

**The Use of Sociodrama to Bring Humanness in Organizational Life**

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### Introduction

Sociodrama is based on the work of Dr Jacob Levy Moreno (1889-1974), who is also known for his creation of Psychodrama, a method of action learning which focuses on the inner process of an individual to help achieve understanding and change.

Sociodrama and psychodrama are like opposite sides of the same coin. Both are grounded in Moreno's theory of spontaneity, creativity and his role theory of personality. Both use similar methods and techniques of spontaneous role-playing and exploring aspects of our lives through concrete action. Like psychodrama, the essential goals of sociodrama are greater insight and understanding of human relationships, a more complete and appropriate expression of emotions, and experimentation with new behavior or attitudes in a mutually supportive environment. In psychodrama, the focus of the action is the life of an individual, while in sociodrama there is a common theme, issue or situation that the group wants to examine not just by verbal discussion or debate, but through spontaneous action. Where psychodrama deals with personal relationships, sociodrama focuses on professional, workplace or public relationships. Instead of a single individual taking on the role of protagonist (the most common situation in psychodrama), in sociodrama the group itself becomes the protagonist of the session.

*“The sociodrama ... starts from within the audience present, it is calculated to be educational, clarifying and energizing to all members, to serve as a stimulus to spontaneity, creativity, love and empathy, and as a check and balance to cultural tensions and hostilities arising from local or world-wide events and as a means for social catharsis and integration.”* (Moreno 1953/93 p 88)

Weiner and Sprague have emphasized sociodrama as a method for learning rather than social change.

*“Sociodrama is a social learning activity based in a group setting.*

*A sociodrama has three primary aims:*

- *an improved understanding of a social (organizational or group) situation*
- *an increase in participants’ knowledge about their own and other people’s roles in relation to that situation*
- *an emotional release or catharsis as people express their feelings about the subject”*

This approach can be good for developing insight, team building and role training. It allows group members to bond, and provides a safe way to share material.

### **Main Idea and Conceptual Understanding**

In an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world, many organizations recognize that they need to develop and sustain an organizational culture that will enable them to thrive in such conditions. It has become important to pay attention to the fundamental question of how to tap the inherent creativity of groups to address their own issues. It is here the practice of sociodrama has something unique to contribute. As an applied method, sociodrama is valuable to practitioners working in education, community, organizational and health professions because it offers a way of thinking about and working in the ‘here and now’ with social systems, with organizational and team culture.

Sociodrama as an action method can be used for exploring the relationships within and between groups/departments/organization. The practitioner learns to analyze such ‘systems’ by setting

them out physically (concretizing) using objects or group members as representations, giving voice to these identified roles within the system. Through role exploration (role reversal, doubling, mirroring etc.), the practitioner becomes a change agent, helping the group to identify where new responses might be possible and to practice the necessary skills to achieve the desired change. The emphasis is always on understanding how individuals, teams, and organizations function.

Action methods encompass a wide range of techniques and approaches. A simple example would be for members of an organization to move around in the space and form a ‘map’ of the internal groups or departments, to explore the lines of communication among them. Action methods draw on role theory, role training, sociometry and sociodrama.

Sociodrama serves this purpose of building what Lewin (1970) called a solidarity group, in which individuals accept the system of values and beliefs that is built or proposed.

### **The Framework of a Sociodramatic Session (*Methodology I will use to share the idea*)**

Sociodramatic interventions directed at transforming individuals and social systems follow the traditional three-phase method: warm-up, enactment and sharing.

In organizational work, these three phases can be preceded by a phase when the group chooses the theme to be worked on. A fifth phase is added, that of processing and registering information. This processing becomes even richer when it is done from different points of view.

#### **A. Warm-up**

As an example of a specific warm-up, a ‘cocktail party’ is carried out during which members are asked to talk in pairs and change partners every five minutes, following a hand-clapping sign.

The suggested topic of conversation is what they think they are doing there and what they expect from the session. With the group sitting in a circle, each participant is asked to tell the best conversations they have had and what has interested them most in their conversation partners. In the end, the whole group makes a synthesis of the most relevant subjects, how the meeting went and their shared feelings.

Another example of a warm-up starts with 'I', 'I and the other' and then forming the 'we'. Each person draws on a piece of paper a symbol that represents them, inspired by an element of nature. They look for a colleague that they are not familiar with yet and introduce themselves with the symbol, explaining why they chose that element. Then, in a large circle, people say only their name, town and the symbol that represented the colleague they had worked with, along with a personal quality they had noticed in their colleague during the presentation. This serves as a base for the sociodramatic technique of role inversion, so that subsequently each person is better able to put himself in someone else's shoes.

This type of warm-up serves for people to gradually adapt to the space and prepare themselves for the themes to be worked on. They are very different from the so-called 'ice-breakers' of group dynamics, because the sociodramatic facilitator pays attention to group themes, feelings and expressions from the time when the warm-up starts. He does not use the warm-up to distract the group, but rather lets the group use the warm-up as a form of expression, giving the director-facilitator guidance about the paths to follow. The theme can also be captured as a 'mind-map'.

The warm up acts as encouragement for subsequent sharing of thoughts, feelings and desires connected to the project/main theme.

## **B. Enactment**

In this phase, the focus shifts to working on the subject that emerged from the group or that which needed a resolution. It can be done in various ways, with pre-planned organizational games, song composition, enactment, dramatization, comedy sketches, games of chance, skill, (or whatever the facilitator's creativity and intuition permits), cooperation or theater. Intermediary objects such as drawings, puppets, sandboxes, masks, dance, music and poetry can be used during facilitation as a way of translating the group's emotions and thoughts. In short, creativity is again the key word. The group is encouraged in the sharing phase to talk about the objects, and what they represented.

The important aspect of enactment is that it serves the purpose by going back to the group's or organization's problems and focuses towards solving these problems and developing action plans. The process while safeguarding the individual role, allows each person to try new roles, change places with other participants and return to his own place charged with new experiences.

A game suggestion is for sub-groups to compose lyrics to melodies that they all know. The group, divided into three teams, is asked to make parodies with lyrics saying how they feel about the theme that has emerged from the above 'cocktail party' warm-up.

Music as a form of expression makes it possible to creatively overcome difficulties and communicate feelings and perceptions about organizational work. Humor is the simplest and often the only way of making group participants realize the seriousness of the content they are dealing with, through unexpected creativity. The group's spirit at this moment is revealed by these composed lyrics.

After the songs are presented, the facilitator asks the group to talk about the process, how they felt, what it was like to work in a team and finally explores the theme of the songs, that is, reads and interprets them along with the group. In sociodrama, the director doesn't interpret the scenes/songs, leaving this to the group.

The group is free to bring up whatever themes they want, with whatever depth they like, without words being put in their mouth. The most that the facilitator can allow herself is to ask what the group means with certain parts of the song. If the group says nothing, it is considered unimportant.

After going through a playful and mobilizing experience, the group becomes open to speak candidly about their difficulties, with the purpose of developing action plans. Of course, for this to happen, a pact is made with the group that nothing that occurs during training will be revealed with individual names, and human resources would only hear about plans the groups have made at the end of training.

### **C. Sharing**

At the end of the enactment, subgroups are invited to share how the activity relates to their daily work life. Associations with teamwork, trust, communication problems and leadership can arise naturally. Subsequently, each subgroup brings a summary of the conversation, in whatever form they want, to share with everyone. This way of working allows people to interact and trace parallels with their organizational reality and doesn't expose them, because they only talk among themselves. The larger group is invited talk about their experiences.

Sharing is the final phase, which serves to unite the group in a reflection necessary to integrate what has been learned in the scene, games or experience. Analysis, making ‘evaluations’ about performance when a game or experience has been carried out is discouraged. The focus is on each person’s expression about what she felt and learnt. Modeling all points of views are acceptable. In this sharing process, individuals feel less isolated and start to realize that others have similar problems or experiences. During this phase, group members share feelings, ask questions, discuss the action and plan habit and behavior changes. “Through this process they calm down in relation to the scene, move into a cognitive scope and prepare themselves for the end of the session.” (Sternberg & Garcia, 2000: p. 20).

Learning is consolidated, and possibilities for new responses to situations that repeat themselves, or appropriate responses to new situations that arise, are discussed.

### **Learning Outcome for Participants at the ISABS Conference**

The ISABS conference is a good opportunity for the members to experience this tool to understand the principles of psychodrama and sociodrama, and how it can be used as a creative learning process focused on solutions for human relationship problems, such as:

- Clarifying values and reviewing behaviors
- Opening communicative spaces
- Improving learning processes
- Reviewing conflict resolution in groups
- Serving critical thinking and
- Group bonding & fostering motivation

## **The Application – How and Where**

This method has been used by the consultant to help groups unite, discover common interests and strengths, and mobilize to reach their ideals. It aids groups to construct their own plans, involve people in a good-humored and creative way with the intervention and action process and commit to the results.

In addition, it helps in:

- Increasing creativity, group problem-solving and team work
- Identifying group norms and values to guide team work for the future
- Assisting in communication, conflict management and team building
- Analysis of stakeholder's action research and strategic planning
- Predicting outcomes or rehearsing implementation
- Supervising managerial or training problems
- Better understanding and interpretation of reality by groups and facilitators
- Providing problem-solving methods that enliven, enlighten and are effective

Our audience ranges from doctors, hospital staff, mental health workers, NGO staff that work with street children, staff and faculty of IITs and employees of corporates.

As an organizational culture change consultant, I feel the process helps the client develop the capacity to assess 'what is going on' behaviorally, emotionally and relationally. Much of an organization's culture can be 'read' from observing the daily interactions between the members of its staff. These interactions of course form a complex pattern. However, when the pattern is at least partially understood, intervention possibilities become more apparent.

Psychodrama helps in developing the ability to ‘go to the mountain top and view the battlefield’. Stepping back and asking, ‘What is going on here?’ can be helpful in discerning some of these patterns.

Needless to say, employees in organizations will answer the question differently depending on their level, relationships with their managers, levels of motivation, relationships with their peers, etc.

One leadership team described their team culture as, ‘Result focused, aligned and inclusive’. In contrast, the junior level management described the leadership as, “Living in an ivory tower! They are completely out of touch with what is going on, and live in their world of strategy and forecasts. We are understaffed, have unrealistic goals, while the support functions squabble over non-priority issues. How will we reach our targets?”

In order to bridge the difference, a consultant needs to facilitate the ability to listen to different perspectives, understand and arrive at a conclusion as to what the causes are.

The member of the junior management, critical of leadership could have had a hostile relationship with his manager or may be reflecting the widely held opinion of the group. Answers taken from several sources, however, are likely to reveal a pattern that can help the consultant and leaders assess how well the culture of the organization is likely to assist or retard the outcomes the leadership team is seeking. Responses may also hint at potential places for interventions.

One significant element that senior leaders ought to understand is that they can change the culture of their organizations by shifting their behaviors and interaction responses, amongst their peers, their direct reports and within the wider organization.

Five elements which contribute to the development of progressive cultures within leadership teams are:

- Shared goals
- Work with information rather than subjective experience
- Humor
- Generated options
- Depersonalized disagreements

We have used Psychodrama to create group norms where senior leaders consciously create safe environment for others to speak up, and be listened to and appreciated, even though their views are not put into immediate action. To have a transparent organizational culture, leaders must be willing to share their thoughts honestly and listen to the candid responses of others. This involves leaders finding ways to be collegial and inclusive, ensuring that contributions are valued and productive working relationships are enhanced, including when there are differences.

Psychodrama and Sociodrama are powerful processes that allow improvisation, thinking of alternative scenarios, shifting roles and points of view, opportunities for replay, and other elements which offer new insights and self-reflection. As a result of spontaneous expression, hidden motives pass to a conscious level where they are accessible to change.

## **Limitations of Sociodrama**

Sociodrama has the potential for Sociogenesis and Sociometric maturation of a group. Sociogenetic maturation means group development from low sociogenetic first and second levels called 'non attachment interaction' and 'affiliation', through the third, fourth and fifth levels called 'belonging', 'multiple consensus leadership' and 'logic discussion compromise', to the high sociogenetic sixth and seventh levels called 'task centered' and 'experiential maturity' (Alvarez Valcarce, P. 1995; Borgatta, E. F. & Cottrell, L. S. 1956).

Sociometric maturation is the process whereby this shift is carried out, from low cohesion between group members (who make choices to interact only in pairs) to high cohesive structures such as triangulation (choices in threes), circularization (where all group members make choices to interact with each other) and hierarchies (where the group successfully establishes agreed-upon internal structures, such as roles or sub-groups with specific responsibilities and different sociometric status).

Sociodrama thus has scope for unearthing invisible dynamics like role conflicts, team inefficiencies, and hidden agenda/taboo subjects.

For this process of group growth to be meaningfully carried out, the following conditions should be met:

- First, the participants must be warmed up to each other by finding which roles they do find in common. There is a good deal of artistry in working with groups in order to bring them to a higher state of readiness to work together.
- The 'age' and maturity of the team will influence the chosen intervention.

- The group theme has to emerge clearly in the warm-up process.
- The team is committed to continuous building on the openness and candor that has been initiated by the action learning process with the help of their HR in its life outside the training room.
- Creativity is a core value, and the approach in sociodrama is that instead of thinking that we're finding the 'right answer', (as if there were one, which, in a changing world, may not be so!) the object is to just explore, with a belief that a creative response is possible. However, for some groups which are highly structured, they may be uncomfortable in 'going with the flow'.

If the conditions are not met, sociodrama cannot be effectively used.

### **My Learning**

A socio-dramatist needs to think in terms of social systems. To do this, the facilitator must think systemically about a presenting situation and identify the various parts of the system, as well as the dynamics between those parts so that the group learns about what shapes its behavior. Systemic thinking involves making descriptions about such things as the roles, relationships, rules, norms, behaviors, patterns and social forces operating in the social system.

Immersion in this process has helped me to move from a 'control' oriented facilitator/ human being to a way of being where I work with 'natural connections' and 'natural emergence'. I now see that dissonance is not a problem to solve, but something to listen to. I realize the need to slow down to the speed of presence, and just connect to myself. The only place I can make a difference is inside me. I understand the need to listen to a conversation beyond hearing just the

words. Thus, I have learnt to manage co-creatively rather than trying to make things happen and allow space for them to thrive or perish.

When I show up like this, this way of being affects or transforms the larger system.

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