

# Workplace and Language

Constructing the user experience of office space

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Kaisa Airo



# Workplace and Language

Constructing the user experience of office space

**Kaisa Airo**

A doctoral dissertation completed for the degree of Doctor of Science (Technology) to be defended, with the permission of the Aalto University School of Engineering, at a public examination held at the lecture hall M1 of the school on 12.12.2014 at 12.

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**Abstract**

The employees are the companies' most valuable asset, therefore it is essential that the work environment meets the employees' needs and supports their performance. Still "the space" is often a neglected attribute in management discourse. Thus experience based knowledge of office users is a crucial element in developing workplaces and -spaces.

This dissertation claims that language constructs experience of workplace because, although we live in a physical reality all our concepts, values and ultimately experience is derived from a social linguistic process. Thus although words do not construct places, they have a profound role in constructing the experience of the places and spaces. The aim of this dissertation is to bring the sociolinguistic perspective into the workplace management research and to portray communicational patterns that lead to the user experience of the workplace.

The theory of social constructionism by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann was applied to workplace management research by using sociolinguistic methods of discourse- and narrative analysis in analyzing the user experience of office space. Communicational patterns were investigated with 3 empirical papers concerning relocation from enclosed office to the open plan office. One paper focused on public discourse concerning open plan office. Additionally literature review was conducted, in which the sociolinguistic perspective in workplace management research was reviewed.

The literature review indicated that the linguistic methods of narrative and discourse analysis are not recognized in workplace management research in a comprehensive way by combining the research on built environment to the research on organization and culture. If they were used, methods were applied to the research of space and place as means of communication and means of identity construction. The 4 empirical papers suggest that the rhetorical patterns of the language of the workplace heavily reflect the ongoing identity work of the office users. Thus when looking into the user experience of workplace, it is crucial to identify what kind identities are displayed and what kind of contradiction are displayed. This is because the office users construct their experience based on their perception of their professional identity.

Language about the spaces is still an unknown territory, and as such should be studied more extensively. This should be acknowledged among all the stakeholders in the facility management and built environment fields of study. Managing the space is important – not only as a physical asset but also as a source of conversations and reflection of social order. The workplace discourse is an important channel to deepen the understanding the workplace experience or any other spatial experience of the user.

**Keywords** Workplace, Office, User experience, Social constructionism, Discourse analysis, Narrative analysis

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Työtilat herättävät paljon tunteita ja keskustelua. Niihin kiinnytään ja ne heijastavat arvoja ja merkitystä. Tästä huolimatta organisaation tiloihin ei ole juuri kiinnitetty huomiota johtamisen tutkimuksessa.

Tässä väitöskirjassa esitettiin, että työtilojen käyttäjäkokemus rakennetaan kielen avulla. Tämä tarkoittaa sitä, että vaikka tilat olisivat fyysisiä, meidän kokemuksemme niistä on sosiaalinen, mikä ilmenee vuorovaikutuksen eli kielen avulla. Sosiokielellisillä prosesseilla on perustavanlaatuisen vaikutus siihen, mitä arvostamme, miten näemme itsemme ja miten koemme tilan. Tästä syystä tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli paitsi tuoda sosiokielellinen näkökulma osaksi työympäristö johtamisen tutkimusta, mutta myös selvittää minkälaiset retoriset strategiat johtavat työympäristön käyttäjäkokemukseen.

Väitöskirjassa sovellettiin Peter Bergerin ja Thomas Luckmannin teoriaa todellisuuden sosiaalisesta rakentumisesta työympäristö johtamisen tutkimukseen. Metodeina käytettiin sosiaaliseen konstruktionismiin perustuvia kielellisiä menetelmiä diskurssi ja narratiivista analyysia. Väitöskirja koostui neljästä empiirisestä tutkimuksesta, jossa keskityttiin tilamuutosprosesseihin sekä yleiseen keskusteluun avotoimistoista. Lisäksi väitöskirjassa toteutettiin kirjallisuuskatsaus, jossa tutkittiin diskurssi analyysin ja narratiivisen analyysin käyttöä työympäristöjohtamisen tutkimuksessa.

Väitöskirjassa tuli esille, että sosiokielellisiä menetelmiä ei ole juuri käytetty työympäristö johtamisen tutkimuksessa tai rakennetun ympäristön tutkimuksessa ylipäätänsä. Jos niitä oli käytetty, tutkimus keskittyi siihen, miten tilaa voidaan käyttää kommunikoinnin tai identiteetin rakennuskeinona. Empiiriset tulokset viittasivat siihen, että kun käyttäjät puhuvat tilasta he panostavat enemmän vastapuolen suostutteluun kuin itse tilan kuvailuun. Lisäksi tilapuhetta ohjasi yleisten ideaalien ja identiteettipuheen diskurssit. Tutkimuspapereiden perusteella voikin sanoa, että toimiston käyttäjien kokemus tilasta muodostettiin oman ammatillisen identiteetin perusteella sekä kielellisillä vastakkainasetteluilla enemmän kuin fyysisen tilan objektiivisista ominaisuuksien pohjalta.

Sosiokielellinen näkökulma on tutkimaton alue työympäristö johtamisen tutkimuksessa. Lisäksi kielen rakenteen luovat käyttäjäkokemuksen, joten niitä tulisi tutkia tarkemmin niin työympäristö johtamisen kuin rakennetun ympäristön tutkimisessa yleensä. Työympäristö - diskurssi luo jatkuvasti uutta tarinaa ja tilakokemusta, siksi sitä ei tulisi unohtaa tiloja johtaessa.

**Avainsanat** työympäristö, toimisto, käyttäjäkokemus, sosiaalinen konstruktionismi, diskurssianalyysi, narratiivinen analyysi

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# Appended Papers 1- 5

This doctoral dissertation consists of a summary and the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their numerals.

- 1.** Airo, Kaisa; Nenonen, Suvi (2014). The review of linguistic approach in workplace management research. Emerald. Facilities, volume 32, iss: 1/2, pp.27-45. ISSN: 0263-2772. DOI. [10.1108/F-12-2011-0102](https://doi.org/10.1108/F-12-2011-0102)
- 2.** Airo, Kaisa; Rasila Heidi; Nenonen, Suvi (2012). Speech as a way of constructing change in space: Opposing and conforming discourses in workplace change process. Emerald. Facilities, Vol. 30 Iss: 7/8, pp.289-301. ISSN: 0263-2772. DOI. [10.1108/02632771211220095](https://doi.org/10.1108/02632771211220095)
- 3.** Airo, Kaisa; Rasila, Heidi; Nenonen, Suvi (2012). Open plan office, from Narratives to discourses—an analysis of an Internet discussion. Proceedings of EuroFM conference in Copenhagen 2012, pp. 178-187.
- 4.** Airo, Kaisa (2014). Academic Identities and spatial narratives. International Journal of Facility Management, pp.282-294. ISSN: 221-4467-67.
- 5.** Airo, Kaisa; Nenonen, Suvi (2012). Analysing the office space from a Narrative Perspective—a case study of an employment office. Proceedings of W070 CIB Conference in Cape Town 2012, pp. 218-227

# Author's Contribution

**Publication 1:** “The review of the linguistic approach in workplace management research”.

The author was responsible for collecting and analysing the data. The author wrote the paper. The second author provided input to the theory and commented on the paper.

**Publication 2:** “Speech as a way of constructing change in space—Opposing and conforming discourses”.

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**Publication 3:** “Open plan office, from narratives to discourses—an analysis of an Internet discussion”.

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**Publication 4:** “Academic identities and spatial narratives”.

The author was responsible for collecting and analysing the data. The author wrote the paper.

**Publication 5:** “Analysing the office space from a narrative perspective—a case study of an employment office”.

The author was responsible for collecting and analysing the data. The author wrote the paper. The second author provided input on the theory and commented on the paper.









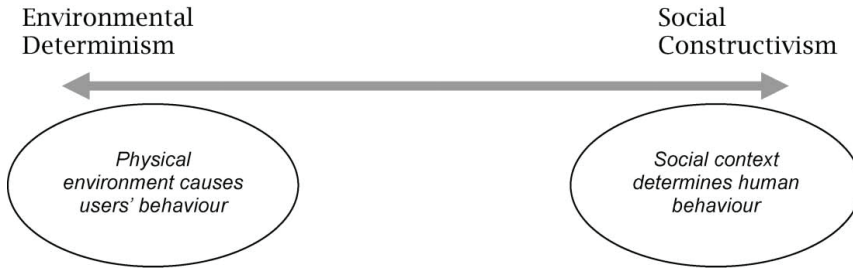
# 1. Introduction

Employees are a company's most valuable asset; therefore, it is essential that the work environment meets employees' needs and supports their performance. Accordingly, employees tend to become attached to places and spaces in a profound way (Altman and Low, 1992). Still, "space" is often a neglected attribute in management discourse (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004).

Experience-based knowledge of office users is a crucial element in developing workplaces and -spaces. People evaluate and ultimately experience workspaces based on their opinions, attitudes, identities and ideals. Experience is often constructed through interaction (Battarbee, 2006). The question of how spaces are experienced is thus a question of *communication*. That is, the language used when speaking and writing about the built environment plays a significant role in shaping that environment and our responses to it (Markus and Cameron, 2002). In other words, people perceive, experience and value spatial issues based on cultural constructions (Price, 2012; Markus and Cameron 2002), which are bound to language and communication. Language and communication then are important factors in studying the user experience of the workplace and -space.

The discourse on the built environment often reflects the engineering paradigm, in which the physical entities and economical attributes of space are the centre of the investigation. The other perspective is the architectural paradigm, which is focused on the aesthetics of spatial features (Markus and Cameron 2002). Both of these paradigms overlook the discursive nature of knowledge creation. The discourse of workplace management involves the social issues of spaces and places (Price and Alexander 2012), but it still lacks the discursive perspective in studying users' experience of spatial issues.

In the field of workplace management, the user experience is often studied using the approach of environmental determinism (Figure 1) by conducting different types of user surveys, such as post-occupancy evaluation or satisfaction surveys (Vicher, 2008).



**Figure 1.** User-centred theories of the built environment by Vicher, 2007, p. 232.

This research does not claim that the physical environment is an indifferent factor in constructing the user experience, but it does claim that the social context, that is language and stories, has impact on the experience of space in general and the workplace in particular. This means that although there is an interest in users' experiences, those experiences are not created in individual minds, which would be isolated from the external influence of the social network. Rather, it claims that individual experience is always constructed in social context. Accordingly, this research is situated on the right hand of Vicher's theories of users' experiences of built environments (Figure 1), because it focuses on how users construct their workplace experiences in a social context, through the use of language. Because the discursive approach is rarely used in workplace management research, this thesis also contributes to the ontological and epistemological premises of the study of workplace management by introducing new perspectives and methods to multidisciplinary workplace management research.

## 1.1 Research Aims and Questions

This dissertation claims that language constructs the workplace experience because although we live in a physical reality, all of our concepts, values and ultimately experience are derived from a social linguistic process (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Foucault, 1969; Lefebvre, 1974 etc.). Thus language has a profound role in constructing the experience of places and spaces. Because language is a vast and complex concept, in this dissertation it is defined as a form of cultural interaction and communication rather than a grammatical system or a system with ethnic qualities. In other words, the interest of this dissertation is in the meta-level of communication, not in grammar or cultural differences. In addition this dissertation takes a socially constructed approach to the relationship of language and space, rather than investigating space as language, with linguistic structures or how linguistic structures represent the spatiality (e.g. Hanks, 1990; Levinson, 2003).

The aim of this dissertation is to bring the discursive perspective into the workplace context and to portray communication patterns that lead to a users' experience of the workplace. Following are its research questions:

**RQ 1:** How is discursive approach connected to the workplace and the built environment?

This question is answered in paper 1, which elaborates the scope of sociolinguistic studies in the context of the built environment. Additionally it provides suggestions about how this type of perspective can be applied to the field of workplace management and what it can contribute to the theory of workplace management.

**RQ 2:** What type of identity positions and rhetorical strategies are adopted when communicating about workplace and space?

This question is answered in papers 2, 3, 4. Papers 2 and 4 examine the language of workplace users, particularly in the context of workplace change. Paper 3 elaborates the rhetorical patterns that arise out of external sources, namely, media reporting and Internet discussion.

**RQ 3:** What do these constructs reveal about user experiences in the workplace and -space?

The final question is answered in this concluding part of the dissertation, which compiles the findings of all five papers and their perspectives on language and the workplace experience.

## 1.2 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of five papers. Because this dissertation's purpose is to describe different discursive processes connected to the experience of workplaces, the cases were selected from variety of themes related to communication and the workplace. In addition, because this perspective is new in the field of workplace management, the theoretical background is investigated and reviewed. Paper 1 also reviews the methods of narrative and discourse analysis to see how well they apply. The research design is derived from the theoretical perspective of social constructionism.

**Paper 1:** "A review of the linguistic approach in workplace management research" focuses on the literature concerning linguistic methods, workplaces and the built environment.

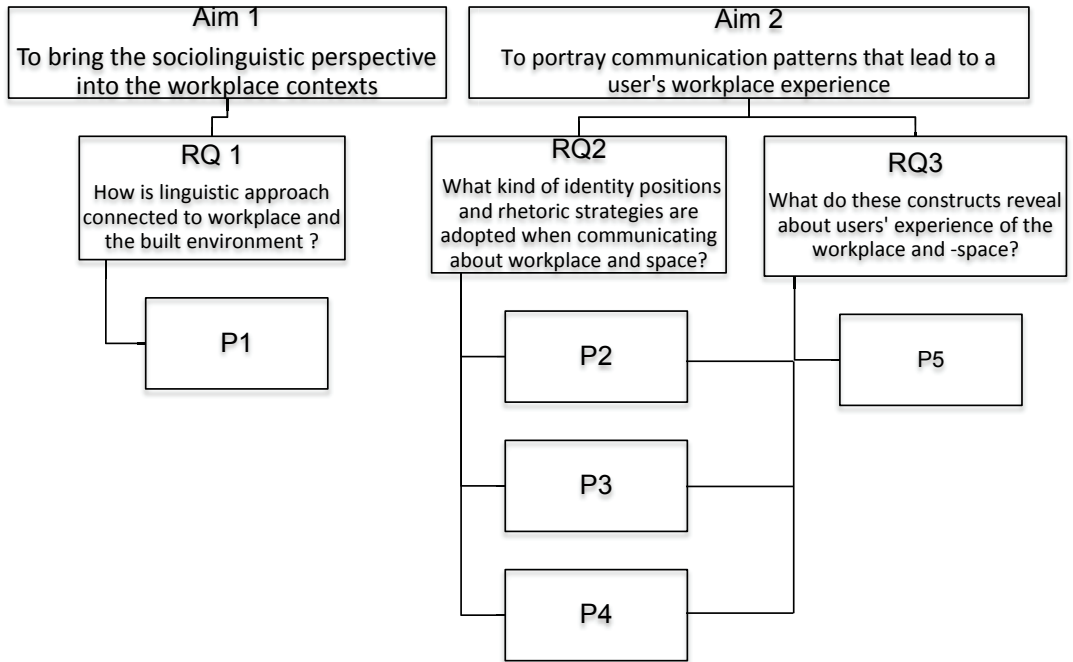
**Paper 2:** "Speech as a way of constructing change in space—opposing and conforming discourses" deals with communication patterns and resistance to change during a relocation process by office users affiliated with a construction company and an employment office.

**Paper 3:** "Open plan office, from narratives to discourses—an analysis of an Internet discussion" deals with the public debate about open-plan offices.

**Paper 4:** "Academic identities and spatial narratives" deals with the social construction of identities in the context of the relocation of a university department.

**Paper 5:** "Analysing office space from a narrative perspective—a case study of an employment office" focuses on space itself and shows how spatial features function as language.

Figure 2 illustrates the structure of this dissertation.



**Figure 2.** The structure of this dissertation.

The results are then presented as the summaries of the appended papers. Following the summaries, the results are concluded and discussed.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism refers to theory of reality and knowledge creation. Therefore it is a theory on what we consider to be real and true. Conversely, it differs from philosophical theories of knowledge in the sense that it is interested in the social processes of knowledge creation rather than objective “truth”. (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The tradition of social constructionism is heterogeneous varying from French tradition of deconstructionism to labeling and symbolic interactionism (e.g. Foucault, 1969, Goffman 1974). Although these theories are in a major role in the tradition of social constructionism, this dissertation is focusing into the work of Berger and Luckmann.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) developed their theory of social construction of reality at the end of the 1960s. Their work accelerated a so-called narrative turn in the social sciences. The term narrative turn means that the research in social sciences began to concentrate more on how knowledge and meaning are constructed rather than the outcomes of the process. Issues such as power, discrimination, deviance, crime and media became popular themes. Narrative turn concentrated on structures of language and its fundamental role in creating our perceptions of reality. Several philosophers and social scientists then contributed to the paradigm, but in this dissertation, it is the writings of Berger and Luckmann (1966) that are discussed.

Social constructionism is based on the idea that language does not mirror reality; rather, it constitutes it (Fairhurst and Grant, 2010). Social constructionism states that reality is both produced and interpreted in a social context. Thus, knowledge is profoundly social (Davenport and Prusak, 2000). It is not just all of the abstract concepts, but also all of the material objects, which are then defined, valued and ultimately experienced in a social process, which is conceptual and thus linguistic by definition (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Foucault, 1969 etc.). Thus, reality is both produced by and interpreted through different symbolic acts at multiple levels, including semantic, meta-communicative and interpersonal levels (Heracleous and Marshak, 2004). From the perspective of social constructionism, studying different aspects of language is crucial when aiming to understand reality as we perceive it.

In this sense, social constructionism is not interested in the content of issues or exact knowledge as such. This means that social constructionism is not interested in what is “real”, but instead it is interested in what we consider to be

real. Social constructionism does not take a stand on the issues of tangible reality, however tangible issues can be products of social construction. For instance, if certain problems are often discussed they might be perceived as problems, although they may have not been perceived as such earlier. This process can also work the other way. Verbalising issues influences the way in which they are perceived. This notion also, concludes to the fact that social constructionism should be careful in providing practical advices, since these advices are also socially constructed and should face the same criticism than the objects, which were discussed in the first place. On the other hand this is the strength of social constructionism, because it claims, that there is not a thing that would exist independently, apart from discursive structures of reality.

Social constructionism is based on two principles. The first emphasises the role of language in constructing knowledge and the second elaborates the social nature of knowledge creation. These fundamental principles are overlapping because one would not exist without another, but they do differ conceptually, because social networks are the nodes of human behaviour and language is the mean between subjects.

In this dissertation, social constructionism is connected to construction of users' experience of the workplace; that is, how users form their opinions and ultimately their experience of space through the means of language.

### **2.1.1 Language and Social Constructionism**

Berger and Luckmann (1966) claim that language is both universal and particular. This means that subjective emotions and thoughts are particular to an individual but become universal through conceptualisation, in other words, language. Language is the structure of objects, which can be mediated in different moments of time. Our everyday life is full of these types of objects that mediate the particular to universal. Language mediates the particular to the universal, but it also conceptualises issues, which means that we cannot explain anything even to ourselves without language or concepts. Thus, we cannot have knowledge without conceptual universal systems such as verbal language.

Language transforms subjective meanings to objective ones. These objectives are the so-called universals, which are understandable in an extensive social network, although their primary initiative has been subjective, a particular meaning. Without language, we cannot share a common reality with someone else, because our behaviour does not make sense unless it is somehow conceptualised. In addition, language offers the possibility to describe issues with which one does not have firsthand experience. It is through language that we are able to describe things that do not even exist. Conversely, language is both normative and carefully structured. One cannot have a language of his/her own. It must be shared and controlled to be understandable. In other words, language can break the borderlines of empirical reality, but it would not exist without common rules and a social network.

Language does not necessarily mean verbal language. Language can be seen as any type of symbolic system, such as mathematic equations or spatial categories. For instance, mathematical processes exist in empirical reality. We understand when something is more or less, deleted or added. Still, we do not need to have this tangible experience in our hands all the time to understand it at a symbolic level. This abstract level of simple issues exists all the time in our environment. It exists in an explicit world: we perceive signs and symbols almost everywhere we visit, but more importantly, it exists in an implicit world. Everything that is produced by humans is based on symbolic systems. For instance, buildings are built based on plans. The plans are developed based on schemes. The schemes are based on both social tradition and individual comprehend. Thus, the simplest things, even physical ones, are products of symbolic systems. Because these symbolic systems define both tangible and abstract reality, we should also be interested in them, not just in the tangible products that they produce.

Language is also based on categorisation. We cannot understand anything without relational definition. That is, everything is defined in contrast to something it is not. For instance, an open-plan office can be seen as such only if we are able to understand enclosed offices as something else. In empirical reality, “open” or “enclosed” can mean a number of things. It is only their relation to one another that allows for elaboration of their distinct properties.

This kind of classification is also necessary to control everyday experiences. Accordingly, we must prioritise time and objects. If we do not make categories, we cannot function in the most ordinary situations. For instance, imagine that a person must go to an office. First, he/she must have an idea about offices in general. That is, he/she must know that offices are not farmhouses or town halls. Second, he/she must know about certain types of offices. He/she knows that he/she works in a particular organisation, which is located in a particular space. Thus, to finally end up at his/her particular office, in a particular city in a particular organisation, he/she has had to make numerous choices among millions of options, in other words, categories.

Categorising plays a fundamental role in experiencing reality, but it is also present in producing objects. Buildings and spaces are good examples of reflections of categorised language (Markus and Cameron, 2002). For instance, museums tend to reflect the categories of history, biology and cultural differences. Hospitals are designed to reflect the perception of different illnesses. Homes are categories of the functions that people perform in them. In Western society, we tend to have rooms for eating, sleeping and working—performances that are biological and physical, but defined in a cultural context.

Van Dijk (1997) describes the discursive process of knowledge creation in his essay on critical discourse analysis. He attempts to describe how discursive acts perform as a means of power in social groups: Knowledge is created between 1) *members and groups*: Language users engage in discourse as members of (several) social groups, organisations or institutions. It is created in 2) *actions–process*: Social acts of individual actors are thus constituent parts of group actions and social processes, such as legislation or news making. Knowledge creation is dependent on 3) *context–social structure*: Situations of



discursive interaction are similarly part or constitutive of social structure; for example, a press conference may be a typical practice of organisations and media institutions. Finally knowledge is created in 4) *personal and social cognition*: Language users as social actors have both personal and social cognition, that is, personal memories, knowledge and opinions, along with those shared with members of the group or culture as a whole. Both types of cognition influence individual members' interaction and discourse, whereas shared "social representations" govern the collective actions of a group. (Van Dijk, 1997).

Although discursive processes take place everywhere and all the time, this dissertation is focused on the fourth type of discursive process, because the focus of this dissertation is the user experience, a concept that is interpersonal, but is created through a social process. In other words, this dissertation examines the speech of employees during a change process, media texts and the social construction of the built environment itself.

To recapitulate: language is both universal and particular. That is, language enables conceptual sharing between individuals by being structured and universal. Regardless of its structured nature, language can address issues that are not part of a tangible, social experience. Moreover, everything that exists is based on symbolic systems, both in the explicit and implicit worlds. This means that all objects, including physical objects such as buildings, are the products of language. Finally, language is based on categorisations. Categorisation enables structured behaviour in the world, but it also creates hierarchical systems, which initiate power relations.

### **2.1.2 Social Construction as a Social Process**

Berger and Luckmann (1966) claim that everyday knowledge is a combination of empirical subjective experience, second-hand knowledge and time constructs. That is, we know what we can physically feel and what someone else can tell us. We can understand the relationship of types of information based on chronological reasoning. In addition, our everyday knowledge is produced through ongoing communication among other people, both those who we meet and people of whom we have knowledge. We reflect our subjective experience onto the assumed experience of another person. That is, we define the other person and ourselves based on feedback given by others. In that sense, we do not really know anything without conversing with someone else.

By repeating these social circumstances over time, certain acts and things may be objectivised. In other words, symbols are born. For instance, we know the heart symbol, even though it might not represent any of the explicit features of a) a physical heart or b) an abstract feeling of love. Accordingly, symbolic structures have constructed languages, which function as a mediator between subjects and society.

Social constructionism emphasises the evolution of social groups, organisations and society as a whole. This social evolution is carried out through habitualisation, which is followed by institutionalisation. This means that certain

behaviour is routinised and conceptualised. This is very important, because we need to be able to predict others' behaviour.

Through this habitualisation, institutionalisation is performed. In other words, as something, an act or an object is repeated long enough it becomes an objective reality that does not need an explanation. This means that once a certain kind of behaviour, object or entity is habitualised (conceptualised) it is institutionalised. For instance sexual behaviour at some point in history was institutionalised as "marriage". With time, these institutions then become "matter of facts", which are not questioned and which enforce our actions. Marriage for instance is something we do not biologically need, but is what we often take for granted. Institutions also produce more objects and symbols.

Institutions create an objective society, which individuals take as an objective truth. This objective truth is then reconciled with subjective society, i.e., the process of socialisation takes place. That is the process in which individuals become members of objective society. The more simplified the order of production, the more harmonic the relationship between the subjective and objective society. In modern society, the order of production is complicated, which enables different types of roles and socialisation processes. (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

## 2.2 Socially Constructed Built Environment

The built environment is always the institutionalised object of a social process. According to social constructionism, this environment is experienced and perceived in a discursive process (Berger and Luckmann 1966). For instance, Rapoport states (1982) that when describing built forms, people tend to have "an affective response rather than a detailed analysis of specific aspects". In other words, ideals, meanings and cultural assumptions govern their assessments. Ideals, meanings and cultural assumptions are overall discursive concepts. Thus, the built environment is not only constructed from the physical environment, but also it is formed verbally. For instance, buildings are used based on the assumptions that people make related to their use. People tend to expect to enter a lobby when coming into a building or they assume that banks have service desks. That is, people use built environments based on a certain narrative that they have adopted. Accordingly, the design of a built environment incorporates a narrative; people interpret this narrative by understanding the environment and acting in a certain way within it. Through these actions, they develop new narratives, which can be interpreted and used in designing new built environments. Furthermore, people talk about, write about and design buildings. While they are constructing the foregoing social processes, they apply their previous experiences, mental models and social conventions to their evaluations, interpretations and productions. Accordingly, this process has a circular influence on their perception of the built environment and formulates new or strengthens old narratives.

Markus and Cameron (2002) claim that the language used, when speaking and writing about the built environment, plays a significant role in shaping both the environment and our responses to it. Additionally, they emphasise the idea

that although buildings themselves do not have a discursive form, people using those buildings use language to interpret their environments. People who design, build and discuss buildings always have an agenda, which is shown in the way that buildings are designed, valued and used. Markus and Cameron elaborate this process with five steps, from language to the actual experience of a tangible building:

Step 1) is the writing of a general, discursive text about a building, which includes some sort of an agenda. This type of text can be a plan to carry out a repair, or introduce a demand to fulfil a need, etc.

Step 2) is to establish categories of peoples, ideas, activities, processes or objects, which will be instrumental in achieving the aims spelled out in step 1.

Step 3) is to produce a brief, which includes spaces and labels that accommodate the actors and situations introduced in step 2.

Step 4) is to construct the ideas delivered in step 3. In step 4, drawings and visual material are often used to concretise the plans introduced in step 3.

Step 5) is to manage the buildings program, which has been planned in the earlier steps. (Markus and Cameron, 2002).

These steps elaborate how language transforms into an actual building. Additionally, choices made at each step have a substantial influence on a physical buildings and how it is used, and thus language has a profound role not only in how buildings are experienced but also in what they really are in their most tangible sense. Additionally, language and communication are present not only in designing and building, but also in managing the built form during its life span.

As language and communication becomes an evident part of experiencing the “inside” of buildings, the ongoing public discourse is also present in our daily lives and life scapes, such as the places that we visit or stay. The experience of the building in question is thus attached to the way in which we form opinions and attitudes in general. Because identity construction and everyday discussions are connected to individual behaviour, that behaviour is connected to the institutions of society, such as public discussions and displayed images.

In addition to verbal discussions, the language of buildings is often also the language of visual data, pictures, diagrams, floor prints and the actual visual representation of the space itself (Tähtinen, 2013). That is, we experience places mostly visually. At least, we are more aware of visual settings. When contemplating the public discussion of the built environment, it becomes inevitable to include the symbolic structure of images. Architectural texts are almost impossible to understand without images (Markus and Cameron, 2002).

Accordingly, just as in “normal” discourse analysis of verbal language, it is not only important what is said, but also what is not said (Foucault, 1969). Again, as in many architectural texts, the aesthetics of the built form receive most of the attention. Pictures and texts often become interdependent. Verbal language can reinforce or equally distort the message of the picture. Thus, they both have a substantial role in constructing the idea of a subject. It must be

noted that the built environment is also a visual representation in itself (decoration, structure etc.), which has a meaning and thus an ability to govern the behaviour and the perception of both its audience and the user.

Therefore, socially constructed space refers not only to the production of actual space, but also to our perception and ultimately our experience of the space. This process is elaborated through habitualised institutions, verbal language and visual symbols.

### 2.3 Socially Constructed Workplace

In recent decades, many organisations have begun to take a closer look at the workplace's strategic significance for organisational performance (Myerson, 2012). Knowledge-intensive work processes and technology have enabled mobility and changed the nature of work and accordingly, demands for work-space. Before the 1980s, work facilities were primarily owned by the organisations themselves. Back then, companies provided workplace maintenance and services were performed in-house. However, in the 1980s companies began to outsource facilities services and give up ownership of their buildings to concentrate on their core businesses (Barret and Baldry, 2003). In the 1990s, the increasing understanding of corporate support management had an effect on workplace management. Accordingly, workplace management started to focus also on managing people, not just spaces.

There is still confusion about the definition of workplace because the concepts of place and space are ambiguous. Taylor and Spicer (2007) argue that the research on organisational spaces is fragmented partially because the definition of "space" is ambiguous. Cairns (2003) claims that this problem is partially due to the lack of a philosophical definition of space and its combination with definitions found in the academic field of management theory. Accordingly, there has been a body of literature produced on the physical environment of the workplace (e.g., Becker and Steele, 1990, Duffy, 1997 etc.), but developing a comprehensive theory of knowledge of the workplace has been problematic. According to Cairns (2003), this is due to a lack of engagement at a meaningful and theoretical level between these areas of literature.

Gieryn (2000, 463 pp.) makes three distinctions or so-called ground rules for the definition of place:

“(1) Geographic Location. A place is a unique spot in the universe. Places have finitude, but they nest logically because their boundaries are elastic.

(2) Materially formed places have physicality. Whether built or stumbled upon, artificial or natural, streets and doors or rocks and trees, place is stuff. It is a compilation of things or objects at some particulars point in the universe.

(3) Investment with meaning and value. Without naming and identification by people, a place is not a place. Places are doubly

constructed: most are built, but they are also interpreted. A spot in the universe becomes a place only when it ensconces identity. (Gieryn, 2000, 463 pp.).”

Gieryn also explains how places differ from spaces by saying that, “Space is what place becomes when the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are sucked out” (Gieryn, 2000, 463 pp.). Spaces thus are physical entities, which lack all of the qualities stated by the ground rules, such as meaning, physical boundaries, an association with meaningful things and specific locations, and finitude. In this sense, workspace, for instance, is not just space, though neither it is a place, because place can be defined based on the above ground rules. Still, workspaces have some of the qualities of places. Workspace is considered to be the physical space in which the work takes place and workplace is the social and organisational place where employees work (Price, 2010). However, workspace includes a gathering of things, meaning and value. Thus, it is not mere physical space. Rather, workplace also implies an organisational, abstract place where one can “go”, without going to a particular workspace. Thus, workplace is not as physical as the definition of place, which includes, for instance, a specific location. Conversely, workspace is more than just physical space. Lefebvre (1974) claims that when investigating (social) space, it is more important to focus on the ways that space is categorised than to focus on the space itself, because space itself is only an abstract entity full of nothing. It becomes understandable only through restrictions and borders; in other words, the way that space is defined. For instance, a room is a room only based on the walls that define the open space as distinct from the closed space. From Lefebvre’s point of view, there is no pure “space” as such, because it becomes a place once it is conceptualised. Conversely, when talking about workspace it is important to examine the ways that 1) people define workspace and 2) the physical borders of the workspace are defined by its organisation.

From the socially constructed perspective, the workplace is naturally something that is constructed through the means of language. Often, the socially constructed workplace literature concentrates on organisational theory. In management and organisation research, discursive papers discuss the general organisation communication theory (Sillince, 2007; Bisel, 2009) or segmented groups in work involving groups such as mothers or the elderly (e.g., Medved and Kirby, 2005). Workplace phenomena such as bullying, change resistance (Bryant, 2003; Jorgensen, 2004; Bryant, 2006) and contradiction (Whittle et al., 2008) have been studied from the discursive perspective. Accordingly, identity construction (Holmes, 2005) and leadership (Fairhurst, 2008) have also been studied using a discursive approach. Putnam (2005) asserts that discourse analysis would be a good method to analyse organisational resistance because it reveals hidden agendas, which often appear together with resistance. Tracy et al. (2006) have studied workplace bullying using narrative interviews to reveal the metaphors used when describing the distress of being bullied. Miller et al. (2007) have used workplace narratives as a resource to map the terrain of workplace emotions. Sonenshein (2006) has studied the manner in which individuals shape the meaning of social structure while using intentionally different language in private and public discussions.

However, these examples rarely touch the topic of “space” or it is considered to be a somehow indifferent attribute in constructing the concept of “workplace”, which is often seen as a network of social relationships rather than a tangible space with meaning. However, Cairns argues “that the contemporary workplace is not merely an activity container (Hillier et al., 1984) for paid work, but contains representations of all other major social places in contemporary society”. This means that the workplace reflects social status and organisation rather than simply functioning as a neutral stage for working. Cairns, like other scholars before him, emphasises that the physical stage of the workspace becomes a place once it is occupied by people. And once it is occupied by people, it becomes a social construction in which language plays a significant role. Space is fundamental in shaping a sense of workplace identity. Elsbach and Pratt (2008), for example, see that “physical environments play a major role in facilitating and constraining organisational action” and building a particular work identity. Cairns (2003) analyses workplaces by embracing the phenomenological philosophy in which everything that is held forth to be an “object” is understood only to be so as perceived by the human senses, as an object of experience, not as an object *per se*.

In this dissertation, Cairns’s definition is used when discussing the workplace in general. However, the term workspace is used when it can be identified from the empirical material. That is, the term “workspace” is used when it has appeared in interviewees’ comments, regardless of the term that they possibly, philosophically, intended to use.

## 2.4 Users’ Experience of the Workplace

User experience is a commonly understandable, holistic and all-encompassing concept that includes the user, the product and the context of use (Battarbee, 2008). User experience is subjective and holistic. Experience is constructed based on utilitarian needs, such as “hunger” or any other basic need that must be satisfied. Conversely, “experience” is constructed through emotional and social needs. At a time when basic physiological needs are satisfied, social and emotional needs, such as appreciation or identity positioning are emphasised more and more. According to Battarbee and Koskinen (2005), an experience is defined as something, that “can be articulated or named, has a beginning and end, (and) inspires behavioural and emotional change’ and ‘experience’ as ‘a constant stream of “self-talk” that happens when we interact with products”.

Currently, there are 3 primary approaches to applying and interpreting user experience. Hassenzahl and Tractinsky (2006) define these as the measuring approach, the empathic approach, and the pragmatist approach: *The measuring approach* is primarily used in development and testing. It builds on the notion that experiences can be measured via emotional reactions. *The empathic approach* also claims that experience is emotional in nature, but that the types of experiences that products elicit should be connected to individuals’ needs, dreams and motivations. This approach emphasises hermeneutics, in which the understanding of users’ experience is the primary force behind de-

signing better product or environments. The *pragmatist approach* concentrates on describing experience, which is constructed in interaction.

Battarbee and Koskinen (2005) take a pragmatic approach when defining experience as something “that happens all the time: subconscious experiences are fluent, automatic and fully learned; cognitive experiences require effort, focus and concentration. Through stories, experiences may be elaborated into ‘meta-experiences’ that are names for collections of individual experiences. Experiences also describe sense-making processes such as anticipating, interpreting and recounting.” (Battarbee and Koskinen, 2005. pp. 6).

As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, Vicher (2007) claims that the research into the user experience of the built environment tends to focus on environmental determinism. In Hassenzahl and Tractinsky’s (2006) terms, this would fall under the category of the measuring approach to experience. According to Vichers (2007), this type of perspective of experience emphasises the cause–effect perspective based on the premise that what is built, and the environments thereby created, cause users to behave in certain ways, many of which are predictable. However, surveys and measurements do not necessarily give answers to issues of which users are not aware or that they are unable to report (Vicher, 2007). Thus, when investigating user experience or attributes of experience, it should be acknowledged that pre-assumptions, discursive processes and social context determine the perceived experience of the built environment. Additionally, although there might be experience external to perception, one is not able to measure it without having a very narrow perspective on the subject.

This dissertation defines user experience as a constructed concept rather than the instrumental result of a product’s impact on a subject (Hassenzahl and Tractinsky, 2006). In other words, in this research the user experience of the workplace is seen as a process rather than as a product of the environment’s straight impact on a user (Vicher, 2008).

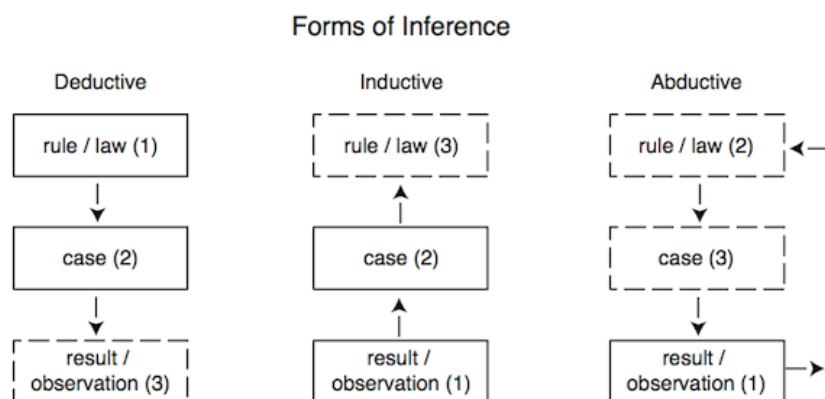
### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Strategy and Design

Social constructionist methods are not either qualitative nor quantitative by nature. This is because they do not seek to find coherent synthesis. At least discourse analysis does not. The methods only points out that objective matter of facts are rarely matter of facts as such, but instead socially constructed.

However from the methodological point of view sociolinguistic methods resemble qualitative methods, which often enable multiple possible interpretations of the same data depending on the intuition, insights and scientific imagination of a researcher, perceiving all such interpretations to be potentially meaningful (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). This also applies to the discursive approach, in which a researcher's interpretations play a profound role. Accordingly, the aim of this type of methodology is more to understand how something works rather than what it truly is. Thus, the results are not ripe for generalisation. In other words, this dissertation aims more to develop theory than to test it.

This dissertation is based on abductive reasoning (Figure 3), which refers to an inference that involves the generation and evaluation of explanatory hypotheses. This means that premises do not guarantee a conclusion; rather, conclusions are drawn from ongoing process between theory and empiricism (Magnani, 2001).



Adapted from: Fischer, H. R. 2001. Abductive Reasoning as a Way of Worldmaking. Foundations of Science 4:361-383.

**Figure 3:** The forms of inference (Fischer, 2001)



From ontological premises, this dissertation is based on social construction, which means that we cannot have knowledge of anything without some form of social interaction. Ontologically, social construction is not interested in what reality actually is, only that knowledge about it is constructed. Epistemologically, this knowledge can only be captured by examining the processes of knowledge creation, in other words, interactions that are mediated by language. Thus, language and discursive methods are natural choices for studying the construction of user experience. Additionally, because reality and knowledge are always constructed in a social process, the validity and reliability of any research of this kind is impossible to determine, because the research in itself is socially constructed rather than an objective measurable truth, which could be validated by further studies.

Based on social construction, it is important to understand that reality is constructed from an ongoing discourse between subjective and objective society. In other words, reality is based on the one hand, how people define social context and on the other hand, how social context defines an individual. Thus, it must be acknowledged that:

- 1) The contradiction and categories of language create knowledge and meaning.

For this reason, the language of the workplace is investigated from a diverse set of contradictory events, such as change projects and relocations. During these processes, meaning is elaborated in discursive oppositions. Therefore, it is not what is said that is interesting, but how and who is saying it and more specific, what types of identity positions and rhetoric strategies are adopted when communicating about workplace and -space.

- 2) Language of and about the workplace is formed in an ongoing process, in which one subject or organisation is not important. Instead, there is interest in the network of stakeholders and institutions, which develop that knowledge in their social context.

Thus, although this dissertation is interested specifically in users, it is aware of the fact that language is formed in social networks among users from a variety of user groups and stakeholders. It intends to describe how the language of and about workplace is formed in a social network. It concentrates on ways of constructing the workplace experience, claims that language plays a profound role in constructing reality and aims to describe examples of how different ways of using language are connected to ways of constructing users' experience of the workplace. In other words, although this dissertation's interest is specifically in users, the notion of social constructionism emphasises the fact that all stakeholders' language affects the language and therefore the experience of the user.

Because it is impossible to "describe" how language constructs both general and specific holistic user-experiences, this dissertation focuses on presenting *examples* of how language is connected to the workplace. 5 steps were taken to describe the process of constructing the user experience of the workplace:

1. First, literature on the use of a linguistic approach in workplace management was reviewed to learn about this perspective in the field of the built environment and the workplace.
2. Second, a relocation process from cell to open-plan office was studied. This was done due to the assumption that the change process provokes subjects to reconcile their relationship with spatial issues and forces them to position themselves between the old and the new spaces.

However, during the interviews it seemed as though the subjects repeated certain discursive structures, which implied that their views on workspace and place were not connected specifically to a certain *type* of a space or office. This initiated a closer look at general workplace speech and open-plan offices. To find this type of communication, an appropriate case would be one that does not involve any specific workspace with particular physical features or a particular type of organisational structure.

3. Therefore, a magazine article and Internet discussion about open-plan offices were chosen because they represented general and public discussion about the concepts of offices and in particular, open-plan offices.

At this point, the theme of identity began to emerge.

4. Thus, a second relocation process was studied. On this occasion, university staff was interviewed during a relocation process from a traditional university building to a newly built business park, in which some staff members were relocated to an open-plan office. The relocation process was researched under the assumption that academic personnel and traditional university facilities may have a strong identity.

Because identity speech seems to govern the subjects' speech about space, it became intriguing to see, how space in itself reflects issues mentioned in interviews.

5. In a fifth case, the roles, stages and positions of different users were investigated by taking a narrative perspective on observing a newly renovated employment office, which was altered to an open-plan layout.

### 3.2 Discursive Approach

A Discursive approach refers to methodology that concentrates on the study of language. The scope of language studies is ambiguous and extensive, varying from the detailed study of grammar, semiotics, and morphology to the more descriptive methods of critical discourse analysis.

In workplace management research, the discursive approach is rare and ambiguous. Research on management and organisational behaviour acknowledges the scope of discursive perspective to some extent, but the research on the

built environment seems to lack such a paradigm. It seems that journals that concentrate on social and cultural studies overlook the subjects of business and the workplace, whereas journals on management and the built environment do not extensively publish papers with discursive/socially constructed perspectives and/or methodology. The use of discursive methods combining all of the attributes of workplace management—(a) management, (b) spatial issues and (c) discursive methods—seems to be non-existent. The challenges of multidisciplinary issues seem to hinder both disciplines. Still, everyday reality is neither partial nor segmented, but instead is a holistic combination of the social and the physical. That is, because workplaces are social constructions, they are also physical entities that are connected to social behaviour. Because the academic tradition of workplace management is not only new, but also focused on practical applications, the ontological and epistemological premises of the field are ambiguous (Cairns, 2003).

### **3.2.1 Narrative Analysis**

Narrative analysis is connected to the idea of social constructionism, which means that our experiences are constructed in an ongoing social process, which embodies our subjective history and our present interactions with our environment. Narrative analysis was developed by Labov and Waletzky (1967), who define narrative as a story that has both a clear beginning and a clear end. Although the world and tangible reality exist all the time, everywhere, mental processes and verbal output are always constructed in a form of a narrative—a story. Thus, analysing the structure of the narratives that people present may reveal something possibly hidden about their experience of a subject.

Rymes et al. (2010) explain that in a narrative analysis, it is important to recognise that narrative in itself is not a portal to experience. At least, narrative is not a direct portal. Instead, narrative, in any form and by necessity, always involves narrating to someone and in some context. This means that narrative analysis depends on speech acts, which are inevitably related to speaking, context, meaning, and subjective descriptions (Rymes, 2010). In other words, narrative analysis is concerned about the positioning of events, things and subjects, rather than the stories themselves.

### **3.2.2 The Process of Narrative Analysis**

There are no exact guidelines for conducting narrative analysis (Busanich, 2012). To conduct a sociolinguistic study, interviews should be flexible and semi-structured. They should allow informants to chat informally in the hope of obtaining data that are as rich as possible. In addition, the questions should mostly be open ended and flexible. Questions such as “Tell me a story about x” or “Describe your feeling towards y” should be emphasised. Questions about details should be asked only when necessary, because the idea of the interviews is to allow informants describe their way of positioning themselves as freely as possible (Smiths and Sparks, 2008).

In this dissertation, two versions of narrative analysis were used. The first version was used in papers 3 and 4, in which the data were verbal. In this version, explicit and implicit structures were analysed, that is, the stories told by the users were analysed. The other version of narrative analysis was used in paper 5, in which the physical features of employment office were analysed.

The first version of narrative analysis of verbal texts examined the explicit and implicit structures of the text (interviews and literal text). The term “explicit structures” refers to content-specific factors of the stories, and the term “implicit structures” refers to their contextual factors. Explicit subjects included issues such as “functional issues” or “aesthetic issues”, etc. Implicit issues referred to themes, such as “background ideals” or “identity construction”. For instance, if a story around the history of an old office indicated that the subject thought that the building was dark and mouldy, the excerpt was linked to the theme of “aesthetics”, and if the subject continued on to say something like “the university should be situated near the city centre, because it should have a higher status in the urban plan”, the excerpt was placed in the contextual theme of symbolic meaning. Explicit narratives referred to the straight reply that subjects offered to questions asked, such as:

Q: “What was your first memory of the place?”

A: “It was when I came here for the entrance exams and the place was huge”.

The explicit narrative of this sentence is that the subject first saw the place when he started his studies and that the place was huge. Implicit narratives refer to the common themes that recurred in certain descriptions of place. For example, in the reply “It was when I came here for the entrance exams and the place was huge”, the implicit narrative is one that describes the characteristics of the place by referring to the size (of the building, area, etc). Additionally, implicit narratives are about contextual positioning, such as how the subject describes him/herself in relation to the question asked. How does he/she justify and explain the events and actions taking place in his/her story? For example, in the exchange set forth above, the subject first references coming to the campus as a student, and then mentions the idea that he/she was small as the place was big. Additionally, implicit narratives often resemble the construction of identity; in other words, positioning claims, such as “what kind of character x was in the context of y”.

The second version of narrative analysis was used to study the physical space of an employment office, and aimed to portray the narratives reflected by the actual space. In this version, the concepts of Erving Goffman (1956) were used to code the physical space. The coding process was based on narrative concepts such as acts, stages, and roles. The roles included the role of user (e.g., employee and customer), the stage was the physical space at different times and the acts were the actions completed at certain steps (entering, exiting, etc.) of a process of visiting or working in the office.

### 3.2.3 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis means number of different perspectives in analyzing language. There are multiple usage and interpretation of the method, which can also be seen as a theory in itself. However discourse analysis was introduced by Harris in 1950's. In Britain in 1970's Mulkey and his students developed the method further (Mulkey, M., Potter, J. and Yearley S. 1983). The term "discourse" is defined by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). More precisely, Foucault developed the concept of discourse by defining analysis as an "archaeological method", which refers to the layered nature of language. By this, Foucault (1969) means that reality, as we perceive it, is a product of an ongoing discursive game in which defining concepts is the basic strategy of claiming a power position. Language both reflects and produces social reality.

Discourse can be narrowly defined as the practices of talking and writing (Woodilla, 1998). More precisely, discourse means the relations of talking, writing or otherwise producing a cultural "text", which can also be a picture, photograph, artefact, and so forth. Text is the basic unit of data for discourse analysis. It is also essential to acknowledge that texts are not meaningful individually, only through their interconnection with other texts (Philips and Hardy, 2002). Discourse is often confused with ordinary communication (Jones, 2005), however, discourse analysis examines the implicit cultural structures of communication rather than the explicit content of that communication.

Discourse analysis often aims to reveal underlying messages bound to culturally dependent values. By deconstructing these values, the researcher is able to find potentially hidden agendas behind the message of the subject. Discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis are traditionally used to study power relations within a society (Fairclough, 1997; Starks and Trinidad, 2007). A typical object of discourse analysis would be a politician's speech or a media text. Recently, discourse analysis has been used to study the ways in which people give meaning to their existing reality (e.g., work, parenting, gender, etc.) (e.g., Ashcraft, 2007).

### 3.2.4 The Process of Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis as a method is an analysis in itself. In other words, analysis takes place while reporting the results, and thus the actual analysis is transparent in the sense that the results are the analysis; analysis has not taken place elsewhere and its results are presented separately. Potter and Wetherell (1994) suggest two features of discourse analysis. They claim that research should impart 'coherence' to a text, showing how it fits together in terms of content, functions and effect, and that it should be 'fruitful' in that it provides insights that may prove to be useful.

Discourse analysis can be seen as a deconstruction of texts, because the analysis attempts to identify 'blind spots' or moments of self-contradiction to analyse the 'tension between rhetoric and logic' in any given 'text'. According to Kaarhus (1996), deconstruction aims to reveal the construction of a text by

undermining the ‘authority’ behind it. When interpreting a text, the deconstructive strategy is to change the focus from the author to the reader. The question that any deconstructionist analysis poses is “How is this text working?” rather than “What does it mean?” (Dahlerup, 1991).

The principle of difference is part of the analysis of opposition, which is vital to deconstructionist and discourse analysis. As mentioned above, language becomes understandable through opposites. Opposites, however, tend to form a suppressive mode; in other words, they form hierarchies (Dahlerup, 1991). Thus, in discourse analysis it is essential to look for these counter positions through language use. For instance, if a participant claims that “I love my own room, cause I am able to concentrate there,” in discourse analysis one can deconstruct the sentence by asking, what is an opposite of one’s “own room”? Is it someone else’s room? Or perhaps a public room? One can ask, what does the participant mean when he/she talks about “concentration”? Is there a place where he/she is not able to do that, and why is it essential in the first place? Thus, when conducting a discourse analysis, the interesting points involve either where these antagonistic oppositions are articulated openly or where they are unspoken. The way that language works rhetorically is of major importance to this approach (Dahlerup, 1991).

Both discourse analysis and narrative analysis can be conducted in multiple ways with respect to different types of “texts”. This dissertation emphasises the opposing characteristics of the claims made in the different data. Accordingly, the focus is on examining methods of persuasion. For example, in the earlier example sentence, the first claim is that

“I love to work in my own room”.

The second claim is

“...because I am able to concentrate there.”

In this example, the first sentence is the primary message and the second sentence explains the first. This dissertation emphasises explanations, not primary sentences. In other words, the interest is less on where people want or love to work, for example, but rather, how they explain those sentiments.

To sum up, narrative analysis is interested in what is said, what kind of roles and settings a message includes and what they say about the perception of reality, whereas discourse analysis is interested on how something is said. It is interested in the cultural tradition(s) that messages repeat. Narrative includes several discourses, but discourse in itself does not include narratives. Narrative is about the content of a message and discourse is about the rhetorical strategies of a message. Thus, narrative analysis can be conducted purely on space (what exists where, who are the users and main characters, etc.) and discourse analysis is always connected to a representation of the space (text, speech, design sketch, what is said and what is not said, etc.). In other words, when investigating space, narrative analysis focuses on describing the space as

a socially constructed entity and discourse analysis investigates how spaces and perceptions of spaces are formed from symbolic acts.

### 3.3 Data Collection and the Role of the Researcher

According to the discursive approach, the researcher's position plays a substantial role in conducting interviews, because the researcher is in charge of the conversation. Thus, the strategy of the researcher in this study was to be as neutral as possible so as to allow informants to speak as freely as possible. The list of questions was short and the questions were open, for example, "Describe the office of your dreams". All of the interviews were conducted with similar structures and using mostly the same questions. Because the interviewees seemed to concentrate on content, such as describing some physical detail or their favourite spot in the office, the researcher focused on their methods of argumentation rather than the actual content of what was said. In that sense, the researcher slightly misled the interviewees into chatting openly for the purpose of getting them to relax and to not think too much about why they said what they did.

The samples were written in the form of spoken language and did not follow the grammar of written language. This is important when using sociolinguistic methods, but it can limit interpretation and translation. Accordingly, although the best way to proceed would have been to conduct the analysis in the same language as the interviews, for practical reasons the Finnish interviews were translated into English. The analysis was conducted in Finnish, but reported in English. Accordingly it cannot be certain that the analysis in papers can be interpreted in the same way it is interpreted in Finnish. And as the translator (in paper 4) did not conduct the interviews or is even familiar with the methods and the research, she cannot either be sure of the English interpretations.

The quotes were translated by the first author in papers 2 and 3, but by a translator in paper 4. The papers were originally written in English. That is, they were not first written in Finnish and then translated to English. The papers were proofread by Finnish translator and a language specialist and the summary was proofread by a proofreading company "The American Journal Experts"

### 3.4 A Summary of the Empirical Material

This dissertation consists of 5 papers, all of which addressed the discursive processes, methods and user experience of workplaces, namely, offices. The first paper reviewed the literature on the use of discursive methods in workplace management research. The next four papers all were situated in the context of an open-plan office.

**Paper 1:** The first paper reviewed the literature on the use of linguistic methods in workplace management research. Ten journals were reviewed over a time period of 6 years between 2004-2010. Out of a total of 2,245 papers, 40 were considered to be relevant. The journals were categorised into 3 linguistic methodological journals and 7 journals on the built environment. Additionally,

papers were gathered using the search words workplace management, discourse and narrative analysis. The reviewed papers were chosen if they included physical, social and linguistic perspectives or, to be more precise, used methods of narrative or discourse analysis in analysing spatial issues. In that sense, paper 1's interest is in studies that use discourse and narrative analysis that are connected in any way to workplace management, not just workplace studies or management theory in their most general senses.

**Paper 2:** The second paper described the way that people speak about change in space. The relocation processes of two different organisations were studied. Fourteen office users were interviewed. The data consisted of twenty-one interviews from two different organisations. The first case was that of a Finnish construction company, which was moving from a partially open office to an open-plan office. Seven semi-structured theme interviews were conducted, before and after the change, with the managers of six teams. Team leaders were selected because they had generally synthesised opinions about the change processes. The second organisation studied was an employment office, in which employees had already moved to a new, open office space. Here, too, seven semi-structured interviews with team leaders were carried out. Both of the organisations were changing their office environments from offices featuring rooms, or that were partly open, to open-plan offices.

**Paper 3:** The third paper focused on the way that opinions about open-plan offices are constructed in the public discourse. Three different text corpora were analysed, using narrative and discourse analysis. The first text corpus concerned the narratives produced by the research papers, which were gathered from the academic literature. The second text corpus concerned media discourses, which were acknowledged using the case example of a news article entitled "Nerves are Frayed in Open-Plan Offices". The third text corpus concerned the user experience of an open-plan office. An Internet discussion concerning open-plan offices was analysed using discourse analysis. The paper that addressed that newspaper article was published, printed, and online as of 19 May 2010. The discussion was followed for two weeks. Sixty-two comments were made. Additionally, the narratives of the research were acknowledged in papers published in *Facilities*, the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, the *Journal of Environment & Behaviour* and the *Journal of Facilities Management*. The search term "open-plan office" was used and a few relevant examples were selected.

**Paper 4:** The fourth paper analysed the way, that academic identity affects users' experiences of an office space. The relocation process of a university's real estate, planning and geo-informatics department was analysed by interviewing 16 departmental employees during their relocation from old university premises to a newly built business park in the autumn of 2011. The narrative interviews were analysed using narrative analysis.

**Paper 5:** The fifth paper focused on how space itself can be used as a language. A newly renovated employment office was analysed using narrative analysis. Data collection was conducted using user-journey observations. Space was conceptualised based on user actions and the researcher's interpre-



tation. Additionally, 20 short-user interviews were conducted of customers. The interviews served as support data for the researcher’s observations. The questions that were asked included, “Why did you come here?”, “How do you feel about the space?”, and “What was difficult and what was not?” (Table 1).

**Table 1:** A summary of the empirical data

	<b>Paper 1</b>	<b>Paper 2</b>	<b>Paper 3</b>	<b>Paper 4</b>	<b>Paper 5</b>
<b>Topic</b>	A Review of the Linguistic Approach to Workplace Management Research	Speech as a Way of Constructing Changes in Space—Opposing and Conforming Discourses	From Narrative to Discourse Analysis of an Internet Discussion	Academic Identities and – Spatial Narratives	Analysing Office Space from a Narrative Perspective—A Case Study of an Employment Office
<b>Method</b>	Literature review *	Interviews	Interviews	Interviews	Observation
<b>Analysis</b>		Discourse analysis	Discourse analysis  Narrative analysis	Narrative analysis	Observation matrix; user journey
<b>Sample</b>	40 articles	7 team leaders * 2 companies  Construction  7 employees Employment office	Magazine paper in Kauppalehti  Internet discussion concerning the paper	16 employees of the Department of Surveying	Employees  Employment office
<b>Secondary Data</b>			Papers in:  Facilities  Journal of Environmental Psychology  Journal of Environment & Behaviour  Journal of Facilities Management		20 short interviews of the customers of the employment office
* Journals: Discourse and Communication; Discourse Studies; Narrative Inquiry; Space and Culture; Environment & Behaviour; Cultural Geographies; Facilities; Journal of Real Estate Research; Journal of Environmental Psychology; Building Research and Information					

## 4. Summaries of the papers

The five individual research papers that comprise this dissertation were all conducted from the discursive perspective. The first paper was a literature review that summarises the linguistic studies conducted in the field of workplace management. The following four papers addressed the social construction of user experiences of the workplace.

### 4.1 Review of the Linguistic Approach to Workplace Management Research

The purpose of this paper was to review the use of linguistic methods such as narrative and discourse analysis in workplace management research to see how they have been used in the built-environment context of and what they reveal when applied to the field of workplace management.

The results showed that the linguistic methods of narrative and discourse analysis are not recognised in workplace management research in a comprehensive way by combining the research on the built environment with the research on organisation and culture. In workplace management research, methods of narrative and discourse analysis are applied to the processes of the built environment. Additionally, methods are applied to the research of space and place as means of communication and identity construction.

The linguistic approach to workplace management research was acknowledged to be rare and ambiguous. When considering that a total of 2,245 papers yields only 40 that are relevant, the percentage of 1.2 is small. Research on management and organisational behaviour acknowledges the scope of linguistic perspective to some extent, but research on the built environment seems to lack this paradigm. Journals that concentrate in on and cultural studies have overlooked the subject of business and the workplace, whereas journals on management and the built environment do not extensively publish papers from cultural perspectives and/or using cultural methodology. In addition, most of the papers presented in this paper are written in the tradition of social constructionism rather than explicitly using linguistic methods of narrative or discourse analysis. Thus, the use of linguistic methods combining all attributes of workplace management—(a) management and organisation, (b) spatial is-

sues, and (c) linguistic methods—seem to be non-existent apart from a few papers (e.g., Ainsworth et al., 2009; Frers 2009).

In the field of the built environment, the linguistic approach focuses either on the processes of the built environment or on the narrative of the form. In research that combines both organisational studies and built environment studies, the linguistic methods or social constructionist perspective are used to describe how space can and is used as a means of communication and identity construction. In addition many authors who acknowledge the relationship between language and built forms (e.g., Kornberger and Clegg, 2004) do not actually use the methods of discourse- or narrative analysis, because they concentrate more on contemplating the (linguistic) philosophy of buildings/workplaces than on analysing them using linguistic methods.

The linguistic approach was considered to be important because it makes the processes of the built environment and the culture of building use visible. This is significant when studying issues such as workplaces, which are connected to social processes in a profound way. Still there are some hindrances in using linguistic methods.

Methods provide communication tools in creating strategies, but they do not focus on the content of the communication as such, thus they do not provide information on what is and should be said or what kind of workplaces should be developed. In studying organisational phenomena, methods help in understanding phenomena, but do not explicitly provide ways to solve problematic situations. In studies of the built environment, linguistic methods focus either on linguistic structures of processes (design, construction, evaluation, etc.) in the built environment or they describe narratives of form. While examining processes, they elaborate the power and value structure, but they do not evaluate the process or end product. Accordingly, they do not take into consideration the actual use of space. If methods are used to describe the symbolic meaning of a space, they do help to explain the actual use of space, but as symbolic structures they are somewhat culturally and individually dependent and do not offer universal recommendations. Linguistic methods acknowledge the idea that space is used as means of communication and constructing identity. This helps management to use space as a communication tool, but again does not take into account individual differences or what kind of messages could or should be delivered. Finally, the linguistic approach is highly connected to its context because its analysis is part of both data collection and reporting. Thus, methods provide different types of information depending on context and the ways in which that information is used in each situation. This can be both a benefit and a challenge. It is a benefit in the sense that a subject's hidden attributes are more thoroughly explored, but it is a challenge in the sense that data are not sufficient for comparison. (Table 2.)

**Table 2:** The benefits and challenges of linguistic approach in Work Place Management research

Focus	Benefits	Challenges
General organisational studies	Gives communicational tools to organisational strategies	Is not interested in the content of communication
Organisational phenomena and segmented groups	Helps to understand problematic social phenomena	Does not provide ways to solve problematic situations
Linguistic structures of the processes of the built environment	Elaborates the power and value structures of architectural processes	Does not evaluate the process nor the end product  Does not take into consideration the actual use of the space
Narrative of the built environment	Delivers tools to make the built environment more understandable	Does not take into consideration individual and cultural differences
Space as a means of communication	Describes how spatial solutions are means of communication  Describes how power is or is not legitimatised in spatial projects	Unable to provide information about the content of communication

This paper showed that the linguistic methods of narrative and discourse analysis are not used in the workplace management research. One reason for this is that linguistic studies are usually connected to representations of spaces rather than spaces themselves. Thus, the focus easily turns to general management studies rather than studies of the built environment. If this is the case, why would it be important to bring this type of methodology to the workplace management research? Markus and Cameron (2002) claim that it is important because architects (as other stakeholders in the built environment) should understand that just like others, they use language in every part of the process. Kornberger claims that words shape buildings, but buildings do not automatically shape behaviour (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004). This statement is based on the notion that architects cannot predict or master human behaviour with spatial solutions because form does not always follow function: places are produced and interpreted all the time. This paper also seeks to emphasise the fact that the built environment is like language; one cannot control it, because it becomes significant only in use and in social context.

## 4.2 Speech as a Way of Constructing Change in Space—Opposing and Conforming Discourses

The purpose of this paper was to portray how office users talk about space during the change process from an enclosed to an open-plan office. It concentrates less on what people actually say about a change in space and more on how they say it. This paper's discourse analysis was performed on two organisational change processes.

Based on the interviews, office users tend to frame changes in space using 3 main types of discourses: a) opposing and conforming sense-making; b) space as a model for mental states; or c) change in space as a reconstruction of identity.

Typically, a person's orientation to change is a reluctance to adapt. Such a perspective can be justified based on the numerous resistant arguments made by the informants. The most common ways that informants created discourses to cope with opposing sense making were to use the pressure of the social community as a strengthening argument, to reference a hidden agenda of management and to distance themselves from the subject. These three main types of opposing sense making were:

1. Social community and own responsibility;
2. Management's hidden agenda; and
3. Distancing themselves.

Informants' conforming discourses on making sense of the change were to compare social pressure to individual opinions, including their own, and to trust professionals. What was interesting was that conforming sense making is based on the same strategies as opposing sense making, although the goal is different.

1. Social community versus individual opinion;
2. Trusting professionals;
3. Including oneself: Contradiction as a way of seeking harmony.

When people talked about the space itself, they did not frame their sentences as colourfully as they did when talking about the change. Therefore, space is something more concrete, an entity that does not arouse feelings as strong as change alone does. This might be due to the tangible nature of space and the abstract nature of change. Change is also a threat in the sense that the outcome is a mystery when talking about space, because people tend to have a more-or-less clear understanding of what space means and how it really looks. Space can, in itself, be an argument either for or against change.

If people tend to frame change using opposing and conforming discourses, and if they use space to reconstruct identity, it therefore is unsurprising that they tend to react strongly to removal.

Based on the study's discourse analysis, one can say that:

1. When speaking about change, people choose sides regardless of their opinions. In other words, they use either conforming or opposing discourses, even if their opinions are neutral. In many cases, an opinion that is content-neutral is framed as either conforming or defending.
2. Means of persuasion are the same regardless of one's viewpoint. Opposing and conforming opinions are structured similarly.
3. People frame their sentences, in other words, they persuade their opponents, much more heavily when talking about change than when talking about space. "Space speak" concentrates much more on substance, and thus discourses on space are not as subjective as discourses on change.

Based on the results of this paper, employees do not use the common defensive arguments, such as the argument that an open office is a threat to privacy and concentration. In fact, they did not say much about the actual office although it was quite apparent that many of them opposed it. Comments about the change in space, and more precisely, about the move to the open office, actually concentrated more on persuasion.

### **4.3 The Open-Plan Office—From Narratives to Discourses—An Analysis of an Internet Discussion**

The purpose of this paper was to show how attitudes to open-plan offices are formed and maintained, both in the research and in the everyday life of an office user. The paper suggested that the media plays a significant role in producing open-plan office narratives, which in turn are reproduced in the discourses of office users as rhetorical tools to express their workplace experiences.

The physical features of an open-plan office have an impact on the construction of its users' experience. However, this experience is always influenced by public opinion, which is constructed in forums such as the media, Internet discussions and everyday common discourse. Public opinion is often considered to be the antithesis of scientific knowledge, but when humans are the targets of observation, public opinion must be taken into consideration because people are heavily influenced by public discussions regardless of the academic validity of those discussions.

To learn whether media narratives are translated into everyday discussion, 3 steps were taken. First, narratives from the academic literature on the subject were categorised. Second, the paper "Nerves are Frayed in Open-Plan Offices", an article published by the Finnish daily business newspaper *Kauppalehti*, was analysed. Third, the discourses of office users were identified in an Internet discussion prompted by the newspaper article.

The discourse analysis indicated that both the paper narratives and the discourses of office users contain hidden agendas, which distort the interpretation of the everyday work experience of open-plan-office users. This results in

a circular discursive structure that forms negative attitudes towards open-plan offices.

Based on this analysis, the research results on open-plan offices were divided into pros and cons. Furthermore, the media adopts only the negative results, which are then exaggerated through the use of discursive acts of promoting fear, which then affect office users' attitudes towards open-plan offices. This negativity is then reproduced in office users' attitudes, which can be reflected in forums such as Internet discussion platforms.

The Internet discussion showed a discursive pattern that aims for negative group cohesion based on conflict. Furthermore, this negativity influences not only the general opinion of open-plan offices, but also research results, where research is based on feedback such as interviews and surveys. Additionally, the similar narrative structures of the research and the Internet discussion imply that either people copy the researchers or the research merely reports what people say.

This paper emphasised the fact, that every discussion has a role in constructing reality. In this case, the example of an online article and Internet discussion has prompted a discussion about the social construction of the workplace in the research on workplace and facility management. After all, the social construction of the workplace is all that exists to investigate users' experience of their office surroundings. This result should and could be applied to the everyday work of facility managers, human resources and management in general.

Opinions on spatial questions are formed based not only on the practical problems that the offices evoke, but also from the ways in which office users express themselves. Thus, the communication patterns—especially those related to change processes—should be acknowledged in a more profound manner.

#### **4.4 Academic Identities and Spatial Narratives**

The purpose of this paper was to describe how the professional identity of university employees affects their experience of the workplace. Additionally, this paper emphasised language by analysing the relationship of identity and architecture from a narrative perspective. That is, stories about spaces are considered to be not only an important source of information, but also a background factor in constructing both the identity of the self and the identity of the place.

Based on the interviews, the narratives of space reflect the employees' philosophical ideals about the roles of research and academia. Accordingly, this ideal is constructed through narratives derived from the users' academic identity.

Functional issues such as air conditioning or equipment in the new workplace were seen as issues that are self-evident and important, but not very interesting. Employees' perceptions of the new workplace are more interconnected with the ways that they describe their roles in academia and the role of academia in society. The narratives could be divided into explicit narratives,

which contain straightforward observations about the environment, and implicit narratives, which explained the explicit narratives using descriptions of identity.

An unexpected result was that the subjects' histories in relation to the building matters less than their personal perspectives on academia and architecture. That is, people of similar backgrounds at the university do not necessarily agree on the value of history and spatial arrangements. Their perspectives were more closely related to their personal views and their own values and ideals about the university, than to the time and events that they had experienced within the university.

The quotes showed that the subjects deployed implicit narratives of their professional identities to explain their explicit narratives about the functionality and symbolism of the space. These implicit narratives can be categorised into two groups, the first representing subjects who see their places at the university to endorse the tradition of research independent from business, and the second representing subjects who see economical and practical issues as the reason for the university to exist in the first place. For the first group, the business park is not an adequate place for academic work, and for the second group, it is perfect. The fact that everyone is satisfied with the functional issues implies that it is actually identity and ideals that govern employees' experience of a space, not the space itself. Additionally, the subjects' academic identities are connected to ontological and epistemological ideals of functional, positivistic and phenomenological views that are seen in the way that the subjects described their identities in relation to space.

Because everyone was more or less satisfied with the functional and aesthetic issues of the workplace, the implicit issues derived from their professional identity played a significant role in their experience about the space: the pragmatic, positivistic, phenomenological and traditional paradigms, in which the pragmatic and positivistic groups emphasised functionality, but also wanted to underline the fact that the symbolism of spaces is an irrelevant factor in their workplace experiences. Phenomenological and traditional groups often drew analogies to the ideals of academia and were concerned about the representations of space. As a matter of fact, many of them were even ready to spend time in non-functional and "ugly" space, if it represented the idea of "academic way of being", whatever that might be.

Additionally, the difference among functionality, aesthetics, heritage and symbolism is not entirely clear, because they are all interconnected. For instance, many think that the new business park is "beautiful" because it is clean and light, but their perceptions of beauty are connected to an appearance that represents a different history or a particular style. Accordingly, the new business park cannot have a history and is not seen as representative of a certain style or era. Therefore, it cannot be "beautiful". This means that, for instance, "beauty" is not just a question of a concrete architectural feature such as building material or layout. It is connected with various other factors, and thus aesthetics, or functional issues for that matter, cannot exist individually in the absence of other cultural references. Subsequently, the experience of the space, which is affected by the abovementioned factors, cannot be measured without



considering the complex contextual issues. Because identity is partly constructed in relation to materialistic issues such as space, the experience of space is consequently constructed in relation to abstract factors such as identity.

Architecture and identity are connected in multiple ways. The problem is how to govern this relationship, because it is an ongoing process between the self and the physical. It is known that buildings might not be used as intended. Additionally, it is challenging to address aesthetic and symbolic values based on the premises of academic argumentation, because they are more or less subjective concepts regardless of the universalities that they impose (such as the golden mean, etc.).

Professional identity and ideals are connected to the perception of space and vice versa. Thus, workplace identities should not be underestimated in the study of space, which cannot be seen as a neutral physical setting because it always represents cultural values. Accordingly, the experience of space is not a product of a linear relationship between the environment and the subject because the experience is connected to subjective ideals, identity and heritage. Conversely, the relationship between identity and space is an ongoing process that is iterative in nature. Spaces also guide the construction of identity and vice versa.

#### **4.5 Analysing Office Space From a Narrative Perspective—A Case Study of an Employment Office**

The purpose of this paper was to portray the narratives that space in itself produces. This is important to acknowledge in order to understand the experience of a physical office space and the unconscious constructions behind the tangible structures of a built environment. The employment office was observed and analysed from a narrative perspective.

The paper's analysis showed that an office space becomes meaningful and usable based on both the narratives that people produce and the narratives the space reflects. The narrative of different users' contradictory expectations and the narrative of power were identified based on observation. These narratives showed that a hidden meaning within a space affects the usage of that space and vice versa.

Based on a narrative analysis of the user journey observation, the conceptual construction of the space of an employment office is

1. in the process of interaction;
2. in value systems based on cultural habits; and
3. in the physical constructs that enable or hinder the process of the two aforementioned factors.

Space thus hinders everyday actions by

1. restricting users' ability to go to places that intuitively (culturally) seem correct; and
2. restricting freedom of choice by locking certain areas, thus rendering customers unable to freely enter (public) conference rooms and the back areas of service desks.

The space supports actions by

1. ensuring the safety of employees, for example, by locking all of the passageways to employee areas;
2. ensuring that the restricted areas are not visible to customers;
3. modelling the organisational structure by the physical structure; and
4. ensuring vivid interaction in designated places without disturbing the peace in the places intended for concentration.

The number of choices when using the space is crucial in experiencing the space; thus, the amount of choices is correlated with the experienced freedom of using the space. For example, a person with full access has the most freedom in using the space. Accordingly, what is seen and what is hidden affects not only the places that the office users access but also how they rank their roles within the space. For instance, the space itself defines customer and employee roles in the employment office. A person who is able to see and access every area most likely has the most power in using the space. Equally, he/she experiences the most freedom related both to the space and to his/her role within the organisation. This observation also correlates with time issues. A person who is able to access every area is a person who is likely able to do that whenever he/she wants. Accordingly, he/she has also the most freedom with respect to the use of his/her time.

The results presented in this paper elaborate that different users have different needs, which are challenging to fulfil in the same context—in this case, an employment office. Although this case presents a few difficulties in designing a functional and attractive workplace, it does succeed in fulfilling some contradictory user needs, such as employee safety and the invisibility of restrictions.

To capture a user's essential experience, the observation of this study should be repeated and a cross-case analysis between different offices or other spaces should be conducted. Observing additional, different types of spaces would also help increase understanding, particularly with respect to workplace space in an employment office.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Main Findings

The aim of this dissertation was to bring the sociolinguistic perspective to the workplace management research and to portray communication patterns that lead to users' experience of the workplace. Communication patterns were investigated by 4 empirical studies and 1 literature review, in which the sociolinguistic perspective in workplace management research was reviewed.

The discursive approach to workplace management research is considered important because workplace management research seems to neglect the perspective of social constructionism, although users' experience of the workplace is not only socially constructed, but also an extremely important issue when evaluating and developing new workplaces and workplace policies. In addition, the user experience is constructed and embodied in the way that users communicate about space. These communication patterns also affect the way that spaces are built and managed, which again influences space in its most tangible sense.

The theory of social constructionism was applied to workplace management research by using sociolinguistic methods of discourse- and narrative analysis in analysing users' experience of office space.

**RQ1:** The first research question addressed the research gap in workplace management research by asking, how is the discursive approach connected to the workplace and the built environment? This was answered in paper 1.

The discursive methods of narrative and discourse analysis are not recognised in workplace management research in a comprehensive way, which would involve combining the research on the built environment with the research on organisation and culture. In workplace management research, methods of narrative and discourse analysis are applied to the processes of the built environment. Additionally, methods are applied to research on space and place as means of communication and identity construction.

One stream of discursive studies in organisation and the built environment focuses on how physical artefacts (including space) are used as a means of communication and role construction. For instance, Frers (2009) has used discourse analysis in demonstrating the way that the material world reaches into social interactions and consequently fills in mental maps of the social world with physical details.

Sparkes et al. (2010) have taken a similar perspective when studying how space can be and is used as a mean of constructing social identity among university students (Sparkes et al., 2010). In addition, Ainsworth et al. (2009) have used the discourse analysis to prove that the spatial imagery has a significant role in constructing the manager identity. Managers used the concepts of mobility and locality and the idea of a social space to describe their role in the organisation.

Henderson (2007) has conducted a study concerning the visual discourse in construction industry, by examining how designers use sketches in validating their vision. Rachael Luck (2007) claims that artefacts are used as a means of communication with building users:

The second stream of the research, which combines linguistic research with management and the built environment, is about surveillance (MacEachen et al., 2008; Sewell, 2012) and physical presence in the workplace (Dew et al., 2005). Surveillance is an extremely interesting case from a workplace manager's point of view because it is connected to spatiality, locality and presence, and therefore resides in a core interest area of workplace managers. Additionally it is a current topic in a time of mobile and disseminated work and open-plan offices. Although e.g., Sewell et al. (2012) do not discuss spatial features as such; they address a very critical topic of how the sense of privacy loss is dealt with in the work community. Additionally, they describe how power is or is not legitimised through communication.

Discursive methods are interested not only in explaining the reasons for which something occurs, but also the ways that it has been and is constructed before, during, and after its occurrence. For example, we are aware of the phenomenon of *change resistance*. This phenomenon can be acknowledged by surveys and reviews, but to understand how actions (such as communication) leading to this phenomenon take place, qualitative and—especially—discursive approaches are needed.

Compared to other qualitative methods, discursive methods emphasise language. Discourse analysis claims that everything is language. For instance, change resistance is a completely communicational act: to become aware of resistance, someone must verbalise the phenomenon. Additionally, communicational actions always include several rhetorical strategies, in other words, discourses. To understand these discourses is to profoundly understand, predict and manage the phenomena. This applies equally to workplaces and to any other social product.

**RQ2:** The second research question addresses the applications of the discursive approach in workplace management research by asking, what types of rhetorical strategies are adopted when communicating about workplace and space? This question was answered in papers 2, 3 and 4.

When talking about spatial changes in the workplace or forming an opinion about a particular space, namely an open-plan office, the primary question is how to persuade an opponent to think in a certain way. The interviewees spent much time and effort stating their positions and validating their claims, rather than talking about the physical space itself.

Although the office users appeared to have their own agendas during the interviews and their views differed, it seemed that the rhetorical tools used were the same. One of these typical rhetorical devices is one that refers to group cohesion, whether from the opposing or the conforming perspective. According to Powell (2005), language and reality are often explained through contradictions and categories, such as good/evil or dark/light. This type of adversarial approach can also be seen in all of the cases dealing with the language of the workplace. In the relocation processes, the interviewees always took either opposing or conforming sides when answering questions about their workplaces. Additionally the texts in paper 4 repeated similar forms of juxtapositioning. Thus, the first rhetorical strategy is based on contradictions.

Second, the concept of the ideal was constructed and presented repeatedly throughout the interviews. In most cases, this ideal is a product of the interviewee's professional identity. For instance, the ideal of "functionality" is much more important to construction company employees than to university employees, who have a greater appreciation for "heritage". In both cases, the perceived "ideal" is a product of each employee's professional identity. This repeats the general principles of Berger and Luckmann (1966) concerning the ongoing discourse between the objective and subjective society, in which identity is constructed between objective and subjective society, but also functions as a mean to construct ideals and thus, both objective and subjective truth. Additionally, it resembles Foucault's (1969) notion of contradiction in creating historical reality. That is, ideals are defined through the paradox of subjective and objective truth.

**RQ3:** The final question brings together the previous questions related to the research gap and applications by asking what kind of knowledge can be attained by taking this approach. This question continues by asking, what do discursive constructs, namely rhetoric strategies, reveal about the user-experience of workplace and -space? This question is answered by all 5 papers, along with the compilation section of this dissertation.

Because identity claims seem to work as a profound rhetorical device in promoting employees' experiences in the workplace, the focus on describing the user-experience of space should be focused on identity claims.

Identity claims also govern interviewees' ideals about physical workspace; the office users claimed that spatial issues in the workplace should reflect the content of their work. In several cases, it was claimed that concentration work should take place in private spaces and dynamic work, such as sales, should be situated in open spaces. This assumption might be based on functional premises. However, employees with the same profession and similar work still had different opinions regarding the same space. Because both explanations arise out of a functional discourse, the final claim is different. This implies that the

experience of the workspace is not purely the product of physical environment. That is, identity work is also applied to the physical appearance of the workspace, and it follows that the experience of the workplace is profoundly connected to identity.

Additionally, the physical layout of the workplace is seen to reflect power issues and cultural assumptions. For instance, in the case study that analysed the employment agency, the areas of access to and exits from the workspace are an important part of defining a user's status in relation to the space. It is important to see who is able to use the space: who has access where and at what times. Freedom in using a space tends to correlate with employee status within that space. Again, the assumed identity positioning of different users is the key issue related to the office's physical layout and appearance.

The conclusion is that the discursive patterns of workplace language heavily reflect the ongoing identity work of the office users. Thus, when studying the user experience of the workplace, one must identify what types of identities are displayed. This is because the office users construct their experience based on their perceptions of professional identity. Additionally, it is important to look into the contradictions (or perceived contradictions) that users experience between spatial identity and professional identity.

## 5.2 Theoretical Implications

This dissertation is based on social constructionism, which claims that reality is based on socially constructed knowledge, which is discursive in nature. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), individuals make sense of this reality by taking an identity position. That is, they both interpret objective society and construct subjective society based on how they see themselves and their institutional roles. This claim also becomes apparent in this dissertation, because identity positioning was the most often used rhetorical device when discussing and in experiencing the workplace.

Workplace should then be designed in a way that supports either employees' professional identities or organisational identity. The physical workplace can also govern work culture and actual behaviour within the space, because it functions as a symbol for the work that is being conducted. If employees experience contradictions between workplace and identity, they also begin to oppose other organisational goals. Conversely, if they identify with their space, they are more likely to perform better. Physical space can also affect the way that employees see themselves. According to one interviewee,

“When we moved to the business park, I started to dress more businesslike”.

In other words, the spatial features of a given workplace are part of the material culture that is connected to identity construction.

From the discursive perspective, users' experience of the workplace is constructed based on the identity work conducted by those users. Accordingly, identity work continuously interacts with the physical environment. It can

contradict the space or it can be enforced by the space. Either way, the workplace can be used as a strategic tool in managing people and their performance.

Although social constructionism may be challenged by the methodological perspective, it is crucial to understand the importance of its premises—that is, the perception, experience and understanding of reality is always based on language. Thus words do construct artefacts and phenomena, but how, that is the question, since the language is everywhere and it exists, evolves, re-shapes and is being re-shaped. Thus, social constructionism does not provide answers, but the pure existence of it might change the way that we perceive knowledge, which influences the way that things “really” are. This means that if we concentrate only on the products of social processes such as workspaces in their most physical sense, we cannot see why they are the way they are. Equally, if we do not understand the way that users, or any other players in the built environment, experience spaces, we cannot really understand them. And if we do not understand this, we cannot develop the physical environment in a way that is satisfying to and/or functional for as many stakeholders as possible. Accordingly, taking a discursive perspective on the research on the built environment offers a novel mindset not only in researching workplaces, but also in designing them.

### **5.3 Theoretical Limitations**

The theory of social construction is about describing how knowledge is constructed. Thus, although research based on social construction is often motivated by practical problems, it does not give recommendations or practical tools to solve such issues. Additionally, theories based on socially constructed principles are in danger of become self-explanatory. In other words, their results can be seen as circular, especially because they are as subjective as other qualitative methods; the researcher him/herself is bound to the empirical data that he/she interprets and describes.

The second limitation of social constructionism is the relationship between empirical data and theory. They explain one another, which can result in circular thinking, making it impossible to say whether data or theory initiated the other. For instance, the general discourse on social construction itself has become both an explanatory and a producing force of social institutions, such as modern school systems or the media. Accordingly, discursive methods of discourse and narrative analysis cannot be evaluated based on their validity or reliability because their main focus is to critically provide fruitful insights into problems rather than to solve them. Because there are no objective results provided by discourse analysis, the reliability and the validity of research and findings depend on the strength and the elegance of one’s arguments. Thus, based on the social constructionism, even the best arguments from discourse- or narrative analysis are subject to their own deconstructive reading and differing interpretations. That is, they are as much a part of constructed reality as the subject in which they are interested.

Third, it is difficult to generalise the results produced by discursive studies, because language is simultaneously subjective and universal. In this sense, all of the results gained through this type of method represent individuals' thoughts and cannot be generalised as societal truth. Conversely, language and the means of using language are shared by the entire corpus. That is, language reflects social reality regardless of individuals' perceptions. Thus, the question of generalisability is not important as such, because the interest of a discursive study is in the ways of using language rather than the outcomes that conversations produce.

#### 5.4 Methodological limitations

This dissertation combines different cases that were designed to introduce and test new perspectives in studying users' experience of their workplaces. Thus, they do not represent any universal discourse on workplaces, spaces or open-plan offices. This is not problematic from an ontological point of view because this dissertation is based on the notion that content is not the main point. However, the major limitation of this or any other research conducted using sociolinguistic methods is the subjective interpretation of the researcher, who is bound to the data because his/her voice is part of the ongoing discourse. Thus, the problem of subjectivity does not concern generalisation, but does concern the validity of the data. It is impossible to prove that a study's subjects really mean what the researcher interprets them to mean. Additionally, the researcher has a role in guiding the conversation in a particular direction, which might affect the way that subjects express themselves. In other words, research subjects might communicate differently in another context. In many cases, discursive methods have been conducted to data, which is not influenced by the researcher. In this sense, real conversations, written answers and reports are more pure examples of portraying the social construct of space than are interviews.

From a methodological perspective, there are limitations that cannot be avoided. For instance, the quotations that are presented as examples were translated into English, which may have altered the meanings of the original quotations.

The data were collected in Finnish and translated into English for the purpose of publishing the papers in international journals. Because language is bound to cultural reality and vice versa, the meaning of the data might have been altered during the translation process. Additionally, cultural differences in behaviour and ways of using language may be interpreted differently in different contexts. However, it is important to communicate research results in an international context. This is only possible by using a common language. Additionally, although the results of the papers may reflect national cultural realities, the international discussion on discourses is important for its own sake.



## 6. Conclusion

This dissertation claims that users' experience of the workplace is more a constructed concept than a tangible result of the environment's impact on users. Accordingly, this experience, like anything else, is socially constructed and language is the only medium. Thus, language in and about space is an important issue on which to focus, as opposed to merely focusing on what the space actually is.

The discursive approach should not and cannot replace many of the traditional survey methods and measurements—or other qualitative methods, for that matter—but it would add a new flavour to the study of workplaces. The workplace is a system of physical artefacts, cultural symbols, human behaviour and spatial dynamics, which orchestrate action and interaction in a workplace. Thus, this dissertation encourages researchers to adopt a discursive perspective in future studies on workplace management so as to understand and develop workplaces in a more holistic way.

To describe users' experience, the analysis could be taken even further by continuing with interviews and comparing their content among different fields of industry and different phases of workplaces' life cycle, that is, it could be illuminating to repeat the interviews with the same informants after they have fully adjusted to their new workplaces. It would also be interesting to investigate longer written texts and reports on ways of using written language as a reflection of space and change. Additionally, the texts that are not bound to the active participation of the researcher should be investigated. Moreover, non-participatory observations of conversations and spaces would illuminate the discourses taking place in real, everyday conversations, because in this dissertation most of the papers are bound to the researcher's own participation.

To capture the essential experience of a user, the observation should be repeated and a cross-case analysis between different offices or other spaces should be conducted. Going further afield to study different kind of spaces would also help to understand the space of a particular workplace.

The data should be gathered not only from the wider workplace context, but also from the narrower context of a particular organisation. There should be a wider scope with respect to different forms of data. That is, the workplace experience could be investigated using secondary data such as general writings, reports and other workplace-related materials. Additionally, it would be important to apply this perspective to the research on the built environment in

general; in other words, to different types of space segments, such as restaurants, shopping centres or housing.

This dissertation does not directly give answers to the question: How should facility managers construct the meaning and the story of the place. It describes how users construct the stories (their experience) of the workplace. By saying this, the practical advice is that FMs should pay more attention to the communication strategies of change processes for instance. What kind of strategies they should apply, would be the question of another research. However in order to develop a sufficient communicational strategy, one should understand how users communicate about the space. One should be aware of current the sensemaking processes in order to develop and manage the facilities in future. This does not mean the FMs or other players in the field should do everything users want, since users always want something they are used to. It only means, that users might pay attention to something completely different than the managers are concentrating in. Additionally the users and the manager consider issues as matters of fact, although they are socially constructed and thus something, which can change based on the rhetorical strategies and sense making processes that are taking place. For instance considering the enclosed office to be “traditional” although in fact, it is not as traditional working space as open plan lay out. Although it is not important, what is traditional and what is not, but it is an example, how we consider something to be objective truth, although it is matter of people constructing meaning in the social network. That is, using language. The whole reality the users experience is constructed with language. Regardless of the subjects, such as offices’ objective historical true nature, if there even is such a thing separate from language.

Undoubtedly, language about spaces is still an unknown territory, and as such it should be more extensively acknowledged. This fact should be acknowledged among all of the stakeholders in the fields of facility management and the built environment. Managing space—not only as a physical asset but also as a source of conversation—is important. The workplace discourse is not disconnected: it takes place in relation to space and is an important channel to deepen the understanding not only users’ workplace experience, but also any other spatial experience.



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## **Appended Papers 1- 5**

The employees are the companies' most valuable asset, therefore it is essential that the work environment meets the employees' needs and supports their performance. Accordingly employees tend to attach to places and spaces in a profound way. Still "the space" is often a neglected attribute in management discourse. This dissertation claims that language constructs experience of workplace because, although we live in a physical reality all our concepts, values and ultimately experience is derived from a social linguistic process. Thus although words do not construct places, they have a profound role in constructing the experience of the places and spaces. The aim of this dissertation is to bring the sociolinguistic perspective into the workplace management research and to portray communicational patterns that lead to the user experience of the workplace.



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