

LEARNING AND UNCONSCIOUS PROCESS: CONNECTING LEARNING, SPACE AND THE UNCONSCIOUS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Key words: Learning, Space, Unconscious

Russ Vince¹
School of Management, University of Bath

Introduction

In this paper I reflect on spatial relations and unconscious dynamics created in management learning. I explain why it is important to acknowledge the interplay between learning, space and the unconscious as well as how to utilize these in helping students of management and managers to understand aspects of the emotional and political context within which their practice is situated. Opportunities to explore spatial and unconscious dynamics together in management learning are unlikely to be found in didactic approaches to managers' teaching and learning. Therefore, I look at two examples where spatial and relational dynamics within the management classroom are linked to the unconscious in groups.

I argue that connecting learning, space and the unconscious in the management classroom can stimulate creativity in the approaches we use to educate managers, as well as greater depth of understanding of organizational dynamics. There are explicit benefits to managers in examining spatial disparities of knowledge that emerge around complex organizational concepts. For example, the notion of leadership is primarily defined and taught in terms of individuals' skills, knowledge and behavior, or in terms of leaders' heroic endeavor, charisma or positive attitudes. However, we know that leaders can use their preferred skills, knowledge and behavior successfully in one organizational setting and yet take the same skills, knowledge and behavior into a different organization only to fail in their role. I suggest that an improved awareness of spatial relations and unconscious dynamics can provide insights into the complexity of relations and actions mobilized by individuals within a leadership role.

From my thoughts on the interplay between learning, space and the unconscious, and using this relationship in the management classroom, I build a provisional conceptual framework for reflection on unconscious dynamics created in the *relational space* of management and organizational learning. I see this as a useful contribution to a growing body of literature that acknowledges learning as a profoundly emotional experience; and that such experience is inseparable from questions of politics and power (Coopey, 1995; Gherardi, 1999; Vince, 2001). My framework combines the group-analytic concept of 'relatedness' (French and Vince, 1999), with the spatial concept of 'throwntogetherness' (Massey, 2005) in order to express the way in which conscious and unconscious emotional dynamics connect to political tensions inherent in relational space.

¹ Professor Russ Vince, School of Management, University of Bath, Bath BA2 7AY, United Kingdom: Phone: +44(0)1225-384419 email: R.Vince@bath.ac.uk

Thoughts on the Words: Learning, Space and Unconscious

The attempt to cover three major concepts like learning, space and unconscious in one, short paper is not without its challenges. In order to contain these concepts into a sense-making framework I will be making very personal choices about their meaning and the literatures associated with them. This is necessarily both a partial and subjective engagement with the literatures. However, I would welcome post-publication critique from the reader of my framing ideas, as external views will help me to rethink the inter-relation between these concepts.

Learning

Learning is the capacity to doubt those things that seem unquestionable. The ability to learn is a fundamental human quality that allows us to engage with and to change our world. Learning implies an awareness of the limitations of existing knowledge as well as the ability to transform knowledge through new information or insight. In organizations, learning is understood both as improvement in performance and as a continuous process of transformation. Learning is related to improvements in the ways in which a role or task is performed, individually or collectively. It is also a potential outcome of the relationship between reflection and action over time. Organizations need to be good at learning because of the importance of generating, appropriating and exploiting knowledge for growth and renewal.

There are two particular ways in which the relationship between learning and organizing has been understood. The ‘learning organization’ refers to an ideal type of organization which has the capacity to learn effectively and therefore to prosper. Learning organizations have been seen as environments where ‘people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together’ (Senge, 1990). ‘Organizational learning’ refers to the study of learning processes of and within organizations, in order to understand and critique what is taking place (Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003). The term ‘organizational learning’ does not mean that an organization is learning, but it does imply that learning and organizing are related. This connection has been captured to good effect by Gherardi and Nicolini (2001) when they talk about organizational learning as ‘learning-in-organizing’; recognizing that learning and organizing ‘are not distinct activities within a practice’. Efforts to understand organizational learning have been assisted in recent years by a general shift from individuals’ learning within organizations and towards social, political and relational interpretations of learning and organizing.

Learning is likely to remain a particularly useful concept in relation to organizations because it is a lens through which researchers and practitioners can view the many and varied emotional and political dynamics from which our seemingly stable and rational organizations are made. One of the most interesting aspects of the relationship between learning and organizing is that learning is at the same time both desired and avoided in organizations. For example, leaders want to see a structure in place that supports improvements in individual practice and organizational performance. However, they also

resist and avoid potential changes that derive from learning if these confront existing power relations and threaten 'the way we do things here'. Our attempts to define what should be learned (in order to perpetuate and to police 'the way we do things here') are double-edged. As soon as organizational members have identified a range of competencies that indicate what should be known within particular roles, the limitations of that combination of competences become apparent. While it can be useful to prescribe a finite set of competencies, skills and behaviours to a role, it is equally important to realise that any prescriptive combination is as likely to inhibit as well as underpin knowledge, innovation and further learning.

Unconscious

The word unconscious has several different uses. It can refer to loss of consciousness, or to lack of consciousness (being unaware of what is happening around you). Such lack of awareness may arise from something that is not perceived (it is not known); or it may be perceived but not acknowledged (it is denied); or it may be acknowledged but not taken as problematic (it is given) (Weinberg, 2007). In relation to individuals, the unconscious describes a realm that is beyond awareness and knowing; at the same time, the unconscious 'has structure and order and a very tangible role in the generation of behavior' (Carr and Hancock, 2007). For example, the Chief Executive Officer's personality and attitudes both conscious and unconscious have a profound influence on the feelings and actions within an organization. The unconscious is often most apparent in the pictorial and visual language we all use in combination with words. Expressions like: 'Freudian slip', 'free-association' and psychoanalytically derived words like projection, regression and denial are all common-place within everyday language. The imagery that connects to our use of language represents *both* the conscious and unconscious minds.

Unconscious processes not only apply to individuals, but are also integral to collective experiences: within groups, in relation to tasks, within organizations and in society (Stokes, 2006). 'Whenever two or more individuals are together there is a shared unconscious field to which they belong and of which by definition they are not aware. We can talk about a relational unconscious process co-created by both participants' (Weinberg, 2007: 308). Unconscious group and inter-group dynamics influence the state of mind of an organization. Through such unconscious behavior, groups of people co-create common defenses, fantasies and assumptions that connect to and reinforce structures and designs to form an 'establishment' in the mind (Vince, 2002) – an unconscious organizational design that represents and further reinforces 'the way we do things here'. This has been referred to as 'the organization-in-the-mind'. People in organizations have a mental image of how their organization works. These diverse images and ideas about an organization are not consciously negotiated or agreed upon among by its members – but they exist. Another way to express this is to say that all organizations exist in the mind, and it is in interaction with these in-the-mind entities that we live. There are also material factors, such as other people, profits, buildings, resources and products. But the meaning of these factors derives from the context established by the organization-in-the-mind. 'These mental images are not static; they are the products of dynamic interchanges, chiefly projections and transferences' (Shapiro and Carr, 1993: 69-70).

Space

There is an emerging literature concerned with space, organization and management theory (Kornberger and Clegg, 2003; Ford and Harding, 2004; Brocklehurst, 2006; Clegg and Kornberger, 2006; Dale and Burrell, 2007; Taylor and Spicer, 2007). Whether the focus of these studies is space as materiality (Kornberger and Clegg, 2003) or space as social product (Taylor and Spicer, 2007), they all call attention to space as an important dynamic in understanding organization and management. Organizations are inspired and impeded by spatial relations and interactions (Meusburger, 2008). Space is categorized, choreographed, configured and corporatized in the service of governing organizational members and social systems, as well as supporting identities of compliance and resistance. ‘Thus, space is inextricably linked to power: it limits and enables, it creates and hinders through precise spatial arrangements’ (Kornberger and Clegg, 2003: 78). Space is a complex web of relations; it is full of ‘strange juxtapositions’ (Massey, 1993) accidental separations and unintended consequences; location and dislocation; and ‘spatial disparities of knowledge’. In his essay ‘Space as a Key Word’ (2005) David Harvey creates ‘a general matrix of spatialities’ (page 105) by inter-connecting Lefebvre’s (1991) tripartite division of space (material space, the representation of space, spaces of representation) with his own understanding of space as absolute, relative and relational. This matrix provides much scope for playful speculation on spatial matrices that relate to specific fields of knowledge. For example, I have used this structure to construct ‘a matrix of spatialities for management learning in Bath School of Management’ (see Figure 1, below).

Absolute space expresses uniqueness of location, it is a way of describing bounded territories, something that is fixed and therefore is amenable to measurement. *Relative space* expresses multiplicity of location, and comparisons between different perceptions and perspectives can throw up differences of political choice – for example between executive decision-making based on financial management and executive decision-making informed by social responsibility. Measurement in relative space depends on the frame of reference of the observer. In *relational space* it is impossible to disentangle space and time, since processes do not occur ‘in’ space but define their own spatial frame. Relational space is therefore ‘embedded in or internal to process’ (Harvey, 2005). *Material space* or spatial practice (Lefebvre, 1991) is the space of experience, and perception, ‘open to physical touch and sensation’ (Harvey, 2005) to include practices such as walking, occupying and meeting (Taylor and Spicer, 2007). *Representations of space* are ‘the dominant space in any society, which is tied to the relations of production and thus to knowledge, signs, codes, etc.’ (Ford and Harding, 2004). Representations of space reflects spatial planning ‘architecture, regional and city planning, ergonomics and office landscaping’ (Taylor and Spicer, 2007). *Spaces of representation* refer to the lived space of sensation, the imagination and emotions that are incorporated into how we live day by day.

Figure 1: A Matrix of Spatialities for Management Learning in Bath School of Management

	<i>Material Space</i>	<i>Representation of Space</i>	<i>Spaces of Representation</i>
<i>Absolute Space</i>	The flat room, the lecture theatre, the Professor's tidy office, the MBA students coffee lounge. Long corridors and brown carpet.	Configuration or placement of chairs (circle, rows, conference format), positions and juxtapositions, deliberate separations and alliances.	Feelings of security or contentment, fear of others, anxiety, spatial assignments or ambivalences, the 'dungeon room' that has no windows. The walls crowding in.
<i>Relative Space</i>	Connection or disconnection to ideas and knowledge; differences of perspective on the distances between others; the politics implied in positions in the room.	Situated knowing. What students reveal about their existing knowledge, the raising of hands, resolute silences.	The anticipation of learning, concern at not getting to class on time, longing to be outside, the delight of new knowledge. Feelings of respect, hatred, ambivalence* for the tutor (* delete as appropriate)
<i>Relational Space</i>	Shifts in proximity and attention with others in the same or different roles, foci of perceptions, connections and disconnections to experience	Knowing more than the tutor, competing for attention, positioning of the self relative to assignments, the discomfort of peer assessment, differences of engagement and attention.	Visions, fantasies, desires, dreams, frustrations, the memory of chalk, strange juxtapositions and unwanted emotions, complicated peer relations. A tendency towards fight or flight.

A Provisional Conceptual Framework

While David Harvey's (2005) 'matrix of spatialities' provides us with a suitably complex and encompassing conceptual model of space, it is too complex for the purposes of linking learning, space and the unconscious in the context of management and organizational learning. Such a framework needs to offer a way to think about and connect to the emotions and politics that are mobilized in management and organizational learning. However, I think that it is possible to draw on aspects of all three of my interpretations of the meaning of these words (learning, space, unconscious) in order to create a simple, provisional conceptual framework concerning the interplay between these concepts. In this paper, my interpretations of the words learning, space and unconscious are all connected to social relations, and these relations can be understood both in emotional and political terms.

Learning in organizations is both desired and avoided at the same time. Managers *feel* that learning is desirable, possible or necessary within the organization because they know that change is unlikely to happen without transformations of existing knowledge. At the same time managers may *act* against learning if the potential transformation of knowledge seems to be transgressing aspects of the status quo. The designs and strategies for learning that organizations create can function (deliberately or not) as processes for emotional compliance to an ideal of corporate citizenship and as political control of the velocity and direction of change.

Emotions 'are rarely, if ever, located within a purely individual space; like power they are part of the medium within which all social relations occur' (Hoggett and Thompson, 2002: 112). Groups of people, when they interact together create an emotional dynamic that makes a group more than the sum of its individual parts. Such underlying dynamics shape and are shaped by the group's mutual activity, for example: their similarities and differences, their antagonisms and consensus, their incapacity to reflect or a determination to act. This process in groups has been called *relatedness*, since it is not about the relationships between people in the group so much as 'conscious and unconscious emotional levels of connection that exist between and shape selves and others, people and systems' (French and Vince, 1999: 7). It is in these unconscious layers of connection, in the interplay between belonging and becoming, that the 'organization-in-the-mind' is created.

Representational spaces invite distinction between space and place, since place implies process as well as materiality. Place is 'constructed out of constellations of relations articulated together at a particular locus' (Ford and Harding, 2004: 818). If organizations are inspired *and* impeded by spatial relations and interactions (Meusberger, 2008) then it is within the 'particular locus' of place that the politics of this tension are worked out. Place 'as an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories poses the question of our *throwntogetherness* (my emphasis)... The chance of space may set us down next to the unexpected neighbour. The multiplicity and the chance of space here in the constitution of place provide (an element of) that inevitable contingency which underlies the necessity

for the institution of the social and which, at the moment of antagonism, is revealed in particular fractures which pose the question of the political' (Massey, 2005: 151).

Therefore, we can combine these notions of relatedness (an emotional layer of connection) and 'throwntogetherness' (a political layer of connection) in order to interrogate spatial and unconscious dynamics as they are mobilized within the relational space of learning groups. I can summarize what we might be looking for in such groups through the following assumptions:

- *Relatedness* (emotion/ space)

A learning group is more than the sum of its parts; it is constructed from both conscious and unconscious relations and dynamics. Groups create rituals, expectations, unvoiced assumptions, distinctive language and complex delusions, etc., that then unconsciously support and recreate 'the way we do things here'.

- *Throwntogetherness* (politics/ place)

'The chance of space may set us down next to the unexpected neighbour' (Massey, 2005). Within learning groups the 'unexpected neighbour' may be the shock of new knowledge, our own prejudice and bias, old and/or new anxieties, similarities and differences with others, patterns of social connection and exclusion, relations of domination and subordination and/or solidarity and co-operation, (etc.). The political tension inherent in the relational space of a learning group is that learning is both desired and avoided at the same time.

In the following section of the paper I provide two examples from management learning that I use to illustrate the interplay between learning, space and the unconscious. I then employ the above framework to analyze these examples and to develop a more detailed explanation of the interplay between relatedness and throwntogetherness, as well as how these concepts can help us to engage with management and organizational learning. In the final section of the paper I discuss how spatial and relational dynamics within the management classroom are linked to the unconscious in groups and organizations. I return briefly to the concept of leadership in order to emphasize the potential importance of the ideas to key organizational roles and relations.

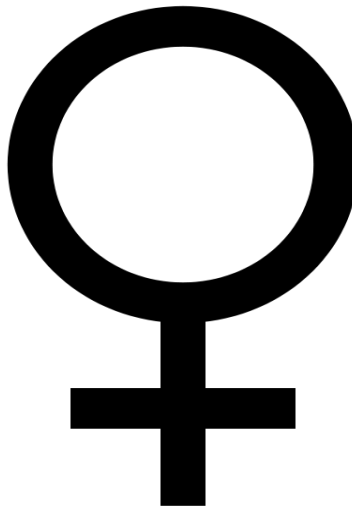
Two Examples from Learning Groups

In this section of the paper I provide two examples from management learning where an attempt was made to use the interplay between space, learning and unconscious in order to understand emotional and political dynamics of organizing. In the initial example I discuss an exercise I developed for the Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Advanced Management Practice (AMP) within the School of Management, called 'The Behaviour and Structure Exercise'. In the second example I discuss the unconscious dynamics

collectively mobilized by pharmacists in Wales, UK, who were part of an ‘Action Learning Group’ learning about leadership.

The AMP ‘Behaviour and Structure Exercise’

The M.Sc. in Advanced Management Practice is designed as a ‘fast-track’ programme for adults in their early twenties who have recently graduated from Business and Management related first degrees. The students are often bright, enthusiastic and diverse in their backgrounds and experience. The experiential exercise is designed to illustrate the importance of understanding the way in which structure and behaviour are inextricably linked in agency. The ‘lesson’ that I hope students take from the event is on the importance of the generative consequences of behaviour, action and inaction – how working together (and apart) creates explicit and implicit structures that then further determine how people work together (or not). In this particular exercise however, there is a specific structure within the learning space constructed from the juxtaposition of chairs, one that is closely linked to inter-personal and social emotions and politics. The students are aware of entering a room with a configuration of chairs, but they are not aware of why the chairs are so arranged. I arranged the ‘structure’ of the chairs into the following pattern:



This pattern is chosen because it has social and political potency for most learning groups. It represents a perpetual emotional and political issue within groups, the desire to avoid interacting with the complex dynamics between the men and the women within the group. In addition, it is designed to mirror behaviour in organizations, emphasizing the significance of gendered power relations in terms of organizational practice and performance. I have used this exercise with two AMP groups so far (AMP1 - 19 students in total, 11 women and 8 men; and AMP2 – 27 students in total, 16 women and 11 men). The instructions that the students receive at the beginning of this exercise are usually something like the following: ‘This is an exercise called the Behaviour and Structure

Exercise. What you do during the time allocated for the exercise is for you to decide and to manage. Your only restriction is that you are not allowed to move the chairs'. The exercise itself lasts for one hour and then there is another hour to talk about and discuss what happened as well as the implications for management learning.

In the first AMP group of 19 students, three things occurred that I want to draw to the reader's attention. First, during the hour-long exercise the group of students did not recognize the 'chair structure' they were in. In the review after the exercise, one individual said that he had noticed the structure but did not say anything about it. Second, several participants got out of their seats and moved around the 'chair structure', looking at it 'from the outside', going back into the structure and sitting in different places. Finally, there was one chair in which all the men in this group sat at different times. None of the women in the group sat in this chair. It was the chair at the very base of the structure. In the second AMP group of 27 students, the structure was recognized right away by a few of the students. Close to the beginning of the exercise I heard a student near to me whisper to her neighbour that 'the chairs are in the woman sign'. Not once throughout the hour was this statement made in the whole group. Therefore, some people in the group remained unaware of the structure (the behaviour, the issue) that others had recognized. In addition, the members of the AMP2 group were not willing to sit in the structure as a whole and very quickly congregated together in the circle (despite the discomfort for some of having to sit on the floor for an hour).

An important point to remember when interpreting such behaviour is that interpretation is only relevant in context. The interpretations that matter are those that belong to the individuals in the room, during the hour, as well as the discussions that the interpretations stimulated in terms of reflective dialogue and learning. The key question is 'what do we make of the interactions between behaviour and structure within the AMP group?' for example, my interpretation, both at the time and now, of the behaviour in the AMP1 group is that the fact that all the men in the group and none of the women sat in one chair is a reflection of unconscious, gendered dynamics in the group. I think that the whispered knowledge of the 'gendered' structure of the classroom that is never voiced in the group as a whole is a very realistic (unconscious) enactment of gendered dynamics within organizations, where such things are talked about in small groups, but never in the organization as a whole. However, it really does not matter for the purposes of the exercise if these unconscious dynamics are referred to as 'a coincidence' (which indeed they were by some). The unconscious in this situation, as in any such exercise, does not necessarily tell us about the meaning of behaviour in the group. However, it invariably stimulates conversation about gendered relations within the group. The unconscious therefore stimulates 'public reflection' (Raelin, 2001) about the politics and power relations in the group, it stimulates reflection on how 'the chance of space may set us down next to the unexpected neighbour' (Massey, 2005) and also raises an issue that I could refer to as the unwanted neighbour.

The Group Dynamics of the Pharmacists' Leadership Programme

Action Learning is an experiential method of helping managers to learn (McGill and Beaty, 2001). The central premise is that managers learn most effectively not through being taught about (e.g.) leadership, but through examining their own leadership practice over time, reflecting and acting on their own practice in order to transform it. This is usually undertaken within a group of peers who are all similarly engaged in attempts to learn and to change. An aspect of action learning that makes it an important method for learning about leadership is that it helps individuals to better understand their own leadership in the emotional and political context of the organizations to which they belong (Vince and Martin, 1993; Vince, 2004 & 2008). When we come together in groups we often bring with us a variety of assumptions and/or ways of working that characterize our profession; that represent ways of thinking to which we are particularly attached, or that mirror aspects of the wider organization within which our role is situated. We can therefore understand learning groups as more than the sum of their individual parts, as having a *dynamic* that is constructed collectively and unconsciously through the interaction of the individuals involved, as well as the mental images we have of how our organizations work (the way we do things here). These images are made up of diverse ideas and assumptions that are often unconscious, that are not static, and that are connected to politics and relations of power.

In the particular AL group I am talking about here, a group of pharmacists based in Wales, UK, a period was set aside each time the group met in order to consider the 'group process' issues that might have an impact on the work the group were attempting to do on that day. This allowed the group to reflect on a wider range of dynamics than those belonging only to individuals within the group. For example, in the early stages of the group's development individuals behaved in ways that reflected the uncertainty of being in a group. This was expressed through the difficulty of finding a clear role for oneself in the group without falling into habitual or stereotypical roles and relations. For example: one member of the group positioned herself as the inexperienced young person in the group, another as the older woman who is implicitly elected the group's 'mum'. Although individuals have put themselves into these roles (through feelings of anxiety, through past habits, through discomfort in the present moment) it is the group that locks them into the roles. They start to take on such roles unconsciously and *for the group* – so the 'mum' is relied on to be the person who looks after the group, makes them feel better about conflicts, and speaks up during uncomfortable silences. Once individuals are locked into these roles, they are difficult to escape, and they inhibit both individual and group learning.

The example I want to provide for the reader is apt because it concerns the unconscious dynamics that were mobilized for this group by a change in material space. In this session, the group process reflections are affected by the fact that the group has been moved from its normal (large, relatively comfortable) room to a different (small, relatively uncomfortable) room. The room 'we should have been in' is being used for a meeting of senior managers, on changes that are taking place within the pharmacists' professional association. One of the members starts to reflect on changes in his

organization. ‘There is so much going on politically, lots of uncertainty, lots of change, there are rumors of a new Chief Executive, it is unsettling’ and ‘they are going to be moving us, because of a problem with space’. Group members are ‘worried about the re-organization, it is all so unknown, there is a rumor that we might merge with other trusts into one big health authority – it’s a big change’. There are strong feelings in the group: feelings of uncertainty about the working environment for pharmacists, about the learning group, and about ‘what is going on downstairs; knowing that there are discussions about the future of the profession. What is the impact on us and on our jobs?’ One of the group members says: ‘we haven’t got a clue about what is going on downstairs’. The physical process of being ‘moved’ connects to and stimulates emotions and associations about the broader changes and uncertainties that are part of pharmacy going forward. There are unconscious associations between experience ‘here and now’ in the discomfort of a new location (a ‘dislocation’) and the emotional discomforts and dislocations that are integral to being a pharmacist at a time of change and uncertainty within the profession.

These examples from the Masters degree in AMP and the Pharmacists’ Action Learning group illustrate why it might be important for managers and management students to be provided with opportunities to relate learning, space and the unconscious. The material space of the classroom connects to the relational space of learning, providing opportunities to view the ways in which conscious and unconscious organizational dynamics are enacted in the classroom. The material space of the classroom and the relational space of learning combine to provide a temporary container within which to view emotional and political processes that are difficult to address within organizations. In addition, opportunities are provided to examine and to transform the organization-in-the-mind, both individual and collective. Struggles with learning often mirror broader struggles with organizing: to let go of defenses, to engage emotionally, to give voice to social and political dynamics, and to encourage interpretations of behaviour, action and inaction. In the final section of this paper, I develop these ideas further, link them to leadership and provide some thoughts on the future development of this area.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this final section of the paper I discuss spatial and relational dynamics within the management classroom and how they are linked to the unconscious in groups. I have used my provisional conceptual framework to analyze the two examples I provided above. Through this analysis, I was looking for a more detailed explanation of the interplay between ‘relatedness’ and ‘throwntogetherness’, in order to elaborate these concepts and to assert their importance in developing an understanding of management and organizational learning. The examples provide some insights about how management learning can be designed from an awareness of the interaction between learning and space. Such awareness is likely to include spatial relations (juxtapositions of power in material space); relational space (process dynamics, concerning, for example, questions of proximity, perception, positioning, fantasy and projection); and political relatedness (the intersection between power and process).

The outcome of a spatial perspective on management learning is an understanding of the predictability of organizational behaviour as well as its complexity. The 'chair structure' produces behaviour that *represents* space ('representation of space'). Such behaviour is tied to existing knowledge, to implicit codes, and to underlying assumptions that constitute the 'architecture of the invisible' (Isaacs, 1999). Behaviour in the 'chair structure' mirrors behaviour in organizations. For example, gendered power relations in the chair structure were whispered about in little groups of two or three AMP members, but never engaged with in the whole AMP learning group. In organizations, gendered power relations are often spoken about in sub-systems but rarely engaged with in terms of the system as a whole. The danger implicit in systemic engagement with power relations is that the organization may have to change. The 'chair structure' also produces complexity. It produces strange juxtapositions, antagonisms and fractures, unwanted emotions, senses and desires ('spaces of representation'). In other words, the 'chair structure' reveals the politics of place. Unconsciously, the learning group refuses to recognize the 'chair structure' even though parts of the group know its meaning. While the conscious knowledge of the structure has an impact on the few, the group (or organization) as a whole is protected by unconscious social defenses against the anxiety produced through relations of power.

In the 'action learning' group of pharmacists, individuals get themselves stuck into a role – the inexperienced one, the group mum, the one who can facilitate the group. This does not occur only as an expression of the feelings individuals have about being in the group, or as a reflection of their habitual individual behaviour within groups. It also represents an unconscious process of limiting the learning potential within the group. Such potential for learning arises from being able to share roles, from discarding habitual ways of thinking and working, and from challenging the stuckness that the group creates in order to limit learning. Once again this can be seen as a mirror of organizational dynamics, where organizations find sophisticated unconscious mechanisms to defend against change. Despite evident desires to make change happen, organizations are always at the same time concerned to defend the status quo.

The constant tension in organizations, as well as in the experience of organizational members, concerning simultaneously making and resisting change creates unconscious ambivalence about management and organizational learning. When a member of the action learning group declares (on behalf of all group members) that, as a result of changes in material space, 'we haven't got a clue about what is going on downstairs', this dislocation connects what is happening now, what is occurring in the organization (they are 'worried about the reorganization'), and the broader uncertainties with the pharmacists' profession ('so much going on politically, lots of uncertainty, lots of change'). Dislocation and antagonism (much more than consensus) provide individuals and organizations with opportunities for learning and change. However, organizational members often struggle to avoid the emotions that are generated within such conflicts, and unconscious organizational designs are thereby created and mobilized that limit members' contact with and understanding of the emotional and political dynamics that surround them. These reflections on space, learning and the unconscious imply a shift in the way that emotion and power are connected in organizations, posing a complex

question for further research: ‘not what kind of affects should we allow – but what kind of affects should be allowed to dominate and through what expressive forms?’ (Hoggett and Thompson, 2002: 114)

The interplay between learning and space is expressed unconsciously as well as consciously in organizations. Through patterns of relatedness, through the emotional and political dynamics of relational space, organizations manufacture and reinforce ‘the way we do things here’. However, there are ambiguities of ‘throwntogetherness’ that can *place* us alongside ‘the unexpected neighbour’, and thereby offer opportunities to be surprised or confused, to notice the unexpected and to engage with the implications that arise for learning within and from relational space. In the introduction to this paper I gave the example of leadership in organizations. Leadership is most often thought of and related to individuals, and I suggested that an improved awareness of spatial relations and unconscious dynamics might underpin insights into a broader understanding of leadership within organizations. Noticing ‘the unexpected neighbour’, in whatever emotional and political form this takes, connects to a different model of leadership, one that offers both an individual and a collective perspective on leadership in organizations. This emerging model constructs leadership on the basis of the individual and collective ability to ‘notice what you are noticing’ (James and Ladkin, 2008) and to see leadership less in relation to what and individual knows and more in terms of interpreting, connecting and intervening in spaces of learning and change.

References

- Brocklehurst, M. (2006) Space, organization and management. In S. Clegg and M. Kornberger (Eds.) *Space, Organization and Management Theory*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School.
- Carr, A. and Hancock, P. (2007) Paris, art, aesthetics, work and the unconscious *Tamara*, 6, 5 – 11.
- Clegg, S. and Kornberger, M. (2006) *Space, Organization and Management Theory*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School.
- Coopey, J. (1995) The Learning Organization: Power, politics and ideology *Management Learning*, 26, 193 – 213.
- Dale, K. and Burrell, G. (2007) *Spaces of Organization and the Organization of Space: Power, Identity and Materiality at Work*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Easterby-Smith, M. and Lyles, M. (2003) Introduction: Watersheds of Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management, In M. Easterby-Smith and M. Lyles (Eds.) *The Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management* (pp 1 – 16) Oxford: Blackwells

Ford, J. and Harding, N. (2004) We went looking for an organization but could only find the metaphysics of its presence. *Sociology*, 38, 815 – 830.

French, R. and Vince, R. (1999) *Group Relations, Management and Organization* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Gherardi, S. (1999) Learning as problem-driven or learning in the face of mystery? *Organization Studies*, 20, 101 – 124.

Gherardi, S. and Nicolini, D. (2001) The sociological foundations of organizational learning. In M. Dierkes, A. Berthoin Antal, J. Child and I. Nonaka (Eds.) *The Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. (2005) Space as a key word. In David Harvey, *Spaces of neoliberalization: towards a theory of uneven geographical development* (pp 93 – 118) Heidelberg: Franz Steiner Verlag

Hoggett, P. and Thompson, S. (2002) Towards a democracy of the emotions *Constellations*, 9, 106 – 126.

Isaacs, W. (1999) *On Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together* New York: Doubleday

James, K. & Ladkin, D. (2008) Meeting the challenge of leading in the 21st century: Beyond the 'deficit model' of leadership development, In: K. Turnbull James & J. Collins (Eds.), *Leadership Learning: Knowledge into Action*, London: Palgrave.

Kornberger, M. and Clegg, S. (2003) The architecture of complexity. *Culture and Organization*, 9, 75 – 91.

Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space* (translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith) Oxford: Blackwell.

Massey, D. (1993) Politics and space/ time. In M. Keith and S. Pile (Eds.) *Place and the Politics of Identity* (pp 141 – 161) London: Routledge.

Massey, D. (2005) *For Space*. London: Sage.

McGill, I and Beaty, L. (2001) *Action Learning* (2nd Edition) London: Kogan Page

Meusberger, P. (2008) 'Conceptions of Space': PowerPoint Presentation at 'Knowledge in Organizations – Learning Organizations' the 6th Interdisciplinary Symposium on Knowledge and Space, Heidelberg, September 17 – 20 (CD-R of proceedings)

Raelin, J. A. (2001) Public Reflection as the Basis of Learning. *Management Learning*, 32, 11 – 30.

Senge, P. (1990) *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* New York: Doubleday

Shapiro, E. and Carr, A. W. (1993) *Lost in Familiar Places* Yale: Yale University Press

Stokes, J. (2006) What is unconscious in organizations? Paper prepared by Stokes & Jolly Ltd., London (version provided by the author).

Taylor, S. and Spicer, A. (2007) Time for Space: a narrative review of research on organizational spaces. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 9, 325 – 346.

Vince, R. (2008) 'Learning-in-Action' and 'Learning Inaction': Advancing the theory and practice of critical action learning. *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 5, 93 – 104.

Vince, R. (2004) *Rethinking Strategic Learning* London: Routledge

Vince, R. (2002) The Politics of Imagined Stability: A Psychodynamic Understanding of Change at Hyder plc *Human Relations*, 55, 1189 – 1208.

Vince, R. (2001) Power and Emotion in Organizational Learning *Human Relations* 54, 1325 – 1351.

Vince, R. and Martin, L. (1993) Inside Action Learning: the psychology and the politics of the action learning model. *Management Education and Development*, 24, 205 – 215.

Weinberg, H. (2007) So, what is this social unconscious anyway? *Group Analysis*, 40, 307 – 322.