 2007) were taken into account. In this direction, interviews were held with the top and middle-level managers of an international company in Turkey. Within this framework, the selection was made based on criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods. According to Maxwell (1996), purposive sampling makes it possible to collect in-depth information about the person, event

or situation that is the subject of the research, and for a specific purpose. Thus, it is possible to comprehensively examine situations that are thought to have rich information, and to obtain deep explanations for facts or events (Patton, 1987). Criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, is based on studying all cases that meet a set of pre-determined criteria. At this point, the mentioned criterion or criteria can be determined by the researcher (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In the related study, the sample criterion was determined by the researcher, and the top and middle-level managers working in the Turkey representative office of an international company were taken as the criterion.

The company that hosted the research is a corporate company established in the 1930s, the world leader in its sector, serving in 56 countries with more than 370,000 employees. The research was conducted in the companies represented in Turkey's 11 regional offices and 70 branch offices with 20,000 employees.

In the firm, which has a horizontal organizational structure, the country president, country vice presidents, general managers, deputy general managers and regional managers constitute the upper-level management team, department directorates constitute the middle-level management team, and

department vice managers and branch managers constitute the lower-level management team. Of course, different groups of actors in an organization reflect different realities. Due to the operational structure of the organization that hosted the study, the lower-level management team was not active in strategic decision making, but it was excluded from this study because it was only responsible for operations. Since this study focuses on the strategic management perceptions of top and middle-level

managers, this group formed *the data sources (analysis unit) of the study*.

Table 2 gives the universe and sample of this study. The middle-level managers constituted the *universe of this study* (43 actors in total). Since 2 of 43 actors that make up the universe of the study could not answer the question and 1 actor could not participate in the interview due to health problems, they were excluded from the study, and 40 actors who were interviewed constituted the *sample of the study*.

Table 2 Participant information

Management level	Task	Number
Upper tier	Country president	1
	Country vice president	2
	Coordinator	7
	General manager	5
	Regional director	11
	Deputy regional manager	1
	Total	27
Lower tier	Department manager	16
	Total	16
GENERAL TOTAL		43

Source: Developed by the researcher

The role of the researcher in metaphor analysis is of great importance (Koro-Ljungberg, 2001). The researcher can act with an identity that detects, evaluates and interprets images in the hunt for metaphors, as well as with an identity that identifies metaphors and presents them as an option to the participant, and in this way identifies, evaluates and interprets images. The role assigned by the researcher directly affects the way of obtaining data. In this study, the researcher hunted for metaphors and acted with an identity that identifies, evaluates and interprets images, and asked the participants to produce the metaphors. Therefore, in the research in question, interviews were conducted in the form of *semi-structured interviews*. The questions presented below guided the data collection process:

1. What would you compare the concept of strategic management to if I wanted you to compare the concept to an object, a shape, an animal, a plant, a living thing, a fairy-tale hero or a historical figure?
2. Why or why?

3. Can I get information referring to your gender, age, educational status, organizational seniority and positional seniority?

In this study, the interviews were conducted on a webinar (online) platform that allows face-to-face interaction through the *internet channel*. Thus, the features of the internet such as extending the field of research by removing the geographical boundaries, providing time and space flexibility to researchers, making communication continuous, and reducing data loss were used (Markham, 2004).

In the process of data collection, the ethics of research and qualitative research were followed and the *ethical contingency stance* (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) defined as minimizing the personalization threat arising from the researcher experiences was adopted.

Before planning of the interviews, the head of the company was informed about the content and progress of the study and permission was sought. In addition, before each interview, participants were informed about the study, it was stated that their participation in the study would be voluntary, that their names would not be used in the study, and

that they would be assigned a pseudonym. Thus, the participants were assured of confidentiality and security in the research. In addition, in order to eliminate the social barriers between the researcher and the participant before each interview, the interview started with unstructured conversation, and efforts were made to establish trust between the researcher and the participant (King, 1994).

Content analysis and **descriptive analysis** were performed at the point of data analysis of the relevant study, and the findings obtained within the framework of the emerging themes were classified and explained in line with the research purpose. It was deemed appropriate to use the criteria of credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity) and consistency (internal reliability) and verifiability (external reliability) in terms of meeting the eligibility criteria of the study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018).

4. Discussion

During the data collection phase of the research, all of the interviews were recorded with interview notes, and the raw data text was created by writing the records in textual integrity that can be analyzed (Creswell, 2016). In this study, the themes were obtained as a result of the integration of the data collected from the field, not with a thematic frame given to the field. First of all, *would you compare the concept of strategic management of the 40 participants who form the sample of the study to an object, a shape, an animal, a plant, a creature, a fairy-tale hero or a historical figure?* The metaphors used were determined by evaluating their answers to the question. Later, these metaphors were grouped and each group was named a related group. Thus, the main themes and sub-themes table related to the concept of strategic management was created (Table 3).

Table 3 Main theme and sub-themes regarding the concept of strategic management

Main theme	Sub-theme	Main theme	Sub-theme	
Historical figure	Atatürk	Plant	Tree	
	War hero		Seed	
Hero of fairy tales, TV series, cartoons and mythology	White Rabbit	Vehicle	Machine	
	Mythological hero		Car engine	
	MacGyver		Tanker	
	Jerry		Train	
Animal	Lion		Object	Robot
	Tiger			Sun
	Leopard	Scales		
	Chameleon	Spirit level		
	Octopus	Sports and game	Go game	
	Owl		Chess	
	Elephant		Trekking	
	Cuckoo bird	Other	Mother/father	
Raccoon	Life			
			Chemist	

Source: Developed by the researcher

As presented in Table 3, 40 participants used the concept of strategic management as Atatürk, war hero, White Rabbit, mythological hero, MacGyver, Jerry, lion, tiger, leopard, chameleon, octopus, owl, elephant, cuckoo, raccoon, tree, seed, machine, car engine, tanker, train, robot, sun, scales, spirit level, Go game, chess, trekking, mother/father, life and chemist metaphors to present their own reality. As a result of grouping the related metaphors, metaphor groups were formed under the names of Historical figure, Fairy tale, TV series, Cartoon and

mythological hero, Animal, Plant, Vehicle, Object, Sports and Game, and Other.

At this point, the following question arises: *What do the participants express with these metaphors in relation to the institutional expressions accepted by the scientific community while defining the concept of strategic management?* As a result of the stated curiosity, *why or why?* The question was asked, the answers given were evaluated, and a summary description text table consisting of the participant own expressions was created and presented (Table 4).

Table 4 Summary descriptive statements on the concept of strategic management

Main theme	Sub-theme	Descriptive expressions
Historical figure	Atatürk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atatürk's way of administration, his vision of the future, having a problem, the way they go together is strategic management... He is a strategist (P1). • ... I can say that Atatürk analyzed very well, managed every stage with thought and achieved the goal. He first decided what he wanted to do, then thought with whom and how he would do it. ... Made plans according to sensitivity of the people. Progressed accordingly (P32).
	War hero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... A war hero has a strategy so that his army is not defeated. For example, he sets up a series of strategic games such as archers waiting behind horsemen facing front and poking the enemy. And it's based on defeating, conquering, and gaining victories. In our current world... we all fight like war heroes, like war heroes. ...The company executives are the same, you fight with the internal customer, you try to please them, and you try to please the external customer. By the way, you also have your own personal family. This is all I think war is, you're trying to survive. Meanwhile, you may lose your family, you may lose your job, you may lose your customer, and your friendships may go bad. Keeping all of these in the balance is also a strategy (P10).
Hero of fairy tales, TV series, cartoons and mythology	White Rabbit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The White Rabbit knows what he wants to do, where he wants to go. He knows for what purpose and in what ways this can be done. He drags those with him like that. ... You need to know where to go. ... You have to make a plan accordingly. You need to motivate your team in line with that plan. ... You have to lock people to specific goals... (P8).
	Mythological hero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think mythological heroes will have a greater impact on people. When we talk about strategic management, we talk about management of managerial staff that makes an impact (P7).
	MacGyver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He managed to get out of every difficult situation he had. He would plan the next step of everything and overcome the events that happened to him with the means he had at his disposal. He was very familiar with the details. He could see it all and see the little details that might come in handy. He could find solutions we wouldn't have thought of in the complex situation he faced, and he could put them together. He could make an explosive out of an agricultural tool. He could do something life-saving from a tape that would never work for you. He would see the big picture and master the small details. He always thought about what awaited him after one step, he always prepared accordingly. None of us lives in an ideal world, after all. He didn't either. How do we get maximum efficiency from what we have? He has always been a source of inspiration in that regard (P14).
	Jerry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jerry's struggle with Tom, his ability to come out using his mind in one way or another, to implement those instant decisions at once, behave wisely, thinking of his own characteristics (small, fast, smart, agile) ... how big the person is in front of him. He acts by considering his own personal and physical characteristics rather than being or having other characteristics. It is the same in the business world. ... if you play the game well, if you set it up correctly, strategically, it doesn't matter how big your company is (P35).
Animal	Lion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their hunting strategies for their survival, their use of wind direction, their clear goals, taking actions according to their own needs... This is management (P2). • The lion is the king of the forests, it sits calmly, is dignified, and directs animals with its eyes and eyebrows. It is part of the game, it moves but sits down, just looks around. For some reason I thought of the leader in strategic management. Everything is planned and he checks that things are not going right within that organization (P27).
	Tiger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It first makes a plan and then moves towards its goal. The strategy requires very strict planning first. It requires focus on the goal. ... Planning is done while establishing this strategy. A tiger does this, too (P15).
	Leopard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... Even when approaching its prey, it takes place in a planned way. The concept of hunting starts with feelings. There is sense perception. Animals are mischievous by smell. It calculates the course of the wind. Most animals calculate this when they plan. Actually, I would like to state that they use their sense organs while making strategic planning. Once it approaches its prey, it approaches quietly and moves very slowly. ... It does not progress because of mass, this time it may lose its target. When it reaches a certain point patiently, it becomes aggressive ... (P24).

Animal	Chameleon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... you will get if you try to make decisions, you show that symptoms are so variable that you should take into account or make decisions by making use of just a fixed idea with company principles or say these are my own principles, these are not always very accurate decisions ... Therefore, you may need to evaluate the situation from different angles and decide accordingly (P12).
	Octopus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It acts both synchronously and independently. Strategic management requires you to be different from others in your industry, for example. That's why I see the living octopus identical to strategic management. It can share the same environment with many different stakeholders in the same ecosystem. Both she ecosystem compatibility with both her differences show (P23).
	Owl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owl is a symbol of wisdom. It thinks a lot, is cool and tells me about strategic management because it can turn its head 360 degrees. Versatile to look, to look at the top ... Owl symbolizes wisdom and knowledge. ... I think the basic knowledge is key to strategic management. I think composure is very important in strategic management. ... You have to think calmly and do long-term planning in order to be able to act strategically. Your company must have corporate memory. Owls also have a very strong memory. They can also see very far. Foresight is very important in strategic management. The more future data you can read, the more future strategic decisions you can make (P26).
	Elephant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are aspects that they change from summer to winter. ... Actually, they act on instinct, but they also plan. ... The same holds for companies, I have to make a profit in order to survive. They also plan this (P29).
	Cuckoo bird	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... The cuckoo nests in other birds' nests and lays its eggs. Those eggs are raised by birds outside of its species. I define this as a business model. The ability to manage different channels and genres. ... People in many different structures can be considered to have the ability to do business in line with their strategy (P33).
	Raccoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The raccoon generates different ways and ideas when trying to find food. It is intelligent, has the ability to learn fast, can immediately produce strategic alternatives and is productive. It makes planning very well in terms of reaching results. These should also be present in strategic management. ... You cannot move without planning (P37).
Plant	Tree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A creature with a solid root, branches and fruit. I think strategic management should also be based on solid foundations. ... Branches can be sub-departments of this administration, and fruit can be the results I have achieved. ... A solid root actually comprises decision-makers' own experiences as well as culture and experience of two companies. Without a robust foundation not only with the decision, the objectives of our policy are very nice but difficult to achieve. In the tree, more than one branch and many leaves come together to form the tree. Although none of them alone makes sense, when the total assets of the company or institution come together, they form a large organization (i.e., the tree) (P30).
	Seed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, we sow the seed. Then, we use the growing plant in the food field or other areas. This reminds me of planning. We need a start to plan. Whatever seed we sow, a plant related to it will come out... (P34).
Vehicle	Machine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a state-of-the-art machine with all wheels working perfectly at the press of a button. A malfunction of one part of the machine can actually cause damage to that part or the entire system. That is why each piece has to work in a coordinated manner at the same frequency. ... The machine goes on the road and if there is a glitch, you may need to stop on the road. For this, planning, a road map, maintenance, repair, repair teams, managers, etc., should be in control of the details. Thus, a giant machine, always oiled forward, can pass casually. Maintenance before operation and the working principles of the machine must be well-known and assimilated very well. The wheels are actually people who must have a very good grasp of their purpose. If there is a deviation there, the whole body can be damaged. ... Any damage to those wheels can affect the whole body. When it comes to a manager, he/she must be very focused, very conscious, know where he/she is going, understand what he/she is doing, and be able to convey the return of this to the parties ... (P5).
	Car engine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because a car engine is made up of almost thousands of parts. A malfunction in one of the parts causes problems in the whole engine, while an improvement in one of the parts can make the entire engine work very well. So it is with strategic management. While you can make a lot of difference by touching a particle, you can make a negative difference by making one place worse. ... The moves that I will do strategically, good or bad, can affect the whole machine (P16).

Vehicle	Tanker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The size of the structure makes me feel like a giant tanker. When passing a giant tanker through the straits, you need to know the current, the weight of the tanker, the wind, the underwater conditions, the external conditions, the engine power of your tanker, you need to think about that current, the wind and the land parts under water and perform a maneuver you need to perform. The captain says that the tanker will turn around, but you must know that that giant tanker will cause that reaction with that force and that current. In other words, it is such a thing aimed at moving, giving its direction and passing its dangerous load through the straits without hitting here and there. Here is this strategy in my eyes. When you make what moves in business life and how that structure reacts after a certain period of time and when walk in the direction you want (P21).
	Train	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... There are a lot of components in that organization like the train that need to act together. The main purpose is to bring that community to the same point. The mechanic gives a command, the wheels make it turn on the rail. Need to adapt (P39).
	Robot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The planning and framework of strategic management must be clear. In a robotic system, things to be done beforehand are programmed (P18).
Object	Sun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy is a bit about looking down, seeing the whole and planning for the future. ... When you look at the sun, it is an object that commands everything, looks from above, and influences the flow of our lives by causing natural events to occur. ... If we can use it correctly, we will benefit from the benefits of the sun. If we do not use it correctly, anything can happen to us and eliminate the ozone layer problem (P13).
	Scales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... You need to balance strategy to build something happy, successful, and sustainable. There are risks, SWOT, you have accepted, there are things that can happen to you, there are things that will not occur. It is necessary to balance them. ... In that management approach, without hurting anyone, without harming the climate, organizing the employee-employer relationship, considering the profitability of the company, scales are important in order to manage this balance. If you do not have a balance, if you do not have a strategy, you will not be able to go forward, you will not be able to build a future (P19).
	Spirit level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balances are very important. A spirit level balances both horizontally and vertically. Everything should be in the balance in management (P28).
Sport and game	Go game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you cannot establish the right strategy in the game, you may lose the game when you think things are going very well. The similarity of this game with strategic management only corresponds to thinking ahead, not today. Strategic management is not about saving the present. In that game, it is not the current move, but how far we can see, 5-10... that is, the next moves... Managing today is not a difficult thing, it is important to see the future (P4).
	Chess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy must be determined in order to be successful. In order to analyze ourselves well and win, we must use resources efficiently and make the right moves, as in chess (P38).
	Trekking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While doing this sport, you need to walk thinking about the next step. You have to plan. You cannot say: I set out. What time will you stop where? How many clothes will you be wearing? How will your walking shoes be shaped? How much food will you get? What food will you get? For example, you walk in the August heat, but after 5 hours you get into the snow. Conditions can change completely. If you do not plan now, if you are unprepared, you will die where there is snow, you will fall, you will starve, you will disappear (P11).
Other	Mother/father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... I perceive the strategy as the parenting of a child. ... What I understand from strategic management is that the company has a goal. There is a place it wants to come to. It has habits and spirit. You also give the children some habits to bring them together and direct them. Then you check whether this takes place (P2).
	Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... I would never say that the conditions are not perfect. We need to be flexible, we must change the way when it comes to location; if it is constantly good, you are going to win it, and since you should go back to the appropriate place, I'd say that you need to create your own strategy... (P20).
	Chemist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imagine a chemist who has millions of different materials in front of him, taking a piece from each of them and producing a product that belongs only to him, that will never be repeated, the same cannot be done. He manages with his executive background, materials, personnel and equipment. It produces a product... (P22).

Source: Developed by the researcher

When focusing on the descriptions of the relevant metaphors, while depicting the strategic management concept of the participants, management, foresight, goal, sustainability, effective resource use, coordination (togetherness, harmony), leadership, direction, control, planning, success, the power of the manager, motivation, fair communication, profitability, struggle, balance, change, seeing the whole, seeing details, generating solutions, determining action, knowing environmental conditions, uniqueness, difference, perception, patience, aggressiveness, calmness, wisdom, versatility, calmness, memory, experience, struggle, attention is drawn to the fact that they highlight concepts such as values, analysis, vigilance and tactics (Table 4).

The characteristics of the upper- and middle-level managers, who constitute the analysis unit of the study, were evaluated in terms of gender, age, education level, sectoral seniority, organizational seniority and positional seniority parameters. According to the evaluation of gender, it was determined that the analysis unit was mostly composed of men (36 people), and the number of female actors (4 people) was small. Based on the age criterion, it was determined that the analysis unit has an average age of approximately 48 years. It has been determined that the actors in question mostly have a bachelor's degree (30 people), the actors with a master's degree (7 people) are in the work team, and the actors with a high school diploma (3 people) are in the minority. Based on the results of the analysis of the sectoral, organizational and spatial seniority parameters, it was determined that the analysis unit consists of managers with an average of 24 years of sectoral seniority, an average of 11 years of organizational seniority and an average of 17 years of positional seniority.

5. Conclusion

The metaphors obtained as a result of the analysis of the data set obtained within the scope of the study and the descriptions of these metaphors reveal that the dominant images of the managers regarding the concept of strategic management match the concept of strategic management. However, as a result of the study, it can be seen that the participants who answered the questions independently of each other defined the concept of strategic management with sometimes similar and sometimes almost the same metaphors. For example, 6 of

the participants used the metaphor of Atatürk, and 4 of them used the lion metaphor, while 2 of them used the machine metaphor. In addition 12 and 5 participants used metaphors to form an animal and vehicle groups, respectively. This situation points out that the shared reality among organizational actors is regular, clear and understandable, and that dominant images are strong in shared reality. If the constructed reality were irregular or complex, the images would also be uncertain and weak accordingly (Şimşek, 1997).

These two findings reveal that the participants exhibited consensus rather than conflict in their evaluations of the concept of strategic management. This shows that there is a strong common bond between the members of the organization. This result also contributes to an explanation of the success of the strategic management field. This consensus is proof that strategic management has a unique and distinctive identity. The different metaphors used are proof that the strategic management field has a lively, active and broad intellectual content. As a result of the study, it was seen that there is a strong and implicit consensus about the essence of the strategic management field. This result supports the research of Nag et al. (2007).

Another contribution of this study is that it enables academics to see how the concept of strategic management is perceived in the eyes of practitioners. Academics can start a discussion on whether they are satisfied with the projection of the field in practice, whether the field needs to change or what the points are where the field can be improved.

With Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) linguistic expansion and Schmitt's (2005) methodological contribution, the concept of metaphor has inspired many studies in organization literature (Erdem & Satir, 2003; Inns, 2002; Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001; Kendall & Kendall, 1993; Sackmann, 1989; Morgan, 1986). What distinguishes metaphors from other symbols in interpretative and symbolic analyses of organizations is that individuals can map the ways of transforming organizational life into subjective reality by going through the stages of perception, meaning and interpretation (Erdem, 2010). This article also shows how organizational actors create their own realities with their subjective perceptions and interpretations of organizational facts. Although the reality achieved is not the same in different groups, it will create the possibility of confronting new realities. Therefore, it should not be

overlooked that organizational facts can be attributed different meanings within the specific context of each organization.

Undoubtedly, there are some limitations in this study as in other academic studies. The organizational context and the participants' own socio-cultural contexts were not analyzed in this study. Organizational context knowledge can be important to make sense of a metaphor (Akşehirli, 2005). In addition, individuals convey meanings by constructing them within their own socio-cultural contexts (Stenier & Mahn, 1996). Within the scope of the study, findings confirming this situation were found. For example, a participant whose focus was on topics such as motherhood and child care responded at that moment using a metaphor based on the situation he/she was in. It was observed that most of the participants used metaphors with the effect of their education, interests and past work experience. Although this was not the focus of the study, it became apparent as a side contribution. Therefore, this finding supports the claims of some

studies in the literature (Akşehirli, 2005; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Stenier & Mahn, 1996). With this study, it was felt that contextual differences could push the strengthening, weakening and/or differentiation of a metaphor. Evaluation of metaphors together with the context in which they are functional can be an important inspiration for future studies.

This study offers a number of opportunities for future research. First of all, considering that our cultural experiences affect our metaphorical orientations (Morgan, 1998), it will be interesting to make a comparison by conducting this study in different cultures. Secondly, this study can be carried out on organizations at different institutional levels, and awareness of strategic management in practice can be revealed. Thirdly, the methodology used in this study will be used in different fields and will contribute to the diversification of methodology in research. Therefore, this study will be an incentive for similar studies by shedding a new light on both the field of strategic management and other areas.

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