A systemic approach to building an innovation culture: a case study

Luc De Schryver *

O2c2 Consulting
Osseghemstraat 31 b25, 1080 Brussels, Belgium
E-mail: luc.deschryver@o2c2.eu

Jan Lahuis

Parktheater Eindhoven
Theaterpad 1, 5615 EN Eindhoven,Nederland

* *Corresponding author*

Abstract

Purpose – Parktheater Eindhoven (PTE) wants to become an organization that constantly reinvents and rediscovers itself. It wants to manage the expected growth in both the core business of theater performances and the soft core businesses of impact social and cultural education by working (and thinking) differently.

Design/methodology/approach – To make sure there would be a sustained impact and a succesful transformation the authors used a systemic approach to help transform PTE into an innovative organization. The four main elements of this approach are Person, Process, Press and Product. The approach was based on scientifically based, proven methodologies.
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The intervention started with the assessment of the organizational climate for creativity, innovation and change. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of this organizational climate was crucial in planning the change initiative. Problem-solving styles were used to clarify individual preferences and why collaboration sometimes leads to decreased trust or increased conflict.

The third element of the intervention was to ensure the organization had the necessary capabilities to initiate and manage creativity. 12 coworkers were trained to become CPS facilitators.

Finally we are focusing on coaching the leadership team (based on the result of the SOQ climate assessment). Leadership plays after all an important role in the creation of an innovative organizational climate.

Originality/value – The systemic approach allows PTE to develop into a dynamic organization that offers a varied and attractive program, develops new cultural products, undertakes numerous social projects, supports many cultural partners and seeks cooperation with more and more cultural and non-cultural partners. PTE has the potential to evolve in

the near future into a platform where theory and practical application of creativity are brought together. During 2023, PTE employees trained in CPS will also facilitate projects or challenges outside PTE.

Keywords – Systemic approach, Problem-solving styles, Climate for creativity, Creative Problem Solving, transformation

Paper type – Practical Paper

1 Introduction

The world is constantly changing. Cliché, but true. We have been hit by a lot of impactfull changes over the last few years; covid leading to …. , increasing energy prices leading to temporary closures of businesses, increasing inflation … And since covid, everything does seem to be moving into a different pace, both slower and faster. This is also true for the theater business and Parktheater Eindhoven.

Parktheater Eindhoven N.V. (abbreviation: PTE), founded in 1964 as Stadsschouwburg Eindhoven, is the theater for Eindhoven and the region. The municipality of Eindhoven is the sole shareholder of N.V.. PTE is one of the larger theaters in the Netherlands and, with a broad programming of about 400 performances per theater season, annually reaches about 200,000 visitors from Eindhoven and its surroundings.

PTE aims to be a theater for everyone and therefore wants to touch the audience with a very diverse programming and contribute to beautiful encounters of theater makers with the audience. In its current mission More than you..., PTE constantly seeks to connect with current and new audiences. PTE is at the center of society and is involved in and initiates various social (impact) and cultural education projects .

The theater wanted to use the covid moment as a catalyst to give additional impetus to their already initiated development. During 2020 they developed their vision for the next four years: “More than you”. The Theater sees its role and function changing from provider of performing arts to facilitator of encounters and conversation in the city. A truly inclusive theater that ensures that everyone has the opportunity to participate, to experience, to experience, to talk and to decide. In doing so, they give meaning to people, life and the city. Using theater to change lives. To create a more fun, more beautiful city. Broaden the view and offer perspectives. Make people think. Finding new horizons together.

“A truly inclusive theater that ensures that everyone has the opportunity to participate, to experience, to experience, to talk and to decide. In doing so, we give meaning to people, life and the city. Using theater to change lives. To create a more fun, more beautiful city. Broaden the view and offer perspectives. Make people think. Finding new horizons together.

We want to use this moment as a catalyst to boost our already underway development. Nothing new normal. A new balance okay. That balance has to be there. But a real new balance. A new game. With new rules. Which brings more. To makers, visitors, residents and employees. For this we must and want to constantly reinvent and rediscover ourselves."

Giel Pastoor, 2020

To manage the expected growth in both the core business of theater performances and the soft core businesses of impact (social) and cultural education, PTE needed a new way of working. Partly to allow current employees to work together in a different, more productive way, and partly to be able to integrate new employees into the PTE organization more quickly.

2 Approach

Many organisations struggle to transform the rhetoric of creativity and innovation into reality because of a lack of understanding of what this means or how to achieve this. Fragmentation of existing research leads to ambiguous evidence with a danger of spurious relationships or confounding of factors that is inadequate to advance theoretical understanding and inform practice.

While corporate innovation is commonly touted as a viable strategy for sustaining superior performance in today's corporations, the successful implementation of corporate innovation remains quite elusive for most companies. An Accenture survey of more than 500 executives revealed that over 50% report a poor innovation process, while fewer than 18% believe their own innovation strategy provides a competitive advantage for the firm.

Rhodes (1961) defined four separate strands which have influence on the occurrence of creativity and which represent the essential cornerstones for any kind of creativity research: Person, Process, Press and Product:

- "The term person, as used here, covers information about personality, intellect, temperament, physique, traits, habits, attitudes, self-concept, value systems, defense mechanisms, and behaviour." (p. 307).
- "The term process applies to motivation, perception, learning, thinking, and communication." (p. 308).

- "The term press refers to the relationship between human beings and their environment." (p. 308). This notion and the word "press" are rather common in the field of education.
- "The term product refers to a thought which has been communicated to other people in the form of words, paint, clay, metal, stone, fabric, or other material. When an idea becomes embodied into tangible form it is called a product." (p. 309).

Treffinger's (1988) COCO model proposes that creative productivity is the function of the dynamic interaction of four factors: the personal Characteristics of people, the Operations they perform, such as problem-solving and decision-making strategies and techniques, the given Context with its cultural and climate factors, the characteristics of the physical environment and situational factors, communication and cooperation, and the final Outcomes, products and ideas. In our approach we will be intervening on all four elements.

Insert figure 1

In order to build a sustained impact of our intervention to create an creative and innovative PTE organization we chose to use a systemic approach.

3 The plan for intervening

Within the framework of "practice what you preach," PTE set out to find a way of working that matched this. PTE chose O2C2's integrated approach in part because it stimulates innovation and creativity with scientifically based, proven methodologies ... theory and practice come together in a systematic way. The systemic approach allows PTE to develop into a dynamic organization that offers a varied and attractive program, develops new cultural products, undertakes numerous social projects, supports many cultural partners and seeks cooperation with more and more cultural and non-cultural partners. With a new way of working, PTE can relate to everything that presents itself in the best possible way. No matter how complex, complicated, challenging or promising it may be.

Early 2022 we started implementing the project "Dichterbij dromen" (dream closer) as part of this transformation process that would help the organization achieving its vision. The utimate goal is to build the ability to innovate and to make it a core organizational capability.-

3 The plan for intervening

3.1 Measuring the organizational climate

Payne et al.(1971) defined organizational climate as the way in which employees perceive their organization and its purposes. Churchill et al. conceptualized organizational climate as the aggregates of the social variables, which constitute a worker's job environment According to Mullins, if organizational culture is defined simply as how things are done around here, then organizational climate can be defined as how it feels to work around here'.

Griffin R.W. & Moorhead G. (2014). explained organizational climate as individual perceptions; recurring patterns of behaviour, attitudes and feelings of employees. Additionally, Robbins and Judge stated that organizational climate can be considered as an aspect of culture and defined as team spirit but at the organizational level, and according to Uhl-Bien et al. (2014), one of the most important aspects in an organization to influence how people behave is organizational culture that can be defined as the shared beliefs and values within the organization.

In order to understand how an employee perceives organizational climate, it is necessary to consider the employee's perceptions of the work situation (including the characteristics of the organization they work for) and the nature of his/her relationships with other people in the same environment. Organizational climate has a significant impact on the well-being of employees that has a direct influence on quality and quantity of work done in the organization (Griffin R.W. & Moorhead G.)

Before starting to develop our approach we wanted to have a better understanding of the organizational climate and how ready it was for creativity, innovation and change. It has been argued that setting appropriate conditions for creativity and innovation results in higher levels of organizational creativity and innovation, as well as better individual psychological well-being (Rasulzada & Dackert, 2009).

When employees feel a deeper sense of engagement and experience a climate conducive to creativity, numerous business benefits result, including higher levels of innovation (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002).

Often, the climate concept has been considered 'objectivistic' (Ekvall, 1987), implying that the climate is conceived as an organizational reality, a property of the organization containing recurrent patterns of behaviour, attitudes and feelings that characterize life in

the organization. Aggregated values of the ratings, usually mean scores of the climate dimensions identified in the ratings, allow for the measurement of climate. Organizational climate, in this sense, is distinct from organizational culture, which reflects the deeper and more stable aspects of values, traditions, rituals and history (Denison, 1996).

Research on organizational culture has typically focused on the underlying assumptions and values of the organization that are deeply embedded and can often be subconscious, hidden and taken for granted (Schein, 2004).

Amabile et al. (1996) further suggest that an individual's perception of the work environment is a key determinant of his or her creativity. According to their model, the perceived work environment influences the creative work carried out in organizations; that is, the psychological meaning employees attach to events in their organizations affect their motivation to generate new ideas.

The organizational climate and culture can create barriers to creativity. When individuals are bound by a strong corporate culture, there is a danger that they may adopt fixed mind-sets to solve problems. Second, culture involves assumptions, beliefs and values that can be deep-rooted within the members of organizations. These things cannot be changed easily. We therefor focused on the organizational climate.

The following dimensions of a climate for creativity, innovation and change were measured. We could benchmark those results against a climate within innovative organizations and against the results of innovative organizations.

Insert figure 2

At the organizational level, the organizational climate forms the foundation for nurturing creativity. There must be trust, respect for individual differences and open communication to support creativity. When trust is lacking, people will not dare to take risk. Respect for individual differences enable individuals to share different perspectives and explore alternative ways of doing things.

3.2 Assessing problem-solving styles

At an individual level, the foundation for creativity is the belief systems. Both employees and managers must have positive belief systems. Employees must think positively of themselves and believe that they can be creative. This is why we invited the

whole organization to take the VIEW assessment. The basic assumption is that everyone is creative. The question is not how creative you are, but how you prefer the use the creativity you have.

Employees play a crucial role in any organisation. They need to have a mix of creativity, technical and human relations skills in order to exercise creativity effectively in organizations. They also have to better understand their own styles reagarding creativity. What are their preferences to their own creativity when solving problems; searching for ideas and planning for action? Once they understand their own preferences and understand the behavior of their colleagues during creative problem-solving sessions they will be able to focus more on the desired new results.

We introduced VIEW: an assessment of problem solving style (Treffinger, Selby & Isaksen, 2008). VIEW is based on theories of learning (Dunn & Dunn, 1993) and cognitive style (Kirton, 2003), psychological type (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), and includes three dimensions of problem-solving style. Problem solving style was defined as consistent individual differences in the ways people prefer to plan and carry out generating and focusing activities in order to gain clarity, produce ideas and prepare for action. An individual's natural disposition towards change management and problem solving is influenced in part by mindset, willingness to engage in and respond to a situation as presented, and the attitudinal dimensions of one's personality. VIEW is applied to help individuals understand their own preferences, and then to help all members understand and appreciate the contributions of the diversity of styles within the group or team.

3.3 Building the internal creative and innovative capabilities of the organization

Creating an internal team of 12 internal CPS facilitators is enabling the organization to build the necessary organizational capabilities to move faster and better toward creative and innovative outcomes. The training that the future facilitators participating in is "Igniting Creative Potential". This training programme focusses on the Creative Problem Solving skillbase that is founded on 60 years of experience and research in understanding what it takes to be an effective problem solver and creative thinker. It provides the knowledge and practical experience necessary to facilitate world-class idea generation and problem solving in groups. In addition to learning a practical framework, tools and techniques for creative problem solving; participants are learning techniques for becoming a master facilitator, and practice their skills on real world business opportunities.

Furthermore the CPS facilitators have a good understanding of how fostering a creative (micro-)climate for the development of creative ideas in the organization and know how to be good coaches.

Foundations, competencies, and support are necessary ingredients to produce creative outcomes. At the individual level, the outcomes of creativity will manifest themselves in the form of new ideas at the workplace. When these suggestions are translated into action plans that get implemented, they become creative outcomes for the organizations. The tangible forms of organizational creative outcomes include new projects, continuous improvement, and improved services.

3.1.1 Linking CPS and problem-solving styles

Although specific CPS tools are likely to be style neutral, there is evidence that people of varying style orientations have distinctly different preferences for particular kinds of tools, phases within stages, and specific stages of CPS (Basadur, Graen & Wakabayashi, 1990; Rickards & Puccio, 1992).

There are meaningful style differences in the level of reported enjoyment in learning CPS tools, guidelines and process. There are also differences in the reported level of use of these resources. VIEW: An Assessment of Problem Solving Style (VIEW) also appears to provide additional insights about these differences over previous assessments. Most of our previous research within the CSP utilized the KAI, which does correlate with the Orientation to Change dimension of VIEW. The two additional dimensions of VIEW seem to add more value in identifying and understanding additional style differences.

Linking the understanding of their individual styles helps CPS facilitators to choose the right tools to get to the desired results, and not using certain tools because they love to use these tools!

3.1.1 Linking problem-solving styles and an organizational climate beneficial for creativity

As a side benefit of using style we noticed that different styles experience the organizational climate in a slight different way. Taking into account those differences is an important part of building an organizational climate that enables creativity, innovation and change.

For example, one dimension of VIEW assesses people's preferences for their ways

of deciding. The task-oriented decider is someone who prefers to examine first choices that are logical, sensible, and that can be objectively justified, and focuses on results or outcomes that are the highest possible quality. The people-oriented decider is someone who prefers to consider first the effect or impact of the choices on people, their feelings, and focuses on the need to create and maintain harmony and positive relationships. Given the same observed behaviour, people-oriented deciders are more likely to be more sensitive to person-oriented tension, seeing more Conflict in situations than task-oriented deciders (Aerts, 2008). Given the potential for individual differences in style affecting the perception of the situation, obtaining insight from style assessments may help build awareness of these differences and assist in creating norms to maximize the productive use of them

3.4 Coaching the leadership team

Leadership behavior has a major influence on the perceptions people have about the climate through their direct decision-making and how their behavior is perceived and observed by others. Leaders can directly or indirectly affect the climate for creativity. Leadership behavior can directly influence the dimensions of a climate for creativity (Isaksen, 2017). Specific actions and practices that impact a climate of innovation include allowing freedom and autonomy in the practice of work, providing challenging work, specifying clear strategic goals, and forming work teams that comprise individuals with diverse skills and perspectives. It also helps to have leaders who understand their role within this transformation process.

The results of assessing the organizational climate for creativity, innovation and change enabled us to make specific analysis of this climate on team level. Those data are used to coach leaders individually in a way that gives them the tools to target certain climate dimensions when working with and leading their teams.

4 Conclusions

The systemic approach allows PTE to develop into a dynamic organization that offers a varied and attractive program, develops new cultural products, undertakes numerous social projects, supports many cultural partners and seeks cooperation with more and more cultural and non-cultural partners. With a new way of working, PTE can relate to everything

that presents itself in the best possible way. No matter how complex, complicated, challenging or promising it may be.

The first results are already widely visible and noticeable to the public. Internal facilitators worked with an external partner together on the "Pak de Vibe" project and organized last October the national launch of the FIFA23 game in the theater. This initiative attracted the interest of 500 children who visited a theater for the first time in their lives. More new projects are being planned in collaboration with education, social cooperation partners and the City of Eindhoven. CPS will be the methodology to create thos new projects.

PTE has the potential to evolve in the near future into a platform where theory and practical application of creativity are brought together. During 2023, PTE employees trained in CPS will also facilitate projects or challenges outside PTE.

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