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# Artistic interventions in organizations as intercultural relational spaces for identity development

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**Abstract:** Recognizing that identities are not static but instead forged in social interactions, this article explores how interplays of similarity and difference can stimulate identity development in organizations. Artistic interventions in organizations are conceived as opening spaces for interactions in which intercultural contention can stimulate identity development at the individual and organizational levels. The contribution draws on data generated from Web-based surveys of employees, managers, and artists who participated in artistic interventions in small and medium sized companies in Spain. Several tensions between their culturally distinct worlds emerge as drivers of a process in which the participants engage in identity development characterized by double-mirroring, coevolution, and resonance.

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## **Artistic interventions in organizations as intercultural relational spaces for identity-development**

Current research on identity emphasizes the dynamic and relational nature of identity-construction as a life-long process. “Identities are forged in and through relations. In consequence, they are not rooted or static, but mutable ongoing productions” (Massey, 2004: 5). As White (1992:4) points out, identity construction is constantly required in contexts characterized by change and uncertainty. The definition and redefinition of identity are stimulated by engaging with and comparing oneself with people from the groups to which one belongs as well as to groups to whom one does not belong (Walsh & Gordon, 2008: 48). This article explores what happens to identities in organizations when their members engage with people whose identity is based in a very different cultural context, namely the arts. It thereby seeks to connect the growing bodies of literature on social identity and art-based learning in organizations.

### **1. Theoretical background**

#### *Interplays of similarities and differences and identity development*

Studies in recent years have confirmed that “identities are defined and redefined as individuals interact and associated with others and therefore are always subject to change and development” (Walsh & Gordon 2008:48). Social interactions that are characterized by “interplays of similarity and difference” (Garcia & Hardy 2007:364) stimulate identity development, especially when they generate “contingencies and contentions” (White 1992:6) or, in Stark’s (2009) terminology, when there is a “sense of dissonance.”

By bringing together different sets of culturally-shaped values, expectations, and behaviors, intercultural situations offer opportunities for such “dissonant” social interactions (Friedman & Berthoin Antal, 2005). They are therefore particularly propitious for triggering identity development. Research on intercultural interactions shows that they create moments at which participants may become particularly aware of distinctive features of their identity, thereby offering possibilities for identity-work (Lee, 2006; Sussman, 2000). The exposure in intercultural exchanges to different ways of seeing, doing and being may stimulate people to affirm their perceived distinctive identity; alternatively, it may stimulate them to choose to

adjust their identity to include characteristics they discover in the interaction with the other culture (Garcia & Hardy, 2007:366; Maguire & Hardy, 2005:35; see also Adler, 2002).

To understand identity development in intercultural interactions in organizations it is useful to look at the connections between the individual and the collective levels. Individual learning in organizations can flow outward and influence aspects of collective identity as well. For example, members of an organization may reaffirm features of the organization's identity that they consider important and with which they identify, or they may perceive a need for change in the organizational identity as a result of their own identity development (Garcia & Hardy, 2007). More generally, employees are exposed to diverse demands to develop their work identities. For example with regard to increasing demands for creative and innovative agency in today's economic world, employees are likened to artists and are required to fully bring into work their subjectivity and emotional motivation – often to the dismay of individual organisational members (Biehl-Missal, 2013). It can hence be assumed that processes of identity construction in 21<sup>st</sup> century organisations that heavily rely on models such as the self-actualizing employee are a contested area that may benefit from interactive, artistic opportunities of negotiation.

Not only are the processes of forging and redefining individual and organizational identity interconnected. They are also both subject to external influences. The embeddedness of identity-development in organizations implies that changes in the socio-political or economic context of the organization are likely to filter through to affect individual identities (Billet, 2007; Garcia & Hardy, 2007). For example, when a company is under significant pressure from its market, its search for a new business model or for new segments to serve will most probably have consequences for its identity and for the identities of its employees. They will need to formulate different answers to such questions as “who am I? who are we? what distinguishes me/us from others?” than they have given heretofore.

#### *Artistic interventions in organizations as spaces for identity development*

We propose that artistic interventions in organizations, whereby “people, practices, or products from the world of the arts enter organizations” (Berthoin Antal, 2009:4), can be conceived as opening spaces for intercultural interactions that are likely to fuel identity

development. As Dewey pointed out, “to multitudes art seems to be an importation into experience from a foreign country” (Dewey, 1934/2005:11). Other scholars speak of artistic interventions as crossing the “cultural divide” (Barry & Meisiek, 2004:5; see also Strauß, 2009). The interaction at work between employees and artists may have consequences for identity development at the individual as well as the collective level. Meisiek & Hatch argue that “artistic processes allow organizational members to playfully explore cultural self-understandings and stakeholder images of the organization, which in turn lead to identity change” (2008:420). Indeed, when artists are invited into organizations – even for a short time – they inevitably apply their culturally-formed identity filters to observe and engage with individuals and to make sense of the organization’s practices. In turn, the members of the organization observe and engage with the artists’ ways of doing and being in their environment, comparing and contrasting the identity of the artist with the characteristic features of their own individual, occupational, or organizational identity (Berthoin Antal, 2011).

Independently of the purpose of the artistic interventions, the interaction between artists and members of the organization is therefore always intrinsically a meeting of identities rooted in different worlds. Previous studies on artistic interventions in organizations have found that the culturally foreign presence of the artist in the work context can hold a mirror up to the employees and managers in which to look at their own individual and collective image (Berthoin Antal, 2013: 101). Hatch & Schultz (2002) refer to mirroring as a key process in their model linking culture, identity, and image.

This suggested potential of artistic interventions is particularly important with regard to the often regulated and less playful social interaction in organizational life that commonly leaves little room to negotiate work identities. Biehl-Missal (2010) has debated that the arts are not only a mirror of society which enable self-reflection, rather the particular form of artistic communication encourages people to think about their social role. On a more general level, the arts and artistic ways of communication are most obviously concerned with issues of identity construction. Manifold constraints in the business world such as the demand for coherence and confidence restrain interpersonal interaction: Leaders and managers in everyday corporate life commonly have little room to openly communicate to followers and stakeholders, rather they are forced to resort to techniques of impression management to present themselves “at their best”, as positive role models with a strong identity, to build

follower belief and commitment in pursuit of a vision (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Biehl-Missal, 2011). Artistic forms of presentation on the other hand, for example in the theatre, may often present a disrespect for positive affirmation, make aesthetically irritating statements, can ‘play down’ seriousness and articulate the dubious, can “confront social and aesthetic expectations and in a subtle fashion can touch and irritate audiences” (Biehl-Missal 2010: 280). Art that does not seek to provide solutions can confront and challenge audiences, open up meaningful and divergent interpretations of (organizational) interaction.

With regard to the multiple constraints and power relations employees and their identities are exposed to in organizational life, the objective of this paper is to explore whether and how artistic interventions in organizations are experienced as opportunities for asserting, redefining, and bringing about changes in identities at the individual and collective levels. We are particularly interested in the dynamics of similarity and difference, and the roles of mirroring, contention, and play in these processes. We address these questions by drawing on the combined perspectives of the three stakeholder groups (artists, managers, and employees) who participated in artistic interventions in Spain. The next section describes how we collected the data and applied three kinds of analysis. Then, in the third section, we present our findings and close with our conclusions.

## **2. Methodology**

### Data collection: The empirical material

The data for our study was generated through Web-based surveys of participants in artistic interventions produced by the Spanish intermediary organization *conexiones improbables* for small companies in the Basque cities of Bilbao, Hondarribia, and Irun (Berthoin Antal, 2012). These interventions, which *conexiones improbables* call “Creative Pills,” last 4 months, during which time the artists meet with the company participants several times to work on an issue the responsible project manager identifies in advance. The format also includes an introductory session to the Creative Pills approach and a concluding session to present results, offering all the artists and companies with parallel projects the possibility of sharing in each others’ learning. This study encompasses a total of 29 creative pill projects, which involved 31 organizations<sup>2</sup> and 42 artists<sup>3</sup>. All of the organizations are very small (i.e., mostly fewer

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<sup>2</sup> In two projects, two companies participated together, hence 29 projects and 31 companies.

than 5 employees) and some are run by an entrepreneur without any full-time employees. We designed pre- and post- experience questionnaires with a mix of open and closed questions for the artists, employees and managers who participated in three different rounds of projects (EkintzaLab 2011, EkintzaLab 2012, BidasoaLab 2012). Table 1 presents the overview over the composition of the sample.

Insert table 1 here

Artistic interventions can last for a few hours, days, months or even years. The interventions we report on in this paper were quite short: three or four half-day sessions spread over the course of about four months. Conexiones improbables calls this form of artistic intervention “Creative Pills” and the intention is for the artists to work on an issue specified in advance by the responsible project manager in order to stimulate innovative thinking in the organization. The questionnaires elicited the thoughts and feelings of the three stakeholder groups (artists, managers, employees) before the artistic interventions, and then their reflections on the experience several weeks after the interventions. Ybema, Keenoy, Oswick, Beverungen, Ellis & Sabellis (2009: 300) outlined the “analytical potential of the discursive perspective in identity studies,” which stimulated us to use the responses to the open questions in these questionnaires for clarifying the aspects of identity-development inherent in artistic interventions.

#### Data analysis:

This paper presents the results of three approaches to data analysis. We draw first on responses to some of the closed questions in order to set the scene for the qualitative analysis. The participants received two sets of questions: one about their expectations before the experience, and the second set stimulated them to reflect on the experience several weeks after the completion of the artistic interventions. Some questions were used for all three stakeholder groups (e.g., how they felt about the experience and whether they would recommend an artistic intervention to their peers); other questions were formulated for one group only (e.g., the employees were asked about their first thought when they learned that the organization would undertake an artistic intervention, a question that was not relevant for the artists or managers who had taken the decision to undertake the project).

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<sup>3</sup> Several artists’ collectives participated in the artistic interventions, so some projects involved two or more artists, hence 29 projects and 42 artists.

Second, we show the outcomes of the lexical analysis that we submitted the data to using ALCESTE<sup>4</sup> (2010 version), a French software program that supports the development of grounded theory by clustering together the terms<sup>5</sup> that the respondents used in their answers to the open questions (see for example Sobczak, Debucquet, & Havard. 2006). The program enables a quantitative-qualitative analysis of discursive data because it generates a statistical analysis of the lexical universe on the basis of the co-occurrence of words, of the types of the words used, and of their statistical weighting in the overall data base. The program establishes clusters using a downwards-hierarchical classification on the basis of the co-occurrence of words (Reinert 2002). The corpus analyzed in this chapter is constituted by the aggregation of individual responses, permitting each lexical cluster to be considered to represent the key issues shared by the respondents. The output that the ALCESTE program generates can be described as “fact-full and meaning-less” in the sense that the data are now ready for the researcher(s) to work with and link to theory-building. The researcher(s) then make the constellations of lexical clusters “meaning-full” by interpreting them to draw out the sense that lies below the surface expressions. In preparing this contribution we attended especially to making sense of data relating to identity issues.

Third, we present the findings of our reading of the responses from all three stakeholder groups in which we sought evidence relating to key concepts from the literature. We were interested in finding discursive traces of identity dynamics in participants’ reflections about their experiences in artistic interventions. We looked in particular for indications of processes of mirroring, play, and contention in the interactions between the artists and the members of the organization. This theory-led reading of the data enabled us to illustrate identity dynamics-related with quotations from the respondents.

### **3. Results**

#### 3.1 Respondents’ attitudes to the intercultural engagement before and after the interaction

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<sup>4</sup> ALCESTE stands for Analyse des Lexèmes Co-occurents dans les Enoncés Simples d’un Texte (i.e., lexical analysis of co-occurrent terms (Reinert, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> In this study, the data is in Spanish, which both authors read fluently. The few responses we received in Basque and English were translated into Spanish so that ALCESTE could process all the words. For this paper, we have translated the respondents’ expressions into English.



In order to get a sense for how receptive the employees were to learning from the interaction with the artists, the pre-experience questionnaire included a multiple-choice item asking the respondents to indicate which had been their first thought or feeling when they heard there would be an artistic intervention project. They had four possible responses to choose from, which had been generated from research interviews in a different organization (Berthoin Antal 2011), and they also had the option of adding their own words. The two most common responses that the employees gave were “good idea!” (EK 2012: 100%, BD 2012: 33.3%) and “we’ll see” (BD 2012: 66.6%). A few employees remembered having felt it was a “strange idea.” None responded that they thought it would be a waste of time and money. In other words the employees were quite open, some even enthusiastic about the innovative approach of Creative Pills.

The post-experience survey included a closed question for all three stakeholder groups relating to how they had felt about the Creative Pill collaboration. They could choose up to three terms from a set of eleven options that had been derived from interviews in a previous in-depth case study, then tested in a Web-based survey designed for that case (Berthoin Antal, 2011). Table 2 presents the results. The most frequent response from all the stakeholders was “stimulating” (32.6 % of responses). This result affirms the assertions made earlier that day-to-day organisational life with its regulations and efficiency needs does not provide much space for divergent and challenging experiences, which were then provided by the artistic intervention. The next responses chosen most often were “useful” (18.8%), “inspiring” (18.1%), and lastly “fun” (11.1%). When looking more in depth to each stakeholder, we find that project managers chose more often “energizing” (21.4%) and the artists emphasized “useful” (23.3%) especially often. None of the stakeholders chose the response option “waste of time.” Only two respondents (project managers) felt the experience had been “disappointing”, and “irrelevant” was marked only once (by an artist).

(INSERT TABLE 2 HERE)

A closer look at some of the less frequently selected response options for this question is useful, too. Given that people are sometimes afraid that working with the arts will reveal incompetencies or parts of themselves that they would prefer to keep private<sup>6</sup>, it quite surprising that only one project manager and one employee mentioned having felt

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<sup>6</sup> This observation is based on comments people have made in interviews that the first author conducted in Sweden as well as in “artful research workshops” she has organized in Germany.

embarrassed in some way. By contrast, it is intriguing that in all three rounds of Creative Pills, some artists (11.6%) indicated that they had felt embarrassed. This response may relate to identity issues: The frequency of both terms “embarrassed” (11.6%) and “useful” (23.3%) suggests the ambiguity of the status and the role (the perceived role by artists themselves) of artists in the context of organizations. Crossing the cultural divide between the world of the arts and the world of organizations by engaging in an artistic intervention confronts artists with questions about how they relate to what is useful for business (and more widely), so it inevitably raises questions about their own identity. Lastly, the fact that “irritating” was checked only once (by an artist) is also worth looking into. The term may at first glance appear negative, so its absence from the responses may seem to be a positive sign. However, the irritation of ways of thinking and doing things is a source of cultural dissonance, one of the triggers of innovation, learning and change in organizations that has been identified in previous research (e.g., Stark, 2009). It is possible that respondents disliked the word, and another word (e.g., “provoked”) might be a better choice. Furthermore, it is possible that a longer intervention format is needed to trigger such learning processes and it is unrealistic to expect it of the short format of Creative Pills.

Several questions in the post-experience survey sought to find out whether the participants felt that the artistic intervention had had an impact on them personally and on other people in the organization. Given that just two respondents reported that the experience had no impact on them personally, and only three respondents indicated that they did not believe it had an impact on other people in the organization, we conclude that the overwhelming majority of participants felt that the interaction with the artist affected people in some way. The fact that 100% of the employees, managers, and artists responded positively to the question asking whether they would recommend such an interaction to their peers, confirms that they consider artistic interventions in organizations to be a potentially valuable experience.

### 3.2 Lexical analysis of respondents’ expressions about the intercultural experience

Given this brief summary of results from some of the closed questions, which indicate an overall positive level of expectations before the intercultural encounter between artists and participants from the organizations, and generally positive feelings about the experience and its impact on individuals and the organization, we turn now to the presentation of the analysis of the qualitative data with ALCESTE. Looking at the kinds of words that are used by the

respondents and statistically clustered by the program offers grounded insights into representations, perceptions, feelings associated with interventions by artists, managers and employees. Here we present what the lexical analysis reveals about identities, boundaries and the potential communication spaces that emerge from the respondents' ways of writing about the meeting between the worlds of the arts and of organizations.

ALCESTE generated three clusters, or lexical universes, from the data: the largest encompasses 58% of the classified terms; the second captures 33%, and the third is the smallest cluster that ALCESTE could generate from the data, covering 9% of the classified terms. Table 3 provides an overview of the data in each cluster. The process of interpreting the data entails revealing the internal coherence of the « lexical universes » in each cluster. The researcher analyses the deeper meaning of the co-occurring words and the grammatical context in which these words were used by the respondents. ALCESTE provides a statistical table indicating the clusters and the grammatical categories (such as adverbs indicating time and place, pronouns, prepositions, verbs). Therefore a careful contextual analysis of each word requires constantly referring back to the phrases or sentences in which they were found. We now describe the content of each cluster and draw out the insights we find that they offer into identity development resulting from the intercultural interaction in the artistic intervention. .

Insert Table 3 here

### **Cluster 1: The confrontation of identities: A social experience that produces new ideas for the organization**

The largest cluster contains expressions stemming primarily from the project managers and the employees. The artists are essentially absent. The core of the cluster is the operational and human value of the artistic intervention. The word “business” appears frequently as the idea of “utility” and “practical applications and ideas.” Concerning the human value, the confrontation of identities seems to be of great benefit especially for employees: improvement of the relationship and communication with colleagues, a better understanding of the “others” in the organization and with whom they share a certain number of values (e.g., in the organizational or occupational culture). Most of the respondents expect a good outcome, even if they cannot always define it at the outset. They write that the experience will “have a

positive effect” for which they feel a certain responsibility because “we will always be able to learn something” about themselves, their colleagues, the artists, or others.

### **Cluster 2: Interplays of identities: experimenting, learning and evolving**

In this cluster the artists predominate; the employees and project managers are far less present. The universe of terms in this cluster revolves around the idea of experimentation and “interest” in “co-learning” between the artists and the members of the organization. The word “exchange” is also important in their discourse. Artistic interventions in organizations are perceived as spaces that “open to new experiences”, that allow to “escape from the routine,” to “leave the habitual parameters of work.” As indicated earlier, artistic interventions may in this sense be seen to provide some compensation for the often regulated nature of organisational interaction. These interventions are also spaces in which the artists meet with the world of small enterprises, putting them “in touch with the real world.” Sometimes the experience can even be destabilizing for artists because it “produced contradictions about one’s capacity, position, tools, reactions in a situation of this kind”, that provoked some dissonances for identity. The artists seem to have a wide range of possibilities in terms of the techniques they can use to “provoke changes, reflections, possibilities” or to “stimulate creativity, develop the uniqueness of the people.” The cluster contains many action verbs like “play, surprise, explore, mix,” with which the artists can open up, even shake up, organizational and individual identities.

### **Cluster 3: Creating the conditions for identity development: A prerequisite for creative processes**

This cluster relates to the pre-requisites for the creative process that the stakeholders feel need to be established in order for the intercultural interaction of the artistic intervention to be fruitful. It is the cluster with the richest vocabulary, which is probably a reflection of the writing style of the artists. This cluster illustrates the concerns that the respondents had about their ability to develop a “common language”, “a minimum set of rules of the game” or, more generally, to create “the possibility of playing together”. They speak of “the game, the

surprise, the strangeness” as the tools and “dynamics” that permit the distance between the world of the arts and the world of organizations/business to be bridged. The artistic intervention appears to be perceived as an inherently destabilizing experience for the various participants, and their challenge lies in being able to “put themselves in the place of the other.” This process appears to help stir up questions about the identities of stakeholders and thereby enable their development.

### 3.3 Content analysis of stakeholders’ responses: a focus on dynamics shaping collective identities

The analysis with ALCESTE has shown the importance of identity issues in the stakeholders’ experiences of intercultural exchange in the artistic interventions. In this third step we now shift our focus to the search for discursive traces of the way artistic interventions could “tap the dynamics that shape collective identity” (Meisiek & Hatch 2008: 413). The strong presence in the responses from managers and employees of expressions relating to a collectivity encouraged us to look beyond the individual level of identity development (e.g., “our organization” “our company”, “we”, “our group”, “our business”, “our community”, the culture of our company”, “our space”). We undertook a theory-led reading through the responses of all the stakeholders in order to produce a “structured ordering” (Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009:331) of our discursive data.

First, our qualitative reading of the data alerted us to the presence of oppositions of concepts, particularly “useful” versus “useless”, “pragmatism” versus “unrealism”, and “tangible” versus “intangible”. These oppositions emerge from the differences the participants expect between the cultural values, practices, and identities they associate with the world of organizations and the world of the arts. Such oppositions confirm that the participants envisage artistic interventions as embarking on crossing the “cultural divide” between the world of the arts and the world of organizations (Barry & Meisiek, 2004:5). Before engaging in the artistic intervention, employees and managers sometimes worried that the differences might be too great to bridge: “we might not find a way to channel the ideas of the artist, or we might feel they are not viable;” “ideas that do not fit the reality of the company”. Artists expressed similar concerns about their “usefulness” in the eyes of the world of organizations. For example, they feared “that they [the company participants] will think it served no purpose, that it was a waste of time for them, that I did not know how to focus the

propositions to their needs.” Another artist wrote of the fear that “I will put myself under too much pressure to ‘solve’ something, to offer something ‘fantastic,’ that they expect such ‘genius’ from me, that there will be an excessive respect for my role as ‘artist.’” Significantly, such oppositions appear particularly in the responses to the pre-experience questionnaires, when the participants describe what they hope or fear from the intervention, and less in the post-experience questionnaires, where their focus is on what they learned from the interaction.

Second, we found evidence for two kinds of tensions relating to identity development in artistic interventions in organizations: internal-external and conformism-creativity. These tensions constitute the motor of the dynamics of identity development in the artistic interventions. We present and illustrate each of these tensions with quotations from the respondents.

### ***Tension 1: Internal - External***

The responses from the three groups of stakeholders indicate that the process of creating an organizational identity is subject both to internal influences (e.g., “the roles of each person,” “the process of decision making”) and to external ones (e.g., “the crisis,” “the profession,” “the customers,” “the other companies in the same industry”). As a manager wrote, “In this period of crisis, it helped me rethink how we do things and the dynamics we are following.” (PM post EK 2012<sup>7</sup>) The responses reveal a sense of inescapability from the external pressures, to which one must “adapt” or “relate.” There is thus a concentration of expectations that the artistic intervention will offer an external perspective (“the view from other eyes”, “from outside”, “looking at us from a different perspective”, “the need to think outside the box”). It is not only the managers who are responsible for the artistic intervention in the organization who formulate these expectations, the employees do so as well, such as “they helped us to look at ourselves, to analyse ourselves” (E, post, BD 2012). The terms that some respondents use to characterize the artists’ perspective suggest that the artists’ position confers on them a kind of neutrality because they are outside the marketplace in which the organization and its competitors are operating. For example, a manager characterized the artists’ perspective on the company as being “without contamination” (PM, post EK 2012) and an employee wrote that the artists “sincerely tell us how they see us and our store” (E,

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<sup>7</sup> The codes following the quotations refer to the different stakeholders and the edition of Creative Pills in which they participated: PM= Manager responsible for project; E= Employee; A = Artist. Pre = Pre-experience response; Post = Post-experience response; EK 2011, 2012 = EkintzaLab 2011, 2012 Creative Pills; BD 2012 = BidasoaLab 2012 Creative Pill.

post, BD 2012) Another expression that appears in several responses (four times) is the artist as “catalyst,” in other words as an agent who is perceived to be a neutral facilitator of change.

### ***Tension 2: Conformity - Creativity***

The responses illustrate how much effort is needed in organizations to overcome the tension between the pressure for conformism and the desire for creativity, without with change and development in identities in the organizational context cannot be achieved. The participants recognized that they need help in “shifting from assuming that a way of seeing business and the work environment is something given, fixed, to conceiving it as something in which we can work and reflect” (E, post EK 2011). Artistic interventions can trigger new ways of thinking and doing in organizational contexts with numerous techniques (e.g., “game,” “physical exercises,” “gymnastics,” and “gaining distance”). They help the participants to break out of habits and routines that can be experienced as “asphyxiating” and in which the employees sometimes feel “imprisoned.” When the artists bring in these kinds of techniques the employees might “have fun” and develop their “creative potential” but at a deeper level the intention is to stimulate the employees to “search themselves” and “question themselves.” It is about freeing oneself from the pressures to conform to the habitual codes and frames of reference, and removing the real or subjective barriers “in order to innovate.” In various responses there is also the idea that the artist can enable people to allow ideas or projects to mature “that [the members of the organization] were not able to verbalize” (the term “verbalize” appears three times in the data). For their part, the artists see their role as “experimenting without contaminating the ways of thinking and discovering the potential creativity of a human collective that is motivated by an objective.” (A, post BD 2012)

### **3.4 Methodological reflections**

In closing our three-fold presentation of the data based on some of the closed questions in the survey, the interpretation of the lexical clusters generated with ALCESTE, and the identification of tensions in themes, we note some of the advantages and the limitations of the data collection method we used. The advantage of Web-based surveys with open and closed questions is that a relatively large number of respondents could contribute the thoughts and feelings they had pre- and post-experience. They could choose when to respond, and the

format was essentially anonymous,<sup>8</sup> offering more freedom than a face-to-face interview at the workplace would permit. However, this method does not allow for as much depth as can be achieved in semi-structured individual interviews or group discussions.

Analysing the data with the three approaches we chose permitted us to observe the emergence of several themes relating to identity development in all three groups of stakeholders, whereby the relative centrality of themes varied across the stakeholder groups. We acknowledge that the centrality of these themes could result from the way questionnaires were constructed and administered (invitation to respond to questionnaires sent by the intermediary organization; responses received and analysed by an academic located in a different country; the focus of the questions, e.g., on participants' expectations, hopes, and fears before the artistic intervention, their thoughts and feelings during and after the experience, and their perception of outcomes and benefits).

#### **4. Conclusions and next steps:**

Our study of these short artistic interventions in small and medium-sized Spanish companies explored how stakeholders express their thoughts and feelings about this intercultural experience in terms that refer more or less consciously to identity issues. The artists, employees and managers who engage in artistic interventions are attracted by the opportunity to interact with people whose identities they expect have been shaped by different cultural orientations than their own. Although their intentions in participating in such interventions do not explicitly include identity development, the pre- and post experience responses from the stakeholders show how fertile the situation is for reflecting on identity at both the individual and collective levels.

The first cluster that we generated from the analysis with ALCESTE indicates that artistic interventions, by creating a situation of potential contention (White, 2002) or dissonance (Stark 2009) between value systems and behavioral expectations, can open spaces for exploring possibilities and can favor a reflexive attitude towards organizational identities and work identities. The interventions are social experiences that activate the reflecting process, whereby identity is embedded in cultural understandings (Hatch & Schultz 2002). Cluster 2

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<sup>8</sup> The respondents only provided the name of the organization they were working with, not their names or email addresses. The responses were only accessible to the researcher.



shows that artistic interventions can stimulate, through interplays of similarities and differences and by means of artist-led play, identity-developing processes that Hatch & Schultz (2002: 991) called the “mirroring process” (the process by which identity is mirrored in the images of others) and the “impressing process” (the process by which expressions of identity leave impressions on others). Cluster 3 shows how artistic interventions in an organization constitute a space in which some of the differences between the values and objectives that characterize the world of the arts and the world of business/organizations inevitably crystallize. The challenge the participants face in their interactions in this space lies in finding ways to make the boundaries between identities permeable in the interest of engaging creatively together and of engaging in identity development. Furthermore, Cluster 3 illustrates discursive “positioning” (Garcia & Hardy 2007:364) accomplishing distinctions with “alterity”, signifying similarities and differences and founding the “Self-other identity talk” (Ybema et al., 2009: 307). In other words, the artistic interventions create a space in which double-mirroring processes occur between the members of the two worlds.

Although we identified certain underlying tensions in the discourse analysis, the data provided less evidence of explicit contention and dissonance in the identity development than we expected from our readings. Instead, artistic interventions in organizations appear here as a *space of possibilities* for *co-evolution* of identities for all stakeholders in which energy is derived from *resonance*. The analysis of the discourse contained in the responses suggests that the stakeholders do not necessarily assess the value of artistic interventions in terms of the results of actions taken but rather in the opening of a space of possibilities (see also Berthoin Antal & Strauß 2013) by unblocking habits, routines, and fixed conceptions of identities in their day-to-day organizational context. Participating in artistic interventions in organizations contributes to “the social processes implicated in identity formation [which] are complex, recursive, reflexive and constantly “under construction” (Ybema & al., 2009: 301). The concept of co-evolution emphasizes that the identity development in artistic interventions is not one-sided and limited to the members of the organization: the artists, too, engaged in a spirit of learning that can also touch on their identity. A significant factor enabling this co-evolution is the conviction, which many participants had from the outset, that something good/new/valuable/interesting would emerge from the cultural interaction, even if they had no idea what the process would entail nor what the outcome might look like. This attitude corresponds to the capacity to trust the process that McNiff (1998) considers essential to art-based learning.

All three stakeholder groups found it energizing to discover that the “foreign” practices and interests from the world of the arts, which the artists embodied during the artistic interventions, could enable both personal and organizational development in the world of business. While not denying the existence of important differences, all three groups of participants can be said to have experienced a sense of resonance between their worlds that enriched their repertoire of possible ways of seeing and doing things. This discovery might enable managers and employees to expand their identity at work to include features that they may previously have considered belonging only to the art world, thereby in a way giving them permission to connect parts of their identity that they had excluded from their work life. For the artists the discovery of how their ideas and approaches to work can resonate in an organization also opens the field within which they define themselves. Recognizing that identity is not a simple unitary construct because individuals develop different facets of their identities in different contexts (Billet, 2006; Walsh & Gordon, 2008; White, 1992), it would be interesting to explore the effects of artistic intervention experiences on work and non-work identities of the participants. Longitudinal research would be needed to pursue this line of reasoning.

Meisiek and Hatch (2008: 413) suggested that “the significant difference between successful and unsuccessful arts-based consulting projects lies in whether or not the intervention taps the dynamics that shape collective identity.” Although the data from our Web-based survey do not permit us to establish definitively the impact of the artistic intervention on identities, the discursive analysis of the responses confirms that this intercultural experience favored a reflexive process among all three stakeholder groups. Employees and managers explicitly or implicitly raise a set of identity questions: Who are we? To what extent are we different from the others / the others companies? How can we help ourselves evolve internally and change our image? Artistic interventions appear to nourish the double internal and external definition of organizational identities as that Hatch & Schultz (2002, 1997) theorized. This identity development appeared in organization members’ responses through references to both their self-understanding of organizational culture (e.g., ways of working, of deciding, relations between employees) and stakeholders’ images (e.g. by consumers, client or others companies, ‘corporate identity’) as well as the perspectives proposed by the artists.

Moreover, our results show that the presence of artists inside the organizations gives them multiple identity positions involving core dimensions of their identity and their subjectivity (Gemignani, 2011): observer and observed, participant and model, leader and learner. So, the process of mirroring and impressing evoked above is rather complex in this particular context and reactivates social and cultural representations associated with the world of art by opposition to the world of organizations.

An angle that would be worth pursuing in future research relates to the role of perceived social status in the identity-related interaction between artists and members of the organization. Walsh & Gordon (2008:50) propose that “[T]he greater its perceived distinction and status enhancement, the more likely members will use that group’s identity to create their own individual work identities.” Artists, employees, and managers are attributed different status in society and in organizations, so it is possible that this factor may also play a role in the process of identity development when they interact.

This research is also an invitation to keep experimenting methodologically. For us and for our three stakeholder groups, the use of pre- and post-experience Web-based surveys was a new approach that was generative but needs to be complemented with other methods. We sense that beyond providing us with rich data, responding to the survey questions can also stimulate collective reflection processes that might nourish “the organizational identity conversations” that Meisiek & Hatch (2008: 417) write about. However, we do not have access at this point to those conversations. To address the methodological gaps of our study, we propose that such surveys be complemented in future not only with interviews and observations to permit the reconstruction of narratives from the different stakeholder perspectives, but also with Web-based platforms for continuing conversations among the participants within and across organizations. Furthermore, it would be intriguing to enrich the data collection, the processes of meaning-making, and the sharing of the learning from the experiences to wider audiences with art-based research methods that support the exploration of “routes to interiorities” (Hogan & Pink 2010).

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**Tables below should be inserted into text where indicated.**

Table 1: Composition of the respondent sample

Edition of Creative Pills	Number of responses and response rate			TOTAL
	Artists	Project managers	Employees	
EkintzaLab 2011 Integrated survey pre- and post- experience	14 (100%)	9 (82%)	6 (35%)	29 (69%)
EkintzaLab 2012 Pre-experience	8 (66.5%)	8 (80%)	4 (44.5%)	20 (64.5%)
EkintzaLab 2012 Post experience	6 (50%)	6 (60%)	2 (22%)	14 (45%)
BidasoaLab 2012 Pre-experience	8 (50%)	10 (100%)	13 (76.5%)	31 (72%)
BidasoaLab 2012 Post-experience	11 (68.5%)	7 (70%)	10 (59%)	28 (65%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>122</b>

Table 2: Overall feeling of the artistic interventions by all stakeholders  
(Choice of three terms from a set of options)

	Artists	Project Managers	Employees	All
Stimulating	27 31.4%	7 25.0%	13 43.3%	<b>47</b> <b>32.6%</b>
Irritating	1 1.2%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	<b>1</b> <b>0.7%</b>
Surprising	2 2.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	<b>2</b> <b>1.4%</b>
Disappointing	0 0.0%	2 7.1%	0 0.0%	<b>2</b> <b>1.4%</b>
Useful	20 23.3%	3 10.7%	4 13.3%	<b>27</b> <b>18.8%</b>
Irrelevant	1 1.2%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	<b>1</b> <b>0.7%</b>
Energizing	4 4.7%	6 21.4%	0 0.0%	<b>10</b> <b>6.9%</b>
A waste of time	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	<b>0</b> <b>0.0%</b>
Fun	9 10.5%	3 10.7%	4 13.3%	<b>16</b> <b>11.1%</b>
Embarrassing	10 11.6%	1 3.6%	1 3.3%	<b>10</b> <b>8.3%</b>
Inspiring	12 14.0%	6 21.4%	8 26.7%	<b>26</b> <b>18.1%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>86</b> 100%	<b>27</b> 100%	<b>29</b> 100%	<b>142</b> <b>100%</b>

**Table 3:** Lexical universes associated with artistic interventions in organization: an illustration of some identity issues

(Calculation basis: 15339 words; classification rate: 77%)

<b>Cluster description</b>	<b>% of total classified words</b>	<b>Lexical universes</b>	<b>Predominant presence of stakeholder group in the cluster</b>
<p><u>Cluster 1:</u></p> <p><b>The confrontation of identities: A social experience that produces new ideas for the organization</b></p>	58.0 %	Ideas (19) new (3) / fresh ; business (13) ; effect (3) positive (8) ; enriching (7) ; relations with colleagues (6) ; useful (5); improve (5) ; none (14) fear (4); learn (4); put into practice (3)	<p>Project managers (21)</p> <p>Employees (10)</p>
<p><u>Cluster 2:</u></p> <p><b>The mutual enrichment of identities: experimenting, learning and evolving</b></p>	33.0 %	Interest / interesting (30) ; world (8) / persons (5) of art (25) ; provoke (19) changes / reflections / possibilities /interactions ; exchange (15) of experience ; strengthen (6) creativity (14) ; sphere (13); process (13) of creation (5) / transformative / inspiration ; new tools (12) ; successes (11) daily (5) ; ways (5) of thinking (10) ; mutual learning (10) ; to experiment (9); to collaborate (8) ; space (8) different (4) / real (7); work (7)	Artists (32)
<p><u>Cluster 3:</u></p> <p><b>Creating the conditions for identity development: A prerequisite for creative processes</b></p>	9.0 %	Language (83) common (8); activate (6) games (56) of roles; establish(22) a minimum of rules of the game (56 ) ; to place oneself (51) in the place (14) of the other (17) ; possibility (13) to play (56) together (16) ; from other (17) sides (31) ; possible (16) futures (17) ; possible imaginaries (16) ; take (41) distance (14) ; put excess pressure on self (12) of responsibility/ of authority; further from reality (6)	Artists (3)

**\*Note :** When establishing the classes' profile the software ALCESTE calculates the degree by which each word and each stakeholder are associated with each class, using a chi-square test (p<0.05). In this table, the number in bracket indicates the value of the chi-square. The higher is the number, the higher is the word or the stakeholder associated with the class.