

# Organisations & People

NEWS, OPINIONS AND REVIEWS

## News Scan

### ***Management, Art and Chaos: an appeal for Management-Art***

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When we ask managers or experienced consultants what the determining factors contributing to success in organisations are, the first and most important reply always refers to renewal, innovation, creativity and realising ideas. These are, in a sense, destabilising qualities. They usually create unrest, uncertainty and indeed sometimes outright panic. They can result in mistakes piling up, costs exceeding all expectations and furthermore what the final outcome may be, heaven only knows. The enthusiasm with which these qualities are mentioned is matched by the uncertainty to which they give rise.

In addition to these qualities, and frequently in apparent contradiction, factors such as speed, results-orientation and process-mindedness are mentioned. These are qualities which tend to confirm and uphold the status-quo. We could call them stabilising qualities. In times of economic uncertainty and/or a strong profit-orientation we increasingly see these latter qualities in the foreground. That's logical, because they offer (the illusion of) certainty, cost reduction and transparency regarding what is happening and why.

Finally there are the communication skills (the 'soft' skills): negotiating, influencing and coaching. Though subject to flavour-of-the-month variations dependent upon which guru is most popular at any given moment, the extent to which these qualities are considered important, whether in times of expansion or retrenchment, remains more or less constant. They are skills which will always be necessary, and which our educational systems (still!) do not include in their regular curricula. As a trainer who earns a part of his daily bread with training programmes in these skills I

will, simply due to simple self-interest, speak no further of this shameful fact.

In this brief article I wish to confine myself to the first series of qualities because, in my estimation, these are the least well understood. They are also the least considered in the literature. To be sure, books about 'creativity' abound, but these volumes usually restrict themselves to the notion that there is always more than one way to solve a problem. And this is the crux, because problem-solving can never introduce anything new into the world. If successful it simply returns us to where we were in the first place. Removing something undesirable is, also with regard to energy, quite different from creating. Let us define creating simply as putting into the world something which was not present before. Naturally such a definition could spark a lengthy debate but for me the definition works because it demonstrates quite simply the difference between creating and problem-solving. You could say that problem-solving looks backwards and sees what is undesirable, while creating looks forward towards something which is desirable but not yet in existence.

This looking forward gives shape to an idea, an insight or an emotion or even to a judgment. And that is exactly what artists do: they seek a (material) form for something which as yet has no physical reality. Sometimes this relates to things which by their very nature cannot be represented in material form (think, for example, of gods or abstractions like hate or love), but sometimes not. Documentary art (in words and images) depicts matters which have their roots in reality in a new manner—Picasso's *Guernica*, for example, but also the realistic landscapes of romantic era depict real 'facts' as well as the associated emotions, passive and active, not only of the painter (in this case) but also of the viewer. The same could be said about expressions in the form of literature and film.

The German artist Beuys went so far as to consider virtually his whole life as a work of art. Assuming that man is called upon to determine his own destiny

(a notion we encounter in management with the term 'empowerment'!) Beuys posits as a precondition that man learn to develop the artist within, to express his creative powers. How can you determine your own destiny if you are unable to articulate your hopes and ideas? And is this not exactly what the true artist does?

If, for our own development, we need to let our inner artist develop, and if we accept that it is equally necessary for the development of our economy that we focus on renewal, then the question arises why this inner artist enjoys so little conscious and deliberate attention. Of the three types of qualities of the leader (of the future) which I mentioned, the creative aspect is the one which enjoys the least attention. This is also so in the context of training and development. Both regular schooling and post-academic training and education appear to focus almost exclusively on mental development. And this education is then measured on a large scale according to one and the same standards—in many European countries the discussion about 'school achievement' is usually understood to include the standard curriculum (reading, mathematics, language) and has been raised to the highest level of political debate. We are threatened with the absolute standardisation and levelling of European education.

To go back to the question, why is so little attention paid to artistic development? You might already have guessed, after reading my introduction. Indeed, its destabilising character is so alarming that we would prefer to stick to the familiar (preferably with the aid of ISO guidelines) rather than explore a different path, rather than experiment with new types of cooperation (or production). Art is not a factor employed to improve the living and working environments of people (other than in the form of hanging up one or two preferably colourful paintings in the corridors leading to senior management offices). Insofar as art plays a role at all it is used, and I am tempted to say 'misused', to stimulate turnover/production: in advertising, marketing and PR. Is art being misused just as much as physics/chemistry in the production of environmentally-unfriendly materials or, worse still, in the development of weaponry? I leave this to your consideration.

How would companies and organisations look if their employees stimulated each other to engage in fundamental renewal processes, were curious about each others brainwaves, had the courage to make mistakes and were (permitted) to focus on the inter-

ests of ALL stakeholders (and not just those of the shareholders!)? Might not human potential at the individual, group (organisational) and social levels then be best served and come to fullest flower, rather than in an environment marked by the desperate hanging on to the achievements of today? To be clear: I do not reject these, but they are not impervious to the progress of time. And they are certainly not so well-developed that we can speak of a "good" (for example, peaceful) world.

My plea is for a form of art education for managers, certainly for younger managers who must lead their organisations into the future. They must learn to apply the artist in themselves to the translation of today's impossibilities into tomorrow's challenges. They will not be able to meet these challenges by linearly extrapolating numbers from the past, but only by means of a creative depiction of a better future for all concerned: the world.

To make a simple start, short training programmes in which the various expressions of art in words, sounds and images can be used in a manner which stimulates creativity. Participants can be challenged to give artistic expression to their thoughts, existing 'real' art can be studied in terms of its significance for the manager by active perception and judgment exercises, and established artists can share their experiences in dialogue with the participants. The focus should be not for consumption or skill development but to challenge and wake up the inner artist of the participants. Even if this inner artist should occasionally doze off again after the programme, its 'owner' will always be aware of its existence. Where seeds have been sown a tree (usually) issues forth, though it may take some time before the shoot sees the light of day.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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