Theatre strategies to develop emotional intelligence skills in business communication: An exploratory study

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A B S T R A C T

Management in a client-centred industry faces complex interaction within the company structures as well as with several client-related communications. Such interactions span a broad range of skills that extend beyond industry knowledge and require communication abilities such as persuasion, negotiation and presentation, among others. It is argued that one of the core competencies for effective communication is to be found in emotional intelligence (EQ). Enhanced EQ, therefore, evidences enhanced communication skills. This article reports on an exploratory study regarding the development of EQ (leading to enhanced communication skills) within the hospitality industry. As theatre is a form of heightened communication, theatre strategies and transactional analysis (as embedded in the theatre strategies) were used as a means to develop communication skills among managers. Emotional intelligence was used as the basis for measuring the potential efficacy of the skills. Based on the comparison of pre- and post-intervention EQ assessments (as an indirect measure of enhanced communication skills), the study concluded that it is highly possible that the use of theatre strategies in training to develop business communication among managers has the potential to contribute significantly to better EQ.

Key words: emotional intelligence, business communication, face-to-face, theatre strategies, Theatre in Education, hospitality industry, emotional competency, thinking preference, transactional analysis, mantle of expert, role-play

It can be accepted that modern business demands effective communication (see, for example, Madlock 2008). Interaction skills are vital.[1] In fact, Maes, Weldy and

Inceogle (1997) rate oral communication competency, which we will refer to as 'face-to-face communication' in this article, as an important part of interpersonal interaction and one of the top skills that will secure managerial and leadership success. Similarly, Puth (2002:8) indicates that effective leadership relies on oral communication. Reviewing the literature (for example, Freeland, Powell, Bixner & Dyer 2010; Hernez-Broome & Hughes 2004; Conrad & Newberry 2011) on the relevance of effective face-to-face communication reveals that an increasing awareness of its importance is evident in several fields, including patient interaction in medical contexts. In this regard, Beardsley (2001: 307), for example, emphasises the importance of effective communication skills for pharmacists, while Brinkman (2007: 47) documents how patients' ratings of medical doctors improved following the doctors' participation in communication skills training. Following their survey of the impact of communication skills training in the field of oncology, Fallowfield, Jenkins and Solis-Trapola (2003: 1447) indicate an enhancement in core skills such as asking and responding to patient questions as well as a reduction in interruptions, which signals improved listening skills. In a business context, especially in a client-centred industry where interaction is pivotal to the success of the business model, this may be deemed equally relevant. Conrad and Newberry's (2011: 11–12) research confirms this and indicates the need for addressing face-to-face communication skills in the training of business students. Congruent to this, Pine and Gilmore (1999: 111–113) suggested, as early as 1999, that mere 'goods and services' are no longer sufficient, and that clients are now seeking 'an experience', which they framed as "events that engage individuals in a personal way" (Pine & Gilmore 1999: 12). Hernez-Broome and Hughes (2004: 27) suggest that the leadership of the future is at its core a "process that engenders and is the result of relationships – relationships that focus on the interactions of both leaders and collaborators".

This view is pre-empted by Dulewicz and Higgs' (2003) notion that the higher up in the company structure one operates, the more emotionally competent interaction and communication is needed. Leadership may thus be posited as requiring effective communication in order to build optimal business relationships in the workplace, and therefore that such communication relies on emotional competencies on the part of business leaders. Alan Joyce shares with the Boston Consulting Group (Freeland et al. 2010: 22) that one "cannot over-communicate". The exploratory study presented in this article is set in the hospitality industry, which is highly client-centred and thus reliant on effective interpersonal or face-to-face communication skills.

Centrally, therefore, in the study that follows, key notions are foregrounded. Firstly, despite a potential excess of information that might be available through technology, such information is often used as 'a steady, one-way stream' and therefore

the essential 'give and take' of communication (two-way communication), which might be seen as a hallmark of relationships, is missing. Secondly, such 'give and take' is dependent upon interactions from moment to moment (in other words, the conversation is 'emergent') in the relationships; such interactions are received, reviewed and reflected upon and the strategic involvement of the next moment is determined and then acted upon. This process appears in 'split seconds' and repeatedly, and, initially, arises from preconceived ideas, notions and values that might or might not be as effective as originally intended (by the communicator). Blakeslee and Blakeslee (2007: 62) indicate that perception is an active construct. Thirdly, the notion of 'communication as information sharing' in business applies only to a portion of an enterprise – another portion deals with human relations and acts of persuasion, reprimand, encouragement, power negotiation, conflict resolution and similar acts of involvement (see Madlock 2008). For any or all of these acts of communication to be effective, the communicators need to be emotionally competent.

Conrad and Newberry (2011: 4) investigated the perception of human resource managers and business school instructors regarding the importance of 24 core business communication skills. This study was aimed at determining the cohesion and/or differences between what they term 'desired' business communication skills as perceived by business practice, and the 'acquired' skills as perceived by business schools that instruct future business managers (Conrad & Newberry 2011: 5). In order to determine the core business communication skills that were central to the investigation, Conrad and Newberry (2011: 10) reviewed 217 business management publications. This review established 24 core communication skills spanning three categories: nine organisational, eight leadership and seven interpersonal (Conrad & Newberry 2011: 11). A random sample, which included 45 human business managers and 45 business school professors, was then asked to rate the 24 skills established (Conrad & Newberry 2011: 12). The study concluded that there were no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of the two sample groups (Conrad & Newberry 2011: 13), suggesting that business leaders and business schools often agree on the communication skills required, and a case is made for investigating how such skills can be developed (Conrad & Newberry 2011: 17). We hypothesise that the key to developing these communication skills lies in the development of emotional intelligence or competencies.

It is generally accepted that all communication has emotion as a key element, even, or perhaps even specifically, business communication (see Conrad & Newberry 2011; Rapisarda 2002). The deliberate channelling and use of emotions and feelings contribute significantly to efficient communication (Cassady & Eissa 2008). Bar-On (among others) refers to this as emotional intelligence and frames it as "an array

of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures" (Stein & Book 2000: 14). Bar-On, Maree and Elias (2007: xiv) indicate that emotional intelligence (or competency) is a skill that can be acquired.

Critically, and drawing on selected fields of our own expertise (namely, work in theatre training and as an industrial psychologist), we surmised that any acts of relational communication (of persuasion, reprimand and so forth) form the foundation of much theatre work, and that actors, in preparing to play the characters in such theatre work, and to portray those characters convincingly (that is to say, so that acts of recognition of the truthfulness of the situation can at least be acceptable to an 'audience' or receiver of the act) go through a set of training methods and skills development that might assist business communicators in their tasks of effective communication. Acknowledging that an actor prepares for a 'virtual performance' and that a person in business prepares for a 'real performance' in the act of communication, we speculated upon how the one skills set could assist in achieving the other skills set. We further posited, drawing on earlier research, that, for actors to develop and portray characters convincingly, strong elements of emotional awareness (Munro, Pretorius & Munro 2008) need to be in place, and, furthermore, that such training seems to enhance emotional competencies in actors. Centrally, practising theatrical skills led to enhanced emotional competency. Actors required emotional competencies (among other skills) to perform convincingly, and in the attaining of the theatrical skills, emotional competencies were enhanced – a synergistic dual skills acquisition. Furthermore, although actor training appears to engage the aesthetic, it is also widely and effectively used in domains such as Theatre/Drama in Education and related interventionist-style simulated behavioural engagements. This is because the strategies of enrolling provide opportunities both to safely 'rehearse' such intervention strategies, and to engage, critique, realign and reflect upon behaviour (Gluck & Rubenstein 2007).

The trajectory of our intervention, as with actor training, therefore started with the notion of 'actor, know thyself' (in this sense, therefore, guiding the individual to appreciate EQ and to know their own current situation); proceeded to 'actor, know thy task' (in other words, to learn how EQ impacts on communication in general and business communication in particular); and targeted 'actor, engage the other character'[2] (put differently, to rehearse to use EQ competencies effectively) and this, we proposed, could take place employing theatre training strategies.

Investigative question

From our specialist disciplines of theatre and industrial psychology, we wanted to interrogate whether strategies used in actor training, with specific reference to Theatre in Education (TIE), could contribute positively to developing emotional competency skills in the business communication of managers (so that business communication strategies could concomitantly be enhanced).

Research methods

We were asked by the CEO of a South African company in the hospitality industry[3] to conduct a series of workshops[4] to assist in the development of the management team's communication skills. The company services clients in the public and private sector nationally.

The group for which the workshops were intended included the company's senior and middle management (senior management refers to the CEO and operational managers, and middle management refers to district managers). Middle management is the vital liaison point between client, staff and senior management. This implies that their communication roles are complex and (1) demand interaction with staff as part of their management/leadership role, (2) include reporting to and interacting with senior management and (3) foreground interacting with clients on managerial tasks, negotiations and sales presentations. An added demand was the fact that recent changes at senior management level required the managers to negotiate, communicate and implement these new strategies while at the same time increasing sales in what was for South Africa (and indeed the world) an economically challenging and stressed environment.

The need to communicate with and within various levels of employment in a large company, and to communicate for various purposes, demands an acute awareness of a constant shift of power structures at play in and during the act of communication (Conrad & Newberry 2011; see also Scott 1990[5]). This ever-present covert and overt power dynamic complicates the use of efficient face-to-face communication strategies. One of the central tenets of Theatre in Education is that it provides a 'virtual safe space' where such power dynamics can be interrogated, and engagement with such power positions can be rehearsed through the recognised and accepted convention of 'role-play'.[6] The management team included both male and female managers (with the majority of the managers being female, as is currently in line with and prevalent in the hospitality industry, given the gendered history of such an industry), and the team was representative of a variety of language and cultural groups. Their ages

ranged between 30 and 60, and in most cases they displayed extensive experience in the hospitality industry.

Task and expected outcome

Conrad and Newberry's (2011) exploration of the *communication demands of the managerial role* led them to define three business communication constructs. These constructs are in turn subdivided into a number of related skills that are then clustered into the three constructs.

Table 1: Communication demands of the managerial role

Construct	Related skills
Organisational communication	1. Initiating open discussion 2. Resolving conflict 3. Creating information networks 4. Teaching important skills 5. Using information technology 6. Providing performance feedback 7. Negotiating 8. Writing business correspondence 9. Making convincing presentations
Leadership communication	1. Arousing enthusiasm 2. Being a change catalyst 3. Creating group synergy 4. Building team bonds 5. Expressing encouragement 6. Providing motivation 7. Being persuasive 8. Building optimism
Interpersonal communication	1. Active listening 2. Building rapport 3. Demonstrating emotion self-control 4. Building trust 5. Relating to people of diverse backgrounds 6. Demonstrating respect 7. Building relationships

Source: Conrad & Newberry (2011: 11–12)

A random sample from Table 1 demonstrates the demands for emotional evocations (encouraging, resolving conflict, convincing, arousing enthusiasm, persuading, building rapport and trust are but a few examples); the managers thus require the emotional competencies to evoke such responses.

Considering the complexity of the hospitality company managers' communication roles, it became clear that they required most of the communication skills in the three constructs defined by Conrad and Newberry (2011), as shown in Table 1. We grouped the 24 skills into 'knowledge', 'attitudes' and 'behaviours'. This implied for us the acquiring of *knowledge regarding crucial elements* of communication in general, and business communication specifically. (It was assumed that 'knowledge of the workings of the company' was embedded.) Furthermore, and congruent to this, there needed to be the acquiring of *strategies and skills explored and practised* to channel an attitude and behaviour change during the act of business communication. As will become clear, 'attitude' towards the particular communication act was embedded in each member of the group (and reflected in the EQ profile) and seemed to be taken as a 'given' position, whereas 'behaviour' would reflect in how these attitudes found their places in the approach to the act of communication (which would need effective EQ both to recognise the need and to engage through communication with that need). Changing attitudes would enhance changes in behaviour, reshaping the communication act and, in short, enhancing EQ. After further consideration, we concluded that the knowledge, attitude and behaviour pillars were all based on the notion of understanding, taking ownership and celebrating personal uniqueness (i.e. the manager knowing him/herself) as well as understanding and applying emotional competencies. We posited, following Thompson (2006: 82), that the acquisition of skills to engage with future communication dilemmas could be taught (Thompson's "futuritive" notion), but these were to be centrally embedded in the sense of self-worth (and enhanced EQ); for example, they could come about *because* of the engagement with the role-play strategies (Thompson's notion of the "performative"). Essentially, effective communication centres around *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* skills and strategies (Bar-On 2006), generating the intrapersonal skills and strategies that will lead to the performative and the sense of self-worth (that is, the 'know thyself' injunction) and the interpersonal that will engage with skills necessary for future communication dilemmas (that is, the 'know the task' and 'know the strategies of engagement with the other' injunctions). This approach, therefore, critically argues that there is a direct correlation between enhanced EQ and enhanced communication efficacy.

The expected outcome of the workshops was thus improved communication skills usage among the hospitality company's senior and middle management, which, given the correlation suggested, would reflect in enhanced EQ. The research question was whether the methods and strategies we had devised were effective in achieving the set outcome. The methods and strategies drew, in an interdisciplinary way, from Theatre in Education and selected actor training techniques, emotional competency

engagements, whole brain learning derived strategic analysis and interventions, and transactional analysis approaches. This article, therefore, reports on the strategies, documents the process, analyses the results and discusses potential reasons for the successes and failures of the intervention.

Overarching strategy

Taking Conrad and Newberry's (2011) constructs into account, we examined the essence of face-to-face communication skills, namely expressing meaning and intent through voice, speech and body, but also reading meaning and intent[7] from other people. Essentially it came down to perceptions, perspectives and paradigms during communication and often during presentation and persuasion. Provisionally, we define 'perceptions' as those stimuli that impinge on the senses of the communicator, and are therefore, by their very nature, selected, interpreted and reinforced according to the person's perspectives on life and on self (Blakeslee & Blakeslee 2007: 42). Perspectives, therefore, are the systems (idiosyncratic to that person or shared in community) that a person draws on to adjudicate that which is going on around them, and to make sense of that situation or event. Clustering perspectives into recognisable bundles that can be explained and exploited provides a person's paradigm or epistemology. In any act of communication, a communicator draws on his/her own perceptions of the situation, and on his/her perspective on life and the particular dilemma (and both are based on his/her paradigm) to construct an action that can be presented to another in an act of persuasion. In essence the presentation is performed.

Stated differently, each person in the act of communication enters that 'act moment' from a particular paradigm that is his/her own. That paradigm influences what perspectives he/she will bring to the act moment. The paradigm and the perspective will influence two dynamics: (1) it will influence what he/she recognises and interprets from what he/she perceives coming from the other in the act of communication, and (2) it will influence the way that the response is shaped. Critically, this occurs from both sides, causing escalations of potential 'miscommunication' problems. From the point of view of the planned intervention, therefore, a fourfold strategy needed to be developed. Firstly, the individual needed to know more about what shaped his/her own idiosyncratic paradigm (and therefore perspectives). Secondly, the individual needed to know how this impacted on his/her idiosyncratic communication 'style' and preferences, so that the 'palette of possibilities' in the communication strategies could be expanded. Thirdly, the individual needed to be led to recognise the idiosyncratic strategies from the other in the act, and fourthly, the individual needed to be led to

develop strategies to engage in a positive manner with these alternate idiosyncratic communication strategies. In short, each participant needed to know his/her own 'idiosyncratic self' and how this impacted on his/her choices in the communication act, and then each participant needed to learn to recognise such idiosyncrasies in others and experiment with alternate strategies, given the stimuli provided by the other in the communicative act. We posited that for all of these to be improved, the level of emotional competencies had to be enhanced, and the way to bring about such enhancement was to 'rehearse' communication skills and strategies. We could correlate the results of the enhanced communication skills by assessing changes in EQ.

We concluded that this is not dissimilar to the demands that the actor faces. Whereas an actor has to 'play' a character that is recognisable, credible, persuasive and believable, a communicator has to play him/herself so that in the act of a particular communication he/she comes across as credible, believable and convincing. Similar to the communication act, the act of performance requires situational and character analysis, which is then embodied and envoiced applying the performer's vocal and physical expression, driven by subtext (emotional intent) and guided by cognitive style (see Blair 2008: 1). Pia (2006: 150) states that the actor's task extends beyond learning and performing lines to applying true listening. This reflects one of the core skills required in effective face-to-face communication (Fallowfield et al. 2003: 1447). Stanislavski (2006: 129) posits: "Truth…is whatever we can believe in with sincerity, whether in ourselves or in our colleagues." This statement potentially indicates the communicative or interactive nature of acting. According to McGaw, Stilson and Clark (2011), it is the actor's conviction and commitment to what is 'true' that enables him to produce actions that reflect the 'truth'. It may be argued that the business communicator also applies his/her actions to his/her conviction of the truth in a specific situation. For example, a scenario where a dissatisfied client needs to be persuaded poses a 'real' situation that becomes 'true' to the communicator, who would then adjust his/her actions in a manner that conforms to this. Furthermore, if truth on stage is what the actor 'sincerely believes' and then 'acts out' by using his/her body, voice, emotional and cognitive skills in interaction, this could be equated to communication in business or any other context (see also Pine & Gilmore 1999: 112–118).

Acting also applies the concept of identifying the character's objective or aim and then employing specific physical, vocal and emotional actions to achieve it (Pia 2006: 17; Kemp 2012: 164). In preparing for a role, an actor engages in gathering information to answer five fundamental questions. Firstly, the actor determines what the objective (or task to be completed) is for the character. Within the business

communication model from Conrad and Newberry (2011), this could be clearly stipulated. This determines (and is determined by) the series of events that need to play out towards achieving the objective (thus the second question seeks the series of events given by the script). Thirdly, the actor attempts to determine why the character has framed that particular objective and then selected those particular events. In this investigation, one begins to see the development of an understanding of the character's paradigm and perspectives. However, in a play no character achieves his or her objective immediately – there are problems along the way, and the actor asks what those problems (or obstacles) might be. In the parallel that we develop for this style of intervention, these problems are manifest in the act of communication arising from the other, and from the situation. Finally, the actor asks how the character gets around (circumvents) or solves those problems, and this gives one an insight into the character's power position (for example) as another element of establishing paradigm and perspective. A critical skill in such circumvention action is to draw on the communicator's emotional competence. For our intervention, we set out to discover how these obstacles might better be circumvented by learning new communication strategies, and how the efficacy of these skills might be foreshadowed (or predicted) by changes in EQ.

Similarly, business interaction is aimed at the achievement of an objective that is then uniquely pursued by means of the communicators' non-verbal, vocal, cognitive and emotional expression (see also Gundlack, Martinko & Douglas 2003: 231). In certain specific communications such as prepared presentations, business communication even demands the development and rehearsal of a 'script'. Pine and Gilmore (1999: 109) compare the fields of acting and business communication by equating four concepts from each, namely: drama as strategy, script as processes, theatre as work and performance as offering.

From this point of departure it was decided to conduct workshops that would

- enhance the business communication skills of the hospitality company's management team by imparting necessary knowledge regarding strategies needed for business communication. These skills specifically draw on intra- and interpersonal knowledge, attitudes and behaviours (and as such on emotional competencies, among other things);
- use Theatre in Education strategies to create reflective and reflexive learning opportunities. The strategies primarily to be used were role-play and mantle-of-expert (which will be defined below);
- employ strategies that originated in actor training to develop awareness of the situation and the use of body and voice in communication.

The overarching strategy was thus to combine strategies and processes from our specialist disciplines of theatre and industrial psychology to change the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the participants to achieve the expected outcome of improved communication skills usage among senior and middle management of the hospitality company. Such improvement would correlate with enhanced emotional competency.

Process

Phase 1: Individual analysis – 'Know thyself'

Purpose

These individual analyses had a threefold purpose:

- For us, as facilitators, to determine each participant's individual profile, needs and preferences, so that we could understand each participant, adhere to their needs and (setting our own perceptions and perspectives aside), communicate effectively with each individual and the group alike;
- For each participant to gain insight into his/her own perceptions, perspectives and paradigms, initially intrapersonally and then in the act of communication, thus interpersonally in order to understand and frame his/her filtering process in communication;
- To define and celebrate each participant's personal uniqueness so that we could establish a sense of self-worth and the worth of the other person in the act of communication, again feeding into the intra- and interpersonal domains. The aim of this is to shift the conceptualisation of persuasion away from manipulation through negotiation and dialogue towards transformation.

Tools

The following tools were used:

- **Emotional competency**: Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi). It was necessary, in the process of 'knowing thyself', for the individual to know and tap into his/her emotional competency. Reuven Bar-On (1983) designed the concept of the "emotional intelligence quotient" and from this followed a self-reporting assessment (Stein & Book 2000), which can be completed online and then interpreted by a qualified psychologist. This assessment instrument has five operational areas, namely: intrapersonal awareness, interpersonal relationships, stress management, adaptability and general mood (Stein & Book 2000). As an

assessment of emotional competencies, we used the Bar-On EQi self-reporting assessment.

- **Thinking Preference NBI**®: Brain functions are extremely subtle and complex and cannot, as previously believed, be clearly attributed to various sides or places in the brain. The left–right brain concept was proposed by Sperry, and the triune brain theory was espoused by McLean (De Boer, Steyn & Du Toit 2001). Building from these findings, Herrmann (1995) as well as Neethling (2000b) posit a metaphorical four-quadrant model for whole-brain activity and specifically indicate that *preferences* of knowing and communicating exist as people favour one or more quadrant.[8] It must be noted that these preferences are not abilities, nor do they reflect on abilities, although they may influence one's life choices and as such lead to abilities. An understanding and insight into one's own preference as well as the preferences of one's corporate team can contribute to more efficient communication, interaction and team relationships, as these preferences dictate perceptions. In shorthand, we refer to these metaphorical quadrants as "Fact, Form, Feeling and Fantasy" (Herrmann 1995: 421–422). Neethling suggests that knowledge of one's "thinking preferences" empowers one to improve relationships with others and to contribute more effectively to team activities (2000). Such knowledge contributes to the individual's exertion and recuperation strategies as well as to the assignment of tasks within team structures. Whereas knowing one's thinking preferences might not directly impact on one's EQ, the argument needs to be made that knowing how people think and pose acts of communication that are dominantly formed by preferences assists in employing one's EQ effectively in the communicative act.

As an assessment of thinking preferences, we used the Neethling Brain Instrument® in which the four metaphorical quadrants are referred to as L1, L2, R2 and R1 (Neethling 2000a, 2000b).

A person who demonstrates an L1 preference would predominantly foreground and prefer analytical, logical and objective activities. A person who demonstrates an L2 preference would predominantly foreground and prefer structured, detailed and procedural activities. A person who demonstrates an R1 preference would predominantly foreground and prefer synthesising, explorative and strategic activities. A person who demonstrates an R2 preference would predominantly foreground and prefer empathetic, sensitive and cooperative activities (Neethling 2000b: 53). (Anecdotally, for example, one can speculate that asking someone with an L1 preference to communicate with someone with an R2 preference could lead to conflict, not about the information shared, but about the way that it is being shared.) Acquiring a critical awareness of this, and being able to gauge, from clues

provided in the communication act, which quadrant was being accessed would allow for better employment of one's emotional competencies.

- **Communication style**: Eric Berne (2010) framed what is known as "Transactional Analysis" (TA), which provides an understanding of an individual's transactional style. Conversation and therefore communication can be conceived of as a 'transaction' or negotiation between two or more over meaning, position, persuasion and power. Within business communication, TA provides a valuable reflection regarding personal communication styles and acts as an indicator of areas that are in need of improvement. In short, this model refers to three modes of communication: parent, child and adult or accountable mode. The parent and the child can each again be divided into two positive and two negative sub-modes. We used the Transactional Analysis questionnaire to determine preferred modes of communication. Knowing one's own TA preferred mode (and being able to identify it in others) allows for strategies to engage with these to the benefit of the act.[9]

In summary, the battery of instruments used provides an in-depth profile of the individual, including thinking preferences, emotional competencies and preferred communicative strategies on a sensory and transactional level. At the end of the briefing, each individual knows his or her profile and, by extrapolation, begins to understand the impact that other profiles might have on a communicative act.

Phase 2: Workshops

Purpose

As previously suggested, the *first goal* of the workshops was to share the knowledge base behind the various assessments with the workshop participants. We believe that emotion and feeling, cognitive preferences, sensory preferences and habitually preferred modes of communication together shape the personally unique core that all humans idiosyncratically access through body and voice during face-to-face communication. It is pivotal to have an understanding of these essentials before building or improving on any business communication skills and strategies, as they determine the filters through which messages are communicated and perceived.

To this we added the *second goal* of the participants mastering the use of the newly acquired knowledge through Theatre in Education strategies used in reflective and reflexive learning opportunities.

The *third goal* of the workshops was to create an awareness of the congruency between mind and body[10] (including voice) during communication.

Strategies

Imparting of cardinal knowledge: This took place (utilising explanations of the various systems used) through lecturing, use of PowerPoint presentations, anecdotes and feedback regarding personal and group profiles, as well as through interactive explorations and discussions. This process provided the participants with a cognitive frame of reference, as well as a set of manageable terms and concepts that could be used in the reflective and reflexive practice in the next phase. In this phase, therefore, each participant was more aware of, and could reflect upon, the centrality of their competencies and those of others in the communication act.

Reflective and reflexive learning opportunities: Theatre in Education is defined by Davis and Evans (1987: 56) as "an improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-centered form of drama in which the participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact and reflect upon human experiences". The authors are aware of the various terms used to describe the application of theatre or drama in seemingly non-congruent fields (see Taylor & Warner 2006: 32). We support Nicholson's (2005: 5) argument that whatever term is assigned for the process, it "indicate(s) the process of action and reflection" in the specific field that leads to the "developing of new possibilities" (Nicholson 2005). Thompson (2006: 15) suggests that the term "applied theatre" is used as an umbrella term for "participatory theatre created by people who would not usually make theatre". As such, Theatre in Education falls under applied theatre/drama.[11]

Communication is a 'human experience' (indeed, one might argue that one communicates in and about the human experience in any act of communication) and 'business communication' is part of that as well, because this particular paradigm of human experience presents its own potentials and problems. We assumed that the participants were fluent with the business content part of the communication, and therefore the emphasis was on the communication part. The information supplied from the Conrad and Newberry (2011) work provided clear guidelines as to specific objectives to be targeted for particular business communication situations or scenarios. Thus, because this was a workshop situation, the necessity to imagine business and management scenarios, to enact and therefore to test the scenarios and potential solutions and problems, and then to reflect upon such scenarios, solutions and problems became essential for 'learning about communication' to take place. Critically, experiencing through this process what was effective (or less effective) enhanced both confidence in communication and emotional competencies in a synergistic way. Theatre in Education strategies were therefore deemed a viable approach for this group as the 'need' for communication development was acknowledged and an experiential approach that promotes active participation and practical application was considered vital to empower the managers with tangible

strategies that could be applied in their workplace communications. In essence, the strategies needed to be identified (a cognitive task) and then rehearsed (an experiential task requiring emotional competency). This promotes the notion of Caine et al. (2005: 2) of "psychophysiological" learning. This approach supports the integration between theory and practice with action and reflection being "interdependent and in constant flux" (Nicholson 2005: 14). The relevance and value of such an approach in business training has been documented by several authors including Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp and Mayo (2000), who commented on the success of such an approach in the context of training marketing professionals.

Furthermore, Theatre in Education as an approach yielded the additional benefit that it involves the whole person in the learning process (Lazarus 2012: 68; Coetzee & Munro 2006: 4). This was considered to be highly relevant, as the person's communicative expression (and competencies) cannot be divorced from the person's preferences or identity (and by extension, therefore, emotional competencies), also known as the person's paradigms, perspectives and perceptions. The benefits of this approach are described by Nicholson (2005: 24):

> Drama is a good way for people to extend their horizons of experience, recognizing how their own identities have been shaped and formulated and, by playing new roles and inhabiting different subject positions, finding different points of identification with others.

Two specific strategies were used: mantle-of-expert and role-play:

- *Mantle-of-expert*: In this strategy, developed by Heathcote and Bolton (1995), the participants assume the 'role of experts'. This strategy guides the participants towards a virtual yet empowered position for the duration of the exploration. As a learning opportunity in this regard, we showed the participants video clips of short scenarios specifically written for the workshops by a professional writer and filmed using actors.[12] The participants, taking upon themselves the "mantle of the expert" (see Weltsek-Medina 2006), critiqued the communicative moments in the scenarios and then discussed how the obstacles demonstrated in the scenarios could have been circumvented. This provided grounds for 'reworking' the scenario to circumvent the problems encountered. (This may also be seen as an adaptation of the Boal Forum Theatre concept, as demonstrated below). The 'distancing' effect of the video clips allowed the participants to engage with what worked and what did not in a non-invasive manner, which thus could point to the emotional competencies or lack thereof in the 'non-present other' of the video. Thus the importance of emotional competencies (among other things) could be foregrounded.

- *Role-play or 'taking on somebody else's role'* (see Herzberg 2003): According to Moore (1997: 29), role-play "holds the attention; draws upon the existing knowledge of the participants; involves decision-making; brings about a greater awareness of the newly explored areas; allows us to deal with just one event at a time (unlike in real life)". LeClair and Ferrell (2000: 317) report on the successful use of role-play in what they frame as "behavioral simulation". They suggest that these simulations provide learning opportunities where participants gain insight into "co-workers, the organizational culture, and how to achieve a common goal". After the role-play moments, we allowed for reflection by the role-players as well as the observers. This fosters 'in the moment' and 'after the moment' engagement (see Weltsek-Medina 2006; Baxter 2011). It should be noted that, at least covertly, the participants in the two reflection or engagement moments began to employ the strategies of emotional competencies that they had come to know in themselves. There was a heightened awareness of the necessity for them to practise this in offering critique to the role-players.

During the following role-play moments, we as the facilitators made use of a concept and strategy drawn from Boal's Forum Theatre. This concept strategises the role of a 'Joker' – an intermediary, a master of ceremonies, a 'translator' or 'rephraser' of the event that is playing out. Boal (1995: xix) does not refer to the Joker as facilitator but "(in Boal-speak) a 'difficultator', undermining easy judgments, reinforcing our grasp of the complexity of a situation, but not letting that complexity get in the way of action". Thus the facilitator, as Joker, operates as a 'constructive bridge' between the 'role-players' (participants directly engaged in the role-play moment) and the 'audience' (the non-involved workshop participants observing the specific role-play moment). The Joker (in this case the workshop facilitator) would stop the role-players and ask them as well as the observers to reflect on the situation so far and to suggest possible improvements drawing from their newly acquired knowledge regarding emotional competence, thinking and sensory preferences as well as transactional modes. These learning moments initially explored the application of the various strands separately; as the participants managed applications of the separate strands, other strands were added until the multi-complexity of communication was accessed. In this way the role-players, now consciously knowing more about themselves and being fully aware of the tasks of the communication (drawing from their understanding of the business and from their work with the Conrad and Newberry constructs) could negotiate and engage with the task at hand, namely effective communication. This engagement demanded both an experiential and a cognitive application, in other words an interwoven emotional competency, a related communication skills competency and a strategic/business competency.

Results

This section reflects upon the results of the intervention strategies employed in this exploratory study so as to attempt to document the results of the interventionist research process undertaken.

Referring back to the table summarising Conrad and Newberry's (2011) work, it seems that only three of the 24 related skills were not addressed. The skills that were addressed are marked with a tick in Table 2.

Table 2: Communication demands of the managerial role addressed in the workshops

Construct	Related skills
Organisational communication	1. Initiating open discussion √ 2. Resolving conflict √ 3. Creating information networks 4. Teaching important skills √ 5. Using information technology 6. Providing performance feedback √ 7. Negotiating √ 8. Writing business correspondence 9. Making convincing presentations √
Leadership communication	1. Arousing enthusiasm √ 2. Being a change catalyst √ 3. Creating group synergy √ 4. Building team bonds √ 5. Expressing encouragement √ 6. Providing motivation √ 7. Being persuasive √ 8. Building optimism √
Interpersonal communication	1. Active listening √ 2. Building rapport √ 3. Demonstrating emotion self-control √ 4. Building trust √ 5. Relating to people of diverse backgrounds √ 6. Demonstrating respect √ 7. Building relationships√

Source: Adapted from Conrad & Newberry (2011: 11–12)

Because these workshops took place intermittently over an 18-month period, we had the advantage of being able to return to the knowledge and skills imparted in the various cumulative iterations. It was evident that there was accumulated and expanding knowledge retention and behaviour change every time, as revealed in each iterative workshop. This was demonstrated in repeated simulated role-play events. Subjective reporting from the participants indicated their heightened awareness regarding the role of emotion and feeling, cognitive preferences, sensory

preferences and habitually preferred modes in business communication, with the concomitant enhanced communication effectiveness.

Before the final workshop, we required of participants to complete the EQi and transactional analysis assessments again. The reason was two-fold:

- To determine whether there was improvement in emotional competency, which we have argued correlates with an enhanced awareness of the use of communication style among participants.
- To use the outcome of the assessments as an indicator of what we should primarily address and explore in the last workshop.

The overall outcome indicated an increase in emotional competency in the group (Table 3 indicates the average changes) across the criteria of all the participants.

Table 3: Average pre- and post-intervention Bar-On EQi results

Bar-On EQi	Before	After
Total EQ	92.375	103.625
Intrapersonal	89	102.75
Interpersonal	105.875	105.25
Stress management	91.125	102.5
Adaptability	93.375	103.375
General mood	94.125	102.25

It should be noted that there appears to be a downward trend in the 'interpersonal' criteria. One of the participants experienced severe personal (interpersonal) trauma during the time of the post-intervention assessment. This drastically influenced the participant's assessment results, and the participant's EQi assessment outcome was significantly lower than in the pre-assessment. As this was a relatively small group, this also possibly explains the slight drop in the interpersonal post-assessment. We decided to include the participant's pre- and post-assessment results in the averages in order to provide a realistic reflection of what we encounter during our training programmes. If we remove the particular participant's pre- and post-intervention results for the interpersonal criterion, the group's interpersonal assessment results move from 103.428 to 108.57.

As an example of a positive shift, the pre- and post-EQi profile of one of the participants is presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Total EQ

78	

50   70   90   110   130   150

Area of Enrichment   Effective Functioning   Enhanced Skills

Composite Scales

IntRApersonal EQ — 71

IntERpersonal EQ — 100

Stress Management EQ — 86

Adaptability EQ — 80

General Mood EQ — 89

50   70   90   110   130   150

Area of Enrichment   Effective Functioning   Enhanced Skills
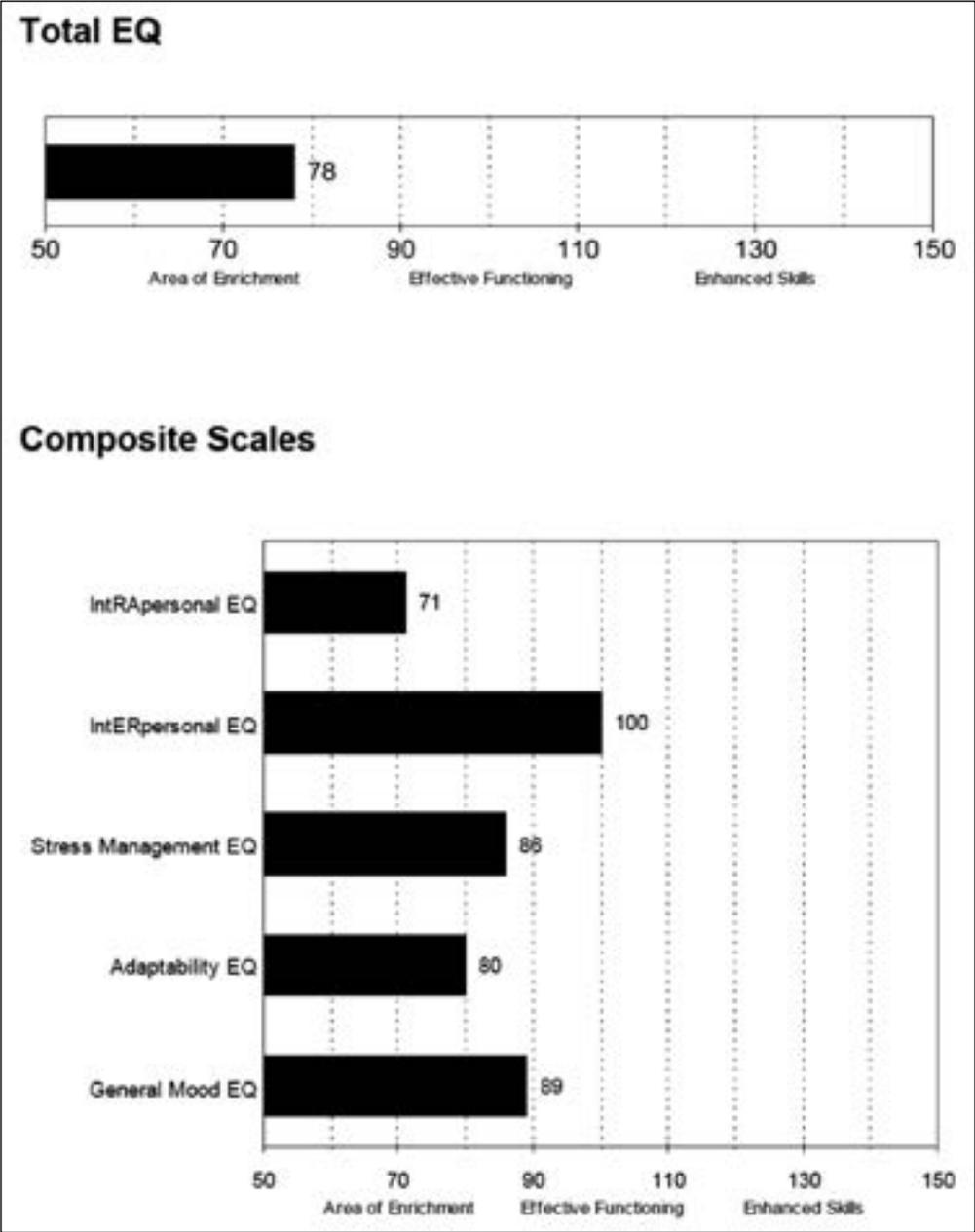
Figure 1: Pre-EQi profile of participant A
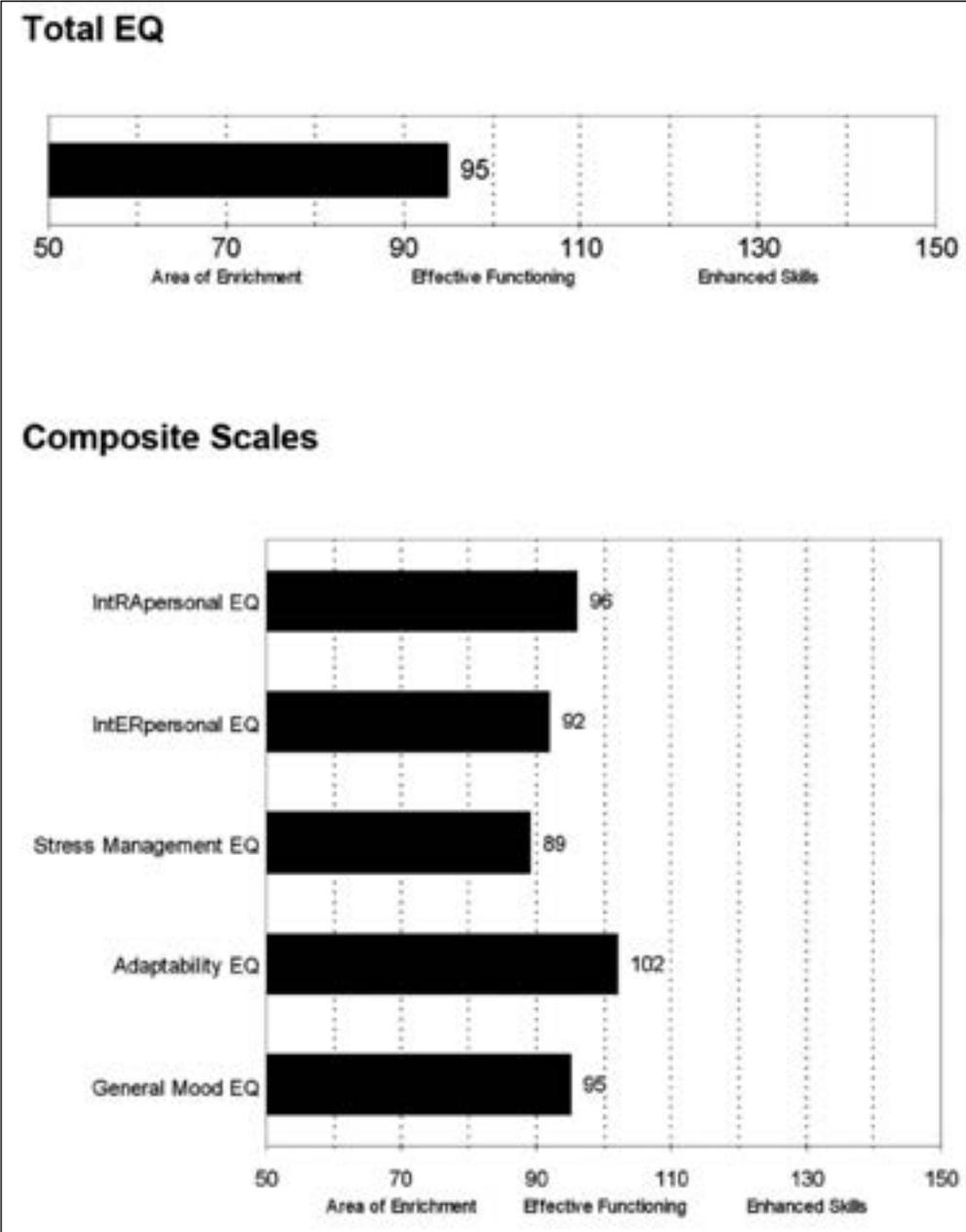
Figure 2: Post-EQi profile of participant A.

A shift occurred from 'parent' to 'accountable/adult' mode as captured in the transactional analysis questionnaire; the data are not reflected in Figures 1 and 2 but can be seen as indicative of changes in EQ.

We did not re-assess Thinking Preference NBI® or perceptual communications, as these are reflective of personal unique preferences and not skills. It is furthermore acknowledged that, for these participants, we have no way of definitively knowing whether the knowledge, skills and strategies acquired were in fact carried over into the actual work environment. Nevertheless, the biggest indication of efficacy was that when an opportunity to employ new district managers into the particular hospitality company arose, we were asked to provide the same information and skills for the potential candidates.

Discussion: Generic methodology

The analytical methods used in this intervention (that is, the profiling of the participants) are frequently used by industrial psychologists coaching in the business field, but these coaches generally do not have a background in acting training or Theatre in Education and thus do not have the same proficiency as the specialists involved in this intervention. In many instances, the industrial psychologist relies on imparting the strategies at a cognitive level, with some experiential practice only. The methods used by industrial psychologists in similar situations suggest an adequate but perhaps not optimal coaching situation. The industrial psychologist involved in this programme (drawing on personal experience, and operating both as coach and as participant observer) is therefore convinced that, because the acting specialists' in-depth knowledge and skills could be utilised in this intervention, the results obtained are significantly better.

This type of study has to be repeated with the quantitative pre- and post-testing, test and control group methodology. However, it should be acknowledged that within the time allowed for this type of training in the corporate environment, and bearing in mind the disproportionate spread of variables, it may be difficult to convince the participants to take more time away from their offices for more, and/ or more streamlined, assessments; to design the intervention to cater adequately for the variables; or to set a control group for an alternative intervention. It can be speculatively argued that such controlled procedures may also impede the seemingly free-flow approach that contributes positively to the effective impact of the use of Theatre in Education and acting strategies. As such, this study relied on self-reporting by participants, participant observation by the coaches and a manner of

pre- and post-testing, at least in terms of pre- and post-EQi and transactional analysis engagement.

It can be surmised that the success or even potential success of this approach, however, lies in the interdisciplinary nature of these workshops. Theatre in Education and acting strategies are methods that can be accessed to holistically accommodate deep structure learning while adhering to each participant's unique profile and preferences. Theatre in Education and acting strategies, without the expert knowledge of vital elements influencing the complex act of communication and specifically business communication, will not achieve the outcomes. It is the interaction between (1) knowledge sharing from the field of psychology and industrial psychology, so that the participants can 'know themselves,' (2) a cognitive frame of reference that is provided, demonstrated and 'practised', which results in the participants' understanding or 'knowing the task of communication' at hand, (3) a set of manageable terms and concepts that are understood and practised, which generates competencies in 'engaging with others' in acts of business communication, and (4) reflective and reflexive learning opportunities so that the business communication moments can be gauged, realigned, improved and re-experienced, that results in multifaceted self-awareness that could guide each participant towards the development of business communication skills that are congruent with their personal uniqueness. In short, learning and practising business communication strategies in this way builds the strategies and the emotional competencies that make the strategies effective. Emotional intelligence building relies on communication strategy development as a tool for EQ development among managers and for communication development. It is not possible to have one without the other.

We conclude that this exploratory study, despite its research limitations, demonstrates the holistic impact of collaboration between drama strategies and industrial psychology, which we plan to investigate further.

Endnotes

1. James M. Cornelius indicates to the Boston Consulting Group (TBCG) the importance of face-to-face communication (Freeland et al. 2010: 10).
2. One of the great realist theatre trainers of the 20th century was Konstantin Stanislavsky. The three 'training books' that are attributed to him are (in the 'correct' translation, as provided by Carnicke 2009) *An Actor's Work on Himself*, *An Actor's Work on a Character*, and *An Actor's Work on a Role*. These three aspects, in this trajectory, mirror the trajectory we posit here.
3. Full ethical clearance to reference the work from the workshop was granted by the CEO of the company. Anonymity and confidentiality have been safeguarded.

4. The workshops were facilitated by Mariana Pretorius and Marth Munro.

5. Scott's book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990) presents a cogent argument around the notion of negotiation in situations of power imbalances. Although he works in the socio-political field, his concepts of the dynamics at play in "onstage" spaces of negotiation and "offstage spaces" of honesty and strategising are extremely useful.

6. The concept of 'role-play' is critical in these situations, as the concept demands that participants acknowledge and accept the duality of the 'roles' in the company that they play/perform 'in reality,' yet at the same time acknowledge and accept the convention that the exercises are 'playful' interrogations of situations that potentially parallel sets of events that they might encounter in the workplace. Critically, the move from role-play to role captures the hoped-for outcome of transference of skills and insights accumulated in the playful engagements to the real situations. Fundamentally, role-play allows for explorations, the gaining of insights and the practice of strategies, in a 'safe' and playful environment. It also allows, in a very important way, for the 'stepping in and out of role' to fracture the stream of an ordinary conversation, for example, so that the dynamics of strategic moments can be considered, reconsidered and 're-attempted' (see Hertzberg 2003, as well as Heyward 2010, for in-depth discussions).

7. 'Meaning and intent' in the communication act combine information and attitude in the shaping of the communication act, and this is presented in 'communication behaviours'. A breakdown in communication often happens because of discrepancies between meaning, intent and speech, or, in the parallel being developed, between information, attitude and behaviour.

8. The notion of preference inevitably brings with it an emotional dimension, as an individual is 'more comfortable' working one way, for example, and 'less comfortable' working another. Yet, if two people in an act of communication have different 'areas of comfort', there is the potential for stress and miscommunication to occur. It becomes imperative, therefore, to be able to know one's own preferences, but also to be able to identify and engage with others' preferences.

9. The profiling also used the Somanous Perception Communication Preference assessment, which draws from the preferred sensory modes in learning (visual, auditory, kinesthetic/tactile) as well as whether a person prefers to work independently or as a collaborator. We used this instrument to determine sensory preferences during communication. Knowledge regarding one's own sensory preferences as well as those of others can enhance effective communication. The design of the instrument is drawn, among others, from actor training.

10. See Kemp (2012).

11. See also Jackson and Vine (2013); O'Toole, Stinson and Moore (2009).

12. The professional writer had pointedly drawn upon the four areas that would demonstrate the idiosyncratic in potential participants, namely, Whole Brain preferences, transactional analysis, emotional competence and the Somanous perception communication preference. The scenarios were set up so as (1) to demonstrate the idiosyncratic at work

and (2) to place contrasting and potentially conflicting 'characters' into an act of communication.

Acknowledgements

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