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The Spatial Psychodynamics of Management Learning

Abstract

This paper addresses the question: how can we help managers to understand the emotional and political dynamics that surround and permeate their managerial roles? A conceptual framework is presented that is based on the integration of literature on space with literature that has taken a psychodynamic approach to management learning. The term *spatial psychodynamics* describes the way in which juxtapositions of material, relative and relational space in the management classroom can reveal dynamics that help managers to perceive the emotions and politics that are part of their roles. Three characteristics of spatial psychodynamics are presented: unconscious dynamics and the interpretation of learning space, the political effects of fantasy in learning space, and how juxtapositions of space create distinctiveness of place. An extended example from the author's practice is used to illustrate how this concept can improve our ability to engage with emotional and political dynamics in the management classroom. The final section of the paper contains a broader discussion that connects spatial psychodynamics with current themes in management learning.

Keywords

Spatial psychodynamics, psychodynamic, learning space, fantasy, emotions and politics

The Spatial Psychodynamics of Management Learning

Introduction

A continuing issue in management learning concerns how to help managers understand the emotional and political dynamics that surround and permeate their managerial roles. This is challenging because it raises themes that are not amenable to easy answers, rational solutions or techniques for problem-solving. Issues of power, anxiety, uncertainty, conflict and difference are areas of managerial experience that can not be captured in a skill set, as a range of capabilities, or through prescriptive approaches to learning. Traditional or didactic methods are unlikely to support managers' learning on these issues, primarily because they have to be felt in order to be understood. Learning about the emotional and political dynamics of management can be uncomfortable, complicated and partial. However, the knowledge generated from attempts to engage with these dynamics can make a significant difference to managers' comprehension of the context within which their work is done. Therefore, the focus of this paper is how we can exploit the *learning space* of the classroom in its emotional and political complexity in the service of management learning.

An assumption that informs my thinking here is that it is important to help managers to set their skills and knowledge in the context of emotions and politics that are part of everyday experience in organizations. Such experience may be constructed from (e.g.) difficult ideas, unlikely partnerships, shifting roles, complicated power relations, uncomfortable emotions and incomprehensible behaviour. In addition, all these aspects of organizational experience are mobilized in the management classroom when managers are confronted with the difficulties of learning about the emotions and politics of managing and organizing. If we can improve how we work with emotions and politics that are brought into the learning space of the management classroom, then we may also improve managers' ability to connect with the complexities of their experience in organizations, to tolerate strong emotions, to engage with political dynamics, and thereby enhance their ability to manage and to learn.

Individual managers' feelings, knowledge and behaviour in the classroom are often a reliable mirror of emotions, behaviour and discourses in the organizations these managers come from (Reynolds and Trehan, 2001). Managers bring: feelings of anxiety and ambivalence, an eagerness to discover, helpful and unhelpful existing knowledge, defensiveness, care, good ideas and competitiveness (to name but a few). In addition, the temporary organization that managers and management educators co-create in the classroom has an organizational dynamic – it is more than the sum of its individual parts. In learning groups, implicit structures and habits emerge very quickly and without knowing; they become established as rules and relations that determine 'the way we do things here'. Such dynamics are contextually specific and political and they both limit and legitimize behaviour and action. Reflecting on the way this happens in the classroom provides an opportunity to better understand and work through these dynamics within organizations.

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This paper makes a contribution both to the theory and the practice of management learning. I develop a conceptual framework based on the integration of literature on space and spatial relations in organizations (Kornberger and Clegg, 2003; Ford and Harding, 2004; Taylor and Spicer, 2007), with literature that has taken a systems psychodynamic approach to management learning (Vince and Saleem, 2004; James and Arroba, 2005; Trehan 2007). I invent the term *spatial psychodynamics* to describe these integrated concepts. I highlight three characteristics of spatial psychodynamics and I develop these through an example from my own practice. The paper adds to an existing literature that asserts the importance of psychodynamic theory in management and organizational learning (Simpson, French and Vince, 2000; Brown and Starkey, 2000; Vince, 2001, 2002; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2002; Vince and Saleem 2004; James and Arroba, 2005; Trehan 2007). It also offers a practical example of spatially oriented classroom exercises designed to reveal the emotional and political dynamics of managing and organizing. In the final section of the paper I discuss why the theory and practice I have presented are important for management learning. My starting point is to articulate my conceptual framework.

The Spatial Psychodynamics of Management Learning

Spatial psychodynamics is a term that describes the ways in which juxtapositions of space and place *represent* (i.e. make visible and manifest) emotional and political dynamics in organizations. Applied to management learning, spatial psychodynamics is concerned with juxtapositions of space and place in the management classroom[1], and how the interpretation of these juxtapositions can help managers to engage with emotional and political dynamics that are integral to their experience and practice as managers. Systems psychodynamic approaches to learning engage with this by recognizing that, in the 'here and now' of the classroom, emotions and politics are generated that have an impact on how individuals learn with and from each other; in relation to authority figures (e.g. tutor, leader, mentor, consultant); and in terms of the systems that such relations produce. When we interact with others in groups we co-create emotional and political dynamics that shape and are shaped by the group's mutual activity. This process in groups is 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). Systems psychodynamic approaches to learning have asked managers to engage with the unconscious dynamics at work in organizations and groups (Stokes, 1994; Vince, 2001; Huffington et al, 2004; Armstrong 2005) as well as defenses against anxiety that help to shape, constrain or avoid learning (Bain, 1998; Simpson, French and Vince, 2000; Vince, 2008). *Spatial psychodynamics* offers an additional framework for comprehending emotional and political dynamics in the classroom to include reflection on the material,

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[1] I am using the term 'classroom' in its broadest sense, to include any physical space in which managers may gather to learn. The term 'juxtaposition' (placing one thing in relation to another) is taken from Massey (1993). It is used here as a way of expressing relatedness in spatial and political terms – as location, dislocation, position and place.

relative and relational nature of learning space (Harvey, 2005). There are three characteristics to spatial psychodynamics that I am presenting here:

- Unconscious dynamics and the interpretation of learning space
- The political effects of fantasy in learning space
- An understanding of how juxtapositions of space create distinctiveness of place (or *situated* learning spaces)

Unconscious dynamics and the interpretation of learning space

In relation to individuals, the unconscious describes a realm that is beyond awareness and knowing. The unconscious is unavailable to thought, yet it is still active; it '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 perceptions and assumptions, both conscious and unconscious, have a profound influence on feelings and actions within an organization (see Gabriel, 1997). 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, 1994). '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 and are influenced by the identity of an organization. Through unconscious behaviour, groups of people co-create ideas, images and assumptions that connect to and reinforce 'the way we do things here' (Vince, 2002). People in organizations have mental images of how their organization works. These diverse images and ideas about an organization are not consciously negotiated or agreed upon by its members – but they exist. They 'are products of the minds of individuals with particular interests, positioning themselves within a particular discursive practice' (Palmer, 2002).

There are two reasons why the unconscious is a central concept in a psychodynamic approach to management learning. First, it offers a way of moving beyond an interpretation of learning as the improvement of individual performance. The unconscious helps us to perceive learning as a *dynamic* process: that we may (or may not) learn in surprising and unexpected ways; that what we think we are here to learn may be different from what we actually learn; that our own learning (and resistance to learning) is inevitably tied to the learning of others; and that 'we can never stop wishing to learn' (Driver, 2010). Second, 'there is no data that can establish the truth of the unconscious because the unconscious ruins the possibility of actual knowledge – it calls everything into question' (Frosh, 2002: 12). From this perspective, learning is 'the capacity to doubt those things that seem unquestionably true' (Palmer, 1979); a process of calling existing knowledge into question; a process of *becoming* (Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes, 2005). Learning as a dynamic process (of becoming) means that interpretation in the midst of others (who may be similarly confused or uncertain) becomes a resource for learning. Interpretation provides a way of negotiating understanding, of co-constructing contextually specific knowledge, of establishing provisional truths. It asks learners to 'notice what we are noticing' (James and Ladkin, 2008) in learning space and to

articulate this, however odd it may seem. How interpretations are made, given voice, how they touch the self and others, how they impact on the collective, how their misinterpretation or return is felt, all this provides us with the knowledge we may need in order to learn both about ourselves and the nature of the group or the organization to which we belong. The process by which certain interpretations become privileged over others, how they are suppressed or legitimized, leads us to a second characteristic of spatial psychodynamics – the political effects of fantasy.

The political effects of fantasy in learning space

Like the concept of the unconscious, the relationship between fantasy and reality is a central feature of psychodynamic theory. Freud (1984) believed that when hopes, dreams and desires are unavailable to us in our conscious lives, fantasy serves as a way of protecting those dreams from being damaged by reality. Fantasy can be seen as a 'wish fulfilling idea which comes into play when external reality is frustrating' (Segal 1991:16). In organizations, fantasy can serve a similar purpose. Organizations build ideas and images of themselves in response to frustrating external (and internal) realities. They do this in order (e.g.) to contain, to control, and to instruct their members in 'the way we do things here'. Fantasies about good and bad, right and wrong in organizations help to generate self-imposed limitations on behaviour and action. Therefore, in addition to their material reality, organizations are constructed from an 'architecture of the invisible' (Issacs, 1999) – a complex interplay of fantasies, taken-for-granted assumptions, language, underlying emotions and power relations.

The building blocks of this 'architecture of the invisible' are imagined boundaries created (consciously and unconsciously) by individuals and groups – helping them to comprehend roles, responsibilities and expectations within the organization. These boundaries provide organizational members with important support and knowledge about how the organization works, as well as how they can work effectively within its implicit and explicit emotional and political regime. However, the same boundaries also impose limits on behaviour, they undermine, avoid and restrict the evolution and transfer of new knowledge and they discourage action as much as they promote it. Therefore, characteristic ways of organizing offer both a supportive structure for communicating knowledge about the organization and a restriction – a defence against difficult emotions and the fears and anxieties generated by such emotions. A paradox of organizational life is that an organization is both a supportive and a restrictive structure, a space within which learning is both desired and avoided.

The fantasies and assumptions that characterise an organization are given structure through politics and power relations. This has been expressed concisely by Slavoj Žižek in his essay on the political effects of fantasy when he suggests that: 'a shared lie is an incomparably stronger bond for a group than the truth' (Žižek, 1999). Most organizations create illusions, fantasies or stories about themselves that connect to political processes designed to protect cherished images of the organization from damage. The way in which organizational values and company mission statements have served as a 'shared lie' offers much practical evidence of this insight. For example, in Enron's Annual Company

Report from 1999 (Enron, 1999), the company core values are: Integrity, Communication, Excellence and Respect. Each is elaborated – but I will only quote what is under the title of 'Respect' since this seems to capture the contradiction between fantasy and reality: 'We treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves. We do not tolerate abusive or disrespectful treatment: ruthlessness, callousness and arrogance don't belong here' (p. 69). The idea that groups might create a 'shared lie' in support of (or to cover up) an organizational regime offers an additional aspect to my framework. Not only is it important to consider how the unconscious is at work in groups, it is also important to consider how emotions and politics are communicated through fantasy. Here, fantasy is not so much an expression of prohibited desires, but rather the very process through which desires become prohibited. In other words, fantasy 'teaches us how to desire' (Žižek, 1999).

The idea of the political effects of fantasy is important for a psychodynamic approach to management learning. Learning groups mobilize a shared fantasy (I use the term 'shared fantasy' rather than 'shared lie' from now on) that undermines managers' ability to notice and to examine the politics of learning groups. This shared fantasy is that, in this learning space, we are all the same because we are all here to learn. Learning groups attempt to level differences of seniority, experience and desire for learning, as well as differences of gender, race and class to ensure that they are not seen as significant within learning space. The denial of difference is a political strategy to minimize antagonism and conflict. The notion of shared fantasy describes the connection between the emotional and the political, expressing a direct link between the unconscious at work in groups and the way the group is at work in relation to the unconscious (to create structures that limit what is possible and legitimate). The phrase captures both the emotional and the self-imposed nature of limitations; the need to place boundaries around the complex organizational dynamics that impact on whatever we think, feel and do. Such self-imposed boundaries are as characteristic of learning space as they are of organizations.

An understanding of how juxtapositions of space create distinctiveness of place (situated learning space)

Fantasy is also expressed and enacted *spatially* within organizations. 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 and perpetual dynamic – that organizations are inspired and impeded by spatial relations and interactions (Meusburger, 2008). Space is choreographed and corporatized in the service of governing organizational members and social systems, as well as supporting identities, both 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' (Meusburger, 2008). The 'strange

juxtapositions' of space create distinctiveness of place – contextually specific locations and dislocations that emerge from emotional and political dynamics (see Ford and Harding, 2004).

Perspectives on space and place are significant for psychodynamic approaches to management learning because they encourage awareness of tensions and contradictions of knowledge and experience that are integral to learning in context. We can increase managers' awareness of space in the classroom as learning space by drawing attention to their experience of different spatial dynamics. In relation to the *material/ physical space* of the classroom we can pinpoint uniqueness of location. What physical 'shape' are we in (a lecture theatre, rows of chairs and tables, or a circle of chairs) and what does being here at this time in this particular spatial arrangement mean for learning? In terms of *relative space* we can identify multiplicity of location, how is being here at this time in this particular space experienced differently by those who are here? For example, Gabriel and Griffiths (2008) examine 'anxieties of voice' as a factor in the synergies or dysfunctions of international learning groups. In terms of *relational space* we can discover how emotions and relations are embedded in the process of locating, by asking: what is it about this combination of human interaction that has generated a particular response? For example, Vince (2010) examines the impact of anxiety on learning groups, showing how the same learning exercise can produce opposing reactions in terms of different learning groups' notion of the value of the learning experience.

In summary, there are three characteristics I have identified in order to describe the spatial psychodynamics of management learning. First, unconscious dynamics at work in learning groups underpin a shift from performance-based to process-based views of learning. The unconscious 'calls everything into question' (Frosh, 2002) and thereby makes variations of interpretation a key resource for learning. Second, the political effects of fantasy help to explain how and why some interpretations are preferred over others. The political process that is involved in how specific interpretations become privileged or come to dominate is connected to shared fantasies that help to impose limitations on behaviour and action. Finally, juxtapositions of space create distinctiveness of place or *situated* learning space; they reveal tensions and contradictions of knowledge and experience that underpin opportunities for learning in context. In the following section of the paper I illustrate how to utilize the spatial psychodynamics of management learning through an example from my own practice. I discuss my example in order to show that connecting ideas about the unconscious, the political effects of fantasy and space/ place in the management classroom can stimulate imaginative approaches to the education of managers, as well as greater depth of understanding of the organizational dynamics that underpin management thought and action.

Spatial Designs for Learning about the Emotions and Politics of Managing and Organizing

In Figure 1 (below) there are three designs for learning space that represent the different physical arrangement of chairs in a classroom for different learning exercises, but with the same group of participants, using the same instruction and the same length of time. In

each different design the participants are given the instruction: 'You have an hour to work together as a group on any task and/or issue you want. The only rules are that you stay together as a group and that you can not move the chairs from their current arrangement'. By creating differences of space and place, each of these three designs for learning aims to engage with different aspects of emotion and politics in the classroom (as a reflection of emotions and politics in organizations). As different arrangements of learning space, all three designs generate different responses. The three components of the conceptual framework I presented above can be used to reflect on these differences and their contribution to learning. Therefore in relation to each design I identify the unconscious dynamics at work, the shared fantasy that seems to control the group, and the implications of space and place.

(Insert Figure 1 near here)

The three designs generate differences in the ways in which the space is perceived, which is to say, its 'relative' qualities (Harvey, 2005). There are multiple locations here within this space, depending on individuals' different ways of experiencing and understanding such arrangements. In addition, emotions and inter-personal politics are mobilized in the lived or relational space of each design. These are particularly visible in the *tensions* that emerge from different spatial arrangements (I discuss these below). After they have ended, all three exercises have up to an hour for the participants to reflect together and with the tutor; to discuss and to make sense of the emotions, relations and politics stimulated within these different spatial arrangements for learning.

Design 1: The Lecture Theatre

In Design 1 the chairs are arranged in a 'lecture theatre' style, however, the tutor is not standing in front of the participants, but sitting in the rows with them. In order to mark the beginning of the hour I say the instruction (above) and let them know the time when the exercise will end. As the tutor, I try not to say very much in the hour, although I will respond if it feels useful to do so and in order to make sure that I have not remained silent for the whole hour. Participants are more used to having someone in the role of Tutor at the front of the lecture theatre rather than within the rows. However, they often remain relatively comfortable within this design even if they are somewhat confused about what they are supposed to be doing.

In the lecture theatre design, despite some standing up, turning around and other movement, we are all looking towards the front. The participants are looking to the front literally, but also consciously and unconsciously. The most frequent outcome of the 'lecture theatre' design is that sooner or later someone (or a small number of different individuals) will get up and go to the front in order to address the group and to attempt to manage their task. The individual that puts him or herself in this *place* (since this is a political act) both replaces the missing tutor and temporarily becomes the tutor. Such an act is often double edged because, while other participants are relieved to have someone who will take on this role, the individual is now 'different' and in danger of being punished for her inability to remain 'one of us' or for his hubris at placing himself 'above

us'. The dynamics of taking a lead, of coming to the front, bring to the surface differences of authority, role and relations that illustrate a tension concerning the extent to which a managerial role both connects and separates an individual from her or his team.

Looking at this from the perspective of my framework, Design 1 represents the unconscious desire for a replacement leader to help save the group from the confusion and uncertainty that the tutor's strange behaviour has caused. The spatial arrangements of the lecture theatre design lend themselves to being dependent on and sustained by the individual or individuals at the front. Such dependency not only relates to the function an individual at the front might perform in helping others to define and decide what they are doing. The individual at the front also serves the purpose of providing a focal point for blame if and when things disappoint, fall short or go wrong. The shared fantasy that sustains the behaviour of the group is that creating a replacement for the tutor will enable the group to successfully manage the confusion and uncertainty that is present. The juxtaposition of space in this design is focused on activity at 'the front' and the distinctiveness of place that is created in this design emphasises the passivity of elsewhere. In its determination to maintain a focus on the front as the place where learning is generated and delivered, the learning group as a whole rejects its own potential to generate learning.

The traditional and everyday nature of this design for learning can encourage examination of hierarchical relations of power and their associated emotions. Reflecting on spatial psychodynamics identifies the double-edged nature of a managerial role. For example, coming to the front in the class is a mirror experience of the promotion of an individual from being a team member to being a team leader. This individual suddenly has to change from being 'one of us' to being in an authority role. The passivity of most of the learning group in this design is an illustration of the dependency and ambivalence that can result from setting up an individual to lead. The group's rejection of its own potential to generate learning provides much opportunity to reflect on the (emotional and political) difficulties of both heroic and distributed approaches to managing and leading.

Design 2: The Circle of Chairs

In Design 2 the chairs are arranged in a large circle, the tutor is sitting within this circular design. The same instruction is given to the group and the exercise lasts the same amount of time. The circle of chairs allows all to see and to be engaged with all other members of the learning group. Participants find the material space of this design less comfortable because the circle means that everyone is *seen* to be a member of the group, and for some members increased visibility and proximity to others means increased anxiety. Design 2, like Design 1, generates anxiety initially as a result of not having a clear task. However, in this place the intensified emotions of visibility and proximity mean that participants feel pulled by an imagined responsibility or expectation to achieve a task (however mundane that task may be). As feelings of anxiety emerge, participants repeat tried and tested strategies for avoiding this anxiety: writing ideas on the flip-chart, going round the group so everyone has a chance to say something, finding an individual from within the group who will be the leader, blaming the tutor, etc. (see Vince, 2010) Such behaviour is

an accurate representation of the speed with which implicit structures and ways of working are set up to defend against the anxiety that uncertainty brings to groups and to organizations. In addition, the Tutor provokes more anxiety because of being closer, more visible, and more present within material, relative and relational space than in Design 1. The failings of the Tutor are often discussed in Design 2, and the Tutor is used more deliberately as someone 'different' within this space, since this helps the group to avoid looking at the differences between group members.

The key managerial tension in this design is about how (individually and collectively) to avoid or to try to manage conflict and difference. One particular assumption that participants make about this circular design is that it *removes* power differences and emphasises the equality inherent in learning with and from our peers. In fact, social and strategic power relations and differences are not 'removed'. Rather, they are replaced with a shared fantasy of equality that sustains the idea that there are few significant differences in the group. This design encourages the notion that 'we are all the same here' – that we are all learning together in the same way and with the same opportunities. Unconsciously, the group defends itself against the differences (e.g. of power, knowledge, understanding, enthusiasm, social and cultural diversity) that are invariably part of the group, and may contribute to its effective or ineffective functioning.

Looking at this from the perspective of my framework, Design 2 represents the unconscious desire to minimize and to avoid conflict and difference. The spatial arrangements of the circle of chairs lend themselves to attempts to include everyone in decision-making, to emphasize that 'we are *all* here to learn together'. The shared fantasy that sustains the behaviour of the group is that in our group there is togetherness and equality; that we only have to work together in order to defeat confusion and successfully perform our task. The juxtapositions of space in this design are focused on the collaborative qualities of the circle. However, they also reveal the potential circularity of collaboration (literally at times, we are all going round in circles). The distinctiveness of place that is created in this design privileges consensus over conflict. In its determination to make everyone in the group happy, equal or involved, the learning group as a whole rejects conflicts and differences that might make a difference to their learning.

The participants' emphasis on the collaborative nature of this design for learning obscures the fact that collaboration *and* compliance are bound together in this format. The fantasy that 'we are all equal', although it begins as a productive response to the discomfort of having to negotiate with others around a task, is a restriction – it eventually discourages differences of behaviour, opinion and action. Reflecting on spatial psychodynamics identifies the contradictions that are part of collective endeavour. Tensions emerge from trying to avoid conflict and differences in the group and through the promotion of togetherness. The exclusion of difference and the avoidance of conflict are very common organizational dynamics, where the tendency is to emphasise the need for 'positive' thought and action and to ignore the destructiveness that is part of organizational behaviour (Griffin and O'Leary-Kelly, 2004).

Design 3: The Woman Sign[2]

In Design 3 the chairs are arranged into the symbol for 'woman', the tutor is sitting within the circular part of the design. The same instruction is given to the group and the exercise lasts the same amount of time. Participants find the material space of this design to be very uncomfortable, especially those individuals who have entered the room last and are positioned in the 'cross' part of the design rather than the 'circle'. The arrangement of chairs in this symbol deliberately *reintroduces* (gendered) power relations as an underlying aspect of all reflections, decisions and actions that occur within the group. Participants are not usually aware of why the chairs are so arranged, and it often takes a while for the symbol to be seen and acknowledged. This spatial arrangement represents a perpetual emotional and political issue within learning groups (and organizations), the desire to avoid interacting with the dynamics between men and women in the group.

I have run this exercise on several occasions now and I have been struck by the consistency in different groups' responses to Design 3. At some point early in the exercise, two or three individuals 'notice' the structure as 'the woman sign' but they do not necessarily communicate this fact to the whole group. The group spends some of the exercise 'knowing' about the spatial design in a sub-group but not in the whole group. In other words, there are participants who know that the design is 'the woman sign' but do not want to say this either out-loud or to the whole group (I have heard it whispered to a neighbour). However, the structure is sooner or later noticed by or brought to the attention of the group as a whole, but an individual or a sub-group then dismisses the design as unimportant, which makes speaking about it more difficult. The shared fantasy inherent in Design 3 is that the gendered power dynamics that emerge are at the same time too obvious and too complicated to discuss.

There are different responses to the design as well. One group of participants found it hard to remain seated in the 'cross' part of the chair structure, and moved themselves into the circle – thereby changing Design 3 back into Design 2 (and its associated fantasies of equality or sameness). In another group, the chair at the base of the structure was sat on by all the men in the group but none of the women. While the varieties of response to the design are relevant to the situated dynamics of a particular group, Design 3 is a complex place, and not a space where making sense of interactions and behaviour is necessarily possible, or where unconscious processes can be made entirely transparent. Design 3 particularly reflects the *embodied* differences that continuously (or never, depending on your point of view) constitute the social. The dynamics of this place seem to me to offer an accurate representation of gendered power relations in organizations, where it is

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[2] The 'woman sign' is not the only symbol that can be used in order to reveal emotions and power relations. Arranging the chairs in a spiral is useful in groups where only a few of the members tend to speak on a regular basis. It focuses the feelings that are part of the centre and the periphery, as well as the inter-personal politics that hold these dynamics in place. Similarly, I have used the 'Euro' sign in groups where I have encountered an underlying discourse on the 'value for money' of the learning experience.

equally difficult to negotiate, comprehend and interact with the way such power relations impact on thought, behaviour, action and inaction.

Looking at this from the perspective of my framework, Design 3 represents the unconscious desire to ignore, avoid or dismiss gendered power relations, to fight against or flee from having to include such issues as a legitimate aspect of management learning. The significance of the spatial arrangement of the chairs is rejected, even when it is perceived. The shared fantasy that sustains the behaviour of the group is that to talk about gendered power relations would take it to an uncomfortable, unwanted and difficult place where tensions between men and women might explode in the group thereby destroying it and rendering it incapable of delivering its task. The spatial arrangement of this design is a challenge because it is explicit about the power relations that are part of experience in a group where men and women managers are working together. The juxtaposition of space in this design is focused on moving away (physically and relationally) from the symbol. The distinctiveness of place that is created here is an attempt to deny, avoid or underplay the difference between men and women. Indeed, this is a reflection of the denial, avoidance and underplaying of other dualities such as location/ dislocation, consensus/ antagonism, and action/ inaction. The learning group attempts to simplify social power relations and in doing so it reinforces them.

Integrating the three designs for learning space

Table 1 (below) provides a visual illustration of the tensions emerging from three different representations of space/ place within the same classroom.

(Insert Table 1 near here)

The three designs can be thought of separately as different approaches to learning space. However, it is the emphasis on their connection as representations of place that provides particular insights about the emotions and politics of managing and organizing. All three designs signify spatial arrangements linked to intersecting structures and relations of power. They help managers to understand how power relations are 'part of the medium within which all social relations occur' (Hoggett and Thompson, 2002). Each design reveals tensions concerning different processes and relations of power. Design 1 is *hierarchical* – revealing both a need for the charismatic power of individual leadership, *and* the passivity, dependency and compliance that are created from it. Existing power relations within groups tend to be reinforced in this place. It also points to the tension within an individual management or leadership role between being part of 'them' or part of 'us'. Design 2 mixes both *collaboration and compliance* – revealing the collective capacity to create something of value together, *and* a fantasy of sameness that avoids conflicts and discourages risk. Avoiding conflict and risk encourages predictability and prescription, which limits the (public) emergence of new knowledge and the transformational potential of learning. Differential power relations tend to be ignored or set aside in this place so that the status quo is not disturbed. Design 3 is *critical* – it points to the contradictions inherent in organization, *and* at the same time it does not attempt to provide solutions or prescriptions for improvement. (The social issues represented here

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are too complex for solutions). Power relations become most apparent in this place, revealing antagonisms as well as consensus, and reflecting multiplicities of location and dislocation, action and inaction. Managers experience their roles through a mixture of such power relations, as well as the associated emotions and political processes generated through engaging with them.

In the final section of the paper I broaden my discussion to consider how an understanding of spatial psychodynamics relates to themes that are important for future research into the emotional and political dynamics of management learning, as well as future practice in the classroom. There are two aspects to this. First, as management educators we may need to think differently about the learning spaces we need in order to reflect on and to engage with emotion and politics at work. Second, we are creating learning spaces for a purpose – to help managers to put their learning into practice. This does not occur simply through attempts to make individuals into better managers (although this is a strong desire that individuals bring into management education). Our attempts are more likely to underpin opportunities for learning in organizations and organizational learning if they can also show how emotions and power relations restrict and undermine learning. Therefore, by helping managers to perceive the dynamic nature of learning, we are also helping them to notice the dynamic nature of practice.

Conclusion: Spatial psychodynamics and management learning

There are a number of insights for managers and management students that can be generated using the three spatial designs for learning. Interrogation of the dynamics of Design 1 can help managers to understand how and why a group might reject its own potential to generate learning through a desire to have someone in control. There is a tension in this space between dependency on hierarchical relations and the emotions that are mobilized when an individual or group 'takes' the lead. Design 2 can help managers to understand how and why a group privileges consensus over conflict. Mobilizing a fantasy that all are equal here excludes the potential to generate learning through the conflicts that are part of group experience. There is a tension in this space between interaction that supports collaborative endeavour within the group and interaction that supports compliance to (self-limiting) group norms. Design 3 can help managers to understand how and why a group might attempt to simplify complex social power relations and inter-personal dynamics in the service of maintaining a collective identity. There is a tension in this space between difference and the denial of difference.

Such ideas are part of the ongoing project of making management education more critical. Exposing tensions within learning space provides opportunities for understanding the complicated emotional and political dynamics that surround our everyday experience of organizations. Managers can learn by examining the hierarchical relations that block learning; by recognizing that, in their attempts to learn, members of groups generate collaboration and compliance, often at the same time; and by appreciating the (often unwelcome) knowledge that prescriptions for improvement are inevitably limited in relation to learning about the emotional and political complexity of organizations.

The question of how we help managers to understand the emotional and political dynamics that surround and permeate their managerial roles is set into broader issues for management learning. For example, scholars have discussed learning issues on Master of Business Administration (MBA) courses (Brocklehurst et al 2007); ways of 'making the Business School more critical' (Currie, Knights and Starkey, 2010); and how to address the 'learner passivity' (Raelin, 2009) that accompanies mainstream approaches to management education.

> 'The passivity of learners is reinforced by the longstanding assumption that the role of the teacher is to rescue learners from their state of 'not knowing' … Teachers collude in allaying learner anxiety by structuring the curriculum to minimize unexpected or anxiety-provoking occurrences and by controlling the class to prevent destabilizing dynamics, be they irrelevant discourses from students, emotional outbursts or even silences. The last thing expected from teachers is to confront students with their own state of not knowing and to help them face the fears that such not knowing can produce' (Raelin, 2009: 407-408).

This journal has had a sustained interest in how to bring different ways of learning into the classroom in order to challenge learner (and teacher) passivity, promote critical reflection on experience and to combine learning with action. (For example see: Reynolds, 1998 and 2009; Dehler, Welsh and Lewis, 2001; Reynolds and Trehan, 2003; Fenwick, 2005; Swan, 2005; Sinclair, 2007) To put it a different way, this field of scholarship has long realized that passive approaches to learning reinforce passive approaches to managing, and therefore that they potentially contribute to the creation of risk-averse and disconnected managers as well as learners. An interest in the dynamics of learning space can help us to engage with learner passivity and to try to challenge the ways in which passive approaches to learning might reinforce overly dependent (rather than inter-dependent) management behaviour.

This point of view can be further enhanced by some reflexive critique. Attempts to use the classroom to 'understand the social world of organizations may be a tempting solution. But there are several difficulties. How would this ensure that students learn the bits of theory that do matter? And how would the faculty actually decide which bits actually do matter? And how could the faculty retrain or learn how to help students make adequate critical sense of their experiences of 'problem-solving' in organizations?' (Fox, 2009: 374) These questions connect with other questions concerning the institutional forces at work in Business and Management Schools to discourage approaches to learning that might undermine provider and/ or customer expectations and happiness (Herbert and Stenfors, 2007). Management learning as a field of inquiry and practice is surrounded by emotional and political dynamics that support and undermine its endeavours; encourage and restrict behaviour; and promote and prevent action. We can not provide solutions, prescriptions or 'best practices' for learning. We can however, continue to propose, implement and reflect on processes and approaches that might engage learners in learning about the complexities of management theory and practice.

Psychodynamic approaches to management learning have concentrated on the ways in which individuals and systems are linked through collective emotions and 'political relatedness' (Sievers, 2001; Vince and Saleem, 2004). The 'depth' of individuals' learning has also been important. Awareness of emotions and power relations is 'uncomfortable knowledge' for managers (Vince, 1999) and underpins difficulties in both reading what is below the surface and managing what is carried by them or what they project onto others (James and Arroba, 2005). Whether focused on individuals or on organization, existing research on the psychodynamics of management learning has sought to raise the difficulties and advantages of learning about the emotional dynamics that reside within and reinforce an organization's political system. Our knowledge can be further developed by recognizing that these dynamics are not only constructed through self/ other relations, they are also a consequence of spatial relations.

In the very first paragraph of this paper I noted that emotional and political dynamics surrounding managerial roles 'have to be felt to be understood'. This does not happen only by creating happiness or fulfilling expectations in the classroom. It also occurs by challenging expectations and encouraging reflection on resistance to learning. This involves paying attention to the emotions that are generated in learning space and to the ways in which learning groups create self-imposed limitations and boundaries on learning. Here I have identified some of the tensions that can be surfaced through reflection on spatial psychodynamics and I have argued that this way of thinking can help to identify some of the ways in which the 'architecture of the invisible' (Issacs, 1999) is created both within learning groups and in organizations. The idea of spatial psychodynamics offers an additional resource to individuals and groups that want to explore ways of working in the 'classroom as real world' (Reynolds and Trehan, 2001). As management educators, if we are to make full use of learning space, then we will have to ask ourselves two questions. In addition to asking, 'what do I want individuals to learn' in the classroom we will also have to ask 'what organizational processes and dynamics do I hope to illustrate?'

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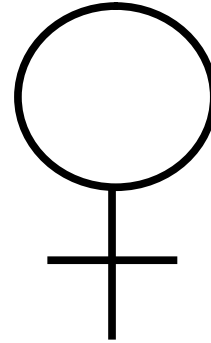
Figure 1: Three Designs for Learning Space (the positioning of chairs in the classroom)
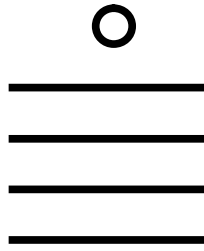
Design 1: Reinforces power relations
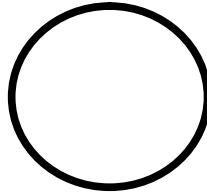
Design 2: "Removes" power relations

Design 3: Reintroduces power relations

Table 1: Linking Three Different Representations of Space/ Place in the Classroom and the Tensions they Produce:

	Individual/ Inter-personal tensions in management learning	*Collective, Organizational and social tensions enacted in the classroom*
Design 1: The Lecture Theatre	Tensions emerge in the management classroom between looking to the front for learning and looking into the whole learning space. This mirrors organizational tensions about where and with whom leadership resides.	*Hierarchy*: The tension between individual charisma and others' dependency, passivity or ambivalence. Organizational legitimization of individual leadership and collective followership or ambivalence.
Design 2: The Circle of Chairs	Tensions emerge from trying to avoid and/or to manage conflict and difference. The tendency to avoid difference means that participants find it hard to imagine that conflict and difference may contribute to the effective functioning of the learning space.	*Collaboration and Compliance*: The tension between the collective capacity to create value from differences and a fantasy of sameness that avoids difference, conflict and risk.
Design 3: The Woman Sign	Tensions emerge from the complexity of social power relations (e.g. gender, race, class) that are deemed to be both essential and irrelevant at the same time.	*Critical*: The 'fractures', tensions and contradictions within organization/ organizing: between antagonism and consensus; between location and dislocation; between action and inaction.