

Dance in New Areas: Integrating Dance Methods into Businesses and Management for Personnel and Leadership Development

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The worlds of “organisation” and “dance” may seem very different and distanced at first sight, but dance can be an inspiration for businesses. This article summarizes a keynote speech held at The G-ACE International Conference 2019 “Organization and Management for Dance” at Sangmyung Art Center Seoul. It discusses that the disciplines of dance studies and management studies come together with more creative approaches to work. Management studies has integrated theory and methods from the world of arts and dance into organizations to generate new insights into how organizations can be managed today. Dance stands for constant change, temporary structures and dynamics and it appears to be an intriguing model for today’s organizational world, and also a reservoir of methods that can be applied for personnel and organizational development. So-called artistic interventions (including dance workshops) bring people, practices, and products from the arts into organisations to help address issues the organisations are facing. Movement exercises in business organizations can provide new bodily experiences that can support new forms of knowing and doing in management. They also are a new area of work for dancers and choreographers.

Key word: Dance, management, organization studies, leadership, artistic interventions, artistic workshops, movement workshops

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Introduction

There are many links between organizations and management and dance. In this conference, we explore many of these connections. To give some inspiration in this keynote, I want to outline the potential of dance for organizations. I will speak about the two worlds of “organisation” and “dance” that may seem very different and distanced at first sight.

The relationship between dance and organization does not only imply that dance is something that needs to be “organized”. Rather also the other way around: theory and methods from dance can advance organizations and management (Biehl, 2017). My approach is intended as an interdisciplinary approach to integrate dance theory and methods into the study of management, for researchers and practitioners in two worlds that may seem very different and distanced at first sight. By doing so, it adds to and develops an increasing interest of scholars in the world of arts and the humanities that have looked into management – and on the other hand it develops management studies that have explored the aesthetics of the organization (Taylor and Hansen, 2005) and body in organisations and its movement (Hujala et al., 2016; Bozic Yams, 2018; Biehl-Missal and Springborg, 2016).

Let me start with a question: If work would be a dance, what would it be? Imagine, you work in an organization, and you dance with your boss (as a form of leader-follower interaction). If you were to move to illustrate your work interaction: Would it be a waltz, where you dance along in a given meter and form? Would it be a paso doble where your boss and you are challenging each other? Or would it be a modern choreography that is emerging and improvised, responding to atmospheres and how other people behave?

Management researchers have actually used dance as a research method to approach “leadership” (Hujala et al. 2016) because leadership is about “leading and following” not only metaphorically, but also practically on many levels.



Figure 1: “Challenging and fighting II (Paso doble dancer)”. Courtesy Emma Vilina Fält (*Drawing out loud*, www.emmafalt.net) and Anneli Hujala, from Hujala et al. (2016).

Dance helps us to understand topics such as Leadership in organizations because “dance is an invitation to think with our entire beings” (Snowber, 2012: 56). Management, Leadership and Organizations also include the knowledge that is embodied and stems from our entire being and existence in the world, not only from the rational mind. In this sense, management is not only seen a “science”, but has also been framed as “an art”.

Management is like a form of art

Academic research and practice have emphasized that management today needs to be creative – it is not only a science, it is also “an art”. I want to illustrate this point, by looking into the tradition of art metaphors that have been used by researchers and practitioners to understand organisations in new ways (Cornelissen et al., 2005). Certain times have called for specific metaphors on organisations. For example, the metaphor of the organization as a ‘machine’ is representative of the times of Scientific Management or Fordist organizations, of factories where goods are produced. The application of the metaphor of the machine for the organization suggests that employees function like ‘gear wheels’ in a large, hierarchical system in which the output can be optimized by using some sort of ‘leverage’ and by raising the ‘pressure’. Employees are likened to mechanical parts with specific functions and skills, being replaceable and to be exchanged when ‘broken’. In this view, rationality is the basis

for making decisions, and emotions, relationships and subjectivity of individuals seem to be of no relevance.

To address this shortcoming, In the 1980s, in academic research the theatre metaphor (Mangham and Overington, 1987) emerged: Employees play their roles in front of customers, other colleagues, and their bosses. They perform, show emotions, and act to a script. Sometimes they improvise, but always try to manage their impressions. This metaphor resonates very much with service-oriented organizations and performative tasks. It values performative, theatrical and emotional aspects over rational and scientific.

Organizations have also been compared to jazz bands (Weick, 1998): Jazz bands improvise, communicate non-verbally, and ‘swing’ or ‘flow’. Leadership is shared, is between people, interactive, not static, in an interplay of leading and support.

This view shares some parallels to the metaphor of dance. Without being physically connected, elements in an organization stand in a relation to each other, and are dynamic, are moving. Whilst in the mechanical image, a leader is in direct connection, pushing or pulling the follower elements – the other image does not show direct control, but it shows a space in-between leaders and followers, in which interaction happens – like a in dance. The interaction is dynamic, is flux, whereby participants interact with each other and are not only controlled. Dance as a collaborative practice and embodied form of interaction demonstrates how people cooperate socially and empathically and how they coordinate their actions without words, connecting to spaces and contexts and each other, ‘leading’ and ‘following’ and making sense of the spaces in-between.

Theory: Organization, management and dance

The dance discipline has often been neglected or undermined by a number of elements. They include ephemerality and transience, the perception of dance negatively as a ‘female’ art, little documentation and social status, and its very nature that is seen as an activity of the body rather than mind, particularly in conservative and religious thinking (Butterworth and Wildshut, 2009: 2). Dance studies has met more reservations in organisation and management studies than in other research fields. The reason is, again, that dance is nonverbal, without words. It is abstract, without a clear meaning. And dance is a transitory art form, without an artefact or object like, for example, a sculpture or a painting. Management studies postulates rationality (being about the mind, not the body), and using rigorous methods. This tradition of positivist management thinking and seemingly rigorous method can however hardly capture the aesthetic, subjective and dynamic nature of organizational life (Taylor and Hansen, 2005). However, we can say: “Life is dance”, because the world is full of movement. Organizations in particular are full of embodied interaction and this is beginning to be

acknowledged.

The disciplines of dance studies and management studies come together: Management studies has integrated theory and methods from the world of arts and dance into organizations to generate new insights into how organizations can be managed today. Dance stands for constant change, temporary structures and dynamics (Klein, 2009) and it appears to be an intriguing model for today's organizational world. Because today, organizations change so quickly and businesses are so dynamic. Management studies have acknowledged, that is it not only about "science", but "art": That means they consider the aesthetic perception, the sensual perception (with all senses) – that is at the center of dance.

Organization studies have for long not considered the body in organization, until first books on the body appeared around the year 2000 (Hassard et al., 2000). The body has in this context traditionally been seen as a mere "brain taxi", "carrying [managers' and employees'] minds from one cubicle or meeting to another" (Ludevig, 2016: 158). Only recently management studies have realized that the body is a sensual resource with which managers and leaders and employees react to the organization, make sense of a situation and experience work. These studies follow Merleau-Ponty (1962), who has explored that the body is the tool which we perceive the world. Through being in our bodies not only in the world, but also in organizations, management, at work, we generate embodied knowing. This embodied knowing helps us to make sense of organizations, management, and work interactions with others, including in leadership situations and leader-follower interactions.

Practice: Dance interventions in organizations

The moving body is important for the perception and interaction with others. In this vein, organizations have resorted to dance as a method for personnel and organizational development. These practices are referred to as "artistic interventions" or "arts-based interventions". Artistic interventions bring people, practices, and products from the arts into organisations to help address issues the organisations are facing (Berthoin Antal, 2009: 4). These activities build on the arts metaphors (e.g. "organizations as theatre") and translate them into practice. These interventions include: organisational theatre, art workshops, sculpture, and the latest addition are dance and movement workshops. This young field started to incorporate practices, processes and people from the world of dance. Contemporary choreography generally thrives beyond the art world in an ever-expanding field of applications, including scholarly and political activities (Butterworth and Wildschut, 2009), work with young people as well as individual self-exploration. The use of dance in organizations seems a natural continuation of its historic tradition of exploring social, spiritual, and political contexts.

Studies have found evidence of the impact of artistic interventions: 1. Seeing things new and

differently; 2. Training of individual capacities (acting, speaking, writing); 3. Enhancing group work (better understanding, communication, interaction, shared values), also on the organisational level (Berthoin Antal and Strauß, 2013). Arts-based methods in organisations are commonly used to generate innovation, to help members to see more and to perceive things differently, to activate them and to foster collaborative ways of working and personal development. Such an approach stands in a broader context of challenges for leadership and management in the 21st century, where innovative and creative, dynamic and human-centred approaches that commonly are related to the world of arts gained new relevance. Arts-based interventions emphasise embodiment over assuming disembodied and purely cognitive actors, linking to studies on the aesthetics of organization and the body. These initiatives aim to develop abilities that are linked to aesthetic, sensual perception and forms of working ‘like an artist’ which are not advanced by methods commonly used in management education and training. Organisational scholars have already come to suggest that dance-based exercises could “serve well in calling into question and re-constructing the everyday practices and routines which we usually maintain and reconstruct unconsciously in everyday working life” (Hujala et al., 2016: 28). Movement and embodied activities typically create and affirm relationships among social actors, connecting individual actors to a community.

Dance-based methods can come in different forms as arts-based initiatives, and have opened up a new area of work for choreographers, dancers and movement instructors beyond the area of the arts. They are offering their workshops to businesses, either through being hired directly via Human Resources or communication departments, or through intermediaries such as TILLT in Sweden (<http://www.tillt.se/en-GB>) or institutes such as the one that I have started with our university in Berlin, Germany (<https://www.hdpk.de/de/hochschule/einrichtungen-und-bereiche/iwk-institut-fuer-weiterbildung-in-der-kreativwirtschaft/>)

These dance sessions must not be confused with dance classes that rehearse steps such as the waltz or samba. Rather, participants move one-to-one, in pairs, or as individuals, through space, performing different exercises and movements. Exercises include dialogue and personal reflection on issues related to work and organization. Often directed by one or two facilitators with a background in organizational consulting and dance, their variety of pair and group movements, postures, rhythm and improvisation allows participants to physically experience and ‘better understand’ various scenarios, which stand in a relation to their life in the organization (Biehl, 2017: 114).

Dance and movement workshops have impacts similar to other arts-based interventions such as seeing things differently and exploring new ways of doing, that are however facilitated through the body as a medium. I present here a matrix from my book (Biehl, 2017: 123), for which I interviewed artists and consultants and participated myself in workshops. The matrix divides on the vertical level

between “kinaesthetic” and “metaphor”. “Metaphor” is when dance is used to illustrate what goes on in leadership for example, and express things metaphorically. “Kinaesthetic” is when the movement exercise is primarily about bodily movement and perception. The matrix draws on the previous chapters in my book (Biehl, 2017) and includes a continuum ranging from dance as metaphor to kinaesthetic experience and practice, and another axe that presents more individual aspects of kinaesthetic politics and group aspects that are concerned with choreography.

View on the organisation	Kinaesthetic	—awareness of the body —body language and connection	—collaboration and co-ownership —leading and following —site-specific walks
	Metaphor	—illustration of leadership —presentation of gender in leadership	—group sculptures and Gestalten
		Kinaesthetic Politics	Choreography
Social dimension of the organisation			

Figure 2: *Categorisation of arts-based interventions with dance in organizations (Biehl, 2017: 123)*

Presentations of professional dancers (**Metaphor/Illustration of leadership, presentation of gender in leadership**) are used to illustrate “leadership” in terms of leading and following. These presentations show that interaction between leader and follower is necessary. The example is from Matzdorf and Sen (2016), who are amateur dancers on a higher level and management researchers, and who give workshops with dance presentations on conferences for example. Matzdorf and Sen have provided the following explanation (Figure 3):



Figure 3: *Fides Matzdorf and Ramen Sen. Photo: Iain Carruthers*

“In this situation, the leader offers the space and provides and holds the ‘frame’ (through the arms, the stance and counterbalance), inviting the follower into a movement that culminates in a big stretch with a kick. It is up to the follower how they accept the invitation and use the space. This move requires practice and trust-building: The partners need to work out and negotiate how energetic their moves can be without losing balance—so they need to know how far they can ‘stretch’ the limitations of their bodies and their strength.”

They suggest that the co-operation involves both parties and mutual trust to let the partner take the lead, with the person moving backwards having the initiative, as they must make the physical space for the person going forwards (Matzdorf and Sen, 2016: 123). These situations of ballroom dancing have received critique as being highly gendered with the male leading, the woman following. However, modern competitive ballroom dancing “has moved on and away from stereotypes such as ‘the lady’s role is just to look decorative’ to a concept that takes a partnership approach and sees the contribution of the two roles to the success of a performance as near equal”, says Fides Matzdorf. Going beyond the binary gender divide, Matzdorf and Sen (2016: 124) suggest that only a team with

a highly-engaged follower, a ‘partner’, would succeed in competitive dance as well as in business environments (Biehl, 2017: 126).

An example in the area of metaphor (**Metaphor/group sculptures and Gestalten**) for the use of dance as a collaborative choreography is Katrin Kolo’s (2012; 2016) work on an artistic research project *UnternehMENSChoreographie* (“Organisational Choreography” whereby in German the words “Unternehmen” and “Choreographie” converge into the noun MENSCH (HUMAN) in the middle, pointing to the moving body (lat. corpus) in the centre of the corporation). The project aimed to recreate, through a choreographic process, structures of interaction, leadership and implicit values in a company. At the beginning participants negotiate the empty space and social relations, for example women explore the margins of the room, while men occupied the centre. Women encouraged others to get up and move.

By exerting movements, they used a form of bodily theorising about identity and relations.

Through dance, the ‘felt experience’ of being within an organisational interaction is explored.

One moment in this transitory performance was termed by Kolo “woman fetches a chair or pulls it away”. This moment refers to the ambiguous potential in supporting motions that are commonly demanded from female co-workers (Biehl, 2017: 131).



Figure 4: “Women fetches a chair or pulls it away” Courtesy Katrin Kolo; Photo: Lisa Schäubli.

Dance-based forms used for representation of embodied knowing and gendered movement and hidden practices in organisations. Think about the following questions: which space are you using in meetings? How do you enter a room? How do you use the space, the halls, the rooms? Do you go through the centre, or rather along margins? In this sense, such exercises can potentially affect “social choreographies” as scripted and embodied, but transitory movement practices in organisations.

This last example (**Kinaesthetic/ awareness of the body, body language, leading and following**) works with the fact that dance literally consists of practices of leadership in the sense of ‘leading’ and ‘following’. Going beyond the immediate metaphor of leadership, dance exercises provide a kinaesthetic experience of leading and following (Ludevig, 2016).

By valuing aesthetic and embodied knowing, management studies have also received and worked with the concept of kinaesthetic empathy: when people feel they are participating in the movements they observe, and experience associated feelings and states. Other people’s movements – albeit strongly visual – not only are perceived through the eyes but are sensed corporeally (Foster, 2011). Leaders in this sense have even learned lessons from techno DJs (Biehl, 2018) who use their embodied understanding of the movement interaction to work with the feedback-loop between DJ and the moving audience. This interaction is not mediated verbally but through back-and-forth of energy and movement in which both sided influence each other. Leaders also need to learn that leadership is in-between a leader and a follower and constantly negotiated.

Many leaders think about “leading” in terms of the physical interaction of one body dragging another body in a specific direction. Through dance exercises however, managers may experience leading as a matter of using body postures to open a space for the follower to step into, or as a matter of using the combined structure of two bodies to give a small but clear direction, allowing the follower to be the one supplying energy for his own movement (in opposition to the situation where the leader drags the follower and, hence, uses his own energy to move the follower). These exercises increase the awareness of the body and how managers can use it in interaction with others, and better react to signals from other people.

The insights can be used to frame subsequent discussions of topics relevant to leaders and followers (Biehl, 2017: 138).



Figure 5: *Participants of a MOVE Leadership workshop “Dancing with Management”.*
Courtesy Daniel Ludevig.

Participants make experiences that support an advanced embodied understanding of leading. For example, the experience of indicating direction through small but precise impulses in dance can be transferred onto everyday interaction at work. Managers can also benefit from their experience of pushing and pulling “to find ways of leading in which they draw upon their own energy to overcome perceived inertia or resistance” (Springborg and Sutherland, 2016: 104). Sufficient time needs to be accorded in exercises to allow participants to immerse in these experiences and to work on their embodied understanding before then speaking about it. Speaking about these experiences is part of the learning and understanding processes. Again, it is about making sense through the body working with individual ideas, which can then be applied to strengthen the own leadership personality.

Conclusion

To conclude: It was discussed how theory and methods from dance have found their way into a new area: management studies. With regard to theory we have noticed that management is not only a science, but an “art” and organizations are “like dance” because they are dynamic, complex, and ever changing. They are not only rationally understood, but have something to do with embodied experience.

With regard to practice, different dance-exercises as methods and “artistic interventions” have

emerged and constitute new opportunities for work for dancers and choreographers beyond the cultural industries and the arts such as the ballet or dance companies. Practitioners who offer their services with dance workshops however need to understand central topics of organizations and management, or refer to literature on the topic (Biehl, 2017: 113-151) to be able to sell their offers and to explain how they work.

Movement exercises in business organizations can provide new bodily experiences that can support new forms of knowing and doing in management and organizations. Dance has always been a tool for self-exploration and group development, and also works for managers and leaders and followers. Leaders need to be able to constantly adapt to ever new situations. It is also about listening inside yourself, and to perceive how others feel and how they react.

Are these exercises with dance only useful in face-to-face-interaction at work where others are present with their bodies? What about digital and virtual work that is becoming increasingly important today? One could say dance has a particular potential despite and because of digitization and digital forms of work and interaction. Working digitally means that the distance between participants is growing, and with it the situation is more uncertain and dynamic. Individuals need to rely on their understanding that resides in the body. They need to manage uncertainty and dynamic and fugitive spaces in-between people. In interpersonal cooperation over a distance, you do not always see what others are doing, but you feel it (applying some form of empathy for what others do, that we know from dance practice). All these elements are central to dance.

After all, when it comes to thinking, cooperating and interacting, we remain in our moving bodies as 'embodied minds' and need them to understand what 'moves' us, and what 'moves' others. Dance studies' potential in this area has now also been received in new areas and other disciplines and new markets for dance practitioners have opened up as well.

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