

# The Role of the Arts in Organizational Settings

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*This article explores the significance of three of the arts in organization development (OD). The art of storytelling is discussed through the lenses of music, drama, and poetry. The article discusses how narrative presented through corporate song lyrics, theatrical scripts and techniques, and poems encourages organization members to make creative sense of the organization culture and change. The application of these media to OD was identified through a review of the literature that verified the use of these three arts in developing people at the corporate level.*

**Keywords:** *art; music; drama; poetry; organization development*

Works of art that are not remote from common life, that are widely enjoyed in a community, are signs of a unified collective life. But, they are also marvelous aids in the creation of such a life. The remaking of the material of experience in the act of expression is not an isolated event confined to the artist and to a person here and there who happens to enjoy the work. In the degree in which art exercises its office, it is also a remarking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity.

(Dewey, 1934, p. 81)

John Dewey (1934), the pragmatist philosopher, stated in *Art as Experience* that art is created not only for aesthetic pleasure or economic consumption but also for the development of the powers of perception and creativity. In the rapidly changing world of the 21st century, can OD practitioners and organizations gain benefit from the arts? This article explores the arts and their aesthetic

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pleasure through three media—music, drama, and poetry—and investigates the roles of these media from an organization development (OD) perspective. There have been a number of studies suggesting that there is benefit from the cross-fertilization of the fine arts, management, and nation building in the development of creativity, commitment, and innovation (Adler, 2006; Austin & Devin, 2003; Bartunek & Carboni, 2006; Nissley, 1999).

The 2004 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, offered a workshop, “If an Artist Ran Your Business”; Denmark opened the world’s first business-school-based center for art and leadership at the beginning of the 21st century; and corporate recruiters in North America are increasingly visiting top art and design schools in search of corporate talent (Adler, 2006). According to Pink (2004), not only is an art degree the new hot credential, the MFA (Master of Fine Arts) is becoming the new business degree. The Academy of Management has created an Arts and Poetry group—adding the arts to the ranks of business policy, human resource management, international management, and organizational behavior, for example, as a worthy area for discussion (Adler, 2006).

Nissley (2007) held that successful organizations have effective leaders who focus on the process of generating possibilities—thinking of new things and seeing existing things in different ways. Therefore, we believe that it is worthwhile to explore the dynamics of narrative or storytelling (these two words are used interchangeably in this article) and investigate how music, drama, and poetry, as forms of storytelling, can help scholars and practitioners develop a better understanding of organizational culture, effective intervention methods, and ways to develop human resources in organizations.

In our literature review, we first explored the significance of storytelling as an artful method to explore and study phenomena in organizational settings. We then report, explicitly, on the impact of the three different modes of aesthetics—music, drama, and poetry—on organizations.

## Organizational Aesthetics and Storytelling

Aesthetics can contribute to people in a small society, known as an organization, in several meaningful ways. Aesthetics can be helpful to organizations in enhancing an understanding of how minds appreciate and value form; an important condition for the form of anything to be experienced as beautiful is that the form needs to be related to felt forms of life (Ramirez, 1996).

Gagliardi (1996) defined aesthetic experience as: (a) a form of knowledge (sensory knowledge, different from intellectual knowledge), (b) a form of action (expressive vs. instrumental), and (c) a form of communication (different from speech). This article focuses mainly on the sensory knowledge of the aesthetic and its relation to OD. The notion of organizational aesthetic in relation to sensory knowledge is evident in Bartunek and Carboni’s (2006) conclusion that “organizational aesthetics is concerned with creating, representing, conveying, and understanding organizational knowledge that arises from

sensory experience” (p. 503). Taylor and Hansen (2005) also suggested that sensory experiences that can be apprehended directly through our five senses influence how our thoughts, feelings, and reasoning inform our cognitions. Although intellectual knowing is driven by a desire for clarity, objective truth, and instrumental goals, aesthetic knowing is driven by a desire for subjective, tacit knowledge and personal truth that we might apply to inquiry in organizational settings.

Sound is essentially sensory, and it has been the interpreter of human thought and emotion since the preverbal culture (Hiley, 2006). According to Haskell (2002), music and rhythm preceded the use of words in communication; before alphabets and written language, “the songs were formed of sounds and patterns, with the human voice as the instrument” (p. 148). As spoken language developed, the shift from making music to making plays and poetry occurred, and “that context dwelt as nuance in the voice of the storyteller” (Hiley, 2006, p. 156). It is essentially established in our learning spaces that we are most pressed to provide forms to things unknown, for example, in expressing the dynamics of organization change (Hiley, 2006). Language shapes perception, and to enter language is to enter a form of life. Senge (1995) added that to hear systemwide and holistic interrelationships, we need a language made up of circles, sounds and silences, reverberations, vibrations, and rhythm; without such language, our habitual ways of seeing the world produce fragmented pictures and counterproductive actions. He held that such a holistic language is particularly important in encountering dynamically complex issues and strategic choices, especially when individuals, teams, and organizations need to view beyond the present situation into factors that shape change.

Corrigan (1997) posited that “if we learn to modify our languaging of an event we can perceive the event differently and we can experience the event differently. The event can thus be conceived differently in our consciousness” (p. 97). Following Corrigan’s perception, we believe that one way to “modify languaging of an event” is to “see” and “hear” (p. 97) the event from its own language by using and making the most of our senses. Organizational events are distinguished from their external environments by means of narrative boundaries that enable organizations to be constructed orderly, rationally, and purposively, whereas the environment is represented as chaotic and unstructured. Storytelling analysis techniques therefore can be used in the field to reveal the construction and deconstruction of organizational order, systems, and culture. Boje (2001) theorized that to gain knowledge about an organization, it is essential to follow the person’s thinking, to see knowledge in practices, and to hear its professionalism and actual stories—what is assumed, attempted, or implemented in such stories? This is congruent with social constructionist thought: categories and interpretations used by storytellers are linked to social “webs of significance” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5), webs that empower some and disempower others. Boje (2001) also posited that goals and intentions of organization stories supposedly are not embedded in structures outside of

actual circumstances but have to be identified within the text of actual events. The main purpose of this article is to present how aesthetic senses are used in the form of musical lyrics, poems, and dramatic script to analyze and deconstruct organizational text to enhance the management of change. Storytelling or narrative has come into play when stories are told strategically within organizations. Polkinghorne (1988) explained that “narrative is a form of meaning making. . . . The narrative scheme serves as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole” (p. 36). Boje, Gephart and Thatchenkery (1996) stated that it is interesting how leaders are able to fashion stories that concern issues of personal and group identity within the organization using a narrative approach, an approach that can make the political economies of the organization more visible. Barry and Elmes (1997) raised the interesting questions: “Who gets to write and read stories/strategies? How are reading and writing linked to power? Who is marginalized in the writing/reading process? And how are rhetoric dynamics increase (or undermine) organization or group credibility?” (p. 432).

In addition, Barry and Elmes held that narrative theory assumes that subjective heterogeneous interpretations of texts are the norm of storytelling in organizational settings; different readers are assumed to comprehend texts rendered differently, depending on their history, values, and beliefs. It is essential that organizations consider discussion of strategy through a storytelling approach, simply one of many possible interpretations, one fashioned not as provable truth but rather provocative point of view, a perspective that opens up new trains of thought (Barry, 1997a). Boje (1991, 1994) highly advocated the use of artistic forms of storytelling as a medium that can capture and communicate the felt experience, the affect, and the tacit knowledge of the day-to-day, moment-to-moment reality of organizations. Increasing the diversity of the ways in which we approach organizations increases the complexity of what we find there. The alternative practices of narrative or storytelling allow us to see an object that is also the subjective experience of organizational life (Phillips, 1995). Phillips, among other scholars, advocated for the benefits of encouraging the use of novels, short stories, plays, songs, poems, and films as legitimate approaches to the study of management and organizations.

Through this article, we provide a deeper sense of meaning and purpose of narrative through three modes of art—music, plays, and poetry. We believe that inasmuch as questions of voice, style, and act are raised, reflexivity of what has happened in organizations can be contemplated. It is important to make room for a wider array of alternative representational practices to seek out meaning in organizations, and we find the possibilities opened up by the blurry boundary of art and science exciting and liberating. In this article, we first address different kinds of musical lyrics as a key platform for locating and discussing storied accounts. We then move on to discuss the role of organizational theater and certain theatrical techniques used to help members understand

their organization cultures as well as to locate contemporary issues. Lastly, we draw on poetry as a narrative means to help organization members relate stories and symbolically present their thoughts on change and OD.

## Music in Organizations

Corbett (2003) concluded that organization scholars have been enslaved by a primary epistemological organ—the eye. Meanwhile, the ear, with its preference for rhythm, harmony, and temporality, seems to have been ignored by most scholars. Whereas the eye locates use in space, with objects, vision, and perceptions of foreground and background, the ear tends to better address the chaotic, complex, and multilayered aspects of organizing by turning us into routines, performance, resonances, relations, speaking, and listening (Corbett, 2003; Prichard, Korczynski, & Elmes, 2007).

Essentially, musical lyrics have been used in a number of organizations as a means to help members make sense of their organization culture and social meanings. Nissley (2002b) posited that the text of organizational songs emphasizes social meaning and can be analyzed in terms of how it describes a social context (e.g., organizational life). Management at two Japanese companies, Kyoden and Canon, were reported to use their corporate songs as means of promoting role modeling and inculcating their respective sets of company values and norms, such as team spirit, harmony, and quality, into the local workforces when the companies expanded their production to China (Hong, Easterby-Smith, & Snell, 2006). According to Hong et al. (2006), companies' songs were sung and chanted along with other corporate activities to foster socialization and corporate culture maintenance rituals, from the general manager down to the operative workers; it was necessary to organize such rituals and activities to cultivate among the local Chinese an inclination to work and learn in teams. Although we may think of the songs sung by workers in Japan and China, or by new employees at new worker boot camps in Korea, organizational songs abound throughout the world. The lyrics of such songs typically express histories, memories, emotions, and ideologies. Full-scale musicals set to an organizational theme have been used in corporate celebrations in several U.S. companies as top executives realize that taking time to celebrate is an integral part of doing business; they anticipate that the cost of the gathering will be offset by the subsequent dividends it reaps in employee morale, commitment, and hard work; seasonal celebrations are also used to enhance the corporate spirit (Deal & Key, 1998). The ups and downs, and triumphs and failures, of corporate life must be dealt with periodically with ceremonial events; otherwise, the collective spirit that unites people in a common ground begins to disappear. Deal and Key stated, "People are homo festivos, their lives dominated by a common yearning for special times and gala occasions. Without them, we diminish an integral part of our humanity" (p. 5).

In Australia (as in many countries), military organizations utilize rituals, traditions, symbols of rank, and ceremonial occasions to develop both the internal identity and external image of their organizations and to productively promote a sense of esprit de corps; one powerful vehicle for enhancing many of these functions is through the use of music and the military band that perform essential roles within the organization for formal parades, functions, and ceremonies, entertaining troops and developing public relations (Boyle, 2003).

Nissley, Taylor, and Butler (2002) examined the organizational songs of the Maytag Company (U.S.-based manufacturer of home appliances) sales organization and its culture developed during the invention of the washing machine technology in the early 20th century. Nissley et al. (2002) considered organizational songs as an organizational discourse and aesthetic expression of organizational culture with the power to shape the identity and actions of the Maytag sales organization as well as power over consumer and employee behavior. In the Maytag Company, organizational songs were recorded in song books and sung at sales meetings or conventions and social events. For this, Nissley et al. contended that these organizational songs may be thought of as an earlier form of self-managing technology or normative rules found in modern management; singing these songs embodied the structure of culture and identity that salespeople had created, reminding them of rules of behavior that went with Maytag's culture and identity.

Corporate songs have increasingly gained popularity, according to a CNN (2002) report; some songs are written by departments as lighthearted entertainment, whereas others are created by management with high production values. KPMG's "Our Vision of Global Strategy," PricewaterhouseCoopers' two songs "Your World" and "Downright Global," McKinsey & Company's "McKC," and IBM's "Ever Onward" are some of the corporate anthems mentioned in the report. El-Sawad and Korczynski (2007) described the role and value of corporate songs, citing several IBM songs as examples. The IBM archives Web pages describe music as a traditional medium for communications and a mainstay of IBM's corporate culture. Other scholars (Maney, 2003; Watson & Petre, 1990) have reported that at sales conventions and other corporate gatherings, patriotic and fellowship songs were sung variously in praise of IBM and in adoration of IBM's founder, T. J. Watson Sr. and of senior executives and more junior staff who had become exemplar IBM employees. Prichard et al. (2007) noted that the extraordinary use of songbooks in the corporate world casts light on the ordinary: the *ordinary* is the widespread absence of Western employers using music to engage workers actively in the terrain of meaning making. Corporate anthems are a reflection of corporate culture, not only at the artifact level but also at the deeper level of the organization culture that Schein (1987) defined as

a pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration—that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore,

to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 385)

According to Schein (1987), when one enters an organization, the first things seen, heard, or felt are its artifacts. They represent the most visible aspects of organizational culture, and they provide clues about the less tangible levels of organizational culture. Schein labeled the middle level of culture as espoused values that represent preferences for what should happen. It is believed that the values of the organizational founder or chief executive officer (CEO) play a critical role in shaping the organization's culture; founder values exert a strong influence on the values held by employees (Zhaoxun, 2005). The deepest level of organization culture is basic underlying assumptions, including truth, reality, and ways of thinking and feeling developed through repeated successes in solving problems (Schein, 1987).

As the underlying assumptions are unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, they are not directly observable and instead must be inferred from what can be seen and heard in organizations; the visible and audible manifestations of culture are seen in artifacts and espoused values (Schein, 1992). Hoshin (2004) posited that organizing processes create a sense of organizational musicality; the dynamic is at once cultural, task and routine specific, embodied, and unconscious. Similarly, Prichard et al. (2007) held that although the theoretical challenges to develop knowledge about organization culture are significant, the epistemological first move is quite modest; rather than using one's eyes and looking at the organization, they suggested that the first move is to explore the soundscapes of work and organizations, and through this to take the epistemological step toward the deeper level of culture ingrained in organizations. Furthermore, there is a particular power in organizational songs because songs are enjoyable; a song that is enjoyed for its own sake is more memorable and is repeated (Nissley et al., 2002). According to Nissley et al., the more we enjoy the song, the more we are induced into the moment and the more the aesthetic experience influences the instrumental concerns of the moment; as the aesthetic experience dominates the individual's critical functions and filters become less active, the felt meaning of the story of the song is allowed to be accepted unquestionably.

## **Drama in Organizations**

Drama is another aesthetic influence on OD. Musical lyrics and plays share a similarity as a means of storytelling of a particular organization. Storytelling in organizations is a commonality in music and theater. The history of storytelling or narrative as an OD intervention can be traced back to the late 1970s, where managers who worked on a project were asked to write short stories to express their concept of an ideal organization (Tyler, 2007). Tyler (2007) explained that there are four types of stories and storytelling in organizations:

(a) emergent storytelling, (b) elicited or invited storytelling, (c) performed storytelling, and (d) cocreated storytelling. For the purpose of this article, only performed storytelling will be further discussed as a means used by music and theater in an organizational context, though all four forms are relevant as examples of the application of the arts in OD work.

Performed stories are stories that are consciously structured and systematically linked to organizational goals (Tyler, 2007). Performed stories in organizational contexts can be studied from strategic and tactical perspectives (Denning, 2001; Garguilo, 2002; Lipman, 1999; Slan, 1998; all cited in Tyler, 2007). Drama, if adjusted to corporate goals, can be used as a tool for understanding organizational issues. Taylor, Fisher, and Dufresne (2002) described the use of the arts in organizational settings through management-as-theater, organization-as-narratives, and management-as-musical ensembles.

Padaki (n.d.) posited, "The theatre is mankind's oldest laboratory for experiential learning and change" (p. 1). Padaki (1993) explained that much of the domain of OD derives from the perspective of the organization as an open system; he introduced the concept of hybridization as a way to take training methods from one sphere to another to assist in behavioral changes. Theater training methodology, he claimed, is particularly effective in helping people internalize systemic realities in a given context and in acquiring the habit of systems thinking.

Leading business schools worldwide are integrating arts-based courses in their curriculum (Adler, 2006). Three of the 2003-2004 MIT's Sloan Leadership courses had arts-based elements, including "Unconventional Leadership: A Performing Advantage" and "Leadership as Acting: Performing Henry V"; the University of Chicago has required a Leadership Exploration and Development course in which MBAs write, produce, and showcase a film; Oxford University in the United Kingdom offers executives a course taught by conductor Peter Hanke, "Leadership as a Performing Art"; actor-director Richard Olivier's Mythodrama in Residence at Cranfield University offers leadership development programs based on Shakespeare (Adler, 2006).

Padaki (n.d.) stated that the power of the theatrical performance in stimulating thought, enhancing emotionality, and widening options in behavior has been known for decades; management literature has been reporting that organization education and training worldwide have had a tendency to be enormously left brain oriented, at the price of the strong potential for management maturity that comes from right brain development. Theater training methodology is perceived to be effective for unlocking and developing employees' intuition, insight, and creative thinking.

In line with Padaki's (1993) concept of hybridization of theater and OD, Meisiek (2002, 2004) suggested the concept of Organization Theater as the conscious use of theatrical techniques in organizations at a specific point in time. According to Meisiek (2003), the organizers of organization theater take the perspective of life-as-theater and implement the techniques of theater in



stage plays for the benefit of employees. Employees are the audience in organization theater and, in most cases, trained actors play the roles. Meisiek (2004) posited that professional organizers of organization theater typically provide consulting service to the company; their work is supposed to serve organizational purposes, as defined by human resource management or strategic management.

In his recent work, Meisiek (2007) provided an example on how the theatrical technique was literally used in a home care organization before and during the performance and detailed what happened following it. The home care organization in his study prior to the theatrical performance was experiencing sinking tax revenues, downsizing, and a prevailing sense of insecurity among its 3,000 employees; therefore, restructuring was envisioned and implemented for community services.

Faced with a negative atmosphere, two managers had the idea of using organization theater to start a general discussion about restructuring efforts and the difficulties faced by the home care workers in their daily work routines. The organization contacted Dacapo Teatret, an organization theater company that had provided its services during a 1-year period with 30 identical performances with about 100 employees in each audience. Dacapo started as change management by using "I Bear It With a Smile," the play tailor-made for home care services. The change agents used "Boal's Forum Theater Approach" (Meisiek, 2007, p. 178) to produce an emotional discourse in the audience. Such discourse produces an impulse for action that carries over into everyday life and leads audience members to motivation for actions previously disregarded. The basic process is the use of rejection and not of acceptance as making space for employees to regain the feeling of being heard and giving them indirect opportunity to adapt to the restructuring that had taken place. In the second half of the play, the audience is introduced to bureaucratic procedures in the home care organization, alongside different interpersonal relationships between home care worker and client; home care worker and home care worker; home care worker and manager, and finally, manager and manager.

When asked about the effects the theater performances had in the home care organization, the managers quoted results from an annual employee satisfaction questionnaire. Over the year that the performances were put on, employee satisfaction had been enhanced. The managers attributed this attitude change to their theater initiative and were thoroughly convinced that it was a worthwhile investment. The manager however did relatively little follow-up on thoughts and ideas after the play. The only follow-up was the printing of a deck of cards given to all employees; each card indicated a scene from the play, the line spoken during the scene, some illustration of the problems of each scene, and a word of encouragement about the issues discussed. All of these served as a reminder of the play, yet they never got used systematically.

The practice of organizational theater brings us back to the concept of identifying organizational culture as earlier described. Although corporate

songs illustrate the way organization members perceive and react to organization culture at the artifact level, as earlier described, plays can speak the beliefs, values, and practices of the audience members (Schoenmakers, 1996). Audiences who participate in organization theater are fairly homogeneous because they share a common background in their profession, receive similar training, follow similar career paths, possess a distinctive work identity, and share values and beliefs grounded in organizational culture.

According to Schoenmakers (1996), after the structured play ends, the narrator typically reflects on the culture by stepping to the stage and encouraging the audience to share ideas, to propose solutions, or to come to the stage and assume one of the roles. Several scenes can be played again, reflecting the various ideas of the audience. This in turn provides the opportunity for employees to voice their concerns, to play with the different roles, and to try different approaches to understand the explicit and implicit values and beliefs of the organization.

In addition to the use of drama as reflection of organizational culture and as a change management tool, drama is also used to teach managers on the skill of organizational improvisation. Why improvisation? Improvisation is a tool to help managers understand and respond to the situation on the spot without preconception or preset plans. Perhaps managers need to respond more effectively to rapidly changing situations in the fierce business environment of the 21st century. McLean (2006) discussed the redefinition of OD and argued that the world in which we live is too complex to plan change; he stated that “change, both positive and negative, imposes itself on us from many sources, most of which are beyond our control” (p. 6).

Researchers have analyzed organizational improvisation, particularly in fast-moving competitive settings, such as new product development (Eisenhardt & Tabrizi, 1995; Moorman & Miner, 1998a, 1998b), a changed political context (Alinsky, 1969), a failed navigational system (Hutchins, 1991), and during emergencies, such as a strike (Preston, 1991, cited in Miner, Bassoff, & Moorman, 2001). Certainly, we could add the situations caused by the 9/11 tragedies in the United States, the tsunami tragedies in south and southeast Asia, and Hurricane Katrina in the southern United States—all of which showed a range of preparedness in using improvisation.

Miner et al. (2001) concluded that the core of the prior work on organizational improvisation has suggested that “the result of prior learning, organization memory, shapes the skillful and fruitful improvisation of novel performances” (p. 304). They found that organizational improvisation can fruitfully be seen as a special type of short-term, real-time learning as well as long-term, trial-and-error learning, and the key learning outcome resides in the organization’s knowledge base. Charles Mingus, a renowned jazz composer noted for his inspired improvisations and protean rhythms, put it best: “You can’t improvise on nothin’, man, you gotta improvise on somethin’” (Kao, 1996, p. 34). Improvisation can be developed in managers by placing them in

present time; as they become more and more accustomed to constant surprises, managers become better and better at keeping themselves free of expectations and preconceptions; they become more capable of reacting creatively to possibilities that were not envisioned in advance (Miner et al., 2001).

Firms can apply theatrical techniques to organizational improvisation in several ways. According to Seham (2001), one unbreakable rule in improvisational theater is the rule of agreement. Agreement requires each improviser to accept, support, and develop the ideas expressed by other performers on stage without denying a player's reality. This also means that anything strange, which might be considered as a mistake, should be justified and incorporated into the scene, while actors agree not to judge contributions as a mistake and to make the most of whatever is in front of them and move the action forward. Crossan (1998) held that the principle of agreement enables actors to be secure in taking risks and to expand further than they have before.

Firms can develop an improvisational capability by incorporating the notion of agreement as a value of their organization cultures. Working in such a culture, organizational members know they can take risks when encountering something new because their improvisational efforts will be supported by others. As in theater, successful improvisation in business needs a culture that is experimental and tolerant of some errors (Vera & Crossan, 2004). Cunha, Cunha, and Kamoche (1999) posited that an experimental culture not only provides the chance to use improvisation skills by encouraging individuals to feel confident, competent, and comfortable but also provides them with the resources (e.g., time, people, and money) that enable improvisational efforts to be successful; an experimental culture promotes competent mistakes that come from novel ideas and not from flawed execution. If not in the short term, several initiations of improvisation are likely to lead to positive outcomes in the medium and long term.

One fundamental principle of improvisational theater is the emphasis on process rather than on product outcomes, which differentiate improvisational theater from other forms of art (Sawyer, 2000). The performance of a firm is judged in terms of the accomplishment of its goals, and the process of attaining goals is perceived as less essential than the actual fact of achieving them. According to Vera and Crossan (2004), the focus on the outcome performance put great pressure on organizational improvisation. When encountering a problem or unexpected situation, individuals and groups are less likely to use improvisational skills if they perceive that they will be appraised by the outcome rather than by the process of attempting to take advantage of the opportunities or to solve the problem (Vera & Crossan, 2004).

One theatrical technique that helps actors to focus on the process rather than on the outcome is "yes-anding" (Crossan, 1998; Vera & Crossan, 2004), which relates to acknowledging the offers of others and building on them. An example of the yes-anding technique in an organization can be illustrated through the discovery of the Post-It note by 3M employees (Fry 1987, cited in

Vera & Crossan, 2004, p. 738). A company researcher discovered the product's bonding agent accidentally while trying to develop its opposite, super-strong adhesive. The researcher took the adhesive result he had not intended to produce and asked others within 3M how they thought it might be used. The second 3M researcher yes-anded the original idea and considered the application of the failed adhesive in keeping pieces of scrap paper from falling out of his church choir book. The rules of 3M allowed employees to make mistakes and to explore undiscovered paths in the process of creating new products, and this led to the Post-It notes we know today. Firms wanting to develop yes-anding capability need to instruct organization members of the rules of their process, which is to define the principles and minimal constraints within which individuals may free their creativity and insert spontaneity.

Another basic technique of improvisational theater used in organizations is real-time information and communication (Barrett, 1998). Whereas in improvisational theater the ideas and stories exist within the group, individuals in businesses have the opportunity to draw on ideas and information beyond the immediate group. Therefore, to perform effective improvisation, organization members need to be attentive to their organization context at several levels (e.g., the group, the firm, and the industry). This emphasizes that organization members have access to real-time information and communication about what is happening now and what can be formal, informal, internal, and external. When real-time information is provided, communication flows in a wide-ranging and timely manner (Moorman & Miner, 1998).

Furthermore, an application of the theatrical technique called awareness can be used to enhance the concept of real-time information in strategic decision making. Eisenhardt (1997) studied executives who attended to real-time information, finding that they can obviously develop their intuition, and those aided by intuition can respond quickly and accurately to the changing environment. Immediate feedback from real-time information and communication is very useful in facilitating the improvisation process by substituting the coordinating role of a plan and allowing groups to learn about the result of their actions as they improvise (Eisenhardt, 1997).

At the bottom line, all theatrical techniques render benefits to improvisers who possess context-specific knowledge and memory of their organizations. Vera and Crossan (2004) argued that

improvisation does not mean that anything goes; improvisation always occurs within a structure and all improvisation draw on ready-mades . . . the memory of the improvisational trope, as a whole, stores information about scenes created in the past that actors can recombine in present improvisations. (pp. 741-742)

Firms can learn from theater by drawing on ready-made situations while improvising. In business, ready-mades are transformed into the concept of organizational memory that has been stored from an organization's history that

can be brought to incorporate with present decisions (Vera & Crossan, 2004). When individual and group knowledge and experiences are institutionalized, they are stored in the organization's systems, structure, culture, norms, beliefs, and procedures.

Many theater groups work with businesses to create company-specific drama for training and for entertainment, especially in the sensitive areas of sexual harassment and diversity. *The Brave New Workshop*, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is one such example. Comedians are often used in company gatherings for the purpose of celebration and to add humor to what might otherwise be difficult or sensitive material. Bill Cosby is another example of someone who frequently participates in such activities.

## Poetry in Organizations

The use of poetry to stimulate creativity is a good example of learning in organizations. De Cock (2000) suggested that poetry as literature can be used as a source of insight that might inspire organizational scholars to set up activities that enable readers to make up their own minds by creating texts that value imagination and enthusiasm over analysis and dry knowledge. To elaborate, Daft (1983) proposed that another side to the decision-making process concerns intuition and feelings: if the rational research model about organizations can be characterized as left brain activity, then several research decisions are made in the nonlinear area of the right brain. Daft contended that human organizations are extremely complex; therefore, one goal of organization research is to understand a small piece of organizational reality in which everything in organizations may be related to everything else. For such an idea, poetry seems to be useful as it renders greater applicability to organizational study.

Phillips (1995) argued that poetry as one type of narrative fiction should not replace any of the conventional practices of organizational analysis, but rather the nature of narrative fiction makes it a valuable adjunct to the current methods of organizational analysis.

Similar to the use of drama as a means of storytelling about an organization, the use of poetry is another artistic way to tell stories through literature (De Cock, 2000) or through narrative fiction (Phillips, 1995; Rhode & Brown, 2005). The use of narrative fiction, as often contained in poetry, provides an opportunity to present issues in a more dramatic form that would lead to an open and honest conversation (Phillips, 1995). This is in line with Whyte (1994)—a full-time poet and a sought-after organizational consultant—who contended that poetry can bring about change by seeding conversations that may be hard for many organizations to encounter, but that are however the ones that managers and employees deeply desire.

Kostera (1997) provided a sequence of poems by several writers as a means of looking at organizations and management that attest to the relationship

between feelings and organizing; these poems were claimed to “reflect new ways of thinking about organizations and management, grounded in very local and powerful feelings” (p. 347) and shed light on the way to treat organization members as legitimate holders of local knowledge. In line with Kostera, Whyte stated in his interview with Essex and Mainemelis (2002) that his objective was to introduce poetry to organizations to stimulate creativity and create discussion and exploration on issues of identity and change in the workplace. For example, one of the sessions Whyte conducted for Boeing was called “Learning How to Learn” (p. 152), in which he brought in the idea that learning how to learn is about creating a relationship with the unknown; at the end, an old epic poem, *Beowulf*, was introduced to help the participants come to terms with the “shadows of the organization” (p. 152).

In addition, one of Whyte’s poems, “Easter Morning in Wales” (Essex & Mainemelis, 2002), was used as a reminder of a deep memory of nature among the organization members as “it is important to speak about these things in work, because work only ultimately makes sense when you understand what is being given back, either to yourself or to your society” (p. 157). The poem is partially illustrated below:

Morning sun turns silver on the pointed twigs.  
 I have woken from the sleep of ages and I am not sure  
 if I am really seeing, or dreaming,  
 or simply astonished  
 walking toward sunrise  
 to have stumbled into the garden  
 where the stone was rolled from the tomb of longing.

(“Easter Morning in Wales,” Whyte, cited in Essex & Mainemelis, 2002, p. 157).

Furthermore, Morris, Urbanski, and Fuller (2005) contended that poetry has the power to shape minds and give meaning to what is seen and heard, which in turn provides organization members with a rich contextual background for developing components of emotional intelligence (EQ). Morris et al. presented the results of their experiential exercise designed to use poetry and visual art in classroom settings to increase students’ awareness and recognition of key components of emotional intelligence (EQ). Extensive supplemental poetic materials were provided to business faculty to use the exercise as effective methods to enhance the EQ of their subjects. The use of the exercises leads to three outcomes: (a) skills and competencies acquired from poetic and fine arts studies are blended with career preparation provided during business course work, (b) a higher degree of unity of knowledge between aesthetic studies and professional disciplines occurs, and (3) instructors who use these exercises seem to have a greater and more meaningful impact on their students (Morris et al., 2005). In line with Morris et al., Armstrong (2004) contended that organizations are emotional places because people are emotional beings subject to a wide range of feelings; all organizations are interpersonal contexts and arouse complex emotional interactions.

Likewise, Grisoni and Kirk (2006) found that the power of poems lies in their ability to focus not only in factual details, but also on behavioral and affective elements embedded in organizational life. In their research on an educational institution, Grisoni and Kirk used organizational role analysis (ORA), together with a range of poems written by organization members, to understand their respective roles. The study drew critical incidents from management meetings, corporate getaways, and other organizational activities that had caused some form of disturbance in the individuals and then reflected the context and disclosed layers of meaning through poems and ORA. One of the meetings provided, afterward, the material for reflective poems:

. . . Silent I see  
 It must be me, or our history?  
 Perhaps it is us? Jolly us! Without any puss.  
 I just cannot say. Instead I stare  
 At something toxic that was in the air . . . (p. 516)

. . . I cannot speak  
 Anyhow  
 At least not just now  
 How did this happen?  
 What does this mean?  
 I don't think I can say  
 Not yet anyway . . . (p. 517)

According to Grisoni and Kirk (2006), these two poems rendered a way of processing and making sense of members' experiences within the organization. The first poem was written down halfway into the sense-making process of a 2-hr meeting presenting strategic issues facing the organization as a whole, whereas the second poem reflected the feelings toward the organization's strategic futures. Using the ORA approach and the creating of poems provided a means of critical reflection to facilitate gaining helpful insights for managers and professionals and addressing difficult and/or tacit understanding that arguably would not have been achieved in the same way through more rational approaches (Grisoni & Kirk, 2006).

Another practical use of poetry in developing business strategy is evident in a collaborated workshop among professionals from Oxford University, Boston Consulting Group, Munich, and Boston Consulting Group, Boston (Buswick, Morgan, & Lange, 2005). The project was created to help a high-tech company in England that wanted to expand quickly and be certain that the strategies for expansion were right. The roundtable discussion was enhanced after a successful attempt in cooperatively writing poetry as part of business strategy:

The CEO wanted to spend time at a strategy retreat developing the thinking of his management team as well as addressing the concrete issues that faced them. We'd kept him informed about the work within the Boston Consulting Group Strategy Institute on poetry and thinking—being a poetry reader himself—he is eager to see how exposure to some poetry would affect the way his team approached certain

key issues. . . . We decided to focus on the real topic at hand—making decisions. We chose a poem that showed how complex making decisions is: complex, that is, in terms of how so many different elements can affect how we see “the fact”. The CEO was very pleased that the content of the poem opened up a wide-ranging discussion of real issues like: when is the right time to kill off a project? What influences we may not be aware of are affecting how we prioritize value and make fine judgments? The poem also opened up how we may be judged, for making tough choices that affect the lives of others. The CEO liked the way the discussion highlighted that in many cases there is not a clear cut right or wrong to the decision we’re faced with. Sometimes the information we have is incomplete, or the different strands of need cannot be definitively prioritized. The poem we used at the workshop was *Traveling Through the Dark*, by William Stafford, and it reminded the management team just how much “in the dark” we often are at important decision-making moments. (p. 34)

Analysis of texts can be practically conducted through musical text, theatrical script, and poems. HRD practitioners can be nonparticipating observers and assume a position of detached involvement to study systems of social actors, and action as narrative analysts can be used to decode the plots, actors, and roles of (assumed) social drama (Czarniawska, 1992). Analysis of text, being displayed in the form of organizational arts, examines what is obvious and ambiguous, what is included and excluded, and what is rejected or prioritized.

We propose that HRD practitioners can assume a role of organizational narrative therapist (Barry, 1997b; Tomm, 1987; White & Epston, 1990). A basic assumption among most narrative therapists is that people’s lives are strongly affected by the sense-making stories they tell about themselves; narrative therapists try to become careful observers and reflectors of client stories to bring up unexamined story elements into something congruent and solid. Despite narrative therapy having been widely used with individuals, couples, and families, the practice can be intriguingly applicable to organizational change (Barry, 1997b). Barry proposed that there are a number of reasons why this approach might be applicable to organizations; organizations are often perceived in family-like terms, and many of the problems found in families are also found in organizations (e.g., issues of identity, social positioning, well-being, power, conflicting resolution, coordinated effort). Barry provided an example of how he helped a small business using a narrative approach:

Prior to the meeting, I talked with several other staff members, trying to familiarize myself with Osteo’s operations. I mostly listened as they described what they did, what they liked and disliked about Osteo. . . . I took notes while Jana sketched metaphoric images; we had agreed earlier that multiple renditions of Osteo might help create some useful “double description”. It became clear the practice was awash with problems. Of the three clinics only one was surviving financially. . . . I found myself overwhelmed by old consulting habits; though I had rejected the use of a standardized diagnostic framework. . . . I also began listening for “internalized” problem descriptions, ones where Will and Sarah had in some way characterized themselves as problems. When asked what they thought needed the most attention, two things emerged: administrative competence and overwork. These were also highly internalized issues.



Barry (1997b) and his coworker used constructed visual and written portraits of clients' experiences to externalize the problems of administrative competence and overwork, as well as to call attention to alternative solutions. One of the pictures illustrated clients having fallen into a wishing well—their wish-come-true business had turned into prison. Another picture sketched the client as a faceless, multitasking therapist who works with clients in a cookie-cutter fashion; body bits that failed to make it through the mould are scattered at the bottom of the table. Obviously, as Barry said, the client mentioned the word *faceless* several times when he talked of the future. Barry reported that the clients found the visual images “very haunting and felt shaken by our construction of their story” (p. 38). Last, Barry and his coworker attempted to get the client to think about how their relationship with overwork and administrative problems had changed by asking them to estimate the percentage of influence each individual now had in their lives, and the points were summarized through more drawings and letters. By using the narrative therapy approach, the change agents could stimulate changes to occur: (a) workloads decreased all around, and staff reported feeling a lot happier and seeing an optimistic future for the business; (b) administrative tasks started running smoothly; and (c) the practice became profitable over the long run.

## Implications for HRD Practice

This article holds many implications for OD practice:

1. One of the most difficult tasks facing the OD practitioner is assisting an organization in changing its culture (Cummings & Worley, 2005; McLean, 2006). The use of the arts could be an effective way of facilitating culture change in an organization.
2. The different modes of art can be used explicitly in growth and development opportunities in organizations. As Nissley (2002a) suggested, for example, “the music paradigm” (p. 33) might be used to bring business organizations together with musicians to help the business organization learn various ways to look at organizational life, such as leadership, communication, and collaboration. For four decades, the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada, has been involved in developing in leaders the capacity to imagine new ideas, create new possibilities, recognize limitations of relying only on technical proficiencies, and realize how artists and artistic processes can inform the practice of leadership; the leadership development programs at the Banff Centre encourage participants to think outside the box as they visit the actor's stage, the potter's studio, and the musician's performance space (Nissley, 2007).
3. Storytelling can help OD practitioners reduce complexity, ambiguity, and unpredictability of organizational life; stories can also be used to predict future organizational behavior (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). According to narrative scholars (Czarniawska, 2004; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Taylor, 2002), stories can be used to interpret, infuse events with meaning, enhance sense making because they assist in terms of comprehension, and might suggest a causal order of events. Taylor (2002) held that organizational members are often faced with aesthetic issues, such as when they perceive an action to be particularly ugly or grotesque and they feel it should be beautiful. For example, when a firm lays off several

employees, the remaining employees watch this being carried out in a very unartful and disconnecting way. Although the remaining employees recognize the instrumental need for the layoffs and the benefits to the organization, they are disturbed by the hideous way in which the layoffs were done. This results in stress that cannot be relieved because there is no arena for discussing it. This article provides examples of how the organization can address the issue, improve the situation, and learn from the experience by using the technique called organizational theater.

4. We propose that HRD practitioners consider using the narrative therapy technique described earlier as a way to externalize piecemeal information in organizations. Scholars in storytelling (Barry, 1994; Boje, 1991; Taylor et al., 2002) posited that change agents rarely encounter a whole, intact story, but rather story pieces and that narrative therapy's focus on more complete telling is especially useful in organizations where expanded telling can offer those who get lost to see the direction from pictures that are pieced together. In line with the use of drawings and letters to aid narrative therapy, we believe that using musical texts, theatrical scripts or acts, and poems would also produce dramatic results.
5. Training in organizational improvisation may be beneficial as it requires the participants to accommodate to each other's work without preconceived notions, thus enhancing their flexibility and adaptability to work in any situational context.
6. An established OD intervention is the confrontational meeting (McLean, 2006). One intent of such an intervention is to help organization members realize what they know, think, or feel. An example for this concept was provided earlier by Grisoni and Kirk (2006) on how to use poetry in a meeting room to help members confront the organizational issues by implicitly soliciting members' feeling and ideas toward the issues before any strategic move has been made.

Undoubtedly, there are many other implications of this article for OD practice.

## Recommendations for HRD Research

To develop a better understanding of music in HRD, other kinds of music genre, such as reggae, folk, country, pop, and religion-related music could be studied and compared among HRD practices in different cultures. In addition, we should also look beyond organizational life to "HRD in community," as McLean and McLean (2001) suggested. The studies of jazz and hip-hop may provide an appropriate showcase of people development in the African American inner-city communities, as an example.

The same is applicable for drama; different cultures produce different themes in their drama that can be used to enhance skills of people in a particular culture. In addition, other art media, such as movies and visual arts, could be studied and developed for the benefit of HRD. Research is needed into the efficacy of the fine arts in manipulating an organizational culture; can a culture be changed through the use of the fine arts? A missing component in the identified research literature was how OD practitioners might be trained to use the fine arts more effectively in their work. This is such a new focus for the field of OD that a great deal of research is still needed.

## Conclusions

Our study is exploratory and intended to provoke ideas and thinking regarding song lyrics, drama scripts, and poems as organizational discourse and aesthetic expression of organizational culture. We believe it is essential that OD and HRD scholars realize the possibility that exists for research on the cross-fertilization of OD and HRD with the arts. Contemporary trends indicate that many of the successful strategies of the 20th century are no longer working in today's organizational cultures. Hence, there is an increasing need to look to innovative approaches in helping organizational members increase their creativity, innovative approaches, and understanding of the organization.

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