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Musical Theatre as an Experiential Learning Device in Organisations: An Exploratory Case Study on Participation, Collaboration and Intergenerational Exchange

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Abstract: This article examines corporate musical theatre as an experiential learning device, focusing on the conditions that may support participation, collaboration and interaction among employees of different ages. Drawing on workplace pedagogy, situated learning and applied theatre, it presents an exploratory case study of MUSical Grease, a one-day training programme conducted at Ronzoni Group in July 2025. Participants from different age groups engaged in embodied exercises, vocal activities, collaborative design and a final performance. The analysis draws on 15 end-of-programme questionnaires comprising eight scaled items and four open-ended questions. Response frequencies indicate very high levels of satisfaction, particularly with enjoyment, freedom to participate without fear of judgement and the perceived accessibility of the activities. Open-ended responses highlight cooperation, opportunities to get to know less familiar colleagues and an interest in further shared experiences. These data capture participants' immediate perceptions and cannot establish lasting effects, tacit knowledge transfer or specific processes of intergenerational learning. The article therefore conceptualises musical theatre as a multimodal performative learning environment with the potential to support inclusive forms of collaboration, identifying design considerations and directions for future research on educational outcomes.

Keywords: Corporate theatre; Musical theatre; Intergenerational learning; Workplace pedagogy; Experiential learning; Inclusive participation.

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1. Introduction

The coexistence of individuals with different professional histories, ages, technological repertoires and expectations is a common feature of contemporary organisations. Such diversity can promote the complementarity of experiences and competences, but it can also make identity boundaries, age stereotypes and communication difficulties more salient. In organisational training groups, perceived age diversity has been found to be negatively associated with learning outcomes through reduced knowledge sharing; a climate of psychological safety, however, mitigates this relationship (Gerpott et al., 2021).

This raises a pedagogical question: which learning devices can turn the coexistence of generations into opportunities for mutual understanding, participation and collaborative design? The workplace learning literature calls for moving beyond a one-way conception of older employees as knowledge holders and younger employees as recipients (Fasbender et al., 2021).

Within this framework, corporate musical theatre may be understood as an experiential learning device. It brings together voice, bodily expression, rhythm, narrative, the negotiation of roles and the creation of a collective artefact. Its distinctive pedagogical feature lies in the interdependence of participants' actions: a scene, a rhythmic sequence or a choreography requires listening, coordination and mutual adjustment. This article presents an exploratory case study of an initiative implemented at Ronzoni Group, using musical theatre as a setting in which to examine participants' immediate perceptions of the relational conditions underpinning collective work.

The article has two objectives: to discuss the educational affordances of musical theatre in the light of workplace pedagogy and situated learning, and to provide a descriptive analysis of participants' evaluations at the end of the activity. Intergenerational exchange is treated as an interpretative and design perspective rather than a directly measured outcome: the questionnaire does not allow exchanges between individuals of different ages to be reconstructed. Satisfaction, perceived participation and freedom from judgement may indicate favourable conditions for collaborative learning, but they do not demonstrate its effectiveness or persistence over time.

1.1 Workplace pedagogy, situated knowledge and intergenerational reciprocity

Workplace pedagogy regards professional knowledge as a practice constructed through relationships between people, tasks, objects,

languages and organisational constraints (Lave & Wenger, 1991). From this perspective, knowledge takes shape through action, mutual observation, the use of artefacts and opportunities to articulate experience.

The key challenge, therefore, is to design tasks in which every participant can both contribute and receive resources. A study of 145 dyads of colleagues of different ages found that the motivation to guide and develop others, alongside the motivation for personal development, contributes to knowledge sharing and acquisition between older and younger employees (Fasbender et al., 2021). Musical theatre may support this reciprocity when it avoids generationally prescribed roles—the older employee who recounts experience and the younger colleague who 'digitalises' it—and instead makes both groups essential to designing a shared performance.

1.2 Applied theatre and musical theatre: the educational value of collective action

Corporate theatre uses performance-based languages to support collaboration and meaning-making in organisations (Buccolo, 2024; Buccolo et al., 2023). More broadly, applied theatre provides an environment in which aesthetic distance enables tensions, practices and dilemmas to be made visible without participants being wholly identified with them. In corporate training, this approach can bring emotion and reasoning into dialogue, engage people at different hierarchical levels and from different backgrounds in analysing organisational issues, and support collective contributions to addressing them. The available evidence is predominantly qualitative and should therefore be interpreted as indicating pedagogical potential (Sinha & D'Souza, 2022).

Musical theatre intensifies certain features of applied theatre. It integrates verbal, musical, bodily and visual modes of expression; makes errors immediately perceptible while allowing them to be corrected without punishment; requires shared timing; and gives value to roles that do not necessarily occupy centre stage.

The collective dimension should not, however, be idealised. A musical theatre programme requires an educational design that distributes tasks, time and opportunities to contribute. Facilitation should therefore provide equally valued artistic, technical, narrative and organisational roles; rotation of responsibilities; explicit instructions for observers; and ways of contributing that do not require compulsory individual exposure.

1.3 Plausible outcomes: social competences, climate and learning

A meta-analysis of 21 primary studies involving 4,064 participants found that active participation in theatre significantly improved empathy, social communication, tolerance and social interaction. The same analysis did not establish an effect on self-concept (Lewandowska & Węziak-Białowolska, 2023). These findings encourage realistic expectations: performative work may be particularly relevant to observable relational practices, but they do not justify broad claims about personal transformation.

In an organisational setting, a quasi-experimental intervention using improvisational theatre within a healthcare management division reported significant improvements in the overall climate for innovation and in participative safety, vision and task orientation; support for innovation, by contrast, did not show significant differences (Kirsten & Du Preez, 2010).

Research on intergenerational musical activities also emphasises synchronised action. A recent review associates active, synchronous music-making with processes of physiological and emotional regulation and identifies rhythmic synchronisation as a possible mechanism supporting cognitive and psychosocial wellbeing (Vernia Carrasco, 2026). Studies of ensemble performance also describe performers' mutual adjustment of timing as a process through which coordination and shared attention emerge (Clayton et al., 2020). Although this literature mainly concerns children and older adults in schools, communities and health and social care settings, it offers a useful perspective on the educational value of choral exercises, coordinated movement and ensemble rehearsals as practices that organise shared attention, listening and interdependence. It offers comparatively little evidence, however, about adult colleagues of different ages in workplace settings, which constitute the context of the present case.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 The "Ronzoni Group Musical" case: aims and research questions

The case examined is a musical theatre training programme for Ronzoni Group, held in Rome on 16 July 2025 and referred to as MUSical Grease in both the project documentation and participants' responses.

According to the project documentation, the programme aimed to create a team-building experience through the collaborative development and staging of a musical inspired by Grease. The pedagogical hypothesis

was that jointly producing vocal, movement-based, scenic and narrative elements could temporarily suspend established roles, make otherwise unrecognised resources visible and generate opportunities for interaction among colleagues with different levels of organisational seniority. Participants' responses identify the main activities as morning vocal warm-ups and choral rehearsals, free dance, reconstruction of a choreography from the film, the creation of an advertising spot and a final performance. The programme was designed and facilitated by the authors and took place over a full eight-hour working day. It was held at Casa San Juan de Ávila in Rome, a training venue outside the company, deliberately selected to provide distance from everyday work routines and enable participants to engage in a meaningful experience in a different setting.

According to the description of the group involved, 15 employees participated: three men and twelve women. Approximately half were aged 23–30, while the remainder were aged 45–60. This group-level composition makes it relevant to consider opportunities for interaction across generations, but does not in itself demonstrate that intergenerational learning occurred.

The first phase focused on group formation through psychophysical exercises derived from theatre training. These activities were intended to foster mutual acquaintance, active listening, interpersonal trust and collaboration, thereby establishing relational conditions for the subsequent creative work.

During the second phase, participants took part in workshops introducing the performative languages of musical theatre through singing, expressive movement and dance. These activities familiarised the group with the artistic resources to be used in designing the performance.

The third phase involved the actual creation of the musical. Participants were divided into two generationally heterogeneous subgroups, in which younger and older employees worked together to design and perform choreography inspired by songs from the film Grease. The task involved negotiating ideas, sharing competences and collectively developing the performance, thereby creating opportunities for interaction and exchange between generations.

The final phase consisted of performances by the two groups. This was followed by a structured debriefing intended to elicit participants' perceptions, emotions and self-reported learning. Data collection for the present study concluded with a questionnaire focusing on satisfaction, participation and perceived aspects of the experience.

The research questions were as follows:

- How did participants evaluate MUSical Grease in terms of group cohesion, engagement, freedom to participate without judgement, accessibility, enjoyment and feeling valued?
- Which activities were recalled as most meaningful, and which organisational aspects were identified as requiring improvement?
- Did the open-ended responses provide indications of interaction, recognition and exchange among colleagues who were previously little acquainted or who encountered one another in a new way?

2.2 Study design and materials

The study adopted an exploratory single-case design, primarily descriptive and interpretative, with neither a comparison group nor pre-intervention measurements. An anonymous questionnaire, completed voluntarily at the end of the day, comprised eight items rated from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("very much") and four open-ended questions addressing preferred activities, encounters with less familiar colleagues, suggestions for improvement and perceived learning. The items described dimensions of the lived experience; they did not constitute a validated measure of intergenerational learning or individual transformation.

The analysed dataset comprised 15 questionnaires with complete closed-item responses and contained no information on respondents' age, role, organisational tenure, function or other individual characteristics. The description of 15 programme participants derives from information about the intervention, but no independent record of total attendance or possible non-responses was available; the response rate therefore cannot be established with certainty. Participants' statements are interpreted as perceptions collected immediately after the activity, and comparisons between age groups are not possible.

Absolute frequencies are reported for each response option across the eight closed items. Given the small sample and the marked concentration of high ratings (94 scores of 5 out of 120 ratings), the analysis prioritises response distributions rather than statistical inference. Open-ended responses were organised into descriptive categories concerning recalled activities, encounters among colleagues, organisational aspects and meanings attributed to the day. This represents a summary of manifest response content rather than an analysis aimed at theoretical saturation. Fifty-six open-ended responses were available, generally brief (median

length of approximately four or five words); quotations are identified by codes P01–P15, assigned according to questionnaire order. Interpretation also requires caution because the authors contributed to designing and facilitating the programme, which may have influenced both the formulation of questions and the interpretation of findings.

3. Results

3.1 Satisfaction with the training experience

Participants' evaluations were overwhelmingly positive. No respondent selected a score of 1 or 2; at least 13 of the 15 respondents rated every item as 4 or 5, and all 15 did so for six items (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of responses to the eight questionnaire statements (n = 15).

Statement	Score 3	Score 4	Score 5
The workshop helped strengthen group cohesion	0	3	12
The proposed activities were clear and engaging	0	4	11
I felt free to participate without being judged	0	2	13
The pacing of the day was well organised	1	3	11
The vocal and movement-based activities were accessible even to those without artistic experience	0	3	12
I enjoyed myself	0	1	14
I would take part in a similar experience again	0	4	11
I felt valued within the group	2	3	10

Note. Scale from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("very much"). No respondent selected a score of 1 or 2.

The highest score was most frequent for enjoyment (14 respondents), followed by freedom to participate without judgement (13). The latter finding is relevant in light of research on training groups with high age diversity, where psychological safety supports knowledge sharing even when age differences are salient (Gerpott et al., 2021); a single satisfaction item, however, provides only an indication of such a climate. All respondents also rated the accessibility of vocal and movement-based activities as 4 or 5, an important consideration for an approach that might

otherwise be perceived as restricted to people with prior artistic experience.

Responses were more varied for feeling valued within the group, rated 3 by two respondents and 5 by ten, and for the pacing of the day, rated 3 by one respondent. The greater variation in perceived recognition suggests that future iterations should make everyone's contributions more visible—including organisation, preparation of materials, technical support, writing and facilitation—rather than associating recognition exclusively with appearing on stage.

3.2 Responses to the open-ended questions

All 15 participants answered the first open-ended question. Preferences mainly concerned movement, dance and choreography (7 responses), the collective creation of the musical or performance (6), and vocal or singing activities (3). Categories could overlap, as some responses mentioned several activities. Many answers simply named an activity, and only five participants explained their choice. Phrases such as "the final part, when the group worked together", "creating the advert" and "recreating the Grease choreography" indicate that participants also remembered processes of coordination and shared invention.

Eleven participants answered the question about encounters with less familiar colleagues. Six reported getting to know someone better, while three described a positive encounter or a different way of getting to know colleagues they already knew. Responses included "it was possible to meet in a new way", "I got to know the intern better, and it was a pleasure", "I felt included in the group" and "this experience enabled me to get to know the team much better". The last two statements came from employees who had joined the company only a few months earlier. The remaining two respondents stated that they already knew their colleagues. Taken together, these statements suggest that the programme created perceived opportunities for recognition and for renegotiating professional familiarity, without documenting intergenerational exchange.

In response to the question on improvements, 10 of the 15 participants answered "no", "nothing" or an equivalent expression, or provided an entirely positive assessment. The five constructive suggestions concerned communication, reducing instructions during organisation, simplifying rehearsals when time was limited, the tiring length of the day and the room temperature. These comments have pedagogical relevance: an embodied learning device requires alternation

between activity and recovery, concise and progressive instructions, rehearsal time appropriate for artistic novices and physical conditions conducive to wellbeing.

Finally, responses to the question "What will you take away from today?" converged on light-heartedness, happiness, enjoyment, group strength, a desire to undertake further activities together and opportunities to relate to colleagues informally. Illustrative phrases included "the strength of the group", "realising that I am not alone", "the desire to do new things together" and "a personal challenge to confront my insecurities and fear of being judged by others".

4. Discussion

The case allows musical theatre to be described as an intentionally designed setting for diverse forms of participation. Choral singing, movement and scenic creation mobilise different expressive modes and require the coordination of complementary contributions. The study's empirical contribution lies primarily in documenting the immediate reception of this training approach: responses indicate that the experience was widely appreciated and perceived as accessible, whereas learning outcomes, changes in working practices and their persistence over time remain unverified.

Open-ended responses emphasised the cooperation required to stage the performance, shared creativity and opportunities to become acquainted with new or less familiar colleagues. This provides a design-related insight rather than evidence of effectiveness: the shared scenic artefact may constitute a genuinely interdependent task in which each contribution derives meaning from the collective outcome. The distinctive feature of musical theatre lies in the interplay between rhythmic synchronisation, the negotiation of expressive choices, the allocation of responsibilities and subsequent reflection on the experience. This configuration may be treated as a hypothesised mechanism of the learning device to be examined in further studies.

The intergenerational dimension must be distinguished from the more general relational dimension. Although the group comprised different age ranges, the questionnaire did not record respondents' ages or ask for specific examples of competence transfer between older and younger employees. Comments concerning two recent recruits and an intern primarily addressed integration and mutual acquaintance, without allowing intergenerational exchanges to be identified. Reduced age stereotypes, the circulation of tacit knowledge and organisational

innovation therefore remain theoretical possibilities and educational design objectives, rather than outcomes established by this case.

High ratings for freedom to participate without judgement and for activity accessibility also raise questions about the inclusiveness of the learning environment. A performative setting may offer multiple ways of participating—vocal, bodily, narrative, technical and organisational—and challenge the assumption that participation necessarily entails visibility on stage. However, this requires intentional educational design: equally valued alternative tasks, accessible instructions, scope to adjust individual exposure, respectful feedback and attention to participants' working rhythms. The questionnaire records only perceived accessibility and does not allow equity of participation to be assessed systematically.

The design has substantial limitations: a single organisation, a small sample, self-reports collected at one point in time, no individual age data and no independent observations of group processes. In addition, social desirability may have influenced evaluations of an activity facilitated by the authors themselves. Consequently, changes in organisational climate, psychological safety or knowledge sharing cannot be causally attributed to musical theatre. The case remains useful for generating research hypotheses and refining educational design, provided it is not mistaken for an impact evaluation.

5. Conclusions

MUSical Grease provides an exploratory case of musical theatre in corporate training. Questionnaires completed at the end of the day document very high satisfaction, positive perceptions of participation without judgement, the reported accessibility of activities and the importance attributed to cooperation. Open-ended responses describe encounters among colleagues, experiences of inclusion and willingness to continue working together; they also point to scope for improvement in instructions, timing, duration and the physical conditions of the learning environment.

From a scientific perspective, the case suggests that musical theatre can be conceptualised as a multimodal experiential learning device combining interdependent tasks, diverse expressive languages and opportunities for reflection. Whether it can produce intergenerational learning, changes in frames of reference or competence transfer remains an empirical question. Future research could complement end-of-programme perceptions with observations of interactions between age groups, interviews, documentation of debriefing sessions and follow-up

measurements, distinguishing satisfaction, collaborative processes and educational outcomes. From this perspective, the value of the case lies in identifying promising design conditions and specific empirical questions for workplace pedagogy and educational practices responsive to participant diversity.

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