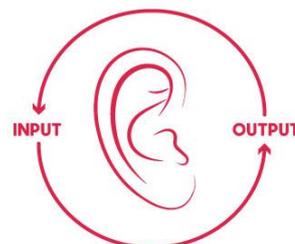


The Quality of Qualitative Listening

A brief reflection on the qualities of open and concentrated listening in different aspects of working with performing arts.

The focus on listening as a pathway to knowledge is often described within the fields of psychology, sociology, coaching, and anthropology e.g.. In this post we want to also high light these qualities from a business development perspective (listening as a tool for creativity and innovation), and from a general epistemological point of view, where listening is a way of learning about the world and about your own being in the world. See selected references with these perspectives below.^{i, ii}



In our [report #8 on Open rehearsals](#) we reflect on the qualities of a theatre being courageous and vulnerable as they invite audiences to watch the imperfect work in progress at open rehearsals. We describe how this rehearsal space contains different qualities. It not only gives the audience an exceptional experience, it also helps to establish an extraordinary relation between the players and this privileged audience. – A relation, which may generate knowledge about the audience, the production, etc.

There are thus several different aspects, which make this open rehearsal space special. One of them being the vulnerability of the director and the players and the other one is the open and concentrated *listening* happening on different levels. The players have to listen to each other in order to connect with each other on stage, they listen to the director, and they listen to the (nonverbal) reaction coming from the audience during rehearsals and potentially also during the after talk. This listening practice is a central part of the creative process. It is essential in order for the players to learn what is working and what adjustments are needed. Moreover, this listening practice can also be relevant in other departments of the organisation.

The project A Suitcase of Methods gives us a unique possibility of spending time collecting and investigating the personal stories and experiences of the audiences in order to learn more about them and about what The Royal Danish Theatre in essence gives them with our productions. We have mentioned this before. However, this qualitative perspective also means a particular approach to the overall work with performance art and work processes in general. Talking to audiences and analysing and reflecting on their experience entails an awareness of not only the audience but also a focus on ourselves as an organisationⁱⁱⁱ. It is a way of taking a step back, listening and considering what we are doing and how our work is working, so to speak. What we



have found is that when we take the time to break from the day-to-day operation tasks in order to listen and reflect on the reactions to our work, we create a space where problems and challenges are welcome, and where new ideas can emerge. In this context, the conclusions from A Suitcase of Methods' studies are less important. Instead, the continuous shifts between the explorative studies and the analysis of our experiences with these are central. The process of asking questions and listening thoroughly seems to be a way to ensure continuous development.

This approach not only characterises the work of A Suitcase of Methods. At the department of Programming, Sales and Strategic Analytics at The Royal Danish Theatre it is a focus point to ensure a continuous curiosity about the results of our work (for instance by initiating different types of studies) and to use these results to develop new ideas. This approach exists on both a micro level in the day-to-day work assignments and on a macro level in the long term planning of the direction of the organisation. The interesting paradox of this approach is that even though it is difficult to find the time to take this 'break' to listen to and analyse the work processes we are in the middle of, it might be exactly what is needed, in order to give way for innovation and creativity in our work. It is a perspective that we ourselves can further develop, particularly when it comes to exploiting the potential of switching between the operation tasks and the reflective and listening perspective in the different departments of the organisation.

ⁱ Brown, Brené (2011): "[The Power of Vulnerability](#)" TED Talk.

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ⁱⁱ For an artistic perspective on the epistemological aspects of listening confer the works of artist Jacob Kirkegaard, currently exhibited at Aros Museum and read about his perspective [here](#) in Kunsten.nu.

ⁱⁱⁱ In our work with audience conversations we work with the specific 'humble listening' approach coined by H.E. Schein. Read more about this approach in our [report #2 Walking, Talking, Drawing the Experienced Relevance of Performing Arts](#).

