

Shadow organizing and imitation: new focus points for research

Abstract

Purpose

Shadow organizing refers to the emergence of parallel arrangements that sit alongside and imitate mainstream or conventional ways of organizing. It can be a response to challenges that require new ways of working without abandoning what is valuable about conventional arrangements. However, the processes through which shadow organizing is accomplished are not well understood; there is a need to go beyond traditional notions of mimicry and metaphor.

Approach

This article demonstrates how a Tardean approach to imitation can address this gap. It deploys imitation as an explanatory concept, based on contemporary readings of Tarde, as well as understandings of organizing as an unfolding process. Child and Family Centres in Tasmania (Australia), are used as an example of shadow organizing, delivering integrated health and education services in an emerging parallel arrangement.

Findings

The analysis highlights an imitation dynamic which is far from straightforward mimicry. Rather, it comprises repetition and generation of difference. This dynamic is conceptualized in Tardean fashion as three patterns: the imitation of ideas before expression; the selective nature of imitation; and insertion of the old alongside the new.

Originality/value

The paper moves beyond metaphors of shadow organizing, and understandings of shadow organizing as mimicry. Conceptualizing imitation in an alternative way, it contributes fresh insights into how shadow organizing is accomplished. This enriches and expands the conceptual apparatus for researchers wishing to understand the betwixt and between of shadow organizing.

Keywords

Shadow organizing; imitation; Tarde; innovation

Article classification

Conceptual paper

Introduction

The term 'shadow' has caught on as a way to highlight how some ways of organizing mimic the mainstream (Bray & Lykins, 2012) – as a shadow mimics its object – though the metaphorical richness of shadow in relation to organizing has recently been expanded to highlight performativity, liminality and secrecy as well (Gherardi *et al.*, 2017). This paper focuses on shadow organizing in broad terms as referring to parallel arrangements that sit alongside and imitate mainstream or conventional ways of organizing. We present a conceptual framework based on contemporary interpretations of Tarde that highlights the role of imitation in shadow organizing, offering a toolkit focusing on three imitative patterns, each of which opens up new horizons and questions.

Shadow organizing can be a way to respond to challenges that require new ways of working without abandoning what is valuable about conventional arrangements. Put simply, shadow organizing is a process, and shadow organization is, potentially, its result. Although there is a vast literature on new organizational types, and their causes and consequence. These include partial, hybrid and shadow organizations, the literature describing the processes by which these emerge is scant (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson 2000; Ahre & Brunsson 2011). Our contribution is to elaborate on the practices of shadow organizing. An important challenge to organization theory is to search for constructs that explain how contexts for work emerge, evolve, persist and change – a process perspective (Hernes 2004). The term shadow organizing usefully brings into focus the invention and imitation dynamics that result in new (shadow) organizational arrangements. These do not necessarily replace older ones but complement them in various ways.

The processes through which shadow organizing is accomplished are not well understood: there is a need to go beyond traditional notions of mimicry and recent metaphorical accounts. The conceptualization of shadow organizing offered in this paper takes as a point of departure the processes and practices of organizing (Gherardi *et al.*, 2017). The introduction of the term organizing has been part of a movement away from a functional emphasis on organization as a discrete structural entity and towards the study of processes and practices of organizing; i.e how an organized state is achieved (Czarniawska, 2010). Framed this way, organizing is understood as a 'social process of accomplishing a collective action in a somewhat orderly manner' (Czarniawska, 2010, p. 156). What flows from this is a focus on studying what people do when they act together to achieve something (Czarniawska, 2013). This stance has gained significant momentum, and by referring to shadow *organizing* we signal a widely shared interest in situated doing, through a set of practices, approached as a question of understanding how organizing is performed or enacted (Alcadipani and Hassard, 2010; Czarniawska 2014; Gherardi *et al.*, 2017; Helin *et al.*, 2014; Nicolini, 2009). A process perspective (Hernes, 2004) entails a focus on the practices of shadow organizing. In line with this, when seeking to understand organizing, we take up practices as an appropriate level of analysis. This draws the researcher's focus into concrete actions and interactions, in furtherance of exploring how shadow organizing is accomplished.

Organizing is an unfolding process involving actors making choices in relation to others, always in specific local conditions (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). The conceptual challenge addressed in this paper is how to understand shadow organizing as an accomplishment: the *how* of shadow organizing. Our response is to focus on imitation, and how imitative patterns come together in the ongoing production of novel parallel organizational arrangements. As such, the central contribution of the paper is to extend the growing literature on shadow organizing, but in the process we also offer foci for research that can further the more general project of understanding *organizing*.

We begin by reviewing literature on shadow organizing, highlighting how metaphors have been prominent in two distinctive strands of work: neo-institutional analyses focused on metaphors of shadow as mimicry, and recent work associating different metaphors with a relational, process-focused methodology. The paper addresses the object of concern of the former (the phenomenon of parallel arrangements as a feature of contemporary organizing), and follows the focus on organizing associated

with the latter. However, it moves beyond both by focusing on imitation as an explanatory concept. This is done by employing ideas of imitative patterns that are drawn from contemporary interpretations of Gabriel Tarde. So, the paper proceeds by introducing Tarde and his work on imitation, before outlining how and why his work is seen as being of relevance to organizational research, albeit in a terrain of varied interpretations and responses. This conceptual paper draws on the example of Tasmanian Child and Family Centres (CFCs). The CFCs offer integrated health and education services for families with young children, existing as a parallel arrangement, alongside conventional health clinics and early education provisions. Rather than understanding them as entities, our focus is on how they come into being through shadow organizing, in particular highlighting the centrality of imitation to this process. We understand shadow organizing as a process that lives side by side conventional forms of organizing in these contexts, part of how they emerge as innovative organizational forms while maintaining many familiar features. We trace three imitative patterns with detailed reference to practices in the CFCs, before returning to wider conceptual arguments and possibilities that are offered through a Tardean approach.

Shadow organizing

Shadow organizing is recognized as important in diverse organizational contexts. Existing literature can be characterized in terms of two distinct approaches. The neo-institutional approach focuses on parallel organizational arrangements, in which the metaphor of shadow emphasizes mimicry or copying. Alternatively, shadow organizing has been understood as a device to understand overlooked features of organizing more generally, emphasizing metaphors of liminality, secrecy and performativity. Both inform this paper, but share a limitation in their metaphorical aspects, which we transcend by deploying imitation as an explanatory concept to uncover the *how* of shadow organizing, focusing on how parallel arrangements are enacted into being through practices.

Parallel arrangements: shadow education

The concept of shadow organizing as a parallel arrangement is perhaps most well documented and recognized in relation to education, dating back at least as far as the 1990s (Nordhaug, 1991). Shadow education refers to a parallel world of informal teaching and learning, in which actors outside formal education mimic their counterparts and compensate for what formal organizations are not able or willing to do. Such arrangements are understood as 'shadowy' in terms of the centrality of mimicry, and with respect to (questionable) legitimacy and legality (Bray, 2011; Bray and Lykins, 2012). Bray and Lykins (2012) discuss a sundial metaphor in which the shadow educational system synchronizes and coordinates with the system proper by imitating it – mimicry is central (Aurini *et al.*, 2013; Bray, 2011). The apparent close relation between formal and shadow education has led some to turn to neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991), regarding shadow education as a case of isomorphism (Aurini *et al.*, 2013; Baker and LeTendre, 2005; Davies *et al.*, 2006; Dierkes, 2008; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This highlights convergence of practices, and reinforces a notion of imitation as producing a copy, although there is some suggestion that shadow organizing can sometimes be ahead of the formal education system (Bray and Lykins, 2012). In this work shadow education tends to be relegated or diminished in relation to its formal or canonical counterpart. The value of a shadow system in addressing shortcomings is noted, but questions of legitimacy often combine with a focus on inefficiency and ways in which it can undermine equity, access, and inclusiveness (Bray and Lykins, 2012). These are valid concerns and critiques, but when shadow organizing is approached differently, a more generative role in production of novel ways of organizing becomes apparent.

Some studies have highlighted the complementary function of parallel arrangements. Author2 (2018) argues that shadow organizing in tertiary legal education intensifies and enriches formal education in ways that are better accommodated in the parallel organizational realm, which is less rigid (see also Author2 and Anon, 2016). The formal and the shadow can grow side by side, rather than in opposition or conflict, in this case stretching out spaces for students' learning (Author2 and Anon, 2015). Similarly, we

present Tasmania's CFCs as a parallel arrangement that sits productively alongside conventional health and education, stretching out how these sectors can meet stakeholder needs.

The metaphors of shadow in this body of work include the aforementioned sundial, and many share notions of reduced visibility and less rigid forms that afford welcome opportunities. Zanutto *et al.*'s (2017) study of 'shadow warriors' in cyber security highlights hiddenness and flexibility, while Pelling *et al.* (2008) argue that the lack of visibility is a defining feature of arrangements that enable risk-taking and experimentation in the context of social adaptation to climate change. In Folke *et al.*'s (2005) description of adaptive governance, informal (shadow) networks emerge out of the fray of regulation and implementation, away from the scrutiny of agencies, where they are freer to develop alternative, creative resolutions. The metaphors in play here do not imply a hard separation between the shadow and other, a point made explicitly in Suárez-Orozco *et al.*'s (2011) non-binary reading, which disrupts either/or categories of authorized/unauthorized in relation to migration. Of primary relevance to our argument are ideas that the shadow need not suggest a relegation of status, nor a rigid distinction from the 'other' – indeed the mingling of conventional and alternative forms is a key feature of our analysis.

Thus, researchers have recognized shadow organizing as manifest in parallel arrangements, deploying linked metaphors that emphasize imitation as mimicry, alongside notions of invisibility, fluidity and questionable legitimacy. In this work, the metaphor functions relatively straightforwardly as a device to capture or represent meanings in empirical analyses. Others have focused more on the methodological promise that metaphor holds *per se*, and it is to this work that we now turn.

Shadow organizing as methodological metaphor

Shadow metaphors have been taken up in work that follows the aforementioned shift to focus on organizing rather than organization. In such a process approach, organizational phenomena are understood as constant processes of *becoming* (Gherardi *et al.*, 2017). This is not just a question of re-imagining what 'shadow' might mean, but re-locating the research endeavour within an alternative methodology. In this vein, Benozzo and Gherardi (under review) explain relationality as an invitation to see the world as the movement of relationships between things rather than the things in themselves, putting this 'interspace' between things in the spotlight, what they call the 'betwixt and between', including with reference to data that are 'not yet' or whose meanings are ambiguous or unsettling.

Gherardi *et al.* (2017) offer three metaphorical meanings of shadow organizing as methodological tools. The dimension of performativity draws on metaphors of sheltered penumbra in the forest, a place where there are opportunities for growth as dark and light intra-act. That of liminality refers to what is between canonical and non-canonical practices, where conditions for experimentation abound. This connects with Pelling *et al.*'s (2008) suggestion that shadows favour experimentation, and with the sense in Suárez-Orozco *et al.*'s (2011) work that it is the in-between rather than the hard distinction between the formal and its counter that are of interest. The secretive dimension resonates with much aforementioned scholarship on shadow practices (e.g. Folke *et al.*, 2005; Zanutto *et al.*, 2017), focusing on the value of being beyond certain gazes, or perhaps hiding in broad daylight. Thus, despite different foci there are notable similarities in the metaphorical meanings associated with shadow. We do not contest these, but extend work on shadow organizing by going where these metaphors do not: tracing the processes through which shadow organizing is accomplished. To do this, we unsettle the notion of imitation as mimicry or production of a copy, presenting imitation instead as an explanatory concept.

Gabriel Tarde and imitation

In this section we introduce Gabriel Tarde and the recent surge in interest in his work, before focusing on three imitative patterns, expressed in relation to contemporary interpretations of his ideas.

The fall and rise of Gabriel Tarde

Living from 1843 to 1904, Tarde was a French sociologist, criminologist and social psychologist. Tarde was famously in disagreement with his contemporary, Emile Durkheim (Borch, 2014). While Durkheim viewed society as a collective unity, explaining change from the 'top down' in terms of social structures, Tarde advanced a 'bottom-up' view (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2017), arguing that society is the product of, rather than basis for imitation, and that countless small inventions change society and its institutions through equally countless acts of imitation (Tarde, 2016). Durkheim 'won' and a 'heavy silence' settled on Tarde's work (Alliez, 2011). However, Tarde is far from an obscure and defeated footnote in sociological thought: the rediscovery of his ideas resonates with criticisms of the structuralism that overshadowed his work a century ago (Alliez, 2011). Now recognized as a founder of 'micro-sociology', and a 'first author' of diffusion theory (Rogers, 1995), Tarde has been taken up by scholars who follow his argument that social changes must be examined in detail as they unfold.

Such has been the interest in Tarde that reference has been made to 'immense revival' (Borch, 2017) or even 'Tardomania' (e.g. Alliez, 2011; Czarniawska, 2009). Gilles Deleuze is often attributed as key to this 'rediscovery', particularly through work on difference and repetition, in which imitation is seen as the propagation of a flux (or flow), and invention is the connection of these (Alliez, 2011). This revival has now left its mark in organizational studies (Borch, 2014; Czarniawska, 2009).

What is the appeal of Tarde to contemporary organizational theorists? Czarniawska (2009) argues that it is the capacity of Tarde's ideas to capture paradoxes typical of organizing that render his work 'eminently suitable as an inspiration for contemporary organization theory' (p. 18). She notes Latour's attraction to Tarde's abolition of micro-macro distinctions, suggesting Tarde in fact offers a relational view. In a Tardean approach, the focus is on processes through which differences (an effect of imitation) meet as imitative flows criss-cross and produce new combinations (see Tarde, 2011). To understand changing ways of organizing, the Tardean looks not for inventions but at social practices of imitation: 'In this respect a practical-theoretical concept of social innovation can benefit fundamentally from the social theory of Gabriel Tarde. For Tarde, in social life everything occurs through invention and imitation' (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017, p. 169). This brings us to the issue of imitation.

Imitation and difference

Imitation is central to Tarde's work. It is 'not a residual category but a pivotal explanatory concept for those who try to understand the phenomena of the contemporary world of organizations' (Czarniawska, 2009, p. 14). The mimicry and isomorphism associated with neo-institutional approaches evacuate imitation of its generative force. Ideas, practices, and organizing are transformed through imitation (Sevón, 1996). The relation between imitation and invention can be considered one of the constitutive paradoxes of Tarde's ideas (Czarniawska, 2011). In Tarde, imitation is far from mindless reproduction of the same thing, nor is it mechanistic.

Imitative repetition is the mechanism of reproducing and transforming the social. A repeated social practice never stays the same. Repetition, change and renewal are inextricably linked. (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017, p. 169).

Tardean imitation has little to do with the diffusion of exact copies suggested by DiMaggio and Powell (1983; Powell and DiMaggio 1991). In Tarde, invention / repetition 'is not a dichotomy at all' (Czarniawska, 2009, p. 10); imitation is a process of differentiating repetition (Moebius, 2004). The process of imitation involves both alterity (formation of perceptions of being different) and identity (Czarniawska, 2005), thus explaining how novelty emerges and is maintained (see also Papilloud, 2011, on alterity). In Tarde, the imitator is not the solitary hero acting alone; rather imitation emerges between people – suggesting coherence with the relational, process approach as described by Gherardi *et al.* (2017). Each imitative act is also innovative in some respect; variation is an essential feature of any imitation (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017; Schmid, 2011).

Three patterns of imitation

Tarde saw three patterns in the way imitation unfolds. He referred to these as laws, but following contemporary interpretations which move away from laws, we extract key aspects conceptualized as 'patterns'. The first concerns the imitation of ideas occurring prior to the imitation of their expression (Tarde, 1962): imitation of other people's behaviour comes only after the imitation of their idea (Schmid, 2011). The notion of translation usefully captures aspects of this: an idea is transformed into an object (buzzword, model etc.) that can then travel and be adopted (Czarniawska, 2009; Sevón, 1996).

The second pattern concerns the selection of what gets imitated. Ideas or practices do not force themselves on organizations (Sevón, 1996). Interpreting Tarde (1962, 2000, 2007), Czarniawska (2009, 2011) highlights three reasons why something might be imitated: pragmatic, power-symbolic, and through association. These are summarized in Table 1, presenting Tarde's original vocabulary (a question of inferiority and superiority), alongside contemporary expressions and a lay explanation.

Table 1 Imitation as a selective process: reasons why some things are imitated

Logical or pragmatic imitation may reflect judgements that something is more useful or in accord with particular aims and principles (Borch, 2014, 2017). This can result in imitating something new, or selecting to imitate something already established. This second pattern also connects with concepts of fashion and translation (Czarniawska, 2014). Imitation drives organizational change, but in doing so rests on translation, rather than diffusion (Corvellec and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016). Organizations translate fashionable ideas according to their own understandings, traditions, needs and means, and this transforms the imitated idea or object; each translation makes what was imitated into something else (Czarniawska, 2009). 'Translation is a vehicle, imitation its motor, and fashion sits at the wheel' (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005, p. 7). Fashion both stands for change, and is repetitive (Czarniawska, 2005, 2009). Fashion is to be taken seriously in understanding imitation (Czarniawska, 2011), and reminds us that selection of what to imitate occurs in a wider context of the emergence, differentiation and adoption of ideas.

The third pattern concerns insertion (Tarde 2016). Novel forms are fostered through superimposing new practices onto traditional ones. Inventions often consist in bringing existing ideas or actions together in novel ways, hence the focusing of many recent scholars on patterns of *recombination* (see Borch, 2014, 2017, Schmid, 2011). 'The enhancement of existing and the development of new practices result from a recombination or reconfiguration of new and existing elements... each new combination of elements and practices is an emergent result of previous practices' (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017, pp. 167-169).

Defending a Tardean approach

The upsurge in interest in Tarde's work comprises differing interpretations of Tarde's ideas, and has prompted objections as to their value. Proponents of Tarde are heterogenous, pursuing theoretical agendas as diverse as those of Latour, Deleuze and Thrift, although all recognize imitation as central to his work (Borch, 2017). Our concern is not to delineate a singular correct interpretation of Tarde, but to explore how his ideas might inspire research addressing important questions relating to shadow organizing.

What of Tarde's objectors? Recent critiques do not necessarily subscribe to either Durkheim's structural theory or his interpretation of Tarde. King (2016) argues Tarde offers an individualist reading of imitation (Latour and Thrift disagree) that would be rejected by many social theorists. However, King (2016) also notes Tarde's focus on imitation has found support in much research, and that the attempt to explain

broader phenomena with reference to microprocesses ‘accords with precepts at the heart of much sociology today’ (p. 49). Objections that imitation diminishes people’s agency have been strongly rebutted by theorists highlighting that in Tarde individuals remain intentional and retain a capacity to resist external influences (Borch, 2017; Schmid, 2011). Even King (2016) agrees that ‘imitation requires active agency’ (p. 52). Writing specifically about organizations, Czarniawska (2004; see also Corvellec and Eirksson-Zetterquist, 2016) notes that it is people’s willingness to imitate one another that produces professional norms, not the other way around. A third key concern with Tarde concerns his account of imitation in terms of universal laws, which seem a poor fit for much contemporary research. However, detailed philosophical and methodological writing suggests this need not be a problem: there are affinities between Tarde and poststructuralist sociology (Moebius, 2004), and with recent formulations of social practice theory (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017). Tarde’s conceptual apparatus can be employed as a set of principles rather than methodological *a priori* (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017), or explanatory concepts (Czarniawska, 2009) – the latter being particularly informative of our approach. Taking analytical inspiration from Tarde does not require or imply wholesale following of every idiosyncratic feature of his work (see King (2016) writing on Latour). Hence, instead of three laws, we frame our conceptualization in terms of imitative patterns. The value of this is demonstrated through reference to an example.

Empirical example: Tasmania’s Child and Family Centres

In order to show how Tardean notions of imitation can help understand processes of shadow organizing underpinning the emergence of parallel arrangements, we work through the three imitative patterns in relation to an example of one such arrangement: Tasmania’s Child and Family Centres (CFCs). These provide integrated services for families with young children, sitting side by side that state’s conventional healthcare and early childhood education systems.

The CFCs were announced by the State Government in 2009 in response to evidence that problems relating to adversity in early childhood cannot be addressed through services delivered in isolation from one another. Integrated approaches have repeatedly been called for (Centre for Community Child Health, 2018; Moore and Fry, 2011). As a whole-of-government initiative, CFCs reflect a departure from prior ways of organizing, designed as a single point of entry to a range of Early Childhood Services including universal, targeted and specialist approaches that offer support for children and/or their parents (Taylor *et al.*, 2017). Government, non-government organizations and communities provide services that span education, health, children and youth, and community development. As such, CFCs are a collaborative service delivery model that sits alongside, and offers alternative ways to access conventional services, rather than replacing them (Tasmanian Government, 2017). Twelve CFCs were opened between 2011 and 2014 in areas with high levels of socio-economic disadvantage. The broad goal of ensuring the best possible start in life is to be delivered through children’s development as healthy, confident and curious learners, nurtured by families in communities that respect and value childhood, with accessible, quality services responding early to needs in culturally appropriate ways (Department of Education Tasmania, 2011, 2015).

Research suggests the CFCs are indeed effective as a parallel arrangement, functioning as an integrated place-based model that addresses inequalities in child development (Taylor *et al.*, 2015, 2017). Parents who used CFCs felt their children were better prepared for school, and rated their experiences of early childhood services more highly than those who did not, noting convenience, accessibility, non-judgemental and supportive approaches, and feeling valued, respected and safe (Taylor *et al.*, 2017). Evidence suggests the CFCs are not only engaging families who require parenting support, but are helping them to develop parenting skills, capabilities and competence (Jose *et al.*, 2018). Enablers of this success, according to those who work in CFCs, include partnerships between stakeholders, strong leadership, flexibility, deformalized service environments, and achieving common understanding (Prichard *et al.*, 2015).

The data analyzed here are from a qualitative case study (Author1, 2019) of three CFCs, two in the south of Tasmania, and one in the north. Two were in communities with very high levels of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, and one served a community with a high proportion of refugee and immigrant families. The first author made two visits to each centre, several months apart, spending seven to 10 days in each. During these periods of observation informal conversations were conducted, and field notes taken. Interviews were conducted with, 20 staff, 16 parents and 12 volunteers. Interviews with parents explored the history of their engagement with their CFC, and the difference the CFC was making to their lives. The approach to interviewing parents focused on specific instances, delving into concrete details of events or changes. The analysis did not take particular innovations as a starting point, nor did it look for 'shadowy' aspects of practices in the CFCs. Rather, it looked for evidence of imitation, conceptualized in terms of the three patterns described above, and traced with detailed reference to concrete practices.

Shadow organizing in CFCs is accomplished through both conventional and new practices – imitations of well-established ways of working, as well as novelties that catch, together constituting the CFCs as a parallel arrangement. Work in the CFCs involves standard surveillance and health checks by nurses, delivery of 'off-the-shelf' courses for parents, scheduled playgroups targeting particular child age brackets facilitated by early childhood educators, and established mechanisms for referring families to appropriate services or making notifications about child safety concerns. It also involves a range of non-canonical and innovative practices that would not be found in the main health and education settings, such as pop-up play groups as a form of outreach, co-presence of nurses and educators in playgroups, discretion and work-arounds to extend or enhance service access for families, and spontaneous collective responses to emergencies in the community (for example, around domestic violence).

Shadow organizing and imitation

In this section we will illustrate the imitative processes at play in the CFCs, conceptualized in terms of three imitative patterns.

The imitation of ideas before expression

Here our attention is drawn to how ideas are imitated through translation into forms that can then be enacted and travel (Czarniawska, 2009; Schmid, 2011; Tarde, 1962). Collaboration between sectors, organizations and professions has been an aspiration in children's services for nearly two decades (Forbes and Watson, 2012). The articulation of this through the idea of integrated service delivery can readily be described as a fashion, evident in national and state policy documents across Australia (Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (2009); Press *et al.*, 2010; Department of Education and Training, 2016). COAG's (2009) *Investing in the Early Years* strategy for early childhood imitates ideas that have international currency, including the OECD's goal for inclusive and equitable quality education and the World Bank's integrated, cross-sectoral initiatives in child and family contexts (see Taylor *et al.*, 2017).

The conception of CFCs as integrated service delivery models imitates this fashionable idea. The CFCs are guided by five best-practice principles stated in the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*: secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships; partnerships; high expectations and equity; respect for diversity; and ongoing learning and reflective practice (DEEWR, 2009). Organizing in the CFCs involves imitation of these wider ideas, translated first into strategic documents (Department of Education Tasmania, 2011, 2015) and then into specific enactments. One participant commented: "It's not some sort of half-baked idea. I think the Department of Education got it right in working at exactly the cohort, the aims and purpose-built facilities". She elaborated on how the idea of CFCs as welcoming, non-threatening spaces involved enactments that imitated the materialities of home, such as communal kitchens where families could spend time without particular agenda.

Ideas from a range of professional practice contexts are also imitated, including good care for families, thriving early childhood, community development, and valuing education. The latter was evident in this comment from an early childhood educator:

Both of us as educators were always really passionate about the families' role as the first educators of their children. So, we never saw school as something separate to the family. That's where we both come from that point of view.

The translation of this idea involved more imitation, for example through 'graduation ceremonies' for children. These imitated the materialities and rituals of high school or university graduations (gowns, photographs, collective celebration), but offered no status, nor did they reflect the completion of formal educational assessments. Thus, the idea of shared family/school responsibilities for children's education, was enacted through practices particular to the CFC setting.

Some of the ideas imitated in CFCs emerged as staff got used to working most effectively in this environment are captured by phrases such as "always serving out of who you are, rather than what you are" or "meeting people as people." These involved a break from the traditional idea of the professional with clear territory to occupy, protect, and remain within. Staff in each CFC came to share a view that their work involved fluid collective ensembles supporting families: "It's very important that there is no hint of ownership", rather than "They're my clients, hands off!" or "I don't deal with that aspect of their problems." In CFCs, professionals collectively practiced as human beings rather than in terms of roles defined by qualifications or positions. "We are not possessive now as workers. I don't feel that this family belongs to me." They imitated a shared idea of what kind of professional is well suited to a CFC. This amounted to someone who engages on a human level, and who will "do things differently, go out of their way and vary their approach" or "bend their system to suit, seek help, go the extra mile." This was described clearly in terms of concrete practices, including meeting families in locations that suited them, and stretching forms of contact: "If it means we're doing home visits above and beyond, then we do... if we have to see them for additional consultations on top, we do." These practices often took the organization of services beyond what was specified in policy:

It is actually the only way it works. If you followed every guideline, it just wouldn't be. In addition to your normal screening, everybody's entitled to three extra appointments. Sometimes I might extend that a bit, maybe an extra four or five. I need that.

Here we see CFCs providing conventional services but emerging as a parallel arrangement in which new practices are possible, through imitations of shared ideas around a particular kind of professional and professional work.

The selection of what to imitate

The selective process of imitation (the second pattern) can be understood in terms of pragmatic, power-symbolic and associative reasons (Czarniawska, 2011) (see Table 1), remembering that the former can involve preference being given to imitations of what is judged more useful or in accord with given aims and principles, whether these be conventional or new (Borch, 2017). These are analytical distinctions; some imitations reflect combinations of more than one reason.

Many imitations in the CFCs reflected pragmatic reasons – they held promise for particular needs. These needs were family-focused and collective, rather than relating to an individual professional's measurable performance. Discussing how the team in one CFC determined who should work most closely with a particular family, one participant said:

If we're a bit unsure then put our heads together and decide as a group who's the best person. It's not about us. It's not about me achieving a great list of parents that I've worked with, this is who I've helped. It's about us all working together *to get the best for that family.* [emphasis added]

Over time, staff from diverse backgrounds organized working in the family's interests through collective negotiations around allocating work. This began among core CFC teams but took hold in practices involving external providers working through CFCs: "Outside services are learning to be more flexible and they are coming to this centre to provide their service." Organizing integrated services depended on these imitations and caught on for pragmatic reasons centred on families' best interests, rather than the interests of institutions, services or individual practitioners.

Power-symbolic reasons were also important. The policy climate around the CFCs was regarded as permissive of novel practices: "It's not an environment where you're not allowed to do stuff." Imitations found legitimacy in strategic documents that articulated visions, desired outcomes, and aspirational ways of working. One example involved a CFC community inclusion officer working with a school-based teacher who ran the local 'Launching into Learning' program (a free playgroup for children under four years). They imitated neighbourly ways of building relationships:

I'm lucky enough to visit community. We've got a locked in day on a Monday where I travel with the Launching into Learning teacher... It's that next step of trying to build these relationships and a lot of those families may struggle to come into the centre or find it just difficult to take it that next step. We start relationships on the front doorstep and we try and keep it where it's that same face that's going to that doorstep.

This was judged as superior to traditional ways of working (expecting families to come to the service) because it found sanction in the CFC Strategic Plan (DoE Tasmania, 2015). This prioritizes relating to 'community belonging' and 'working together' under an overall purpose of improving access to services in the local community. The sense of freedom to experiment and work differently was often described by participants in relation to what the State Government wanted from the CFCs:

I think they [State Government] make it quite plain that the aim of the centre is really to address those falling through the crack issues, you know, falling behind as far as developmental markers go, education, behavioural, all of those things. I don't think anyone comes through the door thinking that it's just a play centre.

In this way, imitations took hold where staff felt they were actively encouraged, or at least sanctioned, and it was through these that shadow organizing unfolded in a way that produced the CFCs as a parallel arrangement, distinctive from conventional healthcare and education, without wholly evacuating relevant conventional practices.

Imitations were also selected according to associative reasons, meaning they were not perceived as threatening to institutional ways of thinking and doing (see Table 1). Practices of offering additional appointments beyond what was formally prescribed in conventional organizing translated widely imitated ideas of 'going where you need to go' and 'working in families'. What might have seemed a risky practice to imitate caught on because it did not pose a threat to established ways of recording and allocating work.

For some things, like sleep and settling, they might need two extra sessions. I don't put them on 'enhanced' [an escalated track when higher levels of risk to children are identified]. I just do it. Then, down the track if they need extra stuff, I might consider that [the enhanced track]. If it's something you can foresee and can be solved in a couple of sessions, I don't. So, it's a funny system because I actually self-refer them back to myself, but you have to do all the paperwork in order to that... there's kind of room for stretching, I think is probably the best way to say it.

This had the (pragmatic) benefit of keeping the enhanced level open for later, while meeting the need for additional support right now. Crucially this could be reflected in appropriate paperwork without threatening norms of record-keeping. This was not an isolated approach, but reported by many nurses in

different settings: “Some families are more high ends needs. If we have to see them for additional consultations on top of the extra ones, we do as well.”

Insertion: novel combinations of old and new

New practices often do not reflect a complete break from past ones, but bring existing forms together in new ways (Borch, 2017; Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017; Schmid, 2011; Tarde 2016). The ‘graduation ceremonies’ discussed above illustrate this vividly. Those involved did not invent the idea of graduation ceremonies from scratch. Rather they inserted it into the context and practices of CFCs, recombining materialities of hats and gowns and reconfiguring practices to develop a format that was appropriate for their setting.

Similarly, practices of ‘professional loitering’ exemplify patterns imitations involving insertion. Professional loitering was a term used by many staff to refer to what they saw as high-value spending of time away from formal appointments or allocated workspaces (clinics, offices). This could involve sitting with colleagues and community members for coffee, or health practitioners joining playgroups led by educators. Imitations of social interactions, normally absent from a conventional clinical setting, were inserted into the wider practices of the CFC. One nurse commented:

I’ll hang out in that building, chatting away, making coffee, talking ‘how’s your baby? Blah blah blah’.
I’ll come out with two or three appointments to be booked from that.

Other practices combined and reconfigured imitations of healthy-eating interventions with imitations of child-focused activities:

We’ve done kids’ cooking clubs. A really nice mix. It was the kids making beautiful, healthy muffins and we’d sit down and share a meal. Then, in the mix of that – but we’d make it fun with a teddy bear’s picnic or a superhero theme, where they’d jump off the trampoline and we’d capture beautiful photos of them in the sky, and things like that.

In this same CFC, plans were in place for a child health nurse to lead activities around baby foods at the time when parents arrive for playgroups. Again, recombinations of existing practices lay at the heart of the emergence of shadow organizing.

Summary

In this section we have traced concrete practices of imitation in order to explain how the CFCs emerge as a parallel arrangement alongside conventional healthcare and early education. This shadow organizing is the result of a criss-crossing of imitative flows that can be conceptualized in terms of three patterns: imitation of ideas, selecting what to imitate, and insertion. Such an account upholds the tenets of the turn to organizing, as it involves close analysis of practices, highlighted here through examples such as graduation ceremonies, professional loitering, outreach work and ways of stretching access to appointments. This aligns our analysis with approaches that address shadow organizing from a relational process perspective (Gherardi *et al.*, 2017). However, it shares its object of concern with a much wider literature on shadow organizing as a parallel arrangement. Tracing imitative patterns enables the analysis to go beyond metaphor and into process, mobilizing Tarde’s ideas for their explanatory potential (Czarniawska, 2009). Imitation can be a basis for understanding how new ways of organizing emerge – not a question of producing copies through mimicry, but a process in which the production of novelty is central.

We have shown how imitation brings the novel and conventional into a dynamic relationship. The organizing in the CFCs is accomplished through a combination of recognizable, established practices

(similar to those that would be found in traditional settings), and through innovations that are particular to these integrated sites. Imitation is key to each of these, and to the ways they are combined to produce wider parallel arrangements. Our analysis focused on what was imitated, reasons for selecting what to imitate, and insertions of old and new, rather than how particular inventions diffused. However, we acknowledge that the diffusion of innovation literature (eg. Rogers 2003) has pointed to themes that resonate with those we have presented, including processes of translation and transformation of innovations that are not static but subject to re-negotiation, re-configuration and re-invention. From a research perspective, the result is an account of CFCs and their accomplishment of integration that is not expressed in terms of organizational entities and how they relate, but as an ongoing process of shadow organizing. The accomplishment of such distinctive ways of providing services for families with young children is, in this view, revealed to lie in subtle variations in practice, which happen through imitation.

Conclusions

In this paper we took as our point of departure an interest in organizing as an ongoing practical accomplishment, rather than in organizations as entities (e.g. Czarniawska, 2014; Gherardi *et al.*, 2017). Specifically, we explored how shadow organizing is accomplished by producing parallel arrangements that sit productively alongside conventional ways of organizing. The conceptualization of shadow organizing as a process has accompanied recent renewed interest in the work of Gabriel Tarde, particularly as discussed in the context of organizational theorizing by Czarniawska (2009, 2011, 2014). This goes beyond a limitation of existing work on shadow organizing, which has been associated with notions of mimicry or focused on metaphors in themselves, rather than deploying explanatory concepts. This conceptual paper shows how Tardean ideas of imitation (as distinct from mimicry as understood from neo-institutional perspectives) can account for the generation of novelty and simultaneous maintenance of the conventional in shadow organizing. Imitation conceptualized as a process of differentiating repetition (Moebius, 2004) is not simply a process of producing straightforward copies, but a relational process that produces novelty, part of an imitation/innovation dynamic through which new practices and forms of organizing take hold. This conceptual approach grounds an understanding of shadow organizing in practices, as we have illustrated with reference to the example of Tasmania's Child and Family Centres.

A Tardean approach can advance the promising idea of shadow organizing, following Gherardi *et al.* (2017) in approaching the phenomenon in terms of its *becoming*. This upholds a central symbolic notion of shadow as betwixt and between, but does not follow an analysis governed by possible metaphorical meanings of shadow. Instead, it deploys imitation as an explanatory concept (Czarniawska, 2009) and operationalizes this through the three patterns of imitation. We have shown how these can be useful in elucidating how parallel arrangements take hold. Focusing on the imitation of ideas, the dynamics of selection (what to imitate), and insertion (recombining old and new ideas into new configurations) reveals the details of how shadow organizing is accomplished.

Shadow organizing has been widely recognized as an important feature of organizing (Aurini *et al.*, 2013; Author2, 2018; Bray, 2011; Gherardi *et al.*, 2017). As a concept it offers a useful way to understand how responses to challenges requiring both continuity and novelty emerge. This is precisely what the example of Tasmania's CFCs exemplifies: the development of integrated, parallel arrangements that sit alongside conventional healthcare and education. Borch (2017) argues that understanding such responses requires excavating the imitative patterns they bring together and pursuing an analysis that traces the role of imitation at a level focused on micro-dynamics as they unfold in practices. The conceptual tools for this are available in the form of three imitative patterns. These have roots in Tarde's (1962) original expression as 'laws of imitation' but can coherently be positioned with more contemporary performative framings (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017; Moebius, 2004).

The first pattern, focusing on the imitation of ideas, refers not just to ideas as envisioned or encoded in policy and strategic documents, but as enacted and translated in practices of organizing. The second pattern offers a means to understand the selective nature of imitation, highlighting pragmatic, symbolic and associative reasons why some things are imitated (and others not). This is a relational account, in which selection is an unfolding process in which actors make choices interactively, always in local conditions, but drawing on broader rules and resources (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Hence it connects with Gherardi *et al.*'s (2017) take on shadow organizing as a phenomenon grounded in relations between interacting elements. The third pattern, insertion, focuses on how shadow organizing reflects combinations of new and old, aligning the conceptualization directly with metaphorical notions of betwixt and between (Gherardi *et al.*, 2017), but going beyond light/dark and legitimate/illegitimate.

This conceptual framework offers researchers a toolkit that opens up new foci and questions in research on shadow organizing. While this also requires a methodology enabling meticulous tracing of imitative patterns in unfolding practices, empirical processes of data collection are beyond the scope of our present paper. Our focus is on highlighting where a focus on imitations might lead. In 1904 Bergson wrote that Tarde opened wide horizons (Moebius, 2004), but it is only comparatively recently that these have been pointed to in organizational research (Czarniawska, 2009). These opportunities come into view through a focus on the dynamics of imitation. Our intention is not to elevate Tarde above others, or to suggest Tardean approaches should displace or replace others (such as diffusion of innovation models associated with Rogers [2003]). Rather, our argument is that contemporary interpretations of Tarde, particularly in the concepts of the three imitative patterns, offer a valuable but as yet overlooked resource to understand shadow organizing. This can be summarized as a set of conceptual or analytical moves, each corresponding to the imitative patterns.

The first move is to trace what is imitated. This involves a shift in focus away from particular inventions and instead into how organizing is replete with imitations, through which novelty emerges. Tarde's first imitative pattern cues researchers to trace the ideas being imitated through specific enactments. In this way, the emergence of novel forms of shadow organizing is understood by asking how practices of organizing imitate particular ideas.

An account of what is imitated will need to confront the issue that imitation is selective. Not everything is imitated, and there are patterns in the reasons for this. This can be opened up through the details of Tarde's and contemporary organizational scholars' work that conceptualize these reasons in three groups (summarized in Table 1). From each of these flow questions that provide a useful focus in analysis: What promise do particular imitations hold in the context of specific organizational needs? What legitimacy do particular imitations gain through their provenance – how are they sanctioned in symbolic terms? What associations make particular imitations threatening or not to institutional thought structures?

The investigation of shadow organizing as a betwixt-and-between practical accomplishment is taken a step further through the pattern conceptualized in terms of insertion. Here, the task for the researcher is to explicitly seek the old and new, empirically elaborating the (re)combinations that drive the imitation/imitation dynamic. This is where the analysis most directly confronts a key lesson from Tarde: that to understand and explain the emergence of new forms of organizing, we must attend analytically to the enduring presence, albeit in new combinations and configurations, of conventional practices and materialities. Thus, the conceptual apparatus of imitation enables us to explore how shadow arrangements unfold over time, captured in three distinctive but connected patterns.

Through this example we have shown that contemporary readings of Tarde's laws of imitation lead us to foci that can that can inform research on how new organizational forms come into being. As pointed out earlier, Tarde does not simply propose some theoretical reflections on the character of imitation. He claims that imitation is a central aspect of human behavior. Further, the relation Tarde postulates between imitation and inventions is one of dynamic mutuality. Inventions come out of imitation and what

people imitate is always an invention of some sort. Hence rather than ask what is being imitated and what is being created (old versus new forms), meaningful questions in line with Tarde would be to ask what is created within the imitative act. A Tardean approach goes further by pointing us to the mechanisms of selection and adaptation that allows new and varied forms of practice to live side by side in organizations. Researchers might take these foci up in exploring further questions pertaining to the organizational conditions that might promote or inhibit shadow organizing. This would approach the question of conditions in terms of favorability to processes of imitation – What multiplies and makes available forms for potential imitation? What supports appropriate and effective selection? What fosters insertions of old and new through which shadow organizing can emerge?

This approach reveals the dynamics of shadow organizing as an ongoing process, betwixt and between traditional and innovative forms. The shift in perspective from innovation to imitation pursues the key question of how new ways of organizing come into being through the imitation of practices (Howaldt and Schwarz, 2017). When seeking to understand shadow organizing as a contemporary response to particular challenges in organization, a Tardean approach does not focus *a priori* on invention, but rather begins by tracing imitation, through which dynamic relations between old and new emerge. This brings together two areas of growing interest to organizational researchers – shadow organizing and imitation – to reveal the dynamics of shadow organizing as a process, an enriched and expanded conceptual apparatus that opens up exciting new possibilities for qualitative researchers in organization studies.

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