Chapter 9
Visualisations of Relatonics:
A Tool to Support Change in the Organising of Work?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is based on theorising and analysis from an ongoing research and development project exploring the use of visualisations in task-based development, specifically the potential of new types of organisational images that may support understanding about work-integrated learning. Thus, the aim of the chapter is to explore the possibilities of visualising work-integrated competence networks—here referred to as relatonics—and contribute to the understanding of how such visualisations can support efforts of organising change when organisational boundary-crossing cooperation is needed for a significant task. A conclusion is that images representing relatonic can be utilised to identify areas with a developmental need and, in this way, are a resource to make more knowledgeable interventions and enable a relatonic to emerge in certain directions.

INTRODUCTION

For many years, the issue of how to understand and lead change in organisations has frequently been addressed both in practice and in research literature (e.g. Beer et al., 1990; Kira & Forslin, 2008; Kotter, 1996; Tidd & Bessant, 2009). The challenge consists of two classic dimensions: *incremental* vs. *transformative* change, and *participative* vs. *dictated* change (Dunphy & Stace, 1990). This chapter is based on the assumption that people – leaders, managers and co-workers – act according to their understanding and conceptions of the world (Hmelo et al., 2000; Sandberg & Targama, 2007). This implies that providing new images of organisation may aid decisions and actions and

improve ways of working. On the one hand, this belief is partly based on the identified problem of too frequent and disruptive reorganisations (Brunsson, 2006; Döös, 2008), and, on the other hand, the difficulties of implementing everyday incremental change (Beer et al., 2005).

Conceptions of the world are grounded in understanding and largely dependent on experiences, and in certain images coupled to one's understanding. The importance of images has been acknowledged in, for example, organisational ethnography (Cornelissen et al., 2008; Hatch & Yanow, 2008; Ybema et al., 2009). The emergence of digital technology has brought with it new possibilities of visualising what goes on *in* and *between* organisations. The main focus of previous research has been to verbalise, i.e., to capture images in words, either in metaphors or in articulation, where knowledge is made more explicit or usable to others. For example, Weick et al. (2005) describe the "image of sensemaking" as an "activity that talks events and organizations into existence" (p. 413). Less attention has been paid to visual images and representations when it comes to analysing their contribution to organisational change and development. Cross et al. (2010) and also Gubbins and Dooley (2010) represent exceptions to this trend with their work on images based on network analyses of information technology functions in large organisations. Partly relating to this is Forsén et al.'s creation of interactive visualisations that enable identification of colleagues with the appropriate knowledge and expertise throughout an organisation (Forsén et al., 2010). It is interesting to note the potential of today's technology to explore the issues addressed by Mintzberg and Van der Heyden (1999), who were pioneers in creating images representing how companies really work. They identified and drew four organigraphs on grounds of principle for managerial work: *set*, *chain*, *hub* and *web*.

Organisations dealing with ill-structured problems (Kitchener & King, 1990) and complicated work tasks continuously struggle to find the most appropriate structures for continuous work-integrated learning and satisfactory task performance. A challenge of managing such dynamic complexity with multiple stakeholders is how to get an overview of the *real* flow of work going on in and across organisational units – a work flow that most likely goes beyond the formal lines of decision-making and organisational structures. Boundary-spanning, work-integrated competence networks are here regarded as a crucial resource in dealing professionally with complicated tasks involving multiple stakeholders. We use the concept *relatonic* (Backström & Döös, 2008) to denote the network of inter-personal competence-bearing relations used when working with an important task of an organisation. Relatonic is an organizing structure at collective level both enabling and constraining how the work task is performed. Through focusing the competence aspect of relations (Döös, 2007), the relatonic concept contributes to further our understanding of the organising processes at work, and as such the concept adds to the field of organisational theory. A specific relatonic may crisscross between several intra-organisational units as well as external partner organisations. One challenge is how to understand and steer the emergence of relatonics. In recent times, alternative images of organisations have come to be used as tools in leading change.

The most frequently used way to represent an organisation is the *organisational chart*, or *organisational diagram* (Mintzberg & Van der Heyden, 1999). This standard image depicts the formal structure and lines of decision-making in an organisation and invites to dealing with change through restructuring reorganisations (Döös et al., 2013). The organisational chart leaves aside the *informal* structures of interaction in the processes of work, i.e., the relatonic remains *hidden*. This becomes problematic when it comes to reality's ill-structured and complicated problems, which, for adequate problem-solving, require the involvement of multiple competences.

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