• An organization is a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision makers looking for work (Cohen, March & Olsen, p.2) [p. 21]

• If areas of ignorance remain constant in size and continually shift, then it seems clear that ambivalent conceptual orientations toward the world will be more adaptive and accurate than unambivalent ones. Problem-solving seems to be favored by opposed sets of propositions, both of which are correct on some occasions (e.g., Bruyn 1966, pp. 23-83). The investigator who retains opposed conceptual orientations will be open to comprehending a large portion of the referent event. It is not that scientists must become more tolerant of ambiguity; information that is received may lend clear support to a specific position and may therefore reduce uncertainty. But this less ambiguous view of a world should not be mistaken for a "correct" view; instead, the scientist needs to search for information that supports opposing explanations of an observed event. The event itself probably contains properties such that both explanations may appear to be valid at one time or another, even though they are opposed. And the scientist who has nurtured more than one point of view will be better able to adapt to this "multiple contingency environment", [p.30]

• People seem to find a proposition interesting not because it tells them some truth they did not already know, but because it tells them some truth they thought the already knew was wrong. [p.59]

• The main suggestion was that the diversity in the phenomenon be matched by diversity in the inquirer so that more of the phenomenon can be comprehended and made sensible. (This is the idea of requisite variety spelled out in Chapter 7). The reader should have sufficient grasp of this suggestion to see why there is a tinge of madness as well as a tinge.of theatries involved in being diverse enough to grasp the .diversity that exists elsewhere. Above all, the excursions into madness and theatries have to be done self-consciously with the person knowing full well what is being done and knowing full well its limitations. Diversity is enhanced by the adoption of ambivalent conceptual orientations, ambivalent inquiring practices, and varying positions on the issues of generality, accuracy, and simplicity. Those who successfully sustain this ambivalence are more likely to remain relevant to practitioners than those who stick with one set of assumptions and techniques that dazzle colleagues but put practicing managers to sleep. Diversity is also enhanced when inquirers take phenomena like organizational behavior with a grain of salt and when they write aphorisms, speculate, do journalism, sit h the armchair, develop cases, and enlarge their questions without effusive apologies. Diversity also means trying to grasp the flows, rhythms, and streams of organizations, a tough undertaking that seems to work best when launched as an inquiry into recipes, codes, or grammars. To grasp flows is often to dig deeply into metaphors since they are compact, articulate, eloquent, vivid, and even accessible if one uses oneself as a metaphor. Diversity means understanding that assumption grounds color a person's receptiveness, attention, and effort expenditure on strange displays, and this mediation of reactions occurs whether the theorist likes it or not. GO COVER FACES portrays a dozen categories of interest, but surely there are more; the diverse inquirer should try to find/create those additions by contemplating private "mistaken" metaphors about organizations. Gaining access to buried themes, chains of associations, and ideas is tough, but part of the difficulty is that people feel reluctant to expose some of their private understandings lest they be thought foolish. That might happen, but since there's already a little madness in the theorizing, mere foolishness is nothing. [p.63f]

• The phrase "nobody ever dies of overpopulation" comes from an editorial written by Garrett Hardin (1971) concerning the population explosion. His point of departure was the catastrophe that occurred in East Bengal in November 1970 when 500,000 people were killed by a cyclone. Hardin asks the question, "What killed these unfortunate people?" The obvious answer is the cyclone. Hardin argues that it's just as plausible to argue that overpopulation killed these 500,000 people. The area where they lived is barely above sea level making anyone who lives there vulnerable to being killed by even quite ordinary storms. Hardin feels that if it were not for the fact that Pakistan is so overcrowded, "no sane man would bring his family to such a place. Ecologically speaking, a delta belongs to the river and
the sea; man intrudes there at his peril." Hardin feels that we tend to exaggerate the effect of something like a cyclone and to underplay the effect of something like overpopulation simply because if we identified overpopulation as a strong determinant, then we would have to deal with the unpleasant question, "How can we control population without recourse to repugnant measures?" (Hardin and Baden 1977). By saying that the cyclone caused the deaths, then we can comfortably say that fate, not human responsibility, was at the root of the problem. As another example, Hardin mentions the fact that every year diseases like tuberculosis, leprosy, or animal parasites "cause" the deaths of millions of people. His argument is that malnutrition is intimately connected with over-population. [p.68]

As we stated in Chapter 4, equivocality removal is essentially an interpersonal process and involves at least two members interlocking some behaviors to accomplish this removal. Using the ideas already presented, we can stat more precisely how interlocked behaviors remove equivocality. The crucial collective act in organizations may consist of members trying to negotiate to consenses on which portions of an enacted display are figure and which are ground. More specifically, members collectively try to reach some workable agreement as to which portions of elapsed streams should be designated variables and which connections among which variables are reasonable. Thus, when we assert that equivocality is removed by interlocked behavioral cycles, we mean that members negotiate over specific issues of identifying variables (e.g., "I don't think that the temperature of this room is important but you seem to think it is") and issues of connection (e.g., "We seem to agree that temperature is crucial to our performance, but I think we play better when we are warmer and you think we play better when we are cooler"). Once members can reach some agreement as to what is consequential and what is trivial in their elapsed experience, and once they can get some kind of agreement as to the nature and direction of the connections among these consequential elements, then the elapsed experience becomes more sensible. That is, there is more overlap in the separate maps that are stored in the minds of the musicians when they leave the rehearsal and there is a greater likelihood that they will interlock their activities of music-making more tightly when they confront new music at subsequent rehearsals. The crucial point is that equivocality removal is both a social and a solitary process. What we are trying to specify is precisely what in that social process: crucial for what is basically a private, singular, and solitary activity. Sensemaking is largely solitary in the sense that structures contained within individual minds are imposed on streams of individual elapsed experience that are capable of an infinite number of individual reconstructions. To recapitulate, musicians enact an environment when they first play through a piece of music, and the outcome of this first play-through is an equivocal display. Based on previous experiences in processing new music, the musicians impose a figure-ground structure on this undifferentiated enacted display. This imposed structure, which is in the form of a cause map, sorts the display into a set of variables that are connected by means of reasonable causal linkages. The act of superimposing a cause map involves retrospecting elapsed experience. Although an imposed cause map makes the equivocal display more sensible for an individual musician, there remains the problem that the labels and connections are both uncertain within individual and different between individuals. Cause maps are approximations and deal with likelihoods, not certainties. Since residual equivocality remains after individual cause maps are superimposed, it is necessary to gain some consensus among musicians as to what the orchestra is confronted with and how it is to be handled. Members activate sets of interlocked behavior cycles to deal with this residual equivocality. Initially, they try to negotiate a consensus on which portions of the display are figure and which are ground. When people collectively try to shrink the possible meanings attached to equivocal input, they essentially are negotiating issues of naming and connection (e.g., "What did we ore the composer do to cause that horrible chord?") Having consensually made the enacted environment more sensible, the members then store their revised and presumably more homogeneous cause maps for imposition on future similar circumstances. [p.142f]

The world's contents are given to each of us in an order so foreign to our subjective interests that we can hardly by an effort of the imagination picture to ourselves what it is like. We have to break that order altogether, and by picking out from it the items that concern us, and connecting them with others far away, which we say "belong" with them, we are able to make
out definite threads of sequence and tendency, to foresee particular liabilities and get ready for them, to enjoy simplicity and harmony in the place of what was chaos .... While I talk and the flies buzz, a seagull catches a fish at the mouth of the Amazon, a tree falls in the Adirondack wilderness, a man sneezes in Germany, a horse dies in Tartary, and twins are born in France. What does that mean? Does the contemporaneity of these events with each other and with a million more as disjointed as they form a rational bond between them, and unite them into anything that means for us a world? Yet just such a collateral contemporaneity, and nothing else, is the real order of the world. It is an order with which we have nothing to do but get away from it as fast as possible. As I said, we break it: we break it into histories, and we break it into arts, and we break it into sciences; and then we begin to feel at home. We make ten thousand separate serial orders of it. On any of these, we may react as if the rest did not exist. We discover among its parts relations that were never given to sense at all,-mathematical relations, tangents, squares, and roots and logarithmic functions,-and out of an infinite number of these we call certain ones essential and lawgiving, and ignore the rest. Essential these relations are, but only for our purpose, the other relations being just as real and present as they; and our purpose is to conceive simply and to foresee (James 1950, vol. 2, p. 635). [p.148]

- Perceptions of personal "limitations/" in Piet Hein's view, turn out to be a failure to act rather than a failure while acting. Limitations are deceptive conclusions but, unfortunately, people don't realize this. What they don't realize is that limitations are based on presumptions rather than action. Knowledge of limitations is not based on tests of skills but rather on an avoidance of testing. On the basis of avoided tests, people conclude that constraints exist in the environment and that limits exist in their repertoire of responses. Inaction is justified by the implantation, in fantasy, of constraints and barriers that make action "impossible." These constraints, barriers, prohibitions then become prominent "things" in the environment. They also become self-imposed restrictions on the options that managers consider and exercise when confronted with problems. Finally, these presumed constraints, when breached by someone who is more doubting, naive, or uninformed, often generate sizable advantages for the breacher [p.149f]

- We have purposefully labeled the organizational equivalent of variation enactment to emphasize that managers construct, rearrange, single out, and demolish many “objective” features of their surroundings. When people act they unrandomize variables, insert vestiges of orderliness, and literally create their own constraints. This holds true whether those constraints are created in fantasy to justify avoided tests or created in actuality to explain tangible bruises [p.164]

- Numerous formulations assume that organizations work on uncertainty (Duncan 1972; Downey and Slocum 1975; Manning 1977), ambiguity (Lerner 1976; Upton 1961), and other forms of indeterminacy. We have chosen to avoid this terminology and to use the idea that organizations try to manage equivocality for specific reasons. To understand these reasons consider the noun equivoque. An equivoque is a pun, a term with at least two meanings, two disparate strings of thought tied together by an acoustic knot (Koestler 1978). Things that are equivocal do not lend themselves to definite classifications. They can always be classified as indications of two or more different objects and meanings. Equivoques are indeterminate, inscrutable, ambivalent, questionable, and they permit multiple meanings. It is important to realize that an input is not equivocal because it is devoid of meaning or has confused meaning (both of these connotations are associated with the words ambiguity and uncertainty). Instead, equivocal inputs have multiple significations. They are difficult to classify and manage precisely because they fit numerous classifications and might be indications of anyone of several states of the world. Thus, when we assert that organizations confront equivocality, we mean that organizations live in an environment of puns. The image we want to capture is not that of an environment that is disordered, indeterminant, and chaotic. Instead, we want to capture the image of an environment that is rich in the possible connections that could be imposed on an equally rich assortment of possible punctuated variables. We feel that equivocality is the term that most accurately preserves these nuances. It is the richness and multiplicity of meanings that can be superimposed on a situation that organizations must manage. An important characteristic of a pun is that its
multiple meanings cannot be compromised. The meanings originally are distinct, they remain distinct, and the only way they can be managed is for some of the meanings to be suppressed or ignored or for the organization to alternate among its choices of various meanings. [p.174]

- The problem with adapting in organizations is that structurally loose enactment is apt to be misread and "tightened" during the reflection and perception that occur in selection. The perceiver will imagine that a more orderly action was responsible for his adaptive success than in fact was the case. At least perceptually, the problem for organizations is not one of entropy and the loss of order, it's just the opposite. Orderliness is overestimated and erroneously given credit for adaptive success. Having been credited, orderly actions are implemented again in the future, perhaps tightened even more, and suddenly (Moore 1964) the organizations finds itself out of touch with changes that are occurring and finds itself saddled with an antiquated, tight structure. [p.186]

- Ten pieces of practical advice:
  1. Don't panic in the face of disorder
  2. You never do one thing all at once
  3. Chaotic action is preferable to orderly inaction
  4. The most important decisions are often the least apparent
  5. There is no solution
  6. Stamp out utility
  7. The map is the territory
  8. Rechart the organizational chart
  9. Visualize organizations as evolutionary systems
  10. Complicate yourself! [p.243]

- Organizations keep people busy, occassionally entertain them, give them a variety of experiences, keep them off the streets, provide pretexts for story-telling, and allow socializing. They haven't anything else to give. [p. 264]