

Chapter 10

Uncover the Hidden Relationships of Work: A Visualisation Tool to Support Informed Change Decisions

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to explore the possibilities of visualising work-integrated competence networks—here referred to as relatronics—and contribute to the understanding of how to support efforts of organising change. The competence-generating processes of an organisation are problematic in that they are largely hidden in the midst of everyday practice. If not receiving adequate attention, there is the risk of conducting too frequent, disruptive, and unhealthy reorganisations. This strengthens the reason why visualisations of relatronics are of value. The demarcation line between what is hidden, and what is not, is relocated through the use of visualisations of relatronics. A conclusion is that images representing relatronics can be utilised to support informed change decisions.

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INTRODUCTION

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; By, 2005; Kotter, 1996; Seo et al., 2004). Organisational changes are usually done with the intention to improve some aspects of the organisation, for instance to make the organisation better at performing its core tasks. Such changes can be crucial for the ability to compete in the market, but previous research indicates that a major part of organisational change efforts does not bring the intended improvements (Balogun, 2006; Beer et al., 1990; Brunsson, 2006). There are identified problems both with too frequent and disruptive reorganisations (Brunsson, 2006; Döös, 2007) and with implementing everyday incremental change (Beer et al., 2005). The outcome of organisational changes may actually be the opposite and lead to decreased organisational performance. How come? An explanation put forward here is that people's ability to adequately conduct the core tasks of an organisation is highly dependent on the many times hidden relationships of work, the *relatonics* (Backström & Döös, 2008; Döös, 2007). Since these relationships of work are hidden, it is easy to overlook them when conducting organisational changes, e.g., restructuring the organisation by moving people to a new department. An unintended consequence of change may thus be that the established *relatonics* are disrupted. This is a problem, because beyond individually gained knowledge and skills, people's competence at work is carried in the competence-bearing relationships that form *relatonics*. *Relatonics* emerge around certain core tasks and disrupted *relatonics* lead to decreased competence to perform the work task (Backström & Döös, 2008; Döös, 2007).

Against this background, we argue that uncovering the hidden relationships of work is critical for managers to be able to make informed decisions of what kind of change to impose on their organisation. This chapter suggests visualisation of *relatonics* as a pre-step before making decisions about or starting an organisational change effort; a pre-step intended to understand the already existing competencies of the organisation and its *relatonics*. The demarcation line between what is hidden, and what is not, may be relocated through the use of visualisations of *relatonics*.

Furthermore, a basic assumption in this chapter is that people – managers and staff – act according to their understanding and conceptions of the world (Hmelo et al., 2000; Sandberg & Targama, 2007). This implies that providing new visualisations and images of organisation may aid decisions and actions and improve ways of working. 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 main

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