

# ALPHAS DON'T BARK

Metaphors Motivate Enterprise Change



By Larry Raymond

# About the Author

**Larry Raymond** is a leading expert on the use of metaphors in business. He's the founder of the Metaphor Language Research Center LLC, based in Boulder, Colorado, USA and co-founder of The River Leadership Resources, a non-profit based in Geneva, Switzerland. He's held executive positions at IBM, Lotus Development, Digital Equipment and Union Carbide.

In addition to researching ways metaphors can help organizations, Larry consults to businesses, international agencies and governments on improving operations and developing leaders.

Larry holds both USA and Irish citizenship, lived in Switzerland for ten years and in Denmark for two, worked in more than 50 countries and published *Reinventing Communication* in 1994, the landmark book in use of visual metaphors for increasing business effectiveness.

“Alphas Don't Bark” is the third eBook in the “Metaphors for Alignment” collection. “Simplify” and “Leading from the Middle” are also available for free download at: <http://www.metaphormapping.com/>

More information is available at:  
<http://riverleadership.org/>  
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# Symbols and Metaphors are Leadership Tools



Each senior leader holds the **ultimate responsibility** to chart the terrain for his or her organization, set its goals and shape its character. This ebook explores how inspirational and working metaphors can help senior leaders find their way. And, since every pioneer knows it's best to not go it alone, the book shows how symbols and metaphors can also keep morale high among all expedition team members.

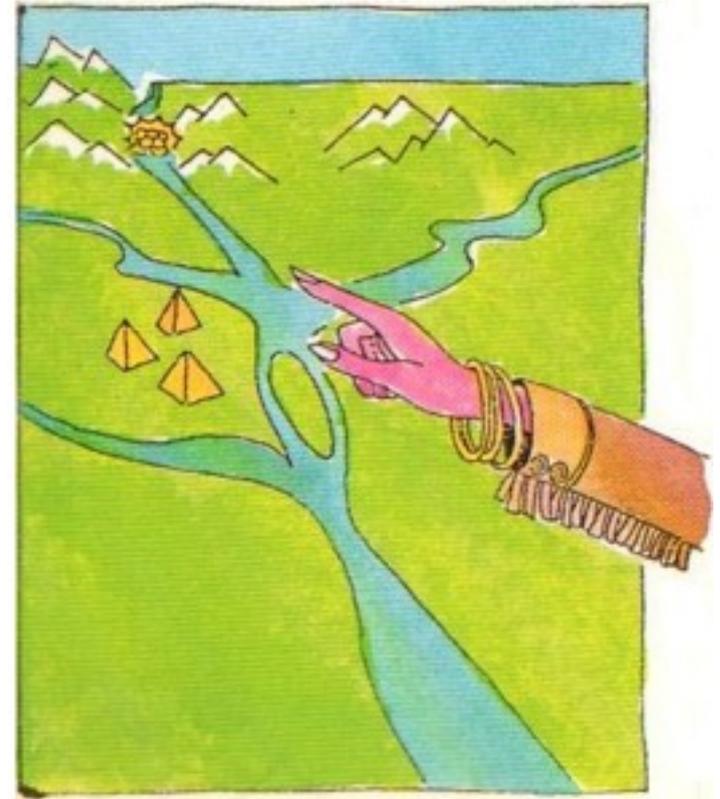
**Visual metaphors transcend conventional language** in their ability to quickly establish a new perspective or attitude by equating it to an existing, well understood one.

# “There be dragons” in enterprise change.

You can't see them, especially when you're focused on your goals, but beware. Those dragons threaten performance and morale through uncertainty, disenfranchisement and conflict.

Pioneers can avoid them by leveraging symbols and metaphors when the mission is:

- ☀ Culture change
- ☀ Business process change
- ☀ Coordination across functions and regions



# Inspirational Metaphors

They're visual images that distill a set of circumstances and send an action message.

The resulting perspective makes it easier to comprehend a complex and emotional issue, quickly identify alternatives and set a course of action.

A multinational company executive knew that optimization efforts under way would mean cutting 600 jobs in the Spanish subsidiary. She wanted to **avoid layoffs** by convincing the staff to immediately start building new skills and moving to other internal jobs and careers.

The **staff resented** the move and **resisted** her ideas. Only a few saw an improvement opportunity. **She needed to inspire them!**

These images formed the heart of her message of how they would look back at themselves and their careers next year, if they took action now.



## Give every mission an inspirational metaphor.

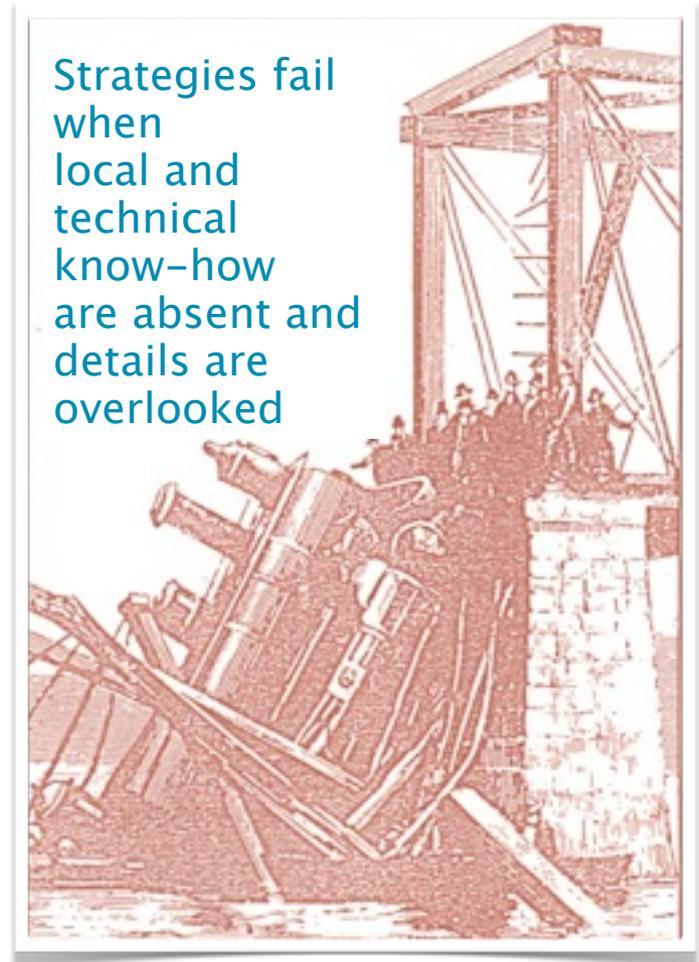
Reach for a metaphor and tell a story your staff can relate to.  
Position your organization to confront change.

# Working Metaphors

Working metaphors are those where the symbols implicit within the metaphor are used by groups to describe and analyze a situation.

They may be used to explore a business process (a village), strategy (a river), attitudes/behaviors (animal caricatures), roles and responsibilities (playing cards) and other aspects of organizational life.

Working metaphors are useful tools for **promoting open conversation** when addressing those problems only a group can solve.



**M**etaphors make it practical for larger groups to **set strategies collaboratively** because they create the environment for creative group thinking and a high degree of ownership, while still being very fast.

A three step strategy, including current state assessment, vision and action plan typically is completed in a day by a cross-function group of 25.

Enterprise or division-level strategies can be adapted and deployed top to bottom by different functions or locations by **cascading workshops**– aided by metaphors and symbols that apply regardless of function, geography or culture.

**This combination of speed and collaboration is a powerful mechanism senior leaders can use to strengthen the organization and move it forward.**

# Move the Organization without barking

Your organization is not a flock of sheep and you're not a sheepdog but, hopefully you get the message from this strained metaphor:

There are better ways to move the organization than barking orders.

**The strength of a leader is not measured in decibels, it's whether the right things are done in the right way.**



# Broad change programs are the province of the senior leader

They are typically addressed in one of three ways:

## 1. Top Down

- For example, a software company wants to establish new vision, mission and values
- Senior leaders map the big picture of how operations will function in the future
- Cascading workshops adapt the vision to functional and regional circumstances

## 2. Evolve & Interlock

- Chemical company supply chain senior leaders map an architecture
- Dozens of projects then optimize and interlock operations under the architecture

## 3. Distributed Ownership

- A central team defines regional and international standards and communication needs
- 40 small countries refine their homeland security method and coordinate with others

Collaboration ensures a successful change program.

New ideas emerge, change happens and the alpha doesn't bark.

# Culture = Success

If you're responsible for a large group, you know that culture = success.

That succeeding in business is not a one shot deal, that your main differentiator is the way you've made your workforce into more than the sum of the individuals.

Depending on circumstances, you may have focused on quality of client relationships, continuous improvement in manufacturing safety or another high-leverage aspect of your business. But, if you haven't examined your overall culture, you're likely overlooking systemic weaknesses and allowing them to drain organization effectiveness.

For example, if yours is a “talk shop” rather than a “get it done” shop, your organization wastes time and is vulnerable to nimble competitors.



As senior leader, you must be the catalyst for change. It won't happen without you. But, you won't achieve change by barking about it. You need engagement, understanding and willing action from a motivated organization. Give them metaphors to work with. They'll see themselves and their challenges differently, address them collaboratively and commit themselves to change.

If you can find the right inspirational metaphor, they'll understand the logic and emotion of what they have to do. **Build windmills!**

The following pages describe more about the working metaphors available to you and how they can be used.

# Continuously Engage Your Staff

When they're non-stop "heads down" doing their jobs, **they're not doing the whole job**

Your employees must also look up and out.

What are clients saying?

What are competitors doing?

How can we improve the end-to-end?



Waiting for the boss lets problems linger and good ideas lie dormant.

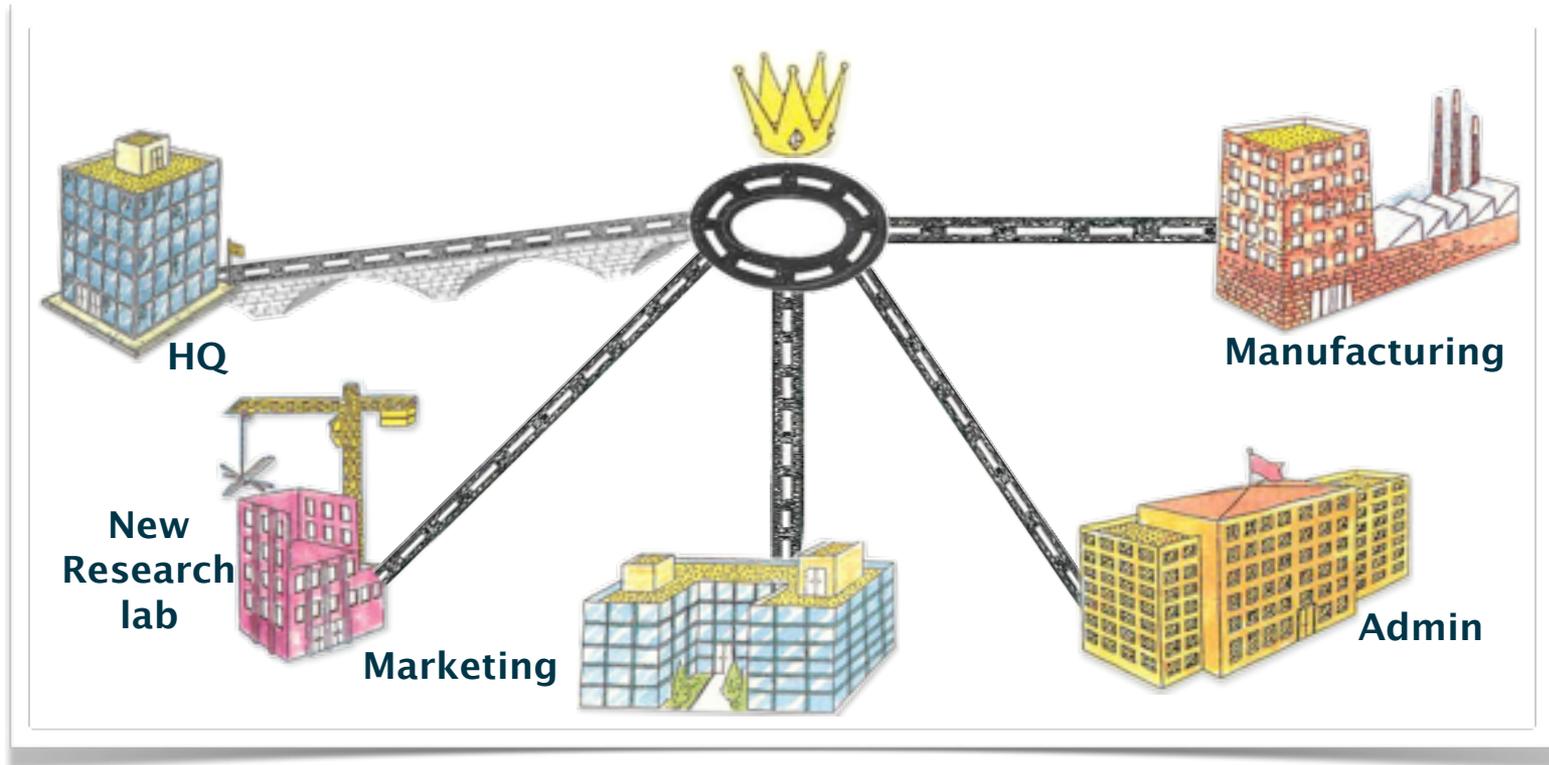
Metaphors bring passion to fix them.  
Everyone on their feet. Out front. In motion.



Engagement, Not indifference.

# Relationships are the Greatest Enterprise Asset

When teams build maps of their ideal operation, strong relationships are always central to their vision. A network of roads represent relationships and their quality. Every function is well connected and people know each other. They want an open culture of easy communication and dynamism.



Group mapping sessions with metaphors, such as the village, start building those

cross-functional relationships that can be the source of the next great competitive idea or the solution to a customer's problem.



# Put Metaphors to Work for **you**

**W**hen each group in your organization is clear about how they fit in, their strengths, weaknesses, goals and obstacles, their energy and creativity are liberated and they're aligned with the whole organization.

**T**hey focus on the right things and don't waste time with unproductive rivalries and politics.

**Y**ou can make this happen. Give them metaphors to work with and **ask (don't bark!) a few questions:**

Who are the stakeholders in your operation?



Where are the strong relationships to build upon?



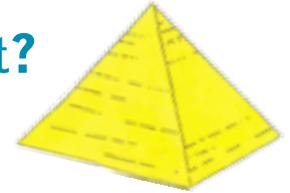
Where are the weak ones to fix?



What doesn't work as well as it should?



What aspects of your function does the team value most?



What uncontrollable changes may occur in the environment?



What opportunities do you see that aren't addressed in the corporate strategy?



# Symbols for Perspective

The short term success of many organizations depends on the execution of projects and strategies. Project teams are inherently optimistic. Sometimes potentially big obstacles are minimized or overlooked in status reviews.

A short **river metaphor** exercise can force an examination of relative risks and give you a better picture of whether they need help.

Here are a few questions map-building requires a project team to address:

**How is the team doing?**

**Are members all rowing together?**



**Are there any hidden problems that could tear up the team?**



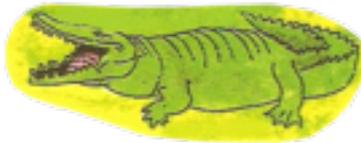


Have the internal bureaucrats  
been blocking you?

Anything you might get stuck on  
or slowed down by?



What's the biggest  
risk you face?



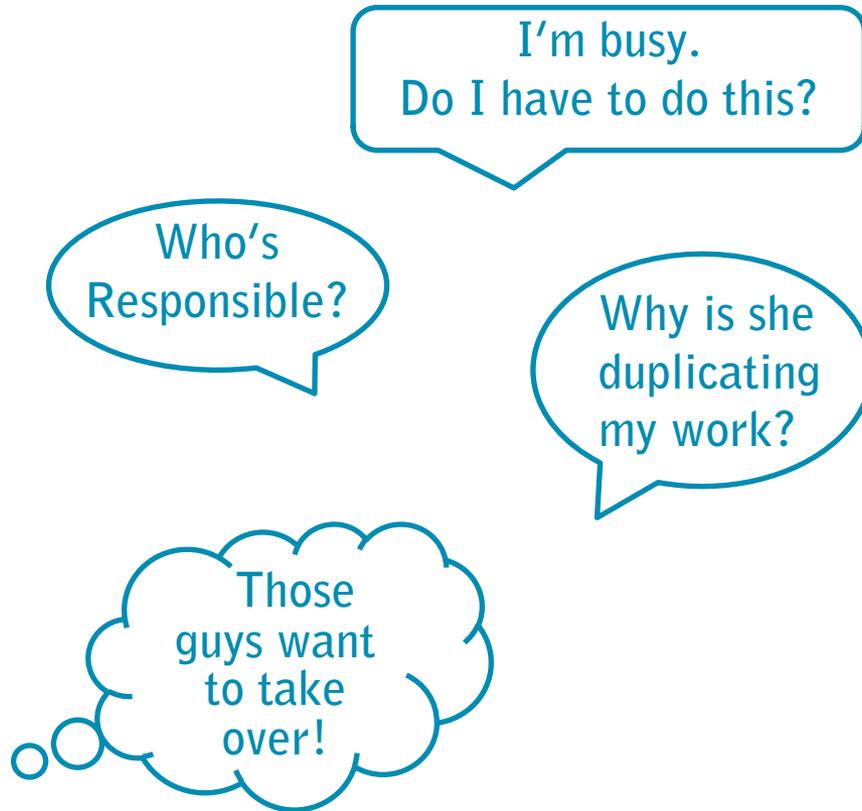
Are there signs of competitors entering the same space?



**S**ymbols make it hard to overlook these important questions.

**T**hey're easy to remember and natural to ask.

# Symbols to Remove Uncertainty



**S**uch sentiments  
evaporate motivation.

**U**ncertainty causes them.

**T**hey waste energy.

**Y**ou can eliminate them.

**T**hroughout the  
organization.

Call on a simple visual metaphor to make roles and responsibilities crystal clear.

Just a deck of playing cards.

**Metaphor trumps uncertainty!**



King - Leader, responsible



Queen - Decision partner  
Must be consulted



Jack - Supports, as directed  
by King or Queen

	G I S E L A	J U A N	C H I	K U R T
ACTIVITY				
#1 Establish agenda and arrange speakers	L	P	S	S
#2 Arrange room and refreshments	\$	P	L	♟
#3 Advertise	P	L		S
#4 Greet guests, arrange seating		S	L	
#5 Write newsletter article	L	P		S

# Closing Messages



Changing enterprise strategies, processes or culture is fraught with risks.

When senior leaders involve the whole organization in the change, they draw in more know-how and commitment and reduce those risks.

Inspirational metaphors focus and motivate organizations. Senior leaders should use them when driving any major change.

**Working metaphors** and symbols support an efficient, collaborative leadership style. They engage hearts and minds, motivate the staff and power the enterprise to peak performance. They're an asset available for exploitation.

When senior leaders employ metaphors and model collaborative leadership, they draw out the full strength of the enterprise and set a course for enduring prosperity.

