

Kurz gefasst: In den letzten Jahren setzen Organisationen unterschiedlicher Art und Größe auf den Einsatz künstlerischer Interventionen als Lernmittel: Einzelne Aktionen oder langfristige Einbeziehung von Musik, Theater oder bildender Kunst werden als eine Möglichkeit gesehen, innovatives Denken und Handeln zu fördern oder Kooperation und Kreativität in der Organisation zu verbessern. Ein WZB-Projekt erforscht Umfang, Vielfalt und Auswirkungen dieser Entwicklung und setzt dazu Befragungen und Interviews in verschiedenen europäischen Ländern ein.

Summary: Over the past few years, learning has moved out of the classroom and into new contexts with new approaches. Artistic interventions in organizations are emerging as one way to stimulate innovative thinking and organizational development. Mapping the scope of this trend and understanding what management, employees and artists expect and how they evaluate their experiences is part of a Europe-wide WZB research project involving web-based surveys, interviews and participant observation.

Breaking the mould Learning with artists at work

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Although learning is usually associated with classrooms in schools, technical colleges and universities, a great deal of it actually takes place in non-educational settings, particularly the workplace – at which employees spend far more time than in the formal education system. And although training in engineering and management has traditionally been considered the primary source of expertise for innovation, managers in organizations of all sizes and in all sectors are breaking the mould by bringing in people, practices and products from the world of the arts for a few hours, days, months, even years.

The findings from studies on artistic interventions in organizations conducted in the research unit Cultural Sources of Newness suggest that this learning form is expanding. One indicator is that the number of intermediaries that bridge between the world of the arts and the world of organizations to initiate and support artistic interventions in Europe is growing from a small handful in 2005 to approximately forty now. In order to observe how the actors are establishing the field institutionally we are currently mapping the intermediaries via a web-based survey and engaging in participant observation.

Our research shows that stakeholders associate a range of different learning objectives with artistic interventions. Managers introduce artistic interventions into their organizations for a variety of reasons, some of which relate to individual and collective learning (such as to discover and try out different modes of leadership, to practice creativity techniques, to improve communication skills), and some of which are oriented to organizational development (for example to question assumptions and routines that have become embedded in the organizational culture, to overcome barriers between organizational units).

The phenomenon of artistic interventions in organizations is not driven by management alone: Artists, too, are seeking opportunities to work in organizational contexts outside the art world. Their motives are as diverse as those of managers: For example, some are interested in sharing their skills with employees, others want to try out different approaches to and places for making art, and some want to engage in organizations as a means of stimulating change in society.

Artistic interventions can take many forms. One is workshop-based. For example, a case chosen for investigation is a German retailer that has integrated several weeks of theater-based modules into its apprenticeship program. The

training workshops with actors culminate in the performance of a play that the apprentices develop themselves. The company has been pursuing this approach for years and the management believes that it is effective not only in developing the young people's communication and presentation skills, but also in increasing their self-confidence, which then shows up in their ability to engage with customers. Given the current pressure in the formal education system to measure learning outcomes, it is interesting to note that the management of this company refuses to introduce quantitative evaluation instruments; instead, it relies on informal feedback from the supervisors of the young people who notice changes when they return to the workplace and on comments from the young people about how they feel about themselves.

The workshop format for artistic interventions is also used by companies for their middle and senior managers. For example, a large German pharmaceutical company regularly brings in a conductor in the context of a week-long international management development program. He spends an evening working with the participants on observing the features and effects of different ways of leading an orchestra. Together they explore the implications for their own leadership styles in the organizational context. Interviews with the artist and with the consultant responsible for the overall program suggest that the approach works well to stimulate the participants' appreciation of the importance of listening and watching while leading. Both the artist and the consultant comment that a particularly valuable dimension of the session is a side-effect: The opportunity it creates afterwards over dinner for conversations with deep personal reflection that do not fit into the normal agenda and workshop discussion mode. The company requires the participants in the management development program to assess the learning experience using a short questionnaire informally referred to as "happy sheets". The fact that the company continues to work with the artist suggests that the management are happy with the feedback, but no data is available on the learning outcomes back at work. This gap exists in almost all kinds of management development workshops, it is not unique to those with the arts.

While it is still quite unusual to have actors teach apprentices or conductors develop managers' leadership skills, the workshop remains a relatively traditional educational format. There are many more formats for artistic interventions, to which we have gained research access through a series of EU-funded partnership projects with intermediaries operating in the field (<http://www.creativeclash.eu/>).

The intermediary with the longest experience in this field is TILLT, based in Sweden. Its portfolio offers a variety of artistic intervention formats, but it is most well-known for its ten-month program that matches an artist with an organization in a multi-phase mutual learning process. The key phases are: research on site by the artist (six weeks), action planning in a team of employees working with the artist (two to three months); implementation of activities (four to five months); harvesting the learning within and across organizations (one to two months). Each artistic intervention project is unique, because it is designed and implemented by the employees with the artist. When asked about the benefits they gained from the experience, employees mention specific skills, including communication. Sometimes the skills are arts-based, like photography or sound recording when the employees chose to address the question of professional and organizational identity by representing their workplace visually or aurally. The kind of learning that they appear to value most highly is the learning about others in the organization, learning to see and do things differently at work.

The managers interviewed so far also emphasize the human learning effects they observe happening during an artistic intervention. For example, a manager at a production plant cited the satisfaction of seeing individuals blossom, take new initiatives, and dissolve barriers between units in the organization. He added that the external auditors had written into their report that they had been struck by the difference in the way the employees had communicated with them on site, appearing far more willing than in the past to talk about their work.



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One might expect that the participants would highlight the value of the new ideas artists brought to the project, but the TILLT approach emphasizes that the ideas need to be generated internally. Interviews reveal that what the participants particularly appreciate as a factor supporting learning and innovation is the energy the artists bring into the organization, opening space for ideas to emerge and be tried out, instead of being shunted aside as unthinkable and impossible in their organization.

The artists report learning a great deal during their initial research phase in which they seek to discover the language codes, the practices, the underlying assumptions, the meaning behind rituals they observe in the organizational culture and subcultures, and they often find inspiration for artworks that they then follow up on outside the project, because these projects are not intended to be sites for art. For example, after observing the movement of forklifts in the company storehouse, a dancer choreographed a ballet. In turn, the performance offered the employees a fresh way of seeing their work, bringing to the fore an aesthetic dimension of which they had been unaware.

Essentially nothing is known about how small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) can benefit from artistic interventions, so we designed a web-based survey instrument to study 31 artistic interventions produced for SMEs in the Basque region of Spain by *Conexiones improbables*, an intermediary organization that specialises in artistic interventions (www.conexionesimprobables.com). The study seeks to reveal what the stakeholders expect from this new kind of interaction before they embark on the intervention, and what kinds of value they believe it generates after they have experienced working. Therefore there are pre- and post-experience versions of the questionnaire for each group – the managers, the employees, and the artists, with partially overlapping questions to permit a comparison of results. The instrument uses a combination of open questions that allow the participants to formulate their thoughts and feelings freely in their language (Spanish, Basque or English), and multiple choice questions that the researcher derived from her previous case studies. These artistic interventions, which the intermediary calls Creative Pills, last for three to four months, during which time the artists meet in several half-day working sessions to generate ideas relating to a need that has been previously defined by the company.

This study is the first one to give employees a voice about their expectations before entering an artistic intervention. Most employees wrote that they hoped the intervention would bring new perspectives, new ideas, and new energy. Several admitted that they did not know why the company was engaging in the project. In their responses to the post-experience questions, the overwhelming majority of employees and project managers indicated that the collaboration with the artist had had an impact on them personally, on other people, and on the organization. Only two respondents reported no effect on them personally and three indicated that they did not think it had affected others. Using a multiple-choice format to elicit the kinds of benefits they had particularly noticed, the employees highlighted “more energy” and “new perspectives” particularly frequently and they appreciated having developed better relations with clients and with the local community. The project managers emphasized that the experience had given them “new ideas” and “new perspectives” and had expanded their contacts in the local community.

Many respondents identified specific new skills they had learned, as well as ideas that they discovered through the collaboration in the Creative Pills. Among the skills employees and managers mentioned in the open questions are technical ones like how to use new media to communicate with customers, how to formulate the specific needs of the organization, how to organize work more effectively, and how to generate new ideas. Many responses refer to social, rather than technical learning, such as to respect the opinions of others, to get to know suppliers better, to discover how customers see the company from the outside, and to develop social networks.

Asked whether they would recommend such an artistic intervention to others,

all the respondents wrote yes. The most frequent terms employees and managers used to explain why they would recommend it were: “enriching” and “different perspectives”. The words the artists used most frequently in their reasons also include “enriching” and “other”, and they often wrote “experiment” and “both” – thereby highlighting the value they attach to moving from words to practice and to mutual learning among the participants.

The research documents show the many different kinds of value that artists, project managers, employees and intermediaries have drawn from artistic interventions, including learning new skills, improving processes and communication in organizations, and stimulating innovation. An indicator of the effectiveness and attractiveness of artistic interventions is in the twofold message from many respondents: They wish they had taken more time, and they are surprised how much was achieved within the time they spent on the process. However, the respondents also note that neither all organizations nor all artists are necessarily well suited for the experience. The distinguishing features are not as simple as organizational size industry or ownership structure, because the sample contains all kinds of organizations reporting positive experiences. All forms of art are also possible. The difference lies primarily in the openness to collaborative learning. The research therefore highlights the importance of a careful selection and matching process, and the need for intermediaries to manage expectations. In particular, the managers and employees need to understand: Benefitting from the learning opportunities presupposes a willingness to engage in an open process whose outcomes cannot be defined at the outset. This finding suggests that the current pressure to evaluate education and training programs on the basis of pre-set objectives may overlook and undervalue the unforeseeable benefits that the participants discover in the experience.