

## Starting up

- Think about your job or profession, or one that you would like to have. List a dozen words and expressions that are used among members of that profession, particularly ones that outsiders would not understand.

## Grammar – compound adjectives

- 1 Do this exercise before reading the article. Match the compound adjectives to the nouns they are most likely to describe in the context of a management conference. ('Man-made' occurs twice.)

1 hard-working	organisations
2 would-be	blog
3 best-known	works
4 man-made	executives
5 Austrian-born	change
6 well-honed	theorists
7 pre-conference	management writer
8 man-made	sword

- 2 Look through the whole article to see if you were right.

- 3 Now match the combinations in 1 above to these examples.

- a) participants at the conference with potentially interesting ideas
- b) part of the information available on internet before the conference
- c) language when used well
- d) senior managers in large companies
- e) Peter Drucker
- f) global warming
- g) companies, charities, political parties
- h) *The Practice of Management*

## **Reading 1**

A metaphor is a way of describing something by referring to it as something else and suggesting that it has similar qualities to that thing. (Some metaphorical language is used so often that people do not think about its 'original' meaning.) Look through the article to find metaphors related to:

### Paragraph 1

- a) biology – natural selection
- b) politics – sudden change
- c) clothing / design (2 words)

### Paragraph 2

- d) physics – lack of air
- e) ancient Roman cities – a place where people meet
- f) water flowing out
- g) the environment and the organisms in it, seen as a whole
- h) biology – reproduction of plants
- i) geography – feature with plants and water

### Paragraph 3

- j) information technology – systems of linked devices

### Paragraph 4

- k) warfare – variety of weapons considered together
- l) something that could be fired from a weapon (but probably never is)
- m) physics – mechanical force
- n) music
- o) biology/geology – the centre of a fruit, or of the earth

## Messy jargon can swamp lucid business thinking

Management theory has moved forward by evolution rather than revolution in recent years. Everyone should be grateful for that, because there are only so many fads and fashions that hard-working executives can handle in any quarter. “We have to get past the idea that some huge new idea is going to come along and change everything,” Julian Birkinshaw of London Business School told the closing session of the recent Global Peter Drucker Forum in Vienna. Rather than the theory, Prof Birkinshaw went on, what is changing is the practice of management — which, as it happens, is also the title of one of Drucker’s best-known works.

The problem with the vacuum of theory is that would-be theorists need no encouragement to rush to fill it. This year, the forum tempted otherwise thoughtful contributors with the overarching title “The Power of Ecosystems”. As a result, the word was so drained of meaning through overuse by the end of the conference that I started mentally removing the prefix “eco” to retain my sanity. There is the seed of a useful idea floating somewhere at the bottom of the swamp of mixed metaphor.

Business leaders certainly need to operate in a world of “new, flexible and adaptive networks of enterprises, jointly pursuing ambitious purposes”, as the introduction to this year’s forum put it. Like the ideal technology system described by internet pioneer Vint Cerf of Google, the healthiest such networks are combinations of “stability, interoperability and adaptability to change”. Author and academic Amy Webb pointed out that metaphors could be a useful way of thinking through complicated concepts. The challenge is “we tend to talk about things in layers of abstraction”.

In fact, Drucker used to describe himself as a “social ecologist”, who studied man-made organisations in the same way a natural ecologist studies the biological environment. The Austrian-born management writer, though, “used language like a well-honed sword”, Anika Marie Kennaugh told a session where young finalists of the forum’s annual essay contest pitch new ideas. “Our arsenal of words,” she pointed out, is now decidedly blunt. Contributions to the pre-conference blog claimed ecosystems could be a silver bullet, they ought to have a value chain — or possibly even be part of one — they should be “leveraged” to “maximise value and achieve competitive advantage” or “populated with new addressable customers”. “If you orchestrate it and tie the ecosystem on to a platform, you’re really resolving the customer problem holistically,” enthused one panellist.

This year, the most useful and engaging discussions of interconnected systems concentrated on the people at their core. I perked up when one speaker started talking about how BASF had helped shrimp farmers by coordinating different participants in the shrimping supply chain, or when Rick Goings, emeritus chairman of Tupperware, reminded the audience of the millions of women who make up the group’s networked sales force and whose advancement the food storage company has tried to champion.

There is another fundamental reason why “ecosystem” is an unhelpful business buzzword. We live in a natural system that man-made change has all too obviously thrown out of kilter. A true ecosystem cannot be “designed”, “built”, let alone “led”, but we all know how easily it can be destroyed.



## Vocabulary – synonyms

Look at the whole article. Replace the words and expressions in *italics* with the correct alternative that has the closest meaning. (The item must also fit grammatically into the surrounding context, which does not change.)

- 1 Management theory has *moved forward* by evolution rather than revolution in recent years.  
a) transported                      b) travelled                      c) progressed
- 2 Everyone should be *grateful* for that, because there are only so many fads and fashions that hard-working executives can handle in any quarter.  
a) thankful                      b) obliged                      c) indebted
- 3 “We have to get past the idea that some huge new idea is going to *come along* and change everything,”  
a) land                      b) manifest                      c) appear
- 4 The problem with the vacuum of theory is that *would-be* theorists need no encouragement to rush to fill it.  
a) inspiring                      b) aspiring                      c) perspiring
- 5 I started mentally removing the prefix “eco” to retain my *sanity*.  
a) mental health                      b) physical health                      c) head health
- 6 Business leaders certainly need to *operate* in a world of “new, flexible and adaptive networks of enterprises, jointly pursuing ambitious purposes”  
a) run                      b) function                      c) process
- 7 Author and academic Amy Webb pointed out that metaphors could be a useful way of thinking through *complicated* concepts.  
a) complex                      b) complete                      c) complimentary
- 8 The Austrian-born management writer, though, “used language like a *well-honed* sword”, Anika Marie Kennaugh told a session  
a) blunt                      b) dull                      c) sharp
- 9 I *perked up* when one speaker started talking about how BASF had helped shrimp farmers by coordinating different participants in the shrimping supply chain  
a) felt better                      b) felt depressed                      c) felt bored
- 10 or when Rick Goings, emeritus chairman of Tupperware, reminded the audience of the millions of women who *make up* the group’s networked sales force  
a) consist                      b) constitute                      c) consequent

11 and whose advancement the food storage company has tried to *champion*.

- a) prioritise                      b) encourage                      c) win

12 We live in a natural system that man-made change has all too obviously *thrown out of kilter*.

- a) caused to destroy              b) caused to develop              c) caused to become dysfunctional

## Reading 2

Which of these are *not* correct 'takeaways' from the article?

Jargon in business...

- a) is always to be avoided.
- b) can sometimes be detached from reality.
- c) can be unhelpful.
- d) can sometimes lead to mixed metaphors.
- e) was avoided by Drucker himself.

## Further discussion / Group work

- 1 Give other examples of business jargon in English or your own language. Are there instances of English jargon that are used in your own language? Which?
- 2 Jargon is a type of cliché – an idea or phrase that is used so much that some people think that it is not effective. Is it always possible to avoid clichés, or are there situations that require set phrases that have been used many times, even if they are clichés? If so, give some examples of these situations from your job or one that you would like to have.

**ANSWER KEY****Grammar**

- 1 hard-working executives - d
- 2 would-be theorists - a
- 3 best-known works - h
- 4 man-made organisations - g
- 5 Austrian-born management writer - e
- 6 well-honed sword - c
- 7 pre-conference blog - b
- 8 man-made change - f

**Reading 1**

- a) evolution
- b) revolution
- c) fashion, fad
- d) vacuum
- e) forum
- f) drained
- g) ecosystem
- h) seed
- i) swamp
- j) networks
- k) arsenal
- l) silver bullet
- m) leverage
- n) orchestrate
- o) core

**Vocabulary**

1c    2a    3c    4b    5a    6b    7a    8c    9a    10b    11b    12c

**Reading 2**

a) and e)

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