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# Artistic interventions in organizations: beyond the fad

Ariane Berthoin Antal

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One of the intriguing trends in the past decade has been the emergence of artistic interventions in organizations. For example, some managers have brought in actors to work for a day with employees to heighten their awareness of issues relating to diversity, others have collaborated with relational artists to develop innovative ideas for new services, while others have organized residency programs with conceptual artists that stimulate reflections about identity over several months. Given the diversity of forms that artistic interventions take, I define them broadly as ‘when people, products or practices from the world of the arts enter the world of organizations’ with a more or less clearly defined learning orientation (Berthoin Antal 2009, p. 4). The body of literature about learning with and from the arts has grown rapidly over the past decade (for example, Boyle and Ottensmeyer 2005; Brellochs and Schrat 2005; Seifter and Buswick 2005; Taylor and Ladkin 2009; Anderson et al. 2011; Biehl-Missal 2011; Schiuma 2011; Berthoin Antal 2014). When even the business weekly, the Economist, announced in 2011 that ‘business has much to learn from the arts,’ I began to wonder whether it meant that another short-loved, short-lived management fad would soon be replaced by

a different exotic idea. Or could it signal that the idea has entered the mainstream so that, as Lotte Darsø, one of the pioneer researchers in the field, suggests, 'the application of artistic and artful processes ... move business forward to make better business in two interdependent ways: one towards innovation and profit, the other towards more humane and energetic organizations'? (2004, p. 155).

The chapter draws on findings from my multi-stakeholder research in over a hundred artistic interventions in organizations of different sizes, in diverse sectors and in various European countries. It therefore contributes to the stakeholder-contingency approach to organizational learning (Örtenblad 2013), albeit with a different combination of stakeholders. Listening to the voices of the artists, employees and project owners in management who have participated in artistic interventions, and to the intermediaries who have accompanied the projects, offers insights into the factors that enable and impede learning from the experience. They thereby enable the contextualization of the practice of artistic interventions as a new approach to developing people, ideas and organizational processes.

The first section of the chapter frames the potential for organizational learning with artists, highlighting individuals as the learning agents and the reasons that insiders need help from outsiders to explore and push the boundaries of their organizational culture. The second section discusses the qualities that artists bring to the organizational learning process as outsiders to the world of organizations. In the third section I present examples to illustrate how artists engage with insiders to open the cultural context for exploration and experimentation; the cases also show how the absence of certain factors can affect the realization of the organizational learning

potential. The chapter returns to the original question and reflects the roles that leaders and researchers can play in shaping the answer.

## **Framing the potential for organizational learning with artists**

The crucial points of departure for conceiving of how artistic interventions can contribute to organizational learning are that individuals are the learning agents, and that they need help opening up their organizational culture that is the learning context. These assumptions have several implications.

### **The individual as agent of organizational learning**

I share the view that the focus of attention must start with the individual because organizations do not have the human capacity for cognition and action (Argyris and Schön 1978). The emphasis on experience as a key source of learning also implies focusing on the individual as agent, and it extends research attention beyond the purely cognitive processing of information to aesthetic dimensions that encompass bodily sensations and emotions (Strati 2000). Learning takes on collective meaning when ‘the texture and feeling of human experiences [are] shared and interpreted through dialogue with one another.’ (Kolb 1984, p. 2)

### **Organizational culture as the context for learning**

The cultural context has primary two functions in organizational learning. It is a repository of past learning because organizational learning is the process through which individual learning becomes embedded in an organization’s structure and memory, which includes explicit and explicit rules, norms and routines (Kim 1993, p.37). In

addition, organizational culture influences the potential for learning by enabling or constraining the process and the substance. 'To be aware of culture is to come to know that which the organization has learned. ... Only when the basic assumptions, beliefs, and success formulas are made conscious and visible do they become testable and open to reinforcement or modification' (Normann 1985, p. 231; see also Weick and Ashford 2001).

### Outsiders to help insiders' learning

A consequence of these two points of departure is that, in order for individuals to be agents of organizational learning, they first need to develop the capacity to examine and challenge the cultural context in which they are embedded. Since by definition cultural conditioning is taken for granted, it is very difficult for people who are socialized in an organizational culture to become aware of the features that shape the way they think and behave in that context. Organizational outsiders, who enter the culture with fresh eyes and with experiences from different contexts, can trigger moments of questioning and experimenting with alternatives.

There are different kinds of organizational outsiders. For example, new employees can stimulate this kind of learning, but they are usually quickly socialized into the dominant culture, so organizations rarely tap into the potential that 'slow learners' represent (March 1991a, pp. 76–8). Management consultants<sup>i</sup> can serve this function, particularly if they maintain their marginality and leave the central roles to the client (Berthoin Antal and Krebsbach-Gnath 2001). The advent of artistic interventions opens the door for a new kind of outsider to help reveal and challenge the cultural assumptions and routines in organizations, namely artists.

## Artists as outsiders in organizational learning processes

There are some key differences between management consultants and artists as outsiders who can stimulate and support insiders in processes of contextualizing organizational learning. Several differences can position artists as potentially particularly well-suited to help members of the organization open up their cultural context for exploration and experimentation, while other differences limit their contribution to organizational learning processes.

### Potential advantages

A first potentially advantageous difference is that whereas management consultants, like their clients, inhabit the world of organizations, artists come from a world whose norms and codes are very different from those in organizations. As John Dewey pointed out, 'to multitudes art seems to be an importation into experience from a foreign country' ([1934]2005, p. 11). Therefore, artists are free to question everything they see and hear in the organization because they are perceived as complete strangers to the culture, while consultants are likely to understand much of what they see when they enter a client organization, and to share some of the core assumptions about the purpose of structures and processes they find there. Artists' questions tend to be purely curiosity driven, and people often feel that their questions are more innocent or disinterested than those of consultants, because artists truly do not know what is going on.

A second kind of difference that can be advantageous for artists stems from the perceived *raison d'être* for consultants and artists in society. Consulting 'has as its main apparent justification the giving of advice to organizational participants about how to

improve the effectiveness of organizations or specific individuals in them' (March 1991b, p. 21). By contrast, the role of artists is characterized variously as having no need for justification, as questioning and critiquing society rather than giving advice, or as generating superfluity rather than striving to improve effectiveness (Chiapello 1998; Schein 2001; Brellochs and Schrat 2002).

A third distinguishing feature of artists is that they work with art-based practices and media that engage emotional and aesthetic ways of knowing (Taylor and Ladkin 2009; Strati 2010; Johansson 2012). For their part, consultants frequently bring new models and tools to organizations, but the format tends to be similar to those that managers have seen before in their training or in previous consulting projects. Consultants' ways of working with clients are primarily cognitively-oriented and their tools are usually designed to produce a reassuring sense of clarity.

Possibly the most significant distinguishing strength of artists as outsiders entering organizations to stimulate and support individuals as agents of organizational learning lies in their attitude to learning and knowing, which differs markedly from the attitude that professional schools (business, law, engineering) instil in managers. This attitude comprises three facets. Most artists enter into the intervention seeking opportunities for co-learning with members of the organization (Berthoin Antal 2015, p. 294). They do not go into the world of organizations just to collect information or impart expertise and then to walk away untouched by the experience. In the process, they model working generatively with 'not-knowing' (Berthoin Antal 2013) rather than seeking rapid closure and certainty. And, their learning in the context is action-oriented: they want to try out ideas and leave a trace in the organization (Berthoin Antal 2015: pp.

295–6). The combination of these three aspects offers the possibility of interacting on an equal footing with insiders, including sharing the experience of vulnerability inherent in facing a new and risky situation whose outcome cannot be defined in advance.

### Potential drawbacks

Not surprisingly, the very features that can be advantages for artists as outsiders in stimulating members of the organization to explore and challenge their cultural context can also be sources of disadvantage. The primary drawbacks stem from their lack of training in the world of organizations, their lack of identification with it, and the temporary nature of their excursion out of the world of the arts.

Unlike management consultants, who are professionally trained in organizational development to be aware of the implications of their actions for people whose working relationships remain embedded in the organizational processes and structures, artists' professional identity and responsibility are oriented to the values of the world of the arts. It is important to them that they maintain this orientation while they interact with the world of organizations. However, the lack of training also means that they are not aware of the lessons learned about organizational dynamics over the decades in the field of organizational development, which can lead to naïve assumptions about organizational behavior (Berthoin Antal et al. 2014).

Whereas management consultants tend to orient their objectives around those of management in organizational learning (Örtenblad 2013), artists are less predictable. While most intend to engage with all participants as co-learners, they may be more likely to identify with the employees than with management, particularly if their interactions during an intervention do not include managers as co-learners. Some artists



come with an (undeclared) emancipatory agenda, projecting onto employees the discomfiture they would experience themselves if they had to work inside an organization. For example, one artist explained to me that he/she wanted to liberate employees from 'running like hamsters in a wheel' and a few others have told me that their implicit criterion for the success of an artistic intervention was to see employees choose to leave and start a new life. Other artists take a more radical position, rooted in a critique of all power structures and in an ethic of artistic provocation. These differences are discussable but not negotiable. They not only distinguish artists from consultants, they imply a different relationship with project owners than managers are accustomed to in dealing with external service providers. Project owners cannot expect to be able to control an artist the way they do other suppliers.

Artistic interventions can open up the context for exploration and experimentation, but artists are temporary visitors in the world of organizations. After an intervention they return to their art world, leaving the participants to deal with the consequences. Consultants are also expected to leave the organization after an intervention, but their remit is oriented to achieving closure. In addition, consultants remain in the same world and can come back to pick up the pieces at any time (indeed, they often prepare a follow-up project). Artists and consultants are therefore complementary types of external agents for organizational learning, and they sometimes team up to work in complex projects. Problems arise when the project owners in management overlook the differences between artists and consultants, forget that they invited the artists in to address issues by disrupting routines and challenging engrained assumptions, and do not take leadership responsibility for creating the time

and space to work with the ideas generated during the artistic intervention (Berthoin Antal and Strauß 2014a).

### Connecting insiders to outsiders: intermediaries

Given the cultural distance that lies between the world of the arts and the world of organizations, it is not surprising that the advent of artistic interventions has been accompanied by the emergence of intermediaries capable of making connections between the two communities. These intermediaries are often composed of people who have experience in both worlds so that they can understand the codes and values of each community. Intermediaries fulfill many functions, including creating the market for artistic interventions, matching artists and organizations, helping management start to formulate an objective for the intervention, assisting in finding funding, training and coaching artists to deal with organizational issues, and supporting reflections on the experience (Berthoin Antal 2012; Grzelec and Prata 2013; Bogerts 2014). By playing these multiple bridging functions, intermediaries also enable artists to maintain their identity while they delve into the world of organizations.

By definition, intermediaries do not take center stage during an artistic intervention but stay on the margins of the process. Although they generally share the tacit assumptions about helping relationships in process consultation (Schein 1999; see also Bauer et al. 2013), they do not engage in the organization as process consultants themselves. The overarching role of intermediaries is to accompany the learning process of the artists and the project owners (usually senior management), while the artists accompany the learning process of the project owners and the employees during the artistic intervention (Bogerts 2014).

## Examples to learn from

Every artistic intervention is unique, because it is a relational process between the artists and the members of the organization who address an issue in a particular cultural context. Nevertheless, it is possible to outline some core common elements in the process, although of course they vary in form and depth depending on the nature and length of the intervention (which may range from hours, to days, weeks, months or years). The contextualization process for organizational learning with an artistic intervention can be conceived in terms of three phases: artistic research of the context, exploration and experimentation with members of the organization to push the boundaries of thinking and doing in the context, and follow-up to embed the ideas in the organization. I will illustrate these phases with examples of artistic interventions produced by three intermediaries in Europe (Sweden, Spain and Germany), each with a different format and time frame.

### Ten months with a Swedish hospital

The intermediary organization with the most experience in Europe (and probably world-wide) producing artistic interventions is TILLT in Gothenburg, Sweden (<http://www.tillt.se/in-english/>). Since its foundation by a dancer in 2002, TILLT has developed several ways of enabling people in organizations to learn with artists, and the strongest is its 10-month project format, originally called Artist-in-Residence (AIRIS)<sup>ii</sup>. The artist spends a day per week in the organization to address an issue that the management and the TILLT coordinator identify in advance. The TILLT team composes a cohort of (usually 6-8) organizations to run artistic interventions in parallel, so that they

and the artists can talk about their experiences, thereby promoting interorganizational learning processes. The projects are organized around four phases, within which the artists are free to develop their own approach with members of the organization.

- (1) The first step (after the project contract has been signed) is to start anchoring the project in the organization, a process that the TILLT coordinator launches by getting management to create a project group with employees from at different levels and parts of the organization. Anchoring is attended to throughout the project life-span, which is why I hesitate to call it a phase, although TILLT does.
- (2) The artist's work then begins, a phase TILLT calls research. During the first six to eight weeks of the project, the artist steps himself/herself into the organisational context by walking around, sensing the atmosphere, and interacting with people. He/she meets with the members of the project group to clarify and possibly re-formulate the initial managerial focus of the project from their perspective and to develop an action plan.
- (3) The action plan implementation follows. Over the next six months the artist works with the employees to realize the various activities they envisaged in the action plan. This phase often involve moments of playful interaction in which members of the organization engage with each other and their context in ways that challenge the cultural conventions of the organization. The interactions entail working with aesthetic sensibilities and arts-based values (such as openness, acceptance of failure, trust in creativity to find solutions, process orientation) and artistic media (for example, writing, bodily expression, photography) to visualize new possibilities. Although the production of artworks is not the purpose of TILLT

interventions, they often result in the creation of memorable traces of the experience.<sup>iii</sup>

- (4) In the closing phase, TILLT stimulates harvesting learning from the experience. It includes an evaluation of the activities (often with external researchers) and a final seminar at which all participating artists and representatives from the organizations report on their experiences and what they have learned.

The management of a hospital chose to work with an artistic intervention in its emergency care unit to help the staff improve their work situation. TILLT selected a textile artist, whom they sensed would click with the organization. During her research phase, the artist observed how the frantically the employees worked in moments of emergency, then waited for the next emergency to come in. While formulating the action plan, one of her suggestions was that they could experiment with ways of using the periods in between emergencies in a more restorative way. Whereas a consultant might have identified tasks that could be undertaken to improve efficiency, the artist addressed the physical and emotional needs of the employees. She did it in a surprising, even provocative way, by drawing on her art form. She brought in a loom and offered to show the staff how to use it in their down time, but instead of working with threads, she proposed that they use materials in their working environment, namely the shredded paper from the previous day's documents.

In the project implementation phase, some employees took up the idea quickly, others followed suit when they saw their colleagues enjoying the process, a few stayed out of the project entirely. The artist observed a breakthrough one morning when she

arrived and noticed that employees were watching her to see how she would respond to the weaving they had done in her absence: someone had woven other small objects from the emergency room into the paper tapestry. They wondered whether she would consider this a transgression of her rules. For her it was an indication that they had taken ownership of the process and found new ways of expressing creativity in their context. By the end of the artistic intervention the emergency room staff had woven a tapestry several meters wide, which they then hung in their space. The loom stayed on as well. In the harvesting phase, the employees shared that they had learned to become more conscious of their need and ability to restore their physical and emotional energies in order to handle emergencies as professionally as they aspired to do.

#### **Four months with a Spanish non-profit**

Like TILLT, the Spanish intermediary based in the Basque country, Conexiones improbables ([www.conexionesimprobables.es](http://www.conexionesimprobables.es)), has various formats for artistic interventions. One of them is what they call a 'Creative Pill', which they also organize in cohorts so that some interorganizational learning can emerge in addition to the learning within each participating organization. The process is quite short—although it is spread over 3-4 months, it involves only six sessions. It opens with a meeting for all the participating organizations to explain the approach and to start connecting them to one another. Shortly thereafter the organizations gather again, this time to be introduced to their artists and to the methodology. Three working sessions with the artists follow in the subsequent weeks, usually in the organization but sometimes the participants choose a different space (for example, the artist's studio). The process ends with another meeting

of all the participating organizations, at which the project owners and the artists describe their process and its outcomes.

The financial crisis in Spain is affecting all kinds of organizations quite dramatically, cutting funding for many activities while also increasing the need for social services. The director of an organization providing employment for people with disabilities received the demand from its parent company to increase revenue by at least 50 percent within a year in order to maintain its current size (88 employees). She set up an innovation group to address the challenge, and they had started thinking about what to undertake, including whether to continue positioning themselves as a foundation or to shift their identity towards a business company. When the opportunity to participate in a Creative Pill arrived by email from the municipality which had obtained European funding for the initiative, the director immediately accepted because she sensed that it could enrich the process they had already embarked on.

The first meeting with the multidisciplinary artist that Conexiones improbables had assigned to her organization gave the director the feeling of having the right partner to work with. The artist learned about the organization from this first meeting, when the innovation team explained what they wanted and what they had developed so far. Then he embedded his research into the interactions, essentially in action research mode, starting by expanding the original innovation group from 12 to 20 people in order to include more employee perspectives. The artist designed and facilitated a game of discovery of hidden talents and interests. The director explained to me that in the dynamic process designed by the artist 'We explored people's activities at work, in

training, and in their hobbies, and we looked at past, present and future. There was great participation!’

At the last working session, I observed how the participative process of visualizing new ideas by looking at the capabilities people in the organization had that were not being tapped into, and at their lives outside the organization, led to three important insights that the participants crystallized with the artist: They should build on their identity as a foundation with social values rather than shifting to a new business identity; they can offer new services to the local community, differentiating themselves from other service providers by drawing on the arts; and they can turn into a strength a feature that might otherwise be perceived as a weakness: ‘One of the difficulties we have working with people with disabilities is that they are sometimes slower than other workers, in a world where there is always time pressure to work fast. The artist says we should “push the slow”, create value for slow care.’ In response to my question about what the organization will do next, the director exclaimed:

‘We will focus on people. This project has helped us put order in all the ideas we had been developing over years but had not acted upon. We can now start making something, start constructing. There are some suppliers who can help us do things. This is the time to go and present our ideas to them. What this project gave us is the time to stop and think, knowing that there is nothing more important for us to do today than this! It is a luxury to have this kind of time.’

Harvesting the learning showed that the work with the artist and his participative method of inquiry and visualization helped them see themselves in a new way, shifted



some of their assumptions so that they could come up with new services to deliver, and energized them to meet the huge challenge posed by their parent organization. They learned how to stimulate bottom-up innovation by addressing both the internal and the external context of the organization. The director was also very positive about the opportunity to share their learning with the other organizations at the final meeting, and curious to learn about what they had come up with too.

According to the director, the artist's way of working differed from that of consultants in two ways. One difference is related to the way they experienced the artist's intellectual approach, namely the 'artist comes with a more open mind, and is able to see further and to connect things in ways that others would not see.' The other is the aesthetic approach, 'the artist prepared the spaces for the scenes, attending specially to it aesthetically. That was important.'

This example has additional relevance for the consideration of the relationship between artists and consultants as complementary external agents of organizational learning. The founder of Conexiones improbables is himself a consultant, and one of his emphases is on 'slow innovation'. Although he did not participate in this particular project, his approach corresponds to the one the artist developed with the organization. In his boutique consultancy company (C2+i) he works on many other projects that do not include artists, but the underlying values are consistent with those that underpin Conexiones improbables.

## Two months with a German manufacturer

In 2012, a new German intermediary organization called Unternehmen! KulturWirtschaft (<http://www.nordkolleg.de/fachbereiche/kulturwirtschaft/unternehmen-kulturwirtschaft-2012-2015.html>) started experimenting with various formats for artistic interventions as part of its own organizational learning process (Bogerts 2014). Instead of defining a model with milestones like TILLT and Conexiones improbables have done, it decided to start by taking a flexible approach, supporting each artist and organization in designing their own format and time frame. The team's intention is to review all the experiences later and decide what lessons to draw from them for their own internal processes as an intermediary and for their support of artistic intervention projects. Whereas the Swedish and Spanish organizations have experience with many different kinds of organizations and work with a mix of organizations in a cohort, this intermediary decided to start one intervention at a time, and to work at first only with companies in the private sector. Another difference between the current approach of this intermediary and TILLT is that Unternehmen! KulturWirtschaft presents the organization with several potential artists to choose from, rather than making the match.

One of the companies that signed up for an artistic intervention with Unternehmen! KulturWirtschaft is a medium-sized equipment manufacturer. The owners were concerned about the mood in the organization, sensing employee dissatisfaction and low identification with the organization, possibly as a result of its recent relatively rapid growth, and hoped that a project with artists could improve the situation. As one of the top managers said, 'we wanted to do something good for them!' The company

chose a team of two artists based on the proposal they developed address the company's challenge.

In order to come up with their ideas to propose to the company, the artists started their research via the internet, seeking to understand its history, products, and culture through its Website. The artists offered to take the employees on a 'journey of discovery' in the organization to get to know people and activities in other departments, and to communicate their ideas in creative ways with the company's materials and products. The management felt that this approach made sense, and also welcomed the idea to set up an 'artists' office' that employees could visit at any time, thereby activating the flow of communication even more. The artists first contacted the employees in writing to find out more about all 50 participants in the project. A practical issue they had to design the project around was that the production and delivery requirements of the organization meant that employees could not leave their work very long, and not until the end of the project could all the employees be brought together in one space.

The artists formed five mixed teams of employees to collect information and design something using the company's own materials, thereby immediately stimulating cross-functional communication and a new way of seeing the organization and its products. Some employees emphasized these two aspects as the most valuable effects of participating in the artistic intervention in their responses to the post-experience surveys. Employees also mentioned having benefitted from experiencing values from the world of the arts, such as 'communication and fun are core features of work.' At the closing event, each team presented its object, explaining the ideas they intended it to

communicate. The artists were impressed by how honestly and constructively the employees expressed their concerns about the situation in the organization during these presentations. After the artistic intervention was completed, management pursued some of the ideas that employees had proposed, and decided to keep working with the mixed groups that had emerged from the project.

At first glance, this appears to be a model artistic intervention that went quite some way towards resolving issues in the organization. However, diverging responses from the employees, management, and artists to the Web-based surveys I sent them reveal a more complex picture. Looking at the multi-stakeholder research data helps to clarify some of the conditions affecting the potential of artistic interventions to support organizational learning.

The pre-experience survey results indicated that the three stakeholder groups started with different definitions of the problem and understandings of the purpose of the artistic intervention. This finding is not unusual, which is why TILLT recommends the establishment of a project group whose first task is to review and potentially revise the topic to address. The unfortunate situation in this case is that the majority of employees reported that they did not understand why management was investing time and money in an artistic intervention, and some added that they felt that the communication issues in the organization were more vertical than horizontal. In other words, the problem of communication between employees and management impeded the clarification of the purpose of the artistic intervention, thereby compounding the problem. The artistic way of working with uncertainty, stimulating a journey of discovery rather than providing

clear answers, also added to the confusion for employees. Although they participated actively in the creative process, they did not see its purpose until the very end, when each group presented and explained its product. Most found this moment to be the most memorable in the whole process, because ‘the fruits of our work could be harvested’ and ‘management was there’ so ‘the anticipation for what will follow is high.’ However, many employees remained skeptical about the value of the artistic intervention in the post-experience surveys, writing that they did not believe that management would follow up on the points that had been raised in the presentations.

A debriefing meeting with top management about the research findings revealed that they had indeed taken ideas forward from the presentations, however they had not paid sufficient attention to sense-making in their communication. The top manager believed they had showed that they had learned from the experience, but they had not enabled the employees to see the connection between the work with the artists and the follow up that had in fact taken place in the organization. This case shows that as important as actions are in organizational learning, they do not necessarily speak louder than words: management needs to attend to both in order for people to see and make sense of changes that result from an intervention. Fortunately for this organization, the research debrief fuelled the management’s learning process and offered the opportunity for closing the gap they had not previously noticed.

## Conclusion

Artistic interventions offer an aesthetically-aware approach to organizational learning that uses a participative exploration and challenging of context as a basis for changing

the context. The revelation and questioning of the norms and codes embedded in the organizational culture occurs in interactions between insiders and outsiders to the organization. The double learning-accompaniment approach to supporting learning between the world of the arts and the world of organizations (whereby an intermediary accompanies the learning of the artist and the company, and the artist accompanies the learning of the management and employees) is based on the assumption that all the participants conceive of themselves as learners (Bauer et al. 2013; Bogerts 2014).

While most artists enter into an intervention with the intention of engaging in co-learning, they often discover when they arrive that this expectation is not automatically shared by management and the employees. My investigations show that project owners often expect employees to participate as learners, but they do not always position themselves as learners as well. Artists usually have to deal with initial skepticism on the part of employees who are unsure how artistic ways of seeing and doing things can relate to their work. So artists find that their first task is to generate the conditions for the co-learning they aspire to, a shift that they sometimes achieve extremely fast by connecting personally with the participants (Berthoin Antal 2015, p. 298). Employees often report sensing that there is a different kind of energy in the space with the artist, and that they extend trust to the artist that they do not necessarily have in management, nor in consultants who are perceived to identify with management's logic and objectives.

Possibly the most powerful contextualizing feature of artistic interventions lies in their potential for expanding the participants' vision of what is possible and worth addressing in the context. The first two cases illustrate how working with artists shifted

the focus from a relatively technical managerial question to a more meaningful societal one: from how to organize work efficiently towards how to restore the physical and emotional energies needed for patient care; and from an inward-looking problem-solving mode towards an outward-looking orientation to meeting needs in the community creatively. The contrast with the third case, in which the potential was only partially realized (at the time of the study), shows the significance of a participative—rather than purely managerial—approach to defining and redefining the issue and the objective of the artistic intervention.

Another key contextualizing feature of artistic interventions is the theme of slowing down in order to engage with the context in new ways. This idea is counterintuitive in management today, but emphasized in some of the organizational literature. Karl Weick and Susan Ashford pointed out the drawbacks of focusing on speed and they encouraged attaching more value to slow learning:

‘A concern with speed is driven by expectancy confirmation rather than evidence, and is top-down with closure being sought in the interest of action. Fast learning that occurs in conjunction with decision-oriented goals should be mindless, single-loop, often superstitious, unreflective, tactical, superficial. It could also be adaptive if fast small learnings match fast, small environmental changes. The problem is, fast learning is expectancy-driven rather than evidence driven, which means that even small environmental changes may be missed if they are unexpected.’ (2001, p. 720)

The ‘naïve’ and provocative curiosity of the artists opens everything they encounter in the world that is foreign to them for questioning—the activities in the

organization, the lives of the employees, the invisible rules and the taboo topics. They thereby stimulate insiders, too, to interrupt their habitual patterns and be 'slow learners' in their context, at least for a while. It was this value that enabled the participants in the second case to reframe the comparative slowness of their handicapped employees into the opportunity to offer 'slow care' to people in the community. Is the 'slow innovation' motto of the consultancy that founded Conexiones improbables paradoxical, or is it a logical outcome of valuing slowness that its Creative Pills often achieve powerful learning effects within just a few working sessions with artists?

Returning to the question posed in the introduction about the potential of artistic interventions to enter into the mainstream and contribute to innovation that is not just profitable but also meaningful for society: the cases show that it is indeed possible to realize this potential in different kinds of organizational contexts. The crux of the matter is that it is not only art's task because leadership matters (Berthoin Antal and Strauß 2014a, 2014b). Essential preconditions are (a) that managers conceive of artists as partners rather than as suppliers, and of themselves as co-learners with the employees and artists rather than as paymasters and controllers, and (b) that they communicate the value they attach to the process in both word and deed. Researchers, too, can influence the capacity of organizations to learn with artistic interventions. They can impede the process by overstating expectations and contributing to a hyped fad. Or they can support the process by engaging in multistakeholder research and by stimulating self-critical reflection among the participants to contextualize their learning in and from the process. Such research takes time, thereby posing a significant challenge to



scholars in an academic context that is valuing speedy publication more than slow learning.

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<sup>i</sup> This chapter refers to management consulting for organizational change and strategic development. It does not include such services as executive search, consulting on information technologies or other special expertise.

<sup>ii</sup> TILLT decided to drop the "artist in residence" label because its connotation in the art world confuses rather than helps people understand the collaborative nature of their artistic interventions in organizations.

<sup>iii</sup> Few artistic interventions in organizations are intended to generate artworks. For the analysis of an exception and its relevance for organizational learning see Berthoin Antal 2011.