

Acting out, Playing out

Theatre Techniques in Team Coaching Programs

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Abstract

Working in teams is one of the answers to deal with the increasing complexity and need for speed in today's workplace. But teams bring about difficulties of their own: bullying, not accepting new team members, 'keeping out' team leaders are just some examples of often unconscious team dynamics that nobody wants, but that sometimes seem impossible to change. Team coaching is one of the way to help such teams get back on track. This multiple case study analyses ten team coaching programs in which such dysfunctional group dynamics in intact work teams were addressed. In all programs theatre techniques are used as a means to improve team functioning and make their workplace a more productive, healthier and happier place to be. The study analyses their effect and fail and success factors in applying them. Findings suggest that theatre techniques help create a safe environment to look at team functioning, and help teams become more aware of unconscious group dynamics and more creative in finding new solutions in dealing with current and future situations at work.

A parallel is drawn with a transitional approach to change and suggestions are made of which type of techniques is best used in which stage of the team coaching program. Also several techniques not yet described in research and literature as a tool for intact work teams, are introduced as a way to address conscious and unconscious intragroup processes.

Keywords: group dynamics, theatre techniques, sociodrama, sculpting, role play, coaching, team development, creativity, playfulness, transitional change

Introduction

*The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.
William Shakespeare, Hamlet*

Where and how this thesis started

To set the stage for this thesis, a vignette of a team coaching session:

A conference room with twelve men and women, aged between 25 and 45, sitting in a half circle around a provisional stage. Half of them are chitchatting and giggling, the other half is looking tense or bored. They are members of a team responsible for taking care and observing perpetrators of serious crimes as part of the process to assess their psychological accountability. Two team coaches are sitting in the back of the room, observing the team. The men and women in the half circle are waiting for six colleagues who have prepared a short scene, playing out a somewhat enlarged version of an everyday work situation. The whole setting is part of a team coaching program, designed to help the team address group dynamics that are hampering their effectiveness and wellbeing. One of the team coaches gives a sign, the 'actors-colleagues' enter the room, the play starts.

***The scene within the scene:** three actors, playing team members, are sitting to the back of the stage, having coffee, chitchatting about the weekend, complaining about the delinquents. They are turned away from a fourth and fifth actor, playing two other team members, both writing. These have staged themselves in the middle of the room where the delinquents spend their days. From the right, actor number six, a big strong man playing*

a delinquent enters the scene. He walks in a fast aggressive way and in passing one of the two actors center stage, he slaps him at the back of his head. This actor looks up startled at the delinquent, exclaiming 'hey, don't do that!' and then looks at his colleague center stage. Without looking up, this colleague says, 'yeah, he's right, you shouldn't do that' and continues his writing. The three colleagues in the back glance over their shoulder and then turn themselves even further away from the colleagues center stage, continuing their chitchat. The delinquent is laughing defiantly at the actor he slapped.

Back to the half circle of the 'audience'. *At the start of the scene most of them are laughing, making joking comments like 'yes, let's get more coffee in the back there' and 'you should exaggerate, not play it exactly like it is!'. Towards the end of the scene, after the slapping, the room becomes very silent. They are watching intently what is happening on stage. After the team coach says 'thank you' and ends the scene, there is a weak round of applause for the actors, who then join the group for a debrief. In this debrief, participants, including the actors share what emotions they felt playing and watching the scene (recognition, shame, anger, threat, guilt, aversion, wanting to get away from the 'badness', helplessness, responsibility, power) and how these relate to their task and the way they operate as a team. Themes like 'proximity and distance' and 'dependence and independence' emerge in the discussion, themes that are strongly linked to their primary task and are reflected in their own group dynamic.*

This vignette stems from one of the many team coaching programs I have been involved in as a coach and consultant over the past twenty years. These programs are aimed at helping malfunctioning teams, which have become ineffective in their task and where group behavior is negatively influencing team members' functioning and wellbeing, get back on track. Such

coaching programs cover both conscious factors, such as division of labor, communication skills and clarity about task and unconscious factors such as anxieties, emotions and group dynamics. Conscious factors are often quite easily addressed using more traditional interventions and techniques like group discussions or structured meetings. Unconscious and emotional processes however require a different approach as they appear harder to grasp, discuss and understand.

In many of the coaching programs I am involved in , I use *theatre techniques* like role play, sociodrama, playback theatre and sculpting as such an ‘alternative approach’. They are an integral part of the coaching process and help teams in a quick and profound way to become more aware of psychological and unconscious aspects that may be influencing their functioning, and help them become more skillful in inventing and exercising constructive ways to deal with current and future difficult situations and anxieties.

In the clinical world, such theatre or drama techniques as they are sometimes referred to, are broadly accepted and well researched methods to help individuals and groups address and deal with anxieties and questions they are facing (Blatner, 1996; Boal, 1995; Moreno, 1953). Research on the applicability and fail- and success factors of these techniques in a business context however is very limited and mostly restricted to the development of individual skills or organizational change, not covering team development. And to be quite frank: I use the theatre techniques mainly based on what I would describe as my ‘professional intuition’. After twenty years in this field this intuition might be well developed, but that doesn’t mean all my choices are right or the best I could have made. Maybe even to the contrary: too much experience may have led to blind spots or leaning towards all too familiar choices without considering sufficient ‘fresh’ options.

Working on this thesis has been an excellent opportunity to become a ‘reflective practitioner in action’ and develop a deeper understanding of the rationale behind the use of these theatre techniques.

Thesis objective and research questions

With this thesis I hope to make a practical and well founded contribution (a description of ‘how to and why not’) to the use of theatre techniques in team coaching programs for malfunctioning teams. I hope this contribution will be useful for the teams involved, their managers and consultants working with them in making organizations and teams more productive, happier and healthier places. In order to achieve this, I wanted to develop a deeper understanding of the rationale behind the use of these techniques in team coaching program, looking at his rationale from a clinical perspective. I worked on answering the following research questions:

- *What is the effect of theatre techniques?*
- *When should you use them and when not?*
- *What is the best way to apply them?*

To find the answers I conducted a literature study on theatre techniques, group dynamics and change processes, building on learnings from the Coaching and Consulting for Change program. Next I conducted a multiple case study analyzing ten team coaching programs I have been involved in.

Thesis structure

After this introductory paragraph, this thesis describes the outcome of the literature study, the approach I used to conduct the research (methodology and limitations, research context, data-gathering and –analysis), the cases and context researched and the outcome of the research (findings, discussion). It ends with conclusions and suggestions for further research and the bibliography. An appendix describes and categorizes the theatre techniques used in the coaching programs researched.

Literature Review

'What you looking at?!
Al Pacino as Tony Montana in Scarface

As part of the work for this thesis I conducted an extensive literature review to find out what answers so far had been found to my research questions. This would inform me about where possible knowledge gaps might be and about what I would consequently have to focus on in my interviews and case analyses to make a meaningful and helpful contribution to the topic.

As it turned out, not much was to be found about the application of theatre techniques in coaching programs for malfunctioning work teams. I then decided to do a literature review on all three subtopics of this thesis (group dynamics, applied theatre techniques, change processes), looking in particular for research where at least two of these subtopics were addressed. In this chapter I describe what literature has to say about the subtopics, dedicating a paragraph to each one of them. Paragraphs have a concluding section in which I summarize what answers the literature review to that point has given to my research questions and what implications this has for the case study.

Group dynamics

To get a deeper understanding of what one is actually working with when working with conscious and unconscious processes in teams, I first turned to the literature on group dynamics.

Conscious and unconscious processes in groups. A common notion in the literature on group dynamics, is that in group life, as in individual life, a group has to deal with both conscious

factors, such as roles, task and context, and unconscious or less conscious factors such as hidden emotions, unconscious behavior and fears. One of the premises of the clinical paradigm is that *'the unconscious plays a tremendous role in determining our actions, thoughts, fantasies, hopes and fears'*. (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007, p. 3) To help groups develop both factors need attention (Amado & Ambrose, 2001) since one will inevitably influence the other and real progress isn't possible until the full scope of group life is addressed.

A second important notion about group dynamics is that, again like individuals, groups can have defense mechanisms, inherent to and specific for the group-as-a-whole (so not just to the sum of the parts). Such defense mechanisms are unconscious psychological strategies to protect the group and its members against distressing feeling and anxieties. These mechanisms are more than the sum-of-parts of individual defense mechanisms but are inherent to and specific for the group-as-a-whole. Sometimes these mechanisms can be appropriate to help groups deal with tensions inherent to their work. For example, temporarily setting aside personal feelings of distress and getting into a 'hero role' in order to save people from a house on fire can be a very helpful defense mechanism for a team of fire fighters (and the people they are rescuing). With dysfunctional groups however defense mechanisms have turned into structural behavior that doesn't help but *deflects* the group from the principal task they have to perform, making the team less productive and negatively influencing the wellbeing of its members. (Bion, 1961; Menzies Lyth, 1990; Wells, 1995; Hirschhorn, 2009; Kets de Vries, 2011).

Different perspectives. In current literature and research, group life is described using three perspectives: first the *individual perspective*, covering intra- and interpersonal processes such as transference and countertransference and 'folies a deux' (Anzieu, 1999; Kets de Vries,

Reflections on Groups and Organizations, 2011) . Group life from this perspective, is explained by what is happening in individuals' *inner theatre* (Kets de Vries, Korotov, & Florent-Treacy, Coach and Couch, 2007, p. 5), and how he or she plays out unconscious emotions and fears, stemming from experiences earlier in life. The second perspective is a *group perspective*, focusing on the group-as-a-whole or intragroup processes, which include the way groups deal with paradoxes inherent to group life (Smith & Berg, 1987), the way different paradigms and value systems present in group members can bring about covert processes within the group (Marshak, 2006) and the basic group assumptions as described by Bion (Bion, 1961). The third perspective is the *contextual perspective*, looking at group life with a focus on inter-group processes and on the way context and task influence group processes and vice versa (Menzies Lyth, 1990; Jaques, 1974) .

Although each perspective looks at group life at a particular level, literature reviewed acknowledges the fact that these levels are simultaneously present and relevant to understanding and working with group dynamics.

Conclusion: Like individuals, groups have both conscious and unconscious processes going on. Unconscious processes such as defense mechanisms can highly and negatively influence the groups' effectiveness and the group members' wellbeing and should both be dealt with when working on team development. Group life can be looked at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup or intergroup/contextual perspective level, all levels being simultaneously present and relevant.

Applied theatre techniques

Access to (unconscious) emotions and creativity. The transfer of drama techniques to areas outside the theatre world started in the therapeutic setting, with Moreno (Moreno, 1953), who developed *psychodrama* and *sociodrama*: a collection of action based therapeutic methodologies and techniques to help people come to terms with and solve their intrapersonal or , in the case of sociodrama, shared interpersonal or intergroup problems. Actions are aimed at helping them access emotions that before remained in the domain of the unknown, or as Christopher Bollas calls it, the ‘unthought known’ (known to the individual, who is not yet able to think about them) (Bollas, 1989) and at activating their creativity in order to develop new behavioral repertoire (Browne, 2005; Gillis & Bonney, 1989; Moreno, 1953). Building on Moreno’s work, psychodrama has been further developed to be used in different therapeutic and non-therapeutic settings, such as education, business, community building and societal change (Blatner, 1996; Boal, 1995; Eckloff, 2006; Holmes, 1994; Hopfl & Linstead, 1993; Mulder & Budde, 2006; Boal, 1979). The essence of working with drama- or theatre techniques however has remained the same: the action and (childlike and playful) spontaneity in these techniques, in which people ‘play out’ what they are experiencing helps them to get not just cognitively but also experientially involved. Or as Blatner (1996, p. xiii) puts it:

‘Actually ‘doing’ the interaction’, engaging one’s own physical body and imagination as if the situation were unfolding in the present moment brings into consciousness a host of ideas and feeling not generally accessed through simply talking about the situation. The nonverbal elements of communication not only act interpersonally, but also as inner cues, so that, for example, behaving in a more angry or frightened manner will evoke an awareness of emotions which may have been otherwise repressed.’

How to use theatre techniques. Literature describes a wide array of theatre techniques in more or less detail (Blatner, 1996; Boal, 1992; Browne, 2005; Devilee, 2009; Eckloff, 2006; Ferris, 2001; Holmes, 1994; Mulder & Budde, 2006). As a common denominator of how these techniques can be applied, three notions stand out:

- Theatre techniques have to be embedded in a process of warming up (to get the people participating in them in an effective state of mind), enactment (‘doing’ the actual technique) and a debrief (discussing experiences and emotions).
- The role of the facilitator, therapist, director or coach (all terms used to indicate the person responsible for the process of using the theatre technique) is to create a safe environment, be quite clear in directions about process and procedure but leave participants plenty of room to experiment and express their feelings. Facilitators should have a profound awareness of unconscious, clinical factors.
- Working with theatre techniques is regarded upon as a professional skill in itself which is not to be used without sufficient knowledge and experience since inappropriate use might (emotionally) damage people. The rule of ‘do no harm’ very much applies here.

Theatre techniques in the workplace The application of theatre techniques in the workplace is a fairly new but increasing area of scholarly interest, looking both at organizations *as* theatre (where theatre is used as a metaphor to better understand organizational life) (Hopfl & Linstead, 1993; Mangham & Overington, 1983) and at theatre *in* organizations. The latter is of most interest for this thesis, and includes such techniques as ‘organizational theatre’ where

professional acting companies develop plays, based on real life organizational situations (Nissley, Taylor, & Houden, 2004; Schreyögg, *Organizational Theatre and Organizational Change*, 2001; Schreyögg & Höpfl, *Theatre and Organization: Editorial Introduction*, 2004). These plays are primarily used to initiate or speed up organizational change processes, aiming at opening up a discussion about desired change. A very recently developed approach is that of ‘playback theatre’, incorporating organizational theatre with active audience participation (Oostra & Devilee, 2012). Both organizational theatre and playback theatre have a contextual perspective, focusing on intergroup and contextual aspects that build on techniques from Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* and his *Image Theatre*. (Boal, 1995)

Other applications of theatre techniques are role playing, used to develop interpersonal communication skills (Monks, Barker, & Mhanachain, 2001; Wiener, 1988) and sociodrama, where intact groups (real life teams) work on an agreed upon problem shared by group members by taking on roles of people or groups they want to improve their communication with (Blatner, 1996; Eckloff, 2006; Kellerman, 1998; Moreno, 1953). In sociodrama, theatre techniques are used to work on strengthening interpersonal relationships with non-team-members. Role play focusses on an intra- and interpersonal perspective, sociodrama on contextual and intergroup relations. In appendix A a more detailed description of both techniques can be found.

Few, if any research however has been done on the application of theatre techniques as a way to deal with intragroup or group-as-a-whole dynamics in a work setting. The only reference was found in an article by William P. Ferris describing how he has helped a software team get a clearer picture of their interpersonal relationship and about the dynamic of the group as a whole. (Ferris, 2001). The technique he uses is an adaptation of a technique used in family therapy,

called ‘sculpting’, in which members of a family create a physical representation of their interpersonal relationships by arranging their bodies in space (Duhl, Kantor, & Duhl, 1973; Simon, 1972).

Conclusion: This part of the literature review gives a first answers to the research question : ‘*What is the effect of theatre techniques?*’ Their playful and physically active nature help people become not just cognitively but also experientially involved, which helps them access previously unconscious aspects within themselves and access the creativity to develop new behavior.

As a first answer to the question of how theatre techniques are best applied, literature suggests to embed them in a process of warming up, enactment and debrief and suggests that the facilitating the process involves creating a safe environment, giving room to express feelings and experiment and give clear directions about process and procedure to be followed. Also being clinically informed as a facilitator and being knowledgeable in the use of theatre techniques is considered of importance.

What seems to be missing in literature so far are three things: firstly clear criteria about *when and when not* to use the techniques in groups (which would help to answer my second research question), secondly clear *criteria* about when to use which techniques and how to apply them, and thirdly an assessment of how and which theatre techniques can be applied to help intact work team deal with dysfunctional dynamics at an *intragroup* level (which latter two would help me give and answer to my third research question: *what is the best way to apply them?*). These missing factors will be an area of additional attention for the multiple case study.

Change processes

The purpose of team coaching is to help a team transition from a malfunctioning situation to a more productive and happier one. Using theatre techniques is one of the means to help them achieve such a transition. Since the literature review on the use of these techniques didn't give much direction on what the best way is to apply them in such a process, I decided to look into the more generic topic of change processes involving conscious and unconscious aspects to see if this would help me answer my third research question or give me directions for my interviews and case analyses. In particular I looked for approaches, conditions and descriptions of the processes teams go through as these might give me an idea of how theatre techniques can or cannot be applied.

Approach. The main body of research on this topic was to be found in literature on the transitional approach to change, with strong roots in the Tavistock tradition of group relations. (Amado & Ambrose, 2001; Bridger, 1981; Stein, 2004). In this view desired change can only become sustainable when change comes from within the team itself and when both conscious and unconscious aspects (or social and psychological aspects as they describe it) are addressed. This implies that helping teams go through such transitions managers or coaches cannot force such change or 'do interventions' which miraculously will transform the team. Their task is to create conditions which enable the team to go through the process, and not to '*fall into the trap of hubris, thinking I know it better than them*' as Anton Obholzer (Obholzer, 2007, p. 27) describes it. This approach requires an open mind to what is emerging at the moment, both at a conscious and unconscious level, and work with that. To fully understand what might be going on and deal with that in a constructive way, a coach or consultant using this approach should have *a strong awareness of group dynamics and act upon them as appropriate.* (Obholzer, 2007, p. 28)

Conditions. To help teams go through such transitional processes, certain conditions have to be met. Without pretending to give a complete overview of these, two conditions mentioned in the relevant literature seemed most material for the topic of this thesis as they come closest to the use of theatre techniques: play and holding environment.

Play. The transitional approach builds on Winnicott's thinking about how children become independent from their mother. In his view, the concept of play has an important role as it gives the child a way to safely experiment and go through the experiences of letting go of the mother and becoming its 'self'. In his view play facilitates growth and therefore health (Winnicott, 1971). Key in his ideas about play is that playing is not psychic reality: it is outside the individual but it is not the external world. Here an interesting parallel occurs with theatre techniques in team coaching programs. They are a 'play', taking place outside the individual, but they are not the external world, just representations or scenarios of this external world. Using these playful techniques can be beneficial to the development of teams just as play is beneficial to the development of children. Also according to Amado and Ambrose, (Amado & Ambrose, 2001), playing (and the potential space necessary to enable playing to take place) is an important factor to help individuals and teams '*modify their internal representation and therefore their perception of the world, so they can develop new action capabilities* (Amado & Ambrose, 2001, p. 21)'.

Holding environment: a second central condition in transitional change processes is that of creating a holding environment, a safe space where individuals or groups can express themselves and experiment. (Amado & Ambrose, 2001). In the description of how theatre techniques ought to be applied, this exact description is given as a condition.

Processes According to the transitional approach, for teams to transition from a dysfunctional to an effective stage, group members need to engage in several experiences: first becoming aware of their ineffective group dynamics and defense mechanism, next letting go of them and finally develop better, more productive ways of thinking, acting and dealing with their anxieties and changing conditions in their environment (Bridger, 1981; Gillette, 1995; Bain, 1998; Amado & Ambrose, 2001). Going through these experiences can provoke anxieties, in particular in the ‘in between’ phase of letting go, where old solutions don’t seem to work anymore and new ones aren’t yet found. Here the concept of *problem toleration* very much applies, in which a coach or consultant should help the team ‘*stay with unpleasant realities until such time as real solutions can be found and effectively implemented*’. (Amado & Ambrose, 2001, p. 20)

Conclusion: Rationale and condition for using theatre techniques show a strong parallel with the transitional approach to change. Though nothing was to be found about theatre techniques in coaching programs as part or as an example of a transitional approach, this part of the literature review suggests some additional insight to the preliminary answer to the research question of how theatre techniques should be applied found in the previous paragraphs. It has also given some aspects to be studied more in depth in the case analysis, in particular how the different experiences described in the transitional approach relate to the team coaching processes and what connections can be made between experiences and the theatre techniques used.

Methodology

Guessing isn't knowing
 Tennessee Williams, *The Night of the Iguana*

*'Tis a shrewd doubt, though it be but a dream,
 And this may help to thicken other proofs,
 That do demonstrate thinly.*
 Shakespeare, *Othello*

Research design

The research design for this thesis is a multiple case study (Yin, 2009) of ten team coaching programs with structurally malfunctioning work teams. In choosing a research design I weighed two factors: the appropriateness of methodology in relation to the topic and the availability or absence of usable variables and sufficient amounts of the right type of reliable data. The literature review had given me insufficient qualitative variables that might help in setting up sufficiently strong quantitative research, and collecting sufficient reliable data to draw accurate and reliable qualitative conclusions would require an amount of effort, time and access I was not able to deliver within the scope of this thesis. This ruled out a qualitative approach. I turned to Yin, Florent-Treacy and Creswell to help me make a further choice within the scope of qualitative approaches (Yin, 2009; Florent-Treacy, 2012; Creswell, 2007). Yin describes the following conditions for choosing a methodology: (Yin, 2009, p. 5)

METHOD	(1) Form of Research Question	(2) Requires Control of Behavioral Events?	(3) Focuses on Contemporary Events?
Experiment	how, why?	yes	yes
Survey	who, what, where, how many, how much?	no	yes
Archival Analysis	who, what, where, how many, how much?	no	yes/no
History	how, why?	no	no
Case Study	how, why?	no	yes

The questions central in the research are of the ‘how and why’- type:

- *What is the effect of theatre techniques?(how do they work and why?)*
- *When to use them and when not?(how do you choose when to use them?)*
- *What is the best way to apply them?(how do you use them?)*

In my research I would have ‘no control of behavioral events’ (experimenting with malfunctioning groups and theatre techniques would have big and probably insurmountable practical and ethical implications) and my focus is on ‘contemporary events’ (work groups are still malfunctioning, the use of theatre techniques is still a developing field). So, according to Yin’s criteria, a case study was indicated.

Elizabeth Florent-Treacys states that case studies are most appropriate for ‘a post event overview and analysis’, which is a fitting description of how I, as a reflective practitioner, wanted to approach the research for this thesis: get an overview of work I have been involved in and then critically and systematically analyze it. (Florent-Treacy, 2012). Again building on Yin, I choose to conduct a multiple case instead of a single case study. Finding replications of patterns in cases that are successful versus patterns in those that are unsuccessful would give a more profound insight into the rationale and systematic behind using theatre technique than analyzing a single case would.

Based upon the outcome of the literature study, I formulated preliminary answers to my research questions which I used as hypotheses for the multiple case study. I compared and contrasted the outcome of the literature review with the findings from the multiple case study, then abstracted those out beyond the themes to the larger meaning of the data and from there make naturalistic generalizations (Creswell, 2007).

Case selection, data gathering and analysis

Case selection. Cases were selected based on both methodological and practical criteria.

Methodologically, all cases were selected to meet the following criteria:

- The coaching program includes theatre techniques like role play, sculpting or sociodrama
- The program focusses on both conscious and unconscious processes
- Groups participating in the programs are intact work teams.

Cases were selected to cover both successful and unsuccessful programs, the definition of ‘successful’ being when team members, managers and facilitators perceive the program as helpful in attaining sustainable and positive changes in the team’s functioning. This improved functioning applying to both the teams’ task effectiveness (the productive workplace) and the team members feelings of wellbeing (the healthy and happy workplace).

Practical criteria were:

- Sufficient physical data available about the coaching programs (notes, design, artifacts, documented feedback from team members and managers)
- Possibility to interview people involved in the programs (team member(s), manager, co-facilitator and, when relevant, professional training actors) in a setting where there was no current working relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (to reduce the risk of interviewees feeling inhibited to give their views).

Data gathering. Data for the research was collected both during the coaching programs and afterwards. Data gathered during the programs include notes I took while facilitating the

programs (participatory observation), documents including descriptions of team functioning, program designs, program documentation, instructions for exercises, evaluation forms from team members, notes from evaluation interviews with clients, and artifact (materials used during coaching such as drawings, pictures, handouts and video recordings of scenes).

To make sure I included multiple perspectives on the cases and reduced the risk of researcher bias, I collected documentation from other parties involved in the coaching programs and conducted interviews with them. For each case I collected data (documents and interviews) from at least two other parties (one or more team members, their manager, a (co) facilitator or a professional training actor engaged in the coaching program) In some instances, interviewees had taken part in more than one coaching program; one of the managers interviewed was in charge of two of the teams, two of the co-facilitators were engaged in working with more than one team. In such cases the relevant coaching programs were discussed during the same interview, using different time blocks for each program.

I conducted the interviews in two phases, the first one being *open ended* to get an impression of the interviewees personal reflections. I choose this open ended approach to steer away as far as possible from my own assumptions and hopes about the effects of the programs and get a broader perspective beyond my own blind spots. In this open ended phase, interviewees were asked the following questions:

- What do you remember most about the program?
- What has had the most impact on you personally, and in your view, on the team as a whole?
- What, in your view, was the team's situation at the beginning en ending of the program and what happened since?

- What do you feel the role of the coaches has been?
- How successful do you feel the program has been?

The second part of the interview was *semi-structured*. The aim of this part of the interviews was to help me supplement the data about the whole program (ranging from preparatory meetings to the final meeting). Steps and actions in the team coaching program were systematically recounted, and interviewees were asked if and how they remembered what happened there both to themselves and to the team as a whole. They were also asked what happened in between coaching sessions. During this part of the interview, I used a form describing each step with room to take notes about the issues addressed during the interview. Most of the interviews were recorded. Three of them not due to practical or personal reasons, such as background noise or feelings of discomfort by the interviewee. In such cases extensive notes were taken on the time-series form. Recordings and notes were used as additional input to form a more in depth and multi-perspective picture of the course and effect of each coaching program.

Data analysis. I conducted the data analysis in two steps: first a single case analysis of each singular coaching program, followed by a cross-case analysis of all cases.

Analysis per case. For each of the cases, I first made a general description, including demographic data, organizational context, initial question and perceived effectiveness of the program. Next a time series analysis was made describing in chronological order the different steps in the coaching program, the techniques used and reactions from the team, the latter including both the observations made by the facilitators and the emotional reaction as describes by team members/managers. Also, relevant events outside the team coaching sessions (such as

team members leaving or significant change in behavior amongst team members) were put in.

Below an example of a time series analysis of one of the cases, in which a team of care takers worked on improving their intragroup dynamic in five one day coaching sessions alternated with three two hour coaching-on-the job sessions of smaller project teams.

Case 6	Prelim Research	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
Theme	Results from interviews, now what?	What is an effective team? Framework and values	Group dynamics	Going through change, Group rules, interpersonal relationships, leadership	Update on group norm Skills	Project results, positioning team coordinators, round up
Interventions general	Presentation of findings, including pictures Discussion: recognizable? Now what? Discussing here and now of group reaction	Introduction by manager about organizational framework Inventory of formal tasks Inventory of projects for project teams	Introducing concept of 'time out' as moment of reflection on the here and now. Introduction about group dynamics and group rules. Inventory of unwritten and dysfunctional rules.. Discussion about organizational framework Feedback carousel	Introduction about emotional change processes, continued application of time outs. Defining new group rules Visualization exercise about containment/non containment of emotions Introduction about core qualities/allergies and feedback to colleagues Discussion about leadership	Assessment of group rules (grading of progress) Introduction and short exercises about influence styles Continued application of time out.	Presentations project teams with feedback Discussion about future application lead by team coordinators Evaluation of progress in group norms Looking back at pictures collected during prelim research
theater	Pictures of theatrical scenes (chosen by team members)	Role play: carousel of values, (musical chairs) where real life case was discussed from different angles/values (art, commercial, care)	Project team members report their results 'on stage' to some colleagues. Other team members become audience. Videotaped and viewed back	Sculpting to represent relative position of team members in relation to new group rules (who makes the most mess for example) Short scenes illustrating troublesome communication, playback theatre	Pictures of clients in conference room as 'audience' Role play with professional training actor - Connecting in style - Practicing real life situations Colleagues as directors behind actor	Series of static sculpting to illustrate change during coaching program Role play with senior team members in coaching/facilitating role (recorded and viewed back)
reactions During session	Silence, trying to blame the manager, later on: recognition, need for change, anger at each other. Dismissal of finding that client wasn't mentioned during the interviews.	Confusion about task, atmosphere is tense, group lightens up during musical chairs exercise, not a lot of self-reflective capacity (yes but,....) Perfunctory participation in discussion about task (outcome: we all do everything, it shoulda coulda woulda been better, but it works fine like it is). Anger when coach addresses this. Denial of necessity to change Projects picked are on task, values and a soon to come exposition of work.	After inventory of unwritten rules: tendency to flee and laugh. Team coach slows down process to let them stay within the anxiety: one team member starts crying, others become silent. Recognition and anger in the team Taped presentations: shock about pervasiveness of current unwritten rules. Helplessness. Lack of clarity about organizational framework (mainly about role of team coordinators) Feedback carousel brings relieve and sense of appreciation.	Recognition and relief about change process (more negative capacity through understanding process?) Animated discussion about new group rules Sculpting brings discussion: so this is where you see me? Scenes bring about anxiety and recognition (and release of tension) Core quality discussion brings playfulness and energy in the group Positive discussion about leadership (good listening).	Partial satisfaction about new group rules, apparent willingness further development Open discussion about difficulties in realizing change During role play: tension about 'not becoming too personal'. After warming up exercise: playfulness and experimenting with new behavior. Central themes: can we disagree professionally and still keep the personal relationship in tact? And 'How does this impact clients and client development?'	Satisfaction about progress Learning atmosphere, insight that change has started but situation is still fragile Clients perspective is more central in discussions. Hesitation about own capacity to continue. Relief about end of program (more time!) Clearer central focus on clients
Between sessions	Gossiping about manager and each other, emails to researcher complaining.	Manager surprised and disappointed about the lack of care-taking perspective and knowledge. 'It's even worse than I thought'.	Team members very tired Assignment to observe and write reflection on group rules in action. Realization of avoidance with some group members.	Summer break. Team members are given 'time out' cookies as symbol for taking out time outs for reflection. Discussion amongst team members and manager about wanted/unwanted behavior. Project teams: inactive	Satisfaction More open discussion between team members and team members and manager. Discussion about clearer defining role of team coordinators, helping them in taking their position	Work meetings and division of labor restructured. More prominent role for senior team members (facilitating dialogue about professional considerations and difficulties)

Project teams

Confusion about their task, coaching on relationship manager as client and project teams. Drifting off task, lot of tension

Project teams

Reflection on group rules in action and clarification of task and required results. Difficult but constructive discussions

Project teams

Teams focus on producing results .Pro-active and cooperative attitude. Relaxed atmosphere

The next step was to analyze each case to find answers to the questions central to this thesis:

- *What is it that theatre techniques actually do?* I analyzed the teams' and individual team members reactions to the different theatre techniques, looking at both conscious and (previously) unconscious processes and at the different levels of dynamics that were addressed (individual, group, context) .
- *When do they work and when not?* I looked for instances in which theatre techniques helped the team to make a next step in their development and for instances in which this didn't work .
- *What is the best way to apply them?* I analyzed under which circumstances and conditions theatre techniques were successfully or unsuccessfully used.

Cross case synthesis. After the singular case analysis I performed a cross case synthesis (Yin, 2009) in which I compared and analyzed all cases to see what analogies and patterns could be found between the findings from the singular case analyses.

Limitations

Although this research was carefully prepared and conducted, I am still aware of its limitations and shortcomings. First of all, the research is based on cases I was previously involved in. This may have led to subjectivity and researcher bias, possibly not being as open to faults, blind spots and shortcomings as a non-involved researcher would be. Another result of reviewing my own cases may be that, although they were co-designed with several other coaches, repertoire and techniques used in the programs might be limited to the ones I happen to be familiar with and prefer to work with.

Secondly, the number of cases and the type of organizations where they took place are limited (ten cases in four organizations) and may not be sufficiently representative. All organizations where the coaching programs have taken place operate in a non-profit or health-care environment, none in a corporate environment, where group dynamic and openness to such techniques and approaches may be different. Findings and conclusions from this thesis may not apply in a corporate context.

Finally, the research conducted only took into account team coaching programs where theatre techniques were used. No comparison was made with programs that worked with only verbal interventions or techniques borrowed from other areas such as dance, painting or music. Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn about the relative effectiveness of the use of theatre techniques.

Cases and context

Second thoughts are ever wiser
Euripides, *Hippolytus*

In my work I often get asked to help clients with what they describe as ‘difficult’ or ‘closed off’ work teams. More often than not, these teams have a long history of unwanted team dynamics such as bullying, not accepting new team members, not adapting to new job demands or ‘keeping out’ their team leader or other relevant parties. Team performance is falling short. absenteeism and stress levels among team members are high, the team is not living up to its full potential, is not doing what it is supposed to do, or in some cases even is acting in a way that is harmful to their primary task.

By the time I get called in, clients (in most cases the team manager or the team managers’ manager) have tried talking to the team, but without sufficient sustainable results and are at the end of what they feel they can do to get the team back on track. Their question is to ‘look at a deeper level’ to see what might be going on and what can be done about it. For them and the team, the situation has become too hot to handle but too present to ignore.

The research done for this thesis is based on a total of ten team coaching programs for such teams, in which I was involved as a team coach/facilitator, or as the consultant who made a preliminary analysis of the team’s situation, which was then followed by a team coaching program facilitated by another coach or coaches. All cases take place in the same North Western European country.

Teams

The teams that are central to the coaching programs analyzed, are intact work teams, meaning they are teams with a common task and belonging to the same organizational unit. Teams come from a total of four different organizations: a health care institution for mentally handicapped clients (three teams of caregivers who take care of clients and of the living accommodations or day time activity facilities these clients use), a forensic psychiatric institution (four teams of caretakers/observers) a University Library (a team of people responsible for the book depot) and refuse collectors (two teams working in the same part of a town, responsible for garbage collection and keeping streets clean). Teams vary in size from five to eighteen members, ages varying from 24 to 61. The male/female ratio varies from 90/10 in the case of the refuse collectors to 10/90 in the case of the health care teams, the average being 50/50. Most team members have a North Western European background, with the exception of the teams of refuse collectors, in which 40% had a Southern European or Northern African background. The level of education varies from primary school to academic, education levels within each of the teams having a smaller spread. In all programs, the team manager is seen as part of the team and participates in all sessions.

Coaching programs

The programs researched have taken place in the period between 2008 and 2013. Their time span varies from a singular half day team meeting, a one day work conference followed by two one day team session, a two day work conference with a 'return day' three month later, programs consisting of five half day meetings spanning a total of five month, to programs consisting of ten half or one day meetings, spanning a total period of nine months.

In each program, theatre techniques are used as a way to help teams become more aware of unwanted group dynamics. In all programs, with the exception of the refuse collecting teams, theatre techniques are also used to help the team create and practice alternative behavior. All programs include moments where what is happening in the 'here-and-now' during the coaching sessions is addressed and discussed.

Each program is designed and facilitated by two team coaches. All coaches involved (in total six for all the programs researched) are clinically informed organizational consultants and coaches. In two of the programs (two of the caretaker teams) professional training actors are used to develop and practice new behavior, to 'mirror' participants non-verbal behavior and to perform a comic theatre act, intended to loosen up the atmosphere during a session. Each team coaching program starts with an elaborate intake, interviewing the team manager and some or all team members. Next a global overall program design is made, describing timing, general topics to be discussed during each meeting, and some notions about the approach (discussing the here-and-now, connection with every day practice of the team, alternating use of various techniques such as theatre techniques, collages, training sessions). Each session is subsequently designed more in detail with a team delegation and the manager to align with current events and team development. Theatre techniques include both used already designed and described techniques and newly developed ones to meet the teams' process and needs. In the latter case, techniques from sociodrama, sculpting and image theatre were adapted. During each session, the program is adapted to what is happening in the here and now and to events in the time between sessions which have an impact on the team. Programs take place in a location outside the teams 'normal' working environment (meeting rooms within the organizations or outside).

Findings

Je gaat het pas zien als je het doorhebt
(you will only start seeing it once you know what you are looking at)
Johan Cruyff, soccer player

In this chapter, I describe the findings from the singular and cross case analyses I conducted and compare and contrast these findings with the first conclusions drawn from the literature review. The structure of the chapter follows the three central research questions:

- *What is the effect of theatre techniques?*
- *When to use them and when not?*
- *What is the best way to apply them?*

What is the effect of theatre techniques?

Answers so far. From the literature review the following first answers to this question were found:

- *The playful and physically active nature of theatre techniques help people become not just cognitively but also experientially involved, which helps them access previously unconscious aspects within themselves and access the creativity to develop new behavior.*
- *This applies to both individuals and to the group-as-a-whole.*
- *Theatre techniques can be applied to address intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup dynamics. No description is found of the use of theatre techniques to address intragroup dynamics in a work environment.*

Findings from the singular and cross case analysis. In the case analysis, I looked for confirming and disconfirming data about these answers, focusing on the effect the theatre techniques had on both individuals and the groups as a whole. In doing so I found the following:

The physical nature of theatre techniques accelerate and deepen experiences and learning within the team at both conscious and unconscious levels. Analysis of the responses of team member to the theatre techniques used suggests that becoming physically active and working in a different (more visual and physical) language helps teams and team members bring into consciousness emotions and thoughts that so far have been out of awareness. An illustrative quote from a team member ‘*Only when I looked at our own behavior from a distance, I realized that this is exactly how we are. It’s terrible!*’ Team members indicate that earlier attempts to talk about such less conscious dynamics had helped them in cognitively understanding what might be going on, but without any of the emotional involvement the theatre techniques had evoked.

The playfulness of theatre techniques stimulates action and creativity. Interviewees indicated unanimously that the playfulness and physical activity inherent to theatre techniques, helped them start moving out of their (defensive) comfort zone and step into action, physically, mentally and emotionally. Analysis of the cases also indicates that theatre techniques brought about creative and innovative solutions beyond their usual behavioral repertoire.

Responses and results were reported *both at an individual level and of the level of group-as-a-whole*: interviewees could clearly recognize and indicate the effects the use of theatre techniques had had on themselves and colleagues as individuals (sometimes bringing about a quite impactful awareness of their own role and anxieties) and on the effect these had had on the group as a whole (*‘somehow, the way it feels in this group, the whole atmosphere has changed*

since we saw what we were doing'). Findings from the case analysis show that different techniques address different levels of group life, including the *intragroup* level, which lacked in the research and literature so far. I refer to Appendix A for a more detailed description and categorization.

Another reported effect of the theatre techniques was that *it helped team members to work and look outside of the normal social order in their team*: other qualities and roles were being addressed when using these techniques, which according to interviewees shifted the balance in aspects like power, formal and informal roles and leadership. This led to new perspectives, innovative solutions and to the fact that team members who 'normally' would be overheard, getting more opportunity to contribute to the team process. '*We didn't know you had this in you! Why didn't you do this before?*' as some team members asked after a scene in which their quiet colleague showed a different, much more assertive and effective side of herself.

Across all cases, interviewees indicated that working with theatre techniques provided them with a feeling of safety, contributing to the creation of a *holding environment* where they felt safe to express what they were feeling and to experiment. '*because it is just play and it is okay if things go wrong or I become too emotional, I felt safe enough to become engaged*' one interviewee described it.

Literature review and findings from case study compared. The findings from the case study fully support the first two preliminary answers given based on the literature review. Findings suggest that techniques can successfully help to address *all* levels of group dynamics, including the intragroup perspective, which so far was lacking from literature and research.

Several techniques were successfully used that addressed this particular level. Findings suggest that the following inferences can be made:

- *Theatre techniques can address intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup/contextual levels, different techniques primarily addressing different levels.*

Findings also suggest additional, not before described effects of the use of theatre techniques:

- *Working with theatre techniques changes the established social order in the group, giving it new perspectives, more innovative solutions and a reassessment of team members' roles and contribution.*
- *The playful character of theatre techniques can contribute to a good holding environment, helping team members feel safe enough to experiment and express themselves.*

When to use theatre techniques and when not?

Answers so far. The conclusions in the previous paragraph, about what it is theatre techniques actually do, informs us about the purpose for which they may be used. This suggests the following answer to the question of when to use them:

- *Theatre techniques can be used in a group when it is desirable to bring about awareness and learning of both conscious and unconscious aspects of its functioning and when creativity is needed to develop new, more helpful behavior.*
- *Theatre techniques can be used to develop solutions outside the restrictions of the usual social order in the group and to reassess team members' roles and contributions.*
- *They can also be used to help create a safe environment for people to express their feelings and experiment.*

So far no clear answers were found to the question of ‘when not to use them’.

Findings from the singular and cross case analysis. In analyzing the data, I looked for instances when theatre techniques helped the team to make a next step in their development and for instances in which this didn’t work. Analyzing cases considered to be not or only partly successful and comparing these to cases considered successful suggest the following factors as disqualifiers for using theatre techniques:

Cynicism as a defense mechanism: With teams that displayed a very cynical way of communicating, the theatre techniques didn’t have the hoped for effect. Team members, managers and coaches report that the playfulness of the techniques reinforced these teams’ use of humor as a defense mechanism. They were eager to engage in the exercises, scenes and sculptures were hilarious with sharp cynical comments, but the interventions didn’t help team members become more aware of emotions and anxieties hidden behind their behavior. In the debrief it was impossible to get them in a more serious mode and reflect on what is is they were doing and why.

Very serious, rational teams or tense. Two of the teams might be described as having a very serious and rational way of communication: very few if any jokes were made and members displayed a great need for rationally understanding what was going on, dismissing the effect of emotions on work life as ‘soft’ of ‘psycho babble’. With these teams it was very difficult to get them involved in the theatrical exercises even after a long period of explaining and warming up exercises. They considered the theatre interventions to be ‘not serious’ enough, and participation (if any) was perfunctory.

In one of the cases, the use of theatre techniques completely missed its goal: here an attempt was made in the first coaching session of a very tense and anxious team to warm up the team and create a more loose, inviting environment. To 'lighten the atmosphere' and give the session a more playful character, a professional training actress was asked to perform a comic act (she acted as a restroom lady who made funny remarks about team members). Tension in this team however was so high that team members didn't understand that she was an actress, even after this was explained to them. They remained highly focused on '*keeping themselves in one piece*' as one of the team members described, with no room for '*funny stuff*'.

Therapy instead of coaching. The focus of all the programs researched was on intragroup and interpersonal dynamics of intact work teams. In particular during the letting go phase, intrapersonal issues came to the surface as people were confronted with difficult parts of their own 'inner theatre'. In two teams, the emotions evoked were too strong for the team member to continue participating in the team sessions. In both cases additional individual coaching was provided outside the team coaching. Some teams had a tendency to jump and extensively elaborate on such individual emotions, digressing from the task at hand (work on improving team dynamic as a whole). At such moments, team coaching gravitated toward group therapy. To get the team on the right track, a quick and solid intervention was necessary to remind them of their task during the coaching program.

Literature review and findings from case study compared: findings suggest that the following criteria might indicate that theatre techniques are better not used in team coaching sessions:

- *Theatre techniques should not be used when highly cynical or serious and rational group dynamics are present or when tension in the group is too high.*
- *In situations where strong intrapersonal reactions which defer the team from its developmental task can be foreseen, theatre techniques might only be used with precaution, paying attention to keeping the group working on its collective task and doing not harm to team members.*

What is the best way to apply theatre techniques?

Answers so far. Based on literature review the following inferences were made about a preliminary answers to this question:

- *Techniques are embedded in a process of warming up, enactment and debrief.*
- *Techniques are facilitated by a coach with clinical awareness and knowledge of theatre techniques.*
- *Facilitators and coaches help the team find its own solutions and deal with difficult emotions that occur, they do not take on an expert role.*
- *A safe atmosphere is created and guarded where playfulness, experimenting and expression of feelings can exist (holding environment and potential space)*

The literature study has also suggested some aspects to be studied more in depth in the case analysis, in particular how the different experiences described in the transitional approach relate to the team coaching processes, and what connections can be made between experiences and the theatre techniques used.

Findings from the singular and cross case analysis. Analyzing the cases I looked for patterns which might support, disconfirm or add to this preliminary answer. In doing so, I found the following.

Warming up, enactment, debrief: In all successful situations, theatre techniques were used within this frame. However, cases show a wide variation in the (relative) amount spent on each of these steps. Some teams needed little or no warming up, other than a short introduction and instruction of what they were supposed to do. This was particularly true in situations where teams were in an active and creative frame of mind and working on finding different solutions and actions. At the beginning of all coaching programs, more warming up was required to get the teams engaged in the theatre techniques (short physical and fun exercises). Interviewees indicated to recognize this and interpreted this as being hesitant to ‘*look foolish*’ (after experiencing more techniques they saw it more as a normal part of team coaching) or as being anxious about what might come to the surface. In the less or un-successful situations, the process remained stuck in the warming up phase (not wanting to start the enactment in the serious and high tension teams) or the debrief failed (in the cynical teams).

Coaches with clinical awareness and knowledge of theatre techniques. All coaching programs studied were led by clinically informed coaches and consultants who also had experience with and knowledge of theatre techniques, so no comparison can be made with the effects of theatre techniques facilitated by coaches with different profiles. Data however suggest an interesting notion about the effect of clinical awareness of the *team members*. Providing them with some theoretical background about clinical concepts was perceived as being effective in enabling the teams to ‘observe’ these formerly unconscious processes with curiosity, instead of

feeling overwhelmed by them and accepting them as a ‘normal’ part of group life which can be understood and dealt with.

Facilitators and coaches help the team find its own solutions deal with difficult emotions that arise, they do not take on an expert role. When asked about the role of the coach, all the coaches interviewed considered themselves to have taken on the roles described here. From the feedback forms studied and the interviews with team members and managers, the majority agreed with this view and mentioned it as an important factor in the effectiveness of the coaching program. One of the feedback forms indicated ‘*It was a relief to hear the coach didn’t have all the answers but that she was curious to what the team might find during the coaching. This helped me in accepting I didn’t have them either (yet)*’.

A safe atmosphere is created and guarded where playfulness, experimenting and expression of feelings can exist (holding environment and potential space). Data suggest this to be an important factor: in all unsuccessful cases, team members mention feelings of not being safe enough to express themselves (afraid of repercussion from team members or managers, afraid coaches were sent to the team with a ‘*hidden agenda to fix the team*’ or fear of being overwhelmed by their own feelings) or feelings of uselessness as they expected possible outcomes of the coaching to be unacceptable and not taken seriously by their environment anyway. In the successful cases, this was sometimes mentioned at the beginning of the programs, but as the programs progressed, such feelings were no longer reported.

A series of experiences. From the time series analysis and the cross case analysis, a pattern emerges of the several kinds of experiences a team goes through on its way to (successfully) change dysfunctional group dynamics, which is very much in line with the

experiences described in the literature on transitional change processes: awareness, letting go, creativity/experimenting and action. In the next section, group behavior during each experience is described in more detail.

These different experiences within the coaching programs did not occur in a strictly linear manner but iteratively: teams moving back and forth between steps both during and between coaching sessions. Comparing successful programs to unsuccessful ones shows that in successful ones, all steps were taken in this order, each next step building on the previous. Two of the less successful coaching programs started with a skills training using role play to develop new behavioral repertoire. In both teams, reactions were defensive and participation perfunctory and later team members indicated not having any sense of urgency or conscious awareness of dysfunctional team dynamics. Only after a profound redesign of the program aimed at first helping the team create more awareness about their dynamic and its negative effects, the team started to get unstuck and willing to develop new skills and behavior.

Patterns in behavior, focus and techniques per experience. Zooming in at the distinctive experiences mentioned above, a cohesive pattern can be seen across all cases of group behavior and reactions during each experience, the teams' focus of attention, and the type of theatre techniques effectively used to deepen and accelerate the particular experience the teams was going through. Below I describe all three facets per type of experience

- **Awareness**, of the need and urgency to change and of defense mechanisms.

Group behavior: In the team coaching programs researched, this experience was noticeable through a change in energy in the group from defensive, distracted or giggly to

a more confused, introverted, sometimes deafeningly silent atmosphere, with team members becoming pale and quiet.

Main focus of attention: group discussions and emotions displayed and verbalized were mainly focusing on intragroup dynamics. The teams made a ‘turning inward’ movement, looking at the inner workings of the group as a whole.

Type of theatre techniques: Findings suggest that theatre techniques focusing on *visually* making clear what is going on and putting team members in a position where they can look at the images constructed are most effective in this stage. Teams where such techniques were used came to a quicker and more profound insight into unconscious processes than other team. Interesting to note is that the words they use to describe this experience very often refer to visual concepts (*‘All of a sudden I saw what we did. This was a real eye-opener. How could we have been so blind?’*).

- **Letting go**, including release of negative affect and starting to make sense of the nature and source of defense mechanisms.

Group behavior: In all programs researched where teams went through this ‘letting go’ experience, team members started crying or became angry, with the anger directed towards themselves or to the environment (manager, organization, coach). Some teams reacted by denying what had become visible, rationalizing or deflecting the anxiety by starting to talk about something else. Only after they had returned to and stayed with their feelings of sadness or anger, they were able to become curious about the nature and source of their unconscious behavior and in doing so, implicitly starting the process of

letting go of old patterns. This was indicated by team members starting to ask questions like ‘*Why do we do this!?*’ ‘*Is this normal?*’ ‘*Does this happen in other teams as well?*’.

Main focus of attention: group discussions and emotions displayed and verbalized were mainly focusing on intrapersonal dynamics and subsequently on intragroup and interpersonal levels. The team members first made a further ‘turning inward’ movement, becoming aware of and expressing their individual reaction to group dynamics, and subsequently a ‘turning outward’ movement, becoming curious about alternative types of behavior, both on an individual and group level.

Type of theatre techniques: Letting go is accelerated and deepened by techniques that *focus on physical and emotional experiences in the moment*. The release of negative affect and trying to understand what is going on are best served, as findings suggest, with theatre techniques that give team members the opportunity to physically act out and feel what they are experiencing, and to physically step into other shoes as a way to understand why things are happening the way they are. Emotions run high when going through this experience and data suggest that theatre techniques work best when in this stag when the enactment is short and the debrief elaborate, paying a lot of attention to staying with and working through emotions.

- **Creativity**, oriented toward ‘inventing’ new intragroup and interpersonal behavior and necessary change in organizational processes (such as a different way of organizing team meetings, redistribution or clarification of tasks).

Group behavior. During this experience, the energy in the teams researched was very high and cheerful (red cheeks, concentration, laughter, louder voices, lot of physical activity).

Main focus of attention: group discussions and emotions displayed and verbalized were mainly focusing on interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup dynamics. The team members made a strong ‘turning outward’ movement, investigating points of views from other groups and parties they had to work with, experimenting with and looking for new kinds of behavior to deal with the outside world, both as a team and in their individual functioning in relation to others.

Type of theatre techniques. Creativity is enhanced by *dynamic and playful* theatre techniques. This experience is characterized by an active and dynamic atmosphere in the teams researched. Theatre techniques that help the teams get in such a playful mode and express themselves in various ways (verbally, physically, with music, sometimes through drawing or painting) appear to be most effective. Here the aspects of spontaneity and action as described in the literature review are very present: high energy techniques that mobilize all senses and help team members (sometime literally) step outside their comfort zone were perceived as most conducive to finding new solutions.

- **Action**, which includes practicing the skills necessary to adopt new behavior en putting new behavior and organizational processes into everyday work practice.

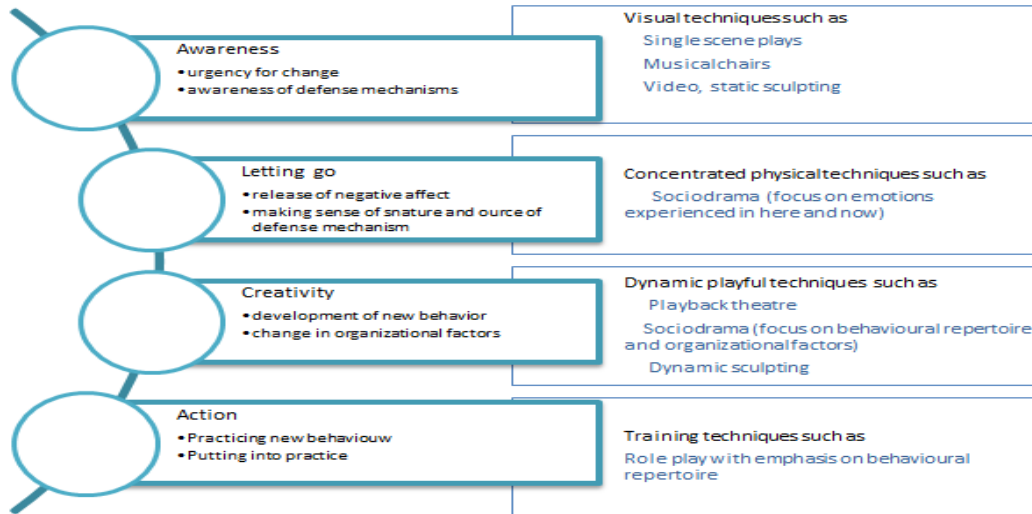
Group behavior: During this experience group behavior can be qualified as a mix of hopefulness, action and frustration. Hopefulness mainly occurring at the end of coaching sessions, after having practiced new skills, action and frustration mainly in between sessions, when the application of new skills wasn’t always easy.

Main focus of attention: The team members made a further ‘turning outward’ movement, working on the development and application of interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup skills to be used in their ‘real life’ work context.

Type of theatre techniques: Action is deepened and accelerated by theatre techniques that help team members *practice new skills and behavior*. In this experience, teams put into practice their new ways of working. Most of this work is done outside the team coaching setting, in their ‘normal’ work environment. To help teams actually realizing the changes they are after, theatre techniques appear to be most helpful in this stage when they focus on practicing new skills.

Literature review and findings from case study compared: Findings support the preliminary answers to this research question, and suggest the following elaboration:

- *Warming up, enactment and debrief should be proportioned in accordance to the situation the theatre techniques is being used.*
- *Clinical awareness is not just necessary for coaches but can also help team members to make working with theatre techniques more effective.*
- *During a team coaching program, teams go through a series of different experiences. Findings suggest that each experience is characterized by specific group behavior and focus of attention, and that different theatre techniques deepen and accelerate different types of experience. This connection between experience and type of theatre technique can be depicted as follows:*



Discussion

Though this be madness, yet there is method in it
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

The chapter looks back at the research and thesis writing process and discusses the meaning and applicability of the findings.

In retrospect

In their original design, choices in the team coaching programs and the use of theatre techniques were based on my implicit assumptions and professional intuition. Much to my surprise, review and analysis of the cases has brought to the surface a clear and repeated pattern of how theatre techniques can effectively be used (and in most cases *are* used) in team coaching programs. This rationale had so far remained part of my own ‘unthought known’ and previously has not been researched and described. Or as Polonius so eloquently says in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: *though this be madness, there is method in it*.

Answers found

In summary, findings suggest the following answers to the original research questions:

The playful and physical active nature of theatre techniques helps teams become aware of previously unconscious dysfunctional group dynamics and creative in finding new, more constructive behavior to deal with current and future situations.

They seem to be effective when used with teams who have a need for making changes in both the conscious and unconscious aspects of their functioning but seem less advisable with very cynical, serious or rational groups or when tension in a group is too high.

Application of techniques seems most effective in a safe environment and when facilitated by clinically informed coaches with knowledge of theatre techniques who give teams room to find their own solutions. Embedding the techniques in a process of warming up, enactment and debrief seems most helpful, as does a conscious choice and use of theatre techniques that match the particular experience a team is going through.

New findings

Looking back at the research and literature study three new and previously not researched and reported notions about working with theatre techniques in teams have come to the surface:

An new connection between techniques and team experiences: A completely new insight was that for each type of experience a team goes through during a coaching program, different types of theatre techniques seem most conducive to creating helpful conditions. Suggestions are made for how these can be matched.

New theatre techniques for intragroup processes in the workplace. Literature on the use of theatre techniques in the workplace so far addresses only intrapersonal, interpersonal or intergroup processes, but not the intragroup level. Several of such techniques have been developed and, according to the findings from the case analysis, successfully used.

Newly described effects when working with teams Findings also suggest that working with theatre techniques in teams as compared to working with individuals or in organizations, has

additional effects not before described. Teams felt invited and enabled to act outside the usual social order in their team, addressing different qualities and roles in team members, which according to them led to more innovative solutions and helped change dysfunctional group dynamics.

Applicability

Having a better understanding of the rationale behind working with theatre techniques in team coaching programs can help create more effective conditions for such programs. It can help consultants and coaches to make better informed choices about when to use which technique and what role to take on, and help team members and their managers get a better understanding of what the process entails they are going through. I feel that with the work done for this thesis, I have contributed to the development of such a better understanding, which can be built upon by researchers and practitioners. My sincere hope is that this contribution, as small as it might be, will help organizations, teams and coaches create more productive, happier and healthier work places.

Further research

*What we know is to what we do not know,
as a grain of sand is to the beach.*
Ivan Panin, *Thoughts*

With this thesis a deeper understanding has been developed about the use of theatre techniques in team coaching programs. To continue to broaden our understanding of this topic, further research into the use of these techniques in a corporate setting and on a larger sample of cases would be helpful. Also, looking at a more in-depth level at why it is that certain types of techniques work best for certain types of group experiences and expanding the development, description and categorization of techniques would be an interesting and valuable topic for further research. Results from such research might help us in making better informed choices in the approaches chosen in team coaching.

Another inviting area for further research is the connection between the character of group dynamics or defense mechanisms on the one hand and the effective use of theatre techniques for bringing these into awareness and possibly changing them on the other one.

The topic could also very well be broadened: what other types of interventions, borrowed from the arts are helpful in working with malfunctioning teams? In my literature study for example, I came across techniques borrowed from other performing arts, such as dance and music, and from the visuals arts, such as painting and photography, used in individual and team coaching programs. When and how can these be used successfully, when not, and how does their effectiveness compare to more traditional team coaching approaches or to the use of theatre techniques?

Conclusion

*There is a time for departure,
even when there is no certain place to go.*
Tennessee Williams, *Camino Real*

Working in teams is one of the answers to deal with the increasing complexity and need for speed in today's workplace. But teams bring about difficulties of their own: bullying, not accepting new team members, 'keeping out' team leaders are just some examples of (unconscious) team dynamics that nobody wants, but that sometimes seem impossible to change. In my work as a coach and consultant I have worked with many of such teams, often using theatre techniques as part of a team coaching program to help them change their dysfunctional dynamics. Most of the choices I made in design, interventions and reactions were based on what I would call my professional intuition. Like many of the colleagues I talked to, even though I felt such interventions were effective, I found it hard to make explicit what the rationale was behind my choices. This brought about a sense of doubt, inadequacy and curiosity about the how, why and when of the use of these techniques. This curiosity has been the driver behind the work done for this thesis: very selfishly to at least be more clear about what I should feel inadequate about, but also from a feeling of professional responsibility, to further the knowledge about how teams, which have often ended up in dynamics that make their performance ineffective and team members feel miserable, can be helped.

Analyzing the ten cases and comparing my findings with the outcome of the literature study was an interesting and exciting journey which, much to my surprise, showed there was method in what I considered to be professional intuitive madness.

I hope these answers suggested here can be a useful addition to consultants' and coaches team coaching toolbox and to team members' and managers' understanding about working on a productive and healthy workplace. An addition however to be further tested and not to be used as a quick fix panacea, but carefully and wisely, with an open mind for emerging events and with clinical awareness to understand and contain often complex and anxiety provoking processes.

This study also has shown that there still is a whole lot more to discover about this topic, as described in the paragraph on further research. The person whom I once heard say "the most important expression in research is not 'Eureka' but 'That's funny' must have been a wise man.

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Appendix A, Theatre Techniques

Description of theatre techniques used in the team coaching programs

- **One scene plays**, in which small groups of team members design and act out scenes from their working life, the assignment given to them being: *‘show us a short scene that is typical for your team’*. The other team members become their audience. After the scene has been enacted, a collective debrief takes place, taking into account emotions experiences by both actors and audience. In all cases where this technique was used, scenes turned out to show much more of the teams behavior and dynamic than team members anticipated, bringing into awareness unconscious processes and giving a starting point for letting go of negative affect and understanding what is going on. In contrast to organizational theatre, where professional training actors depict such scenes, based on earlier interviews in the organization, scenes depicted were more readily accepted as ‘true’ because they were designed by the team itself.
- **Static sculpting**, a technique in which team members are asked to make a physical representation (a ‘sculpture’) of the relationships or atmosphere within their team. Sometimes this sculpture is photographed. After enactment, a collective debrief is conducted in which interpretations of and reactions to the sculptures is being discussed. Again, like in the one scene plays, this image speaks louder than anticipated by team members, unintentionally showing aspect like physical distance or proximity or facial expressions of sympathy, aversion or fear. A variation to static sculpting is asking team members to stand in a line which has to be organized according to as given criterion

related to issues in the team (like age, number of years in this team, physical strengths, informal status within the group). The coach then discusses with the participants if they feel everyone is standing in the right position and what these differences in position mean for the group-as-a-whole. The findings suggest that this technique is particularly helpful in teams that have difficulties in tolerating differences among team members. This 'line up' makes such differences visible and open for discussion.

- **Video.** Recording 'natural' situations like work meetings, and then viewing them back, making the team its own audience, looking at themselves as if they were actors. In the debrief, special attention is needed in this technique to help the teams not just focus on the content of their discussion but on the way they behave as a group, focusing on issues like structure of discussion, listening skills, subgroup formation and general atmosphere and group dynamic. Like the one –scene-plays and the static sculpting, this technique helps teams look at themselves and bring into awareness behavioral patterns in the group that have become unconscious.
- **Musical chairs.** In this technique, chairs representing different positions within the team are placed in the room. Positions can include such things like different values present in the team, negative, positive or neutral attitude towards change or different professions represented in the team. Positions can either be identified by team members themselves or suggested by the coach. A delegation of the team is asked to take these seats, other team members sitting around them to observe what happens as the delegation starts a discussion, representing the position that is designated to the chair they are sitting on. In the debrief, attention is paid to emotions experienced by both actors and audience, how it felt to listen to or represent different positions and how both actors and audience

responded to these differences. An important point in the debrief is to discuss how this effects the dynamic of the group-as-a-whole. A collective analysis is made of the relative 'status and strength' of each position and how this relates to their current group dynamic. In one of the caretaker teams researched for example, three chairs represented the different value systems present within the team (in this case the values of caretaking, art and commerce). Based on a self-chosen example from their work, they discussed a current issue from the perspective of the value their chair was representing. For the audience, this gave a very clear insight into how the 'opposing' standpoints so far unconsciously determined the way they normally discussed work matters. For the team members sitting on the chairs, it brought an additional awareness of how much they unconsciously identified with the value they were representing and how little effort was put in trying to understand their colleagues' point of view. Afterwards, the mental image of these chairs was a recurring symbol in team discussions as a way to make differences in value systems open for discussion. (*what chair are you sitting on now? or 'try sitting on my chair for a second'*)).

- **Sociodrama, focusing on the physical and emotional experience in the here and now.**

Here team members take on different roles, literally standing in the position of for example other team members, representatives of other teams, clients or manager. Their physical distance and posture should express the relationship as they experience them. Next, each actor is asked to speak some lines about what he or she is feeling or thinking from that position. This can be done in one scenario or in several different possible scenarios that are relevant to the situations. In the debrief, actors reflect upon the feelings taking on these roles evoked. To keep the focus on the actual experience of the *actors*,

this technique works best when audience feedback is limited. Findings suggest that team members get a quick and deep understanding of what emotions other parties experience or may experience in different scenarios, and in consequence, develop a better understanding of why they act the way they do. Taking the different perspectives helps them in reflecting upon their own behavior and anxieties as well. Findings suggest that it is most effective when scenes are fairly short (max 5 minutes), team members remain in charge of how far they want to go in the scenes, and that a lot of time is taken for an elaborate debrief, in which team members are helped to verbalize and integrate what they have experienced.

- **Sociodrama, with the emphasis on behavioral repertoire and organizational factors.**

In this technique team members again take on several roles, including those of people outside of their team. They play out short day-to-day scenes in the ‘old’ situation (the current one, with the unhelpful group dynamic), and then try out different scenarios of these same scenes, experimenting with different types of behavior towards each other and towards people outside of their team (such as clients, managers, team members from other teams). In the debrief, the different scenarios are analyzed in terms of helpfulness and feasibility. Findings are translated into practical steps to take, both in terms of behavior and necessary organizational changes. In the coaching programs researched, this variation of sociodrama led to clearer definitions of roles and tasks, new agreements about ways of dealing with clients and customers and to a starting point for the development of new behavioral skills.

- **Playback theatre.** This technique is a more dynamic variation of the one-scene-plays described above. Like in the one-scene-plays, small groups of team members are asked to

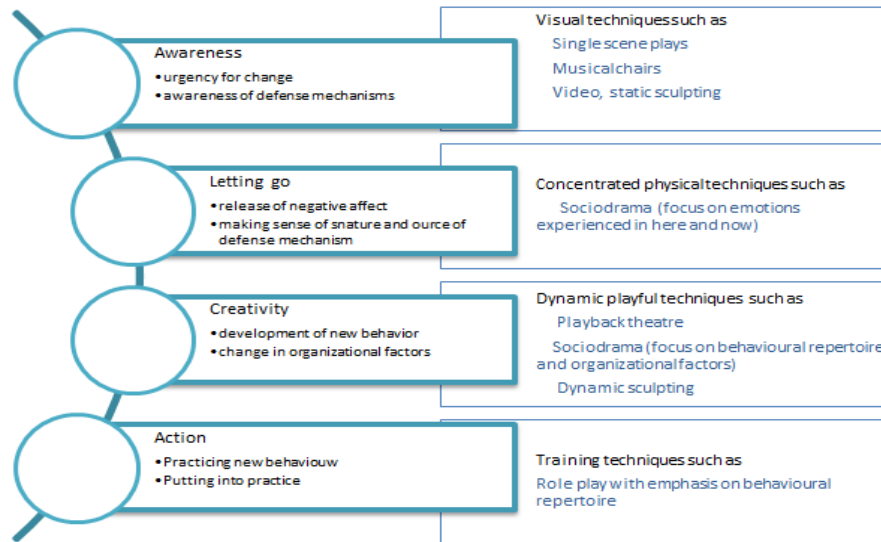
‘show us a short scene that is typical for the old way of working in your team, making it a bit bigger than in reality’ They perform this short play once, with colleagues being the audience. They then restart the scene from the beginning, and team members in the audience take on the role of the play directors. As soon as one of the ‘directors’ sees a moment in the play where he or she feels the behavior displayed is not helpful or desirable, he or she calls ‘cut’. At that moment, the play freezes, the ‘director’ gives instructions for the new desirable behavior (literal sentences to say or different physical positions, postures or facial expressions), the actors rewind the play and integrate the new behavior in their play. Each member of the audience can become a director whenever he or she sees fit. This continues until the scene has been performed to the satisfaction of the audience, after which the actors receive a round of applause and the team is debriefed about what they have learned from this play, addressing both their ratio and emotions, and how they could integrate it in their day-to-day work.

- **Dynamic sculpting.** In static sculpting, only the current situation is being physically expressed in a ‘sculpture’. In dynamic sculpting, small groups make, in quick succession, sculptures of the current situation, the desired situation and the steps necessary in between to go from the current to the desired state. Each sculpture or image may be ‘revealed’ by pulling away a curtain or screen and welcomed with a round of applause. Sculptures are (literally or metaphorically¹) photographed and photographs are put up in chronological order to help the team figure out what practical steps they could take to make this future image a reality.

¹ In the case of metaphorical photographs, team members are asked to act as if they are taking a mental photograph of the sculpture. This mental images are then referred to in the debrief.

- **Role play**, where team members can train alternative behavior and skills such as giving and receiving feedback, develop better listening skills or structure the way they participate in discussions appeared to be most helpful in this stage. This techniques emphasizes interpersonal relationships, sometimes touching on intrapersonal processes and hindrances. Role play works with it least two people: a protagonist, being the one who is practicing the new behavior and an antagonist, the one who ‘receives’ the new behavior and reacts to this as he or she feels appropriate’. In the debrief, experiences from both protagonist and antagonist are addressed. In the team coaching programs researched, role play has been used in different variation, such as the ‘*carrousel*’, in which the same situation is played out, in short succession, by different actors, trying out different types of behavior, the ‘*protagonist with assistants*’ where one team member tries out different kinds of behavior, interrupted by time outs in which he or she can ask feedback and tips from the assistants in the back (see illustration) or the ‘*clinic*’ in which a team member doesn’t play his own role, but that of the other party to physically and emotionally experience how different kinds of behavior affect this other party. In the case of a clinic, protagonist and antagonist trade place. From the feedback and interviews used as input for this research, working with a professional training actor for role play was perceived as more effective than ‘practicing on each other’. This is in contrast to the techniques described earlier, where working with professional training actors did, according to team members and facilitators, not bring added value.

Use of techniques per experience



Levels addressed by the different techniques

The table below described which theatre technique primarily aims at and addresses which level of dynamic (intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup or intergroup/context).

According to the findings in this research, all techniques used in the team coaching programs evoked emotions within individuals, having effects on an intrapersonal level, giving information about what might be happening at all levels. This however is not taking into account in this table. Only techniques specifically *aiming* at becoming aware and working with these intrapersonal dynamics are scored as such.

	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal	Intragroup	Intergroup/ context
One scene plays		X	X	
Static sculpting			X	
Video		X	X	
Musical chairs			X	
Sociodrama, experience	X	X		X
Sociodrama, scenario's		X		X
Playback theatre		X	X	
Dynamic sculpting			X	X
Role play	X	X		