Research-based Theater as a Facilitator of Organizational Learning

12

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Toward Polyphony and Joy

Once upon a time, a humanist, economists, artists, an industrial manager, sales managers, and researchers sat around a table and searched for common ground. As the two researchers, we were members of this group when the following questions cropped up: "Is the present organization management so tied to the traditional orientation of control and command that the humanistic dimension of the organization as a community of individuals has been forgotten? Where is the process of joy and enthusiasm?" The managers thought that it might be obscured by the contemporary focus on efficiency and analytical problem-solving. Everyone present wondered whether the existing situation of complex organization was causing people's holistic perspective to be blocked behind technical rationality. What if there is hidden learning potential?

In that phase of searching for ways to tackle these probing questions, the humanist, economists, artists, industrial manager, and sales managers pointed out the social dimension of every employee's knowledge creation. The research and development process from which this chapter stems therefore started with the experimental hypotheses that the aim of organizational development was to stimulate dialogue within an organization through art-based learning practices and that the aim of the research that would be needed to support that process was to describe a learning process based on art-based methods and action-based learning. With the help of art-based actions, particularly applied theater, my coauthor and I wanted to find out how employees are able to become sense-makers of organizational events. Different voices, human experiences, and worldviews of an organization were treasured. Hence, we ask in this study (a) whether polyphonic learning space can be constructed

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by combining theater techniques and applying them to that space and (b) what kind of knowledge creation process might arise from this endeavor. In polyphonic learning spaces a key element of change and organizational events are seen as a continuous, possibly evolving, cumulative, and emergent process (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, 2005; Weick & Quinn, 1999). From this perspective learning is a collective and interpretive action process in which the members of an organization construct meanings together and change itself is a pattern of endless modifications in day-to-day work and social practices (Abma, 2000; Pässilä, Oikarinen, & Kallio, 2013).

We follow the path that Weick (1979, 1995), Schein (1999), and Czarniawska (2001, 2008) have pioneered, that of loosely organized actions, concrete incidents, and the power of narratives. However, we move further along the course of dialogue and suggest that if an organization is able to make sense of events related to a problem and become empowered through art-based action (Abma, 2000; Barry & Hansen, 2008; Barry & Meisiek, 2010; Boal, 1995), then its members will be able to create new relationships that tie them together in a fresh way. Our contribution to the discussion of organizational learning and knowledge creation is to stress the social infrastructure of an organization by asserting that narratives encourage engagement (employees with different perspectives doing things together) and that it is possible to gain knowledge by interpreting personal experiences.

Through a case study we describe an interpretive action approach to learning where employees, managers, researchers, and artists seek and create polyphonic understanding together. (For an explanation of polyphonic organizational learning, from which the concept of polyphonic space is derived, see Oswick, Anthony, Keenoy, Mangham, & Grant, 2000.) Polyphonic space inside an organization is built on a dialogue in which the role of management changes from the setting of goals to the shaping of directions (Lester & Piore, 2004; Oswick et al., 2000; Palmer & Dunford, 2008). In construction of the polyphonic space, our research and development is based on the ideas of the Brazilian theater philosopher and practitioner Augusto Boal, who has applied theater-based techniques to various purposes (Boal, 1995; Nissley, Taylor, & Houden, 2004; Schreyögg & Höpfl, 2004; Taylor, 2003).

In the first three sections of this chapter, we describe the theoretical and methodological framework of the study. In the second and third sections we also discuss learning and theater in an organization. The fourth section deals with research orientation and the application of theater in an organization. We then turn to the description of the case we researched and to our conclusions, in which we suggest that polyphonic space opens temporarily between participants with the help of aesthetic distance and enriches the participants' way of being and relating. The concept of aesthetic distancing means embodied and cognitive engagement in a process wherein participants use their senses, bodies, and experiences to reflect on their experiences of social reality of work and those of others with the help of imaginative thinking. Imaginative thinking is done via various theatrical techniques. Metaphors, for example, create aesthetic distance and enable to people deal with sensitive work-related issues.

Facilitating Learning Within an Organization

Boal (1995) claims that theater is a way to form knowledge, and the artists in our case study readily agreed with him. At a practical level Boalian theater is a learning dialogue where conceptual thinking and awareness are based on everyday experiences. This type of learning dialogue is very sensitive and leaves its speakers vulnerable. Therefore, it should be facilitated with full respect for each individual. Mezirow (2000) and Kolb (1984) point out that individuals construct their own worldviews by grasping experiences and reflecting upon and conceptualizing them in a social context. In an ideal learning situation, learners comprehend their own sense-making and schemas and thus are able to generate a deeper understanding of their own organization and work than in suboptimal contexts. Through sense-making new ideas may occur, and learners may identify problems and interpret them with others in social processes (Abma, 2003; Argyris & Schön, 1978; Boonstra & de Caluwé, 2007; Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999; Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). Although even these human issues are well known in organizations (see, for example, Abma, 2003; Brown & Duguid, 1991; March, 1991; Marshak & Grant, 2008; Van de Ven, Rogers, Bechara, & Sun, 2008), mainstream traditional management is concerned with controlling and monitoring business activities. The managers in our case study pointed out that learning is too often impeded by the demands of unanimity, operational effectiveness, analytical problem-solving, and technical rationality. Organizational diversity comes to be seen as a threat, not a possibility.

At this juncture Weick (1979, 1995) might point out that valuing an organization as a collection of multiple, socially constructed, loosely coupled realities with competing interests and conceptions contributes to learning possibilities. Tying into "Weickian tradition," we claim that if an organization wants to provide for dialogic learning, it has to create a safe environment and procedures for nurturing diverse worldviews among its employees (see also Chap. 13, McNiff, in this volume). For this reason we argue that events in an organization and narrative reflection (Czarniawska, 2008) on them offer possibilities for learning (Pässilä, Oikarinen, & Vince, 2012). Stories, narratives, and myths are practical tools for framing new, shared meanings, changing mindsets (Ford & Ford, 1995; Marshak & Grant, 2008), and creating self-understanding in an organization (Abma, 2003; Nissley, 2010; Reissner, 2008). Narratives may be used in various contexts in an organization. Bruner (1996), for example, calls attention to narratives as an expression of the individuals' ways of constructing meanings, and Hänninen (1999) points out the process of inner narratives and socialization. By contrast, Gergen (1994); Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004) describes a more collective and community view of narratives. Lämsä and Sintonen (2006) argue for structuring the interactions in an organization, Oswick et al. (2000) concentrate on interrelationships, and Rhodes (1996) has an interest in the narrative approach to change.

By this time the economists, humanists, artists, industrial managers, sales managers, and researchers around the table were arguing again. They had various interests, all headed in different directions. As the storm settled, they decided to follow the human-related path, which treats narratives as constructed images of experience

that connote real life but are not actually images of reality. The group's members shared Jarnagin and Slocum's (2007) argumentation that narratives more or less channel a logical, intuitive, and emotional understanding when employees interpret internal sociocultural actions in the work community (p. 294). They also ascribed to in Oswick et al.'s (2000) application of narratives to dialogic scripting, a creative process of fictionalizing a real event. The group supposed that narratives enable the learners to disengage themselves from the context-specific elements of the event and to attend to the underlying "intertextual aspects."

Scripting is a way of gaining aesthetic distance and of interpreting one's own organization with the help of narratives. A group selects a key incident and uses it as a springboard to produce a fictionalized narrative (script) through collective interaction. According to Abma (2003) and Reissner (2008), a storyteller as a learner has an active role. The storyteller is able to examine the problem and its possibilities and to produce different points of view on the subject at hand through the script. Bruner (1986, 1990) emphasizes that learning through narratives is a sensitive system of searching, selecting, organizing, and interpretation whereby the learners, building on knowledge drawn from subjective experiences, interpret their social reality together (Gergen, 1994). The dialogue during this interaction to gain aesthetic distance takes place in the act of giving and receiving meanings (Hänninen, 1999).

Theater in an Organization

Theater has attracted increasing attention as an intervention technique, as a resource or technology in organizational change, development, and learning (Chap. 11, Berthoin Antal, in this volume; Boje & Rosile, 2003; Clark, 2008; Darsø, 2004; Josendal & Skarholt, 2006; Meisiek, 2002; Nissley et al., 2004; Schiuma, 2011; Schreyögg & Höpfl, 2004). The practical application of various theater techniques to an organizational setting has increased as well (Berthoin Antal, 2009; Meisiek, 2004; Meisiek & Barry, 2007). Barry (2008) thinks that this mounting interest is related to a new paradigm of artful turn in organization studies. With our study we are taking part in the discussion of application (Mienczakowski, 1995; Mienczakowski & Morgan, 2001; Mienczakowski, Smith, & Sinclair, 1996) that centers on the interpretation of existing situations from different points of view. Standing in this tradition, we offer a way to see organizational events differently with the help of art, especially its distancing effect. From the perspective of art education, dialogic scripting is like a serious playfulness; people interpret their own actions in a context of play (Heikkinen, 2002). Drawing on previous research in a field of applied theater, we propose an approach called *research-based theater* (RBT) as a practical orientation and method to bringing together alternative worldviews distributed throughout the organization.

From the RBT tradition, we understand art-based action in a frame of postmodernism rather than of modernism. Therefore, our theater philosophy and practices related to organizational learning are based on open dramaturgy, which inherits narration from the epic drama of Bertolt Brecht (1964). Brecht was a creator of the

distancing effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*, also known as the alienation effect and the estrangement effect), which has interesting potential for organizational learning. Theater offers techniques for both expressing and challenging one's own worldviews and for interpreting the worldviews, attitudes, and behavior of others. In this sense theater operates in a field of experiential and transformative learning (Boal, 1992, 1995, 1996). Because communicating the views of different groups is the key to deepening peoples' understanding within an organization, it is important to bridge gaps and facilitate discourse between different work units, to plot the reality together, so to speak.

The theater practices examined by Boal (1992, 1995, 1996), including open dramaturgy, are considered postmodern in that the theater acquires the new role of heightening awareness and plotting reality (Taussig & Schechner, 1994). Unlike conventional modern theater or Aristotelian dramaturgy, in which episodes are constructed through a hero's actions in a linear and causative plot, open dramaturgy is like a puzzle. Likewise, we approach the organization as a puzzle, seeing it as a fragmented and open-ended community; its narratives, as fractured and unfinished stories, even as a multinarration (Schechner, 1988) or, from the perspective of narrative organizational studies, an *ante narrative*, as Boje (2001) suggests.

In the context of diversity, theater is not about finding one solution or truth. In theatrical interactions, the participants explore many different meanings hiding somewhere in the processes of finding solutions and possibilities (Boje, Luhman, & Cunliffe, 2003; Pässilä, 2012). In keeping with Clark and Mangham (2004), we define RBT as a way of telling polyphonic stories inside an organization. Our definition casts theater as a performative narration formed by gesture, text, and interpretation.

The roots of applied theater lie within the community-based orientation of theater. The meaning of theater is more like storytelling than a performing art (Nissley et al., 2004), and its pedagogical core is situated in critical learning (Asikainen, 2003). The process of plotting reality is based on the philosophy of theater that emphasizes significant incompleteness and insufficiency (Heikkinen, 2002; Oddey, 1994); in the context of plotting, reality is more puzzling than explanatory. Theater techniques can help build bridges between analogies and social reality, with the metalanguage of the theater promoting the generation of dialogue (Asikainen, 2003; Heikkinen, 2002), or as Boal (1995) puts it, "making thought visible" (p. 137). We have applied this metalanguage to the process of "making representations and power relationships visible" and to Burke's (1969) idea of a dramatic analysis of reality, an inquiry in which we are interested in "different 'realities'" (Rhodes, 1996, 6th heading: "The sides of the story") among communities within an organization. The function of applied theater is like a transformative agent or mirror. The audience has an active role as a storyteller and sense-maker deeply involved in the situation, in which communication is shaped by the interpretation of different situations that are presented or constructed during drama (Boal, 1995). Theater thereby becomes a communicational space for conversation and interpretation, setting things in motion, raising people's awareness, breaking gridlocks, shaking things up, and unfreezing them (Ford & Ford, 1995; Heikkinen, 2002; Marshak & Grant, 2008; Oswick et al., 2000; Pässilä et al., 2013).

Theater as an Aesthetic Learning Space

In RBT the interactions are based on Boal's Image Theatre approach (Boal, 1995), by which the human body is used as a tool to represent experiences in life: attitudes, feelings, behaviors, ideas, and patterns of power relationships. The interest in practical and research learning lies in dialogue that unfolds in a performance context through an encounter between members of the organization and trained theatre actors. If circumstances are favorable, the learning may emerge in a social space between fiction and fact, between encounters of individuals. The still images (which illustrate events happening in organization) are symbolic depictions of something that has happened or could happen in real life. When people interpret body images, they reconstruct and reflect on their own view of the issue.

Frozen Images as a Learning Initiative in an Aesthetic Learning Space

In our study a Boalian technique called *frozen images* is applied as a data-collection method and as a narrative technique for reflection. The participants (individually or in groups) create and reflect on an image or an impression of a situation. Frozen images offer an opportunity to treat problems in fragmented time. In a frozen image, time and reality are conceptual; linear time is modified and checked as episodes from the past and from the future (Neelands, 1990, p. 4).

Boal explains aesthetic space through the concept of *metaxis*, the idea that symbolic actions in a role-play scene help the participants observe the existing situation ("as is") and a nonexisting possibility ("as if") in order to investigate habits, beliefs, language, feelings, and social relationships. The aesthetic space, formed through imitation in drama, is a specific place of representation (*mimesis)* situated in time and reality. It is a human property that allows people to observe themselves in action with the aid of aesthetic distance. The self-knowledge thereby acquired empowers the person "to be the subject (the one who observes) of another subject (the one who acts)" (Boal, 1995, pp. 13–20).

Understanding in Between, in the Metaxis of Aesthetic Learning Space

Aesthetic space stimulates knowledge creation in a specific manner, enabling transformational learning processes to arise in reflections and in the interpretation between the experience of lived and fictional life situations. Similarly, the pedagogical core of applied theater is situated in reflective and critical learning, but the actual here-and-now moment of subjective understanding is situated between, in the *metaxis* of, interpretations of imitations constructed in the aesthetic space (Boal, 1995). We see vast learning potential and an interesting subject for research in the aesthetic space as a forum for contextual and situated understanding and as a way to share tacit and self-transcending knowledge. As a learning space where sense-making

takes place, theater sets up a template allowing for the observation of familiar taken-for-granted reality from an unfamiliar angle, one that uses well-known elements and signs of daily work life in a fictional setting. The character of reality as a social construction may become apparent; the taken-for-granted reality is likely to become contingent, making it evident that it could be different. This duplication process is not straightforward. It does not produce unequivocal, predictable outcomes, so it is unnecessary to guide the process as a linear project (Schreyögg & Höpfl, 2004).

Research Orientation—Acting on the Organization from Within It?

The relationship between studying an organization and acting on it from within and with its members was integral. The research had two levels: (a) problems of a rather conceptual nature that were related to research and (b) practical problems related to the organization's development work. We posed the following research questions:

1. In what way could applied theater be a device for research?
   - In terms of theater as a process of acquiring knowledge, how can personal and unformulated knowledge be shared with others? What kind of a co-construction and creation process of new knowledge does RBT represent?
2. How can an organization construct a polyphonic space for organizational learning?
   - How should learning processes be triggered by art-based techniques? How can ideals and ideas of all the organization's members be shared organizationally?

These questions suggested qualitative research, which involves a participative, subjectivist investigation of a detailed case. The importance of participatory and democratic elements was outlined in both the research and the development process. Figure 12.1 illustrates our combination of research and development work in an organization.

The formulation of the research problem guided us to a phenomenological constructivist view of knowledge. The main idea, both theoretically and practically, was that the learning process in an organization is a social and cultural event, where all the members of the organization (with various competences, backgrounds, needs, skills, experiences, and feelings) should be seen and heard, and that everyone's ideals and experiences are valued. Taking on this view, we started our process of action
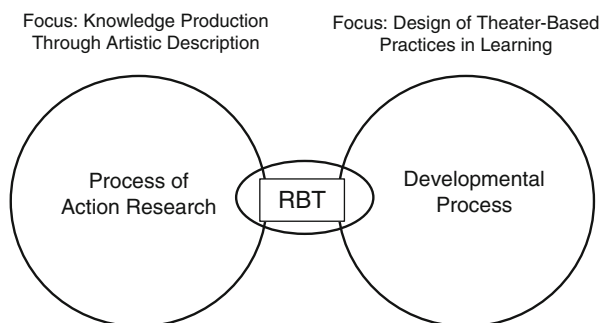

Fig. 12.1 Combining action research and development processes by means of research-based theater (RBT)

research. Instead of taking an analytical problem-solving or linear decision-making approach, we decided to pursue a more interpretive line by which we would study together with the members of the selected company how to create a polyphonic space that would enrich learning and the generation of knowledge among all of them. A second central aspect of the research was theater's relation to embodied tacit knowledge—the actual process and art of doing something in a specific context, not just talking about it.

Our research orientation emphasized social interaction between people and the changing practices of social processes (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). We created forums in which people could join each other as co-participants in developing the practices related to their daily work life (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). The aim was to create a process in which people collectively try to understand how they stand in relation to and interact with one another and the world. This approach included sense-making dialogue. According to Barry (2008), the artistic approach stresses problem-finding, and the narrative approach revolves around the artful reframing of problems. By his definition, which we adopted, artistic actions in research are an iterative and emergent perspective on a problem.

As we worked on our case study, we encountered a multilayered process of action research in which various aims existed. We found it crucial to be aware of one's own position, power, and purpose when acting within an organization. One critical phase of action research became evident: The organization's practical orientation to the process accommodated the desire of the members to improve effectiveness through functional social practices. Managers and employees sought concrete outcomes and benefits. However, we researchers had humanistic aspirations for change, desiring to see how the social dimension of the learning process is shaped and shifted by the ways the members of the organization see and understand themselves (Barry, 2008; Kemmis, 2001). The artists, for their part, were also interested in actions and events related to the artistic process and play that increase possibilities for emancipation, empowerment, or both. Various existing interests caused a measure of communicational confusion that signaled a lack of common ground and shared language. RBT seemed to reveal the power relationships among different communities inside the organization. Power issues are exceedingly hard to deal with, and they made it difficult to see and interpret existing situations from different points of view. As a result, researchers and artists were involved in various social processes (roles, rules, needs, interests, feelings, emotions, and power between different groups) during interactions.

Even though there was agreement that the learning process would allow also for an interpretive orientation to the organizational landscape, the needs for actions were quite often framed only from a rational and instrumental perspective. The artists in particular could not understand the worldview of functional rationality. They were amazed at how members of the organization claimed that only rationality drives practices. The artists argued that all human practices also have social elements. By the same token, participatory action research emphasizes the dynamics of social factors related to knowledge creation. Learning and action researcher Kemmis (2001), too, claims that social elements (power, trust, engagement, collaboration, and communication) operate more or less through interpretation.

Case Description

Our intention with this case study on RBT as a vehicle for organizational learning to describe a knowledge creation process derived from art-based methods and action-based learning. The enterprise we worked with was a factory of a multinational forestry company in Finland. This company operated (and still does operate) on a fiercely competitive market in an industry whose entire tradition is shifting in Finland and the rest of Europe. In the course of our study, several downsizings of forestry enterprises occurred in Finland, with the individual factories having to modernize themselves and be innovative in order to survive. The need for change was in the air. Across the production, sales, and product development units of our case company, the situation had culminated in a shower of accusations about who was to blame. This type of tension could hardly be solved in an analytical way or through top-down management, so the starting point of the research in this organization was the need for connections between people inside it.

The first challenge was to bridge different views—regarding art, artists, art education, research, researchers, and development work; the daily operations of the factory, employees, and managers; innovation activities; and learning—to have them converge on a joint, meaningful point of interest. Efforts to connect people were far from harmonious. The process was sometimes chaotic, and participants survived it by discussing with each another and listening to "others' odd" voices. An engineering manager and an applied theater artist worked hard together to build common ground for the participants. At the outset we had both virtual and face-to-face conversations and meetings between theater workers and the researchers, the researchers and the managers, the researchers and the employees, and the employees and the managers. It took many discussions to create a shared, multivoiced vision of what everyone involved was to achieve, and it changed during the journey. Two basic elements of the research vision on which agreement was eventually reached were that everyone involved was interested in the employees' sense-making and that the employees felt that it is important to express their views. From that point onward, we researchers understood theater as an active, participatory place for sense-*making* (as a learning action) as well as sense-*breaking* (as unlearning and critical reflection) in an organization.

In the spring of 2008, about 70 workers of our case company started participating in the learning process, which lasted for 18 months altogether. This chapter probes the first intense 3-month period. In keeping with action research practice, interventions in the organization were recorded on videotape. We realized that it would be difficult to describe the richness of the interactions during the research process adequately, so we captured events and feelings in a 12-min movie that served as a basis for our traditional research report.

A Case Based on Participatory Action Research

Our use of theater for closely, yet sensitively, examining the social interactions and practices of our case organization—how people act, react, think, talk, and feel—had the main goal of helping us understand its *social* infrastructure, for we
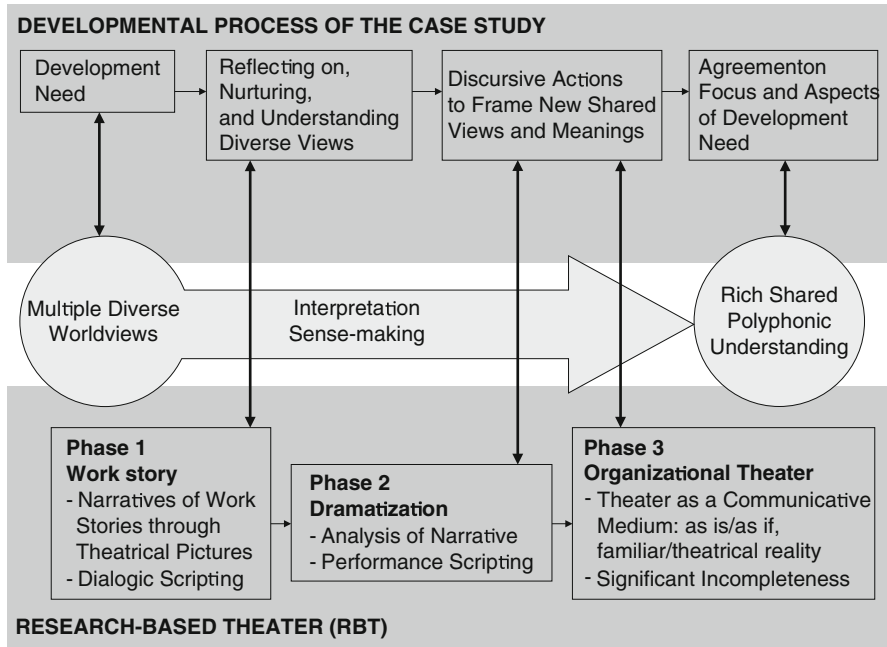
DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF THE CASE STUDY

| Development Need | → | Reflecting on, Nurturing, and Understanding Diverse Views | → | Discursive Actions to Frame New Shared Views and Meanings | → | Agreementon Focus and Aspects of Development Need |

Multiple Diverse Worldviews

Interpretation Sense-making

Rich Shared Polyphonic Understanding

Phase 1 Work story
- Narratives of Work Stories through Theatrical Pictures
- Dialogic Scripting

Phase 2 Dramatization
- Analysis of Narrative
- Performance Scripting

Phase 3 Organizational Theater
- Theater as a Communicative Medium: as is/as if, familiar/theatrical reality
- Significant Incompleteness

RESEARCH-BASED THEATER (RBT)

Fig. 12.2 The developmental process of the case study

noticed that the company's *technological* infrastructure had primacy. The production and manufacturing process had been attended to, but human processes had been accorded less importance. Figure 12.2 illustrates our approach to knowledge creation, specifically, the manner in which we linked interpretive process and art-based activities into the case study's development process. Our theoretical assumption was that RBT is a way to form knowledge. At a practical level it is a learning event and a dialogue in which conceptual thinking and awareness is constructed and based on everyday experiences.

Plotting Realities with the Help of Theatrical Pictures (Phase 1)

The interactions began with five separate work-story workshops (9–28 people in each) whose participants were employees and managers from the same department. We researchers wanted to hear what the employees from various units—production, post-production, sales, design—had to say about the situation in the organization. First, the participants recalled individual experiences. They were then divided into smaller groups of 4–7 people. With the help of seven premade theatrical pictures (see Fig. 12.3), the members of each group collectively constructed a story related to significant moments in their daily work. These work-story interventions were an application of a specific Boalian resource, the frozen-image technique from Image

Fig. 12.3 The sets of theatrical pictures used to narrate work stories in the case study

Theatre—by which combined elements of mask theater and Johnstone's (1981) technique of low and high status. Participants used the theatrical pictures[1] to trace significant meanings in the lived and experienced social life of the organization. They were instructed to interpret pictures as images of reality: "Imagine that these pictures are a description of what happens in your company." The employees then sequenced the pictures and plotted their story by telling what is done; when and where it is done; and who does it, how, and why. Through storytelling, members of the same work unit shared their ideals and ideas of the organization and their work. The main idea of this phase was dialogic scripting. We asked the employees to tell the story step by step.

Phases of Research-Based Theater

In phase 1 we collected stories about details of the organization's life. People told us how they act in a specific situation, how they see each other, what kind of tensions are related to encounters, what people say to each other, what they think of each other, and how they feel (see Fig. 12.2). The objective of this phase was to shape a space for interaction and discourse inside the different work units. Table 12.1 illustrates the learning focus and potential mode of knowledge creation in this phase.

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[1] As part of a larger research project, Anne Pässilä has created and produced over 500 such theatrical pictures (photographs of still images) with a graphic designer, photographer, and three actors. Each image, or sequence of images, was constructed on the basis of five elements of drama—act, scene, agent, agency, purpose (Burke, 1969) and from other influences and resources, including Boal's (1995) practices of image theater, mask theater (based on Brecht's alienation effect), and the "statues" technique of improvisation theater (Johnstone, 1981).

Table 12.1 Phase 1 of the case study on constructing polyphonic space: the work story

Technique	Learning focus
Storytelling interventions based on theatrical pictures at five different work units (January 2008)	To reflect on one's own experience
	To construct a shared meaning of the experience
	To provide for experiential knowing

Table 12.2 Phase 2 of the case study on constructing polyphonic space: dramatization of narratives

Technique	Learning focus
Researchers and artists analyze employees' stories and devise a script based on them, then dramatize the script for performance (seven role-play scenes) and rehearse the scenes with the employees (January–March 2008)	To make groups' worldviews visible
	To make power relationships visible from different perspectives
	To design reflective questioning: How to define and share relevancy of knowledge

In the dramatization of these narratives (phase 2, see Fig. 12.2), researchers and artists analyzed the narratives, scripted stories, and translated them into performance—into theatrical scenes (performance scripting). This step resulted in stories illustrating the employees' experiences, revealing concrete events, feelings, fears, hopes, and tensions. Analysis began with evocative reading of the stories through dramaturgical lenses. The researchers and artists traced what employees were doing and why and categorized the stories into themes that pointed in the same direction: the relationships between the groups inside the organization and the power struggles concealed in these relationships. Table 12.2 explains the learning focus in the dramatization phase.

Role-play scenes were the triggers for the action-based learning in the third phase of the intervention, organizational theater (see Fig. 12.2), in which the intent was to reveal barriers and blocks in communication and to uncover the problem through the use of play-acting and an action-based learning assignment. During the theater session, the members of the organization watched theatrical scenes enacted by trained applied theater actors and then interpreted what they saw. Events were situated in the context of daily work and events were performed by three main characters on stage: a customer, a salesperson, and an operator from the production line. After each role-play scene, the participants reflected in groups on what had happened in the scene. Next, the members of each group summarized their conversation and the spectrum of the meanings, shared it with the other groups, and commented on each other's views.

The employees and managers worked together in small groups, each of which had one participant from the five different work units. In this phase, the group members outlined the problems and potential inherent in the events on stage. They analyzed themselves by dialoguing about their own practices, behaviors, and relationships. Employees and managers shared, repeated, amplified, and interpreted the social practices of everyday work and reinterpreted as well as resequenced them. Table 12.3 illustrates the learning focus in this phase.

Table 12.3 Phase 3 of the study on constructing polyphonic space: organizational theater

Technique	Learning focus
Participatory intervention of applied theater and reflective questioning	To discuss different worldviews, uncover problems, question and make assumptions transparent, confront things taken-for-granted, trace potential from one work unit to the next
	To redefine and reconstruct narratives
	To increase employees' creation of knowledge about their worldviews on the basis of their own sense-making

Based on this experience, employees suggested practical actions that concentrated on how to change the existing situation. They shared ideals and ideas about what kinds of social engagements needed to be done, what skills they would need to reach their target, how they would encourage each other, how they would learn from each other and from the customers, and what kind of plan they required to do it. They engaged in problem-shifting and planned their own development targets. The following dialogue illustrates the concept of aesthetic distance manifested by their insights.

Salesman: You see, these two men at stage one from production and one from the sales department don't understand each other.

Operator: This person from production does not know that the information has changed. Nobody has told him.

Salesman: So he is working with the wrong data.

Operator: But is it his fault?

Salesman: He is making a mistake because of someone else.

Operator: Of course, in the end it is always the production unit's fault.

Being very sensitive this type of dialogue is facilitated by aesthetic distance. Even as members of the organization were discussing what was happening on the stage, they were also interpreting their own behavior, communication, and attitudes by gaining distance from it. Without such openness and atmosphere of trust, it becomes difficult to do things together or construct an image of one's own organization. In an ideal situation, members of the organization draw a picture of their own sense-making and schemas and are then able to deepen their understanding of their own organizational actions and how they are related to it. Our claim, based on this case, is that space for creating knowledge is formed among the employees, between them and managers, and between both those groups and the actions on stage. Play and imagination created an atmosphere that was serious yet playful and open to the emergence of polyphony.

The Organization as a Storyteller

Ultimately, the humanist, artists, industrial manager, sales managers, and researchers gathered around the table one last time. This group constituted a metaphor—the organization as a storyteller that illustrates learning as a continuous process and

Table 12.4 Outcomes of the interventions during the case study

Work story intervention	Organizational theater intervention
Learning orientations	
Expressing one's own worldview	Gaining exposure to others' worldviews
Sharing first with one's closest colleagues, whose conceptions probably are in accord with one's own	Conducting dialogue with opposing viewpoints
Reflecting and interpreting experienced reality	Imagining possible worlds and ways to reach them
Practicing critical self-reflection	Prioritizing what should be done
Entering into collaborative discourse	Reflecting what we have done vs. how and why "the others" are doing it
Negotiating and collective sense-making	Engaging in social reinterpretation
Knowledge creation	
Related to emotion, body, and action	Related to the logic of social events, mind, and collective memory

stresses the collective self-understanding of the kinds of plots, scenes, tensions, and roles that are presented within the organization. We researchers and artists claim that experience and nascent knowledge are bound to people's bodies. We thus venture to argue that knowledge creation through art-based processes has a tacit and embodied dimension. When people reflect on organizational events on the stage as a spectator they think by acting. A person's thinking is thus related to physical movements, gestures, and encounters involving another person engaged in the act. Whenever people have to describe thinking by acting, it is a translation process. Then they translate contextual action into conceptual text, so they change communication from one language (embodied) into another (written). These acts are probably a general issue of how to express one's own individual embodied experiences, or how to describe the experiences of the organization's members conceptually. On the theater stage a person may act, but on a research stage one has text only, and sometimes it does not capture the whole spirit. Or perhaps a gesture enables one to catch another, novel view.

We have thus far described how applied theater may serve as a device for research and how an organization may construct a polyphonic space for organizational learning by applying theater techniques and engaging in action-based learning. Our case study has described how learning processes were triggered by art-based techniques and how ideals and ideas of all members of the organization were shared through storytelling and theater techniques at the organizational level. Table 12.4 illustrates the learning orientations of the interventions and the creation of knowledge.

We found collective knowledge creation to be a matter of *metaxis* born in the space of storytelling. Knowledge creation took place simultaneously in two different worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image during interaction. While interacting, members of the organization shared their personal and unformulated experiences in order to accumulate different pieces of information and to structure those of practical use into a meaningful pattern. We cherish the idea that everyone is involved in knowledge creation. Coordinating this total participation is
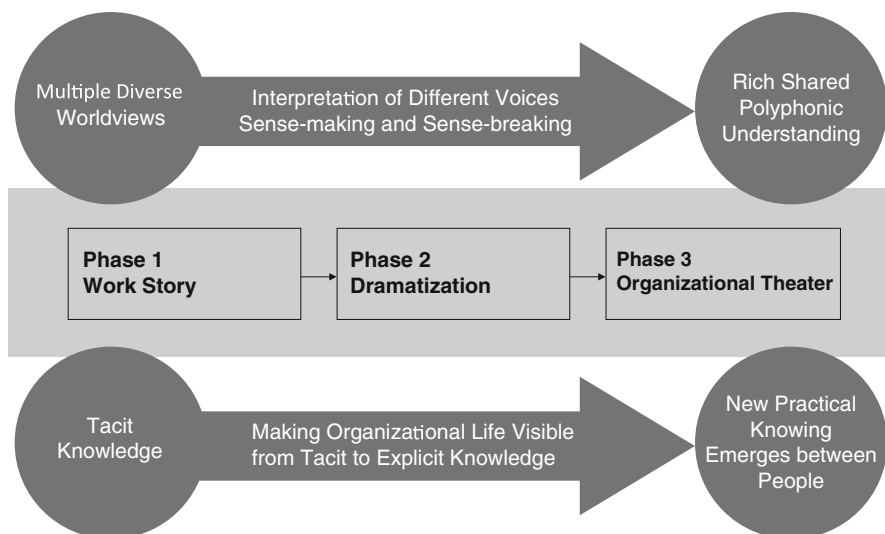
POLYPHONIC SPACE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Fig. 12.4 A model of polyphonic space for organizational learning

possible if the organization, at both the social and structural levels, is willing to acknowledge these tensions and is ready to learn from them. Employees and managers empower themselves by sharing identities through roles and by dialoguing their voices through interpretations of the script.

Polyphonic space (see Fig. 12.4) divides reality into two levels: the usual, familiar reality and the theatrical reality as it appears on stage. This approach underlines that learning through theater is a social, cultural, and collective construction, that knowledge creation takes place between people in a suitable setting. It suggests that learning in a context of theater and action-based learning is understood as the sensitive contributions of learners and that different knowledge is generated between them during the interpretations of lifelike narratives.

A Co-construction and Creation Process of New Knowledge in Research-Based Theater

In polyphonic space the learners articulate their own worldviews, conceptions, and experiences. They pay full attention and listen to other, possibly opposing points of view and build a shared polyphonic understanding together. The polyphonic space is constructed from an interrogative and evocative reading of the narratives conceived by the employees and managers themselves. Through the polyphonic space, learners try to trace significant meanings. The perceptions of the organization's members, the ways in which different communities share their interpretations of

reality through theatrical signs and role-play scenes, shorten the distance between them. The dynamics of the learning process are often conflicted and chaotic because of the nature of diversity. One participant verbalized the dynamics of the socially constructed space by saying, "Even though we tried to be open to different points of view [and] tried to see things from another's perspective … the conversation drifted to our own perspective. … We took a defensive position." In critical reflection, however, we suggest that an awareness of different positions is the cornerstone of sociocultural renewal.

We claim that it is crucial for an organization to hear different voices; that learning as an element of change is multilayered, highly complex, and conflicted; and that organizational events are understood differently in the various phases of the process and in different roles within the organization. As the story of this case study wound to a close, the last observations around the table were that there is no single specific change related to renewal but rather several different interpretations of change, and that organizations need to cherish diversity, not control it.

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