DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION CULTURE BY THEATRE-BASED METHODS

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ABSTRACT

The accelerating rate of change in the environment of companies sets out new challenges for all the members of the organization; they must be able to continuous improvement and renewal. Both researchers and practitioners strive for finding ways to foster and facilitate innovation in organizations. Discussion on applicable organizational designs and management tools on different phases of innovation processes is vivid.

Organizational culture is noticed to be a key element in the innovation capability of the organization. For the organization, its members are decisive to its ability to innovate. A culture which is encouraging, open to debate and experimentation supports individuals and teams to innovate and learn. Despite the recognized importance of culture, approaches and methods to develop it are still scarce. There is an agreement only, that it is extremely difficult and time-consuming to change organizational culture.

This study creates and explores new intervention practices directed to develop organizational culture. The aim of interventions is to be communicative and concentrate on relationships between people. The purpose is to find intervention practices which help members of organizations to perceive, reflect, and cultivate their organizational culture.

The intervention methods are based on Augusto Boal’s theatre practices and applied theatre-based techniques. We name this novel method as a research-based theatre. Research-based theatre most typically focuses on inspecting social problems and it opens up a possibility to investigate habits, language and social relationships. In this case the goals of research-based theatre are related to...
the learning and awareness process of an individual, the socio-cultural norms and tensions in a community and becoming aware and changing these factors. The aim is humanistic: to support the personal, social and cognitive learning of an individual, and enhance the culture of an innovative community. Communicative actions are integral in everyday practices. Language and communication processes are the key for change in social context at organizations development.

Methodologically, the study represents action research. Research-based theatre can be compared to participatory action research. Action research process, as also research based theater, is a social process; it involves social analysis which locates in the wider context of cultural action as language, activities and relationships.

The paper concludes with suggesting an approach to develop organizational culture by theatre based interventions. The suggested approach illustrates the use of research-based theatre first to facilitate the participants’ reflection of their current social and cultural practices and then to modify organizational culture. The modification of culture is encouraged by opening up new experiences at individual level and facilitating discussions, interpretations and conceptualizations at group level as social and collective actions.

**Keywords:** research-based theatre, organizational culture, innovation

1. Introduction

An organization’s capabilities for innovation are an essential source of its sustainable competitive advantage. Nowadays, innovation i.e. generation and adoption of new ideas as well as transfer and utilization of them into practice are incumbent on all the members of the organization. Capabilities to foster collaboration, cooperation and participation – both inside and among organizations are essential. Open innovation needs mechanisms for importing and exporting knowledge, ideas and practices. In every stage of innovation process in- and outflow should be enabled. (Chesbrough 2003, Amabile 1997, Axtell et al. 2000, Van de Meer 2007)

A major source of potential innovation arises in the course of working. It is the members of the organization at all levels, who are in contact with customers, suppliers, partners and other stakeholders. These interactions create potential for new idea generation. In order to innovate and renew, an organization’s ability to grasp these new ideas is crucial. Equally, it is essential to recognize alternative world views, practices and ideas distributed throughout the organization. Bringing together these alternative world views generates potential for development and renewal. The members of the organization at all levels should be involved in interpreting new ideas, making sense, finding and adapting congruence. It is from any site of such interactions that new insights for innovation can emerge. (Brown & Duguid 1991)

It is a problem of many organizations, that they are trapped within their own world view. They socially construct their environment: organizations produce their enacted environment. (Weick 1979) In order to change, an enacting organization must be able to reconceive not only its environment but also its own identity. By asking different questions, by seeking different sorts of explanations, and by looking from different points of view, different answers and world views may emerge. It is this process of seeing the world anew that allows organizations to see themselves anew and to innovate and renew themselves. (Brown & Duguid 1991, 52, Weick 1979, 169).
First, the existence of different world views and approaches and secondly, the process of discussion, reflection and sense making are seen as premises for innovation. The challenge is how to cultivate these in organizations which strive for effectiveness, tight-coupling, orderliness, core competencies, shared world views and implementation of management strategies. The closure of organization i.e. its inability to recognize and adapt to the current environment inhibits its innovation (March 1991, Brown & Duguid 1991, Weick 1979).

The innovation literature today identifies two ways how to stimulate innovation in an organization. First, there is a structural approach which concentrates on creating organizational structure and mechanisms supporting innovation. Secondly, there is a cultural approach which concentrates on the creation of an innovative climate. (van de Meer 2007) We see these both aspects – cultural and structural – essential. As Schein (1999, 171) emphasizes culture is embedded in structure. From a social-cultural view, people and their actions are sources of innovations. Company’s innovation sensibility is based on individuals and their capability of interacting together and creating new knowledge and new meanings. Individuals need to have a specific space and time for co-creation, forums for originating, composing and interacting, thus they need a creative and invulnerable stage to meet each others. These forums for knowledge creation do not arise automatically they must be built into an organizations’ everyday practices. (Nonaka & Konno 1998)

The traditional hierarchical organizational structure has been noticed to be far too inflexible. There is a common notion that the more permeable and organic the organizational structure, the greater the potential for innovation. Greater organizational flexibility is sought by reduction in hierarchy and decentralizing power, authority, responsibilities and resources to smaller units based around core activities. Usually the change is launched by flattening hierarchies and decentralizing structure; increasing teamwork, autonomy and self-conduct; encouraging multiskilling and new kinds of co-operation. Typically, as determinants of innovative organizational structure in addition to organic flexible design are named sufficient resources incl. slack, communication channels, widely distributed high quality knowledge, shared vision and risk-taking. (Wan et al. 2005, Tiernan et al. 2002, Paalanen et al. forthcoming).

The challenge is the transformation from a traditional mechanistic bureaucratic organization to an open, dynamic and organic form. The restructuring initiatives create considerable cognitive disorder (Schein 1999). Attempts to change organizational structure need to coevolve with changes in social factors, in the ways the world is seen and made sense. A different way of thinking is needed to be able to act and innovate in an open co-operative form (van de Meer 2007, Tiernan et al. 2002, Dodgson, Gann & Salter 2006). Often the basic presumption has been that by changing the structures the behavior will change and the change in attitudes will follow (Cyert & March 1992, Fiol & Lyles 1985). But it has been noticed that the structural changes are insufficient if the culture will not transform alike. The employees try to work as they are used to if the culture does not change congruently with changes in structures (Tiernan et al. 2002, Oikarinen 2008).

In order to be able to capitalize the potential of new organizational forms and open innovation the organizational culture has to change correspondingly. The change of culture is crucial to support new kind of action in organization. By changing the structure of the organization the behavior of individuals can be adjusted. But if the changes of employees’ behavior are made only by adjustment to organizational structures, their innovative behavior and initiatives to development and renewal are endangered. (Oikarinen 2008) The role of the employees as agents of organizational innovation and development is enhanced if structural changes are supported by
cultural changes. In order to institutionalize and make the new ways of working permanent, cultural and structural changes should be supportive. (Tiernan et al. 2002, Oikarinen 2008)

So the management of cultural transformation can be considered essential. But the extent to which leaders can manage the change of recipients’ schemata, world view and culture is questionable. Of course management is in central position in transforming but the socially constructed perspectives suggest that instead of being passive acceptors, change recipients are actually active change creators. They determine the outcomes through social processes of interaction. In decentralized organizations the actions, behaviors, gestures and language of colleagues, and their shared personal experiences, have important direct impact on employees’ culture development and change outcome. The horizontal interactions in organizations and their contribution to cultural transformation have gained less attention in innovation management than vertical interaction or management. (Balogun & Johnson 2004)

The aim of this paper is to study new intervention practices to develop organizational innovation culture. Based on previous theories of organizational culture, learning and interventions we construct a new method for intervention based on applied theatre and drama. We approach innovative culture from a social-cultural perspective and are interested in how dialogues can be enhanced by drama pedagogical processes. We are sketching a new pedagogical innovation tool by constructing a new combination from existing techniques. The suggested approach illustrates the use of research-based theatre first to facilitate the participants’ reflection of their own current social and cultural practices and their understanding of practices and conceptions of colleagues working in other functions. Eventually the aim is to modify organizational culture.

The paper begins with an overview on organizational culture, learning in organizations and applied theatre and drama. Then we explore the possibilities to intervene in the framework of research-based theatre (RBT) and describe our first impressions.

2. Organizational culture

How to cultivate organizational culture is a question without an unambiguous answer. In this paper culture is defined according to Schein (1996) as a set of basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be that a group of people share and that determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and, to some degree, their behavior. Culture is understood as an interaction, communication and sense through symbolic forms. So culture is the whole complex system of society: shared beliefs, knowledge, language, arts, values, behaviours, customs, and morals. According to this definition, in culture the following elements are emphasized: action, awareness, communication between subjects, interaction between symbolic forms and social institutions. (Fornäs 1998, 168-169, Schein 1996)

There are multiple traditions in literature on managing organizational culture: can it be managed and what is meant by managing. Much of the literature on culture change is prescriptive and managerial in orientation (e.g. Peters & Waterman 1982). Many approaches to culture change recommend that employees are willing agents who are powerless and will respond positively to management initiatives. Changes in behavior are seen as premises to cultural change. There is a common presumption that by changing behavior and visible manifestations, changes in values and basic assumption will follow. (Crossan, Lane & White 1999, Harris & Ogbonna 1998, Cyert & March 1992, Fiol & Lyles 1985)
That managerial approach can be criticized by noting that it is only managing behavior, not culture. It has been noticed that formalized attempts to manage organizational culture can have a range of unpredictable and sometimes unintended consequences. Such unintended consequences can range from general acceptance to outright active rejection. So, the conscious management of organizational culture is at worst an impossibility and at best extraordinarily complex. (Harris & Ogbonna 1998)

In this study organizational culture is seen as organic. It grows or emerges within the organization and emphasizes the activity of organizational members as culture makers. (Lindstead & Grafton-Small 1992) An organization provides the normative territory to which members identify. Firstly, identification defines the conventions and rules by which individuals coordinate their behavior, and secondly, it guides the process of social interaction and formation of values and convergent expectations. The act of identification has important implications for the shared assumption and values and thus to the creation of the organizational culture. (Kogut & Zander 1996, Weick & Roberts 1993)

This interconnectedness of culture and identity as well as their tacitness makes their management extremely challenging. As meaning, understanding and learning are situated in an identity, unlearning is difficult. Identity rules out alternative ways to act and to exploit new avenues of development. (Lave & Wenger 1991, Kogut & Zander 1996) It has been emphasized that the attempts to develop behavior should start with the reflection of employees’ conceptions of work (Sandberg 2000). The way an employee concepts his work exposes how he makes sense of his work and what the meaning of work is for the organization. As has been noticed, the ways people actually work usually differ fundamentally from the ways organizations describe that work in manuals, training programs, organizational charts, and job descriptions (Brown & Duguid 1991). And maybe that is one of the reasons to the failure of the attempts to change work practices and thus the culture. As Scheeeres & Rhodes (2006) noticed, the attempts to change organizational culture by formal training actually cemented existing perceptions, beliefs and cultural norms.

Not only the strength of organizational culture but the existence of subcultures as well have been proposed as major obstacles for the organizational change efforts (Detert, Schroeder & Mauriel 2000, Bechky 2003, Harris & Ogbonna 1998). Culture in an organization is pluralist with the existence of subcultures. In one organization there can be many kinds of subcultures. As most significant subcultures Harris and Ogbonna (1998) named those based on location, hierarchical position and service conditions. Bechky (2003) states, that participation in occupational communities structures the understanding of its members as it conducts their language, the locus of their practices and their conceptualization of the product. Schein (1996) identified three particular cultures: operator, engineering and executive culture. He proposes that until executives, engineers, and operators discover that they use different languages and make different assumptions about what is important, and until they learn to treat the other cultures as valid and normal, organizational innovation efforts will continue to fail. To create alignment among the three cultures is of creating enough mutual understanding among them to evolve solutions that will be understood and implemented. Harris and Ogbonna (1998) emphasize that developing a unified and strong organizational culture is not realistic. The feasible aim is to develop strong multiple subcultures guided by overarching principles.

It has been criticized that most culture change efforts proceed with little attention to the pluralistic reality i.e. the importance of subcultures should receive more attention (Detert, Schroeder & Mauriel 2000). The existence of subcultural strenght is mentioned to be a key determinant of employee responses to change efforts. For example, the stronger the extent to which values are consistent and cohesive across the members of the group, the more difficult it is to change it. In
to accomplish organization-wide change, subcultural sensitivity and specific subcultural change efforts are required. Particular emphasis is needed on the interplay between enhancing subcultures (those that particularly embrace the new initiative) and countercultures (those that actively oppose it) in order to understand why some cultural conflicts end with real changes and others with return to status quo. (Harris & Ogbonna 1998)

Existing theories on organizational and cultural change commonly classify employee responses as either adoption or rejection. The study of Harris and Ogbonna (1998) indicates that the majority of employees will respond to change in a manner which is somewhere between total rejection and complete acceptance. So this mid-range of employee responses largely determines the success or failure of a given change effort. For example, when employees seem to have accepted new culture they actually are recycling those aspects which are consistent with the past culture. So the focus of change efforts should concentrate on creating forums for interpreting, discussion, reflection and sense making, not to eliminate resistance and opposition.

3. Learning

The processes of seeing a world anew, innovating, developing and transforming expect learning, both of individuals as well as of organizations. Learning is a process where the interactive relationship between cognition and action is critical. According constructivism-based learning theories individuals construct their own world views by grasping experiences, reflecting and conceptualizing them in social context. Organizational learning is multilevel. New ideas occur and problems are identified by individuals. But they are discussed, reflected, interpreted and made sense with others. Social processes and group dynamics guide interaction. (Kolb 1984, Crossan et al. 1999, Argyris & Schön 1978)

We all know that it is crucial to learn how to co-operate and communicate openly (Harmaakorpi & Melkas 2005). An organization’s internal communications is the basis of innovation (Schein 1996). Gustavsen (1996, p. 8-15) points out the communicative action in everyday practices arguing that language and communication are the key to change in a social context in an organization’s development. Thus, it is imperative to get the workers engaged in an enriching dialogue. The aim is to practice creative and reflective thinking; to exploit the innovation potential hidden in the everyday activities of the employees.

4. Applied theatre and drama

The roots of the theatre rest in the rituals used to strengthen the social activities and belief systems of communities. Through these rituals the functional and performative script was passed on from one generation to another. Modern western theatre could be categorized to Aristotelian dramaturgy and to open dramaturgy. Raymond Saner (1999) uses concepts modern and post modern theater. Aristotelian dramaturgy, conventional modern theater, is linear and causative, in which episodes are constructed through hero’s actions and core narrative (plot). Open dramaturgy is like a post-modern puzzle, episodes are constructed through theme and protean protagonists. The narrative is fractured and unfinished. (Schechner 1988, 25 – 26; Saner 1999, 6-9.) This open dramaturgy could be called also as an example of postmodern dramaturgy. Open dramaturgy inherits narration from the epic drama of Bertolt Brecht. Applied theatre is partly based on Augusto Boal’s theatre practices (Boal 1992, 1995 and 1996). Boal’s theatre practices are a continuum to what Piscator and Brecht have created; art is to be seen as raising awareness. The theatre has in different ways demonstrated “The Great Story”, up till the present day. The applied
Theatre appears as a theatrical tradition which breaks *The Great Story*. At the heart are the multi-voiced personal, local and culture-bonded stories. (Nissley, Taylor & Houden 2004; Paavolainen 2002.)

Previous studies and practices of art-based methods have been based on community art, applied theatre and organization theatre (Darso 2004; Meisiek 2002, 2004; Clark & Mangham 2004; Kantonen 2005; Lacy, 1995; Jacob 1995; Boal 1992, 1995 and 1996). Irving Goffman’s (1959) influence is undisputed when it is a question of life as a theatre. Ian Mangham (1996) advanced that metaphor to a training program and practices of management skills within an organizational setting. Mangham (since 1973 till 2005) has developed the use of theatre in organizations. Mangham anchors his ideas to the work of Kenneth Burke’s (1968) dramaturgical perspective on social and organizational life and the work of Bertolt Brecht’s theatre philosophy. Mangham has studied the idea of aesthetic distance, which has much common with Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt.* (Mangham, 2005, 943-953.) Stefan Meisek (2004) has used the concept of catharsis when studying the possible effects of organization theatre.

Applied theatre most typically focuses on inspecting social problems, communication and relationships. Very often the goals of applied theatre are related to the learning and awareness process (Asikainen 2003). With the use of applied theatre, analogies to social reality can be created, and the meta-language of the theatre enforces the generation of dialogue (Heikkinen 2002, 129).

Schechner states it possible to transform the social system, and by a certain system of rules construct an event referring to reality, thereby creating a meaning referring to reality. (Schechner 1988, 11.) This is also related to the analysis of the relationship between theatre and reality (Frontier 1997, 101-130). An aesthetic context, a theatrical scene, helps to generate a framework and tools to observe the existing situation (“as is”) and create a future vision (“as if”), as well as a reorganization of the relationship between the existing and the imaginary situation. Applied theatre, forum theatre and imagine theatre, provide an opportunity to investigate habits, language and social relationships. The aesthetic space is formed in theatre contexts; it is a specific place of representation in situated time and reality. (Boal 1995, 16-20) One could consider this transformation as a multi-dialogue consisting of “experiencing the other side” (Buber 2002). For example Boal’s theatre techniques, still images, offer an opportunity to handle problems in an fragmatic time. In a *still image* (one technique of Boal) time and reality is conceptual; linear time is modified and checked as episodes. One episode is scanned in a spiral; the past and the future. (Neelands 1990, 4)

In applied theatre, the participants’ interpretations play a crucial part. The applications, narrative, performative and theatrical techniques are based on the notion that in postmodernism, identity must be continually reconstructed through narrative. Applied theatre does not seek to determine the culture norms of an organization; they are used to observing and interpreting the internal socio-cultural climate and actions. In a dramatised situation the participant is given an active role, he or she is able through the character to examine the problem and produce different points of view on the subject at hand. The form of applied theatre is referring to a constructivist concept of learning (Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1994) and, to be more specific social constructionism. In where the learner-actor is active, participating and empowered to change. Thus, knowledge is not merely transferred; it is a diverse system of searching, selecting, organising and interpreting knowledge whereby the learner, building on prior knowledge and through subjective experiences, interprets the social reality. From the socio-cultural point of view, thinking also happens collectively between and within people. The dialogue takes place in the action of giving and receiving meanings according to commonly agreed rules. This emphasizes that we think in a

In theatrical action, in the world of fiction, observations are made of reality and *vice versa*; reality is observed and its elements are dramatised into fiction. The outcome is an understanding; a system of new meanings opened up by observation and interpretation, where an individual experience is an important observation. The key factor in learning is aesthetic distance in which the outcome at best is a multivoiced understanding. An aesthetic context is a system of new meanings opened up by observation and interpretation, where an individual experience is important. It could be described as a dialogue as in Martin Buber’s (2002) definition; observing, looking on and becoming aware. As we have already earlier pointed, experience alone is not enough; the generation of a new understanding necessitates systematic observation and critical consideration, as well as a conscious understanding and conceptualisation of the experience (Mezirow 1991, Kolb 1984, Lintunen 1995, 111). In theatrical action, knowledge absorption needs active generation (Lintunen 1995, 113). It takes place in a group, as a social and collective action. The group work and group talk is directed by social and aesthetic rules, in a theatre context the social norms could be exposed through different voices. Group action is emphasized and with it, the new provision of meanings. (Heikkinen 2002, 95). Unfortunately this also offers an opportunity of using manipulative learning methods, thus it is exceedingly important to expose the “politics of performance” of theatre in an organization. It is essential to understand that theatre must not be a manipulative tool for management, control and power relationships must be taken into account when scripting performances and techniques in organization theatre. (Nissley, Taylor & Houden, 2004, 819-825)

5. Research-based theatre interaction

In this case theatrical approach is based on Augusto Boal’s theatre practices and applied theatre-based techniques, of which we in this study use the concept research-based theatre (RBT). RBT can be compared to participatory action research (Kemmis & Wilkinson 1998; Kemmis & McTaggart 1988) process. RBT connects dramatic art work, research documentation and education. By using RBT, socio-cultural norms and tensions are attempted to be highlighted between different people in an organization, and thus make them aware of work practices and social representation After that it might be possible to change the culture. This kind of a change process is more social and humanistic than technical. (cf Taylor 2003, 1-4; Darsø 2004, 86-90; Sydänmaanlakka 2003).

The concept of Organization theatre is adopted as a name for the team of applied theatre workers in our research and development project. Professional applied theatre workers are Pirre Toikkanen and Raili Heikkilä. According to them the identity of theatre workers is based on theatre practices of Brecht and Boal. Organization theatre aims at drafting a learning script which will involve employees during and between theatre-based training sessions. The work of Organization theatre is a part of RBT.

RBT interest is focused on how to see social representations (Helkama, Myllyniemi & Liekkinen 2001) in own organizations. We assume that through narrative and theatrical stories participants create codes which they can use in an introspective way when interpreting interactions and relationships in work situations and also in their own organization culture. Research material is collected by applying episodic interview. In episodic interview several methods are included in the same research. It is based on the theory of social representation formed by Moscovici, thus
being appropriate for research problems which examine how the different subcultures interpret social reality and experiences. (Saastamoinen 1999.)

RBT data (work stories) are analyzed by using Kenneth Burke’s (1968) *dramatistic perspective*. Via follow-up questions all the group stories are retold and plotted into three different perspectives (which are marketing, pre-developing and production).
1. ACT: what is done?
2. SCENE: when and where is it done?
3. AGENT: who does it?
4. AGENCY: how does he or she do it?
5. PURPOSE: why is it done?

**Problem formulation through stories**

Theatre in organizations in our research and development project could be defined as a learning interaction in which learning is understood as a knowledge creation process of interaction and sense making between workers. It could be described as learning by doing (John Dewey) and when theatre method is used it could also be described as thinking by doing (as Allan Owens has described it). Knowledge creation environment is constructed through applied theatre, whereas learning methods in organization theatre are applied from self-directed learning in which participants improve their ability to work together in a collaborative way as well as their understanding and awareness of practices and situation related to innovativeness. Figure 1 describes the three elements of theatre in organizations.
Our assumption is that innovation capability in an organization requires more social and collaborative methods among different teams and units inside the organization as well as information brokerage outside it. With help of research-based theatre we enquire what kind of a transforming script is to be modified from applied theatre. Research-based theatre is a method used in this study to enquire and construct a transformation script from a combination of theatre, collective learning and innovation business. Previous research projects have encouraged creating novel approaches to culture change. (Paalanen, Pässilä & Paalanen forthcoming)

In our research and development project we construct and pilot a new intervention method based on theatre and Schein’s (1999) framework of phases in problem solving. Schein has developed a basic model from sensitivity training programs of Richard Wallen, presented in Figure 2. The model consists of two cycles of activity – actions that occur before and after the decision to be taken. The first cycle consists of three phases: problem formulation, generating proposals for action and hypothesizing meanings of proposed solutions or testing and evaluating them before action. The second cycle also consists of three phases: action planning, action steps and evaluation of the action steps. According to Schein, every phase needs to be managed in a particular way. (Schein 1999, 152-153) In this paper we concentrate on the first phase, i.e. problem formulation.
In our research and development project we understand theatre as collective learning, where the understanding of an individual is developed in a co-operative social context, and meanings are made of the experiences of the participants. The key factor here is a collective growth of common and shared understanding constructed using theatre as a narrative approach. The theatre method offers an opportunity to create forums where people can join and share a common vision of change and the changing practices. Therefore, we try to characterize problem formulation through the narrative method.

Narratives can be helpful when the goal is to become aware of the causes of problems or symptoms, as Schein would say. In this case, the core of cultural transformation is in the micro-level learning process: how to recognize the identity of one’s own group, roles and social norms, in other words, tracking the symptoms.

For tracking the symptoms we are gathering knowledge from social relationships by using a narrative method; we call this story telling technique “work story”. With help of the work story, the story teller can step outside the problem. It is more a collective story than a story of one
individual. Through narration the participants can learn from their own experience, and make their own experience accessible to others.

**Work story – training session with different work units and teams**

We test this methodology in a big Finnish industrial company in winter 2008. So far we have had five training sessions. In one session all the participants (9 – 28 persons) represent the same department. During the session the participants are further divided into smaller groups (4 – 7 persons). We consider these groups represent subcultures. With help of theatrical pictures each group constructs a story which describes a problematic event step by step. It is an attempt to reconstruct the process of problematic situation with the focus more on symptoms than on consequences.

Following picture (Fig. 3) is an example of the theatrical pictures used in activating the storytelling. There are also questions in theatrical pictures i.e. what has just happened?

![Theatrical picture example](image)

**Figure 3.** Example of a theatrical picture

Theatrical pictures are produced in a drama workshop by professional theatre workers, Minna Partanen and Mari Kanervaniemi along with their students. Drama workshop was a process of an experimental session held in May 2006. During the sessions we linked three different drama techniques. The foundation was Image theatre of Boal to which we linked elements of mask theatre and Keith Johnstone’s technique of low and high status.

The storytelling, work story, leads employees to issues which should be changed. Stories are told in three steps. Firstly, individual stories are told by writing (4 pictures and one “free” story altogether 30 minutes), secondly, a verbal story is gathered together in groups (eight pictures are to be reorganized to a description of a problematic episode which ends in a situation where client is not satisfied; altogether 45 minutes) and thirdly, the groups narrate their own story to each other (45 minutes). In the end reflective discussion is held, facilitated by researchers (15 - 30 minutes).
The aim of this first training session is to clarify what are the problematic issues defined by different work units (marketing, pre-developing and production) and which are the symptoms they pinpoint. Through work stories three different perspectives bring difficulties to light. This is an employee-orientated way of defining the turning points of problematic situations, seen from perspectives of the different subcultures. The goal is to find opportunities and invent practises for future. The training session is a participatory and interactive learning event, in which the employees are activators. The learning target is to recreate significant episodes of the workers experiences and learn from experiences.

The next training session will be focused on producing proposals for solution, and the tool for that is organization theatre. Through theatre, different stories will be exposed and together with participants we will construct a common new story – how to do things differently. The learning agenda is focused on increasing co-operation between work units and co-creation by a constructed and shared interpretation.

6. Conclusions

Our research and development project has just begun and any far-reaching conclusions are impossible to make. However, our first impressions are very encouraging. Firstly, the feedback of participants was very positive. The discussion during the training sessions was active and various viewpoints were highlighted. The participants told us this was such a new approach they had not experienced before. Secondly, the empirical data – narratives – we have gathered is very rich. Narratives are detailed, animated descriptions of various series of events. Many of those stories do not only picture occasions, they also illustrate the feelings and thoughts of participants. We considered our first steps in developing organizational innovation culture by theatre-based methods worth continuing.

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