

# NARRATIVE: HAMMASPEIKKO -TOOTH TROLL I RESEARCH VIDEO

ANNE PÄSSILÄ,  
TUIJA OIKARINEN,  
SUVI KONSTI-LAAKSO  
*Lappeenranta University of Technology  
LUT Lahti School of Innovation  
anne.passila@lut.fi*

Our approach to innovation follows in the footsteps of interpretative dimension of innovation which questions if there is a missing dimension in innovation research - they break new ground in the field of interpretation, based on cultural and communicational studies. Innovation is often studied only as a decision-making and problem-solving process. Innovation processes must also be affected with issues that cannot be 'solved' or unified in a logical, linear and analytical fashion. The interpretative view is not widely understood in the field of innovation, although it would provide the potential for new insights. The goal of interpretative innovation is to discover new definitions. This, participatory process of sense making, is understood to be a fragmented, ongoing, open-ended (and multi-voiced) process of dialogue which emphasizes interaction and communication. We assume that one of the vital tenets of the participatory innovation process has to be toleration of incompleteness and distance, as well as to withstand multiple viewpoints and a lack of universal truths - there may be no single 'answer', rather multiple suggestions and proposals.

## **BACK GROUND OF RESEARCH-BASED THEATRE**

The method for analysis developed in our research is based on the idea of

drama as an interrogative reading of meanings in real-life situations. In order to understand how employees in our study created an understanding out of customers' narratives we lean on participatory action research ideas about representational knowledge. As a whole, the participatory theatre based process made people participate in order to accumulate different pieces of information and structure those into a meaningful pattern that could be put to practical use. Through narratives (written, told, drawn and performed), researchers, artist, customers and members of an organization made a description of the events, actions and emotions happening in the organization, while also trying to illuminate why those things happen. The research objective of research based theatre was to capture, describe and explain the logic of representation in an organization. The narrative approach was first used as a tool for structuring the interactions, interrelationships and habits of people in the workplace and work community, and, subsequently, it was used as a research method for organizational research as well. We named our theatrical approach 'research based theatre (RBT)' (Mienczakowski, 1995; Mienczakowski, Smith & Sinclair, 1996, Mienczakowski & Morgan 2001), and drama-based qualitative

research actions were used to organise discourses inside the organisation and amongst customers. The steps of RBT are framed through 1) Plotting realities; narrative data collection and interventions among customers and the organisation, 2) Analysis; dramatization of narratives and 3) Searching multi-voiced understanding; presenting narratives in an organizational theatre intervention, 4) Shared idea generation for action planning. (Mienczakowski & Morgan 2001, Pässilä & Oikarinen 2009, forthcoming)

## **PARTICIPATORY THEATRE – THE RADICAL THEATRE OF BOAL**

In participatory action research (PAR), people generate new knowing together. This type of knowing is tied to epistemology, which appreciates the value of human and emancipatory knowledge. Park (2001) broadens the horizon of epistemology to include such forms of knowledge as representational, relational and reflective as well. He claims that power and knowledge are related and that ordinary people's involvement in the research process generates knowledge for solving social problems and emancipates people to be responsible members of the community. (Park 2001, 84) Gayá Wicks and Reason (2009) point out that it is important to be aware of how access is

established, and how participants are engaged. So it is vital to understand what happens at the beginning of the action research process and pay attention on how to map out the practices of opening communicative space. (Gayá Wicks & Reason 2009)

Timothy Clark (2008, 403-404) has crystallised the use of theatre in an organisation as a resource and technology. He defines four typologies for theatre depending on its participatory and adaptive dimensions; namely, corporate theatre, radical theatre, organisational theatre and situational theatre (Clark, 2008). Each of these applications of organizational theatre puts the artist in a new professional, societal oriented role as an actor of social change (Lacy, 1995; Jacob, 1995). Each application aims at a different type of organizing participation. We are interested in discovering the possibilities of the so-called radical theatre of Augusto Boal in the use of PAR as an employee-oriented practice-based learning process within a public organization in the early stages of action research project. The radical theatre of Boal facilitates 'the process of discursive exploration, release and political action' (Clark 2008, 404).

### NEW WAY OF EXPLORING "ORGANIZING PARTICIPATORY INNOVATION"

Boal's concept is divided into 'Image Theatre', 'Forum Theatre', 'Rainbow of Desire' and 'Legislative Theatre'. Since forum theatre is an interactive theatre in which the audience has the power to suggest and make changes to events on stage, the members of the audience are encouraged to join in the action on stage, becoming co-constructors and co-actors, which Boal terms 'spect-actor'. Using the Greek terms 'protagonist' and 'antagonist', Forum Theatre seeks to show a person (the protagonist) who is faced with obstacles and resistance (the antagonists). In Forum Theatre, the facilitator of the action is referred to as the 'Joker'. The Joker takes responsibility for the logistics of the process and functions as a neutral link between the actors and the audience, encouraging them to step into the role of a 'spect-actor'. (Boal 1992, 1995) This type of theatre is associated with critical adult education and re-

flective learning processes (Asikainen 2003).

Forum theatre is scripted by a professional artist, and in our case, by the research actors from the organisation (employees and their customers) and researchers from the university as well. In a performance situation, the audience in a role of 'spect-actors' is given the opportunity to intervene and to become self-directed performers (Clark 2008, 404). The core idea of intervention is to create a space for democratic dialogue as well as reflective thinking (Asikainen 2003). According to Clark, quoted from his private correspondence with Iain Mangham, 'The nature of the performance emerges in consultation with audience members. Through the active participation of the audience a performance has the potential to change from the original intent. In this respect a script initially offers a set of possibilities that the audience is free to accept or reject. As the performance commences they are empowered to take on the roles of playwright and actor simultaneously and so create something that has meaning and emancipatory possibility for them' (Clark 2008, 404).

We have been inspired by organizing participatory innovation and searched for communication and shared understanding in the context of forum theatre. In Forum Theatre we were interested in the dental care professional's actions when working with a patient, and, more precisely, how the young people had experienced these encounters. It was shown from the material that there was a lack of communication between the young people and the dental care professionals. When writing a forum theatre scene, the phenomenon was taken to a somewhat exaggerated level. Therefore the ques-

tion in the scene remained: What are the mistakes in interaction that can be made during an appointment?

The most interesting question was how to transform the material into forum theatre. In the scene, the young patient had the role of the protagonist and the dental care workers were seen as antagonists. This creates a different situation to the original concept of forum theatre, in which it is usually the protagonist whose story the participants are examining. We wanted the young patient to be seen as the main character but nevertheless explore the story from the workers' point of view.

### CASE

The case company is a health care unit in a public organisation in Southern Finland. The age of its employees ranges from 25 to 63 years. The employees' work experience is 25 years on average. There are 36 employees who participate, of whom two are male and 34 female. The employees' levels of education range from Graduate to upper secondary school education. They usually work in pairs and/or alone.

We concentrated especially on one phase of RBT, the organizational theatre session (number 10 in Fig. 1). It lasted for four hours in total, and the forum theatre scene itself lasted for 20 minutes. Qualitative data from forum theatre was gathered via recorded videotape (4 hours) and participatory observation of five researchers.

The scene focused on how dental professionals deal with their teenage customers. The idea was to think together about what happens between dentists and their patients during the treatment process, and why. The following figure illustrates the process of action research via RBT.

The vivid element of RBT was an

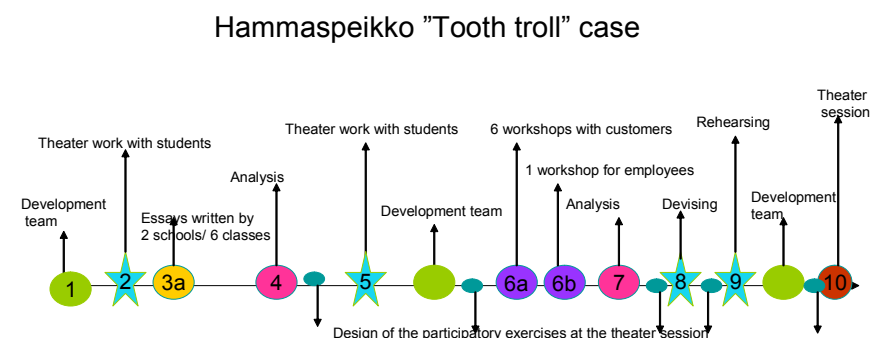


Figure 1: Process of research via research-based theatre

evocative process through storytelling and the interpretation of stories. It was felt that behind the stories, a new knowing emerged and this common knowing became a part of those who were engaged in the interpretation. We then decided to try to raise the level of relational knowledge. For example, at the start of the theatrical interactions, the employees would reminisce about their own teenage years by telling stories about their life, using their own photos that they had been asked to bring along. During this reminiscing process one could easily sense the intensity of the sharing. We thought that this connection to the employees' own teenage years was cornerstone in gaining knowledge through the customers' experiences. It opened up the employees' perspective, and at the end of the Forum Theatre phase, reflective knowledge was in the air when the employees paid attention to their attitudes and feelings about their customers like when they were reflecting upon their own youth.

Contextual and situated understanding was vital in a practice-based learning process enriched by forum theatre. Making meaning and awareness of how meanings are constructed is one key element of transformative learning. Phase on stage reflects to the situation in real life as well as participators imagination and events on the stage. Aesthetic space of the research-based theatre was a bridge from real life actions and a reflection of it. Through aesthetic space it was possible to demonstrate the present situation of reality as it was experienced and it also offered a place for simulations of various situations as if it might be happening.

### WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM A COMBINED PERSPECTIVE?

From the perspective of organizing participatory innovation, our study has the practical objective to raise awareness among participants and we also had an idealistic goal for the people to empower themselves in a context of encounters in an aesthetic space during artistic interactions. We understand the employees' knowledge gaining during interactions as sense making and sense breaking. This sense making and breaking is a path to change actions, to find ideas as to how

to renew one's own work practises and attitudes behind actions. Thus, study has a strong practise-based learning element woven into the question how to create knowing together. We thought that an artistic approach with a narrative orientation offers a framed forum for finding out how to learn from the customers' experiences and ideas.

We found that the process was as iterative and heuristic in which turns were taken between 1) sense making activities of the theatre actors, the development method designer, and the participants of the case company, 2) management targets of organizational development program, as well as 3) reflections upon research. Seen from the perspective of the systems and based on action research theory, this is a question of social structures (roles and rules) and the functioning of these structures. The level of the system operates through rational and instrumental actions and it seeks functional rationality. On the other hand, the research process stemmed from the dynamics of social order, individual and collective professional identity, which operates more or less through interpretation.

Interpretation, linked to embodied knowledge as well as given and constructed knowing, is woven into instrumental expectations during the dynamic of the research process. We found that it is crucial to be aware of one's own position and actions. From this perspective, we formed three lines of research process, based on Gummesson's (2000) thinking as well as action research in learning and change. These three lines describe (see Figure 2) the different types of the role of the researcher as well as different research positions in a context of organizing participatory innovation: 1) a writer of scientific research, 2) an actor in the organizational development project, and 3) a constructor of a development method. These lines infect each other and produce experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing. In our process, we found several methods to gain knowing. In the following, we attempt to clarify the course of our process with the help of Heron and Reason's definition of cooperative inquires. According to Heron and Reason, knowing

has several nature; experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing. In this quote, Heron and Reason controvert that:

*“Experiential knowing* emerges through direct face-to-face encounters with a person, place or thing; it is knowing through the immediacy of perceiving through empathy and resonance. *Presentational knowing* emerges from experiential knowing, and provides the first forum of expressing meaning and significance through drawing on expressive forms of imagery through movement, dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, story, drama, and so on. *Propositional knowing* 'About' something is knowing through ideas and theories, expressed in informative statements. *Practical knowing* is knowing 'how to' do something and is expressed in a skill, knack or competence” (Heron & Reason 2001, 149; originally in Heron, 1992, 1996a;).

Three lines of organizing participatory innovation are formed out of various questions:

- 1) The role of researcher includes research-related questions: Where, when and how do we collect data and analyse it? How do we get feedback from organization and how do we give feedback to them? Is feedback a monologue or a dialogue?
- 2) The role of facilitator consists of the questions related to the development project and the interactions in it: How do we organize storytelling? What stimulates storytelling? How do we share experiences together? How do we interpret stories?
- 3) The role of constructor comprises of the questions concerning learning and related practical actions: How do we use narratives? How and what do we learn from narratives? How do we script the stories? How do we dramatize scripts to performance? How do we devise stories into theatre scenes?

The following picture (Fig.2) illustrates the lines along which the researcher moves in participatory research.

During the process, the researcher engages in dialogue between theory and praxis. The cycle forms a collective learning process for the all the partici-

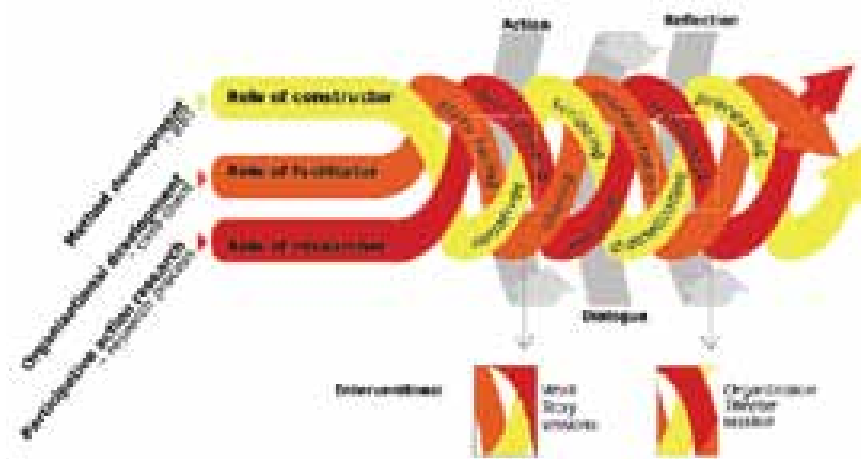


Figure 2: The lines of organizing participatory innovation

pants. Because of the sensitive nature of this type of research process, it is important to describe the richness of the process. This richness is related to how theory and practice are woven together. We are asking whether it is even possible to transform artful actions, that is to say, *gestus* or movement in a form of representational knowledge (Park 2001) into text. With this in mind, we have also made a research video in which we try to illustrate the interactions not only as an intellectual and rational process but affect-laden action. In the video we have dramatized events with our heads and hearts as well. As a conclusion we point out in our *Tooth troll I* – research video that aesthetic understanding happens besides language also through motions and emotions in acting and imagining. The aesthetic space is full of potential variations of different plots and narratives. Aesthetic understanding emerges in the encounters of different people in a shared aesthetic space, and this understanding could be seen as a polyvocal transformation in which knowing and understanding is constructed evocatively through reading the other person's experience. In this kind of a process, learning and know-

ing are a constructionist action by all participators, even those who are not directly involved in the events on stage. An aesthetic learning action aims at bounding socio-cultural present and historical process of organization's everyday life to reconstruct the identity of organization.

#### REFERENCES

- Asikainen, S. (2003). *Prosessidraaman kehittäminen museossa [Development of process drama in a museum]*. Joensuu: Joensuu yliopistopaino.
- Boal, A. (1992). *Games for Actors and Non-actors*. Trans. by A. Jackson. London: Routledge.
- Boal, A. (1995). *The Rainbow of Desire*. Trans. by A. Jackson. London: Routledge.
- Boal, A. (1996) *Politics, Education and Change*. In J. O'Toole and K. Donelan (Eds.), *Drama, Culture and Empowerment*, p. 47–52. Brisbane: IDEA Publications.
- Clark, T. (2008). *Performing the Organization: Organization Theatre and Imaginative Life as Physical Presence* (pp 401–411). In D. Barry & H. Hansen (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of New Approaches in Management and Organization*. London: Thousand Oaks: New Delhi, Singapore: Sage Publications.
- Gayá Wicks, P. & Reason, P. (2009). *Initiating Action Research Challenges and paradoxes of opening communicative space*. *Action Research*, Vol. 7, Issue 3, p. 243–262.

Heron, J. & Reason, P. (2001). *The Practice of Co-operative Inquiry: Research 'with' rather than 'on' people*. In P. Reason, H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of Action Research*, pp. 144–154. London: Routledge.

Heron, J. (1992). *Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in Another Key*. London: Sage Publications.

Heron, J. (1996a). *Co-operative Inquire: Research into the Human Condition*. London: Sage Publications.

Jacob, M. J. (1995). *An Unfashionable Audience*. In S. Lacy (Ed.), *Mapping the terrain New Genre Public Art* (pp. 50–59). Washington: Bay Press.

Lacy S. (1995). *Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys*. In S. Lacy (Eds.), *Mapping the terrain New Genre Public Art* (pp. 19–49). Washington: Bay Press.

Mienczakowski, J. (1995). *The Theater of Ethnography: The Reconstructing of Ethnography Into Theater With Emancipatory Potential*. *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 1 No 3, Sage publications, pp. 360–375.

Mienczakowski, J., Smith, R., Sinclair, M. (1996). *On the Road to Catharsis: A Theoretical Framework for Change*. *Qualitative Inquire*, Vol 2, No 4, Sage publications, pp., 439 - 462.

Mienczakowski, J., Morgan, S. (2001). *Ethnodrama: Constructing Participatory, Experiential and Compelling Action Research through Performance*. In P. Reason and H. Bradbury (Eds.) *Handbook of action research*, pp. 176 – 184. London: Sage Publications.

Park, P. (2001). *Knowledge and Participatory Research*. In P. Reason and H. Bradbury (Eds.) *Handbook of action research*, pp. 83–93. London: Sage Publications.

Päsilä, A. & Oikarinen, T. Forth coming. *Research-based theatre as a facilitator for organizational learning*. Forthcoming in Meusburger, Peter & Berthoin-Antal, Ariane (eds.) *Knowledge in Organizations – Learning Organizations*, Vol. 6 of the series *Knowledge and Space*, Springer.