

Images and Metaphors as Tools in Communication between Advisors and Farmers

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Abstract: This study explores how advisors communicate with farmers and what perspective or images they use in this communication. Advisory meetings between farmers and advisors were observed, and the participants were interviewed afterward. There is a variation among advisors in how they communicate with the farmers in advisory meetings. The images of interest were images of a machine, the brain, an organism, a cultural image, and a political image. Some advisors are skilled in switching between these various perspectives. These images of farms and farming can be developed and applied as tools for advisory services to improve communication with farmers and to make their advisory services more relevant. Observation of advisory meetings is rarely done for research purposes, and applying the theory of images of organisations has not been done before.

Key words: Advisory service, images of farming, tool for advisors, qualitative method, Norway

Introduction

The impact of advisory service depends on the communication between the farmer and the advisor. A number of variables influence farmers' demand for advisory services (Labarthe & Laurent, 2013; Prager, Labarthe, Caggiano, & Lorenzo-Arribas, 2016), but not much is known about the variety among advisors in regard to communication with farmers. Ingram (2008) shows that long-term partnerships between advisors and farmers are informative and proactive, but the parties must also be willing to learn from each other and accommodate each other's knowledge. According to Ingram, 'Joint learning, credibility, trust, and loyalty can be manipulated to initiate a shift towards more facilitative relationships' (op cit: 23). However, to do so, there is a need for mutual understanding, for which both the advisor and the farmer are responsible. As a part of the profession, advisors have the benefit of being able to understand the farmer, farming, and the farmer's needs. However, literature on training extensionists or advisors is relatively scarce than that on training farmers (Landini, Brites, & Mathot y Rebolé, 2017).

This paper explores how advisors communicate with farmers and what perspective they use in this communication. More insightful knowledge on this issue can contribute to improved communication between advisors and farmers. Faure et al. show that many are concerned about advisory service methods and suggest that more research is needed on 'new, integrated advisory methods to both deal with complexity and uncertainty and to combine participatory approaches and decision support tools' (Faure, Desjeux, & Gasselien, 2012:484).

We used Gareth Morgan's work on images of organisations to carry out the analysis (Morgan, 1997). Morgan uses images as metaphors and tools to emphasise various aspects of an organisation. These metaphors may also be relevant as tools to analyse farms and farming. Our research questions are: What images of farms do advisors have? Do advisors change images? Do advisors challenge farmers to switch images, and how? What are the roles of advisors and farmers in various images?

Empirical data were gathered from nine advisory meetings where advisors met with mostly two farmers each. Data were generated from observation of the meetings and from interviews with advisors and farmers. The results show that these images are useful for analysing communication. They can also be developed as tools for advisory services to improve communication with farmers and to make the advisory service more relevant.

However, a significant condition to achieve improvement is the capability of switching between various perspectives due to variations between farms and farmers.

Conceptual framework

An important factor in communication and interaction between advisors and farmers is how they understand each other. This understanding is complex and depends on the skills involved and the interpretations of the situations. Feldman (1995) argues that there is seldom only one alternative to interpret qualitative data. In research fieldwork, there is a flow of data that probably would not give sought-after support to a specific theory. Feldman argues that ‘the difficulty in interpreting qualitative data is not in learning how to create interpretations but in learning how to get away from pre-established interpretations’ (Feldman, 1995:64). Even though advisors are not doing research, this point is relevant in the interpretation of data from farms.

Morgan’s (1997) concept of images of organisations can be applied to elaborate on this issue.¹ Morgan applies the images as metaphors, stating, ‘The use of metaphor implies *a way of thinking* and *a way of seeing* that pervade how we understand our world generally’ (Morgan, 1997:4). Morgan discusses images of organisations like machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political images, psychic prisons, flux, transformations, and instruments of domination. However, not all of these images are relevant to farming and are thus not discussed.

The image of a machine

Organisations in this metaphor are regarded as a machine constructed by specific functions that are created to do specific tasks. The management is related to make this machine work, improve efficiency, and achieve optimization. According to Håan and Iversen (2006), the farm can be regarded as a system where the various components are mutually dependent and where the structure, rules, instructions, and manuals are important. Order and tidiness in documents and machinery are highly valuable. The aim is to achieve predictability. Scientific Management and Taylorism (Taylor, 1911/1967) are typical schools of management for this image.

The image of an organism

This metaphor emphasises organisational needs and relations. This evolutionary perspective of organisations regards organisations as organisms that must adjust to their tasks and to changes in their environment, like an amoeba. A farm can be regarded as an open and flexible system that adjusts or change due to changes in external conditions and the environment (Morgan, 1997) (Håan & Iversen, 2006). Emphasis is on the farms’ needs and life-cycle.

The image of a brain

This metaphor emphasises information processing, intelligence, and learning. Morgan provides a set of principles for learning organisations. This metaphor is relevant to perspectives like single- and double-looped learning (Argyris & Schön, 1996) and knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In relation to a farm, issues like knowledge, innovation, learning, and efforts to improve these elements will be of most interest.

¹ Thanks to Gudrun Sofie Tanum Håan and Mai Sonja Wesche Iversen, who gave us the inspiration to apply Morgan’s metaphors to farms in relation to advisory service (Håan & Iversen, 2006).

The cultural image

In this metaphor, the social life of organisations is in focus. The concept of cultivation and culture can be traced to agriculture, cultivating land, and emphasising the organisation as a society. Following how (Håan & Iversen, 2006) apply Morgan's (1997) cultural image, a farm can be regarded as its own society characterised by symbols, norms, values, routines, and constant interaction with the local and global culture.

The political image

Interests, conflicts and power plays are emphasized in this image and how shape the organization. This image is characterized by who is in charge; formality and informality; who allocates resources, controls decision processes, creates alliances, and controls of the machines; and who owns the power of definition and truth (Morgan, 1997); (Håan & Iversen, 2006). For farming, this is a useful perspective to understand a situation and why things occur as they do. Both internal family relations and external relations are relevant.

There is no right or wrong image. The main point is that different images emphasise different perspectives and shed light on various factors related to organisations. Images as metaphors of organisations can be applied in situations of advisory service.

Farming and advisory service in Norway

The Norwegian agricultural and innovation system (AKIS) has transformed from a governmental-driven strategy with a focus on farming and public goods into a commercialized business with a focus on farmers in focus. As in many other countries, the agriculture sector in Norway has shifted to be more market oriented since the late 1980s, with less subsidization and increasing focus on competitiveness. The number of farms declined, and those remaining became larger and more specialized. However, rising productivity has also increased the total production volume (Almås, 2002; Forbord, Bjørkhaug, & Burton, 2014). By the start of 2017, there were 8326 dairy farms with an average of 27 dairy cows and 5143 farms with suckler cows and an average of 16 cows. Both averages have increased in recent years (Norwegian Agriculture Agency, 2017).

Specialization in production and new economic activities on farms have increased the need for specific competence building and related advisory service support to farmers. It follows that farmers need not generic one-size-fits-all advice but rather specific advice relating to their own situation and resources (Grande, Haugum, Jakobsen, & Stræte, 2014)). This transformation in AKIS governance over the last 30 years has also affected its advisory system. For example, there is a smaller budget for publicly funded advisory services at the county and municipal levels (Almås, 2002). Hence, the advisory service is private to a high degree and dominated by farmer-owned cooperatives.

Advisors in the food industry are often a part of cooperatives, such as TINE for dairy (<http://www.tine.no>) and Nortura meat (<http://www.nortura.no/>). This service is provided by organizations that buy produce from farmers. TINE has organized its advisory service in a specific department, TINE Advisory Service, with a staff of about 350 in total. In Nortura, this service is incorporated with the membership service for farmers. About 150 of their advisory staff are divided to provide membership services and advisory services. In both companies, there are advisors dedicated to specific tasks of advisory service, such as key advisors for dairy farmers and advisors about suckler cows for beef producers.

Methods and case description

The case study is based on interviews and observations of meetings between advisors and farmers in Norway. This study examines advisory service for dairy farmers and farmers establishing beef production with suckler cows. We studied five dairy advisors from the TINE dairy cooperative and four advisors from the Nortura beef cooperative. Eight of the advisors visited two farmers each, while one beef advisor visited one farmer. Before, between, and after visiting the farmers, the advisors were interviewed face to face. A few days after the visit, all 17 farmers were interviewed by phone. The study includes observations of the meetings, which lasted approximately 2.5 hours. Researchers rarely have access to these meetings (Messervy, 2014) because advisors do not want to share their working practices with their competitors. The records and notes were transcribed and analysed with the software NVivo. The method gave us hands-on access to the advisory practise rather than just listening to the informants' answers in retrospect.

To obtain some variation and more robust material, the advisors were picked from four different regions in Norway. Regional leaders from TINE made a list of candidate advisors from which researchers could choose. The candidate list from TINE had about ten names. For Nortura, the regional leaders proposed four advisors. The researchers contacted the selected advisors for further agreement. The advisors picked out two farmers to visit after a talk with the researcher. The advisors consented to the researchers attending the meetings. The advisors were two women and seven men. All of the farmers were men, but in six of the 17 cases, female partners were also in attendance. Interviews and observations were conducted by three researchers.

It can be argued that the selection of advisors and farmers is too small to reveal anything about the advisory service. However, for the purpose of searching and exploration, there is no need for a representative survey of all advisors and farmers. We can gain insight into how the advisory process can take place. Based on this material, we present five cases.

The selection process by both farmers and advisors imparts systematic bias to the material. There is a danger that leaders have suggested candidates who are among the best performing and least problematic to visit. What can offset this is that researchers and contact managers in the companies sought to understand that this was not a personal evaluation, that the data would be anonymous, and that the purpose was to gain knowledge to everyone's benefit. To what extent this explanation worked, we do not know. Furthermore, there is methodological uncertainty in the advisors themselves choosing the farmers to visit. We can imagine there is a possibility that the advisors chose not to visit farmers they find difficult to meet. An advisor stated, '... Today, I do not think I have chosen the hardest ones.' On the other hand, the advisors follow an annual plan for whom they visit and when, and the plan to visit two farms every day had to be carried out in practice because there is a certain coincidence with which farmers were visited.

The theory of images of organisations was applied in training of the advisors in TINE. However, the images were not an issue during the meetings or in the interviews. All in all, we cannot deny that there is systematic bias in the selection of both advisors and farmers, but it is not a requirement for the study that the sample be fully representative, so we regard the data as valid. Although the number of informants is not particularly large, there are still ample and rich data with significant variation.

Analysis and findings

The study shows that the meetings between advisors and farmers were successful to various degrees in terms of achieving satisfaction among both parties. We could also observe that this degree sometimes changed from meeting to meeting with the same advisor.

Case advisor A

Advisor A is a male beef advisor from Nortura. He is in his early 40s, he has worked as an advisor for 16 years, and he is well experienced. He has an agricultural education from college and some post-qualifying education in economy. His main task as an advisor in this case is to support farmers who are planning to establish or expand suckler cow production. He also has a task from Nortura to help increase delivery of animals to their slaughterhouse in the region. This advisory service is free for the farmer. If there are some extra specialty deliveries from the advisors, the farmer has to pay for them. Advisor A defines his tasks very clearly: ‘Yes, of course, to help the farmer to optimize his farming so they can in fact make some money on this too’ (advisor A).

The advisor visited two farms in very different situations (AF1 and AF2). At the first visit, a young couple was thinking about establishing suckler cow production. They were not farming at the time, the farm had poor resources, and the couple had little competence in suckler cow production. It seemed that the path to establishing a new production would be long and hard in this situation. However, advisor A met with them for 2.5 hours, followed by some economic calculations for starting up. The advisor responded to their questions with respect and patience while raising fundamental questions about their life situation. This approach is similar to an image of an organism and related to how the farm can grow. The political image is also of relevance. There was first an interplay among the couple about the man’s parents, who still lived on the farm and had interest in production being maintained. Advisor A then entered the arena. The process ended with the couple shelving their plan, unsurprisingly. The role of the advisor was to help the couple to make a decision, in which he succeeded. The couple was supported and helped with arriving at a reasonable conclusion. The potential farmer was satisfied with the meeting, but not with the realities that were revealed: ‘I experienced this as a positive meeting, constructive for me at least, and light was shed on some issues’ (farmer AF1).

The second visit was different because the farmer couple was already in business with suckler cows. Their challenges were now twofold: planning a new cow house and deciding on expansion while simultaneously running their existing production. The meeting included both a dialogue about practical questions related to the present production and the plan for the future production and cow house. The advisor switched between the two topics. The farmer explained in the interview after the meeting: ‘This is about what I used to do when he had been here, that we first have had a look at the status outside, and then walked in-house. And that I feel is a very good way to do this because we then know more about what we are talking about afterwards’ (farmer AF2). We observed that the farmer was able to determine the direction of the meeting. From a political perspective, we can see how the farmer manoeuvred to achieve what he wanted from the meeting, with tacit support from the advisor since making farmers take ownership of the situation is a part of his method.

The advisor shows strong flexibility in switching between various farmers and topics related to the advisory situation. He thinks about expansion at both the farm level and at the regional level. This is associated with an organism’s growth. Furthermore, the political image is relevant to understanding the interplay between the people involved.

Case advisor B

Advisor B is a male dairy advisor from TINE. He is about 60 years old and educated at an agricultural college. He has worked with advisory-related tasks in the dairy cooperative for most of his occupational career. His main task in this case is to be the main contact between the farmer and the advisory service from the dairy cooperative. Basic key advisory service is free for the farmer and collectively funded by the cooperative. The service includes an annual visit to the farm at minimum, but other advisory activities that the farmer may have to pay for may also be added, such management plans and construction drawings. Advisor B expresses his view on the tasks in his job as an advisor:

.... I feel that the 'herd recordings' [Norwegian Dairy Herd Recording System (NDHRS)] is the basis for much of the rest, and that the data must be there to be able to make use of the tools we have. So I feel that a part of this [advisory service] must be to ensure that data are there and that they are the right ones, and thus a check-up with the farmer if the data delivered are good enough. (Advisor B)

Advisor B emphasizes that the data and the system must be correct and in shape, and that control is an important task in his job. The machine image is thus an appropriate fit.

We followed advisor B to two farm visits (BF1 and BF2). The first was a traditional farm larger than the average of size in Norway. The farm had been having problems with bacteria, which advisor B was concerned about, but the situation was rather steady. Advisor B could concentrate on doing his tasks. He had prepared by looking for improvements in the farms' NDHRS. Farmer BF1 was satisfied but commented on the interviewer's question about things that could be improved: 'Eventually... some more pressure on challenges and to challenge me on some issues, maybe ...' (farmer BF1). The advisor was very satisfied with the meeting:

It is a very interested farmer, and for me the goal is to maintain his interest. I feel it was good enough, and now we also may have a bit of economic advisory service as well. And I feel I did not need to push on very much here, the progress came more or less by itself. (Advisor B)

Advisor B did not see the need to challenge the farmer more than he did. The image of a system or machine worked well from his perspective. Taking the farmers' comment into account, an image of an organism could have been useful for challenging the farmer. During the meeting, there were some hints about the future and progress, but the advisor did not follow up on this.

The second farm had installed a milking robot 1.5 years ago. Advisor B is familiar with the robot but not an expert. The farmer had support from both specialized advisors related to the robot and to the feeding of concentrate. Advisor B was prepared to meet the farmer couple but had to work hard to maintain a dialogue. The male and female farmers did not engage much as B went through the list of possible improvements in the dairy farming. Advisor B was not dissatisfied but a bit uncertain about the results of this meeting.

... They are maybe a bit more reticent to join activities and make efforts. But it is frankly very good that they seem to be driven, they follow up on the farming, and make it work, and all this is good (Advisor B)

The farmer was not very satisfied; he experienced the meeting as almost a waste of time, which was also expressed by his body language during the meeting. BF2 said in the interview afterwards about the impact of the meeting, 'In fact, not much ...'. Advisor B did his best to help the farmers and succeeded well at the first farm but less at the second. He followed his routines and worked as a controller, which is line with the metaphor of a

machine, and he was less flexible in switching between perspectives. The farmer also probably had a machine perspective, but they did not match very well. If the advisor had turned to the brain and learning perspectives and inspired the farmer to do the same, the process and outcome could have been more inspiring.

Case C

Advisor C is a male beef advisor similar to advisor A. Advisor C is more than 60 years old and has been a farmer himself. One of the farmers we visited (CF2) was considering an expansion to suckler cow production in addition to dairy farming. This meeting was about this issue. At a certain stage in the meeting, the farmer was challenged by the advisor. After the meeting, the farmer was asked about this challenge:

Yes, what is strongest in my feelings after the meeting and what has bothered me is what he mentioned several times about involving the next generation. I feel for my sake it is very difficult. (Farmer CF2)

The farmer feels his children were too young (15–23 years old) and did not want to disturb them about issues of the future when they were busy with their studies. However, the farmer did not perceive that the advisor said too much as the issue was relevant but a sensitive and difficult one. Advisor C had an organism perspective in this case, and he challenged the farmer to do the same. We can also see elements of a political perspective when the advisor raises the issue about involving the children in the process in a mild and careful way by asking open questions. The farmer was not pushed hard to answer, but it was also obvious during the meeting that these questions touched the farmer. The good balance between organism and political images from the advisor worked well.

Another example with advisor C is a meeting with beef farmer CF1. C had also invited an advisor from a fodder supplier. CF1 had built a new suckler cow house one year prior. Farmer CF1 said after the meeting with the advisors:

Well... I am not there yet I mean when you start fine-tuning feeding, feeding plans, and that kind of thing, all other things must first be in order. So all the stuff about concentrates, mixing concentrate and so on I must have things in order first, it must have worked for at least a half more year before we can start to see if it is a plus or minus. So the meeting we just had now, I think that was In fact we postponed it for half a year until I had this use with the implemented concentrate. This is what I have tried to say but we will see(Farmer CF1)

This sequence can be interpreted as the advisor missing the farmers' needs. Their perspective was a mixture of the machine and brain images, and there was a need for detailed adjustment of the feeding with concentrate. To do that, the farmer had to have the brain or learning perspective. However, the farmer was not ready for that. He was still struggling to assume the machine perspective and was not ready for more learning for the time being.

Case D

Advisor D is a man early in his 50s. Like advisor A, his advisory service is on suckler cows. D emphasises that farmers must learn and achieve insight, which is related to a brain perspective. He spoke about a method he makes use of:

... and very often, at least in my cases, I bring them [the farmers] with me to visit two or three others [farms] according to what I consider where they are in the process, what they need, their own plans, and so on. But of course I ask, 'are you interested', 'should we spend a day or a half travelling around?' And I have some farmers whom I have an appointment with that have already invested to show their farm

production. ... I feel I get good feedback from those whom I bring with me, and those who have invested feel it is fun to receive visits as well. It is mutual. (Advisor D)

Farmer DF2 mentioned D's visiting method on his own initiative: '...the day we followed him was good ... very useful'. He confirms the learning aspect of the brain perspective.

Advisor D is also concerned about the future for farmers who invest. Often, there is an older generation at the farm, which may have strong wishes about maintaining the traditions and continuing farming in the future. The advisor wants cases of crossroads like this to involve both generations, and he wants to meet them together: 'Yes both generations.... to make openness related to the questions'. Advisor D answers a question about what role he takes in such cases:

Nothing more than saying, what opportunities at large I can see at the farm. At that stage, I can be a sheep advisor and I can be a beef advisor—yes, opportunities. And then I talk about how much time they must expect to spend. But maybe I try to turn the issue to what they have most interest in. For if they are going to embark on what they are talking about when they take over, it is a lifestyle. Are they there? (advisor D)

His perspective in this case is a combination of the organism and political perspectives. The first perspective brings the needed issues forward, and the latter finds out how to do it, like in the case of involving the older generation.

Case E

Advisor E is a female advisor and about 60 years old. She performs a dairy farming advisory service similar to advisor B. She has a special responsibility for organic farming as a part of her job. We studied her visits to two different dairy farms and we identified several perspectives.

At farm EF1, there was a rather challenging situation with some illness, various personal difficulties in the family, and halted farming, but there were ambitions of expansion at the same time. There were also some challenges related to communication within the family. The advisor had a rather complex situation. Her practical approach was to alternate between open crossroad questions with proposals of concrete solutions for farming while manoeuvring between family members in a balanced way. For example, she convinced the wife to take over the registration for NDHRS from the man, as it had hardly been done lately. After the meeting, both the advisor and male farmer expressed that they were satisfied with the meeting. Advisor E switched between the political interplay with the family and the more machine perspective on the farm.

The second farm, EF2, had mixed farming with 10 dairy cows, as well as vegetables, herbs, and berries. They were also a host for cooperative urban farming. The farming is based on bio-dynamic principles. This is the first visit for E, and her aim is to create trust and to be updated on the farm. Bio-dynamic farming is built on a holistic perspective as an alternative to more conventional farming. Often, there are debates on what kind of farming is best. To some degree, these alternatives are a minority in the TINE cooperative. For an advisor, there may be a challenge in switching between conventional and organic farming, for example. The dividing lines are both sociocultural and agronomic, and the advisor must take this into account. Farmer EF2 gives a clear message on that:

... She [advisor E] shows her broad spectrum of interest, which may not be normal, as we say we want hay with many sorts where we cut the grass later with increased dry residue, for example. Of course, the most common answer would be that this is nonsense because there will not be an efficient production from that. So I feel it is

very good that she follows our mad thoughts based on using hay as a main fodder in 2016. ... We want diversity and she understands this, she understands what I am talking about ... (Farmer EF2)

In this second visit, the advisor emphasises the social and cultural perspectives. We also observed that she switched between these perspectives and the brain perspective, as she also experienced that the farmer was very eager to learn.

The cases presented here are only cases of unique meetings between advisors and farmers. To summarize, we found examples of images in use in all of our cases. The examples are not exhaustive for all the cases, and in most of them, we find the image of a machine in use in parts of the meeting, along with brain, organism, culture, and political images. There are not always sharp borders between the images, and when advisors switch images there may be a smooth transition.

Discussion

The results show variation among advisors in how they communicate with the farmers in advisory meetings. There is also variation in how the individual advisors communicate, which is an indicator of how flexible they are when meeting various farmers. The metaphor, images, or perspectives are not concrete tools that the advisors make use of in communication. We did not discuss the metaphors with the advisors, so we cannot say how conscious they are about these perspectives. According the analysis, however, there is no doubt that the advisors have capabilities to see, interpret, and understand different aspects of the farms and farming to varying degrees.

We observed that in some cases, these capabilities improved the communication between the advisor and farmer, and the farmer tended to be more satisfied with the meeting. We assume that the communication between farmers and advisors will generally improve if both parties have capabilities to switch between various perspectives. The effect will be improved advisory service and hopefully improved farming results.

Our analysis shows that Morgan's images of organisations are relevant in the study of communication between advisors and farmers. The application of this approach reveals what perspectives the actors use and can serve as an analytical tool for research. Communication with different perspectives applied by advisors and farmers can cause trouble and reduce the quality of the advisory service, as our findings show for examples in cases B and C. However, there may not be only one answer to what is the right perspective to use. The advisor is the professional in this communication and must be capable of switching between the various perspectives and benefits from being able to help the farmer to assume different perspectives as well. There is a need for advisors not only to have expert knowledge but also to be competent in identifying and operationalizing the implications that arise in practical situations when meeting farmers (Landini et al., 2017). Training could be helpful, and the images could be a useful tool in training.

Our study indicates that the roles of the advisor and the farmer are different from one perspective to another. For example, the advisor acts more as a controller in the machine perspective, as a coach in the brain and cultural perspectives, and as a supporter in the organism perspective. In the political perspective, the advisor can assume the role of a mediator. These different roles require different qualities and efforts from the advisor. Even though our study is limited to person-to-person relations, the application of the approach of images may not be limited to this situation. Complex technologies 'require a collaborative approach for successful innovation and diffusion' (Eastwood, Klerkx, & Nettle, 2017:10). Thus, this approach could also be relevant in such cases, which should be explored.

In the machine perspective, the farmer can be regarded as the machine operator, while in the organism perspective, the farmer is a gardener or agent that make things happen. In the brain image, the farmer is a learner who is searching for something. In the cultural perspective, the farmer assumes the role of a representative or may be inspirational, while in the political, the role of an agent or negotiator is the most conspicuous.

Flexibility between images may improve capabilities to better target farmers' needs. That is, advisors' contributions may have more impact on farmers' outcomes and performance. A well-skilled advisor will have advantages of rising to various situations and needs of farmers. One of the important skills is to be able to switch between perspectives. This skill includes clear understanding of one's own role as an advisor, a capability to analyse what the farmer is concerned about, and a capability to perform adequately.

Our study is not an evaluation on how these perspectives work as tools for advisors, which remains for future work. However, our study indicates that these perspectives can be helpful. To make them useful, the advisors need knowledge about the various perspectives. Furthermore, they need training in switching between them. A mentor for advisors could thus be helpful to improve these skills.

Farmers could also be trained in the use of the images as well as a kind of self-reflection. According to Hislop (Hislop, 2002), 'Although the management consultancy literature frequently mentions the central role of the consultant in understanding consultancy processes, clients have been largely neglected'. The advisor can stimulate the farmer to switch perspectives. To do so, the advisor must remain updated on farmers' needs to stimulate the most adequate image. Furthermore, advisors must prepare examples or cases that illustrate other images to present to the farmer. One tool for the advisor could be to ask open questions, as our study shows.

Conclusion

This study shows there is a variety among advisors in how they communicate with farmers and how they deal with the various types of farmers. We have applied Gareth Morgan's work on images of organisations to analyse meetings between advisors and farmers. We observed that advisors manage to switch between the various perspectives. Those who mastered this flexibility seem to achieve better communication with the farmers and have improved results of the advisory service. In some cases, advisors and farmers had different perspectives, and if the advisor did not switch perspectives, the quality of communication suffered, and both parties became dissatisfied with the meeting. In other cases, advisors tried to influence farmers to switch perspectives in order to see aspects that the advisor considered at important. Most often, farmers appreciated these challenges, even though they may offer resistance in the beginning.

Our study also indicates that the roles of the advisors and the farmers involve different perspectives. For example, the advisor acts more as controller in the machine perspective and more of a coach in the brain and cultural perspectives. These images are useful for analysing communication, and they can be developed as tools for advisory services to improve communication with farmers and make the services more relevant. Future research should investigate how the images can be developed as practical tools.

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