

# **The use of Industrial Theatre in Organisations**

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*“Conversation is at the heart of the new inquiry. It is, perhaps, the core human capacity for dealing with the tremendous challenges we face. To engage in great civilisation we need to ask questions that matter. We cannot afford to spend our time on issues that can't hold our attention, that don't touch our hearts. The culture of conversation is a different culture, one that could make a difference in the future of our world.”*

Institute for the Future, In Good Company, 2006: 5 Innovation at the intersection of Technology and Sustainability

## **Introduction**

In this paper the concept of Industrial Theatre is discussed as it manifest in organisations in the context of behavioural transformation efforts. Understanding dynamics in organisations leads to the exploration of Chaos and Self-Organising Theory. Underlying theoretical organisational development techniques such as Appreciative Inquiry and Storytelling are positioned as critical building blocks for sustainable organisational transformation. Transformational theory is also introduced as the researcher argues that the use of Industrial Theatre in organisations can contribute to sustainable organisational transformation.

## **Background**

The complexity of the external environment and the challenges that confront leadership today threaten to overwhelm any CEO, Organisational Development practitioner or strategist (Kets de Vries, 2001 & Viljoen, 2008). Companies have to cope with multiple dimensions of change involving international best practice, regulation, technology, new competitors and business models, market pressures and constantly changing customer demands (Drotskie, 2008). The interface between the activities of design, production and distribution requires highly diverse workplaces.

The future workplace will become even increasingly more diverse as globalisation escalates and equal employment practices are implemented worldwide. Globalisation implies that interactions between professions and skill-sets from different parts of the developed and less developed worlds will occur (Thomas, 2005). This would suggest that people from different backgrounds and cultures will need to relate with one another as they are drawn together by the nature of workplace globalisation. Talents and attributes of people from different backgrounds and heritages will need to be fully valued, utilised and developed, to materialise organisational benefits such as innovation, competitiveness and sustained performance (LeBaron, 2005).

Tomorrow's world will be vastly different from today's reality, and this implies that new organisational and individual strategies and approaches will be required in order to deal with this accelerated pace of change (Viljoen, 2008). The interplay between the changing external environment and the internal individual worlds leads to continual alterations in both worlds. The ability of the individual, the team and, ultimately, the organisation to respond swiftly and timeously to these changing realities will be the differentiating factor between competitive organisations in complex markets with declining profit margins (Senge, 2003).

All organisations and all individuals within these organisations will increasingly be exposed to challenges and ambiguities caused by changing dynamics during organisational transformations. The development of flexibility, adaptability and change resilience in individuals and organisations will remain a continuous challenge, as organisations strive to be emergent and fluid in their strategic behaviour (Viljoen, 2008). The understanding of human and organisational reactions to change can, therefore, enhance the sustainability of transformational efforts (Nel, 2003).

It is assumed that organisations are social systems (French & Bell, 1999). Different employees often see the same thing but interpret it differently based on their own unique way of thinking (Salisbury, 1999). Therefore, in order to understand the way in which decisions are made and strategies implemented within an organisation, one would need to acknowledge and understand how employees within the organisation

view the system and what constitutes their worldviews. It thus becomes critical for the leadership within an organisation to firstly value diversity and secondly ensure that all employees contribute significantly to the implementation of the organisational strategy thereby ensuring enhanced shared understanding and alignment. **A culture, thus a system of shared meanings**, may guide the way in which organisations act and the way in which individuals view and interpret the corporate world (Novinger, 2001). Organisational culture provide the behavioural framework for individuals and leaders that can contribute directly to business sustainability (Viljoen, 2008).

Industrial Theatre as organisational development methodology can assist organisations in translating a system of shared understanding and thus impact directly on organisational culture (Viljoen, 2008). Culture impacts directly on THE WAY in which things are done in an organisation and therefore Industrial Theatre can impact behaviour in organisations sustainably (Viljoen, 2008).

### **Industrial Theatre as Organisational Development methodology**

**Industrial Theatre** provides emotive solutions based on dramatic media comprising various forms of live Theatre, video and corporate events. If drama is combined with the disciplines of psychology and Organisational Development, as well as comprehensive strategic business knowledge, then unique dramatic solutions may be created (Du Plessis, 2004).

Industrial Theatre influences assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, mindsets and frames of reference, and creates an understanding of all these elements and the way in which these elements impact on the learning, behaviour and personal growth of the individual. In this way industrial Theatre brings about an understanding of complex (business) issues and is a very effective way of educating, mobilising and motivating people. If facilitated into effective leadership behaviours through appreciative inquiry and/or story telling the researcher believes that the shared metaphor created by industrial Theatre could lead to sustainable transformation (Viljoen, 2008). However, more academic research on the impact of Industrial Theatre on culture and ultimately business results is needed.

New crystallised needs surface from the developmental areas identified by the organisational culture study. A transformation strategy should be contracted with key role players. Industrial Theatre and storytelling may be utilised successfully to translate values, leadership intent and strategy throughout the organisation (Viljoen, 2004). Stories, myths, rituals and metaphors are described by LeBaron (2005) as symbolic, relational tools that may help to align shared pictures. Industrial Theatre can assist in translating these stories and myths throughout the organisations.

Leadership development initiatives can support Industrial Theatre and should be implemented consecutively, for example, emotional intelligence journeys, business simulations and growth groups. Typically, interventions on a supervisory level will be invaluable (Viljoen, 2008).

Industrial Theatre promise to be an excellent vehicle to create significance into new organisational strategy, to ensure alignment of the workforce and ultimately lead to commitment and buy-in of the workforce that will manifest in changed organisational behaviour. Viljoen (2004) mentioned that Industrial Theatre can be used to assist organisations to translate organisational values into behaviours and facilitate the alignment of individual values with organisational values. It further promises to assist in portraying cultural dynamics as it manifest in day to day organisational life.

The Benchmark of Engagement (BeQ) is as a tool to understand the underlying dynamics that contribute to sustainable organisational growth. What makes the BeQ unique is that it not only measures engagement on different organisational domains, such as on individual, group and organisational domains, it also takes into account national cultural dynamics (Viljoen, 2008).

Good Organisational Development practice implies that everyone who has participated in a culture study should receive feedback (French & Bell, 1999). Industrial Theatre is an ideal vehicle to tell the organisational story as described by the BeQ. Through stories very difficult organisational dynamics such as cultural differences can be displayed without judgement (Viljoen, 2004).

The underlying philosophies of Chaos and Self-organising Theory, Appreciative Inquiry are discussed in the next paragraph. These philosophies and techniques may be applied in order to create shared understanding and alignment around organisational goals. It becomes relevant as an effective and congruent Industrial Theatre philosophies rely heavily on the insights gained from these theories.

## **Chaos and Self-organising Theory**

*"All things in this world are impermanent. They have the nature to rise and pass away. To be in harmony with this truth brings true happiness."*

Buddhist chant

Chaos theory refers to the qualitative study of unstable behaviour in deterministic, non-linear, dynamic systems (Haake, 2001). The name "chaos theory" derives from the fact that the systems described by the theory are apparently disordered. The theory attempts to describe the underlying order in apparently random data. Self-organising refers to the dynamics of a system to tend to itself in order to increase its inherent order. A system will create its own reality and organise accordingly.

Senge (2003) states that creating or self-organising differs from problem-solving. Problem-solving involves making something that is not liked, disappear, while creating refers to making happen that which is truly cared about. In Industrial Theatre the group members are requested to engage in joint action planning and shared decision making and problem solving (Viljoen, 2008).

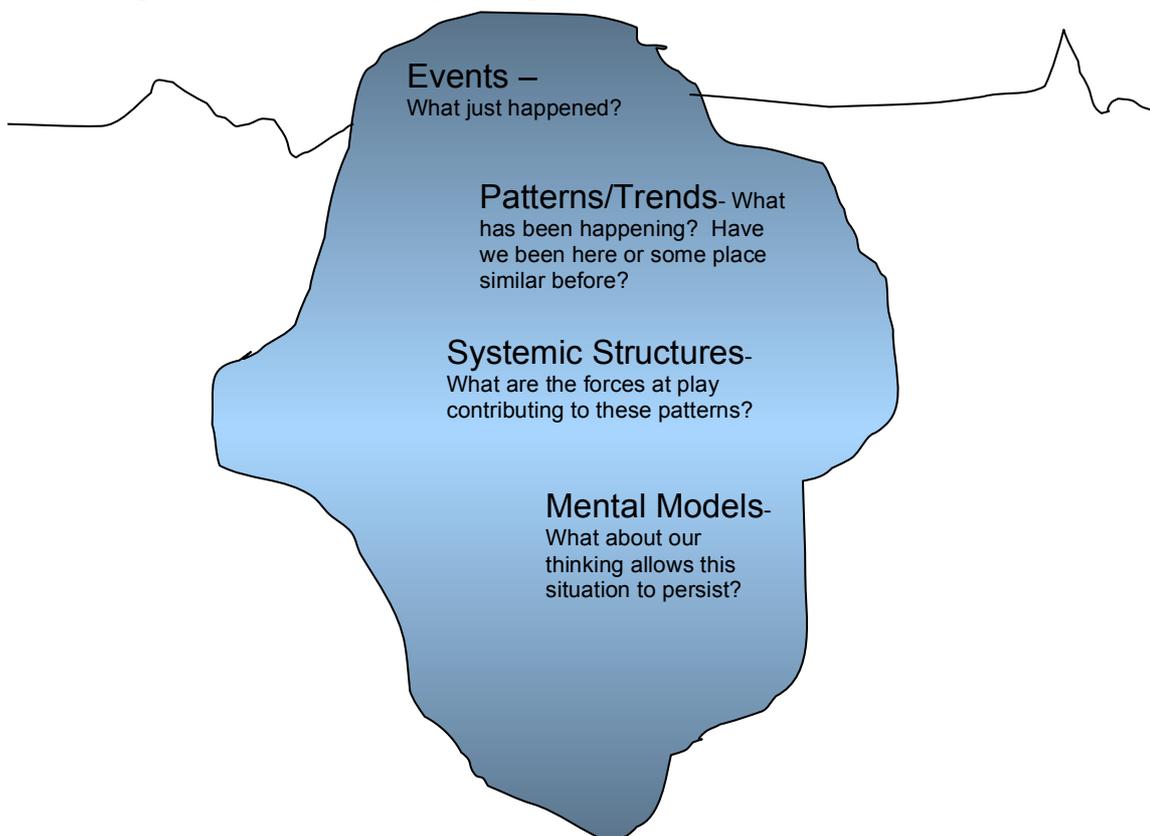
Organisations resolve day-to-day problems and generate new results. Senge (2003) states that it is hard to maintain a sense of purpose if your primary role is to solve problems individually or collectively rather than create something new and meaningful. Without a deep sense of purpose it is difficult to harness the energy, passion, commitment and perseverance needed to thrive in challenging times. This presents leadership with a difficult paradox to manage.

Senge (1993) uses the metaphor of an iceberg to explain that it is possible only to see events in the external world. However, unseen patterns and trends, as well as systemic structures and mental models, may be found beneath the surface. Figure 1 indicates the questions that may be posed in order to explore the root causes of events.

Ackoff (2003) expresses the importance of identifying those assumptions that prevent someone from perceiving alternatives, denying these assumptions and then exploring the consequences of these denials.

During change or transformational initiatives the principles of self-organising theory may provide valuable insights. Systems will always attempt to attain equilibrium (Senge, 1993). Therefore, careful strategising is required should it be necessary for a system which is in equilibrium to change or to adapt. Sustainable change may take place only if the underlying mental models as described in Figure 1 are taken into account.

**Figure 1** Exploring root courses



Senge, 1993

Senge (2003) explores the tension between vision and reality. This tension may be uncomfortable, and creative tension often becomes emotional tension. Views from other fields of study, for example, industrial psychology and educational psychology, may assist in understanding the way in which individuals and groups respond to emotional unease, for example, the defense mechanisms that come into play may be analysed. These defense mechanisms include fight and flight behaviour or political gamesmanship (Fraher, 2005). Industrial Theatre can be used with great effect to normalise these dynamics (Viljoen, 2008).

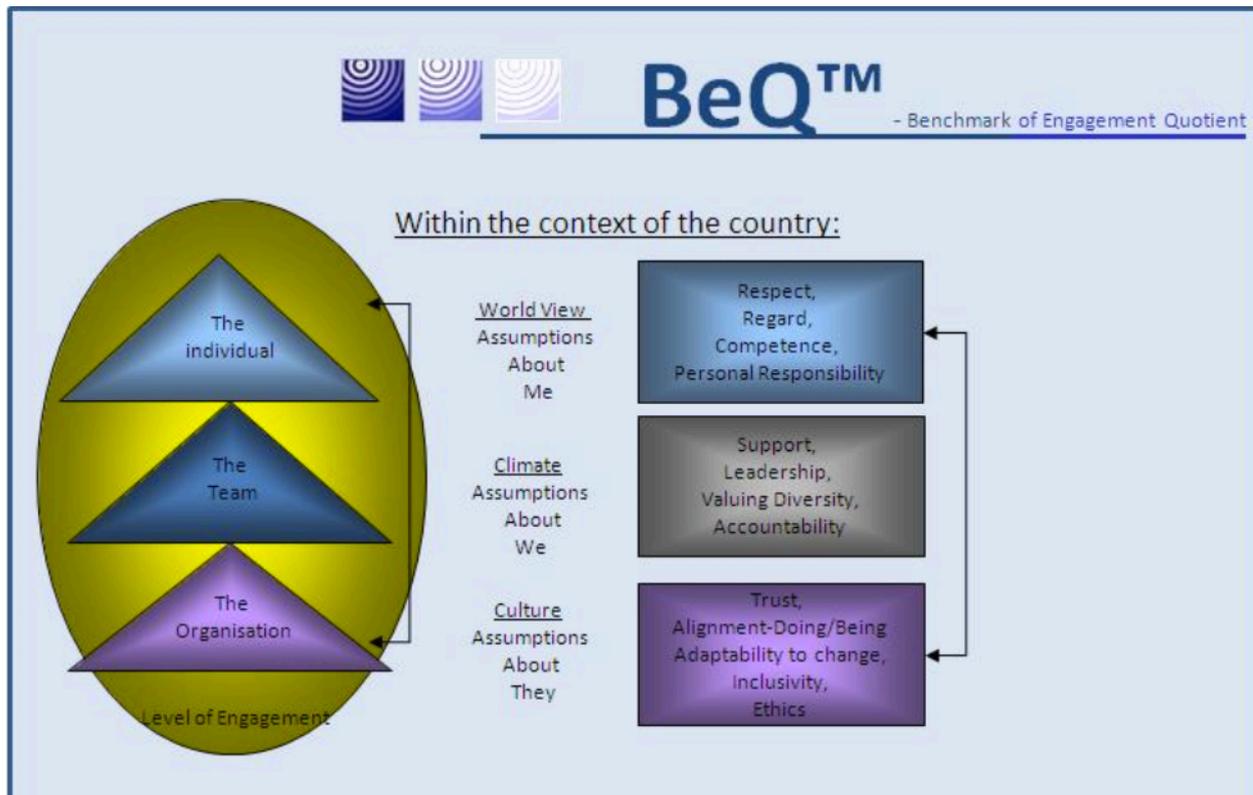
Senge (2003) agrees with Ackoff (2003) that the understanding of constraints is a prerequisite for creation. Organisational Development theory and methodologies, such as storytelling, facilitated industrial Theatre, systems archetype analysis and working with results from scientific climate studies, may assist leadership to understand mental model and underlying assumptions/beliefs and may contribute to the sustainability of transformational attempts.

### **Employee engagement the key to unlocking organisational gifts**

Employee Engagement (The Conference Board of Canada, 2006: 3) may be defined as *"a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organisation, that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work"*. Therefore leadership should ensure that the maximum number of employees engages the maximum amount of energy in terms of the strategy and the values of the organisation, and that, through involvement and participation, tacit knowledge and wisdom be unleashed and aligned. The Corporate Leadership Council (2004), for example, found a direct correlation between employee engagement and talent retention.

Viljoen (2008) defined engagement as the willingness of an individual to contribute discretionary energy to organisational benefits. This willingness can manifest in organisational benefits as described by the Benchmark of Engagement (BeQ).

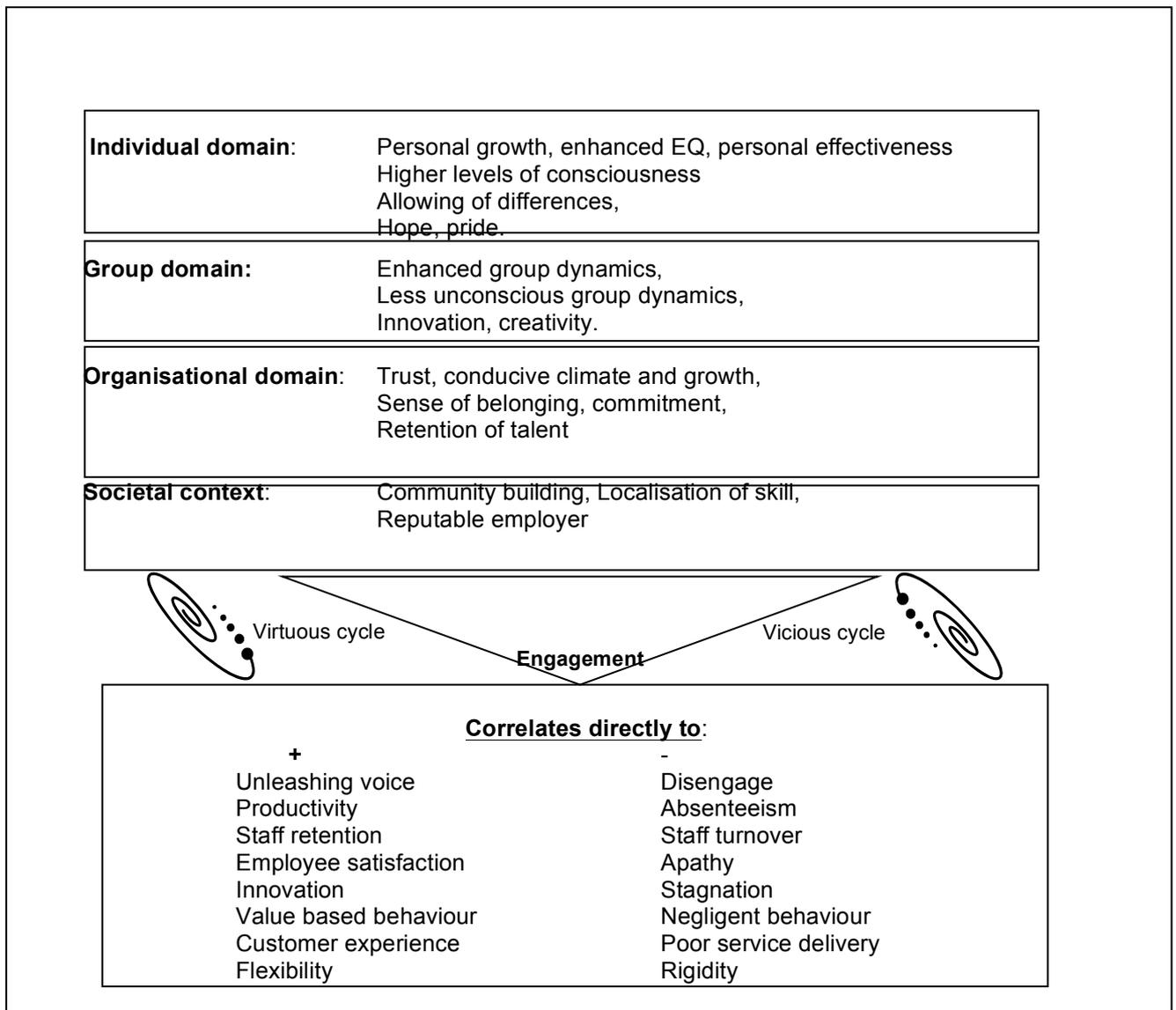
**Figure 2: Engagement as determined by the BeQ**



**Engagement is the outcome of climate (a shared set of attitude in human affairs) conducive for involvement and participation should be engendered by leadership within the organisation (Viljoen, 2008). Organisational benefits will materialise from such a climate.**

Employee engagement is released in the synthesis of individual, group, the organisation and in context of the industry and the national culture (Viljoen, 2008). There are direct correlations between the level of engagement and organisational performance indicators as can be seen in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3 Benefits of Inclusivity**

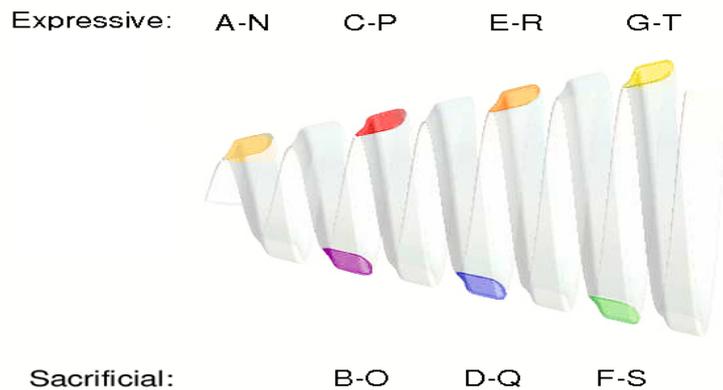


### National cultural dynamics

The **national culture (the culture associated with a nation as a whole)** in which the company operates, contributes to the complexity that faces leadership on a daily basis (Hofstede, 1993). Dynamics caused by diversity factors in this domain should be acknowledged in business strategy and practice.

In figure 4 below the powerful theory of spiral dynamics are visually displayed. Cohen and Beck (1994) explained that different groups of people ask different questions of existence, which can be depicted in a spiral which osculates from a collective to an individual world view.

**Figure 4: Natural cultural dynamics as explained by spiral dynamics**



Laubscher (2010) argues that different national groupings excel at different niches and have different gifts that manifest from different questions of existence. She warns that a society like Ghana do not do well with strict rules and regulations that are enforced autocratically. The learning style of Ghanaians can be described as visual, audial and copying. They do excellent with metaphor and can derive learning from symbols. Typically, safety are presented in a conflicting manner, describing that one should be safe in order to achieve results later. This is in contradiction with the question of existence of Ghanaian groupings that ask the question, “how will working safely help my family.”

Spiral dynamics principles integrated in industrial Theatre scenes can contribute to the sustainability of the intervention.

The underlying organisational development methodologies of Appreciative Inquiry and Storytelling that form an integral part of Industrial Theatre will be discussed in the following paragraph.

## **Appreciative Inquiry**

*Appreciative inquiry (AI) asks us to pay special attention, by means of deliberate use of positive word choice, to value "the best of the past and present" - in order to "ignite the collective imagination of what might be."*

Cooperrider in Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999: unknown

Appreciative inquiry refers to seeing what others may not see, encouraging the sharing of different vantage points and focusing on the use of positive language in order to facilitate or unleash the positive energy of thought. It involves heightening the awareness of the value, strength and potential of both the self and others – and overcoming the limits that are imposed, often unconsciously, on one's own capabilities by the choice of language used to define the scenarios being described. The fundamental methodology underlying appreciative inquiry was, to a large extent, developed by Barrett (1990).

Bushe (1990) contributed significantly by refining the methodological process of appreciative inquiry, which forms part of the Organisational Development methodology which is referred to as action research. Action research projects may be directed towards diverse goals, and, therefore, there are different variations of the technique. Appreciative inquiry represents a viable complement of the conventional forms of action research in that it does not attempt to deny the existence of problems and concerns, but, rather makes an effort to enquire about a constructive solution by taking into account past success, and encouraging a feeling of accomplishment in members. Appreciative inquiry is thus able to find effective solutions to current problems. A more empowered, open head space is encouraged by the fact that the mind is not permitted to be bogged down by allowing downward spiralling, problem focused, and depressing discussions. This, in turn, energises, rather than deflates, a discussion focused and action planning session (French & Bell, 1999). During organisational change efforts appreciative inquiry may be used to focus on what is right in terms of the situation, rather than focussing on what is wrong. As all members within the organisation typically engage in the appreciative inquiry process it will obviously result in a sense of inclusion. Viljoen (2008) stated that Appreciative inquiry should form the basis of industrial Theatre initiatives.

Appreciative inquiry is a vehicle for social innovation that aims to advance the theoretical knowledge of consequence (French & Bell, 1999). It represents an alternative approach to problem-solving. Instead of identifying, analysing and solving problems appreciative inquiry treats organisations as positive forces that are able to generate leverage beyond problem-centred focus points by directing the focus onto the strengths of the organisation. By means of careful questioning appreciative inquiry uncovers the strengths of the teams/ organisation, and these strengths are then used to change the present scenario or plan the future more successfully.

This approach focuses on solving real problems by focusing on strengths and future positivity; and by not getting bogged down by a negative, downward spiral that often leads to groups' identifying imagined or unrealistic problems as a result of the anxiety which is caused by the fear of the negative (French & Bell, 1999). Appreciative inquiry deliberately focuses attention on what works, what is possible and what imbues an experience with vitality (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). It assists in uncovering hidden assets and, by focusing on aspects of the desirable future, it involves living in the now (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Appreciative inquiry is an applicable methodology to use during the feedback phase of organisational research, for example, in climate studies like the BeQ and in industrial Theatre.

French and Bell (1999) summarise appreciative inquiry as qualitative, diagnostic research that focuses on the strengths within organisations, and which assists in co-creating shared understanding and meaning. Four principles apply, namely, that the research of topics should begin with appreciation; questions and foci should be applicable; enquiry into scenarios should be provocative; and the inputs generated should be collaborative and positively focused.

The interventions which are used in respect of the technique and methodology of appreciative inquiry include small group discussions (Cooperrider, 1999). In facilitating Big systems events such as industrial Theatre, this technology can be applied with sustainable success (Viljoen, 2008).

When applying appreciative inquiry, a researcher, in collaboration with the organisation, aims at identifying the most significant growth possibilities latent in the

system that could be leveraged. This typically happens during industrial Theatre. The inquiry centres on, for example, “When did people attain the highest motivational levels in the life of the organisation?”, “When did people feel the most fulfilled?” and “What do staff members do to make themselves, their tasks, their team and the organisation successful?” These are example of typical questions that can be asked during the facilitation of an Industrial Theatre initiative.

## Organisational Storytelling

*“Without the continuity of storytelling and the messages they contain from the leadership of the group, the people of any tripe or corporation will forget who they are.”*

De Pree, 1989: unknown

Narratives may be used as a valuable lens for both understanding and managing organisations in the 21st century. They are often perceived as either ephemeral, relevant mainly to entertainment or as something that only children enjoy and primitive societies engage in. There is, however, a valuable application for storytelling in the new world of work. The top executives in large corporations are often rarely even seen by their employees, and stories about them could create confidence in the organisation (Brown et al., 2005). Every organisation seems to create stories (narratives) as a way of making sense of organisational life. Narratives and storytelling in Industrial Theatre interventions constitute an obvious and central aspect of every functioning organisation. Cultural messages are passed down in stories (LeBaron, 2005).

Stories are the carriers of behavioural norms and provide information on how to behave. According to Brown et al (2005), people display remarkably stable behaviour over time and, although there are subtle changes, the continuity and endurance of behavioural norms owe much to stories. Stories help to explain the social fabric of the organisation. Brown et al (2005) argue that any discussion about an organisation that does not place narrative and storytelling at the centre is bound to be misleading and incomplete. Stories become embedded in legends and myths. Stories about the past constrain behaviour in organisations. These stories may wield

so much power that economists term this path-dependency, implying that the road you take will determine where you go. Stereotypes are created because human beings relate to stories about other human beings (Brown et al, 2005).

Stories are one of the ways in which knowledge, for instance, social knowledge is transmitted and, therefore, stories are critical in knowledge management strategies. Storytelling may be applied with great success during the translation of strategy or else archetypal stories may be used in growth processes. Storytelling may take many forms – it may be the managing director who addresses people with passion, someone with a life lesson could translate learning through his/her story, or the storytelling could form part of the creation of strategy or the translation of values. Industrial Theatre is an ideal way of telling organisational stories (Viljoen, 2008). Employees may be taught how to write their own stories or else stories could be told dramatically through Theatre (Du Plessis, 2004).

People are able to recall something easily when it is told in a story (Brown et al, 2005). Weick (1995) identifies the need to make sense of the organisation and the environment as the strongest impulse in many organisations. Just as a story needs context (Brown et al, 2005), organisational stories refer to the organisation as it was at a specific time and at a specific place. Storytelling is one of the ways in which norms are transferred (Hechter & Opp, 2001). Stories told through Industrial Theatre endure and, although, the names referred to may change, the behavioural lessons remain the same.

Stories are salient. Purposeful storytelling may reach large numbers of people within a short space of time and is relatively cheap. Narratives communicate naturally as human nature reacts to authenticity and universal truths. Storytelling communicates collaboratively, persuasively, holistically, contextually, intuitively, entertainingly, interactively, emotively and kinetically in order to invoke action. Brown et al (2005) state that storytelling spurs double-loop learning – reaching speedily into the deeper recesses of the psyche and changing values and attitudes. This methodology enables human beings to unlearn what they have been taught.

During transformational efforts organisational storytelling may be utilised to create shared understanding, to comprehend the reason for the change, to relate to the transition and to describe behaviour suitable to the new reality.

Brown et al (2005) indicate that stories may be used for entertainment, conveying information, nurturing, promoting innovation, preserving organisations and also changing organisations. Jung (1981) described archetypal stories as stories that are not subject to the laws of time and space. A person is able to experience a good story as if he/she has lived that story him/herself.

Brown et al (2005) maintain that the conventional view of communication is to ignore the internal dialogue within every individual. They stated clearly that it is not the story that has the impact – it is the process of storytelling. A good story may be funny, clever or moving. A story has to be true to one's own sense of the way in which things work (Brown et al, 2005). Storytelling may be used to translate tacit knowledge into consciousness. Stories must be understandable, told from the perspective of a single protagonist (a person who is in a situation typical of the organisation), convey a degree of strangeness, but still be plausible and embody the change idea as fully as possible.

The story should be as topical as possible to convey a sense of urgency (Brown et al, 2005). Viljoen (2008) added that by wiring an Industrial Theatre intervention around the dynamics identified in a valid climate study and to support organisational strategy, a sense of significance is created that contributes to the success and sustainability of the intervention.

Huss (2004) stresses the importance of authenticity during storytelling. Brown et al (2005) state that it is best if the story is true, told in a minimalist way, and has a happy ending. They maintain that the storyteller must be passionate as he/she translates an emotive message with the story. A story must be true to one's own sense of the way in which things work (Brown et al, 2005). When carried out correctly, storytelling is invisible to the listener. Storytelling may be used to translate tacit knowledge into conscious awareness and shared insight. Leadership is

encourage during Industrial Theatre initiatives to share their own views and show their personal authentic emotions.

There are no definite steps in storytelling. It is, however, critical that shared experiences be created by the storytelling. It is valuable if the story is analysed after it has been related. Within organisations stories may be told with great effect to translate norms, share visions and promote change initiatives. If a leader shares passionately from the self the audience will relate to the authenticity and respond emotively (Brown et al, 2005). A good story is funny, clever or moving. It may be used to communicate complex ideas, motivate people to change, persuade people to work together, share knowledge, deal with rumours, transmit values and lead people to a shared outcome.

Storytelling is the way in which human beings share the expertise, reliability and trustworthiness of other people. Owing to the fact that organisational operations are increasingly becoming virtual this perceived outcome becomes increasingly important. Brown et al (2005) state that there are no alternatives to telling stories – no system nor a human resources department is able to do it. Storytelling in person is intensely interactive, whereas other forms of communication are passive. Storytelling may assist a person to perceive reality in a new way. Organisational storytelling assist employees to understand the strategic intent of the organisation, become clear about values of the company and align themselves around the task at hand (Viljoen, 2008).

Everybody has a different way in which he/she hears a story, and a different way of being engaged and of experiencing what is being told. Archetypal storytelling allows for the listener to interpret the story in his/her own way. Tacit knowledge, which forms part of the intellectual capital of an organisation, may be identified as the most important resource in any organisation (Dess & Picken, 2000). Storytelling may be used with great success in organisations. It may ensure the translation of strategy and the creation of shared meaning, and, thus, significance and buy-in within organisations.

The power of a story is unleashed through its application to the lives of the employees. The sustainability of Industrial Theatre can be studied in analysing the behaviours of employees over time. A valid climate study such as the BeQ can measure the impact on individual, group and organisational level.

### **Critique of Industrial Theatre and storytelling**

Stories may be perceived as nebulous, ephemeral, subjective and unscientific. Much still needs to be done to convince traditional line managers that storytelling should form an integral aspect of their leadership skill set.

The recognition of the importance of storytelling may constitute a challenge to leadership within the new economy of work. Stories may be subjective (Dess & Picken, 2000) or even be culture-specific. Brown et al (2005), however, argue that the cultural differences are far less significant than the similarities. Stories often consist of archetypal wisdom that is applicable across cultural boundaries.

Viljoen (2008) suggests that the value of Industrial Theatre can be significantly increased by positioning it as a critical part of an overall transformational strategy, by ensuring leadership buy-in and visibility, to ensure that scenes are depicting real issues as indicated by a valid climate study, by facilitating each scene, by communicating small wins and decisions implemented immediately and by co-creating a view of the ideal future.

### **Conclusion**

Industrial Theatre and organisational story telling are a very powerful way in which to convey complex, multi-dimensional concepts. While a certain amount of knowledge may be reflected as information stories are a fundamental aspect of unlocking vital knowledge which remains beyond the reach of easily codified information. Storytelling may be perceived as a knowledge management tool, as it assists people and organisations to discover the hidden values in ideas and intellect. Industrial Theatre communicates collaboratively, persuasively, holistically, intuitively, entertainingly, movingly, freely and interactively.

When linked to organisational strategy, when it forms part of a bigger transformational process, when the underlying dynamics of a climate study are addressed and when Theatre intervention is facilitated properly, sustainable transformational results can occur. It is however the buy in of leadership, the visible support for the intervention and the way in which leadership will deal with the energy that is created during the Theatre that will determine the ultimate sustainability of the intervention.

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