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**Resumo** The main purpose of this research paper is to understand and define the concept, scope and dimensions of organisational schizophrenia. This concept is argued to be of valuable importance for the field of human resources. A definition of organisational schizophrenia is presented both by addressing existing literature and also from applying a qualitative exploratory approach using focus group discussion and interviews. The main conclusions of this research are that organisational schizophrenia is ...

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# **DEFINITION AND A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR ORGANIZATIONAL SCHIZOPHRENIA**

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**Abstract:** The main purpose of this research paper is to understand and define the concept, scope and dimensions of organisational schizophrenia. This concept is argued to be of valuable importance for the field of human resources. A definition of organisational schizophrenia is presented both by addressing existing literature and also from applying a qualitative exploratory approach using focus group discussion and interviews. The main conclusions of this research are that organisational schizophrenia is an important concept that should be further clarified and studied. From the focus group there is some agreement that the analogy is very useful for understanding some phenomena within the organizational behaviour realm. Actually, organisational schizophrenia is more than just a metaphor, since its understanding can result in practical implications, such as identifying symptoms and the application of corrective actions.

**Key-words:** organizational schizophrenia; metaphors; organizational behavior.

### **Introduction**

The main idea behind this paper is that organisations are constantly pressured by the dichotomy between “being” efficient and “showing” a positive attitude towards society in general. If an organisation is tempted to pursue antagonist paths derived by management fads, probably these may lead to opposing behaviours, confusion and some degree of frustration. In their paper published in MIT Sloan Management Review, Bartlett and Ghoshal (2002) argue that in an era of organizational fluctuations and fads consisting in “delaying, destaffing, restructuring and reengineering” has created employees who are “more exhausted than empowered, more cynical than self-renewing”. “Somewhere between theory and practice, precious human capital is being misused, wasted

or lost". Another important claim of the authors was that "today's managers are trying to implement third-generation strategies through second-generation organizations with first-generation management".

These thoughts led one to consider that this constant market pressure could be leading organisations to a "nervous breakout" and to have processes, policies and practices that can be viewed as a form of "organisational schizophrenia".

So, in order to attempt to define what organizational schizophrenia is, it is important to understand the actual disease. According to the American Psychiatric Organization, schizophrenia is a "chronic brain disorder" that "when is active, symptoms can include delusions, hallucinations, trouble with thinking and concentration, and lack of motivation". Is there a parallelism between this disease and some type of organizational behaviour led by a continuous fast pace within the business reality? The paradigm of the organisation viewed as a brain is well established within organisational theory (Morgan, 2006). If an organisation has a "brain" and "it can learn" is not possible then that this brain may also suffer from a disease?

The main objective of this research was then to understand the concept of organisational schizophrenia. How is this concept viewed and treated within the literature? What are the main issues a definition of this term would comply with? Would a definition of organisational schizophrenia be accepted by professionals within different fields of practice? Would they consider it useful? Identifying the "disease" what would then be the next steps for addressing it?

The approach taken within this exploratory research was to perform a systematic literature review in order to identify the grounds for the definition. For the systematic review, the RefViz software was used initially and after building the literature map obtained further research was undertaken outside the Web of Knowledge database. The next step was to perform a focus group with different professionals and test an eventual definition. Finally, indication for future research is presented from a conceptual model perspective.

### Systematic Literature Review

The nature of the research in hands required searching, filtering and analyzing a large amount of publications. This is a research task to be performed in the methodological underpinning of literature reviews and conceptual model building. In the latest decade, there have been quite a large number of academic studies focusing on meta-analyses, systematic literature reviews, integrative and structured literature reviews and so on (Briner and Denyer, 2012, Crossan and Apaydin, 2010, Denyer and Tranfield, 2009, Pittaway and Cope, 2007, Walker, 2010, Kofinas and Saur-Amaral, 2008, Saur-Amaral and Amaral, 2010).

The main benefit of using this method is being able without previous knowledge on the topic to achieve a complete process of identification of scientific main areas and a high degree of efficiency in the research process (Kofinas and Saur-

Amaral, 2008, Saur-Amaral, 2010, Saur-Amaral, 2011). In social sciences, the first adaptation of systematic literature reviews was done in 2002 and 2003 (Tranfield et al., 2003, Tranfield and Mouchel, 2002). Tranfield and his colleagues proposed that systematic reviews should be used to develop decision-making evidence databases for managers, to overcome the typical unsystematic, informal and unconditioned process of literature review and to identify key areas to research.

For this study, the author applied the three steps of systematic literature reviews, considering the experience of previous studies (Kusluvan et al., 2010, Hjalager, 2010, Law et al., 2010, Kofinas and Saur-Amaral, 2008, Saur-Amaral, 2011, Saur-Amaral, 2012). Firstly, the review protocol was build. Secondly, a search is rigorously performed, according to the review protocol and all the steps are recorded and decisions justified, ensuring transparency and replicability of the study. Then, records are extracted to Endnote X4, and the preliminary relevance analysis and selection is performed.

RefViz software is then used to understand the sample and create the starting point for content analysis, using as orientation framework the keywords, drawing on categories building in a grounded-theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). The literature map is built upon the data obtained from content analysis.

### Search Steps and Filtering Procedures

Using the protocol, search was conducted in three different moments (see appendix 1 for details), using keywords such as schizophrenic organizations and organizational pathologies, followed by a combination of the three searches using Search History functionality in ISI Current Contents, so as to ensure there were no duplicate records in the final sample. Search 1 OR Search 2 OR Search 3 gave us a starting sample of **509** papers, which was a first working sample, exported to Endnote X4.

The Subject Bibliography with abstracts, organized by publication years was created using Endnote. The researcher performed separately the relevance analysis, reading all abstracts and putting aside those that were not related with the initial research goal. After the relevance analysis only **53** relevant papers were found which constituted the working sample.

### Descriptive Statistics

The initial analysis of the sample was regarding paper distribution per year (see Figure 1) and revealed there has been an oscillating tendency. The first paper emerges in 1994 and until 2008 the tendency remains between 1 till 3 papers published per year. From 2008 onwards there was an increase in publications shifting between 5 and 6 papers, excluding a lower production year in 2011. One may argue that this is an indicator of the interest of this field of research, beginning in the 90's until presently, but still not firmly established.

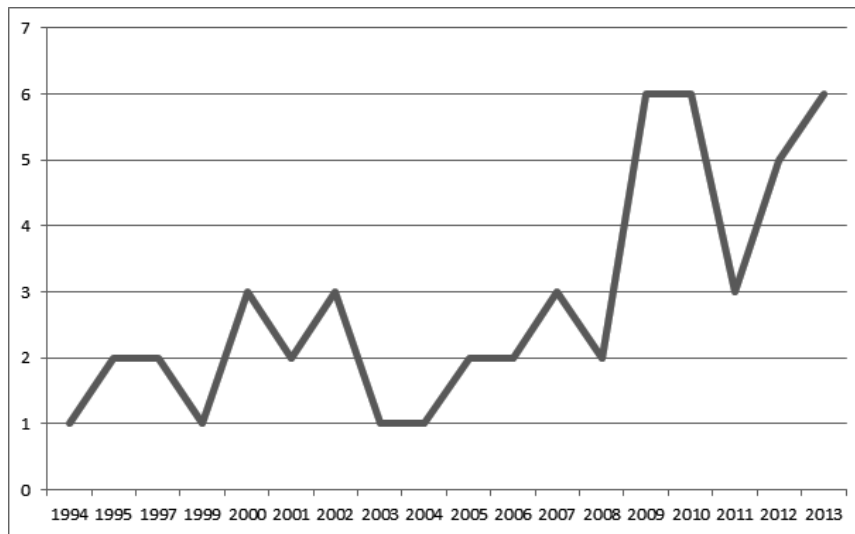


Figure 1 - Paper distribution per publication year

Regarding scientific journals it can be found 39 different publications that vary in scope between Ethics, Law and Management. Again it is difficult to identify a representative Journal in the field (see Figure 2) nevertheless the Journal of Organizational Management stands out concentrating about 13% of papers of the sample. Other occurrences are barely significant.

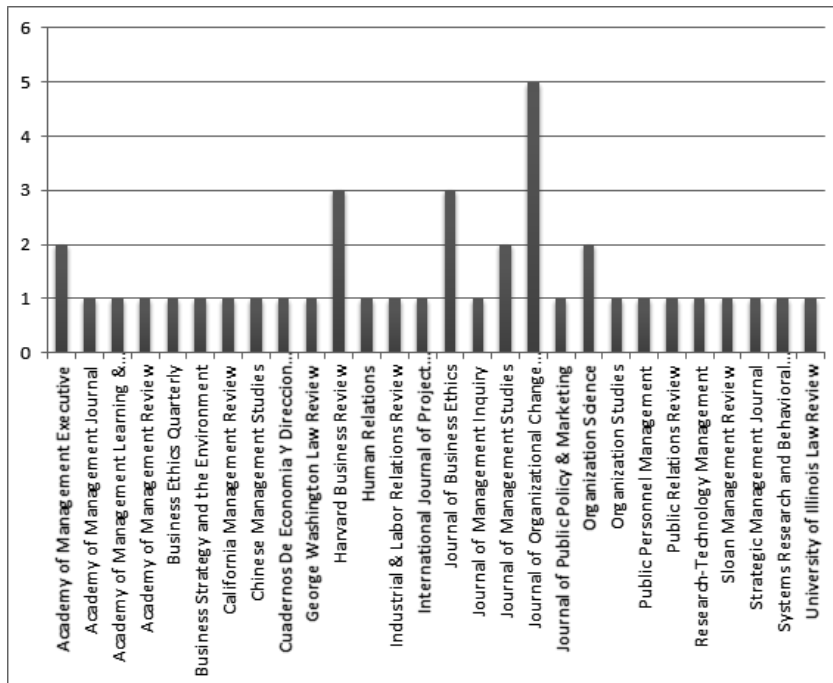


Figure 2 - Papers published per scientific journal

The analysis of top authors revealed that there was no author with more than one paper in the subject. Nevertheless looking more closely to our sample it is possible to identify a paper from de Vries (2000) that in the further literature review was considered as a leading author in the field. Another author, Edgar Schein, well known from his work on organizational culture was found (Quick and Schein, 2000) with a paper on the field.

#### Exploratory Galaxies: Results from Data-Mining in Refviz

RefViz defines groups using word count and semantic distance and the researcher uses major topics and minor topics, together with stop words and thesaurus to ensure quality of the data mining process (Agrawal, 2009). Based on calculations of number of words and semantic distance (applied to abstracts, titles and keywords), as well as the personalized thesaurus available for the analyzed sample, RefViz software draws maps of literature that can be used to comprehend the invisible colleges, or to identify trends and gaps based on contrasting different time intervals. The main limitation of using this software is that data (papers to be analyzed) can only be retrieved from ISI Web of Knowledge. Since this database includes only Journals with impact factor, many

research work produced is left out. In order to overcome this limitation, after the literature map was drawn, further research was undertaken using all databases available for research.

Figure 3 presents the literature map drawn with RefViz 2.0 for the relevant sample characterized in the previous section. Considering that a key issue in defining the final map is the elimination of outliers in the first outputs, the literature map we presented was obtained after three reiterations, when no outlier could be identified, i.e. is a robust output.

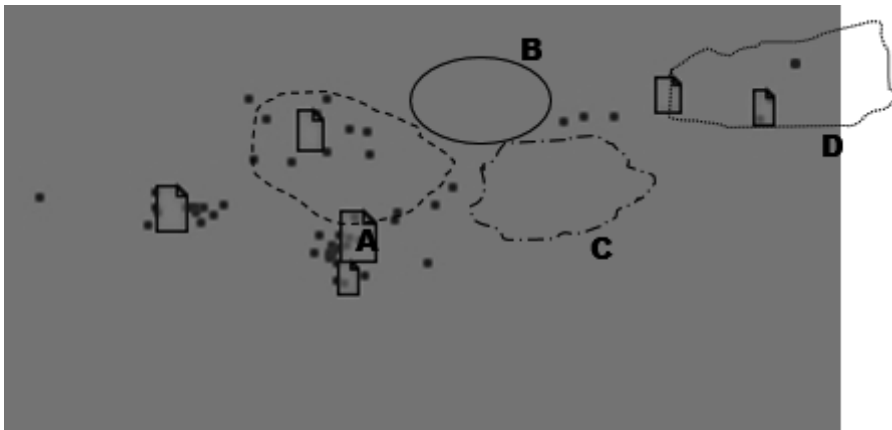


Figure 3 - Exploratory literature map drawn with RefViz

Looking at Figure 3, it is possible to identify six clusters of references, marked by the rectangle shape. Four of them were so closely linked that were considered as two for the purpose of the content analysis. Clusters were named according to their contents: (A) Managing Complexity; (B) Corporate Behaviour; (C) Organizational Metaphors and (D) Leadership and Ethics.

Content Analysis – ISI Web of Knowledge

Following the literature map drawn using Refviz and cluster identification a content analysis was undertaken.

#### (A) Managing Complexity

This cluster of literature was related to the consequences of ambivalence and ambiguity on self-concept and decision-making (Lapp and Carr, 2006) and using the dynamic capabilities view of organisations (Fraj et al 2013) for managing in a world of uncertainty (Kimmie, 2009).

#### (B) Corporate Behaviour

Corporate behaviour takes the perspective that social collectives have



normative minds and can be explored in terms of their social psychological processes (Yolles, 2009; Huang, 2007) that should take into account the inherent challenge of regulating it within the global economy (Gond et al, 2009).

### (C) Organisational Metaphors

Within this cluster authors discuss critically the use of metaphors in organization studies. They argue that, although these metaphors are potentially powerful it is necessary to take into account the inherent dynamics and bidirectionality of metaphorical language use (Schoeneborn et al 2013). Main metaphors used in this cluster were euphoria and corporate adrenaline (Brown, 1997); organizational miasma (Gabriel, 2012); organizational pathologies (Sales, 2002); paralysis by analysis (Langley, 1995); micromanagement disease (White, 2010); organizational dysfunction (Kersten, 2005); corporate bullying (Durniat, 2010) and finally organisational therapy and neurotic organisations (van de Loo and de Vries, 2000; Quick and Schein, 2000).

### (D) Leadership and Ethics

Within this small cluster, references allude to how leadership (Gardner, 2007) and personal traits (De Hoogh and Hartog, 2009) can have an impact on organisational behaviour.

An initial conceptual framework was designed based on the cluster analysis and is shown in the following figure. The main idea is that schizophrenic corporate behaviour can be the result of how companies deal with an uncertain business environment. The way literature address this issue can be further enlightened by an organisational metaphors' approach and the main influence revealed by the literature is related with leadership.

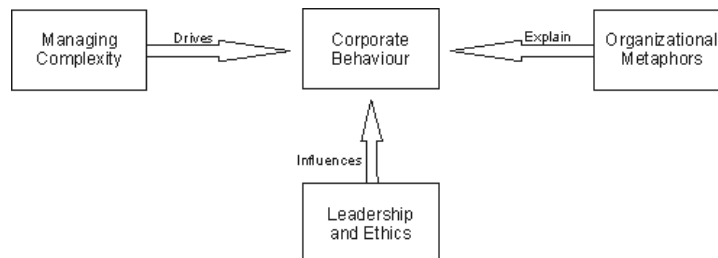


Figure 4 - Conceptual framework for organizational schizophrenia

Further literature review was then undertaken using all databases available. The rationale was to use keywords that emerged from the initial literature review undertaken at the ISI database.

## Content Analysis – Other Databases

“Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia” is a seminal work from Bateson et al (1956) that reports on a research project which formulated and tested the broad, systematic view of the nature, etiology and therapy of schizophrenia. In this work they explain the “double bind” theory, where an individual is confronted with a no win situation, no matter what he/she does. When a person is caught in a double bind situation he/she will respond defensively in a manner similar to the schizophrenic. They also point out that poorly designed communication processes provoke schizophrenic behaviours. “As his work progressed, Bateson proposed that we consider Epistemology as an overarching discipline of the natural sciences, including the social and behavioral sciences: a meta-science whose parameters extend to include the science of mind in the widest sense of the word” (Bale, 1992).

1) A mind is an aggregate of interacting parts or components.
2) The interaction between parts of mind is triggered by difference, and difference is a non-substantial phenomenon not located in space or time; difference is related to negentropy and entropy rather than energy.
3) Mental process requires collateral energy.
4) Mental process requires circular (or more complex) chains of determination.
5) In mental process, the effects of difference are to be regarded as transforms (i.e., coded versions) of events which preceded them. The rules of such transformation must be comparatively stable (i.e., more stable than the content), but are in themselves subject to transformation.
6) The description and classification of these processes of transformation disclose a hierarchy of logical types immanent in the phenomena.

Source: Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), p. 92.

Figure 5 - Criteria of Mind

The model of mind advanced in Bateson’s work (figure 5) is a radically inclusive paradigm: extending the meaning of mind well beyond its previous boundaries; and where warranted, recognizing mental process in systems that do not include living components.

Another author that emerged from the search was Manfred Kets de Vries, a recognised expert on leadership and organisational behaviour, with many works published regarding the study of organisational malfunctions (Kets de Vries and Miller, 1984, 1987; Kets de Vries, 1979, 1991).

This author (Vries, 2004) argues “that the organizational man or woman is not just a conscious, highly-focussed maximizing machine of pleasure and pains, but also a person subject to many (often contradictory) wishes, fantasies, conflicts, defensive behaviour, and anxieties - some conscious, others beyond consciousness”. He goes further stating that “after all, it is individuals that make up organizations and create the units that contribute to social processes.” He

poses a few questions, one of which is: "Is management really a rational task performed by rational people according to sensible organizational objectives?" He is also responsible for terms such as "organisational neurosis" and links these to organisational structures and leadership styles.

Wentworth (2002) presents some ideas regarding the concept of organizational schizophrenia, but not an actual definition. Nevertheless, she relates this concept to the "opposing pulls of employees' need to have a personal life and the organization's need to have employees accessible and working on an almost constant basis". According to her, "schizophrenia, in the clinical sense, implies a split between a person's thought and emotions. Schizophrenics display inappropriate thought patterns that often do not match the emotions displayed. Or they display emotions that fail to match the situation." The main focus given by this researcher is the number of hours of work and the balance between work and personal life. She also stresses that although companies are trying to provide programs to address this issue they are failing to do so. Also she blames technology for this overload (email, mobile contacts, etc.).

One author (Alvarado, 1984) presents the following metaphor "an organization is like a human body". To support this theory he quotes Ackoff (1974) that states "...this definition of health applies equally to organizations and organisms". In his paper he explores the metaphor of the human body in order to establish different organizational pathologies, building from the organizational theories perspective. He classifies human diseases such as hereditary and acquired, and as inflammations, degenerations and tumours. He goes further in his paper exploring organizational pathologies using these human illnesses as a comparison.

What are the symptoms of an unhealthy organization? According to Bierema (2012) stress, violence, an inability to manage diversity, violated psychological contracts, poor management and leadership (Puplampu, 2005), illness, underperformance, or absenteeism (Kets deVries, 2001) are all examples of organisational disease.

Some authors (Quick, Macik-Frey and Cooper, 2007) point out the role of leadership for the creation of unhealthy organisations, namely leaders may do significant damage to individuals and organizations through excessive narcissism, duplicity, and toxic micro management.

Puplampu (2005) presents a continuum between organisational health and death, pointing the finger to the structure, processes and technology's role in promoting healthy environments.

The Healthy Organization	The Normal Organization	The Sick or Struggling Organization (Level 1)	The Sick or Struggling Organization (Level 2)	The Distressed Organization (Level 3)	The Dying Organization
Characterized by fit between structure, people, systems, process and technology, with due regard for diversity and related matters	Serious efforts to align systems with market and environment amid normal difficulties	Up to two symptoms and in need of intervention. "Rotten fruit syndrome" internally sick but holding on.	At least two symptoms apparent. "Embattled species syndrome" including public perceptions of illness, managerial fire fighting, and external demands for change.	Experiencing three or more symptoms and in need of immediate intervention or life support. "Basket case syndrome" internal sickness, external ridicule, targeted for closure or forced sale.	Characterized by breakdown of essential systems with possibility of termination.
Six symptoms: (1) executive delusions of grandeur, (2) procedural weakness, (3, 4) employee alienation of the malicious and redundant forms, (5) organizational haemorrhaging or constipation, or (6) corporate directionlessness.					

Source: Adapted from Puplampu, (2005)

Figure 6 - The Continuum of Organizational Health and Sickness

From the six symptoms pointed out, the first relates to a description of a schizophrenic condition. This author also makes several recommendations for rescuing distressed organizations including positioning new leadership with performance contracts that stipulate a range of performance indicators. Another strategy would be to seek culture change through hiring new employees who are not vested in preserving the status quo. A third approach is to redesign organization structure, process, and procedures and make a commitment to organization development.

## Focus Group

Focus Groups are a research technique that allows for data collection through the interaction of a group of people. This method consists in an interview conducted to a small group of people conducted by a moderator in a non structured way. The moderator role is to motivate the group discussion regarding the research hypotheses / problem that are subject of the study under analysis (Carson et al 2001, Malhotra, 2004, Vaughn et al 1996).

Group discussion is a methodology particularly suitable when the prior knowledge of the situations is small, the issues are sensitive and complex and if you want to take full advantage of the opportunity to explore and induce hypotheses, find out the views and attitudes of individuals and details of the issues that are being explored (Krueger, 1994, Harker, 2004). For Morgan (1988) this is an excellent method to establish the 'why' behind the 'what' from the perspectives of the participants.

This was the method chosen to along with the literature review undertaken provide the author with the answers to the research questions raised.

The focus group was composed of 10 elements including psychiatrists, CEOs, human resources managers, business consultants, researchers and faculty. In the focus group the moderator organized the discussion according to the research questions, namely:

1. Would a definition of organisational schizophrenia be accepted by professionals within different fields of practice?
2. Would these professionals consider it useful?
3. What would be the perceived concept of organisational schizophrenia?
4. What are the main issues a definition of this term would comply with?
5. After identifying the pathology what would then be the next steps for addressing it?

Results from the focus group included a general agreement of the existence of an organizational pathology that could be named organizational schizophrenia.

One of the participants was very convict in stating that "more important than study the disease it is to study the patient" making the analogy that organizations are unique as well with their own cultural identity, and as such it would be affected by this pathology in an unique way.

Continuing the parallelism between the schizophrenia and organizational schizophrenia, one of the participants stated that a detachment from reality leads to communication problems and that these can also be a cause for schizophrenia. Also, there can be an oscillation between moments of lucidity and moments of reality detachment in organizations.

Most of the group agreed that employees are constantly under pressure and that several instructions they have to follow are contradictory which may lead to paradoxical injunctions and the double bind perspective. And these are derived from organizational processes.

Another participant added to the discussion that organizational schizophrenia would derive from leadership style mimesis, i.e. “show me your leader and I will let you know how ill your organization is”. Some leaders are petty, envious, and short sighted and most of the times antagonize their team. If leaders behave this way it is arguable to say that the other elements of the team seeking acceptance will follow the same patterns and distort behaviors.

There was no consensus regarding the possibility of surviving this pathology. Is it possible to have success suffering from organizational schizophrenia? In this case the group was divided, some considering that in the long-term, and if not treated, this condition would lead to business failure. Others considered that some business environments could be propitious for organizational schizophrenia since for creativity and innovation some degree of delusion could be helpful. Also, someone considered that for some business leaders the perception from others of their own organizational schizophrenia could be helpful for achieving their business goals.

Regarding the definition of the concept of organizational schizophrenia the group agreed that it should be defined according to its characteristics, and not as a whole. When looking at the parts, some of the characteristics could even be positive.

Finally the group agreed that the characteristics that should be taken into consideration would be leadership styles, processes including communication, organizational culture and structure.

### Organisational Schizophrenia Concept, Scope and Dimensions

Following both the extended literature review and the focus group the conceptual schema earlier presented was revised.



Figure 7 - Conceptual framework revised

In order to present a conceptual definition of the term it is important to understand that organisations are complex systems hence there is a need to study them at macro level, a meso level and a micro level (Clegg, Hardy, Lawrence and Nord, 2006). Within the macro level issues such as strategy formulation and top management decision making are addressed; the micro level looks at individuals within organisational context; finally, the meso level includes departments' decision centres.

Following the literature review and focus group the following findings were obtained:

- Organisational schizophrenia is driven by complex environments that are propitious for double bind situations;
- Leadership is critical since it provokes mimetism does enhancing schizophrenic organizational behaviour;
- Organisational schizophrenia will be manifested according to several symptoms namely within structure, culture and communication processes;
- This condition derived from a reality detachment can be addressed and overcome.

According to this rationale a definition is put forward:

*“Organizational schizophrenia is a disorder, that can be manifested at different organisational levels (micro, macro and meso), depths and perspectives, and when is active includes symptoms such as lack of vision and a clear sense of purpose, trouble with managing people and change, poorly designed communication processes and rigidity in organisational structures”.*

### Conclusions and Implications for Practice

Following the literature review and the focus group, the main conclusion is that organisational schizophrenia is an important concept that should be further clarified and studied. From the focus group there is some agreement that the analogy is very useful for understanding some phenomena within the organizational behaviour realm.

Actually, organisational schizophrenia is more than just a metaphor, since its understanding can result in practical implications, such as identifying symptoms and the application of corrective actions.

Further work is advised in relation to the development of a scale that can measure the degree of organisational schizophrenia. Also, further research should address different organisational levels (macro, meso and micro) and different perspectives (right/left side of the brain). Other research questions that can be raised include understanding if organisational schizophrenia, if controlled, could enhance breakthrough innovation. Finally, since organisational schizophrenia involves people and behaviours, it would be insightful to clarify how HR practitioners can intervene within this context.

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## Appendix 1 – Search Protocol and Results

Date of Search	Search Equation	Results
1 <sup>st</sup> October 2013	"Schizophrenic Organizations" in TOPIC. Refined by: research domain "Social Sciences" AND research areas "Business Economics". Timespan: All Years	32
	"Unhealthy Organizations" in TOPIC. Refined by: research domain "Social Sciences" AND research areas "Business Economics". Timespan: All Years	69
9 <sup>th</sup> October 2013	"Neurotic Organizations" in TOPIC. Refined by: research domain "Social Sciences" AND research areas "Business Economics". Timespan: All Years	22
	"Corporate mind" in TOPIC. Refined by: research domain "Social Sciences" AND research areas "Business Economics". Timespan: All Years	218
	"Organizational Neurosis" in TOPIC. Refined by: research domain "Social Sciences" AND research areas "Business Economics". Timespan: All Years	3
	"Corporate Pathology" in TOPIC. Refined by: research domain "Social Sciences" AND research areas "Business Economics". Timespan: All Years	27
14 <sup>th</sup> October 2013	"Organizational Pathologies" in TOPIC. Refined by: research domain "Social Sciences" AND research areas "Business Economics". Timespan: All Years	138
	Total	509
	After relevance analysis and duplicate elimination	53

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