Walk the Talk: Creating a Collaborative Culture in an Activity-Based Workplace

Mari Ekstrand

Department of Architectural Design and Management at
Norwegian University of Technology and Science, NTNU
email: mari.ekstrand@ntnu.no

Abstract

Creating organisational change by moving in to new premises has recently gained increased interest and attention. Business driven and process oriented relocation strategies – continuing after the relocation – enable organisations to re-design both space, current business practices and corporate cultures. The question, however, is whether such projects succeed in the end of the day. This paper explores how the process of moving in to a new workplace concept strategically may be used to change an organisation's collaboration culture. This is studied from the perspective of cultural artefacts, change management as well as physical and structural change. The discussion builds on semi-structured interviews with 65 employees from a Norwegian organisation. The findings indicate that the physical change, supported by process activities and change management actions, paved way for a cultural change towards more collaboration amongst employees as well as increased collaboration across hierarchical levels. However, misalignment in some areas between the new concept and existing cultural assumptions, values and norms, also restricted the organisation in fully achieving the intended ends. Therefore, the study highlights challenges and issues to overcome in order to use facilities as a tool for strategic change. The findings further underline the importance of creating a continuous change process, extending beyond the moving process itself.

Keywords: Artefacts, Change management, Workplace concepts, Activity-based working, Socio-materiality.

1. Introduction

Succeeding with organisational and cultural change is a challenging task (Schein, 2004; Balogun, 2006). Often advocated spatial efforts to enhance organisational collaboration, especially through open workspaces, common pathways and increased sightlines have also been found to have their limitations and sometimes fail in achieving the intended ends (Pepper, 2008; Becker et al., 2003; Rylander, 2009). Becker et al. (1994) however argue that business driven and process oriented relocation strategies – continuing after the relocation – may better enable organisations to re-design both space, current business practices and corporate cultures. It is furthermore becoming more and more recognised that in order to succeed with strategic change,

different organisational factors need to be aligned with the new strategy. This approach recognises that the physical workplace is an integral part of the organisational structure and culture. Interweaving organisational structures and culture in organisational change processes, may thus provide organisations with greater opportunities to achieve transformational change (Becker et al., 1994; Schriefer, 2005; Miles, 1997). In this perspective, the organisational structures or space may function as a catalyst for change (O'Neill, 2007; Inalhan and Finch, 2012; Allen et al., 2004) or the other way around, be used in order to reinforce and stabilise the change (Bate et al., 2000). However, in execution of organisational change strategies, Miles (1997) argues that organisations often start up by changing structures and infrastructures. Changing people, culture and core competencies generally require a longer process. This article aims to explore the culture-structure relationship in an organisational change process.

1.1 Cultural Artefacts and Organisational Change

When executing a strategy, managers must handle a number of different factors, organisational culture being one of the most important (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Schein, 2004). According to Schein (2004), an organisational culture consists simultaneously of three reciprocally connected levels: *(1) artefacts*, *(2) espoused believes and values,* and *(3) taken for granted assumptions*. The three levels are based on the degree to which the phenomenon is visible to the outsider. Taken for granted assumptions being on the lowest level and artefacts on the highest – most visible level. Artefacts, physical and/or non-physical, are all organisational phenomena that one may see, hear and feel. Espoused values and believes, as well as assumptions have been found to have a significant role in determining employee perspective, adaptation to and use of space (Hirst, 2011). Although not always visible to the observer, they are expressed and shared through social processes (Schein, 2004). Artefacts are furthermore environmental signs conveying information about social orders – thereby influencing and constraining social actions (Baldry, 1999; Bechky, 2003). Therefore artefacts are often considered as a form for organisational message (Cooper et al., 2001; Allen et al., 2004). Klingmann (2007: 259) argues that architecture is "a visual symbol for the expression of a corporation's culture and personality". Thus, space may be used as a cultural creator – forming and reinforcing the culture (Schein, 2004; Steele, 1973).

Space and artefacts are also socially produced and culturally constructed – leading people through embodied experiences in the form of feelings, emotions, and memories (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004; Taylor and Spicer, 2007; Dale and Burrell, 2008). Language and the way we talk about space further construct spatial experiences, not only steering our interpretation of space but also forming actions, behaviour, interpretations and judgements (Airo et al., 2012). As people make subjective judgements of physical environments, the experience and judgement of a particular place may not simply be reduced to strategies, intentions, managerial and architectural plans (Ropo et al., 2013). For example, Rylander (2009) found that project managers, designers and users, through their different understandings, perspectives and experiences apply substantially different meanings to a new workplace concept. In line with the

concept of affordances developed by Gibson (1979) actions are formed not only by the space and its artefacts, but also by social processes informing people about space and its meaning. In this perspective, artefacts do not determine behaviour but rather provide cues of socially accepted behaviour in a particular context (Värlander, 2012; Gibson, 1979).

Artefacts are furthermore commonly used to lead, manage and divide people and support hierarchies (Vaasgaasar, 2015; Taylor and Spicer, 2007; Grenness, 2015; Baldry, 1999). Building on such argumentation, leadership may be formed without the presence of the leader, this through artefacts providing the observer with information forming actions and the meaning-making process (Ropo et al., 2015; Greenlees, 2015). Size, location and furnishing of individual offices are especially often used for this purpose (Muetzelfeldt, 2006; Baldry, 1999). Edenius and Yakhlef (2007) also argue that spatial markers and symbols are useful in order to formalise rules. However, when spatial change is made without addressing the other cultural dimensions, unintended changes within the political culture of the organisation may occur (Markus, 2006). Ultimately, if new artefacts are in contrast to other artefacts and/or existing assumptions, values and norms an equivocal message may be created, leading to misinterpretations and possibly unintended outcomes (Schein, 2004; Gibson, 1979; Pepper, 2008).

1.2 Leadership and Cultural Artefacts

Space in it self does not hold meaning. Meanings attached to space is rather created, changed and defined by time and former experience. The same process goes for culture and leadership, this as leaders create culture, and culture defines and creates leadership (Schein, 2004). Leadership is, however, not only a social phenomenon, this as "leadership is being shaped, modified and constructed by material workplace arrangements" (Ropo et al., 2015: 2). The ways in which leaders and organisational members act, behave and use space – such as the CEO's position at the head of the table – are in fact cultural artefacts, affording people and their actions (Schein, 2004; Gibson, 1979). Thus, space is connected to the way organisations are used to seeing and regarding leaders. The general trend to move from a 'hierarchical' control system to 'horizontal' network structures, is however changing the role and view of leadership (Dale, 2005). In this perspective, transition to open, transparent and activity based workplaces, where leaders and employees work side-by-side, may influence new cultural assumptions (Blakstad, 2015), decrease boundaries and hierarchies (Värlander, 2012), and support values of equality amongst organisational members (Grenness, 2015; Bakke, 2007). Nevertheless, ownership of space is still deeply connected to assumptions such as status, importance and value. Transition to a non-territorial workplace without owned space may for some imply lower status, lack of interest in employee comfort (Hirst, 2011) and even signal that everyone is replaceable (Bakke, 2007). Leaders that are forced to give up their office may thus feel that their personal status is threatened (Elsbach, 2003).

As change in cultural artefacts challenge existing norms and assumptions, this may result in strong emotional reactions and even resistance. To cope with the new workplace, organisational

members need to 'unlearn' old values and norms an 'relearn' new ones (Grenness, 2015). Building on the argumentation by Schein (2004), placement of oneself in relation to others and to different functions symbolise factors such as membership, status and social distance. Here, leader's actions, functioning as cultural artefacts, are pivotal in forming values, behaviours and norms (Balogun, 2006). Especially top-level management actions and belief in the value of the change have been found to be pivotal in succeeding with organisational relocation strategies (Bakke, 2007; Schriefer, 2005). Miles (1997) further argues that successful change managers are those who take any opportunity, no matter how trivial, to demonstrate and act the change. This may constitute a new corporate storytelling, which may act as an effective support mechanism for the change processes. Behavioural stories may function as a means of guiding employees in their everyday decision making processes, help employees to understand the rationale for change and be a tool for communicating a message (Stegmeier, 2008). This is a continuous process where the 'change agent' assists others in the transition from the present state to the desired state (Becker et al., 1994).

Schein (2004: 170) argues that, "shared assumptions arise only over the course of time and common experience". To this end, actions and use of space may function as meaning-making triggers contributing to organisational learning (Balogun, 2006) and through 'learning by doing', activities gradually form new sets of rules and norms (Steele, 1973). The open office environment daily offers opportunities to support the change effort and "lead through own appearance and action" (Vaasgaasar, 2015: 80). In the transition to new workplaces, managers need to 'walk the talk' – explaining the new strategy through their own actions. This is an iterative process were managers often are challenged, this as the transition itself may lower their status and force them to start to earn status in other ways than through physical artefacts and cues (Grenness, 2015). Higgins and Mcallaster (2004), however, observed that top managers generally do not perceive the links between changing strategy, changing culture, and changing cultural artefacts. As assumptions are often taken for granted, managers are also seldom aware of their own assumptions and what effect this has on the change process (Schein, 2004). If manager behaviour is not in line with the new strategy this may become a hindrance, allowing employees to act on old values and norms (Balogun, 2006; Balogun and Johnson, 2004).

2. Methods and Case

The empirical material draws on semi-structured individual and group interviews with 65 employees from a Norwegian professional service network provider. The organisation provides services within fields such as auditing, consulting, financial advisory, risk management as well as tax and legal. Participants were purposely selected from the different business areas and levels within the organisation, this to include organisational members with different roles, work tasks and responsibilities. In between interviews, use of the workspaces was studied through unstructured observations. Brief informal discussions with approximately 40 employees were also conducted during the study. The study was conducted in three main phases approximately 1,5 years after the transition to the new headquarters. Data from each phase was analysed before

moving onto the next phase. To identify differences and similarities between the business areas, data from the units was furthermore coded and analysed separately. The focus was, however, on cross-unit analysis, thus the reported findings cut across all units, unless otherwise stated.

The change started early in the process with a new organisational strategy. The intention of the relocation was to set *"a new standard for collaboration"*. The strategy focused on better collaboration and utilisation of knowledge within and across the different business areas. The organisation wished to build on the newly implemented strategy, and by transition to the new building, reframe the culture-structure relationship. The new concept was activity-based, supported by free-seating and clean-desk principles. Due to high resistance towards free-seating, confidentiality requirements and other practical needs, some departments were allowed to have individually owned workstations. The different zones range from silent- and semi-silent zones, project areas, meeting- and collaboration rooms to open centrally located areas for social interaction. Signs hanging from the ceiling mark each zone. The signs have a colour, a symbol and a short description – explaining and giving cues to what activities are appropriate within each zone. The main focus was on facilitation of interaction processes, as explained by one manager: *"It is important that the new building facilitates employee interaction. The building cannot create interaction by itself, but it may facilitate interaction"*.

3. Findings

3.1 Collaboration within Departments and across Hierarchies

Where free-seating and space-sharing structures were implemented, employees reported that internal communication and collaboration had increased. Work in the new office was described as "more social" and collaborative than in the old office. Several employees commented that, as they often worked close to others they had gained a larger internal network and also befriended new colleagues. As told by one of the employees: *"You come in contact with people that you normally don't come in contact with"*. *"I've got new friends here"*, comments another. Several experienced that this eased seeking help from others. Many also remarked that they had gained a closer connection and more knowledge about different areas within their own department. Working in open workspaces was furthermore reported to help streamline work processes.

Perceptions, however, varied between departments. In departments where individual workstations had been implemented some managers and partners seemed to perceive an increase in collaboration, however, most employees did not perceive any noticeable increase – rather in some instances a decrease. At these locations several employees stated that, as one were afraid to disturb others, one did not 'dare' to talk in the open landscape. Thus a 'whispering' culture was created at several areas. As employees became more used to the open landscape, this code of conduct gradually changed towards more interaction at most areas. Nevertheless, some groups still struggled with social interaction at the time of the study. At these areas the norm and assumption was that work processes were mainly conducted as individual tasks, thus the

workspace ought to be quiet allowing for individual concentration. This sub-cultural norm and the high value placed on individual work also effected interaction within adjacently located groups. In the words of one employee: *"I find it useful to throw out a question to colleagues in an open workspace, however, I don't feel comfortable with doing that here"*. Some, especially lawyers, further stated that, due to confidentiality requirements it was challenging to discuss work related issues in the open landscape. A perception, however, not shared by all – especially not by partners and managers. Contrarily, these groups argued that confidentiality was no problem as long as one followed the organisational confidentiality ethics and guidelines and also used the available collaboration rooms. Nevertheless, some used individual work processes and the confidentiality requirement as legitimate claims for having own offices.

To facilitate random encounters and collaborative work processes, each floor had a centrally located coffee area, furnished with lounge furniture and high-stand tables. Despite this and the signs, explaining the purpose of the zone, these areas were mainly seen to be unused after the transition. In the beginning, many believed that spending time in these areas was perceived as "being lazy" or "non-efficient". As one employee stated: *"As a consultant, you charge the customer by the hour. You need to be efficient. Hanging out in a sofa may give the wrong impression"*. To change such assumptions, some managers hung additional signs, emphasising the value of collaboration and informal interaction. To 'walk the talk' some further started to spend more time working and collaborating from these areas. At the time of the study, use of these spaces had remarkably increased. To facilitate team collaboration, open landscape 'project areas' were also located adjacent to the informal areas. Also, these areas were mainly unused after the transition. The general openness and caution of sharing sensitive information to others seemed to restrict employees from using these areas. Furthermore, as these areas also were new functions with which employees did not have any experience, some reported that they were insecure with regards to what kinds of work processes and activities that were appropriate or allowed. However, at the time of the study, these areas were highly appreciated and believed by many to be crucial for collaborative working and creating 'workflow'. Being able to share documents on screens on the walls and spread out work material were seen as especially important. Several employees also commented that the project places were efficient in sharing knowledge and informing others – *"the people just passing by"* – about on-going projects.

The former workplace concept had a hierarchical workplace structure with individual offices mainly assigned to seniors, managers and partners. Going from this to a workplace structure where members from the different levels of authority shared workspaces created challenges as well as benefits. The new workplace facilitated a flatter structure allowing organisational members at different levels to sit 'side-by-side', thus collaboration across hierarchical levels was seen to have been improved. Many also described the organisational hierarchy as being flat, especially with comparison to similar organisations outside the Scandinavian countries – an observation in line with research on Scandinavian workplace cultures (e.g. Grenness, 2015). Arguably, the new workplace was perceived to better reflect the low-hierarchical structure. Transitioning to a new workplace also changed the hierarchical map of the workplace. In the former workplace, free-seating had been implemented in one department. However, informal rules and behavioural norms, grounded in the hierarchical structure and culture, defined where

different organisational members were *expected* to find a desk. As such, areas for managers, partners, seniors and newly employed had been created. With few exceptions, these sub-groups had disappeared during the transition in to the new office. The exceptions were mainly related to areas were members from the top-level management situated themselves. As a result others seemed to avoid situating themselves at these particular places. Nevertheless, as most top-level managers situated themselves adjacent to the informal areas, they also – through their choice of place – invited employees to engage in interactions by the 'manager's' table. Employees' perception was that when top-level managers and also other managers worked from these areas they simultaneously signalled that they appreciated a low-hierarchical culture and were open for inquiries and interactions. Several employees also reported that knowing partners and managers spatial patterns both eased finding them and also eased knowing when they were available for inquiries. Moving managers and partners from assigned offices were, however, by some seen to create higher boundaries and challenges in terms of communication. Previously, the sign of an open door functioned as a cultural artefact informing organisational members of the person's availability. Uncertainty of whether the persons were actually available for questions or having to ask them to join in for a conversation at another location seemed for some to make the threshold for making contact somewhat higher. Few managers and partners on the other hand perceived this to be a challenge, rather stating that inquiries had increased – however, becoming shorter and more efficient. Managers and partners also perceived that working next to others facilitated 'workflow', tacit knowledge sharing and sharing of sensory experiences.

3.2 Collaboration Across Departments

In the old building, a centrally located staircase connected the different departments and was described as a place where people 'bumped into each other'. The new office – higher and narrower in structure – seemed to decrease spontaneous encounters and therefore also collaboration between organisational members from different departments. However, areas such as an in-house coffee bar, the previously mentioned social and project areas, and a project area accessible for the whole organisation on a separate floor, created substitute areas for spontaneous encounters and collaboration activities. Employees who spent more time at these locations did not, to the same extent, share the view that spontaneous encounters or collaboration across departments had decreased. Contrary, these employees believed that the new facilities provided better locations for more relaxed and 'deeper' conversations and interactions. Especially the in-house coffee bar functioned as an area where organisational members from different departments were seen to interact with each other. Stated by one employee: *"I went to work at the coffee bar one time, and a person that I just had sent a mail to came in. So we sat down and had a brief conversation"*. Additionally, internal staircases connecting some of the floors were found to benefit spontaneous interactions.

Nevertheless, the view shared across the organisation was that knowledge of and connection to other departments had diminished. Many assumed that, as they did not see members from other departments as much, they did not collaborate as much. The ultimate effect is, however,

questionable, as most employees perceived that their own work had little or nothing to do with other organisational departments. However, in instances where specific projects were held across different departments, employees were seen to move around more, also working from multiple floors. The sharing structure and freedom of movement within the building did in this perspective offer opportunities for work in and between the different departmental floors. The perception of less cross-departmental collaboration may further be related to the fact that the organisation since the transition had experienced a significant growth. Some employees expressed that this had resulted in less communication and fever instances of informal group meetings – also within their own departments. In this perspective, some artefacts from the old workplace had also been lost. For example, the staircase in the old building facilitated weekly status meetings, also called 'stair-meetings'. Although these meetings still occurred, they were not as frequently held and no longer perceived as an important cultural artefact. Ultimately, some expressed a loss of a former 'homey' culture and feared that as the organisation continues to grow this would continue to affect the organisational belonging.

3.3 Time and Management

Prior to the transition, workshops and process activities were conducted with the aim to discuss issues such as, what 'a new standard for collaboration' meant for each department. The general answer to this question was that: *"The new standard for collaboration is something we develop together over time"*. As previously described the patterns for socialising, collaborating and communicating had since the transition gradually changed. When moving to the new workplace many seemed to categorise the workplace into primary, secondary and tertiary workstations. The 'own' work desk was perceived as the primary workstation, meeting- and project rooms functioned as secondary workstations and informal meeting places were perceived as tertiary workstations. As the different cultural dimensions gradually changed, many started to regard the former secondary and tertiary workstations more as primary workstations – ultimately considering a multitude of workstations as being suitable for conducting different work processes. A 'mentality change' was also seen to have happened amongst some groups of managers and partners. Prior to the transition, several of these groups requested a separate area assigned to them, a request, however, turned down by the management as they believed it to be against the strategy and the desired collaborative culture. After the transition none of the interviewed managers and partners requested such an area. However, at one department the free-seating structure was gradually redefined into one area for managers and partners and another area for 'others'. This was not a formalised structure, rather as one employee put it: *"When managers and partners always choose a place in the same area, no one else dare to sit there"*. Thus, there were still instances were managers' and partners' behaviour maintained a hierarchical structure, thus the social relationships across hierarchical levels were not yet fully developed. As a result, behavioural artefacts restricted development of a collaborative culture.

Statements and actions given by specific organisational members were further seen to influence organisational members' assumptions and norms. Early in the process, the CEO and the top-

level management informed the organisation of the intention and vision for the new workplace concept. Doing so they also stated that they would work in the same workplace, with the same sharing principles as everyone else – adding that anyone that wanted something else could come and talk to them. Few came. Since the transition the CEO and the top-level management have kept their words, working according to the free-seating structure. Also other managers and partners commented that they felt obligated to be early adopters and give good examples for co-workers. This question was also raised in the process where managers and partners were told that if they didn't feel that they could lead the change, they should at least try not to be openly negative. Nevertheless, few partners and managers perceived that there had been any focus on them as regards to being 'change agents'. Although managers' behaviour was found to be important for 'leading the change', few regarded their actions in the office to be of any importance. Several organisational members, however, commented on specific managers, their actions and how this had been important for creating a 'new standard'. Placing oneself in a highly visible area, working from different locations and actively participating in the everyday work environment were by many seen as important cultural artefacts. Contrary, when managers and partners seemed to do the opposite – creating own areas, choosing the same place every day or removing them selves from the work environment – employees often reacted negatively, arguing that they should at least try to lead by example and try the concept. As a result, some groups of employees also had a tendency of breaking the concept rules, creating sub-groups and their own rules. Noticing the importance of the process and management actions, some managers emphasised the value of putting enough resources into the process: *"If you really want to create a transformational change then you need to put resources on changing minds"*.

4. Discussion

Implementing a new workplace concept with an open shared space structure did in many ways facilitate "a new standard for collaboration". However, creating a new standard for collaboration did not only require a physical change but also a change within the other cultural dimensions. In line with the argumentation by Schein (2004), the findings illustrate that where a change in assumptions, values and norms had not happened, no remarkable change occurred or unintended outcomes emerged. As for the departments where individual work was valued higher than collective work, the new spatial artefacts worked in direct contrast to the existing cultural norms and values. As such, employees also resisted the new workplace, arguing that it did not support them in meeting the intended ends – findings also in line with Grenness (2015), Rylander (2009) and Pepper (2008). In this perspective, the new artefacts in themselves did not have the power to 'break through' and change the other cultural dimensions. However, at departments where team and project work processes were valued higher, change was more seen as an alignment and modification of the physical workspace to better fit the culture and the already implemented strategy. To this end, the workplace and its artefacts both paved way for the change as suggested by O'Neill (2007), Inalhan and Finch (2012) and also Allen et al. (2004), but also, as suggested by Edenius and Yakhlef (2007) and Bate et al. (2000) functioned to formalise rules which further stabilised and reinforced the change.

As suggested by Schein (2004) and Hirst (2011), employee assumptions, values and behavioural norms guided and formed adaptation to, use of, and satisfaction with the new workplace. Old assumptions such as: the standard desk is the primary workstation, and that fun and informal conversations are not an important part of core work processes did thus create barriers for change. The fear of 'sharing information' and the pending confidentiality discussion at some departments represented a 'confidentiality culture' where information should be 'guarded' and properly handled by the employee. During the transition, the value of knowledge sharing, however, became more and more prominent at most departments than the value of confidentiality. As managers also took a more present part in the landscape, breaking down the hierarchical boundaries, this further supported the non-verbal message and ultimately the change initiative. The change in values influenced both use and the ways employees related to and talked about space, findings also supported by Airo et al. (2012). By time, the new concept started to work more in harmony with a newly formed organisational collaborative culture – stressing the fact that structure and culture must co-evolve (Bate et al., 2000). The process here was one of continuous learning, changing and learning from changing. The process of 'unlearning' and 're-learning', as emphasised by Grenness (2015), may in this perspective be seen as an iterative process where old and new values and assumptions are tested against each other. This in turn, stress the need for a change management process extending beyond the transition itself, as also emphasised by Becker et al. (1994).

As a new set of assumptions, values and norms gradually was created at some departments, and especially as some hierarchical structures were broken down, employees also got more freedom to start to explore the new concept. However, the fact that the project was seen to be finished soon after transition and that no formal structures were developed to follow and further steer development of the original vision, may also have hampered goal achievement. The focus on spatial change as a tool for affecting cultural change, also contributed to the creation of a rather rational deterministic thinking. Supporting the argumentation by Värlander (2012) and Rylander (2009), the deterministic perspective was found to be challenging and partly unfruitful in achieving the intended ends. The additional cues and behavioural artefacts implemented by some managers and partners may in this perspective have been crucial for achieving the intended ends. However, as some managers' and partners' actions and use of space also reinforced hierarchical levels, the boundaries within the organisation were not eliminated – rather redrawn in the new office. In line with Becker et al. (1994), Balogun (2006) and Miles (1997) corporate managers' and partners' actions strongly defined the value of the new cultural artefacts as well as the meanings employees assigned to the different spatial solutions. As such, sub-cultures and norms became visible in the open workplace structure. The lack of physical boundaries between groups and members, also allowed for cultural norms to transmit and travel between groups. Due to the complicated interaction between the spatial workplace and the organisational identity, as well as the different identities within different sub-group, achieving the intended ends were seen to require as extended process. Thus, the study stresses the need not only for a continuous iterative change management process but also the need for applying a set of different tools, measures and strategies within the overall strategy.

5. Conclusions

The article illustrates that use of a new workplace concept to effect cultural change is dependant on an alignment between spatial artefacts and other structural and cultural dimensions. If an organisation attempts to utilise a relocation process for strategic change organisational aspects, cultural values, norms and assumptions needs to be addressed and handled as an integrated part of the strategy. This will ultimately lead to a situation where space and culture may co-evolve into alignment. In a physical transition it is further important not only to renew critical cultural artefacts, but also to maintain those that already support the new strategy and the desired culture. In accordance with the perspective of space as socially constructed, management and sub-groups' use and relation to the concept were also found to be important in shaping new cultural assumptions and norms. Arguably, implementation of new workplace concepts with the intention to affect and change cultural dimensions need to be handled as an on-going process, continuing after the relocation and also supported by management action and behaviour as well as supported by a multiple set of integrated tools and strategies. Organisational members' appropriation of space and buildings are furthermore significant in achieving high levels of building usability. Addressing the socio-material relationship in research as well as in the development and implementation of new workplace concepts may provide the building sector with more knowledge with regards to buildings' usability and strategic use of the built environment.

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