

# YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 27

*Metaphors are a great tool for transformation and innovation*

---

## Use Metaphors to Facilitate Transformation...

*"The metaphor is probably the most fertile power possessed by man."*

*Jose Ortega y Gasset (1883 - 1955) Spanish philosopher*

*"Tim, you've changed. You're caring. Giving. You're... loving. And you've got a termite coming out of your ear." TV Programme Home Improvement; script*



*"Termite Hill, Shamwari"*

### *Are you using metaphors to their full power?*

---

We were driving round the [Shamwari Game Reserve](#) in South Africa, when our ranger stopped at a termite hill.

"This one is dead" she remarked. "The aardvark (anteater) has burrowed in to feed on the termites and has rooted out the queen along with the others. Without the queen, the colony dies within weeks."

As we drove on I considered that if the aardvark had been brighter, he could have had an endless supply of food, as the queen produces twenty thousand eggs a DAY.

I wondered too if we couldn't use this as a metaphor for some organisational interventions.

In a bid to capture the most "termites", e.g. obtain greater productivity, from the "termite hill" i.e. the organisation, the "aardvark" i.e. management, destroys the "queen" that sustained it, e.g. its creative staff?

Having pondered that, I got on with my holiday!

## SO

Metaphors are a powerful way to view a situation. Zoltan Kovecses explains in his book (["Metaphors. A Practical Introduction"](#)) that the metaphor has a target (e.g. the organisation) and a source (e.g. the termite hill).

You compare the characteristics of the source (e.g. aardvark eats queen) with the characteristics of the target to visualise the target, (I'll let you imagine your own example).

As a result, we can provide others and ourselves with a way to understand complex situations in a simple way and provide a common language to use ("let's make sure we don't eat the queen here").

# YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 27

To use metaphors most powerfully you should be aware of three points:

- They can be too simplistic or crude and
- They only reveal certain aspects of a situation so
- You should use more than one source to compare with your target if you want to reveal more about the situation

*If you would like a more in depth article about metaphor, with a tool that helps you use them, click [here](#) to find Metaphor and its Use.*

## ACTION

- Think of a situation in your organisation or your life.
- Generate three separate metaphors for it and see how they help reveal more about it.
- For an excellent read on metaphor you might like to look at Gareth Morgan's "Imaginization". Coincidentally he uses the construction of termite hills as a metaphor for corporate strategy.

## TO CLOSE

Our Land Rover arrived at a "live" termite hill. With a knife, our guide scraped a small hole and immediately termites appeared to repair it. She put one termite in each of our hands and invited us to eat it.



Termite

Only after my son and my wife had popped them in their mouth quite happily, was I persuaded (or embarrassed) to eat mine.

I can tell you that they taste overpoweringly of peppermint, but I felt like the Terminator eating this tiny wriggly little creature. Or should that be "Termitator"?

Have a metaphoric week, run a few ideas up the flagpole at work to see if they fly.

*[John Brooker](#) | Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.*



*We facilitate leaders and teams in medium to large organisations internationally to:*

- *Make Meetings Outstanding*
- *Make Transformation Simpler*
- *Make Innov8ion Flow*

*Imagine what we can do for you...*

*Contact John or Kate Brooker:*

*Speak: +44 (0) 20 8869 9990*

*Write: [hi@yesand.eu](mailto:hi@yesand.eu)*

*Read: [www.yesand.eu](http://www.yesand.eu)*