Creative processes using the "Yes, and" principle by Susanne Schinko-Fischli

"Yes, and" creates a safe harbor.

Almost everyone is familiar with this situation. Someone has an unusual idea and it is met with negative comments along the lines of "yes, but ....". This is demotivating and the person will be careful in the future to not propose new, unconventional ideas.

In order to be creative, one needs access to his or her unconscious. And to have access to it, one needs to feel safe and have confidence that his or her own ideas are not devalued.

Having a **"safe haven"** is therefore the most important prerequisite to being able to work creatively in a team.

In improvisational theater there is the "yes, and" principle that was developed by the inventor of the Theatresports, Keith Johnstone. This means that an offer or proposal will be adopted with a "yes". Then with the "and", the improviser will add something new of his or her own.

"Yes, and" leads into an unknown future.

Accepting "offers" is the most important rule of improvisational theatre. Only in this way can shared stories develop and unfold on the stage. At the same time, this means getting involved with something unknown. And that is why it feels so much easier to say "yes, but" or "no" even though those responses are counter productive.

The "and" is essential. For the participants it leads into an unknown future. The participants not only accept the offer of another person, but with the "and" they get to contribute their own part to the history and thereby create something new.

These basic principles apply to any creative teamwork. Piece by piece, the participants can arrive at extraordinary, collaborative solutions together.

"Yes, and" - making mistakes goes with it.

Here is the thing about "mistakes". Basically, mistakes only exist when there is an unequivocal "right or wrong" in the picture, e.g. in known routines, standard procedures and accepted norms. However, when the future is being invented, and when people need to work as a team to arrive at something new, then mistakes do not or cannot really exist in the commonly accepted sense of the word... because it is not really possibly to know what is "right or wrong" when dealing with the unknown.

In the framework of improv theatre, there is a lot less stuff that would count as a mistake. And when such mistakes or errors do happen, the actors try to create something out of them. Not only does the group learn from each mistake, but something unexpected and new may arise from it as well. Therefore mistakes must also be accepted in improvisation theatre. Here is an example of improv theatre as it would unfold ideally on the stage:

Patient: "Ow, my leg hurts so much"

Doctor: "But I've already amputated your leg." (Does not accept the offer)

Patient: "Oh no, it must be a woodworm." (Says yes to the block)

Doctor: „Yes, so it is and it is contagious." (Now the actors are working together again).

The chair collapses.

Doctor: „My God, you have infected the furniture!"

"Yes, and" is essential for creative processes.

The "yes, and" principle is fundamental for innovation and creativity. It can be applied not only in a team setting but also individually when saying "yes, and" to one's own ideas.

Unfortunately, it is often only superficially applied even with the classic creative methods such as "brainstorming". Time and again teams do not build upon the ideas of others, rather each person brings a highly personal, preconceived idea into play and secretly hopes that it is "the best" one and will get selected and used further. As long as ideas are still associated with individuals and are not built upon the ideas of others, then no new joint ideas – that is, nothing new - will arise.

The social psychologist Sven F. Goergen noted in an experiment that 20 people thinking alone had up to 50% more, as well as more original, ideas than "teams" that used classic brainstorming and therefore operated with a hidden element of competition.

The executives must also say "Yes, and".

A positive leader picks up the ideas of others and allows the team to come to a joint or shared new idea or realization. Moreover, such a leader subsequently gives recognition to the team as opposed to an individual. At the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), for example, the names of all the participants - that is, contributors - of publications are listed in alphabetical order, no matter how big or small each of their contributions was.

This is an example of how the contribution of all those involved are recognized, thereby strengthening motivation and allowing genuine teamwork to develop. If something new is developed together as a team to solve a really tricky problem, then the solution that the team arrives at tends to be more creative and also a much better solution to addressing complex problems than would the efforts and thoughts of one person who is trying to come out ahead. Additionally, there is increased acceptance and involvement during the implementation for the team's solution.

In the end one must also be able to say no - idea generation and evaluation need to be separated.

Only **after** the creative process has finished, does the phase of analysis and selection begin. Of course, saying "no" becomes an option, as well as evaluating which new ideas and concepts are useful and feasible, and which are not.

Susanne Schinko-Fischli

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