

DRAMA-BASED INTERVENTIONS WITHIN CORPORATE MILIEU: CASES OF TWO ORGANISATIONS IN INDIA

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Abstract Drama-based trainings are increasingly finding favour with corporate India in diverse areas. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the usage of such drama-based interventions and the resultant impact on the employees through cases of two organisations in India for inducing awareness and understanding of the brand proposition amongst employees in one case, and for educating them on safety protocols, in the other. Bringing about desired behavioural change or understanding is not easy if interventions are too theoretical or not experiential. Out-of-the-box thinking propels organisations to go beyond the tried and tested methods to experiment with novel ways of training employees. The dynamic nature of drama encourages participation of the audience directly, as in forum or interactive theatre, or indirectly, through observation, and helps the target audience absorb learnings through experience. By detailing two cases of drama-based interventions being used in varied areas of specialisation and how its usage has tremendous potential to achieve the learning outcomes without making the process tedious for participants, this paper demonstrates the importance of creating an impact through a novel and alternate mode of training as one through drama.

Keywords: Drama-based Training, Learning & Development, Training, Theatre-based Training

JEL Classification: D83, M53, Z11

INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Theatre for Youth in 1978 defined creative drama as “improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-centered in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact and reflect upon human experience” (Davis & Behm, 1978). The essence of drama can be summed up as creative. One of the earliest formal usage of drama-based intervention in its nascent form was by Jacob Moreno, the founder of psychodrama, who used dramatic rendering for showing behavioural changes in people. He also expanded its scope to impart business training on employee relations. Usage of drama-based interpolations escalated hence forth especially during the 1960s & 1970s St George J., Schwager S., Canavan F. (1999).

A review of literature through leading databases as Scopus, Ebsco, Jstor, Google Scholar and Google search shows research on drama-based interventions expanding its scope

and range from the field of education to clinical experiments, and now swiftly moving to the corporate milieu in greater numbers than ever. There are numerous references to drama-based interventions in various disciplines, viz. education (Joronen, Håkämies, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2011; Greenfader, & Brouillette, 2013); medical education and healthcare (Koponen, Pyörälä, & Isotalus, 2014; Eisenberg, Rosenthal, & Schlusell, 2015); psychological experiments (Koch, Ostermann, Steinhage, Kende, Haller, & Chyle, 2015; Sikorski, 2015); law (Wilkes, 2008)); research (Valle & Connor, 2012; Greenwood, 2012), to corporate training (Koponen, & Julkunen, 2015; Yavuzer, 2012), increasingly finding space and enriching the research databases.

United States and United Kingdom dominate as far as publications on drama-based training or theatre or arts based trainings and/or interventions are concerned as is visible in Table 1 through the graph depicting publication wise leading countries in the said area. Australia, Finland, and Turkey

come next. The number of publications per country beyond South Korea, the last on this list, is miniscule and hence was not shown in the graph.

Table 1: Country Wise Publications on Areas Related to Drama-based Training

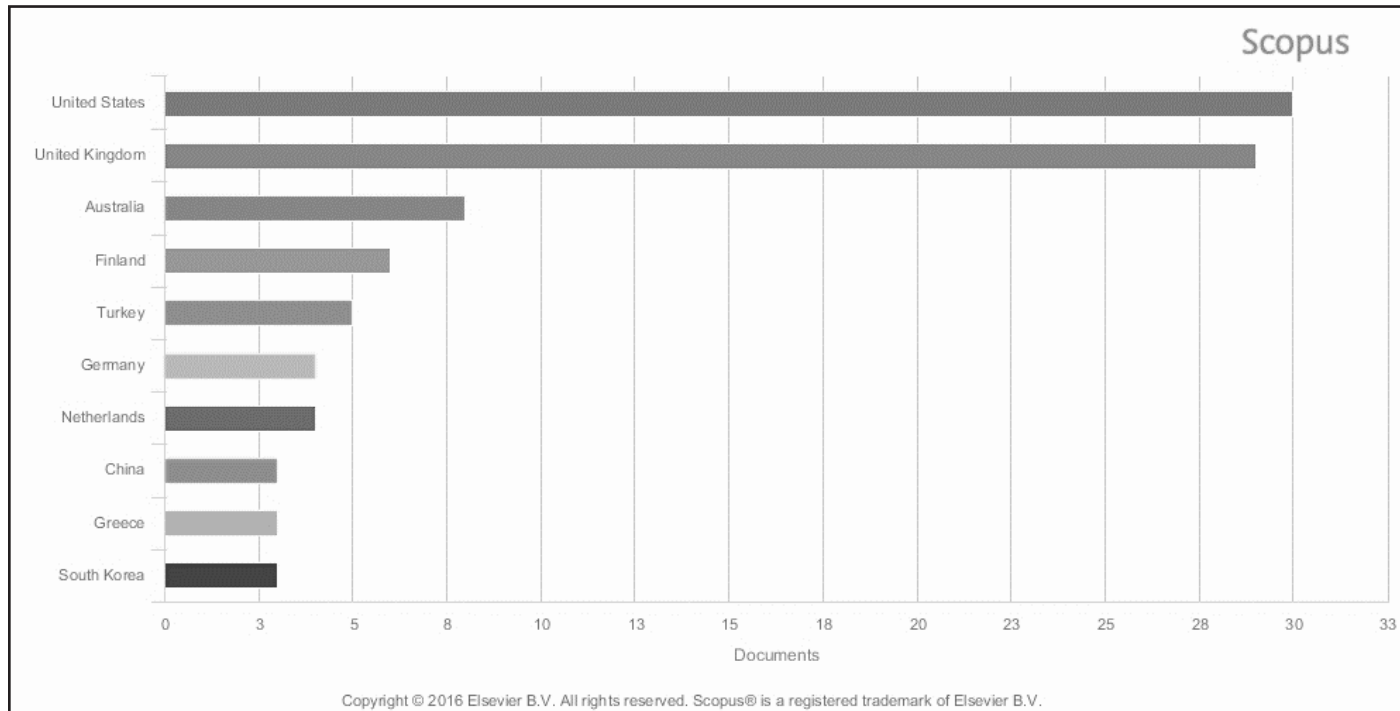
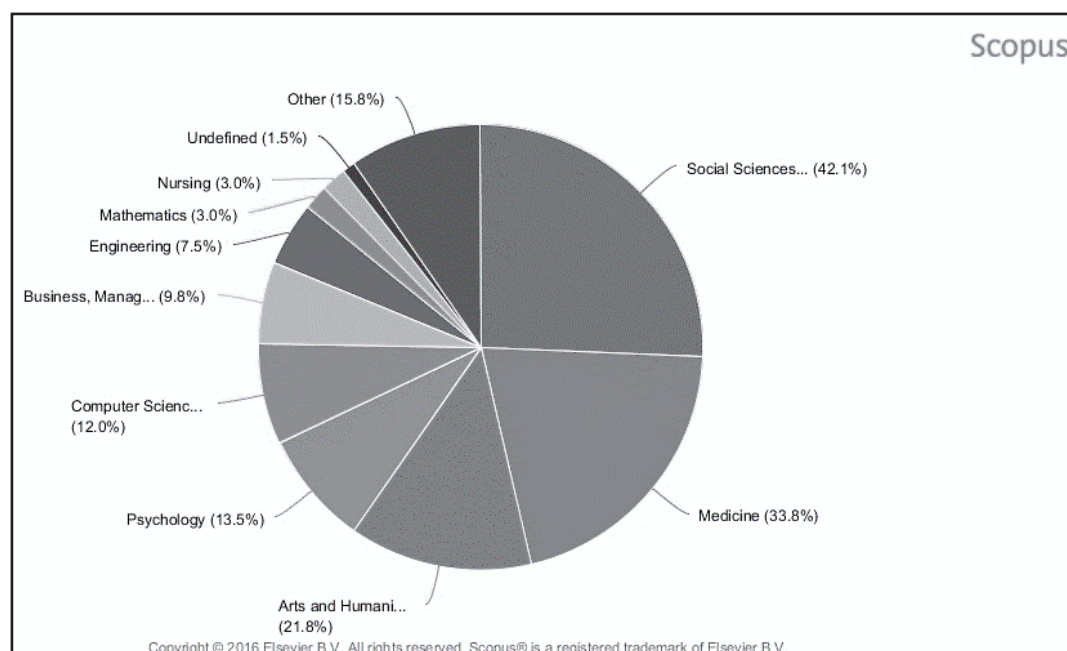


Table 2 shows the disciplines in which drama is being used as a tool for training. It can be gauged from the following pie chart generated with respect to the papers, articles or books written on the said area. Social sciences and medicine top the list. A random google search on drama-based training

generates multiple results of companies specialising in this genre and increasingly getting involved in conducting training programmes for various organisations in diverse areas such as communication, conflict handling, change management, gender sensitisation and others.

Table 2: Disciplines in which Drama/theater based Interventions are being used as a Tool for Training



In India, learning & development industry is estimated to be worth over US\$ 3.5 billion (Kapur & Karthik, 2012) and is registering strong growth every year. Various alternate methods of training are being explored by organisations and that had led to more demand for experienced professionals in these areas. Over the years, theatre-based corporate trainings has evolved and a google search on companies specialising in this genre in India will result in numerous results ranging from team building to diversity training, training in legal implications and developing other diverse skillsets. Organisations like ITC, HAL, have already evolved their training methodologies for employees into drama-based programmes in some areas. This is testimony to the inevitable and growing need for evolving the existing learning and development methodologies. As Indian organisations expand, with expansion arises the requisite for investing in training and development programmes as enablers for employees to compete on a global platform in an increasingly competitive business environment and knowledge driven economy. The need for introduction of novel and effective learning and development interventions accelerates at every step of a business life cycle.

Two cases of organisations in India using drama-based interventions throw more light on how drama-based interventions have been used for achieving learning objectives. The cases have been written post discussion with the managers involved in initiating and introducing drama-based interventions in these organisations. Feedback was positive in both the organisations with employees showing greater enthusiasm towards learning through drama-based interventions vis-a-vis classroom sessions for the stated topics.

CASE 1: ASSESSING THE GAP BETWEEN THE EXISTING & DESIRED CULTURE AT STRATA CAPITAL FOR BUILDING BRAND PROPOSITION AND BRIDGING IT THROUGH DRAMA-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Strata Capital registered with the Reserve Bank of India as a systemically important Non-Banking Financial Services (NBFC) company and is the parent group's leading financial services venture, incepted in 2007. Being a late entrant in the sector aggressively dominated by entrenched players, Strata Capital faced the challenge of creating a unique identity for itself in the industry. Through initial market research and on the basis of surveys conducted and anecdotes reported in the media, there appeared to be an erosion of trust in the financial sector as a whole, and banking in particular. Interactions with customers revealed customer dissatisfaction with some of the big players were involved in aggressive collection mechanisms, misbehaviour with customers and mis-selling of certain complex products to retail clients who may not

have needed or understood the finer details. Looking at the available white spaces in the industry, the management of Strata Capital felt that company could potentially ride on the twin brand pillars of trust and credibility. These tenets were strongly associated with the parent group too.

With these insights in place, management decided to build a brand that would earn admiration and respect from all stakeholders. The aim was to combine genuine care with expertise to advise customers on the most suitable products for them rather than just selling for the sake of numbers and risking erosion of trust. Consequently, company's brand proposition was born. However, internalisation of the brand values was crucial to create the ability for employees to transfer the brand identity to brand reality for customers and relevant stakeholders

An all employee survey called the Strata Capital identity Survey was conducted to measure employee perception, awareness and comprehension of the brand proposition. It was to be repeated every quarter.

The survey was done online using e-mailers and Google-docs at the back end, intranet login page and the desktop medium for reinforcement of the message. Majority of the employees participated enthusiastically (n= 254).

It pointed out to a huge gap between employees' awareness and understanding of the brand proposition. Only 10% of the respondents agreed that they knew what needed to be done and the behaviours which needed to be demonstrated to become the financial services providers of choice for customers. 15% of the respondents felt that the brand proposition was unique and offered a good opportunity for Strata Capital to establish its mark in the already cluttered BFSI sector.

70% of employees expressed lack of awareness on how to live the brand during moments of truth with customers. Only 23% of the respondents felt that the mediums of communication used to cascade the brand proposition internally were effective to the extent of fostering the desired behavioural changes. Majority of the respondents were looking for more innovative approach other than the regular e-mailers, posters, leadership messages and newsletters. Employees felt that these mediums were passive and did not engage them appropriately around the brand promise.

The case was clear. Company needed to innovate. It came up with an interactive medium for storytelling and behavioural change after some brainstorming.

The Birth of StageOn - the Strata Capital Theatre Group

StageOn was positioned as a unique communication initiative that drew its power from the act of theatre and

storytelling. StageOn –the Strata Capital employee theatre group planned to stage in-house performances for the purpose of demystifying complex organisational issues, infotainment and building peer-to-peer collaboration. Using sophisticated improvisational skills of a well-known professional stage personality, auditions were held to screen potential employees who could act. Strata Capital already had an extensive pan-India footprint and Mumbai office accounted for about 25% of the total employee base. The screening process received an overwhelming response at Mumbai branch. Finally, a group of 12 actors and actresses was formed to represent StageOn which was slated to debut in the company's Annual Day post three months after the idea was conceived. Extensive communication was sent out to create excitement and buzz across the company. The news was well received as one could hear the corridor conversations indicating a growing curiosity for StageOn. Rehearsals commenced soon after.

Setting the Stage - Framing Techniques

Taking cues from the employees' survey, frames were developed around specific instances which employees might face during certain tricky moments of truth. Thereafter, using intuitive scripting and storytelling, the frame was demystified with the desired behaviour a Strata Capital employee is expected to exude during those moments. Some of the frames used, for instance, were selling to a customer during end of the month when pressure of meeting targets was at its peak; taking time to explain the finer prints to customers; pacifying an irate customer; caring for colleagues; caring for the society and so on.

The interactions between actors (employees) on stage offered solutions to the dilemmas captured in the frames. A *sutradhar* or host character was used who was portrayed as an anti-thesis of an ideal Strata Capital Employee, always engaged in wrong doing. The remaining actors then demonstrated the right or desired behaviour for that particular frame.

A feedback form was given out to the audience at the end of the show to gauge the level of performance of the actors and the extent to which the actors were able to engage participants, intellectually and emotionally, on the complex aspect of Brand promise. The feedback was extremely encouraging and positive, and performances were appreciated by everyone, including senior management team members from the parent company.

The subsequent Strata Capital identity survey indicated a positive shift in employee perception, awareness and comprehension of the Brand identity. Also, employees felt that StageOn played a pivotal role in helping them see through the dilemmas they faced every day during the moments of truth with customers and other important stakeholders.

CASE 2: USING DRAMA-BASED INTERVENTIONS TO GET CLOSER TO THE MILESTONE OF ZERO INJURIES AT SYSIK, INDIA

Sysik is an engineering company with businesses in tooling, materials technology, mining and construction. The lost time injury frequency rate (LTIFR) is a metric that forms the cornerstone of many businesses' safety reporting. It is frequently listed as a key performance indicator (KPI) and indicates the relationship between the hours worked and the number of lost time injuries (LTI). A "frequency rate" is used to ensure that different businesses can be compared on equal terms. In this instance, the frequency rate is *per million hours*. Finally, most LTIFRs are calculated over a 12-month period. This has the effect of "averaging" out any spikes or dips in either the hours or LTIs. Thus, the full calculation of the LTIFR is as follows:

(Avg.) LTIFR = No. LTIs p.a. / Hours p.a. x 1,000,000.

The above calculation tells us the number of serious injuries expected for any given million hours worked.

A Step Closer to Zero Injuries

Given the challenges and risks facing the industries in which Sysik operates (mining, roads, ports, oil rigs, automobile, and aviation manufacturing facilities) maintaining a safe work environment had always been a top priority. To emphasize company's strong focus in this area, it established a "Zero Harm" vision and aimed to achieve this vision through globalisation and localisation. In other words, company strove to think globally and act locally. This involved finding ways to coordinate and standardize various activities more efficiently between the business areas as well as driving innovations. Safety activities were integrated into all areas of the group. To continue on the path to success, top management felt that it was important to establish active and visible leadership, a knowledge-sharing corporate culture, strong communication, and consistent accountability.

Campaigns

The prime focus of company's health and safety strategy was on preventative measures and various activities to change the corporate culture. Several campaigns were carried out mainly to create awareness towards reducing the number of crush injuries in production operations. These campaigns, collectively referred to as the "Hands and Fingers" campaign, helped to improve awareness and consequently reduce the injury frequency rate. At Sysik Mining, an extensive training

programme known as “Speaking Safety” was initiated for sales personnel of mining equipment. Based on the Group’s strong safety culture, this programme helped sales personnel to feel more comfortable communicating about products’ safety solutions to customers and regard this as a sales advantage.

At Sysik India

Despite a significant improvement in the reported lost time injury frequency rate (LTIFR), Sysik India’s safety norms were, in some instances, a matter of concern and scrutiny. In certain quarters, breach of safety protocols was reported. Several campaigns were introduced to increase employee awareness in the area. The goal was to create an industry-leading safety culture and pass this culture on to customers and suppliers. However, the instances of various safety lapses indicated that a lot more needed to be done to fully ingrain safety culture in the organisation.

Using Theatre to Educate Employees about Safeguarding Themselves and the Work Environment

At Sysik India, when the topic of drama-based safety campaign was taken up in one of the Union meetings, it immediately gathered full support of the union members and blue-collared workers. One of the senior members, with a good record of stage performance agreed to be the main anchor for this initiative.

Auditions were held and a group of 20 enthusiastic actors was shortlisted to be the part of the theatre group. The performance was to debut on the World Safety Day.

Setting the Stage

Sysik followed a robust safety protocol and the procedures were well documented in a safety manual. However, a random dipstick indicated that employees were not fully aware of the protocols and procedures. Taking cues from the employees’ survey, frames were developed around specific safety areas. Scripting and storytelling followed. Each frame consisted of one actor breaching the safety protocol and the remaining actors educating him on the desired behaviour the employee should demonstrate to safeguard himself/herself.

The interactions between the actors on stage offered solutions to the safety dilemmas captured in the frames. As a result of this intervention, Sysik India reported an improvement in its LTIFR records & it is now being considered to be adopted as a best practice for global replication by Sysik’s other business units.

CONCLUSION

Drama-based interventions are increasingly being used in organisations and have found takers in India as well. There are many professional players in this arena helping organisations achieve desired objectives of learning and behavioural change. The uniqueness of cases discussed above lies in the fact that in both, employees performed their theatrical roles with élan minus any aid of a professional theatre group. The performance was well appreciated by the target audience comprising of other employees. Such interventions in these cases acted as an excellent tool for employee engagement. Greater understanding and assimilation of such initiatives can create a win-win situation for trainers as well as the learners by ensuring engagement of both the parties. It has tremendous potential to facilitate learning through entertainment by taking it beyond lecture mode into the realm of interaction and participation. This could find a crucial implication especially for HRD managers or L&D professionals in organisations.

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