

## Art-based methods: Theatre Teaches and Business Theatre

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### **Abstract**

*The paper aims to investigate the use of arts in teaching, specifically the art of theater, to provide the new skills searched from the job market. Our work compares the two experiences of the Theatre Teaches performed at University of Brescia and of Business Theatre at University of Catania. The idea of the paper is based on the scientific collaboration among the two co-authors involved, during the last 10 years, on the development of innovative method of teaching focused on non- technical skills. After depicting the incumbent needs of non-technical skills searched from the job market, the comparison on the use of theatre in the two Universities highlighted how both methods support the development of relational, cognitive and managerial soft skills, even if in a different way: when using Theatre Teaches the major skills concern the cognitive ones, while when using Business Theatre the major skills concern the relational ones. Furthermore, it emerges that Theatre Teaches is more effective with cognitive engagement while Business Theatre with emotional engagement. Both are effective in the behavioral engagement (i.e. physical participation in an activity), which emerges as the distinctive characteristic of theatre art-based method.*

**Keywords:** Art-based methods; Theatre; Soft Skills; Economic, managerial and engineering education.

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## **1. Introduction**

The fourth industrial revolution together with the worldwide competitiveness are changing the way we work asking for professionals who have skills such as flexibility, creativity, spirit of collaboration and adaptation, ability to understand, communicate and learn quickly. In the era of artificial intelligence, the managers should be able to turn the complicated into simple, to find effective solutions for different problems and to communicate creatively how, where and when the solutions identified must be put into practice. The widespread idea is that the technical skills can be learned, but these may have a limited impact on competitiveness and business results if the company does not have managers who know how to motivate their teams, who effectively communicate and who are able to listen. The future belongs to companies that hold the best technology and technical knowledge together with managers and employees characterized by cognitive, methodological and interpersonal skills (Yunus and Li, 2005).

These considerations seem to revive the role of the University whose purpose is not only to provide technical knowledge, but to transfer a method to solve new and different problems. Numerous studies have raised serious concerns about widening the gap between graduate skills and the needs of the job market in an increasingly globalized society (Mourshed and Patel, 2014). Same concern is found in the European 2020 Strategy and in the opinion of many employers and policy-makers as recently reported by the European Center for the Development of Professional Training.

As such, the paper aims to investigate the use of arts in teaching (named in the literature as *Arts-based methods*), specifically the art of the theater, to provide the new and aforementioned skills searched from the job market.

## **2. Arts-based methods**

*Arts-based methods* aim to teach through mechanisms in which the use of art reach hidden knowledge that are difficult to achieve through logic and simple rational thought. According to Adler (2006), art helps to broaden the vision of real problem and this implies the acquisition of many different non-technical skills.

The training methods based on the art can pursue objectives and achieve different results also depending on the environments and contexts in which they are implemented. Some of the most emblematic situation in which these techniques were used are:

- *Virginia Commonwealth University*: theatrical lessons are given to doctors so that they acquire new skills that enhance their clinical empathy (Dow *et al.* 2007);

- *LEGO company in Denmark*: entrepreneurial strategies are represented through three-dimensional constructions creatively using the famous Lego bricks (Roos *et al.* 2004);
- *U.S. Army leaders*: leaders of the US Army show the film "Sky of Fire" to illustrate the key elements of leadership (Bognar, 1998);
- *MBA students at Babson College*: art history classes are held to improve their creativity (Pinard and Allio, 2005).

These are some examples, certainly not exhaustive, but which show different experiences widespread in the world where traditional teaching methods merge with innovative artistic experimental techniques.

Using the review carried out by Taylor and Ladkin (2009) it is possible to distinguish four different methods of training using arts.

The first one is the *Transfer of Skills*. Starting from the learning of selected artistic skills, the aim is to transfer what achieved to business organizational contexts. Music, theater or dance can create different abilities like taking advantage from mistakes, how to improvise, have full control of the surrounding space. Then arts allow you to develop skills that can easily be relocated in the workplace (Eisner, 2002).

The second method is the *Projective Technique* and it is based on the Freudian projection theory. Projection is a mechanism that involves moving one's feelings or characteristics onto other objects or people. This theory was presented for the first time by Freud in 1896. In the field of managerial training, this activity can be explained in three different ways. The first through the presentation to the subjects involved of some images, specially constituted in an ambiguous way, such as to arouse visual stimuli that give rise to different interpretations on which can be discussed in groups. The other modality contemplates the creation of objects that materially represent the ideas inherent to the company dynamics. The latter, called *Imagination Lab*, is a technique that aims to express concepts that could hardly emerge through the use of simple words, the idea is comparable to the drafting of the company strategy through the use of Lego bricks.

The third tool is the *Illustration of the Essence*, which is based on fundamentals similar to previous technique. This method aims to make managers able to recreate a shared culture within the company. Various artistic forms can be used, including theater and cinema. By adopting this technique, individuals facing a same theatrical representation focus their attention on different aspects. This is also true inside a team in the business in which individuals present heterogeneous ideas. The ability acquired through this tool consists, while taking into account the various visions, although divergent, to spread in the working environment the sharing of a single mission.

The fourth and last method analyzed is the *Manufacturing*, which is based on the concept shared by the biologist Ellen Dissanayake (2015), that the human brain has evolved through the learning of manual skills. These activities are poorly developed in the modern human due to the presence of industrialized products and technology. So, in this case, art becomes a means by which one can continue to develop its own brain skills. "Doing" implies a mental effort that activates the right hemisphere where intuition and creativity are located, elements that are fundamental in the process of forming new managers.

### **3. The theatre as tool of non technical skill training: the case of the University of Brescia and Catania**

#### ***3.1. The experience at University of Brescia: Theatre Teaches***

Theatre Teaches is a new Arts-base method carried out at the University of Brescia for the first time in the academic year 2014-2015 (Bannò et al., 2018) by Professor in Industrial Economic at the Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering Mariasole Bannò and the Actor and Author Andrea Albertini. During the course it is asked students to write a play using topics seen in class and get him to scene. Not to be confused to Business Theatre, this method is applicable in any framework. In the first phase, but only after the Professor carried out the more traditional part of the teaching, Actor, teachers and students attempted to know each other without the typical first-meeting-embarrassment, also experiencing to remove mental oxidations typical of our individual society, such as halfway gestures, voices that can't be heard, etc. After this first liberating phase, the Actor illustrated the characteristics of theatrical techniques, then the students were allowed to self-select into groups of 7 to 10 people and wrote a script, dealing with directing, with the description of the characters, the creation of movements within the stage space, the choice of furnishings and costumes, lights and music. The added value of this theatrical exercise was the writing of an original script by students, as the result of their ideas and fantasy (Amaral et al. 2017; Pfeifferet et al. 2017). The script was then given a more institutional scenic form by the Actor, then it has become a real play where the actors and technicians were the same students that wrote the play (Senje, 2017). All pieces have been performed in one of the most important theatres in the city, under the patronage of the municipality, where two thousand spectators attend the entertainment.



Figure 1. *Theatre Teaches, Professor and students, University of Brescia (2018).*



Figure 2. *Theatre Teaches, the spectators, University of Brescia (2018).*

Referring to the review carried out by Taylor and Ladkin (2009) it is possible to distinguish all four different methods of training using Theatre Teaches. In particular, *Transfer of Skill* and *Manufacturing* are the most developed ones.

Finally, to analyze the effectiveness of this type of teaching, a simple question was put to the students during the written examination, that was: Why the proposed initiative was more effective than other ones? About 120 interesting answers were collected and analyzed.

### **3.2. The experience at University of Catania: Business Theatre**

Business Theater was born in France and more precisely in Paris in 1980 thank to Michel Fustier. Graduated in literature and philosophy, he was a lecturer, then an expert in management control, head of staff, business consultant and specialist in problems of strategy before founding Business Theater. The dissemination of this theatrical methodology is attributed to Christian Poissoneau, who began to recite scenes related to the company life

placed in their work context with the aim of bringing out not only the elements that the company wanted to communicate but by paying attention to any problems that existed in the organization itself. He founded in Montreal, Canada, in 1984, *Théâtre à la carte*, a theater company with the aim of proposing his work to business organizations. From Paris was spread to Canada and to many European cities such as Brussels, Barcelona, London, Geneva and in the late 1990s it reached Italy too. A fundamental year was 1991, when the first FITE International Business Theater Festival was established in Nantes. The diffusion for the first time of Business Theater in Italy was attributed to Paolo Vergnani in 1997.

The founding element of this type of training is the different vision of the manager; no longer seen as a simple passive subject, but as an actor protagonist of his work experiences. This method, unlike traditional ones, aims to increase the involvement of the interlocutors by placing their experience in the foreground. The participants are encouraged to reflect on their own behavior, being able to grasp also critical aspects of their character that, probably, if communicated through different channels, would be difficult to be accepted (Pearce and Brady, 2003).



*Figure 3. Business Theatre, the students and the coaches, University of Catania (2012)*

Business Theatre enters in the classrooms of the University of Catania through the contribution of two professionals: Professor Giorgia Maria D'Allura, Professor of Economics and Business Management at the Department of Economics in Catania and the Actor, Author and Director Antonio Caruso. They tested this method for the first time in the academic year 2011-2012 (D'Allura and Faraci, 2018).

The motivation that led to the adoption of this new teaching technique inside a management course was the difficulty in transferring the complexity of business management to the students. In the traditional economic approach, some components that are considered non-rational are omitted, instead they have a significant impact on the economic and financial results of a company. Economic activity is influenced by a multiplicity of elements such as moods, character of the individuals in the organizations, way of living work and relationships with colleagues or the importance given to values. Therefore, being able to recognize and

know how to manage all these unconscious factors allows the person responsible for the management of the company to act more effectively.

Referring to the review carried out by Taylor and Ladkin (2009), also in this case, it is possible to distinguish all four different methods of training when implementing Business Theatre. In particular, and contrary to Theatre Teaches, *Projective Technique* and *Illustration of the Essence* are the most developed ones. Same that in Theatre Teaches experience, in order to analyze the effectiveness of this type of teaching, a simple question was put to the students during the written examination, that was: Why the proposed initiative was more effective than other ones? About 20 complex answers were collected and analyzed.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

A first analysis of responses of the two courses, carried out by simply identifying keywords, in each students' answer, reveals that the students recognize the transversal competences, as positive aspects, in both methods. By analyzing both courses we can accordingly divide the soft skills in three main categories: relational soft skills, cognitive soft skills, managerial soft skills. For each category we identify specific competences that can characterize the two methods (Table 1), even all of them are developed from both methods our elaboration was based on the major relevance of each soft skills to the method.

**Table 1. Soft skills according Theatre Teaches and Business Theatre.**

Soft Skills	Theatre Teaches	Business Theatre
Relational	communication skills, team-working skills, conflict management skills, public speaking	listen the others, take responsibility, consciousness of different point of view, skills acknowledgement, increase self esteem, impersonating
Cognitive	concept better internalized, in dept knowledge, problem solving, creativity, ability to tolerate pressure and stress	discovering new aspect, imagination, ability to manage unforeseen situations
Managerial	leadership skills, negotiating skills and ability to motivate	innovation attitude and entrepreneurial skills

Source: Our elaboration.

By analyzing Table 1, it emerges that the proposed division and the specific characterization in three main categories of the two analyzed methods, well reflects the classification given by following Taylor and Ladkin (2009). When using Theatre Teaches the major skills concern the cognitive ones, while when using Business Theatre the major skills concern the relational ones. According to Kahu (2013), these categories compose the student emotional,

cognitive and behavioral engagement. By comparing the two methods, it emerges that Theatre Teaches is more effective with cognitive engagement as task-specific thinking that a student develops and uses while undertaking in an activity while Business Theatre to emotional engagement students' feelings towards teachers, peers and the course. Both are effective in the behavioral engagement (i.e. physical participation in activities), which emerges as the distinctive characteristic of theatre techniques.

The result of these experiments indicates that there is a significant potential to improve students' competencies through theatre creativity which is developed using both methods, Theatre Teaches and Business Theatre. The comparative analysis shows the validity of these methods in the development of skills and competences that characterize managers (Azouzi and Jarboui, 2013). The revisited theater turns out to be an instrument of elastic formation and with ample possibilities of use.

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