Coaching as a Liminal Space

Exploring Use of Theatre in Management Training and Development

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Introduction

The chapter explores use of theatrical techniques in management training and development and the implications of such HRD practices for the identity construction of trainees. The research, on which this chapter builds, has been designed, implemented and interpreted following a constructionist philosophy. The aim here is to explicate and explain the results of this empirical study—observations of a theatrical training event—analysed through a lens which frames management training as a *transition ritual* (Turner, 1969; Van Gennep, 1909). Borrowed from anthropological studies of cultures, transition ritual (exemplified in rites of passage such as birth rituals, coming of age or marriage ceremonies) is a type of ceremony which develops through "performative sequencing" so to "transform" the participants from one mode of being to another (Turner, 1980, pp. 160–161). Transition ritual in this chapter is thus used as a metaphor so to create better insights about managerial identity construction in training and development events. Such analogical description of training and development practices enables more creative ways of thinking about HRD. Moreover, it draws our investigative attention to the structural aspects of HRD events aimed at transforming identities. In other words, such framing of management training and development emphasises how such practices are linked to managerial identity construction in organisational life.

Through analysis of the theatrical training event two aims are followed: first, the chapter explores the capacities that theatrical training methods may provide for identity construction of organisation members. Second, in the tradition of critical studies on HRD (Abrahamson, 1996; Andersson, 2012; Clark, 1999; Costas & Kärreman, 2016; Kunda, 2006; Watson, 1994, 2001) the chapter questions whether such management development practices are aimed for *identity regulation* (prescribing identities which are considered aligned with achievement of organisational goals and objectives); or conversely, training by theatre provides a less-regulated space facilitating creative self-development.

Next, I will discuss the conceptual framework of transition ritual, and relate it to organisational life, drawing on the literature which has used this

conceptualisation for metaphorical analyses of organisational practices and identities. The coaching event, Rehearsal for Reality: Difficult Performance Conversations will be described through the lens of transition ritual. Analysis and conclusions will follow.

On Transition Rituals

In Turner's definition, a ritual is a social performance that "transforms" the participants from one mode of being to another as it involves transition from one social world to another (Turner, 1980, pp. 160–161). To develop a conceptualisation of ritual process, Turner (1969, 1980) drew mainly on Van Gennep's (1909) classical formulation of *les rites de passage* staged in three phases of *separation*, *transition* and *incorporation*. Rites of passage are performed with the purpose of upward mobility of specific members of the social group. These members are first separated from their everyday lives and the established social structure. Then, they enter a 'limbo-like' space, a condition referred to in cultural studies as *liminality*, in which the transition occurs (Turner, 1969). Stripped of their established identities and status the *liminars* are directed through the transformational process. Later, having passed the transition phase successfully, they are allowed to claim their new status and position. Hence, they reincorporate into the social structure with a new identity, and the rights and obligations attached to it (Beech, 2011; Turner, 1969, 1980). Transition ritual has been employed in examination of organisational phenomena. Eriksson-Zetterquist (2002), for instance, has described a graduate training programme as a three-phase ritual: separation of the newly graduated from their previous occupation (university), entering the liminal space of training, and finally entering the corporate environment, now in a managerial position.

The condition of liminality has been specifically influential in making sense of organisational life. According to Turner (1969, p. 95), *liminal personae* are necessarily ambiguous and difficult to categorise, as the liminal space is "betwixt and between" established social structures. Such definition of liminality has been used by organisation scholars so as to explain the often tem- porary, ambiguous and uncertain state of contemporary organising spaces falling outside the traditional organisational boundaries, and the identities produced within such social settings (Borg & Söderlund, 2013, 2014; Tempest & Starkey, 2004; Zabusky & Barley, 1997). Garsten (1999), for example, applies the metaphor of liminality to transitory states of employment so as to explain the identity construction of temporary workers. Such liminal subjectivities are shown to be ambiguous and undefined. She argues that liminality of temporary work allows freedom from established organisational boundaries, hence may lead to playfulness and innovation (even rebellion), as routines are suspended and normative lines may be crossed. The liminars are "temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure. This weakens them, since they have no rights over others. But also liberates

them from structural obligations" (Turner, 1980, p. 27). Garsten's (1999, p. 604) observations have shown, however, that through experience of being betwixt and between established identities, the liminars become more reflexive, "turning control and monitoring onto the self". Organisational control processes then can utilise the liminal condition to regulate identities of the temporary workers (Garsten, 1999).

Describing consultancy practices, Czarniawska and Mazza (2003, p. 267) have referred to a condition of liminality where "the usual practice and order are suspended and replaced by new rites and rituals". They suggest that management consulting resembles transition rituals, where consultants are summoned to organisations to organise such rites: their task is to "temporally turn a regular organisation into a liminal one" bringing in their "foreignness of expertise" as "special powers obtained in distant places" (2003, pp. 279–280). They reflect on the fragility of consultants' liminal subjectivities. As they enter the temporary space of consulting in the client organisation, they experience a state of in-between-ness, of ambiguous and uncertain subjectivities. The liminars hence may experience anxiety.

Tempest and Starkey (2004, p. 507) draw on liminality as the condition of "existing at the limits of existing structures". They use the metaphor of liminality to explore individual and organizational learning, where work is organised mainly in networks and project teams, i.e. temporary and liminal structures between, or at the margins of, permanent organisations. In their view, liminal spaces provide opportunities for "transcending existing structures and disrupting their taken-for-grantedness" (p. 509) and as such the liminal subjectivities are exposed to different experiences, enhanced learning, and increased opportunities for self-reflection. The liminal worker however, faces anxieties of the temporary work arrangement; and so, extended liminality may create subjectivities uncertain of their level of competence and their memberships in, and loyalties to, permanent organisational structures. In dealing with such a state of anxiety the liminal persons might lose their abil- ity to practice reflexivity and reach self-awareness. In a similar vein, Ellis and Ybema (2010) examine the experiences of managers in inter-organisational networks through the lens of liminality, highlighting the changing and transitory nature of their subjectivities, and argue that extended experiences of the liminal condition may be psychologically harmful.

There are, however, more positive portrayals of the condition of liminality. Sturdy, Schwarz and Spicer (2006) theorise on liminality through examination of business dinners attended by consultants and clients. Their main argument is that although liminality provides an unstructured, unstable and fluid space in which the normal organisational rules and identities are suspended, the liminal space of business meals is not wholly unstructured, but a set of different orders, identities, and structured rituals regulate it. Moreover, the liminal subjectivities do not necessarily shape around shared anxieties of the participants, but some liminars experience the suspension with comfort and ease, not only because the liminal experience liberates from established

conventions, but also because rules of inclusion/exclusion, and of exerting influence in the liminal space are somewhat different from the day-to-day customs, in ways that some liminars may find easier to navigate so as to constitute desired identities and organisational status (Sturdy et al., 2006). Thus the liminal space creates possibilities for creativity.

Beech (2011) also sheds a positive light in relating liminal subjectivities to identity construction in organisational settings. He argues that those subject to transition rituals practice (collective and individual) reflexivity because the liminal condition—of being 'interstructural' betwixt and between previous and new positions—persuades them to consciously examine their previous established identities. This is because the disruption of taken-for-granted routines makes the liminars pause, examine and question if any changes are required, and consequently offer them a repertoire of possible identities to take on.

The organisation literature thus alludes to the transition rituals of organising as a space for constructing subjectivities of organisation members. Some studies have reported the status-less subjectivities of the limbo-like liminal space as suffering states of anxiety, discomfort and even psychological disorder. Such subjectivities are seen as susceptible to excessive organisational (and self) monitoring, control and regulation (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003; Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Garsten, 1999; Tempest & Starkey, 2004). Others, on the other hand, have observed that experience of liminality may also create enjoyment, liberation, creativity and reflexivity (Beech, 2010; Sturdy et al., 2006).

The chapter now builds on conceptualisations of liminality in cultural and organisation studies so as to explain the observed theatrical coaching event. Similar to transition rituals, in a training process managers experience a transition, losing their established positions in the organisation so to enter the liminal space of training. After passing through the training rituals, and bestowed with new skills, they emerge as more capable managers.

Transition ritual and the liminal condition are aimed at identity transformation; both in the original anthropological and cultural conceptualisations (Turner, 1969, 1980; Van Gennep, 1909), and the more recent organisational take. Explaining the observed training event through the lens of transition ritual consequently demonstrates how theatrical training is effectively employed as an organisational technology for constructing (or in a more cynical view, regulating) identities.

After explanation of the methodologies employed in this study, in what follows I refer to Turner's (1969) detailed account of a specific transition ritual, *rites of installation of the chief* in an African tribe; following that I will recount the training event while making comparisons with installation rites. Such framing of theatrical management development practices results in novel insights, which will be discussed in the final parts of this chapter.

Methodology

The analysis draws on a study of training and development activities of L&D Australia (a pseudonym), a small consulting company founded by performing

art professionals which offers theatre-based training and development solutions. The choice of research methods for this study has been informed by a constructionist philosophy (Czarniawska, 2008; Gergen, 2009). During the study I had the opportunity to shadow one of the L&D Australia consultants, Maria, who allowed access for observation of her daily activities during one month (on shadowing, see Czarniawska, 2007). The shadowing process included periods of intense note-taking, and complementary interviews (which were audio-recorded) with Maria to discuss her day's activities. Such complementary interviews are useful for getting closer to work processes in the field as they construct an image of how people make sense of field practices and what is important to them (Barley & Kunda, 2001).

The analysis builds specifically on the observation of Rehearsal for Reality: Difficult Performance Conversations, a training event conducted by a team of L&D Australia consultants, during the time I was shadowing Maria. I observed this training programme, which was delivered to a selected group of sales managers working in a pharmaceutical company in Sydney. The training event progressed from a gathering of trainees in a training room, to coaching sessions (through role-play) in smaller groups, and finally gathering back into a big group for a wrap-up and return to the routine of organisational life.

Trying to frame and make sense of the activities practiced in this event, I noticed that such a training process is structured in ways reminiscent of a *transition ritual* (Turner, 1969, 1980). In a training process, managers experience a similar transition. First they are separated from their routine place and their established positions in the organisation, then they enter the liminal space of coaching and, after passing through the coaching rituals, finally come out as more capable managers (or, in the case of the observed, as more capable conversationalists). This is why I chose to frame the coaching process as a ritual located in a liminal space. My framing builds, more specifically, on a comparison between the training workshop and Turner's (1969) description of "the rites of installation of chieftainship" in an African tribe. In what follows, Turner's *installation rites* and the *rites of training* in Rehearsal for Reality: Difficult Performance Conversations will be described and discussed.

Coaching as a Liminal Space

Rites of Installation

In recounting the rituals of the installation of the chief—the highest tribal status—Turner (1969) began with a sketch of the wider social structure. Each tribe belonged to an interconnected network of tribes, centrally ruled by a headchief who was the political source of power. The authority of the head-chief extended to control over the chief of each tribe. Each chief was that tribe's symbol of power, fertility and well-being. The ritual powers, however, were assumed by another figure, the headman. On installation of a new chief,

the headman guided the prospective chief from the status of an *ordinary tribe member* to the status of *chief* through a series of symbolic performances. On the night of his installation, the chief-to-be was separated from the tribe (hence, symbolically, from his normal status) to spend a night in seclusion. He was accommodated in a newly constructed shelter separated from the village. In that liminal space, the headman conducted the rites of transition. He washed and purified the liminar with the sacred medicine and taught him "medicines of witchcraft" and "wisdom". During this phase the liminar was expected to behave in a humble manner, as befitted the status of a person deprived of all previous or promised privileges. He was also subjected to the *rites of reviling* (Turner, 1969, p. 100); the headman gave ceremonial speeches and reminded the liminar of his wrongdoings. Other tribe members could join in the scolding process. During this ritual, the liminar was passive and humble; he obeyed instructions and embraced the wisdom bestowed upon him by the headman. After passing the transition rituals in the secluded shelter, the liminar was formed anew and bestowed with additional powers to make him capable of coping with his new station in life. These powers were symbolised by the "lukanu bracelet" which had belonged to the head-chief, was passed to the headman, and was in turn passed to the new chief on his installation. The lukanu bracelet was believed to have mystical powers responsible for the fertility of the tribal lands and people. The newly installed chief, owning the lukanu bracelet, left the shelter and returned to his tribe, now possessing the essential power and wisdom to rule. In what follows I describe the L&D Australia's training event, building on an analogy with the described rites of installation of the chief in the African tribe.

Rehearsal for Reality: Difficult Performance Conversations

When the L&D Australia team (five consultants) arrived at the pharmaceutical company, they were directed by Helen, the pharmaceutical company's training and development manager, to enter the training room. During the next hour, they were engaged in the final preparations and organisations for the upcoming training session in which each consultant would be in charge of coaching a small group of managers through the Rehearsal for Reality methodology. The client company had signed up a number of their sales managers (about 25) for a half-day workshop for training on how to deal with challenging conversations with peers or subordinates. L&D Australia had asked in advance for some "case studies"—examples of situ- ations potentially containing such "difficult conversations" (as explained by Maria). These became scripts for the role-playing during the session.

In analogy with the installation rites, the main characters of this training ritual can be identified. The participant sales managers (trainees hereafter) resemble prospective chiefs. Guided by their designated L&D Australia coach—the headman—they were to engage in the *rites of coaching* and, empowered by the wisdom bestowed on them, they were to transform into

managers capable of handling difficult conversations. Participation in this ceremony was not a matter of choice but had been prescribed by the training and development department, the headchief who held the political power. Helen as the training and development manager represented this figure while the L&D Australia consultants—positioned as coaches and organisers of the transition rites—held the ritual powers.

Helen projected L&D Australia's slides on a white screen. The title read: Difficult Performance Conversations: Rehearsal for Reality. She introduced the L&D Australia team to the trainees, took them through the workshop agenda and divided them into several groups, to each of which a coach was assigned. Thus the trainees were separated from the organisation, stripped of their everyday status and prepared for a phase of seclusion through which they were to become capable of dealing with their employees and peers, with newly gained wisdom.

Then each coach took their group to a pre-assigned room. Maria's group consisted of three sales managers: Lucy, Jade and Tony. The coaching sessions most resembled the liminal space of the ritual: during the secluded coaching sessions, trainees/liminars were also to pass the coaching/transition rituals by following the instructions of the L&D Australia coach/headman in order to obtain the wisdom for managing their difficult conversation. This wisdom was introduced by Maria as L&D Australia's main philosophy. She drew a diagram on the board, a triangle with the word *awareness* in the centre and *purpose*, *habit* and *choice* at the vertices. She explained:

> We have a purpose in whatever we do but how much of that, we do out of habit and how much is conducted by conscious choice? We hope that through the course of this coaching session you gain awareness regarding your unhelpful habits and become attentive to your choices. We won't tell you what to do; just see what possibilities may emerge if you are aware.

In a sense, Maria presented the trainees with the magical formula through which they would obtain the 'self-awareness' required for managing their employees and peers. She taught them, as the headman taught the liminars of the installation rite, the wisdom "which made them feared by their rivals and subordinates" (Turner, 1969, p. 98).

The coaching started with Lucy's problem. She needed to conduct a difficult conversation with one of her sales representatives who had performed very poorly. She was responsible for convincing this man to attend an official performance assessment conducted by Human Resources (HR). Lucy was afraid the employee would refuse to attend this meeting, if she was not able to direct the conversation properly. Maria instructed her as to how to rehearse the conversation:

> Let's assume, Lucy, that you're going to let this guy know he has to show up to the HR meeting. Your purpose is to communicate the message that

there's no possibility to skip this meeting. With this purpose in mind you should try to be mindful of your communication habits and choose to use strategies that meet the purpose.

In the first role-play, Lucy was going to call the sales representative—now acted by Maria—and direct the conversation as she saw fit. To simulate the conditions of an indirect phone conversation they sat back to back. In the first round of the conversation, Maria/sales representative was very difficult and uncooperative and did not make it easy for Lucy to say what she had called to say.

After the rehearsal, Maria commented on the performance and Lucy's characterisation; then the other participants were also invited to comment. Tony and Jade both pointed to Lucy's unhelpful conversational habits in the role-play and made suggestions as to how she could act better. These comments were welcomed by Lucy, who announced she would take them on board through the second rehearsal. This scene echoed the 'collective reviling' of the liminars of the installation rite by the headman and the other members of the tribe (Turner, 1969, p. 100); in this liminal space, criticism and comments are allowed regardless of official statuses and normal hierarchies. The trainee was supposed to listen to and welcome the suggestions from colleagues who in everyday situations would have not interfered with her style of communication management.

Next, Maria wrote down a summary of their discussion on the board. She concluded that Lucy needed to prepare by having in mind, and communicating, just the *facts* in order to prevent any unexpected reactions from her adversary: "facts matter the most. Try to stay objective and don't get emotional". Then, the group started listing those facts for Lucy. They rehearsed the phone call for the second and third times, followed by more discussions and suggestions. In each role-play, Maria would act out 'the employee' in a different manner, approximating another version of the prospective reality. Maria then suggested that Jade (who was making lots of suggestions) take Lucy's place and act as her so that Lucy could see herself played. Lucy observed the scenario unfolding between Jade and Maria. The group rehearsed Lucy's scenario a few more times until she announced that she felt much more comfortable. Then Maria moved on to Tony and Jade's cases, which were discussed, coached, and rehearsed in the same fashion.

When the group coaching sessions were finished, the L&D Australia consultants led their trainees back to the main training room. Helen led the closing session. She thanked the L&D Australia team and hoped that the sales managers had all taken from the coaching sessions what they wanted to take. After the wrap-up, the sales managers were invited to "check out" by sharing one word that reflected their take on the training programme. They, one by one, articulated their learnings manifested in one word, and the session officially concluded with Helen's wishes for success for future challenging conversations.

Discussion

The analogical description of the training event above raises questions regarding the implications of the use of theatrical coaching methods by HRD practitioners. First, I will explore the capacities such theatrical training methods may provide for identity construction of organisation members. Later, I will discuss whether theatre was employed as a technology for identity regulation in the studied HRD event.

Theatrical Coaching: Dramatic Experimentation

As cultural and organisation studies of the condition of liminality have established, statuslessness and liberation from the established social structure may foster creativity in construction of liminar identities (Beech, 2011; Sturdy et al., 2006; Turner, 1980, 1982). What stand out in the above description of the training event, moreover, are the possibilities offered for identity experimentation activated through the dramatic mechanisms of the role-play. This mode of experience can be called *dramatic experimentation*. Three dramatic processes—identified in studies of theatrical training and interventions by Meisiek and Barry (2007)—allowed for such experimentation during the Rehearsal for Reality training event.

First, the theatrical role-play had *mirror-like* effects in that the trainees were provided with the chance to observe themselves and their organisational life acted out by the L&D Australia coach and by the other trainee-participants. Such *second-order observation* (Luhmann, 1998), as staged by others, reveals the image of "attractive and unattractive" realities of the participants' organisational identities (Meisiek & Barry, 2007, p. 1806), which arguably may lead to an increase in the organisational audience's reflexivity and target an awareness that alternative ways of being are possible (Schreyögg & Höpfl, 2004). Second, theatrical coaching worked as a *window* to fictive prospective situations the trainees may encounter. According to the trainees and the L&D Australia coaches, the fictive situations scripted and acted out during this session provided accurate approximations of real life situations and personae. This impression is supported by the sheer multiplicity of the scripts offered and emerging through the coaching session, as well as by the speed with which the professional actors produced "real-like" characters (as described by the trainees in conversations about the coaching session) from their learnt repertoire of human characters. This widened the repertoire of the scripts and identities with which the trainees could practice in the safety of the coaching session, and offered a sense of preparedness for dealing with challenging situations in their working life, as pointed out by the trainee/sales managers of Rehearsal for Reality during the training event. Thirdly, theatrical coaching worked as a *passage* between the theatrical reality and everyday routine reality. Rehearsal for Reality provided participation in a fictive reality, a simulated

situation in which the coach/actor personified the sale managers' adversaries. When the trainees rehearsed their conversations, they participated in the fictionality of the situation and also entered "a domain of action" (Meisiek & Barry, 2007, p. 1806), where they could be creative in trying out new characters and new scripts—in short, new possible identities. In Boal's (1998, pp. 9–10) terms, they became *actors-spectators* who did not only look at the staged images, but entered "the mirror of the theatrical fiction", transformed the image they saw in it and brought back that trans- formed image or "the image of their desires" to the domain of reality, that of working life. In this sense, Rehearsal for Reality aimed to help the trainees to become more capable in improvised action and in widening the range of their everyday performances. According to Schechner (1981, p. 84), rehearsals add to the array of one's "restored behaviour", that is, "known and/or practiced behaviour, either rehearsed, previously known, learned by osmosis since early childhood, revealed during the performance by masters, guides, gurus, or elders, or generated by rules".

Providing opportunities for such dramatic experimentation supports the claim that the trainees are offered freedom from established identities, and an opportunity for reflexivity and identity experimentation during Rehearsal for Reality. But was theatrical coaching employed solely to provide a creative space for self-development in the case of this HRD event? Or were specific subjectivities promoted through rehearsing such Difficult Performance Conversations?

Theatrical Coaching: Creative Identity Construction or Identity Regulation?

To achieve the new status of capable managers/chiefs within the organisation/tribe, the participants of Rehearsal for Reality were to follow the L&D Australia coach/headman's instruction and learn the magic hidden in the 'power of facts'. In order to achieve awareness about their unhelpful habits in conversational situations, they were instructed to reflect on the choices that emerge in each conversation. While within the liminal space of coaching, the trainees were to follow these instructions and respectfully attend to the comments and criticisms of the coach and their colleagues.

When I inquired about L&D Australia's philosophy (purpose, habit, choice, awareness), Maria explained that it means that, in order to reach their purpose, trainees should become aware of their bad communication habits, such as acting emotionally, and instead to learn to communicate the facts. "Facts matter the most," she said, while contrasting "emotional acting" with "objective acting". L&D Australia's training modules, such as Rehearsal for Reality, according to Maria, advocate that in dealing with relationships at the workplace, emotions must be managed. In this sense, a form of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979) is prescribed. Maria explained

that Rehearsal for Reality helps the trainees to access their emotional range and through multiple rehearsals learn to manage it:

> As actors we have the ability to access emotions, because we're trained to do so. We can raise emotions in the trainees to show them when they're emotional their conversation would not work. This is because they're in another space with their emotions, because they are not objective. So practicing to manage such emotions would be helpful.

According to Maria, being professional actors, L&D Australia consultants are able to offer scenarios in which the trainees' emotions are triggered. Through rehearsing such challenging situations, the trainees gain insight into how emotions blind their judgments; therefore, such training programs provide the trainees with practices and techniques that equip them with the "objectivity" required to resolve conflict in work situations. Identity regulation, Kunda (2006) argues, is mainly incorporated in HRD practices intended to shape employees' experiences, thoughts and feelings—in short their selves—to be oriented in ways that guarantee organisational objectives (also see Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Costas & Kärreman, 2016; Watson, 2001). Identity regulation, in this view, shapes the organisational members' selves in a way that their potentials for growth are realised through consolidation of their commitments to the organisational objectives. Through such control, employees are prescribed with the desired "member roles", which can be described as "explicit, detailed, wide-ranging, and systematically enforced prescriptions for what members in good standing are to think and feel about themselves, their work, and the social arrangements under which it is per- formed" (Kunda, 2006, p. 161). It could be said that the desired "objectivity" and "facts" were presented in Maria's account as "special powers" offered to the trainees. To return to the ritual analogy described in the preceding pages, the aim of Rehearsal for Reality, with its strong emphasis on the power of facts and objectivity, was to equip the trainees with the *lukanu of rationality*, which awarded them mystical powers to obtain objectivity, good judgment and wisdom which will lead the organisation/the tribe towards prosperity. As explained earlier, the lukanu bracelet was believed to bestow upon the newly installed chief the essential powers and wisdom to lead their tribe.

Upon closer examination of the theatrical coaching event, contrasting pictures emerge: in one, Rehearsal for Reality widens the range of trainees' spontaneous performances in real work life situations, while in the other it teaches the trainees to regulate their expressions to factual and objective arguments. Such contrasting images can nevertheless be put together, in that they both offer ways to deal with uncertain, unpredictable and uncontrollable aspects of organisational life. This can be further understood in the light of what training and development practices aim at. Höpfl and Dawes (1995, p. 22) emphasise the strong *desire* for "order, control and predictability" in

organisational life, and argue that HRD practices are expected to realise this desire through the development of organisational members who act with self-awareness in the face of complex, tensioned and unpredictable realities of everyday organising. In this perspective, Rehearsal for Reality can be seen as an effort to create a sense of control over unexpected and uncontrollable organisational life. Through the rehearsals, the trainees are instructed to master their emotions and exert objectivity. To develop such skills, they are invited to practice. As explained by Maria, through Rehearsal for Reality the trainees are pushed out of their comfort zone by rehearsing the unwanted situations. Hence, training by theatre, such as that described, seems to provide an appropriate and creative device for exploring *predictions of unpredictability*. Rehearsal for Reality, therefore, can be viewed as an effort to exert control over what is not controllable, or at least to maintain an important illusion of controllability (Langer, 1975).

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrated how HRD practices such as coaching create a liminal space for identity construction. Through structural changes to the organisational routines, coaching situations create a liminal space, which induces change in the liminal subjectivities. The chapter thus contributes to theorisation of identity in HRD by conceptualising theatrical coaching as creating a liminal space in which managers, stripped of their managerial positions and responsibilities, are offered freedom to experiment with different characters and personae, observe those performed by other trainees, and change, shape and reconstruct those performed identities without fearing consequences. Use of theatre as a coaching device provides for further creativity in experimentation with different subjectivities and taking actions suitable for hypothetical situations, which may occur in the future. Dramatic experimentation thus offers opportunities for increased reflexivity and adds to the repertoire of scripts and characters the training managers would be able to employ on their return to day-to-day practices, becoming more capable in improvised action. However, as demonstrated in the case of the analysed theatrical coaching event, theatre may be used in paradoxical ways: such coaching technology does create a space for improvisation and creativity, but it may also be used for identity regulation to create organisational selves of rational, self-aware members who can improvise with confidence and contribute to the illusion of controllability in managing organisational life, a quality so desirable in managers.

The present study, however, falls short of the investigation of the long-term impacts of such coaching techniques on trainees' identities. It is imperative to pursue more comprehensive studies of use of theatre in HRD, the ways such practices operate and influence life in organisations, and their implication for identity construction. Hopefully, opportunities to extend such efforts will occur in the future.

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