

# Qualitative Evaluation

## - of circus workshops at Stockholm School of Economics 2010

As part of the specialization in Management at the MSc-level, and in order to address issues such as creativity and entrepreneurship, we decided to do a workshop with ten contemporary circus artists and thirty MSc-students in the spring of 2010.

After a series of lectures with both groups, about creative leadership and cultural entrepreneurship, among other things, they were asked to hold two full-day workshops. The first workshop took place at Cirkus Cirkör in Alby; the second at Stockholm School of Economics. The results were then presented to members of the faculty of both Stockholm School of Economics and the University College of Dance and Circus.

Here are some extracts from the written evaluations of the workshop by the MSc-students:

*The most inspiring thing was to behold the people who truly follow their passion, no matter the cost. Choosing the course of arts as a profession is more risky, in the sense the financial rewards are substantially less, and as ones career path is less clear, some might be forced to retire due to injure or age. To see people really burning for their cause is inspiring to say the least, from my perspective of having just that – a passion and then lose it, gives me a sense of hope, a basis for humanity.*

*To hope and have the imagination to do that what we truly wish for and follow our dreams can only be described as - a life worth living for. Dreams are the reason for our being, to pursue them is exactly why we are here, to be happy. Finding ones dream and then simply go for it, is a lesson one can definitely learn from the circus. However, the biggest risk of all must be to be stuck in a life with no joy.*

...

*Meeting people that are so intrinsically driven by what they do, serves as a clear inspiration that there is still hope that I eventually will find that job that challenges me both academically and personally. It also demonstrates that there are things that are not entirely out of my control – serving as a strange comfort that I can do something myself to find my own happiness.*

...

*The workshop has reminded me to turn that coin around from time to time and to look at both sides! As most people in business schools, I myself often pay too much attention to what other people like professors, recruiters or the job market want me to be. I should rather pay more attention to my own skills, talents, expectations and passions and do what I want to do in order to become who I want to be. The workshop has helped me to keep in mind that my personal development should be based on both, the inside and the outside view of myself.*

...

*Many business students are very focused on receiving good grades, rather than actually learning something and developing themselves. I think it is clear that when the focus is too much on rewards the performance can actually be worse, because creativity is lost. For example, the additional pressure that the circus artist felt when performing at company events and receiving compensation made him feel more scared of trying things in the moment: they had paid him and therefore he did not want to risk a bad show. However, when he did not improvise in the moment the show was not as alive and spectacular.*

...

*I remember one artist asking me after passing by a group of students in the corridor: -Why does everybody look the same here? - Does everybody think in the same way as well? - Oh yes, was my answer. - That's strange, he said.*

...

*From the workshop it was quite clear that the circus artist had a different approach to creativity. They constantly needed to push their own limits and the limits of their customers to seduce, shock, and dazzle them.*

*The problem is that we naturally dislike people that question or criticize us, but we should understand that it is probably one of those people that help us to take the next step. Therefore the workshop has helped me to further embrace critique as something positive and constructive that helps me to develop my future.*

...

*I noticed that I, and probably many other business students, am much more creative than what I thought. During our discussions, I was able to come up with pretty creative solutions (particularly when we worked with the acrobats) and that was nice. It gave me a little bit of a morale boost, which I think is rather important. It is important because in order to dare to be creative, one must feel that one has*

something interesting to offer. And many business students probably do not think of themselves as creative. So, to understand that one actually is creative is important because it works like a self-full-filling prophecy.

...

I do believe that businesses have a lot to learn from artists about facilitating processes to enable opportunities to be spotted and seized – to improvise more. To quote Charlie: “If you only have your eyes set at the other side of the street, you’ll end up being hit by a bus”.

...

I think that I met a couple of authentic leaders in Alby. They exhibit genuine passion, had a strong conviction, are originals not copies, and they base their actions on their values.

...

The ability to completely let go of a situation and let trust guide your actions and communication is a value that I can only dream of in business relationships. However, to strive for this state of trust is truly desirable as it constitutes a genuine, mutually beneficial, and authentic relationship where all parties communicate at the same level.

...

While artists have learnt to use risk, we seem to have learnt to avoid risk at all times.”

...

The value lies in the ideas that are exchanged and as long as the people exchanging them are different enough to teach each other something, yet similar enough to learn from each other, I firmly believe that progress will occur.

...

The main conclusion is then, that managing the talents of my generation possibly (though, questionable) will be like managing artists – at least, because intrinsic motivators will be shared. This serves as a strong indicator that creative leadership has a clear role in future management and that management as a discipline will have to seek new inspirations.

...

“I never thought that one day I would have an opportunity to dig into the world of art and see things from the eyes of an artist. This

*experience has changed my perception of real artists. This experience has changed my perception of the art world."*

...

*I really had a fun time during these workshops and it gave me some eye-opener both when it came to the importance of mixing teams and the different frames of references that people had.*

...

*First of all it was really interesting to see how the different artists use different methods in order to be creative. The second experience that I value is discussions we had about some moral and ethical aspects of the business world and the choices we make in life.*

...

*I want to learn how to think broader and see problems from several viewpoints, to argue critically, and become more persuasive in communicating, and I believe arts to be a good way to enable that.*

...

*It is not about the transfer of particular knowledge or procedures like teaching the artists how to write a business plan or the business students some technique to enhance creativity. The kind of learning that I have experienced during these two days was rather about understanding different ways of thinking, interacting with people with diverse mindsets which were yet unfamiliar to me and broadening my horizon. The workshop broke down prejudices and stereotypical assumptions on both sides and encouraged outside-the-box-thinking.*

...

*I realized that I need to work on my inner balance. Looking for outside orientation rather than trusting my intuition has often been my standard procedure.*

...

*My main take-away is that I can see the bigger picture now and really appreciate the circus as an innovative form of organization which is far ahead of many business organizations in meeting changing environmental challenges and constituting opportunities.*

...

*One topic that I thought a lot about during and after the workshop is career choice and life planning. In this field I noticed a big difference between the business students and the artists. Most of the business students have a very rational approach: After high school they decide to go to business school and pursue an education that will later enable*

*them to find a job that secures their future. Many of the students do not really know what they want to do in life but by choosing this path the probability of being financially successful in the future is pretty high. It is a path that is very common and broadly accepted in society.*

*Most of the artists on the other hand started to do something they liked although they never knew if they would ever be able to earn any money with it. They started with their passion and tried to develop it in order to be able to make a living with it some day. To me it seems that lots of artists have the courage to break with societal norms. Business students on the other hand lack that bravery and therefore stick to the beaten track. This is a reason why most of us chose a corporate career rather than becoming successful entrepreneurs.*

*In this sense I believe that business students are much more risk averse than circus people, but that through interaction with the artists these aversions might be reduced. Therefore, I believe that the workshop accomplished something that is usually very difficult for business schools to achieve: **It enhanced entrepreneurial thinking.***

Emma Stenström, PhD

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