me because they see it every time I haul them into a meeting. The regularly scheduled meeting isn't about filling calendars; it's about fulfilling expectations and providing clear direction. In my experience, people will complain about most anything, even things that are good for them–like regularly scheduled team meetings.

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No More Metaphors

I enjoyed reading Leigh Buchanan's article "No More Metaphors" (Forethought, March 2005). I do not believe that the field of business management is conceptually infertile, only that it is lacking in coolness. The goal is to squeeze money out of every seam and, in some cases, make it magically appear out of nowhere (and disappear again into executive pockets) – not something that necessarily captures the imagination. Hence the use of metaphors to compare it to something that does. So, we are like the adventurous explorers who wander into the frozen wastelands and the perky fishmongers who toss fish to entertain yogurt-eating yuppies. A cross that needs to be borne by those who practice and mostly enjoy this profession.

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While Leigh Buchanan may have metaphor fatigue when it comes to books on management, it is very difficult to sell books, or anything else in our information-saturated society, without metaphors.

Figurative language is a key tool of impact and persuasion; the best business communicators use it all the time. Think Steve Jobs, Jack Welch, Meg Whitman. At a critical moment in the lead-up to its IPO, Google used figurative language to great effect when it announced, to Wall Street's chagrin, that it would not report short-term earnings: "A management team distracted by a series of short-term targets is as pointless as a dieter stepping on a scale every half hour." Indeed, one reason President Bush is having trouble selling his Social Security program is that he has not come up with a descriptive metaphor that grabs the imagination of United States citizens the way "axis of evil" did.

Selling anything today–ideas, services, products, or books–without metaphors is like driving a Ferrari without gas: You won't get very far.

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Class–or Mass?

The case study "Class–or Mass?" by Idalene F. Kesner and Rockney Walters (April 2005) provides an excellent example of the perils of steering a company toward a scale-economy culture.

Neptune Gourmet Seafood, the upmarket company that is the subject of the fictional case, created false efficiencies when it harvested more seafood than its customers wanted. The core problem is simply overproduction, which led to excess inventory. Neptune is using its new technology to push supply, when the objective of the lean enterprise is to enable demand to pull product to market.

Neptune is at a critical juncture. Its premium market position is extremely valuable but very fragile. If the company discounts excess inventory, its upscale product becomes just another commodity. If Neptune creates a midmarket brand, it will dilute the firm's brand equity, and competitors that are focused on that market will ultimately hand the company its head. Capturing mass-market share would require a strategy for selling through big-box retailers – all masters at creating competitive tension and driving aggregate prices down. Neptune should avoid this channel at all costs; many companies in the Wal-Mart and Sam's Club trap regret having chased that volume.

Alternatively, Neptune should harvest to demand. Casting the net fewer times will get the boat in port sooner, which will decrease the cycle time, which will reduce lead time, which will shrink inventory. Shorter lead time will also result in fresher seafood with a longer shelf life. Neptune should focus on growing the market for upscale seafood, fine-tuning its packaging and promotions, and jealously protecting its brand equity. Companies should bleed down excess inventories by curtailing production temporarily–never by discounting or dumping.

Finally, Neptune should support its trade association and help to discourage overproduction by its members. The association's objectives are to prevent market prices from sliding and to uphold the highest standards for quality, both of which are in Neptune's best interests.

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Sorting Data to Suit Yourself

It seems ironic that David Weinberger considers hierarchical tree structures unsuitable for organizing digital information ("Sorting Data to Suit Yourself," Forethought, March 2005). Hypertext, invented by Theodore Nelson in the 1960s and implemented on the Web via the hypertext transfer protocol (the "http" of Internet addresses), was originally meant to free us from the tyranny of hierarchical organization and encourage people to link documents together in multifarious ways. It was only in 1993, when business gained access to the Internet, that tree-structured data organization started to become the norm on the Web. (Indeed, Nelson repudiates what his brainchild has become, saying that "the Web isn't hypertext, it's decorated directories!") Will business now bring Internet structure full circle to its academic roots?

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