The Russian Open Game: notes on a Westerner's experience

by Kate Gilbert

Working paper series September 1998

Kate Gilbert, Principal Lecturer, Wolverhampton Business School
tel: 44 (0) 1902 321776
fax: 44 (0) 1902 321777
email: k.gilbert@wlv.ac.uk

Copyright

Abstract

The Russian Open Game is a highly structured set of techniques and procedures for managing an intensive group learning situation extending over a number of days. As such, it offers a challenge to assumptions that the "Russian learning style" does not favour the use of participatory techniques in training and organisational development. While there is a growing literature on the reactions of Russian groups to Western training events and methods, there are few records of the reactions of Western participants on Russian events. The paper presents a description of one iteration of the Russian Open Game, held in Kaluga in May 1998. It sets out the key roles and techniques of the method, and examines issues such as openness, participation and conflict as they arise in the game. It concludes that the Game involves a high level of manipulation of events and group dynamics by the leadership, and that it is this role of the leader-as-choreographer rather than leader-as-facilitator which is the principal area of difference between the Russian Open Game and a typical British participatory training or organisational development event.

The author

Kate Gilbert

Principal Lecturer in Cross-cultural Management in the People and Organisation Management Division of Wolverhampton Business School, Kate Gilbert is also Deputy Associate Dean for Research and Consultancy.   In recent years her research has focused on the dynamics of cross-cultural management knowledge transfer, in the context of management development programmes, specifically in Russia and the Former Soviet Union. She is also interested in the development of public sector management and non-governmental organisations in the emerging social welfare system in Russia.

The Russian Open Game: notes on a Westerner's experience

Introduction

Conventional belief about Russian management education, often based on fairly brief experiences, holds that Russian learners do not take easily to the participatory style which has become taken for granted in Western management training and education programmes. My own experience has been that, when the purpose and rationale of a particular activity is known and understood, a Russian group will throw themselves into the process with just as much enthusiasm and gusto as a British group, and often with more intellectual effort. How was it that there seemed to be this contradiction?

This paper charts the still rather unusual experience of a Westerner as participant in a Russian management development programme, carried out using the specific technology known as the Russian Open Game technique, developed in the 1980s. It is both a participatory and a highly-structured method for taking a large group of participants through an intensive developmental experience over the course of a few days. It thus suits the typical Russian geographical and temporal situation, many people being geographically isolated and needing to make the most intensive use of the short periods of time that they are able to get away from base and devote to their individual development. Having heard about through reading around the subject of Russian management education in the years following the breakup of the Soviet Union, I was interested to find out more about the technique of the Russian Open Game. When invited to participate in the game in Kaluga in May 1998, I accepted with some excitement. Here was a great chance to experience a Russian form of a participatory event from the inside and thus improve my own knowledge and understanding.

The days spent in Kaluga were intensive, exhausting, exhilarating and quite extraordinary. In retrospect I can say that I learned a lot, not least about myself and what it means to be a westerner in Russia. I also gained insights into the Russian Open Game, but while some earlier questions have been answered, many new ones have come to the fore.

- After a brief description of the game, this paper tackles a number of issues or questions which emerged for me as a participant either during or after the experience. These are:
- The role of the facilitator/leader team - issues of power and expertise
- Information for participants
- Notions of "openness" - Relative tightness of content and process
- The idea of participating groups taking up single positions and sticking to them throughout the game (need for integration)
- The impact that the presence of a sizeable number of Westerners had on the dynamics of the game, especially in the plenary sessions
- Issues of language and interpretation
- Conflict as an ingredient in the game

Structure, aims and ethos of the Russian Open Game

The Russian Open Game technique has received interested attention from a number of Western sources, including the Nijmigen Catholic University in the Netherlands, which has forged a partnership with Kaluga Institute of Sociology and stages a ROG event on an annual basis, adopting a different theme each time. Organisers of the event identified a number of global and local themes which the ROG format is capable of addressing, including:

- The global tension between an agenda pushing forward the role of the computer in education and the need to create a stronger social and interpersonal orientation in organisations
- Informational overload and the pressing need to separate the information wheat from the chaff
- The need to develop highly-skilled, knowledge-oriented and proactive personnel
- The imperative for organisations to become learning organisations.
- The specific local challenges facing Russia of societal and economic turbulence, shifts in power, social tension, unemployment and national fragmentation.

"Chaotic society needs special non-traditional educational and learning tools. And we see here two key practical ideas:

1. Universities development as self-learning organisations (in Western terms - learning organisations).

2. Learning processes transfer from a monologue and dialogue approach to the multilologue (polilogue) approach. We take into consideration now forming in Russia new learning discipline - a kind of metapedagogy for the 21st century - as we name it - "The multilogue philosophy and technology". Our experiments and calculations help us to announce that it is possible to shorten a learning period in 1.5 or 2 times with higher resulting quality of professional and social skills and adaptivity for the future (just-in-time self-learning). One of those complex tools we use now to organise temporal learning organisations is the "Russian Open Game" (ROG)" (Zaitsev, 1997).

The most simple definition of the term is that ROG seems to be the "most concentrated simulation of life". The Open Game is characterised as an intensive "multilogue", using specific communication techniques and procedures enabling a process of personal and organisational development. Its proponents argue that it is a good tool for overcoming cross-cultural differences, and this is borne out by the commitment of the Dutch partners to developing their own skills in using the ROG techniques and procedures within their own contexts.

The games are organised for 1-7 days with a number of participants from 12 to 250 persons. People can be organised in 3-10 groups with 5-25 members each. The optimal number is 7+/-2..

There are three phases in a game - projecting, gaming and reflecting. The respective roles of the game team (organiser and facilitator group) and the game participants are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Phases and roles

1. PROJECTING	2. GAME	3. REFLECTING
Game-team activity	Gamers and game- team activities	Game-team activity
(1-6 months)		(2 weeks - two months)
projecting	* instructing	reflection
diagnosis	planning	reporting
* game-team training	self-determination	after-game consultancy
scenario development	group activities	reflection
	* game-team interventions	
	plenary sessions	
	club & relax activities	
	psycho-therapy	
	headquarters	
	game-team end-of-day	
	analysis	

Source: Zaitsev, 1998.

Analysis is based on the experience of more than 250 different games provided by the KaIS gaming team in 1990-1997 in Russia, the Ukraine, the Netherlands. More than 100 of them were of 4-5 days duration.

ROGs are organised on the basis of six main principles:

1. System approach.

2. Dialectical principles.

3. Expert-based approach. All participants and a game-team are exchanging ideas as experts in some field of life and the role of the game organisation team is in handling the self-realisation of gamers' expertise during the game.

4. Activity principle. The situation can be changed only through activity by the gamers in the "here and now". All participants can influence the game programme and procedure, etc.

5. Reflection.

6. Principle of "learning-to-learn".

Table 2. Open games elements and game-team interventions

Elements and norms	Degree of distribution	Methods and interventions	Notes
A. Social island condition:			
1. Conference hotel	All the participants	number of rooms = number of game-groups + one for headquarters	One plenary hall
		fruits and vegetables for free during the game	
2. Communications facilities	A leader and a game team	black-boards and flip-charts	No phones
		round-table chairs for group discussions	
		- the east-oriented plenary	
		discussions with groups at definite places	
		video, overheads, note books, printers, copiers	
B. Positions:			
1.Personal	Players & game team	Reflexive questions.	
2. Group roles	Players and game team		
	Critics	Intergroup and plenary reflections	
	Consultancy	Game item	
3. Game roles	Positional	Individual added instructions	For trained & experienced gamers
C. Organizational rules			
Punctuality	Players	Established in Preliminary instructions	
Don't leave a group			
No telephone calls			
Do not visit home apartments			
No meetings with non-gamers			
2. Activities "just in time"	Players, game team	Preliminary instructions and organisation	
No late arrival for gamers			
Gamers' full-time participation			
Keeping definite			

procedures			
Participation in all the game events			
Acting in the "here and now"			
Only game question analysis			
Club activities		End of day "official activities"	
3. No "shoulder straps"	Games	Reflection	
None here are more equal than others		Critic Consultancy	
No fools but only experts			
4. Rule of the first manager			Face saving
consultancy		Diagnosis and recommendations	
Participation/absence			organisation model
5. Competitiveness		Judge group	The most effective for homogeneous topics
D: Leaders:			
1. Team co-operation			
game team mutual aid	Game team	Team training and scenario-designing	
game-keepers non-competitiveness		Gamekeepers skills	
Game leader's right for a decision			
Rule of patience			The first turns of a game
2. "Not before but after"	Game team, game HQ	Games spoken difficulties	Have to be repeated not less than twice
3.Intervention/consultancy limits		Consultancies	
Not more than 2 notions per game tour		Game processes, reflection	
No lecturing			
4. Collective responsibility for outcomes of the game	Gamers	Feedback, group dynamics, self-determination	
5. Undivided authority			
6. Self-programming	Players, game team	Redesign	
7. Self-development			

8. Expert knowledge surplus	Game team, experts	Diagnosis, Bank of information Key notions analysis	
Information exchange balance	Headquarters	Intervention and consultancy designing during the game	
F. Health limits	For all		
1. No ill participants			
2. Dry rule - no alcohol at all during the period of the game			

The process

The event extended over three full days plus an initial evening session (which I missed due to late arrival), although it is quite common for the game to extend over five or even seven days. During this time, participants are expected to avoid contact with the outside world, and observe certain conventions, such as taking part in evening activities which, while not connected overtly to the theme, contribute to the process. A fairly elaborate set of norms and expectations accompanies joining instructions. These are non-negotiable, and are summarised

There were some 40 participants, of whom over 30 were Russians. Only two of the foreigners, a German aid worker and myself, were Russian speakers. In general, among the participants, there were two types; those who had come to learn more about the theme (the learning organisation in the global context) and those who had come primarily to find out more about the Russian Open Game. These two categories crossed national and cultural divides, so it was possible to identify Russian participants who had been attracted by the possibility of learning more about the Russian Open Game, as well as those who were looking for insights on the learning organisation. Likewise, there were Westerners who had been drawn to the event by the theme itself, as much as by the "Russianness" of the context.

Participants are formed into groups, the optimum size of which is laid down in the rules and conventions as 7, plus or minus 2. Each group takes up a position, or perspective, which is maintained through most or all of the game. The theme of our game being the learning organisation (or the "self-learning organisation"), five groups were created, representing the positions of managers, staff, clients (or customers), competitors, and consultants. In adopting a position, groups were expected to synthesise and elaborate on the specific perspective of "their" position as the game progressed, and deviation from the position was specifically discouraged. There was a certain degree of latitude allowed as to which group individuals would prefer to ally themselves to, and so some deliberately, for example, opted to join the "Consultants" group as this represented their primary professional role in "real life". Others, for reasons of developing alternative perspectives from their professional role, chose different groups, such as "Customers" or "Competitors". Four of the groups were Russian-speaking, and one was a bilingual English-Russian language group made up of foreigners and Russians.

Specific questions are presented to the groups to work on, and bring presentations to plenary sessions. The questions addressed within this game were:

- What is the self-determination of the group within the context of the self-learning organisation? (By this is meant the way the group defines its position, the identity and definition of that position, within the given context)
- What is the structure and form of the Self-learning organisation?
- What are the methods and technologies of the SLO?
- What conflicts can arise during the transition to a SLO?
- What are the global tendencies of the SLO?

Plenary sessions observe a strict process. They are chaired by a member of the game organising team, who keeps people within role and makes sure that the rules are observed. Presentations are taken group by group. First, a member of the group presents the main points arising from the group's deliberations on the question. There is an explicit expectation that each member of the group will have a go at presenting at some stage. Then, questions are invited from the floor. The questioner comes to the front and addresses the assembled company. Questions can only be framed within the context of the presentation, and may not introduce any extraneous element. Usually, seven questions (no more and no less) are taken and answered. The rationale for this number of questions appears to me more than simply for purposes of time management. Setting a limit concentrates minds and discourages flippant or trivial questioning. Questions are expected to move the group forward in its thinking. Following this, feedback, observations and suggestions for future development of its ideas are given to the group from the floor. Then, the original presenter can reply. The form of this reply can be short or long, simple or complex. Once this process is completed, the plenary moves on to the next group, and the whole cycle begins again. If the game organising team think it necessary, the leader or a nominee expert can present a short talk, either at the beginning or end of the plenary session, or in introducing the next question. This talk may clarify a point which is causing some problems to the groups, perhaps by dealing with some ambiguity, or give reflections on how the game is proceeding and whether there are any general problems which need to be addressed.

Conduct of group sessions

Working groups consisted of eight to ten people. Each group was given a room in which to work. Rooms were basically furnished with chairs and a small table, and a flipchart was provided if requested. Groups were expected to keep closely to the brief for their discussion and deliberation set by the Game Leader, and were required to present at the next plenary whether or not they felt ready or inclined to do so. Thus, if they were having problems, they would be expected to present their blocked situation to the plenary group and receive, through questioning and feedback, some enlightenment on how to proceed. This process had some resonance about it of a dialectic struggle, and appeared to have the effect of fostering group cohesion from a very early stage. The level of group discipline throughout the Game was impressive, especially at points when there was dissent and the threat of a split between groups and leadership. The group would assemble and start work analysing the situation and

the question presented to them immediately, even as members were still coming in through the door.

Balance between plenary and group sessions

Most of the group sessions, of which there were four or five in the Game under study, lasted about one and a half hours. This was a rather short time in which to discuss a major question, come to some sort of conclusion, decide how much of the discussion to share with the plenary, and plan a presentation. In contrast, plenary sessions commonly lasted for three hours or even more (partly but not entirely due to the need for consecutive interpretation). The first plenary session of all lasted for a marathon eight hours.   This meant that for the vast bulk of the time, participants were in the role of listener or audience and were not actively engaged in the process.   Apart from the single person who was making the presentation, even groups giving presentations were largely passive most of the time. For some participants, there seemed to be an contradiction between this enforced inactivity and the idea of the game as an active approach to learning. Of course, listening and thinking are key aspects of the learning process, and I would not want to discount their importance, but the balance of time spent in plenary necessarily cut down the time available for *active* listening.

The role of the facilitator/leader team

The roles and responsibilities of the leader, supported by a team of game facilitators, are extensive and quite elaborate. A great deal of planning goes into the game in advance, and during the game there are evening meetings which may go on deep into the night. The leader is responsible for making sure that the groups work effectively in their sessions, as well as for the structure and effectiveness of plenary sessions.

Each group has a facilitator from the game team who works with the group as a participant, but also safeguards the process of the group work and keeps the group "on task". In the case of the "Consultants" group, of which I was a member, this was easier said than done, as all members of the group were strong and assertive, worked as consultants in real life, and, for at least some of the time, wanted to find out about one another and share experiences.   At one point, the group felt collectively that they would try to work alone for a time, without the facilitator; not because she was not doing her job properly, but ironically, she might have been doing it too well!

It was surprising for a Westerner to observe that the leader took multiple roles. Participating as a group member, he thus had "inside knowledge" of one group and not of the others. Such a position would not be viewed as best practice in my own country, where the facilitator, having set up a group activity, is expected to keep a distance unless specifically invited in by a group, and then only for a very short intervention. In a plenary session chaired by another member of the game team, the leader gave feedback and asked questions, as an ordinary participant. This was a risky strategy, as it might be difficult for presenters to know in what capacity he was speaking at any one time. Confusion could thus result, as a criticism coming from the leader as leader is very different from criticism coming from a fellow participant, and in such a codified setting as a game, anything that the leader does carries heavy symbolic significance.

Information for participants

From the point of view of a shared understanding of the theme of the learning organisation (which came to be known as the self-learning organisation, i.e. an organisation in which the learning process is essentially reflexive), there was plenty of information for participants. In his opening briefing, the Leader presented the group with ten key characteristics of the learning organisation. During the group sessions this scheme of characteristics made it possible to talk about the self-learning organisation, in fairly abstract terms. It was difficult to relate these abstractions to real life, and I found myself constantly referring back to my mental constructs of the organisation in which I currently work. This gave me a way in to thinking about the learning organisation which was rooted in my experience, and enabled me to conjure up mental images of managers. staff, customers, competitors and consultants. Without this mental image I felt lost, not knowing whether I was thinking about. for example, the customers of a business school or the customers of a radio factory. The needs and interests of those two groups of customers are very different, and generalisations about them are only helpful at a fairly abstract level. Thus I felt that it would have been helpful for me to have been given one or more case studies of organisations which our groups could have used to stimulate and order our thinking. That way, I reasoned, we could be fairly confident that when we spoke of clients or customers we would have similar concepts in mind. However, when I raised this in a conversation with a Western colleague, I was reminded by him that it is the Anglo Saxon tradition to start with the specific case and generalise to theory, whereas the Roman tradition prefers to start with general principles and apply them to the particular case. So in articulating this problem that I had, I was simply displaying my own cultural influences, and my own learning style.

Notions of openness

To some extent I was at a disadvantage in evaluating the open nature of this "open game", as some important preliminary reading did not reach me in England. Thus I arrived at the workshop on the first morning with only a hazy idea of what was going on.

The respective roles of the leader and the other members of the game team emerged gradually. On the first day, some aspects of the process of the game such as timekeeping seemed rather loose. It was not clear, for example, how long group presentations should last, and so the first plenary session was a marathon of several hours. This was potentially alienating to those participants who expected to be active most of the time. On the other hand, certain aspects of the content, or theme, seemed to be non-negotiable. For instance, aspects of the self-learning organisation, or the global challenges being faced by organisations, were not up for discussion. This was rather different from what would be expected in a British workshop of this type, in that facilitators would be very careful and strict about process issues, such as time-keeping, ground-rules for communication, etc., while (having presented some fairly open-ended stimulus material, such as a case scenario) leaving content issues very much up to the dynamics of group and activity. It is a convention of a modern (or rather post-modern) Anglo-Saxon style of group learning that the facilitator should not be judgmental about the outcomes of group work, but should be open to challenge from the group. It was observed that in Russia this was not the case: the leader or facilitator is empowered to criticise what a

group has produced, while it would be extremely unusual for Russians overtly to challenge their leader.

 Hierarchy ostensibly open, shown in the principle "no one more equal". All participants had equal status within their own group and within the plenary group. One of the organisers, an extremely eminent expert in the field, who took part in the Consultants group for a time, did not take advantage of the elevated status that he would have been given outside.

I was very struck by the openness of the process within our group, and the energy and seriousness with which we applied ourselves. Even when we got a bit silly, crossing the highway with chairs and flipchart to have our group session in the woods, we got straight down to intense discussion straight away.

Positions

A key feature of the Russian Open Game is the positions taken up by the groups. Positions (in this case, managers, staff, clients, competitors, consultants) provide the focus for group activities and the framework for plenaries, as every group, while considering the same question, is considering it from a unique and different perspective. This was a new idea for me. While in my own work I may ask a group of participants to adopt a particular perspective for one activity, it was entirely novel to expect them to maintain their "position" for as long as three days. I didn't see how it was possible at first, and I was very impressed to observe that not only is it possible, but it also works. The maintenance of positions leads in group work to a high level of cohesion, but enough depth to ensure that there is a certain amount of challenge in the debate, and in plenaries, reduces the level of duplication, building up a complex picture which reflects the diversity of real life.

However, I agree with the colleague who has suggested that towards the end of the game there should be an effort made to integrate the different perspectives. Otherwise people may go away feeling pessimistic about the prospects for integration. This could be done by setting up heterogeneous groups for the final round, or by changing the tempo completely and inserting a new kind of activity, such as the development of a collective mural or graffiti board.

Participation of Westerners

Obviously, any ideas about the impact that the Westerners had on the dynamics of the game could only be conjectural, as it is of course impossible for me to experience a game without the presence of westerners. Observational data collected at the time does however indicate different patterns of behaviour between Russian and Western participants in the plenary sessions. In particular, Westerners took the floor in question and feedback sessions to a degree out of proportion to their numbers in the group. A small cohort of Western participants made a point of speaking at every available opportunity in the plenary session, whereas Russian participants appeared to be less intent on making their views known to the wider audience. This may, of course, be because informal debate was constrained for the Westerners who were unable because of lack of Russian language to converse freely with other participants during breaks and non-programmed times. Whatever the reason, there was a discernible domination of the "floor discussion" by Westerners. To some extent, freedom of

discussion and the flow of question and answer was constrained by the need to provide consecutive interpretation whenever a Westerner (English-speaker) was talking, as it was necessary for the interpreter to project her/his voice across the whole room. When Russians were speaking, it was more feasible for interpreters to provide simultaneous translation to the small group of Westerners sitting nearby. This in turn influenced the proxemics and group dynamics in the plenary, however, as all non-Russian speakers were compelled to sit close together and lean in unison toward the interpreter. This point leads to wider questions of language and interpretation.

Issues of language and interpretation

Consultants, members of staff of KaIS, acted as interpreters for plenary sessions, and for the bilingual group in which most of the Westerners participated. Their command of English was impressive, and they did an extremely good job in some quite difficult circumstances. For example, several of the Russian participants were understandably unused to working with interpreters, and tended to run on with their speech leaving the interpreter struggling to catch up. Others, Russians and Westerners alike, would speak in whole paragraphs, challenging the interpreters to remember what they said at the beginning. Thus, quite a lot of the detail and nuances of what was being said in Russian in the plenary sessions was lost to the foreigners. Some of these, not being native English-speakers, were mentally translating from their native language to English and back again, which took up some of their attention and a lot of their mental energy. So it is probably fair to say that, with the exception of those who were fully bilingual, nobody was working at the peak of their mental efficiency in the plenaries. The possible exception is the interpreters, who were constrained in this role and were not able to contribute their own ideas as individuals in their own right.

To my mind, the ideal situation is to bite the bullet and pay the going rate to professional interpreters, briefing them fully in advance about the key terms which they will encounter in the event. (Most problems with professional interpreters are caused by lack of preparation on both sides.) Although this would add to the costs of the event, it would free the bilingual consultants to contribute their professional expertise to the process of the game, and this would be a net benefit to everyone.

Conflict as an ingredient in the game

It is apparent that there is an expectation that there will some kind of conflict or crisis during the course of the game. Prigozhin (1988) has written about this, suggesting that groups will reach a point where they cannot see a way forward for integrating different group perspectives and reaching a solution. In our open game in Kaluga, the leader presented us with an analysis of the "crisis" which had occurred the previous evening. I had been resting and in the sauna for much of that evening, enjoying the company new and old women friends, and so had no idea what this crisis was about. It was clear from the faces of many of the participants that they had no idea either. I started to become indignant and could feel my emotions building up. At the moment that I became conscious of this, I felt that I understood. I wondered whether a conflict situation was being consciously generated. Certainly, there had perhaps been some "rumblings of discontent" the previous evening. The "psychological activity" which we had engaged in, drawing a group picture of our experiences so far, had created an

interesting diversion but had not taken us very far, and some had noted that the leader had not been there to observe our efforts Later there had been quite a lot of drinking, and of course when people drink, their inhibitions are lowered and they speak more freely. Perhaps this talk about a crisis was a way of asserting the authority of the leader for the final stage of the process. Interestingly, after a rather uncomfortable period of introspection and analysis, the groups did seem to work very effectively up to and through the final plenary session, and in the final round a participant observed that the conflict situation of the morning had been necessary and productive.

Overall impressions

The Russian Open Game is undoubtedly a powerful "technology" for individual and collective learning. The adoption of a position for three or more days challenges the participant to think in new ways and apply discipline and rigour in that thinking. The group context provides both support and challenge in that thinking. The alternation of plenary and group sessions enables an iterative process of learning to take place, in which one's own positional thinking is constantly set against a broader context of the other positions. In this way, the game manages to avoid some of the pitfalls of other forms of participatory group-work, in which valid and valuable differences of opinion may be glossed over for the sake of a spurious consensus. It does not entirely escape, however, the risk of the phenomenon known as "group-think", the tendency of groups to adopt a single point of view and to disregard competing explanations or suggestions. To some extent, the leader sets up a group-think situation at the beginning of the game by presenting his or her definition of the theme of the game and a number of key points or characteristics. In this way, in our game, everything about the "self-learning organisation" was open for debate except what we mean by a self-learning organisation. As a member of the positional group of Consultants, I came away having learned at least as much about consultancy and the role of the consultant as I had about the self-learning organisation. This may be because, in plenary, we did not have time to integrate our group findings sufficiently before the end of the workshop. It may be because of the problems of interpreting very abstract and novel concepts in real time. It may be because we did not have a clear example of a self-learning organisation to focus our thinking (although it is arguable that our positions should be enough). It may be a combination of all these factors. Or it may be simply that I as an individual at this moment, am more focused on my own practice as a consultant than on the learning of the organisation in which I spend most of my working time. What we as participants take from an experience like this depends very much on what we bring to it, and what we find within the process. The technology is not the learning itself, but provides a framework for the learning to take place. To that extent, leaders and facilitators can only be responsible for the process, and not for the outcome. The outcome depends on ourselves, and the outcome is ourselves. This is the challenge of participatory learning.

Conclusions

Experience of the Russian Open Game presents a challenge to the assumption that highly participative approaches to learning are inappropriate within the Russian context, owing to

cultural differences in teaching and learning styles, and different expectations of the learning situation. It is clearly simplistic to contend that Russian learners are reluctant to engage in participatory techniques such as simulations. Indeed, evidence suggests that, in a highly structured context, Russian groups and individuals will engage with such techniques with a level of commitment, concentration and seriousness unusual in the average British group. Nevertheless, the degree of structure of the game, and the degree to which the leader is prepared to adopt a directive stance, to the extent of laying down parameters for conceptual framing and discussion of concepts, suggests that there are differences, which focus on the respective roles of leader, game team and group members, and which suggest a clear hierarchy of expertise and authority. The leader acts as choreographer rather than facilitator in the Russian Open Game. To this extent, the Western participant-as-observer is compelled to question the degree to which the game is indeed "open", in that neither the process nor the outcome appear to be entirely open. Such questions reveal possible cultural differences in the conception of leader as learner-facilitator in training and organisational development situations, which are open to further and more structured research.

_____

References

PRIGOZHIN, A.I. (1988) *Game methods of collective decision making in management consulting*. Moscow, Moskovskii Rabochi Publishers, translated and reprinted in *Soviet Education*, December 1991, vol.33, no.12. pp 25-45.

ZAITSEV, (1998). "The Russian Open Game Management Technology". Paper presented at the International Fred Emery Memorial Conference "On the future of Universities and Education" in Turkey, Instanbul.