ACTOR SKILLS IN MANAGERIAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR THE INFORMATION AGE

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Abstract

The knowledge-based economies of today’s information age demand a higher level of communication skills in the workplace. One viable method of teaching communication skills leverages the techniques found in actor training. This thesis explores the use and effectiveness of actor training in the training and development of managers and professionals. The theories of Aristotle, Burke, Dewey and Ong are referenced to understand the value of the performance metaphor—“As a leader, you’re always onstage”—as an underlying approach, while the theories of Wiener, Watzlawick, Baxter, Ting Toomey and others reinforce the viability of actor training in the field of communication. A review of the literature reveals a body of scholarship that tests the use and effectiveness of an actor skill-training platform in the areas of management, law and medicine. This thesis gathers qualitative and quantitative data to determine the perceptions and success of actor training skills and their impact on communications. The qualitative data was gathered using a semi-structured interview format. Two surveys were administered—one to the National Communication Association and another to a top one hundred law firm in the U.S. The data collected provide further insights on the perception, use, strategies and obstacles of actor training in non-acting related professions.
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Dedication

To my son Willem, and to my mother Jenny, who arrived and departed this world at almost the same time. They continue to inspire me to grow and share what I have learned with others.

David de Vries
Chapter One: Introduction and Proposal

*Speak the speech, I pray you...trippingly on the tongue.*

—Shakespeare, *Hamlet III ii*

**Introduction**

The “actor” has played a vital role in Western Civilization since the Golden Age of Greece. Charged with presenting and interpreting the narratives that gave shape and meaning to people’s lives, the ancient actors carried on the oral traditions that led back to the earliest tribes of mankind. Sir Ben Kingsley (2011), noted stage and film actor, described his job this way:

I think that the role of the actor, perhaps at its simplest and its purest, is one of the tribal storyteller, and that if you were to transport me back maybe 3,000 years, I’d be sitting around the fire at night with the little tribe, reassuring them about their past, hoping that they will sleep through the night, and comforting them about their future, and try and build those bridges of empathy—particularly aspects of life that are baffling and frightening (Kingsley, 2011).

We all assume multifarious roles throughout our lives, despite our initial thoughts of film and television stars and the perception that "acting" might imply something artificial or deceptive. The best of us engage those roles with a combination of authenticity and energy. We are all called upon to act, to perform
in one way or another in our jobs—whether we are on the Broadway stage or
leading a meeting of three hundred in a hotel ballroom. Even in a weekly breakout
with six colleagues, people are asked to stand before a group of people and deliver
a message. In today’s global information economy the expectations are always
high. People are depending on you to get the message across effectively whatever
the venue is.

**Topic Rationale**

Industries and professions have begun to understand that paying greater
attention to methods of communication—how those messages are delivered—may
reap substantive benefits in job efficacy. The training that actors receive in theatre
training programs focuses on the soft skills of communication—the development of
nuanced vocal and physical expression, body language, active listening and how to
thrive in the rigors of performing. These are precisely the skills that can bring added
value to professionals in various fields. The hard skills of communication—what to
say and how to say it—are becoming increasingly important for people who lack
the necessary training to interact in a variety of managerial challenges. Pedagogical
approaches that have germinated in acting programs and experimental theatre
companies can provide effective guidance not only in leadership positions, but also
in the fields of law and medicine.

The information age has created a workplace that demands specialization,
with rigorous academic training in very specific fields of study. Engineers,
computer programmers, accountants and the like spend the bulk of their careers in highly individualized, technical endeavors. As they move up the chain of command in an organization, many of these highly trained specialists find themselves in terra incognita. While upward corporate mobility is the path to success for many, leadership requires a higher standard of communication acumen—skills that are rarely emphasized within their discipline. These new managers may be uncomfortable communicating with the people they are charged to lead and motivate; or they may not be as effective in delivering their message as they could be. Attorneys may possess great legal minds, but they may falter if their communication skills in the courtroom do not complement their skills in reasoning. Skilled physicians diminish their effectiveness if they don’t recognize the value and importance of the soft skills that clinical empathy training can offer them.

Theoretical Foundations

Twentieth Century actor training is linked, either explicitly or implicitly, to a number of different communication theories. Cohen (1978) draws from the ideas of several communication theorists to examine how one approaches an acting role. Dismissive of any behavioral line of demarcation between acting onstage and offstage acting, Cohen claims that all acting is communication, consciously or unconsciously intended to influence others (p. 7). Cybernetic and systems theory (Rav, 2002) are used to explain actor intention and motivation. Indeed, one of the central tenets of Cohen’s “Acting Power” is the importance of the feedback loop in
making choices onstage to achieve a goal (Cohen, p. 37). Cohen references the systems theories of Paul Watzlawick and the Interactional Perspective (Griffin, 2009, pp. 169-178). “One cannot not communicate” (1978, p. 37) is one of the axioms developed by Watzlawick and Beavin (2009, p. 177). Cohen centers his pedagogical approach to acting on a systems theory perspective that differed from the traditional “method” approach to acting. The “method,” adapted from the teachings of Constantin Stanislavsky (1961), tended to be a more deterministic approach—concerned more with past causes to explain present motivation than the more goal-oriented cybernetic theory (1978, p. 34).

A training focus on the soft skills and the hard skills of communication as referenced previously, draws from Bateson and Watzlawick’s ideas about content and relationship (2009, p. 172). In short, content refers to what is being said, and relationship is how it is said. The interaction between these modalities lies at the heart of all our communication. The actor must understand the distinctions in both content and relationship to create an authentic portrayal of any reality. We use these same skills in offstage interactions.

Shurtleff (1978) believes that understanding a powerful and believable acting scene must include not only a strong goal-oriented intention, but also its opposite. Although no communication theorist is specifically cited, Shurtleff’s ideas parallel the theories of Baxter and Montgomery’s “relational dialectics” (Griffin, 2009). The theory of relational dialectics argues that while we idealize notions of behavioral drives for connectedness, certainty and openness, in truth, the opposite drives of
separateness, uncertainty and closedness are always present in dialectic tandem, creating a continuum of tension in relationships (pp. 156-157). Shurtleff (1978) believes that these contradictions, or “the dynamic interplay between unified oppositions” (p. 155) not only describe real relationships, but they create more dynamic and dramatic relationships onstage as well (pp. 55-56).

Research Question & Proposal

Is actor training an effective method of increasing the communication skill sets of managers and professionals, and what techniques are utilized to teach these skills? This question will be tested through the aggregation of scholarship on these training methods and their foundations in pertinent communication theory as well as the scholarship on the use of actor-based training in managerial and professional development. A description of the ways in which these skills are utilized will be examined in a review of the literature on the subject.

Research Method & Scope

A survey of companies that implement this training paradigm will be taken to observe and evaluate effectiveness. Companies will be chosen based on their presence in the market and willingness to provide access and information. The data will be driven by a series of interviews that will include a standardized set of survey questions designed to render quantifiable conclusions in addition to anecdotal
evidence collected in the interviews. The interviews will focus on three perspectives:

- Educators already utilizing these methods of training
- Participants who have taken this type of training
- Decision-makers who have implemented programs utilizing these training methods.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study will be limited to a sample of convenience. Surveys will be created to collect data from online audiences. Interviews will be conducted based upon referral and access obtained in the research process.

Conclusion

Aristotle, who may well have been the first communication theorist, said that rhetoric was “the art of finding the most available means of persuasion” (Rorty, 2011, p. 715). Laurence Olivier, considered one of the great actors of the 20th Century, mirrored that idea when asked, “if somebody asked me to put in one sentence what acting was, I should say that acting was the art of persuasion. The actor persuades himself, first, and through himself, the audience” (Tynan & Olivier, 1966). From the beginning of Western Civilization, the membrane separating the actor and the rhetorician was permeable. Leaders and professionals have much to learn
from actors and actors have much to teach people who make their living influencing the behaviors and attitudes of others. Whether the skills of an actor bring real value to organizations that need effective communicators is a primary focus of this study.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

*All the world’s a stage*

*All the men and women merely players:*

*They have their exits and their entrances;*

*And one man in his time plays many parts*

—Shakespeare, *As You Like It, II, iv*

Theories of communication explore the basic acts of human messaging, both verbal and non-verbal—their meaning and intent; their origins and their effect. The scope of the field is vast—a compendium of ideas relating to all aspects of human interaction. Communication theory also informs the training of actors and their understanding of the characters they create and interpret. But the connection between these two disciplines can be reciprocal as well. The actor’s concentration on performance, character creation, creativity and spontaneity may also be used to teach non-actors to communicate more effectively. This review of the literature examines how these disciplines are related, and can be combined to increase the effectiveness of message delivery in the workplace.

**Foundational Theories**

Organizations, recognizing that effectiveness of the message directly impacts the success of their business, spend countless hours and billions of dollars each year crafting their communication, both in-house and for the public arena. They also devote considerable resources to train their employees to communicate more effectively (Bares, 2011). In a knowledge-based economy, this goal seems only
prudent. But it’s hardly an innovative idea. The Sophists of ancient Greece were, perhaps, the first communication consultants, teaching politicians and lawyers better methods of delivering their message. They focused their teaching on the style and delivery of oral argument (Griffin, 2009, p. 279). In highly litigious 5th century Athens, Protagoras and other Sophists were hired for their expertise, but they paid little attention to whether or not an argument was right, or even true. The Sophist’s chief concern was on the end result—whether an argument would achieve its goals. In fact, the Sophists were so bold as to suggest that they could make a specious argument plausible through purely rhetorical means (Sophists, 2011). This lack of moral underpinning set the Sophists at odds with Plato, who believed that the use of persuasive rhetoric (and let us acknowledge that we are speaking of a purely oral culture by default) is only legitimate if it includes a quest for truth (Rorty, 2011). Nonetheless, rhetoric is still “concerned with appearances” (p. 720) as Aristotle posited, and those appearances are vital to a message’s delivery.

If rhetoric was the art of finding “the most available means of persuasion” (Solmsen, 1954, p. 24), then affecting that end required crafting the delivery of the message: “For it is not enough to know what we ought to say; we must say it as we ought; much help [in persuasion] is afforded toward producing the right impression in speech” (Rorty, 2011, p. 724).

Aristotle’s handbook “Rhetoric,” built on his mentor Plato’s ideas, synthesized the need for truth in content and persuasiveness in style with his five canons of Rhetoric: Invention, Arrangement, Memory, Style and Delivery (Griffin, 2009, p.
Indeed, instruction in Rhetoric and “public speaking” today hasn’t veered far from the paradigm created by Aristotle (p. 279). But there was a lessening in the importance given to methods of style and delivery through the centuries that may be traced back to the scholarship of Peter Ramus, a 16th Century Arts Master from France (Triche & McKnight, 2004). Ramus believed that processes that strictly involved the mind were “more excellent acts,” distinct from the body’s delivery of those ideas (p. 43). The primacy of the written word and Ramus’ parochial separation of the mind and the body relegated that portion of the Rhetorical canons concerned with how the ideas were presented to a lesser status in the pedagogical hierarchy.

“Style and delivery” were subsequently separated in pedagogy from the gestalt originally conceived by Aristotle, and that may have been to the detriment to those who were required to speak publicly. Without matching the act of delivery with the “excellent act” of thought, one presents an unconvincing argument. The persuasiveness of the speaker cannot rely solely upon the content of the thought. This is why TV lawyers are invariably better than their real-life counterparts in oral arguments. In a culture driven by media and information, the way the words are spoken are as important as the ideas that are being conveyed. There is no better example of this than the communication savvy of Steve Jobs, who transformed the product rollout into a totally theatrical event, rehearsed and staged to perfection, commanding the interest of millions of consumers and the envy of many CEOs (Isaacson, 2011).
Ong (1982) examines the distinctions between oral cultures and text-based cultures. Though all chirographic cultures are born from their “oral mother”, the unique characteristics of both cultures have often been overlooked. Ong describes a new iteration of orality—“secondary orality”—that has developed in the explosion of electronic media (p. 133). Since so much of our information today, both salient and non-salient, is consumed through means other than the written word, there is a strong case to be made for a greater emphasis on the crafting and delivery of our messages, as orality re-emerges from the shadow of its chirographic progeny.

Shakespeare understood the importance of matching an idea to its delivery in Hamlet’s directives to the Player King:

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature: for any thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as t’were, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure (Hamlet, III, ii).

Holding “the mirror up to nature” harkens back to the “Poetics” of Aristotle, who believed that imitation was one of the primary impulses of comedy and tragedy (1954, pp. 223-224). Aristotle’s explanations of the processes of drama in “The Poetics” are sometimes coupled with his “Rhetoric” in the same published edition, for the reason that they function much the same on topics that are
intrinsically related. If drama’s purpose is to move the heart, the purpose of
Rhetoric is to move the mind (2009, p. 277). It could be argued that effective
arguments are made only when both of these centers of consciousness are
engaged.

Contemporary theorists found a relationship with the dramatic impulse as well.
Kenneth Burke believed that life wasn’t just like a drama; it was a drama. Feehan
(1979) understood Burke’s development of Dramatism as a way to glean from the
structural elements an artist imposes on story and narrative as an appropriate
analog to decoding our own experience:

Drama is a shaping of experience, a shaping that takes place in the
mind of some agent. To understand any experience is to organize
that experience, to give form to consciousness. Drama exhibits the
characteristic human process of making sense of life, so that drama
realistically represents the world of human action (p. 410).

Burke emphasized the importance of “identification” as paramount in the
rhetorical act. The relationship between audience and actor (using the term “actor”
as the agent in the communicative act) is made possible by finding commonalities
of perspective and experience and is a prime objective of the rhetorical act. Buber
(1965) shares a similar sensibility with his idea of “dialogue” as an inter-human
experience:

The chief presupposition for the rise of genuine dialogue is that each
should regard his partner as the very one he is. I become aware of
him, aware that he is different, essentially different from myself, in
the definite, unique way which is peculiar to him, and I accept
whom I thus see, so that in full earnestness I can direct what I say to
him as the person he is (p. 71).

Burke’s (1969) “Dramatism” provides a template that identifies structure,
context and their ratios in a rhetorical act. Akin to the journalist’s mantra of “who,
what, when, where and how”, Burke’s “act, scene, agent, agency and purpose” (p. xv),
allows us to more fully understand what lies beneath the surface of an event by
an examination of its parts and their relationships to each other. Not only does
Burke give us an interpretive lens through which we may view a message, he gives
credence to the dramatic metaphor as a meaning-maker of our experience of the
world. This is particularly useful as a teaching tool, because people relate to the
analogs of stories (movies, plays, TV shows) as a way to understand the
communicative act.

Application of Communication Theory in Acting Skills

Acting teachers have relied upon theories of communication to inform and
advance their own work in the last century. This section of the review develops the
relationship of approaches in acting theory with communication theories that serve
as source material or inspiration for their instruction.

Cybernetics rose from the mind of Norbert Wiener, a math prodigy whose
work on military technology in middle of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century became a way to
understand how the mind worked via a mechanical model (Bynum, 2010). Wiener took his findings from the mechanics of artillery systems and focused his theory on social and behavioral systems as well. Cybernetics argues for a mechanized model of the mind: goal-oriented behavior regulated by feedback systems can reduce the workings of the mind to a machine-like process no different than the way a ballistic missile self-corrects on its way to a target (Froese, 2010).

Cohen (1978) states that cybernetic analysis “is the best kind of analysis for the actor, because it is closer to the analysis that his character makes, and that we make daily” (pp. 33-34). The feedback loop is a central tenet in Cohen’s acting theory, which shifted the focus from deterministic thinking about the actor’s process to a cybernetic approach. As Freud’s deterministic weltanschauung fed earlier ideas about acting—most prominently, the “method” of Constantin Stanislavski (1961)—Wiener’s work in Cybernetics and Systems Theory represented a new paradigm in acting theory (p. 33).

In his explanation of the importance of the feedback loop, Cohen also co-opted the ideas of Watzlawick (2010) who stated, “you cannot not communicate” (p. 56). Cohen continues:

To remain “uncommunicative” is to communicate dislike, disapproval, or a variety of other feelings and informational bits. In the feedback of a common interaction, an ordinary conversation for example, thousands of signals are transmitted and received every minute, from conscious verbal dialogue, to conscious non-verbal
signals (shrugs, winks, gestures), to the unconscious and autonomic behaviors of our physiology, behaviors of which we are all skilled observers and interpreters (1978, p. 37).

Baxter’s Relational Dialectics Theory proposes a very different perspective on interpersonal communication (Baxter, 2004). Initially interested in the role of opposites in communication, Baxter became immersed in the dialectical theories of Hegel and Marx. Baxter cites the work of Mikhail Bakhtin as an influence in her shift from the more goal-directed dialectic approach to a dialogic view. Her work with Montgomery (p. 185) in Relational Dialectics argued against goal-oriented behavior designed to self-correct interpersonal relationships to a state of equilibrium (p. 186). In stark contrast to the cybernetic model, Baxter states:

…relational dialectics, like dialogism more generally, displaces the notion of a center with a focus on ongoing centripetal—centrifugal flux. There is no center, only flux. Equilibrium is a concept grounded in stability. By contrast, relational dialectics, and dialogism more generally, emphasize change. Equilibrium is based on the logic of balance: when a system is out of kilter, or out of balance with too much of one opposition, the system corrects itself by restoring balance. By contrast, relational dialectics, like dialogism more generally, views balance as distinctly nondialogic. (2004, p. 186)
While this approach differs greatly from Cohen, Shurtleff (1978) used similar ideas to argue that compelling relationships onstage always contained oppositional impulses. Acting theory has been continually fed by the field of communication and provides a test ground to explore the veracity of these hypotheses.

Much of the training developed for business and professional application comes from a few theorists leading the way in theatre pedagogy. Spolin (1963) is considered one of the most important thinkers in the area of improvisation and her 1963 work “Improvisation for the Theater” is considered a benchmark in the field. Spolin believes the “game” is the best medium to spawn fun—the precedent to spontaneity and creativity. These games can vary, but Spolin emphasizes the importance of creating a “Who, What, Where” structure that gives shape and form to an exercise. Although a theatre game may be unscripted, it is important to create enough structure to allow creativity to flourish. Undisciplined settings can quickly become destructive, rather than constructive exercises. Transformation lies at the heart of Spolin’s process (p. 39), the act of change being the most compelling of dramatic activities. These exercises can provide the basis for developing training exercises in other fields of professional development. Spolin’s ideas embody the ideas of John Dewey (1938), who argued for a more experiential form of educational process. Theatre games are, by definition, learning by doing. They emphasize growth and transformation within the form, which relates to Dewey’s principle of continuity (p. 36). A student’s immersion in the experience of a theatre-game can lead to new habits in their interactions with others in the game. Certainly
one must account for an individual’s resistance to the experience, but as Dewey states:

The basic character of habit is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. For it is a somewhat different person who enters into them (p. 35).

Herein lies the goal of theatre-games: that by performing the exercise, one may be changed by the experience and develop different habits of behavior—in the case of a theatre-game, more freedom, spontaneity and creativity.

While Spolin was developing her ideas in Chicago, Johnstone (1979) was taking a different approach at the Royal Court Theatre in London (p. 9). Influenced by the mask and clown work of French director Jacques Copeau, Johnstone’s approach was less contextual than Spolin, and centered more on the use of relationship status as a process to sustain a performance (p. 41). Status is constantly changing and can be played, either high or low, in a variety of ways, e.g., in non-verbal form, with self-deprecating behavior (low) or superciliously avoiding eye contact (high); verbally, status can be played low by adding powerless speech idioms (“um”, “uh”, “you know”, “like”), or high (limited pitch range and the omission of speech interrupters). The constant interplay between these power exchanges can lend its own momentum and interest in an improvisation (p. 33).
Improvisation is the art of spontaneous performance and storytelling. Despite the unscripted format of improvisation, the underlying structures actors utilize promote idea creation and sustain a performance. Actors must be willing to accept what their partner offers to them (p. 94). All too often, our first instinct is to “block” an “offer”, or another idea, with a negative comment or action – effectively shutting down the creative process. When idea creation is stifled, an improvised performance has nowhere to go. Johnstone’s explanation of exercises designed to rid the improvisatory process of negativity and break the bad habits that inhibit idea creation is a valuable approach for anyone tasked with generating cooperative and creative thinking.

There are people who prefer to say ‘Yes’, and there are people who prefer to say ‘No’. Those who say ‘Yes’ are rewarded by the adventures they have, and those who say ‘No’ are rewarded by the safety they attain. There are far more ‘No’ sayers around than ‘Yes’ sayers, but you can train one type to behave like the other. (1989. p.1)

Johnstone’s concept of ‘status play’ bears resemblance to the Face Negotiation Theory developed by Stella Ting-Toomey. Ting-Toomey’s theory is predicated on the idea that a person is constantly seeking to either save face or give face, which may be interpreted as maintaining or conferring honor or, in Johnstone’s terms, status (2009, pp. 400-401). Although Ting-Toomey’s theories relate more to intercultural communication and bridging the divide between collectivist and
individualist cultures (Ting-Toomey, 2010), her “Facework” analysis is applicable to interpersonal communication within cultures and useful for the actor in developing characters of different cultural mindsets. Johnstone’s work with ‘status’ precedes the ‘facework’ of Ting-Toomey by several years and there are no citations to suggest cross-pollination of ideas. But it would be of interest to know if Johnstone may have influenced Ting-Toomey with his ideas of status play.

Practical Application of Skills in Training

Hough (2011b) uses the techniques pioneered by Spolin and Johnstone to train managers to be more creative and spontaneous. By exploring improvisation in the micro, the learner can readily adapt those lessons in macro to their business practices. One example is learning how to handle miscues in an improvisation onstage, e.g. when an offer is blocked or a participant gets “stuck” and doesn’t know what to say or do next in the improvisation. Transparency and acceptance are the participant’s primary tools; learning to acknowledge what is happening with humor, honesty and grace. That approach can be the most effective way to handle organizational miscues as well (p. 68).

Vera and Crossan (2005) seek to dispel the misconception that improvisatory techniques lack structure, and therefore are of little use in organizational thinking. By reinforcing the ground rules that Johnstone articulates—specifically the principle of “agree, accept, and add” and the use of free association and reincorporation (p. 207)—Vera and Crossan hypothesize that “improvisation can positively impact
team innovation if certain conditions are present” (p. 221). Through quantitative analysis, Vera and Crossan test five specific hypotheses with intervention/control group studies. Their results confirm the efficacy of Johnstone’s practices and the use of the improvisatory paradigm in organizational behavior.

Kirsten and du Preez (2010) test the practice of improvisation as a tool for innovation, by developing a study that measures changes in group dynamics and a climate for innovation. Their primary testing device is the Team Climate Inventory (TCI), “a five-factor, 44 item, multi-dimensional instrument with acceptable psychometric properties (p. 5). A questionnaire was administered to both experimental and control groups prior to training/testing sessions and then eight weeks after the workshop was conducted. Analysis of the data was processed using Statistica software. Although there were instances where no significant difference could be discerned between control and experimental groups, the overall conclusion indicated measurable improvement in ‘climate for innovation’ in groups. This research also cites the prior research of Vera and Crossan (2005) and solidifies the importance of improvisatory pedagogy in organizational development.

Surveys indicate that oral communication skills are considered critical skills by employers and academicians alike (Pittenger, Miller & Mott, 2004). Today business communication courses are widely offered in business schools. While the value of a business communication curriculum is generally recognized, the degree of the coursework’s effectiveness is the subject of the research of Pittenger et al. (p. 327).
The authors designed a study to test the improvement of a group of business students in their oral presentation skills. The study emphasized skills training by assigning an oral business presentation, which was then videotaped, reviewed and critiqued. Comparisons were made between presentations made prior to intervention and those made after skills training. Prior to skills training, more than half of the students were rated below competent according to the assessment survey that was developed to grade the student’s performances. However, after skills training, 100% of the students crossed the competency threshold (p. 330).

The authors provide the test data and the assessment criteria they developed, as well as an implementation strategy for educators to utilize in other environments.

Taylor and Ladkin (2009) take a broader view in support of a more general arts-based paradigm by which leadership and managerial skills can be developed. The authors explicate four processes – skills transfer, making, projective technique and illustration of essence – to develop greater acumen. In brief, “Skills Transfer” is the practical and beneficial use of skill sets developed in art curricula that improve one’s overall effectiveness in management. Examples are provided where people with arts training leverage their skills in beneficial ways in business environments (p. 57). “Projective Technique” is a more theoretical approach aligned with the aesthetic theory of Langer (p. 58) that can be used “to help managers develop a more complex and nuanced understanding of organizational issues” (p. 65).

“Illustration of Essence” uses artistic expression, i.e., a play or a film, to understand the fundamental aspects of a comparable situation and thereby flesh out a greater
understanding of a managerial dilemma. Taylor and Ladkin use Shakespeare’s Henry V to create a discussion about the elements of leadership that are germane both to the story and to the participant’s personal experience.

Reading and seeing Henry V performed and engaging in extended discussion of leadership as Shakespeare has portrayed it can help a manager have a much more complex and nuanced understanding of leadership in a way that is based in a felt, emotional, personal connection rather than through an abstract, intellectual theorization (p. 66).

“Making” is creating art for the purpose of experiencing a personal connection, to heal the often fragmented and compartmentalized experience of management. The “making” of masks is just one example the authors suggest to complete this facet of arts-based training (p. 62). Taylor and Ladkin do not means-test their agenda, but they do provide a suggested pathway to take the concepts from theory to research study.

Nicolaidis and Liotas (2006) take a broad look at the application of theatre-skills training in the business world, and argue that it has been overlooked as an effective training tool for managers. The authors present three particular uses of theatre in management development. The first component they address is the use of role-playing to educate and inform. Real understanding of complex dilemmas in leadership can be better achieved with experiential, active learning—a cornerstone of the theatre skills process. The authors argue that discussion of case studies is not
as effective as role-playing scenarios or “Theatre as Representation” (TAR) experiences (p. 20).

Skills-training is also stressed as a valuable tool. While improvisatory methods are arguably the most valuable of these techniques, Nicolaidis and Liotas also give credence to Psychodrama, which has been used as long ago as the 1930’s in training workshops for the R. H. Macy Company (p. 21). Psychodrama takes a more therapeutic approach and seeks to change behavioral patterns without fear of being punished for mistakes in the safe environment of the training exercise.

Organizational Theatre is a term used to describe performances using larger scale production methods to teach, inform and create change. Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed—a theatrical form to foment social change—is cited as yet another way theatre can be used in business to teach and influence organizational culture (p. 22). According to Nicolaidis and Liotas, theatre “has the power to transform the individual in ways that traditional forms of learning cannot. It should be used more extensively in organizations worldwide” (p. 23).

Application of Skills in Health Care

Dow, Leong, Anderson and Wenzel (2007) provide convincing research that theatre/acting skills can be used to train doctors and lawyers to interact more effectively in their professional capacity. In their study, a team of physicians and theatre educators from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia created a pilot program to teach clinical empathy to a group of 20 residents. The
intervention consisted of instruction in skills training – active listening, physical presence, physical and vocal expression and body language and positioning. As with similar studies, participants were evaluated prior to intervention and four months subsequent to the course of instruction. The results for the intervention group showed significant improvement over the control group in empathetic communication, relating to the listener, nonverbal communication, respect for dignity and overall impression (p. 1116).

Larson and Yao (2005) seek to define the elements of empathy and argue for its importance in patient-physician relationships. The authors suggest, “To cultivate an acute ability to empathize with others, one needs patience, curiosity, and willingness to subject one’s mind to the patient’s world” (p. 1100). This projection is, in fact, precisely the actor’s journey when creating a character. It follows that using a mindset similar to the actor’s could provide a physician with a better understanding of a patient’s thoughts and feelings as well. This article explains the fundamentals of an empathic process under the rubric “Emotional Labor”, making a distinction between “surface acting” and deep acting” (p. 1104). Surface acting entails “faking it” – superficially changing the voice and face to merely suggest care and concern for a patient. Deep acting requires an internalization of the patient’s situation and a value-guided commitment to care. There is ancillary evidence to indicate that surface acting actually leads to lower job satisfaction and the authors concur that surface acting without a value-guided approach to care can lead to
burnout (p. 1105). Perhaps the most compelling argument for theatre/acting skills in clinical empathy training is made in Larson and Yao’s conclusions:

The framework of emotional labor and acting methods provides a channel through which physicians can learn skills that activate empathic processes. There are already well-developed techniques in acting training that can be adapted for teaching physicians to empathize. Teaching acting to physicians also enriches their reservoir of human experience and makes it easier for them to develop perspective, which, ironically, can help them achieve detachment when they become too engaged in a patient’s experience (2005, p. 1105).

A response to this article, originally published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, was published in that same journal. Haller (2005) reinforces Larson and Yao’s thesis, and claims “As a pediatrician and actor, I have found my training in acting to be among the most powerful skills I bring to my practice”. A subsequent letter to the editor is more suspicious about the use of acting as an effective metaphor for the doctor-patient relationship. Lipsitt (2005) questions the authenticity of this paradigm when engaging patients. Clearly more persuasion is needed to properly explain the tenets of acting in a physician/patient relationship to skeptics of this approach, although Lipsitt, who teaches at the Harvard Medical School, suggests that admission policies in Medical Schools might be better served
paying more attention to student’s skills in empathic interviewing and less on expertise in biochemistry.

Application of Skills in the Law

Hanrahan (2003) advocates revitalizing the study of classical rhetoric in American Law Schools and uses the rhetorical expertise of Johnnie Cochran, Jr. in the O.J. Simpson trial to substantiate her case. Hanrahan claims that there is a widely held belief that:

...trial lawyers need some sort of system to develop techniques of oral argument. Most trial lawyers, however, are thrown into practice without ever receiving this essential training. If law schools revived classical rhetoric methodologies [sic], then students could effectively develop oral argument skills essential to realize the goal of the U.S. legal system—to find and express truth (p. 299).

A need for more training in oral argument in the courtroom is germane to the research question of this thesis. Those needs can be met by the training methods explored herein.

A thorough explanation of the use of theatre-skills in role-playing and simulation training is Gunsalus and Beckett’s description of their interdisciplinary program at the University of Illinois (Gunsalus & Beckett, 2008). Teaming the College of Law with Professors and graduate students from the Department of
Theatre to take the law student from novice to professional, Gunsalus and Beckett combine skills training with simulations to teach a three-tiered program. Stage One focuses on Client Counseling, Fact Investigation and Interviewing (CFI). Stage Two is a Negotiations Skills course and finally a Trial Advocacy course serves as their “capstone experience” (p. 447). The training uses actors to play opposite the law students. The exercises are videotaped and critiqued by theatre professionals who instruct the students in a variety of skills, including workshops on stage fright, understanding body language, and the use of props (p. 451). The classes have been quite popular in the program and students reported they were overwhelmed by the amount of information that can be gleaned in interviews, by training the eye to look for nuanced information in client negotiations (p. 452). The authors provide a comprehensive explanation of their program and reinforce the methodological approach by arguing the greater value of experiential learning in simulation training (p. 462).

Not only can actor-training skills be applied to enhance the effectiveness of managers and professionals, the entire theatre/drama model can be used as a pedagogical analog to professional situations. Ball (2004) chaired the Theatre Department at Duke University and applied the skills he taught acting and directing students to the education of legal professionals. Ball’s use of the theatre as an analog is an effective way to focus on trial advocacy as a performance medium. The courtroom is effectively a theatre. The jury is the attorney’s “audience” and the witnesses in the case are the “cast”. The leading actor in this performance is, of
course, the attorney. Specific suggestions—making sure the jury (audience) can see and hear everything, how to effectively use props in a trial—are provided in this succinct text to reinforce the attorney’s awareness of the technical aspects of performance style and logistics. The theatre analog also provides an effective pedagogy to teach basic rhetorical style to trial attorneys. A legal case is seen from a storytelling point of view, with the major events of the trial referred to as the “plot”. How an attorney chooses to tell the story of the case—their use of language and the structuring of the story—is as important as the performance elements. Ball reminds law students:

You must do things legally right, but that is not your ultimate goal.
Your ultimate goal is to persuade. Legal requirements control how you are allowed to persuade, but laws and rules of procedure and evidence are limitations, not goals.

YOUR ONLY GOAL IS TO PERSUADE

Actors spend as much time learning to be plausible as you do learning laws and rules of procedure and evidence.

Sometimes acting students erroneously come to think that their goal is to be plausible. It is not. Their goal is to be interesting. Being plausible is merely prerequisite to their real goal: being interesting.

The only thing more absurd than a plausible actor who is not interesting is a legally expert trial attorney who is not persuasive (2004, p. 137).
Application of Skills in Leadership

Halpern and Luber (2003) also use the theatre and performance analogy to instruct leaders on how to gain authenticity and a greater sense of connectedness with their work, their words, and their people. Comparisons are drawn between the skills of effective acting and effective leadership, with a model for migrating the methodology of an actor’s approach to performance into leadership skills for managers. The P.R.E.S model—Presence, Reaching Out, Expressiveness, Self-Knowing—challenges students of leadership to become more aware of their bodies, their voices and ultimately themselves to relate to people more genuinely (p. 9). Popular films, television shows and famous plays are used in frequent examples that viscerally relate the journey of the actor with the demands of leadership. Well-known actors are quoted, who relate their experience and reveal the connections inherent in anyone who is charged with the task of persuasion.

Both of these approaches use the theatre or the acting performance as a metaphor to understand more deeply the challenge of leadership. As Parker (1998) states, “teaching within the metaphor” is an effective method for deeper understanding of any subject:

By teaching this way, we do not abandon the ethic that drives us to cover the field—we honor it more deeply. Teaching from the microcosm, we exercise responsibility toward both the subject and our students by refusing merely to send data “bites” down the
intellectual food chain but by helping our students understand where
the information comes from and what it means (Parker, 1998, p. 126).

An explanatory approach describes the methods Holtom, Mickel and Boggs
(2003) used to teach ethics in leadership through the use of interactive drama by
using actors in interactive dramas. Their approach differs from standard role-plays
because the actors perform the same material for different groups. Interpretations
vary widely however and active participation is very high among those attend their
workshops. The authors provide quantitative data to support the efficacy of the
work as well as a basic process of the workshops. Their experience echoes that of
Dewey and other practitioners of theatre-based teaching—the experiential nature of
the learning process is more effective than simple information and inspiration
dissemination (p. 296).

Conclusion

Communicating effectively is a vital skill for virtually everyone in the
workplace. With information economies proliferating, it is incumbent upon many
in the professional and managerial ranks to sharpen their ability to communicate
their messages with efficacy, and to interpret the interpersonal communication they
receive with sensitivity and understanding. Many organizations are investing in
communication training that utilizes theatre skills-based methods to train their employees in a variety of settings.

Today, managers are trained with exercises that originated in acting classes to gain a greater sense of expressiveness and a more authentic connection with the people who follow them. Physicians are trained in clinical empathy, in much the same way that actors learn to listen and respond to their fellow actors on stage, to increase their awareness and sensitivity toward their patients. Lawyers in training have also found benefit by working with theatre professionals to increase their skills in client negotiations and trial advocacy.

Although there is sometimes resistance to the value of “soft skills” that theatre-based training brings to the world of business, there is a growing body of scholarship that argues for the effectiveness of this type of training. There is also more and more evidence that emotion and its expression is more an asset than a liability in organizational behavior (Kreamer, 2011). Decision-making is deeply affected by the parts of the brain where emotion is processed (Bechara, 2004). Training that focuses exclusively on functional/rational processes, leaves a great deal of important emotional/intuitive skill building to chance. This can be remedied with a course of exploration that is fulfilled by a theatre-based process. Arts-based training—specifically theatre/actor skills—increases the communication effectiveness of managers and professionals in measurable and salient ways and provides a pedagogical foundation for professional development programs.
There is substantive evidence that theatre skills training is an effective pedagogy in a variety of settings. In business, the law, and in medicine, theatre/acting training can reap tangible benefits to students in all of these disciplines.
Chapter Three: Scope and Methods

_Actors and leaders face a common challenge. They must form connections, communicate effectively, and work with others as a team. They must be prepared to play different roles, as the situation requires. They must be prepared to influence and move people every day._ (Halpern & Lubar, 2003.)

Introduction

A review of the literature reveals deep ties between communication theory and the practical application of those ideas in actor training. We have also seen the use of actor training applied to professional development programs in a variety of settings:

- Teaching managers presentation and interpersonal communication skills.
- Teaching attorneys advocacy and negotiation skills.
- Teaching physicians clinical empathy skills.

Although these training methods have been used to improve the communication skills of professionals and managers, further inquiry is required to examine the existing perceptions of this kind of training and their use outside of the realm of a theatrical application to understand how these skills can be better integrated into professional development protocols.

The Goal of the Study

The aim of this thesis project is to collect data about the perception and use of actor skill training from several professional perspectives, by administering a series of surveys targeting specific demographic interests. The survey information will be
coupled with a series of personal interviews (live or electronically) with communication skills facilitators already immersed in teaching this type of training, to learn more about the perception and use of these methods from their unique perspective.

The data will be aggregated and analyzed to determine patterns of perception, detect strengths and weaknesses, general biases and areas on which to focus, to better implement training programs that address the communication skills of the different professions.

The Scope of the Study

An inductive approach will first be focused more generally on scholars in the field of communication by issuing a voluntary survey through the National Communication Association. Using their listserv—www.natcom.org/CRTNET—the survey will provide information on the general perception and use of actor training skills in the field of communication. Potential questions for this audience include:

- What is your level of familiarity with this kind of training?
- Do you believe actor skill training in professional development is an effective pedagogy?
- What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of training professionals with these methods?

The second survey will inquire more specifically on the perceptions and use within the legal profession with a survey offered to one law firm.
This survey will be administered via SurveyMonkey.com, a website that facilitates the development, distribution and analysis of survey data. A sample organization of convenience will be chosen to represent this demographic; the goal is to seek an organization that would ideally provide 25+ participants in the survey. A series of general demographic questions would be followed by questions regarding perception and use of communication skills training in general. Two additional questions would be added that address their specific professional concerns, i.e. questions about trial advocacy and negotiation skills. The data would then be analyzed to detect those patterns of perception and use from their specialized fields of expertise.

Potential questions for this audience include (see Appendix A):

- Have you ever participated in any communication skills training?
- How comfortable are you speaking in front of people?
- What kind of training would help your communication skills in your job?

The final component of data collection will be a personal interview with facilitators already using actor skill training in professional development. These interviews will be conducted from a template of open-ended questions, intended to induce a discussion of their methods, and the successes and challenges of their practices. The interviews will be conducted in a manner most convenient for the interviewee, live or electronically (Skype or telephone), and will be recorded for the interviewer’s benefit to accurately render the responses to the inquiry.
Potential questions for the interview subjects include (see Appendix B):

- Describe the techniques you used in the communications skills training?
- What are the greatest obstacles for students to overcome in this training?
- How do you get the participants to embrace and/or “buy in” to the training paradigm?

Limitations of the Study

Given the time constraints of the thesis project, data collection shall be conducted over a period of 3-4 weeks and shall be limited to the samples of convenience previously referenced. Samples of convenience will be used in this study, but because the scope covers both general and specific foci, in addition to the personal interviews collected, it is believed that a threshold of qualitative data can be met sufficient to address the research questions posed by this thesis.

The tentative timeline for the data collection and analysis is:

- Week of February 27, 2012—Finalize survey and identify participants
- Week of March 5, 2012—Distribute survey to participants
- Week of March 12, 2012—Follow up on encouraging participation
- Week of March 26, 2012—Collect surveys and begin data analysis, conduct personal interviews
- Week of April 9, 2012—Edit and finalize the chapters and complete syllabi for the intervention training modules
Conclusion

A goal of this project is to collect data to create a clearer picture of the perceptions, methods and results of actor training in professional development. The spectrum of inquiry will stretch inductively from the general to the specific in an effort to generate a sufficient amount of data for analysis. Recommendations and directions may be taken from the results of this study to inform communication training and development departments. In addition, educators may wish to implement these skills into their own training syllabi. Finally, this research may add to the positive perception of these methods, benefit the facilitators who teach the techniques and, more importantly, the participants who increase their skill set in message delivery effectiveness.
Chapter Four: The Study

For the most part, actors love to be watched. Lawyers? Not so much.

--JM, actor and educator at Emory University Law School

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to identify the effectiveness of actor training skills in professional and managerial development and the uses with which they were employed in training and development programs. Dewey (1936) and Kolb (2009) have been prominent advocates of experiential learning in progressive American education, and actor training in communication skill building is almost purely experiential. Experiential learning can be defined as a “direct encounter with the phenomena being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter, or only considering the possibility of doing something about it” (Smith, 1996). But the basic notion of experiential learning can be traced back to Confucius who said: “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand” (Confucious, n.d).

As previously cited in Chapter Two, Burke (1968) believed that the dramatic structure of theatrical storytelling not only helped us to understand the events of daily life, but also created a template to map out human experience. The essential elements of Burke’s “Dramatism” are a consistent point of reference when the performance paradigm is applied in a pedagogical setting. As has been previously stated, one of the purposes of the study was to examine organizations and individuals who implemented the drama/performance metaphor to frame a
communication skill-building program.

Data Collection

The data was collected in three formats:

1. A series of nine (9) interviews was conducted with educators and business leaders in the field who have employed similar training methods.
   a. The list of interviewees includes faculty in Law and Management Schools, Corporate Facilitators from Consulting Groups and one Human Resource Manager for a Fortune 100 company.

2. A fifteen-question survey was issued to the employees of one of America’s top one hundred law firms (ilrg.com, 2012).

3. A three-question survey was issued to the 8000 members of the National Communication Association, designed to gather data to support the themes from the interviews and the law firm survey.

The interviews and surveys were conducted to gather data to address the following questions:

- What are the general perceptions of actor training skills as a framework for communication skill building?
- How effective are these training methods?
- What are the learning strategies used in actor skill training for professional development?
• What are the primary obstacles faced by students when engaged in this kind of training?

Data Analysis

Personal interviews were conducted with a sample of convenience. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to identify patterns and perceptions that would support the thesis project hypotheses regarding the use of actor skills as an effective training platform. The legal survey results were analyzed to determine whether actor skills were a viable and relevant training platform for legal professionals. Given the minimal response to the survey issued to members of the National Communication Association via a listserv query, the information gleaned from the results renders minimal supporting evidence for the use of actor skills in training and development. However, the responses received from the NATCOM survey were, with only one exception, overwhelmingly positive about the perceptions of actor skills in communication training—rating the techniques effective or highly effective.

Results of the Study

The interviews provided the bulk of the qualitative data supporting the perception, efficacy, description, and perceived obstacles for actor training skills to improve communication where message delivery and performance in front of an audience is critical to success. The legal survey provided the bulk of the
quantitative data to determine perception and use patterns. The general goals for the survey sent to the law firm were to identify:

- Level of participation in communications skills training programs.
- Comfort level speaking in front of people.
- Types of training that would help your communication skills in the workplace.

The perception survey was emailed to 784 employees at the Law Firm, and generated 92 responses (12% response rate).

**Survey Demographics**

As the following charts indicate, the participants were primarily attorneys, with slightly more men electing to participate. The respondents were categorized by area of expertise in the firm: Intellectual Property, Litigation, and Commercial, Financial and Real Estate (CFRE). The remainder of the respondents consisted of administrative employees. Demographically, the age of the participants follows a common age range pattern in professions that require extensive post baccalaureate education.
Table 1  
**Demographics: sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  
**Demographics: age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60 or older</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 or younger</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Slightly less than 50% of the respondents held positions of leadership, while only 42% claimed delivering information to an audience as a major component of their job responsibilities.
Table 5
Demographics: presentation as a component in work tasks

Almost half of the respondents (48%) claim that presentations are part of their work tasks, while more than half claim involvement in team meetings and negotiations as a primary component of their jobs. Research, reading and writing made up the largest number of responses for those who claimed “Other.”

Table 6
Demographics: work task breakdown
Interviewee Profiles

For the purposes of confidentiality, this research uses pseudonyms (initials) for the names of the interviewees and fictitious names for the companies.

- SK, CEO, Miranda Consulting, Massachusetts
  Originally a sketch comedy performer, joined the company twelve years ago and was part of the team that grew the company from one million dollars in annual revenue to almost nine million dollars in annual revenue.

- KR, senior Facilitator, Miranda Consulting, Massachusetts
  Broadway actor who migrated to training and development and currently facilitates communication training with Fortune 1000 companies all over the world.

- KH, CEO and Founder, AdLib LLC, Ohio
  Authored book on the use of improvisation as a training tool in business; senior executive for an award-winning training and development company, with seven branches nationwide.

- RB, Communication Consultant, Illinois
  Over 25 years in public relations and marketing and began acting 10 years ago after studying with Second City in Chicago Illinois, a leading improvisational training ground. He has written a book on his approach.
• LP, Assistant Professor, Business Administration, Business School, Research 1 University, Virginia

Facilitates communication training for MBA candidates with emphasis on performance studies and rhetoric

• JM, actor and educator, Law School, Research 1 University, Georgia.

Teaches trial techniques to 2nd year law students and a course in courtroom persuasion to 3rd year students.

• MB, Actor and CEO of Performance Consulting, Georgia.

Consults with large and small corporate entities integrating performance techniques, and human growth potential theories into business practices.

• LB, human resources manager—Fortune 100 Financial Services Corporation, headquartered in Connecticut.

Implemented acting skills training platform for technology group of company.

• CH, litigator and partner with TK, a top 100 law firm in the U.S.

Trained in acting skills prior to law school.
Perception

Interviewees agreed that there is some initial skepticism about the use of actor skills in communication. However, the effectiveness of the training appears to allay those fears. “It’s perceived as a little bit risky, but not as much as you might think. People are surprised by how rigorous the experience is,” says SK, whose firm utilizes the performance metaphor as the framing device for their training (2012).

“Almost everybody says, ‘I’m intrigued and a little skeptical. I’m curious to see how this is going to play out,’” says KR, a senior facilitator with the aforementioned consulting group (2010).

RB (2012) begins his communication seminars with a story about a CEO who turned to actor skills to improve his performance in business. According to RB, this story about the integration of business and theatre is intended to quell any skepticism people might have about the legitimacy of his framing device.

Academics who responded to the NATCOM survey overwhelmingly had a positive perception of the use of actor skill training. The reduction of anxiety in front of an audience and the development of confidence in presentation skills were key factors that were echoed by more than one respondent. KW (2012), professor at a regional university in the Northeast, has this to say about the teaching platform: “I really believe an acting class can help college students become better mid-level managers by the time they reach their late 20s or so. It provides a degree of confidence that helps them manage those working under them.” DL (2012), interdisciplinary professor of Communication and English at a state public
university (ME) believes,

...these techniques help people overcome small hurdles one step at a time, which builds confidence, which translates into better performance, and the cycle continues. Any failure in the process should be used as a learning opportunity to keep improving, rather than focusing only on what went wrong, since that can break confidence and stall the cycle of psychological and performative [sic]success (2012).

LP (2012) teaches communication skills with an emphasis on the performance metaphor to third year MBA students. The students enter her class with lots of analytical acumen and see her approach as a legitimate value-add to their skill set. “The rest of the MBA program is so left-brained, they’re really ready for some right-brained” learning. The feedback generated from her class, which uses Shakespeare, poetry and performance exercises, is very positive. “They love it—they absolutely love it.”

In the law firm survey, two questions generated considerable support for the use of actor training skills. Seventy-six percent of the respondents indicated that the delivery of information is as important as the message being delivered. The fact that fifty seven percent of the respondents responded that they would benefit from additional training in communication skills establishes a rationale for actor training skills.
Table 7

Please respond to the following statement: How one delivers information is as important as the information that is being conveyed.

- Agree: 76%
- Undecided: 13%
- Disagree: 11%

Table 8

Please respond to the following statement: The way I communicate in presentation situations requires additional skills training.

- Agree: 56.5%
- Undecided: 28.3%
- Disagree: 15.2%
**Efficacy**

Efficacy refers to whether actor-training skills can be successfully integrated into leadership and communication skills learning platforms. KH (2012) began her consulting business in the basement of her home with a phone line and a question: “Who are the last companies that would ever buy this kind of training? That’s who I’m going to call.” That approach proved to be a successful strategy for AbLib. “We found a niche and the niche that we play in is the last place that you’d expect. Eighty percent of our clients are attorneys, accountants, scientists and engineers.”

Miranda Consulting originally thought that creative types were the best market for the training they provided, but that proved not to be the case. “We’ve been more successful in conservative, analytical environments” says SK (2012). Highly trained, technically savvy people are often thrust into management and leadership roles with little background in message delivery or style. As SK recounted, this “is where this training thrives.” As Miranda Consulting has grown in size and stature, with several of the top business schools in the country on their client list, including Harvard, Columbia and Northwestern University, their approach has changed. The company’s image is “not ‘we’re crazy actors’—we’re people who understand learning, and we understand business and this is a solution—and it’s a unique solution, but it’s highly effective.”

LB (2012) is a human resources manager for a Fortune 100 financial services conglomerate headquartered in Connecticut. She describes the company as “very conservative, highly analytic and execution-driven as a culture.” Miranda
Consulting was hired initially to conduct a storytelling workshop to train their leaders to be more visionary and inspiring, and perhaps more importantly, to be able to share those visions with their teams. Subsequently, an offsite workshop on “fostering change” was organized with Miranda for their technology group and leadership team. “We knew we had to do something more dramatic to shake people up,” say LB. The company had used other types of training like “Outward Bound” to foster change, but LB believes that the actor skills training offered by Miranda were “a little more all-inclusive and relatable.” Using the theatre games and improvisation exercises, “really unleashed this different kind of energy that day and was extremely beneficial to do the rest of the work we needed to do.”

The improvisation games fostered a change in the dynamic of the technology group (fifty members) and its leadership team (ten members). It set “a new kind of tone and relationship between these folks.” As LB recounted, the differentiator in this kind of training was its emphasis on the experiential:

…you start to bridge from a fun, seemingly unrelated activity to something that could have some relevance because it was experiential; and so you start to remember it better, dig for the bridges, and because it’s so memorable, it has more impact than something intellectual.

“I knew that this could fail with a technology group,” which she described as “highly analytic” and “very introverted.” But LB was enthusiastic about the training’s effectiveness, believing it helped people “rewire” by breaking out of
standard modes of operating. “It [the workshop] did exactly what we needed it to
do and gave people a bit of a one eighty, brought them way out of their comfort
zone, but doing that all together in a bonding experience, too.”

Survey respondents were asked to rate the value of different elements of
communication using a Likert Scale of “Very Important,” “Moderately Important,”
or “Unimportant.” This question yielded a wealth of information on what
respondents valued in the communicative act in the workplace. Only one answer
was possible in this question.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Moderately Important</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization of ideas</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of analogies in conveying ideas</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of personal narratives or relevant examples</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal strength and variety</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant quality of voice</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial expressiveness</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Contact</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energized delivery</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic passion for subject</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsal and preparation</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-verbal communication and gestures</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to relate to the audience</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>92</td>
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</table>

answered question 92

skipped question 0
All (100%) of the respondents believed that “organization of ideas” was “Very Important”, while the smallest percentage believed that facial expression and gesture were “Very Important.” An “ability to relate to the audience” was deemed “Very Important” by more than half of the respondents and “eye contact” by an even greater number. While eye contact may be considered a technical detail of a communication exchange that can be easily altered, the ability to relate to an audience calls for a greater sense of the nuance of communicating—a skill that is directly addressed by actor skill building. “Vocal strength and variety” was judged “Very Important” by slightly more than a third of total respondents; another skill that can be directly addressed by actor skill building. Ranking highest in the “Unimportant” category was “use of personal narratives or relevant examples.” This is not surprising, considering that personal narratives are not as germane to the particulars of trials, hearings and litigious negotiations. One of the principle tenets of an actor-based approach to performance is rehearsal and preparation; and to its value, two thirds of the respondents in this survey agreed that it was “Very Important” to communication.

Training is an essential pathway to skill-building and the survey respondents had a mixed response to the question, “Training in the following areas could improve my performance or the performance of my associates.” A majority (66%) of respondents recognized the need to have greater body awareness, which may be related to controlling stage fright and the physiological effects it has on the body. While a significant percentage of respondents make only a supposition that training
“could” improve their communication skills, it is important to recognize that this supposition carries an implicit belief in the efficacy of actor-skill training.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice training (for clarity, volume and energy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body awareness (so your body reflects the message and its intention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body language (what you communicate nonverbally)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional expressiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of storytelling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please respond to the following statement: "Training in the following areas could improve my performance or the performance of my associates." Please check all that apply.
Table 11

Please indicate any training that you have already participated in. Please check all that apply.

- "Toastmasters" or other public speaking training
- Acting class in high school
- Acting class in college
- Improvisation or Comedy Training
- Debate training
- Vocal training (including singing)
- Company-provided training in communication skills
- Company-provided training on sales techniques
- Outside training on sales techniques

Other responses about what training could be of benefit included “taking Acting Class,” “the ability to talk off script without referring to notes,” and “spatial awareness—proximity to one’s audience.”

A majority of respondents (52%) reported having taken company-provided training in communication skills. Other forms of training listed completed the difference with only 17% reporting N/A, or no ancillary communication training. Other forms of related training included “Acting Class Post-Law School,” “TV appearance training,” “Teaching as a graduate assistant,” “Instructor training and instructor positions in the U.S. Army,” “Public speaking in the community,” a
“Large role in play (Arsenic and Old Lace) in high school,” and “Lots of experience.”

Those aforementioned training experiences were positive influences for over 80% of reporting participants. Respondents reported “Lecture with interactive discussion” the most effective training method, but with numerical parity among choices, there appears to be little discernable pattern in this data point (see below).

“Other” responses included: “Steve Jobs said “Powerpoint slides are a substitute for thinking,” “Debate format with interactive Q&A,” and “Informal training by competent mentor who monitors performance in actual situations.”

Table 12

If you selected any items above other than N/A, would you agree that the training you received positively influenced your job performance?

- Strongly Agree: 26%
- Agree: 59%
- Undecided: 13%
- Disagree: 1%
- Strongly Disagree: 1%
Companies such as Miranda Consulting and AdLib are successfully delivering acting skills training to managers and professionals, indicating the efficacy of this learning platform in managerial and professional development.

**Strategies**

Strategies refer to the methods and uses of an actor skill-training platform. The strategies include role-playing, storytelling and personal narratives, improvisation, physical and vocal exercises, public speaking/text analysis and coaching on nonverbal communication. All of the educators who were interviewed applied the performance metaphor to their methods. RB (2012) believes that “every communication should be treated like a performance.” He applies that strategy to
all forms of communication: emails, teleconferences, networking events, meetings, etc. Based on his improvisation training at Second City, RB stresses the importance of “objective-focused” communication that adheres to a concrete premise. A continued focus on the premise of the “scene”, i.e., whatever the communication message may be, helps avoid “mission creep” and keeps the message on track. RB recounted how any project that gets passed along to several departments, can easily become “larded” with “irrelevant junk” that dilutes the original premise of the project. “If it doesn’t support the premise, you have to toss it out. If the objective is to talk about quality, for example, don’t talk about service. Keep it very, very focused. That’s one of the lessons from Second City.”

In addition, improvisation is the defining learning paradigm at AdLib. A large part of what makes an improvisation work is when all of the players follow the rules of engagement. KH’s rule one is: “Say yes.” Acceptance or “saying yes”—not blocking an offer made in a scene—is a tenet of the work of Spolin (1963) and Johnstone (1978) as well. The conversation in any medium cannot continue without the word “yes.” “Put the critic on hold” means dispensing with one’s preconceived notions and reinforces the “yes” mentality necessary to create an environment where people feel safe to let all the ideas flow toward a creative goal. Finally, “make it public” is a reminder that people work best when their efforts are acknowledged and shared among team members. These simple rules always apply to an improvisation sketch and are faithfully applied to business practices in AdLib’s strategy (Hough, 2011a).
AdLib was also recognized by Tech Columbus Innovation Awards for their use of technology. “We use everything from social media to videoconferencing to Google Plus to even the telephone line to create an experience in teams that are not in the same room that is interactive and improvisational” (KH, 2012).

Managing performance anxiety and developing a greater sense of confidence were recurring themes with respondents and interviewees. Using a performance metaphor as an instructional paradigm, directly addresses the anxieties that are inherent in performing. “When it comes to public speaking, you’ve just got to deal with the stage fright issue,” says LP. To train her MBA students, she uses a combination of actor skill techniques, “mindfulness” techniques popularized by Jon Kabat-Zinn, professor of medicine emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, and Enneagram Institute testing to explore the nature of “presence” (LP, 2012).

Courtroom Persuasion Drama is taught in the formal setting of the law school’s courtroom. It’s a pointed message about context, intended to reinforce the dramatic nature of what occurs in a trial. JM (2012) also wants her students to become comfortable and familiar with the setting, much the way actors familiarize themselves with the set of each new play. Although the class is held in the courtroom, there is no legal content for the students during the first third of the semester-long one credit course. Instead, the instructor (JM) uses only theatre games, storytelling and personal narratives and improvisation to familiarize students with the goal of performing in the courtroom. For this reason, students always do some sort of presentation in front of their peers every class. One class
exercise requires students to create a character description from a poem, which they perform and critique. Subsequently, they are asked to sit in the Jury Box as those characters as they listen to opening or closing statements. This exercise teaches empathic responses, active listening skills and seeing the world from another person’s perspective.

CH (2012), law partner at TK, a top 100 law firm, relies on the actor training he received in undergraduate school to raise his level of performance in the courtroom. In addition to performing in school plays in college, CH studied improvisation, which he believes helps him think on his feet, avoid panic and adapt when the unexpected occurs in the courtroom. A monologue class was of particular use in his practice:

A lot of what I do is “monologueing”. In preparing a closing argument I’m thinking about the facts, but a lot of what I’m doing is telling a story in a long form monologue, and I don’t want people to nod off, and so I think about vocal things I learned in that class—I think about the arc of the monologue building to a point—that affects how I write it as well as how I deliver it, but it’s all part of the same thing (CH, 2012).

Although he has not received any additional training in actor skills since law school, the actor training CH received in college has been, …a huge benefit to me in my practice. I’ve done very well largely because I’m able to draw on some of that training and distinguish
myself from the yahoos who come into court and don’t know what they’re doing (CH, 2012).

The genesis of Miranda Consulting was an acting class taught by one of the two founders, who ran a theatre company in Massachusetts. One of her students sat on her theatre company’s board and owned a consulting firm. He recognized the value of the actor training he was taking as effective communication skill building and thought it would be a good fit for the employees of his firm. From there, an approach was carefully crafted around the performance metaphor, using the same basic principles as the acting class, and developed for application in management training. The company’s long list of clients now includes many of the Blue Chip companies of the global economy. Most of the workshops Miranda conducts are one or two days in length for eight to twelve people.

The two-day course that KR (2010) teaches implements many of the active learning methods recommended by Silberman (2006). The program is based on the company’s P.R.E.S. model:

- Being Present
- Reaching Out
- Being Expressive
- Self-Knowing

A series of physical exercises designed to raise people’s energy level higher is used along with focusing greater awareness on the breath. Silberman states: “One of the advantages of games and simulations is the extent to which they encourage
participants to confront their own attitudes and values (2006. p. 131). “Checking in”—part of the self-knowing process—is done to determine differences in the student’s physical states. The work is always related back to real-life situations in the workplace. For example, students are asked to recall a high stress situation at work and recall what happened to their breathing at the time. The class is encouraged to describe those differences with metaphors—KR wants to “keep pushing them into the right side of their brain” (2010). Metaphors and their value as communication tools are discussed which leads to a discussion of the use of images when one speaks with employees and co-workers. Again, Silberman reinforces this approach:

Being able to design activities that help participants visualize adds a powerful component to your experiential learning repertoire.

Although it can be utilized to help participants retain cognitive information, imagery has special value as a way to help them mentally rehearse putting skills into action and to bring feelings and events into focus (Silberman, 2006. p. 140).

KR stressed the importance of “circling back” — reiterating the point of the exercises as a continuous form of review. “So what? We did these kooky exercises. Why? What purpose does it serve?” (2010). Positing questions of this nature and reframing the conclusions for the student’s workplace experience keeps the exercises connected to the goals of the course.
Another floor exercise called *Big Change Fast* is used that emphasizes being flexible and quick on your feet. This exercise targets the “expressive” part of the P.R.E.S. model. KR said this exercise was a line of demarcation in the class: “By the end of that exercise, if they’re going to buy in, they’ve bought into the workshop” (2010).

The afternoon begins with an introspective exercise called the *River of Life*, where the students use a flip chart to identify and illustrate the seminal moments of their lives. KR models the work first and then pairs people up to share one positive and one challenging personal life story with their partner. The point the exercise makes is that a leader has to be willing to be transparent, vulnerable and self-reflective – and be willing to share that with the people he or she leads as the situation requires. Day one ends with a ‘participant-prepared skit’ (2006. p. 125), focusing on the creation of a two-minute presentation introducing one’s partner from the day’s pairing. Students are encouraged to find a hook to build the presentation around – a metaphor, a poem or a song is suggested (KR, 2006).

The next day begins with energy work and the concept of *Passionate Purpose*. “Putting an action behind their message,” says KR, “helps get more of themselves into it.” The value of storytelling is discussed and students are asked to share more stories with the class and how they can be integrated into a business conversation. The program ends with students using the class and coach for feedback in a practical application of their work. Perhaps it’s a presentation they have coming up or a difficult one-on-one conversation they need to have with an employee. It
could also be a sales pitch they’ve made hundreds of times and need to re-evaluate. KR relishes the opportunity to side-coach the participants in this active learning situation. Peer coaching relationships are also encouraged after the course is completed so there is a sense of continuity in the program’s message.

**Obstacles**

“When it comes to public-speaking, you’ve just got to deal with the stage fright issue,” say LP of one of the biggest obstacles students face in this kind of training. The “students want to overcome stage fright and perform as powerfully as they imagine they could,” so LP goes to great lengths to normalize the experience of stage fright (2012).

Further evidence of the salience of actor-based training for the respondents can be gleaned from a survey question related to public speaking.
Table 14

Please respond to the following statement: I am very comfortable speaking in front of groups of people.

- Very Often: 35%
- Sometimes: 28%
- Rarely: 12%
- Always: 18%
- Never: 7%

While more than half of respondents answered that they were “Always” or “Very Often” comfortable speaking in front of groups of people, a significant percentage only felt comfortable “Sometimes” or a lesser value, indicating that remedial help with this skill could be of benefit.

JM has tremendous admiration for the intelligence of her law students. But she recognizes the challenges they face. “They’re afraid of making mistakes. The competition in law school is so fierce—the difference between a 3.74 GPA and a 3.70 may be the difference in getting a job. Getting them to let go—to feel free enough to make a mistake is a really big challenge.” Learning the skills of preparation and the benefits of rehearsal are also big challenges: “As I explain to
them on their first day, I could write a book and hand it to them, and tell them everything they need to know, but it’s a performance skills class, and it has to be experiential—over time. You have to do it over and over. You have to rehearse. You have to learn the skills. You have to practice the skills. And you have to play.”

For KH, learning styles is a key differentiator among their students and respecting how people learn means providing room in the curriculum for diverse approaches: “We can’t approach everyone the same way, assuming they have the same extroverted personality. Learning differences, the way people assimilate information and techniques is different. We want to introduce the material in a way that is very, very safe.”

Conclusion

While the data do not definitively conclude that actor skills are necessary to improve the communication skills of managers and professionals, there is evidence to suggest that actor skills may improve the quality of communication and positively impact organizational performance.
Chapter Five: Summaries and Conclusions

It [actor skill training] works because of the very simple and very powerful metaphor—“when you’re a leader, you’re always onstage.” – Lili Powell, Darden School of Business, University of Virginia

Summary

Actor skill training has been used to improve communication skills, foster change in corporate cultures, and develop a higher standard of job performance in the workplace. This thesis has provided qualitative and quantitative evidence of the effective application of actor skill training in academic institutions, corporate entities and professional partnerships. Connections have been drawn between foundational theories in the field of communication and foundational theories in theatre pedagogy. Specific references have been made to the ideas of Aristotle, Burke, Ong and Dewey. In addition, Wiener’s cybernetics, Baxter’s relational dialectics, and Ting Toomey’s face negotiation theory, among others, continue to inform the praxis of the actor and how those skills are identified and taught.

A review of the literature on the subject presented peer-reviewed studies of the integration of actor skills into management, law and medical training programs. Those studies clearly and repeatedly indicate an improvement of communication skills in intervention groups that are exposed to this type of instruction. The data collected in this thesis corroborate the scholarship cited in Chapter Two and support the original hypothesis that actor training is an effective method of
increasing the communication skill sets of managers and professionals.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to a sample of convenience. The data were collected from three (3) distinct sources:

1. Interviews with nine (9) professionals who have had direct experience with the training methods examined in this thesis.
2. Response to a brief survey posted on the listserv of the National Communication Association from nine (9) members. Respondents to this survey were all employed in higher education, and provided both quantitative and qualitative responses to the survey.
3. A questionnaire issued via surveymonkey.com, to the partners, associates and administrative staff of a top 100 law firm in the United States. Ninety-two (92) members of the firm responded, representing a twelve percent (12%) response rate. The survey was designed to identify the demographics of the respondents, their perceptions of and participation in communication skills training using actor skills, and the efficacy of this type of training.

The interviews produced a wealth of information on the successful use of actor skill training in corporate and academic environments. One specific example focused on a training weekend with the technology group of a global financial services firm. The training was used to foster culture change and develop a more
innovative and inspiring approach to leadership and, according LB, Human Resources manager, was very successful toward that end (2012). The consistent success of Miranda Consulting, and their implementation of performance metaphor training in business schools and corporate training, supplied strong evidence of the value of the application of these methods. The implementation of actor skills training in the curriculum of a top twenty-five law school and a top fifty business school in the U.S., were additional examples that indicated the efficacy and value of these training methods. Information was also collected about the perceptions students had about this training and the obstacles they most often confronted. Despite initial skepticism in many cases, performance anxiety was recognized as an obstacle to working at a high level. Students in the law school and business school previously cited generally understand that a focus on their delivery, and a reduction of “stage fright” was important training and preparation for their professional lives.

Participation in the NATCOM survey did not meet a threshold that bears any consequence quantitatively. However, the quality of the responses received were helpful in developing the qualitative picture of the perceptions and uses of actor skills in communication skill building. EO (2012), who teaches at a Jesuit University in the western United States, has used role-playing, improvisation and voice and body exercises in conflict management and mediation training. She believes the training is highly effective in management training and elaborated on her experience with role-playing and improvisation:
It provides simulation of real life events. People can take role-playing very seriously, and it is interesting how we so easily make these situations very real. Also, it provides ways for trainees to identify with course material in a very personal way. Every bit as real as a case study, perhaps even more so when the trainees bring past situations into the role-plays or improvs (2012).

The 12 percent response rate to the survey issued to the sample law firm meets a threshold for quantitative consideration and provided key insights to the research questions posed by this thesis.

• 76% of respondents believed how information was delivered is as important as the information being conveyed.

• Only 15% of respondents did not believe they needed additional communication/presentation skills training. There were a large number (28%) of undecided responses, which may indicate lack of knowledge about the importance of communication skills. 57% did believe they required additional training.

• 66% of respondents thought that training in body awareness could help improve their performance.

• 59% of respondents believed that prior actor skills training positively influenced their job performance.

Respondents to the legal survey recognized the value of message delivery by a
large margin and also recognized the value of past skills training in acting and the need for additional study to improve job performance.

While it would be impossible to draw overarching conclusions from a sample group of this size, the data does add to a growing body of scholarship (see Chapter Two) that confirms the efficacy of the performance metaphor as an interdisciplinary approach to communication skill building and how acting skills may help improve communication skills in managerial and professional fields.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. Increase the scale and scope of a survey sample to provide more reliable indicators of perception, use and efficacy of actor skills training. While the primary survey used in this thesis targeted a law firm, increasing the scope to include a larger sample would provide more comprehensive data to analyze. Broadening the scope of the study to target other types of professional training—healthcare, technology, sales and information technology—would be invaluable in finding areas where actor skills training could be applicable.

2. Develop and implement interventions for specific professional disciplines, e.g., healthcare, law, sales and information technology, using the exercises and approaches discussed herein.

3. Conduct a case study wherein the impact of actor skill training in one company was explored and examined in depth.
Conclusions

Good communication skills are vitally important for anyone in the workplace today. As industrialized countries continue to shift human resources to service and knowledge-based tasks, those skills will be increasingly more important in the Information Age of the twenty-first century. The Sophists of ancient Greece may have been the first to tout the value of how we deliver our messages, but they were certainly not the last. Aristotle’s rhetorical canon identified the elements of effective delivery and style, and his theories continue to inform the way we approach the public presentation of ideas. The body of knowledge continues to expand on the ways we can communicate more effectively, and how those communication skills can be taught.

Using actor skills as a training device is one viable approach to effective communication skill building in the workplace. A “performance metaphor” suggests that we are always “onstage” in the workplace and this is a truism for anyone to some degree. Professional effectiveness in communication and leadership is dependent upon the ability to persuade, to inspire, to listen and respond with authenticity and vitality. Seeing the workplace through the lens of the actor’s journey draws upon our very human need to understand the world in a narrative construct and to share those stories with others.

There is a positive perception about these training techniques, and data from the legal survey indicates a desire to acquire more experience and training using some of these methods to increase performance levels in the workplace. The
training strategies discussed in this thesis can also be particularly effective in fostering change in organizations. Improvisation, storytelling, and role-playing exercises require participants to move beyond the traditional roles they play in the workplace and interact in a fundamentally different way with their cohorts. These kinds of exercises take participants out of their comfort zone, creating an environment that fosters better relationships among team members. Re-aligning company goals or integrating different corporate cultures is made easier as a result of experiential training wherein trust and team building are engendered and a positive “yes-based” environment is created.

For CH, actor training is a critical element of his overall training as an attorney. In a surprising admission he explained why:

I’m a litigator. When I am in a trial in front of a jury, ninety-nine percent of what I’m doing is drawing on actor training, and one percent on legal training. Because most of what I’m doing in a jury trial has nothing to do with the law, rules of evidence or anything. It’s all about storytelling, presence, where you are in the courtroom. Are you open or closed to the jury? Are you engaged in your posture? Are you flailing your arms? It’s a performance and I draw on that stuff [actor training] all the time (2012).

For attorneys, or those who perform their jobs in very public ways, actor training promotes skills in the final, and too often forgotten canon of Aristotle’s rhetoric: delivery.
The workplace demands leaders who present themselves and their ideas with “authenticity”—an oft-used mantra in communication skills training. But being “authentic” is not just about a lack of artifice. Authenticity implies a connection with something real. An actor’s process in communicating to others can yield surprising results in the quest to achieve this sense of authenticity, because it requires a synergy of heart and mind—thought and action. The actor “believes” the truth of his circumstances, no matter who the character is or what the circumstances are. But the only path to understanding the journey of another is to understand oneself.

This is the paradox of acting: in order to be fully engaged as an actor playing someone else, you must first be fully connected to your own sense of self. SK, Chief Executive Officer of Miranda Consulting, recalled how one of their training participants described the difference in Miranda’s approach: “I remember a woman saying to me once, ’There’s something about your work. Other training in communication, I always leave feeling like I’ve been asked to be someone else. You teach me to be more fully myself; and that really enables me to be an effective communicator” (SK, 2012).
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Legal Survey

This survey is voluntary, for the purposes of collecting data on communication skills training methods. This survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete and the information will be held in confidentiality. If you would, please complete the following information:

Code ______

1. What is your sex?
   □ Female
   □ Male

2. Which category below includes your age?
   □ 21-29
   □ 30-39
   □ 40-49
   □ 50-59
   □ 60 or older

3. Please indicate your field of work
   □ Litigation
   □ Intellectual Property
   □ CFRE (Commercial, Financial, Real Estate)
   □ Administration

4. Please indicate your level of responsibility on a typical matter
   □ Team leader responsible for 3 or more employees
   □ Team Leader responsible for less than 3 employees
   □ Team Member in a group of 3 or more employees
   □ Team Member in a group of less than 3 employees

5. Is a major component of your job delivering information to audiences, via presentations (trials, hearings, workshops, training modules, team meetings, etc.)?
   □ Yes
   □ No
6. Which of these activities best describes the requirements of your work tasks? Please check all that apply.

- Presentations (including trial and hearing appearances)
- Administration
- Negotiations
- Team Meetings
- Other (please specify)

7. Please rank the following elements in their importance for effective communication.

*Respond to each using the three-point scale below.*

3=Very Important  2=Moderately Important  1=Unimportant

- Organization of ideas
- Use of analogies in conveying idea
- Use of personal narratives or relevant examples
- Vocal strength and variety
- Pleasant quality of voice
- Facial expressiveness
- Energized delivery
- Authentic passion for subject
- Rehearsal and preparation
- Non-verbal communication
- Ability to relate to the audience
- Eye Contact

8. Please respond to the following statement: “How one delivers information is as important as the information that is being conveyed.”

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
9. Please respond to the following statement: “I am very comfortable speaking in front of groups of people.”

☐ Always
☐ Very Often
☐ Sometimes
☐ Rarely
☐ Never

10. Please respond to the following statement: “The way I communicate in presentation situations requires additional skills training.”

☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree

11. Please respond to the following statement: “Training in the following areas could improve my performance or the performance of my associates.” Please check all that apply.

☐ Voice training (for clarity, volume and energy)
☐ Body awareness (so your body reflects the message and its intention)
☐ Body language (what you communicate nonverbally)
☐ Emotional expressiveness
☐ Use of humor
☐ Use of storytelling
☐ None of the above

12. Please indicate any training that you have already participated in. Please check all that apply.

☐ “Toastmasters” or other public speaking training
☐ Acting class in high school
☐ Acting class in college
☐ Improvisation or Comedy Training
☐ Debate training
☐ Vocal training (including singing)
☐ Company-provided training in communication skills
☐ Outside training in communication skills
☐ Company-provided training on sales techniques
☐ Outside training on sales techniques
☐ N/A (Not Applicable)
13. If you selected any items above other than N/A, would you agree that the training you received positively influenced your job performance?

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

14. Please rate the following training methods in terms of their effectiveness.

4=Most Effective  3=Moderately Effective  2=Less Effective  1=Ineffective

☐ Powerpoint Presentation with lecture
☐ Lecture with specific examples related to the topic
☐ Lecture with interactive discussion
☐ Actors role-playing the training scenario with interactive discussion
☐ Workshop with participants engaged in role-playing
☐ Other (please specify)__________________________

15. Are there other benefits to this type of training not addressed in the previous questions that you could describe in more detail?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your anonymity is secure and your confidentiality is protected. The results of this survey will be used in a Thesis for the completion of a Master’s Degree in Communication and will benefit the community of scholarship on the topic of study.
Personal Interview Template

1. How does the performance metaphor guide your training methods?

2. Can you provide any examples of how this training directly affected the performance of people and/or organizations that took your workshops?

3. What do participants in this kind of training most have to learn?

4. What is your professional background and how did you migrate your skills to this type of training?

5. What most challenges you in this kind of training?
   - **Cue list for discussion**
     - The physical space assigned them to teach in
     - The time allotted to teach the material
     - The number of students assigned to them
     - The incoming attitudes of students
     - The attitudes of management
     - Other (please specify)

6. What specific techniques do you use in your training?
   - **Cue list for discussion**
     - Role Play
     - Improvisation
     - Theatre games
     - Storytelling
     - Video recording and review
     - Other (please specify)

7. Do you use/employ actors to role-play with the students?
   - Yes
   - No
8. What skill sets does this kind of training most impact?

- **Cue list for discussion**
  - Listening (also, picking up non-verbal cues)
  - Spontaneity
  - Expressive communication
  - Team Building
  - Speaking before a group
  - Other (please specify)

9. What most challenges students in this kind of training?

- **Cue list for discussion**
  - Picking up and understanding non-verbal cues
  - Taking the risk to be vulnerable with others
  - Connecting with the body and voice in exercises
  - Buying into the performance metaphor
  - Leaving their roles in the organization behind to stand as equal in the classroom
  - Other (please specify)

10. What is the most common positive feedback you receive about this kind of training?

- **Cue list for discussion**
  - A fresh approach to an old problem
  - Challenging work, but ultimately rewarding
  - Relevant to the challenges of their jobs
  - Enjoyed the camaraderie of the workshop
  - Good team building experience
  - Other (please specify)
11. What is the most common negative feedback you receive about this kind of training?

- **Cue list for discussion**
  - The class material was not relevant to the job I do
  - The class was a waste of time
  - There was not enough time allotted for the class
  - I had difficulty being open to the class material
  - I had difficulty working with the other students
  - Other (please specify)
NATCOM Survey

My name is David de Vries, and I'm collecting data for graduate coursework in Communication and Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University. The subject of inquiry is "Communication skills training in professional development." The survey is voluntary and your participation will be held in confidentiality. Thank you for taking the time to assist me!

Please take just 5 minutes to answer the following questions...

1. Have you ever used actor/performance training methods? Please answer yes or no to the following choices.
   
a) Role-playing  
b) Improvisation  
c) Voice and/or body exercises

2. How would you rate the effectiveness of actor skills training when applied to management training? Select your answer from the following choices:

   a) Highly Effective  
b) Effective  
c) Not Effective

3. How can acting skills be used to improve communication training methods in professional and managerial development? Please explain.