Producing liminal spaces for change interventions: the case of LEGO serious play workshops

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to advance spatial studies of change interventions by conceptualizing them as liminal spaces and examining how these spaces are conceived, perceived and lived during the intervention process.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper explores change interventions as liminal spaces in the empirical context of LEGO serious play workshops through participant observations and interviews.

Findings – The study shows that in change interventions an abstract, conceived liminal space is created, maintained and closed down to enable the planned change to take place. While practicing the space, the change participants may indeed perceive this space as liminal, but the space is less manageable because of their both prescribed and unprescribed interpretations. Furthermore, as subjectively experienced, the space may hold a spectrum of liminal, liminoid and everyday (business as usual) notions.

Research limitations/implications – The study contributes to the research on (1) the spatiality of change interventions and (2) artificially created liminal spaces of organizing.

Practical implications – The paper reminds consultants and organizations embarking on change interventions to pay attention to the spatiality of such interventions. The study shows that it is not enough to plan how these spaces are to be used, but also it is equally important to consider how the participants use and experience them.

Originality/value – The study provides a novel insight into change interventions by examining them as liminal spaces that are simultaneously conceived, perceived and lived during the intervention process.

Keywords Change interventions, Liminal space, Spatial production

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Spatial management and organization studies have flourished during the last decades. For example, identity (Liu and Grey, 2018; de Vaujany and Vaast, 2014), power relations (Dale and Burrell, 2008; Zhang and Spicer, 2014), leadership (Hawkins, 2015; Ropo and Salovaara, 2019), gender dynamics (Tyler and Cohen, 2010; Wasserman and Frenkel, 2015), and work practices (Cnossen and Bencherki, 2019; Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018) have been studied from a (socio)material perspective. In their pursuit to better understand the spatiality and materiality of organizing, management and organization researchers join the other social scientists interested in materiality, such as human geographers (e.g. Cresswell, 2015; Massey, 1995; Tuan, 1977), philosophers (e.g. de Certeau, 1984; Foucault, 1977; Lefebvre, 1991) and psychologists (e.g. Becker and Steele, 1995; Gibson, 1966; Graamans *et al.*, 2020). Often, they also draw inspiration and theoretical perspectives from these studies. Spatial management and organization studies are underpinned by the idea that the social and the material aspects

of organizing are inextricably intertwined and therefore spatiality of organizational phenomena should also be researched (Balogun *et al.*, 2014; Carlile *et al.*, 2013; Orlikowski, 2007; Ropo *et al.*, 2015). As Kreiner (2010, p. 200) notes, "space matters to organizations; and therefore, space should matter in studies of organizations."

Despite this greater "material turn" in management and organization studies, several researchers (e.g. Antonacopoulou *et al.*, 2019; Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018; Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2015; Taylor and Statler, 2014) have argued that materiality and spatiality of change interventions have received limited attention. Physical spaces of change interventions, in particular, are often regarded as "a mere background" (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2015, p. 42) in the change intervention research. Yet those researchers who do acknowledge the spatiality of change interventions suggest that change interventions require and produce a very specific type of space (Pässilä *et al.*, 2019; Roos *et al.*, 2004; Sutherland, 2013).

Some researchers have described the space of a change intervention as a liminal space (Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018; Howard-Grenville *et al.*, 2011; Johnson *et al.*, 2010; Kempster *et al.*, 2015) referring to a highly ambiguous, creative, reflexive and change-inducing in-between space, where normal organizational routines and structures are momentarily ceased. This connects the physical spaces of change interventions into a wider interest towards the concepts of liminality and liminal spaces in management and organization research (e.g. Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003; Hawkins and Edwards, 2015; Iszatt-White and Lenney, 2020; Shortt, 2015; Sturdy *et al.*, 2006; Söderlund and Borg, 2018; Wagner *et al.*, 2012). Both liminality and liminal spaces are highly dynamic and processual concepts, and they have a great "potential for capturing contemporary challenges and the complexities of change and development at work" (Söderlund and Borg, 2018, p. 897). As such, conceptualizing spaces of change interventions as liminal spaces helps both researchers and consultants to appreciate and take into account the ambiguity and complexity involved in change interventions.

Adopting the conceptualization of spaces of change interventions as liminal spaces, the objective of this research is to study how change interventions as liminal spaces are spatially produced. In line with prior research (e.g. Liu and Grey, 2018; Taylor and Spicer, 2007; Wasserman and Frenkel, 2015; Zhang, 2006; Zhang and Spicer, 2014), I employ Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad as a heuristic device as through this framework researchers can study organizational spaces in a more nuanced and comprehensive way. Lefebvre's triad consists of three spatial components: conceived space, that refers to the planned and measurable aspects of spaces; perceived space, that refers to how spaces are used in both prescribed and unprescribed ways; and lived space, that refers to how spaces are subjectively experienced. These components of space, while analytically separate, are simultaneously socially produced: conceived space through managerial and architectural plans, perceived space through how inhabitants actually use the space, and lived space through the sensuous experiences, feelings and memories these spaces evoke (Ropo and Salovaara, 2019).

This paper explores the spatial production of liminal spaces for change interventions in the context of LEGO serious play workshops. The findings of the study show that in change interventions, an abstract, conceived liminal space is created, maintained and closed down to enable the planned organizational change to take place. While moving in and using this space, the change participants may indeed perceive the space as liminal, but it is ambiguous and less manageable because of their both prescribed and unprescribed interpretations. Finally, as subjectively experienced, the space of a change intervention is not necessarily liminal at all; instead, the participants of these interventions may experience a spectrum of liminal, liminoid and everyday (business as usual) spaces.

Through these insights, the paper contributes to two theoretical discussions. First, it advances the research on the spatiality of change interventions (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2015; Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018). Second, the study contributes to the research on artificially created

liminal spaces (Hawkins and Edwards, 2015; Johnson *et al.*, 2010). The paper provides practical implications for consultants and organizations embarking on change interventions.

First, I begin with a theoretical framing of change interventions as liminal spaces and then delve into the production of these spaces. Next, I describe the methods used to collect and analyze empirical material, before reporting the findings. I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical contributions and practical implications of the study.

Change interventions as liminal spaces

A construction of a specific type of space, and need for such a space, is often mentioned in the change intervention literature; especially so when it comes to change interventions that utilize artistic or playful elements. For example, these interventions are argued to create ambiguous interpretive spaces (Barry and Meisiek, 2010), afford aesthetic workspaces (Sutherland, 2013), create safe spaces for learning (Pässilä *et al.*, 2019), convert everyday spaces into "serious play" rooms (Roos *et al.*, 2004) and form *ludic* learning spaces (Kolb and Kolb, 2010). Common to all of these spaces is the idea of leading the intervention participants momentarily away from the everyday practices and routines (Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018) to a transformative space in which they are safe to creatively think about their organizational issues. This notion of leading away from the everyday connects to the concept of liminal spaces and, indeed, some scholars have described change interventions as liminal spaces (Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018; Howard-Grenville *et al.*, 2011; Johnson *et al.*, 2010; Kempster *et al.*, 2015).

Originating from the anthropological studies of rituals (e.g. Turner, 1974, 1979), liminality derives from Latin word *limen* which refers to threshold. At the heart of liminality is a transition from one stage to other; it is an experience that shapes and structures anew a person or a collectivity (Thomassen, 2015). During liminal time, normal rules and routines are momentarily suspended and liminal participants may critically reflect their everyday life (Turner, 1974). Liminality also temporarily lessens the significance of formal statuses and structures, as well as enables interaction between people, who normally would not interact (Turner, 1979). Liminal spaces, then, are the physical locations in which liminal experiences take place. As "almost anything may happen" (Turner, 1974, p. 13) during liminal time, liminal spaces are highly ambiguous and creative spaces. Turner (1987, p. 102) elaborates that liminal spaces are "privileged spaces where people are allowed to think about how they think, about the terms in which they conduct their thinking, or to feel about how they feel in daily life." It is this heightened reflexivity in liminal space, and the "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1979, p. 465) characteristic of these spaces, that allows liminal participants to truly question their everyday practices and to consider potentially better ways of organizing their lives. Liminoid spaces (Turner, 1982), then, closely resemble liminal spaces, but they do not involve "the key feature of liminality: *transition*" (Thomassen, 2015, p. 47).

Some management and organization scholars have studied physical in-between spaces, such as corridors, as liminal spaces (e.g. Shortt, 2015), while others have researched organizational phenomena that momentarily open up a liminal space (e.g. Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003). In the first stream of studies, the no man's land characteristic of liminal spaces is emphasized, and these spaces are seen in juxtaposition to the everyday spaces which embody the norms, routines and social expectations of the formal organization (Dale and Burrell, 2008; Shortt, 2015). The liminal spaces of change interventions, however, belong to the latter stream of studies, as they not only need to be evoked for the intervention to take place, but also maintained for the duration of the said intervention. They are artificially created liminal spaces, as they do not come about organically (Thomassen, 2015). Next, I delve into the previous literature on how liminal spaces are produced for change interventions.

Producing liminal spaces for change interventions

Management and organization scholars have generally approached liminal spaces as located either outside or within organizational boundaries (Söderlund and Borg, 2018). Some researchers argue that liminal space needed for a change intervention is achieved by relocating the organizational members to another geographical setting for the duration of the intervention (Johnson *et al.*, 2010; Sturdy *et al.*, 2006). Others suggest that everyday spaces can be momentarily transformed into liminal spaces for the change process to take place (Hawkins and Edwards, 2015; Wagner *et al.*, 2012). The empirical cases of this paper contain both types of liminal spaces, as the organizational members are not only away from their usual premises, but their "away day" locations are also transformed during the interventions.

Taking another look into the anthropological roots of the concept, liminal spaces are evoked, maintained and closed down through the three phases of the liminal process (Turner, 1974, 1979): first *pre-liminal* (separation) phase leads the participants away from the everyday space and towards the liminal space. Second, *liminal* phase maintains the ambiguous and reflexive liminal space and finally, *post-liminal* (reaggregation) phase restores the everyday space for the changed individuals. Like with the liminal spaces of organizational change interventions, here separation and reaggregation phases may refer to a literal movement from an everyday space to a liminal space and back to the everyday space (e.g. a special location to which individuals go for a rite of passage). Alternatively, they may refer to such rites that momentarily change an everyday space into a liminal space (e.g. a town square is changed into a holy space for a public ritual). Both types of liminal processes often involve masters of ceremonies, who lead the participants through the process, as well as various sacred rites and objects that strengthen the liminal experience (Turner, 1974, 1979). For Turner (1974), these liminal processes are an integral part of society as an ongoing dialectical process between social structure and anti-structure; that is, between the everyday life that is subject to a gradual change and the symbolic time of rituals that enables more radical change. Liminality, then, is a component of anti-structure, though it should be noted that here anti-structure does not refer to a *lack* of structure, but instead to a structure that is *different* from the everyday norms and routines (Turner, 1974).

In the context of organizational change interventions, consultants and other outsiders are often viewed as the guides, or "masters of ceremonies", who lead the participants through the liminal process (e.g. Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003; Hawkins and Edwards, 2015; Wagner *et al.*, 2012). As such, they have received a substantial amount of previous scholarly attention. These studies show that consultants and other outsiders frequently need to, *inter alia*, manage the experiences of doubt and uncertainty (Hawkins and Edwards, 2015), deal with their own liminal experiences (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003) and enact emotional labor as they attempt to successfully navigate the participants through the liminal process (Iszatt-White and Lenney, 2020). Moreover, Johnson *et al.* (2010) propose that consultants need to be endorsed by the top management, and considered as legitimate by the organizational members, in order to succeed in guiding the organization through the liminal process. Consultants need to carefully create seductive atmospheres in order to lead the intervention participants away from the everyday, but not to lead them astray (Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018).

The various rules and procedures of the change interventions, in turn, can be seen as the "sacred" rites of the interventions. Johnson *et al.* (2010), for instance, bring forth the "liturgies" involved in the change interventions; that is, the prescribed forms of the interventions that consultants utilize in guiding the participants through the liminal process. Furthermore, these interventions often involve specific rules that deviate from the everyday norms and routines of the participating organization. These rules especially tend to lower the normal hierarchical structure of the organization in order to allow the participants to interact more freely (Roos *et al.*, 2004; Pässilä *et al.*, 2019). Overall, management and organization scholars

have examined various conversational tools that are utilized in creating and maintaining suitable spaces for change interventions and the body of descriptive "how to" literature is especially large (Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018).

On the contrary, while various material tools are often involved in the production of spaces for change interventions, the existing change intervention literature tends to merely mention them in passing (Antonacopoulou *et al.*, 2019; Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018). Still, these "sacred" objects of the change interventions play an important role in evoking, maintaining and closing down liminal spaces. Roos *et al.* (2004) recount in the following how they used toys to create a space for a change intervention: "[. . .] we converted the corporate boardroom into a 'serious play' room containing LEGO materials ranging from loose bricks to pre-packaged retail sets [. . .] Now bricks in many colours shared the boardroom with the dark oil paintings of the company's founding fathers, and employees passing by the open door stopped in their tracks to stare in silence as the room took shape" (p. 557). This description not only shows how radically everyday spaces may be transformed for change interventions, but also captures the ambiguity and strangeness often linked to liminal experiences. Moreover, as the material tools are used during the change interventions, they further participate in the creation of liminal spaces (Kempster *et al.*, 2015).

While there is a robust body of literature that addresses the gap between planned change and lived experience of change (e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2015; Balogun and Johnson, 2005; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Weick, 1995, 2001), the spaces of change interventions have been approached from a rather managerialist and one-dimensional perspective. That is, these studies mainly view the liminal spaces of change interventions as conceived spaces (Lefebvre, 1991). This reflects the overall evolution of spatial management and organization studies where the earlier studies focused on the planned and measurable aspects of spaces (e.g. Bitner, 1992; Elsbach and Pratt, 2007; Hatch, 1987), while the second "wave" brought forth interest towards power relations (e.g. Dale and Burrell, 2008; Tyler and Cohen, 2010; Zhang and Spicer, 2014) and lived experiences of spaces (e.g. van Marrewijk, 2010; Ropo and Salovaara, 2019; Shortt, 2015). These three main streams of spatial organizational literature have been connected to Lefebvre's spatial triad and it has been argued that to comprehensively study the spatiality of organizational life, researchers need to pay attention to all three components of spatial production (e.g. Taylor and Spicer, 2007; Zhang, 2006). Thus, in this paper I explore the production of liminal spaces for change interventions not only as conceived, but also as perceived and lived.

Method
The research presented in this paper looks at the spatial production of liminal spaces for change interventions in the empirical context of LEGO serious play (LSP) workshops. LSP is a trademarked facilitation method that seeks to harness the power of playful interaction into organizations in order to enhance creative collective problem-solving (Kristiansen and Rasmussen, 2014). The method was first utilized in an executive education program in the LEGO company in the 1990s and further developed through sets of interventions in other organizations (Roos *et al.*, 2004). Nowadays LSP training and facilitation is a multi-million dollar business that involves dedicated material sets sold by the LEGO company (Roos and Victor, 2018). LSP facilitators are consultants, who utilize specific techniques and step-by-step procedures in their workshops. Some of these techniques and procedures are described in the findings section (for a more detailed description, see for example Roos *et al.*, 2004).

Data collection
The methods of data collection in this research were participant observation and interviews. The main body of empirical material was generated from two LSP workshops (workshops

A and B). Both workshops were one-day offsite interventions with thirteen participants and one facilitator. Workshop A involved members of an advertising agency and the agenda of their workshop was renewal of organizational identity. Workshop B involved top and middle management of a non-profit organization focusing on popularizing science and their agenda was long-term strategy work. The study was also informed by observations of an additional one-day offsite LSP workshop involving members of a local government, as well as by several informal conversations with two workshop facilitators. One of the facilitators held both workshops A and B and both of them were involved in the facilitation of the additional workshop.

My access to the workshops was negotiated in advance between the facilitator and the participating organization. Around an hour before each workshop, I met the facilitator onsite and was briefed about the basics of the participating organization, as well as the agenda and schedule of the workshop. After this I helped setting the site for the workshop, which mainly consisted moving tables to an appropriate formation and distributing small packages of Legos around the room. Once all the participants had arrived, the facilitator introduced me, and I briefly recounted the purpose of the research. I did not partake in the actual workshops; instead, I took detailed field notes of each moment spent with the participants and the facilitator.

All of the 26 participants of workshops A and B were inquired after the workshops whether they would like to be interviewed, with seven of workshop A participants (A1–A7) and six of workshop B participants (B1–B6) agreeing. The average duration of these semi-structured interviews was 35 min. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in verbatim. The interviewees were first asked to describe their expectations for and the overall experience of the workshop, after which each part of the workshop was discussed in detail. Furthermore, they were asked to consider what (1) they personally and (2) their organization gained from the workshop in order to examine whether the workshop had prompted some sort of individual and/or organizational-level change. Overall, the interviews were conducted to evoke rich conversations about the senses, feelings and memories (Ropo and Salovaara, 2019) the participants experienced before, during and after the workshop. Table 1 summarizes the main body of empirical material.

Data analysis
The data analysis of the study was guided by Alvesson and Kärreman's (2007) ideas of problematizing the existing theoretical knowledge by looking for deviations between the theory and empirical materials to prompt novel insights for new theorizing. Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) recommend that the fieldwork should be loosely theoretically informed, yet rich and varied. While a very broad interest towards liminality, materiality and spatiality gave some direction for my research, I attempted to produce a thick description of the LSP workshops.

I started the data analysis by carefully reading the empirical materials and systematically searching for points in which the materials deviated from what would be expected, given the

Workshop A	Workshop B
An advertising agency	A non-profit organization in science education
1-day off-site intervention	1-day off-site intervention
Agenda: renewing organizational identity	Agenda: long-term strategy work
13 participants (whole organization)	13 participants (top and middle management)
7 interviewed afterward, field notes	6 interviewed afterward, field notes

Table 1.
Summary of the main body of empirical material

previous studies on liminality, materiality and spatiality of change interventions (e.g. Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018; Howard-Grenville *et al.*, 2011; Johnson *et al.*, 2010; Kempster *et al.*, 2015). I was curious about the extent to which the spaces of LSP workshops could be analyzed from the perspective of the above-described liminal process. Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) refer this stage as the construction of breakdowns in existing understanding. As their analysis method is based on abductive inferencing, here "data are to be taken seriously, and the validity of previously developed knowledge is to be queried" (Reichertz, 2007, p. 221); that is, earlier theories should be both used and confronted to explain something unexpected observed in the empirical world.

Through this process, I encountered several breakdowns between the previous literature and different forms of empirical materials. These observed breakdowns suggested that differently from prior research on the spaces of change interventions (e.g. Barry and Meisiek, 2010; Roos *et al.*, 2004), my empirical materials could shed a light on how these spaces were actually used and experienced, rather than what were their planned aspects. This led me to utilize Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad as a heuristic device in the next analytical phase. For example Zhang (2006) illustrates the value of Lefebvre's triad with a simple example of an everyday spatial event in which a person is walking into their office: conceived space directs the researcher's attention to the planned and objective aspects of this event, such as the length of the corridor; perceived space leads to observe the bodily movements of the person; and lived space tells about the person's inner subjectivity, for example their "feeling about the stupid doorknob which wouldn't turn" (p. 222). He argues that while these components can be studied separately, all of them need to be taken into account in order to truly understand the production of any kind of organizational space.

Thus, in order to provide a rich understanding of the spaces of LSP workshops, I constructed each spatial component of Lefebvre's triad from the data. First, conceived space was constructed from the schedules and conversations with the facilitator; second, perceived space was constructed from the field notes; and third, lived space was constructed from the interview data. I then examined each component further, posing the data such questions as what kind of space the facilitator wanted to deliver to the participants? How the participants and the facilitator moved in and used the space? What kinds of spaces the participants experienced during the intervention? Throughout this process, I kept in mind Zhang's (2006) notions that the analysis of any space requires constant movement from one component of space to another, and that all of them need to be considered when studying the production of spaces.

Findings
Conceived space
Analyzed through the lens of conceived space, all the observed LSP workshops appeared as liminal spaces created and maintained to manage collective work on a specific, pre-identified organizational issue. As such, the workshops as conceived spaces were what one could expect, given the previous research (e.g. Howard-Grenville *et al.*, 2011; Johnson *et al.*, 2010; Kempster *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, while not a conscious choice from the facilitator, the liminal space of the workshops was indeed evoked, maintained and closed down following the three phases of the liminal process.

First, the pre-liminal phase consisted of warm-up exercises that aimed to (re)familiarize the participants with the use of Legos and demonstrate how they could be used to communicate about serious issues. These exercises meant to guide the participants further away from the everyday space and into the liminality of "serious play" room (Roos *et al.*, 2004).

The subsequent liminal phase involved longer model-building exercises that directly focused on the pre-identified organizational issue. In workshop A, each participant first built

a model of their understanding of their current organizational identity, after which subsequent models were built to represent their hopes for the future. The most important pieces of the latter models were then utilized to build a collective model. In workshop B, the participants built two individual models that represented their visions of the unexpected services their organization could provide in ten years' time. These exercises involved different techniques, such as utilizing another participant's idea as a starting point for the model. In both workshops, guided conversations were held in-between the model-building.

The final post-liminal phase consisted of longer guided conversations that dealt with the main insights of the workshop and the overall experience. As in any liminal process, the purpose of this phase was to slowly reaggregate the participants into the everyday space, armed with changed organizational perspectives.

Perceived space
Looking at the workshops as perceived spaces, the facilitator moved in and used the space to create and maintain the liminal space she hoped to conceive for the participants. Before the workshops, she took great care to provide a suitable setting (Goffman, 1959) by converting the offsite venues, chosen by the clients, to "serious play" rooms (Roos *et al.*, 2004). She repositioned tables, put on an upbeat playlist and distributed colorful Legos everywhere in the room. During the workshops, the facilitator utilized rules, instructions and atmospheric means (such as music) to first create, then maintain and finally close down the conceived liminal space.

The participants generally moved in and used the space in a manner suitable for the conceived space; for the most parts they did not explicitly resist the workshop agenda or procedures. However, the participants of both workshops did occasionally move in and use the space in unprescribed ways. The most striking of such moments was the beginning of workshop A, as the participants arrived ten minutes before the scheduled starting time and one of them begun to prepare a brunch with cocktails. According to the facilitator, this was not preplanned with her, but she quickly went to help and encouraged others to do so, too. A couple of participants took up her request, while most of them continued to casually familiarize themselves with the venue. The overall mood was relaxed and filled with casual banter and joking. Finally, around forty minutes late, the facilitator was able to properly begin the workshop.

Another moment of participants of workshop A using the space unexpectedly occurred during the main liminal exercises. The workshop schedule dictated that the participants were first to individually build models depicting their understanding of their current organizational identity, and then to have a facilitator-guided conversation about their models. After a ten-minute break, they were supposed to have another round of individual model-building and subsequent conversations, this time focusing on their future aspirations related to their organizational identity. Nonetheless, one participant begun to tell how she would modify her model to advance their organizational identity already during the first round of conversations. The facilitator stopped her, reminding that they would go there later on. The participant agreed somewhat reluctantly, and the conversation continued. However, once the facilitator announced the break, the participant went straight to the Legos and begun to modify her model. Others reminded her about the break, but she just smiled and said that she would now build what she had wanted to say. One by one, others followed her example and once almost everyone was already building, the facilitator jumped in and gave more specific instructions for the exercise.

Compared to the workshop A, the participants of workshop B outwardly seemed to move in and use the workshop space more in tune with the facilitator's guidance. However, the field notes show that throughout the workshop they used the Legos less especially during the guided conversations. For instance, in the second warm-up exercise, the participants were

first to build a five-piece model from random bricks and then to explain a word given by the facilitator through the model in smaller groups. Before the second part of the exercise, the facilitator established that every piece should be described and used when explaining the word and that other participants should look at the model and not the person explaining it. She also demonstrated how individual Legos were to be used as symbols for abstract concepts, utilizing a single brick as a device in her speech. Still, while the overall atmosphere was focused on the task, most participants hardly used the Legos when explaining their word and their listeners, too, generally did not look at the models.

Later on, the participants of workshop B deviated from the instructions to build abstract models even more explicitly. In their first liminal exercise, the participants were to build an individual model based on another participant's idea; for this, they had previously filled idea papers answering the question: "What unexpected services Organization B could offer in 2030?" Like with the other exercises, the participants listened the instructions carefully and proceeded with the task promptly. However, as they presented their models, it became clear that instead of abstract models depicting new services, everyone par one had built a concrete model of a new science exhibition. Most of the exhibitions, while innovative, were suitable for producing the services their organization already provided. This trend continued in the next exercise, and the facilitator was unable to guide the subsequent conversations into a more abstract level that would have better supported the workshop's agenda: long-term strategy work.

These moments reveal how the facilitator's control over the space can be contested. Considering the workshops as perceived spaces, the ambiguity of liminal spaces (Shortt, 2015) and the constant spatial negotiations between the facilitator and the participants come more deeply to the fore.

Lived space
When examined as lived spaces, the workshops do not merely appear as liminal spaces, but as a spectrum of various types of liminal, liminoid and everyday spaces:

Liminal spaces. Some participants (A5, A6, B5) indicated that they had experienced the conceived liminal space during the workshops and gone through the intended change process. In the interviews, they recounted outcomes of the workshop that were in line with the organizational goals (renewal of organizational identity and outlining of long-term strategic interests, respectively). The participants of workshop A even indicated that they had changed or intended to change their own behavior to better support the shared organizational identity. All of them said they had enjoyed the workshops and found the LSP method useful in thinking about their organizational challenges creatively. They found the experience to be "positive" (B5) and noted how working with Legos made them "think very deeply" (A6) about their organizational issues. One of them marveled: "These legos have quite a fantastic power; with them one can build a prerequisite for the existence of a whole firm" (A5). Intriguingly, one participant (A6) felt that the workshop did not lower the normal hierarchies in a way they usually do in liminal spaces (Turner, 1979); instead, she stated that those who usually voiced their opinions the loudest did so too in the workshop, while others remained more silent.

Not all experiences of liminal spaces, however, were in line with the organizational objectives of the workshops. In particular, one participant (A4) seemed to have experienced a more personal liminal space, which was not directly about the intended organizational-level change. Rather than focusing on the renewal of the shared organizational identity, this participant started to examine his own professional identity and to deliberate what makes work in advertising meaningful for him. This contemplation was prompted by a younger colleague's LEGO model that had the aspiration of doing societally meaningful work at the center. In his interview, the participant named this as the most unforgettable moment of the workshop and said he "had thought about it the most" (A4). The liminal space generated by

the workshop seemed to have sparked a change in perspective for this participant, but not the intended one.

Liminoid spaces. Looking at the interview data, most of the participants (A1, A2, A3, B1, B3 and B4) described an experience of a space that, instead of a liminal space, was more in line with Thomassen's (2015) notion of liminoid spaces. That is, these participants found the experience enjoyable and creative and felt that they had momentarily disengaged from their everyday norms, routines and practices. However, none of them found the workshops particularly change-inducing. When asked about personal and/or organizational outcomes of the workshops, all of them struggled to name anything specific and indicated that they had not experienced any sort of change due to the workshops. Still, some of them (A1, A2) believed that other participants of their workshop might have experienced a change and all of them were positively intrigued by the LSP method. The participants described the method as "fun" (B1), "unaffected" (B3) and "great" (A1) and praised how well it took everyone's perspectives into account (A2). One of them stated: "It was a positive experience; I liked how there was creativity, but on the other hand it was quite structured [. . .] I myself found it quite interesting and nice way to work" (B4).

Still, the interviews with some of these participants (especially B1 and B4) suggest that these experiences do not necessarily remain as liminoid. While at the time of their interviews, none of these participants felt that they had experienced a change due to the workshops, they did acknowledge the potential of the method. One of them said that the workshop was "a start of a conversation and an ideation" (B4) and noted that all new ideas need time and refining. Similarly, another talked about how their organization needed to return to the LEGO models and think about how the concrete models could be translated into long-term strategic goals so that they could "see what they meant in the higher level" (B1). These notions connect to Turner's (1974) ideas of gradual changes that occur through several cycles of liminal spaces, instead of transpiring during one liminal space. If these participants attempt to evoke new liminal spaces around the ideas of the workshops, their experiences of liminoid spaces can be redefined in their memories as firsts of a series of change-inducing liminal spaces.

Everyday spaces. Finally, some participants appeared to have remained in the everyday space (A7, B2), or alternatively returned there (B6) before the post-liminal phase of the workshop. Based on the interviews, these participants did not consider the workshop as a particularly creative experience and, even more importantly, they did not disengage from their everyday lives. One of them was particularly frustrated with the LSP method and the use of Legos, stating that "there is certainly no organization in the world that has built their strategy with legos" (B2). Even though this participant found the whole experience more or less a waste of time, he did not express his discontent during the workshop. Instead, he did everything that was asked for, and appeared to present a cynical performance (Goffman, 1959) of entering into the conceived liminal space. Another participant (A7) seemed to have more positive feelings about the workshop – even expressing happiness for the other participants whom she believed had enjoyed the experience – but nonetheless she personally felt unable to enter into any kind of liminal or liminoid space during the workshop. Somewhat similarly, one participant (B6) initially entered into a liminoid space, even a liminal space, but then returned to the everyday space ahead of time due to bodily discomfort caused by an old ailment. Bodily sensations also participate in the production of space as a lived experience (Ropo and Salovaara, 2019).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the spatial production of liminal spaces for change interventions and thus to advance our understanding of the spatiality of change interventions. In order to achieve a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of

the production of these spaces, I employed Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad as a heuristic device. In other words, in the empirical analysis I not only examined how the space of change intervention was planned to be used, but also studied how the intervention participants moved in and used the space, and how they subjectively experienced the space. Next, I discuss the main findings related to each spatial component.

First, the study shows that if we regard the space of a change intervention as a conceived space, we see the liminal space one would expect to see, given the knowledge from the previous studies on producing liminal spaces. Here the change intervention proceeds in a linear manner and follows the liminal process, consisting of pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal exercises (Turner, 1974). The consultant facilitating the intervention acts as a liminal guide (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003; Hawkins and Edwards, 2015), leading the somewhat passive participants first away from the everyday space into the liminal space and then back to the everyday space. She utilizes both conversational and material tools in order to create and maintain the liminal space (Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018; Kempster *et al.*, 2015), which is carefully planned to guide the participants to work together on a specific, pre-identified organizational issue. Once the everyday space is restored in the end of the intervention, the participants should have experienced an organizationally meaningful change.

Second, if we then study this space as a perceived space, we still witness a liminal space, but here the ambiguous, "almost anything may happen" (Turner, 1974, p. 13) characteristic of these spaces comes to the fore. While various norms, routines and social expectations are interwoven into the everyday spaces, organizational members are generally able to move in and use liminal spaces more freely (Shortt, 2015). Consequently, as a liminal space is opened for the change intervention to take place, the participants are allowed into a space that lets them interpret and practice the space in multiple ways. In the present study, this characteristic is manifested in the various unexpected ways the participants move in and use the space during the intervention. Here the consultant needs to constantly negotiate with the participants in order to keep the intervention going. Consequently, the liminal space as a perceived space appears to be much less dictated by the consultant than the above-described conceived space of the intervention.

Finally, if we examine the space of a change intervention as a lived space, we find that this space may not necessarily be liminal at all. Instead, the empirical study suggests that a whole spectrum of everyday and liminal spaces can be experienced during the interventions. While some participants did experience the conceived liminal space, others experienced more personal liminal spaces containing transitions less connected to the organizational objectives of the intervention. Some participants did not experience the liminality during the intervention, and instead remained in the everyday space. The spectrum of lived spaces also included experiences of liminoid spaces (Turner, 1982), which outwardly are remarkably similar to liminal spaces, but do not bring forth any sort of experience of a transition (Thomassen, 2015). These liminoid spaces, however, may be redefined as liminal spaces over time, if they are followed by several other cycles of liminal spaces and thus gradually evoke the intended change (Turner, 1974). In sum, when observed through the lens of lived space, the space of a change intervention differs even more drastically from the conceived space than the above-described perceived space.

Contributions and practical implications

The theoretical contribution of this paper is two-fold: first, I advance the research on the spatiality of change interventions. While management and organization scholars have been increasingly interested in the spatial and material aspects of organizing, several scholars have recently brought forth that the spaces of change interventions, and other material artifacts involved, are still rarely the main focus of the change intervention research. Instead

of seeing organizational spaces as active participants in the sociomaterial construction of organizational phenomena (Balogun *et al.*, 2014; Carlile *et al.*, 2013; Orlikowski, 2007; Ropo *et al.*, 2015), the existing change intervention literature tends to treat the spaces of change interventions as somewhat passive containers, even though the need for having a specific type of space is often mentioned (Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018; Pässilä *et al.*, 2019; Roos *et al.*, 2004; Sutherland, 2013). This study has brought the spaces of change interventions in the foreground and examined how such spaces are conceived, perceived and lived. Through Lefebvre's spatial triad, I have constructed a multi-faceted understanding of the production of the spaces of change interventions and highlighted how different spatial components as analytical lenses show very different spaces of change interventions. As all of these spaces are involved in the spatial production of change interventions, the study sheds light on why the consultant facilitating the intervention may not be able to provide the specific change-inducing liminal space despite all the careful planning and procedures.

Second, the study advances management and organization research on artificially created liminal spaces. Following others (Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018; Howard-Grenville *et al.*, 2011; Johnson *et al.*, 2010; Kempster *et al.*, 2015), here the conceived intervention space is seen as a liminal space that is created and maintained to manage organizational change processes. However, looking at this space as a perceived space reminds us that liminal spaces cannot be managed in the way everyday spaces of an organization are managed. On the contrary, research on concrete in-between spaces, such as corridors, shows how organizational members often escape the managerial control to liminal spaces (Dale and Burrell, 2008; Shortt, 2015; Taylor and Spicer, 2007). While artificially created liminal spaces, such as the spaces of change interventions, are different from these in-between spaces, they too open up possibilities for unexpected spatial interpretations and practices. More importantly, the findings related to the lived space suggest that rather than approaching the space of a change intervention as a monolithic liminal space, it may be more fruitful to consider this space as a spectrum of liminal, liminoid and everyday spaces.

The research has practical implications for consultants and organizations embarking on change interventions. First, it reminds that the spatial and material aspects of change interventions need to be considered properly when planning and conducting interventions (Elmholdt *et al.*, 2018; Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2015; Taylor and Statler, 2014). Physical spaces and other material aspects are not passive containers of change interventions; instead, they play an active role in the consultant's attempt to evoke creative, out-of-norm moment for a change to take place. Second, the study emphasizes that it is not enough to plan how these spaces are to be used. Instead, it is equally important to consider how the spaces are actually used and experienced. Change interventions can open up liminal spaces that bring forth the intended change, but they are not necessarily used in the preplanned ways. Instead, the spaces are also produced through and in a constant spatial negotiation between the participants and the consultant facilitating them, and due to the liminal conditions, the consultant cannot dictate how the participants are to use the space. The participants' subjective experiences of the spaces, then, are even less manageable. While conceptualizing spaces of change interventions as liminal spaces helps consultants to appreciate and take into account the ambiguity and complexity of change interventions, the study shows that especially the lived experiences of these spaces are even less straightforward than what the previous research indicates. However, the study also suggests that liminoid experiences of change interventions (out-of-norm, yet not transformative) can be redefined as liminal experiences if they are followed by a series of new liminal spaces that then together gradually evoke the intended change. Change interventions require diligent follow-ups, as without them, they can easily turn into singular, meaningless divergences from the everyday routines and practices.

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