



NICK BARTER  STUART MCMILLEN

METAPHORS

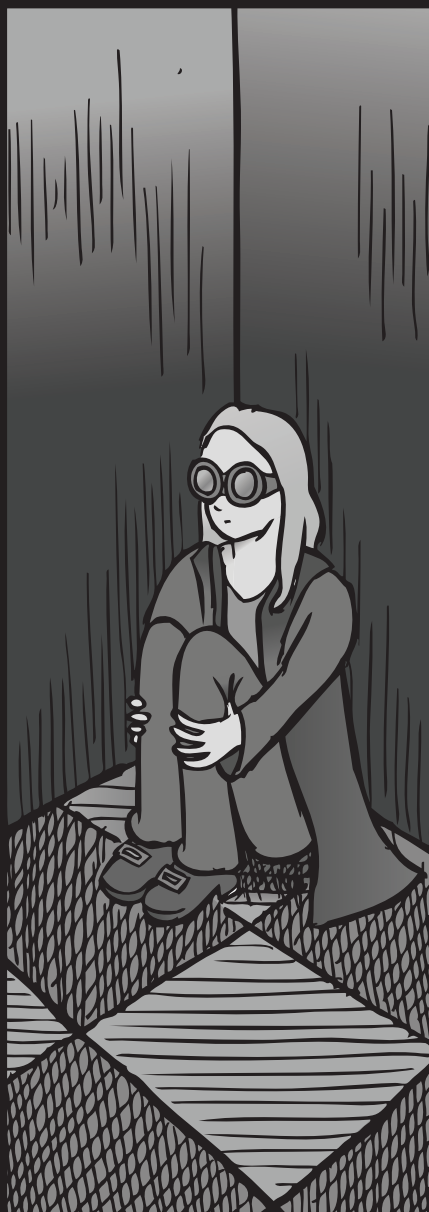


THE LENSES WE USE
TO INTERPRET AND
UNDERSTAND OUR
 REALITY 

Metaphors are
the lenses we use
to interpret
and understand
our reality.



"A heart
of gold".

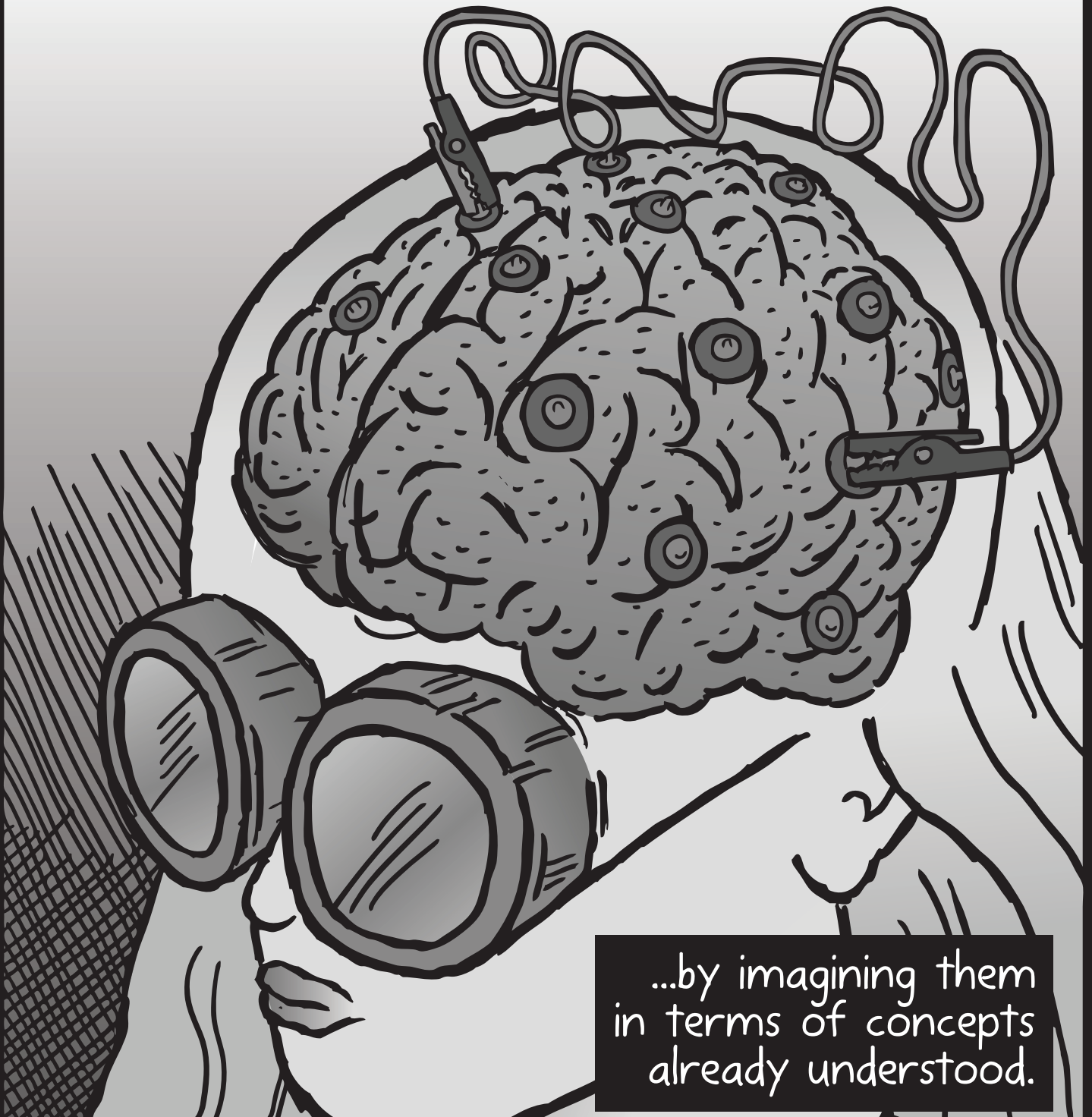


"Being kept
in the dark."



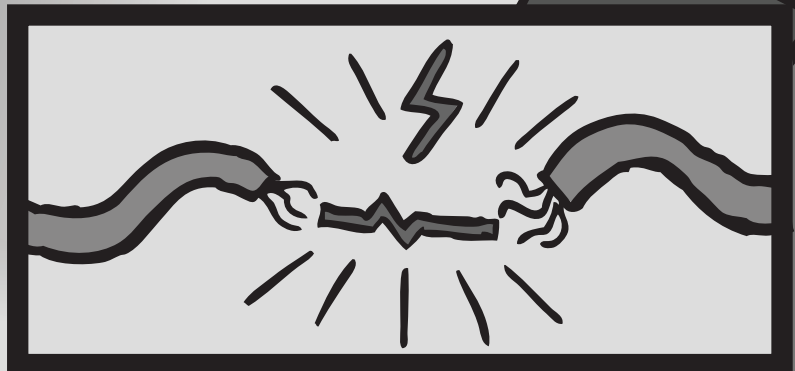
"Turning
the corner."

Metaphors allow us to grasp unfamiliar concepts...



...by imagining them
in terms of concepts
already understood.

Each metaphor is
a mental shortcut.

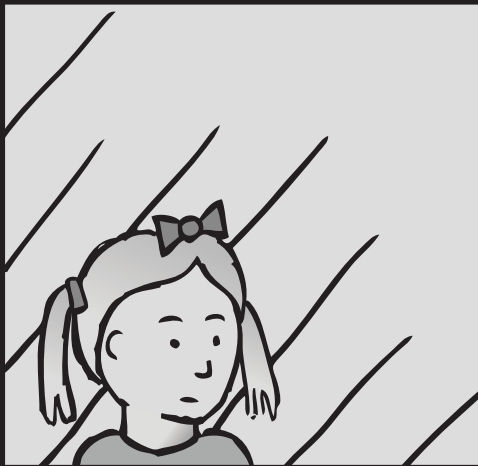


But the shortcuts pose hidden dangers.

Metaphors obscure or distort our understanding, because the new is not the old.



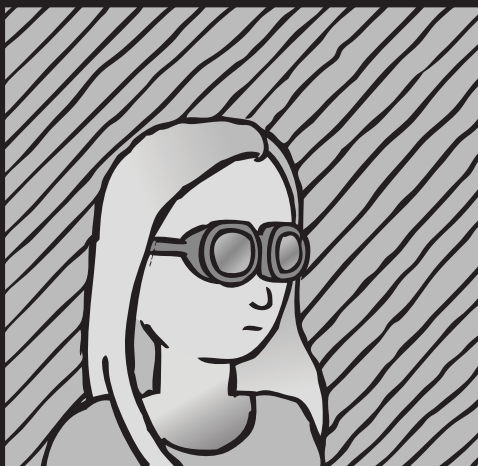
A pitfall which can cause us to think and act in bizarre ways.



Like eyeglass
lenses we wear,
the metaphor
lenses of
our minds are
not with us
from birth.



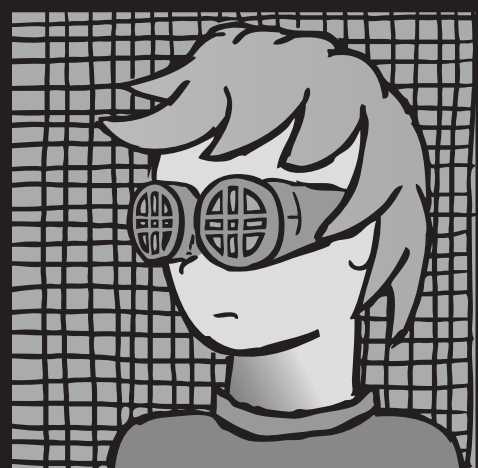
We take our
metaphors
from the
society
and culture
around us...

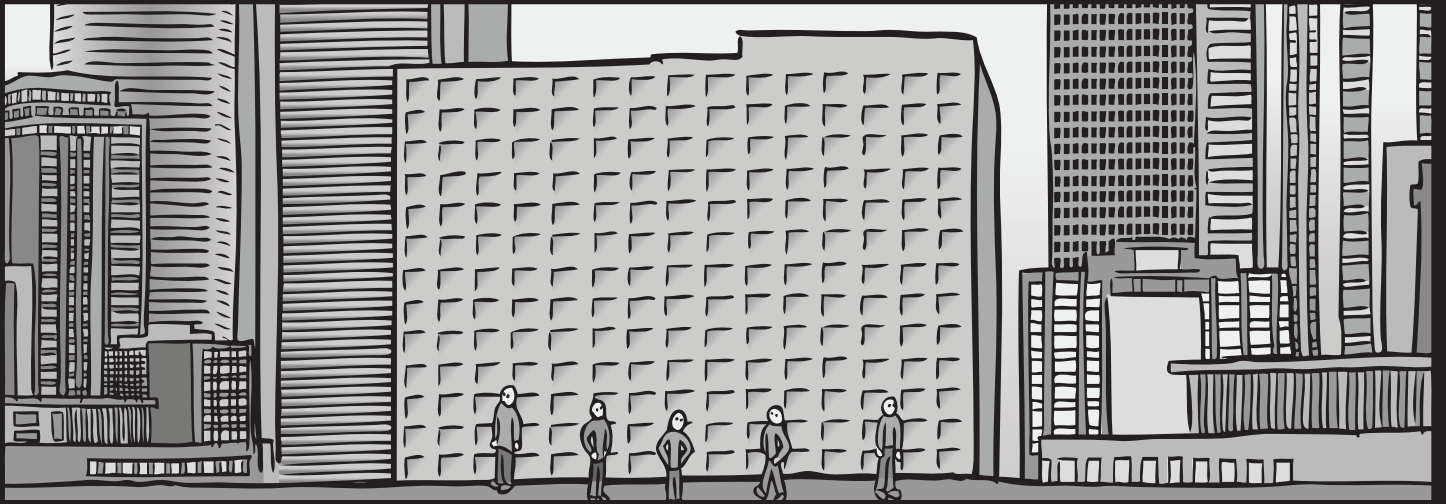


...and, without
realising we
are looking
through them...

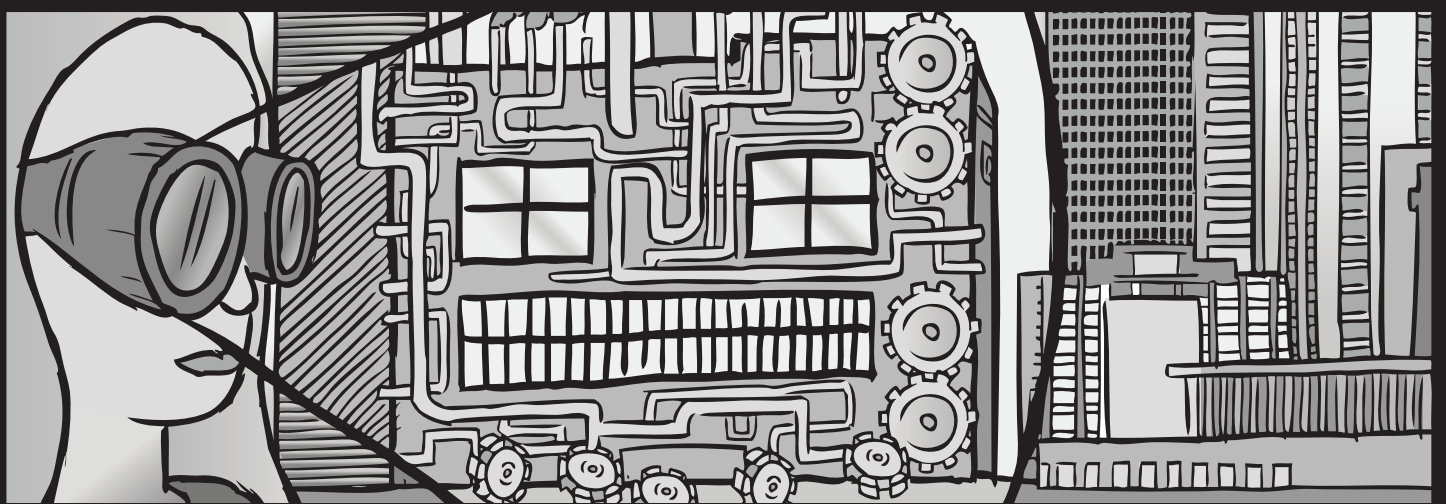


...we use them
to interpret
and act
in our world.





To what extent do metaphors shape the way we conceive our world?



To what extent do metaphors mask our surroundings, and alter our perception of the world?



How much of our understanding is constructed purely from imagination through metaphors?

Our society is heavily influenced by organisations.



Corporations.

Government institutions.

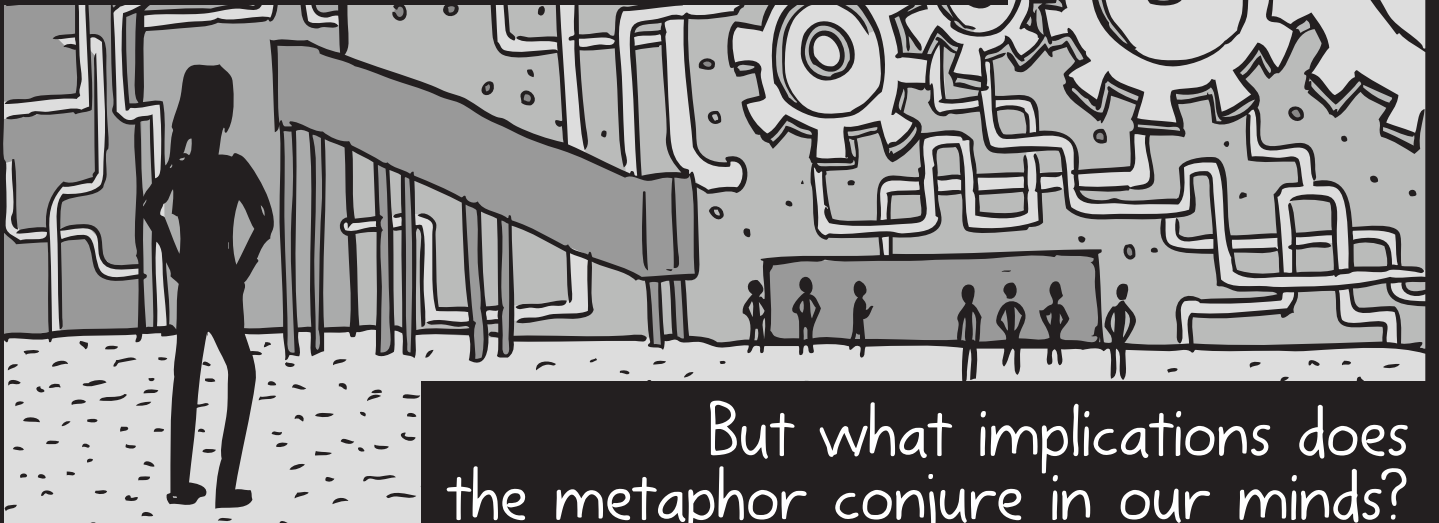
Religions.

Yet much of their influence comes purely from the metaphors we use to conceive them.

A common metaphor for imagining organisations is as self-contained entities: 'machines' which exist in their own right.

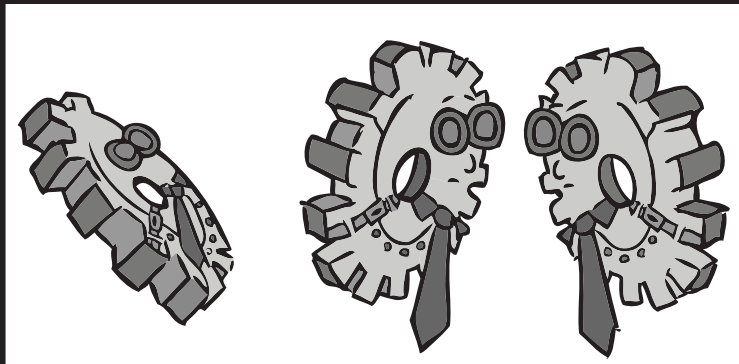


The 'machine' metaphor helps us imagine and grasp the abstract concept of an organisation.



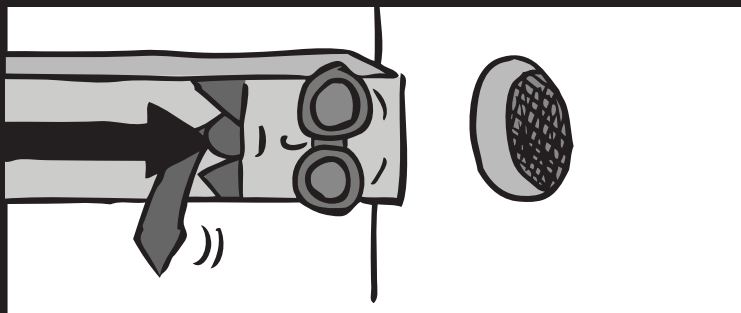
But what implications does the metaphor conjure in our minds?

If organisations
are 'machines'...



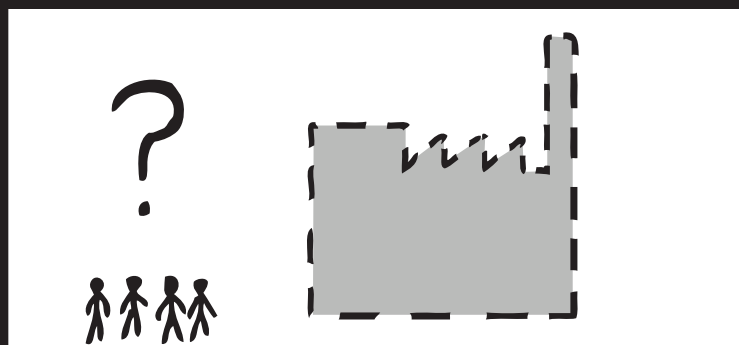
...are the people inside an
organisation merely 'parts'?

Should the human
dimensions, human needs
beyond the parts'
requirements be ignored?

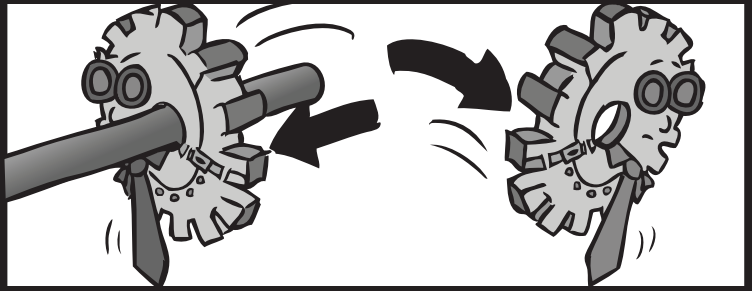


Hammered out?

Is the machine an entity
in its own right?

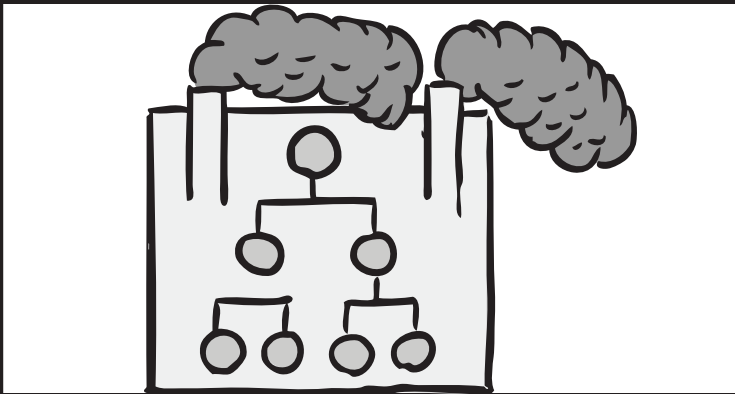


Should defective parts of the machine be replaced?
How does this happen?



What happens to defective parts?

Does anyone truly work
'in' an organisation,



or do they all work
'for' the master machine?

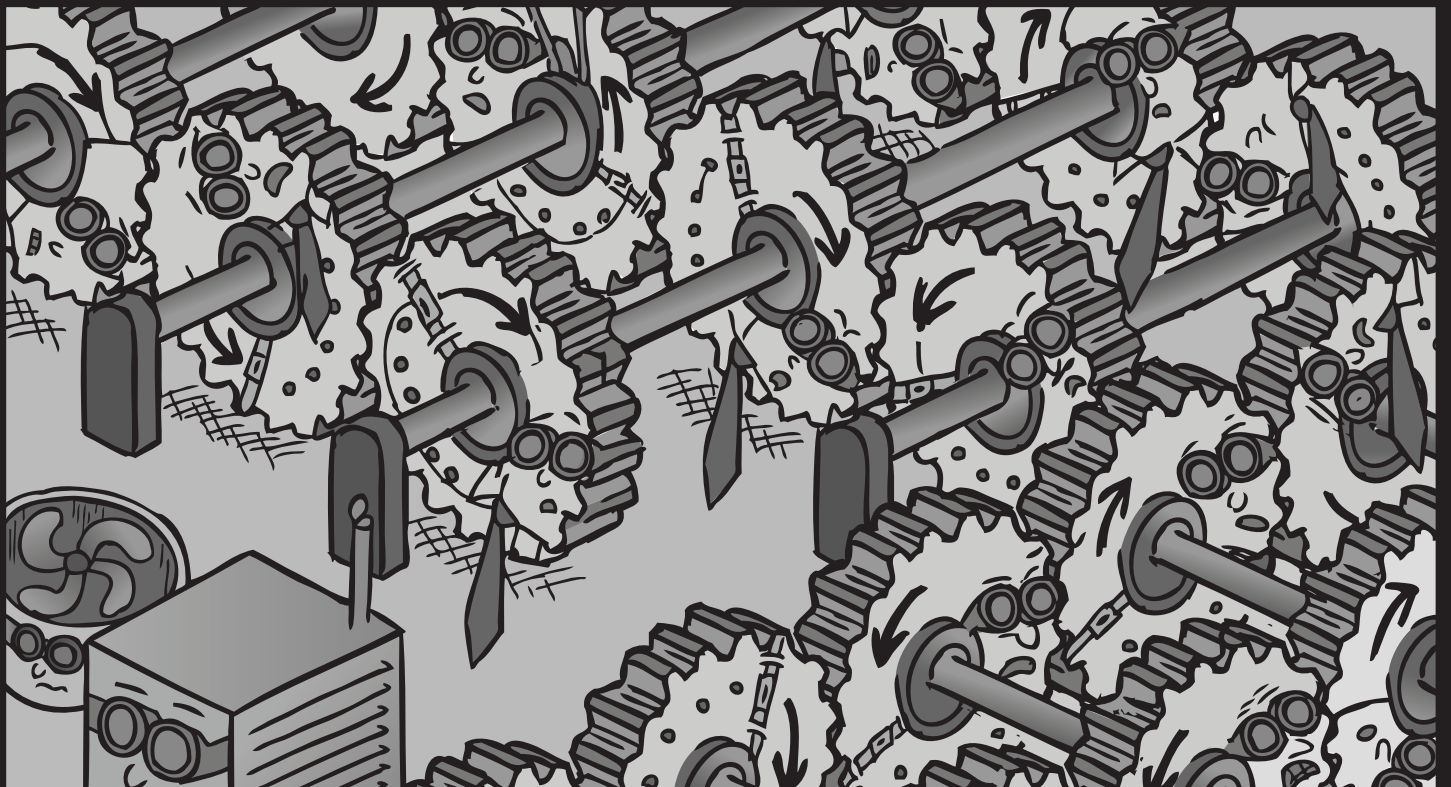
Should the machine
continue operating
no matter what?



This 'machine' metaphor is a dehumanising way of viewing organisations.



It is a dehumanising way of viewing ourselves



By looking through this lens, everyone that constitutes an organisation is de-prioritised to slave-like 'parts'...

...wired into a master machine
that supersedes all workers.



An imaginary entity
that controls...



...yet exists only in the minds of the metaphor's users.

An alternative to the 'machine' perspective
describes organisations as living organisms.

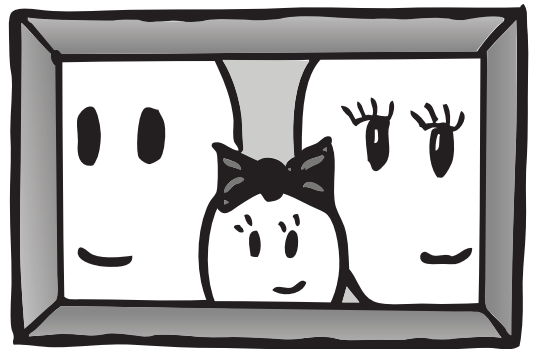
This metaphor raises questions of its own:



Should we think of organisations as being 'alive'?

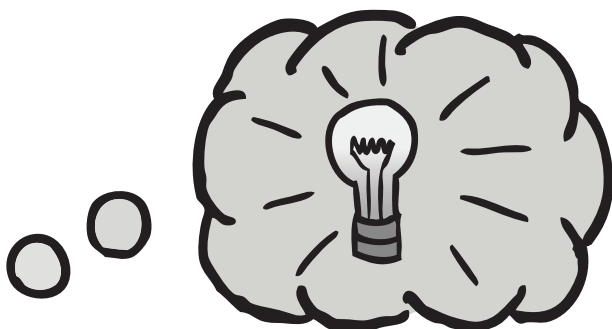


How was the organism born?

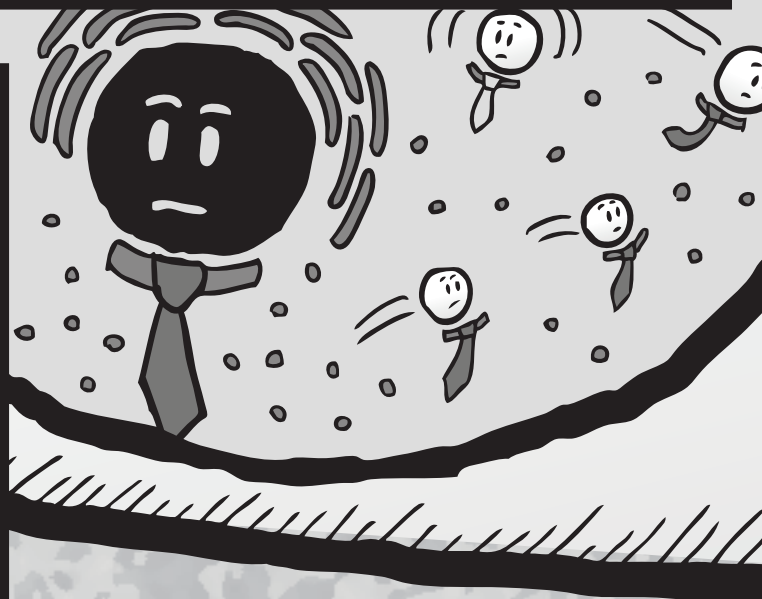


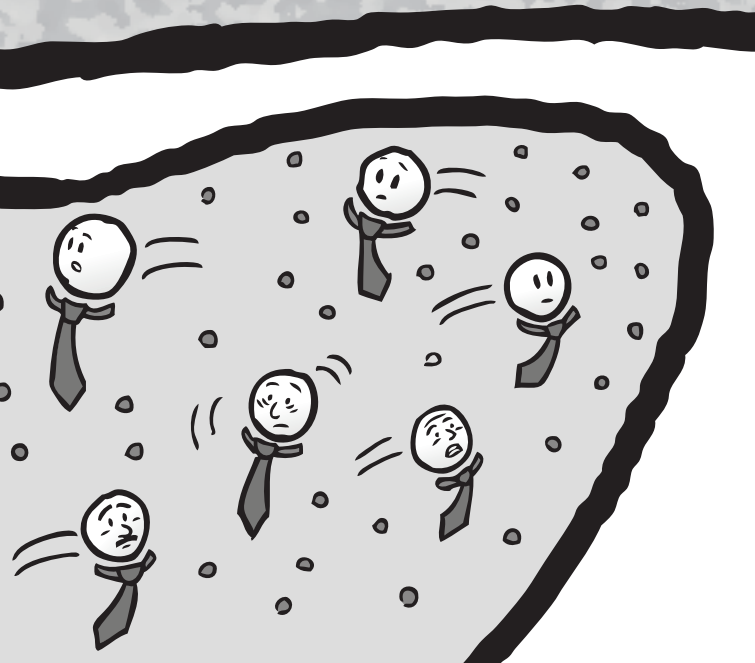
What created it?

What does the organisation think about?

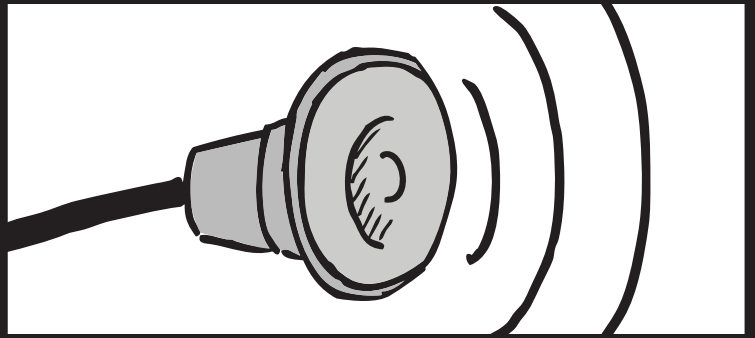


Does it have goals?



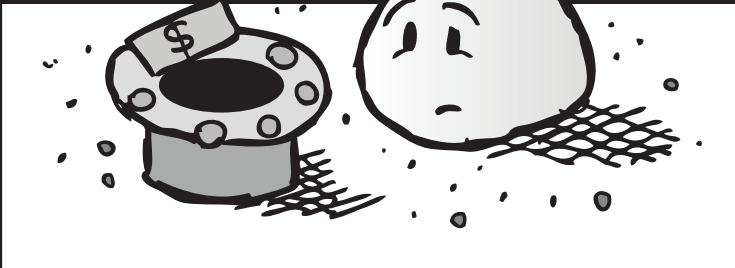


Does the organism
speak for itself?

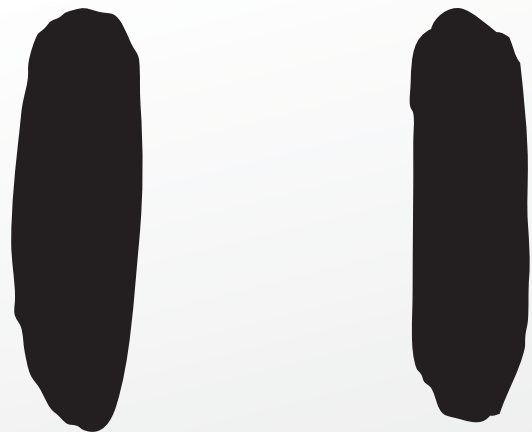


How?

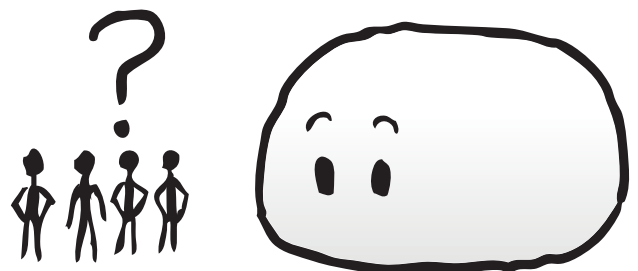
Should we care about
organisations in the
same way we care
for living things?



Is it a 'being'?

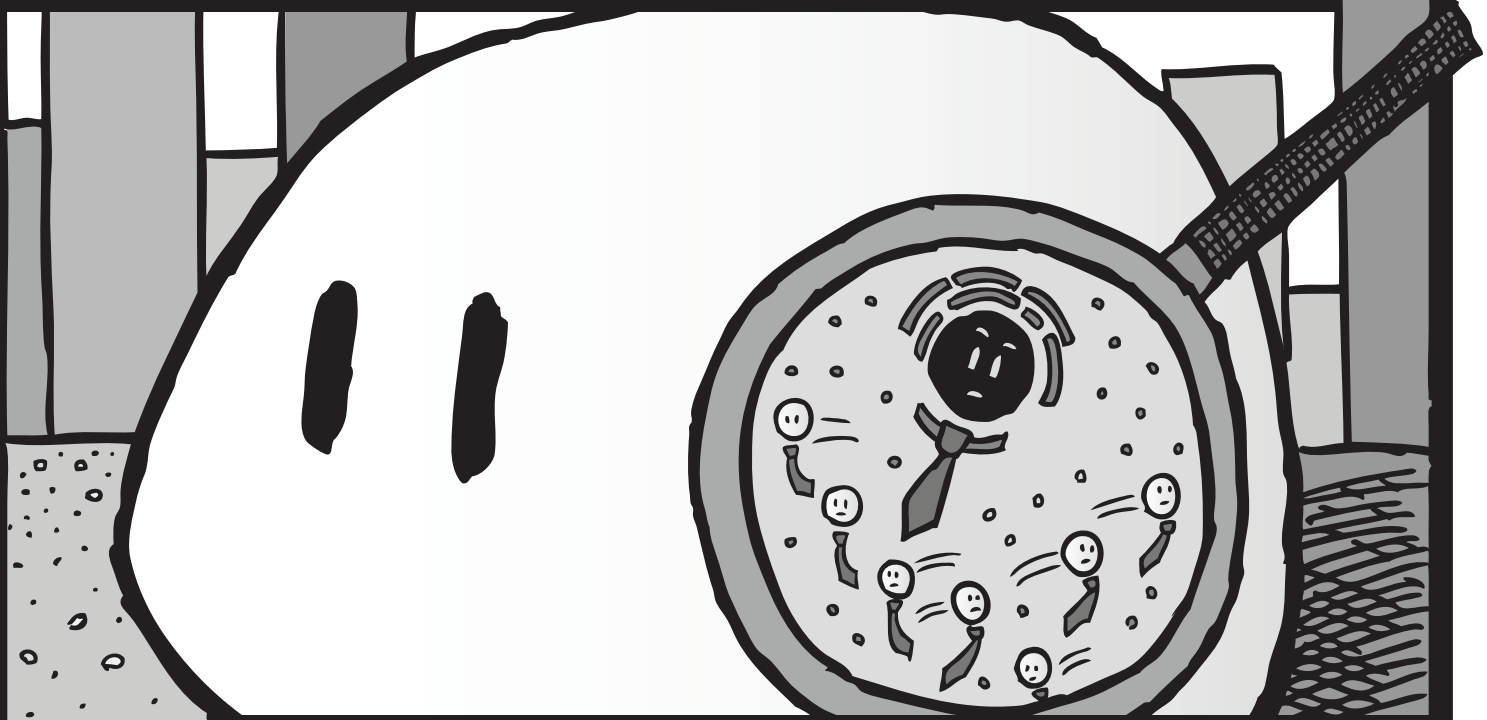


What roles do
employees play within this
'living' organism?



Would it live without us?

On the surface, biological imagery seems warmer and more suitable than that of machinery...



...but the metaphor still paints human employees as subservient to a master entity.

Also, by borrowing words associated with organisms...



...organisations are unwittingly raised to the status of living creatures worthy of concern.

Though we may 'know' that organisations are not living creatures...

...loosely using expressions about a company's 'survival' and 'death' takes our minds into the zone of the organism metaphor.

With our minds we visualise a single shell wrapping around...



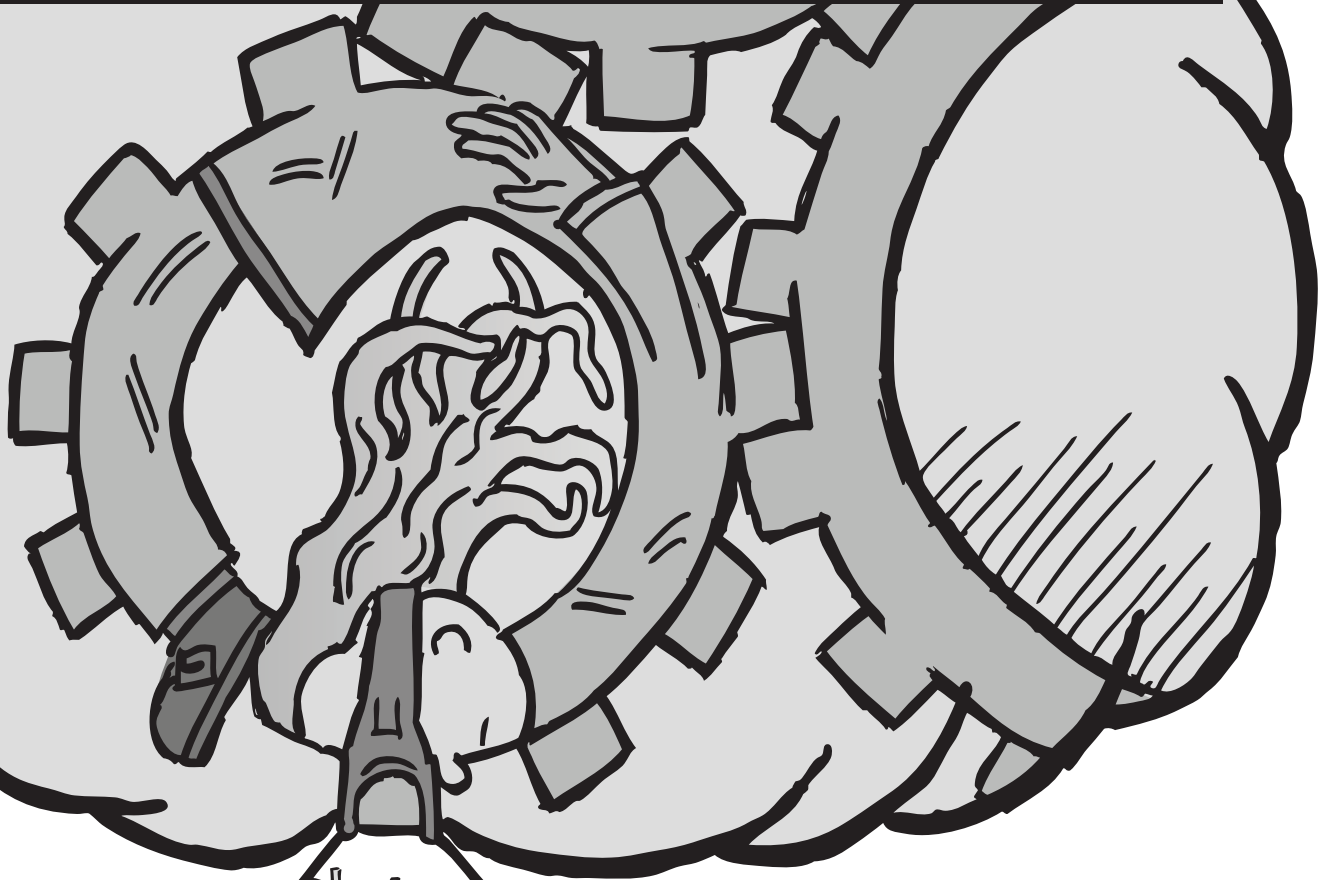
...what is really a group of people.

The way we conceive
organisations reflects the
way we conceive ourselves.

By unwittingly using
these metaphors
to describe
our reality...

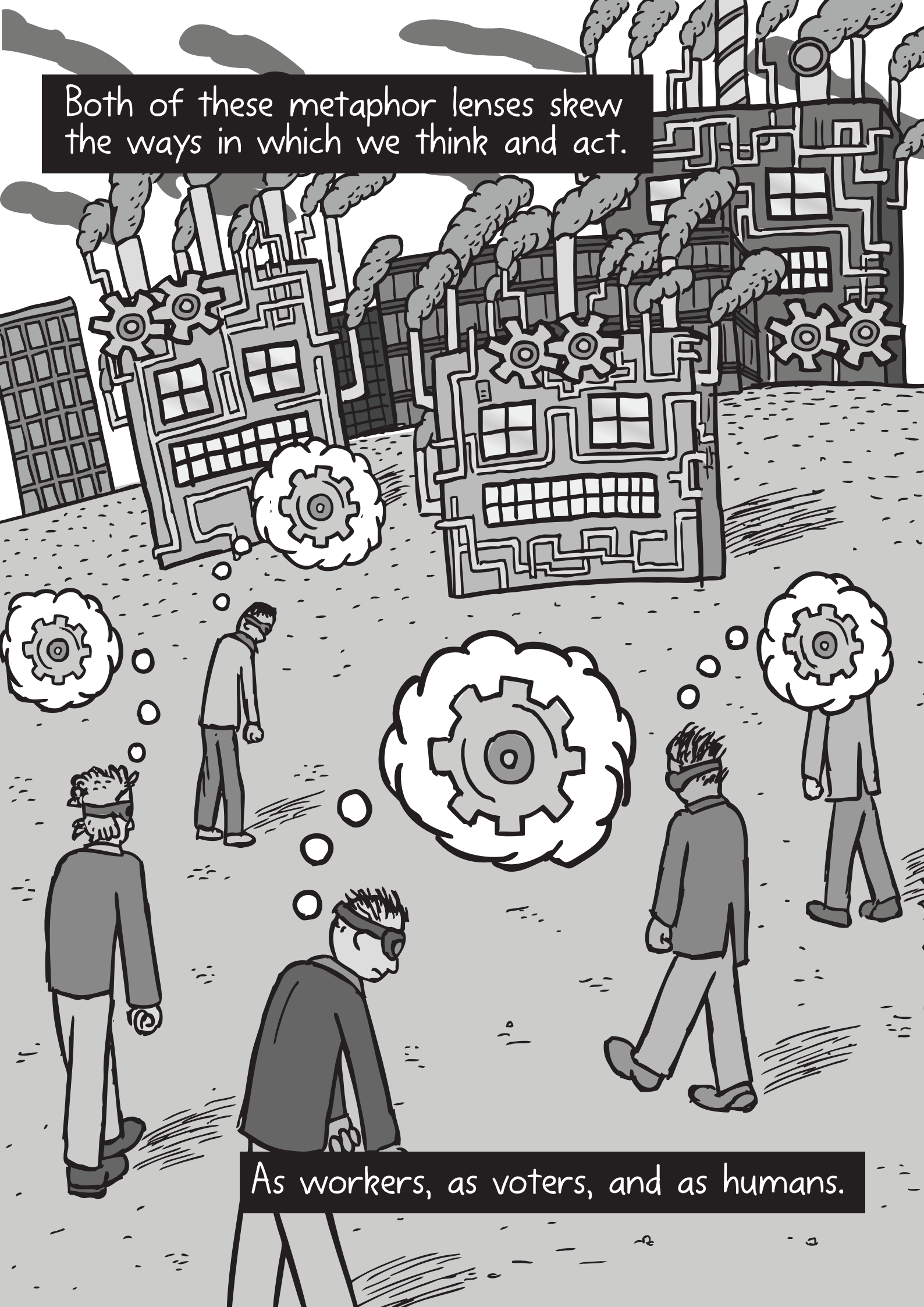
...we pave the road for our actions.

A pattern emerges where we act in ways consistent with our distorted view of reality...



...and then look at our self-created world as 'evidence' that our perceptions must be true.

Both of these metaphor lenses skew
the ways in which we think and act.



As workers, as voters, and as humans.



There is an alternative.

A solution which involves removing the distorting lenses we use to conceive organisations...



...and replacing them with helpful metaphors which do not marginalise or de-prioritise us.

A solution which involves returning to the root definition of the word 'organisation'.

fertilisers
organisation
derived from the Greek
word 'organon' meaning
instrument or tool
organise
act or process
for plant



What if we we built upon the root meaning behind the word and viewed organisations as tools to help humanity.



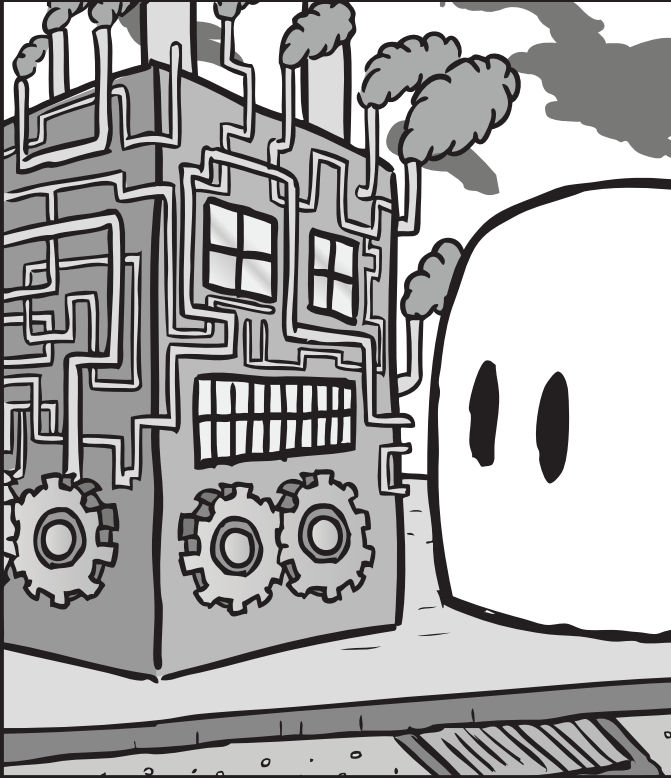
A platform which acknowledges that organisations do not, can not exist without the people that constitute them.

By seeing organisations as tools we use to help each other...



...a cascade of possibilities is revealed to our eyes.

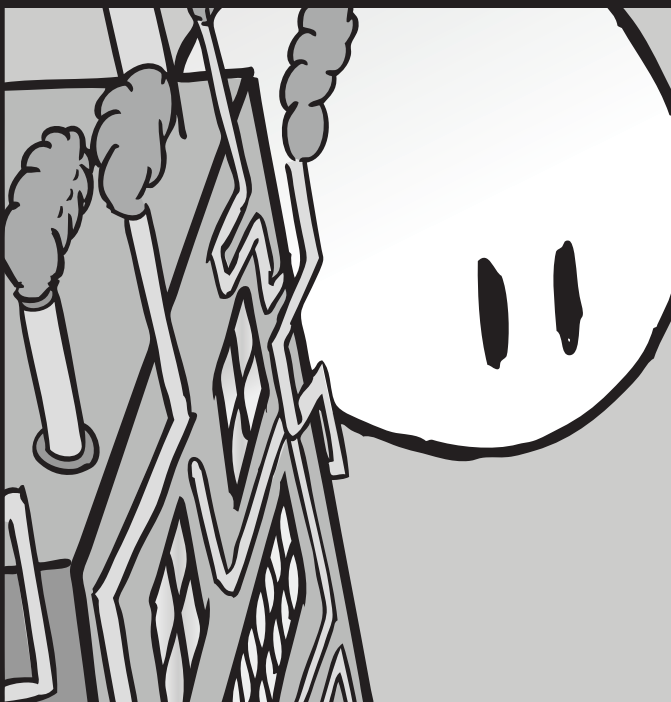
From a view which
imagines organisations
as entities in themselves...



...to an understanding
that organisations
are the product
of the people
that constitute them.

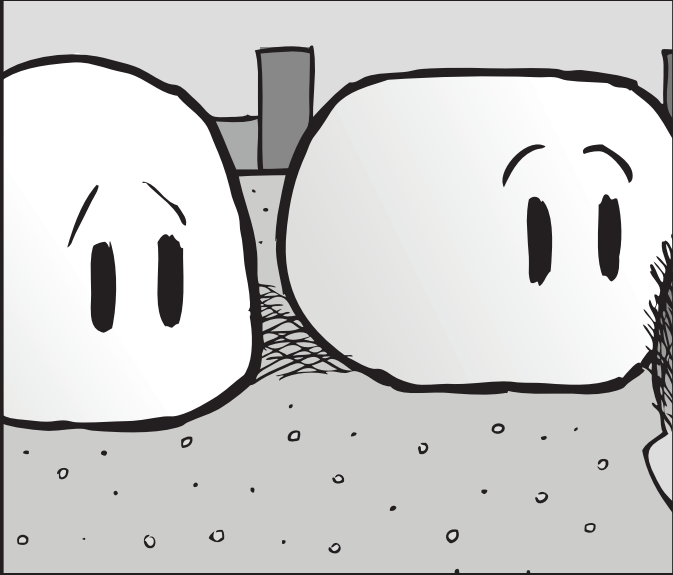


From a world populated
with organisations
chartered to serve
their own purposes...



...to a world of people
using organisations
as tools to serve the
goals of humanity.

From a mindset
concerned with
the perpetual operation
of organisations...

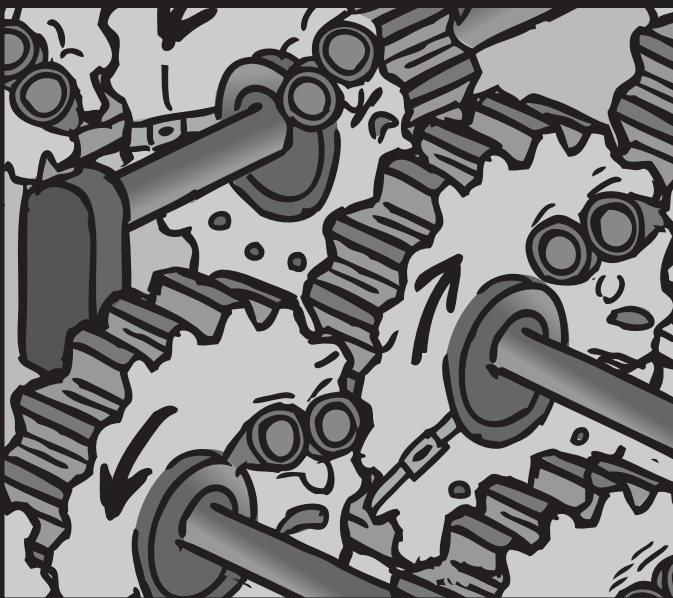


...to a world where
organisations are
established for
specific ends...



...and those ends are only pursued for as long
as they are helpful and necessary to all humans.

From metaphors
which point us toward
dehumanisation,
suppression and an
unravelling of
moral concern...



...to metaphors
which can help
us pursue the
full potential
of humans.

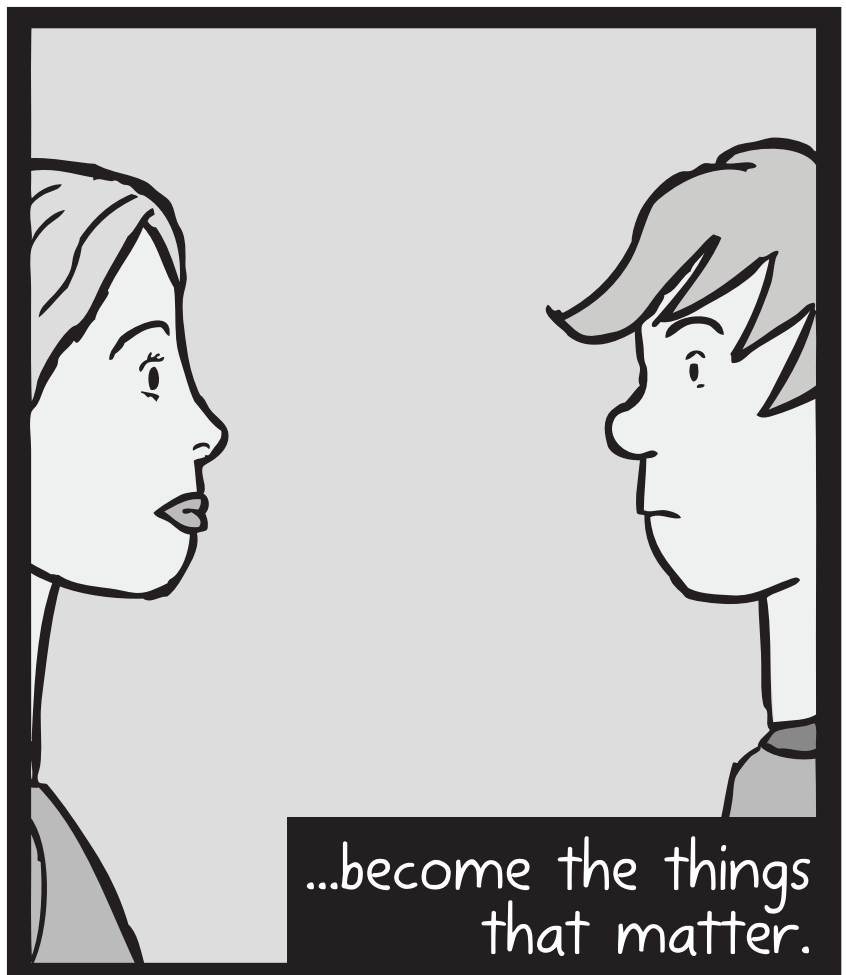
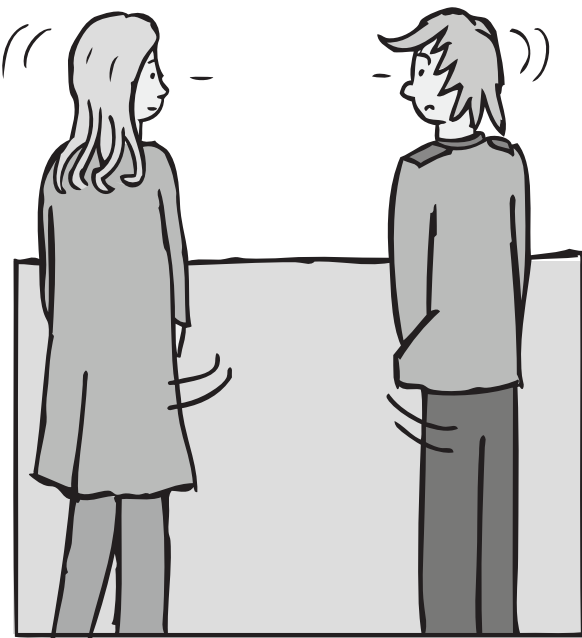


With a change to the lens
through which we view the world...



And the things
that remain...

...the people
that remain...



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General Support Note

This work attempts to convey how metaphors distort our perceptions and understandings and in so doing may lead to outcomes that do not recognise the value of all humans. The 'Metaphors' graphic story was sparked via a conference paper produced by Dr Nick Barter.

The conference paper is approximately 10,000 words long and as such is 'text heavy'. Given this, there was a desire on Nick's part to explore the dissemination of academic ideas via a different format, in particular a graphic format, partly because Nick is a fan of graphic novels. The aim and hope of delivering what are essentially academic ideas in a graphic format is that it makes the ideas more accessible to the audience (a graphic novel is easier to read than 10,000 words). In so doing the aspiration is that this format will lead readers into picking up academic articles of 10,000 words to explore ideas, in this instance the distorting ability of metaphors, in more depth.

In order to complete this graphic novel format, after meeting by chance, Nick shared the original article with Stuart. Stuart and Nick then developed a storyline together, with Stuart also drawing the illustrations.

The original conference paper that was the seed for this story can be referenced as follows:

- Barter, N, (2011) 'Metaphors that facilitate Organisational Understanding: Reaching for the New and How Machine and Organism Metaphors do not enable Sustainable Development,' Australasian Conference on Social and Environmental Accounting Research, Launceston, Australia, 4 - 7 Dec, 2011
http://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/188432/barter.pdf
(Mirrored copy at stuartmcmillen.com)

This paper had approximately 67 references and as such it captures and weaves together the ideas of others, not just the author. Thus in terms of the cliché, this work stands on the shoulders of others.

Correspondence regarding the 'Metaphors' story should be directed to Nick Barter.