

OLKC 2008 International Conference on Organizational Learning, Knowledge and Capabilities

AN EXPLOSIVE FORCE: EMOTIONS, AESTHETICS AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

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Abstract

This paper uses a modified version of Gregory Bateson's (2000a) levels of learning to consider a multimodal understanding of organisational learning; one that sees emotions, aesthetics and learning as complex, interactive and interdependent.

Tosey and Mathison (2008) argue that this requires a framework such as Bateson's, which differentiates between logical types, and (in its modified form) between embodied, analytic and aesthetic modes of knowing. Such a proposition starts to explode the myth of rationality in organisations and approaches which 'propound an objective and universal interpretative key to organisational life' (Strati, 2000: 14).

Using a specific exhibition as a starting point the paper explores the nature of organisational learning at Constructa², a contemporary art gallery, based in the South of England. Constructa has been through significant change in the last five years as a result of financial crisis and potential closure.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Organisations working in the publicly funded sector generally exist in a permanent state of anxiety and vulnerability as a result of a dependence on state subsidy which is often unpredictable. Arts organisations are no exception and it could be said that for some financial crises have become a way of life.

“The arts sector seems vibrant and healthy to the public - creating illusion is the artist’s stock in trade. Behind the scenes it is tough going.” (Clarfield, Bird, & Carnevale, 2002)

The language used in the accounts of such crises is often metaphorical and emotive, perhaps reflecting the mission led nature of the work, for example:

“There is hardly a theatre or arts centre in the country that is untouched by Battersea Arts Centre’s (BACs) work. You might think local councillors would be thrilled and proud to be the custodians of such a local and national treasure...but you would think wrong. Last week BAC’s local council, Tory-governed Wandsworth, gave notice that from April 1st it intends to cut BAC’s grant from £100,000 to zero...If this was to go ahead, BAC could not survive and would have to close.” (Gardner, 2007)

The organisation featured as the case study in this paper, Constructa, has survived the threat of imminent insolvency. It has undergone a transformative change, a turnaround, where ‘a corporate turnaround may be defined simply as the recovery of a firm’s economic performance following an existence-threatening decline’ (Pandit, 2000: 32). In mission led or ‘idealistic’ (Zagier Roberts, 1994) organisations it is often about more than mere economic survival and as such their recovery process could be regarded as an extreme context for considering organisational learning and change.

The paper begins with a consideration of organisational learning and makes particular reference to Bion’s concept of ‘container and contained’ as something which enables or inhibits learning. It goes on to explore Bateson’s (2000a) Levels of Learning, which is used as an interpretative framework for the case study data. This framework is modified in order to attend to both the level and mode of learning, in particular the analytic, aesthetic and embodied.

2. ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING: CONTAINER AND CONTAINED

The field of organisational learning is now quite diverse and from modest beginnings it has grown exponentially in the last twenty years, a domain of ‘volcanic’ activity ‘in which multiple foci of interest co-exist all the time’ (Bapuji & Crossan, 2004:397). Themes and debates have emerged, abated and re-emerged in different forms. There is also a growing range of disciplines in the field (Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999): psychology/organisational development, management science, organization theory, strategy, production management and cultural anthropology and while it may be beneficial to take account of the developments across these fields they have different origins and concerns.

Despite the debates Bapuji & Crossan (2004: 400) suggest that there is a growing acceptance of the many perspectives, organisational learning can take various forms; it can be behavioural and cognitive, exogenous and endogenous, methodical and emergent, incremental and radical and can occur at various levels in an organisation as well as between organisations.

This paper derives primarily from the psychology/organisational development disciplines and takes the view that the 'organisation' is something different to the sum of its parts, it illustrates some sort of 'organisation-in-mind'.

"[Any] organisation is composed of the diverse fantasies and projections of its members. Everyone who is aware of an organisation, whether a member of it or not, has a mental image of how it works. Though these diverse ideas are not often consciously negotiated or agreed upon among the participants, they exist. In this sense, all institutions exist in the mind, and it is in interaction with these in-the-mind entities that we live." (Shapiro & Carr, 1991: 69-70)

Talking to one of the board members at Constructa she said that they (the Board) had all learnt to verbalise this organisation in the mind and that they felt no dissent from it as a Board, 'So speaking as an organisation, we can, speak with a strong sense of self'. Even if we accept that Constructa as an independent entity does not exist, its members act as if it does. Armstrong (2005:5) suggests it may be a response to something intrinsic ' a particular, more or less idiosyncratic, response to a common, shared organisational dynamic.'

This notion of an 'organization-in-mind' is likely to have an impact on the nature of learning that occurs, something that may not always be evident, it may manifest itself in organisational culture, unwritten rules and rituals. Coupled with the notion of the organization-in-mind this paper utilises a definition of organisational learning that recognises the need for some form of containing framework:

"The phrase 'organisational learning' describes an explosive force within a restraining framework (both 'container' and 'contained' - (Bion, 1985))." (Vince, 2002)

This perspective suggests that while organising is a process that can enable learning, it is also a process which can quickly bring into being defences against the anxieties of such learning; learning cannot therefore be regarded as unproblematic or universally beneficial. The metaphor of explosion suggests it can be a destructive as well as a constructive force.

Bion first wrote about the concept of container and contained in the 1960s in 'Learning from Experience' (1962), which focussed specifically on the psychoanalytical encounter. He later extended it beyond the individual to groups, institutions and society in the 1970s. It is a concept that is deceptively simple, yet it can be applied in numerous ways. Bion likened it to the relationship between mother and baby, where the mother is the container with the capacity to contain the distress of the baby. Bain (1999) uses a physical metaphor to describe it in its simplest form.

"If you clasp your wrist with your hand, the hand is the 'container', and the wrist the 'contained'. If you clasp too tightly i.e. the 'container' is too strong you will stop the blood flow in your wrist. If the clasp is too loose, the wrist can easily slip out of, or break the 'container'."

When considering the institution as a container there is an interdependence between our individual experience and the collective experience. As individuals we are containers for the 'stimulus of what may be contained'.(Bain, 1999:2-3) Equally, the institution performs a similar function for the collective.

Bion (1970) outlined three possible relationships between container and contained:

- Parasitic: where one depends on the other to produce a third relationship which then becomes destructive to all three, they effectively feed off each other to a point of mutual destruction
- Commensal: where both container and contained co-exist without changing each other, the relationship is shared to mutual benefit
- Symbiotic: where there is growth in both container and contained, 'the essence of the concept is the potentiality for transformation in container and contained.'(Bain, 1999: 3) An advantage is gained by the sharing of the relationship to create a third.

Bain (1999) proposes that the transformational process between organisational container and contained could be used as a measure of organisational learning. Some organisations are more containing than others and therefore more able to provide the opportunity for growth in both container and contained. As in the wrist metaphor, some squeeze too tight and prevent the blood flow or fail to contain at all. The notion of containment came up in the Constructa interviews, where there was a sense of too porous a container and an absence of 'holding'.

*And I think it is, it is,
More about having a kind of focused.
Acknowledging what we're good at,
what we're bad at,
what we can do to
make things we're bad at better.
And it's just somebody that would have,
somebody that would have a kind of,
you know their eye on ALL of it.
As kind of, as a package.*

(Office Manager, male)

This process is closely linked to issues of communication, 'the entire emphasis of the container/contained process is on the capacity to listen, to take in, and to react in response.'(Obholzer, 1996:54) If the organisation is incapable of listening to its members they'll feel unheard and alone. If it is full of anxiety it will spill over into its members and once again communication will be impaired. This focus on communication is echoed by Bateson (2000a: 279) in relation to learning where he describes 'learning' as a 'communicational phenomenon.'

In order to consider the organisation as a bounded object, as container, Armstrong suggests four dimensions that help make sense of organising:

1. The organisation as contextually embedded (the ecological dimension)
2. The organisation as enterprise (the identity dimension)
3. The organisation as process (the task dimension)
4. The organisation as structure (the management dimension)

By taking a holistic view and looking across the dimensions it may be possible to shed light on the nature of the work and its psychic demands, as well as conscious and unconscious strategies for containment.

“In these terms the context of the organisation and its form of activity can be held in tension, to be surfaced when the context challenges the enterprise, correspondingly, they experience, consciously or unconsciously, the dilemmas of balancing the claims of survival and growth against the cost to identity, to embodied practice.” (Armstrong, 2005: 109)

3. A MULTI MODAL APPROACH TO ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

3.1 Bateson’s levels

Drawing on Bateson (2000a) the question becomes not if organisations can learn, but in terms of considering the case study, ‘what is the nature of learning here?’ Bateson (1904- 1980) was an English academic who worked across and influenced diverse fields, his daughter described his journey as one ‘characterised by a distinctive way of thinking rather than a specific concrete subject matter.’ (Bateson, 2000a:ix)

Mary Catherine Bateson, observes in her foreword to the 2000 edition of ‘Steps to an Ecology of Mind’ that; ‘the processes with which Gregory was concerned were essentially processes of knowing: perception, communication, coding and translation’.

Bateson describes ‘The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication’, as an attempt to illuminate ‘the barriers of misunderstanding which divide the various species of behavioural scientists... by an application of Russell’s Theory of Logical Types (Russell, 1921) to the concept of “learning”.’ (Bateson 2000:279). In summary, the theory of logical types distinguishes between a class and members of that class and, in order to avoid logical paradoxes, stipulates that a class cannot be a member of itself.

His theory of ‘levels of learning’ (Bateson 2000) has been influential in the organisational learning field (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Bartunek & Moch, 1994; French & Bazalgette, 1996; Roach & Bednar, 1997; Tosey & Mathison, 2008; Visser, 2007). The levels (Table 1) have a number of characteristics. Even though they appear as a hierarchy Bateson’s levels are in fact recursive, the different levels of learning can occur in parallel. (Bredo, 1989). It is also not a progressive theory of learning, by which one ‘improves’ from lower to higher levels. ‘Lower’ levels are neither necessarily inferior to, nor less desirable than higher levels. Bateson’s emphasis on the notion of *context* in learning is significant, and implies that the task of understanding organisational learning involves sensitivity to such contexts.

Table 1: The levels of learning, adapted from Bateson (2000)

Level IV	‘...would be change in Learning III but probably does not occur in any adult living organism on this earth’
Level III <i>Paradigm Shift</i>	...is a change in the process of learning II e.g. a corrective change in the system of <i>sets</i> of alternatives from which change is made. This is likely to result in a change in identity such as religious conversion or - learns, learns how to learn and simultaneously learns how to learn how to learn.
Level II	...is change in the process of learning I, e.g. a corrective change in the

<i>Emergent pattern; reframing situation or context</i>	set of alternatives from which choice is made, or it is a change in how the sequence of experience is punctuated e.g. the hidden curriculum, unwritten rules and transference. The fish confirms the porpoise's understanding of the context – its relationship to the trainer.
Learning I <i>New operational knowledge</i>	... is change in specificity of response by correction of errors of choice within a set of alternatives. e.g. changes in knowledge, skills and attitudes. A porpoise gets a fish for exhibiting the right behaviour from a choice of behaviours
Learning 0 <i>Unchanged response</i>	... is characterised by specificity of response, which – right or wrong – is not subject to correction e.g. the two mice who keep hunting for the cheese in the same place every day in 'Who Moved my Cheese' (Johnson, 1999). A porpoise gets a fish for a single behaviour

Tosey (2006) argues that only a framework such as Bateson's, which differentiates between logical types enables us to understand organisational learning appropriately as multi-dimensional, paradoxical and aesthetic.

Zero level learning is automatic, responses to stimuli could be said to be hard wired, 'where causal links between 'stimulus' and 'response' are as the engineers say 'soldered' in'. (Bateson, 2000a: 284). An example would be the two mice, in 'Who Moved My Cheese', who keep searching for the cheese in the same place every day, even though it has been moved. All the other levels involve some form of trial and error and as such behaviours are subject to correction until the right response is found. Learning I occurs in a situation where a choice can be made between a particular set of alternatives, 'the specification of how these corrections are made is determined by the particular context of learning.' (Keeney, 1983: 156)

Learning II is concerned with learning about a particular context of learning, often referred to as learning how to learn. In this instance you learn how to respond to a specific context. So learning at this level moves beyond behavioural choices to comparisons across learning opportunities, a feedback process makes this comparison possible. Efforts to avoid habitual behavioural response involve learning at this level. Strategies to achieve this might include an eclectic approach, taking on a variety of frames, as if choosing from a wide repertoire of music. Or, combining different elements from different frames and creating a new integrated approach, a new symphony.

Learning III Bateson (2000:301) identifies as being very rare and notes that it is most likely to occur in 'psychotherapy, religious conversion and in other sequences in which there is a profound reorganisation of character.'

"In sum, different orders of learning and change indicate that people or systems of people may be classified as being caught in a frame, a set of frames or a system of sets of frames. The order of being stuck determines the required order of the solution." (Keeney, 1983: 159)

Bateson's theory implies that organisational learning would be created by a change in patterns of behaviour that emerge from changes in context (including changes in the interpretation or perceived significance of context).

Bateson questioned the extent to which intentional action can produce desired effects, which contrasts with the view that new understandings and skills are learnt first, and then applied in order to generate new organisational capabilities.

“[Bateson’s] central insight was that active engagement within the aesthetic process can enable us to see beyond the ‘purposive consciousness’ which has led us to ecological peril. Our conscious awareness is largely limited to the satisfaction of immediate desires by the most direct ways available. We have lost access to the wisdom accrued in evolution and even to the greater part of the fruits of our personal experience.” (Charlton, 2003:225-226)

Tosey and Mathison (2008) suggest it is significant that, according to the evidence of his writing, Bateson’s levels are clearly not about cognition alone. He referred explicitly to ‘a stance at the side of my ladder... to discuss the structure of this ladder’ (Bateson 2000:308), which suggests that any form of cognitive reflection on the theory is to be distinguished from the type of learning that is ‘on’ the ladder.

In modifying Bateson’s framework Tosey has drawn on two other dimensions which are raised by Bateson in his writings. The first being his references to embodied, enacted change. His definitions of ‘learning’ include change of behaviour as well as change of meaning. In this respect Bateson’s ideas seems strongly compatible with recent theoretical notions of ‘embodied mind’ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993) and contrasts with, an emphasis on cognition and critical reflection.

The second dimension relates specifically to aesthetics and art. This emphasis is both general in his writing, (Harries-Jones, 1995:14) and specific to understanding the relationships between the levels of learning; ‘I have suggested elsewhere... that art is commonly concerned with... bridging the gap between the more or less unconscious premises acquired by Learning II and the more episodic content of consciousness and immediate action’. (Bateson 2000:308) Tosey and Mathison (2008) suggest that Bateson’s emphasis on the aesthetic potentially contrasts with the metaphor of ‘man as action scientist’ that is espoused by Argyris (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith D, 1985), which emphasises intentional, cognitive inquiry into contexts and their ‘governing variables’.

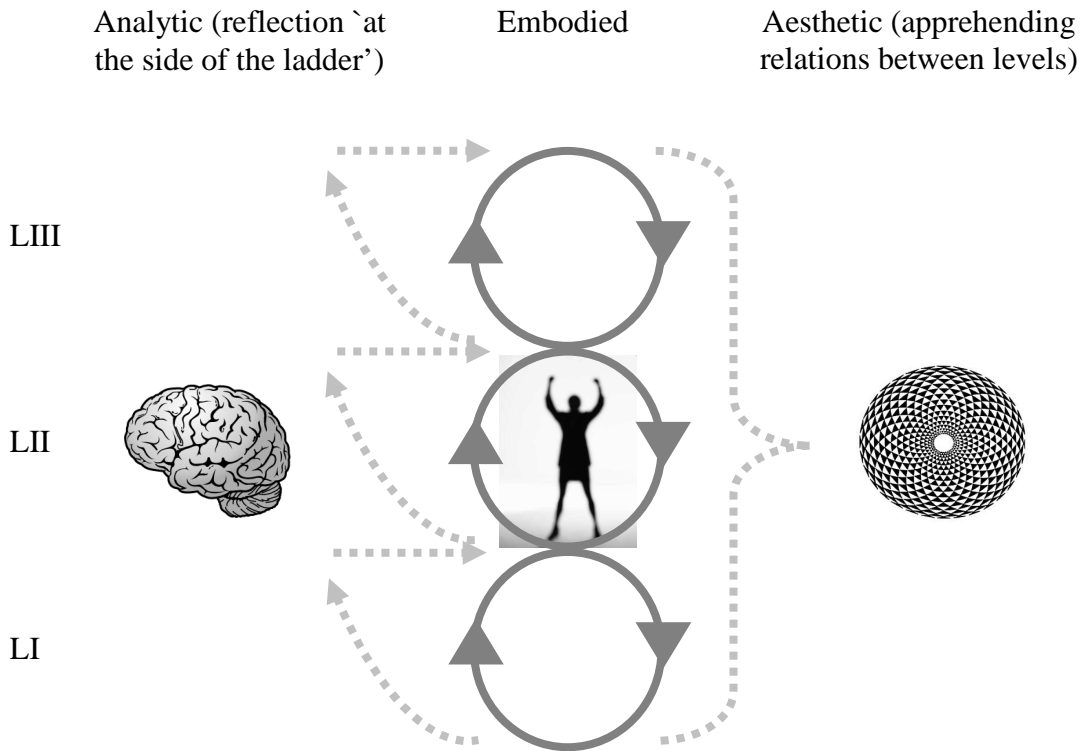
Bateson reinforces the importance of aesthetic understanding, he saw it as enabling us to move beyond conscious awareness, in his writings the aesthetic and the sacred became closely linked as can be seen in third order learning in particular.

“One of Bateson’s most penetrating insights is that when we are actively engaged with *any* element of beauty we are able to reaccess much of the systemic wisdom that our total reliance on conscious thought and intention has overlaid and largely sealed off from us.” (Charlton, 2003:226)

This suggests that context may be best thought of in an aesthetic rather than analytical way, as (for example) ‘story’. Recent work in the field of consciousness studies (Nunn, 2005) proposes the metaphor of ‘man as story’, which echoes Bateson’s own interest in story (Bateson 1979). ‘Stories’ are seen by Nunn as multiple, complex, interacting, competing and fluid patterns of meaning, including personal biography, local situational meanings, cultural scripts, and mythic archetypes.

Based on the above, Tosey (2006) offers a visual representation of Bateson’s theory (figure 1) that reflects these three modes - embodied learning that simultaneously involves multiple levels, reflective processing that is ‘at the side of the ladder’, and the aesthetic mode that can unconsciously recognise the pattern of relationships between levels.

Figure 1: A representation of Bateson’s theory showing embodied, analytic and aesthetic modes



3.2 Case Study

“Come in. Out of the glare. Let your eyes adjust to the partial light inside...”

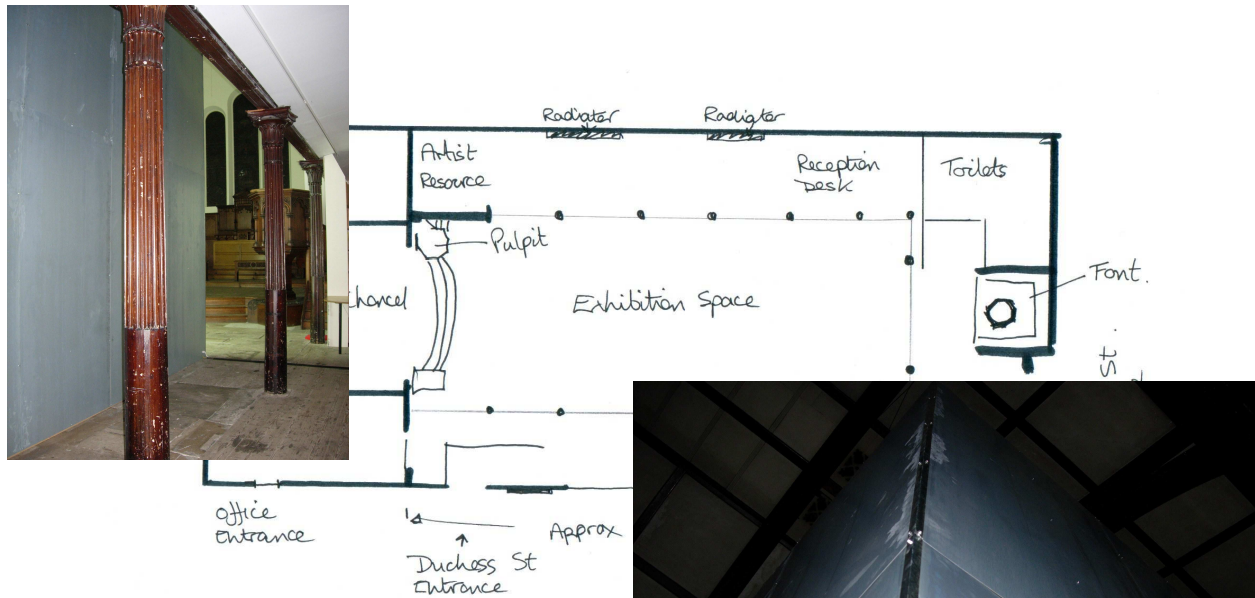
These are the opening lines of a press release for an exhibition at Constructa³, a contemporary art gallery based in the south of England. It was set up in a deconsecrated Church and describes itself as:

“A place where artists come to make new work.”

When Constructa was first opened in 1996 by a group of artists it was regarded as avant garde, some ten years later it is grappling to understand what it has become and where it goes next. It has prided itself on supporting artists who are keen to experiment, be adventurous and push the boundaries of their work – perhaps by changing scale, method or materials – a deliberate change of context. Using the ‘Kevin Carter’ exhibition as a starting point this paper explores the nature of organisational learning at Constructa. The case study data has been gathered through participant observation over eighteen months, as well as a series of semi-structured interviews and document review.

³ A pseudonym to respect confidentiality

Figure 2: Constructa Floor Plan and 'The Box'⁴



Sitting in the gallery space it is clear that the heart of the building is dedicated to the arts programme and its associated activities. The work across the years has ranged from textiles fine as spider's webs to a meadow of wild flowers. Audiences can move through, interact, touch and smell the works. A central aim of the space is to bring people in direct contact with the artist and their work – an aesthetic experience.

Constructa has a core team of eleven, all of whom are part-time. Most of the staff are also practising artists, one of the early values of the organisation was to be 'artist-led'. In 2006/7 it had a turnover of £371,000 and received £200,000 in funding from the local authority, Arts Council England (the state funding agency for the arts) and the European Union. Any other income is generated from education activities, publications and venue hire, which sometimes sit at odds with the artistic drive of the gallery. It grew out of a pragmatic need for a number of artists to find a space, and for the local authority to find a purpose for a deconsecrated church. It was unsuitable for artists' studios as such it became an experimental space for exhibitions.

Constructa is part of a changing sector, issues of technology, personalisation and transformation are being hotly debated, as 'now the term art ... Has become an active space rather than one of passive observation. Therefore the institutions to foster it have to be part-community centre, part-laboratory, and part-academy, with less need for the established showroom function' (Doherty, 2004).

⁴ Floor plan taken from field notebook plus fieldwork images

3.2.1 Embodied



As you walk into the space, the features of the church are still clearly visible; yet in its centre sits a huge galvanised steel box. Inside the box you sit on a church pew and the lights are dimmed. **Flash!** The image burns the screen. It takes a while for startled eyes to adjust. Into focus emerges a small African child, emaciated and curled in the dust. Less than a metre away stands a statuesque vulture. This is the only image in a text based installation that tells of the short, troubled life of Kevin Carter. His

beginnings, his life as a photojournalist and his ultimate suicide brought on by the scenes he witnessed, captured and distributed. This is a nerve jangling, skin rippling, emotion wrenching experience. It is in your body before your thoughts form.

Imagine that you are standing there, before the exhibition opens, spanner in hand, one of the team that is being rushed in to help with the construction of the box. There is a plan to follow but no-one knows what it is except the artist. You are running out of time. It takes far longer than anticipated. The sheer physical labour of creating the enormous galvanised steel box in which the work is to be housed is exhausting.



“Exhaustion is a great stimulus for embodied knowing, but you realise this best later on as you start to reflect upon it all. Not only is there movement back and forth within the ceremony. There is also movement back and forth between doing and reflecting.” (Rose, 2005)

One of the Gallery Directors talked about a lack of time for reflection. Staff seemed unwilling to discuss the event – unable, apparently, to move into conscious reflection. It was a visceral, emotional experience. This is an international artist they have not worked with before and the relationship is often mediated by a third party. The staff describe how they tried to explain their ethos to the artist, but it was only the Chair and Vice-Chair who succeed in sharing some of the culture at the end of the week, by just ‘chatting’ at the exhibition’s opening night – ‘we want people to have a learning experience, we want people to grow’(Chair, female).

The story of the exhibition mirrors the process the organisation has been through in the last ten years. It is a story of winning through against the odds, of delivering in spite of a lack of resources.

It is a story of inspiration and learning to innovate, to overcome the challenges. This is not the place to work if you cannot think on your feet, act on your own initiative, hold your nerve and commit yourself completely.

3.2.2 Aesthetic

“Knowledge is gathered in a particular organizational context by breathing its air and atmosphere, smelling its odours, appreciating its beauty and enjoying the stories told. It is also gathered by being repelled by its ugliness, upset by tragedy, amused by the grotesque.” (Strati & Guillet de Montoux, 2002: 757)

Aesthetics links to learning in that it ‘derives from the knowledge-creating faculties of all the human senses’. (Strati, 2000) That is not to confuse aesthetics with art. The etymology of art is in the ancient Greek being ‘techne’, suggesting the transformation of raw materials with ability and intelligence, whereas aesthetics is concerned with knowing on the basis of sensible perceptions. The Chambers Dictionary defines ‘aesthetic’ as relating to perception by the senses and the Greek verb ‘aisthanomai’ denotes the stimulation of abilities related to feeling (Strati, 2000).

In an interview with one of the Co-Directors, he talked about the aesthetic qualities associated with the Kevin Carter exhibition. On the one hand the team recognised it as a great achievement, a coup for the gallery to host an international artist of significant standing. Yet the experience was almost too much to bear, it had become undiscussable.

“The Kevin Carter piece this year

*Was a magnificent piece
That everyone loved*

It’s difficult to discuss it

*With anyone who worked on the project
Or in the office*

*Because the process was hard
In making it*

It left a bad taste in people’s mouths

*People don’t want to talk
about it*

or can’t

Appreciate the value of it

That’s a real shame.” (Co-Director, male)

The exhibition combines issues of beauty, ugliness, the sacred and the tragic. For Bateson grace and aesthetics were intimately linked, grace offered the possibility of the integration of the conscious and the unconscious, he was fond of the ‘famous words of Pascal: for grace to be achieved, ‘the reasons of the heart must be integrated with the reasons of the reason’.’ (Charlton, 2003: 169)

The emotional impact of 'Kevin Carter' resonates with the plight of the organisation. The exhibition's story seems to mirror the process the organisation has been through; it is a story of winning through against the odds, of delivering in spite of a lack of resources; of inspiration and learning to innovate, to overcome the challenges.

The team now question the return on the emotional and physical effort, the fact that it left a 'bad taste' and did not go according to plan in the early stages. This links to their earlier fight for survival and questions from both the organisation and its funders about whether it should survive at any cost, 'these challenges as they are registered emotionally, have to do not only with questions of viability – whether or not the organization will survive – but equally with the cost of viability – what will and what must be risked in the cause of survival.' (Armstrong, 2005: 107)

3.2.3 Analytic

This is the mode which supports reflection on the levels of learning (see also appendix 1), 'at the side of the ladder'.

Learning 0

The gallery regularly produces a programme of exhibitions, for the past ten years they have followed a similar format and approach even if each exhibition differs in terms of content. A clear project management handbook outlined the steps to be followed. Past routines and behaviours were mobilised. A number of 'unwritten rules' (Scott-Morgan, 1994) manifest themselves, they both contain and exaggerate the pressure.

Rules about quality, taking responsibility, delivering on time, giving all your effort, respecting the artist and above all 'the show must go on.' One of the Co-Director's talked of not having the time to reflect on projects, it was enough to rely on their automatic responses each time. That is not to say this level of learning is inferior, their behaviour in relation to bringing the exhibition in on time and budget was highly proficient.

Learning I

Learning I involves a change in behaviour albeit within the familiar frame of producing an exhibition. Late decisions on funding and the challenges of working long distance with an international (South American) artist meant that some of their automatic responses would not suffice. Relationship with the artist was mediated by a third party, as 'interpreter', a challenge for a gallery which is used to a very close relationship with its artists. The tight timescales meant that the existing procedures and planning would not suffice, new approaches were tried which included calling on an informal support network to bring in extra help at the last minute.

Learning II

Learning II builds on Learning I and denotes a change of pattern. The work with an unfamiliar artist created a new relational reality. For audiences it also punctuated the familiar context of the gallery. Most of the experience took place in a galvanized steel room in the centre of the gallery. As a result of the anxiety of pulling the show together staff found it very difficult to talk about the exhibition and reflect on its wider impact.

They learnt how the organisation deals with anxiety, emotional containment, the container became too tight for growth. There was also a need for the artist to learn a new context or frame:

“...and L came up to me and just grabbed my arm (gestures the gripping of her arm) and said THANK you SO much for that. For what?

Because I thought we were just chatting to the artist and his technician, and she said we, this, this week, for two weeks we have been trying to make them understand what Constructa is about, err, that this isn't a theatre space, it's not the Whitechapel it is a public space where we want people to BE and that is our ethos, we want them to engage and we want them to have a learning experience and we want people to grow as a result of seeing that extraordinary piece and what you and N said has said it all. Now we didn't know we were saying it all, we were simply talking about what Constructa meant to us.” (Chair, female)

Learning III

A number of people, the researcher included, found the work profoundly moving both physically and emotionally. No evidence was found of level III learning in the organisation. As the other levels illustrate, learning was still happening just not at a paradigmatic level.

4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

While emotions and latterly aesthetics are now recognised as part of the field of organisation studies there is a tendency, with a few exceptions (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001; Gibb, 2004; Strati & Guillet de Montoux, 2002; Tosey, 2006; Vince, 2002), to treat both areas as domains that are independent of each other with little relevance to learning. The Constructa case study hopefully illustrates some of the complexities of organisational learning and that a focus on cognition (the analytic) alone ignores the knowledge creating faculties of the senses and the emotions.

As has been observed through the case study learning is not purely a matter of cognitive insight and reflection, ‘The richness of human knowledge and understanding is far deeper than the set of knowledge we can produce a symbolic account of. As Polanyi (1967) puts it, “we know more that we can tell”.’ (Klemmer, Hartmann, & Takayama, 2006)

It used to be that the senses were primary. A person knew something by ‘being deeply and intimately connected to it, a knowing that was somatic and emotional.’ (Clark, 2001: 84). Following the Scientific Revolution, reason displaced somatic connections. The cognitive has since been regarded as the primary way of knowing. However, as Polanyi (1969) and Lakoff and Johnson (1999) have argued, knowledge begins in the body; to make sense of the world we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body, and vice versa.

At Level III the aesthetic notion of the sacred becomes particularly important and Bateson warns against even trying to describe it. Any experience at Level III is likely to be more than intellectual, particularly as it relates to transformation of identity.

“Bateson’s levels appear to involve *enacted and embodied change in relation to contexts* whereas Argyris and Schon emphasise *intentional inquiry into contexts* and their ‘governing variables’, plus *conscious agency* in changing those variables.” (Tosey, 2006: 10)

Bateson’s model is an interpretative framework, not a complete theory. In relation to Constructa it has been used to explore some of the frames, moving outside of intentional action to attend to the emotional and aesthetic patterns of organisational learning, *that which they could not describe*. This is a resource stretched, mission-led organisation and as such has little access to ‘formal’ training, HRD expertise or the ability to implement the kinds of systems and structures promoted by the Learning Organisation literature. In order to consider such a case what was needed was a framework which could take account of its various contexts.

This has been an attempt to develop a systemic understanding of organisational learning that addresses a concern with the nature of the ‘learning’ in organisational learning. It also acknowledges the fact that learning can be beneficial and problematic as well as recognising the role of communication, both conscious and unconscious, ‘contained’ and ‘container’.

The case study illustrates that organisational learning takes place across recursive levels. In the case of Constructa it includes levels 0 to II, which suggests that organisational learning has different characteristics to an individual’s acquisition of skills and knowledge. An important feature of the framework is that it is recursive, the levels are nested, like ‘Russian Dolls’. (Tosey, 2006) Finally, and possibly of most importance is the focus on context, which concentrates attention on the social and the communicative.

Appendix 1: Levels of Learning and the Constructa Case Study

Level/Mode	Analytic	Embodied	Aesthetic
<p>III <i>Paradigm Shift</i></p>	<p>No direct evidence from the case study data of LIII</p>	<p>(Possibly for some individuals, the researcher included – her past connections to Africa) the exhibit shocks and disrupts habituated assumptions, raises consciousness.</p> <p>‘I agreed to see it again, and it was <u>incredibly</u> moving and we came out of it and I’m not good when something moving has happened, believe it or not, in snapping back into chat mode does rather knock me out.’ (Chair)</p>	<p>The exhibition and its construction mirroring the organisation.</p>
<p>II <i>Emergent pattern; reframing situation or context</i></p>	<p>A new relational reality was created (Constructa plus international artist).</p> <p>Staff found it hard to discuss, learnt emotional containment:</p>	<p>‘...and L came up to me and just grabbed my arm (gestures the gripping of her arm) and said THANK you SO much for that. For what? Because I thought we were just chatting to the artist and his technician, and she said we, this, this week, for two weeks we have been trying to make them <u>understand</u> what Constructa is about, err, that this isn’t a theatre space, it’s <u>not</u> the Whitechapel it is a public space where we want people to BE and that is our ethos, we want them to engage and we want them to have a learning experience and we want people to grow as a result of seeing that extraordinary piece and what you and N said has said it all. Now we didn’t know we were saying it all, we were simply talking about what Constructa meant to us.’ (Chair)</p> <p>‘AJ piece this year which was a, you know a magnificent piece of work that everybody <u>loved</u>, everyone got a lot out of, but uhm, it’s difficult to</p>	<p>Unknowing: ‘We didn’t know the significance of the box, he (the artist) wouldn’t tell us.’ (Co Director).</p> <p>A collective moment – everyone jumps when the flash happens and the image of the child emerges. Responding to uncomfortable sensory knowledge. Issues of representation, the role of the media, life and death. An experience of something sacred; horror, beauty, tragedy, ugliness. A shared, archetypal experience of profound tragedy.</p> <p>‘We’re, we’re, we’re keepers of the flame and we like different shaped</p>

Level/Mode	Analytic	Embodied	Aesthetic
	<p>Navigating the exhibit and its setting; challenge expected responses to a 'gallery'. A changed environment in which to experience the world afresh.</p>	<p>discuss it with anyone who worked on the project or anyone in the office because the process of, was hard, in making it and it left a bad taste in people's mouths and people don't want to talk about it or can't appreciate the value of it because of that.' (Co-Director)</p> <p>`So being in the presence of an installation or an exhibition or an event is an opportunity for a person to grow (.) intellectually, emotionally, spiritually almost certainly not physically (laughs) otherwise we'd all be a lot taller. uh, uh, they see art as vital to the human experience, simply that, so by creating art for the public to experience in a space that is free to enter they feel they are creating opportunities for people to grow' (Chair)</p>	<p>flame holders and we like other people to put colours in the flame uhm but I think that's what we are. I think we're keepers of the flame and we need to find a way to finance it.' (Chair)</p>
<p>I <i>New operational knowledge</i></p>	<p>Drawing the team together. Using networks and finding emergency help to deal with pressure to get the funding and have it done on time.</p> <p>Uniqueness of construction</p> <p>Communicating with an International artist for whom English is a second language.</p>	<p>...the funding was late, it took much longer to construct than we expected, we had to get a load of volunteers and people worked three days solid. M was exhausted..." Project Manager</p> <p>. `We had the skills but we had never done this before';</p> <p>`...extraordinarily high production values, genuinely collaborative, very demanding of self and of artists, not demanding of potential backers, investors, sponsors and finally funders.' (Chair)</p>	
<p>0 <i>Unchanged response</i></p>	<p>Following routines to carry out the project plan..</p>	<p>Physical fabrication. Bolting the steel together and making the box; `We had used, spanners, nuts and bolts before.'</p>	

Level/Mode	Analytic	Embodied	Aesthetic
	<p>The 'unwritten rules'. Getting the look and feel right. – following the artist's instruction.</p> <p>No time to reflect</p>	<p>'it's actually a very strange process going from one exhibition to the next that uhm, there's never time to really sit down and appreciate what, what you've done' (Co-Director). 'But I, you know in a way its another symptom of being over stretched, that you know, people wouldn't thank me for setting up another meeting once a month to talk about, (.) stuff like that even though people thought it was valuable, there's just not the time to do it.' (Co-Director)</p>	

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