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Abstract:

At the beginning of the 21st century there is a growing interest in the renewal of current thinking about managing and organizing. This study joins that search for novelty with an exploration of what can be learned from the theatrical rehearsal for the development of new possibilities for organizational performance and design. What insights for organizational renewal emerge from the dynamics of the rehearsal as a practice of artful making? We describe the rehearsal around the four distinct organizing principles of responsiveness, workability, unsettledness and embodiment. Taken together these principles expand the existing repertoire for organizational and managerial practice. The rehearsal shows how to nurture form giving processes in organizations through which innovative performance alternatives can be shaped and performed.

Key words: organizational renewal, theatre and organization, managing as designing, organizational aesthetics

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1. Introduction

Something is shifting in the terrain of management and organization. Confronted with a troubled financial system and a global recession, the question arises whether a swift repair of our existing institutions will be sufficient to weather the storm. How to regain and maintain successful organizational performance in the uncertain times that lay ahead? Perhaps we find ourselves at a crossroads where clear signs indicate the need for a renewal of our business models and managerial practice. When we take this perspective, we see that the current challenges can give momentum to the search for new pathways that may lead us to a more sustainable and just global society.

Those of us who believe in reform rather than repair, realize that we need new ways of seeing and thinking in order to find creative solutions for the problems that were caused by our modernist approaches to business and organizing. This explains the current thrust to balance our dominant analytical way of knowing and the prevalent questions of efficiency and expediency with more artful considerations of management (Adler, 2006) and organization design (Weggeman et al., 2007; Yoo et al., 2006). In efforts to heighten the vitality and agility of organizations and the innovative and improvisational qualities of management, many in the field of organization studies seek inspiration from artistic endeavors such as architecture, theatre and jazz (Zandee, 2008, p. 137).

Boland and Collopy (2004, p. 3) for instance, propose that managers put less emphasis on decision making and become more like designers or “form givers” who engage in the development of performance alternatives “that are both profitable and humanly satisfying.” With its focus on form giving, the idea of “managing as designing” can be enriched by practices of “artful making” (Austin & Devin, 2003; Collopy, 2008) which are typically used in arts organizations.

In this paper we explore what can be learned from the theatrical rehearsal as an example of an artful form giving process to enrich the theory and practice of managing by designing. Will it work? This pragmatic, forward moving question connects the worlds of design and theater (Romme, 2003, p. 558; Broekhuijsen & Ibbotson, 2007, p. 61). In both cases the aim is to bring something innovative and valuable into the world. Something original that will be enjoyed by users, customers and audience.

What can managers, who want to shape performance alternatives for organizational renewal, learn from the process through which actors prepare themselves to perform? We start exploring this question by joining the theoretical conversation about managing and organization from a design perspective. We then continue with a brief overview of the field of organizational aesthetics with a specific focus on studies that explore relationships between organization and theatre. Our study of the theatrical rehearsal looks at theatre as organization by highlighting one of its pivotal practices. We describe the relational form giving process of rehearsal around four distinct organizing principles. In our subsequent discussion we show how the special qualities of the rehearsal process can inform thinking about organizational design and the role of managers in bringing forth new possibilities for organizational practice. We conclude the paper with some thoughts on the theoretical contributions and practical applications of the rehearsal as artful making process.

2. Managing as Designing

Few will dispute the notion that at the beginning of the 21st century we lack the environmental stability and predictability for which modernist organizations were once designed (Yoo et al., 2006, p. 215). Dependent on our perspective, we realize that organizations now perform in a dynamic environment with ample challenges, or opportunities, or both. Adler (2006) states that in a context characterized by dramatic changes in society, the economy and technology, most managers realize that business as usual no longer works. According to her, management now faces the challenge “to design strategies worthy of implementation, not simply to select from among approaches that have succeeded in the past” (ibid, p. 488).

The realization that we need new performance strategies is in line with the notion of Boland and Collopy (2004) of “managing as designing.” They seek to counterbalance the prevailing managerial “decision attitude” which concerns itself with the careful evaluation and selection of existing problem solutions, with a “design attitude” which enables the discovery and development of new alternatives. The invitation for managers to escape the limitations of decision making by taking on the role of designers, has been welcomed in the fields of information and organization studies (Avital et al., 2008). The action

oriented designing approach opens possibilities for constructive, divergent behavior and legitimizes questions about why we should stick to familiar routines and how to make things work in a more humanly desirable way (Avital & Boland, 2008, p. 4). A design attitude resists taken for granted practice by fostering novelty in a more open-ended exploration of innovative performance options.

The idea of managing as designing doesn't only encourage the development of new alternatives for organizational performance. It also focuses attention on how we may design organizations in which the search for novelty can be initiated and nurtured. Those who study organization as design, are looking for new forms to align organizational capacity with the "flowing, changing, variable contexts of life" (Weick, 2004, p. 48). Such alignment efforts can be undertaken from a structural perspective, in which re-designs are promoted that make organizations more flexible and better suited to deal with uncertainty, ambiguity and chaos (Hock, 1999; Romme, 2003; Zandee, 2008). Another approach is to let go of our tendency to treat organizational structures as rather stable artifacts and to start thinking about organization design as an ongoing activity instead (Yoo et al., 2006). In such a view, the notion of design implies a dynamic process that leads to impermanent outcomes and that embraces "ephemerality and constant improvement" (Jelinek et al., 2008, p. 319). When "design" becomes "designing," we respond to the flowing nature of the environment with temporary organizational designs based on a "handful of simple rules and key processes, easy to vary and reconfigure" (ibid, p. 322). Once we perceive organizations in terms of more "transient constructs" (Weick, 2004, p. 47), it is a small step to an interpretive, semantic understanding (Krippendorff, 2006) that acknowledges the sensemaking efforts of those who work in organizational settings. Organizational participants then become involved in a process of iterative redesign in which their understandings, experiences, and feedback are taken into account.

The study of management and organization from a design perspective invites the drawing of parallels with artful theorizing and practice. Weggeman et al. (2007) for instance, are interested in how aesthetic considerations can be instrumental in designing better organizational processes. They propose a research agenda to study the potential of aesthetics in organizational design and the possible links with organizational performance. With their research they may lag behind Austin and Devin (2003, p. xxix)

who already claim that some successful business processes are becoming more and more like art. They substantiate this claim by drawing comparisons between knowledge work and the making of theatre.

3. Organizational Aesthetics

Clearly, artists and artistic processes have become a source of inspiration in our search for more innovative ways of managing and organizing (Adler, 2006). A growing number of studies use an artistic lens to illuminate and understand certain aspects of organizational life. Such explorations may look at architectural practice to learn about designing (Yoo et al., 2006), at jazz or theatre to study improvisation (Barrett, 2000; Vera & Crossan, 2004), or at fiction to reflect on human emotions in the workplace (Czarniawska-Joerges & Guillet de Monthoux, 1994; Patient et al., 2003).

This apparent fascination with the arts goes well beyond romantic notions of artists as visionary, avant-garde persons from whom organizational participants can learn how to be more creative. In a search to renew our thinking and talking about organizations, many embrace an aesthetic perspective to highlight the sensuous realm of organizational existence that is so habitually neglected in modernist views. With its focus on sensuous experiences and embodied knowing, the field of aesthetic discourse (Gagliardi, 1996; Linstead & Höpfl, 2000; Strati, 1999) can offer an alternative sensibility that may indeed expand and transform our understanding of organizations and organizational performance.

In their review of the field, Taylor and Hansen (2005) make distinctions between four categories of organizational aesthetics research. They categorize existing studies on the basis of both content (instrumental or aesthetic) and method (intellectual or artistic). According to them, the majority of studies in organizational aesthetics deal with the intellectual analysis of instrumental issues (*ibid.*, p. 1218). In these studies researchers look at artistic forms or processes to find new answers for mainstream questions concerning organizational practice and managerial effectiveness.

One well established type of intellectual exploration is the use of arts-based metaphors to study organizations and their activities (ibid). In these metaphorical comparisons organization becomes like theatre, or like storytelling, or like jazz improvisation. Once connections between art and organization are made, one can also contemplate what lessons for management and organizing can be found in artistic forms such as literature, and in form giving processes that are typically used in arts organizations.

In this paper we join these intellectual/instrumental studies, by looking at the theatrical rehearsal to gain new insights in the organizational dynamics that enable successful performance and renewal.

3.1. Theatre and Organization

Of all the arts-based metaphors, the idea of organization as theatre is perhaps the most dominant (Cornelissen, 2004, p. 713; Taylor & Hansen, 2005, p. 1218) and the exploration of connections between theatre and organization is increasingly popular and well developed (Clark & Mangham, 2004; Schreyögg & Höpfl, 2004).

The dramaturgical view that organizational life can be seen as theatre (Goffman, 1959; Mangham & Overington, 1987; Vaill, 1989) is an attractive one because it is not difficult to find resemblance between theatrical and organizational performance. For instance, both actors and managers have to play convincing roles in front of their respective audiences. Furthermore, in both domains it is expected that such performances are being prepared and delivered on time, within budget, and in an accurate manner (Austin & Devin, 2003, p. xxiii). This accessibility and transferability (Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 728) of the theatre metaphor may at the same time hamper its potential for truly new and surprising insights into, for instance, identity and role enactment within an organizational context (Cornelissen, 2004, p. 721). As is often the case with metaphorical explorations, it remains difficult to surpass transfers of only theatrical labels onto organizational life, and to go beyond comparisons that “enliven and illustrate rather than explain and predict” (Barry, et al., 2003, p. 367).

But, according to Broekhuijsen and Ibbotson (2007, p. 57), theatre offers more than a metaphorical perspective. Theatrical texts are rich material for reflection on the social reality of organizations and the craft of theatre production includes methods and

techniques that may expand the organizational behavior repertoires. Studies that focus on theatre as a craft, may draw lessons about teamwork (Carley, 1996), or leadership (Dunham & Freeman, 2000), or improvisation (Vera & Crossan, 2004), or change (Ford, 2007). Rather than looking at organizations as theatre, these studies look at theatre companies as organizations with unique organizing processes.

Recently, the worlds of theatre and organization are becoming even more intertwined with organizations offering their stage for theatrical performances (Clark & Mangham, 2004; Darsø, 2004; Nissley et al., 2004; Schreyögg & Höpfl, 2004). Beyond role plays as a management development tool and the occasional occurrence of staff cabarets for mere entertainment, theatre *in* organizations is now also used as change intervention. Such organizational theatre often has emancipatory intent and will be used to dramatically portray and subsequently discuss problematic situations that the audience lives through in daily practice (Clark & Mangham, 2004, p. 42).

What studies of the theatre craft and the use of theatre in organizations have in common is that they are often based in personal experiences, or close observations thereof, with the processes of theatre production (Austin & Devin, 2003; Dunham & Freeman, 2000; Ford, 2007; Nissley et al., 2004; Rae, 2004). This intimacy allows for richer descriptions and the potentially fruitful exchange between practical knowledge and theoretical frames.

In this paper we describe one pivotal theatrical process, namely the rehearsal, as the practice through which the making of theatre becomes reality. Because one of us is an actor and director, we can share insights that are firmly grounded in hands-on experience.

4. Theatrical Rehearsal as Relational Form Giving Process

In traditional theatre there is no expectation that brilliant scripts will automatically result in stellar performances, or that well-trained actors can mesmerize audiences by acting solely on the basis of their individual professional skills (Broekhuijsen & Ibbotson, 2007, p. 60). Since “the script is not the play, nor is it a specification” (Austin & Devin, 2003, p. 33), actors and director come together in a rehearsing process to transform the theatrical text into a meaningful performance.

The rehearsal starts with many givens such as the script, the cast, the stage, and the steps in the process that will culminate in the opening night at a preset date. At first sight that does not seem to leave much wiggle room to make it a relational form giving process. In reality however, there is ample space for collaborative sensemaking and shaping in the organized encounter between the plurivocal meaning of the script and the diverse collectivity of the performers' group.

In traditional, repertory theatre one succeeds to re-interpret classical texts, like Shakespeare's plays, in ways that keep them alive and relevant in settings that are distinctly different from the context in which the original performance was staged (Rae, 2004, p. 96). Although the text of the play is fixed, its meaning is not. On the contrary, theatre scripts invite multiple interpretations. Like musical scores, they give phrases, monologues and dialogues but no clarity about why and how a character says or does something.

Confronted with an ambiguous script, the director often plays an interpretive, orchestrating role in crafting a directorial vision that functions as "scaffolding" for subsequent more detailed interpretations, re-directions, and action experiments by the members of the cast (Dunham & Freeman, 2000, p. 115). The composing of this cast is another important pre-rehearsal task for the director. In the search for the "right" people to play the different characters, it obviously is important to find qualified actors. However, as long as that standard is met, "star" talent may not be casted because of a preference for good ensemble players (ibid, p. 113). Once the initial conditions of creative vision and cast are fulfilled, the rehearsal process can start with the objective of "pulling together a cohesive whole while encouraging an explosion of individual and idiosyncratic activity" (ibid, p. 108). This cohesive whole will later be delivered to an audience that will recognize and enjoy it as a theatrical performance.

Rae (2004, p. 97) notes that surprisingly little scholarly information is available about the rehearsal process in comparison with the extensive literature about performance texts or reviews of the performances of those texts. In other words, the focus is more on the input or outcomes of the rehearsal rather than on that creative process itself. To remedy

this oversight, Rae (2004) gives an overview of the core conditions of effective rehearsal practices under the four main headings of people, place, practice and process.

In what follows, we join Rae in taking a closer look at the process, rather than the outcome, of rehearsal. We describe it as a relational, form giving practice through which actors collectively “prepare themselves to be ready to perform adequately at the desired moment” (Broekhuijsen & Ibbotson, 2007, p. 60).

4.1. Organizing Principles

We view the rehearsal as a prime organizational process of theatre companies. More than just practicing or the director telling the actors what to do, the rehearsal is a vital process of co-creation (Ibbotson, 2008, p. 82). This process is guided by some specific organizing principles which we describe here as: responsiveness, workability, unsettledness and embodiment.

4.1.1. Responsiveness

Rehearsing is about interaction. The performance created through the rehearsing process is the visible manifestation of the interactions sparked among a unique combination of individuals with specific resources working together in certain circumstances. These interactions extend beyond director/actor and actor/actor exchanges to include all members (such as stage managers, technicians, and set designers) of the group involved in making the production. Even the audience, though physically absent, has an important position in this relational setting. Decisions about scenes and props and peculiarities of characters are made with the audience and its expectations in mind.

Rehearsal interactions tend not to be routinized or mechanical but are instead highly responsive in character. This responsiveness shows in how one engages with the script, with one another, and with the “whole” that everyone is dedicated to. Rather than judging the content of a theatrical text, the intention is to bring forth its meaning in comprehensible artistic form. The rehearsal as collaborative process of creation is not about the individual expressions of personal feelings or ideas. Each individual action needs to be an effective response to the prior gestures of others while at the same time making a new contribution to the overall texture and direction of the play. Obviously the usage of unique talents and skills is being applauded, but individual vanities and

preferences are put aside in order to concentrate on what really matters: the collective preparedness to perform. Actors form an “ensemble” in which “individual members relinquish sovereignty over their work and thus create something none could have made alone” (Austin & Devin, 2003, p. 16). The outcome of rehearsing with this “spirit of group generosity” (Dunham & Freeman, 2000, p. 115) is a quality of sensitivity and cohesion which is essential for a good performance (Broekhuijsen & Ibbotson, 2007, p. 63).

4.1.2. Workability

Acting means action. One can observe this clearly during rehearsal, where a passive intellectual mode of “talking about” what could be done is avoided and replaced by an active mode of doing what might work. The focus of the cast and its director is on the workability of the multiple possibilities for each component – such as characters, movement, props, and set design – that together will enable the performance. Guided by the question what will work best, actors try out their ideas in a series of alternative gestures. What matters in this search for form is how each action suggestion belongs in the envisioned whole of the performance. This sense of fit, or the impact of a certain gesture, is more important than the actor’s intentions. Ideas that are perceived to have limited functional value will not be used however well intended, creative or spectacular they may be.

During the rehearsal period many attempts to find form are shared in an iterative process of action and reflection. This process is characterized by very short feedback loops. Each idea that is acted out in tentative form becomes immediately available for evaluation in its visible, audible, and touchable appearance. Normally feedback is given by the director with others present to witness and to reflect, which enables everyone involved to get a feel for the whole (Broekhuijsen & Ibbotson, 2007, p. 63).

4.1.3. Unsettledness

During rehearsal, director and actors strive to maintain complexity and openness as long as possible to delay the moment when things become “fixed” in chosen forms. The ability to keep the creative flow going and to welcome chaos and unsettledness, allows for the emergence and appreciation of perhaps surprising acting possibilities that may eventually be selected for performance.

The search for potential forms happens through experimentation in a setting that is bounded by some clear constraints. As said before, the rehearsal starts with many givens such as the directorial vision, the cast, and the theatre stage. These constraints are welcomed as catalysts for creativity as they define a secure, clear structure in which small-scale improvisation can take place (Ford, 2007, p. 21). Within this structure further constraints may be offered, for instance in the form of “what if” questions like: “what if in this scene it is pouring with rain?” (Broekhuijsen & Ibbotson, 2007, p. 62).

In this mode of experimentation actors are encouraged to try out many and highly contrasting ways to play their scenes before settling on the best solutions. Contrast in things like movement, use of props, speech and timing is clearly preferred over the gradual improvement of a certain *mise-en-scène*. Through contrast a large number of variations in scenes and interactions are made visible and available for comparison and choice.

All drama is about improvisation (Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 729). Even in repertory theory there are deviations from rehearsed routines and unforeseen circumstances that ask for creative, in the moment, responses. Experimentation during rehearsal prepares the actors for such adaptability on stage (Dunham & Freeman, 2000, p. 117).

4.1.4. Embodiment

Theatre is the bodying forth of meanings contained in texts which depict certain aspects, conflicts or dilemmas of our human and social existence. It gives those meanings a visible, physical form. Acting, like music making or dancing, is an essentially bodily activity.

The creative process of rehearsal has not really started until the first idea is transformed into a gesture (Broekhuijsen & Ibbotson, 2007, p. 61). Through this embodied enactment of textual interpretations actors literally *make* sense together. Ideas can be intellectually beautiful, but on stage they are unreal and meaningless unless the actor can manifest them in a wave of the hand, a giggle, or a sudden backward jump. Responsiveness to the performance vision, the feedback of the director and the presence and actions of others,

asks for more than cognitive understandings. In the relational process of rehearsing actors make ample use of their sensuous awareness and intuitions.

Rehearsing is about the experiencing and testing of possibilities for action. Experiments with posture, pause, facial expressions, and vocal pitch may not lead to workable solutions for a specific performance, but they will be stored somewhere in the bodily memories of the actors. This “l’intelligence du corps” becomes a valuable, somewhat tacit source of action potentialities.

Because of the embodied articulation of ideas, theatre is a direct, evocative form of communication that invites both players and audience to participate and respond with their full feeling capacity.

The four organizing principles of responsiveness, workability, unsettledness, and embodiment give the contours of the theatrical rehearsal as a “complex, holistic process” (Rae, p. 111). Taken together, they guide the collaborative endeavor which, when successful, will result “in a coherent production that satisfies its makers and ‘works’ for its audience” (ibid).

5. Possibilities for Organizational Renewal

Our study of the theatrical rehearsal is guided by an interest in the renewal of current thinking about management and organization. Looking for ways to reform our modernist institutions and approaches to business and organizing, we take inspiration from the rehearsal as a practice of artful making. What possibilities for organizational renewal emerge from our description of the organizing principles of rehearsal? What can managers, who want to manage by designing, learn from the rehearsal as a relational form giving process? In what follows, we reflect on the rehearsal dynamics to see what lessons can be drawn from this central process of theatre companies for the shaping of performance alternatives in other types of organizations.

The four organizing principles of responsiveness, workability, unsettledness and embodiment provide interesting openings in our dominant views on organizing. The

notions of workability and embodiment, for instance, interrupt the normal flow from planning to implementation and invite a shift to learning and changing by acting. Through gestures as manifestation of tentative interpretations, sensemaking becomes less about reflective comprehension and more like an active process of “meaning shaping.” In theatre this search for form is highly relational in character. The principle of responsiveness encourages a shift from a focus on the individual to an understanding of performance as a collaborative act. Barrett (2000, p. 240) uses the word “attunement” to describe this responsive quality of ensemble work in jazz improvisation, saying that: “In order for jazz to work, players must be actively listening and responding to one another, attuned to the unfolding world that they are simultaneously creating and discovering.” Similarly in theatre, actors build on what emerges in the interaction and avoid intellectual judgment in order to keep the momentum going. Responsiveness thus creates a nurturing space for the experimentation with a variety of possible forms. It allows us to let go of a premature need for certainty and to embrace a sense of creative unsettledness when deciding on possibilities for action. In rehearsal the search for form is not a mind-full, but a bodily activity. The principle of embodiment makes us aware of how we are sensuous beings who participate in organizational life in ways that are richer and more complex than a mere cognitive or emotional perspective will allow us to understand.

Though the application of each one of the principles can renew our thinking about organizing, it is important to realize that in rehearsal they function together to create a dynamic organizational practice of learning action, unified multiplicity (Dunham & Freeman, 2000) and embodied knowing. It is therefore interesting to see how the interplay between certain principles can inform new solutions for the organizational design challenge.

5.1. Workable Unsettledness

Aesthetic considerations are beginning to play an enriching role in organizational design through, for instance, the study of the architectural practice of Frank Gehry (Boland & Collopy, 2004; Yoo et al., 2006), or the mobile art of Alexander Calder (Barry & Rerup, 2006). In thinking about the aesthetics of design, Weggeman et al. (2007, p. 347), wonder whether some organizations are more beautiful than others, or whether aesthetically pleasing organizational processes lead to more successful organizations.

Like the theatrical rehearsal, the design approach to organization studies is guided by the pragmatic question of “will it work?” rather than, “is it valid or true?” (Romme, 2003, p. 558). Where the two perspectives differ however, is that design mostly concerns itself with the workability of the structures and procedures of organizations as artifacts (Weggeman et al., p. 350), whereas theatre is interested in the workability of gestural manifestations of meanings given to artifacts known as theatrical texts. Because of the special qualities of these texts, the theatrical rehearsal can combine workability of acting solutions with an unsettledness or adaptability in the form giving process. Theatre scripts give plurivocal, personified versions of human and social reality in ways that necessitate meaning shaping engagements by those who will perform.

If the principle of workable unsettledness is embraced in approaches to organizational design, the focus will be less on the perfection of structures as artifacts and more on the process through which actors in organizations can shape performance solutions within a certain structure and context. Already the most dynamic stance in design thinking (Jelinek et al., 2008) incorporates the principle of unsettledness in its language of *organizing* and *designing*. But how can organizational participants engage in a form giving process that enables them to successfully connect organizational capacity with environmental requests? Wierdsma (2004) starts to answer that question with his notion of the “temporary workable agreement.” Rather than seeking structural solutions, people come together in dialogue to explore different perspectives and performance alternatives in order to reach temporary agreements that enable coordinated action.

5.2. Responsive Embodiment

The principle of workable unsettledness relates to the qualities of liquidity and openness of the problem solving process that is fostered by a design attitude (Boland & Collopy, 2004, p. 10). In the rehearsal however, these qualities are complemented with a responsive embodiment which makes it a more sensuous, rather than rational, endeavor.

Ibbotson (2008, p. 119) draws connections between acting and managing by stating that “most of the skills of effective leadership and management are embodied knowledge, not intellectual.” Successful managers inspire responses in others through meaningful expressions of strategies and ideas, rather than to rely on the efficacy of financial targets

and action lists. They become like actors who play their role in the theatrics of organizational life.

The most obvious parallels between theatrical and organizational performance can probably be drawn for service work, because theatre companies are themselves like professional service organizations (Broekhuijsen & Ibbotson, 2007; Schreyögg & Höpfl, 2004; Witz et al., 2003). One of the unique characteristics of all services is that they are simultaneously produced and consumed (Weggeman et al., p. 353). This means that service professionals can not design and make a service to store it somewhere for later use. Like actors, the best they can do is to prepare themselves to deliver requested services in the moment that satisfactory performance is expected. Now that we are entering a knowledge-based economy with ever more customer specific service work (Yoo et al., 2006, p. 215), the rehearsal becomes an interesting model to emulate by professionals and their managers.

In theatre form and content are intimately connected in the meanings expressed by actors through their appearance and gestures. The principle of embodiment appreciates the full sensuous capacity of performers as skillful professionals. Rehearsal combines embodiment with responsiveness which makes performance not individualistic but relational and attuned to the context in which it may be delivered.

Managers who embrace the rehearsal quality of responsive embodiment use their “physical skills” (Ibbotson, 2008, p. 119) to evoke constructive responses in others and are able to transform a collection of individual professionals into a responsive ensemble that can act together in unforeseen circumstances.

To summarize, the qualities of workable unsettledness and responsive embodiment may inspire possibilities for organizational renewal by enriching thinking about design and by making the role of manager less technocratic and more artful. Managers as designers can learn from the rehearsal how to nurture form giving processes through which innovative solution alternatives are shaped and performed.

5.3. Organizational Rehearsal Spaces

The rehearsal teaches us that only the manifestation of ideas in visible, tangible form makes them real. The four congruent principles which give the rehearsal its form giving capability and relational texture, enable the design of organizational rehearsal spaces in which the idea of designing as a process of artful making can be explored.

Ibbotson (2008, p. 72) describes the rehearsal as a process that allows for “co-creation – for the exploration and discovery of ideas.” He contrasts this process with the more common approach to organizational change that is based on the engineering model of planning and implementation. In this blueprint model there is rarely opportunity for the collaborative interpretation and shaping of proposed strategies into meaningful action possibilities. That is unfortunate if we believe in the need for innovation and the collective preparedness to perform in order to remain competent in uncertain and dynamic environments.

Managing by designing is an inclusive act. The successful design of new performance alternatives, products and processes asks for “innovative methods of collaborating across disciplinary, functional, and organizational boundaries” (Boland & Collopy, 2004, p. 17). Such collaboration can be practiced in organizational rehearsal rooms as play spaces for design. For the relational form giving process of artful making to blossom, people need to come together in a safe space “where mistakes can safely be made and failure celebrated for what it teaches rather than what it achieves” (Ibbotson, 2008, p. 73).

Managers become artful directors of change when they consciously create and facilitate organizational rehearsal spaces around the principles of responsiveness, workability, unsettledness and embodiment. Working together in such spaces people can utilize their sensuous, imaginative and relational capacities in order to give form to novel solutions that not only work but are also beautiful and enjoyable.

6. Conclusion

We feel that our study of the rehearsal as a relational form giving process has theoretical value and practical relevance. It can make a special contribution in both realms because of its combined focus on *process*, *relation*, and *embodiment*. This perspective adds to our more common focus on outcomes (or artifacts), individual actions and qualities, and an intellectual way of knowing.

The description of the theatrical rehearsal around four organizing principles helps to fill the void in the scholarly literature about this rich artistic process (Rae, 2004, p. 97). With our exploration of artful practice we make a contribution to the field of organizational aesthetics. In our discussion of this practice we have shown transferability to the fields of organization design and change. Like other studies that use an artistic lens, the theatrical rehearsal inspires new thinking about organizing.

As discussed, the rehearsal model shows potential for innovation and performance preparation in professional service firms (Broekhuijsen & Ibbotson, 2007). In essence, the rehearsal is a twofold process of form finding and the nurturing of performance cohesion and ease through the practicing and refining of found forms. As such, the rehearsal practice can be used for both the development of new service concepts and the enhancement of the collective preparedness for the performance of services that already exist.

The theatrical rehearsal can be applied as an arts-based method in management development (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). It adds to the existing practice of role playing, by making such play less focused on the development of individual skills and more geared toward the collaborative exploration of possibilities for action. In addition to role playing, the rehearsal model informs new interactions in the managerial classroom between representatives of academia and practice. Instead of merely lecturing, theoretical concepts can be enacted in ways that lead to the creation of “acting knowledge” (Broekhuijsen & Ibbotson, 2007, p. 64) rather than abstract understandings.

With its relational and process orientation the theatrical rehearsal can be used for purposes of organizational development and change. In our own practice we are

experimenting with theatre as change intervention through the design and facilitation of temporarily rehearsal spaces in organizational contexts. We do this in small settings with groups of managers or professionals. However, we believe that the rehearsal principles can also be applied in large group settings. For example as a novel approach in the “design phase” of appreciative inquiry summits (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 170). We find that the rehearsal has much potential as play space for shared experimentation and design of innovative organizational action alternatives.

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