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A review of the theoretical foundations of research into arts-based interventions in organisations and management education, and their methodological implications

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Structured Abstract

This paper explores theoretical frameworks, drawn primarily from learning theory, which might inform future research into arts-based initiatives (ABIs) in organisations and HE, and both the analysis and dissemination of outcomes.

The theoretical insights considered here include pedagogical and philosophical models (eg Buber 1937/2002; Heron 1992; and Gardner 2006, 2011); psychological and management frameworks in self-efficacy, social cognition, socio-constructive approaches and complexity theory (eg Bandura 1997; Hutchins 1995; Kolb and Kolb 2010; Mowles *et al.* 2008); and models applied to research in the creative arts, including metaphor, aesthetic distancing, embodiment, and threshold concepts (eg McGilchrist 2009; Pässilä and Vince 2012; Dreyfus 1996; Meyer and Land 2005).

In the conference presentation, we will also review some of the more populist ideas, including emotional intelligence, presence and mindfulness (Boyatzis and McKee 2005; Senge *et al.* 2005; Goleman *et al.* 2002), which have become established in leadership and management development practice, aiming to consider whether their application to the analysis of research results may offer

benefits in the dissemination and interpretation of arts-based research for practitioners.

The paper concludes by considering potentially appropriate research methodologies and other recommendations for future research into ABIs, and by inviting debate and feedback.

Purpose

The aim of this paper is to inform future research in arts-based practises in organisational and management development by exploring potentially fruitful theoretical starting points, and relating those to applicable research methodologies.

Design/methodology/approach

The approach adopted here is both interdisciplinary and research-focused. The paper considers theoretical insights from the work of philosophers, psychologists and educational theorists, and considers for each the research disciplines that might effectively be applied to future research into the processes and impacts of arts-based practices in management development and education. By doing so, the hope is to encourage the future development and implementation of ABIs by identifying both their personal and their organisational impacts.

Originality/value

Evidence for the impact of ABIs is needed if the potential organisational and educational benefits of this evolving interdisciplinary field are to be realised. The theoretical toolkit that could be applied is of considerable intellectual breadth. The opportunity of this paper is to present, for debate, something of this breadth, to consider how these and other theoretical insights might inform research initiatives that will benefit management practitioners as well as scholars and educators, and to present the results of a pilot study.

Practical implications

The outcomes of this proposal lie in its potential to support and inform the design of future research in arts-based practices in personal and organisational learning, as well as the effective dissemination and application of those research findings in organisational contexts and HE teaching.

Keywords

Arts-based management, Arts-based innovation, Theory of arts in management, Research and arts-based management

Paper type

Academic Research Paper

1 Introduction

This paper considers theoretical frameworks which could inform research into the impact of arts-based initiatives (ABIs) in management and programmes of study offered within higher education. The discussion both confirms and extends Schiuma's (2011) analysis, and supports his recommendations that the aims and process of such initiatives must be planned with care, are fundamentally cultural, and require the establishment of a climate of trust. This paper also identifies exemplar research processes; and concludes by offering recommendations to inform the planning and analysis of future ABIs in both organisational and HE settings.

2 Researching arts-based management practices

As Schiuma (2011) identifies, art-based initiatives (ABIs) in organisations can be implemented to address a people-centred issue (eg 'to engage people's dreams, emotions and energy to achieve challenging organisational objectives that require people's engagement and passion', p.212) or a strategic one (to 'build arts capital', p.213), though their potential is most fully experienced where these two aims combine in 'artful organisational development' (Schiuma 2011, p.213).

In this paper, the focus is on theoretical frameworks and previous research that might inform the design and analysis of future research into the potential personal and communal effects of ABIs, as distinct from their possible strategic outcomes. This represents a complex, interdisciplinary research challenge which is likely to benefit from mixed-method research and disciplinary collaborations.

3 Theoretical frameworks and potential research approaches

3.1 Pedagogical and philosophical models

Habitus: Bourdieu

The notion of *habitus* might usefully support the analysis of shifts between individuals in group interactions through an ABI. The concept was introduced by Bourdieu (1977, quoted in Becker 2001, p.137) in place of previous scholars' theoretical emphasis on 'culture':

> 'The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*...'
> (Bourdieu 1977, p.72)

His additional explanation of 'dispositions' relates to the embodiment theme outlined under a separate heading below:

> 'The word *disposition…* expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being, a habitual state* (especially of the body and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity*, or *inclination.*' (Bourdieu 1977, p.214, f.1)

Artistic source: Buber

The work of the philosopher Buber (1937) relates both to the human artistic impulse, and to the experience of relatedness to life and between individuals. His work may therefore usefully inform both the planning of ABIs (including the depth of their potential impact, and the associated need to minimise emotional risks to the participants) and the analysis of qualitative findings relating to participants' experiences.

These quotations from his seminal work, *I and Thou*, relate to the human source of art; the human role in 'bodying forth' art; and his frequent theme of 'meeting' life, whether in the world or in one another:

> 'This is the eternal source of art: a man is faced by a form which desires to be made through him into a work. This form is no offspring of his soul, but is an appearance which steps up to it and demands of it the effective power. The man is concerned with an act of his being.' (Buber 1937, p.9)

> 'To produce is to draw forth, to invent is to find, to shape is to discover. In bodying forth I disclose. I lead the form across – into the world of *It*. The work produced is a thing among things, able to be experienced and described as a sum of qualities. But from time to time it can face the receptive beholder in its whole embodied form.' (Buber 1937, p.10)

> 'All real living is meeting.' (Buber 1937, p.11)

Basic Active Emotions: Heron

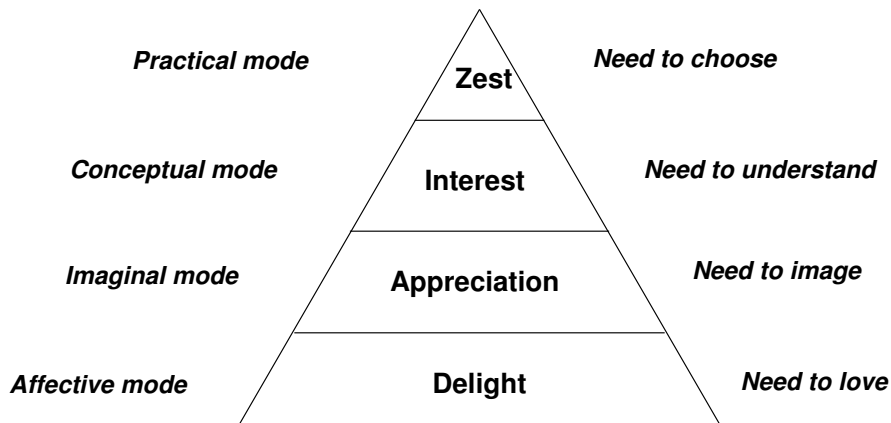In his 1992 book *Feeling and Personhood*, Heron defines an 'Up-Hierarchy of Basic Active Emotions' below (1992, p.122) as one exploration of his proposed 'model of personhood'. For Heron, spiritual and existential dimensions are core to being human: 'a person is an embodied spiritual presence' (Heron 2001b: 33). At the same time, action through 'participation' is implicit in his theory of the person:

'From our felt participation in the world, we open intuitively to grasp a
total situation, then discriminate thoughtfully in order to act within it.'
(Heron 1989: 17)

Heron defines these four modes of being:

Delight   'Appreciation is a delight that springs from the love of aesthetic form;
interest a delight that springs from the love of knowledge; zest a delight that
springs from the love of action.' (Heron, 1992, p. 123)

Appreciation   'The emotions of a fulfilled imaginal sensibility are of a range and subtlety
that outstrip the power of language to symbolize them. Hence they are
conveyed by the non-discursive symbolism of drawing, painting, sculpture,
music and dance.' (Heron, 1992, pp. 122–3)

Interest   'When the need to understand is realized, we experience interest,
extending into curiosity and fascination, the passion for truth, excitement in
intellectual discovery, pleasure in the clear communication of ideas.'
(Heron, 1992, p. 123)

Zest   Heron uses the word 'zest' to encompass 'the emotions involved in the
fulfilment of free choice and effective action', which he identifies as
including 'relish, gusto, exhilaration, achievement and work satisfaction'
(Heron, 1992, p. 123).

Practical mode	Zest	Need to choose
Conceptual mode	Interest	Need to understand
Imaginal mode	Appreciation	Need to image
Affective mode	Delight	Need to love

Up-Hierarchy of Basic Active Emotions
Source: Heron 1992, p.122

Heron's identification of the 'imaginal' capacity, encompassing our inner
potential, the imaginative and the artistic, might helpfully inform analyses of the

experience and outcomes of participants in ABIs. 'Entelechy needs', he argues, also underpin the formative potential of the whole person:

> '… the spiritual life within harbours spiritseed, entelechy, the formative potential of my becoming…. entelechy guides the emergence of, and is progressively realized in, the actual entity.' (Heron 1998, p.52)

Multiple Intelligences: Gardner

Gardner's definitions of different forms of 'intelligence', and ways of identifying them in practice, could also support the analysis of the intrapersonal and organisational effects of ABIs.

Intelligences	Description
Linguistic	An ability to analyze information and create products involving oral and written language such as speeches, books, and memos.
Logical-Mathematical	An ability to develop equations and proofs, make calculations, and solve abstract problems.
Spatial	An ability to recognize and manipulate large-scale and fine-grained spatial images.
Musical	An ability to produce, remember, and make meaning of different patterns of sound.
Naturalist	An ability to identify and distinguish among different types of plants, animals, and weather formations that are found in the natural world.
Bodily-Kinesthetic	An ability to use one's own body to create products or solve problems.
Interpersonal	An ability to recognize and understand other people's moods, desires, motivations, and intentions
Intrapersonal	An ability to recognize and understand his or her own moods, desires, motivations, and intentions

Source: Davis *et al*. 2012, pp.6–7.

In addition to these eight intelligences which, Gardner argues, passed necessary 'tests' as distinct intelligences, he and his colleagues have speculated that there may be one more (which he calls '8½'): 'existential intelligence', an innate intelligence which inquires after broader purpose (as distinct from the labels 'spiritual' or 'religious') (Gardner 2012).

3.2 Psychological frameworks and complexity theory

Self-efficacy: Bandura

A well-established tradition of research in organisational psychology and educational studies has developed from Bandura *et al.*'s (1997) definition of self-efficacy, including:

- Efficacy expectancy: 'the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce [a desired outcome]'
- Individuals' 'expectations of personal efficacy stem from…':
  - 'Performance accomplishments'
  - 'Vicarious experience'
  - 'Verbal persuasion'
  - 'Emotional arousal' (Bandura, Woods and Beyer 1997: p.126)

Self-efficacy research frequently defines questionnaires which participants complete before and after an event or intervention, with both standardised measures relating to their general levels of confidence that their actions will be effective and other questions relating to the specific intervention.

Distributed Cognition: Hutchins

Distributed cognition may also offer fruitful insights into the emergent, shared nature of group and individual learning through ABIs. Hutchins (1995) identified how skilled understandings operated across a naval crew in a crisis situation, an example of 'situated seeing' (Hutchins 2000). With research collaborators (Hollan *et al.* 2010), he recently defined the process of distributed cognition research:

> 'Distributed cognition looks for cognitive processes, wherever they may occur, on the basis of the functional relationships of elements that participate together in the process.' (Hollan *et al.* 2010, p.175)

Such research typically applies ethnographic research methods, including both observational and media analysis techniques. Through the analysis of language, Hutchins and his collaborators aim to identify shared representations that emerge within a group. They carry out their research 'in the wild' (as opposed to in research laboratories) (Hollan *et al.* 2010, p.176), and seek to identify how processes (especially expert practices) operate in groups. The context of such research also respects both the physical body and the physical environment:

> '… the organization of mind – both in development and in operation – is an emergent property of interactions among internal and external

resources. In this view, the human body and the material world take on central rather than peripheral roles.' (Hollan *et al.* 2010, p.175)

Like ABIs, this approach also focuses on practice and 'events':

'Since the cognitive properties of systems that are larger than an individual play out in the activity of the people in them, a cognitive ethnography must be an event-centered ethnography.' (Hollan *et al.* 2010, p.179)

System dynamics

Mowles *et al.* (2008) define the interrelatedness of organisations in terms which may also support the analysis of the impact of ABIs:

'What systems theories have in common is the concept of an organisation as a whole with a boundary…. realigning the parts can influence the whole….' (Mowles *et al.* 2008, p.807)

Quoting both Elias (1978) and Bourdieu, Mowles *et al.* endorse 'the "art" of the *necessary improvisation* which defines excellence' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.8) in effective management and organisational practice. They unfavourably contrast this improvisatory potential with processes of organisational target-setting – a tension which is also likely to apply to ABIs aligned to specific organisational outcomes. Bourdieu's definition of 'practical logic' also confirms the need for both participative and reflexive processes, and the improvisational nature of such practices:

'"The idea of a practical logic, a 'logic in itself', without the conscious reflexion of logical control, is a contradiction in terms, which defies logical logic. This paradoxical logic is that of all practice, or rather of practical sense. Caught up in 'the matter in hand', totally present in the present and in the practical functions that it finds there in the form of objective potentialities they contact; it can only discover them by enacting them, unfolding them in time" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.92).' (Mowles *et al.* 2008, p.814)

Mowles *et al.* also cite Taylor (2002) in arguing that the outcomes of such emergent experiences are, by definition, unpredictable:

'We are drawing attention to the radical possibilities of responding to emergent phenomena which could genuinely transform our relationship with others and the work that we do together. This involves our acknowledging both intended and unintended consequences of acting together to bring about change and negotiating what we think it might mean.' (Mowles *et al.* 2008, p.818)

3.3 Models applied to research in the creative arts

Aesthetic distancing

In order to analyse the content of ABIs that draw upon traditions of drama and theatre, including role playing, we must also consider aesthetic distancing (Brecht 1964). Brecht reconceptualised the illusion of theatre with what he called *Verfremdungseffekt,* the "alienation effect", referring to the audience member's role as observer and experiencer rather than one who is involved in the drama. Boal's work (eg 1995), inspired by this idea, informs current practices in both acting and education therapy (see also Holtham *et al.* 2013; Pässilä and Vince 2012).

Threshold concepts and the role of boundary objects in pedagogy may also be helpful here:

- Threshold concepts are defined by Meyer and Land (2005) as including the concept of irony for students of literature, of pain for medical students, or entropy in physics. They act as major building blocks of knowledge or insight which enable a student to understand and therefore apply a theoretical concept:

   '… such conceptual gateways… may be *transformative* (occasioning a significant shift in the perception of a subject), *irreversible* (unlikely to be forgotten, or unlearned only through considerable effort), and *integrative* (exposing the previously hidden interrelatedness of something).' (Meyer and Land 2005, p.373)

   They also draw upon the theory of liminality (itself another potentially useful concept for the understanding of the impact of ABIs), citing the work of Turner (1969). Moving to an understanding of threshold concepts can, they argue, be a liminal experience of transition from one state of being or identity to another.

- Boundary objects can be 'stuff and things, tools, artefacts and techniques, and ideas, stories and memories' (Bowker and Star 2000, p.298) which can help to build understanding between different groups or 'communities of practice': 'they enable co-ordination, but they can do so without actually creating a bridge between the perspective and the meanings of various communities' (Wenger 1998, p.107). Edwards (2005) considers their role in 'mediating' learning: citing Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström (2003), she reviews

their function in participatory learning which promotes 'boundary-crossing and border-crossing' (Edwards 2005, p.5).

Embodiment: Merleau-Ponty

Embodiment is an important theoretical reference for future research into the process and impact of ABIs. Holtham *et al.* (2013) quote from the work of Merleau-Ponty and his definition of the intentional arc (1962, p.136) as a starting point for the analysis of 'the interconnection of skillful action and perception' (Dreyfus, 1996). A considerable body of research, related to the learning of physical skills and sport as well as arts-based practices such as dance and music, explores embodied experiences in the acquisition of skills. Standal and Engelsrud (2011), for example, analyse semi-structured interviews and observations (including of physical imitation) with the aim of understanding 'the lived experience of the research participants, and the way their experiences are expressed through actions, speech and silences' (p.156). They also quote Merleau-Ponty as an authority for the development of learned, automatic skills:

> '[Habit] is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort. The subject knows where the letters are on the typewriter as we know where one of our limbs is, through a knowledge bred of familiarity.'
> (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p.166, quoted in Standal and Engelsrud 2011, p.157)

4 Research frameworks

These are some of the research methodologies and data types identified through this initial study which might inform future ABI research:

Topics/type of research	Data sources / methodologies

Creativity in UK schools: pilot study	A 'collaborative, inquiry-led approach' to define and pilot a 'creativity' self-assessment tool for use in the classroom. Data sources:
	
	    'Portfolios/passports
	
	    Diaries/journals/blogs
	
	    Learning stories/journeys
	
	    Teacher observations
	
	    Testimony from others

	Evidence from "products" [of the pilot research] Reports Reflective interviews Progress reviews Other' (Spencer *et al.* 2012, p.117)
Human interaction research	Video of interactions, inviting participants to support the coding process, including identification of key incidents (eg Gottman and Levenson, 1985; Levenson and Gottman, 1983)
Emotional response research, applying repertory grid techniques	Asking respondents to compare and categorise emotional terms or scenarios; can produce a range of data with some consensus as well as individual responses (eg Parkinson and Lea 1991; Reisenzein and Hofmann 1990)
'In the wild' cognitive ethnography	Interviewing, surveys, participant observation, and video and audio recording – especially 'the analysis of recordings of events' (Hollan *et al.* 2010, p.179) (eg Goodwin and Goodwin 1996; Suchman 1987); other research projects have also analysed automated recordings in digital technology contexts (eg Hill *et al.* 1992)
Pedagogical research related to disciplinary integration in an HE programme	Thematic analysis of teaching content, marked assignments (including an oral presentation) and student notebooks (Nowacek 2011)

5   Conclusions

This paper offers an initial review of theoretical frameworks which may offer analytical insights into ABIs. Further promising theoretical underpinnings might include: threshold concepts (Meyer and Land 2003); metaphor and narrative theory (McGilchrist 2009 and Goodson 2013); the potential application of Bateson's (1979) definition of 'levels of learning' (Tosey *et al.* 2008); ludic play (Kolb and Kolb 2010); storytelling (McDrury and Alterio 2003; Moon 1999), and neurophysiological models that relate to artistic experiences as well as organisational behaviour (eg Rock 2008 and Rock and Cox 2012; Oatley 2011; Lieberman 2014), especially towards research to explores physiological and

entrainment effects in music and other artistic experiences (Becker 2001). The associated conference presentation will also consider how the concepts developed by some of the more populist theorists, including emotional intelligence, presence and (Boyatzis and McKee 2005; Senge *et al.* 2005; Goleman *et al.* 2002), might support the dissemination of research findings associated with ABIs.

The concepts and research reviewed here begin to indicate both the breadth and depth related to researching the processes and impacts of ABIs on both individuals and organisations – and of the potential impacts on the participants. To quote from Wenger (1998):

> 'Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming – to become a certain person or, conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person…. To support learning is not only to support the process of acquiring knowledge, but also to offer a place where new ways of knowing can be realized in the form of such an identity.' (Wenger 1998, p.215)

For both practitioners and researchers of ABIs, my concluding recommendations are therefore that:

- We should integrate both reflective practices and a reflexive, critical stance in our research planning and processes, with the aim of both exploring the emergent, active experience of the participants (including the researchers) while also seeking to surface and critique assumptions, as they emerge, such as expectations of predictable, specific or even benevolent outcomes from ABIs.
- In planning our interventions and associated research, we prioritise the establishment of supportive learning and research cultures after the period of the intervention, to acknowledge the depth of potential impact on both the learners' and the researchers' identities.

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