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Acting in a Generative Building

A qualitative study of how Activity Based Working is translated and acted upon
in practice at a large Nordic bank

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Abstract

Activity Based Working (ABW) has emerged as a popular management trend among practitioners in the current business environment. In previous research however, aspects of organizational space and its influence on social behavior has been largely ignored, despite their intimate relationship. This study therefore aims to investigate how the concept of ABW is translated and acted upon in practice at a large Nordic bank, contributing to the body of empirical research on organizational space. As analytical tools we have used the theoretical fields of organizational space and the theory of translation. The study has the character of a qualitative, single case study carried out at a large Nordic Bank having implemented ABW. Data was collected through 20 interviews at two different departments as well as with members from the project group initiating the change. Observation and shadowing was also done as a complement to the interviews. The results showed that ABW has been translated in different ways at the office, depending on individual and group needs, and that it has had both intended and unintended consequences. A number of tensions in the form of four paradoxes connected to the use of ABW have also been identified. The study gives insight into how ABW is translated and acted upon in practice, thus providing valuable input to both the case organization as well as to organizations and the field in general.

Key Words

Activity Based Working, ABW, Organizational Space, Generative Building, Translation

Introduction

I have been curious to understand how the world around us is changing in a fast pace while we try to keep up and the offices come last, looking like they always have. (*Interview with Interior Design Architect, 2017-02-14*)

If the organizational world around us is in constant change, should our organizational spaces not follow suit? The quote above highlights how practitioners find offices to be lagging behind the development of other aspects of organizations. Ironically enough, scholars express a similar frustration about the fact that in management theory, aspects of organizational space and its influence on social behavior has been overlooked during the best part of the 20th century (Marrewijk, 2009, Orlikowski, 2009, Clegg & Kornberger, 2006; Baldry, 1997). As argued by Marrewijk (2009) it was not until the 90's that the space field slowly started to wake up again before finding new energy in the 00's with publications such as Kornberger & Clegg (2004), Hernes (2004) and Dale & Burrell (2008).

Clegg & Kornberger (2006) reason that since architecture is about organizing space it is also about organizing social order. Dale & Burrell (2008) agree, devoting their book to "*prompt recognition of the significance of space and architecture for understanding organization*" (p.33). Based on its potential impact on organizations de Paoli et al. (2013) argues that organizational space should be seen as a part of corporate strategy and not as a basis for it. Literature of more practical character confirms how the workplace layout can be used as a strategic tool for companies to gain competitive advantage and company growth (Leesman, 2016; Senab, 2016; Sisteck 2017). According to Falk (2015) the focus of many modern companies' improvement efforts lies on increasing employee innovativeness through cooperation, to attract new employees by offering a modern work environment and to increase their cost awareness. Leesman (2016) adds the ability to embrace change and to meet the demands for flexibility to that list. As a response to these focus areas, a workplace concept called Activity Based Working (ABW) has emerged.

The idea of ABW is to provide a range of choices of office work settings to employees depending on the activity performed. In other words it aims to allow employees to choose the office setting most appropriate to their task at hand. The design of an ABW office can include spaces for private meetings, areas for conversation and spaces for intense, focused work (Wyllie et al, 2012). This way, the solution departs from the traditional office structure where each employee has his/her own desk assigned specifically to the particular individual. Instead, the floor sections are shared and divided into different zones adapted to different tasks. This requires employees to be mobile and flexible in their way of working. A critical aspect is therefore to equip employees with flexible and mobile information and communications technology enabling them to work wherever they please (Parker, 2016). What should be made clear however is that ABW is not a hot-desking program, where a traditional office has been attributed with non-allocated seating. ABW has the same philosophy of non-allocated seating, but is essentially focused on the experiences of the employee whilst being in the office environment (Wyllie et al, 2012; Hogg, n.d.). A true activity based working environment is

based on the activities performed and these are far more numerous and diverse than what is achievable simply by rearranging desks (Falk, 2015).

There are several different objectives behind the implementation of ABW in an organization. Some of the most prominent are space savings and cost reductions, increased freedom of choice and increased collaboration (Veldhoen + Company, n.d.). What the main objective behind ABW is in practice however is debated. Parker (2016) argues that there is a kind of disconnect between the way organizations want their employees and external stakeholders to see ABW (empowering the employees and promoting flexibility and mobility) and the company's own, underlying agenda (cost reductions, efficiency gains and individual output accountability). In his way of looking at it, implementation of ABW is driven by a cost management agenda more than anything else. At the same time, Hoendervanger et al (2016) identify positive effects when looking at ABW satisfaction. Employees who switch between different activity settings more frequently were shown to have a significantly above average satisfaction with the new concept. As argued by both Hoendervanger et al. (2016) and Skogland (2017), those who do not switch or do not identify themselves as a "mobile employee" were instead less satisfied with ABW. Many companies struggle with employee "inertia" due to the non-mobile profile of their employees, which, in turn, leads to failure to adopt the new behaviors necessary to realize the potential benefits of the activity based surroundings (Leesman, 2016).

What scholars and practitioners are united around, however, is their belief that these ABW solutions cannot be implemented in a standardized manner but instead need to be adapted to the local context (Backman, 2017; Wyllie et. al., 2012). According to Appel-Meulenbroek et al., (2011), differing needs for privacy and interaction for employees makes it hard to design one standardized concept serving every need. Also, since implementing an ABW concept is about building a socio-material relationship it is important to continuously manage the building process and not consider it to be finished just because the material part of the project is (Skogland, 2017). This is supported by Marrewijk (2009) who attributed the failed implementation of flexible workspaces at the Dutch telecom operator KPN's headquarters to the fact that its primary motive was cost reduction as well as the lack of a thorough change program to help employees adapt to it. It is clear that, when introducing an ABW concept, training and coaching is a crucial step in the implementation process (Ekstrand & Damman, 2016; Meulenbroek et al, 2011). More choices regarding the physical space may require more tolerance and flexibility from employees and managers as well as a greater will to compromise between individual and group differences (Becker & Steele, 1990). In some cases, new office concepts are not used as intended, leading to a risk of loss in productivity, illness and dissatisfaction. Misuse and opposition to changes can be resolved with active user involvement in the design process, according to Appel-Meulenbroek et al., (2011).

Aim and purpose of the study

This study aims to examine how ABW is translated and acted upon in practice. It took place in the context of the Gothenburg regional headquarters of one of the largest banks in the Nordics, henceforth referred to as "the bank". The office, which houses around 600

employees since mid 2016, is designed according to the bank's own ABW concept "Bank Unlimited". At the time of the study the organization had just gone through an initial couple of months of settling into the office. By fulfilling our aim we hope to contribute to the body of empirical research on Organizational Space, which is so dearly requested (Marrewijk, 2009; Skogland, 2017). Orlikowski (2009) argues that, not only has the space field been ignored, it has also been mistreated by the application of an ontology in which the social and material are treated separately. We will attend to that problem by applying a sociomaterial perspective to the studied phenomena in which the material and social are connected in a recursive relationship (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004; Dale & Burrell, 2008; Orlikowski, 2009). Drawing upon the theories of Organizational Space and the Sociology of Translation we uncover four fundamental paradoxes related to the studied phenomenon. These can be summarized as tensions between (1) ideas and practice, (2) cooperating in groups and staying mobile, (3) the inherent flexibility of ABW and keeping the concept standardized and finally (4) the perspectives of form following function and function following form. Based on these paradoxes we are able to draw a number of conclusions with practical implications further elaborated at the end of this thesis.

Theoretical framework

Orlikowski (2009) agrees with the importance of space and materiality, arguing that it is an integral aspect of organizational activity. According to her, the ontological separation between the social and material in previous space studies cannot account for the complexity of real life. Instead she promotes a sociomaterial perspective on organizational life in which the social and material should be seen as "constitutively entangled" in a recursive relationship. This is expressed by Dale & Burrell (2008) as "*the spaces and places around us construct us as we construct them*" (p.1). The sociomaterial perspective of organization follows the same ontology as the sociology of ANT and Translation, which are built on the principle of generalized symmetry, meaning that the material and the social (the human and non-human actors) are treated equally (Latour 1986; Callon 1984). The recursivity also implies that space should be seen as a social construction and that the top down aspect of the "Cartesian rationality" (that structure follows strategy), better known in architecture and design terms as "form follows function" (Sullivan, 1896), cannot be true (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004). In fact, Kornberger & Clegg (2004) propose the opposite; form is the starting point and function is the follower. Venturi & Scully (1966) agree, claiming that "*in modern architecture form follows function, but in the architecture of complexity this image is reversed as form evokes function*" (p.34). This can be highlighted by the fact that it is impossible to design something based on a specific predefined functionality since that would imply that designers know what will be needed in the future, which simply is not possible. Instead, buildings, offices etc. are designed based on the functions that were necessary in the past (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004).

Based on the idea of the reversed Cartesian rationality, Kornberger & Clegg (2004) present what they call the generative building. This is a building that enables different functions and individual ways of acting upon the organizational space by being multifaceted and flexible. It distinguishes itself from other buildings in five aspects: (dis)order, flexibility,

problem generation, movement and design (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004). The flexibility of the building is about breaking down barriers to cooperation and communication in order to improve teamwork and increase the identification of groups and individuals with the organization and its goals (Dale & Burrell, 2010; Schriefer, 2005). This should be contrasted to what they call the terminal building which is tailored to support the exact functions that the organization is thought to be in need of. Such ordered spaces, according to the authors, create static conditions that do not give room for creativity, new ideas and communication between other groups than those intended by the designers. Baldry (1999) agrees, arguing that both fixed and semi-fixed structures may be seen as invariable by both workers and management and accepted as the way the organization “does things”. On the other hand, completely disordered spaces do not give enough room for efficiency, predictability and recurrence of actions, which is not favorable to an organization either. The generative building, therefore, tries to combine order and chaos by positioning itself on the borderline between the ordered and the disordered. Its goal is to support movement and change rather than the static, as well as to create new problems and questions rather than keeping people on a straight path of certainty (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004).

The “chaos” of the generative building, however, stands in contrast to the emphasis on the positive effects of individual control over the working environment promoted by Ekstrand & Damman (2016). Such environmental control is defined by O’Neill (2010) as the degree of control and responsibility an employee has over the location, methods, contents and tools used to conduct their work, together with the freedom to choose how and when to use different physical workspaces for different activities. In line with this, a lack of possibilities to control the immediate work environment has been linked to dissatisfaction (Ekstrand & Damman, 2016). The same is true for lacking the possibility to personalize your own workstation, which generally is perceived as a negative aspect of flexible workspaces (Bodin Danielsson & Bodin, 2009). Baldry (1999) also addresses a basic conflict of interests between employees and management connected to individual control of the work environment. On the one hand the working environment should be healthy, safe and preferably controllable by the occupants. On the other hand, it represents costs such as heating, lighting and ventilation which management ideally wants to minimize. Doing so, however, implies shifting control over the work environment from the individual employee in favor of centralization. Based on this, it becomes evident that the management of physical space is a complex undertaking, with differing demands to be met and needs of different stakeholders to be weighed against each other (Gustafsson, 2006).

Continuing on the theme regarding the role of physical space in organizations, Marrewijk (2009) argues that spaces are designed based on the type of corporate culture that the company wants to promote and are thus as much a tool for organizational change management as anything else. Both de Paoli et al., (2013) and Baldry (1997) agree, claiming that there is widespread evidence supporting the idea that buildings represent results of strategic decisions made by organizations. Space and built structures have both functional and symbolic relationships to organizations (Baldry, 1997). The building itself gives signals, subtly communicating what kind of building it is and what kind of social activity is

appropriate within it, thus facilitating managerial control over the labor process (Stimson, 1986; Baldry, 1999). Buildings and their spaces can also send signals about status and behaviors. These spatial signals can be transmitted by e.g. the degree to which the space is personalized, the amount of space allocated, décor, social configurations within the space and more. Such signs and functions of office buildings can undermine as well as reinforce each other (Baldry, 1997).

This symbolic power of buildings can be used to reinforce hierarchical differences. Baldry (1999) concludes that, generally, the higher up you are in the hierarchy the more space is allocated to you and you also tend to have greater control over that space and its boundaries. Spaces can also be tools for exerting power, which Foucault (2003) demonstrates through his idea of the “Panopticum”. It exerts control by keeping the perception of being surveilled constant, regardless if someone is actually surveilling or not. The fact that buildings and organizational spaces are believed to be tools for changing cultures and social behaviors confirms the idea of them as powerful non-human actors. However, being powerful still does not mean that the space will be used as initially intended, since intended use does not control practical use and what people do (Yanow, 2010). That would imply that spaces could be seen as a container preserving whatever is put into it. In other words that the Cartesian rationality is true, which Kornberger & Clegg (2004) claim it is not.

The fact that intended and practical use do not stand in a perfectly deterministic relationship to one another has stimulated the development of an entire field of research trying to connect the dots. This is referred to as the sociology of translation. Translation builds on the basic assumptions that the social should be seen as performative rather than ostensive, as well as the general acknowledgement that human and non-human actors are equally important parts of the “heterogeneous network” making it up. This is referred to as “generalized symmetry” (Latour, 1986; Callon, 1984; Law, 1992). Nicolini (2010), Czarniawska (2015) and Callon (1984) have provided different descriptions of the process of translation. According to Czarniawska (2015) the travel of ideas starts by the idea being materialized in an object enabling it to move through time and space using energy from every individual actor in the chain. This can be compared to the ideas of Latour (1986) and Law (1992) that non-human actors, or “extrasomatic resources”, are what determine the durability of ideas and social relationships in the human society. The next step is for the materialized idea to be transferred into action. This can be compared to the concepts of disembedding and embedding, proposed by Giddens (1991). Finally, when an action is repeated regularly and discussed in a normative way without major questioning it has become institutionalized (Czarniawska, 2015).

In contrast to the diffusion model of innovation, where an idea is seen to have an inner force moving it forward in a straight line, translation acknowledges the fact that every actor in the network shapes and modifies the idea based on their own interests and interpretations of it. Since this implies that the actor initially launching the idea relies on the other actors in the network to keep spreading it further, power cannot be possessed or stored and should therefore be seen as a consequence rather than as a cause of collective action (Latour, 1986). This can be compared to the reversed causality of the Cartesian rationality discussed by the

scholars in the organizational space field. Furthermore, if ideas are met with resistance, “friction” is created. This is often seen as a negative phenomenon in the social as well as the technical world, if the diffusion perspective is applied. From a translation perspective however, “friction” is seen in a more positive tone. It occurs when traveling ideas meet ideas in residence (i.e the frame of reference of the person receiving the idea; local procedures, history and experiences). But instead of arguing that friction prevents and stops the movement, it is seen as creating energy in the meeting of ideas and their “translators”. Without friction there is no translation and it should be seen as an energizing clash between ideas in residence and traveling ideas, which leads to translation of them both (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994).

Methodology

The aim of this study is to examine how an ABW solution is translated and acted upon in practice. Our interest lies in digging deep into the studied phenomenon, which is why we have opted for a qualitative, in-depth, single case study. Silverman (2013) argues that qualitative approaches are particularly good for in-depth studying of a phenomenon and having one single case gives us the ability to dig deeper. Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that it is sufficient to generalize based on a single case study. He argues that single case studies can be of great importance to scientific development and that the force of examples is underestimated. They are also good at producing context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Our approach follows the belief that the best research usually says a lot about a little (Silverman, 2013).

The setting

The case organization of this study is one of the largest banks in the Nordics with over ten million private customers, more than half a million corporate customers and employing around 30 000 people. The bank is present in the Nordic countries as well as the Baltics and Russia. They offer services in personal banking, commercial and business banking, wholesale banking and wealth management (company website, n.d.). The majority of the study was carried out at the Gothenburg office with around 600 employees. The organization moved into this office building around mid 2016, approximately five months before the study was conducted. The move to the new office was an effect of an internal reorganization where smaller regions were merged into larger entities run from one regional office, referred to as a “hub”. The Gothenburg hub, serving around 500 000 customers in the western region of Sweden, contains a number of different departments such as personal banking, business and commercial banking, back office and IT. Since 2012 the bank has been engaged in a project to convert their office spaces into ABW offices based on their own concept called “Bank Unlimited”. Initially, a pilot involving 400 employees was carried out at the head office in Stockholm. After conducting the pilot, the decision was made to introduce the modified ABW concept throughout the entire organization. Today, the ABW concept is used by around 13 000 employees within the organization.

The main actor taking part in the ABW project at the bank is the internal project group responsible for the initiative. The project group is situated in Stockholm, working in close

cooperation with different partners of which one is an interior architect bureau specialized in implementing activity based office solutions. The architect's role was to interpret the client's needs and design the physical space accordingly. Other important actors within the bank itself are the managers and middle managers in charge of conveying the concept to their employees. Some were responsible for making the move itself run as smooth as possible while others got the role as representatives for their group in contact with the project group.

Data Collection

Data was collected through methodological triangulation, using interviews, observations as well as written documents. Silverman (2013) argues that, by looking at the intersection between data from multiple sources, you get closer to the true state of reality as well as increased reliability. Data collection was done throughout the period of February to April 2017. The interviews were semi-structured in character using open-ended questions to invite the interviewee to a discussion aiming to generate a wide range of information (Silverman, 2013). This way, the interviewees were not steered into specific answers but able to talk freely about their work and the subjects discussed (Czarniawska, 2014). All interviews were conducted in person at the Gothenburg office, apart from those held with the project group located in Stockholm. A limitation of this study is that the case organization was not studied for a longer period of time, meaning that we did not have the opportunity to see how things unfolded chronologically to a large extent. Therefore, interview questions focused on how interviewees experience and use their workplace today, but effort was also made to trace back in time to get an understanding of how the process had unfolded. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed, helping the interviewers stay mentally present and not worry about losing details (Czarniawska, 2014). Transcribing also enables deeper analysis and gives the possibility to revisit interesting passages afterwards (Silverman, 2013).

A disadvantage of using interviews is the fact that non-human actors, playing an important role in this study, cannot be interviewed. Yanow (2010) acknowledges this saying that *“to analyze experience of, in and with organizational spaces, scientific discourse requires words; but space is wordless”* (p.139). A risk with interviews is also that interviewees can be tempted to give the “right” answers to try to “please” the interviewers (Czarniawska, 2014), often referred to as “Social Desirability Bias” (Nederhof, 1985). Therefore the interviews were complemented with a session of shadowing, which Czarniawska (2014) promotes as a common method to gather data regarding non-human actors. The notes from the shadowing were transcribed after the observation when the observer still had it fresh in memory. In addition, observations were done when present at site for interviews and meetings, including tours of the office, walking around the areas and conversing with employees. Conducting the majority of the interviews at site at the Gothenburg office it was possible to get a deeper understanding of the physical surroundings and what the interviewees were referring to when talking about the office. Using interviews and the time spent at site while doing them to gather observational data like this is a methodology suggested by Czarniawska (2014). The fact that our understanding of the roles of the non-human actors, despite this, is based primarily on accounts from human actors was taken into account when later analyzing the material.

As a starting point we decided to base the data collection on two departments with presumed different work patterns. This choice was made with help from a member of the regional management team, having wide knowledge of the bank, with whom we met for an initial interview before carrying out the bulk of fieldwork. Using the social network of one initial informant to sample subsequent respondents like this is referred to, by Silverman (2013), as snowball sampling. One of the chosen departments is the private and corporate banking departments where employees are perceived to have a mobile work pattern and working close to the customers. The other is the back office department with a perceived stationary work pattern and where employees work far from the customer. The interviews at the two departments were complemented by a few more with members of other departments. In those cases the respondents were asked to define his/her own work pattern in terms of mobility him/herself.

To complement the primary data collected through interviews and observations, internal documents such as handbooks, presentation materials, handouts, brochures etc. was studied in order to get a deeper understanding of the subject and how it is being presented internally at the studied organization. External secondary sources such as the company's own website, newspaper articles and online material was also used. The data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, i.e. the point where further data collection does not generate any new information (Czarniawska, 2014). In *Table 1* below a full list of interviews and observations carried out in the study is presented.

Respondents	Interviews	Observation	Hours
Managers	5	Shadowing	3
Employees	12	Present at site	12
Architects	1		
Project leaders	2		
Total	20		15

Table 1. Summary of interviews and observations.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, parts of the grounded theory method was used which, according to Bryant & Charmaz (2007), refers to the methodology itself and not the end product. In our case, this is an important distinction since we do not aim to necessarily create new theory but rather use parts of the grounded theory method suitable for processing and analyzing the data. This choice is based on the argument by Martin & Turner (1986) that the grounded theory method is well suited for handling the type of qualitative data collected in this study. Some scholars, such as Corbin & Strauss (2008) and Hood (2007), raised criticism towards claiming that you have used grounded theory as a method for data analysis without actually creating

any new theory. We acknowledge this by, again, emphasizing that we are merely using the grounded theory method and nothing more.

The first step in the process of analyzing the data was to code the interview transcripts. This follows the first step of the grounded theory method (Wiener, 2007). Codes that were overlapping were consolidated and some were made broader by combining them into one. This provided the basis for the thematization of the empirical section into the titles: “The concept of ABW at the bank”, “Making the ABW concept fit the context of the Gothenburg office” “Using the ABW office in practice”, “Acting upon the ABW principles” and “Intended and Unintended Consequences of ABW”. Having written content for each title we started analyzing them in the small sections following each empirics title. At this point we iterated between the themes, the empirical findings, our analysis and collecting new data. This follows the idea of *constant comparative analysis* promoted by Glaser and Strauss (1967) or the description by Hood (2007) of the grounded theory method as “*a spiral of cycles of data collection, coding, analysis, writing, design, theoretical categorization, and data collection*” (p. 154).

To deal with ethical issues a number of factors were considered. Firstly, all interviewees were informed about the purpose, methods and intended use of their contributions prior to the interviews. Consent from the interviewees was of crucial importance in the process, including the consent to record the interviews for practical and methodological reasons. Also, all interviewees as well as the company itself were kept anonymous in order to respect and protect their identities. This was assumed to generate incentives for interviewees to give elaborate and sincere information, thus improving the quality of the data. These ethical considerations follow the arguments of Silverman (2013) who highlights their importance when conducting research.

The concept of ABW at the bank

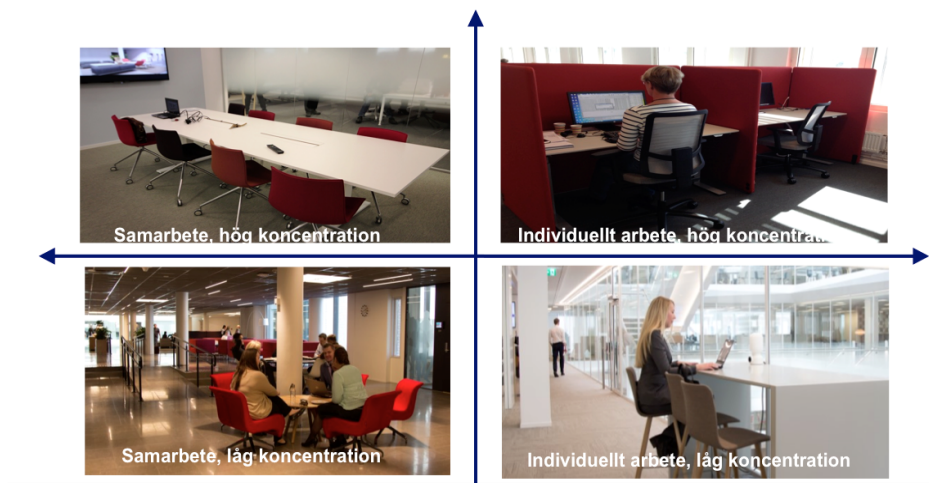
The impetus for implementing the “Bank Unlimited” concept at the bank in the first place came from the fact that the market in itself is changing. One manager expresses:

What one is starting to see happening on the bank market is that we have gone from being a supplier of an everyday commodity into a supplier of a consumer discretionary (...) and customers tend to travel farther for those. So, I think we will see a dramatic change and a decrease in the number of physical localities.

With the new circumstances on the market the organization realized that they needed to be more cost efficient to be able to compete. As described by one manager a bank basically has three major costs; capital, wages and office space. The most relevant way to cut costs at the time was through effectivization of the latter. At the same time the bank is aiming to improve their service to their customers by employing a so called “omni-core” and thinking in terms of the entire “customer journey”. This implies that instead of having one single bank advisor with whom you discuss your inquiries as a customer, you should have the entire competence of the bank at your disposal regardless of your point of contact. Also, a core value within the

company is “One Bank Team”, referring to teamwork and a feeling of belongingness for all members of the organization. All these aspects led to the choice of ABW as the office solution. According to the bank’s internal presentation material the implementation of the ABW concept is, in the short term, supposed to increase flexibility, improve the working environment and wellbeing, cut costs and increase cost awareness. The cost efficiency argument is supported by a study showing that the bank’s previous office space was used to an average of only 50%. In the longer term, the ABW solution is supposed to contribute to the company strategy and culture, to becoming a more attractive employer and to increase productivity and environmental sustainability.

The idea is being implemented as a standardized concept, called “Bank Unlimited”, across the entire organization. This has been a difficult task since the bank itself is a heterogeneous organization with departments ranging from private-/corporate banking to back office and customer service to marketing and IT, all with their own different characteristics and needs. In Bank Unlimited, the offices are divided into four different area types ranging from those intended for work with high or low levels of focus as well as areas for collaboration or individual work (see fig. 1). The different environments available are e.g. standard desks, focus workplaces (equipped with soundproof screens), flex rooms (small, non-bookable meeting rooms), big project tables, phone boxes (individual, soundproof “boxes” for one person), touchdown workplaces (designed for shorter stays, e.g. between meetings), a silent room and lounge areas (intended for informal meetings). These different types of areas are supposed to support different activities and needs among employees. In addition, employees belong to a specific “home zone” within the office where they have their personal locker, post boxes and closest colleagues.



(Figure 1. Internal presentation material)

Furthermore, three main principles are present at the offices: clean desk, free seating and mobility. Clean desk implies that when leaving work for the day, the desk is to be cleared and made available for somebody else. At times there might be a particularly high demand for standard workplaces in which case it is recommended to clear the desk even when leaving for

meetings etc. To make sure that the rules regarding clean desk are followed each floor has a floor host, a service that the bank purchases from an external company. These floor hosts can to some extent signal to managers if they notice that an area gets messy. Free seating is what the name suggests, there are no personally assigned desks at the office and the employees are free to choose a workstation. Mobility is the general idea of trying to stay mobile. This implies e.g. that employees are supposed to change activity areas when needed, meaning that some might change several times a day while others do not change at all. To support mobility there are a number of IT solutions at place, such as personal laptops, Skype, OneNote, Follow Me Print and more. These IT solutions are to be used by employees in order to remain mobile and keeping paperwork to a minimum. Another way of promoting mobility at the office is that all employees are provided with customized bags designed to fit their necessary belongings. The idea is that this should facilitate packing up and down as well as moving between different areas.

Physical layout at the Gothenburg office

Entering the large office complex housing the bank and several other companies, one is met by a reception desk where visitors register their visit. An elevator then takes you up to the fifth floor of the building where you reach a customer lounge equipped with sofas, tables and a coffee machine. Receptionists are available in the lounge for assistance. Behind locked doors and dimmed glass walls is the area where employees work, separated from the space accessed by visitors. Customers are picked up from the customer lounge by the employee with whom they have booked a meeting and showed to the meeting room area, containing rooms of different sizes, in connection to the lounge. The office has the capacity to welcome both private and corporate customers for physical meetings at site as well as online meetings from a distance, concerning all aspects of their banking. There are around 40 meeting rooms for external meetings and 25-30 rooms for internal meetings. When moving through the locked doors and into the working area of the bank's employees, there are different zones containing different groups, each filled with desks, lockers, focus tables and other types of workstations. There are internal meeting rooms throughout the office, as well as kitchens, lunchrooms and lounge areas. The floors are covered with carpet, the walls are painted in a light color and through the windows one can overlook the Gothenburg landscape. Because the amount of space needed was underestimated in the planning process the office gives a slight impression of being overcrowded.

Making the ABW concept fit the context of the Gothenburg office

Organizationally, the Gothenburg office is characterized by consisting of a comparatively large part of departments with a more stationary work pattern. Also, since a majority of the employees are working close to the customers they have a need of sitting together in groups to support the entire "customer journey". That implies handling information subject to bank secrecy and must not be shared freely, which is something the employees have to consider when choosing workstation at the office. One of the managers says:

I would say that the closer you are to the customer the more you go towards relationship banking and the more important it is for us to sit tightly together in the team. So, the further away from the customer you get the more you can follow the ABW schoolbook in full scale.

For employees in the back office unit in particular, the new office concept has been a challenge adapting to. Many of them feel like it is not fully suited to their work pattern, sitting at the same desk throughout the day and working with quite a bit of paperwork. They are also the ones who express the greatest resistance towards the concept. Many of these respondents say that even though they had the opportunity to express wishes and opinions regarding the new office, not much was listened to in the end. Instead, many feel like mere receivers of a concept that was implemented without taking different needs and work patterns into consideration. For employees from the other departments the perception of the concept is more indifferent. This is emphasized by the fact that many of them do not seem to take much interest in it and therefore do not know much about it. When asked who they think an ABW office is suitable to, many of the back office employees think it is those who are more mobile, such as private advisors or managers. The answers to the same question posed to managers followed the idea that it works better the further away from the customer you are. In summary, the idea seems to be that the concept is suitable for project managers or offices where a greater part of the workforce consist of managers or people working in business development, i.e. headquarters. This is confirmed by one of the managers in the following quote:

The concept itself is made for personnel working at a head office where you sit and develop products (...) But it's not really for this kind of production staff where you sit still.

Generally, the project group recommends that changes should be kept to a minimum during the first three months after moving into a new location. This is seen as a turbulent "honeymoon phase" where many of the issues will be resolved automatically as time passes. Despite this, quite a few things actually changed at the office during the first months. Among the more significant changes is that the initial idea of free seating around larger home zones containing several groups each turned into free seating within smaller home zones containing just one group. This was an initiative launched by the regional management, even though the initial idea was that all departments should be mixed at the office. This because they experienced the need of sitting more privately due to e.g. confidentiality issues. One manager describes the change as:

It was decided that every team should have their own area, but that it would be free seating within them. That if you are 17 people in the team you might have 17 seats but you should still not sit at the same place.

Effectively, this has resulted in decreased mobility since the new home zones are smaller than the old ones. It also implies that each home zone does not contain every type of activity area, meaning that employees within one zone do not feel like they have access to the different activity areas the way they are supposed to. Another change related to decreasing the size of the home zones is the implementation of a rotational schedule where home zones are switched between groups in the back office unit. The idea is to increase movement as well as to give everyone equal access to the “nicer” parts of the building. Also, as mentioned earlier, the organization realized that the office size was underestimated from the beginning and therefore another adaptation about to be made is to add new floor space to the overall layout. Additionally, some of the less utilized ABW areas have been replaced by more regular desks. As a result, the proportion between regular desks and other workstations as well as the number of desks per employee is changing compared to what was initially intended.

Discussion: Balancing order and chaos in the generative building

The variety of work patterns among employees at the Gothenburg office implies different demands on the work environment. Connections can therefore be drawn to translation theory, seeing the changes made at the Gothenburg office to suit the local circumstances as a translation process where the idea is translated according to the interests of its users (Latour, 1986). Although some employees feel like the new office is not as well suited to their way of working as for others, the idea is that this gap will be bridged with time and continuous translations. Already a number of changes based on bottom-up initiatives have been made, some of which are the smaller home zones and the introduction of a rotational schedule. These are good examples of how a new problem have arisen and in turn provoked an innovative solution, supporting the idea by Kornberger & Clegg (2004) that the generative building not only should provide the flexibility to overcome such problems, but give rise to them in the first place. The concept of rotating zones is a creative and innovative idea to deal with the issue of people feeling unfairly treated when it comes to the location of their home zone. That way the new office concept seems to have increased the inventiveness and will to experiment among employees. Fittingly, the ABW concept as such is inherently flexible and changeable, making this possible.

Kornberger & Clegg (2004) explain the experimental aspect of the generative building by referring to the way it tries to combine order and chaos by positioning itself on the borderline between the ordered and the disordered. At the Gothenburg office, “chaos” can be symbolized by the existence of different activity areas to be used by employees, both in the way it was intended as well as through individual interpretations. “Order”, on the other hand, can be symbolized by the three principles and the fact that there are certain rules and norms for how to use the activity areas. For example, a meeting room is intended for collaborative work and the lounge area is intended to work as a space for informal meetings. By combining the ordered and disordered in this manner, the goal of the building is to support movement and change rather than the static, as argued by Kornberger & Clegg (2004).

Using the ABW office in practice

Despite the existence of presentation materials and information documents concerning Bank Unlimited the goals and purposes of the ABW concept do not seem to have fully reached out to the employees. A common denominator among interviewees is that they are not fully aware of the official purpose; they have rather made their own interpretation of it. The most common interpretation of the purpose among employees and managers is that it is about reducing costs. Some also believe that it will increase collaboration, knowledge sharing and flexibility. Among those, the new office concept is believed to contribute to one of the organization's core values "One Bank Team". However, when asked about her team members' perception of the purpose of Bank Unlimited, one manager answers:

I think many of them feel that they have sort of been kicked into this. We haven't really spoken enough about why, the advantages and how it's supposed to be used. It's more like: this is how we work now. Adapt or die.

The quote also points toward a lack of knowledge about the intended use of the office. In particular the employees at the private/corporate banking department have little knowledge about the types of workstations available for them to use and the fact that they are allowed to dispose of all the facilities throughout the office. This issue does not appear as big among the back office employees, who generally have a better idea of what activity areas exist. When asked how she learned to use the office, one of the back office employees says:

I don't know, you just like pick up a little from here and a little from there, that this is the way we work roughly.

A manager attributes some of the observed behaviors to the fact that people are creatures of habit, valuing security and consistency over uncertainty and change. This is made apparent by the fact that respondents, from every studied department, agree that little movement is taking place between different home zones at the office. One of the architects highlights the same thing, saying that entering a big office and choosing freely where to sit can be a source of discomfort for many. Conversely, working in the same area every day brings a sense of security and comfort. The majority of respondents express reluctance towards moving far away from their home zone since entering another zone or floor level is connected to a feeling of discomfort. One manager says:

We have this home zone and if we move into the next zone, there is like a whole other division that works with back office and possessions, so we don't have much relationship at all. So we don't move between each other's zones.

According to one of the architects their experience is that just by using the term "zone" or something that implies that there are boundaries on a blueprint, people are likely to stop moving outside of them. The above quote also suggest that the different departmental and

group divisions “on paper” inhibit the movement between zones because of the feeling of having no relationship with one another. However, what really determines people's sense of belongingness, according to one of the architects, is the location of their personal storage space and lockers. The movement of different groups can thus be controlled by the placement of these. It is also clear that the physical proximity to areas within the office has an impact on how they are used. Since the office is quite large the distances between the different activity areas seem to act like a barrier inhibiting the switching between them. If an area is close to a specific group it tends to be used by the employees of that particular group, and if not they rarely move there. This is true even though the employees could have gotten great use of the specific activity area to perform their current task. One manager expresses:

We don't have a lounge area in our zone, even though we are actually the ones with the biggest need of brainstorming with each other. Instead, the lounge area is located in another home zone, in back office, where I have never seen anyone use it. (...) According to ABW we should then move from our home zone to the lounge but people don't do that, because it has to be close to them.

The number of different activity areas used by employees varies within the group of respondents. Many employees, from every studied department, only use one or a few different workstations during a workday. Other respondents, usually but not exclusively managers, do in fact make use of the different activity areas and move around between them as intended. Some examples mentioned are working in the silent room or in one of the small unbookable rooms when taking an internal course requiring deep focus, sitting in the lounge area with a multi-functional group to discuss a customer's full bank commitment or taking a seat by one of the higher “touchdown” tables when only spending time between two meetings. One employee says:

At this office, I have the possibility to change environment to what I need at the moment. Which was harder at the previous, traditional office.

However, there are other individual interpretations of the concept that go against the intended use of different activity areas. For example, the meeting rooms are mentioned as an area where people create their own personal workspace, even though this is not the way they were intended to be used. Some employees tend to occupy meeting rooms for a whole day, even when there is no meeting taking place. One employee explains having a hard time concentrating in the open landscape so she books a meeting room for herself when she has the need to work without being disturbed. She says:

There are always meeting rooms available. If everyone worked the way I do, booking rooms just to make calls, the whole concept would fail. So it's not really adapted to my needs, so I try to adapt it to my way of working instead.

Another example of an area that is not used as intended is the lounge area near the back office units. Since the coffee break room is located far away for many employees, the lounge area is often used as a place where people spend their breaks, drinking coffee and talking loudly. This way, the area is often not suitable for the informal meetings intended to take place there. Contributing to the fact that the lounge area is not used as intended is also the fact that the units located close to it, such as the back office department, do not have work tasks that require that sort of workplace. Furthermore, some employees within the back office department mention that they have a lot of paperwork that does not fit into the layout as it is today. Therefore, the floor beside the desk is used as storage, even though the clean desk principle applies there as well. As one employee explains:

I can't solve it any other way than accepting the desk as it is, but then I will have to use the floor as well. And then it will look the way it does.

Interestingly, among all respondents, there seem to be no dissatisfaction related to not being able to personalize the workplace the way that you can when having a fixed workstation. By contrary, several interviewees perceive such personalization as negative since it creates a feeling of exclusion and inhibits employees from different units to mix and socialize across group borders. Many express that they would not want to go back to having their own workstation. One manager says:

If you look at the old place when I started there as a manager, we had a group that had screens between them where they didn't see each other, they put up family photos and schedules and everything. You had your own little office there. I don't like that, so I'm positive towards this openness, that you are not stuck in one place.

Connecting to the theme of control over the workplace, there are several solutions in place at the office that aims to decrease the environmental impact, since the office building is a so called "environmental building". This can be observed in e.g. elevators that are generating energy when moving up and down, water taps in the bathrooms designed to reduce the amount of water used and lights turned off automatically after business hours. A manager explains during a shadowing session that if one stays at the office after business hours and the lights turn off, one can "buy" more time by pressing certain buttons on the wall.

Discussion: Individual translations and control over the workspace

In the process of embedding the ABW idea in the studied organization it is clear that employees have made their own interpretations of both its purpose and structure. According to Czarniawska (2015), however, this is a natural part of the process and an effect of the fact that the translation of an idea lies in the hands of every individual actor in contact with it (Latour, 1986). It also suggests that the management has been unable to design and introduce the new concept into the organization in a top-down manner. Instead the employees have

created their own prototype of the concept, which is in line with the argument by Yanow (2010) saying that intended use does not control practical use and what people do. An example is the fact that, despite the inherent physical flexibility of the concept, employees feel confined to a specific area for two reasons. On the one hand because the bank has opted to use the term “zone” to denote the different parts of the office where particular units belong. This is consistent with the architect’s experience that using the term “zone” makes people stay within it. On the other hand, boundaries are created based on the formal organizational structure of the bank. The quotes of the respondents give a feeling that employees do not mix or communicate over department boundaries to a large extent since they do not have any “relationship” with each other. In other words, the mobility across the entire office is in fact restricted by these two types of “mental” boundaries just as if they were physical ones. Since a key to reaping the benefits of an ABW office, according to Parker (2016) is the flexibility and mobility of employees every type of boundary, physical or mental, is a problem. Interestingly, both Dale and Burrell (2010) as well as Schriefer (2005) argue that the generative building is all about breaking down barriers between people while, in this case, our study suggest that it has actually helped to establish them. Thus, if the ambition of the bank management is for that prototype to correspond more closely to the intended use of the concept there is a need of putting more effort into making every aspect of the organization support the ABW concept, i.e. into managing the continuous socio-material building process related to it (Skogland, 2017). This also includes making sure that information about the use and purpose of the new concept is properly communicated, since it is made clear that this is not the case at the bank as of today. However, the employees’ own interpretations of the purpose being to reduce costs is aligned with the view of Parker (2016), that the implementation of ABW is driven by a cost management agenda more than anything else.

There are several ways in which employees act upon the concept of ABW, translating it in their own way and according to their own interests and needs (Latour, 1986). One example is the employee who transforms the meeting rooms into a personal working space to get away from the noise of the open landscape and to work with higher concentration. That is despite the fact that it is not the way it was intended to be used in the first place. Another example lies in the fact that the physical proximity to different activity areas seems to have more power in terms of how they are used as opposed to the form and characteristics of the area itself. In this case physical proximity has become a more powerful non-human actor than first expected, thus confirming the relevance of the idea of “generalized symmetry” where human and non-human actors are treated equally (Callon, 1984). The fact that the usage pattern of activity areas is not necessarily influenced by their built in functionality is an example of how function, in this case, follows form as argued by Kornberger & Clegg (2004). In this case space is made sense of individually in a bottom-up manner, thus pointing at how power is a cause rather than an effect of collective action (Latour, 1986). In some instances however, the activity areas and the ABW office concept is used as intended. Some examples are choosing to work in the silent room, booking a small meeting room when having the need of discussing something privately, sitting in the lounge area with a cross-functional group to

discuss one particular customer's full bank commitment or taking a seat by one of the higher "touchdown" tables when only spending time between meetings.

The study also shows interesting differences to parts of the organizational space field. In theory, a lack of possibility to control the immediate work environment as well as not being able to personalize the workstation is connected to dissatisfaction among employees (Ekstrand & Damman, 2016; Bodin Danielsson & Bodin, 2009). However, this is contested by the respondents of the study, claiming the very opposite, that the personalization of the fixed workstations experienced in the past is seen as something negative and that most would not want to go back to their old way of working. Continuing on the theme of control over the work environment, the solutions in place to decrease environmental impact of the office building, e.g. regulation of lighting, creates a centralized control over these ambient factors. As mentioned, this lack of control is linked to employee dissatisfaction (Ekstrand & Damman, 2016) and often implies a conflict of interest between employees and management since centralization reduces costs but removes control from employees (Baldry, 1999). In the bank's case however, it seems like the centralization of the control of ambient factors is legitimized by referring to its environmental benefits, thus putting the lid on a potential conflict altogether.

Acting upon the ABW principles

The first two principles, clean desk and free seating, are widely known by employees and managers at the Gothenburg office. Generally, these principles are followed but based on an individual interpretation of their meaning. The desks are emptied on a daily basis, meaning that the employees clear their workstation when leaving the office for the day. However, when it comes to clearing the desk when absent during the day, e.g. to have a meeting or going for lunch, the opinions and behaviors differ. Since this aspect of the principle does not have a clearly defined rule it is open for interpretation. This behavior is also affected by the fact that the extra work and time required to set up and clear the workstation is experienced by many as time consuming and inconvenient. The result is that some employees leave their things on a desk the whole day while some might bring their belongings when leaving for a longer period of time. Furthermore, the definition of "a longer period of time" is also subject to individual interpretation. When deciding if to clear the desk or not, it is more about creating an understanding of what is appropriate within one's specific group. One employee explains:

If you know that you are going to be away the whole afternoon you would bring your things but if you are going for a two hour meeting you leave the stuff on the desk (...) I mean, the basic thought is that you should bring your things. But no one does it, so you don't do it (...) And then you have to have some feeling for it as well, if there is a lot of people you should maybe bring it.

The free seating principle is generally followed but also here there is room for individual interpretation of its meaning. Most employees express the feeling that free seating is applied even though it is only within their own home zone. Since the units are grouped together and

the home zones differ in size, applying free seating can mean simply changing from one seat to the one next to it the day after. For an employee in a larger home zone, there might be a larger amount of seats to choose from, giving free seating a slightly different meaning. The third principle, mobility, is not as outspoken as the other two and hence not as widely known among the respondents. It is more of an effect of the ABW concept in general by providing the right conditions for mobility, as expressed by the respondents. This despite the fact that some feel like the concept and its principles do not fit their tasks and everyday work pattern particularly well. However, the IT solutions provided to support mobility, e.g. Skype and Follow Me Print, are used to quite a large extent.

In general there is no formal control of the adherence to the principles at the office but as mentioned earlier, there are so called floor hosts present at site, a service the bank purchases from an external company. Apart from dealing with practicalities, such as providing office supplies, they can also signal to management if particular areas get messy or if they notice other apparent breaches of the basic principles. This, however, does not seem to have considerable impact on the extent to which employees follow the principles. Furthermore the managers do not have any formal processes for controlling or maintaining the principles, instead the way they should be followed is more based on custom and mutual understanding. One manager explains:

We don't check the principles much at all I would say. I don't go around marking who's stuff is still there by the afternoon and give them a note. It's up to each unit to decide and govern. Instead I try to make it look decent and clean up. But nothing formal, sometimes I tease them a little and say that it looks like they have been sitting at the same seat for two weeks and then they usually move to the next seat the day after.

The fact that the principles are not formally controlled and room is given for individual interpretations by employees as well as their units implies that unofficial rules have been developed. One example is the lack of movement discussed earlier. It implies that, even though free seating exists as a principle, some respondents express the feeling of encroaching on other units' spaces if taking a seat there. One employee says:

I think it was better when it was completely free seating. Now it's like you are supposed to sit with your group but there might not be space available there anyway so then there is some kind of middle ground that I don't think is good. And especially not when we got extra staff in, because then they encroach on the others' zones.

This feeling of territoriality could also be an effect of the rearrangement of home zones that was described in an earlier section. The fact that home zones were decreased in size, now containing a smaller group of people, might further increase the feeling of intruding if moving

into other groups' zones. When asked what would happen if one took a seat in another group's home zone, one manager says:

They would wonder why you are sitting there, I think. But you will realize quite quickly that you don't have anything in common, you could just as well have sat in a different company.

Another example of an established unofficial rule is that people who are first at the office in the morning always get to choose the workstations that are considered to be the best ones, e.g. the window seats. This means that employees arriving later do not get the opportunity to choose their desk but has to be satisfied with what is left, a problem perceived by employees from every studied department. To deal with this issue the back office units have, as mentioned before, decided to introduce a rotational schedule in which the different groups switch home zones on a regular basis. This way everyone will have access to the "good" spots in the building and mobility will increase.

Discussion: Function follows form and the power of principles

A fundamental part of the concept is the principles of clean desk, free seating and mobility. They also show an example of a translation process having taken place in the studied case (Latour, 1986), since e.g. the fact that there are no clear guidelines as to when to clear the desk based on the length of absence gives room for a wide range of individual interpretations. It can also be seen as triggering the creation of internal rules and the establishment of norms for appropriate behavior. These are, in turn, likely to vary between different groups and departments. This phenomenon could be explained using the bottom up, "function follows form", perspective on organizational space as proposed by Kornberger & Clegg (2004). In other words, the form (i.e. the principles) set by management is not directly and automatically controlling the function (i.e. if and how the principles are followed). The principles are not powerful simply because they are stated by the project team, instead they are dependent on how employees themselves act upon them. As one employee says, since no one cleans their desks when leaving for meetings you do not do it yourself either. In other words, the power of the principles is a consequence rather than a cause of the collective action (Latour, 1986).

In connection to this, it also becomes evident that space is a social construction (Clegg & Kornberger, 2006) and that the spaces and places around us construct us as we construct them (Dale & Burrell, 2008), since the meanings of the principles at the office are made sense of by the actors within it in a recursive process. But one should not forget that the principles are not completely disregarded, they are still acknowledged as important at the Gothenburg office and followed, even if that is through own interpretation of their meaning. There is a feeling of employees within the groups exerting control over each other. Respondents say that one "gets a feeling" of what is appropriate behavior in the office and follow the principles according to that. This could be connected to what Foucault (2003) demonstrated through his idea of Panopticum, where surveillance and the feeling of its presence is there even when the surveillor is not. If the employees feel like they are surveilled in the large open landscape

where everyone shares the same activity areas, they might tend to follow the principles to a greater extent. Since they are always surrounded by colleagues, which are the ones determining how to follow the principles as well as controlling each other in this matter, surveillance is always present.

Intended and Unintended Consequences of ABW

As an effect of introducing the new ABW office concept, both intended and unintended consequences have emerged. Many respondents agree that ABW has had a positive effect on cooperation and the possibility for different functions to have a dialogue. Their belief is that these positive effects are partly attributable to the fact that you constantly overhear what others are talking about. Overhearing implies that learning from each other as well as asking for advice comes more naturally, justifying why one of the managers at the private banking department refers to the office as “a learning environment”. This fact is generally supported by respondents who are new at the bank or in their position, in the process of learning their new tasks. They very much seem to appreciate the fact that the office makes it easy to ask for help, decide who to sit next to in order to “tap into” their knowledge and have access to focus rooms or even working from home when doing internal coursework. Another positive consequence of overhearing mentioned by a manager is that she feels closer to the customer since she now hears when her employees speak to the customers in a way that she could not at her previous office. The fact that everyone shares the same space across department boundaries is also perceived to contribute to better knowledge sharing and an increased feeling of being part of the organization itself. One employees says:

I mean, when we were in the other building it was just us and you didn't have any feeling of what the rest of the bank, like; “ok they belong to the same as we”. Here it's more a feeling of belonging. That everyone is part of the bank.

Connected to the increased feeling of belonging to the organization, some respondents express the feeling of decreased hierarchy and a feeling of being close to the managers at the office, since everyone shares the same space. At previous offices, managers were often situated in a separate space. One employee explains:

The managers can sit wherever they want but most often they sit amongst us, which is really good since you always have the manager close if you need advice. And also, the entire Gothenburg management team are in the same building as well, which is really cool because it creates a completely different feeling when working, to have them that close and meeting them every day.

Interestingly, the aspect of overhearing in the open landscape is simultaneously seen as a disadvantage since it implies that employees have a harder time concentrating at work. This opinion is shared among employees across all studied departments. Another challenge connected to overhearing, particularly for managers, is the issue of confidentiality. A large

part of the managers' work involves discussing information and issues regarding employees or business strategy that must not be spread freely. Confidentiality is also an issue for operative employees since their work related to customers is subject to banking secrecy and should only be accessed by the employee responsible for the particular customer. For both managers and employees the confidentiality issue becomes an important aspect affecting their choice of workstations. Employees from every studied department claim that the sensitivity of the information they will handle has a big impact on the type of seat they choose. One manager describes it as follows:

It is not very often I can choose to sit here (in the open lounge area) (...) For coach sessions you might be able to sit like this but if you're about to talk about something that nobody should hear you need to sit in a space that can be closed. (...) What we are talking about are often things that concern our part of the business, our customers, how we handle it. It's a bit like; you don't go around everywhere talking loudly about that, you want to keep it somewhat within our area.

Another consequence of the new office is the fact that it has given rise to a new way of categorizing the different offices working closely with customers. Previously when they were spread out on different smaller localities around Gothenburg they each had a geographical designation corresponding to where they were situated. The same groups are still used and each of them are referred to as a bank office even though they are now all in the same office building. The new groups created after the move however are leaving this geographical way of thinking in favor of a new functional categorization, but they are still referred to as different "offices". Some examples are one office focusing on enrolling new customers, one focusing on wealth management and another one focusing on customer support.

Respondents also refer to more practical consequences that the implementation of the new office has resulted in. One example is the fact that the clean desk principle implies that there is no build-up of paper or general litter but that the office is automatically kept cleaner compared to traditional offices. Facilitating this is also the development towards decreased paper handling, which is a process that has been ongoing since before moving into the new offices. However, the move has accelerated the process towards a completely paperless office, which respondents see as something positive. A consequence of this is also that the risk of overlooking particular tasks, because it was written on a paper that disappeared or because somebody got sick and could not get to work one day, is perceived to have decreased significantly. Some work tasks, however, still have a character implying that paperwork cannot be left completely. One manager also points out that, even though the individual workstations are generally cleaner in the new office, there are responsibility issues when it comes to the shared spaces. According to her it is hard to decide who should be responsible for keeping them tidy. Manning certain shared spaces for service and security reasons, such as the customer lounge, also become problematic because of the lack of a natural division of responsibility.

Discussion: Things do not always turn out as intended

As argued by Yanow (2010) intended use does not control practical use and what people do. Kornberger & Clegg (2004) acknowledge this fact in their idea of the generative building, transforming unintended use into something very much the opposite. In a generative building, people's usage patterns and interpretations, whatever they may be, are all, if not intended, at least expected. This goes hand in hand with translation theory as described by Latour (1986), which applied to the ABW concept at the bank reveals how it has changed from the initial idea to something very different when put into practice. The aspect of overhearing, which is one of the consequences of ABW at the Gothenburg office, has led to increased cooperation within the organization and among its members, making it a learning environment. This is in line with what Falk (2015) said about how companies today strive to increase employee innovativeness through cooperation, and that this is also believed to be a main objectives behind implementing a solution like ABW (Veldhoen + Company, n.d.). In contrast to our previous finding that the ABW concept, to a certain extent, has created more boundaries this case is actually an example of the opposite. As a learning environment the Gothenburg office manages to break down barriers to cooperation and communication just like Dale & Burrell, (2010) and Schreifer (2005) argues. The fact that a manager mentions that the overhearing also makes her feel closer to the customer and more involved in her employees' work points towards a contribution to the bank's strategic goals, e.g. "omni core" and "One Bank Team". Therefore, the generative building could also be considered to increase the identification of groups and individuals with the organization and its goals (Dale & Burrell, 2010; Schreifer, 2005). That the aspect of overhearing seems to bring as many positive implications for employees as negative ones is unfortunate, but likely inescapable to some extent. It only further supports the notion that things not always turn out as intended (Yanow, 2010).

Another interesting consequence of the new ABW office is connected to hierarchy. The symbolic power of organizational spaces is often used to reinforce hierarchical differences by e.g. having more space and more control over it the higher up in the hierarchy you get (Baldry, 1999). In the studied organization however, the case is the opposite. Employees express a feeling of being closer to managers since they are located in and using the same workspace as the rest of the employees. This way, hierarchical levels have become blurred giving way for increased transparency and team feeling. One can see the building as promoting the type of corporate culture the company wants to have (Marrewijk, 2009). The building and its interior space could be seen as signaling that all members are more on the same level when it comes to hierarchy and benefits, since everyone shares the same spaces and types of workplaces. This is in line with what Baldry (1997) argued, that buildings and their spaces also send signals about status and behaviors. Connecting further to the aspect of hierarchy, at a traditional office where employees have assigned seats, an initiative as the one of rotating home zones explained earlier would most likely not have been possible. There, the structures available may be seen as invariable and accepted as the way the organization "does things", end of story (Baldry, 1999). It is likely that the assigned seats and location of the different employees' personal workstations would not have been questioned to the same

extent. At the ABW office everyone has the same opportunity to take advantage of the office and its different spaces making the organization flatter in hierarchy as a result. However, if a goal of the new ABW office was to promote a flatter organization and increase collaboration by mixing different departments through free seating, it is somewhat curious that it was the regional management that took the initiative to create the smaller home zones in the first place. Maybe the effects regarding increased collaboration, mobility and cross-functional working would have been even greater if this change had not been made. However, we must also remember that the reason for the change has equally as much to do with confidentiality issues, which are particularly important related to the topics discussed within the management team.

Discussion

Throughout the study, it has become clear that the use of ABW as an office solution is a complex matter that is not easily defined in terms of success, how it is to be handled and how it works in general. As a result, a number of tensions related to how the concept is used in practice standing in a paradoxical relationship to one another, has been found. The discussion in this section will revolve around the four paradoxes considered most significant to understanding the studied phenomenon.

Paradox 1: The grand idea vs. the practice at the bank

Looking at the journey of translations of the ABW idea, which started in the minds of the members of the project group and ended in the practical reality of the Gothenburg office, it is clear that the “idea world” where the journey began and the “practical world” where it ended up stands in a paradoxical relationship to one another. In the “idea world” the creators did not have to take seemingly trivial practical details into account when dreaming up a grand vision of a concept aiming to revolutionize the way people work. In the “practical world”, however, things such as geographical distance, noise and confidentiality proved to be incredibly powerful actors, greatly affecting the success of that vision.

The study showed that, when implemented in practice, the ABW concept is not always used as intended. As argued by Kornberger & Clegg (2004), that does not have to be a bad thing in itself but if the reason is practical details that could have been foreseen, it might be a different story. In the studied case, the amount of switching between different activity areas in the office is rather low. This goes against the argument by Parker (2016) that ABW offices requires employees to be mobile and flexible in their way of working. An important reason for the low switching seems to be the geographical proximity between different activity areas, some of which are situated quite far apart. Employees tend not to move long distances in order to switch to another type of activity area just because it is slightly better suited to perform a particular task. Another practical aspect restricting the mobility of employees is overhearing. Employees need to take overhearing into account when choosing workstation since they are handling confidential information. At the same time Hoendervanger et al. (2016) found that employee satisfaction related to ABW is tightly connected to increased switching behavior. This study showed that generally, those least satisfied with the ABW

solution at the Gothenburg office are those who do not switch workstations often, i.e. stationary employees. The study therefore very much confirms previous research conducted by Hoendervanger et al (2016) as well as Skogland (2017), saying that mobile employees who switch often between activity settings are generally more satisfied with ABW. In other words, there seem to exist a kind of “mobility threshold” which is crucial to overcome for employees before starting to feel satisfied with the ABW office. The same thing is discussed by Leesman (2016) as “employee inertia” comparing employees to a stationary body requiring an extra push to start moving but, once up to speed, easily keeps its momentum. When the threshold is overcome and the mobility has increased, satisfaction among employees tend to follow (Hoendervanger et. al., 2016; Skogland, 2017).

The organizational structure on paper is another practical aspect that has created obstacles for employees to use the ABW concept as intended. Most importantly the groups and teams that exist on paper seem to create invisible boundaries inside the office, which implies that employees do not mix and work in cross-functional teams as much as intended. This has triggered a process in which the new physical office structure and the organizational structure recursively affect one another to develop into a unity better supporting the organizational goals. Such a recursive relationship between physical and social structures follows the argumentation by Dale & Burrell (2008) and Kornberger & Clegg (2004). The recursive relationship has been made evident throughout the duration of the study, partly by the fact that the earlier geographically categorized “offices” have transformed into functionally categorized ditos and partly by the fact that the last round of interviews showed that employees have started to break the unofficial boundaries to work more in cross-functional, “omni-core teams” as mentioned by one of the managers.

If we relate the fact that practicalities have become important non-human actors, with a big impact on the way employees use the concept, to what Kornberger & Clegg (2004) said about the generative building and how it is supposed to be multifaceted and flexible, it seems like visionaries and idea-makers have assumed that it becomes flexible just by providing different activity areas inside a building and forgotten that flexibility is as much determined by whether the employees can actually use it in a flexible way. In other words, the different activity areas in the office do not become important actors until they are actually put to use. This, however, should be seen in the light of the concept of “friction” discussed by Czarniawska-Joerges (1994), which is created when traveling ideas meet ideas in residence. The “resistance” experienced at the Gothenburg office as well as the fact that parts of the ABW concept are not used as intended could, especially in the social world, easily be interpreted as a negative aspect inhibiting the further spread of the ABW idea. But does this really have to be the case? Seeing it from a translational perspective it is the friction between the existing procedures, history and experiences that provides ideas with energy to move forward (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994). So maybe it is the friction that will further develop the ABW solution as it moves on within and from the bank into other contexts. This in a recursive process, translating both ideas in residence at the bank and the traveling idea of ABW.

Paradox 2: The need for group cooperation vs. individual mobility

Another recurring theme in the study is the fact that, to do their job many of the employees need to discuss different aspects of their work with their closest colleagues. This implies sitting closely together in groups within their home zones. That, in turn, creates difficulties following the mobility and free seating principles since it is harder for an entire group to be mobile at the office compared to a single individual. Hence, a second paradox of this concept is that even though increased collaboration is seen as one of ABW's main benefits (Veldhoen + Company, n.d.), the greater the need for it the less suitable ABW seems to be.

To meet the need of sitting tightly together in teams, the home zones have been rearranged and made smaller while the free seating principle still applies within them. In other words a translation process, as discussed by Latour (1986), has taken place to mold the concept according to the specific contextual conditions. However, there is still a perceived difficulty in terms of combining the need for cooperation and the basic ABW principles. Based on this, it seems like the ABW solution at the bank is best suited for "lone wolves", e.g. managers, who are not as dependent on cooperating with the same colleagues as are the operative employees. This is confirmed by the respondents who generally believe that managers are better suited for ABW at the bank. Against this background, it comes as no surprise that problems arise when the need for collaboration in groups is high at an ABW office. According to Dale & Burrell (2008) modern employees require their work environments to support collaboration and communication. Contrary to cooperation within a group, as discussed above, collaboration across groups and departments is perceived to have increased as a result of the ABW concept. This follows the general perception among employees that it has contributed to creating a greater team feeling for the organization as a whole.

Paradox 3: The inherent flexibility of ABW vs. the organization's need for a standardized solution

The ABW concept, referred to as Bank Unlimited, was developed by the project organization together with the team of architects aiming to create a solution suitable to the specific organization. As a large organization there is a need for the bank to keep complexity down by implementing a similar concept at all sites, i.e. a standardized solution. At the same time, one of the core ideas with ABW is its flexibility and possibility to be adapted to different needs. The study points towards a paradox here, namely the fact that a standardized concept is rolled out that has a built in idea of being flexible, creating a difficult balance between compromise and perfect fit.

One recurring theme in the study is the fact that many, often employees in the back office units with a perceived stationary work pattern, do not feel like the ABW solution is suitable to their way of working. However, the unique characteristic of the ABW idea is that it is supposed to be flexible and adaptable to every individual and their own interpretations, regardless of his/her needs. Remember, being multifaceted and flexible is exactly what the generative building is all about (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004). At the same time it also implies that the solution does not tend to be perfect for anyone. Following Becker & Steele (1990), it

is more of an acceptable compromise for most. It could be that the compromise lies further away from an optimal solution for certain employees, in our case those with a stationary work pattern, than for others. As argued by Appel-Meulenbroek et al. (2011), Backman (2017) and Wyllie et al. (2012) in such cases a perfect fit solution that is adapted to the specific group might be preferable. But then you inevitably end up with the issues discussed by Kornberger & Clegg (2004) related to the terminal building. Such a building has to be designed based on previous experiences and ideas of future needs, which is problematic in itself. Moreover, what happens when the world changes? Then, the terminal building becomes a firm and immobile colossus that requires excessive time, effort and other resources to change. This pinpoints the difficulty for the bank to find the balance between compromise and perfect fit in this particular case and for ABW projects in general.

It is also clear that those responsible have had to make difficult decisions regarding the balance between adaptation of the concept on the one hand and keeping it standardized, for the sake of cost efficiency and scalability, on the other. The fact that alterations are necessary in order for the office to work for different users is acknowledged by both management as well as the project group initiating the ABW project. It is also coherent with the arguments of scholars in the field such as Appel-Meulenbroek et al. (2011), Backman (2017) and Wyllie et al. (2012). But how far is appropriate to go? And how do you decide which employees, groups and/or offices are “worthy” of adaptations and which ones are not? In this light, waiting for the “honeymoon phase” to pass before evaluating what issues still stand when the dust has settled and what is resolved when time has had its toll, seem like a quite good idea. Just like Becker & Steele (1990) argued, more choices regarding the physical space may require more tolerance and flexibility from employees and managers as well as a greater will to compromise between individual and group differences. These issues are in line with previous research on the field, acknowledging the difficulty inherent in trying to meet differing demands and weighing the needs of different stakeholders while trying to design a general concept (Gustafsson, 2006; Appel-Meulenbroek et. al., 2011)

As argued by Skogland (2017), when building socio-material relationships like an ABW solution, it is important to continuously manage the change process and not to consider it finished just because the material part of the project is. What is apparent in the study, however, is that coaching and continuous training in the new office concept does not seem to be fully at place. There are neither any established processes for teaching new employees about it. An effect of this is the relatively low awareness among employees about the official purpose of the concept as well as how it is to be used. That could end up being problematic as experienced by Marrewijk (2009) in his study of KPN’s corporate headquarters. Maybe this is where the real difference between the process of implementing the concept today and in the future will lie; the extent to which the purpose of such a project is communicated and motivated from higher levels in the organization.

Paradox 4: Form follows function vs. Function follows form

So, is the designer version of the Cartesian rationality true or not? Does form actually follow function or is it rather the other way around? There are certainly several aspects of this study

pointing towards an attempt to lead the organization using the form of the office to influence the function and in turn the social structures and behaviors within. One example is using the ABW concept to support the bank's strategy. This is in line with de Paoli et al. (2013), seeing the organizational space as part of the organization's corporate strategy and not the basis for it, which must be seen as a rational and sound idea in essence. However, it implies that somehow the Cartesian rationality "form always follows function" must be true if there is to be a possibility to lead the organization using the design of the organizational space. Is that really the case?

First of all it is clear that from the corporate management there is a belief that top down governing using form to influence function and in turn the social behavior is possible. This is shown by e.g. the fact that it is a standardized concept being implemented across a big part of a large organization, giving little space for local adaptation. It is a decision taken at the highest corporate level and the different subunits, let alone the "regular" employees, have had little or no chance to resist. Both employees and managers claim that they do not feel like they were listened to during the process of developing and implementing the new concept. Many feel like the design of the concept was already decided beforehand and that they more or less just had to accept it as it was. Researchers within the field make clear that trying to implement a standardized solution is not the way to go if you want a successful implementation (Appel-Meulenbroek et. al., 2011; Backman, 2017; Wyllie et al., 2012), which somehow points towards the existence of other interests affecting this change. The idea of using spaces and physical structures to exert power is not strange in itself, it follows the arguments of Kornberger & Clegg (2004) as well as Marrewijk (2009) that design of physical space has a lot to do with power. However, they also conclude that it does not mean that the spaces are used as intended. In other words it is all a question about the causality between form and function; what comes first?

Despite the attempts to exert top-down control through the implementation of this office concept it has also become clear through the study that form does not always follow function. You cannot govern an organization in detail by implementing a physical design that you expect will lead social behavior as intended. As soon as employees start using the concept in practice they will make individual interpretations and a bottom-up, function-follows-form, causality emerges. This shows how power cannot be stored but is an effect rather than a cause of collective action, as argued by Latour (1986). There are several examples of this among which the reinterpretation of free seating through the establishment of smaller home zones, the fact that employees rarely move between zones and that some activity areas are not used as intended, e.g. the lounge area used as a coffee room, are just a few. The use of the ABW principles is another example, where the form (i.e. the principles) set by management is not directly and automatically controlling the function (i.e. if and how the principles are followed). The feeling of decreased hierarchy as a result of ABW could also be added to the list and is in itself even facilitating the bottom-up effects at the office. That being said, there are still ways in which the office is being used as intended e.g. in terms of mobility, cross-functional cooperation and certain activity areas. Therefore, what we are looking at is actually

neither a top-down (form follows function) nor a bottom-up (function follows form) process but rather a recursive process, just like the one described by Kornberger & Clegg (2004).

Conclusion and practical implications

Organizations today are using workplace layouts as a strategic tool to gain competitive advantage and company growth, since architecture is both about organizing space as well as social order. In this study we have investigated how a sociomaterial concept such as Activity Based Working has been translated and acted upon in the context of a large Nordic bank. The study makes contributions to the body of empirical research in the organizational space field based on an ontology in which the social and the material are treated equally. With the aid of our theoretical tool set we have been able to draw conclusions with implications for practitioners, which will be presented in the following section.

Firstly, the study showed how the visionary idea and the practical world in which it is later embedded sometimes differ quite substantially. Seemingly trivial practical details suddenly become powerful actors jeopardizing the success of the concept. At the same time our study suggest that such problems tend to be amended through a recursive process in which a better fit between the social and material is automatically created over time. Most of the “powerful practicalities” in terms of their impact on the practical use of the concept affect employee mobility, which is a fundamental principle to making the concept work as intended. When sufficient mobility is not upheld the office stops working as an ABW office and becomes like any other regular office. Overall, the study also showed that employees who do not switch seats often are the least satisfied with the solution, which is consistent with previous research.

Secondly, ABW is often promoted as a concept that improves cooperation but, as a matter of fact, our study gives clear indications of the opposite. In practice, even though digital tools designed to help people cooperate without being in physical proximity to one another are put in place, people prefer to sit close in groups when cooperating. That, in turn, substantially inhibits the mobility of employees and therefore their ability to use the ABW office as intended. For that reason we conclude that ABW seems to be better suited for “lone wolves” who are not dependent on others to get their job done.

A third paradoxical relationship found is between standardization and adaptation. One of the benefits of ABW is its scalability based on the fact that it is often implemented as a standardized concept. The idea is that its inherent flexibility implies that it should suit everyone. However, it turns out that the concept’s inherent flexibility is not sufficient to give everyone a good working environment. Instead, a solution like ABW is and will always be a compromise for everyone. That might not be a big issue for some, but for others it most definitely is. The alternative is a perfect fit solution, referred to as a terminal building. The downside of the terminal building, however, is its inertia making it slow at adapting to a changing environment. What is also to be highlighted is the importance of continuous management of the sociomaterial building process, i.e. to provide coaching and training in the new concept, as well as not to regard the change process as finished just because the material part of the project is.

Finally, the study made clear that there have been attempts to lead the organization using the form of the office to influence its function and in turn the behaviors within. I.e. in a top down manner assuming that form always follows function. However, at the same time there are instances where the structures from the top are not giving the intended behavior at the office. Instead the users make their own interpretations and a bottom-up, function-follows-form, causality emerges. In those cases other factors than the simple functionality of the areas control their use. To summarize, what we are looking at is actually neither a top-down (form follows function) nor a bottom-up (function follows form) process but rather a recursive process taking place.

The drawn conclusions give rise to a number of implications for how, we believe, similar sociomaterial projects could be addressed. First of all, mapping out any practicalities that might have an impact on the concept should be given priority already when the vision is created. Secondly, information about employee mobility should be complemented with details about their need to cooperate in groups as the basis for making decisions on the concept design. Thirdly, the concept must not be implemented as a standardized solution but adapted to the local context. When doing these local adaptations it is important not be afraid of the “resistance” likely to occur. The friction occurring when ideas in residence meet traveling ideas gives it energy and should therefore be embraced to some extent. Finally, to ensure a smooth and successful use, emphasis needs to be put on continuously managing the sociomaterial building process, before as much as after the material parts are finished. A crucial part of this process is to properly communicate the purpose of the concept and the change.

This study gives room for further research within the area. One approach could be to extend the study by investigating how the concept was developed from the start, with more emphasis on the process before the concept steps into the specific context. This would give a deeper understanding of the subject and give valuable implications as a result. Another suggestion is to put more effort into observations to better include the non-human actors in the study. That way, the non-human objects would be given a clearer voice. A final idea is to turn the study around and make it into quantitative character, studying if an organization actually reaches the measurable goals through changing their physical workspace. All these suggestions would further add to the body of empirical research within the field of organizational space and contribute to the understanding of the field as a whole.

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