**Discussion 2: Organic Structural Elements**

Using metaphors to understand organizations or to create a new structure helps provide new meaning to various management concepts. Many authors have suggested useful metaphors in addition to Morgan. For example, Margaret Wheatley (1992) discusses how quantum physics, molecular biology, and chaos theory could help one better understand organizational performance and leadership. Swarm intelligence (Bonabeau & Myers, 2001) is another metaphor to help understand the complexities of organizations and to gain new insights into the changing nature of business environments.

When studying insects and their self-organizing behavior, individuals can learn to stretch their thinking in new ways. Morgan (1993) explains the “termite mound” in his earlier book, Imaginization. This week, you will explore the termite mound concept further and use it for understanding self-organized organizations.

**Case Study**

The most important time for effective structures are in times of turbulence. A consultant was working in a typical hierarchical company in the auto industry. She was hired to set up a team-based management structure. However, early on, the company received a letter from one of their suppliers that they had 30 days to remove the defects in their products. If the company lost this contract, it might not be able to survive. Jobs were on the line. Employees and leadership were concerned about their future. They had tried all types of quick fixes but nothing seemed to work. Turbulence was ongoing as management tried different possible solutions.

The president called in the consultant and asked for her help. The first thing the consultant did was to remove the structural roles and policies of the management hierarchy and build a team across all sections of the plant that reported back to the rest of the employees in their departments. The cross-section team met weekly to develop their mission, objectives, parameters, and agreements of how to work together on the problem of removing defects. The consultant also set up weekly phone meetings between the company and the supplier to report progress as well as a trip by the entire team to meet onsite with the quality engineers for reality checks, to demonstrate progress, and to issue alerts when the defects were beginning to decrease upon arrival at the customer's plant.

As the team set up their mission, objectives, data collection process, and analysis to pinpoint where the defects were coming from, employees who were union were working during their free time at home, staying after work, talking to one another and with management over lunch. Interactions and attitudes about work began to change. The team produced the results their customer was looking for. The culture in the supplier's union plant began to change from this project, as there was less management versus union mentality: Managers and union workers began to talk to one another as partners, they began to see their responsibilities as being a part of helping to solve problems.

In a debriefing with the president, the consultant asked him what was different this time when working on the problem that created success versus the past year where the employees and management could not solve the problem. The president thought for a minute and replied, “The walls were taken down, we began to talk with one another, we built deep relationships with one another and our customer.” The consultant asked, “If this structure works so well in times of stress, why don’t we use it as a permanent structure?” He shook his head and replied, “I do not know. We should.” The company began developing a team-based management structure.

**Preparation**

Do you know when to restructure? The discussion for this week provides you with the opportunity to gain some experience in thinking about turbulence and how it impacts the need for total change or some changes within an organization.

**Day 5: Initial Post**

**By Day 5, post**an analysis of a case of experienced turbulence in an organization of your choice with focus on the role of organizational structure and organic elements during this time of crisis.

MGMT 8005M: Week 3 Discussion 2 Additional Information

• Be sure to read the articles under Resources for the Week and review the videos under your suggested reading, especially on organic structures and the metaphors with insects on swarms and termites.

• Select an organization with which you are familiar.

• Define key terms (e.g., turbulence, organic elements) before you begin addressing the questions.

• Describe what drives the need for organic elements.

• Interpret the actions the organization took (or might have taken) to address turbulence. • If the organization has not considered this need, explain what you think the organization should be doing.

**Readings**

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2017). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (6th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

* Chapter 3, "Getting Organized" (pp. 45-70)
* Chapter 4, "Structure and Restructuring" (pp. 71-92)
* Chapter 5, "Organizing Groups and Team" (pp. 93-114)

[Bonabeau, E., & Meyer, C. (2001, May). Swarm intelligence. A whole new way to think about business. Harvard Business Review, 79(5), 106–114, 165.](javascript:ActivateLink('WK03.HBR',true)" \o "Swarm intelligence. A whole new way to think about business)

[Eisenhardt, K. M., & Sull, D. N. (2001, January). Strategy as simple rules. Harvard Business Review, 79(1), 107–116.](javascript:ActivateLink('WK03.HBR',true)" \o " Strategy as simple rules)

Morgan, G. (2006). *Images of organization.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

* Chapter 3, “Nature Intervenes: Organizations as Organisms” (pp. 33–69)
* Chapter 4, “Learning and Self-Organization: Organizations as Brains” (pp. 71–114)

[Walden University Online Writing Center. (2014). Walden templates: Overview. Retrieved from https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/templates](https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/templates" \o "Walden University Online Writing Center" \t "_blank)

[Walley, E. E., & Stubbs, M. (2000). Termites and champions: Case comparisons by metaphor.](https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=8gh&AN=3762416&site=eds-live&scope=site" \o "Termites and Champions" \t "_blank) *[Greener Management International,](https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=8gh&AN=3762416&site=eds-live&scope=site" \o "Termites and Champions" \t "_blank)* [(29), 41–54.](https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=8gh&AN=3762416&site=eds-live&scope=site" \o "Termites and Champions" \t "_blank)