ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME 2018–2019

THE ART OF REFLECTIVE

COMMUNICATION

A BOOK BASED ON THE TRAINING MATERIALS FROM THE PROJECT ENTITLED

LET'S PLAY IT BACK! LET'S LIVE IT AGAIN!

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT USING SOCIAL DIALOGUE THEATRE

VITAKULTÚRA ASSOCIATION

2019

Participating organisations:

Vitakultúra *(Debating Culture)* Association (Budapest, Hungary), Tandem, n.o. (Komárno, Slovakia), Szederfa (*Mulberry Tree)* Home –Gyöngyház (Mother of Pearl) Association of Developmentally Disabled People (Iklad, Hungary), Panta Rhei Association (Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania)

Project leaders and trainers:

Attila Donáth, Beáta Somogyi, Dániel Rózsa, Dénes Maróti, Dávid Abonyi

Zselyke Molnos compiled this book from the project materials.

Budapest, 2019

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Description of the project

The Vitakultúra Association applied for Erasmus+ funding with a project in which the association and its cooperating partners would support a culture of reflective communication among representatives of the helping professions (e.g. trainers, social workers, mental hygiene professionals). We held a number of multi-day training sessions to support the effectiveness of those communities and organisations using playback theatre and other arts such as poetry, music and fine arts.

Our objective with the project was to allow the participants to develop personally, with a view to using the resulting new capacities and relational and social competencies in their roles within the partner organisations, in a conscious manner. The improved self-confidence, sense of responsibility and capacity for action of the participating individuals would allow them to take a more comprehensive role in realising the objectives of the organisations in which they play roles.

We believe that in the helping professions it is particularly important to have effective feedback, to establish a strong culture of reflective communication in which the persons concerned provide information to each other about themselves, each other, the situation at hand, their work and its results, and their relationships in the interest of supporting each other and their own development. Developing such a culture required theoretical, system-level, that is to say organisational-level and personal work from the participants. During the project, we assessed the cultures of reflective communication of the persons and organisations involved, and we defined the exact organisational characteristics and individual life stories to which we should adapt the development for optimal results.

The target group of the project was complex. We primarily supported professionals in the helping professions who work for the partner organisations in their personal development and in their roles within their organisations. In the second instance, through our work with them, we also wanted to reinforce the system-level reflective communication cultures of our partner organisations, and, thirdly, we also aimed to exert a beneficial influence on the narrower or wider target groups and environments of those organisations.

The project was coordinated by the Vitakultúra Association, its partner organisations were TANDEM from Komárno, Slovakia, the Panta Rhei Association from Sfântu Gheorghe,

Romania, and the Szederfa Home of the Gyöngyház Association of Developmentally Disabled People in Iklad, Hungary.

We completed three training courses in 2018, one in each of the participating countries, and in 2019 we returned to each location with follow-up events: Social Dialogue Theatre sessions, presentations and workshops about the topic of reflective communication for specialists and laypeople working in the helping professions.

Introductions of the participating associations

Panta Rhei Association, Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania

Panta Rhei is an association of professionals in the helping professions whose primary motivation is their love of their work and their vocations.

We do our work so as to help those who come to us find their innate freedom and build happy and authentic lives.

Our motto: *Life is constant flow, movement, transformation.*

Our objectives: helping those who are open to living consciously and to assuming active roles within their own lives and in their communities.

Developing more mindful and competent presences in our own professions and in our relationships.

Our scope of activities:

- Personal and group development
- Group training sessions for personal and professional development
- Thematic training courses
- Training sessions
- Community development
- Organisation development
- Community playback theatre

TANDEM, n.o., Komárno, Slovakia

TANDEM, n. o. is a non-profit organisation for development and training which was established in 2009 in Bratislava, but which is currently situated in Komárno. The word TANDEM is a Hungarian acronym, each of the letters corresponds to one of our core values.

T – TUDATOS – MINDFUL

A – ALTERNATÍV – ALTERNATIVE

N – NEM FORMÁLIS – NON-FORMAL

D – DINAMIKUS – DYNAMIC

E – EMBERKÖZPONTÚ – HUMAN-CENTRED

M – MEGERŐSÍTŐ – EMPOWERING

We provide individual and group development sessions informed by those values on a variety of topics and for a range of target groups from secondary-school students through educators to non-governmental organisations.

We believe that "Everybody knows that something can't be done and then somebody turns up and he doesn't know it can't be done and he does it." (Albert Einstein)

Szederfa (Mulberry Tree) Home – Gyöngyház (Mother of Pearl) Association of Developmentally Disabled People, Iklad, Hungary

The Szederfa Home run by the Gyöngyház Association in Iklad officially became a residential home and day-care centre for adults with developmental disabilities in 2005, while supported living and employment were added to their range of services later on. 16 people have found permanent homes here, and 20 developmentally disabled people living in the area with their families work at the home so as to maintain meaningful, complete lives despite their social disadvantages.

The staff and the clients of the association form a dynamically growing community and they work continuously to build a joyful, learning, innovative organisation informed by the core values of respect for human dignity, partnership and favouring win-win situations.

Playback theatre is used at a number of levels in the organisation, both at internal and public events, as a tool and methodology that can be used to develop and enrich organisational culture.

We, the members and the staff of the association, are building a future in which all can find the path leading to personal development.

Vitakultúra (Debating Culture) Association, Budapest

We have been building communities since 1997 – non-governmental organisations, student and workplace communities as well. We work with empathy, engagement, and an honesty that yields peacefulness. Our work in the association is also an education for us – we learn to be sensitive and to identify the essence.

The Vitakultúra Association is a non-profit organisation that was established in 1997. Our primary and general objective is cultural development and the promotion of integrative social processes through the development of individuals and groups. Our members and partners from the helping professions provide development and psychological support for underprivileged people and their helpers.

Our members are specialists from various fields (education, social work and the for-profit sector), and the association provides complex professional development services. The trainer, supervisor and coach Attila Donáth is our esteemed cooperating partner and co-founder of the Social Dialogue Theatre.

Our main methodologies are as follows: drama pedagogy, psychodrama, playback theatre and neuro-linguistic programming. Main activities: training courses, supervision, mentoring, applied playback theatre performances and the facilitation of complex processes, publications, Social Dialogue Theatre, informal and adult educational events and courses.

Introduction of the project's leaders and trainers

Attila Donáth – professional leader

Attila Donáth has been working as a counsellor, organisation development specialist, trainer, supervisor, coach and community social worker for thirty years. He is a playback theatre professional, a playback theatre conductor and a teacher accredited by the Centre for Playback Theatre, as well as director of the Opening Circle Central European School of Playback Theatre since 2014. He has been cooperating with the Vitakultúra Association regularly since 2000. He is also one of the developers of Social Dialogue Theatre.

Beáta Somogyi – professional leader

Beáta Somogyi is a playback theatre professional, non-governmental community and organisation development trainer, founding member of the Vitakultúra Association and a teacher at the Opening Circle Central European School of Playback Theatre. She is a drama teacher and leads a playback theatre company. She is one of the developers of Social Dialogue Theatre and since 2010 she has been using the method regularly as a professional leader and project manager.

Dániel Rózsa – trainer, chairperson of the Vitakultúra Association

Dániel Rózsa is a playback theatre professional. As a trainer and as the leader of a playback theatre company, he has provided training courses in the for-profit sector, in education and in the non-governmental sector for the last twenty years. He is a founding member, and as of 2010, the chairperson of the Vitakultúra Association, and a teacher at the Opening Circle Central European School of Playback Theatre. He is one of the developers of Social Dialogue Theatre and a permanent member of its project team.

Dénes Maróti

Dénes Maróti is a graphic artist and painter affiliated with the Fiumano Clase Gallery (London, UK). He is a fine arts consultant and trainer in a number of Vitakultúra Association projects. He created the visual works in the present project, and he was also the leading co-creator of the visual works created by groups during the training courses and the follow-up events.

Dávid Abonyi

Dávid Abonyi is an adult education specialist and trainer. He is a member and trainer of the Vitakultúra Association. Along with being the project manager of the present project, he also led the musical workshops at the training courses and the groups of musicians at the playback theatre performances.

About this book

The present book contains the project's training materials, that is to say the training materials of the three four-day training courses held at three different locations during the year 2018, but it does not contain material from the follow-up events implemented in 2019 using Social Dialogue Theatre[1] and other methods.

The aim of the project was to develop the culture of reflective communication, and although the target group was composed of specialists working in various helping professions, reflective communication is an important tool for everyone who works with people. For that very reason, in this book we present the development of the culture of reflective communication using an approach that goes beyond the boundaries of individual professions, from a perspective of individual development.

As regards its structure, the book starts with the theoretical background, and presents the training methods used through presenting a lot of feed-back from participants as well as practical examples.

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[1] The Social Dialogue Theatre (SDT) is the intellectual property of Attila Donáth and the Vitakultúra Association. It is a form of public community forum that allows the social/community groups involved in a specific theme to express their perspectives and to listen to each other's perspectives in a controlled fashion. Accordingly, it offers a new, alternative form of negotiating for the interest groups, communities and individuals engaged, during which it becomes possible to achieve a change in the cooperation between the parties concerned. Social Dialogue Theatre is an open and artistic form of dialogue, a specific form of applied playback theatre.

THE ART OF REFLECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Part I:
Theoretical foundations, pillars

The theoretical background of the training is based on four pillars:

1. *Reflective communication*
2. *Cooperation*
3. *Joyfulness*
4. *The systems perspective*

Each one of those is supported by its own theoretical model. During the training sessions, each of those components appeared in practice again and again, and we followed up the practical experiences with building awareness of the aspects of those pillars that had manifested in the group process, and the forms those manifestations took, and we added the theoretical background as well. This was done in a comprehensible, concise form on a flip-chart.

Reflective communication

Feedback plays an essential role in natural systems. In a living organism, the nervous system and the hormonal system are able to play their regulatory roles because they receive continuous feedback from the organism. Molecular-level feedback works in a similar fashion within individual cells. At the level of a biome or a larger ecological system, too, dynamic equilibrium is maintained through feedback processes, and they also allow the system to change, to develop gradually.

Human communities, as systems, operate a great many interactions, in which verbal and non-verbal reflections (known as feedback loops in systems theory) serve as the foundation for cooperation and joyfulness.

In our culture, in our communities and in our workplaces, which are usually determined by hierarchical structures of power, we are socialised for one-way communication. Therefore in most of our human interactions we operate a calibrated form of communication, based on the supposition that we understand what the other person meant, and as a result we don't ask back, we do not refine our understanding. At such times we already have a conception of what

opinions the other person could have, or what another person could understand a concept to mean, or perhaps even how they could feel, and we use that mental map of our own construction to respond, that is to say we relate to others as if we knew why they do what they do. But such 'mind-reading' and attribution of intent often leads us astray.

The alternative manner of interaction, using *feedback communication*, involves asking more questions instead of doing the interpretation ourselves. "What do you mean when you say...?", "What does that mean for you?" This allows us to find out the meaning that a phrase or a word has for the other person, what they mean by it, and what the purpose of their communication had been.

Here is an example of the role of providing feedback from the first moments of a training session:

We begin by getting freely acquainted, then continue with the framework: the leader of the host organisation talks about the venue for the training, the time and place of lunch and dinner and the timeframe of the day. Attila Donáth stops the process and asks the host (E) about why it would be important to get feedback from the participants.

E: "It would be important for me to know that I got the information across as I had wanted. Also, it is also important for me to know that in my organiser role, because if everything is clear, I don't need to play that role any more, I can concentrate on the others."

Attila Donáth: "What do you think could happen if we fail to request feedback now, if we don't ask any questions in turn?"

Participants: "E could be left with a sense of uncertainty; he may not be able to fully participate in the day, because people could keep derailing him with organisational questions." "A number of us could pester him over and over again with the same questions about organisation."

Attila Donáth: "What is your fantasy, what kind of an emotional state could E end up in?"

Participants: "I think he would be happy to answer once, twice, three times, and then he would be exhausted by the evening." "He would become increasingly frustrated and irritated."

Attila Donáth: "The difference between calibrated and feedback-based communication is that either I just assume something, or I verify it by asking a confirming question: "What do you mean by...?" – You will be awfully bored with those constant questions. At the beginning, it will

seem really lame, very contrived. But allow yourself the luxury of beginning to practise it, and after a while it will be integrated, and you will begin to need it innately."

Asking repeated questions to get confirmation or a more accurate understanding requires cooperation. At those times we expend attention, time and energy, working together in order to understand each other more clearly and to facilitate connections with each other.

The criteria of reflective communication:[2]

−   **Development-oriented**: It serves the development of the individual or the cooperation – it is not self-serving and not intended purely to denigrate the listener.

−   **Personalised**: Providing feedback is a form of connecting with the other person. That's precisely the reason why giving feedback can only be successful if we avoid generalisations, focus on the other person and provide feedback that is specifically for that person.

−   **Specific**: The topic should be delimited. The more precisely we specify the focus of the feedback that we are requesting or giving, the simpler it is to accept it or to connect with it. During the training, the participants all requested feedback from each other about particular phases of the work on very many occasions, and it was always a part of the task of the person receiving feedback to express the perspective or perspectives of the feedback.

In one exercise, people could choose freely whether to act as participants or as observers. After the exercise, the observers provided feedback to the participants based on a criterion determined in advance: *What emotional, physical or cognitive changes did you observe in the participant group during the exercise?*

Another example: Dávid Abonyi, as project manager, summarised the objective of the project, and requested feedback based on the following criteria: *1) How clear is the logic of what I am telling you? 2) How clear is the overall objective?*

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[2] Based on Rick Maurer's work (Mauer, R. 1997. *A visszajelzés eszköztára vezetőknek.* (Feedback Toolkit) Budapest: RészVétel Foundation).

– It takes the form of **I-messages**, that is to say it is non-judgmental: it should be cast in terms of how it engages me, my feelings, the effect the events had on me.

– It takes the **systems approach**. When we provide feedback, we are intervening in a live system. At such times it is important to provide the feedback with the intention of increasing order, concentration and the joyfulness of the encounter, while also taking action against factors that would cause the system to disintegrate.

Cooperation

The existence of living systems, human groups and communities is dependent on cooperation. According to the biologist and physician Joachim Bauer[3]: *"From a neurobiological perspective, humans are essentially characterised by social resonance and cooperation."*[4]

Our systems of motivation are powered by the desire to be connected with each other, and that *"includes not only personal relationships ..., but all forms of social cooperation ... Neurobiological studies have shown that nothing powers motivational systems more than the desire to be seen by others, the prospect of social recognition and positive regard, and – most of all – the experience of love."*[5]

Cooperation with others is a fundamental human need, but it is also important to stress that it only works in relationships between equals – in coercive, subordinate relationships we can speak of quasi-cooperation at best. The direction of development leads from conditions of dependency through autonomy towards cooperation, for which the experience of autonomy is a requirement along with the recognition that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that is to say cooperation can create something qualitatively new, it can generate value.

Following Joachim Bauer[6], we can define the criteria for cooperation as follows:

1) Seeing, being seen and making visible
2) Shared attention towards a third thing
3) Emotional resonance

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[3] Molecular biologist and neurobiologist, as well a physician qualified as an internalist, psychiatrist and in psychosomatic medicine.

[4] Bauer, J. (2012). *Az együttműködő ember*. Budapest: Ursus Libris, 19.

[5] Ibid., 29-30.

[6] Ibid.

4) A shared space of action

5) Mutual understanding of motives and ideas

During the training courses, we practised various forms of cooperation continuously. Here are some examples:

o On one occasion, the participants worked in groups of three to find examples of the pillars of organisational culture manifesting in the previous process.

o At the beginning of an afternoon session, groups of four discussed the links between the works of art that had been produced and then exhibited in the morning and the training process during the morning session.

o At the beginning of a training course, all the people who had formulated needs concerning the use of space coordinated their requirements in a transparent fashion (in a 'fish tank' exercise)[7].

o Shared attention towards a third thing: when working in large groups, the trainers helped with maintaining focus, or, if required, with changing the focus.

o Maintaining continuous awareness through monitoring the process and reflections every time attention was scattered, something new happened, or action was moved to a different space. In order to be able to cooperate, it is important to be in the same space and time psychologically. It is difficult to cooperate with someone who is not present.

o Involving the entire group in setting up the space for a playback theatre[8] performance: During one of the training courses, in preparation for an open performance in the afternoon, the company members (all the people that chose to participate as actors or musicians) began to set up the space: locating the stage, the audience, the musicians – they were moving things and furniture about, etc. A passive group of onlookers also formed. Bea Somogyi: *"Dear company members, please use all the available resources so that we finish setting up the space in 3 minutes!"*

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[7] See Part III: The tools of development
[8] See the section entitled *The forms of feedback* in Part II for a more detailed description of playback theatre.

o While using a dramatic form of feedback, the group members lined up along a straight line to indicate how well they understood what was happening and how the process would be continued. The question of what to do about those at the "I don't understand" end of the scale was raised. Attila Donáth: *"At one end of the line, we have a resource, at the other and, we have a need. How about having the people at the two ends of the scale having a conversation? The group always knows more than the leader, it is worth making use of that resource."*

o It is important to be able to offer each other points of connection. When we were working with the theme of a particular organisation, people from the other organisations were able to reflect on what they heard along the points of connection that had been established.

o Utilising the resources of the group: when a representative of one organisation got stuck, we brought the resources of the other members of that organisation to the fore, we activated them, and that helped with resolving the blockage.

Along with the above-mentioned situation of partnership, the other condition for cooperation is becoming attuned with each other. The trainers were attuned in the course of a purposefully organised process – e.g. travelling to the training venue together, having meals together, etc. In the case of playback theatre, a form of improvised community theatre that we used a lot to develop the culture of reflective communication, it is also indispensable for the actors, the musicians and the conductor to be attuned to each other before a performance.[9]

Joyfulness

In his *Finding Flow*[10] (1998), Mihály Csíkszentmihályi mentioned the following conditions for joyfulness:

- Undertaking a task that we have the opportunity and a chance to complete
- The ability to be attentive to, or to focus on what we are doing
- Having a clear target for our actions
- As fast feedback as possible

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[9] This process is described in Part IV.
[10] Csíkszentmihályi, Mihály (1998). Finding Flow. Basic Books.

– As far as possible, we should do what we do gracefully and with a high level of commitment

The experience of joyfulness means a particular type of concentration, not falling apart but a structured, stable state, during which we are clear about the purpose of our activity. At such times, the preoccupation with being disappears, the perception of time becomes subjective, and, paradoxically, after the experience of flow, the sense of self that returns is reinforced.

We followed those criteria throughout the training, joyfulness was constantly in focus along with the other three pillars of organisational culture. One of the most important aspects of that was that people only ever assumed roles in line with their personal needs and requirements, so the trainees participated in tasks that they found pleasurable, and to which they were committed.

In addition to the professional pleasure associated with development, the pleasure of connecting with others was also strongly present all along, as well as the joy of creation, as we worked with various art forms a lot. The latter grew to the level of cathartic experiences in our joint creative performances.[11]

The community programmes that could be described as free time, which were included in each of the four-day courses, and where we took part in local cultural programmes (e.g. wine tasting, forest bathing, folk dance, etc.) were also related both to joyfulness and the systems perspective.

The systems perspective

We live our lives embedded in systems: natural systems, human societies, communities and groups – so our existence is played out in nested systems that are constantly connected with each other.

The systems perspective[12] is a complex approach that allows us to see not only components but also relationships, to notice not only that which is right in front of us, but to see the background of processes as well (e.g. knowledge of group dynamics helps trainers understand the group process). The systems perspective and system theory are indispensable for

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[11] See the section entitled *The use of art in development* (Part IV).
[12] Pioneered by Ludwig von Bertalanffy.

understanding longer periods of time, for recognising interconnections and for sustainable planning.

Following Gerhard Fatzer (2005) [13], the characteristics of living systems are as follows:

1. **Holistic organisation:** each component of the system connects to all the others so that if one component changes, that will result in changes to all the other elements and thereby the entire system, too.
2. **Synergism:** a living system is more and different than the sum of its parts.
3. **Feed-back:** it allows the system to regulate itself.
4. **Cyclic character of systems:** the events occurring in organisms can be understood as cycles, which compose the entire life-cycle of the system.
5. **Openness of living systems**: continuous exchange of matter, energy and information with the environment.
6. **Negative entropy**: All systems share the tendency that pushes them in the direction of disorganisation, disintegration, destruction (entropy), but this can be prevented if the system acquires new energy and information.
7. **Differentiation and integration:** these are alternating and complementary processes: living systems develop in the direction of increasing differentiation, while integration is the organisation of the differentiated state into a unity.
8. **Dynamic equilibrium:** the totality of changes within certain bounds, aimed at maintaining balance.
9. **The equifinality principle**: All living systems are capable of reaching a particular target state along various paths and from a variety of initial conditions.
10. **Self-organisation:** the innate organising process of living systems.

During the development of the culture of reflective communication, we used a 4 by 3 matrix: the 4 pillars of organisational culture (feedback, cooperation, joyfulness, systems approach) and the 3 levels of development (the individual level, the group/organisation level, and the level of the network/community around the organisation).

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[13] Fatzer, G. (2005). A szupervízió intézményi és rendszerdinamikája. *(The institutional and systemic dynamics of supervision)* In: *Szupervízió (Supevision)* (Ed. Emőke Bagdy, Erzsébet Wiesner).

We modelled the effect of a single person on the group as a larger system several times. We kept using the feedback that is a fundamental condition for the operation of systems (the self-regulation of living systems is facilitated by feedback). We also used ritual elements consciously when closing training courses, playing music together, offering personalised feedback and celebrating.

Dani Rózsa had the following observation about one of the characteristics of systems: *"Today, someone told me that when they think of a system, they have an image of a square, rigid structure, but what we are talking about here is a living system, like our bodies or this group. All living systems are open. And all systems have a force acting in them that pushes them towards disintegration (entropy), but it is possible to counteract that process if the system is able to get new energy and new information. So when we have all these experiences, and we begin to organise them through learning, and we draw certain inferences from them, it increases order in our system. This is happening at the individual and the group level as well."*

Part II
The forms of reflective communication

During the day, we practised feedback and reflections continuously, in a great variety of forms, every time the process required it or made it possible.

Verbal feedback kept recurring in large group, small group and one-on-one settings as well (e.g. when clarifying limits, providing summaries, etc.). We started each day with questions and feedback about the previous day of training.

Some examples of reflections about the first day:

- *"A bit of lateness can create so much!"*
- *"This folder system is so clear and easy to follow!"*
- *"For me, the important thing yesterday afternoon was analysing the process, when we looked through it and closed the subfolders individually, and then I saw what had happened and why we had done each thing."*
- *"There was a very fast flow of ideas in the fishtank exercise, it was unbelievably efficient."*
- *"When Attila changed his position at the moment he changed roles, I really liked that, I will use it myself."*
- *"It was important for me when E noticed Z's metacommunication and asked about it."*
- *"I marvelled at the living nature of the system!"*
- *"For me as group leader it was important that a single person can stop the process, because I have thought that a group has a rhythm that everyone should keep up with."*

The ***"book and film titles"*** that the participants made up to describe individual sections of the process were also condensed verbal reflections, which described the content experienced in the given section in a compact fashion: *"To reflect and to be reflected"*, *"My life in the orchestral pit"*, *"And then I came across myself"*.

During the large group circles that concluded the individual training courses, we used the **threefold system of criteria** recommended by Attila Donáth for providing feedback, namely **interests, experience and value**: *"What knowledge did you acquire during these four days that*

serves your interests? What experiences (feelings) did that bring for you? What values did you experience?"

Some examples of feedback:

- o *"Sometimes it's someone else's tooth that hurts in my own mouth – I got a living experience of that."*
- o *"Learning: keeping communication clear through providing feedback."*
- o *"The experience of encounters and playing on stage."*
- o *"Value: experiencing the quality of hospitality."*
- o *"Experience: accepting what comes."*
- o *"Learning: facing up to the task."*
- o *"Simply being together is such a great experience, and while I wish for something great, I fail to notice it!"*
- o *"Values: togetherness, people, being different, playback theatre."*
- o *"How easily resources are allocated once the target is clearly defined! And when we fail to find our power, what is it we should be looking for?"*
- o *"Value: rules and freedom – together, like that."*
- o *"I realised that I learn on the basis of emotions – that was a great realisation for me."*
- o *"The message of the first day: I should take action for myself!"*
- o *"Experience: the power of creating something together."*
- o *"In communication, formulating the message clearly is ever so important, and giving feedback is also important."*
- o *"Experience: identifying my feelings in my body."*
- o *"The importance of role awareness – I will practise it!"*
- o *"Learning: it is worth stopping even for the sake of a single person; providing and requesting feedback continuously to keep the connection alive is also worthwhile."*
- o *"Learning: we mean different things by the same thing (the map is not the reality) → the importance of feedback."*
- o *"Experience: the joy of encountering my inner voice."*
- o *"Value: difference in unity, and discovering music as experience and value."*

In addition to verbal feedback, we also used many **dramatic elements** for feedback. One of those was ***sociometry***. For instance, on the first day of training we discussed the three levels of the contract: the legal, the professional and the emotional levels, and about how those all manifest in the training process. The trainers then asked the participants to provide sociometric feedback about how well they understood what we would be doing: they positioned themselves along a line that represented a scale from *It is clear to me what we will be doing* to *I don't understand what is going to happen* at the other end.

In another situation, we used sociometric feedback for process analysis: people stood along a timeline to show which process of the previous afternoon had been the most valuable for them, and then they each described it verbally as well. The experiences of the participants were thus expressed in two ways in parallel: firstly in space, and secondly by the events they talked about being recorded on the flipchart.

Another dramatic form of feedback was when we all stood in a circle at the end of a day of training, and closed with a great round of ***rhythmic, shared applause***. Similarly, on the last day of each course, we celebrated, played music together and gave gifts to each other to provide feedback about the pleasure of working together.

When we encountered a blockage, or someone froze up, we used the method of **sharings**, during which we represented the *sequence of feelings* and then the *sequence of learnings* in space. The sequence of feelings was created by participants each verbally expressing one experience of the moment of freezing, and then creating a row of people behind the owner of the theme. Then everyone turned around, and each person told the person in front of them what they had learnt from the process.

This is how one participant reflected on that process: *"It was an astonishing and strange feeling: I saw myself in a circle – it was as if everyone had my voice and my experience."*

The techniques and enactments from ***playback theatre*** also represented a dramatic and also artistic form of feedback.

Playback theatre is a form of improvised community theatre in which the actors enact, or 'play back' the experiences and stories shared by members of the audience. The process is facilitated by a musician (or musicians), and a conductor who creates a connection between the audience and the stage. During the enactments, the emotional aspect of the stories told is in the

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foreground, reflected, and all the people present become participants of a joint creative effort in which they can connect with each other's experiences.

In addition to classic playback theatre, the genre has a number of applied forms: it is a great tool for development e.g. in organisation development, training courses, work with people with special needs and for supporting dialogue between various social groups (Social Dialogue Theatre),[14] or in any situation in which it is worthwhile to share, express and reflect experiences, life events and interactions in the interest of creating personal connections.

During the training courses we used the opportunities that playback theatre offers for developing the culture of reflective communication a lot. For instance, sharing the experiences of dramatic work done in small groups, and then playing them back allowed us to share information about the work of the small groups in the large group, and on the other hand we all received an opportunity to connect with that work at the experiential level. Participants shared the following feelings, for instance:

o *"There was a tension in me, stage fright, about expressing myself through my body."*
o *"When the whole group moved together, in a sort of synch, and reflected a feeling in an amplified manner, that had a very powerful effect."*
o *"When we played the great bell game, and all the people began to talk at once, I felt, hey, this is more powerful than I had thought, and then when people were beginning to get in tune with each other, a very beautiful, wide harmony was formed."*

These experiences were then enacted in playback theatre forms.

Other **forms of artistic feedback** included the ***poems*** and the ***works of graphic art*** inspired by the process, which reflected individual experiences, moods, processes, as well as the ***creative group performances*** that occurred during all three courses, in which 4 or 5 instruments of artistic expression were integrated with the participation of the whole group, and which resulted in unbelievable experiences of flow.[15]

Finally, as **written feedback**, the participants completed *feedback forms*, on which they could provide feedback about the entire process and the success of the project once more, in a structured form and based on specific criteria.

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[14] Social Dialogue Theatre, the intellectual property of Attila Donáth and Vitakultúra Association.
[15] For more detail, see the section entitled *The role of art in development*.

Part III
The tools of development

Our fundamental ways of working

Our working method had the following characteristics: learning based on the participants' knowledge; a group oriented process; working in the here and now; a multilevel process (the *folder system*); experiential, action-oriented, practical learning; learning with a proactive and innovative approach; parallel work at the personal, group and community levels; cooperation between several group leaders; use of arts for development, modelling and integration.

1.   *Group oriented process:* we build on the *group's own internal resources,* and the leader only assists with bringing those to the fore and then steps back, provides space. So we are activating the knowledge of the persons present, we begin with that, and we build learning on that.

     The existing skills of the group members are channelled into the training process. For instance the sociometric exercises of the first day of training were led by a participant who works as a trainer herself. At the last training course, the participants themselves defined and maintained the boundaries.

2.   When ***working with the here and now***, the trainers are able to channel the processes, the interactions that occur in the group into the development process. The approach under which we use the situations that arise in the process itself as the material for development was a fundamental part of our working method. Starting with the assumption that any expression is suitable for supporting the objective of the training course, there is no need for any prefabricated, canned content (for instance group exercises that are complete and can be used at any time), because the group process will generate its own raw material to be incorporated in the learning process.

     The example below offers a closer look at how someone being late can be used as raw material for learning, and the learning that resulted because the trainers did not disregard the unfolding of parallel processes in the group.

Work with one of the host organisations was soon interrupted by the 'buzzing' of one person returning late from the break as he delivered a whispered message for one of the participants from another late person. By stopping the process, we gained an opportunity to learn about role-awareness (how we get into roles, how the roles that get attached to us without us consciously taking them on yank us about), we used playback theatre to replay emotions, and the participants were able to offer feedback for the owner of the theme, expressing why stopping the process at that point was important for them.

One person reflected that the same participant, who had still not arrived, had also asked him to tell the others that they would be late, but he had not said anything, which made him feel frustrated during the work, and when he got the opportunity to play the role of the other participant, the one that did deliver the message, he was able to identify with it completely. "For me, trying to do playback theatre on the first day was leaving my comfort zone far behind, but I was so frustrated, I had to play Z. ☺" The theme owner's reflection: "I realised as it was happening that my 'buzzing' was also a great opportunity for the group to learn, and I got a lot out of the playback enactment."

What happened there, and how can that example be used in other cases, and how was all that about the development of cooperation?

It is an important aspect of cooperation that we jointly direct our attention to some third thing. In this instance, the group was focusing on working with the topic brought by the host organisation. Another dynamic thread entered that process, and the trainers did not question its significance (when someone takes action, that probably has some significance and a reason). They did not decide whether it was a good thing or a bad thing, whether it was too little or too much: instead, they endeavoured to understand it, to develop a connection to it, and assisted the group to be able to connect with that occurrence, to be able to pay attention collectively to that third thing. (When developing a culture of cooperation, the actual identity of that third thing is not all that important.)

It was also an important component here that events always have an emotional charge, as this one certainly did, and if that can come to the surface, the experiential level of the event can take the group to a higher level of cooperation. This happened when feelings were shared and then enacted using playback theatre.

The participant who had done the buzzing asked why, in a process with several other people, the others would be interested in the marginal experience of one person – that is to say, how can we bring in a third experience in a way that reinforces cooperation in the group?

In his response, Attila Donáth talked about how it had happened in this particular instance:

> *We assisted that by making everyone motivated, at three levels:*
>
> *1. the responsibility associated with individual roles kept increasing,*
>
> *2. legitimization occurred at the group level,*
>
> *3. in addition, it was always the persons involved and not the leaders who were in a position to take action: you decided, you asked continuously, it was continuously about you – and everyone else could connect to that.*

3. ***Multilevel process*** ('folders' and 'subfolders'): as the above example also shows, working in the here and now is not linear, present impulses and situations may open new 'subfolders' (process within the process), down to even 3 or 4 nested levels. (*We're at work on the computer, an email comes in, we stop the work, click, open the letter.*) As a result, a number of parallel, nested processes are open at the same time.

   Tracking of the multilevel process (*'folder system'*) was assisted by reflection and process analyses.

4. ***Action-oriented work:*** we used a great many dramatic elements: we stood up, moved, represented processes in space and played back emotions.

5. ***Experiential learning:*** as we were acting, we experienced the actions, and then we rendered the experiences conscious later. In each block, we amplified our experiences during action, and finished the block with recalling theoretical knowledge from the literature. So the cognitive part came after the action, and information was incorporated, integrated on the basis of our own experiences.

6. ***Proactive, innovative learning***:[16] the proactivity of participants leads to some kind of innovation, and learning follows as we achieve a conscious awareness of that. We are proactive when we want to clarify something. As a result of the initiative, we rethink

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[16] Based on Attila Donáth's PIL (Proactive, Innovative Learning) model.

something once more, and something new appears: innovation – and it's good to transform that into learning, into awareness.

7. ***We worked at the personal, group and community levels*** in parallel. The individual is a part of the group, and the group is part of a community (each of the groups attending our training courses are parts of various helping communities). All three levels of those nested systems manifested during the training in the following way:

After each block, we all expressed our subjective experiences (individual level), and in the course of that there were opportunities to move from the individual to the group level and then to the community level.

The personal experiences shared generated group-level questions, suggestions, and then, moving yet another level up, there were questions about how the individual groups are able to use their experiences at the training for developing the culture of reflective communication in their own communities (community level).

8. ***Cooperation between several group leaders:*** it was a part of our working method that we spent a lot of time working in small groups organised by the needs of individuals, and then integrated what we had learnt and experienced in the large group. This required the presence and cooperation of several group leaders.

9. ***Use of artistic elements:*** elements of improvisational theatre, graphic representation, music and poetry (haiku) were emphatically present throughout the training, they assisted the process by creating a balance of cognitive and emotional aspects and by expanding our toolkit of creative self-expression.[17] We worked a lot in small creative groups, and then we integrated the experiences we had there in a *joint creative performance*.

10. ***Modelling:*** the trainers modelled cooperation, feedback-based communication and transparency etc. for the participants.

An example of modelling transparent coordination: members of the trainer group were consulting in a fishtank configuration (in a central circle, out loud) during the first hour of the training course, about whether the process needs to be modified in any way so as to accommodate taking notes or recording video.

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[17] For more detail, see the section entitled *The role of art in development*.

11. **Integration**: getting people who arrive late for any reason to engage with what had gone before (verbally, dramatically or using playback theatre). In the course of one of these processes, the participants drew the following conclusions:

"The essence of integration is ensuring that the group doesn't disintegrate."

"What we are practising now is something we will also be able to utilise in the life of our organisation."

"Lack of information can lead to an impasse, so integration can be understood as conflict prevention."

"It is important to complete integration not only at the cognitive but also at the emotional level."

Attitudinal components

– **Proactivity:** express your needs, 'help yourself'. While you are a part of the process, you are also one of its shapers. Keep being connected to yourself: which of your needs are being expressed? How can you represent them, how can you stand up for yourself?

During each course, a number of pieces of art were created, and the participants could freely choose the ones they wished to take home – for instance because it was about their story, or it connected to their process in some other way. In the following excerpt, we map the destructive sentences from our cultural environments that can prevent us from taking the initiative and representing our needs.

Attila Donáth was talking about how representing ourselves, and taking action to support our own needs, requires us to invest work and energy, so it is easier to just not take that step. In response, a participant, S, said that he wanted to do something for himself and he chose one of the paintings. "Attila, what you just said hit me quite hard, because I have this experience that I am not allowed to touch the beautiful things... If it is up on the shelf, I am not allowed to touch it." Following on from that, we began to collect other, similarly destructive messages.

　　o　*"I don't deserve it, I am not entitled to it."*

　　o　*"I am too little for it."*

　　o　*"What will they say if I take the most beautiful one?"*

- o *"If the others did the same, what would be left here?"*

- o *"I am impeding the process, I am taking time from the important things."*

It is important to realise how we pass on these destructive prohibitions and constraints in both our personal and our professional roles, and what we can do to change that.

– ***Entering roles through personal motivations:*** people always assumed roles through personal motivations. For example, during the training sessions, we often worked using various art forms in small groups. The instruction was as follows:

"Those who were most affected by the music yesterday should group around Dávid, those mobilised by graphic art should go with Dénes, those wishing for physical movement will work on movement techniques with Dani and those interested in the basic techniques of playback theatre should gather around Bea!"

– ***Role-awareness and target-awareness***: What is the purpose of our self-expression and what role does it come from? Are we performing a role adequately, or in a conflicted way, or perhaps in an underdeveloped or overdeveloped manner?

In relation to the above example of 'buzzing',[18] Attila Donáth had this to say about role-awareness: *Think it through: when D asked you during the break to tell others he would be late, what was the role he was enticing you into? When we are clear about the role being offered to us in an interaction, it is much easier to decide what to do with that role... Think about recent situations in which you ended up assuming a role though you had no idea why that was happening to you!"*

The clear assumption of roles and an awareness of the purpose is served by entering a contract at all three of its levels (legal, professional and emotional levels).

Participants' reflections on the roles:

"As an employee, it hinders my work that my superiors appear in multiple roles, and in some of their roles they are unable to provide assistance with my work, because the other role is taking up all their attention and time."

"Working with this is exhausting, but very worthwhile."

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[18] Lásd az I. Elméleti alapok visszajelzésről szóló részében leírt dőlt betűs példát.

"It is important to work with this, but it shouldn't fill the entire day, we also have our lives to live."

"I have grown stronger in something I had already been quite aware of: handling my roles consciously, not only for myself, but also in order to keep my relationships clear and safe."

– ***Communication with feedback:*** instead of "I think that he thinks that...", keep asking questions and clarifying.

As a part of the culture of reflective communication, we emphasised during the training courses that we should reflect in the first person singular instead of generalising (e.g. instead of "One feels that..." say "I feel that...".)

– ***Transparency***: we mostly used the 'fish tank' exercise for transparency, in which one group of participants coordinates aloud in a central circle, while those in the outer circle listen, and then reflect on it.

Examples of transparent coordination:

o The representatives of individual organisations coordinated their ideas for continuing the process before the entire group

o While working with the theme brought by the host organisation, the organisation worked in a transparent manner, and the other organisations took turns providing feedback about it

– ***Continuous modelling of cooperation*** by the trainer team

– ***Conscious use of elements of humour***

– ***The opportunity to enter into new contracts:*** as the process is a living one, the need to create new contracts my arise at any time. New contracts (i.e. reinterpretations of the freedoms and boundaries within the project) can be implemented through feedback, and the quality of that reflection determines whether the individuals, groups and organisations engaged in the processes generate conflicts or develop further. Contracts can be rendered more accurate or clearer through reflective communication, facilitating qualitative advancement.

Methodological components

– Psychodrama – for example use of the inner voice technique to distinguish between two leadership roles (e.g. head of an association and of a theatre company)

– Sociodrama – the use of sociometry in process analysis and in individual feedback

– Drama pedagogy components – e.g. situational exercises

– Playback theatre – we used it during the training in both small and large group settings (e.g. reflection exercises for mutual attunement, re-enactment of feelings), and in the closing performance (at the end of all three courses we put on improvisational theatrical performances for an invited external audience, as a part of dissemination, as a taster of the work we had been doing together)

– Forum theatre – we used if for resolving a specific problem situation (see below: 'the flipchart board situation')

– Other art forms: music, graphic art, poetry, singing – those were used constantly in small-group work

– Joint creative performances / dialogues between artists: integration of all those artistic elements in a single large work of improvisation – that was the climax of the process in all three training courses

– The fish tank technique: transparent coordination was facilitated by having a smaller group in an inside circle negotiate out loud, with the external circle listening and then later providing feedback (everyone through their own roles)

– Visual note-taking – process analysis, theoretical knowledge

– Flash mob components

– Council – during work with a topic introduced by a host organisation

– Personal work for compressing the "emotional folders" and for *'decompression'*:

In the morning of the fourth day of a course, a number of people indicated that they were experiencing emotional fatigue and were not ready to take in new experiences. Recommendation: a one-hour walk outside, where we can all find what recharges us, either alone, in pairs or in smaller groups. The objective of that was – just as we always recompressed the intellectual folders – to have an opportunity to recompress the emotional folders, too.

What exactly do we mean by recompressing emotional folders?

People's reflections indicated that the group is in a very inward-focused, mutually focused and elevated state, which is like a protective membrane, and when, at the end of the process, the participants leave it, they may become vulnerable. So it is important, at the end of the course, to set aside some time for decompressing before entering everyday life again. It may be pleasant to spend a few more days walking 'six inches above the floor', but it can also be dangerous, depending on what awaits each of us in the next few days.

Below, we present the handling of a situation with a lot of tension, in which a number of the above components (methods, attitudinal features, techniques) were used.

*At the beginning of each training course, we began with the boundaries, sharing information about the new venue and the daily schedules. At one of the locations, where space was limited, a number of people voiced their needs (**proactivity**) concerning the use of space (use of the camera, lack of a flipchart board, where should the graphic artist's desk be located?), and the project leader expressed his needs associated with administrative tasks. Attila Donáth asked all the people who had voiced needs to coordinate with each other for 15 minutes in an inside circle (**transparency, cooperation**). The goal of that process was to ensure that everyone is clear about their own needs, and they all express them, too, and then all those voicing needs should coordinate so as to provide an opportunity for everyone to present their own proposed solutions, taking circumstances into account. The trainers requested role-aware reflections from the outer circle: What did people understand of all that through their own roles? (**feedback, role-awareness**).*

*Once the solution was agreed on in the inner, coordinating circle, they started organising the training space, and everyone took part in that (**cooperation**).The also arranged the stage and tested it with Bea Somogyi, but before that, people assumed roles based on personal needs: who would like to be an actor? A musician? (**individual motivations** as drives)*

In the meantime, one of the participants noted that he wished the group would get on with it – and a playback theatre interview was started straight away, with questions about the feelings he

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*was having. Then the emotions expressed were played back **(channelling the needs of participants into the process, reaction in the here-and-now, playback theatre)**.*

***Emotional work** on the frustrations caused by the small space continued. Attila Donáth asked one of the participants to perform a process analysis of the day so far based on his own subjective impressions: Walk along a timeline and stop at points that were significant for him, and amplify his experience. The following stations were created:*

  – *First impressions: it was raining all the way here, and how cold it is!*
  – *Pleasure to see familiar faces*
  – *Frustration caused by the room being this small*
  – *Expression of various needs, coordination and its importance*
  – *B's comment to get a move on! – something he can identify with*

*Then the other participants chose the stations to which they connected the best, and 5 small groups were formed. Small-group conversations, ventilation, amplification of emotions followed, then each group summarised a shared experience at the end, which we then watched in **playback theatre enactments**: each group enacted their shared experience together (Bea Somogyi led the process).*

*Finally, the flipchart board that had been ordered arrived, but it turned out to be a whiteboard. Once more, we began to **search for a solution** for attaching flipchart paper to a whiteboard.*

*Next, we used forum theatre to model a potential conflict. Bea Somogyi introduced the **forum theatre**, a form of community theatre: where, how, for what purpose is this method used? Then we started brainstorming about how the paper could be attached to the board we had available. Using some elements of forum theatre, anyone who had an idea or a proposed solution described it out loud and then tried it straight away. Those suggestions and attempts led to a complex solution: the paper was finally solidly attached to the board.*

*We continued by **raising awareness:** we had conversations in pairs about the prevention and the solution of problem situations and conflict situations, followed by a quick sharing circle in the large group.*
Some examples:
  o *I share my feelings*
  o *I make myself open*

- o *Making myself seen*

- o *Acceptance*

- o *Adaptation*

- o *Carification of my own role*

- o *Feedback can be a tool for preventing conflict situations,* etc.

Why did the trainers choose that method to handle the problem?

After a start filled with frustration, the newly ordered flipchart board also proved to be useless as it was. Instead of following our usual ways of operation and seeking a scapegoat (there's always a scapegoat), or leaving it up to Dani Rózsa to find a solution during the break (Dani Rózsa had the task of registering the theoretical pillars in writing on the board) we allowed ourselves to hear each other, to provide space for each other's creativity and suggestions. So we worked together on solving the problem, and we specifically devoted time and space to working with emotions (see subjective process analysis, connection to individual stations, small-group work, playback enactments).

Part IV
The use of art in development

As we have seen, at the training courses we didn't only work at the cognitive level, but also through action, which included artistic components such as playback improvisational theatre, haikus and graphic art – and through those we expressed the emotional side of the processes that took place in the group.

The arts have a stronger impact on the emotions than on the cognitive level, and they play a number of roles in training and development processes:

- ❖ They help improve awareness.
- ❖ They widen the associative fields of the participants.
- ❖ They provide space for the creative expressions of the individuals and the group, they support the mobilisation of creative energies and motivations.
- ❖ In their group forms, they promote cooperation.
- ❖ In development processes, they assist with creating a cognitive-emotional balance.
- ❖ They can be used for providing feedback.
- ❖ They facilitate connections between people.
- ❖ They play an important role in joyfulness.

In artistic, creative processes, the paradox of spontaneity and discipline manifests. Discipline, on a foundation of planning and mindfulness, is an enabling factor of spontaneity. Spontaneity is operated through creative humility. We create the framework, the discipline, and that offers a sense of safety, and then we allow themes to flow through us freely and a creative process is played out.

Below, we shall present the roles of playback theatre, fine arts and poems, and the way they interconnected in our creative performances.

Playback theatre in the development process

We have already mentioned playback theatre among the forms of providing feedback (Part II). This is Dani Rózsa's observation about the genre: *"If we have an experience, and we share it with each other, that can happen verbally, but it can also be shown with movement, in a gesture or facial expression. We do that in everyday life to react to another's experience, or to augment our own description. That's playback theatre already: you allow what is inside you to be expressed through your body, your face, and you can add sounds, too."*

In addition to being a form of dialogue that allows us to encounter each other – to see, to be seen and to make others see – playback theatre is also highly suitable for making feelings visible, for reflecting them. Every time emotions have a strong influence on whether someone is able to pay attention in a given situation, it is important to stop. And playback theatre is a great tool for stopping, slowing down and amplifying something, especially if personal feelings and experiences are involved. It offers a much richer way of connecting for the others, too, than just having the person concerned say how they feel: the others can not only listen but also reflect the feeling for the teller.

Why is it important to provide space for feelings? According to Bea Somogyi: *"As long as we live, we continuously have feelings – whether we know about them or not. If we amplify them, we can then deal with them, and we can use them for our development."*

Arranging the creative space

During the training courses, we placed emphasis on the conscious use of space, and we identified the following parts of the available space:

There is a *training space*, where we work in a large group or in small groups.

Separately from that, there is the *playback theatre space*: the stage (chairs for the actors, colour cloths), the musician's space, and the chairs for the conductor and the story-teller. Within the stage, we also distinguished a neutral space for waiting (*technical space*) and a *creative space*.

During a training session we discussed, among other things, the way an individual connects with an organisation. We used the analogy of playback theatre to represent the person's

belonging to the organisation, and the significance of an intermediate space (technical space) that facilitates "decompressing" (that is to say, the transition from one state to the other, the changing of roles).

In the technical space, the actors await the experience or the story shared by the teller, and that condition of readiness is what helps them to enter the state of focused attention. Then the conductor begins the interview with the story-teller, while the actors listen, seated on the chairs on stage – that it the phase of receiving the story. Then the conductor signals to them to stand up – they are beginning the transition from the receiving, silent phase to the phase of action, but the enactment doesn't start just yet. Bea Somogyi: "As I stand there, I allow the conductor's summary of the experience or the story shared to affect me, and I allow everything that I have heard to start moving, to start flowing within me." Then the conductor says "Let's see it! Let's hear it!" and the actors step out into the creative space, and they start to improvise through connecting with each other: this is the playback enactment.

We modelled all of that, and then we worked on increasing awareness.

How is all that related to the connection between an individual and an organisation?

There are three things that are worth thinking through and being aware of in relation to that:

1. First of all: do the legal, professional and emotional layers of our personal contract provide safety and freedom for us in our organisational role – or do they limit us, burden us, make us helpless and frustrated?

2. Secondly, it is worth considering whether there is a technical space related to our work, that is to say a place and a condition where preparation takes place, and where we can then achieve a state of readiness awaiting action, so that this process is a legitimate part of our work? Attila Donáth: *"When I get off the bus, the train, and I enter my place of work, is there a stop there, is there a so-called intermediate space, and state, through which I can leave one life situation and enter another (which helps me get attuned, prepare and adapt), or do I just 'stumble' from one state, one role, into the other?"* The question is, are we aware of the significance of the intermediate state?

3. Finally, it is also worth considering whether the place where we take action is a creative space where we can be creative knowing that the organisation behind us (in the playback theatre analogy, this is the stage itself) makes us feel safe and trustful. Does it provide harmony? Can we lean on it, will it support us? How do we stand with our colleagues, the people we work with, the people we serve, or those with whom we are in any sort of interaction? Is the relationship characterised by mutuality? Can we expect people to be open to each other's cues – in the way that actors during the playback enactment respond to each other's offered movements, situations, openly, with the capacity to connect, because they have a fundamental openness? And do we get feedback on our creative action, are we celebrated, applauded, rewarded? When we step back, do we have an opportunity to rest? Is there space for that in the process?

What are the types of processes for which we used playback theatre?

We used playback theatre as an instrument in a number of different forms and for a number of different purposes within the training process:

- o In every situation in which the process required working with emotions (for instance in the tense situation mentioned above)
- o As a feedback tool, to reflect feelings and experiences
- o For integrating certain parts of the process or certain participants
- o In small-group creative work
- o In the joint performances that used a number of art forms
- o In the closing performances and follow-up events, where the communities around the organisations that had participated in the project were also engaged in the development process

About the role of warming up

Every time we work at the group level or the organisation level, it is important to warm up appropriately in order to promote connections and cooperation.

During the training courses, we often worked in small groups, which were always created on the basis of individual needs and motivations. Warming up to each other and the creative work in the small groups took place using various modalities (auditory, visual, kinaesthetic).

What was the role of attunement, of warming up there? Conscious bodily warm-up was important because whatever we do, we use our bodies to do it. In order to be able to enact the feelings of another person on the stage as playback actors, we must be in a physical condition that is simultaneously relaxed and sufficiently energized so as to be able to connect to ourselves and others.

For the small group working with music, it was important to warm up their hearing, to be engaged with the auditory state, while those working with fine art techniques needed to engage consciously with colours, shapes, light and shadows.

On one occasion, two small groups worked with the following warm-up exercises:

The two groups formed two circles, and they began with mirroring exercises.

- Introduce yourself with a gesture, sound and stance – then the others all mirror it back together.

- Establish eye-contact with someone, and when you have it, exchange places. (Bea Somogyi: *"Find the gazes, and be curious about whom you will meet!"*) This was followed by feedback about the exercise: what signals did you send and receive, how did you show each other that you had met, that you were now a pair? (By making eye contact, nodding, smiling, etc.)

- Figure out who is opposite you in the circle, and start mirroring each other. Dani Rózsa: *"In the mirror game, you move together. The idea is to create a form of movement that is good for both of you. Play with proximity, distance, use the space well, and discover how it is best to move together – without knowing whether you are leading or following."* As reflection on the exercise, the pairs discussed what had happened, what it had been like to lead and to follow, and then we shared our experiences at the group level.

- The next instruction was this: *"Recall your day so far, and amplify a feeling that you would like to experience again. The point is not to imitate some action in pantomime, but to present a feeling, a mood. Step forward into the circle, show your feeling, step back, and then we will all show the same feeling together."*

After the warm-up, which took about half an hour, the two small groups were standing opposite each other in two semi-circles, and they had the task of exchanging places with both groups moving together. Shoulders touching, the groups moved as units, and without any advance discussion or coordination, they performed the task by following each other's movements, mirroring each other, using their peripheral vision and stopping for a moment now and again, and using various gestures, to turn around into each other's places in the circle. Without the warm-up that had just occurred, that would not have been possible.

Playback theatre performances in the training process

During each training course, we gave a playback theatre performance to which participants invited their friends and acquaintances. The performances were meant to present our shared work to a wider audience as a way of expanding it.

Preparing for the performance consisted of the following processes:

We set up the space: the stage, the auditorium, the space for creating artwork and the place for exhibiting the pictures created during the performance. Once more, people entered roles based on their personal needs (*Who is motivated for the role of playback actor or musician?*) Warming up and rehearsal used our own stories, participants enacted each other's experiences and moods. Finally, in a last round of getting attuned to each other, the conductor had this to say: *"Look around. As your gaze travels around the circle, greet your companions, acknowledge that we are together, and we will create this performance together from beginning to end: we will enact the feelings and the stories of the audience."*

The theatre performance lasting 60 to 90 minutes then started. After the invited audience arrived, there was a little music and then the actors came in and went up on the stage. The conductor spoke briefly about the relationship between the performance and the project, and then people started sharing feelings and stories, which were then enacted.

Haikus were also written during the performance, and they were read out after the enactments.

The actors concluded the performance with a tableau – an enactment composed of elements of the entire performance – and viewers got an opportunity to view the pictures created during the performance as they walked out. After the performance, viewers were invited to a circle discussion of the genre or to provide feedback for the actors, the musicians and the conductor.

Fine arts in the development process

As another artistic element, fine arts were in an emphatic position throughout the process. Our graphic artist Dénes Maróti worked continuously in the large group sessions, and the finished pieces – instruments of artistic feedback – were exhibited, participants could connect to them and discuss them.

Later (starting in the afternoon of the first day of each course) we began to work in small creative groups, and one of those was the small group that worked with graphic expression.

Pieces of art were also created during the theatre performances, and the shows were concluded with guided tours and a discussion.

At the end of each four-day course, the host organisation received all the graphic art and other works as gifts.

Poems in the development process

A number of poems, including many haiku were written during the training courses and the closing theatrical performances. They were essences that, along with providing feedback, also reinforced emotional engagement and connection.

During the training courses, poems were written freely, or as part of the work of one of the creative small groups, as inspired by the process.

The following poem was written during the section about clarifying the roles we assume:

We keep on adding roles to roles
the whole lot flows with gratitude
between two chairs, above, below
a consciousness recognising a system
seeks to find itself, a role,
a love that changes hats.

All of us here, let's cook
using whatever we have handy
train for cooperation

and start with a clean slate –

I'll be my own guide, come on, bro

this will be some soup, and this, the stew

(Dániel Rózsa)

A shared feeling and its enactment inspired this poem:

Of rock, of stone, of pebbles

I'm made of rebellious matter –

Great power, from the depths

The great stones begin to move.

The motionless also begins to move

The unshakeable is now shaken up

The moss moves over to the south

A thing that's never been begins.

(Dániel Rózsa)

The following poems were written during work in small groups and at the joint creative performance:

What's good for me,

Will it be good for you?

Is anyone else stressed by the question

that breaks through my boundaries?

(Ágnes Bencze)

Why do I hide from myself,

if

I

don't

need

to hide from you?

(Tünde Szendi)

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The Teaching of Master Villon

Merciful Prince, a sound's never sweet or ugly
By itself – the way it connects or stands apart
Is what makes it biting or benign
(Bencze Ágnes)

One of the participants had this to say about the difficulty of reading a poem out loud and thus becoming visible: *"The interesting thing was that the wish to get out there and read it was much stronger than the fear that... I would be seen just as I am."*

The haiku below were written during the theatre performance, then, after each enactment, the authors read them for the audience.

"Today we become
A mass of lively colours
We all have faces"

(Emese Pusztai)

"Snow covers it up
Our shared past stands in silence
Frozen in cold bronze"

(Emese Pusztai)

"Our armour is worn
We could just take it all off
We sweat inside it"
(Rózsa Dániel)

"I let you go now
Your place inside me empty
I treasure the breeze"
(Emese Pusztai)

Other art forms

Dance appeared in the process as a brief intermezzo. Attila Donáth asked Dániel Rózsa to talk about the tango as the quintessence of connection. Dániel: *"It is an alternative form of communication, where there is a framework, and within it, we do not learn steps, but to connect to each other, and we move together through that."*

As he was talking about it, they were demonstrating the tango with E. *"There is an attunement in the tango. I give an impulse, and then I wait for my partner to react. We communicate continuously, every moment, and there are no steps set in advance, it's all improvisation."*

The creative small groups

At the first training course, we warmed up for the playback theatre performance in four small groups: playback theatre techniques (Bea Somogyi), culture of movement (Dani Rózsa), graphic art (Dénes Maróti) and music (Dávid Abonyi). This was the instruction given: *"Those who were most affected by music yesterday should group around Dávid, those mobilised by graphic art should go with Dénes, those wishing for physical movement will work on movement techniques with Dani and those interested in the basic techniques of playback theatre should gather around Bea!"*

After returning to the large group, the small groups had an opportunity to share something about what had been important for them about working in the small groups: e.g. the 'voice-bell' exercise, 'plates-in-hand' – a movement exercise, reflection of feelings by the rest of the group, rubbing palms together and placing them over the eyes, and then looking around for a long time, in quiet.

At the next course, the creative small groups were used more frequently, and poetry was also introduced among the art forms.

The creative small groups were about joyfulness, practising cooperation and giving feedback, and creative work.

Dialogues between artists: joint creative performances

The creative work in small groups was integrated, dialogue between the various art forms was established by the joint performances that were also the climaxes of the training courses.

Attila Donáth on the role of the creative work done in the small groups: *"You all come from your own organisations, and you have entered a small creative group based on your own inner needs and requirements. Those small groups have become creative communities, and their work culminates in the joint performance. So you have experienced what it is like to get engaged with a creative process based on your own needs, which of your resources you activated, and you saw how those resources were brought to the surface in a free creative process."*

The dialogue between the art forms was usually assisted by a discussion about the method of realisation: how could we create a dialogue between images, poems, music and enactments? The following ideas were raised: new poems would be written in response to the pictures, or poems would be written about playback enactments, or music would be made about the pictures, movement for the music, and then poems about that again. Each group should send out an impulse to which the others can react. Dávid Abonyi led that process. Instruction: *Each small group should present their work, and the others should connect to it with sound, poems, movement, or pictures – new creative work, or something they had made previously.*

But as things progressed, it became a living, fast-flowing process, resulting in a powerful experience. The music started it all (guitars and the customary percussive and effect instruments of playback theatre were used) → others enacted, wrote and painted in parallel in response to it → Dani Rózsa continued by reading poems, while the music grew quiet and the enactments slowed down, but they didn't stop → L read a poem→ B put a picture in front of her → they started to play music → others started enactments, playing to the music, the harmony between the music and the dance grew stronger, then faded out again → E stood up and read a poem → there was silence, they waited a little, then the music started up again → the actors reacted with a fluid sculpture[19] → Dani Rózsa stood behind them and read a poem, accompanied by quiet music → the music and the acting continued, then faded out → L read a poem next to the playback sculpture, then repeated it → the music grew stronger again, the poem became quieter, then the

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[19] 'Fluid sculpture'is a fundamental technique in playback theatre.

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music grew quieter and the poem became louder → in the meantime, pictures were placed on the floor, then Dénes Maróti's group laid sheets of paper in front of the actors in a semi-circle and began to work sitting on the floor → the guitar music continued and poems were read one after the other → the flow, the synergistic creativity kept growing stronger → the actors raised a sheet of paper, the poems still kept coming, the actors sang a poem → multiple catharsis! The dialogue of the arts concluded with a great shared round of applause.

Reflections on the experience the next morning:

- *"There was a turmoil in the morning, we were looking for our places, then in the afternoon, in the joint creative workshop, it all opened up like a butterfly out of a chrysalis."*
- *"I decided in advance that I will only be a musician this time, but then I was pulled in by the sight of the fuchsia-coloured paper..."*
- *"I experienced being in the process!"*
- *"I* understand *in general, but now I* saw*..."*
- *"relaxed togetherness"*
- *"altered state of consciousness"*
- *"My atoms were vibrating."*
- *"quantum tango"*
- *"I had no idea what I was doing, it was just happening."*
- *"It was a great power, being together!"*

Summary

The project aimed to develop the culture of reflection. For that purpose, we reflected continuously on the work we did together, on our cooperation, our relationship, our operation within our organisations, and it was also an objective to review the culture of reflection of the participating organisations and their communities, and to develop that as well.

Each course was *focused on the topic of the host organisation,* and the other organisations worked with their own topics through that. In addition, we always worked at three levels: *the personal, the organisational and the community levels* (the latter being the level of the networks of the individual participating organisations).

The process had three dynamically repeating components: *action, theoretical discussion* and *reflection.* As a form of adult learning, the training courses activated the knowledge of the participants while we worked in an action-oriented manner. This was followed by making the process conscious (process analysis) and connecting the experiences we had with the theoretical background: presentation of the theoretical model associated with what had happened, and representation on a flipchart. Finally, feedback and reflections were offered using the artistic tools, resulting in complete integration of the entire cycle.