

Typology of Harm Cards - Review  
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### **My Background**

I am an independent theatre practitioner and PhD candidate at Griffith University Brisbane. I deliver participatory theatre workshops in community contexts and largely work with vulnerable or marginalised groups. I have previously worked in prisons, schools, health agencies and community centres. My PhD examines the role of theatre in intercultural community building with diverse young people and within this work there is a strong focus on ethical practice and how practitioners can adopt an awareness of the ethical issues that arise within community arts projects.

### **The Cards – initial impressions**

My first interaction with the Change Media and the Typology of Harm cards was at the Spectres of Evaluation conference at Footscray Community Arts Centre in February 2014. I participated in a workshop with Change Media where the cards were introduced and we played several of the game scenarios using the cards and embodying the various archetypes.

I immediately responded really well to the idea of the cards and could foresee a number of applications that they would have in my work, particularly in the area of student training. Having gone into the idea of ‘harm’ within my PhD, I found it fascinating to be presented with a tool whereby the harmful agendas and attitudes within this field could be fully examined. Working in community settings presents a series of complex challenges and many practitioners and arts managers are not given the time or resources to fully examine their agendas and approaches to this work. I believe there is a real capacity within the field for harmful practice to occur, which can be mitigated by developing awareness and insight into these behaviours. The Typology of Harm Cards, by presenting the archetypes for harmful behaviour in the field, have a great deal of potential to develop the awareness and insight that community arts workers require if a culture of best – and ethical – practice is to be achieved.

### **Design and Archetype Grid**

I really enjoyed the design and aesthetics of the cards. On a practical level, they are a good size and shape and the quality of the paper means that they are easy to handle and feel good in the user’s hands. They are potentially a bit thin and may therefore have a shorter life span, being prone to ripping, folding or general wear – especially if being used in group training scenarios.

The artwork of the cards is delightful, and creates an excellent balance between the serious meaning of the tool, and the playful nature in which it can be used. They are bright and colourful and engage the user immediately. The cartoon-like designs on each card also offer an ironic twist to the concept of ‘harm’, offering a childlike caricature to portray the serious theme. Each design relates well to the topic of the card and is instrumental in conveying the meaning of the individual cards to the user.

I also like the fact that the cards are divided into the five groups. The meaning of most of these is really clear and positions the archetypes within recognisable frameworks that are familiar to

community arts workers. I particularly like the inclusion of the 'office' group, which extends the use of this tool beyond the practitioners on the ground and includes those working in project management and administration. This addition recognises that harm can come from many different directions within a project and potentially extends the dialogues beyond those working with arts to those working in community organisations, charities or public sector services who may be receiving or hosting such projects.

I do however find myself feeling slightly less at ease with terminology of the 'colony' group. Whilst the meaning of the individual cards in this group is clear and the overall theme is clearly that of someone who believes that they know what is best for a community, the word 'colony' suggests something far bigger and more political than the other groups, and as such it seems to stand out to me as a term that doesn't fit within the spectrum of the grid. 'Office', 'bootcamp', 'clinic' and 'gallery' are all places that are familiar and recognisable to the user and are places that the user may even inhabit within their daily life, whilst 'colony' does not define a specific sense of place or everyday familiarity. Additionally, the 'gallery' term limits the identification with this group to visual arts, and thus excludes those artists in other disciplines. Several of the cards within the group are related to stage or screen disciplines and thus perhaps the term 'gallery' is too restrictive. I'm not precisely sure what word could be used as an alternative that would be inclusive of different arts spaces, but I felt it is a potential consideration for future development.

I like the archetypes themselves and think that the spread of these reflects a wide range of realistic behaviours. It's difficult to imagine what may be left out and in fact due to the current number of cards, I don't believe that adding more would be useful. The addition of the Jokers is a clever idea, although I think the specific intention of the Joker could be better defined for users. The wording of the archetype cards is also quite complex in places and assumes a high level of literacy and thinking on behalf of the user. If using these cards with student practitioners, or artists who have English as a second language for example, I believe that several of the descriptions – especially on the front of the cards – would be too complex and ambiguous to those users groups. An example of this might be the 'Botanist' card which states that "collective classifications are statistically more often agreed on than not" and "Just genotypical, some people just have it". I don't believe the meaning of this would be fully available to those users who had limited language literacy or those who had a lower level of understanding or engagement in the complexities and political nuances of the field.

### **Game Play Scenarios**

I really responded well to the use of cards as a game and I think this is a useful and appropriate way of engaging with them. I understand the link with the idea of tarot cards, although I'm not sure how useful this was in terms of examining the potential for harm however, it does introduce a fun element and a degree of light-heartedness to the application of the cards. With more time allocated to this tarot exercise, it could also be an excellent way for users to find types that they identify with and consider the way in which they apply them within their practice.

The 'my project is better than yours' was an interesting game and took the use of the cards in a direction that I hadn't considered. It was interesting to perceive a scenario that was about practitioners demonstrating and experiencing harmful behaviours in the context of funding pitches and meetings with stakeholders. This is a very relevant application for the cards and one which I

think many practitioners would benefit from. It allows the arts worker to 'rehearse' different communication strategies in order to mitigate the harmful behaviour of others.

The main question that I have with this game play scenario however is the use of the 'harmful' behaviours being applied within a positive framework whereby they can add strength to a project. Users are asked to think about the cards as a series of strategies that they can pick up or put down as required to assist with communication and presenting ideas. I think there should be a clear boundary about whether the cards represent harmful behaviours, or whether they can be seen as useful tools which can be applied to support arts workers in variety of challenging situations. I understand the point behind the negative element of the cards and that they are designed to create a balance to the extensive positive rhetoric within the field however, if this principle is to be upheld then I would question game scenarios where the behaviours are being presented as potentially useful. Asking players to adopt negative behaviours in order to win a game that reflects a real life scenario, without offering alternative strategies, also introduces a contradiction whereby to 'succeed', one must take on a negative behaviour. I understand the intention behind this, however it 'corners' the practitioner into an inevitable situation of harm. Potential outcomes in the real world that lead on from this contradiction may be negative emotions such as blame or guilt without a sense of being able to move in a different direction. Equally, the spread of cards is so wide that practitioners may find themselves immobilised and unable to communicate with stakeholders for fear of embodying a range of these harmful behaviours.

I do however believe that this game play scenario is important for developing arts workers' capacity to react constructively to harmful behaviours. The further game play scenario of looking at 'how do you handle harm', where the 'judge' becomes a more central player in the game, is a valuable and useful device. By asking the practitioners to develop non-harmful strategies to mitigate these power dynamics (or vice versa), the framework becomes significantly different to the previous scenario. I question how useful it is to ask game players to respond to one harmful behaviour with another, and I would argue that developing strategies to negotiate with and reduce these behaviours would be more helpful for users. Additionally if the game scenarios are to help arts workers to identify (and reduce) their *own* harmful behaviours, especially without offering any positive qualities in the explanation on the cards, then I think they need to steer away from the implication that these archetypes can be useful.

I also think the potential for using these cards as a form of 'courage training' and assisting arts workers to cope with abuse of power or bullying scenarios is really powerful. The cards can offer a safe way to 'rehearse' these conditions and practise various approaches as developed by the group. Above all, these game scenarios create a dialogue about harm that is largely missing from the field of practice and presents arts workers with a much needed framework through which to build an awareness of these archetypes and strategies to manage and negotiate these within their work.

### **Further Applications and Strategies**

For me, these cards present an excellent opportunity for practitioners to examine the risks in their own practice and project delivery in community settings, and to build a culture of ethical practice. I think there could be more scenarios based around how arts workers interact with the communities themselves and enabling the users to identify the harmful behaviours that they can see within their own work. Whilst the application of the cards within power scenarios such as funding pitches is

useful, to me the cards lend themselves far more to an exploration of how workers can best engage with communities.

I believe there is also enormous potential to develop more advanced and dynamic role play scenarios so that the archetypes can be fully experienced and the effect of the behaviours can be *felt* by the users. This type of activity can link the intellectual understanding of the archetypes, with the embodied and sensory experience. One such scenario may be that a volunteer is chosen to become the 'arts worker', while the rest of the group are the 'participants'. The volunteer/s can facilitate an activity whilst using the archetypes of one or more of the cards. This type of embodied role play can assist the users in feeling and experiencing the effects of the behaviour themselves and can lead to further discussions around how it felt to be treated in that way and observations about the participants reactionary behaviour to the archetype. This can be further work-shopped with different archetypes and can also be developed by the group so that it is facilitated in a more constructive manner<sup>1</sup>. Scenarios could also be developed such as a project team designing a creative arts project and trying to negotiate a conclusion whilst having to manage each other's archetypal behaviours.

I think there is also a great potential to link this work to role theory and subsequently use it to unpack the idea that these cards do not just represent behaviours, but that they are potentially imbedded roles that practitioners play and which have been employed (possibly even unconsciously) to serve some kind of function or benefit to the arts worker. In this sense, the cards can be used to explore the agenda and core beliefs behind the behaviour as well as the considering the behaviours themselves. By examining what this function is and creating an understanding of how each individual feels it assists them – such as protecting them, maintaining a fixed identity or fulfilling a series of assumptions – it can be possible to not only bring a profound awareness to what the behaviours are and *why* we use them, but also reconstruct these beliefs and replace them with more ethical and non-harmful approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> An idea that can be further informed by Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre techniques