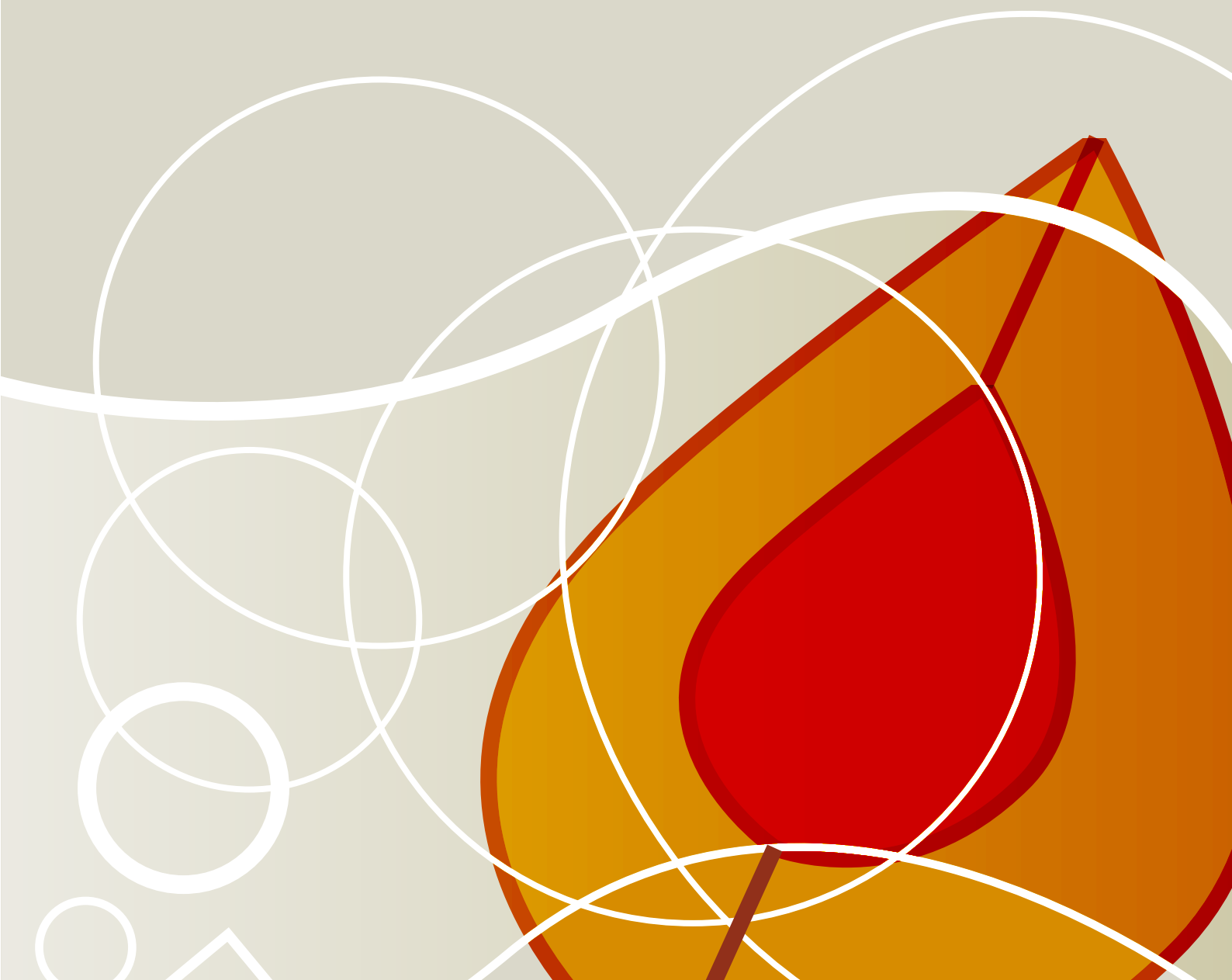


**MiL Concepts 4/2009**

**“The Theatre Entrance”  
– A Helpful Way to Innovation and Learning**

Øystein Rennemo



## MiL Concepts 4/2009

### Abstract

The aim of the paper is to examine the power of some theatre exercises as supporting methods for exploration and learning in a MiL Institute management development programme in Coop, a large Scandinavian retail organisation. This is done by discussing a case where the participants were working in project groups on important strategic issues, with the expectations to implement new solutions and produce some significant business results. In this work the participants wanted to strengthen their ability to work creatively. A theatre based learning experience was planned in co-operation between the MiL learning coaches and an external theatre professional. The experience and the “theatre entrance” turned out to be both helpful as well as a good learning experience for all participants. When working with complex organisational problems, it is necessary to develop new mindsets in order to discover novel ways of handling challenges. The theatre experience helped the participants to find new perspectives and new sources for learning. Using an academic concept one could say it offered the managers a new ontology from where the world could be perceived in new ways. It also offered opportunities for new understandings of themselves, their colleagues and their team members and it had a positive impact on the climate and the relations in the various groups. The paper also relates these experiences to several other examples where theatre activities play an important role in personal, group and organisational learning.

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## Purpose

Several theoretical contributors have argued for the importance of crossing mental borders and moving into the “field of ignorance” in order to be able to find perspectives from where new concepts can be invented and new learning obtained. Others have stressed the assumption that creative work emerges from feelings, emotions and sensual images rather than analytical thinking. These two-hypotheses draw attention to the field of art. “*The artist is not a man who describes but a man who feels*” (E.Cummings). A variety of art disciplines (poetry, music, painting etc.) might be really helpful as tools for exploration and mental border crossing; they could be named “borderline tools”. Among these tools we also find the art of acting. In this paper the purpose is to examine the power of some theatre exercises as methods to explore and learn. This is done by discussing a case from a management development programme in Coop, but also by relating these experiences to several other examples where theatre activities play an important role in personal, group and organisational learning.

## Setting the Scene

The paper will focus on an experimental workshop in a recently ended programme within Coop, with participants from Norway, Denmark and Sweden. MiL Institute ran the programme for Coop and three MiL consultants were taking the roles of learning coaches, including the author of this paper. The other two were Inger Draeby from Denmark and Mette Sandahl Bengtsson from Sweden. This is necessary to mention because the learning philosophy of MiL Institute influenced the case. The participants were divided in four “cross border groups”, each group challenged with an important strategic issue, presented in April 2007 by the CEO in each country. The expectations were to implement new solutions and produce some profitable and useful business results. While working with the action based model (cf. appendix, background), defining their ambition about results, learning, information and creativity, three out of four groups wanted to strengthen their ability to work creatively, “out of the box.” They approached the three learning coaches for support. From there on the coaches started planning a two day workshop where they wanted to explore some theatre methods as helping tools to develop explorative and creative behaviours, i.e. theatre based exploration. This was done in cooperation with the learning coaches and an external professional, Ørjan Hattrem, from the department of dramatics at Nord-Trøndelag University College in Norway.

## The Learning Experience and the Empirical Material

“*The theatre has moved from a metaphor to describe organisations towards a technique to change them*” (Darsø & Meisek 2007:10). This quotation illustrates the possibility of the field of organisational theatre practice, which is described as a movement from entertainment towards innovation. However a great variety of methods and techniques exist with the ambitions to bring change to individuals, groups, organisations and even societies. In this case we wanted to create a learning experience that offered possibilities to increase the creativity, innovation and change in how the participants’ viewed the work in their respective projects.

Three out of the four project-groups met in Hurdal, 80 km north of Oslo. Two of the groups, we call them the Sourcing group and the New-business group, were complete, i.e. five and six persons in each group. For various reasons two of the members in the third group, the Food-service group, were unable to participate on this day. In addition, one person from the fourth group had requested to take part in the “theatre day” and therefore supplemented the Food-service group in the group exercises.

In our case there were no professional actors performing. Only the professional theatre instructor using techniques from the education of actors, inspired by the questions of reflections from the learning coaches. This situation was quite different from the well known Forum Theatre tradition, inspired by Augusto Boal (2000). Here the professional actors invite the spectators to come to the stage encouraging them to take part in the play, trying to find new solutions in the dilemmas facing them. In this way, the spectators are offered a different and an aesthetic learning possibility not only as spectators but as “spect-actors” (Boje & Larsen 2007:33). In other words they are both spectators and actors. In our case the participants were basically actors, but also spectators when watching, not the professionals, but each other on the stage. Consequently, I have later in the text called them either actors or participants. The stage was not a functional theatre scene, just the floor in the huge, comfortably lit room at the Hurdalsjøen Conference Hotel.

## **Connections to the MiL Learning Philosophy**

Since one of the groups was a mixed group we decided to use exercises that were not project dependent. Important in the planning was also that the different exercises had no predefined goals regarding the output. We wanted the framework to be free, allowing everybody the space to reflect spontaneously visavi the experiences from the “theatre” experiment. This way of working was influenced by the learning philosophy the coaches are encouraged to follow when working for MiL. The following sentences from MiL’s homepage may serve as an illustration:

*We believe that people contribute productively to the success of their organisation – as long as they are taken seriously and offered opportunities to participate in setting targets, reviewing the progress and learning in the process.... There is nothing more effective for personal learning than oneself getting to grips with and being responsible for sorting out a concrete dilemma. We learn infinitely more from putting our own words on what we do than from what we hear others talk about.*

(www.milinstitute.se)

The learning philosophy gives direction to the role of the learning coaches. The participants were given a possibility to try different exercises, but they themselves had the ownership of the interpretations of their experiences. In that way one could say that the exercises were performed in a spirit of democracy. It was, as Darsø, Levy, Bond, Friis, Finnestrand and Skarholt (2007:47) put it; a situation where seeds were planted and no bombs were thrown. The driving force of a possible change in the participants’ attitudes and behaviours in the project work came about when they themselves reflected on this experience. As we will see later on the groups were able to harvest from the seeds immediately in the project group. For one of the groups you might even say they changed the group behaviour to the extent that the experience could be seen as a transforming bomb:

*We became much more familiar with bringing new perspectives and references from totally different lines of business into our project.*

## **The Set up of the Workshop**

The workshop was divided into two parts. Day one was the active “theatre day” with different exercises. Day two was a follow up day where the project groups continued their own work together with their learning coaches using the experiences from the theatre day.

The theatre-day started at about 9 a.m. and ended at about 4 p.m. The day was divided into three sections: 1) First we had different warming up exercises (stretching, breathing, concentration and various physical exercises). These were individual oriented exercises. At the end of the warming up we moved around the room in a virtual landscape. 2) The middle part contained exercises where the participants were encouraged to concentrate and be aware of themselves as a whole group, not just as individuals but as a collective. One might call this training in collective consciousness. 3) In the third and most time-consuming part of the day, the three groups were assigned to solve different problems and to show the results of their work in a non-verbal performance. They were for instance told to take themselves through an imaginary and rough terrain with trees, waterfalls, mountains, snakes etc. They were told to present this as a story. In this part they had the possibility to plan, practice/train and finally perform. It is important to underline that we did not work with theatre texts in this case. With one exception, the only permitted language was the body language and to mime. The exception was one exercise, carried out twice, when the participants were allowed to talk to each other the first time. Thereafter only body language was allowed.

Some of the participants were a bit insecure in the situation they were brought into, together with a professional theatre instructor, doubting and questioning what a professional retail business could possibly learn from the theatre. We will see what a few of them had to tell about this later on when they reflected on the experience. Still, as one of the learning coaches remembers; *from a coaching point of view I was surprised of how relatively easy people accepted the set-up.*

During the day we had some reflection breaks and at the end of the day the groups and individuals got the opportunity to reflect on the whole day and even to relate to the project work in each group. In the afternoon the three present project groups were asked to make a 10-15 minutes presentation of their project work so far, emphasising successes, difficulties and experiences that the other two groups could benefit from. This was prepared before the workshop, but the groups got some time to change their presentation in the light of the experiences of the day.

Here some of the reflections in action are documented, but most of the empirical material contains reflections on action collected in a questionnaire presented to the participants after their project work was ended and presented to the CEOs. They were asked to answer ten questions (see appendix).

## **Out of the Box and into the Play**

Hardly any of the participants/the actors, expressed any negative attitudes to the experience neither in action, or reflecting on the actions (question 4) or in the overall evaluation. They also recalled very well the different exercises (question 2) five months later. Some of them said they felt insecure in the beginning of the exercise.

*I was a bit sceptical in the beginning and felt outside my comfort zone. After a while I managed to relax and it became much better (New business group).*

*No negative feelings, but performing in front of the other participants felt a bit uncomfortable the first time (New business group).*

One statement connects the insecure feeling to some of the exercises:

*I felt uncomfortable when walking alone through the woods. I tried to relax, but couldn't. Maybe I tried too much, I didn't manage to see and feel the forest. (Sourcing group)*

Finally one of the participants (New business group) told the rest of the group that he/she was very tired during the workshop due to various working problems and was lacking in energy. This person writes in the reflection note that he/she did not benefit from much of the day her-/himself and felt a bit unprepared. Still he/she underlined the value of the day for the rest of the group and saw some advantages in it for the project group.

The overall feedback from the participants leaves behind an impression beyond dispute that the day was highly appreciated and positive regarding the outcome. *Everything was positive. Besides, it was fun!* While we could find three slightly negative statements in the reflection material written five months afterwards, 22 statements (question 3) have a positive character where some typical ones are:

*All the exercises were positive, presented with charm and confidence.*

*To me the exercises were really out of the box.*

*Acting in groups produced a common experience. The physical contact helped to develop a team feeling.*

*When we were not allowed to talk to each other it was interesting to notice the importance and help from other senses.*

*The exercises on the floor showed the impact of my physical behaviour on the rest of the group. Small changes in my movements, gestures and motions influenced the rest of the group.*

## **Learning from the Experience**

The actors undoubtedly had a good time, but what kind of knowledge or learning did they develop during that day and in their reflections afterwards? Broekhuijsen and Ibbotson use the term 'acting knowledge' (2007:65) to describe the kind of knowledge that organisational theatre offers as an alternative to the analytical, rational and academic way of building knowledge. This is an interesting idea and very close to another one, 'working live,' introduced by Shaw and Stacey (2006). In our case the acting knowledge which was developed during the day was of four types: 1) Learning about me. "I learned about another ME during that day." 2) Learning about you. "I learned about another YOU during the day". 3) Learning about us. "We learned about another US". 4) A new reality. This kind of knowledge was more general, not directly connected to the people present or the common project work. It may therefore be useful to present some more authentic documentation of these four types of learning from the reflections of the participants.

### **a. Learning about a new me**

One of the participants (Food service) had been a member of a theatre company during four years some time ago. For this person the experience turned out to be a great reminder without much new learning. Most of the others though, have much to say about their personal output of the day.

*I became more aware of my behaviour and body language and the way it affects others.*

*I learned how to underline my messages with my body language.*

*I realized that I need to challenge myself unconventionally to go out of my comfort zone. It is good for me.*

*I was really out of the box. Pantomime and theatre exercises helped me to extend my comfort zone.*

*I learned something about building trust in groups.*

*For me, I took a new role in one of the exercises where I was in the centre and had to improvise. Before I didn't think I could do that. Afterwards I have come back to this*

*experience and have applied this learning in my professional role.  
I learned a lot about catching the mood in the room. When doing that I can better see the over all picture in the situation where I find myself. It gives me more information.  
I learned something about relaxing. Unfortunately, I have a tendency to frame a situation too fast. It's a pity because it limits my action. When I learned to relax, everything went much better. I had a really good time.*

Another person was inspired by some of the exercises and was encouraged to use at least one of those in the team of leaders he/she was responsible for. Finally one participant writes about a relational effect of the day. The relation to one of the colleagues changed in a discernible way during the day. It became more open and positive. This turns attention to the next learning area.

#### **b. Learning about a new you**

About a quarter of the actors talk about changes in perceptions or opinions about colleagues in the project group. Although this is not a dominant message in the material, it is still important. The theatre day gave the group members possibilities to see and learn about new aspects of each other, in particular the more creative and playful ones. One of them (Sourcing group) mentions that he/she perceived X playful and felt that this was very liberating. Another one in the same group saw for the first time that the same X and even another one of the group members was *super creative*. It had an *energizing effect* upon the whole group. The same type of observation is mentioned by several others in more general words. One can imagine that changes in interpersonal opinions in some way or another will influence behaviour.

#### **c. Learning about a new we**

In the reflection material, the impact on the different teams, the team climate, spirit and cooperation is the most mentioned result from the theatre day. This is noted from each of the groups and almost by every one of the actors.

*We in the group became much closer to each other during the day. A lot of humour and a strong team spirit developed. The physical contact in the exercises helped to develop a "we"- spirit.*

*Our "nature travel" strengthened our feeling of belonging together.*

*The trust inside the group and to each other increased noticeable.*

*It helped to be a part of the group when I (sometimes) felt foolish. A safe group climate developed this day.*

*It was important to listen and to show each other respect.*

*It was energizing to create something together and the interplay between the different group members improved. We could see new competencies in the individuals. This was beneficial later on in our work.*

*Our behaviour changed to a more informal one and a fundamental trust aroused. In the continuation of our work we felt like a "dream team."*

*Afterwards we got more personally and group oriented and less production oriented. More creativity and "out of the box thinking" developed which was good for the project work later on.*

The last quotation is written by one of the members in the Sourcing group. We might see a difference between the Sourcing group and The New business group regarding this area of learning. Both groups report a distinct effect upon the team climate. They also agree upon the learning effects in view of their project presentations later on.

*In our presentations, more attention was given to presentation technique, body language and articulation.*

*Later that evening we changed our project presentation in a more creative direction. I think the theatre day influenced the final project presentations for all the groups.*

In both groups we even find opinions about the feedback climate in the groups which was improving as a result of the day. The Sourcing group participants are however more precise and positive regarding some other effects, particularly related to their explorative and creative behaviours.

*When we (in the group) are looking back to Hurdal we see this as a great “out of the box experience.” Not as isolated exercises but more as an event or a milestone. Partly we created other “out of the box experiences” ourselves (for instance driving go-cart) and partly we continuously worked to strengthen group solidarity. We became much more familiar with bringing new perspectives and references from totally different lines of business into our project.*

This change in behaviour could even be observed afterwards in their project meetings. After a meeting one month later they write an e-mail to their learning coach telling “*in accordance to the out of the box experience at Hurdal, we have arranged meetings with IKEA, Nokia and Inex*” in order to find new perspectives and “pearls” for the project.

#### **d. A new reality**

Here and there in the reflections from most actors you find statements describing learning as something new, as another ontology. Like an eye-opener, allowing the opportunity to see the “world” in another way. Some people comment upon the task oriented climate in the group up to this day emphasizing how refreshing it was to be allowed to “disconnect” the head for a moment, as one of them writes. Others are very positive about the playfulness and the effect this had to break barriers and inflexible behaviour in the group. The theatre day was a result of demands from the whole group. Afterwards several write in similar ways that they now had a common reference to the concept “out of the box” and to be out of the comfort zone. This was also referred to by one of the other learning coaches in her reflections five months later. *The concept “out of the box” got a visual, tangible and emotional anchor. Afterwards I am surprised how often I hear people refer to the event and the ‘out of the box’ concept.*

Non-verbal communication was another area of learning. Several noticed the impact of other senses (hearing, seeing and feeling) when they were not allowed to talk. *Still the communication went very well.* The impact of the body language is often mentioned.

*When you move around it is obviously very important how you do it. I see a parallel to a workplace situation. If you are bored or feeling down, your body language affects others and removes energy from the room.*

Several of the exercises were collectively oriented without any kind of predefined structure or leadership. The initiatives and leadership grew spontaneously from the interplay between the actors assuming willingness to be aware of individual initiatives. Still the actors were able to develop the exercise, co-ordinate between them and produce a performance. Not surprisingly the leadership is mentioned in the material, since this happened as a part of a management training program.

*We succeeded to behave with conformity and as a reconciled group without having a leader. The person who was accepted as a leader in the group was the person who was in the right place with the right expression. Afterwards we talked about the lightness of collective leadership.*



## Learning from the Tales

In the *Organisational Theatre – Thin Book* (Darsø, Meisek and Boje 2007), the authors emphasize the importance of the ‘moment’ in which something new becomes possible. *It can be found in expressions such as ‘magic’, ‘silence’, ‘the space of possibility’, and being in the moment’.* There is no doubt that the theatre can create that moment. The main question seems to be whether people have the courage to stay with that moment and have the wisdom to seize it (*Ibid:13*).

Our case tells about a group of people, unfamiliar with the theatre based exercises, with the courage to stay in moments where new learning was possible and with the ability to seize it.

Shaw and Stacey (2007) introduce the concept “Working Live” meaning a creative way to bring dilemmas and emotions in organisations into the dialogue. Boje and Larsen (2007) make a similar comment, describing the concept *as working in the moment with all the surprises that emerge*. In our explorative situation, we wanted to encourage the participants to feel and think with their body in situations where the logical and rational way of problem-solving was not the obvious and natural way of behaviour. The question is if our example deserves to be categorized under the label ‘working live’? I definitively think it does. As mentioned before, the ambition of bringing new ways of looking at the project work was of a rather indirect character. Still, as we have seen in the interpretations and reflections from the actors, many parallel processes were discovered between the theatre exercises and their own project work. The theatre day had an immediate effect upon the group work, for instance the same evening when the groups presented their project status to each other.

We might therefore conclude that there is no need to focus on a specific organisational dilemma or problem when working with theatre based training. When people, as in our case, have a working relation, they themselves transform their common experience from this situation to their ordinary working challenges. The theatre improvisation increased the participants’ awareness, spontaneity and risk taking. They saw some new possibilities outside their ordinary box and a possibility for change became evident.

## Moments of Change

The ability to improvise in the moment, without using the verbal language requires trust and courage. We have seen that this trust developed in the group, though it should be mentioned that the group of people were familiar with each other before the exercises. The whole group had met earlier in two four day workshops. One of the workshops was very personally focused. In addition, the project groups had met a couple of times. Therefore, as a group, they did not start from scratch. They were all a part of a career-oriented training program and some trust was already in place when the day started. This was one of the reasons why they could catch the moment with relative ease. Borrowing an expression from Boje and Larsen (2007:38) one could say that a moment of time was opened and a space for change was possible. We have seen most of the Coop managers describing moments of change in their reflections.

Some strong connections exist between change, innovation, new learning and emotions. This is clearly one of the main findings in the research of the American couple Root-Bernstein. After studying people in innovative professions (artists, inventors and scientists, etc.), at work, they claim that creative behaviour is strongly connected with intuition and aesthetic experiences. *It is very difficult to find any major figure in any art or science who has said that creative work is done using words, mathematics, logic or any of the other higher order forms of thinking that are supposed to characterize intelligence. Even the most verbal poets and*

*mathematical scientists maintain that their creative work emerges from feelings, emotions and sensual images (Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein 2003:377).*

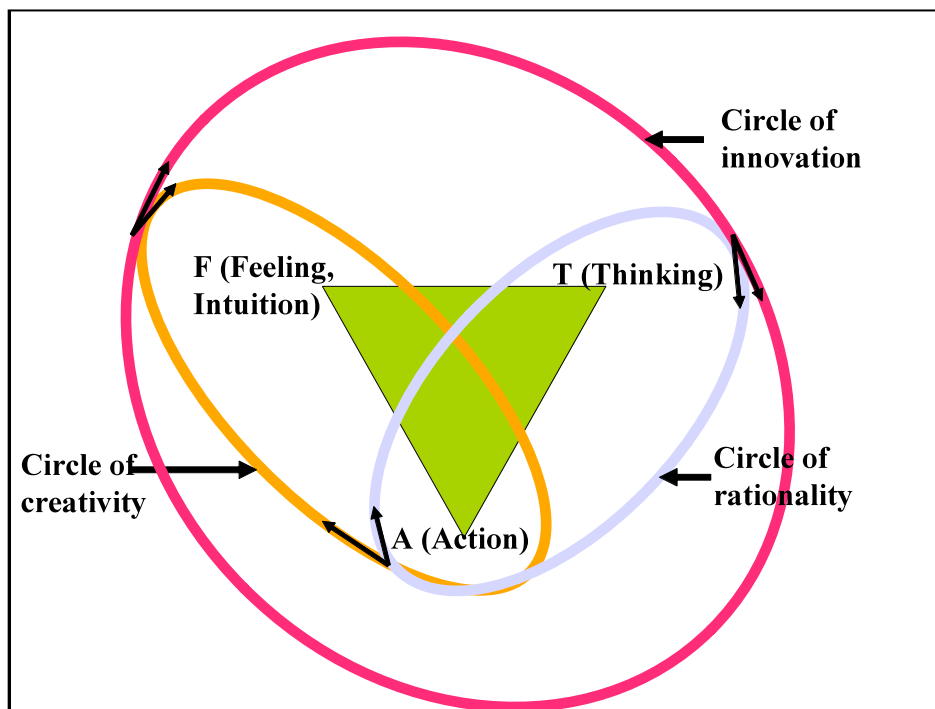
New ideas exist before they are conceptualized verbally, as emotional and metaphorical forms of knowing (Darsø 2004). Consequently, you would expect many feelings in rooms where innovative learning is taking place. So far in this paper there has been no mention of this. Yet, it is frequently reported in the reflections from the actors. In fact, positive feelings are more often mentioned than frustration and negative feelings. The following words are cut and pasted from their reflections: Competitiveness, delighted, energy, empathy, feeling of community, feelings of success, frustration, humour, laughter, irritation, joy, open minded, power to influence, out of comfort zone, relaxed, relief, tired. One of the learning coaches has this interesting reflection about the observed feelings from her position: *Laughter grew in the room, but also stillness. I believe emotions became a little more distinct during the day.*

## **Organisational Theatre and Action Research**

Darsø, Levy, Bond, Friis, Finnestrand and Skarhol (2007:49) make an interesting connection between Organisational Theatre and Action Research claiming that the aim for both are to *achieve collective learning and change through involvement and reflection. Moreover the members of the organisation are themselves responsible for making change happen - through collaboration with theatre and/or researchers.* In our case long term relations existed between the actors and the learning coaches, but it was the actors' responsibility to draw conclusions about the lessons learned. The connections between Action Learning and Action Research (Rennemo 2006) are quite close to MiL's philosophy of Action Reflection Learning. In the philosophy you might say that the obligations of bringing back the lessons learned to the "state of art" are less emphasized. This is the aim of this paper. In both Action Research and Action Learning traditions one finds value oriented principles regarding learning methods and the role of the researcher or consultant in cooperation with the field. When working with organisational theatre it is probably very important where to locate the responsibility for the learning process. Artists/professionals and action oriented researchers/consultants have different roles to play and probably different competencies to build upon. In our case this became visible a couple of times when the external professional was more oriented towards commenting on a concrete level from a professional basis and some quality criteria, whereas the learning coaches were more oriented towards reflecting on a meta level. The different orientations and competencies turned out to be mutually supportive.

## Summing up in a Model

There seems to be an increasing understanding from both innovative practitioners and academic researchers that thinking and feeling or rational and intuitive processes are inseparable in innovative processes. Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein (2003) give an overwhelming illustration of this in their study, quoting a huge amount of innovators, among those Henri Poincaré, the mathematician. *It is by logic that we prove, but by intuition that we discover* (ibid:246). This innovative interplay could be illustrated as in the model below.



Appreciated actions are what help the world further. What becomes an appreciated or a good act is of course nothing absolute, but could be seen as a result of negotiations or the result of network translations. In this “struggle” defining the result of the action, network elements or effects of both rational and emotional characters will be of great importance. These elements are also important in the initial production of the act. Problem solving could be seen as interplay inside a triangle of feeling, thinking and action (Sewerin 1996). The final act is at best a result of mutually inspiring processes between those three. Quite often though, we see in problem solving processes examples of misalliances where two exclude the third resulting in an insufficient or rejected act. This triangle could even be used as an analytical tool, not unfamiliar to consultants, when describing organisational cultures. Weakness in one of the areas is compensated by the consultant’s intervention. However, in our case, it was the Coop managers themselves that asked for help when wanting to strengthen their creativity. The instrument this time, introduced by the learning coaches, was the theatre entrance. It turned out to be a rather helpful entrance and a good learning experience for those participating.

Reviewing the model, the innovation process could be seen as integration between rationality and creativity, justified both theoretically and practically and clearly supported from our case. In the model this is outlined as circles because of the ongoing character of the processes. Sometimes we are turning around in the circle of rationality, sometimes in the circle of creativity, sometimes we move from one to another and maybe sometimes we even manage to handle both in a united circle of innovation. We also might see this as learning cycles and

different kinds of learning loops. In this case it is valuable to focus on methods helping the learning process, such as reflection as in the presented case. Still, there is an ontological, unmentioned and challenging issue in this unifying effort between the two basic circles.

It is reasonable to consider the circle of rationality being based upon rational and consequently substantial logic (March 1995), closely related to a separable cause and effect thinking and to the modern paradigm of science (Latour 1999). When moving to the circle of creativity, working with feelings, emotions and intuition favourably supported from the field of art, it could be argued that we have moved into another “world” of constantly changing relations. It seems much easier to find relational oriented logic in this world. If so, it demands an ontological shift in behaviour, from a rational and substantial to a relational (Emirbayer 1997). Chi and Hausmann (2003) raised the question if radical discoveries require an ontological shift. Their own answer was affirmative and this paper supports their findings. For the individual, this could be rather challenging because being in the moment of different “worlds” where unexpected things may happen requires *courage and boldness* (Boje & Larsen 2007:34). Probably this was the reason for some of the resistance felt by some of the actors. It seems appropriate to end up here with some of their voices and finally thank them for their help.

*I was a bit sceptical in the beginning and felt outside my comfort zone. After a while I managed to relax and it became much better.*

*I learned something about relaxing. Unfortunately, I have a tendency to frame a situation too fast. It's a pity because it limits my action. When I learned to relax, everything went much better.*

*There are many opinions about the Hurdal workshop. I myself think it was here the project work turned into a new direction.*  
(Participant in the overall evaluation)

## Appendix

### Background

Trying to connect to other organisational theatre experiences, some refreshing discussions was found in the so called “Thin Book” (Darsø, Meisek and Boje 2007) produced by the people gathered in “The Organisational Theatre Thin Book Summit” that took place in March 2005, organised by Learning Lab Denmark. I did not take part in the summit myself, but have found some of the analytical points, ideas and thoughts offered in the book interesting to consider, as the authors themselves encourage the readers to do (ibid: 8). Several participants in this summit seem to have connections with two of the strongest organisational theatre traditions in Denmark, The Forum theatre and The Dacapo Theatre. Dacapo Theatre in Odense, Denmark, is a consultancy firm that has built its portfolio upon Interactive Theatre. They are using instruments and effects from the theatre to highlight and find solutions to organisational problems. The Forum Theatre in Copenhagen works from an Interactive Projective tradition inspired by the Brazilian Augusto Boal (2000).

In a recently published Norwegian book (Rennemo 2006) the argument is made for a new action based model in organisational development, based both on the author’s practical experiences from doing action based programs in a number of private and public firms during the last 15 years as well as from theoretical studies of the different action based learning and research-traditions, emphasising the strengths and positive contributions from each one of them. The model is highlighting four values or processes that could, but not necessarily should,

be emphasized in action based development programmes: This is 1) the value of innovation and creativity (exploration), 2) the value of production of appreciated and measurable results (production), 3) the value of creating new learning and competencies both for individuals and for organisations (knowledge creation) and finally 4) the value of using and developing transformable knowledge from and back to “the state of the art” (information).

By focusing on these four processes the action-based practitioner or researcher is given a better possibility to design and evaluate a concrete development program. In collaboration with the organisational field, he/she is provided with a practical tool helping to focus on which of the four values are going to be emphasized, and to what extent. In the planning period of the program, it is necessary to consider all the four values in order to become aware of what you exclude as objectives. This prioritization is a necessary clarification in the contract relation between coach and client and/or other working relations in the program.

The development approach has been tracked in a number of companies during the last two years. In this paper the emphasis is first and foremost on the creative and innovative part (the value of exploration) of such a programme, and investigates how methods, tools and exercises from the theatre might help participants in action based development programmes to find new ways in their problem solving or production process and thereby serve as a catalyst for learning.

## **Methodology**

The questionnaire that was presented for the participants in January 2008 contained the following 10 questions.

- 1) Which project group did you belong to?
- 2) Which exercises do you remember from the theatre day?
- 3) Do you remember any of the exercises as especially positive? If so, in what way were they positive?
- 4) Do you remember any of the exercises as negative in some way or another? If so, which exercise and why?
- 5) Do you remember if any of the exercises activated any strong feelings inside you during that day? If so, can you name those feelings and why they arose?
- 6) The aim of the day was to help the project groups to work more creatively and thinking “out of the box.” To what extent did it contribute to that aim and if so, in which way?
- 7) Looking back on the theatre day, do you think it was useful for the project work? If so, in what ways?
- 8) Looking back....., do you think it was useful for your teamwork and team spirit? If so, in what ways?
- 9) Looking back ....., did you have any benefit of the theatre day related to your development personally or as a leader? If so, in what ways? If not, why was it so and in what ways could the theatre day been arranged more usefully for you?
- 10) Anything else (reflections, feedback etc.) you want to comment upon?

The reliability of the material is better from two of the three groups, the Sourcing group and the New-business group, since they both completed the theatre-day and since all have answered the questionnaire. In the evaluation of the management training programme the theatre day was also commented on by several participants, including those absent. For this reason some statements from the evaluation are included. The empirical material contains quoted expressions and reflections in the three Scandinavian languages, in this paper in a translated version. The quotations from the field are mainly directly translated. A few of them are slightly compressed, a common practice when handling qualitative material (Kvale 2007).

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