

Metaphors MBA Students live by @Organizations

María Marta Preziosa, PhD.
Business Ethics Professor and Researcher
Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina (UCA)
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Many thanks to The Association of MBAs for the invitation to
this amazing Conference
Thank you all for being here
And thanks to Juan Pablo for sharing with me this presentation

C.S. Lewis,
Bluspels and
Flalansferes, 1939

For me,
reason is the natural
organ of truth;
but imagination is the
organ of meaning.

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Let's start with 2 quotations

Do you remember Clive Staples Lewis?

The philologist and philosopher who wrote The Narnia
Chronicles?.

Among other issues, Lewis wrote about imagination.

No doubt, he is an expert.

Let me read this quotation for us

....

.....

Meaning

3

Keep this word in mind

Meaning, connotation, significance, sense

George Lakoff,
Philosophy in the Flesh,
1980

...cognitive slavery - ...
an unaware and
uncritical dependence
on our unconscious
metaphors.

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We are used to say that we teach MBA students to improve their decision making skills

So, think about this second quotation, for a moment. Professor George Lakoff, from University of Berkeley, is the creator of cognitive linguistics,

He says that for being truly rational,....

we need to go against cognitive slavery...

And what is this about?

...

Non-Conscious Metaphor

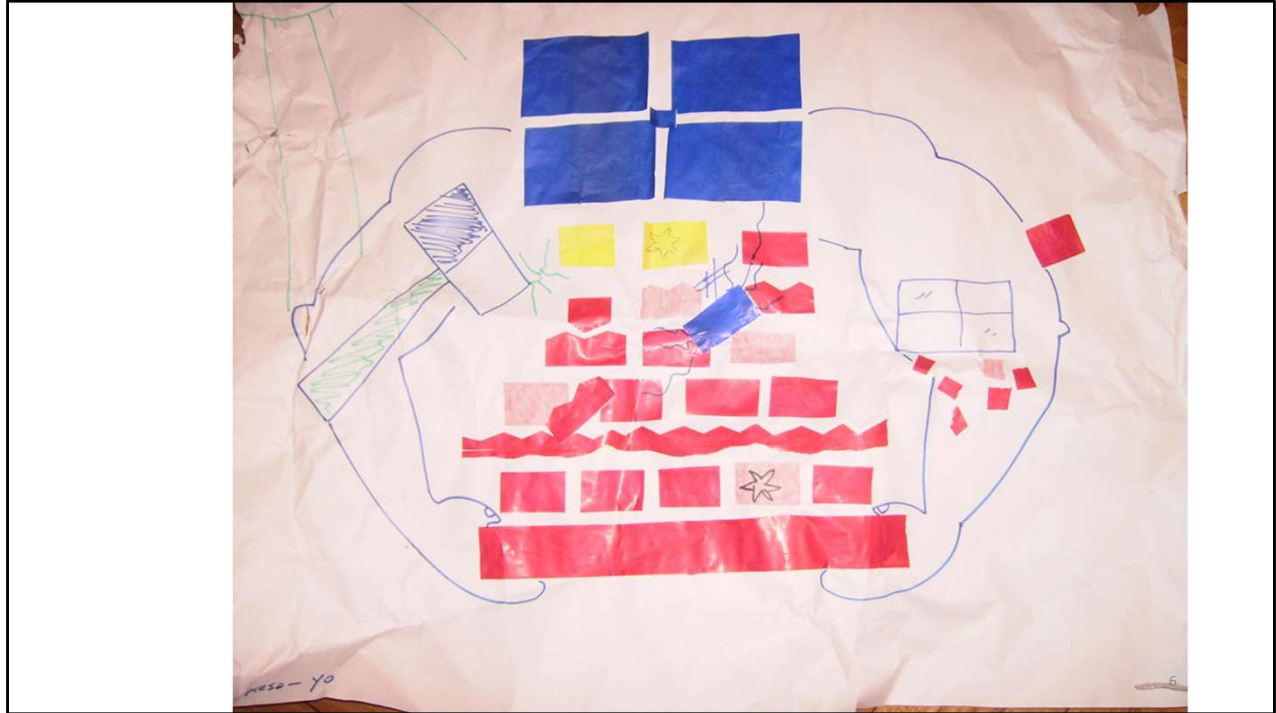
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Keep also this idea

But now

Let's reveal some metaphors that I have inferred as meaningful and characteristics to the MBA Student's mindset

May be, these metaphors are enslaving our students in their decision making skills.



This group drawing was made by MBA STUDENTS a few years ago 2014.

The drawing represents the relationship between the company and the students as employees

Here, you can see that the company punish the bricks with the hammer.

The bricks are the employees. Here, we can see the effort of this little blue brick in climbing the wall.

The blue brick wants to reach to the top, where the blue blood bricks are ruling the company.

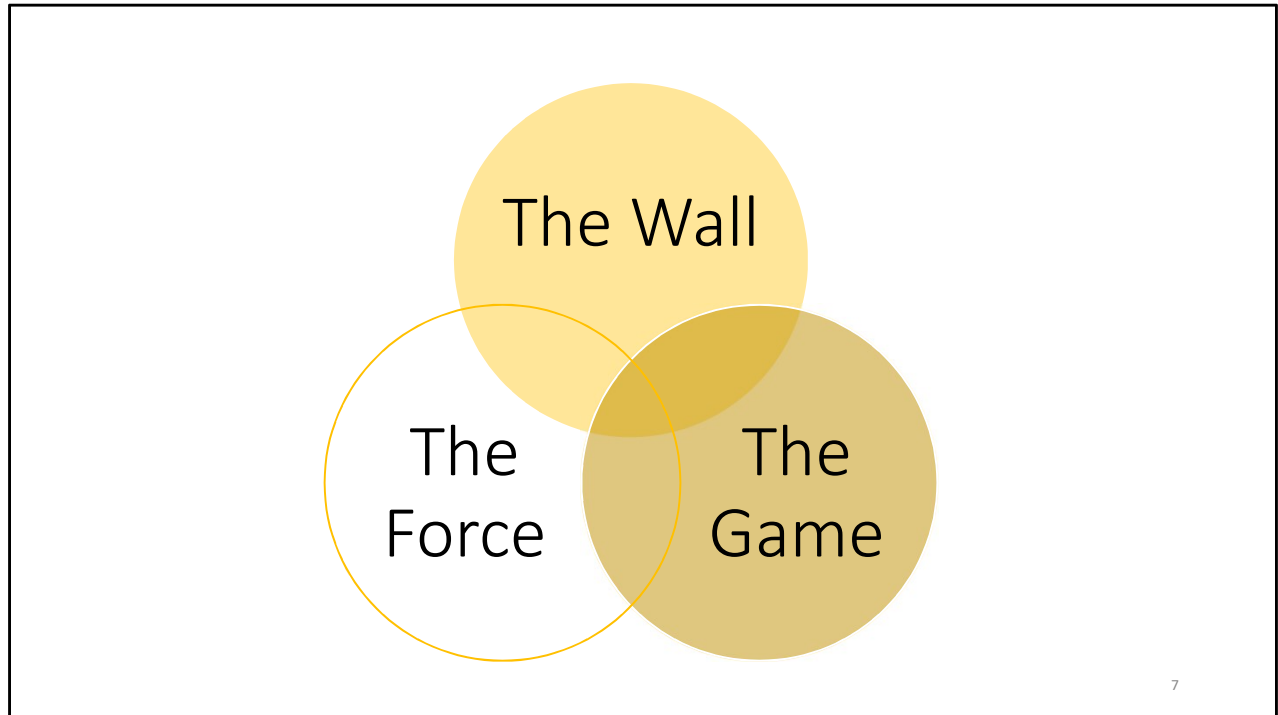
However, we can see that not everything is punishment. Those big and strong arms are also protecting the bricks.

The bricks feel lucky as long as they belong to the company and are not fired.

In this wall you can see different forces. Some forces go bottom-up,

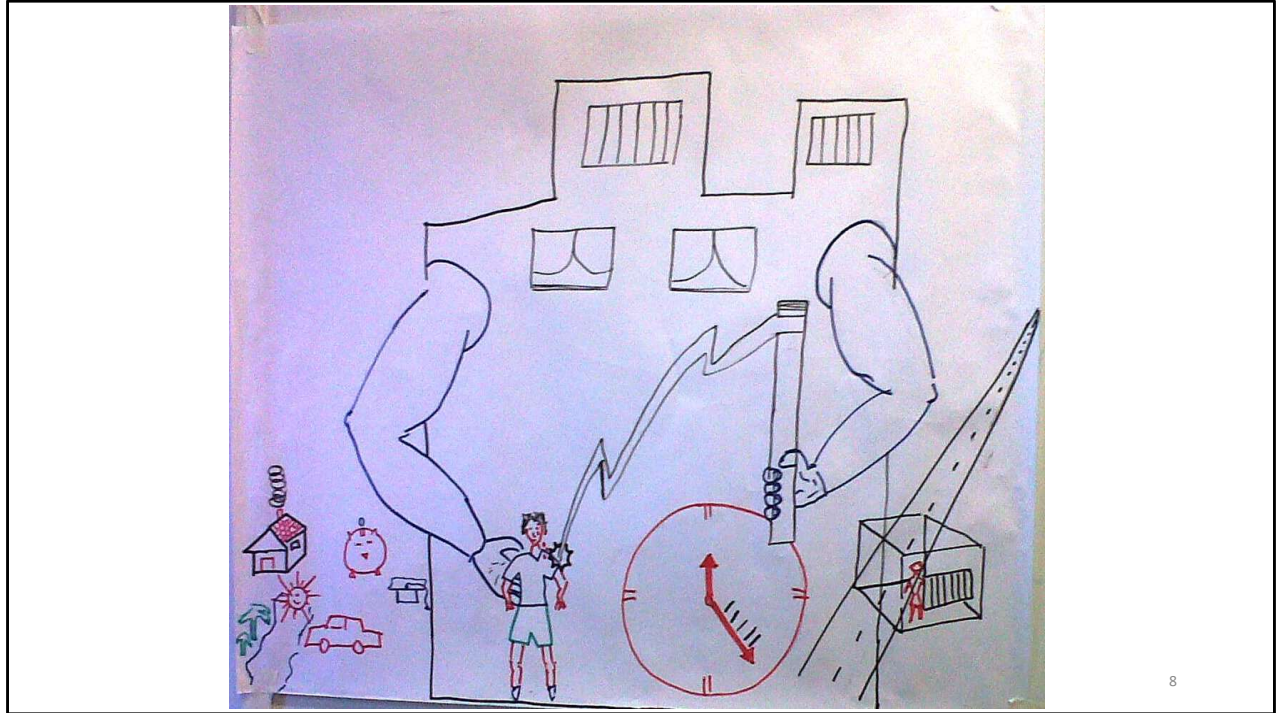
some deploy top-down

Some privileged little bricks can fly and enter the company through the window



These are the three main metaphors I've found as characteristics of MBA Students mindset.

THE WALL
THE GAME
THE FORCE



In this group drawing we also find a representation from the relationship between the company and the student as employee.

The company is symbolized as a wall.

The company has big arms which, again, can punish people.

One of those arms has a scepter which send a lightning bolt or has a whip

The employee is almost paralyzed by its shock.

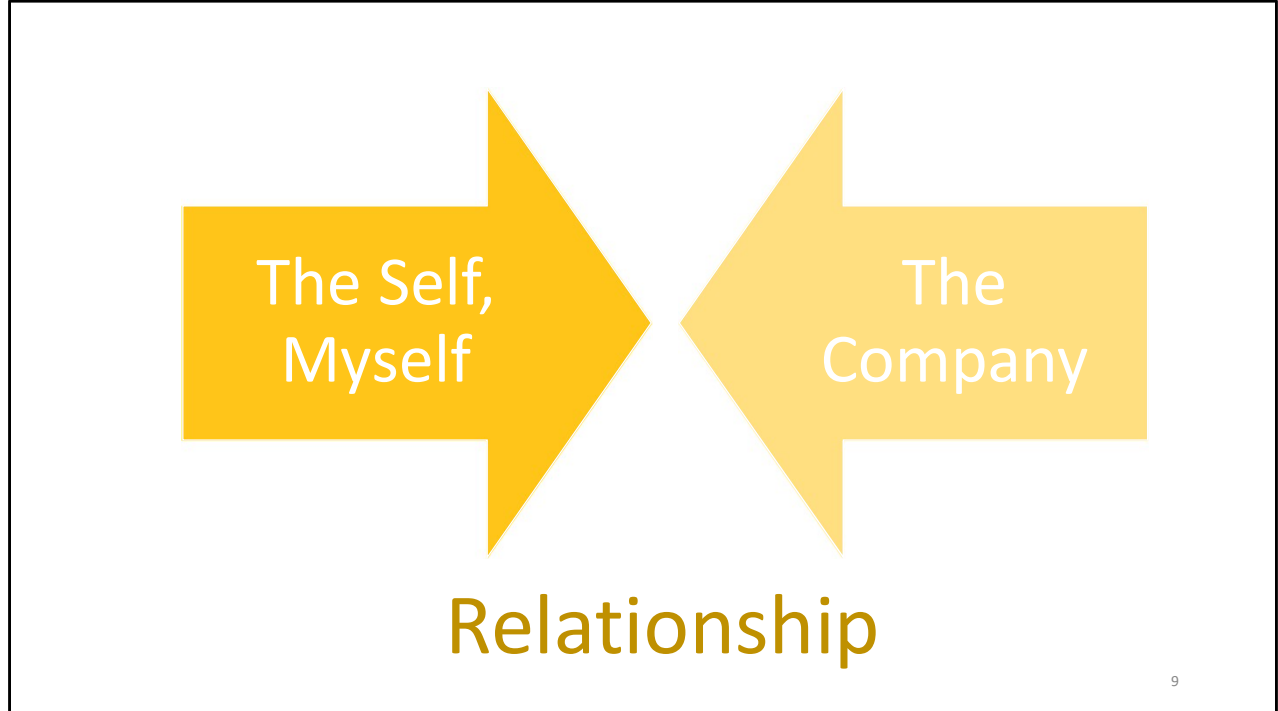
Again, not everything is punishment.

The company is also a road to savings, car, house, vacation, education

However, this path is also perceived as a prison.

In this wall you can see, as well, the forces mentioned in the previous group drawing.

Some forces go top-down (as a lightning bolt or a whip) and freeze other sources of power, like the manpower.



The 3 metaphors THE WALL, THE GAME, THE FORCE symbolize the relationship between the student's self as employee and the company he/she belong to, in both senses.

The 3 metaphors were elicited in Executive MBA classes, where all the students are employed.

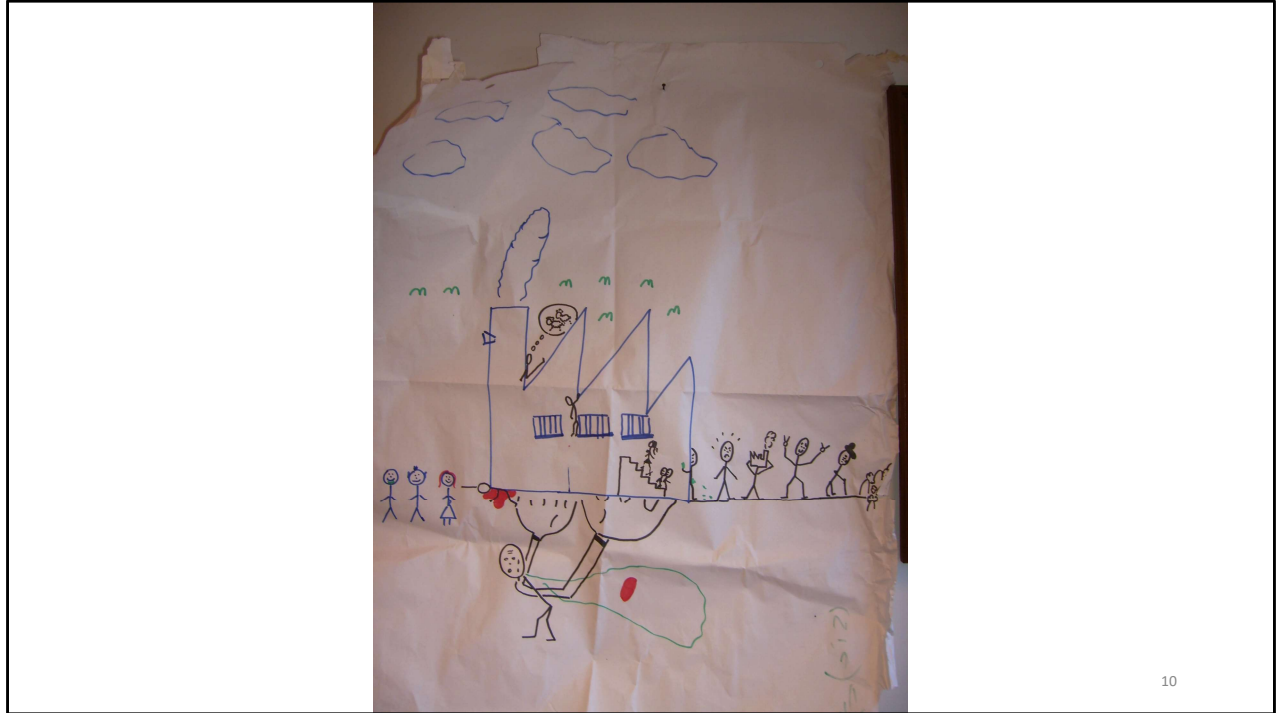
The methodology for eliciting these metaphors was the group drawing.

The aim was to draw this relationship.

All the drawings that I'm going to show, were made by 4 o 6 students. So in one classroom you have, more or less, four or five groups drawing at the same time.

The drawings are not only explained by its creators, first of all they are interpreted by other classmates who didn't create this group drawing, but created another one.

So, the different readings reflect the shared understandings
among those 20 or 25 students
Then, there is a third reading, which is mine.



In this group-drawing the company again is represented as a big wall.

The self of the employee is doing an enormous effort.

Notice the big hands, the sweating face, the blood, the bleeding superhero's cape and his flying skills.

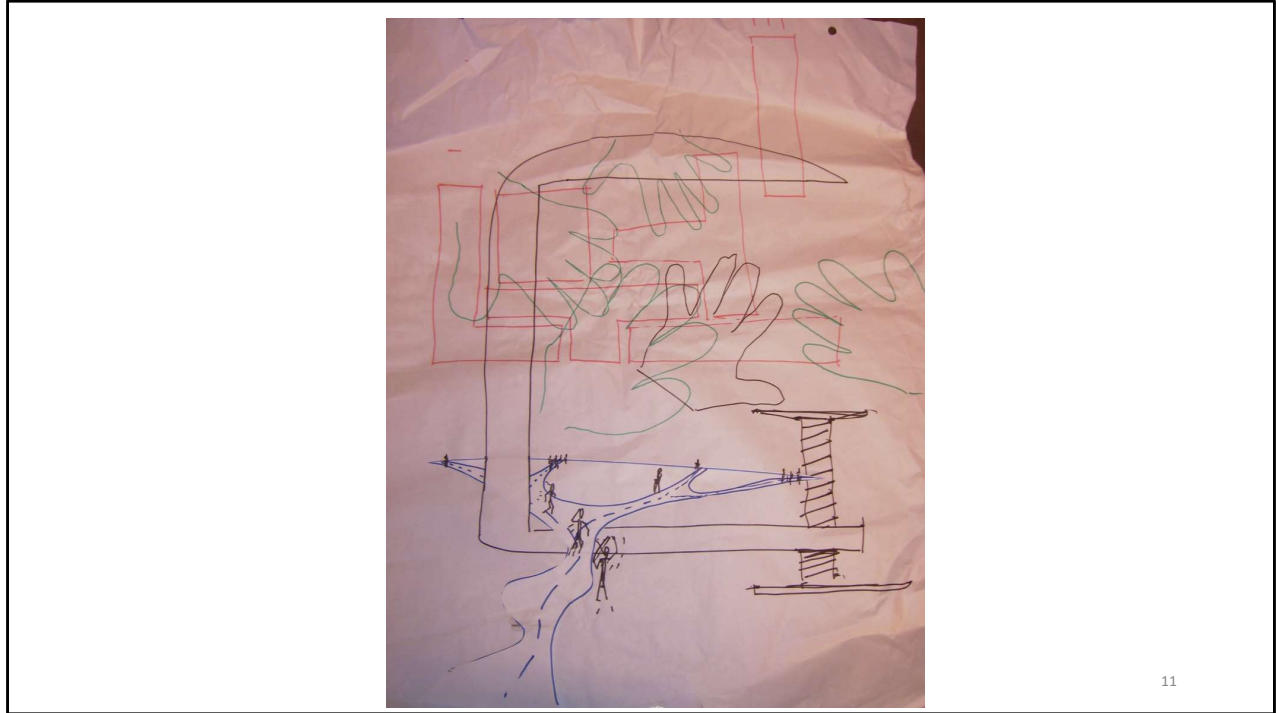
The employee is sustaining the company, the self is bearing all the efforts.

Here, the force is bottom-up, and the heaviness is top-down.

You can see people climbing the stairs, people sleeping on the top, and people complaining outside.

For some people, suffering is all the way long, inside, outside.

For others, it's easier.

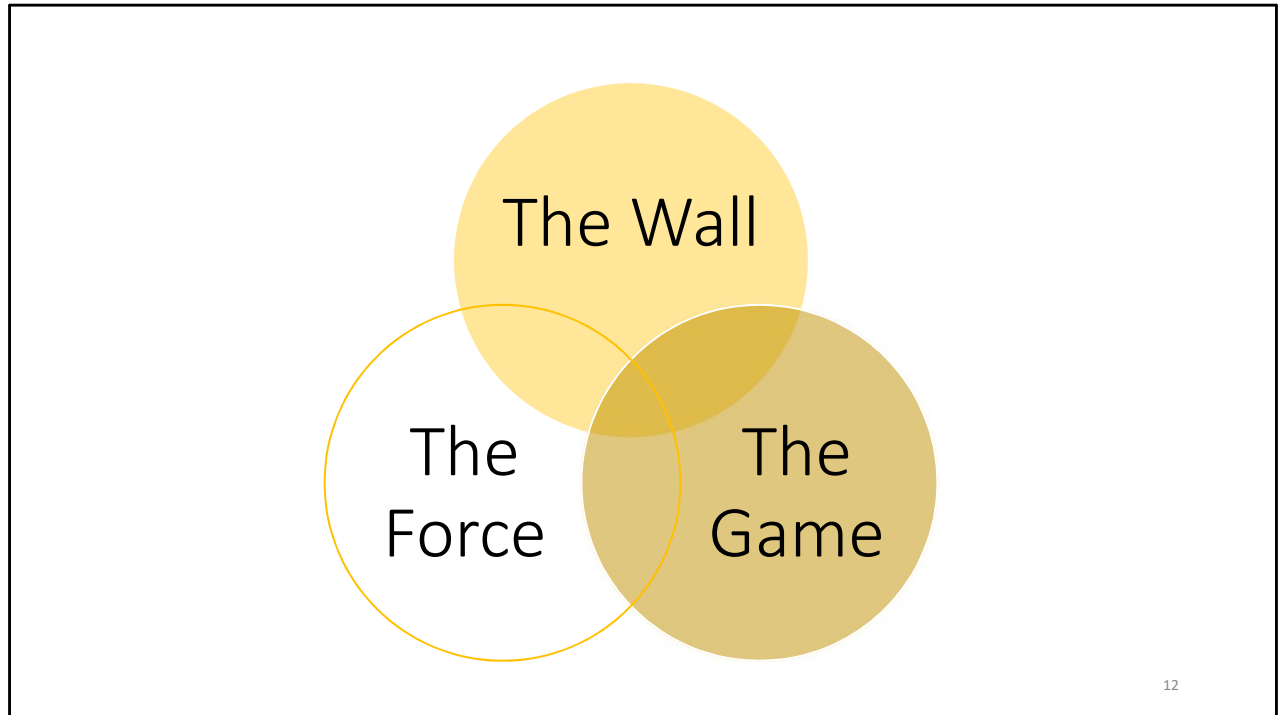


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In this drawing we find again bricks . 2010
but now the brick is not any more in an static wall.
There is a random game, like the Tetris, that land the brick
where the luck allows it.
The brick symbolizes the self
The brick is not only a piece of a whole, like in the wall, but also
a piece of a game.
Here, the company is represented by the carpenters' vise. The
vise holds the bricks, gives them stability and shape.
If we observe the forces, we can identify 2: a random force, and
also a unitive force.
The forces are like the fate and the arbitrary rules will place you
and hold you in a discretionary way.
The hands symbolize individual work. One of the hands is called

“the black hand”, which means that somebody with hidden identity can change the things up.

The company is experienced as a path where you are on your own. People on the road are armed with bows and arrows. However, this place will hold you, will secure you until the black hand decides other way.



We have already seen some elements of the force, of the wall, and of the game.

They are not the only ones, but the most repeated and the most comprehensive one

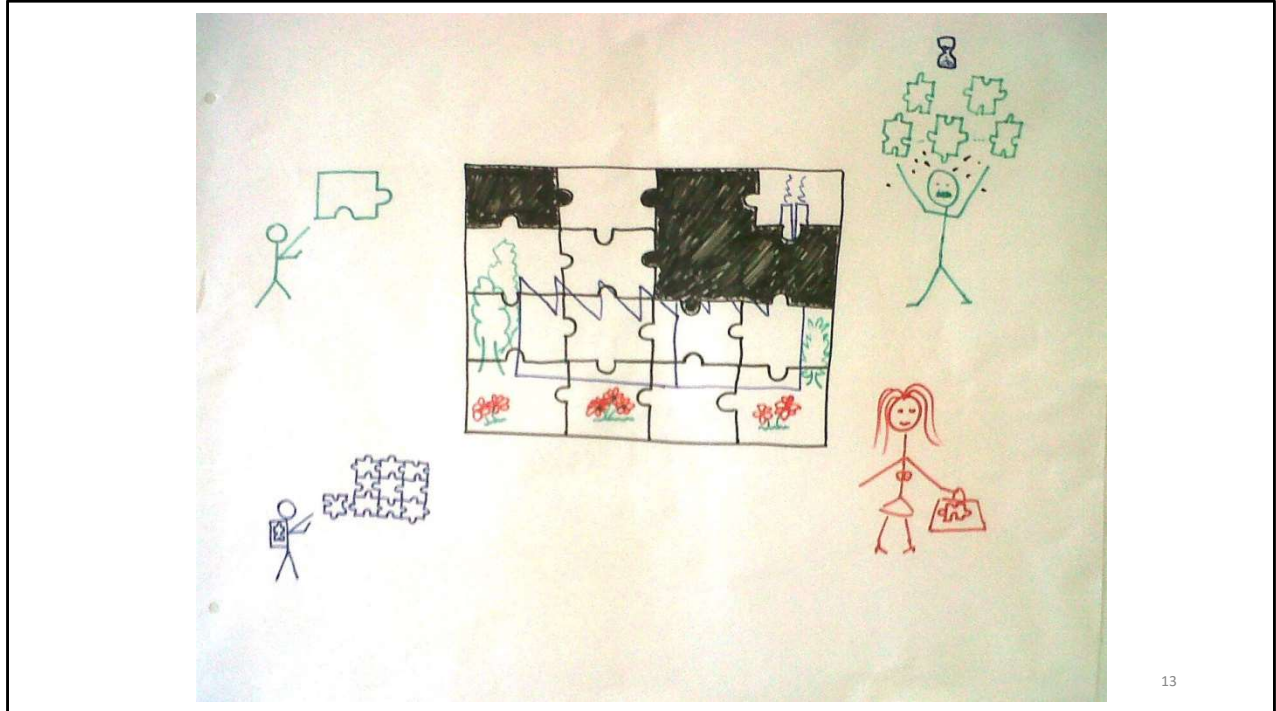
As metaphors, these images can integrate contradictory elements.

And as we have already seen, they should not be considered as discrete or isolated symbols.

On the contrary, they are, imbricated and overlapped.

As mythologist Gilbert Durand says: symbols explain themselves each other

Let`s see more drawings



2010

This group drawing symbolizes the same relationship. Here, we find pieces but of a puzzle. The company is the big puzzle. People are pieces who need to fit in. People make enormous efforts to fit it, managing time and tasks.

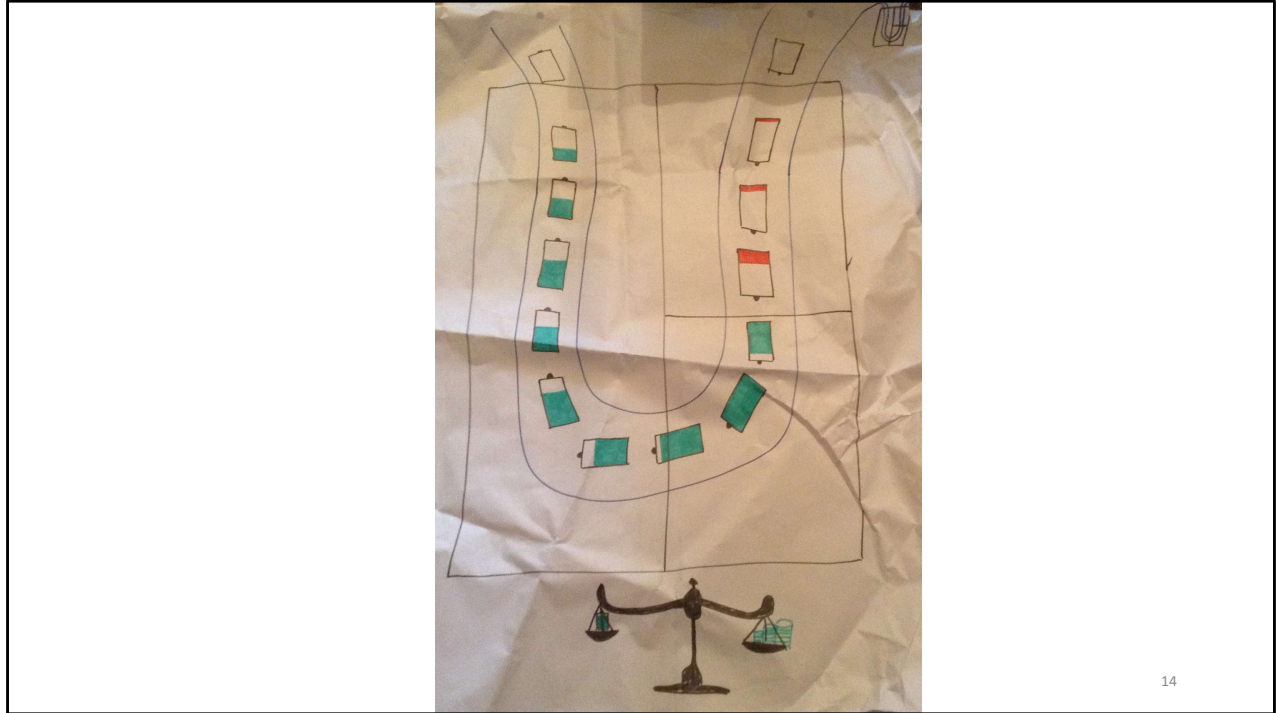
The only force that we can notice here, is the personal effort to fit in.

However, the strict design of the puzzle, is also a hidden force to deal with.

Differences, symbolized by a woman, are not always an advantage to fit in the big picture.

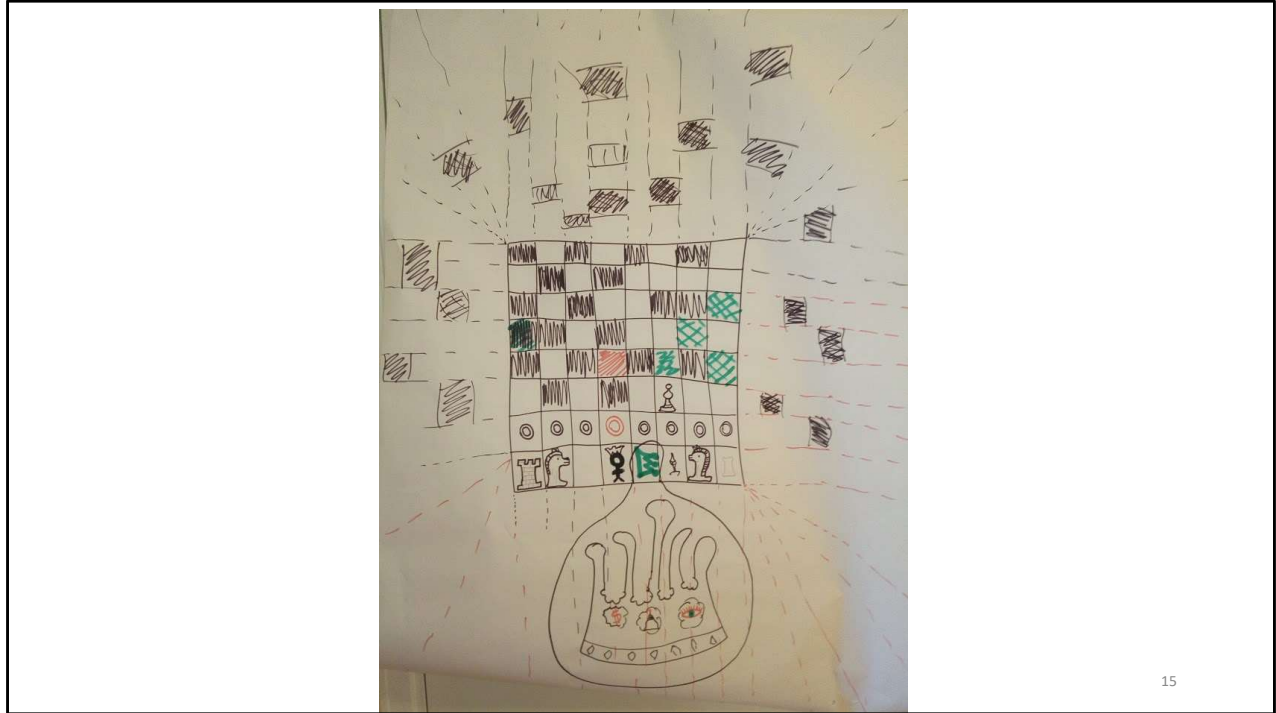
So, we have here a constructive relationship between the part and the whole which is also a game where the student as

employee experience that the challenge is to avoid being out of place.



In this drawing (2015) the students see themselves a small pieces of energy, which are organized by the balance-sheet. Here the forces are balanced, but according to the company's interests only.

At the beginning, the company provides energy to the individual. At the end, the individual is exhausted.



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2018

Here, we have a board and pieces of chess and checkers

The relationship with the company is a game where you can experience many things. For example:

That you make choices

That you take risks, receive benefits or setbacks

You find multiple rules, and some of them are unknown yet.

some pieces follow the rules, and some don't.

In the game you can experience yourself as a piece which is played by others, or on the contrary that you are the King who play others



This drawing is from 2015.

Here we can see that the students experience a fruitful and growing relationship with the company

However, there are some threats, like the big scissors, or the small ants.

You can find these threats once you walk into the organizational maze.

In the maze, you find fruits, ants or scissors, but in a random way. The maze is a different game than the Tetris, or the chess or the puzzle.

It can be adventurous, fun, but also a dead end.

Here the forces are merely random forces.



2018

Here, we can see the relationship is symbolized as a whirligig. The whirligig moves like a spinner. That is the company. The center of the relationship is an exchange of knowledge, of know how

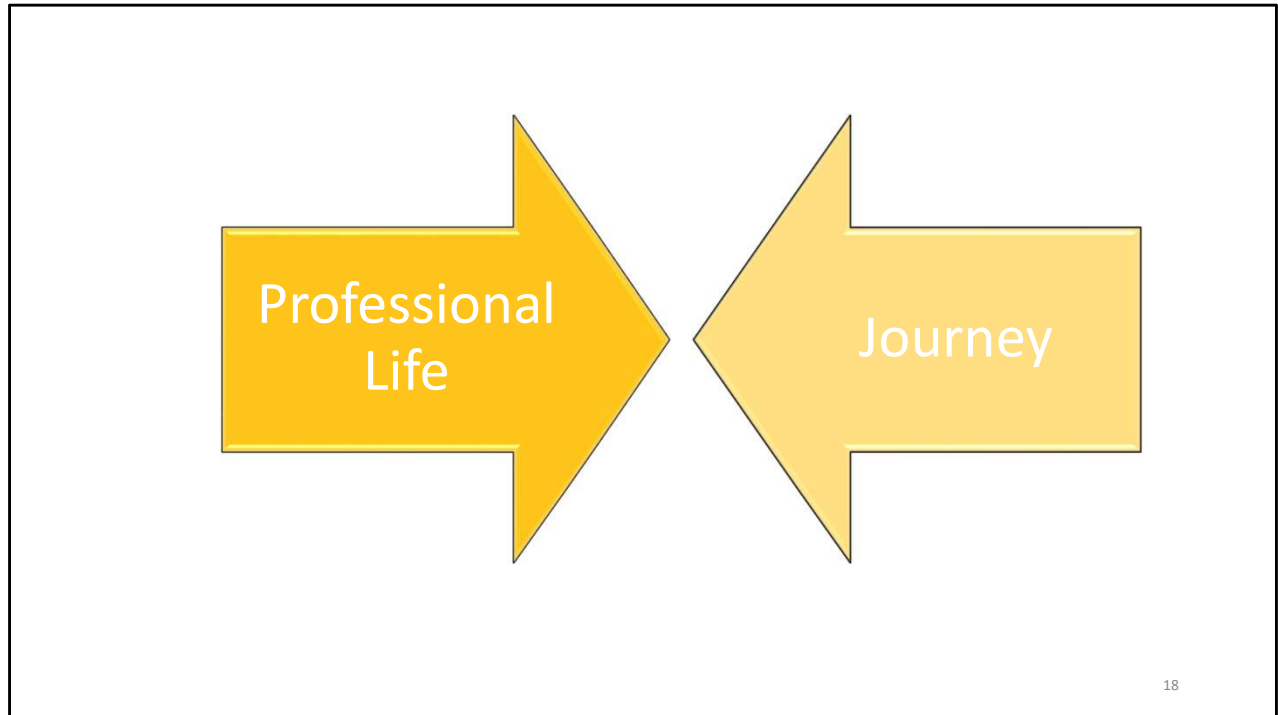
The force here is a centrifugal force

People seem to be treated like toys.

They are played by the company

In its movement people received benefits, or are discarded and replaced by another one.

Some of them are running or scaping and other feel drown.



Now, the last 3 drawings I`m going to show you, are about imagining and drawing the professional life as a journey
Well, you can imagine yourselves where is this trip going: to the top



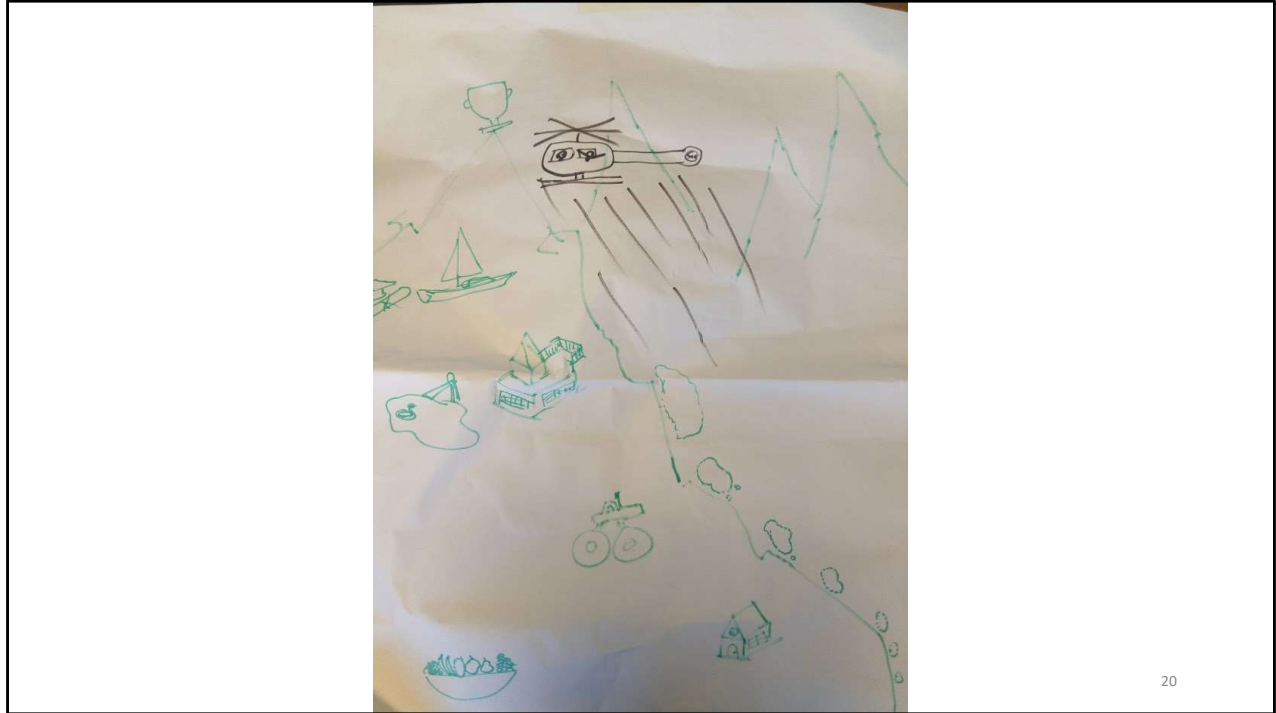
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2014

If the purpose of life is to reach the top, why we cannot choose a vehicle (VIACL) or something that can smooze the climbing?

To reach to the top some of them use the stairs and others get a privileged elevator

And in the end the high aim: the personal equilibrium

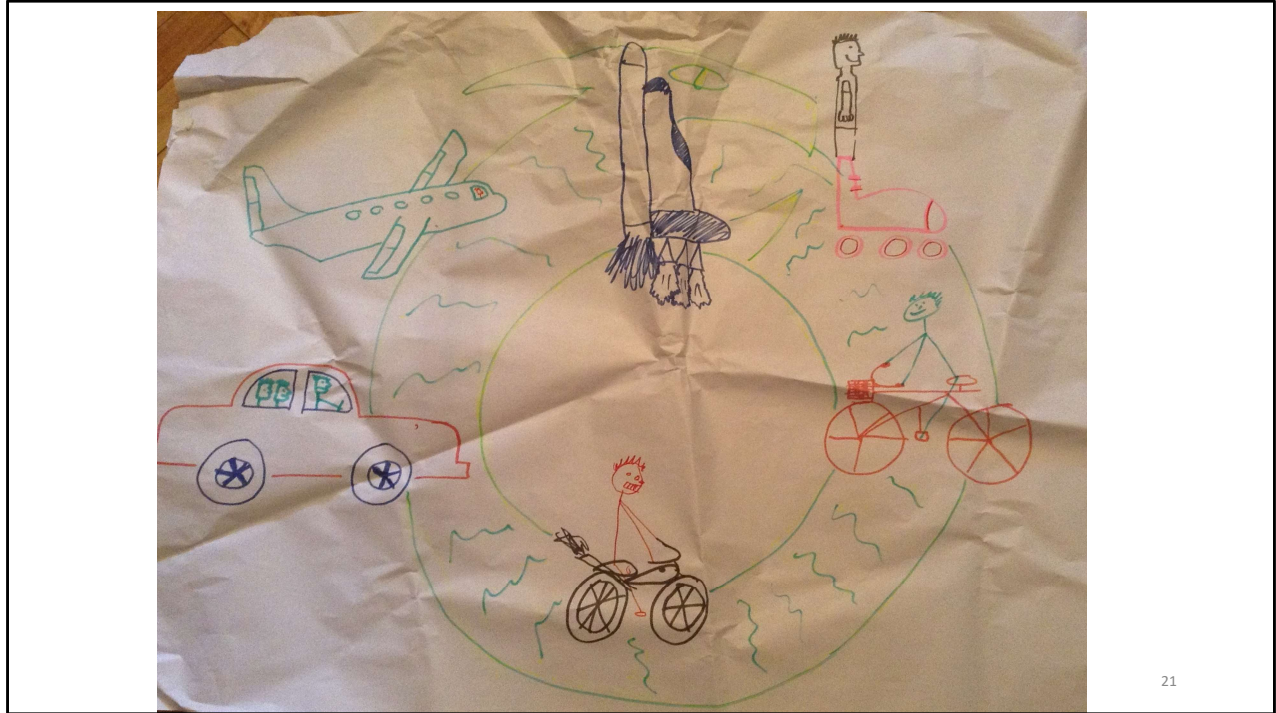


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2018

Why not a helicopter?

While lots of rocks roll down the mountain, they aspire to a powerful tool helping them to climb.



(2015)

the life is considered a cycle and growing in life means that you are changing and improving your vehicles

The final vehicle is made for reaching the stars.

No less than that



Let`s infer some insights about our MBA students mindset

FIRST SLIDE

Existentially speaking: They experience the company as place of power.

The company is not a place of production of goods or production of services

The company is not a place of efficiency, or a place for rational decision making

Some of them feel themselves powerless and imprisoned inside the corporations.

And they want to be empowered

SLIDE 2

The company is experienced as an unbalanced place where some of them are privileged or need less effort to climb to the top and staying there.

They also experience that the corporation as a game of survival
They want to learn about the game. They want to know about its rules

They are doing an MBA to understand the rules and play the game
However, some of them want to do the effort, but some of them forget to work on themselves to gaining new skills. They only want a vehicle (VIACL)

SLIDE 3

Let's give them ideas, images and resources for self awareness, to help them work on their inner selves and gain some real deep personal strenght.

And May the force be with you