



Email Postings February 2007

Management as an Art

Summary

These emails inquire into management as an art form: what are the distinguishing features of managing and artistry? For many, being an artist differs from management practice. And yet, making art and managing are socially transforming activities.

Edited
Ralph Bathurst 26/02/2007

Katrin Kolo

Friday
16/02/2007

Hello Guys

Sorry, I just wrote something concerning the *distinction* theme in another email with the topic *artists*.

I don't want to repeat myself here, but have a new suggestion for distinction:

In Management people talk about the *hat* they are wearing in a certain situation or fulfilling a task such as wearing the hat of the leader or the researcher or ... meaning playing a special role.

So I want to suggest, that there is not necessarily a distinction between *being* an artist or manager (unless we need it to confuse people) rather than between *acting/playing* the role of artist or manager.

So, what would be the description of these two *hats* one person could wear and the distinction between them?

Katrin

kk@KATRINKOLO.COM

Jürgen Bergmann

Saturday
17/02/2007

Hi All

I organised a small seminar in the house of the German industries in Berlin when Berlin was still under the influence of Christo's great work on the Reichstag.

The audience were managers, artists and politics involved in cultural work.

You know that one of the biggest German automobil companys had asked Christo, if he would accept to put their logo on the wrapped Reichstag? They would have paid him a very hugh amount of money (some millions I had heard).

Surely he refused.

The question which raised up during the seminar was: What would have been lost if Christo would have accepted the offer? And I assure you that most of the present managers did not perceive what would have been lost. They only saw what Christo did loose by refusing the offer!

I had the same experience during a project contracted with a big chemical company. The central action of that project was an perspex bowl which passed from hand to hand during two years through the whole company around the world. The crucial and decisive impact of the project in the company was not the realisation of the project itself, but the process of decision during its conception which came to a crisis (the 'to be or not to be' of the project) concerning only one point: Why is it absolutely necessary for the success of the project that the logo of the company is not represented on the perspex bowl. It took me serveral months to convince the top executives. The amplitutde or proportion of that process of decision – the bowl symbolised the new philosophy of the company – took such an extent that one of the members of the management board left the company and a section of the company with three thousands employees was sold.

I did not forsew that effect. But I'm convinced that by the end of this, positive consequences for all were only possible because of the confrontation of two quite different perceptions. The artistic one, which deals with *absolute* symbols and the economic one, which deals with *objective* results.

The eminent point was, as during the seminar in Berlin, that the managers in the beginning did not even perceive that there is a difference between the bowl with the logo or without the logo!

And that makes the difference (for me) between an artist and a manager.

And I hope – have a look to Pierre's 'Dual Dilemma of Totality and Banality' in his book the *Art*

*Firm** – that this difference will never be abolished.

Best Jürgen
j.bergmann@TRANSICO.DE

*Guillet de Monthoux, P. (2004). *The art firm: Aesthetic management and metaphysical marketing*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Katrin Kolo

Friday
16/02/2007

Dear Jürgen and all others

I very often made similar experiences as yours, but I also came across artists behaving less like an artist (rather like a foolish manager), while managers behaved more like visionary artists.

That's why I believe this distinction is more within the individual than between *artists* and *managers* in general. That's why I proposed to make the distinction – if at all – between behaving, playing the role or wearing the *hat* of an artist or manager rather than speaking of artists and managers as separate classes of persons.

In your example with the Reichstag or the Bowl, I would also say, that from the beginning *managers* must have seen a difference in the Reichstag with the Logo or without (otherwise, they could have given Christo the money also without the Logo) and also in the Bowl with or without the Logo (otherwise, they wouldn't have to discuss so long about it).

Another question arises here for me: (Why) do or should people wearing the *artist's hat* feel offended by those Logo offers? Isn't it the normal right to ask for one party and equally to refuse for the other no matter for what reasons?

All the best

Katrin

kk@KATRINKOLO.COM

Teike Asselbergs

Saturday
17/02/2007

Hi Katrin and all

If a person that for many years trained as manager puts on a hat of an artist, but without having the experience or knowledge of the paradigms hold in the art field, is that person wearing the same hat as a person who does has that knowledge and has experience because of many years of training?

or

If a person that for many years trained as artist puts on a hat of a manager, but without having the experience or knowledge of the paradigms hold in the management field, is that person wearing the same hat as a person who does has that knowledge and has experience because of many years of training?

Teike

Ps: and now for something completely different, since I am living in Istanbul I cannot wonder if the *artist* or *leader* concepts do not follow some pattern that is similar to that of the concept of the *oriental* both in that these words are infused with certain histories, are too broad to handle without contextualisation, and have some issues with 'otherness'? I am just making free associations here.

Teike

teike.asselbergs@GMAIL.COM

Pierre Guillet de Monthoux

Saturday
17/02/2007

Just a stupid little comment in the logo-affair from swedish horizon: the reason why firms in Sweden are interested in logos on art projects seems actually not to be the hope of promotion but rather that if they cannot show that money was spent on *marketing* (by pointing at the logo) tax authorities would not accept deductions of the cost they spend on sponsoring arts.

P

pgm@FEK.SU.SE

Jürgen Bergmann

Saturday
17/02/2007

Dear Katrin

For me it's very simple: artists behaving like managers are not artists.

And managers behaving like artists are not managers.

There is no 'behaving like'. [It depends on] whether you are or you are not artist/manager.

I don't think that artists feel offended by *logo-offers*. In the contrary: The difference of perception is necessary, because it manifests that the artistic work works.

Therefore I wrote that I hope that this difference will never be abolished.

As Peter stated some mails ago, I'm manager too, of my own organisation. But really, if I would not clearly differentiate who I am in which situation, I would lose my capacity of organising or creating. And I'm only a manager for my own organisation. (I hope that there will be one time someone who runs my organisation so that I'm not obliged anymore to do it myself!) When I'm working on a project, even if there is much organisation to do, I'm an artist. The perception is quite different. And how could it be possible to deliver my artistic work for my own organisation? This is phenomenologically impossible! That's the reason why a manager employed by a company is a manager and not an artist, even if he realises artworks in his leisure time or for other companies. Maybe he is more open and innovative in the company where he is employed, maybe he can more easily decide within a risky context, and so on, but his determination is fixed by his managerial perception of *objective* results. And that is good! This is his responsibility for his company and for society in general. If he would not act within the perception of that responsibility he would transgress his ethical integrity and become unscrupulous. These are examples enough.

A manager who confounds himself with an artist or an artist who confounds himself with a manager will always be in the dilemma described by Pierre: banality or totalitarianism.

Especially an artist working within the context of responsibility for management, companies or business in general, must be an artist, must have a steely forged artistic identity to oppose the perception of *absolute* values to *objective* results. He must be perceived as artist, if not, he will transgress ethical integrity as the manager who believes himself an artist.

Unfortunately there are already lots of artists confounding themselves with managers and acting within the context of managerial responsibility. They act as managers but not with their responsibilities. Their passage leaves a mass of infertile bullshit behind them which is a costly legacy that are hostile to absolute values.

Jürgen

j.bergmann@TRANSICO.DE

Katrin Kolo

Saturday
17/02/2007

Thanks for the question.

I would start here: what does it need to be able to play a certain role or put on a hat? I'd say, it definitely needs a certain amount of knowledge, probably training and for some roles also experience. I would even add a quite big amount of interest and will. This applies to any role not only to artist and manager. But very often it is also in the personality of someone from

childhood on or the way they were raised.

So therefore yes, we could say some people might even be born as managers or artists. But does it mean, that they will become managers or artists and are either one all there live? I would suspect, that many people with the personality of an artist become trained managers and also many, who are born as managers are trained and/or working as an artist. Some might even switch at one or more points in their lives.

So, who would you call an artist and who a manager?

In my other comment under the topic *artists*, I have raised the question, if there is a distinction, then what is Christo? His origin, visions and probably also the way he makes decisions make him an artist. But when you ever heard him talking about how he implements and markets his pieces of art he is a very tough and organized manager.

What about a visionary manager, who makes also decisions an *artistic* way, but produces not art, but, for example a consumer good? What is he: an artist or a manager?

How do you make the distinction?

Are you what you are trained in? Are you what you produce? Are you, how you make decisions? Are you what branch you work in? Are you, what you claim to be? What is more important in the distinction, what you do or how you do something?

From my own experience (I am trained in dance and economics): I cannot really make a distinction, apart from what I am about to produce and for whom I produce it, like a choreography or a strategic paper. But even then, in the first instance I manage people within a certain space and timeframe and in the latter I develop a visionary concept with an idea to realize it.

The distinction, if in the way *you are* ... is a very stereotypical labelling, with a lot of prejudice and expectations in it, that are very often not true or fulfilled. So I prefer the *role playing/Hat* distinction, if one has to be made at all. And still the question, how you would describe the role/hat of a manager or an artist is not answered.

Time to manage my artistic vision of a dinner.

Katrin

kk@KATRINKOLO.COM

Ole Fogh Kirkeby

Sunday
18/02/2007

The crucial point in this discussion is, I think, whether there exists a point of convergence between the vectors of aesthetics and ethics in the practise of art. This is, I guess, the Greek connection. To Aristotle the *poiesis* does not automatically develop ethical attitudes, the *phronesis*, the *arête*, etc. So the question is rather, whether it is totally off the mark to speak about the beauty and ethical quality of management. There is a tacit gentleman's agreement that management can only be judged ethically from outside, formally, *post festum*. If anything goes, it really goes. This is actually expressed by the etymological and language-game-foundation of the word management, which belongs to the circus. Leadership, however, having old-Germanic linguistic roots, means to go in front, and to search for, at the same time. The question then arises, whether we are able metaphorically, or by analogy, to transfer the way in which the scope of not-knowing peculiar to the artist, a not-knowing always cancelled by the ability to do, practise, effectuate, (and hence inserted into a *practical reflectivity* as a compensation for the lack of theoretical reflectivity) can be applied to leadership. In other words, does there exist ontic dimensions in which the leader is able to learn something from his own practise, which can justify the application of the concept of art to what he does, without yielding to shallow criteria of excellent performance?

Aristotle was very reluctant to grant *techne* an inherent ethical force which made it a contribution to the development of a personal and collective ethos – poetry is a complicated exception here.

In my opinion this means that if leadership should be an art, it must be the art of re-creating the social dimension, and hence, it implies a new view on politics, focusing on a meso-level of political action with the organisation as the *polis*, where the criteria of the good and of beautiful create a balance between the individual and the *collective* mind, i.e. between the

development of individual and collective norms and values. The concept of *corporate citizenship* has not up until now caught the core of this line of demarcation, not at least because it has not reflected the fact, that the good organisation – in an ethical sense – necessarily must be the beautiful organisation.

So, if leadership should be an art it must be the art of creating beautiful social relations. But how are we to define 'beautiful social relations', and hence, the criterion of a *mastership* for leadership, for there does not exist a *techne* without, at least, inherent criteria of mastership?

It is obvious that there does not exist any pronounced correlation between artistic accomplishment and ethical perfection, actually the relation is not just challenged in art, but almost totally abandoned today. What the artist learns from his own work is not more than a sense of material, of form, and, if he is clever enough, the ability to handle the feed-back spiral of style – and perhaps also something about himself as an empirical person? But a leader must, in order to be an artist, be able to draw ethical lessons from his own performance. He is doing the most important thing of all, creating the frameworks of lives, and if he should be able to relate to beauty, this beauty must be chiasmatically intertwined with the good.

The ethical point of Aristotle is that we do not know what the good is until we practise it, and that we cannot practise the good, without knowing what it is. The *paideia*, the overall normative framework and content of culture nurtured through life-long learning should guarantee the possibility of the solving of this paradox, but today we have not got a normative culture, or at least only fractions of it. The artist lives inside the paradox of not knowing what he does. Until he does it – explores this paradox, and stays in it deliberately – it is the secret of his practise, what but about the leader?

Art transforms society indirectly, through the market, leadership transforms social relations directly. The art of transforming social relations directly is symbolically demonstrated in the theatre, but the organisation is not a theatre. So we actually lack a new language of the beauty of meso-political performance, if it should make sense to speak about leadership as an art.

Yours Ole Fogh Kirkeby
ofk.lpf@CBS.DK

Vincent Dégot

Tuesday
13/03/2007

I am stricken in all the debates as an (un) active member of AACORN I follow, like a sort of tennis match by the conception which implicitly reduces art to works, as if management was only decisions. May be my point of view is biased by the fact that I have a rather classical – and to some extent documented – knowledge of classical art rather than contemporary productions. But I will not extend on my position because what I want to say is not linked to a point of view. Let's say in short that a broader view helps to identify certain gaps.

To return to my starting point, Art is much more than a collection of productions: it is a philosophy, an history, methods to understand the meaning of works in their context, methods to understand why this works have been produced in such a way because of the available techniques (the relation between the chemistry of colours and the *innovation* of Tintoretto, the relation between the progress of metallurgy and the apparition of the *ronde-bosses* in the 13th century the Pisanos in Sienna), methods to understand the secret meaning of the works like (for instance) what Freud propose in his *Essays of Applied Psychoanalysis*, Iconography, the links between texts and visual production (from Warburg to Panofsky), and so on. And all this constellation of disciplines related to art, are themselves using various field of Science: psychology, history, chemistry.

I have not yet read in those excited exchange between Aacorn members any reflection on how the methods developed and mobilized to study art could be transferred, adapted, to study this recent productions (comparatively to art) that are economic decisions. (I hate to quote myself, but there is a modest try in a paper published a long time ago in various languages and journals entitled 'Portrait of the Manager as an Artist'). Decisions are linked together by their context, their 'authors', they are series such as works of art. They can be

classified according to school of thoughts, (may be like 'scuola' in painting).

Ok that's all, I am sorry if I am not clear enough, sorry for my French.

I am presently working (not professionally, as a dilettante) on a *theory* of art considering that a work of art is a solution, perhaps the only solution if you take into account all the constraint (technical, of style, of his personal history, of the patrons, of the location, etc.) that the author could produce. If you demonstrate or accept this hypothesis studying a work reconstructs the tree of choices that – consciously or not – the author has made. I think that such a theory could have some resonance in management study. If this topic appeals to some of the scholars on the AACORN network let me know.

The problem with theories on art – and probably be other domains – nowadays, is that at the difference with those enunciated by Kant or Croce, is that their authors will be challenged to validate them, meaning in the modern way to gather the material to validate them. Did you notice any reference to a precise work of art in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*?

But a theory is two sided object. Either you collect and classify and analyse material to substantiate then (the scientific way) or you accept it as it is and observe to what extend it explains the world (psychoanalysis being a good example of what has been described by Ginzburg as the 'Evidential Paradigm').

The reference to Kant reminds me of another research project connected to art and aesthetics that I would like to tackle if they were some scholar (that I am not) interested to invest some time in digging with me. Is it possible to reconstruct the corpus of works of art effectively known (in the sense of a physical encounter) by some of the authors (philosophers like Kant or Nietzsche, man of letters like Flaubert or James) who have proficiently written on art? To deal with such a research one has to establish first the travels those authors have done which could have put them in contact with works , but also, if we are dealing with authors in the 18th or 19th century, to locate where were these works, belonging to whom, visible or not.

OK now I am done

Vincent Dégot (Ecole Polytechnique, Paris)

degot_vincent@YAHOO.FR