

Preliminary Insights into the Role of Space in Organizational Change

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ABSTRACT

The study of organizational change has been studied under different perspectives including positivistic and interpretive approaches with varieties of methods. However, this study is focusing more on the process of organizational change by taking into account the inner and outer contextual issues of an organization. Although the contextual issues like the role of key actors, leadership, significant events, time, technology, power, culture and etc. have been extensively studied but even until recently only relatively little is known about the role of space in organizational change. Considering that space bears different meaning under different perspectives, this study conceives space as the manifestation of lived human experience which resides both in the symbolic and aesthetic dimensions of the physical representation of space. Finally, to guide the research, interpretive qualitative case study method should be employed as the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of the study. Using this approach, the subjective nature of space embedded in the archival documents, culture, human experiences, physical architecture and other physical representation can be fully captured and explained.

Keywords: Organizational change, Interpretive, The concept of space, the role of space

INTRODUCTION

The study of organizational change has long been a central interest among the organizational social scientists, and is seen as one of the great endeavors in social science (Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001). It has been studied under different perspectives including positivistic and interpretive approaches with varieties of methods. These studies have demonstrated that organizational change has always been associated with the questions of ‘what’ triggers and consequences of change, ‘where’ and ‘when’ the change takes place, ‘why’ organizations change, and how organizations change. While mainstream approach focusing more on the causal-effect relationship between the change variables and organizational change, interpretive approach focuses more on studying change as a process in which change is perceived as socially constructed, in a perceived unique organization. Therefore, interpretive researchers tend to study the process of organizational change by taking into account the inner and outer contextual issues of an organization. Although the contextual issues like the role of key actors, leadership, significant events, time, technology, power, culture and etc. have been extensively studied but even until recently only relatively little is known about the role of space in organizational change (Taylor & Spicer, 2007).

Considering that space bears different meaning under different perspectives, this study conceives space as the manifestation of lived human experience which resides both in the symbolic and aesthetic dimensions of the physical representation of space. To guide the research, interpretive qualitative case study method will be employed as the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of the study.

The paper is organized as follows; first it will discuss the concept of organizational change by presenting the nature of organization, the definition and the past studies in organizational change. Second, the concept of space in respect of organizational change is discussed with major reference to Taylor’s and Spicer’s (2007) work. Finally, the section on the discussion of research approach and the research design and methods before summarized in the final section.

UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Definition of Organization

It is argued that to understand the organizational theory and change, it is important to firstly understand the nature and concept of what organization is (Barbara & Fleming, 2006; Hodgson, 2006; Wijnberg, 2004). This might be explained by the notion that organization concerns with the conception of individual and structure (Hodgson, 2007), and the point of reference for management researches (Leblebici & Salancik, 1989) which are central to social science. However, to produce the comprehensive definition of organization is not an easy task (Barbara & Fleming, 2006; Leblebici & Salancik, 1989). Despite the difficulty to come up with consensual organization's definition, there are some attempts to have been made. According to Handel (2001:1-3), the difficulty of defining the organization is attributed to the disagreement of view about the nature of organization and its very diversity among themselves. With regards to organizational change issue, Van de Ven and Poole (2005) highlight that the definition or conception of organizational change will depend on the ontological assumption on it. Handel (2001:1-3) highlights that there are two main approaches on how to define organization. First, rational approach which views organization as a mean by which people working together to accomplish complex task and achieving its objectives. Second, natural approach which views organization as a product of the interaction between social and human systems. Natural approach views organization as full of complexity where people will interact to each other to satisfy their needs, to gain social recognition and prestige, to gain and exercise power, and to have their own interest and objectives which are possible to differ from the organizational itself. The organization is also viewed as made of formal i.e. management, structure and technology; and informal system, i.e. culture, politics and leadership. Natural approach is basically what being embraced by the alternative researchers in interpretive approach of studying organizational change (Barbara & Fleming, 2006:7).

Definition of Organizational Change

Van De Ven and Poole (2005) highlight the critical role of how the view about nature of organization will affect the conception of organizational change itself. They argue that the definition of change can either be *variance* or *process* methods. The definition based on variance method will view change as a dependent variable that can be explained by some pre-hypothesized independent variables. This will lead to the investigation of an '*observed difference over time in an organizational entity on selected dimensions*'... In contrast, process method views organization as comprising of process and therefore defines organizational change as event-driven process that can be explained by unfolding the history and story of the change events based on their temporal order and sequence. From the perspective of process methods, Van De Ven and Poole (2005) highlight the definition of change as a '*narrative describing a sequence of events on how development and change unfold*'.

Past Researches on Organizational Change

Taking the standpoint of Van de Ven and Poole (2005), the past researches on organizational change can be grouped into mainstream approach (positivistic) and alternative approach (interpretive). Positivistic approach tends to view change as dependent variable which can be explained by investigating the explanatory power of independent variables. Whereas, alternative approach tends to view change as a product of the interplay and interactions between the social actors and the wider environment, which can be explained by investigating how this interactions between them create change over time.

According to Van De Ven and Huber (1990), the study on organizational change tends to focus on two main questions. First, '*what are the antecedents or consequences of changes in organizational forms or administrative practices?*'; and second, '*how does an organizational change emerge, develop, grow or terminate over time?*'. These two questions emerge as the consequence of the different ontological and epistemological stances of researchers in conducting their researches. The first question tends to be associated with the positivistic approach who views the change as a product of input of change dependent variables (e.g. Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008; Baillien & Witte, 2009; Berneth, Armenakis, Field, & Walker, 2007; Elias, 2009; Mishra, Bhaskar, & Khurana, 2007; Wezel & Helmhout, 2006). The change can be explained through its causal-effect relationship with the input variables by using statistical

tools. In contrast, second question emerged as the answer for more calls to employ alternative approach in studying organizational change among the scholars. The second question views the change as the product of social interactions among the social actors whether at social or firms level. Therefore, researchers who involve in the research which focus to answer the second question tend to view the change as a process, thus looking for alternative approach to investigate the phenomenon of change at social or organizational level (e.g. Bevan, Robert, Bate, Maher, & Wells, 2007; Bridges & Meyer, 2007; Hempel & Martinsons, 2009; Jiao, Lau, & Lui, 2005; Latta, 2009; McKinney & Morris, 2010).

THE ROLE OF SPACE IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Pettigrew et al. (2001) argue that the current study on organizational changes is far from achieving its maturity to understand the dynamics and effects of time, process, discontinuity and context. They believe that the study on organizational change should take into account the *temporal and spatial* context of the change. They critique that positivistic approach has been underplaying the complex processes that lead to understanding the dynamics of change across *time and space*. Further, Pettigrew et al. (2001) highlight among others, that future research in organizational change should take into consideration the issue of the examination of multiple contexts and levels of analysis; and the inclusion of time, history, process and action. Some studies however have already considered on the Pettigrew et al.'s call, i.e. Nadesan's (1996) study on the how space and gender interact to shape the identity organization actors; Abbot's (1997) on call for alternative research of time and space in sociology; Sahay's (1997) study on information technology using time-space perspective; Gieryn's (2000) study of the concept of space for place in sociology; and Maznevski and Chudoba's (2000) study on teamwork in the context of space over time.

It is argued that with regards to the issue of time however, it is a common practice for social scientists to privilege the analysis of time (Taylor & Spicer, 2007), and has been the central issue in all disciplines of inquiry (Ancona, Goodman, Lawrence, & Tushman, 2001). For example, Huy (2001) investigates the organizational planned change in the context of time; Elias (2009) studies the effect of time on employees' attitudes towards change; Lee and Lee (2008) study the role, and Purser and Petranker (2005) the dynamic and Orlikowski (1998) role of time in organizational change process; Mitchell and James (2001) use positivistic approach to predict changes in relation to change in time; and Ancona, et al, (2001), and Ancona, Okhusen, and Perlow, (2001) propose different conceptions of time with regards to temporal research.

According to Taylor and Spicer (2007), although the time and space are closely linked in the social science research, but until recently the issue of space and place has only been portrayed as neutral settings (Sahay, 1997). They suggest however, that there is a promising trend of increasing number of scholars that take space and place as a central analytical theme in their research. Beside some attempts, few researchers in organizational space studies highlight the challenge and difficulty in giving meaning and definition for space in respect of the organization study (i.e. Halford, 2004; Sahay, 1997), despite that fact that human relations and its organizational setting has long been investigated (Marrewijk, 2006). Taylor and Spicer (2007) highlight that the existing research can be classified into three categories, as shown in Figure 1: (1) studies of space as a distance; (2) studies of space as the materialization of power, and; (3) studies of space as experience.

	Space as distance	Space as materialized power relation	Space as experience
Definitions of Space	Measurable distance between points	Relations of dominations made material	Understanding and interpretation of space
Key Analytical Concept	Physical distance between people, resources, customers and competitors.	Workplace; architecture; work-non work divide.	Symbolism; Aesthetic; Actors; Interpretation; Discourse.
Approaches	Ergonomics; Office design; Population ecology; Social ecology; Network analysis.	Employee relations; Labour process; Theory; Foucauldian organization studies.	Organizational cultural studies; Interpretive organization studies.

Dominant Data Methods	Measured distances, diagrams.	Interviews, participant observations.	Non-participant observation, interview; visual data.
Key Studies	Baum & Mezias, 1992; Brookes & Kaplan, 1972; Bitner, 1992; Greenhut, 1956; Hatch, 1987.	Collinson & Collinson, 1987; Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992.	Berg & Kreiner, 1990; Cairns, 2002; Ford & Harding, 2004; Yanow, 1998.

Figure 1: Formations of Space. Source: Taylor and Spicer (2007).

Space as Distance

Central principle to the study of space as distance is the view that distance is physically exists, and that existence can be objectively measured and represented. Taylor and Spicer (2007) highlight that the most widespread issue has been studied in this example is the workplace layout and its influence on the employees' behavior, motivation, and perceptions towards their superior among others. They also highlight that few studies have also gone beyond within organizational level but taking into account how the distance between the industries and geography locations might affect the organization activities.

Despite the significant advantages of studying space as distance, Taylor and Spicer (2007) identify at least two criticisms or its shortcomings of the studies in this perspective. First, they are unable to take into account the ways in which actors attribute meaning and significance to space (Halford, 2004). Taylor and Spicer (2007) argue that these factors are far more critical in shaping the organizational activities and process rather than physical quantitative and representation of distance. Second, they ignore how the patterns of power and resistance may influence and shape the manifestations of distance and proximity. Taylor and Spicer (2007) argue that power and resistance are two influential elements in social forces that shape the configuration of space and how spatiality is practised. In general, they criticized the view of space and distance as 'visible' physical representation since it does not provide convincing explanation on how this distance emerges as what it is. This has promoted the alternative endeavor of some researchers to study space as materialization of power relation in general, and space as a lived experience particularly at the organizational level.

Space as Materialization of Power Relations

Central to the view of space as materialization is to conceive the space as the signification of relations of power and dominations among the actors in the organization. This conception of space with regards to power and domination is attributed to the contribution of Karl Marx's theory (Taylor & Spicer, 2007) of the actors struggle in class structure to have gain over the economic surplus, to place new mechanism of surveillance and control systems (Wickramasinghe & Alawattage, 2007:20). With regards to the role of space in organizational change, Marx sees the change as the consequence of materialization of power and domination at play in capitalism. Taylor and Spicer (2007:330-331) has also highlighted that researchers in this category argue that existence of structured industrialized area or city, the workforce layout in an organization, and the physical appearance of a building, structure and wall are the exact examples of how materialization of power and domination between the societal actors is signified. In the present world where people see the world as 'boundaryless', researchers like Ezzamel & Worthington (2001) perceive the requirement for physical and time spent in organizational by the management over the employees is the best example where space is seen as important element for materialization of power relations between employees and management.

With regards to view space as materialization of power, Taylor and Spicer (2007) highlight several critiques about it. First, it is disputable to claim that any spatial layout is caused by the materialization of power among the social actors. In other words, it ignores the influence of other forces in the process of creating this so called space. Second, it is also a short step to claim that behavioral aspects of organization are seen as the product of power relations and domination. This argument based on the assumptions that human as the key actors will always act and react in such a way which is complex to describe and predict. Therefore, it cannot be attributed to fact that they being monitored and controlled.

Space as Experience

The main principle of viewing space as experience is based on the notion that space is the manifestation and production of experience by those human actors that inhabit them, which also gives less concern to view spaces as distance between points and as the materialization of power relations. In other words, the experience of the organizational human actors will define what the meaning of physical layout, walls and etc. Most of the researchers that hold on this conception of space will generally employ the interpretive approach in their investigation of organizational space (Taylor & Spicer, 2007:333). In particular, *'the univocal relation between objects, language and an objective reality is questioned'* and investigated. Taylor and Spicer further argue that central to this space conception is the symbolic (i.e. Cheng, 1998; Watson, 2003) and aesthetic (i.e. Strati & de Montoux, 2002) dimensions of the space which are mirrored in the inhabitants' experiences which are now increasingly recognized by researchers in this approach.

The building and physical representation in the organization are perceived to deposit the aesthetic and symbolic identity of the organization. Taylor and Spicer (2007) highlight the findings of some researches which demonstrated how the organization's fundamental ideology such as openness, transparency and accountability can be represented by its workplace and physical building layout as perceived by the inhabitants. Some researchers have also demonstrated how the history, long time stories, struggles, culture and identity (i.e. Halford & Leonard, 2005) of the organization are depicted through the physical representation of the organization's aesthetic and symbolic building and workplace. Halford and Leonard (2005) argue that organizational actors' experience of their space as element of contextual organizational setting is essential to interpret the practices of subjectivity and power in organizational life. In line with this, Sahay (1997) also argues that in order to fully understand the interaction of organizational change process and the newly implemented (technical) change, research should take into consideration the role of time and space. Sahay views that space as a manifestation of actors' experience, will influence the actors' behaviors in their everyday's practices.

RESEARCH APPROACH IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

Perhaps the work by Burrell and Morgan (1979) on the classification of empirical approaches in social science based on their schemas on ontology, epistemology, methodology, nature of society, and human nature is crucial for any researcher to be aware of before embarking to do with any research (Laughlin, 1991). Borrowing the work of Burrell and Morgan (1979), Morgan and Smircich (1980) argue that the research methods in social science can be stretched from more subjectivist to more objectivist including (1) exploration of pure subjectivity; (2) hermeneutics; (3) symbolic analysis; (4) contextual analysis of Gestalten; (5) historical analysis, and; (6) lab experiments, surveys. Out of these six, Yanow and Ybema (2009) highlight that hermeneutics and symbolic analysis are the two major methods used in interpretive approach.

This study will adopt hermeneutics methods where reality is perceived to be socially constructed. This is done through the interactions among the social actors using symbolic mediums such language, labels, actions and routines. Therefore, reality is not in a concrete representation but merely created through symbolic shared meanings. Through the investigation of these shared meanings embedded in symbolic mediums will give deeper understanding of how the reality is constructed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To study of the role of space in organizational change, the researcher will adopt the interpretive qualitative approach. This approach is favored based on number of reasons. Firstly, researcher conceives the organizational change as product of the interaction of internal organizational process and its human actors, it is socially constructed. Pettigrew (1990) stresses that in order to fully understand the richness and dynamics of change through time and space, research should focus on the interplay of multiple organizational contexts by employing more qualitative research method. Further, Pettigrew (1990) also argues that the qualitative approach in investigating the phenomenon of organizational change will make the research more theoretically sound and practically useful (i.e. Sahay, 1997). Second, researcher

also views space in this context as a manifestation and representation of organizational actors' that is developed over time and through their everyday's social interactions. Researchers believe that in order to understand how the role of space influences the organizational practices (eventually the change); the research should investigate the human actors' experience of the space at their natural setting (i.e. Halford & Leonard, 2005; Sahay, 1997; Watson, 2003). Thus, through qualitative approach, the researcher will be able to grasp rich understanding of this explanation.

The interpretive approach is opted for due to its advantages for the objectives of this research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) each of the interpretive approaches has its own unique methodological considerations that guide the conceptualization, design and implementation of individual research. With regards to investigating the role of space in organizational change, social scientists believe that it can be investigated by taking into account how the process of human actors' experience is evolved in the organization. This will involve the investigation of symbolic discourse, aesthetic and social interaction between the human actors. Interpretive approach will enable the researcher to analyze the micro level of individual interconnections among sub-units of organization such language and culture, if focusing on local meanings and symbolic worlds (Prasad & Prasad, 2002). In investigating the role of space at organizational level change, most of the interpretive researchers will employ longitudinal case study in which data collections are primarily derived from opened and semi-structured interviews, analysis of archival texts and documents, and the physical site observations (i.e. Halford & Leonard, 2005; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Sahay, 1997).

Case Study

In choosing and evaluating the case study method, the researcher considered a number of arguments. First, It recognizes the uniqueness of a particular organization (Bryman & Buchanan, 2009) and events and so enables deeper understanding, avoiding the over generalization problems faced by many other social science research approaches. According to Halford and Leonard (2005), the case study method enables them to collect very detailed knowledge that shows how individual's subjectivity within organization are shaped by varied discursive interpretations between spaces and times. Secondly, the study of space in contextual setting using the case study method shows increasing significant numbers among the social scientists. Thirdly, beside the comprehensiveness of explanation that can be expected from conducting a case study approach, it can also be used as a tool to generate (Otley & Berry, 1994), develop, modify, reassessed and reject of a particular theory (Dambrin, Lambert, & Sponem, 2007). The data collected from a case study can contradict or reveal previously unseen inadequacies in the theoretical notion guiding the research. For instance, the study on management accounting change by Cobb, Helliard, and Innes (1995) based on Innes and Mitchell's (1990) is one of the good examples where their exploratory and explanatory case study approach was able to generate new theoretical framework and accounting change model. Finally, one of the advantages of explanatory case study method is it will enable the researcher to combine more data collection techniques to better explain the research question under study (Tsamenyi, Cullen, & Gonzalez, 2006).

Data Collection Methods

The combination of more techniques in data collection process, usually known as triangulation of data collection (Yin, 2003:97), will increase the quality of data collected during the research process (Andon, Baxter & Chua, 2007; Ryan, Scapens & Theobald 2002:154; Yin, 2003:97), and at the same time will provide a broader explanation of the case under investigation (Hassan, 2008). Therefore, in this study the researcher will combine the interview, analysis of text and documents, and direct observation to collect and triangulate the data for verification and validity purposes.

Interviews

In order to understand to subjective role of the space in organizational change process, the researcher will attempt to capture the lived experience of the human actors in the organization. The interview enables the researcher to capture better understanding of the perception and experience of human actors about the space during their everyday's' social interactions (Cassell, 2009; Nadesan, 1996). This is in line with the argument by Caccia and Steccolini (2006) which shows that through the interview of key actors, a researcher will be able to gain knowledge of the change history, its impacts, verify the actual happenings and evaluate the organizational changes, in which all these are the central

elements of change where the role of space resides. According to Ryan et al. (2002:154), interview is one of the vital elements in data collection process especially in the case studies with qualitative research approach. Nadesan (1996) argues that using interviews with the participants in the organization enable the data collected from each of them to be triangulated which later provides more room for further verification and identification.

Content Data Analysis

To obtain good quality of information, this research will also employ content or documentation (Hassan, 2008) analysis to supplement the information gathered in the interview process (Andon et al., 2007). This includes the analyzing the management (accounting) reports (Innes and Mitchell, 1990), intranet and internet sites (Andon et al., 2007), archives and local histories (Halford & Leonard, 2005), newspaper cutting, legislations, academic articles (Hassan, 2008), memos and minutes of the meetings (Soin, Seal, & Cullen, 2002).

Direct Observations

In understanding how the space influence the organizational change, Halford and Leonard (2005) argue that direct observation to the physical space of the organization is important to investigate the nuances from spatial and temporal context. They further argue the physical observation will enable the researcher to envisage and relate the first experience of space while listening, transcribing and understanding the text and taped data. The observations might also includes attendance on the relevant meetings, informal discussions with individuals (Halford and Leonard, 2005; Kasurinen, 2002), formal individual discussions, and sites touring (see for example, Lind, 2001; Moilanen, 2008; Soin et al., 2002). According to Soin et al. (2002), although the direct observations sometimes provide obscuring information but they will also provide little important information that can complement the whole story behind the scene. For instance, Soin et al. (2002) noted that the informal discussions with individuals will provide more ‘gossip’ that gives clues on where and how to locate the important source of data, and to identify other important initially ‘*unseen*’ individuals for further investigation. Kasurinen (2002) found that the use of informal discussions in data collection activity will help to deepen the understanding of the research context. Halford and Leonard (2005) have demonstrated that the stories of people in the organizations will reflect the identity of the organization and its people in which they are the entities where the ‘space as experience’ resides.

CONCLUSION

This study tends to investigate the role of space in organizational change process. It conceives the space as lived experience of organizational human actors which can resides in symbolic and aesthetic space dimensions. Despite the dominance of positivistic approach on prior studies, this research will use interpretive qualitative case study approach. Using this approach, the subjective nature of space embedded in the archival documents, culture, human experiences, physical architecture and other physical representation can be fully captured and explained.

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