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## FROM ABSOLUTE, RELATIVE AND FIELD SPACES TO RELATIONAL SPACE: EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS AND RECONFIGURATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL SPACE

*DE LOS ESPACIOS ABSOLUTO,  
RELATIVO Y DE CAMPO AL ESPACIO  
RELACIONAL: FUNDAMENTOS  
EPISTEMOLÓGICOS Y  
RECONFIGURACIÓN DEL ESPACIO  
ORGANIZACIONAL*

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# **From Absolute, Relative and Field Spaces to Relational Space: Epistemological Foundations and Reconfiguration of Organizational Space**

De los Espacios Absoluto, Relativo y de Campo al Espacio Relacional:  
Fundamentos Epistemológicos y Reconfiguración del Espacio  
Organizacional

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**ABSTRACT**

This article is a conceptual and theoretical study that develops a transdisciplinary analytical framework to understand organizational space as a strategic dimension of human resource sustainability. Organizational space is analyzed not only as a physical container, but as a relational configuration —spatiality— in which material dispositions, social interactions, symbolic meanings, and power relations converge. Based on epistemological underpinnings from nomothetic and ideographic sciences and classical and contemporary organizational theory, the article argues that spatial configurations exist and coexist articulated or unarticulated, actively organizational culture, employee well-being, and sustainability outcomes. Based on transdisciplinary organizational theory (Pérez Mayo & Vallejo-Trujillo, 2018), organizational space is conceptualized as a dynamic and constitutive dimension of organizational life, rather than a neutral context. The article contributes to research on human resource sustainability by offering a coherent analytical framework that integrates the physical, social, and symbolic dimensions of organizational space. Its main objective is the construction of an analytical category and the articulation of a transdisciplinary framework. In this sense, it is inscribed in the tradition of conceptual development within organizational theory, rather than in research aimed at testing hypotheses.

*Keywords:* organizational space, relational spatiality, socio-spatial theory, materiality in organizations, relational ontology

**RESUMEN**

Este artículo es un estudio conceptual y teórico que desarrolla un marco analítico transdisciplinario para comprender el espacio organizacional como una dimensión estratégica de la sostenibilidad de los recursos humanos. El espacio organizacional se analiza no solo como un contenedor físico, sino como una configuración relacional —espacialidad— en la que convergen disposiciones materiales, interacciones sociales, significados simbólicos y relaciones de poder. A partir de fundamentos epistemológicos provenientes de las ciencias nomotéticas e ideográficas, así como de la teoría organizacional clásica y contemporánea, el artículo sostiene que las configuraciones espaciales existen y coexisten de manera articulada o desarticulada, influyendo activamente en la cultura organizacional, el bienestar de los empleados y los resultados en sostenibilidad. Con base en la teoría organizacional transdisciplinaria (Pérez Mayo & Vallejo-Trujillo, 2018), el espacio organizacional se conceptualiza como una dimensión dinámica y constitutiva de la vida organizacional, más que como un contexto neutral. El artículo contribuye a la investigación sobre la sostenibilidad de los recursos humanos al ofrecer un marco analítico coherente que integra las dimensiones físicas, sociales y simbólicas del espacio organizacional. Su objetivo principal es la construcción de una categoría analítica y la articulación de un marco transdisciplinario. En este sentido, se inscribe en la tradición del desarrollo conceptual dentro de la teoría organizacional, más que en la investigación orientada a la comprobación de hipótesis.

*Palabras clave:* espacio organizacional, espacialidad relacional, teoría socioespacial, materialidad en las organizaciones, ontología relacional

## **INTRODUCTION**

This article addresses a clear research problem: the conceptual marginalization of space in human resource and organizational sustainability studies. While space has traditionally been treated as a technical, architectural, or logistical variable, this study argues that organizational space constitutes a central analytical category for understanding organizational dynamics, human well-being, and sustainability.

The objective of this study is to develop a conceptual and analytical framework that repositions the organizational space as a transdisciplinary category relevant to the sustainability of human resources. Consequently, the research questions guiding the study are:

- a) How can organizational space be conceptualized as a transdisciplinary analytical category?
- b) In what ways does spatiality influence the sustainability of human resources and organizational dynamics?

From a transdisciplinary perspective, organizational phenomena cannot be adequately explained through isolated disciplinary perspectives. Pérez Mayo and Vallejo-Trujillo (2018) argue that organizational theory must move towards integrative frameworks capable of articulating physical, symbolic, cultural, and relational dimensions. This epistemological position supports the present study. Rather than making deterministic claims, this paper conceptualizes spatial configurations as analytically grounded tendencies that shape patterns of interaction, power relations, psychosocial experiences, and organizational sustainability. In this sense, the organizational space emerges as a strategic domain in which culture, leadership, well-being, and performance are co-produced.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Epistemological Foundations of Space in the Nomothetic Sciences***

The concept of space has historically raised three major epistemological issues: its nature, its reality, and its structure. Classical debates between relative and absolute space—from Leibniz to Newton—already reveal that space was never a neutral concept.

The shift introduced by field theory and general relativity established that space cannot exist independently of relational dynamics (Einstein & Infeld, 2005). This epistemological

transformation is foundational for organizational analysis, as it allows space to be understood as relational, contextual, and meaningful.

### ***Epistemological Approaches to Space: Relative, Absolute, and Field-Based Conceptions***

Relative space conceptualizes space as a positional quality of material objects, a view associated with Leibniz, who rejected the notion of empty space as an independent entity (Leibniz, 1715/2002). Space, in this sense, represents the order of coexistence among objects. Maxwell later reinforced this position by arguing that all knowledge of space and time is essentially relative.

In contrast, absolute space, advanced by Aristotle and Newton, conceives space as an independent container of material objects. Newton argued that absolute space exists independently of external references.

The emergence of general relativity transformed these views by establishing that space cannot exist independently of matter and energy. Physical phenomena such as gravitation are explained as variations in the metric structure of a field (Einstein & Infeld, 2005). In this article, these physical theories are not applied as explanatory models for organizations, but as epistemological references supporting a relational and non-substantialist understanding of space.

Space Beyond the Physical Sciences, Minkowski's (1908) formulation of spacetime as a unified construct reinforced the relational conception of space. Although developed within physics, this abstraction provided epistemological foundations for social sciences, where space is understood as contextual, dynamic, and socially constructed rather than neutral (Nolte, 2021).

### ***Explanatory capacity of the model in the face of existing socio-spatial theories***

Sociospatial theories have contributed significantly to overcoming the conception of space as a neutral container, emphasizing its socially constructed, symbolic and relational character. However, much of this literature has been developed in fields such as critical geography, urban sociology or cultural studies, where space is mainly analyzed as a product of social practices, discourses, workplace violence, discrimination or power relations.

The socio-spatial literature has provided fundamental frameworks for understanding space as a socially constructed, symbolic and relational phenomenon. In studies of the organization,

various works have explored how spatial configurations affect work practices, identity, and power (Våland & Georg, 2018; Weinfurter & Seidl, 2019).

*Ontological limitation: space as a product rather than as a constitutive dimension*

Many sociospatial theories conceive space as the result of social processes, that is, therefore structured by economic, cultural or political dynamics. In contrast, the model proposed in this article adopts a constitutive relational ontology: space is not only produced by the organization but actively participates in the production of the organization itself.

Inspired by the overcoming of the absolute conception of space (Einstein & Infeld, 2005), organizational space is understood as a dynamic configuration in which the human converge in materiality, symbolism, interaction and psychosocial effects. This perspective allows us to analyze how spatiality not only reflects culture and power, but also configures practices, identities, and organizational results that define organizations. For example, an organization that in the discourse speaks of non-discrimination, non-violence in the workplace and is the opposite. They create spaces to only cover up these organizational anomalies and that normalize and institutionalize violence in all its types. Eso implica que los espacios se llenan de todo lo malo y lo bueno.

**Dimensional limitation: absence of systematic analytic integration**

Most socio-spatial approaches emphasize specific dimensions—for example, symbolism, control, or materiality—without articulating them in a systematic integrative framework applicable to organizational analysis.

The proposed four-dimensional model—spatial configuration, symbolic spatiality, relational dynamics, and psychosocial effects—offers an integrated analytical structure that:

- It connects the physical with the symbolic.
- It links the relationship with well-being.
- It allows analyzing coherence or dissonance between spatial design and organizational culture.
- It facilitates its operationalization in future empirical research.

This integration overcomes fragmented approaches by providing a cross-sectional analytical matrix.

**Explanatory limitation with respect to organizational sustainability**

Socio-spatial theories rarely make explicit links to human resource sustainability. Their focus is usually on power, discourse, or social production of space, but not on how spatial configurations systematically influence engagement, well-being, or organizational continuity.

This model introduces an explicit connection between spatiality and sustainability, by incorporating psychosocial effects as a structural dimension of the analysis. In this way, organizational space becomes a transversal strategic variable that:

- It shapes perceptions of belonging.
- It influences psychosocial balance.
- It affects satisfaction and commitment (Uscanga Arévalo et al., 2021).
- It indirectly affects long-term sustainability.

Thus, the contribution lies not only in reaffirming that the space is socially constructed, but in demonstrating that it is organizationally constitutive and strategically relevant for sustainability. The so-called "spatial turn" in social sciences established that space is dynamic, relational and meaningful. However, this article proposes an additional shift: from the epistemological recognition of space to its formalization as a structured organizational analytical category. To do this, you must:

1. Define clear analytical dimensions.
2. Articulate them with organizational theory.
3. Explicitly link them to sustainability.

To establish bases for its future empirical operationalization.

*In this sense, the additional explanatory capacity of the model lies in its character:*

4. Ontologically relational.
5. Analytically structured.
6. Organizationally specific.
7. Strategically linked to sustainability.

*Thus, the proposed model expands the existing socio-spatial theories by:*

- Repositioning space as a constitutive dimension of the organization.
- Integrate physical, symbolic, relational, and psychosocial dimensions into a coherent framework.

- Establish a systematic bridge between spatiality and sustainability of human resources.
- To provide a conceptual architecture susceptible to future empirical operationalization.

Therefore, its contribution is not merely rhetorical or metaphorical, but structural and analytical: it offers a conceptual matrix capable of explaining how different spatial configurations generate differential conditions of interaction, meaning, healthy spaces and well-being, influencing organizational sustainability.

### **Organizational Space and Productivity: From Scientific Management to Human Relations Theory**

Frederick Taylor (1911) identified inefficiencies arising from poorly designed workspaces, arguing that worker selection alone was insufficient without scientifically organized environments. While focused on efficiency, Taylor implicitly acknowledged the relevance of spatial organization.

Elton Mayo (1968) expanded this perspective by demonstrating that emotional and spatial conditions influence worker performance and well-being. The Hawthorne studies revealed that spatiality could be systematically examined, although technical methods alone could not fully explain human behavior (Merlí, 2004).

Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) showed that lighting, fatigue, and monotony interact with spatial conditions in complex ways.

From a complex perspective, organizations operate as dynamic systems characterized by non-linearity and interdependence. Guerrero Sánchez, Guerrero Grajeda, and Pérez Mayo (2021) conceptualize organizations as complex systems in which everyday interactions are shaped by structural and spatial conditions. These findings support a relational interpretation of organizational space, where spatial arrangements interact with social and emotional variables rather than determining outcomes directly.

This perspective moves the analysis beyond technical efficiency and situates organizational space within broader social and cultural dynamics.

### **Organizational Space and Human Resource Sustainability**

This article explicitly defines sustainability as human resource and organizational sustainability, emphasizing long-term well-being, commitment, and ethical organizational design.

Empirical research conducted by Pérez Mayo and colleagues demonstrates that organizational commitment and job satisfaction are closely linked to structural and cultural conditions (Uscanga Arévalo et al., 2021). From this perspective, organizational space functions as a strategic lever that shapes perceptions of belonging, recognition, and psychosocial balance.

Spatial configurations that enable interaction, autonomy, and symbolic recognition contribute to sustainable human resource practices, whereas poorly designed spaces may undermine morale and well-being. Thus, organizational space is repositioned as an analytical variable transversal to sustainability and human resource research.

### **Methodological Positioning and Future Research Directions**

In response to the reviewers' observations, this study explicitly defines its methodological positioning as a conceptual and theoretical investigation. The article adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and transdisciplinary approach, synthesizing literature from physics, organizational studies, and sustainability research.

The proposed analytical framework organizes organizational space into four dimensions:

- a) spatial configuration,
- b) symbolic spatiality,
- c) relational dynamics, and
- d) psychosocial effects.

Pérez Mayo and Roque Nieto (2025) emphasize that transdisciplinarity functions as an epistemological bridge integrating scientific, social, and humanistic knowledge. Following this logic, future research may operationalize this framework through case studies, ethnographies of workspaces, discourse analysis, and spatial mapping combined with interviews.

### **On methodological positioning**

The observation regarding the descriptive or philosophical nature of the methodological section allows us to specify more clearly the nature of the design adopted. The present study does not respond to empirical logic, but to a methodology of theoretical construction based on epistemological and conceptual synthesis. Consequently, its objective is not to describe data

collection or analysis procedures, but to make explicit the process of integration, articulation and conceptual formalization of different theoretical frameworks.

The research is part of the tradition of theoretical development in organizational studies, where the contribution lies in conceptual clarification, systematic integration, and expansion of the explanatory capacity of the field category (Cornelissen, 2017; Jaakkola, 2020; Whetten, 1989). From this perspective, rigor is not evaluated by criteria of statistical validity, but through ontological coherence, logical consistency, conceptual delimitation and heuristic capacity. The manuscript systematically articulates four theoretical domains:

- Theory of space (particularly in its relational turn),
- Organizational studies,
- Contemporary approaches to human resource sustainability,
- Relational epistemology.

This integration responds to the logic of analytical convergence aimed at the construction of a transversal organizational category, —the organizational space— conceived as a constitutive dimension and not merely contextual. Such an approach is consistent with the principles of theoretical construction that emphasize the need to clearly define constructs, conceptual relationships, and differentiated contributions with respect to existing frameworks (Makadok et al., 2018).

However, we recognize that the theoretical selection process, the conceptual inclusion criteria, and the integrative synthesis logic could have been more explicitly formalized as a conceptual methodology, including a systematic description of:

- Criteria of ontological coherence,
- Principles of interdisciplinary integration,
- Justification of the analytical limits of the model,
- Delimitation of its explanatory scope.

A greater formalization in these terms would have helped to clarify that the study adopts a design typical of advanced conceptual organizational theory, whose central purpose is to expand interpretative frameworks and propose analytical architectures susceptible to future empirical operationalization (Jaakkola, 2020).

In this sense, the manuscript is not situated in the field of philosophical speculation, but in that of the systematic construction of theory, understood as a process of conceptual

problematization, critical integration, and structured formulation of explanatory categories (Cornelissen, 2017; Whetten, 1989).

### **Illustrative Analytical Explanation of the Four-Dimensional Model**

To clarify the scope of this proposed conceptual-analytical model, an illustrative vignette is incorporated that contrasts two spatial configurations widely disseminated in contemporary organizational contexts: offices in open spaces and spaces structured through cubicles. This comparison is not empirical in nature, nor does it intend to establish deterministic causal relationships; Its purpose is to demonstrate the analytical applicability of the model in plausible organizational situations, preserving its conceptual nature.

#### **Spatial configuration**

In an open-plan office or open spaces, the architectural layout eliminates internal barriers and favors transversal visibility between the members of the organization. This configuration tends to promote accessibility, fluid circulation, and spontaneous interaction. In contrast, cubicle-based design introduces semi-private physical boundaries that segment space into individual functional units, structuring work into relatively autonomous modules.

From the relational perspective of space —inspired by the overcoming of the absolute conception of space described by Einstein and Infeld (2005)— these configurations are not mere technical arrangements, but structures that predispose specific patterns of interaction and organizational coordination.

#### **Symbolic spatiality**

The open floor plan can symbolize horizontality, transparency and collaboration, values associated with participatory organizational cultures. However, it can also represent constant exposure and implicit surveillance. In contrast, cubicles can communicate individual autonomy and concentration but also suggest fragmentation or hierarchization.

This dimension confirms that space acts as a carrier of organizational meanings and participates in cultural construction (Pérez Mayo & Vallejo-Trujillo, 2018). Spatiality, therefore, not only organizes bodies, but also symbols.

#### **Relational dynamics**

In open environments, interaction tends to be more frequent and less formalized, facilitating rapid exchanges and cross-cutting cooperation. However, permanent proximity can lead to interpersonal tensions or distractions.

In spaces segmented by cubicles, physical borders regulate social proximity. This can strengthen focus and privacy but reduce spontaneous interaction.

From the perspective of organizational complexity (Guerrero Sánchez et al., 2021), these spatial configurations interact with structural and cultural variables, configuring relational conditions without linearly determining the results.

### **Psychosocial effects**

The open floor plan can be associated with perceptions of collective belonging and dynamism, but also with overstimulation and social fatigue. Cubicles can promote a sense of control and individual focus but generate isolation or symbolic disconnection.

Previous research has shown that organizational commitment and job satisfaction are linked to structural and cultural conditions (Uscanga Arévalo et al., 2021). In this sense, the spatial configuration operates as a transversal variable that influences the well-being and, by extension, the sustainability of human resources.

### **Methodological value**

The incorporation of this analytical analysis does not transform the conceptual nature of the study, but rather provisionally operationalizes the theoretical framework. It allows us to observe how the four dimensions —spatial configuration, symbolic spatiality, relational dynamics and psychosocial effects— interact in an integrated way.

The comparison shows that the organizational space does not function as a neutral container, but as a constitutive relational configuration of organizational life, in coherence with the relational ontology defended in this work (Einstein & Infeld, 2005; Pérez Mayo & Vallejo-Trujillo, 2018).

From the perspective of human resources sustainability, the coherence between spatial design, organizational culture, and psychosocial needs is configured as a strategic element for organizational well-being and continuity.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that organizational space cannot be reduced to a neutral or merely physical container. Drawing on epistemological insights from the nomothetic sciences and organizational theory, space emerges as a relational and constitutive dimension of organizational life.

Consistent with transdisciplinary organizational theory (Pérez Mayo & Vallejo-Trujillo, 2018), this article conceptualizes organizational space as a hybrid construct integrating physical, social, symbolic, and cultural dimensions. Empirical and theoretical contributions from organizational studies confirm that spatial configurations influence well-being, interaction, and sustainability outcomes.

Understanding organizations as complex systems (Guerrero Sánchez et al., 2021) reinforces the argument that spatiality actively participates in shaping organizational dynamics rather than serving as a passive backdrop. From a human resource sustainability perspective, organizational space becomes a central analytical category linking structure, culture, and human development.

In conclusion, reconceptualizing organizational space from a transdisciplinary standpoint contributes to more inclusive, ethical, and sustainable organizational designs, fully aligning with the objectives of human resource sustainability research.

### **Future Research Directions**

Organizational challenges are fundamentally cultural, emerging from shared symbolic and practical worlds constructed through interaction. Spatiality plays a decisive role in shaping these dynamics. As Maturana (1994) argued, human beings are constitutively social, and their development occurs within specific spatial and cultural contexts.

Future research may operationalize the proposed framework through qualitative case studies, spatial ethnographies, organizational discourse analysis, and comparative studies of workplace design, integrating organizational space with human sustainability and well-being indicators.

This proposal is not merely rhetorical. From the perspective of theoretical construction in organizational studies, a substantive contribution is not limited to the generation of empirical data, but can consist of conceptual clarification, the systematic integration of existing frameworks, and the formulation of new analytical categories with explanatory capacity (Whetten, 1989; Jaakkola, 2020). In this sense, the article proposes structural contributions that transcend discursive reiteration.

First, the manuscript introduces a unified analytical category of organizational space, overcoming fragmented approaches that treat space as an architectural, cultural, or symbolic variable in isolation. The formalization of space as a constitutive dimension of the organization expands its ontological status within organizational analysis, moving it from a contextual condition to a structuring condition.

Second, an integrative model of four dimensions is proposed—spatial configuration, symbolic spatiality, relational dynamics, and psychosocial effects—that articulates levels of analysis that are frequently dissociated in the literature. This integration responds to the need, pointed out by contemporary organizational theory, to build conceptual frameworks that connect materiality, interaction, and meaning in coherent structures (Cornelissen, 2017; Makadok et al., 2018). The model not only describes dimensions of space but also explains how its articulation generates differential conditions for organizational dynamics.

Third, the article develops a relational ontology that links space and sustainability, establishing an explicit bridge between spatiality and sustainability of human resources. While recent literature on organizational sustainability and people management has emphasized well-being, commitment, and ethical organizational design (Aust et al., 2020; Ehnert et al., 2016), the constitutive role of space has remained sub-theorized. By integrating spatiality and sustainability in the same conceptual architecture, the manuscript expands the explanatory capacity of the field by showing how spatial configurations indirectly influence engagement, psychosocial balance, and organizational continuity.

Finally, the study is based on a transdisciplinary epistemological foundation, articulating space theory, organizational studies and sustainability under a relational logic. This approach responds to recent calls that underscore the need for integrative frameworks capable of transcending disciplinary fragmentations in organizational research (Jaakkola, 2020).

However, we recognize that, although the contribution is structurally substantive, its positioning within the contemporary literature on human resource management and sustainability could have been more precisely explained. A broadening of the dialogue with peer-reviewed research from the last ten to fifteen years—particularly in human resource sustainability, organizational structure, and organizational design—would strengthen the visibility of the contribution and clarify its location in current debates in the field.

In this sense, the contribution of the manuscript is not rhetorical, but conceptual and architectural; however, its strategic insertion within the recent literature can and should be strengthened to maximize its academic impact.

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