

# Newcastle University e-prints

---

**Date deposited:** 13<sup>th</sup> June 2012

**Version of file:** Author final

**Peer Review Status:** Not known

## **Citation for item:**

Reissner SC, Pagan V. [Anatomy of resistance in a partnership workspace](#). In: *7th Organization Studies Summer Workshop: Organizations as spaces of work*. 2012, Rhodes, Greece.

## **Further information on publisher website:**

<http://www.os-workshop.com/>

## **Publisher's copyright statement:**

This is the authors' version of a paper presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> Organization Studies Summer Workshop, and is reproduced here with the permission of the conference organisers.

## **Use Policy:**

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not for profit purposes provided that:

- A full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- A link is made to the metadata record in Newcastle E-prints
- The full text is not changed in any way.

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

**Robinson Library, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle upon Tyne.  
NE1 7RU. Tel. 0191 222 6000**

**7<sup>th</sup> Organization Studies Summer Workshop**  
***Organizations as spaces of work***  
**24-26 May 2012, Rhodes, Greece**

***Anatomy of resistance in a partnership work space***

Stefanie Reissner\* and Victoria Pagan

*Newcastle University Business School*

5 Barrack Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4SE, UNITED KINGDOM

\* Corresponding author, email: [stefanie.reissner@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:stefanie.reissner@newcastle.ac.uk)

## **Abstract**

In this paper, we examine organizational actors' responses to a new partnership work space, specifically looking at manifestations of resistance in the language of interviewees. We explore the effects of these responses on the construction of the partnership organization's socio-cultural space, in which all organizational actors play a part. Resistance is not characterized within a negative paradigm; rather, it is part of the normal range of responses as organizational actors negotiate their work place practice. We conclude that construction of the organization's socio-cultural space is constituted by organizational actors' past and present lived experiences which coexist and compete to negotiate, through a lens of resistance, the new partnership context.

Key words: discourse, partnership organization, resistance, social construction, work space

## **Introduction**

What are the manifestations of organizational actors' resistance when differing socio-cultural work spaces are brought together as a result of the formation of a public-private partnership? How do these manifestations of resistance affect the socio-cultural work space within this new boundary? While resistance in organizations is a well-researched phenomenon (see Ford et al. 2002 for a summary), it remains ill understood how it contributes to the construction of the socio-cultural space of a newly formed partnership organization. Socio-cultural work space is defined in terms of lived experience, representation and understanding (Taylor and Spicer 2007), sensemaking (e.g. Weick 1995; Sonenshein 2010) and personification (Baldry 1999). It is the 'multiple social contexts within which employees and managers operate' (Down and Taylor 2001: 7).

Through our research<sup>1</sup> we demonstrate that organizational actors, who have been brought together through the manufacture of a public-private partnership, jointly and discursively negotiate the organization's new socio-cultural space (see Ford and Harding 2004; Hernes et al. 2006). Their responses are characterized by adaptation, subversion and reinscription of its dominant discourses and associated messages as manifestations of resistance (Thomas and Davies 2005). Such responses are an integral part of the construction of a new organizational space and not part of a paradigm of resistance as conflict (e.g. Barbalet 1985; Clegg et al. 2006). Our paper follows calls for the study of resistance as socially situated practice (e.g. Putnam et al. 2005; Mumby 2005) and in specific contexts (e.g. Symon 2005), and brings together the literatures on resistance and work space dynamics.

In this paper, we explore the reciprocal relationship between organizational actors' social interactions as part of the organization's socio-cultural space – interactions that are both constructing the socio-cultural space and are constructed by it. We argue that the newly created, manufactured partnership work space is not neutral (Taylor and Spicer 2007), but one in which interpretations among different groups of organizational actors co-exist and compete (see Baldry 1999). Such differing interpretations are constituent parts of an organization's socio-cultural space.

Our research was set in NorthService Ltd.<sup>ii</sup>, a public-private partnership, which we consider to be a useful setting for the study of work space dynamics. Such partnerships are formed by bringing together, through organizational actors, existing and very different work spaces into a singular yet contested physical and socio-cultural work space. This new work space is labelled 'public-private partnership', establishing a new boundary through the dissolution of the existing boundaries of the 'private' work space (characterized as free market, profit driven, open competition) and the 'public' work space (characterized by strict governance, democratic influence, service for citizens). However, the new socio-cultural work space within the public-private partnership boundary is open to negotiation by organizational actors, and responses of resistance as conceptualized in this paper are an element of such negotiation.

In this paper, we dissect NorthService Ltd.'s struggle to merge, integrate and assimilate the socio-cultural work spaces of organizational actors formerly from the public sector and those formerly from the private sector as they seek to establish a new partnership work space. Our data was gathered during the first two years of

NorthService Ltd.'s existence with a focus on how organizational actors' responses have been pivotal in socially and discursively constructing its new socio-cultural work space (i.e. one of lived experience, see Taylor and Spicer 2007). Our paper focuses specifically on the manifestations of organizational actors' resistance in language and discourse (see Fleming and Sewell 2002), which both describe and construct the organization's socio-cultural space. Our contribution is an analysis of how organizational actors' responses of adaptation, subversion and reinscription of the discourses that dominate the organization (Thomas and Davies 2005) contribute to the social and discursive construction the socio-cultural work space of a public-private partnership.

### **Work space and resistance**

*'Space is an emblem, an icon, which produces the organization, contributing to the universe of meanings that encode the organization' (Chanlat 2006: 20).*

Organizations generally have formally boundaried physical and socio-cultural space (e.g. Baldry 1999) as 'constructing organizations involves the setting up or changing of entities in such a way that they come to resemble the general and abstract concept of organization' (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000: 722). In this respect, there is a relationship between the intangible, conceptual organization, including its socio-cultural space, and the formed organization, including its physical space. The whole of the organizational space (physical and socio-cultural) is invested with personal significance, representation and power (Chanlat 2006). An organization's physical space includes buildings, semi-fixed features like desks

which are potentially influenced by organizational actors (for example through personalization with artefacts which convey a message of ‘this is where I work and this is the sort of person I am’, Baldry 1999: 544), and casual space in communal areas. Taylor and Spicer (2007: 327) identified three formations of work space: (1) *distance*, i.e. the physical separation between things/people; (2) *materialized power relations*, i.e. the meaning of structural design; and (3) *experience*, i.e. representation and understanding.

We consider socio-cultural work space as an extension of Taylor and Spicer’s (2007: 333) third formation; ‘it is our perception and experiences of a space that give it life, animation, and make it occupied’. Hence, we focus our analysis on that abstract aspect of organizational space which is constructed by and through organizational actors (see Ford and Harding 2004; Hernes et al. 2006) and the way in which they seek to shape it. This perspective builds on the assumption that reality is socially constructed by organizational actors (see Berger and Luckmann 1966) through their interactions such as the conversations in which they engage (e.g. Ford 1999; Putnam et al. 2005; Thomas et al. 2011) by and through the organization’s space. ‘Discourse is the principal means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are.’ (Mumby and Clair 1997: 181).

Whilst the constitution of an organization’s physical space is largely employer-led, never more so in the manufacture of ‘new’ organizations (e.g. mergers, acquisitions, partnerships), the socio-cultural space is constructed jointly by organizational actors and can include ‘struggles of legitimacy’ (Vaara and Tienari 2011: 371), with material and social practices producing and consuming its values,

norms, behaviours and control (Taylor and Spicer 2007). The influence of the working environment (or space) on organizational actors' behaviours, values and priorities as 'contested terrain' (Baldry 1999: 536) has not been widely appreciated in the literature. Specifically, where two socio-cultural spaces are brought together through the manufacture of a partnership, in part involuntarily, there is a resultant space that is formed through negotiation of organizational actors' responses to their organizational context; in Mumby's (2005: 22) words, how they 'engage with, resist, accommodate, reproduce and transform the interpretive possibilities and meaning systems that constitute daily organizational life'.

Organizational actors' responses to a new organizational space are subject to variation (e.g. Edwards et al 1995) and include those which indicate resistance. Thomas and Davies (2005: 687) regard resistance as 'a constant process of adaptation, subversion and reinscription of dominant discourses. ...Resistance is, therefore, stimulated by the contradictions, weaknesses and gaps between alternative subject positions'. We conceptualize discourse as 'thick tissues of self-reinforcing and consistent opinions, stories, assumptions, words, etc. which inform different practices' (Gabriel 2008: 78). Resistance does not reside in individuals but 'is a function of the socially constructed reality in which someone lives' (Ford et al. 2002: 106). Hence, we follow Fleming and Sewell (2002: 863) who suggest that 'rather than looking for patently grandiose and global strategies of insurrection we may instead find it in the commonplace cracks and crevices of intersubjective relations and other quiet subterranean realms of organizational life.'

In addition, 'the identification and characterization of resistance will vary from situation to situation' (Symon 2005: 1643). Rather than approaching resistance as an

organizational deficit (e.g. Barbalet 1985), we agree with Clegg et al. (2006: 131) who contend that ‘...resistance is normal. Only an inability to see that the nature of social reality is socially constructed and thus appears differently to people who have different interests in its co-construction, negotiation and de-construction, would lead one to see resistance as in some way deviant’. Our analysis therefore builds on a constructionist understanding of resistance that allows for a more dynamic conceptualization (e.g. Ford et al. 2002; 2008; Thomas et al. 2011).

The socio-cultural space of a new partnership organization is, in part, talked into being (Gabriel 2008; Vaara and Tienari 2011) through negotiation of meaning displayed through organizational actors’ narratives. Resistance can be indicated in such narratives as well as through its constitution in language (e.g. Fleming and Sewell 2002) by contrasting different lived experiences. For example, ‘different discourses may compete for supremacy, or, alternatively may coexist while taking little notice of each other’ (Gabriel 2008: 78-79). Ford et al. (2002) identify three discursive contexts (which they call ‘background conversations’) that draw on organizational actors’ past experiences – (1) *complacent* deriving from past success, (2) *resigned* deriving from past failure that have diminished organizational actors’ resolve to succeed, and (3) *cynical*, deriving from past failure which has led to pessimistic expectations, frustration and disappointment. These discursive contexts potentially constitute the tones of organizational actors’ responses.

Prasad and Prasad (2000) conceptualize everyday resistance (see Mumby 2005), which they call ‘routine resistance’, as part of the continual experience of organizational life. In their words, ‘seeing routine resistance as discursive implies, therefore, that the act and art of resisting is both planned and accidental, strategic

and spontaneous, often retrospectively constructed, but always emerging out of the local interpretations and discourse of multiple organizational actors' (p402). The physical distance between organizational actors may be minimized by the formation of new partnership work space, but space as a manifestation of power relations and of lived experience (Taylor and Spicer 2007) provokes organizational actors' reinterpretation and reinscription of the dominant discourses (Thomas and Davies 2005), part of which may include "stick[ing]" to their old task-based social ties to help them get things done rather than turning to new, untried partners for support' (Valley and Thompson 1998: 42).

Hence, socio-cultural space is constructed by organizational actors' interaction and relationships as well as symbolic meanings represented through physical space, which constitute the lived experience in and through the organization (Ford and Harding 2004; Taylor and Spicer 2007). This builds on the assumption that 'staff working in large organizations occupy material places which they endow with a meaning' (Ford and Harding 2004: 828). In this respect, where organizational actors are brought together from two previously existing organizational spaces, new organizational space – physical and socio-cultural – results. As Hardy et al. (1998: 63) describe: 'buildings are built, products are manufactured, services are rendered beyond (and because of) all this organizational talk. Thus discourse and talk are central to organization and organizing ... but so is non-discursive action'. Organizational actors' lived experiences are influential in the construction of the new organizational space as well as being influenced by it; 'while space is what shapes action and inter-action, it is reshaped by actions and inter-actions in turn' (Hernes et al. 2006: 44). Valley and Thompson (1998) describe that resistance can be affected

by organizational actors' previous ties; those that differ from the new space and those that concur. As such, resistance can be a resultant response to 'the difficulty in changing "routine-based and history-dependent" behaviour' (p41).

There is 'continuous dialogue and multilogue' (Vaara and Tienari 2011: 387) as meanings and interpretations of the organization construct and become manifest within its socio-cultural space. In Gabriel's (2008: 79) words: 'discourses are not as coherent or as consistent as first thought. They entail numerous internal tensions and contradictions.' There is interaction between organizational actors as they jointly negotiate a new and manufactured organizational work space (e.g. Buchanan and Dawson 2007), thereby seeking to overcome 'the dualistic debate of "compliance with" versus "resistance to"' (Thomas and Davies 2005: 683). As Symon (2005: 1658) describes, 'counter-arguments may be about arguing over interpretations of particular discourses, seeking to commandeer the same discursive space'.

All organizational actors are participants in, and producers of, an organization's socio-cultural work space; therefore, setting managers and employees in opposition is unhelpful (e.g. Thomas and Davies 2005). One manifestation of resistance can be an organizational actor establishing themselves as 'other' to a particular discourse (Symon 2005) as a way of attempting to negotiate situations that can appear contradictory in themselves (e.g. Knights and McCabe 2000) or at odds with their previous lived experiences. But this can occur between peers (horizontally), not just between managers and employees (vertically). Prasad and Prasad (2000: 396) describe manifestations of organizational actors' resistance as: those whose responses are claimed and owned as deliberately resistant, they own their resistance and '[open] up a space in which dissent could be more publicly

expressed'; and those who label the words and behaviours of others as resistant and by naming this resistance, 'individuals never [identify] themselves with these actions, but [attribute] them to other employees'.

Our understanding of resistance acknowledges ambiguity and complexity (e.g. Thomas and Davies 2005; Ford et al. 2008; Thomas et al. 2011), recognizing 'the ongoing tensions and contradictions that constitute the process by which organizational actors attempt to shape workplace practice' (Mumby 2005: 23). The ways in which organizational actors respond to the manufacture of a new work space also reflect their attempts to endow it with meaning in socio-cultural terms, negotiated in a dialogic fashion (Thomas et al. 2011). The context of manufactured work space and the associated promoted and negotiated discourses of the socio-cultural space offer an opportunity to 'focus on the everyday dynamics of organizational life and the ways that organization members actively engage in an interpretive struggle with these [senior management and corporate] discourses' (Mumby 2005: 28).

Our above discussion of work space and resistance demonstrates clear areas of overlap between the two strands of literature. However, to date there have been few attempts to synthesize and apply them to the discursive study of resistance in a newly created partnership work space. By focusing on manifestations of resistance in organizational actors' language, our analysis below contributes to the current understanding of how socio-cultural space is created through differing responses by organizational actors.

## **Methods**

We conducted a detailed analysis of the discursive negotiation of the socio-cultural space of NorthService Ltd., a public-private partnership organization, as part of a larger qualitative and inductive study into management communication. Our analysis focuses specifically on organizational actors' responses to the new organizational context that seek to adapt, subvert and/or reinscript the organization's dominant discourses (see Thomas and Davies 2005) in the joint negotiation of NorthService Ltd.'s socio-cultural space.

Our analysis builds on the assumption that organizational actors create their social realities (Berger and Luckmann 1966) through the stories that they tell to themselves and others (Bruner 1991). Such stories help organizational actors to make sense of their experiences at work (Weick 1995) – a process that shapes their perceptions and behaviours. Such a narrative sensemaking approach (see also Sonenshein 2010) focuses on the joint construction of meaning among organizational actors that creates organizational realities and constructs its socio-cultural space. A further assumption of our analysis is that organizations are complex responsive processes (Stacey 2001) in which organizational actors respond to stimuli from other organizational actors and the organization's wider environment. Organizational actors' responses are constrained by their capacity to respond as well as the power relations in the organization.

The main method of data collection in our study was qualitative interviewing, a largely unstructured type of interview with a focus on eliciting the interviewees' stories (Mishler 1991). A total of 25 individual and three group interviews were conducted with organizational actors from all hierarchical layers and departments

within NorthService Ltd. in the autumn of 2010. Five senior managers, five middle managers, five line managers and ten frontline employees agreed to be interviewed individually. One group interview was held with senior and middle managers (nine participants), one with middle managers (five participants) and one with frontline employees (four participants). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and the transcripts returned to interviewees to check and amend. Our dataset consists of approx. 2,000 minutes of audio-recording.

Our analysis has examined interview transcripts to explore organizational actors' differing responses to the manufacture of NorthService Ltd. and to the ongoing negotiation of its socio-cultural space. Data were analyzed inductively, with NVivo software aiding the management of the data. Through multiple readings of the interview data, frequent themes and categories emerged, creating the coding framework. The data was then constantly compared with the relevant literature to test small-scale hypotheses as advocated by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Following this, 'mini-narratives' were sought within the interview transcripts (Vaara 2002) in order to identify the perceptions and experiences of the new socio-cultural workspace of different organizational actors.

For the purposes of this article, we have chosen not to distinguish between different types of organizational actors as both managers and employees seek to adapt, subvert and/or reinscript the discourses that dominate the organization (see Thomas and Davies 2005). Given the limited space available, we have had to be selective in which data we present in order to illustrate our argument. The dominant, 'official' discourses have been synthesized through our analysis, and we have selected examples of employee responses thereto. Through the interview excerpts

we have provided in this paper, organizational actors offer their accounts of lived experience compared to the organization's dominant discourses and associated messages in the negotiation of NorthService Ltd.'s socio-cultural space.

### **Work space context: Public-private partnerships in the UK**

Our research is set in England, where a structure of government bodies, known as 'local authorities' or 'councils', operates at a local level (Directgov 2011). They comprise both paid officers and members who are democratically elected by residents. Local authorities are part of the public sector, that part of the economy that includes institutions which are partly funded by tax-payers to provide services to, or for the benefit of, residents (e.g. health care, highways, and education, see Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000).

In recent decades there has been a trend towards the transfer of service delivery from the public sector to the private sector (Spackman 2002) to 'improve efficiency and value for money ... by the application of private-sector management techniques and processes' (Ferlie et al. 2003: S9) and as part of a 'modernization' agenda (Broadbent and Laughlin 2004). There has been a range of models including private finance initiatives (PFI), which are largely capital infrastructure projects (e.g. Broadbent and Laughlin 2004), and other 'co-operative institutional arrangements between public and private sector actors' (Hodge and Greve 2009: 33) that take the form of strategic partnerships or joint ventures.

In 2007, NorthCouncil, a local authority in England, sought new ways to address economic and social deprivation in its community. It has responsibility for a

range of public services including welfare benefits, health and social care, housing, leisure, education and transport. NorthCouncil was trying to deliver these services more efficiently so that new business could be brought in from outside to sustain present and create new employment. In order to do so it approached private-sector organizations as potential partners, and ServiceCom plc, with a track record of similar public-private partnerships, became the private-sector partner of choice. NorthService Ltd., the resulting partnership, represents an arrangement through which certain NorthCouncil services (including procurement, ICT and human resources) are managed and delivered. Individuals who had been largely employed in such departmental roles in NorthCouncil were transferred into the new work space, bringing continuity of operational expertise, whilst management expertise was brought in from ServiceCom plc.

By creating public-private partnerships, the socio-cultural work spaces of public-sector actors and private-sector actors are being brought together with an expectation that they will merge, integrate and blur, and so are the discourses in and through which they are constituted (see Hardy et al. 1998). In the case of NorthService Ltd. the socio-cultural spaces of its public-sector and private-sector parent to the creation of the public-private partnership have not neatly combined to form a tidy and agreed socio-cultural partnership space.

In our exploration of the formation of a public-private partnership work space, our analysis reveals that on the surface the motivation behind such partnerships can appear shared, but that those driving the creation of such partnerships enter with different expectations and discourses which may compete with each other. The ideal behind NorthService Ltd. was designed on a drawing board, and organizational

actors enact the reality thereof, particularly by and through its socio-cultural space. Organizational actors have to negotiate their responses to the new organizational work space contextualized by its artificial and manufactured nature. Our analysis below focuses specifically on the discursive space in which resistance takes place, potentially creating unintended consequences that allow organizational actors to respond to the organization's dominant discourses and shape their lived experiences (drawing on Putnam et al. 2005).

## **Manufacturing the work space**

### ***The instigation of dominant discourses and responses to them***

NorthService Ltd. came into existence in 2008. The partnership agreement was predicated on a commitment by NorthCouncil and ServiceCom plc to work together to generate efficiency savings of current council operations and bring in new business from outside organizations to absorb any roles lost to efficiency, thereby safeguarding and creating jobs (discourse of economic development). Approximately 400 members of NorthCouncil staff, mainly frontline employees and line managers, were transferred into the new work space without change in contract and largely without choice. Managers and internal consultants were transferred from ServiceCom plc to manage services more efficiently, most of them on a temporary basis.

NorthCouncil and ServiceCom plc had a mutual narrative in describing NorthService Ltd. as 'joining forces', combining the best of each work space (see Hodge and Greve 2009) in terms of management, operational expertise and lived

experience (Taylor and Spicer 2007). This partnership narrative adopted expressions of mutuality, alliance and collaboration, and an associated, unitary discourse of partnership (see Fleming and Sewell 2002). Such a discourse of partnership evokes a sense of continuity in the idea of combining two existing work spaces (NorthCouncil and ServiceCom plc) while opening opportunities for creative potential for improvement, which is articulated by describing the best of each existing work space in the manufacture of that of the new partnership.

The discourses of economic development and of partnership dominate the new work space at NorthService Ltd. as they denote a response from organizational actors with regard to both changed physical systems and processes and new socio-cultural attitudes, priorities and behaviours. We acknowledge that notions of 'domination' imply power and control; however, we would argue that despite this organizational actors jointly construct the socio-cultural space. NorthService managers drive these dominant discourses at the heart of the organization's purpose, which contribute to the construction of the organization's socio-cultural space together with all organizational actors' lived experiences and associated alternative discourses.

The underlying message of the dominant discourses at NorthService Ltd. is improvement both internally (for the organization) and externally (for the community), which generated some initial responses of excitement and high expectations among organizational actors, as employee David recalled:

We had the change managers come in [from ServiceCom plc] and they were very full of ideas and they were very much open about their outlook on how to do things in the section. So immediately that gave you a sense that old boundaries that were there might not be there anymore and that there is no point thinking in

that kind of way. Because you are obviously in a much more free environment, so thinking that way was going to limit yourself. Yes, that's how I began to look at it quite quickly.

David's reflections reveal an adaptive attitude towards the message of improvement (approval in principle). He demonstrates awareness of how the organization's socio-cultural boundaries are changing and that continuing to think in the old way would be restrictive. While David's response is one of approval in principle, he alludes to room for resistance by contrasting 'how things were then' with 'how things are now', thereby pointing at contradictions between the dominant discourses and organizational realities as manifest within the organization's socio-cultural space.

Employee Sebastian's response is similar to David's in that it approves of the dominant discourses in principle; however, he names the resistance of others more explicitly, potentially pointing at his own (see Prasad and Prasad 2000):

I think it's good, I think it's really good. I know there's a lot of people who look at it negatively and think that we are being swallowed up this big organization [ServiceCom plc]. I don't see it like that to be honest with you, personally I think it's us dragging this big organization into our little town or little area, I think it can only be good.

Sebastian compares fellow organizational actors' perception ('being swallowed up') with his own ('dragging in'). These responses sit alongside one another as constituent parts in the organization's socio-cultural space, yet both of them differ from the dominant notion of ServiceCom plc's role in NorthService Ltd. and the local area. The language used by managers and in official press releases (see Fleming and Sewell 2002) conjures up images of ServiceCom plc as a knight in shining armour coming to rescue, through NorthService Ltd., the deprived local community that NorthCouncil serves. By referring to notions of 'being swallowed up' and

'dragging in', Sebastian contributes alternative interpretations of the discourses that dominate the organization.

### ***Improvement and business as usual?***

In the early stages of NorthService Ltd.'s existence, another message from the dominant discourses was about the need for 'business as usual', i.e. minimizing any perceived sense of change to operations or purpose as a result of the manufacture of the new partnership work space. The business as usual message seems to contradict the improvement message that is at the heart of the dominant discourses (see Gabriel 2008), potentially creating tension in organizational actors' lived experiences that construct NorthService Ltd.'s socio-cultural space. For instance, employee Hetty subverts the business as usual message in the following account as her lived experience at NorthService Ltd. is dominated by change (which by definition is more in line with the improvement message).

I do think you serve the people of the borough, that's the way it was then and now it's not that anymore, it's make a profit. This is a business, how can we bring new business in. It's a complete culture change to everything that we've ever known, which is why I think people have a hard time trying to accept it. And there's constantly involvement workshops, there's meetings all the time and you have to learn this, you have to learn that, there's a new system, this is a new system, and it's like 'god, how much?' It's a lot. Sometimes you feel like you don't want to come to work because you think 'right, what is there today, what have I got to do today?' I don't mean to put a negative spin on it but it is a lot of change to take on board for people, and you really have no choice but to get on board and do all those changes. But on the upside of it, you've got to go with the flow.

Hetty highlights the changes that the manufacture of NorthService Ltd.'s new work space has brought for her as opposed to the sense of continuity that was built into the initial discourse surrounding NorthService Ltd. She demonstrates resistance through the subversion of the business as usual message, but by stressing that she does not 'mean to put a negative spin on it' it is clear that she does not do so within a paradigm of negativity (see Barbalet 1995; Thomas and Davies 2005, Clegg et al. 2006). Hetty seems to appreciate the possibilities for improvement that the creation of NorthService Ltd. has provided, but at the same time seems overwhelmed by the magnitude of change in her daily work. Hetty's contribution to NorthService Ltd.'s socio-cultural space is the identification and questioning of contradictions between the messages underlying the organization's dominant discourses.

Like Hetty, employee Jim has also experienced more change than the business as usual message implies. However, whereas Hetty intends to go with the flow, Jim identifies more specific attitudes which subvert the message of improvement to one of potential decline.

I just think there's a general sense of the way that things were done which worked has changed and maybe it's changed too quickly and people don't understand the work they are doing as much anymore. So it's harder to be invested in it and it's harder to take a sense of pride in it and therefore they don't enjoy it as much.

Jim suggests that business practices in NorthService Ltd. may have changed too quickly for organizational actors to keep up with, leading to a decline in understanding, pride and enjoyment of their work. Jim positions himself as 'the other' (see Symon 2005) and assigns himself the role of 'observer' within NorthService Ltd.'s socio-cultural space. He marginalizes himself (owned resistance, Prasad and

Prasad 2000), does not seem to value his own part in the negotiation of NorthService Ltd.'s socio-cultural space and thereby questions the organization's work space boundaries. In other words, Jim alludes to an inconsistency between organizational actors' lived experience and the improvement message dominating the official discourses. In that way, Jim points at contradiction between different dominant messages, at a crack in the dominant discourse that can be challenged and subverted (see Fleming and Sewell 2002; Thomas and Davies 2005).

In other organizational actors like Pat the dominant discourses and associated messages invoke a response of cynicism in which they focus on all differences they can find.

We will be taken over by a partnership and everything will be rosier and so much better, but it won't. It will be exactly the same as it was before you were taken over, you are just working for different management, whatever they promise.

Pat is sceptical about the discourse of partnership and the improvement message. She articulates resistance by alluding to broken promises from past lived experience in a cynical fashion (see Ford et al. 2002). Specifically, Pat sticks to a conceptualization of continuity as negative as opposed to the more positive intent of the business as usual message (see Valley and Thompson 2008). In other words, while the business as usual message is intended to minimize disruption for organizational actors, for Pat it maximizes feelings of pessimism. Her response is the antithesis to the discourses that dominate the organization.

Our analysis above indicates that the socio-cultural space is constructed through and populated by contradictions in organizational actors' messages, interpretations and lived experiences (see Ford and Harding 2004; Hernes et al.

2006). There is potentially a struggle of legitimacy (Vaara and Tienari 2011) within NorthService Ltd.'s socio-cultural space as organizational actors 'attempt to shape workplace practice' (Mumby 2005: 23) through their lived experiences and interpretations past and present.

## **Shaping the work space**

### ***Structured activity***

The previous section of this paper explained how NorthService Ltd. as a manufactured work space came into being and how organizational actors have begun to construct its socio-cultural space by adapting, subverting and reinscribing the discourses and messages that dominate the organization (Thomas and Davies 2005). Both formal and informal conversations with NorthService managers provide insights into their impression of resistance among organizational actors. Managers also alluded to feelings of impatience at a lack of progress towards the organization's goals over the first year or so. There is a sense of eagerness to shape the organization's socio-cultural space more strongly by repeating the dominant discourses and associated messages (see Symon 2005). A whole-organization event called 'You are the difference' (YATD) was organized and consisted of senior-management presentations and group discussions among organizational actors.

YATD took place about 18 months into NorthService Ltd.'s existence to provide an opportunity for all organizational actors to reflect on the lessons learned and to outline a clearer vision for the organization's future; the event was an intervention by managers in the negotiation of the organization's socio-cultural space

that sought to include all organizational actors. The intention was to enable organizational actors to reconcile different lived experiences, thereby reducing tension and shaping the dominant discourse through 'dialogue and multilogue' (Vaara and Tienari 2011: 387) in a shared and physically bounded discursive space (see Symon 2005). Some research participants, like David, suggest there may have been misconceptions of the 'other' (named resistance, Prasad and Prasad 2000) between those organizational actors based on their different lived experiences and previous socio-cultural spaces.

Well, I think um, this isn't necessarily my view, but I think there's a kind of like, we're public sector workers, and you know [ServiceCom] is a private sector company. Public sector's a whole different attitude really, and there're a lot of reasons for that. So there might be people who feel that a private company is going to have their nose in the air [and there's] some kind of like cultural anxiety about that. So I think things like [the event] help in breaking the ice and showing that they are not stuck up or whatever. You see, I find those attitudes a bit tedious, but there are a lot of people who are literally worried that these [ServiceCom] people are above them. And it's hard to do things about those attitudes, but I think having that kind of [event], doing things like [senior manager] telling a funny story does help break away those kind of concerns of people. Because if you just see them up there and they are just talking to you, you don't see the human side of them, and you don't realize that they are just people, they are not here to belittle anybody or anything like that. I think that's kind of why it's important.

David is at first tentative about describing whose views he is relating – his own or those of his colleagues (see Prasad and Prasad 2000). But he acknowledges that the event offered insights into a hitherto unknown facet of senior managers: their human side and their evidently benign intentions for NorthService Ltd. and the local area that it serves. In other words, YATD brought the macro-discourse of partnership to a micro-level, specifically focusing on partnership-relationships within the

organization – relationships between managers and employees, as well as relationships between formerly public-sector and formerly private-sector actors. The dominant message is, therefore, ‘We’re all in it together’ (see Fleming and Sewell 2002). We suggest that the event allowed for the joint construction of the organization’s socio-cultural space. David continues his reflection on the event and his response as follows:

The people in the communications forum said when they went to the [You are the difference event], there were obviously people who were really negative, but one of the things that I agreed with was the openness, that [senior managers] were saying, ‘we’ve had some difficulties, we’re hoping that we are going to be able to sort them out, but they’re there’. That was something that I don’t think I was expecting. I remember being slightly surprised about that, because there was part of you that thought it was just going to be a PR stunt. But no, it wasn’t and they were very open and honest and I think that’s the best way to be. I think most people would have been brought on side from that, all three of [the senior managers] had positive attitudes towards that and I think that’s a very important part of it.

The YATD event exceeded David’s pessimistic expectation of it being nothing but a PR stunt, a glossy and shallow contribution to the organization’s socio-cultural space. But contrary to his expectations, David considers the event to be open and honest, making an authentic and meaningful contribution by managers to NorthService Ltd.’s socio-cultural space. However, the event was also met with owned resistance (Prasad and Prasad 2000); for example employee Jim found it, in his own words, patronizing.

I think to say it’s compulsory to go to [a nearby] hotel and sit in on something like [You are the Difference], when at the time there wasn’t a great deal of give and take in decision making in things that were happening. I think from that point of view it was patronizing in that no one felt like we were important at the time to the

staff, I think we felt like we were entirely expendable to what they wanted to do. But because there were rumours going around about the [introduction of a centralized] service desk and all the rest of it at the time, and a lot of people were worried about our floor becoming nothing more than a call centre, which hasn't, borne out. But like I say at the time there was a lot of whispers going around and there was a lot of sense of the work that people were doing wasn't being appreciated. I mean I know that the actual event was maybe an attempt to say look we do appreciate the work that you are doing and we are trying to be more open and we are trying to give you faces to talk to and things like that, but at the time it came across I mean to me and I think to a lot of people there who I was sat with, it came across as a waste of time and a little bit patronizing.

Jim acknowledges his initial reaction of feeling patronized by being told to attend the event at a time when he felt undervalued by managers, whilst articulating his understanding of what it was 'attempting' to achieve. He alludes to difficulties in communication at the time YATD was held and to a need to rely on 'whispers'. With hindsight, he has begun to appreciate perhaps more benign motives behind the event and managers' attempt to provide an opportunity for the lived experiences of all organizational actors to interact within a singular physical space and time.

YATD has shaped the negotiation of NorthService Ltd.'s socio-cultural space by providing a structured interaction in which emerging differences between organizational actors can be bridged. Despite managements' goal to involve every single organizational actor, several interviewees did not attend the event due to illness, holiday and other circumstances, and according to their comments during the interview none of them were sorry to miss it. Even those interviewees who did attend YATD were not all positive towards it, sharing Jim's owned resistance (Prasad and Prasad 2000). They were less willing to rethink their position within the organization's socio-cultural space and contribute subversion to its construction.

### ***Unstructured activity***

The negotiation of an organization's socio-cultural space is, of course, an ongoing process as discourses respond, messages change and lived experiences alter. This section of our analysis focuses on organizational actors' unstructured contributions that shape the organization's socio-cultural space in line with their own agendas (deliberate reinscription, see Thomas and Davies 2005).

One example is Dan, an HR officer, who tries to seize the opportunity to be an active participant in the construction of the new organizational space, influencing the adaptation to his own ends.

More recently I've become more involved with work with [NorthService], the top tier, the [senior management]. There is work developing around the people strategy there, about how we are going to better utilize our resources to this thing which is like a transition pool [in which employees whose roles have become redundant will be transferred on a temporary basis]. So I've started exposing myself, putting myself into situations where you are working with totally different people, who talk a different language, not foreign but [ServiceCom] speak and it's a different way of thinking, different business sort of different perspective on stuff. And I deliberately did that because I recognized probably about a year and a bit ago that is where the future is. I realized the council isn't going to keep me in a job for ten years, I need to be doing it somewhere else. So I made the shift, still doing the people related stuff which is really important to us, because it's my profession, it's what I do, it's what I get enjoyment out of, but also understand that it needs to be done in a different way and with a different kind of thinking around it and different dimension to it and that's the kind of business focus, business argument, customer sort of stuff that [ServiceCom] do, and that's what they've come here for anyway.

Dan has been proactive in seeking opportunities to mix with those organizational actors who are in a position of power and decision-making. Through his own initiative Dan has positioned himself to embrace 'the ServiceCom way'. It seems almost as if Dan seeks to adapt the dominant discourses from the inside to put his agenda into practice (see Mumby 2005; Symon 2005), and to do so, he has firmly latched on to the improvement message. Dan's adaptation and reinscription (Thomas and Davies 2005) aims to shape an experience that he would like to live and see lived within the organization's socio-cultural space.

Employee Rebecca seeks to shape NorthService Ltd.'s work space through her nomination as the communications representative for her department, a role in which she interacts regularly with middle and senior managers. The communications representative is a pivot connecting different layers of hierarchy and associated socio-cultural space. During the interview, Rebecca described some of the difficulties she is facing in this role:

The last [round table meeting with senior managers] was about three weeks ago and they gave me the job to go around rounding people up, and it was an impossible task. I was there for three hours just on the top floor just trying to get people to come to this round table and I had to cajole them, 'oh please just for me please'. I went from person to person and people just told us point blank they weren't interested and a few went, 'well if it's for you, what do I do', so I said 'well I'll even write the questions'. I even wrote the questions and handed them out, as long as you put bums on seats, because that's what they wanted, they wanted bums on seats and a few questions. So they gave me the task of rounding them up and I did manage to get a whole team together and I just sent them the questions that they could ask and also I said, any of your own, you don't even have to ask these, but I'm just giving you a sample of something, so that we're not just sitting there looking a bit blank.

Rebecca's dedication to her role as communications representative becomes apparent through her dedication (desperation) to recruit participants. Whilst she recognizes managers' attempts to break down any perceived barriers and minimize separation between hierarchical layers through interventions like the round-table meetings, her need to 'cajole' others names their resistance (Prasad and Prasad 2000). In the instance quoted above, Rebecca uses her own credibility among her colleagues to overcome their resistance to attend the round-table meeting with senior managers, recognized as a legacy from their previous lived experiences (see Valley and Thompson 1998), and hints at frustration with their attitudes.

Yet, the round-table meetings have been designed as an opportunity for organizational actors to ask the chief executive and other senior managers questions about NorthService Ltd.'s future direction and more operational aspects. The intention is to attract interested parties, not those recruited involuntarily. Hence, Rebecca's determination to get 'bums on seats' in the round-table meeting by appealing to her colleagues to do her a personal favour and even writing questions for them can be seen as an unwilling act of subversion. Interestingly, she also denies working for ServiceCom plc in public, as the following interview excerpt indicates:

I think we're in the situation where I don't work for [NorthCouncil] anymore, I work for [ServiceCom plc] and that takes a lot of getting used to. Outside of here if somebody says where do you work, I find it easier to say I work for the Council, because people understand that you work for [NorthCouncil]. [If I say] 'I work for [ServiceCom plc]', [then they'll ask] 'have you moved? What are you working for [ServiceCom plc] for?' So people are still unsure that [ServiceCom plc] took over part

Rebecca evidently is uncomfortable with the idea of having to explain to outsiders the role of ServiceCom plc in the local area. Rather than support NorthService Ltd.'s

dominant discourses of economic development and partnership, Rebecca in her language (see Fleming and Sewell 2002) subverts them through denial.

Both Dan and Rebecca perceive opportunities in the 'new way' and they acknowledge the resistance of others (see Prasad and Prasad 2000). Their response towards adaptation to the organization's dominant discourses additionally demonstrates subversion of the interpretation and lived experience of other organizational actors. In addition, Rebecca also owns her subversion externally to the organization through her shifting description of her employer (see Prasad and Prasad 2000) according to context and audience. These intersubjective relations (Fleming and Sewell 2002) construct, and are constructed by, the socio-cultural space of the organization (see Ford and Harding 2004; Hernes et al. 2006).

### **Discussion: Negotiating a new work space**

Our analysis above has provided rich insights into organizational actors' differing manifestations of resistant responses to their new organizational context, by and through which the socio-cultural space of the organization is constructed. We contend that these responses sit alongside one another as constituent components of the organization's socio-cultural space and play an important part in its negotiation (see Ford et al. 2002; Thomas and Davies 2005). Organizational actors' differing responses discussed in this paper reflect their lived experience past and present, their interpretations of organizational reality and their expectations for themselves, the organization and the wider community. We acknowledge that our data illustrate a

moment in time in NorthService Ltd. and that the negotiation of its socio-cultural space is in constant flux.

As a routine of everyday organizational life (see Prasad and Prasad 2000; Mumby 2005), organizational actors respond to NorthService Ltd.'s dominant discourses of economic development and partnership, and associated messages, contextualized by their own expectations, agendas and lived experiences (past and present, see Valley and Thompson 1998). Following Thomas and Davies (2005) we identify two main responses of resistance in the language used by our interviewees: (1) adaptation and reinscription and (2) subversion and reinscription. More importantly for our analysis, these responses occupy and constitute the organization's socio-cultural space, with organizational actors jointly and discursively negotiating it (for a summary please refer to Table 1 below). In Gabriel's (2008: 78) eloquent words: 'the way we talk about the world becomes constitutive of the world'.

---

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

---

While instances of adaptation, subversion and reinscription of the discourses that dominate the organization (see Thomas and Davies 2005) can be observed, organizational actors' responses are more complex and may include internal inconsistency. Building on Thomas and Davies (2005), our analysis demonstrates how these broad responses are articulated in language and discourse in the construction of NorthService Ltd.'s socio-cultural space. Each articulated response is individual, based on that organizational actor's lived experiences past and present

(see Valley and Thompson 1998), and they are crucial to the construction of a new work space, specifically the socio-cultural space. Such responses are not marginalized but rather a part of the organization's reality. Socio-cultural space is, therefore, inclusive, comprising all organizational actors' experiences and associated interpretations operating alongside the discourses that dominate the organization. In Gabriel's (2008: 79) words, discourses 'have a tendency to fragment and disintegrate or mutate into other discourses ... They are engaged in constant interaction with other discourses'. All organizational actors play a part in the construction of the socio-cultural work space and in interaction within it; differences, contradictions and struggles for legitimacy are all normal (see Clegg et al. 2006).

## **Conclusion**

Resistance to the manufacture of a public-private partnership is manifest in organizational actors' differing responses to the new organizational context as they attempt to adapt, subvert and reinscribe the dominant discourses (Thomas and Davies 2005). These responses are intrinsic to the construction of the partnership organization's socio-cultural space. Manifestations of resistance are uniquely constructed by and through the organizational context in which they operate, specifically past and present lived experiences (see Valley and Thompson 1998; Ford et al. 2002), being brought into one singular organizational space simultaneously constructing and being constructed by it. Our contribution to the discursive study of resistance is a deeper understanding of the negotiation of the

partnership organization's socio-cultural space through organization actors' talking it into being (Vaara and Tienari 2010).

In the socio-cultural work space, organizational actors negotiate situations that are perceived as contradictory in themselves (Knights and McCabe 2000) or at odds with their previous experiences and expectations. Responses of resistance contribute towards the sculpting of organizational practice (Mumby 2005) through differences in expression of resistance (see Vaara and Tienari 2011). An organization's socio-cultural space includes tension arising from external and internal contradictions. External contradictions arise from the dominant discourses and associated messages (such as the improvement and the business as usual messages discussed above), while internal contradictions arise from organizational actors' meaning system, reasoning and lived experience. Such contradictions and alternative interpretations of organizational reality constitute normal part of an organization, particularly in those organizations that have been manufactured at the drawing board.

## References

Baldry, Chris

1999 'Space – the final frontier'. *Sociology* 33/3: 535-553.

Barbalet, Jack M.

1985 'Power and resistance'. *The British Journal of Sociology* 36/4: 531-548.

Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann

1966 *The social construction of reality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Broadbent, Jane, and Richard Laughlin

2004 'Striving for excellence in public service delivery: Experiences from an analysis of the private finance initiative'. *Public Policy and Administration* 19/4: 82-99.

Bruner, Jerome

1991 'The narrative construction of reality'. *Critical Inquiry* 18/1: 1-21.

Brunsson, Nils, and Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson

2000 'Constructing organisations: The example of public sector reform'. *Organization Studies* 21/4: 721-746.

Buchanan, David, and Patrick Dawson

2007 'Discourse and audience: Organizational change as a multi-story process'. *Journal of Management Studies* 44/5: 669-685.

Chanlat, Jean-Francois

2006 'Space, organization and management thinking: A socio-historic perspective'. In Stewart Clegg and Martin Kornberger, eds. *Space, Organizations and Management Theory*. 17-43. Herndon, VA: Copenhagen Business School Press.

Clegg, Stewart, David Courpasson, and Nelson Phillips

2006 *Power and organizations*. London: Sage

Directgov

2011 'Local government structure' Available at:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/UKgovernment/Localgovernment/DG\\_073310](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/UKgovernment/Localgovernment/DG_073310) [Accessed 22 November 2011]

Down, Simon, and Scott Taylor

2001 Work spaces in two small firms: The management of people beyond organizational walls. Manchester Metropolitan University Business School Working Paper Series WP01/04.

Edwards, Paul, David Collinson, and Giuseppe Della Rocca

1995 'Workplace resistance in Western Europe: A preliminary overview and research agenda'. *European Journal of Industrial Relations* 1/3: 283-316.

Ferlie, Ewan, Jean Hartley, and Steve Martin  
2003 'Changing public service organizations: Current perspectives and future prospects'. *British Journal of Management* 14/S1: S1–S14.

Fleming, Peter, and Graham Sewell  
2002 'Looking for the good soldier, Švejk: Alternative modalities of resistance in the contemporary workplace.' *Sociology* 36/4: 857-873.

Ford, Jeffrey D.  
1999 'Organizational change as shifting conversations'. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 12/6: 480-500.

Ford, Jeffrey D.; Laurie W. Ford, and Randall T. McNamara  
2002 'Resistance and the background conversations of change'. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 15/2: 105-121.

Ford, Jeffrey D.; Laurie W. Ford, and Angelo D'Amelio  
2008 'Resistance to change: The rest of the story'. *Academy of Management Review* 33/2: 362-377.

Ford, Jeffrey D., and Nancy Harding  
2004 'We went looking for an organization but could find only the metaphysics of its presence'. *Sociology* 38/4: 815-830.

Gabriel, Yiannis  
2008 *Organizing words: A critical thesaurus for social and organization studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm L. Strauss  
1967 *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, ILL: Aldine.

Hardy, Cynthia, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Nelson Phillips  
1998 'Talk and action: Conversations and narrative in interorganizational collaboration'. In David Grant, Tom Keenoy, and Cliff Oswick, eds, *Discourse and organizations*, 65-83. London: Sage.

Hernes, Tor, Tore Bakken, and Per Ingvar Olsen  
2006 'Spaces as process: Developing a recursive perspective on organisational space'. In Stewart Clegg and Martin Kornberger, eds. *Space, Organizations and Management Theory*, 44-63. Herndon, VA: Copenhagen Business School Press.

Hodge, Graeme A., and Carsten Greve  
2009 'PPPs: The passage of time permits a sober reflection'. *Institute of Economic Affairs* 29/1: 33-39.

Knights, David, and Darren McCabe

2000 “Ain’t misbehavin’?” Opportunities for resistance under new forms of “quality” management’. *Sociology* 34/3: 421-436.

Mishler, Elliot

1991 *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mumby, Dennis

2005 ‘Theorizing resistance in organization studies: A dialectical approach’. *Management Communication Quarterly* 19/1: 19-44.

Mumby, Dennis, and Robin P. Clair

1997 Organizational discourse. In Teun A. Van Dijk, ed. *Discourse as social interaction*, 181-205, London: Sage.

Prasad, Pushkala, and Anshuman Prasad

2000 ‘Stretching the iron cage: The constitution and implications of routine workplace resistance’. *Organization Science* 11/4: 387-403.

Putnam, Linda, David Grant, Grant Michelson, and Leanne Cutcher

2005 ‘Discourse and resistance: Targets, practices, consequences’. *Management Communication Quarterly* 19/1: 5-18.

Sonenshein, Scott

2010 ‘We’re changing – or are we? Untangling the role of progressive, regressive, and stability narratives during strategic change implementation’. *Academy of Management Journal* 53/3: 477-512.

Spackman, Michael

2002 ‘Public-private partnerships: lessons from the British approach’. *Economic Systems* 26/3: 283-301.

Stacey, Ralph D.

2001 *Complex responsive processes in organizations: Learning and knowledge creation*. London: Routledge.

Symon, Gillian

2005 ‘Exploring resistance from a rhetorical perspective’. *Organization Studies* 26/11: 1641-1663.

Taylor, Scott, and André Spicer

2007 ‘Time for space: A narrative review of research on organizational spaces’. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 9/4: 325–346.

Thomas, Robyn, and Annette Davies

2005 ‘Theorizing the micro-politics of resistance: New Public Management and managerial identities in the UK public services’. *Organization Studies* 26/5: 683-704.

Thomas, Robyn, Leisa D. Sargent, and Cynthia Hardy

2011 'Managing organizational change: Negotiating meaning and power-resistance relations'. *Organization Science* 22/1: 22-41.

Vaara, Eero

2002 'On the discursive construction of success/failure in narratives of post-merger integration'. *Organization Studies* 23/2: 211-248.

Vaara, Eero, and Janne Tienari

2011 'On the narrative construction of multinational corporations: An antenarrative analysis of legitimation and resistance in a cross-border merger'. *Organization Science* 22/2: 370-390.

Valley, Kathleen, and Tracy Thompson

1998 'Sticky ties and bad attitudes: Relational and individual bases of resistance to change in organizational structure'. In Roderick Kramer and Margaret Neale, eds. *Power and Influence in Organizations*, 39-66. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weick, Karl E.

1995 *Sensemaking in organization*. London: Sage.

**Table 1: Work space and responses of resistance**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Manifestation</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Contribution to socio-cultural space</b>
Approval in principle	Positive in tone and language, but demonstrates awareness of contradictions in organizational reality	David	Supportive of new organizational context, thereby supporting the dominant discourse (at present) i.e. the dominant socio-cultural space for the organization.
Supportive yet subversive	Commitment to perform organizational role, but negates organizational membership in public	Rebecca	Attempts to integrate other organizational members to the dominant socio-cultural space. Internal contradiction in responses – feeling of confusion?
Approval to manipulate	Positive in tone and language, but calculating attempt to make his agenda reality	Dan	Drives selective response to the dominant discourse to suit his goals.
Attempt to be positive but feelings of confusion	Trying to be supportive, but feels overwhelmed with new organizational context	Hetty	Contributes reality check as to whether dominant discourse is in line with lived experience, questioning and identifying contradictions within

			the socio-cultural space.
Indifference	Indirectly resisting by naming resistance in others (Prasad and Prasad 2000)	Sebastian	Contributes alternative interpretations of dominant discourse.
Self-marginalization	Limited contribution to meetings, observes and interprets.	Jim	Constructs himself as 'other' (Symon 2005), thereby questioning work-space boundaries.
Pessimistic, cynical and subversive	Identifies contradictions in discourse/message and subverts them.	Pat	Contributes antithesis to dominant discourses and underlying messages.

---

<sup>i</sup> We gratefully acknowledge financial support by Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under award No. RES-061-25-0144-A for this research.

<sup>ii</sup> All names have been changed to protect the organization's and our research participants' identities.