„Creative Agility"
A Guideline to Implementing Artistic Interventions in Organizational Contexts (IO1)

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In the Erasmus+ project "Creative Agility," an international team develops a modular training kit for "Creative Agility." Art-based strategies play a central role in this project.

1. Initial Considerations - Ottersberg Case Study:
Our societies are in a state of upheaval. Established and proven processes in interpersonal interactions and collaborations are being tested and transformed. But how can this change be organized?
The international team of artists, facilitators, and scientists sees a key competency in the ability to act in an open, flexible, and collaborative manner - with "Creative Agility."

There are participants in society who have extensive expertise in dynamic and heterogeneous contexts - artists. To investigate the use and impact of art-based methods in organizational contexts, the University of Applied Sciences, HKS Ottersberg (D), conducted a case study in a municipal context. The case study was scientifically accompanied and evaluated by the ZHAW, Zurich University of Applied Sciences in Winterthur (CH).

Decision-makers from municipal politics and administration in the town of Ottersberg (D) were recruited as a test group. To gain the biggest range of insights, sequences were conducted both in-person, as well as online.
An online kick-off, consisting of two sessions – each two hours long - was followed by five workshops of three hours each, with one unit having to take place online due to the pandemic. A joint public representation of the results was also part of the case study, which was then concluded by an online review. The case study was conducted in the fall of 2021.

In the following, the various units will be briefly introduced. Findings that appear interesting for the further development of the training are schematically outlined. For a detailed presentation, please refer to the video "Guideline to Implementing Artistic Interventions in Organizational Contexts" (IO1) (www.hks-ottersberg.de), the following guide serves as a written accompaniment to the video mentioned above.

2. The Artistic Method
The artistic method chosen was *Narrative Recherche*. What is *Narrative Recherche*? It is an artistic technique, used in the theater with which society can be questioned. Different perspectives and narratives are collected and merged into an artistic form. This creates a common narrative that still allows the different individual narratives to exist and remain visible. Similar to a mosaic that brings together different pieces to form a whole without changing the individual parts.

Fig. Aspects of *Narrative Recherche* as an Artistic Research Method

3. Structure and Findings of the Case Study
The basis of any examination is artistic research. Therefore, the process was structured into three parts: a pre-research phase, a group work phase, and a follow-up phase.

3.1 Pre-Research (online)
The pre-research took place in two online meetings, in which the topic area was discussed together with the participants, and content-related information was collected. At the same time, the team was introduced and initial group-building processes took place. Here are the most important opportunities and objectives of the online kick-off.

> **Online kick-off:**
> - good first get to know the participants and their digital skills
> - introduce the team and approach/working method,
>   - possibly prepare slides/presentation for this
> - define the topic together,
> - set initial (playful) impulses;
> - collect basic impulses/input for preparing the group phase, or for selecting the modules
>   - use tools to record (written) notes: chat, Menti, record Zoom session.

3.2 Group work phase (in person)
The most important and necessary condition for open-ended group work is to agree on a "safe space":

> **The „Safe Space"**
>
> The „safe space" is a central prerequisite for (artistic) experimentation. If this place is outside of the organization/everyday context, it is somewhat easier to establish.
> Above all, it is not only a matter of the location but also the atmosphere:
> - there are no „mistakes", only "attempts with different experiences"
> - attempts with the option to fail are possible
> - „right" and „wrong" as judgments are being avoided
> - we try something out and practice, rather than rehearsing something
>   - = TRY-stage, not PRACTICE-stage

3.2.1 Theatrical and methodological inputs:

Narrative Recherche combines the participants' content and questions with playful methods of collaborative play development. Accompanying this is a rich repertoire of theatrical methods and exercises, depending on the experience of the instructing individuals.

> **focus + methods**
>
> **Settings:**
> - ensemble building (across factions, functions, departments, and hierarchies)
> - partner work + small-group work (heterogeneous, mixed groups)
> - each participant brings their own experience, knowledge, engagement, and what they choose to share
>   - = Each person contributes their share, which forms the basis for collective examination
>   - = avoid hierarchical dominance during a conversation

Narrative Recherche confronts the participants with the tasks and opportunities of authorship and direction. Central artistic principles from theatrical work apply here.

> **Artistic principles**
>
> Dilemmas are exciting = Struggling with the right action
> = Where is the „drama" / dramatic conflict?
> Our task is **not to solve** the conflict, but **to tell the story** of the conflict.
> We are collectors and tellers of stories.
> We are not creators of stories

3.2.2 Character and scene work

The scenes are developed based on the acting characters and their actions. The Narrative Plotboard, which was developed in-house, serves as a very useful tool that can be used in analog and digital forms. The guiding question is: **Who** says/does **what**? **What** does **who** say/do?

Principles for character and scene work

- We don't have to know better than the (acting) characters
- All characters are equally important
- Supporting characters are crucial – they tell the world
- „The king is played by others" – possibly the problem as well…?

Character work is expanded through individual "role study", in which each person chooses an acting character that is as far removed from their background as possible. In this way, different character perspectives are obtained, and at the same time, a change of perspective is achieved for the participants.

With the collaboratively developed Narrative Plotboard, situations can be illustrated and shared through the acting characters. On this basis, scenic play is also a possibility.

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conflicts as narratives

- Creation of a „Narrative Plotboard" through collaborative (small group) work (also possible online through whiteboard)
- Presentation of different dramaturgy
- (= effective narrative structures)
  ◦ Often with hope for (re)solution at the end
  ◦ „Mosaic" = alternative?
- Idea/dramaturgy of the mosaic
  (= Narrative Recherche):
  ◦ Many individual components (narratives) create a whole picture
  ◦ Gaps create spaces for individuals to fill in with their perspectives
  ◦ Opposites are possible – they expand and energize the mosaic
  (= opposing poles expand the world)
  ◦ The mosaic is not static, but dynamic. The building blocks/narratives are in constant motion.

3.2.3 Mental Inputs

The vague, open fields – to navigate in a fluid, ambiguous space

The „open field" can create uncertainty. At the same time, it can also mean the necessary mental space for creating something new. If we learn to open up fields and tolerate openness and uncertainty, we create the mental space from which we can create new things. But how do we generate open fields and how do we navigate within them collectively? And what experiences do artists have in them?

Experiences in the vague, fluid field

<p style="text-align:right">„Questions into one's own uncertain heart":</p>

- How do I behave when faced with big, complex questions in my narrow scope of authority/competence/"powerlessness"?
- How does each individual/everyone ("we") deal with a permanently latent complexity?
- How do we convey, share, and organize facts/questions for which immediate answers are not available?

„What freedom is there in the thought of not having to have solutions?"

- In the end there must and will be a solution, but it is not necessarily the one we expected at the beginning.
  - „I am not searching, I am finding." (Pablo Picasso)

The idea of the mosaic

- Individual stories and perspectives come together to form a larger picture
- Common narrative, without destroying individual narratives
  = Question about the „**we**"

What do these experiences mean for leading and steering in open-ended processes? Here are some points from directing, or process control in theater rehearsal work:

Leading and controlling in the vague, fluid field

<u>**Safe Space is essential**</u>

- „no ‚mistakes', only attempts with different experiences"
- Attempts with the option to fail are possible
- Avoiding „right" and „wrong" as evaluations

<u>**Clarify the situation for everyone**</u>

- Commonly shared moment
- A prerequisite for the scene to be good
- I don't have to describe the scene (=solution), but the situation (=task) that underlies it.
  The scene arises through the actions/interaction of the participants.

> **Questions open**, answers close
> - Genuine tasks (=no occupational therapy/alibis)
> - Make your own search itself the topic
> - Challenge and involve everyone (including oneself)
>
> **Involve the ensemble**
> - Searching, sensing, feeling, and testing
> - Trial and error
>
> **Make decisions**
> - Take responsibility
> - The alternative to powerlessness is not power, but ACTION
>
> **Self-observation**
> - Personal experience and action in dealing with the matter
> - „do honestly" (to others and oneself)

In the conducted case study, a public presentation was part of the process. The developed narrative about a specific municipal conflict was thus shared with the public, providing a basis for a common factual debate. A presentation is not a necessary condition. But it can be a means of transfer and implementation.

3.3 Online follow-up
An online follow-up provides the opportunity to take a supporting look at the transfer and implementation into the organizational routine after intensive in-person group phases.

> **Possible questions for follow-up or transfer to everyday life:**
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> - What would happen if we looked for and communicated a different approach to the promise and longing for solutions and answers?
> - Does renouncing the promise of knowing the solution make one (professionally) vulnerable?
> - What would have to be in place for a changed approach to be possible?
> - What options for action and design exist in the ambiguous, fluid (future) field – independent of the overarching framework conditions?
> - Which organizational processes are receptive to 'creative agility' at all? And in which processes is it not possible at all?
> - What suggestions and opportunities arise from the jointly experienced training?
> - What was missing? What else could help?

3.4 Recommendations from the perspective of the research partner ZHAW/Winterthur

Based on the process observation of the conducted case study, the IAM Institute of Applied Media Science at ZHAW developed a series of questions to be clarified before conducting future training in Creative Agility. The IAM has many years of expertise in the fields of communication, discourse, and design research in transdisciplinary practice contexts. The research report on the accompanying research conducted by ZHAW can be downloaded from the website of ZHAW (https://zhaw.ch).

Questions before conducting creative agility training (ZHAW)

1. Who is our **audience** (organizational teams vs. individuals)?
2. What are the explicit and implicit ‚**expectations'** of us Creative Agility trainers from our audience?
3. What **framework conditions** need to be considered (protected space vs. intervention directly in the practical context)?
4. What **effects** on the participants do we as creative agility trainers wish for?
5. What specific **artistic, moderation, and organizational develop ment competencies** do we have in the analog and digital space?
6. Which **analog and digital communicative skills** are particularly ef fective for specific tasks and how do we acquire them (keyword: 'Digital Literacy')?
7. How do we **clarify** our **roles as creative agility trainers** in the project teams?
8. How do we deal with **overarching, connect-transcending, or re curring, and with job-content-specific issues/problems or ques tions**?
9. What **(additional) expertise** do we need regarding sustainable im pact **in different practice contexts that are unfamiliar to us**?
10. What **problems** could we be confronted with **in the creative agility process** and how can we prepare ourselves effectively for them ('Nasty problems list')?

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4. Closing remark

The presented guideline is based on the insights and experiences gained from the case study conducted in Ottersberg (D) in autumn of 2021. It is understood as an intermediate step for the procedural development of a modular system. Its use depends on many factors, such as the people involved, the organization, the different backgrounds - and not least the mediating and guiding individuals.

Happy creating!