Creating dialogue by storytelling

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Abstract

Purpose – The objective of this paper is to develop practice and theory from Augusto Boal's dialogue technique (Image Theatre) for organisational use. The paper aims to examine how the members in an organisation create dialogue together by using a dramaturgical storytelling framework where the dialogue emerges from storytelling facilitated by symbolic representations of still images.

Design/methodology/approach – The study follows the lines of participatory action and art-based research. The data are collected from 13 dramaturgical work story storytelling sessions in four different organisations. The research design belongs to the tradition of research-based theatre, which implies artful inquiry, scripting and performance in research.

Findings – The paper presents a model for organisational dialogue. The model illustrates the dramaturgical storytelling of work story which influences problem shifting in a positive way.

Research limitations/implications – The limitations of this study are related to the scope of the research. The Scandinavian cultural context facilitates an open, bottom up process. More case studies in different kinds of environments should be conducted. In the future it might be advantageous to conduct more longitudinal studies on how organisations can nurture continuous dialogue.

Practical implications – Work story as a dialogue practice facilitated members from the same occupational groups to share experiences with each other and construct common interests by investigating unstructured and uncertain social situations at work.

Originality/value – The paper combines research fields that explore art-based initiatives within organisations, workplace learning and innovation research.

Keywords Dialogue, Dramaturgical storytelling, Learning, Art-based initiatives, Innovation, Storytelling

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Dialogue, which means encounters between persons, exchanging experiences, ideas and opinions (Boal, 1995), is the key when creating a reflexive learning culture (Cunliffe, 2002a, 2002b) for practice-based innovation (Melkas and Harmaakorpi, 2012). Storytelling and stories can portray situations from the perspective of the teller (Gabriel, 2000; Gabriel and Connell, 2010; Abma, 2007) and offer a landscape for dialogue and learning (Abma, 2003; Cunliffe, 2002a). This article develops practice and theory from Augusto Boal's (1995) dialogue technique (Image Theatre) for organisational use and especially for workplace learning (Gherardi, 2006; Elkjaer, 2003; Cunliffe, 2002b). The study is linked to a research field that explores art-based initiatives within organisations (e.g. Meisiek, 2002, see also Clark and Mangham, 2004; Taylor and Ladkin, 2009; Barry and Meisiek, 2010; Schiuma, 2011).

Authors in innovation research (see the innovation policy perspective, Jensen *et al.*, 2007; Lundval, 1992; Uhlin, 2000 and the interpretative perspective, Lester and Piore, 2004 and the learning perspective, Ellström, 2010; Nilsen and Ellström, 2012; Darsø and Høyrup, 2011; Pässilä *et al.*, 2011; Oikarinen, 2008) suggest that organisations need

to pay attention to learning processes and cherish multi-voiced interactions that assist innovation. Traditional learning programmes are focused on formal and codified "know-what" or "know-why" types of knowledge and informal "know-how" and "know-who" types of knowing as well as generative and innovative learning, are challenging in workplaces.

The ability to collectively reflect experiences related to practices and construct-shared understanding of their modification needs is important for learning (Vince, 2002). This ability to make sense of present and past habits and behaviour also creates a culture of practice-based innovation (Melkas and Harmaakorpi, 2012; Pässilä *et al.*, 2011; Pässilä and Oikarinen, 2013). Instead of giving answers to people or advising them on how to be innovative, learning should raise questions and dialogue about what is meaningful for people in their work: what inspires or blocks them, how they construct relationships between each other and how they develop their work together.

Practice-based innovation is a collaborative form of creating knowledge in which the aim is to combine knowledge interests from theory and practice alike, as well as knowledge from different disciplines (Harmaakorpi and Mutanen, 2008; Melkas and Harmaakorpi, 2012). Recent innovation discourse on practice-based innovation highlights the need for an interactive, interpretative and shared learning mode. People and groups in organisations create knowledge by participating in and contributing to negotiations of the meanings of actions and situations. Melkas and Harmaakorpi (2012, p. 2) highlight that one cannot just "pour knowledge into" the innovating partners, they must be interactive in the collective learning processes that lead to successful innovations. Learning processes require interaction, dialogue and a questioning of prevailing assumptions and reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2009, 2008; Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004), are noted to be filled with challenges and tensions (Vince, 2011) and are hardly approachable with traditional methods (Abma, 2000, 2003; Cunliffe, 2002a, 2002b).

Therefore, this study has turned to art-based initiatives to facilitating dialogue. Barry and Meisiek (2010) have termed a field of art-based initiatives in organisations "the workarts". The term "workarts" reverses the term "artwork" to emphasise the work that art does in workplaces, attempting to challenge and improve the work done there. The authors of this paper have developed, together with employees and managers, a specific dramaturgical storytelling technique, Work Story, composed in organisational settings. On a practical level, it means that people from the same professional group gather together and begin to reflect and share their own experiences with the help of images, namely Theatrical Images (TI).

This article addresses the questions: How do the members of organisations construct dialogue together in a dramaturgical storytelling framework? And how does dialogue emerge from storytelling facilitated by symbolic representations of still images?

Methodologically this study follows the lines of participatory action and art-based research (Brydon-Miller *et al.*, 2011; Boal, 1979/2008; Finley, 2008; Leavy, 2009). The analysis of 13 dramaturgical Work Story storytelling sessions in four different organisations suggests that a transformational, in-between situation, between a realistic "as is" mode and an imaginative "as if" mode, characterises dialogue during storytelling and leads participants to problem shifting rather than problem solving.

The study concludes by outlining a suggested model for organisational dialogue. The model illustrates the dramaturgical storytelling of Work Story, which can be used to facilitate dialogue within the workplace. The proposition is that dramaturgical storytelling influences problem shifting in a positive way; it transforms the engagement of employees and enables the discovery of alternative, or as yet non-existent, ideas and proposals.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we provide a brief overview of the key concepts. Second, we present practical examples and explore the ways in which the examples resonate with the concepts. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the use of dramaturgically framed storytelling.

2. Conceptual framing

"Organisations are not simple structures but complex interweaving of people and their emotions, meanings, interpretations, actions, assumptions, bodies and ways of talking..."(Cunliffe, 2009, p. 104). Therefore it is important to make sense of whats going on between people. A dialogue provides opportunities for learning (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Gherardi, 2006; Elkjaer, 2003) and innovating (Jensen *et al.*, 2007; Ellström, 2010; Nilsen and Ellström, 2012; Darsø and Høyrup, 2011; Pässilä *et al.*, 2011).

2.1 Practice-based innovation and learning

It is the process of seeing the world around us differently that allows organisations to see themselves from a novel perspective and be able to innovate. So, the premises for innovation are the existence of different worldviews and approaches and the process of dialoguing, reflection and sense-making in workplace learning (Ellström, 2010; Nilsen and Ellström, 2012). The challenge is how to cultivate these in organisations that strive for effectiveness, competitiveness and orderliness, and are trapped within their own worldview.

The innovation potential of organisations is based on individuals and their capability to interact and create knowledge (Jensen *et al.*, 2007; Lundval, 1992; Uhlin, 2000). All the people in an organisation ought to be cherished as creators of innovation (Amin and Cohendent, 2004; Melkas and Harmaakorpi, 2012). The way employees understand their work exposes how they make sense of it and its meaning for the organisation. The way in which people actually work usually differ fundamentally from the ways organisations describe work in manuals, training programs, organisational charts and job descriptions (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Cook and Brown, 1999; Gherardi, 2006). In order to utilise the innovation potential embedded in everyday work practices, organisations need dialogue.

In the context of renewing work practices, organisation members confront "messy" unstructured situations. An unstructured situation is contextual and there are multiple ways to interpret it. A situation like this demands interaction; joint inquiry that allows interpretations and collective sense-making of these interpretations (Elkjaer, 2003). Instead of trying to identify whose "truth" is the right one, organisational actors could interpret together how reality is created in their everyday encounters and work situations and question which assumptions are taken-for-granted (Ellström, 2010; Pässilä *et al.*, 2011).

The focus of learning should concentrate on creating forums for interaction; collective interpretation, discussion, reflection and sense-making for alternative worldviews. Nilsen and Ellström (2012) emphasise that organisations and individuals ought to challenge established patterns of thought and action. However, one can hardly approach alternative worldviews with traditional, formal learning methods (Abma, 2000, 2003; Vince, 2011). Therefore, the authors of this paper are interested in applied drama and theatre, and storytelling as a learning method that could offer the possibility to challenge established patterns of thought and action.

2.2 Applied drama and theatre, and storytelling in the workplace context

Applied drama and theatre (ADT) is an umbrella concept for various theatre practices that operate out of the traditional art world and art institutions, for example in development projects, social and health care institutions and adult education. Nicholson (2006), Jackson (2007) and Needlands (2004) have defined the complex roots of ADT. One common definition is the idea that participants in ADT explore their own experiences and views of reality in a dramaturgical frame and, by doing so, they construct new meanings (Jackson, 2007). One characteristic of ADT is that it provides an imaginative framework for exploring and understanding how different people experience reality. The Brazilian artist Augusto Boal (1979/2008) 1992, 1995, 1996) participatory theatre practice, namely the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), in a field of change and development, is one of the significant branches of ADT that examines social reality. Boal (1995) created theatrical techniques whereby participants form a path to interact, to learn collectively and to build trustful relationships in order to explore and change the oppressive structures of everyday life. Storytelling is a strategy to make sense of these socially constructed structures. Also, when the participants are sharing their stories and collectively creating meanings they are co creating a dialogue.

Boal's (1979/2008) theatre techniques represent the door to sense-making[1]. Over 40 years Boal's theatre has addressed personal, political and community level problems as well as questions about identity, race, gender, human rights, political processes in communities in Latin America, Africa and Europe (Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006; Prendergast and Saxton, 2009). In Image Theatre (Boal, 1979/2008, still image technique), the human body is used as a tool for representing life experiences, attitudes, feelings, behaviour, ideas, the patterns of power relationships, and social relations. The participants' demonstrations are symbolic images of something that has happened, or could happen, in real life. At the same time, when people tell stories and interpret body images, they reconstruct and reflect their own views on the issue. According to Boal (1996), the focus of drama is always a dialogue where people seek to find out something unknown through action. However Barry (2008) reminds us that dialogue, in the context of workarts, is more like problem shifting as a sense-making action than problem solving as a change action. Cohen-Cruz (2006) emphasises that the relationship between theatricality and lived experiences of reality is very fruitful for dialogue. Storytellers' habitual way of seeing and believing are challenged, enabling them to make new distinctions and to shift contexts. But he reminds us that not all storytelling is liberating, there is always a risk that the stories reproduce dominant ideology and voicing them just victimises the storytellers. Boal (1995, pp. 16-20) has defined action in an aesthetic context and shown through praxis that theatrical framing both generates the existing situation ("as is") and creates a future vision or

scenario ("as if"), as well as reorganising the relationship between the existing and imaginary situations.

In addition, ADT offers a stage for reflection in an organisational learning context (Pässilä *et al.*, 2011). Stories are esteemed for framing shared meanings (Gabriel, 2000; Gabriel and Connell, 2010; Abma, 2003) and creating reflexive self-understanding (Cunliffe, 2002b) in organisations. ADT as an artist-led intervention, is one way to gain knowing in workplace context (Barry, 2008; Barry and Hansen, 2008; Clark and Mangham, 2004; Mangham, 2005; Nissley *et al.*, 2004). Artist-led interventions allow organisation members to make sense of complexity in the business environment and offer an essence of that complexity. The arts offer also a new lens to tackling problems or shifting perceptions. But there are limitations; when the arts are used well in a workplace they can open up thinking but that they can also be used to mask corporate rhetoric and work practices, and then the arts are just fake-entertainment (Nissley, 2010).

This article develops the practice and theory of dramaturgical storytelling practice in order to co-create dialogue between organisation members. The focus is on an artist-led intervention; a dramaturgical storytelling, namely Work Story (WS). The study explores how the members of organisations construct dialogue together in a dramaturgical framing and how dialogue emerges from storytelling, facilitated by symbolic expressions and representations.

3. Practical case example: creating dialogue by storytelling
3.1 Research design and method
Together with employees and managers the authors developed a dramaturgical storytelling technique, Work Story. On a practical level it means that people from the same professional group gather together and begin to reflect and share their experiences with the help of TI (images used in this study are Theatrical Images, applied from Boal's Image Theatre) and a professional applied theatre instructor. Images were used to capture the ineffable, the hard-to-put-into-words, and to pay attention to things in novel ways (Weber, 2008, pp. 44-45).

Methodologically this study follows the lines of participatory action and art-based research (Brydon-Miller *et al.*, 2011; Finley, 2008; Leavy, 2009). The research design belongs to the research-based theatre tradition, RBT (Beck *et al.*, 2011; Mienczakowski, 1995; Mienczakowski *et al.*, 1996; Mienczakowski and Morgan, 2001; Saldaña, 2008), which implies artful inquiry, scripting and performance (Saldaña, 2008) in research. As a research method, RBT is an inquiry process in which various actors (employees and managers of an organisation, researchers and artists) gain collective and personal knowledge by sharing their experiences. Storytelling with the help of images is one approach that uses participatory visual methods within qualitative research (Vince and Warren, 2013; Weber, 2008). Such methods are particularly useful in research projects that seek to evoke and articulate embodied knowledge.

3.2 Case study organisations
This study documents the dialogue constructing in four organisations in Finland 2008-2010. The first case company operates in the forest industry sector and the other three case organisations in the public health care sector. All of them have faced structural changes during the first decade of the twenty-first century. All four case

organisations were familiar with the new innovation discourse and highlighted the value of openness and the importance of innovation in their official speeches and strategies. However, there was another reality on the practical level: on a micro-level, the managers and employees were not fully familiar with how to organise learning related to practice-based innovation.

Practical workplace situations were the triggers for co-operation between organisational actors, researchers and an artist (= applied theatre instructor) within the organisations. The interpretation of problems launched co-operation as to what should be examined together. However, it took two to four months and multiple meetings, e-mails and phone calls by the researchers, the artist, the directors, managers and key persons of each organisation for the focus of each storytelling session to become clear. The focuses reached were:

- customers are dissatisfied with a product and complain;
- teenage patients of dental care do not show up for their appointments;
- the emergency duty of one health care centre is being re-organised; and
- health care professionals are facing problems in taking care of mentally disabled patients.

Altogether we organised 13 interventions with 151 participants from the case organisations (2–6 interventions per organisation). Each intervention was facilitated by an artist and a researcher, and 2–3 researchers collected data via participatory observation. As documentation, there are 36 hours of videotapes and a 250-page fieldwork diary.

The aim of the documentation was to collect data on how dialogue emerged through stories. Researchers and applied theatre instructor analysed the stories and conversations of all the Work Story sessions by using an analytical approach of interactive ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2008). As a result of the analysis six stages of dialogue were traced. Interactive ethnodrama was a way to reveal the meanings of lived experiences. Interactive here means that participants also took part in the analysis during storytelling sessions. They reflected which kinds of expressions, beliefs, attitudes and experiences were articulated in the stories and Theatrical Images.

Table I illustrates the research setting.

3.3 A description of dramaturgical storytelling; Work Story – its goals, the setting and what was done
The goals of the Work Story sessions were:

- to share experiences on uncertain situations that the employees had faced at work;
- to explore these situations from "as is" and several "as if" perspectives;
- to look for alternative scenario solutions for unstructured situations; and
- to explore what should be renewed, how it should be done and what the employees themselves think they should know and learn.

We extended Saldañas's (2008) ethnodrama to participants themselves being ethnographic storytellers. The following principles were applied to the storytelling

Cases	Case 1. Factory	Case 2. Care unit	Case 3. Public corp.	Case 4. Public corp.
Field	Multinational forest industry	Public sector health care unit	Public health centre	Public health care unit
Practical unstructured situation	Customers are dissatisfied with a product and complain	Teenagers' no-show for dental care	The emergency duty of re-organization	Problems in taking care of mentally disabled patients
Focus of Work Stories	How did we come to the situation in which the customer is not happy?	What happens before, during and after a dental care operation?	What will happen during reorganizing our unit's practices?	How to share experiences between different work units and professionals?
Findings from dialogues	Employees generated ideas on how to cooperate	Employees and managers negotiated how to organise a customer-friendly practice	Employees and managers generated ideas on how to organise their practice	Employees and managers generated ideas on how to solve problems related to the culture of their own organisation
Work Story sessions	Six storytelling sessions for employees from different work units	One storytelling session for employees	Two storytelling sessions for employees from different work units	Four storytelling sessions for employees from different work units
Participating employees	Operators Sales managers Sales assistants Designers	Dentists Nurses Assistants	Nurses Doctors Collaborators	Nurses Doctors Assistants Managers
Amount of participants	70 employees	36 employees	25 employees	20 employees
Documentation	Four researchers + one applied theatre instructor 4 hr videotape + researchers' notes + 14 Work Stories	Three researchers + one applied theatre instructor 5 hr videotape + researchers' notes + Five Work Stories	Three researchers + one applied theatre instructor 3 hr videotape + researchers' notes + Four Work Stories	Three researchers + one applied theatre instructor 24 hr videotape + researchers' notes + Six Work Stories
Time frame	Spring 2008	Spring 2009	Autumn 2009	Spring 2010

Table I.
The research setting

technique: the story was about lived experiences; the plot was the vehicle for the structure of the story and event (= an unstructured situation); the events included sequential arrangements of actions; the storyline was the progression of the event and the story was placed at the storyteller's organisation; and the characters resonated the storyteller's organisation.

The facilitation method – the use of TI in storytelling – was based on of Boal's Image Theatre technique[2]. Figure 1 illustrates examples of the TI.

Images were used to capture the ineffable, the hard-to-put-into-words, and to pay attention to things in new ways (see the methodological studies from Weber, 2008, pp. 44-45; Vince and Warren, 2013). In other words, people made sense of the complexity with the help of TI.

The structure of the storytelling is illustrated in Table II. Each Work Story session lasted about three hours. Participants were colleagues from the same work unit or profession i.e. doctors, nurses, salespersons, designers, operators. The number of participants *per se*ssion varied between 2–28 persons. If there were more than six participants, they were divided further into smaller groups of 3–7 persons.

Employees discussed what was important to them, what the other units should know about their work, what they should know about the other units, and what alternative practices they could use in their work. They scripted an ambiguous work situation by interpreting the action in one event. Plotting started by charting what is wrong in a specific event: what is happening in the event, what the relationship is like in the event, how relationships are created, who the main character is and how he or she sits in relation to others in the event.

The dramaturgical storytelling techniques of the Work Story were first created with the case company, the "Factory". Next we will illustrate how the Work Story session proceeded there. In Chapter 4 we complement the discussion with the findings from the other cases.

3.4 Creating dialogue with the help of storytelling – what was learned
The focus of the storytelling was very operational at first: to reflect a situation where customers are dissatisfied and complain. The organisational actors' interest was to develop the current practices and thus decrease amount of complaints from customers. They had tried to solve the problem by analysing the causes for complaints, by recruiting personnel for quality control and by improving their data system. Despite this, the amount of complaints kept piling up, there were accusations between sales, design and production. The management of the factory realised that the problem was
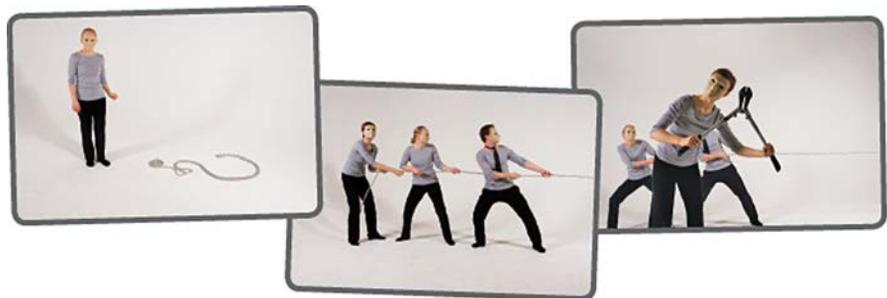

Figure 1.
Theatrical images

Step 1 Generation of themes	Orientation to Theatrical Images
	via reflecting on still images illustrated by artist and researcher
Step 2 Inquiry and reminiscence	Individual story; recalling one's experiences
	in writing
	4 pictures and one "free" story
	(partial) sharing with others
Step 3 Narration and sharing	Collective story; a mixture of the group members' experiences, composed into a story
	in homogeneous, small groups
	organizing 3–8 pictures into a description of events which lead to problems
Step 4 Sharing and exploring	Oral presentations and collective analysis of group stories
	pointing out the turning points of the stories
	identifying alternative chains of events
Step 5 Exploring and reflecting	Reflective discussion and reflective questioning
	outlining the wider context, the "big picture"; how the acts of the participants and changes in practices impact on others and vice versa
Step 6 Exploring, generating and analysing	Working out what needs to be done differently
	making social structures visible
	mapping alternative practices
Outcomes	Practical ideas for what needs to be done, how to renew one's work, and how to deepen co-operation with colleagues
	Shared awareness about how one's actions create and transmit social situations

Table II.
The six steps of dialogue

very complicated and multifaceted. To get to the bottom of the problem the management wanted to give all the employees concerned an opportunity to participate in reflecting on the problem. So, we were asked to study and facilitate the construction of collective dialogue.

We organised separate Work Story sessions for each occupational group. The first step in the session was to create a sufficiently safe and distancing work approach for storytelling. The applied theatre instructor and the researcher, who acted as facilitators, warmed up the group, introduced the theatrical images and instructed how to compose stories with them. Then the participants discussed the focus of the storytelling. During the second step, the participants articulated their individual experiences and views. Each chose one TI from a collection of images and explained the event and experience it described in his/her everyday work. Through TI participants were able to articulate experiences embodied in people and embedded in practices.

For example, an operator described an image:Here the foreman and an operator are wondering how on earth they can accomplish what the sales manager has promised to a customer. The sales manager is not in the picture as he is downhill skiing with another customer.(In the quotation the storyteller uses the expression "picture" when pointing to TI.) The participants then wrote about their feelings, fears, hopes and experiences through symbols and gestures depicted in the TI. After that they had an opportunity to share their stories with others, as much they wanted. They often started with phrases like "in this picture, this character is from sales...."; "the atmosphere in this picture is . . . "; or "she is a designer and should tell her manager that . . . ". Sharing

personal experiences, followed by joint contemplation (open questioning), led the participants forward to joint storytelling.

After this, the participants compiled a collective story in small groups so that up to 3-8 TI were organised into a description of a situation ending with the customer being dissatisfied. Next, there is an illustration of how four sales assistants narrated and shared their experiences during collective storytelling with each other. The following is an example of dialogue:

Joanna: The character in this picture is someone from the marketing department.

Lisa: Yes, she has just received feedback from a customer.

Joanna: Not positive feedback.

(Laughter)

Eva: No! Definitely not!

Lisa: This is just so typical!

Elisabeth: This depicts her feelings just after the phone call. You can see how she is.

Joanna: Lying face down.

Lisa: Again she is being treated like rubbish.

Elisabeth: Everyone is pointing at her.

Eva: Look, she has such a heavy burden.

Lisa: Like she was the guilty one.

Joanna: Why do they always blame us?

Elisabeth: Even when we are just middlemen.

Joanna: […] and trying our best.

Eva: But look, there she is at home and lying face down; can't get to sleep.

Lisa: She thinks that nobody cares or values her work.

Joanna: Even though she has done her work excellently.

Elisabeth: But how has she done wrong then?

Eva: Here she asks, "Why does this happen?"

In general, issues of power are difficult to discuss but through TI it seemed to be a little bit easier. Participants interpreted an image, pointed to it and talked "as if" it were a real situation. For example: Lisa and her colleagues (see above example) tried to make sense of what was happening in their work community. "Like rubbish" describes their position; they feel that they do not have any power. Eva's question, "Why does this happen", shifted the storytelling to the next level. The participants started to discuss what was "behind" their practice and actions; what kinds of beliefs, hopes and fears. The atmosphere between them was serious and playful at the same time. In a very fragmented way they communicated what the problematic issues were.

The fourth step of the Work Story was oral presentations of the group stories. All
the participants gathered together and each group shared their stories. Together the
participants discussed situations of TI in the story and defined turning points where
the characters' actions could change the situation and the story would have an
alternative ending. "If this character here acts differently the situation will change . . . ".
The collective creation of new endings and reflection on the turning points became a
vivid moment; in the "as if" mode the participants were even able to discuss very
difficult and sensitive issues. The "as if" mode protected them (in the image, the focus
was on the character, he or she, rather than the narrator who was protected by his/her
role as storyteller) when reflecting upon their own actions, making visible the
inhibitors and possibilities for reform both at the level of the story and their own
relationships. Figure 2 illustrates TI after storytelling.

At step five, all the participants started exploring and reflecting on what they had
done during storytelling and on how the stories actually resonated with reality.
Participants considered that resistance emerges through blame; "the cause of
complexity is always in the other unit". But gradually, because of the "as if"
imagination, participants started to reflect upon their own actions. By plotting a story
– based on one's experiences at work – and scripting it, participants became aware
how they actually form, shape and maintain social reality around themselves. This
encouraged them to look for alternative scenarios for a situation and to be aware that
they need to create several possibilities and problem solving scenarios rather than only
have one correct solution.

Figure 2.
Example of a TI after
storytelling

At step six, stories were cooperatively analysed by using analytical approach of interactive ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2008). Employees, the applied theatre instructor and the researcher together examined narrated and scripted situations based on real life and imaginative experiences. All the stories from one session were gathered together into different storylines. Interactive ethnodrama was conducted through the following questions:

- What is this story about?
- What happens in it?
- When and where does it happen?
- Why does it happen?
- Who is the main character? Who else is involved?
- How does the character act and react?
- How do the other characters feel?

One analysis of a situation started when the applied theatre instructor asked employees to define the key events in storyline (storyline consisted of 3-8 TI) and then the participants started discussing.

After listing the key events there was a discussion of their nature in general: what is meaningful in the event, what inspires or blocks the characters in that event, how they construct relationships between each other, how they encounter each other and which barriers they have faced and will face. During this conversation the applied theatre instructor asked what power they have, or need, to change the event. Participants were silent for a while. Then one of them by pointing out on TI started to reflect on how reality is created in their everyday encounters and work situations:

> This event over here, its about how we do things. See; that lad is a newcomer, he doesn't know the rules yet. The old chap here is laughing at him and his suggestions. Its odd, because the newcomer has a point. I don't know whether we really act like that in real life. I suppose, yes. We old chaps should pay attention to what that lad is saying. But I wonder why we don't. We have our own standpoint and cling to it.

This comment led them to question which assumptions are taken for granted. Someone else pointed to the storyline and argued: "He is acting like that because he is afraid to lose face or status." A third person joined the conversation: "Yes, this could really happen somewhere . . . (all employees laugh a lot at this comment). . . but not in our unit." At that point we all understood that he was actually saying that it was happening in their organisation too. The participants clarified, at least partly, what the problematic issues in unstuctured situations were, and explored their reasons and symptoms.

This way, the analysis proceeded and at the end of each session participants had generated themes from the key events of the stories. In general, the themes were related to specific work practice, roles in work, rules, power tensions between people, emerging emotions, lack of information, lack of feedback, and lack of co-operation between work units.

After each storytelling session two researchers listed the themes and all the ideas (that need to be changed according to employees) from the stories and conversations. These lists were then transcribed into Word documents, or drawn into maps and

introduced to the managers and key members of the organisations, who categorised the
themes and listed the necessary changes. Their reactions were complex; at the same
time they were excited about the ideas but also expressed their fear whether it was
possible to put these change ideas into practice.

4. Discussion
This article discusses how it is possible to create dialogue by storytelling and to find a
model for organisational dialogue. Boal's Image Theatre (Boal, 1979/2008, 1995)
provided an opportunity for studying and designing storytelling as a way to facilitate
dialogue in a workplace-learning context. In a dramaturgical storytelling framework,
namely the Work Story, the dialogue emerges from symbolic representations of
Theatrical Images.

The Work Story is a practical example of enabling reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2008, 2009;
Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004). The result of dramaturgical storytelling is that
employees and managers were able to create new insights of practice by defining and
reflecting problems and possibilities. It can be understood as an alternative way to
facilitate learning process that assists innovation. The problem-setting and
possibility-setting cherish multi-voiced interactions. The Work Story – as a
reflexive approach to constructing dialogue – echoes to the previous studies of
art-based initiatives in the workplaces by underlining storytelling as a potential way to
gain "know-how" and "know-why" types of knowing in work places.

Dialogue is in a major role in knowing gaining process like this. Participants of the
Work Story sessions were able to see for themselves how social reality is structured
through their own sense-making and actions. To employees and managers
understanding reality, for instance, consisted of a need for regularity, structure,
predictability and an assumption that "one has to have everything in control". But
when a situation like that is portrayed in the Work Story session, they started to laugh.
Similar collective self-awareness occurred at each session. On the one hand, employees
and managers understood that the need for regularity and predictable structure is
derived from each corporation's formal job description in the official manuals, but they
also understood that things never work like that. On the other hand, they themselves
construct barriers and bottlenecks by presuming knowledge production to be a
controllable and structured linear process instead of highlighting existing or emerging
"know-how" and "know-who" types of knowing. They pointed out that, "know-what"
and "know-why" types of learning create images of a controllable and structured linear
learning process. However, when people are involved it, the image of a controllable
situation collapses.

Simultaneously, with plotting a story from their experiences and talking about it,
participants formed that helped them face the complexity of situations and the
interactions within it. The new, emerging knowing is embedded into social situations
with colleagues when participants, in their stories and conversations, make visible
what happens in unstructured situations and generate ideas how to resolve these
situations. Participants became enthusiastic to find more "as if" possibilities when they
distanced themselves (with the help of TI) from lived experiences and reflected on
events with a dramaturgical gaze. The following model for organisational dialogue
suggests how members of an organisation are able to construct dialogue in the context
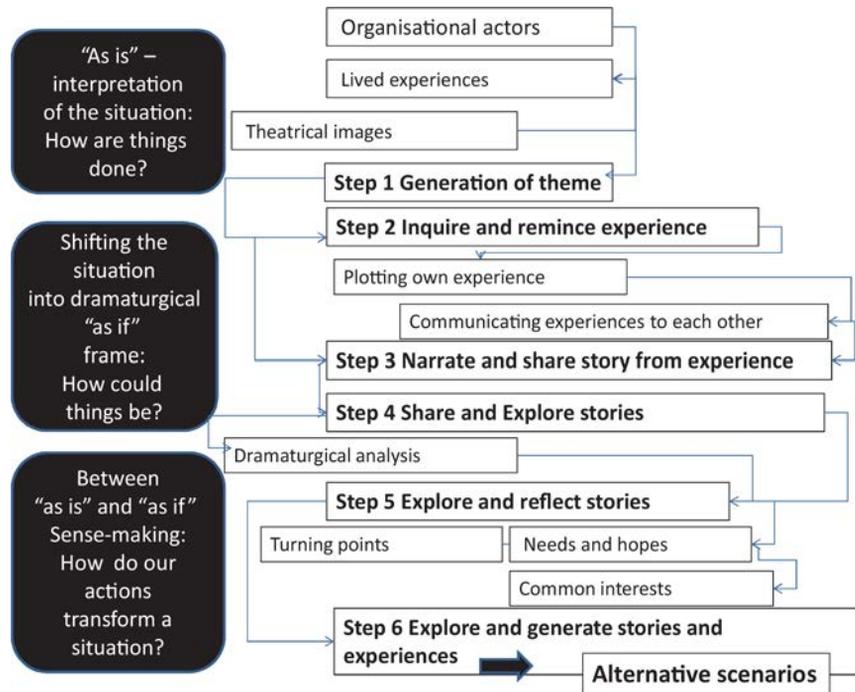of the dramaturgical storytelling of the Work Story (Figure 3).

The participants moved slowly but steadily towards the point where different
points-of-view, needs and wishes could emerge, and found hidden possibilities, as well as
finding out ideas how complex problems may be faced. The situational and contextual
"ahaa" moment occurred while they were creating dialogue: the employees' findings were
radical and novel to themselves in their own work. In other words, they shifted the
problem and made situational boundaries visible in their organisation. This led them to
idea generation: they started to innovate how to reorganise practices (they discussed what
should be changed and reflected what other units should know about their practice and
vice versa). In spite of this, they faced the paradox of "not knowing what they do not
know". This is a moment of reflexivity; through stories, symbols and metaphors the
participants bring to light their perceived difficulties and start to process the problem.

Simultaneously, they also created a shared learning mode for practice-based
innovation by making dialogue acceptable with each other without being afraid of
"making a fool of him/herself". Each professional group constructed stories on how
they experienced everyday relationships with each other and how to be innovative. In a
workplace learning context innovation is not a "thing out there", something you can
control, it is a question of how people, all organisational actors, encounter each other in
everyday organisational practice, how they shape that practice with their actions and
conversations and, above all, how reflexive they are.

However, reflexivity carries assumptions about power that is enacted in
organisational actors' everyday relationships with each other. In a session held in a
health care corporation, for instance, employees brought up unspoken tensions and
oppressive power relations. The context here was the following: The employees were

informed by managers about forthcoming changes; emergency services were to be merged into one unit and the new arrangements meant that both employees and managers had to reorganise their daily work practices. At first, employees expressed their emotions and tensions through metaphors; "having a part in a play", "playing a game", "being in a battlefield or competition with someone" or "playing Tug of War". During this metaphorical dialogue the atmosphere was extremely sensitive; employees shared with each other what was meaningful for them in their work. After the metaphorical dialogue TI acted as a broker for employees to indicate what specific action and emotion inspires or blocks them. When articulating how they construct relationships between each other they described power tensions and resistance with the help of TI.

A legitimate question that may be raised is whether the Work Story can be used as an inquiry method for organisational actors who have no interest in opening the Pandora's box of knowledge, such as "know-how" and "know-who". Undoubtedly, there are organisational actors who are keener on traditional learning programmes than art-based initiatives. However, Work Story approach requires that all participants were in a position in which they have the power to change existing practices. If the organisational actors lack that power, the Boalian philosophy will be "tamed", and storytelling just keeps on maintaining power tensions. It is more realistic to term the intention as "finding hidden possibilities", rather than empowerment in the context of work communities. The implications of the study for the practice of workplace learning is that the dramaturgical storytelling of Work Story supported a shift in emphasis – by encouraging the individual's ability or opportunity to make sense of reality.

5. Conclusion

In this study we discussed organisational actors' dialogue co-construction in a frame of storytelling. As a result, a model is suggested for organisational dialogue inside an organisation through the dramaturgical storytelling of Work Story. Such an interaction can assist to construct the engagement of organisational actors in developing their own work, if allowed and resourced by management. By the model for organisational dialogue suggested in this study, organisational actors can make sense of the unstructured and uncertain situations that are part of everyday work.

The limitations of this study are related to the scope of the research. The Scandinavian low-hierarchy work culture facilitates an open, bottom up process. Even though there is some earlier evidence of using Boal's technique in a work community context, there is a need to practice the methodology in other research contexts to understand the benefits of it in terms of practical implications and change support. As for future research, this study calls for longitudinal studies on what happens after the Work Story sessions and how organisations can continue in a manner that nurtures creating a learning culture for practice-based innovation. The dramaturgical storytelling of the Work Story technique could also be examined in the light of the theories of participatory innovation.

Notes

1. For example, Cohen-Criz and Schutzman (2006) present a collection of essays and case studies on the work of Boal; also Prendergast and Saxton (2009) introduce TO studies; also see the website of the International Theatre of the Oppressed Organization, www.theatreoftheoppressed.org

2. Anne Pässilä created and produced over 500 TI with a graphic designer, photographer and three actors. Each image, or sequence of images, has been constructed on the basis of five elements of drama: act, scene, agent, agency, purpose (Burke, 1969), as well as from other influences and resources – including Boal's (1995) theatre practices of Image Theatre, mask theatre (based on the Brechtian alienation effect; Brecht, 1964) and the statues technique of improvisation theatre (Johnstone, 1996).

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