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# The Authentic Workplace: Theatrical Practices in the Corporate World

Katherine Dumas

Chapman University, [dumas104@mail.chapman.edu](mailto:dumas104@mail.chapman.edu)

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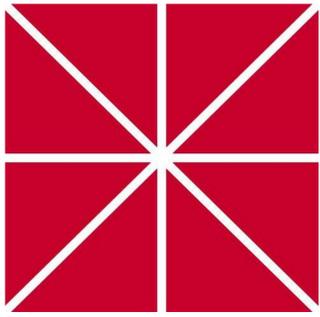
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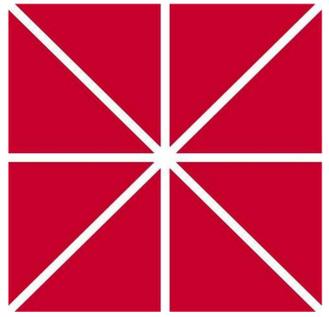
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# The Authentic Workplace: Theatrical Practices in the Corporate World



Katherine Dumas

Advisor: Dr. Jocelyn L. Buckner

Chapman University Department of Theatre

## Thesis:

When practicing or studying theatre, in a collegiate environment or otherwise, the very first expectation is that of teamwork. Theatre artists are encouraged to think of “the play” as “something greater than oneself” – and in doing so they abandon their individual egos and try to embrace all ideas, no matter who they may come from. The artists are all part of a creative team, and they must let themselves be authentic in their needs, open in their approach, and people-centered in their individual leadership style. Collaborative instincts are strong in theatre professionals and students alike, and not by coincidence. These soft skills are focused on and cultivated from day one in any theatre career, be it brief or lifelong, professional, or just for fun.

This constant emphasis on collaboration, openness, and authenticity gives those with a background in the performing arts an advantage over those who have an interest in the more traditional workforce, with backgrounds in more traditional education and training. There is a movement in the corporate world to seek out emotional intelligence in potential employees before they are hired, and people trained in theatre are well prepared for that expectation.

I argue that by studying and applying the soft skills considered most valuable to theatre professionals, people of any profession have the upper hand within their company or organization. I will examine the mission statements and values of professional theatre companies nationwide in order to provide an essential overview of the standards to which those in the theatrical field hold themselves. I will then apply those skills and values to our twenty-first century corporate world by suggesting design elements for workshops on empathy, collaboration, and emotional intelligence with foundations in theatre practices.

## Methodology:

When reframing corporate workshops with foundations in theatre practices, it is vital to refer back to methods used effectively in theatre classrooms with young people. These are the stepping stones to the work that must be done for the corporate world. In my design I utilize interactive theatre techniques used by educators, community workers, artists, students, and others working in community dialogue and problem solving found in Michael Rohd's *Theatre for Community, Conflict and Dialogue*.

Additionally, I look at Patricia Sternberg's *Theatre for Conflict Resolution: In the Classroom and Beyond* to provide more theatre games that promote trust and problem-solving. Sternberg goes a step further by bookending each chapter with a summary of how each procedure aids in conflict resolution beyond the rehearsal space and into real life situations. Her superb final chapter, “Conflict Resolution in Theatre and Life”, details how theatre can be used for healing, negotiating, self-understanding, and defining morality.

To move the workshop's intentions beyond the world of theatre, I look at the field of leadership studies. Where are the connections between what is proven in the arts and what is proven in the study of management skills? I pull from Jen Shirkani, author of *Ego vs. EQ: How Top Leaders Beat 8 Ego Traps with Emotional Intelligence*, who analyzes the significance of emotional intelligence, or EQ, in leadership and conflict resolution. She gives tips for managers on how to sharpen and maintain your EQ, most of which revolve around active listening and teamwork.

In leadership studies giant Patrick Lencioni's work *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable*, he analyzes the varying downfalls of any group, be they within the corporate world or the world of theatre. He pinpoints the main sources of mediocrity: “Absence of Trust, Fear of Conflict, Lack of Commitment, Avoidance of Accountability, and Inattention to Results.” (Lencioni, 188) These five dysfunctions are addressed every day in theatre classes and performing arts communities. Addressing them in workshops for corporate employees through the lens of theatrical practice will give them life - they will become more tangible to participants through physical dramatic work than if they had remained a simple list. Giving leadership theories new meaning and significance within modern workplaces is precisely what these workshops aim to do.

**Ensemble Building in the Workplace**

**10:00AM - OPENING REMARKS**

- What is an ensemble? How is it different from a team?
- What is a rehearsal space? How is it different from a conference room?
- Finding your “scene partner” - who have you not yet connected with?
- Questions

**10:30AM-11:00AM - OPENING EXERCISES**

- Introduction to Stanislavsky
- Physical Warm-Up
- Pass the Gesture

**11:00AM-11:30AM - TRUST EXERCISES**

- Introduction to Meisner
- Performance Art Activity: “A Minute of Silence”



Image from Phoenix Theatre Ensemble: phoenixtheatreensemble.org

**11:30AM-12:00PM - ACTIVE LISTENING**

- Childhood Storytelling and Repetition
- Listening to Build a Representative Image

**12:00PM-12:30PM - EXPLORING CONFLICT**

- Finishing Incomplete Dialogue to Uncover Biases
- Building a Scene from Trigger Statements

**12:30PM-1:00PM - CLOSING REMARKS**

- Ensemble Connection Activities
- Debrief: What Was Learned
- Moving Forward: Keeping Your Workplace Theatrically Compelling

**1:00PM END OF SESSION**

## Significance:

Later in the academic careers of young artists, they may be told that majoring in theatre for college is unnecessary and frivolous, especially in this day and age. This opinion can be attributed to a family's financial worries, certainly, but also to that enduring phrase “the theatre is dying” - which it certainly is not. However, it has been proven time and again that the study of theatre can in fact be a major solution for the stresses of today. In theatre professor Tracey Moore's article “Why Theater Majors Are Vital in the Digital Age,” she explains that the craft of acting and creating for the stage “involves human behavior,” referencing Constantin Stanislavsky's techniques for constructing life on stage. She argues that by “acquiring those skills” - that is, a practiced imagination, a sharp focus, and an ability to trust one's impulses - theatre “could be an antidote for college students who are said to be lacking empathy, isolated and narcissistic, distracted and jaded.” This is to the point that because theatre students are among the only college-age employees who are taught to actively pursue a more authentic and natural life outside the workplace, they are one step ahead of those other millions of students entering the workforce whose struggles with concentration and empathy remain unchecked.

## Moving Forward:

Getting hired at an organization requires hard skills and expertise at times, to be sure. However, if you are unable to make an effort to understand the culture and engage with your peers on a deeper level than what Sheryl Sandberg calls your “all-work persona,” not only will you not be with the company for that long, but you will not be happy there. Through this project I have discovered a tendency within myself and within other theatre students to undersell our skills and talents. There is so much more to the larger workforce than knowing how to network and having a business degree. We, as students of the performing arts, at any level and with any emphasis within our degree program, from stagehand to artistic director, gain absolutely crucial traits and abilities through our experiences with the collaborative, emotional, difficult, sometimes infuriating art to which we have committed ourselves.

I have learned to be proud of and declarative about my skills, and have found myself encouraging others to do the same. I tell my peers not to shy away from the many abilities we have all worked so hard to take ownership of, and I support younger students by using those abilities such as authenticity and empathy to help motivate them every day. These skills have caused me to believe in myself and in my goals. Because of this project, I feel like I do not have to worry so much about if I will be a right “fit” for a company's culture and expectations.

As a theatre student, I know that my commitment to collaborating effectively, even when the process becomes time-consuming and exhausting, will give me the upper hand over any competition. That confidence is why this project matters. This research can give an entire group of people, the theatre artists prone to worrying, hope. Not only is it proof that they are well-equipped for the modern workforce - it also allows them to trust themselves in their ability to be teaching artists, and, through the workshop proposal, gives them even more tools to help others become just as prepared.

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