

POWER AND INSTITUTIONS

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Title:

Participatory change interventions: Invitation to share power or ‘benign manipulation’?

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Abstract

In exploring one particular approach to change management, we argue that the original intention of forum theatre to bring about societal change, through challenging institutional power structures, has been subsumed and even ‘colonized’ (Nissley et al., 2004) by organizations. Through the use of empirical data, the paper examines the potential for participatory change interventions to enable employees to challenge and reshape existing organizational power structures. We identify the subtle ways through which this potential is undermined from the initial selling of the intervention through to the staging of the live performance. Whilst not ascribing malicious intent, we argue that the power of market dynamics and the institutional desire for control means that such interventions take the form of ‘benign manipulation’, allowing existing power structures to remain untouched. This raises wider questions about the reality of participatory approaches to change at an institutional level. In particular, we argue that the offer of employee participation in change sounds ‘benign’ but may mask an underlying intent to ensure that change still occurs on management’s terms, preserving existing power dynamics.

Key words: power, participation, organizational change, forum theatre, consultancy

Introduction

There is a need within contemporary organizations ‘to understand the effects and side-effects of forms of institutional control that might seem benign to the designers and implementers of those systems’ (Lawrence, 2008, p 181). This paper explores the overt and covert power dynamics of one such form of institutional control, namely the use of participatory interventions during organizational change. More specifically we explore the application of forum theatre, initially designed to as a potentially radical method of supporting societal change, to instigate behaviour change of employees in organizations.

Thus we aim to explore to what extent the potentially disruptive power of forum theatre is allowed to shape change in organizations by giving employees voice and

power. In other words, is participation in name a genuine opportunity for emergent change or do the dominant elite deliberately, or unknowingly, emasculate that potential so that their management agenda continues to drive change and existing power relations are not re-configured in any meaningful and substantive way? Our field data, comprising of interviews with forum theatre consultants, actors, facilitators, clients and employees, reveals tensions between the development and implementation of a participatory experience and the perceived needs of the organization to achieve pre-determined outcomes.

Drawing on the critical literature on change and management consultancy, we argue that the power dynamics of buying and selling forum theatre limits the more radical potential of forum theatre from the initial contact with the organization.

Organizational rhetoric around the need for change often masks a desire to maintain the position of the existing elite (Sorge and van Witteloostuijn, 2004) and yet those change agents charged with carrying out the orders of the elite are often caught between the need to please their masters and simultaneously engage peers and subordinates in the change effort, occupying the uncomfortable place of the ‘squeezed middles’ (Oshry, 2007). We argue that the espoused purpose of engendering engagement and inviting employees to participate in organizational change is undermined through various gestures (Stacey, 2002) needed to satisfy the needs of more senior players, or ‘tops’ (Oshry, 2007); such gestures are often subtle, and can be seen as examples of Lukes’ (1974) third dimension of power. We conclude by identifying specific ways clients and the theatre consultants themselves curb and curtail the potential radicalism of forum theatre at three critical points during the commissioning, development and implementation of such interventions. Without ascribing malicious intent, we argue that, taken together, the cumulative impact of these activities is that the views and desires of those initiating or managing the change have pre-eminence, whilst cloaked in the ‘feel good’ rhetoric of participation, thereby maintaining institutional control.

Literature Review

In this section we situate the concept of power within the less individual, personal and visible interpretations of power and examine some of the power dynamics embedded in selling change interventions. Within the organizational change literature, a distinction is often made between directed and participatory approaches to change (Dunphy and Stace, 1993); ways of conceptualizing the latter are reviewed, together with a consideration of why such approaches are often advocated. The review concludes with an overview of a particular approach to change in organizations, namely forum theatre.

Embedded Power – The Cloak of Invisibility

‘Power is a difficult idea to pin down and has been very widely ignored, marginalized and trivialized in many discussions of organizations.’ (Clegg et al, 2006, p6). Power has traditionally been defined as the ability to change other people’s behaviour so that they do what you want them to do. However the ways of achieving this vary significantly; some approaches are far more explicit and obvious than others. Power can be conceptualized as an individual property (Pfeffer, 1992); as a relational property (French and Raven, 1958) or as embedded in organizational and societal structures and procedures (Lawrence, 2008). Proponents of the latter argue that the first two approaches focus on visible or semi-visible aspects of power whereas power is pervasive and embedded in less obvious features of organizations such as regulations, norms and routines which perpetuate existing power relations. The unseen nature of embedded power arguably makes it all the more influential. Buchanan and Badham (1999) comment that ‘invisibility and intangibility cannot be equated with insignificance’ (p57). The workings of embedded power are often hard to detect and, as Lukes (1990) suggests, ‘power is at its most effective when least observable’ (p1). Research in this area is therefore relatively rare, hence the contribution we hope this paper can make.

The embedded view of power is valuable in drawing attention to the way taken-for-granted patterns and practices in an organization, or indeed society, can serve to perpetuate existing power relations, rather than to encourage or allow change. One such taken-for-granted pattern that has received relatively little critical attention is the rhetoric around participative methods as part of a broader organizational change effort and the extent to which management’s perceived ‘right’ to shape the outcomes

of change may be challenged. Participatory approaches to change imply a sharing of power, and a lessening of institutional control which, as Lawrence (2008, p.171) suggests ‘involves the effects of institutions on actors’ beliefs and behaviours’. The reality though may be subtly and significantly different.

Participatory Change and the Rhetoric of Involvement

Distinctions are often made between directed and participatory approaches to change (Dunphy and Stace, 1993). Directed approaches assume that leaders with positional power (French and Raven, 1958) or ‘tops’ (Oshry, 2007), have the right and the responsibility to initiate organizational change and that they know the desired end point of change, often referred to as the vision (Kotter et al, 2002). Clegg et al, (2006, p2) draw attention to the link between change and power when they ask, ‘what is organization but the collective bending of individual wills to a common purpose?’

Participatory approaches, as the term suggests, place greater emphasis on involving others in organizational change and thus on the surface, seem to be less controlling, allowing others voice and power. Distinctions in the degree to which involvement means empowering others have led some writers to distinguish between collaborative and consultative approaches (Dunphy and Stace, 1993). When adopting consultative approaches, managers may seek employees’ views, typically about incremental adjustments in how things are done, which, whilst they may be significant, are gradual, rather than dramatic (Holbeche, 2006). Collaborative approaches aim for greater involvement, offering employees ways of participating in important decisions, such as the major realignment of a unit, which may potentially shift existing power relations.

What assumptions underpin the use of participatory approaches to change? Early writers proposed participatory approaches as a means of pre-empting resistance (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979). Others believe that engagement gives people the enthusiasm and will to change for the good of their own role and the organization’s future (O’Reilly, 1996) and may also allow ‘innovation, experimentation, localised decision-making and power sharing across all levels of the organization’ (Vanstone, 2010 p2). Weick (1995) suggests that people can retrospectively discover beliefs that justify their actions: ‘committed actions uncover acceptable justifications for their

occurrence' (p135) through sensemaking processes, resulting in behavioural commitment through the process of retrospectively discovering beliefs that explain or justify actions.

Forum Theatre as a Vehicle for Participatory Change

Forum theatre is a type of participatory change intervention that is increasingly being used in organizations. The initial practice of forum theatre was developed by Augusto Boal, a South American theatre director working in San Paulo in the 1960s, with the aim of enabling communities to both challenge and change society's inherent power structures and inequalities (Boal, 1979; Babbage, 2004; Nissley et al., 2004). Boal founded his ideas on the belief that all theatre is necessarily political, is not a 'specific position or set of attitudes but the fact of connectedness to the system by which a society is organized and governed' (Babbage, 2004 p39) – thus by this definition all theatre is political and both 'reflects and affects the way that society is organized through its dynamic engagement with the value systems underpinning it' (ibid., p40). In Boal's terms, theatre is a weapon, with two fundamental principles – 'to help the [participant] transform himself into a protagonist of the dramatic action and rehearse alternatives for this situation so that he may then be able to extrapolate into his real life the actions he has rehearsed in the practice of theatre' (Boal, 1995 p40).

Boal's model of forum theatre has had a lasting influence on theatre-based activity in initially community and educational settings and, more recently, organizations. In the organizational setting, forum theatre interventions are designed 'to promote and support change within organizations ... using diverse techniques to create an awareness of problems, to stimulate discussion and foster a readiness for change' (Meisiek 2004, p798) and to bring about some form of change in behaviour either at an individual or organizational level (Meisiek, 2004; Schreyögg, 2001). Such approaches aim to promote change through focusing on potentially difficult organizational issues and using theatre and drama as a vehicle for exploring these issues.

In the organizational context a 'standard' forum theatre intervention will start with a dramatic representation of the issues to be considered, followed by what are termed

forum workshops or interactive theatre, where actors present a brief scene which leads to some type of impasse and the audience of employees are asked to direct the scene to a more 'satisfactory' resolution. Through the staged improvisation and the subsequent discussions, employees are encouraged to consider different perspectives, identify areas of dissatisfaction and take action on an individual and/or organizational basis (Gibb, 2002; Meisiek, 2002; Meisiek and Barry, 2007).

The use of forum theatre can thus be a vehicle for organizational change by enabling the 'rank and file' members of organizations to work on an equal basis with their superiors (Coopey, 1998). 'Having seen a staged dialectic, group members enter into a dialogue as equals – through dialogue they become aware of their situation and of the possibility that their situation could be different' (Meisiek and Barry 2007, p1808). In such a scenario, change becomes a joint venture, rather than one driven solely by the management perspective. This perspective resonates with the move from management-driven to employee-driven approaches to organizational change through the creation of 'arenas' or learning spaces (Burgoyne and Jackson 1999; Fulop and Rifkin 1998) within organizations to facilitate more open-ended approaches to organizational change. From this perspective, forum theatre interventions can be viewed as a participative approach to change that both empowers employees and gives them the space to make their voices heard to themselves and others.

Forum theatre also supports a dialogical approach to change in which different ideas are discussed within a specific context with the aim of persuading others to follow this approach (Jackson 2007), enacted through the creation of events or spaces which enable exploration of idea, and construction of new meanings which in turn facilitates change. Dialogue in this context can be defined as 'a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions and certainties that compose everyday experience (Isaacs, 1993, p2), often the very factors that senior managers contemplating change may wish to encourage. Thus it is the collective (rather than individual) experience which triggers dialogue among forum theatre participants, through the sharing of a particular experience (Meisiek 2002). Thus, the aim of the enacted part of forum theatre is to enable employees to identify with the protagonist and, by empathising with their situation, reflect on how this enactment resonates with their own behaviours, which in turn leads to change. Raelin (2008) argues that dialogical

approaches to change can enable the questioning of ‘quick- fix managerial strategies that entail tacit assumptions of control [and] attempts to bring to the surface through progressive inquiry those governing sociopolitical values that may be blocking communications’ (p520).

Power Dynamics in the Market Relationship

The buying and selling of consulting interventions is fraught with anxieties for both those endeavouring to sell consulting services as well as those within the organization wanting to purchase consulting support (Sturdy, 1997). For consulting firms, including theatre consultancies, persuading clients to buy their services and building the client relationship is essential to their commercial survival (Maister, 1997). Indeed, for small businesses such as theatre consultancies, it is often the informal personal networks, word of mouth recommendations and repeat business that are the key features of market relations (Bryson 1997) and, furthermore, for many consultancies around two thirds of revenues comes from repeat business (Rassam and Oates, 1991).

Radical and more emergent approaches to change can stoke managers’ anxieties because in change situations, ‘the hassle factor is likely to be high. Time scales and budgets are likely to be critical. The changes are likely to involve irreversible long term commitments. The penalties for error will therefore be high’ (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992, p42). Clients who are hiring consultants are embedded within their own organizational hierarchy with a need to manage the perceptions of those senior to themselves that they have chosen wisely and can answer to the dominant logic of the business case (Dutton et al, 2001). Money exchanging hands in terms of fees charged is clearly tangible but value is often difficult to define, especially when product offerings and outcomes are ambiguous, as is the case with change interventions (Alvesson, 1993; Clark, 1995). Empirical studies have therefore shown that clients’ greatest anxieties are around cost / value for money (Fullerton and West, 1996; Sturdy, 1997) with the result that consultancies often have to scale down the original vision and provide ‘quick wins’ (Kotter, 1992) to ‘manage the client’. Thus the challenge of selling radical versus incremental change ‘interventions’ requires a

delicate and complex balancing act for consultants in managing clients' (often unstated) expectations (Fincham, 1999).

Alvesson and Johansson (2002) comment, 'the plurality of interests in organizations makes it difficult to simply aim at...client orientation' (p237). For consultants selling any type of change intervention, including that of forum theatre, there is thus an inherent tension between meeting the needs of the contact client and the needs of employees. Indeed, Schein, (1987, p117) notes that 'in reality, the question of who is actually the client can be ambiguous and problematical.' Lippitt and Lippitt (1978, p 16) add a note of pragmatism when they warn that it is 'crucial to determine...whether there is a difference between the client system and the individual or office which pays the bills'. For those charged with leading change in organizations, there can be a similar tension between the assurances required to reassure those further up the hierarchy whilst acknowledging the possibility and potential of emergence through employee participation. This returns us to our initial question around the extent to which forum theatre, as a change intervention, genuinely leads to employee participation in change processes or should it be viewed simply as another mechanism whereby the norms and routines in reality continue to exist, perpetuating rather than changing the existing and embedded organisational power structures (Coopey 1997).

Methodology

The findings presented in this paper are part of a wider piece of research into the development, implementation and evaluation of forum theatre interventions in two different organizations. The data presented in this paper is drawn primarily from forum theatre interventions in two different organizations. The primary data collection method was semi-structured in-depth interviews and, as the forum theatre sessions were part of ongoing programmes, live events were observed on several occasions. The sample consisted of the two clients and the two lead consultants and using purposive and snowball sampling (Silverman 2010), eight actors and thirty employees, the latter interviewed on both an individual and group basis. In addition,

interviews were undertaken with three further clients and two lead consultants who had commissioned or managed forum theatre events.

The data was reviewed initially using template analysis, a ‘flexible technique with few specified procedures, permitting researchers to tailor it to match their own requirements’ (King, 2004 p257) and enabled links to be made between the development of the initial codes from the literature and the emergent codes from the data. Each transcript was explored initially to look for codes that related to how such events were implemented and managed across the different stakeholders (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Findings

In this section, we explore the ways that the emergent potential of forum theatre is systematically curtailed when used as a change intervention in organizations. In each phases - promoting and selling the use of forum theatre, script development and implementation - there are small but significant gestures that alter the meaning of the intervention (Stacey, 2002). We then examine the way that the intervention is further bounded during the live performance by both the role of the facilitator and the culture and norms of the organization itself.

Pleasing the Client: The Commercial Imperative

Before employees even have the opportunity to experience forum theatre, the very use of it, as a change intervention in organizations, must be sold by the consultant and bought by the commissioning client in the organization. Our findings show that with the introduction of this market dynamic, both buyers and sellers subtly and perhaps unconsciously already begin to limit the radical impact and emergent potential of forum theatre.

Maintaining Credibility

Credibility is a key component in building the trust required to reassure potential clients to purchase consulting services (Maister, 2002). This is especially important

when the client has significant reward power (French and Raven, 1958) to give, or withhold, the consulting contract. The findings show that when selling forum theatre, consultants consciously and subtly altered their appearance and recruited certain actors over others to fit into what they believed were the organizational requirements, thus demonstrating the subtle way in which the norms of the business world had the power to shape the nature of the engagement from the very beginning.

Personal appearance seemed to be important. There was a view that looking or even sounding like an actor (whatever that might be) would not be an effective way of getting business, and initial success was attributed to an appearance of normality by the lead consultants:

I'm not a terribly 'luvvie' actor. I'm quite normal, quite sort of, you know, the acceptable face of actors. And I think the fact that I was very nice, approachable and professional, businesslike in my approach and I did what I said on the packet, I think really paid off ... we were seen as being very professional and understanding the world of business ... (Mark, Lead Consultant)

Not only did the lead consultants aim to present themselves as understanding business, but there was also a belief that there was a need to appoint actors who could be perceived to fit an organisational norm and would therefore, again, be credible in the eyes of the clients and subsequently, the organizations' employees.

Some [actors] just didn't look right and they wore terrible suits or tatty shoes or just didn't have the right sort of look, ... I suppose it's about fit ... and there was a guy who we really liked, we thought was lovely and very good but he was too quirky ... We ask people to wear corporate clothes and he came wearing a brown moleskin suit. (Alan, Lead Consultant)

As well as potential organisational actors needing to present a corporate appearance there tended to be a preference, where possible, for actors to have an understanding of business:

All the actors ... have to have some understanding of the business ... one of my regulars is an ex-corporate lawyer who after ten years as a partner in a law firm

decided to throw it all up to be an actor ... there is another one I use who used to be in sales. So they have that experience and that makes a BIG difference (Tony, Lead Consultant)

The data thus suggests that the maintenance of the organisational status quo starts early in the process of delivering forum theatre interventions. Through hiring actors who look the part, and speak ‘business-speak’ the emphasis is more on external attributes, rather than internal skills or experience as an actor. That is not to say that the skills of the actors is ignored; rather that in the field of organisational theatre, there is need for more than their acting skills. So, though expectations of what dress code is appropriate, the buyer as a representative of the powerful institution of business, shapes which actors are allowed to participate and which are not.

Where the clients had input into the choice of actors, again there was a similar requirement for business ‘fit’:

Typically the best actors are those that have all been in business and that’s the strength of the act. Mainly because it’s language, it’s face validity. (Linda, Client)

From the consultants’ and commissioning clients’ perspective, having access to actors who have had a business background is clearly an ‘enabler’ rather than a constraint, in that it enables the ‘product’ to be sold more easily, particularly where clients specifically require this, and, of equal importance, supports the quest for credibility, both by the theatre consultancies and their clients.

The Dance between the Potential for Emergence and the Desire for Defined Outcomes

Forum theatre, as an intervention aims to collectively influence behaviours, on the basis that changes in individuals may lead to changes in the organisation; thus the espoused intention would be to address the underlying issues related to a particular organisational situation, enabling participants to make informed choices about their behaviour **and** empowering them to make significant changes which would benefit the participants as individuals as well as the society or organisation of which they are

a member. From the perspective of change, this exemplifies an emergent approach (Stacey, 2002).

For me it's about stopping people in their tracks and saying, or doing enough to get them to consider themselves and their environment and consider their actions and how they might view things differently in the future, or act differently in the future ...
(Paul, Client)

This extract, which relates to an organisational-wide intervention, embodies both individual change through reflecting on their individual reactions, plus places that reflection within the context of the (organisational) environment.

Another actor commented, in considerable detail:

... and then we do, you know, what Shakespeare was doing to society, though not perhaps quite as eloquently, ... where he would try and hold a mirror up to the human condition, I think we try holding a mirror up to an organisation so that they watch it slightly larger than life, they watch themselves reflected and that's very, very powerful... the fact that it speaks to people and they feel that they are seeing themselves up there and are able to confront an image of themselves without feeling that somebody's telling them or criticizing them... (Roz, Actor)

These quotes articulate the power of forum theatre to show, without an enormous amount of effort, organizational life as it is and life as it could be. Another extract sums up a number of comments from practitioners:

... the combination of the intellectual and the emotional has a huge impact. ... and the other thing is it's a really pain-free way of tackling some very, very difficult issues
(Tony, Lead Consultant)

While the practitioners would be expected to provide a coherent, often passionate account of what is distinctive about forum theatre interventions, their comments were supported by their clients.

... it's very much alive and ... can involve the audience ... So it gives more of an opportunity to explore the issues ...think it gave breadth and depth and a level of engagement which is hard to replicate by other methods. (Julie, Client)

These comments would appear to support the rhetoric that clients are willing to engage with theatre-based interventions in the belief that the workforce will genuinely have an opportunity to both explore, and have an input into, the direction of the change. However, this approach would imply that clients were open to the possibility of relinquishing control of outcomes to their employees. However, unsurprisingly, clients were also clear that there were already in place specific outcomes which needed to be met.

- 'in every scenario there were some key things we were trying to get across' (Julie, Client)

- 'I knew what I wanted to, I knew what was wrong, and what I wanted to fix, ... and I did know the outcomes' (Katherine, Client)

The above extracts show that in spite of an espoused enthusiasm for interventions which provide an opportunity for employees to engage in open-ended discussion, in reality, there was a reluctance to fully engage with the potentially open-ended nature of forum theatre, that is the possibilities for emergent rather than pre-ordained outcomes (Meisiek and Barry 2007). As Coopey (2002) notes, in spite of the rhetoric of more radical approaches 'there seems no intention of prompting any radical, thoroughgoing rethinking of personal and corporate values' (p56), rather aiming to promote a unitarist perspective of what is acceptable and not acceptable by the organization. Thus while clients did see forum theatre approaches as being non-traditional, the difference appears to be in the structure of such events rather than the outcomes.

Furthermore, theatre consultants consciously distanced their work from that of Boal, claiming that this was a requirement of meeting their clients' needs, an example of the ubiquitous cult(ure) of the customer (Du Gay and Salaman, 1992). Thus, while several of the consultants knew of the work of Boal, some at first hand, they were

keen to emphasise that their work was based on the techniques of Boal, rather than the underpinning philosophy.

In terms of the original uses of forum theatre ... in the face of aggression and harsh politics and repression ... it was a fantastic method for that environment and it spawned a method that now has much wider use. So, no ... I don't think he [Boal] would feel ownership of it or proud of it at all, but I don't care. (Dan, Lead Consultant)

This emphasis on the transactional nature of the client/consultancy relationship is an example of a more embedded pattern and institutional power of clients defining what is and isn't wanted and what is and is not acceptable which is clearly understood by the consultancies. As one consultant commented:

*I am ultimately there for the client ...they say 'We want to spend money on this intervention in **this** organisation to bring about **these** outcomes ... so I am in the hands of the client (Richard, Theatre Consultant)*

Thus these pragmatic, commercial considerations of what is needed to win the work and please the client, mean that theatre consultancies distance themselves from the underpinning philosophy of Boal, are willing to forgo a more emergent approach to meet the client need for more defined outcomes and will make sure they look the part.

Design and delivery of forum theatre: bounding the intervention

'Power is a constant attempt to impose different modes of being on disparate ways of becoming' (Clegg et al, 2006, p16). In this next section, we explore the power relations that come into play during the design and delivery of forum theatre interventions. In particular, we explore the way that employee participation in the development of the script is rarely realized. We then examine the way that the intervention is further bounded during the live performance through the role taken by the facilitator and the culture and norms of the organization itself.

Script development: Whose Voice is it Anyway?

Whilst a theatre audience has no influence on what is presented on stage, nor how the drama unfolds, in forum theatre ‘the narrative is unmade and remade before our eyes’ (Babbage 2004 p45). So, forum theatre scripts are designed to engage the workforce with ‘the issue’ by provide a representation of their organisation. All the forum theatre events observed for this study involved a scripted piece at the start of the session and aimed to show the audience recognisable behaviours and, through identification with those behaviours, ‘facilitate diagnosis’ (Weick 1995 p129) of the issues being presented.

However, the issues to be addressed were, without exception, identified by the management not the employees and these ‘issues’ were then presented to the employees through the initial dramatic representation. This representation was seen by the lead consultants as being key to engaging the audience, drawing their attention to the issues to be discussed and providing an opportunity to step back from their routines and ‘getting the audience deeply involved in the problem situation and confronting it with hidden conflicts, subconscious behavioural patterns, or painful truths’ (Schreyögg and Hopfl 2004 p697). In order for this to happen, without exception, the starting point for the theatre consultancies was researching the company.

The first thing you do is the research – what are the issues, what’s their daily work life, what is the language they use, what sort of situations are they going to recognise, what sort of characters are they going to recognise. (Tony, Lead Consultant)

A number of lead consultants stated they aimed to involve staff in the process, both formally through focus groups, or informally by ‘*hanging around in canteens and corridors, grabbing people to have a word with them*’ (Julie, Client). While this approach suggests that employees have an opportunity to be involved at an early stage, the theatre consultancies had already received a brief from the client commissioning the work.

It was also clear that consultants were more than aware of the need to sell the product, so while there might be a preference for taking a more democratic approach, there was also a need to align with the organisational perspective to maintain credibility.

*I'm interested in the individual delegates and what I can do for them, that's my passion, that's what excites me about my job, but I only get to do that **if I hit the organisational target.** (Dan, Lead Consultant)*

So while the data suggests there is a willingness for the employees to have involvement in the script development, this approach was limited by the need to meet the clients' requirements. It should also be acknowledged that even with the most consultative approaches, when an event is designed to reach a large number of employees over a series of weeks, it is rarely possible to consult or involve more than a small percentage of employees without considerable financial outlay. Employee participation in the design of the script is therefore very different from participation in practice. Here again the opportunity to share power is lost in the interests of pragmatism.

The Role of the Facilitator : Easier for Whom?

Boal used the term 'joker' for facilitator; the term is derived from the joker in a deck of cards - just as the wild card is not tied down to a specific suit or value, 'neither is the ... joker tied down to an allegiance to performer, spectator, or any one interpretation of events' (Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman 1994, p237). Furthermore whereas the term 'facilitate' is usually taken to mean 'to make easy' in Boalian terms the joker is the difficult-ator, 'undermining easy judgements, reinforcing our grasp of the complexity of the situation, but not letting that complexity get in the way of action or frighten us into submission or inactivity' (Jackson 1992 p.xix). Thus Boal's theatre does not privilege any particular message but aims to provide a space where different and opposite points of view are aired, with the ultimate goal of promoting social and personal change through critical thinking and discussion (Babbage 2004).

In the forum theatre events which were observed, actors also took on the role of facilitator. While the forum theatre methodology would appear to support a process model of facilitation (Schein, 1987) with the facilitator 'acting as an objective

observer and process controller' (Pellegrinelli 2002 p. 344), the actors, in their facilitation role, came with their own assumptions and perceptions of what might and might not be appropriate in certain circumstances.

... for example we had somebody today suggest that somebody put something into a role-play in the forum workshop Let's demonstrate that this idea has no legs and don't argue the toss, don't stand there and argue with the person with this idea, show them that it's not going to work. (Drew, Actor)

There appeared to be a number of tactics for 'showing them that it's not going to work' – one popular one was to re-interpret the suggestion, and enact the suggestion inappropriately, firstly, to bring in some humour and secondly, to demonstrate that this suggestion would not work.

And sometime you manipulate it slightly so you take what they've said and you do it badly.... (Roz, Actor)

This approach did not always go un-noticed by participants - one employee commented that the actor had not rated his suggestion so did not follow it through:

I actually secretly felt he didn't try very hard to do [my suggestion] ... I felt he kind of sabotaged it in a way ... (Employee)

There was also an example when the actor specifically stated what he thought should happen, which resulted in loss of credibility and even interest in exploring the issues further:

... and one of the actors said, ' Oh no, we don't want you to do that, we want you to go down this direction.' And you could see half the team [the employees] got turned off (Employee)

It is clearly difficult for facilitators / actors to leave their own views behind. As one actor/facilitator commented, 'That's our job to feel how other people feel' (Peter, Actor), but, this important acting skill may conflict with the need to facilitate the

process in a way that enables employees to take the lead in discussions. In addition when undertaking a long-term project, there was evidence that the actors began to anticipate audience reactions and shape the session accordingly. One client saw this as being positive.

When the actors are engaged in roles and then they stop and hear the questions from the audience, it starts to give them a feel for what are their concerns, what are the range of issues and how might they be answered ... That information goes when an actor is taken out of that role and another comes into it, so they don't know how to respond in the same way. (Client)

However, it is unsurprising that the actors facilitated in such a way that effectively rejected suggestions that would not lead to some type of pre-ordained solution.

Overall, the actors, were keen to stimulate debate and discussion, and respond appropriately to employee perspective:

[Forum theatre] should be more challenging, provoking, As you saw, the audience were beginning to interact with each other and ideas were exchanged and it became a forum, it became, sort of, the means to open out to the forum to actually discuss (Mike, Actor)

but at one and the same time were very clear that, 'there is a set of learning that the organisation wants to see pulled out of a particular scenario and they may or may not organically come from the room' (Tom, Actor). Thus the power relations embedded in the client – consultant relationship shape and constrain the behaviour of those responsible for managing interventions live in the moment.

Organizational Culture and Social Acceptability

It is however worth noting that control over the processes was not always driven by the facilitator; both management and peer control limit the extent to which individuals feel free to 'speak their mind'. One employee felt that everyone was working hard to display what they perceived as the 'correct' behaviours, partly at least because the CEO was also present at this particular event.

Well everyone was saying the right things, you know, ... and I just felt everyone was behaving themselves ... and the CEO had come along ... (Susan, Employee)

Similarly, a lead consultant had the experience, perhaps extreme, where the presence of senior management had a significant impact on the event:

... and in the first afternoon ... it went pretty well in the morning, ... the president of the organisation was sitting there. So there were about 40 people including the president and nobody said a bloody thing (Richard, Lead Consultant)

It would seem that however hard the actors work to create a pluri-vocal learning space, the organisational culture, with its embedded power relations and social norms, will have a significant impact on the extent to which employees do, in reality, feel confident enough to make contributions which may conflict with their colleagues' views. It is not only the presence of management which may stifle debate, but also the prevailing norms of what is and is not acceptable in terms of conflict and confrontation. This was evidenced by a client who noted that:

One person had very strong views ... and other members of the audience went, 'What!??' and making other kind of comments and were wanting to challenge but weren't, but were making comments, mutterings between each other. And then in the other kind of discussion groups people tend to not want to confront other people. (Jane, Client)

Thus there is an issue of ongoing relationships: to what extent is it reasonable to expect people to challenge and confront each other vociferously when they need to maintain working relationships beyond the sessions. Thus the organizational context is clearly a mediator in relation to the depth of the discussions and the willingness of employees to engage in robust debate.

Discussion

This exploration of one particular approach to managing change would appear to

support Clegg's proposition that 'power defines, constitutes and shapes the moment. Power is inseparable from interaction and thus all social institutions potentially are imbued with power. '(Clegg et al, 2006, p6). Thus, while there is considerable emphasis in the organisational studies and change management literature on the need for greater employee participation across organisational life, including moves to more democratic and open-ended approaches to change management, in reality 'managers are still in practice working from a perspective that values unity and control over plurality' (Clark and Butcher, 2006 p314).

From Shakespeare to Schiller, Brecht to Hare, theatre has been used to question the status quo, to hold a mirror up to society, and to 'provide models for the ways in which societies behave' (Shepherd and Wallis 2004 p1). Yet, as we have already argued, when used in organizations, the possibilities for change are already contextualized by the market relationship between the seller of forum theatre and the client buying on behalf of the organization. 'Power concerns the ways that social relations shape capabilities, decisions, change; these social relations can do things and they can block things unfolding' (Clegg et al, 2006, p3). The findings suggest that there are tensions between the potential for emergence and the desire for control; between the possibilities of allowing employees to see things differently, make sense of their experience and act differently with the perceived organizational need to deliver some 'key messages' on behalf of the management.

These findings illustrate the way consultants carefully choose how they present themselves as credible and business-like 'change agents' illustrating the embedded power and influence of the conventions of the business world which values rationality and conformity over intuition and novelty. In addition, clients' attraction to emergence and the novelty of theatre, and yet desire for defined outcomes, requires theatre consultants to try and meet those needs, whilst remaining true to the espoused intent to offer a genuinely participatory experience to employees.

The need for lead consultants to demonstrate visibly business credibility also supports previous concerns about the extent to which the business world views the arts' world to be 'other' than them (Meisiek and Hatch 2008) and emphasises the perceived duality 'which sets an evil corporate world that is motivated by power and control

against the sacred art world that is motivated by personal freedom and exploration’ (Taylor and Thellessen 2007).

Furthermore, while there is indeed reference to debate, dialogue and interaction, there is, at least on the clients’ part, an emphasis on ensuring that the discussions stay focussed on the issues that the managers deem to be of importance, supporting the proposition that forum theatre in the organisational context tends to be promoted and used as a method for increasing business efficiency ‘rather than [for] any political or moral reasons such as creating an equitable workplace’ (Nicholson 2004 p. 50).

There are clearly tensions between the need for the actors to manage an agenda to meet the requirements of the organisation and allowing the employees to take the discussion in unexpected and possibly unwanted directions. Thus, while the actors may appear to support Boal’s comment that ‘it is better to have a good debate rather than a good solution’ (Boal 1992 p230), they are, in this process, likely to be subject to expectations and pressures which are at best contradictory and potentially conflicting. They believe they are operating in a democratic space and yet are expected to support predetermined organisational outcomes. They are briefed by their own managers on those outcomes and yet have to respond to the live direction of participants during the process.

‘It is not the place of the theatre to show the correct path, but only the means by which all possible paths may be examined’ (Boal 1979: 139), however, our findings suggest that through various strategies, covert and hidden, only a pre-defined number of paths may be explored. Indeed, as Clark and Mangham (2004), in relation to their own observations of forum theatre, comment, ‘If new understanding is to be brought about by allowing audience members to step back and take a look at what they are doing, more attention needs to be given to the complexity, irony, politics, and power struggles that characterize organizations’. It is suggested by this discussion, that this comment could apply equally to any change intervention within organizations, that without a critical understanding of the ways in which institutionalized power structures constrain the most participative of change management processes, such approaches are unlikely to be realised in reality.

Conclusion

In our discussion we have shown that the commercial imperative to sell work means that theatre consultancies conform to what they perceive to be the established norms of the business world in terms of dress and behaviour. In endeavouring to please the client, they also tend to distance themselves from forum theatre's radical roots and heritage to meet the control needs of the client commissioning the work. In the design and delivery of the forum theatre interventions, we show how the potential for employee participation in the development of the script is rarely realized. This could be seen as a pragmatic response to the large number of employees in the organization and the financial and opportunity costs of their involvement. Adopting a more critical stance, it could be argued that without their involvement at this stage of the process, employees' concerns and issues are not surfaced, and instead we have a further example of Lukes (1990) third dimension of power, management's ability to keep issues other than their own off the agenda.

Thus, while the organisational studies literature suggests that it is the employee perspective that leads organisational and forum theatre processes and the outcomes are defined by employees rather than management, closer examination shows a clear tension between the espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris and Schon 1991). The methods of working, the outcomes and the way in which the latter unfold are crucially influenced by the power relationships between the various stakeholder groups, that is, the clients, the lead consultants who tender for the project, the actors/facilitators who deliver the product and the employees themselves.

This examination of the relationship between the forum theatre practitioners, clients and employees indicates that while the espoused aim in terms of the process is one of 'anything goes', in reality there is considerable tension between the underpinning belief system of facilitating genuinely open forums and the recognition that the client has specific outcomes that need to be met. Allowing employees to shape the event and outcomes, without some form of management, clearly has implications for the consultancies in terms of their ongoing business relationship with clients and the expectations and experience of lead consultants, actors and employees are shaped and shape each other prior to and during the event to keep the outcomes bounded rather than open-ended.

Thus on one hand there are the demands of the managers to develop an appropriate and possibly 'controlled' change intervention and, on the other hand, the nature of theatre which potentially creates more ambiguous outcomes. Unsurprisingly there is both synergy and dissonance. Meisiek and Barry (2007) argue, 'managerial intentions expressed in the organisational theatre are only the beginning of any change process' and that 'the responses of employees ... are endogenously shaped and cannot be anticipated' (p.1808); clients, however, suggest they are looking for a more controlled approach. Thus, while more radical interventions may encourage radical learning it is questionable to what extent organisations want creative, freethinking managers or staff who are questioning of the status quo (Coopey 1998; Gilmore and Warren 2007). As Clegg et al. (2006) note 'it was a concern with efficiency that gave birth to power in management and organizations' (p7), and this desire for efficiency and clarity in relation to change interventions moderates and drives even the most participatory approaches. We do not claim that this process is enacted consciously and deliberately, rather that the pragmatic business of earning a living and keeping those in power satisfied means that winning the work, the consultant's need to please the client, the client's need to deliver defined outcomes that reassure their bosses, the prevailing organizational culture, all mitigate against the more radical potential of forum theatre and emasculate its liberating power.

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