CultureCase

Using dance to bring about innovation

This research was conducted by **Nina Bosic Yams** at **Mälardalen University, Sweden**

Summary

This paper describes an attempt to inculcate innovative thinking and innovative practices through the use of contemporary dance and choreography. The study took place within the bureaucracy of a Swedish municipality in 2014-15. At the core of the programme was two years of ‘practice-based training for 22 innovation leaders’ from different parts of the organisation. The data for the paper comes from 67 ‘personal reflection stories written by participants after each of the six workshops’. It revealed that ‘dance-based methods enabled participants to develop different innovative skills and strengthened their innovative competence’. In particular the use of ‘body, movement, space and time in new ways in everyday work’ enabled people ‘to feel better, develop their personal innovative practice and create conditions they need to be innovative’.

The municipality where the programme took place was suffering a combination of budget cuts and the challenge of local unemployment, immigration, debt and housing

The 22 ‘innovation leaders’ were drawn from administrative and specialist policy teams within the bureaucracy. Most of them were women aged over 40 with more than eight years experience inside the organisation. The main phase of activity combined ‘theory and tools from innovation management with dance-based methods, following principles from the choreographic model of creative processes’.

The training was designed to inculcate the five innovation competencies

The participants really progressed their abilities in Questioning, Observing, and Experimenting and made less progress with Networking and Associational Thinking. A key factor was the need for ‘continuous cycles of experimenting and then reflecting on the new learning experiences over a longer period of time’, as was becoming ‘more aware and experimental about using body, movement, physical space, and timing’ in everyday work routines. ‘Working with the body also increased participants´ awareness of their own needs, feelings, and conditions they needed to become more innovative’.

Keywords

organisational change **innovation** **Sweden** **dance**

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