

Elton Xhetani  
Warwick Business School  
University of Warwick  
Coventry  
West Midlands  
CV4 7AL

E-mail: Phd10ex@mail.wbs.ac.uk

**Paper title: Identity and spatial change in schools**

My research focus is based on ‘How does organisational architecture affect teachers’ professional identity? A comparative case study based on Sixth Form Colleges.’ This research explores crucial gaps in the organisational studies literature. The gaps identified concern organisational space, professional identity and the relationships amongst each other. The specific gap in the literature, which is the focus of my research, concerns the limited research undertaken to date on how space as meaning and professional identity link together. By space I mean particularly physical building(s), architecture and spatial structures. Again, when referring to place I pay particular attention to interactions, physical appearance, intersubjectivity, movements and how teachers interpret space. The existing literature on organisational space largely analyses its impact on workforce reactions by employing physical measurements. Marrewijk and Yanow (2010) comment that researchers fail to discuss the importance of narrative approaches to the relationship between organisational space and professional identity and consequently, there is little awareness or understanding of spatial formation are produced, re-produced and communicated in everyday organisational life. Additionally, a review of the literature on professional identity reveals, as Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) argue that there is an absence of scholarship on the narrative scopes of professional identity. From the current literature it is clear that there is a connection amongst organisational space and professional identity, but the question remains that we do not fully understand how this relationship works and cannot yet, accurately model or theorise explanatory or predictive representations. Equally, as argued by Taylor and Spicer (2007), Marrewijk and Yanow (2010) and more recently Hancock and Spicer (2011), there is even now comparatively little consideration given to the links amid ‘spaces, feelings, attributes and acts outside of some of the work in organisational culture and symbolism’ (p 93). Hence, as illustrated in Brown and Humphreys (2006) more research is necessitated to give attention to how narratives of space shape professional identities. This research investigates this specific gap.

From my preliminary literature review, and also from personal interest, I have chosen to base my empirical research within the field of post primary education up to and including A

Levels. The field of education is one area where there is a deliberate drive to use new buildings and changing layout to serve educational purposes. The core staff delivering the education can be considered professionals partly because professional qualification are required to enter the profession but more importantly professional standards of behaviour attitude and achievement are required to be a successful teacher. Hence, situating my research in this field enables me to consider the interaction between space and professional identity. As Beijaard et al (2004) pointed out identity is an on-going process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences. They argue that identity answers the recurrent question “Who am I at this moment?” (p 108). In this study, however, I will adopt Beijaard et al (2000) definition where teacher’s identity consists of three sub-identities, the teacher as a subject matter expert, pedagogical expert, and didactical expert. As a consequence believe there may be an impact upon and consequence for the professional identity of teachers. My research method included visual methods and what I have done here is that I have given cameras to participants and asked them to take pictures of what they deemed to play an important role in their teaching/profession. This is a new method used in organisational studies. That said I am using this approach as a prompt to my interviews so teachers referred back to them and gave the narrative account on each photo taken.

A similar approach has been utilised by Sam Warren (2002). In her study, Sam focuses on the role of photography in exploring the aesthetics of processes of organizing. She argues that links are drawn between the contemporary consumer culture and aesthetics in the organizational and work context. This study attempts to bring into attention the role of aesthetics in work organizations by examining it in a ‘non-rational’ way.

In this research the author’s experiences during an ethnographic study of the website design department of a global IT firm are used to show that photographs taken by workers of their work environment helped them to express the relationship they had with surrounding aesthetics. Photographs were thus used by the respondents to communicate their aesthetic experience during semi-structured interviews. The images were an ‘aesthetic lens’ through which the author looked at his research questions and he also used them as a basis for discussion.

The author spent 3 months with a website design department of an IT firm located in the South of England. The members of the office had recently moved to an ‘aesthetically designed’ office intended to convey the creative spirit of staff to customers and to provide a creative environment. This particular department was chosen because the author saw it as an opportunity to explore the relationship between consumption, aesthetics and organization.

The key questions for the employees were how did they feel working in such an aesthetically appealing environment (and did it appeal to them) and was their attachment to the organization changed.

During the first stage, she engaged in many conversations with staff during which they showed her the places, objects and spaces they were talking about. When she was asked to see all that, she decided to start using photographs. First she took the photos herself but

because of her own view being reflected in the photos, she decided to hand the camera over to the respondents. The respondents were thus given the instructions to take photos of things that they felt represented their work environment. The photographs were later viewed and discussed in an interview discussion between the respondent and the author.