Moving off the Map: How Knowledge of Organizational Operations Empowers and Alienates

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Abstract. This paper examines how employees become simultaneously empowered and alienated by detailed, holistic knowledge of the actual operations of their organization, drawing on an inductive analysis of the experiences of employees working on organizational change teams. As employees build and scrutinize process maps of their organization, they develop a new comprehension of the structure and operation of their organization. What they had perceived as purposively designed, relatively stable, and largely external is revealed to be continuously produced through social interaction. I trace how this altered comprehension of the organization's functioning and logic changes employees' orientation to and place within the organization. Their central roles are revealed as less efficacious than imagined and, in fact, as reproducing the organization's inefficiencies. Alienated from their central operational roles, they voluntarily move to peripheral change roles from which they feel empowered to pursue organization-wide change. The paper offers two contributions. First, it identifies a new means through which central actors may become disembedded, that is, detailed comprehensive knowledge of the logic and operations of the surrounding social system. Second, the paper problematizes established insights about the relationship between social position and challenges to the status quo. Rather than a peripheral social location creating a desire to challenge the status quo, a desire to challenge the status quo may encourage central actors to choose a peripheral social location.

Introduction

The implementation of system-level changes—organizational or institutional—depends on central actors who have the necessary authority and resources. Paradoxically, centrally positioned actors are less likely to initiate or support significant challenges to the status quo because their attention, interpretations, and interests are conditioned by the system in which they are embedded, and changes to the system may threaten their position (e.g., Battilana 2011 and Battilana and Casciaro 2012). Although this pattern is documented across the organizational change, innovation, and institutional change literature, exceptions to this pattern have been identified. Central actors may become dislodged from established ways of thinking and acting because of external technological, economic, or regulatory shocks (Meyer et al. 1990, Greenwood et al. 2002) or provocations from the periphery (Leblebici et al. 1991, Kraatz and Moore 2002).

Beyond these external prompts, there is significant interest in understanding whether central actors can be catalyzed to work for change through local, endogenous means. The focus being how the ordinary operations of the organization or surrounding social system might provoke central actors (Sewell 1992, Clemens and Cook 1999). As social systems face difficult challenges, such as inequality, ethical breaches, unchecked authority, and unsustainable resource choices, those who study change wonder whether there are unrecognized and unrecorded avenues through which central actors may be mobilized to challenge the surrounding social system. At the heart of the issue is the identification of mechanisms that reshape the interpretations and interests of central actors and that activate them to reflect on the social systems in which they are embedded. If central actors are to initiate change within a system, they must experience something that alters how they comprehend and relate to the system—an organization, a community, an institutional field—dislodging them from the system in which they are embedded.

Two disembedding mechanisms have been hypothesized and observed empirically. First, contradictions,

tensions, and inconsistences emerge from the operation of any system (Clemens and Cook 1999, Seo and Creed 2002). When central actors experience these contradictions, they are catalyzed to reflect on the tensions and develop change plans to resolve them (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006, Creed et al. 2010). Second, centrally embedded actors may be cognitively disembedded through exposure to alternative models of organizing (Kraatz and Block 2008). Awareness and understanding of competing models or pluralism (Jay 2013, Pache and Santos 2013, Yu 2013), encourages reflection on how other models may work locally, possibly prompting central actors to initiate change. These two mechanisms prompt central actors to think about alternatives either because they are needed (internal contradictions) or because they are possible (multiplicity). As alternatives appear and are reflected on, they indirectly erode the taken-for-grantedness of the surrounding system.

In this paper, I describe another means through which central actors may become disembedded from the surrounding system and catalyzed to work to change that system. This finding emerged inductively through a study of the experiences of employees across five organizations assigned to work on business process redesign (BPR) change teams. During this assignment, some employees had the opportunity to develop a detailed, comprehensive understanding of their organization's logic and operations. They see directly how the structure and operation of the organization, which they had perceived as purposively designed, relatively stable, and largely external, is continuously produced and emerges through social interaction. They observed, in an unmediated way, how the organization is far more malleable and changeable than they had imagined and, at the same time, far less centrally coordinated and actively designed. I examine how this knowledge reshapes their interpretation of possibilities for change and their evaluation of where they would be best placed to make change. The knowledge of the organization revealed through the mapping process alienates these employees from their central roles, and they voluntarily move to peripheral organizational change staff roles. Beyond the cognitive disruption previously described, the identified mechanism generates both cognitive and physical reorientation to the system.

The paper offers two contributions. First, it identifies an alternative means through which central actors may be disembedded. Established ideas about the mechanisms of endogenous, agentic change rely on the ideas of contradictions and multiplicity as indirect means through which the surrounding system loses its taken-for-grantedness. I show how knowledge of actual operation of the surrounding system, when detailed and grounded, is a direct means through which

the organization loses its taken-for-grantedness. Second, based on a longitudinal perspective, the findings show that the relationship between social position and challenges to the status quo may be more complicated and dynamic than previously suggested. Rather than social location creating a desire to challenge the status quo, a desire to challenge the status quo may encourage central actors to choose a peripheral social location. When central actors move to peripheral roles voluntarily, they may use the relational and informational resources from their prior position to mount well-resourced challenges to the status quo. This alternative directional relationship indicates that there is more variation in the motivations and resources of peripheral actors than currently assumed.

Social Position and Agency
Across several literatures, a relatively stable pattern emerges concerning the relationship between an actor's formal or informal social location and agentic action. Examining *formal* social position, research at the organizational and institutional level often (but not always) draws on Bourdieu's (1985) concepts of fields and capital to argue that, within each field of competition (at different forms of aggregation: organization, community, profession, etc.), actors are distributed in hierarchical relationships based on the logic of competition and the value of their capital. The idea that social systems are organized into a set of relatively stable relations with actors being more or less central to the field and that these positions within the web of relations are tied to distinct ways of interpreting, understanding, and acting has influenced how theorists think about the possibility of agentic sources of change (Battilana 2006, 2011; Battilana and D'Aunno 2009; Lockett et al. 2014). Central actors embedded in taken-for-granted arrangements will be less likely to reflect and act on them because their interests, awareness, and actions are conditioned by these arrangements (Holm 1995, Seo and Creed 2002).

This general relationship is substantiated by studies of change efforts showing that those on the periphery are more likely to instigate change and that central actors are more reluctant to do so (e.g., Leblebici et al. 1991, Haveman and Rao 1997, Kellogg 2009, and Battilana 2011). Peripheral actors in organizations are more likely to initiate a change; however, as they move to the center of the organization, they are less likely to initiate challenges to the status quo (Battilana 2011; Kellogg 2011, 2012). Such challenges emerge from peripherally located actors for several reasons. First, an actor's social position conditions the actor's experiences in the social system and the interpretations the actor develops. Those on the periphery are farther from the sites of organizational decision making and resource allocation, which makes them more likely

to be open to and exposed to multiple, heterogeneous models that challenge legitimated patterns in their organization (Battilana 2006, Nigam et al. 2015). Whereas those in dominant, or central, positions are inclined to defend orthodoxy, those in dominated positions are inclined toward heterodoxy (Bourdieu 1993, Nigam et al. 2016). Second, because those on the periphery are more loosely embedded, they experience limited pressure to adhere to norms or role expectations or to participate in prescribed ways (Coser 1965, Merton 1972). They may act in unpredictable or naïve ways to tackle problems that others either do not notice or find intractable and solve them in ways that centrally located actors find unconventional (Merton and Zuckerman 1973). Third, people in marginal positions are often disadvantaged by current arrangements that motivate them to introduce changes that increase their status and resources (Battilana 2011). They may also have a more general interest in change because they have so little at stake in status quo arrangements.

Those who study institutional change have been concerned by this pattern as it suggests that change will rarely be initiated by centrally located actors. Moving beyond the effects of exogenous shocks (Greenwood et al. 2002), a line of theory has proposed pathways through which embedded actors might become cognitively dislodged. This theory has been complemented by empirical work identifying experiences that facilitate consciousness of and reflection on the surrounding system.

Awareness of institutional contradictions (Seo and Creed 2002, Greenwood and Suddaby 2006, Creed et al. 2010, Voronov and Yorks 2015) and exposure to institutional pluralism (Pache and Santos 2013) may disrupt cognitive patterns and catalyze actors to reflect on the taken for granted. Contradictions, tensions, and inconsistences that emerge from the operation of any system create a sense of dissonance with the familiar, generating tensions to be resolved and triggering reflection on the status quo (Clemens and Cook 1999). These tensions reveal that the ways of operating or organizing are not inevitable or stable, dissipating the taken-for-grantedness of the system. Seo and Creed (2002, p. 225) explain that "the ongoing experience of contradictory reality reshapes the consciousness of [actors], and they, in some circumstances, act to fundamentally transform the present social arrangements and themselves." For example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) ministers in the Anglican Church experienced a tension between the church's value for human life and dignity and the marginalization of LGBT members (Creed et al. 2010), and employees experienced the inconsistency of working in a firm that claims to be meritocratic but consistently passes over high-performing minorities and women for promotions (Meyerson and Scully 1995, Meyerson

2001). The tensions resulting from such contradiction move central actors to rally for change.

Alternatively, central actors may be cognitively and normatively disembedded by exposure to alternative models of organizing. "Exposure to multiple, incompatible institutional arrangements may also facilitate . . . a graduate shift in actors' consciousness" (Seo and Creed 2002, p. 233). Extant arrangements and ways of working lose their inevitability. Awareness and understanding of pluralism (Jay 2013, Pache and Santos 2013, Besharov and Smith 2014) encourage reflection on how other models may work locally, thus eroding the taken-for-grantedness of local arrangements, possibly prompting central actors to initiate change.

These documented disembedding mechanisms share two features. First, they prompt central actors to think about alternatives either because they are needed (internal contradictions) or because they are possible (pluralism). As alternatives come into view and are reflected on, the taken-for-grantedness of the surrounding system disappears. Understanding of the surrounding system is a secondary effect of being conscious of and reflecting on contradictions or competing models. Second, reflection on contradictions or alternatives does not happen to just any central actors. The actors who are observed to be disembedded interact at interstices that allow them to consider alternative ways of organizing the surrounding system (Furnari 2014). Pluralism and contradiction are revealed to actors who are centrally located in a field while simultaneously observing misaligned arrangements or logic or multiple models. These interstitial interactions facilitate insight, reflexivity, and new ambitions.

In this paper, I show that central actors can be disembedded when the socially produced character of the surrounding system is revealed—its taken-for-grantedness dissolved directly. Rather than indirectly coming to understand their assumptions about the necessity and stability of the surrounding system, central actors are confronted bluntly and with concrete detail. They become disembedded from the system and catalyzed to work to change it. Further, this direct disembedding mechanism goes beyond cognitively disrupting actors to physically moving them out of the system.

Data and Method

The findings emerged from an inductive study of managerial and professional employees' experiences on BPR organizational change teams. The research-design and data-collection processes were informed by a general interest in the practice of devolving responsibility for organizational change work to rank-and-file members, a phenomenon for which there are abundant prescriptions (e.g., Hammer and Champy 1993 and Kotter 1996) but few analyses. I chose to study

BPR because it is a radical prescription for changing how work is organized. BPR initiatives aim to transform vertical, functionally organized structures into horizontal, process-based structures. BPR proponents argue that functional boundaries are detrimental to quality, innovation, and cost because they interfere with the flow of information and knowledge, prioritize functional goals over organizational goals, and create an overspecialized and sequential division of labor.

I studied the activities of five project teams tasked with redesigning their organization's operations (e.g., a product-production process, a customer-service process, and a claims-processing process). The team members were to create a new operational model intended to lead to radical, visible change in their everyday routines and those of their colleagues and reports. This is in contrast to the more glamorous and distant work of designing strategies for executives or implementing information technology with distributed and often less visible effects.

A puzzle emerged as the teams disbanded. Some team members returned, as intended by senior management, to their prior role and career in the organization. Some chose to leave their careers, taking on organizational change staff roles with responsibility for organizational development Six Sigma, total quality management (TQM), BPR, or Lean projects or assuming temporary contract roles to manage BPR project teams within their organization or other organizations. Given that team members were established, successful professionals who could have returned to their jobs or accepted attractive lateral transfers or promotions, these postproject role choices were surprising. Thus, I shifted my effort to a grounded analysis of these unexpected postproject role choices. How did employees account for these choices, what did these choices mean to them, and what informed and influenced these choices? What provoked centrally located employees to assume new peripheral organizational roles within a space of 7 to 16 months?

Research Setting

Although the employees' experiences are my unit of analysis, project teams were my sampling unit. I selected teams based on three theoretical issues that prior literature suggested influenced employees' experiences. First, I sought teams that required different time commitments (number of days per week that employees worked on the project). On some teams, employees worked on the project one day a week (20%). On other teams, employees worked five days a week (100%). These differences suggested the order of resources that senior management provided to the team, but I also hypothesized, given the role of encapsulation in conversion processes (Lofland 1966), that time spent on the project would significantly influence the team members' experiences. Second, I sought teams that were led and staffed by employees. I, therefore, excluded projects that involved external consultants. I also excluded projects initiated by the purchase of an enterprise resource planning system from SAP or Oracle.[1] Both external consulting services and technological systems have implications for the participation of employees in BPR that would have complicated the analysis. Third, although it was not possible to select teams based on project outcomes, I sought access to as many teams as possible to increase the potential for project-outcome variety.

Senior management and project leaders were not eager to embed a researcher in a nascent team working on a difficult assignment replete with novelty, ambiguity, and time pressure. I approached more than 20 organizations, and I eventually negotiated access to six teams in five organizations. Four of them, Natural Resources, High Technology, Durable Products, and Consumer Goods, are Fortune 500 companies. The fifth, Insurance, is a midsize regional insurance company. To maintain confidentiality, I do not describe the content of the projects. Table 1 presents the project team characteristics.

All teams redesigned a product or service process. Following redesign, another team took responsibility for implementation. The redesign phase, as prescribed (e.g., Davenport 1993, Petrozzo and Stepper 1994, Hammer and Stanton 1995, and Braganza 2001), involves an "orientation" to BPR, "discovery" of the current functional organization of work, and "design" of a process-based organization. The redesign phase also involves developing a communication and training strategy and related materials and costing all proposed changes.

Because the teams had considerable responsibility, project team leaders, in consultation with a steering committee, selected employees carefully, using three main criteria. First, team leaders selected "the best and the brightest." A team leader explained, "I wanted people who didn't have extra time on their hands. I wanted the really high-value performers. . . . The [team member's name] of the world, who are smart as a whip and have quite a bit of attitude." Second, they wanted employees with credibility and attitude: "someone who is a healthy skeptic, meaning that they are not terrible but they question things until they are convinced that they make sense, and usually those kinds of people are vocal. . . . So we want one of those." Employees known to be observant, thoughtful, and at times critical of their own professional practice and the local practices were selected. Third, team leaders selected employees who had experience and expertise related to the work being redesigned. Securing the participation of these employees required extensive negotiations with their superiors.

Table 1. Project Team Characteristics and Data Collection Activities

Project details	Natural resources (NR)	High technology (HT)	Durable products (DP)	Consumer goods (CG)	Insurance	
					(I_1)	(I_2)
Type of process	Product	Product	Service	Service	Service	Service
Team size (number of persons)	10	10	11	8	7	6
Estimated time commitment (%)	25	100	100	40	20	20
Project duration (months)	8	13	16	12	8	7
Project resources	Travel, external training, materials	Some travel and materials	Extensive travel, external training, and materials	Some travel, training and materials	Limited, for training	Limited, for training
Status of project	Shelved	Shelved	Cancelled	Implemented	Implemented	Implemented
Data collection activity						
Interviews	14	20	15	31	17	15
Observation	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Project documentation	Yes (extensive)	No	Yes (limited)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Timing	Retrospective	In play	Retrospective	In play	In play	In play

The selected employees were well established in terms of hierarchical position, educational attainment, and organizational tenure (see Table 2). They were primarily white-collar workers; more than half held managerial or director-level positions. Ninety-eight percent had a bachelor's degree, and 58% had a master's-level education. Their fields of study ranged from education to management to engineering. Across the teams, there were equal numbers of women and men. Tenure ranged from 1 to 32 years and averaged 14.1 years across all team members.

Data Collection

The data for this analysis are 113 in-depth interviews with 48 team members across six teams, project leaders, and others in the organizations; observation of the project work of 21 team members; and project documentation from each team.[2] I interviewed team members when a project was launched and when it ended. In the first interview, I asked them to explain how they came to join the team, what they expected from the project, what they knew about BPR, and any work they had begun on the project. In the second interview, I asked them to describe their activities and to reflect on their experiences on the project, including difficult and satisfying moments, and what they had learned, would do again, or would avoid. I also asked them to explain and evaluate the idea of BPR. The interviews lasted 50 to 100 minutes. I recorded all interviews on tape or took notes, which I typed following each interview. I observed three teams, each for one week, as they worked on their project. I wrote field notes and typed these up each evening. I collected the PowerPoint decks that each team created to present their recommended designs and to record their work in process, including team activities, goals, project plans, data,

and team members' reflections. These tended to be detailed. For example, one team recorded, at several points throughout its project, each team member's reactions to the project and the team's progress.

To generate context for the team members' experiences, I interviewed the executive sponsor, members of the steering committee, and the project leader and the project leader's contact in the process office, organizational development office, or human resource department.[3] These informants spanned multiple levels of the organization and held different perspectives on the circumstances surrounding the present effort as well as on its scope and their expectations. I also collected data on the criteria and process for selecting team members.

I obtained access to the Natural Resources and Durable Products teams after the redesign phase of their project had ended. To mitigate retrospective bias as much as possible, I relied extensively on interviews with the project leader and sponsors and available documentation to generate a timeline of the projects' activities and used this information to probe the team members about the concrete details of their experiences and recollections. Table 1 summarizes the data-collection activities.

Analysis

I examined employees' postproject role choices, grouping them into two categories, each with several subcategories: return to role to continue career (former role, lateral role, promotion) or choose organizational change role that deviates from career (permanent organizational change staff role, temporary organizational change project role). Most employees returned to their role to continue their career (25 cases). They either were promoted (seven cases), moved laterally (eight cases), or

Table 2. Team Member Data

Case Company	Individual	Preproject role Level	Preproject role Role	Postproject role Level	Postproject role Role	Same organization	p, t, c[a]	Postproject role	Education	Sex	Tenure	Primary team responsibilities	Percentage of time[b]	Size of team	Duration (months)	Project outcome[c]
								Panel A: Return to career								
DP	2	D	C1	VP	nc	y	p	Promoted	B	M	22	Communication & mapping operations	80	11	16	Cancelled
HT	3	M	C1	D	nc	y	p	Promoted	M	M	10	Communication & new design	60	10	13	Impl inter
IN1	1	D	C1	VP	nc	y	p	Promoted	M	F	30	Communication	20	7	8	Implement
IN1	5	M	C2	D	nc	y	p	Promoted	HS	F	23	Training & costing	20	7	8	Implement
IN2	1	M	C1	D	nc	y	p	Promoted	B	M	24	Training	20	6	7	Implement
IN2	4	NE	C1	P	nc	y	p	Promoted	HS	F	14	Training	20	6	7	Implement
IN2	5	NE	C2	P	nc	y	p	Promoted	M	F	13	Communication & new design	20	6	7	Implement
HT	5	P	C1	nc	nc	y	p	Lateral transfer	B	F	5.5	Training	40	10	13	Impl inter
HT	6	P	C1	nc	nc	y	p	Lateral transfer	B	F	8.5	Training	40	10	13	Impl inter
HT	7	P	C1	nc	nc	y	p	Lateral transfer	B	F	12	Training & communications	60	10	13	Impl inter
HT	8	P	C1	nc	nc	y	p	Lateral transfer	B	F	14	Training & new design	60	10	13	Impl inter
HT	9	P	C1	nc	nc	y	p	Lateral transfer	M	F	8	Costing	60	10	13	Impl inter
IN1	3	M	C2	nc	nc	y	p	Lateral transfer	B	M	8	Costing	20	7	8	Implement
IN1	4	M	C1	nc	C2	y	p	Lateral transfer	B	M	10	Communication & new design	20	7	8	Implement
IN2	3	M	C1	nc	nc	y	p	Lateral transfer	M	M	20	Communication	20	6	7	Implement
CG	4	P	C1	nc	nc	y	p	Prior role	M	F	2	Training	40	8	12	Implement
CG	6	P	C2	nc	nc	y	p	Prior role	M	F	10	Costing	40	8	12	Implement
CG	8	P	C2	nc	nc	y	p	Prior role	M	M	14	Costing	40	8	12	Implement
HT	2	M	C1	nc	nc	y	p	Prior role	M	M	9	Communications	60	10	13	Impl inter
HT	4	P	C2	nc	nc	y	p	Prior role	B	F	3.5	Costing	60	10	13	Impl inter
IN1	2	M	C2	nc	nc	y	p	Prior role	B	M	6	Training & costing	20	7	8	Implement
IN2	6	P	C1	nc	nc	y	p	Prior role	B	M	4	Costing	20	6	7	Implement
NR	2	M	C1	nc	nc	y	p	Prior role and retired	HS	M	32	Develop training	25	10	8	Cancelled
NR	4	M	C2	nc	nc	y	p	Prior role and retired	M	M	28	Communication & mapping operations	25	10	8	Cancelled
NR	5	M	C2	nc	nc	y	p	Prior role and retired	M	M	30	Communication	25	10	8	Cancelled
								Panel B: Choose organizational change roles								
DP	3	D	C1	nc	C3	n	p	Organizational development role	M	M	1	Mapping operations & new design	100	11	16	Cancelled
CG	1	D	C1	nc	C3	y	p	Organizational development role	M	M	23	Mapping operations	40	8	12	Implement
CG	2	D	C2	nc	C3	y	p	Organizational development role	M	M	25	Mapping operations	40	8	12	Implement

Table 2. (Continued)

Case		Preproject role		Postproject role					Individual Characteristics			Team responsibilities		Team characteristics		
Company	Individual	Level	Role	Level	Role	Same organization	P, t, c[a]	Postproject role	Education	Sex	Tenure	Primary team responsibilities	Percentage of time[b]	Size of team	Duration (months)	Project outcome[c]
CG	5	P	C2	nc	C3	y	p	Organizational development role	M	F	9	Mapping operations	40	8	12	Implement
IN1	7	M	C1	nc	C3	y	p	Organizational development role	M	F	12	Mapping operations	20	7	8	Implement
NR	3	M	C1	nc	C3	y	p	Lean change role	M	F	27	Mapping operations & new design	40	10	8	Cancelled
NR	6	P	C1	nc	C3	y	p	Lean change role	M	F	14	Mapping operations & costing	25	10	8	Cancelled
NR	8	P	C2	nc	C3	y	p	Lean change role	M	M	18	Mapping operations	25	10	8	Cancelled
DP	6	M	C2	nc	C3	y	p	Six Sigma change role	M	F	22	Mapping operatings & communications	100	11	16	Cancelled
DP	7	M	C2	nc	C3	y	p	Six Sigma change role	M	M	17	Mapping operations & design	100	11	16	Cancelled
DP	8	P	C1	nc	C3	y	p	Six Sigma change role	HS	F	16	Mapping operations & costing	100	11	16	Cancelled
HT	1	D	C1	nc	C2	y	p	TQM change role	B	F	14	Mapping operations & new design	100	10	13	Impl inter
HT	10	P	C1	nc	C2	y	p	TQM change role	M	M	15	Mapping operations & new design	100	10	14	Impl inter
DP	1	D	C2	VP	C3	n	t	BPR initiative leader	B	M	5	Mapping operations & design	100	11	16	Cancelled
DP	4	D	C1	nc	C3	n	c	BPR project manager	M	M	14	Mapping operations & design	100	11	16	Cancelled
DP	5	M	C2	nc	C3	n	c	BPR project manager	B	M	12	Mapping operations & design	100	11	16	Cancelled
IN1	6	M	C2	nc	C3	y	t	BPR project manager	M	F	6	Mapping operations & new design	40	7	8	Implement
NR	1	M	C1	nc	C3	y	t	BPR project manager	HS	M	23	Mapping operations	40	10	8	Cancelled
NR	7	P	C2	nc	C3	y	t	BPR project manager	M	M	8	Mapping operations	40	10	8	Cancelled
CG	3	P	C1	nc	C3	y	t	BPR team member	B	F	14	Mapping operations	40	8	12	Implement
CG	7	P	C2	nc	C3	y	t	BPR team member	M	F	10	Mapping operations	40	8	12	Implement
IN2	2	M	C2	nc	C3	y	t	BPR team member	M	F	6	Mapping operations & new design	45	6	7	Implement
DP	9	P	C1	nc	C3	n	c	Change consultant	M	F	3	Mapping operations & training	100	11	16	Cancelled

[a] p = permanent, t = temporary, c = contract role.
[b] Percentage of time per week spent on project work.
[c] Project cancelled, project implemented, or implementation interrupted.

returned to their jobs (10 cases). Twenty-three chose organizational change roles. Some moved into permanent roles located in organizational change, organizational development, or human resources departments (13 cases), and the rest found temporary or contract roles that allowed them to continue working on restructuring projects intended to radically transform bureaucratic organizations (10 cases).

Movement Toward the Periphery and the Core. Those who chose change roles moved toward the periphery of their organization. In absolute terms, they moved from roles that were core to the organization's operations to staff roles farther from the core. Those who returned to their careers, in contrast, remained in their central role or shifted even closer to the organization's core. They moved up the hierarchy and/or into roles that were more central to the organization's operations. Similar to Battilana (2011), I used measures of hierarchical position (VP, director, manager, professional, nonexempt) and relationship of the role to the core operations (core role, role directly supports core operations on a regular basis, role indirectly supports core operations or directly supports infrequently) to plot the social position of employees' roles before and after their participation on the team. I transformed job titles to be comparable across organizations based on my in-depth knowledge of the settings. I provide a complete breakdown of the preproject and postproject roles by team member in Table 2. The information about each employee's hierarchical position indicates whether the role is C1 (most central), C2, or C3 (least central). For example, a C1 role in a durable products company would be a production manager. A C2 role would be a quality control manager. A C3 role would be an organizational development manager. To preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, I do not reveal their roles.

Accounts of Movement to the Periphery. In the next stage of analysis, I strove to understand employees' postproject role choices. I coded each team member's account for that person's choice. Using an open approach, I coded any data in which they discussed their role in the organization and their postproject role choice found in interview transcripts, conversations recorded in field notes, or documentation related to each individual (e.g., when they are quoted in PowerPoint decks). I then grouped these codes into more general conceptual categories through continuous iteration across employees' coded accounts. This analysis led to the identification of three conceptual categories that covered employees' accounts of their postproject choices. Those who returned to their career described how their work on the team contributed to their skill development, knowledge of the organization,

visibility, and network. They believed the project to be an aberration in their career and expected to return to their prior path. I labeled these accounts "development." Those who moved to peripheral roles described the effect that their work on the project had on how they related to the organization. As I analyzed and reanalyzed these accounts, I created two conceptual categories of experience that employees expressed—alienation and empowerment—to account for their choices. These team members described becoming alienated from their former positions and becoming empowered to continue to change organizations. They provided an alienation account that pushed them to take on new roles and an empowerment account that pulled them to new roles. I wrote detailed memos that elaborated and explored these two conceptual categories. I also noted that, although these concepts emerged in employees' accounts, their salience and prominence varied.

Identifying the categories of development, alienation, and empowerment moved me to a new stage of grounded theorizing. I knew from my coding of the accounts that team members identified moments and activities in which they recognized their development, alienation, and empowerment. I returned to the accounts to understand what activities and interactions informed, structured, and guided these experiences. This analysis was done employee by employee rather than team by team because, although employees were configured as a team, they often worked on smaller tasks in isolation and on larger tasks with a subset of the team. Contrary to prescriptions and expectations, few activities, besides presentations, involved all team members. Project team leaders had to decide how to best distribute the allotted human resources to complete a redesign proposal on time. They distributed the work—training, costing, communication, mapping, and redesign—across team members.

A primary implication is that employees, even those on the same team, were assigned different responsibilities and tasks and, as a result, had remarkably different experiences. As I coded, I began to identify and elaborate on activities that team members drew on to explain how they came to experience development, alienation, and ambition. In Table 3, I show the patterned differences in activities and their relation to postproject role choices.

I was most interested in how employees moved to the periphery, so I focused on identifying which activities contributed to experiences of alienation and empowerment but were not related to experiences of development. The activity of process mapping, developing an "as-is" representation of the organization's operation, emerged as central in employees' descriptions of how they became alienated and empowered. In contrast, those who experienced development and shifted toward

Table 3. Summary of Differences in Responsibilities, Experiences, and Postproject Role Accounts

	Promoted, lateral transfer, return to prior role	Move to the periphery
Primary responsibility on team	Planned communication strategy, developed materials, and communicated change process. OR Developed training strategy and developed materials. May have involved conducting some initial training. OR Developed new organizational design of process. OR Estimated cost of changes and expected savings.	Collected data on all work involved in producing a good or service and created an end-to-end map.
Accounts of effects of responsibility	*Developed communication, persuasion, and project skills.* "I came from a job where I had a ton of formal authority to a job where I had no formal authority. So I learned to manage in a situation where I had no formal authority but had to deliver something." "The huge majority of peoples' resistance, their reluctance, is not fact based. If you get down to the root of their reluctance, it's not a logical issue, it's an emotional one. In the past, I'd beat you to death with the numbers, overanalyze things. Today I don't even attempt to convince people of a lot of things from a logical standpoint." "It made me more savvy (politically)." *Exposure and visibility to senior managers.* "I think the main professional impact has been...some very senior level interactions, pretty detailed senior level interactions and all cross-functional interactions so I know what's going on, I know people inside the company an awful lot better than I used to and have kind of a common experience basis." "You get extra visibility, but it is a double-edged sword because you also get more work." *Learned about the business beyond functional role.* "It was an opportunity to learn a lot more about our business and then to learn about what's going on in the outside world and where we may need to improve."	*Developed a detailed understanding of his organization's operations.* "What I find attractive is...looking at it holistically. We, like a lot of companies, are very functionally siloed, and I liked very much having a way of approaching the business that said I don't have to worry about all those boundaries but just do what's right. And for me that was very powerful and very attractive." *Felt empowered to change the organization.* "Maybe some of the concepts are fairly simple but...if we can get everybody focused on that, we can start to ignore the functional boundaries a little bit, and that's where it got fun, and that's where it got challenging." *Felt alienated from the organization.* "I guess, on one hand, I was proud that in this maze of such a mess I could actually get things done. There was a certain amount of pride that...I was getting the end result done pretty well every day. The cost to the company ... painful."
Examples of postproject role	Promoted from director to VP (DP2) Transferred between core functions (HT7) Remained in role (IN1)	Shift from core function director to director of organizational development (DP3) Shift from core function manager to Lean change manager (NR3) Shift from core function director to TQM director (HT1)

the center of the organization either were not involved in process mapping or were involved marginally and did not identify it as a significant experience. Given this, I focused on understanding the features and consequences of this activity in my settings. I sought theoretical approaches to inform and deepen my analysis of these activities, including theories of knowledge objects (Knorr-Cetina 1997, Bechky 2003) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967).

Although my data collection and analysis included all team members, the focus of this paper is on those who moved to the periphery. Nonetheless, it is important to understand how those who returned to their central roles or who moved closer to the core informed my findings. As is typical in grounded theory building, they provided a contrast against which to see and interpret the choices and experiences of those who moved to the periphery. They allowed me to make analytical categories about changes in social position. They also allowed me to understand how the accounts of the postproject role choices were formed, especially how different experiences varied these accounts in patterned ways. Although I could write about the experiences of those who remained at the core of the organization, I write about the experiences of those who moved to the periphery. However, this writing would be impossible without the full data set and the grounded analysis of these data.

Other Factors. During the course of the analysis, I was conscious that individual differences could be influencing my findings. It is possible that those who chose organizational change roles were predisposed to do so and that the BPR project facilitated their career change. Although I cannot rule out individual differences in predisposition (cf. Pratt 2000), the selection process suggests that individual differences are not central factors in what I observe. In the online appendix, I consider how demographic, situational, and structural factors relate to the interpretation and theorization of the data. I find that two factors—time working on the projects and the outcome of the projects—may have intensified feelings of empowerment and alienation. Further, the analysis suggests that, although it is possible that the selection criteria correspond to a potential predisposition to work in an organizational change role, it is difficult to imagine how. However, even if these employees were predisposed to organizational change roles, their accounts offer important insights into experiences that informed their decisions to assume peripheral roles through which they could work to change organizations in more or less radical ways. Further, their accounts suggest how employees developed a new apprehension of their organization that created both a sense of empowerment and a sense of alienation.

Findings
Postproject Role Choices
Participating in the BPR project involved a quid pro quo: in taking the assignment, employees could expect increased rewards and status. Project leaders described implicit or explicit postproject arrangements for team members. For example, a project leader explained that each recruit was encouraged to think of the experience as "an important stepping stone" into a senior management or attractive developmental role. Another said, "This experience flags them as high potential" and went on to describe the upward paths possible. Such arrangements reflect practitioner recommendations that team members be promoted or moved into lateral roles that help them build their career as the projects wrap up (Hammer and Stanton 1995). Overall, team members were expected to take on postproject roles that were similar to or better than their prior roles, enhancing their career in the organization.
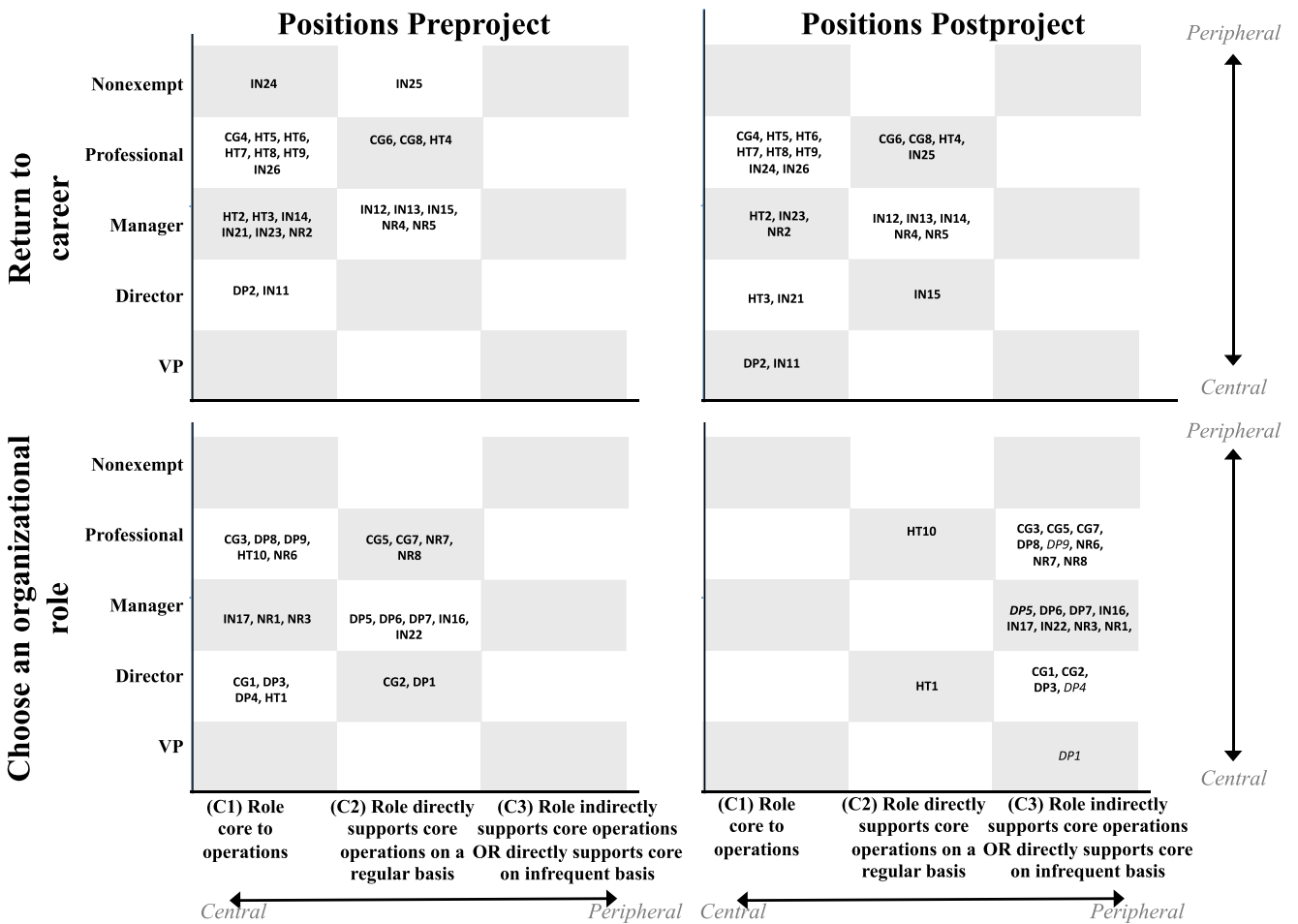
Most did this. They either remained in their central roles or moved into more central roles by accepting promotions or moving laterally into roles that were core to the organization's operations. This is illustrated in Figure 1. The top two grids show the preteam and postteam roles of those who returned to their careers. Each code corresponds to one manager (see

Table 2). The *y*-axis indicates the hierarchical position of the role, moving from low (central) to high (peripheral). The *x*-axis indicates the role's position in the operations from core to periphery: C1 (most central), C2, or C3 (least central). For example, DP2 was promoted from the director of a function to the VP of the function. IN24 was promoted from a nonexempt position to a supervisory role. HT5 was transferred from a product development role into a lateral role that would pave the way to a future promotion.

Beyond the promise of career rewards, the project work supported employees' moves into new roles because it exposed them to senior management and organizational politics, and it enhanced their management skills and network. For example, a manager explained that as he costed the design and presented his work to senior management, he learned "how to handle myself on a big visible project." Another manager, who was responsible for internal communication, spent considerable time presenting in town halls and management meetings. He explained, "I thought I knew a lot about how we work. I know so much more now," and described how he could use this new cross-department knowledge and these new relationships when he returned to his job. A manager who led her team's communication strategy said, "Through the project, I was given exposure to a lot of senior people and the way they thought about things. I think I can use this going forward." The employees who remained in central roles were responsible for developing communication strategies, training plans, new designs, or financial forecasts. Through this work, they developed skills and resources that facilitated and encouraged their move to more central roles.

As explained in the methods section, I do not describe this expected outcome in more detail. Instead, I focus on the unexpected outcome. Some employees turned down promotions, lateral transfers, or their prior central role to assume organizational change roles working on BPR or other change projects. Some, (e.g., HT10 and IN17) moved into permanent organizational change roles, retaining their hierarchical status in the organization but moving from a core line role into a peripheral staff role in TQM and organizational development, respectively. Others (e.g., DP1 and NR1) took temporary BPR project jobs in their organization or other organizations. The bottom two grids in Figure 1 show the preteam and postteam roles of team members who chose organizational change roles. These role choices moved them to the periphery of the organization. Almost all who moved to new organizations were working on contract (italicized in Figure 1). In these roles, they reported making the same or less money and losing pension and

Figure 1. Positions Before and After Project Work

Positions Preproject — Return to career

	(C1) Role core to operations	(C2) Role directly supports core operations on a regular basis	(C3) Role indirectly supports core operations OR directly supports core on infrequent basis
Nonexempt	IN24	IN25	
Professional	CG4, HT5, HT6, HT7, HT8, HT9, IN26	CG6, CG8, HT4	
Manager	HT2, HT3, IN14, IN21, IN23, NR2	IN12, IN13, IN15, NR4, NR5	
Director	DP2, IN11		
VP			

Positions Postproject — Return to career

	(C1) Role core to operations	(C2) Role directly supports core operations on a regular basis	(C3) Role indirectly supports core operations OR directly supports core on infrequent basis
Nonexempt			
Professional	CG4, HT5, HT6, HT7, HT8, HT9, IN24, IN26	CG6, CG8, HT4, IN25	
Manager	HT2, IN23, NR2	IN12, IN13, IN14, NR4, NR5	
Director	HT3, IN21	IN15	
VP	DP2, IN11		

Choose an organizational role — Positions Preproject

	(C1) Role core to operations	(C2) Role directly supports core operations on a regular basis	(C3) Role indirectly supports core operations OR directly supports core on infrequent basis
Nonexempt			
Professional	CG3, DP8, DP9, HT10, NR6	CG5, CG7, NR7, NR8	
Manager	IN17, NR1, NR3	DP5, DP6, DP7, IN16, IN22	
Director	CG1, DP3, DP4, HT1	CG2, DP1	
VP			

Choose an organizational role — Positions Postproject

	(C1) Role core to operations	(C2) Role directly supports core operations on a regular basis	(C3) Role indirectly supports core operations OR directly supports core on infrequent basis
Nonexempt			
Professional		HT10	CG3, CG5, CG7, DP8, *DP9*, NR6, NR7, NR8
Manager			*DP5*, DP6, DP7, IN16, IN17, IN22, NR3, NR1,
Director		HT1	CG1, CG2, DP3, *DP4*
VP			*DP1*

Peripheral ↕ Central (for Return to career panel)
Peripheral ↕ Central (for Choose an organizational role panel)
Central ← → Peripheral

benefit plans. These team members moved to the periphery of both the organization and the labor market. The move of a large minority of team members from central line roles to peripheral organizational change staff roles is not an expected outcome of prescriptions for broad-based participation in organizational change initiatives (Hammer and Champy 1993, Kotter 1996).

In the remainder of the paper, I unpack employees' accounts of their decision to move to the periphery. In particular, I focus on experiences that reshaped their interpretation of the contributions they made and could make from central roles and their evaluation of peripheral roles as a possible source of change. I begin by describing process maps and how team members constructed them. I then present how this knowledge changed their interpretation of central and peripheral roles, influencing their postproject roles. I do not argue that process mapping deterministically causes employees to move to peripheral positions. Rather, I show how deep engagement in representing and understanding the operations of the organization, occasioned by process mapping, changes the way they understand the organization and their participation in it. As with all social processes, this is probabilistic, and unobservable as well as observable factors (discussed in the methods section) influence this process.

Building a Process Map

A process map is a detailed physical portrait of the operations being redesigned. Often a large-scale diagram located on the walls of a conference room, the map is used to understand current work and coordination practices and to guide redesign options (Petrozzo and Stepper 1994). To build the map, team members begin by collecting all information about the operations being redesigned: What were the work activities? Who did the work? What interactions and hand-offs occurred? What information and tools were used? How long did each work activity take? What happened when errors were found? Senior employees' high-level, often prescriptive, accounts of departmental operations could not answer these questions. The map, if it were to guide organizational redesign, had to capture employees' experiences working in concrete circumstances.

To collect this information, they traced the entire string of activities involved in building a product, processing a claim, or attracting and retaining a client. They did this by watching employees work or by speaking with them about their work. One explained, "I walked the plant [floor] about one night a week . . . [because] if you are going to impact people's work, you should know something about it." He explained that in walking the plant floor he saw how employees worked and spoke with them about problems they faced on the job. I observed these types of interactions. For example, a team member met with seven adjudicators to understand how they processed insurance claims. The purpose of the meeting, he explained, was to answer the question, "What do we do?" As they listed their tasks on a whiteboard, the adjudicators described on whom they relied for inputs, who their outputs affected, what information they drew on, the veracity of that information, missing information, the databases they could access or not, the workarounds they had devised, and the people they called for help. This information was not easily articulated, requiring that the team member probe and question accounts, and employees' accounts varied. Several adjudicators agreed that the session was useful as they learned about new workarounds and resources. The three-hour meeting was also useful for the team member as he collected the details needed to integrate this domain of work into the process map.

As team members learned about the work contributing to an eventual good or service, they ordered and recorded it on a large plane, usually a large piece of paper attached to the wall, using colored markers, stickers, sticky notes, and string. Figure 2 illustrates this multimedia work.[4] They located the people, interactions, computer systems, machinery, forms, and reports that contributed to an output. Roles were written on sticky notes, and their relationships and connections traced via string. Thick black lines identified the functional boundaries. Reserves of information, their sources, and their uses were drawn along the bottom of the map. Team members plotted the connections between the roles and activities, tracking whether they were done sequentially or simultaneously and color-coding them based on their contribution to the end product (value added, green string; non–value added, yellow string). The emerging diagram became a panorama of the web of interactions that constitute the organization.

Despite being selected to work on the process map because of their far-reaching knowledge of operations and connections across the organization, the team members were unfamiliar with the organization depicted on the map. One explained that "it was like the sun rose for the first time. . . . I saw the bigger picture." They had never seen the pieces (jobs, technologies,

tools, and routines) connected in one place, and they realized that their prior view was narrow and fractured. A team member acknowledged, "I only thought of things in the context of my span of control." The map, as shown, distanced them from their local, deep familiarity with a specific domain. It lifted them to a higher, comprehensive vantage point from which they could trace and scrutinize the surrounding patterns of action. They began to reflect on rather existential issues: What constitutes this entity we call an organization? How is the organization actually ordered? What principles or logic are used to structure the organization? As they answered these questions, they generated new knowledge about the makeup and logic of their organization.

Observing the Lived Order. The map integrated the daily experience of employees distributed throughout the organization. By consolidating these narrow but grounded observations and accounts of work, the map revealed how locally experienced worlds connected and fed back into one another in ways not previously known or recognizable. For example, team members from DP mapped the customer-service process from the negotiation of the sale to the delivery of the final good. This process cut across six departments and three buildings. Team members at HT mapped a production process from the procurement of raw materials to the finished goods. Although the four departments were located in one facility, no one had ever walked this process across them. Because the work was fragmented across departments and sometimes locations, it was almost impossible for an individual manager to trace the practices that linked employees across time and space. The map made these practices accessible for observation and reflection.

The map also revealed interactions that were typically invisible or unacknowledged by senior management.

Figure 2. (Color online) Process Map

Activities and transactions made invisible by technology were now visible. A team member explained the following:

> If you think about some traditional manufacturing you can see the work. . . . We have people that do one thing—move information. And one of the issues with this is that you can't see it. . . . We got it on the walls and drew it out explicitly. . . . So we really get it out of their heads and out of the information systems and explicitly show [it].

Other activities that were either missed or glossed over in the official description of operations, including preparatory work, coordination tasks, and communication necessary to get things done, were marked on the map. Rework, workarounds, and tools that employees, using their own good sense, had created to help them do their work were identified. The adjudicators, for example, had created and shared decision letters that, over time, became de facto templates. These templates surfaced as important tools in the work process. Likewise, shadow databases, extra steps used to compensate for old machinery, and regular coordination exchanges were identified and located on the map.

Such examples, when observed in multiples on the map, illuminated the tangle of practices that link employees as they worked to produce a good or service. Using evocative imagery, a team member explained how this view was different from what most employees saw:

> People are only seeing the surface. And then they see a little bit of whitewater, the churn, and the stream is so muddy that they really can't see down to the bottom and see where the rocks are piled up and see where the tree branches have gotten snagged and where the dead bodies are rotting that is causing all of the churn on the top of the water. . . . They really don't get a picture that if you cleared out all of those rocks and stumps and tree branches and dead bodies how fast the stream could really flow and how clear it could be.

The map allowed them to see how the system operated below the surface, integrating all the pieces to generate a comprehensive view. They commented on the uniqueness of this comprehensive view: "We don't allow people to see the end-to-end view . . . to see how things interrelate." One explained that the experience "ruins [one's] perspective in a good way." Another described how it gave her a "whole different way of looking at things." By revealing the web of roles, relations, and routines that coalesce to make the organization, the map made the organization's actual operation intelligible.

This panoramic, detailed view of the lived order or the "is-ness or quiddity" of action, "namely, the social relations that are implicit in its organization . . . cannot be grasped from within that experience" (Garfinkel 1967, p. 262). Competent members of organizations draw on everyday knowledge (Schutz 1962, Berger and Luckmann 1967) as they perform their roles, but this knowledge does not speak to the organization's broader order. Despite how remarkably capable these employees were at "recognizing, knowing, and 'doing' the lived order," the broader order or structure is often "resistance to analytic recovery" from the inside (Pollner and Emerson 2001, p. 121). Even if they would like to observe and reflect on their organization's detailed operating process, they rarely have opportunities, such as building process maps, that provide time and access.

Observing Order as Emergent and Negotiated. As these team members began to see the web of relationships that make up the organization, this view provoked "ahas" of surprise and disappointment, which they began to scrutinize. "We were overtaken by what we learned," explained a team member. Another said,

> The wall was discovery after discovery. We do what? And, you know, we had customers in the room, we had suppliers in the room, we had people from every function in the room. It was just a blast in terms of learning how the business really operated.

They expected to observe inefficiencies and waste, the targets of redesign, and they did. Tasks that could be done with one or two hand-offs were taking three or four. Data painstakingly collected for decision-making processes were not used. Local repairs to work processes in one unit were causing downstream problems in another. Workarounds, duplication of effort, and poor communication and coordination were all evident on the map.

Beyond these issues, they observed a more fundamental problem. A team member explained, "I'm getting a really clear visual of what the mess is." Standing back from the wall, he sighed, and said, "The problem is that it was not designed in the first place." Instead of observing a system designed, adapted, and coordinated to achieve stated goals, he pointed to three examples on the map that demonstrated the exercise of agency in various places and at various levels in the organization. These change efforts lacked broader perspective and direction as well as coordination and integration with other efforts. The first example was a quality initiative created by a functional manager. Although it reduced processing times and errors for the work done in the function, the gains had a negligible overall effect because other functions had not undertaken a similar effort. It was a valiant effort but failed because it did not spread across functional boundaries. The second example was the development of a rather low-tech database that distributed information about client files, allowing employees from different functions to track work and improve

troubleshooting. Senior management did not fund or recognize this effort despite its success, so the overall impact was local. The third example was of a "kingdom builder," a resourceful manager who, in the name of a strategic priority, gained authority over several departments that were not a natural fit. He amalgamated these departments, thereby creating numerous inefficiencies. No higher authority seemed to recognize this problem and work to rechannel this individual's efforts. Such examples demonstrated that there were multiple local, loosely coordinated logics guiding the emergent design of the organization.

The team members building the map learned that, although the organization was once designed to serve a purpose, the original design had been eroded, patched, and overgrown with alternative plans. One explained, "Everything I see around here was developed because of specific issues that popped up, and it was all done ad hoc and added onto each other. It certainly wasn't engineered." The accretions of local decisions, changes, and fixes had overtaken it. They were faced with a set of jobs, work processes, and interactions that were "the sediments of a history of voting, decree, conflict, agreement, compromise, bargaining, persuasion, coercion, and other forms of interaction" (Barley 2008, p. 501). One explained why this happened:

> The functions don't really understand … the inputs and outputs. They see problems, and the general approach, the human approach, is to try and fix them. We are seeing this every day. Functions have tried to put band aids on every issue that comes up. It sounds good, but when they are layered one on top of the other, they start to choke the organization. But they don't see that because they are only seeing their own thing.

Whatever the cause, the effect was that they had difficulty tracing a purposive system that coordinates action and decisions to create an efficient and effective organization.

The lack of a higher order of design and guiding forces for daily organizing was a realization. The current design and logic was largely disconnected from the way work was performed and coordinated. In another organization, a team member explained that she had been "assuming that somebody did this on purpose, and it wasn't done on purpose; it was just a series of random events that somehow came together." They could not locate any one person or even a committee of people—senior executives or senior employees—who were designing and enforcing bureaucratic plans of action. Although senior employees make strategies and plans, the people putting together the maps saw that the eventual sorting out of how to actually meet these goals and targets via day-in, day-out work occurred in less anticipated ways. There was no central force actively evaluating, reining in, and coordinating actions and decisions across the organization. This explains, for example, the local efforts to improve quality and the creation of local databases and templates.

Some held out hope that one or two people at the top knew of these design and operation issues; however, they were often disabused of this optimism. For example, a manager walked the CEO through the map, presenting him with a view he had never seen before and illustrating for him the lack of design and the disconnect between strategy and operations. The CEO, after being walked through the map, sat down, put his head on the table, and said, "This is even more fucked up than I imagined." The CEO revealed that not only was the operation of his organization out of his control but that his grasp on it was imaginary.

They learned that what they had previously attributed to the direction and control of centralized, bureaucratic forces was actually the aggregation of the work and decisions of people distributed throughout the organization. Everyone was working on the part of the organization that they were familiar with, assuming that another set of people were attending to the larger picture, coordinating the larger system to achieve goals and keeping the organization operating. They found out that this was not the case.

Implications for Participation
Team members building the map observed the organization as a web of interactions, developed by people as they tried to accomplish their work, guided weakly, if at all, by a bureaucratic logic. This led them to reflect on their participation in such a system. Discovering how their organization was produced was "a turning point"; some went so far as to call it an "epiphany." They were able to locate themselves within the web of roles and relations while standing outside that web to see how it made up the organization. One explained, "I just have such a different perspective on what is difficult and what is possible." This new apprehension of the organization fueled alternating senses of empowerment and alienation, affecting their evaluation of where—in which roles in the organization—they could best improve the organization.

Empowerment. Understanding the organization to be continuously produced with few design constraints and limited direction gave these team members a sense of opportunity to consciously create an efficient structure to coordinate work. They were inspired to try things, to intervene in routines and the organization broadly. This sense of potential focused them on, as one explained, "inventing the board and not just playing the game … [seeing] what's really out there and not arguing too much for the limitations that maybe aren't so real." They expressed a desire to

move from participating in the system to designing a new system, taking advantage of numerous insights to improve the organization. One team member realized how much his perspective had changed through an interaction with colleagues about changing an established way of doing things: "They said, 'Well, you can't.' I said, 'Why can't we? . . . We can do anything we want. We made it up. We'll make it up some more.'" Where his colleagues saw routine as rigidity and a lack of possibility, he saw a time-bound fabrication—made up in a different era and adjusted over time—and one that they could improve on and reinvent into whatever they wanted.

They realized that they had conceptualized the organization as prior to, external to, and independent of them. In doing so, they had objectified the organization, talking about and treating organizational divisions, senior management, functional boundaries, job roles, and rules as "things" having a reality and existence of their own. One explained that organizational boundaries had become so familiar that they forget they had created them:

> So what are we doing? We are really filling customer orders; however, we have it broken down into smaller pieces, and we give each one of those pieces to someone we are calling a department manager. These structures [departments] that we put in place sometime in the past have become real in peoples' minds, and we think there is a difference between someone who works in department A and someone who works in department B.

Members of the organization carry on as though these distinctions are facts, burdening the organization's categories, practices, and boundaries with a false sense of durability and purpose. The human decisions and interactions—often supported by data and rationale but rife with haste and politics—that created the organization become lost over time. And as they do, the organization increasingly becomes discussed, imagined, and treated as a naturalized, necessary structure.

The idea that organizations are an ongoing human product was a provocative insight for these employees. This new perspective, as one explained, "made things seem possible." Once they could see the "what" as a dynamic social creation, they could begin asking better questions about "how." A team member explained that the logic of organization should not be fixed and how its rules, synthetic creations, are free to deviate:

> We organize time by shifts or by hours or by day or whatever, but that is artificial. There is such a thing as the day, but it doesn't necessarily have to impact how you go about your business. So we said what happens if we run this particular unit continuously?

When they reconsidered these features (boundaries, roles, reporting relations, work flows) as emergent, contingent, and mutable and, therefore, as inviting change rather than constraining it, they found that they could look at their organizations in unfettered ways and imagine greater possibilities for change. Work shifts and functional boundaries, for example, moved from having an alien facticity (Berger and Pullberg 1966) or an independent existence removed from human influence to having a malleable constitution accessible to agentic redesign. These team members shifted from understanding the organization as a planned object, naturalized and existing independent of their participation, to understanding it as an emergent process, constructed and constituted through their daily actions. Observing the organization as continuously in the making gave employees an overwhelming sense of possibility, sparking ambition.

A team member explained that this new perspective on his organization represented potential for something better: "I live for the days that people tell me, 'well, you can't do that.' . . . I can." Such encounters emphasized how others granted the organization an overstated sense of purpose and stability, foreclosing the possibility of remaking the organization according to other logic or configurations. For some, this inspiration to restructure organizations was amplified by the failure to see the potential gains in their organizations. For example, one describing his move to another organization's BPR efforts said, "You can see the value that can be, that potential energy that can be unleashed if we can only make it to here [points to progression on project plan]." Another described regret over the organization being so slow to find this solution, combined with a newfound sense of possibility:

> I keep thinking to myself if I knew then what I know now . . . this is exactly what we needed 15 years ago . . . so it does kind of bother me. . . . I sit here and think "Man, we could have done so much." So now is my opportunity to do so much.

Yet another was defiant in her belief: "Every day, I can do things to make it better." This team member saw this new understanding of the organization as an opportunity. The organization that appeared inert and resistant was actually made up of relational or transactional connections representing possibilities for change. Another pointed out, "When you do all the discovery and diagnosis and you go do that redesign and you go, 'geez, this could really work,' it's hard to let go of that." In organizations that were not going to continue with BPR, this required finding other opportunities:

> When you realize that you're probably not going to get there [implement the project], you don't lose the belief in what is possible. You realize that you have got to go make that possibility happen someplace else.

Their peripheral role choices allowed team members to exploit this new understanding of the organization's operations. They could work with new assumptions about the mutability and possibility of

the organization and create structures and systems to coordinate and direct the web of roles and interactions. Their new role choices also allowed them to remain above and outside of the organization's daily operations.

Alienation. Beyond a sense of empowerment, choosing a peripheral role also aligned with the team members' emerging sense of alienation from their jobs and careers in the organization. Their new structural knowledge led them to question the value of their central managerial roles. As they reflected on the purpose and contribution of their role, they experienced alienation from their work.

Scrutiny of the dense web of transactions and relations revealed that only a portion of the daily effort—theirs and that of others—was contributing to core outcomes and that their efforts to improve operations had not yielded the intended effect. Productive connections between jobs were missing. Job outputs (data, analysis, designs) that could have informed other jobs were not shared. Poor follow-through and communication gaps and time delays meant duplicated efforts or created rework. Misunderstood feedback created more work. Further, no one was making observations at the level of the web and attempting to remedy these issues. A team member was distressed by numerous indications of waste and non–value added work flowing from particular jobs:

> If you asked just about anybody in the organization how much of the work they do all day is value added, they would tell you some very, very high number. And in actuality it is usually a very small number, and the majority of the time they are spending in intervention resources . . . and all of the things that you discover, that was painful.

The distress of identifying work and jobs that did not play a meaningful role in the system, or any role at all, was a common theme.

Futility of effort was observed at the group and individual level. In some cases, the map showed that a department's work was not integrated into the larger system. For example, a team member came to realize that his work did not serve the purpose he assumed:

> When we put everything on the wall, I could see that the databases I had implemented were used, but they (the division) had 10 different databases because they didn't trust the data that I had put out there. Those, to me, were "aha" moments. The work we did in IT definitely doesn't fulfill the needs of our customers (the division) because, if it did, they wouldn't have to recreate things on their own.

In this case, he observed that, because the data his group provided was not being used, the work of his group was done in vain. Particular jobs were also shown to have limited impact.

As part of the map-building process, employees were invited to identify their role on the map and to indicate how it was connected to other roles through either inputs or outputs. Team members recounted that it was difficult to observe employees "go through a real emotional struggle when they see that what they are doing is not really adding value or that what they are doing is really disconnected from what they thought they were doing." In one case, a finance manager noticed that his role was on the wall but that it was not connected to any other role on the wall. He had been producing financial reports and sending them to several departments because he understood them to be crucial for their decision-making process; however, no one had identified his work as an input to theirs. This realization was, in the end,

> devastating for him. He was on the verge of tears . . . at first, he became very argumentative and was trying to convince people that you go from this Post-it note down here to mine. [Other employees explained] Well no, we don't do that. It was a two-hour conversation. And he finally sat down, and he said, so why am I doing this? It was devastating.

The eventual outcome of this "aha" was that the manager was moved to another role in the department after working four years in a position that had served almost no purpose.

After such analyses, team members could not look at particular roles and people in the same way. One described how these observations evoked negative emotions:

> You really start understanding all of the waste and all of the redundancy and all of the people who are employed as what I call intervention resources. The process doesn't work, so you have to bone it up by putting people in to intervene in the process to hold it together. So it is like glue. So I would look around [the company] and I would see all these walking glue sticks, and it was just absolutely depressing and frustrating at the same time.

Reflecting on his job and his reasons for taking a new path, another explained, "I was the glue that held the broken egg together. I was the workaround guy. I don't want to go back to that." Team members did not want to go back to working as an "intervention resource."

In their prior roles, the team members had tried to fix some of the problems in their realm. They assumed that these changes had translated into improvements. However, they observed, via the process map, that these local initiatives made no difference either to the end product or service or to the larger system of operations. They also observed instances in which their well-planned and well-intentioned strategies actually

made outcomes or operations worse. One explained the following:

> I was responsible for so much of what was screwed up on that wall. I created it. I had made my little piece of the world better, but when I looked at it from the big picture.... I had spent my entire 10 years in that part of the business, and it was pretty ugly, and I was responsible for a whole bunch of that.

They could now see how local efforts and improvements may be either wasted or destructive when the larger system is taken into account. Another noted, "Our approach was 'just do this part.' Well, you can't just do this part because it doesn't move the needle at the end of the day. You are suboptimizing things to make one little gleaming light." They observed the futility of working on one part of the larger system without taking into account side effects, delays, and feedback. They also observed that some of the issues that seemed important and potentially of high impact were very small in relation to the overall system. A team member explained, "We were optimizing one little piece of the business. Once you put it into the scope of all the work, you realize that it is so small and so far down that it really doesn't matter."

Their new understanding of the organization's makeup created a sense of alienation or powerlessness as they realized that, in their daily role or through intentions to change their local unit, they were not creating significant value and impact in the organization. This new focus on the broader system and on creating direction and coordination across units discouraged small-scale changes and endorsed a more radical approach to getting at the systemic, root causes. Returning to their job and career meant returning to the belly of this complex system, being one part of the whole, being limited to local, small-scale change. For example,

> I could have stayed, but there were so many things that we discovered, I personally discovered, and the team discovered, during our process journey that I could not get back into the mold of status quo and small incremental improvement and don't rock the boat and don't make waves, just plug away and check the boxes as you go.

Their knowledge of the limits of local, small-scale change and the futility of changing parts of the organization without addressing the system as a whole, discouraged employees from returning to their career in the organization. They did not want to contribute to the mess or reproduce the mess they had observed.

Team members were bittersweet about their "choice" as many did not experience it as a choice. They were asked to participate in building an object that revealed things they had never seen before. What they had learned could not be unlearned or ignored. One explained his choice: "If I'd have known how hard it would have been, I would have never started; now that I've started, I'd never go back." Another, in discussing his new role, explained the following:

> So why do I sit here in my—my free time from 10 o'clock to midnight drawing process maps and trying to figure out the processes of some of these other companies, I'm not quite sure.... I don't feel like I have much of a choice.

He felt compelled to do this work. Others expressed similar sentiments about the difficulty of turning back—"you get to the point where it's harder to go back than forward"—and returning to their prior careers.

Discussion

This paper builds theory about the relationship between social position and challenges to social systems. I show how detailed, comprehensive knowledge of how a social system operates changes one's orientation to and place within that system. Beyond catalyzing central actors to work for change, detailed knowledge of the surrounding system has the side effect of alienating central actors from working within the observed system. Central actors volunteer to relocate to the periphery because they perceive it is a better place to make lasting change.

In my study, employees see how the organization, which they had perceived as purposively designed, relatively stable, and external, is continuously produced and emerges as people interact. As they identify fragmented systems and myriad principles guiding and coordinating this web of interactions, they begin to question the efficacy of their efforts to change the organization from central roles. They recast their central positions as ineffective roles that reproduce the organization's inefficiencies. At the same time, they see the potential to improve the efficiency and quality of the organization's operations by working at a distance to create a new design and coordinating force. Their dual sense of alienation and empowerment inspire them to identify new roles—a variety of organizational change positions allowing them to instigate change—which move them toward the periphery of the organization.

As they do their jobs and develop their careers, employees rarely have the opportunity to observe the habituated action that produces their organization or to develop deeper insights about what constitutes an organization. Bureaucratic organizations do not lend themselves to analysis willingly. Through the division of labor, functional boundaries, and centralized authority, bureaucracies generate and perpetuate partial and myopic views of organizing processes. Those who inhabit organizations rarely have occasion to see the full picture, and even if they do, there are limited opportunities to reflect on it.

Building a detailed model of how work is accomplished—the gathering, organizing, and synthesizing of multiple understandings—helps generate structural knowledge. The resulting object allows for observation of, reflection on, and discussion of what makes an organization. Although not intended to create insights that disrupt career paths, the work of building a map facilitates this possibility by requiring detailed investigation and representation of how the organization operates. The information collected is broader than a routine, unit, or department. It shows the network of connections that turn inputs into outputs, allowing employees to see the side effects of local forces and changes. The full picture of connections is observed.

Knowledge of the structuring of social realms is distinct from everyday knowledge about the roles and rules of action used to participate in these realms. We may be skilled participants in a realm without being conscious of how these realms are produced and sustained through ongoing human action and interaction. In my study, employees develop knowledge about how their organization is constituted and the principles guiding this constitutive process. Developing detailed, organized insight into an organization's operations alters their understandings of their capacity to disrupt it and, consequently, their place in it. Learning that the organization is the dynamic product of social interactions rather than the given context that contains these interactions allows employees to understand how their actions can either reproduce or reorder the social world. They come to see that significantly reordering the organization requires moving to its periphery.

Without this knowledge of structure, we apprehend social realms, such as organizations, "as existing over and beyond the individuals who 'happen to' embody them at the moment . . . as possessing a reality of their own, a reality that confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact" (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 58). This perspective or comprehension affects how we speak and act. We speak about organizations as if they are objects that exist independent of us, and we act as though they constrain and guide our actions. When we objectify social systems (organizations, communities, families, gender roles), we apprehend them as "prearranged patterns" that impose themselves on us, coercing particular roles and rules (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 21). We free ourselves to talk about and inhabit them as independent of us: as existing prior to us, standing before us, outliving us, and operating without us. Given this, we are relieved of greater responsibility for them. Our responsibility is to skillfully fulfill our role within these objectified realms.

The mapping experience reveals the patterns of daily life, delineates employees' contributions to those patterns, and problematizes their taken-for-grantedness.

For this to happen, "one must either be a stranger to the 'life as usual' character of everyday sense or become estranged from [it]" (Garfinkel 1967, p. 36). Whereas, as some sociologists "know that organizations and institutions exist only in actual people's doings and that these are necessarily particular, local and ephemeral" (Smith 2001, p. 163), employees may be less likely to know this. When they do, it problematizes their past and future participation.

Insights that dereify surrounding structures are likely to be decentering (Garfinkel 1967). The realization that social worlds do not have an independent, stable existence but instead emerge from our collective action is "sometimes arrived at in a moment of heady delight, but often as a horrifying realization" (Lynch 2013, p. 6). This realization is considered a "fatal insight" (Pollner 1987, p. 88) because it destroys assumptions that the current order, roles, rules, and routines are given. Within the system of roles, rules, and routines, there is far more room to maneuver than previously assumed (Ewick and Silbey 1998, 2003). Rejection of objectivity puts possibility, perhaps even responsibility, squarely in the court of subjectivity.

Contributions

Disembedding Central Actors. There has been significant theoretical work outlining how actors deeply situated in a social system might emerge as challengers to that system (Sewell 1992, Emirbayer and Mische 1998, Clemens and Cook 1999, Seo and Creed 2002). Across these works, the correspondence between position in social structures and mental structures is common, highlighting new knowledge, understandings, or perceptions as the mechanisms for decentering—at least mentally—central actors. As embedded actors focus on foreign ideas, a plurality of models, or identified contradictions, these inquiries secondarily or indirectly generate a new understanding about the mutability of the surrounding system and, thus, the opportunities and efficacy for action. Empirical work has documented how exposure to contradiction (e.g., Creed et al. 2010) and pluralism (e.g., Pache and Santos 2013) triggers a primary realization, a reflection on this new discovery, followed by a secondary realization of mutability of social system and then creating a sense of agentic possibility.

My findings extend this work in two main ways. First, I show how the flexibility and mutability of the social system can be a direct realization. In my setting, employees come to understand opportunities for agentic action directly through understanding how the surrounding social system is produced. The knowledge that the organization is a series of patterned interactions that persist because members choose, collectively and unconsciously, to reproduce them opens new avenues for action and possibilities

for change. This insight can emerge directly. Beyond being an additional and alternative mechanism for disembedding central actors, this mechanism suggests a more straightforward, homegrown means through which a range of central actors may recognize their possibilities for action. In situations in which actors lack exposure to multiplicity or innovation in the broader environment or do not experience tensions or contradictions, they may have the opportunity or create opportunities to explore how the system works.

One side effect of this direct disembedding mechanism may be that, beyond empowering action, it also alienates people from their prior central work and location. Studies of the indirect disembedding mechanisms indicate that catalyzed actors remain in their central roles (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006, Creed et al. 2010). One potential reason for why those directly disembedded move to the periphery is that they develop a deep and detailed understanding of the surrounding system. They go beyond understanding that the organization could be structured otherwise and see the intimate details of how interactions and relations make the organization. These details reveal that their central roles are less efficacious than they had understood. It seems likely that this direct process of disembedding has other implications that require further study.

Second, these findings indicate that particular sets of central actors are likely to be disembedded, and this will have implications for the type of change that catalyzed actors pursue. In other words, the mechanisms identified are not available democratically or randomly across embedded actors. Those who have disembedding experiences are located in central roles involving interstitial interactions access to contradictions, multiple competing models, or direct insight into the system. In this paper, managers selected for roles and then given particular assignments on organizational change teams were uniquely situated to develop deep, detailed knowledge about the operation of their organization. The role and assignment oriented their attention, realizations, and subsequent courses of action in a particular direction. This is also true for central actors who experience contradictions and tensions. These experiences stem from interstitial roles—central actors with strong normative affiliations—or marginalized insiders (Creed et al. 2010). Exposure to new models and ideas or a plurality of models occurs when embedded actors fulfill role obligations that require temporary, periodic shuttling to events outside the organizational core (Greenwood and Hinings 1996). These centrally embedded actors with cosmopolitan duties are more likely to be disembedded. In such cases, the changes that actors pursue are informed and shaped by the character of the interstitial aspect of their central role.

Social Position and Agency. The findings contribute to social location accounts of agency offered in the literature on organizational change, innovation, and institutional change by problematizing the direction and nature of the relationship between social position and desires to challenge the status quo (e.g., Kellogg 2009 and Battilana 2011). Moving beyond the established finding that social location facilitates a particular desire to challenge the status quo, I show that this desire may encourage central actors to choose a peripheral social location. The findings complicate established assumptions about why peripheral actors initiate change and the resources backing changes from the periphery. Overall, the findings have implications for how we conceptualize and study challenges from the periphery.

The findings also suggest that provocations from the periphery are not all similarly motivated. Prior work suggests that actors on the periphery may be motivated to challenge current arrangements because they are disadvantaged by them and are likely to benefit from changes (Bourdieu 1993, Battilana 2006, Jeppesen and Lakhani 2010). In my setting, employees who choose to move to the periphery are not motivated by their marginality. These employees were not working for change that would make them more central; they were trying to escape the perceived futility of central roles and to work for change that could make their organization more effective. This finding suggests that those who leave the center to push for change from the periphery are likely to have a specific change agenda in mind and that their work on the periphery is likely aimed at achieving a particular end. We should not assume that challenges from the periphery are motivated by a desire to become more central in the system or that they originate from the individual's experience of inhabiting a peripheral position. Further, the findings suggest that, by identifying the realizations that push actors to the periphery, we may better understand their particular motives and variation in motives across actors.

An important implication of the findings is that challenges from the periphery will not be equally resourced. Prior studies show that, although peripheral actors instigate challenges, they are not well resourced to effect change (e.g., Sgourev 2013). As a result, these actors require intermediaries to assist (Cattani and Ferriani 2008) or collective action that facilitates the movement of peripheral actors toward the center and central actors toward the periphery (Sgourev 2013). My findings suggest that we will observe variation in the resources supporting change initiatives launched from the margins. If central actors move to peripheral position to launch change campaigns, we should see some relatively sophisticated and better-resourced attempts because they have

insider knowledge of the system and relationships with those in the center. Challenges from those who move from the center may be perceived as more sophisticated as they can draw on the dominant discourse in creating a case for change, mobilize established ties that are centrally located, and rely on knowledge from their prior roles at the core of the organization. As a result, some provocations from the periphery may be more likely to succeed, and challenges initiated by those who move to the periphery may be more successful than challenges initiated by those who begin there.

Overall, the findings indicate that there is more to be learned from studying challenges from the periphery longitudinally. Several of the assumptions accompanying the cross-sectional observation that change comes from the periphery require reexamination in light of the findings of this study. Beyond studying the temporal dynamics of social position, greater emphasis on prior experiences, motivations, and resources may generate more nuanced accounts of challenges from peripheral actors. Although we have compelling accounts of how peripheral actors disrupt the status quo, we also need to understand situations in which there is silence from the margins or when there is variation in the quantity or quality of challenges.

Objects and Visualization. In this study, members on organizational change teams build a process maps as a means of generating knowledge of the surrounding system, the subject of focus in organizational change. Like other objects or tools—Porter's Five Forces or Balanced Score Card—they structure employees' attention, interpretation, and choices (Jarzabkowski 2004, Kaplan 2011, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan 2015). They are directive, inviting their makers to focus on the priorities and values encoded within them. Through objectual practice (Knorr-Cetina 1997)—work with or through objects—scientists, market analysts, and strategy makers generate knowledge about focal subjects. As expected, the process maps informed managerial decisions about redesign. The maps also had the unexpected effect of influencing employees' interpretations of their efficacy within the system and their choices of roles and career paths. The findings of this study suggest that we should consider how objects regularly used by employees reshape their subjectivities and choices *beyond* the focal subject.

Finally, the work with the process maps shifted employees from their more typical verbal and textual mode into a visual mode. It is difficult to imagine how employees would come to understand the emerging nature of their organizations without a visual tool. Given the surge in visualization studies in organizational contexts (Meyer et al. 2013), this study suggests that we pay attention and conduct further research, both observational and experimental, to examine how visualization of social systems affects actors' orientation to and participation in the organization. It also suggests that we need to identify and examine other visual, interactional experiences that give actors structural insights into various social worlds, including, for example, social network diagrams (Janicik and Larrick 2005) and system mapping (Otto and Struben 2004).

Boundary Conditions and Limitations. Studying only BPR projects places boundary conditions on my findings. It is reasonable to ask whether the experiences identified are specific to BPR. What other objects or activities might offer insight into the constitution organizations? What other experiences in organizations simultaneously empower and alienate? For example, social network diagrams, which have become easier to create and analyze via web-based applications, may spark reflection on the constitution of social structure. This raises questions about the conditions under which such experiences might produce feelings of alienation and empowerment or catalyze employees to change their interaction patterns and place in the network. Although this study identifies an important empirical pattern and set of mechanisms, it is difficult to know how the findings generalize to other change efforts and to speak with certainty about the necessary conditions.

A second limitation is the relatively small number of cases studied. The study was designed to build theory and is, therefore, based on a manageable number of carefully selected cases. Future research could analyze more teams and, thus, more team members to better understand the role, if any, of individual tenure, job role, and education or any patterns related to peripheral role choices. Further research might also consider the longer-term consequences of the observed changes, examining employees' tenure in peripheral roles, career patterns, and perspectives on role efficacy.

Conclusion

This study continues the conversation about how actors shift from reproducing to challenging established patterns of action. I show how realizations about their organization—its nature and logic—motivated employees to move to peripheral organizational change positions. The findings indicate that as we continue to explore who challenges, we must consider antecedent processes. Understanding how some become challengers—successful or not—involves examining the dynamics of social position and exploring experiences that reshape our subjectivities, changing our relationship with and participation in social systems.

Endnotes

[1] These systems are designed using process logic, and organizations must often adjust in some pragmatic way to the information system. Such projects involve a complex interaction with the imperatives of technological systems that require considerable effort to customize.

[2] For four teams—High Technology, Insurance 1, Insurance 2, and Consumer Goods—I collected longitudinal data. Four team members declined to be interviewed.

[3] The projects were tied organizationally with one of these more permanent offices or departments in the organization.

[4] To ensure the confidentiality of the organization, I do not identify which project team developed this process map.

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