Playback Theatre in service for organizational contexts

School of Playback Theatre
Playback Theatre Leadership Essay
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supervised by
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Foreword

Many playbackers have done work in organizational settings before my wife and I started our journey with Teater X, a Playback Theatre Company based in Stockholm Sweden. I owe gratitude for the inspiration and encouragement received from Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas who has been generous to share experiences both privately and through writings and courses we have partaken in. Others have over the years been helpful in processing our playback experiences, and when it comes to understanding the challenges in organizations, I especially would like to thank Tim Van Ness, Veronica Needa, Di Adderly and Päivi Ketonen who all have been generous and inspiring colleagues. I also owe thanks to the writings of Sara Halley for initial impulse to the theme of this essay. For making this essay readable I owe much to the feedback received by my wife Synne Platander and to Randy Mulder, my buddy from PlaybackTheatre Leadership class in 2008.

In Sara Halley’s leadership essay from 1996 she foresees a wide range of possibilities for PT work to be done in organizations. Using system theorist Peter Senges “five disciplines” Halley suggest areas within the disciplines where PT can be of substantial usage. In this paper she writes that it is her belief “that we as Playback practitioners have a great deal to offer organizations”. For example “a number of applications for Playback in team learning” were she especially mentions “the kind of listening and presenting” that playback offers to “help people and groups to assess their current reality” as well as serve as an excellent tool for dialogue that adds movement to mere talking. Also she draws attention to the fact that the Playback ensemble in it self “think and act in a system way and therefore can be a powerful mirror for organizations”. In her concluding part she asserts that:

“We model ancient wisdom that could be thought of as new technologies. We rely on an interdependence that indigenous people have known about and honored for ages and scientists are just beginning to validate. In a simple and sometimes metaphoric way (much like nature herself) we give the gift of clear vision, and bring the necessary qualities of respect, compassion, caring, creativity, humor, and acceptance to our work. We model team learning and apply systems theory in a way that sometimes looks effortless.

When I look at current reality through the lens of Playback, I feel hope. I believe that our greatest gift consists of this: rekindling hope in the human spirit.”

Together with Jonathan Fox, Sara Halley some 10 years later (2006) in a chapter on Playback Theatre (in the Change handbook/ Group methods to shape the future,) concluded with some of the possible outcomes of PT in organizational work as wells as some of the pre-requisites for success. They state that

“Because of Playback Theatre’s effectiveness in building community and its inherent valuing of all voices, it can play a key role in organizational change efforts. This is especially true for any organization looking to develop a more effective team culture, greater openness and transparency in management, and more participatory leadership at all levels.”

In my paper I will describe some of my findings and understandings of prerequisites and outcomes from PT work in organizations. I will also come back to some statements from Halley & Fox but first I invite you to join me on my journey.
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Introduction

I was introduced to Playback Theatre in 1995 by the young Norwegian, Synne Thiis, who in 1994 had been one of the first graduates from School of Playback Theatre Leadership training in upstate New York, USA. I was in a transition time professionally as well as personally. Synne came to be a significant part of both; we have been partners in life and in Playback since the spring of 1995. As the years went by our understanding of the prerequisites for successful playback has increased, and in particular Playback within organizational contexts, as has the understanding of how it is to run and develop a PT company, which is an organizational construct of its own.

Looking back to where I started with PT in 1995 I see that I already was on a journey of bringing myself and Action Methods into use on the organizational settings. I had just entered a new role as organizational consultant/process leader in my own business. I had done my psychodrama training, up to director of Psychodrama (CP) and was aiming for work mainly in organizational fields. I had left my employment in elementary school, in favor of being a career coach, supervisor for workgroups, coach for managers, as well as facilitator for conferences, staff meetings, etc. For a few years I had been doing some work with Action Methods. I was in relation with clients and milieus with interest in dynamic methods. I encountered Playback Theatre about the same time. I saw a great potential for bringing even this concept to organizations. Playback Theatre also resonated with the performer in me, as I had been in a band and doing theatre while I was younger.

Some personal review and reflections on the endeavors of bringing Playback Theater to organizational arenas is to follow. This story will be told in four parts. I have revisited the organizational/corporate venues we’ve been working in, and tried to recollect the learning’s derived from the different phases. It’s a sensemaking process that is as subjective as any sensemaking process. It is first of all my story. I have been member of two companies since my initial meeting with PT. The focus here is not to write the full story of any PT-company but to sort out bits and pieces that can illuminate the weaving of a sensemaking thread on making playback theatre work in organization. If this can be a part of shared meaning for others you are welcome.

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1 In his book Sensemaking in Organizations Weick argues that sensemaking is about such things that “the placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding and patterning”. He also states that interpretation is a component not a synonym with sensemaking which it is often misunderstood to be. Weick points to that most descriptions of interpretation focus on some kind of text and that what sensemaking does is “adress how the text is constructed as well how it is read. Sensemaking is about authoring as well as reading.” Sensemaking is grounded in both individual and social activity and whether the two are even separable is a recurrent issue in Weicks writing.

2 The term organization is used to cover both corporate and businessfield entities as clients to us and sometimes to identify the administrative body of roles and responsibilities in Teater X.
Part One 1995 - 2003 Finding our ways to and on organizational arenas.


The first experiences from the organizational field we made already during the time we were part of Teater Nu, a PT company started by Johan Dahlerus in 1995. Teater Nu became a forerunner to Teater X that later was founded by Synne and me in 1999. Its first performance besides performing for family and friends started 1996 was a contracted performance in an organizational context, the transition for a workgroup that had a new manager taking over after a missed and appreciated predecessor. It went quite well, and we were inspired to continue this work. We were new to Playback and pleased that it worked.

We got requests now and then and were happy to be asked. The kind of work we were asked to do was a bit random. Some of it more relevant than others. One of the more relevant series of engagements was going to Denmark several times in a project run by Nike Brandt Poulsen, the Magic Mirror-project. We were giving performances as well as trainings in playback and listening skills for social-pedagogues working with troubled institutionalized youth and helping them to launch a PT troupe of their own.

I can recall doing 10 -12 performances in organizational settings together with Teater Nu during these 3 years. Some of them went quite well, others I can see now were not really adequate for the context. One time we were replaced by a string quartet in a series of reoccurring seminars. Probably a good choice for the context but at that time it felt as a big rejection of what we were doing.

We got requests from various places; people we knew, relatives and others. We were eager to do these jobs. It was fun and challenging and both Synne and I saw a need to raise the professional standards of the work if we were going to charge organizations for the services we offered. This was maybe one of the key factors leading up to a split in this first group. The social part of the company life was strong in Teater Nu. The Playback Theatre-company Teater Nu was loosely organized and geographically spread over a big area. Not everybody was interested in making Playback part of his or her professional identity. Some of the participants participated mainly for their own needs with low ambitions to perform in public.
During the spring of 1999 Synne and I took the initiative to create a Stockholm-based company with more professional ambitions. Teater X started out August 1999 as a project, at first administered by my own business (Platander Utbildning). We wanted to heighten the quality of the craft by having regular weekly trainings, keep up regular public performances, and increase the number of commissioned performances. We wanted to grow in numbers and in functions. Having multiple musicians and conductors were goals we held from the start. The name Teater X was a preliminary name for this project and we wanted in due time to create a suitable organizational body to fit our purposes. We had a strong ambition to make PT a part of our income. We wanted to expand commercially to the level that we could employ our artistic director, Synne, at 50% within a couple of years, and the others in due time. We outlined a vision of the whole company being part time fed by PT theatre. We were seven regular members and a freelance musician at that time, and invited two more members within the first year.

Our goals, perhaps, were overly ambitious. Still, we achieved quite a lot in a wide range of settings. From Teater X’s birth in the summer of 1999 through the next three years we did keep up weekly daytime rehearsals, monthly public performances and launched around 24 corporate performances. Among them there were a lot of trainings ranging from: program’s for unemployment agency staff, project leaders in a research-organization, and government administration project leaders.

Among these early corporate gigs we had some interesting and puzzling experiences. One of them was working with the board members of a web-based news bureau. We were hired by a business consultant to assist him in bringing cultural and relational awareness to an all male board. The purpose was to induce more openness and cooperative climate in the board of the organization.

We had one part of Playback, one part of Impro to illuminate cooperation skills and one part Action Methods with the board taking place on the stage (with the actors seated as spectators) presenting their board and the relationships between different units. I had them role-reverse\(^3\) and identified some challenges and clarified positions and increased the possibility to embrace different perspective. At least that was what we assumed.

Some weeks later we heard that they had gotten rid of the boardmember who we had in focus and with whom we facilitated several role-reversals. He was overtly opposing how things were done.

\(^3\) an intervention technique adapted from Psychodrama that was founded by J.L. Moreno. Role reversals enables shift in perspectives through enactment of the others’ “role” repeating the arguments and statements, (an especially active form of active listening if you prefer) and by role reversing with two actual persons you can enhance a more accurate perception of the held viewpoints. Increased empathy and understanding is the potential output of this.
as I recall it. His superior did role reverse with him and very accurately mirrored his thoughts and feelings. Immediately afterwards we were glad to contribute to this bigger clarity and understanding. In retrospect I wonder if we were used to make disagreements visible and in some way legitimize their intention of sacking the boardmember? This is a question we were asking ourselves. The Consultant was happy with the solution and showed no understanding of our concern. We have not continued to cultivate relationship with him. And we became aware of hidden agendas and the risk of being used for obscured purposes. The questionmarks around this episode surely raised ethical concerns of how Teater X and Playback Theatre is used.

On another occasion we were invited to do a series of four performances in two weeks time for a city outside Stockholm. We were happy and flattered to do this, but didn’t do our homework properly. We missed some of the important questions to the organizers. Our eagerness to do contracted playback by far exceeded our understanding of the setting.

In short, we had audiences who by the roles and functions they held, were naturally polarized. They were first line managers and trade unionists (from the same communal workplaces, schools, daycare centers, etc.) with little openness towards each other when it came to exposing sensitive and important matters. The program for the halfday was rather thin, Playback being the main content. The warm-up of the audience prior to the event was unclear to us as well as the follow up. So in a way we acted in a vacuum. There were some new procedures on formalizing cooperations between trade unions and employer that was to be launched. That was the overall purpose.

In retrospect we could surely have rigged the situation differently. We were so “performance format and personal story” bound at that time. To find out that we were the almost the only content at these occasions were uncomfortable to us. The need of the audience was primary information but instead they got a dialogical tool.

We did these four performances, each time a challenge to make a PT-event out of it. We tried to make the audience and the setting adapt to the playback format rather than to adapt the intervention to the needs of the organization. We were asking for stories, as playbackers do and of course there were lots of potential stories from their shared reality there that could be of interest but not in this setting, they way it unfolded. And with not enough consideration to what warm-up was needed to launch these stories the ”present” were rather numb. The only stories that emerged were stories from the past and from other organizations. Good stories as I recall, good and bad examples of cooperation in the workplace and organizational culture through different decades the audience members had experienced.
How this was to be taken further by the organizers was not obvious to us. They ended the session with a Q & A panel on the stage with central representatives from employer and tradeunionist. We could see and hear the overtly expressed needs from the audience: information about the new procedures and the timetable to implement them, and that happened every time. So we were more of a kickoff event activity instead of the potentially potent dialogical facilitating tool we really wanted to, but did not yet know how to be.

Still, during these early years we had some really satisfying experiences as well. Her follows an example were the performance became a very adequate and integrating part of a program.

We were engaged to partake at a conference held by the Regional traffic-police chiefs and the Government Road Agency about traffic security and the ending of a joint-project and their future cooperation. The playback theatre performance ended up being the last session of the conference instead of the scheduled time after lunch the last day. That was a lucky strike for both us and the organizers. They decided to drop the closing panel discussion and were happy with the performance and the collage of pictures from the two days of conference that gave flesh and emotions to the issues at hand and also highlighted some of the expectancies and worries upon the future cooperation.

We saw the possibility to conclude an event in a good manner. The participants shared the content and the experience from the two days conference and we helped them integrate emotional and cognitive elements from the proceeding days. We portrayed a drunk schoolbusdriver, a single mother of five kids struggling to have lowered speedlimits and traffic signs on the road real close to her house, the lorry drivers transporting goods under a tight schedule. We also to the amusement of the gathered groups portrayed the two organizations caught in their own hierarchy and agendas, trying to get the other part to take initiatives and bear costs for the future cooperation. We felt very good about the timing of the performance and that there was ”existential nerve” in the stories and the enactments. Life and death were really present, and at the same time it was all organizationally relevant.

**Observations, Discoveries & Conclusions**

During these early years we met a variety of different audiences, in different settings, noticing that we were more comfortable when people worked in social or cultural contexts. These people were more open to sharing thoughts and feelings from their work life, that made us the playbackers resonate as we could relate to both the way of sharing as well as often to the content of their work.
Some of these experiences from different settings led me to conclude that we as performers could do jobs in many settings but that our weak link was that of the conductor. We were 4 - 5 persons altering in the conductor role, we were gaining experiences as conductors but for most of us the role of the actor was preferred. It was OK for many of us to conduct a public performance, were people came to us and we were hosting “the given context”. When we arrived to a context constituted by someone else, an organizer of an event for a special purpose or entered into the heart of an organization we were more of Bambi on ice.

We needed to train the conductors ability to address organizational culture and needs. Be able to both understand and articulate relevant understanding of how PT can meet organizational needs. This understanding would be beneficial for client-organizations as well as for the ensemble. The weak spot was not how to deal with strong emotional personnel material, rather the opposite. With little self-disclosure, as often happens in workplace and organizational settings, how to frame those stories to be of organizational relevancy is a key question? How do we make the actors see the value of doing even these stories? Some actors still appreciated the public performances more because they felt that these stories were meatier than those emerging in most organizational settings we had entered so far. Of course still many clients still saw us mainly as an entertaining piece to put in somewhere in the program, sometimes as a surprise as well! That somewhat hysterical “kickoff energy” blended with alcohol seldom made a good mix for good Playback to occur.

Our own internal organization started to evolve during this early years. We created an Association in 2003 with a board and standards. Annual elections of new board were held, while revue of the past year and new ambitions were raised for next year. We thereby subsequently separated our own business PLATANDER UTBILDNING, from the Playback ensemble. We kept the name, Teater X, which we had become very fond of. The name reflects the unknown factor X and the spontaneity required from our selves as well of our clients, and all the potential unknown stories, we also liked that existential, experiment, exchange, extra, exalted, all spelled with an X.

After initiating this Association Teater X we now saw a growing differentiation occur. Now some gatherings were meetings and some were rehearsals. Different needs started to find ways to be addressed using different forums. New processes/procedures/roles emerged both administering the group as a whole as well as before and on the missions/performances. We saw a great benefit of separating the roles of the conductor and that of the producer. Other persons than the Conductor should deal with the roadie stuff, logistics, equipment and rigging. We also started to be cautious of
the different warm-up needs that existed for different persons and functions in the performances. Delegating warmups and other things helped the conductor to maintain energy. Synne was the Artistic Director of the group but we tried to share responsibilities more equally. We had different persons taking up responsibility for different rehearsals, and also for updating our logbook that we kept for all the stories shared in our performances.

Soon after the founding of Teater X - Association we communicated Synne’s and my future plans of moving to Norway. We wanted to prepare the group to stand on its own feet. The group now consisted of 7-8 persons.
Part Two  2003-2008  Maturing internally as an organization and refining art & relevance in organisations

We now had an organizational body for Teater X and our first website launched around 2004. Some members had left, we had recruited new, artistically strong members, and the team had established a beautiful esthetic professionalism. We experimented with forum-theatre, IMPRO, and other elements to be more apt to the needs of the settings. We even lent ourselves to be alternative living Power Point illustrations for lecturers/speakers a few times, once at a kick-off event for a Corporate Health Care presenting themselves to new clients another time at the Ministry of Finance that had a seminar about managers responsibility when it came to monitoring and induce a good working climate. During this time Teater X established some long-term relationships with some of the consultants that used us, one of them being Stefan Dahlberg and his Competence Compagniet that became of great significance to us.

This group is a network of consultants having assignments in a variety of organizations, including experience with Debriefing and Crisis Management. We have been a re-occurring part of his/their resources over the years. We’ve been hired several times in different settings, for ranging from programs for managers for sales driven privately held organizations as well as government officials.

The Swedish State run Pharmaceutical Organization, Apoteket AB, were clients that was established through this collaboration. Stefan Dahlberg and Pontus Holmgren (who later became a member in Teater X) ran a “Large Group” work over two days. The group was aimed at merging two cultures under a new manager: Teater X was hired to end day one with stories from situations that these managers had encountered in their worklife. It was a rather humorous and lightweight performance and that was maybe the first time we felt really satisfied despite the lack of emotional depth. There was a strong sense of community present. We were actually helping to build bridges between two cultures, being part of a ritual for these managers under a new manager: This felt important and meaningful to us.

And as Pontus put it at that time the difference with other entertaining things one could have ended the day with, this playback event was both entertaining and kept the participants within their own context were other entertainer/lecturers bring their audiences mentally to their own universe.

The impact we had on the audience was great and the appreciation that followed was vast. The ensemble helped to open up system boundaries between the members in the two departments which were to become one. Teater X has been hired several times from different departments within this

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4 both Production and Chain of Drugstores.
The afore mentioned professional network of debriefers, Competence Compagniet (CC) had to deal with private and corporate traumas in the aftermath of the Asian/Thailand Tsunami in 2004. Scandinavian countries were hit rather hard. Many families celebrating Christmas holiday in this part of Asia were targeted and around 500 to 600 hundred persons from Scandinavia never came back. CC worked with one of the main travel agencies over a period of many months. We decided to offer Playback Theatre as one of the healing rituals for those professional debriefers who had witnessed and contained so much suffering from others. Stefan, had as mentioned earlier, hosted Teater X in several different corporate training programs, saw a potential for our offer to be a nice contribution later that spring. Other people in his network were concerned if theatre was the right thing to do in a situation as this. The risks, involving a theatre company, that by vulgar amateurism might ridicule professional helpers that both were shaken personally and had high professional standards, were at hand. All of us Playbackers had a strong commitment to do this performance. None of us were personally hit by the tragedy even if I had an adult daughter in Kao Lak/Thailand at the time of the catastrophe. Stefan managed to get acceptance among his peers to have us as part of the ritual and a team of five Playbackers launched our act of service.

In the afternoon before dinner all the debriefers, who had been in different groups during the day, were led in to this big beautiful old industrial hall. The lighting and the atmosphere were sacred; it was high under the roof, white walls, some fabric hanging from the ceiling in transparent ways. One big white rugged carpet was our stage. We had placed the boxes and the cloth in a standard Playback setting. I was the musician at that moment and Maria was the conductor. The performance started with short forms from organizing and standby positions that many had withheld. Some images from lonely homecoming kids were offered: “what happened to that Finnish boy who walked over the floor at Airport in transit for Finland with only a blanket covering him?” Stefan’s own stories from both organizer and debriefer perspective were acted out as well as others. Some frustrations from the bystander debriefers that were put on hold for future work, led us slowly to also portray the paradoxes of on one side there was “trauma” and suffering on the other “business as usual state of mind” some of the debriefers had witnessed going down to Thailand. The stories were enacted bravely with beauty and respect and in one scene, Alan in the role of a Hotel manager trying his best to maintain a sense of everything is fine and “even the toilets are working as they should,” “Look her mister,” grabs a “corner” of the huge round carpet, and I as the musician immediate mirrored him from the other side and we suddenly found ourselves dragging the carpet as a huge wave overturned everything left on stage.
boxes, instruments, cloth - everything is turned upside down and created a huge turmoil. That was a very special moment.

This performance is one of the most profound in my Playback experience and is probably the most heartfelt organizational service I participated in. The level of seriousness and the contained trauma that was carried out by these heroic debriefers who also had lost a dear colleague in the tragedy was dense. It was almost too much for us in the ensemble especially in the minutes before we opened, and the moment when the audience members walked into the room that we had prepared. We had an involuntarily icebreaker by me presenting myself by the name of another actor in the opening. And I was maybe the person most known by name by the audience! The laughter that followed released a lot of tension in the whole room. After that we could work our way through the performance and in a respectful and artistically daring way, contribute to this containing/closing ritual of the aftermaths of the Tsunami for this organization.

Largegroup work and performance

In those “maturing” years we also gained some useful experience of being consultants and playback performers at the same event. We did some performances were Synne and I were facilitating large group work during the day and ending the evening with Teater X. A concept that often works really smooth. At some occasions we still struggled with how to integrate consulting and Playback more organically, so that the shift into the performance was not so abrupt. The warmup for participants and performers were not always attuned. The Playback crew was not always on track with what was going on and what to expect, and sometimes they felt that the Playback work was a little too superficial and “out of the blue”. Even though we, the facilitators, were quite satisfied with the outcome. We (facilitators) could see the stories that were told in the light of the previous work of the day. We didn’t always successfully communicate this to the actors, and maybe not even for everyone in the audience. We were reminded that the Conductor always needs to ensure and “renegotiate” relevance in the here and now. And if this is prepared wisely, it is easier for everyone involved.

Another example of this is when Synne was invited to do a performance with a City department that dealt with assimilation of immigrants through two vital but separate activities one being language training, that was the responsibility for one section and the other was finding/creating worklife trainingplaces that was the main responsibility for the other section. Synne as Conductor managed to grasp the dilemmas at hand and by asking about the true and relevant job story experiences, step by step created an atmosphere were the real issues at hand surfaced. The stories shared from the two
cooperating units within the same department really spotlighted their dilemmas and some good integrative work was done during the performance. The animation of a "planning sheet" that held the whole dilemma in itself was brilliantly enacted and right on target. Synne was really satisfied with how to really be of service for the organizational context.

The performance’s success took some careful planning and a really good warm up of the audience. The conductor had achieved a thorough understanding of the organizational context, it’s real need and it’s real challenges. She was also given a mandate by the organization and the boss to deal with these issues. The entertaining aspect of this performance was optional, the relevant processing of real dilemmas were the focus.

Observations, Discoveries & Conclusions

During this period between 2003-2008 with approximately 35 - 40 corporate performances altogether; seven to eight a year; we saw the need to further elaborate our understanding and skills in dealing with organizational matters. Not every request is suitable for PT. Other Improv companies could be part of entertainment at conferences and we started to recommend other groups in the field to people who approached us. We saw a growing need to be more selective in what contexts we wanted to work in to set some clear criteria’s on what we as an ensemble needed, in order to do a good job.

Corporate work do not always get emotionally charged. Synne and I have had difficulties at times to communicate with the ensemble that it does not have to be deep and existential to be of relevance for the context.

During this time Synne and I wrote an article on findings we had done so far for a Nordic Dramamagazine DRAMA(2007) in an issue on drama and theatre in the corporate field. We now saw even clearer that the level of satisfaction on behalf of the troupe and conductor had less to do with depth of stories, rather on relevancy and feeling of contributing to an actual visible need. We saw that the PT Company's preparation to organizational work needed to be taken care of. So that the expectations of the conductor and ensemble aren't imposed on the audience who didn't respond or contribute in a "desired" manner. The audience is not there to serve cues for us to show off by making clever art. Yes, indeed. A relevant question for any Playback company is: Who should be serving who?

Our conclusions in the article is that
"Whether it's entertainment, team building, conflict management, management development, conferences, anniversaries or other performances it is important that purpose, context and mutual expectations are made clear and coherent. With proper warm up to the right context can playback theater be extremely rewarding for everyone involved. Customer dialogue is crucial to the outcome of a meaningful interaction between audience and the ensemble. Theatre X is at their best when given room for both humor and seriousness, existential and emotional resonance.

When we get the trust to portray the important stories of individuals, groups and organizations it is a privilege to be in service as co-creative catalyst for a sensemaking experience."

**Maturing internally as an organization**

When we as an ensemble raised our ambitions and got more involved with each other, internally and administrative, we saw that the time was never quite enough for the things we aspired to fulfill. Many meetings raised more questions and issues compared to the available time to process them. We tried to apply the motto "striving for excellence and accepting imperfection," even to administration, marketing and other less artistic and more organizational issues. The hard part was to accept the imperfection. The differentiation process concerning roles and functions in our internal organization continued. We soon saw that we needed backup, an administrative professional and hired a young student to be Marketing Assistant. We also formed a "marketing group" with her and two members including myself. We were a committee with special focus on strategies and measures for creating contracted works in the corporate field and reporting to the Board that held the overall responsibility.

During this period the marketing group launched our series of recurring promotional lunches, especially designed to attract and build relations with even more organizational consultants. We wanted to approach business consultants more directly and strategically. Developing relationships with them would help us to be more relevant to the settings we were facing. In turn we could be more of a useful tool for organizations' developmental needs. When we worked together with experienced business consultants we felt much more satisfied, as the pre-work was done by them and also that our contribution was possible to build upon for the consultant in their further work. By that we could relax and do our thing with a "pre" and "post" taken care of. We could be a more relevant useful block in the training programs most of the times. We also saw that they often were our gate opener into organizations we ourselves didn't otherwise could access. We generally speaking saw the cooperation with other consultants as a success-factor for entering the corporate field. My understanding at this time was that we didn't compete with them, rather complemented them with
Playback Theatre. I saw that the future for us primarily was giving complimentary service to Organizational Consultants.

After a year or so, the marketing group was weakened when our hired market assistant was recruited to be the treasurer for the Teater X - Association as nobody else wanted to take that role. She had some knowledge of bookkeeping and the board thought it was a good way (or at least convenient) of using her competence. The loss of manpower in the marketing group became evident after a while. She left us when she concluded that we had no funds to supporting having her on the payroll.

Over the years we have always had a mixture of members who were employed outside of their work with Teater X and members who relied on its potential income. Sometimes the expectations were higher on getting paid than at other times. These shifts were valid and over time changed from persons within the group. From time to time many of us took up other jobs for survival which resulted in fluctuations in commitment to Teater X. The expectancy on PT as a substantial income source had not yet been met.

External Supervision

Di Adderly came to work with us on conducting, both with the group TX and also as part of the summer training for what was to become Skandinavisk PT Studio. Di Adderly increased some sharpness and crisp to the conductor’s possibilities to be direct without being intrusive and being entertaining without losing depth.

During these years Synne and I also hired Tim Van Ness to facilitate PT for “organizational development people” OD in cooperation with GRO a company run by Pontus who later became member of Teater X. We wanted to strengthening the bonds with these groups as well as increase our own understanding of “how to do it” including, “How to make the personal narratives organizationally relevant? How to maintain a relevant openness in the midst of “organizational political” correctness?” Tim has taught at the Scandinavian PT Studio twice in Sweden so far. A few members of Teater X took part in these trainings with Tim together with business consultants from our network. Tim also spent some time together with Teater X internally, shared some of his learning’s, and worked with the needs of our group.

Some years earlier we also hired an external consultant Ron Wiener, a sociodramatist and business consultant from England, to work more directly on Teater X as an organization. He helped us to look

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5 a center of training for Playback Theatre in Scandanavia run by me and Synne
“objectively” at ourselves as well as identify what we wanted to be. It was a very creative, artistic and well attuned intervention that clarified a lot of our culture, our mindsets, and challenges. He helped us to clarify implications of having both a business part and a nonprofit part to our work and helped clarifying significant roles functions and in relation to the default structure.

The included mapping of roles and areas of responsibility is the most visible result from that weekend. See figure 1

The images of family matters and business matters made sense to us. We were a community that at times took up professional tasks that we got paid for. And different agendas needed to be taken care of in different ways.

Ron was working with us knowing of Synne and myself moving to Norway in the future. And the default structure could no more rest solely in the hands of us. The collection of functions, roles and responsibilities was gathered of the whole of theater X naming and categorizing the roles and the function we saw as necessary to maintain and develop Teater X in the way we wanted. My contributions to roles put on the chart was derived from my vision to create an economically rewarding and professionally driven Theatre Company that could have more members on the payroll. In order to
maintain and develop Teater X these roles needed to be spread. It was I that after the weekend summarized this work into the image and presented it to the Teater X. Not all members shared the view that these were necessary functions/roles. Some thought it was a too ”big costume” to wear. Many members in the group saw the ambitions and focus on incomes and marketing in organizations as sidetracks and were mainly interested in performing for a public audience.

So we had a situation were not all members wanted to put effort into building TX to something that it wasn’t already. During this time it was challenging to contain these differences within the group. Among them the forementioned different levels of need for economical outcome, different levels of ambitions for the company, visible through both time allocated for rehearsals trainings and meetings as well as different villingness to volountarly take on functions/roles. And of course the direction wanted for the future of the company.

Artistic and administrative leadership for TEATER X had been at Platanders hand from the beginning, and altered during the years. We were ready to give up being the ”default structure” we, for obvious reasons, held as founders and leaders, and urged members to take on responsibility at many occasions during the years. We tried to see different organizational solutions to both further the professionalizing and also to include the wider circle of members. In 2008 we arrived at a separation of the business part and the association. So Platander Utbildning was again running the commercial side of Teater X and the association Teater X ran public performances and rehearsals roughly speaking. We could contain the differences and maintain an ensemble and a community through this decisions that in a way created two formally differentiated organizations. Overlapping in some cases and leaving things between chairs of each “organization” at other times. And the above presented scheme in figure I was no longer valid as a picture of one organization, but had surely helped to clarify where we differed in images of what Teater X was and directions for the future, we saw clearer what parts were shared responsibilities and what part should remain in the custody of me an Synne.

The pressure on taking up roles was lowered, and we legitimized every level of participating. This calmed down the ambitions for the association, at least temporarily. That has later developed into more frequent and ambitious profile.

First I want to present some frameworks that has helped me in my understanding and guided my strivings along the way.

As one theorist put it: “If you want to understand an organization; try to change it”.

Jan Platander
Playback Theatre Leadership Essay 2011
Playback theatre in service for organizational context’s

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Part Three  Theoretical mindsets that proved to be helpful.

I have been co-leading a training programme for facilitators & process leaders for more than a decade together with Marianne Wiktorin; the Art of Consultation with extensive use of Action Methods and Systems Thinking. We have used Bolman & Deal's, Reframing Organizations as part of our curriculum. These frames of reference has obviously become a part of my own understanding of organizations.

Reframing Organizations according to Bolman & Deal.

Bolman & Deal (Reframing Organizations) presents an overall categorization of management and organizational theory. They have chosen to lump together four different main frames of reference. This gives a four-set of glasses to view organizations and mainly how different mindset around understanding organizations are constituted. How is the world around me organized and how should it be organized ideally?

It forms a grid over potential viewpoints. When things go awry, how do you attribute the causes and what guides your thought on relevant interventions? Here follows a brief presentation of these 4 perspectives:

1 The Structural viewpoint: Organization theories that use the Machine metaphor as a guiding image for understanding organizations. It emphasizes roles, regulations, structures and flux of input and outcome. It describes organizations in general as rational systems that it is possible to adjust and refine to be cost-benefit maximized, efficient and in a fruitful exchange with its environment, contributing to fulfilling the assigned tasks. The idealized leader is the Analytical Designer, the Architect.

2 The Human Resource viewpoint: Theories that use the Family metaphor or the organism as a guiding image, emphasizes needs, competencies, synergies, communication and facilitation of organic growth. “Take care of people and people will take care of business!” Business is understood as rooted in the needs in the environment that the organizations is set to fulfill. Idealized leadership styles are the facilitator; the good parent.

3 The Political/Power viewpoint: Organization theories that use the metaphor of the Jungle or Parliament as guiding image. It emphasizes power, influence, resources, and interest optimization. To negotiate and create temporary alliances, and sustaining inner and outer legitimization by adjusting and
be sensitive to shifts in power balances is within the reigns of this field. Idealized leadership images are, the Statesman, the Negotiator, the Warrior:

4 The Symbolic viewpoint: The symbolic approach uses the metaphors of Temple or Theatre to understand organizations. The emphasize is on rituals, sensemaking, aesthetics, meaning and stories. It is about communicating meaning, purpose, direction, vision and building corporate Culture. To develop liturgies that helps to pertain an understandable universe that make sense and motivates employees as well as attract costumers and business partners. The Prophet, the Sensemaker, the Storyteller are in these perspective aspects of the true Magician.

To deliberately alternate between these four different perspectives is said to be beneficial. Any organization is all this and more. To have a multi-theoretical understanding helps you to be able to contain some of the complexity. How you address the system determines how it responds, or at least how you understand the responses. This has been valid also in my attempts to develop and understand the organization, Teater X.

I can see that Teater X has been rather strong in the HR and in the Symbolic perspectives and weaker in the Structural and Politics. We have a strong emphasis on art, relationships and understanding human conditions. And on the other hand weaker when it comes to efficiency and businesslike practice. No one should be surprised.

Along the way there has been other helpful concepts to illuminate both the praxis of being an organization (Teater X) and also in focusing on making a contribution to customers and their organizations.

**Theory of Living Human Systems / Systems Centered Training**

One other vital influence for me has been the Theory of Living Human Systems. In this concept I found a meta-theory to guide the praxis of Playback Theatre and all kind of interventions in organizations. It is a communication/information theory, a group development theory, and a set of intervention tools, useful and powerful. At the core of this concept is the discrimination and integration of differences. This is tapping into the underlying processes that according to the claims of this theory helps all living human systems to survive, develop and transform. For example, even a short term gathering of people such as a performance can be seen as a system, which I will use to outline some key concepts from SCT.

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SCT Systems Centered Training are an intrinsic part of Theory of Living Human Systems, by Yvonne Agazarian.
A performance has boundaries in time and place, a goal to achieve, differentiated roles organized in two subsystems, the ensemble and the audience. The conductor, actors, musician in the subsystem of the ensemble and the audience subsystem containing potential and emerging tellers. A special role, the Conductor, vectors/directs the communication in the system as a whole. In the performance these two systems, actors and audience need to have their needs met by interacting with each other in order to reach their common goal. The conductor is the key person facilitating the transference of relevant information and energy through both systems and to minimize noise partly through clarifying the agreed upon objectives and also to clarify expectations towards the audience. The conductor should use of all the curiosity on the edge of the unknown so he can elicit and induce to all present. The conductor is directing energy to help systems warm-up to open its boundaries, which is a prerequisite to sharing information. A vital question is, What opens system boundaries and what closes them, individually as well as on a group and system level? Yes, one person is also a subsystem (contained within the surrounding system) that has boundaries, personal goals, and roles. One crucial point is the conductor’s ability to create rapport with the people gathered, and to subgroup with any teller and help them to connect to audience subgroups while at the same time deal with tendencies to polarize into opposing subgroups. Adding to this is the conductor’s ability to walk securely in this fields of polarities and balancing them, including them, and challenging them at the same time. Functional sub-grouping is a tool and approach that helps this process. This is obviously tapping into the, for any playbacker, familiar playback questions used to address the audience: “Anyone else with a similar experience?” “Who has a totally different experience?” It is important to acknowledge both.

Sensemaking, enactment theory, social constructivism

I have throughout the paper used the term sensemaking several times. In his book Sensemaking in Organizations1995 Weick argues that sensemaking is about such things that “the placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redresssing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding and patterning”. He also states that interpretation is a component not a synonym with sensemaking which it is often misunderstood to be. Weick points to that most descriptions of interpretation focus on some kind of text and that what sensemaking does is “adress how the text is

7 Role, Goal & Context is correlated to each other and define each other. Change one and the rest need to change. Also is every context nested in a bigger context. There is alway a system / context level above an one below.

8 the goal; a performance produced through the unfolding of audience members real life experiences portrayed by actors.

9 Noise as in contradictory, vague or redundant communication, by SCT terminology, that draws on Shannon & Weavers findings.

10 curiosity on the edge of the unknown is where discoveries and changes happens, its presence induced by curiosity according to SCT

11 9 subgroup (join, pace, empathitize)
constructed as well how it is read. Sensemaking is about authoring as well as reading.” Sensemaking is grounded in both individual and social activity and whether the two are even separable is a recurrent issue in Weicks writing.

In the Book "Organization theory: Modern, Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives" by Mary Jo Hatch outlines some developmental lines of theories on understanding organizations. When referring to an earlier contribution by Karl Weick and his The Enactment theory that saw its light in 1979 where Weick deliberately is inducing associations to the art’s, for example the mime actor who enacts a world of imaginary objects and surroundings that we by his enactment in a way can see. This theory says that when we use any the term for example organization we do create the phenomena we are studying. When an organization makes themselves a picture of the context they operate in, they also do create the situations they responds to. Weick deliberately uses this term to emphasize that managers and leaders are active- they construe, reorganize, choose some and neglect other objectivities in their reality. The difference between mime and enactment is that we are aware of the difference between the door induced by the artist and a real door:

Through the enactment we try to create an environment, a culture a strategy or an organization, when that is done we have difficulty discriminate between our own creation and reality. As individuals we rarely can create this "realities" and be considered sane. It requires a social agreement and cooperation to achieve this. And the concept that reality is socially constructed was according to Mary Jo Hatch, maybe first conceived by Berger & Luckman that in 1966 wrote an influential book, The Social Construction of Reality. In that book they outline the creation of social order through negotiations and agreements based upon a common history and experiences. The social order is there maintained through the consensus about how the world is constituted. Berger & Luckman illuminates the "paradox that man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product". Through members interpretations patterns of meaning in their actions emerge, and the assumption that these patterns exist independent of the interpretation that created them. A sensemaking process has occurred.

The standpoint from the social constructionist says Hatch, leads to the conclusion that the categories used to understand organizations for example environment, structure, culture, leadership not are real or natural in any objective meaning. Instead are they products of opinions held by members of the society. That means that we invent and maintain those definitions of concepts/notions we then use to make sense of our experiences in the world. Accordingly we act and interpret our actions inside a
sociocultural context that we are in reality the originator of. And Mary Jo Hatch cites the American antropologist Clifford Geertz when he says, "Man is an animal trapped in webs of significance he himself has spun."

Some social constructivistic perspectives is in a way modern by the fact that the world continues for them that adopt this as a true objectivistic viewpoint. The concept that reality is not at all objective rather objectified thereby introduces a new understanding of instability and the potentiality in organizatoric change. If says Hatch, organizations are social constructions that we continually reconstrue, then we could if we were aware of these processes alter them during this reconstruction. Drawing on research from a symbolic-interprative perspective that studies subjective and social construction do make ourselves aware of our participation in shaping organizational processes. Hatch says that this dawning insights connects the symbolic-interpretative approaches with some postmodernistic approaches on organizational theory. These (postmodernistic) thinkers wants to control these processes and reconstruct the organizational reality according to even freer guidelines.

**A slight excursion to postmodernism, collage and narratives.**

According to Hatch its impossible to choose one core theory or collection of typical ideas to examplify postmodernism, there are to many. And even the value that diversity has among postmodernists contradicts the idea of uniting these different viewpoints to a coherent and all inclusive explanation. This has lead some organizations- researchers working outside the postmodern perspective to conclude that this is a "anything goes" approach. This is not true, Hatch continues, since postmodernism even though its relativism in the sense that it takes distance to the idea of universal criterias for truth and quality, does not sacrifice all norms. Postmodernist tends to perceive questions of right and wrong and good and evil as social constructs that preferably should be adressed to a personal domain of reflektion and praxis wherein they are valid.

The postmodern criticism of the modernistic "age of enlightenment project" rationalizing human cultures and societies, targets its blind faith to rationality and the attempt to develop an integrated theory about the universe based on scientific principles and methods, (in astronomi and Physics examplified by Galileo and Newton). The modernistic assumptions appear in such organizational theories as the systemtheory which is also liable to post-modern criticism according to Hatch. Postmodernism challenges the modernistic strivings after uniform beliefs, by its supposition that knowledge is produced in so many parts and in so many ways that it is essentially fragmented to that extent that you never really can expect to ever conclude in uniformed and integrated understanding.
An idea that postmodernist especially finds worth to problematize and deconstruct is power/dominion, something that is normally accumulated in the top of organizational hierarchies. Imbalances in power and influence undermines democratic principles and postmodernists have a general idea to remedy these imbalances by giving voice to the unspoken. Hatch mentions the striving for participation by marginalized members in the organizations, women, ethnic minorities and elderly and junior staff. The postmodernistic claim is that by focusing on the unspoken, that is normally hidden by ingrained thought- and expression-patterns, we undermine old perceptions and question categorizations that labels people. An approach like postmodernism demands reflexivity on your behalf, says Hatch, meaning that you use your own understanding and discoveries about your self and your environment/context to arrive to your assumptions when you produce or use knowledge. She continues;

In one way you will be opportunistic in that regard that you want to use many contradictory, paradoxical, and incompatible views to avoid the power traps that is contained in separate points of view. As a result of your growing complexity, diversity the image of your own single identity with one unified perspective will dissolve.

And Hatch ends her brief presentation on postmodernistic approaches to organisational understandings with the words by Michel Foucalt, that you in order to be postmodern have to “spirit away Man”. In other words make rid of old entrenched/rooted assumptions of your self and the world, in order for other and basically new ways of seeing and beeing can enter the conceptual world of yours.

The organizational metaphors mostly used within the Postmodern reigns is Organization as a narrative/story, as a text, a discourse or collage. The metaphors that attracts postmodernists seems to have one thing in common, namely a pronounced aesthetic dimension. They highlight the artistic aspects of an organization by comparing them with different artistic creations of discoveries. And Hatch suggest this elaboration of postmodern approach for the reader:

"Image yourself one of the organizations that you have been member of as an example of a art form you enjoy, For example a rock concert, a painting, an opera, a ballet or a novel. Which aspects of the organization is illuminated by the metaphor you choosed, and which aspects is covered?"

In this “frame of reference” the manager/leader is a theoretician and the theoretician is an Artist. And one of the artist that is fostered by postmodern approaches is the one of the storyteller even if this concept as I see it likely can be understood and used even from different modernistic viewpoints.
**Corporate Storytelling**

Corporate Storytelling in recent years has become a growing concept in management literature and in organizations wanting to be proactive and up to date. To my understanding, mainly used in branding of companies both in the States as in Western Europe. There is a deeper meaning to this concept than first meets the eye. It’s not only to collect a bunch of success stories and wrap them up in fancy brochures or on a website. It is about tapping into one’s natural tendencies to making sense of our experiences through stories. Stories are the fabric of sensemaking in all walks of life. A story is a result of how we understand and pick up cues from the stream of continual ongoing events even in a business setting. An inspiration in this field has been Mats Heijbel who works with corporate storytelling full time with an array of organizations in Scandinavian. Once we did a joint presentation on different approaches in the narrative landscape for an Appreciate Inquiry Network in Stockholm. I see that our quest is similar in several aspects. Sometimes when I explain what Teater X offers, I explain that we work with “Corporate Storytelling Live”.

As Matts puts it:

“When you tell about your company or organizations in meetings with clients, customers, coworkers or other stakeholder as owners or neighbors and others you should not use your time presenting figures and numbers or strategic visionary documents through reading from Power Points. These facts are on the internet or in printed material. Instead you should try charging your brand with emotional values. Therefore you need to constantly listen to your organization and the customers to build a repertoire of true stories linked to the products and services of your enterprise. This repertoire can be accessible to all but the stories has to be true, likely and believable. If not they won’t be spread. If you are credible inwards and outwards then stories will be spread in time and space and even on the social web.

A storytelling organization do not command everybody to produce a certain quantity of stories all the time. The ones in charge listens all the time consciously for corporate anecdotes and catch stories they think can be good for building future and success. There are custodians of tradition everywhere.

Then share the stories you collect in all social meetings as staff-meetings, introductory meetings, meetings with the press/media and so on.

When you build organizational repertoire of stories it is important to keep with the ease of the anecdote or fable. Exclude numbers, organization descriptions and abstract facts. Paint instead, with wide colorful

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12 In turn he is inspired by the works of Steve Denning and others from USA and in other countries globally.
brush, a story populated with a clear case that shows something important about the company or organization.

Company folklore is just as nice as any other folklore and Corporate Storytelling can accommodate a drama as profound as that written by Strindberg and Selma Lagerlöf. There is a lot of 2010’s contemporary drama in the world of work. The drama, we will search, find, harvest and use. And why not pick up on the stage as everyday drama.

All organizations need to reflect on their stories. Authorities and departments that need to adapt to current conditions. You and I as individuals need to reflect on our own stories in our personal brand. Japan by Fukushima, the United States after the downgrade and the financial crisis, the political parties, the local schools and elderly care. Not to see the power of story is slowly falling behind the times.”

Translated by me from a newsletter by Matts Heijbel

Some stories from teater X work that illustrates some aspects of corporate storytelling.

The first is an example of a personal narrative that captures the shift in atmosphere in the whole organization represented by the reception desk in a holographic way. In this story a manager witnesses the actions of a subordinate young employee, who had decides to make every mornings encounter with the people working in the building a cheerful moment and a good starting place for everyone. In the past, the area where this young employee worked was considered a rather “dead” part of the building where nobody really cared who passed through or why. Even if it were the desk, nobody were really there on either side of it. As a result of some reorganization, administrators decided to renew the reception area physically and also and inform/ train the desk staff to keep track of who came and if they were not working in the house also to do a check in, who they were and who they were visiting.

This project, had been going on for some months with rather good results for both employees and visitors, with one exception, the city’s fiscal chief of the tax authorities/bailiff department who had been working for the city in the same office for over 20 years. He never looked at the women at the reception desk, and never said a word as he passed by. Even if they had started to verbally greet people passing. One day the young assistant who had been again overlooked suddenly shouted out:

“Stop! Wait!” She ran up to him as he entered the first step on the stairs and frankly stated.
“No No No! This is not the way to do it.” She gently took his arm and said.–
“Let’s do it over again!” and took him back to the entrance.–
“Watch me.” she said and proceeded through the door, said,
“Hello.” she smiled and greeted the colleagues at the reception. –
“Now it’s your turn.”, she said to the perplexed man.
“Try it out, its not that difficult.”

And he did!

From that day forward the fiscal manager always says hello with a smile when he arrives at the building and often stops to tell a little story about whatever.

Stories from real life can tell us about the present state and the wished for future which are picked out from situations from the here and now. Corporate Storytelling uses the reality and depicts challenges which members meet in every day life to communicate meaning and understanding reality. The “heroes” in the organization are identified and vague visions and values can become concrete.

The second example characterizes the journey of another “hero” fraught with struggles and triumphs. The setting is a Sales Kickoff Conference for Consultancy firm of mainly technical engineers assisting other organizations in different projects. We had been asked to help them animate corporate core values. This theme is often induced by us asking for challenges the audience have overcome.

A senior female manager told about a serious miscalculations she and her colleagues had made during negotiations with a department from Ericsson Telekom. She and her colleagues had underpriced the cost of jobs they were going to provide Ericsson with by three million SEK. The furious reaction from Eriksson representatives when this message was delivered some time after that the contracted had been signed and project lasted. The response was amongst the toughest she had encountered professionally, and for some weeks they did not know if they were getting paid or even if the project was going to be concluded. They got the extra three million Swedish Kronor. The project survived and developed to a three times as big affair. That was the end of the story.

To have the guts to be truthful and transparent with mistakes were at the core of this story. And the immediate response from younger colleagues towards this manager was great thanks for sharing this. Later in this workshop her boss granted her a special public acknowledgment and gratification for being so “heroic” not to cover up and being truthful and daring.

And later this spring we had another women from a different worksetting admitting a series of great mistakes towards a subcontractor. And this coming from a Superior manager, had a similar effect on younger colleagues. And we were working with their core values out of which one was “a shared commitment to excellence”; NOT in this case, but bravely shared and empathetic received by colleagues.
Why this collage of mindsets?

The bits and pieces of different organizational concepts that I have included in this paper is stepping stones in my own understanding. I present glimpses of mindsets that have come in and out of my radar. I have used these trying to make sense of the organizational landscape I have been trying to navigate in. A journey in different multilayered contexts. And they are intertwined, so it has been difficult to focus only on one of these. So the purposes are manifold.

One purpose has been to understand the Playback-company as such. What is Teater X and how can it be best developed. Some concepts have been in my reach in order to examine, understand and change this organizational body. What concepts could assist my strivings to create a good environment for art, and members, to develop and also trying out effective tool for developing a professionalized organization. What routines and procedures can and should be developed and how to influence and build an organisational culture and provide leadership internally that meets the needs of the group and can help us to be of service for our “market”, the other organization.

Another purpose is to be able to tap in to the mindsets of our clients, what guiding images might they have to understand themselves. And what would be a rationale for them to make use of us and make sense of such a use. In short what would be concepts that legitimatize the use of PT.

And thirdly, what really happens when Teater X interacts with an organization. Who is reflecting who and by what means and with what impact. A more indepth understanding of the prerequisites and outcomes of such an encounter. (*Her comes philosophy, ethics and tool of dominion.*)

And I see these presented mindsets as roadmaps in a complex word, not confusing the maps for the “reality”. Different aspects of reality appear with the use of different maps/framework. And some are more useful in a meeting with a client, others are useful when you internally process/evaluate your performances and interactions with participants in an organizational context. And others might pin point the patterns of interplay within the playback ensemble. A roadmap can take you to places and sharpen your senses for observations in relevant realms. But you have to curiously enter reality to be able to see something new and gain new knowledge. And bravely building shared knowledge from shared experiences might create even more wonderful and totally new maps. That is sensemaking maps that would include puzzling pieces of information gathered through your collective process. Shared experience transformed to shared meaning.
Part Four - The recent experiences 2008 - 2011
- elaborated formats - and the tipping point we’re at.

During the last four to five years Teater X has grown in size by including three new members in 2008. The company, at the present is 12 members. We continue to provide monthly public performances and occasionally offer pro bono gigs at conferences and celebrations. We have had about eight promotion-lunches for organizationally relevant guest, managers, consultants, HR-professionals and event-bureaus. New developments have emerged in several different areas.

We have mostly developed our experience in the Organizational field. We have become stronger in the customer dialogue. We have a broader and deeper understanding of the pre-work for relevant work in organizations. Subsequently more members in the company appreciate the work being done in organizations for different reasons. We now have a stronger sense of identity and self-awareness of what we are doing. While our relevance and our own sense of purpose has increased, so has the incomes produced from these corporate jobs. The company is more able to help members with their professional incomes. Over the years some of the members deepened their knowledge within team building and group supervision, and the ambition and focus to work in organizations has also been strengthened by new members that are working in these fields. More members acquired conductor training and were able to handle the double role of conductor and consultant. In turn, we are less depending of cooperating consultants. Now, we stood stronger on our own feet.

Some years ago we started to talk about bringing other and extended formats for work done in organizations to different setting. The combination of workshop facilitation and playback should be more visible. We wanted it to be clear that we also offered Playback as an integral part of whole workshops led by a Conductor/Consultant. We were not only offering performances of 60-90 minutes.

As we played with words in “Teater X” we came up with “XL,” or “Extra Large”. We first presented this concept at one of our promotional lunches in the spring 2009 and, to date, have performed around ten XL workshop/performances. Teater X is still the name of our ensemble, and in addition we offer our XL and XS\(^\text{13}\) formats of services.

These extended missions (XL) lasted from four, five hours and up to two days. More than once have we been engaged in working with vital questions to help with an organization’s future directions:

\(^{13}\) We also use “Teater Extra Small” XS which can be 20 minute short form events with full ensemble or simply coming with two actors and using this form of XS ensemble to both facilitate, conduct and enact.
1. The first XL back was at a regional health organizations leader gathering. Participating stakeholders included politicians and bosses from different departments, of medicine and paramedic both at the central hospital but also from the county as well as trade union representatives. And we worked on the organizations past, present and future challenges for almost a full day.

2. We have done XL work with a museum with over 120 participants on psychosocial environmental issues. These issues included looking on current and future scenarios and helping the organization readjust their mindsets, priorities, and future plans.

3. We helped a group of leaders within Apoteket AB with how to communicate tough information concerning reorganization and relocation of workplaces.

4. We helped summarize a three-year project within a Farmers Association with 40 stakeholders from different organizations.

5. We worked alongside a Dairy organization for two days with Future scenarios and necessary adjustment of Strategies and plans for every part of the organization.

6. We facilitated the theme of “challenges of the civil society” in a national conference with stakeholders from a variety of organizations.

7. In a Norwegian telecom business we worked with core values and helped to identify correcting strategies.

8. An engineering consultancy firm for a two day conference with three intermissions on core values, good examples and refining understanding of relations between their identified three success factors.

9. A business school’s “Base Camp” by diving into the look and feel of their Core Values.

10. A conference for a team of administrative units within a research organization spread over the whole country. Purpose of follow up on earlier Corporate Values work and Launching aligned and committed Workgroups.

Clarification, engagement, interactivity and deeply processing important issues are our primary focus here. The method and content is well attuned to real organizational needs. The entertaining is bonus effects of the core mission. And this not replaceable by a string quartet.
Examples of moments and chunks of work being done in a XL setting

• Early in the workshop the actors are presented followed by the Conductor asking basic questions: We present two to three short forms to establish rapport and some clarification on how playback works. Questions are recognizable Playback-questions, Who has a word to describe your organization? What does the organization means to you at this moment? What does your work signifies by nowadays? Depending on the purpose or setting, the Conductor might ask something really trivial or more challenging. After this short “take off”, actors go standby.

• A mapping (locogram or spectrogram) of the organization may follow. We ask them to place themselves in the geographical spots where they work in our meeting space. They are directed to clarify who does what and how these groups relate to each other. And this is sometimes reflected back by playback.

• At other times we have them create a timeline (spectrogram) of either when they came to this organization or mapping a societal timeline from a chosen point relevant to the organization’s area of work. This time span can range from 10-15 years up to 150 years (sometimes even earlier in historic time for example when we worked with the history of the Swedish Milk.) This timeline always proves its efficiency in starting to move people by a criterion relevant to themselves as they warm up to the past, present and future of their organization.

During these mappings, the Playbackers standby ready to portray some of these sharings from the large group in short forms. Eventually a story from the past or present emerges.

• The workshop participants are then placed into relevant cross fertilized groups to work on issues at hand, all in the same big room. Their process may be recorded by themselves using flipcharts.

• The process rolling through a mix or workshop element were the organization in different settings discuss and share experiences relevant for the overall purpose, some shifting of groups and shifting of task for the groups in favor of creating as many meeting points as possible/relevant. We deliberately create different subgroups to override the factual structures of people working close together. And tales, opinions and emotions surface under the guidance of the conductor/facilitator that elegantly can draw on Playback actors collaboration and artistic skills to at the spur of a moment contrast, illuminate, amplify, or summarize the content being shared. We contribute with poetry in motion and co-create a multi dimensional sphere of shared meaning.
The Conductor/Facilitator’s need to have a co-leader/assistant for the whole group process became evident during some of these missions. On many of these occasions this person takes actual photos of the workshop’s activities which then are displayed on one big or two parallel screens on the Playback stage. These photo collages allowed viewers the possibility to extract information about their own process, flip charts and colleagues in working mode gets more visible and appreciated.

- We often conclude having the participants return to the groups of people they work with daily, in their natural everyday group conclude on the next step ahead personally, and in their group and for the organization to make necessary changes happen. Teater X often provides an ending collage in a ritualized way to end the time spent together.

The organizers and participants expectations for meaningful interaction have at all times been met and by far exceeded.

Discovery

At these X-Large settings the actors are "on" for maybe six to seven hours. In these cases we discovered a need for them to adopt a different stage presence than normal, not constantly alert, but rather be in a “standby” position. To keep up the actor’s connectedness and energy, we sat close together. We became very neutral observers not trying to grasp everything going on, but rather tuning in to the energy in the room. It’s somewhat like a cat’s laziness/readiness. We wanted to have a readiness to act on the spur of a moment whenever the Consultant/Conductor signaled.

Points to notice

We have started to adopt the Formula of Change\footnote{according to Wikipedia; The Formula for Change was created by Richard Beckhard and David Gleicher, refined by Kathie Dannemiller and is sometimes called Gleicher’s Formula. This formula provides a model to assess the relative strengths affecting the likely success or otherwise of organisational change programs.} as a good “checklist” for the design when we create a relevant design for a workshop on change. That helps us to understand what is there to illuminate and keeping an eye of the desired outcome as well. The factors needed are

1. A sense of urgency/ The present state is in some way intolerable.

2. An idea or image of what the desired future looks like


These three factors has to be in place otherwise our natural resistance to change will dominate.
If one factor is missing no change will occur even if the other two are strong. Creating change requires commitment, and process of gaining/increasing commitment is filled with questions and answers. Proclamations seldom succeed in creating lasting effects. If we can move people emotionally the chances of change may multiply.

**Observations**

Now we seriously do compete with business consultants for whole assignments having very strong and experienced consultants as members in the group. We now can have a direct discussion with Human Resource departments. More often than not, we have redesigned contracts which were formerly performances to becoming XL size and adjusting the interventions more in line with the actual needs of the organization. Having the right man or woman to do the preliminary negotiating (dialogue) on what we can offer leads to better understanding on both sides, (the client and the Conductor/PT troupe) on what needs to be fulfilled and what is to be expected. We can now better synthesize the understanding of our needs to do a good job, with an understanding of needs of the organization. We learned what can be achieved through an array of different interventions available where PT might be one component among several Large Group Work approaches. Our knowledge of the craft of PT as well as the craft of OD (Organizational Development) has in many ways distributed more evenly in our company, among new members entering and old members who have trained in the field. This distribution can be largely attributed to our common experience of doing these jobs, which has been vast, and that all members have participated at least one XL gig.

**Conclusions**

The conductor’s understanding before entering the organizations is a main factor for success. This conclusion is confirmed by Halley/Fox in the book, Handbook for Change;

“*The cornerstone of the conductor’s training is a thorough understanding of group process, including the stages of group development; how to adequately warm up and close a group; diagnostic and intervention skills; thinking on one’s feet; and a strong sense of ritual—that is, a heightened sense of aesthetic form and*”

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15 Three factors must be present for meaningful organizational change to take place. These factors are:

D = Dissatisfaction with how things are now;

V = Vision of what is possible;

F = First, concrete steps that can be taken towards the vision;

If the product of these three factors is greater than

R = Resistance,

then change is possible. Because D, V, and F are multiplied, if any one is absent or low, then the product will be low and therefore not capable of overcoming the resistance. According to article on Wikipedia
presence. In addition, the conductor must be skilled in using the Playback Theatre method, understand what forms to use where, how to invite a teller, and make sure the actors know what they need. Finally, the conductor also needs to be a bridge between the organization and the acting troupe, understanding the issues and cultures of both.”

Not all conductors/producers, myself included, have been so clear about the importance of some vital homework that is the foundation for a relevant intervention. I myself have often been focused on the obvious, but nevertheless frustrating fact, that clients seldom really understand the conditions necessary for a good PT performance, nor of it’s possible outcomes. Instead of helping distillate what they want to accomplish from the event or program, I have been occupied by explaining and negotiating the set of conditions needed, worrying about the risks and the mismatches that may or may not occur and focusing on the possible obstacles instead of going more directly to the positive outcome.

Sometimes, this unnecessary worry combined with my observations that we did not always succeeded to be relevant in our early or even maturing years. Sometimes we got too blurry artistically and vague. Some times we missed the points delivered, and the context relevance went down the drain. Over time these worries have decreased. What we deliver is nowadays never so poor that the client’s expectancies not are met or even exceeded.

We observe the need for PT-companies to respect their own boundaries around time and rituals for building and maintaining the artistic vessel. This includes the need for clarification about timing for necessary technical equipment, necessary time and clarity in the function of the "check in" and the "warm up", and the need to spread the responsibilities of different roles amongst the members to prevent exhaustion. These are not new insights but rather a deepened understanding shared by even more members in the group.

Another observation related to the time just before or during the actual work (performance or workshop) sometimes blending with the outer context is beneficiary and sometimes such input overload us as ensemble. What impact does it have on the individual as well as on the group? The conductor obviously needs to tap into two systems to be able to be the bridge between the ensemble and the organization or audience, and s/he needs to in a subgroup with both. Each system has its own needs and some boundaries to be respected on both sides. Producer and Conductor from Teater X can hold different aspects of the role of the Gatekeeper: When the ensemble has built the necessary momentum and trust within their own system, they are able to open up to the outer
context. Before that happens it can shatter the individual’s and the group’s cohesion. This dynamic has become even clearer when working with the extended XL format. Relevant information delivered at the right time, clear logistics and delegated responsibilities increases trust and is beneficiary for a relevant warmup of the ensemble.

**At a tipping point - Teater X today**

Teater X has built a momentum that is significant in the "market" we are active in. We have a brand that exceeds expectation and stands for quality and originality. We are improvisational theatre deeply rooted in human compassion and understanding with an edge consisting of professional facilitation skills relevant for organizational work.

Teater X has gone from starting as a project in 1999 to nonprofit –association in 2002 to a flux organization in 2008 with multiple centre for coordinating, producing and nurturing. In many ways, we are looser in structures than ever, and in some respects stronger then ever.

Today Teater X has a nonprofit - association that runs the public performances and organizes rehearsals. The two founders, myself and Synne, no longer live in Sweden, but another country, Norway. We are still members, but not on a day-to-day basis, and more remotely connected to the group. Synne maintains her role as a Mentor/ Artistic Director & myself as a main Producer of corporate performances even though other members obtains contracts and often also produces them.

So we have a couple of parallel producing units for corporate works and we have the Teater X-Association with an elected board, running the public performances and maintaining rehearsals and artistic development. We have a fluid decision making process. At every meeting members can make decisions that are valid until they are questioned at another meeting. We have minimized the “you must” and “you need” to do this in order to enhance the voluntary ”I want” and ”I will”. Any one wanting to do a playback related thing owns his/her project and is responsible to allocate the resources needed to accomplish this.

There is a sort of "Open Source" thinking permeating the group now. Let us be open with each other and with the things we want to do. If we trust the "us" we are and the things we do, all will prosper. There are many "leaders", many initiatives not always coordinated, but the ensemble is alive and it’s kicking. The positive outcomes from this exceed the alternative. And the group of people that calls our selves teater X have survived an important shift in our history and seeks new paths for the future.
At the end

Halley & Fox conclude that there are areas where Playback is a possibly helpful and meaningful activity to dive into facing organizational dilemmas:

"In the many different settings for Playback Theatre—which include public, semipublic, and private gatherings—Playback Theatre’s outcomes are similar. Dialogue occurs through the public sharing of stories. One story leads to another, connections are made between people, and awareness of differences between people and their life experiences are also brought out. Compassion, empathy, and greater understanding are frequent outcomes. At times, a sense of “everything is fine” can be replaced with a more realistic view, one that honors the current contradictions and existing conflicts, building individual and system capacity to live with ambiguity, which is necessary in any significant change process.”.

Further on they say, and I also see my own practice in Teater X, with these words ringing in my ears

Playback Theatre draws inspiration from the idea of the small community, in which everyone is known to one another. Its brand of storytelling improvisation conforms to characteristics of traditional societies where cultural ceremonies were intimate, communal, redressive, and attuned to the environment.

If we can live the ideals we offer others, if we can raise our capacity to contain differences and find our way, making sense of our experiences individually and collectively that is when we walk our talk.

It has been an accumulative process to ripe the insights of today. Finding our way to the contexts and in the contexts. And some things seem so obvious in the light of the present, at the time experienced it was the best we knew and could embrace. The most lasting impact of doing this writing and dwelling on past experiences is luckily the growing proudness of what has been accomplished regarding both outcome in knowledge and experience as well as the recognition and the impact of today’s work.

The voyage with Playback Theatre has been one of the most rewarding and challenging organizational and existential experiences in my life. I would not be the same person without Playback Theatre. Among other things I have met the universal need to be met and respected. When a subgroup is manifested that I can identify myself with I don’t feel so alone and vulnerable and dare to contribute even more. A metaphor suitable for organizational development: to see similarities in the
appearing differences and the differences in the appearing similarities. With respect to the natural need for both differentiation and integration. There are an area where the individual and collective responsibilities meet. As a person I am responsible and accountable to help build the groups (community) I want to be a member of both professionally and personally.

We make space and we make sense for others as well as for ourselves. I envision us Playbackers as hunters and gatherers in search of stories that, through poetic unfolding and daring sharing, create sensemaking rituals for our time. With the hope that many organizations of different kinds around the world will be energized, and even transformed by this “glocally” oriented tribe of Playback Practitioners devoted to Love, Peace and Understanding.

Jan Platander 31 august 2011
**Referential Works**


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