

an excerpt from

Managers Not MBAs
A Hard Look at the Soft Practice of
Managing and Management Development
by Henry Mintzberg

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DEVELOPING MANAGERS I
The IMPM Program

*Do not go where the path may lead; go instead
where there is no path and leave a trail.*

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

What should Vladěna do? She has a good education—a bachelors degree in philosophy from a reputable Czech university and a masters in international affairs from a well-known American one. She has excellent experience, having worked for an international consulting firm and then an Internet startup before becoming a manager with a Czech telecom company. There she practices management using her experience and her wits. That is all she has, beside the mentoring of an experienced colleague. Vladěna is smart and personable. She wants to go to business school.

What will it do to her? Increase her bargaining power in the international job market, to be sure. Give her a better understanding of business, too, including the vocabulary to face other managers with MBAs. But will it make her a better manager?

Through several chapters, I have argued no, quite the opposite. Now I would like to describe perhaps not what Vladěna is able to do right now but what I hope all Vladěnas will be able to do in the near future.

THE INTERNATIONAL MASTERS IN PRACTICING MANAGEMENT

A group of colleagues and myself, from Canada, England, France, India, and Japan, have spent the better part of the last decade bringing the intentions of the previous chapter to life. We did not wish to create just another program or even just a novel one. We set out to change the course of management education: to showcase an approach suited to the serious education and development of practicing managers. The attainment of knowledge and the enhancement of competences are important, but we wanted our program to go beyond these, to help people become not just more effective managers but wiser human beings—more thoughtful, more worldly, more engaging.

The result is the International Masters in Practicing Management (IMPM), which we believe is true to the tenets of the last chapter. We still have a long way to go, but we have come a long way too, enough, I believe, to present our experience as indicative of what is possible. My intention in this and the next four chapters is to convince you of that, by describing the IMPM's design, functioning, results, and offshoots.

I make no pretence of objectivity here. My colleagues and I have put our hearts and souls into this activity, so you will have to accept a certain degree of enthusiasm instead. Besides, objectivity is boring, while we have created something exciting. What we have done and learned requires some space to be appreciated, so this discussion has been divided into several chapters: on the IMPM setting (Chapter 10); on mindsets as an organizing framework for management education (Chapter 11); on learning back on the job (Chapter 12); on the impact of such education on the sponsoring organizations, including its costs and benefits (Chapter 13); and on the diffusion of this innovation into other programs, short and long (Chapter 14).

In developing the IMPM, we borrowed the best innovations we could find from other programs for practicing managers (many of them, as noted in Chapter 7, in England), added a number of our own, and wove all this into a comprehensive model that we think of as a single innovation. Thus, while parts of the IMPM can be found in other programs, the package cannot, although these chapters have been written to change that.

Sprinkled throughout are anecdotes, stories, and comments from those involved in the program—participants, company people, faculty, observers. (Some of these come from papers written by these people for a conference held on the program in England in 2000. They can be seen,

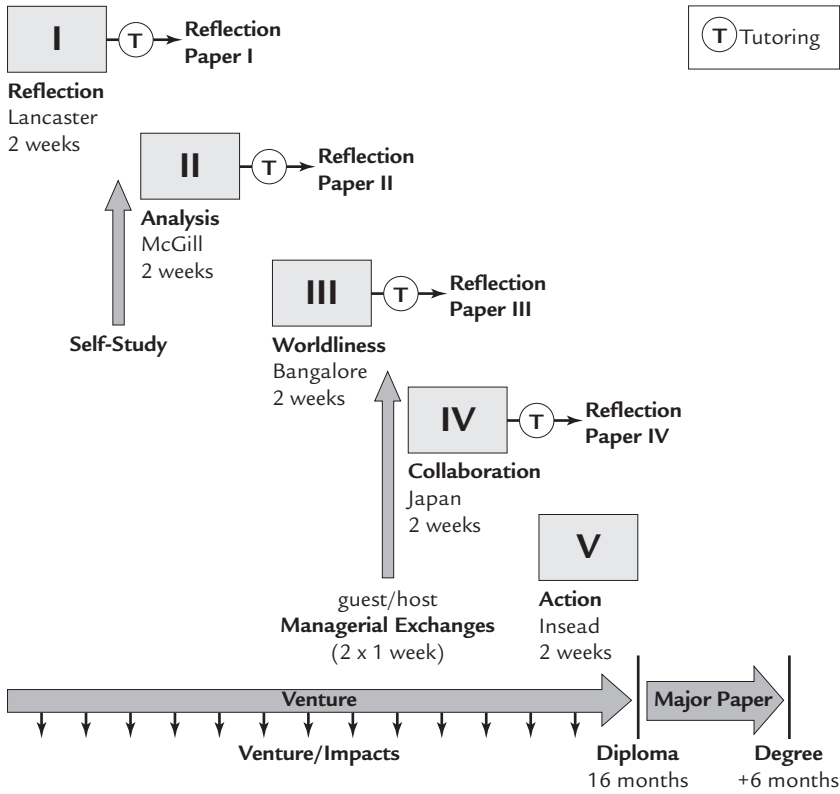


FIGURE 10.1
Structure of the IMPM

and will be referenced, at www.impm.org.) All of this is offered in the hope that others will borrow from our experience, as we have borrowed from others, so that we can all get on with the long-overdue job of developing management education.

OVERVIEW Figure 10.1 shows the outline of the IMPM as five two-week modules at our five locations, each devoted to a different managerial *mindset* (called reflection, analysis, worldliness, collaboration, and action). Around these are the program’s other activities, many of which happen back at work. *Reflection Papers* are written to link the learning of each module to the participants’ context. These, especially, are supported by *Tutoring* (shown with a T). What we call *Self-Study* develops the “language of business” in marketing, finance, and accounting, in preparation for Module II. *Managerial Exchanges* takes place between Modules II and IV, in which the participants pair up and spend a week

at each other's workplace. A *Venture*, as well as *Impacts*, focus on change activities back at work. All of this spreads over almost a year and a half, so that the IMPM becomes ten weeks of classroom activity embedded in a sixteen-month educational journey. Following this, those who wish to receive the Masters of Practicing Management degree write a *Major Paper* as a kind of small thesis.

Middle to senior managers, mostly in the age range of thirty-five to forty-five, are sent and sponsored by their companies: (I will use the word *company* for convenience, although one prominent NGO has been active in the IMPM, and a sister program has been developed for social sector organizations.) A given class, which we call *cycle*, of which there has been one each year since the spring of 1996, usually has about thirty-five to forty participants. We request that the companies send them in groups so that they can work together on company issues and also that the class can be seen as several working clusters and not just a collection of individuals.

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING: AUTHENTICALLY INTERNATIONAL

We set out to create an authentically international experience in the IMPM—not a domestic program with foreign activities but one truly balanced across different parts of the world, centered in none, so that each location feels both local and foreign. The companies that have sent participants are headquartered in all five of our locations and sometimes beyond. While they have been asked to commit to only one cycle at a time, most have participated in most or all of the cycles, including (up to Cycle 8, started in 2003), Fujitsu and Matsushita from Japan, LG from Korea, Électricité de France (EDF)/Gaz de France, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies headquartered in Geneva, BT from Britain, Lufthansa from Germany, and Alcan and the Royal Bank from Canada. From India, we have had mostly senior managers from small companies, which has worked fine (although some larger companies there, including Hewlett-Packard, Coca-Cola, and Bharati Telecom, have sent managers more recently). Typical of our balanced attendance was Cycle 3, with fifteen Asians, fifteen Europeans, six North Americans, two Africans, and one South American.

MULTICULTURAL, NOT “GLOBAL” Our program may sound rather international, but it is not meant to be “global.” Like most managers of even the most “global” corporations, our participants have mostly been

TABLE 10.1 GLOBAL OR CROSS-CULTURAL
(adapted from Costea and Watson 1998)

AN AMERICAN MBA PROGRAM IN BUDAPEST	THE IMPM
• Participants are similar in East and West.	• Participants' identities are as diverse as their cultures.
• Teaching materials and methods are transferable because business practices are universal and management is "global"—hence the focus on teaching as transmission.	• Teaching materials and methods have to adapt to different needs because managerial practices are contextual—hence the focus on learning as personal and shared reflection.
• Manager is seen as an abstracted, individual self with behavior mainly ordered by economic rationality.	• Human self is seen as a dynamic combination of processes and events happening in relation to other selves.
• Learning is seen as cognitive and decontextualized.	• Learning is seen as interactive, in relationships.

rooted in their home cultures.¹ Our intention has been not to rip them out of these cultures but to leave those roots intact while extending their reach to other cultures. Why impose conformity when we can benefit from diversity, to explore different perspectives? In this spirit, our intention has been to create *worldly* managers, not global ones. (See Table 10.1.)

The IMPM has thus become a meeting ground of different cultures—across countries and companies—in a safe and relaxed setting, on each other's home territories. That opens up the learning, including putting into question the very notions of global and local. Stereotypes fade quickly in such a classroom, as people find commonality where they expected diversity and diversity where they expected commonality. This, of course, happens in every program with international participation, but the fact that the IMPM is as Japanese as it is British, as Canadian as it is Indian, and so forth, makes all the difference. Moreover, because the participants are locals in one of the modules, and can therefore host their colleagues, experiences abroad become less voyeuristic and more engaging.

¹ A poll in one of the cycles, as to who in the class carried a passport different from the location of head office, was rather revealing, about this group and probably "globalization" in general. Only the Alcan and Red Cross people put up their hands in any numbers. Almost all the other participants, despite in some cases widespread international experience and even current location abroad, were nationals of the headquarters country.

With this has come something quite novel for the partner schools: an expectation that they embed their modules in the local culture—to discover their managerial roots, so to speak. Some schools embraced this challenge more than others, most notably in Japan and India (about the context of development if not about an Indian style of managing).

STRUCTURAL SETTING: A BALANCED PARTNERSHIP

The IMPM has been set up as a balanced partnership, of the Indian Institute of Management at Bangalore (IIMB); Insead in Fontainebleau, France; the Lancaster University Management School in England; the McGill University Faculty of Management in Montreal, Canada; and in Japan a group of faculty drawn from three schools, at Hitsosubashi University, Kobe University, and the Japanese Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (later including the Korean Development Institute in Seoul).

The program has a small central administration independent of any school, which includes a program director and a program administrator. A cycle director, usually from one of the schools, oversees and coordinates the activities of a particular cycle and attends all of its modules. Each school names a module director for each cycle, who heads up the local design and delivery team and attends the entire module. These module directors, plus the cycle director (who often heads up the module in his or her own school), do most of the tutoring.

All of these people together also form the Organizing Committee concerned with programwide issues. This has worked well because people represent schools, not departments. So they do not lobby for their particular functions (nor need they lobby for their schools, since each has its own module). But they have not been shy to lobby for their views of what the programs needs (to the point where we have come to call this committee the “Mob of Six”).

Finally, the deans or directors of the various schools form the Governing Committee of the program, which meets annually, usually in conjunction with the annual meeting we hold for representatives of the participating companies, where we share our learning and practices.

All of this adds up to a most unusual partnership. I have been asked repeatedly by academic colleagues, especially in the United States, how we have managed to sustain such a partnership. At first the question puzzled me. We manage it like any alliance, I answered, with a good

deal of attention. Then I realized what was driving the question. In many collaborations, a prestigious school, usually American, takes the lead, and others follow. The IMPM partnership works because it *is* a partnership; there is no lead school.

The partnership extends to the companies that send the participants, but more *de facto* than *de jure*. These companies do not form a “consortium” that owns the program, but the fact that so many have remained with the program over the years, and meet with us annually to share experiences, has produced a rather strong partnership. (More on company activities later.)

CONCEPTUAL SETTING: MANAGERIAL MINDSETS

A major challenge for us was to come up with a framework to get past the functional structure that has so dominated business education. Criticizing it is easy enough, but we needed a structure to replace it. So we gave a good deal of thought to developing one that would be managerial.

The traditional business functions see the world as made up of problems out there, to be slotted into the bodies of specialized knowledge in the schools—marketing, finance, human resources, and so forth. The world is seen as objective, amenable to the application of systematic knowledge. Give managers the tools, and they will solve the problems.

Managers, unfortunately, do not live in such a world. Their world is messy and confusing. Those problems that can be slotted into the conventional functions can be delegated to functional specialists, leaving behind the difficult problems. These are managerial precisely because they don't fit into the neat categories.

As noted in Chapter 8, some programs have used thematic structures, around issues such as globalization and supply chain management. This is better, since it approaches concerns as they can appear on the managerial agenda. But such themes can be narrow and temporary. Managers need a framework that is more stable and broadly conceptual.

DERIVING THE MINDSETS² As suggested in Figure 10.2, everything an effective manager does is sandwiched between *action* on the ground and *reflection* in the mind. Reflection without action is passive; action with-

²The framework described here was influenced by a model of managerial work that I developed a few years earlier (see Mintzberg 1994).

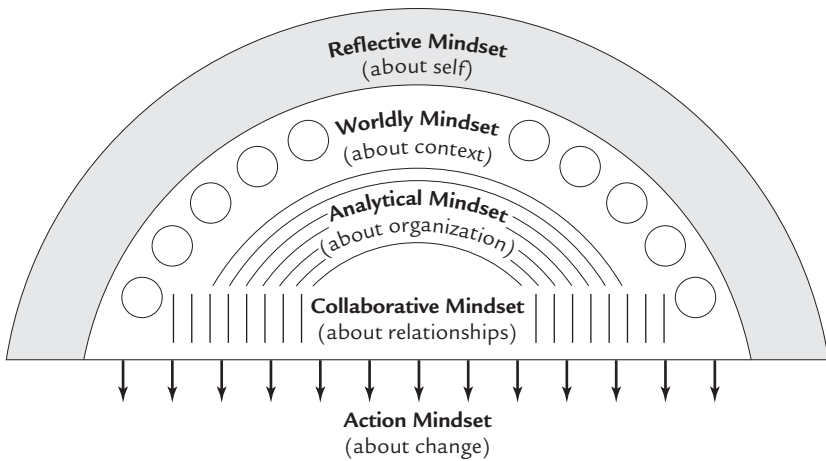


FIGURE 10.2

A Framework for Management Education

out reflection is thoughtless. Effective managers thus function at the interface of these two *mindsets*: where reflective thinking meets practical doing. We thus sandwich our program in the same way, beginning with a module on reflection and ending with one on action.

But reflecting and acting about what? We see the whats on three levels: about people and their *relationships*, about the *organization* being managed, and about the world around that organization—namely, its *context*. This gives us two mindsets and three subjects.

But each of these three subjects has another mindset most closely related to itself. For people and relationships, we take that to be *collaboration*—getting things done cooperatively with other people, in negotiations, for example. About the organization, we take the predominant mindset to be *analysis*. Organizations depend on the systematic decomposition and combination of activities that analysis is all about. And about context, we take the most important mindset to be, not global, but *worldly*, which the *Oxford Dictionary* defines as “experienced in life, sophisticated, practical,” suggesting a deep appreciation of reality in its many forms.

Likewise, the two initial mindsets also have subjects of their own. For reflection, that is *self*: Managers reflect ultimately as individuals. And for action, the subject is *change*, across all the other subjects—self, relationships, organization, and context.

Put this all together and you have five perspectives that have to be combined in the practice of managing:

- Managing Self: the reflective mindset
- Managing Organizations: the analytic mindset
- Managing Context: the worldly mindset
- Managing Relationships: the collaborative mindset
- Managing Change: the action mindset

If you are a manager, this is your world!

We mapped these on to our five locations, so that each partner could develop its module based on one of the mindsets—not exclusively, but essentially. Much of this has in fact proved fortuitous: We do reflection in England, home to people who can be rather thoughtful; analysis at McGill, in North America, where the analytical approach to management has had its fullest development; worldliness in India, a very different place where so many worlds collide; collaboration in Japan, which gives great attention to that mindset; and action at the France-based Insead, which has great strengths in the teaching of change. It has, in fact, been fascinating to see how the modules have taken on these five different flavors—for example, a rather inquisitive flavor about reflection in England compared with a more hard-nosed flavor about action at Insead.

We make no claim to this framework being scientific or comprehensive, only that it has proved particularly useful in our program (see Gosling and Mintzberg 2003). Managers relate to it easily and naturally; they can see themselves and their work in it. Also, we do not use the label “mindset” to set anyone’s mind. We have all had more than enough of that! Rather, we see these as attitudes—turns or frames of mind that set activity in motion. Think of them too as *mindsights*—namely, perspectives. Just bear in mind that, improperly used, they can also be *minesites*: too much of any, in the absence of others, can blow up in a manager’s face, whether it is obsessive analyzing or compulsive collaborating, etc.

PEDAGOGICAL SETTING: THE REFLECTIVE CLASSROOM

How to bring these mindsets to life? Our purpose has been not simply to teach these frames but to give them life in the learning process. That is where our approach of experienced reflection comes in: to leverage the extensive and varied experience of managers around the perspectives of reflection, action, collaboration, analysis, and worldliness.

We do not want “students” in our classroom—vessels sitting there waiting to be filled—any more than we want “customers”—buyers lined up to receive our “services.” We want *participants*, who take responsibility for their learning by bringing their own experience to bear on it. “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing” is an ancient Greek expression. Reflecting on experience is the IMPM’s one big thing.

For deep reflection to occur, the participants—and the faculty—have to relax their everyday assumptions and open their minds to new and sometimes seemingly strange ideas. In Samuel Coleridge’s famous phrase, already used several times, they must willingly suspend their disbeliefs; in a related phrase of one of our cycle directors, Ramnath Narayanswamy, they have to “institutionalize doubt.”

Reflection takes place inside and outside our classrooms. I shall discuss the outside activities later, concentrating here on reflection inside.

APOSTROPHE TABLES We use what we call “apostrophe tables” for seating. After spending time in the class, Jeanne Liedtka, of the Darden School at Virginia, referred to this architecture as “a kind of breeding ground for subversive student democracy!”

This idea came about after a question from Nancy Badore, who became well known for setting up an ambitious executive development program at the Ford Motor Company (see Helgesen 1990). “How do you intend to sit people?” she asked me before we began. “I suppose in one of those U-shaped classrooms,” I replied. “Not those obstetrics stirrups!” Nancy shot back. That became one of the more important moments for our development. We sat down with an architect and came up with another design, which has become absolutely critical to our whole approach.

We call them apostrophe tables because participants sit around circular tables spread out in a flat classroom, and in some places we add extra little tables (the apostrophes) for those who have to swivel around to see a presentation. We do not want people sitting there as individuals in tiered rows, all facing an “instructor” who directs the proceedings. Nor do we wish to disrupt the class in order to “break out” for small-group discussions—which should happen frequently. This seating, as noted in Chapter 9, creates a set of communities around the tables and a sense of community in the whole flat room. It feels very different from the assembly of individuals in a traditional classroom. Because the participants can face in to share experiences as well as out to hear presentations, they own the space as much as the faculty do. In a sense, the classroom has no obvious front, other than a wall where presentations are made. This architecture may restrict class size—we find it works

well up to about forty people—but much beyond that, any classroom risks shifting from learning to teaching.

Most important, this seating allows the class to go into and out of group discussions, sometimes for a few minutes at a time. We can, for example, ask whether there are any “table” questions—questions considered by the groups around the tables instead of just coming from the first individual who raises a hand.

Our seating arrangement is certainly convenient, and round tables have certainly been used elsewhere, but I believe that, compared with the usual arrangement of business school classrooms, it is revolutionary—as suggested by the story in the accompanying box.

“I *SEE* WHAT YOU MEAN!”

Tomo Noda of Insead wanted to get involved in IMPM-style education, but had never been in one of the classrooms. So we invited him to the opening of a new cycle at Lancaster—the first day of a new class.

As program director, Jonathan Gosling began by outlining briefly what was to come. After about ten minutes, he called for questions. There were none—everyone was new, too shy to start. So Jonathan talked for another five minutes and then said, “Why don’t you discuss this around your tables and see if there are any questions.” There was an immediate buzz in the room, as all took up the request.

Tomo walked over to me with a gleam in his eye. “I *see* what you mean!” We had explained the IMPM approach to him in advance, and he understood everything we said. But a few minutes in that classroom, even with a brand-new group, and he *saw* the difference!

We have sat people in all kinds of ways around the tables: in company groups to consider different models of organization; by country of residence to compare consumer behaviors; according to job titles to consider the pressures of managing; and so on. Other times they sit randomly or explicitly mixed (“No one from the same company or country at any one table”). Once, after one intensive session on “Managing Selves,” the women in the class decided that—for once—they wished to sit together.

IN AND OUT OF WORKSHOPS This architecture can encourage the faculty to rethink their approach. That is because the class they face consists of communities, not just individuals, who face into their own

concerns as much as out to the faculty's ideas. Nothing, of course, stops faculty members from making their own inputs; indeed, introducing interesting material is a critical part of the process, whether by lecture, case discussion, or prior reading, etc., to stimulate the learning. But this happens best when the material is turned over to the participants around the tables *on their agendas*. They have to run with it—see how it can be made insightful in their own contexts. That is what opens up profound possibilities for learning.

Here, especially is where our “50:50 rule” comes in: Half the time, we try to turn the classroom over to the participants on their agendas. After I do a session on forms of organizations in the second module, for example, I ask the participants, sitting in company groups, to discuss how they can use this material to better understand the structural problems in their companies.

Workshops can run short and long. Table questions need take only a few minutes, as can some other discussions. In one session on morality, the professor stopped his presentation repeatedly for ten-minute discussions around the tables—for example, on “Does a manager have to be ‘good’ to be good?” This worked well. I asked afterward whether he usually does this sort of thing. “Never before,” he answered. “I read your ‘Instructions to Instructors’ [about our approach] and decided to give it a try!”

More commonly, the groups around the tables get into the issues for the better part of an hour—to get to the meaning of their experiences. As this happens repeatedly, over the course of five modules, the participants get to know each other's context rather well. The classroom thus becomes a kind of running set of live cases.

MORNING REFLECTIONS Absolutely central to the whole learning process is what we call “morning reflections,” an idea introduced by Ramesh Mehta, the director of the Cycle 1 Module in Bangalore. (I will use numbers to designate the year of the cycle—e.g., Cycle 6 means our sixth class—and Roman numerals to designate the modules—e.g., Module IV is the one on collaboration in Japan.) First thing in the morning, when the mind is fresh, often after thoughts have come up since the previous day, everyone is asked to reflect. The key here is to capture, share, reinforce, and extend the learning in this especially relaxed time of the day.

We start with a few minutes of personal time for everyone to write thoughts in the “Insight Books” they are given. (One graduate held it up at a meeting in her company to welcome new participants to the program and said, “This is the best management book I ever read!”) It is

rather remarkable to see a classroom full of normally very busy managers sitting in absorbed silence.

Discussion follows around each table, to share these thoughts. Ten to fifteen minutes of this serves both to surface and to screen individual ideas. Open-ended plenary discussion then follows, primed by the small-group exchanges (usually led by the module or cycle director, sometimes by participants). Needless to say, these discussions can run long—while a professor anxiously waits to begin the scheduled morning session. The solution to this problem is simple. Let him or her wait (and learn, too). Sure, this can affect the day’s schedule. But, to repeat, we are there to learn, not to cover ground, and much of our best learning happens during these morning reflections. Even—especially—when they run long, often the better part of an hour. Frank McCauley, who headed up executive development at the Royal Bank of Canada, visited our class in India and attended a morning reflections. He later told a *Fast Company* journalist, “That was the most fascinating conversation in an academic setting that I have ever seen. We zoomed around the room discussing everything from political to economic issues, and then got into ethics and business” (Reingold 2000:286).

As this suggests, anything can come up in these sessions: thoughts about yesterday’s issues, happenings in the companies, items in the news, concerns from earlier days and earlier modules. So these morning reflections become a running commentary—a main thread—across the entire program, to blend all the learning.

SHARING COMPETENCIES One form of reflection that seems to work well, although we have not used it nearly enough, is the competency sharing discussed in Chapter 9. The object here is rather modest: not to present best practice, or even to propose good practice, but simply to share actual practice—how the managers in the room have used certain competencies.

It is interesting how many ideas come out when you ask a group of experienced managers to share some competency experience. Everybody loves to tell a favorite story, and in competency sharing lots of stories get told, about what worked and what didn’t. As noted in Chapter 9, when we asked in the very first module, “How do you reflect in a busy job?” the ideas poured out. Almost everyone in the room had something to say—at one point eight people were trying to get in. Such discussions are not dramatic. They are quiet and low-key, yet enthusiastic.

Competency questions for other modules can include “How do you manage around formal structure?” (Module II), “How do you get close to customers?” (Module III), “How have you managed a big shift

through little changes?” (Module V). The list is endless and highly relevant. Such questions come up naturally in a classroom of managers; the trick is to stop what is being done and allow time to consider them.

Experienced reflection in all these aspects does not just mean using more workshops and engendering greater participation. It is much more than that: It is about reconceiving the classroom to put the focus on the experience of the learners. And that changes everything.

THE FACULTY ROLE IN A REFLECTIVE CLASSROOM As faculty in this program, we teach; our job, as noted, is to introduce interesting materials to the classroom. So we lecture, assign readings, lead case discussions, design exercises, run simulations. We do what all proper management professors do. (We even grade papers.)

But beyond that, our role is to stimulate deep and insightful reflection, which as noted earlier requires a shift in orientation. We have to help draw out the participants’ experience and work with them to make key connections among the conceptual inputs and their personal experiences.

This requires some designing, for content and especially for process, but mostly it requires engaging: The faculty have to be involved, physically by their presence, intellectually by their thoughts, emotionally by their energy. It looks easier than, say, lecturing, but it is far more demanding. If I had to identify one skill most critical to all this, it would be the one in shortest supply in so much contemporary education: listening.

Kentaro Nobeoka, as codirector of Module IV in Japan, commented that to manage a class interactively, the professor needs to get 95 percent of what is said. With English as his second language, he figured he got about 75 percent. Maybe that is because he tried harder, because I doubt that most English-language faculty in our program get that much. (Of course, they really get far less, because so much of the discussion happens among the participants around the tables.)

The faculty set the tone, which has to be one of openness, flexibility, and suspended disbelief—a high level of thoughtfulness where everyone is prepared to listen more than talk, and then talk based on what has been said. All the best intentions, manifested in the most wonderful curriculum, are necessary but far from sufficient conditions. The learning is hugely dependent on the tone set in the classroom—of trust all around, earned by respect of everyone present for each other.

In most programs, the faculty come and go; they fly over, drop a message, and fly on. We do not favor this pigeon view of teaching. We have faculty who come and go, too, but in between we expect them to land and engage the class, particularly in workshops that link their material to the participants’ experience.

There may be a place for a few “stars” who can mesmerize the class with their ideas. The trouble with more than a few of them, however, is that the mesmerizing interferes with the learning. I have watched too many stars who, while quick to take questions, will not be diverted from their own agendas, and whose ideas in the classroom seem to have a half-life of a few hours.

A key distinguishing feature of the IMPM classroom is the faculty who stay and facilitate, notably the module director for each module and the cycle director for all modules. By remaining on site, meaning in the classroom, they become a key part of the glue that holds the whole learning experience together. They get to know the participants, their experiences, and their concerns, while working with them as a cohesive class.

Over time, we have strengthened the role of the cycle director, providing that person with more time in the classroom to discuss program activities that happen outside the classroom—notably the reflection papers, managerial exchanges, ventures, and impacts. (Having these two people in class may seem expensive, but it should be realized that they take sole responsibility for much of the class time—perhaps up to one-third in all—including discussion of the above activities, morning reflections, and field studies [discussed later], most involving little preparation time.)

But the faculty cannot facilitate alone. The participants have to take up that role, too. Learning does not happen as long as people sit back waiting to be facilitated. So a measure of our success is the extent to which the participants grow into the role of facilitators. The spirit of this was expressed by a faculty observer who commented after a particularly satisfying session: “They felt *he* [the professor] brought closure. *They* brought closure!” A related story is told in the accompanying box—a nice way to close this chapter on the IMPM setting.

SPIRITUALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

He was a senior professor of religious studies who had never faced a classroom of managers before. He was to talk to them about “Spirituality and the Practice of Management,” in Module I on Reflection, and then do a drama workshop with them. This whole activity was scheduled for a full day plus some of the following morning.

As he began to talk, with what seemed to me about three words in every sentence that I had never heard before, I thought, “Uh-oh.” Amid references to “grand narratives” (like Genesis) and “little

narratives” (personal stories), his own grand narrative was falling on the deaf ears of people concerned about their own little narratives. But the class listened politely. For a while. Then a hand went up, followed by a comment to the effect of “Could you, uh, maybe clarify that last point?” Similar questions followed, and he started to get defensive. The class and the speaker started to go their separate ways. Some tense moments followed. How are we going to get through a day of this, I thought.

Then someone said, “I’m struggling to understand what you are trying to say.” It was the perfect sentiment: not that she had tuned out, but that she was trying to connect. He had obviously worked awfully hard to prepare his presentation—too hard—and obviously had interesting things to say. This comment acknowledged it and expressed goodwill. The professor relaxed and took on a more pragmatic tone, and the morning finished with some useful learning.

The afternoon was very different. The professor led an exercise, a “feeling” for spirituality, and then organized the class into groups that presented skits on the reactions to the module. That worked fine.

Following this, we all sat in a big circle to reflect on the day. There was good discussion, with relaxed warmth. Then one of the Japanese participants, not yet comfortable in English (this was the first few days of the first module), spoke up, saying, in effect, “You know, to be honest, I have not understood anything of the morning materials.” The class, very sensitive to a colleague, picked up on this in terms of what might be done in the remaining hour the following morning. A mention was made of focusing on Western religion alone, specifically Christianity, but the professor misunderstood this comment to mean a request for something on comparative religion. No, everyone said. At this point I suggested, motioning to the professor, “You should present a description of Christianity, as you set out to do this morning, so that you [motioning to the Japanese participant] will understand it. And if you do, then we shall all understand it. But [turning back to the professor] you must do no preparation.” (Images of him being up to 4 A.M.) Everyone agreed.

There followed the next morning one of the most impressive presentations that any of us had ever heard.

The class had empowered the speaker. Great managing is not about making just something out of what you get but something wonderful. These managers suspended their disbelief and through honest struggle learned about spirituality—in religion and in that classroom.

this chapter has been excerpted from

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