THE ARTS AT PLAY: WORKING WITH ARTISTS AND PCP IN ORGANISATIONS

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The workshop presented at the EPCA 2016 conference, after highlighting the strong connections between PCP and contemporary arts and their effectiveness in improving organisational growth, introduced a methodology for operating inside organisations. The model assumes the co-construction of the intervention by a PCP consultant, responsible for the analysis of client's needs and group processes, an artist, the catalyst for change, and a producer, the crucial mediator between consultant, client and artist.

The workshop participants experienced this intervention methodology by working directly with an artist and realizing a collective artwork piece, which embodies the group answer to a question about PCT identity.

Key words*: PCP, organisations, contemporary arts, creativity*

INTRODUCTION

In a world where cultural and technological changes are getting faster and wider, and complexity in society is rapidly increasing at every level, people are asked to be more and more flexible and creative in everyday life and in working life in particular. Organisations are increasingly challenged by the global economy and cultural changes in society, in a way that suggest that the business landscape of the twenty first century requires a new paradigm in addressing organisations and work (Heinsius & Lehikoinen, 2013). In order to succeed, organisations need to invest in creative innovation, cultural competencies, relationships and collaborative skills, emotive knowledge and occupational health, alongside (and probably even more than) specific job related skills. Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) is a useful theory for working in organisations in such a challenging world given its focus on change and multiple realities.

Artists may have a role in improving organisational growth as well, when they lead creativity processes in collaboration with psychologists, consultants and art curators. A number of experiences in Europe show that artistic interventions in organisations can effectively support changes and team building, strengthen creativity and innovation, improve communication processes and interpersonal relationships, enhance working conditions and organisational climate (Heinsius & Lehikoinen, 2013).

This work, after highlighting the strong connections between PCP and contemporary arts *(§1)*, reviews some European experiences of artistic interventions in organisations *(§2)* and presents a model for intervention in organisations which assumes the co-construction of the intervention by a PCP consultant, responsible for the analysis of client needs and group processes, an artist, who acts as the catalyst for change, and an art intervention producer (henceforth called producer), the crucial mediator between consultant, client and artist *(§3)*. The workshop planned for the XII EPCA conference (2016) served as an example of this methodology, experienced by workshop participants through direct work with an artist on a theme of interest for the PCP community.

PERSONAL CONSTRUCTS, PSYCHOLOGY AND THE ARTS

For Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), developed by G.A. Kelly, the act of construing may be considered the fundamental basis of human behaviour (Kelly, 1955). Jörn Scheer and Kenneth Sewell well introduced the issue of PCP and creativity (Scheer & Sewell, 2006): "*To construe has two meanings: to build and to interpret.* Thus, this verb lends itself nicely to describe the process of actively developing a personal world – by using *personal constructs*: the tools used to attach meaning to things, people and events and moreover to develop individual ways of dealing with them". Indeed, according to this theory individuals develop a personal view of the world, irrespective of the existence of a 'real' world. They filter the world through a set of unique personal constructs of their own making, so there are as many ways to construe circumstances as there are people construing them. In other words, there can be an infinite number of ways to construe the world, i.e. an infinite number of worlds, according to the PCP notion of *constructive alternativism*.

Construing (...) implies trying out possibilities, comparing different options, choosing alternatives, revising choices. This is a process of loops or cycles, moves from loose construing and tight construing and back and forth until a person feels something has been created that can be tested out. Creativity thus is at the core of the human activity – of living. Creativity is also considered as being the core of artistic activity. By creating a work of art, artists construe – but so do the people who enjoy a piece of art, such as a painting or a performance. (Scheer & Sewell, 2006).

The artist puts his/her personal meanings into play in the artwork and the beholder 'attaches meaning' to the object of his/her admiration. As a theory about persons and meanings, PCP seams to fit particularly well with the arts, and in particular with people dealing with the arts (Raskin, Weihs & Morano, 2005; Scheer & Sewell, 2006).

Furthermore, PCP and contemporary art fit well together since they are characterized by similar approaches to 'reality', 'knowledge' and 'truth'. The superordinate dimension of foundationalism versus constructivism subsumes *easily* the dimension of modernist versus postmodernist art. Constructivism has to do with construed, changing, interdependent reality and created meaning, versus independent, permanent reality and inherent meaning; with multiperspectives, ambiguous meaning, connotation and personal experience, versus single perspective, clear meaning, denotation and objectivity. Similarly contemporary art has to do with postmodernism, processes, spectator's experience, surprise, and the primacy of maps, versus modernism, things, artists' meanings, confirmation and primacy of territory (McWilliams, 2009).

Last but not least, when the role of the constructivist psychologist and psychotherapist can be described as helping people and organisations to cope with their troubles through a revision of their personal or group meanings (constructs), similarly the role of the artist can be described as helping people and society to cope with their contradictions through the emergence of their signifiers and significata. "The purpose of art is to make us change perspective and view things from another angle" (Berthoin Antal, 2011). Experiencing different points of view is actually the major goal for both clinical and organisational interventions in a constructivist perspective. The object of both constructivist psychology and contemporary art can be summarized as the emergence of meaning and the construction of realities where meanings can be reconsidered, recombined, created or abandoned in an infinite number of ways, and where some of these ways may – better than others – help people, organisation or society in facing everyday reality.

Those are the main reasons why we believe that PCP and contemporary arts can work well together: putting at play methods and tools from their different professional settings with a strong common objective could open new opportunities for professionals of both fields, and for their clients: "when you do unordinary things you get unordinary results that you would not get with ordinary methods" (Heinsius & Lehikoinen, 2013).

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ORGANISATIONS AND THE ARTS / ARTISTS WITHIN ORGANISATIONS

In a complex society like ours, in which persons and groups are continuously faced with challenges, changes and crisis, creativity and the ability to deal with complexity and to promote change and innovation become of primary importance for personal, group and organisational growth.

Art is a complex language: when you watch a piece of art you are not (just) watching something that may or may not be beautiful, you are engaged in a dialogue. The language of art is quite complex: each artist has his/her own statement, a plot to research and a personal method. Each artist works in a specific context and his/her statement and method are in a relationship with this context. The context is a complex combination of historic values and references, contemporary issues, visions of possible futures. A piece of art is a work that says something about each aspect of this complex scenario: something about the history, something about the present and something about the future at the same time. Hopefully it says something new about these aspects. When a new achievement resulting from this dialogue overcomes time, i.e. when it produces fertile questions and significant answers even after generations and in different societies, it can be considered as a 'capolavoro' (masterpiece), like for example in the case of Picasso or Mondrian.

Organisations, managers and entrepreneurs face similar issues daily: they have to manage complexity, work in the present with awareness about the past and foresight about the future, to be innovative while keeping an identity, to be continuously engaged in research and reconstructions of a moving world (actually, like persons in general). While research and creativity are the core of the artist's work, managers and entrepreneurs may be overwhelmed by technical and economic issues, and may be less experienced than artists in managing meanings and developing lateral thinking and creativity. How can the arts help business? They can be of help in working with meanings to develop new ideas. Ideas are not something that suddenly comes up in your mind, they are instead something you need to develop and nurture day by day. This is the reason why organisations may find it very helpful to learn this straight from an artist.

This is indeed what some organisations experimented with in artistic interventions in Europe. Artistic interventions are defined as situations "when people, products or practices from the world of the arts enter organisations to trigger or support change at the individual, group or organisational level" (Vondracek, 2013). Some projects and surveys have analyzed the context of artistic intervention in Europe in the past years. The Creative Clash project by TILLT Europe in 2009 resulted in the most extensive global report on the subject, collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data from 41 active producers of artistic interventions in Europe (Vondracek, 2013), focusing on interventions when artists enter organisations and apply their artistic practice in order to trigger or support the development of the organisation. It is argued that ...

... artists can reveal the potential of the group because of their abilities to think laterally, 'out of the box', to be imaginative, to challenge traditional solutions, to follow non-linear and uncertain process in order to allow the development of new visions, to realize out of a vision something new that is not necessarily functional or dependent on a pre-existing theory or scientific integrity.

The tangible impact of artistic intervention in an organisation is also considered:

It stimulates creativity (at management as well as workforce level), contributes to competence and leadership development, reinforces collective spirit and goals, improves social relations and dialogue, improves motivation and self-esteem, encourages disruptive thinking in the way processes are managed, thus challenging management and work life routines, improving efficiency, helping organisations in finding their identities and values to better achieve their shared goals and commits organisations to take risks and change direction; it challenges organisations to innovate.

In addition, ...

... artistic intervention helps identifying more suitable career paths, skills development, social mobility, social inclusion and cohesion, gender equality and equal opportunities, enriching people's life and promoting new forms of work-life balance." – "In short, artistic interventions generate aesthetic and emotional aspects that are generally overlooked at the workplace and that engender new perspectives and behaviours. The engagement with artists can stimulate individuals and groups at emotional, physical and intellectual level, introducing shared positive experiences within groups. – The arts have the potential to show that the everyday can be reinvented and that the ordinary is usually extraordinary and that the extraordinary can become part or intervene and wonderfully interrupt everyday life (Naomi Kashiwagi, artist, in Vondracek, 2013).

A key role is played by the producer, whose role is to match the right artist with the right organisation and to formulate a project that is equally interesting for both the artist and the organisation. The producer has to understand needs and opportunities of the organisations, changes in society and driving forces of the artists in order to match organisations with artists, develop joint projects, support the processes, promote reflection on the experience, and produce research and evaluation. In addition, the artist needs to (and often is trained to) develop several areas of competency to work effectively in organisations: contextual, artistic/creative, social, pedagogic, research, management and marketing, embodying different intertwining strands of competency and knowledge. Given the complexity of skills and knowledge required, producers often work in strong collaboration with organisational consultants, who can support the producer in analyzing the organisation's needs and anticipating possible results within a theoretical framework, and can support the artist in accompanying and 'reading' group processes (Heinsius & Lehikoinen, 2013).

A MODEL FOR INTERVENTIONS WITH ARTISTS IN ORGANISATIONS

The present model for intervention in organisations assumes the co-construction of the intervention by a PCP consultant, a producer and an artist, with different but strongly interconnected roles.

The producer (in our case a company with focus on innovation and deep knowledge in contemporary art and communication) is an expert in the language of art and in cultural based innovation: the producer knows the world of the local manufacturing and service industry and knows well the artists who may work in that context. (S)he develops, in collaboration with the consultant, a project for art intervention to be submitted to organisations, finds a client, and chooses the right artist for that project. Then, in accordance with the client's needs and goals, (s)he works with the consultant and the artist for the co-construction of the specific intervention: what is going to be done, why, how and when.

The consultant (here a PCP psychologist and psychotherapist) contributes with the theoretical framework through which the organisation's needs, social climate and processes can be read. In addition she supports the producer in the analysis of the client's needs, the definition of the intervention's goals and the evaluation of results. In addition the consultant supports the artist with issues concerning group processes, like promoting members' engagement, participation, acceptance, and facilitating conflict resolution.

The artist is the one more directly engaged with the group: he presents his statement, his method and his context and a theme to work on, a 'problem' artistically speaking. Under his guidance, the group works at its own participatory piece of art. The producer and the consultant support the artist in the relationship with the client and with the group of participants, granting independence and freedom to his artistic action. The intervention results in a collective realization of an artwork which embodies the group or organisation's questions and meanings.

As to the contents (what, why, how and when is going to be done) the producer, consultant and artist work together for the co-construction of the intervention, everyone with their specific competence, language and perspective, in order to construe a commonly defined objective and method.

THE ARTS AT PLAY: WORKSHOP AT EPCA CONFERENCE

During the EPCA conference in 2016, a workshop following this method was presented by the authors and held by Erica Costantini (PCP consultant) and Rok Bogataj (artist). The participants were invited to work with the artist on the co-construction of an artwork piece which was intended to embody their feelings, thoughts and anticipations about the theme: "Visibility for PCP: a challenge?". The workshop work and results are described here following the PCP experience cycle.

Anticipation: assumptions and aims of the workshop

The model of intervention in organisations was presented at EPCA 2016 as an 85 minute workshop activity. Our anticipation about the workshop was that the model would be an interesting experience for colleagues working in organisations and/or with the arts, that it would be effective in exploring how the participants construe PCP and that it would result in a piece of art embodying a common representation of PCP identity.

Investment: target and methodology

The conference participants were invited via e-mail before the conference to register for the workshop in order to be able to better organize the practical activity. The workshop room was overbooked (with more than 20 participants). The three professionals involved - the PCP consultant Erica Costantini, the curator Federica Manaigo for CREAA s.n.c and the artist Rok Bogataj – presented themselves, the contents of the present paper, and their way of working. Then followed the group work to realize the art piece. Due to his research method, the artist invited the participants to build one of the most basic geometrical constructions, a pyramid. He involved the participants in a complex experience, first making the components of a sculpture, as in an art studio, and then creating an art work, guided by the artist, as though being artists themselves. The consultant asked them to think

about how important is it that PCP is known among professionals and institutions they work with, and which are the core aspects of PCT in their personal view which give identity to the theory, and then asked them to write their 5 most relevant features on the 5 sides of their pyramid. They were then asked to consider which among those aspects should be more visible, and to glue the pyramids together in a way that the more important features of PCP – according to the group – would be visible for a person approaching the final sculpture.

Encounter: experience and emerging themes

The so-called individual work actually resulted already in lively cooperative activity: people talking to each other, moving in the room, and sharing resources to solve practical issues concerning the task of building the personal pyramids, so that the climate warmed up before the actual 'collective work' for the realization of the art piece started. When the artist invited the participants to put together their pyramids thinking about which words would be visible at the end and which not, a certain time of loosening and uncertainty was followed by spontaneous small group discussions and activities. Some people were not comfortable with the idea of getting rid of something (since 'everything is so important'), and this resulted in a productive discussion and in a number of unexpected solutions about connecting pyramids in order to get everything important there. The work resulted in a composition that was construed by the group of participants mainly as 'inclusive but fragile': the closing intervention by the artist allowed the group to feel excited and proud about the result and to recognize their personal and group contribution towards it, in addition to its communicative power. PCP features that resulted more visible in the sculpture were: constructive alternativism, change, meaning, reflexivity, creativity, anticipation, movement, sociality, person as a scientist.

Validation and/or invalidation: results

We can say that our anticipations about the workshop were validated. The workshop got

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immediate registration from colleagues working in organisations and/or with the arts and was overbooked. The short workshop time did not prevent us experiencing a successful activity, however more time would be needed in an organisational context where the final feedback about the activity is expected to require more elaboration and discussion time and the workshop would last at least 4 hours.

As already said, the individual work phase was useful to warm up the social climate, and the anxiety related to the loosening phase at the beginning of the group work was successfully channelized during the following 'practical' task of glueing pyramids together. In addition, the collaborative and creative solutions and the closing intervention by the artist allowed the participants to recognize their personal contributions and the group common identity in the final sculpture.

Revision: generative questions and conclusions

Some relevant issues and useful questions arose from the experience. The first is about time: the workshop experience strengthened the awareness that in an organisational context, time for introduction and presentation should be shorter and time dedicated to activity and to final discussion and feedback should be longer, so that the group process can be easily warmed up at the beginning and accurately elaborated at the end of workshop. The second is about how to get a good compromise between loosening and tightening in order to reach both art-related goals and organisational goals: it is important that the art process led by the artists meets the organisational needs in terms of group work and its impact on the organisation itself, and that the artists involved in the project are well aware of their role in the group processes. An important issue is how important it is to communicate the difference between and 'art-based activity' and 'creating a collective artwork'. Here the presence of the artist is fundamental: some workshop participants reported that the fact that 'the artist was present' and that they were collaborating to produce an 'actual piece of art' gave a great sense of power and energy, enhancing therefore workshop effectiveness. However for some people

this difference was not perceived as strongly, at least not at an explicit level. It is important that colleagues and possible clients are aware of this difference, which actually is the key aspect of the methodology for training in organisations which we present in this work. 'The artist is present', the title of a famous performance given by the artist Marina Abramovich at MOMA, New York in 2010, would also be an ideal title for this project.

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